Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean

Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C. A. Bayly, eds.
New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. 410 pages.

This book contains the output from a series of discussions leading to an American Social Science Research Council (SSRC) conference in Aix-en-Provence, France in September 1998. The 18 essays address some aspects of the history of the Mediterranean-Middle East and Indian Ocean-South Asian areas between the 1890s and 1920s, when modernity and colonialism struck these areas. Despite the lack of a precise definition of modernity, the contributors unravel how the advent of "European" modernity in transportation, military power, media, and imperialistic or colonial tendency shaped these areas' culture and social structures.

Many of the essays focus upon eighteenth- and nineteenth-century urban areas in port cities and important cities like Izmir, Haifa, Alexandria, Cairo, Basra, and Istanbul. This alludes to the fact that the cosmopolitan

areas, especially coastal or port cities, are the locus of change, instead of rural areas. Throughout the book, modernization in Asia is treated less as an overpowering energy enacting inevitable social change than as a contested arena where subjugated people actively adapted, resisted, or altered the course of modernization inflicted by European colonialism.

The introduction by C. A. Bayly and L. T. Fawaz provides background sketches of the challenge of area studies in history and long-term historical trends affecting the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean rim circa 1600-1920. Three broad strokes are identified: the relative decline of such Muslim empires as the Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals or Deccan, due to their growing irrelevance or colonial encroachment; European mercantilist-imperialistic efforts in the maritime affairs of the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean; and sweeping social change in Muslim societies due to embracing or reacting against the European onslaught or a pure reconstruction of culture and thought (e.g., Wahhabism, the Young Turks, and the pan-Islamic movement in Egypt and India). Against this backdrop, all chapters weave diverse, indepth, and interesting analyses at the macro, micro, or societal and individual levels.

Chapters 1, 2, and 3, by M. Tuchscherer, A. Raymond, and C. Dubois, respectively, discuss the Red Sea area's trade and port city activities between the mid-1500s to around the 1920s. Tuchscherer writes about the geographical, cultural, commercial, and political factors that contributed to integrating the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden coastal areas between 1547 and 1700. He mentions three factors that defined this area's history: the rise and fall of Ottoman hegemony, the decline of the spice and pepper trade toward the end of the sixteenth century, and the subsequent rise of such luxury items as Indian cotton and Yemeni coffee. Raymond's essay analyzes the monopoly of Cairo's coffee trade merchants *(tuggar)* and its spherical influence in the Red Sea's northern zone, including the Hejaz, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and, in turn, confirms Tuchscherer's conclusions about the rise of trade in luxury items with European demands. The Ottomans, through Cairo's *tuggar* monopoly, controlled the coffee trade in the Red Sea's northern zone up to Jeddah, where European ships and others eventually broke this monopoly in late 1790s with Napoleon's conquest of Egypt.

Dubois continues Raymond's analysis with Europe's regional control over the area in the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries and, in turn, unified Red Sea trade activities. She contends that three important factors contributed to this: the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which

facilitated maritime movement from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea area; the revolution in transportation (i.e., steamships and railroads) that affected the Middle East; and the intense colonization of Africa and the Middle East.

Chapter 4, 5, 6, 10, and 14, by K. McPherson, M. Seikaly, H. Fattah, R. Kasaba, and R. Ostle, respectively, deal with continuity and change in Indian Ocean port cities, Haifa, Basra, Izmir and Alexandria, respectively. McPherson argues that the Indian Ocean's port cities functioned differently before and after the European arrival, beginning in the early sixteenth century. Before that event, port cities generally were subject to the ruling decree of the palace in the hinterland; the movement of laborers, merchants, sailors, pilgrims, and immigrants was unrestricted and "porous"; and wealth creation depended upon developing "entreport." After the Europeans arrived, port cities were first removed from the palace's authority. They then rose to power, became loci of colonial administration and seats of power over the colonized land (e.g., Singapore, Penang, Jakarta, Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta).

"Cosmopolitanness" was partly induced by European rulers in a single urban setting by introducing new land transportation (e.g., railroads), a new education system with a colonial language (e.g., English) as a medium of instruction, and the variegated movement or settlement of people in different professions across the colony. Seikaly's Haifa, Fattah's Basra, Kasaba's Izmir and Ostle's Alexandria to a large extent depict the conclusion reached by McPherson. However, a dominant theme in these chapters, except for Ostle's Alexandria, which focused on society's cosmopolitan aspect, was the rise of a new reaction against colonial subjugation in new political institutions or associations centered on nationalism, regional identity, and religious universalism, especially from 1900 onwards.

I found chapters 9 and 11, by C. A. Bayly and Ayesha Jalal, respectively, the two most appealing chapters. Bayly attempts to compare and contrast Copts in Egypt and "Muhammadans" in India from 1880 to 1914 in terms of the representational issue of minorities in society. Copts, although the colonial administrators' coreligionists, were seen as a disadvantaged group in relation to the majority Muslims, and received unfavorable treatment from the English colonials. Indian Muslims, however, were seen as a favorable community due to historical service in the colonial army and administrative positions. This perception prevailed in England's political institutions and colonial administration, thereby causing the two communities to be treated differently.

Jalal's essay deepens Bayly's line of argument by showing the dichotomy of views among the English over Indian Muslims in the same period (e.g., Muslims as "rebels" versus Muslims as "neutral"). Jalal shows that Muslims were perceived in a loyalty/disloyalty continuum in such a way that they had to choose between membership in Islam's universal community and a sense of belonging to their local community and land of origin: India. Bayly and Jalal's essays represent a departure from the conventional analysis of using only the victim's viewpoints to understand representational issues in colonial societies. Both essays show that even the non-victim factors (e.g., Englishmen's view as a source of inspiration for nationalism movements and specific colonial policy favoring Muslims in India) would contribute to the variegated continuity and change in these colonial societies of the late nineteenth century.

This book is valuable for researchers who need an alternative reading of what transpired in Muslim societies, especially during the tumultuous period of colonial expansion from the sixteenth century onwards. Rather than seeing "decline" or "crisis" as defining the Muslim fate, readers may use a much more balanced analytical category of "adaptation" and "change" as defining a specific Muslim response to colonial encroachment.

Hasnan Hakim
Candidate, Master of Human Science
International Islamic University Malaysia
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia