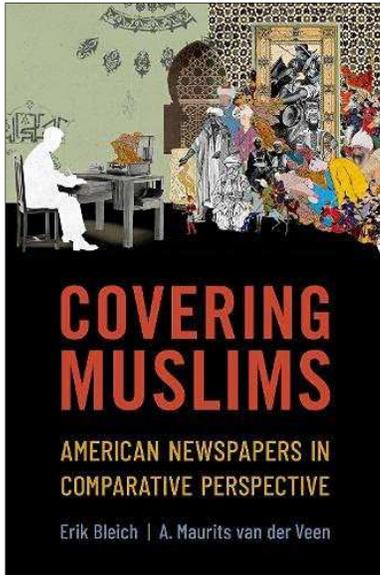


Brief Reviews, Summer 2022



Covering Muslims: American Newspapers in Comparative Perspective. By Erik Bleich and A. Maurits van der Veen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. 198 pp. \$99 (\$29.95, paper).

The authors, both professors at U.S. universities, open this book with an open, innocent question: “Is the media’s coverage of Muslims and Islam as negative as critics claim?” They then immediately show their bias by acknowledging,

The title of our book, *Covering Muslims*, is a conscious echo of Edward Said’s *Covering Islam*, which first appeared in 1981. ... Forty years later, our quantitative analyses do little to challenge Said’s conclusions, underscoring the longstanding nature of this problem.

Having started out with a predetermined conclusion, Bleich and van der Veen proceed to prove that conclusion by relying on computers to crunch “all 256,963 articles that mention Muslims or Islam in 17 national and regional US newspapers over a 21-year period” from January 1996 to December 2016. They first “demonstrate precisely how negative [mentions of Muslims or Islam] are compared to the average newspaper article,” then “carry out four types of comparison: across groups, across time, across countries, and across topics” by looking at nearly another one and a half million articles dealing with related topics.

The authors admit, “When working with more than a million articles, it is impossible for a researcher to read even a small fraction of them” and acknowledge their heavy reliance on computer-assisted topic modeling algorithms never revealed to the reader except cursorily in an appendix. Of course, as computer scientists have long observed, garbage in, garbage out; unless we know what the machines were programmed to do, how can we put credence in the results?

But Bleich and van der Veen’s more profound problem has nothing to do with methodology. It concerns their numbing blindness to the fact that negative coverage of Muslims and Islam results not from some innate prejudice but from two monumental facts: fourteen centuries of hostile Muslim-Christian relations in the background and an epidemic of Islam-based violence, cultural imperialism, and religious supremacism that every non-Muslim adult alive today has experienced. Until the professors recognize this blazing reality, all their computer programs have no value and can safely be ignored as garbage out.

Daniel Pipes

The End of Two Illusions: Islam after the West. By Hamid Dabashi. Oakland: University of California Press, 2022. 333 pp. \$29.95.

Your reviewer approached this book with some wariness, having [previously](#) been referred to by the author as “an infamous charlatan.” Sure enough, deploying his eccentrically florid version of English, the Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University has this to say about me in *The End of Two Illusions*:

With Bernard Lewis, Orientalism has officially exited the realm of colonial reason and entered the twilight zone of its unreality—it is now positively delusional, just like “the West” it defends and its habitual hobby horse of “civilization,” which it takes out of the closet for yet another fantasy ride. In this hallucinatory project, Bernard Lewis is aided by an even sorrier gang of minions like Daniel Pipes on one side and self-loathing native informants like Fouad Ajami on the other.

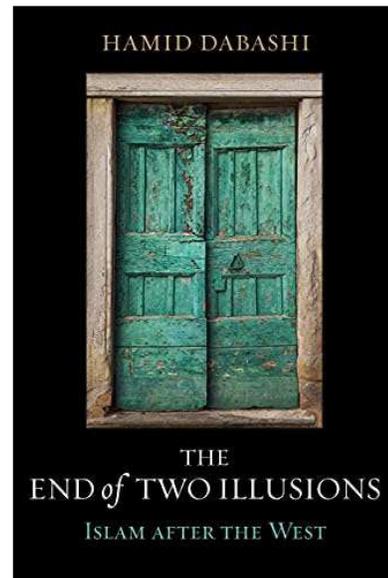
Lewis, Ajami, and I are riding a habitual, hallucinatory hobby horse? What is he talking about?

But, getting serious, Dabashi devotes his volume to answering a question:

Whence this hatred, wherefore this bizarre fixation with making Muslims, just for the accident of being Muslims, the enemy of reason, sanity, and civilization?

