Foreword to the Turkish edition of

Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East

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Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East sought to present a synthetic historical survey based on the state of the scholarship at the end of the 20th century. It also endeavored to revisit and develop the conceptualization of class that Zachary Lockman and I articulated in *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954*.

> …the process of capital accumulation creates the objective matrix within which human agency operates, limiting and thus to some extent determining the choices real people can make in a given situation. Class formation is a perpetual process: as capitalism develops, as the relations of production are continuously restructured, and as the political and ideological framework changes, classes are perpetually reshaped. Classes as historical actors are thus the "effects" of struggles which are structured by the totality of economic, political, and ideological-cultural relations. They should not therefore be regarded as entities which exist independently of political and ideological practice. Rather, classes are formed in the course of social and political conflicts in which multiple historical actors seek to organize a given group of people as members of a particular class, as citizens of a nation, as adherents of a religious group, or around some other pole of identity… Objective conditions may make some outcomes more likely than others, but no single outcome is automatic or entirely predictable. (Beinin & Lockman 1987: 4-5)

When we researched our doctoral theses that culminated in *Workers on the Nile*, there was no history of the Egyptian working class in any European language. In fact, only a handful of European and American scholars had used

class as an analytical framework to examine any Middle Eastern country.[1] Although we had important differences of interpretation with our Egyptian colleagues, our problematic, narrative arc, and sources were in dialogue with them and therefore necessarily inhabited the same categories they did. Sources that might have allowed us to conceptualize a more radical departure were not readily available to young foreign scholars working in Egypt for the first time with very limited networks of informal influence to facilitate access. Consequently, we fell short of fully implementing our theoretical perspective.

About the same time as *Workers on the Nile* appeared, gender analysis, the cultural and linguistic turns in historical studies, post-structuralist theory, and post-colonial studies challenged the viability of the "new labor history", which was inspired, as we were, by works like E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). Thompson and many who followed him tended to conceptualize "workers" as male, proletarian, heads of families who worked for wages. This rendered invisible the productive role of females, who always worked at home, in agriculture, and in urban crafts, although they were rarely paid, and from the mid-19th century on, as wage-earners in factories, most commonly textile and cigarette rolling enterprises in the Middle East. And it ignored or took for granted the labor of women in the social reproduction of working class and peasant families. Most Euro-American versions of the new labor history also ignored empire, which was arguably a condition of possibility for the industrialization of the North Atlantic countries, as well as race and ethno-religious communalism.

The key concepts and themes of the new labor history, like its antecedents, were rooted in the histories of the North Atlantic countries. It is possible to narrate the histories of some important groups of workers in the Middle East and the Global South in these terms. But much is thereby

[1] The most important works of that era, which retain a value today, are: Batatu (1978), Abrahamian (1982), and Davis (1983). Less interesting because it hewed closely to the line of the Communist Party of France is Couland (1970).

marginalized or occluded. For example, in recent decades the "informal sector" may account for as much as 40% of GDP in some non-oil exporting Middle Eastern countries. This vaguely defined category includes a wide variety of precarious workers and the underemployed who are simultaneously a highly visible but often statistically opaque component of social reality. There are studies of precarious agricultural labor in the Middle East (Toth 1999). But urban contingent labor has not received due attention.

Post-colonial studies is premised on the interpenetration and co-constitution of the cultures of metropoles and colonies in the past and present. There is no contradiction between this insight and the social histories of workers and peasants. Peasant lives, the political economy of cotton cultivation in 19th and early 20th century Egypt or silk reeling in Mt. Lebanon and Bursa, and the niches available for continued craft manufacturing were inextricably intertwined with Euro-American politics, markets, and tastes. Research on such relationships began before the publication of *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* and continued subsequently (Quataert 1991, Quataert 1993, Vatter 1995, Beinin 2010a). But overzealous deconstruction of everything and skepticism about any form of materialism rendered it unfashionable. Much more than most other fields, Middle East studies was directly confronted by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which proposed that Western discursive practices were the principal mechanisms of the subordination of the Middle East and Muslim world. Whether or not Said intended it, his book provided a powerful example and impetus for privileging textual analysis over social history.

In the face of these theoretical challenges, many social historians discarded the view that "workers" or "peasants" constituted stable analytical categories. Some abandoned the project of social history altogether and adopted a culturalist orientation that focused on language as the principal object of investigation and the discursive construction of all social categories. In its extreme forms, "society" disappeared altogether and texts, or anything that could be designated as a text, became the only viable subject of study.

