



Book Review: The State in North Africa after the Arab Uprisings, by Luis Martinez¹²

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The book of Luis Martinez is a very interesting work about the North African region. It is a relevant and old question that how the nation state is formed or is non-existent in this area. The book also tries to evaluate the different types of social factors that influenced the democratic movements after the Arab Spring. The work is suitable to comprehend either by average readers, or by scholars as well. The theme is current and the problem is important in order to understand the underlying processes that surround the North African issue. The book is well-designed, thorough, and gives a full perspective of the question of national cohesion concerning the area. The chapters are logically structured, they go through every single country and endeavour to give a full picture about North Africa and the nation state.

The first chapter relates on the nation-building of the North African countries. It postulates that after their independence, these countries firstly embraced nationalism, and tried to subdue democratic issues by the way of autocratic tendencies. According to the chapter, the first signs of democratic changes developed after the Arab Spring in 2011, which was a new phenomenon in the Arab World and North Africa as well (p. 21.). The author also enlightens the reader that with the emergence of these models also came the revitalization of Islam, or Islamism that had also a radical wing which had a definite effect on the formulation of these nation states in the area. The radical wing could be called jihadism and according to the book, it intertwined with the emergence of the social ramifications of the Arab Spring.

The second chapter comments on the social transformation that took place in North Africa since the 1990s. Martinez tells us that the social changes were the consequence of a long and hard process, political and other grievances that hit the society. In the 90s, the Islamists were excluded from political life and this caused upheavals in the public life, thus justice was sought. The book enumerates a lot of factors that contributed to the formation of the new social ethos: increasing influence of younger generation, demographic boost, and increasing urbanization, growth of informal economy, high corruption, social violence and terrorism and uncertainty of the youth (p. 41.).

After discussing the effects of social transition in North Africa, the book examines each country in the area to understand the social movements that took place after the

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Arab Spring. In the third chapter, the author describes the situation in Tunisia. As for the author, the toppling of the Ben Ali-regime had major consequences. The Ennahda Islamist party won the elections and the Islamists became widespread in the country. However, the country was prepared for the radicals and in 2017 a large clampdown was issued against them (p. 55.). The emergence of radical Islamism was however well handled by the army and the security forces, and in 2018, a new election was called, which was a more significant turn to democracy in the country.

The fourth chapter is about Libya, and the events that took place in the country after the Arab Spring. With the death of Gadhafi, the Libyan society dissolved, and tribalism and jihadism blossomed in the country (p. 59.). Radical Islamism became the followed example in Libya and armed militias took over regions and towns where they could expound their views and take control of the society as much as they were able to. Although in 2012 elections were held, Islamism became the most influential ideology in the country and jihadism prevailed. The Libyan nationalism lost its previous sense of communalism and democracy was far from reach. Instead of democracy, tribalism became the norm and militias took over the lead in several towns and regions. By 2018, military forces were able to reconquer some parts of Libya, but since then, uncertainty is significant in the North African state.

The fifth chapter concerns Morocco, and is describes how the Moroccan situation developed after the events of 2010/2011. There was an upheaval in 2011 called the 20 February Movement, but the monarchy retained its power and resolved the situation quite peacefully by implementing reforms, although radical jihadism became prevalent in the country. Although social reforms were enacted in Morocco in the 2000s, the radical Islamism sprang up in the area and AQIM and IS (or ISIS) became widespread. Counteracting the jihadist threat, in 2015 the Moroccan ulema presented a fatwa against the radicals (p. 89.). However, on October 2016, a movement named Hirak came to being, which disturbed the otherwise peaceful life of Morocco. At the end, the revolt was subdued, and the monarchy continued to be the significant form of statehood.

The sixth chapter deals with the situation in Algeria. The country didn't experience revolts because of the resentment that arose due to earlier radical Islamism in the 1990s. The problem – according to the author – in Algeria is that people think that the change to democracy would give rise to Islamist extremism, thus the government tries to implement moderate Islam to counter the jihadist threat (p. 99.). For example, in Algeria, the region of Kabylie was the source of insurrections, but also Christian evangelization became present in the area, which turned out to be less influential than Islam. The author thinks that the (democratic?) future depends on what will happen after the death of Bouteflika, will there be a softer society after he passed away. However, Algeria could not escape the demonstrations either, as in 2019, uprisings began in the country. Democracy's fate is in the hands of the future.

The seventh chapter concerns the deconstruction of nation-states. Martinez thinks that the Arab Spring and the events related to it only gave way to the radical Islamism, and that the catalyst for these terrorists was the 2012 Malian intervention of the French,



which increased the hatred against foreign intruders. Because of this, the author thinks that the jihadist groups destabilized the former nationalist states, and a confused situation developed in North Africa. According to him, the jihadist groups are successful, because they understand what ordinary people want and they exploit their grievances. People feel that the state abandoned them, and these groups present themselves as an alternative (p. 123.). Weak states and saudization of Islam also contributed to the spread of radicalism in North Africa and the Arab Spring also gave way for the Islamists.

The last, eighth chapter deals with regional disintegration and security breakdown. Libya is cited as a role model for state disintegration, where the radical Islamists created a stronghold. The spread of radicalism is also said to be one of the main causes of the high-number migration towards European countries. In addition, the demise of the border control and the weakening of the security apparatus gave way to the spread of AQIM, MOJWA, Ansar al-Dine and the like (p. 138.). Operation Serval in Mali weakened the states as well and the common Algerian-Libyan border control became porous and radicalism thrives in these areas. Martinez thinks finally, that the deconstruction of the nation-state and the weak prospects of peace are the consequences of the rise of the radical jihadism.

Finally in his summary, Martinez assesses the situation in North Africa after the Arab Spring and comes to the conclusion that because of the radical movements, there was only one state in the area which came somewhat close to democracy, and this was Tunisia (p. 155.). Nevertheless, Martinez thinks that the democratic thoughts became present in the minds of the local people, only the circumstances make it impossible to become reality, and also jihadism is a great obstacle in the way of democratic changes. However, the author is concerned that these factors prevent effective nation-building in the North African region.

To conclude, I would like to add that the book is an important and inspirational work, and I would recommend it not only for the ordinary reader, but for researchers who are interested in the topic. Martinez provides us with a thorough and thoughtful comprehension of the topic and he gives us important insights into the social and democratic processes that have undergone in recent years in North Africa.