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ASKAR H. AL-ENAZY, *The Creation of Saudi Arabia: Ibn Saud and British Imperial Policy, 1914–1927* (New York: Routledge, 2010)

SEBOUH DAVID ASLANIAN, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2011)

ISA BLUMI, *Foundations of Modernity: Human Agency and the Imperial State* (New York: Routledge, 2012)

DAWN CHATTY and BILL FINLAYSON, EDs., *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

REŞAT KASABA, *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2009)

CHRISTINE M. PHILLIOU, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2011)

SALIM TAMARI, *Year of the Locust: A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2011)

BAKI TEZCAN, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

During the last decade, the postcolonial approach has become influential in the humanities and the social sciences. Tracing its own historical origin to interaction with Western European modernity, it focuses on contemporary power inequality, which it intends to eliminate by demonstrating the connection between power and knowledge. Hence, this approach not only puts the present in conversation with the past but also poses power inequality as the analytical lens through which to approach states and societies. In the last decades, a number of scholars working on the Middle East have adopted the postcolonial approach. In this review essay, I initially discuss its application in the study of the region and then contextualize eight recent works within that framework.

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The theoretical lineage of the postcolonial approach is contested. Scholars locate the origins of its critical framework in the works of many scholars: Karl Marx's study of conflict and ensuing power inequalities¹; Hannah Arendt's conception of politics, power, and violence²; Antonio Gramsci's formulation of the relationship between power and hegemony³; Michel Foucault's discussion of power and knowledge⁴; Edward Said's criticism of Orientalism⁵; and the employment by proponents of critical race theory and subaltern studies of local knowledge to deconstruct the European colonization of knowledge.⁶ What unites these disparate scholars? All engage in interdisciplinary research with the intent to problematize the connection between power and knowledge, focusing primarily on destabilizing the detrimental impact of 18th- and 19th-century Western European modernity on the rest of the world. Intent on establishing a more just and equitable world, each of them employs mainly the lens of culture to destabilize the power-knowledge connection. As such, their approach generates the three corollaries of the postcolonial approach as follows: the intersection of power and knowledge empowers the subject while enfeebling the object (*definition of contemporary inequality*); the origins of such contemporary empowerment can be traced spatially to Western Europe, temporally to the 17th century, and culturally to the Enlightenment (*origins of contemporary inequality*); politically, this contemporary empowerment needs to be eliminated for the creation of a common humanity predicated on equality, justice, and world peace (*elimination of contemporary inequality*). Especially significant is the third corollary because it presents a political and moral project of the liberation of all humanity.⁷

Yet, the course one must take to accomplish this mission still remains unclear. In order to deconstruct current Western hegemony, some scholars favor keeping existing theoretical frameworks to carry out empirical analyses of specific contexts throughout history, while others argue for a more radical stand, that is, the development of an entirely new theoretical approach based entirely on the use of local sources not tainted by Western interpretation. The divide thus emerges in interpreting the boundaries of Western European modernity's impact: can the impact be successfully challenged by additional empirically driven local analysis alone, or has the impact also suffused and tainted existing frameworks, thereby necessitating the development of an alternate framework? The most significant recent work adhering to the latter approach is Raewyn Connell's ambitious book, *Southern Theory*.⁸ In the book, Connell attempts to overcome the Western colonization of knowledge by turning to the works of Southern⁹ scholars such as 'Ali Shari'ati of the Middle East, Raul Prebisch of Latin America, Paulin Hountondji of Africa, and Ranajit Guha of the Indian subcontinent. The insights Connell draws from these Southern scholars form the knowledge base of his new approach, one that is distinctly different from the Western modernity-based approach advocated by Northern scholars.¹⁰ Walter Mignolo adds to this knowledge reconstruction by developing the concept of epistemic disobedience; he creates a decolonial cosmopolitanism that contains multiple trajectories of development. Mignolo presents his approach as the only way through which to imagine and build democratic, just, and nonimperial/noncolonial societies.¹¹ Some scholars have started to approach the Middle East present and the Ottoman past within the postcolonial framework in terms of the production of local

knowledge, with the intent of constructing an alternate discourse that moves beyond the shackles of Western European modernity by challenging its hold on the past and the present.

In regard to the Middle East, the postcolonial approach traces contemporary inequality to the region's interactions with Western modernity in general and to the domination of Western Europe and subsequently the United States in particular. It argues that states and societies that "lost" to Western Europe and the United States, such as the Ottoman, Persian, and Mughal empires, as well as the regions within which they were located, such as the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans, and the Caucasus, became marginalized. Without challenging such loss and marginalization, the postcolonial approach argues, it would be impossible to destabilize the past and present intersection between Western power and knowledge. How do scholars undertake this challenge? They analyze contemporary local processes on their own terms, making sure not to treat their subjects as objects without agency. They thus focus first and foremost on making the voices of the people from these regions heard. In terms of tracing the historical origins of contemporary inequality, they argue that the Ottoman Empire presents a unique case in that its temporal and spatial life destabilizes the inherent privileging of Western hegemony. Temporally, the Ottoman Empire existed from the 13th to the 20th centuries, thereby covering the pre-Enlightenment, Enlightenment, and post-Enlightenment periods. Spatially, Ottoman rule extended from the Middle East, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe in the West, to the Caucasus in the East, the Crimea in the North, and the Arabian peninsula and North Africa in the South. Ruling over a vast terrain as a sovereign power, the Ottoman Empire was never directly colonized by expanding European powers. According to the postcolonial view, its temporal and spatial location thus provide the perfect counterpoint to Western domination.