Others, who remained committed to the histories of working people, sought to integrate the insights of post-structuralist theory and associated critiques of the new labor history while remaining engaged with the study of society, social movements, workers, peasants, and other subaltern strata.

Lockman's edited volume, *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies* included our individual criticisms of the shortcomings of *Workers on the Nile* along with other essays that deployed various aspects of post-structuralist theory (and some that did not) (Lockman 1994). The most important conclusion from the engagement with post-structuralist theory for the study of workers and peasants – in the modern Middle East and elsewhere – is a conception of gender, race, ethno-religious identity, and class as inextricably intertwined and mutually and dynamically constituted categories over which there are constant cultural, social, and political struggles. This is now widely accepted as a point of departure for a "newer" labor history that situates working people in multiple and even contradictory contexts, acknowledges their engagement with an array cultural practices and political institutions well beyond the ambit of their own social milieus, and explores their lives beyond work. Reimagining working people in this way allows us to embrace Geoff Eley's maxim that there is "no need to choose" between "history from above" or "history from below" or between cultural history and the history of society (Eley 2014, Eley 2008, see also Eley 2005).

Beyond these substantive intellectual challenges, the demise of the Soviet Union rendered class and all other analytical categories associated with the Marxian tradition unfashionable. Younger scholars in particular too often dismissed work that continued to regard that tradition as relevant as merely a "mode of production narrative." There is no reasonable basis for such a view. The form of Marxism adopted in the Soviet Union was only one particularly dogmatic variant of a rich intellectual tradition. Varieties of "western Marxism" and Marxian-influenced theoretical orientations had flourished for decades with no connection and even in opposition to official Soviet bloc ideology. But

post-Cold War triumphalism, exemplified by Francis Fukuyama's proclamation of "the end of history," was widespread (Fukuyama 1992).

Although the collapse of the Soviet Union did not mean that the contradictions of capitalism had been resolved, the power of trade unions and labor movements, and, in the Global South, populist coalitions which sought to advance the welfare of workers and peasants and accorded them a prominent status among "the people", declined markedly in the last decades of the 20th century. Formerly labor-oriented parties in the North Atlantic world made fundamental concessions to pro-corporate neoliberalism (exemplified by the Clintonite Democratic Leadership Council in the USA and Tony Blair's New Labor in the UK). The Arab defeat in the June 1967 War and the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1970 symbolized the exhaustion of the potential of anti-imperialist Arab socialism. Arab New Lefts sought to provide an alternative to the projects led by authoritarian populist states. But their social base among working people was typically limited. In countries where they were motivated by the Palestinian national struggle, they devoted more attention to foreign policy questions than domestic social issues. The Lebanese Civil War of 1975-90, the 1979 Iranian revolution, and the Turkish coup d'état of 1980 marked the end of an era in Middle East history dominated by anti-imperialism and secular visions of economic development and social equity.

The class compromises represented by the ascendancy of social democracy in Europe, the New Deal in the United States, and authoritarian-populist developmentalism (sometimes designated peripheral Keynesianism) in the Global South were the outcome of a specific phase in the history of global capitalism. But that cannot diminish their historical significance. Nonetheless, scholars, no less than other people, prefer to ride a winning horse. If workers and peasants were not destined to be the core of a popular coalition leading humanity to a better world, their attractiveness as subjects of study diminished.

Theoretically viable responses to the intellectual challenges directed at the new labor history and associated forms of social history were available.

Nonetheless, during the 1990s and early 2000s – not coincidently the zenith of self-confident, corporate globalization inspired by the neo-liberal Washington Consensus policies – the project of making working people subjects of their history was intellectually and politically in retreat, especially among historians of Europe and North America. In 1994 *International Labor and Working Class History* featured a roundtable on the future of the field in which several of the articles engaged with departing co-editor Ira Katznelson's claim that labor history had lost its "élan, directionality, and intellectual purpose" (Katznelson 1994). Many similar proclamations and prescriptions for reorientations were issued in other venues.

Critiques were also directed at the tradition of peasant studies focused on agrarian class structures, the development of capitalist agriculture, and the continuing poverty of small farmers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America – central concerns of *The Journal of Peasant Studies*. Two of its former editors established *The Journal of Agrarian Change*, seeking to expand the ambit of inquiry (Bernstein & Byres 2001). While some of the new journal's contents address the themes that concerned the founders of *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, articles on topics like agribusiness, rural microfinance, contract farming, food sovereignty, and genetically modified crops appeared regularly, along with other subjects informed by the diminishing viability of small family farms in the neoliberal era.

