

## Local practices in the Gulf region: Between State Sponsored Development Initiatives and Transnational Relations

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## INTRODUCTION

Sharon Nagy

The discovery and commercial exploitation of petroleum and natural gas at the middle of the twentieth century catalyzed unprecedented changes in the societies in the Arabian Gulf. As the region was increasingly drawn into the global political economy, its economies and populations grew and diversified. Unfortunately, neither popular nor scholarly images of this region kept pace with these developments. Many continued to view the area as backward, tradition-ridden, inhospitable and resistant to change. With recent events drawing world attention once again to the area, we pressed to recognize the realities of the changes. The 2003 war in Iraq revealed the highly developed infrastructure available in the region—sea and airports, communications technology, human resources and effective commercial networks. However undeniable these developments are, they remain enigmatic to many observers. They are not an easy fit with long-held stereotypes of the region. At first glance, the high level of technology, urbanization and transnationalization seems to contradict the relatively conservative social practices and cultural values. Unfortunately, with so little scholarship on social and cultural change in the region, discussions of the Gulf are too often framed within tired dichotomies of traditional/modern or global/local leaving the complex realities of life in the region today unexplored.

The authors of this series offer new insights into standard questions such as the relationships between new technologies, the environment and social practices; state sponsored development as an assertion of power; changing gender practices; and the relationships between education, religion and political action. Based on fieldwork conducted within the last ten years, all of the essays in this series explore the socio-cultural implications of the material and organizational changes of the past few decades. Gardner and Finan analyze the impact of new technologies on traditional desert livelihoods, while the remaining papers look at various forms of social organization in the region's growing cities. One focuses on family structures and the others discuss women's participation in religious, professional and service organizations.

Rizzo and Pandya write about women's organizations in Kuwait and Bahrain respectively. The complementary approaches of these two essays richly illustrate a range of models—organizational and ideological—for women's civic engagement. Women's participation in these organizations is shown to be explicitly linked to both local and global economic and political contexts. Both Gardner and I draw upon a classic theme in anthropology—the relationship between technology, the environment and social practice. Gardner examines the impact of climate prediction technologies on the pastoral nomads whose livelihoods and social organization have long been embedded in the desert environs. Looking at the built rather than the natural environment, my paper explores the relationship

between changing house form and family organization and values. In both cases, state sponsored development projects (climate prediction technologies in Saudi Arabia and housing grants in Qatar) are shown to have the potential to unintentionally impact prevailing social practices and networks. While at the same time both reveal the complexity, efficiency and flexibility of local social networks and practices.

The field-based research of these essays provides the authors and the audience with access to contemporary lived experience not usually drawn into scholarship on this region. Despite a spate of qualitative accounts written by European travelers through the region in the early twentieth century, the literature on the region since mid-twentieth century has been largely focused on policy, security and economy. Relative to other regions of the Middle East and North Africa, very few scholars working in the field based methodologies of ethnography, religious studies, and sociology either conducted or published research on the Gulf States during the late twentieth century. Within the Gulf States, the anthropology of Oman is perhaps the most developed with important contributions by Frederick Barth, Unni Wikan, Dale Eickelman and Dawn Chatty. While other locales have produced only the sporadic and isolated accounts, such as Donald Cole, Soraya Altorki and Eleanor Duomato's work in Saudi Arabia or Anh Nga Longva's in Kuwait. The contributors to this series represent a new generation expanding the depth and reach of ethnographic and sociological field work in the Gulf States. The authors' field sites include Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and each draws upon earlier contributions raising new questions and suggesting new directions for building dialogue within Gulf Studies and Middle East Studies.

## DIVISIONS AMONG WOMEN'S GROUPS: IMPLICATIONS FOR FEMINISM IN KUWAIT

Helen Rizzo\*

Since the 1980s, the increased population of educated, employed, mobile and politically aware women has facilitated the growth of global, national and local women's organizations around the world.<sup>1</sup> It was especially true in the Middle East where urbanization, education and employment opened up opportunities for participating in economic and political life and dramatically changed the occupations and activities of women. New statuses and global networks strengthened women's and democratic organizations in the Middle East by empowering them, adding legitimacy to their existence and giving them access to international organizations. In Kuwait, women's organizations became tied to the international women's movement as well as to regional mobilized groups. The Women's Cultural and Social Society, Kuwait's oldest women's organization, has participated in both the UN Conferences and Pan-Arab Conferences on Women since the mid 1970s.<sup>2</sup> More recently, both secular and Islamist women's groups participated in the Fourth UN Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 even though they did not wholly agree with feminist groups on issues of abortion, gay rights and sexual freedom.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars of international feminism point out that feminist groups and women's organizations concentrate on national or local issues, even as they think more globally as a consequence of networking and participating in international conferences. For example, in Kuwait, the extension of women's political rights became salient nationally again when the emir, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, granted women the right to vote and run for Parliament in 2003 through an edict in May, 1999. Parliament twice rejected the edict in close votes in November 1999. In July 2000 the Constitutional Court rejected four cases that challenged the constitutionality of the ban on women voting in the election law<sup>4</sup>. As of 2004, the parliament is about to consider a new draft bill that will give women both the right to vote and stand as candidates for parliament if approved. In the meantime, Kuwaiti women continue to lobby, organize demonstrations and held mock parliamentary elections during the summer of 2003 in order to obtain formal political rights. However, the results

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of last year's parliamentary election potentially present more difficulties for the women's rights campaign. The liberals, who were actively advocating women's voting rights as part of their parliamentary campaigns, lost almost all of their seats in parliament, being swept by the Islamist revivalists (Associated Press, July 6, 2003). However the BBC correspondent in Dubai, Julia Wheeler, believed that "despite the liberals' poor showing, their campaign for greater women's rights has more chance of success in the new parliament." Furthermore, "many of the new Islamist MPs are predicted to be less opposed to women having political rights than outgoing colleagues" (BBC, July 6, 2003).

Thus, women's groups in Kuwait that favor extending women's rights meet opposition from groups those that do not. In this case, women's professional organizations that support women's political advancement face opposition from several kinds of groups: Islamist and tribal ones, and women's religious and service organizations that view the extension of citizenship as a threat to identities of wives and mothers. As women's movements in the United States and Britain demonstrate, the issues of women's equality and liberation can be divisive. More specifically in the British and American cases, religious beliefs and values differentiate groups of women more than social status or social structural characteristics. The differences in religious beliefs, and in subsequent worldviews, center on what comprises fulfillment for women. For feminists, this often includes marriage, children and family life but extends beyond traditional roles and statuses. It may include participation in public life, economic independence and control over reproduction. For religious women, the statuses of wife and mother are primary to identity and place in the community. Lack of support for some feminists' issues comes from religious women's perception that these issues devalue or threaten their identities.<sup>5</sup>

However in previous research based on interviews with the leaders of Kuwaiti women's organizations, I found that the line between secular and religious women is not clear cut.<sup>6</sup> First, members of Kuwaiti women's associations have similar social class backgrounds, i.e. upper and upper middle class, with advantaged educations, professional occupations and income. Many of these women hold important positions in society with great decision-making power.<sup>7</sup> Second, religion, marriage and family life (often seen as "traditional" concerns of religious women) are important to all of the leaders I interviewed, including secular women. Third, the rights of Kuwaiti women to participate in public life--education, the labor force and civil society (all supposedly "modern", "secular" concerns)--are strongly supported by both secular and religious women leaders, feminist and non-feminists like. Fourth, not only is there support for women's political rights among secular women but there is also growing support from some Islamists. In addition to the support I found from the women leaders of the Islamist Shia Cultural and Social Society, a small number of independent Islamist women, both Sunni and Shia, are speaking out on behalf of women's formal political rights and advocate greater participation in the public sphere and paid labor force.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, I argue that the controversy between sets of women's groups in Kuwait is similar in some ways to that in Britain and the U.S. but also significantly different in others. It is similar in that status differences do not particularly divide women's groups. It differs in that almost all Middle Easterners identify as religious people. Although the members of women's organizations in Kuwait all strongly identify as Muslims, they hold various interpretations of Islamic beliefs and practices that yield different attitudes towards women's identity and roles in the family. Thus, the movement for political rights is both supported and opposed by Muslim women's groups who holding differing beliefs and worldviews within the same religion.

In this paper then, I will examine the extent of and possible reasons for the disagreements over women's political rights in the perceptions of problems, political

behavior and attitudes of 125 active members from ten Kuwaiti women's organizations and committees through a preliminary descriptive analysis. I will then explore the implications of this research for feminist mobilization in the Middle East.

The descriptive analysis will explore the differences between the professional and service organizations in terms of members' perceptions. First, I will compare members' perceptions in terms of the problems that women face that they feel still need to be addressed in Kuwait, such as the lack of rights in politics, divorce and employment. After establishing what the main problems are, I will investigate the differences between service and professional organizations in terms of their members' political participation and attitudes toward obtaining women's formal political rights. I will also examine the differences between the organizations in terms of possible key explanatory factors for differences in political participation and attitudes toward women's rights--Islamic beliefs and practices, perception of status inconsistency, social and political involvement and social background characteristics.

I argue that there are substantive differences between members of service and professional organizations, in their perceptions of problems and areas that need to be improved in Kuwaiti women's lives. Specifically, members of professional associations will perceive the lack of women's political rights as a serious problem that needs to be addressed by Kuwaiti society, while the members of service organizations will not.

Consequently then, I expect that the professional members will be more politically active and more supportive of women obtaining formal political rights than the members of service organizations. Also, I expect that there will be differences between the members of professional and service organizations in terms of key factors associated with their perceptions of women's problems, political participation and attitudes toward women gaining formal political rights--Islamic beliefs and behaviors, perceptions of status inconsistency and political awareness and involvement. I elaborate on these factors below.

### **Factors Associated with Women's Political Behavior and Attitudes**

#### *Islam*

Because Islam is a complex set of beliefs and behavior patterns, there are aspects of Islam that are both compatible with improving the status and rights of women<sup>9</sup> and aspects that are a barrier to increasing women's political rights and participation.<sup>10</sup> Some aspects of Islam's complexity that will be examined here are religious orthodoxy, Islamic revivalism and practices. As Johnstone<sup>11</sup> noted there are multiple aspects of religion such as identification with certain beliefs and acceptance of religious behaviors. More specifically orthodoxy refers to the beliefs of a religion, while religiosity refers to practices and behaviors.<sup>12</sup> In politics, for example, different components of religion often have different effects on political behavior and attitudes. Furthermore, within Islam, there is "pristine" Islam (the ideal) and "traditional" Islam (the practiced)<sup>13</sup> as well as the Islamist movement which have different interpretations regarding women's rights and their place in society.

I argue that Islamic beliefs (orthodoxy) are influenced by several factors including pristine Islam and the Islamic revivalist movement. In regards to pristine Islam, the early teachings of Muhammad and the *Qu'ran* (Chapter 2, verse 187) stated that both sexes were equal under the eyes of God and thus they both needed to be treated with justice and respect.<sup>14</sup> As Middle Eastern feminist scholars<sup>15</sup> have pointed out, Muhammad had a great love and respect for women. More specifically, Muhammad listened and gave weight to women's expressed opinions and ideas. Their opinions and ideas, even those concerning

matters of spiritual and social importance, continued to have weight and were a feature of the Muslim community in the years immediately following the Prophet's death. The most clear evidence of this was the acceptance of women's contributions to the *hadiths*, the stories of the life of Muhammad that are used as a regulation of social conduct and a source from which to derive Islamic law. Muhammad's widows made the largest contributions to the *hadiths*. Moreover, women in Islam are seen as equal partners in sin and equal and independent persons in prayer which puts Muslim scholars in a position to interpret women's status in the *Qu'ran* in a favorable light. Furthermore, there is an unmistakable egalitarianism which runs through the *Qu'ran* which explains why many Muslim women and men insist that Islam is not sexist. They hear and read a different, yet legitimate, message in the sacred texts than the one heard by makers and enforcers of androcentric, traditional Islam. Thus, holding Islamic beliefs influenced by pristine Islam should be associated with greater public participation and support for women's rights.

On the other hand, the rise of the Islamist revivalist movement, in response to the economic and political crises of modernization since the late 1970's, is seen as a barrier to women's rights and political participation. In general across the Middle East, women "...staunchly defend the veil as liberation from a preoccupation with beauty, call for the education of women in order that they be more competent in raising 'committed Muslims,' and argue that '*Shari'a*' [Islamic law] and women's emancipation are compatible. At the same time, they accept that men and women are physiologically and psychologically different and thus require different roles."<sup>16</sup> Thus, the role of women in society became a focal point of the movement. In response to a century of Arab nationalist and feminist ideas about women's rights, the revivalist movement emphasized that women's primary, divinely ordained role was to be mothers and to take care of their families. Furthermore, Islam forbids women to govern or rule from the revivalist point of view. They argue that it was imperative for the Islamic community's survival that women subordinate their needs to those of men and their families. Therefore, I argue that women, who are in agreement with the Islamist interpretations of the role of women in society, will not be politically active or support women's rights to political participation because they see politics as an inappropriate realm for women.

Thus I expect that the members of both types of groups to hold strong Islamic beliefs but that the professional women will be influenced by pristine Islam and will have a more secular view of religion, that religion should be an individual and private affair. On the other hand, I expect that the members of service organizations will be influenced by the Islamist movement and therefore will not want to separate religion from the rest of social life in Kuwaiti society.

Finally, believing in traditional practices and behaviors (religiosity) may not be associated with women's political participation and supportive attitudes for women's rights, because Islamic religiosity is associated with traditional and conservative cultural positions and influenced by traditional Islam which sees women as the weaker, irrational, irresponsible sex who needs to be under the control and protection of men. Therefore I argue that service group members will be more conservative in their religious practices than professional women.

#### *Status Inconsistency*

Second it is also important to understand women's status when examining their mobilization in the Middle East. This research builds on the women and development literature which studied women's status in mainly the economic realms, by examining women's status multidimensionally.<sup>17</sup> In past research, I addressed how social and economic development is a contradictory process especially in its impact on women's status. By

conceptualizing status with multiple dimensions instead of just focusing on economic status alone, I found that development both enhances women's status (in terms of education and health), yet it still excludes women from other important arenas (such as the paid labor force).<sup>18</sup> The result of this process is an inconsistency in women's status, which is especially acute in Kuwait. Women are becoming educated and entering the paid labor force but are still excluded from basic political rights, such as voting and running for parliament.

Lenski<sup>19</sup> has argued that status inconsistency leads to stress within an individual who has significant inconsistencies because that person wants to be treated in respect to his/her higher status while others tend to respond in terms of the lower status. He hypothesizes that the resulting mismatch between expectations and experience leads individuals to want to change the inequities within the social order through involvement in liberal or radical political parties and/or movements.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Blocker and Riedesel<sup>21</sup> argue that experiencing inconsistency objectively is not a sufficient determinant of attitudes or behavior. They argue that individuals' realization of this discrepancy explains attitudes and behaviors. Thus, I argue that the recognition of status inconsistency is an impetus for women to organize, participate and support improving their political position. I further expect that the members of professional associations will be more likely to perceive status inconsistency than members of service organizations and will aim to eliminate gender inequality in their professions and in the society at large.

#### *Political and Social Involvement*

Formal and informal groups are crucial to women's mobilization because they provide avenues to political participation through the resources and networking opportunities they provide for their members. They also provide political experience that can be transferred to other organizations. Neighborhood groups are especially important in the Middle East because they are institutions in which personal networks are maintained and business and politics are conducted.

Besides involvement in neighborhood and voluntary groups, I argue that political awareness, such as following political and public events in the media and in general, is a necessary precondition for political participation as Conge<sup>22</sup> found. At the micro-level, research on social movement participation found that citizens who were aware of political and current events through the media and/or their own observations and experiences were more likely to be politically active, especially if that awareness was connected to troublesome situations, dilemmas or grievances.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, I expect that awareness of political and current events to be associated with greater political participation and that it is professional women who are more politically aware and involved than the members of service groups. In turn, I expect that it will be these professional women, who are involved in politics and more likely to recognize the gender inequality in the political system, who will support women's political rights of voting and representation in Parliament.

#### **Data and Methodology**

I had access to the population of women's organizations and committees in Kuwait at that time, ten groups total during a three-month period, January - March 1998. These included two informal groups and one formal group that operated at the local, neighborhood level and seven larger, more formal organizations with a national scope. These groups also varied by religiosity (secular versus religious organizations) and status (professional versus charitable associations). The leaders of women's organizations were key informants and granted on-site personal, semi-structured interviews which provided data about the background, goals, structure and activities of their organizations and formed the basis of

classifying groups, as well as providing the leaders' insights on women's status, politics and religion. The resulting description was unique to Kuwait but also compatible with Moghadam's and Minkoff's<sup>24</sup> typology of women's organizations in the Middle East and the United States, respectively, which is largely based on organizational goals and strategies. Seven groups studied had service goals, which is the orientation of the most numerous and traditional women's organizations. Two organizations had professional goals. Moghadam notes that such associations are either assemblies of professional women or women's committees of larger professional organizations. A final organization started as a professional association but, over time, it became a sports club. Although Moghadam's classification did not include such groups, they reflect the popular interest in associations for physical activity, which has spread through the populations of developed countries in the last 20 years. I counted the sports club as a third professional organization because of its original goals and its current professional membership. There were between one and three leaders interviewed from each organization. The appendix contains a short description of each group as well as a table that summarizes the goals and activities of professional and service organizations.<sup>25</sup>

Because of the difficulty of acquiring a random sample of women's organization members, the leaders of each organization assisted me in obtaining a nonprobability, snowball sample of active members. Each leader distributed between 10-30 questionnaires to active members and I received between 6-22 surveys from each organization for a sample size of 125 women total. Even though I do not have a representative sample of all members of women's organizations and committees in Kuwait, I was able to survey a majority of the active members of the associations. They completed questionnaires on their perceptions of Kuwaiti women's current problems, social background characteristics, religious beliefs and practices, perceptions of status inconsistencies, political awareness, social and political activities and attitudes toward women's rights. Therefore, the results address the attitudes and behaviors of active members of Kuwaiti women's organizations.

### **Members' Perceptions of Areas of Improvement and Problems that Kuwaiti Women Face**

For the members of these groups, there are substantive differences between the service and professional organizations in their perceptions of problems and areas that need to be improved in Kuwaiti women's lives. Table 1 compares by organizational membership the most important improvements needed. Confirming the hypotheses above, a significant portion of members of professional organizations ranked politics as the first area that needed to be improved. There was more variation among members of service organizations. Most of the members of service organization thought that education was the top ranked area for improvement but a significant number of women from the *Alaamal* Group and the Kuwaiti Women's Voluntary Society for Community Service thought that rights in divorce were important issues that needed to be addressed. Very few of the service members thought that the area of politics needed improvement.

In Table 2, the divide lessened between members of service and professional organizations. The members of professional organizations overwhelmingly thought that lack of rights in politics was the biggest obstacle that Kuwaiti women face currently. However, there were a significant proportion of women from the service organizations, especially among the members of *Bayader al-Salam* and the Kuwaiti Women's Voluntary Society for Community Service, who also thought that the lack of political rights was problematic. Thus, women from both service and professional associations saw the lack of political rights as a significant difficulty. Again, the members of service organizations were not as united in what they perceived as problematic. Members of service groups, who did not perceive the

lack of rights in politics as a problem, mostly thought that the lack of rights in divorce was the biggest obstacle. Also a substantive minority from the Social Reform and Islamic Heritage Societies thought that balancing work and family responsibilities was difficult.

### Differences among Women's Groups

In order to more fully understand the disagreements between service and professional organizations over women's rights, I will now examine if the possible factors associated with political participation and attitudes towards women's citizenship rights differ by type of organization.

#### *Social Background Characteristics*

Table 3 compares the social background characteristics of members by organization. There were very few systematic differences between service and professional organizations, except that the members of the professional organizations tended to be more educated and had fewer children than the members of service organizations. The members of professional organizations tended to have college-educations or more and had between two to three children, while the members of service organizations had high school and associate degrees and families of three to five children.

The Social Reform Society, the Islamic Societies, the Kuwaiti Women Volunteers and the WCSS attracted older members than the other groups. Most of the members were married with the exceptions of the *Al Fatat* Club, which attracted younger, single women, and the Kuwaiti Women Volunteers that had some divorced and widowed members. Most members were urban residents except for the Islamic Heritage Society where all of the members surveyed were from non-urban areas of Kuwait. The groups had mostly either all Sunni or all Shia members. However, the Kuwaiti Women Volunteers, the WCSS, and the *Al Fatat* Club had significant Shia minorities in their predominantly Sunni organizations. Also the WCSS along with the Shia Social and Cultural Group also had large second-class citizen minorities while the rest of the groups overwhelmingly had first class citizens as members. Finally all of the groups were advantaged in terms of the percentage in professional occupations and income. However, the *Alaamal* Group and the Kuwaiti Women Volunteers had the lowest percentage of membership in professional occupations (25-33%) and the Islamic Heritage Society, the Kuwaiti Women Volunteers and the Shia Social and Cultural Group attracted women from families with lower annual incomes. Even though the Islamic revivalist groups' orientation was more populist, they still attracted a privileged membership like the groups in the Federation and the professional organizations.

#### *Religious Beliefs and Practices.*

In examining the second set of factors in Table 4, there were more systematic differences between and among the service and professional organizations. First, all of the members of women's organizations strongly identified with Islamic beliefs. However, as hypothesized, professional group members tended to be more secular in their beliefs with the exception of the Shia Social and Cultural Group members who were more like the service organizations. More specifically, the WCSS and the *Al Fatat* Club did not feel others had to agree with their religious views and they felt that separate politics and religions could be separated in Islam. Even though the members of the WCSS and *Al-Fatat* Club held strong religious beliefs, they tended to want to keep religion a private affair and out of the realm of politics. As one member of the *Al Fatat* Club put it, "I think religion is a very private thing and I love my religion, but I like my privacy with my religion." Furthermore, a member of the Women's Cultural and Social Society thought that politics and religion should definitely be separated "...because I believe that religion is something between you and God.

It doesn't have to do with any other person." She thought that politics had to be secular because it makes laws that apply to everyone regardless of religious affiliation. Thus, as predicted, the members of two professional organizations had a more secular view in that they would like to see politics and religion separated.

On the other hand, the members of the Shia Social and Cultural Group and the service organizations not only held strong religious beliefs but they strongly felt that others should share those beliefs and that religion and politics cannot be separated within Islam. This finding partially supported my hypothesis: members of service organizations were more orthodox in their religious views than members of professional groups. However, the Shia Social and Cultural Group were not more secular in their religious worldviews than service organizations. The Shia Social and Cultural Group is both a professional organization and part of the Islamic revivalist movement which explains its members more orthodox religious beliefs in comparison with the other professional organizations. In an interview with leaders of the Shia Social and Cultural Group, they thought it was the responsibility of every Muslim to teach others about Islam. The world would be a better place if everyone held their religious views because Islam is good for the world. Moreover, leaders thought that separating politics from religion was impossible and a source of all of the problems in the world.

The next section in Table 4 examined two statements about the Islamists' point of view concerning the role of women and women's rights within Islam. The first statement, which examines the Islamists' belief that men and women had different roles in society, differentiated the service from the professional organization members. I found that the members of the professional organizations did not believe that women and men had separate roles in society, which supported the above hypothesis. However, there were differences among the service organization members as well. The members of the Islamic revivalist groups and *Bayader al-Salam* were more supportive of the idea of separate roles for men and women than the Islamic Societies and the Kuwaiti Women Volunteers. This could be due to the former groups' interpretations of appropriate gender roles in Islam. They believed that men and women were created biologically different in order to fulfill distinct roles and duties in society.<sup>26</sup> However, unexpectedly, the Islamic Societies and the Kuwaiti Women Volunteers were more in line with the professional organizations in their disagreement with this statement. They did not believe that Islam dictated separate roles for men and women in society.

The second statement under Islamists' view examined the idea that Islam gives women all the rights they need; therefore, they do not need more rights from Kuwaiti society. This statement differentiated the professional societies from the service ones, as expected, except for the Shia Social and Cultural Group. The members of the other two professional associations, the WCSS and the Al-Fatat Club, disagreed with this statement. They felt that Kuwaiti society was being un-Islamic by denying them political and social rights that are guaranteed to women under Islam. On the other hand, the Islamist Shia Social and Cultural Group along with the service organizations supported the idea that they had all the rights they needed under Islam. One interpretation is that the service groups felt that there was no need to push Kuwaiti society for more rights. However, the members of the Shia Social and Cultural Group support women's rights. Their interpretation of this statement could be that if Kuwaiti society were more Islamic then women would automatically enjoy the rights that were guaranteed to them by the religion.

Finally, in terms of religiosity, the members were asked about their agreement with the following practices: wearing traditional clothing, divorce and polygamy when the first wife cannot have children. First, even though the meanings of women's dress is subject to much debate in the Arab world, in the Kuwaiti context traditional dress refers to the *abaya* (a

black cloak that covers women from head to toe) and the *hijab* (a headscarf worn to cover women's hair) to distinguish this type of dress from Western fashion or European-style clothes favored by urban women from the upper and middle classes. However, to argue that the use of the *abaya* distinguishes urban from non-urban and educated from less-educated Kuwaiti women or that it is a sign of traditionalism is misleading. The *abaya* regained its popularity in the 1980s, especially among young urban women, many of whom were educated and participating in the work force.<sup>27</sup> Instead Longva<sup>28</sup> argues that the *abaya* and headscarf are "...also an integral part of the traditional Islamic discourse on female modesty that linked the covering of hair and bodily shapes with morality, and lack of covering with sexual laxity." Among Kuwaiti women then the debate over dress is not one of traditional versus Western but rather, one over how to define female Kuwaiti identity--either in terms of sexual morality or in terms of participation in public life.<sup>29</sup> Thus, it is the only practice that differentiated the members of service organizations from professional organizations. In general, the members of service organizations preferred traditional clothing, as hypothesized, except for the members of the Kuwaiti Women Volunteers. They were more similar to the members of two of the professional organizations, the WCSS and *Al Fatat* Club, in that they preferred Western clothing. This is in line with the Kuwaiti Women Volunteers' more moderate approach to Islam. Again the members of the Islamist Shia Social Cultural Group were more like the service organizations' members in that they also favored Islamic appearance over Western dress.

Second, the service organizations exhibited unexpected differences in attitudes toward divorce. The Islamic revivalist groups--the Social Reform Society, the Islamic Heritage Society and the *Alaamal* Group--disapproved of divorce more than the organizations that belong to the Federation of Kuwaiti Women's Associations--*Bayader Al Salam*, Islamic Societies and the Kuwaiti Women Volunteers. The members of the Federation were more like the professional organizations in that they saw the necessity of divorce. Finally, all members agreed that a man taking a second wife was NOT acceptable, even in the situation where the first wife cannot have more children.

Next Table 5 displays the last set of factors, perception of women's status and political awareness, which potentially explain differences among the members in their political activity and attitudes towards women obtaining citizenship rights.

#### *Status Inconsistency*

The survey asked the members if they perceived an inconsistency in women's status in Kuwait by asking about discrepancies in opportunities for women. All members agreed that even though there are good opportunities for women in Kuwaiti society, there are areas that need improved. The professional members of the WCSS agreed the most with this statement. This did not support the hypothesis that the professional members overall are more likely to perceive status inconsistency than the service organization members. However, service organization members did not agree on which areas need to be improved. Professional organizations overwhelmingly saw the lack of political rights as a problem that needed to be overcome while the service organizations tended to target divorce and education as areas in need of improvement.

#### *Social and Political Involvement*

In terms of following public and political affairs in the media and in general, the divide between service and professional organizations unexpectedly did not hold up. Instead among the service organizations, there were differences in political awareness between the Islamic revivalist groups and the members of the Federation for Kuwaiti Women's Associations. The Islamic revivalists, who did not see politics as an appropriate place for

women, did not follow political and public affairs as regularly as the Federation members did. The Federation members were very similar to the professional organizations in this regard. These women were very aware, following political and public affairs in the media and in general on a very regular basis.

Finally, Table 5 displays the differences between service and professional members in their political behavior and attitudes toward women gaining political rights which are key to women's mobilization.

#### *Political Participation*

In comparing the political behavior of the women's groups, there was a division between the professional and service organizations, as hypothesized. The members of the professional organizations tended to be more politically involved than the members of the service organizations with the exception of the *Al Fatat* Club. The members of the *Al Fatat* Club were more like the service organizations members in participating politically less often than the members of the WCSS and the Shia Social and Cultural Group.

#### **Attitudes toward Women's Citizenship Rights**

Finally, there was a clear division among the service and professional organizations in their attitudes towards women's citizenship rights. Overwhelmingly, the professional organizations were in support of women obtaining these rights which include the right to vote, the right to run for parliamentary office and the right to hold appointed political offices such as ministers and ambassadors. The members of the professional organizations also thought that obtaining them would improve other areas of women's lives. On the other hand, the service organizations, in general, were not supportive. However among the service organizations, some groups, such as the Social Reform Society, the *Alaamal* Group, *Bayader al Salam* and the Kuwaiti Women Volunteers, favored women's suffrage. These last three groups also supported somewhat the right to hold appointed political office. But the sticking point for all of the service organizations was the right to run for parliamentary office. None of them were enthusiastic about women running as candidates for parliament. There is an interpretation among some Muslims, especially the revivalists that Islam does not allow women to hold positions that would allow them to govern or rule. This could explain why there is support for women voting but little support for women running for parliament.

#### **Conclusions**

The goals of this research was to examine whether or not there were substantive differences between service and professional organizations in terms of their perceptions of women's problems, their political participation and attitudes towards women gaining formal political rights. Members' perceptions of the main problems that Kuwaiti women faced reflected the division between professional and service organizations in their respective goals and activities as articulated by their leaders.<sup>30</sup> The former overwhelmingly saw the lack of political rights as the main problem, while the latter tended to target divorce and education as areas that needed improvement.

