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Middle Eastern Societies (1918-1939): Challenges, Changes and Transitions

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Abstracts

Diana Abbani, University of Sorbonne, Paris, France and Orient Institute, Beirut, Lebanon

"Music and society in Lebanon during the period of al-Nahḍa (from the nineteenth century until the beginning of the Second World War)"

The paper focuses on the relation between Beirut society and music at the end of the First World War till the dawn of the Second World War (1918-1939). It follows the musical changes which occurred after the Great War that affected and interacted with/within the society: from the entry of new ideas; to the conflicts between traditionalist and modernist, the use of European music theory, notation and western instruments; the birth of patriotism and modernism (with musical school, conservatory), to the emergence of socio-cultural and patriotic songs. Through the prism of music and leisure, we will analyze how the society adopted and adapted to the political and geographical changes in the region, and how it reacted and resisted. We will also study the emergence of the variety music during the French mandate period, which follows the evolution of society towards more modernity and thus more westernization, both in the texts and in the musical discourse itself. Finally we will discuss how Beirut faced the emerging mass music that is a standardized commercial product accessible to the entire population, and which sometimes reflects the discussions and concerns of the society, borrowing from the West its discourse and aesthetic. The study considers the Lebanese musical production from different angles. From a social perspective, it traces the changes in the musical life in mandatory Beirut based on an analysis of the press during this period (ex. *Lisān al-Ḥāl*, *al-Ma'raḍ*). Our aim is to follow how the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the French presence changed and affected the musical scene and the concept of entertainment and leisure in Beirut, as well as its consequences on the places of consumption and distribution of music. The study follows also the entry and the evolution of the record industry in the musical scene, to identify the changes it imposes in terms of forms of expression, places or topics. From a socio-political angle, it analyzes the role of music in the ideological construction of a "national narrative", asserting a certain Lebanese specificity within the Levant. It will also analyze how collective identities take shape in songs that build national imaginary by setting myths and debating new social values. Finally, it analyses certain songs' texts and their messages from a literary perspective, in order to understand and trace subjective, social and political desires, claims, taste and changes in this period.

Amit Bein, Clemson University, USA

"There she is, Miss Universe: Keriman Halis goes to Egypt, 1933"

Taking the visit of Miss Universe Keriman Halis [Ege] to Egypt in 1933 as a starting point, the paper examines efforts by the Kemalist government and affiliated Turkish interests to generate positive public opinion in Egypt in the 1930s; assesses their motives and effectiveness; and analyzes how these attempts echoed in debates in Egypt on whether Kemalist policies ought to be adopted as models for reform and modernization.

Ebru Boyar, METU, Ankara, Turkey

“Taking health to the village: early Turkish Republican health propaganda in the Anatolian countryside”

One of the main challenges the new Turkish Republic had to face was the low population rate and poor health conditions in Anatolia. Even before the establishment of the new Republic, during the Turkish National Liberation War (1919-1922), the Ankara government set out to develop public health policies and prepared an extensive survey on health conditions in those places under its control. The successful implementation of such health policies depended not only on a sufficient body of capable health care personnel, medical infrastructure including hospitals and equipment, and a developed sanitary system and legal framework, but also on the cooperation of the population, the majority of which lived in small towns and villages. Therefore, the state had to ensure that the population took their health conditions seriously, believed in the necessity of preventive public health measures and the benefits of modern medicine, and also abandoned popular superstition and folk medicine. In order to achieve these goals, village headmen and teachers were used as opinion makers to inform the members of their communities about the new policies, special informative brochures in simple Turkish were prepared and distributed, posters were hung in *köy odaları* (village rooms), schools and other public spaces, and, where possible, short films were shown and public meetings organized. Using such methods to reach, and teach, the population, the government sought to bring about a change in the mind-set of the rural population, an amelioration of health conditions and, in so doing, to transform the human landscape of Anatolia.

