

On the third topic of economic development, Kuru observes that the Islamic world began to lag behind European societies due to increasing political authoritarianism from the 11th century onward. This development hobbled a vibrant merchant class and prevented the rise of a bourgeoisie that could function independently of the ruling elite. In the modern period, similar problems are being replicated within rentier economies that help prolong the dominance of authoritarian political and religious elites.


The picture is, therefore, rather dismal. So how to break out of this morass? The solution is quite obvious to Kuru—the ‘ulama’-state alliance has to end. A new class of intellectuals and scholars has to emerge that can present new ideas free of state interference and who can speak truth to power, as they were entrusted to do in the past.

The author’s overall analysis provides a helpful *longue-durée* perspective on today’s problems in the Muslim-majority world. But Kuru does not tell us how this solution can be achieved when one of the main reasons for the longevity of certain authoritarian regimes in the Muslim-majority world is that they are being shored up by the West. The burning, unaddressed question remains: how do Muslim-majority societies win deliverance from outside interference and the machinations of others who would use them as pawns in their own power plays? In her recent book *How the West Stole Democracy from the Arabs* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2020), Elizabeth Thompson painstakingly documents how Britain and France ruthlessly aborted the rise of a pro-democracy movement in Syria in the post-World War I period because it was politically inconvenient, thereby setting in motion illiberal currents that continue to destabilize the region. Her analysis is a chilling augury for the present—there is no doubt that for the foreseeable future, the political aspirations of the populations of the Middle East will continue to be held hostage by global power dynamics and the ability of these populations to chart their own destiny will continue to be thwarted.

Kuru’s concluding comment that Muslims should establish competitive and meritocratic systems in order to solve the problems of violence, authoritarianism, and underdevelopment is all well and good. But one is tempted to ask: are these systems also not required to be moral, just, and ethical? Here I am reminded of the views of Wael Hallaq articulated in his book *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics and Modernity’s Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014) that the modern nation-state project as it developed in the West has scant regard for moral and ethical concerns because of its exclusive focus on political and utilitarian objectives. The resurgence of blatant nativism, virulent racism, and religious bigotry that have allowed authoritarian ideas to gain ascendancy in a significant number of Western countries today appear to lend credence to Hallaq’s perspectives. Furthermore, environmental degradation spearheaded by the industrialized countries threatens to render the earth uninhabitable within this century. Might the guidance of a revitalized, non-state affiliated ‘ulama’, who are capable of marshalling their moral imagination, allow the Muslim-majority world to rethink perhaps what flourishing societies in the 21st century could look like without succumbing to the costly missteps of liberal modernity? Kuru’s analysis persuades that that would be an experiment worth undertaking—should it be allowed to get underway.

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The Caravan: Abdallah Azzam and the Rise of Global Jihad. Thomas Hegghammer (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020). Pp. 719. \$34.99 cloth. ISBN: 9780521765954

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Already in life, ‘Abdallah ‘Azzam was a legend: an ascetic “cleric with balls” (p. 500) whose words and actions aligned and who “spoke truth to power” (p. 480). No wonder that his untimely death in a bomb

blast in Peshawar in 1989 (aka “the biggest murder mystery in the history of jihadism” [p. 436]) only added even more hagiographic layers. Since then, ‘Azzam has been turned into an icon of jihadi “pop culture” with a “brand value and level of recognizability comparable to that of Che Guevara on the political left” (p. 466). Thomas Hegghammer, however, is far from star-struck. *The Caravan* is a careful, impressive, and comprehensive work that drills deep into ‘Azzam’s biography. This pioneering book delineates how he became the founder of the so-called Services Bureau (*Maktab al-Khidamāt*) who through this initiative greatly facilitated the travel of Arab foreign fighters to Pakistan and (sometimes) onward to join the jihad in Afghanistan. Six out of eighteen chapters deal with ‘Azzam’s early life in the West Bank, his contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Palestinian Fedayeen movement, and his intellectual formation in Damascus and at al-Azhar, where he completed a doctorate in Islamic legal theory (p. 76). By 1977, the refugee of the 1967 war seemed to have made it in Jordan: ‘Azzam had a large family and a house, was a charismatic and admired university teacher (pp. 80–87) and a senior figure in the Brotherhood who traveled internationally (p. 97). Yet, bitter internal disagreements put his career in disarray and led to his expulsion from Jordan. In the fall of 1980, ‘Azzam found himself in Saudi Arabia, broke and somewhat adrift. His life took a new direction when he was able to climb on the Saudi-sponsored “pan-Islamic” bandwagon, which according to Hegghammer had been accelerating from the 1960s due to “a cluster of religious institutions in Western Saudi Arabia,” such as the Muslim World League. ‘Azzam benefitted from an exchange program between King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz University, the Saudi institution where he was teaching at the time, and the newly established Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan (pp. 106–8). His new home in Pakistan’s capital brought ‘Azzam much closer to where the jihadi action was. From 1982, ‘Azzam’s most productive period as writer, recruiter, and ideologue began, first as a part-time jihadi who only visited Peshawar on the weekends, then full-time starting in 1986. Until his death, he wrote several jihadi classics, such as *Signs of the Merciful in the Afghan Jihad* (1983) and *Join the Caravan* (1987). Palestine and the “liberation of Jerusalem” remained on ‘Azzam’s mind throughout his life. With the battlefield against Israel inaccessible due to neighboring Arab states preventing fighters “from even getting within striking distance,” Afghanistan had become the ultimate opportunity for boosting Muslim morale and establishing an exemplary Islamic state (p. 25–26).