Furthermore, there were clear divisions between the service and professional organization members in their levels of political participation and support for women obtaining political rights. The former was more politically active and was much more supportive of women gaining the rights to vote, to participate as candidates in parliamentary elections and to hold appointed political office than the latter. The professional members

also thought that obtaining these political rights would improve other areas of women's lives, while the service members did not support that sentiment.

Thus, even in this small country, there are disagreements and divisions over what should be the goals and strategies in meeting women's interests and needs. Not surprisingly, there is a divide between women's groups over what Molyneux calls practical and strategic gender needs<sup>31</sup>. The more numerous service organizations concentrate on meeting women's practical gender needs through promoting charitable works among their members and in the Kuwaiti population, thus not challenging the gender hierarchy. In particular, they want to assist poor women at home and abroad with food and donations, help women gain skills to earn an income and become a productive member of the labor force, and encourage women to be better wives and mothers through promoting Islamic lifestyles. On the other hand, the professional organizations are more interested in meeting women's strategic gender needs. More specifically, they want to empower women in the economic, political and social realms through lobbying and conscious-raising sessions in order to obtain formal political rights, as well as achieving women's equality in divorce, employment, citizenship rights and access to the welfare state. Thus, women tend to belong to either one of the professional groups or one or more of the service organizations, depending on their priorities in meeting practical or strategic gender needs. This made mobilization for women's political rights across the service/professional divide very difficult.

Furthermore, there were divisions among the professional organizations that prevent them from working together on their respective campaigns for women's rights. Not only did interviews with the leaders reveal that the professional organizations were divided by a history of competition and differences in sect affiliation, but there were differences in their religious worldviews that may prevent them from working together. More specifically, the Shia Social and Cultural Group did not want to separate religion from politics, especially in terms of women's rights. They argued that Islam respects women and that God gave women political rights through the *Qu'ran* and the *Sunnah*. Thus, Kuwaiti society is being un-Islamic by denying women these rights. On the other hand, the members of the WCSS and *Al Fatat* preferred to keep Islam out of the debate on women's rights. In separate interviews with leaders of both groups, they felt that some men misinterpret or misuse Islam in order to justify keeping women out of politics. Instead, the leaders and members preferred to use a more secular argument, that women deserved formal political rights because they were citizens of a democratic society.

This division among the professional women over how to eliminate gender inequality in Kuwaiti society stems from ideological and religious differences between the professional women. In research on the women's movement in the United States, the main ideological divide has been between liberal and radical feminists. Liberal feminists have traditionally emphasized the "equal rights" position, which argues for the similarities between men and women, and they have worked for policies and strategies that treat men and women identically. On the other hand, radical feminists emphasize women's "difference" from men either through biology or socialization. They argue that women are basically different from men in their capacity for nurturing, compassion and cooperation and they are working for policies that address female-specific needs, especially those that address women's role as mothers.<sup>32</sup>

In Kuwait, I would classify two of the professional groups, the WCSS and the *Al-Fatat* Club, as liberal feminist organizations. In terms of their goals and activities, the two groups are seeking women's equality within the existing social structure. They are working towards women's equal access to the male-dominated economic and political realms through gaining legal and economic rights in politics and in the labor force. The third professional group, the Shia Social and Cultural Group, does not take the "liberal equal rights" approach.

Instead, the members take an Islamist position on feminism that has some similarities with radical feminism. Like some radical feminists, the members contend that biological differences between women and men lead women to be better equipped to raise children. Furthermore, they argue that men and women cannot be treated exactly the same. They believe that Islam instructs its followers to treat women and men with justice. They consider the liberal approach (treating everyone exactly the same) will not result in a fair and just society. Instead they maintain that the differences between men and women must be recognized. They contend that men and women have different duties, especially in the home, but they do not claim that this makes men better than women. On the contrary, they do believe in equal rights for women, especially in the public realm. But it can only be achieved through fairness and justice, not through treating men and women identically. They are also similar to radical feminists in that they want to see a fundamental transformation of society. However where radical and Islamist feminists depart is in how society should be changed. The Shia Islamist women maintain that if a “true” Islamic society could be achieved in Kuwait then everyone would benefit by this revolution, including women. I do not see radical feminists in the West advocating an Islamic revolution as a means of transforming patriarchy. Nor do I see the Islamist activists agreeing with many of the demands of radical feminism such as sexual freedom, the right to abortion or with radical feminism’s often critical stance of mainstream religion’s and “fundamentalism’s” role in the maintenance of patriarchy.

Thus, the sociological literature on women’s movement ideology has been very limited in its concentration on the U.S. and Western European movements. However, this is changing. The transnational women’s movement is developing a global feminism that incorporates women’s diversity in race, class, religious and political ideology, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc...<sup>33</sup> As part of this global movement, scholars are now examining the role of religion in feminism. Religious feminists have taken two broad approaches to fighting patriarchy in religion: 1) revision through their critiques of patriarchy and sexism within their religious traditions and attempts to reform these traditions from within and 2) reconstruction which seeks to “‘deconstruct, subvert and reconstruct’ the past and present of a given tradition...unless the traditional notions of gender are removed from people’s understanding of God, women will never share equally with men in the church (or mosque) *or* outside of it.”<sup>34</sup> For example in the last fifteen years, groups of Catholic women and feminists from Latin America have started to criticize the sexism of the church and how that has negatively affected the lives of millions of women in this region. These women are key activists in the International Women’s Health Movement and the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Women’s Health. Both organizations have been very involved in legal reform and in policies that advance women’s empowerment. “Also, feminist members of the organization Catholics for a Free Choice are contributing with alternative interpretations to Catholic teaching on sexuality and abortion from a theological perspective.”<sup>35</sup> During this same period in Muslim countries as well, there is a growing feminist reinterpretation of Islam and its religious texts, the *Qu’ran* and *hadiths*, among reform-oriented Muslim women, known as Islamic feminists or Muslim feminists in the West.<sup>36</sup> Thus religion is an important part of forming feminist identities especially in the developing world.

In Kuwait then, the divide between more secular and Muslim feminists may not be insurmountable. As Rupp and Taylor<sup>37</sup> argue, “feminist disputes take place with a social movement community that, as it evolves, encompasses those who see gender as a major category of analysis, who critique female disadvantage, and who work to improve women’s situations.” They conclude, “...in every group, in every place, at every time, the meaning of ‘feminism’ is worked out in the course of being and doing”. Since both secular and religious feminists strongly identify as Muslims in Kuwait, they can justify in their discourse and in debates that women having a voice in political life is also Islamic. Islamic beliefs and their

desire for women's empowerment should be used to unite the members of women's professional organizations. The resources that women activists have give the struggle for women's rights in Kuwait a reason to be optimistic. There is a core of educated, religious, organized, politically active women that can use Islam as an aid instead of a barrier in the fight against patriarchy. These particular women see the inequality in the political system and in the society at large and are working towards achieving women's political rights to improve women's lives overall.

## TABLES

### SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

### PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

IMPORTANT IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED	Social Reform Society	Islamic Heritage Society	Alaamal Group (Shia)	Bayader Al Salam	Islamic Societies	Kuwaiti Women Volunteers	Women's Cultural and Social Society	Al Fatah Club	Social and Cultural Group (Shia)
Rights in Divorce	12.50%	0%	68.20%	6.30%	20%	50%	20%	12.50%	0%
Making Family Decisions	12.50%	0%	9.10%	18.80%	20%	0%	25%	12.50%	0%
Politics	0%	16.70%	0%	6.30%	0%	25%	40%	43.80%	66.70%
Education	56.30%	50%	13.60%	56.30%	40%	12.50%	10%	25%	33.30%
Employment	12.50%	33.30%	9.10%	12.50%	0%	12.50%	5%	0%	0%
Other	6.30%	0%	0%	0%	6.70%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Did not rank	0%	0%	0%	0%	13.30%	0%	0%	6.30%	0%
Sample Size	16	6	22	16	15	8	20	16	6

TABLE 1: MOST IMPORTANT IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED IN WOMEN'S LIVES BY ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

### SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

### PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

BIGGEST PROBLEMS FACING KUWAITI WOMEN TODAY	Social Reform Society	Islamic Heritage Society	Alaamal Group (Shia)	Bayader Al Salam	Islamic Societies	Kuwaiti Women Volunteers	Women's Cultural and Social Society	Al Fatah Club	Social and Cultural Group (Shia)
Lack of Rights in Divorce	31.30%	50%	59.10%	25%	46.70%	50%	15%	37.50%	16.70%
Lack of Rights in Politics	12.50%	0%	22.70%	37.50%	20%	50%	70%	50%	66.70%
Lack of Decision Making Power in the Home	0%	0%	13.60%	0%	0%	0%	10%	6.30%	0%
Balancing Work and Family Responsibilities	37.50%	50%	4.50%	25%	20%	0%	0%	0%	16.70%
Lack of Rights in the Workplace	6.30%	0%	0%	12.50%	0%	0%	5%	6.30%	0%
Other	6.30%	0%	0%	0%	6.70%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Did not rank	6.30%	0%	0%	0%	6.70%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sample Size	16	6	22	16	15	8	20	16	6

**TABLE 2: BIGGEST PROBLEMS FACING KUWAITI WOMEN TODAY BY ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP**

SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS	Social Reform Society	Islamic Heritage Society	Alaamal Group (Shia)	Bayader Al Salam	Islamic Societies	Kuwaiti Women Volunteers	Women's Cultural and Social Society	Al Fatat Club	Social and Cultural Group (Shia)
Age	40	33	35.1	36	50.53	47.75	44.2	33.28	33.67
Percent Married	93.75	50	77.27	62.5	60	37.5	85	37.5	66.67
Number of Children	4.63	2.83	2.41	2.94	3.33	2.63	2.5	2.13	2.33
Percent First Class Citizens	93.75	83.33	90.91	87.5	93.33	100	75	93.75	66.67
Percent Urban Residents	68.75	0	100	93.75	100	87.5	100	75	83.33
Percent Sunni	100	100	0	93.75	100	75	85	81.25	0
Education	6.69	6.17	5.77	6.94	6.2	6.13	7.15	6.63	7
Percent in Professional Occupations	50	66.67	33.33	81.25	58.33	25	70	53.33	50
Family Income (US \$)	63,278.58	36,500.01	63,564.72	61,133.34	77,040.00	45,699.99	76,585.71	58,158.00	39,144.00
Sample Size	16	6	22	16	15	8	20	16	6

**TABLE 3: BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS BY ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP**

SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES	Social Reform Society	Islamic Heritage Society	Alaam al Group (Shia)	Bayader Al Salam	Islamic Societies	Kuwaiti Women Volunteers	Women's Cultural and Social Society	Al Fatat Club	Social and Cultural Group (Shia)
<b>ORTHODOXY:</b>									
Islamic Orthodoxy Scale	3.71	3.64	3.67	3.5	3.42	3.44	3.01	3.31	3.69
I have a duty to help those who are confused about religion.	3.81	3.5	3.77	3.63	3.5	3.38	3.05	3.47	3.83
Even though it may create some unpleasant situations, it is important to help people become enlightened about religion.	3.44	3.67	3.68	3.25	3.29	3.63	3.05	3.25	3.33
I believe that the world would be a better place if more people held the views about religion that I hold.	3.63	3.83	3.82	3.4	3.53	3.25	2.85	3.19	4
I believe that the world's problems are seriously aggravated by the fact that so many people are misguided about religion.	3.94	3.67	3.68	3.63	3.61	3.5	3.48	3.56	3
I believe that all Muslims must work together to face the Western cultural challenge.	3.78	3.67	3.86	3.63	3.41	3.25	3.13	3.44	4
I believe that Islam does not separate politics and religion.	3.69	3.5	3.19	3.5	3.17	3.63	2.5	2.94	4
<b>ISLAMISTS' VIEW:</b>									
Islam teaches that men and women have different roles in society.	2.31	2.33	2.41	2.44	1.93	1.75	1.2	2.06	1.67
Islam gives women all the rights they need, therefore they do not need more rights from Kuwaiti society.	3.19	3.17	3.73	3.13	3.53	3	2.05	2.38	3.5
<b>RELIGIOSITY:</b>									
Traditional clothing is preferable to Western clothing.	3.13	3.67	3.68	3.06	3	1.63	2.25	2.44	3.17
Disapprove of divorce.	2.25	2.5	3.14	1.94	1.68	1.13	1.95	1.75	2.17
Second wife is okay if first cannot have children.	2	1.83	1.09	1.69	2.33	1.25	1.55	2.13	1.33
Sample Size	16	6	22	16	15	8	20	16	6

TABLE 4: RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES BY ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

VARIABLES	Social Reform Society	Islamic Heritage Society	Alaamal Group (Shia)	Bayader Al Salam	Islamic Societies	Kuwaiti Women Volunteers	Women's Cultural and Social Society	Al Fatah Club	Social and Cultural Group (Shia)
<b>PERCEPTION OF WOMEN'S STATUS:</b>									
Even though there are good opportunities for me as a woman in Kuwaiti society, there are areas that need to be improved.	3.41	3	3.64	3.31	3.36	3.28	3.8	3.34	3.17
<b>POLITICAL AWARENESS:</b>									
Political awareness scale.	3.61	2.96	2.93	4.09	4.33	4.47	4.53	4.38	4.38
Read about public and political affairs in newspapers.	4.06	2.67	3.24	4.25	4.73	4.75	4.7	4.69	4.5
Read about public and political affairs in journals.	3.19	2.83	3.05	3.44	3.87	4.25	4.1	4.13	4
Follow public and political affairs from radio and TV stations.	3.56	3	2.82	4.19	4.2	4.13	4.65	4.31	4.5
Follow public and political affairs in general.	3.63	3.33	2.64	4.5	4.53	4.75	4.65	4.38	4.5
<b>POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:</b>									
Political participation scale.	2.15	2.13	1.52	2.38	2.15	2.3	2.8	2.31	3.23
Worked on political campaigns.	1.5	1.5	1.18	1.75	1.52	1.63	2.1	1.63	2.5
Influence the vote choice of others.	1.5	2	1.27	1.56	1.38	2.13	2.13	1.38	2.67
Discuss political issues with family.	2.75	2.5	1.95	3.13	3.07	3.13	3.6	3.44	3.67
Discuss political issues with friends.	2.75	2.67	1.99	3.06	3	2.88	3.49	3.19	3.83
Worked with others to influence policy makers.	2.25	2	1.18	2.38	1.8	1.75	2.65	1.94	3.5
<b>WOMEN'S CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS:</b>									

Women's citizenship rights scale.	2.3	1.96	2.66	3.12	2.48	3	3.76	3.34	3.71
I am supportive of women obtaining the right to vote.	2.88	1.83	2.91	3.31	2.47	3	3.8	3.56	4
I am supportive of giving women the right to run in parliamentary elections.	1.63	1.83	2.27	2.88	2.13	2.25	3.7	3	3.83
I believe that women should be able to hold political offices such as minister and ambassador.	2.38	2	2.73	3.25	2.8	3.5	3.8	3.44	3.33
Obtaining increased political rights will improve other areas of women's lives.	2.31	2.17	2.73	3.06	2.54	3.25	3.75	3.38	3.67
Sample Size	16	6	22	16	15	8	20	16	6

**TABLE 5: PERCEPTION OF WOMEN'S STATUS, POLITICAL AWARENESS, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN'S CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS BY ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP**

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Valentine Moghadam, "Transnational Feminist Networks: Collective Action in an Era of Globalization," *International Sociology* 15 (2000): 57-85.

<sup>2</sup> Haya al-Mughni, *Women in Kuwait: The Politics of Gender* (London: Saqi Books, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Haya al-Mughni, "From Gender Equality to Female Subjugation: The Changing Agenda of Women's Groups in Kuwait", in *Organizing Women: Formal and Informal Women's Groups in the Middle East*, ed. Dawn Chatty and Annika Rabo (New York: Berg, 1997), 195-209.

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Watch World Report 2001* (New York, NY: Human Rights Watch, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Somerville, "Social Movement Theory, Women and the Question of Interests," *Sociology* 31 (1997): 673-695.

<sup>6</sup> Helen Rizzo, "Even Roses Have Thorns: Women's Organizations and the Struggle for Enfranchisement in Post-War Kuwait," *Social Development Issues* 24 (2002): 41-49.

<sup>7</sup> Haya al-Mughni, "Women's Movements and the Autonomy of Civil Society in Kuwait", in *Feminist Approaches to Social Movements, Community, and Power, Volume One: Conscious Acts and the Politics of Social Change*, ed. R.L. Teske & M.A. Tetreault (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 170-187.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Fatima Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory* (London: Zed Books, 1996); Katherine Meyer, Yousef Ali and Sheri Locklear, "Political Participation of Men and Women in Postwar Kuwait," *Research in Political Sociology* 8 (1998): 57-80; Katherine Meyer, Helen Rizzo and Yousef Ali, "Islam and the Extension of Citizenship Rights to Women in Kuwait," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998): 131-144.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave", in *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, ed. Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 3-25; Samuel P Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993): 22-49.

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- <sup>11</sup> R Johnstone, *Religion in Society: A Sociology of Religion*. 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1992).
- <sup>12</sup> Michael O. Emerson, "Through Tinted Glasses: Religion, World View, and Abortion Attitudes," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35 (1996): 41-55.
- <sup>13</sup> "Pristine Islam can be defined as non-canonized Islam which was practiced under the Prophet Muhammad (610-632) and, partially under the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs (632-661)." On the other hand, "One may define traditional Islam, in its broadest context, as canonized Islam." Traditional Islam is the institutionalization of the religion that occurred over the centuries after Muhammad and the first Caliphs. See Hamid R. Kusha, "Minority Status of Women in Islam: A Debate between Traditional and Modern Islam," *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 11 (1990): 58-72, especially pp. 60-63.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Haleh Afshar, *Why Fundamentalism? Iranian Women and their Support of Islam* (York: University of York, 1994); Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*; Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*.
- <sup>16</sup> Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 147.
- <sup>17</sup> Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970); Karen Bradley and Diana Khor, "Toward an Integration of Theory and Research on the Status of Women," *Gender & Society* 7 (1993): 347-78; Valentine M. Moghadam, "Development and Women's Emancipation: Is There a Connection?" *Development and Change* 23 (1992): 215-255.
- <sup>18</sup> Helen Rizzo, *The Distribution of Wealth, Investment in Social Programs and the Status of Women in the World System* (Masters Thesis: The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, 1995).
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- <sup>24</sup> Valentine M. Moghadam, *Women, Work and Economic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998); Debra C. Minkoff, "From Service Provision to Institutional Advocacy: The Shifting Legitimacy of Organizational Forms," *Social Forces* 72 (1994): 943-969.
- <sup>25</sup> See also Rizzo, "Even Roses Have Thorns"; al-Mughni, *Women in Kuwait: The Politics of Gender*; al-Mughni, "From Gender Equality to Female Subjugation" for a fuller description of these organizations.
- <sup>26</sup> al-Mughni, *Women in Kuwait: The Politics of Gender*.
- <sup>27</sup> Anh Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion and Society in Kuwait* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 126.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> See appendix and Rizzo, "Even Rose Have Thorns" for more details.
- <sup>31</sup> **Practical gender needs:** response to immediate perceived necessity, identified within a particular context. They are often concerned with inadequacies in living conditions such as water provision, health care and employment. Practical gender needs do not challenge the gender divisions of labor or women's subordinate position in society. These are needs women identify in their socially accepted roles in society.
- Strategic gender needs:** Needs women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society. Strategic gender needs vary according to particular contexts. They are related to the gender divisions of labor, power and control and include such issues as legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages and women's control over their bodies. Meeting strategic gender needs helps women to achieve greater equality. It also changes existing roles and challenges women's subordinate position. See Maxine Molyneux, "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua," *Feminist Studies* 11 (1985): 227-254.
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- <sup>33</sup> Valentine Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 27 (2002): 1135-1171; Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, "Forging Feminist Identity in an International Movement: A Collective Identity Approach to Twentieth Century Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 24 (1999): 363-386.
- <sup>34</sup> Nayereh Tohidi and Jane H. Baynes, "Women Redefining Modernity and Religion in the Globalized Context", in *Globalization, Gender and Religion: The Politics of Women's Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts*, ed. Jane H. Baynes and Nayereh Tohidi (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 17-60, especially p. 48.

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<sup>35</sup> Laura Guzman Stein, “The Politics of Implementing Women’s Rights in Catholic Countries of Latin America”, in *Globalization, Gender and Religion: The Politics of Women’s Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts*, ed. Jane H. Baynes and Nayereh Tohidi. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 127-155, especially p. 136.

<sup>36</sup> Tohidi and Baynes, “Women Redefining Modernity and Religion”.

<sup>37</sup> Rupp and Taylor, “Forging a Feminist Identity in an International Movement”, 364 and 382.

## Women's Religious Practices in Bahrain: Umm al-Darda'

By Sophia Shehadeh\*

During the last few years, few places in the Arabian Gulf have provided a dynamic model for the study of gender and religion as did the tiny kingdom of Bahrain.<sup>1</sup> In 2002 for the first time in Bahrain's history, not only were democratic elections held, but also women were able to vote and run for office. It seemed that everyone I spoke to had something to say about women's changing role in society. Queen Sabika, who rarely appeared in the public realm, suddenly and for the first time began to make frequent public appearance discussing women's issues among other subjects. My interests lay in the area of religion: how were women's religious practices changing? What were the implications of these changes? Specifically, how were women's communal practices—religious activities occurring beyond the domestic sphere—changing in light of the Islamic resurgence? As a focal point, I considered women's religious institutions. This study, in particular, will examine a single institution: a small women's center for Qur'anic learning called Umm al-Darda'.

There are several reasons why Bahrain makes a valuable case study. Despite its small population—it is really the size of a city and not a country—it is more significant than its size suggests. This is due in part to its interconnectedness with other countries, which have made Bahrain in many ways a microcosm of the Gulf region. For example, many residents of other Gulf countries frequently travel to Bahrain, either for business or for pleasure; Bahrain is a tourist site and a business center. Since the 1980s Saudi Arabia has been connected to Bahrain through a causeway, which Seikaly describes as a “sign of incorporation into the Saudi sphere of influence.”<sup>2</sup> The Saudis are now able to easily enter Bahrain, and indeed they cross often in order to vacation (alcohol there is legal and there are fewer social restrictions). The proximity to Saudi Arabia can also be felt in Sunni religious spheres, just as the proximity to Iran is felt in the Shi'ite community. (Around seventy percent of the Bahraini population is Shi'ite, although the ruling elite are Sunni).<sup>3</sup> Bahrain's global visibility is also due to its past history as a British protectorate, and its current status as the site of the Fifth Fleet of the US Navy. Because of these links, what happens in Bahrain resonates further than its shores. This study, which focuses on the female students of Umm al-Darda' and the Sunni population involved in the Islamic resurgence, sheds light thus not only on the practices of the Sunni women involved but also on the roles religion and gender play in the dynamic Gulf region.<sup>4</sup>

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I found Umm al-Darda' to be a center of female agency, where participating Muslim Bahraini women actively struggle together to shape society, either through teaching, gaining skills, self-improvement through the process of "perfecting their religion," or through the articulation of religious, social, or cultural goals and concerns. This involvement is carried out communally, in a realm that is neither fully public, private, sacred, or profane,<sup>5</sup> and reflects the rise of female literacy, as well as the current socio-religious and political context in Bahrain. Many scholars have written about the ways in which women have negotiated agency from within the external dominant power structure.<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, this study falls in that category and it must be said that despite any gains, in many ways Bahrain remains a patriarchal, traditional, society in which men control the courts and dominate government. However, there exists a commonly held perception in the West of Muslim women as being marginalized and oppressed, and of Islamic movements as being the same no matter where they are found: violent, backward, Taliban-like, and comprised solely of men.<sup>7</sup> The example of Umm al-Darda' offers an alternate view of Islamic movements. It demonstrates that Muslim Bahraini women involved in the Islamic resurgence are not sitting at home, isolated from communal discourse and religious practices. Rather, they are actively grouping together creating new religious organizations and centers that are woman-focused and which reflect social, political, and economic change, as well as the desire to rationalize and modernize religion.

### Umm al-Darda': The Center

Umm al-Darda' is a modest little place, with two floors and a few classrooms, situated in the trendy café-strewn quarter called 'Adiliya. Inside it feels rather cozy: there are almost always thermoses of ginger tea and cardamom coffee set up for the refreshment of the students, as well as piles of cookies or other treats. Incense is regularly burnt, creating a soothing environment for the women, who come in at different times in the morning and afternoon for classes, arriving laden with Qur'ans, notebooks, pencils, and various study guides. Usually they come without their children, so to focus better on the lesson and to prevent disturbing others. Their free time and ability to get childcare suggests at least a middle-class status. Their attire is representative of the recent trend towards Islamic adherence as regards clothing in the Gulf: most wear the *abaya*, (a black robe) and cover their hair. Some cover their face as well, but this last article of modesty is usually taken off within the all-female safe space of the center. Some women, especially those from Egypt or other countries, also dress modestly but include colors in their wardrobe, and a few individuals prefer not to cover their hair at all. All of the women seemed to be delighted to be there, perhaps because they enjoyed the learning, or the social aspect of the gathering, or simply happy for a chance to get out of the house. Describing the function of Umm al-Darda', one of the founders smiled and acknowledged that the women come not only because they are trying to improve their religion, but also because it is a social center, where women can chat together during the breaks, drink tea, and eat cookies. Clearly, however, many of the women took their classes very seriously, and had studied at Umm al-Darda' for years, graduating to higher and higher levels of Qur'anic expertise. I sat in on some of the advanced *tajwid* (Qur'anic recitation) classes, and was struck not only by the beauty of their recitations, but also by the intensity with which some women tried to perfect their skills.

Located in Manama, this center was founded in 1993 and is managed solely by women. They teach almost all of the classes, although occasionally a male expert is brought in when needed to teach certain classes for which there is no qualified female. The purpose of the center is to further Muslim women's proficiency in *tajwid*, *hafẓ* (memorization), *tafsir*

(Qur'anic exegesis), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and other related subjects. Adjacent to Umm al-Darda' is a thrift shop, also run by the women. The shop, as well as functions held by the Center helps raise money to sustain Umm al-Darda' as well as for charitable purposes.

It must be stressed that while Umm al-Darda' reflects a larger religious, social, and even political context, the Center is essentially an educational and religious institution whose objective is the teaching of the Qur'an to women. As for any political agenda, it can be argued that the Center represents a movement to bring Muslims back, away from Western values and culture, as is in some ways does the entire Islamic resurgence. Bahrain is quite Westernized. McDonald's, Burger King, Seattle's Best Coffee, and J.C. Penney's as well as many other similar American and European chain stores are found throughout the island. English is spoken everywhere. There is a large Christian presence as well: some churches have been active since the late 19th century, when they were established in Bahrain for missionary purposes. Bahrain, a British protectorate from 1869 to 1971,<sup>8</sup> is still home to many British people as well as Americans. The Bahrainis, while some might benefit from and appreciate the wealth that has come in part from Bahrain's ties to America, also resent the encroachment onto their own culture. US foreign policy has done nothing to improve this resentment: it is clear that most Bahrainis are upset with US policies regarding the war in Afghanistan, the Israel/Palestinian conflict, and now the war with Iraq. One woman at Umm al-Darda' mentioned to me that even education in Bahrain has become Westernized, with English taking more and more of a priority over Arabic, and religious studies not being sufficiently taught. The Center has responded by offering religious classes in Arabic for children, and by trying to strengthen Islamic identity among women.

### Research and Methodology

I came to the center on the recommendation of members of Discover Islam, which is a larger Islamic center in Bahrain that offers Qur'anic studies (for men and women) in many languages, because many of their students are non-Arab converts to Islam. In contrast, most of the students at Umm-al Darda' are Bahraini Muslims, and I attended classes for a period of three months in order to carry out research on women's changing practices. There are other women's centers for Qur'anic learning in Bahrain; but Umm al-Darda' is an exception in that it is not directly affiliated with another male-led organization. Among the Sunni religious centers in Bahrain, some are informal and simply held in someone's house, and others possess the status of a formal organization. Clubs, societies, and organizations have to register with the government.<sup>9</sup>

Being Muslim and able to speak and understand Arabic (although not quite at a native level) somewhat facilitated my research, in that I was able to understand the instruction and lectures, and to persuade the management to allow me to carry out interviews. After initially allowing me to observe classes for a few days, the founders made it clear that if I were to continue to spend time there, I would have to participate in a class suitable for my level. Thus, I began Qur'anic recitation classes with the beginners three times a week. My classmates were mainly Bahraini, Kuwaiti, and Egyptian housewives, and all were native Arabic speakers who wanted to gain religious skills.

Wishing that I could simply blend in, it soon became apparent that my presence was an anomaly. There were no other Westerners there; most Westerners interested in Islam would probably take classes at Discover Islam, which was designed for the needs of

converts. The pending war with Iraq initially added to my tension, because I was not sure how the students and teachers would react to my American nationality. Admitting to teachers and students that my purpose in taking classes there was to write my PhD dissertation about women and religion in Bahrain made some people concerned about what I might say about them, and also probably did not make me seem like a sincere Muslim. Additionally, I had very little background practice with Qur'anic recitation. When it was my turn to recite a passage, I typically took a deep breath, felt my body become rigid, my face turn red and sweaty, and then I recited, stumbling and faltering. Thankfully, many other students were supportive—some held their breath while I recited because they could tell that it was quite difficult for me—and a few sometimes even applauded my efforts! After awhile, it seemed that while I was not going to blend in, at least I felt that my “strangeness” was going away. One student even joked about my nationality, asking me if I served chicken nuggets to my children for the evening meal in Ramadan. This period of observation and participation helped me find students and teachers that were willing to be interviewed. This study is based on those interviews, and my observations at the Center. I have changed the names of the students and teachers, with the exception of the main founder Sawsan, who has allowed me to use her name.

