



Project  
**MUSE**<sup>®</sup>

*Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.*

<http://muse.jhu.edu>

cessful in not granting the major cultural and linguistic demands of Kurds” (pp. 224–225). One might wonder, however, if this constitutes a success for “Turkey” rather than for certain mono-nationalist-minded political actors within the Turkish state establishment (which might be what Olson actually meant). If such “successes” prevent Turkey from resolving Kurdish disaffection within its borders, they could more accurately be termed “failures” for the state and its people.

On a more critical note, Olson’s book contains more awkward sentences, stilted language, punctuation errors, and, on occasion, questionable translations than his earlier works. For instance, he quotes the then-TSK Chief of Staff General Ilker Basbug as stating that “to stop the bloodshed it is even understandable to meet with Ma’sud Barzani, the President of the KRG” (p. 80). Very surprised by the general’s use of the term “KRG” (the acronym for “Kurdistan Regional Government”), I located the October 30, 2008 *Zaman* article that Olson referenced for this quote. According to this article, Basbug used the term “the leader of the northern Iraq region” rather than KRG: “*Basbug, akan kannın durması için baslatılan diplomatik temasların da önemli olduğunu vurguladı. Kuzey Irak Bölgesel Yönetimi lideri Mesud Barzani’yle görüşülmesine olumlu bakan Basbug, çalışmaların iyi gittiğini; ancak sonuç alınabileceği kanaatini tasımadığını bildirdi.*” None of the other Turkish language sources I found indicated he had used the term “KRG” either. The difference is significant, given that use of the word “Kurdistan” (even as part of an acronym) could signal an important shift in the TSK’s discourse and proclivity to recognize Kurdish identity.

In general, letting the actors “speak for themselves” so much leads to a kind of “he said, she said, then he said” narrative of a two-year period in Turkish politics. This can result in a less than gripping text. In many instances, what “he” or “she said” also cries out for some kind of reaction or appraisal from the author. For instance, Olson outlines Ibrahim Sahin’s (former deputy chairman of the National Police’s Special Operations Unit) claim that some 520 DTP members are actually Armenian, and that the PKK is “run by Armenians” (p. 124). Does Olson find this

claim credible, or is Sahin the [very well armed] Charlie Sheen of Turkish politics? Sometimes academics should provide some judgments as well. Additionally, social scientists looking for the application of any theories on nationalism, identity, protracted conflicts, social movements, or other products of their disciplines may not find them here. According to Olson, these theories occur implicitly in his treatment of the text. In this reader’s case, they were so implicit I missed them.

*Dr. David Romano, Department of Political Science, Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri. E-mail: DRomano@MissouriState.edu*

## SOCIAL CONDITIONS

**Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East**, by Asef Bayat. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010. \$21.95.

*Reviewed by Zain Abdullah*

Works on the Middle East and Muslims are in no short supply. And the recent uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, among other countries in the region, make the prospect of ever new releases imminent. What has been missing, however, are innovative ways to grasp the area’s complex polities and, at the same time, its everyday realities. But Asef Bayat is clearly among the few capable of approaching this task. With 16 years of teaching Middle East Studies at the American University in Cairo, he has gained a firsthand look at a nation in transition. He has also written skillfully on his own country of Iran. As a sociologist, director, and chair of centers on Islam, society, and the modern world, he approaches his subject with academic rigor and insight.

*Life as Politics* has 12 main chapters, which were all adapted from essays mostly written in 2007, and they range in publication from 2000 to 2009. Besides this, the book opens up with a short preface and an introductory chapter laying out the book’s premise. At its core, though, Bayat is interested in agency and social change among

ordinary Muslims in the Middle East. While revolution and social activism in the region are typically viewed in terms of political Islam (Islamism) or social movements, Bayat offers an alternative view of how change occurs through what he calls “social nonmovement.” This refers to how the poor engage in unorganized behavior as a politics of practice (based on direct action), rather than as a politics of protest for claims against the state, acquiring, often illegally, resources they deem essential for their survival and dignity. In short, “nonmovement” constitutes the concerted and somewhat ordinary efforts of disfranchised groups working individually to improve their lives. While this behavior is categorized as collective action and believed to foster some sort of social change, it is nonetheless a “nonmovement” because it lacks an ideological framework, appointed leadership and the formal structure of protest organizations. By comparison, social movements deliberately mobilize their members and challenge the state to meet their demands (pp. 19–20). However, the distinction between movement and nonmovement is less about how they differ in terms of structure and content.

Rather, Bayat proposes a new way of thinking about movement itself, despite the fact that his idea of nonmovement might appear counterintuitive. Instead, the author focuses on the collective and compensatory behavior of the unorganized masses, which is perhaps a major reason his reformulation of social movement is so intriguing. It has the potential to intervene into what we commonly understand to be collective agency overall, not to mention its implications for rethinking social activity and political practice in the Muslim Middle East.

*Life as Politics*, however, is more than a critique of social movements. It is decidedly an exploration into the kinds of action Bayat calls the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary” (p. 45). In fact, it is this encroaching behavior that qualifies what he means by social nonmovement. This activity might include, for example, illegally tapping into public services like electricity, water, and telephone lines; appropriating certain public sectors such as the informal economy or, for women, entering male-dominated spaces; and

the strategies of the homeless to gain access to land or housing. As such, each chapter attempts to show how this process occurs in the areas of poverty and the economy, Muslim women and feminism, youth and the politics of fun, political Islam and revolution, urban ecology, and everyday cosmopolitanism. In essence, this notion of quiet encroachment speaks to “the discreet and prolonged ways in which the poor struggle to survive and to better their lives by quietly impinging on the propertied and powerful, and on society at large” (pp. 14–15). But whereas traditional social movements target their own members for mobilization, the quiet encroachment of social nonmovements involves millions of ordinary citizens all massively working to redress their marginal status. As a result, this collective action produces an “art of presence,” a people’s creative efforts to assert a shared voice or presence in society, despite the odds against them (pp. 26, 248). This is the “agency” Bayat writes about and the major idea animating his work.

