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Citation for published version (APA):

Chin, W. A. (2015). Colonial Wars Post Colonial States A Debate on the War on Terror. *ReOrient: The Journal of Critical Muslim Studies*, 1(1), 96-118. Article 10.

Citing this paper

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BOOK REVIEWS

COLONIAL WARS, POST-COLONIAL STATES: A DEBATE ON THE WAR ON TERROR*

David Kilcullen. *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One.*

London: Hurst and Company, 2009. 346 pp. ISBN 978-1-85065-955-6.

Douglas Porch. *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War.*

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 434 pp.

ISBN 978-1-107-69984-7.

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These two books capture the principal debates which dominate military analysis on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both explore the evolution of what is termed counterinsurgency (COIN). COIN simply sets out the tactics, techniques, and procedures the military employ to tackle an insurgency: generally understood to be an armed revolt by a segment of the population which aims to overthrow the national government or secede from an existing state. An important evolution in the world of insurgency and COIN since the end of the Second World War has been the emergence of a transnational dimension in which local conflicts were connected to a wider geopolitical contest between the superpowers. The war on terror witnessed the continuation of this process, albeit between a superpower and non-state actor(s). Thus, the military and academic community in the UK and US came to see Al Qaeda and its cognates and affiliates as a global insurgency whose principal goal was to wear down the “‘far enemy’,” principally the US, via an endless succession of local insurgencies so that they could then defeat the near enemy in Muslim-majority countries and establish a new political order (Mackinlay 2009, Stout et al. 2008, McGrath 2011).

As Porch clearly notes in his study, it is important to recognise that both insurgency and COIN have a long history, but COIN really came into its own

* The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not represent the official policy or views of the Ministry of Defence.

in the 1950s in the era of decolonisation. After the Cold War, military theorists concluded that the opportunities for insurgency were declining in an increasingly globalised and urbanised world, which made it difficult for groups to conduct armed revolt as envisaged by classical insurgent strategists such as Mao Zedong. Most important was the common perception that COIN had been perfected to a point which made it relatively straightforward to defeat a proto insurgent group and it was hoped this would deter future insurgencies (Metz 1994). Hence, little thought was given to this type of war in the post-Cold War era. Indeed, in the early stages of the war on terror, both the Americans and the British did not anticipate conducting COIN in their struggle to defeat Al Qaeda. However, as the level of violence in post-war occupied Iraq and then Afghanistan escalated, it became apparent that the American-led coalition was facing not one but multiple insurgencies in each country and so they began to immerse themselves in the history of insurgency and COIN. The new COIN strategy which emerged from these deliberations was applied first in Iraq and then subsequently in Afghanistan. In 2009, the consensus within the American political and military establishment seemed to be that this mode of war played a key role in helping the Americans defeat the insurgency in Iraq and might have enjoyed more success in Afghanistan had the campaign not been sabotaged by an American president more concerned with exiting Afghanistan than with winning the war (Ricks 2009, Woodward 2010, McChrystal, 2013).

Looking at these debates from the vantage point of the world today in 2015, it is hard not to conclude that actual events resolved this discussion in favour of those who believe that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were always doomed to fail; the only question is how far COIN contributed to this process. It also seems unlikely that an American or British government will repeat what was attempted in these wars in the future, as a combination of austerity and war weariness have reduced appetites for COIN. A good way of illustrating the economic stress caused by these interventions is to compare US and Taliban costs incurred in the recent war in Afghanistan. In 2012, the US deployed 90,000 soldiers and supported the training and employment of over 300,000 Afghan soldiers. In total, the US was spending \$100 billion annually in support of this war. In contrast, the Taliban sustained its war with between 20,000 and 40,000 fighters and had revenues of \$100 to \$200 million (Jones and Johnston, 2013: 1).

Given these disincentives for intervention of the kind seen over the last decade, you might wonder why we should read these books. In my view, I believe these studies will appeal for two distinct audiences. First, on a general level, they are interesting from a historical perspective because they provide an insight into why and how politicians and the military chose to deal with the problems of Iraq and Afghanistan in the way they did, and both offer different insights on this matter

which will shape the debate on the rights and wrongs concerning what happened in both wars. These themes will appeal most strongly to strategic theorists, military and political historians, and some political scientists in helping to understand how and why these wars mutated. Second, and perhaps more significant, are the ways in which both books highlight how former colonial militaries and indeed their political masters looked to the age of imperialism to find answers to the questions posed by the challenges of military occupation of countries with a significant Muslim presence in the twenty-first century (Edelstein 2004: 44-91).

Kilcullen's work is most interesting because it shows clearly the tension between the claims for universal rationality and particular background assumptions which continually subvert that rationality. Kilcullen's credentials on COIN are impressive in that he was a soldier but also completed a PhD on insurgency, which relied heavily on the use of anthropology. As a former soldier and scholar, he played an influential role in advising the US military in both Iraq and Afghanistan on how to use and apply military power to defeat the insurgents, and it is clear that he drew heavily on his time as a research student to shape and inform his recommendations.¹ Understanding the culture of the society under military occupation became the most important force multiplier in contemporary COIN. As such, his work will also be of interest to anthropologists eager to see how their discipline was used or abused in both these wars. I cannot stress how important this aspect of the war on terror was and remember a CIA analyst lamenting the fact that they could not find enough anthropologists to go to Iraq or Afghanistan. What was interesting was his solution to this shortfall was to dispatch political scientists to act in this capacity.

Porch's study of both colonial and postcolonial COIN is a direct attack on Kilcullen and reveals how unconscious preconceptions and prejudices can shape or influence policy to create something that might be well-intentioned, but is also deeply flawed. More disturbingly he also shows how, in the past, the military used colonial wars as a way of maximising their own sectional interests and goes so far as to suggest that the notion of COIN being something distinct from war in general is nothing more than illusion used by ambitious soldiers to promote their personal agendas. This, in turn raises important questions regarding the rationale employed to justify military action in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Given these broad themes and issues, I believe both these works will be of interest to anyone interested in the fields of postcolonial studies and political Islam.

Although military intervention on the scale of Iraq and or Afghanistan seems unlikely, today it is important to note that the Bush administration and to a lesser extent the Blair government were hostile to the concept of COIN and all that it implied in terms of nation building, reconstruction, and development. But when confronted with the choice of escalation or quitting and losing in Iraq and Afghanistan, they chose the former. Unfortunately, the same risk continues to

apply today. For example, the British government remains hostile to COIN, and new ways have been devised to engage militarily with the likes of Al Qaeda and new groups such as Islamic State (IS). But if these measures fail and the strategic narrative tell us it is in the vital interests of the UK to escalate militarily, what will the government do? If direct intervention comes about, then we may find ourselves once again locked in a COIN campaign in another Muslim country. This might seem a remote prospect, but a recent UK Parliamentary report was deeply critical of the failure of the government to deploy a more robust force to counter IS in Iraq (House of Commons Defence Committee 2015: 4). In contrast in the US, having deployed over 3,000 soldiers to Iraq, the big worry is whether this is the start of an unplanned and uncontrolled escalation which will result in another large scale occupation and military engagement. Worryingly, there are a number of figures associated with military, intelligence services, and neo-conservative ideologues who spoke of multi-generational wars, and this became a firm part of the narrative surrounding this conflict (Cecil 2014). If this does happen, then perhaps both Kilcullen's and Porch's work will help the Western powers not to repeat mistakes made in the recent past.

