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*Writing Regionalism into the History of Modernization:
A Review of Nathan Citino's Envisioning the Arab
Future (Book Review)*

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is an excellent example of the kind of contribution that regionalists can make to the field of global history. All of Citino's case studies are global phenomena that had a regional expression. As I argued elsewhere, during the 1950s and 1960s the U.S. supported modernization-promoting despots (I called them "ISI-dictators") not just in the Middle East but also in other areas of the Third World: Syngman Rhee in Korea, Fulgencio Batista in Cuba, and Ramon Megsaysay in the Philippines.⁴⁴⁴ Likewise, American efforts to promote land-reform were a uniform policy in the underdeveloped world. And as Citino himself notes, America tried to create model-villages not just in Jordan but also in Vietnam (with results that were far more catastrophic than they were in Jordan).

Another heretic thought that I want to raise concerns Hammarskjold's proposal for regional cooperation. Was it really a lost opportunity? Citino emphasizes Washington's role in foiling this plan, but what about other Arab countries? Would Saudi-Arabia or the emirates have accepted that scheme? Probably not. State logic maintains that their rulers would want to decide what to do with their oil-profits rather than be committed to giving them away to a regional fund. Citino notes that Hammarskjold, unlike McGhee, saw Egypt-and not Turkey-as the natural leader of the Middle East and indeed, Nasser gave his blessing to Hammarskjold's plan. That was no coincidence. Egyptian diplomacy under Nasser tried to push through the Arab League exactly these kind of ideas for regional cooperation. Thus, in 1961 Egypt tabled a proposal for a full economic union under an Economic Unity Council. This blueprint never materialized because of disagreements between Arab countries rather than Western intervention. Nasser realized that one way to circumvent this obstacle was to undermine conservative Arab regimes and encourage the rise of like-minded movements in the Arab world. Again, the reason that he was unsuccessful was not so much the Eisenhower Doctrine. The endeavor was simply too ambitious and Egypt's resources too meager. This too was a global phenomenon. Other Afro-Asian countries that tried to lead the Third World, or at least the world regions in which they were dominant, were equally unsuccessful. Just like the American policy makers that Citino covers, leaders in China, India, Indonesia, and Yugoslavia tended to view poor countries in too uniform terms and failed to see that the great disparities between them would make it very hard to create a common platform.⁴⁴⁵

The last point I want to raise is the tendency to view the process of development as a cultural construct rather than a material process. There is a lot of useful information about the networks of knowledge and cooperation between American and Arab policymakers, recreated here by Citino's painstaking archival research. And there is also plenty of discussion about how these decision makers imagined modernity and how they hoped to bring it about. However, I would have liked to know more about the profit question: Were these American officials affiliated with corporations that stood to gain from industrial growth in the Middle East? I would make the same argument with regard to speed as a metaphor; a theme that is recurrent in the text. Speed, as Citino points out, was directly related to the revolutionary appearance of air travel on a massive scale. However, air travel is also an industry and I would have liked to know more about the economic transformation of the Middle East that resulted directly from the introduction of air travel. This could have foregrounded a discussion about why it took airports and airline companies so much time to respond to the new challenge posed by international terrorism.

As any writer knows, there is only so much one can do in a given space, be it an article or a book. There will always be people who would want the author to cover this or that topic in greater detail or wonder why the book does not fully subscribe to their particular worldview. Even given my questions

and criticism, it is clear that Nathan Citino has written a very valuable study, one that will be debated by scholars of various disciplines and regional interests. I have benefited greatly from reading it and want to thank the editors of H-Diplo for giving me the opportunity to review it.

