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978-1-107-00750-5 - Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East

John Chalcraft

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## *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*

The waves of protest ignited by the self-immolation of Muhammad Bouazizi in Tunisia in late 2010 highlighted for an international audience the importance of contentious politics in the Middle East and North Africa. John Chalcraft's ground-breaking account of popular protest emphasizes the revolutionary modern history of the entire region. Challenging top-down views of Middle Eastern politics, he looks at how commoners, subjects and citizens have long mobilized in defiance of authorities. Chalcraft takes examples from a wide variety of protest movements from Morocco to Iran. He forges a new narrative of change over time, creating a truly comparative framework rooted in the dynamics of hegemonic contestation. Beginning with movements under the Ottomans, which challenged corruption and oppression under the banners of religion, justice, rights and custom, this book goes on to discuss the impact of constitutional movements, armed struggles, nationalism and independence, revolution and Islamism. A work of unprecedented range and depth, this volume will be welcomed by undergraduates and graduates studying protest in the region and beyond.

JOHN CHALCRAFT is an Associate Professor in the Department of Government at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His publications include *The Invisible Cage: Syrian Workers in Lebanon* (2009), *Counterhegemony in the Colony and Postcolony* (co-edited with Yaseen Noorani, 2007) and *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories: Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863–1914* (2004).

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**Advance praise for *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East***

‘John Chalcraft is the Howard Zinn of Middle East studies and has devoted his career to rescuing workers and their agency from the neglect of pundits and chroniclers of the elites. His synthetic treatment of these themes is essential for understanding how the region came to be so fraught in our own era.’

Juan Cole, Professor of History, University of Michigan

‘John Chalcraft’s *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* is awe-inspiring in its breadth, depth and richness of theoretical nuance and empirical texture. Unparalleled in both its ambitions and its achievements, this book provides not only a brilliant synthetic re-interpretation of the role of popular politics in the making of the modern Middle East, but also a source of inspiration for historians of other regions of the world interested in contentious politics. In all the right ways, this is a very big book.’

John Sidel, Professor of International and Comparative Politics, LSE

‘This book makes an outstanding contribution to the study of the recent history and politics of the Middle East. By focusing on the struggles, ambitions and passions of popular politics, Chalcraft brings out the rhythms of political contention over an impressively wide range of countries throughout the past 250 years. This is a major achievement, restoring agency to those who have often been written out of the dominant narratives of power, obliging us to think again about the location and the outcomes of the political conflicts that continue to shape the region.’

Charles Tripp, Professor of Politics, SOAS

‘Media analysis of the Middle East and North Africa portrays the region as the land of fallen tyrants brought down by unfocused mass street violence until yet another despot seizes power. John Chalcraft’s book tells us otherwise. Ranging geographically from Morocco to Iran and the Balkans, and covering the late eighteenth century to the present, his study demonstrates the workings of mindful, strategic and organized collective populism. In its comparative and theoretical approach, this work is unmatched.’

Julia Clancy-Smith, Professor of History, The University of Arizona

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*Advance praise*

'Waves of popular protest convulsed the Middle East long before the uprisings of the Arab Spring. John Chalcraft's insightful book shows how mass mobilization helped to shape state-formation and nation-building in the region over the past two centuries, creating the backdrop and repertoire for today's tumultuous conflicts.'

Charles Kurzman, Professor of Sociology, University of  
North Carolina

'John Chalcraft has written a masterpiece of bottom-up analysis and interpretation over two centuries of Middle Eastern longing, struggle and change.'

Michael Provence, Associate Professor of History,  
University of San Diego

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The London School of Economics and Political Science



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*For Julie, May and Pablo*

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## *Maps*

- 1 The Ottoman empire before 1914 (from Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2001)) *page 53*
- 2 The Middle East and North Africa in the twentieth century (based on a map from Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2001)) 311

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## *Preface and acknowledgements*

Sometimes a striking phrase will not go away. It seems to contain a vital but elusive idea. This research project has been dogged and inspired by such a phrase: ‘The people defied the authorities and took matters into their own hands.’ This was what some Palestinians in the late 1980s said to doctoral researcher Sonia Nimr about their uprising of 1936–9 (Nimr 1990: 3). My aim has been to write a history of this kind of transgressive mobilization in the Middle East and North Africa since the eighteenth century. Along the way, I have incurred many debts.