Kilcullen argues that most insurgents in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere were not crazed religious fanatics, as the rhetoric of the war on terror implied. This is a point we would do well to take on board when seeking to explain the actions of groups such as IS. Neither was it safe to take lots of different insurgencies and define them under the banner of Islamist terrorism. In his view, this prevented one from understanding the real causes of the insurgency which often had its basis in local, not global issues. In addition, whilst Kilcullen accepts that the leadership of a religiously motivated insurgency is unlikely to accept compromise, this does not apply to the broad mass of those involved in such conflicts. It is important to note that one of the constraints of Western liberalism has been to see its enemy as being irrational and fanatical, for example, images of China under Mao. In Kilcullen's view, the reason why people resort to armed struggle is due to more prosaic motivations, and hence political compromise as envisaged in modern COIN is possible.

It is within this context that we see the emergence of what he calls the "accidental guerrilla." This concept captures a cycle which begins with the infiltration of Al Qaeda into a region. Then, via a combination of persuasion and coercion, the group integrates into the community, but few in that community support the religious/political ideology espoused by Al Qaeda. What changes and causes them to support Al Qaeda is intervention by external powers, which is precipitated by the activities of Al Qaeda. This then transforms the conflict from an ideological struggle between "Enlightenment" and "Religion" to the emergence of local resistance to an occupation. Under these circumstances, the local population allies

with the insurgent against the outsider. Afghanistan offers the clearest illustration of this cycle and was triggered by the Soviet invasion of 1979. In the case of Iraq, the catalyst was the occupation of the country followed by the emergence of a local resistance, which then provided the opportunity for Al Qaeda to intervene in the hope of creating another front in the war on terror.

Thus, accidental guerrillas are fighting to remove an occupying power from their country or region, rather than showing support for a particular religious/political ideology. A good example of this can be seen in the Anbar Awakening in Iraq in 2006. In this case, the local (designated as Sunni) population first allied with and then turned away from Al Qaeda because of the latter's overzealousness in imposing its interpretation of Islam. As such, it is possible to see the support for these conflicts in two tiers, those who cannot be reconciled and are unwilling to compromise and the majority who fight for a host of other reasons. The key is to find a way of separating these tiers so that a meaningful political accommodation can be achieved with the latter. To do this, Kilcullen advocated the introduction of classical COIN which de-emphasises the importance of killing insurgents and focuses instead on winning the hearts and minds of the people by providing security, governance, and jobs; a range of activities captured in the term "population centric counterinsurgency" (Department of the Army 2006: 1-1, 1-28, 5-18). These are very much the kind of measures employed by the British to defeat communist insurgents in Malaya, Borneo, and Oman during the Cold War. This more nuanced overview of the insurgents' motivations recognises the complexity that surrounds the question of why people embark on the path of insurgency. There is, however, I think, scope to develop this further by recognising that divisions also emerge within the leadership of groups such as Al Qaeda. For example, it is claimed that Ayman Zahawari attempted to appeal to the Al Qaeda's representative in Iraq, Zarqawi, to moderate the violence of his group because it was alienating wider opinion in the Muslim world.² Similarly, Al Qaeda conducted internal strategic debates on questions such as should they have carried out 9/11? Interestingly, these discussions were shaped and informed by the reference to Marxist and Maoist thinking on insurgency and an examination of historical campaigns (Stout et al. 2008: 42-43). This suggests a more open and engaging approach within the inner core of this tier than we have been led to believe.

The extent to which we can apply a COIN strategy which was designed primarily to defeat Maoist insurgency was questioned, even in the early stages of the occupation of Iraq. One very persuasive sceptic on this topic is Stephen Biddle. He questioned the assumptions of those who sought "to re-fight the Vietnam War" in Iraq using methods which were not used, but should have been in this earlier war (Biddle 2006: 1). The fundamental problem was that the model of COIN articulated for dealing with the Vietnam War was designed to fight a particular

kind of insurgency: Maoist protracted guerrilla war. This was an ideologically driven insurgency that represented the interests of the masses and was intended to overthrow illegitimate governments. This, it is argued, is in contrast to the post-Cold War era where the rise in ethnic and religious identity, not a secular and progressive ideology, became the driver of insurgency (Metz 1994: 1).

The notion that the driver of insurgency had changed from an agenda based on ideology to one based on ethnicity and religion has been challenged. For example, in the view of Marks, it is important to recognise that Cold War insurgencies were just as much about ethnicity and religion as ideology. He cites two examples to support this view: the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and Shining Path in Peru (Marks 2004: 109). He points out that insurgencies consist of people who have a wide range of needs, which includes factors such as national identity and or ethnicity. Successful mobilisation requires the leadership of such movements to be sensitised to these needs and provide some way of satisfying the aspirations of their followers. Most important, Marks appears to believe that by addressing the social, political, and economic ills that affect the bottom strata of the insurgency, it is possible to cause the revolt to dissipate and die (Marks 2004: 115). If we accept this argument, then Kilcullen's solutions remain relevant. If, however, we believe that the emergence of identity has become of paramount importance in insurgency, then tactics such as winning hearts and minds and the pursuit of political, economic, and social lines of development within the context of a COIN campaign will be self-defeating because such action will not change the loyalty of the target group (Kaufmann 1999: 385-405).

