

EDITOR'S NOTE

This volume of *Almuntaqa* features five articles, one Arab Opinion Index analysis, and two book reviews. They revisit important paradigms in modern Arab history and provide new insights into contemporary issues, with three of the articles interrogating state and regime politics and policies following the latest popular revolts in the Arab region.

The first article is by the Tunisian scholar Souhail Hbaieb who skilfully brings together different threads of Azmi Bishara's thoughts on secularisation, democracy, sectarianism, state formation in the Arab region, and Islamism to highlight Bishara's novel contributions to the study of secularisation in the Arab context. Hbaieb illustrates how Bishara centres the modern state in his comparative analysis of secularisation in the West and in the Arab region, arguing that differentiation between the religious and the mundane occurred within the realm of the modern state and concurrently with its formation. Even contemporary Islamic movements and modern patterns of Islamic religiosity are manifestations of secularisation, as they embody this differentiation.

The next article features an innovative methodological intervention by Rana Barakat that deploys the literary and artistic renditions of Palestinian stories in order to make the case for an Indigenous history of Palestine wrought with Israeli settler colonial violence but not completely defined by it. Focusing on Radwa Ashour's novel *Al-Tanturiya* and Samia Halaby's exhibit/book *Drawing the Kafr Qasem Massacre*, Barakat highlights Indigenous voices of defiance and existence, usually erased in colonial archives.

Moving from Palestine to Syria, Ammar Shamaileh, Alan Aloskan, and Mohammed Zahr dissect changes within Syria's political and social elites during Syria's Civil War (2016-2021) as the Assad's regime started to (re)consolidate power. They argue that Syria's Assad regime, due to its state of "precarious stability" finds no need to engage in power-sharing with powerful elites. Instead, it makes frequent changes to the elite landscape in order to prevent the rise of networks that can be potentially threatening to the regime.

Abdennour Benantar's article on Algeria's security policy fills a gap in the literature on Algeria's state policies in the context of the *hirāk*. Benantar's analysis rests on an examination of the tensions between ethical-normative imperatives and security ones on one hand, and non-intervention and non-interference concepts on the other. He concludes that Algeria's security policy and doctrine have undergone minor adjustments lately as Algeria adapts to regional security imperatives.

The last article by Eltigani Abdelgadir Hamid outlines the challenges facing the civilian-military coalition in Sudan in the aftermath of the Salvation regime's collapse. Hamid posits that the current arrangement involving world powers and regional authoritarian regimes is to steer Sudan into a hybrid system that keeps members of the old regime in key positions while maintaining a minimum degree of democracy. This arrangement, Hamid argues, may not be sustainable due to serious internal challenges, including the lack of an experienced political leadership capable of making independent decisions and the absence of effective political institutions that can support the transition to democracy.

Hicham Raïq's analysis relies on data from the Arab Opinion Index provided by the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies to evaluate the digital divide and its impact on political participation in selected Arab countries. Using a multivariate logistic regression analysis, the paper assesses the role of demographic and socio-economic status (SES) in unequal access to the internet, concluding that gender, age, income, and educational level play a major role in the level of Internet access, and that vulnerable social groups are more reluctant to participate in political activities.

In the Book Review section, Hikmat al-Abdulahman reviews Ahmed Hussein's book on *The European Union and the Arab Region: A Realistic Portrait of Challenge*, describing it as an exceptional study with rich contributions to the field of International Relations. Meanwhile, Lotfi Aïssa reviews the proceedings of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies' Third Annual Conference for Historical Studies, held in Beirut on 22-24 April 2016, and published by the ACRPS under the title *Arab History and Arab Historiography: Past and Present Forms of Writing*. Aïssa provides a detailed assessment of this volume's contributions to Arab historical knowledge production that reconsiders Western historical periodisation, engages with universalist historical concepts, challenges state and populist narratives, and examines the complex relationships between memory and history.