

closer economic integration. But it proved difficult to agree on, due to divergent interests and preconceptions of member states, and problems of that kind reappeared when it was to be implemented; the final effect was uncertain when Tooze finished his book, and it still is, not least because of tensions between EU authorities and East Central European member states.

Tooze devotes a whole chapter [S 215–230] to what he calls “America’s national crisis”. As he sees it, a very brief phase of bipartisan action at the beginning was followed by increasing social and political polarization and a breakdown of civic consensus. But when he sums up this analysis with comments on “a polarization between those who affirmed the many transformations America has undergone since the tumultuous 1960s and had done well out of those changes and those who hankered after a return to the 1950s, or at least their vision of that bygone era” [S 225], there are good reasons to disagree. It would be more plausible to say that the crisis pits two heterogeneous coalitions against each other, and that the composition of both sides is still very much a matter of debate. The reactivated left wing of the Democrats is surely not drawing support only from beneficiaries of globalization and deregulation; the hard core of Trumpian Republicans is aiming at a transformation very different from any kind of return to the 1950s.

The last chapter of the book reiterates and accentuates the main points of Tooze’s diagnosis of our times. He continues to stress the scope and impact of state intervention, even more significant in the Covid crisis than in the financial one; but the new interventionism is a matter of specific institutions, and it presupposes a distinctive historical constellation. “The significance of central banking as a domain of modern government is that it is one arena in which the authorities have been forced to grasp the scale of the challenges facing us” [S 293]. This grasp is, however, both enabled and limited by a socio-political context: “What has made central bankers into the exemplar of modern crisis-fighting is the vacuum created by the evisceration of organized labor, the absence of inflationary pressure, and more broadly, the lack of antisystemic challenge” [S 293]. This is

not a perspective for a sustainable future. Tooze describes the managerialism that took centre stage from 2008 to 2020 as “a scrambling effort to preserve a dangerous status quo” [S 294], and argues that it has less in common with postwar Keynesianism than with late nineteenth Bismarckian conservatives.

To sum up, Tooze’s work on the Covid crisis seems to reinforce the concern with parallels to 1914. The message of the two books is disturbing, and in that regard convincing (at least for the present writer); a more detailed discussion than is possible here would no doubt raise more questions about specific issues. But it would in any case be very hard to find a scholar who does contemporary history better than Adam Tooze.

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**Gilles Kepel: *Away from Chaos: The Middle East and the Challenge to the West*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020, 376 pp.**

Gilles Kepel, a French Arabist and sociologist with Czech roots, specialises in the issue of political Islam and especially its more militant forms, and for decades been a sought-out expert interpreter of events in the wider Middle East. In his latest book, *Away from Chaos: The Middle East and the Challenge to the West* (2020), he shows how a new order has been emerging

out of the chaos in the region in the wake of the Arab Spring. In the first part of the book, titled “The Barrel and the Koran” (pp. 11–102), he ties in with his previous works: *The Prophet and Pharaoh* (1984), the highly successful *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (2000), and *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom* (2008). To provide a meaningful historical background for the interpretation of current events Kepel recycles some of his earlier theories here. Kepel argues that the secular nationalism to which the post-colonial Arab elites attached themselves – like the elites of Turkey and Persia before them – is an anomaly; a deviation from a tradition that has endured fourteen centuries during which governments in the region used Islam to secure political power. Arab nationalism thus collapsed in the 1970s. The pursuit of “liberation” led only to the former colonial masters being replaced by even more repressive domestic rulers, who were unsuccessful even on the foreign policy front, symbolised by a number of failed wars with Israel (1948, 1956, 1967). What’s more, there was never a total separation of state power from religious institutions, which dictators usually secured influence over and increasingly used to justify their policies. According to Kepel, this became especially apparent during the so-called Ramadan War (1973) with Israel, which pro-regime Syrian and Egyptian clerics declared to be a jihad. Soldiers cried “Allah is great!” as they attacked, and the idea then took hold that the war had been a success because God had come to the aid of the demonstratively pious President Sadat and thanks to the Saudi establishment, which crucially influenced the course of the conflict by levying an oil embargo while describing its oil riches as God’s just reward for practising and promoting the strictest version of Islam. According to Kepel, the vacuum that discredited secular nationalism left in its wake has since the 1970s consequently increasingly been filled by political Islam, which has become the main ideology promoted by both governments and the opposition. This theory is not unique to Kepel and is shared by other French experts on the Middle East, such as Francois Burgat and Olivier Roy. Kepel also argues that since the 1980s the struggle has been heating up over who will

