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Unevenness, (Under)development, and Resistance in the Middle East and North Africa: An Introduction

Gönenç Uysal*

Abstract

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been one of the most significant peripheries of the world capitalist system studied for its social, economic, and political underdevelopment, crises, and conflicts, not only in comparison to Western countries but also in relation to the discrepancies within the region itself. Yet, the protests and uprisings against imperialism, colonialism, and authoritarianism have underlined the burning necessity for critical/radical approaches to examine the political economy of the MENA and state-society relations in the region. This special issue draws upon critical/radical approaches and explores unevenness, (under)development, and resistance that have characterised the economic relations, social structures, and state apparatuses in the MENA.

Keywords: Dependency; Development; Globalisation; Marxism; Middle East and North Africa; Modernisation; Neoliberalism

Introduction

The 2011 uprisings that started in Tunisia and later spread to Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria – soon called the Arab Spring by a number of scholars and commentators – resulted in social, economic, and political turmoil which have remained unresolved for almost a decade. Tunisia has often been presented as a success story by mainstream scholars and media considering the ongoing civil wars in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, as well as the 2013 coup d'état in Egypt. However, it is debatable to what extent unemployment, inflation, foreign debt, and austerity were responded to in the post-2011 era, the very same issues that led to the ousting of President Ben Ali in Tunisia in the first place. Even though Turkey managed to present itself as a regional model until the mid-2010s, the growing authoritarianism as a response to popular protests as well as the failed coup attempt of July 2016 were soon combined with foreign policy failures in terms of neighbourly relations with the region (Guida and Göksel 2018: 156-164). Furthermore, the question of political Islam was particularly heightened following the Muslim Brotherhood's fall from grace in Egypt. Nevertheless, the role of political Islam in domestic politics and geopolitical rivalries has remained significant in the Persian Gulf, particularly between Iran and the Gulf monarchies.

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The past and present social upheavals as well as prolonged economic and political difficulties have compelled scholars to study the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region for its underdevelopment, crises, and conflicts. In fact, the MENA has been characterised by important social, economic, and political discrepancies on the regional scale as well as in comparison to advanced Western countries. On the one hand, the MENA has often been associated with vast natural resource reserves and agricultural riches bringing immense wealth concentrations in the region. On the other hand, it has also often been associated with resilient authoritarianism or varying degrees of democracy, and failures concerning economic transformation as suggested by advanced Western powers such as the United States and Western-dominated international organisations including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Union (EU). The main aim of this special issue is to provide a comprehensive, critical, and conceptually rich analysis of the political economy of and state-society relations in the MENA; particularly in Iran, Turkey, and Tunisia. For this reason, this article explores the main theoretical approaches to development in the MENA; namely, the modernisation theory, the globalisation/neoliberal theory (Halliday 2005: 1), dependency theory (Halliday and Alavi 1988: 2), and Marxist theory (historical materialism). According to Cox (1981: 128), one of the most significant pioneers of critical theory, “theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose”. Therefore, this article also briefly examines the global political economy and geopolitics in which these aforementioned approaches have flourished. In order to maintain consistency, this paper refers to “developing/underdeveloped” countries of the “Third World” or “Global South” as late-developing countries. It defines late-development in the following sections. Later, it briefly discusses the theoretical and empirical contributions of individual papers.

1. Modernisation Theory

The post-Second World War era was characterised by the emergence of the United States-led liberal international order based on the agreement at Bretton Woods in 1944 (Kiely 2010: 100). The United States promoted global capitalism through free movement of capital across borders, particularly through selective advancement of free trade and regulation of international finance, and new international economic institutions, mainly the IMF, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank’s most important section), and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The post-war international order foresaw cooperation between advanced capitalist countries not only against the Soviet Union and the socialist camp, which threatened the capitalist camp under the leadership of the United States, but also toward an aim to integrate advanced capitalist countries, particularly Europe, under the US hegemony. The post-war international order further foresaw the demise of colonial empires. The United States promoted the colonies to establish their independence so long as the postcolonial states would not become too radical and possibly ally with the Soviet Union. The United States maintained its hegemony over late-developing countries by presenting its role as the “leader of [...] post-war liberal order of sovereign states, which in the long run would promote a free international economic order” (Kiely 2007: 49). In this way, late-developing countries, whose majority remained colonial

and semi-colonial states gaining their independence, would be integrated into the world market economy. In the Middle East, Syria and Lebanon gained independence in 1943, Jordan in 1946, Libya in 1951, Egypt in 1952, Tunisia and Morocco in 1956, and Algeria in 1962 (Hanieh 2013: 22-23).

