Justyna Nedza, Takfīr *im militanten Salafismus. Der Staat als Feind*. Leiden: Brill, 2020. x, 343 pp., ISBN 978-90-04-37910-7.

Salafism has received considerable attention from scholars of Islam over the past few decades, much of it focussed on politically quietist or, conversely, politically activist forms of Salafism rather than the radical Jihādī-Salafism mostly studied by scholars of terrorism and radicalisation. This is regrettable, as Jihādī-Salafism is a subject to whose ideological and theological tenets only scholars of Islam can truly do justice. It is partly for this reason that the book Takfīr *im militanten Salafismus: Der Staat als Feind* by Justyna Nedza, who works at the German Ministry of Interior and Sports Rhineland-Palatinate, is a very welcome addition to the literature on this subject.

After addressing the general terminology used in the book – "Salafism" and its categorisation, as well as "Islamism" – the introductory Chapter 1 discusses the term "Jihādī-Salafism" and why Nedza is critical of Quintan Wiktorowicz's use of it. Nedza argues that, by using this term, Wiktorowicz problematically reduces *jihād* to one meaning of revolutionary violence or warfare and suggests that this is only a sufficient characteristic of one group of *salafīs*. Nedza's alternative is "militant Salafism," by which she refers to the militant and physical form of *jihād* and, more generally, the violent creed and methods used by the people she has studied.

Like many works before this one, Nedza's describes how militant Salafism arose as a combination of *wahhābī* ideas and Islamist thought since the 1950s and how repression and the war against the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan in the 1980s helped foster groups and scholars of this type. The defining characteristic of militant Salafism, Nedza writes, is the prominence ascribed to *takfīr* (excommunication, declaring someone to be a non-Muslim) and its relation to the religious justification of violent action as a just war in the form of *jihād*, particularly with regard to political rulers. She states that militant Salafists, unlike Islamists like Sayyid Quṭb and Abū l-Aʿlā Mawdūdī, do not take a deductive approach by criticising ruling systems as a whole, but apply an inductive rejection of individual acts and those responsible for them to apply *takfīr* to broader regimes.

Given this, Nedza is particularly interested in the role the nation-state has played in global militant Salafism: Have its ideologues completely abandoned it or does it still play a role in their ideas? Have their personal, local, and national contexts influenced their views? In order to answer these questions, Nedza focusses on two case studies: first, the former leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Sayyid Imām al-Sharīf; and second, three Saudi scholars who

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have served as major inspirations to Al-Qāʿida in the Arabian Peninsula: ʿAlī al-Khuḍayr, Nāṣir al-Fahd, and Aḥmad al-Khālidī.

These figures are interesting not just because of their writings on *takfīr* and the state, but also because they have gone through a process of ideological revisionism. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with their biographies and basic ideological positions. Nedza describes al-Sharīf's life, education, and membership of Islamic Jihad in Egypt, his publications, and his status as an international ideologue. She also discusses in detail how he applies *takfīr* to the state, parliament, and the legal system of Muslim-majority countries – based mainly on the situation in Egypt – as well as the "helpers" (*anṣār*) of these regimes: the military, the police, and even certain Muslim scholars and groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. Chapter 3 takes a similar approach, analysing the lives, education, and writings of the three Saudi scholars and their influence on Al-Qāʿida in the Arabian Peninsula. Nedza describes how al-Khuḍayr, al-Fahd, and al-Khālidī strongly criticised Saudi ties with and support for the United States, even qualifying them as acts of *kufr* (unbelief), However, unlike al-Sharīf, they did not go so far as to explicitly apply *takfīr* to their Saudi rulers, although it does seem implied in their goals. Neither did these three Saudis call for *jihād* against the Saudi regime or its rulers, although they did support attacks against non-Muslims in the country as well as in Afghanistan and Iraq while they were occupied by the United States and other Western countries.

Chapter 4 constitutes the core of the book. In it, Nedza enters into the intricacies of the four scholars' ideologies with regard to *takfīr*. She delves into the differences between minor unbelief (*kufr aṣghar*) and major unbelief (*kufr akbar*), what the four scholars associate with these terms, and why they believe their governments are guilty of *kufr akbar* for not fully applying the *sharīʿa*, thereby facilitating *takfīr*. Nedza also points out that the three Saudis, unlike al-Sharīf, make frequent recourse to the concepts of *al-walāʾ wa-l-barāʾ* ("loyalty and disavowal") to show their discontent with the Saudi regime. All four use the term *irjāʾ* ("postponement") to accuse others of neglecting acts that are a part of the faith by postponing judgement on those guilty of *kufr*, thereby avoiding *takfīr*. The chapter also deals with the differences between what Nedza refers to as *takfīr* in its general and concrete forms (*takfīr al-muṭlaq* and *takfīr al-muʿayyan*) and the extent to which *takfīr* of groups and institutions can be seen as examples of the latter. She also deals with Ibn Taymiyya's concept of *al-ṭāʾifa al-mumtaniʿa* ("the resisting group"), how he used it to describe a diverse group of opponents and how the four scholars central to this book have each applied this to their enemies.

Chapter 5 deals with the theoretical underpinnings of these four ideologues' views. In al-Sharīf's case, these can be found in his apparent belief that he can act as an absolute *mujtahid* (a direct interpreter of the sources), while the

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three Saudi scholars strongly rely on the early *wahhābī* tradition for theirs. In Chapter 6, Nedza looks at the sources used by all four, which range from early *wahhābīs* to neo-*hanbalīs*, modernist reformers (though mostly to criticise other modernists like Muḥammad ʿAbduh), and Islamist thinkers. Chapter 7 deals with the limited and, in the Saudi case probably disingenuous, ideological revisionism that all four men have espoused.

Nedza has written an outstanding book. Much of the subject matter dealt with here had already received some attention from academics such as Madawi al-Rasheed, Daniel Lav, and me. Nedza, however, is keenly aware of this and has produced a work that not only makes extensive use of an impressive amount of secondary literature, but also successfully builds on it by going into greater detail, analysing the four scholars from multiple angles and producing a book that is highly nuanced and overflowing with high-quality discussions of Jihādī-Salafī ideology. That she has gone to the trouble of tracing these ideas back to the classical sources and citing these extensively only underlines this.

Some criticism can be levelled at the book. Nedza might, for example, have put more effort into contributing to the broader study of Salafism, rather than just focussing on the work of four scholars. She mentions several academic debates on Salafism, for instance, but does not engage much with them and, where she does so, is perhaps not as effective as she could have been. Her arguments against associating *jihād* solely with Jihādī-Salafīs, for example, are sound, but her alternative term – "militant Salafis" – does not seem to solve the problem, since militancy is not beholden to advocates of violence like al-Sharīf either. Similarly, her claim that varying contexts have been important in shaping Salafism (pp. 7–8, 189) is obviously correct, but suggests that other scholars have somehow neglected this, which does not actually seem to be the case.

Yet these points are minor when compared with the many useful discussions, insightful analyses, and interesting ideological details Nedza offers us. Her unwillingness to make broader claims about Salafism may be rooted in a not only understandable but laudable reluctance to go beyond her immediate research subject. Nedza's book shows that Jihādī-Salafism is not the simple, superficial trend it is often thought to be, but – its position on the margins of Islam and its reviled status among both Muslims and non-Muslims notwithstanding – is a trend with considerable depth. Doing that as she does is, in itself, a significant achievement.

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