In narrating this fascinating and untold story, Hegghammer draws on a wide range of interviews and primary Arabic sources to dispel popular falsehoods, such as that the United States trained the Afghan Arabs (pp. 182–4), that the Saudi government helped to create al-Qa’ida (p. 416), and that the Arab foreign fighters made a significant military difference in Afghanistan (p. 365). He emphasizes that until 1984 no systematic recruitment scheme for foreign fighters was in place (p. 166). The Afghan Mujahidin made it clear that they needed money, not Arab volunteers. The Services Bureau was thus an organization with a broad portfolio which covered, for instance, schools, logistics into Afghanistan, and aid (pp. 217–238). When significantly more Arabs arrived later (up to 7,000 until 1989 in Hegghammer’s estimate), the Bureau struggled to offer them actual weapons training. This was one of the primary reasons why Usama Bin Laden tried to build his own training facilities, which eventually led to the establishment of al-Qa’ida (pp. 331–38). What emerges from Hegghammer’s meticulous and well-sourced account is that ‘Azzam was neither an effective military man nor a particularly talented manager. He was, however, a public relations genius. The Arabic *al-Jihad* magazine, published by the Bureau, was widely read and distributed on a global scale. ‘Azzam also had a major impact on jihadi thought by advancing the effective argument that “jihad is indeed for the defence of territory, but governments have no say in who should participate” (p. 302). As Hegghammer shows, he was a rather inclusive and conflict-averse figure who denounced factionalism and focused on shared threats against the Muslim community (*umma*). His emotional speeches lauded the virtues of the “homo jihadicus” lifestyle (pp. 291–94) while remaining unspecific on many important details. This vagueness partly explains the broad and unique appeal ‘Azzam still enjoys “across the entire spectrum of militant Islamist groups” (p. 468). At the same time, this hands-off approach came with a steep price: Hegghammer argues that ‘Azzam’s failure to put into place any governance structures for his advocated “privatization” of jihad opened “a Pandora’s box of militancy that could not be controlled, precisely because it was reared on rejection of authority” (p. 306).

One of Hegghammer’s most important arguments is that the mentioned “pan-Islamist movement,” tacitly supported by the Saudis, provides the “missing link between the inward-looking forms of

Islamism of the 1950s and 1960s and the outward-oriented ones of the 1980s and 1990s” (p. 496–97). If Arab Islamists had not been excluded from local politics, if ‘Azzam had not enticed so many to come to Afghanistan, this “most transnational rebel movement in modern history” would not have developed a life of its own and gone global (p. 2). In this discussion, the author brilliantly demonstrates the extent of ‘Azzam’s influence. Yet, given how much he remained a religious scholar at heart until the end, ‘Azzam’s ideas and oeuvre play a rather subordinated role in the book overall. Relevant chapters provide more of a brief summary than a comparative analysis of, say, ‘Azzam’s “geopolitics” (p. 141). Additionally, there seem to be two silences in particular that warrant more investigation. For one, the example of Iran and Shi‘i ideological input lingers in the background but is seldomly explored in more depth by Hegghammer (pp. 99–100, p. 315, pp. 344–45). Second, the Arabs in the author’s narrative appear to have virtually no interaction with Pakistani Islamists, even though, for instance, the Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami sent substantially more volunteers inside Afghanistan (p. 203) and covered the war extensively in its Urdu publications.

Since Hegghammer is forced to cut through a great deal of unreliable information and mythmaking, he occasionally gets carried away with trying to set the story really straight. One example is when he criticizes existing scholarship for misinterpreting documents and claiming that al-Qa‘ida was founded in August 1988 when this must have happened “any time between August 1987 and July 1988” (pp. 353–54). However, this does not mean that the book is only recommended for those with a deep fascination for the minutiae of modern jihadism. Quite the contrary: Hegghammer tells a gripping, authoritative story about foreign fighters, their motivations, and their conflicts which succeeds in getting as close to his male (and occasional female) protagonists as historically possible.

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Decadent Orientalisms: The Decay of Colonial Modernity. David Fieni (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020). Pp. 224. \$110.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780823286409

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David Fieni’s sophisticated and cogently argued *Decadent Orientalisms* examines a selection of literary texts through the lens of Orientalism, defined as “a style of having power” that equates progress with “the Occident” and decline with “the Orient.” Fieni associates decadence with Orientalism’s conception of the “biological degeneration, social backwardness, philological stuntedness, and historical belatedness” of Arabs and Muslims during “colonial modernity” (p. 71). Noting that these groups continue to be represented today in “the West” as irrational, unscientific, and incapable of living in secular society, Fieni traces how France’s colonial mission left a legacy of anti-Semitism in the Arab world (p. 98), and how the French empire “continue[d] to engineer and reengineer the Semitic object for its own nationalist purposes” (p. 51). He demonstrates how closely Orientalism is linked to the Algerian Civil War, the War on Terror, and contemporary debates on “anti-Jewish anti-Semitism” and Islamophobia. The trope of the decadent Semite who is stagnant yet inherently degenerate has been recycled and renewed over time in the West. Arabs have rejected the trope and denounced, in turn, European and American decadence.

Divided into two parts, the book focuses on late 19th and early 20th century French and Middle Eastern writers and then on North African writers from the 1970s to 2010. Fieni chooses to emulate Edward Said’s “contrapuntal critique,” considering Western discourses of Eastern decline and Arab and Islamic responses. Chapter 1 investigates the “anti-Semitic philosophy of history” of French philologist Ernest Renan, the purveyor of enduring Orientalist tropes who was excoriated by Said. The concept