For reasons similar to those that animated debates centered among historians of Europe and North America over the future of labor history and peasant studies, there was a parallel period of decline in studies of Middle Eastern workers and peasants and social history more broadly in the late-20th and early 21st centuries. But labor history was always less central in the historiography of the Middle East than Europe, North America, Latin America, or South Asia. So the decline in labor studies was perhaps less striking.

Moreover, some scholars continued to investigate topics like craft workers, and others employed in small scale enterprises, workers' roles in anti-colonial struggles, the role of industrial workers in authoritarian

developmentalist projects, with greater attention to gender issues than was characteristic of the field before the publication of *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Yıldırım 2002, Abisaab 2004, Abisaab 2009, Abisaab 2010). John Chalcraft provided a provocative revision of the account of the coal heavers guild of Port Said presented in *Workers on the Nile* (Chalcraft 2004, Chalcraft 2001). Akram Khater (1996, 2001) was perhaps the first to integrate gender, class, and a transnational perspective in his studies of the Lebanese silk-winding industry. Anthropologists applied post-structuralist theory to studying the fate of workers in urban crafts and small workshops in the neoliberal era (Koptiuch 1999, Elyachar 2005). Samer Shehata (2009) achieved an important methodological breakthrough in becoming the first scholar to conduct participant observer research in a mechanized textile factory. Based on his work as a winding-machine operator in two public-sector spinning and weaving firms in Alexandria, Egypt for ten months in 1996, he concluded that the authoritarian, even tyrannical, labor control system in these factories was an important building block of former president Hosni Mubarak's authoritarian regime.[2]

Research on the nature of land tenure in the Ottoman Empire and the fate of peasant agriculture in the transition to capitalist forms of ownership was less affected by the retreat of social history, although it integrated a renewed attention to legal norms (Owen 2000, İslamoğlu 2004, Mundy & Smith 2007, Bakr 2004). The rollback of agrarian reform in Egypt was a notable development of this era and drew some attention (Saad 1999, Bush 2002). But this did not prompt, although perhaps it should have, a reconsideration of the histories of land reform or a broad comparison of the fate of agrarian reform in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq.

So, as Mark Twain might have said, reports of the death of histories of workers and peasants in the Middle East and North Africa were greatly exaggerated. Studies of working people were subsequently reenergized by real

[2] See also Shehata (2003) which summarizes some of the book.

world developments that undermined the confidence of the post-Cold War triumphalism that imagined such interests were passé. Struggles of working classes and other subaltern strata in the Middle East and North Africa persisted and even intensified in the 21st century. In addition, the sub-prime mortgage and financial crises of 2007-09 and the ensuing "great recession" stimulated a renewed interest in capitalism as an object of inquiry. Marcel van der Linden's call for reexamining capitalism, which was always already global, as a historical concept can be linked to his promotion of "global labor history" as "a distinctive field of research," although he wisely cautions that it is not a comprehensive theory (Linden 2015: 30, Kocka & Linden 2016).

Over the last decade and a half, scholars of the Middle East and North Africa have expanded the ambit of their histories of working people, addressing new topics and revisiting older topics in new ways using new sources and research methods. Books by Hannan Hamad and the late Donald Quataert, and Andrea Grace Wright's unpublished dissertation exemplify both the continuing vibrancy of the study of working people and new ways of doing so. In what follows I connect their principal concerns – gender, the permeability of peasant and industrial labor and free and semi-free labor, and transnational labor and capital – with other recent works exploring similar and related themes to map out the salient contours of the field as it has formed since the publication of *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*.

Hamad's stunningly original *Industrial Sexuality: Gender, Urbanization, and Social Transformation in Egypt* (2016) examines both hand loom weavers and the workers at the mechanized mammoth Misr Spinning and Weaving complex in al-Mahalla al-Kubra. The Misr Spinning and Weaving workers feature prominently in *Workers on the Nile* and *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*. But Hamad impressively transcends what Lockman and I were able to accomplish by using an array of court and company documents, petitions, and central state reports to sustain her focus on the local forces struggling over a wide array of social, cultural, economic, and political issues in the formation of a newly industrializing urban environment. The ambitious

scope of *Industrial Sexuality* includes the gendered workplace in both manual and mechanical spinning and weaving, the intermediary roles of shop floor foremen, masculinity and urban violence, entrepreneurial women who rented rooms to male factory workers migrating from surrounding peasant villages, sexual harassment, homosexuality, child labor, child molestation, prostitution, and more.

