Populism and Corporatism in the Middle East and North Africa: a Comparative Analysis

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Abstract This paper would first define the concepts of populism and corporatism often used to study political systems in Latin America and Europe, (specially Southern Europe). The utility and the relevance of the concepts for the study of politics in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions are delineated. Since our study of populism intends to not only shed light on populism as an ideology and movement, but also analyze its role as an instrument of incorporation of the newly energized masses in the political system and the consolidation of power of populist regimes, we believe the two concepts are organically linked and complementary and as such are integral to understanding populism not only as an opposition movement, but also in shedding light on the policies of populist states once in power. By making brief allusions to populist movements in other parts of the world, especially, Latin America, the commonalities and the differences are dissected. References are made to case studies of the Egyptian, Algerian, Libyan and Iranian revolutions as popular revolutions guided by a populist ideology and how these populist regimes once in power utilized a corporatist strategy to govern. These case studies would illuminate the particular political and cultural manifestations of Middle Eastern populism and corporatism, thus further contributing to our theoretical understanding of comparative populism and their application to the MENA political scene. Such broadly comparative approach allows us to engage in theoretical observations that put the MENA in a larger global context. It also challenges the theory of Islamic exceptionalism. In this paper, we first briefly define the concepts of populism and corporatism in a comparative perspective. Then the relevance and the application of the concepts in understanding the broad dynamics of the regional politics will be discussed.

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1 Populism and the Middle East and North African Populism Defined

Populism as a movement and as an ideology is a multi-class as well as a cross-class phenomenon (Conniff 1982: 218). Insofar as its base of support is drawn from different strata (although the lower classes often constitute the broader and more solid core of this base) and insofar as it purports to speak on behalf of “the people” as a whole rather than a distinct class (Marxism), populist appeal cuts across class lines. Accompanying this multiple base of support is a monist and unitarian ideological thrust. In response to the fragmentation of modern life, the populists call for a unifying vision that would make the creation of an organic society possible. Populist ideologies tend to glorify the common man and advocate supremacy of the masses over the elite (De La Torre 2000: 4, Postel 2007). They also call for the revival of traditional values, defying foreign economic, political and cultural domination (Canovan 1981: 297, 2004: 241–252). These salient characteristics of populism are complemented by its eclectic sources of ideological inspiration.

Modernization puts in motion old and new social forces. While empowering the new industrialists, the bankers and the technocrats, it often impoverishes such traditional social sectors as the bazaar merchants, the middle and lower classes that have held tenaciously to their nativist values, and most notably the peasantry either in rural areas or as new migrants to the cities. The new intelligentsia, elevated by its modern education, aspires for a larger voice in the policy-making process. The unionization of the working class also heightens its consciousness, facilitating its mobilization and consequently increases their demand for political participation. The impoverished social groups, however, experience a decline of social status, finding themselves the losers in the process of modernization. The traditional sector of the economy, the bazaar and the traditional middle class can no longer compete effectively with the modern sector. The growth of agribusiness also leads to the bankruptcy of a large segment of the peasantry and small farmers. While divergent in their points of departure, both groups of losers tend to employ mass politics and populist ideology to assert their position in the power structure (Dix 1985: 39).

In a broad definition, Ernesto Laclau argues that populism is a by-product of a ‘fracture in the “power blocs” that leads one faction to appeal to “the people” in opposition to the establishment ideology of the political elite, a process that may occur at various ‘stages’ of development (Ibid). The success or failure of such an appeal is contingent upon the emergence of charismatic leaders who abound in populist movements. Peron, Cardenas, Echeverria, Vargas and Chavez in Latin and Central America and Nasser, Ben Bella, Bomedienne, Qadhafi and Khomeini in the Middle East and North Africa are a few examples. To solidify their base of support, populist leaders thrive on patron–client relationships found between the landlord and peasants in agrarian societies. By implementing reforms that would benefit their client groups and political constituency, they establish a dependent paternalistic

relationship that assures them a continued base of support (Schmidt et al. 1977; Gellner and Waterbury 1977).

Paul Taggart defines populism as a malleable ideology that encompasses several distinct characteristics. First, it identifies with an idealized heartland, it glorifies “the little man”, the underdog and the toiling masses. Second, populism as an ideology or movement usually emerges in times of crisis. As such, it thrives on a crisis milieu and purports to provide a remedy to national crisis. Those social groups that are most susceptible to or adversely affected by the crisis are among the most ardent supporters of populists. Such crises are often either economic, political or cultural, or a combination of all three. The inability of the state to provide the basic social needs, food, housing, health care and education allows the populists to step in and fill the vacuum, thus posing themselves as a *de facto* dual power. The crisis may also be political in nature, derived from the eroding legitimacy of the state either due to its subservience to foreign powers, or due to incompetence, repression, corruption or a combination of all four. The crisis may also be cultural in nature. The indiscriminate introduction of the Western culture by the ruling elite may be perceived by many nationalists as an alien and imposed cultural invasion, undermining the “authentic culture” and national identity. A sense of social malaise and cultural alienation may induce a quest for cultural authenticity and the revival of a perceived “golden age.” The heterogeneous base of support of populist leaders and their ability to mobilize people from different social strata and urban and rural sectors may be partially explained by their appeal to those who might be affected by all three crises chronicled above.

Another key to the appeal of populist leaders is their uncanny ability to arouse the masses to direct political action, thus bypassing procedural and democratic politics. The malleability and the eclectic nature of populism as an ideology allow populist leaders to constantly adopt and adjust to their political environment. By pandering to ‘the people’, and often to the most archaic elements of ‘the people’, populist leaders are able to read the public mood and react to it effectively. This perhaps partially explains their ‘popularity’. Mostly authoritarian, however, they often replace mass mobilization and staged demonstrations organized from above for genuine democratic political participation from below (Taggart 2000; Lambert 1969: 204–207).

Another significant characteristic of populism in the MENA region is its purported third path of development between and beyond capitalism and communism. While they borrow from both capitalism and communism, they adamantly defy both to forge a new path of development that is perceived to be uniquely their own. Narodniki’s peasant commune in Russia of the 1870s, Peron’s justicialismo in Argentina in the 1940s, Nasser’s, Ben Bella and Bomedienne’s Arab socialism in the 1950s and 1960s, Qadhafi’s ‘Third Universal Theory’ in the 1970s and Khomeini’s ‘Neither East Nor West’ in the 1980s all attest to this common ideological attribute.

Populist ideologies in the developing world are partially evoked by the economic and cultural impact of the West, thus engendering nationalist ideological response. The nationalist thrust of populist movements is demonstrated by a predilection and affinity toward traditional cultural values. As a common cultural denominator and the source of primordial loyalties, such values (including religion, especially in the

MENA region) unify the masses and enhance their mobilization. In contrast to Latin America, where Catholicism is the dominant religion, much of the MENA region embraces Islamic faith. This imbues MENA nationalism with a distinct cultural trait rooted in Islam. This in turn may explain the rise of religio-politics as a powerful force in the regional political landscape. Such forceful and pervasive presence of religion in political life, for the most part, is absent in Latin American populism. The partial explanation for this phenomenon might be found in the fact that the Latin American countries embraced Christianity, as did the ‘Yankees Imperialists’ who dominated them. Thus, with the exception of Liberation theology, they could not use Christianity (Catholicism, though different from the pervasive Protestantism in the USA), effectively as the banner of national identity and the instrument of mass mobilization. In addition, the church in many parts of Latin America was hand in hand with the landed nobility and the political establishment. In contrast, serving for many, as a source of cultural identity, distinctively different from the Christian West, and heir to a history of political activism against the state in many parts of the Muslim world in twentieth century, Islam was used effectively as the banner of national identity and mass mobilization by populist leaders to combat the Western encroachment and dominance and anchor their movement in the domestic culture and stoke nationalism.

