

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Ali Kadri. *Arab Development Denied: Dynamics of Accumulation by Wars of Encroachment*.**

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**Reviewed by Alaa Tartir**

An examination of the development processes in the Arab World over the last three decades reveals a status of reverse development. This status can be illustrated through many socio-economic indicators such as poor long-term and oil-dependent economic growth; high levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality compared with global standards; the outflow of real and financial resources; and continuous violations of basic human rights by repressive regimes or by military settler-colonial occupations. As a result, development in the Arab World remains elusive; the Arab World underwent a process of “purposeful deconstruction” of its potential to transform structurally, and hence its ability to grow was stripped. This is described as a process of de-development.

The denial of the Arab development is attributed to a number of internal and external obstacles and factors. Dr. Ali Kadri, a senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore, eloquently examines in his book *Arab Development Denied: Dynamics of Accumulation by Wars of Encroachment* those factors and provides detailed answers, framed within a political economy analysis, on how and why the Arab World has been impoverished over the last three decades. Dr. Kadri attributes the Arab World’s de-development to the imperialist hegemony over oil and to the increasing role of financialization, which stripped the Arab World of its resources through the wars of encroachment. In his core argument, Kadri argues that wars—as the aggressive facet of capital—are an integral part of the global economy that aims to commodify human lives. In addition, Kadri argues that development means sovereignty and national security, and at its core is the sovereignty and power of the working class. Kadri goes further to cogently argue that the crucial moment for development in the Arab World starts when the internationalist socialist project is reimagined and reinstated.

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The book consists of nine chapters that explore and analyze the forces that obstruct sound development in the Arab World. It starts with setting the context through providing an economic history of the Arab World combined with an analysis of the macroeconomic policies. Then it discusses and problematizes fundamental issues of class structure, democratization, war, oil, and imperialism. The last three chapters discuss Arab disintegration, commodification of human lives, and the need for a socialist ideological retreat.

Chapter One explores, examines, and problematizes the empirical background of the Arab economy and shows that “the business cycle is determined by US-led imperialist concerns” (p. 18). This chapter argues that “instead of mobilising resources for development, the surplus petrodollars of the Gulf states fund the formation of divisive sectarian identities, contribute to wasteful consumption and bolster regression” (p. 27). It also argues that “examining the shared social relationships that *shape* poor development is a more useful form of analysis, because it allows us to conceptually address the underlying causes” (p. 27). The links between the Arab ruling classes and the international financial capital are fundamental to the analysis in this terrain. Therefore, it is argued here that the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies “has (deliberately) overlooked the obvious, which is the ties of Arab merchant classes to US-led imperialism and the war context” (p. 46). This analysis led the author to conclude that the

successive Arab defeats, shifts in the mode of appropriation of the ruling classes from industry to commerce, and imperialist oil control/militarisms represent the context of development and the core reason for Arab retrogression. The state was gradually stripped of a sovereignty whose substance is working-class security; hence it lost autonomy over policy. (p. 47)

The author argues that in order to reverse the cycles of Arab de-development, policy measures need to empower the working class by locking in the circuit of value, direct redistribution, and land reform.

Chapter Two reviews and criticizes the Arab World’s existing or imposed neoliberal macroeconomic policies which failed to address the detrimental factors of poverty, inequality, unemployment, economic growth, and freedom. The chapter argues that instead of those harmful neoliberal policies, the focus should “shift into modes of stemming resource flight, recirculating value nationally, revalorising labour and redistributing value through social policies. Long-term investment in the physical and social infrastructure and industrial projects are the very core of effective state policymaking” (p. 69). The chapter concludes by stating that in the Arab World, “the resource curse is the curse of the imperialist assault sustained by

the Arab working classes, and that an examination into the re-empowerment of the working class within the political process is required” (p. 19).

Chapter Three explores the class politics hindering resistance and undermining the process of long-term development. The chapter discusses the political preconditions of accumulation by forcible encroachment, with a focus on the issue of security as the substance of sovereignty (p. 73). It also investigates the required steps toward moving to “an institutional framework that would allow Arab working classes the right to a degree of power in the state” (p. 20). To address all these complex issues, it is crucial to define what development exactly means in this context. In the author’s view, development “captures the terms by which human potentialities are unleashed and the welfare gains afforded to the working classes are broadened.” It “ensues not as a result of an atomised human agency realised in the state, but rather as a result of political struggle mediated in forms of working-class organisation that improve living standards” (p. 71).

In other words, “development combines the infusion of knowledge in production, incremental growth in capital and progressive institutional change. Hence, development is both improved living standards wrought in the class struggle and growth in capital stock” (p. 71). Therefore, development becomes “the articulation of the social forces that shape the outcome of capital accumulation” (p. 71). How does this expanded view of development tally with Arab conditions is one of the main questions that this chapter addresses. It concludes that the democratic and developmental processes in the Arab World cannot be attributed to cultural differences between the Arab World and Western countries, but to the quality of social structures. This means that the working class of the Arab World is “at the mercy of a continual joint assault by Arab ruling classes and US-led capital” (p. 91). And therefore the ultimate conclusion of this chapter is that in order to “deconstruct capital and its encroachment wars, the world working classes must target not the weakest link in the chain, but the most critical one—the formation of working class-led states in the Arab World” (p. 92).

