

REVIEW ARTICLE

## Transgressive moderns: social relations and cultural institutions in Middle Eastern History

Odile Moreau and Stuart Schaar, eds., *Subversives and Mavericks in the Muslim Mediterranean: A Subaltern History*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2016. 219 pp. <https://doi.org/10.7560/310915>

Stephanie Cronin, ed., *Crime, Poverty, and Survival in the Middle East and North Africa: The “Dangerous Classes” since 1800*. London, New York and Dublin: I.B. Taurus, 2020. 314 pp. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781838>

Ramazan Hakkı Öztan and Alp Yenen, eds., *Age of Rogues: Rebels, Revolutionaries and Racketeers at the Frontiers of Empires*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021. 400 pp. <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474462624.001.0001>

Each of these books analyzes the relationship between social stratification and modern state-building through case studies on political movements, on the one hand, and opportunistic individuals, on the other. The volume edited by Odile Moreau and Stuart Schaar presents eight case studies that compare and contrast the biographies of individuals that don't fit squarely into contemporary political, ideological, or economic categories. Stephanie Cronin's volume is a collection of eleven essays on bureaucratic and economic processes that created new notions of crime and poverty. Central to this edited volume is the concept of social class, which is less fundamental to Moreau and Schaar's book. The last volume, edited by Ramazan Hakkı Öztan and Alp Yenen, deals with many of the same questions as Stephanie Cronin's. However, its case studies deal more explicitly with the gray zone between conventional and clandestine politics during a period of upheaval and revolution that transformed the region into a collection of nation-states. Each book is unique but together they provide us with valuable insights into the processes that brought magnates, hustlers, revolutionaries, and criminals into a common political sphere. As such, these volumes contribute significantly to the historiographical debates about transregional political projects, empire- and nation-building, and the multiplicity of ways that violence and capital accumulation have interacted with one another in the modern context.<sup>1</sup>

Striking in their topical breadth, the case studies in these volumes have significant thematic overlap as well as methodological insight. These books are valuable

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Can 2020; Murray-Miller 2020; O'Sullivan 2016; more specifically on violence, see Robert Crews, *Trafficking in evil? The global arms trade and the politics of disorder*, in Gelvin and Green 2014, 121–142.

additions to the historiography of the Middle East as they each provide insights into the particularities of social relations within the context of state-building efforts (in both imperial and postimperial contexts), illegal behavior, and the broader trajectories of political upheaval that took on different ideological forms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A few of the interventions made in these collections are especially useful to global historians and to historians of the Middle East in particular. These are worth considering prior to discussing the particularities of each individual volume and the thematic overlap between them.

First, many of the articles in these volumes analyze illegality as social behavior within the context of the normative social order prescribed by modern states. Social historians of the British Marxist tradition have demonstrated that social constructs such as banditry and criminality, not to mention punishment, have reflected the material relationship between social groups. More importantly, historians of this tradition have analyzed the historic use of legislative apparatus and bureaucratic institutions to support a prescriptive social order that benefits elite society and upholds specific class relations.<sup>2</sup> Historians of the Middle East have arguably been reticent to apply this sort of material analysis to their case studies in recent years due to the popularity of cultural history and linguistic analysis. The essays in these edited volumes offer refreshingly novel perspectives on cultural institutions by reconsidering the insights and the pitfalls of this older social-history tradition.<sup>3</sup>

Second, these volumes underline the fluid relationship between political movements and ideology. Both state and nonstate actors in many of these case studies appear quite malleable. Since the 1990s, historians of nationalism and sectarianism alike have shown that the political identities of historical actors have been consistent only in their fluidity. The particularities of nationalist and sectarian claims is second in importance to the more general transformation of ethnic and religious identity into something expressed explicitly in political terms. Ussama Makdisi's work on sectarianism in mid-nineteenth-century Lebanon was especially generative in this regard.<sup>4</sup> The transformation of religion and ethnicity into political categories, such histories argue, has come with the emergence of a shared political arena due to transformations in the ruling strategies and the administrative capacity of the modern state.

The historians and social scientists who have contributed to the edited volumes reviewed here have also analyzed ideological movements and the politicization of identity—from pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism to international Communism as well as Macedonian, Turkish, Armenian, and Moroccan nationalism, among others. In doing so, they uncover a tendency among their historical actors to adopt pragmatic political programs rather than to remain consistent with political convictions. Put another way, some of these case studies demonstrate that a political culture required

<sup>2</sup> Linebaugh 2006.