Existing analyses of Ottoman history that can be considered to lie within the postcolonial fold have so far concentrated temporally on the early modern period up to the end of the 17th century and the late modern period from the 19th to the early 20th centuries and spatially on the margins of empire, in the Balkans and the Arabian peninsula. Scholars have selected these particular time frames because they enable the deconstruction of the Eurocentric paradigm of modernity and this particular space because concentration on the periphery better reveals the intersection of power and knowledge. They have also claimed that those scholars working on the central Anatolian lands and the imperial capital tend to naturalize the connection between power and knowledge. The temporal and spatial selections of postcolonial scholars are further compounded by their subjectivities: younger generations are generally more willing to challenge and replace existing analyses at all costs, while older generations tend not to take the postcolonial approach into account.

Given that I survey the field of Ottoman studies here, I start by situating and criticizing my own work in that area. In the first book I wrote on the Ottoman Empire while still a graduate student, I approached Ottoman history solely in relation to its interaction with Western Europe during the 18th century but did so by incorporating contemporaneous French and Ottoman documents.¹² My theoretical approach reflected and reproduced the existing practice of prioritizing the empire's relations with the West, without spatially taking into account its interactions with regions to the East, such as those under the Persian and Mughal Empires, during the same period. The second book, which I

originally wrote as my doctoral dissertation, further studied the process of Ottoman Westernization, expanding the temporal scope to the 19th and early 20th centuries.¹³ But I was still confined spatially by the Ottoman Empire's relations with the West to the detriment of the East. In addition, the empirical data for both books came from the central archives of the Ottoman Empire and, as such, epistemologically limited my interpretation to the imperial city or at most to the central Anatolian lands. I therefore naturalized Ottoman rule in the central lands, downplaying variations in rule, especially in the faraway provinces of the empire. Yet my second book alerted me to the dire fate of non-Muslim minorities especially at the end of the empire, and to the frequent state use of collective violence against them, almost to the point of extinction.

As a consequence, in my recently completed manuscript I attempt to look at the Ottoman Empire not from the standpoint of the center—the state and its officials—but rather from that of the non-Muslim minorities.¹⁴ I specifically focus on the collective violence practiced by the Ottoman state and Ottoman society against Armenians. Temporally, I concentrated initially on the massacres and deaths from 1915 to 1917, a period defined in history as the Armenian Genocide, but I then decided to expand the temporal boundaries back to 1789 and forward to 2009 because the episodes of collective violence and the bases of their subsequent denial preceded and succeeded these three years. Analyzing this Ottoman practice of collective violence alerted me to the disparity between state rhetoric of tolerance and integration, on the one hand, and the practice of prejudice and discrimination, on the other hand. I realized that as an ethnic Turk, just like members of the dominant Ottoman majority at that time, I too had naturalized the power embedded in the knowledge produced by the center. I therefore decided to base my analysis not on official state documents but instead on contemporaneous memoirs that better captured the spectrum of local meaning. In my last work, then, I developed a more critical perspective by looking at the imperial capital in relation to those dominated communities located not only at the center but also in the peripheries of the empire both spatially and epistemologically. Even though I did not directly employ the postcolonial approach in the book, I nevertheless focused on inequality within the Ottoman system in order to shift and correct my initial focus naturalizing the standpoint of the imperial capital and the dominant Turkish Muslim majority at the expense of the provinces and the non-Muslim minorities.

This is the context for the academic knowledge and experience that I draw upon in analyzing postcolonial studies of the Ottoman Empire and contemporary Middle East. Recent scholarship carefully distinguishes the early modern period, extending from the 16th to the end of the 18th century, from the modern period of the 19th and 20th centuries. Unlike postcolonial scholarship that clearly marks these periods by the emergence of a perceived racial difference between the colonizer and the colonized, scholars of the Ottoman Empire demonstrate that, as no such direct colonization occurred in the Middle East, Ottoman imperial identity was much more fluid and premised on categories such as ethnicity, religion, and tribal affiliation. There was often social accommodation and religious tolerance.¹⁵ And this fluidity in identity and flexibility in social boundaries extended from the central lands to the provinces.¹⁶ Such depictions successfully challenge the Eurocentric, Orientalist formulations that had reified differences and divides, anachronistically mapping onto the empire binarisms introduced much later by European colonial rule.¹⁷ This epistemological reformulation is also accompanied by a spatial one

whereby the Ottoman Empire is analyzed not solely in relation to its connection to Europe but also as located within the global world, especially through its connections via trade and conquest with the Islamic world and Asia.¹⁸ This narrative of early modern Ottoman history recounts the age of discovery not solely from the hegemonic vantage point of Europe but by incorporating the activities of non-Western empires on their own terms. The 19th and 20th centuries form the modern period during which the empire began to reform its military and fiscal administration by following increasingly powerful Western European models. The nature of this transformation is debated by scholars, the majority of whom argue that what occurred in the empire was not inevitable decline but rather continuity through reform.¹⁹

Scholarly work on the Ottoman modern period becomes complicated when scholars analyze the origins and consequences of Ottoman modernity. The major problem concerns the differentiation of polarizing Western practices from domestic practices. Even though this polarizing impact brings the Ottoman Empire much closer to its European counterparts *in form*, thereby enabling many scholars to identify similarities to areas under European colonial rule, the local *content* of this impact remains unclear. The predominant scholarly focus on Ottoman formal political power certainly highlights escalating power inequalities, but how these inequalities exist across time and space, that is, how they are negotiated by different imperial communities such as non-Muslims, Kurdish tribes, or recent Chechen or Circassian immigrants, and how this negotiation differs during the autocratic rule of Sultan Abdülhamid II or the ensuing proto-nationalist rule of the Young Turks, is not yet apparent.

