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Arshin Adib-Moghaddam *On the Arab Revolts and the Iranian Revolution: Power and Resistance Today*, Bloomsbury, 2013, x + 250 pp., $120.00 US (hbk) / $37.95 US (pbk), ISBN 9781472511898 / 9781472589040.

In *On the Arab Revolts and the Iranian Revolution: Power and Resistance Today* Arshin Adib-Moghaddam aims to question received notions of politics through a parallel discussion of the 2011 Arab revolts, the 1979 Iranian revolution, and social movements in Europe, North America, and Palestine. Written in exceptionally clear, vibrant and eloquent prose, the book is a compelling read, weaving together theoretical reflections and analysis of events with the goal of understanding "global changes to forms of power and resistance" (1).

While the relationship between resistance and power is a consistent and unifying theme of the volume, the book reads as a collection of related essays, and Adib-Moghaddam calls each chapter an interregnum, which to him "denotes a space in between, a period of discontinuity" (1). As other writings by the same author, the book itself is located "in between" academic fields, engaging at once critical theory and international relations, two fields that, at least on the surface, are quite divergent in scope, direction and approach. Being in between, the book troubles received views on both sides: readers interested in conceptual discussions might be skeptical of Adib-Moghaddam's syncretic combination of sharply different thinkers (Foucault and Adorno for example), while political analysts might be impatient with his abstract reflections, or question his discussion of the success of Arab revolts in light of subsequent events. But here also lies the interest of the book, especially if one takes the notion of interregnum to signal not only a set of transformations in the contemporary political landscape, but also a suspension of current regimes of interpretation. Each chapter/interregnum can be read as introducing a conceptual discontinuity. By discussing the events that took place around the world between 2009-2012 as singularities that disrupt habitual thinking, the book derails expectations for closure—even those that the book itself seems to unwillingly build around the notion of resistance or the demands for social justice and democracy, which for Adib-Moghaddam are the defining global traits of these movements. Moreover, read at the end of 2014, when renewed "reigns" have almost closed the interregnum opened in 2011, the volume is a reminder of a recent past that already seems so far away and yet is so close.

Adib-Moghaddam sees the dyad of resistance and power as a mobile articulation: they are opposite yet inseparable. So Mubarak's Egypt and Pahlavi's Iran produced the resistance that in the end caused their demise. However, rather than a mechanical movement of

reversal, he argues, we should see the dynamic of resistance and power as dialectical, a process of unfolding. It is a "negative dialectics" (Adorno), one that, while including a process of (self-?) realization, is never complete, and, as such, is open towards new struggles and confrontations. Echoes of Sartre (76-77), Hegel via Horkeimer and Adorno (149-151), and an in-depth recuperation of the notion of resistance in Foucault (chapter 4) constitute the scaffoldings of this conception, at times in critical dialogue with Said, Fanon and several contemporary Marxian thinkers (Žižek, Laclau and Mouffe, Negri and Hardt).

Resistance, while territorialized in place and time, is not per se dependent on the specific circumstances from which it emerges: "[t]here is nothing particularly Iranian or Arab about these revolts and nothing European, western or American about demands for democracy and social justice" (73) because "resistance to injustice is a human trait" (22), its forms are "deeply rooted in the human psyche and transcendent of cultural or ethnic particularities" (22). This does not mean that every movement of resistance is successful, because structural elements such as organization and leadership are crucial political axes that determine positive (Egypt and Tunisia) or negative (Iran 2009) outcomes. In addition, when discussing resistance, a distinction should be made, Adib-Moghaddam argues, between radical movements and revolutionary ones. While sharply and at times violently critical of domination, radicalism does not necessarily aim at seizing power (see his discussion of Iran in chapter 5).

