Dear reader,

Welcome to the second edition of the newsletter of the Middle East and North Africa Research Group. This briefing introduces the published work of two established MENARG colleagues. Dr. Brecht De Smet talks about the debate that his book 'Gramsci on Tahrir' stirred in academic circles, while Prof. Dr. Koen Bogaert presents his new monograph 'Globalized Authoritarianism'. The briefing also focuses on more topical news from the MENA region. Pieter Rondelez discusses the border protests in Gaza and analyses the meaning of non-violent protest in this context. Joachim Ben Yakoub in turn investigates the historic link between May '68 in Tunisia and the global Occupy movement. Finally, you can also find a report with pictures of the Morocco trip that the MENARG organized for the students of the Master Conflict & Development.

Enjoy the read!

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Investigating counter-Revolution in Egypt: the ongoing debate

By Brecht De Smet

The events of the ‘Arab Spring’ and its aftermath raise fundamental questions about the process of revolution and counter-revolution and the nature of state power in times of crisis. The revolutionary uprisings, first in Tunisia and then in regional heavyweight Egypt, reinvigorated mass emancipatory politics throughout the Middle East, the African continent, and the world at large. The occupation of Tahrir Square came to represent the potential for a global rupture of capitalism. The financial crisis of 2008 has revealed the structural instabilities of deregulated capital flows, while the subsequent tendency toward populism, authoritarianism, and securitarian management has shown the limits of bourgeois democracy to govern society.

Yet by the end of 2013 the outcomes of the Egyptian uprising had already proved disappointing. The military, bureaucratic, and security networks from the Mubarak era – the so-called deep state – were able to cling onto state power. Notwithstanding the fall of a dictator, essential political and economic structures remained unchanged. Moreover, the counter-revolution was successful, not despite the mobilisation of the masses, but because of it. The current strongman, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, came to power through a clever and agile appropriation of the grassroots Tamarod (Rebel) campaign, which rallied hundreds of thousands – if not millions – of ordinary Egyptians in the streets.

My book Gramsci on Tahrir: Revolution and Counter-revolution in Egypt (2016) addresses this complex process of revolution and counter-revolution. As part of Pluto Press’s Reading Gramsci series, the book engages not only with the Egyptian revolution, but also with the current literature and debates on the thought of the Sardinian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). Gramsci has been one of the most influential Marxist thinkers as his ideas have been appropriated by different disciplines within the critical social sciences, ranging from political theory, post-colonial and cultural studies to international political economy. Through a re-engagement with Gramsci’s ideas, and especially with the concepts of hegemony, passive revolution, and Caesarism, I offer a lens through which to interpret current processes of revolution and restoration.

For Gramsci, hegemony means at its core class leadership: in modern bourgeois society, subaltern (i.e. subordinated) groups are not only dominated by the ruling class, they also actively accept its class rule on the basis of its political leadership, its cultural aura, its military prestige, and its technical ability to ‘manage’ society. These groups become subordinated allies of the hegemonic class, whereas groups that remain oppositional are more straightforwardly dominated. Both domination and hegemony are achieved by a combination of force (violence, coercion), fraud (or corruption), and consent-generating policies. Gramsci’s notion of passive revolution has witnessed a renewed interest from scholars within the domain of international relations and political economy. While the concept is discussed at length in Gramsci on Tahrir, a provisional definition has to suffice here. Passive revolution refers to those historical, often gradual, processes of capitalist state formation and reformation that are achieved through mechanisms of state intervention, political co-optation, and economic concessions to subaltern groups. Gramsci investigated historical episodes ranging from German and Italian unification, over Fascism, to Fordism through the conceptual lens of passive revolution. The idea of Caesarism is closely connected to passive revolution and to Marx’s concept of Bonapartism. In brief, it points to the relative autonomy, in times of crisis, of a class faction or even the state itself, transcending momentarily the warring camps of the class struggle and subjugating the whole of society to its direction.

The book continued a debate that began with the publication of my article on Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Egypt in the journal Science & Society (2014). This article was criticised by Middle East historian Joel Beinin in the scholarly e-zine Jadaliyya, which generated a back-and-forth discussion between Beinin and myself (2013–2014). Our exchange centred on the way notions such as (passive) revolution and Caesarism can be deployed to understand the contemporary process in Egypt. Beinin argued that the use of these concepts restricted our understanding of the specificity of the events of the Arab uprisings. I concurred that these concepts should not be used as a strict model, but precisely as a means to interpret and tease out the complexity of the process under investigation. The Jadaliyya debate encouraged me to write a book that further develops this approach, as well as its application to the Egyptian case.

Gramsci on Tahrir positioned itself within the existing literature on the Egyptian revolution among those works that are sympathetic to the emancipatory movement of workers, peasants, women, the urban poor and other subaltern groups. Instead of evaluating the revolutionary process merely on the basis of its outcomes, I insisted on comprehending revolution
as a process of class and popular subject formation, intersected by ruling classes’ strategies of repression, deflection, and co-optation. Moreover, an understanding of the process of revolution and counter-revolution in Egypt is embedded within the general process of global capitalist development. Neoliberal capital accumulation is understood as a process that has fundamentally restructured the nature of state and class in the region since the 1970s. This view allowed me to explore contemporary populist and authoritarian tendencies in the West as well, which are understood as varying articulations of a general crisis of neoliberal accumulation and hegemony.

