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Book Reviews

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Edited by Nadia Barsoum

The Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa

INDIA IN THE 21st CENTURY: WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW by Mira Kamdar. United Kingdom, London, Oxford University Press 2018. 244 pages. India is fast overtaking China to become the most populous country on Earth. By mid-century, its 1.7 billion people will live in what is projected to become the world's second-largest economy after China. While a democracy and an open society compared to China, assertive Hindu nationalism is posing new challenges to India's democratic freedoms and institutions at a time when illiberal democracies and autocratic leaders are on the rise worldwide. How India's destiny plays out in the coming decades will matter deeply to a world where the West's influence in shaping the 21st century will decline as that of these two Asian giants and other emerging economies in Africa and Latin America rise. In *India in the 21st Century*, Mira Kamdar, a former member of the New York Times Editorial Board and an award-winning author, offers readers an introduction to India today in all its complexity. In a concise question-and-answer format, Kamdar addresses India's history, including its ancient civilization and kingdoms; its religious plurality; its colonial legacy and independence movement; the political and social structures in place today; its rapidly growing economy and financial system; India's place in the geopolitical landscape of the 21st century; the challenge to India posed by climate change and dwindling global resources; wealth concentration and stark social inequalities; the rise of big data and robotics; the role of social media and more. She explores India's contradictions and complications, while celebrating the merging of India's multicultural landscape and deep artistic and intellectual heritage with the Information Age and the expansion of mass media. With clarity and balance, Kamdar brings her in-depth knowledge of India and eloquent writing style to bear in this focused and incisive addition to Oxford's highly successful *What Everyone Needs to Know* series.

AUSTRALIANAMA: THE SOUTH ASIAN ODYSSEY IN AUSTRALIA by Samia Khatun United Kingdom, London, Oxford University Press 2018. 286 pages. Australian deserts remain dotted with the ruins of old mosques. Beginning with a Bengali poetry collection discovered in a nineteenth-century mosque in the town of Broken Hill, Samia Khatun weaves together the stories of various peoples colonized by the British Empire to chart a history of South Asian diaspora. Australia has long been an outpost of Anglo empires in the Indian Ocean world, today the site of military infrastructure central to the surveillance of ‘Muslim-majority’ countries across the region. Imperial knowledges from Australian territories contribute significantly to the Islamic-Western binary of the post- Cold War era. In narrating a history of Indian Ocean connections from the perspectives of those colonized by the British, Khatun highlights alternative contexts against which to consider accounts of non-white people. Australianama challenges a central idea that powerfully shapes history books across the Anglophone world: the colonial myth that European knowledge traditions are superior to the epistemologies of the colonized. Arguing that Aboriginal and South Asian language sources are keys to the vast, complex libraries that belie colonized geographies, Khatun shows that stories in colonized tongues can transform the very ground from which we view past, present and future.

A POPULATION HISTORY OF INDIA: FROM THE FIRST MODERN PEOPLE TO THE PRESENT DAY by Tim Dyson. United Kingdom, London, Oxford University Press 2018. 310 pages. A Population History of India provides an account of the size and characteristics of India’s population stretching from when hunter-gatherer homo sapiens first arrived in the country—very roughly seventy thousand years ago—until the modern day. It is a period during which the population grew from just a handful of people to reach almost 1.4 billion, and a time when the fact of death had a huge influence on the nature of life. This book considers the millennia that were characterized by hunting and gathering, the Indus valley civilization, the opening-up of the Ganges river basin, and the eras of the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughal Empire, British colonial rule, and India since independence. By observing India through a demographic lens, *A Population History of India: From the First Modern People to the Present Day* addresses mortality, fertility, the size of cities, patterns of migration, and the multitude of famines, epidemics, invasions, wars, and other events that affected the population. It draws together research from archaeology, cultural studies, economics, epidemiology, linguistics, history, and politics to understand the likely trajectory of India’s population in comparison to the trends that applied to Europe and China, and to reveal a surprising and dramatic story.