In this study, I will address Bahrain's unique social and cultural circumstances as they regard gender, contrasting them to Bahrain's neighbor Saudi Arabia. Then, I will examine the rise of Islamic resurgence in Bahrain, and shed light on the founders of Umm al-Darda' and the context in which it was founded. Finally, I will discuss the flexible ways in which religion is continues to be understood and practiced, as conveyed to me by women involved in classes at Umm al-Darda'.

### Terminology

Issues of terminology arose when I attempted to find definitions to apply to the group I studied, in order to link them to larger movements and at admittedly to categorize them. I quickly found out that the act of labeling can be quite problematic. While the founders of Umm al-Darda' are Sunni Muslims, they were not happy to accept other labels regarding their specific creed, or *aqida*, preferring to call themselves simply “Muslims.” Admitting at one point that they felt closest to the Salafi creed, which is how other groups in Bahrain tended to describe them because of their conservative dress and mannerisms, they nonetheless seemed to find it counterproductive to attach any label. (Those more hostile to the group used “Wahhabi” or even “Ninja,” referring to the face coverings some women adopted).

I asked one teacher if she could categorize her creed, giving it a name, and this was her reply:

No, I cannot. No. No, I can't. Salafi just means those who follow the Salafiyin. And the Salafiyin are those who follow the Tabi'in, who follow the Sahaba [companions of the Prophet]. And the Sahaba are those who follow the Prophet, peace be upon him. I follow the Qur'an and the Sunnah. If I say: “I'm Salafi,” it's a big label with quite heavy connotations. I can't say that. I believe in Allah, I try to follow Islam as much as I can, I feel Allah gives to those people who can carry it, and to those who can't carry it. How can I be a Salafi and watch TV? Salafi means how you follow the tradition of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and the Qur'an, in your dealings. My husband works for Coke. If I were really Salafi I'll ask him for a divorce, because he's doing haram [a forbidden action]. It's not a question

of Coke. I can't label myself. May Allah help me to be perfect. Coke. I can't label myself. May Allah help me to be perfect.

The term Salaf refers to the ancestors who lived at the time of the Prophet, and the Salafiyin are those who try to follow them in spirit and practice.<sup>10</sup> Voll writes about the Salaf : “They are believed by Sunni Muslims to have had special insight into the requirements of the faith because of their close association with the Prophet Muhammed. As a result, fundamentalist reformers and other renewers frequently call for a return to the attitude of the ways of the salaf.”<sup>11</sup> Obviously, however, this teacher was uncomfortable with the label in that it conveys notions of purity that she was unwilling to attach to herself. A true purist might object to her spouse working for Coke on the grounds that the Prophet would never do so. Like others, she simply did not see any positive purpose in the act of labeling.

Without a doubt, choosing terms to use when referring to groups is always a politically charged decision: what one calls a group reveals one's own sentiments. While some other scholars have used terms such as “Wahhabis” or “Islamists” to refer to those involved in Muslim resurgence movements, I found those terms to be laden with pejorative connotations, and sometimes incorrectly used. Voll refers to “movements of Muslim revival” and to the “Islamic resurgence,”<sup>12</sup> whose contemporary appearance he places at 1979-1980.<sup>13</sup> Those terms are more appropriate. He writes: “Part of the visible Muslim resurgence is putting modern sentiments into Islamic garb, but the Islamic resurgence also involves the creation of new and effective forms for the continuing vitality of the Islamic message.”<sup>14</sup> Selecting terms that appear to reflect the ideals of those to whom the terms refer is a manifestation of the attempt at understanding.<sup>15</sup> Thus for the purposes of this paper, I refer to the movement in Bahrain represented by Umm al-Darda' as an expression of Islamic resurgence in Bahrain: a movement promoting the vitality and relevance of Islam to the modern context. Clearly, there is no easy way to label the group that I studied, except to say that they form part of the Islamic resurgence to which Voll refers.

### **The Najd region versus Bahrain**

My findings contrast with a thesis put forth by Eleanor Doumato, which in simplified form argues that Islamic resurgence has led to women's loss of ritual and communal space.<sup>16</sup> Her argument pertains to unique historical and political circumstances: the rise of what she calls “Wahhabi” Islam in Saudi Arabia in the late eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup> This type of Islam calls for a rejection of religious innovation, and advocates a return to the original practices of the Prophet's era, as well as a strict, literal interpretation of the Qur'an. Clearly, what is called *Salafi* Islam is similar in a general way. She argues that Saudi women from the Najd, being traditionally excluded as women from religious orthodoxy and from the religious center—the mosque—had previously turned to “subversive” rituals and practices that affirmed women's empowerment such as Zar rituals, saint veneration, tomb visiting, and other activities now associated with Sufism.<sup>18</sup> The rise of a new Islamic movement led by Muhammad abd al-Wahhab in Najd<sup>19</sup> led to the demolishing of Sufi structures and suppression of these types of activities, thus taking away alternative religious and healing practices from women. This left them quite restricted in their religious options, marginalized and isolated, she argues. She writes: “Wahhabism reconfigured women's experience of community through ritual, placing their focus back on a single sacred center that in reality they were not invited to enter.”<sup>20</sup> This narrowing of ritual space she argues, reflected the narrowing of Najdi women's social space, and redefined female boundaries as being constrained chiefly to the domestic sphere.

While Doumato focused on Saudi Arabia, not Bahrain, it is relevant to note whether or not her argument can now extend to its neighbor Bahrain, also a religious and conservative country whose ruling family has roots in the Najd region.<sup>21</sup> The Saudi Arabian religious movement, although originating as a reform movement, is currently a state-supported ideology, unlike the situation in Bahrain. This distinction is made clear when one looks at the status of women in both countries. In Bahrain, women can drive, work in any field they wish, dress as they like, and vote, whereas in Saudi Arabia ostensibly for religious reasons they are legally unable to do so.

Bahrain, however, has in the last few decades witnessed its own contemporary Islamic resurgence, such as that represented at Umm al-Darda', although this movement began at a much later date than did the one in Najd. The Islamic resurgence in Bahrain draws its inspiration from many sources, since Islamic ideology truly has "gone global" and it is no longer possible to refer to sources solely in geographic terms, although Saudi Arabia and (for the Shi'ites) Iran remain quite influential.<sup>22</sup> My purpose is not to equate the two resurgences—they began at different times and for different reasons—but to examine whether or not in Bahrain women have also experienced similar religious isolation. Do Sunni Bahraini women, then, feel excluded from "a single sacred center," (the mosque), and has the resurgence of Islam led to their feeling of constraint to the domestic sphere? The situation in Bahrain is quite different from that of its much larger neighbor.

First of all, I have found that women in Bahrain do not feel excluded from the mosque: religious involvement everywhere occurs in various types of spaces, with notions of centrality being relative. This is not to say that in Saudi Arabia women were not deprived of other centers of religious practice as a result of the reform movement, as Doumato notes, but rather that the mosque has never been the sole religious center of practice for women. The Bahraini Muslim women from Umm al-Darda' that I interviewed assured me that they found the home to be their own sacred site for prayer, and considered it to be far more appropriate space for themselves than the mosque. The Prophet Muhammad was reported to have said that while women should not be forbidden from praying in the mosque, the home was more suitable for that purpose.<sup>23</sup> Many Bahraini mosques have sections for women in which to pray, but they found it an inconvenience to go as well as not the optimal site for their prayer. One woman put it: "I don't go to the mosque, not even for *taramih* prayer.<sup>24</sup> In the house it [prayer] is much better. God thinks it is better for me." Juan Campo discusses the sacred qualities of Muslim domestic space. He writes: "For many scholars of religion, houses appear to be outside the field of subjects defined by sacred texts, mysticism, and holy places. It is almost as if houses were too much within the mundane sphere of human existence."<sup>25</sup> He argues that houses in Islamic tradition are in fact sacred, and not isolated spaces, but rather "zones of social interaction."<sup>26</sup> The notion that women, whether in Saudi Arabia or Bahrain, feel as though they are marginalized because they do not pray at the mosque, is not an accurate portrayal of the central religious and social importance given to the home. For many Muslim women, the ritual center may well be the home, and not the mosque.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, Bahraini society, despite its proximity, unmistakably possesses a different character than that of Saudi. Typically, Bahrainis describe their society as being open and tolerant of diversity. Strategically located in the Arabian Gulf, Bahrain has long been a center of international trade, dating back to the third millennium.<sup>28</sup> This constant exposure to people from other religions and countries has given Bahrain a cosmopolitan quality. As for the population, only 63 % are Bahraini Arabs. This includes the Sunni relatives of the ruling Al Khalifa family as well as other Sunni tribes from the Arab Peninsula, the *Baharna*,

or Arab Shi'ites native to Bahrain, and the *Hawala*, Arabs who lived in Iran for a while and then returned. For the most part the rest are South and Southeast Asians, Arabs from other countries, Iranians, Europeans and Americans. Approximately 60 % of the workforce are made up of foreign males. Bahrain is host to several churches, and many non-Islamic ethnic and religious clubs, reflecting its reputation for tolerance. While Saudi Arabia has had trade and pilgrimage routes for centuries, and is also host to different regional cultures, heterogeneity is embraced in Bahrain's self-presentation far more than in Saudi Arabia's.

Additionally, Bahrain was the first of the Gulf States to adopt modern education. The first public girls' school was established in 1928. The rise of modern education (due in part to oil wealth) in the 1950's did not immediately lead to a rise in women's education, which was still considered to be "not only unnecessary but also detrimental and a threat to traditional society."<sup>29</sup> Yet when education became free, parents then began in larger numbers to send both boys and girls to school. Al-Misnad argues that the implications of this for society were profound, leading to the emergence of the nuclear family, and the refusal of women to be as subservient as their female ancestors.<sup>30</sup> Not only was Bahrain first in this regard, but Bahraini curriculum for the elementary school level also can be distinguished from Saudi Arabian curriculum in that Bahrain spends much less time teaching religion: 7.5% of instructional time compared to 31%.<sup>31</sup> The emphasis on religious studies in Saudi Arabia is a means to further religious adherence and thus the acceptance of the official state ideology. Bahrain's lack of emphasis in this area and the greater time given to mathematics and science suggest that modernization has been a greater concern of the Bahraini government than promoting a single religious dogma.

Furthermore, Bahrain has a history of open intellectualism, as reflected in its tradition of cultural clubs. This phenomenon started in the early 1900s, when clubs first appeared to oppose British colonialism. Later, clubs were formed to discuss literature, Arab nationalism, Islamic reform, and other topics. Sami al-Hanna refers to this time as "Bahrain's Modern Renaissance," adding that ideas from major thinkers in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Europe, and India were discussed openly in these forums.<sup>32</sup> This intellectualism led to expanding horizons in modern thought. The editor of the first Bahraini newspaper (first printed in 1939) allowed women to write for the paper. This, he argues, "lay the cornerstone in the first women's movement in Bahrain."<sup>33</sup> Indeed, women's organizations—such as the Bahrain Women's Society—and other groups and clubs in which women participate are flourishing in Bahrain, and are part of this cultural legacy. In fact, the oldest women's club in the entire Gulf region is in Bahrain: the Bahrain Young Ladies Society. It was founded in 1955, and it actively supports women's causes, whether political or social.<sup>34</sup> Umm al-Darda', while not club but rather a religious educational institution, nonetheless forms part of the strong Bahraini tradition of communal discourse.

Finally, Bahrain's economy is weaker than that of Saudi Arabia, and women increasingly have to work, which changes the social landscape. Oil production in Bahrain dropped in the early '80s, and Bahrain is no longer as wealthy as it was during the peak of the oil boom in the 70s.<sup>35</sup> For that reason, and because of a growing trend to hire Bahrainis as part of the "Bahrainization" project, more Bahraini women have joined the labor force. An interviewee told me that in the old days, members of large, extended families all lived together in one house. Now each couple wants to live in a single family home, and the expenses are so high that women have to work. She also added that a lot of money goes into women's social life. This involves parties, dinners, gifts, flowers, wedding parties, house warming parties, and more. A family like hers had to give big presents frequently during these occasions—presents that easily cost a hundred dinars (270 US dollars). The

family's wealth, it seems, is channeled into these events, which are orchestrated for the most part by women. Men just spend their life working and paying, this woman claimed. These days, however, men can no longer "do it all," and many women have to work as well in order to continue putting on this show. A lot of people are in debt, she said. Seikaly also writes about the change in social life after the fall in oil reserves, and states that for middle class women work became a "normal and needed support for the family."<sup>36</sup> The percentage of women in the workforce has tripled in the last decade or so: in 1991 it was only at 8.8%,<sup>37</sup> but in 2001 it rose to 25.6 %.<sup>38</sup> However, economic forces are not the only factor behind women's participation in the workforce. Many women work for reasons of personal fulfillment. This shift of women into the workplace could have bolstered society's acceptance of women's participation in other non-domestic forums such as religious organizations, making religion more of a public matter for women, and less of a domestic, tribal or ethnic affair.

Indeed, women in Bahrain possess greater rights than their Saudi counterparts—such as the right to drive, to choose any career they wish, and now the right to vote—all of which are a sign of Bahrain's greater liberal tendencies. Regardless of that social openness, they have also ceased to a great degree (since the Bahraini Islamic resurgence in the late twentieth century) practicing the types of "women-centered" alternative rituals that Doumato argued came to an end with the rise of "Wahhabi-style" Islamic conservatism in Saudi Arabia. Why would that be so? What I found was that this change was not imposed on women by external sources, and did not translate into a restriction of women's religious activities. Rather, this change was embraced by women themselves as moving away from what has come to be seen as outdated superstitious folk practices and towards what was perceived as a rational, educated, modern way of practicing. New religiously oriented organizations have replaced the old ways of meeting, and these new forums reflect current concerns and issues, as well as the Bahraini tradition of open-mindedness and communal discourse.

### **The Islamic Movement in Bahrain**

There are various reasons given for the rise of the Islamic resurgence in Bahrain, but few address the resurgence as a result of modern education. One argument that I often heard was that the resurgence began as a middle class movement, as middle class Sunnis and Shi'ites realized that the oil boom benefited first and foremost the ruling elite, upper classes with links to the ruling elite. They felt disenfranchised, and this alienation led to the formation of the Islamic resurgence as a way in which to check the power of the elite as well as to create a movement in which they felt ownership and belonging. Another argument is that the rapid development that Bahrain has undergone in the last few decades has created an uneasy balance between modernization and tradition, causing women to reinforce their communal Bahraini and Muslim identities, in order to maintain tradition in their increasingly modernized world.<sup>39</sup> A Turkish student of Umm al-Darda' offered another explanation, saying that the Muslim world currently has a lot of enemies, and that the resurgence is an attempt to unite the different factions in order to be stronger. Without a doubt, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 influenced Bahrainis, especially among the Shi'ites, but also among the Sunnis. The resurgence can also be attributed to feelings against the rise of Western culture found in Bahrain and Western imperialism in general, as already discussed.

While all of those reasons are valid to varying degrees, modern education has also changed the way in which many in the Gulf region approach their religion, with

dissatisfaction with what came to be seen as uneducated and superstitious traditional Sufi-type beliefs, and a strong emphasis on textual Islam. The resurgence is not only a political response.

Religious practices in the region in the early twentieth century differed greatly from mainstream Sunni Islamic practices found today in Bahrain, especially among those involved in the recent resurgence. Those earlier Sufi-type practices, included healing rituals that made use of spells, charms, exorcisms, and other folk remedies.<sup>40</sup> Some traditional cures, such as drinking water mixed with the ink of a Qur'anic sura, most likely had a limited capacity to heal, and some practices were actually harmful if not lethal.<sup>41</sup> Carl W. Ernst writes: Through the experience of colonialism and European-style education, Muslim modernists have been highly critical of Sufism, not on the grounds that it is foreign to Islam but because they see it as a medieval superstition and a barrier to modernity."<sup>42</sup> Islamic resurgence reflects the rise in education level: there is no longer the same degree of willingness to accept traditional beliefs that either are unscientific, irrational, and/or have no basis in a textually based Islamic orthodoxy.<sup>43</sup> Moving away from these practices is seen not only as a purification of religious beliefs—a shift away from what are now perceived as misinformed, superstitious, uneducated practices—but also a move towards social progress, education and modernity. Ultimately, this perhaps reflects the desire to “rationalize” religion. In this way, core notions of communal identity are retained, despite the transformation of tradition.

Before the arrival of modern education in Bahrain, the only education available to Bahraini children was religious *kuttab* education, which was a system of informal schools run by mullas, which emphasized the rote memorization of the Qur'an. Those girls who were allowed to attend usually went only for a few years until they were around ten. Initially, when modern schools for girls arrived, girls' education was not widely approved, especially among the lower classes. Sheikha al-Misnad writes: “Apart from *kuttab* education which they received in childhood, the education of women was considered not only unnecessary but also detrimental and a threat to traditional society.”<sup>41</sup> Women as a group were not truly able to gain full access to religious debates, discourse, orthodoxy, and a wide range of religious texts until they gained greater levels of literacy, which only happened in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>44</sup> Thus until then folk religion was all they had.

Besides the text-based curriculum at Umm al-Darda', exemplifying this influence of modern education on religion is the very structure of the Center's classrooms. There are chairs in rows, a podium and desk for the teachers, overhead projectors, and cassette players. One can buy textbooks—Umm al-Darda' creates some of its own curriculum—cassettes, (and of course some special items that any Middle Eastern women's organization might sell such as crafts, beauty products, and Yemeni honey). In other words, the way in which religion is taught parallels the way in which other educational subjects are being taught. Religious change, then, is linked with educational change on many levels, in terms of curriculum and structure.

While women before the rise of modern education in Bahrain were not completely excluded from textual learning, they rarely had the same level of access to orthodoxy as men. Practices were based on oral traditions passed from mother to daughter. With the rise in literacy levels for women, orthodoxy has become accessible to some, as seen in the Center. New religious institutions and centers such as Umm al-Darda' have provided

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<sup>1</sup> al-Misnad, *The Development of Modern Education in the Gulf*, 2.

women with the opportunities to gain specialized textual knowledge. What they do with this opportunity remains to be seen, as these Muslim women continue to negotiate their roles from within an Islamic framework, as have Muslim women in other countries.<sup>45</sup>

### **Umm al-Darda': The Founders**

Umm al-Darda' was founded by a small group of women, many of whom had traveled abroad during the seventies. Bahrain, people vehemently explain, was quite different then. The oil boom of the seventies caused rapid development and modernization on the island. This, coupled with increasing Western influence in the region (due to globalization and the politics of oil),<sup>46</sup> led to a radical social transformation characterized by a new trend towards a liberal lifestyle. Commonly, women completely covered from head to toe in black apparel would tell me that back then, they used to go to the market place in a mini-skirt. Feminism was being debated, as well as other political ideologies, in new and different ways, in part because female literacy, which was largely neglected before the 1950's, rose drastically. By 1980, 80% of young girls were enrolled in elementary schools,<sup>47</sup> and girls represented 51% of the total in high school.<sup>48</sup> Women began to work, receive an education, discard their abayas, and become active in the public realm.<sup>49</sup> For the first time in Bahrain's history, women were graduating from secondary schools, and receiving grants along with men for university travel abroad. Sawsan and Leila, administrators of the center, were recipients of these grants. Sawsan was one of the original founders of the center, and Leila came on board at a later date.

I met with them as part of my introduction to the Center, and they narrated, in flawless English, the story of how Umm al-Darda' was created. Interestingly, they and many others only began to practice Islam during these educational trips abroad in the eighties, and then brought their newly found Islamic identities back to Bahrain when they returned with their degrees. Neither Sawsan nor Leila was very religious before going to McGill University in Canada, where they were roommates. Sawsan, who now has five children, yet still finds time to attend conferences and tend to her managerial duties, allowed me to interview her. She once dreamed of becoming a doctor and now plans to get an MA in Educational Administration. At that time, she explained, it was very easy to get a scholarship for study abroad, whether male or female. She and Leila enjoyed their time in Canada, and there they and the other Bahraini women with whom they were abroad, made connections with the larger Muslim student community. They spent time together, initially more due to cultural similarities than due to religious beliefs. The contact with other Muslims, as well as the exposure to Western values and culture had a profound effect on both of them, as well as on many others that traveled abroad at this time. Sawsan described this experience:

When we started practicing, it was just between us, the girls. There were one or two of them who were practicing much more than us. They started advising us. When you are there [in the West], you see the value of your own religion much more. You see the way people are living and they way they are wasting their lives. Especially at our age, you see the things that they take care of. You really value your religion much more. We felt, among us, that we must take care of our religion much more, and that we should start practicing. We had some gatherings every week, and one of these ladies would talk and teach us. These girls inspired us. Then we had some Gulf mates that would also teach us and tell us, it was just among us at first, then we started going to the functions. We started helping them. We never knew they were there before.

After we started practicing our religion in a correct way there, I started to wear the hijab. We had very nice societies there; we felt that the people were very active. They did very nice functions, the Muslims. I think that any place when there is a minority they try to cling together. When we were there, it was very nice. We used to go to Islamic conferences. We really, really missed this when we came back to Bahrain, because at that time, even politically, you couldn't say what you wanted, you couldn't write in the press, you couldn't do anything that you wished. We found that it was very different, what we could do in Canada, and what we could do here.

Other Muslims that I interviewed, who had also studied abroad in the West during that time (the late seventies and eighties), offered similar accounts of their religious awakening. They met practicing Muslims from other countries who inspired them to begin practicing, and to become involved with communal activities such as Muslim student groups.

Seikaly refers to this initial involvement in the Islamic resurgence, and writes about the character of the group of female students who traveled abroad and the sudden reappearance of Islamic garb, including the *hijab* (veil):

Such suggestions [to cover fully] mainly came from women who had been educated in the West and who were completely immersed in the Islamic movement. It was noticeable that these women showed great self-confidence and expressed leadership traits of being assertive, emphatic, and proselytizing. It is clear that to them the veil was the strongest symbol forging their revitalized identity and they went to great pains asserting its distinctiveness and authenticity.<sup>50</sup>

Culture shock brought on by the exposure to university culture in the West, combined with an admiration for other young Arabs who seemed to be focused in a new and positive way on an idealistic, unifying, Islam, provided them with an alternative to the Western lifestyle. Donning the *hijab* was not only a sign of piety but also of this new identity and involvement with a greater movement.

Ambitious young people returned to Bahrain full of enthusiasm about getting involved in similar social, political, or religious movements to those in which they were involved during their time abroad. Yet, some returned only to become disillusioned. Bahrain in the eighties was characterized by governmental oppression. Political parties were prohibited, the Constitution was suspended in 1975 by the Amir, Sheikh `Issa bin Salman Al Khalifa, and according to the 1996 Amnesty International report, "The Government of Bahrain has engaged in a consistent pattern of human rights violations since the early 1980s."<sup>51</sup> This tension encountered upon return was not unprecedented: al-Misnad writes that earlier waves of Bahraini students who went abroad in the early twentieth century "strongly criticized the authorities for their administration of the country's affairs" upon return.<sup>52</sup>

In Sawsan's case, she brought back her new commitment to Islam, but did not immediately make any plans to start a center or anything similar. Instead, she tried to find work in scientific research, but also was not able to realize that dream.

There, [in Canada] I felt that people were really up to something. Here [in Bahrain of the 80s] you get really disappointed. I wanted to do something,

but at that time, things weren't easy. At that time I had so much enthusiasm, I wanted to do something. My father is an educated man. My mother is not. They always looked up to educated people. They always said we want you to be something. I wanted to be something then. I didn't get any chance. I don't know how to say it, something lighted under me went out. I enrolled myself in classes, in children's teaching, flower arrangement, but something inside me wasn't satisfied.

It was in that context that she and eight to ten women like her began to formally study *tajwid* with an Afghani sheikh.<sup>53</sup> This pursuit interested Sawsan greatly, and she and the other ladies with the encouragement of the sheikh began to formulate a plan for a center in which they would teach other women Islamic skills. At that time no such center existed in Bahrain, and thus women had not begun to learn traditional textually based Qur'anic skills; it was a field that previously had been dominated by men.

Sawsan and Leila insisted that one reason that Umm al-Darda' was created was that they did not want male thinking. I noticed a feminist slant to many Bahraini women, and these two were no exception. They also did not want to associate themselves with any other Muslim group on the island, and insisted vehemently that they were not a branch of any male Islamic organization. (However, they do maintain an affiliation with al-Fatih mosque). Often Islamic groups have a "women's wing," perpetuating the notion that women's religious role is marginalized. Umm al-Darda' is unique in that it is not a "wing." Clearly, establishing a center separately from men was a way to avoid gendered hierarchy: women provided themselves with a space in which *they* could interpret the Qur'an, discuss their own role as *they* understood it to be given by Islam, and indeed enter into other communal discourses. It must be said, however, that this is not to say that they have rejected men in any way, they have not. Male Qur'anic experts are brought into the Center occasionally as needed, the female teachers refer almost solely to male Islamic scholars, and there is no sense whatsoever that Umm al-Darda' represents any radical feminist movement as understood in the West.

However, asking women at Umm al-Darda' about their daughters revealed much about the ways in which these women viewed the changing nature of gender roles, and the relationship of gender and religion. For the most part, a desire for female strength was reflected in their answers. Women wanted their daughters to take active roles in society, and to become involved with public religious activities. Sawsan, for example, said she would let her daughters be whatever they wanted to be. Another student, Dana, said she wanted her daughters to be married and happy, but that they could also be politicians if they wanted. Iman just wanted her daughter to be honest, and thought it was best for women to restrain their public activities to the charitable sphere, or to teaching. But when I asked her if she would support her daughter's choice to have a career that typically is associated with men such as engineering, or law, she replied: "Yeah, yeah. But I'll still tell her the minus points. I'll tell her my point of view. I'll tell her my way, why I don't like it. I tell her "Be a teacher," but she doesn't like it. She wants to do something with marketing. She has the quality of leadership. She has her own character." Only one woman told me that she thought women should just stay home. For most women interviewed, their religious beliefs did not translate into a desire to exclude women from the public realm.

In fact, the Center's name reveals much about way in which the founders viewed women's roles. Sawsan explained to me why they chose the name "Umm al-Darda'":

We chose the name Umm al-Darda' because she is the wife of one of the very famous companions of the Prophet (May peace be upon him) Abu al-Darda'. She was a very knowledgeable scholar, especially in Qur'anic Sciences, and she used to teach this even to men. And we aim by naming the center after her to reveal the fact to the public, and to honor her memory.<sup>54</sup>

Their role model, then, is a female scholar who was so knowledgeable and educated that she was able to invert gender roles and teach men. While others might consider the women involved in the Islamic resurgence as having rejected a strong public role, this is not at all how the founders at Umm al-Darda' perceive themselves.<sup>55</sup>

At Umm al-Darda', attitudes among the students and teachers towards "correct practices" continue to undergo change and reveal a range of opinions. Unfortunately, there is the notion in the West, that "Islamic movements" are comprised of a homogenous group of people that all follow a simplified, purified, version of Islam. Contradicting this idea, the founders and the students are diverse in many ways, and while all consider themselves to be Muslims, they do not uniformly identify with a single group of beliefs.

### **The Flexible, Changing Nature of Religious Practices**

Reflecting the complexities of a country that has recently undergone rapid development, and of the diversity found in Bahrain, I found a great range of beliefs as well as fluidity regarding changing practices. Change was found in multi-lineal, multidirectional forms, contradicting the unilineal narrative. For example, one young woman in my class was a Shiite of Persian descent. When I asked why she was studying at Umm al-Darda'—a Sunni establishment—she said simply "We are all Muslims." Her aim was to learn Qur'anic recitation, which is a skill that of course both Sunnis and Shiites appreciate. Another student clearly did not identify with the external practices of most of the students, and refused to cover her hair saying that the belief that God was first was enough, and that wearing the *hijab* was superficial.

Similarly, a student told me that while she thinks music is *haram*, she does not prohibit her daughter from listening to it. This student loves music herself, and was a singer before becoming religious, and then gave up music altogether. She said that sometimes when she overhears her daughter listening she feels that she is about to dance—but stops herself! Clearly, the fact that she allows her daughter to play it at all displays her own religious flexibility. While strict with herself, she did not force her behavioral code onto her daughter. These stories show that that cultural change is not unidirectional, nor predictable. Obviously, regardless of any movement in which a group might be involved, no one exists isolated in a bubble, but rather exposed to the cultures, needs, and opinions of their family elders, and younger members.

Also contradicting any notion that opinion is homogenized in the resurgence, I found that women were willing to critique some aspects of religious practices, above all those that caused some of them and their female relatives to suffer. For example, not everyone was satisfied with the prevalent patriarchal system, especially as reflected in the religious courts. I asked one divorced woman if it was difficult to obtain her divorce. She responded:

I am the one who didn't want to stay with the man. So after that I went to the courthouse to talk to the *qadi*, (Islamic judge). My husband didn't want

to divorce, said before I divorce you; I'll beat you. *Wallah*, from the beginning, the judge didn't help. He wasn't patient. He was old-fashioned, close minded, and believed that the man should do anything he wanted. No chance for the woman to do something, everything is in the man's hand. He didn't understand. He thought ladies couldn't think.

Other women also complained about the distress that female relatives had undergone when trying to obtain a divorce. One said that she knew someone who could not obtain a divorce, no matter how badly she was treated, until she bribed her husband with money so that he would grant her the divorce. There was no sense that Islamic institutions were above critique, and many women (as they do everywhere) had gripes with male domination. On the other hand, many also made sure to emphasize to me that their husbands were supportive in every way and left choices such as the level of adherence to Islamic dress, up to them. In other words, within the Center not only was diversity of practice found but also disagreement regarding religious structures such as the male-dominated court system.