The United States-led liberal international order brought about the “discourse of development” that determined the framework for understanding underdevelopment in the “Third World” as well as offering strategies and practices to reduce it (Escobar 1995). The emergence of this discourse on development coincided with the Truman Doctrine (Truman 1947). Even though the Truman Doctrine was mainly framed as a response to the growing Soviet influence *vis-à-vis* Turkey and Greece on its southern border, the US ruling classes were aware of the significance of the “great natural resources” in the Middle East (Hanieh 2013: 22). This subjected the Middle East to the possibility of an intervention – either economic or military – by the United States to maintain the interests of the free market economy. In 1957, the US President Eisenhower (1957) confirmed the US guarantee to “employ the armed forces of the United States to assist to defend the territorial integrity and the political independence of any nation”, especially in the Middle East.

The Bretton Woods system and international economic institutions complemented the Truman Doctrine. The Bretton Woods foresaw the transfer of savings from countries that had trade surplus to deficit countries on the basis of the “dollar-gold standard” (Kiely 2007: 43). This standard was based on the fixing of prices of national currencies against the price of the US dollar and the fixing of the US dollar against gold. Since this standard prevented competitive devaluations of national currencies, a fixed international currency system was aimed at enabling the Middle Eastern countries to maintain purchasing power and participate in foreign trade with advanced capitalist countries on the basis of the redistribution of finance. The IMF provided late-developing countries with short-term financial funds to ensure the adoption of required structural adjustments toward free-market economy. Similarly, the World Bank provided loans, framed as aid, at concessional or zero rates of interest to late-developing countries often on the condition of purchasing donor goods. The GATT promoted the liberalisation of international trade through tariff reduction and various other means while enabling late-developing countries to protect certain economic sectors from foreign competition (Kiely 2007: 44-45). Overall, foreign aid and debt functioned as mechanisms to integrate the Middle East within the world market economy (Hanieh 2013: 29). Nevertheless, the compromise reached at the Bretton Woods allowed some room for development in late-developing countries in the form of import-substitution industrialisation in the post-war era through the early 1980s. Import-substitution industrialisation was based on “the promotion of a domestic industrial base [initially to] produce goods for the home market, reduction in the dependence of expensive manufactured imports and relatively cheap primary product exports, [and] the protection of new domestic industries through tariffs or import controls” (Kiely 2007: 51). In the Middle East, Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq, and Algeria adopted import-substitution industrialisation (Owen 1992: 26).

In the above context of global political economy, modernisation theory emerged as the dominant approach to understand (under)development in the late-developing world, particularly in the Middle East. Indeed, the emergence of modernisation theory almost coincided with the establishment of the United States Agency for International Development

(USAID) in 1961 (Cheibub and Vreeland 2018: 3). According to Rostow (1991: 134), the pioneering scholar of modernisation theory, “the most important single item on the Western agenda” was to show that late-developing countries could “move successfully through the preconditions into a well-established take-off within the orbit of the democratic world, resisting the blandishments and temptations of Communism”. It should be noted that Rostow previously held a position at the MIT’s CIA-backed Centre for International Studies prior to assuming a foreign affairs adviser role to the US Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson (McWilliams 1984: 4). In this way, modernisation theory soon treated the United States as the highest stage of development in order to prevent the rise of socialist movements in late-developing countries and rapprochement between the Soviet Union and late-developing countries.

