

# URBAN VIOLENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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# URBAN VIOLENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

*Changing Cityscapes in the Transition  
from Empire to Nation State*



Edited by  
**Ulrike Freitag, Nelida Fuccaro,  
Claudia Ghrawi and Nora Lafi**



berghahn  
NEW YORK • OXFORD  
[www.berghahnbooks.com](http://www.berghahnbooks.com)

Published by  
Berghahn Books  
www.berghahnbooks.com

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Urban violence in the Middle East : changing cityscapes in the transition from empire to nation state / edited by Ulrike Freitag, Nelida Fuccaro, Claudia Ghrawi and Nora Lafi.

pages cm -- (Space and place ; volume 14)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-78238-583-7 (hardback) -- ISBN 978-1-78238-584-4 (ebook)

1. Urban violence--Middle East--History. 2. Sociology, Urban--Middle East--History. 3. City and town life--Middle East--History. 4. Community life--Middle East--History. 5. Political culture--Middle East--History. 6. Petroleum industry and trade--Social aspects--Middle East--History. 7. Social change--Middle East--History. 8. Middle East--Social conditions. 9. Middle East--Politics and government. 10. Middle East--Colonial influence. I. Freitag, Ulrike. II. Fuccaro, Nelida. III. Lafi, Nora. IV. Ghrawi, Claudia.

HN656.Z9V587 2015

303.60956--dc23

2014033530

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed on acid-free paper

ISBN: 978-1-78238-583-7 hardback

ISBN: 978-1-78238-584-4 ebook

This book was published as part of the 2nd DFG/AHRB collaborative projects (PAK 566, FR 1004/10-1).

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# Acknowledgements

This book presents some of the results of collective deliberations on urban violence in the Middle East by a group of researchers: Rasmus Elling, Ulrike Freitag, Nelida Fuccaro, Claudia Ghrawi, Nora Lafi and Fatemeh Masjedi. We collaborated between 2011 and 2013 as part of a German–British research project sponsored by the German Research Council (DFG) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of PAK 566, FR 1004/10-1. We are grateful for their support of the project, which allowed for intensive conversations amongst and between the editors and the contributors of this book, and which has led to its publication. Through this process the two research groups – based at Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin, and the School of Oriental and African Studies, London – were able to develop a common understanding of urban violence. Many colleagues and staff at both institutions encouraged the project and provided the necessary logistical support during our activities, for which we would like to express our thanks.

The chapters in this volume are based on some of these conversations. They are a first attempt to bring together in a more systematic way general theoretical literature on urban violence as a means of contestation with Middle Eastern case studies. We are grateful to the publishers, Berghahn Books, for their unequivocal support of the project, and to the anonymous reviewers for their comments which urged us to push our reflections further than we might otherwise have dared.

In the course of the three years' work on the project, and of editing this book, we were very happy to be supported by outstanding student assistants without whose help the group's activities, the conference and the editing of this book would not have been possible. Nushin Atmaca, Jihan Akrawi, Semra Kertal, Yasser Mehanna, Layla Safta-Zecheria, Patrick Winkelhorst and Christoph Rother, as well as, in the later phases of editing, Christian Kübler and Teresa Schlögl, were of invaluable help, while Mitch Cohen gracefully and often at short notice was willing to improve the English of our texts. We also thank Melody Mosavat for drawing the maps for the contributions by Lafi, Freitag and Ghrawi.

Editing a book with Arabic, Ottoman and Persian spellings, as well as various European language renderings of personal and place names, always presents a challenge. We have opted for a simplified system of

x *Acknowledgements*

transliteration which follows the IJMES style, unless the names are part of quotations.

The editors

Berlin, January 2014

# Introduction

CLAUDIA GHRAWI, FATEMEH MASJEDI,  
NELIDA FUCCARO AND ULRIKE FREITAG

This book was conceived in mid-2010 as a response to a perceived gap in scholarly reflections on different forms and expressions of urban violence in the history of the Middle East from the late eighteenth until the mid-twentieth century. While urban violence has recently become a vibrant field of study in other regions, and has increasingly been understood as an extreme but not exceptional expression of political and social contention, we felt that scholarship on the Middle East differed. There, urban violence was often seen as a sign of the violent nature of the region's societies or as an expression of confessional or ethnic factionalism. We thus aimed to bring together contributions that would show a variety of contexts in which urban violence could develop, erupt or be suppressed and avoided, discuss the actors and institutions involved in these processes, and reflect on these events in the context of more general theories and debates. We thereby get away from the 'hysterical mainstream [that] locates the sources of violence in or emanating from the region in Islam(ism) or attributes it to some half-baked but remarkably persistent cultural explanations (tribalism, ancient hatreds, cycles of violence, etc.).'<sup>1</sup>

In addition, we were wondering about the impact of the transition from empires (the Ottoman and Qajar) to nation states in the region, a process that was heavily 'moderated' by European powers, which after the First World War experienced a last apex of imperial expansion in the Arab Middle East in the form of the mandates system.<sup>2</sup> As it turned out, the modernizing and centralizing reforms undertaken by the Ottoman and the Qajar empires since the mid-nineteenth century provided for a more gradual transition between the two forms of state than we

had initially assumed. What turned out to be more important than the form assumed by the state were processes and degrees of centralization and urbanization, as well as, from the early twentieth century on, of industrialization.

Hence, the contributions in this volume aim at understanding the crucial relationship between political and social protest, the evolution of the urban public sphere, and the physical expansion of urban centres. Urban violence is understood here as one particular ritual of power and a ploy for popular and state legitimacy in the context of street politics.<sup>3</sup> Besides instances of ritualization in both public ceremonial and ritual performances, it can be used to make political claims that cannot be realized in other ways or can serve the at times dramatic and theatrical enforcement of the rule of law. The chapters also investigate in different ways how episodes of violence relate to the transformation of the physical landscape of the city and to changes in the specific settings of popular contestation and state action. They also examine how these changes reflected wider trends across the region as well as European and Western influences.

