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Afterword

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“Il s’est produit ceci d’inouï. Nous nous sommes mis à parler.” [This extraordinary thing happened. We started speaking.]
Michel de Certeau, *La Prise de parole [The Capture of Speech]*¹

This book is not just another testimony. It is not simply an aggregation of militant and scholarly voices. It is proof of what the revolutions underway in the Arab world are producing: a community of meaning, of dreams and imagination. A community that moves forward, from experiment to experiment, from uprisings and enthusiasm, from failures and violence to disasters. A community that builds through struggle, but also through knowledge, a community that learns and gives lessons for itself and for the world.

For the Arab revolutions, which began with the impetus of "enough is enough", with the desire to see the walls that stood in front of the people fall, have for more than 10 years produced spaces for a more dignified future. One of the aspects of this dignity that has been recovered and is to be reclaimed involves words and concepts. It is not only expressed in programs and manifestos, it is expressed in a certain way of looking at the world and of telling it. I will describe it here.

First, it stems from an asserted desire not to separate the 'militant' and the 'scientific'. This statement, which may seem simple, is not. It goes back to a very deep habitus of the academic world. The demand for neutrality, the belief that one understands things better from a distance, the shortcomings of self-involvement, while they have often been discussed and distorted, remain complex subjects at a time where science is being called into question, and where it has become difficult to say the word 'truth'. What this attempt asserts is that there is a value in starting from a committed experience in order to identify the truth of an experience. And to value experience as a legitimate place of knowledge. It also affirms that the question of intellectuality can be re-examined within a renewed framework, which is critical of the professionalized and standardized position of academics to explore other ways of producing (and transmitting) knowledge. It also takes note of an intellectual heritage that was largely built outside of universities subject to state or economic powers. Finally, it proposes that intellectuals no longer consider themselves as representatives, spokespersons or witnesses, but as fragments of a world, among the world.

A second characteristic complements the first. It involves not separating the languages, and intimately mixing formal and in-depth explorations. If this book is relatively classical in its form, it considers multiple approaches and languages to express the revolt. It makes room for multiple languages by anchoring the word in the territory, in the Arabic language and in the other languages that populate it: those of the arts, of the bodies, of the living beings that inhabit it. Thus, it defends a position that promotes a living and connected indigenous thought.

The third requirement that I see consists in establishing a new and powerful link between the individual and the collective, between singular voices, to revisit another prerequisite of the social sciences, that of "representativity". In the unique moment of the revolutionary experience, isn't it the most unique that is the most representative ? This book seems to tell us.

And this question should not be taken as an attempt to escape, because it puts the finger on one of the difficulties we encounter in dealing with the history of these moments, which are beyond the reach of the sociology and other fields adapted to more “sedate” times. When everything is on the move, it is difficult to adjust the instruments social scientists are used to deal with. One has to adapt to the changing realities, to stay aware, be prepared for the changes and still careful with what remains. The everyday practices in the production of knowledge are then also experiencing the transformations affecting society as a whole: space, time, language, bodies, everything is on the move”. Here, the singularity of voices supports a political demand, one that challenges the order of social differentiation by confession or by wealth through clientelism, to bring the recognition of the freedom to do things differently, the guarantee of being able to be outside the framework into a new civil framework. Specifically, looking at a people on the move, the authors gathered in the volume experience other ways of naming their society, by freeing them from old labels. The new civil framework they build have comprehensive and common historical roots, a shared geography, a reservoir of multi-situated and interacting voices, a space for political debate and struggle.

Thus, this third requirement is naturally linked to a fourth. The contributions in this book show how the Lebanese revolution was able to combine societal causes with an approach that recognizes power and class relations. Again, this might seem obvious from an intersectional perspective. However, the tension between these two fields of claim is real and acute in the Arab space. The massive presence of NGOs in the space of what was thereafter called civil society, the work of international institutions, the weakness of a certain number of social intermediaries such as trade unions could have led people to think at the beginning of the 2000s that the frameworks to describe society had definitively put aside class and power relations. Of course, social movements had continued in the meantime, but the Thawra succeeded in associating and connecting them to other demands linked to minority rights, feminism and the question of civil status. It showed, through its many interventions, how these two sides of the movement were intertwined, in the struggles for the rights of domestic workers for example.