In contrast to Islam which has had a presence in the consciousness of most people in the MENA region as one of the more potent and omnipresent source of their identity since the seventh century, secular ideologies are fairly new in the region and their roots do not go further than two centuries. They have not had a chance to develop deep roots, especially among the poor and the poorly educated. Identification of secular ideologies with repressive and corrupt secular elites has discredited them. Further, as the political and cultural domination of the West expanded in the twentieth century, the Muslims’ anxiety about safeguarding their identity, ‘authenticity’ and culture intensified. In a reactive response to the West, the infusion of nationalism and religion, often manifested in revival of Islam, was their way of ending the identity crisis and reclaiming the ‘self.’

It is in this context that the revival of religion in the age of secular ideology, combined with the mythical glorification of ‘the people’ as the repository of noble virtues, transformed into a potent ideology of deliverance. ‘The people’ was now projected as the new messiah that was going to deliver the society to the promised land. This lends populism an alluring messianic aura. Populists promise a new Utopia in which the alienated and the oppressed would find a new heaven in the organic and egalitarian society of the future. No longer living a fragmented existence, the individual can become whole again by embracing the new creed, the ‘political religion’ that would make deliverance and salvation possible. This messianic attribute imbues populism with an appealing moral aura that many other ideologies lack.

While William Jennings Bryan, the populist leader of the USA in the late nineteenth century, used religious metaphors in his political speeches, his followers were primarily among ‘the Bible people’ and he accused his political opponents to be ‘sinners’, Latin American populism, decidedly lacked such pronounced religious character. Quite to the contrary, the two better known leaders of Latin American

populism, Peron in Argentina and Cardenas in Mexico, were distinctly anti-clerical. In contrast, Nasser in Egypt, Ben Bella and Bomedienne in Algeria, Qadhafi in Libya, all secular leaders, and Khomeini and Ahmadinejad, the leaders of Islamic Republic in Iran, utilized Islam (to different extents) to mobilize the masses and sanction their respective political agenda.

The mass appeal of populism lies in two distinct characteristics that it has in common with all revolutionary ideologies: a pragmatic and a Utopian element. First, insofar as populism is based on a critique of the status quo, it is pragmatic; insofar as it promises deliverance to an authentic 'golden age' in which the national dignity is restored and virtue and justice reigns, it is utopian. By championing the 'superior moral ethos' of the toiling masses and promising social justice, populist leaders promote themselves as the new messiahs who are going to deliver national salvation as well as the moral regeneration of their respective societies.

While these general characteristics of populism provide a road map to chart the multifaceted and contradictory features of this ideology, for the sake of accuracy in analysis, it is important to distinguish between the classic populism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that lasted until 1970s in some parts of the developing world, and the neo-populism of the last 40 years. Since many parts of the developing world, including Latin America, Middle East and North Africa, have become more deeply integrated in the global capitalist economy, while rhetorically alive, practically, the idea of economic nationalism has become obsolete. With the downfall of communism in East Europe in 1989, followed by the Soviet Union in 1991, and China, increasingly opting for free enterprise and capitalism, socialist and populist economic schemes have begun to lose luster in the face of integrative thrust of global capitalism.

As the World Bank and the IMF loans became contingent on the recipient countries' implementation of 'structural economic reforms', many countries in the developing world began to privatize their economies, dismantling state-owned enterprises, subsidies and much of the social safety network, often associated with classical populist economic models. Hence, globalization and the pervasiveness of the free enterprise and the market economies made the classical populist rhetoric of economic autonomy and nationalist self-sufficiency and control meaningless. As the developing countries found themselves in competition with the former Soviet Republics and East Europe for Western loans and investments, the old assumptions of 'dependency school' and the virtues of economic independence from the capitalist market economy gave way to welcoming the virtues of the 'joint venture.' Therefore, the post-1980s populist leaders had to build their coalitions with different constituencies within the confines of national economies that its fortunes were increasingly at the mercy of global forces over which they exercised little control (Weyland 2001: 1–14).

While in the face of onslaught of globalization, the idea of economic populism in large measure has become obsolete, the political and cultural appeal and relevance of populism remains. Indeed, the perceived loss of control, centralization of power and perceived powerlessness, commercializing of the Western culture and its penetration in remote corners of the World, has galvanized populism. The increasing assertiveness of the USA in imposing its will politically and militarily, in

particular in the MENA region, has bestowed upon populism a new lease of life, thus giving birth to neo-populism (Dorraj and Dodson 2009:127–153).

2 Corporatism and Governance

The intellectual origins of corporatism can be traced to such classical philosophers as Aristotle and to such modern thinkers as Comte and Durkheim. As a concept of state and society, corporatism is rooted in a synthesis of Roman law, Catholic absolutism, specifically its Thomistic version [theological thought of the Italian theologian of Roman Catholic Church, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)], an organic-state tradition and the authoritarian political heritage of parts of Europe, especially Southern Europe and Latin America (Klaren and Bossert 1986: 26). Organic statism emphasizes the unity of the political community, ‘the concession theory of assertion’ and the central role of the state in achieving the public good (Klaren and Bossert 1986: 27). In this scheme, the state is the prototype, the most natural and most perfect form of political community. Churches, interest groups and private associations and other institutions are organically and dialectically linked to the state, drawing their power from it and empowering it in turn, thus constituting a whole. The state also has a moral mission: to promote general welfare and regenerate society. Drawing upon the Catholic tradition of Latin America, and its Iberian culture, the corporatist concept of state and community also politically enriched the Catholicism of the twentieth century and the Iberian culture. It challenged Marxist class conflict and also negated liberal individualism as well as the liberal notion of a decentralized, non-interventionist state.

Corporatists, like populists, believe that corporatism constitutes a third path of development, a non-Marxist and non-capitalist path unique to Latin America and stemming from its social history and political culture. Like populism, this claim on authenticity lends corporatism a nationalist appeal vis-à-vis ‘alien ideologies.’ As the national ideology of social solidarity, purporting to be averse to unbridled capitalist individualism and Marxist class conflict, it can be effectively used for mass mobilization, thus making multi-class coalitions possible (Pike and Stritch 1974; Wiarda 1974; Bianchi 1984; Richards and Waterbury 1990; Cammette et al. 2015). Urbanization, industrialization and the incapacity of the established institutions to respond to the demand of the masses for increased participation generate a political crisis. As modernization engendered social fragmentation and anomie, the corporatist idea of an organic society in which political alienation and social isolation are resolved became increasingly morally appealing as well.

Corporatist states are often strong, activist and interventionist in economic and social life as well as in inter-group interest mediation. They attempt to forge partnership between state, business and labor with the state playing the overarching role of setting the direction, control and the agenda. The hierarchical nature of corporatist states renders them as the ultimate judge and arbiter in interest articulation and mediation. They do so by building institutions and mass organizations that are ‘incorporated’ into the state. By putting their supporters in charge of them, these organizations are often hollowed out and tightly controlled, no

longer functioning as representative democratic institutions that they were once advertised. Thus, such mass organizations are often devoid of independence and function as the arm of the state and a tool for the implementation of its policies (Schmitter 1979; Wiarda 1997; Pinto 2017).