While the majority of contributions in this volume are written by historians, they are influenced by strands of historical analysis that make strong use of sociological concepts, most prominently those advanced by Charles Tilly and William H. Sewell, Jr. In the spirit of these scholars, they treat events of urban violence in modern Middle Eastern history as an expression of contentious politics and as 'both the outcomes of structural ruptures and the causes of sequences of cultural and political change that lead to new structural configurations.'<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the contributions to this volume do not deal with episodes of cataclysmic violence such as war or large-scale massacres. Instead, they analyse more common violent events performed by both individuals and groups that can be explained as part and parcel of the 'systemic and stabilising' violence of the everyday, to use David Nirenberg's words.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the focus on public violence largely implies that, at least for most of the historical contributions, the historical gender segregation is replicated in the historical narrative, since often women either did not participate in the events actively or are not mentioned in the records available to the historian, except as victims (e.g. chapters by Lafi, Krimsti, Freitag) or a potential moral danger (e.g. the brothels mentioned in Lévy-Aksu's chapter). Thus, their very prominent appearance in Hammad's chapter mirrors two aspects, namely their increased public role by the 1950s, and the fact that the state increasingly involved itself in censoring the everyday life of its subjects and hence started to concern itself with the policing of abusive language among neighbours.

## **The Iranian and Arab Uprisings, Urban Violence and the Modern State**

The volume thus contributes to theoretical as well as empirical debates that have already informed the study of violence in other parts of the world, and it destroys the myth of the Middle East as a region marked by particularly violent eruptions, for instance of a communal nature. It does so by integrating its history into more universal processes of urban change and political negotiation. Writing about the past, however, cannot be divorced from the present. This lesson was brought home in particularly poignant terms when the so-called Arab Spring emerged in early 2011 while preparations for this volume were in full swing. The wave of uprisings that spread in North Africa and the Middle East was preceded by Iran's 'Green Movement,'<sup>6</sup> which erupted as a series of protests against the second term in office of the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June 2009. In all these cases, the movements did not erupt overnight.

These events sparked a new scholarly interest in the societies of the Middle East, which for decades were perceived as being caught in a hopeless political stalemate. The urban centres of the uprisings, such as Azadi Square and Enqelab Square in Tehran, Tahrir Square in Cairo and University Square in San'a became symbols of the struggle between citizens and state power. We argue that the historical case studies in this volume can contribute significantly to a better understanding of the processes of the recent past and present, and highlight continuities and ruptures in the urban social formation.

A closer look at Middle Eastern cities reveals that until early 2011 they were not dormant at all. To start with Iran, a trend that Asef Bayat terms 'post-Islamic' became visible by the early 1990s. On the one hand, the new mayor of Tehran allowed the symbols of the Islamic revolution, such as photographs of martyrs and revolution leaders, to become less prominent on the streets of Tehran. They were replaced by commercial billboards, and the construction of inner city highways and shopping malls followed an American model rather than the archetypes of the 'ideal Islamic city' embodied by Qom and Kerbela, which had been propagated after the Islamic Revolution. New parks and recreational facilities built by the municipality provided spaces for men and women to mingle, and music and art added to the changing urban culture and introduced new ways of being young and Muslim at the same time. This contributed to a new youth culture among college students, male and female, and especially women's and students' movements, laying the foundations for the Green Movement of 2009 with its large female component.<sup>7</sup>

The Green Movement itself, which started as a contestation of the Iranian elections, came to signify the struggle for civic rights beyond an Islamic agenda. It was driven by students, youth, religious intellectuals, professionals and state employees, including women, and gave the important signal that large segments of Iranian society demanded fundamental political change. This has to be seen against the background of a young population, 70 per cent of whom were under the age of thirty-five. The Iranian state answered the movement with harsh violence. Many activists and participants were arrested, tortured, killed or disappeared.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, what started in early 2011 with a young Tunisian's desperate act of self-immolation in front of a governorate building in the provincial Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, with the murder of a young blogger by policemen in an Internet cafe in Alexandria, with demonstrations against fake parliamentary elections in Cairo and with schoolchildren spraying anti-regime graffiti in the Syrian provincial city of Der'a (to name only some events and places),<sup>9</sup> had begun to unravel long before. The 'Arab Spring' uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East advanced, unnoticed by most observers, from outside the marble-clad centres of the political elites and the sparkling meeting places of the new urban bourgeoisie. They had their origins in the suburbs and provincial towns, where a rapidly growing population has struggled for the fulfilment of basic needs, where large-scale modernization projects in conjunction with the privatization of many basic services had neglected the rights of the poor and the disenfranchised majority, and where state-patronized factionalism has fuelled dissatisfaction amongst those who were denied participation in the opportunities of economic liberalization. The protests that erupted in early 2011 could draw on discrete movements with specific concerns that had started to form earlier, such as initiatives concerned with the environment in Cairo. These movements at times reflected economic or political grievances and at others expressed localized political concerns.<sup>10</sup> Besides these connections to earlier mobilizations, the uprisings of 2011 were ignited by events of exemplary everyday violence that demonstrated the powerlessness of the people vis-à-vis unjust and brutal governments, quite closely comparable to the Iranian Green Movement.

The mobilization that followed these initial events was eased by various communication and social networks that not only connected local communities with each other, but also linked towns and cities on national and regional levels. Hence, spontaneous public articulation of enagement against despotism, corruption and social neglect in urbanized areas quickly gained a more organized form that aimed at the urban centres of state power. When the wave of protest reached the capitals

and other major cities of the respective states, a wider spectrum of the population embraced the movement for civic empowerment and began to challenge the current social, economic and political orders. Activists, intellectuals and common folk alike seized the opportunity to take political change into their own hands by claiming their ownership of both the city and the socio-political transitions incubated in the urban sphere.<sup>11</sup> Spontaneous concerts in the squares and parks of Tunis, symbolic 'cleaning' sessions and street painting in Cairo, and the procession of the revolutionary flag through the boulevards and alleyways of Homs and Damascus demonstrated a unified and determined public that governments could no longer ignore.<sup>12</sup> In cities where no obvious public spaces for assembly and demonstration existed, as in Bahrain, these were spontaneously created, as testified to by the protesters' camp on Pearl Roundabout in Manama. Even under the most oppressive circumstances, protesters were remarkably inventive when it came to leaving their mark where it could be noticed, as illustrated by the dyeing of water in public fountains in Damascus.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, already at an early stage of the uprisings, it became clear that they also were marked by a notable degree of violence. For instance, Egypt's peaceful political spring in January 2011 was interrupted by a 'day of rage' during which protesters in Giza, Suez, Alexandria and other cities fought street battles with violence-prone police forces, smashed windows and set fire to or attempted the siege of police stations, municipal buildings and National Democratic Party headquarters, throwing stones and Molotov cocktails.<sup>14</sup> It was Charles Tilly who suggested analysing such outbursts of violence as a universal, albeit extreme, means of putting forward collective claims in any given society and time. Tilly also emphasized that 'above a very small scale, collective violence almost always involves governments as monitors, claimants, objects of claims, or third parties of claims.'<sup>15</sup>

