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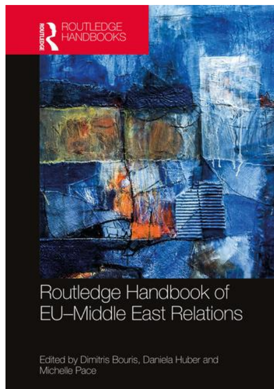

Routledge Handbook of EU–Middle East Relations

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Everyday Middle Easts

Publication details
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429317873-8
Ali Bilgic
Published online on: 31 Dec 2021

How to cite :- Ali Bilgic. 31 Dec 2021, *Everyday Middle Easts from:* Routledge Handbook of EU–Middle East Relations Routledge
Accessed on: 28 Mar 2023
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429317873-8

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6
EVERYDAY MIDDLE EASTS

Ali Bilgic

Introduction

An invention of the Western/Eurocentric discourse, the words "Middle East" were adopted by the Western/European military and state circles in colonial times and even before (*el Medio Oriento*, *le Moyen Orient*, *Mellanostern*, *der Vodere Orient*) (Renton, 2007). The discursive generation of a region for Eurocentric strategic and political interests and as a stage for competition amongst them is certainly hardly novel, noting "Latin" America being another example of the appropriation of space through a Eurocentric looking glass (Gobat, 2013). What is intriguing, however, is how quickly and deeply the words "Middle East" were accepted and widely used by the very people whose identities were originally targeted by these two words. *Ortadogu* in Turkish, *alsharq al'awsat* in Arabic and so on, are entrenched in the strategic, political and daily languages in the region (Halliday, 2005: 81). The words and discourse revolving around these two terms are accepted, challenged, questioned and appropriated through daily practices of people in the region.

This chapter sets a conceptual agenda for rethinking alternative discourses on the Middle East with the objective of revealing how power operates in/through spatial discourses. It identifies the Western/Eurocentric discourse on the Middle East as a geopolitical "truth". This discourse (re)constructs an allegedly timeless truth about the Middle East with the objective of configuring and instrumentalising this geography for Western/Eurocentric political and economic interests. It then counters this construction with an alternative discourse labelled as "everyday Middle Easts". The latter refers to the lived realities of everyday politics in the Middle East and focuses on "common" peoples' "apolitical" discourses and practices. Both discourses are normative as they engender alternative truth claims with spatial implications. While the analysis prioritises everyday Middle Easts politically, such prioritisation is less about ignoring or minimising the discourse of the Middle East as a geopolitical "truth" and more about challenging what this truth claim enables politically, that is, in constructing a Middle East which is instrumental to Western/Eurocentric interests. It is argued that the exploration of the politics of everyday Middle Easts can unravel the power of the latter and shows a way of challenging such a power performance.

The theoretical argument is illustrated through two processes. The first concerns the process of human mobility. The discourse of the Middle East as a geopolitical "truth" currently

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manifests itself through migration control policies of European states and the European Union (EU). It will be demonstrated how a certain truth claim about the Middle East as a "transit region" has been produced and then led to specific policies. The practice of "counter-mapping" will be briefly discussed as an alternative way of studying human mobility in the region. The second concerns contentious politics associated with the Middle East uprisings in 2011. In this case, "everyday Middle Easts" reveal an alternative truth on how authoritarian regimes, supported by the West, were produced and have also been challenged through the daily activities of ordinary people. This chapter will discuss how adopting the perspective of "everyday Middle Easts" enables an analysis that tackles the question of power which is inherent in certain discourses about the Middle East.

The Middle East as a geopolitical "truth"

Naming a geographical space is a "representation of space" and is a political performance (Lefebvre, 1991: 33). It attributes meanings to the inhabiting peoples, spaces and histories. It erases some of them, appropriates others, isolates them from the surrounding geographical spaces, and relates to them in accordance with the interests of the name-giver/s. Naming engenders a discourse that provides us with short-cuts to understand and relate to the geographical space named. It aspires to become "a truth" that is hardly questioned: a truth that is written on and produced through words, bodies and acts of performance. Therefore, naming a geography is an attempt to generate a "discourse of truth" in the Foucauldian sense and this attempt is highly political. It delimits the space in accordance with the political interests of the actor who names it. It draws boundaries and therefore defines who is (should be) inside the borders and who is (should be) outside (Agnew, 1994). Such spatial demarcation is accompanied by defining actors who are (or should be) politically meaningful in the defined geography by marginalising others.

When the geography now called the "Middle East" was named through British and Eurocentric strategic interests, this was more than an act of drawing borders. More importantly, it was an attempt to define a geography that was situated ontologically, epistemologically and, therefore, politically in relation to European interests.

The essentialisation and instrumentalisation of the geography called the "Middle East" and the materialisation of this geography has a history. The infamous Sykes–Picot secret accord between Britain and France in 1916 gave birth to a Middle East (excluding North Africa) under the mandate of two colonial powers with control over its natural resources (Keulertz and McKee, this handbook) and peoples. Articulated on the strong foundation of Orientalism (Said, 1978), the essentialisation of peoples living in this geography as incapable of self-government did not go unchallenged, as shown by successive rebellions from Egypt to Syria and to Palestine. Although the years preceding World War II were hardly stable in this region, the borders that were drawn through the 1916 secret accord were to a certain extent materialised in the San Remo Conference in 1920.

While the Middle East was a stage of conflict between warring parties during World War II, the Cold War engendered a different geostrategic conditioning of the region in Western security thinking. In addition to the instrumentalisation of the geography for Western economic interests that dominated the interwar years, the region was assigned a new role at the beginning of the Cold War. American and British military strategists aimed to integrate the region into the containment policy that circled Soviet expansionism through regional alliances. In 1955, such an alliance was formed between Turkey (the only NATO member from the region), Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Britain as the "Northern Tier" of the containment policy. The Pact was immediately weakened with the rise of Nasserism following the 1956 Suez incident which

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challenged Western interventions in the region, and the military coup in Iraq in 1958 which in turn toppled the pro-Western monarchy. However, none of these developments prevented Western intervention in Lebanon in 1957 as part of the Eisenhower Doctrine, which aimed to "secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence" (Eisenhower Doctrine, 1957) of Middle Eastern states against communism (Halliday, 2005: 100–130).

Therefore, the early years of the Cold War contributed to an instrumentalisation of the region with material manifestations: firstly, the Middle East could be used as a frontier to protect Western security/political interests; secondly, the region was essentially unstable, chaotic and unpredictable; and thirdly, certain political groups and regimes could be supported because their presence enhanced Western interests in the existing order. Thus, the Middle East as a geopolitical "truth" was articulated within this historical context in the wake of the Cold War.

The Middle East as Europe's frontier against migration after the Cold War

Instability in the "Middle East" region and preventing the "spillover" of this instability into the region named "Europe", whose borders were defined by the newly formed "European Union", were the main concerns of European decision makers in the immediate post–Cold War era. According to the Western European Union (1991: 4), "Europe can no longer view its security solely in terms of the establishment of peace on the continent of Europe. It must also bear in mind that its relations with its southern neighbours also concern its security". The European Commission (1992: 17) concurred that

> most Mediterranean countries are facing political instability, rapid population growth, large movements of population, and high unemployment. These problems, especially in the case of the Maghreb countries, are also our problems – such is their influence on the region's security and the potential migratory pressure on the Community.

However, it must be noted that this long-standing view has been questioned and challenged by actors in the Middle East. According to the latter, real problems such as illiteracy, patriarchy, violence - which have been exacerbated partly because of the European/Western support of authoritarian regimes in the region - have been overshadowed by the European security/political concerns imposed on the region (Mouna, 2018: 12–13).