Gramsci on Tahrir sparked off new discussions, which were held at the Political Studies Association and Historical Materialism conferences (2016), and which led to the publication of a critical debate in the Review of African Political Economy (2018) with contributions from international scholars Anne Alexander, Cemal Burak Tansel, Sameh Naguib, Roberto Roccu, and Sara Salem. Alexander, Naguib, and Tansel engaged with my understanding and conceptual deployment of passive revolution and Caesarism, drawing on their extensive knowledge of, respectively, the Egyptian and Ottoman/Turkish historical trajectories. In my Rejoinder to the debate I reiterated that passive revolution is not a clearly delineated political form, situated somewhere ‘in between’ revolution and restoration. It is in Gramsci’s own words a ‘criterion of interpretation’: a methodological searchlight that reveals the agency, agility and adaptability of dominant groups, which are able to survive their own hegemonic crises. Thus a nation’s history can be comprehended as a series of discrete revolutionary and passive-revolutionary episodes that are incorporated within long-term transformations of global capital. Gramsci on Tahrir offers a reading of postmodern history through his lens of revolutionary upheavals and their displacements: the 1882 Urabi uprising; the 1919 revolution; the 1952 Free Officer coup; the 1977 ‘bread riots’; and the recent mass movements. In her contribution, Salem complemented my deployment of the concept of passive revolution through an insightful discussion of the continuities and discontinuities within Egypt’s modern trajectory of socio-economic development and state formation.

Concerning Caesarism, Alexander and Naguib reprimanded me for reducing Egypt’s history to a series of ‘Caesars’, eliding the role of subaltern resistance, thus sending a message of defeat and despair to the Egyptian masses. However, as Roccu pointed out, an important part of the book consists of an understanding of the revolutionary process that places class struggle and subaltern subject formation at the heart of the analysis. Notions such as hegemony, passive revolution and Caesarism probe into the conditions for successful proletarian strategies against/within developed capitalist states. Gramsci’s main problem - how is capitalism able to turn its own recurrent organic crises into means of survival and even rejuvenation – remains relevant today to understand ruling classes’ attempts to transform forms of accumulation, production, labour, and state power in order to escape the current crisis of neoliberal capitalism.

Moreover, I argue that Gramsci takes the concept of Caesarism much further than a simple typology of state forms – an analysis which is more in line with Marx’s writings on Bonapartism. Instead of an authoritarian aberration, Caesarism appears as the naked relation between the bourgeois class and the capitalist state – as the essence of bourgeois hegemony. Compromise, co-optation, fragmentation of the opposition and molecular, gradual change engineered ‘from above’ – i.e., passive revolution – appear as the true hallmarks of capitalist state formation. Political forms that appear historically as aberrations of bourgeois class rule – Bonapartist or Caesarist régimes – are in fact the purest expressions of bourgeois state power. Henceforth, the concept of Caesarism highlights that forms of populism, authoritarianism and outright dictatorship in the periphery are not expressions of an ‘incomplete’ or ‘backward’ capitalism, but the naked essence of capitalist state power. The occupation of Tahrir Square is revealed as something much more than a ‘democratic’ struggle against dictatorship. A desire for social justice and human dignity coincided with practices of popular self-organisation, which embodied the seeds of an alternative society based on equality, diversity, co-operation, and joyful labour. Tahrir challenged the orientalist, paternalist view that Arab and African countries are still ‘catching up’ with Western modernity. The self-organisation of the masses represented an embryonic society that was already moving beyond the restricted paradigm of bourgeois, representative democracy. Hence any ‘stage theory’ or ‘transitology’ that demands the construction of a national (bourgeois) democratic framework before any radical social reforms are implemented is inherently reactionary. The imaginary of Tahrir galvanised groups in Europe and the US, asserting the ability of revolutionary masses in ‘backward’ nations to pose the most radical and advanced solutions to the problems of global capitalism.

In this regard, I rejected Alexander and Naguib’s cautious appreciation of the Muslim Brotherhood presidency (2012-2013) and its short-lived potential for democratic reform of Egypt’s ‘deep state’. Alexander and Naguib consider the phase of so-called democratic transition between 2011 and 2012, culminating in the Morsi presidency, as entailing tangible, democratic reforms. However, in the context of post-uprising Egypt the very idea of ‘democratic transition’ has played a nefarious role in demobilising, dividing, deflected, and destroying the revolutionary movement. It offered political and economic elites a means to channel recalcitrant popular will into representational structures and procedures that could be circumscribed and controlled. Thus, the authoritarian dimension of counter-revolution – open and violent repression of revolutionary groups and movements and sexual
different subaltern groups 

exploitation 

that explained the inner connections between diverse forms 

and social groups together under the umbrella of opposition 

areas 

From the beginning of the uprising 

lutionary camp 

regime created and encouraged cleavages within the revo 

demands of workers 

of the deep state intact 

ritarian state apparatus 

capitalism was not about democracy or dictatorship 

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transforming the structures of dictatorship into democratic 

Brotherhood attempted to capture positions in the cabinet 

time 

prime defender of revolutionary demands 

Morsi deflected popular initiative by presenting himself as the 

making 

'intimidation of female activists 

social movements 

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The old passed away, but the young will never forget.

BY PIETER RONDELEZ

On the 30th of March 2018, tens of thousands of Palestinians gathered along Gaza’s border with Israel in a prelude to what has become known as the Great March of Return. The timing was not a coincidence. 30 March is “Land Day”, an occasion that commemorates the killing of six Palestinian citizens of Israel by Israeli security forces in 1976 during protests over the government’s expropriation of Arab-owned land in the north of the country. Ultimately, however, the objective of the Great March goes well beyond mere commemoration. It even goes beyond their protest against Israel’s (and Egypt) longstanding blockade of Gaza. The movement initiated by the people of Gaza on Land Day was the first of several weekly marches leading up to 15 May. That day will mark the seventieth anniversary of the formal start of the 1948 war that led to the creation of the Jewish state, and to the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from their lands. Seventy years later, the Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria plan to march on Israel’s border and have the intention trying to cross it.