In a nutshell, modernisation theory equated capitalism and modernity, correlated capitalism and liberal democracy, and associated all of them with development (Lipset 1959; Parsons 1964). It understood capitalist modernisation as an evolutionary, linear, and universal process that should be adopted by traditional non-Western societies to achieve a Western level of social, political, and economic development. The adoption of modernity meant the adoption of social, political, and economic outcomes of capitalism as developed in Western countries, which would in return bring liberal democracy and development. The fundamental criteria to assess economic development remained per capita income and the growth in gross national income per capita (Cheibub and Vreeland 2018: 3). More nuanced interpretations of modernisation theory explained the relationship between capitalism and democracy in relation to the “uniqueness” of “natural” development of market relations and hence bourgeois social order in England, unlike “modernisation from above” in the case of France or communist revolution in the Soviet Union (Moore 1974). Nevertheless, contradictions of the Cold War pertaining to the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union determined the paradoxes of modernisation theory. In support of the US backing for anti-communist authoritarian regimes, certain proponents of modernisation theory argued that modernisation could bring about praetorian politics in the absence of robust political institutions that would accommodate sharp economic development and meet growing economic and political demands of masses (Huntington 1968). More contemporary proponents of modernisation theory associated underdevelopment and authoritarianism with references to lower levels of per capita income. Accordingly, in poor countries, the masses would not fight for democracy because they would have not much to gain or lose unlike leaders who had relatively higher stakes to win by becoming a dictator (Cheibub and Vreeland 2018).

Modernisation theory allowed some room for development in the late-developing world by regarding industrialisation as a fundamental means for development, and thus, by consenting to import-substitution industrialisation. Nonetheless, it explored political economy and state-society relations in terms of ahistorical and Western-centric binary oppositions (Ercan 2009: 94-95). It presented an idealised understanding of development based on capitalism, and divided various social formations into two categories; namely, developed and underdeveloped/developing. It characterised the latter societies with the lack of necessary social, economic, and political dynamics that would bring about development. In the case of the Middle East, certain proponents of modernisation theory explained underdevelopment in

relation to particularly the role of Islam (Huntington 1997; Göksel 2016: 252-255). Furthermore, the ahistorical, idealised, Western-centric portrayal of development ignored social, economic, and political discrepancies pertaining to colonisation and imperialism, and thus, legitimised underdevelopment in late-developing countries. The limited understanding of economic development in terms of per capita income/gross national income per capital disregarded social inequalities and unequal distribution of wealth as well as emancipatory social movements particularly in the Middle East.

2. Globalisation/Neoliberal Theory

The dollar-gold standard was characterised with a contradiction that the reliance of supply of the US dollars to the world on the US deficit, in return, brought about the dependence of the stability of the US dollar on the surplus of the US economy. By the 1970s, the US began to have trade and payment deficits while the US dollars stockpiled in European banks as a result of the US trade deficits versus West Germany. In order to maintain the competitive position of the United States, the US President Richard Nixon gave up gold convertibility and allowed the downward-floating of the US dollar (Kiely 2007: 61). The unilateral abandonment of the direct international convertibility of the US dollar to gold was followed by other countries, and this rendered the Bretton Woods system dysfunctional. Between mid to late 1970s, the United States continued to have trade and current account deficits. The late 1970s witnessed to the transition from policies of capital controls to policies of controlling inflation. Meanwhile, debt crises emerged in the late-developing world. In the 1973/1974 period, the OPEC (Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries) countries proclaimed an oil embargo against countries, including the United States, supporting Israel during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. While the oil prices nearly quadrupled during the embargo, the oil exporting countries deposited their gains in European banks. The petrodollars added to the already expanding Eurodollar market were then loaned to late-developing countries which sought access to capital. Nevertheless, the 1980s witnessed to a series of debt crises in late-developing countries that brought about structural adjustment under the IMF supervision. The structural adjustment represented a shift from protectionist import-substitution industrialisation to the liberalisation of market in the form of devaluation of national currencies, reductions in state spending, wage cuts, and the lifting of barriers against capital inflows and outflows (Kiely 2010: 136-138). This issue will be further discussed in relation to neoliberalism in the following sections.