<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that there are no notable examples of material analyses in the late Ottoman and broader Mediterranean context. Recent works argue that legal and cultural institutions are only properly understood in conjunction with the political economy in which they formed. Examples include Barakat 2019; Kostopoulos 2016; Svetla Ianeva, Guild and non-guild labour in the Central Balkans during the nineteenth century, in Papastefanaki and Potamianos 2021, 131–153; Ecchia 2014; and Christos Hadziiosif, The invisible army of Greek labourers, in Papastefanaki and Kabadayı 2020, 113–148.

<sup>4</sup> Makdisi 2000.

certain features for participation from would-be actors including activism, which ranged from formal petitioning to public violence and the creation of sociopolitical entities (whether as formal political parties or informal underground networks). Such patterns of behavior are demonstrable amongst state actors, aspiring reformers, and violent revolutionaries who vied for access to power.

Third, these volumes strike a balance (albeit with varying degrees of success) between detailed local case studies and global economic and geopolitical trends. The rapid transformation of technology and the spread of market relations during the modern era created a political economy that was internationally legible and that defined the modern era as one of global interconnectedness and interdependence. The centrality of the market in modern societies altered social relations in a number of ways most often related to land, labor, and capital. However, as Zachary Lockman and others have pointed out, analyzing the specificity of local and regional institutions is still crucially important for establishing a broader understanding of this process.<sup>5</sup> It is true that the integration of the global economy altered social relations. However, by emphasizing the historical interaction between the local and the global, these edited volumes demonstrate that social relations did not change in a linear or a homogeneous manner in the various societies that became politically and economically “modern.” At the same time, certain experiences—such as rebellion, banditry, and criminal behavior—accompanied the transition to modernity throughout the regions analyzed in these volumes. A number of the contributors analyze these phenomena through the lens of political economy, on the one hand, and cultural analysis, on the other, thereby demonstrating the extent to which modern social and political actors resemble one another in the Middle East, the Caucasus, and North Africa.

Stephanie Cronin, in particular, offers insights into two important aspects of these theoretical discussions. She highlights the historical creation of categories such as bandit, rebel, and criminal while distinguishing between this process and the historiographical discussions surrounding such social phenomena. In one of the two essays written by her in *Crime, Poverty, and Survival in the Middle East and North Africa*, she provides a masterful analysis of the historiography on banditry in the Middle East. In it, she highlights the centrality of Eric Hobsbawm’s conception of the “social bandit”—as a popular hero and a committed supporter of the peasantry—to histories of the region.<sup>6</sup> Some, including Sabri Yetkin (the historian of banditry in the Aegean region), have adopted many of the basic assumptions made by Hobsbawm about the potential populism implicit in the activities of bandits and rebels.<sup>7</sup> Many of the most significant works on (so-called) bandits in the non-West, however, have rejected the premise of this argument as being too romantic. The diversity of social relations across distinct geographies in the modern Middle East and North Africa offers a helpful counterpoint to such romanticism because the actors in question were often motivated by more than social convictions and behaved in ways that were

<sup>5</sup> Lockman 1993, 71–110.

<sup>6</sup> Cronin 2020, 81–104; see also Hobsbawm 1969, 17–30.

<sup>7</sup> Yetkin 1996; in particular Yetkin, like Hobsbawm before him, relies on popular songs and poems written about bandit protagonists, see 180–190.

hardly supportive of the peasantry or the working class(es). A number of the essays in these edited volumes consider socioeconomic factors and cultural institutions in tandem to analyze the dynamics of banditry, crime, and social movements in the modern era. This approach builds on insights from older traditions of social history while also offering useful critiques of their theoretical apparatus.<sup>8</sup>

Both *Age of Rogues* and *Crime, Poverty, and Survival* propose new ways of conceptualizing the transformation of culture and society during the nineteenth century. The two propose different interpretations of this period but are complementary to one another in key ways. Both books suggest that the terminology and rhetoric surrounding illegal behavior and political upheaval be reconsidered both as social experiences (i.e., as reflections of political and socioeconomic hierarchies) and as cultural phenomena (i.e., as reflections of context-specific cultural practices and institutions). Thus, within this theoretical framing, the Iranian phenomenon of *luti*, the Caucasian *abreks*, the *haiduks* and *klephts* of the Balkans, and the broader phenomenon of *eşkiyalık* (banditry) throughout the Ottoman domains emerge neither as romanticized images of the “prepolitical” peasantry nor as expressions of age-old cultural traits within rural, agricultural societies.