It is no surprise that Israel has described these demonstrations as ‘riots’ and a ploy to ‘camouflage terror attacks’ led by Hamas. However, Hamas did not initiate the protests even though it supports the movement and has provided technical and administrative support. In reality the protest is organized by the Higher National Commission for the March of Return and Breaking the Siege. This is a multi-party entity formed by an array of national and Islamist factions and organizations from the occupied territories and the diaspora that seek to expose and confront Israel’s occupation and influence global public opinion. Even though sources have reported some people hurling stones, tossing molotov cocktails, carrying handguns, throwing firebombs (in some incidents attached to kites) and burning tires at the fence, the vast majority of actions from the Palestinian side of the border were in line with the core idea behind these marches: a strategy of non-violent, peaceful resistance.

According to International Crisis Group, all major Palestinian factions agreed to participate and keep the demonstrations unarmed. Even Hamas instructed its followers and security forces to ensure that no arms were displayed among the protesters and no weapons were fired at Israeli forces. The idea of non-violence was raised by Abu Arteba – by many seen as the person who initiated the movement – who wrote a viral Facebook post in which he wonder what would happen if thousands of Gazans attempted to peacefully cross the frontier to reach their ancestral land and homes. This Palestinian activist and journalist believes the strategy of armed resistance has failed and that it is time to return to peaceful, non-violent means.

The return to non-violent tactics reminds us of the ideas of Mamathma Ghandi. In an essay written in 2008 (later reworked in a book in 2012 ‘What Ghandi says’) Norman Finkelstein assessed the relevance of Ganndi’s doctrine for the Israel-Palestine conflict. This is not the place for a detailed analysis of Ghandi’s ideas and Finkelstein’s arguments, however, I feel that two elements raised in Finkelstein’s essay are helpful for interpreting the current events in the Gaza strip. First, how could we explain Israel’s ruthless response to these peaceful protests? It has been established that Hamas did not initiate these protests, nor does it have any reason to exploit these events with acts of violence. Sara Helm of the Independent argues that nothing has ever frightened Israel more than the demands of Palestinian refugees for a right to return to their pre-1948 homes. This fear is inextricably linked to what Finkelstein calls the ‘moral legal international consensus’ that exists according to this Palestinian ‘Right of Return’. In his essay he refers to the annual UN resolution titled the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine (supported overwhelmingly by Member States) that calls for a settlement of the refugee question on the basis of resolution 194 agreeing that the refugees should have a right to return. In particular it states that ‘the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for property of those choosing not to return’. Nevertheless, Israel and the United States have consistently rejected such a settlement.

According to Finkelstein a moral legal consensus is a prerequisite for turning to the strategy of non-violent resistance or Satyagraha pioneered by Ghandhi. In the Palestinian case this condition is fulfilled and the return to this tactic by the Palestinians brings us to the second element I want to elaborate on: what can one expect from these marches? Israel reacts as it has done before: brutal and disproportionate violence. Since 1948 anyone who tried to get back was shot as infiltrators or detained as terrorists. On the first day of the ‘Great March of Return’ seventeen Palestinians were murdered and over 1,400 were wounded by Israeli live fire, rubber-coated bullets and tear gas. The current events and victims are in line with numerous deaths during other unarmed protests along Gaza’s border in recent years. Which brings us back to Ghandi’s idea of non-violence. Despite what many believe, Ghandi was not against violence as such. However much he deplored violence,
committees and actors involved in the organization of the meals
danger at the border and agreed they would pitch tents
most people are aware of this cross it
suggests what could happen if these marches continue to be
Israel
their own state and instruments of power
convinced that Palestinians
non
of the weak
Ghandi would argue then they would be practicing a
nonviolence
retaliate
they would be confronted with an opponent without the wish to
more brave and strong than violent resistance
violence would redeem and convert the wrongdoer since
This could explain the way Israel has been reacting since
we observe that organisers started to modify it to avoid
Such an event would lead to a massacre and many if not
Palestinians
have interpreted these actions by the Palestinians as a
nonviolence of the weak
the military will use violence if Palestinians
keep approaching the border and will definitely result in a
unprecedented bloodshed on 15 May. Although Ghandi would
have interpreted these actions by the Palestinians as a
nonviolence of the weak, it could produce positive (limited)
results in the light of the expected shedding of blood. It could
lead to (1) visible international outrage and (2) it could open up
fissures in Israeli society where more and more citizens and
actors would oppose to the brutal tactics of their government.
Concerning the former, both the UN and the EU have already
condemned Israel's response and have called for independent
investigations after soldiers were accused of killing unarmed
people. Of course, these are limited results in the light of the people that are already
killed and wounded. It is time to ask ourselves the question how
many unarmed Palestinian victims need to be buried before the
international community (and the United States) will put real
pressure on the Israeli regime and for the Israeli citizens to
realize it is not in their long-term interest to keep the
Palestinians locked up in the Gaza prison and threaten them as
second-rank citizens. It is awkward to read policy
recommendations and suggestions by commentators, experts
and policy-makers arguing that necessary steps have to be
taken in order to reduce the risk of escalation. For the
Palestinians, the current situation is already the outcome of
seventy years of escalation. Turning to non-violent means
seems to be their weapon of the last resort. Even though it
could be conceived as 'non-violence of the weak', at least it has
the advantage of exposing very clearly the structural, brutal and
proportional violence upon which the Israeli regime is built.

