

BOOK REVIEWS

The Universal Enemy: Jihad, Empire, and the Challenge of Solidarity. Darryl Li (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020). Pp. 364. \$30.00 paper. ISBN: 9780804792370

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Since at least the advent of the Global War on Terror, the so-called foreign fighter has been portrayed as a maligned and incomprehensible figure. Darryl Li's *The Universal Enemy* seeks to disrupt, and offer an alternative to, this dominant narrative. The titular "Universal Enemy" is often represented as an inscrutable antagonist of all humanity whose willingness to fight in "other people's wars" in the name of jihad renders them incomprehensible. The combination of unauthorized mobility, solidarity that transcends the nation-state, Islamic piety, and extra-state force troubles assumptions foundational to the contemporary global order: first, the nation-state's monopoly on violence and second, the trinity between state, territory, and people central to ideologies and practices of nationalism.

The book is an ethnography of foreign Muslims who participated in the war in Bosnia after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Inverting the trope of the universal enemy, Li analyzes jihad as an Islamist project aimed at all humanity. In doing so, he seeks to move away from an analysis of jihadism as an analytic category in itself to instead consider it as a form of universalism that, at times, comes into conflict, contact, or cooperation with other universalist projects, specifically The Non-Aligned Movement, United Nations Peacekeeping, and the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Li argues for an understanding of jihad that is located in particular places, moments, relations, institutions, and personal experiences and in doing so, he writes against the "foreign fighter" as an aberrant figure to instead compellingly illustrate the lived realities, relations, and journeys that are often occluded from portrayals of jihad.

The protagonists of *The Universal Enemy* are among the thousands of foreign-born Muslims who fought, worked, and provided aid in Bosnia during the Wars of Yugoslav Secession in the 1990s. Li primarily focuses on men who joined the Katiba, a unit that operated in the name of jihad but served under the army of the nation-state of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The foreign fighters, referred to as *anşār*, had diverse nationalities, class backgrounds, life experiences, and orientations to Islam and traveled myriad routes to end up in the Katiba. By the war's end, some had been martyred (in a fascinating section, Li takes us to cemeteries where kin and communities continue to contest the meaning of jihad through practices of memorialization) while others returned home. Still others received citizenship from the Bosnian state because of their military service, married local women, and stayed, only to have their citizenship revoked and face the threat of detention and deportation as the reaches of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) recast them from fighters in solidarity with co-religionists to dangerous, threatening subjects.

The book draws on fieldwork in Bosnia and ten other countries from 2006–18. Li's narrative spools out across time, from repeated conversations with 28 self-described mujahidin who reminisced about their time in the war and shared their lives as ex-fighters. Li travels across space as well—for example following ex-mujahidin to Egypt or immigration detention in Bosnia. He also follows his interlocutors across multiple media, finding them in surveillance materials or army records collected by the UN war crimes tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia, or listening for mention of them by other mujahidin. One of the remarkable achievements of this approach is that the reader gets a sense of the deep and complicated relationships forged among the mujahidin, as protagonists appear and reappear in narratives, written accounts, and at different points in Li's fieldwork. One also gets an unsettling glimpse into what it might be like to be subject to the full surveillance regime of the GWOT. Perhaps it would have strengthened the text to more critically and reflexively read these different archives against one another, offering a

clearer sense of what is entailed ethically, politically, and empirically by bringing mujahidin accounts into the same frame as the tools and narratives of empire.

The Universal Enemy is described as an ethnographic-history as it focuses primarily on the recent past and the ways that this past has reverberated into, and been reconfigured by, the present. If the book is part history and part ethnography, the hyphenation continues as Li is both anthropologist and lawyer, training that is visible in moments such as his reading of the Supreme Court cases about *habeus corpus* rights at Guantánamo Bay, the denaturalization of ex-mujahidin who had become Bosnian citizens, or European Court of Human Rights rulings on the lawfulness of detaining and deporting ex-mujahidin. At times, Li's legal training facilitates his involvement beyond that of an observer or interlocutor, such as when he works to prepare *amicus curiae* briefs when one mujahid sought to challenge his denaturalization through the courts. Li forthrightly wrestles with the ethical possibilities and challenges of his position as anthropologist-lawyer and his practice of ethnographic lawyering. However, it seems clear that in this particular study—where, as Li notes, the GWOT relies on legal processes as much or more than extra-judicial practices—lawyering both shapes what he can see and share while also being the condition of possibility for this highly original book project.

The book itself is structured in two parts hyphenated with an interlude. The first half focuses more closely on the jihad in Bosnia as a particular universalism. A recurring theme in this section is how mujahidin sought to manage difference; by necessity, they had to forge bonds beyond race, nation, and language and Li shows how they did so through kinship, community, language, and the cultivation of *akhlaq*, or virtues. While highly specific and localized, the text does not fail to note similarities and material connections between jihad in Bosnia and other locations. Indeed, Li carefully traces connections between people, places, and texts throughout. The second half of the book, however, is where these connections and collisions really shine as Li devotes the last chapters to articulations between the jihad and three other universalist projects with which it uneasily cohabitates on Bosnian territory and beyond: The Non-Aligned Movement, UN Peace Keeping, and the Global War on Terror (GWOT).