The crisis of the late 1970s actually indicated the crisis of the global accumulation of capital, which was restructured through the transition to neoliberalism. Neoliberalism can be regarded as the latest phase of capitalism (Harvey 2007), which dissolved the social compromise between labour and capital in favour of the latter. It aimed to restructure the pattern of capital accumulation through an increase in marketisation, deregulation, and precarisation of the labour force. The transition to neoliberalism in the 1980s in late-developing countries was supervised by the Washington DC-based international organisations, particularly the IMF and the World Bank. Therefore, the early stage of neoliberalism of the 1980s was often referred as the Washington Consensus. The Washington

Consensus required “imposing fiscal and monetary discipline; reordering public expenditure priorities toward pro-growth and pro-poor expenditures; creating tax systems with broad bases and marginal rates; liberalising interest rates and prices; ensuring a competitive exchange rate; liberalising trade; liberalising inward foreign direct investment; privatising state- owned enterprises; deregulating industries to ease barriers to entry and exit; and ensuring property rights” (Morrison 2018: 75). However, the short-term results of structural adjustment policies were disappointing and considered as failures, as even confirmed by the IMF (1989).

The post-Washington Consensus era beginning in the 1990s did not mean a break from the 1980s. On the contrary, the World Bank (1992) encouraged “good governance” and institutional reforms, all of which indicated transparent and accountable government, rule of law, economic efficiency of markets and governments through public sector reforms. Moreover, the role of the US dollar as international currency was strengthened in the context of increased international transactions (Duménil and Lévy 2012: 243). The dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the key role of the United States in the process of neoliberal globalisation further reinforced the US hegemony. The US hegemony was also strengthened through the US-led military interventions to safeguard the integration of late-developing countries in the neoliberal global political economy. Following the end of the Cold War, such interventions were portrayed as “humanitarian interventions” in accordance with the “resurgence of the cosmopolitan idea that the rights of individuals [were] more important than the sovereignty of nation-states” (Kiely 2010: 194). In the Middle East, one of the most significant examples of the US-led humanitarian intervention became the Iraq War of 2003 that reinforced the free movement of capital. In 2004, a year before the ratification of the Iraqi Constitution of 2005, the Coalition Provisional Authority introduced a patent law that made the re-use of seeds “harvested from new varieties registered under the law” illegal for Iraqi farmers. In this way, it established “a new seed market in Iraq, where transnational corporations [could] sell their seeds, genetically modified or not, which farmers would have to purchase afresh every single cropping season” (Neocleous 2013: 22).

The transition to neoliberalism brought about a new stream of approach within the discourse of development; the neoliberal theory. Neoliberal theory underlined the strengthening of market dynamics, liberalisation of market through free movement of capital, developmental strategies aimed at increasing exports, and individualism, in order to maintain economically-developed, independent, democratic, and technologically-modernised societies. In this regard, the neoliberal theory redefined development in favour of market efficiency and high technology while dismissing welfare and redistributive mechanisms that hitherto benefited working classes. Such a neoliberal redefinition of development confirmed the integration of late-developing countries within the world capitalist system in accordance with the restructured pattern of capital accumulation and current needs of capital to expand on a world scale (Ercan 2009: 116-119). In parallel to the free movement of capital on a world scale, globalisation theory emerged as a significant approach on (under)development significantly beginning in the 1990s. It should be noted that neoliberalism cannot be reduced to globalisation. Nevertheless, Duménil and Lévy (2012: 243) underlined the attainment of various components of globalisation, including “free trade, the international movements of capital and the corresponding investment worldwide, global financial mechanisms (with the

rise of international banking and tax havens) and currency exchanges". Globalisation theory explained underdevelopment in the developing world with references to "insufficient globalisation", which would have otherwise abolished "authoritarianism, corruption, conflict, over-regulation, and the low level of emancipation of women" through transparency, "new systems of communication", "liberating potential of markets", "loosening bureaucratic hierarchies" (Giddens 2000). Globalisation theory, therefore, converged with the aforementioned modernisation theory regarding its ahistorical understanding of underdevelopment and social, economic, and political discrepancies associated with it as defining characteristics of late-developing countries. It further sought poverty reduction, health and education, and institutional reforms through the "opportunities" of the world market and marketisation rather than problematizing the socio-economic unevenness created by market dynamics (Kiely 2018: 177).