Elizabeth Brownson, UW-Parkside, USA

“Reform or restrictions? The Ottoman Family Code (OLFR of 1917) and women’s status in Mandate Palestine”

This paper examines how the 1917 Ottoman family code modified Hanafi law and attempted to change particular marriage practices, such as raising the age of marriage. Certain western scholars have tended to hail the code enthusiastically as an indication of progress but have paid little heed to its application or the actual social change that it instigated. I analyze the law’s corresponding changes in Palestinian society and elsewhere I examine the extent of its application during the Mandate period. Other scholars claim that the OLFR limited judges’ and muftis’ options by condensing a large corpus of legal interpretations and practices into a single code. Indeed, Judith Tucker argues that it did not improve women’s status overall. I agree that the code was conservative in some respects and that it restricted jurists’ and judges’ flexibility, but I will show that it also included important benefits for women.

Nazan Çiçek, Ankara University, Turkey

"Mapping social change through matters of the heart: debates on courtship, marriage and divorce in the late Ottoman and early Republican era"

This paper delves into the way marriage both as an idea and institution was imagined, "problematized", discussed and criticized in the late Ottoman and early Republican era in Turkey in a series of popular magazines between 1912-1950. By ascertaining how the definition and perception of marriage as a social construct figured in the cognitive map of the pro-modernization intelligentsia and decision-makers in the early Republican era this paper seeks to contribute to our knowledge of the complex topography of biopolitics in a non-Western country at a time when the validity of traditional models appeared to have crumbled and yet the quest for new models was almost invariably accompanied by a general anxiety of losing cultural autonomy and national-self. In so doing, this paper will examine a body of essays on the subject of marriage and divorce paying special attention to the discussions over the "merits" and "evils" of arranged marriage, love marriage and marriage based on companionship.

Kate Fleet, Cambridge University, UK

"Public good, private interest and the provision of water in the early Turkish Republic: the case of Terkos"

With the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, a new regime was initiated in the granting of foreign concessions. In the context of public works, the new republican government made much play of the contrast between the new political climate in which concessions were to be granted on the basis of public benefit, and the Ottoman approach which was described as self-seeking and one in which emphasis was placed not on the benefits to society or on public health but on personal and political gain. Taking the Istanbul Terkos water company as a specific case, this paper argues that while in fact the Ottoman government did concern itself with public benefit and public health in granting this and other concessions, it was under the new Republic that rhetoric and reality combined. In the case of the Istanbul Terkos water company, the republican government adopted a more robust approach which forced changes in water provision, a renegotiation of the agreement and ultimately led to the buy-out of the company.

Ulrike Freitag, Freie Universität Berlin & Zentrum Moderner Orient, Germany

"State-society relations through the lens of urban development"

This paper considers both historiographical and historical challenges in reconstructing state-society relations, as reflected in the histories of major Middle Eastern cities. While dealing with a "period" marked by vastly differing political ruptures and settings, a number of challenges seem to be common to the period. A major theme is the quest for (mostly) state-led modernisation, linked to the effort to establish post-Ottoman nation-states and political institutions. While the formation of national(ist) political actors dominates much of the historiography, the urban scene saw more of a continuation and at times acceleration of late Ottoman administrative and infrastructural developments.

The world economic crisis of 1929, as well as demographic and socio-political changes, impacted on how this played out at the local level. Jeddah in the Hijaz is taken as a case-study for this investigation, which will be discussed in comparison to other Middle Eastern cities.

Amal Ghazal, Dalhousie University, Canada

“Fault lines: modernity and sectarianism among Ibadi Muslims in the interwar period”

This paper looks at the debates concerning sectarianism, modernity and nationalism among Ibadi communities in the interwar period, with a focus on the Ibadis of the Mزاب valley in Algeria. Ibadi reformers, influenced by Islahi (reformist) thought, sought a reconciliation between Islam and modernity, a sectarian rapprochement with non-Ibadi Muslims, and a role in nationalist movements. Those debates, taking place within wider networks of Ibadi and non-Ibadi scholars and activists in the Arab world, and involving anti-reform Ibadis opposed to the goals of reformers, reveal three trends in the interwar period. First, religious reform (and opposition to it) was a major vehicle of (re)defining both religious and nationalist identities. Second, the divide between reformers and anti-reform conservatives widened, shedding light on the significance of the anti-reform and anti-modernity camps in defining the contours of debates around identity at the time. Third, there existed political imaginations defying the nation-state framework, contesting the view of WWI and its aftermath as being the catalysts for nationalist movements in the interwar period.

