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Abstracts of Presentations

Héla Yousfi

National Sovereignty for Arab Countries: A Utopia?

The two main demands of the Arab revolutions chanted from Tunis to Damascus via Bahrain - "The people want the fall of the regime" and "work, freedom, national dignity" – remain, nine years later, unfulfilled. On the ground, people are still struggling to find political, economic and social solutions to these problems, and several endogenous as well as regional explanations have been summoned to explain these difficulties.

The fact that these slogans make the state both the target of challenges and the provider of solutions, as employer and as guarantor of national sovereignty, further complicates the intelligibility of current dynamics.¹

One can neither deny nor resolve this paradox. Yet, it has unfortunately produced a number of simplistic theses: one interpretation reduces the revolutionary process to issues of political and economic liberalisation, whilst another one focuses on the role of the state in the management of economic and social problems.

But these theses do not withstand a closer observation of the facts and raise two fundamental questions: what does the return of 'national sovereignty' mean for the political agenda of Arab countries? In a region suffering from wars and neo-liberal reforms, can the state (and what kind of state) still be a relevant subject of analysis? Above all: does the state have the political, economic and symbolic resources to respond to the emancipatory claims of the peoples of the region?

Dalal El-Bizri

The Unconventional Imperialism Requires an Unconventional Left

The pandemic culminated flaws embedded in the entrepreneurial system that was already suffering from weak traditional values, and declining economic and technological status. The system embarked on an anti-democratic course. Traditional imperialism had weakened with the emergence of new imperialisms involving conflicts.

The official enemies of the current order are the "caretakers" of the traditional left who have inherited its role. Among them are the Islamic fundamentalists, but their leftist burden is not heavy. They were adopted and supported by new and old, global and regional imperialisms.

Leftists fall within this equation in the middle group in favor of the Shiite fundamentalism. They follow its steps regarding the priority of hostility towards traditional imperialism and Zionism, and in the issue of rapprochement with the new imperialisms. This priority of anti-imperialism forced them to abandon the rest of their leftist concerns (the social and the political).

The remaining leftists, who are also still proud of their leftism, are scattered, distracted, and lost. They are united by only one position: hostility towards the Iran axis. They are neoliberals of varying degrees and fields, they are persistent, and they are, singularly. demanding democracy

and the rule of law. They are also preachers preaching seasonally to “revive the leftist project” or “reveille it”.

The question is: how is it possible to combine new and traditional imperialisms, and traditional and new left ... if what is required is the resurrection of "forces opposing the current regime"?

Mustapha Kamel Al-Sayyed

The Crisis of Capitalism under the New World Disorder

There are three major dimensions of the present crisis of world capitalism, namely the Covid 19 pandemic, recession in world economy and deterioration of environmental conditions. With crises being recurrent under Capitalism, it does not seem that historical experience offers good lessons on how to deal with the current one. The old recipes do not seem to be effective in dealing with its profound causes rooted in declining rate of return to capital, concentration of wealth and growing inequality in its distribution and unprecedented productive capacity met by a shrinking demand. Several alternatives are offered as a way out, ranging from reforms within the present Capitalist system to moving to new types Capitalism such as ethical Capitalism, regulated Capitalism to return to the model of welfare state. Neoliberalism has paved the way to the current crisis but a complete breakdown of the World Capitalist system is unlikely. The fiscal dilemma of the Capitalist State renders many of these alternatives unrealistic. A complete breakdown of Capitalism is unlikely. The most probable scenario is therefore persistence of its crisis. How would the different subsystems of Capitalism, such as the political and the socialization subsystems contribute to the perpetuation of an economic system in crisis?

Raef Zreik

Populism and Hannah Arendt

Populism is a phenomenon that has occupied political thought in the last decade, and there are many articles trying to understand the emergence of movements and leaders such as Trump, Erdogan, and Netanyahu around the world. There is constant discussion about the crisis that the liberal democratic thought is facing at this stage, in addition to the continuous attempts to understand and diagnose this crisis.

In this paper I will also try to contribute to this discussion through a specific angle in the history of thought based on Hannah Arendt. Arendt had observed and analysed the emergence of totalitarian regimes in the first part of last century in her book on the foundations of totalitarianism. When we read Arendt's text, we feel that we are in front of a text describing some of the phenomena in which we are now living, in a state of expansion and domination by populist policies and movements.

The paper aims to compare the populist movements now with the totalitarian movements that Arendt describes in the middle of last century to ask if there is anything to be learned from Arendt in this context, and to what extent can populist tendencies turn into totalitarian movements. In addition to that it aims to examine the nature of the crisis in liberal thought in the past century compared with its current crisis.

Basem Ezbidi

The Repositioning of Political Corruption in the Current Global System

The paper outlines the general framework for the most important features of the structural political corruption that accompanied the neoliberal transformations in recent decades, with the aim of discussing and analysing its new positioning formulas in the future, especially after the current Corona pandemic. It also looks into the repercussions of this process of localizing political

corruption and its effects on humanity, politically and environmentally, especially in terms of the prospects of democracy and the wellbeing of the environment.

Reem Bahdi

Is International Solidarity Possible across the Redeemable-irredeemable Divide?

Across time and space, people have been sorted into groups, deemed morally deficient, and their moral insufficiency has been used to explain both their sad predicament and the violence that has been directed at them by the state. In each instance, the deemed morally deficient group has a counterpart, one that faces the same life conditions but whose circumstances are defined as the function of external circumstances rather than inherent trait. Laws were passed to reflect all of this. This mechanism of defining and dividing groups into those who are deficient on the inside (and therefore irredeemable) as against those who live in deficient circumstances (and therefore redeemable) serves a particular political function - divide and conquer. But, we are supposed to be living in a post divide and conquer world. International law, especially international human rights law, promised to speak above, beyond and through the divide and conquer. The UDHR promised that "all people are born and free and equal in dignity and in rights." Dignity, equality and rights grounded and foregrounded the potential for international solidarity. We now know that this utopia cannot be achieved through law. But, can we build the solidarities we need to bend the arch of history closer to justice through law? Can we use law to build international solidarities given law's role in the process of sorting, disciplining and dispossessing?

Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua

Forging an African Governance/Human Rights Identity in a Post-COVID-19 World Order

There is talk of a new world order in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and, therefore, the likelihood of a new period in history where there will be changes in world political thought and the balance of power.

Huntington has already talked of clash of civilizations and identifies an African civilisation but only in the present and also as still coalescing. However, that position is only partly true. Africa had thriving civilizations.

However, what Africa lacks today is a Pan-African civilization and identity rooted in human rights and democracy and derived from its past civilizations and cultures to develop a form of governance that speaks to the needs of its people in contemporary times.

It is feared that the new emerging world order may also pass Africa by and cause it to remain on the fringes of this new order. This concern is anchored in the manner in which governments, backed by security agencies, have performed in a number of African states during the COVID-19 crisis in seeking to balance individual rights and community interests. It is also about how emergency laws have been enacted to deal with emergencies without declaring states of emergency; and the dismal response from the African Union to condemn such practices.

Based on history, the new laws enacted, the new directives given and the new measures imposed, will transcend the emergency and become the "new normal." This tendency will definitely dilute the quality of democracy and respect for human rights and the rule of law. This phenomenon has the tendency to distract Africa from focusing on taking advantage of placing itself in the new world order and using it to build a sustainable, holistic democratic and development structure for the continent. We now have a new opportunity in the emerging new world order to forge a true lasting cultural identity premised on a home-brewed concept of human rights and democratic governance.

Sami Khatib

Violence, Capitalism, and the Spectre of Fascism

In the 1930s, Max Horkheimer, one of the founding figures of Frankfurt School Critical Theory, stated: “Those who do not want to talk critically about capitalism should also keep quiet about fascism.” The “exceptional” violence of fascism cannot be understood without analysing the “normal” violence of capitalism. According to Marxist theory, violence is an inherent characteristic of capitalist class society. If the basic socio-economic relation is a violent relation, violence is not an exception but shapes, maintains shows how the manifest violence of ‘primitive accumulation’ remains present in the everyday of capitalist production. The same applies to the violence of colonialism and imperialism: it is an integral part of capitalism’s history and on-going functioning. In my paper, I will rely on Frantz Fanon’s gloomy analysis of the reality of colonial violence. Fanon grasps the spectral omnipresence of colonial violence as an asymmetric and dialectical relation without resorting to the fantasy of nonviolence or equivalence of (colonial) violence and (decolonial) counter-violence. As I will argue, Walter Benjamin’s dialectical concept of “mythic violence” proves instructive when read with and against Fanon. In conclusion, I will pose the question how early Frankfurt School’s theory of fascism can help us in understanding today’s situation of neoliberal fascism and autocratic forms of contemporary capitalist domination, and sustains capitalist reality in its systemic or ‘normal’ functioning. On a global scale, the normalized violence of capitalist relations of production points towards capitalism’s repressed origin: Every mundane act of commodity exchange is a congealed remainder of the original violence of the so-called ‘primitive’ or, ‘ursprüngliche’ accumulation through which capitalism was historically implemented.

Haytham Manna

Civil Resistance and Nonviolence

During the phases of decline we are witnessing; the global system was characterized by the multiplicity of the patterns of violence practiced against those who were placed in the position of "the enemy". And whether the cluster of "evil" included cultures, religions, or gigantic state entities, resorting to violence, be it military or economic, was the most prominent way to preserve what could be preserved.

