



Afterlives of Revolution: Fatemeh Sadeghi's comments

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May, 2024



The Dhufar Revolution in Oman (1965-1976) was an attempt to depose the British-backed Sultan and implement social ideals based on egalitarianism. But the revolution was suppressed by the government, its British backers, and other allies.

Ever since, dominant narratives about this event have celebrated the revolution's demise. Until recently, the most significant exception in this trend has been Abdel Razzaq Takriti's *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans, and Empires in*



Oman, 1965-1976 (2013). Alice Wilson's [*Afterlives of Revolution: Everyday Counterhistories in Southern Oman*](#) is another significant publication that sheds light on different aspects of the Dhufar revolution and its legacy. Continuing the story beyond the timeframe of Takriti's study, Wilson examines the long-lasting impacts of the revolution which left an unmistakable trace on Oman and its people.

Based on ethnographic research in Oman, *Afterlives of Revolution* questions narratives of revolutionary defeat and counterinsurgency triumph. It brings to light the suppressed counterhistories of former revolutionaries' wartime and post-war experiences. The book answers the question of what happens to ideas and people when a revolution is suppressed, but revolutionary ideals are not. It explores the lasting legacy of the Dhufar Revolution and breaks the official silence in Oman regarding these events.

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Counterinsurgency actors and the official narratives of Oman's government cast the Dhufar revolutionaries as "godless communists", "terrorists", "destabilisers of the country", and a "threat to stability and morality" (p. 200). By carefully exploring the archives, narratives, and accounts of former revolutionaries, and those of new generations, Wilson familiarises us with the untold, yet significant stories of a "forgotten" revolution and its revolutionaries. According to the counterinsurgency, the revolutionary spirit was lost. However, Wilson traces how former revolutionaries still drew on revolutionary values. And during the Arab Uprisings in north Africa and southwest Asia, demonstrations also broke out in Oman, where protesters demanded political, economic, and social reform.

For those who follow Iranian history and politics, the Dhufar revolution is particularly fascinating because of, on the one hand, the Pahlavi monarchy's involvement in counterinsurgency and, on the other, the contribution of Iranian



leftist guerrillas to the revolution. The latter include the sisters Rafat and Mahboubeh Afraz whose experiences are reflected in the memoir of Mahboubeh Afraz, who was a doctor. This memoir is particularly important because Afraz witnessed first-hand the effects of counterinsurgency forces' violence, such as depriving civilians, including children, of food in order to crush revolutionary resistance. The presence of the Afraz sisters in Dhufar, as well as other initiatives of female revolutionaries that the book retrieves, illuminate women's diverse ways of participating in the revolution beyond the iconic images of female guerrilla fighters.

The Dhufar revolution served as a proxy war between the Iranian government and its leftist opposition. While the Afraz sisters' memoirs have already been published in Persian, we are not familiar with the stories and experiences of the revolutionaries. Conventional narratives typically polarise revolutionary outcomes based on success/failure. *Afterlives of Revolution* questions this reductionist account. While dominant approaches mainly focus on the roots and causes of the revolutions and question when an uprising should be called a revolution, this book raises different questions. Instead of asking "what makes a revolution?", it asks "what survives of revolution?".

Inadequacy of the Success/Failure Account

The book illustrates that the belief that Dhufar's revolution was defeated or failed is incomplete at best. The concept of afterlives brings into view a broader vision of revolutionary ideals, values, and aspirations to create a different, more egalitarian future and social relations, and how these ideals outlast repression. Instead of polarising and reductionist discourses of victory versus defeat, afterlives demand a re-evaluation of the revolutionary experience.

The contribution of *Afterlives of Revolution* is to show that these transformations have had lasting effects beyond the revolution. As the book demonstrates, in post-war Oman, former participants cultivated egalitarian values in their personal lives, drew on revolutionary values when they went on to work in development



projects, and transformed the gender dynamics of labour force participation.

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While the book is about the long-lasting legacies of the Dhufar Revolution, its framework can also be applied to other contexts and other revolutions in southwest Asia and north Africa and their legacies. The concept of afterlives broadens the spatial and temporal horizons of revolutionary experiences as well as theories on revolution. Below, I open a dialogue with this book through my own study of the Iranian revolution and the existing situation in Iran.

Afterlives as Happening of Revolutions

Dissatisfaction with the dichotomous account based on success/ failure is one of the obstacles to the study of revolutions. This is well illustrated in the study of the Iranian Revolution and radical political movements in Iran today. This dichotomy reduces the experience of revolution to binary concepts. In my study of the recent massive uprisings known as the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in Iran, which I discuss in my forthcoming book *The Future's Pasts: Redemptive Aspirations in Contemporary Iran*, I propose two alternative concepts to this dichotomy: taking place and happening. While taking place refers to the occupation of a position and a place and visible aspects of the revolutionary experience, happening refers to a range of transformations, mainly invisible aspects of a revolutionary experience. This conceptualisation allows us to go beyond success/failure paradigms and look into revolutionary experience more closely.

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Revolutions can take place, but that does not mean that they also happen. Conversely, a revolution might not take place, but it can happen. While the



Dhufar revolution did not take place, it happened in many ways as Wilson demonstrates. It happened to the extent that it could change some of the socially constructed hierarchies based on gender, race, and status. In the happening, we are faced with a spectrum instead of a dichotomy. We can talk about the extent to which revolutions have come close to their aspirations and the extent to which they have not.

Afterlife is about the happening of a revolution while it might not have taken place, i.e., could not oust an incumbent from political power. A similar account can be applied to the Syrian Revolution. The Syrian revolutionaries were unable to overthrow the Assad regime, but as Charlotte Al-Khalili tells us in her book *Waiting for the Revolution to End* (UCL Press, 2023) it is still happening.

Paying attention to the afterlives of revolutions is important because we have entered an era in which, due to the emergence of panopticon regimes, we may no longer witness classic revolutions like the Iranian Revolution and the Arab uprisings. As a result, we need a novel conceptual framework which bring under scrutiny the dimensions of the revolutionary experience that have received less attention.

Instead of asking questions such as why the revolution took place and how it could not take place, which are the most asked questions about the classic revolutions such as the Iranian Revolution of 1979, relying on the framework that *Afterlives of Revolution: Everyday Counterhistories in Southern Oman* provides, one can raise new questions, such as what happened to the Iranian Revolution and in what ways it did not happen? What are the long-lasting legacies of the Iranian Revolution? This book provides a new window on the revolutions of southwest Asia and north Africa and their legacies beyond the failure/success paradigm.