Adib-Moghaddam intersects his analysis of resistance with two other intertwined concerns: a critique of binary approaches in international relations and a reflection on the category of neighbor. He offers a critique of views that polarize enemies as separate others, arguing that the clash of civilizations discourse (chapter 1), the antagonism between Iran and the U.S. (chapter 6), and the struggles and oppositional rhetoric in Palestine and Israel are predicated on a mutual dependency, inscribed in the logic of resistance and power outlined above. Because resistance and power are in a dialectical relationship, one should recognize that such polarizations are the product of uncanny resemblances: indeed they are assonances between neighbors who are mutually imbricated. The final interregnum (chapter 7) develops this critique of the politics of representation into an articulate discussion of the category of neighbor. Letting aside its Christian genealogy, and criticizing Levinas' legitimation of Israel's exception, Adib-Moghaddam exemplifies the category noting how Europe is the product of a reconstructed history that has excluded Jewish and Muslim neighbors from its foundational matrixes, turning them into external enemies instead of participating insiders. This is why a recognition of the "immanence" of neighbors, as the author argues in his finale, should make people realize that acts of war are acts of self-mutilation, and lead to a search for a "non-militaristic approach to international affairs" (194).

However, citing the book's closing lines risks not accounting for the complexity of the argumentation in the chapters, unless one brings Adib-Moghaddam's interregnum perspective to its ultimate conclusion. For this purpose, a supplement offered by Nietzsche is needed, in order to complement the book's discussion of Foucault, and draw a sharper line of demarcation between the author's analysis of resistance on one side, and judgments about what is good and what is evil on the other.[1] Nietzsche's genealogy charts the process through which values are constantly reworked in light of the perspectival play of forces to which they are subjected, and clarifies that any will to resistance is as blind as any will to

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[1] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

power, the difference being more in the relative degree of force at a particular point of application, rather than in an intrinsic morality of one over the other. There is no dialectic, no realization, no righteousness. Nietzsche insists that beyond good and evil does not mean beyond good and bad. Instead of a transcendental normative order, forces are to be considered in relation to their effects, as immanent to the situation at hand.

The transvaluation of values makes Adib-Moghaddam's analysis of resistance more stringently linked to the visceral and the bodily, and less predicated on acts of self-recognition, which are admittedly partial and in flux, as recent events remind us. If the dialectics of resistance is negative, or no dialectic at all, no call for justice liberates a supposed subject of resistance. The task of the genealogist is not oriented at revealing the conditions which will make everyone revolt once they become aware of them, but is rather aimed at making strange what everyone takes for granted: calls for social justice in our contemporary world are no safe ground, they are no pristine cry of redemption, but, instead, are already part and parcel of a mediated world in which everything has a perspectival value. Indignation (the keyword of the Spanish movement) and the anger and joy displayed in the squares of 2009-2012, were already in the process of becoming appropriated and re-mediated, certainly not the expression of a primordial opposition to injustice. Their force stemmed from the ways in which they made temporarily inoperative the regime of signification in which they were themselves placed, through performative acts that exhibited the structure of signification itself: the refusal of representation, the artistic production, and the citational nature of the protests (particularly evident in the Iranian case) worked towards a suspension of dominant forms more than their substitution.

Without explicitly stating it, Adib-Moghaddam seems at times to suggest this view, when he discusses the idea that resistance is a "drive," or when he describes the "libidinous bio-ontology" (129)—the channeling of passion into political action that characterizes the "revolutionary subject" in twentieth century Iran. However, he stops short of analyzing critically the inherent progressive humanism that these statements evoke. It is here that readers might mistake his analysis for yet another generic call for "social justice" or his genealogy of twentieth century Iran for a trans-historical desire for liberation—something I doubt would be in line with Adib-Moghaddam's deconstruction of Iranian historiographical fables.

Going beyond good and evil means to understand how, as Adib-Moghaddam argues, in the current regime of interpretation, resistance and terrorism become interchangeable signifiers (168), and further helps make clear that Islamophobia, or the mutual demonization of the U.S. and Iran, are not just the product of mis-representations, or "flawed intelligence" (38). Adib-Moghaddam cleverly uses declassified documents to show what was really going on at the time of the arm exchange between the U.S. and Iran in the 1980s. His revelation should not only be used to demonstrate the complicit strategies of American and Iranian powers, or as a prefiguration of the present alliance against ISIS, but also as a reminder that the constitution of publicness and secrecy are both intrinsic to the articulation of domination and resistance, not to mention the transversal political economy of violence that accompanies it. As Arshavez Mozafari has brilliantly shown, figurations of the devil in contemporary Iran are not just a trope picked up along the way, but have been crucial for the articulation of Iranian modernity all along, especially during the Reza Shah Period (1925-

