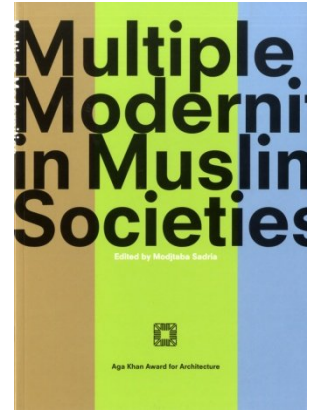


Multiple Modernities in Muslim Societies

Tangible Elements and Abstract Perspectives

Edited by: Modjtaba Sadria

Is there any such thing as modernity in Islamic societies and, if so, what are the identifiable elements of this modernity? Here, a leading group of thinkers and practitioners from diverse theoretical backgrounds pose the question of what it means to be modern - exploring notions of myriad 'multiple modernities' that operate beyond the Western singular definition of modern civilisation.



This volume represents a major new contribution to the debate about modernity; this volume offers new perspectives and ways of considering experiences of modernity in non-Western societies. Questions about which aspects of civilisation might be identified as the tangible elements of modernity are discussed, both within the built environment - the cities, architecture, the material cultural heritage - and within the lived environment - in culture, politics and economics. The interplay between modernism, secularism and religion is explored and the view of the religious state and modernity as mutually exclusive is challenged.

While Muslim societies are chosen as the primary focus, the subject of the discussion has clear relevance to other cultural contexts and contributes to the wider debate on modernity. Rather than pose final solutions to the 'problem' of modernity within Muslim societies, the contributors instead create a space for the opening, questioning and recasting of the debate. This is an important contribution to the fields of Architecture, Cultural Studies, and Middle East and Islamic Studies.

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Preface

Farrokh Derakhshani

As Director of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Derakhshani introduces the work of the Award and its core goal of framing architecture as a social act and responsibility. As the inaugural workshop in the Knowledge Construction series, the aim of the workshop is outlined as a means of addressing the most significant issues and debates relating to architecture in Muslim societies. Derakhshani gives an overview of the layout of the volume, which includes both the papers and the subsequent, rich discussion which formed the essence of the workshop.

Modernities: Re-posing the Issues

[Modjtaba Sadria](#)

Approaches to issues of modernity in Muslim societies – whether the possibility of Muslim modernities is supported or rejected – have generally framed these issues as problems that must be solved. The opening paper discusses possible alternative epistemological approaches to the study of a plurality of modernities, comparing the dominant *problem solving* approach with an alternative *problem-posing* approach. Through its ability to problematise existing orders of knowledge and produce new ways of thinking, it is argued that problem-posing offers a more fruitful method to investigate issues relating to modernities, architecture and Muslim communities.

From Civilisations to Multiple Modernities: The Issue of the Public Sphere

[Armando Salvatore](#)

Salvatore approaches the discussion of the possibility and characteristics of Muslim modernities through the notion of civilization, and asks if we can consider there to be an Islamic modernity as part of the problematic of multiple modernities. Using Habermas's notion of the public sphere and communicative action, and critically assessing modernity in relation to democracy and secularism, it is suggested that there exist fundamental anti-modernities in the experiences of modernity. This essay explores the fundamental tension of Islamic modernity between maintaining their core legacies, while also coping with a hegemonic, Western modernity.

Iranian Islamic Modernities

[Masoud Kamali](#)

The third essay in the volume critiques the tradition of social science meta-narratives that frame modernity as an exclusively western invention, aligned with a linear model of development. The author provides a comprehensive overview of the history of modernization in Iran, examining in particular the changing role of Islam and the relationship between civil society and the state. Kamali argues that the concept of multiple modernities opens the way to generating more socially and historically specific understandings of modernities.

Why Critical Modernism?

[Charles Jencks](#)

The contribution from Jencks discusses modernity from the perspective of critical modernism and its development and expression within art and architecture, with its intrinsic characteristics of skepticism and disenchantment. It is argued that the differences between forms and critiques of modernism to a large extent operate within the same discourse; they are 'prefix-modernities'. This essay questions whether modernity can 'grow up' and move beyond this.