Biblio
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finkelstein/

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written on May 3, 2018.
From the 'Tunisian Mai '68' to 'Occupy Tunis'

BY JOACHIM BEN YAKOUB

When making sense of the world from the vantage point of the global south, and from Tunisia in particular, a direct line can be drawn from the revolts of 1968 to the recent series of uprisings that shook the world in 2011. Both form discrete turning points in a continuous struggle for an “unfinished independence”. Time and again, however, the claims for liberation and dignity embodied and enunciated in these worldwide struggles, are caught in a web of Eurocentric readings. It therefore remains crucial to point at the fundamental differences between 1968 in Tunisia and 1968 in Paris, as did philosophers like Michel Foucault and Albert Memmi. Exposing the historical tensions between Tunis and Paris in 1968, but also in 2011, from the perspective of the global south, will hopefully facilitate the vital insight why the recent demands to “occupy Tunis” might seem superficial in the light of the latest demand to “decolonize Wallstreet”.

The anti-authoritarian character of the protest movement in 2011 in the streets of Tunisia, demanding the fall of the regime, now only seven years ago, convinced some observers to frame the uprising as the 'Tunisian Mai '68'. Writer and philosopher Mehdi Belhaj Kacem (2011) went as far as to dub the Tunisian revolution “a successful May '68”. Even in academia, Tunisia specialists like Michael Ayari and Vincent Geisser (2011) drew a parallel, unveiling what they consider “a generational and cultural dimension reminiscent of French May 1968”. Such readings of history put the recent uprising in Tunisia in a progressive teleological line, implicitly reinforcing the idea that Tunisians, and by extension Arabs or Muslims, are late or backwards, and are only today becoming truly modern, as they catch up with the train of History. It moreover erases the legacy of protest happening in Tunisia since 1968 and thus dismisses the simultaneous global history of history. I will therefore take up the challenge formulated by Frantz Fanon (1963: 206), taking a critical stance against colonial dynamics of historical erasure and amnesia, as he stated, that “[e]ach generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it.”

The challenge of rediscovering the proper mission of our generation, out of relative historical opacity distorted by colonial currents and undercurrent, starts from the necessity to think through the global circulation of 'Mai '68', but also of the more recent 2011 uprisings, their points of diversion or rupture and their points of convergence or confluence. Shedding light on the way contestations travel globally, in transnational solidarity constellations, in this case between French and Tunisian activists, will hopefully contribute to the collective challenge to provincialize 'Mai '68' and to reflect on the similar need to provincialize the recent "Occupy Movement". Questioning the reproduction of Eurocentric historiographies from the perspective of the Global South, will illuminate not only the radical simultaneity of worldwide dissent since the sixties, but also on specific but too often overshadowed demands for decolonization.

Tunisia’s March 68

Before going into the details of the protest year of 1968 in Tunisia, we have to re-adjust the historical period within which this period is too often situated and framed. The student and working class revolts of 'Mai '68' did not happen in the 'post-war period'. To understand this, we have to go back about 20 years, until May, 8th 1945, the day the Allies vanquished Nazi Germany and thus the day World War II ended. That day is until today being remembered and celebrated as V-day and came to signify the start of what is generally known as the post-war period. But, as sharply noticed by Hannah Feldman (2014), a general acceptance of the idea of a post-war periods silences the decades of decolonization. Rachid Bouchareb (2010) showed in his controversial film ‘Outside the Law’ how a parade in Sétif, where thousands Algerian celebrated the victory over the Nazi’s, ended in a bloodbath as French occupying forces start shooting after the celebrating masses also proclaimed national liberation. In the post-colonial context of Algeria, May 8 1945 is today thus not so much remembered as the victory over Nazi-occupation, but as the day of the Sétif massacre, a prelude to the Algerian revolution that led to its formal independence about twenty years of struggle later.

Also in relation to its former colony Tunisia, the Eurocentric appellation of post-war period is relative. Although Tunisia gained official independence in 1956, the French still used military force to impose their political will. In 1958, for instance, the French Army bombed the village of Sakiet Sidi Youssef, causing the death of more than 70 people, including a dozen of students from a primary school, while 148 were wounded among the civilian population. Five years after official independence, i.e. in 1961, the French were pushed back out of the port-town of Bizerte and its naval base after a three-day battle with Tunisian military forces, leaving about 600 Tunisians dead. Tunisia was one of the first African countries to liberate itself from the French colonial Empire, but certainly not the last. Algeria gained independence in 1962, Djibouti only in 1977. The fundamentally problematic and inaccurate historicization of the so-called 'post-war' period, silences France’s continuous...
involvement in colonial occupation, military interventions and imperial wars in Tunisia and elsewhere in the Global South.

It was thus in the bloody context of a worldwide decolonization movement and anti-imperialist struggle that the first fierce mass protests against the independent post-colonial state of Tunisia occurs. On June, 5th 1967, members of Groupe d’études et d’action Socialiste en Tunisie, (or G.E.A.S.T.), better known under the name of its journal ‘Perspectives’, organized a first protest at the British and American embassies in Tunis to contest their government’s complicity with the Western support of Israel in the Six-Day War. The military strength shown by Israel against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan was not only a turning point in the history of the occupation of Palestine and thus of the international legitimacy of the Israeli state, but also heralded the end of Pan-Arab ideology, leaving a fertile ground for different forms of political islam to emerge. The Perspectivists denounced what they considered an imperialist aggression against the Palestinian people and in vain demanded a two-state solution.