Ethnographies of female garment workers in Fes, Morocco and Port Said, Egypt by M. Laetitia Cairoli and Leila Zaki Chakravarti bring Hamad's focus on gendering the early phases of textile industrialization up to the recent past. Their studies point out new ways in which class is becoming gendered as young women from rural or provincial regions engage in factory work. Using the same participant-observer method as Samer Shehata, they examine textile factory work in the era of the neoliberal Washington Consensus (Cairoli 2011, Chakravarti 2016). Since the 1980s, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Turkey have developed tax-privileged and often trade union free Export Processing or Free Zones. In many of them, garment assembly relying on highly unstable arrangements with Western brands is the most common manufacturing enterprise. Factory owners import fabric from Europe or less often North America; workers cut and sew it into garments; the finished goods are then exported duty free. Firms work on razor thin profit margins enabled by the super-exploitation of young women and preferential access to European or U.S. markets. Cairoli and Chakravarti consider the work process, gender relations on and off the shop floor, the cultural construction of class through the consumption of previously unaffordable commodities and the circulation of new gender performance ideals, marriage practices, and much more. Although their books have been published relatively recently, they are based on fieldwork conducted in the mid-1990s and mid-2000s respectively, giving them a historical character.

Equally impressive for its use of new sources and examination of new structures of work is the research on Ottoman coal mining which constitutes the capstone of the distinguished career of the dean of Ottoman labor

historians of his generation, Donald Quataert. In 2001 Quataert curated a special section of *International Labor and Working-Class History* on "Labor History in the Ottoman Middle East, 1700-1922," which introduced the broader community of labor historians to the subject. His own contribution to that issue (with Yüksel Duman) was the translation and edition of the memoir of a late-Ottoman era coal miner, Ethem Çavuş, which doubled the number of autobiographies by Middle Eastern workers then known to scholars (Quataert & Duman 2001).[3] Quataert continued to study the workers in the Zonguldak coalfield based largely on local state records, demonstrating that the distinctions between workers and peasants as well as between free and semi-free labor are not fixed. Peasants from more than 300 villages in the coalmining region were conscripted to work twelve-day shifts in more than 100 different mines along with military labor and later wage workers (Quataert 2006: 7).[4]

Quataert's work reflects the broader efflorescence of revisionist histories of the late Ottoman Empire and the Turkish republic. The range of that work in labor history was presented in the supplement to the *International Journal of Social History* edited by Touraj Atabaki and Gavin D. Brockett and the conference on "Working in the Ottoman Empire and in Turkey: Ottoman and Turkish Labor History within a Global Perspective" convened by M. Erdem Kabadayi and Kate Elizabeth Creasey in 2011 (Atabaki & Brockett 2009, Kabadayı & Creasey 2012). Several of the papers presented at that conference take up themes mentioned in this essay (and others). In addition, the gendering of work in the early modern Ottoman urban economy and in modern factories has been a consistent topic (Zarinebaf-Shahr 2001, Balsoy 2009).

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[3] The other previously known autobiography is Fikri al-Khuli's *al-Rihla*, which is discussed in Chapter 4. The late 'Atiyya al-Sirafi (2007), an Egyptian who worked mainly as a bus conductor, also published a memoir. Al-Sirafi was a communist activist and frames his life as part of "the history of the Egyptian working class," giving it a less personal tone.

[4] Gürboğa (2009) brings this history into the era of the Turkish republic.

Hamad, Quataert, and Wright (see below) compel us to acknowledge that the boundaries between workers and peasants, free and unfree labor, and activities classified by state authorities as criminal and work are porous. Among those who have pushed the envelope on these issues, is Gülay Yılmaz (2011), who suggests that the Ottoman *devşirme* system can be considered a form of military labor. Several scholars have begun to turn their attention to the industrial and commercial enterprises of Middle Eastern armies, which are typically staffed by poorly paid conscripts (Grawert, Abul-Magd & Springborg 2016, Abul-Magd 2017, Stacher & Marshall 2013). But we still know little about this form of labor. Convicts, another category of unfree labor, have also been considered under the rubric of labor history (Sipahi 2016). Prostitution, hitherto excluded from Middle Eastern labor histories, is always subject to a certain degree of duress, whether freely contracted or manifestly coerced. In addition to Hamad's discussion in *Industrial Sexuality*, Hamad (2014) and Liat Kozma (2011) have investigated the early efforts of the modern Egyptian state to police sex work.