From Critique in Modernity to Critique of Modernity

[Modjtaba Sadria](#)

Looking from a non-political perspective at issues of modernities, Sadria underlines the social recognition of human autonomy as a prerequisite for criticism and self-criticism. The essay argues that criticism is an important tangible element of modernity, and asks how we can understand criticism as an ontological tool. A model for understanding the concept of criticism is proposed that highlights four archetypal forms of criticism, discussed in relation to two key axes: political orientation and the position of the critic. The degree to which these forms of criticism reflect underlying premises of modernity while at the same time contesting them is outlined.

Counter Space of Islamic Modernity

[Homa Farjadi](#)

The essay outlines the difference between the discourses of modernization and modernity and discusses the possibilities for lived spaces that emerge from each. Challenging conventional approaches to architecture and urban planning, the notions of 'counter-design' and the 'open city' are proposed as key ways to negotiate and bring together these two discourses in new forms of spatial modernity. The

author offers a fascinating discussion of both planned and unexpected instances of this spatial modernity in relation to Islamic cities.

A Destructive Vacuum: The Marginalisation of Local Knowledge and Reassertion of Local Identities

[Farid Panjwani](#)

What are the impacts of the privatization and globalization education on local contexts? This essay discusses how increasingly universalised standards of education have led to a dissociation of education – particularly higher education – from local and national contexts. The resulting marginalization of local knowledge and local identities is discussed, as well as the space this creates for the flourishing of Islamist ideology and affiliation. A reconceptualisation of education to address these issues is outlined.

Modernity: Keep Out of Reach of Children

Fatemeh Hosseini-Shakib

This essay warns – from an insider’s perspective – of the continued presence of ethnocentrism in discourses and critiques surrounding modernity/modernization/anti-modernity. The continued presence of homogenized representations of Muslim societies is discussed, particularly in relation to Iran and Islam. The author calls for alternative critiques of modernity that adequately recognize the nuances and diversity of representations in the Muslim world.

Multiple Modernities: A Theoretical Frame

[Masoud Kamali](#)

Furthering the critique of west-centered notions of modernity, Masoud Kamali argues that the legacy of these meta-narratives still exists to a large extent in social science theory in both western universities as well as their counterparts in Muslim societies. The author outlines several theoretical suggestions that challenge these established paradigms, and contribute towards the foundation of a scientific framework that ensures a diversity of perspectives through which to understand modernity in different societies.

Some Reflections on “Tangible Elements of Multiple Modernities”

[Deniz Kandiyoti](#)

Reflecting on the key debates of the conference, Professor Kandiyoti argues that both simple and theoretically complex examples of tangible elements of modernity can be identified, and offers a succinct conceptual distinction between the terms ‘modernization’ and ‘modernity’. The author discusses the possible parameters of a theory of multiple modernities, and the need for it to address the ethical and political dimensions of the diverse manifestations of ‘modernities’.

Multiple Modernities in Contemporary Architecture

Jeremy Melvin

Melvin’s essay provides an overview of the discourse of modernity within the discipline of architecture. The particular characteristics of architecture’s modernities and how they interact with modernity in a traditional sense are discussed. The evolution of the theory of “modernism” and the historically contingent circumstances from which it arose are laid out, as well as the forms of modernity that have been inherent to architecture.

Entangled Modernity: Multiple Architectural Expressions of Global Phenomena: the Late Ottoman Example

[Stefan Weber](#)

The volume concludes with a discussion of the expressions of modernity in the architectural heritage of the Late Ottoman Empire, using the approach of an “entangled modernity”. Following a revisionist trend of historiography, this approach argues for a shared but multiple heritage. Using examples of new forms of housing and the *sug* in Damascus, the author argues that rather than assigning to modernity a set of binding criteria, the dimensions of modernity and social change need to be first understood within local contexts.

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