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INTRODUCTION BY CEMIL AYDIN, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AND GEORGIOS
GIANNAKOPOULOS, KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

Ussama Makdisi's *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World* is an eloquent and deeply engaging work. This book is part of a wider project of rethinking the historical roots of sectarianism in the Arab Middle East that has given the author the reputation of one of the most original intellectual historians of the Middle East and the Arab world. The book offers a new explanatory framework for the history of modern Arab political thought and the political history of the Eastern Arab lands (Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon as well as Egypt) since the 1860s. Makdisi demonstrates how it was the imposition of political and epistemic violence introduced by European interventions that made sectarianism a problem for postcolonial Arab nations. The book therefore challenges the deep Orientalist perceptions of the Middle East as a region cursed with eternal sectarian conflicts - one of the key themes underpinning current anti-Arab racist discourses. In contrast, Makdisi argues that the Arab Middle East created one of the most successful and vibrant traditions of an anti-sectarian political culture of citizenship during the half a century before World War I, and post-Ottoman states in the region tried to preserve this anti-sectarian legacy. He uses the term "ecumenical frame" to describe a form of co-existence rooted in a "cultural and constitutional commitment to the equality of citizens of different faiths" (8).

The reviewers all agree that the *Age of Coexistence* is an exciting, extraordinary, and paradigm-changing book. They are also in awe of the clear analytical prose; reviewer Joshua Donovan praises the style as being more "like an extended essay in *The New Yorker* than a dense academic monograph." Others also note how this book illustrates Makdisi's position as the leading intellectual historian of the Middle East as well as a global public intellectual. Donovan notes that the book recasts the question of sectarianism in the Middle East as essentially a problem of managing diversity. For him, the book's merit lies in deconstructing the binary between secularism and religion. He recounts the rival visions of co-existence articulated by some of the book's protagonists and argues that the analysis of the "ecumenical frame" could be further enriched by considering Islamist visions of political order. Madeleine Elfenbein commends the effort to present a more decentralized account of the Ottoman history and to remind to "Turcophone Ottomanists," as she puts it, of the importance of the Arab provinces of the empire. Elfenbein also draws attention to the existence of a northern Ottoman ecumenism encapsulated in the writings of the Greek enlightenment thinker Rigas Feraios, and urges the author to think more systematically about the conceptual links between sectarian violence in the Middle East and racial violence in the United States.

The reviewers highlight Makdisi's contribution to a non-Eurocentric theory of secularism. As Donovan emphasizes, Makdisi's capacious discussion of secularism in the Ottoman Arab lands rescues the concept from its Christian genealogies. As Hussein Omar notes, the racialized portrayal of the Arabs as obsessed with their religious loyalty produced a scholarly view of the Middle East as being cursed by eternal sectarian conflicts. Omar concurs with Elfenbein on the merits of the book's "comparative gesture" to treat sectarianism as a "global variant on a local theme." Moreover, Omar raises a broader objection about what he sees as a problematic distinction in the book between religion and politics. He argues that "the cleaving apart of religion from politics in normative-legal terms was a product of 'the age of coexistence' rather than the condition of its possibility." Drawing on examples from the Egyptian past and present, Omar concludes with a note of caution against current unintended political readings of the age of "coexistence."

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd highlights the book's attempt to place Zionism in the context of Ottoman and Palestinian history, and applauds the author's call to understand Zionism as something more than a European settler colonial project. She notes that Makdisi challenges the erasure and tragic foreclosures of alternatives to oppressive nationalisms and appreciates the recovery of a historical tradition that may frame possible pluralist futures in the region. Hurd concludes that "While a touch of nostalgia for the ecumenical frame surfaces occasionally in the book, Makdisi is under no illusion that it can or should be revived, carefully pointing out its elitist, socially conservative, and highly gendered dispositions."

Elizabeth Thompson highlights the book's contribution to debates on the transition from Ottoman to European rule in the Arab Middle East, namely the idea that the ecumenical frame survived the collapse of the Ottoman empire and framed political projects in the interwar period. This insight, Thompson argues, reaffirms recent accounts that point to the

weakness of civic nationalism in the region after the First World War.¹ Thompson also raises a methodological objection. She argues that the book's preoccupation with what she terms "elite intellectual history" obscures challenges to the "ecumenical frame" prior to 1948. Finally, she notes that the 1920 Syrian Constitution could have been covered more extensively both to reinforce Makdisi's main argument about Arab ecumenical visions and also to discuss this moment of an Arab state's liberal break with the Ottoman framework of co-existence that ushered in a counter-colonial vision of monarchical democracy.

The Age of Coexistence is explicitly not a story of romantic co-existence. In fact, Makdisi carefully recounts the violence, genocides, trauma, and tragedy in various parts of the Ottoman lands, particularly in the Balkans and Anatolia. Yet, he rescues the story of the struggles for constitutional equality between Turkish-speaking Sunni Muslims and the other ethnicities and religious communities from narratives of doomed failure by demonstrating how they should be thought of in the comparative and global context of similar constitutional struggles in the rest of the world such as India, Europe, and North America.

In his response, Makdisi restates the purpose and main aim of the book and responds to the criticisms raised by the reviewers. We wish to thank the author and the reviewers for a very fruitful exchange. Makdisi's response not only engages in detail with the points raised by the reviewers, but also proposes a bold manifesto for a new epistemological and methodological agenda about the writing of Arab intellectual history within the framework of a non-Eurocentric global intellectual history. It offers an ethic of history writing that not only recovers the suppressed and erased experiences of the past, but places these experiences in the service of a political commitment to imagine a democratic ecumenical future for the Arab Middle East. Elfenbein notes that that in the book Makdisi "flips the script" on the scholarly and non-scholarly narratives on the Arab Middle East as a land of primordial and innate sectarian passions that led to the failure of the adoption of Western ideas of toleration, civic nationalism, and democracy. We would concur that *The Age of Coexistence* successfully does so.

Participants:

Ussama Makdisi is Professor of History and the first holder of the Arab-American Educational Foundation Chair of Arab Studies at Rice University. In April 2009, the Carnegie Corporation named Makdisi a 2009 Carnegie Scholar as part of its effort to promote original scholarship regarding Muslim societies and communities, both in the United States and abroad. In 2012-2013, Makdisi was an invited Resident Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Institute for Advanced Study, Berlin). He was awarded the Berlin Prize and spent the Spring 2018 semester as a Fellow at the American Academy of Berlin. In addition to *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World*, Makdisi is also the author of *Faith Misplaced: the Broken Promise of U.S.-Arab Relations, 1820-2001* (Public Affairs, 2010). His previous books include *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Cornell University Press, 2008), which was the winner of the 2008 Albert Hourani Book Award from the Middle East Studies Association, the 2009 John Hope Franklin Prize of the American Studies Association, and a co-winner of the 2009 British-Kuwait Friendship Society Book Prize given by the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies. Makdisi is also the author of *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (University of California Press, 2000) and co-editor of *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa* (Indiana University Press, 2006). He has published widely on Ottoman and Arab history as well as on U.S.-Arab relations and U.S. missionary work in the Middle East. His articles have been published in the *American Historical Review*, *Journal of American History*,

¹ Elizabeth F. Thompson, *How the West Stole Democracy from the Arabs* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2020); Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); James L. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) Keith David Watenpugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Aeon, the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Diplomatic History*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, and in the *Middle East Report*.

Cemil Aydin is professor of international/global history at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. His publications include the *Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia* (Columbia University Press, 2007), "Regions and Empires in Political History of the World, 1750-1924" in Jurgen Osterhammel and Sebastian Conrad, eds., *An Emerging Modern World, 1750-1870 (A History of the World, Book 4)*; Harvard University Press, May 2018): 33-277, and *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Harvard University Press, Spring 2017).

Georgios Giannakopoulos is an Academy of Athens postdoctoral visiting fellow at the Centre for Hellenic Studies, King's College London. He is currently working on a monograph provisionally titled *British Intellectuals and Imperial Order in Southeastern Europe (1870-1930)*. His work on British and Southeastern European history has appeared in the *History of European Ideas*, *Global Intellectual History*, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*.

Joshua Donovan is a Core Curriculum Preceptor and History Ph.D. candidate at Columbia University. He is completing a dissertation examining identity and subject formation within the Greek Orthodox Christian community in Syria, Lebanon, and the diaspora. His work on religion in the Middle East and the United States has appeared in *Islam and Muslim-Christian Relations* (2019) and *Studies in World Christianity* (2013).

Madeleine Elfenbein is a historian of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and the globalization of political thought. She received her Ph.D. in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations from the University of Chicago, and she is currently a Visiting Scholar in the History Department at Columbia University.

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd is Professor of Political Science and the Crown Chair in Middle East Studies at Northwestern University. She is the author of *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (2008) and *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (2015), both published by Princeton, and co-editor of *At Home and Abroad: The Politics of American Religion* (Columbia, 2021) *Theologies of American Exceptionalism* (Indiana, 2020), *Politics of Religious Freedom* (Chicago, 2015), and *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age* (Palgrave 2010).

Hussein A.H. Omar is assistant professor in Modern Global History at University College Dublin. His first monograph *Rule of Strangers: the Birth of 'Politics' in English-Occupied Egypt* is forthcoming with Oxford University Press.

Elizabeth F. Thompson is professor of history and Mohamed Said Farsi Chair of Islamic Peace at the American University in Washington, D.C. Her most recent book is *How the West Stole Democracy from the Arabs* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2020), on the establishment of a democratic government at Damascus after World War I and its destruction by leaders of the Paris Peace Conference. She is also author of *Justice Interrupted: Struggles for Constitutional Government in the Middle East* (Harvard, 2013) and *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (Columbia, 2000), which won two national book awards.

REVIEW BY JOSHUA DONOVAN, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

On 17 October 2019, thousands of Lebanese women and men took to the streets to protest against decades of economic stagnation, political corruption, and an anemic public infrastructure that has continuously failed to provide even the most basic needs of the citizenry. People also took aim at Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system. One of the most prominent slogans of the October Revolution, "*Kilun ya'nī kilun*" ("all of them means all of them") offered a forceful denunciation of *all* sectarian elites. This, in turn, led to explicit calls to abolish sectarian quota systems and personal status laws that have been woven into the fabric of Lebanese politics and society for over a century longer than the state has existed as an independent political entity. This bold articulation of an explicitly anti-sectarian politics in the Middle East defies orientalist stereotypes of a region hopelessly mired in sectarian conflict. According to Ussama Makdisi, however, such calls for coexistence were not without historical precedent. Quite the contrary. In his latest book, *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World*, Makdisi builds on over two decades of engagement with questions of sectarianism and inter-communal relations in the Middle East, and eloquently presents a long, robust, and variegated tradition of anti-sectarianism in the Arab world. At the same time, his sweeping historical account explains why previous efforts to govern a diverse population have failed to live up to expectations.

Age of Coexistence operates on two levels and seems aimed at two different audiences. On one level, Makdisi's accessible prose reads more like an extended essay in *The New Yorker* than a dense academic monograph, inviting a wide readership of non-specialists to reconsider stubborn, old, and grossly inaccurate tropes about a region that is supposedly paralyzed by 'ancient hatreds.' No doubt drawing on years of teaching in the American South, Makdisi de-exceptionalizes the Middle East by framing the question of sectarianism as a problem of managing social difference – a problem which is hardly unique to the region. Indeed, Makdisi makes explicit comparisons to racism in the United States and anti-Semitism in Europe, and says that "the challenge of political inclusion has plagued every secular state in the modern era – whether democratic republics or empires" (11). He insists that the difficulties of creating inclusive societies is a distinctly modern problem in which "older discourses and practices of discrimination" were confronted (and ultimately "refracted") by "a radically new lens of equality and citizenship" (12). This was just as true for the Ottoman Empire as it was for Europe and North America. Makdisi convincingly shows the general reader that sectarian tensions in the region are not timeless and that generations of people in the region have worked toward peaceful coexistence, however imperfectly, even in the face of significant challenges.

The second level on which the book operates speaks more directly to scholars who work on the modern Middle East. For this audience, Makdisi recounts the "making of the modern Arab world" by centering anti-sectarianism in his narrative and, in the process, intervenes in several key scholarly debates in provocative and interesting ways. Among the most striking contributions Makdisi makes is his treatment of the secular and religious. Several scholars have challenged the notion of a sharp secular/sectarian binary by insisting on more nuanced accounts of leaders, movements, and events. For example, some have shown how nominally secular dictators in Arab countries carefully deployed religious rhetoric and actively shaped state religion to cement their power.² Others, including Makdisi himself, have shown that moments of horrific sectarian violence in the region were often driven by non-religious factors.³ Still others have argued that pious Muslims can unquestionably be

² Samuel Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein, Islam, and the Roots of Insurgencies in Iraq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dār al-Iftā* (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 182-198. [My thanks to Karim Malak for the latter reference]

³ Yezid Sayigh, "The Arab Region at a Tipping Point: Why Sectarianism Fails to Explain the Turmoil," in Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, eds., *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1994).

integrated into secular western societies.⁴ Even so, these productive threads still often presuppose a secular/religious binary; they simply point out that the boundary between the two can be porous.

Age of Coexistence goes a step further, offering a new paradigm which collapses the distinction between the religious and the secular. In its place, Makdisi posits a capacious “ecumenical frame,” borne out of nineteenth century efforts to “reconcile a new principle of secular political equality with the reality of an Ottoman imperial system that had historically privileged Muslim over non-Muslim” (7). Paradoxically, this ecumenical frame “upheld both the constitutional secularity of citizens and the necessity of religiously segregated laws to govern marriage, divorce, and inheritance that have actually denied the secularity and equality of citizens” (7-8). Makdisi rejects genealogies and anthropological accounts of secularism that claim that it is intrinsically western or Christian.⁵ The ecumenical frame, in other words, was not merely mimetic; it was a fundamentally unique project built and shaped by Christians, Muslims, and Jews, men and women, the pious and the irreligious. As an analytical tool, Makdisi’s “ecumenical frame” is not a single, monolithic model for coexistence. Rather, it encompasses a wide array of political projects, philosophies, and worldviews, which offer different ways to establish peaceful and equitable societies in a religiously diverse region.

