

given the significance it deserves. His commentary was part of a very complicated process in the nineteenth century that has extensive ramifications not least in the work of al-Qāsimī, who wrote one of the last traditional type commentaries in the Middle East. Al-Alūsī could have been easily overlooked, since his commentary is not accorded the significance it deserves when compared to al-Manār of the reform Islam movement.

The second exegete I wish to highlight is Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh. To pick a living Shiite commentator (the only living commentator in the selection), instead of a Sunnite, is a brave decision. The committee is banking on our preconceived notions of what to expect from a conservative cleric to undermine our confidence in our own judgements. This is one of the most engaging authors writing in the Middle East. Tafsir, it appears, is one of the preferred genres for Muslim intellectuals. The study notes Faḍl Allāh's concern for the relationship with his Lebanese Christian compatriots which is a central theme to his Quran commentary. This is a feature one hardly expects in Tafsir.

This anthology is the result of a careful process of deliberation and insightful judgements. The meticulousness of the editors is apparent in every aspect of the book. The selections are extensive, the translations read well and are faithful to the Arabic original. The editors' insistence on a complete translation of the excerpts is to be lauded, given the temptation to cut and thus render "modern" the complexity of this form of writing. The anthology states that it has two major aims: to make a representative selection of the Tafsir literature available in English and to show the multiplicity of voices available in this tradition. The editors are modest; the anthology has achieved far more than it has set out to do. It is repositioning Tafsir as a central discipline in Islamic studies, an overdue development, and a major achievement.

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MADAWI AL-RASHEED:

Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious and Media Frontiers.

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Saudi Arabia likes to fly below the radar in its state-to-state diplomacy, and also in its transnational policies: the strong, direct role of the Saudi state and its elites in other societies and economies is often visible only to insiders.

This state of affairs is unfortunately mirrored in the literature about the kingdom: little is written about Saudi diplomacy, but the academy has produced next to nothing about its transnational linkages. *Kingdom without Borders* is therefore an important work: Madawi Al-Rasheed and her contributors set out systematically to analyse transnational influences emanating from the kingdom, focusing on both government-to-society and society-to-society linkages.

Saudi Arabia's global soft power, ideologically and economically, now surpasses that of any other Arab country, and this book illuminates many of its little-known facets. Al-Rasheed's substantial introduction describes the different types of transnational links the kingdom has created over the decades, and analyses their increasingly fragmented constituencies within the Saudi regime. In her account of the seemingly boundless ambition and "expansionism" of the regime, she may be

overstating its aspirations and its capacity to take initiatives: in fact, Saudi leaders have often found themselves on the defensive, and at least until King Abdallah, Saudi elites have frequently – rightly or wrongly – felt cornered regionally and internationally. That said, many defensive moves on their part have resulted in important transnational interventions, which are usefully categorized. After relating the Saudi case to theoretical concepts of “transnationalism” and “cosmopolitanism”, Al-Rasheed briefly alludes to the main driving forces of Saudi Arabia’s transnationalism: massive wealth, sacred geography, and a quest for legitimacy.

Part I deals with transnational politics and opens with a chapter by Nelida Fuccaro discussing frontier formation on the eastern shores of the Arabian Peninsula at the time of Saudi state formation. She aptly analyses the interplay of new concepts of nationality and older primordial categories, accelerated and complicated by a British political agent in Bahrain who promoted the codification of citizenship and boundaries. The social account of the Najdi community in Bahrain as a kind of fifth column of the Saudi regime is nuanced and based on meticulous source work, even if there are minor mistakes in categorizing the tribal genealogy of Saudi merchant families (Bassam and Zamil).

Fawwaz Traboulsi discusses the Saudi–Lebanese connection between 1924 and 1952. Lebanon, according to the author, was the first site of Saudi expansion in the region. The story of Hussein ‘Uwayni, a Lebanese of indistinct background made good in Saudi Arabia who became Prime Minister in the early Lebanese republic is fascinating – not least in how it foreshadows the later, much better known, story of Rafik Hariri, who also famously kept his close links to the Saudi regime and business on return to his homeland. The chapter breaks new ground in a largely untouched area of research: the crucial role of Levantine advisors and entrepreneurs in early Saudi state-building and business expansion.

As‘ad AbuKhalil’s contribution on Saudi Arabia’s role in Lebanon during and after the civil war starts with a generic conceptual introduction which is followed by a plethora of interesting facts about Saudi Arabia’s clients in Lebanon’s domestic conflict, its role in supporting right-wing and Christian groups, and its early cheque book diplomacy. A shorter piece by Roger Hardy on Saudi Arabia and the war on terror provides a compact overview, although it contains few new facts.