A number of the contributors to both volumes present these phenomena instead as cultural institutions within specific socioeconomic contexts thereby contributing to our understanding of upheaval in the Middle East as a long-term process with significant variation. Mattin Biglari, for example, in his chapter of *Crime, Poverty, and Survival*, presents group thievery in the southwestern Iranian province of Fars as part of a broader “culture of raiding” defined by the commercialization of agriculture and the loss of local cultivators’ rights to the land. In doing so, he highlights that raids on landowners and foreign companies had their own internal logic that justified such activities, at least to the raiders. What remains unclear here is the extent to which such raiders enjoyed popular support, especially because they often turned to raiding peasants. In that sense, this article does not respond directly to the questions of populism raised in the aforementioned debates over Hobsbawm’s work.<sup>9</sup> Other essays from these two books provide more explicit analysis of that question.

An example is Jeronim Perović’s analysis of Caucasian banditry (*abrechestvo*) in late imperial Russia and later Soviet-era interpretations of the phenomenon. His chapter in *Age of Rogues* is enlightening in this regard. Perović’s research reveals the extent to which, in spite of a variety of romanticized views of this historical phenomenon, many contemporaries of the infamous *abrek* Zelimkhan attest to the material factors that motivated his banditry and the often arbitrary nature of the violence he (or at least those associated with him) committed in the North Caucasus. This, for Perović,

<sup>8</sup> Karen Barkey, in her frequently cited book *Bandits and Bureaucrats*, demonstrates that the relationship between the Ottoman state and society was a dynamic one that did not reflect the same political realities as seen in Western Europe both during and after the Thirty Years’ War. For Barkey, political power in the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire was a cultural construct that subsumed banditry into a broader political economy with the Ottoman patrimonial system at its core. Barkey 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Mattin Bilgari, A state of “tribal lawlessness”? Rural and urban crimes in Fars Province (c. 1910–1915), in Cronin 2020, 117–134.

indicates a broader “culture of violence” in the region, which acted as a thorn in the side of Russian imperial expansion, while also undermining the stability of social structures for local inhabitants and contributing to a broader “intra-societal struggle.”<sup>10</sup> This demonstrates that bandits and raiders were certainly agents in the history of these late empires and that they were motivated by political and economic factors. However, this by no means indicates that they were necessarily heroes of the peasantry, the village, or the nation.

Both *Age of Rogues* and *Crime, Poverty, and Survival* also tell the story of how illegality became an expanded political domain. They do so from different vantage points but ultimately contribute collectively to a broader understanding of the transformation of state power in the region. Stephanie Cronin, for her part, presents the articles in *Crime, Poverty, and Survival* as an exploration of the relationship between modern governance and the social experience of the *lumpenproletariat*. As such, analyses of institutions ranging from sex work to urban theft, smuggling, and strongman performances, among other phenomena, help to explain the expansion of the state as a political reality in the lives of its citizens while making clear that the state is a bounded social entity within a larger set of cultural institutions not defined by legislation or bureaucracy. This is a critical perspective that seems to bolster Timothy Mitchell’s analysis of the state as a “structural effect,” which relies on “the metaphysical effect of practices” within society. These practices differentiate groups and individuals and create the illusion of an entity ruling society from without.<sup>11</sup>

Cronin et al. provide tangible examples of such structural effects in Middle Eastern history while emphasizing the material basis for the processes of social differentiation that made some social actors into criminals, bandits, or outcasts. Taken together, these books move us closer to an understanding of the “state” as a network of social institutions and cultural practices that have an effect over who gets criminalized, impoverished, and ultimately which groups and individuals survive (both literally and figuratively).

