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led native African forces subduing other natives. The second strand of Le Clezio's story takes up with Nour's descendant, a dreamy orphaned loner named Lalla, who spends her days roaming the Atlantic beach dunes and the periphery of the untamed inland desert on the outskirts of her shantytown abutting a nameless city in contemporary Morocco. The copper-skinned Lalla radiates a purity which draws humanity to her, particularly men. Yet it is she who willingly distances herself from society.

A procession of supporting characters propels her story from Morocco to Marseilles. There, an expectant, runaway Lalla enjoys a short-lived career as a coruscating fashion model. Throughout her journey she draws upon the strength of her blue-veiled ancestors' warrior spirit to keep her aloft during the dark hours of hunger and hardship. An ensuing tragedy drives the story to its climax, the French army's decimation of Nour's tribe and the violent, ecstatic birth of Lalla's daughter at dawn, alone on her native sands.

The distinction of Le Clezio's writing resides in its appeal to the senses. As in many of his works, *Desert* relies more on meditation, description, and form than on plot. In the first half, wherein Le Clezio contemplates the landscape, the dazzling light, and lashing winds of the desert and the ocean, the pace is, at times, numbingly slow. Then, in the second half, a radical narrative shift occurs once Lalla disembarks in Marseilles. There, the tale's frenzied pace mirrors the malaise of an immigrant penned-in amidst the confining urban spaces. What comes through in Le Clezio's lucid language is the strength of the Tuaregs' tenacious character, born of the arduous life along the Saharan caravan routes that allows them to endure in a menacing modern world.

Though born in France during World War II, Le Clezio grew up in Nigeria, where his father served as a French army physician stationed in West Africa. Largely educated in post-war England and France, Le Clezio has taught or lived in venues from the United States and South Korea to Panama and Thailand. He also has long been intrigued by Mesoamerican cultures, though some of his post-Nobel republished writings on the subject have been strongly rebuked for their

lack of nuanced cultural perception and outmoded research. Having sojourned among the world's various *indigenes*, Le Clezio affirms in his work what he believes to be the often noble values of vanishing cultures, as well as the West's indifference to the destruction wrought by its agencies of power.

In 2008, when the Nobel Committee announced the selection of Le Clezio for the Prize, the Committee's Permanent Secretary singled out American literature as being absorbed with its own mass culture, too "isolated and insular," uninterested in works in translation and, in sum, unwilling to participate in the world's literary conversation. The comments caused a brouhaha in the Republic of Letters. Then, in his acceptance speech, Le Clezio took aim at his own prosperous, literary readers in the West, highlighting the irony of writers deeply engaged in remedying the plight of the world's outcast and poor, only to have their work be primarily read by those affluent enough to afford the price of their books.

In time, Le Clezio may well yet join those few eminent authors whose books are read regularly by Americans in translation, like Mahfouz, Marquez, or the pre-*Lolita* Nabokov. But with its mystical, at times even hallucinatory passages and rather contrived plot, *Desert* is unlikely to be the signal book which causes his literary career in the United States to unfurl, carpet-like, from both ends at once.

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LAW

From Coexistence to Conquest: International Law and the Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1891-1949, by Victor Kattan. London and New York: Pluto Press, 2009. xxix + 261 pages. Maps. Notes to p. 367. Bibl. to p. 387. List of individuals to p. 395. Gloss. to p. 402. Index to p. 416. \$54.95.

Reviewed by Sanford R. Silverburg

Beginning with a provocative rather than descriptive title, Victor Kattan has pro-

duced the strongest case for Palestinians in their quest for political recognition that has appeared in recent times. Kattan, a Sudanese national with Anglo-Palestinian parentage and currently a teaching fellow at the prestigious Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, brings to the table an erudite if polemical advocacy in an interesting fashion. This extended position paper is more of an attack on Zionism and its proponents' efforts to develop a political organization for the Jewish people in ancient Palestine than it is an argument for the Palestinian cause based upon evidence from Palestinian sources. The arguments put forth are placed in the context of international law as it was understood in the early part of the 20th century, occasionally borrowing later developments to support a position *ante* and framed with historical interpretation. The primary focus is the case for self-determination for Palestinian Arabs and condemnation for the Zionists' taking of what is believed to be a rightful patrimony. The beginning date of the historical development, sub-titled 1891, we learn from the Chronology was the initiation of Arab — and not necessarily Palestinian — opposition to Jewish immigration to what was to become Palestine.