When the newly formed EU redefined the borders of Europe and, consequently, who should be in and out, the Middle East was discursively essentialised as a region of instability which could leak into "Europe" as an island of stability through migration. To stop such movement, European states and the EU have engaged with the ruling regimes in the region through the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1995), the European Neighbourhood Policy (2004) and the Union for the Mediterranean (2010). These schemes have promoted democratic and good governance reforms while engaging with chosen civil society actors. "Europe" carefully worked with certain regimes and authoritarian leaders, such as (then) Ben Ali of Tunisia as well as (then) Mubarak of Egypt, in a region essentialised as a geography of instability that should be contained by these authoritarian regimes.

The Middle East as a "neighbour" that should be contained was accompanied by another type of essentialisation in the area of migration: the Middle East as a "transit region" for sub-Saharan and Asian migrants bound for Europe. Adopting a militaristic discourse, the EU constructed "three defence lines", as worded by Commissioner Franco Frattini in 2005. The first line was equipping EU borders with the latest technology; the second was funding Middle

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Eastern, particularly North African, countries in order to garner their cooperation to control the EU's southern borders; the third defence line was the countries of origin such as sub-Saharan and Asian countries (Frattini, 2005). The EU thus instrumentalised the Middle East in a way that the region became operationalised as the second defence line against human mobility towards Europe via the Middle East.

Such instrumentalisation of the Middle East quickly resulted in policies in several areas. One area has been the support for law enforcement agencies in the Middle East, including border guards and coast guards, with technologies and equipment to detect and stop would-be immigrants. Joint naval operations between European and Middle Eastern states in the Mediterranean have been ongoing since 2003. Another practice that Europe flirted with, but implemented unsuccessfully, was the establishment of off-shore asylum processing centres in the Middle East (Bilgic, 2013: 111–126). Although the plan was legally dismissed, the idea has been reframed in two forms. In 2005, the EU started Regional Protection Programmes, which aimed "to improve refugee protection through durable solutions (return, local integration or resettlement in a non-EU country)". Secondly, the infamous "EU–Turkey Refugee Deal" in 2016 has enabled EU countries to choose which refugees they will take in while returning unwanted immigrants (i.e. irregular migrants) to Turkey (Pace, 2018).

In North Africa, the camps have been increasingly accepted as a tool for irregular migration prevention. Libya was (and still is) the frontrunner of cooperation with the EU in the area of migration control. In 2000, Italy and Libya signed an agreement to fight terrorism, organised crime and irregular immigration. Following a police cooperation agreement in 2003, Libya accepted that Italy would fund the establishment of two camps on Libyan territory (European Commission, 2004: 59). "Later, in 2004, Italy and Libya signed a bilateral agreement whose content has never been disclosed, despite requests for such by the European Parliament" (Bilgic, 2013: 117). After signing this agreement in October 2004, Libya readmitted irregular immigrants from Italy for the first time. Four days after the mass expulsions from Italy to Libya, the EU lifted the 18-year-old arms embargo on Libya (De Haas, 2008: 1310). Libya's cooperation with the EU resulted in the European Commission's proposal to negotiate a Framework Agreement with Libya in order to give "a push forward in Libya's re-integration into the world trading system". According to NGO Fortress Europe (2007: 5), in 2007 there were at least 20 camps just in Libya.

Libya's cooperation with the EU and European states was hampered by the uprisings in 2011. Not only did the regimes Europe had been working with in this "transit region" fall or become seriously weakened, but "instability" as an essentialised character of the Middle East spilled into "Europe" with a high level of human mobility at the borders that were meant to separate the two geographies. Facing such a challenge, "Europe" was quick to restore the status quo. For example, "in a visit to Tunis by Commission President Barroso in April 2011, it was made clear that the EU's offer of around €400 million of aid to support Tunisia's democratic transition would necessitate reciprocal actions to counter irregular migration" (Carrera et al., 2012: 5–6). In the case of Libya, the removal of the Gaddafi regime by the UK-France intervention, which was followed by the emergence of three governments, rendered cutting new deals difficult for Europe. However, in 2017, the Italian government signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of National Accord for the organisation of joint naval patrols to detect migrant boats, so that the apprehended migrants could be returned to the camps in Libya. Amnesty International recently stated:

