

## RESENHA

### *Book Review*

## **THE POWER AND THE PEOPLE: PATHS OF RESISTANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST<sup>1</sup>**

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The various battles against long-established systems of repression in the Middle East are the focus of analysis of Charles Tripp in *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). The manuscript of the book was completed when the Arab uprisings were at the height of their strength, but the research process that gave origin to it started years earlier not least because "resistance of all kinds has been a familiar feature of political struggles across the Middle East for much of the past century. Given the ways in which the region has been invaded, battered and reconfigured by the armed forces of states from outside the region, as well as from those within, this should not be surprising" (p. 68). Tripp opens the book with a chapter on the armed resistance in the context of anti-colonial violence with a compelling case study of the strong resistance in Algeria against the French army in power. He also discusses the ways in which the use of violence "was seen as a way of writing the Palestinians as a nation back into world history" (p. 29). While Golda Meir asserted that Palestinians did not exist, the rise of the Palestinian Liberation Organization proved her wrong.

The author dedicates chapter two to the analysis of what he calls "the importance of space in organizing power" (p. 73). For him, precisely because the public space is used by the state to project its authority and to show its public face occupying it is a way of showing people's power. The ways in which public spaces are sites where the state shows its power, but also reveals its weakness, is discussed by Tripp in the light of the 1978 Iranian Revolution, the fall of Mubarak and Ben Ali and the uprisings against other regimes in the region. The long resistance against capitalism is the subject matter of chapter three, where the reader can find an in-depth retrospective of the protests and demonstrations that became a regular feature of Middle Eastern politics in the last decades. This should explain that the massive and radical

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<sup>1</sup> *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East*, de Charles Tripp. Cambridge University Press. 2013.

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manifestations that swept several Arab regimes in the last few years did not come out of nowhere. As the author elucidates, "when confronting the seemingly overwhelming power of global capitalism – seen most recently in the entrenchment of globalization and the dominance of neoliberal orthodoxy in economic affairs – various strategies of resistance have been used. Initially, this resistance was entwined with the politics of nationalism, since European imperial powers directly controlled the major economic assets of the region, in banking, industry, communications and oil. Further signs of resistance appeared during decolonization. It was then that nationalist elites in the Middle East had won control of the assets previously owned by Europeans" (p. 136). The riots that took place from the 1980s onwards were exactly against the appropriation of the national wealth by the local elites and the consequent further exclusion of the Middle Eastern masses.

To illustrate his argument on the singularity of women's resistance and how the "impact on the balance of power between men and women involves much more than simply open opposition to government policy" (p. 180), Tripp begins chapter four with a telling narrative of two demonstrations that occurred in Morocco in March 12, 2000 "in response to a government project to encourage the more complete integration of women into the economic and legal life of the country" (p. 176). Whilst in Rabat around 70,000 people gathered on the streets in support of the government project, at the same time, in Casablanca, a demonstration twice as big took place against the proposed reforms. Throughout the chapter, permeated with accounts like this, the author demonstrates that those who "permit, even applaud, gender decriminalization" are often the same ones "who are nevertheless active in resistance to oppression in other spheres" (p. 181).

The final two chapters are dedicated to the analysis and discussion of narratives of power and the art of resistance. Chapter five focuses on how defining a national history was part of the resistance to colonialism as well as a strategy of the new state elites to secure power after independence. In analysing the Algerian case, for example, the author reveals that the virtual exclusion of the Berbers from the national history of Algeria as an Arab country is a contested narrative against which the Imazighen have been resisting for decades. In chapter six, a comprehensive study of the power of art as a symbolic form of resistance is developed. Tripp movingly states that "the act of producing art, whether in form of posters, graffiti or publicly accessible artistic events [...] may not in itself change the balance of power, but it is a factor that shapes the environment in which attitudes to power are formed" (p. 306; 308).

*The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East* is definitely a valuable resource for IR scholars interested in appreciating the Arab uprisings as part of the long history of Middle Eastern peoples' challenge to political repression and the current global struggle against economic and cultural oppression.

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