

Review

Reviewed Work(s): The Quality of Life and Policy Issues Among the Middle East and North African Countries by El Syed Al Aswad

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BOOK REVIEW

Review of *The Quality of Life and Policy Issues Among the Middle East and North African Countries* by El Syed Al Aswad

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This book addresses the key challenges and threats to the quality of life for the people who live in Middle East and North Africa. The ultimate focus of author is on both local/internal and global/external factors and drives which can have significant impact on the quality of life in MENA. Furthermore, the book delineates details of quality of life, success, challenges and human development in MENA. The book represents 21 countries of MENA region but the main six countries on which all cross-cultural analysis was done are Egypt, Iran, Israel, Tunisia, Turkey, and the UAE. The book has also highlighted the demographic, geographic and political features of those countries. The ultimate indicators of quality of life were well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, tolerance, freedom of speech and political right. The author of the book El Syed Al Aswad is a well known academic researcher in the discipline of happiness, life issues and policy issues. He is currently working as a professor at UAE University. Furthermore, he has so many contributions in the field of happiness, life quality and social issues. Accordingly, his work has also significant importance in the relevant applicable discipline.

Since from 2500 years, the key factors of happiness have not yet identified in concluding manners. Happiness varies from person to person according to his/her perception, attitude, behavior, personality and culture. Does income is related to happiness or not? Many scholars have different thoughts about the relationship between happiness and income. For instance, Grimes and Wesselbaum (2019)

put forward that happiness has a strong relationship with income. Correspondingly, Rasiah et al. (2019) suggests that more income leads to economic growth which ultimately contributes to the happiness of people. Though, there are worthy scholars who have a different point of view about relationship of happiness with income. For instance, Ng and Diener (2019) believes that there is no significant relationship of income with happiness, similarly, Bussin and Christos (2019) also believes that happiness is purely related to the concept of equality means to say that everyone will be happy if they are treated equally from governments, furthermore, they prefer the public policies which are supposed to be followed equally by people. Conclusively, it can be stated that happiness is a variable that is treated differently by people. Moreover, in the policymakers' view, governments are strongly concerned with the happiness of people because the factors of happiness either monetary or nonmonetary are strongly associated with governments' public policies.

According to Li et al. (2001) conflict of interests is a major cause for disparity behaviors which ultimately decreases happiness. In the unification of organizations, cultures, countries, and in states many issues and challenges arise due to dissimilar attributes of people. Similarly, in the unification of Germany people have different interests, attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, the citizen of Germany got affected more because the consolidated regions became unified with Germany. Self-governing rights and conditions refer to autonomy (Deci and Ryan 1995). Therefore, culture plays a vital role in the driving of autonomy. People belong to the collectivist culture prefer less autonomy and the people who belong to individualistic societies prefer autonomy. In the MENA region, there are many similarities and differences related to the autonomy of people and freedom of speech.

It is imperative to mention that the purpose of the book is to enhance the policymaking process. For which it

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comprises the analysis of social issues like education, health, happiness, living standard, and technology. Furthermore, the book has analyzed the country's issues in the scope of culture, economy, demography, and society. Moreover, the book is dedicated to the people of MENA—Middle East and North African Countries who are suffering from truncated life. Therefore, six influential and diverse countries were carefully chosen from a total of 21 countries in the MENA region. These six countries are UAE, Turkey, Israel, Tunisia, Iran, and Egypt. Furthermore, the individual and comparative study in the book makes it more valuable.

When we investigate the geographical areas on which this study is conducted, we observe that this region has significant importance. For instance, the region upsurges its importance on the international level after the event of 11th September 2011, Spring of 2011 and the global financial crisis of 2008. However, these events affected the overall regions' happiness and well-being very scarcely and negatively. Moreover, Syria's war with Yemen also affected the quality of life of its people.

At the start of the book, Al Aswad introduces its audience about the importance of regions' culture, demography, happiness and well-being in academia, politics, governments, policymaking, and labor unions and has been studying from 2500 years. In the last 40 years scholars did a lot of affluent contributions in the acquaintance of happiness of people. Furthermore, he enlightens the importance of major indicators of happiness and he mentioned some of the attributes of happiness and well-being, for instance, education, economic growth, health, income level, freedom of speech, quality of life. These attributes of happiness are influenced by the culture of the state, demographics of the country, technological advancement, social awareness of people and societal economics of the country. The author has explained how these influencing factors affect the attributes of happiness which ultimately indicates the degree of happiness of people in a specific area. Moreover, the author demonstrates how policymaking affects the indicators of happiness such as social policy, fiscal policy, governmental goals, and priorities. Indeed, Al Aswad proficiently settled this book with multiple surveys, statistical analysis and international measures with the enclosure of discrete and allied analysis of indicators of happiness and key drivers for those indicators among chosen six countries in MENA region, which ultimately appeal scholars, intellectuals and policymakers.

Al Aswad congregated shreds of evidence from numerous global level expert organizations, such as the United Nations, Human Development Index, Pew Research Center, World Value Survey, Global Competitiveness Index, UNESCO, Institute for Economics and Peace and Social Progress Index. Therefore, these authenticated organization's data certify the results shown by this book and creates its importance at the international level.

Moreover, the book provides a historical context of the region, specifically, six countries that are chosen. It describes the level of happiness in history, quality of life in the past years, modern era as well as the medieval era and the development of humans in the region. Al Aswad also mentioned the issues of the region since 1950 which includes external and internal challenges such as Israel-Palestine clashes, the war of Syria and Yemen and engrossment of Gulf in the war, impacts of Da'ish and Al-Qaida, impacts of the financial crisis, spring of 2011, political and social issues. Furthermore, he also described that the above challenges have gravely affected the happiness and well-being of people in the region. Almost half of the Muslim population of the region believes that the West and US policies have a substantial role in the deficiency of the region's prosperity, well-being, happiness, the downfall of economy and development. These beliefs also supported by Pew Research Center in 2011. Moreover, the lagging behind of region also caused by military expenditures in wars and controlling of other nonstate actors such as Al-Qaida, IS and other merriments.

In the second half of the book key indicators of happiness such as education, life quality, income, freedom, religious autonomy, etc. are discussed in detail as a separate analysis and comparative analysis of six of each country, its historical context, and steps of human's development in the region. Moreover, Al Aswad gives a multicultural, multieconomical and multidisciplinary analysis of the region by focusing on the happiness of people. Furthermore, he makes his book more important by giving similarity and differences analysis in the region based on key drivers and indicators of happiness. The author's focus is during the writing of the book is policymaking which focuses on the happiness of people which attracts policymakers of the region and they will have a better understanding of policymaking through this book.

In conclusion, it is still unanswered that happiness is good or not good. Happiness is a variable that varies from person to person (Frey and Stutzer 2000). The ultimate happiness is the satisfaction of the person. Governments strict the policies for people even the purpose of government is to provide happiness to all. But if the ones' happiness that is linked with the sadist, the racist, the shallow and vulgar than it is sure that the other person's happiness affected badly. Therefore, the policies of governments limit the rights of people.

Indeed, this book is complete in its context and the contribution of the author has significant importance but unfortunately, the book is based on only six countries from 21 countries of the MENA region. Fifteen countries are ignored, therefore, the results of the book sufficiently show the condition of that chosen six countries and other countries may have different cultures, societies, and operating systems like communism, socialism, and capitalism. Therefore, the scholars of the region will have the open opportunity and straight future direction to enhance the knowledge in this field.

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