

talented local administrations and takes on a more active role in inadequate local administrations (p. 204). Hence, asymmetrical decentralization policies may contribute to more successful public governance in these countries compared to symmetrical decentralization policies.

All in all, the author unpacks the important relationship among socio-economic development, local capacity, and better governance in

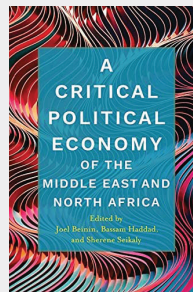
the case of Turkey. However, he leaves it open whether the situation observed in Turkey is compatible with other countries or not. Nevertheless, the effort to put these complex and overlapping themes into an appropriate order should be appreciated. This study provides a reliable reference for academics in the field. In addition to its academic value, *Decentralization and Governance Capacity* provides a useful reference for policymakers and bureaucrats interested in this subject.

A Critical Political Economy of the Middle East and North Africa

Edited by Joel Beinin, Bassam Haddad and Sherene Seikaly
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A Critical Political Economy of the Middle East and North Africa is premised on the idea that Rentier State Theory (RST) can no longer serve as an explanatory principle in analyzing state dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The editors of the book presuppose that only a methodology rooted in a critical political economy can explain the fortunes of people in the MENA region in their respective polities.



The concept of ‘class’ is usually swept under the carpet, but not in this volume. Given the domineering neoliberal order, marshaling the courage to discuss class is an added value. Nevertheless, the editors trust that “...causes are simultaneously effects; all events are situated in a relational matrix.” (p. 1). The flattening of causes by equating them with effects and presupposing both as free-roaming enunciations serves the stultifying of historical change.

Developmentalism has been responsible for the reintegration of precapitalistic modes of production into global capitalism. Applying units of measurements such as GDP not only hides how measurements come littered with ideological biases but that the sophistry of numbers can somehow magically replace analysis. Furthermore, developmentalism sells the illusion that the peoples of the MENA region may one day become the replica of Europe.

The book is divided into two uneven parts. Part I, “Categories of Analysis,” has four chapters. In Chapter 1, Kristen Alff illustrates how diverse land tenure practices under the Ottomans, contrary to Orientalist allegations, have never been a hindrance to capital accumulation. Mercantile activities have been predominant in the region, but the wide-ranging practices of Middle East elites should not be construed as capitalistically

driven. But according to Alff, the imperialists simply pressed through various Oriental regimes such as the *corvée* system to enforce capitalism. The only violence that capitalism introduces in the Middle East, Alff finds, is the commodification of labor (p. 42).

In Chapter 2, Max Ajil, Bassam Haddad, and Zeinab Abul-Magd trace the fortunes of developmentalism in Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria. The 1967 defeat before Israel brought a *coup de grace* for Egypt and Syria's developmental projects. Again, large-scale debts meant to fund development decided the fate of Arab Socialism in Egypt and Syria (p. 61). While Egypt succumbed immediately to the *infitah* policy, Syria resisted but not without a considerable cost to the material wellbeing of its population. Tunisia's nationalist movement was only pitted against European settlers' supremacy. The moment that supremacy was reversed, President Lahbib Bourguiba was happy with replacing, not undoing, the colonial system (p. 51). The contributors explain the persistent infighting in Syria today because "...the war simply is too lucrative to dissolve" (p. 67).

Chapter 3 by Timothy Mitchell dispels roaming myths regarding the role of oil both in the MENA region and the world at large. Oil supply, readers find, is governed by conglomerates such as ExxonMobil, Shell, BP, and Chevron, whose concern is never to ensure the continuous supply of hydrocarbons but rather the control of production and circulation for the sake of cashing in; "...earnings stretch far into the future" (p. 73). No less consequential is Mitchell's observation that, unlike coal, which helped to create mass democracies, oil accelerates regression toward inegalitarian polities. Labor has not challenged oil conglomerates, but the nation-states have. The unfortunate side of this equation is that

these states become resistant to coups (p. 77). Perhaps it is better to underline how MENA states have become resistant to democratic change since by exempting populations from taxation, governments can elide the principle of 'no taxation without representation.'

