

to reshape the gender discourse and its politics. For example, they don't advocate whether Arab women should adopt a western, secular agenda and oppose an Islamic, conservative one. Instead, they point out the ways in which secular and Islamic gender discourses are constructed within specific sociopolitical contexts.

This book contributes to a field of scholarly work that favors a holistic and more balanced approach driven by the theories of structuralism and intersectionality. This book shows how gender identities and subjectivities emerge in moments of revolutions and sociopolitical unrest; in such times, both men and women challenge, subvert, and resignify existing gender norms in different forms and ways. The concrete examples taken from actual incidents that took place on the streets and in the media during the Arab Spring make this book an easy and accessible read for introductory level courses in Middle Eastern studies as well as for more advanced courses. It falls into the array of works that have since attempted to study the influences of the 2011 revolutions on the state of women in the Arab world. However, it differs from other works in combining the ontological and the epistemological, giving a broader understanding of the formation of gender discourse in an Arab context. The concentration on the contextual, in some essays, gave plausible causes to consider some subversive actions as alien to the context. Certain articles deemed some practices like undressing or posing naked as incompatible with the moral structure of the context. Others have considered notions like universal feminist values of gender equality inapplicable in an Arab milieu. These stances create binary oppositions the book claims to dismantle and inadvertently acknowledge certain subversive actions while condemning others. ✂

DOI:[10.1017/rms.2017.25](https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2017.25)

Rima Sadek
University of South Carolina

DAVID GOVRIN. *The Journey to the Arab Spring: The Ideological Roots of the Middle East Upheaval in Arab Liberal Thought.* London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2014. xvii + 334 pages. Biographical appendix, Index. Cloth US\$89.95 ISBN 9780853039174.

Until relatively recently, natural history museums were preoccupied with taxonomy. Row after row of glass cases (and in the back, drawer after drawer of samples) sought to group insects, fish, reptiles, and mammals

into categories based on their appearance, their genealogy, and their diet. Ambitious dioramas often showed them in repose, and sometimes even showed them in action, but the ways that species engaged with each other and with their environment was often an afterthought.

David Govrin's book on the "new liberalism" in the Arab world reminds me of one of those exhibits. After brief surveys of the underlying ideas of liberalism and the fate of liberalism in the Arab world in the early twentieth century, Govrin focuses his book largely on the articles that a select group of writers published in the 1990s and 2000s. In doing so, he seeks to establish a taxonomy of liberal Arab thought leaders. Scholars of the Middle East are likely to recognize familiar names and even some friends: Abdel Monem Said (the sole "establishment liberal"), Osama al-Ghazaly Harb, Hala Mustafa, and Khalid al-Dakhil ("semi-establishment liberals"), Hazem Saghieh and Saad Eddin Ibrahim (among his "independent liberals") all make frequent appearances here. He cites their views on why democracy has seemed to founder in the Arab world, and what they think a more ideal Arab state might look like. The book is overwhelmingly Egypt-focused, and popular Gulf writers who have written on many of these themes, such as Abderrahman al-Rashed and Sultan al-Qasimi, are largely absent.

While Govrin surveys perhaps twenty writers, he pays relatively little attention to how those writers engage with their environment: either with the state that they seek to reform or with the publics they seek to engage. These writers seem to write in a vacuum, without visits from the security services, generous state subsidies for more benign activities, or any kind of public engagement. In fact, the attractiveness of their ideas to a broad public seems assumed at times. As these writers gained exposure on the Arab satellite television stations that have spread since the mid-1990s and on the online outlets that flourished alongside them, the writers' audience expanded exponentially. Their ideas did not become widely accepted, so it is all the more curious that these failure of the writers to gain broad traction is not explored.

While I am unclear on the timing of the dissertation on which this was based, it appears to have been conceptualized in the mid-2000s, which the author describes as the "peak of the public discourse" in the early 21st century Middle East (ix). It was completed in 2011, when many thought democracy was on the march and both the salience of Islamist politics and the resurgence of authoritarian regimes were remote prospects. This book is, in some ways then, a period piece, capturing the optimism that some felt with the multiplying outlets for liberal writers in the decade before 2011. In that same decade, and absent from this work, was the broad literature on

the durability and adaptability of Arab authoritarianism. The dissertation on which this was based was perhaps a little too exultant in 2011, and it fares even less well in today's prevailing Arab political environment.

Govrin is an Israeli career diplomat who now serves as ambassador to Cairo, and he can be excused for his optimism. As a professional, he clearly saw Arab intellectuals with whom he could engage when many in Israel were—and are—skeptical of the possibility of any Arab political reform. His book is a helpful cataloguing of elite liberal ideas in the Arab world in the last century. The book might be read as a long refutation of those who argue there is no one to talk with on the Arab side. But as an analyst of how Arab societies work and the role that intellectuals play in its daily life and in its governance, Govrin is a less valuable guide.

The book provides a useful starting point for students looking to orient themselves in some of this writing, but it is marred by some errors that I wish an editor had caught. For example, the distinction between an 'ayn and hamza is often garbled, so Abel Monem Said's name is consistently spelled "Sa'id" rather than "Sa'id," and al-'Afif al-Akhdar's first name is presented as "al-'Afif" on page 98 and "al-'Afif" on page 99. Saudi Arabia's Prince Alwaleed bin Talal is presented as "Saudi Crown Prince Walid Ibn Talal," (130) representing at the very least a grand promotion.

While the title of this book promises a textbook that could be of great use to survey courses that seek to explain the genesis of the Arab uprisings that began in 2011, professors seeking such a book will need to look elsewhere. But for those who seek to undermine the notion that the Arab world is monolithic, unthinking, and reactionary, this book provides a useful starting point. ✂

DOI:[10.1017/rms.2017.26](https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2017.26)

Jon B. Alterman
Center for Strategic and International Studies

JEFF HALPER. *War Against the People: Israel, The Palestinians and Global Pacification.* London: Pluto Press 2015, xi + 296 pages, index. Paper US\$25.00 ISBN: 978-0-7453-3430-1.

W*ar Against the People* could not have come at a more important time. But the reality it presents is shocking and unnerving, even to someone who's spent their whole life working on Israel/Palestine. Halper shows us, in frightening detail, just how central war and violence have always been to Israel's strategic power and position, both vis-à-vis Palestinians and globally. This portrayal