His reply:

Underlying all such antipathy is the unexamined presumption of an



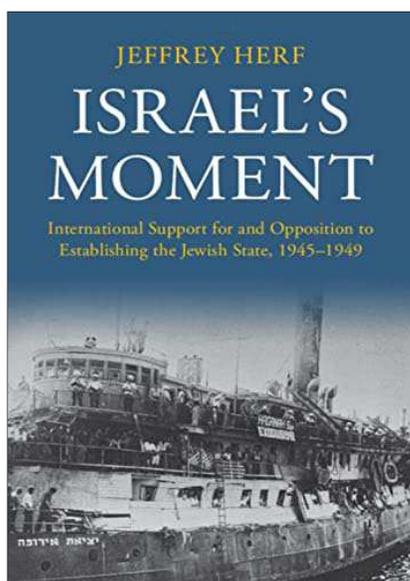
innate hostility between “Islam” and “the West”—two vast abstractions with frightening powers of persuasion. ... This presumed opposition between “Islam” and “the West” corresponds to a particular period of globalized capital when its innate and debilitating contradictions are in need of a fictive center and a global periphery cast as culturally inferior to “the West”—ready for abuse, plunder, and domination.

He fingers the enemy:

The works of Huntington, together with those of Francis Fukuyama, Bernard Lewis, and Alan Bloom, demonstrate a collective fear of losing the stronghold of white Christian supremacy.

Sound familiar? It should, as it is nothing but warmed-over and updated Edward Said. Take it from this minion of Bernard Lewis: if you wish to read such trash, read the original and skip the work of his sorry minion Dabashi.

Daniel Pipes



Israel's Moment: International Support for and Opposition to Establishing the Jewish State, 1945-1949. By Jeffrey Herf. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 500 pp. \$39.99.

In an era when book after book by credentialed frauds flush with jargon and making spurious claims cross this reviewer's transom, Herf's study is a relief: true scholarship, with extensive research, clear prose, and sensible, convincing arguments.

A distinguished university professor in history at the University of Maryland, Herf has studied in archival detail the context in which the State of Israel was born, focusing especially on the "moment" of May 1947 to early 1949. He offers four core conclusions about this extended process, three of them simple and one complex: (1) The Soviet Union had far more importance than the United States. (2) U.S. officialdom opposed Israel with a fervency and extent not hitherto realized. (3) The Left supported the creation of Israel far more than the Right. In support of this last point, himself a liberal supporter of Israel, and therefore somewhat besieged in the university

environment, Herf's delight nearly sings in chapter 3, "American Liberals and Leftists Support Zionist Aspirations, 1945-1947."

His fourth conclusion connects Israel to larger historical forces:

the passions of two eras—World War II and the Holocaust, and the Cold War, one just past and another just beginning—shaped Israel's Moment. The controversies during this period reflected the lingering passions of the former and the new-found zeal of the latter.

In other words, Israel's coming into existence served as a hinge event and, as a result, had outsized importance. *Israel's Moment*, therefore, goes beyond the Middle East to explore "the transition from World War II to the Cold War." Not only did remarkable and fleeting circumstances combine to enable an unlikely Zionist triumph, but those circumstances look unlikely and exotic 70-plus years later.

Indeed, Herf's account anticipates extreme reversals in policy vis-à-vis Israel; in its early years, it was the Soviet Union, France, and the United States; currently, similar processes can be seen in India, the United Arab Emirates, and Sweden. For reasons idealistic and practical, he confirms how championing or resisting Israel's existence and welfare touch the very deepest nerves of international politics.

Daniel Pipes

Jihadism in Europe: European Youth and the New Caliphate. By Farhad Khosrokhavar. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 424 pp. \$99 (\$35, paper).

Khosrokhavar, an Iranian-French sociologist and retired professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris,

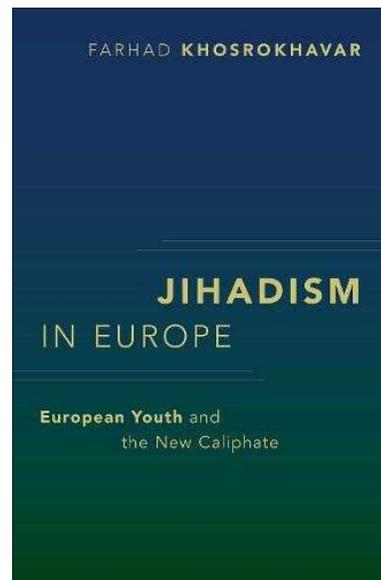
has developed a “sociology of jihadism” to explain why so many Muslims in Europe become radicalized and join jihadist movements. He argues that “contempt and humiliation” are at the heart of the radicalization of Muslim youth and that their desire to “humiliate” native Europeans has become an “irresistible impulse.”