control this new ideological trend: whether it will be revolutionary Shia Iran and conservative Sunni Saudi Arabia. Both these actors moreover have oil money at their disposal with which to spread their variety of Islam across the region and in the suburbs of large European cities, thus destabilising the region and deepening the sectarian divide between the two branches of Islam. The fruits of this are still being reaped today, the most recent manifestation of which has been the anti-Shiite/Iranian Islamic State (ISIS). While in what I feel is Kepel’s best book, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World* (1991), Kepel distinguished between re-Islamisation of a society “from below” (through the educational and charity work of religious movements) and “from above” (a revolutionary movement topples the regime and then Islamises the state and society from a position of state power), in this book he does away with typology and stresses not the role of domestic movements but the influence of international actors. He sees a dangerous combination of three interconnected factors in the region: oil wealth, Islamisation, and armed conflict (p. 48). He highlights the ways in which Shiite and Sunni political Islam have been enhancing themselves, but in his view it is the Persian Shiites who come up with innovations that in Arab Sunni areas then tend to be adopted and taken to extremes: examples include the popularisation of the cult of martyrdom, asymmetric warfare, and a focus on the jihadist use of the media. According to Kepel, the Sunni Arab regimes tried to neutralize the growing influence of the revolutionary Shiite Iran on two fronts: through support for the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan (1979–1989) and for the Iraq of Saddam Hussein in the war with Iran (1980–1988).

Like the resistance to the Israeli occupation of Palestine before, resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan became an issue of importance for the Sunni masses around the world and led to the globalisation of jihad. Religious opposition to Sunni regimes everywhere from Saudi Arabia to Algeria, despite their support for the Afghani jihad, was ultimately reinforced by the Second Gulf War (1990–1991), during

which these regimes aligned themselves with the United States against Iraq and enabled the deployment of American troops in the vicinity of holy areas in Saudi Arabia, and the Islamists were split on allowing this. Some of them, front and foremost the Sahwa movement and Osama bin Ladin, recalled a line in the Quran: “expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula” (p. 49). Kepel is attempting on the most general level demonstrate that what has happened is the gradual “radicalisation of Islam”, not the “Islamisation of radicalism”, the theory supported by his academic rival Olivier Roy: and this occurred along the path from the Afghani jihad to the Islamic State. He shows that this is a process that has unfolded across three generations of global jihad, though in doing so he is somewhat uncritically accepting the conceptualisation put forth by a representative of the third generation of jihadists, Abu Musab Al-Suri, the most detailed analysis of whom is provided by Philipp Holtmann in *Abu Musab Al-Suri’s Jihad Concept* (2009). The first generation was drawn to a strategy of hitting out at enemies located close to home, such as their own godless governments, and in the 1990s a jihad was launched on three fronts – in Algeria, Egypt, and Bosnia – in efforts to replicate the success in Afghanistan. These revolts were mostly led by veterans who had returned from fighting against the Soviets who deemed waging jihad against the home government to be the duty of individual believers (pp. 30–67). This strategy was never successful. It never won wider appeal among the local population, and Islamists never managed to seize power by means of jihad. During the 1990s the only successful jihadisation was observed in the case of the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where, however, Iranian influence gained sway rather than that of Arabs returning from Afghanistan. According to Kepel, the second stage of jihad was, by contrast, characterised by attacks on distant enemies (*al-adou al-ba’id*), as the attention of Afghani Arabs and their new allies turned their attention away from the Soviet Union and domestic regimes and towards the United States. This shift was best exemplified by Al Qaeda, headed by Osama bin Ladin and Ayman

