

I haven't been able to put up a third publication because of copyright restrictions, but here's a forthcoming review that relates more closely to the concerns of UBIAS: Time.

On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013).

Émile Durkheim's observation that 'it is the rhythm of social life that is the basis of the category of time' was unusual for a turn-of-the-century European. It might have been less remarkable elsewhere in the world. Inhabitants of Bombay and Beirut, Calcutta and Cairo showed themselves better able to conceptualise multiple temporal frames of reference than did exponents of western modernity. In Vanessa Ogle's words 'Europeans were slow to develop the same imaginary flexibility of abstraction and ability to juggle different times that those at the core of modern globality had displayed all along'.

The historian of Egypt, On Barak, occupies, as does Ogle, the front line of a renewed 'temporal turn' in the humanities and social sciences. This attentiveness to time is perhaps the first real vogue for the topic since the outpouring of classic texts such as Bender & Welbury's *Chronotypes: the Construction of Time* (1991) and Gell's *Anthropology of Time* (1992) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Much of the new interest, including the work of Ogle and Barak, demonstrates just how late and limited was the standardisation of time in colonial and, as Barak calls them, semi-colonial contexts. Many of these studies are being undertaken by global historians and historians of science and technology but this is work that pays little attention to disciplinary boundaries.

Barak's *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* explores the introduction of technologies such as trams, trains, telegraph and the telephone to Egypt between the mid nineteenth century and the mid twentieth. Barak explores how Egyptians experienced the temporal effects of these technologies. He identifies the emergence after 1850 of new binaries between western punctuality and Egyptian slowness. The latter was sometimes conceptualised as an ethically-inspired refusal to rush and sometimes as a failure to 'keep up'. Paradoxically, the more Egyptian life accelerated the more it appeared to slow down: every glitch in the new technologies was seen as characteristic of local shortcomings. In this way the dichotomy between western impatience and Egyptian deliberation became an 'invented tradition' that was written into supposedly timeless cultural and religious identities. The punctuality associated with timetables was given a context in *akhlāq* (Islamic ethics) while clock time was made part of Islamic conviviality and solidarity rather than a Weberian ideal of individual entrepreneurship. The final, and perhaps most original, chapter provides a history of 'delay' in relation to the telephone. It shows that Egyptian uses of this technology were peculiarly gendered: telephones breached divides between public and private, masculine and feminine, in diverse and complex ways.

On Time is a dazzling feat of research, covering sources that cross multiple languages and genres. However, it is an even more impressive feat of conceptualisation. Barak is able to

wield an unusual range of expertise, from the anthropology of time to cultural history, material culture studies and histories of science and technology. Particularly impressive is the way he takes up proposals from theorists such as Bruno Latour in ways that are both readable and enlightening. One example of this is the intrusion of broken objects into Barak's story. Trains crash with camels or are derailed in uncanny circumstances. In a subchapter that echoes Timothy Mitchell's wonderful 'Can the Mosquito Speak?' (*Rule of Experts*, 2002), telegraph cables in the Red Sea are eaten by so-called 'sea termites' that hitched lifts on European global shipping. Technology, in this book, is always breaking. It does not swagger aggressively from imperial metropole to (semi-)colonial periphery but limps precariously in unpredictable directions with unexpected implications. It is in the moments of frustration at technological failure that the temporal expectations of Barak's protagonists are revealed most clearly.

One of this book's most compelling features is the space Barak affords to the voices of those protagonists. Many current works in science studies or transnational technopolitics are arid affairs with little space for human experience. This is not such a book. Barak's painstaking research means that delightfully human stories intrude throughout. The book is therefore a model for how to balance people and concepts, history and theory. It should be required reading for a very wide range of scholars and students. Historians, anthropologists and sociologists of Egypt, of globalization, of time and of technology will find a great deal to inform and intrigue them.

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