In the name of preservation of national interest and social partnership, corporatist regimes justify their intrusion in cultural and political realms of life that under pluralist states, for the most part, is left untouched and unregulated. However, globalization, regional integration, democratization and the rapid pace of change, accelerated by technological revolution, have posed formidable challenges before corporatist regimes. For example, it might be the position of state in international system, rather than its national standing that would dictate its ability to deliver on its promises.

Hence, such international organizations as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its predecessor, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), promote neo-liberal economic policies. These include dismantling state-owned enterprises, abolishing or substantially reducing government subsidies and imposition of austerity programs. They stipulate that reception of their loans and financial aid program is contingent on implementations of these 'reforms.' These policies clearly undermine the welfare state and its ability to deliver its end of the corporatist bargain with the masses. The looming presence of multinational corporations also undermine the ability of the state to protect the domestic market and the most vulnerable strata to the classic cycles of boom and bust pervasive in the capitalist economic cycle.

As the economy and with it the business become international and interdependent, sovereignty of the corporatist states erodes and they find themselves increasingly at the mercy of the global market, actors and organizations that they do not control. Thus, their ability to set the economic and social agenda and to deliver on their promises diminishes. The impact of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on eroding the power of PRI (Revolutionary Institutional Party) and its monopolistic grip on Mexican political life provides a clear example. The emergence of PAN and other political parties and the ascendance of Vicente Fox to presidency transformed the nature of the corporatist state and society in Mexico. The Mexican case is a clear example that regional integration brings corporate institutions under the reverberations of external powers and modifies them substantially.

The loss of its monopolistic powers to manage the economic, social and political realms also erodes the abilities of the corporatist state as the mediator, the ultimate arbiter and the provider of subsidies, social welfare, benefits and services. Thus, the mantle of corporatist state as the ultimate steward of the national economy and the defender of the national interest loses credibility and the regime becomes susceptible to external pressures. As safeguarding and protecting the 'national interest' become more challenging, the corporatist state is rendered ineffective and weak.

Culturally, globalization and penetration of American popular culture in the remote corners of the world has undermined the traditional sources of identity and loyalty, often associated with the nation state. Thus, articulating a single unifying

national vision to rally the support of the nation becomes more problematic. These challenges have not led to the disappearance of corporatism, rather to its metamorphosis and rebirth as neo-corporatism to adopt and adjust to changing global, regional and domestic scenes. However, it remains to be seen to what extent neo-corporatism can successfully cope with the powerful forces of global, regional and domestic challenges discussed above.

These, however, are not the only issues that have undermined the efficacy of the corporatist state and have given rise to neo-corporatism. In Latin America, for example, the traditional pillars of corporatism, the Roman Catholic Church, the army and the oligarchy are losing power. The rapid growth of Protestantism in Latin America in the last two decades has eroded the power of the Roman Catholic church and has helped to further secularize politics. With the notable exception of Venezuela, the democratization of the last two decades to some extent has depoliticized the army, putting it back in the barracks. The subordination of the military to civilian authority has transformed military–civilian relations in ways that the army no longer holds the undisputable powers as it once did. Hence, the power of landed aristocracy has diminished substantially as increasing integration of Latin American into the global market has created manufacturing and service industries and new financial and political elites.

In the MENA region on the other hand, the corrosive impact of globalization has ushered in dynamics that point to a different direction. While the landed aristocracy and the agricultural sector have declined, neither the army nor the mosque display any signs of erosion in their power. Indeed, Egypt and Algeria are still being governed by military generals, and in Iran and Libya militias and paramilitaries wield substantial power. Hence, the limited liberalization of the last three decades has provided Islamists with an opportunity to use their organizational strength and assert themselves, as demonstrated in the aftermath of the ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings in 2010–2013.

The major wild card in the development of events in both regions that may play a significant role in charting the future development of neo-populism and neo-corporatism is the nascent civil society. Whereas in Latin America, the civil society seems more autonomous vis-a-vis the state or its organizational arms, in the MENA region, due to pervasive repression and the stifling of political life, the mosque has emerged to fill this vacuum. As the source of common cultural denomination and identity for many, and as alternative to the lawlessness of the secular state, Islamic parties have penetrated the organizations of civil society by providing social services as well as ‘spiritual guidance and refuge.’ Therefore, in the near future, the development of neo-populism and neo-corporatism in the region is not going to happen in spite of Islam, but through Islam and its different interpretations.

Having briefly defined populism and corporatism, for the purpose of the present study, we would not erect a wall between the two. Rather, we would agree with Ronald Newton that ‘in natural corporatism are found the typical structures and processes of populism’ (Newton 1986: 219–233). Such a theoretical synthesis and the conceptual convergence of the two models also render them more applicable to the study of social and political developments in the modern Middle East and North Africa, in which elements of both ideologies dominate the political landscape and

mold its form and content. Finally, through a comparative analytical lens, we attempt to elicit what the MENA region's particular form of populism contributes to our theoretical understanding of the subject.

3 Middle Eastern Populism: Variations Amidst Similarities

The colonial and semi-colonial status of much of the MENA region until the Second World War induced retarded economic growth and galvanized a sense of aggrieved nationalism. Introduced from without and geared primarily toward the interest of foreign capital, industrialization in MENA never reached its zenith. One ramification of this retarded economic development was that it never altered the agrarian social relations fundamentally. In the new social order, new institutions and values did not replace the old ones. They only nominally modified, cosmetically modernized and ultimately revitalized them. Therefore, modernity of tradition and traditionalization of modernity, the universal dialectics of our time, found its succinct manifestation in the unfolding dynamics of MENA populism as well.

Ideologically, MENA populism was a synthesis of nationalism, elements of socialism and Islam. In less developed countries in the regions, where the resilient tribal character of the society and the preeminence of religious values never allowed secular nationalism to take hold, Islam assumed a more pervasive role as the ideology of nation building (e.g., Libya). Hence, the movement of nationalist self-assertion often took on an Islamic cast. The Islamic revivals and renewals in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries were the earliest forms of populist predilections in the region. The quintessential character of these movements was their demand for autonomy, an end to foreign domination and the restoration of Islamic institutions and values (Burke and Lapidus 1988). Due to the appeal of the socialist economic model, a home-grown interpretation of socialism developed, endowing MENA populism with an egalitarian bent. The fusion of nationalism, Islam and socialism, the tripartite ideological constituents of populism in the region, was blended with its patrimonial authoritarian political tradition. Nasser's Ben Bella's and Bomedienne's 'Arab Socialism', Qadhafi's 'People's Republic' and Khomeini's labeling of his theocracy as the government of 'the oppressed and dispossessed' are all examples.

In what follows, we would briefly analyze four populist revolutions of post-World War Two in the region.

4 Egypt

The Egyptian populist leader, Gamal Abdul Nasser, saw himself as the savior of his people and the protector of the poor. As an Egyptian scholar has observed, 'Nasser liked to look on himself as the representative of laboring masses and the people at large' (Abdel-Fadil 1980: 109). After Mahmud Abdel Latif, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, failed in his assassination attempt, Nasser addressed the crowd in the following words: '...My life is yours, my blood a sacrifice to Egypt.

I speak to you with God's help after the mischievous tried to kill me. Gamal Abdul Nasser's life is your property; I have lived for you, and will do so until I die, striving for your sake'. Nasser's courage, audacity and championing of 'the people's cause' evoked an intense emotional response from the masses. Nasser perceived the modernization of Egypt as linked to the destruction of the old feudal system and the landed aristocracy. He once asserted:

I realize we have upset big landowners, but was it possible not to upset them and yet behold some of us owning thousands of acres, while others do not own the plot of land wherein they are buried after their death? (Nasser 1959: 53).

