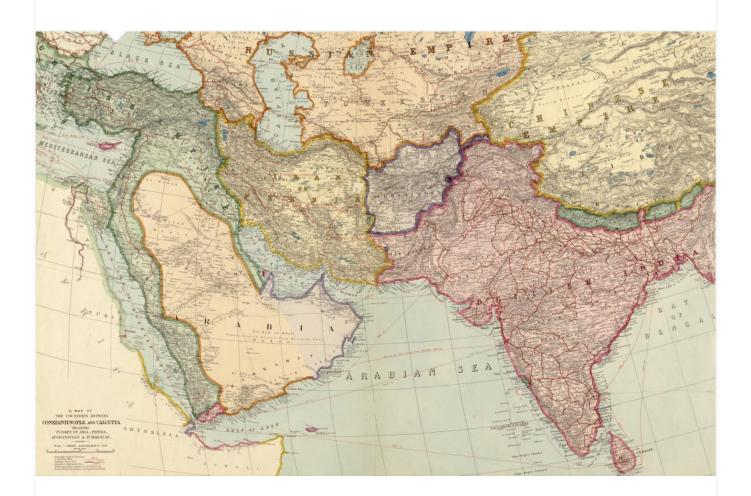# {essays in history}

The Annual Journal produced by the Corcoran Department of History at the University of Virginia

On the Margins: A Historiography of Modernity in Southern Arabia

Volume 42 (2009)

Reviewed Work(s)

On the Edge of Empire: Hadhramawt, Emigration, and the Indian Ocean, 1880s-1930s. By Linda Boxberger. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002)

Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhramaut: Reforming the Homeland. By Ulrike Freitag. (Boston: Brill, 2003)

Oman Since 1856: Disruptive Modernization in a Traditional Arab Society. By Robert G. Landen. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967)

Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundation of an Emerging State. By John E. Peterson. (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1978)

Yemen: The Search for a Modern State. By John E. Peterson. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982)

The emergence of states in a tribal society: Oman under Saʿid bin Taymur, 1932- 1970. By Rabi Uzi. (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2006)

Historians of the Middle East often focus their scholarship on the "coming of modernity"-a shorthand for scholars that examine how new technologies of communication, transportation, and warfare; efficient state bureaucracies; and innovative political ideologies come into conflict with and transform "traditional" societies. Both classic (Robert Landen's *Oman Since 1856: Disruptive Modernization in a Traditional Arab Society*, and John Peterson's *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State)* and recent (Ubi Razi's *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society*) monographs on Southern Arabia are emblematic of this interpretive framework. But a transformative model of modernity-initially developed to articulate the differences between the history of political and technological development in Europe and the "developing" world-have always been an uncomfortable fit in the Middle East. There, European and Ottoman imperialism, in tandem with resistance, collaboration, and other responses to such efforts, generated composites of political, economic, social, and cultural behaviors that scholars describe contrastingly as "modern" or "traditional". But these admixtures profoundly disturb the rationality of transformative models of modernity. Increasingly, scholars, including Ulrike Freitag and Linda

Boxberger, have sought to transcend the "disturbing" logic of this modern/traditional dichotomy by examining the motivations of local actors in the Middle East without "orientalizing" them as backward and primitive-the unspoken connotations of "traditional."

Situated on the Indian Ocean shore of the Arabian Peninsula, the historical scholarship concerning Oman and Yemen provides a window into the development of this historiographical trajectory. Partly because of political restraints, relatively few historians have been able to perform research in Southern Arabia, and many of them have relied on general works on the Persian Gulf based largely on British sources because of the difficulties in accessing local archives. Only in the past two decades have Western historians and anthropologists been able to supplement research in the region (particularly in South Yemen) with private local collections and oral histories.[1] An implication of the limited attention to Oman and Yemen is that historians have often applied models of the "coming of modernity" to the margins of the Middle East without developing the localized interpretive nuances that proceed out of extended scholarly debate. Historians of Oman and Yemen have not been irresponsible in their scholarship; but the "marginality" of the region in academia allows a fairly clear examination of the particular ways historians have modified their models of modernity over the past several decades.