In conclusion, Umm al-Darda' functions, thus, not only as a center for religious learning, but also as an institution which gives women a public forum in which they can join in communal discourse regarding religious, social, cultural and political matters, as well as learn the textual features of Islam. Clearly, while Umm al-Darda' is representative of a greater movement, those involved embodied degrees of diversity and flexibility regarding religious practices. The example of Umm al-Darda' offers a different picture of the Islamic resurgence than what is typically portrayed. Sawsan noted that in Bahrain there were many male scholars, but a great dearth of highly educated Muslim women in the field of Islam, specialized in Qur'an, *fiqh*, and hadith. She said: "When there is a woman scholar, it is different, she understands you." The ways in which women use their newly found access to textual Islam remains to be seen, but it is significant that regardless of religious ideology, women find value in religious community with other women.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Population in 2003: 667,238. "Bahrain," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2003

<sup>2</sup> May Seikaly, "Women and Religion in Bahrain," in *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*, ed. By Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John Esposito, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 177.

<sup>3</sup> "Bahrain," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2003. The statistics regarding religious demographics for Bahrain are controversial due to the political situation in Bahrain. The difference between Sunni Islam and Shi'ite Islam chiefly has to do with authority. The Sunnis believe that the Prophet Muhammad did not have any religious successor. The Shi'ites, on the other hand, believe that religious authority was passed on to the Prophet's son-in-law, Ali, after his death. They hold that this authority then passed through a chain of imams, until finally stopping in the person of the final, twelfth imam.

<sup>4</sup> The Shi'ite population is also involved in a resurgence, which began after (and was inspired by) the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Illustrating the inadequacies in describing social settings with binary terms such as "public" and "domestic," it would be inaccurate to describe the activities that occur at Umm al-Darda' as taking place in the "public realm," since in fact Umm al-Darda' is not accessible to the general public (men are excluded except in instances when they are needed to teach), or to the media. Yet certainly these activities are not "domestic" in any way.

<sup>6</sup> See Marnia Lazreg's *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*, 1994 and Sossie Andezian's "The Role of Sufi Women in an Algerian Pilgrimage Ritual," 1997.

<sup>7</sup> The Taliban of Afghanistan are a religious movement known for their repressive treatment of women and girls. While they were in rule girls were not allowed to go to school.

<sup>8</sup> Sami al Hanna, *A Modern Cultural History of Bahrain*, (Bahrain: University of Bahrain, 1991), 18-19.

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<sup>9</sup> In 1959 an ordinance has existed regulating the status of clubs and societies, mandating their registration with the state. Fuad I. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1980.

<sup>10</sup> This can mean the attempt to live as closely as possible in the way that the Prophet Muhammad and his followers of that era did. For example, since it is believed that the Prophet advocated dying one's hair with henna when it turned white, a Salafi today might use henna instead of a dye such as *Clairol*. They might chew *miswaq*—a small stick—because it was used then by the Prophet and the early Muslims to clean their teeth. Essentially, it is the attempt to practice Islam as close to the way it was originally practiced as possible. Stringently observing prayer times, and literally interpreting the many regulations found in the Qur'an and the body of the *hadith*—the collection of sayings and actions of the Prophet recorded by his followers—is also associated with the *Salafi* creed.

<sup>11</sup> John Orbert Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, second ed, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 410.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 289.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Although, obviously there are many cases in which one would not wish to “manifest understanding.”

<sup>16</sup> Eleanor Doumato, *Getting God's Ear* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> The Muslims involved in the Islamic resurgence that I spoke to in Bahrain find the term “Wahhabi” to be offensive, because it over-emphasizes the role of the founder of the movement, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) rather than the message of Islam. The term has also been used to mean “religious extremist,” which in the post September 11th era carries highly charged implications.

<sup>18</sup> For more information about the Zar ritual, see chapter four—“Engaging Spirits: Prophylaxis, Witchcraft, Exorcisms, Trial by Ordeal, and Zar”—of Eleanor Doumato's book *Getting God's Ear*.

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, born in Central Arabia (1703-1792) founded what John Voll refers to as a “fundamentalist” movement of “socio-moral reconstruction.” Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, 53-54. This movement has been termed “Wahhabi,” but as noted the term is pejorative.

<sup>20</sup> Doumato, *Getting God's Ear*, 215.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 241

<sup>22</sup> When I asked one Bahraini woman what she used to teach religion to her child, she showed me a CD made in London.

<sup>23</sup> Juan E. Campo, *The Other Sides of Paradise: Explorations into the Religious Meanings of Domestic Space in Islam* (Columbia, South Carolina: South Carolina Press, 1991), 35.

<sup>24</sup> The long prayers carried out after Muslims break their fast every evening during the month of Ramadan.

<sup>25</sup> Campo, *The Other Sides of Paradise*, 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 35-6.

<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, during a trip to Yemen I heard that there are women's mosques attended solely by women, with women giving the sermons.

<sup>28</sup> Fred H. Lawson. *Bahrain: The Modernization of Autocracy*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 27.

<sup>29</sup> Sheikha al-Misnad. *The Development of Modern Education in the Gulf*. (London: Ithaca Press, 1985), 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 299-300.

<sup>31</sup> Mohammed Monir Morsi, *Education in the Arab Gulf States*. (University of Qatar: Dar al-Uloom Printing Press, 1990), 101.

<sup>32</sup> Sami A. Hanna, *A Modern Cultural History of Bahrain*. 54.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 62-3.

<sup>34</sup> Emile A. Nahkleh, *Bahrain: Political Development in a Modernizing Society*. (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1976), 54.

<sup>35</sup> May Seikaly, “Women and Social Change in Bahrain.” (IJMES 26, 1994), 415-16.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 423.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 423.

<sup>38</sup> See <http://www.bahrainedb.com/whybahrain/human.stm>.

<sup>39</sup> Seikaly, “Women and Social Change.”

<sup>40</sup> See Doumato, *Getting God's Ear*.

<sup>41</sup> For information regarding traditional practices that did more harm than good see Doumato, *Getting God's Ear*, 185-211.

<sup>42</sup> Carl W. Ernst, *Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 199. While Ernst has argued that education has led to a criticism of Sufism, he did not apply his argument to Bahrain nor to women.

<sup>43</sup> In a country such as Bahrain, where there are many different Muslim groups, obviously there are many “orthodoxies.”

<sup>44</sup> See al-Misnad for more information regarding the history of education in Bahrain.

<sup>45</sup> For more information, see Miriam Cooke's *Women Claim Islam*, 2001.

<sup>46</sup> See Fred Halliday's book, *Arabia without Sultans: A Political Survey of Instability in the Arab World* (1974), for more information on politics, oil, globalization, and the Gulf region.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Misnad, *The Development of Modern Education in the Gulf*, 77-80.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>49</sup> Seikaly, May. "Women and Social Change." She also argues that not all women were included, however; rural and lower class women were excluded from this phenomenon, because even within the feminist movement class hierarchies remained, and the chasm between the educated elite and the poor was not bridged.

<sup>50</sup> Seikaly, "Women and Religion in Bahrain," p. 182-3.

<sup>51</sup> Amnesty International July 1996 (AI Index MDE 11/18/96)

<sup>52</sup> Al- Misnad, *The Development of Modern Education in the Gulf*, 203.

<sup>53</sup> According to Sawsan, this shaykh was invited to Bahrain by the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs in Bahrain.

<sup>54</sup> The Encyclopedia of Islam does not mention Umm al-Darda' other than that she was married to Abu'l Darda', who died in approximately 652, and that their tombs are near the gates of Damascus. Encyclopaedia of Islam CD-ROM Edition v. 1.0

<sup>55</sup> Although, it goes almost without saying that all the women felt that women's domestic role was highly valued and important.

## Keeping Families Together: housing policy, social strategies and family in Qatar

Sharon Nagy\*

### Introduction: Material and Cultural Change in Qatar

The discovery and commercial exploitation of petroleum and natural gas in Qatar during the second half of the twentieth catalyzed unprecedented urbanization and population growth. In Qatar, as in the other Gulf States, large-scale urban development projects such as land reclamation, road and infrastructure placement and public housing has been sponsored and financed by the state. The transformation of the built environment is a material testimony to new socio-cultural circumstances and a useful focus of exploring material and cultural change in the region. This paper takes one of the many material manifestations of post-oil development, housing, and explores its meanings for Qatari residents. Space and society is one of the oldest and well-theorized arenas in the social sciences. And, the focus on housing evokes several classical themes in the anthropology: the cultural and social articulation of family and dwelling; the social and symbolic nature of built forms; and built form as a venue of state influence on domestic life. Touching upon these themes in the specific ethnographic context of Qatar, this research explores the ways in which residents' lives have been affected by the changing locations, sizes and forms of their homes during the post-oil period and how local social practices and values are integrated into the new urbanized spaces in Doha.

Recently, space has come to be recognized as integral to the performance of daily practices and the reproduction of social, political and ideological structures.<sup>1</sup> Spatial technologies, such as architecture and planning, are understood as a means to channel everyday life by creating spaces through which the individual moves.<sup>2</sup> This literature alerts us to the many ways that State sponsored architectural/urbanization projects can influence the nature of social and political relationships. Qatar is no exception to this. Elsewhere, I've described the way building technology and housing grants have altered the nature of architectural signification amongst resident groups; reinforce national and ethnic hierarchies; and, bolsters the Emir's image as a beneficent ruler.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I look more specifically at housing and residential structures examining the impact of developments in Qatar's housing stock and housing policy on family structure and cultural values. In-depth

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interviews in which Qatari residents were asked to talk about their residential histories are used to explore the cultural values and attitudes toward changing material culture.<sup>4</sup> Through this examination of how Qataris have experienced changing house form and residential relocation, we begin to understand the impact of economic growth and urbanization on the everyday lives of Qataris and unravel some of the apparent contradictions in how modernity is culturally mediated in the Arabian Gulf.

The societies in the Arabian Gulf States need not be understood as anomalous cases of social change. The income from oil provides a unique catalyst and context for change. Nonetheless, certain aspects of the process of change in the Arabian Gulf have their correlates in other developing countries. Qatar is not only useful as a case study of oil producing countries or other countries dominated by a highly valued single commodity, but some of Qatar's experiences also provide valuable comparisons to processes of change elsewhere. Despite the growing literature on the region, most scholars writing about sociocultural change in the region since 1970 have focused on the region's changing place in the global system and the transformation of the regions' socio-political structures from tribal-based systems to modern nation-states.<sup>5</sup> Altorki and Coles' ethnography of the city of 'Unayzah in central Saudi Arabia is a rare examination of how the broader economic changes in the region impact the everyday life of residents. Their ethnography of 'Unayzah, a traditionally agricultural settlement which is now a moderately sized provincial city, argues that the transformational changes stimulated by the "oil boom" after the 1970s were possible in part due to precursory changes of a more gradual, developmental nature. Their detailed description of the development of social and economic institutions in 'Unayzah between 1930 and 1970 corrects a number of stereotypes about the region and demonstrates that many of the social changes believed to be a product of the recent economic transformations actually began earlier.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in my research in Qatar, I have found that despite events of a transformational nature at the macro-level (e.g., integration into the global economy, political restructuring, the shift to wage labor in a service economy, and the construction of new infrastructure) micro-level practices (e.g., family relations, division of labor by gender, and nature of labor relations) exhibit a greater degree of continuity.

Although they may change at different rates, macro-level and micro-level practices are nonetheless linked through particular institutions or spheres of activity. One such sphere of activity is the built environment. Studies of the built environment from a broad range of disciplinary perspectives attest to the built environment as a record of social change. The construction, renovation, reuse, and demolition of buildings are acts motivated and restricted by social and cultural phenomena. However, social and spatial changes do not necessarily occur at a similar rate. The investment of material, labor and finances which are required to construct or renovate a building can lead to a time lapse between the spatial alteration and the social event or change by which it was prompted. Similarly, buildings constructed of all but the most perishable materials often outlive the social unit for which they were designed. Thus, one would expect changes in the built environment to occur at a slower rate than changes in the social structure. In the period under consideration, however, family structures have exhibited greater continuity than the spatial structures housing them. There are several reasons for this. First, the economic circumstances in Qatar have created a situation in which it is economically viable for Qataris to construct new homes or renovate old ones. Because houses are easily and frequently rebuilt, building activity affords residents the opportunity to adjust the dwelling form to accommodate changes in social organization without the time lag that might occur in societies where building and renovation is not as easily financed. Second, Qatari family

organization and social practices provide a great deal of social fluidity within spaces. Consequently, even when existing built structures present physical obstacles to social relations, they do not always impose disruptive changes in social practices. Residential patterns and houses spatially separate categories of residents in Doha and effectively reduce opportunities for interaction amongst the different groups. At the same time, the flexibility of family relations enables the social boundaries of a house to extend beyond, or contract within, its physical structure.

As the locations, sizes and forms of Qataris' homes have shifted during the post-oil period, one of the most often asked questions about Qatar's housing policies is how they impact the family. Will the practice of granting homes to a designated "head of household" (effectively married/engaged men) lead to a shift from multi-generational extended families to smaller nuclear family households? This possibility worries some, convinced that spatial boundaries and obstacles to interaction will usher in the demise of valued family ties. Concerns about rising divorce rates and fears that children will abandon their elderly parents are often tied to the introduction of new housing patterns and styles, or simply to a vague idea of dangerous "Western" values. In the opinion of many in Qatar, new housing and residential patterns are a threat to 'traditional' family values, which they understand to be couched in Arab-Islamic cultural practices.

These fears expressed by Qataris are not at odds with the hypotheses one would expect social scientists to formulate about the impact of new housing forms on Qatari lives. Since Morgan's early suggestion that a dwelling is a direct expression of the social unit it houses, comparative research has found correlation between dwelling form and social organization.<sup>7</sup> While such studies are frequently static depictions of a particular fit between buildings and those they house, the underlying assumption of the equilibrium between built form and social organization allows for the consideration of a more dynamic model as well. Groups adapt their behaviors to their environment. While conversely they adjust their built environment to their behavioral needs through construction, renovation or relocation when necessary. At first glance, the new urbanized spaces and new dwelling forms in Qatar seem to contradict the prevalent social and cultural practices, particularly the importance of extended family residential proximity and preferences for patrilocal post-marital residence. However, as the examples that follow suggest, the socio-spatial flexibility of family organization provides a mechanism for mediating the introduction of new urbanized forms within meaningful cultural frameworks.

### **Housing Policy in Qatar in the Late Twentieth Century**

Beginning in the 1960s, the Qatari government assumed increasing responsibility for housing its citizens. The formalization of housing assistance affected significant changes in how Qataris are housed and coincided with many changes in building technologies and land use practices.<sup>8</sup> While the earliest forms of housing assistance in Qatar were offered primarily to those of extreme economic need, the housing policies have evolved to include all Qatari citizens regardless of income level. It is important, therefore, not to confuse Qatar's housing assistance programs with those in places such as the U.S.A. where "public housing" is provided on the basis of economic need. Qatar's land and housing grants are one part of a welfare system that provides subsidized housing, education, and health care to all Qatari citizens (but not the large population of foreign workers). This group of programs and policies are presented as a means to redistribute income from Qatar's petroleum and natural gas resources to the broad base of its citizens

and are not limited to citizens with demonstrated economic need. With all Qatari citizens eligible for the health, education and housing benefits, the programs tend to reinforce gross social distinctions between Qatari nationals and the large population of foreign workers who are ineligible for many of the benefits rather than the more subtle social differences amongst the Qatari citizenry.

Qatar's first official housing policy was established in 1964 providing for the distribution of homes to the disabled, elderly, unemployed and those who'd been asked by the government to relocate in order to accommodate urban redevelopment plans.<sup>9</sup> Some housing assistance had been available earlier, but differed from the formal policies begun in 1964. The earlier assistance operated on the basis of personal requests made to the ruler, other members of the ruling family, or influential members of Qatari society and was given in the spirit of charity. Under the new policies, housing assistance was provided systematically to large segments of the Qatari population as entitlement rather than as charity. The 1964 housing policy sets forth a system to provide "free houses" to citizens without independent means to acquire property and housing (Figure 1). Houses provided by this policy were also used as an incentive for residents to relocate in order to facilitate the implementation of urban development projects and to reposition Qataris nearer to new employment opportunities. Thus, the policy affected citizens from a range of income levels. Despite the increase in income experienced by this time in Qatar and the improvement in basic infrastructure and services, residential relocation was not within the economic means of all citizens, some would not have been able to move without the provision of a state subsidized house, and others with sufficient economic means may have chosen to expend those resources on something other than a new home. Using the housing policy as incentive to relocate residents was one of the first steps toward broadening the grants to include all Qatari citizens.



**Figure One:** An early public house in Medinet Hamad, Doha. This style of house was granted to Qatari families through the mid-1970s. Photo by Sharon Nagy, 1993.

In 1984, the system used to classify eligible recipients of housing was expanded to avoid the exclusion of the growing numbers of educated, employed Qataris whose income had increased beyond the maximum allowed to qualify for the earlier free houses for which their fathers had qualified.<sup>10</sup> While, the new classification is primarily designed to distribute

housing to all interested Qatari families, the letter of the policy also preserves the spirit of the earliest housing given as charitable assistance by offering grants to widows and the disabled. However, in practice, these grants are most often used to finance an annex or addition to the recipient's extended family home. Thus, it would be erroneous to interpret these smaller grants as contributing to class/income distinctions. In both the design of the policies and the public's perception of them, a clear distinction was made between free houses offered to the elderly, blind, disabled, and destitute under the earlier policies and houses provided to citizens today. In addition to expanding the base of beneficiaries, the practice of distributing completed homes to beneficiaries was replaced by a system of land and building grants. Beneficiaries are now assigned of a plot of developed land, free of charge, or partial reimbursement for privately acquired and developed land. In addition, the recipient receives an interest free loan for the construction of a house. Most recipients supplement the building grant with private financing, frequently doubling the amount of funds available for construction.<sup>11</sup>

To qualify for a land and building grant, one must be a Qatari citizen and the "head of a household". Generally, this means a married man. However, as mentioned above, provisions are also made for widows and divorcees with children. In practice, young men apply for their grants when they get engaged. The process can be bureaucratically cumbersome and time consuming. Several years may pass before the land is granted, and then construction and financing can take several more. The lands used for the grants are primarily in newly developed areas on the edge of the city, which are zoned for low-density housing for Qatari citizens. Some effort is made to accommodate requests for particular locations. Yet, only those with sufficient influence or enormous luck get their choice of property. The plots are approximately 900 square meters, walled, and linked to public utilities. Grant recipients may either select the design of the house from a catalogue of pre-approved models or hire an independent designer (Figure 2). Most Qataris use the grant to build two-story villa style homes with a small service annex on the property. These houses are very different from the single story structures built around a courtyard that were common as late as the 1960s and 1970s.



**Figure Two:** Newly constructed land grant home in Dha'fna, Doha. This is a style selected from the catalogue of pre-approved models provided. Photo by Sharon Nagy 1994.

These changes in house form have been state sponsored and clearly linked to changing building technologies introduced through the expansion of industrial infrastructure. The new houses incorporate styles and technologies introduced in Doha through the expansion of Qatar's industrial infrastructure. As we'll see in the following discussion of how Qatari families have experienced the changes in residential structures, the new forms have also impacted the daily lives of Doha's residents.

### Modern Houses, Modern Families

Significant changes in house form and style such as those introduced through the new policies and technologies in Qatar, would be expected to have an impact on social structure—in the way people use their homes and in the “family” that occupies it. In societies where renovation and rebuilding are common, such as Qatar, the development cycle of the family is an important factor influencing changes in house form.<sup>12</sup> Building activity allows the residents to adjust the dwelling form to accommodate changes in household organization caused by life cycle changes and/or economic circumstances (Figure 3). Given the variable and dynamic family organization in Qatar, the social boundaries of the family do not necessarily correlate to the physical boundaries of the house. The following discussion explores the importance of family as both a social and spatial organizing principle and how changes in house form are related to the meaning of family in Qatar today.



**Figure Three:** Decorative panels being delivered to construction sites in a newly developed neighborhood in Doha. This is just one of the many ubiquitous signs of the active construction activity in Doha. Photo by Sharon Nagy 2001.

When Qataris speak of “family” they can be referring to any portion of a multi-generational, extended family linked primarily through the male line. The particular features of Qatar's kinship practices can lead to very complex and dynamic kinship structures. For example, the strong patrilineal focus of Qatari lineages produces the

potential for close relationships amongst brothers and with uncles and cousins on the father's side. However, because Qatari men as Muslims are permitted to take more than one wife, matrilineal descent is also an important structural factor in kinship grouping. While polygyny is far less common today than in previous generations, when it does occur the offspring of the same mother constitute sibling groups distinct from their half-brothers/half-sisters. Furthermore, preferences and patterns of marriage between related lineages create overlapping lines of patrilineal and matrilineal descent. When one's maternal and paternal grandfathers are brothers, it becomes rather difficult to sort out who is related to you from which side. Consequently, the group referred to by the term "family" is quite variable and dynamic, and almost certainly much larger than "family" in most Western societies.

Although most Qataris reside with a set of persons related to them by birth and/or marriage, the social boundaries of the family do not necessarily coincide with the physical boundaries of the house. During a family's development cycle, new family members will be added to the existing house, and others will leave to form houses of their own, or join existing houses. Consequently, some individuals identified as family members may not reside in one's house, such as a married son who has established his own house with his spouse and their children. In some cases, individuals maintain residence in more than one house. For example, newlyweds frequently shift residences between their natal and marital homes and men with multiple wives may maintain separate houses for each wife. Other residents of the house, such as domestic servants may be related by the exchange of services and rather than by blood or marriage.

### **Keeping Families Nearby: family values and residential proximity in Doha**

Family closeness—not only in the nature of relationships but also in actual residential proximity—remains a strong cultural ideal for most Qataris. Many of my interviewees fondly and nostalgically described the "old style" family homes and neighborhoods implying that the urban redevelopment and restructuring of physical spaces in Doha has made this preferred lifestyle a thing of the past. The way they describe it, the urbanized and expanded spaces of Doha present obstacles to family interaction—barriers and spaces that separate them from each other. However, when they describe the choices they've made about current housing, they reveal some unique and successful strategies used to retain and restructure some degree of family residential closeness.

Qataris remember their neighborhoods before the 1960s as safe, open and friendly places full of familiar and usually related faces. I repeatedly heard claims such as: "We all knew each other, back then. It was mostly people from the same family, my uncles, cousins, brothers. So, the children were free to run about and the women could pass easily from house to house." In some cases, neighbors could explicitly be identified as actual kin related by birth or marriage. In other cases, the neighbors' relationship was not as clear. Perhaps, they were simply from a relatively similar social category, but referred to using an idiom of kinship. Some families did indeed cluster in particular areas. In fact, a few neighborhoods still carry the name of the family, which was dominant in that area. For example, both new and old Khulaifat are named after the Ahl Kholaifi and Fareej Sweidan is "the neighborhood of the Al-Suwaidy." Even neighborhoods that are not named after a specific family are frequently known to be the home of one or two families. This is seen in comments such as, "most of the Al Bu Anain lived in Wakrah," or "Rayyan is where all the

Al Thani live.” As a result, families are identified with particular places in which they used to live and places are associated with specific families.

Like the neighborhoods associated with a particular family, several well-known houses in Doha are identified as belonging to certain families. A few of these houses constitute landmarks in the cityscape of Doha. While giving me a lesson in Doha’s “modern architecture,” Shaikh Fahd Al Thani<sup>13</sup> identified these landmark homes as part of the first wave of new construction built by merchants profiting from the economic boom after the start of oil production. He explained:

In the fifties, people wanted modern houses. And, those who could afford to build them did. The first modern building to be constructed was a hospital built in the 1950s somewhere near the Diwan. Also, that’s when they built the guest palace [in Rumaila]. And, near the guest palace is the house of Abdul Rahman Darwish, the one with the wooden balconies. And, of course the famous Jassim Darwish home—[the first] built with stones brought all the way from Lebanon.

Although most of the descendants of these merchants have moved to more modern accommodations, the older home is still acknowledged as an important part of their family history. For example, when I interviewed Miriam Yusef, the great granddaughter of the original owner of one of these landmark buildings, she began her residential history with an apology for not knowing enough about the family home. She was too young to have ever lived in it. “My family lived in *that other house* before this one I was born in. But I do not remember it, so I cannot tell you about it.” *Talal Jaidah*, born in the early 1960s, is one of the youngest Jaidahs to have known the house, which he called the “Jaidah House”: “I remember the old Jaidah House from when I was a child. Now, it’s a parking lot! I am really the last generation to remember the old house. It was around a courtyard, and each uncle had a room overlooking the yard. As the children got older, sometimes they had a room on the roof. This way they had more privacy. I never lived in the Jaidah House. I lived in a house next to it as a child.” These houses are now part of family histories, houses that the younger generations, like Miriam, have only heard of but never actually knew. Although neither Miriam Yusef nor Talal Jaidah had ever lived in the well-known house of their ancestors, they still identified it as part of their own residential histories.<sup>14</sup>

The Darwish, the Fardan, and the Jaidah are of settled merchant backgrounds and their elite status and economic resources enabled them to resist, or at least delay, surrendering these family homes to the bulldozer of development. Other homes of particular family renown are found throughout Qatar. Those located outside of Doha, such as the ruined towered buildings in Um Slal Mohammad and Wakrah, have generally been abandoned for homes in the city. Others, particularly those of the ruling family, have been turned into public monuments. The National Museum of Qatar was the home of Shaikh Abdullah bin Jassim Al Thani until 1933.<sup>15</sup> The families with neighborhoods named after them or famous houses identifying their ancestral lands have accessible referents to past residences. As symbolic reminders of an idealized past, these houses belong to more than the family who owned them. These private landmarks are important public symbols of family cohesion and values.

Today, the land distribution policies can make it difficult for family members to live near each other. A Qatari cannot apply for land until he qualifies as the head of a household. This, in effect, means at marriage. So, it’s unlikely that a group of brothers of

varying ages would be applying at the same time. As a result, they are usually granted lands in newly developed areas at a distance from each other. Nonetheless, some families have found ways to build homes near each other. The simplest solution is to purchase land on the private real estate market. But, this costs more. If someone buys land, they may still be entitled to the land grant. Some people I spoke with were able to receive a partial cash reimbursement for the land in lieu of their land grant. This reimbursement is unlikely to cover the full cost of land purchased privately. Another strategy is to make use of contacts within the appropriate agencies to secure a series of adjacent plots. 24 year-old *Mona Jabber* rather matter-of-factly explained how her husband and his brother have used political connections to secure desirable lands. At the time of our interviews, Mona was expecting her first child and living in a large house with her in-laws. She was excitedly telling me about the new house that she and her husband have started to plan—her dream house, in the perfect location near both of their families.

We have just purchased six plots in Hilal. First, we got land in Dhafna from the government. But, that is not where we wanted to live. It's too far from the family in Hilal. My husband already started building on the Dhafna land, but we will rent it out. He went to Shaikh Hamad<sup>16</sup> and asked for other land. They gave him two plots in Hilal, but we aren't going to use that either. Eventually we will build there and rent it out too. We are planning to build on the six plots that we bought in Hilal. We will build two villas [using the six plots]—one for his mother and brother and one for us. We will have a very large garden and swimming pool. I'd like to have six bedrooms in our villa.

If adjacent lands can be arranged, brothers often will build houses next door to each other such as those Mona's husband and brother-in-law are planning. Alternatively, families might opt for a family compound, which is a single walled enclosure with houses for a group of brothers or a father and his married sons. For example, when *Talal Jaidah's* family left the "Jaidah House" they built a family compound with Talal's father and each of his paternal uncles constructing a separate villa within a single, shared enclosure. "When we moved from the old house in the city center, the family moved to Al Sadd. We got a



**Figure Four:** A relatively large villa built on privately purchased land within Doha. Photo by Sharon Nagy 1994.

huge piece of land and everyone built their own houses. There is a large central kitchen in addition to the kitchens in each of the villas. This is good because the children can play in the large yard, and there are stronger family ties. *We are lucky because the Jaidah are still a unit.*"

Yet another option is to construct a single house large enough to have several internal suites for sons as they marry (Figure 4). Since a couple generally lives with or near the groom's family after marriage, families often construct additions in preparation for a son's marriage. Often the family will divide the upper floor into suites for married sons or elderly relatives. *Hind Saleem* spent her childhood in a large, extended family household on As-smakh Street in the city center. Her father and his brother had houses next door to each other. "In fact, we could get to their house from the roof!" There were other relatives living "within a five minute walk." In the 1980's, her father built a villa in Hilal, but Hind moved instead to her in-laws' home also nearby in Hilal. She described the current house she shares with in-laws:

It's a two-story house with two wings upstairs. One is for us [Hind, her husband and their children] and the other is for my brother-in-law and his wife. Our wing has a library, our bedroom, children's room, two baths and a kitchen. And, a very big balcony that I am very tired of. I can't use it because people could see me, so why have it? The other wing is similar. There is also a living room upstairs, but we don't use it. The whole reason for living with his parents is that they won't be alone, so we try to share meals and spend time with them. We go downstairs to share meals with my husband's parents. Eventually one of the two sons will move out and the other will renovate the upstairs for just his family. It will probably be us [that remain], because my mother-in-law is my aunt.<sup>17</sup> So, I am closer to her than my sister-in-law is. Another brother-in-law already lives in the adjacent plot with a door that connects our yards. We share the majlis with him, too.

Like the family compounds, not everyone builds such large and complex houses. Some newlywed couples prefer to make use of their land and building grants to establish a separate household, albeit as close to family as possible. The newly married couples I interviewed who were living in the same house as the groom's family usually considered these living arrangements temporary until such time that their land grant was processed and they'd saved enough money to move. Again, Talal Jaidah describes this process and how strategies can be combined when resources permit: "When my first brother married, we added a wing for him. Recently my second brother married and I had to give up my studio for him. Now that we [my brothers and I] are all marrying, my mother insisted if we move out that we build a compound together." The house he describes with its additions and internal suites is actually part of the Jaidah compound. A group of brothers, Talal's father and uncles, have built houses together on a compound. In order, to delay the departure of the next generation, his father's house has been altered to accommodate married sons. As the promise extracted from his mother reveals, eventually part of the family will need to move further a field.

