Violence and Representation in the Arab Uprisings..
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Set over nearly 200 years, *Violence and Representation in the Arab Uprisings* comprehensively narrates the slow transformation of citizenship in the MENA region in general, and in Yemen and Tunisia in particular. Thinking citizenship beyond standard rights and duties but rather in its everyday practice, Challand sets the years of 2011–2014 as a fundamental turning point in this story, as it pinpoints the moment when citizenship existing only on paper came into full play. The way Challand does this is by looking at informal politics: when people stop following the formal rules of the game, they start to self-represent themselves as equal citizens in their own rights and demand democratic accountability over state violence. The book's aim is in no way negligible because studies of actual democratic life in the region remain scant. This fresh and welcomed look at the Arab Uprisings through the lens of citizenship takes this crucial historical event away from the usual spotlight of theories of conflict, revolution, and social movements and, in doing so, destabilizes conventional assumptions regarding their alleged successes or failures.

We do have come accustomed to the seasonal metaphor of winter after spring. These revolutions would have brought no regime changes, or, if changes there were, it was for the worst. Yemen, one of the two case studies in Challand's book, is indeed a case in point with its dramatic descent into war. Challand does not shy away from that sad realization—the region has indeed seen a return of securitization—yet, he can still see spots of democratic participation and even, perhaps, in some more institutional engagements toward decentralization. This observation is made by comparing Yemen and Tunisia, two countries with quite opposite outcomes (war versus democratic transition), which only reinforces that claim.

However, the book really innovates in its theoretical contribution to historical sociology. Challand's ambition is to connect the seemingly opposed concepts of violence and representation, and he does so pretty well in a long and detailed introduction. Going back to the Latin root of the term, he conceptualizes two meanings of violence. One is *violentia*, which equals violence to destruction. That one has been at play in MENA states for decades if not centuries. The other is *vis* and means "force" or "energy", which Challand combines in *vis populi* to indicate the collective might of the people. The author thus argues that by claiming representation through informal politics after 2011, the people claimed back old uses of physical force by the state. And it is through this demand that they actually enacted citizenship. How does Challand go about to develop this argument?

Violence and Representation is aptly composed of three parts that reconstruct a diachronic arc of citizenship before, during, and after the kernel years of the Uprisings. Each part consistently compares Yemen and Tunisia.

The first part of the book is a *long durée* account of state making in the colonial and post-independence era. Challand argues that this period saw the establishment of *latent* citizenship: its emergence was merely legal, while in practice, marginalization of several social groups prevailed. Examples abound, from unequal taxation in Yemen under the Ottomans, unequal pay between Tunisian and European workers under French rule, and economic marginalization of Tunisia's south and interior in the 2010s. Challenging conventional assumptions about the "weakness" of the Arab state, Challand convincingly employs the term of "encroachment" to render coercive intrusions on people's rights and territories. It is these colonialist, imperialist, and capitalist encroachments—Western and local—and the more recent resilience of corrupt and militarized governments which limited citizenship in the MENA region. However, this citizenship was nonetheless *latent* because experiments in self-governments and civic mobilizations did come to the surface (i.e. the 1990s Hirak movement in southern Yemen). This account of sporadic outbursts of citizenship life, which is reminiscent and tributary to John Chalcraft's history of transgressive movements in the region (*Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East,* 2016), is a useful reminder that the civic spirit of the 2011 Uprisings did not burst out of nowhere.

Part two actually dives into the Uprisings times. This microaccount of 2011–2014 explores lived experiences of civic activism in both countries. This is where Challand eventually deploys empirical findings to shed light on the inner workings of *vis populi.* Marginalized groups (which he identifies as women, youth, unemployed, semiformal networks, forgotten, and peripheral) reclaimed streets and public squares through graffiti, visuals, marches, occupations, artistic workshops, poetry readings, political assemblies, and—notably—symbolic acts of physical destructions. In these informal acts, a "new collective imaginary" replaced the uneven distribution of violence with a project of civic equality. Two historically marginalized cities aptly illustrate this. In Tunisia, Siliana, in the rural hinterland, embodied the return of the dispossessed when citizens marched out of the city to protest renewed police violence. In Yemen, the town of Taiz, halfway between Sanaa and Aden, similarly became a protest epicenter through the encampment of social outcasts.

However, while in both cases the people managed *cultural* representation through increased visibility, *political* representation in formal institutions seemed more difficult to achieve. Soon both countries faced a crossroads

and chose reform over a radical change. For Challand, this means the failure of informal politics to translate into meaningful political change. In Yemen, the transition was monopolized by traditional political parties in the National Dialogue Conference. In Tunisia, it is the regrouping of old political and security figures which took control of reform.

The third and final part deals with the aftermath of the revolutions, between 2014 and 2021. Civic and artistic creativity, refoundation of the Yemeni Republic as a federal state, and processes of decentralization in Tunisia are described as legacies of the 2011 call for demarginalization. This did not prevent the voiceless from being gradually silenced again by an older male generation, with the return of the "strong man" syndrome in the shape of Khaled Said in Tunisia, and through a regional war in Yemen. Here, one may stop and wonder at Challand's use of the term "resubjectivation" to describe the process by which people are sent back to their previous social roles, "citizens awaiting for decisions to be made on their behalf" (p. 343). On the contrary, it would seem that we observed the *de*-subjectivation of those who had emerged as subjects in 2011.

Perhaps, one limitation of the book is found in how informal politics are empirically developed over the full narrative arc of the book. Challand did a clear effort in building a large database of 350 items of textual and visual material to document spontaneous acts of citizenship for which, he points out, planned fieldwork is by nature a challenge. Yet, at several points in the book, we are still missing those thick ethnographic descriptions that help to analytically describe everyday practices of democratic life, despite existing works on the topic (Lisa Weeden's *Peripheral Visions Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*, 2008, comes to mind). This is quite clear regarding the case of Yemen. The data come from a dozen interviews (compared to 58 for Tunisia) and primarily online sources, including 250 pages of documents, mostly produced by the National Dialogue Conference. This marked tendency for focusing on this formal political process—though judiciously balanced with cases of artistic creativity toward the end of the book—mechanically leans toward the conclusion that politically, the formal prevailed over the informal. Elsewhere, the book does not develop an analysis of the subsequent lives of these ordinary people who suddenly came to political activism in 2011. A study of actual social changes in citizenship would have to go one level down, with the help of biographical trajectories and ethnographic observations, to fully articulate the everyday with the mesolevel of formal politics—a colossal task, it must be said, for a book of such a long time span.

Perhaps, the *long durée* is both the strength and weakness of the book. Its long span reifies the Uprisings as a kernel of change. At the same time, it is commendable because such a serious historical exploration of citizenship shows how the locations of informal activism in the Uprisings overlapped with the fractured geographies of the past centuries. *Violence and Representation in the Arab Uprisings* shall thus remain an unavoidable point of departure for any future engagement with the social life of citizenship in the MENA region.

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