Colonialism in the MENA Region: Foundations, Legacies and Continuities

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Understanding the legacy of colonialism is impossible without considering its historical and political-economic roots. Colonialism and its sister term, imperialism, refer to processes that go back millennia, to the great Bronze Age empires, when political authority first expanded to include large territories with many communities and cultures (crucially, with different languages) under a significant degree of political, military and economic control of one central(izing) system. But while the great ancient, classical and pre-modern empires – from Egypt and Rome to Byzantium and the Abbasids – shaped the history and even ideologies of modern imperialism and colonialism, the actual methods, structures and rationalities of governance changed in fundamental ways with the onset of modernity.

Before rehearsing the history of the last half millennium we need to acknowledge the confused if implicate relationship between "imperialism" and "colonialism." While their roots lie deep in the Roman past (their differences are apparent in their Latin roots: *imperium*, which means to command, and *colonus*, which means a farmer) the two English words first appeared only in the mid-19th century (cf. Williams 1976, 87, 159–60). The difference between commanding others and directly controlling

and (re)working territory is at the core of the difference between the two terms, but how that difference is expressed semiotically can change depending on the moment and place in time, and kind of questions, one is addressing.

For the purposes of this discussion, we can define imperialism as a broader category of action, of which colonialism is a specific and particularly intensive type. Specifically, imperialism involves the projection of political, economic, cultural and/or strategic power, almost always backed at some point by military power, which reflects a significant degree of control over foreign governments, peoples and/or territory well beyond the home territory. On the other hand, the conquest and/or imposition of formal sovereignty, control, governance and/or administration over a particular territory marks a degree of intensification of control that can more properly be described as "colonialism." So the British and other European empires could both deploy imperial power through their control of the seas, successful engagements in interstate military conflict, their ability to determine and even impose specific kinds of trade relations and treaties, to encourage or even compel smaller countries to become indebted to their financial systems, and to establish various kinds of protection agreements with local leaders in regions, like the Persian Gulf or the African and Indian coasts, that lacked the presence of strong local states. Their policies and actions became specifically colonial when they asserted and/or imposed direct control, sovereignty and governance over overseas territories, often but not always after militarily subduing them (or threatening to do so).

Historians have described over a dozen types of colonialism (Shoemaker 2015), but most of those fall outside the more narrow definition I have suggested. For the purposes of studying colonial legacies across the Middle East and North Africa I believe two broad types are most relevant within the paradigm I've outlined. The first can be termed "administrative" colonialism; epitomized by British rule in India, it involves the actions described above: imposing or establishing a foreign regime of governance and administration over a territory (whether the territory is formally declared a colony or

termed a "protectorate" or "mandate" doesn't change the basic dynamics of this regime). The ability of the British government to rule the Indian subcontinent with only 20,000 soldiers and administrators is the most well-known example of administrative colonialism.

The second type is "settler colonialism," which itself can be differentiated into two broad types. The more typical version is when a colonial power moves significant numbers of its own population into a conquered, occupied and/or annexed territory in order to establish what Crosby (1986) describes as "neo-Europes" — that is, new societies peopled by settlers from the home society (and other Europeans) designed to resemble the home country as much as possible. Algeria is perhaps the epitome of this kind of settler colonialism, which also include many of the British, French, German, and other European African and American colonies and those in Australasia established across the 18th and 19th centuries. In almost all these cases the insertion of a settler population was either initiated by or continued in coordination with the colonial and metropolitan governments. Other colonies and protectorates, such as Tunis and Egypt, saw the immigration of large numbers of Europeans of various classes as part of the larger process of colonial rule and/or opening of the southern and eastern Mediterranean more fully to the increasingly European-dominated world system.

However, there are other settler colonial enterprises that were, at least at first, not sponsored and/or controlled by European powers. The first English colonists in North America are the seminal example of such settlement outside of Europe, followed by the Dutch settlements in what today is South Africa. The most important example of this kind of "unsponsored" settler colonialism in the MENA region was, of course, the Zionist colonization of Palestine, which proceeded without an official state sponsor and indeed against the wishes of a somewhat hostile Ottoman state until the British conquest of Palestine in 1917 and the creation of the British Mandate. The more than 1 million French settlers in Algeria, along with 150,000 in colonial Tunisia, constituted two of the most important examples of state-sponsored settler colonialism in the MENA region.

Colonial Identities

Having delineated the relationship between imperialism and colonialism as well as the different types of colonialism relevant to this discussion, a periodization of the process of imperial and colonial expansion and its different manifestations impacted the subsequent history of the MENA region can be imagined. The peoples of the MENA have been subject to conquest, large scale migrations and imperial states for millennia; the most relevant pre-modern example of which are the Islamic conquests and broader spread of Islam across the region. The era of modern colonialism/imperialism begins in the mid-15th century with the Christian conquest of the Iberian peninsula, the Portuguese navigation around West and into Southern Africa, and finally the Spanish and Portuguese arrival in the Americas, which inaugurated the first era of truly global, overseas empire. The Iberian powers were followed soon after by the Dutch, English and French as they began their overseas imperial empires, while in Asia, the Qing, Safavid, Mughals and Russian empires all rose to their greatest heights between the 16th and 18th centuries.

We can describe this period as the era of "proto-globalization," when the emerging modern world system hadn't transitioned from mercantilist to industrial capitalism. There were two main differences between the two groups of early modern expansionist empires and they involved control over territory and identity. Regarding territory, the Iberian, English, Dutch and French empires were all based on the conquest, acquisition and/or at least significant control over territories literally across the ocean from comparatively small states at the imperial center. On the other hand, the great land-based empires – from the Ottomans in the West to the Qing in the east – were territorially contiguous, the result of expanding out of a core territory to include adjacent regions over many centuries.

The difference in imperial geographies produced profoundly important differences in identity between rulers and ruled, and through it in the relationship between the various subjects of these

empires and those at its geographic and political/administrative center. However ethnically and/or religiously hierarchical and concentrated political power, the land-based empires – epitomized in the MENA at large by the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires – were to some degree cosmopolitan, in that most if not all subjects shared a common juridical relationship to the ruler and a broader, common imperial identity (even if the majority of people living in the empire had little contact with or even knowledge of the imperial state). All these land-based empires were based on certain ethnic and/or religious hierarchies and their expansion was seldom free of violence and prejudice.

But such differences were not ontological hierarchies that imagined and treated people outside the center and/or not members of the dominant religious, ethnic or tribal group as essentially and inalterably other and thus inferior. And rarely if ever did anyone question whether the minority members of these empires had a history, were rational and capable of reason, or were even human. But the emerging and quickly dominant overseas or "New World" empires that began with the Spanish and Portuguese arrival in the Americas were marked from their very start precisely by the need to define local and indigenous populations over whom Europeans would exert control and ultimately sovereignty as somehow civilizationally, historically, culturally intellectually separate from and inferior to themselves, and indeed not fully human, if at all.

Even after Pope Paul III declared "indios" were in fact human and had souls with his 1537 papal encyclical, *Sublimus Deus* they continued to be enslaved, murdered and worked often to death, while African slaves were assigned the position of, at best, three-fifths of a fully human person. Colonized peoples fared not much better in many cases. What is as clear as it is too often ignored is the unique and uniquely pernicious nature of the way conquered and controlled peoples were conceived of under modern European (and more broadly, Western) colonialism and imperialism, which has had a profound impact on the entirety of world history to the present day.