An alternative to family compounds and multiple unit buildings is to maintain ties and fulfill obligations to family through frequent visits and other forms of interaction. *Abdullah Abdul Qadi*, an employee of the Qatar General Petroleum Company with a modest income, lived with his wife and children in a house provided by his employer in the town of Dukhan which is on the east coast of Qatar about 60 miles from Doha. By Qatari standards this is a considerable distance to live from ones' family. Abdullah's widowed

mother lived in a relatively small public house in Doha with his unmarried siblings. Abdullah would spend weekends in Doha so that he could be near his family. He and his wife used to stay with his widowed mother and siblings on their weekend visits. Since the birth of his children, it has become harder to accommodate his growing family in his mother's house. Consequently, he has rented a flat near his mother's house for his weekend visits.

Family compounds, adjacent villas, and proximal rentals allow the establishment of independent nuclear family units while preserving proximity to the extended family, while the internal suites within a family villa do not allow the same degree of separation for nuclear family units. However, any of these patterns earn the occupants the respect and admiration of fellow Qataris. The establishment of a joint family house, compound, or neighborhood signals the occupants' access to the economic or political resources to secure sufficient land and their commitment to close family relations. To use Talal's words from above, a family compound preserves "stronger family ties" and as we'll see below bestows the honor and respect of others on the family.

### **How New Kholaifat got its Name: the honor in family proximity**

The housing saga of the al-Kholaifi family's illustrates, the honor bestowed on families that manage to live in close proximity to each other. Throughout my research, I heard this story from at least ten different people. It'd begin like this: "Have you heard what happened to the al-Kholaifi?" Or "Do you know how "New Khulaifat" got its name?" According to the various versions of this story, the Al-Kholaifi resisted government attempts to acquire their properties during the general relocations in the late 1970s. They stood as a united block and refused to release their homes until they had secured a promise of an area of the new developments that was not only large enough to house all of them together but also on/near the water. They got their request—the promise of a portion of the newly reclaimed land in the New District of Doha that was adjacent to the bay. The old neighborhood was called al-Khulaifat, and the new one is officially named New Khulaifat (*al-Khulaifat al-Jadeeda*).

At the time the new lands were being assigned, they were still being reclaimed.<sup>18</sup> So, when deciding whether or not the lands were suitable, the al-Kholaifi had to judge from the mapped projections and the powers of their imagination. When the occupants of Old Khulaifat saw the proposed location on the map, they were satisfied with its location near the waterfront. However, the zoning regulations for the New District of Doha do not allow for residential areas directly on the waterfront. So, the Al Kholaifi family members were slightly peeved to learn that there would eventually be a major roadway and some public parks separating their new neighborhood from the waterfront. It would be easy to interpret this story as one of a family being duped by the housing administration. But, that was never the gist of its telling. The tale was invariably offered as an example of strong family values. The Kholaifi family is held in high esteem for their insistence upon remaining together. An interviewee from another family told me he thinks that New Khulaifat is one of the more attractive residential areas in Doha. He attributed its superior design and upkeep to the coordination facilitated by the close kinship relations amongst the family members.

The Newlywed Dilemma: “Your mother forces you to marry, then gets upset when you move out. What to do?”

Two contradictory cultural values shape Qataris’ choices about where to live after marriage. On the one hand, as a patrilineal society with strong preferences for family cohesion and proximity, the cultural ideal is for a married son to bring his wife to live with and raise a family amongst his birth family. Yet, at the same time, a mature man is expected to exhibit his masculine and family honor by the ability to establish a home and support an extended family. Despite the cultural preference for extended family proximity, young couples are therefore expected to demonstrate their ability to establish and maintain a household of their own. The housing grants, in fact, are often described as a means of helping young couples to fulfill this expectation. As they lament the pressures and changes of modernity, some Qataris argue that the second value is beginning to take precedence over the first and that this may threaten family cohesion and family values. However, these contradictory values resemble those shaping processes of social fission and fusion amongst segmentary and nomadic societies in earlier periods of Qatar’s history.<sup>19</sup> These two values need not be seen as contradictory. As we’ll see in the varied strategies for housing newlywed children, it’s possible to achieve both simultaneously. This does not always occur without tension and the balancing process differs somewhat for men and women.

While there is considerable pressure for adult males to exhibit their competence and independence by establishing a house separate from their parents, the stigma of living alone tempers the idea of a private residence as a demonstration of independence and autonomy. Living alone implies that one prefers to be free of family obligations and responsibilities, or desires privacy and freedom to engage in activities that they could not perform in a house shared with family members. Such activities and behaviors by Qatari reckoning could only be irresponsible, shameful or immoral. A private residence does not convey the meaning of maturity and success for the adult male through a show of independence and freedom but rather by providing evidence of one’s economic and social competence to support a new family. An adult Qatari can demonstrate his independence and autonomy from his father’s house while maintaining ties and filial loyalty in a number of ways. The preferred strategies in Qatar today are to establish a separate house within close proximity to the paternal kin or a suite within the same building. We have seen how this can be accomplished by acquiring adjacent plots of land or by building a family compound.

Once his own home is established, he may even bring patrilineal kin to live in his house, such as elderly parents and unmarried or divorced sisters. In fact, grants are available for those who need assistance building an addition or annex to house an elderly relation, a widow or divorced woman. *Saad Ali’s* residential history shows how these annex grants can be used to adapt in the physical structure of the house to accommodate extended family:

Before moving into the new house ten months ago, we were living with my family. We had two villas in one yard. One was given to us by the government [i.e., a public house]. We built the second one. Or, rather the government built it for my grandmother. She was allowed one bedroom, one sitting room and a hall. It was one story; we added a second story onto my grandmother’s house, added two bedrooms [at our own expense]. Then, one of my sisters got money for an extension onto the other house, so we also changed the carport into a sitting room.

The cultural ideal is for a couple to reside with, or near, the husband's family. In practice, post-marital residence patterns vary considerably. A woman is not expected to sever ties with her parents, siblings, and other patrilineal relations upon marriage. Despite, the ideal of patrilocal residence, a married woman's membership in her father's lineage is expressed in continued interaction, relations of support and affection, and the fact that they do not take their husband's name at marriage. A young woman's relations with her lineage are, of course, primarily with those relations with whom she'd previously resided, namely her parents, siblings, and grandparents. Occasionally, one might have a particularly close relationship with a cousin or aunt, if raised with/by them. A woman will visit her parents' home frequently, staying for various lengths of time, she will return to her parents' home for the birth of her child, or immediately thereafter with the now common practice of hospital births, and will stay with her parents if her husband is traveling.

Many of my interviewees retained dual residence in their natal and marital homes. Several of the young married women I interviewed, who were living with their husband's family referred to their fathers' home as their own. When *Mona Jabber* married, she and her husband had not yet acquired their own house, so they lived with her family for the first two years of their marriage. They have since moved a short distance from her parents where they now share their own villa with her husband's mother and brother. "We live upstairs. They [her mother-in-law and brother-in-law] live downstairs. But, I spend most of my time at my father's house. Almost every day I am there from 4:30-7:30. If I go downstairs to my mother-in-law, I rarely stay more than a half-hour. I am still very close with my family and my father continues to treat me the same as he does my unmarried sisters."

When space allows, young women might maintain a room in their father's house, which they use on short visits as well as longer stays when their husband travels for work or study. *Hessa al-Tajir*, a young woman who had been educated in the United States, would return to her parents' house whenever her husband was away overnight as she and her family deemed it imprudent for her and her young child to be alone in his absence. Thus, a young woman who lives in a separate home with her husband might return to her parents' home for overnight stays more often than a young woman living with her in-laws. The latter would not have the same need to return home in her husband's absence since her in-laws are present in her house. In this regard the trend toward nuclear family residence may contribute to a shift toward increasing bilateral relations.

While there clearly has been a trend toward married couples living in a house separate from either set of parents, such a separate house is not always immediately established. Often it is the case that the couple lives with one of their families while they wait for their land and building grant application to be approved and processed. Many also spoke of living with a parent in order to save money before establishing their own house. *Nahid Saif* explained to me that she and her husband were able to rent a home upon marriage only because her husband had been in the military and was entitled to a housing allowance, otherwise they would not have been able to afford to live on their own before receiving their land and housing grant. A few yet unmarried Qataris expressed a preference for neo-local residences after they marry as a way to avoid the potential conflicts and ambiguities that may arise from patrilocal residences. When describing the house she'd like to live in after marriage, *Nada Hashim* told me: "[After I marry] I do want to have my own house." To which I asked, "One for yourself, and one for your husband?" Laughing, she continued, "Now, that's not a bad idea! No, I mean, not with his family." While *Dr. Turki*

*Sulaiman* felt that for the sake of privacy it would be better for his sons not to remain in his home. Describing his new five-bedroom villa he commented “When my children leave, this house will be much too big for my wife and me.” I asked whether his children might stay, to which he responded, “Well, normally girls don’t stay [although his own sisters had lived with his parents after marriage]. If my son wants to, I suppose he can. But it is better if he moves out for privacy. This is one thing my father insisted upon. He said, ‘I don’t care what you do, but when you marry you should move out. It causes too many problems.’ I think my father had difficulties with one of his brothers.”

The arrangements for living with the husband’s family have changed little with the change in house form from a yard-oriented house to a villa. In the yard-oriented house, a separate room would be provided for the newly married couple if possible. This room may have been either a preexisting structure or expressly built for the newlyweds. The couple would however, share the remainder of the living space with the entire household. The shared spaces included the activity area of the yard and *liwan* (loggia), the kitchen, washrooms, toilets, storage areas and *majlis* (guest reception area). Similarly in the houses today an additional bedroom or suite might be added to the house, or existing rooms will be converted for the newlyweds. The newly married couple would have use of one of these suites, sharing the remainder of the house with the husband’s family. However, it is becoming common to provide a complete apartment on an upper floor for the younger couple. This is, of course, most feasible in the very large homes.

While many of my informants described their patrilocal residences as satisfactory, some thought it best to eventually establish their own homes. *Shaikha Naaman*, who lives in a suite in her in-laws’ home, prefers to move eventually.

My husband doesn’t want to move. But, I think it is better if we do. His brothers will marry soon and they will want to bring their wives. They have said that they will move and that we should stay. But I think it would be better if we moved. I have moved a lot in my life and am used to changing. I think I have become bored, or just ready for another change. I would like my own house. The problem is that we built the suite that we are living in. We spent about 200,000 Riyal building it and furnishing it. Although his family says that we own that, it is not our own property.

Shaikha’s narrative shows the complexity of her situation. She begins by explaining her plans to move as a means of accommodating her in-laws and making space for their expanding family and points out that she is well accustomed to changing and therefore a suitable candidate for relocation. This justifies the move as fulfilling family obligations. Yet, she also confides her desire for a house whose ownership is uncontested and unambiguous. Shaikha’s desire to move is not motivated solely by a wish to reduce her interaction with her in-laws. She hopes that a house in the same neighborhood as her in-laws will enable her to balance the desire for her own home with her desire to fulfill her obligations as a daughter-in-law. When *Saad Ali* and his wife announced their plan to establish a separate house, they encountered resistance from his mother and grandmother, which similarly demonstrates the complexities and contradictions of residence patterns and preferences. Saad Ali and his wife had been living with his family since their marriage thirteen years and five children earlier. He explained the reaction to his decision to move: “They [his mother and grandmother] were very upset about my wife and me leaving and moving into our own home. They want the family to stay together. I offered for my mother to come and live with us. But I think she feels that in her house she is in charge, if she comes to live in our house she will no longer be the king. It is silly. Your mother

forces you to marry and then gets angry when you move to have a home with your wife and family. What to do?"

While married couples may decide to establish a house separate from either set of parents, the pull toward maintaining proximity and relations with the natal family remains important. Younger couples building their separate homes expect that their house may someday house family members other than themselves and their children. Just as they have been able to live with parents until capable of establishing their own home, they expect to house their own married sons. When explaining why Qataris build very large homes, the most common reason was "planning for the future." More specifically, most meant planning for an increase in the number of occupants. A few expressed doubts that the generous housing grants could continue indefinitely. So, they felt whatever assistance they received now should be used to invest in housing future generations. Qataris expect that they might someday share their house with an elderly parent or an unmarried, divorced, or widowed sibling. Among the 38 interviewees who provided details of house membership, none lived in single generation household. Fourteen lived in houses occupied by members spanning three generations and the remaining 24 lived in two-generation households. Additionally, 15 of them share their house with relatives outside the nuclear family. If family compounds and proximal houses of family members were considered, the number of informants living "with" extended family would dramatically increase.

### Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, both Qataris and others commonly assume that the new styles of housing in Qatar will encourage nuclear family households, neolocal residence patterns and the demise of extended family values. However, this does not seem to be the general pattern of change in Qatar. Although some families now live at greater distances from each other than they might have in the past, I consistently found that Qataris are able and willing to expend effort and resources in order to establish residences within proximity to their extended family. It is incorrect to assume that villas only house nuclear family. Many of them are occupied by extended families, including three generations of kin, more than one husband and wife pair and their offspring. It is also evident from the lives and living situations of Qataris, described here, that the establishment of spatially separate houses does not invariably sever social relations between their occupants. For many Qataris the increase in house size is motivated by the desire to *preserve* family relations. This was *Miriam Yusef's* point when she explained that, "Our family relations here are very strong, and they are even stronger today than before. We build these large houses to accommodate our families, and keep our family relations strong—so we can be near one another, so that we can get together and meet. It is not only because we have a lot of money!"

Despite the changes in house form and the distribution of residences, relations based on kinship remain a primary source of social organization in Qatar and have provided a source of sociocultural continuity in the midst of recent changes. In my understanding, the system of family relations derived from a history of residential mobility, economic hardship, and political instability have thus far proven flexible enough to endure the economic and political restructuring in Qatar. The strategies for maintaining residential proximity show how continuity is maintained by manipulating new opportunities and

resources, insulating micro-level processes from the macro-level changes and creating a context in which meaningful practices can be continued.

The continuity of practices has in part been facilitated by the relative affluence of Qatar, and of Qataris. Because of their economic position, Qataris for the most part have not been bound to making decisions or selecting directions for purely economic reasons when those choices conflict with social or ideological preferences. For example, many middle-class Qataris I interviewed could afford to purchase land on the market in order to secure residential plots near other family members, instead of accepting the individual plots of land distributed free of charge by the government which would leave them living further from each other. It is possible that the sheer quantitative increase in urban population in the Gulf States could provoke sociological situations in which the preexisting cultural systems no longer provide meaningful representations for the indigenous population, and thus undergo transformational, or even disruptive, change. However, micro-level social practices have thus far provided sufficient continuity to avert a general discontent with the current directions and objectives of the State's development policies. On the one hand, the evidence of flexibility and continuity in social and cultural structures in Qatar reaffirm the findings of Altorki and Cole in Unayzah.<sup>20</sup> However, I further argue that the recognition of the continuity of social processes helps us understand the apparent contradictions between modernity and traditional practices.

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#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Giddens, Anthony, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984); Pred, A. *Place, Practice, and Structure: Social and Spatial Transformation in Southern Sweden, 1780-1850* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1986); Pred, A. "The Social becomes the Spatial, the Spatial becomes the Social: enclosures, social change and the becoming of places in Skane" in *Spatial Relations and Spatial Structures*. G. Derek, and J. Urry (New York: St. Marten's, 1985): 337-365.

<sup>2</sup> Abu-Lughod, Janet, "Culture, Modes of Production and the Changing Nature of Cities in the Arab World" in *The City in Cultural Context*, eds. J. Agnew, et al. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 94-119; Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975); King, Anthony, "The Social Production of Building Form: theory and research" in *Environmental Planning and Social Space* 2 (1984): 429-446; King, Anthony, *Buildings and Society: Essays on the Social Development of the Built Environment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980); Lewandowski, S. "The Built Environment and Cultural Symbolism in Post-Colonial Madras" in *The City in Cultural Context*, eds. J. Agnew, et al. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 237-254; Rabinow, Paul, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1991); Zeynep, Celik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Nagy, Sharon, *Social and Spatial Process: an ethnographic study of housing in Qatar*. Ph.D. Dissertation submitted to the dept of Anthropology at University of Pennsylvania., 1997; Nagy, Sharon, "Social Diversity and Changes in the Form and Appearance of the Qatari House" in *Visual Anthropology* 10 (1998), 281-304; Nagy, Sharon, "This Time I Think I'll Try a Filipina": global and local influences on the relationship between foreign household workers and their employers" in *City and Society*, (1998), 83-103; Nagy, Sharon, "Dressing Up the Downtown: Urban Development and the Government's Public Image in Qatar" in *City and Society* (2000), 125-147; Nagy, Sharon, "Making Room for Migrants, Making Sense of Difference: spatial and ideological expressions of diversity in Urban Qatar" forthcoming in *Urban Studies*.

<sup>4</sup> While describing their homes to me, informants revealed much about life in Qatar and their experience of the transformation of the social and physical environments since the discovery of oil. The range and wealth of detail that emerged from the residential history interviews indicate that the house and other features of the built environment are methodologically useful for understanding social processes.

<sup>5</sup> al-Rumaihi, Mohammad G., *Beyond Oil: Unity and Development in the Gulf* (London: Saqi, 1983); al-Rumaihi, Mohammad G., *Bahrain: Social and Political Change Since the First World War* (London: Bowker, 1978); Crystal, Jill, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: rulers and merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990); Heard-Bey, Frauke, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates* (London: Longman, 1982); Khuri, Fuad I.,

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*Tribes and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980); Zahlan, Rosemary, *The Creation of Qatar*, (London: Macmillan, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> Altorki, Soraya and Donald Cole. *Arabian Oasis City: The Transformation of 'Unayzah* (Austin: University of Texas, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Morgan, Lewis Henry, *Houses and House-life of the American Aborigines* (Chicago: University of Chicago , 1965 [1881]).

<sup>8</sup> Nagy, S., *Social and Spatial Process*, 1997; Nagy, S. . "Social Diversity and Changes in the Form and Appearance of the Qatari House." 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Justice, Law Number 1, *Official Gazette of Qatar* (1), 1964.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Justice, Council of Ministers' Decree Number 5, *Official Gazette of Qatar* (10), 1984.

<sup>11</sup> The availability of additional financing suggests that many recipients would be able to finance their homes without state assistance. While this may be true, few would be able to finance homes of the magnitude and style that has become expected of Qataris in the recent past.

<sup>12</sup> Goody, Jack, *The Developmental Cycle in Domestic Groups* (Cambridge: Cambridge University , 1971 [1958]); Lawrence, Deborah. and Setha Low. "The Built Environment and Spatial Form" in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 453-505; Netting, Richard McC., R. Wilk, E. Arnould (eds.), *Households: Comparative and Historical Studies of the Domestic Group* (Berkeley: University of California , 1984).

<sup>13</sup> The names used throughout my published work are pseudonyms selected to preserve the ethnic and class markers yet providing anonymity to research participants. Pseudonyms are consistent throughout all of my published work.

<sup>14</sup> For discussions about buildings and social memory in Arab-Islamic society see Bahloul, J., *Architecture of Memory*, 1996 and Slymovics, Susan, *The Object of Memory*, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> al-Kholaiifi, Mohammad J., *Al-'amarat al-Taqlēdiya fi Qatar [Traditional Buildings of Qatar]*(Doha, Qatar: Ministry of Information, Department of Antiquities and Museums, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani was at the time the heir apparent in Qatar. He became the ruler in 1995.

<sup>17</sup> In a patrilineal kinship system, one belongs to his/her father's lineage. Consequently, paternal cross cousins are not members of your lineage. They belong to the lineage of their father—or the aunt's husband.

<sup>18</sup> Land reclamation is a method of using landfill to transform shallow waters into usable land. This technique has been widely used throughout cities along the Arabian Gulf.

<sup>19</sup> Cole, Donald, *Nomads of the Nomads: the Al Murrab Bedouin of the Empty Quarter* (Arlington Heights, IL: AHM Publishing, 1975).

<sup>20</sup> Altorki, S. and D. Cole. *Arabian Oasis City* (1989).

## Navigating Modernization: Bedouin Pastoralism and Climate Information in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Andrew Gardner and Timothy J. Finan\*

### Introduction\*

*There are four things a person cannot know: when you will die, where you will die,  
how you will live your life as planned by Allah, and what rains will come.*

These wise words were shared with us by an elderly Bedouin taking respite from the hot midday sun in a small market town in northeastern Saudi Arabia. We were working on a project funded by the Saudi Arabian government – a project with two distinct purposes. First, using ethnographic methods, we had set out to describe the impact of the Kuwaiti oilfield fires (set during the 1991 Gulf War) upon the rangelands of northern Saudi Arabia and, by extension, upon the people and livelihoods that depend on this rangeland. Second, we were to investigate ways that the Saudi Meteorological and Environmental Protection Agency (MEPA) might better disseminate climate and weather information to the Bedouin peoples of the northern deserts. The impacts of the oilfield fires have been discussed elsewhere, and in this paper we explore the role of climate information in contemporary Bedouin livelihoods.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, we wish to assess the need and value of government-generated climate information as well as its potential impact upon the livelihood strategies of the Bedouin peoples.

The sentiment conveyed by the elderly Bedouin above—that climate prediction and climate forecasting are beyond the purview of the mortal—was a recurring theme in our conversations in Bedouin encampments. We argue here, however, that this cultural view is but one aspect of the complexities obscured by the notion of *modernization*. In unpacking the various strands implicit in this notion, we seek to portray a highly variable set of processes, in many ways unique to the Kingdom and its environs, and to contextualize the interface between climate, environment, and the Bedouin nomads in these larger arenas. Finally, we argue that numerous processes embedded within the notion of modernization have reshaped nomad livelihoods in the Kingdom, minimizing the importance of climate variability while simultaneously bringing a host of more pressing concerns to the fore.

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Through the transformation of cultural, social, and ecological landscapes we chart, we conclude that the creation of a sophisticated climate information system may, in fact, hasten the demise of the Bedouin way of life.

### Framing Modernization

Contemporary Saudi Arabia is a complex demographic fabric made up of indigenous tribal peoples, citizens who trace their origins to other countries, and the many temporary workers from India, the Philippines, Pakistan, Indonesia, Somalia, other Arab states, and elsewhere. Like the other states of the Arabian Peninsula, the Kingdom is highly urbanized, and the majority of the population is distributed across the principal cities. While Riyadh is the capital, Jeddah, nestled on the Red Sea between Medina and Mecca, is the Kingdom's commercial hub. Here the ancient *souq*, or market, is now surrounded by vast and ultra-modern shopping malls, built with the wealth generated by the Kingdom's petroleum reserves. In one such mall recently constructed at the entry point to the old *souq*, jewelers sell authentic Rolex and Omega watches, while the store window mannequins are clad in the latest Parisian fashions. These stores, rather than serving intrepid western travelers, are the commercial infrastructure of the Kingdom's wealthy urban class.

While the western coast of the Kingdom has an urban heritage stretching back millennia, many urban dwellers trace their heritage back to the Bedouin tribes of the vast interior deserts. The deserts of northern Saudi Arabia, while seemingly barren to the untrained eye, provide the range resources that support a significant and durable pastoral population. In many ways, the contemporary Bedouin replicate the livelihood of centuries past: to some degree, they remain a pastoral people, they dwell in large, distinct tents, and they move from one location to another as their livelihood strategies dictate.

Contemporary Bedouin nomads herd a combination of camel, sheep and goats. Prior to the influx of petroleum wealth to the region and, more importantly, the introduction of the truck to the Bedouin livelihoods, camels were cornerstone of the Bedouin livelihood. First and foremost, camels are adapted to desert conditions—they can thrive upon a wide variety of vegetation, and move great distances without water. At the same time, camels traditionally provided a means for transporting household goods from one grazing location to another, thereby allowing the Bedouin to migrate across and beyond tribal lands. Finally, camels provided meat, milk, and market value. Sheep and goats, on the other hand, are more vulnerable to desert conditions. They need water daily, and as such, they are unable to travel long distances in the parched terrain of the interior deserts. In times past, sheep and goats were thus kept in small manageable numbers and used for local consumption. With the advent of modernization, however, the rapidly growing urban population created a sharp demand for mutton, preferably from local breeds. A strong domestic market emerged, causing Bedouins to restructure the composition of their herds and to adopt technologies that could overcome traditional constraints.

Climate variability is a defining characteristic of the Saudi Arabian rangelands. A nine-year series (1980-88) of precipitation data from five MEPA weather stations in and around the study area (an area roughly the size of Texas) demonstrates both the temporal variability and the spatial variation of rainfall in the northeastern rangelands (see chart 1). There are, of course, annual patterns to this rainfall. The data for mean precipitation by month (see chart 2) reveal a highly arid period of approximately four months, beginning in

late June and lasting midway through September. Peak rainfall occurs in mid-spring while a second peak occurs in the autumn. Thus, the probability of rainfall during the summer months is extremely low, while the “rainy season” months are characterized by large variations in both annual amounts and spatial distribution (see chart 3). These data effectively demonstrate the nature of the challenge faced by the Bedouin herders under traditional range conditions.

In the pre-modern era, herd maintenance meant a constant search for food and water across this highly variable landscape. Bedouin culture had developed a highly efficient communication system, embossed upon a template of familial relations and tribal identity, but also extending through complex networks to other tribes in the peninsula. Knowledge of rainfall was a critical asset, and the exchange of such information was a primary theme in many forms of social contact. Tenure on these lands was secured at the tribal level, and Bedouin camps moved freely within their large tracts of tribal land (*dirab*). Seasonally, however, tribes were forced to seek water and pasture on the range of other tribes. Nomadic routes extended many hundreds of miles across several tribal boundaries, since the typical rainy season would begin first in the north and move south. Access to these others’ tribal land was secured through several mechanisms including negotiation, alliance through marriage, and, at times, warfare. In times of bountiful rains, Bedouin tribes were able to feed their animals and host the herds of tribes from rain-starved areas. In times of climatic stress, tribes called upon the social debts incurred during time of bounty, seeking better pasture on the tribal land of others.

Donald Cole’s seminal ethnography of Bedouin life in the Kingdom provides a portrait of a livelihood already in the throes of rapid change.<sup>2</sup> He also described the ambiguous position of the Bedouin peoples in the Saudi socio-political structure – one in which they are both revered and disdained by the powerful, entrenched urban classes.<sup>3</sup> Checking in on the Bedouin tribesmen some twenty-five years later, we found many of the predictive aspects of his ethnography entirely accurate. To describe these changes as the result of *modernization*, however, would be a disservice to the complexities of their agency. In the sections that follow, we unpack six aspects of modernization driving change in the livelihoods of the Bedouin peoples. In our analysis, we seek to portray their agency in adapting and shaping these forces of change. Understanding the specificity of these processes will, in the end, allow us to better map the potential impact of the government’s climate information system upon pastoral nomads of the northern deserts.

### **The Evolution of the Saudi Welfare State**

The traditional Bedouin livelihood system went through a series of fundamental changes with the influx of petroleum wealth. After the OPEC embargo of the early 1970s, petroleum-derived income to Arabian Gulf states increased rapidly. This bonanza era, financed at the pumps of western nations, brought untold wealth to the fledgling nations of the Arabian Gulf. Saudi Arabia was a principal beneficiary of this wealth, and the ruling royal family rapidly expanded public expenditure in order to distribute the bounty. A vast health care system was forged. Modern universities, free to citizens, were constructed. Agricultural price supports were implemented. Utility rates were held well below the market rate. Government positions, in even the remotest of towns, drew Bedouin into the security of state employment. To some degree, all Saudi citizens benefited from this expanded welfare state.

In the decade that followed, this era drew to a close. Oil prices on the international market began to drop in the early 1980s. The royal family continued to expand in size and to draw heavily on the national coffers. Gargantuan public works projects begun in the late 1970s required ongoing capital investment from the state. And finally, in 1991, Iraq invaded Kuwait, only to be driven back by allied forces—an effort largely financed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.<sup>4</sup> Together, these factors sapped the nation's income, and as the ruling family instigated a series of austerity measures, both urban and rural Saudi citizens faced an across-the-board increase in the cost of living.<sup>5</sup>

The Bedouin coped with the elimination of civil positions and the dearth of opportunities in government-funded labor positions (particularly in the National Guard), by refocusing upon the core component of their traditional livelihood—raising sheep, goats, and camels on the rangelands. These same factors, however, led many non-Bedouin to diversify their livelihoods. In villages and towns large and small, non-Bedouin Saudi hired knowledgeable foreign laborers to manage herds in the surrounding desert. The income generated by this activity provided some respite from the financial cutbacks at the state level. At the same time, it increased the number of animals on the range, thereby lowering the market price of meat for Bedouin and non-Bedouin alike. Similarly, the increased number of animals on the range fostered the transmission of communicable disease between animals—an ongoing problem at the time this research was undertaken.

### **The Elimination of Trans-border Migration**

As is the case in much of the world, the national boundaries of Saudi Arabia and its neighbors were imposed over a more fluid spatial distribution of indigenous cultural groups. The Bedouin are a nomadic people by tradition, and both tribes and tribal allegiances spanned the convenient borders demarcated by world powers.<sup>6</sup> In decades past, as relations between nations remained civil, cross-border travel, trade, and communication continued much as it had for centuries. These migratory conduits were of particular importance to the Bedouin peoples, as long distance migration traditionally functioned as a principal response to the dry and unpredictable environment of the Middle East's central deserts. Bedouin participants described to us their recollections of migrations during their youth—journeys that carried them and their families as far north as Syria, east to Iran, and south into the desert pastures of the Omani peninsula. As one Bedouin recalled his final trip out of the Kingdom: "Nineteen eighty-five was really dry, so I took my herd up to Iraq. Relations between countries were still good, and we went almost to Syria. We stayed there for two years. There were few problems with diseases then, and when there was a problem, we would just move."