Satoshi Katsunuma, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan

“The development of reformatories in interwar Egypt”

Many scholars have pointed out that interwar Egypt witnessed a growing interest in social reform. At that time, the improvement of juvenile care was regarded as an important aim. While activities for the improvement of juvenile care conducted by private organizations have already attracted scholarly attention, institutions for juvenile care that were run by the government such as reformatories still remain an unexplored field of study. However, it was in the interwar period that the Egyptian reformatory system, whose origin can be traced to the age of the British occupation, began to expand in size and role. In this presentation, I will explore why the government developed the reformatory system, how effective juvenile care was in reformatories, and what kind of outcome its development caused. My analysis will also explain why previous studies exclusively focused on juvenile care provided by private organizations.

Liat Kozma, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

“Medical doctors and the formation of a regional profession”

From the early 1920s, the Egyptian Medical Association started consolidating the monopoly of Egyptian doctors over the practice of medicine in Egypt itself. They established their professional realms of intervention beyond that of individual clinical encounter, to encompass the nation as a whole. They saw the worker, the peasant, the

mother, the bachelor – and more, as objects of reform and themselves as qualified to intervene.

From this vantage point, the Egyptian medical profession sought to establish itself in both the regional and the international sphere. The first – by organizing the Association's annual conferences in neighboring countries (four such conferences were held – in Beirut, Jerusalem, Damascus and Baghdad), and by inviting doctors from neighboring Arab lands to participate in those conferences held in Egypt. In the international level, the Egyptian medical profession claimed expertise in the colonial discipline of "tropical medicine". They did so by publishing articles on various tropical diseases, and by hosting international medical associations.

My lecture will explore these conferences as transnational sites, in which doctors from different backgrounds were trying to find common grounds. Doctors throughout the region studied in the same schools in Istanbul, Beirut and Cairo; they deliberated diseases that infected bodies beyond and across national border; they also shared a language –biomedicine, in both the international and regional contexts; and Arabic, in the regional one. They also shared a class-status, and a privileged position within their national communities. My lecture will thus explore the challenges they were facing, as a first preliminary attempt to look at doctors as a transnational middle class in the Middle East.

Fred H. Lawson, Mill College, Oakland, USA

“Class formation and political institutionalization in Syria, 1918-39”

How the Syrian public expressed its economic and political interests changed dramatically between 1918 and 1939. Prior to that era, rich merchants and manufacturers tended to act in an atomistic fashion, and exhibited little if any corporate behavior in their dealings with government officials. As the 1920s went by, however, commercial and industrial actors made increasing use of the formal chambers of commerce and industry to articulate demands vis-à-vis the authorities and consolidate collective notions of benefit and threat. In a similar fashion, laborers who had earlier organized themselves on the basis of de facto guild institutions, and had set up nascent occupational associations under the auspices of the Committee of Union and Progress, formed exclusive unions (niqabat) during the 1920s that co-ordinated strikes and protests and maintained cohesion among members in the face of efforts by factory owners and state agencies to impose new restrictions on their activities.

Increasing institutionalization on the part of commercial and industrial elites on one hand and tradespeople and workers on the other took place in a mutually interactive way, and in the context of an external (French) administration whose priorities sometimes coincided with — but most often diverged from — those of one class or another. French policy affected the dynamics of class formation and political institutionalization less profoundly than has usually been reported. More crucial were the local struggles that characterized particular cities and provinces, which generated outcomes that confronted the Mandatory authorities with unexpected challenges, to which they most often made improvised and temporary responses.

By the late 1930s, Syrian politics retained important vestiges of the "politics of notables" that had structured domestic affairs in preceding decades. But behind the façade of personalist in-fighting, policy-making reflected the clash of collectivized class interests. Such conflicts set the stage for the emergence of organized political parties, whose platforms tended to express the shared objectives of their respective constituents. Consequently, class interests permeated Syria's liberal moment to an even greater extent than in Lebanon and Iraq, and effectively supplanted the ethno-sectarian modes of political mobilization that became predominant in these two neighboring states.