The Modernity Supernova

If the era of modern colonialism and imperialism began in the second half of the 15ᵗʰ century, the MENA region in fact was one of the later regions to experience its full force. First, the region was under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire, which reached its zenith through the 17ᵗʰ century and then remained strong enough to maintain control over most of its Arab/North African territories until World War 1. On either side of the Ottomans the situation was similar; despite losing what remained of its Iberian territory in 1492, the Moroccan Sultanate remained a powerful and independent force will into the 19ᵗʰ century; the Safavid Empire reached its zenith at the same time as the Ottomans and while its decline was perhaps more precipitous (and accelerated under the successor Qajar dynasty) the country's strategic location and encouraged its role as a buffer between Russian and British imperial interests. It was only well into the first full era of globalization, in the wake of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and Greater Syria, the balance of power shifted more fully towards the British and French empires (LeVine 2005, ch. 3).

Yet during the three centuries between the arrival of the Europeans in the Americas and the onset of European colonialism in the MENA, European imperialism/colonialism became what could be termed the generative order of the modern world system – what I call the "modernity matrix." The modernity matrix is a set of four processes – imperialism/colonialism, capitalism, nationalism and modernity as an ideology and set of governmental discourses – that evolved beginning with the global singularity of 1492, when the Eurasian-African system and the Americas were first brought together into a true world system. The reason I describe these four processes as a matrix is that each of the "coefficients" (to borrow the mathematical term for the elements in a matrix) shares a fundamental dynamic of hierarchization, exclusion and domination and together they are intensified and augmented through their interaction with each other. As important for our discussion, imperialism/colonialism, and particularly colonialism, is not merely primus inter pares among the four coefficients of the matrix; it's

also the "generative order" of the system (cf. Bohm 1980). Why is colonialism generative of the larger matrix? Because while capitalism and at least protean forms nationalism existed before 1492 they were both fundamentally transformed by the kind of imperialism and colonialism that emerged with the global singularity of 1492 and rapid assertion of colonial sovereignty over the Western hemisphere.

The unparalleled immensity of the territories, resources and through them wealth suddenly available to the Atlantic European maritime powers with the "discovery" of the "New World" unleashed a global economic, political, strategic and cultural supernova. At first, this explosion of wealth energized many of the land-based cosmopolitan empires across Eurasia, producing a "global trade boom" with the sudden influx of silver and increase in trade across Eurasia that lasted 300 years (cf. O'Rourke and Williamson 2001, LeVine 2005b) and encouraging the formation of new states in Africa (with the wealth generated by the slave trade) and ultimately the Americas as the Europeans lost control of their neo-European settler colonies. But over the course of the next two centuries the full destructive force of colonial capitalist modernity proved too powerful and destructive, eroding and ultimately dismantling the political economies of most every other political system on the planet, leaving the major European imperial powers in control of the vast majority of the earth's territory and oceans.

From Necromodernity to Decolonization

Even the success of the post-1492 Spanish and Portuguese colonial enterprises literally burned themselves out from the unparalleled wealth that moved through them, the capitalist world system it generated, and the political and ideological order of the nation-state, depended on an unprecedented genocide (beginning and continuing to the present day with indigenous Americans, with stops along the way across Africa, the Subcontinent and Australasia), followed by mass enslavement of African peoples, and the rise of a mercantilist world capitalist system of unique scale, intensity and ferocity of

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exploitation of peoples as well as ecosystems. The level of violence, death, and mass exploitation demanded by this emerging world system required ideologies, identities and governmentalities defined by aggressively policed hierarchies, exclusions, alienation, exclosure (just as territory within the nation-state underwent capitalist "enclosure") and in many cases replacement – what we can term a discourse of erasure and reinscription (LeVine 2005a; cf. Holston, 1989) that emerged as a core element of modern nationalism, capitalism and modernity as both an ideology and set of processes.

The colonial foundations and architecture of the modernity matrix were reflected in two of its core characteristics that are rarely if ever discussed together. The first characteristic has to do with the nature of modern states. Scholars of the MENA region have long studied the "Arab state" and its counterparts in Turkey and Iran through a normative lens that has compared – and judged it – vis-a-vis the normative liberal Euro-American model of governance at the political, institutional and cultural levels. Not only does the focus on the Arab/MENA "state" as somehow *sui generis* and deformed miss the complexity of MENA states, but as the work of Timothy Mitchell on the nature of both the "state" and the "economy" so eloquently demonstrates (Mitchell 1991; 1998), analyzing the state as if it is a concrete set of institutions and actors misses perhaps the most important characteristic of the modern state: its discursive, spatial, epistemological and through them political fluidity.

Specifically, one of the central aspects of modern modes of power is how the state functions not as a set of institutions that concentrate and redistribute power, but rather as the effect of a series of operations that constantly redefine and shift the "limits" or boundaries between what inside and outside a "state" that in fact does not have a concrete existence. As he puts it, "So politics itself is happening not so much by some agency called 'state' or 'government' imposing its will on some other preformed object—the social, the population, the people – but rather that it concerns a series of techniques that create... the effect of a state: the very distinction between what appears as a sort of structure or apparatus of power, and the objects on which that power works" (interviewed in Schouten 2013, 6).

When we consider the state the result of a series of discursive and ideological moves, as well as practices, rather than the site where they take place, it becomes clear how permeable the institutional structure of the state is and why it's so common for states to be thoroughly penetrated by ostensibly "outside" actors and forces who utilize it for "their" ends – that is, it's riven with corruption and abuses of publicly authorized power. This dynamics holds true whether it's the corruption of the Baathist regimes in Syria and Iraq, the Egyptian military, the Moroccan Makhzen, the Turkish "deep state" or, it should be clear, the long ago bought and paid for US government (Mitchell's primary example of this phenomenon in his seminal example). Indeed, it also becomes clear that one of the most powerful legacies of colonialism as the generative order of modernity are literally manufactured states, such as Iraq, Pakistan, or Nigeria, that have little if any historical grounding and are doomed to continue the colonial practices in the territories in which they emerged long after their creation and independence.

If the state is best, or at least well-, understood as an effect of various relations and technologies of power, it is also a series of networks through which particular kinds of economic and social order are established and maintained, what Foucault termed "biopower" as circulated by specific forms of "biopolitics" (Foucault [1975-76] 2003, 244-46). Capitalism is at the heart of this system, the nation-state is its ideal political form, but the generative order has from the start been colonialism. Foucault defines biopolitics as a "quintessentially modern political rationality" focused on the proper organization and administration of human life and populations "to ensure, sustain, and multiply" life and put it "in order" (Foucault 1990, 136-38).

But modern biopolitics suffered from what Foucault termed in a 1975 lecture at the College de France as the "paradox" of a "racism that society... direct[s] against itself... and it will become one of the basic dimensions of social normalization" (2003, 62). As Columbia University English Professor Rachel Adams (2017) eloquently explains, **"State racism is for Foucault the essential characteristic of the modern biopolitical state: it is both the function of the modern state and that which constitutes it."**

If the basic function of the modern state was to "order life" in order to ensure the smooth functioning of capitalism, executing that function was shaped by the reality that modern states and governing structures have from the start shared many characteristics with "rackets" – criminal organizations who export money, resources and loyalty in return for protection (especially in times of war) from threats that more often than not, they've helped create. Watching the Nazi system solidify before their eyes, Frankfurt School founder Max Horkheimer and colleagues such as Theodor Adorno, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm and others adopted the terminology of criminality in the United States, realizing, as Horkheimer, explained in 1942, that "the basic form of domination is the racket. […] The most general functional category exercised by the group is protection" (Horkheimer 1985). Adorno would similar warn how in authoritarian societies "the threat of retaliation always loomed over those who broke ranks in what Adorno called "a closed, violent, strictly ruled ingroup — a racket" (Adorno 2000, 68; cf. Jay 2020).