Broad as this ecumenical frame is, Makdisi does indicate that some ways of handling diversity fall outside the boundaries of the ecumenical frame. Chapter one sets a temporal boundary. Makdisi begins his account in the early modern Ottoman Empire, prior to the *Tanzimat* reforms of the mid-nineteenth century. Unlike scholars such as Karen Barkey, who have argued that the Ottoman Empire was relatively tolerant toward non-Muslims, Makdisi insists that “pervasive discrimination was a reality to which Christian and Jewish individuals seeking justice or redress had to adapt” (30).⁶ He does not mean to suggest that there was rampant persecution of non-Muslims, but rather that the “unremarkable reality” of coexistence was “predicated on the deep formal inequality within every community of the empire” (32-33). This claim may be a bit overstated given the Empire’s vast size. Benjamin Braude, for example, argued that the *millet* system was not systematized until the early nineteenth century, making it difficult to make broad generalizations about the position(s) of non-Muslim populations in the Ottoman Empire.⁷ Historian James Grehan provides further cause for caution in his analysis of rural villages in the early modern Levant, in which religious boundaries were often blurred almost beyond recognition.⁸ However, Makdisi is right to remind us how illegible modern conceptions of ‘tolerance,’ ‘equality,’ and ‘discrimination’ would have been in a premodern Ottoman context.

For Makdisi, peaceful coexistence in the premodern era falls outside the ecumenical frame because the latter was a specific response to the distinctly modern problem of sectarianism. He has a specific beginning in mind for the ecumenical frame: namely, the well-known period of horrific sectarian violence in the mid-nineteenth century Levant, and its aftermath. In an attempt to show its “civilized” *bona fides* to imperial Europe, the Ottoman Empire embraced an expedient quota and

⁴ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *Becoming American? The Forging of Arab and Muslim Identity in Pluralist America* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011); Olivier Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁵ He specifically disputes the accounts of Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); and Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

⁶ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁷ Benjamin Braude, “Foundation Myths of the Millet System,” in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 1 (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982): 69-88.

⁸ James Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Makdisi himself qualifies his claim of pervasive, uniform discrimination and acknowledges the heterogeneous experiences of non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire.

partition system in Mount Lebanon and tethered the promise of equal citizenship to membership in a recognized religious community. Makdisi holds up the model of pluralistic national piety as a favorable alternative to the new Ottoman system. The champion of this model was famed thinker Butrus al-Bustani, who believed that national belonging would not need to be predicated on membership in a specific religious community but rather on membership in a diverse national community that transcended religious distinctions. Although Makdisi says that these dual approaches to modern coexistence were among “many different interpretations of the ecumenical frame” (74), it is a binary that is repeated in slightly different iterations throughout the book.⁹

While al-Bustani’s national ecumenism and Ottoman quota systems were two very different sides of the same ecumenical coin, there were other nineteenth century models that fell outside the boundaries of the ecumenical frame. In chapter three, Makdisi turns to two such models: ethno-nationalism in the Balkans and the genocidal policies of the Young Turks in Ottoman Anatolia, both of which replaced the *Tanzimat* policies of nondiscrimination with a “deliberate and systematic unraveling [of coexistence] – as a desired end in itself” (81). The tragic legacies of this decidedly anti-ecumenical desire for supposedly “homogenous” populations are felt even today by non-majoritarian religious and national communities in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Anatolia, and Northern Iraq. Makdisi juxtaposes this ethnic cleansing with the nineteenth-century Arab literary renaissance known by scholars as the *Nahda*, a variegated and widely-studied movement, which he includes in his ecumenical frame.

Since Albert Hourani’s seminal work, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, was published in 1962, scholars have discussed and debated the nature and impact of the *Nahda*.¹⁰ More recently, scholars have expanded the scope of the *Nahda* to include more diverse authors, a wider range of topics and viewpoints, and have insisted on an earlier start date, which conflicts somewhat with Makdisi’s origin story for the ecumenical frame. For example, foundational figures in the *Nahda*, such as ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti and Rifa’ al-Tahtawi, penned some of their most seminal works prior to the mid-nineteenth century sectarian violence described by Makdisi which the ecumenical frame was supposed meant to address.¹¹ The nebulous boundaries of the *Nahda* make it difficult to fit it neatly into Makdisi’s paradigm. Nevertheless, Makdisi’s point that the *Nahda* (and, by extension, the ecumenical frame) was firmly ensconced in a religious framework and was predicated on gendered and class hierarchies is important and underappreciated. He concedes that the *Nahda* included some female authors, resolutely impious secularists, and some people from more humble socioeconomic backgrounds. However, Makdisi suggests that these thinkers were generally exceptions to the rule. Finally, he convincingly argues that the ‘ecumenical *Nahda*’ coincided with the sharpening of religious communal lines on a social level. In a particularly felicitous passage, Makdisi writes: “As members of one family living in a new national house, Arabic-speaking brothers and sisters ostentatiously shared one living room, only to retreat each evening to carefully guarded bedrooms” (107). In other words, there were important limits to the civic Ottomanism of the late Ottoman Empire.¹²

The second part of Makdisi’s book turns to the post-Ottoman period, during which the Arab *Mashriq* was divided and ruled by colonial Britain and France as ‘mandated territories’ under the auspices of the League of Nations. For good reason,

⁹ Makdisi had previously held up al-Bustani’s “ecumenism” as “a synthesis” of indigenous, foreign, American missionary, and Arab elements in: Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 182.

¹⁰ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

¹¹ Tarek el-Ariss, *The Arab Renaissance: A Bilingual Anthology of the Nahda* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2018); Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, *Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age: Towards and Intellectual History of the Nahda* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹² An excellent account of “civic Ottomanism” in the context of Palestine is Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

historians have noted the ruptures wrought by World War I and the emergence of the postwar order.¹³ However, in chapter four, Makdisi importantly reminds readers that colonial authorities often “drew on the logic of the previous Ottoman millet system at the same time as they dismantled the unified structure of Ottoman sovereignty” (118). As other scholars have shown, the novel aspect of “colonial pluralism” was the concept of religious and ethnic “minorities” – a notion which politicized communal identities in new and often problematic ways.¹⁴ The most important difference, according to Makdisi, was that the ecumenical frame was brought into a complex system of newly-drawn sovereign states. Non-dominant communities (especially Christians and Jews) “had to choose between being a cloistered, dependent ‘minority’ and belonging to the anticolonial nationalist majority” while Muslims had to consider how to belong to an imagined community that both “transcended” and was “defined principally by their faith” (123).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, people in the Arab mandates had very different ideas about how to resolve these fraught dilemmas. Nevertheless, Makdisi considers the multiplicity of approaches as all being within the bounds of the ecumenical frame, allowing him to include otherwise irreconcilably different people such as Muslim Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna and pan-Islamist Shakib Arslan with others like King Faysal of Iraq and Ba’ath Party co-founder Salah al-Din al-Bitar, as well as political groups such as Hezbollah, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and more in the same analytical framework. Such lists (which appear more than once in the book) present a difficulty with using the ecumenical frame as an analytical tool. While Makdisi specifically excludes certain ideas, systems, and people, the ecumenical frame is construed as so broad that it often seems to encompass nearly the entire political and intellectual sphere of the *Mashriq*. Perhaps that is the point, but in order for the framework to be convincingly deployed in future research, scholars will need to clarify and explain precisely how the ecumenical frame is present in their own work. Fortunately, Makdisi’s next chapter offers two clear examples of how to do this.

Chapter five explores the diversity of the ecumenical frame with another interesting comparison between Michel Chiha and Sati’ al-Husri. Chiha was a Christian banker who helped to formulate the sectarianism political system of Lebanon, while Husri was an educator and a champion of a secular Arab nationalism in Iraq. According to Makdisi, Chiha believed that the state was responsible for promoting harmonious relations between communities, *not* to democratize relations between individual secular citizens. He built very clearly on the sharpened communal distinctions from the late Ottoman era that discussed previously. Al-Husri, by contrast, believed that the best way to deal with diversity was to transcend it. He sought to depoliticize and, ultimately, sublimate different religious identities under a single secular national identity. Although al-Husri, himself a Muslim, understood the historical importance of Islam in the *Mashriq*, he presented it through a cultural lens that could be embraced by both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Other Christian nationalists, like Michel ‘Aflaq, would pursue similar strategies. In other words, Middle East states could be “defined” by Islam, but not in an explicitly religious sense. Neither system prevented communal violence. In Chiha’s system, violence erupted when communities felt that their access to political power was threatened or minimized. Meanwhile, al-Husri’s system was deeply, and ultimately violently, skeptical of communities like the Assyrians who sought to establish an autonomous enclave in Iraq. Moreover, Makdisi points out that both men were inescapably paternalistic and upheld deeply gendered personal status laws – legacies which continue to draw the well-deserved ire of protesters and activists to this day.

Because these competing visions of coexistence had such a lasting impact on the region, his thorough analysis in this chapter marks an important contribution to scholarship on the Middle East. One disappointing omission is a more detailed analysis

¹³ For a succinct overview of ruptures and continuities of the post-WWI period in the Middle East, see: James L. Gelvin, “Was there a Mandates Period? Some Concluding Thoughts,” in Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arsan, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates* (London: Routledge, 2015), 420-432.

¹⁴ See, for example, Benjamin Thomas White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); and Peter Sluglett, “From Millet to Minority: Another Look at the Non-Muslim Communities in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” in Laura Robson, ed., *Minorities and the Modern Arab World: New Perspectives* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2016), 19-38.

of Islamist projects, like the Islamic modernism of Rashid Rida or the political activism of Hassan al-Banna. Given Makdisi's suggestion that at least some Islamist figures, parties, and movements also fit within his ecumenical frame, the reader would have benefitted immensely from an analysis of this influential and fundamentally different strain of thought. If, as Makdisi claims, it was vital to portray oneself as "anti-sectarian" and committed "to rebuilding, not abolishing, the ecumenical frame" how did Islamists meet these challenges? What might their efforts tell us about "the nature and limits of the modern ecumenical frame" (160), particularly when considering the fate of ecumenism after Islamist movements began to displace Arab nationalism after 1967? Such questions await further research.

Chapter six turns to the fraught history of British Mandate Palestine and the *Nakba* (or "catastrophe") in 1948. Here, Makdisi presents a familiar cast of characters and episodes but narrates events through a slightly different lens. Many Palestinian Muslims and Christians proposed to have an independent Arab Palestinian state that would guarantee equality to non-Muslim subjects. This, Makdisi credibly argues, is a continuation of the Ottoman-era ecumenical frame. Such an Arab Palestinian state could have been open to some Zionist migration to Palestine, albeit in small numbers, a claim that is supported by social histories of a delicate but often peaceful coexistence in Mandatory Palestine.¹⁵ This ecumenical approach is placed in stark contrast to Israeli Prime Minister David "Ben-Gurion's uncompromising vision of... an exclusivist ethno-religious state in what had historically been a multireligious land" (190). Unlike his previous dual comparisons, Makdisi places Ben-Gurion's Zionism firmly outside the ecumenical frame. He also argues that Ben-Gurion's ultimate success in 1948 shattered the ecumenical frame in Palestine and reverberated painfully throughout the region. Notably, Makdisi also gestures to a third (ultimately unsuccessful) vision for Mandate Palestine, which he calls a "Zionist Ecumenical Frame." Here, he is referring to the often-overlooked binational movements, which proposed a system akin to Lebanon's sectarian system of communal power-sharing. This proposal fits within Makdisi's ecumenical frame. Although binationalists like Hugo Bergman, Martin Buber, and Hans Kohn are only treated in passing by Makdisi (and other scholars), the rising popularity of a binational or "one-state solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict makes the inclusion of this proposal particularly interesting. After all, Makdisi notes, "despite its corrosive sectarianism, the Lebanese political system had preserved, not overthrown, the Ottoman-era ecumenical frame" (193). The same cannot be said for the *Nakba*.

The book ends with a whirlwind tour of Arab nationalism, the rise of authoritarian governments, the 'Islamic turn,' and a nod to the kinds of protest movements described at the beginning of this review, although none of these issues are explored in any great depth. Rather, they are presented as an urgent call for further research. There is a rich tradition of anti-sectarianism in the region that can serve as an inspiration to contemporary thinkers and activists, but Makdisi's account makes it clear that if this tradition is to be salvaged, it must also be reimagined and updated along more egalitarian lines. Political systems like Lebanon's corrupt sectarian consociationalism and authoritarian regimes elsewhere which cynically gesture toward secular nationalism and strategically decry "religious extremism" have proven so intractable because, in very different ways, they all uphold a version of Makdisi's "ecumenical frame." *Age of Coexistence* reminds readers that if these deeply flawed systems are to be corrected, they must be replaced with something that addresses the paradoxes and internal contradictions of the ecumenical frame and that can fulfill the promises and aspirations of equal citizenship in pluralistic societies.

¹⁵ For example, Abigail Jacobson and Moshe Naor, *Oriental Neighbors: Middle Eastern Jews* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2016), especially chapters one and two; and Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

REVIEW BY MADELEINE ELFENBEIN, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

This is an exciting book. It takes up a well-worn theme—religious conflict in the Middle East—and works this dreary material into a fresh tale that sheds a genuinely clarifying light on the modern history of the region. More important still, it opens up new prospects for thinking about this history and histories of social conflict more broadly. As an illuminating series of case studies in how social differences can be accommodated or exploited by those in power, *Age of Coexistence* deserves the attention of anyone interested in pluralism as both a historical reality and an aspiration for the future. The story it tells is steeped in dark ironies and tragedy, but it is morally lucid and ultimately hopeful, lending substance to the appealing notion that most people genuinely want to live, and practice politics, together. The greatest obstacle to peace, Makdisi suggests, is not our stubborn differences but the many ways that states have entrenched those differences in their efforts to ‘manage’ them.

