

This observation also leads to another major issue with *Saudi Clerics and Shīʿa Islam*, which opts to “examine sectarianism from a political sociological approach” (p. 10). In doing so, Ismail relies on a rather schematic investigation of the historical development of Sunni–Shii polemics. For the classical and pre-modern periods, she deems it sufficient to compare the anti-Shii statements of Mālik b. Anas (d. 796) with those held by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) (p. 53), whose views, in turn, contemporary Saudi ‘*ulamā*’ “largely imitate” (p. 94). In contrasting them with their supposedly more accepting Egyptian colleagues (pp. 49–51), however, Ismail does not consult Rainer Brunner’s landmark study *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* on how al-Azhar has increasingly adopted a more intolerant stance over the last decades. Likewise, there is no reference in the book to scholars who were trained in Saudi Arabia but have gone on to pursue their polemical mission elsewhere, like the Pakistani Iḥsān Ilāhī Zāhīr (d. 1987). Missing is also more historical nuance when discussing the reaction by Saudi ‘*ulamā*’ towards the Iranian Revolution. Given its initial enthusiastic reception among Muslim groups and scholars worldwide, the reader wonders whether Saudi views have indeed simply stayed “consistent” since 1979 (pp. 154–7). According to Ismail, even the political lens which Saudi ‘*ulamā*’ apply to Iran is mostly drawn from Ibn Taymiyya, who saw the Shiis as traitors, intent on harming the Muslim community (p. 134). Does this suggest that Saudi scholars did not at all engage with the deeper implications of Iran’s system of government that put clerics in charge? Ismail’s material on the political views of contemporary ‘*ulamā*’ may perhaps preclude her from probing these questions. It mostly dates from the last ten years and is thus informed by the increasing Shii dominance in Iraq, the fallout of the Arab Spring, the war in Syria, and the rise of the Lebanese Hizbollah as a formidable regional force. These developments stoked fears of a Shii takeover of the region, led to the deployment of Saudi troops to Bahrain, and caused an increase in anti-Shii polemical activity. Finally, the book would have also benefitted from a more theoretically informed approach towards religious polemics. This would have helped to embed accusations of sexual promiscuity against Khomeini, for example, within wider discursive patterns (p. 95). The extensive transliteration is generally consistent with only minor lapses (e.g. ‘Umar b. Khaṭāb instead of correct al-Khaṭṭāb (pp. 44–5), Burijirdī instead of Burūjirdī (p. 50), Muḥsin al-Ḥākīm instead of al-Ḥākīm (p. 180)).

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NADAV SAMIN:

*Of Sand or Soil: Genealogy and Tribal Belonging in Saudi Arabia.* (Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics.) xii, 283 pp. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015. ISBN 978 069116444 1. doi:10.1017/S0041977X16000847

The tribes are back! After being discarded by many anthropologists in the second half of the past century, tribal groups have launched a staggering comeback. Especially in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, they can no longer be neglected or denied. Yes, they may be criticized for what they believe and value, but they represent a large portion of the population. Not as nomads or *badw*, because the word Bedouin is still used as a derogative in the mostly urbanized communities of Arabia, but as members of tribal groups that assume a high-ranking position in

the countries' social hierarchy. In fact, this kind of tribalism has never fully disappeared. Nadav Samin in his excellent book explains what happened to the attribute "tribal" over the past fifty or sixty years in Saudi Arabia. Although the country underwent a dramatic transformation in its economy, lifestyle, education and, to a lesser degree, its religious outlook, the notion of belonging to a tribe remained the backbone of society. Saudis are proud of their tribal heritage, and if they do not have one, they go to great lengths to obtain it because Saudi society still operates on the basis of tribal values. This is one of the book's most important conclusions: that the kingdom is not defined only by Islam and oil, but by its tribal DNA.

Samin explores this valuable lesson alongside the works of one of Saudi Arabia's most renowned tribal historians and scholars Hamad al-Jasir, who dedicated much of his professional life to the unearthing and reconnecting of Saudi Arabia's tribal roots. After presenting a much-needed appreciation of al-Jasir's work, Samin sheds light on what he calls "the dark matter of tribal belonging". Tribalism, although ancient and widespread, has its negative sides, especially when creating hierarchies of belonging. Those who do not belong to one of the noble, recognized tribes, experience hardship, even racism, and in response they create their own hierarchies and try to blend in with the other. This stands in stark contrast to the image of Saudi Arabia as a Muslim country of unity and citizenship. Instead "kinship attachments could be reckoned before attachments to locale and religious orientation" (p. 57).