The more that wealth and power in a society are concentrated, the more like a racket it becomes; especially when the dynamic of protection and extortion are attenuated by the violence of colonial, racial, gender and/or class domination: what the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (2000) termed the "coloniality of power." At the heart of the coloniality of power is what Cameroonian critical theorist Achille Mbembe (2000) first described as "necropolitics," which is not merely the state's "right" to kill and to organize people to be killed, but to expose people to extreme violence and death, to force entire segments of populations either to reduce them to a state of exception, to the barest and most precarious existence. All in order to preserve the established economic and political hierarchies.

Bio- and necropolitics, each with its own forms of productivity and violence, can't exist without each other, although the balance attenuates over time. The first two eras of modern capitalism, between the 15th and 18th centuries and during the long 19th century, ending with eruption of World War 1, saw a unique synergy between the two, enabled by the generative role of colonialism and the violence

attending it in the unprecedented wealth produced by the capitalist system. After two world wars separated by a nearly global Depression, the pendulum swung back towards a more pronounced biopolitical order in the era of post-War decolonization and development in the Global South, which was accompanied by the rise of Welfare states in the West. But these changed in the 1970s,when what some economists (derisively) term "cuddly capitalism" was replaced by the "cutthroat capitalism" of the emerging neoliberal order.

If the state can be understood as both an effect of various types of routinely changing power relations and as a racket, what Charles Tilly (1985) famously described as the criminal nature of the all states – not merely their similarity to but also their functioning as extortion and protection rackets in the manner of mafias, and the importance of war as a way of deriving power and profit, becomes clear. When war-making and state-making are combined, the synergy of violence and criminality are uniquely powerful. What Mitchell's and Tilly's arguments, taken together, tell us, then, is not merely that all states are inherently colonial, and thus based on processes of exclusion, hierarchization and violence, but that they are also, inherently, criminal. Barring very specific political and economic circumstances, such as the Great Depression and Post-World War II reconstruction when the desperateness of the situation gave workers and ordinary people more power over government and capital, their institutional and political structures and ideologies will always tend towards using their monopoly on violence and their cultural-political hegemony to ensure the perpetuation of political-economic power by elites. This is why it's been so difficult for most state systems to function in the interests of the majority of their populations.

This analysis of colonial and state power is lent further credence if we consider the development of the most important sociological approaches of the last several decades: decolonial and indigenous theories and methodologies. Decolonial and indigenous theories and methodologies emerged out of the subaltern and postcolonial traditions developed first by scholars of and in South

Asia and the Middle East, epitomized by the work of Edward Said on Orientalism and the Subaltern Studies group's new historiography of colonial India. There is no denying the epistemological (and political) power of postcolonial and subaltern studies; they have generated some if not much of the most important and innovative research on both colonialism and the periods before and after it during the last forty years, including in the MENA region.

But there was a conceptual flaw in both postcolonial and subaltern studies, and that was the lack of a broader understanding of what the coloniality of power outlined above, which for half a millennium has been the core dynamic, or generative order of modern political systems and apparatuses. Indeed, it explains why "coloniality" so often continues both in the metropole and former colonies long after colonialism has formally ended, making any transition to a democratic, or at least more just and equitable political-economy, well-nigh impossible in the postcolony and, as neoliberal policies – the lineal descendent of the liberalism of the era of 19th and early 20th century "high imperialism" – took hold in the West, in the post and/or neo-imperial countries as well. And so, the situation that persists today is one where most states regardless of their global position are inherently both colonial and criminal in their aims, practices and/or discourses of governance towards their citizens; all the more so when rather than being the agents of colonialism (that is, European states) they are its creation (that is, the postcolonial states of the Global South). Indeed, this dynamic helps explain why, like the two partners in a long-term abusive relationship, it seems equally hard for former colonial/imperial powers to behave as such vis-a-vis their former colonies or spheres of influence, and for postcolonial states to stop behaving as if they are still colonized.

Finally, no analysis of the coloniality of power in the context of the modernity matrix would be complete without a discussion of the level of violence involved in the unfolding of colonial capitalism and modernity: genocide on an unprecedented scale killing tens of millions of people, the enslavement of at least 12 million Africans, the development of an extractive, then agricultural, and finally industrial

capitalism that worked millions of people to early graves, especially in the colonized world and, finally, war and colonial conquest on a global scale. All these constituted a series of wounds which, like being stabbed or shot, take an instant to inflict but a lifetime – collectively, many generations – to heal.

Franz Fanon eloquently captures this dynamic when he discusses the "enormous wound" (*énorme plaie*) inflicted by the colonizer whose every action serves to inflict and maintain a "systematic negation of the other and a frantic decision to refuse the other any attribute of humanity" (Fanon 2002, 240). This in turn produces the kind of schizophrenic or split consciousness that both Fanon, and Du Bois before him, made the centerpiece of their psychologies. As John Drabinski put it summarizing Fanon's thinking: "To be colonized is to be wounded" (Drabinski 2012, 130-32).

This is the context in which we must understand the particularly "creative destruction" of colonial capitalism in the colonies, and why it was far greater and more destructive than in the metropole, reflecting a "necropolitics" at the core of capitalist modernity based as much on death and displacement as on exploitation (cf. Mbembe 2019). Indeed, we can understand colonialism as both the seminal and quintessential example of necropolitics. As former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo tellingly described it, "It is virtually impossible to estimate the full social costs of colonialism, from its inception, through its exploitative existence, to the huge human and material resources that went into dislodging it from our continent."

The other core characteristic of the modernity matrix, and particularly of the modernity coefficient, is how from the start the very possibility of being "modern" depends on creating a category of pre- or non-modern political subjects against whom modernity is defined. To quote Mitchell again with reference to modern cities, "The identity of the modern city is in fact created by what it keeps out. Its modernity is something contingent upon the exclusion of its own opposite. In order to determine itself as the place of order, reason, propriety, cleanliness, civilization and power, it must represent outside itself what is irrational, disordered, dirty, libidinous, barbarian and cowed" (Mitchell 1988,

165). Particularly in the context of the rise of Enlightenment discourses, liberalism, and secular emancipatory politics, modern capitalism, nationalism and colonialism all engaged in the same process of separating out colonizers from colonized, attributing all the positive characteristics of Enlightened modernity to them, while depriving those on the wrong end of the power spectrum of any agency, rationality, or possibility of development, at least without a long and necessarily harsh European tutelage.

How did this dyanmic affect the mechanisms of rule? To quote the first British Viceroy of Egypt, the Earl of Cromer, in 1908: because the "mind of the Oriental... of the most slipshod description … [and] singularly deficient in the logical faculty... it may be doubted whether any instance can be quoted of a sudden transfer of power in any civilized or semi-civilized community to a class so ignorant as the pure Egyptians... Neither, for the present, do they appear to possess the qualities which would render it desirable, either in their own interests, or in those of the civilized world in general, to raise them at a bound to the category of autonomous ruler with full rights of internal sovereignty." Clearly, the need to define the colonized other as utterly lacking in the most basic elements of a modern identity, never mind modern political, economic and socio-cultural structures, has from the start been the sine qua non for the justification for European colonialism, and the mass violence, displacement and exploitation that has inevitably accompanied it, and the "civilizing mission" and "white man's burden" that were the only hope to cure these deficiencies.

If the processes, ideologies, identities and governmentalities of modern capitalism, nationalism the nation-state are not merely derived from but inherently and inalterably colonial, then the impossibility for so-called "postcolonial" countries to develop and equitably administer what one Arab critic of globalization has termed a "human nationalism" (LeVine 2005), one comprising relatively representative politics and economic systems that are equitable and not inherently corrupt, becomes far more understandable. Less known yet equally important is the manner in which the "coloniality of

power" has long – indeed, always – functioned in MENA societies during the modern era; before, during and after colonial rule.

