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PROJECT

Everyday Life and Revolutions

How do extraordinary revolutions link to the daily lives of ordinary people? In this project, I intend to tell the story of the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia from the perspective of ordinary people - the urban poor, marginalized youths, and women. I want to narrate how these subaltern groups acted once the uprisings started and what happened to them after the revolution, when the dictators were toppled. As I discuss in my book *Life as Politics* (2013), a great deal was happening in the domain of subaltern activism before the uprisings. The urban poor were involved in the daily struggle to survive and improve their life chances by encroaching on the propertied and powerful, that is, by building extra-legal shelters, extending urban services to their habitat, or extending themselves into the street subsistence economies. Muslim women were involved in everyday battles to enhance their rights - in NGOs, educational institutions, and courthouses. And the youths were engaged in efforts to claim their "youthfulness". But these were fragmented and dispersed struggles often in the form of "non-movements", collective efforts of disparate actors, yet ones that kept them in constant mobilization. So, when the political protests organized by the youth activists began, these subaltern groups were ready to join. The political climate following the downfall of the dictators offered opportunities for the "non-movements" to assume more organized and coordinated forms, before they returned to the "non-movement" repertoire when the new rulers showed little support for subaltern concerns. I tell the story of the revolutions from the perspective of the subaltern; this places the narratives within the analytical framework that explores, and makes sense of, the relationship between everyday life, the mundane, and the ordinary, on the one hand, and rupture and extraordinary revolutions, on the other.

Recommended Reading

Bayat, Asef. "Plebeians of the Arab Spring." *Current Anthropology* 56, S11 (October 2015): 33-43.

- . *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013 (2nd edition).

- . *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

- . *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Ordinary People, Extraordinary Revolutions

How do we account for the link between ordinary lives and extraordinary revolutions, between the mundane and the monumental, the routine and rupture? In my Wiko book project, *Everyday of the Arab Spring*, I want to narrate the story of the Arab revolutions from the perspective of ordinary people - the urban poor, marginalized youth, and women - focusing on Egypt and Tunisia. I am hoping that such a narrative may also help address the puzzle of surprise - how the spectacular uprisings emerged from the societies that were deemed politically inept and stable.

In my earlier works, I had suggested that, contrary to what was imagined - "docile societies," "passive citizens," or "stable authoritarian regimes" - a great deal was in fact happening in Arab societies below the surface: developments that had significant bearing on the Arab uprisings, but went unnoticed because the analytical tools to capture them were lacking. I call them social "non-movements" - the collective action of non-collective actors, the common and contentious practices of dispersed individuals and families who strive to enhance their life chances, often in a quiet fashion, but end up in the long run establishing alternative norms in society with which the elites have to grapple.

These ordinary people and their non-movements did not mean to spearhead regime change or lead revolutions. But when young activists organized the large-scale street protests in 2011, the non-movements of these subaltern groups were transformed into a collective and contentious force merging into what came to be known as the Arab Spring uprisings. Indeed, the participation of ordinary people shifted the image of the protests from some "fringe activism" of "radical youth" into a matter of the social mainstream. Once the autocrats were toppled, the aftermath of the uprisings saw an unparalleled rise in popular militancy at the grassroots. The disruption of police control and the state machine offered new opportunities for the previously dispersed poor, women, the young, and social minorities to seize property, claim welfare (e.g., urban collective consumption), call for leveling, and assert identity - they became visible, audible, and organized. Yet, as the new post-revolution states began to consolidate themselves, the subaltern population seemed to return once again to the quiet and un-assuming non-movements.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Bayat, Asef (Marburg, 2017)

Is there a youth politics

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1814578986>

Bayat, Asef (Stanford, California, 2013)

Life as politics : how ordinary people change the Middle East

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1602877440>

Bayat, Asef (2013)

Revolution in bad times

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=864490100>

Bayat, Asef (Oxford [u.a.], 2013)

Post-Islamism : the changing faces of political Islam

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=728952467>

Bayat, Asef (Berlin, 2012)

Leben als Politik : wie ganz normale Leute den Nahen Osten verändern

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1615184376>

Life as politics <dt.>

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1615184376>

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