WITNESS TO WAR AND PEACE, EGYPT THE OCTOBER WAR, AND BEYOND by Ahmed Aboul Kheit, Egypt American University in Cairo Press, 2018. 373 pages. The son of a fighter pilot, raised in an air force barracks, Ahmed Aboul Gheit was privy to the confidential meetings, undisclosed memoranda, and battle secrets of Egyptian diplomacy for many decades. After a stint at military college, he began his career at the Egyptian embassy in Cyprus before later going on to become permanent representative to the United Nations and eventually, Egypt's minister of foreign affairs under Hosni Mubarak. In this fascinating memoir, Aboul Gheit looks back on the 1973 October War and the diplomatic efforts that followed it, revealing the secrets of his long career for the first time. In vivid detail he describes the deliberations of Egypt's political leadership in the run-up to the war, including the process of articulating Egypt's war aims, the secret communications between President Sadat and U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the role of the Soviet Union during the war, and the unfolding of events on the battlefield in Sinai. He then gives a detailed and deeply personal account of the arduous process of peacemaking that followed, covering the 1973 Geneva Conference, the 1977 Mena House Conference, Sadat's visit to Israel, the 1978 Camp David Accords, and the subsequent 1979 Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty. From Sadat's impassioned address to his cabinet on the eve of the war to delegations ripping out the wiring at their respective hotels, from Jimmy Carter cycling through the bungalows at Camp David to Yitzhak Shamir's blunt admissions to his Arab counterparts in the 1991 Madrid conference, Aboul Gheit offers an information-packed, first-person account of a turbulent time in Middle Eastern history.

CATHOLICS AND SHI'A IN DIALOGUE: STUDY IN THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY edited by Anthony O'mahony, Wulstan Peterburs and Mohamed ali Shomal. UK, London, Melisende 2011, 346 pages. Catholics and Shi'a in Dialogue is Studies in Theology and Spirituality is the first volume to appear from the proceedings of the Catholic-Shi'a Dialogue initiative which is supported by the following academic and religious institutions: The Centre for Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue, based at the Jesuit Theological Faculty in Heythrop College, University of London, the Benedictine Ampleforth Abbey and College, and the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute Qum, Iran. The Catholic-Shi'a initiative is an international group of Catholic and Shi'a scholars and religious leaders who seek to sustain and develop a dialogue and conversation between Christianity and Islam from their distinctive religious traditions. The initiative seeks to engage with the highest level of intellectual and religious discourse on matters of contemporary significance and importance for the global society whilst maintaining the theological integrity of these two respective traditions. The other volumes in this series are: A Catholic-Shi'a Engagement: Faith and Reason in Theory and Practice (2006) and A Catholic-Shi'a Dialogue: Ethics in Today's Society (2008).

CATHOLICISM ENGAGING OTHER FAITHS VATICAN II AND ITS IMPACT edited by Vladimir Latinovic, Gerard Mannion, Jason Welle, O.F.M.. UK, London; Palgrave Macmillan. 331 pages. This book assesses how Vatican II opened up the Catholic Church to encounter, dialogue, and engagement with other world religions. Opening with a contribution from the President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, it next explores the impact, relevance, and promise of the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* before turning to consider how Vatican II in general has influenced interfaith dialogue and the intellectual and comparative study of world religions in the post conciliar decades, as well as the contribution of particular past and present thinkers to the formation of current interreligious and comparative theological methods. Additionally, chapters consider interreligious dialogue vis-à-vis theological anthropology in conciliar documents; openness to the spiritual practices of other faith traditions as a way of encouraging positive interreligious encounter; the role of lay and new ecclesial movements in interreligious dialogue; and the development of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue. Finally, it includes a range of perspectives on the fruits and future of Vatican's II's opening to particular faiths such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

SITES OF PLURALISM: COMMUNITY POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST edited by Firat Oruc Oxford University Press 2018, 259 pages. The editor studies are within some policy circles, at the heart of these conflicts lies a fundamental incompatibility between different ethnolinguistic and religious communities; it is held that these divisions impede any form of political resolution or social cohesion. Yet, despite this galvanised public focus on pluralism and 'minorities' within the turbulent Middle East, there has been limited scholarship exploring these tensions. Sites of Pluralism fills this significant gap, going beyond a narrow focus on minority politics to examine the larger canvas of community spheres in the Middle East. Through eight case studies from esteemed experts in law, education, history, architecture, anthropology and political science, this multi-disciplinary volume offers a critical view of the Middle East's diverse, pluralistic fabric: how it has evolved throughout history; how it influences current political, economic and social dynamics; and what possibilities it offers for the future.

COVERING THE SHI'À: ENGLISH PRESS REPRESENTATION OF THE LEBANESE SHI'À 1975-1985 by Robert Tomlinson, New York, Lexington Books, 2018. 180 pages. Often demonized by the Western media and press, Hezbollah's origins are rooted in activities of the Lebanese Shi'a in the late 1970s and early 80s. *Covering the Shi'a: English Press Representation of the Lebanese Shi'a 1975-1985* chronicles how the English-language press and media represented the most consequential group in Lebanon to Western audiences during the critical period of 1975-1985. Focusing on three of the most prominent English-language newspapers at that time, the book outlines how the Western media frequently disregarded the Shi'i civil rights movement in Lebanon. Conflating that movement with other Arab independence campaigns, the Western media missed key aspects and the dynamics at work in the Lebanese Shi'i community. Additionally, in failing to understand and report the nature of the transnational networks that supported the Shi'i community in Lebanon, the resultant news narrative reported in the English-language media was at odds with the narratives harbored by the Lebanese Shi'a themselves. In order to gain an understanding of the operations of Lebanese Hezbollah today, and the current media coverage of the organization, this book offers insights on the origins of Shi'a resistance and how one can evaluate the group today. The author organized this book into four chapters the first chapter explores Musa al Sadr and his role in transforming the Shi'a into a more activist community, one that demanded civil rights within the Lebanese society

