

CHALCRAFT, JOHN. *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016. xvii, 594 pp. Maps. £64.99; \$99.99. (Paper: £18.99; \$29.99.)

This is an ambitious work that is long overdue. It is strange that for a region as volatile as the Middle East there are few studies that give an overview of resistance and social movements, or “contentious politics” (p. 3), in modern times. The strength of the book is that it analyses the many forms of resistance in the whole region and connects these developments in modern history starting at the end of the eighteenth century up to the present day. Part I (these are not called chapters, because they are so long), “Millenarianism, renewal, justice, rights and reform, 1798–1914” (pp. 54–197), deals with the long nineteenth century; Part II, “Patriotism, liberalism, armed struggle and ideology, 1914–1952” (pp. 198–311), analyses the interwar period and the rise of nationalist movements; Part III, “National independence, guerrilla war and social revolution, 1952–1976” (pp. 312–392), deals with authoritarian states and social reforms; Part IV, “Islamism, revolution, uprisings and liberalism 1977–2011” (pp. 393–520), analyses contention prior to the Arab Spring.

In addition to its length and thoroughness, dealing with almost all forms of resistance, mobilization, and contentious politics over the past 200 years, *Popular Politics* is theoretically ambitious. Chalcraft engages directly with most questions that have emerged with the growing attention being paid to social movements and the application of social movements theory to the Middle East over the past twenty years. He poses three questions that guide his research. “First, what contribution did contentious mobilization make to overall patterns of historical change [in the region]? Second, to what extent can we speak of innovation and creativity in relation to contentious mobilization? [...] And, third, to what extent did the nature of what I will call mobilizing projects, complete with forms of leadership, organization, identities and principles, goals, strategies and tactics, determine the course and outcomes of contentious mobilization?” (p. 7).

The brief answer Chalcraft himself gives is that the book “makes a pitch for the existence of unruly, transgressive and creative contentious politics in the history of MENA” [Middle East and North Africa] (p. 7). But he is careful to situate his work in a broad tradition and shows how his work builds on it while at the same time being innovative. For instance, he criticizes Marxism for its emphasis on structure and socio-economic determinism. He directs the same critique at “teleological modernism, materialism, and class essentialism” (p. 8). Instead, his book is informed by gender studies, cultural history, with an emphasis on subjectivity, identities, cultural creativity, constructivism, and agency. Moreover, he situates mobilization and contestation in a transnational and translocal context. With regard to classic social movement theory (SMT), he agrees with the critique of fixed opportunities for revolt (opportunity structures) in *Dynamics of Contention* by McAdam *et al.*,<sup>1</sup> and emphasizes “unpredictability, informality and confusion” (p. 23), as well as the notion of “transgressive contention”. The last is important for establishing broad coalitions of contentious action between social groups and classes. Finally, he uses Gramsci’s concept of hegemony to explain the combination of political leadership, economic and cultural forms of power, the formation of coalitions, and the inclusion of subaltern groups in the creation of a “dominant bloc”. The “expansion” and “contraction” of hegemony, consensus,

1. Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge, 2001).

legitimacy, and leadership play a crucial role in the long processes of contentious politics. Chalcraft, however, is careful to avoid any determinism and warns that “[H]egemonic contraction forms a key enabling condition, but it cannot explain the precise initiatives that are undertaken. To understand how mobilizing projects form and cohere, this book has made much of leadership, ideas, norms, and the translocal” (p. 40). He repeats this argument throughout his book, as, for instance, in relation to the demise of the nationalist Wafd in Egypt, which did not succeed in building a hegemonic bloc and which was overtaken by the Free Officers, who took power in 1952. “It would be wrong to underestimate, therefore, the role of political leadership, ideology, organization, along with the form and nature of new popular mobilizations, and the way they interacted in the political field in determining the shape and quality of the crisis of the state, the attrition of liberal nationalism, and the rise of alternatives” (p. 279).

Given the ambitions of this book, the main question is how well does it achieve its goals, and, especially, can these rather broad, vague assumptions and guidelines compensate for the lack of a strong metanarrative and hold such a massive book together? The main threat to its coherence is that, in doing justice to all historical forms of contention in all of their cultural, social, and economic diversity and different repertoires over such a long period of time, Chalcraft’s narrative collapses under its own weight. Another problem is that he includes all forms of mobilization, even state populist mobilization, which means that he covers more than just social movements. Although acquiring state power is logical when a social movement succeeds in becoming a hegemonic bloc, it means including the authoritarian states of the 1950s to the 1970s.