The crucial role played by the 'modern' state in the definition, sanctioning and monopolization of violence has been observed by, amongst others, Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski, who came to the conclusion that 'any definition of violence already assumes a partial standpoint sustained by violent relations'.<sup>16</sup> In the process of building centralized and professionalized state administrations, governments in all parts of the world were increasingly able to use their institutional leverage to define violent and criminal or deviant behaviour and to forestall such action on the behalf of public security, but also as a response to challenges against their own legitimacy. The latter has been termed the state's external and internal monopoly over legitimate use of force, however debated the boundaries of legitimacy might be. Whilst external military action does

not fall within this volume's focus, internal policing in the preventive and intervening sense is central for the assertiveness of the modernizing state<sup>17</sup> and thus for our inquiries. State policing became most apparent in the urban context, where new forms of governance and modern infrastructures were first introduced. The three contributions in Part I of this volume by Lafi, Lévy-Aksu and Hammad on 'Managing and Employing Violence' discuss the pivotal role played by the late Ottoman state and by European and modern state administrations in Middle Eastern cities from the late eighteenth until the early twentieth century. However, the processes of industrialization and urbanization at times outpaced those of state building and the modernization of the state apparatus, sometimes leading to cases in which external powers intervened in policing or the state took recourse to the military for internal repression.<sup>18</sup> This is demonstrated in detail in the three contributions in Part IV on oil cities (Elling, Fuccaro and Ghrawi).

The urban character of violent struggle has even farther-reaching implications. For example, most of the Arab uprisings in 2011 and since have shown that the lines of confrontation by no means always run exclusively between governments and people. Different groups and factions within the urban community may enter temporary or permanent alliances and exert violence against each other in their struggle for the reallocation of power or resources. During the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, the spontaneous formation of street and quarter groups defending their local urban spaces against police raids as well as against opportunist marauding might well serve as an example.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the formation of youth gangs joining in the protest as well as using the occasion for looting resembles the violent crowds described by Krimsti, Riedler and Mazza in Part III. These chapters, which cover the period from 1850 to 1920, point to a number of continuities as well as to many ruptures in the development of collective action in the urban context. For example, present-day rioters could often build on new types of sociability, such as football clubs or political organizations, in addition to the new media such as Facebook and Twitter, through which they could mobilize much more quickly in the vastly expanded modern urban spaces.

In some cases, the symbolic dimension of violent behaviour must be emphasized. Thus, rioters attacked symbolic sites as well as their guardians, as in the case of the aforementioned torching of Cairo's headquarters of the National Democratic Party, which supported President Mubarak's regime, and in the attacks on more than ninety police stations all over Egypt. The symbolic significance of the choice of targets and occasions for the deployment of violent protest is also highly visible in the fatal



clashes between supporters of soccer teams closely identified with the opposed regime, on the one hand, and protesters on the other.<sup>20</sup> For their part, governments at times chose to retaliate against protesters with excessive force that aimed at discouraging others to follow their example as much as at stigmatizing protestors as outlaws and expelling them from the regime's 'goodwill', such as in the attacks on the protesters in Tahrir Square or in the Syrian town of Der'a, the torture of children who had decorated the walls of their school with graffiti demanding regime change. The symbolism of these violent acts transmits their socio-political message in a way that was heard and understood by all conflicting parties in the respective context. It further seems to multiply the coercive power of violent behaviour by those who lack other resources to make their voice heard, as will be discussed later in this introduction. Some of the historical case studies in this volume, such as the articles by Ulrike Freitag, Reza Masoudi Nejad and Florian Riedler, examine symbolic uses of extreme violence by states and protesters during events of seemingly irrational outrage and killing, or during outbreaks of (ritualized periodic) violence between neighbourhood communities. These authors' examination of an anti-Armenian pogrom also draws attention to the complexities of sectarian violence, which have been a marked feature of the Arab uprisings. The contributors to Part III, on 'Communal Violence and its Discontents', develop this topic further.

Another aspect of the violence witnessed during the 'Arab Spring' can be linked to specific spatial structures and distribution of power and resources that seem to be characteristic for the evolution of the 'modern' nation state and that paralleled processes of economic integration into world markets and rapid urban growth. In Part IV, the link between 'Spatiality and Violence' is explored in three contributions by Elling, Fuccaro and Ghrawi, who look at the specific setting of twentieth-century oil cities in the context of nascent nation states, and discuss ethnic segregation and social control in the light of economic growth and parallel underdevelopment. Khaled Adham follows a similar path of inquiry in his chapter on contemporary Cairo, in which he discusses the recent uprisings in connection to their interrelation with neo-liberal economic conversion and urban planning. He demonstrates how those people whom government officials and their business cronies had expelled to the margins of the city and had excluded from access to decent living space chose to stage their demands for justice in the heart of the city and at the centre of power, namely Tahrir Square, with its direct access to the surrounding government buildings. The four contributions thus add a structural argument to the notion of the city as a 'stage' for protest.

## Why Urban Violence?

While Riedler's aforementioned article demonstrates how the imperial capital of Istanbul, as a capital city, provided an ideal stage both for a national and an international audience on which to play out (in extremely violent terms) the Ottoman-Armenian conflict, many of the case studies in this volume consider violent incidents in secondary and provincial cities. Thus, it was the provincial towns of Sidi Bou Zid and Der'a that sparked the uprisings in Tunisia and Syria respectively. It seems that the usually emphasized characteristics of the city – such as a developed infrastructure, a wide social stratification and the quality and diversity of urban lifestyles<sup>21</sup> – did not necessarily play key roles in the outbreak of the uprisings, although they seem to have helped to accelerate the events once the protests reached the regional towns and cities. This raises the question of why cities matter and how we conceive of urbanity.