Review by Nicole Sackley, University of Richmond

Writing Regionalism into the History of Modernization: A Review of Nathan Citino's Envisioning the Arab Future

In 1900, Methodist minister and Chautauqua movement leader Jess Lyman Hurlbut published a guide to the Holy Land featuring “one hundred stereographed places in Palestine.” A proselytizer for ‘Biblical history,’ Hurlbut imagined the popular nineteenth-century technology of the handheld stereoscope to possess “magical...power to give us a vivid realization of the actuality of the Biblical narrative.” Its illusion of three-dimensional depth through two juxtaposed photographs would enable Americans at home to “stand...in the very presence of Palestine” and “*think* [themselves] into those far-away lands.” Through stereoscopes and accompanying guides, Hulbert and other turn-of-the-twentieth-century Western travelers attempted to construct a Near East fully knowable to Western imperial eyes. Hulbert’s guide superimposed Orientalist tropes and apocryphal Biblical meaning onto street scenes in contemporary Jerusalem, Damascus, and Hebron.¹ Yet the stereoscope, as art historian Jonathan Crary notes, differed from still photography in that “the disjunction between experience and its cause...the composite, synthetic nature of the stereoscopic image could never be fully effaced.”² By the 1920s, the stereoscope had lost out to photography and film as a *techne* of seeing, in part because of its inability to hide the constructed-ness of its virtual reality.

It is precisely this constructed-ness—the awareness of overlap and difference between perspectives set side-by-side—that Nathan J. Citino mines so brilliantly in his new history of modernization in U.S.-Arab Relations between World War II and the 1967 Six-Day War. *Envisioning the Arab Future* offers a history of postwar modernization in “stereoscope vision” that “considers how American development strategies and the superpower rivalry combined with patterns in Arab history” (287, 10). It begins with a critique of U.S. diplomatic historians for depicting development as an American ideology and set of policies and practices gestated within the United States and exported to ‘the Third World’ during the Cold War. While highlighting U.S. power and intellectual assumptions, such an approach, Citino argues, risks re-inscribing the “mental categories of the Cold War” by “portray[ing] developing countries...as sharing underlying similarities based on their economic backwardness and relationship to Cold War politics.” To focus on the third world as an object of historical analysis misses a “diversity and complexity” of different national and regional histories and perspectives (145, 179-180). At the same time, Citino identifies regional lacunae in recent work by international historians who focus on the transnational construction and circulation of development expertise. Like the U.S. ‘export’ narrative, such global histories bring into focus some important features of the history of development, while blurring or effacing others.

Citino’s method is to introduce regionalism—in this case, the regional history of the Middle East—as an “intermediate frame of reference” between the nation and the world.” (6) The method demands

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wide and deep reading in multiple historiographies and archives. *Envisioning the Arab Future* draws on Arab-language sources, from newspapers to memoirs, and research in eighteen archives from Egypt and Lebanon to the United States and Great Britain. Attuned to the latest U.S. scholarship, Citino nonetheless privileges themes in Middle Eastern historiography. The book is organized around seven chapters that explore the cultural meanings of speed and travel, the legacies of Ottoman history, intra-regional ideological and political rivalries, and the challenge of Islamism and Palestinian revolutionaries to Arab socialist and secular nationalist regimes. The chapters overlap temporally, but they all further Citino's larger argument. That is, from the late 1940s through the mid-1960s, Arab and American elites shared assumptions and practices with which they imagined and competed over the future of the Middle East. Those assumptions and practices broke down in a "crisis of modernization" in the late 1960s and early 1970s. (253)

Other reviewers in this roundtable will no doubt address the contributions Citino makes to the history of the twentieth-century Middle East. My aim in what follows is to highlight what Citino offers historians of international development. In Citino's hands, stereoscopic vision becomes a mechanism for decolonizing histories of development. *Envisioning the Arab Future* demonstrates how to place U.S. and third-world actors in the same frame and explore both the shared and differing contexts and political assumptions they brought to their encounters. It explores development as a political vernacular deployed not only in superpower rivalries but intra-regional struggles. It recovers the role of history—both imperial legacies and narratives about the past—in the construction of modernization theory. It reminds diplomatic and development historians of the analytical power of cultural analysis, and it challenges both the timing of, and cultural essentialism with which, many scholars place Islamism in histories of U.S.-Arab relations.

