

Palestinians in Syria is written in a lucid style with Al-Hardan carefully guiding the reader through each chapter, resulting in a cohesive and accessible text. The book is carefully researched and documented with a robust bibliography that includes sources in French and German to supplement the usual Arabic and English sources. There are detailed endnotes and a comprehensive index. *Palestinians in Syria* will be of great interest to those who study refugees, memory, community building, and the *nakba*.

JUSTIN THOMAS, *Psychological Well-Being in the Gulf States: The New Arabia Felix* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013). Pp. 201. \$68.42 cloth, \$32.00 paper. ISBNs: 9781137287502, 9781137524201

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Psychological Well-Being in the Gulf States is, according to its author Justin Thomas, a synthesis of three decades of existing research on psychological disorders in the Arab Gulf states. Thomas is interested in exploring the effects of the Gulf states' hyperrapid transformation on the psychological well-being of the region's citizens. This is a novel approach to one of the principal recurring questions in the emergent field of Gulf studies: what are the social and political effects of large-scale material change on a region that was until recent memory sparsely populated, largely rural, and tangential to the main action of modern Middle Eastern history?

Thomas's book is grounded in an emergent field of medical literature that looks at the physical effects of the introduction of globalized food production chains and high caloric diets on Gulf populations, the best known of which are notable increases in diabetes and obesity rates. Thomas's premise in *Psychological Well-Being* is that the transformation of Gulf societies must have produced effects beyond the physical, to include the introduction of psychological ailments such as weight, mood, substance, and anxiety disorders.

One such effect, Thomas suggests, is the rise of eating disorders in the Gulf. Once thought culturally specific to the Western world, the author demonstrates that eating disorders such as anorexia are increasingly common in Gulf societies, and that while their appearance may be related to the introduction of Western lifestyles and norms in the Gulf region, their form and scope is shaped by local sociocultural factors. Interestingly, Thomas suggests that such eating disorders may be less psychological novelties than reflections of "changing idioms of distress," where in place of the stomach aches and migraines of earlier generations (what he terms *somatic* reactions), the distress that contemporary Gulf youth experience in the face of rapid social transformation is manifest in psychological ailments.

Thomas's primary argument is that the psychological changes observable in the Gulf fit patterns that are also observable in Western societies, but that the manner in which psychological disorders are expressed in the Gulf, to include their relative intensity, distribution across genders, and other qualities, is conditioned in important yet still opaque ways by the particular sociocultural configuration of Gulf societies. Across categories of psychological ailment, Thomas considers whether the particular culture of the Gulf enhances or diminishes the prevalence of certain disorders in Gulf societies. He wonders, for example, if Gulf Muslim religiosity tempers weight control behavior or substance abuse, as has been known to occur with respect to religious Christians in Western countries. He shows that while levels of depression among youth in the Gulf and in Western countries are comparable, specific segments of Gulf society, such as women in plural marriages, are more likely to experience depressive symptoms.

Thomas acknowledges the speculative nature of many of the linkages he proposes between Western and Gulf psychological outcomes, based as they are largely on extrapolations from Western experiences. Yet he returns repeatedly to this theme, both to underscore the universality of psychological disorders in a globalized world and to highlight the need for a greater sensitivity to their idiomatic expression in divergent sociocultural contexts such as the Gulf region. In his concluding chapter, Thomas appeals to scholars in his field to consider more rigorously how to apply the leading clinical treatment models within the specific social and cultural context of Gulf states, so as to improve mental health outcomes in that region.

Thomas builds his case for revising the approach to clinical interventions in the Gulf region by referencing pertinent historical and religious sources from the Islamic tradition, sources that attest to the distinctive quality of Gulf Muslim culture, he suggests. From a historian's perspective, however, his ambition to affirm linkages between the disciplines of psychology and Islamic studies is largely unsatisfying. It is also unfortunate that Thomas speaks so little about his own research and how it relates to the findings, arguments, and theories he describes or proposes in the volume. These shortcomings aside, Thomas's book is an admirable survey of literature in a field that might otherwise be overlooked within the mainstream of Middle East studies, yet whose implications are no less vital for interpreting an increasingly important region within that field. This book is recommended to psychologists or related social scientists for its insights into psychological and social changes in Gulf societies.