This superficial theorizing is relatively harmless. More problematic is the contention that Central Asians’ non-Western mentality, particularly their religiosity, best explains Hizb ut-Tahrir’s rise. After summarizing the material and political factors SMT suggests explain the party’s emergence, Karagiannis argues that the SMT account is incomplete because it does not address ideology. He decides that this neglect reflects a shortcoming of SMT, which was developed to explain ‘Western’ organizations, with their distinctively ‘rational’ decision makers (92). Karagiannis concludes that Hizb ut-Tahrir’s popularity in Central Asia must be understood with reference to Central Asians’ ‘deeply held religious beliefs and values’ (96) which are ‘deep-rooted in the collective subconsciousness due to the region’s long Islamic tradition’ (93). Although I do not doubt that the long history of Islam in the region (and Central Asians’ loyalty to the religion of their ancestors) is an important factor here, acknowledging this is a far cry from claiming Central Asians who support the party are being driven by their inherent spiritualism to act against their best interests. This argument is disappointing, particularly in that the book is otherwise full of evidence that political, economic, and indeed pragmatic concerns are critical to an understanding of the party’s success.

To summarize, many portions of this work will serve as a useful reference for students and instructors, but caution should be taken. The book offers some useful correctives to available accounts of jihadist groups in Central Asia, but some of its underlying assumptions remain problematic.

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With the Arab Spring we witness a turn in scholarly perspectives on the Middle East and North Africa that shifts the focus towards the aesthetic dimension of political culture. Lina Khatib’s book Image Politics in the Middle East: The Role of the Image in Political Struggle is an important contribution to this change in perspective. Unlike many recent works on visual culture in that region, Khatib’s book does not isolate the visual dynamics of the Arab revolts, but situates them within a broader framework of image politics in the Middle East. Khatib presents visual analyses from a range of countries during the last decade and provides analytical tools for examining different modalities of power associated with the image. With her programmatic opening sentence ‘Politics in the Middle East is now seen.’ (p. 1), she highlights the importance of acknowledging the agentive potential of images in structuring and changing power relations. Khatib offers more than a ‘snapshot of the role and dynamics of the image in processes of political struggle in the region’ (3) with her deep and situated insight.
into the strategic use and public function of images in times of political change in Lebanon, Iran and Egypt.

Adopting an approach of applied visual culture studies, Khatib considers not only images of political change, but more broadly how those images are used, circulated, consumed, appropriated and subverted by various social actors. She proposes a new perspective on the different ways in which images actively partake in political change and in so doing she narrates recent Middle Eastern politics as a story about the struggle for the visual sphere. This narration is composed of crucial moments in Middle Eastern image politics, starting with the visual legacy of the Cedar Revolution and image management by Hizbullah; continuing with the image politics of the Iranian regime as well as niches of oppositional art in Iran and the Green Movement as forms of visual protest; and finally leading to the ‘visual rush of the Arab Spring’ and the way it put an end to the personification of politics so strongly associated with the image of dictators.

Khatib’s book presents a range of concepts for describing possible relations between images, texts, media and bodies. In her innovating account of the Arab Spring, the latter marks a turning point in these relations since its visual dimension does not primarily rely on intentional strategies for using and controlling images in a certain way. Rather, these revolts witnessed the emergence of ‘hypermedia spaces’: symbolic fields formed by different images and different media which reconfigure the relation between the state and its citizens, between producers and consumers, popular culture and politics, material presences and places (4–5). In these hypermedia spaces, the image becomes a ‘floating image’ that multiplies and circulates in uncontrolled ways and thus acquires a sort of agency which differs from the functional and strategic uses of the visual which Khatib associates with image politics in the region before 2011. In her descriptions of image struggles during the Cedar Revolution, Hizbullah’s image management and visual politics in Iran, images are principally used as ‘political tools’ or ‘weapons’, as political identity markers and identifiable brands, a means to spread charisma and construct martyrdom through ‘hyper-images’ or simulacra.

Drawing on the example of image-management strategies by Hizbullah, Khatib shows how the movement has been quite successful at merging propaganda with political marketing and branding strategies by adapting its visual products and target audiences to political changes while at the same time retaining a recognizable continuity in its representation as a resistance group and a religious party. The chapter on Hizbullah’s image politics draws a complex picture of links between acts of war commemoration, the construction of martyrs’ images and the use of religious and national references to address local and global audiences in different ways. These image strategies differ from the more tactical use of images during the more recent revolts, in which images ‘float’ and take on ‘multiple meanings, references, mediations, reincarnations and presences’ (12) beyond the context of their production.
The book’s strength lies in its broad view of political contexts where images are seen and circulated in various ways, and this approach opens new perspectives for further research on visual culture and image politics, not only in the Middle East. Studying such a vast array of political and spatial contexts is invariably reliant, however, on a broad definition of what constitutes an image. Khatib’s examples of image politics cover political rallies, the wearing of symbolic signs by demonstrators, as well as billboards, murals, museum displays, caricatures and television broadcasts, and this often renders distinctions between acts, performances, images and mediations impossible. The nature of the images addressed in Khatib’s study evolves in the course of the book, although this is not explicitly discussed: in the first part, images are mainly associated with the visual outcome of deliberately producing and spreading particular political messages; in the second part, focused on the Arab Spring, images are identified more in the creative production of reflexive and ironic pictures. This difference perceived here in the visual dimension of the Arab Spring offers fresh potential to formulate efficient concepts and refine theories of the image.

Khatib’s major contribution lies in presenting a variety of visibilities, images and gazes that have changed the political landscape in the Middle East. The illustrations in the book play their part in this variety. Most of these entirely black-and-white pictures show billboards, murals, photographs and rallies within the broader frame of the street, space or interior where they have been placed, thereby featuring the social contexts in which images are perceived. In this book, Khatib suggests a range of conceptions and interpretations of the political role of images that raise important questions and contribute to shaping an analytical framework for visual studies. The book invites further research into the different ways in which ‘politics in the Middle East is now seen’ and also into different modes of intervening in the aesthetic conditions for seeing political change.

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In the second half of the twentieth century, violent expressions of religious fanaticism led some intellectuals to attribute the causes of such violence to an intrinsic incapacity in Islam to recognize and adapt to the challenges of the modern world. Safdar Ahmad argues against this position by presenting the cases of Muslims that have attempted to reform their society through the application of Islamic principles. In his opinion, Muslim reformers represent the Islamic way to modernity, which should not be associated with European intellectual thought and be defined by such concepts as the contraposition of science and reason with religion and superstition.