Complicating the historiography of Oman and Yemen, however, is a growing consensus among scholars that although Southern Arabia is on the margin of the Middle East it was among the "centers" of the Indian Ocean world at least until the early twentieth century. Understanding the relationship between new scholarship that focuses on the interrelatedness of Southern Arabia to the rest of the Indian Ocean world and previous constructions of the region as the primitive edge of the Middle East is thus crucial for bridging two conflicting narratives. While the "marginal" narrative focused on how sultanates in Oman and Yemen belatedly embraced modernity under Western influence, the new "centrist" narrative suggests that Southern Arabians (particularly Hadramis) who were sojourning in the Indian Ocean World brought development to Southern Arabia. The two narratives are not unrelated: by bringing them together in this review essay I hope to outline how scholars' usage of "modernity" has transformed over the last several

decades. In particular, I will focus on how various historians have periodized modernity, discussed development, accounted for the influence of outside contact, and dealt with the seemingly contradictory mixtures of traditional and modern behaviors.

Disruptive Modernity

Early modernization theory in the 1950s and 1960s focused on the "process by which societies have been and are being transformed under the impact of the scientific and technological revolution."[2] For modernization theorists such as Cyril Black, the progress of science was generally beneficial but presented particular problems to traditional societies. The aim of his comparative research was to identify the social, economic, and political challenges of adopting modern technologies in order to suggest ways of overcoming them. Though some modernization theorists fell into a deterministic logic that suggested the inevitability and inherent desirability of modernization, Black used modernization theory as the framework from which to understand local idiosyncrasies of nineteenth and twentieth century Russia, Japan, and the Middle East. [3] Still, he also described traditional societies as "latecomers" whose own adoption of modernity was unique in that the expectations of progress exemplified by earlier modernizers were often incompatible with their own traditions.[4] That is, modernization was a natural process for Western nations, but elsewhere, modernization was introduced and sometimes imposed by internal and external actors who desired the perceived benefits of technology that modern societies enjoyed.

In 1967, Robert Landen followed a similar theoretical framework that focused on the impact of modern technology; but he included "disruptive modernization" in the subtitle of his *Oman Since 1856* to explicitly argue against a historiographical trend in the 1960s that emphasized the benefits of scientific and technological progress. Landen dated the onset of modernity in Oman to 1862 with the "penetration of modern steamer and telegraphic communications into the Persian Gulf" and argued that this interference from the modern world sparked a "time of crisis when the region's ancient culture was changed irrevocably."[5] For Landen:

The term "modernization" . . . describe[s] the process by which a society confronts or adapts to the complex of revolutionary ideas and

techniques first developed in Western Europe, starting in the twelfth century, which enhanced man's ability to understand and control his environment and radically changed his relationship to this environment. [6]

Like other contemporary scholars, such as Persian Gulf scholar J.B. Kelley, Landen suggested that Western Europe and Great Britain in particular revolutionized the world by spreading their political and technological innovations. However, while J.B. Kelly argued approvingly that the British "brought peace, justice, and the rule of law to the [Persian] Gulf in the nineteenth century," Landen dwelt on the negative impact of modernization on Oman.[7] He suggested that "the process may be viewed as two-sided-an implied *destruction* as well as *construction* of institutions, attitudes, and practices."[8] While Kelly and Landen may have disagreed over the benefits of British Imperialism, neither disputed the irreconcilable differences between modern and traditional societies. For these scholars, modernity implied a completely new conception of the world that inevitably replaced, and in the process destroyed, traditional technologies, economies, and political institutions. For example, Landen analyzed the decline in the use of large wind-powered ships, the surrender of control of investment markets to Indian traders with access to superior currencies, and the establishment of informal indirect rule by the British-and he linked all of these processes to the disruption of traditional commercial maritime networks by British steamships.