Crucial in the analysis of the postcolonial approach to Ottoman history is Selim Deringil's 2003 intervention.²⁰ Attempting to negotiate the boundaries of the Ottoman modernity project, Deringil states that over the course of the 19th century, Ottoman administrative elites gradually adopted the mindset of Western imperialism in dealing with their periphery, thereby inadvertently conflating Western ideas of modernity and colonialism. This "borrowed colonialism" in turn led Ottoman officials to depict the subjects in the provinces as living in "a state of nomadism and savagery."²¹ Deringil thus identifies the initial tension of Ottoman modernity that Ussama Makdisi had already noted in the case of Lebanon²² as one occurring between "the new official intolerance of diversity, and the reality of the need to tolerate such diversity." Deringil then extends this argument to the Ottoman state's treatment of nomads in general and those in Tripoli, Hijaz, and Yemen in particular. This intervention drew upon Makdisi's concept of Ottoman Orientalism, that is, the emergent Ottoman mode of administration in regard to its own Arab periphery, which was "based on a hierarchical system of subordination along religious, class, and ethnic lines."²³

In Ottoman history, the period from the 1880s to the 1910s was marked by rapid land contraction as the empire literally lost 95 percent of its landmass.²⁴ Given the extremely accelerated rate of change, it is no accident that identities became increasingly polarized and inequalities escalated. Ottoman postcolonial scholars focus on the nature of Ottoman modernity, tracing its particular characteristics through the travel accounts and memoirs of those officials serving solely in the Arab and North African provinces.²⁵ Their analyses reveal an increasing divide between the educated, "civilized" officials of the imperial center and the "colonial" subjects in the periphery, whom the officials attempted to study, discipline, and improve. All agree that the Ottoman "colonial"

relationship was much more nuanced than its Western European counterpart: the local was not summarily “othered,” denigrated, and exploited; instead, it retained its agency and negotiated relations with the Ottoman capital, Western Europeans, and their local counterparts.

Yet, there is currently a divide in regard to the exact location of the historical origins of inequality in the Middle East. Some scholars, such as Makdisi, whose work concentrates on the colonizing state, prioritize the imposition of a new reformist Ottoman state ideology and trace local inequalities to this imposition. Others, such as Jens Hanssen, whose analyses instead highlight the colonized locals, privilege local relations to recover the agency of provincial Ottoman subjects and trace how such *indigenous* local inequalities impact and fragment the imperial center.²⁶ Still another group of scholars have begun to deconstruct the lens of the Ottoman imperial center, challenging the assumed uniformity of the imperial decision-making process to argue not only that local conditions dictated imperial decisions but also that such decisions often changed over time.²⁷ In summary, then, the existing postcolonial approach to Ottoman history focuses on the dynamics within the empire itself, without privileging Western European influence as the sole source of change.

The postcolonial approach has indeed provided new insights into the history of the Middle East in general and of the provinces in particular. However, many scholars employing this approach have yet to address two criticisms. The first of these concerns the issue of selectivity. As historian Frederick Cooper has stated, postcolonial scholars doubly occlude history: they iron out differences within European history while articulating such differences in the histories of regions colonized by Europe. They thus “pluck stories” that fit their argument without taking into account larger historical contexts, “leapfrog legacies” to build causal arguments without fully articulating the historical process of colonization, and “flatten time” by treating European history only in terms of the negative dimensions of the Enlightenment, thereby not analyzing Europe within its own historical complexity.²⁸ This selectivity problem becomes especially pertinent with regard to the specific spatial and temporal foci of Ottoman and Middle East history. Spatially, the imperial provinces are often analyzed at the expense of the central lands; temporally, early modern and late modern scholars focus on their respective time periods without conversing with each other. Contemporary studies likewise concentrate on the peripheries and everyday interactions often to the detriment of larger structures and state institutions.

This criticism in regard to selectivity leads to a second criticism concerning interpretation. The causal leap that postcolonial scholars often make from identity to power relations and social change does not address the question of how much of what is observed is mere internal imperial differentiation over time and how much is a consequence of the empire’s external interaction with the rest of the world. Hence, the origins of change remain unclear. After all, social change often ensues from the interaction of external and internal dynamics. Although the postcolonial contribution of articulating local dynamics is most welcome, the Ottoman Empire was nevertheless located in a wider world context, the impact of which also needs to be taken into consideration. Specifically, issues connected to agency still need to be addressed. First, scholars need to study state officials in greater depth, identifying especially the nature of their prior interactions with Western Europe in general and Western-style education in particular.