Obviously, the focus on cities is not self-explanatory, given the widespread occurrence of rural rebellions and uprisings in Middle Eastern as well as, indeed, in global history.<sup>22</sup> Still, the Arab Spring protests started in densely populated and rapidly expanding environments that can be qualified at least as 'urbanized'. Mirroring this urban focus, the case studies in this volume are likewise concerned with a variety of cities and towns that range from cosmopolitan Cairo and Jerusalem in the nineteenth century to embryonic forms of industrial settlements that were only beginning to develop into larger urban formations during the second half of the twentieth century. Certainly, the role of cities has increased with the dramatic urbanization processes since the nineteenth century, but most notably in the second half of the twentieth century, in much of the Middle East. Furthermore, these have caused an increased blurring of the urban–rural divide through phenomena such as the 'urbanization of the countryside' and the 'ruralization' of the cities, thus highlighting connections that can be found in earlier periods as well, albeit in different forms. One such earlier form is the entanglement of urban tax-farmers and the rural hinterland of cities through webs of tax raising, credit provision, access to markets and manufacturing through contracts.<sup>23</sup>

Since we contend that there are certain specificities to urban violence, we cannot avoid the basic question: What do we mean by 'urban'? Furthermore, the Arab Spring uprisings evolved in varying manners, but all witnessed various forms of violence at some stage. If we consider such fundamental divisions as between systemic or state violence, ritual and everyday violence, cataclysmic violence and violent protest, and if we bear in mind the multiple levels of conflict that might be fought out in

a violent event, violence becomes an immensely complex concept that needs to be defined with reference to the urban sphere, on the one hand, and to the historical transitions discussed in this volume, on the other.

To begin with, the urban sphere in this book's context is portrayed as 'a site, an arena where larger social, economic, or cultural processes are worked out.'<sup>24</sup> Yet, this site is not static, but is itself undergoing a constant process of transformation in which changing visions of society are reified in the material and organizational surface of the city as much as in the social practices that evolve in the urban sphere. The basic idea that socio-spatial relationships are 'an inherent part of societal development' was formulated in the second half of the twentieth century by neo-Marxist thinkers who linked transitions of and within the urban sphere to larger changes in industrial capitalism and the world economy.<sup>25</sup> In his influential work *The Production of Space* (1974), Henri Lefebvre suggested that social practices in the urban sphere either reinforce or alter a given socio-political order. By arguing that the modern urban space is the product of capitalist modes of production and thus 'structures' capitalist order, makes it concrete and – consequently – reproduces it through everyday practices and routines, Lefebvre claimed that alternative interpretations and utilizations of space can challenge and alter the prevailing socio-political system.<sup>26</sup>

Lefebvre's writings on the relationships among the capitalist mode of production, urbanization and revolutionary change must be read in the context of his own experiences with the Parisian uprisings of 1968; they thus strongly reflect intellectual thought and urban experience of the late twentieth century.<sup>27</sup> Yet, they certainly were an inspiration for what became known as the 'spatial turn' in social and cultural sciences four decades ago.<sup>28</sup> The turn towards a stronger reflection of space in historical analysis was prepared by thinkers such as William H. Sewell, Jr. who conceptualized processes of historical transition in the wider theoretical framework of structuralism. Sewell emphasized the 'strong reproductive bias built into structures', which leads to 'powerful continuities of social relations' but also makes it 'possible to explain the paths followed in episodes of social change.'<sup>29</sup> Later, he used his concept of structure to define space as 'a constituent aspect of contentious politics.'<sup>30</sup> In this sense, the ability to control, utilize, transcend, imagine or reinvent space and hence to reproduce or transform social order is put into effect in 'the ways that spatial constraints are turned to advantage in political and social struggle and the ways that such struggles can restructure the meanings, uses, and strategic valence of space.'<sup>31</sup> Thus, the built environment and the social and communication networks of the city become essential conditions, but also issues of social mobilization. 'In providing a site for

alternative forms of political organization and action, cities offer a number of spatial and social resources', argued Fran Tonkiss in 2005.<sup>32</sup> Among these resources she recognized were: first, the public space in itself and therefore 'the informal spatial infrastructure for political action and association'; second, information and mobilization networks, 'from dense transport networks and a concentration of press and broadcast media, to the informal communications technology of bill-sticking and graffiti'; third, 'social networks that support pressure groups' including 'crucial sites for a politics of assembly, collectivity, spontaneity, and for spatial expressions of solidarity'; and finally, 'identities, ideologies and "lifestyles" ... which provide *the critical mass* to locate politics in space'.<sup>33</sup> Hence, the urban sphere is a physical as well as cognitive intermediary in contentious politics, as it provides the means for mobilization, serves as a rallying point for collective identities and allows for collective practices that are able to challenge spatial and socio-political structures. Furthermore, it is the space in which most institutions representing the state are located, and hence is where state actions as well as actions against the state are played out most effectively. In addition, and given the specific structures of the rural and urban economy in Middle Eastern history, many key economic players (such as landowners) and institutions (such as banks, industries and trade) have been mostly urban-based, adding to the attractiveness of the city as a theatre for protest and violence, as discussed in the chapters by Riedler and Adham, among others.

Clearly, the urban level of analysis brings to the foreground the historical processes 'at stake', the conflicts that arise around reproducing and transforming structures of all kinds and at all scales – from the street, the neighbourhood and the quarter to the city, the state and the whole region. The contributions in this volume analyse the resort to violence as one possible means of partaking in these conflicts. As Norbert Elias has argued, violent behaviour is, regardless of the time and place, a normal part of human emotional affects. Yet, the acceptance of the use of violence in relations between individuals or groups has changed over time. Whereas violent brawls and struggles between smaller competing socio-political entities used to be the norm where no regulating central power existed, the development of the centralized and institutionally differentiated state led to a growing regulation of violent behaviour.<sup>34</sup> As Coronil and Skurski have reasoned for the context of the 'modern' state, violence 'is associated with acts of transgression and aggression against central values, [but] it is also present in the mechanisms that preserve order and legality and in the practices that seek to institute new visions of society'.<sup>35</sup> Their observation that 'in the context of political violence, violence appears as a tool wielded in the pursuit of power'<sup>36</sup> should be

emphasized here. Ussama Makdisi has drawn our attention to the intricate link of the Ottoman modernization process and the employment of violence by the state in Lebanon and Syria, notably in the forceful suppression of the 1860 massacres. Persecuting the perpetrators of crimes against Christians, the Ottoman authorities reflected an image of justice and tolerance that was central to defining the Empire as 'modern', particularly in the eyes of the Great Powers.<sup>37</sup> One of the topics that feature in a significant number of chapters in this volume is that of the exercise of state violence as an intricate part of the process of building a 'modern' state, both in the imperial and the post-imperial period.