Unfree or semi-free labor was integral to pre-capitalist social formations. The recent investigations of forms of labor and categories of work not previously considered part of the field of labor history remind us that whenever possible capital has also relied on unfree or semi-free labor to reproduce itself and generate profit in order not to pay the full cost of the process. A specific capitalist social formation can include workers of different legal statuses, a variety of labor control regimes, agribusiness, family-owned farms, sharecroppers, and slaves. This opens up difficult questions about where to draw the boundaries of categories so that they retain their explanatory power. The labor of chattel slaves in the American South and semi-free Egyptian peasants was critical to industrializing English and North American textile manufacturing. Although Sven Beckert (2014) has demonstrated that they are part of the same global process, their life experiences, culture, legal status, and forms of mobilization and resistance differ considerably from wage laborers in the factories of New England or Lancashire.

Labor migration is one of the most salient expressions of globalized capitalism in the contemporary Middle East and North Africa. The themes of transnational labor migration and semi-free labor combine in the Persian Gulf (and to a lesser extent Lebanon, Iraq, and Joredan), where the vast army of migrant workers is usually recruited through the *kafala* (sponsorship) system which gives them little or no rights. Workers cannot change jobs or remain in the country without the sponsorship of an employer.

Andrea Grace Wright's study of labor migration from South Asia to the Persian Gulf focuses on the globalized labor in the era of petro-capitalism. She addresses topics that have long been staples of labor history, like strikes (Bahraini, other Arab, and Indian workers at the Bahrain Petroleum Company in 1932, Abu Dhabi in 1963, Qatar in 1968, Indian construction workers in Dubai in 2015) and other forms of collective action. But the conceptual point of departure is the circulation of oil and the labor required to produce it and to construct the built environment around it. Wright (2015: 4) argues that "the production of oil does not fall neatly into the bounded units of nations or regions. Rather, oil and labor create their own scale that is informed by two things: colonialism/imperialism and exchange in the Arabian Sea". Wright's study, appropriately for a doctoral dissertation in a joint anthropology/history program, addresses both historical and current aspects of labor migration.

Mehran Kamrava and Zahra Babar's (2012) edited volume on migrant labor in the Gulf focuses solely on contemporary issues. Pardis Mahdavi's contribution to that volume is one of the first studies of informal/illegal labor in the Persian Gulf. Her subsequent study of the intimate lives of migrants in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Kuwait City, also set in the contemporary era, explores the blurred boundaries between labor migration and human trafficking, family breakups, illegal residence, statelessness, deportation, detention, sex work, and sexual abuse (Mahdavi 2016). Many of her subjects are domestic workers, who are exceptionally vulnerable to abuses that are largely unacknowledged and unstudied as they occur in the inviolable private homes of "respectable" people.

Adam Hanieh's pioneering study, *Capitalism and Class in the Gulf Arab States* (2011) argues that the new regional formation he designates as "Khaleeji (Gulf) Capital" has advanced beyond state-owned investment in oil and gas to include private sector enterprises in construction and contracting, petrochemicals, aluminum, steel, media, retail, and finance and equity that are fully integrated into the circuits of global capital. For all its achievements, this landmark book says almost nothing about the workers employed in these enterprises, leaving an open door for others to enter.

It is extraordinarily difficult to gain access to information about any aspect of migrant labor in the Gulf. Wright did much of her research in South Asia, a promising strategy. When Kristina Bogos, a Georgetown University M.A. student researching the conditions of migrant workers, arrived in Qatar she was detained and told she had been placed on a common blacklist maintained by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Bogos 2016). Bogos was eventually allowed to enter on a tourist visa, but her application for a student visa to study at the Georgetown University campus in Qatar was denied. Apparently, authorities of the United Arab Emirates had informed their Qatari counterparts that when Bogos had been an undergraduate at New York University's Abu Dhabi campus, she had exposed the maltreatment of migrant construction workers building it. The UAE denied entry to New York University Professor Andrew Ross, who was intending to investigate the conditions of those same workers. Despite such perils, the past and present of labor migration to the Gulf is a potentially rich field of inquiry.

Before labor migration to the Persian Gulf from South and Southeast Asia drew the attention of scholars (and human rights activists) interest in Arab labor migration was stimulated by the Egyptian government's decision to allow its citizens to migrate freely to work in the oil-rich states of Libya and the Persian Gulf in the mid-1970s. From these starting points, scholars have sought out the historical precursors of the regional circulation of labor. Ilham Khuri-Makdisi (2013), Julia Clancy-Smith (2012, 2008) and Anthony Gorman (2008) have all addressed the southern European workers, especially Greeks

and Italians, some of them radical leftists on the run, who sought to make their livelihoods on the southern shores of the Mediterranean in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Establishing prostitution as a legitimate subject of historical inquiry led naturally to investigating European women who migrated to the Middle East and North Africa seeking to work as prostitutes (Biancani 2016).