By focusing on the disruptive impact of modernization, Landen also argued against scholars who suggested modernization commenced with "the coming of the oil industry" to the Persian Gulf on the eve of World War I.[9] In order to push the timeframe for modernization earlier, Landen introduced his book with two chapters detailing the "golden age" of Oman prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century and the "silver age" of Oman following the successful expulsion of these European intruders in the seventeenth century. Landen's general theme in these introductory chapters is that historical change was minimal in the region for millennia, though the rising influence of Omani merchants on the coast and the consolidation of the Ibadi Imamate in the interior were the two "major threads running through Omani history."[10] The climax of these minimal changes was the Busaidi

dynasty's attempt in the late-eighteenth century aimed to "develop the Omani state into a tightly supervised maritime empire embracing both shores of the Gulf of Oman, the major Persian Gulf islands, strategic points on the Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf proper, as well as Oman's east African possessions."[11]

For Landen, the ensuing conflicts with other Arab states led to British intervention and "supervision" of the Persian Gulf at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which "overturn[ed] the context within which Gulf civilization had traditionally operated, and established the prerequisites for the penetration of modern culture into the region."[12] Essentially, Oman retained substantial privileges as a British ally but lost its dominance over Persian Gulf affairs. The new context was especially apparent to Landen when the British Government of India resolved an Omani succession dispute by dividing the dominions of the Busaidi dynasty into its Arabian and East African holdings in 1856, the year Landen chose for the beginning of modernization. For Landen, British interference in Omani affairs severely curtailed the ability of the Sultanate to benefit from the new commercial networks of the nineteenth century based on steamship technology by depriving it of revenue from the profitable East African commerce.

Landen's application of modernization theory to Oman further abstracted the dichotomy between traditional and modern. Instead of a simultaneous process in which the construction of a modern society replaced a traditional society, Landen suggested that disruptive modernization stalled Oman "as a sleepy backwater for another century."[13] Instead of integrating Oman into the modern world, Landen argued that modernization marginalized Oman until oil revenues expected to begin in the late 1960s would finally allow Oman to construct its own modern institutions and implement modern technologies. In addition, the way Landen periodized modernity in Oman-disruptive modernization, followed by a significant period of stagnation, and finally an (expected) phase of modernization prompted by oil revenues-portrayed a prolonged disjuncture between traditional and modern societies. In Landen's model of disruptive modernity, Oman's traditional society was conceptually and temporally isolated from modernity for a full century.

Modern States

While Landen emphasized the disruptive role of modern technology and the imperialism that introduced and imposed modernity, scholars of Southern Arabia in the 1970s and 1980s focused their efforts on understanding the creation of "modern states", as evident from a brief glance at the sub-titles of some of the few monographs on Oman: "the Modernization of the Sultanate"; "The Making of a Modern State;" and "Formation of the State since 1920."[14] John Peterson, the most prominent historian of the region, helped establish this trend with his *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State* and *Yemen: the Search for a Modern State*. In these monographs, Peterson focused primarily on political change by exploring the context for the coups d'état in Oman and Yemen in 1973 and 1962, respectively. Peterson's focus on the establishment of centralized political authority implied that modernity in Southern Arabia began after the coups when the triumphant leaders committed to "modernize" their countries. But Peterson also recognized the complex interaction between modernity and tradition. Instead of a theoretical gap between tradition and modernity, it was the competition among traditional polities within Oman and Yemen that created modern states, thus ensuring that some traditional structures continued to operate within modern states. For Peterson, these traditional structures existed beside modern innovations and presented a challenge for modern states trying to shed inefficiency.

While Peterson accepted some of Landen's conclusions, for instance that "modernising forces must disrupt the existing social fabric" and cause "the old, rigid structure of society . . . to disintegrate," he argued against interpretations of Omani and Yemeni history that suggested the two regions had "awakened from [their] centuries-long slumber and embraced the modern world."[15] Rather, Peterson insisted that the foundations for the particular political structures of modern states in Oman and Yemen could be discerned in the historical processes of the twentieth century: modernity was part of an ongoing process, not a static condition that political communities somehow acquired.

In both regions, Peterson suggested the primary historical dynamic was the competition between a religious Imamate and a secular Sultanate. The Imams' political authority only extended to the mediation of

disputes among tribes, and they relied on religious qualifications and nominations by the leading tribes for their authority.

Thus *shaykhs* seeking political advantage for their own tribes were often able to manipulate the Imams. But when the Yemeni and Omani Sultanates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries threatened the political independence of the tribes, the respective Imamates served as a forum for the tribes to organize resistance. However, the competition among tribes inherent in the institutions of the Imamate enabled the Sultanate, which relied on ties with coastal merchants and foreign powers to create patron relationships with various tribes, to successfully exert authority over tribal factions and create weak centralized states. While "the Imamate [of Oman] disappeared in 1955, the foundations of the Sultanate's administration, so haphazardly laid over the course of the twentieth century, remained."[16] Peterson describes a similar development in Yemen. One implication for Peterson's interpretation is that the modern states in Oman and Yemen emerged from traditional struggles for supremacy; the British were certainly influential in providing support to the Sultanates, but modernity arose out of local responses to the socio-economic challenges of the twentieth century.

