MENA diasporas in the global South, to the authors’ directives for the future of the discipline, than to demand it in this volume.

Notes

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In Wars of Terror Gabriele Marranci boldly addresses two of the greatest and profoundly troubling transnational phenomena of our times, global jihadism and its counterpart, the global ‘war on terror’. In a concise analysis and critique, this work focuses on the discourses and rhetoric that form the sullied cultural patina on both sides of this accursed coin. In this effort, Marranci deconstructs the polarizing grand narratives and highlights a troubling commonality held by opposing entities: the intent to ‘define the human’ and to civilize the Other accordingly.

Beginning with a brief account of terrorist attacks in the 1980s and 1990s, by individuals or groups who identified as Muslim, the opening chapter fixes the 9/11 attacks of 2001 as the moment when terrorism ceased to be a criminal act and became an act of war. Marranci argues that the subsequent framing of a war on terror pushes ‘some individuals to adopt a civiliser [sic] forma mentis – a particular way of thinking about, imagining, and reacting to the environment, its challenges and threats’ (p. 8). In this dynamic of fear there is no ‘Muslim and non-Muslim’, but rather humans of strong faith and sentiments towards particular ideals, who are willing to impose those ideals on others in order to protect the ‘correct kind of humans’ (ibid: orig. italics). The book thus focuses on this dynamic of fear, from which civilizational discourses and rhetoric emerge, in which the ‘other side’ are fixed as uncivilized, inhuman categories – the barbarian, the crusader, the Muslim, the Christian. Thus are the dynamics producing the Wars of Terror.

The second chapter examines the conceptual history of civilization and hadāra in Western and Islamic cultures, respectively, citing certain similarities in their intellectual trajectories. He dissects Huntington’s (1996) development of the Clash of Civilisations, by which the supposed perfection of a monolithic Greek-Judeo-Christian Western tradition is inevitably incompatible with ‘a divine plan
sanctioned in the Qur’an and Hadiths’ (p. 22). Though notoriously critiqued in academia as essentialist, Marranci acknowledges that Huntington was a pioneer in understanding the increasing relevance that culture and religion would have after the collapse of communism. However, it is through the cultural production of values that Marranci moves the debate from a supposed clash between abstract and monolithic civilisations to one between the human agency of the civilizers on both sides.

The book thus moves into the discursive realm of the various labels and stigmas imposed internally upon the in-group, and externally against the out-group. Muslims, as an out-group, are incapable of modernization, democracy or human rights, and Islam is deterministic and coercive (Chapter 3). Conversely, as the out-group, the West has become materialistic, humanistic and immoral, excluding religion from the public sphere (Chapter 4). Notably, in both cases, the in-group narrative sees their own society as being in decline and often promulgates conspiracy theories to explain this decline. Marranci’s discussion of conspiracy theories circulating amongst Muslim civilizers, laden with Occidentalist rhetoric in which the West is ‘jahiliyya’ – ignorant or indecent – is a particularly important insight for those trying to understand this conflict.

Chapters 5 and 6 pivot on civilizers’ struggles over women’s’ bodies and on the use of instrumental violence. Marranci rightly asserts that, given the ubiquity of patriarchy, the position and role of women in society often serves as a litmus test for civilizers everywhere. The first comparison made here is the (literally) restricted role of women in Islamic public spheres on one hand, and the objectification and disinterest in women’s honour on the other. This is followed by contestations over the relative brutalities of Western drone warfare and jihadi terrorist attacks. With this, Marranci highlights the narratives of young male Muslims who see Western nations turning their vastly superior military technologies against a people poorly equipped to defend themselves. This narrative, the author points out, is worthy of a Hollywood epic, and comes complete with deep emotional identification with the collective and the underdog’s heroic struggle for justice against a powerful foe.

_Wars of Terror_ is not an ethnography in the classic sense of thick description of the intimate lives of others in a given place and time. Given the transnational breadth and complexity of such wars, one wonders how a single ethnographic account could approach the subject. Instead, Marranci draws upon his years of research and his prolific publication record on the subject of Islam and terrorism to draw out his concluding thesis of a ‘a clash among opposing, but similar, ways of thinking’ (p. 129). The book is, however, most certainly anthropological in its focus on human experience, the production of discourse and values and, at its heart, the application of cultural relativism to this troubling schismogenic phenomenon.

The reliance here on cultural relativism, such a cherished anthropological contribution to human understanding, forces us to confront a regression to moral nihilism; if all socialities are equally worthy, then none can be more just or just
'better' than another. Both sides discussed in this ‘clash’ can rightly claim cultural greatness, yet equally both sides can be castigated for cynical, abusive and destructive implementation of their ideals. When it comes to violent implementation, how do we evaluate the deliberately structured violence of a battle plan and the deliberately a-structural chaos of a terror attack, or the disassociation of remote-controlled execution and the intimacy of beheading by the blade?

_Wars of Terror_ is a significant contribution to one of the most problematic contemporary concerns. It should be read by anyone who wishes to develop a more nuanced understanding of the issues, emotions and ideas at stake. For the wider audience it deconstructs the supposed intractability of a struggle of civilizations and shows the frail commonality on both sides, of ordinary humanity driven to wrath by fear and panic. For anthropologists, in particular, the book should both inspire us both to apply the discipline’s canon to global issues, and to explore the current limitations of our methods and understandings.

References

Brian Callan
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_MIRZAI, BEHNAZ A. A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran, 1800–1929_.

Published in 2017, _A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran, 1800–1929_ should be considered one of the first well-documented historical studies on the topic of slavery in modern Iran. Based on her PhD thesis, the author has revised and completed her book after ten years of archival research and fieldwork in Iran, France, the UK and a number of African countries. The book is organized in eight chapters, and has a very informative introduction in which the author explains her methodology, sources, purpose, the historical context etc.

In the first chapter, ‘Commerce and slavery on Iran’s frontiers, 1600–1800’ (pp. 26–34), the author discusses the intervention of foreign countries and the challenges of Iran’s neighbouring states with regard to the commerce of slavery and geopolitical issues. The second chapter, ‘Slavery and forging new Iranian frontiers, 1800–1900’ (pp. 35–53), provides detailed information regarding the difficulties and challenges, such as insecurity, that Iran confronted during the Qajar period (1789–1925), and which resulted in the displacement of local Iranians in general and the development of the slave trade and slavery in particular. ‘The trade in enslaved people from Africa to Iran, 1800–1900’ (pp. 53–73), the third chapter of the book, investigates the history of African slavery commerce in Iran during the nineteenth century through analysis