To clear the ground for his novel approach, Makdisi casts doubt on what we think we know about sectarianism. Although he employs the term freely, he does so with the caveat that it is “an ideological fiction” layered over conflicts between religious and ethnic communities, which serves to harden and politicize identities that have been in flux since the moment they appeared (4). He shows how the notion of sectarianism as endemic to the Middle East has warped the study of the region by polemicizing it in two ways. First, sectarianism serves as a focal point for Western scholarly treatments that end up replicating the logic of past colonizers and their apologists in their insistence on the timelessness and intractability of sectarian strife involving Muslims. Second, it induces a tendency common to the region’s own major historiographical traditions—primarily the Arab, Turkish, and Zionist ones, but the Balkan and Armenian ones as well—to produce selective accounts aimed at exonerating their own heroes and highlighting the suffering of some groups at the expense of others. Another tendency he identifies and rejects is the impulse to dismiss episodes of intercommunal violence as ‘mere’ epiphenomena of European colonial violence or displacements of class struggle. The Middle East bears the marks of both sectarian and Western colonial violence, and it is certainly hard to produce a history that does credit to both aspects of this single historical reality. In fact, as Makdisi and others have argued, the two forms of violence are intimately linked, but this doesn’t make the task any simpler.¹⁶

How to narrate a history in which sectarian violence has played a major role without either naturalizing this violence or denying it? In response to this conundrum, Makdisi proposes to flip the script and tell the story of the modern Middle East anew, not as a litany of tragedies but as “a laboratory for new ways of thinking about coexistence” (45). Coexistence was a much-touted feature of Islamic societies from their beginnings, but Makdisi is not especially interested in the old-fashioned kind, built on the paternalism of Islamic states toward their non-Muslim subjects. What he has in mind is a much more robust pluralist vision that did not emerge until the 1860s, in the aftermath of searing intercommunal violence and the imposition of a punishing and anti-democratic order from abroad. This “new norm of coexistence” was something quite different: “a new kind of political intimacy and meaningful solidarity that cut across Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious lines” (2). The great untold story of the modern Middle East, he argues, is the emergence of this shared sense of intimacy and solidarity, not in an atmosphere of suppressed religiosity (the Western model of secularism critiqued by Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, and others), but in a setting where piety and religious observance remained in public view.¹⁷ What Makdisi’s book bears witness to is the nineteenth-century emergence and twentieth-century elaboration of “a modern political

¹⁶ Makdisi’s first book, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), suggests that the eruption of sectarian violence in Mount Lebanon was a distinctly modern phenomenon that arose in response to the erosion of the traditional Lebanese social order through the twin incursions of European and Ottoman imperial forces.

¹⁷ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

culture...that valorized religion and coexistence, and demonized sectarianism” (3). The spirit that gave rise to this distinctive anti-sectarian culture is what Makdisi calls “the ecumenical frame.”

This novel phrase at first irritated me as much as any neologism does, but I came to appreciate it as a deft rhetorical move. Coining a new phrase for the distinctively modern culture of pluralism that his book documents allows Makdisi to sidestep the debris of debates over liberalism’s true origins and meaning and focus on this culture as a historical phenomenon in its own right, freed from the overlay of European ideological terms. The new term helps advance Makdisi’s quest to tell a story of the Middle East that is “unrecognizable from within the confines of” any of its dominant narratives (17). Makdisi dispenses with the heroic epithet “liberal” at the outset, noting that he has always found it “deeply inadequate” to describe an era marked by so many calamities (8), yet he pays homage to the perceptive and empathetic readings of Arab culture in Albert Hourani’s 1962 classic *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, and notes that Hourani himself later regretted his use of the term (224).¹⁸ Like Hourani, he seeks a word “to capture the shared sense of the universal, transcendent ideal of a modern political community” that makes room for its inhabitants (7). So, he opts for “ecumenical,” a word with Mediterranean roots: the same *oikouménē* that ancient Greeks knew as the whole of the inhabited world would later become the core of the expanded ecumene of the Islamic world.

I appreciate Makdisi’s insistence on the continuities between the modern political culture he’s describing and its regional forebears. Yet in spite of this insistence, Makdisi’s account of the emergence of an ecumenical frame is an exclusively Arab one, leaving out the rest of the region’s inhabitants. While he tips his hat to earlier traditions of pluralism, including Ottoman modes of governance, for establishing its primordial scaffolding, he remains narrowly focused on how the ecumenical frame developed in the empire’s Arab provinces—and specifically in those of the Mashriq, or Arab East, understood here to encompass Egypt as well as modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq. The other Arabic-speaking regions of Africa and the Gulf have no place in this account of Arab intellectual history.

The narrow geographical parameters of Makdisi’s study are arguably justified by its chronological framing, which is anchored by a pair of heavily fraught dates in the history of the Mashriq: 1860 and 1948. The first marks the Damascus massacre of 1860, “the largest single massacre of Christians in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire across four centuries of Ottoman rule” (18), while the second marks the founding of the state of Israel, which led to both “the loss of a multireligious Palestine” and “the end of Jewish life in most of the Arab world” (22). This story is sandwiched between chapters that extend the chronological narrative by several centuries, taking us from the seventeenth-century Ottoman wars of expansion to the Arab uprisings of 2011. Yet the crux of the narrative centers on a period of less than a century.

It is in this period that Makdisi locates the “great divergence” between the empire’s Arab provinces, on the one hand, and its Anatolian and Balkan territories, on the other. As Makdisi tells it, in this period the Arab world (or the subset of it that he focuses on) experienced a *nahda*, or renaissance, characterized by the founding of new intellectual institutions and the flowering of a “new ecumenical sensibility,” while the Ottoman Balkans and Anatolia underwent “the rise of systematic, exclusionary, ethno-religious nationalism,” which was countered by “the rise of a xenophobic Ottoman Turkish Muslim nationalism” that culminated in genocide (20). He puts the contrast in straightforward terms: “My contention is that nahda ecumenism emerged as a counterpoint to Turkish nationalism, and that both manifested the limits and possibilities of a *modern nationalist age*” (21).

This tale of two modern political cultures is suspiciously tidy. It does point to something real and interesting: the Mashriq as the birthplace of a uniquely pluralistic political culture shaped by both the long history of the Mediterranean and the particular circumstances of its modern history: Ottoman rule followed by colonization and indirect rule by European state powers, and then by the challenge of securing genuine self-rule as independent nation-states. Above all, the book does credit to the intellectual labor of the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish thinkers and politicians who built this culture for themselves and their compatriots. This history is worth emphasizing, not only to dispel the myth of Middle Eastern political

¹⁸ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

backwardness but to educate Turcophone Ottomanists and others accustomed to thoughtlessly replicating the Ottoman imperial mindset in our tendency to regard the northern provinces as “central” and peripheralize the rest.

And yet I could not help thinking of all the Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Armenian, and Jewish thinkers and politicians whose efforts to build a pluralistic culture in the Ottoman north are discounted or overlooked in this account. It is startling to read, “What Ottoman statesmen changed from above during the Tanzimat, Arab subjects changed on the living ground of culture” (87), and to watch Arab thinkers spring to life on the page in all their fullness while their northern compatriots appear only from a great distance, as remote figures driven by nationalist antipathies. I thought of the Greek nationalist hero Rhigas Pheraios, whose eighteenth-century vision for a Greek constitutional state was nothing if not ecumenical; and of the dozens of other writers and conspirators of the nineteenth century who were propelled by similar visions, and who dedicated their lives to struggles for justice, equality, and inclusion within and outside the confines of the Ottoman state. This northern Ottoman ecumenicism ultimately fell short, and genocide and further catastrophic losses came in its wake. Without denying the enormity of these events, let us not overlook what came before them, if only to gain a clearer glimpse of what was lost. Just as the intricate beauty of the Arab ecumenical frame illuminated by Makdisi need not be eclipsed by later violent conflicts in the Mashriq, neither do we as readers need to see it set off against a landscape of unrelenting grimness up north.

The aspect of the book that I found most promising and ultimately frustrating was its attempt to provide a global frame for making sense of its subject. Makdisi wants to help his reader make sense of sectarian conflict through recourse to analogy: “Sectarianism [in the Middle East] is a real problem,” he writes on the first page of his book, “but it is no more real, and no less subject to change over time, than analogous problems of racism in the West and caste politics and communalism in South Asia” (1). The parallels between sectarian violence in the Middle East and racial violence in the United States and Europe become a running theme of the book, and while Makdisi studiously resists any suggestion of equivalence, his insistence on their incommensurability leads him to miss the chance to explore how they might be related. The chapter entitled “The Crucible of Sectarian Violence” explains the episodes of sectarian violence that erupted in the Levant between 1841 and 1860 through reference to race riots in the United States and anti-Jewish violence in Europe, which are described as “analogous problems within a global nineteenth-century discourse of citizenship and equality” (55). These episodes *are* analogous, but they are also connected, and I waited in vain for the connections to be drawn. A tantalizing hint of the linkages between apparently disparate racial and religious hierarchies appears on the bottom of the same page, where we learn about an 1850 riot in Aleppo in which working-class Muslims targeted their more prosperous Christian neighbors, who were “the most obvious symbol of the new Europe-oriented Ottoman order of things.” These Muslim rioters demanded that Christians should not parade with crosses, and should not “employ [black] slaves, male or female” (55). Makdisi explains in a footnote that the modifier “black” is implied, not stated, and that is the last we hear about the presence of Black people in Ottoman Syria.

This is but one of several examples where Makdisi comes close to placing hierarchies of race and religion in the same conceptual frame without quite getting around to it. He goes as far as to note that the rise of modern racism and sectarianism share a common timeframe, observing that the rise of “racial anti-Semitism” in Europe and the birth of a post-slavery racial order in the United States took place in the same span of years that forms the focus of his book (11). The phrase “racial anti-Semitism” offers a hint that religious difference is among the many forms of social distinction to have been absorbed and weaponized by the modern racial order. It is all the more frustrating to see this insight go unexplored. Instead, Makdisi pursues the image of two histories running parallel to each other, and with it the view that “what race has been to America, religion has been to the Middle East”: the central dilemma haunting its dreams of equality, justice, and peace (12).

The presence of Black people, and Black culture, in the Middle East stretches back over a thousand years, much of it due to forced migration.¹⁹ Of the many great untold stories of the Middle East, this surely counts as one. Historians like Eve Troutt Powell have begun the massive work of unearthing and telling these stories, while scholars like Sophia Azeb are undertaking to theorize the overlapping of the African and Arab worlds and explore “the lifeworlds of an African diaspora that does not pause at the edges of the Sahara or the shores of the Mediterranean.”²⁰ Someday I hope to read an intellectual history of the Middle East that takes its racial dimensions into account and connects them to ideologies of race in other parts of the world. This book has something valuable to offer that project: a passionate and convincing argument for the writing of indigenous intellectual history that is “unrecognizable” to those in power, and a model for how to do it.

¹⁹ John O. Hunwick and Eve Troutt Powell, *The African Diaspora in the Mediterranean Lands of Islam* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2002).

²⁰ Hunwick and Powell, *The African Diaspora in the Mediterranean Lands of Islam*; Powell, *Tell This in My Memory: Stories of Enslavement from Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); Sophia Azeb, “Epilogue: From Antigua to Algérie: The Particularity and Promise of the Afro-Arab,” *Post45* accessed September 16, 2020, <http://post45.org/2020/09/epilogue-from-antigua-to-algerie-the-particularity-and-promise-of-the-afro-arab/>.

REVIEW BY ELIZABETH SHAKMAN HURD, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

As I finished reading Ussama Makdisi's new book the port of Beirut exploded. For Makdisi, the explosion on 4 August 2020 serves as an unwelcome reminder of the failings of a French-imposed political and social order in Lebanon that deepened the sectarian divisions it sought to transcend. The Lebanese state, Makdisi reminds us in chapter 5, was "stitched together by colonial violence—French soldiers and officials determined the destiny of the area's inhabitants far more than their allegedly ancient and deeply felt communal aspirations" (141). Rather than age-old communities or natural divisions, it was affluent, propertied, and landowning men who "methodically sectarianized" (142) the workings of the state. For decades, what columnist Sami Nader describes as a "cartel of political parties" has taken advantage of these divisions in order to entrench their rule via sectarian patronage networks.²¹

And yet there is more to the story. For even as Makdisi reminds us that sectarianism was made and not found, *Age of Coexistence* also teaches us to be wary of the simple explanations and monolithic characterizations that often pass as knowledge in analyses of the Middle East. Rather than trafficking in easy celebrations or rushed condemnations, this book offers a nuanced understanding of the Ottoman and early post-Ottoman history—including the missed opportunities—that shaped the contemporary terms of coexistence in the Middle East. A compelling study of the terms of political and social inclusion in the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Makdisi's account is a powerful rebuke to those who would reduce Lebanese or Middle Eastern politics to either innate sectarian division or simplistic us-versus-them, West-versus-East renderings of the politics of secularism. Those interested in moving beyond such frames would do well to read it carefully.

The book is organized around the 'ecumenical frame,' a phrase that Makdisi uses to capture an underappreciated mode of coexistence constructed by Arabs of diverse backgrounds living in Ottoman lands beginning in the nineteenth century. The term 'ecumenical' captures "the shared sense of the universal, transcendent ideal of a modern political community in which explicit religious differentiation was transformed from being a marker of imperial culture to being a crucial aspect of national culture" (7). The ecumenical frame, then, is a multivalent concept referring to:

a body of thought that sought to reconcile a new principle of secular political equality with the reality of an Ottoman imperial system that had historically privileged Muslim over non-Muslim, but that was also attempting to integrate non-Muslims as citizens; a system of governance that often retained vestiges of and signs of Islamic paramountcy while upholding the equality of all citizens irrespective of religious affiliation; and a new political and legal order that has consistently upheld both the constitutional secularity of citizens and the necessity of religiously segregated laws to govern marriage, divorce, and inheritance that have actually denied the secularity and equality of citizens" (7-8).

Arab peoples of the former Ottoman lands, including literate Arab Muslims, Christians, and Jews, invented, contested, and transformed this normative order. Together they "collectively denounced 'religious fanaticism,' which they construed to be an unnatural deviation from normative 'religion' and the 'coexistence' that religion allegedly engendered." They did so, Makdisi notes, even as many of their Ottoman Turkish and Balkan peers were fighting "existential wars to define new nation-states denuded of meaningful religious diversity" (9). The book tracks the emergence, tensions, challenges to, and, ultimately, shattering of the ecumenical frame between 1860 and 1948. In the process, it also parochializes sectarianism—no mean feat—which, far from defining the Ottoman landscape and "waiting to emerge, like desert locusts, to devastate the land in periodic, but inevitable, eruptions" (28), appears in this account as no more than one "expression of a global tension between sovereignty, diversity, and equal citizenship" (5).