The articles from part one of Cronin’s edited volume are especially revealing in this regard as they show some of the ways that public morality and public health both intersected and shaped the policies of expansionist states in the early-twentieth-century Middle East. Francesca Biancani and Jairan Gahan both show that regulating prostitution became a major concern of the colonial government in British-occupied Egypt and the regime in Pahlavi Iran. The terms of debate in both contexts were remarkably similar and consisted primarily of those who supported regulation versus those who supported complete abolition of all sex work. In both cases, pragmatism resulted in long-standing regulatory institutions such as licensing, quarantining, and sanitization efforts. These efforts were largely unsuccessful in their purported aims to decrease venereal diseases and increase the safety of sex workers but they provide clear examples of the ways that governments in Iran and Egypt subsumed sexual behavior and sexual labor into the administrative realm. Müge Özbek and Hanan Hammad show that pre-World War I Ottoman and interwar Egyptian governments also sought to mitigate the illegal activities of women but were largely unsuccessful

<sup>10</sup> Jeronim Perović, Caucasian banditry in late Imperial Russia: The case of Abrek Zelimkhan, in Öztan and Yenen 2021, 83–119.

<sup>11</sup> Mitchell 1991, 94.

due to short-sighted tactics that ignored common socioeconomic roots of theft and prostitution.<sup>12</sup>

*Age of Rogues* also explores the relationship between state-building, illegality, and social upheaval. However, it is decidedly more micro-historical in terms of the case studies offered. Many of the articles in *Age of Rogues* deal with a specific person or members of a social movement rather than with categorical discussions of social phenomena as such. This is helpful in a number of ways. For one, biographical and prosopographical case studies have the potential to expand our understanding of the limits of the state and the interaction of state-building with specific networks organized along political, commercial, or conspiratorial lines. The book's case studies by Michael Provence and Houri Berberian are especially enlightening in this regard; they each demonstrate that the political convictions of their historical subjects (Rubina Areshian and Ramadan Shallash, respectively) were multifaceted. Their opposition to Ottoman policies was representative of personal concerns like protecting their families, defending their honor, making a living, and expanding their networks. Although these concerns were interwoven with specific ideological programs, they were not perfect reflections of ideological convictions.<sup>13</sup>

The ideological convictions of other historical actors in *Age of Rogues* reflect their pragmatic approaches to political power and to economic opportunity. Ramazan Hakkı Öztan's article on the arms-dealer Naum Tyufekchiev is interesting in this regard. Tyufekchiev, as Öztan points out, enjoys a complicated legacy that does not cohere with dominant narratives about the division between the alleged "traitors" and purported "standard-bearers of nationalist historiographies." Öztan's case study, by shining the spotlight on the global arms trade, provides a useful challenge to top-down accounts of nationalist movements and their intellectual lineage. The profit margins of guns and explosives kept figures like Tyufekchiev in business while radicalizing the politics of Armenians, Macedonians, and Bulgarians, not to mention Bolsheviks and Ottoman Unionists. This pragmatism and business-first approach did not make Tyufekchiev less politically involved, but more so—he even served as a go-between during negotiations between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire after World War I. Meanwhile, he continued to sell explosives to buyers in Anatolia and the Balkans until at least 1922.<sup>14</sup>

Öztan, along with his co-editor Alp Yenen, also helpfully frames the role of ideology as a reflection of "inter-imperial competition" and the subsequent "local economies of competitive violence." To demonstrate this point more clearly, the two co-editors rely on the example of the Internal Macedonia Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) because it relied on public displays of violence to recruit, fundraise, and

<sup>12</sup> Francesca Biancani, Disciplining sex work in colonial Cairo, in Cronin 2020, 21–38; Jairan Gahan, Governing prostitutes between fear and compassion: Tehran's red-light district (1922–1970), in *ibid.*, 39–50; Müge Özbek, "Disorderly women" and the politics of urban space in early twentieth-century Istanbul (1900–1914), in *ibid.*, 51–64; and Hanan Hammad, Disreputable by definition: Respectability and theft by poor women in urban interwar Egypt, in *ibid.*, 65–80.

<sup>13</sup> Houri Berberian, Gendered narratives of transgressive politics: Recovering revolutionary Rubina, in Öztan and Yenen 2021, 53–82; Michael Provence, A man of the frontier: Ramadan Shallash and the making of the post-Ottoman Arab East, in *ibid.*, 333–354.

<sup>14</sup> Öztan, Chemistry of revolution: Naum Tyufekchiev and the trajectories of revolutionary violence in late Ottoman Europe, in *ibid.*, 261–301.

mobilize a following. Eventually this tendency fueled the Ilinden Uprising in 1903 and created a culture of endemic violence in Macedonia. This violence was a challenge to “conventional politics”—a notion that they use to explain its inverse: “transgressive politics”—and a prime example of the paramilitarism and secretive societies associated with “parapolitics.” This terminology, however, as well as the very notion of “rogues,” as an analytical category, remain limited in purchase as will be explained in the following text.