The Ottoman Empire managed to maintain its independence, however constrained by loss of territory, wealth and prestige, until World War 1 saw it stripped of its remaining Arab territories. Specifically, while the first wave of modernization reforms (the so-called Tanzimat undertaken by the Ottoman Porte beginning in 1839) were based largely on traditional Islamic principles of governance (Abu Manneh 1994) that could have encouraged the emergence of a "Levantine Modernity," by the latter part of the 19th century, at the same moment the Empire had become one of Europe's "best colonies," it also began to see itself in the mold of the major European colonial powers: a "modern member of the civilized community of nations" and the "committed advocate of reform in the Orient." It even desired to emulate the other "civilized" nations by sending colonists to the "dark continent" to "bring the light of Islam into savage regions" (this account taken from LeVine 2005, 7-10; Deringil 1999; Kayalı 1999; Rogan 1999; Brummett 2000).

Once it set out to become modern, the Ottoman state absorbed the inherently hierarchical, exclusivist, and colonialist paradigms that were at the heart of European modernity, from privatization of land to "free trade" agreements. In striving to become as modern as Europe, the Ottoman state became just another European imperial power spreading a modernity that was defined by the separation of and hierarchy between peoples and increased exploitation of the poor. Indeed, when we think of the Empire in this way, the move towards genocide against Armenians takes on a new significance, understandable as a predictable result of rather than abberation from an exclusivist modern rationality (as Zygmunt Bauman's seminal research on the Holocaust (1989) demonstrated).

It is worth comparing the experience of the late Ottoman Empire with that of the Moroccan Sultanate on the other side of the MENA. The Moroccan sultanate was similarly strained during the 19th century as it began losing territory to Spain and France (Britain meanwhile cemented its imperial

power through brokering treatis and imposing a huge loan on the Sultanate to repay its war debt to France and Spain). Finally, French and Spanish protectorates were created in 1912 that lasted till 1956. But unlike the Ottoman state or the numerous regions, territories and peoples of the MENA region who saw some level of imposed imperial/colonial rule, the Makhzen actually benefited from the imposition of foreign rule. That is, the French colonial state and its army (and to a lesser extent the Spanish as well) modernized the Moroccan state and, as important, achieved an unprecedented degree of control over formerly "dissident" territory – the so-called "*Blad as-siba*'" (lit: land of dissidence), the large swaths of the country that were never more than nominally under the control of the Sultan and often in some level of revolt, or at least refusal to pay tribute and keep the large swaths of the country outside his direct control (the so-called *Blad al-Makhzen*) pacified. Indeed, one might well imagine that the Sultanate would not have survived to the present day without its *modernisation à la française*, with Morocco becoming a republic like its Algerian and Tunisian counterparts. But the Makhzen, with its centuries-deep roots, was able to strengthen and even deepen its penetration of society under French "protection," successfully transition to a modern monarchy and, ultimately, become a colonizing power in its own right with the occupation and annexation of the Western Sahara in 1975.

Tightening and Loosening the Ties that Bind, From the Colonial to Global Eras

Most of the pre-colonial MENA constitutions had, like other constitutions of the era, two distinct audiences and functions. The first was external, establishing the sovereignty of the state over the territory in question against any potential internal or external challengers. The second was to establish a concept of citizenship, and a relationship among citizens and between them and the ruler and his state. To some degree or another all these re-imagined relationships could be related to the institution of the *ahl al-hall wa-l-'aqd*, known in English as "those who loosen and bind" (literal meaning: "The People of Solving Problems and Making Contracts"). Although the concept is rooted in the Jewish and then

Christian concepts of the authority possessed by certain members of the community to determine what is permissible or not (cf. Psalm XX; Matthew 6:19; Acts 2: 14-40), it was more immediately drawn from one of the most important verses in the Qur'an, Sura 4:59, which begins "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you..."

Ahl al-ḥall wa-l-ʿaqd was fairly well used in medieval Islamic political discourse by jurists like ibn Taymiyya and al-Juwayni to refer to the members of the religious and the political elite in a society who were tasked with selecting and, when necessary, deposing a ruler. Also known as *ahl al-ikhtiyar* (the people who choose or electors—ie, of the next imam or leader), the *ahl al-hall wa-l-'aqd* were those who possess the "might" – that is, the "*shawka*," power and authority – to ensure that their choices would be accepted most widely by the whole community and in so doing ensure stability as well as effective rule.

The question, whether in the classical era or today, has remained as to who has the power to "bind and loose" the highest level of political authority. In the modern era, beginning with the Tunisian Constitution (cf. Brown 2001), the *ahl al-ḥall wa-l-ʿaqd* came to take on a particularly important significance, related to the expanded meaning of shura, or consultation, related to the spread of the idea of democracy in Islamic thought, as evidenced by its use by well-known religious modernizers like Muhammad Abduh and his disciple Rashid Rida, who expanded the kinds of people who were possessed the *shawka* to be part of the *ahl al-hal wa-l-'aqd* to include increasing numbers of non-elite citizens, including even journalists.

When coupled with the ideas of *shura* (consultation) and *ijma'* (consensus), the institution of the *ahl al-ḥall wa-l-ʿaqd* illustrated the many concepts indigenous to Islam and Muslim societies that could like the so-called "Protestant ethic" in Europe, pushed the MENA region forward towards the kind of development that, after immense bloodshed and oppression, the majority of Western countries achieved after World War II. But the essential coloniality of modern political power, coupled with the

ultimately overwhelming power of European imperialism and colonialism across the MENA, prevented

such a development most everywhere in the region (although it's fitting that the one country to enjoy a

democratic transition since the 2011 Arab uprisings is Tunis, home of the region's first constitution

exactly 150 years before). As Samir Amin so pointedly wrote, the transformation from competitive to

imperial capitalisms that Europe alone was fortuitously positioned to make thanks to its unique

combination of luck, geography (its location vis-à-vis the New World), and favorable resource stocks

(especially coal), constituted the "point of departure for the conquest of the world" (Amin 1989, 152).

That point of departure had developed quite a windy and long trajectory by the era of high

imperialism that began in the last quarter of the 19th century and continued till World War II. As the

following chart reveals:

Year	Event
1798	French invasion and occupation of Egypt (ended by 1801)
1820	British-designed Maritime Treaty in Persian Gulf
1830	French invasion and colonization of Algeria (completed in 1848)
1830	Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire
1830-1878	Increasing autonomy and ultimately independence of Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire
1839	British conquer Aden, which is ruled as part of British India until 1937 when becomes Crown Colony
1860	Creation of autonomous Mount Lebanon region under French Pressure
1881	Imposition of French Protectorate in Tunis
1882	Imposition of British Protectorate in Egypt
1882	Creation of first Zionist settlement in Palestine
1889	Beginning of the Italian Protectorate in Somaliland
1892	Establishment of Trucial States in Persian Gulf under British protection
1899	The Anglo-Egyptian invasion, occupation and establishment of a "condominium" in the Sudan
1904	Mauritania becomes a French colony
1910	Italian conquest of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (present-day Libya)
1912	Imposition of French and Spanish protectorates in Morocco
1914	World War I (ends 1918)
1915	British support for Hashemite "Arab" Revolt in Arabia
1916	Qatar becomes British protectorate
1917	British and French conquest of the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire
1920	San Remo Conference and official division of the Ottoman territories

1923   Imposition of the League of Nations mandates over Palestine, Transjordan, Lebanon, Syria and Mesopotamia/Iraq

1937   Aden's status "upgraded" to British Crown Colony

Each one of these examples of European colonial rule reflects a different iteration of the generative coloniality of power for the larger process of modernization across the region, impacting the specific ways in which national identities and the political structures that contained them emerged as well as how capitalism evolved and interacted with local political economies. While some countries, like Algeria and present-day Libya, took years and large-scale violence to pacify, others, such as Somaliland and the Gulf sheikhdoms sought European protection. Still others, like Tunis, initially aided European colonial ambitions before succumbing to them; or, like Egypt, didn't let their own colonization get in the way of working with their colonizer to colonize jointly their neighbor to the south.