Second, the current focus on ethnic Arabs and nomads needs to be complemented with analyses of imperial interactions with, and the local agency of, the Greek Rum, Assyrian, Armenian, and Jewish minorities as well as 'Alawites, Kurds, and Circassians. Also inadequately addressed are issues concerning structure. What specific institutions and organizations impacted social practices? For instance, how did family or educational structure influence social action, and how did this influence transform over time? With this critical analysis of the postcolonial approach in Middle East studies in mind, I now turn to an analysis of the eight works under review.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE EIGHT WORKS

In relation to the research question addressed and the paradigm challenged, Isa Blumi's *Foundations of Modernity* adopts the postcolonial approach most explicitly and emphatically of all the books under review here. Focusing on how to "expose and disassemble the pernicious mythology that all change containing inherent injustices originated in Europe," Blumi contends that "changes monitored in the Balkans, Red Sea, and Persian/Arab Gulf, long associated with expanding Modernity, prove much more unstructured than conventionally depicted within formal imperial contexts" (pp. 13, 16). He then traces the emergence of "Modernity's assertion to total Truth and History" in the post-World War II world, an assertion he terms "Modernity-as-trope," which arrested and silenced the agency of local actors throughout the world. Hence, in terms of interpreting modernity in relation to its Western European origins and pernicious impact, Blumi reiterates the critical stance of the postcolonial approach. He then suggests—but does not fully execute—an alternate approach, one that epistemologically challenges the hegemonic interpretations of Western European modernity based almost exclusively on formal institutions at the imperial center, by instead prioritizing the analysis of the informal, unstructured relations of the local populace in the peripheries. The empirical examples Blumi provides in relation to the alternate approach range from the Balkans, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf. Yet he does not explain how and why he chooses these particular sites as opposed to others. Blumi's alternate approach therefore suffers from Frederick Cooper's criticism regarding plucking stories, leapfrogging legacies, and flattening time. Although Blumi should be congratulated for presenting an alternate approach and prioritizing the agency of local actors, his overall analysis still suffers from two shortcomings. First, he treats the West and its modernity as one undifferentiated monolithic whole, not taking into account the variations among, for instance, the practices of French, British, Italian, and Austro-Hungarian states and societies across space and time. Second, the boundaries of the actors' agency within the Ottoman Empire also remain unclear; for instance, the nature of the interaction between the Ottoman state and its officials on the one side and the local populace on the other was complex, in that it significantly varied not only from one province to the next but also over time. Blumi also dismisses provincial variation in regard to relations with Western actors; port cities, agriculturally active lands, and the imperial capital all developed different relationships with the West that cannot be fully explained through the postcolonial approach. Criticizing of Western and imperial formal institutions is one thing, but Blumi's removing them entirely from historical analysis significantly decreases the analytical power of his ambitious, alternate approach.

Perhaps just as ambitious as Blumi's book is Baki Tezcan's *The Second Ottoman Empire*, which presents the Ottoman early modern period (the late 16th to early 19th centuries), in contrast to the earlier patrimonial period, as the "Second Empire," marked "administratively by an early modern state . . . culturally by an early modern sensibility; economically by a more market-oriented economy; legally by a more unified legal system . . . monetarily by a more unified currency system; politically by the development of a type of limited government . . . and socially by a *relatively* less stratified society" (p. 10). In addition to arguing for an epistemologically distinct period of Ottoman rule, Tezcan also challenges the decline thesis,²⁹ as many others have already done before him, replacing it with a new model of socioeconomic transformation that leads to an early modern polity. In fact, the empirical research question leading to such an ambitious approach is already in conversation with the decline paradigm. Tezcan asks why "the first instances of regicide (1648) and dethronement (1687) in Ottoman history [are] interpreted as signs of decline," especially when "similar acts in Western European history are viewed as advances in the history of limited government" (p. 5). His approach also criticizes "the modernity [that] came to be closely associated with capitalism and colonialism and . . . as a European phenomenon imposed on the rest of the world." He instead argues that modernity was a global phenomenon, one "that has to do with the relative democratization of political privileges as a result of the political empowerment of economically affluent commoners" (p. 13). In substantiating his arguments, Tezcan, unlike Blumi, presents systematic and ample archival and other documentation such as contemporaneous poems, songs, and ballads.

Like Blumi, Tezcan should be lauded for generating an intellectual debate that constructively develops the field of Ottoman studies. There are nevertheless two issues that he needs to address in future work. First, although taking a critical approach to Eurocentric analysis, Tezcan nevertheless employs many concepts of Western origin, such as "modern sensibility," "market oriented economy," "unified legal and currency systems," "limited government," and "commoners" in developing his argument. If actors, actions, events, and processes are all embedded in particular times and spaces, deriving their meaning from such particularities, then both Western and non-Western concepts have to be subjected to similar criticism and analysis. Instead of first critically tracing and discussing the emergence of these concepts in Western European history, however, Tezcan simply defines them to then seek historical instances in which they are articulated in the Ottoman context.

The visibility of the postcolonial approach in Blumi's and Tezcan's works is much more muted in Reşat Kasaba's book, *A Movable Empire*, on Ottoman nomads, migrants, and refugees. Kasaba specifically questions the reasons behind the survival of tribes and other migrant groups despite the concerted efforts of the Ottoman and subsequently the Turkish state to settle them (p. 5). In asking this question, he challenges "the assumption of a sharp divide between stasis and mobility as markers of civilization and barbarism, respectively" (p. 7). His critical engagement with modernity is muted in that he only challenges one particular aspect of Enlightenment thinking, specifically its interpretive binaries of, for example, urban–rural or change–stability. Approaching the continuum of Ottoman and Turkish history, Kasaba argues that state policy toward tribes transformed over time from an accommodating stance to a punitive one. The novelty of Kasaba's approach stems from his narrating history from the hitherto un(der)studied unit of tribes.