Like most histories of development, *Envisioning the Arab Future* is a history of elites, but one that casts a much wider net to reveal a diverse range of American and Arab modernizers. Along with Egyptian President Gamal Nasser, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and U.S. President John F. Kennedy, Citino peoples his history with Arab diplomats like Khalid al-'Azm (known as the Red Pasha), Communists Salah Madhi Daklah and Nabih Rushaydat, and intellectuals and development project leaders like Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy and Lebanese rural sociologist Afif Tannous. British orientalists, Iraqi military officers, American oil executives, lawyers, and geologists, and Palestinian *fida'iyyin* also figure prominently. Citino even includes Islamists, notably the Egyptian writer Sayyid Qutb, in his pantheon of postwar modernizers.

These Arab and American elites shared experiences and assumptions about the mechanisms of modernization, even as they contended over the purpose of social transformation. Citino dispels notions of Arab isolation by emphasizing the importance of global travel in shaping Arab worldviews. Drawing on the work of Ussama Makdisi, Cemil Aydin, On Barak, and others, Citino emphasizes the long history of interchange between Americans and Arabs and between Arab elites and the world, from American missionary projects (American University in Beirut was founded in 1866) to Arab travel to Europe, the United States, and Asia.¹³ This traffic accelerated after 1945, as new U.S. programs like Fulbright student exchanges and private enterprises such as Arab American Oil Company (ARAMCO), brought thousands of members of the Arab elite to tour or study in the United States. Arabs and Americans also both participated in emerging global circuits of development expertise. Citino is particularly impressive in documenting how Arab experts both drew on and contributed to these global networks, from Bandung to Calcutta, from California's imperial valley to

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West Africa. Arab modernizers also traveled to Poland and the Soviet Union, followed the careers of Cuban leader Fidel Castro and Congo Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, and hosted delegations from China and North Vietnam. Indeed, Citino's account implies that, through non-aligned conferences and visits to the 'Second World' of Eastern Europe, Arab modernizers could more fully claim the label 'cosmopolitan' than their American counterparts.

Citino depicts American and Arab modernizers as sharing a firm faith in the power of a secular elite to engineer social and economic transformation through large-scale development projects. Citino offers, as the paradigmatic example of this shared faith, the friendship of Nasser and the prominent U.S. Arabist William Roe Polk. Nasser and Polk were champions of accelerating economic growth through state-led industrialization, population control, military leadership, and the forging of what Polk termed 'new men' from the furnace of the Egyptian army and planned rural communities. A powerful paternalism—that frequently shaded into disdain for both peasants and an Arab periphery described pejoratively as *mutakhallif* or “retarded, backward, underdeveloped”—undergirded this vision. (26) Both Nasser and Polk viewed the Muslim Brotherhood as a fading remnant of a 'traditional' Arab past. And Nasser, who justified Egypt's military intervention into Yemen as enabling Yemen to break “the shackles of under-development,” was particularly taken by Walt Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth* (236, 246).^[24]

Rostow's theory of historical economic stages and its famous metaphor of economic 'take-off' holds a central place in Citino's history of Arab visions of modernization. Citino argues that the intellectual assumptions that undergirded Rostow's iconic text—about “the interdependence of social, economic, and political change” and the ability to uncover and forge a unilinear path to the future—defined not only U.S. modernization theory but also Arab thought and politics in the years after World War II (18, 54). Citino makes the case that, like Rostow and other American modernizers, Arab elites spoke the language of social 'systems' and imagined modernization as “linear, structural” change wherein transformation in one realm of society had cascading affects throughout “the system.” (45) Moreover, where other historians have connected secular nationalist leaders with American modernizers, Citino reads Arab sources to make the case that, in the postwar Middle East at least, systems thinking extended also to those who rejected secularism. Egypt's Sayiid Qutb, for example, re-formulated Islam as a “system [nizam] superior to either of the superpowers' materialistic prescriptions.” (39) Where Walt Rostow posited a trajectory from “The Traditional Society” to “the Age of High Mass Consumption,” Qutb constructed Islamism that rejected consumption as the measure of modernity.^[25] Here Citino builds on work in Middle Eastern historiography to complicate the binary of tradition and “modernity” to understand development thinking. Instead of accepting Nasser's judgment of Islamism as backward-looking, Citino demonstrates how Islamists, like their secular counterparts, “appropriated the language of postwar modernization” to envision a postwar Arab future different than its past. (288)