Most of the military violence took place by proxy, and the fuel were the "Fighters Without Borders", who imagined that the bombing of an embassy or the kidnapping of a journalist could shake this system. In the meantime, economic violence escalated through the process of "multilateral sanctions" as an official policy of the powerful. In all of the cases we have lived and are witnessing, the "collateral damage", as Madeleine Albright called it, was much greater than the intended results.

In both cases, the resort to violence by the oppressor and the oppressed, was devastating to the weaker components of society and the vulnerable peoples.

How can nonviolence and civil resistance become the common international method for civil societies to face the lack of self-immunity in the periphery and the most vulnerable societies, during the slow transformation process in the global order that we are witnessing?

Adam Hanieh

Gulf Capitalism and the Changing Global Political Economy

The six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar) constitute one of the most important zones of power within the contemporary Middle East. Since the onset of the Arab uprisings in 2010-2011, scholars have

begun to focus greater attention on the growing political and military role of the GCC in the region, as well as the specificities of the Gulf's own political economy.

This presentation will locate the GCC within the wider international sphere, focusing in particular on the post-war period, in which oil (and its associated financial surpluses) emerged as central to the balance of global power and the functioning of modern capitalism. It traces how these features have shaped the development of the state in the Gulf, to which is linked a powerful class of Gulf business conglomerates that have come to dominate all moments of accumulation.

Given this state-class relation, the presentation examines the significant internationalisation of Gulf capital that has occurred over the last two decades, concomitant with the rolling-out of neoliberalism (in both the Middle East and globally). The presentation will ask what this internationalisation of capital might imply for the Middle East's place in the shifting dynamics of the world economy – focusing in particular on escalating China/US rivalries and an imminent downturn in the global economy.

Gilbert Achcar

But When Was Our World Smiling?

The Covid-19 pandemic culminated an era characterized by significant decline in social and political achievements, which peaked in the 1960s. That decade witnessed the rise of national liberation movements and their rootedness. In addition to that, it had witnessed great successes in decolonization, the steadfastness of the Vietnamese people in the face of the American aggression, the "cultural revolution" in China, rays of hope for democratization in the countries dominated by Moscow, and the peak of the welfare states in the west. Generally, during that decade, the world witnessed high rates of economic growth and societal development.

In our Arab region, the sixties marked the deepening of the nationalist movement with Nasserite Egypt at its centre. And despite the second Nakba in 1967, the hope of the people was so strong that the Arab defeat sparked a wave of radicalization that encompassed the entire region, with the Palestinian resistance at the frontlines. On the global scale, the era was culminated by a wave of youth radicalization that was symbolized by the year 1968 with the movements that it witnessed in various continents. The 1960s world was indeed smiling, its youth were optimistic and looking towards a bright future.

As for the time of Covid-19 that comes after forty years of neoliberalism. These years have witnessed the dismantling of many social achievements acquired in previous decades, the shifting balance of global powers in a way that unleashed the hand of US imperialism, especially in our region, and the marrying of some limited democratic transformations with economic transformations characterized by obscene exploitation and growing inequality with slow growth rates in most countries. This in turn led to a new wave of authoritarian backsliding, with the rise of reactionary groups; from religious fundamentalism to the far-right, all the way to Donald Trump's victory becoming the president of the United States.

Can the new generation regain the ability to smile and hope, under what conditions and how?

George Giacaman

The Arab World after the Pandemic?

Expectations abound about the shape of the world after the Corona pandemic, especially that the world will witness a major globalized economic recession that will affect most countries, albeit to different degrees. While some see that the epidemic has broken the spine of economic globalization, others argue that this will generate a global conflict between conservative forces seeking to prevent or contain change, and mass movements that are expected to arise or re-emerge,

similar to what happened in the mortgage crisis in 2008, but it will not be limited to The United States and Europe, it will spread to different countries of the world.

The Arab world will not be far from this conflict, which originally began at the end of 2010 with the revolution in Tunisia and then Egypt on January 25, 2011. The Arab world was ready for such an explosion before, as several reports have shown in relation to poverty and unemployment among young people in particular, and the corrupted regimes and political authoritarianism. The Arab world will now witness, due to additional impoverishment and destitution, a return to a third stage of uprisings and revolutions in which the Arab countries that have led the counter-revolution since 2011 will be aligned, and now with the support of Israel in particular and its alliance, because of its awareness of the "danger" that change imposes. On the other side will be the forces that will fight for change. Success in this change will depend on the availability of three basic conditions that will have the final say on the outcome of the conflict.