²¹ Cited in Tom Bateman, "Beirut Blast: Picking up the Pieces of a Shattered City," BBC.com (13 August 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53757809>.

The first section focuses on the origins of the ecumenical frame in late Ottoman times. It demonstrates how differing contexts, local tendencies, and varied governance capacities made for not one but many different ‘Ottoman Empires’ across time and space. By the late nineteenth-century, for example, the Empire had produced two irreconcilable cultures: “a militant nationalist one that violently repudiated religious difference in the name of ethno-nationalist coherence and an ecumenical Arabic one that embraced this difference under a diminished, but still capable, Ottoman sovereignty” (109). Makdisi then traces the diverse reception of the Arab ecumenical frame in the post-Ottoman state system. Of particular interest is a series of illuminating historical comparisons involving Lebanon, in which the frame was more or less preserved, Israel/Palestine, where it was overthrown, and modern Turkey, where it was “destroyed by locals” from 1924 onwards.

The most important payoff of the book however comes in later chapters. I especially appreciated the thoughtful attempt to enrich contemporary critical discussions of Zionism by situating it in the context of Ottoman and Palestinian history. The discussion of the *Nakba* of 1948, for instance, underscores that “the systematic Jewish Zionist de-Arabization of Palestine in the wake of the 1948 war was also its de-Ottomanization,” and that while there were differences in foreign versus local leadership, Zionism shared “striking parallels with the Turkish Kemalism that had gone to war against the Armenians, Greeks, and Kurds in Anatolia and the Aegean” (194-95). The culprits, for Makdisi, are exclusivist forms of nationalism that “violently and irrevocably disrupted and effaced centuries of uneven, yet equally undeniable, complex coexistence” (195).

Resituating Zionism in its Ottoman and post-Ottoman contexts also encourages the reader to revisit strong characterizations of Zionism in contemporary discussions as a European-sourced form of settler-colonialism. As important as these elements of Zionism are, Makdisi is certainly correct in arguing that to focus on European and colonial power at the expense of local histories is to obscure Zionism’s “insertion into a much broader and already unfolding story of coexistence that had been, in the Ottoman era at least, principally concerned with Muslim and non-Muslim.” A major contribution of the book is to illuminate this “historically dense field” in which “initial Arab responses to the arrival of European Jewish colonists in the 1880s were far from monolithic” (165). The insertion of Zionism into this field in fact “inaugurated a new sectarian conflict between ‘Arab’ and ‘Jew’” (164). Today it is easy to forget that “Jews and Judaism, after all, had always been a vital part of a multireligious Palestine,” and that ultimately, as Makdisi emphasizes, the problem “was not the Jewishness of the settlers, but the gradual crystallization of a nationalist Zionist project that regarded Palestine as a Jewish national homeland” (165). In other words, as we should know but often appear to forget, “the Arab-Israeli conflict did not erupt in a timeless empty space” (17). Makdisi’s careful exposition of these moments of historical closure, and the implicit promise of revisiting them, are a highlight of the book.

Foregrounding the Ottoman legacy also catalyzes an important shift in historical understandings of the region by challenging historiographical traditions that remain segregated between Kemalist and Zionist, Arab and Armenian, and Ottoman and post-Ottoman. No longer should Ottoman history be allowed to “flow seamlessly into that of Kemalist Turkey as if Ottoman history were only a Turkish concern” (17). No longer should Arab historians be segregated from their Balkan and Armenian colleagues. No longer can Zionist historians legitimately “flatten a complex Jewish diasporic past into an anti-Semitic prelude to Zionism” (17). Instead, with regard to the latter, we can see clearly that the “demand for a ‘Jewish’ home dependent on Western military power foreclosed the possibility of a cultural Zionism that could be reconciled with the nahda ethos of conservative coexistence” (171). In addition to the violent reductionism and naïve orientalism of sectarian explanations of everything Middle Eastern, it is precisely this tragic foreclosure and effacement of alternative modes of coexistence that appears to have motivated Makdisi in this book. As he concludes in what is perhaps his most powerful chapter, “Breaking the Ecumenical Frame:”

In the face of the capacious, if ambiguous, Ottoman Arab ecumenical frame that Palestinian Muslims, Christians, and Jews had inherited, the post-Ottoman Zionist nationalist frame was more narrowly designed, more militant, and more focused ideologically. The irony here was supreme. At the very moment, by the middle of the 1920s, when the vexed question of Muslim and non-Muslim appeared to have finally exhausted itself, at the cost of great human suffering and displacement in Turkey and the Balkans, British-backed Zionism obsessively and aggressively

demarcated Jew from non-Jew. Colonial Zionism, in effect, created an “Arab” question in Palestine and a “Jewish” one in the Mashriq where neither had previously existed (171).

The refraction of Zionism through the prism of the ecumenical frame enables Makdisi to decenter mainstream U.S. narratives of Israel as a bastion of democracy in a dangerous and theocratically inclined wilderness. Instead, the nationalization of the ecumenical frame via Zionism and Kemalism in the post-Ottoman era appear as two comparable expressions of the triumph of violent ethno-nationalism over alternative modes of coexistence. The costs are incalculable; as Makdisi explains, “the loss of a multireligious Palestine was a terrible blow that was compounded by the end of Jewish life in most of the Arab world. The destruction of the idea that one could be simultaneously Arab and Jewish still scars the Arab world” (22). And far beyond, one might add, for it is not only Arabs who were (and remain) impoverished as a result. I think of a Jewish Iranian colleague. Or of Armenians in Turkey. There are many others.

While a touch of nostalgia for the ecumenical frame surfaces occasionally in the book, Makdisi is under no illusion that it can or should be revived, carefully pointing out its elitist, socially conservative, and highly gendered dispositions (130, 162). And yet the break with this Ottoman heritage and the shattering of the ecumenical frame are nonetheless responsible for the “main tragedy” in the region (162). Alternatives were foreclosed. To explore the roads not taken in the transition from Ottoman rule to the modern state system is a worthy enterprise, and not only for historians. The challenge of reconciling belonging and difference is surely no less daunting today than it was in Ottoman and post-Ottoman times. And not only in the Middle East.

REVIEW BY HUSSEIN A.H. OMAR, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Toward the end of *The Age of Coexistence*, Ussama Makdisi borrows a metaphor from the prophet poet William Blake to describe sectarianism as a “mind-forg’d manacle” (219). Sectarianism is a prison of the imagination— for Arabophone intellectuals who have never fully escaped its clutches but also crucially for European and American observers of the Arab world, who persistently presented it as the particular and peculiar political penitentiary of that region. Deftly weaving this double sense of the ‘manacle,’ *The Age of Coexistence* tells two stories: one, which builds on the insights of the author’s first book, understands sectarianism as a response to the modern reconstitution of societies according to horizontal norms of equal citizenship; and a second one, about the stubborn orientalist portrayal of the Arab world as saturated with religion and therefore especially prone to internecine, sectarian violence.²²

In order to redress the second issue— that of historiographical representation— the author invites us to rethink the first— that of the region’s historical transformation. Far from offering evidence of modernity’s failure to tame the ancient passions, sectarianism is to the modern Arab world, Makdisi suggests, what race is to the modern United States and Judeophobia is to the history of modern Europe (5). If religion vexes the properly political discourses of equal citizenship (“incomplete, paradoxical and often contradictory”) in the Arab world just as race unsettles them in American ones, the author’s task is to show us why and how that came to be (12). The choice to focus on the Arabophone *Mashriq* is key for Makdisi, because unlike the “Balkan and Anatolian north, which was convulsed by the question of nationalism and ethnic cleansing,” the Arabophone Eastern Mediterranean witnessed “no such nationalism.” Instead it saw the ‘emergence of an antisectarian tradition in the Arab world that preserved the wealth of religious diversity’ (20). Arabophone intellectuals proposed solutions to overcome the religions’ vexation of equal citizenship through a new ‘ecumenical frame’ which emphasized the fraternity of the region’s constituent communities, and which would with time make of sectarianism a new “heresy” (160). By heeding the call of Arabophone intellectuals’ quest for co-existence, Makdisi hopes to recover that somewhat forgotten, or indeed actively repressed, tradition.

While Makdisi is certainly right to insist that there has been an overarching tendency to understand the politics of the region as religiously determined, his account shies away from explaining the persistence of that perception. As the author convincingly shows, fears of Muslim fanaticism—and by extension sectarian violence— were shared by foreign, colonial observers and state-making Arabophone elites alike. Why were these contingents—both of which are often otherwise mutually opposed— sufficiently convinced of the imminence of the danger of Muslim fanaticism that they would re-shape their policies, projects and institutions in such a profound way in order to contain it? In other words, what conditions fuelled or fed this paranoia beyond ‘Orientalism,’ which is ultimately an explanandum disguised as an explanans?

Even if we are to concede that its extent, nature, and intensity may have been distorted by those colonial administrators and zealous missionaries who sought to pathologize the region’s inhabitants, Makdisi indicates that sectarianism is a real social phenomenon that requires explanation. He compellingly suggests that sectarianism is one of the many ways that populations respond to the reconstitution of social relations along horizontal lines across the world in the nineteenth century. Sectarianism, anti-Blackness and Judeophobia can all be understood as symptoms of unresolved tensions within the transition from hierarchically ordered societies into ones that are defined by equal citizenship. Although, politically speaking, the objective of answering those questions through a comparative approach is generative insofar as it points to a universal ‘problem’ that is neither exceptionally or particularly ‘Arab,’ one wonders whether comparison really offers us the best way of doing so. Such comparison leaves open the question of why the problem of equal citizenship, engenders particular and indeed peculiar forms of vexation in each of these regional contexts. Makdisi backpedals from the suggestion that Ottoman Sunni supremacy might be compared to White supremacy during and after the abolition of chattel slavery; he also cautions us against using the European ‘Jewish Question’ as a measure for toleration in the Ottoman Empire (12) And indeed, as Makdisi shows, de-exceptionalisation can also go too far: anthropologist of religion Talal Asad’s diasporic critique

²² Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

of secularism merely transposes concerns about elsewhere onto the Arab world, which is in turn reduced to a stage for Asad's metropolitan 'theory' (15).

Aside from the comparative gesture which sees sectarianism as a local variant on a global theme, Makdisi offers little explanation for the more widespread emergence of the phenomenon—although he frequently implies that it is best understood as the product of a 'politicized' religion or a pietisation of politics. He draws on the metaphor of "haunting" to point to the ways in which sectarianism unsettles the project to institute equal citizenship (12). Religion, like race, appears as an unwelcome spectre that intrudes upon the political sphere, never to be fully exorcised from it. Doing so betrays a sense that there might have been pre-political religious communities uncontaminated by power and its profane institutions. But rather than merely 'politicise' *a priori* religious communities, and thereby induce a muddying of the political by the religious or vice versa, it may be more fruitful to think of how the modern sectarian identities were already political at the moment of their materialization. In other words, there was no conversion of a purely religious mode of communal identification into a political one: many of these sects were *both* religious *and* political from the moment of their formation. This is nicely illustrated by an example from Egypt.²³

Amid debates over the possibility of political representation in English-occupied Egypt, members of Egypt's largest indigenous Christian community jettisoned the term 'Coptic Nation' as a form of self-identification for 'Coptic minority.' In this context where communities were to be represented according to their relative numerical strength, activists adopted strategies for augmenting their numbers: specific forms of denominational identification—Orthodox Copt, Protestant Copt, and Catholic Copt—were jettisoned for the larger category of 'Copt.' Far from uncontroversial, the adoption of that moniker led to debates over its meaning, particularly when the Anglican lawyer Akhnukh Fanus formed a political party organised along communal lines in 1908.²⁴ Many, such as the nationalist law professor Wissa Wasif, balked at the prospect: he insisted that to speak of 'a Coptic political party' was meaningless since it was abundantly clear to all that Egyptian Christians were not one, but of multiple denominations.²⁵ Wasif, who was Orthodox, asked on what grounds Fanus, a Protestant, might speak on behalf of 'the Copts,' since he did not belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church himself. He was troubled to see the community defined in a purely statistical rather than a doxic sense. Moreover, what of the fact that a huge portion of the adherents to the Coptic orthodox church were not Egyptian at all but instead Ethiopian or Sudanese? And yet to speak of the Copts as a purely confessional category seemed to miss something important: the Copts were identified, and self-identified, through a shared bloodline (sometimes but not always as 'sons of Pharaohs') as early as the ninth century, which was far from a figment of orientalist fantasy propagated by missionaries as it is often depicted.²⁶ Rather than representing the politicisation of religious modes of identification, the controversies about what or who a Copt were

²³ For example, in describing the extirpation of Muslims from the Peloponnese after 1821 Makdisi asserts that "[w]hatever the raw passions displayed, religious passion... was clearly in the service of the political and not the other way round" (48). Likewise the newly independent Greece resolved the tensions between religious difference and equality of citizenship by "nationalizing" religion and by allowing the state's neo-Hellenism to "cannibalize" the Greek Orthodox Church (49). In Makdisi's telling "the Tanzimat politicized religious diversity" and thereby 'entrenched, magnified and made central the idea of the sectarian community" (63).

²⁴ Fanus's attempt to establish the Coptic Party in spring of 1908 had been prompted by the First Pan-Islamic Conference, held in February of that year. Little is known about the Coptic Party ('al-Hizb al-Misri'), except the programme a precis of which can be found in Mikha'il Sharubim, *al-Kafi fi Tarikh Masr al-Qadim wa-l-Hadith*, (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dar al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1998) 5: 528- 531.

²⁵ For the biography of Akhnukh Fanus Rufa'il (1856-1918) see *Qamus al-Tarajim al-Qibṭiyya* (Alexandria: Jam'iyyat Mar Mina al-'Ajayba li al-Dirasat al-Qibṭiyya, 1995), 17.