### The Role of Violence in Contentious Politics

Violence constitutes a kind of coercive power in conflicts in *all* times and is mobilized by governments and subjects alike. The employment of violence follows the logic of resorting to existing power resources in a conflict. It can be the chosen long-term strategy in conflicts in which the rebelling party lacks many supporters, internal cohesion or legitimacy, or simply the adequate resources for large-scale mobilization. Especially in the case of suicide bombings, the violent act aims at equilibrating the inferior number or strength of those who make a stand against a superior opponent.<sup>38</sup> Yet, in many cases, the turn from peaceful to violent behaviour seems to happen spontaneously or as an ad hoc decision that does not reflect any discernible long-term strategy. Violence is indeed often employed by subaltern actors in the absence of other available resources and as a means for self-empowerment. In her work on religious rioting in sixteenth-century France, Natalie Zemon Davis identified cases of 'folk justice' in which groups of individuals from various social backgrounds employed violence against 'idolaters' in order to enforce traditional law or social values and norms because the authorities were either unable or unwilling to do so.<sup>39</sup> Edward Palmer Thompson analysed bread riots in eighteenth-century England as a means to warn authorities of popular discontent and to pressure them for action or to start a bargaining process between starving people and authorities.<sup>40</sup> Even what looks like irrational and excessive violence follows this logic. 'Violence is explained not in terms of how crazy, hungry or sexually frustrated the violent people are (though they may sometimes have such characteristics), but in terms of the goals of their actions and in terms of the roles and patterns of behaviour allowed by their culture.'<sup>41</sup>

Charles Tilly has suggested that repertoires of (violent) contention changed with the emergence of a centralized state and a capitalized econ-

omy in more recent history. Analysing conflict in Great Britain between 1750 and 1830, Tilly asserted that, with the emergence of an ‘increasingly powerful and demanding state’, the repertoire of contention likewise gained new forms that were better suited to placing demands.<sup>42</sup> Contentious action in the eighteenth century, he observed, evolved largely around local issues and nearby objects, and was employed either directly or relied on ‘a local patron or authority who might represent [people’s] interest, redress their grievances, fulfill his own obligation, or at least authorize them to act’ and further ‘included a good deal of ceremonial, street theater deployment of strong visual symbols and destruction of symbolically charged objects.’<sup>43</sup> The street as a theatre for ‘abstract forms of symbolically constructed violence – targeting persons and communities by exposing them to humiliation’<sup>44</sup> is one possible entry into the problematic of urban violence in Middle Eastern cities, and is taken up by a number of authors in this volume. Such forms of contention, Tilly argues further, were replaced in the nineteenth century by new forms of mass action that could occur in different places while addressing the same national issues. The socio-political and physical transformation of the urban sphere played a crucial role in this change of repertoires. ‘Voluntary associations formed, especially among the middle classes, to promote self-help, recreation, education, moral reform, and political action’ while ‘pubs and coffee houses became increasingly important gathering places and bases for special-interest associations.’<sup>45</sup>

This applied to Middle Eastern cities as well. Edmond Burke III was among the first who encouraged a study of shifting repertoires of urban protest in the transition from reforming Ottoman and Qajar empires to the Young Turks and Persian revolutions of 1908 and 1906 respectively, and the evolving nation states.<sup>46</sup> For the nineteenth century, Burke evoked a symbolic world and the existence of a predefined ‘ritual drama’ that unfolds in the urban theatre. In the context of nationalism and secularly based social movements in the twentieth century, ‘the old repertoire of collective action, based on the gathering of the crowd at the mosque, solemn processions to the seat of government, and the presentation of petitions to the authorities faded out everywhere’ and were exchanged for new styles of collective action like strikes and boycotts.<sup>47</sup> In a similar approach, Sami Zubaida analysed forms of popular organization and mobilization in the major cities of the Ottoman Empire and its successor nation states, retracing the transformation from ‘traditional’ urban politics that evolved in the urban quarters and around ulema, urban notables, and *futuwwat*, into a ‘political modernity’ that enacted more inclusive political units and increasingly targeted the centres of state power.<sup>48</sup>

## Contentious Politics in Middle Eastern Cities

Covering a time range from the late eighteenth century to the 1960s and encompassing a geographical space from contemporary Egypt and Turkey to Iran and Saudi Arabia, this book aims at further developing an urban perspective on the politics of contention and specifically on the occurrence of violence in the transformation process from the Ottoman and Qajar empires into nascent nation states, highlighting the diversity of actors, forms and spatial dimensions of urban violence. The transformations in question were not just political transitions, but were at times also preceded, and at others accompanied, by wider processes of urban modernization. This process can be traced to the middle of the nineteenth century, although it certainly accelerated in the twentieth century and needs to be put in the context of the cities in question. Urban modernization came in different guises: from administrative reforms starting in the Ottoman Tanzimat from the 1850s, the subsequent improvement of old and the introduction of new infrastructure (water supply, street lighting), new types of policing, all the way to the major reshaping of the urban space through massive building projects and efforts at town planning.<sup>49</sup> In more recent times, considerable rural to urban migration and the rapid expansion of cities also need to be considered, again occurring at different times in different places, but taking on a particular dynamic after the 1940s.<sup>50</sup> These processes resulted in the socio-political and physical transformation of cityscapes, as well as in new spatialities of injustice.

In this volume, the changing cityscapes are presented from two complementary perspectives. Some of the authors depict how transitory processes in Middle Eastern history, such as the late imperial administrative reforms and growing economic activity by foreign countries in the Ottoman Empire, unbalanced the existing socio-economic conditions and accentuated older or created new lines of urban conflict. It is in this constellation, for example, that confessional and ethnic identities came to be regarded and used as a major factor in conflict and mobilization. Urban violence, then, might be understood as a practice employed by resident communities and governments to establish a new socio-economic equilibrium, as illustrated in the chapters by Feras Krimsti, Florian Riedler and Ulrike Freitag. Other authors, such as Reza Masoudi Nejad and Claudia Ghrawi, interpret urban violence as a means to overcome spatial restrictions and their social implications and, with them, to challenge whole socio-political systems.

As we will see, analysing violent events and their actors at different scales (the street, the neighbourhood, the city quarter, the municipality, the empire or the nation state) is essential in order to grasp the dynam-

ics of urban violence. This approach informs most contributions to this volume, although it is demonstrated most explicitly in Nora Lafi's chapter on mapping and scaling urban violence in the 1800 insurrection in Cairo. A number of chapters (Lafi, Freitag, Fuccaro, Ghrawi) pay attention to how new spaces of urban contention were created inside the city and in its immediate hinterland, and how they were chosen and used as sites of violent confrontation by different actors. The salience of space, urbanization and urban planning becomes clear in a number of contributions, most notably in the chapters dealing with oil urbanization and political unrest.