> Most of the people currently held in Libya's detention centres were intercepted at sea by the Libyan coastguard, which has enjoyed all kind of support from European

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> governments in exchange for preventing refugees and migrants from reaching European shores. Through the donation of ships, the setting up of a Libyan search and rescue zone, and the construction of coordination centres, among other measures, European taxpayers' money has been used to enhance the Libyan capacity to block people attempting to flee Libya and hold them in unlawful detention.
>
> *(De Bellis, 2019)*

In July 2019, the abuse and maltreatment of migrants in the camps in Libya forced the United Nations to call for closing all detention centres in the country.

The EU's migration management strategy through the Middle East is but one area where the region has been appropriated in accordance with European security/political interests, which were filtered through the colonial and Cold War periods. The West's naming of a region the "Middle East" has produced a discourse of truth about this region and the people living in or passing through this geography. It discursively delimits and isolates its space, which has enabled the essentialisation and instrumentalisation of this geography through a Western/Eurocentric looking glass. The "Middle East" is reproduced as a geography to be ruled by former colonial powers, a geography of instability that should be contained by the West. This is accompanied by the instrumentalisation of the very same geography as a frontier of the West against communism (then) and unwanted migration (now). Naming this geography a "transit" area has produced significant material consequences and human cost, as was shown in the case of Libya. Europe supported the Gaddafi regime in exchange for its cooperation in containing migrants in camps under inhumane conditions. Camps in Libya and other countries in the region have been material manifestations of the Middle East as a geopolitical "truth" of the West/Europe as a frontier, a transit and, therefore, an instrument to keep the latter "secure". However, this saga does not have to be the only truth about the Middle East and human mobility.

An alternative discourse on migration through counter-mapping

In academic discourse, when the Middle East is accepted and studied as a transit region, it risks epistemologically reproducing such a Eurocentric geopolitical truth. However, with the rise of critical geopolitics in the area of migration, new ways of thinking about the geographical space called the Middle East have been articulated. One such explication is "counter-mapping" (Garelli and Tazzioli, 2017), derived from critical geography (see Sparke, 1998; Pickles, 2012). Counter-mapping as an epistemological approach aims to challenge the "silences of maps", that is, political agents, practices and spaces that are silenced by official or state mapping. Therefore, the objective is to develop a fresh understanding of space beyond the state-centric gaze in order to explore a "politics of emergence" (Garelli and Tazzioli, 2017: 11). In the case of migration, exploring "politics of emergence" refers to the study of interactions and intertwining between migration management/control policies and migrants' practices (ibid.).

Counter-mapping refuses to use borders and spaces as delimited by grand geopolitical discourses of truth (Isleyen and Fakhoury, this handbook). Instead, it explores spaces that have been overlooked and marginalised by such discourses. This can be an abandoned camp, a café where migrants often meet or a neighbourhood where migrants and other inhabitants interact on a daily basis. In this way, methodological nationalism, which is underlined by geopolitical discourses of truth, is undermined. Furthermore, the acknowledgement and integration of anthropological research on mobility and space into (global) politics has contributed to dismantling the macro-political focus on the Middle East in favour of exploring micro-politics of human mobility and how the former is rendered possible by the latter. Along this line of thinking, the next

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section will examine the everyday politics of the Middle East to discuss how such an approach can challenge the essentialisation, instrumentalisation and materialisation of geopolitical truths of the West on the region. The issue is illustrated through the so-called Arab Spring.

