



Subaltern Rightful Struggles

Comparative ethnographies of the Bedouin villagers in the Naqab and the akhdam slum dwellers in Sana'a

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Abstract

Liberal assumptions that the poor and the illiterate are as not likely to demand or even know their rights have been forcefully challenged by a body of scholarship in anthropology and political science that expands the field of the political and resurrects the subaltern as a political actor. These accounts point to the everyday life as a site of transgressions, and investigate mundane practices through which the subaltern enact their agency, quietly seek material entitlements, and manoeuvre to escape control and regulations. While such a focus is important, it tends to overlook various ways of subaltern being, speaking or becoming, which are shifting and evolving, and are not necessarily circumscribed by the everyday or the local. This thesis, with ethnographic sensitivity-and against binary categories of mainstream political science- draws attention to the continuum of ways through which the marginalised deal with their multi-layered subordination. More precisely, drawing on extensive fieldwork conducted with the Bedouin villagers in the Naqab, and the akhdam slum dwellers in Sana'a, the thesis sheds light on a multiplicity of sites and scales of subaltern struggles, as well as the connections between them and the different logics that drive them. The distinction between what I call the logics of practice and articulation marks roughly the boundaries between the non-political and the political, but also points to the potentiality of the political rooted in the ordinary.

Shifting away from the notion of subaltern struggles as place-bounded and parochial, the thesis argues that they need to be understood in relation to the transnational context within which they are embedded. By scrutinizing subaltern efforts to be known, intelligible and supported by global audiences, the thesis uncovers processes through which both the Bedouin and the akhdam become recognized as bearers of specific traits, on which basis their claims are justified. The questions posed here are as much

about the particular groups under study, as they are about larger issues of knowledge production and the workings of the global human rights regime.



Jury:

Salwa Ismail (SOAS University of London), Olivier Roy (EUI), Bogumila Hall (candidate), Donatella della Porta (EUI/SNS), Asef Bayat (University of Illinois, external supervisor)

Bio

Bogumila Hall is a researcher working in the fields of political anthropology, political sociology and social movement studies. Focusing on the geographical Middle East, her ethnographic work interrogates issues of subaltern politics and agency, knowledge production and representation, and transnational activism. Bogumila Hall has postgraduate degrees in Middle East Studies and Sociology (both Jagiellonian University), and Social and Political Sciences (EUI). She has conducted extensive fieldworks in Syria, Israel/Palestine, and Yemen.