al-Zawahiri (pp. 68–94), and it culminated in the 9/11 attacks, which were followed by the cataclysm of the “global war on terrorism” and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Kepel’s analysis here reveals most how much it is based on an examination of the key writings of jihadists and the ideas of jihadist intellectuals, and from there he goes on to trace how these ideas spread and became combined and, depending on historical experiences and political texts, then mutate. The intended effect of the 9/11 attacks on a distant enemy did not, however, materialise, despite the fact that, unlike the first stage of jihad, it was a perfect media event for a global television audience. The attacks did not result in a wave of mass uprisings across the Muslim world, which we saw ten years later during the Arab Spring. It did not even result in new recruits flocking to join Al-Qaeda, which Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah managed to attract following their suicide attacks. On the contrary, prominent celebrity figures in the Muslim world condemned the 9/11 attacks. Kepel argues that in response to this failure a third-generation global jihad was born. This jihad generation was influenced by Abu Musab al-Suri, a child of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan and of accelerating globalisation as well. He wrote his monumental “Call for a Global Islamic Resistance”, which is around two thousand pages long, under difficult security conditions between 2001 and 2005. As well as setting out a positive programme, he criticised the preceding two generations of jihadists. Al-Qaeda especially was in his view a complete fiasco in that it overestimated its influence. While the Muslim masses enthusiastically welcomed the 9/11 attacks because they feared and loathed the arrogant United States, this did not mean that they sympathised with Al-Qaeda, and it most certainly did not mean that they were willing to respond to the call to wage jihad and to take up arms. They did not identify with Al-Qaeda, which offered them nothing of any relevance for their everyday lives. That, according to al-Suri, is what led to the *de facto* destruction of Al-Qaeda Central, as it was built on the outdated model of Leninist political parties, where a narrow leadership at the top issues orders through a pyramidal hierarchical

structure to the lowest segments in the structure at the bottom. Al-Suri's motto, by contrast, was "system, not organisation" (*nizam, la tanzim*) (p. 99). He instead raved about building ties that could form horizontal networks, which would grow organically out of connections to a given place and its context and thus from the ground up. However much al-Suri – who was weaned more in a French university environment than by classical Islam – was inspired in this by the late-modern European philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and his model of a matrix, applied here to the issue of a revolution, his approach can, in my opinion, be summed up as the same strategy that was used by the global environmental movement – think globally, act locally. Al-Suri called on Jihadists to respond to local issues of relevance to people in a given place and time. At the same time, however, they were supposed to keep their eye on global trends relating to jihad, so that within the scope of their own possibilities they could imitate successful attacks and thereby replicate acts of terrorism in different places. Nevertheless, in the same spirit of Hegelian dialects, Al-Suri's Westernised thinking rejected the endless debates that went on among Islamic militants about whether the forces of jihad should focus its attacks on a near enemy or a distant one. The first stage of jihad thus introduced a theory, the second a counter-theory, and the third offered a synthesis of the two ostensible opposites and thereby transcends them. In this perspective, there are no near or distant enemies. There is just one space in which to wage a legitimate jihad, and that space is on the two banks of the Mediterranean Sea and in the neighbouring regions. In other words, here a link is formed between the Middle East and Western Europe.

I consider the high point of Kepel's book to be its second part, "From Arab Spring to Jihadist Caliphate" (pp. 103–229). This part does not recycle as much from past publications as the first part does, though it does draw on the ideas and observations Kepel published in his reportage-like *Passion arabe, Journal 2011–2013* (2016). Kepel also demonstrates in this part of the book that he is a master of condensation and simplification, as he is always able to summarise