The fifth requirement, which could actually be the first because it lies at the very foundation of the book, is to leave traces, to be aware of what is being played out in terms of visibility, communication, competing voices, even when one appears to have "lost". The Syrians, Egyptians and Yemenis have shown us over the months and years what it means to think about defeat in a revolution. It means reflecting on the event, but perhaps not (only), as one might think, to identify mistakes and learn from them, but to keep its revolutionary charge in the past. It seems to me that the authors gathered here want to capture the magic. They want to fight against the retrospective effects of disenchantment, the way it comes down on what has been experienced to take away the magic. This gesture, magnificently embodied by the most personal texts of the book, but also by lucid and precise retrospective studies, is very close to the act of archiving. It is also what made me think of the famous text of De Certeau. For he puts it well: writing comes when the traces fade away, when, as he says, "the after restarts the before." Then, one writes to understand and relive the before, in a form of battling nostalgia.

Finally, all these requirements seem to me to be part of a conscious desire to account for the singularity of a collective experience, affirmed as indigenous and radically specific, while linking it to an equally strong feeling of belonging to a common world that goes beyond the national framework. For there is no trace here of chauvinistic discourse on the most beautiful, the most radical or the most revolutionary of revolutions. We find the affirmation of a position in a history that is also constructed beyond borders. Here, Lebanon's belonging to the

movement that shakes the Arab world as a whole is expressed, starting from its specificity, but with its empathy for the other Arab peoples.

Throughout the texts, we feel the link with the struggles of previous years, and the place given to two Arab subjectivities in Lebanon marks this link. Being Palestinian in Lebanon seemed to be an identity that had been fixed for decades. As a "brother" welcomed with varying degrees of courtesy, as a companion of misfortune, as a third-class citizen, the Palestinian had no real right to a place in the city, even though he constituted one of the essential components of the country's culture, aspirations and projections.

During the Thawra, Palestine as a cause does not come to speak for the Palestinians of Lebanon, who come to tell their Lebanon, the one they share daily. On a different note, the Tunisian migrant sees the revolution deploying very familiar notes in front of her eyes, echoing her experience of the 2011 Tunisian revolt. She shares here her experience. Unlike the Arab revolutionary circulations of the 1960s and 1970s, which were built on political and ideological affiliations, today's solidarities are built on the living, on common experience, on shared experience, on the recognition of a sister-brotherhood, on site. Beyond sympathy and solidarity, these pages contain a series of deviations from the imposed frameworks of thought and a reworking of the question of emancipation on a regional scale and beyond, which sounds to me like an invitation to continue writing the history of the Arab revolutions.

As some chapters mention, the Lebanese political structure was not, at the time of the Thawra, in any way comparable with those of the countries of the 2011 revolutions. It seemed that at the heart of the revolutionary act was a pattern, very much staged in 2011: the lasting embodiment of power by a single man. The revolutions wanted to bring down the regime, and this regime had a face. Some came to believe that this face was the regime.

However, it is clear that it is not enough to topple the tyrant, even if it is necessary to do so in order to topple the system he heads. The 10 years of revolutions have shown us many configurations: places where the head resisted, with more or less repression and violence (in Syria of course, but also in Morocco, or in Jordan); others where the head was replaced by a clone (in Egypt); those where violence rushed into the vacuum left by the fall of the authoritarian power (Yemen, Libya); and finally, those where it was discovered that the system was much more complicated than we thought and that it would take time to proclaim democracy (Tunisia and Sudan). These ways of describing the situations are obviously schematic, but they allow us to show why, when Lebanon, and before it Iraq, embarked on a revolution, they were able to be recognized as sisters by those that preceded them. Of course, there was not just a single head (but all heads, as the protesters said), but there was a system that held it all together. The contributions gathered in this book provide many keys to understanding and naming this system in the Lebanese context, and I will not go over them in detail here.

It is more its kinship with other situations in the Arab world (and beyond, perhaps), that I would like to highlight. For in reality, if we are willing to ask the question of uprisings in the right sense (i.e. not why did people rise up, but why don't they do so more often), the elements to justify the revolt do not simply boil down to autocracy, or the denial of democracy in the most procedural sense of the term.

The thawra is not just another demand (that's how I understand the slogan of the streets of Beirut, *Thawritna mich Hirak*, our revolution is not just another struggle or another movement).