If systems thinking could unite a diverse array of elites, it could never bridge intractable divisions about the political aims of modernization. One of Citino's key insights is showing how, in the Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s, development functioned as a discourse and set of practices with which to fight political battles and shore up political legitimacy. Contentions over the aims of modernization could pit U.S. foreign policymakers against Arab leaders, but development could also provide an arena for intra-regional rivalries. “[D]ifferent contemporary agendas could attach to the same development project” (146). Citino offers the East Ghor canal project to resettle Palestinian refugees

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expelled from Israel on newly irrigated land in Jordan as a case in point. Where the Eisenhower administration understood the project as “a public symbol of Jordan’s pro-Western orientation and willingness to deescalate the conflict with Israel,” Jordan’s King Husayn viewed East Ghor to as means to challenge Nasser for leadership of the Arab Middle East by “promoting Jordan as Israel’s leading Arab rival when it came to ‘making the desert bloom’” (164-165). The Kennedy administration failed to see how the Qasim regime in Iraq used connections to the socialist world to promote Iraqi state patriotism or pan-Arab nationalism; the Johnson administration grew frustrated when development projects failed to turn Nasser’s “energies inward” away from the conflict with Israel (227). The stubborn myopia of U.S. policymakers—who, wearing Cold War lenses, were blind to the local, political agendas that Arab modernizers had for development—is a running theme of *Envisioning the Arab Future*.

Yet, as Citino shows, both American and Arab modernizers understood development as a political project and an opportunity to shore up political legitimacy. In a deeply-researched chapter, Citino traces the trajectories of four community projects in Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia to explicate how elite “planners sought validation by appearing to take the wishes of locals into account and by demonstrating respect for their ways of life.” (99) From ARAMCO’s suburban “American Camp” in the Arabian desert to the Egyptian Tahir Province agricultural settlement:

...local knowledge about human and natural environments took on political value. Far from ignoring local knowledge, planners compiled, scrutinized, and brandished it as a defense against charges of paternalism (99).

Here, Citino enters into an historiographic debate about the nature of elite power in development practice. Challenging historian James C. Scott’s widely-cited depiction of state-led development projects as “authoritarian high modernism,” Citino argues that American and Arab modernizers were acutely aware of the political context of their schemes. ARAMCO established an office to “collect and manage local knowledge” and how advocates and detractors of the Tahir settlement argued over its ability to “respect peasants’ ways of life” (122-123). Concern for popular acceptance, Citino writes, led modernizers to attempt to “distinguish...their own, locally focused efforts from what they portrayed as the malign influence of distant and impersonal bureaucracies” (101). In Citino’s depiction, development projects involved not only state power and violence, but also efforts at cultural legitimation. Such efforts at legitimation were more for the benefit of donors (such as the Ford Foundation) and political support from the urban middle class than for the poor, who were the objects of such schemes.

Citino concludes that model village projects had little support from the poor themselves. In the political debates over development, subaltern voices come through, Citino suggests, through acts of resistance, such as the attack on the U.S.-backed Arab Development Society by Palestinian refugees chanting anti-American slogans in 1955 and the attacks against ARAMCO’s American camp during the Arab-Israeli war in 1967. This reader wondered whether such actions were, in fact, less symbolic attacks against these sites of planned modernization than against U.S. imperialism more broadly. But Citino’s efforts to include them are important, nonetheless. They demonstrate the imperative, in the face of limited archival sources, of writing the poor back into histories of development.

One of the larger aims of *Envisioning the Future* is to return history to the history of development.