For much of Saudi Arabia's state history, religious and governmental authorities push hard to denounce, combat or at least co-opt these tribal sentiments, but Samin introduces various Arabian sources arguing for the study and acknowledgement of genealogies reflecting on the ever-existing attachment of Saudi society to tribal heritage. Especially during the pre-oil era of state formation, tribal customs, such as raiding, customary law or communal property, have been suppressed, while in the boom years of the 1970s, with the concurrent economic change and general prosperity, people went back in search of their tribal roots. This included elements from all sectors of society including the ruling family.

During these times, al-Jasir became the uncontested authority in matters of genealogical attestation, and Samin, having access to al-Jasir's archive and letters, reveals the importance of lineal authentication for marital practices. Tribal and in particular patrilineal endogamy has long been viewed as the normative practice in Saudi society, and Samin shows that this practice has become more popular (although with limits) and is now even sanctioned by the authorities. The principle [of lineal compatibility] affirmed the validity of marital status hierarchies in Arab societies (p. 129), and the growing popularity of superior tribal descent started a race towards general authentication of tribal descent, which al-Jasir was often able to provide. On the other hand, incompatibility based on different ethnic, racial or tribal origins would stigmatize the status of the "inferior" family and seriously threaten their desired descent on the social hierarchy.

"Tribal belonging is a central facet of modern Saudi identity" (p. 165), and Samin argues that the Saudi state, despite its earlier opposition, has become a major facilitator of this by building the institutional framework through legal policies and documents (*tabi'iyah* – nationality papers) and favouring *badawi* (formerly nomadic) over *hadari* (settled) citizens. The government's control over the public sector with its inherent paternalism and nepotism has thus facilitated the recent surge in tribalism as well as the emergence of new levels of social fragmentation. Now the segmentation is not only between citizens and foreigners, but also among the Saudi citizenry according to their tribal and regional origins. Samin's book helped us to recognize these new realities and forces us to see Saudi society with new eyes. It shatters many stereotypes abundant among people in the west and the Arab world about the kingdom and leads us to reconsider outdated anthropological myths. The

book is a very challenging read due to the complexity of the author's ducatus, but ultimately an indispensable tool for better understanding Saudi Arabia.

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J.E. PETERSON (ed.):

*The Emergence of the Gulf States: Studies in Modern History.*

xvi, 388 pp. London: Bloomsbury Academic on behalf of Altajir Trust, 2016. £119.99. ISBN 978 1 472587602.

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Increasing academic interest in the history of the Indian Ocean region has generated further discourse on one of its north-western extensions, the Persian Gulf. David Commins, for instance, has authored *The Gulf States: A Modern History* (London, 2012), and Lawrence G. Potter has edited two recent volumes: *The Persian Gulf in History* (New York, 2009) and *The Persian Gulf in Modern Times: People, Ports, and History* (New York, 2014). Several contributors to Potter's two volumes, including Potter himself, Fahad Ahmad Bishara, James Onley and Daniel Potts, have also authored chapters for John Peterson's *The Emergence of the Gulf States: Studies in Modern History*. This edited volume, however, is more focused than Commins's and Potter's works. Largely excluding Iran and Iraq, it concentrates on the six Arab states that came to form the Gulf Cooperation Council: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Peterson also dedicates most space to the period from the eighteenth century until 1971, when the last states gained independence from Britain and "we enter a grey area between history and politics" (p. 6).

Peterson argues that the period between 1800 and 1971 "witnessed the greatest concentration of change in the region's long history" (p. 2). This is in contrast to many accounts that focus on the economic boom resulting from the rise in oil prices after 1973. Peterson writes that the "rapid transformation of the Gulf . . . began well before the impact of oil" (p. 6). His volume thus aims to "lay the essential foundation for understanding the emergence of the six states of the Arab littoral and the fundamental pillars on which their society and politics rest" (p. 2). In order to achieve this ambitious goal, the editor worked with four advisory editors: Bernhard Haykel, Frauke Heard-Bey, Mohammed al-Muqadam and James Piscatori. This group, together with representatives of the Altajir Trust (a charity founded by a former Ambassador of the UAE to Britain), then selected contributors from a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, archaeology, history, linguistics and political science. Most of these authors are based in the USA and Britain, despite the editor's "best efforts" (p. 6) to find historians from the Gulf. Whereas many other edited volumes (including Potter's two books) emerge from a single conference, support from the Altajir Trust allowed for two workshops in 2012 and 2014, in which the authors, the editor and his advisory editors developed the chapters. The result is a high-quality book, whose chapters are interlinked and better integrated into one overarching narrative than the subtitle *Studies in Modern History* might suggest.

The authors gathered by Peterson largely succeed in arguing for a profound transformation of Gulf societies between the late eighteenth and the late twentieth century. Michael Crawford contends that the sectarian tensions that surfaced after the Iranian Revolution in 1979 were the result of longer, differing trends in how Sunnis and Shia tackled clerical authority and its relationship with political power. Fahad Bishara and others note that