John Chalcraft examined the plight of impoverished Syrian peasants who migrated to work in Lebanon beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, a hitherto neglected topic. Unlike migrants to the Persian Gulf, they nominally chose their course freely, facilitated by Syrians' special status permitting them to enter Lebanon freely and without formalities. Nonetheless, they were subjected to "the direct and indirect discipline of a constructed 'labour market'" that trapped them in "an invisible cage" (Chalcraft 2009: 3).

Like the crises of global capitalism of the previous decade, the Arab popular uprisings of 2011 impelled a renewed study of workers, peasants, and other Middle Eastern and North African subalterns among those who have argued for a more complex understanding of those social movements than the dominant western narrative of youth-led "Facebook Revolutions." The uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, and Bahrain, as well as the more limited protests in Morocco, were preceded by over a decade of labor mobilizations. In none of these countries did workers or trade unions actually lead the protests.

However, the General Federation of Workers Trade Unions in Bahrain actively supported the pro-democracy movement there. Consequently, thousands of its members were dismissed from their jobs and the federation was subjected to serious repression. Bahraini trade unions have been a major political force in the country since the 1950s (Khalaf 1985). But there is still only a limited literature on this topic.

In Tunisia and Egypt, mobilizations of workers and the unemployed were a major factor undermining the legitimacy of long-ensconced autocratic presidents, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak.

In Egypt, from 1998 to the end of 2010 well over two million workers participated in 3,400-4,000 factory occupations, strikes, demonstrations, or

other protests. These collective actions involved public and private sector factory workers, bakers, civil servants, teachers, tax collectors, medical doctors, transport workers, and garbage collectors. Except in one case, they received no support from the Egyptian Trade Union Federation. They were nominally illegal and organized through local informal networks. Nonetheless, state authorities negotiated with strike leaders on many occasions, and workers regularly won significant economic gains. Other protests in this period included demonstrations against water shortages and poor housing and sit-ins staged in front of government offices for a wide range of causes. Workers' collective actions intensified following Mubarak's departure. Even the more repressive praetorian regime of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has not succeeded in reducing the annual number of labor and other social protests to their pre-2004 level (Beinin & Duboc 2014).

In Tunisia, the per capita number of strikes during the 2000s was even higher than in Egypt. Strikes and other labor actions were often legal and an accepted way for the regime and the national trade union leadership to allow workers to blow off steam. Consequently, they were typically shorter and less intense than in Egypt. The great exception was a massive six–month-long revolt of the unemployed in the Gafsa phosphate mining basin in the first half of 2008. Their demands for fair hiring practices and employment in the phosphate mines developed into the largest oppositional social movement of the decade before Ben Ali's ouster. The modes of mobilization and issues in Gafsa – unemployment, economic, social, and cultural marginalization, and even the same slogan: "A job is a right, you pack of thieves" – reappeared in the demonstrations that followed Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in Sidi Bouzid in December 2010, the spark that ignited the Arab uprisings.

The labor mobilizations preceding the Arab popular uprisings of 2011 were almost entirely unnoticed by the Western press, think tanks, and academics and the international financial institutions. But in the second half of the 2000s, the Egyptian workers' movement attracted the attention of several doctoral students in anthropology, sociology, and political science. Nadine

Abdalla (2013), Dina Bishara (2013), Marie Duboc (2012), Dina Makram Ebeid (2012), and Brecht De Smet (2012) have completed their dissertations. The dissertations are yet unpublished, but several articles and book chapters in English and French are available.[5] Anne Alexander and Egyptian labor journalist Mostafa Bassiouny authored the first account of the role of workers before, during, and after the Egyptian uprising (Alexander & Bassiouny 2014). They are exceptionally well-informed, if somewhat rigid in their interpretations. I followed Egyptian events closely during my residence in Cairo in the mid-2000s and published both scholarly and journalistic essays. That work culminated in a report for the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center and a short book situating the events of 2011 and beyond in their historical context and comparing of the Egyptian and Tunisian cases (Beinin 2010b, Beinin 2016).