For Peterson, modernity and tradition were rough labels that obscured that "the Imamate of the twentieth century was only partially 'traditional'; [and] the [Yemeni Arab] Republic has turned out to be far from revolutionary"-a term that Peterson used interchangeably with modern.[17] Thus, Peterson's work highlights the realization in the late 1970s and 1980s that modernity and tradition interacted in ways that defied easy categorization of entire political systems. To illustrate the complexities of the modern state, Peterson occasionally shared anecdotes or short biographies of Omanis and Yemenis. For instance, he suggested that the Omani state's dilemma of balancing modernity and tradition:

. . . was captured in the typical picture of an Omani individual, who still carried a *khanjar* but adorned it with a wristwatch, who carried a camelstick but travelled by Land Rover or Datsun, who dressed in white *dishdasha* and skullcap yet concluded business deals by telephone in English and spent his holidays in London.[18]

Besides demonstrating the admixtures of modernity and tradition as experienced on an individual level in Southern Arabia, these examples underscored Peterson's major interpretation: Oman and Yemen embraced modernity in order to achieve and maintain what he termed structural legitimacy because it was Southern Arabians' expectation for modern development that spurred political opposition to the sultanates in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Peterson's argument about structural legitimacy reveals what scholars mean when they mention modern states. In addition to describing the development of government ministries, the military, efficient budgetary procedures, and, of course, the implementation of modern technology, medicine, and infrastructure, Peterson argued that the "difference between the old and the new variations [of political structures] lay in the latter's ability to respond adequately to the needs of the country rather than to the whims of an eccentric Sultan."[19] This interpretation is particularly pronounced in his descriptions of the Dhufar rebellion in Oman. He asserts that:

[The Sultan's] petty restrictions on the lives of his Dhufari subjects led to the outbreak of isolated attacks on government vehicles which then escalated into first a Dhufar-nationalist rebellion and then became a vicious civil war pitting the government against Marxist-Leninist rebels supported by the leftist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the major Communist powers.[20]

Though explicitly denying that modern Southern Arabian politics relied on a "social contract" for legitimacy, Peterson built on Black's observation that expectations among subjects for modern development motivated traditional governments to modernize; without structures that responded to these expectations, traditional governments lacked legitimacy. Therefore, Peterson argued that the coups in Oman and Yemen resulted from the inability of the respective traditional governments to effectively implement such reforms. That the leaders of such coups immediately embarked on extensive modernization projects suggests that they viewed the political situations similarly.

In contrast to traditional polities in Oman and Yemen which depended on the charisma and aptitude of individual leaders, Peterson distinguished a modern state by its ability to transcend the interests of a

single tribe, dynasty, or family that were often at cross-purposes. However, these modern states did not necessarily benefit "the population as a whole" and could often provide improvement in economic terms alone.[21] In fact, it was a universal dilemma for modern states in the "Third World" to achieve a national consensus in the face of opposition from traditionalists who felt their privileges were being eroded and modernists who felt the state was not developing quickly enough. For Peterson, modernity began when these conflicts of interest began to be worked out within the political structures of the state in 1955, rather than through competition among tribes or between the sultanates and the imamates.

Besides distinguishing modern states from traditional polities, Peterson's work reveals some of the enduring characterizations of the Middle East presented by Landen as well. Namely, Peterson continued to emphasize the insularity of Oman and the Yemen, even within the Middle East, as well as the essentially rigid social and political formations that preceded modernity. For example, while acknowledging the spread of Marxist ideologies to Dhufar through Southern Yemen, Peterson describes this movement of ideas into Oman as exceptional. And he suggested that by accepting Marxist ideology, "the Dhufari revolt forsook its tribal nature."[22] Thus, although Peterson acknowledged a complex interaction between modern ideologies and "tradition", he continued to categorize them into a dichotomy that inevitably results in the relinquishing the latter in favor of the former. This logic is even more apparent in his description of the Omani Sultan's failed modernization projects. He suggested that:

Being political innovations largely without concomitant social, economic, and education transformation, these hesitant attempts were for the most part doomed to an insulated existence alongside the traditional Omani way of life until they became the major building block of the post-1970 society.[23]

Thus, Peterson argued that by attempting only partial modernization, the Sultan inevitably set up inherent contradictions between modern and traditional structures that doomed his rule.