But what is most important about Kilcullen is that he articulated and supported a political vision which reinforced Western notions of what constituted good governance in what were predominantly Islamicate societies. This model is reduced essentially to a social contract between a government and a population which focuses on the delivery of goods and services but pays little heed to deeper religious or ideological disputes which gave birth to these conflicts. Some have questioned this construct as being too simplistic and ignoring the real sense of religious grievance felt by the insurgents as a whole. In essence, people are more than just social and economic consumption units (Jones and Smith 2010: 433-46).³

Another area of debate concerns the importance of cultural understanding when conducting COIN. This is one of Kilcullen's big innovations in COIN as it was applied in Iraq and Afghanistan. Looked at from the perspective of 2015, it seems the military believe this concept will continue to be an important force multiplier in a future war, as one military analyst put it: "strategic results can only be achieved by influencing people," and a critical enabler in that process is cultural understanding (Hoffman 2014, 1). This general assumption has not gone unchallenged, and Porter, in his book *Military Orientalism*, questioned the extent

to which commanders and troops on the ground needed to be trained in the culture of the society from which the insurgents originated. In his view, this reflected a failure to understand how culture worked, especially in the midst of a war and merely resulted in a gross simplification of warfare into Western and Eastern or orientalist conceptions of politics, strategy, and conflict (Porter 2009: 23). Perhaps one of his most interesting insights is to acknowledge that war is an interactive process and that when Western and “Eastern” militaries have fought each other in the past, the result has been a process of mimicry with each taking something from the other’s culture. Focusing on culture in this way can also lead to a distorted view of the enemy which results in over or under estimation of an opponent’s martial virtues. (Porter 2009: 38) Most importantly, it leads to a flawed understanding of the opponent. In the case of the Taliban, for example, Porter was critical of the way in which Western militaries tried to explain what they perceived to be the irrational tactical and strategic actions of the insurgents through the prism of tribal and religious culture (2009: 83). A more powerful and damning indictment of the way in which culture has been exploited both politically and militarily in the war on terror is presented by Tarak Barkawi and Keith Stanski. In their edited volume *Orientalism and War*, they argue that “public discourses of the war on terror are suffused with orientalism.” Within this construct, “law abiding, Christian and Western civilization is threatened by ‘mad mullhas’ who hail from an East ever resistant to modernity” (Barkawi and Stanski 2012: 1). What is truly ironic here is that cultural training of the military, which is designed to address such framings, relies on the discipline of anthropology which was at the intellectual heart of the imperial project and was itself suffused with notions of a superior west facing an inferior Eastern enemy (Waterston 2008). Edward Said dates the beginning of Orientalism with Napoleonic invasion of Egypt. The French came not only with soldiers and arms but also with scholars and artists. The conquest of Egypt was not simply a military matter driven by strategic logic, but also an epistemological and cultural enterprise which sought to make Egypt knowable as well as governable.

The critique of Orientalism in its various iterations has sought to make the point that Western claims to knowledge that accurately represents the “Orient” are undermined by the way in which the Orient is constituted by Orientalism. In other words, the existence of the Orient organised in ways which often contrast with the West is a product of articulation of discourse, not the uncovering of an obscure reality (Sayyid 2003: 32-34). The knowledge of Muslims and Islam that practitioners of COIN require, that is, knowledge of how to control, and predict and make effective deployment of military power, is inherently unstable. The positivism required by this type of COIN is unable to cope with the constitutive character of the discourse of Orientalism.

Does Kilcullen's thesis have any relevance in a post-Iraq/Afghanistan world? It depends on how you choose to define an external intervention, which is treated rather loosely in the book. In truth, it is possible to question whether this process of anger and resentment by the local people against an occupying force actually happened during the war on terror, as Kilcullen claims. For example, Richard Iron, who served as a British military adviser to the Iraqi Army in 2008, noted how convenient it became to explain rising "Shia" violence in Basra as being due to the presence of British troops. The solution to this problem was simple and elegant: the British should leave; something both the British military and the UK government also wanted and, in October 2007, they agreed terms with the militias and withdrew their forces from the city. However, when reflecting on this period and in particular the Iraqi government's efforts to regain control of Basra in March 2008, he was struck by the fact that violence continued to punctuate daily life in the city. He also reflected on the cheers of support offered by the people of Basra for American soldiers as they entered during Operation Charge of the Knights. This led him to question the idea that the presence of foreign forces was a cause of rising violence. In his view, opposition to the British arose not because they were British, but because of the political challenge they represented to the insurgent militias. Iron believed most ordinary Iraqis simply wanted security and stability and were prepared to take it from whichever organisation could provide it (Iron, 2013, Kindle, 46%).

If we look at the world today, I do not think the cycle Kilcullen sets out explains recent insurgencies sufficiently. For example, in the civil war in Yemen, insurgent groups allied with Al Qaeda have emerged, even though initially there was no direct external military intervention by Western or other forces there. The collapse of Libya into civil war also raises questions over this idea of the accidental guerrilla because, even though Western military power was employed to bring about regime change, no occupation took place and so we need to find other causes which explain the descent of the country into civil war. Similar questions arise over Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al Qaeda in Mali. It has also been asserted that had American forces remained in Iraq in support of the Malaki government, they could have exerted pressure to prevent Shi'a violence against the Sunni population, which might have prevented the rise of IS (Brownlee 2014). Equally important, US military forces could have supported Iraqi security forces in engaging IS in summer 2014 and prevented large tracts of Iraq falling under the control of this group. In sum, the cyclical causes of insurgency Kilcullen sets out are quite specific and served to challenge the dominant view in the war on terror that every fragile or failing state in Muslimistan was a potential breeding ground for terrorism and insurgency, and could only be addressed through large-scale COIN. In his view, this could provoke the very thing such action was intended to prevent.

Where perhaps his thinking has greater potential lies in what he terms “pseudo accidental guerrillas.” This concept refers to the radicalisation of settler communities in the West, primarily Europe. Kilcullen believes that within these communities, we see many of the same dynamic processes explored in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, that is, infiltration of immigrant communities by an Al Qaeda cell and manipulation of social and economic grievances in an effort to mobilise support and encourage violent action. This has brought about intervention by the state’s security forces within what are described as insular communities, and this has served to exacerbate the radicalisation of the Muslim population. This view coincides with that of John Mackinlay whose book *The Insurgent Archipelago* argues that the war on terror failed to recognise the connections, caused by global media and the internet, between what was happening in faraway wars like Afghanistan and Iraq and the emergence of the threat posed by local Muslim populations living in the West (Mackinlay 2009). Similarly, Marc Sageman who has written extensively on radicalisation of Muslims in North America and Europe asserted that the domestic terrorist threat posed by groups like Al Qaeda now trumps the threat these groups pose overseas (Sageman 2008). Whilst this view is challenged, it is clear that in the light of recent attacks such as *Charlie Hebdo*, both American and European governments are becoming increasingly concerned by such threats. Less certain, however, is the extent to which Kilcullen provides a convincing explanation as to why some American or European Muslims choose to resort to violence or if they do, why some choose to leave and become foreign fighters and others stay and orchestrate attacks within their home countries. I am not convinced that accidental guerrilla syndrome answers either of these questions satisfactorily.