Khosrokhavar finds that this societal alienation—marked by a “loss of meaning” in secular society and a “lack of hope” in the future—prompted more than six thousand European Muslims to travel to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State. Their “aspiration to a utopia” and their “frustration to everyday life in Europe” coupled with “urban and family problems” motivated them to join the caliphate, which, according to Khosrokhavar, “raised the hope of ending the humiliation” caused by “the subaltern position of Muslim migrants in Europe.” In Khosrokhavar’s words,

Those who suffered economic marginalization and social stigma developed an unrelenting sense of hatred toward society and its standards. In 2013-2014, the newborn state transformed rancor and hate into a new hope, that of a new Muslim society in the Middle East where Muslims from all over the world could achieve recognition and become full-fledged citizens, in contrast to Europe.

Khosrokhavar also faults aspects of Muslim culture and society in an insightful, in-depth analysis of the “subcultures of humiliation and counter-humiliation” among European Muslims.

In Europe, these young people feel ashamed of their non-European roots. Instead of being proud of their origins in order to gain self-confidence and become future



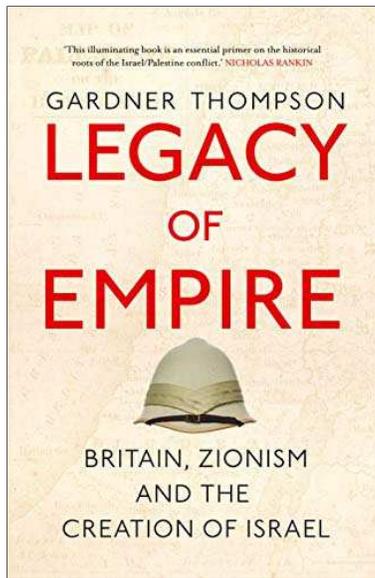
citizens ready to access the middle classes, they develop a sense of unworthiness that embitters them from the very beginning.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the book delves into the crisis of Muslim families in Europe, showing how an increasingly feminized European culture has undermined the father’s traditional authority, leading to “headless patriarchal families.”

The young person who radicalizes often declares that he recognizes no other authority than God and denies his father’s legitimacy, God’s representative in the person of the caliph or the charismatic recruiter replacing the fallen father.

Overall, Khosrokhavar offers insights into the roots of Islamic radicalization among European Muslims, but he unfairly blames European society as the principle cause. In fact, of course, the primary sources of Islamic radicalization lie in the foundational texts of Islam—the Qur’an, Sunna, and Hadith.

Soeren Kern
Gatestone Institute



Legacy of Empire: Britain, Zionism and the Creation of Israel. By Gardner Thompson. London: Saqi, 2019. 366 pp. £20.

A haughty and persistent sneer dominates Thompson’s book, starting with the very title, which turns Zionists into bit actors in their own drama. Thompson’s approach turns a serious and deep topic into a puerile copybook exercise. This self-described historian of British colonialism reduces Middle Eastern passions to London-based drawing-room dilettantism.

Illustrations of this unfortunate approach abound; consider some quotes from the author’s introduction:

- “The Balfour Declaration was a landmark expression of nimbyism. ... This approach did something to protect Britain and other states from politically unpopular Jewish immigration; it did nothing to recognise the rights of Palestinians in their homeland.”

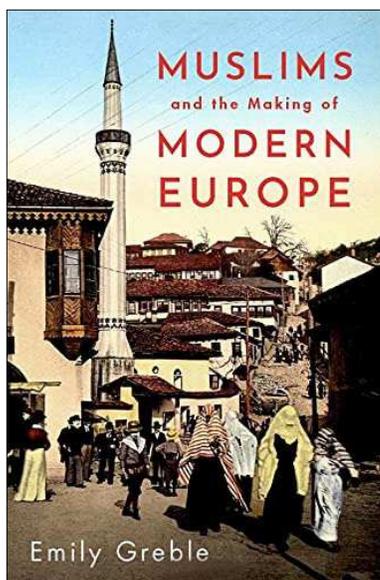
- He breezily condemns “the uncharacteristic ineptitude of decision-makers in the British government in the aftermath of the First World War” as concerns Zionism.
- He finds “caprice in [British Prime Minister] Lloyd George’s adoption of Zionism, along with a dogged refusal to grasp that it could not work.”
- Zionism he calls “only one, eccentric, answer to the Jewish Question of the late nineteenth century.”
- “Israel was—and remains—scarred by an inter-communal conflict provoked by Zionist colonization fostered by the British during an ill-judged administration of Palestine.”