It has not become a fashionable denomination simply by mimicry. However, it should not be denied that this dimension exists. Like a refrain or a catchphrase that is repeated, the revolution circulates between spaces, each one seeking to give it a new interpretation. The same tune, with different arrangements, greater and greater challenges, a bit of emulation and even envy, a bit of chauvinism about the most beautiful, the strongest, the first, the new revolution. This is an obvious dimension of what has emerged in the streets of the Arab world today. Never mind, or better still, let's take it into the revolutionary bag. The revolutionary waves have these vogue effects, why despise or criticize it, why deduce that it's all a sham?

Because revolution is performance, it is part of an experience, it improves, borrows, adjusts and adapts. The Lebanese Thawra was off to a flying start, it had already made Lebanon a certain avant-garde through all the movements that had agitated it in recent years, it was also the receptacle of the violence of what was being played out on the other side of the border in Syria, it was still home to so many survivors of the Palestinian wars and guardians of its own revolution for national emancipation. Lebanon is the terrain of these experiments, it has made a revolution that, in many aspects, contains others.

Despite all the misfortunes the country had experienced, its revolts had a festive air, an engaging soundtrack, a smooth face... However, it was a revolt of misery that we were witnessing, which was getting worse by the day. Collapse rarely accompanies a revolution to this extent. It precedes or follows it. Here, it came before the mobilizations, then accompanied them, then ended them. A series of crises, which led the country to bankruptcy, pushed a large part of the population into misery and poverty.

The social crisis has again transformed the protest landscape as it has transformed the Lebanese landscape as a whole: forced exile and migration have given new forms and new borders to political protest. The mobilization takes transnational contours, reactivating the diasporic structure of the Lebanese population and creating new centralities and new solidarities arising from the exile. This is the case in a city like Berlin, where the Lebanese of this new exile join the Syrian, Egyptian, Iraqi, Palestinian, and Afghan exiles. In these refuges, solidarity of experiences and exchanges are built again. The social crisis has numerous consequences, leading to a global transformation of the spaces of power and the spaces of contention.

What faces, what landscapes emerged then? A massive explosion on 4 August 2020, people's bank deposits and lifesavings under siege, barricades to cut off access, power cuts, giant blackouts, fires, unemployed people and empty fridges. In the face of this, the revolution invented other ways of dealing with it, while replaying the revolution as a declaration of war. First of all, because it was triggered by a refusal to pay, a refusal to pay taxes, which is the first form of protest. The national community, founded on solidarity, breaks down on injustice, its apparent disloyalty is the affirmation of another community, that of anger.

This warlike comparison is not insignificant, but it must also be understood as arising from the last years experienced in the Arab world, and in Lebanon in particular. For this country is living through the time of hopes, uncertainties and fights that the whole region has been experiencing at least since 2011. This period has been transformed into a kind of war of attrition in which both powers and peoples readjust their assaults and strategies, in which the most brutal methods of repression are deployed as indignation wanes, and in which the methods of resistance and urban guerrilla warfare are refined. But Lebanon is also living in a post-war period that is dragging on, a post-civil war period that keeps on reminding of the ruptures, the wounds that emerged and still occupy spaces, hearts, and souls.

Revolutionary speech is born out of the political and media noise, but it is also grafted onto silences and omissions, and this is what makes it so overwhelming. It is in the way of occupying space that the exploration of wounds is most strongly visible. The revolutionaries have taken over the space, the space marked by borders, trenches, ditches, and impossibilities inherited from the war and rebuilt with the "reconstruction" that has made the roads overrun with vehicles, that has increasingly ravaged the infrastructures reduced to rubble by the war. In this country, closing off the street paradoxically means circulating, making straits in the city where one is forced to cross paths, to meet.

Taking to the street means linking a territory that was previously simply crossed, occupied by cars, crossed by flows. Like the *Piqueteros* in Argentina in 2001, who used to block the highways to stop the economic flows and to represent the place of impediments that the people of the shantytowns could reclaim, the new Lebanese *piqueteros* made their presence visible by means of barricades, by trying to reinterpret the blockade over and above the traumatic memories of a 15-year war in which one could no longer pass. The revolution then becomes an experiment, in the scientific sense of the term. The revolutionaries spread out and test, try out new gestures and rituals.

The developments of the revolutionary moment as well as the gestures accomplished in this book are steps to write the common history of the first revolutions of this century. They are also stones on the path of other ways of writing the desire for emancipation. They constitute an experience that we already know is, as Michel de Certeau wrote, "unassailable" (*imprenable*), simply because it took place.

Notes

¹ Michel de Certeau, *La Prise de parole (et autres écrits politiques)*, Paris, Seuil, 1994 p.41.
these texts were originally written between june and september 1968.