

general. It will be a favorite for those in military or security studies, or for any member of the public who is yearning to understand the back story behind the spectacular interventionism of the Egyptian military that has dominated world headlines, thrilling, terrifying, and bewildering observers.

TARIQ RAMADAN, *Islam and the Arab Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Pp. 256. \$27.95 cloth.

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Amidst the proliferation of writing on the current sociopolitical upheavals in the Middle East, Tariq Ramadan contributes an ideological perspective on questions of political ethics that seeks to negotiate the tensions between Western secular-liberal culture and the robust assertion of Islamic identity. This book, pitched to a popular yet educated audience, applies this perspective in a scatter-shot fashion to a wide-ranging set of figures, trends, and challenges raised by recent events in the Middle East. Part introduction, part commentary, and part prescription, the book's first two chapters survey a number of different features of the "Arab Awakening" while the last two chapters attend to the specific role of "the Islamic reference." Ramadan's analysis is often vague and he emphasizes questions and debating points rather than answers. However, his perspective on the direction in which he hopes Arab societies will move is worth considering.

The book is less than ideal as a primer for those with little previous exposure to the Middle East. One finds a brief recounting and evaluation of the first year of the sociopolitical uprisings in Iran, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen (each country receiving between two to four pages lest particulars be absorbed into facile generalizations), some commentary on the role of technology and new media in the uprisings, and a few pages on the historical evolution of both secularism and political Islam. One also finds several sections on the West: the debate over its behind-the-scenes role in the uprisings; the Orientalism of its media commentators on the political left and right alike; and the inconsistency and hypocrisy of its foreign policy, which lurches between rhetoric celebrating democracy and self-determination, and actual positions that expose realpolitik-driven concerns over oil, stability, as well as economic hegemony. The writing is conversational, the analysis glancing, and reasonable disagreements among analysts are largely ignored. Unfortunately, much of the information in these chapters is already dated and easily accessible elsewhere in clearer and better organized presentations.

Since Ramadan is best known as a representative intellectual who speaks on behalf of Muslim causes, the two chapters in which he takes up the relevance of Islam to the uprisings would seem to be the most promising. There is, he claims, "one single Islam [and] a diversity of interpretations. . . . The same body of references and values nurtures the diversity of interpretations" (p. 69). This open-ended approach enables him to claim the initial protesters for Islam, if not for Islamism: "most of the activists . . . who were calling for freedom and justice and an end to corruption and dictatorship, did so as Muslims—and not against their religion" (p. 15). In developing his views, Ramadan sets up two extremes—Islamist theocracy and a secularism wherein religion is entirely privatized—and he sensibly criticizes the commentators who claim that the future can only involve a stark choice between the two. Ramadan's mediating position is democratic and he speaks not of an Islamic state but rather of a civil

society infused with Islamic values, where religion provides social mobilization. His list of core Islamic values include democracy (characterized by five inalienable principles), access to education, the protection of human dignity, the mitigation of poverty, an increased role for women in public life, increased freedom of expression, and acceptance of religious pluralism (including for atheists and agnostics). Such a list is likely to sound very fine and familiar to Western readers, yet Ramadan claims that if Muslims are to work toward cultural authenticity and autonomy, they must draw upon their own collective memory as well as their intellectual, religious, and cultural references in determining how to apply and develop these values. In addition to disparaging the idea of a single, global, (Western-led) liberal civilization, he criticizes international institutions such as the IMF and insists that Middle Eastern economies turn their attention toward Africa and the developing world and away from dependence on the West. In fact, he claims that the West is so fraught with its own political and economic crises that it needs to look to the Muslim Middle East for “real perspectives for the future” (p. 110).

Ramadan’s view of the hopes and ambitions of reforming currents may well seem attractive to most readers, with the exception of extreme theocrats and secularists (and it is worth noting that he singles out Edward Said as a particularly interesting case of the latter). His analysis of the Orientalism in much popular Western coverage of the uprisings will certainly serve as a helpful corrective for some Western readers. But once past these introductory-level points, the book is long on questions that need to be debated, and short on substantive analysis or proposed solutions. This leads to at least three related shortcomings. First, Ramadan tends to write about what *he* thinks Arabs ought to say Islam represents, instead of attending to what they in fact say and do. He does claim that the petro-monarchies offer no hope, the Islamist parties seem to function better as outside critics, and the Turkish experiment seems generally promising yet may fail to develop economic goals that live up to genuinely Islamic objectives. However, far too few pages are devoted to these topics. Second, he tends to intellectualize his subject matter in a way that ignores social scientific analysis of forces operating beneath the surface of intellectual debate over ideals. The types of analyses of social change (and resistance to social change) found in disciplines such as sociology, economics, and political science are completely ignored. Third, even with respect to the political-ethical ideals he emphasizes, Ramadan’s writing is devoid of challenging detail and ignores internal conflicts. Take the example of freedom of expression. Ramadan writes as if the uprisings mean that a completely open debate about the proper limits to freedom of expression is desired, where no one is prevented from promoting their own views by soft or hard threats. Yet even if such an “ideal speech situation” were to occur—which, of course, it will not—at the end of the debate, limits will be set that will inevitably contradict the limits favored by others. The conception of freedom and rights defended by some will have a (perceived) chilling or corrosive effect on the conception of freedom and rights defended by others. With respect to every other specific issue, some interpretations of the “essential references and values” of Islam will contradict others (as well as Western liberal conceptions of such values), and one gains little perspective on these inevitabilities from this book. It is only by writing in vague and general terms, ignoring social forces, and neglecting to explore contradictions and conflicts between competing political-ethical visions that the author maintains a utopian emphasis on openness to the future and to on-going debate.

*Islam and the Arab Awakening* is a good read for laypersons unfamiliar with Muslim reformist voices, as long as they do not require an introduction to the facts and figures. The way in which Ramadan seeks to frame the uprisings is useful for its divergence from the frame provided by much of the Western popular press. However, those in academic settings will do well to look to other resources that incorporate more specificity of detail and disciplined analysis of evidence.