The history of the Middle East operates in two registers in this book. First, Citino uses his wide-ranging knowledge of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Ottoman and European imperial history to examine the particular regional contexts that shaped modernization efforts in the Middle East after 1945. Second, he documents the shared fascination of American and Arab modernizers with history as a mechanism for political legitimation and as a guide for the future. Arab elites drew on examples from U.S. history to, in Nasser's words, "compensate for the past and catch up to the future" (2). In land reform debates, for example, Egyptian Free Officer Sayed Marai invoked U.S. President Thomas Jefferson's agrarian vision; Murai's opponent Magdi Hasanayn countered with references to industrial farming in California's Durham colony; another Syrian alluded to the "the wild west of America in Gold Rush days." (144-145)

The traffic in historical precedents moved in both directions. While Arab elites drew selectively from U.S. history to advance local agendas, U.S. social scientists, policymakers, and corporate leaders consumed and repackaged the Middle Eastern past to suit Cold War goals. Challenging standard scholarly interpretations of modernization theory as a mix of American liberalism and Parsonian social science, Citino demonstrates the significant role politicized narratives about Ottoman and Egyptian history had in shaping core postwar ideas and assumptions about modernization. Citino depicts how exchanges between American and Arab intellectuals fed U.S. visions of the military as a modernizing social force, the Arab periphery as backward, and of Ottoman land reform as destructive. He identifies British Orientalist H.A.R. Gibb, the political scientist Dankwart Rustow, Arabist William Polk, and Lebanese-American sociologist Afif Tannous as critical importers and translators. Through Arab regional experience and studies with Turkish, Lebanese, and Egyptian scholars, Gibb, Rustow, Polk, and Tannous brought these narratives to central sites for the construction of modernization theory and U.S. policy, notably the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the University of Chicago's Adlai Stevenson Institute of International Affairs (ASIIA), and the U.S. Department of State. Citino's close attention to individual biography and intellectual genealogy reveals the imprint of narratives of Ottoman imperial decline and Kemalist rebirth on such central texts of modernization theory as Daniel Lerner's *Passing of Traditional Society* and Rustow's *Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey*.^[22] Citino's research thus joins other recent historical scholarship on community development and cultural anthropology to depict more diverse roots and branches for social scientific theories of modernization.^[23] At the same time, Citino does not lose sight of asymmetries of power. It was American policymakers and corporate leaders who selected and amplified (through platforms like CFR and ASIIA) those narratives that bolstered their own political and economic agendas in the Middle East, and then rearranged "historical materials...like the *bricoleur*" as political circumstances changed (95). In the case of Turkey, social scientists re-envisioned Atatürk from "the father of the Turkish example to a generic military modernizer" as U.S.-Turkish relations deteriorated over the course of the 1960s (93). Throughout, Citino brings our attention to such examples of modernizers re-scripting the past—both the distant imperial one and their own personal careers as modernizers—to serve their political agendas. The intellectual work of writing the history of development, Citino suggests, requires peeling back the layers of "development mythology" (103).

Adept at diplomatic and intellectual history, Citino is also a keen and creative reader of culture. Other historians, notably Christina Klein, Melani McAlister, and Andrew Rotter, have explored the cultural representations of Asia and the Middle East in the postwar American imagination, but the