3. Dependency Theory

Beginning in the 1960s, the literature on development has brought about its opposite, the literature on underdevelopment, which emerged as a response to the Western-centric understanding of development (Ercan 2009: 125). This coincided with "the displacement of dependence on the import of consumer goods [...] at the expense of a new dependence on the import of capital goods" in the face of increasing budget and trade deficits as a result of import-substitution industrialisation (Kiely 2007: 54). The literature on underdevelopment can be regarded as a heterogeneous set of approaches, all of which can be broadly categorised under the dependency theory. Dependency theory aimed to explain underdevelopment not as an internal characteristic of late-developing societies, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (see Amin 1976), but as a feature of the hierarchical world capitalist system. With this aim, it focused on dependency relations between advanced capitalist countries and underdeveloped countries (peripheries) and how development in the latter was determined by the expansion of the former.

According to the dependency theory, development in peripheries was "profoundly inimical to the dominant interests in advanced capitalist countries" since peripheries "suppli[ed] many important raw materials to the industrialized countries" and "provid[ed] their corporations with vast profits and investment outlets". The developing world, therefore, represented "the indispensable hinterland of the highly developed capitalist West" (Baran 1973: 120). In this regard, dependence refers to "a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected" (Dos Santos 1970: 231). Baran (1973) underlined the role of foreign trade that transferred surplus value from peripheries to advanced capitalist countries and prevented industrialisation. Dos Santos (1970) broadened dependency theory by merging it with the uneven and combined development theory. Dos Santos (1970: 231) added financial relations to trade relations regarding the transfer of surplus value since trade relations were based on "monopolistic control of the market" and financial relations were based on "loans and export of capital", both of which transferred surplus value in the form of profits and interests. Frank (1982) underlined that dependence relations caused "development of

underdevelopment” since development in advanced capitalist countries and underdevelopment in peripheries were different sides of the same coin. Even though not considered as a member of the dependency theory, this article examines Immanuel Wallerstein’s (2006) world-systems theory under dependency theory due to its focus on the transfer of surplus value from peripheries to advanced capitalist (core) countries. The world-systems theory sought to merge modernisation theory’s understanding of development as an internal dynamic and dependency theory’s understanding of underdevelopment as an external dynamic (Ercan 2009: 141). According to the world-systems theory, surplus value was transferred from peripheries to core countries through low wages, low profits, and the lower levels of production of capital-intensive goods. World-system theory also conceptualised semi-peripheral countries located in between peripheries and core countries, and regarded semi-peripheries as having a role to relieve the impact of global economic crises while benefiting from exploitative economic relations (Wallerstein 2006).

The significance of dependency theory lay in its focus on the polarisation of world economy between advanced capitalist countries and peripheries through the transfer of surplus value. This highlighted that political independence of peripheries did not necessarily mean economic independence and thus discredited the modernisation theory and the neoliberal/globalisation theory. Nevertheless, the dependency theory presented a static conceptualisation of the world capitalist system where both core countries and peripheries became passive objects – rather than active subjects – determined by market mechanisms (Ercan 2009:143). At the heart of this conceptualisation, there lay the failure of dependency theory to notice the importance of class antagonisms (and economic and geopolitical rivalries) pertaining to relations of production (Weeks 1981). Since dependency theory focused on relations of redistribution of surplus value rather than relations of production, it could not explain why the process of capital accumulation occurred in core countries but not in peripheries where surplus value was produced. Furthermore, it could not explain the overwhelming amount of capital flows among advanced capitalist countries rather than between core countries and peripheries as assumed by dependency theory.

4. Marxist Theory

The emergence of Marxism or historical materialism dates back to Marx and Engels’s writings on capitalist relations of production in the nineteenth century. Even though Marx and Engels (1970) did not mention the notion of imperialism but rather extensively wrote about colonialism in Ireland, India, and China, the later proponents of Marxism utilised imperialism to explore the contradictions of the world capitalist system where peripheries are integrated hierarchically and unevenly. Imperialism was mainly developed significantly by Lenin (1964), Bukharin (1929), and Luxemburg (1972), all of whom studied capitalism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. By doing so, these classical Marxists argued that capitalism evolved into its monopolist stage, which differed from its relatively competitive stages in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Imperialism, which characterised the international order at the monopolist stage of capitalism denoting the monopolist unification

of commercial, financial, and industrial capital, was a result of contradictory tendencies inherent in the process of capital accumulation.