Brian McClaren, University of Washington, USA

"Tourism and mobility in Italian colonial Libya"

This paper discusses the evolving paradigms of mobility in the tourist exploitation of Libya during the period of Italian colonization, which will be viewed against the various means used to restrict the movements of the local populations. It will examine this phenomena in the broader context of colonial policy, the argument being that the various mobilities and forms of control that were tied to the tourist system reflected colonial hierarchies, and thus instantiated state-society relations. It begins with the initial stage of tourism, which was tied to the modernization process and the military control of the territory. It then traces the shift from the "automobile raid" of this early period to the organized tours with motorcoaches in the late 1930s. The paper concludes with this final stage in the evolution of the tourist system, which combined an unprecedented network of modern travel with an authentic experience of the native culture.

Michael Provence, University of California San Diego, USA

"The long shadow of the Ottoman Great War in the Arab East, 1920-1940"

Decades after the Great War, Arab politicians and ordinary people continued to unfavorably compare the colonial present to the Ottoman past, and to the more seemingly independent and more dignified Turkish Republic. Such traumatized grievances faded away in disappointment in the years after the Alexandretta Crisis, but the echoes of the Ottoman state and its institutions remained into the 1940s.

This paper examines some examples taken from of law, lingering Unionist political practice, and general laments of loss, under three categories:

- 1) Unfavorable legal and constitutional comparisons. In these cases ex-Ottoman politicians and legal scholars point out the defects of the Mandate legal and political regime relative to the Ottoman system.
- 2) Tendencies to conflate militarism with modernity. Former military officers and Unionist party members continued in positions of influence in all post-Ottoman states, and trauma and continual political crisis seemed to generally discredit civilian politicians and empower the military. Once introduced, Mandate martial law never disappeared, and ex-military officer-politicians tended to embrace euphemisms such as "emergency law".
- 3) Emotive laments at loss, catastrophe, and injustice, mostly from petitions in the

archives of the league of Nations.

Eugene Rogan, Oxford University, UK

"Colonial States and nationalist societies in the interwar Arab world"

The post-war partition of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire was shaped by the balance of imperial interests rather than the imperative to create a stable Middle East. The results proved de-stabilizing to both the successor states and the imperial powers themselves. Nationalism emerged in response to foreign occupation and the creation of bounded nation states, and rivalries plagued Franco-British relations right through the interwar years. In hindsight, the mandates that Britain and France sought at Versailles served rather to undermine than to extend the age of European empires. And the flaws of the imperial state system left a legacy of instability that has plagued the region down to the present day.

Emilio Spadola, Colgate University, USA

"Is the call modern? Mass politics and media between the two wars"

In this paper I argue for the emergence of mass communication — technically reproducible, simultaneous, long-distance connections — as a transformative force in the interwar Middle East and North Africa region. I do so by looking at "calling" or "summoning" (or "summoning up") new audiences as a common metaphor and aim deployed by elite nationalist and Islamic reformist (salafiyya) thinkers of 1918-1939. If political or religious summoning was hardly foreign to premodern politics and religion, it is nonetheless helpful to question its reemergence within conscientiously modern (modernist) movements. Focusing on mass politics in early 1930s Morocco, I rethink mass communication not simply as a quality of social life or a set of techniques, but rather as a novel and enhanced political force particular to modernity. The call — an effort not only to command audiences, but to control mass communication itself — thus marks a key challenge for elites vis-à-vis the emerging masses of the interwar period.

Pınar Şenışık, Doğuş University, Istanbul, Turkey

"Turkish-Greek compulsory population exchange and Cretan Muslims: a new approach to identity politics in the early Turkish Republic"

The aim of the present paper is to examine the Turkish-Greek compulsory population exchange in 1923 whose legacy remains strong to this day. The paper will attempt to discuss how the Cretan Muslim refugees were perceived by the Turkish authorities and what kind of ideologies and policies were adopted and implemented to integrate them into the Turkish Republic during the early phase of the one-party era. To be more specific, beginning with the discussion of Turkish policies and practices towards the refugees, this paper will try to explore how these people reacted to these ideologies and policies, how they challenged and recreated the political and socio-cultural structure through their own experiences and strategies. Moreover, this paper deals with the question of how the "traumatic memory" of the forced migration shaped their identities and definitions of "otherness", "homeland", and "fatherland".