While this novel approach to social movement theory is fascinating, it also poses a unique challenge to any work, particularly one of previously published essays. In these cases, the new idea or theoretical model needs to unravel systematically, allowing the reader to follow each stage of the argument from opening remarks to a more advanced formulation. In *Life as Politics*, each chapter is quite persuasive, but the book as a whole doesn’t always allow for this sort of progression. That is, each chapter acts much too independently, merely deploying the notion of social nonmovement or quiet encroachment as a way to unify the sections. Moreover, it is advantageous to clearly define all relevant terminologies or phrases. A compelling array of concepts can help to add textual nuance and depth, and Bayat is certainly generous in this regard. But this tactic can also backfire. Too many “big ideas” in a single volume can overwhelm the reader, slowing down the book’s pace and make it difficult to connect the dots between concepts. Connecting terms, particularly as they occur across chapters, between words like Islamism, post-Islamism, post-Islamic feminism, for example, and street politics, political street, and Arab street, not to mention how they inform the

book's core ideas of nonmovement, quiet encroachment, the politics of practice, agency or the art of presence, tends to inundate the work unnecessarily.

Despite these few concerns, Asef Bayat has given us a revelatory book. Its bold foray into social movement theory and Middle East Studies affords us a fresh look at an old idea, not to mention a better sense of an unduly mystified part of the world.

*Zain Abdullah is the author of Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem (Oxford University Press, 2010) and assistant professor in the Religion Department at Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.*

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

*Prepared with assistance from Carl Z. Kiefer, Heather Malacaria, and Leah Nagy.*

### ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

**Disputed Land: A Geopolitical Perspective on the Israel-Palestine Conflict**, by Elisha Efrat. Jerusalem: ABC Publisher, 2010. Efrat's book describes and analyzes the geopolitical situation of the disputed land that Israelis and Palestinians have long fought over. The book provides a variety of figures and maps that help put the dispute into context. In 12 chapters, Efrat provides insight on the occupied territories, the green line, the separation fence, the territory of the Palestinian State, population, settlements, economic potential, spatial patterns, as well as opinions regarding a solution to the conflict. Efrat concludes that permanent peace may be achieved if the right of Israel to exist and live in peace is accepted; there is no forgiveness for killing innocent people by suicide bombers; and Palestinians' right to live in peace and honor is accepted. (HM)

**Across the Wall: Narratives of Israeli-Palestinian History**, ed. by Ilan Pappé and Jamil Hilal. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010. \$95. Editors Ilan Pappé and Jamil Hilal bring together scholars from various disciplines on Israel and Palestine to develop a shared framework for studying the history of the Arab-Israeli Conflict. They argue for a "bridged narrative" that seeks to accommodate seemingly incompatible meta-narratives into one complete framework. *Across the Wall* critically examines some of the most contested issues in the Arab-Israeli Conflict — the 1948 and 1967 wars, the Israeli occupation, and the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). (CK)

DOI: 10.3751/65.2.4

**Edward Said: A Legacy of Emancipation and Representation**, ed. by Adel Iskandar and Hakem Rustom. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010. \$29.95. The death of Edward Said, intellectual and advocate for Palestinian rights, led Adel Iskandar and Hakem Rustom to compile 31 discussions from various scholars on Said's legacy. The essays and interviews explore emancipation and representation through the subjects of post-colonial theory, literature, music, philosophy, and cultural studies, offering a glimpse into Said's impact on the field. (CK)

**Gaza: Beneath the Bombs**, by Sharyn Lock and Sarah Irving. New York: Pluto Press, 2010. \$20. The December 2008 Israeli offensive in Gaza, code-named Operation "Cast Lead" was a military operation with little press coverage from the Palestinian perspective. Author Sharyn Lock arrived in Gaza with the Free Gaza movement, defying an international press ban and volunteering her time with Palestinian Ambulances. Her day-to-day account of her involvement offers a grim perspective on Palestinian life in Gaza during this period. (CK)

### EGYPT

**Muhammad Abduh**, by Mark Sedgwick. Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2010. \$40. Part of the "Makers of the Muslim World" series, *Muhammad Abduh* recounts the life of Egyptian Mufti Muhammad Abduh — jurist, religious scholar, political activist, and freemason. Author Mark Sedgwick examines Abduh's impact on bridging the divide between Islam and the West, and his advocacy for a more modern conception of Islam. Sedgwick also brings to light new sources and research exploring Abduh's lasting effect on Islam — a man both praised as a sage and cast out as a renegade. (CK)

**Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940**, by Wilson Chacko Jacob. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. \$25.95 paper. *Working Out Egypt* provides an analysis of the formation of the Egyptian national subject in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jacob explores the effect that colonialism has on subject formation, and in particular, the *effendiyya's* (Egyptian bourgeois class) struggle to free itself from an ambivalent, performative subjectivity, referred to as "effendi masculinity." Jacob analyzes the different ways in which this effendi masculinity took hold through the years in sports, sex talk, fashion, and intelligence and learning. Jacob concludes that through colonialism, effendi masculinity was local and global, national and international, as well as particular and universal. (HM)