The second problem that emerges in this study is the way in which it accepts the existing dominant thinking surrounding COIN and especially the British interpretation of its actions in past campaigns. Kilcullen assumed that an enlightened and ethical approach to COIN explained why these measures succeeded or failed in the past. This brings me to Douglas Porch’s study of COIN, which challenges many of the ideas set out by Kilcullen and others who strongly supported the application of COIN in recent interventions. Unlike Kilcullen, Porch takes the long view of COIN and explores its evolution from the nineteenth century until the end of the American occupation in Iraq in 2011. Through this prism, he sets out a well-researched and cogent argument which exposes important deficiencies in current COIN doctrine.

Porch challenges the prevailing orthodoxy that you can win in COIN without excessive violence. As he explains, many COIN campaigns in the past were actually wars of conquest and contained a level of brutality which we would find difficult to stomach today. Such brutality extended to the era of decolonisation and

more recent campaigns. However, COIN theorists have chosen to ignore the dark side of modern COIN and focus instead on the aspiration that COIN is won by securing control of the population rather than killing insurgents. In his view, the American military looked at the history of COIN through rose-tinted glasses and as a result learned the wrong lessons. For example, British COIN was believed to be more successful than either French or American practice because it supposedly bounded this activity within a clear legal and political framework which imposed strict rules on the use of force. Recent research, however, has uncovered that in both Malaya and Kenya (Moniboit 2012), the law allowed the British security apparatus to kill, imprison, and torture on a large scale. Elkins, for example, estimated that the British killed over 100,000 people in their efforts to suppress the Mau Mau revolt (Elkins 2005). Although not as violent, the experience of the conflict in Northern Ireland also demonstrated abuse by the security forces, which Porch believed is an integral part of the history of COIN (Newsinger, 1995: 88-111).

Similarly, he questions the extent to which victory in these wars is actually a consequence of who manages to control the hearts and minds of the people. Today, it is a basic maxim in COIN that the people are, to use Clausewitz's concept, the strategic centre of gravity (Clausewitz 1976: 617), that is, victory will be achieved by the side that commands the support of the people. This implies that whoever has greater popularity will in the end prevail. However, the causes of victory are many and not just a consequence of a well-resourced reconstruction plan. But even if we accept the hypothesis that winning the support of the population is the key to victory in COIN, Porch claims more research needs to be done to demonstrate that good governance and economic development actually translates into meaningful support for the government. Porch also raised important questions about what other means have been used in the past to achieve effective control of the people.

Porch also challenges the view that COIN constitutes a separate category of warfare and that special tactics and the application of cultural and anthropological techniques are an important component of COIN as applied in Iraq and Afghanistan. In his view, there is within the American and British military a romanticised view of COIN and how it was done in the colonial era. In this golden age, colonial police and the political officers who spent many years working with various tribes on the fringes of the empire possessed a sufficiently detailed knowledge of the language, customs, and traditions of the people they were supposed to control which made conducting COIN easy. This knowledge was largely missing when the US and UK intervened in Iraq and Afghanistan and great efforts were made to improve cultural awareness. Most interesting here was the way in which the US military drew on the experiences of T. E. Lawrence and the Arab Revolt to help them understand how to mentor the Iraqi military. However, as Porch, who draws on the work of

historian David French, demonstrates, the belief that colonial soldiers possessed a better understanding of the cultural terrain in which they operated was a myth. In most cases, cultural understanding amounted to little more than an embellished “Orientalized Western view of indigenous societies ... that had either to be improved or preserved from contamination” (Porch, 318). Control did not arise from better understanding, but by supporting those tribes willing to collaborate with the occupier and the criminalisation of those who opposed the imposition of colonial government. Thus, Human Terrain⁴ and Female Engagement Teams⁵ are seen as new examples of imperial control exerted via the practice of divide and rule. In fact, he is very critical of the employment of anthropologists in recent conflicts and implies such expertise is not used to promote greater understanding, but rather who to target. Thus, he sees little difference between today’s current batch of anthropologists and experts from the colonial era who worked in the Arab Bureau or the Indian Political Service.

Porch’s third important point is that COIN is won at the political and strategic level, not at the tactical level, which is where COIN theorists tend to focus. For example, in the case of Vietnam, he does not believe a more COIN-orientated army, a better strategic hamlets campaign, more Combined Action Platoons, or an unrestricted Phoenix Programme could have compensated for a corrupt and illegitimate government. In Iraq, the Anbar Awakening, which saw the local Sunni population in Anbar province rebel against Al Qaeda and join the Iraqi government and US forces to expel them, and the Surge, which involved the deployment of an additional 30,000 American troops to Iraq, are seen as key turning points in the war. But in truth these actions had little impact on the strategic context of the war. More important was the consolidation of Shi’a power and associated with that the ethnic cleansing of both Sunni and Shi’a communities. Similarly, in the case of Afghanistan, the effort made to apply the tactics, techniques, and procedures learned in Iraq failed because the fundamental strategic problem was the illegitimacy of the Afghan government.

Fourth, COIN-incentivized development programmes were also condemned as being unsuited to war-torn failed states within which COIN took place. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, massive cash injections designed to kick start development overwhelmed the governments and exacerbated corruption and nepotism. This empowered warlords and other criminals who appealed to ethnic and sectarian division and undermined good governance. This argument is true up to a point and in the early stages of the occupation of both Afghanistan and Iraq. In the first instance, a lot of money was expended to facilitate the search for Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, and their supporters. Little consideration was given to the wider macroeconomic and political effects caused by this injection of cash. This problem was compounded by the now infamous Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in

Iraq which spent \$19 billion in 2004 before it was closed down (Chandrasekaran 2007). One CPA official who worked in Maysan remembered being given a sack of money containing millions of dollars by his boss and told to spend it on making friends. In another case, a new power station was completed, but it was not connected to the electrical grid which made it useless (Stewart 2006). However, Porch fails to acknowledge the efforts made by the international community to address these problems and ensure aid was spent properly in the later stages of the war. Certainly post 2004, the US Government Accounting Office took a keen interest in how government money was being spent and the same applied to Britain's aid programme.

However, there is a downside in this audited delivery of aid in that national governments have tended to allocate aid to their own national aid champions, who ensured the donor state benefited economically. In development terms, this does little to increase the ability of the receiving state's government and people to address their problems. Instead, the aid agencies maintain their monopoly on delivery of aid. One could argue that by controlling the allocation of aid in this way, the international community is doing little to enhance the power and legitimacy of the government. It was for these reasons that Britain's Department for International Development accepted that, by giving billions in aid directly to the Afghan government, a significant amount of this funding would be lost to corruption, but this was a price worth paying if it increased the capacity and legitimacy of the Afghan government in the eyes of its people.