The first danger to coherence occurs in Part I, where Chalcraft analyses such diverse uprisings as the religious Wahhabi movement in Arabia (1740–1803), the Egyptian revolt against the French invasion (1798–1801), the resistance of Abd al-Qadir against colonial France (1832–1847), the Egyptian Urabi revolution (1879–1882), the Sudanese millenarian movement of the Mahdiyya (1881–1885), disparate revolts and forms of banditry in Morocco in the nineteenth century, as well as numerous other minor uprisings, revolts, guerrilla wars, and diverse forms of “resistance of the weak”. Although his exposé is fascinating, and certainly underscores his assumption that revolts influenced developments in all these regions and that equality and justice drove them, the common dynamics are hard to discern.

This critique applies less to Part II, which is characterized by the consolidation of the unifying semi-colonial nation state and the rise of the nationalism led by the notables in the interwar period. Chalcraft explains how new alliances between urban notables, tribes, peasants, and later the new middle classes and emerging working classes tried to establish new hegemonic blocs based on national independence and justice during the uprisings starting at the end of World War I and ending with the military coup in Egypt in 1952. In between, he analyses the Abd al-Krim’s republic in the Moroccan Rif (1921–1926), Izz al-Din al-Qassam’s Great Revolt (1936–1939) in Palestine, the nationalist movement led by Messali al-Hadj in Algeria, and the labour and women’s movements in Egypt, and how these movements contributed to the increasingly focused notion of national rights, self-determination, and social reform either in its religious, secular, or feminist form.

Part III focuses on the radicalization of political contention leading to the hegemonic bloc led by the authoritarian states and their specific forms of co-optation, repression, and mobilization. This part of the book is perhaps the most problematic as it is the most authoritarian but, at the same time, also the most revolutionary period. Contention was supported, channelled, and inoculated by the state in the revolutions “from above”. Finally, Part IV deals with the “hegemonic contraction” of these states and how they were challenged by a host of opponents to meet their commitments to justice and equality,

ranging from the Palestinian resistance movement, the Islamist movement, secular liberals, the rise of Hizbullah, the “bread riots” in Algeria in the 1980s, uprisings in Bahrain, and the Arab Spring.

This is undoubtedly an impressive book. It is a timely contribution to the debate on Arab politics and it provides a powerful argument to show that Arabs are not passive and that the dominant focus on resilience of authoritarian states is mistaken and myopic. The room Chalcraft gives to agency, ideas, context, and indeterminacy is refreshing. On the whole, his book gives a welcome impetus to social movement research. The range of topics he covers is staggering, and the way he analyses them convincing. Often, the reader is struck by the new comparisons he makes. Some sections are simply good to read because they are a reminder of a revolutionary fervour one has forgotten, such as his sections on the Palestinian liberation movement. But there are some important omissions too. In rejecting economic determinism, Chalcraft seems to bend too much in the direction of voluntarism. I believe that citizenship, such a crucial theme around which most of the contention was centred after nation states were introduced in the region, would have been a great topic to weave through the narrative. With the exception of the Shi’is in Iraq and Bahrain, he pays little attention to minority movements, such as the “Berber Spring” in Algeria, the Amazigh movement in Morocco, the Kurds in Iraq and Syria, or sectarian mobilization. What I find most problematic is the imbalance between narrative detail, which is often too elaborate (why, for instance, do we have to read ten pages on Tariq al-Bishri, Adel Hussein, and other 1980s’ Islamist thinkers on Islamic authenticity?), and his theoretical arguments, which are scattered sparsely throughout the text and pulled together only in the conclusions. The impact of this work would perhaps have been greater if Chalcraft had chosen fewer examples, tightened his theoretical argument, and reduced the number of pages.

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SPD und Parlamentarismus. Entwicklungslinien und Problemfelder 1871–1990. Ed. by Detlef Lehnert. [Historische Demokratieforschung, Vol. 9.] Böhlau, Cologne [etc.] 2016. 317 pp. €45.00.

In the final chapter of *SPD und Parlamentarismus*, Bernd Faulenbach opens with the observation that “like no other German party Social Democrats have been the guarantor of parliamentarianism”. In his introduction, editor Detlef Lehnert draws attention to Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein, and Rudolf Hilferding, party notables who, a long time before the Godesberg Programme (1959), saw the virtues of politics mediated through a parliament and its parties. In *SPD und Parlamentarismus*, there is little to suggest that Social Democracy has ever stood apart from the German tradition of parliamentary democracy. Under the leadership of Bebel or Schmidt, Ebert or Brandt, Social Democracy has played host to much debate since its earliest days about whether socialists can be too Reichstag-orientated – see Wilhelm Liebknecht’s 1869 talk “Über die politische Stellung der Sozialdemokratie