

with capitalism by their own economic dependency on the industrial economy, and that dependency was abetted by the unions and labor activism Nepstad examined in chapter 1. Where two progressive priorities come into conflict, *Catholic Social Activism* seems unable to see the clashing priorities.

It seems important to say that this is not a bad book: it delivers what it promises, a sociological analysis of progressive Catholic movements during the last century. Its weakness is a reifying presumption that what a sociological analysis needs—an identifiable progressive caucus divisibly distinct from the whole church—contributes to an understanding of the Catholic Church over the period investigated. It does, but only to a point. And where Nepstad describes a “clear instance of Catholic laypeople not obediently following the lead of the Vatican” and coming out “on the side of the poor rather than on the side of the Vatican”(126), it is difficult not to imagine that a future sociologist may write almost exactly the same sentence praising some of the Catholics at war with Pope Francis today. Both would tell us something about what divides Catholics. Neither would much illuminate the intricate reality of how Catholics sort through the competing priorities they face in a challenging world that always is more complex than the binaries into which we divide it.

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***Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison.* By Ahmet T. Kuru. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. xvii + 303 pp. \$99.99 cloth, \$33.60 paper.**

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Scholars of Islam and authoritarianism have been waiting for this book. There is much conventional wisdom about the role of Islamic religious

scholars ('ulema) in restraining (or supporting) the ruler in Islamic societies, but few systematic analyses. Most social scientists lack the training in the Islamic sciences or research languages that are required to systematically analyze the primary sources relevant to understanding the role of the 'ulema across time and space. But finally, someone with the right skills, and a commitment to process tracing, has taken up the task.

In this sweeping work, Kuru follows in the footsteps of Barrington Moore in examining how social relations shape political structures and outcomes. Explicitly, the research question that occupies this work is: "Why are Muslim-majority countries less peaceful, less democratic, less developed?" (p. 1). Implicitly, however, the real (and more interesting) question is: Why did Muslim-majority countries, which led the world in technology and learning from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, begin to lose ground to Western Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries? Why did this differentiation seem to accelerate between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries? What role did class and broader social relations play in this dramatic shift?

This framing is important because it allows Kuru to question those who attribute decline in Muslim-majority countries to colonialism. Kuru argues instead that the differentiation in progress began much earlier than colonialism. In Kuru's words, "The difference between the intellectually and economically dynamic Muslim world during its early history, on the one hand, and the stagnant Muslim world during its later history, on the other, requires more nuanced and sophisticated explanation. What historical factors explain this difference and constitute the roots of Muslims' contemporary problems?" (p. 3).

Kuru argues that the answer lies in an alliance that developed between the state and 'ulema that prevented the development of an independent bourgeoisie and a flourishing intellectual class (philosophers and other non-religious scholars). "I argue that the relations between religious, political, intellectual, and economic classes have been the engine behind the changes in and reversals between the levels of development in the Muslim world, as well as in Western Europe" (p. 3).

By focusing on this structural arrangement, Kuru is able to speak directly to those who argue that it is Islam as a religious tradition that has prevented democratization and broader forms of progress. Kuru's section "The role of Islam" beginning on page 34 is, to my knowledge, the best summary (and critique) of this literature to date. He argues, "the ulema-state alliance is not an essential aspect of Islam, but a historical construct of the eleventh century and its aftermath" (p. 158). By

demonstrating that the 'ulema-state alliance leads to decline and that this arrangement of power is not original nor essential to Islam, Kuru seriously weakens the (Islamophobic) counter-arguments that attribute decline and incompatibility with democracy to Islam as a religion.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I, containing three chapters, lays out the need for the work, while Part II illuminates Kuru's actual argument. Personally, I found the introductory chapters to be unnecessary. The idea that Muslim countries suffer higher rates of political violence (chapter 1), lower rates of democracy (chapter 2), and low rates of socio-economic development (chapter 3) are already well-documented. These ideas could have been addressed in a few paragraphs, and should have been, to make the scope of the book more manageable and to focus attention on the key argument related to the 'ulema-state alliance. Nevertheless, because the chapters bring Kuru's argument into conversation with the leading counter-arguments, the chapters could be assigned in the undergraduate classroom to summarize these debates.