The book begins with a discussion of anti-semitism, sensitively handled, in combination with the goals of British colonialism and political Zionism, both of which are intertwined and thus in the contemporary intellectual climate subject to disparagement. As most observers of the history of the region know, there was no outlined political entity of Palestine until the British, maneuvering along with its European counterparts, artificially carved out of the defeated Ottoman Turkey's territory something that it could control for larger imperial interests. Kattan then delves into the intricacies of diplomacy, recognized as often devious. The Balfour Declaration, along with the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, and Sykes-Picot and Feisal-Weizmann Agreements, are scrupulously examined with interpretations heavily weighted by parliamentary commentary, and minutes in diplomatic correspondence as well as anti-Zionist statements made by Jews and non-Jews. The

British Mandatory authority comes under attack at numerous points in time and subject, generally for an overall failure to recognize the rightful position of the indigenous Arab population, which when connected with territory becomes the basis for granting what the Allied governments pronounced as a part of the liberal democratic theme in the post-World War I period, national self-determination. There is the requisite full discussion of the inter-communal conflict during the Mandate period, followed by a rather one-sided analysis of the 1948 War that ushered in the overall Arab-Israeli conflict and was the major cause for the displacement of Palestinians from their residence. The conditional status of Palestinians who, for a set of causes, failed to remain *in situ*, is taken up by the author without, however, a determination of their legal status and hence referred to as "refugees."

The remaining portion of the book deals with the dastardly "creation" of Israel as essentially a zero-sum game that left the Palestinians with no politically recognized status found in all historical treatments of the events that follow the British Mandate. In a concluding shot, Israel is placed in a context of how it has failed to live up to its international legal obligations since becoming a widely recognized state.

While the references employed are encyclopedic, including original and secondary material, there is a dearth of relevant Palestinian Arab sources. This point, perhaps minor, is intriguing since there was a Palestinian lawyer's society active during the period and certainly other Arab legal sources — as opposed to commentary — have abounded subsequently. Interesting from an international legal perspective is how Kattan quibbles about Transjordan and Egyptian military intervention beyond their borders into Palestine once the State of Israel was declared. Their actions are not condemned out of hand — nor necessarily accepted — since Transjordan was not a UN member and the norm of anticipatory self-defense had not yet been established.

The power of Kattan's presentation and arguments with their elegant style are completely comfortable within the field of international law and will invite, to be sure, a

host of expansive commentary.¹

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MEDIA

iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam, by Gary R. Bunt. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009. 289 pages. Gloss. to p. 294. Notes to p. 348. Index to p. 358. \$24.95.

Reviewed by Robert Rozehnal

In the digital age, cyberspace offers an alternative outlet for religious piety, practice, and polemics. With this eclectic monograph, Gary R. Bunt, a senior lecturer in Islamic Studies at the University of Wales, cements his reputation as the most prominent and prolific scholar of today's "cyber-Islamic landscape." In six wide-ranging chapters (plus an introduction and conclusion) Bunt charts Muslim community networking and identity politics online across a wide social, political, and cultural spectrum.

The book's opening chapter, "Locating Islam in Cyberspace," examines the complex interconnections and tensions within Internet Islam — and the vexing questions about audience, anonymity, and insider/outsider perspectives that scholars face while tracking Cyber Muslims. Bunt's analysis highlights the complexity of Islamic authority in cyberspace, a medium that both facilitates personal interactions and undermines normative modes of hierarchy and power. "The Internet is facilitating communication that could make the *ummah* more cohesive," he argues, "but it also represents and exposes diversity of expression and

understanding, which can facilitate fractures rather than heal the divisions within Islam" (p. 36). "Accessing Cyber-Islamic Environments" documents the demographics of Muslim web users. Tracing the fault lines along the digital divide, Bunt charts the sharp disparities of connectivity within Muslim countries, emphasizing the lack of computer access among Muslim women and the consequences of pervasive government censorship.

"Decoding the Sacred: Islamic Source Code" offers important insights into how the Internet simultaneously facilitates and reconfigures Muslim discourse and practice. Bunt surveys a variety of Islamic digital platforms: from Qur'an recitation, translation, and interpretation, to ritual performances and polemics. His analysis focuses on key Muslim exemplars in a range of cultural spaces, including the Qatar-based Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Iraq's Ayatullah 'Ali al-Sistani, and the Egyptian popular preacher Amr Khaled. Bunt demonstrates how new technologies and new media spaces — Podcasting, video blogs, social networking sites — reach new Muslim audiences and create alternative markets for Islamic knowledge, all of which stretch the boundaries of normative tradition.

"The Islamic Blogosphere" narrows the focus to explore the emerging global networks of Muslim bloggers. With diverse backgrounds as information technology (IT) specialists, scientists, journalists, and students, bloggers represent powerful new Muslim voices, from Morocco to Malaysia and all points in between. As Bunt illustrates, by harnessing technology their influence transcends their numbers. In his words, "The impact of blogs reaches from the cybercafe in the *souq* to governmental offices and international media" (p. 133).

The book's final two chapters spotlight a key (and controversial) dimension of Muslim cyberspace discourse. "The Cutting Edge: Militaristic Jihad in Cyberspace," depicts the Internet as a critical tool in the propaganda, recruitment, and logistical operations of Muslim militants. Bunt provides rich examples of the use of multiple media forums by tech-savvy jihadists, from video clips and blogs to e-magazines. With a palpable sense of irony he notes that, "Developers in

1. I have in mind here a work at the completely opposite end of the political spectrum, Howard Grief, *The Legal Foundation and Borders of Israel Under International Law* (Jerusalem: Mazo Publishers, 2008).