



Preliminary Research Findings Brief

NGPA in the Middle East: historical perspectives

Project aims, objectives, methods

Aims and objectives – this project:

- Investigates leadership in non-governmental public action in Iraq, Egypt and Syria by analysing the national movements which emerged in all three countries after World War II.
- Analyses how non-governmental public action was shaped by Western military intervention, violence by state and non-state actors, and the military-led revolutions of 1952 in Egypt and 1958 in Iraq.
- Explores how this history shapes contemporary activism in Iraq, Egypt and Syria.

Research questions - this project asks:

- What does leadership mean in the context of non-governmental public action?
- Who are the leaders?
- How are they accountable to their constituencies?
- What factors shape the choices leaders make?
- **Methods - the research uses:** Archival sources, Contemporary media, Memoirs and In-depth interviews

Key research findings

The diversity of leadership models and practices in the pre-revolutionary national movements of Egypt and Iraq (1945-63)

- the leadership models which predominated in the national movements at this period can be divided into three basic types: bureaucratic, democratic and exclusivist
- although the outcome of the revolutions of 1952 and 1958 was the consolidation of military dictatorship, the relative strength democratic and non-democratic models of leadership in the pre-revolutionary movements was more evenly balanced.
- in contrast to the dominance of army officers in the aftermath of the revolutions, leaders in the pre-revolutionary movements were drawn from diverse social backgrounds
- a significant role was played by leaders from working-class, peasant and lower middle-class social backgrounds, particularly in the trade union movement.
- leadership in the national movements was not simply dependent on the pre-existing 'cultural capital' of activists, but included skills which can be learnt through apprenticeship. Many leaders were 'made by the movement'.

The importance of leadership to social movement organising

- leadership plays a crucial role in social movement organising
- leaders are not only office-holders in formally-constituted organisations but play a role throughout social movements
- leadership is a crucial factor which knits together social movements beyond their formally-organised components through the activist cultures created in shared experiences of collective action
- leaders in social movements act as organisers, technicians and articulators of collective action

The dialogical nature of social movement leadership

- democratic leadership in social movements is a conversation in which the roles of 'leader' and 'follower' or 'activist' and 'participant' are constantly changing.
- democratic leadership's dialogical nature can be a great asset to movement activists as it allows leaders to respond flexibly to changing situations, harness the talents and energies of wide layers of people, and build networks which constantly renew themselves as new leaders emerge.

Policy and practice implications

'Agitator' models for understanding social movement leadership are inadequate

- Frameworks which see leaders in social movement as manipulators of passive participants do not adequately explain the dynamics of social movement organising.
- My research highlights failures by the Iraqi, Egyptian and British authorities, all of whom had an interest in understanding the movements developing in opposition to their policies at this period, to grasp that the movement could not be stopped by rounding up 'malignant agitators'.
- This was not only because the national movements were an expression of deep social and economic discontent, but also reflected the capacity of the movements to renew themselves by creating wide layers of leaders who were shaped by a shared activist culture.

Democratic leadership in the national movements was not just about electoral practices

- Some organisations within the national movements had highly developed internal electoral practices.
- However, these practices on their own are not a reliable guide to either the degree of internal democracy, nor the democratic impact of any given organisation.
- Less formal democratic practices, such as fostering a culture of debate, were also important in the overall activist culture of the movement.

This period illustrates the richness of Egypt and Iraq's indigenous democratic traditions

- Rather than relying on examples from the global North (and in particular Europe and North America), those concerned with democracy-building in Egypt and Iraq can look to the recent past for inspiration.
- For example, a robust democratic culture developed in many of the trade unions, including accountable structures, regular elections, and mechanisms to select and change leaders which evolved out of trade unionists' own practical experiences of organising.
- The national movements also fostered debate at a local, regional and national level, and created spaces in which alternative visions of society could be articulated (cafes, bookshops, meetings and media).
- This vibrant civil society was maintained in the face of harsh repression by the authorities.

Key publications and outputs

Articles in peer-reviewed journals:

'Political opportunities and collective action in the Iraqi revolution 1958-9', International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies, Vol 2. No.2 (2008) (forthcoming)

Conference and workshop contributions:

'The national movement and the state in Iraq 1958-63', presented at the annual conference of the International Association of Contemporary Iraqi Studies, 11-13 June 2007, Philadelphia University, Amman, Jordan

'Democracy in movement? Iraq 1945 – 1959', presented at The Politics of Elections and the Struggle for Democracy in the Middle East: Perspectives from Within and Below, workshop, 8 December 2007, SOAS, London.

'Democratic and bureaucratic leadership in the Egyptian labour movement: contrasting patterns of industrial conflict, 1945-54 and 2006-7', presented at NGPA programme workshop on labour issues, 10 December 2007, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London.

Other publications:

'Al-dimuqratiyya min asfal – durus masr wal iraq' *Awraq ishtarakiyya* 18 (Winter 2007), Centre for Socialist Studies, Cairo, Egypt

For further information

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