²⁶ See Hussein Ahmed Hussein Omar, 'The Crinkly People of the Black Earth: Examining Egyptian Identities in Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam's *Futub*' in Philip Wood ed. *History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 149-169.

represented the realignment along vertical, communal lines of social solidarity at a moment when a horizontally ordered social hierarchy was beginning to be contested, the world over.

Those debates resonated with others happening elsewhere (outside the Mashriq as much as within it). They reveal the fundamental instability of the tense, twin concepts of nation and minority rather than the contamination of one sphere by another. Were the Jews a religion or a nation? What about the Armenians? Who or what counted as a Greek or indeed a Turk? Far from a distinctive characteristic of Judaism or the Ottoman *millet* system, the double meaning of ‘nation’—in its biblical sense even— was all too common in European history as well. Arrogant scholars like Bernard Lewis failed to recognise this: Lewis pointed to the ambiguities in the term *umma* to mean *both* the global community of believers *and* the modern nation state as evidence for the incapacity of Muslims to assimilate modern concepts.²⁷ But what he could not or did not want to see was that that ambiguity was shot through within most conceptions of nationhood in the first two decades of the twentieth century in Europe as much as anywhere else.²⁸ If we are to cast the Arab world as unexceptional in its ‘failures’ to institute equality of citizenship then we need to examine ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ as historical artifacts of the ‘age of coexistence’ itself rather than deploy them unproblematically as value-neutral and normative terms of analysis, with their own Eurocentric histories. It is only by doing so that we will come to see that the master categories of modern political equality presented contradictions and logical aporia to those that grappled with them, wherever they did so.

Indeed it seems to have been only after the First World War that a new, apparent consensus was ushered in that nationality should be represented as a subject of both domestic and international law.²⁹ The decoupling of religion from nationality was premised on the notion that the former was immaterial, ineffable, and unrepresentable, while the latter formed the legal basis of a new world order. In this understanding, religion was conceived as simultaneously residing in the dark recesses of the heart or forehead, the locus of personal belief, as well as occupying a much larger, global, indeed supranational form, which exceeded, transcended, hovered above, and indeed eluded, any state or legal form.³⁰ The fact that nationality in Greece and Turkey would be defined by religious affiliation rather than place of birth or mother tongue in the famous population exchanges of 1922 reflected the inherent difficulties of conceptualising a form of citizenship that did not understand the religious and the political to be inseparable.³¹

The vicious debates about who, or what, a minority was or ought to be, get at the much larger question of how ‘religion’ and ‘nationality,’ previously used interchangeably, sometimes synonymously, would come to be cleft apart after the First World War and recast as incommensurate and opposite concepts. From this perspective, the cleaving apart of religion from politics in normative-legal terms was a product of ‘the age of coexistence’ rather than the condition of its possibility.

²⁷ Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

²⁸ As an aside it might be worth reflecting on how the synonymy and ambiguously murky relationship of religion and nation gets forgotten over time as these new categories are naturalised and how this process allows the Zionist movement to appear like an ancient rather than modern phenomenon and thereby exceptional as a form of nationalism.

²⁹ Will Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality: Europeans, Ottomans and Egyptians in Alexandria* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

³⁰ “Address by the Right Hon. Syed Ameer Ali on Islam in the League of Nations,” in *Transactions of the Grotius Society: Problems of Peace and War* 5: (1919), 126-44.

³¹ The fact that Turk could simply meant Muslim as late as the turn of the twentieth century is evidence of that complexity. See Sarah Shields, “The Greek-Turkish Population Exchange: Internationally Administered Ethnic Cleansing,” *Middle East Report* 216 (2013), 2-6.

If undoing the normative separation between ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ might contribute to a more subtle understanding of the emergence of sectarianism, so too might an undoing of the distinction between intellectuals and statesmen that the author forwards. In the book’s introduction Makdisi explains that the story he tells,

“about the ecumenical frame is... primarily an intellectual one, insofar as those who first wrote, imagined and inculcated coexistence were typically literate Ottoman Arab subjects between 1860 and 1920. These individuals were, for the most part, not directly connected to statecraft” (8-9).

The distinction is largely overstated: the practitioners of politics were often indistinguishable from those who thought, read and wrote about it in the period under question. Take for example, Rashid Rida who appears in the book merely as a popular editor, theologian and journalist but who was also president of the Syrian Arab Congress, and the co-author of the 1920 Constitution as Elizabeth Thompson has recently shown.³² But aside from being a concern about the identities of the figures examined, I worry that casting coexistence as a frame (of mind), rather than a set of concrete legal, political or ethical arrangements, obscures more than it elucidates. As Makdisi correctly points out, at least at the discursive level, no one says they are against ‘coexistence.’ Like corruption, which even the most corrupt politicians can never defend, if no one is against ‘coexistence’ then can this idea of coexistence be said to have a truly political history at all? Indeed, without examining the relative merits—theoretical and practical, logical and logistical — of competing proposals for realizing ‘coexistence,’ we risk reducing ‘coexistence’ to a series of deracinated slogans and platitudes that, as we shall see, have been and indeed are open to expropriation.

The question for most political activists (a term that I use in order to reject the political theory/practice distinction posited by Makdisi) in the period under question was seldom whether they aspired to coexistence at all but rather what kind of coexistence they desired and how it might best be attained, protected, and perpetuated. The controversies around the 1911 Coptic conference, which are in the book dismissed as “so-called,” precisely centered on such questions (86). The perspicacious proponents of proportionate (‘minority’) representation who called for the conference drew attention to the fact that the British imperial authorities had assumed that they alone could determine, and act in, the interests of the majority, one which was defined in purely confessional rather than in political terms. And yet there was no popular sovereignty to ‘test’ the veracity of these claims. For many Copts, the British officials had erected a ‘sectarian’ ‘Islamic state’ and as such there was no tension between simultaneously advocating for ‘minority rights’—warning of and worrying about the logical problem posed by ‘the tyranny of the majority’—and challenging, and struggling against, the British occupation as vociferously as their Muslim counterparts. Indeed, they understood both of these things to be related.

The nationalists (Muslim) Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid and Abd al-Aziz Fahmi led the charge against minority representation. Together they raised the objection that minority representation not only reproduced legal difference between two otherwise fraternal communities, but also replaced ideological disagreement in politics with ethnoreligious conflict that would be enshrined in law. By their argument, this would make the imperial state the persistent arbiter between the country’s communities, and thus perpetuate its position within it. In some ways, their argument anticipates the post-secular one (of Talal Asad and his scholarly disciples) which critiques the role of law in producing and exacerbating sectarian difference. However, for Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid and his colleagues, an emancipatory politics would by contrast need to reject the very definitional vision of the British authorities and reconstitute the state upon foundations that did not have religious categories at their heart.

While this radical vision was indeed seductive for many, for the Copts that were the immediate victims of a British-constructed “sectarian” state— a term used in that context over a decade before Makdisi claims it enters the lexicon of Arab politics via Michel Chiha in Lebanon— this radical vision struck them as utopian (135). The fact that the categories of ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ were socially constructed fictions did not mean that they were lies, since twenty-five years of policy had been constructed around them. Both positions— of the Coptic Conference and its Muslim critics— could be read as

³² Elizabeth F. Thompson, *How the West Stole Democracy from the Arabs: The Syrian Arab Congress of 1920 and Its Destruction of the Historic Liberal-Islamic Alliance* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2020).

instances of the ‘ecumenical frame’ that Makdisi describes, inasmuch as they were arguments for coexistence of a kind. But if that is so, their differences nicely illustrate how hegemonic the discourse of coexistence had, and has, become— and also, more importantly, how much of the picture that frame actually obscures.

It was indeed the arguments of Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Fahmi that seemingly won the day: the Egyptian constituent committee (of which the latter was a member) unanimously rejected provisions for minority representation in the newly sovereign kingdom’s constitution. Pointing as evidence to the mass uprising of 1919 which had raised as its insignia the Muslim crescent embracing the Christian cross—perhaps the most iconic image of the ‘age of coexistence’—intellectuals began to argue that Egypt’s authentic and primordial spirit was one of communal unity. Those, they argued, that claimed that minorities required legal protections were no more than colonial stooges. The 1919 revolution made a taboo of discussing the important questions about the management of religious difference that the Coptic question had raised. Far from forgotten, the myth about the communal coexistence that the 1919 uprising allegedly ‘heroically’ ushered in is perhaps the most enduring in Egyptian history, popular and academic alike.³³ Very little of this material from Egypt makes it into Makdisi’s book, which offers a welcome respite from the default Egyptocentricity of Middle East history. And yet, the Egyptian case is instructive, even contrapuntal: unlike Lebanon, in Egypt it was the colonial state, rather than the multi-religious society that was labelled ‘sectarian’ a good decade before Makdisi dates the appearance of the term in the Levant.

But relegating the Egyptian case to the sidelines also means that some of the affinities between Makdisi’s historiographical observations and those that were made by certain figures of the ‘age of coexistence’ are ignored. As previously stated, Makdisi argues that his focus on the Arabophone Mashriq is due to a “great divergence” (76) that the region experienced in relation to the Ottoman north. The former witnessed the growth of an antisectarian tradition while the latter was built upon “ethnic cleansing and genocide.” Makdisi expresses dismay that “this central paradox” upon which “the book turns” has yet to be “properly acknowledged” let alone explained by historians (20). While this indeed might be true in the historiography itself today, it isn’t entirely new: as early as 1920 Dawud Barakat, Egypt’s most prominent editor (incidentally Syrian, Christian and a founding member of the Ottoman Decentralization Party), remarked that the debate around minority rights in Egypt was a ‘disease’ that had infected this once sterile land of coexistence from other areas of the Ottoman Empire.³⁴ Sectarianism was a disease of the Turks that massacred Armenians, and of the Christians and Druze of Mount Lebanon, but was not authentically Egyptian. He cautioned against the importation of such concerns into this land of coexistence, lest it face the same catastrophic fate of its neighbours.

The point of evoking Barakat is not to accept his exceptionalist, quasi-chauvinist claims about Egypt. Rather, it is to draw attention to the fact that his apologetic hinged on an argument that shares some affinity with the one Makdisi forwards. Barakat, preempting many scholars of today, pointed to the entwining of the cross and the crescent in Egypt’s 1919 uprising as evidence of the country’s primordial spirit of *convivencia*, while he insisted that debates about the status of minorities, and the sectarian concerns it seemed to reflect, were merely caused by foreign contaminants. That Barakat refused to acknowledge that that very uprising led to a massacre of Armenians in a Cairene refugee camp, for example, suggests that claims about the ‘age of coexistence’ have been, and are, dangerously appropriated by denialists.

Like Barakat, Egypt’s present-day tyrants evoke the ‘authentic’ spirit of coexistence – as manifested in 1919 – to dismiss calls for the protection of religious ‘minorities,’ to reject debate about political representation, and to denigrate attempts to interrogate the contemporary state’s colonially derived, majoritarian identification with ‘Islam.’ “The age of coexistence’ is called upon not to break free of the mind-made manacles but (actually, and not just figuratively) to manacle those that dare to dream differently. If we are to claim ‘coexistence back from those that cynically and nostalgically instrumentalise it, we

³³ Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 68- 9.

³⁴ Thomas Philipp, “From Rule of Law to Constitutionalism: the Ottoman Context of Arab Political Thought,” in Jens Hansen and Max Weiss, eds., *Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 260.

must not reduce it to a discursive trope but instead be prepared to critique, interrogate and reject the ideas that are often smuggled in under its banner. Unlike those that claim that the ‘age of coexistence’ is evidence of some kind of eternally tenacious Arab propensity for tolerance, Makdisi warns of its fragility. His account is subtle, nuanced, and historicizing. And yet to argue that the manacles of sectarianism are “mind forg’d” is not to argue that they are forgeries of the mind and Makdisi is careful not to do that. But it is only by insisting on the importance of maintaining that distinction, rather than muddying it, that we can finally break free from its stultifying clutches.

REVIEW BY ELIZABETH F. THOMPSON, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Age of Coexistence is an important essay by a mature scholar. On the foundation of prior research, Ussama Makdisi constructs a new historical perspective on the resilience of pluralism as a political ideal in the post-Ottoman Arab world. His first two monographs concerned the history of nineteenth-century sectarian violence in Lebanon. In *The Culture of Sectarianism* (2000), Makdisi argued that the cause of the 1860 civil war was not principally class tension, as previously argued, but was rather a cultural shift toward cross-class sectarian unity promoted by French missionaries. This shift became politically volatile in the 1850s, when a weakened Ottoman state promoted equality among citizens regardless of religion. In *Artillery of Heaven* (2008), Makdisi explored how dogmatic American missionaries threatened hierarchical structures that had enabled peaceful coexistence in Lebanon. In response, Arab converts to Protestantism like Butrus al-Bustani, a prominent reformist intellectual in Beirut, molded an indigenous Christianity. They adapted their religious belief to the need for mutual tolerance in a diverse society and to the fact Christians remained a minority in Ottoman society.

In *Age of Coexistence*, Makdisi expands his perspective to embrace the entire Arab Mashriq (eastern Mediterranean) over the course of a full century, from the launch of Ottoman reforms in 1839 through the period of European mandatory rule, to the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. He begins by placing *Artillery of Heaven's* Bustani within a generation of intellectuals who inspired a cultural *Nabda* (revival) in the late nineteenth century. In response to the horrific violence of 1860, these Arab elites, led by Syrian Christians, built what he calls an “ecumenical frame” that challenged the Ottoman hierarchy of Muslim over non-Muslim. Through their press and their schools, Christian writers advanced notions of equality and tolerance, brotherhood and neighborliness. Sunni Muslim elites responded in kind, as in the liberal curriculum of the *Maqasid* school network and in the growth, by the time of the Ottoman empire’s defeat in World War I, of an inclusive vision of Arab nationalism. Rational debate among leading Muslim clerics and leading Christian writers negotiated terms of coexistence in a process that would have impressed the theorist of the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas. Evidence of their progress, Makdisi argues, is the coinage of the word *al-tasabul* (tolerance) to oppose *al-ta'assub* (fanaticism) (103). He emphasizes that the shift occurred within the frame of religion, not based on the acceptance of secular liberalism. Women sought liberation not by rejecting religious law but rather by demanding reform within the religious segregated personal status laws.