As we've already seen, Morocco's ruling system owes much of its resilience and even the survival of the monarchy and the territorial integrity of the state (never mind the successful occupation of Western Sahara) to the practices of governance and control put in place by the French. Across the MENA in Iraq, which was created out of three separate if neighboring and long-interacting provinces of the Ottoman Empire, an independence movement erupted among "Iraqis" already by 1920. And yet even as newly minted Iraqis revolted against British rule, the inclusion of a large segment of Kurdish territory in the mandated territory of Iraq so soon after the Kurds were promised an autonomous state in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres represented one of the great political and ethnic erasures of the colonial era, matched only by the equally devastating erasure of Palestinians from the territory that officially bore their name.

Indeed, the betrayal of Palestinians' as well as Kurds and Armenians' expectations (who were also promised a state of their own in the Treaty of Sèvres, only to see all mention of them erased in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923) highlights the lack of humanity at the core of the European colonial

project. Yet their abandonment by the Great Powers is only the most notable example of how imperial "great politics" completely disregarded the promises it made to conquered people. The entirety of the imperial and colonial enterprise in the modern era similarly failed to "civilize" and "uplift" conquered peoples; not because the burden on the "white man" – i.e. Europe – was too great, but rather, as we've seen, because by its very nature and structure colonially derived capitalism, nationalism and modernity are based on and require conquest, domination, hierarchization and intensification of inequalities in power, freedom and wealth in order to survive and grow. This is why, as Homi Bhabha (1984, 1994) has so eloquently stated, the vision of "civilization," freedom, modernity and development was always a ruse, creating a system of mimicry that like a mirage or rainbow in the distance, always recedes the closer the colonized move towards it while dehumanizing the colonized in the process.

This dehumanization at the very heart of colonially-derived and shaped European humanism and Enlightenment is a core factor in the rise of specific types of ethnic, religious and political violence across the MENA region in the last two centuries. Needless to say, the history of interethnic, sectarian, religious and internecine conflict in the MENA long preceded the modernity, as it did in every region of the globe. But the introduction of European colonialities of power across the region shaped the way in which violence was imagined, understood, deployed and experienced, and its imbrication in political discourses and practices, in unique ways that profoundly shaped the "limits" or borders of the colonial and post-independence states and societies of the region alluded to by Mitchell above.

Thus, whether it was the Druze-Maronite "civil war" of 1860s, the Armenian genocide during and after World War I, the Zionist-Palestinian conflict of 1882 till the present day, the Iraq-Iran war and Iraqi genocide of Kurds-1947-49, or the rise of the Islamic State today, the violence that has so profoundly shaped the region was itself shaped in powerful ways by the shifting (im)balances of power between the major European powers and the states and polities of the MENA. To be sure, not all of these conflicts were caused directly by growing European imperial and colonial presence, power and/or

control; but all of them were in part the inevitable outcome of changing political and strategic

economies across the MENA as the balances of power shifted from local to European powers and

financial interests, even as many sub-regions within the MENA actually saw significant growth and

greater autonomy because of the emerging system.

Highlighting the complexity of the situation, in the inter-war era European control was

consolidated across the MENA even as many countries were granted "independence" before, during

and after World War II.

Year of Independence	Country	Notes
1918	Yemen (North)	Independence from Ottoman Empire
1922	Egypt	Unilaterally granted by UK
1923	Republic of Turkey declared	
1925	Inauguration of Pahlavi Dynasty	"Persia" changed to "Iran" in 1935
1932	Iraq and Saudi Arabia	Iraq – UK; Saudi Arabia – uncolonized
1943	Syria and Lebanon	France. Completed in 1946
1946	Transjordan	UK
1948	Israel	Palestine permanently divided, 1 million Palestinians exiled between 1948-67)
1951	Libya and Oman	Libya – UN; Oman – UK
1956	Morocco, Tunisia and Sudan	Morocco & Tunisia – France; Sudan – UK/Egypt
1960	Mauritania and Somalia	France & UK
1962	Algeria	France (war of independence from 1956-62)
1971	Bahrain, UAE, Qatar	UK
1977	Djibouti	France

Despite official independence, countries like most every mandate and protectorate remained more or

less under French or British control for decades after the formal end of foreign rule, at least until the

coups d'état and revolutions that toppled the first generation of postcolonial regimes: in Egypt in 1952,

in Iraq in 1958, in Algeria with the successful FLN war of independence against France in 1962, in

Syria in 1963, in South Yemen in 1968, in Libya in 1969 and finally in Iran in 1977-79. In the midst of

this era there was continual Western – now largely US, British, French and Soviet – intervention across the region, from planning and executing outright coups, as happened in Iran with the 1953 CIA and MI6-initiated toppling of Mohammed Mossadeq (where the aptly code-named "Operation Ajax" wiped Iran clean of any chance of a nationalist government for the next twenty-five years, till the Islamic Revolution), and in Iraq in 1963 and 1968 with the two Baathist coups (also likely supported if not spearheaded by American and British intelligence services). Concurrent with this more direct interference was the "tripartite aggression" of the Suez Crisis in 1956 (when the UK, France and Israel teamed up to attempt to topple Nasser by initiating an invasion of the Sinai), the creation of the Baghdad Pact in 1955, the US intervention in Lebanon in 1958 in support of the "Eisenhower Doctrine," French and then US support for Israel's military and nuclear programs in the 1950s and 1960s (especially after the ostensibly miraculous victory in the Six Day War), and the all-out US and broader Western support for Israel, as well as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the so-called "moderate" Arab monarchies and republican governments across the MENA in the last four decades.

The ongoing coloniality of power across the region naturally produced its own opposition, whether in the form of revolutionary movements within military forces that overthrew pro-Western (and in some cases even post-revolutionary) governments, to various strands of secular, and later religiously grounded organizations that were committed to the violent dismantling of existing systems, whether it was the PLO and its offshoots looking to destroy Israel in the 1960s through 1980s to al-Qa'eda's growing war against the Saudi regime and then the US in the 1990s through the Islamic State's desire to tear up "Sykes Picot" and literally redraw the borders of the MENA region in the last decade. But since the emergence of the neoliberal world system the only successful revolution has been in Iran with the creation of the Islamic Republic, which no less than Michel Foucault realized as it was happening was the "first great revolt… of bare hands… against neoliberalism" (Foucault 1987, 45). What's more, with the participation of the Syrians and rapidly disintegrating Soviet Union in Operation

Desert Storm to remove Iraq from Kuwait, there was a more or less complete realignment of the region by the early 1990s towards a mono-polar US-led order.

To be sure, US hegemony has been challenged since then, first by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, then by growing Iranian assertiveness in the face of US sanctions and the rebirth of an aggressive and self-assured Russian foreign policy and by the rise of China as a major economic and strategic player across the region. But even after the disastrous US invasion of Iraq — the clearest example of a direct imposition of imperial/colonial occupation since Iraq's invasion of Kuwait the previous decade — the US remained the singularly important strategic, military and economic actor across the MENA region, using its massive and largely military and security aide packages and diplomatic support for regimes across the region, as well as its network of dozens of often massive military bases spread out from Morocco to Pakistan to ensure its continued power and influence and, as important, the massive flow of money and weapons into and out of the MENA. How this has occurred is the subject of the next section.