The chapters are grouped in four thematic parts that share similar argumentative approaches and thus invite the comparison of case studies and results. The first, 'Managing and Employing Violence,' includes contributions that consider how different state administrations employed or sanctioned violence in order to exercise and maintained their authority in the urban arena. These include a European imperial power, namely, the French in Egypt, the late Ottoman imperial government, and the modern Egyptian state that emerged after the First World War. Nora Lafi's contribution discusses in detail the topography of violence in Cairo under the French military occupation of the city. She focuses on a specific episode of unrest, namely the revolt staged in 1800 against French rule. Her article discusses forms of repression and terror as methods of governance in an environment where local political alliances were of crucial importance for the occupying power. Lafi shows how rebellious notables mobilized urban factions in order to foment unrest. She also focuses on the different articulations of violence, from unrest on the street to clashes between regular armies. Thus, she suggests the need for a typology of urban violence that can better conceptualize the different forms that it takes in urban spaces.

An understanding of late Ottoman urban society through definitions of order, disorder and criminality is at the heart of Noémi Lévy-Aksu's chapter, which discusses Istanbul under Hamidian rule. Lévy-Aksu examines how processes such as classifying violence and instituting a new type of police force helped to bring the issue of violence and public disorder to the attention of the authorities in a more systematic manner. She also demonstrates how the press popularized violent crimes as acts directed against public order and not just against individuals. In doing so, Lévy-Aksu highlights the extent to which the Ottoman state, with its new instruments of urban control (censuses, police and press), was able (or indeed unable) to control violations of public order. Its upkeep was central to the legitimization of the state, which therefore concentrated



on disturbances of what came to be considered the ‘public order’, rather than crimes against individuals.

While Lévy-Aksu depicts the last years of imperial rule, Hanan Hammad’s chapter is squarely set in interwar Egypt, a nation state in the making under British tutelage. While the contributions of both Lafi and Aksu take more of a macro-perspective, Hammad starts from below. She examines how women use explicit sexual language as a ‘weapon of the weak’ in the working-class environment of al-Mahalla al-Kubra. As a number of cases involving such language were taken to court, the state (represented by the various bureaucrats involved in these cases) contributed to defining not only appropriate and inappropriate language, but also gender and social hierarchies. In criminalizing the use of offensive language and public sexual gestures, the state conformed to the dominant middle-class values of the ruling *effendiyya*. In addition, Hammad’s discussion of state intervention in cases of mutual, sexually explicit re-primation shows the extension of the power of the government in regulating social, often neighbourly relations. In addition to the different degrees and methods of state involvement in violent acts, which was to some extent congruous with the transition from empire to nation state, these three chapters in Part I also demonstrate how different analytical scales help to make sense of instances of urban violence. While this is at the heart of Lafi’s approach, Hammad, taking the bottom-up perspective, also shows how very trivial local incidents could demand a state response in order to define social order. These definitions are, as discussed above, central to Lévy-Aksu’s contribution.

Part II, on ‘Symbolic Politics of Violence’, explores the theme of symbolic politics in two different settings: the first is in the context of a prominent Shiite religious ritual, namely the Muharram procession in the Iranian city of Dezful, and the second regards an attack on consuls and Christians in the Red Sea port town of Jeddah.<sup>51</sup> In the first chapter, Reza Masoudi Nejad presents the traditional annual Muharram processions organized by the quarters of Dezful to symbolize the competition between two rival urban factions, Heydari and Ne‘mati, in the late Qajar and early Pahlavi period. While this rivalry had a long, religiously grounded history in a number of cities in Western Iran, Masoudi Nejad traces its transformation in the 1940s into a competition between landlords vying for the control of different neighbourhoods. The processions had long served to channel aggression and violence. Masoudi Nejad argues that, in the context of political transformation in the 1940s, urban crowds in some of Dezful’s quarters started to use the processions as a way to express their resentment against the very same landlords who

organized them.<sup>52</sup> This ended with the land reform of the 1950s, which eliminated the problem by transforming the political and social position of traditional landowners.

The Dezful case illustrates how urban rituals could both contain and channel aggression, but also provided a potential outlet for contingent violence. The second chapter in this part, Ulrike Freitag's article on the 1858 massacre in Jeddah, shows how extreme violence was used consciously: by the urban crowd to express grievances otherwise suppressed by the Ottoman state, but also by the state itself (and even more so by the European powers whose subjects were killed during the incident) to punish the suspected and real culprits in order to deter a repetition of the bloodshed. The symbolism held also for those who were attacked in what might have seemed to contemporaries like a recurrence of communal violence elsewhere in the Empire: Christians, no matter whether they had European or Ottoman nationality, had come to be identified locally with the imperial powers, which were feared for their economic prowess and military might. Thus the killing of Christians by the urban crowd, which had been incited by local notables, took on a symbolic meaning beyond the elimination of immediate competitors in the lucrative overseas trade. Freitag investigates the spaces in which the violence was staged, and shows how, by the end of the nineteenth century, both urban change and shifts in international power relations had made a recurrence of such events far less likely. Both chapters in the section highlight the importance of urban spaces for the course of events. In Masoudi Nejad's chapter, this pertains to the routes chosen by the Muharram processions, in Freitag's contribution to the spatial proximity of port, market, government and consular buildings, which greatly facilitated the rapid mobilization and escalation of violence.

The chapters in Part III on 'Communal Violence and its Discontents' review prominent cases of sectarian violence, thereby scrutinizing the validity of monocausal explanations that tend to emphasize intercommunal tensions as causes for violence. In his chapter on the 1850 riot in Aleppo, Feras Krimsti challenges the seemingly obvious idea of a Muslim attack on Christian neighbourhoods. He asks what the language employed in contemporaries' writings betrays about the idea of a clash between Christian and Muslim inhabitants, and afterwards compares these accounts with the actual spatial setting of the riot. Krimsti's textual and spatial analyses reveal the degree to which religious confrontation was evoked by contemporary narratives, and traces the events back to the emergence of Aleppo's Christians as key economic and political actors in the city's history. He thus convincingly argues that the attacks targeted the symbols of this socio-economic rise more than the Aleppine

Christian communities in general. Once again, the symbolic dimension of communal violence becomes quite evident.<sup>53</sup>

Writing about the massacres of Armenians in Istanbul in 1895–96, Florian Riedler follows a similar approach, making use of a spatial analysis of urban socio-economic structures to explain the extraordinary and unprecedented violence against the Armenian inhabitants of Ottoman Istanbul. Besides showing that the city provided a ‘stage’ that allowed Armenian nationalists and the Ottoman government to convey their respective political message far beyond the immediate witnesses and parties involved, Riedler succeeds in deconstructing larger categories of actors such as ‘Muslims’ or ‘Armenians’ by developing a more differentiated picture of the effects and interdependencies of urban violence at the micro-level of the city. He points out that it was mainly poor Armenian migrant workers who were attacked and killed during the massacres. Not only were they living in the centre of events, which made their neighbourhood an easily accessible and thus logical option for the attack, they were also exposed to the discriminatory administrative practices of the municipal government concerned with unwelcome migrants who entered into competition with other urban groups in the local labour market.