The protest spread over the capital into adjacent popular neighborhoods, deteriorating into incidents of anti-Semitic vandalism. The state responded with the arrest of the young activist Mohamed Ben Jennet, member of the Perspectives movement and student in Islamic theology at the Zitouna University, sentencing him to twenty years of forced labor as he was accused of having incited the attacks on Jewish shops and synagogues and by doing so of threatening national security. The state’s arbitrary criminalization of Ben Jennet and demanded his release. On March, 15th 1968 thousands of protesters congregated to demonstrate at the Faculty of Literature of the University of Tunis. Protest spilled over in the Science Faculty and to neighboring technical and high schools. Protesters denounced American and British imperialism and the occupation of Palestine and called for a general strike to protest against the repressive and authoritarian regime of Habib Bourguiba, the first president of independent Tunisia. The police consequently arrested more than 200 protesters, nearly half of whom were incarcerated, accused of having incited the protest. Leading Perspectives members such as the by now renown Ahmed Othmani, Gilbert Naccache, Noureddine Ben Khader, Brahim Razgallah, and Abdelaziz Krichen received – without legal defense - up to sixteen years of prison for their membership of an allegedly illegal organization and for attempted subversion against the state.

Teaching in the philosophy department at the University of Tunis in 1968, French philosopher Michel Foucault had no other choice than to leave his ivory tower and enter into the praxis of the ongoing political movements. His house in the bourgeois Northern Suburb of Sidi Bou Said transformed in an organizing quarter for protesting students. Foucault also took Ahmed Othmani under his protection and helped him hiding, while authorities sought his arrest. He also engaged in mobilizations for liberation of political prisoners in Tunis and later also in Paris with ‘The Prisons Information Group’.

In an interview with Duccio Trombadori in Paris in 1978 Foucault expanded on the way in which he experienced March 1968 in Tunisia. Indirectly responding to the German critical philosopher, Herbert Marcuse’s commentary on his absence on the barricades in Paris, Foucault compares both events, as he witnessed and experienced politics in a totally different way in Tunisia. Both student revolts in Tunis and Paris were ideologically framed from a Marxist perspective, but in Tunis the students revolted with an impressive violence and radical intensity, making any theoretical references redundant. In the neocolonial context of Tunisia, ideology was not only an analytical frame, but at the same time “a kind of moral energy”; taking the streets was therefore an “existential act”.

January 10th 1968, the Perspectivists organized together with the Communist Party and the ‘Tunisian Committee of Solidarity with the Vietnamese People’ a protest to contest the diplomatic visits of U.S. Vice President Hubert Humphrey and South Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Affairs Tran Van Do to Tunisia. Thousands of students converged at the University of Tunis to contest the Vietnamese war and imperialism in general. The reorganization of the protest movement in solidarity with Vietnam, facilitated the formation of the ‘Committee in Support of the Liberation of Mohamed Ben Jennet’. An increasing number of protesters were mobilized, who condemned the

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contrary to the May revolts in Paris, Tunisian workers did not join forces until later in the 1970s and 80s, when the socialist experiment of post-independence was gradually abandoned as the state pushed for economic liberalization to open up the local markets for the international financial system. As the self-proclaimed ‘Father of the Nation’, Bourguiba, declared himself president-for-life, the government moved slowly but surely towards political authoritarianism, promoting a new kind of state-capitalism. When economic growth started to sputter, protest gained momentum during the historical ‘Black Thursday’, January, 26th 1978, when the government killed about 200 of its own citizens and provoked what Hele Beji (1982) aptly termed a generalized feeling of “national disenchantment”. IMF-imposed austerity program and the consequent rise in the price of bread and other basic products provoked in 1984 what came to be known as ‘The Bread Riots’, killing again over a hundred protesters. Nevertheless, the protest movements offered a blow to what was left of the legitimacy of the neocolonial regime, but at the same time paved the way for the medical coup conducted by General Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, November 7, 1987. Since Tunisia had signed its ‘structural adjustment plan’ with the World Bank and the IMF in 1986 and 10 years later its ‘association agreement’ with the European Union to assure the installation of a Euro-Mediterranean free trade zone, it was frequently endorsed as an ‘economic miracle’. The miraculous and exceptional façade that was hiding huge social and economic disparities between city centers and their peripheries but also between different regions, was blown to smithereens. No wonder that the revolting masses did not rest after having ejected Zine-El Abidine Ben Ali in 2011. Directly after the ousting of the authoritarian president, a government of ‘National Unity’ was proclaimed, mostly constituted by members of the ancient regime. Demands to completely overthrow the government were consequently pushed for by disenfranchised youth who travelled with the ‘Liberation Caravan’ from Menzel Bouzaïane, Sidi Bouzid to the capital. The convoy mobilized under way to finally occupy Kasbah Square in Tunis, where the Prime Minister and his government held office until the national constitution was abrogated.

The successful occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt, which took place in the aftermath of the Tunisian uprising, inspired activists over the Mediterranean to follow suite. When travelling over the Atlantic, the strategy of occupation became the name of a worldwide movement. Launched as ‘Occupy Wall Street’ in New York City’s Zuccotti Park, on 17 September 2011, the movement developed into the most virulent worldwide protest of the last decade.