These migrations, rather than a temporary response to environmental hardship, were a fact of life wrought by the difficult conditions of the desert rangelands.<sup>7</sup> Migration was the norm, and within this fundamental reality, the Bedouin constructed intricate intertribal allegiances, conduits for communication, and social networks. Long distance migration, as well as the social forms it produced, came to an end in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War. Bedouin were no longer at liberty to move their herds to the verdant Iraqi pastures in times of stress, nor could they pass through Iraq to places further north. This fundamental change meant that the Bedouin were forced to stay in the Kingdom during times of drought. Compounding the problem, the relative stability of the Saudi regime drew Iraqi and Kuwaiti Bedouin south—the northern deserts of the Kingdom functioned as a safe harbor for Kuwaiti and Iraqi Bedouin fleeing the aftermath of the Gulf War, and many

remain in the region to date. This fact, combined with the closure of northern migration routes, increased the pressure on the fragile desert rangelands, and similarly increased the prevalence of communicable disease due to overcrowding on the rangelands.

### Large-scale Labor Importation

A walk through the cosmopolitan port city of Jeddah is enough to convince the observer of the vast demographic changes brought about by the influx of petroleum wealth. Nearly every small shop is run by clerks from the Indian subcontinent. Foreign laborers sweep the streets, pump gas, cook in the countless restaurants that dot the streets, and fill an untold number of other urban occupations. In private homes as well, expatriate domestic servants are now the norm; Filipinos and Indonesians are preferred in the household, but many families now opt for the less-expensive Sri Lankan. In Saudi Arabia,



**Figure 1:** Expatriate herder and carcasses on the range

the total expatriate population remains a large minority; in neighboring Kuwait, Qatar, and UAE, the population of foreign laborers now exceeds the indigenous population.<sup>8</sup>

The impact of this infiltration of foreign labor, however, has not been confined to the urban milieu. The Bedouin, too, frequently contract expatriate labor. Male herders from Pakistan, India, the Sudan, Afghanistan, and other nations are the common shepherds throughout the deserts of the Kingdom. The small, single white tent has become the widespread signal of an expatriate herder living in proximity to his herds, in sharp contrast to the large, brown, divided tent of the Bedouin family. With the introduction of this foreign labor force, the Bedouin's herd size has become disconnected from the constraints of household labor, thus permitting the Bedouin pastoralist to expand their operations and intensify the pressure on the rangeland.

The introduction of paid expatriate labor into pastoral livelihoods has had another—more significant—impact upon the Bedouin. With cheap labor easily available, non-Bedouin Saudis have been able to invest in sheep production on the open rangelands. In the villages and towns of the northern deserts, merchants and civil servants can now hire expatriate laborers to manage investment herds. The experience of these expatriates is sufficient to manage the animals, and with the introduction of foreign barley (described

below), a working knowledge of the climate and rangelands is no longer a necessity. As such, the Bedouin now face competition from a new class of pastoralists.

### **Subsidized Barley Supplements**

In the 1970s, the Bedouin began to incorporate barley grown in Iraq into their livelihood as a mechanism for weathering particularly long droughts. Over time, these tentative reaches into the global agricultural market expanded, first to include barley from Eastern Europe, and then barley from Australia and beyond. As part of the government's extensive safety net, price supports held the market price of barley at an artificial low. The easy availability of barley fostered a switch from camel to sheep: barley provided a buffer between the harsh climate and the herds of sheep, for in times of stress, the Bedouin could rely on purchased feed as a principal survival strategy for the herds. And over time, barley consumption shifted from a coping mechanism to something commonplace in their daily routine – amongst the Bedouin we spoke with, barley consumption was framed in parameters that included the number of bags consumed by the herd per day, and the number of days per year that the barley was needed. Invariably, this second number was in the hundreds, and several Bedouin we spoke with reported feeding barley to their animals every day, without exception. As one participant recalled,

“I have fed barley to my animals all year, because the rangeland was bad all year. If there's not food, the animals die! The barley costs 27 SAR [approximately \$7.50] a bag, and I feed my herd 26 bags every other day. In the best of months, when the range is good, I feed only the pregnant animals and the animals going to market, but I buy barley all year round.”

The increasing use of barley supplements, in tandem with the other changes described in this paper, can be seen as a key factor in shifting Saudi pastoralism from an ecological to economic calculation. In the pre-contemporary era, successfully raising sheep and camel on the range required a detailed knowledge of the rangeland geography, rainfall patterns, and rangeland vegetation. With the introduction of barley, the ecological knowledge base described here became inconsequential – non-Bedouin peoples of the village and towns of the region could simply purchase barley at the artificially low market price, hire a foreign laborer to tend the herd, and collect the profit from market sales. Rainfall, of course, still served an important function, for should the rangelands bloom after significant rains, profit margins multiply as barley costs diminish. Yet the reliance on barley, in tandem with the other factors described in this paper, were part of the shifting discourse of Bedouin life, best characterized as the evolution of a pastoralism based on an economic calculation from one based upon an environmental one. Barley – as one significant factor in this shift – contributed to the processes already described in some detail: pressure on the rangelands increased as both Bedouin and non-Bedouin herds expanded, and while animal mortality increased, relative market prices continued to plummet.

### **Land Tenure and the Nationalization of Rangelands**

Even before the influx of petroleum wealth, the Arabian Peninsula, long at the global crossroads between east and west, played host to a diverse set of peoples. In the context of the Kingdom, however, identity has always been tethered to the tribe, and despite the sweeping tides of modernization, tribal affiliation remains a centerpiece in the

identity of urban and rural Saudi alike.<sup>9</sup> For the Bedouin, however, tribal affiliation connotes more than identity. In times past, and for much of the last century, Bedouin tribal affiliation conferred land tenure. Each tribe had a homeland in the desert—a *dirab*—over which the tribe exercised control.<sup>10</sup> These regions “represented a functional area of habitual use composed of water holes and associated pastures to which the group held rights.”<sup>11</sup> In times of climatic bounty, the Bedouin of one *dirab* might host those not blessed by Allah’s gifts. Conversely, in times of duress, Bedouin tribes reached out through their social networks to neighboring tribesman with more verdant pastures. Through this process, a complex social system was forged, one that not only formed the material basis of the tribal political system, but also one that favored the sustainable use of the limited and fragile range resources.<sup>12</sup>

This system of land propriety was abolished by royal decree in the early 1950s,<sup>13</sup> a political move wrought by the ruling family’s desire to exert control over the transnational nomads within its borders, by a desire to quell tribal fighting over the use of these lands, and, in more general terms, by the desire to move Saudi Arabia toward a more “modern” countenance, one in which private property played an altogether more important role than in earlier history.<sup>14</sup> Although contemporary Bedouin remain firmly attached to their *dirab*, what has changed is their ability to control the use of that land by other tribes or non-tribal pastoralists.<sup>15</sup> Without the right to prohibit passage, any pastoralist can move his herd to any part of the range, regardless of the traditional *dirab*. Furthermore, in the arid environs of the Saudi desert, tribal power often hinged on the control of key water sources. With the construction of government water wells and the widespread use of water trucks (now commonplace on the desert range), the underlying social power implicit in the notion of the *dirab* has been negated.

National policy has negated these traditional forms of tenure, and today rainfall brings Bedouin and non-Bedouin alike to any region blessed with rain. As one Bedouin nomad described, “We are Bedouin, and we are always looking for good rangeland. If it rains anywhere in the Kingdom, people start to move, and we Bedouin are always asking each other about the land. When I get there, even if it’s crowded, I take my place amongst the others.” As he describes, knowledge of rainfall in a specific area opens the door to the convergence of herds from all over the Kingdom – a possibility wrought by the eradication of the *dirab* system. In contemporary Saudi Arabia, Allah’s bounty is quickly consumed.

### Trucks, Roads and Water

Perhaps no change in the Bedouin livelihood has had more of an impact than the introduction of motorized transport. Upon reaching the crest of a large dune, it became no surprise to see a handful of small Toyota and Nissan trucks spread out over the vista below. A Bedouin tent, nestled in the dunes some forty miles from the nearest pavement, could be tracked by the traffic coming and going—friends and family arriving with news of distant pastures, a son returning from the herd for respite from the mid-day sun, or the patriarch returning from town, where sheep have been sold and barley purchased. In the small market towns and villages that dot the northern deserts, the streets buzz with these vehicles as the Bedouin come and go, exchange information, and go about the business of contemporary pastoralism.

The impact of the truck has been described in other anthropological work in the region.<sup>16</sup> In our study, we observed three distinct forms of motorized transport utilized by the Bedouin. First, the small Nissan and Toyota pickup trucks allow the Bedouin to move about the desert, check on distant herds, carry sheep to market, carry barley back to camp, and pay social visits to friends and relatives. This last component should not be overlooked: as we will describe below, climate information travels rapidly through the Bedouin social networks, and the increased mobility granted to the Bedouin by the truck has dramatically



**Figure 2:** A herd gathers around a water truck

extended the scope of this information. Second, all the Bedouin families we interviewed possessed a water truck. The water truck allows the Bedouin to carry water from government wells to distant herds, and as such, it provides a mechanism for overcoming poor pasture, drought, or overcrowding on the range. The ability to have water at all times was a necessary condition in the transformation of Bedouin herd typology from camel to sheep. Finally, should the Bedouin pastoralist decide to move his herd long distances, large tractor-trailers are rented for the journey.

All together, these forms of motorized transport, as well as the paved roads that connect the towns and villages of the northern deserts, are infrastructural aspects of modernization that increased the mobility of the Saudi Bedouin. These factors facilitated the shift to barley-based pastoralism and, furthermore, opened regions too distant for travel by camel to use. For Bedouin and non-Bedouin alike, these same factors removed the necessity of ecological and climatic information from the pastoralist equation. With barley, water, trucks, and roads on which to move about, knowledge of the location of distant wells, the flora of the range, or the location of recent rains became unnecessary prerequisites to sustain a herd. In other words, while a pastoralist might increase profits by making use of rainfall and its bounty, non-Bedouin nationals – without access to this information – found it possible to enter the pastoral livelihood, and with the structural changes in the political economy of the region, many did.

### Modernization

The six factors we have described above are indicative of the complex and pervasive impact of modernization upon the Bedouin livelihood. Each has contributed to the others, forming a web of interconnected causation that, together, shapes the processes

of modernization in which the Bedouin livelihood is enmeshed.<sup>17</sup> In environmental terms, one way of conceiving of this suite of factors is in terms of buffers, a concept developed elsewhere by the authors.<sup>18</sup> In both technological and social terms, these factors have reshaped the relationship between the Bedouin peoples and the environment that traditionally sustained them. Increased mobility conferred by the truck, the ability to move water from government-constructed wells to distant herds, and the availability of barley have shifted the basic calculus of this Bedouin livelihood. In decades past, the success of the Bedouin pastoral enterprise depended upon an indigenous knowledge of both the climate and the fragile desert landscape, as well as upon the indigenous system of communicating vital, pertinent pieces of information. In contemporary pastoralism, the ecological balance of this system has been superseded by the economic concerns of the market: the price of barley, the price of labor, and the market price of sheep.

In terms of policy, the Saudi government has enabled – even encouraged – this shift. In disassembling the tribal tenure system, mandating price supports for barley, forging a vast welfare state, and constructing a transportation infrastructure in the remote provinces of the vast Saudi desert, the Al-Saud family has encouraged these changes. It is a system of change common to many nomadic peoples, and many have posited these changes as subjugation to the nation-state.<sup>19</sup> In practice, these changes spurred the shift from a subsistence-based Bedouin livelihood to one well-integrated in regional and global markets. Yet the boundaries of these policies extended to non-Bedouin as well, and with the rollback of the welfare state, many non-Bedouin began to add a pastoral component to their livelihood. As a result, both the rangeland and the Bedouin face new strata of vulnerability: as their livelihoods become increasingly interconnected with regional and global markets, they face increasing competition from non-Bedouin pastoralists.

### **Climate Information**

To speak of modernization as an external force, however, or as emblematic of the onslaught of the capitalist juggernaut upon a helpless and static people would do a disservice to the intelligence and adaptability of the Bedouin we came to know. This adaptability, we suggest, is well illustrated by the social and communicative system we've briefly described in this paper. Prior to modernization, the communicative network of the Saudi Bedouin nomads was legendary, and well described by Donald Cole.<sup>20</sup> Tribal networks and frequent visits provided a mechanism for exchanging valuable information about the condition of rangeland and the presence of rainfall both distant and near. Yet the breakdown of tribal-based land tenure, the introduction of the truck, and the other forces of modernization we've described did not end the importance of these networks. Rather, the daily trip to the market, during which sheep are sold and barley is purchased, became the new nexus of Bedouin communication – less grounded in traditional tribal structures, but more extensive in its reach. Information travels rapidly through these contemporary networks. Rainfall on distant pastures is noted, and when the calculation makes sense, the tents are packed, a large truck is rented, and the animals are moved.



**Figure 3:** Bedouin truck at the market, with sheep for sale and barley for the herd.

So in the context of this rapid change to the Bedouin livelihood, what becomes of the government-sponsored climate prediction system whose utility we were supposed to gauge? First, as we noted in the introduction to this paper, climate prediction is at odds with deep-seated beliefs of these Islamic people. For many, attempts to predict the rainfall infringed upon the purview of Allah. Others we talked with, however, had given up on this climate information system for altogether different reasons. As one participant recalled, "I usually send someone to check on any news that I hear. And the news has to come from people! We don't believe the things we hear on the radio and television. Sometimes we'll hear something on television about the place we're in right then. The television says that there's rain here, right now, but we don't see anything! How can we trust that source of information?"

In this paper, we've tried to contextualize the analysis of a climate information system in a host of other factors that roughly fit under the rubric of modernization, and to show that rainfall has become an increasingly marginal factor in the calculus of contemporary Bedouin life. What is of particular interest in this Bedouin's description of his decision-making process, however, is not the inaccuracies of the government-sponsored system, which are certainly reparable. Rather, it's his focus on information that comes from people. The Saudi Bedouin have adapted their versatile and historic system of communication to the contours of modernization. They quickly hear of rainfall, and know when relocation makes economic sense. What the proposed climate information system will do, we suggest, is benefit non-Bedouin pastoralists – those without a deep and historic knowledge of the land, and without access to the social networks through which climate information is conveyed. As such, this climate information system will only exacerbate the conditions of Saudi pastoralism as a whole by increasing the number of animals on the range, lowering market prices for the animals, and further marginalizing the Bedouin people from their traditional livelihood.

## Conclusion

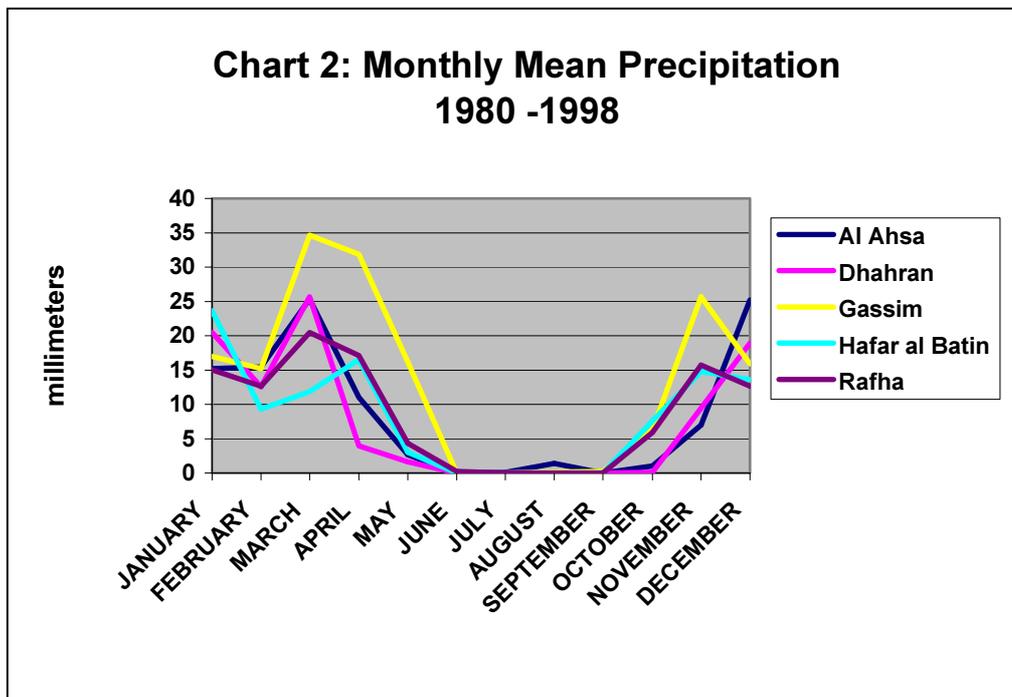
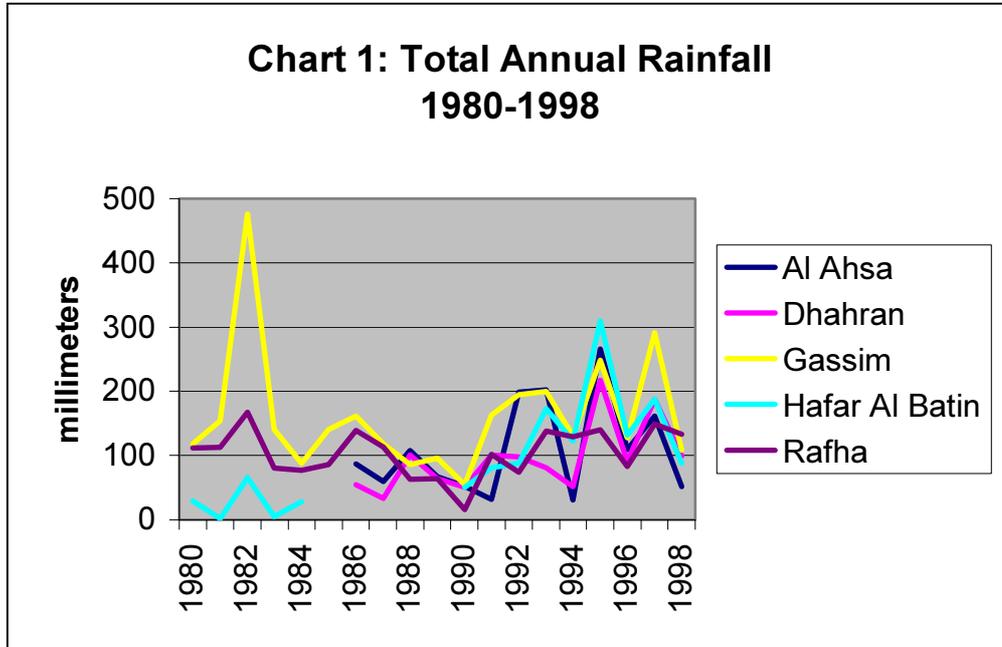
In this paper, we have argued that the calculus of Bedouin pastoralism has undergone a fundamental shift. The livelihood of the Bedouin peoples of Saudi Arabia once rested squarely upon their ability to navigate the difficulties of the fragile, arid desert rangelands. Their movements, customs, and, in the largest sense, their culture, were in many ways a product of this tenuous relationship with the environment and the rangeland-commons upon which they depended: tribal relations, land tenure, and migratory patterns were cultural adaptations to these extreme conditions.

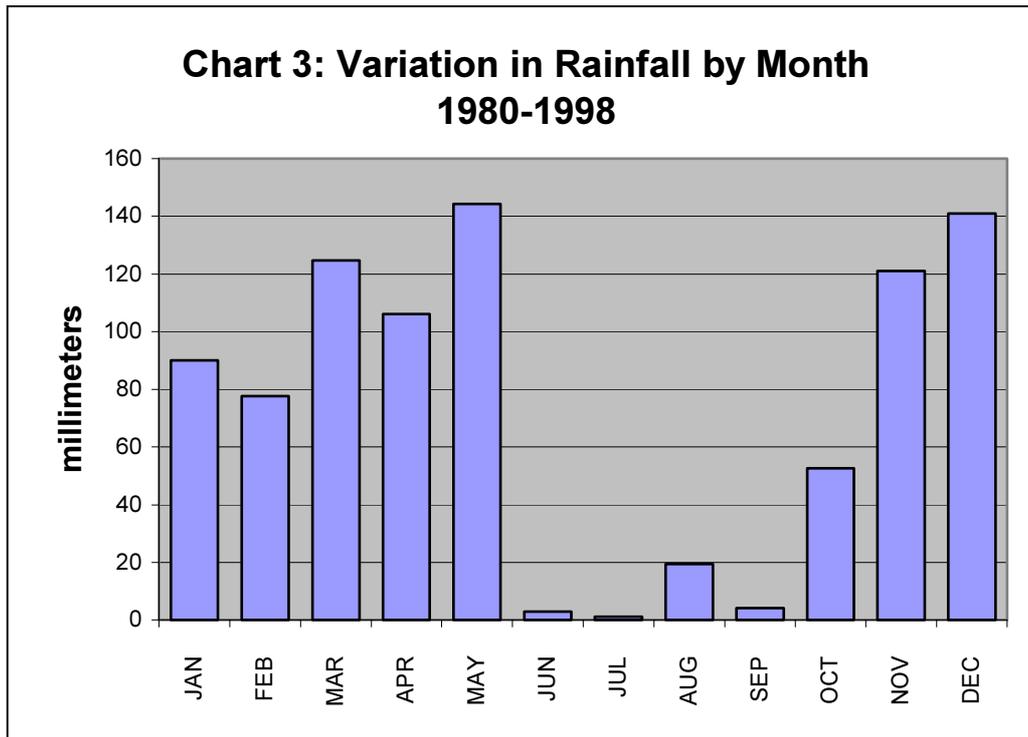
In the second half of the twentieth century, the Bedouin coped with dramatic changes to the context of their livelihood. New technologies were introduced, market forces began to make inroads into all aspects of their lives, and land tenure shifted in accordance with the demands of the modern nation-state. In the course of adapting to these changes, the environment in which they lived became an increasingly *insignificant* factor in their survival. More important was their ability to navigate the complexities of modernization – the moniker for a diverse array of forces emanating from different sources and strata. In this paper, we've focused upon six noteworthy aspects of modernization and the changes they instigated: the emergence of a welfare state; the establishment of national boundaries; the introduction of market labor to the Bedouin livelihood; the growing reliance on global feed markets; the eradication of tribal sovereignty over their desert homelands; and the incorporation of motorized transport into the day-to-day business of Bedouin pastoralism.

Indigenous knowledge about the landscape and the climate, once the key to success, is now ancillary to the central economic calculus of Saudi pastoralism. Moreover, the shifting calculus of Bedouin pastoralism has opened that livelihood to urban capital: because indigenous knowledge of the landscape and climate is no longer a necessary component of a successful pastoral operation, town and city-based entrepreneurs now compete with the Bedouin for the scarce desert resources. The carrying capacity of the desert – no longer a consideration when barley and water are available – has long been exceeded.

Superficially, the idea of assisting the Bedouin pastoralists with climate information is a good one, for any day the animals spend on good range is a day without barley, the principle cost in contemporary Bedouin pastoralism in the Kingdom. But our ethnographic data suggest that in the wake of modernization, the only advantage the Bedouin now retain is their traditional knowledge of the climate and landscape of their desert environs. As a government-provided free good, climate information will mostly benefit those without this connection to land and environment. Whether this move is indicative of the government's ambiguous relationship to the Bedouin people of the Kingdom is a matter of debate: what is certain is that the climate information system will do the Bedouin more harm than good.

## CHARTS





#### ENDNOTES

The research presented here was gathered as part of a project funded by the Meteorological and Environmental Protection Agency of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The authors would like to thank Dr. Abdul Aziz Al-Eisa, Abdalah Khaleel Huddad, Khalid M. A. Arkanji, and Al-Ghoraibi Fahad Hassan for their assistance in the field.

<sup>1</sup> Gardner, Andrew, "The New Calculus of Bedouin Pastoralism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." *Human Organization*, vol. 26 (2003): 267 – 276.

<sup>2</sup> Cole, Donald P., *Nomads of the Nomads: The \*Al Murrab Bedouin of the Empty Quarter*. (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1975)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Curtiss, Richard H., "Four Years After Massive War Expenses Saudi Arabia Gets Its Second Wind." *Washington Report On Middle East Affairs* (September 1995), 48-57.

<sup>5</sup> Champion, Daryl "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Elements of Instability Within Stability." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* vol. 3, 1999: 49-73.

<sup>6</sup> See Wilkinson, J. C. "Traditional Concepts of Territory in South East Arabia." *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 149, (1983): 301-315. In his discussion of territoriality in Arabia, Wilkinson argues that traditional concepts of land tenure in the region follow a rational, non-European pattern based on customary practice.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 309. Wilkinson describes the livelihoods of camel-herding nomads as, "continuous living on the verge of a natural disaster."

<sup>8</sup> Kapiszewski, Andrzej, *Nationals and Expatriates: Population and Labour Dilemmas of the Gulf Cooperation Council States* (London: Ithaca Press, 2001); see also Champion (1999). Champion describes the impact of the large expatriate labor force upon conceptions of work within the Saudi citizenry.

<sup>9</sup> Rae, J., Arab, G., Nordblom, T., Jani K. and Gintzburger, G., "Tribes, State, and Technology Adoption in Arid Land Management, Syria." *CAPRI Working Paper No. 15*. (Washington, D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute: 2001), 18. As Rae and his coauthors note, tribal affiliation "imparts an authenticity of descent and quality of honor that sets them [tribal members] apart from non-tribal society."

<sup>10</sup> Land tenure is a very complex issue on the Arabian Peninsula. Contemporary legal and bureaucratic structures overlay tenure principles drawn from Islamic law and customary practice. The combination of these forces active in a particular region at a particular time is, frequently, difficult to perceive. As Donald Cole notes, in the case of the Bedouin homelands ownership of the *dirab* focused primarily upon the land's wells and water resources (email to author, May 24, 2004); see also Altorki, Soraya and Donald Cole, *Arabian Oasis City: The*

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*Transformation of Unayzah*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989); Chaudhry, Kiren Aziz, *The Price of Wealth: Economies and Institutions in the Middle East*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997); Hajrah, Hassan Hamza, *Public Land Distribution in Saudi Arabia*. (London and New York: Longman, 1982). Wilkinson adds that, "there are few bedu tribes of the region who do not actually own considerable portions of villages, even if they may use clients to do the cultivation itself" (1983: 305).

<sup>11</sup> Rae et al. 2001: 19

<sup>12</sup> The *dirab* system, as described here, is to be distinguished from the *bema* system. The *bema* is a grazing reserve, traditionally under the control of sedentary, community-based leadership (rather than Bedouin). The *bema* system is often cited as a successful (albeit historical) example of managed, sustainable use of rangeland commons. See Al-Eisa, A., "Changes and Factors Affecting Bedouin Movement for Grazing," in *Drylands: Sustainable Use of Rangelands Into the Twenty-First Century*. V. R. Squires and A. E. Sidahmed, eds. (Rome: IFAD Series, Technical Reports, 1998); Al-Rowaily, Saud L. R., "Rangeland of Saudi Arabia and the "Tragedy of Commons." *Rangelands* vol. 21(1999): 27 – 29.

<sup>13</sup> Cole, Donald P., "Tribal and Non-Tribal Structures among the Bedouin of Saudi Arabia." *Al-Abhath* vol. 30 (1982): 77-93.

<sup>14</sup> As Chaudhry notes, "In practical terms, tribal *dirabs* (homelands) were the source of much conflict. The notion that particular tribal confederations had control over large parcels of land was not only contrary to the theory of a nation-state, in which citizens could move freely within national borders, but also a threat to the control of the central government over its territory" (Chaudhry 1997: 174, footnote 96).

<sup>15</sup> Al-Eisa, A. (1998)

<sup>16</sup> Cole 1975; see also Chatty, Dawn, *Mobile Pastoralists: Development Planning and Social Change in Oman* (New York: Columbia Press, 1996)

<sup>17</sup> See Gardner 2003 for an explication of the interconnectedness of these factors.

<sup>18</sup> Gardner, Andrew "Land Use and Land Tenure in the Middle San Pedro River Valley," in *An Assessment of Climate Vulnerability in the Middle San Pedro River Valley*. Timothy J. Finan and Colin West, eds. (Tucson: ISPE/CLIMAS. 1999), 12-29; see also Finan, Timothy J., Colin T. West, Diane Austin and Thomas McGuire, "Processes of Adaptation to Climate Variability: A Case Study from the US Southwest." *Climate Research* vol. 21 (2002): 299-310. Perhaps the clearest definition of "buffering" is provided in Vasquez-Leon, Marcela, Colin Thor West, Timothy J. Finan, "Comparative Assessment of Climate Vulnerability: Agriculture and Ranching on Both Sides of the US-Mexico Border." *Global Environmental Change* vol. 13 (2003): 159-173. The authors note that "buffering refers to the dynamic interaction of technology adjustment and social restructuring that links public policy, social institutions, and private decision-making in such a way that rural residents perceive that climate risk has been reduced to the point where they may no longer see themselves as vulnerable to climate variability" (Vasquez-Leon et al. 2003: 161).

<sup>19</sup> See Ernst Gellner's foreword Khazanov, Anatoly, *Nomads and the Outside World*, 2nd Edition (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994). Also see Hiatt, Joseph M., "State Formation and the Encapsulation of Nomads: Local Change and Continuity Among the Jordanian Bedouin." *Nomadic Peoples* vol. 15 (1984): 1 – 11; Fabietti, Ugo, "Sedentarisation as a Means of Detribalisation: Some Policies of the Saudi Arabian Government Towards Nomads," in *State, Society, and Economy in Saudi Arabia*, Tim Niblock, ed., (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982); Galaty, John, "Social and Economic Factors of Privatization, Sub-division and Sale of Maasai Ranches." *Nomadic Peoples* vol. 30 (1992); Humphrey, Caroline and David Sneath, *The End of Nomadism? Society, the State and the Environment in Inner Asia*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Hiatt, Joseph, M., "State Formation and the Encapsulation of Nomads: Local Change and Continuity Among the Jordanian Bedouin." *Nomadic Peoples* vol. 15 (1984): 1-11.