The Rise of Neoliberal (Dis)Order

While the colonial era that began in the MENA with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 ended officially with the independence of the last of the Gulf sheikhdoms (UAE and Bahrain) in 1971, the legacies of colonialism and the coloniality of power remain to the present day. Indeed, they were (re)solidified and often strengthened by the openings (*infitah*) so many societies underwent to the emerging neoliberal economic order (LeVine 2005) beginning with Sadat's *infitah* program initiated in October, 1974, exactly one year after the Ramadan/Yom Kippur war and right as he was reorienting Egypt's geostrategic as well as economic relations away from the Soviet Union and towards the West. The structural adjustment programs designed and often imposed by the major Washington Consensus institutions (the US Government, the IMF, World Bank and related institutions) soon penetrated most

of the Western aligned countries of the region, featuring the usual policy prescriptions of floating local currencies, lowering tariffs and opening more fully to foreign investment and trade, all of which necessitated an end to so-called "import substitution industrialization" and the subsidies on which it depended (which usually meant decimating local industries). At the same time, social spending and subsidies were to be cut to reduce budget deficits, while government income (whether through rents or taxes) would be devoted increasingly to service the debts incurred by bailout loans from international financial institutions.

Whether in the MENA region or across the world, Washington Consensus policies usually led to anti-austerity protests once the cuts in subsidies and support for ordinary citizens were felt fully. Beginning with food riots in Egypt in 1977 and followed by protests in Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon and across the region, the same issues have continued to plague governments across the region till the present day; they are considered among the prime causes of the Arab uprisings (cf. Mossallam 2019) as well as the return to protests across the region (including Iran) in 2018-2019 – so much so that no less than the paper of record of the neoliberal order, the *Financial Times*, asked in a 2018 article whether the Fund was "sowing seeds of a second Arab spring" as repression replaced subsidies to contain the social unrest such policies inevitably caused (England and Saleh 2018). Had they read Raymond Williams nearly half a century ago, they wouldn't have had to ask. As he pointed out in *Keywords* (1976, 160-61): "If imperialism is understood primarily as an economic system of external investment and the penetration and control of markets and sources of raw materials, political changes in the status of colonies or former colonies [did] not greatly affect description of the continuing economic system as imperialist."

David Harvey, the leading theorist of the neoliberal order, was not telling most citizens of the MENA anything they didn't already know when he argued in a 2004 essay that contemporary, neoliberal

globalization "represents the 'new imperialism'," one defined by "accumulation by dispossession" (that is, controlling a country's resources, land, and labor) rather than anything resembling the free market and liberal democracy advertised by its acolytes and salesmen. This was already the common experience and understanding by the 1990s (cf. LeVine 2005b). If this reality is becoming more inescapable today in the Global North, it's been the defining feature of global capitalism everywhere else for half a millennium. But there have been significant changes in the dynamics of the modernity matrix and the role of colonialism and imperialism in them since the mid-'70s *infitah* programs ushered in the neoliberal age in the MENA.

Perhaps the harbinger of the era was the October 1973 War, which saw the OPEC oil embargo and the massive rise in the price of petroleum, and with it, the profits accruing to the primary oil producing countries and the major oil companies. In his "Limits of the State," Timothy Mitchell explored how the major US oil companies got the US government to change the way their profits were taxed after World War II when the Saudis demanded an increase in the royalty payment from 12 to 50 percent and, unwilling either to cut its profits or to raise the price of oil, Aramco arranged for the increase in royalty to be paid not by the company but by U.S. Taxpayers by exploiting, with the help of the State Department, a loophole in the tax law so that royalties were treated as direct foreign taxes that could be subtracted from Aramco's corporate tax bill, thus preserving its immense profits while also directing a massive increase in wealth to the Saudis. "This collusion between government and oil companies," Mitchell argues, "obliging U.S. citizens to contribute unaware to the treasury of a repressive Middle Eastern monarchy and the bank balances of some of the world's most profitable multinational corporations, does not offer much support for the image of a neat distinction between state and society" (Mitchell 1991, 89-90).

Indeed, the case study of Aramco points to the foundation of the post-colonial order in the MENA region. With the British and French empires spent, the US now globally ascendent and the

Soviet Union hot on its heels as the 2nd global hegemon, the stage was set for a not so "neo" imperial and colonial order globally, one in which in the MENA countries, which were largely in the "Western" camp now under the control of the United States, eventually split in the 1950s and 1960s into those regimes that remained anchored to the US and former colonial powers and those, like Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Yemen, and Libya, that saw through independence movements, coups and revolutions "Arab socialist" systems of varying styles take power.

Whatever their political shortcomings, including large-scale violence and repression of their citizens, the socialist Arab regimes initiated large-scale socio-economic transformations in their countries that unleashed a veritable revolution in human development across the region – in literacy and education levels, health indicators, and similar markers – by the late 1960s, and for countries like Iraq, Algeria and Libya blessed with large petroleum reserves, well into the 1970s and beyond. The increasingly wealthy Persian Gulf countries, Iran as well as its Arab neighbors, also saw extremely high levels of development as the money began pouring in after 1973. All this wealth was distributed throughout the region in the form of remittances as millions of Arabs from poorer countries without oil reserves, such as Egypt and exiled Palestinians, moved to the Gulf to work (cf. LeVine 2005b, Hanieh 2013, Chalcraft 2016).

Over the next two decades, however, oil prices sank precipitously, Iran and Iraq became engaged in a brutal 8 year long war, while structural adjustment programs were imposed across the MENA. Many of the previous gains were lost, and with them the "authoritarian bargain" that enabled governments to trade democracy for high levels of human development. At the same time, neoliberal polices created new opportunities for amassing wealth and power within MENA societies just as they did globally. Whether it was militaries getting into manufacturing and then privatizing state-owned businesses (Egypt), kings and Presidents gaining personal control over large sections of previously nationalized sectors (Morocco, Yemen), the children of the political leaderships flocking to the Paris,

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London and Boston to get MBAs and financialize significant parts of their countries' economies (Egypt and Libya), the emergence of reformatted business-government elite networks (Syria) or merely the intensification of corruption, graft and outright theft of unfathomable amounts of the national economy (as happened in Tunisia and Yemen), and the emerging neoliberal regime strengthened and entrenched some power networks while opening space for new actors to challenge those that were less fleet of foot.

While the neoliberal realignment started in the 1970s and picked up steam in the 1980s, the watershed moment was the 1991 Gulf War that resulted after Saddam Hussein invaded and occupied Kuwait in August 1990. This moment signified the rise of the United States to hyperpower status and with it the Washington Consensus to the "only game in town" when it came to most countries looking to "develop" or "modernize." With the Soviet Union disintegrating countries like Syria and Libya began to move closer towards the "Western" orbit as liberalization and privatization increased and social safety nets and other elements of the "authoritarian bargains" that had been in place for decades began to fray new kinds of political openings, albeit very controlled from above, began to occur. To accompany the end, or at least renegotiation, of the authoritarian bargains governments seemed to "liberalize," at least superficially and to a small degree, the space for oppositional politics, even as repression against any forms of dissent or challenge to the system was ramped skyward.

As the table below shows, on the one hand, there was, if not quite a flowering, then a budding of civil society and parliamentary systems across the region, especially in the moderate monarchies like Morocco, Jordan and Kuwait and, to a lesser and far more superficial extent, in Egypt. But this was also accompanied both by an intensive crackdown on any truly oppositional politics as well as any elements of civil society that actually threatened the discursive and political and ideological boundaries or borders between "states" and societies.

Deeper States and Upgraded Authoritarianism

Whether "weak" or "strong," shallow or "deep," in monarchies as well as republics, most all states of the MENA and their societies have struggled to address the often incommensurate demands for both liberalization and privatization (usually accomplished, if at all, in a quite distorted and corrupt form) and for "bread, freedom a social justice," as the rallying cry for the Arab Spring put it. These struggles were reflected in the successive failure of post-independence, then revolutionary, then post-revolutionary states to maintain the so-called "authoritarian bargain" across the region; in how even redistributive "revolutionary" states descended into little more than murderous military-ruled mafias, especially with the arrival of neoliberal "openings" in the mid-1970s.