complex and closely analysed issues into a number of propositions and effective concepts in the form of neologisms and summary typologies. In his view the Arab Spring uprisings ushered in potential new alternative paths of future development for the Middle East. Local societies found themselves at the crossroads between democratisation, a drift towards even harsher dictatorships, and a decline into the chaos of civil war, militarisation, and jihad. By Kepel's account, it was the university-educated, liberal-minded urban middle class, somewhat cut off from the rest of society, who ignited the revolutions in the region that weakened or sometimes even toppled the ruling regimes. The ensuing revolutions were, however, "hijacked" by Islamists, in most cases ones with close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. Although the Brotherhood's attempts to ignite a revolution for decades had been futile, they were well positioned to take good advantage of the opportunities that arose as a result of the sudden opening created by revolutionary dynamism, whether they did so by gaining success in elections or through armed jihad. According to Kepel, this *brotherising* of the revolutions was possible because of the Muslim brothers' solid anchoring in their home societies and because of support from abroad, most notably Qatar and Turkey. An additional bolster was the fact that initially the United States sympathised with the Brotherhood and did not therefore interfere with their ascent. Regional forces of counterrevolution, however, also soon became involved in the region's revolutions. There were two rival forces in this: Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on one side and Iran on the other. According to Kepel, as well as its "brotherisation" the Arab Spring thus also underwent "Salafisation" under the influence of the conservative monarchies in the Gulf, and the Salafisation of Sunni Arab societies then led to the emergence of two unusually tense lines of conflict: one dividing the Muslim Brothers and the Salafists (resulting in two competing versions of political Islam poised against each other), and the other dividing Sunnis and Shias (two historical branches of Islam set opposite to each other). The counterrevolutionary thrust of Salafism derives from the fact that, unlike the Muslim Brothers, Salafists are

opposed to the idea that any human institution along the lines of a parliament should be able to make laws. In their view, people have already received their laws, and these laws are the word of God, which people should obey. A related idea that they embrace is that there is no such thing as a sovereign people, which is what revolutionaries from Tunisia to Damascus were calling for when they shouted “the people (*ash-sha’b*) want the regime (*nizam*) to fall!” According to Salafists, however, there is no such thing as “a people” or “a nation”, there is only the community of all Muslims (*ummah*). That community is then divided into those who follow Islam in a correct and devout manner and are committed to the idea that Sharia law is the only system of law, and those who do not fit these criteria. Although Salafists oppose the West and are especially against the non-believers (*kafir*) in Europe, they locate their chief enemies among the ranks of other Muslims. Alongside their criticism of the Muslim Brothers and the Brothers’ openness to democratic politics, Shiites are the Salafists’ chief fixation. Their view is that Sunni Muslims are oppressed by Shiites and are increasingly being subjugated by Shiites, and most strikingly so in Iraq (2003) and Syria (2011). They thus want Sunni Muslims in the Middle East and Europe to wage jihad, but they are asking them to do so against a heresy that the majority of Muslims in Western Europe and northern Africa have never encountered personally or in some cases even heard of. Another enemy whom the Salafists similarly loathe is a mystical version of Islam that enjoys mass popularity – Sufism. Salafists deem mystical Islam to be heretical as well, and they take pleasure in destroying the tombs of venerated Sufi saints. They couple the notion that “their” Salafism is the only correct version of the faith with an obsession about purifying Islam and a tendency to declare other Muslims to be heretics and to seek to destroy them. This drive to purify Muslim society is also aimed at non-Muslims who have been living alongside them for centuries, such as the Yezidis in Iraq, who were attacked by the Islamic State. This fanaticism, coupled with a desire to purify Muslim society, means that ultimately the Salafists turn on everyone, and this sets in motion a spiral

of violence and leads in the end to their isolation. They are ultimately left without any allies and are in a fight with everyone, which is what happened to the Islamic State.