<sup>20</sup> Cole, 1975

**Bülent Özdemir**  
*Ottoman Reforms and Social Life,  
Reflections From Salonica 1830-1850*  
Istanbul, The Isis Press, 2003.

**Reviewed by Feryal Tansuğ\***

Bülent Özdemir's book, *Ottoman Reforms and Social Life, Reflections From Salonica 1830-1850*, is a useful contribution to the growing literature dealing with 19<sup>th</sup> century, urban, Ottoman history. The book is a reworked doctoral dissertation, which was based on archival material from the Ottoman Judiciary Court Records (*ser'yye sicilleri*) of Thessaloniki and (somewhat uncritically) reports of the British Consul Charles Blunt.

Bülent Özdemir's main aim is to contribute to the Tanzimat literature by focusing on the local history of Salonica and throughout the book. At that he succeeds. He challenges Orientalist assumptions and suggests a new perspective from which to approach 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman reforms. He argues that unless scholars use a 'bottom-up' approach to analyze the provincial origins of the Ottoman reforms, it would be impossible to overcome historiographical biases which conceal more accurate picture of the Ottoman state and society. Following Rif at Abou-El-Haj, Özdemir argues that 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman reforms should be analyzed by considering the internal dynamics of the Ottoman Empire, which were more significant than external forces. He states that the internal dynamics of the previous centuries - social and economic changes- prepared a base for the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman reforms (p. 34).

Ottoman reforms were not a Western imposition. They originated within the Ottoman State itself in order to make society adapt to the changing socio-economic conditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He contradicts the 'rise-and-decline' thesis which argues that Western-type reforms were imposed on the Ottoman State to save the empire and its institutions from dissolution and corruption. The author provides a good review of the

literature concerning the Orientalist school, the world system perspective of Wallerstein, and a new perspective of the recent regional socio-economic studies. Özdemir supports the latter perspective, which has generated bottom-up approaches and demonstrates through local studies that the Ottoman socio-economic structure was subjected to the transformation under the impact of the internal social and economic forces long before the massive European influence accelerated this transformation (p. 33). However, while underlining the role of the internal dynamics of the Ottoman Empire, he seems to ignore the influence of external factors. This study constitutes a good example of the economic and social history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire in that it attempts to overcome the shortcomings of institutional histories. Instead of approaching from the Ottoman state perspective, it attempts to focus on the impacts of the reforms on ordinary people's lives in Salonica.

The second part of the book is devoted to the analysis of the administrative and financial reforms of the Tanzimat and its implications on the Salonica society. For example, the author notes the deteriorating conditions of the local industrial enterprises due to the penetration of the European manufactured products into the Ottoman market. He also notes the Ottoman state's attempts to support and protect the interests of local artisans. Through variables of import and export trades and value tables between 1835-1845 the author demonstrates that Salonica had a very dynamic economic structure just before and after the Tanzimat. He also devotes a separate chapter to the impacts of the Tanzimat reforms on agriculture and peasants. The Ottoman State was alarmed at misadministration by local notables and state officials towards peasants. The Tanzimat measures tried to reign in local abuses, and as a result of reforms, there was a considerable increase in the cultivated lands and production in the 1840-1841 (pp. 141-143).

In this context, Özdemir underlines his main argument that "Tanzimat Reforms were not mere imitations of Western institutions or practices, but a response to the real concerns raised by the social problems of the country." (p. 144). He argues that much of

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the difficulties in implementing the reforms was due to the incompetence and ignorance of the local authorities. He mentions that the local powers' abuses of peasants did not suddenly disappear when the government attempted to control them through extending centralized power. They remained systemic during and after the reforms (p. 179).

In the last part of the book, the author discusses Muslim, Jewish and Greek communities of Salonica. Even though he claims that he considers the social, cultural and economic impacts of the Ottoman reforms on Salonica's society, he does not elaborate so much on the social and cultural transformations as he does of the economic aspect. One interesting point he makes is that, in the archives, there are no records of violence against non-Muslims in Salonica during, or because of, the Tanzimat reforms, as compared to the Arab lands of the Empire in the same period. The author makes an audacious argument about the perception of the Muslim community in the Balkans, but without supporting it by archival evidences. Like Meropi Anastassiadou, the author of the book *Salonique, 1830-1912, Une ville ottomane a l'age des Réformes*,<sup>1</sup> Özdemir contests the prevailing assumption in Balkan historiography regarding the role of Muslims in the economic life of the region that Muslims were mostly government officials, military men or land holding groups (pp. 178, 185).

Özdemir argues that "Muslims of Salonica in the 1840s were involved in every sphere of city life ranging from rich merchants to peasants and porters. There were ten Muslim commercial establishments in Salonica in 1839. Quite a large number of the artisans of the city were Muslims." (pp. 178-179). Moreover "Muslims of the middle class (artisans and traders) continued to prevail in Salonica even in the face of the negative impact of foreign trade, in which the non-Muslims were very active and which consequently paved the way for the disintegration of the Muslims' professional

organizations, 'guilds'" (pp. 183-184). In order to support this argument, he cites ten Muslim commercial establishments in Salonica in 1839 (pp. 178, 184) without comparing this number to Jewish and Greek establishments. He also mentions the Muslims' involvement in maritime activities (p. 184) by depending on Consul Blunt's reports (178-179, FN.1). For example, regarding the Jewish community of the city, he mentions various big Jewish trading family firms (200); or by depending on a court register of 1835, he notes that the shop owners and merchants were predominantly Jews and Greeks (p.117, fn. 1).

However, he does not give similar evidence for the Muslim involvement in commercial life in Salonica. Moreover, while he argues that the Muslims of Salonica were involved in commercial activity, he also explains why economic activity did not flourish further among the Muslims: "The Ottoman government did not, however, intend to promote economic activity only among the Muslim population of the Empire by the Tanzimat measures....there was a huge potential among the Ottoman elite, which had traditionally been interested in agricultural, military and administrative careers and not in commerce" (p. 183). This was because, apparently, the state was never concerned with turning Muslims into state backed merchant class to constitute the backbone of the economy.

Although this is generally perceived as the weakness of the Ottoman state during the reforms, Özdemir suggests to view this attitude of the state, alternatively, as a "daring act of the Ottoman State at a period at a time in which no other state showed a similar initiative." (p. 183). If Özdemir's and Anastassiadou's new arguments concerning the economic and social role of the Muslim community of Salonica could be supported by examples of specific cases from archival data, it would offer more reliable insights to the existing literature about the role of the Muslims in the economic and social-cultural life in the Balkans. Therefore, there is still much to be done concerning the Muslim community of Salonica. Özdemir, while contradicting traveler accounts about negative description of the Turks in the Empire –as being lazy, non-producing, smoking, gossiping people– (p. 184, fn. 1), inconsistently, he uses

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<sup>1</sup> Meropi Anastassiadou, *1830-1912, Une ville ottomane a l'age des Réformes*, (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997), translated into Turkish as *Tanzimat Çağında Bir Osmanlı Şehri, Selanik*, (Ankara: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2001).

another traveler's account –from Adrianople– as a evidence to demonstrate “tolerance, dialogue and mutual respect as the basic elements among all the polarities” in the Salonica society (p. 185-186).

The author mentions the Ottoman state's support and encouragement to improve the Jewish community's social-cultural conditions and to play an active role in the city's administration after the 1821 Greek Revolt. He criticizes viewing the transformation in the Ottoman Empire as leading to “the emancipation of the Ottoman Jewish community.” He demonstrates in the case of Salonica that the socio-economic transformation of the Jewish community did not occur at the behest of the increasingly active European Jewry. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European literature on Ottoman reforms, have equated equality before the law with “Christian-Muslim equality” or “Christian Rights” and ignored Ottoman Jews who benefited from the reforms as well (p. 203). Instead, Jewish transformation was a part of the Ottoman transformation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In examining the Greek Orthodox community of Salonica, the author contradicts the prevailing assumptions concerning the origins of the Balkan nationalisms: the idea that the impact of the French Revolution and Enlightenment on the Orthodox Christian community, and their 'secular' historical past enabled them to revolt against Muslim Ottoman oppression, and to establish nation-states. He supports the view that in the Ottoman Balkans different ethnic and religious groups did not remain as distinct groups, but created a unique Balkan character. The author provides the reader with a rich literature on this approach (p. 205-206) in order to argue that the Greek community was not a particular agent of modernization in Salonica, but rather part of the general and on-going transformation of the Ottoman social and economic structure.

In sum, Özdemir argues that there was no separation between ordinary people in Salonica. Muslim, Jewish, Orthodox experienced similar conditions during the age of Ottoman reforms. They paid taxes, suffered from abuses of local authorities, shared an extended common past and co-existed in the

region in mutual respect and tolerance (184, 226-227). However, Özdemir does not prove this thesis with rich local sources. The book does not effectively support the idea of a well-functioning plural society of Salonica with “tolerance, dialogue and mutual respect and without any political intervention” (p. 185-186). Yet, his critical analysis of an Ottoman Balkan city during the Tanzimat age written from the perspective of social and economic history invites further inquiry into a less-known aspect of Ottoman history.

**Robinson, C. F. (ed.)**  
*A Medieval Islamic City Reconsidered. An Interdisciplinary Approach to Samarra*  
Oxford Studies in Islamic Art XIV  
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.  
207pp.

**Reviewed by Edward J. Keall\***

For almost a century, Samarra has been a major feature in the purview of historians of Islamic art and architecture. High-lighted mostly through the pioneering work of Ernst Herzfeld from before 1914, Samarra was known for its extraordinarily sudden but short-lived creation in AD 836 by the Caliph al-Mu'tasim. It was a new palace-city that spread for miles mostly along the east bank of the River Tigris, north of the Abbasid capital, Baghdad. Vast palace compounds were connected by broad avenues and flanked by the residences of the royal court and the military, together with polo-grounds and race-courses. What made it possible to erect these extensive constructions so rapidly was the ready availability of river mud suitable for sun-dried brick construction and gypsum plaster that could be moulded, carved and painted to create an instant sense of lavishness. The painstaking quarrying and carving of stone was not needed for this superficially extravagant show of grandiosity. The layout and structure of the Grand Mosque was not only the largest of the early mosques ever built, it also provided the blue-print for historians of architecture to measure the development of the so-called Arab courtyard mosque. Wall ornament from the houses also featured in any

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work that addressed the issue of the evolution of Islamic art.

Similarly, Samarra has been famous for some time for the production of a new kind of particularly exotic glazed pottery termed “lustreware” because of the glimmering effects of the metallic pigments used in the glaze mix. Because of the short-lived occupation at Samarra by the royal house (it was abandoned as a residence by the Caliph in AD 892), the relatively limited time-span for the production of lustreware has made it an invaluable icon in the realm of Islamic ceramic studies. It is easily recognizable wherever it is found, and provides explicit insights into the trade in luxury goods at a very specific moment in time.

It is fascinating, therefore, to find that this monograph on Samarra (which represents papers delivered in 1996 at an Oxford University symposium) scarcely deals at all in detail with any of these long-maintained clichés. Instead, the volume charts new directions in terms of how one may try to gain insight into different aspects of Samarra’s identity. The academic approach which best exemplifies this output from a new generation of scholars is the contribution by Marcus Milwright on Abbasid Palace Design. While the article’s title appears at first glance to reflect the traditional art historical view, we are given rather an anthropological theme, with a detailed picture of what resources, in what quantities had to be used in order to build this vast new city. In a different, but equally novel vein Julia Bray presents a picture of how Samarra was seen in contemporaneous literature. Best of all in this sense is the verse composed by a court poet to be recited as he was dunked into a pool at the palace, for the amusement of the Caliph.

Continuing the anthropological perspective, Jeremy Johns presents figures on what it took to feed the Abbasid army. Derek Kennet presents a treatise on how the physical evidence for the living quarters of the army reflects its social organization. He takes clues from the minimal textual record but relies mostly on the “archaeological evidence” by which he means using the pre-WWII aerial photographs which first appeared in Herzfeld’s 1948 *Geschichte der Stadt Samarra*. Due to the short-lived occupation of the site,

the original layout is not confused by the overburden of later buildings. The worthlessness of most of the building materials has meant that few of the walls have been damaged through recycling demolition. While somewhat amorphous when viewed from the ground because of its scale, the skeleton of the city is eminently visible from the air. While erosion has softened the outlines of the walls, the lack of vegetation cover means that artifacts can be easily recovered from the surface and identified by the archaeologist. The real champion in this systematic approach to “ground truthing” has been Alistair Northedge who has successfully identified villages and monasteries that existed in the area before appropriation of land took place when al-Mu’tasim commissioned the city’s foundation. Editor Chase Robinson rightly points out that Herzfeld’s mantle has now passed to Northedge, who in this monograph presents an illuminating article on the typological and functional aspects of the numerous palaces of the Abbasids at Samarra.

Yet for all its great value as an updated analysis of the archaeological and textual evidence on the palaces by the experts on Samarra, it is not for the lay reader, nor for the novice student. For this we must criticize the editor, who could not see the potential contribution of these symposium papers beyond the interests of a moderately constricted group of Oxfordian scholars and their peers. For we have neither a good road map of the entire site (which stretches for 35 km in a narrow swath 5km wide), nor a complete concordance of the buildings mentioned by the various contributors. To be sure, there is a small scale map on p.8, but the lettering is minuscule. The name of the so-called Dar al-Khalifa (Caliph’s Palace) does appear on it, but it is not absolutely clear which precise part of the ruin-field it refers to. One must leaf through the different articles to find that the Dar al-Khalifa represents the palace built by al-Mu’tasim in 836, and that a portion of it was excavated by Herzfeld and published as Jausaq al-Khaqani. Similarly confusing examples of inter-changeability of the local site name (cf. Abu Dulaf) with the textual name (al-Ja’fari) abound in this volume. On the main map, the famous Grand Mosque is not referenced at all. An urban studies student must do a lot of independent collating in order to have a correct overall perspective.

Notwithstanding this serious shortcoming — and one which plagues many archaeological theses — these Samarran studies reflect a refreshingly new approach to the study of the city. For this reason, the book is highly recommended. We may still await, however, with eagerness another monograph or more that will give us both an overall picture of the palace-city's spectacular growth and equally quick demise, along with insights into the lives of the people who dwelt there, and further discussion regarding the real motivation for transporting the court away from the real capital, Baghdad. The simple, traditional explanation that the Caliph wanted to reduce the nuisance that his troops were causing the citizens of Baghdad, by building a new city away from the ordinary populace, does not seem to be a completely adequate explanation. Whatever we may eventually judge the full reason to be, this Oxford Studies monograph goes a long way to signaling how we can apply systematic literary and archaeological analysis towards that end.

**Bernard Heyberger,**  
*Hindiyya : Mystique et criminelle (1720-1798)*

Paris: Aubier, 2001. 456 pp.

**Reviewed by Stefan Winter\***

*Hindiyya* is a consummate piece of historical writing that combines biographical narrative, long-term structure analysis and good old-fashioned murder mystery. Revisiting some of the themes from his seminal 1994 study *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme Catholique*<sup>2</sup>, Bernard Heyberger sets out to investigate the life, career and mental world of the Maronite prioress and mystic Hindiyya 'Ujaymi (d. 1798), one of the most colourful and certainly most controversial figures in the early modern Levant. The result, more than just an important contribution to Lebanese and Catholic Church history, also offers a unique gender-based understanding of the impact of European imperialism on one segment of Ottoman-era society. If any regret

can be voiced about this book at all, it is that Hindiyya's case as well as the sources treated here may indeed be so original and particular as to defy useful methodological comparison with, or insertion into, Middle Eastern history in a wider sense.

The study is arranged chronologically in four parts, beginning with Hindiyya's childhood in Aleppo in the first half of the 18th century. Born into a devout, upper middle class Maronite family, it is the profound changes in oriental Christianity in this period that play a key role in Hindiyya's later career as a living saint. Since the Catholic Reformation, Jesuit and other Latin missionaries had increasingly brought local Christian society into the sphere of Roman influence, the split within the Orthodox community and the Melkites' union with the Catholic Church being the best-known result. However, Heyberger also reveals a more profound rupture between traditional, lineage-based religious identity and a newer, more individualistic and affective form of devotion among Aleppo's Christians irrespective of confessional denomination. For young women in particular, who in the past might be even more sequestered than their Muslim sisters, studying with a "Frankish" friar or joining one of the new Latin religious orders could be a means to avoid early marriage and instead lead a life of self-determination.

The author explores some possible historical-psychoanalytical explanations for Hindiyya's growing pietism and penchant for ecstatic visions (e.g. diagnosing her with hysterical neurosis and later on with paranoid psychosis); more pertinent and convincing is his portrayal (chapter 4) of how European cultural influences, from popular literary tracts on saints' lives to the new realism of baroque painting to an enlightenment fascination with anatomy, informed her mystical obsession with the body of Christ. Given to self-laceration and extreme fasting from an early age, Hindiyya finally divulges her visions of Jesus asking for her hand as his spiritual bride. With the shepherding of her Jesuit confessor, her claim to sainthood is concretized by the miraculous appearance of stigmata, an engagement ring, and prophetic abilities. Therewith begins not only a stellar religious-charismatic career, but also a fierce contest

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<sup>2</sup> *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme Catholique : Syrie, Liban, Palestine XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Rome: Ecole Française, 1994).

between local and Roman Church authorities for control over her.

To her Jesuit handlers, who were already envisaging her eventual death and burial in view of getting her canonized, Hindiyya at first represented an opportunity to realize their project of opening an inter-denominational women's convent in Mt Lebanon. They were opposed in this by the Shuwayr monastery, which preferred to see any new order placed under Melkite direction, but also by the Maronite Khazin clan and indeed by Hindiyya herself, who fought and was ultimately able to found her own convent, the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, on Khazin property at Bkerké in 1750. Part II of this work is perhaps the most informative in terms of local political history, as it deftly illustrates the role of religion in the growing independence of the Maronites in 18th-century Mt Lebanon. Backed by both France and the Shihabi emirate, the Khazins were using their extensive *waqf* landholdings to patronize the newly established Lebanese Order and other monastic groups and thus supersede the patriarchate as the locus of power within the Maronite community. The Holy See, on the other hand, was becoming ever more determined in this time to stamp its authority on all Catholic institutions, and viewed both secular interference in, and lack of proper Church control over, women's religious orders in Mt Lebanon with increasing suspicion. With Hindiyya there was indeed cause for concern, as her doctrine of her own "mysterious union" with Christ, legitimized through frequent prophetic visions, bleedings, and demonic admonitions, began to command the obedience of the local highland population; the author asks (p. 139) what role a small group of Muslim Shihabi women devoted to Hindiyya may in fact have played in the conversion of the entire Shihabi dynasty to Christianity around this time. Still, her vocation of Sacred-Heart spiritualism can be seen to have been fully in line with European and especially Italian models of the time, and a papal mission sent to investigate her order (at the instigation of the Jesuits!) in 1753 yielded no evidence of heresy per se. Despite strong reservations about Hindiyya's honesty and a "misogynist" attitude toward charismatic female saints in general, the papal authorities preferred to bury the issue—thus perhaps

paving the way for the order's rapid descent into chaos and violence.

Hindiyya's mounting megalomania and the campaign to dissolve her order, the subjects of parts III and IV, serve the author to throw the conflict of local vs. external factors in Lebanese politics in the later 18th century into greater relief. The 1754/1768 scission of the Maronite Lebanese Order into Aleppine (Halabi) and mountain (Baladi) factions was an aspect of this conflict whose importance has heretofore probably been underestimated. Hindiyya, being partial in this regard to the diffuse, distant authority represented by the Maronite patriarch (Yusuf Istfan was in fact wholly under her sway) and the Aleppine clergy, started to persecute women at her convent from Baladi families, who along with the local Maronite episcopacy supported the strong, centralized government of the Shihabi emirs. Reports of nuns being beaten, humiliated and possibly even poisoned at the convent reached a papal legation sent to investigate in 1774, but were brushed off by the patriarch as being politically motivated. In true cult fashion, Hindiyya and her acolytes began to perceive any form of opposition as a satanic plot, and subsequently set themselves above all moral and religious constraints in the name of defending the "mystery of the union." The full extent of the horror at Bkerké—the systematic use of torture and exorcism to extract confessions from nuns accused of conspiring against Hindiyya—came to light only after the beating death of one of two Baladi sisters, a murder the tormentors maintained until the very end had been committed by the devil himself.

To Heyberger, this crisis within the Maronite community was, much like witch-hunts in 17th-century Europe, metaphoric of the weakness of Church authority in a time of profound social anxieties, especially among women, over confessional pluralism (p. 267-8). Indeed, it was only after the intervention and seizure of the convent by the Shihabi emir, for whom re-establishing Rome's ecclesiastic authority was a means to consolidate his own secular rule over the Maronite community in this time, that the Congregation of the Sacred Heart was finally dissolved and the rebel patriarch deposed. If Hindiyya's ascent in grace was characterized by the frequent inversion of power between her and her nominal superiors,

her banishment bespeaks also the rationalization of authority in Lebanon in the hands of the Shihabis in the late 18th century.

Hindiyya's unresolved place in the Lebanese collective memory leads the author to venture a more provocative conclusion as well. The majority of previous studies have tended to absolve Hindiyya of any personal wrongdoing, painting charismatic mysticism as the real essence of Lebanese religiosity and her as the victim of secular greed and Roman bullying. In fact neither Hindiyya nor any of the other actors were ever called to account for, or repented of, their material crimes at Bkerké. The disavowal of individual responsibility and the unending quest for "justice" from some higher authority, in the author's opinion, also marks the story of Hindiyya as one of Lebanese clientelism and sectarianism, a paroxysm in the construction of Maronite cultural and political identity that remains relevant still today.

*Hindiyya* breaks new ground as a study of religious deviance and *mentalité* in an early modern Levantine society. It owes its interest, however, to a historiographical context that is clearly more Christian and European than it is Arab Middle Eastern. As with other classics of *mentalité* history, it is the detailed inquisitorial reports of contemporary Catholic Church officials sent to investigate the flocks' spiritual state that afford such keen insight into Hindiyya's evolving personality. Indeed, the essence of Heyberger's vast array of materials comes from the Roman archives of the Propaganda Fide; Arabic sources feature largely in the form of Maronite religious tracts, and Ottoman official sources, not at all. When one considers that Hindiyya's lifelong fight against authority revolved around issue such as whether it was permissible to sell her blood and hair as living relics, or if she could unilaterally lift the prohibition on eating meat on the Friday of the Feast of the Sacred Heart (with her Halabi supporters pointedly eating fatty foods in defiance of Rome that day), one feels distinctly that hers is a story not of Ottoman, but of Roman Catholic provincial society. This in no way detracts from the book's merit. To the contrary, it helps drive home what makes Lebanon historically and historiographically different.

Eugene Rogan (ed.)  
*Outside In: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East*  
London: IB Tauris, 2002

Reviewed by John T. Chalcraft\*

*Outside In* makes an important and suggestive contribution to the non-elite social history of the modern Middle East. This edited collection takes up the intriguing question of marginality, defined in terms of "the individual's non-conformity to legal or social norms" (p. 3). The book joins a conversation held by historians from Jacques le Goff on medieval France to Abdelhamid Larguèche on eighteenth and nineteenth century Tunisia about, *inter alia*, drinkers, Jews, migrants, "roughs and toughs" (p. 187), "the poor, the insane, convicts, prostitutes, and performers" (p. 4). Editor Eugene Rogan acknowledges a debt to Michel Foucault, not because of the latter's work on "marginality as such", but because of "his discursive method of analysis and his focus on the institutions by which authority and society classify and act upon the individual" (p. 2). The goal of the book is not to offer "hard and fast conclusions", but to "achieve a better understanding of Middle Eastern societies in a period of rapid change by examining them from outside in" (p. 5).

The volume is based on a genuinely impressive array of sources, including chronicles, court records, government correspondence, interviews, maps, memoirs, petitions, pictures, poems, police records, regulations, reports, and songs. Original material is used in an exemplary fashion and with remarkable consistency throughout. Every article has something to tell historians about the vital question of where to search and how to break new ground in writing the modern social history of the Middle East. Van Nieuwkerk's chapter, for example, is a vivid reminder of how oral sources – even a single interview – can be used effectively to shed light on contemporary struggles and to raise intriguing questions about the past. She carefully analyses the shifting oral narratives of a grandmother, a mother, and a daughter who had varying links to the Cairean entertainment

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business. She vividly shows how through religion, 'force of circumstances' and claims on respectability these women accept, justify, or condemn singers and dancers, arguing persuasively if not particularly surprisingly that "the marginality of the business is felt more strongly as the social status of the family rises and the ensuing middle-class values gain prominence" (p. 250). As for method, Van Nieuwkerk made productive use of an interview assistant who had worked in the entertainment business for thirty years. Particularly suggestive is the author's record of a heated exchange between assistant and interviewee about the respectability of entertainment. That such a clash was not intended by the scholar, but was productively accommodated within the chosen methodology, is an important point, going to the question of how sources can ever do more than reveal the methods by which historians select them. Through its impressive manipulation of often original material the volume as a whole stands as an important refutation of those who only decry the lack of sources written by or relating to non-elites in the modern Middle East, and suggests new directions for social historians.

The collection resoundingly achieves its relatively modest goal of enhancing our understandings of Middle Eastern societies at a time of rapid social change, for the contributors consistently advance their arguments persuasively. To consider two of the most striking arguments: first, Khaled Fahmy considers prostitution in nineteenth century Egypt in order to uncover "the social space of an increasingly marginalised member of society" and to shed light on state policy on "public hygiene, morality and public security" (p. 77). He argues persuasively that "[a]fter the large army that Mehmed 'Ali created had been disbanded in the early 1840s, and after the medical threat that prostitutes posed to the troops in their camps had receded, the medical and legal authorities in urban centres shifted their concern from the prostitute's body to the brothels as a source of sedition, danger and infestation" (p. 98). Fahmy makes a powerful case that brothels and prostitutes were not so much stigmatized and regulated on the basis of their immorality, strictly conceived, but because they were seen as a threat to the security, "peace and tranquility of urban centers" and the lifestyle of the dominant

classes (p. 98). Such a thesis speaks suggestively to those trying to understanding changing visions of order in the nineteenth century Egyptian and Ottoman world.

Second, Julia Clancy-Smith examines the Maltese and other southern Europeans residing in Tunisia, 1830-1870s, successfully nuancing in the process a familiar picture in which colonizer and colonized are radically distinct and monolithic. She argues against the view that "all powerful European consuls . . . resolutely advanced the interests of their foreign nationals against those of the indigenous population" (p. 153). She argues instead that "in day-to-day encounters there existed ample room for negotiation on all sides", that there were important differences between the social norms held by European elites and by "Mediterranean subsistence migrants" (p. 153), and that European identities were not fixed or monolithic. Her work points to spaces and social practices too often either dismissed as betwixt and between, or simply considered residual to the dynamics of colonization.

Other contributors make less ambitious arguments, but are none the less persuasive for that. Mine Ener examines the poor shelter of Takiya Tulun in nineteenth century Cairo, and convinces us that it served as both a "place of refuge for [poor] individuals who had petitioned for admittance" and as a "means to enforce prohibitions on begging" (p. 70). This is important work because historians know desperately little about welfare practices and policies in the nineteenth century Middle East. Moreover, although Ener does not frame it this way, it is exciting to discover more about a part of what Karl Polyani called the "self-protection" of society against the ravages of the emerging market economy. Rudolph Peters, to pick another example, argues cogently that in Egypt prior to 1882 "prison sentences had no strong stigmatizing effect and that released prisoners were not marginalized socially" (p. 32). Even prisoners themselves "were not isolated from society. They could be visited by their relatives and worked side by side with other workers in factories and workshops" (p. 45). Such work draws attention to the counterintuitive idea that convicts may not have been marginal – i.e. stigmatized and excluded – in any meaningful sense, raising suggestive questions about

state/society relations and attitudes to justice and government with which historians are only beginning to grapple.

The volume is one of the first in English to tackle on a major scale in the study of the modern Middle East the question of marginality, an important organizing concept for social history. The idea of marginality, based around forms of stigma and social exclusion, can allow us to escape the more compartmentalized and mechanical versions of history from below, and greatly diversifies the possible subject matter – taking us well beyond, for example, the ‘cloth cap proletariat’. At best it makes the production of the marginal a shifting product of the whole array of social relations, rather than something which inheres in a distinct group. It also offers a way to transcend either/ or approaches to the debate over whether the subaltern can speak or not, and does not automatically force us to consider only either discourse (often elite-produced) on the one hand, or material practices on the other. The chapter by Jens Hanssen skillfully exemplifies some of these themes. Hanssen examines the discourse of public moralists, the urban environment, prostitution, and entertainment in *Fin-de-siècle* Beirut. He makes the important argument that marginal persons “were produced as tragic urban figures not merely by objective alienating processes of rapid urbanization” but rather by two strongly – and subtly – linked phenomena: first “a powerful discourse on morality that viewed marginality as an obstacle to the imagined industrious and prosperous future of Beirut”, and second by “the process of geographic and demographic urban expansion” itself. (p. 184). For Hanssen both public moralists and the physical infrastructure of the city combine to produce discourses and practices which create the marginal, which is internal to and defined against centrality – signified by industriousness and prosperity on the one hand, and well-lit streets, respectable quarters and so forth, on the other. Hanssen thus shows ingeniously how unlit parts of the city *become* threatening and marginal once gas street-lighting is established elsewhere.