And yet, the move towards neoliberalism offered states, if not peoples and societies, the chance to reboot. As Steven Heydemann argues, the ability of repressive regimes to attenuate their policies of control in the neoliberal era to accommodate and manage changing political, economic, and social conditions – what scholars have termed "authoritarian upgrading" — is crucial to their survival. As he writes, "Authoritarian upgrading consists in other words not in shutting down and closing off Arab societies from globalization and other forces of political, economic, and social change. Nor is it based simply on the willingness of Arab governments to repress their opponents… [but rather] is shaped by what might be called "authoritarian learning" (2007, 1-2).

This process accelerated as online public spheres and through them real world civil societies began to develop and push for greater freedom and accountability. Until the eruption of the uprisings beginning in late 2010 governments sought to contain, redirect and when possible coopt pressure from below, and when necessary even facilitated "controlled forms of political contestation" as exemplified by the growing participation of Islamist political parties in formal parliamentary political processes. At the same time, regimes and the systems they represented had to walk a type rope between ongoing demands to apply Washington Consensus policies and more successfully integrate into global markets while also addressing the demand by various classes (including burgeoning middle classes) for both a

level of economic opportunity commensurate with the sacrifice of guaranteed educations, jobs, healthcare and subsidies part of the old authoritarian bargains.

What Mitchell concluded about the "borders" between Aramco and the US government almost three quarters of a century ago is relevant for the manner in which MENA states function today: "It is a line drawn internally, within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a certain social and political order is maintained. The point that the state's boundary never marks a real exterior can suggest why it seems so often elusive and unstable. But this does not mean the line is illusory. On the contrary… producing and maintaining the distinction between state and society is itself a mechanism that generates resources of power" (1991, 90). As with Aramco, the fact that so many ostensibly and even legally "private" companies are understood to "lie outside the formal political system… disguis[es] their] role, [and] is essential to its strength as part of a larger political order (ibid.).

As Syria scholar and *Jadaliyya* co-founder Bassam Haddad (2011; cf. Hinnebusch 2012) demonstrated in his groundbreaking research on business networks in Syria under Bashar al-Assad, in many cases the changed relationships between regimes and the elites tied to them "paved the way for forms of economic agency that maintained the security of the regime but diminished the development potential of the state and the private sector." Much if not all of this was achieved outside of public view or even knowledge, while at the same time the coalitions of intelligence, security, military, judiciary and criminal elements — increasingly known as the "deep state" (*dawla amiqa* in Arabic, *derin devlet* in Turkish) — that long exerted a deep but largely hidden influence over governance in MENA countries was rendered at least partially visible through the neoliberalization of the region's political economies.

It should be clear from our discussion that all states, whether the Moroccan Makhzen, the US government, or the Egyptian regime, exist at various depths into society beyond the official boundaries between them, with the "deeper" — that is, more fully hidden — actors, policies and apparatuses of

power hidden precisely because so much of their core function resembles the kinds of criminality against which states by their very definition are supposed to be defined. But even the deepest states can face political and economic challenges that threaten its stability, which occurred in the second half of the 2000s as the global financial crisis and then recession took hold, and unemployment and inequality increased. The boundaries were stressed to the breaking point with the eruption of the Arab uprisings, and indeed already a year earlier when the allegedly fraudulent victory of then President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad led to the explosion of the "Green Wave" protest movement in Iran.

What is most important from our perspective to understand about these dynamics is the fundamental change in the relationship between authoritarian states and the societies they govern under neoliberal conditions. Specifically, if as we've seen authoritarian bargains had guaranteed a minimum level of concern, care and order by governments for their citizens in order to harness their productive power – what Michel Foucault famously termed a "biopolitics" – becomes, with the turn to neoliberal policies, something much closer to necropolitics, or even necroliberalism, where people increasingly becomes superfluous, expendable, monetized and/or economized through the violence and death either they can inflict or is inflicted upon them. The immense brutality of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the long-term war it unleashed across Central Asia and the Middle East, the Iran-Iraq War that began not long after, the intensification of Israeli rule in the Occupied Territories and the invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon in 1982, the 1991 and then 2003 Gulf wars and the hundreds of thousands of dead (and millions of injured) they produced, as well as the decades of ruthless authoritarian rule in countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq and Yemen – all these coincided with the neoliberal transformation that replaced any obligation to care and develop populations with the marginalization and securitization of most everyone outside the elite, a process exacerbated precisely by the rise in inequality and other negative factors associated with neoliberal policies.

If these dynamics sound like colonialism that's because they are very similar in terms of the

relationship between governments and large sections of the population; the coloniality of power that developed under colonial regimes is quite similar to those under many present-day regimes, a situation made worse by the fact that just like under colonialism, the governments deploying these policies justify doing so in the name of protecting and/or developing the people, if not the nation. The rise of what today is referred to as necropolitics, at least vis-a-vis the MENA region, is tied directly to the change in the fundamental governance regimes away from populist development strategies based at least to some degree on the commitment by governments to provide basic health, education, and other levels to their populations and towards various combinations of political openings and greater policing and repression. And as we draw closer to late 2010, when a young Tunisian fruitseller in a dusty provincial town sets himself alight in protest against all the indignities visited upon him by a callous and even deadly state, the ability of governments to control the space and forces for politics outside of greater and more overt repression, violence and fraud became increasingly thin.

Quite simply, if a government has signed onto an IMF-sponsored loan or World Bank or other Washington Consensus institution's aid program, then by definition it will have to enact policies that are at odds with the majority of its citizens' welfare. And if that government is also already, as Horkheimer and Tilly among others help us understand, structurally close to a mafia or racket, then these policies will reinforce the separation between the rulers and the ruled. In this situation, in order to maintain some semblance of support from populations that are potential enemies, governments will, like so many before them, create and persecute "enemies" – Shi'a, the Muslim Brotherhood, Kurds, secularists, "terrorists," etc., who will increasingly be described as enemies of the nation. And at this point, the road to mass violence and even genocide once again becomes open, as the civil wars, invasions and regional conflicts across the MENA have so tragically shown.

But Tilly doesn't just show how states structurally resemble organized criminal enterprises. Equally important, he demonstrates how crucial war-making is to the solidification and preservation of

power by states, as both are "quintessential protection rackets with the advantage of legitimacy… [that] qualify as our largest examples of organised crime" (Tilly 1985, 169). If we have seen, the rise of modern capitalism, and along with it nationalism, are umbilically tied to colonialism and imperialism, both of which proceeded through large scale violence and war, then it's not surprising that neoliberalism, as an extreme, market fundamentalist form of capitalism, has been equally dependent on war and mass violence for its spread and consolidation as the hegemonic form of governance regime today.

In their seminal but still under-utilized 2002 book *The Global Political Economy of Israel* Israeli economists Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler demonstrate in great detail how the long-established petrodollar coalition linking together the major Western (US and European) powers to the major Gulf oil producers, whose immediate post-War dynamics were revealingly discussed by Mitchell in his analysis of the US-Aramco-Saudi relationship, morphed in the course of the last half century into what they term a combined "weapondollar–petrodollar coalition." Their finely detailed analysis revealed the role of arms sales, and war, in ensuring the petrodollar cycle that ensured the funneling of billions of petrodollars back to the US through weapons purchases (as well as other major investments in Western economies, including real estate and the financial markets), which in turn encouraged and exacerbated conflicts across the MENA region and beyond. This process has enabled members of the coalition to gain and/or cement control of a disproportionate amount of the world's resources and corporate profits, to the extent that they have been able to ensure that their profits remain much higher than their size, relative to the larger economy, would dictate.