Yet, as he also acknowledges, these form numerically one-quarter at most of the societies under question. As such, the meanings they take on emerge through their interaction not only with the state but also with the rest of the populace, meanings that once again vary significantly throughout the empire and later the republic. Such variation necessitates further in-depth analysis of the particular yet complex patterns of interaction across time and space.

The next five works to be reviewed differ from the previous three in terms of what drives their research: the authors center their examinations on particular local actors at particular intersections of time and space. Christine Philliou's *Biography of an Empire* presents the most sophisticated and novel approach among them. She commences with a significant and well-defined research question that is predicated on a prevalent binary in the field of Ottoman history: that is, she asks whether the Ottomans were "a force of stagnation and repression that kept the modern world at bay, or . . . early pioneers of tolerance and cosmopolitanism" (p. xvii). Rather than taking on the binary and therefore risking being confined and constrained by it, Philliou instead proposes to go beyond this "black hole of tolerance and violence" by studying the early 19th century in general and the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1808–39) in particular, a period that marks the turning point from tolerance to violence. Also, pushing beyond the state–society and nation–empire binaries, she focuses on "the practice of Ottoman governance in a time when the disjuncture between political realities and political discourse persisted for decades (ca. 1770–1860)" (p. xix). What distinguishes her work from the previous three is her specific empirical focus. Adopting a cultural approach, Philliou builds her argument around an apologia written by one Christian Ottoman official during this time period. After contextualizing the apologia within the particular time period, she argues that the theoretical concept of Ottoman governance covered a range of social practices that are not easily captured by projecting "the term *modernization* or *modernity* [which] is to accept its many implications about twentieth-century paths of development" (p. xxiii). In doing so, Philliou avoids the trap Tezcan falls into of uncritically adopting Western concepts; she instead builds the concept of Ottoman governance from the empirical ground up. Philliou is also able to conceptually traverse the tolerance–violence binary to instead present a novel approach that is able to contain elements of both violence and tolerance. It provides a theoretical and methodological model that, of the books reviewed here, most successfully answers the challenge that the postcolonial approach poses to the hegemony of Eurocentric conceptualizations in the social sciences and the humanities.

Salim Tamari's *Year of the Locust* is likewise centered on a particular historical source: the diaries of ordinary Arab soldiers in Palestine serving in the Ottoman army during World War I. From this empirical vantage point, Tamari then addresses a larger historiographical question, specifically, how and why World War I constituted a rupture in Palestinian history, "undermin[ing] progress toward a multinational, multiethnic state [and instead giving] rise to narrow and exclusivist nationalist ideologies and provincial affinities" (p. 8). Through this research question, he takes issue with nationalist Arab historiography that silenced the long period of Ottoman rule, selectively highlighting the short periods of state violence instead. Hence, rather than critiquing modernity in its entirety as the postcolonial approach would recommend, Tamari destabilizes its impact on nationalist knowledge production. Contemporaneous soldiers' diaries enable him

to reconstruct the rupture in the daily lives, lifestyles, work habits, social norms, and habits of Palestinian Arab inhabitants during this period. He too avoids reiterating the modernity framework through two practices: methodologically, he prioritizes the agency of local actors through the diaries, and theoretically he explicitly focuses on nationalist historiography.

In his book *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean*, Sebouh Aslanian also focuses on the agency of local actors although in his case that of Armenian merchants in the Middle East. The research question that guides his analysis is the manner in which the global trade network of Julfan Armenians worked in disparate parts of the world, ruled by different empires over time. In doing so, Aslanian takes issue with “the Eurocentric impression that the driving force of the Indian Ocean has been the crusading Europeans” and with “the narrowly parochial concerns of national(ist) historiography” (pp. 5–6). His focus enables him to successfully navigate beyond state-centered explanations predicated on formal institutions such as courts, to develop the concept of “circulation societies” that form around a nodal center in relation to object, economic capital, and information. It is ironic, however, that the global trade network of Julfan Armenian merchants ultimately collapses due to state intervention; the Iranian state’s looting and over-taxation of the nodal center in Julfa destroys the network. Once again, the Eurocentric hegemony in knowledge production is destabilized through an emphasis on local actors and on the particular meanings and actions they produced over time.

Askar al-Enazy’s book, *The Creation of Saudi Arabia*, has a wider focus insofar as he starts off with a local actor but then expands his scope to include Western actors in order to critically demonstrate how they constrained and shaped the course of action taken by the local actor. Al-Enazy analyzes archival documentation in Saudi Arabia and Great Britain to critically analyze the interaction between the two. The research question is once again a local one, asking why, in the creation of Saudi Arabia, the state expanded territorially during the period from 1915 to 1926. Al-Enazy challenges the dominant paradigm that states that this expansion was due to Ibn Sa‘ud’s personality and aggressive Wahhabi ideology, arguing instead that Britain’s imperial policy in the region in general and Palestine in particular dictated Ibn Sa‘ud’s actions. He contends that existing analyses “have generally tended to interpret Ibn Saud’s actions on the basis of the time frame in which they are writing” (p. 5), thereby critically challenging existing scholarship for reflecting Cold War anxiety that prioritized differences, such as those related to religion, in interpreting history. His approach takes into account both research trajectories that the postcolonial approach suggests, namely, focusing on the local generation of knowledge on the one side and critically analyzing Eurocentric knowledge with the intent to generate a new framework on the other.