Just as Peterson preserved the interpretation that modern innovations were "insulated from the traditional Omani way of life," until after the

coup in Oman, he continued the historiographical trend of contextualizing Oman and Yemen as the edge of the Middle East and the Arab world. For example, although insisting that modern states emerged from local political struggles, Peterson also suggests that "the economic and social transformation occurring in the Gulf, wrought by the advent of oil revenues gradually *worked its way south* towards Oman. . . . [even as] Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula's *other mountainous bastion of traditional rule*, was plunged into civil war" that resulted in its modern state.[24] Thus, the two states at the southern edge of Arabia are grafted into a larger "coming of modernity" narrative that traced the diffusion of Western ideas and structures along paths dictated by oil exploration. This context assured that Oman and Yemen continued to be treated as marginal latecomers to modernity. Still, Peterson's focus on state formation shifted historical attention in Southern Arabia to internal political history rather than the previous emphasis on disruptive external influence.

Revisionist Historiography

The opening of South Yemen in the 1990s to Western researchers facilitated a resurgence of interest in Southern Arabia even as scholars began revising their theories of state-building and modernization; but these revisionist historical studies on Oman and Yemen were only published in the last decade. These studies have called into question not only the conclusions reached by Landen and Peterson, but also the models of modernity that they relied on. In the case of Uzi Rabi's *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society*, the criticism of early models of state formation in Oman is implied. But Linda Boxberger's *On the Edge of Empire* and Ulrike Freitag's *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation* directly confront interpretations which treated Yemen as a marginal region that belatedly adopted modernity in response to challenges introduced by the West. All of these works complicate the traditional/modern dichotomy by emphasizing the dynamic social processes operating in Southern Arabian societies, but none of them abandon Peterson's emphasis on state-formation. In addition, these revisionist scholars retained an analytical distinction between modern and traditional societies but differed in how they transcend the unavoidable contradiction of the two concepts.

Rabi's work on Oman targeted the period of stagnation suggested by Landen and what Rabi considered the political rhetoric of the modern Omani state. Rabi suggested that following the coup d'état in 1970, scholars generally accepted the interpretation of government propaganda in painting the previous regime of Saʿid bin Taymur as "medieval and isolationist, and the government that succeeded it as progressive and enlightened," thus sweeping the sultanate which ruled Oman for most of the twentieth century "into the trash bin of history."[25] Instead of portraying the coup as the "beginning of a thorough shift from tradition to modernity in Oman," Rabi followed the lead of Peterson in "maintaining that lines of continuity are to be drawn between Saʿid's reign and that of his son."[26] Specifically Rabi credited Saʿid for bestowing on his rebellious son "a country with relatively healthy accumulated public surpluses, one whose complete independence was in no doubt, and untroubled by the running sore of the Imamate."[27] These positive developments, for Rabi, could not have been achieved by a society locked in a timeless traditional state; rather he argued that Saʿid was responsive to the challenges of the twentieth century and that his reign should be considered part of an "ongoing process of state-building in Oman" that was characterized by competition between "different versions of the state-the sultanic, the British, and the Imamate version."[28]

Rabi's work was anticipated in some ways by Peterson's analysis of the origins of modernization programs hesitantly implemented by Saʿid. But Rabi applied newly developed theories about chiefdoms and chieftaincies to argue that Saʿid constructed a "Unified Tribal State" that successfully put down competition from the Omani imamate and avoided British control of the state. According to Rabi, both the Imamate and the Sultanate were chiefdoms, an "intermediate political structure between tribe and state" or, applied to Oman, a "power-sharing system that involved pastoral nomads, semi-sedentarized tribesmen, and urban dwellers."[29] Within these inter-tribal alliances, rivalry among tribes was "a functional part of the total system," so Oman's traditional society was not a "sea of chaos" as described by Peterson and other earlier historians. By describing how Saʿid cultivated personal relationships of allegiance with particular tribes and accepted British assistance when their interests coincided with his, Rabi attempted to transcend the "dichotomy between tribe and state."[30]