While clearly inspired by the praxis of the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolution, the global occupy movement might in the future be remembered as an event in itself, framed in a purely Western
Genealogy, in the same way as May 68 is remembered as a worldwide protest with Paris as its epicenter. The Occupy movement could indeed easily be historicized in line with the student occupations of 2009 and 2010, when students of the University of California occupied campus buildings in protest against budget cuts, tuition hikes, and staff cutbacks resulting from the economic crisis of 2008. As such the Occupy movement could be seen as a continuation of the anti-globalist protest that gained momentum in the early 2000s, erasing its transatlantic genealogy, silencing the protests that emerged in Tunisia, the Arab world, the African Continent, the Global South at large. This potential process of historiographic erasure was disrupted by a viral picture of a woman demanding the freedom of Palestinian political Prisoners, holding a banner proclaiming: ‘Occupy Wall St. NOT Palestine’. It was the first image that punctured the colonial connotation of the main slogan of the ongoing protest and provincialized the occupy movement that was circulating globally. In an interview by Arun Gupta (2012) for The Guardian, acclaimed writer Arundhati Roy completed the slogan: “We ought to say, ‘Occupy Wall Street, not Iraq’, ‘Occupy Wall Street, not Afghanistan’, ‘Occupy Wall Street, not Palestine.’ The two need to be put together. Otherwise people might not read the signs”.

Indeed the reframing of the worldwide protest movement through the thematization of its main strategy (i.e. occupying squares) exposed the limits of settler colonial and imperialist contemporary realities and interests. Equally telling was the way in which the Occupy movement faced its shortcomings in the city of Oakland in California in the United States, when militants of the newly formed ‘Occupy Oakland’ movement were invited by indigenous activists and their allies to re-think the main aspiration of their protest, as for the Ohlone people Oakland has already been occupied land for about 240 years. In short, indigenous activists tried to make clear that their demands to “Occupy Oakland” happen on stolen land (Barker 2011). Their demand to ‘Decolonize Oakland’ rather than re-occupy it, was nevertheless rejected by the assembly and as stated by Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang (2012) shows “the reluctance of some settlers to engage the prospect of decolonization beyond the metaphorical or figurative level”.

Also in the revolutionary context of Tunisia, the transnational translation process of the occupy movement failed. The occupation of the Kasbah square of 2011 in Tunis pushed forward a revolutionary method that would later seem to be constitutive for the global social dynamic now known as the Occupy movement. Once the signifier of the Occupy movement was codified globally, it traveled back to Tunis but devoid of its political agency. On 11 November 2011, when the worldwide movement against the 1% gained momentum and people pushed at a global level “to occupy the streets, the cities, the countries and the world”, a small group of engaged Tunisian students hardly succeeded in mobilizing a hundred enthusiasts to protest on the Bourguiba Avenue with the slogan ‘Occupy Tunis’. Except for a few dozens of well-connected students and activists, nobody really saw the political purpose of ‘occupying Tunis’ in the light of the revolutionary process the country was going through. Their action did not provoke any significant momentum in the public debate. How can this be explained?

To understand this, we need to go back to 'May '68' in Tunisia. 'May '68', as understood in Europe, never happened in Tunisia; not in 1968, nor in 2011. As already discussed, we need to understand the Tunisian 'March 68' in the context of an ongoing struggle for independence and decolonization, against the occupation of Palestine, the war in Vietnam and a fortified neocolonial regime at home. Similarly, the recent uprising of 2011 is not so much a 'May '68', but rather a continuation of the struggle for decolonization, this time against a neocolonial regime strongly embedded in global dynamics of capital accumulation and deeply entangled in a worldwide web of imperial and settler colonial interests that converge in Wall Street.

By claiming the strategy (i.e. occupying squares) rather than the message (i.e. decolonisation) of the uprisings, the worldwide Occupy movement was deprived of its most contentious demands. One wonders if perhaps in 2061 we will commemorate 50 years of Occupy movement, remembering how bravely the students in New York were occupying the epicenter of global capitalism, while again unwittingly
overseeing the bloody sacrifice of the masses in the Global South fighting their neocolonial authoritarian governments? Solidarity networks that connect the Global North and Global South remain as critical today as they were 50 years ago. It is vital to underline the connections between Tunisia and Wall street, in 1968 and 2011. Keeping in mind that Paris in 1968 was not the epicenter of a global wave of protest, but one of the many centers of a confluent worldwide protest against neocolonial, imperialist and settler-colonial interests, is key to understand why the Tunisian regime will never fall, unless Wall Street falls too. Only then one can see why the demand to occupy Tunis might seem secondary to the demand to decolonize Wall street.

**Biblio**

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The student trip to Morocco

Each year, the Master Conflict and Development Studies (C&D) offers students the opportunity to join a three week study trip to the Global South within the framework of the courses Research Practice and Fieldwork. The main objective of the Research Practice and Fieldwork course is to bridge the gap between the limitations of the confined space of the ‘classroom’ and the field(s) of study. During the trip students are confronted with the social, political, economic and cultural realities of a development and/or conflict setting. As such, the study trip provides students with a (first) experience in ‘the field’ and gives them the opportunity to exercise skills relevant to a professional, research- or policy-oriented career in the realm of conflict and development studies.

In previous years, study trips were organized to Jordan, Israel/Palestine, India, Uganda and the Philippines. This academic year, it was the first time we included Morocco as a destination besides Uganda and an extensive program in Brussels around the issue of migration. The Morocco trip was organized and coordinated by MENARG staff.

The politics of “uneven development” were the central theme of the study trip to Morocco. The concept of uneven development is widely used in the critical literature on development politics. As an analytical tool, it offers an understanding of pressing development issues in a country like Morocco, not as a (temporary) problem of some regions, cities, or even populations that are “lagging behind” and “need to catch up”, but rather as the produced result of political processes that cannot be disconnected or separated from the outside world, from a wider set of relations involved in the making of contemporary globalization.