The works reviewed so far have all primarily focused on the past, albeit partially in order to critique existing Eurocentric interpretations in general and the elements of Western modernity embedded within such interpretations in particular. Hence, none of them directly addresses contemporary inequalities in the region. What sets Dawn Chatty and Bill Finlayson’s edited volume *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East* apart is their focus on the contemporary period. The local actors they focus on are the refugees within the region;³⁰ by concentrating on such marginalized local actors, they are able to critically analyze the impact of imperial legacies on the one side and the role of local states and Western nonprofit agencies in reproducing such

marginalization and subsequent inequality on the other. The research question driving their analysis is predicated on an empirical observation; they question how and why dispossession and forced migration have been an indelible part of life in the modern history of the Middle East and North Africa. After all, they state, the Middle East “is a major refugee-producing region of the world . . . also host[ing] more than a third of the world’s forced migrants” (p. 277). Chatty and Finlayson point out that the continued presence of refugees undermines the settlement of long-term political conflicts. And this is so, they argue, because of the “normative power of the modern concepts of nation state and nationalism” in both the Middle East, where the issues emerge, as well as in the West, where most of the aid to the Middle East originates (p. 211). That the authors direct the same criticism to both the Middle East and the West is refreshing in terms of a theoretical approach. Chatty and Finlayson challenge the paucity of social science research on this group and the current treatment of refugees as “objects” rather than agents. Their attempts to restore the agency of local refugees through in-depth interviews, thereby including “their current livelihood predicaments, their perceptions of their conditions, and their aspirations for their future” (p. 279), dovetails with the concern of the postcolonial approach; they likewise challenge the existing Eurocentric analysis that strips local actors of agency. Chatty and Finlayson conclude by pointing out the manner in which governments, communities, social groups, and aid agencies in the region as well as in Western Europe have frequently drawn upon the exclusionary practices of nationalism in generating and sustaining contemporary inequalities.

CONCLUSION

In summary, then, the spatial, temporal, and empirical emphases of these works on local actors reveal the complex, multifaceted agency that such actors possess. Spatially, the eight works cover the Ottoman Empire in particular and the Middle East in general, including the Balkans, moving to the central lands of Asia Minor including the imperial capital, then to Cyprus, Palestine, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the Western Sahara, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Temporally, Kasaba, Tezcan, and Aslanian concentrate on the early modern period; al-Enazy, Blumi, Philliou, and Tamari on the cusp of the modern period; and Chatty and Finlayson on the “late” modern or, put another way, the contemporary, period. In terms of content, all of the historical works employ primary sources, yet in varying degrees and with varying analytical power. While almost all draw on Western material, especially in the form of consular reports, those that have incorporated materials from other archives in their analyses—such as Philliou with her use of central imperial archives as well as Greek ones and Aslanian with his innovative use of Armenian material from many archives throughout the world—make the most original contributions to the field. Further, their use of archival material does not remain limited to official documents; many of the works introduce personal correspondence, diaries, and journals (Aslanian, Tamari, Philliou) as well as dream books (Tezcan) into their analyses, thereby enriching their particular interpretations. As such, all fulfill to some degree the research trajectory proposed by the postcolonial approach, that is, primarily focusing on local archives and experiences to analyze the past as well as the present.

Turning to the social actors in these works, most of the books concentrate on local actors at the margins of state and society, asking how such actors negotiate power

relations. While Kasaba works on Ottoman nomads, migrants, and refugees, Blumi concentrates on all local agents, again prioritizing the refugees among them. Chatty and Finlayson likewise study refugees, though contemporary ones. Their emphasis on refugees as social actors deserves special attention because as social actors, refugees move across nationalist and epistemological borders, challenging the regional boundaries that determine scholarly specialization as well as the disciplinary boundaries scholars maintain in carrying out their analyses. Refugees also highlight social practice, specifically what does and does not work in terms of state policies in general and exclusionary practices in particular. Tamari's study is based on the diaries of ordinary Arab soldiers serving in the Ottoman army, and Aslanian traces the activities of Armenian merchants from Julfa throughout the world. Philliou's focus is on the Ottoman Greek Rum phanariots that governed the Balkans for the sultan. With these three studies, the agency of religious and ethnic minorities in imperial settings becomes articulated. Their particular emphasis on the everyday lives of people, those who did not "make" history as individuals but nevertheless "created" history in disparate regions, time periods, and local contexts brings in yet another dimension of local agency. In Tezcan's analysis, the Ottoman janissaries emerge as the main power players in their roles as soldiers and financial entrepreneurs; al-Enazy instead undercuts the dominant agency of Ibn Sa'ud by documenting how many of his policies were actually shaped by British officials.

In conclusion, how do the eight works address the three postcolonial corollaries of the definition, origins, and elimination of contemporary inequality? In defining contemporary inequality, most take issue with the Western colonization of knowledge, either directly or indirectly challenging dominant Eurocentric explanations of the Middle East, past and present. Most locate the origins of inequality in the past in general and the advent of modernity into the region in particular. Among them, those who rely on specific local empirical sources to dispute specific aspects of Western modernity are more successful than their more theoretical counterparts. With the exception of Chatty and Finlayson, none directly addresses the ethical, normative issue of the elimination of contemporary inequality, although it can be argued that all eight works will, in the long run, enable the development of a richer, stronger analysis of the Middle East, an analysis whose origins are located not in the West but instead in the region. Ultimately, the postcolonial approach provides a new, rigorous, and critical framework through which to study the Middle East, one these authors draw on to generate a much more fine-tuned, nuanced, and source-rich analysis that could, in the long run, generate an entirely novel theory.