On another occasion, he is quoted as saying, 'our socialist society is a promising field for all who want to work but there is no place in it for millionaires' (Stephens 1971: 345–346). Nasser argued that Arab socialism was not against ownership, but against 'exploitative ownership'. He favored moderate gains by capitalists who were not dependent on foreign capital.

If King Farugh's personal weaknesses and his subordination to the British government projected him as inept and illegitimate, Nasser's fierce nationalism exuded self-confidence and represented what was authentically Egyptian. He 'spoke the language and lived the life style of the common people' (Hinnebusch 1985: 13). His 'Third Worldist' rhetoric, his policy of positive neutralism and his skillful use of Islamic symbolism* enhanced his popularity among the masses. His repeated call for Arab unity and pan-Arabism and his galvanizing nationalist rhetoric restored Arab pride and dignity and revolutionized their self-perception and identity. He made the ordinary Egyptian and, for that matter, the ordinary Arabs believe in themselves and take pride in their identity.

Instrumental in Nasser's appeal was his adoption of a third path between capitalism and communism—usually referred to as 'Arab socialism' and 'positive neutralism'. While he was not a socialist, his economic policies had a socialist flavor. Like other populist leaders in the developing world, Nasser faced a dilemma: to accept Western capitalism was to accept foreign ownership and the control by a small elite of over 95% of Egyptian wealth (Goldschmid and Boum 2015: 287). To accept communism was to alienate the Islamic factions. Therefore, Nasser opted for a mixed economy based on state control and nationalization of major industries.

*Nasser is known to have used the Al-Azhar mosque to address the masses. His portraits in Cairo and provinces were adorned by the slogan "Allah sent him to help our country".

Instrumental to Nasser's success was his charisma. The combination of his personal attributes, his ability to draw on the patrimonial legacy of Egyptian political culture and his articulation of deeply felt national sentiments made Nasser enormously popular. His dominating presence, his mastery of the spoken word and his call on the voiceless and the powerless masses to enter the political arena projected him as the grand patriarch, the ultimate voice and the protector of the Egyptian people. As Sandra Mackey puts it:

Gradually Nasser developed into a hypnotic speaker who combined neoclassical Arabic with the language of the man in the street and the peasant in the

fields and added to them the chatty confidences of a father speaking to his family. As a result, he became the accomplished master of the spoken word, the most successful Arab communicator of modern time. In a culture in which language is magic, his voice was his power. Resonance, cadence, and image mesmerized people and pulled them to him (Mackey 1992: 167).

Hence, the epithet *al-raïs* (the boss) used by ordinary Egyptians of peasant origins to refer to Nasser is reminiscent of a patron–client relation prevalent in the populist politics and the political culture of the region. While attempting to transform Egypt, Nasser effectively used traditional political relations and symbols to build his own power base and the mystique surrounding his persona.

This cult of personality was a quintessential part of Nasser's authoritarian populism in which a program of social and economic reform on behalf of the lower classes was combined with crushing the middle class intelligentsia, and the religious (Muslim Brotherhood) and the secular (Wafd and communist) parties that opposed him. Hence, in the final analysis, Nasser's charisma was a two-edged sword. On the positive side, his charisma allowed him to mold a heterogeneous coalition and lead Egypt effectively at the hour of crisis. Yet, his charisma was responsible for masking 'the full measure of the difficulties confronting an Egypt slender of resources and growing population' (Baker 1978: 115; Vatikiotis 1978: 144). Nasser's rhetoric, promises and political ambitions far exceeded Egypt's meager resources and capabilities. Due to this paucity of domestic resources, Egypt's foreign policy and the political ability of its leadership assumed a particularly significant role in its success.

5 Algeria

Nasser's evocation of nationalism and Arab pride promulgated nationalist self-assertion throughout the region. The Algerian Revolution of 1954–1962 was one such example. The French had ruled Algeria with an iron fist since 1830. French colonialism was intent upon destroying Algerian cultural identity, primarily by attacking their language and religion. Therefore, it is not surprising that the themes of Arab nationalism and Islamic self-assertion dominated the Algerian Revolution (Gillespie 1960: 3–121, Hutchinson 1978: 1–17). After 8 years of bloody armed confrontation with the French, Algerian nationalists organized in the National Liberation Front (FLN) gained their independence in 1962.

Based on a synthesis of Islam and Marxism, the Tripoli program of 1962 established the foundation of the secular socialist state, reinforcing the leaders' plans for an independent Algeria with an Islamic culture. The first 3 years of independence were under the rule of the charismatic leader of the FLN, Ben Bella. High unemployment and the French attempt to destroy the Algerian culture put industrial and educational reform on top of Ben Bella's agenda. He also advanced agrarian reform and established peasant cooperatives, state farms and state control of foreign trade. The farm property previously owned by French colonialists served as the base of 'Algerian socialism.'

In 1963, Ben Bella signed the March Decrees, which legalized the takeover of extensive agricultural and industrial property abandoned in the Coon exodus, and he introduced autogestion, a system of workers' management through popularly elected officials. The state provided guidance and coordination within the framework of national planning. Autogestion was meant to be the transformative agent from the colonial economy to the socialist economy of the future (Nelson 1985: 79). The Algerian economy, however, suffered from the flight of European skilled labor and the lack of managerial and technical expertise (Nelson 1985: 79). Hence, autogestion was abandoned a few years later. During the first congress of 1964, the charter of Algiers was published. It espoused the compatibility of Marxism and Islam and reinforced the ideological foundation of socialism with roots in nationalism and progressive Islam.

Ben Bella's monopolization of power alienated many groups. He banned the opposition political parties. Then, in 1963, he drafted a new constitution that gave him immense power as the head of the state, the commander in chief of the armed forces and the General Secretary of FLN. Ben Bella's attempt to consolidate power in his own hand and to curb the influence of the army, along with the failure of his economic programs, led to a successful coup d'etat in 1965 by the minister of defense, Houari Boumediene. The 11 years of rule by decree that followed effectively began the era of authoritarian populism in Algerian politics (Ottaway and Ottaway 1970: 1–173).

Soon after seizing power in 1965, the new president began an extensive program nationalizing industries (including the oil industry) and banks. He implemented a more forceful state intervention in the economy. To expand state penetration of the civil society, in 1967, Boumediene established communal (township) assemblies. In 1969, these institutions were complemented by creating Wilaya (provincial) assemblies. In 1971, he initiated extensive land reform. Although he encountered resistance from the private landholders, he managed to use a national charter referendum (approved by 98.5%) to silence them. He emphatically committed Algeria to socialism and recognized Islam as the state religion. Boumediene envisioned the Algerian state as a system of decentralized local government counterbalanced by a single centralized party, the FLN, and a well-established administration.

Since 1962, the Algerian political culture has been imbued with a strong concern for the impoverished masses. Because ending exploitation and oppression and inaugurating 'the reign of justice' played an important role in revolutionary rhetoric, FLN leaders, once in power, had to improve the quality of life and well-being of the lower classes. Genuinely committed to the welfare of the masses, the FLN implemented a wide array of social services and educational programs (Ottaway and Ottaway 1970: 158–159). The FLN leadership under Ben Bella and Bomediene did not see a contradiction between its simultaneous adherence to the principles of Islam and scientific socialism. On the contrary, they perceived the synthesis of the two as a quintessential part of the identity of the Algerian people and state. This synthesis has implied a somewhat puritanical and austere approach to moral and religious affairs, but a technocratic and secular approach to economic growth and modernization (Ottaway and Ottaway 1970). The tension between this technocratic,

Western approach to development and the reaffirmation of Arab and Islamic social and cultural policies constitutes the essence of the Algerian elite's identity in the post-colonial era.

