

EDITOR'S NOTE

AlMuntaqa's Third and Final Issue for 2018

The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 opened a Pandora's box in that country. Iraq has been wracked by multiple episodes of terrorist activities, sectarian and ethnic tensions, and near state collapse. The sectarian violence that erupted in 2006 following the twin bombings of the Al 'Askarī Shrine mosque in Samarra, the 2017 Iraqi Kurdistan independence referendum, and the ISIS takeover of Mosul in 2014 (and later large swathes of Iraq), are just a few examples of these tensions. These events put issues of ethnic and sectarian fragmentation at the forefront of Iraqi politics. Not only this, but they have led some scholars to perpetuate the narrative that Iraq's fragmentation is due to its artificial nature as a state.

In this issue of AlMuntaqa, we present two articles that tackle these issues head on. The first, titled "Iraq is not Artificial: Iraqi Tendencies and the Refutation of the Artificial State Hypothesis" by Nahar Muhammed Nuri, addresses the idea that Iraq is an artificial state. The author argues that three formerly Ottoman provinces or vilayet which would compose present-day Iraq — Mosul, Basra and Baghdad — were in fact led and centrally administered from Baghdad for quite a long time prior to the creation of the state. Moreover, the records of local correspondence and private reports, with official bodies that contained the concept of "Iraq," demonstrate that Iraqis shared a concept of a "homeland" analogous to the previous tribal concept of a dirah. This is in contrast to the Eurocentric explanations of nation-state formation in Iraq, which emphasize its "artificial" nature, and do not fully explicate the motivations of the Sykes-Picot agreement.

In the second article, "Kirkuk in Iraqi Narratives of Victimization and the Victimizer," Khalil Fadl Osman explains "the nature of narratives of victimization and how they make use of the past in the service of political projects spearheaded by political elites." He uses "the contending narratives" of victimization (real or imagined) perpetuated by "communal elites" of Kirkuk province's main demographic groups – Kurds, Turkmens, Arabs and Christians. The author argues that these narratives of victimization are rich in historical content, but are also based on a selective reading of history. As Osman notes, they are "fundamental to the reinvigoration of intercommunal disputes in Kirkuk, a city suffocated by newly conscious identities."

Continuing with the theme of social pluralism in Arab societies, Ahmad Al-Ismaeli's paper "Ethnic, Linguistic, and Religious Pluralism in Oman: The Link with Political Stability" delves into the fascinating ethnic, confessional, and linguistic pluralism that characterizes modern Omani society. The paper provides a look at a rarely examined aspect of Oman, namely its social diversity, and explains how and why this diversity has not, unlike in many cases in the Arab world, led to outward social and political tensions.

Fourthly, we turn to an analysis of demographic transitions and why they present "a real opportunity to accelerate growth and improve economic performance." In his paper titled "The Demographic Gift in the Arab World: a Blessing or a Time Bomb for Morocco?", Brahim Elmorchid examines population dynamics in Morocco

to analyze how they have contributed to the emergence of what is often termed “the demographic gift” at the beginning of the third millennium. In particular, he aims to understand the extent to which several economic and social indicators interact with this phenomenon. He concludes by cautioning that in the case of Morocco, this opportunity for development through the demographic gift did not result in any real gains. Rather, it transformed into a curse when one examines microeconomic indicators, as well as unemployment rates and migration rates.

Finally, in the fifth research article, Hicham El Haddaji examines the question of political and religious despotism through the eyes of two prominent Arab Nahda (enlightenment) thinkers namely: 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi and Shaykh 'Ali 'Abdel Raziq. In his study, titled “The Congruent Critique of Despotism in 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi and Shaykh 'Ali Abdel-Raziq,” El Haddaji delves into a comparative analysis of the thought of these two intellectuals, who provided a prescient critique of despotism in its political and religious form during a tumultuous period in the Arab world – the early 20th century, which saw the collapse of the Islamic Caliphate under the Ottoman Empire after nearly 600 years. Al-Kawakibi’s book was first published in 1902 and represents a scathing critique of despotism, Ottoman rule over the Arab world, and a call for an Arab Nahda or enlightenment, all during the period of Ottoman collapse. Abdel-Raziq’s work on the Islamic Caliphate was written in 1925, roughly three years after the Ottoman Empire collapsed. In his work, he rejected the idea of returning to an Islamic Caliphate. El Haddaji outlines the similarities and differences of these two authors, and their important contributions to Arab Nahda thought.

In this issue’s Arab Opinion Index short article, titled “Public Opinion of Women’s Rights and Democratic Values,” Dana El Kurd unpacks the relationship between opinions of gender equality and perceptions of democracy. She argues that opinions towards women’s rights are a part of democratic values, and that opinions of gender equality can help predict democratic, or anti-democratic, sentiment.

This issue also features two book reviews. First, Hamza Mustapha provides a synopsis of the edited volume *The Issue of the Kurds in Syria: Facts, History, and Myth* released by ACRPS in 2013, while Khalid Walid Mahmoud reviews the edited volume *January 25: Research and Testimonies*, also released in 2013. Both works provide in-depth analysis and detailed accounts of their topics, and are an asset to researchers interested in understanding the cases of Syria and Egypt more fully.

Finally, this issue would not have seen the light of day were it not for the dedicated and serious work of the chief translation and editing team in Doha led by Abby Francesca Lewis and Chris Hitchcock, as well as Mirvat Abu Khalil, who coordinates the translation team in Beirut. Last but not least, we extend our gratitude to the freelance translators who worked on many of the difficult texts in this issue, Charlie Lawrie and Chelsea Villareal.