NOTES

¹This Marxian strand originates in Marx to cover subsequent formulations including world systems and dependency theory. See Stephen Katz, "The Problems of Europecentrism and Evolutionism in Marx's Writings on Colonialism," *Political Studies* 38 (1990): 672–86; and Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds., *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997).

²See Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence* (New York: New Press, 2003); Dan Stone, "Defending the Plural: Hannah Arendt and Genocide Studies," *New Formations* 71 (2011): 46–57; and Christopher J. Lee, "Locating Hannah Arendt within Postcolonial Thought: A Prospectus," *College Literature* 38 (2011): 95–114.

³See Couze Venn, "Cultural Theory, Biopolitics, and the Question of Power," *Theory, Culture and Society* 24 (2007): 111–24 and "Neoliberal Political Economy, Biopolitics and Colonialism: A Transcolonial Genealogy of Inequality," *Theory, Culture and Society* 26 (2009): 206–33.

⁴See David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993); and Syed Hussein Alatas, "Intellectual Captivity and Developing Societies," in *The Civilization Project: The Visions of the Orient*, ed. A. Abdel-Malek (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 1981), 19–62. See also Venn, "Cultural Theory" and "Neoliberal Political Economy," for a critique of Foucault for failing to take into account colonialism's undergirding of the political economy of liberal capitalism.

⁵See Bart Moore-Gilbert, "Western Autobiography and Colonial Discourse: The Case of Rousseau's 'Orientalism,'" *Social Identities* 11 (2005): 301–14; Thomas David Dubois, "Hegemony, Imperialism and the Construction of Religion in East and Southeast Asia," *History and Theory* 44 (2005): 113–31; and Pramod K. Nayar, *Postcolonialism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2010), esp. 13–21.

⁶See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Nayar, *Postcolonialism*, esp. 21–24.

⁷See Christopher Bayly, "Moral Judgment: Empire, Nation and History," *European Review* 14 (2006): 385–91; T. Hasseler and P. Krebs, "Losing Our Way after the Imperial Turn: Charting Academic Uses of the Postcolonial," in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*, ed. A. Burton (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), esp. 93.

⁸Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007). On the Global South, see also Caroline Levander and Walter Dignolo, "Introduction: The Global South and World Dis/Order," *Global South* 5 (2011): 1–11; on theorizing from the borders, see Chris Rumford, "Introduction: Theorizing Borders," *European Journal of Social Theory* 9 (2006): 155–69; Levander and Dignolo, "Introduction"; Alcoff (2007) in critically analyzing Dignolo; Rumford, "Introduction," on theorizing borders.

⁹The term "Southern scholars" refers to all scholars located in the non-Western world and writing from an explicitly non-Western perspective.

¹⁰"Northern scholars" refers to all those located in the rich and powerful north and who advocate a Western approach that privileges the interests of the North at the expense of the poor and dominated South.

¹¹See Walter Dignolo, "Cosmopolitanism and the De-Colonial Option," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 29 (2010): 111–27; "Dispensable and Bare Lives: Coloniality and the Hidden Political/Economic Agenda of Modernity," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self Knowledge* 7 (2009): 69–88; and "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought, and Decolonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture and Society* 26 (2009): 159–81.

¹²Fatma Müge Göçek, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire during the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹³Fatma Müge Göçek, *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁴Fatma Müge Göçek, "Deciphering Denial: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present and the Collective Violence against the Armenians, 1789–2009" (book manuscript, 2012).

¹⁵I. Metin Kunt, "Sultan, Dynasty and State in the Ottoman Empire: Political Institutions in the Sixteenth Century," *Medieval History Journal* 6 (2003): 217–30; Ralph Grillo, *Pluralism and the Politics of Difference: State, Culture and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Eyal Ginio, "Neither Muslims nor Zimmis: The Gypsies (Roma) in the Ottoman State," *Romani Studies* 14 (2004): 117–44; Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Nicholas Doumanis, "Durable Empire: State Virtuosity and Social Accommodation in the Ottoman Mediterranean," *Historical Journal* 49 (2006): 953–66.

¹⁶Jane Hathaway, *A Tale of Two Factions: Myth, Memory, Identity in Ottoman Egypt and Yemen* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2003); Eric R. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Marc David Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Amy Aisen Elouafi, "The Colour

of Orientalism: Race and Narratives of Discovery in Tunisia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33 (2010): 253–71.

¹⁷See also Palmira Brummett, “Gender and Empire in Late Ottoman Istanbul: Caricature, Models of Empire and the Case for Ottoman Exceptionalism,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 27 (2007): 283–302; Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Molly Greene, *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹⁸See, for example, Andrew C. Hess, “The Evolution of the Ottoman Seaborne Empire in the Age of the Oceanic Discoveries, 1453–1525,” *American Historical Review* 75 (1970): 1892–1919; Affan Seljuq, “Relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim Kingdoms in the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago,” *Islam* 57 (1980): 301–10; Abbas Hamdani, “Ottoman Response to the Discovery of America and the New Route to India,” *Journal of American Oriental Society* 101 (1981): 323–30; Thomas D. Goodrich, “*Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi*: An Ottoman Book on the New World,” *Journal of American Oriental Society* 107 (1987): 317–19; Salih Özbaran, “An Imperial Letter from Süleyman the Magnificent to Dom Joao III Concerning Proposals for an Ottoman–Portuguese Armistice,” *Portuguese Studies* 6 (1990): 24–31; and Linda Darling, “Rethinking Europe and the Islamic World in the Age of Exploration,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 2 (1998): 221–46.