6 Libya

Inspired in large part by Nasser's example in Egypt, in 1969, a young officer in Libya, named Mu'ammar Qadhafi and his fellow 'free officers' overthrew the monarch, King Idris, and seized power. Deeply influenced by Nasser's ideas of 'Arab socialism' and pan-Arabism, Qadhafi aspired to build a revolutionary Libya modeled after Nasser's Egypt. He immediately declared that the revolution was accomplished for Nasser and in the name of Arab unity, so that Libya could join forces in the fight against Israel (Sicker 1987: 17, 47, 67). Freedom, socialism and unity were espoused to be the main goals of the revolution.

Qadhafi's social philosophy, the ideological guide of his revolution, is referred to as the 'third universal theory' and is articulated in his *Green Book*. *The Green Book* criticizes the existing political systems and offers an alternative to them. Its main objective is to encourage the oppressed people to overthrow their oppressors and seize power. Qadhafi's 'Third Universal Theory' declares that both communism and capitalism have failed to fulfill human needs. According to Qadhafi, neither in communism nor in capitalism is the real wealth and power controlled by the people. Under communism the real power is not wielded by the working class, but by the communist elite. Due to the domination of political process by interest groups and factional political parties, Western democracies are not truly democratic either. Western democracies, contends Qadhafi, often degenerate into the rule of a few over the overwhelming majority (Al Qadhafi 1980: 5–22). Qadhafi's response to the alleged shortcomings of both systems is his Third Universal Theory, which advocates the creation of a 'direct democracy,' a genuine 'people's democracy.'

In Qadhafi's version of people's government or 'peopledom' (as the title of 'Libyan Arab jamahiriyyah' under his rule suggested) supposedly people as a whole are directly involved in the political process of decision making.

Qadhafi's charisma was partially rooted in his populist lifestyle. His 'humble' origins, as well as his strong identification with Islamic and Arab identity, established him as an authentic son of the Libyan political culture. He mingled freely with the masses, occasionally resided in a tent, insisted on driving his own car unchauffeured and dropped all official titles, answering only to the word 'brother.' He admired the virtues of rural Libya and appeared interested in the welfare of the common people who related well to him (El Fathaly and Palmer 1980: 86).

Qadhafi began his 'popular revolution' by banning all political parties (Al Qadhafi 1980: 12–13). Calling them divisive, instead he created 'people's committees' and 'the Arab Socialist Union' to replace the government bureaucracy and the political parties. Qadhafi borrowed Nasser's model of the Arab Socialist Union, a single mass political party designed to expand and integrate the regime's base of support. Such a monopolistic party would also eliminate alternative sources of power and political socialization. As a prototype authoritarian populist leader,

Qadhafi left no doubt that the party should not be an instrument of democratic participation; quite to the contrary, it should be an instrument of dictatorship. As he put it: ‘The party is the contemporary dictatorship. It is the modern dictatorial instrument of governing.’ The party is ‘fundamentally based on an arbitrary authoritarian theory...i.e. the domination of the members of the party over the rest of individual members of the people’ (Al Qadhafi 1980: 12–13).

Under his rule, the committees also became a direct base of mass mobilization and support for the regime. He perceived these committees and their armed detachments, ‘people’s militias’ and ‘the Arab Socialist Union’, as the instruments of ‘direct democracy.’ However, the leadership of both organizations gradually came to be dominated by the supporters of Qadhafi or, in the face of domination of the Revolutionary Command Council, they became devoid of real power. Where committees became organs of independent power, they were dissolved (Sicker 1987: 19–20).

To enhance lower class support for his regime, Qadhafi created free education, profit sharing and unemployment compensation, and he proposed distributing oil revenues more equitably among the people. To resocialize the populace and further consolidate his base of support, Qadhafi began a ‘cultural revolution’ in 1973. He declared the Shari’a, Islamic law to be the only source of law and himself the sole arbiter of religious issues, thus elevating himself to political as well as spiritual leader of his people. Like other charismatic authoritarian populist leaders of the MENA, Qadhafi thrived on mass mobilization and mass support. Until 1987, Qadhafi maintained a level of relative autonomy from his base of support. His access to large financial resources provided by oil revenues freed him from any genuine accountability to domestic groups or foreign patrons, thus rendering him virtually impervious to domestic or international pressures (Bearman 1986: 254–297). By the 1980s, however, ‘People’s Committees’ that were supposed to be the organs of ‘people’s power’ had abused many of their powers, including usurping the power of the country’s ordinary courts and were passing many arbitrary and repressive judgments. Gradually, these committees became a power unto themselves, mobilizing people through fear and intimidations. Thus, increasingly, ‘repression rather than loyalty or reliance on Qadhafi’s charisma became the norm...’ (Vandewalle 1991: 220).

7 Iran

While deeply rooted in the Shi’ite political tradition, modern Iranian populism can be traced to the failure of Mossadeq’s national reformist government in the 1950s. The failure of the liberal democrats’ parliamentary tactics to secure independence, democracy and social justice was a major catalyst for the ascendance of the populist politics of the 1960s and 1970s. The generation that stepped onto the political scene after a 1953 CIA-sponsored coup d’état that restored the royal crown identified the defeat of Mossadeq’s government with the ineffectiveness of liberal ideology and the parliamentary method of political struggle. Hence, the polarized and highly ideological political atmosphere of the 1950s, marked by the impact of the Cold

War on the one hand and the pervasiveness of national liberation movements and revolutions in the developing world on the other, became the major international antecedents of Iranian populism. The populist metamorphosis of Iranian political culture during the 1960s had a major impact on the Neo-Islamic populism that emerged as the guiding ideology of the clergy in the 1979 Islamic revolution (Dorraj 1990: 124–139).

Khomeini's Charisma as a grand ayatollah and 'the source of emulation' for the Shi'ite faithful played a key role in uniting a heterogeneous coalition that toppled the Shah's regime. The constitution of the Islamic Republic enunciates the goal of the revolution as 'a movement aimed at the triumph of all oppressed and deprived over the oppressor' (Algar 1980: 19). This populist tone not only reflects the composition of the movement that overthrew the monarchy, but also the ideology of its leadership. After the revolution, the new regime confiscated the property of those who had fled the country and nationalized major industries, including banks, factories, insurance companies, foreign trade and undeveloped (Mawat) land—all of them only to be denationalized later (Bakhash 1989: 186–201). By 1982, '87% of manufacturing firms employing over five hundred workers were government owned or controlled. The corresponding figures for companies with more than one thousand employees was 95.4%' (Karimi 1986: 42). In this process, the entire class of industrialists was replaced. The nationalized sector of the economy was referred to as the mixed or 'state-people's' sector (Behdad 1988: 114–115). This sector was countered by two additional sectors: the 'people's sector', which included small producers and the participation of the 'people', and a state sector comprising heavy industry and other industries closely linked to the security of the state (Behdad 1988: 116–117). Great losses in state-controlled industries, however, caused the government to reexamine its policies and return some of these industries to private hands. While the profit motive was publicly downplayed, the government attempted to boost the sagging economy by creating additional material incentives for private investors. Since 1984, the economy has witnessed the burgeoning of small private industries, and their share of profit in the market has increased (Behdad 1988: 114–115).

