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SUMIT K. MANDAL, *Becoming Arab: Creole Histories and Modern Identity in the Malay World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Pp. 257. $105.00 cloth, $40.99 paper, $33.00 e-book. ISBN 9781107196797.

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Sumit Mandal's elegantly written book has been a long time coming, and it will find a warm welcome with scholars of the Hadrami diaspora of Southeast Asia and the wider Indian Ocean world. Writing a history of a once "creole" community memorialized as having a boundless ability to integrate in royal courts and coastal towns, from the Swahili Coast to the Moluccas, Mandal shifts his more discrete account into a depiction of the early nineteenth century era of shippers and peddlers, the so-called "fathers of boxes" (*aba' al-banakis*) moving their wares from Javanese docks to doorways. Indeed in the interregnum prior to the return of the Dutch to Java after 1816, Arab vessels had once more thronged to the web of ports that had been dominated by the East India Companies and their Chinese compradors. Even if the Dutch and the English would reassert their dominance in the ensuing decades, Mandal tracks an ironic shift by the middle of the century, as relatively constrained Arab mercantilists profited under European rule. Some became large scale businessmen with opportunities for freshly migrated friends and kin alike, obtaining land while networks of trusted middlemen pushed further into the hinterlands, earning reputations among the Dutch as usurers and tricksters of supposedly credulous natives. Yet others became trusted hands, ready to plant their capital as much on Dutch Java as in neighboring British Singapore. Mandal even points to the growth of several Arab-owned limited-liability building companies by the end of the century. These would only proliferate into the 1920s, their names being familiar to anyone with Arab heritage in Indonesia today—whether highborn sayyid or less august shaykh, as they were increasingly divided.

Mandal offers a nuanced treatment in tracking the emerging salience of this distinction into the twentieth century rather than retrospectively casting these categories as primordial. Indeed, he demonstrates how such distinctions became more forcefully asserted as the Dutch colonial state sought to contain and categorize its Muslim subjects with the shift to metropolitan rule, recognizing the utility of appointing spokesmen and captains to serve its own interests. In this process, "Arabs" shifted from being members of a more amorphous and foreign "Moorish" community, and emerged as seemingly natural leaders of Muslim communities, albeit as leaders subject to draconian pass and residence laws applied as they were, to so called "Foreign Orientals" (*Vreemde Oosterlingen*). While information is often scarce before the middle of the nineteenth century, when a great many of the people classified as Arabs could be as much Malay or Javanese as foreign, Mandal tracks the rising leadership that was often, but not exclusively, sayyid. This is not to say that these new economic lords were necessarily of the same lineage of those "Lord Sayyids" of Malay literature. Rather they were an increasingly modern elite, with properties on both sides of the Indian Ocean, and often non-sayyid neighbors who had profited from a share in their claims to Arabness. Yemen's Tarim Valley is, after all, a relatively small social place, much as the Dutch forced Arabs of whatever share of the Prophet's birthright into cramped cantonments in the coastal cities of "their" Indies.

Whereas others have long looked at the histories of the contestation between sayyid and nouveau-riche shaykh, less attention has been paid to how the Dutch managed and racialized the parameters in which they could operate. In this regard, Mandal offers an absorbing study worth comparing with what happened under the British, though he has a curiously bifurcated view of British "scholar merchants" like Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781–1926) and later Dutch "scholar bureaucrats" such as the Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936). And while the latter was indeed erudite and arrogant, especially when pouring scorn on contemporaries like L. W. C. van den Berg (1845–1927), who studied the Arabs of the archipelago in the 1880s, he was perhaps less committed than Mandal suggests to seeing Arabs as inherently superior Muslims, even as he recognized their influence. It is also worth noting that Snouck's Office for Native and Arab Affairs had close relations with the emergent local reformers and non-sayyids who were seeking their own path toward leadership; though he scorned the notion that anything was to be gained by an association with the Sultan of Turkey. To be sure, Mandal does a nice job of

outlining the pull of Istanbul and the caliphate of Abdulhamid II (r. 1876–1909) for many who sought an escape from their invidious classification as Foreign Orientals. Some would found societies and journals, not all of which were necessarily hostile to the Dutch government. Often this depended on the very town in which one was active. The largest Arab center, that of Surabaya in East Java, was in fact the most traditionalist and the locus of physical fights into the 1920s. Still, Arabs were more united than divided by a sense of elevated responsibility for Islam and a longing for a distant homeland, which would survive both the collapse of the caliphate and the birth of Indonesian nationalism into the 1930s.

Becoming Arab has had a long gestation since its formulation as an important dissertation. In some senses it is still talking to what was a very active subfield in the mid-nineties, and is perhaps less intimate than one might like, using few Arabic sources. While Mandal does an excellent job of reading Western sources, we hear few of the voices of Arab men (and certainly women) beyond petitions to the pan-Islamic journals of the Middle East. And if he treats the emergent arguments about marital parity in the 1900s, Mandal had less to offer concerning debates about the Sufi orders and direct participation in party politics. Perhaps more could have been done with the thicket of journals published by the rival factions, particularly after the Great War, as Hadramawt itself became, in effect, a British colony with some sayyid propagandists anxious to stem the tide of reformists, many of whom only knew of their homeland from newspapers and the wistful memories of their grandfathers.

That said, this is certainly a welcome text to be read alongside *The Graves of Tarim* of Engseng Ho—whose thinking on degrees of Arabness has helped guide Mandal—as well as the more recent work of Nico Kaptein on Sayyid Uthman (1822–1914), who served as Snouck Hurgronje's helpmate in a battle against Ottoman propaganda. Mandal is strong in his account of the economic background and enforced transformation of Arabs under colonial rule. He also makes welcome use of images, such as an 1854 watercolor by A. van Pers, whose depiction of a peddler of cloth graces his cover. Still, there is more work to be done to get us closer to such antecedents, and the anonymity of the trader reminds me of an image included in an atlas to accompany Jules Dumont D'Urville's *Voyage au Pôle Sud et dans l'Océanie* of 1846. Plate 150 shows a regional trading vessel floating beside a ruined battlement overlooking the "Malay Quarter" of Semarang, in central Java. Several of the crew are in the process of transferring into a smaller

vessel. With its swivel gun, broad matted sides, and bamboo mast, their ship could belong to any number of people. Yet the full turban on the captain's head suggests that he is an Arab, as much as the Arabic-language flag fluttering from its stern declares that his company is in the business of trade (*lil-tabadala*). The only pity of this image is that a stay obscures the first part, and thus the name of his company, which would have been that of his family, doubtless stretching from one end of the archipelago to the other, and from colonial history to postcolonial present. Still, in *Becoming Arab*, Mandal gets us that much closer to their interconnected worlds of trade, authority, and identity.