As befits so condescending a book, Thompson’s pretense to originality falls predictably short. He begins with a superficial survey of the Jewish and Zionist background, then immediately goes off-track in claiming an alleged Zionist blindness to the Muslim population of Palestine, concluding with the canard that “Zionists preferred the fiction of a land without a people.”

This last error typifies Thompson’s superficiality; a smidgen of research would have turned up a 1991 article by [Adam M. Garfinkle](#) that documents how acutely aware the Zionists were of Palestine’s indigenous population and that the phrase “Palestine is a country without a people; the Jews are a people without a country” refers not to demographics but to nationhood. To take one of many examples, David Ben-Gurion wrote in 1918, “Palestine is not an empty country ... on no account must we injure the rights of its inhabitants.”

Thompson chose a rich topic; too bad he handled it wretchedly.

Daniel Pipes



Muslims and the Making of Modern Europe. By Emily Greble. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. 354 pp. \$35.

Arguing against conventional thinking, Greble asserts, “Southeastern Europe was central to the European experience of encountering Islam.” In so doing, she focuses on a small and peripheral population over about seventy years. Even granting the validity of this thesis, the grandiose title misleadingly conjures up fourteen centuries of Muslim-Christian interaction. A title like “Balkan Muslims, 1878-1949: A History of Small-Scale Complexity” would far more accurately capture the topic of her book.

But is the thesis convincing? Were the Muslims of southeastern Europe really more central to the European experience of Islam than the impact of Indians on Great Britain, Algerians on France, and Turks on Germany? In larger historical terms, did they have a greater effect than the church over fourteen centuries? Or is this the special pleading of a young scholar, an associate professor of history and Russian and East European studies at Vanderbilt University, for her

specific area of research?

Greble’s thesis comes down to a perverse interpretation of Western nationalism: “Discrimination against women, working-class men, and linguistic, confessional, and racial minorities was central to nation-building projects from the United States to Central Europe.” According to this view,

Muslims who challenged arbitrary European norms ... were cast as bandits or foreign agents, their cultures depicted as a “clash of civilizations,” their ideas critiqued as non-Western, foreign, Other.

The alleged centrality of Balkan Muslims lies in their being the first to experience the global reality that non-Muslim-majority states “prove unable to accept the existence and possibility of Muslim citizens.” One simple fact shows up the inanity of this conclusion, namely the vast, steady, and enthusiastic 60-year-long immigration of Muslims to Western countries where they became citizens.

Greble would have done better to stay away from the grand theorizing and instead have stuck to her topic, where she is a fine researcher, especially capable at turning up obscure but noteworthy stories. Maybe the second edition of her book will adopt this reviewer’s suggested title and drop the elements of Edward-Saidian pretention.

Daniel Pipes

Narrative Traditions in International Politics: Representing Turkey. By Johanna Vuorelma. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 203 pp. \$119.99.

Struck by the contrast between the stale Turkey she had read about before reaching the country and the fresh one she found on arrival, Vuorelma turned this discrepancy into a book,

where she minutely takes up this purported problem of media, political analysis, and public opinion. A more intelligible version of her title might read, “A Century of Foreigners Stereotyping Turkey.”

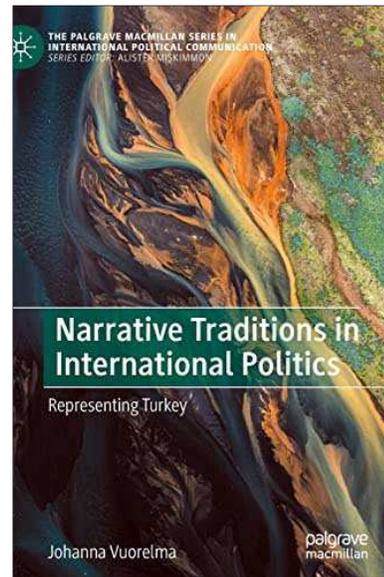
The author, a researcher at the University of Helsinki, gives her point of view away already on page 3 by citing Edward Said and then never, ever deviating from his party line. For example, the texts she relies on about Turkey “are read not only as descriptions of the international but also as descriptions of the Western self.” She takes far more interest in “the loose epistemic community of journalists, scholars, diplomats, and politicians” than in Atatürk and Erdoğan.

