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Hymnen des Jihads: Naschids im Kontext jihadistischer Mobilisierung, by Behnam T. Said. Ergon-Verlag, 2016. 361pp. Pb. €48.00. ISBN-13: 9783956501258

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The number of books and articles on all things jihad has mushroomed over the past decade and a half. Apart from more historical studies on the concept of jihad or warfare in Islam, which have been around for a longer time, some of these more recent publications focus on terrorism, radicalisation and movements, scholars or militants associated with groups like al-Qaʿida and others. Given the fact that numerous scholars from multiple disciplines have already written about the phenomenon of jihad and the movement often referred to as "global jihadism", one could wonder what anyone could still add to this. In the past few years, however, a new field of research has emerged that is sometimes referred to as studying "jihadi culture". This field does not focus on the military practices, radicalising trajectories, religious doctrines, political viewpoints and strategic plans of jihadis, but on what they do "when they don't fight", as Norwegian researcher Thomas Hegghammer puts it on "The Bored Jihadi", a Tumblr page dedicated to jihadi culture.

The book under review, *Hymnen des Jihads: Naschids im Kontext jihadistischer Mobilisierung* by the German researcher Behnam T. Said, seeks to contribute to this new field of jihadi culture studies by focussing on one aspect of it, namely the use of songs (*nashid*s) in the context of militant Islamist mobilisation. Jihadi poetry and music have been dealt with by other scholars, such as Tilman Seidensticker and Thomas Bauer, but Said seems to have meant this book, which is based on his PhD-thesis obtained at Friedrich Schiller University Jena, as a comprehensive (and perhaps even the definitive) treatment of the subject, a task in which he has largely succeeded.

Said defines jihadi *nashid*s as those songs that have lyrics of which the dominating themes fit in with well-known jihadi narratives such as fighting against repressive regimes and striving to die as a martyr and that use the language associated with this trend. The author also takes into account where these songs are used (jihadi videos, websites and forums) to decide whether they can be seen as truly jihadi *nashid*s or not (p. 17). Interestingly, Said shows that an early reference to a song sung by women and children to welcome the Prophet Muhammad to Yathrib (Medina) is actually quite controversial, with some scholars claiming that it was not a song but a poem, while others doubt the validity of the *hadith* in which this song appears altogether (p. 23).

It is clear, however, that songs have been used throughout Islamic history for various purposes, such as herding camels, encouraging soldiers who are march-

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ing or preparing for battle and stimulating labourers. Whether such songs were always called "*anashid*" (pl. of *nashid*) or labelled otherwise, like "*aghani*" (pl. of *ughniyya*), depended very much on the context, Said shows. In modern times, the latter label was used more by secular or Christian Arabs, while "*nashid*" often referred to nationalist or religious songs, although still different terms ("*taranim*" or "*aghani ruhiyya*") were used for Christian church songs. Within this spectrum of terms, Said states that Jihadi *nashid*s are *a capella* songs (sometimes accompanied by percussion instruments or electronic audio-effects) with a militant Islamist message (pp. 24-9).

The first chapter of the book shows how the genre of Islamist *nashid*s has developed in Egypt and Syria since the 1970s. As Islamists expressed opposition against popular music, *nashid*s gradually became a pious alternative that was acceptable to them. These songs did not always have the same goals, however, with some characterised as "protest songs" while others focussed on *da'wa* (calling others to Islam). Said describes how regional and local developments influenced the topics of these *nashid*s throughout the Muslim world, perhaps most importantly the jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union in the 1980s, which, in turn, had an impact on the subjects used in *nashid*s (war, martyrdom, etcetera) by jihadis. The latter, because they were increasingly influenced by Salafism coming from Saudi Arabia ("Wahhabism"), were more likely to produce *a capella nashid*s, rather than ones accompanied by musical instruments, such as Palestinian Islamist *nashid*s at the time.

The debate over whether to use musical instruments and even whether music itself is permissible is dealt with in the second chapter of the book, in which Said analyses views on songs from medieval scholars as well as modern ones rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood and those with a Salafi background. The latter are less likely to allow musical instruments to be used and often restrict music to the human voice – sometimes accompanied by percussion instruments – and often propose other ways of spending one's time (such as reading or reciting the Qur'an) as alternatives to listening to or making music. Jihadi-Salafis, Said writes, take a more pragmatic approach than their non-radical Salafi brethren, an attitude he ascribes to Jihadi-Salafism's partial roots in Muslim Brotherhood-thinking. This chapter also deals with *nashid*-singers and, perhaps more importantly, the functions *nashid*s may have, including shaping identity and strengthening solidarity among jihadis as well as serving as a tool in their radicalisation.

The rest of the book is dedicated to examples of jihadi *nashid*s and the analysis of their lyrics, metre and rhyme. This may seem odd in a book dedicated to jihadism, but given the fact that jihadis often combine classical forms of Arabic poetry with modern subjects (pp. 30-1), a more literary approach may not be as strange as it appears at first glance. Said distinguishes several different categories of jihadi *nashid*s, based on their lyrics, including battle songs (among which

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is the relatively famous *nashid* "*Ghuraba*"), elegies, songs of praise/songs about leaders, *nashid*s about martyrdom, songs about prisoners, those sung to mothers and the ones about specific conflicts.

As this review has perhaps already implicitly made clear, Said's book is highly descriptive. Considering the fact that little has been published on jihadi *nashid*s, this may not be entirely avoidable, perhaps, but it is nevertheless striking that after finishing the book, one is clearly left with the impression that there is no overarching argument or thread found throughout its pages. It almost seems as if no general research question underpins any of it and the author was really only interested in merely giving a straightforward – albeit thorough – description of jihadi *nashid*s. This may lead some to wonder what the point of this book really is, other than providing information. The same applies to the author's use of social movement theory (SMT) and particularly the concept of "framing" (pp. 36-8). While employing these makes sense in a book on cultural expressions such as jihadi *nashid*s, which are used to convey a certain world view, and the author does return to this in the conclusion, SMT's role in this publication is simply too small to be of any greater theoretical value for the book as a whole.

This relatively minor criticism should not obscure the book's many obvious qualities, however. As mentioned, Said has produced a comprehensive treatment of the subject of jihadi *nashid*s and provides his readers with a wealth of information about them. It is written well and the author's understated style of writing is even funny at times. More important, perhaps, is the fact that Said has drawn on the literature from fields ranging from musicology to Arabic poetry, ensuring that this book contributes to the academic study of Islamism, music, culture, literature and radicalisation, not to mention the emerging field of "jihadi culture". The book should therefore appeal to scholars from all of those fields and, as such, deserves a wide readership.

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