What is most useful about this framing of organizations like the IMRO (and Tyufekchiev in the preceding text) is that it challenges the linear and teleological narratives that often drive nationalist accounts. Yenen and Öztan show that the IMRO and other transgressive political organizations and individuals floated between the practices and institutions of conventional politics, on the one hand, and in the shadows of conspiracy, on the other, thereby changing shape and scope in the process. This is fundamentally an approach that privileges diachronic analysis over historical anachronism. It also reveals the ways that political action and ideological prescription often interact with one another on a two-way street and create specific “cultures of agency,” each with context-specific boundaries and opportunities depending on political economy, cultural institutions, and other factors defined within chronological and geographical boundaries. Understanding political activism as socially conditioned is, of course, nothing new as decades of labor history have demonstrated.<sup>15</sup> However, within discussions of political violence, this sort of diachronic analysis is a welcome intervention.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the studies that demonstrate that political movements were hardly a pure reflection of the pillars of specific ideologies, there are case studies in both of these books as well as in *Subversives and Mavericks* that offer novel insights into the political and economic networks of historical actors. In particular, Khalid Ben-Srhir (in *Subversives and Mavericks*) and Aline Schlaepfer (in *Age of Rogues*) analyze the fascinating lives of Boubeker El-Ghanjaoui (Morocco) and Sayyid Talib al-Naqib (Iraq).<sup>17</sup> The former was key to the development of British-Moroccan relations during the second half of the nineteenth century whereas the latter was a contender for the throne in Iraq after World War I prior to the British decision in favor of King Faysal. Ben Srhir shows that the cameleer-cum-notable El-Ghanjaoui helped expand British political power in North and West Africa by representing British merchants there as a commercial agent.<sup>18</sup> El-Ghanjaoui also instrumentalized British influence to his political and economic advantage in the process.

<sup>15</sup> Recent examples include Nacar 2019; Papastefanaki and Potamianos 2021; and Papastefanaki and Kabadayi 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Yenen and Öztan, *Age of rogues: Transgressive politics at the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire*, in Öztan and Yenen 2021, 3–52.

<sup>17</sup> Khalid Ben-Srhir, *The life of Boubeker El-Ghanjaoui: From a wealthy cameleer to a wealthy notable in precolonial Morocco, 1870–1905*, in Moreau and Schaar 2016, 25–56 and Aline Schlaepfer, *Between ruler and rogue: Sayyid Talib al-Naqib and the British in early twentieth-century Basra*, in Öztan and Yenen 2021, 235–260.

<sup>18</sup> The fact that El-Ghanjaoui was an agent of British merchants in Morocco (a *semsar*) and that he enjoyed the protection of the ‘Alawi Sultanate’s protection makes him akin to the “portfolio capitalists” of Sanjay Subrahmanyam and C. A. Bayly’s famous 1988 study on the mutual permeability of politics and economics in South Asian history. See Subrahmanyam and Bayly 1988.

Talib al-Naqib, in spite of the fact that he was not a commercial agent in the same sense as El-Ghanjaoui, reveals a similar malleability of British policy in the Mesopotamian and South Asian context. In both cases, the authors argue that the distinction between law and lawlessness reflected relationships more than behavior in any objective sense. The importance of these interventions is that they use political economy as an analytical tool to help us rethink the categorical definitions of “bandits,” “rogues,” or “revolutionaries,” rather than trying to redefine them definitively. These cultural categories, as these two studies show, were embedded in social hierarchies and are not enlightening as prescriptive or normative terms.