Vuorelma divides the era under study into five parts (to 1952, to 1991, to 2003, to 2011, and currently), but those matter less than “four narrative traditions” that she finds “already evident in the early 1900s” and still present now; this continuity “shows that the beliefs that they carry are deep-seated and enduring.” Those traditions present

Turkey as a country that (1) “we” are potentially losing, (2) is standing at a decisive crossroads, (3) is led by strongmen who embody the state, and (4) is constantly threatened by a creeping Islamisation.

Sounds insightful, no? But, in a dramatic refutation of this thesis, Matthew deTar argues in his far superior study, *Figures That Speak: The Vocabulary of Turkish Nationalism*,¹ that the continuities in Turkish history are real, not just the result of foreigners’ limited understanding. As summarized in the blurb to his book,

¹ Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2022.



If the surface of Turkish politics has changed dramatically over the decades, the vocabulary for sorting these changes remains constant: Europe, Islam, minorities, the military, the founding father [Atatürk].

Beyond her mistaken assumption, Vuorelma distorts writings in her sample to fit the four neat rubrics. As an example, take a 1994 *National Interest* article, “[Islam’s Intramural Struggle](#),” that she discusses. I happen to know it well, being its author. Vuorelma asserts, “The beliefs that feature in the ‘losing Turkey’ narrative tradition are present in Pipes’ analysis.”

But a look at my article finds quite the opposite. I present (pre-Erdoğan) Turkey as a country flush with “Muslims confident to learn from outsiders, oriented toward democracy, and ready to integrate in the world.” I portray Turkey as enjoying “a uniquely well-formulated and widely accepted philosophy of secularism” and serving as “the great success story of the Muslim world.” More, “The Turkish model threatens to undermine the Khomeinist experiment much as the Western model ultimately undermined the Soviet

experiment.” I call on the Turks “to emulate the mullahs and disseminate their own ideas to the Muslim world” and for Washington “to encourage the Turks to stand strong.” In short, I call on Turks to promote their ideas more forcefully. Where’s the “losing Turkey” theme here? Only in Vuorelma’s imagination.

Vuorelma has an ax to grind and, like too many academics, does not let petty facts get between her and the grinding stone.

Daniel Pipes

The Ottoman World: A Cultural History Reader, 1450-1700. Edited by Hakan T. Karateke and Helga Anetshofer. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021. 379 pp. \$150 (\$39.95, paper).

The editors, both on the faculty at the University of Chicago, have selected forty-six texts from a two-and-a-half-century period to provide a sourcebook on Ottoman culture, self-consciously getting away from what they call the usual “state-centric” approach to the empire. The abundance of information about political topics has, they note, made it

too easy to represent Ottoman history as one limited to battles, imperial campaigns, conquests, complex institutions, careers of notables, luxurious palaces, and the like.

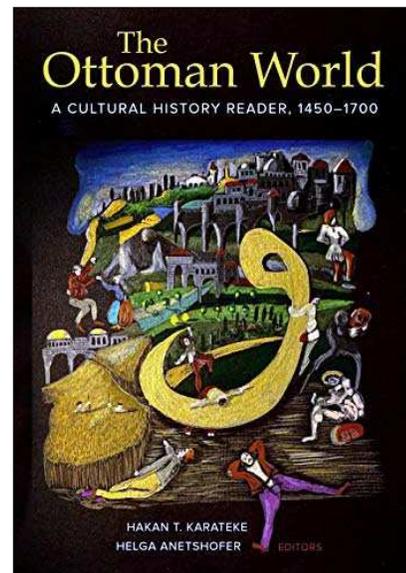
They hope the present volume, with its translations primarily from Turkish but also from Armenian, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, and Persian, offers an enticing sample of the “alternative riches” the Ottomans have to offer.