Everyday Middle Easts

The truth about the Middle East produced by the Western/Eurocentric geopolitical discourse is not the only way of thinking about the Middle East. There are alternative truths based on lived realities in the region and truths that can challenge the power relations imbued in the latter.

What does the Middle East look like if one is situated in the Middle East? What does the Middle East mean for so-called Middle Easterners, who are politically and epistemologically essentialised through the geography they live in? How is the Middle East as a geopolitical "truth" lived, understood, appropriated, challenged and resisted in mundane spaces of social life? These questions are derived from a conceptual, epistemological and methodological perspective called "everyday" that has been subject to increasing analytical attention in politics and International Relations (IR) (among others, see Hobson and Seabrook, 2007; Guillaume, 2011; Guillaume and Huysmans, 2019). This section introduces and discusses this flourishing perspective called "everyday". This will be followed by a discussion of how adopting such an analytical perspective can challenge assumptions about the Middle East as a geopolitical "truth".

Although the focus on the "everyday" in IR has been influenced by the writings of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, the starting point lies in feminist scholarship. Motivated by the question "where are women in international relations?" to understand how international relations are lived and produced, Enloe's seminal book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989) took the readers from the echelons of power, statespersons' relations and geostrategic movements of states to everyday life in banana plantations and around American military bases. Enloe's argument that the international is lived and produced through so-called apolitical spaces and non-political actors contributed to the development of a research agenda in feminist IR and beyond. This new agenda has brought about a novel perspective about what the political is and where politics happen, as well as questions and challenges that have long been overlooked by macro-focused and elite-driven IR research. What is this new perspective and what does it enable?

In IR,

> the everyday can be read as a text that illuminates central practices at the heart of the production of "international" representations, the reproduction of relations of domination – gendered, economic, social – at the international "level", as well as the consumption of "international" goods, ideas, and norms.
>
> *(Guillaume, 2011: 446)*

Studying or focusing on the "everyday" broadens the analytical scope of politics by adding previously "apolitical" actors, interactions and spaces at a small scale. This generates a different "level" which is separate from the state and/or elite international politics and is referred to as "micro" politics in IR (for example, see Solomon and Steele, 2017). It creates a superficial analytical separation that potentially implies self-contained levels. Instead, the "everyday" focuses on *horizontal* encounters between the so-called "elite", or "macro" level, and "common people", or "micro" level, that make the "international" possible.

> Horizontal does not refer to power relations being symmetrical but rather refers to an analytics in which processes like globalisation or sovereignty . . . or the entities like

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> the state or world-system only exist as they are enacted in daily practices, relations and entanglements.
>
> *(Guillaume and Huysmans, 2019: 283)*

When the everyday is understood not as a distinct level of actors or specific practices, but as a plane of horizontal encounters or "a site of practice" (Stanley and Jackson, 2016: 230), politics goes beyond the so-called "macro" politics of states and tackles the problem of "methodological elitism" (ibid.: 225–226). The everyday enables an analysis that explores how "elite"-driven policies are enacted in mundane spheres of life. This enactment involves appropriation, acceptance, reformulation of policies, as well as resistance to them by individuals and groups. These processes have been discussed particularly in security and political economy studies (for IPE, see Hobson and Seabrook, 2007; Elias and Roberts, 2016; for security studies, Rowley and Weldes, 2012; Higate and Henry, 2010). The following discussion demonstrates how the everyday perspective can reveal new truths about the Middle East.

Middle Easts of people: "shh . . . the walls are listening"

What does the everyday perspective bring to the way the "Middle East" is understood? How can it help us challenge the instrumentalisation of the Middle East? For example, Jan Busse, who identifies the production of space as a context of governmentality, shows how modern subjectivities in Palestine are produced through what he calls "world society", which underlines the pervasiveness of certain norms and principles and their impacts on social relations (Busse, 2018: 29). Busse's research demonstrates how everyday spatial projects, such as rooftop gardening, have been a technology of governmentality in "world society" that produces certain Palestinian subjectivities (159–161). As Busse's research reveals, moving away from methodological elitism towards the everyday reproduction of space enables a perspective that unpacks how power works pervasively. This dismantles the physical, emotional and cognitive borders engendered by the Middle East as a geopolitical truth, while producing new ones. As Busse argues, "power is dispersed power that is pervasive in potentially every social relation" (2018: 3).