Each of these three chapters manages to simultaneously complicate our understanding of both jihad and the universalism with which it is juxtaposed. The chapter on the Non-Aligned Movement powerfully illustrates two crucial themes that traverse the book: how jihad builds on and engenders different forms of mobility and how processes of racialization, among other forms of difference, are made and remade through these ephemeral universalisms. If Non-Alignment was a state-led universalist project that spanned decades, Li shows how it also transformed lives across borders—leading to new encounters, experiences, and relations. Li troubles the “foreign” in foreign fighter by illustrating how some men who had initially migrated to Yugoslavia from countries such as Egypt and Syria as foreign students under the auspices of Non-Alignment would years later either join the jihad or try to differentiate themselves from it, unsuccessfully, as they found themselves newly racialized as mujahidin in a political landscape that no longer held space for difference beyond national identity. Questions of racialization and mobility also run through the chapters on UN Peacekeeping and the GWOT, reaching their most chilling conclusion in the final chapter on the GWOT, where what Li describes as a global network of “carceral circulation” depends on separating local Muslims from foreign ones. The ex-mujahidin, firmly placed in the latter category, are de-naturalized, surveilled, hunted, detained, and deported. It's a heartbreaking end to a powerful book, one that demands a reckoning with the violence of universalism.

In *The Universal Enemy*, Li takes as his primary foil not so much anthropology or Middle East studies, but security studies, in particular, terrorism studies, which in the aftermath of 11 September 2001, has developed into a veritable industry for explaining, classifying, and enumerating what Li calls the “rootless Muslim threat.” If this perhaps dominant view is easy to critique, Li also raises objections to the liberal response to such scholarship, which he argues seems caught in providing examples of either “good Muslims” or “everyday Muslims” as a means to counter depictions of Muslims as threatening. By reading jihad in terms of universalism, Li seeks to build a theoretical frame that allows for the consideration of both Islam and violence without reducing one to the other. Li takes the horizons of the mujahidin project seriously, while neither minimizing nor romanticizing the challenges it poses to US empire.

This is an important and singular book, one that can be recommended to anyone interested in jihad, Bosnia, the GWOT, race and difference in Europe, or universalism. It would be appropriate for both undergraduate and graduate classes related to these topics although some supplemental information

about the Yugoslav Wars would be welcome. Li's prose is clear and compelling throughout, drawing one into the issues and people he describes. Midway through the text, Li writes that "if universalisms can be approached as lived projects—and not simply as civilizations or ideologies writ large—then they must emerge from somewhere tangible and be apprehended through the experiences of those enmeshed in them" (p. 152). *The Universal Enemy* succeeds in illuminating these lived projects and enmeshments and making clear why, and how, they matter for us all.

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Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison. Ahmet Kuru (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Pp. 316. \$34.99 paper. ISBN: 9781108409476

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In this timely and thoughtful book, Ahmet Kuru provides us with a panoramic survey of key historical and political developments in the pre-modern Islamic world that helps set the stage for a reckoning with its present. Based on his survey, he isolates specific factors that have resulted in what the author describes as three persistent problems in the contemporary Muslim-majority world: the crystallization of a culture of political authoritarianism; onset of endemic violence; and, a situation of chronic economic underdevelopment. Kuru dismisses from the outset two tendencies in some quarters to explain the origins of these problems. One attributes them to Islam that is invoked as a reified concept in such discourses; the other to Western colonial occupation of a broad swath of the Muslim-majority world starting in the 19th century.

Kuru says that the reality is far more complex and that neither of these explanations can account for the current situation. Instead, he says, one should focus on a critical pre-modern development—the formation of the 'ulama'-state alliance starting in the 11th century—that in large measure contributed to the onset of these problems. The author sets out to prove his thesis by charting a historical course from the early centuries of the Islamic period to the 11th century and beyond. This allows him to trace vibrant periods of cultural, intellectual, and economic flourishing in the early centuries that he attributes to the non-interference of the state in such activities and the independence of the learned scholarly elite from the government. All this began to change in the 11th century, according to our author, when the 'ulama' began to increasingly consort with the rulers. The alliance that sprung up between them ultimately proved to be quite stultifying and produced the kind of top-down political control that promotes authoritarianism. The loss of the 'ulama's traditional role as a non-governmental group that could lobby for the welfare of the people as honest, independent brokers has proved to be disastrous, the effects of which are still with us today.

With regard to what appears as endemic violence in Muslim-majority societies, Kuru offers a nuanced analysis that takes into consideration specific historical and political factors. His position is markedly different from that of certain Western academics, such as Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, and secular Muslim critics, such as Adonis of Syria, who have pointed to what they understand to be a violent essence within Islam that predisposes Muslims to violence. Kuru challenges this essentialist position by pointing to the diversity of views among pre-modern Muslim scholars on what constituted legitimate violence and the conditions under which violence becomes permissible. The larger point that the author makes is that religious texts are multivalent—how readers choose to read them is highly contingent on their worldview and the specificities of their life circumstances. In Kuru's opinion, it will be difficult to curtail violent activities unless a credible learned class of scholars mounts a searing critique of militant interpretations and challenges their legitimacy. But, he laments, given the 'ulama'-state alliance, no such scholarly class who can speak with such credibility and moral authority has emerged or is currently visible.