



Grassroots Movements, Beyond Dichotomies

International Workshop at the Centre for Advanced Studies

“Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities”, Leipzig University

15 March 2024

at Strohsackpassage (Nikolaistraße 8-10, 04109 Leipzig), Room 4.55

Approach

The Middle Eastern region has been undergoing a bloody skinning process for decades, ever since the failure of centralist development dictatorships – whether of Western or Soviet provenance, secularist or Islamist. Although this process has no end, the contours of a future “order” are discernible. On the one hand, the states in the region are transforming into neoliberal, militaristic, and securitized power maintenance machines, integrated into this or that regional power bloc (the Abraham Peace, Axis of Resistance, and Turkey-Qatar axis) and waging their imperial (proxy) wars for regional dominance with the involvement of rival world powers. On the other hand, we are witnessing grassroots democratic movements, uprisings, and revolutions. Since the Green Movement (2009) and Arab Spring (2011), regardless of their geographical scope, and concrete objectives, and despite bloody repression, they have been constantly forming and reforming region-wide. Thus, they have become a facial feature of the region, and its future shape is probably unthinkable to eradicate any more.

It has been rightly emphasized that these post-Islamist movements transcend both authoritarian secularism and Islamic fundamentalism in a post-secular era. Accordingly, they express social (ethnic, linguistic, religious, regional, etc.) plurality exposed to homogenizing state coercion. They represent the struggle for survival of large segments of the population challenged in the course of neoliberal restructuring and warlike devastation of the social and natural basis of reproduction. Their demand for civil democracy, whether or not it is coupled with a regime change, aims at the destruction of the so-called deep state and democratic reform of the state; but the “Zan-Zendegi-Azadi” (Woman, Life, Freedom) revolution in Iran once again makes it decidedly clear that the democracy question runs through all state and non-state social spheres as well as institutions, and can by no means be reduced to the question of the (re)conquest of the state and its liberal-democratic reformation, especially since this form of state has long since lost its magic.

With the “leviathanization of the state” on the one hand and grassroots democratic movements and revolutions on the other, which seem to contest the state’s monopolization of the political, the Middle East offers a scenario that can hardly be explained by the Oriental-Islamic backwardness of a region stagnating in a transition from tradition to modernity, but rather points most dramatically to a global world situation. The question arises: can we approximately explain this scenery with accustomed sociological dichotomies such as state-civil society, system-lifeworld, public vs. private sphere, secular-religious, liberalism-socialism, and Orient-Occident? In the workshop, we want to exchange views on interpretation and explanation patterns concerning country-specific experiences, how the grassroots democratic movements and revolutions in the region are to be grasped, and what role they play in shaping the future of the Middle East.

The workshop will take place as a hybrid event. The corresponding connection data will be made available to all registered participants shortly beforehand.

Schedule

Friday, 15 March 2024

9:30 Registration

9:45–11:15 Session 1

Moderator: Firoozeh Farvardin (Humboldt University of Berlin)

Asef Bayat (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and Humboldt University of Berlin)

Gennaro Gervasio (Università Roma Tre)

11:30–13:00 Session 2

Moderator: Firoozeh Farvardin (Humboldt University of Berlin)

Nilüfer Göle (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales)

Ebrahim Towfigh and Mehdi Yousefi (Independent scholars, Iran)

13:00–14:00 Lunch Break

14:00–16:00 Concluding Session and Open Discussion