Many of the articles in *Age of Rogues* (especially those in part two) emphasize that specific communities within the Ottoman domains simultaneously experienced “the transformations of the long nineteenth century” but were still able to rebel against, undermine, or fend off the incursions of the Ottoman state. Anna Vakali demonstrates that Christian rebels in Bosnia during the mid-nineteenth century contested the Ottoman right to collect taxes there. However, a variety of perspectives ensured that no single group obtained proprietary rights to the nation, thereby challenging the idea that Bosnian or Serbian nationalism developed linearly. Toygun Altıntaş argues that Armenian revolutionaries were able to recruit the peasantry in Sasun only after sustained punitive measures designed to repress anti-Ottoman political activities. In both studies, rebels acted out against the impositions of a modernizing state and became invested in debates over a nationalist future. Ironically, the policies of Ottoman state-building contributed to a contraction of state control in both cases.<sup>19</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the Ottoman government’s attempts to delegitimize nationalist movements in the Balkans and in eastern Anatolia led it to demonize rebels in both places as bandits (*eşkiya*). However, İlkay Yılmaz shows that this characterization was also bolstered by appeals to international cooperative measures against anarchism, an ideology and a set of revolutionary tactics that the Ottoman sultanate uncritically applied to Bulgarian, Armenian, and Italian seasonal workers regardless of political affiliation.<sup>20</sup>

*Subversives and Mavericks in the Muslim Mediterranean* deals with many of the same historical issues as the other books. Much like in *Age of Rogues*, the personal networks and biographical trajectories of the historical actors analyzed show that ideological fluidity was a defining feature of social mobility, political survival, and cultural relevance within national and transnational contexts. The definitions for subversive and maverick offered in Odile Moreau’s introduction to the volume, however, lack the theoretical or historical specificity needed to draw broader conclusions about their implications within the historiography of the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>21</sup> That said, her reference to cattle drivers in mid-nineteenth century Texas provides a useful comparative reference. As a contested territory, the decision of settler cattle drivers in Texas to not brand their cattle had significant political and economic implications

<sup>19</sup> Anna Vakali, Conspiracy under trial: Christian brigands, rebels and activists in Bosnia during the Tanzimat, in Öztan and Yenen 2021, 151–177 and Toygun Altıntaş, The abode of sedition: Resistance, repression and revolution in Sasun, 1891–1904, in *ibid.*, 178–207.

<sup>20</sup> İlkay Yılmaz, Conspiracy, international police cooperation and the fight against anarchism in the late Ottoman Empire, 1878–1908, in *ibid.*, 208–234.

<sup>21</sup> Odile Moreau, Introduction: Trajectories of Subversives and Mavericks in the Muslim Mediterranean, in Moreau and Schaar 2016, 1–24.



—namely the appropriation of native lands. In this sense, being a “maverick” in Texas had specific implications within the political economy of “manifest destiny,” as described in a recent monograph on the history of the American West.<sup>22</sup>

Some of the case studies in *Subversives and Mavericks* conform, at least partially, to this conception of a maverick. In particular, Khalid Ben-Srhir’s analysis of the life of Boubeker El-Ghanjaoui, Wilfrid Rollman’s summary of Qa’id al-Raha al-Najim al-Akhsassi’s political career, and Şuhnaz Yılmaz’s reevaluation of the much-debated ideological trajectory of the Ottoman officer and well-known *génocidaire* Enver Pasha all cohere with this definition of mavericks as being utilitarian in their approach to social networks and political allegiances. In the case of the first two, extensive political connections seemed to have taken them from relatively humble origins (a cameleer in El-Ghanjaoui’s case and the descendant of freed slaves in al-Akhsassi’s case) to well-established elites by the end of their days. In Enver Pasha’s case, it may be more accurate to think of him as a failed maverick because his exploits in the late Ottoman period made him a liability within the context of Republican Turkey under the regime of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In spite of his efforts to wrangle together supporters in Central Asia for a pan-Turkic nationalist movement, he died on the battlefield in Turkestan without the political clout he had hoped could project him back into the national limelight in Turkey.<sup>23</sup>

If the use of maverick has limited purchase within the context of this book, the idea of subversives is arguably more applicable to many of its case studies. The studies by Leïla Blili on the intellectual and political lineage of prominent female thinkers in North Africa and Sanaa Makhoulf’s analysis of ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi’s *Umm al-Qura* in particular examine various strains of subversive thought. They show that Nazli-Zeinab Hanem and others criticized the social relations between men and women in North Africa whereas al-Kawakibi argued that Islamic societies should purify themselves of the corrupting influence of contemporary religious leadership and embrace a highly romanticized version of early Islam.<sup>24</sup>

These examples, despite their different ideological trajectories, relied on the same innovations in steam-powered transportation and long-distance communication as the anarchist networks of the eastern Mediterranean analyzed by Ilham Khuri-Makdisi and On Barak elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> On this point, I would add however that a shortcoming of all three books was a limited discussion of the role of technology and the direction of its influence; in other words, were these innovations in transportation and communication critical prerequisites for the kinds of political activism and propaganda discussed in these studies? Did these technologies change the form or also

<sup>22</sup> Specht 2019, 21–66.