Shana Marshall, in Chapter 4 finds that the endurance of, say, Egyptian, Syrian or Algerian militaries in power in spite of popular contestations can be explained through the latter's congruent connections with the global military-industrial complex. Such regional militaries are not simple to state functionaries but form a powerful class whose interests answer the need for a powerful metropolitan class for growth through expanding arms sales. Globally considered, the extortion of value, not only wealth, is not possible without MENA regional militaries. In recycling oil money in Western economies, the MENA militaries become indispensable, even invincible, in maintaining the world order as it is, making radical change exceptionally challenging.

Part II, "Country/Regional Studies," consists of seven chapters; I am highlighting only two, as my selection illustrates the editors' stance vis-à-vis class. Adam Hanieh's fifth chapter rejects Hossein Mahdavy's RST, whereby Gulf governments have been classically approached. Hanieh posits that state and class are phenomenologically interlinked. Therefore, reliance on oil may have initially served and even fueled consumptive habits -but in the long run, it has facilitated the diversification of Gulf economies, creating a wealth-generating class, not crooked elites. Meanwhile, Hanieh observes that these economies' heavy reliance on non-citizens can be fatal in terms of a labor regime.

Chapter 8 by Muriam Haleh Davis follows Jacques Marseille's presupposition that start-

ing from 1930 onward, France was overburdened by her colonies. Davis posits that no rupture exists when moving from colonial to postcolonial modes of production (p. 164). In fact, what can be considered a rupture occurs between pre-colonial and colonial modes of production. The appropriation of tribal lands explains the proletarianization of native Algerians and the foundation of a system that has systematically worked against the historical owners of the land.

The book stays fixated on one class: a single player, the one holding power, at this point. Nowhere do readers see the strife that usually occurs between competing classes, a situation that leaves readers wondering if the editors consider other classes worthy of attention or whether attempts to alter the present configuration of classes in the region are either naïve or wasteful. That explains the static account of class, an account divorced from regimes of land tenure, oil production and circulation, arms dealerships, state formation, and labor rights. Various contributors, including the last one, zoom in on the role the subaltern may play in reshaping the political economy, but overall, the contributors treat the subaltern as an immobile category: only the imperialists, the capitalists, are rendered as agents of history.

Regarding the fate of capital in the Gulf, it remains a mystery how the emergence of the capitalistic class that is independent of rent has neither flattened the state's capacity for coercion nor forced it toward democratization. Such a state of affairs leaves readers wondering how these basically feudal monarchies maintain their grip on power if indeed there exists a solid capitalistic class as Hanieh advances. Indeed, the crash of the real estate

sector in 2009 offers a reflective insight into how privately owned businesses could be, after all, a bubble; they cannot survive without state patronage because these investments are concentrated in non-productive sectors.

Similarly, Chapter 8 makes it look like Algeria's independence was a charity from the capitalists and that capital accumulation had a hand in pursuing a policy of decolonization. This is no different from squeezing facts to meet a theory. All these untenable conclusions result from confusing causes with effects.

While the book traces a progressivist line from Orientalism and modernization theories, the overall approach is non-emancipatory, as it is geared toward justifying the triumphant status quo, the one that emerged from the 2011 Uprisings. The three contributors of Chapter 2 conclude that these uprisings subscribe more or less to classical bourgeois revolutions (p. 66). They may appear so, but only when flattening cause and effect, that is, when refusing to register that the uprisings initially started as incendiary, but their revolutionary momentum was crushed in consequence of the counterrevolution's regressive policies. Thus, the book's approach is geared towards confusing, not explaining, what indeed took place. This confusion underlines the extent to which a triumphant regime of political economy pretends to provide a critique by simply promoting capital's counterrevolutionary moment. As underlined in this review, those researchers working on the critique of political economy will benefit from the glitches of this book. Similarly, in its focus on the true movement of history, not ideology, students of the Arab Spring will find this volume particularly rewarding.