¹⁹See, for example, Ariel Salzmann, “An Ancien Regime Revisited: ‘Privatization’ and Political Economy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire,” *Politics and Society* 21 (1993): 393–423; idem, “Citizens in Search of a State: The Limits of Political Participation in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808–1914,” in *Extending Citizenship, Reconfiguring States*, ed. Michael Hanagan and Charles Tilly (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 37–66; James D. Tracy, “Studies in Eighteenth-Century Mughal and Ottoman Trade,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 37 (1994): 197–201; Virginia H. Aksan, “Ottoman to Turk: Continuity and Change,” *International Journal* 61 (2005/2006): 19–38; “The Ottoman Military and State Transformation in a Globalizing World,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27 (2007): 259–72; and idem, “Theoretical Ottomans,” *History and Theory* 47 (2008): 109–22.

²⁰Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Postcolonial Debate,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45 (2003): 311–42.

²¹*Ibid.*, 318.

²²See Ussama Makdisi, “Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity,” *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 680–713; *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000); “Ottoman Orientalism,” *American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 768–96; “Rethinking Ottoman Imperialism: Modernity, Violence and the Cultural Logic of Ottoman Reform,” in *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, ed. Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp, and Stefan Weber (Beirut: Orient Institute, 2002), 29–48; and “After 1860: Debating Religion, Reform and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (2002): 601–17.

²³Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” 768.

²⁴Murat Pakar, “Egemen Politik Kültürün Dayanılmaz Ağırlığı” (The Unbearable Weight of the Dominant Political Culture), in *Psiko-Politik Yüzleşmeler* (Psycho-Political Encounters) (Istanbul: Birikim, 2007), 131–52.

²⁵Christoph Herzog and Raoul Motika, “Orientalism ‘Alla Turca’: Late 19th/Early 20th Century Ottoman Voyages into the Muslim ‘Outback,’” *Die Welt des Islams* 40 (2000): 139–95; Tal Shuval, “The Ottoman Algerian Elite and Its Ideology,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32 (2000): 323–44; Thomas Kühn, “Ordering Urban Space in Ottoman Yemen, 1872–1914,” in Hanssen et al., *The Empire in the City*, 329–47; idem, “Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism: Contesting Boundaries of Difference and Integration in Ottoman Yemen, 1872–1919,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27 (2007): 315–31; Monica Spiridon, “Identity Discourses on Borders in Eastern Europe,” *Comparative Literature* 58 (2006): 376–86; Michael Provence, “Ottoman Modernity, Colonialism, and Insurgency in the Interwar Arab East,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (2011): 205–25; and Lynda Carroll, “Building Farmsteads in the Desert: Capitalism, Colonialism and the Transformation of Rural Landscapes in Late Ottoman Period Transjordan,” in *Archeology of Capitalism in Colonial Contexts*, ed. Sarah K. Croucher and Lindsay Weiss (New York: Springer, 2011): 105–20.

²⁶See also Isa Blumi, “The Commodification of Otherness and the Ethnic Unit in the Balkans: How to Think about Albanians,” *Eastern European Politics and Societies* 12 (1998): 527–69; “The Ottoman Empire

and Yemeni Politics in the *Sancak* of Ta'izz, 1911–18,” in Hanssen et al., *The Empire in the City*, 349–57; “Contesting the Edges of the Ottoman Empire: Rethinking Ethnic and Sectarian Boundaries in Malesore, 1878–1912,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35 (2003): 237–56; *Rethinking the Late Ottoman Empire: A Comparative Social and Political History of Albania and Yemen, 1878–1918* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2003); and *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800–1912* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²⁷Costas M. Constantinou, “Diplomacy, Grotesque Realism, and Ottoman Historiography,” *Postcolonial Studies* 3 (2000): 213–26; Edip Gölbaşı, “‘Heretik’ Aşiretler ve II. Abdülhamid Rejimi: Zorunlu Askerlik Meselesi ve İhtida Siyaseti Odağında Yezidiler ve Osmanlı İdaresi” (Heretical Tribes and the Regime of Sultan Abdulhamid II: Yezidis and Ottoman Administration in Relation to the Issues of Mandatory Military Service and the Politics of Conversion), *Tarih ve Toplum* 9 (2009): 87–156; idem, “Osmanlı Kolonyalizmi Perspektiflerine dair Eleştirisel bir Değerlendirme” (A Critical Assessment of the Perspectives on Ottoman Colonialism), unpublished paper, 2011; and Florian Riedler, *Opposition and Legitimacy in the Ottoman Empire: Conspiracies and Political Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2011).

²⁸Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2005), and “Postcolonial Studies and the Study of History,” in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, ed. Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzi, Antoinette Burton, and Jed Esty (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 401–22.

²⁹Critics of the decline thesis argue that early Ottoman history especially has suffered from a historical analysis that privileges the demise of the empire, thereby working backward from this historical fact to trace the origins and elements of decline over centuries and, in the process, interpreting indigenous processes narrowly as harbingers of a future crisis.

³⁰Chatty and Finlayson define the region culturally in a broad manner, stretching from Pakistan and Afghanistan to the Western Sahara.