POPE FRANCIS AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: RELIGIOUS THINKERS ENGAGE WITH RECENT PAPAL INITIATIVES edited by Harold Kasimov, Alan Race. Switzerland, Springer Nature (Palgrave Macmillan) 2018, 347 pages. This book engages thinkers from different religious and humanist traditions in response to Pope Francis's pronouncements on interreligious dialogue. The contributors write from the perspectives of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Humanism. Each author elaborates on how the pope's openness to dialogue and invitation to practical collaboration on global concerns represents a significant achievement as the world faces an uncertain future. The theological tension within the Catholic double commitment to evangelization on the one hand, and dialogue on the other, remains unresolved for most writers, but this does not prevent them from praising the strong invitation to dialogue—especially with the focus on justice, peace, and ecological sustainability.

THE LEBANESE FORCES: EMERGENCE AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN RESISTANCE by Nader Moumneh New York, Hamilton Books 2019. 576 pages. In this book, author Nader Moumneh—a Canadian senior policy adviser of Lebanese descent—examines the research of the formation and evolution of the Christian resistance in Lebanon he performed as a graduate student at the American University of Beirut in the early 1990s. He has conducted hundreds of lengthy interviews with senior Lebanese Forces leaders who were thoroughly impressed by his communicative yet assertive personality, his scrupulous presentation of facts, his obsessive attention to detail, and most importantly, his unwavering determination to unveil behind-the-scenes events. Mr. Moumneh drew upon his self-acquired persuasion tactics and negotiation strategies to earn the Lebanese Forces' trust and gain access to top secret, never-before published information. Since then, he has continually revised and expanded the manuscript to address the rapidly changing situation in Lebanon and the Middle East. *The Lebanese Forces: Emergence and Transformation of the Christian Resistance* has taken twenty-five years to produce and is unique in its own right. Mr. Moumneh's work is not a typical re-telling of the Lebanese crisis, rather it is a magnificent blend of skillful craftsmanship, an unprecedented wealth of painstakingly referenced chronological research and now declassified intelligence information.

DIGITAL MIDDLE EAST: STATE AND SOCIETY IN THE INFORMATION AGE edited by Mohamed Zayani. India, New Delhi, Oxford University Press 2018. 335 pages. In recent years, the Middle East's information and communications landscape has changed dramatically. Increasingly, states, businesses, and citizens are capitalizing on the opportunities offered by new information technologies, the fast pace of digitization, and enhanced connectivity. These changes are far from turning Middle Eastern nations into network societies, but their impact is significant. The growing adoption of a wide variety of information technologies and new media platforms in everyday life has given rise to complex dynamics that beg for a better understanding. *Digital Middle East* sheds a critical light on continuing changes that are closely intertwined with the adoption of information and communication technologies in the region. Drawing on case studies from throughout the Middle East, the contributors explore how these digital transformations are playing out in the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres, exposing the various disjunctions and discordances that have marked the advent of the digital Middle East. Both individually and collectively, the chapters that constitute this volume offer vivid accounts of how digital technologies are affecting the region. These grounded reflections paint a complex picture of a digital Middle East we are only just beginning to apprehend.

THE FALL OF THE OTTOMANS: THE GREAT WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST by Eugene Rogan. New York: Basic Books, 485 pages. By 1914 the powers of Europe were sliding inexorably toward war, and they pulled the Middle East along with them into one of the most destructive conflicts in human history. In *The Fall of the Ottomans*, award-winning historian Eugene Rogan brings the First World War and its immediate aftermath in the Middle East to vivid life, uncovering the often ignored story of the region's crucial role in the conflict. Unlike the static killing fields of the Western Front, the war in the Middle East was fast-moving and unpredictable, with the Turks inflicting decisive defeats on the Entente in Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, and Gaza before the tide of battle turned in the Allies' favor. The postwar settlement led to the partition of Ottoman lands, laying the groundwork for the ongoing conflicts that continue to plague the modern Arab world. A sweeping narrative of battles and political intrigue from Gallipoli to Arabia, *The Fall of the Ottomans* is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the Great War and the making of the modern Middle East.