Implicitly, Rabi's analysis was also an attempt to overcome the contradictions asserted by Peterson between the Omani states' need to respond effectively to the expectations for modern development by its subjects and the traditional "tribal" political system of Oman. Instead of simply impeding progress, Rabi argued that Saʿid "was determined not to allow the unexpected wealth to alter the country's traditional way of life and rend its social fabric, a development he had witnessed in some of the neighboring states."[31] Thus, while rejecting Landen's assertions of stagnation, Rabi agreed not only that modernization was disruptive, but that the Omanis were well aware of modernizing reforms as a threat. Rabi's intertwining of traditional tribal and modern state characteristics in the Unified Tribal State perhaps rescues Saʿid's reign from accusations of indifference and ineffectiveness, but by describing chiefdoms as an intermediary political structure between tribes and states in the process of state-building, he continues the progressive logic of modernity.

In contrast to the implicit criticisms of Rabi, Linda Boxberger and Ulrike Freitag, who both conducted field research in southern Yemen at the same time, took aim directly at assumptions that modernity is inevitable, Western, and revolutionary, while tradition is static and insular. Boxberger, an anthropologist, focused on establishing the complicated traditional dynamics of Omani society by examining social groups. Rather than circumscribe her study to an analysis of tribes, she described the political and social relationships among *sada* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad), *mashayikh* (local religious authorities), *qabaʿil* (settled tribes), *badu* (nomadic tribes), townspeople, *dhuʿafaʾ* (farmers, builders, and fishermen), ʿ*abid* (slave soldiers of the sultan), and *subiyan* (household servants). By tracing how the power and prestige of such groups varied and changed through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Boxberger argued that:

Hadhramawt was by no means transformed by its increasing connections with the outside world and the imperial powers. Old ways were not abandoned, but rather modified in their encounter with the new. Voices urging the maintenance of the ways of the ancestors debated with those voices espousing modernist reform.[32]

While Peterson had used "modern" and "revolutionary" interchangeably, though often qualifying the revolution by pointing to traditional precedents, Boxberger explicitly denied the reality of any revolution at

all, thus dismissing an inherent contradiction between modern and traditional societies.

Indeed, for Boxberger, the modern steamboats that Landen argued had disrupted the traditional economic structures of Oman facilitated greater exchanges of people and ideas through emigration of Hadhramis throughout the Indian Ocean. It is these emigrants, not Westerners, who Boxberger credits with the development of "modern" institutions; after acquiring wealth through their commercial activities in the Indian Ocean, many of these emigrants returned home and reconfigured the networks of power and prestige by introducing "material goods, fashions, and ideas that they had encountered in their experience abroad."[33] For her, the conflict between tradition and modernity was not because of incompatible structures as it was for Landen, Peterson, and Rabi; rather they were both equally powerful forms of rhetoric that local actors used to make political and social claims. Thus, tracing the beginning of modernity is a matter of identifying when "modern reform" became persuasive for seeking interests within the Hadramawt.

More than any other scholar of Southern Arabia, Ulrike Freitag grounded her interpretation in a thorough review of modernization and state-building theory. Although acknowledging that some scholars dismissed the progressive logic of modernity as teleological, Freitag asserted that retaining a comparative framework was a helpful analytical tool; thus she followed a "neo-modernist" interpretation that takes a "broad approach and acknowledges that we are talking more about a loose combination of ideas which have inspired scholarship than about a stringent and historically compelling and Western-led path of international development."[34] In particular, she focused on the development and interests of Hadrami merchant elite that she labeled bourgeoisie. According to Freitag these Hadrami bourgeoisie used the political and material resources and experiences they gained from "sojourning" in the Hadrami diaspora in the Indian Ocean to formulate "a quest for constitutional order and legal hegemony, an effort to centralise judicial practices, co-opt interpretations, and impose the 'rule of law.'"[35] For Freitag, the primary characteristic of modernity was the shift from "community" to "society". In other words, the Hadrami bourgeoisie created new volitional organizations based on common interests which contrasted with "pre-modern organizational forms such

as tribes or certain types of religious and professional associations like guilds, membership in which resulted from birth or choice of profession."[36]