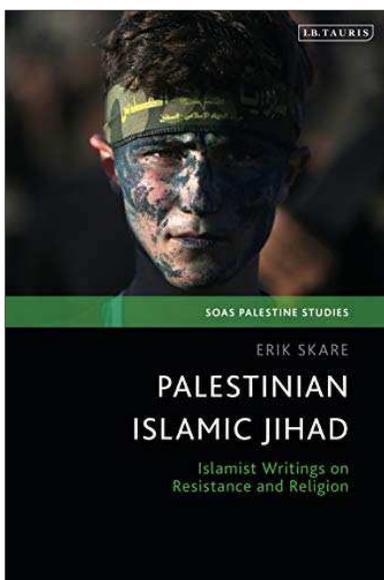
Unsurprisingly, a large percentage of the materials derive from law courts, for where

else does one find more everyday stories written down for posterity? The sections on a heretic, on children and youth, on prostitutes and pimps, on nocturnal activities, on non-Muslims, and on public health mostly derive from Islamic court records while those on Jewish converts to Islam and marriage and divorce among Jews derive from Jewish court records.

The editors have succeeded in proffering a wide range of information though anyone expecting gems of literature or storytelling will likely come away disappointed. From the first excerpt (letters from a scholar seeking more funds from his patrons) to the last (a collection of Nasreddin Hoca jokes), the quality of writing is mediocre, despite the many competent translators. Those inclined to see Ottoman culture as dull will no doubt find confirmation in this anthology. So, while *The Ottoman World* represents a valiant effort to re-balance interest in the six-hundred-year-long empire, this reviewer senses that it will, rather, bolster the “state-centric” approach.

Daniel Pipes





Palestinian Islamic Jihad: Islamist Writings on Resistance and Religion. By Erik Skare. London: I.B. Taurus, 2010. 266 pp. \$115.

Skare, a postdoctoral researcher at the Center for International Studies, Sciences Po, Paris, has assembled and translated twenty documents written by the leaders of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the anti-Israel terrorist group operating primarily out of the Gaza Strip since the group's inception in 1981.

The documents (by leaders such as Fathi Shiqaqi and Ramadan Abdallah Shallah, the group's first two secretaries general), help the reader better understand the ideology of a generally under-analyzed organization. They delve into the founding and thinking of the group, its perspectives on Islamic history and religion, its views on violence, and its relations with other Palestinian factions such as Hamas, Fatah, and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Palestinian Islamic Jihad purports to address PIJ's relationship with Tehran, currently the group's most important financial and political patron, but the book provides very little insight into these deep ties. Indeed, the

author dances around the immutable fact that PIJ today is a tool of Iran, instead insinuating that it maintains a modicum of independence. He also pretends that PIJ backed the Islamic Republic of Iran for reasons that were "not so much about theology" but because it was an ally against Israel.

Unfortunately, Skare's failings extend well beyond this. His introductory notes to each document severely undermine his work. He laments that PIJ "is all too often dismissed as Hamas' more violent and uncompromising little brother," when that precisely describes what it is. He praises PIJ leaders for framing their violent ideology through history rather than religion as if that somehow better justifies their violence. He gushes over PIJ's "refreshingly clear language" that is neither refreshing nor clear. He lauds PIJ leaders as "pragmatic," a description that hardly suits the chieftains of a violent, terrorist organization.

In short, Skare provides valuable primary texts from which one can learn much about PIJ's origins and outlook while his notes suggest that he drew too close to his research subjects—an all too-common problem in the deeply tainted field of Middle Eastern studies.

Jonathan Schanzer
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

The Politics of Persecution: Middle Eastern Christians in an Age of Empire. By Mitri Raheb. Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2021. 207 pp. \$24.99.

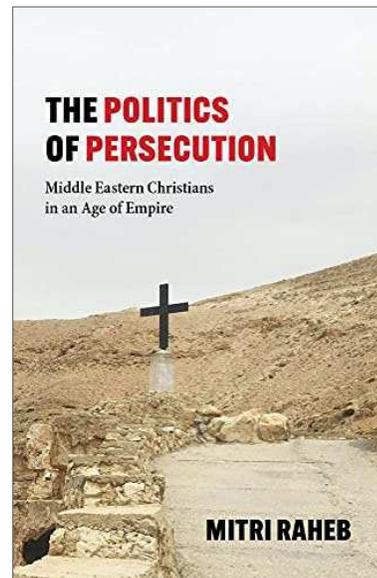
Raheb, a Lutheran clergyman and academic in Bethlehem, argues that "Christian persecution is a Western construct that says more about the West than about the Christians of the Middle East." Whatever persecution Christians may experience has little to do with Islam and is rather a byproduct of political developments that were and are almost always precipitated by Western or Israeli actions.