In both chapters, a spatial examination of the violent events and their urban settings negates the idea of a direct confrontation between distinctly divided Christian or Armenian and Muslim communities. Although certain neighbourhoods of both Aleppo and Istanbul were known to be inhabited by Christian or Armenian majorities and others by Muslim majorities, these communities did not live in strict separation, but rather formed residential clusters in what we would nowadays call multi-ethnic and multi-religious cityscapes. Furthermore, spatial divisions were determined not only by ethnic or religious belonging, but also by occupation, social status, and by the necessity to lodge newly arrived migrant groups in the process of urban expansion. This also applies to the chapter by Roberto Mazza on the transformation of Jerusalem and the Nebi Musa Riots of 1920. Far from being a ‘confessionalized’ city, Mazza argues, nineteenth-century Jerusalem showed the pattern of shared spaces, inhabited by both Muslims and Christians. Violent intercommunal strife was in fact exceptional, as relations between the communities were mediated by a system of urban politics that gravitated around the Ottoman governor and a few urban notables. This changed only with the growing confrontation between Arabs and Zionists at the beginning of the twentieth century, which introduced violence as part of the local political vocabulary. Mazza shows how, in this period, intercommunal violence became organized into events, following a distinctive script and

rituals, and with a specific spatial logic. What Mazza defines as 'structured violence' was further reinforced by the new conceptualization of urban space operated by the British mandatory administration, which promoted a particularistic vision of the city with confessionalized spatial divisions. The three contributions in Part III suggest that the focus on religious and ethnic explanations of intercommunal violence seems to be either the result of a biased reconstruction of events (Krimsti) or of purposeful political mobilization (Riedler, Mazza). Further, the causes of violent strife can be found in the shaking of socio-economic foundations of urban coexistence by administrative and economic reform, immigration into cities and the exclusionist practices that accompanied the advancement of nationalist political agendas.

While most of the chapters in this volume examine urban violence in naturally 'grown' but now transforming cities, the chapters in the last thematic section, Part IV on 'Oil Cities: Spatiality and Violence', use the mainly planned and heavily industrialized oil conurbation as their analytical point of departure. Oil cities and their hinterlands present a rich empirical field for testing the dynamics of structural violence and violent protest, thereby offering a different insight into the politics of violent contention at the historical juncture of oil industrialization in the context of consolidating nation states. The widespread perception of violent unrest as a struggle between a 'colonizing' foreign company and a 'native population' is explicitly challenged in Rasmus Elling's chapter on violent struggle in the Iranian oil city of Abadan during the Second World War. Revisiting the image of Abadan as a 'dual city', Elling concentrates on an understudied and seemingly 'banal' incident of violence between local and Indian residents. He argues that the city offered multiple spaces for violent confrontation as a result of the various ethnic and religious groups living in Abadan. In his case study, Elling shows that violence was not only an oppressive means of control and coercion employed by the company in the pursuit of economic interests, but was also embedded in the urban 'everyday politics' that structured relations between the different labour forces employed in the oil industry. Elling concludes that 'social processes and political structures that shape modernity were and are often moulded and sustained by violence and coercion'.

Taking a different yet complementary approach, Nelida Fuccaro investigates how the oil industry in Iraq generated 'multiple histories of violence' in Kirkuk and its oil conurbation in the period of the Hashemite monarchy. Fuccaro examines forms of structural and physical violence, and shows their interconnections as they became an integral part of new urban geographies and disciplines of industrial production under the aegis of oil. She analyses how the creation of new and differential ur-

ban spaces paralleled the deployment of mechanisms of surveillance and control, in turn triggering the mobilization of different violent actors, from policemen and tribal leaders to labour activists. The oil industry, she argues, created spatial, social and political 'orders of difference' that became most manifest in a variety of violent urban landscapes, culminating in the explosion of labour unrest after the Second World War. By the 1950s, oil-related violence was increasingly directed against the Iraqi government, given the increasing association of the oil company with the Hashemite regime.

Claudia Ghrawi pursues a similar line of argument in her chapter on structural and physical violence in Saudi Arabian oil towns between 1953 and 1956. In the emergent oil towns, she contends, structural suppression of the Saudi labour force was violently and deliberately advanced by the state, thus driving the oil workers struggle for better working and living conditions towards a more and more explicit confrontation between state and subjects. This confrontation contributed as well in shaping the physical setting of the growing oil conurbation. Ghrawi demonstrates the interdependence of structural violence, violent threats and the actual deployment of physical violence. Structural inequality and repression, and the use of downright force on the side of the state, occasionally prompted oil workers to resort to physical violence against spatial and other representations of the opposed order. These attacks are read as having at times been effective attempts to re-enter the bargaining process when non-violent means had proved unsuccessful. Buttressed by the replacement of traditional local forms of personal rule with a gradually more impersonal and centralized government, physical violence became, at least temporarily, a frequently employed resource in conflict resolution between the government and Saudi oil workers.

The contributions dealing with oil cities suggest that the interplay between structural and physical forms of violence and oil urbanization is far more complex than interpretations that portray violence as being a result of straightforward confrontation between oil companies and the labour force. Violence as an urban phenomenon in the context of oil development involved a number of actors, often reflecting various ethnic and religious divisions among the workforce living in and around the oil cities. Structural and physical violence thereby complemented each other as modes of 'oppression' and 'insurrection' in the context of the functioning of corporate power and the parallel building or consolidation of the modern nation state. Here, the use of force became a decisive means of contention.