It is also possible to infer from Porch's claims that the injection of cash on a huge scale served to make intercommunal strife considerably worse and perhaps even caused it. But, in Afghanistan and Iraq, the conflict was already bad long before the Americans came. In the case of Iraq, tensions between different groups (increasingly organised around sectarian and ethnic lines) were at all time high. In Afghanistan, decades of war had all but destroyed many aspects of civil society, and people took refuge in networks and associations which for a number of reasons had been less directly damaged. A good illustration of how internal domestic tensions can happen entirely independently of external intervention can be seen by looking at Nigeria which is being consumed by an insurgency led by the Islamist group Boko Haram. According to the *Economist*, the "systemic corruption and misrule have fed Islamic radicalization and ethnic militancy" in Nigeria (*The Economist* 2014). Nigeria highlights a deep-rooted problem and is a representative example of the challenges which confront many postcolonial states consumed by internal political divisions and weak governance. Political life within such states verges on being a Hobbesian state of nature as different ethnic and religious groups compete for power.

Given COIN's chequered history why did it enjoy such a renaissance? In Porch's view, the answer is that

COIN offers a doctrine of escapism for many relevant personalities and institutions – a flight from democratic civilian control, even from modernity, into an anachronistic, romanticized, Orientalist vision that projects quintessentially Western values, and Western prejudices, onto non-Western societies. (Porch, 330)

In the past, the emergence of the construct of small wars and the doctrine which followed it in the nineteenth century had much to do with the interests of those in the military operating on the fringes of the British or French empires and seeking to compete with their more privileged counterparts responsible for the continental defence of their countries (Porch 2013, Kindle, 56%). By arguing that small wars required a special skill set and greater resources, those commanders in charge of these faraway campaigns helped promote their own career interests. Porch believes that precisely the same dynamics came into play in the American military when faced with the political crisis which erupted as Iraq seemed to be descending into civil war. By abusing history, they created an image that supported their claims of what could be achieved, and this allowed them to persuade politicians they had an answer to the problems caused by perceived military failure in 2006. Porch provides one of the more interesting and thought-provoking studies on recent COIN campaigns. Most impressive is the way in which the author binds the past and the present together and shows that many of the problems experienced today have a long and if not always illustrious history which challenges Western military preconceptions that there was ever a golden age of COIN. Both Porch and Kilcullen have one powerful message that it is best not to intervene militarily in another state. Where they differ is that Kilcullen believes, as the fabric of war itself changes from industrial interstate conflict to “war amongst” the people, the West will sometimes have to do this. In contrast, Porch believes this happens because policy becomes hijacked by a deeply flawed logic based on biases formed in the age of Western Imperialism which continue to permeate government and society today.

Notes

1. It is important to note that Kilcullen was not alone in promoting the anthropological approach to population control. See, for example, M. McFate (2005).
2. A copy of this letter can be found at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-english-translation-2>
3. On the importance of religion as a source of motivation, see Jones and Smith (2010).
4. Human terrain is a process employed by the military which allows them to achieve a better understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of the local population under their control in a COIN campaign. This activity relies heavily on the use of anthropologists, sociologists, and

political scientists to provide a contextual awareness which is then used by the commander to determine how best he or she can exercise control over an occupied territory.

5. Female Engagement Teams used female service personnel to go out and develop trust-based and enduring relationships with Afghan women they encountered on patrols. This provided the military with another source of intelligence.

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Mayanthi L. Fernando. *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism.*

Durham and London: Duke University Press. 2014. Paperback (US\$25) / Hardcover (US\$95). 266 pp. + notes, references, index.
ISBN 9780822357483.

By Roshan A. Jahangeer, York University

There is a moment while reading this book where you suddenly find yourself in the author's shoes, transported to a large university auditorium filled with mostly white, elite French law students. It is 2004, and you are sitting with friends who are waiting their turn to address the two speakers invited to intervene on the question of secularism in France: Bernard Stasi and Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux. They are two of the members of the now-infamous Stasi commission, which had just submitted its report recommending a law to ban all "conspicuous religious signs" in public schools across France. They are speaking about how they were forced to consider banning "the veil" in public schools after hearing testimony from Muslim women who had begged for state protection from the rampant sexism of Muslim "communalists" of the immigrant suburbs. Curiously, the speakers do not mention the testimonies from two other young headscarf-wearing Muslim women, which had directly contradicted the previous ones.

The moderator opens the floor to questions, though he passes over your friends while sarcastically remarking that he already knows what *their* questions would be, as they were among the few racialized students in the room. The same thing happens when other racialized Muslim women wearing headscarves attempt to ask questions. They are told that only law students from the university can ask questions. Outraged at the blatant exclusion, you notice yet another racialized student pleading with the moderator for the chance to discuss the proposed legislation with the speakers, only to be shut down again.

As the scene continues to unfold, you slowly come to understand that this absurdly Kafkaesque scenario is not an isolated event, but rather symptomatic of the active process of exclusion and regulation taking place at all levels of French society when it comes to questions regarding Islam and Muslims.

Mayanthi Fernando details this experience in one of three "Field Notes," which are interspersed throughout her book. They form part of the fieldwork research that she elaborates in painstaking detail in her ethnographically and theoretically rich book, *The Republic Unsettled*, which details her experiences in Paris, Nantes, and Rennes, during the tumultuous period of 2002-04, when the law banning "religious signs" was proposed and then subsequently implemented. Her analysis is augmented by the fact that she not only worked as a language assistant at a local

public high school during the controversial passing of the law but also took an active part in organizing as a member of the One School for All Collective, which formed to mobilize against the 2004 law.

The Republic Unsettled is invaluable not only for anthropologists and ethnographers but also for scholars wanting to deepen their understanding of how contemporary secularism functions as a theory of politics and society, including through its contradictions, tensions, inconsistencies, anxieties, and instabilities. Fernando's ethnographic investigation and interviews with key interlocutors add to an already rich set of literatures within the field of secularism studies, which includes the works of Talal Asad (1993, 2003), Saba Mahmood (2005, 2008), and Hussein Agrama (2012), among several others. In the book, she explores how dominant modes of secular-republican power attempt to separate the religious from the political, and private from public, while constantly transgressing those very same boundaries; how it entails active and constant state management and intervention as opposed to neutrality; and how it produces and regulates the religious subjects under its management through both inclusionary and exclusionary measures. In short, she traces the complicated schisms produced through the normalizing power of secularity that not only arranges political, legal, and institutional practices in ways that reproduce the same tensions that are immanent to its formation but also manages the sensibilities and forms of sociality of the subjects it regulates. In doing so, Fernando manages to shine a light on how the tensions and contradictions immanent to secularism itself are constantly displaced onto Muslim French – a neologism she coins that reproduces the awkward juxtaposition of being both French and Muslim when the two terms are thought of as opposites – such that they are perpetually accused of being unable to properly separate religion from politics and private from public, thus legitimizing the need for even further intervention and regulation of their bodies and practices.