The recent proponents of Marxism utilise imperialism to explore the interaction between economic competition among various capital fractions and geopolitical rivalries between the capitalist states as well as the interaction between the expansion of capital accumulation on a world scale and the domination and subordination of peripheries (Kiely 2010: 3). When capitalism flourishes and dominates in a given social formation, it simultaneously reproduces itself within the social formation and expands outside of this social formation. In this sense, the process of the internationalisation of capital refers to the expansion of capital on a world scale in order to appropriate more surplus value for revalorisation of capital (reallocation of money that gained through exchange/selling to new production) (Palloix 1977: 3). Late-developing countries are inclined to hierarchically integrate to the world capitalist system, which enables imperialist capital to determine domestic patterns of capital in late-developing countries (peripheries) through relations of dependence. While peripheral capital fractions develop symbiotic relations with imperialist capitals, the domestic pattern of capital accumulation is organised in a way to enable the transfer of parts of surplus value to imperialist countries. In this way, peripheral capital fractions can even expand on a world scale subordinate to imperialist capitals once they complete the monopolist unification of commercial, financial, and industrial capital fractions (Uysal 2021). Nonetheless, the internationalisation of capital fosters national and global capital-capital and labour-capital contradictions. Therefore, social, economic, and political particularities and discrepancies in a wide array of diverse social formations in the Middle East are examined in relation to “the dialectic of rivalry and unity of interests that characterizes the relationship [among] the major imperialist powers” as well as between dominant and ruling classes in the Middle East and imperialist countries (Hanieh 2013: 13).

The recent proponents of Marxism further explore social formations in late-developing countries in relation to the dynamics of uneven and combined development arising from the contradictions of the expansion of capital on a world scale (see Anievas 2010). Late-development indicates the late development of capitalist relations in temporal terms and socio-historical particularities stemming from late development (Yaman-Öztürk & Ercan, 2009: 56). The dynamics of uneven and combined development were conceptualised by Trotsky (1957, 2008). The contradictory tendencies inherent in the process of capital accumulation “develop some parts of world economy while hampering and throwing back the development of others” (Trotsky 1957: 20). This uneven development occurs between countries and regions as well as within them. The later confrontation and harmonisation of domestic and international class relations can enable late-developing countries to substitute for institutions and practices of earlier processes of development and/or adopt contemporary institutions and practices. Such a leap forward can still be affected from the distorting impact of spatiotemporal pressure, and the same class relations can paradoxically encourage the continuation of backward forms and practices (Anievas 2014: 41-56). The combined development “draw[s] together [...] the different stages of the journey” resulting in “an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms” (Trotsky 2008: 5). In this regard, late-developing countries of the Middle East are characterised with complex and contradictory amalgamation of “backwardness” and “leaps forward in development” (Linden 2007: 145-

146). In this regard, the rise of authoritarianism in certain countries in the Middle East, particularly in Turkey, can be regarded as the merge of neoliberalism and political Islam (Uysal 2019; Göksel 2018).

5. Revisiting Development in the Middle East

This special issue explores the political economy of and state-society relations in the Middle East drawing upon various critical/radical approaches. Alphan Telek's article entitled "On the Origins of Authoritarian Islamic Regime Foundations in Middle East: Iran Case" discusses the historical development of authoritarian and Islamic regime in Iran. Telek proposes a periodisation; namely, preliminary, constitutive, and confrontation phases; to understand authoritarian and Islamic regimes in the Middle East. In the case of Iran, Telek periodises state-society relations in relation to social, economic, and political dynamics that led to the Islamic Revolution of 1979; the entrenchment of the regime change between the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and 1990; and social and political movements that favoured or challenged the Islamic regime beginning in the 1990s. Telek understands the pre-1979 era as the preliminary phase characterised with anti-imperialism and anti-Westernism merged with anti-establishment and anti-democratic practices of the *ancien régime*, and particularly focuses on nativism. Telek argues that the regime change following the revolution was constituted through social polarisation, socially shocking events, and the culture of martyrdom. Telek regards the post-1990 era as the confrontation phase marked with popular reaction against oppression and exclusion from the political decision-making processes. Telek further underlines that the Islamic regime has been favoured through crony solidarity among regime supporters in the face of the dissolution of social solidarity.