Kepel’s approach underlines the specifics of the individual countries that were involved in the Arab Spring and their post-revolution trajectories. He nevertheless also identifies some general features they have in common that led to their revolutions: dynastic tendencies (attempts to transfer power to relatives), a labour market that, especially in the public sector, is unable to absorb waves of unemployed secondary-school and university graduates, and an approximately twofold increase in the price of basic foods and propane and butane for cooking (2009–2011). Unafraid to draw historical parallels, this French author reminds us that the French Revolution broke out also at a time when the majority of the population had to spend more than half their income on food. The most general problem of the regimes in Arab population who were ruled over believed that there was a chance that their standard of living could gradually improve, but then this fragile social contract collapsed. In another analysis Kepel identifies two types of geographically localised revolutionary situations: the first and less precarious of the two is in northern Africa (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya) and the second and far more problematic one is in the Levant (Bahrain, Yemen, Syria). In Sunni Arab northern Africa societies tend to be more homogeneous, and identity politics that would pit Sunnis and Shiites against each other can gain little footing here. The different social classes in these societies were therefore able to at least temporarily set aside their disputes and unite against the dictatorship in a single revolutionary coalition and think of themselves as “a people” (*ash-sha’b*). This made it easier to overthrow dictatorships more quickly and mostly without bloodshed. In Kepel’s view, there is an analogy to be made here with the European Springtime of the Peoples (1848), a mass continent-wide uprisings of people who had democratic demands. And the outcome both back then and today was disappointment, because, contrary to great expectations, no direct changes ensued. Everywhere Islamist terrorism intensified. And

everywhere the fall of the dictatorship led to earlier historical dynamics being brought back into play. However much the revolutions' leaders tried at first to reproduce the success of the revolutions in Egypt and especially Tunisia and even in the Levant and tried to topple dictatorships by appealing to national unity, over the course of the revolutions the societies involved became increasingly polarised into Sunni and Shiite segments, which resulted in sectarian revolts. In these places, social classes never had a chance to unite even temporarily to form a single revolutionary coalition, because class divisions overlapped with sectarian ones.

The third and final part of the book, titled "After ISIS: Disintegration and Regrouping" (pp. 231–317), is by contrast more of a disappointment. Here Kepel focuses on describing the transformation of international relations that occurred in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. According to Kepel, the basic contours of what tomorrow will bring are gradually emerging out of the chaos. In other words, the defeat of the Islamic State has been followed, especially in the Levant, by the biggest reconfiguration of Middle East politics since the First World War, when the Ottoman Empire collapsed. Even now, however, what we are witnessing is nothing less than the most visible manifestation of the birth of a new global order, this time amidst the decline of American international hegemony. The main problem with the third part of this book, however, is that Kepel is describing an anomic situation. He is presenting a detailed picture of the disintegration of the old order and the established rules, but, despite his proclamations, this order and these rules are being replaced not by the birth of new and lasting alliances but by ad hoc coalitions. What Kepel's description of international relations in the Levant most resembles is thus the war of all against all. Kepel's book can nevertheless be recommended as a reference for everyone with an interest in understanding current events in the Middle East and one that considers the historical roots of the dramatic processes that are going on today.

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**Jóhann Páll Árnason: *The Labyrinth of Modernity. Horizons, Pathways and Mutations*. Lanham – Boulder – New York – London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020, 230 pp.**

The present review focuses on a very important book, *The Labyrinth of Modernity*, through a fundamental reflection on the value and diversity of the modern world. As the title suggests, the book is about bringing together current debates on the approach to modernity, which it links to the context of civilization. Professor Árnason approaches the idea of modernity as a new civilizational specificity combined with the social imaginary, thus analysing and deepening view of civilizational features and specificities of different cultures. The social imaginary in this case is understood as targeting a strong vision of human autonomy yet remaining open to differentiation at both the ideological and institutional levels, even in changing historical contexts. The introduction of the book also introduces this perspective as a corresponding framework of social theory that focuses on the differentiation of the economic, political and cultural spheres. The chapters describing the Soviet model as an alternative conception of modernity and the issues of East Asian politics form undoubtedly essential parts of the book. The book concludes with reflections on the theory of globalization and ways of formulating it in the light of the civilizational approach.

After reading, this book seemed to me to combine theoretical arguments with case studies that aim to map the new functioning of the formation of modernity on a global scale. In this respect, it is a detailed elaboration of historical sociology that analyses the major historical variables with respect to modernity. The book is also a kind of culmination of the journal *Social Imaginaries*, which is also a project of Árnason and associated colleagues. For where the journal connects cultural and social phenomena, the book uses particular insights from the theory of civilization to clarify the use of social imaginaries in creating a new world. In the book, Árnason argues that the contemporary social era is not a given object to theorize about. Rather, it