While such associations are commonly referred to as civil society, Freitag used the term bourgeoisie instead to avoid the progressive logic inherent in the typology of political structures forwarded by Rabi. By definition, civil society describes the host of associations that act as intermediaries between states and individuals; by using bourgeoisie, Freitag signaled that the Hadrami merchant elite pushed for the creation of a modern state, as did the bourgeoisie in France. But the end result of such efforts was not a foregone conclusion and their own experiences account for the "traditional" elements preserved in the "modern" state in South Yemen.

However, Freitag was conscious not to push the comparison too hard; while she referenced Max Weber's study of France to suggest that "modern" infrastructural and institutional changes there in the nineteenth century were contemporary to similar developments among the Hadrami, she did so in order to put "European modernity's triumphal march into a temporal perspective."[37] Instead of pursuing an "ahistorical and apologetic search for historical roots of various phenomena in a specific culture" (i.e. where did modern states come from), Freitag argued that examining the interests of specific elites could transcend the "dichotomy between 'colonial state' and 'traditional society,'" between modernity and tradition.[38]

As for state-building in Yemen, particularly the influence of Hadrami emigrants on the process, Freitag independently reached similar conclusions to Boxberger. In part, this concurrence resulted from contextualizing South Yemen (including Hadramawt) within the Indian Ocean, instead of as the edge of the Middle East. As Freitag explained:

Since most of the discussions about change in the modern Middle East focus on the exchange or confrontation with Europe, and neglect the non-Middle Eastern Muslim and non-Muslim worlds, a study of Hadhramaut thus significantly widens the historical perspective and provides a useful corrective to some of the older historiography on factors and agents of change in the modern Middle East.[39]

By reorienting their analysis to the long-standing connections that Yemenis maintained throughout the Indian Ocean, Boxberger and

Freitag could better discern non-Western influences in the region. Both of these scholars also confronted the issue of Western influence since it is so predominant in Middle Eastern historiography. While Boxberger asserted the agency of local actors who strategically used Westerners and Western ideas, institutions and technologies to meet their own needs, Freitag argued that what has come to be regarded as "Westernization" was part of a wider "relatively close international integration from the 16th century."[40] Thus, Western modernity is but one variation among many of roughly contemporary historical processes.

Though no similar study has yet been attempted that situates Oman firmly within the Indian Ocean rather than as a fringe of the Middle East, it is likely that such a study would also disturb the prevailing portrayals of Oman as isolated during the twentieth century. This isolation may have been true from the perspective of the British, or even of the formal economic and political relationships between the Omani and Yemeni states with other states; but other levels of communal organization and social groups from both regions continued to maintain networks throughout the Indian Ocean world. By examining how these communal organizations operated to meet the challenges of the twentieth century, rather than dismissing them as "traditional" and inefficient, the revisionist histories of Rabi, Boxberger, and Freitag have each sought to transcend the contradictory logic of the modern/traditional dichotomy.

Conclusion

The historiography of modernity in Southern Arabia demonstrates some of the major characteristics of modernity as developed by scholars over the past fifty years. While initially dedicated in the 1950s and 1960s to outlining the political, social, and economic developments resulting from the adoption of Western science and technology, by the 1970s, scholars had centered most of their analyses on the creation of the modern state. Recent scholars have continued this emphasis on state-building; hence when scholars speak about modernity they are generally contextualizing their subject within the administrative and political structures of states that assert authority over individuals, rather than corporate groups such as tribes.

Of course, modern states are contrasted against earlier kinds of states, as demonstrated by Uzi Rabi's discussion of the Unified Tribal State. Even more promising for future research into "traditional" states or other kinds of political structures is the research of Linda Boxberger who elucidated a number of organizational strategies that are generally lumped together as "tribal" by many scholars. Only by understanding precisely how networks of power operated in earlier societies can the continuities which John Peterson emphasized be better discerned. And Ulrike Freitag's research demonstrated persuasively that the formation of modern states is not only a Western phenomenon that diffused across the globe but a kind of historical process that emerged as part of a global system of commercial interaction. By recontextualizing Southern Arabia in the Indian Ocean instead of the Arab World, Boxberger and Freitag portrayed the region not on the margin of modernity, but as actively involved in the creation of a local variation of modernity. Scholars no longer use modernity and tradition to contrast different types of societies, usually the former following or developing from the latter. Rather, the terms represent particular manners of describing political and social positions about how best to confront historical challenges. And in the Middle East, these positions have acquired new labels: Islamic Modernism and Islamic Fundamentalism.