Akif Avcı's article entitled "Global Free Trade and the Fragmentation of Capitalist Classes: An Uneven and Combined Development Approach to MUSIAD in Turkey" explores state-capital-class relations through the formation and internationalisation of second-generation finance capital, namely MUSIAD (*Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği*, the Independent Industrialists and Businessman Association). Avcı draws upon the theory of uneven and combined development, and discusses MUSIAD and its relations with the state apparatus and governments in relation to MUSIAD's integration with the world capitalist system under its hierarchical and uneven dynamics. Avcı argues that the case of MUSIAD should be placed in the nexus of the integration with the global relations of free trade in competition with TUSIAD (*Türk İş İnsanları ve Sanayicileri Derneği*, Turkish Industrialists & Business Associations) and the role of Islamist political parties in government (particularly *Refah Partisi*, Welfare Party, and *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice and Development Party) regarding the favouring of certain of big-scale finance capital and SMEs. Avcı considers MUSIAD consisting of mainly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and few big-scale monopolist finance capital, whose fractions are nationally-oriented, internationally-oriented, and transnational in accordance with their uneven integration with the global circuit of capital.

Mehmet Erman Erol's article entitled "From Dictatorship to 'Democracy': Neoliberal Continuity and Its Crisis in Tunisia" explores authoritarianism in Tunisia in relation to the

transition to and consolidation of neoliberalism by drawing upon critical political economy approaches. Erol briefly discusses the purge of state-led developmentalism, which was followed following the establishment of independence and decolonization in the post-1956 era, through economic opening and retreat from the socialist experience beginning in the 1970s. Then, Erol discusses the transition to neoliberalism in relation to the rise of authoritarian political regime under Ben Ali combined with the curbing down of labour militancy and the adoption of economic reforms under the supervisions of IMF, World Bank, and the EU, beginning in the 1980s. Erol focuses on the Jasmine Revolution and its aftermath based on the Jasmine Plan followed by the Islamist-led troika of 2011-2014 as well as the secular-Islamist grand coalition of 2014-2019. Erol provides insights about the possibility of the rise of organised working classes against the post-Jasmine Revolution that did not offer any alternative to the neoliberal practices of police state and state of emergency in the face of state austerity, high unemployment, increases foreign debt, and wage cuts/stagnant wages.

6. Conclusion

Following the global economic crisis of 2007-2008, global political economy has undergone overwhelming transformations (Bieler and Morton, 2018). Most significantly, the global economic crisis has resulted in the decline and disintegration of the US-led liberal international order as well as the EU. It has further resulted in the rise of China and other non-Western powers including Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa (collectively called the BRICS). The global economic crisis has further resulted in the rise of right-wing populist and neo-fascist movements, decline in globalisation combined with trade wars, ongoing wars and conflicts, and global climate crisis. The Middle East has been unevenly and hierarchically subjected to these global transformations. In fact, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has remained one of the most significant unresolved issues. Another significant issue exacerbated by the global transformations included the question of political Islam; whether in the form of transnational jihadism, such as Al-Qaeda, or in the nexus of geopolitical rivalries, such as the rising tensions in the Persian Gulf between and among Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain. The Middle East has staged new wars and conflicts as a result of the global transformations; such as the ongoing civil war – or rather the proxy war – in Yemen in which Saudi Arabia (backed by Western states) and Iran took opposing sides. Similarly, the ongoing civil wars in Libya and Syria have been proxy wars between and among the United States, Russia, Iran, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, and Turkey. The COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) and the global and Middle Eastern responses to it have not only represented but also deepened and broadened the global transformations and crisis. Nevertheless, the Middle East has staged and will continue to stage new waves of protests and demonstrations, such as in Lebanon between 2019 and 2020, against the aim of ruling and dominant classes to restore neoliberal policies as a response to the crisis of global political economy.

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