The new regime also built a wide array of institutions to buttress its support among the popular masses. Among such institutions were the revolutionary committees (Komitehs), which were spontaneous mass-based organizations that sprang up throughout the country right after the revolution. Their origins can be traced to neighborhood committees, which assumed the role of local security forces patrolling streets and guarding the buildings. Later, some of these committees evolved into armed detachments of clerics in Tehran and the provinces and some of their members joined the ranks of the revolutionary guards. In collaboration with the revolutionary prosecutor generals' office and the revolutionary courts, these committees also arrested individuals and confiscated property. As the power struggle between the 'moderates' and the hard line 'fundamentalist' intensified under Mehdi Bazargan and his successor Bani Sadr, committees assumed a new significance as the coercive arm of the fundamentalists to implement their will and subdue the opposition. Due to repeated public complaints about the arbitrary use of force by the committees and corruption in their ranks, they were purged.

Another important institution was the revolutionary guards (Pasdaran-i Enqilab). They became the main alternative to the regular army, which was mistrusted by the regime. They performed the dual task of providing internal security and defending the nation. They were deployed extensively both against the Kurdish rebels and in the war against Iraq. If the revolutionary guards provided the regime with a military arm, Bonyad-i Mostaza'efeen (the foundation for the dispossessed) became the financial arm of the regime. This organization confiscated and administered the property of the royal family and other officials of the Shah's regime on behalf of the downtrodden and provided many financial services to them (Dorraj 2016: 245–262). Hence, the institution of Friday Prayer leader (Imam Jom'ae'h) allowed Ayatollah Khomeini to appoint his relatives, former students and associates to key positions of power. They in turn informed him of mass sentiment in the provinces and took his messages directly to the people.

Ayatollah Khomeini's charismatic authority and his credentials as the spiritual and political leader of the revolution legitimized these institutions as the organs of people-clergy power. His effective use of Shi'ite mythology and sacred traditions rendered his message communicable to the ordinary people. For the laity, he personified the link of historical continuity with their past and resolved their cultural anxiety and crisis. Many of them identified with his simple lifestyle, his values and vision. His politicized rendition of Shi'ism proved to be a potent political force for mass mobilization, and his forceful personality kept the heterogeneous clerical coalition together. He repeatedly referred to the dispossessed as the people who have sacrificed the most for the revolution and are its true heirs (Khomeini 1982). By championing their cause, Khomeini developed a sense of mutual identification between the popular masses and himself. They looked to him for leadership, and he mobilized them to consolidate his power.

In June 1979, the new regime established a housing foundation to build affordable accommodations for the poor. Ayatollah Hadi Khosrowshahi, the head of the foundation, also called for the seizure and distribution of private land. Some of the shantytown dwellers were allowed to occupy the homes that were left empty by the officials of the former regime. The influx of war refugees after the onset of the Iraq–Iran War (1980–1988) exacerbated the housing problem. In some suburban areas, such as the Zoor Khaneh region in Karadj, the poor forcibly took over the public land and began to build homes. Before its dissolution into the Ministry of Housing, the Foundation of Housing managed to distribute 12,000 plots of land to lower income families in Tehran, build 7576 small units and assist private builders with another 5095 units (Bakhash 1984: 189). The formidable population growths (more than 20 million in the past decade alone) have rendered these measures insignificant and inadequate. Khosrowshahi's vociferous political pronouncements that he would distribute the land and the houses of the rich among the downtrodden also led to the migration of large numbers of peasants to the cities. This migrant peasantry that had played a significant role in the demonstrations which toppled the Shah's regime now constituted a major base of support for the regime (Bakhash 1984: 188–189).

The policies of the regime toward labor, another constituent basis of its support, also reveals a sequence of reforms and retreats. After the revolution, the Islamic

Republican party, which aspired to incorporate labor into the Islamic state, advocated the retention of Islamic councils. Because the austerity programs imposed by the exigencies of the war made the labor demands a political liability and because of the unions' penetration by some leftist organizations, the leadership declared the very idea of workers' councils non-Islamic and in 1982 banned them (Bayat 1988: 41–55). Unlike the Latin American populism, in which labor unions and workers' councils played a significant role in the political process, in Iran Shuras (Councils) did not have a significant impact on the political process due to the weaknesses of the labor movement. This can be said about our other case studies in the Middle East as well. While active, their influence was confined to the expropriation of some major industries, and the struggle for better wages, better working conditions and more power in hiring and firing. While labor has been repeatedly mobilized throughout the revolution, with the exception of a brief interlude (1979–1982), unionization has been discouraged. Such issues as increased wages, insurance and retirement remain thorny and contentious. In a conciliatory move toward labor, however, Rafsanjani's government granted several concessions, including acknowledging workers' rights to collective bargaining, and to job security and providing improved benefits and wages. Nevertheless, strikes were common among workers who constantly struggled to keep up with spiraling inflation. But most strikes were settled in a few days through bargaining and compromises (Petrossian 1992: X11).

Dividing the world into the camps of the oppressor and the oppressed nations (the quintessential populist virtuous “us” versus wicked “them”), Iran's sympathies in global politics were clearly with the developing world (the oppressed). Like Egypt, Algeria and Libya, Iran was firmly committed to the Non-Aligned Movement and the “Third World solidarity”. Hence, Ayatollah Khomeini was given the title of the leader of ‘the dispossessed masses of the world’ by his followers. Under his leadership, Iran actively supported the movements of national liberation in the developing world (Ramazani 1986). Iran's trade with the developing nations also increased considerably since the revolution (Benard and Khalilzad 1986: 155). However, since much of the developing world lacked the major industrial goods that Iran needed, in the immediate years following the revolution, a debate raged among the post-Iraq–Iran war ruling elite on the admissibility of seeking Western investment and loans for the reconstruction of the country. In the ensuing years, the Islamic Republic welcomed both Western and the Chinese investments in the economy (Dorraj 2014: 127–141).

While national populism of different shades has dominated the political scene of MENA in the postcolonial era, the question of the specific form of government is a wide open one:

The acceptance of Western military organization, including the citizen army, and of Western administrative organization, including the merit system, and of Western industrial organization, including state capitalism, does not commit the Middle East on the central question of the nature of legitimate government (Binder 1964: 5).

So wrote Leonard Binder in 1964. He might have added that in the Middle East a stable government could be, in essence, anything but a democracy in the Western sense of the word.

On one hand, the historical social conditions under which Western democracy developed are no longer present in the MENA region. On the other hand, the colonial impact and the socio-cultural developments of the region have deterred the development of Western-style democracy in the area. Instead, we have witnessed the rise of nationalism and populism with religious or constitutional colorations. Although inspired by examples of Western enlightenment and rationalism, the constitutional movements in Turkey (1876), Egypt (1879) and Iran (1906) were not movements in pursuit of Western democracy. They were primarily nationalist reactions to Western encroachment and a desire for less arbitrary rule. Due to the pervasive role of Islam in political and cultural life, no secular political ideology emerged in the Muslim Middle East and North Africa until the nineteenth century. Because the study of politics was confined within the realms of shari'a, it is not surprising that 'even in nationalism one finds religious overtones' (Bill and Springborg 2000). The movements of nationalist self-assertion from Egypt to Algeria to Libya and Iran all provide examples. Although we have witnessed numerous attempts at democratization in the region in the last 30 years, the establishment of a democracy in the MENA region so far has remained an elusive goal.