The first three chapters of Fernando's book brilliantly exposes this quandary, what Elizabeth Povinelli has called "The Cunning of Recognition" (2002), through delineating the various ways that politicians attempt to recognize and include the secular public face of Islam in France while erasing the multiple modalities of the contemporary forms of Islam practiced by millions of its citizens. Chapter three, "A Memorial to the Future," is particularly successful at demonstrating how a state project that aims to recognize public Islam by constructing an Islamic Cultural Institute (ICI) entails its complete transformation into clearly separable fragments of culture, religion, and politics, such that it appeals predominantly to non-Muslims and to imagined "secularized" Muslims of the future while ignoring the real needs of fasting and praying Muslims who happen to be local residents. Similarly, the creation of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), which was meant to institutionalize Islam as one of the religions officially recognized by

the state alongside Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism, entailed a complete transformation of local forms of political and religious authority in favor of male elites elected through mosques, ironically reproducing gendered forms of power that disadvantages women who do not attend mosques.

Fernando's contributions are particularly poignant in her discussions of how discourses of gender, sexuality, feminism, and Islam take on significant distortions through the refractive lens of secular power. In Chapter four, "Reconfiguring Freedom," Fernando masterfully analyses the constraints veiled Muslim women faced when attempting to defend their practice of veiling as either a choice or as an obligation (but never both) in public discourse. She points out that while this coupling of choice and obligation is unintelligible to many secular republicans, who choose to theorize choice as being free from any external influence and obligation as being linked to a negative form of authority, her interlocutors conceived of this coupling differently. To them, the headscarf was similar to other norms and practices such as prayer and fasting, whereby a divine injunction is taken on freely in order to actualize the characteristic virtue it is meant to produce in its practitioner. In other words, wearing headscarf is more accurately understood in the context of other "bodily disciplinary processes" that the women proceeded to undertake as part of their "spiritual journeys" in order to cultivate a properly pious Muslim French self (160). However, due to the "secular tone deafness [of] the multiple meanings of the term 'obligation'" (168), the public defense of veiling was not intelligible in the context of French or European legal understandings of religious freedom. Fernando astutely argues that this limitation of the secular ear is ultimately what allowed both courts and policymakers to dismiss these women's arguments that a ban on "religious signs" would violate religious freedom, because ultimately the understanding of religious liberty reflected a Protestant imbrication of the secular that privileged (internal) belief rather than (outward) manifestations of belief, further reinforcing the separation between what constituted private versus public religion.

Furthermore, in Chapter five, "Of Mimicry and Woman," Fernando goes on to analyze the flipside of the denial of rights for veiled Muslim women: the state's privileging of access and space for carceral neofeminist "secular Muslim women" from the movement *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* (NPNS). Fernando analyzes the emergence of this movement within the neoliberal context of a nexus between sexuality and secularity, what Joan Scott calls "sexularism" (2011), as NPNS have become the privileged interlocutors who call on white men and women of the state to "save" brown women from the sexually oppressive brown men of the *banlieues*. She argues that secular and "sexually liberated" Muslim women from the *banlieues*, such as Fadela Amara, Loubna Meliane, and Chahdortt Djavann (similar to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Irshad Manji, and others), have been celebrated by

politicians and media alike precisely because they represent modern “exceptional citizens” who have been liberated from the clutches of Islam and who testify to the possibility of becoming an ideal secular subject of the French state. Fernando argues that the state’s celebration of such women and their associated movements is integral to republican rule as they become the “native experts” who provide an alibi for the criminalization and regulation of those not conforming to the imperatives of secular rule, namely, the sexually oppressive Muslim man and the veiled Muslim woman, both of whom represent aberrant sexualities within a secular order. However, what such secular Muslim figures elide are the neoliberal policies adopted by political elites that have weakened the welfare state and its existing social supports, and that have exacerbated the economic deterioration of the *banlieues*, thereby elevating rates of unemployment and delinquency. As such, their presence demonstrates that as republican secularism continues to position itself as the political arrangement best suited to defend sexual freedom and sexual equality globally, “sexuality has become a key site of concern and regulation in secularism’s self-narrative of progress and cultural exemplarity” (209), a site that increasingly perpetuates Islamophobic and Orientalist representations of Muslims who do not conform to secular imperatives.

The Republic Unsettled is crucial reading for scholars of critical Muslim studies who are engaged in decolonial approaches, as it does the painstaking work of beginning to untangle the threads of the seeming unity and universality of secularism, unraveling the contradictions and erasures that reveal the globalizing pretensions of secular power in its contemporary forms. Fernando’s work contributes greatly to interrogating the normalizing force of secularity, in producing political, legal, racial, gendered, and sexual arrangements that give the appearance of a naturalized entity, but which, like all other sedimented political formations, entail very particular constructions and configurations of power. I concur with Fernando in cautioning that

We certainly must not accept secularism’s claim to universality, but we do need to attend to the broad, trans-Atlantic genealogy of its formation, to the effects of its universalizing imperatives, and to the increasing hegemony of the sensibilities and political, legal, and institutional practices that make secularism a global project. (24)

In doing so, we might perhaps begin to provincialize the secular powers that increasingly render incommensurable any life worlds that do not bend to its rule(s).

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Kecia Ali. *The Lives of Muhammad*.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2014. Hardcover. \$29.95.
342 pp. ISBN 9780674050600.

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Parallel to the quest for the historical Muhammad, modern scholars are also intrigued by an alternative path of investigating the way biographers have understood the Prophet's life. Kecia Ali's *The Lives of Muhammad* adopts this latter approach by writing the history of *Sīra* works. Beginning with her overview of the formative, medieval and early modern writings, Ali concentrates on the nineteenth (or rather late nineteenth) and twentieth centuries for mapping this history.

The historian's task of identifying discursive shifts in the biographical literature is replete with methodological challenges, given the enormous amount of printed material available. However, the rigor with which Ali approaches the subject is praiseworthy as her extensive notes and updated bibliography testify. Her methodology is informed by her historicism that permeates the work in its varied connotations, from an investigation of the historical contexts of different biographies to a denial of any "pure" Islamic tradition (236).

She identifies transformations within certain key themes in order to give her readers a sense of the "shifting attitudes about human achievement, the nature and place of religion, marriage and sexuality" (2) that have informed ideas about the Prophet. Her focal point is what Tarif Khalidi, in his *Images of Muhammad* (2009), calls the late nineteenth-century phase of "polemical *Sīra*" in the history of Muslim prophetic biographies. However, she argues that these intra-Muslim and inter-confessional polemics did not emerge from separate intellectual worlds; instead, these narratives and explanations about the Prophet's life have been, since the nineteenth century, mutually informing in a variety of ways.