In the early twentieth century, the Arabs’ bottom-up movement proved more consequential than the top-down constitutional efforts by Turkish reformers in Istanbul, Makdisi argues. The ecumenical frame enabled the region to avoid the catastrophic sectarian violence that engulfed the Balkans and Anatolia, beginning in the 1870s and culminating in the Armenian genocide and mass expulsion of Greeks from Turkey during and after the Great War. Arabs suffered, too. A wartime famine caused more than 200,000 Christian deaths on Mount Lebanon and as many more in the surrounding region. But the threat of a violent sectarian reprisals was blunted when, after the war, leaders of the Maronite Church were able to blame the mass death on the Ottoman Turks. Only in recent decades have historians revealed the complicity of local elites in aggravating the famine, a fact known by commoners at the time, but covered up by the pro-Maronite French mandatory regime.

In the middle chapters of the book, Makdisi makes a substantive and provocative contribution to recent debates on the transition from Ottoman rule to European rule in the Mashriq after 1918. In Chapter 3, he articulates more clearly than others have that Arab politics differed dramatically from that of the postwar Turks, who embraced an intolerant, exclusive nationalism. In Chapter 4, “Colonial Pluralism,” Makdisi argues that Arab ecumenism survived the transition to rule under British and French mandates and in British-controlled Egypt. The Syrian Arab Kingdom established at Damascus prefigured colonial rule in what Makdisi calls the “nationalization of the ecumenical frame.” Europeans dismantled pan-Ottoman structures as they partitioned Arab lands into mandatory states. While Europeans thereby unloosed a variety of anti-colonial movements, they remained largely ecumenical (121).

Arab ecumenism suffered from internal defects, Makdisi concedes, but he argues that they were not fatal. The post-Ottoman frame remained paternalistic and hierarchical, despite calls for equality. Makdisi argues that the violence against Assyrians in 1930s Iraq is a reminder of the capacity for cruelty that persisted within the post-Ottoman ecumenical frame,

not evidence of its breakdown. He demonstrates the inner vitality and flexibility of the frame in Chapter 5, by comparing two intellectuals who posed competing models of ecumenism: the Francophone Lebanese Catholic, Michel Chiha, and the Syrian Muslim Arab nationalist, Sati' al-Husri. Chiha favored communalist politics of segmented coexistence in Lebanon while Husri advocated secular nationalism to unite the peoples of Iraq. Like them, Makdisi contends, “most major political constellations in the Arab Mashriq—liberal, nationalist, monarchical, conservative, Islamist or communist—committed themselves to rebuilding, not abolishing, the ecumenical frame” (160). While elites had to struggle against conservative forces, they were largely able to assert a hegemony of moderation where “overt displays of religious chauvinism were made taboo” (161).

The argument that ecumenism survived under European colonial rule is critical to Makdisi's conclusion in Chapter 6. He locates the primary cause of the collapse of the Ottoman ecumenical frame to an external factor, European Zionism. The founding of Israel in 1948 represented a “caesura in the modern history of coexistence in the Mashriq” (163). Unlike Christians in Lebanon who sought dominance but at the same time accepted pluralism, Zionists aimed to transform Palestine into a purely Jewish state. By contrast, Palestinian elites who built a national resistance movement did so in the ecumenical tradition of honoring pluralism. The mufti, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, rejected the Islamic populism of Izz al-Din al-Qassam as too extreme. Even though peasants defied the mufti to launch an armed revolt in 1936, Makdisi points out that “the revolt's goal was not Islamic revival” (184). Indeed, the bard of the Arab national movement, George Antonius, was Christian. In the end, it was Israel's founding prime minister, David Ben-Gurion's implacable Jewish nationalism that brought the age of coexistence to an end in the 1948 war and in Israel's refusal to permit Palestinian refugees to return.

Age of Coexistence affirms Makdisi's rank among the leading intellectual historians of the modern Arab world. It is an insightful, carefully reasoned, and at times brilliant intervention against what non-specialists continue to believe has been a long history of sectarian violence in the Middle East. More specifically, the book contributes to a growing literature on intellectual history that has demonstrated the remarkable weakness of nationalism in the region after World War I. In 1919-20, Arabs at Damascus defied postwar trends in Europe, where exclusive models of nationalism dominated in former Ottoman and Habsburg territories. Their Arabism was constructed as an inclusive tent in a Syria that did not yet contain a large Kurdish population and where Armenians still intended to return to Anatolia. The most dogmatic elite nationalists there and in Aleppo carried limited sway over the population, as James Gelvin and Keith Watenpugh have also shown.³⁵ Intellectual historians of Iraq and Egypt have similarly argued that the existence of proto-fascist nationalism has been exaggerated, and that most elites remained committed to liberal concepts of pluralism.³⁶ Likewise, Salim Tamari's study of Palestinian Arab elites' diaries demonstrates that they responded to the collapse of pluralist Ottomanism under the brutal repression of the Young Turks with ambivalence and brotherly humanism.³⁷

However, Makdisi resists recourse to the language of liberalism that has dominated intellectual and political histories of the period. Ecumenism rested on the acceptance of religious communalism in public life and must therefore be distinguished from secular politics. In this respect, *Age of Coexistence* may be read as a challenge to a historiography that has grown out of

³⁵ Elizabeth F. Thompson, *How the West Stole Democracy from the Arabs* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2020); Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); James L. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) Keith David Watenpugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

³⁶ Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Abdesalam M. Maghraoui, *Liberalism without Democracy: Nationhood and Citizenship in Egypt, 1922-1936* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

³⁷ Salim Tamari, *Year of the Locust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

(and beyond) Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939*.³⁸ For Makdisi, the ecumenical frame emerged from an indigenous political tradition, not through the importation of liberal European traditions. Apparently because of this view, and because Makdisi does not permit his intellectual history to stray into a study of political action, the book devotes little space to Arabs' participation in the 1908 constitutional revolution; nor does it address the Syrian Congress and its ratification of a constitution in 1920. This is in sharp contrast to arguments made by Michelle Campos in *Ottoman Brothers* and in my study of the region's constitutional tradition.³⁹

The sharp division between intellectual and political history comes at a cost. For example, Makdisi offers a lengthy discussion of Rashid Rida, a leading Muslim intellectual, as a problematic participant in constructing the ecumenical frame who insisted upon the primacy of Muslims in any Arab polity (91-100). However, Rida became president of the Syrian Congress in 1920 and supervised the ratification of a constitution that disestablished Islam eight years before the Turkish Republic did. The constitution dropped Ottoman language about an Islamic state and made no reference to Islamic law. On a compromise point, Article 1 required the king to be Muslim. However, the king was not the seat of Syrian sovereignty. As representative of the people, the Congress was. Rida's position shifted away from his former Islamic paternalism in 1920 under intense debate among Congress deputies and because he came to regard equality as an essential principle of good Islamic governance. The politics of this period should be read neither as a continuation of Ottoman ecumenical frames nor as a prefiguration of colonial pluralism. It represented a liberal break with the past that was then demolished by the French colonial army.⁴⁰

Makdisi's masterful exercise in elite intellectual history simultaneously demonstrates the limitations of his chosen genre. He closes *Age of Coexistence* with an epilogue that signals the persistence of the ecumenical ideal in the popular youth movements of the 2011 Arab Spring. This is an anomaly for a book that largely skirts discussion of social movements. At the end of Chapter 4 Makdisi acknowledges that in order to fully understand the internal contradictions in the ecumenical frame, we must go beyond the speeches and gestures of political and intellectual elites, to understand more deeply the era's political economy, institutions, and the motives of mass politics (125). But in absence of such a study of context, the book continues its argument in chapters five and six through the study of elite texts.

Makdisi's contention in these final chapters that the ecumenical frame prevailed through much of the 1940s and that the primary cause of its demise lay with the ascendancy of Zionism sits uneasily with my own understanding of the rise of mass politics in the twentieth century. In Chapter 6, "Breaking the Ecumenical Frame: Arab and Jew in Palestine," Makdisi is persuasive in arguing that Arab elites still envisioned a pluralist Palestine. But the work of Ted Swedenburg and others on the grassroots nature of the 1936 revolt questions the relevance of the Arab Higher Committee.⁴¹ The chapter begs for a shift in focus to mass mobilization and the need to understand why mass protest and ultimately the 1936 revolt were galvanized by populist Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam's death at the hands of the British. Intellectual history alone cannot

³⁸ See, for example, Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, ed., *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962/1983).

³⁹ Thompson, *How the West Stole*, 199-246; Elizabeth F. Thompson, *Justice Interrupted: The Struggle for Constitutional Government in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ Thompson, *How the West Stole*, 199-246.

⁴¹ Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2003); Y. Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement: From Riots to Rebellion, Volume 2, 1929-1939* (New York: Routledge, 2016). Of special interest is a book published after *Age of Coexistence*: Mark Sanagan, *Lightning Through the Clouds: 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020)

explain why ecumenical Arab nationalists like Hajj Amin al-Husseini and George Antonius (as well as Zionist bi-nationalists like Martin Buber and Judah Magnes) did not build as strong a movement as David Ben-Gurion did.

The history of social movements elsewhere in the region complicates the argument that it was the 1948 war that dethroned elite ecumenism. In Iraq, Makdisi is correct in remarking that the popular Iraqi Communist Party was pluralist and not overtly hostile to religion. But the reasons it was defeated by narrowly nationalist military officers in 1963 are complex and not directly related to Zionism. In Egypt, the populist, lower-middle class Muslim Brothers movement grew much larger than the elitist Wafd Party by the early 1940s. It expanded greatly by organizing support for Arab Palestinians against Zionist Jews well before 1948, and it explicitly sought to reassert Muslim primacy over non-Muslims in Egypt.⁴² The Brothers did not unequivocally share what Makdisi argues was a dominant “commitment to religious diversity could be reconciled with parallel commitments to the rule of law, equal citizenship, social justice and democracy” (162). Without confronting these realities on the ground, Makdisi misses the opportunity to persuade historians who read the period as laying broad foundations of sectarian conflict across the region that the ecumenical elites he has studied were the era’s leaders, not laggards.

On another historiographical front, Makdisi’s intellectual history also implicitly challenges histories of the Mashriq in the interwar era that emphasize the primary importance of European rule in damaging structures of governance and society that underpinned pluralism and tolerance. Makdisi acknowledges that the French and British threatened sectarian coexistence, but he insists that the ideal survived as “colonial pluralism.” Other historians, however, have come to darker conclusions in countries other than Palestine, and long before 1948. They paint a picture of much more sustained repressive violence outside of Palestine than Makdisi acknowledges.⁴³ They also emphasize the cultural and social damage done when British and French entered Greater Syria as partisans of one sect over others: the Maronites in Lebanon, and the Jews in Palestine. They used colonial methods of divide-and-rule to isolate the Sunni majority and to grant autonomy to Alawites and Druze in Syria and exclude Shi`ites from the ruling elite in both Lebanon and Iraq and thus aggravated sectarian tensions. Sunni urban elites remained distant and negligent of the drastic poverty suffered by Shi`ites in the south of Lebanon and Iraq.⁴⁴

Given this social context, one wonders how much urban elites’ anti-sectarian writings really mattered in societies so deeply and suddenly riven by inequality and state violence. Historians who focus on the era’s new class conflicts tend to regard the interwar era as the foundation of later, sectarian conflict. They have shown how backlash against European rule fueled intolerance among Sunni Muslim majorities. For example, in Egypt, while the Muslim Brothers captured popular discontent with the ruling elite cultivated by the British, Coptic Christians were transformed from patriotic brothers in 1919 into a minority group, stigmatized as a somehow less Egyptian.⁴⁵ Without confronting these realities on the ground, Makdisi’s book misses the opportunity to prove his argument that the elites he studies were leaders, not laggards.

⁴² Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1997).

⁴³ Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain’s Covert Empire in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Daniel Neep, *Occupying Syria Under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴⁴ Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (London: Saqi Books, 2004); Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi`ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁴⁵ Jeffrey Culang, “‘The Shari`a must go’: Seduction, Moral Injury, and Religious Freedom in Egypt’s Liberal Age,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60:2 (2018) 446-75 and Jeffrey Culang, “Ordering the ‘Land of Paradox’: the Fashioning of Nationality, Religion, and Political Loyalty in Colonial Egypt,” in *Beyond Versailles: Sovereignty, Legitimacy, and the Formation of New Politics after the Great War*, Marcus M. Payk and Roberta Pergher, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019) 99-123. On how Islamist reaction changed Egyptian liberal politics, see also Beth Baron, *The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the*

The book is so well written and so thoughtful that its limitations are simultaneously its virtues. While the methods of intellectual history are ultimately inadequate in proving the causal argument proposed, the questions they raise open a fruitful debate for a wider community of historians on the resources available to Arabs who dare to look past the failed Arab Spring to a more peaceful future.

Muslim Brotherhood (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and the Clash that Shaped the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018) and the older, yet quite relevant Charles D. Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

RESPONSE BY USSAMA MAKDISI, RICE UNIVERSITY

I wrote these lines as the dust from the Washington D.C. riot of 6 January 2021 settled, and as Donald J. Trump's cruel presidency entered its final days. Like so many others, I have been appalled by Trump's brutish jingoism and by the fact that these impulses resonate with millions of my compatriots. Yet I am also struck by how insular many U.S. pundits and politicians remain, even as they genuinely try to make sense of the scenes of mayhem in the U.S. capital. They thought that such scenes would never unfold in the United States; what they really perhaps thought, and some indeed did say, was that such scenes properly belonged to the allegedly darker and less developed nations. They insisted that the United States is not a small poor 'banana republic,' ignoring the fact that Americans played a major role in creating these simulacra of republics in the first instance. Most objectionable to me was their assumption that the non-Western world, not America or Western Europe, were places where violence naturally unfolded, coups happened as if by magic, sectarian passions inevitably flourished, and states ultimately failed.

