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Demography and Democracy: Transitions in the Middle East and North Africa by Elhum Haghighat (review)

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(Review)

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sary spiritual renewal of the modern subject that Hallaq invokes is quite close to that advocated by Guénon, although it is not clear to what extent Hallaq wishes to associate himself with perennialism, however much *Orientalism Restated* overlaps with it in its indictment of modernity. Indeed, Hallaq's redefinition of the Orient as the non-Western world in possession of spiritual traditions necessary for the refashioning of the modern subject (pp. 243–46) supports a reading of it as a perennialist critique that draws on, among others, Thomas Kuhn, Carl Schmitt, Giorgio Agamben, Foucault, Patrick Wolfe, and John Gray. *Restating Orientalism* certainly aligns with perennialism in its strong rejection of secular humanism and the need to refashion the self with intense study of a traditional religious or spiritual path (Islam being the primary one presented here).

There are several areas in which Hallaq's analysis departs from previous traditionalist criticisms of Western modernity, the primary one being the importance he gives to law (pp. 112–21; although this is hardly surprising considering his previous writings). The focus on law as the essence of Islamic morality and the bulwark of Islamic spirituality is worth noting considering how influential recent discussions of Islam have argued against an earlier Orientalist fixation on law as metonymically standing in for Islam itself and for a greater consideration of the role of Sufism as being equally characteristic of Islamic civilization.³ Sufism receives little discussion in *Restating Orientalism*, although Hallaq repeatedly sets it next to the *shari'a* as the twin moral systems that shaped the premodern Muslim self (p. 83).

For readers already sympathetic to Hallaq's criticisms of the moral vacuity of modernity and its corrosive influence on the self, *Restating Orientalism* may provide them with a theoretical nuanced understanding of the exceptionally negative role of European

rationality in world history. For those not already sharing his belief (and even for some who do) that modernity and modern states create citizens lacking ethical formation (p. 105), the genealogy he sketches may be less convincing, and his conflation of Enlightenment philosophy, the rise of modern science, the emergence of the nation-state, and European colonialism is simplistic. They may similarly question his claim that there was something particular about European Christianity that distinguished it from other spiritual traditions and that laid the groundwork for later European justifications for environmental destruction (pp. 87–89, 99). Still, I believe that most readers of *Restating Orientalism* will find their interpretations of Orientalism challenged, will be provoked to question assumptions small and large, and will be pushed to justify their own understandings of modern knowledge and its genealogies.

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SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Demography and Democracy: Transitions in the Middle East and North Africa, by Elhum Haghghat, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 261 pages. \$99.99 cloth; \$22.17 paper; \$20.20 Kindle.

Reviewed by Paul Puschmann

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the Middle East and North Africa have turned into the world's deadliest conflict zone. Due to the civil wars in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen, and the rise of the co-called Islamic State, hundreds of thousands of civilians have died, and millions have been forced to take refuge, mostly in neighboring countries. The flow of refugees has caused enormous challenges to international aid organizations and has put serious pressure on governments of refugee-hosting countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. If we add to this the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict,

3. See Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Thomas Bauer, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* [The Culture of Ambiguity: An Alternative History of Islam] (Berlin: Insel Verlag, 2011).

the Kurdish independence movement, the power struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Qatar diplomatic crisis, and more structural sources of instability — such as the large differences in wealth between and within countries, high unemployment, and limited availability of water — the political future of the Middle East and North Africa looks gloomy.

In *Demography and Democracy*, Elhum Haghighat shows that there is also reason for a more optimistic view of the political future of this region. Haghighat analyzes demographic and democratic transitions and demonstrates that, from Morocco to Iran and from Yemen to Turkey, large-scale developments — declining mortality and fertility, rising life-expectancy, schooling, and the advent of what might be called a civil society — have taken place that pave the way toward “modern” societies that sooner or later will be receptive to liberal democracy. She thereby convincingly refutes the idea that Islam is incompatible with modernization and demonstrates that a clash between Western and Islamic civilizations (as predicted by Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington, and others) is highly unlikely. However, Haghighat also demonstrates that modernization in the Middle East does not follow the same paths as in the West; and that the interplay of economic, demographic, and political forces plays out very differently in various countries in the region, leading to *multiple modernities*, which are essentially compatible with Islam and are often even strongly connected to it. Piety movements and charity organizations — in which women are driving forces — also play a pivotal role in reform and they are, according to Haghighat, some of the building blocks of a rising civil society.

In the last chapter of the book, Haghighat focuses on Yemen, Tunisia, Qatar, and Iran to strengthen her arguments. Each of these countries has undergone thorough changes in the past half-century, and each country has made steps forward. However, each country struggles in its own way with the transition toward modernity. While the rights of women, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people are everywhere either absent or highly contested, each country faces its own challenges. Qatar has de-

veloped thanks to large oil and gas reserves and a large cheap and docile immigrant work force — based on the *kafala* system, which makes migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation — into the richest country in the world, but political inclusion lags. Tunisia has also experienced rapid demographic changes, as well as strong improvements in education and gender equity, and seems to be closer to liberal democracy, but it faces economic challenges. Iran’s fertility decline is impressive and so are its improvements in health and life expectancy, but economic development is much lower than one would expect given its large mineral reserves. Moreover, although the country possesses democratic institutions, its regime has remained highly autocratic. Yemen struggles on all fronts: its demographic, economic, and political development lag far behind other countries in the region.

The book is a good introduction to students of the Middle East and North Africa, offering plenty of food for thought with respect to economic, demographic and political developments. However, specialists in the field might be disappointed as they will gain few novel insights from this monograph. The book offers a rich trove of statistics, but does not go beyond simple descriptive analyses. Additionally, the principal ideas discussed are — contrary to what the author suggests — not new at all but rely heavily on earlier works. For the links between demography and democracy, the author obviously builds on the work by Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd and to some degree also on the research by Richard Cincotta and John Doces.¹ Unfortu-

1. Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd, *A Convergence of Civilizations: The Transformation of Muslim Societies Around the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Richard P. Cincotta and John Doces, “The Age-Structural Maturity Thesis: The Impact of the Youth Bulge’s Influence on the Advent and Stability of Liberal Democracy,” in *Political Demography: How Population Changes Are Reshaping International Security and National Politics*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone, Eric P. Kaufman, and Monica Duffy Toft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 98–116.

nately, though, these ideas are not extended, but rather simplified, and in such a way that some of the genuine arguments seem to have gotten lost, especially when it comes to the “youth bulge.” Although Haghghat’s efforts result in a highly readable book for nonspecialists, those who are interested in the topic would be well advised to turn also to the works cited above, as well as to other relevant publications in the field.²

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2. For examples, see Youssef Courbage and Paul Puschmann, “Does Demographic Revolution Lead to Democratic Revolution? The Case of North Africa and the Middle East,” in *Population Change in Europe, the Middle-East and North Africa. Beyond the Demographic Divide*, ed. Koenraad Matthijs et al. (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015), 203–23; Shingo Hamanaka, “Demographic Change and Its Social and Political Implications in the Middle East,” *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 2, no. 1 (2017): 70–86. doi:10.1177/2057891116636490.