With the rise of imperialism, whose brunt was severely borne by the Muslim-majority lands, the biography of the Prophet, to Ali, became a product of or a

response to European Orientalist writings. According to Ali, however, all authors, Muslim or non-Muslim, agreed on a common, although “thin slice of early Muslim writings,” “a birth-through-death narrative, which pauses at marriages, battles, and revelation,” (8) that became a canon just a century or two ago for the continued, varied interpretations of the Prophet’s life. This “thin slice” gave rise to hagiographical and polemical bodies of literature, converging into a single kaleidoscopic whole where each other’s accounts were pressed into service by both Orientalist and Muslim authors for new explanations. Another seminal change was reflected in the fact that “the (early) texts written symbolically came to be read literally” (231). Thus, imagining about the Prophet took a shift from conceiving him as an exemplar or type to seeing him as a personality or individual, whose real truth is hidden in his full life story and not merely in his broad divine image.

The Lives of Muhammad follows a smooth structure. Building on the academic debates in the first chapter on the historical Muhammad and early modern writings on the Prophet, Ali ultimately leads the reader to modern approaches. The story of his life remained incomplete and fragmented in the early phases of Islamic history. Quoting from Chase Robinson’s *Islamic Historiography* (2002), Ali informs us that “having entered a market of competing ideas and polemics, early Christians and early Muslims eventually came to tell the whole story” (23). She notes, “If Syriac Christian polemics against Islam motivated early refinements in Muhammad’s biography, colonial era missionizing by western European Christians has a similar effect” (2-3). The image of the Prophet underwent many transformations in Muslim and non-Muslim literature before the modern period: an Arab hero of the early centuries, an imposter for early modern European thinkers, and a genius in the Romantic writings.

Ali appropriates five select themes to discern new developments in the Prophet’s biography. The chapter titled “A True Prophet” discusses the question of the truth of Muhammad’s claim to prophethood. For evangelizing Orientalists and their Muslim respondents, the key issues included writing a competitive hagiography (for the founders of Christianity and Islam) and understanding the evolution of religion (either within the Christian or Islamic view of the movement of world history). In “Eminent Muslims,” Ali addresses the role of the Prophet as a community leader and military commander and also deals with the question of how the Islamic figures such as the early caliphs played a key role in his biographies. The underlying historical problem for writers of biographies is explaining the early success of the Arabs as compared with their recent downfall and how this can be understood in terms of the ultimate truth or falsehood of Islam. In two subsequent chapters, “The Wife of Muhammad” and “Mother of the Faithful,” Ali compares and contrasts with great insight the ways Muslims and non-Muslims have seen the role and stature of Khadīja and `Ā’isha as the Prophet’s wives. Muhammad’s

marriages raised challenges for Muslims and non-Muslims in coming to terms with historical and contemporary issues on marital relationships, child marriage, polygamy, and sexuality in Islam. The norms based on modern sensibilities were to serve as the canon by which to judge these “problematic” aspects in the life of the Prophet. For instance, she observes, “If biographers settled fairly rapidly on Khadija as a positive force in Muhammad’s life, Aisha’s presence was substantially more contentious” (157).

Finally, in the chapter “An Enlightened Man,” Ali recognizes a biographical move from an earlier received, comparable triad of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad toward the new combination of Jesus, Muhammad, and the Buddha, a pragmatic transformation echoing the recent trend of discerning common elements of enlightenment in religious thinking and also attempting to understand religious founders as moral teachers instead of delving into the ultimate historical truth of their life histories. As a consequence, she contends, many Muslim authors dispensed with miraculous elements in the Prophet’s life without denying them openly. In addition, recent authors of these biographies hail from diverse backgrounds, including academic, journalism, and public scholarship, with varied audiences. Therefore, many writers, such as Tariq Ramadan (2007), aim at a global audience and choose lessons from the Prophet’s life that are “applicable to universal human struggles” (224).

The Lives of Muhammad invites us to reflect on some methodological issues facing any historian of *Sīra*. Given the enormous size of the available literature in many languages, Ali’s historical method of writing through select themes serves the purpose to a considerable extent. However, the question of how far Ali’s choice of *Sīra* works can represent the modern period is still a challenging one. Her selection of Muslim biographies is influenced by an underlying assumption that such writings should necessarily be in dialogue or debate with European or American works. Therefore, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (1935) occupies a privileged position in her treatment. For Ali, “Haykal marks a watershed moment, the point at which Western and Muslim writings have become so intertwined that one can no longer speak of influence or reaction but interaction and fusion” (94). However, it is difficult to consider Haykal as an archetype of the modern Muslim biographer. This issue becomes quite complicated when we deal with the categorization of different biographies such as modern or traditional, or the ones based on the idea of enlightenment. In such cases, categorization seems more of a pragmatic strategy to take account of the large body of literature rather than having a concrete epistemological value. While Ali has tried to build good evidence for showing shifts in the writing of *Sīra* and the resultant new categories, it is hard to establish that old ways of imagining the Prophet’s life gave way to the new ones. As the visible victims of Orientalist paradigms, Syed Ahmad Khan and Ameer

Ali in British India are the obvious choices for Ali as specimens, but they are far from being such models. If we broaden the list by studying, for instance, the works stemming from such influential traditions as Deoband in India that seem to follow very traditional patterns of remembering the Prophet's life, we may have a different impression about modern *Sīra*. Although Ali notes that different writings defy her categorizations and gives a recent example of Weinberger's *Muhammad* (2006) in which he attempts to "resuscitate the miraculous elements that Haykal and his ilk had dispensed with" (229), the fact of the matter is that these elements remain one of the most persistent, if not common, patterns (in terms of both form and substance) of conceiving the Prophet's life throughout the centuries. Thus, it begs the question as to whether these shifts, as traced by Ali, are only ascertained discursively or they depict a real change in how the majority came to see the Prophet at a given point in time. Ali's depiction gives the impression of an essential nature of modern *Sīra* writings emerged under ubiquitous Western intellectual domination. One cannot deny this hegemony, but which aspects of *Sīra* are universally affected by it is not easy to establish in a diverse body of literature.

Another important question is to what extent one can make sense of the nature of modern Islam by studying modern *Sīra*. Ali understands modern Islam as a "profoundly Protestant tradition" (239). While labeling modern Islamic thought as Protestant has always been attractive (and may be arguably true to a certain extent), it is hard to claim which aspects of Protestantism these are that modern Islam actually adheres to universally. If it means studying foundational texts without recourse to their commentarial tradition, as Ali contends (239), then the diversity of Muslim approaches to the Qur'an, Ḥadīth, and *Sīra* resists such a characterization.

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Mohammad Siddique Seddon. *The Last of the Lascars: Yemeni Muslims in Britain, 1836-2012.*

Markfield, UK: Kube Publishing. 2014. Paperback. £14.99. 340 pp.
ISBN 9781847740359.