In order to introduce our students to the problematique of uneven development, we set up a program of 17 days. On 25 March we flew to Rabat. We spent ten days in the urban region of Rabat and Casablanca and seven days in the rural south (the regions of Midelt and Ouarzazate). We ended our trip in Marrakech from which we flew back to Brussels on April 12. Our goal was to explore both the social and spatial discrepancies within cities as well as between ‘the city’ and its rural hinterland.

Thanks to two University Development Cooperation Capacity Building (UDC) grants of the Global Minds Fund from VLIR-UOS, we managed not only to prepare an ambitious program and visit interesting sites beforehand, but we also managed to include local students of the Mohamed V University of Rabat as full participants in the study trip. Compared to the previous years, this has been an innovation. In general, we took this ‘Global Minds’ opportunity to introduce a new more ambitious format, by paying more attention to co-creation and participation with local academic and development partners. We worked closely together with Soraya el Kahlaoui from the National School of Architecture in Marrakech, Lahcen Ameziane from the Mohamed V University and Leon Buskens from the Dutch Institute in Morocco (NIMAR). In short, we shifted the focus from ‘observation’ to ‘cooperation’ in order to intensify the contact with local partners, experts and peers and create a more comprehensive ‘learning process’ for our students. In total 15 students from Mohamed V and 15 students from Ghent University participated in the study trip.

More concretely, the program went as follows: We started the program on Monday 26 March. During the first five days of the study trip we planned several lectures with predominantly Moroccan academics on the core issues of the trip: urban development, slum upgrading, the strategy of new towns, the general political economy of the country since the 1980s, the rural-urban divide, the question of social movements and women’s movements more specifically, the issue of collective lands and landownership, and finally, the issue of Amazigh-identity and culture.

These lectures were also open to the broader public and were attended by many more students of Mohamed V, NIMAR and other partner institutions.
These lectures were alternated with different field-visits. On Monday we visited the territory of the Guich Loudaya, an ancient tribe land that is now threatened with dispossession and eviction. We talked to a member of the Guich and we visited a particular urban neighborhood that was built in the 1970s on Guich land. The struggle of the Guich Loudaya goes back to colonial times.

An encounter with Fatmi of Guich Loudaya (26 March)

First encounters between the Moroccan and Belgian students (26 March)

The day after we visited a large urban megaproject, the Bouregreg project along the river valley with the same name that separates the cities of Rabat and Salé. Over the last two decades, several urban megaprojects have been launched in order to tackle questions of urban development. These kind of projects have to give a boost to the attractiveness and competitive position of Moroccan cities within a global market environment by building, for example, luxury real estate, marinas and new transport infrastructure. For young students of political sciences, looking into the issue of urban megaprojects can be very revealing. It raises important questions that unsettle the ways in which we understand broader issues such as the relationship between globalization and individual countries, or between global capitalism and local places like Casablanca, and also those issues relating to democratization and authoritarianism. Moroccan cities played an important role in the changing political economy of the country, not only in terms of the increasing commodification of urban land as a means to extract profits and generate growth, but also as urban laboratories for the development of new modalities of government, control, and domination. Yet in contrast to their utopian promises, urban mega-projects do not solve the contemporary urban crisis in the region, but reproduce it in different ways. These projects do not tackle urban poverty, but relocate it, usually to the outskirts of the city.

Dinner party in Dar Naji in the presence of local musicians (26 March)

A visit to the Bouregreg project (27 March)
Besides these two field visits, we also made visits to the new town of Tamesna, the ancient medina in Casablanca, the urban peripheries of Casablanca and its colonial city. The goal of the first five days of lectures and field visits was to provide our students with a general introduction into the themes of uneven development in the Moroccan city and prepare them for their own fieldwork assignments.

During the second phase of the study trip, the students were divided into groups of four (two students of Mohamed V University and two students of Ghent University). Each group had five days to conduct their own fieldwork which they had prepared in the weeks before the trip and during the first five days of the program. The groups worked around several themes such as, amongst others, gentrification, land dispossession, slum upgrading, migration and superdiversity. Despite the explorative nature of their exercises, several groups managed to conduct multiple interviews and visit different sites to inform their specific case studies. Moreover, this was an interesting peer-to-peer experience for the students of both universities in which they learned from each other while preparing, conducting and discussing their fieldwork exercises. Of course, besides the hard work, there was also time for entertainment, diversion and just being together.

After our stay in Rabat and Casablanca, we left the urban areas and went South via Meknes, Azrou, Midelt in order to end in the region of Boumalne. The goal here was to contrast the development issues and challenges in the cities with those of the rural areas and try to get a grip on the reality and character of uneven development between the urban and rural world in Morocco. We started on 5 April with a lecture on land issues and the question of collectively owned land and tribal land in Morocco at the National School for Agriculture in Meknes. Afterwards we visited El Hajeb with members of a local tribe who explained how their collectively owned land is increasingly appropriated by the state in order to turn it over to other investors without proper compensation. It became immediately clear that we entered more sensitive territories and explored more sensitive issues as we were stopped and questioned several times by police officers and local authorities. Especially our Belgian students were now openly confronted with the realities of an authoritarian regime. And it would get worse.