Salwa Ismail relates Saudi governance of financial flows and its new promotion of a “reformed”, moderate Islam to the post-9/11 US global security governance strategy. The chapter contains interesting details about US interventions in the Saudi banking system, but does not offer much evidence that Saudi’s promotion of a socially somewhat less restrictive Islam is part of an imperial design or in any way co-ordinated with the US.

Paul Aarts, Roos Meertens and Joris van Duijne describe Saudi–European links on several levels in a chapter fittingly titled “Kingdom with borders”. Based on a sober account of geo-economic facts and shared interests, they analyse the clear limits of Saudi influence in Europe.

Part II deals with the Saudi role in global Islam and is perhaps the most interesting section. Hamadi Redissi’s account of theological refutations of Wahhabism between 1745 and 1932 is meticulous and dense. He ends with perceptive if brief observations on how an initially heterodox movement became integrated as a traditional dogma in the course of the general Salafi “return to the roots” in the early twentieth century.

Saeed Shehabi’s chapter on the role of religious ideology in Saudi expansionism offers a survey of various world regions and is ambitious in scope and hence a little cursory in parts, though it does contain numerous interesting facts. Madawi Al-Rasheed herself has penned a further chapter on the dichotomy of official

Islamic discourse in Saudi Arabia, highlighting the rhetoric of “obedience at home and rebellion abroad”. The descriptive account is concise, although her speculation that jihad in Iraq might be an opportunity to save the House of Saud from immediate collapse seems to overestimate the regime’s fragility.

Drawing on literature on transnational social movements, Roel Meijer examines the ideology of the leader of “Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula”, Yusuf al-Uyairi. He convincingly shows how Uyairi has managed to weld disparate theological and political concepts into a potent rhetoric of grievance and militant mobilization.

Laurent Bonnefoy, in his densely argued chapter on Salafism in Yemen, contends that the different strands of this movement have largely operated according to local interests and agendas, and have adjusted intellectual concepts of Salafism to local political exigencies – quite autonomously from, and sometimes opposed to, Saudi religious organizations, even if Saudi resources have been widely used in Yemen.

Noordhaidi Hasan’s empirically detailed chapter about Saudi-supported Salafism in Indonesia furnishes a contrasting account, contending that there is widespread, direct Saudi influence in Indonesian Salafism. The account of how anti-traditional, globalized Salafi social practices have spread even in rural communities seems strikingly to corroborate Olivier Roy’s “Globalized Islam” hypothesis.

Faisal Devji, in his chapter on the “Arab” in global militant discourse, provides a wide kaleidoscope of ideologies of very different historical provenance, at one point linking Muhammad Iqbal, Nietzsche and Bin Laden. He contends that “Arab” in Al Qaeda discourse has become a moral instead of an ethnic category. The essay is stimulating, but its categories sometimes so abstract that one wonders how revealing the analogies really are.

Eleanor Duomato offers a critique of how Saudi influence in the US Muslim community has been blown out of proportion: whatever Saudi intentions may be, she shows convincingly that the mechanisms for far-flung interventions – propaganda material in English, teaching materials in use, etc. – just did not exist.

The final section of the book deals with the Saudi role in the media. Mai Yamani provides a short polemic on the internal contradictions of Saudi media strategies which, she contends, have the potential to bring the system down in an age of a globalized media culture.

Andrew Hammond, a former Reuters correspondent in Saudi Arabia who had to leave the country after issuing critical reports, provides a fascinating on-the-ground account of the media sector and foreign journalism in the kingdom, of hired hands and patronage structures in the media. His subtle analysis of the implicit pact between pro-Western Saudi “liberals” and the regime is relevant far beyond the realm of media analysis.

Finally Noha Mellor’s chapter discusses the paradox of socially very liberal satellite channels, owned by Saudi notables who are supposedly part of a traditional elite. Their orientation, she argues, is a result of their integration into the international business elite, and in effect reflects Western media hegemony.

The book does not have a tightly unified conceptual framework, and there is no shared theoretical discussion. The question of what exactly is special about Saudi Arabia is never quite addressed. Many of the individual contributions, however, are of high quality, and the book provides so many useful empirical facts and specific hypotheses that readers have ample material from which to draw their own conclusions. At a time when the state of Saudi knowledge, though much better than five years ago, is still lagging behind that of most of its neighbours outside the Arabian Peninsula, “getting out the facts” is what is needed most, and the volume does it well.

Steffen Hertog