In lieu of a conclusion, Khaled Adham's Afterword on social injustice and revolution in contemporary Cairo redraws the analytical link to the

Arab Spring of 2011, and accentuates the significance of urban physical structures for collective claims by arguing that the Egyptian revolution was not only played out in specific urban places, but was also a result of what he calls the 'spatiality of social injustice'. As in the case of oil towns, the urban planning process in Cairo was driven by profit considerations as much as by the aim to build hierarchies and displays of the power of corporate or state agents into the urban sphere and make them absolute and permanent. In both scenarios, the subaltern urban population became marginalized and isolated from the wealth and prestige accumulated in the city. Yet, these marginalized individuals found their rallying point in the manifest symbols of their inferior position in society and could turn them into a resource for mobilization. Given the widespread nature of the type of urban planning discussed by Adham, this chapter speaks to concerns that extend far beyond modern Middle Eastern cities.

In most chapters of this book, urban violence emerges as one of the means of contention that aims at changing the balance of power between conflicting parties. Violent conflict is often preceded by the violation of a prevalent order by peaceful means, most notably in assembling and staging demonstrations in places strongly controlled by the authorities (Fuccaro, Ghrawi and Adham) or in a ritualized manner by crossing the invisible but nevertheless absolute lines of social or political relevance (Masoudi Nejad). In other words, such 'violations' are answered by physical violence against attempts to mobilize power resources to change the power equilibrium by challenging the city's social, ethnic or religious geography or by the sheer power of the united mass. In the modern city, be it the mid-twentieth-century oil conurbation or contemporary Cairo, this violent answer became institutionalized and built into the structure of urban governance in the form of a permanent threat of force, facilitated by urban planning that allowed for more control through the spatial layout, with wide streets and open spaces, and by greater state policing ability. This type of increased state control, which can be considered a feature of political modernity, can be traced back to the modernizing reforms of the nineteenth century. Lévy-Aksu's article provides clearer definitions of deviance and of measures for the better surveillance and control of the urban sphere, while Hammad traces them to the level of neighbourhood and individual relations by considering cases brought to court in order to censure particular behaviours deemed 'dangerous' or 'deviant'. Lafi and Elling, on the other hand, show that the process of implementing surveillance and control, especially when foreign actors or corporate interests were involved, was accompanied by a remarkable degree of violent resistance, as well as

everyday violence by and between social, ethnic and religious factions of the urban population.

Clearly, the expansion of state control did not pass unchallenged. Rather, violence could at times take the form of the last resort by people not otherwise involved in the decision-making processes as a means to rebalance the lost social, economic or political equilibrium. This was often done under the rubric of restoring the 'traditional' order, as Freitag's chronologically early case study shows. Here subaltern violence is used conservatively and thus takes part in the (attempted) reproduction or reinstatement of local structures that were challenged by the modernizing empire/state (Krimsti, Masoudi Nejad). In other cases, governments or urban administrations themselves might take the (informal) lead in a violent confrontation between conflicting parties in order to further the imposition of their national or imperial visions (Lafi, Riedler, Mazza). In a contrasting manner, the intent to overcome traditional divides and to create a more inclusive urban geography can be marked by the urban community's symbolic abolition of violence (Masoudi Nejad).

As the chapters in this volume show, the phenomenon of urban violence as a particular type of contentious politics is rather complex. Yet, in comparison with the discussion of urban violence in a range of sociological and social science literature that seeks to explain its occurrence elsewhere, its occurrence in Middle Eastern cities does not represent an exception. In the modern Middle East, as in Europe and indeed elsewhere, violence has been a latent historical feature of local communities and local and state institutions under pressure as a consequence of political, social and economic change. Its latent presence in society is nothing specifically Middle Eastern, even though the forms of its manifestations and the frequency of its eruptions might differ from society to society. What the contributions to this volume suggest is the relevance of regionally specific processes of urban modernization, often under the impact of foreign actors and spanning both the imperial age and the establishment of the modern Middle Eastern states, in determining particular forms of violent contention as well as specific practices of conflict resolution within Middle Eastern cities.

### Notes

1. L. Khalili. 2013. 'Thinking about Violence,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, 791.
2. The designation of Persia as a 'Qajar Empire' after 1856–57 is a matter of debate; see F. Kashani-Sabet. 2002. *Frontier Fiction: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804–1946*, London: I.B. Tauris, 143.

3. For more on street politics, see A. Bayat. 1997. *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran*, New York: University of Columbia Press.
4. S. Tarrow. 1996. 'The People's Two Rhythms: Charles Tilly and the Study of Contentious Politics', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38(3), 588.
5. D. Nirenberg. 1996. *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 13.
6. N. Hashemi and D. Postel (eds). 2010. *The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future*, Brooklyn: Melvin House; H. Dabashi. 2011. *The Green Movement in Iran*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
7. A. Bayat. 2013. 'Post-Islamism at Large', and 'The Making of Post-Islamist Iran', in A. Bayat (ed.), *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 7–9 and 39–43 respectively.
8. Dabashi, *The Green Movement*, 43–46, 66–70.
9. S. Poisson. 2013. 'Les Mobilisations Discrètes des Mouvements Environnementalistes au Caire', *Confluences Méditerranée* 85(2), 129–40.
10. Karine Bennafla stresses this transformational aspect of the cities: K. Bennafla. 2013. 'Avant-propos', in K. Bennafla (ed.), *Villes Arabes: Conflits et Protestations*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 9–16.
11. As David Harvey put it, 'the right to the city is ... far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire': D. Harvey. 2003. 'The Right to the City', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27(4), 939.
12. A Middle Eastern perspective on the role of the public in contentious political processes can be found in: S. Shamy (ed.). 2009. *Publics, Politics, and Participation: Locating the Public Sphere in the Middle East and North Africa*, New York: Social Sciences Research Council.
13. C. Bank. 2012. 'Al-Thawra al-Suriyya...Ikhtilat al-Dam bi-'l-Fann', *Deutsche Welle*, 27 March, retrieved 23 September 2013 from <http://dw.de/p/14Sm2>.
14. M. El-Ghobashy. 2012. 'The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution', *Middle East Research and Information Project* 258(1–7), retrieved 13 September 2013 from <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer258/praxis-egyptian-revolution>.
15. C. Tilly. 2003. *The Politics of Collective Violence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 9–10.
16. F. Coronil and J. Skurski. 2006. 'States of Violence and the Violence of States', in F. Coronil and J. Skurski (eds), *States of Violence*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 9.
17. See for example W. Reinhard. 2000. *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt: Eine vergleichende Verfassungsgeschichte Europas von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, second edition, Munich: C.H. Beck, 363–70.
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