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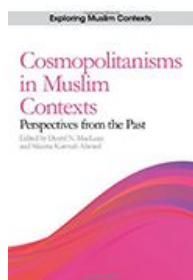
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Cosmopolitanisms in Muslim Contexts: Perspectives from the Past

By: Derryl N. MacLean
Sikeena Karmali Ahmed, editors

Cosmopolitanisms in Muslim Contexts: Perspectives from the Past. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, in association with the Aga Khan University, 2012. 208 pp. \$90.54. ISBN: 978-0748644568. Pbk: 2013. 190 pp. \$36.98. ISBN: 978-0748689859. Ebk: 208 pp. \$22.9

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This volume is a collection of essays loosely centered around the notion of cosmopolitanism, the editors' choice of the plural *cosmopolitanisms* was wise, as the individual essays have rather different perspectives on what constitutes "cosmopolitanism." This is not to say that these perspectives are mutually contradictory so much as address fields so disparate as to have comparatively little in common. While many of the essays are quite interesting and thought-provoking, and all are thoroughly researched and documented as well as being carefully written, this volume suffers greatly from a lack of interconnectedness, a quality often characteristic of thematically-oriented collections. Many scholars will find at least one of the essays very relevant and useful; few will view the entire collection in the same way.

Most significant about this collection is its orientation toward cosmopolitanism within Muslim contexts during the last two centuries rather than during the classical or medieval periods, and toward comparatively mundane rather than official or high-culture cosmopolitanisms. MacLean argues in the first chapter that he and Ahmed expect that these essays will encourage larger reflections on commonalities and differences: "In particular, this book seeks to ask the question, is the concept of cosmopolitanism useful for the study of Muslim societies and cultures of the past?" (p. 1) MacLean continues by giving a clear definition of cosmopolitanism, and states that contributors were asked to explore the relationship between "the high pan-Islamic and the grassroots vernacular form of cosmopolitanism within Muslim contexts." (p. 2) The contributors undeniably explore the vernacular, but the degree of engagement with the high pan-Islamic varies greatly from one essay to the next.

The most compelling essay in the collection is the fifth chapter: Ariel Salzmann's "Islampolis, Cosmopolis: Ottoman Urbanity Between Myth, Memory and Postmodernity," which addresses the status of various non-Muslim communities in Ottoman cities before the establishment of the modern Turkish state. Salzmann's text repositions this issue from previous studies by conceptualizing urban space as not "the experience of subordinated groups in terms of binary relationships between *a* subordinated group... and *the* Muslim political authority," (p. 71) but rather as the interplay *among* the subordinated groups, as well as with the dominant authority. The contrast between medieval Istanbul, where members of different faith communities often lived in mixed neighborhoods, and Venice of the same period, where Jews and Muslims were confined to literal ghettos, is illustrative. Salzmann documents how disasters such as plagues, floods and fires brought members of different communities together in mutual support, especially given the Ottoman state's general inability or refusal to provide much in the way of social services for these largely impoverished groups. Salzmann's most compelling example is of a lottery sponsored by a Jewish group to raise funds for the marriages of orphans; the ticket is printed in multiple languages, demonstrating that members of other faith communities, including Muslims, found the cause worthwhile. Such solidarity appears to be the exception rather than the rule in 21st century Istanbul; Salzmann begins the essay with the extraordinary event of the murder of a Turkish-Armenian journalist in 2007, which brought the city together.

Also of note is Thomas Kuehn's "Translators of Empire: Colonial Cosmopolitanism, Ottoman Bureaucrats and the Struggle over the Governance of Yemen, 1898-1914," which describes how Ottoman leaders learned from the British experience of managing subjects of different civilizational levels. Kuehn argues that to the Ottomans, "the principal reason for the success of British colonial rule seemed to be the native chief or local ruler under British sovereignty who governed on behalf of the crown and ensured British domination in a cost-effective way, not the Oxbridge-educated district officer of the Indian Civil Service who managed the locals under his charge." (p. 64) But actually, using British principles of indirect rule were problematic, especially given the perceived threat of British intervention in a Yemen not fully under Ottoman control. This issue led to a complex understanding both of principles of governance and of the (declining) Ottoman state's place in a world being divided up among more vigorous imperial states.

Other essays in the volume range farther (and further) afield, taking as their subjects the adoption of Islam among Tanzanian hinterland villagers in the interwar period; the means by which different groups of Muslims were (largely) integrated into a cosmopolitan whole in Mombasa; the use of

curse words in colonial Alexandria and their problematic status with regard to laws intended to enforce respect for the dignity of officials; British and Persian perceptions of each other's cuisine during the early nineteenth century; a look at the work of the Muslim Indian artist Abdur Rahman Chughtai and the tension between its comparative timelessness and cosmopolitanism and the poetry Chughtai's paintings accompanied in a published volume; and various understandings of the doctrine of *al-tashabbuh bi-l-kuffar* or "imitating the infidel." This last essay suffers from too broad a perspective, while the first essay, on the Tanzanian villagers, presumes a bit too much background knowledge on the part of the reader: while the endnotes provide ample references, a few paragraphs of explanatory background information would have greatly improved the otherwise informative essay.

Again, the plural "cosmopolitanisms" is perhaps the best indicator of this volume's content. MacLean and Ahmed are to be commended for bringing together such a wide range of scholarship under the same theoretical umbrella. The book undeniably manages to ask the question posed by its editors; however, given the plurality of cosmopolitanisms within the volume, whether that question has been fully answered has yet to be seen.