8 Comparison and contrast

Post-World War II, Middle Eastern populism emerged during the Cold War and the rise of national liberation movements. These circumstances enhanced the emergence of polarized ideological politics. The victory of the Chinese, Algerian, Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions lent new credence and viability to armed struggle. Where allegiance to the state was not yet ascertained, this unprecedented entrance of the masses into the political arena in the post-independence period popularized mass politics. Industrial growth and urbanization introduced new social forces to the political scene. Populist ideology incorporated these newly energized forces. More significantly, the populist revolutions in Egypt, Algeria, Libya and Iran were movements of nationalist self-assertion that through modernization of tradition and traditionalizing of modernity introduced a new political culture. This new political culture in turn served as the new source of political socialization to reorient the political loyalty of the populace.

In Arab socialism, Arab nationalism, pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism, the major ideological trends in the Arab world and the larger MENA region, one can detect a populist essence. The Egyptian, the Algerian and the Libyan revolutions that had unmistakable populist characteristics, for example, synthesized many aspects of these ideologies. The personal attributes of Nasser, Ben Bella, Bomedienne and Qadhafi, to a large extent, were also dependent upon their capacity to draw on the underlying populist character of these ideologies. The Iranian revolution in contrast

was decidedly informed by a populist interpretation of Shi'ite Islam under Khomeini's charismatic leadership.

In all four countries, populism was both the means and the end of the social reform. It was simultaneously the source of ideological inspiration and political legitimization. How can one discuss Arab socialism and its search for equity without mentioning its primarily lower and middle class base of support? How can one speak about non-alignment and neutrality without referring to the populist protests against Western neo-colonial policies? How can we separate pan-Arabism from the revival of Islamic values, which, for the overwhelming majority of Arabs, have become an inseparable part of their identity? How can we explain the ascendancy of Shi'ite Islam as the ideological banner of protest for the majority without reference to it being the source of common cultural denomination for the majority of Iranians?

All of these ideological elements are dialectically linked. Arab socialism, for example, synthesized elements of nationalism, pan-Arabism and Islam, and some of its advocates attempted to find precedents for it in the Qur'an and Hadith attributed to the prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, Arab socialism distinguished itself from Marxism by emphasizing the significance of religion and spirituality and by focusing on class solidarity and unity rather than class struggle (Rejwan 1974: 96–98). Hence, its advocacy of the third path between communism and capitalism—an attribute of Iranian Shi'ite populism also—denotes as much the erosion of legitimacy of both West (for its economic exploitation) and East (for Russia's past history of imperial domination and its professed atheism under the Soviet regime) in the region as it denotes a need for self-assertion in the era of neo-colonial domination. In Egypt for example, a segment of the educated elite desired the restoration of the Pharaonic golden age (Gershoni and Jankowski 1986: 13–20). Nasser in his liberation rally, the single monopolistic mass party, often emphasized the 'teaching of religious observance and orthodoxy' to the youth. Nasser was also an advocate of Islamic unity (Nasser 1954: 77; Dekmejian 1971: 38–39). In Iran in contrast, Khomeini overtly advocated a return to the pristine Islam of the seventh century as the only path of salvation. A populist essence is also evident in Qadhafi's 'Third Universal Theory', Ben Bella's 'Arab socialism' and Khomeini's 'Neither East nor West,' all of which claim to supersede both capitalism and communism and to revive Islamic identity and culture. The populist ideology also served as an instrument to build a corporatist state. Hopwood captures the essence of this all-encompassing corporatist spirit of the Nasserist state in Egypt when he describes the Liberation Rally, inaugurated in 1953 (and replaced by Nation Union in 1957, which was itself replaced by the Arab Socialist Union in 1962) as the following:

It was not to be a party but a means of rallying the people round the new rulers, an organization to mobilize popular support and to squeeze out potential opposition. Throughout his political life, Nasser viewed such organizations only as a means of obtaining the consent of the people to his rule, not as a means of encouraging political discussion and participation. He was opposed to any group other than the RCC seeking power and he wanted to encompass all of political life within one organization (Hopwood 1985: 87).

Political control and mass mobilization were the two main motifs behind the creation of such single monopolistic mass political parties. Its counterparts in Algeria (FLN), Libya (Arab Socialist Union) and Iran (Islamic Republican Party) performed the same functions.

Another attribute of corporatism, its opposition to class strife and its emphasis on national unity and class collaboration to achieve national goals, is patently present in the ideologies of our four revolutionary leaders. For example, according to the Charter of National Action submitted by Nasser to the National Congress of Popular Forces in 1962, the main premise of ‘Arab Socialism’ is that the Egyptian people must oppose ‘the dictatorship of any classes.’ Rather, they would opt for ‘the dissolution of differences among classes’ by creating a democracy that is based on ‘the entire working forces of the people’ (Abdel-Fadil 1980: 3). This theme is also forcefully present in Ayatollah Khomeini’s emphasis on the unity of Islamic Umma (community) and Qadhafi’s and Ben Bella’s emphasis on unity of ‘the people’.

All four of our case studies of populist revolutions are characterized by the emergence of charismatic leaders who implemented popular-nationalist policies to expand and consolidate their bases of support. All four regimes took steps to diminish foreign control of their economic and political systems. To carry out their policies and to intimidate their opponents, though to varying degrees, they relied on extensive mass mobilization and utilization of religious and national symbolism. None of the four leaders, however, was a democrat. If in Latin American populism there was a democratic streak, conspicuously absent in MENA populism is any democratic tradition. Instead, clientelism was used by these authoritarian leaders to forge a new base of support and to maintain them in line through dispensation of carrot and stick as warranted. All four leaders implemented social and economic reforms on behalf of the lower classes and in turn relied on their political muscle to maintain power. While the base of support for the four regimes came from heterogeneous class backgrounds, the lower classes constituted the main bulk of this support.

These revolutions were also movements intended to create a new political culture, thus forging a new ideological foundation for national identity and political loyalty. To different degrees, they all rejected Western cultural hegemony and revived and revitalized domestic traditions. This bestowed upon them an aura of authenticity, thus widening their nationalist appeal. In all four revolutions, social justice and the creation of a more egalitarian society played a major role in propaganda and the program of its leaders. All four implemented egalitarian policies that benefited their respective political constituencies. They were also inspired by a utopian vision of a just order that would prevail at the end of the revolutionary path. Yet, foremost, these were revolutions of nationalist self-assertion.

Whereas in Egypt the guiding ideology was secular nationalism, Arab socialism and pan-Arabism, insofar as Arab identity for the overwhelming majority is inseparable from Islam, Islam also played a significant role in the process of mass mobilization. In Algeria, Libya and Iran, the role of Islam as the banner of cultural authenticity was more distinct in mass mobilization against colonial powers and their proxy regimes. Whereas the first two opted for secular regimes, Iran established a theocracy. As modernizing leaders formally bowing before the sanctity

of Islam, Nasser, Ben Bella, Bomedienne and Qadhafi were primarily inspired by secular nationalism while drawing on Islamic symbolism to elicit popular legitimacy. Their program of social reform was also based on gradual secularization of their respective society. They attempted to curb the power of clergy and relegate their activity to the realm of the sacred (Dekmejian *Opcit*: 132–133, Hopewood *Opcit*: 95–97). Khomeini, however, labeled the very idea of separation of state and mosque a ploy of imperialists to dominate Muslims. He maintained that religion and politics were not separate during the rule of Prophet Mohammad and they should not be separate now (Khomeini 1978).