Specifically, Nitzan and Bichler demonstrate that "during the 1970s, there was a growing convergence of interests between the world's leading petroleum and armament corporations … The … politicization of oil, together with the parallel commercialization of arms exports, helped shape an uneasy weapondollar–petrodollar coalition between these companies, making their differential

profitability increasingly dependent on Middle East energy conflicts" (2002, 201-202, also see 24-27).

What is most important here is that in this process, and viewed from within the larger context of neoliberal globalization, "the lines separating state from capital, foreign policy from corporate strategy, and territorial conquest from differential profit, no longer seem very solid" (ibid., 202).

In fact, the political and economic "depth strategy" deployed by the weapondollar– petrodollar coalition – the real "coalition" behind the interminable Israeli Occupation, the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the war on Yemen and the authoritarian rebound after the initial victories of the Arab uprisings – has made possible an unprecedented comeback by these sectors of the economy after significant retrenchment in the 1990s. Not surprisingly, it has also ensured that Western governments see authoritarian regimes as the best if not only reliable partner for maintaining this coalition into the future, and because of it stay silent or even endorse their unending violence against their populations.

Disembedding Colonialism, Building a Future of Bread, Freedom and Social Justice

One of the hallmarks of modernity, which has been accelerated and intensified in the era contemporary neoliberal globalization — is how the manner in which time and space have been compressed as the ability to travel long distances ever more quickly (whether its modern shipping, air travel, or instant communications) has literally "deterritorialized" and "disembedded" people from the cultural, economic and in some cases political ecosystems in which they have always existed. For those who do not fit into the normative and/or hegemonic local identities, social systems or (political) economies, the chance to be lifted out of them (whether ideologically or virtually, or for the luckier few, literally) and join the global ecumene can be a godsend (for example, being LGBTQ or even just a metalhead in a conservative Muslim country where ostracization and even persecution of gay or trans people is still rampant and written into law).

For others — whether it's the millions of migrants working in the Gulf under miserable

conditions that are still better than what they'd endure at home, or the millions of refugees fleeing war and environmental devastation, deterritorialization is a brutal reality that leave little room for psychological or cultural considerations. But for the majority of people who either can't or don't want to take advantage of the assumed benefits of globalization, or see them as a threat to local/indigenous cultures, such deterritorialization or cultural disembedding will likely be seen as a grave threat, particularly when coupled with untrammeled support by the perceived main sponsors of neoliberalism, the US and Europe, for their own repressive governments.

And as we saw with the rise of the mobile pan-Islamic jihadis of the Afghan War era, which became more institutionalized with the rise of al-Qaeda and actually governmentalized with the Islamic State and its various offshoots, the neoliberal era can also produce deterritorialized and disembedded jihadis (cf. Dolatabadi and Seifabadi 2017) where before it the pain of colonialism and postcolonial repression produced poets like Adonis or Mahmoud Darwish, or even revolutionaries like Yasser Arafat. It's further not surprising that among their first acts of state and society building would be to quite literally as well as discursively tear down the "Sykes-Picot borders" drawn by British and French colonial officials during World War 1 and which created the border between Iraq and Syria which, at least for a little while, lost all coherence or power while Daesh controlled huge swaths of territory astride the border between the two countries.

As the sociologist Manuel Castells correctly predicted (1996), globalization is dividing the planet, within as well as between societies, between those who can and/or want to create positive "project" identities that try to imagine and enable new forms of collective solidarity and build towards a collective future, and those who adopt "resistance" identities that are far more closed and hostile to those outside smaller and smaller circles of identity and solidarity. The latter, not surprisingly, are prone to violence on ever larger scales, especially when they clash with secular or sectarian/religious mafia states (as in Syria and Saudi Arabia).

Earlier in this chapter I discussed my belief in the importance of adopting decolonial and indigenous theories and methodologies to analyze the histories and contemporary dynamics of the MENA region (and globally). The Chicana cultural studies theorist Gloria Anzaldúa understood this dynamic better than most; her research on the concepts of mestiza and "borderlands" or "frontier" identities, while derived from her research along the Mexican-US border, is relevant to the MENA and most other postcolonial societies as well.

If the "colonial wound" remains "one of the most significant and ongoing effects of coloniality" (Ureña 2019, 1649), Anzaldúa saw the border between the United States and Mexico precisely as "*una herida abierta*" (an open wound)… where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (1987, 25, as quoted in Ureña: 2017, 1649). Crucially, however, Anzaldúa sees hope in the pain and suffering endured for centuries by what she terms los atravesados" (1987, 140), the millions of people forced to traverse the borders between the Global South and North in order to survive after neoliberalism and neoimperialism and colonialism made life in their home countries untenable, even at the barest level of existence (cf. Agamben 1995) and who, as Ureña points out building on Anzaldúa's insights, provide us with "categories and approaches to decolonizing knowledge… to promote the healing of the 'human' that is so often lost in the humanities by reframing her fractured existence as a source of power and knowledge" (Ureña 2019, 1649-50). Her focus on disability as a crucial site for the formation of such identities is seconded by the recent work of Iraqi anthropologist Omar Dewachi (2017) on the wounds and disease caused by the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and its aftermath. It also pushes us to open ourselves as scholars to developing the "critical cosmopolitanism beyond nationalism and colonialism" and the "radical and alternative knowledges" that still remains so hard to emerge in the Global South (cf. Grosfoguel 2008).

I saw this kind of intellectual openness in, or rather above, Tahrir Square on Day 11 of the #Jan25

Revolution, when I ran into a young protest organizer in a safe house above the Square wearing an "End the Occupation" t-shirt. Curious (in fact, excited) by the fact that a protester against the Mubarak regime would wear a shirt referring to the Israeli Occupation, I asked him why he was wearing that particular shirt. Without a moment's hesitation, he answered with a smile "Because we're occupied too" — the smile clearly (confirmed by our ensuing conversation) signaling the power of that realization. As he explained, beginning with the eruption of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000 and intensifying with the mass protests against the US invasion of Iraq two and a half years later, the emerging generation of Egyptian youth, who would lead the 2011 uprising, came to understand how similar their own situation living under the Mubarak regime was to Palestinians and Iraqis living under invasion, Occupation and the violence they demanded, enabled and sustained.

And so when hundreds of thousands of people in Tahrir shouted in unison that "The People Demand the Downfall of the System" (*ash-sha'b yurid isqat an-nizzam*) the system they were referring too wasn't just the Mubarak government, or even the larger governing system in Egypt, which by then most Egyptians understood had become little more than a massive criminal racketeering and extortion enterprise with a state attached to it. Rather, it was the global system of war, violence, mass exploitation and inequality that had been imposed on Egypt and the Global South more broadly or centuries, and which was continuing in force under the present world system (this assumption was confirmed in my numerous conversations with protesters during the course of the 18-day protests). This is precisely why the Arab Spring uprisings immediately inspired and sparked a global Occupy movement based precisely on this realization.

Neither the Arab uprisings nor the global occupy movement managed to fundamental change most of the structures of power, either in the MENA or globally. But they did point to a way forward to, and as important, a vision of the future that final offered a robust alternative to the ever worsening status quo. As I write these lines under a Coronavirus quarantine in March 2020, with the surprising

and so far at least partially successful uprisings in Sudan and Algeria giving new life to the Arab revolutions, it's clear that the coloniality of power, which for half a millennium has wreaked so much havoc around the world, is reaching the point of most pandemics, where the virus has reached so much destruction that it runs out of people to infect and thus, finally, starts to weaken. It remains to be seen whether, in the wake of the last decade of protests, civil wars, invasions and now pandemics, a new and more "human" paradigm for power might finally replace it.

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