By Shamim Miah, University of Huddersfield

The study of Muslims in Britain often starts with a number of historiographical assumptions. The first assumption is a deeply problematic one; it assumes that the history of Muslims only begins with the process of migration and settlement. More crucially, it fails to acknowledge the colonial and, more crucially, the postcolonial legacies associated with Muslim countries. Second, the migration of Muslims is usually framed within a neo-liberal lens; that is to say that greater emphasis is placed on patterns of employment without placing emphasis on the development of Muslim institutions, community infrastructures, and people. Finally, Muslims are usually the subject of conversation and very rarely do they help construct and shape the parameters of debate about them. It is thus refreshing to read Seddon's book on the Yemeni Muslims in Britain, as it breaks with the above conventional typology of writing the history of Muslim migration and settlement by attempting to blur the boundaries between the West and the Rest. Seddon's book manages to transcend the typical binary construct of the West and the "other" by not only providing a voice for the *subaltern*, but also the broader contextualised settings of the colonial and postcolonial realities of the Yemeni Muslims in Britain.

The Last of Lascars challenges the reader to think outside the racialised binary by questioning the normative model of the "other," whereby the "other" is often located outside history, or at best, its people are seen to possess banal historical significance. As a crucial shift away from this framing, Seddon locates the Yemenis in Britain within a broader and vibrant historical canvas with its roots traced back to the story of Queen of Sheba, as narrated within both the Old Testament and the Qur'an. Not only do Yemenis carry a complex biblical history, but they are also a nation that has a crucial historical and geo-political significance through the Port of Aden, the "gateway to China" which connected Yemen via a maritime trade route with neighbouring countries. Through its production of spices, together with frankincense and myrrh, Yemen has attracted travellers, scholars, and traders – all of this provides a fixed located centre for tribal and regional histories to be connected. Furthermore, the Yemeni community within the diaspora is not disconnected from its *roots*, but rather actively helps shape the socio-political landscape of Yemen through a complex web of transnational tribal connections which are kept alive from within the diaspora.

Whilst the importance of *roots* is fundamental to the Yemenis, so is the significance of *routes* to Britain. The Muslim community, viewed through prototypical orientalist lens, assumes all Muslims as de facto monolithic, unchanging, and antiquated. This assumption is further challenged; the long and complicated history of Yemenis in Britain meant that this community had a tendency to *re-make* itself, especially in light of the socio-political context. The early arrival and settlement of Yemeni *lascars* at British port cities, such as Cardiff, South Shields, Manchester, Liverpool, and London, connected Yemenis to the British Empire as early as 1836. This meant that all Yemenis were lumped together with the “other” British colonial subjects, including Malays and Indians, under a collective definition of *lascars*. *Lascars*, or sailors, not only had to overcome poverty, destitution, and squalor, but also to endure the barrage of missionary and Christian proselytising which often targeted “destitute colonial heathens roaming the streets of British cities.”

The Yemeni *lascars* were able to *re-make* themselves following the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, when Britain drew upon its colonial subjects to fight for its colonial objectives. Thousands of Yemenis served in merchant vessels used to ship crucial supplies to troops across Europe, Middle East, and North Africa. This came to an abrupt end post First World War, following the “racial disturbances” or the “Arab riots” across British ports caused mainly by the post-war recession and a strong backlash from the indigenous population, often orchestrated by trade union movements. The inter-war period also witnessed the “forced and voluntary repatriation” following an imposed deportation of Yemenis. The inter-war period also witnessed the *re-making* and anchoring of Yemeni community especially through marrying of indigenous women. Once again, there was considerable backlash against mixed marriages with indigenous women, seen as sexually deviant. Yemeni men, considered to be “dangerous brown men” with their racialised hyper-sexuality, were seen as a considerable threat to white women. Children of mixed marriages were often described as “half-bred” or “half-caste” – both of these terminologies carried stigma, with the implicit suggestion of diluting or tainting of ethnicity. Seddon provides a detailed insight into how the Yemeni community perceived dual heritage children. It is clear that these children were not seen through a derogatory lens; rather they were given a unique status which is signified by the term *muwallad*, loosely referring to a hybrid identity construct. The concept of *muwallad* is particularly helpful, given that in the early period of migration, Yemeni men who settled in a number of British cities, such as Manchester, married local women, unlike the majority of men from South Asia, who either decided to remain single or married women from their respective countries.

The crucial shift in the Yemeni community in Britain occurs between 1930 and the 1950s. This marks a shift away from the normative historiography in two ways: first, the interest in Islam is not clouded by the Rushdie affair or the War on Terror. Rather, the study of Muslims is deeply connected with patterns of migration and settlement. It is thus refreshing to observe the spiritual and religious movement inspired by the *Alawi* Sufi *tariqa* (order) through the works of charismatic religious teacher, Sheikh Abdullah Ali al-Hakimi. The inter-war period provides a detailed account of religious institution building through the establishment of a number of *zawiyas* (Sufi lodges) throughout Britain during the 1920s under the leadership of Sheikh al-Hakimi. It also illustrates the functioning of the *Alawi tariqa* in Britain which can be traced back to the North African spiritual master, Ahmad al-Alawi (d. 1934) of the *Darqawi Shadhili* order. Second, Seddon provides a detailed and complex account of religious leaders, politicians, workers, businessmen, and various community groups as they *re-made* their identity through the interplay between integration, hybridity, diaspora, Islam, and Arabness.

Seddon weaves a helpful repertoire of *invisibility* and *visibility* to make sense of Yemeni presence in the United Kingdom. He shows how throughout the history of Yemeni migration and settlement, the Yemeni communities were often made *invisible* through a monolithic category association of “Indians,” “Arabs,” “Africans,” or “South Sea Islanders.” It was not until the 1990s they began to take a “visible” presence, largely due to the phenomenal success of the Sheffield-based boxer, “Prince” Naseem Hamid. “Prince” Naseem was born to Yemeni parents in 1974; by the early 1990s, he was known internationally for his un-orthodox boxing style, outlandish ring style performances, and a string of high-profile successes. The “Prince Naseem” factor not only brought Yemeni community to public recognition, but it also contributed to a hybridised Yemeni identity which juxtaposed religion, hip-hop subculture, and Yemeni identity with Britishness.

The Last of Lascars provides a complex and multi-layered account of one of the oldest Muslim communities in Britain. A key theme running through the book challenges the received wisdom of Muslims in Britain – Muslim communities are not fixed. Rather, they are complex and are constantly in a state of flux often, but not always, making and re-making themselves in light of socio-cultural and geo-political changes. Furthermore, this book will significantly contribute towards an interdisciplinary approach in understanding the complex realities of Muslim communities, appealing to scholars in history, Islamic studies, sociology, and postcolonial studies.