Things get interesting in part II, where Kuru lays out his historical argument with a breathtaking grasp of an enormous amount of empirical material. Chapter four presents the evidence that from the seventh to the eleventh centuries, when Islamic societies were vibrant, Islamic scholars tended to be petty merchants and resisted alignment with the authorities. This chapter also seriously critiques the arguments that Islam and the state must be unified.

Chapter five analyzes why we begin to see a period of decline in Islamic lands from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. Chapter six examines the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries with particular attention to the relationship between the 'ulema and the state in the Ottoman Empire, and the final chapter analyzes how Muslim reformers responded to the rise of Western colonialism and intellectual dominance.

One particularly strong element of the work is that Kuru does not shy away from analyzing theological debates and their impact on political institutions. Most political scientists avoid engagement with religious ideas, knowing that they do not have the background to do them justice and/or that surveying beliefs is difficult. The result has been a field keen to address questions of agency and institutions without serious engagement with the ideological and theological debates among scholars and philosophers that might shape how institutions are designed. Those scholars that do engage religion have tended to take one of two extremes: religious ideas explain everything, religious ideas explain nothing.

Kuru keeps ideas in their place, in a broader web composed of agents and structures, but still shaping opportunities, coalitions, and conflicts.

The section on Ghazali in chapter four (p. 108) captures this complexity. Kuru broadly agrees with the claim levied by some critics that Ghazali's formulation of Sunni orthodoxy has contributed to the decline of intellectual vitality in the Muslim world, but he also points out inconsistencies in Ghazali's positions. In addition, Kuru addresses the structural conditions that allowed Ghazali's ideas to flourish, namely, the 'ulema-state alliance. Further, he makes clear that the structural conditions were much more consequential than the specific ideas Ghazali advocated. Kuru concludes, "In sum, Ghazali's main negative role in Muslims' intellectual life concerns not the details of his particular views but his contributions to the consolidation of the ulema-state alliance" (p. 111).

The main weakness of the work is how little the 'ulema-state alliance is conceptualized. The work would have benefitted from an entire chapter on the concept including empirical implications. How will we know it when we see it? Instead, the phrase is left to stand for itself, and an enormous amount of empirical material is piled on top of it, leaving the reader to do the work of parsing out what exactly the 'ulema-state alliance is. The term alliance implies a mutually-beneficial arrangement to protect the privileges of two distinct actors, but the actual cases presented (and those that I know of myself) suggest that most religious scholars find themselves in a particular relationship over which they have very little control. It is not, in fact, an alliance. In personal correspondence with the author, he clarified that scholars usually inherit particular relations with the state that they have little ability to influence. The term alliance then refers less to why the two groups are supporting one another (the exchange of privileges), and more to the reality of the alignment. For this reason, I think the phrase "ulema-state association" might be closer to what is meant.

The argumentation is systematic and comprehensive, so documented it borders on defensive. The flip side of this hyper-attention to detail is that the citations are a gold mine. The one table provided on page 228 masterfully summarizes the argument, but there were a number of other points throughout the work that would have benefitted from being captured in a visual format. All things considered, it might be helpful to not look at this as a book, but rather more of a proposal for a research program. And, due to Kuru's fastidious and comprehensive approach, he succeeds at both! Nevertheless, it is a daunting read for even the most interested scholar, with constant refutations of counter-arguments, and footnotes so precise they border on compulsive. The result, however difficult for one reader to take in, is a masterpiece and a gift to the field.

Overall, Kuru convincingly argues that times of more independence for religious scholars have yielded more vitality and innovation in all spheres of life including religion. But he does not take the final step of his analysis, which is to bemoan the increasingly tight relationship of rulers and scholars in Muslim states in contemporary times, and what it suggests for the future of Muslim societies. That connection he largely leaves to the careful reader.

Instead, Kuru frames this situation as an opportunity: “Muslims can redesign the relationship between their religion and their states in way[s] that would promote intellectual and economic creativity” (p. 235). While technically accurate, it is unrealistic. If Kuru’s theory is correct, and I fear that it is, then given the strength of the security apparatus in the contemporary Middle East, the degree of the bureaucratization of the religious sphere, the anti-intellectual atmosphere, and the weakness of entrepreneurship, we should expect the region to be rife with violence, authoritarianism, and underdevelopment for the foreseeable future.