I wrote my book *Age of Coexistence*, in part, to push back strongly against such expressions of segregated imaginations, expressions that, in a different context, have made orientalist and disillusioned citizens of the Middle East disparage the modern history of the Arab world as one of unremitting sectarianism and failure. I wrote my book, moreover, in the aftermath of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq that devastated an already besieged Iraqi people and paved the way for state and societal collapse and the scourge of "Islamic State" of ISIS across the Levant. For many observers, this unraveling of the Middle East appeared inevitable because they saw it as peopled only by one-dimensional warring "Sunnis" and "Shiis" and "Kurds" and "Yezidis" and so on.

I felt that a tremendously insidious narrative had taken hold inside and outside of academia, one that set the allegedly morally advanced secular West against a backwards, medievalized, and perpetually sectarian Middle East, as if these places represent ontologically dueling versions of human activity. In the face of such a demoralizing and ahistorical account of modernity, *Age of Coexistence* presents a complex history of modern association and solidarity between peoples of different faiths—a history that has been almost totally effaced by the incessant focus on the problem of sectarianism in the contemporary Middle East. This modern solidarity first emerged in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Arab world and continued to flourish in the post-Ottoman era of the twentieth century. It involves myriad women and men who have embodied the struggle to transcend sectarian differences.

My challenge was to offer a critical and empathetic story of coexistence without defensiveness, that is, to write a history that neither glorified the past nor denigrated the present, and that explored the grim significance of sectarian tensions without being seduced by their sensationalism. I wanted to think about how these tensions provided urgent impetus to modern antisectionarian solidarities and commitments by citizens of different faiths and communities. I wanted to understand how they sought to imagine *and* build a world greater than the sum of their religious or ethnic parts—commitments that remain evident, if one is prepared to recognize them, in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt and beyond. I call this modern iteration of coexistence the "ecumenical frame" and through it I trace how an extraordinary idea of Muslim and Christian and Jewish civic and political community rooted in secular equality went from unimaginability to ubiquity in the course of a single century, and nowhere more so than in the Arab East.

I acknowledge, however, that this antisectionarian ecumenical frame was contested from the outset; that it was subject to conflicting interpretations that valorized "real" religion and demonized sectarianism, often in contradictory and conservative modes, but also in more liberal and even radical ways. This ecumenical frame encompassed both thinking *and* action (more on this dichotomy later), that is, imagination, writing, behavior, pedagogy, and politics. To appreciate the significance of this story, I cut across many of the conventional conceptual divides that segregate Ottoman and post-Ottoman historiography, Balkan and Arab experiences, and, as I allude to above, Middle Eastern and Western histories. I specifically do not want to conflate the remarkable diversity of the Middle East with Islam, or reduce the rich diversity of Muslims to one kind of Islamic piety often fetishized by Western academe and Middle Eastern fundamentalists alike. Most of all, I emphasize from the outset of the book that there is far more work to be done to elaborate my thesis on modern coexistence, to explore angles, perspectives, geographies, politics, groups, and communities that I have not explored, and thus

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to refine and rethink aspects of my book. I very much think of this book as the beginning of a research agenda, not the last word on it.

For all these reasons, I very much appreciate the initiative by Georgios Giannakopoulos and Cemil Aydin to convene this roundtable around *Age of Coexistence*. I also appreciate the engagement of Joshua Donovan, Madeline Elfenbein, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Hussein A.H. Omar, and Elizabeth F. Thompson with my account and their mostly gracious, varied, and thoughtful assessments of the book's contributions. Like any scholar, I am gratified by attention to my work and welcome substantive criticism of it. I am fortunate to have this combination of academics thinking through some of the arguments I put forth. I am acutely aware, of course, that I can neither control how others read my work, nor necessarily predict which facets of my research will interest each of these reviewers.

Let me then recapitulate some of the basic premises of my book. The ideals and implementation of secular equality, solidarity, and liberation are universal in scope: they are the products of human struggle that have taken different courses in different parts of the world. They have been bitterly contested and fought for in every society, and their meanings have been subject to a plethora of contending interpretations. I make a basic and fundamental distinction between the long history of coexistence in the Islamic world before the principles of secular equality and citizenship and that form of self-conscious modern coexistence that was produced in the nineteenth century following the emergence of these principles. I also recognize the crucial role of political and legal structures in the quest to build (and restrict) functioning ecumenical political communities. And I draw attention to the agency, historiography, and concerns of those who were most directly implicated in the transformations of their world—particularly the Arabs of the Mashriq on whom I focus.

To help clarify my argument, I suggest in the book that the struggle *against* sectarianism and sectarian divisions in the modern Arab East might be thought of as analogous to parallel nineteenth and twentieth-century struggles *against* racism, communalism, and tribalism in America and Europe, South Asia, and Africa respectively. Despite huge differences in context, the most radical emancipatory projects of ecumenical community have consistently duelled with narrower, more belligerent, more cloistered, less imaginative and more conservative understandings of community. As a result, the radical promise of a modern secular solidarity, and the work to build emancipated, antisectarian, and genuinely liberated and representative political communities, has often been overshadowed by far more ambiguous and modest terms of political and civic inclusion. Nowhere is this tension more apparent than in the elaboration of notionally equal (male) citizenship irrespective of religious affiliation on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the concomitant promulgation of religiously-segregated, manifestly gendered, and unequal laws of personal status that still predominate across the Middle East.

The first half of *Age of Coexistence* focuses on the transformation of an Ottoman Islamic empire of unequal subjects into an empire of nominally equal citizens. This momentous period between the Greek War of Independence (1820s) and the end of the Ottoman empire was marked by internal rebellions, conscription and wars, ethnoreligious nationalisms in the Balkans, sectarian violence in the Levant, and European colonialism. This was also the period in which the *problem* of “sectarianism” first entered modern Arabic vocabulary—and I show how Arab teachers, journalists, and reformers of different faiths sought to overcome and uplift what they described as their ignorant and irrational compatriots and coreligionists. I pay particular attention to the infamous sectarian massacres of 1860 in Syria that led to an international crisis centered on Mount Lebanon and Damascus during which Ottoman and European diplomats created an autonomous region of Mount Lebanon along communal lines in the name of rational government. At the same time, and precisely because of the horror of these massacres and their sectarian implications, I show how this moment also galvanized a new Arab antisectarian consciousness.

Although by no means anti-Ottoman, and in fact clearly dependent on a diminished but still viable Ottoman sovereignty, Arab subjects took the lead in developing and embodying a clearly new form of ecumenical solidarity. Their imperatives were different from those of the ruling Ottomans, for whom the nondiscrimination of the *Tanzimat* reform era was always subordinate to the imperative of rejuvenating late Ottoman imperial sovereignty. The new “civilized” Arabness flourished during the period we refer to as the *nahda*, or renaissance, of the late Ottoman era. The most underappreciated aspect of the *nahda* was its ecumenical thrust as some Christian Arabs took the lead in establishing “national” schools that included

Muslims and non-Muslims on equal terms, and some Muslim Arabs reconfigured their notion of modern Islam to accept and include non-Muslim compatriots. However conditional this acceptance may have been, it was remarkable nevertheless.

For the sake of perspective, we should bear in mind the contemporaneous backlash in the United States against black emancipation, in Europe to Jewish emancipation and in the West, generally, to even the possibility of equality with colonized peoples or immigrants from colonized countries. Still, in my book I clearly acknowledge the class and gender limitations, the taboos, and elisions in this ecumenical *nahda*. Muslim and non-Muslim Ottoman subjects and citizens elaborated often conservative communalist ways of adjusting to the new reality of Ottoman citizenship. Finally, I note how the ecumenical *nahda* in the Arab East differed from the nationalist trajectory of the Ottoman Balkans and Anatolia, where the violent contest between different ethnoreligious claims overwhelmed ecumenism and led ultimately to the Balkans Wars of 1912-1913, the Armenian Genocide of 1915, and the Greek-Turkish population exchange of 1922-23.

The second part of *Age of Coexistence* tracks how European colonial powers cynically divided the Mashriq in the post-Ottoman era through a politics of colonial pluralism. These powers insisted that in the East, unlike the West, sectarian and communal passions inevitably would trump secular national ones in the absence of European colonial tutelage. The Arab East, in fact, was the first place in the world to be colonized and sectarianized *in the name of self-determination*. During the Mandate era, Arab political elites and ordinary citizens grappled with broken promises of independence as colonial powers established mandatory states that lacked sovereignty. Like other peoples in the region, Arabs had to answer difficult questions about how to relate to the reality of European colonialism and how to grapple with fundamental questions about secular affiliation. Vexing questions included, for example, whether one identified as an anticolonial Christian Arab or as a member of a Christian minority dependent upon Western power in a Muslim dominated Arab world, or whether one was a Jewish Arab or a Jewish Zionist, a secular Arab nationalist or a Muslim Brother and so on. I contrast the cases of Iraq and Lebanon to elaborate on these tensions and contradictions.

There is stunning irony in the fact that at the very moment when the Arab East had appeared to have made great strides in elaborating modern forms of coexistence that encompassed Muslim and non-Muslim as secular compatriots, the region was confronted with British-backed colonial Zionism. This Zionism constituted an expression of a European ethnoreligious nationalism. Its foundational terrain was European not Ottoman, and its leading Jewish Zionist partisans and leaders were overwhelmingly European. With crucial British imperial support, they introduced a new conflict between “Arab” and “Jew” that ultimately devastated the ecumenical frame in Palestine, led to the *Nakba* of 1948, and precipitated the end of Jewish Arab communities in places such as Iraq. The ecumenical frame survived elsewhere in the Arab East, but because this frame was not inevitable or immutable, it was further damaged by the external and internal pressures that I detail in my epilogue. But even now, at one of the darkest moments in modern Arab history, I believe more than ever before in the necessity and urgency of ecumenical solidarity that rejects religious and nationalist chauvinisms of any kind. I believe one can and must reinterpret the past in order to continue with the great, unfinished, and always contested revolution to build transcendent ecumenical multireligious and multiethnic political communities rooted in secular equality.

This brings me to Joshua Donovan’s generous assessment of the book. I understand his observation that I sometimes present so capacious an adumbration of who is included in the ecumenical frame that the term seems to lose some of its analytical precision. I think this is a fair point. As I suggest above, we do need far more research to see to what extent various individuals, communal organizations, social movements, and political parties related to the ecumenical frame. We need far more work on how citizens, states, and social movements, for example, vied over the interpretation of one key paradox of the ecumenical frame: the secular equality of citizens transposed with religiously segregated laws of personal status within a sovereign state. Donovan asks, more directly, about what he observes to be an omission of Islamist projects from the book. One answer is that I did not omit the most obvious Islamist project at all. I do follow the Ottoman empire’s own transition from an Islamic empire with unequal subjects to a “civilized” state with a Muslim sovereign. This late Ottoman polity ruled over nominally equal citizens, but also, as I point out, began to stigmatize certain minorities as despised and dangerous. The late Ottoman empire constitutionally enshrined Islam as the religion of the state. I also explore some of the debates that famous Muslim reformers, writers, and scholars such as Rashid Rida and Muhammad Abduh engaged in, and I point out how at one level they shared the language of the Protestant convert and educator Butrus al Bustani about sectarianism being

a manifestation of ignorance (though they also denounced Western missionary hostility to Islam). At another level, I show how they revealed the inherent chauvinism of their version of an Islamic ecumenical frame, particularly their bigoted view of the proper place of non-Muslims in an “Islamic” society, especially as it related to Coptic and Syrian Christians in their midst. But my point in analyzing these debates was to situate them in the larger context of massive Ottoman (and Egyptian) legal, ideological, and political transformations.

Another answer to Donovan’s question goes back to my point that this book does not pretend to be all-encompassing. My emphasis in the book, rather, is to show how sovereignty was and remains key to making sense of the viability and nature of the ecumenical frame. Its diminishment and abrogation inevitably shape the contours of coexistence. This is why I focus in the second part of the book on the post-Ottoman Mandate era during which influential figures such as the francophone Lebanese ideologue Michel Chiha and the anticolonial pedagogue Sati al-Husri envisioned competing communalist and secular nationalist political projects respectively in Lebanon and Iraq. Chiha was philocolonial and consumed by the need to elaborate a modern sectarian state to protect minorities. Husri was fiercely anticolonial and was concerned with building a strong secular state. I focus on them because they were architects of contending political orders and not merely detached elitist intellectuals. And that is why I focus on the structures of colonial Zionism, which, despite being profoundly sectarian and anti-ecumenical in relation to the history and reality of Palestine, became powerfully sovereign by destroying Palestine in the name of building a Jewish state. One place where, I suppose, we can further think through Donovan’s question is by studying how the Muslim Brotherhood acted during its very short rule in Egypt after the Arab Spring, before the military coup toppled the elected president Muhammad Morsi and savagely suppressed his followers.

Madeleine Elfenbein’s review is also constructive. I appreciate how she admits to her own initial skepticism at the concept of the “ecumenical frame.” She raises two important points that I will address. The first is her suggestion that my distinction between the ethnonationalist Ottoman North (the Balkans, Istanbul, Anatolia) and an ecumenical Ottoman South or Mashriq is “suspiciously tidy.” I do make the comparison between Ottoman North and South stark, but I also stand by it. The *Tanzimat* had two strands, an ecumenical one rooted in nondiscrimination and secular Ottoman citizenship, and a second nationalist one that was obsessed with protecting sovereignty. My point is that, unlike the case in the Balkans or Anatolia, in the Arab East the two were not in fundamental contradiction because of a variety of factors, including the absence of separatist ethnoreligious nationalisms, the nature of European imperialism, the demographic and social make-up of the populations, a common Arabic language and antisectarian agency, and a still viable Ottoman sovereignty. That is why Arab Christians faced nothing similar to the persecution of the Armenians in the late Ottoman era. I do not doubt, as Elfenbein correctly points out, that there were Armenians, Turks, Bulgarians, Greeks, Albanians and others who embodied and exhibited ecumenism, but in reality they were ultimately overwhelmed by the nationalist wars and ethnic cleansing as Elfenbein concedes. Perhaps my reading of the Ottoman empire is provocative, and perhaps it may need to be recalibrated, because it connects Arab, Armenian, Greek, and Turkish histories that have so often been told apart *and* against each other. I am more than happy to refine my argument—and I am certain that it will be modified and challenged by the work of scholars whose primary focus is on the Balkans or Anatolia.