The research was made possible by a two-year ESRC Mid-Career Development Fellowship which bought out my teaching during 2009–11, and by a term’s research leave granted by the London School of Economics (LSE) during 2011–12. Thanks are also due to the Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères at La Courneuve, in France, the Archives of the Hoover Institution in Stanford University in the United States, the Institut Français du Proche-Orient in Syria, the Bibliothèque François Mitterrand in Paris and the British Library in London, where much of the research was conducted. I would like to thank the academics, journalists, activists and intellectuals in the region who were generous with their time during the research, especially Abd Al-Aziz Al-Arab, Yasser Alwan, Naira Antoun, Mustafa Bassiouny, Ralph Bodenstein, Vittoria Capresi, Khaled Fahmy, Dina Makram Ebeid, Sameh Idriss, Philip Rizk, Tamer Wageeh and Muhammad Zahid. Among LSE colleagues, Fawaz Gerges’ good sense and support has long been important to me. John Breuilly and Martha Mundy’s intellect and erudition have been a source of engagement and learning. Thanks are also due to George Lawson and the Global Historical Sociology Workshop where there were useful discussions and presentations. I am grateful to John Sidel, whose wisdom, mentoring, good humour and engagement with the manuscript have been important throughout. This book has been enriched

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by the presentations and discussions in the LSE-based seminar series, Social Movements and Popular Mobilization in the Middle East. I am grateful to the Middle East Centre and the Government Department for supporting the series, and to paper presenters and discussants Maha Abdelrahman, Gilbert Achcar, Charles Anderson, Fadi Bardawil, Claire Beaugrand, Joel Beinin, Marie Duboc, Salwa Ismail, Charles Tripp and Frédéric Vairel. My Ph.D. students have taught me much: I have been inspired and enriched by Michael Farquhar's subtle and intelligent commentary, Neil Ketchley's strong-minded engagement with social movement literature and Alia Mossallam's originality, imagination and activism. The research and acuity of Amélie Barras, Francesca Biancani, Jann Boeddeling, Yasmine Laveille, Suzanne Morrison, Fuad Musallam, Anastasia Nosova and Reza Pankhurst have in different ways contributed to this study: it has been a privilege to work with you all. This book has also developed alongside two masters courses at LSE: The History and Politics of the Modern Middle East, and Popular Politics in the Middle East. I would like to thank the students on these courses collectively: their energy, good humour and application has surprised and energized me year on year. Some took the trouble to read and comment on parts of the manuscript, especially Cecilia Rossler, who helped me cut down on the waffle, and also Joseph Leigh and Cécile Rossi. I would like to thank the journal of *International Labor and Working Class History* for allowing me to reproduce parts of my article 'Migration and Popular Protest in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf in the 1950s and 1960s' (79 (2011), pp. 28–47) in the present volume. Cambridge University Press allowed me to reproduce the two maps from Joel Beinin's book *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (2001). I want to thank Laleh Khalili for suggesting Mosa'ab Elshamy's photography for the cover image. Alaa El-Mahrakawy gave me some useful references towards the end of the writing-up process. I would like to thank Karim Eid-Sabbagh for convivial intellectual conversation. Anne Alexander has been an enduring source of engagement and kindly helped me with contacts in Egypt. I would like to thank Zachary Lockman for his encouragement of this project at an early stage and his support since. I am grateful to Michele Filippini for discussions and references on hegemony.

I am particularly thankful to colleagues and students who went out of their way to read parts, and sometimes all, of this weighty



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'beast' in its near-final incarnation: Julie Gervais, Michael Gilsean, Neil Ketchley, Nawal Mustafa, John Sidel, Charles Tripp and the anonymous reviewer at Cambridge University Press. These readers saved me from errors large and small, and played important roles in both maintaining my morale and refining the presentation and overall argument. I am grateful to the whole team at Cambridge University Press, especially Maria Marsh, the Commissioning Editor, whose enthusiasm and support have helped enormously in turning this manuscript into a book. In sum, it is a pleasure to acknowledge here how very collective is the whole process of writing a book, while of course I must take responsibility for the remaining errors and misjudgements. Finally, I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to my partner Julie Gervais, whose intellect, passion, joy, gimlet eye on parts of the text and unstinting encouragement and support in regards to the burdens and demands of book-writing have been a fundamental source of support, pleasure and inspiration.