1941) and have set the stage for restructuring the relationship with nature, technology, and the divine.[2]

Adib-Moghaddam seems to suggest that if resistance and power can only be thought together, the "realist" language of international relations and the microphysical analysis of power can reach a point of conjunction in recognizing that what is at stake is a play of forces, a temporary and unstable positioning rather than a definite positive or negative outcome. Or, to put it in other terms, that if the enemy/neighbor is immanent, what is at stake is less an abstract notion of justice and more a question of governmentality, with all the ambiguities it entails. This uncanny meeting of security studies and Foucault on the terrain of governance would call for a renewed effort to rethink what is at stake in this convergence. There is a constitutive ambivalence at play in desire (this is probably why Foucault was skeptical about it), and it cannot be easily undone. If "power over someone" is also an "act of self-mutilation," and if resistance is the correlate of power, then resistance is not such a clean drive against injustice, but an ambivalent act, which carries with it more conflicting and divergent forces than it might seem. In the long run, Egypt and Tunisia in 2011 were successful not only in overthrowing governments, but also in revealing the force of this ambivalence. Nothing is beyond good and bad, and violence cannot just be explained away as either just repressive or liberating.

Besides Nietzsche's trajectory, there are two other less radical lines of development that receive inspiration from this suggestive book, and make inoperative the dialectic of resistance and power by also connecting it more specifically with the idea of the Islamicate world. The first one is geopolitical. Adib-Moghaddam presents many indications that a more vigorous evasion from European and American trajectories is needed. His analysis of resistance reveals the interconnectedness between apparently opposite systems of domination, and therefore contributes to decentering the polarity between the west and the rest, towards a more comprehensive global view of the political landscape. Without belittling the impact of western imperialism, a more systematic south/south perspective might further make inoperative the totality of the West's monopoly over forms of thought and action. Developing the idea of the "immanent neighbor" might likewise suggest how Western articulations (including the relationship between resistance and power?) are just contingent realizations of a larger network of actions and thoughts. It is here that the loose configuration called "Islamicate," connecting Asia, Africa and Europe might offer the most relevant trajectories to be explored: definitely immanent to Europe, and yet also quite unlike it.

The second line of development concerns the relation between religion and politics. While Adib-Moghaddam discusses in detail the political articulations of Islam, for him Islam is foremost a system of ideas that can be mobilized towards totalitarian or democratic political projects. This is certainly true, but one wonders if this secularization of Islam does not preclude a discussion of the political theology at work in these instances. The interplay of resistance and power, the immanence of the other, the desire for justice, and the relationality of evil have a strong theological connotation. A systematic consideration of these theological trajectories would entail not only abandoning the divide between secularism and religion, but also force a reconfiguration of the state/society divide as the prime battleground of domination. One would have to discuss how notions of transformation and

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[2] Arshavez Mozafari, "An Intellectual History of Early-Pahlavī Demonology, 1921-41/1299-1320," PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2014.

revolution, and therefore of redemption and salvation, are predicated on a power that dispenses more than it will ever accept in return, a power towards which humans always feel indebted, and in relation to which they organize to reciprocate without ever succeeding in doing so—a power that always comes back to haunt them from a elsewhere, located beyond the here and now of the everyday. This is the power, one can speculate, that as Adib-Moghaddam masterfully discusses, Foucault noticed in 1979 while witnessing the revolutionary movement in Iran. But this is also nowadays the power of capitalism, which as Walter Benjamin noted,[3] has become itself a religion, a cult without ideology that cultivates guilt and indebtedness in an endless celebration of its rituals of consumption. The future task of the critic is therefore to interrogate this emergent, indistinct zone between religion, revolution, and capitalism.

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[3] Walter Benjamin, "Capitalism as Religion," in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, ed. M. Bullock and M. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996 [1921]), 288-291.

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