Elfenbein’s second question is why I only juxtapose racism in North America and sectarianism in the Middle East rather than directly connect the two and offer a fuller investigation of the question of anti-blackness in the Middle East. The question of race and racism opens the space for an important discussion that I cannot do full justice to in this forum. Suffice it to say, as I note above, my book is not an exploration of all forms of discrimination, inequality, or racism in the Middle East. While I agree with Elfenbein that a study of antiblackness in the Middle East is important in its own right (and the excellent scholars mentioned by Elfenbein make this a central aspect of their research), that is not my project. Rather, my goal is to explore how and why a new ecumenical political culture that sought to transcend sectarian difference emerged and how it was elaborated, contested, and limited, and why it was fatally undermined in some areas of the Middle East but not others. My analogical references to the racial order in the U.S., the communal politics in South Asia, and the Jewish Question in Europe are not intended to suggest commensurability between these phenomena. Rather, they are to provide what I feel is crucial perspective that is often missing when one thinks about sectarianism in the Middle East, or the alleged failures of Arab modernity. They reflect my attempt to think about how different societies grappled with what I regard as a

global nineteenth-century problem of the transition from formal inequality to nominally equal citizenship and national political communities.

These transitions gave rise to parallel modern problems of sectarianism in the Middle East, racial segregation in the United States, and communalism in South Asia respectively. Indeed, I think it is imperative to distinguish between, on the one hand, the historical experiences of the black population in the United States, where the ideology of racism and white supremacy were profoundly tied to chattel slavery, and, on the other hand, the experiences of non-Muslims in the Ottoman Islamic empire. The July 1860 massacre of Christians in Damascus, the Armenian Genocide of 1915, the anti-Jewish Farhud in Iraq in 1941 and the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians in 1948 did not emanate out of anti-black racism, but they were centrally concerned with questions of religion, discrimination, nationalism, colonialism, citizenship, equality, and sovereignty. Thus in the period coeval to the ecumenical *nahda* in the Ottoman empire and the rise of ethno-religious nationalisms in the northern part of the empire that my book explores, the United States witnessed a growing white American obsession with miscegenation, furious white supremacy, the lynching of innocent blacks, and the establishment of a new system of racial segregation as a reaction to the formal Reconstruction-era emancipation and enfranchisement of black Americans.

These developments were parallel to, but also fundamentally different from the modern problem of sectarianism in the Middle East, and even racism in the Middle East, which I don't think is reducible to only anti-blackness, as Elfenbein suggests. Inclusion and exclusion in the U.S. political community were problems explicitly cast in terms of race. In the Ottoman empire they were cast primarily in terms of religion (and ethnicity) and sectarianism through which European powers often intervened. If we do not insist on these distinctions, then we risk letting white supremacy of North America off the hook and universalizing—yet again—U.S. historiographical concerns, albeit from a progressive perspective. I do not deny, of course, the reality of racism and discrimination in the Middle East, or even thinking of some forms of sectarianism as racism, or thinking of some forms of anti-sectarianism as analogous to anti-racism. We should, in fact, explore more the exclusions, contradictions, and ambivalence inherent in the repeatedly broken promise of equal citizenship in the Middle East. In *Age of Coexistence*, I try to draw attention to the problematic nature of the sudden disestablishment of Islamic legal and ideological primacy during an era of Western military and economic hegemony, missionary activity, and colonialism—which led to a defensiveness and chauvinism among several Muslim Arab reformers such as Abduh and Rida that is still evident in the region.

To acknowledge this chauvinism frankly is imperative, but I also think it is crucial to stress that the Muslim Arab attitude toward non-Muslims was *not* the equivalent of the racism of white southerners towards emancipated blacks in the United States. The white American near wholesale repudiation of blacks as neighbors, let alone as equal compatriots, is a world away from how Muslim Arabs generally viewed their Christian and Jewish compatriots. For all its ambiguities, the Arab acceptance of modern ecumenical compatriotship was clearly less coerced and far more socially intimate and profoundly ecumenical than anything in the vastly more violent U.S. experience of “race relations”—despite the intrusion of European colonialism in Ottoman and Arab affairs and the absence of European colonialism in the post-bellum United States. This Arab Muslim habitation of the ecumenical frame has never been given its proper due. I say this not to romanticize at all, but to invite even more thinking about the difference between juxtaposition and linkage, and the relevant question of the importance of sovereignty in effecting emancipation anywhere in the world.

I am grateful to Elizabeth Shakman Hurd's review as well, and how she draws attention to the chapter on colonial Zionism. I don't have much to add to what Hurd writes. She ably summarizes my discussion of how the advent of colonial Zionism in Palestine posed an ultimately catastrophic challenge to the ecumenical frame because a European nationalist movement sought to create a fantasy of an exclusively Jewish ethno-religious state in a historically, culturally, and socially multireligious land that was home to an overwhelmingly Muslim and Christian Arab population. And Hurd values how I relate this narrative of the *Nakba* to the much less appreciated story of the ecumenical frame, for Palestine was subject to the same transformations of the *Tanzimat* and the ecumenical *nahda* that transformed the rest of the Ottoman Arab East. This is one of the reasons, in fact, that I seek to distinguish between the sectarian state of Lebanon (which I discuss in an earlier chapter), which for all its flaws was never defined in legal or political terms as a Maronite Christian state, and the avowed

Jewish state of Israel. These were two parallel but fundamentally different political projects that are often superficially compared with one another. My point is that the former emerged from a foreign European context and the latter from an Ottoman ecumenical one, albeit after major French colonial intervention and mediation.

Moreover, for totally understandable reasons, there has developed an unfortunate theoretical, academic, and activist disconnect between understandings of the question of Palestine and the rest of the region's history. I seek to decenter discussions of British-backed Zionism as *only* a settler-colonial movement, *not* to deny that crucial aspect of its unfolding in Palestine. I call attention to the obvious but almost taken for granted fact that colonial Zionism did not emerge from the region's historic and native Jewish communities. My goal, as Hurd notes, is to draw out some of the stunning ironies and paradoxes related to the ecumenical frame that are rarely discussed when it comes to the question of Palestine: to understand colonial Zionism as the antithesis of ecumenical Arabism; to relate the *Nakba* of 1948 to the fate of Arab Jews; and to interrogate the foreignness at so many levels of colonial Zionism and its crucial role in provoking a new sectarian conflict between "Arabs" and "Jews" which was by no means inevitable, let alone primordial, nor even predictable given the history of the Ottoman Arab East. Before the advent of colonial Zionism, there was no "Jewish Question" in the Ottoman empire akin to Europe's Antisemitism. Rather, it was the Armenians who bore the wrath of the late Ottoman nationalist state. The perverse irony is of course that colonial Zionism devastated ecumenical Palestine by methodically, relentlessly, and coercively turning a native majority into a minority on its own land with British colonial support and then through its own Zionist sovereignty in the name of erecting an ethno-religious Jewish state. Even more perverse, colonial Zionism created an "Arab" question in Israel and a "Jewish" question in the rest of the Arab East where neither had previously existed.

Hussein Omar offers some thoughtful comments about the book's contributions and about how they might intersect with aspects of Egyptian and Coptic history. Omar, however, laments that I shy away from explaining the persistence of the perception of religion as a determinative factor in the politics of the region. He also writes that I suggest that before the nineteenth century, religion and religious communities were somehow uncontaminated by politics. The first chapter of my book explores the nature of the Ottoman Muslim imperial order and its millet system and how Christian church leaders were often auxiliaries of empire in the premodern era. My point is that religion was sectarianized in a very particular way during the *Tanzimat* amidst massive European intervention and amidst a new political language of equality, nondiscrimination, and citizenship. It was in the nineteenth century that European powers demanded, and the Ottoman state was compelled to acquiesce to, making (allegedly) proportional representation of religious and ethnic communities a sign of nondiscrimination and civilized rule, and later of secular equality. That this sectarianization occurred in some parts of the empire (Samos, Mount Lebanon, and eastern Anatolia) but not others (Damascus) raises the question of the diminished sovereignty of the late Ottoman empire. This is why political sectarianism became so controversial to secular nationalists in the Ottoman and post-Ottoman eras who correctly understood how sectarian mechanisms created transnational patronage networks, augmented and legitimated Europe's colonial interventions on behalf of allegedly oppressed non-Muslim groups, and inevitably weakened the possibility of national solidarity and sovereignty. In sum, the issue of sovereignty, which Omar mostly overlooks in his review, is key to my argument about the construction, nature, viability, and transformation of the ecumenical frame.

More puzzling to me is why Omar reduces my argument about coexistence to being a "frame of mind"—although I spend considerable time in the book discussing the importance of the *Tanzimat* decrees, the Ottoman constitution, the pedagogical system of post-Ottoman Iraq, the creation of the sectarian state of Lebanon, and colonial Zionism. Citing my introduction, Omar declares that my work is primarily an "intellectual" history and that he does not accept a "theory/practice" dichotomy that I allegedly propose in my account. What I actually write is that "at first glance" this book appears to be an intellectual history in its first part since I am dealing in that section with Arab reformers and teachers who lacked sovereignty. I go on to say that the book is *also* a political history insofar as the entirety of its second part is about the adaptation of the Ottoman-era ecumenical frame in conditions of constrained sovereignty. After conceding that much of the historiography of the modern Middle East is Egypt centric, Omar asserts that it was in Egypt that the idea of the "sectarian" state first emerged before it was consecrated in Michel Chiha's Lebanon. In the absence of substantive evidence, I find this assertion is unconvincing. Omar's review has little to say about the comparison I did make between the anti-minoritarian Iraqi nationalist case and the Lebanese sectarian one. To be sure, there are many affinities between Egyptian

history and the history of rest of the Arab East (that was one of the points of my book), but one ought to grapple seriously with this other history on its own terms. I feel very much that this is a missed opportunity.

Elizabeth Thompson raises a couple of significant points in her review to which I would like to respond. The first concerns Thompson's disquiet with what she describes as "elite intellectual" history, and the "elite texts" upon which this history depends, as opposed to what she suggests might be a more supposedly grounded political history and action. The second concerns Thompson's understanding of my discussion about colonial pluralism and the impact of colonial Zionism. The latter misapprehension is easy to clarify: I do not minimize the damaging or darker aspects of European colonial rule, although I do think that it is vital to understand that even European colonialism had to contend with the pre-existing ecumenical frame. I do specifically point out how colonial pluralism—through which European colonial rulers set themselves as the sole arbitrators of allegedly endemic sectarian feuding communities—was indeed fundamentally dangerous and consequential: both in its divide and rule imperialism and in setting up sectarian structures in countries across the Arab East. But it was also inadvertently consequential in terms of providing a focal point against which anti-sectarian figures and movements could rally and unify—this holds as much for Islamists such as Rashid Rida as it did for secular nationalists such as Sati al-Husri both of whom were shaped by the politics of the late Ottoman era. Colonial Zionism in mandatory Palestine, of course, magnified these dangerous European sectarian policies and contributed directly to the triumph of an anti-Arab ethno-nationalist movement in the heart of the Arab East. While colonial Zionism clearly destroyed the ecumenical frame in Palestine by ethnically cleansing the Arab Palestinian population there in 1948, I do not say that it destroyed the ecumenical frame in the rest of the Arab East. What I say is that the advent of the sectarian nationalism of European Zionism contributed decisively to the inexorable undermining of the viability of being a Jewish Arab or an Arab Jew—and so too did some of the chauvinistic anti-Jewish Arab responses to colonial Zionism that I examine in the case of Iraq.

Thompson's more interesting criticism of what she refers to as elitist intellectual history raises its own set of questions for me—specifically about who and what defines an "elite"? Literacy, religion, education, political power, access to capital, social station, forms and conditions of labor? And what kind of elite exactly? Long before he was celebrated as an icon of the *nahda* Butrus al-Bustani, for example, was a convert to what had been an unrecognized Protestantism; he worked as a printer in the American mission press, earning less than his American mentors, as well as a translator and preacher. When he was confronted by the horrors of 1860 that devastated his homeland, which gave rise to bitter sectarian acrimony, he took action by working anonymously to publish eleven epistles to urge the reconstruction of an antisectarian society in Syria.

Even if we accept, for the sake of argument, Thompson's suggestion that Bustani's pamphlets are "elite texts," Bustani went on to build the first ecumenical "national" school in the Ottoman empire in the aftermath of the 1860 riots. Pedagogy is not necessarily radical political action, but, of course, it often is, especially the antisectarian kind that Bustani advocated and personified. When it comes to the second half of my book and particularly my contrast of the contending state projects of the communalist Michel Chiha and the secular nationalist Sati al-Husri, a monumental secular nationalist pedagogue, both men were certainly involved in political action. Thompson calls for more elaboration about the aspects of my argument—to see how it might fit, be contradicted by, or refined by aspects of the ecumenical frame. As I admit in the introduction to the book, there is more work to be done on the material, class, and geographical aspects that I was not able to cover sufficiently, or myriad social and political movements within the ecumenical frame, or the advent of mass politics.

These are points that are also raised by Elfenbein and Donovan. But to me, at least, it ought not be a question of either writing intellectual history or political history but writing both at the same time. Indeed, at the end of her review, Thompson insists that there are clear limitations of focusing on "urban elites"—who are assumed to have been out of touch with the true picture of their societies "deeply and suddenly riven by inequality and state violence" as Thompson writes. I wonder if we would say the same about well-known figures in Western academe such as W.E.B. Du Bois or CLR James or Hannah Arendt? And if not, why not? My point is not to be polemical but to take this opportunity to insist that part of what my book tries to do is to call attention to a now obscured *culture*—and not simply an idea—of coexistence. It is also to insist that there is a vast accessible public archive of native intellectual production that has consistently been overlooked by Western academics in search of what they determine to be authentic—and typically Islamist—voices. For all the legitimate

criticism and contradictions of the work of writers, teachers, and statesmen that was simultaneously intellectual and political, this work must not be dismissed as “elite” primary sources that have to be theorized by others, but rather should be read on their own terms in order to better understand and engage with their own cogent, urgent, theoretical insights into their social and political worlds.