Therefore, the everyday perspective primarily provides an opportunity to unravel the workings of power. Reflecting on her earlier work, Enloe (2011: 443) states that "power was deeply at work where it was least apparent". The question of where power is least apparent leads to the importance of exploring the "sites" of politics as introduced by Stanley and Jackson (2016: 229). They argue that the everyday is not a descriptive but a conceptual category, which "foregrounds how mundane rhythms and spaces can be reconfigured as sites where the political is produced and reproduced". It follows that the Middle East as a geopolitical "truth" was (re) configured through a discursive power regime that repeatedly instrumentalised the Middle East for Western-centric geostrategic interests. However, such "in-built teleology" was interrupted in January 2011.

The decades preceding the uprisings in 2011 witnessed increasing cooperation between European states/the EU and authoritarian regimes, particularly in North Africa. These regimes were instrumental in suppressing political Islamists as well as other opposition groups which were increasingly considered as threats to stability and order (Zoubir, 2009; Sottilotta, 2013). Additionally, they were instrumental in controlling irregular migration to Europe and exporting gas and oil (Bilgic, 2010). As discussed earlier, the Middle East was instrumentalised for European/Western political and economic interests in cooperation with local elites. Such instrumentalisation enabled the materialisation of (new) borders in the form of detention centres, camps and coast guard operations through European technical, economic and political support to these

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regimes. The Middle East as a geopolitical "truth" produced a discursive regime in which this region could only exist politically in relation to its instrumental value for Europe/the West. Consequently, institutions and elites mattered politically, inter-state relations were prioritised, and peoples, spaces and lives were made meaningful only in the background of a "macro" political game. What if those in the background were brought to the front? In the background are those spaces that are considered "private" and "non-political", those activities that are banal and mundane, and those people who are the subjects of and subjected to the discursive regime of the Middle East as a geopolitical truth. The words of a Tunisian, Mouheb Ben Garoui, who joined the protests in 2011, are worth being quoted at length:

> At the dinner table, in the privacy of our homes, we quickly learned the kneejerk response to a comment or innocent question about the president or his party. . . . "Shh! The walls are listening!" My parents taught me not to talk politics, not to criticise, and not to think. They did because they loved me: they were afraid that the feared political police would send me *behind the sun*, the term used for those critics of Ben Ali who were disappeared.
>
> *(italics original, Ben Garoui, 2012: 50)*

Fear, like other emotions, is felt bodily but learned socially. Essentialised as "undemocratic, authoritarian", instrumentalised for certain political interests, and materialised in the form of police, prisons and detention centres, the Middle East as a geopolitical "truth" was (re)produced in the most private spaces while people were engaging with mundane practices, such as having dinner. Elite or state policies and structures were enacted in the everyday by the people who were disciplined by this regime of truth. They were subjected to this regime but were also its subjects. The dinner table where Mouheb learned from his parents whom he should fear was a political space where the Ben Ali regime, supported by European/Western geostrategic interests, was reproduced.