The most extensive work on the Gafsa rebellion and its context is the unpublished dissertation of the anthropologist Amin Allal. Some of its flavor is available in English as a chapter in a book on social movements in the Middle East and North Africa co-edited by Frédéric Vairel and myself (Allal 2013a, Allal 2013b). Historian Hafidh Tabbabi (2012) compiled the available Arabic documentation (government records are not open, and the website of the underground Tunisian Communist Workers's Party, which reported on and encouraged, but did not lead the movement was shut down) introduced by a synthetic essay.[6] The most accessible accounts of the Gafsa rebellion are by Eric Gobe (2010) and Larbi Chouikha (Chouikha & Gobbe 2009).

Tunisia is the only country other than Bahrain where trade unionists were a major force in the uprising. Mid-level leaders of the national trade union federation, the UGTT, played key roles in organizing the popular response to

[5] Duboc (2013), Beinin & Duboc (2013, 2014), and Bishara (2015) are among them.

[6] In 2011 the Tunisian Workers' Communist Party became legally recognized. In 2012 it changed its name to Workers Party and joined the leftist Popular Front – a nine-party coalition which won fifteen of the 217 seats in the 2014 elections for the Assembly of the Representatives of the People.

Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in the impoverished center-west regions and developing it into a national social movement. After Ben Ali's departure, the top UGTT leaders who had collaborated fully with his regime, were politely but firmly retired. The federation then became the single most important organization in engineering Tunisia's transition to a procedural democracy, which unfortunately incorporates many practices and elites of the Ben Ali era. Labor sociologist Héla Yousfi (2015) had exceptional access to federation members and leaders in compiling her account of its role in the Tunisian uprising. The extensive quotations from her interviews with them are a particularly valuable resource.

The global spike in food prices in 2007-08 prompted demonstrations and riots across the Middle East and North Africa, evoking the "anti-IMF food riots" that resisted the imposition of Washington Consensus economic policies from the 1970s to the 1990s. Ray Bush (2010) and Habib Ayeb (Bush & Ayeb 2014) wrote about these protests, the broader crisis of peasant agriculture, and the role of rural social forces in the popular uprisings. For Bush, the peasant mobilizations in Egypt were a continuation of the protests against the rollback of agrarian reform in the 1990s addressed in his earlier edited volume (2002).

Bush and Ayeb (2012) have also led a controversial effort to apply the literature on "marginality" to the subaltern strata of the Middle East and North Africa. Rabab el-Mahdi's contribution to their edited volume insists that class remains the more relevant category, whereas Asef Bayat's chapter argues that marginality may not be an entirely negative status but have a liberatory component. Allal and others emphasize that the social movement that ultimately toppled Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali began in Tunisia's center-west governorates, which are often decried, by their residents and others, as marginal. In addition to Allal's work, marginality and related issues in Tunisia

are addressed in both an unpublished dissertation and a dissertation in progress.[7]

In the 2000s, movements of unemployed university graduates emerged in Morocco and Tunisia. Some of the work on Tunisia mentioned above discusses the important role of its Union of Unemployed Graduates (L'Union des diplômés chômeurs) in both the 2008 Gafsa rebellion and the mobilization following Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation. In contrast, the much better established Moroccan National Association of Unemployed Graduates decided not to participate as a group in the protests of the February 20th (2011) movement in order not to undermine the chances of their eventual employment by the state (Badimon 2013). Inspired by the example of their Maghrebi counterparts, a much weaker movement of Egyptian unemployed graduates emerged in 2015. It has not been the subject of any serious investigation, and it is unclear if it will persist. Earlier, and in a very different context, Asef Bayat (1997) found a different dynamic: a lively mobilization of unemployed – degree holders and factory workers – following, rather than preceding the victory of the Iranian revolution.

Iran was omitted from the geographical ambit of *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, which was defined as the Ottoman Empire and its successor states in which Islam is the dominant religious tradition, in order to establish a geographical coherence defined in indigenous terms. However, Iranian labor history has been quite lively in recent years and deserves to be mentioned. Touraj Atabaki is leading a research project on the social history of labor in the oil industry based at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. Three articles with an introduction by Atabaki, representing the first fruits of that team's work appeared in *International Labor and Working*

[7] Chomiak (2014) gives the flavor of her still unpublished doctoral thesis. Rebecca Gruskin, a Stanford University doctoral student writing her dissertation on the history of the Gafsa phosphate mining basin, argues that Gafsa should not be understood as marginal, but rather as an important node in a globalized system of fertilizer-dependent agriculture since the early 20th century.

Class History no. 84 (2013). On the same topic, Stephanie Cronin (2010) has written an informative article about the 1929 Abadan oil refinery strike, among the earliest in the Middle East oil industry.