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cultural history of development and modernization remains largely unwritten.^[1] Where Klein, McAlister, and Rotter focus on U.S. sources, Citino applies his stereoscopic method to culture by examining how Americans and Arabs found cultural and political meaning in travel, domesticity, speed, and revolution. Citino reads political cartoons, memoirs, court transcripts, and photographs in attempt to show how “American and Arab perceptions of one another [were] mutually constitutive” (9). Gender is an important category of analysis for Citino: He illuminates how ideologies of separate spheres supported American and Arab modernizers’ claims to respect “tradition”; how the Arab Development Society and a new generation of *fida’iyin* offered up competing visions of Palestinian masculinity; and how “gestures of masculine camaraderie” cemented relationships between American and Egyptian elites (241). But it is Citino’s examination of the airplane as a metaphor for the rise and decline postwar modernization that is perhaps his most exciting and innovative re-interpretation of the history of U.S.-Arab relations. Bringing together readings of Arab sources with scholarship by Yoav Di-Capua, Jennifer Van Vleck, and other cultural historians of aviation, Citino makes a compelling case that for “Arabs and Americans alike, fascination with the cutting-edge technologies of speed influenced the dominant descriptions of societal progress” (54).^[2] He shows how Rostow’s famous metaphor of economic ‘take off’ was more than a useful visual analogy; it tapped into cultural connections that associated speed—and particularly the jet airplane—with progress and expertise. The image of take-off, Citino argues, “functioned as a self-evident argument for elite authority, because technical skill was essential to managing a complex system through a dangerous process of transition” (255). It was precisely this symbolic power and claim to legitimacy that Palestinian *fida’iyin* consciously sought to attack through a series of international airline hijackings after 1967. Egypt’s and Syria’s humiliating defeat in the war against Israel—in which they lost most of their combined air force—“eliminated any political value that aerospace may have held for Egypt and other Arab countries as a modern symbol of state authority” (265). The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine capitalized on this political crisis by reversing Rostow’s metaphor, to highlight U.S. underdevelopment of the Middle East and Arab leaders’ complicity in it. The Front understood their guerilla tactics as symbolically meaningful attacks on American and Arab elites’ systems of technocratic oppression.

In a volume filled with impressive research and rich with new interpretations, there is little with which to contend. I do have, however, two questions for Citino. The first is about methodology. Citino makes the case that Americans and Arabs shared a romance, and then subsequent disillusionment, with the image of society as a system. In the first chapter, he uses the appearance of the term ‘system’ in writings of Islamists like Qutb and U.S. social scientists like Daniel Lerner as evidence for a shared thinking in systems (46). In the final chapter, he draws parallels between African-American and student radicals in the United States and *fida’iyin* and Islamists in the Middle East to depict a shared “crisis of modernization” in the late 1960s. In both parts of the world, protestors condemned ‘the system,’ decried state power, and talked a new language of liberation. Each was part of a “more comprehensive break with postwar structuralism” that [Daniel] Rodgers describes as the ‘age of fracture’ in the United States and that [Elizabeth] Kassab labels the second *Nahda* in Arab thought^[3] (274). While appreciating Citino’s wide reading of both U.S. and Middle Eastern histories, the connections here seem to me to rely too much on comparison. Citino’s interpretation here would have been stronger with more evidence of political and intellectual exchange across national borders. On what routes did these ideas circulate? There is some evidence of African-American consumption of Palestinian nationalism. But how did *fida’iyin* and Islamists ingest the global politics of 1968?

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My second question revolves around the place of Israel in Citino's account of the postwar Middle East. One of the aims of *Envisioning the Arab Future* is to "broaden the discussion of postwar Arab history beyond anti-Zionism" and to demonstrate that "U.S. relations with the Arab world encompassed more than just battles over Israel" (289, 5). Citino is right that the centrality of the Arab-Israeli conflict in U.S. diplomatic histories has obscured other important connections between the United States and the Middle East. Yet, in sidelining the state of Israel and the longer history of Zionist activity in Palestine, Citino misses an opportunity to investigate what role Zionist developmentalism played in this story. Did the interwar Zionist ideas and projects, that Jacob Norris traces in *Land of Progress*, filter into Arab modernizers visions of development?¹²¹ How did American images of the Israeli kibbutz and popular narratives about Israel as the 'land of milk and honey' shape how U.S. policymakers approached Arab development projects? My goal here is not to re-center Israel in this history, but a full history of postwar modernization in the Middle East would seem to need to wrestle in some way with both Israeli actors and perceptions of Israel. But that would also require more research, adding to an already full account.

Ultimately, neither of these critiques amount to more than quibbles. More than a regional case study, *Envisioning the Arab Future* is an important and exciting reinterpretation of the history of modernization and postwar international development. It both enhances and undermines the stereoscopes in our histories.