THE THIRTY-YEAR GENOCIDE: TURKEY'S DESTRUCTION OF ITS CHRISTIAN MINORITIES 1894-1924 by Benny Morris and Dror Ze'evi. Cambridge-Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 2019. 636 pages. This book is structured in accordance with the staggered nature of the Turkish campaign. There are chapters on the pre-1894 background; the massacres of 1894-1896; the Armenian genocide of 1915-1916; and the destruction of the Greeks, Assyrians and remaining Armenians in 1919-1924. Between 1894 and 1924, three waves of violence swept across Anatolia, targeting the region's Christian minorities, who had previously accounted for 20 percent of the population. By 1924, the Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks had been reduced to 2 percent. Most historians have treated these waves as distinct, isolated events, and successive Turkish governments presented them as an unfortunate sequence of accidents. *The Thirty-Year Genocide* is the first account to show that the three were actually part of a single, continuing, and intentional effort to wipe out Anatolia's Christian population. The years in question, the most violent in the recent history of the region, began during the reign of the Ottoman sultan Abdulhamid II, continued under the Young Turks, and ended during the first years of the Turkish Republic founded by Ataturk. Yet despite the dramatic swing from the Islamizing autocracy of the sultan to the secularizing republicanism of the post- World War I period, the nation's annihilationist policies were remarkably constant, with continual recourse to premeditated mass killing, homicidal deportation, forced conversion, mass rape, and brutal abduction. And one thing more was a constant: the rallying cry of jihad. While not justified under the teachings of Islam, the killing of two million Christians was affected through the calculated exhortation of the Turks to create a pure Muslim nation.

SAVING IRAQ: REBUILDING A BROKEN NATION by Nemir Kirdar. Published in the UK by Weidenfeld and Nicolson 2009. 294 pages. In the first part, Nemir Kirdar reminisces about Iraq's history. From the country of his youth—a stable and vibrant land of great promise—to the 1958 coup that plunged Iraq into a period of terror and destruction, foreign occupation, and the fall of Saddam Hussein, he's been uniquely placed to comment on events and propose solutions. Now Kirdar shares his vision for tomorrow's Iraq, providing a blueprint for political, economic and social renewal. Calling for Iraqis to rise up and unlock their nation's potential, Kirdar affirms that Iraq can again be unified. In part three, the author analyses the grievous shortcomings of the occupation, his main motivation in this endeavor to present his vision to save Iraq.

FRAGILE NATION SHATTERED LAND: THE MODERN HISTORY OF SYRIA by James A. Reilly published US: Boulder, Colorado. Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2019. 258 pages. How did the lands that are today Syria survive the vicissitudes of centuries of Ottoman, Egyptian, and French rule, only to stand in ruins today, shattered by a brutal civil war? To provide answers, James Reilly traces five centuries of Syrian history, from the Ottoman period to the present. Reilly brings to life the myriad historical, cultural, social, economic, and political factors that have bound Syrians together, as well as those that have torn them apart. Drawing on extensive primary sources and recent historiography in English, French, and Arabic, he has written an essential book for those who want to understand not only contemporary Syria, but also the Middle East region. This book tells the story of Syria's modern history over many centuries, linking Ottoman, colonial and independence eras to explain the present and to trace contours and possibilities for the future. The 500-years history is told here for the first time in all its color and complexity. Also noteworthy, the social and cultural dimensions of Syrians' experiences, and not just their political and institutional stories, are key part of this account.

MANY RIVERS, ONE SEA: BANGLADESH AND THE CHALLENGE OF ISLAMIST MILITANCY by Joseph Allchin, London, UK, Hurst Publication, 2019, 237 pages. A perennial frontier for Islamic orthodoxy, Bangladesh is witnessing an alarming rise in Islamist-inspired assassinations and terrorist attacks. In July 2016, the world's attention fell upon a café in a leafy Dhaka neighborhood as the barbarity of a distant 'Caliphate' was visited on this corner of South Asia. Twenty-nine died in the assault on the Holey Bakery, affixing an unbidden nightmare to the image of a supposedly tolerant Muslim nation. Joseph Allchin probes Bangladesh's recent and distant past as he investigates how it has become the latest front in world extremism. Delving into the local and global differences between political actors, he exposes the determining influence still exercised on most allegiances by the long aftermath of the country's independence struggle, and scrutinizes the careers of two long-term rivals: current prime minister Sheikh Hasina, and Khaleda Zia, who held the office in 1991-6 and 2001-6. This unerring investigation examines the relationship between radical Islam and the Bangladeshi political class, exposing the forces driving the conditions for extremism that bedevil the country's present and future.