Another implication of the recent scholarship on South Arabia is that Oman and Yemen need to be included in any attempts to conceptualize an Islamic Modernity independent of or at least in active participation with Western influence. While the Middle East is often synonymously glossed as the Islamic World, Southern Arabians in particular were influential in taking Islamic ideals throughout the Indian Ocean. From India and Zanzibar to the Philippines and Indonesia, the most populous Muslim nation in the world, Hadramis played an important role in shaping Modernity, though in ways different from Westerners.[41] Scholars may very well agree that Southern Arabia remain an isolated backwater of the twentieth century in terms of international politics, or they may find that throughout the twentieth century the region continued to influence the development and transfer of Islamic practices and ideologies throughout the Islamic World beyond the Middle East. But treating the region as merely the edge of the Middle East that belatedly adopted modern political structures would continue to obscure any such contributions to the development of Islamic modernity.

Daren Ray

University of Virginia

[1] See the preface to Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire.*

[2] Cyril Black, "General Introduction," in *Comparative Modernization in the Middle East: the Ottoman Empire and its Afro-Asian Successors,* (Darwin Press: Princeton, NJ): 1992, 9; also Black's introduction and Samuel P. Huntington, "The Change to Change: Modernization, Development, and Politics," in *Comparative Modernization: A Reader* (New York: the Free Press): 1967. Huntington characterizes the difference between modern and traditional societies by the degree of control over the natural and social environment (28).

[3] See Black, 15, where he explicitly disclaims any relationship between modernization and progress on moral grounds; i.e. modernization may very well lead to the destruction of all mankind. Note the assumption that the Middle East, defined by Black as the former domains of the Ottoman Empire, is equated analytically with nation-states such as Russia and Japan.

[4] Black, 11.

[5] Robert G. Landen, *Oman Since 1856: Disruptive Modernization in a Traditional Arab Society* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ): 1967, vii.

[6] Landen, 80

[7] J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1798-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press): 1968; quoted in J. C. Wilkinson, "Britain in the Gulf", Review Article, *The Geographical Journal* 134:4 (Dec., 1968): pp.552.

[8] Landen, 80; emphasis in original.

[9] Ibid., 79.

[10] Ibid., 52.

[11] Ibid., 67.

[12] Ibid. 68.

[13] Ibid., 159.

[14] Two of these are titled "Oman" revealing the area studies approach taken by historians of Oman, and the third is titled "A Modern History of Oman," thus making explicit the connection between states and modernity. See the extended reading list below for full citations; for another example, see F.A. Clements, *Oman the Reborn Land,*(Longman: New York): 1980.

[15] Peterson, *Yemen*, 11, 24, 26.

[16] Peterson, *Oman*, 103.

[17] Peterson, *Yemen*, 11; he uses the word "revolutionary" here in place of modern; they are interchangeable in much of his analysis.

[18] Peterson, *Oman*, 213.

[19] Ibid., 211.

[20] Peterson, *Oman*, 32.

[21] Peterson, *Yemen*, 26.

[22] Peterson, *Oman*, 180.

[23] Ibid., 103.

[24] Ibid., 200; emphasis added.

[25] Rabi, 1, 2.

[26] Ibid., 2.

[27] Ibid., 8.

[28] Ibid., 4, 7.

[29] Ibid., 3.

[30] Ibid., 3.

[31] Ibid.. 7.

[32] Boxberger, 4.

[33] Ibid., 3.

[34] Freitag, 13-14.

[35] Ibid., 19-20.

[36] Ibid., 18-19.

[37] Ibid., 25.

[38] Ibid., 24.

[39] Ibid., 1.

[40] Ibid., 24.

[41] For a comprehensive treatment of how Hadramis "moved" through the Indian Ocean, see Engseng Ho. *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean.* University of California Press: Los Angeles, CA, 2006.

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