Chapter Four analyzes the developmental failures in the Arab World through the lens of the unrelenting assault on sovereignty of Arab states (p. 94). The state is understood in the text as “a principal agent of development to the extent that labouring classes exercise their political rights” (p. 113). And in this vein, this chapter argues that the neoliberal turn in the Arab World “is not separate from conflicts or military assaults; it is an outcome of political defeat and waning sovereignty” (p. 20), and therefore, the Arab states engender ruin (p. 21). One of the main conclusions of this chapter is straightforward: “In the warped social context of neoliberalism, not a single cent of all those petrodollars engenders development ... Petrodollars have generated only human and environmental waste” (p. 113). As far as poverty is concerned, this chapter concludes that poverty in the Arab World

“results from its war-and-oil subordinate mode of integration into global social and economic reproduction.” Finally, the trap of poverty will persist, unless the “Arab state is reconstituted with significant labour representation, value-entrapping mechanisms and radical redistribution” (p. 114).

Chapter Five explores the war–development nexus and the abjection and de-development consequences, and it is based on a major argument throughout the book that “wars are integral part of the global economy” (p. 115). The wars in the Arab World, combined with the “power emanating from oil control,” are a “principal social condition of global capital accumulation” (p. 21). It concludes by arguing that the security-development interaction “emerges as an outcome of the multitiered power structure, the resultant vector of which is US-led capital, for which oil and war are essential” (p. 136).

Chapter Six takes the politics of imperialist aggression and the interaction between “free market” policies and their anti-developmental outcomes as its starting point, to address the history of dislocation in the Arab World “under colonial and imperialist assault in relation to the crisis of capital” (p. 141). This chapter covers three inter-related themes: the integration of the Arab World with world capital, the interaction between the Ottoman capitalism and European capital, and finally, the dislocation of neoliberalism and colonialism (p. 141).

Chapter Seven argues that sovereignty and industrialization “are requisites for integration around a ‘social contract’ or an egalitarian redistribution bolstered class entente within a nation-state, and that they also promote cross-border integration with other working class–bolstered nation-states” (p. 159). In turn, Chapter Eight tackles the unemployment issue and the commodification of labor through a critical perspective toward contributing to a radical policy perspective. It argues that “the right to work as in article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to be implemented, social equity has to precede the mythical individual productivity criteria for job creation” (p. 182). This argument is based on the working assumption that “a social consideration based on social as opposed to private values must replace the neoclassical efficiency criterion that demands ever lower wages to expand employment” (p. 183).

Finally, Chapter Nine address the main question, “How might class restructuring favouring the working classes and their development come about?” (p. 211). The chapter argues that in order to assess policy options available to the Arab World, “one must better understand its class structure as mediated through its political framework” (p. 218). In other words, it is “the resultant balance of class forces that will drive and shape the task of development” (p. 218). Furthermore, the chapter argues for the necessity of working-class representation in the state and for the need to restore policy concepts such as egalitarianism, distribution, land reform, and nationalization (p. 24). It concludes by stating that the crisis of the Arab World

“is a deeply rooted social crisis that is continually fed and reproduced by social dislocation, artificially stimulated religious and ethnic conflict, and a vortex of international powers emboldened by US military excursions and Israel’s superior military capabilities” (p. 222).

In summary, de-development means stripping by force the working classes in the developing entities “of the right to own and control their resources and use them for their own benefit. The fact of de-development is an argument for capitalist decadence, made manifest by the acute degrees of misery in security-exposed peripheral countries” (p. 3). The argument continues with a clear link between development, security, and sovereignty and the well-being of working classes, where “the imperialist forces must always ratchet up their power and exercise, often with the support of their local class alliances, the worst forms of atrocity against the Arab working classes” (p. 3). The original conceptual and empirical understanding and analysis of the de-development processes is a unique characteristic of this publication. This reflects both the conceptual sophistication and the empirical strength of the author and his analysis of the historical trajectories in economic terms.

The book concludes that

the disempowerment of the working classes imperils national, communal and individual security. Of all the deficits in knowledge, democracy or capital formation ... it is the working-class power deficit that deprives peoples of the right to shape their future. Without a rearticulation of the regional security arrangement to redress the sovereignty deficits of national states whereby working-class power becomes preeminent, the Arab World will not be able to own the means and tools of development. (pp. 3-4)

Therefore, at the fundamental level, the book argues that “development is working-class security wrought in the course of the class struggle. It is both means and end of the sovereignty of the working class” (p. 4). The centrality of the working class as a main unit of analysis is an additional distinctive characteristic of this publication. This unit of analysis allows the reader to examine the roots of today’s transformations in the Arab World through a fundamentally important lens, one which the mainstream narrative and scholarly literature often neglects.

Dr. Kadri’s publication is not an easy read, given the theoretical and conceptual framing of an already complex topic. The book’s informative and highly analytical nature provides the reader with in-depth knowledge of the root causes of de-development in the Arab World. Engaging with the book on multiple occasions rewards readers with additional insights, reflecting the book’s depth of knowledge. Rooted in a theoretical understanding of political economy in the Arab World, this is a book that does not offer any compromises.

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