

A Critical Political Economy of the Middle East and North Africa
Edited By Joel Beinin, Bassam Haddad and Sherene Seikaly Stanford,
CA: Stanford University Press, 2021, 331 p.

Subah Mutahhara SAMİHA* 

This edited volume examines the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) through the lens of political economy. It is based on the premise that a few classical approaches commonly used in research in the MENA region will no longer suffice. This book is edited by Joel Beinin, Bassam Haddad and Sherene Seikaly. It is divided into two parts. While the first part is titled ‘Analysis Categories’ and has four chapters, the second part titled ‘Country/Regional Studies’ is designed with seven chapters.

In the introduction part, the political-economic difficulties of modernism in the former Ottoman provinces which were under the British and French mandate regimes are examined. It is argued that development mentalism is a colonial paradigm as it enables the reintegration of pre-capitalist modes of production into global capitalism. Contributors do not entirely deny the so-called “Arab exceptionalism”. Still, they argue that the histories of capitalism in this region are interconnected, although very different from the history of capitalism in the Western world.

The first chapter illustrates how the polymorphic land ownership practices during the Ottoman period in Egypt and the Levant were never an obstacle to private property, unpaid wage labour and capital accumulation. However, they had different applications in agricultural production than Western capitalism. In the second chapter, the authors discuss the impact of colonial rules on class structure change. In the unstable period after the defeat of the Arab states in 1967, Egypt began to implement an open-door policy to facilitate foreign investment. However, Syria resisted the previous policy, which negatively affected the country’s economy. The authors claim that the civil war in Syria resulted from the failure to provide economic welfare by following an open-door policy as in Egypt. According to them the civil war in Syria is too lucrative to be resolved for the regime, opposition, ISIS, neighbouring countries and foreign players.

* E-mail: samihamim92@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-3263-0114

In the third chapter, Timothy Mitchell explains that oil is transported through pipelines, so it needs fewer workers than coal, and as a result, the threat to oil companies comes from governments rather than workers. In this regard, states take a stand against all forms of rioting. According to him, the reductionist approach of the rentier state theory proves its inadequacy. He also shows oil not as a cause of instability in the MENA region but as a factor that makes it possible. As a reader, I think at this point a discussion of the obstacles to democratic transition in the MENA state would have been more required.

While in the fourth chapter, Shana Marshall elaborates on the role of conflicts and the armies in the recycling of oil money for the economy of Western countries, in the fifth chapter, Adam Hanieh maps the intertwined regional integration and class formation in the Gulf Cooperation Council and identifies the relationship between the state and the class. He rejects the rentier state theory, which neglects the importance of labour.

The sixth chapter focuses on the problems of applying economic doctrines in the region. Even if the success of these doctrines is proven in the countries where they were born and developed, their application in the region encountered certain problems and structural differences that derive from the state-formation process. Thus, the authors think that although the history of capitalism in Egypt is somewhat different from the history of capitalism in the western world, they are interconnected. So here they talk about capitalism in Egypt, not Egyptian capitalism.

In the seventh chapter, Nida Alahmad tried to explain the role of the state, oil and war in the formation of Iraq. Here she argues that state, oil, and war are interrelated rather than strictly delimited categories determining particular political economy effects.

Muriam Haleh Davis' chapter eight acknowledges that Jacques Marseille's idea that France was enriching itself from the colonies is a myth and argues that there was no interruption in the transition from colonial to post-colonial modes of production.

Ziad M. Abu-Rish's chapter "Lebanon Beyond Exceptionalism" historicizes the political economy of the Lebanese Republic by talking about its changes. In the academic world, Lebanon's formation and economic development history is often considered an exceptional position. The author challenges this notion of Lebanon in comparative political economy and he thinks local linking features with the global political economy is more fruitful than excluding Lebanon.

Chapter Ten rejects the perception that US Middle East policy is determined by the power of the Zionist lobby. However, the author could not completely deny the power of the Zionist lobby in the USA. In the eleventh chapter, the author describes how Colonialism was shaped in the occupied Palestinian territories and she also illustrated the failure of Oslo political framework in the Palestinian economy.

This theoretically noteworthy book approaches the region from a new perspective. It goes beyond the rentier state explanations that mention the relationship between class and state but ignore

the class conflicts that have had a significant impact on the capitalist construction process in the region. The book also shows the subalterns, which play a significant role in the economic recovery of the region, as a dormant class. However, this volume does not include any chapters on modern Turkey and Iran, which are geographically and historically inseparable parts of the region. Moreover, most of the countries in this area are former Ottoman provinces, and because Turkey carries the legacy of the Ottomans, it is imperative to illuminate Turkey's position in the critique of political and economic developments in the region. The reader may conclude that, the book tried to portray the MENA countries as unsuccessful in terms of political economy and these two countries were not mentioned because the same thing is not possible to say for them. Despite such minor shortcomings, the book will be useful to researchers who intend to pursue academic work in the MENA region.