Iranian peasant studies, formerly a lively field, have also revived. Stephanie Cronin (2005) is perhaps the leading current voice in this area.[8] Sohrab Behdad and Farhad Nomani's "Workers, Peasants, and Peddlers," while it adopts a narrowly economic and gender blind approach, highlights the expansion of peasant agriculture and petty commodity production and the decline of waged labor due to the withdrawal of capital from the market and "the shriveling of the capitalist relations of production" during the protracted post-revolutionary economic crisis (Behdad & Nomani 2002).

Cronin has also been one of the leaders in researching topics that might might be considered explorations in an "expanded" history of work. Pastoralists have typically been omitted from histories of workers and peasants. However, Cronin's *Tribal Politics in Iran: Rural Conflict and the New State, 1921-1941* (2006) shows that rather than the stereotypical constant conflict between pastoralists and peasants, the two groups sometimes overlapped, while some tribesmen became workers at the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The tribes were in a process of sedentarization and internal class cleavages were emerging as large landholding and capitalist farming developed. They willingly supported the early Pahlavi state but later allied with cultivators in opposing the state's oppressive overreach. Some of the contributions to Cronin's *Subalterns and Social Protest* (2008) – on shantytown dwellers in Casablanca (Lamia Zaki), emancipated female slaves in Algiers (Fatiha Loualich), bandits and pirates in Greece (Gerassimos Karabelias) – similarly suggest an expansion of the ambit of the histories of working people. John Chalcraft's, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (2016) surveys the history of mobilizations of workers and peasants and also includes other subaltern struggles that might

[8] Cronin (2005) and Bayat (1997) are reprinted in Cronin (2008), pp. 141-70, and pp. 91-115 respectively.

also be considered under this rubric. A capacious approach to labor history would also enable us to consider smugglers of oil and other commodities across the Iran-Turkey border as a category of workers (Bozçalı 2011, Bozçalı 2014).

Considering military labor as an aspect of labor history has already been noted. While reasonable in principle, it is perhaps too provocative and too contemporary for scholars to consider Tunisian young men from the impoverished center-west regions who have travelled to the Levant to fight for the Islamic State in numbers proportionally greater than from any other Arab state as engaged in labor migration seeking masculine validation and employment as mercenaries. Similarly, Kurdish fighters in the Women's Defense Units (YPJ) in Rojava, northern Syria do work that they consider socially useful while furthering the cause of women's emancipation. New forms of labor, transnational migration and gender issues are combined in these stories waiting to be told.

The still dominant framework of nationalist historiographies is inadequate for treating several of these forms of an expanded labor history, and of course labor migration as well. Nonetheless, many, probably most, of those who have worked in any capacity since the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the contemporary Middle East state system have identified themselves as members of a nation. Egyptians or Indians who migrated to the Persian Gulf seeking to earn a living did not thereby cease to think of themselves as Egyptians or Indians. Yemenis who left urban employment in Aden at the end of the British colonial era and became autoworkers in Dearborn, Michigan, even after residing in the United States for decades, did not cease to consider themselves Yemenis, although scholars might analyze their migration as an aspect of the unraveling of the British imperial order in the Middle East. Palestinian refugees who sought work in the Persian Gulf countries after the Nakba of 1948 have never abandoned their Palestinian identity. But the persistence of national identities should not avert our attention from the work and the attendant social relations enabled by membership in transnational or subnational communities; Kurds smuggling oil

from Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey; Jewish silversmiths in Yemen and Djerba, Tunisia; early modern commercial networks of diasporic Armenians, Greeks, and Jews.

Transnational aspects of productive processes along with attention to forms of work not previously considered, more powerful and expansive gender analysis, and the roles of workers, peasants, the unemployed, and other subalterns in the food protests of 2007-08 and the Arab uprisings of 2011 have been focal points of a renewed interest in the histories and presents of working people. In the Middle East, as elsewhere, stable, full time employment with social benefits and wages that can support a family and small family farming are under attack and no longer normative. This requires us to reconfigure the categories of work and working people, for the present and the past. Defining work as the application of human labor power to the production of use values allows us to consider of many forms of work, including those that have proliferated in the neo-liberal era, that have previously typically been excluded from histories of workers and peasants. However, if the history of working people is to retain any coherence as an intellectual project, then they must somehow be distinguished from other subaltern categories. Neither the newer scholarship on the Middle East surveyed here nor work on other global regions has reached a consensus on a useful delimitation of the field.

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