It must be noted that a focus on the everyday pluralises how the geography called the Middle East can be understood. The Ben Ali regime – and other authoritarian regimes – was produced at countless dinner tables, street markets, factories and farms where gendered, classed, sexualised subjects encountered the elite of Tunis, Rome and Brussels. Therefore, there were, and are, multiple Middle Easts that negotiate and negate a singular Western/Eurocentric geopolitical truth. At dinner tables, shared feasts during Ramadan, cafes and McDonald's, people talk, joke and sing about, and, therefore, perform politics (Mossallam, 2013; Pettit, 2015). Ordinary peoples' everyday activities have important political meanings and give birth to new truths about the Middle East. For example, following the overthrow of Gaddafi in 2011, a mundane practice of riding a bike by women became a form of resistance to rising conservatism and patriarchy in the country (Alnaas and Pratt, 2015: 168–169). Through this allegedly "apolitical" practice, the members of "Friday's Bike" Facebook page expressed their desire to develop a new relation with the public sphere, as one member stated:

> I ride my bike everywhere I go abroad, why not in Libya? I want to have a different experience with the stress of Tripoli. I want to have a different relation with the public sphere as a woman with no restrictions and gender barriers.
>
> *(Alnaas and Pratt, 2015: 169)*

Such pluralism of multiple encounters and of endless Middle Easts essentially carries seeds of change, if one knows where to look (Anderson, 2006). Reflecting on the inability of Western

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elites and Middle East scholars to understand and explain how the societies in this region were changing, Tarek Masoud (2011: 21) states:

> Those of us who study the region not only failed to predict the [Mubarak] regime's collapse, we actually saw it as an exemplar of something we called "durable authoritarianism" – a new breed of modern dictatorship that had figured out how to tame the political, economic, and social forces.

The reason for such failure can be the analytical and methodological inability and normative unwillingness to extend the political analysis beyond formal institutions, elite-driven discourses and practices. In other words, this is a failure to examine what Asef Bayat calls the "quiet encroachment of people". According to Bayat, people who are excluded from formal institutions negotiate, appropriate and challenge political realities "through direct actions in the very zones of exclusion" (2010: 14). These "zones of exclusion" are the everyday "sites of practices" where people encounter each other and power regimes and produce alternative discourses about their lives and politics. In these encounters, the Middle East as a geopolitical "truth" can be challenged by the very subjects of this regime. Emotional, cognitive and eventually material borders erected by the Middle East and essentialised as "authoritarian" are dismantled in "private" spaces, as the new Middle Easts emerge/d. Mouheb, who learned fear in his house, left for university at the age of 19 and was accommodated on the sixth floor of a dorm. He reflects:

> On the sixth floor, I spent the best moments of my life. I lived with ordinary students who, like me . . . opposed Ben Ali in secret. Sometimes we had to be careful because [of] student spies . . . But this situation created a sense of unity among underprivileged students. . . . I took a path that would lead to revolution, though I hardly knew it then.
>
> *(Ben Garoui, 2012: 51)*

The fear of "behind the sun" did not leave Mouheb until the collapse of the regime. However, it survived with other feelings such as a sense of unity and hope for change, which eventually came in 2011. This change would not have been possible if people like Mouheb had not quietly encroached towards the central squares from alleys, café shops and dormitories.

Conclusions

The main objective of this chapter has been to demonstrate the power of naming a geographical space. Naming privileges a certain understanding of space at the expense of erasing others epistemologically and politically. The discussion has countered the Middle East as a geopolitical "truth", which has produced and instrumentalised one type of Middle East – as shown in relation to the Middle East as a frontier against migration, and with "everyday Middle Easts", which is repeatedly produced in ordinary peoples' encounters with "the truth". It has privileged the everyday Middle Easts because it has enabled a political analysis that tackles the question of how power works and how it can be challenged in allegedly apolitical spaces. Surely, this does not mean that the latter can be abandoned. The Middle East as a geopolitical truth is integral to the daily, quotidian production of everyday Middle Easts. People's subjectivities and identities are produced through these discourses. Emotional boundaries conflate with physical borders of the Middle East as a "geopolitical truth". However, borders are also questioned, sometimes dismantled, and some are rebuilt. Geopolitical and everyday truths on the Middle East interact and coexist. A challenge for political science and IR scholars who think and work on the geography

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of the so-called Middle East is to make a normative decision about how they approach this geography whilst being conscious of the political implications of this choice.

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