To make his thesis work, Raheb predictably begins his history in 1800 with the waning of Islam and the ascendancy of Europe. Christianity under Islam for the preceding twelve centuries—when it went from being the dominant faith to a tiny minority due to sporadic bouts of persecution and systemic discrimination—is otherwise presented in a rosy picture. Thus, the “persecution of Christians under the Ottomans, if any, was rare and localized.”

On the other hand, the “penetration by European powers had disastrous consequences for the region by introducing Zionism, nationalism, and colonialism.” The Mount Lebanon massacre of 1860 when Muslims butchered more than ten thousand Christians, and even the Turkish genocide of millions of Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek Christians, are presented as byproducts of European interference. Thus, “the only two cases of Christian persecution [by Muslims] in the past two centuries must be interpreted within the context of Western imperial penetration.”

Raheb avoids mentioning the obvious: While Western interference, past and present, may well have prompted and continues to prompt Muslims to massacre Christians, that is only because Muslims already see Christians as inferior infidels. Muslims massacred Christians in Mount Lebanon, during the Armenian genocide, etc., because they felt Christians were, thanks to colonial powers, becoming equals as opposed to knowing their place as second-class dhimmis within the Muslim social order as they did in the preceding millennium.

Though the European contemporary sources and eyewitnesses Raheb quotes disagree with him—always presenting the Muslim massacres of Christians as a byproduct of religious animosity—he gets around this by arguing that such Europeans did not understand the true, “political” significance of what they were reporting on—because they understood everything through an “Orientalist paradigm”:



In this paradigm, we depict an orientalist attitude of a superior and civilized Christian West that gazes at a barbaric “Orient” that is Islamic, irrational, anti-Christian, and stuck in a primitive mindset ... This discourse is part of an orientalist perception that persists in framing the Middle East as ... backward.

Clearly, Raheb, the Palestinian academic, is very much influenced by another famous Palestinian academic, Edward Said. This is especially evident in his presentation of Israel as one of the worst persecutors of Christians even though the examples he offers are sparse and pale in comparison to those furnished by Muslim-majority countries. Worse, whereas Israel’s conflict is not with Christians or Muslims but rather a territorial dispute with Arabs—and therefore furnishes the only example that truly conforms to his political thesis—he bemoans the actions of “radical Jewish groups” and “terrorists.”

Raheb boasts that

an important and unique feature of this book is that it is written by a

native Palestinian Christian theologian who has spent his entire life in the region ... As such, it provides a decolonial interpretation ... [and] allows us to expose the orientalist perception dominant in Western discourse.

But his pedigree also involves well-known drawbacks: Christians living in the Middle East tend to have a dhimmi/hostage mentality that accommodates Muslims, whereas those living abroad can speak more forthrightly.

The insistence that the persecution Christians suffer is an outcome of anything and everything except Islam—including “climate change [which] will take its toll on the Christian community”—is especially absurd.

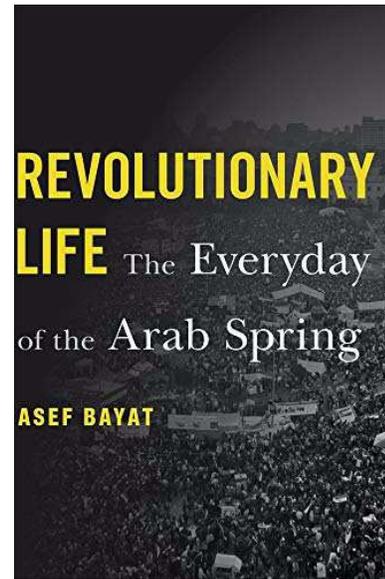
Although Raheb makes some good points—for example, that Westerners can exploit the persecution of Christians for their own agendas without actually trying to make a difference—these are overshadowed by the book’s defects. In short, *Politics of Persecution* is fatally marred by the author’s own politics.

Raymond Ibrahim

Author of *Sword and Scimitar*

Revolutionary Life: The Everyday of the Arab Spring. By Asef Bayat. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2021. 336 pp. \$35.

Revolutionary Life delves into an often overlooked aspect of the 2011 “Arab Spring” revolts: their everyday participants. Prevailing scholarship, especially concerning Egypt and Tunisia, tends to omit the masses, opting instead to focus on the structures and individuals at the top. Bayat, professor of sociology at the University of Illinois, argues that to understand the outcomes of the Arab revolts, one must first understand their grassroots. With this, his book pioneers an important topic.



