

Book Review

Fred Halliday (2014), *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 388 Pages. ISBN: 0521597412.

Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin* & Jodie Rose Monica O'Neill**

The leading academic of the global politics of the Middle East is undoubtedly the unapologetic Marxist writer Fred Halliday (1946-2010). He was also one of the prominent Middle East scholars, academic professors, international relations theorists and analysts of global affairs. In his words in 'the Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology' (2014), the Middle East region has been termed the kingdom of the international political economy where economics and politics interlock and are defined by one another. The political economy of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is dominated by what Fred Halliday terms in his work an indissoluble interconnection. The political factors – states, conflict, ideology – are entwined with the economic – production, finance, technology. The relationship between domestic and international economic issues are inseparable from politics, and this is nowhere more accurate than in the Middle East due to the nature of leadership and financial traditions that often resist economic integration and unity outside its immediate sphere. Halliday highlights the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the discovery of oil for military purposes during The Great War created a new reliance of the Western world upon the Middle East. This reliance extended during the Cold War through strategic obligations and political assistance to allies such as Israel and Iran.

According to Halliday, the importance of understanding the historical and international context is emphasised as a fundamental aspect of studying the Middle East with the collaboration of understanding the definitions of language concerning state, nation and tradition. The notions of predictions and deep-structural characteristics or to argue that Islam as a religion is an explanation to political, social and economic differences is too simplistic and unhelpful in understanding the Middle East. Halliday's rejection of predictions in the social sciences is instrumental when understanding the role of oil as Halliday states "nothing makes a fool so quickly of an economist...then the unexpected reversals, or resistances, of oil prices." Halliday argues that simply oil is the essential economic factor for the whole of the Middle East and appears to concentrate more on the effects of globalisation on international relations between the Middle East and Western superpowers. The population expansion of the region is only second to the population growth of sub-Saharan Africa, resulting in most people in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) being under twenty years old and based in cities. The end of the oil boom resulted in questions emerging concerning economic centralisation and the levels of state intervention in the Middle East.

The ideas of the author explored above and the intrinsically close relationship between oil and the economy clarify how the political, economic and social realities of MENA have evolved throughout recent history. However, the economics of oil is now becoming a concept of the past and the reality of environmental change is growing in significance on the international political agenda. Nevertheless, we argue that what is needed now is a new perspective on MENA that also focuses on the adverse effects of climate change in the region as well as promoting sustainable economic growth through a new emerging market of renewable energy. Green social capital is a very new concept let alone when concerning MENA economics, but there is great room for innovation in MENA given the large population, growing levels of educated graduates, and of course the growing alarm of ecological damages to our global system that need immediate attention. As stressed by Halliday in this book, international relations and the social sciences lenses are useful in addressing and exploring the realities and experiences of climate change in a way that natural science cannot. Subsequently, the field of international relations provides a human face to a growing problem that is both scientific and human inflicted regarding the damages to the ecological system. Postcolonial perspectives are also useful when

* Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin, Centre for Research in History, Politics and International Affairs, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia. Email: irwansyazli@ukm.edu.my

** Jodie Rose Monica O'Neill, Department of Politics, College of Social Science and International Studies, University of Exeter, EX4 4RJ, United Kingdom. Email: jodieoneill6@gmail.com

analysing climate change and how it effects the most vulnerable and impoverished in society because it highlights how western dominance and monopolization through the earth natural resources has caused the impoverishment of the Global South's limited access to human necessities.

This book deals with a heavily conceptualized topic and debate on the international relations perspectives toward the issues of power, politics and ideology in the Middle East, yet Halliday carefully justifies his arguments based on relevant case studies and events. Without any doubt, this book is an invaluable resource for anyone with an interest in the international relations discourses with reference to contemporary Middle East and North Africa.