After our visit to El Hajeb, we drove to Midelt (to visit an informal mine) and continued our journey down south to Boumalne. The next day, our plan was to visit a local protest camp in a small village called Imider in order to get a closer look at some of the development problems and political struggles people of the rural South face every day. For more than six years now, residents of the municipality of Imider, a collection of seven villages near the town of Tinghir in southeast Morocco, occupy a water valve on Mount Alebban. Since August 2011, they established a permanent encampment and took control over the water pumps that serve a nearby silver mine. Confronted with economic marginalization, the continuous pollution of their communal grazing lands and a severe water shortage, the villagers collectively decided to hike up the mountain and cut off the water supply to the mine. They have refused to leave ever since and continue to resist the mining company in what has become the longest sit-in in the history of social protest in Morocco.
We also hiked up the mountain on April 7. Our goal was to stay there for three days and the local villagers had planned a whole program of field visits, workshops, meetings and other cultural activities. Unfortunately, we could not stay there very long as the local authorities immediately threatened to evict us from the country and thus forced us to leave the mountain after barely two hours. The disappointment was big among our students and the disillusionment among the local villagers even bigger. They had been preparing our visits for weeks.

After this event, we were forced to improvise. We quickly found a new hotel and started thinking about ways to reorganize the program. After a day of collective reflection and a more low key program to refresh our minds, we managed to find a meeting room in the nearby city of Ouarzazate thanks to one of our Moroccan students who had connections with the local union. We invited some of the activists of Imider to Ouarzazate to come and talk to us and, as such, still managed to complete part of the program. The next day, we ended our stay in the rural South with a visit to Noor, one of the largest solar power plants in Africa. After that, we crossed the infamous mountain pass Tizi n’Tichka linking Ouarzazate with the city of Marrakech. We had our last lecture in Marrakech on 11 April followed by a visit to the famous medina. The next day we flew home, tired but satisfied.
Over the past thirty years, Morocco’s cities have transformed dramatically. To take just one example, Casablanca’s medina is now obscured behind skyscrapers that are funded by global capital and encouraged by Morocco’s monarchy, which hopes to transform this city into a regional leader of finance and commerce. Such changes have occurred throughout Morocco. Megaprojects are redesigning the cityscapes of Rabat, Tangiers, and Casablanca, turning the nation’s urban centers into laboratories of capital accumulation, political dominance, and social control.

In Globalized Authoritarianism, Koenraad Bogaert links more abstract questions of government, globalization, and neoliberalism with concrete changes in the city. Bogaert goes deep beneath the surface of Morocco’s urban prosperity to reveal how neoliberal government and the increased connectivity engendered by global capitalism transformed Morocco’s leading urban spaces, opening up new sites for capital accumulation, creating enormous class divisions, and enabling new innovations in state authoritarianism. Analyzing these transformations, he argues that economic globalization does not necessarily lead to increased democratization but to authoritarianism with a different face, to a form of authoritarian government that becomes more and more a globalized affair.

Showing how Morocco’s experiences have helped produce new forms of globalization, Bogaert offers a bridge between in-depth issues of Middle Eastern studies and broader questions of power, class, and capital as they continue to evolve in the twenty-first century.

EducationLab#1: Persona non grata in the classroom

On Wednesday May 9th, the Middle East and North Africa Research Group initiated the first “EducationLab”, together with the ‘Global Studies’, the Education research groups of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences (PPW) and the Specific Teacher Training Program of Ghent University. The day was financed by the Fund Baillet-Latour. The Education Lab was a participatory research day during which teaching staff, school management and policy makers discussed the different dynamics through which global political conflicts are reproduced in the classroom and how to handle these conflicts. Redefining, in a bottom-up way, what is at stake today in secondary education was the main objective of the first but certainly not the last “EducationLab”. The participative research day was sold out. With 60 participants, of which a majority school staff, the EducationLab#1 reached its main target.

This EducationLab#1 is part of an ongoing action research project that focuses on the challenges related to global conflicts that teaching staff of the third grade (16-18 years) in Ghent frequently encounter in the classroom. In its initial phase - which principally included a mapping of existing initiatives, by interviewing stakeholders and by conducting a literature review – the research retraced the ways in which there has been a call to transform the policy on radicalisation into a preventive and inclusive approach.
citizenship education. As a first step to further reflect on the challenges that such approach entails, thisEducationLab#1 aimed to develop new perspectives and to deepen existing strategies of dealing pedagogically with challenges related to the reproduction of political conflict in the classroom.

The day started with a keynote of Prof. Dimokritos Kavadias who presented his ongoing research on citizenship in secondary education and the tense relation between conflict, demotion and cohesion in the context of socio-economic inequality and superdiversity, with Brussels as a case study. The presentation was followed by three workshops around the figures of King Leopold II, Saint Nicholas and Bin Laden, three ‘persona non grata’ in secondary education today. Through the workshop on Leopold II – facilitated by Chokri Ben Chika and Julie Carlier – the participants were introduced and made familiar with the concept “critical zoo-ism”, to make colonial stereotypes move and give conflict a space in the classroom. The second workshop – facilitated by LauraNsengiyumva and Kris Rutten – questioned the controversies related to the racist figure of ‘Black Pete’ and proposed the method of “rhetorical listening” as an analytical and pedagogical framework to cope with conflicts in the classroom. In the third and last workshop, which centred on the figure of Bin Laden and was facilitated by NinaHenkens and Sami Zemni, the pedagogical relation of trust in the safe space of the classroom were framed in the light of existing political power structures to turn prevailing dissensus into a questioning research attitude. Insights gained and points raised during the three workshops were brought together in a plenary session in the afternoon, during which the outcomes of the workshop were assessed by three specialists in educational science: Orhan Agirdag, Naima Lafraichi and Dimokritos Kavadios. A discussion was moderated by Tony Valcke on the contemporary challenges concerning the reproduction of political conflicts in the classroom.
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