

Book Review: The Modern Arab State: A Decade of Uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa

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*In **The Modern Arab State: A Decade of Uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa**, edited by **Youssef Cherif**, he and other authors contextualize what was termed the “Arab Spring” and point out continuities and discontinuities in the years since, writes **Kylar Cade**.*

The Modern Arab State: A Decade of Uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2021.

Arguably the most tumultuous and conflict-ridden region in the world, observers can have a lot to ask when considering whatever became of the hope and dreams that many people expressed in the Arab world at the time of the “Arab Spring.” They need not be so disheartened:

This book deliberately refrains from using the term “Arab Spring. The term delineates a single moment in history (which it was not) and could connote the backwardness of Arab League (AL) peoples (hiding their rich intellectual and publicly-engaged history). Instead, authors identified the events of 2011 and thereafter as “uprisings.” Hence, history is not something in the past but a current reality continuing into the future.

This book is short but informative, made up of a foreword and short introduction, followed by five chapters and a

short conclusion. The foreword situates this publication in a broader attempt to understand Mediterranean affairs. The introduction quickly establishes the notion of the non-linearity and evolution of history, namely the changes that have taken place in AL countries.

Chapter one, written by Lina Khatib, claims that five types of political systems have emerged since 2011, though not necessarily as a direct result of the uprisings that year. She then analyzes four countries that characterize four of those categories and writes about three countries for the last category.

As for the second chapter, writer Amro Ali highlights a keyword that emerged with newfound political meaning in 2011: Karama. He includes philosophical, postcolonial, literary, semantic, and ethical views about the word. He also esteems the formulation of a supranational social contract, seeing the transnational connections of AL citizens.

Chapter three explicitly brings the AL youth into the picture of a regional history of “youthful” revolutions and movements; thus, the uprisings of 2011 were a successful manifestation of decades of unrest. Cherif contends that exclusion and lack of Karama led to disaffected youth, who then received less than satisfactory, “cosmetic” reforms. Post-2011, people of this demographic have had to contend with increasing repression.

Whereas Khatib provides a political background on the post-2011 AL state, Özlem Tür presents a political economic history pre-and post-2011, showing that economies of AL countries continue to suffer to the benefit of cronyism and amidst corruption. The following and final chapter further links the conditions of AL economies to the failure of the original social contract of the post-independence years. Its author, Nader Kabbani, also suggests that an improvement/renewal of the original social contract should be pursued, at least in the near term, rather than a new, more inclusive social contract, recommending changes in and adoptions of policies along the way.

The conclusion ends with realizing a poor turnout of events in the AL region. However, it also offers Karama and the example of Tunisia as beacons of hope.

Overall, this book succinctly develops a picture of causes and effects of AL citizen uprisings that have taken place, even as recently as 2019. It tackles the topic from multiple angles, including history, comparative politics, political theory, sociology, political economy, and public policy. Moreover, it maintains the unique perspectives and writing styles of the contributors.

Chapters are not isolated from one another and provide a helpful progression of issue matters. The book starts with a general overview of country governance mainly from the 20th century onwards. It ends with policy analysis and recommendations for the benefit of national development and the empowerment of the citizen. Contributors continually draw on a set of countries. Youth and technology surface throughout the book, but not as much as the concept of the social contract. The publication also (appropriately) considers external influence on AL countries.

Nevertheless, the entire work is not academically rigorous: the term ‘uprisings’ is not consistently used (when the context is taken into account). Additionally, there is a potential overlap of social contract content, and the final chapter discusses the UAE seemingly as an afterthought. Furthermore, perhaps a more thorough treatment of all

AL countries, or a close comparison of Gulf states, would have grounded the transformations that have taken place.

Students, civil society actors, and the reader interested in understanding contemporary affairs, global and regional (AL countries), will find this work illuminating and structurally helpful to guide comprehension.