Fahad Ahmad Bishara’s ‘A sea of debt’

Posted on May 6, 2021 by Nadeen Dakkak
[vc_row][vc_column][vc_column_text]I suggested reading this short article to the reading group due to my interest in exploring research which seeks to differently conceptualise the Gulf region. Terminologies which echo imperial interests have been the subject of much criticism through the centralisation of its historical connections with South Asia and East Africa and decentralisation of its position within the constructed borders of the Arab world or the so-called Middle East.

Excavating indigenous sources in order to look at historical connections between regions in Asia and Africa is a crucial entry point for questioning and rethinking the borders and national identities that emerged following decolonization, but also for moving beyond Eurocentric knowledge production, and understanding the contributions of critical texts that have emerged from the region throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This includes the writings of Muslim jurists and judges which were not typically perceived as containing theoretical value despite their importance in helping us understand the Indian Ocean world. These

writings demonstrate the dynamic and complex nature of Islamic law which has tended to be seen as static and monolithic.

The article provides a summary of Bishara's doctoral dissertation which became the basis for his book *A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Western Indian Ocean, 1780-1950 (2017).* Our discussion focused on some primary points from Bishara's text, namely obligation as a legal and social phenomenon that enables a micro-understanding of the role of everyday practices and actors in shaping economic life, and that contributes to a macro-understanding of experiences of capitalism in interconnected regions such as cities that lie on the Indian Ocean trade route.

We also discussed the significance in Bishara's work of legal texts by Muslim jurists and judges who offered theorizations that differed from how similar issues were tackled by colonial scholarship.

Reading group event details

Date: 6th May 2021
Title: A Sea of Debt
Chair: Nadeen Dakkak
Bishara's article 'A sea of debt' was discussed at a reading group by Reading Decoloniality members prior to the existence of this publication. For this reason, this post is structured differently to what you may know to be the publication style.

Citation

Bishara, F. 2014. 'A Sea of Debt: Histories of Commerce and Obligation in the Indian Ocean, c. 1850-1940' *Enterprise and Society*, 15(4): 643-654.[/vc_column_text][/vc_column][/vc_row][vc_row][vc_column][vc_separator align="align_left" el_width="50″ css_animation="fadeIn" css=""]

Editor: CLAIRE FRENCH
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