Our case studies also demonstrate that once in power, these populist governments suppressed ethnic, political and religious dissent and emphasized integration, solidarity and cooperation to achieve the corporatist ideal of national unity and the creation of a ‘holistic’ society. Revolutionary rhetoric notwithstanding, these new leaders could not elevate themselves above the patrimonial culture in which they were socialized. Their rule remained personal and authoritarian, and they displayed little tolerance for their political opponents. Hence, their personal charisma played an instrumental role in mass mobilization as well as the institutionalization of their power. To the extent that the new institutions were built around the charisma of the leaders, however, they remained unstable and their endurance beyond the death of the leaders was precarious. Although the political legacy of Nasser in Egypt and Khomeini in Iran made it difficult to reorganize the revolutionary institutions on a new basis in the post-revolutionary era, political expediency did not prevent either Sadat or Rafsanjani from doing so.

In all four case studies, the state played a large role in regulating the social and economic realms of life. This tight regulatory control usually relaxed when the state achieved a degree of stability, continuity and self-confidence. In all four cases, the populist state maintained relative autonomy from its base of support. For example, Nasser repressed trade unions during 1952–1954, and the Islamic Republic banned them altogether after 1982. Both Qadhafi and Bomedienne used repression and cooptation to maintain a tight control over labor, all four leaders banned the opposition political parties, guaranteeing their monopoly on power.

Ideologically, all the leaders maintained universal, international or regional ambitions in terms of the applicability of their ideas and export of their revolution. Whereas Khomeini and Qadhafi’s political ideologies laid claim on the universal truth, the ideological ambitions of Nasser and Ben Bella and his successors were more regional in scope. Ayatollah Khomeini purported that his brand of Shi’ite Islam was the only authentic Islam true to the message of its founder. Qadhafi’s Third Universal Theory is presented as an ideological alternative to capitalism and communism to all humanity. According to Qadhafi, it contains guidance for both the social and private realms of life. Nasser’s, Ben Bella’s and Bomediane’s Arab socialism and pan-Arabism had more limited ideological ambitions, primarily confined to the Arab world: the restoration of Arab dignity and pride in the post-colonial era and creation of a more egalitarian social system.

9 Conclusion

Our study of the impact of populist metamorphosis of the region and its impact on the modes of governance, agenda setting and policy choices reveals that MENA is not outside of the global system, neither is it immune to the dynamics of social forces that mold its economic, social and political developments in which the role of global trends and external powers loom large. While the broad syndromes that inform these developments are universal, they assume different political forms under different cultural and historical traditions. The challenge is to separate the universal from the particular, explain why they assume the particular forms that they do in their MENA context and shed light on the ideological impact of populist and corporatist strategies on the modes of governance found in the region.

While the explanation for the particular form of MENA populism is rooted in its culture and history, populism molds the political culture in profound ways and defines the language of political discourse and tools of legitimation. It also often redefines history, historical memory, culture and national mythologies in light of the new ideological orthodoxy it presents. Thus, it sets the political agenda, defines the rules of the game and sanctions the means and ends of politics, in an attempt to recast and recreate national identity. Through a combination of moral regeneration and social engineering, populists ultimately aim to recreate the society in their own image.

The attempt to create a populist-corporatist state was a by-product of two interrelated and interacting phenomena. First, it was a response to social decay and fragmentation and the ensuing sense of moral malaise that engulfed the MENA societies in the post-colonial and post-modern era. Second, its authoritarian character was the manifestation of the region's history of patrimonialism and political absolutism, buttressed by a lack of Islamic reformation. Whereas the first factor rendered populism salient as a political and moral project, thus explaining its popularity, the second one exposed its limitations to make "the rule of the people" truly democratic. Whereas some Latin American populist regimes had a democratic streak, in the MENA region, as our case studies reveal, populist regimes are decidedly authoritarian.

Its authoritarian bent notwithstanding, populist ideology enhanced the task of mass mobilization, allowing the fragile new revolutionary regimes to protect themselves against colonial intrusion and pressure with a thick layer of mass support. Hence, the corporatist structure of the state assimilated the newly energized social forces into the political system and facilitated its consolidation of power. The nationalist thrust of these populist revolutions enhanced the corporatist task of molding national unity in face of internal and external threats. With its emphasis on the sanctity of the unity of the Umma (Muslim community), overtly or covertly, Islamic ideology was employed by the secular and the religious leaders alike, in the elusive pursuit of the corporatist ideal: the creation of an 'organic' and 'holistic' society. Corporatism and populism also provided an alternative to the ideological challenge of liberal democracy and communism, thus legitimizing the new elites' claim on authenticity.

The early phase of MENA populism was characterized by the popularity of secular nationalism, Arab socialism and pan-Arabism, most notably personified by the charismatic rule of Nasser in Egypt. Its latter phase was intertwined with the resurgence of Islam, of which the most dramatic expression was the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the vibrant political impact of Khomeini's populist rendition of Shi'ite Islam. While the two stages are distinct in their ideological colorations, conceptually it is a mistake to separate the two. Not only are there some common social policies, social bases of support, methods of wielding power and leadership styles, but the essence of populist politics is remarkably persistent cross-nationally in our four case studies.

While Nasser and Khomeini represent distinct eras of secular nationalism and Islamic revival, Qadhafi, Ben Bella and Bomedienne span the two eras of ascendancy of Arab socialism and the rise of Islamic revivalism. Their attempts to reconcile these two ideological trends stem as much from the genealogy of revolutions that brought them to power as from the forceful presence of new realities. The confluence of Islam and socialism in the ideology of the leaders of Libya and Algeria is based on reinvigorating Arab traditional identity in the post-colonial era and cultural imperialism, and hence the modernization and politicization of this identity in the age of ideology.

Our case studies reveal that populist regimes are intensely nationalist. They oppose foreign political and cultural domination and espouse to revive a perceived 'golden age' of culture and history as the new source of political socialization, thus forging a new national identity. Their defiant nationalist political posture seems to provide a remedy for the aggrieved nationalism of the masses and their psychological need for the restoration of national pride in the wake of lingering memories of the colonial era and the realities of their subordinate position in the global power structure in the post-colonial era. No longer willing to play the role of a subordinate client state, populist regimes are often at odds with global hegemonic powers. Furthermore, populist regimes' attempt to assert national autonomy and their raw egalitarianism and redistributive policies often fall at odds with the neo-liberal laissez-faire policies espoused by the USA and its allies. Hence, their attribution of the social malaise to the ascendancy of the "alien and imposed" Western post-modern culture often imbues populism with a nativist and reactive ideological character. Populists display elements of a progressive as well as a reactionary ideology in their outlook. While their ideals of economic redistribution of resources and the provision of a social safety network renders them progressive, their backward-looking vision on culture, anti-intellectual political posture and political authoritarianism and intolerance render them reactionary.

Insofar as populism responds to dislocations caused by industrialization, urbanization and capitalist growth and expansion and emerges in the time of crisis, it is a transitional ideology. Once the crisis that rendered it salient has dissipated or the populist regimes' constituency becomes disillusioned, they tend to become vulnerable to mass uprising and discontent and would often pave the way for the ascendance of regimes to their right or left. As such, populism is episodic. We cannot have permanent populism. While the allure of populist symbolism continues

in the region, from the standpoint of social policy, there cannot be a permanent populism. MENA populism is no exception to this norm.

As our case studies clearly demonstrate, all four countries have now left behind the populist phase of their revolutions and have opted for policies and programs that characterize ‘late populism’ (Hertog 2016: 12–19) and post-populist states. Hence, as the examples of ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings of 2010–2013 and Donald Trump’s presidential victory in the USA have demonstrated, with the rise of social media the central role of charismatic leaders in the success of these movements has diminished.

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