The 2011 uprisings are widely perceived as a failure because real reform has hardly materialized in institutions, leadership, and policies. But Bayat describes how at the micro level—in families, schools, farms, art scenes, and popular media—change has, in fact, occurred. The spirit of the revolts led to the questioning of well-ingrained norms and to challenges to social hierarchies. Bayat observes that while this progress may not be initially obvious, it is, nonetheless, substantial.

For example, change took root in women’s lives. Despite an initial rise in violence and sexual harassment following the deposition of Mubarak, Egyptian women found their voices and the will to fight for their rights. Collectives sprang up everywhere, from Aswat Nissat, empowering women to enter politics, to Sitta al-Heita’s urban mural project, which confronts ideas of female domesticity. Divorce, removing the hijab, solo travel, involvement in government, activism, career choices, and a willingness to speak out against patriarchy were just some of the “bottom-up feminist” changes that Arab women, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, experienced.

Studying the non-elite helps understand why 2011-like events might happen again. The

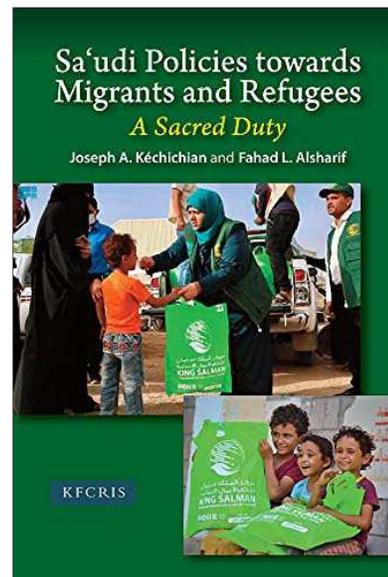
chapter on youth participation in the Arab revolutions is especially compelling. Here, Bayat distinguishes between “youth in politics” and “youth politics.” The former is how this group is traditionally depicted in analytical works: as tangential. The latter sees it as a vector of change, equipped with the right balance of independence and ideological flexibility to push revolutionary movements to fruition. Throughout the book, Bayat expands on the portmanteau “refolutions”—reform revolutions—in which movements pressure incumbent powers to reform themselves. These, he finds, result in little change at the state level but in much impact at lower levels.

By diving deeper into overlooked and marginal groups, Bayat reveals the dynamics of ordinary people disregarding individual ideals and participating in something exceptional. *Revolutionary Life* is a study of the ordinary that is anything but.

Elizabeth Pipes
New York University

Sa’udi Policies towards Migrants and Refugees: A Sacred Duty. By Joseph A. Kéchichian and Fahad L. Alsharif. Published in conjunction with the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2022. 362 pp. £60.

As the subtitle non too subtly suggests, Kéchichian and Alsharif have an apologetic mission to fulfill in this study published under the auspices of a Saudi monarchical institution. Contra the kingdom’s reputation for closed borders and parsimony, they argue it has welcomed and spent lavishly on refugees. The authors make clear that they wrote *Sa’udi Policies* to counter what they consider to be unfair criticisms, quoting many critics in a hurt tone. As one of those critics, one who has written repeatedly on this topic [since 2013](#), this



reviewer takes keen interest in seeing the counter-argument. It goes like this:

As a non-signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 follow-up Optional Protocol, Riyadh does not label refugees as such but rather as “brothers and sisters.” Due to this semantic difference, the outside world is blinded to the country’s generous and far-sighted immigration and integration policies. For example, rather than cram refugees into isolated camps to fester, the Saudi authorities sprinkle them around the country, give them education and work opportunities, naturalize them, and turn them into productive Saudi subjects. Kéchichian and Alsharif, both non-academic specialists on Saudi Arabia, assert very substantial numbers of such refugees coming from many countries, such as 500,000 Rohingyas and two and a half million Syrians.

This reviewer cannot ascertain the truth of such gigantic numbers; he can only judge their credibility. Here, things collapse due to lack of specificity. In the course of a 362-page book, the authors provide no information on the annual influx of refugees, their demographic profile, their destinations within the kingdom, their educational careers, their work charac-

teristics, their socioeconomic standing, their interactions with the native population, their relations with other immigrant communities, their engagement with the state, or anything else.

This radical absence of detail makes it difficult to believe the book's blithely asserted grand statistics. Surely, a study proving the critics wrong should devote much less space to treaties, Qur'anic quotations, and disquisitions of Islamic law, and much more to specifics of refugee life, including photographs and personal stories. Until the refugees are brought to life in a future study, skepticism of the official Saudi line as issued by Kéchichian and Alsharif remains prudent.

Daniel Pipes