<sup>23</sup> Khalid Ben-Srhir, The life of Boubeker El-Ghanjaoui: From a Wealthy cameleer to a wealthy notable in precolonial Morocco, 1870–1905, in Moreau and Schaar 2016, 25–56; Wilfrid Rollman, Servant, officer, and resistance fighter: The autobiography of Qa’id al-Raha al-Najim al-Akhsassi (1867/68–1964), in *ibid.*, 97–112; and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, Revisiting networks and narratives: Enver Pasha’s Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turkic Quest, in *ibid.*, 143–166.

<sup>24</sup> Leïla Blili, Nazli Hanim, Kmar Bayya, and Khiriyya Bin Ayad: Three women living between Istanbul, Cairo, and Tunis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in *ibid.*, 79–96 and Sanaa Makhoulf, Little known roots of Islamism: al-Kawakibi’s *Umm al-Qura*, in *ibid.*, 113–142.

<sup>25</sup> Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, Fin-de-siècle Egypt: A nexus for Mediterranean and global radical networks, in Gelvin and Green 2014, 78–102 and Barak 2013.

the content of political thought and civic engagement? This relationship between technology and politics remains underdeveloped in all three edited volumes.

*Subversives and Mavericks* in particular has a few other shortcomings worth considering in terms of its overall framing. In spite of some thought-provoking individual case studies such as those of Blili and Makhoulf mentioned in the preceding text, the presentation of this volume as “a subaltern history” is problematic.<sup>26</sup> Around half the historical figures presented by the authors enjoyed an elite pedigree and the majority of the case studies deal with historical actors in some way connected to the state apparatus. Although Odile Moreau, Leïla Blili, Sanaa Makhoulf, and Şuhnaz Yılmaz all analyze the various subversive ideas of the historical actors in question, this does not make the figures subalterns, which by Moreau’s definition would require that they be “ordinary people.” Putting the vagueness of this definition to the side, terms like *subaltern* remain relatively meaningless when their conceptual boundaries are not clarified. This is especially problematic in relation to Aref Taher Bey and Enver Pasha, who were representative of the Ottoman government at various stages of their careers and, in the case of Enver Pasha, this includes being implicated in ethnically cleansing the Armenian population of eastern Anatolia during World War I.<sup>27</sup> Arguably, Armenian victims of genocide and the Basmachi fighters that Enver Pasha tried to mobilize in Turkestan were more accurate examples of “ordinary people.” Alain Messaoudi, in his review of the same book, claims that it may be the volume’s “diversity which makes this book appealing.”<sup>28</sup> To a less sympathetic reader, such diversity amongst its historical protagonists only serves to challenge the effective applicability of its theoretical foundations and thematic framework.

A notable exception to the book’s theoretical shortcomings is the article therein by Julia Clancy-Smith that deals with the history of girls’ education in North Africa and the role it played in creating opportunities for subversive activities. In it, she analyzes a few case studies but focuses primarily on the life of Fadhma Amrouche, who was a subaltern figure in more ways than one. Amrouche was doubly out of place as a Muslim girl educated at both Catholic and secular French-language schools and as the daughter of a woman who had been shunned by local society. As a result, she had to find ways of exploiting “small spaces” for social advancement in the context of colonial Tunisia. She was quite successful in doing so and even taught catechism while still a Muslim amongst nuns in Aïth Manegueleth. The fact that Amrouche was out of place within many of the spaces she navigated and that she was disconnected from the conventional political apparatus makes her a more typical subaltern, at least to my mind; this is not the case with most of the other articles in this edited volume. It would be more accurate to consider this a collection of essays that help to make sense of the modes by which Muslims in the Mediterranean engaged in social, political, and geographical mobility across its shores. As such, it contributes significantly to

<sup>26</sup> For a similar perspective to the one I have expressed here, see Juan Cole, *Between the postcolonial and the Middle East: Writing the subaltern in the Arab world*, in Ball and Mattar 2019, 94.

<sup>27</sup> Odile Moreau, Aref Taher Bey: An Ottoman military instructor bridging the Maghreb and the Ottoman Mediterranean, in Moreau and Schaar 2016, 57–78 and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, *Revisiting networks and narratives: Enver Pasha’s Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turkic quest*, in *ibid.*, 143–166.

<sup>28</sup> “Cela étant, c’est peut-être sa diversité qui donne son attrait au livre”: Messaoudi 2018.

historiographical debates over the relationship between empire-/nation-building projects and interregional migrations of people, ideas, and capital.<sup>29</sup>

The other two books also have issues in their framing that are worth mentioning. The concept of rogues in *Age of Rogues* is a useful attempt at confronting the issues with “subaltern” and similar language discussed previously. However, the term remains limited in its purchase given that it blurs the line between conventional and unconventional politics without analyzing the question of structure and agency. Although the authors describe “rogues” as agents within the context of transgressive politics, they don’t sufficiently explain how this makes the term any more useful than that of insurgent, bandit, revolutionary, or the many other terms that they criticize.<sup>30</sup> The aspects of the book that categorize various political actors as opportunists are more insightful. In some cases, this opportunism was explicitly oriented toward a political goal whereas, in other cases, it was more economic in nature. In this way, the opportunism of these actors is perhaps what describes their agency more accurately rather than the concept of rogue, which arguably serves only to describe a politically constituted perception of these actors by others. The most useful intervention of the book then seems not to be its specific terminology but the strength of its case studies, which provide a multifaceted analysis of the political and economic possibilities created during an era of revolution, mass politics, and war.

In like manner, *Crime, Poverty and Survival* frames the experiences of various groups as part of the same socioeconomic process by presenting them as members of the *lumpenproletariat* and the “dangerous classes.” This language, in borrowing from European social history, inherits some of that history’s limitations while also proving itself inadequate to account for the diversity of the case studies presented. As Cronin points out in her introduction, the origin of the concept of the dangerous classes is the urban, industrial environment of western Europe in the 1870s.<sup>31</sup> As such, it seems to me that many of the case studies that deal with the rural environment deserve a slightly different approach. Whereas in the urban setting, the ways in which an underclass could form are intimately linked to the processes of bureaucratization, on the one hand, and limited industrialization, on the other, this was fundamentally different from the rural bandits and smugglers presented in section two of the book. In these cases, the relationship of peasants, tribal groups, and other rural actors to the various colonial and national regimes that sought to control their way of life were more akin to the responses of indigenous populations to invading and/or occupying forces. Perhaps further engagement with settler colonial and colonial studies would have provided worthwhile insights in this regard.<sup>32</sup> This fundamental difference doesn’t take away from the importance of both types of case studies (i.e., rural and urban) but the framing of both cases as a history of the “dangerous classes” doesn’t seem sufficient to account for the uneven experience of state intervention in the lives of rural versus urban subjects. The social concept of class, although crucial for the case studies in Cronin’s edited volume, infers a flattened social experience of

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Gingeras 2019, 211–366; Minawi 2016; Lorenz 2021; and Kayali 2021.


<sup>30</sup> Alp Yenen and Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, *Age of rogues: Transgressive politics at the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire*, in Öztan and Yenen 2021, 4–5.

<sup>31</sup> Stephanie Cronin, *The dangerous classes in the Middle East and North Africa*, in Cronin 2020, 1–9.

<sup>32</sup> See e.g., Wolfe 2012; Ford 2008; Sunderland 2004.

integration into the global political and economic order of the modern era. The variegated social hierarchies across such a vast geographical and cultural space can be obfuscated in the process.

Nevertheless, this and the other edited volumes considered here are not only impressive collections in their own right but they also promote a transimperial and transnational comparative framework that deepens our collective understandings of illegality, political engagement, and state-building in Europe, Africa, and Asia. In short, the thirty-one essays collectively reviewed here offer insights into a number of debates within Middle Eastern and global historiography. They highlight the agency of transgressive historical actors, the actions of whom were often political in more ways than one. They also show that the relationship between state-building in both the imperial and postimperial worlds was intimately linked to the social experience and to political and economic hierarchies throughout the countries of the Mediterranean. As such, ideology was not always the origin point of social upheaval but it certainly became woven into its dynamics throughout the region. Violent action, material factors, and cultural institutions were generative of social and political movements in complex and overlapping ways. The authors of these essays collectively contribute to an up-to-date interpretation of social history (broadly defined), which benefits from decades of cultural analysis without neglecting socioeconomic and material factors in the process.

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