However – and perhaps this is inevitable in an edited volume – I did not feel that the concept of marginality was as richly developed in the other articles or as consistently used as it might have been. The

“fairly loose working definition” deployed (p. 4), which refers to non-conformity to social norms, but says nothing about social exclusion, certainly allows the editor to bring all the pieces into the volume, and assuredly makes the collection a coherent whole, but sacrifices consistency and conceptual development in the process. In Van Nieuwkerk’s chapter, for example, the term marginality could be substituted for the term ‘stigma’, in a way which would not diminish the argument, and would probably clarify the matters, given the interesting and complex genealogy of the word ‘marginal’ and the term ‘marginality’. Sami Zubaida’s sketch of practically uncharted territory – the history of entertainers in Baghdad, 1900-50 – argues persuasively that while musicians, singers, dancers, prostitutes and the like remained socially marginal, this marginality was constructed in different ways according to the “differentiation and institutionalization of different forms of music and entertainment in the modern period” (p. 213). For example, Zubaida strikingly illustrates how outbreaks of violence disappeared from certain forms of musical entertainment by 1940. But for all the skill of the author, and the interest of these points, it is not clear how the use of the concept ‘marginality’ advances the argument or clarifies the complex social position occupied by Baghdadi entertainers. Likewise, François Georgeon argues that in Istanbul during the nineteenth and early twentieth century the consumption of alcohol (increasingly raki not wine) emerged from proscribed places and lost much of its stigma. Opposition came to target “not consumption so much as the intemperance to which it could give rise” (p. 26) and did so in a health-oriented rather than a religious mode. This is a suggestive and persuasive argument, but one can imagine a number of frames for it, and the idea of marginality/ centrality strikes the reader as somewhat contrived. In these three contributions, there is little explicit about social exclusion, the key part of the definition of marginality that is dropped by the collection, in order, it seems, to accommodate these pieces.

Eugene Rogan alludes to the “methodological pitfalls” (p. 3) associated with the concept of marginality, but these are not made explicit in the volume, and raise problems, which anyone seeking to use the

concept of marginality would dearly like to see explored. Beyond some useful references in the introduction we never get a thorough unpacking of this polysemic term or its not unproblematic academic origins – in English – in US sociology and psychology debates about immigrants in the 1920s. The references to Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* and *The History of Sexuality* do not necessarily convey the necessary clarity about the concept of marginality. Foucault is regularly a complex figure of citation, and the problem is compounded because Foucault does not offer a clear definition or substantial discussion of the notion of marginality in these volumes. Eugene Rogan's own fine – and at points entertaining – article clearly bears a debt to Foucault's work on madness, confinement and psychiatry. Rogan makes an important contribution to the history of the advent of the modern European psychiatric asylum in late nineteenth century Egypt and Lebanon, and thus the introduction of a “new notion of madness” (p. 104) which conformed “to European definitions grounded in the new science of psychiatry” (p. 121). Rogan persuades the reader that “[w]hen confronted by madness, the public turned increasingly to medicine rather than religion” (p. 121). But I wanted to see more to justify the use of the notion of marginality rather than some other metaphor. For whereas marginality can imply figures placed around the edges of a broad central zone, *Madness and Civilization* arguably constructs a division – mostly basically between reason and unreason – which makes the metaphor of the margin problematic, or at least in need of elucidation.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Foucault's work can and has lent itself to work based on the concept of the discursive construction of Self and Other, rather than center/ margin. Who is in the center, who is at the margin, and what precisely does this convey? Can the social be analyzed in terms of centers and margins, and is this primarily a physical and objectivist idea of integration, or is it primarily a discursive production? If it is

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<sup>4</sup> Foucault does discuss marginality elsewhere, in terms of non-conformity to rules and norms and exclusion from certain categories of human activity (production, reproduction, language, and games). See a lecture delivered by Michel Foucault in 1970 and published in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, James Faubion ed., Trans. Robert Hurley and others (London: Penguin, 1998): 335-342. Nothing is particularly simple here: for example, Foucault sees celibate clerics as marginal men.

both, how do we specify the links between the two? These questions are not unanswerable, but they needed more elaboration.

The collection's title, “Outside In”, implying a view of Middle East history from the outside or the margins, does not clarify the matter. This is because as Hanssen's article shows, marginality is a construction with indissoluble connections to centrality, and does not imply a view from any pristine outside, or external or marginal space. On the contrary, as the volume's emphasis appears to confirm, mechanisms of social exclusion and stigmatization often proceed from authority, expertise, the wealthy, and the state. Only one article squarely tackles the interesting question of how, if, and when marginal groups resisted, accommodated, or negotiated their marginal status. Eyal Ginio aims to understand “the situation of migrants and/or unskilled workers” in eighteenth century Ottoman Salonica “from their point of view”, as well as to grasp the “way in which the authorities and the local society understood and defined this social phenomenon and coped with it” (p. 126). He argues that “the ostensibly rigid borders between the permanent worker and the foreign migrant shifted according to the workers' competence to acquire local patrons and affiliation to networks of support” (p. 142). In other words, Ginio takes up the question of whether marginal figures sought to or could transform their situation, and persuades us of the importance of the construction of social networks in this regard. But this is the only view from the ‘outside’, as it were, that the volume offers. As a whole the collection, in spite of its title, does not self-consciously address the issue of marginal agency.

This is part of a more general absence of a further elaboration of what the volume's research can tell us about marginality. The reader is informed that “these are not subjects which lend themselves to hard and fast conclusions – and we offer none” (p. 5). Hence, no contribution to larger debates about marginality is specified. This is rather disappointing, in view of the high quality of the research in the volume, not to mention the larger need to integrate Middle East studies into debates held elsewhere – partly to combat persistent claims of exceptionalism. Numerous issues could have been addressed. For

example, apparent throughout the volume is the importance of new forms of science, health practices, and medicine, new and powerful notions of progress, prosperity and industriousness, and new visions of order: are we to understand that European norms and practices are starting to dominate the production of marginality, or are much more complex processes at work?

Ultimately, one might say that these criticisms, which revolve around sins of omission not commission, can only be properly addressed in single-author works. Whether this is true or not, one hopes that future researchers, drawing on the consistently solid scholarship of this ground-breaking work, will rise to the challenge.

**Luis Martinez (tr. Jonathan Derrick)**  
*The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*

London: Hurst & Company, 2000, pp. xxii+265

**Reviewed by Amandeep Sandhu\***

Luis Martinez finds, his repeated denials to the contrary, the roots of the Algerian Civil War in one source—a war-oriented worldview. In this worldview, the contending parties of Algerians, according to Martinez, find violence to be a means for accumulation of wealth and prestige. Martinez represents the conflict through rational choice lenses where contending actors—the military and guerilla groups—use violence to further their own wealth and prestige. In the introductory chapter, Martinez takes issue with the oft-cited explanation of the “black decade”—one that holds responsible the social and economic crisis resulting from the downturn in the oil market in the 1980s for the civil war—and of demographic transition. Martinez views the Algerian crisis not as a crisis of the state, but in fact as an economic and political resource that was used by the military.

In the first part of the book, chapters two to four, Martinez traces the lineage of the conflict from its beginning in 1991 to its descent into a civil war by 1993. While

conventional accounts have held the Islamic bloc of votes as mainly responsible for the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), Martinez shows that the rise of the FIS cannot be explained solely by the centrality of cultural factors. Contrary to the conventional explanations, Martinez shows that four groups were responsible for the rise of the FIS: 1) petty traders; 2) military entrepreneurs; 3) the ‘hittiste’ (literally those who prop up the wall—meaning unemployed) and 4) devoted Muslim activists. The FIS’ banning led to a revolutionary situation, which worsened into a full-blown war in response to the increasing state repression. The initial diffidence of the MIA guerillas was replaced by the rise of more assertive groups—the GIA and the MEI.

In the second part of the book, chapters five to seven, the author illustrates how the military and the guerillas used the liberalization of economy to maximize their respective strengths. At the end of 1993 the regime, with increasing defense expenditure, found itself unable to pay back the debt and approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF implemented a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). While the increasing capital flow into the state coffers staved off of disintegration, the liberalization also lent itself well to the designs of the guerillas—who enriched themselves as the private trade in the areas under their controlled increased. This led to a “plunder economy” in which the military, local elites and the regional Emirs added to their reserve of resources at the expense of the general public. Partly the state’s decision to privatize the economy, according to Martinez, was meant to reward those patronage networks that inherited the state sector destroyed by the guerillas who, counter-intuitive as it may sound, destroyed the already defunct state sector infrastructure rather than the oil and gas infrastructure.

In the third part of the book, chapters eight to eleven, Martinez explains the consolidation of the civil war. With overflowing state coffers, the regime felt more confident and began maneuvering to address underlying political issues. On political front, Mahfoudh Nannah and his Hamas-MSI party were given recognition; on economic front, the job creation helped the unemployed, and increasing opportunities enticed the “petty bourgeois” section of population and thus

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roped in the informal economy. Martinez concludes that, given the parties to the conflict were unable to defeat another by military means, Algeria was falling back into a political scenario that has precedence in the Algerian history: the arrangement of Beyliks, the decentralized arrangement in which the central government leaves the problem of fighting the conflict to local leaders. In the long run, this would lead to the destruction of the FIS-inspired alternative and the guerillas will be slowly incorporated into the military.

Martinez does a fine job of explaining the civil war from close to the ground. As the usual expression has it, explanations should be ground up—but in Martinez case he seems to hug the ground. How else would one explain his complete neglect of the wider international context of the conflict? It is, after all, no secret that the French have worked to defeat the guerilla opposition. But the main problem with the book is this: Martinez's historical framework is seems to fit like a straight jacket on the contemporary events. Take, for, example, his main argument about the worldview that underpins the conflict—for him, the figure of “political bandit” in Algerian history is the yardstick to measure the rise of agents seeking to maximize wealth and power through political violence. Important as history is, it does not dictate the present; there might be parallels but the present cannot be explained via a one-to-one reference to the past. Besides even if one buys Martinez's contention that it is indeed a war-oriented worldview that is at the bottom of this conflict, one is hard pressed to explain why this conflict began when it did begin—that is, why did this worldview gave rise to the crisis in 1991-92 and not before that? As important as this book is for reliable information on the events on the ground, it remains far from satisfactory in explaining the civil war.

**Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi`**  
*Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History*  
London, Pluto Press, 2004

**Reviewed by Salam Kitmitto\***

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There is a disheartening dearth of literature in English on intellectual developments in the modern Arab world. The book under review, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History*, by Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi`, seeks to rectify this deficiency. Identifying the cataclysmic 1967 Arab defeat to Israel as the “great divide” separating the *nakbah* epoch and its “accompanying sense of bereavement and shock” following the loss of Palestine in 1948 from the post *naksa* era of “despondency and deepening crisis” (p. x), Abu-Rabi` launches into a systematic analysis of the intellectual output of leading ideologues and ideological forces that have dominated the post 1967 Arab world. The text is divided into two sections, “Themes” and “Thinkers.” The former section focuses on ideologies such as nationalism, Islamism, secularism as well as *shari'a* and globalization, and examines them in the context of their emergence and instrumentalization in the contemporary Arab world. The latter section engages the works of contemporary Arab intellectuals such as Rashid al-Ghannushi, Muhammad al-Ghazali, Muhammad `Abid al-Jabiri, Costantine Zurayk, Mahdi `Amil and Abdallah Laroui.

The book begins with several precarious assumptions that inform the rest of the text. Before going on to enumerate a combined fourteen theses that he intends to defend in this work (p. xv-xvii), Abu-Rabi` states that the primary target audience he has in mind for his book are Muslim intellectuals residing in the West, whom Abu-Rabi` chides for having “failed to produce a critical and constructive Islamic theory of knowledge” that will enable the “Muslim masses” to deal with the problems they face in the West as the “Muslim community...is in a state of intellectual and religious disarray” (p. xiii). These Muslim intellectuals, Abu-Rabi` continues, “have also failed to inform us as to how to become both ‘Muslim’ and ‘modern’...[The Muslim intelligentsia must] brake out of its current historical impasse...and become a leading light to the downtrodden Muslim masses” (p. xiii).

Yet, who precisely are these “masses,” we are never told. The only thing we know about Abu-Rabi`s “masses” is that they seem devoid of any agency, and are idly waiting for their intellectuals to filter down to them an

appropriate “theory of knowledge” in order for them to make some sense of their lives in the “West.” More importantly, can one even reduce a group of peoples comprised of individuals with ethnic, linguistic, sectarian, and historical differences, to such an essentialist (and some might add pejorative) term such as the “Muslim masses”? For instance, can one speak of the “Jewish masses” without accounting for whether they are Israeli or non-Israeli Jews, Sephardic or Ashkenazi, etc.? How about the “Christian masses”? Curiously, these monolithic representations seem to be appropriate (and applied) only when one is referring to Muslims.

Abu-Rabi’s vague and all-encompassing framework begs the question of why the focus on the entire Muslim world? The Arab world (which this book, after all, is about) constitutes a miniscule percentage (approximately fifteen percent) of the entire Muslim population, and is not representative of the Muslim world as a whole, and vice-versa. The Muslim world (sidestepping the problematics of defining this entity), with its fifty-five-plus nations and over one billion citizens, did not after the 1967 defeat undergo a process of introspective criticism and re-evaluation equipollent to that of the Arab nations. It is a habitual folly of scholars of the Middle East to conflate the Arab world with the Muslim world, and reduce the former to a representation of the latter (and vice-versa).

A couple of pages later, Abu-Rabi tells us that “One may divide thought into ‘official thought’ and ‘popular thought’”, and his book is “sympathetic to the popular discourse,” while aiming to unveil the “grandiose pretensions of ‘official thought’” (p. xiv). But the Arab intellectual milieu is not as bipolar as Abu-Rabi describes it. If Abu-Rabi is correct, then where do we situate an intellectual such as Sadek Jalal al-Azm? This “Apostate of Damascus” has offended just about everybody: the official government (which imprisoned him for a while), “popular” religious sensibilities and the religious authorities (in calling for the secularization of society and for defending *iblis* and Salman Rushdie). Hence, there must be *at least* another level of “thought.” Ironically, by demarcating “thought” into either an “official” or “popular” realm, Abu-Rabi leaves no room

for his own subject matter – the intellectual (who may reside outside of both spheres).

In the chapter entitled “Contemporary Arab Intellectual Trends,” Abu-Rabi highlights the four major ideological forces that have shaped the contemporary Arab world: Islamic, nationalist, liberal, and Marxist/leftist (p. 64-90). On the contentious topic of Arab nationalism, Abu-Rabi describes the divide-and-conquer strategy employed by the major world power, the United States, and its next of kin regional ally, Israel, in their dealings with the various Arab countries. He then situates their approach within the larger context of a world economic system dominated by the US: “Capitalist globalization has exerted much time and effort to dispense with Arab nationalism as one of the most serious contenders to its economic and political hegemony in the Arab world...It is to the advantage of globalist forces to deal with the Arab world as disparate entities rather than as one cohesive political unit” (p. 77). And therein lies the paradox of Arab nationalism. Whereas the proponents of Arab nationalism advocated the unification of all Arab speaking nations in order to stem the encroachment of Western imperialism, this process was resisted by those Arab regimes that were themselves benefiting from their own increasing immersion in this Western dominated capitalist system (primarily among them the Gulf countries). Hence, Arab nationalism has had to not only contend with external actors seeking to halt its drive for unity, but also internal ones that objected to (and stood to lose from) its totalizing project.

While historically its effect has been paradoxical, is Arab nationalism still relevant today? According to Abu-Rabi, the answer is in the negative: “Arab nationalism is dead at the beginning of the twenty first century” (p. 80). Though Abu-Rabi is correct to claim that political Arab nationalism began to lose its hegemony after the 1967 defeat (p. 77), one must eschew the impulse to transform an individual or political party into the absolute embodiment of this ideology (with all its attendant values and meanings), and conclude that their departure from the scene signifies the end (or “death”) of Arab nationalism. We must remember that Arab nationalism does not have any single meaning, but encapsulates a constellation of meanings that vary across

spatial-temporal boundaries and transcend any single political party (i.e., the Ba'ath) or personality (Nasser). As As'ad AbuKhalil has convincingly argued the ideology of Arab nationalism is reemerging and its discourse is being redefined (and refined).<sup>5</sup> Rather than hark back to the greatness of past Arab civilizations, "neo-Arab nationalism" will be anchored in the lived experiences of contemporary Arabs.

Though he seems all too anxious to write the obituary for Arab nationalism, Abu-Rabi' is nevertheless an astute observer of Middle Eastern society, as when he notes that "The Arab intelligentsia from Morocco in the West to Iraq in the East understand that they more or less face the same challenges and perhaps the same enemies...Technology has made the 22 states of the Arab nation more culturally and linguistically interdependent" (p. 77). Abu-Rabi' raises an intriguing point here. Can the proliferation of technology in the Middle East (particularly satellite television) offer the Arabs a new means of "imagining" themselves as a single nation and hence strengthen one of the founding pillars of Arab nationalism (i.e., the unity of the Arab peoples)? The advent and spread of print-capitalism in the Arab world in the nineteenth century allowed people to imagine themselves as constituting a single community, or nation. Arabs from as far away as Morocco can now instantaneously witness the harsh realities facing their fellow Arabs in Palestine or Iraq. Can satellite television, then, act as the modern equivalent to, and have the same effect as, eighteenth and nineteenth century print-capitalism? Perhaps only time will tell.

After a thorough (though at times laborious) discussion of the historical context of contemporary Arab thought, Abu-Rabi' finally begins to engage the works of the leading Arab intellectuals. Though on the whole his engagement with the works of these thinkers is satisfactory, his treatment is at times lacking. For example, Abu-Rabi' is of the opinion that, with the sole exception of Zionism, Costantine Zurayq held an "infatuation with the West" (p. 298). Zurayq, like many of his contemporaries, was painfully

cognizant of the technological, scientific, and intellectual superiority of the Western world, but was far from advocating wholesale adoption of everything the West had to offer. To let Zurayq speak for himself: "What is preached by some, namely, that we should throw away this ancient [Arab] heritage and accept the new Western culture, is mistaken."<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, although two chapters (p. 256-295) are devoted to one of the most intriguing contemporary Arab intellectuals, Mohammed 'Abid al-Jabiri, Abu-Rabi' would have done well to delve deeper into one of al-Jabiri's most revolutionary and controversial conclusions, which holds that "Avicenna consecrated a spiritualist and gnostic trend whose impact was instrumental in the regression of Arab thinking from an open rationalism...to a pernicious irrationalism which augured the 'gloom-thinking' that scholars like al-Ghazali...spread and popularized."<sup>7</sup> This interpretation, which situates the traditionally opposing Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali on the same (irrationalist) philosophical problematic, defies almost a thousand years of Islamic thought.

Of all intellectuals, however, Abdallah Laroui comes in for particularly harsh criticism for his condemnation of "Arab culture without offering practical solutions." "It is a pity," Abu-Rabi' concludes, "that such a great mind, one who has done much to enlighten us about the dynamics of modern Arab thought, seems to go nowhere in his critique of Arab society" (p. 369).

This reviewer must admit to a certain excitement upon stumbling across Abu-Rabi's book. Not since the late Albert Hourani's majestic *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939*, has a work been published that seeks to present a comprehensive analysis of the intellectual developments in the modern Arab world. Abu-Rabi', who is a specialist in Muslim-Christian relations at Hartford Seminary, has attempted to provide as comprehensive an analysis as possible while

5 As'ad AbuKhalil, "A New Arab Nationalism?: The Rejuvenation of Arab Nationalism," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 46 (1992): 22-36.

<sup>6</sup> Qustantin Zurayq, "al-Wa'i al-Qawwmi," in *al-'amal al-Fikriyah al-'Ammah lil-Duktur Qustantin Zurayq* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahdah al-'Arabiyah: Mu'assasat 'Abd al-Hamid Shuman, 1994), vol. 1, 70.

<sup>7</sup> Mohammed 'Abid al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy: A Contemporary Critique*. Trans. Aziz Abbassi (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 1999), 58.

focusing only on the main intellectual trends (p. 46). As a result, subaltern voices such as those of the Islamic liberal Shaykh Abdallah al-Alayli (whose views may be said to represent a wider spectrum of Arab society) are ignored. Al-Alayli, a Lebanese Sunni clerk whose books have been banned in virtually all Arab countries, has repeatedly stated that the *shari`a* must perpetually be reinterpreted if Islam is to have any relevance in modern society. He has appealed for the reconciliation of Islamic legislation between Sunnis and Shi`as, declared that penal measures (such as stoning) are in fact un-Islamic, adopts socialist economic views, and also believes that there is no inherent contradiction between Islam and secularism.<sup>8</sup> Abu-Rabi` would have done his readers a great service had he introduced them to these marginal voices who do not command much scholarly or media attention outside (or even within) the Arab world.

I will conclude this review on somewhat of a puzzling note. At one point early in his book, Abu-Rabi`'s narrative verges on the incomprehensible, as when he decides to share with the reader a "fictitious journey [he] imagined [he] had taken to Mecca" (p. 35). After "arriving" in Mecca, Abu-Rabi` comes across "guest workers": "All of these guest workers are brought to the Gulf States by their sponsors; they perform all sorts of duties that the arrogant contemporary 'Bedouin Bourgeoisie' refuse to perform" (p. 37). Abu Rabi` then sets out to enjoy the diversity of the Gulf (even though he complains earlier that "Gulf culture is more or less one-dimensional in its ethnic, religious, and political composition" [p. 20]). After eating at an Afghani bakery, and having his hair cut by an Indian barber, and washing his clothes with a Javanese lady (p. 37), Abu-Rabi` goes in search of an "authentic" Arab Bedouin:

I look around searching for Bedouins, the indigenous people of the land, nomads, known for their fortitude and perseverance who have proudly inhabited the environs of Mecca all these centuries, and who have imprinted a meaning and authenticity on the place....Alas, no Bedouins are in sight. The proud

and true Bedouin race seems to have completely disappeared from Mecca. The fringes of the desert have become strewn with magnificent urban centers. The desert is truly empty without the Bedouins. I look around; I see fewer Arabs and more non-Arab Muslims. The venerable Bedouin sense of *'assabiyyah* has been entirely appropriated by these non-Arab Muslims, who refuse to accept ephemerality, fragmentation, and discontinuity. What happened to the Arabian race? Are the desert Arabs reveling in luxury and corruption? One voice tells me that the Arabs, who grew tired of the desert heat after many centuries, *had decided to migrate en masse to London, Paris, and Tel Aviv [sic], where the weather is cooler, the food tastier, and the women prettier...* Another voice told me, no, the true Bedouin migrated to the big cities, to modern Jedda and Riyadh, which are even more modern than New York. They inhabit all these high-rises now. This voice went on, saying that initially the Bedouins were accompanied by their animals, especially their authentic Arabian horses, to the high-rises but when they discovered that this was impractical, they abandoned the idea (p. 38. Emphasis in the original).

Some of the sources Abu-Rabi` cites for this "imaginary" journey are a who's who of classical Orientalism: Gibb, Massignon, and even Lawrence of Arabia. Although this might have been an "imagined" trip, there is no imagining the Orientalist essentialism informing Abu-Rabi`'s thoughts. For an ostensibly serious study on a serious subject, the reader is left wondering what the intended function was for the disclosure of this figment of Abu-Rabi`'s imagination.

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<sup>8</sup> See AbuKhalil, 33.

**Edhem Eldem**  
*French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century.*

Leiden, Boston, Cologne: Brill, 1999

Reviewed by Christopher Drew  
Armstrong\*

French travelers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seem to have unanimously concurred that Istanbul was ideally situated for international trade. For Jacob Spon, a physician from Lyons who arrived in Istanbul on September 23, 1675, the port was the best in the world, forming a huge amphitheatre around which the city and its monuments were arrayed.<sup>9</sup> Upon his arrival in Istanbul on September 13, 1754, the architect Julien-David Leroy stated that the natural configuration of the site made the city appear like “la capitale du monde.”<sup>10</sup> Under the word “Constantinople” in Louis Moreri’s *Grand dictionnaire historique*, the port of Istanbul was described as: “le plus agreeable & le plus commode, qu’on se puisse imaginer.”<sup>11</sup>

If the first impression made by Istanbul on travelers was one of unparalleled magnificence befitting an imperial capital, closer inspection revealed haphazard planning, cheap construction and a general state of neglect and decay. Spon pointed out that the ancient walls of the city were crumbling and Moreri claimed that apart from the public buildings, the city was a confused assemblage of poorly built wooden cabins. Leroy concluded that: “Si l’aspect de cette ville est très-beau, l’intérieur au contraire en est très-désagréable.” These descriptions may be read as thinly veiled metaphors for the state of the Ottoman administration as it was perceived by French merchants, at once overwhelmed by their minimal role in the vast amphitheatre of the imperial marketplace while simultaneously

convinced of their own superiority relative to the assortment of Armenians, Greeks, Jews and Turks with whom they were compelled to do business.

Edhem Eldem’s *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* is an important contribution to the large body of studies investigating Franco-Ottoman commercial and diplomatic relations during the *Ancien Régime*. In the course of the eighteenth century, France became the dominant western nation in the Levant trade as British and Dutch competitors withdrew to pursue more distant and lucrative commercial opportunities. Unlike Britain and Holland, French trade in the Levant was not managed by a single trading company but was conducted by a number of independent trading houses regulated by the *Chambre du Commerce* in Marseilles. An extensive network of consulates located in ports or *échelles* throughout the eastern Mediterranean represented the interests of French traders to local Ottoman authorities, ensuring that trade regulations negotiated in Istanbul were applied throughout the empire.<sup>12</sup>

The consuls reported directly to the French ambassador in Istanbul who was appointed by the king and who functioned as the supreme arbiter of French affairs in the Levant. The French ambassador was by far the most important representative of a western nation stationed in Ottoman territories. He not only corresponded regularly with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and was responsible for the protection of all Catholic missions in the Levant, but also oversaw French trade and navigation throughout the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, he maintained a detailed correspondence with the Secretary of State for Maritime Affairs (*Secrétaire d’Etat à la Marine*), among whose responsibilities were the French Navy and the management of all French maritime commerce.

Eldem’s book is the fruit of extensive research in the rich archives of the *Chambre du Commerce* in Marseilles and complementary collections in Aix-en-Provence, Istanbul, Nantes and Paris. The

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<sup>9</sup> J. Spon, *Voyage d’Italie, de Dalmatie, de Grèce et du Levant*, vol. 1 (Lyon: Antoine Cellier le fils, 1678), 1, 220-223.

<sup>10</sup> J.-D. Leroy, *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* (Paris: Guérin & Delatour, 1758), part 1, 5.

<sup>11</sup> L. Moreri, *Le Grand dictionnaire historique*, 8th ed. vol. 2 (Amsterdam: George Galler, 1698), 249.

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<sup>12</sup> A. Mézin, *Les Consuls de France au siècle des Lumières (1715-1792)* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1996).

collections of the *Chambre du Commerce* have been mined for over a century by French scholars and it was within the tradition of research beginning with the monumental publications of Paul Masson that Eldem initially situated his work. The huge volume of commercial data available in French archives and the difficulty of obtaining complementary Ottoman documentation have resulted in a one-sided picture of how this trade relationship functioned and a distorted impression of the relative significance of French imports in the overall economy of the Ottoman capital. Eldem has sought to redress these imbalances by providing a sense of how French trade fit into the global context of trade in Istanbul and of how Istanbul developed in relation to the larger European system of finance. Despite Eldem's efforts, the Ottoman side of the trading equation remains sketchy and is largely understood through French sources.

Eldem is meticulous in assembling and assessing the trade data available on all French goods entering Istanbul throughout the eighteenth century. Precise comparative data for goods entering the city from other parts of the Ottoman Empire and from eastern sources such as India do not exist but it is clear that French imports were minimal by comparison. Representing an average of 80% of the value of French imports into Istanbul in the period between 1718 and 1769, the traditional staple of French trade was fine woolen cloth manufactured specifically for the Ottoman market in Languedoc. The market that the French most successfully exploited in Istanbul was for upper middle range textiles but the potential for expanding this market was negligible and was constantly threatened by competition from other western nations and by political instability in the Ottoman capital. Ultimately, the French never managed to penetrate the cloth market in Istanbul to reach lower income consumers, a fact clearly grasped by French merchants.

In the 1780s, textiles represented only 40% of French imports into Istanbul, reflecting an unexpected shift in the last quarter of the century away from manufactured goods towards the importation of raw materials and half-processed goods from colonies in the Caribbean, notably coffee and sugar. The case of coffee is particularly

surprising since it was traditionally exported from the Ottoman Empire to Europe. As with textiles, the French managed to create a niche for a cheaper, lower quality alternative to a finer, eastern product (i.e. Mokha coffee from Yemen) rather than replacing demand for an existing good.

As an imperial capital, Istanbul stood out as an economy distinct from the other *échelles* of the eastern Mediterranean. Unlike other major cities such as Thessaloniki and Izmir that were centers for the exportation and redistribution of goods, Istanbul was primarily a center of consumption. Most goods manufactured in the capital were produced for the local market and the bulk of French exports from Istanbul were raw materials such as wool, silk, cotton, alum, beeswax and hides. On average, the total value of these exports represented only a quarter of the value of imports. Consequently, while France ran a trade deficit overall in the Levant throughout most of the eighteenth century, in Istanbul the situation was reversed.

This imbalance was addressed by converting the trade surplus in Istanbul into bills of exchange that were used by French traders to purchase goods for export in the other *échelles*. Ottoman officials embraced the use of bills of exchange as an efficient means to transfer revenues from the provinces to the capital, thus avoiding risky cash transfers. Trading houses in Marseilles used these bills to transfer surpluses accumulated in Istanbul to other European centers of finance and the *Chambre du Commerce* used them to pay administrative expenses. Although the system of bills of exchange was in place before 1700, it was only after 1750 that a fully integrated system of bills of exchange of all nations trading in the Levant linked the Ottoman capital into the larger European financial network and speculation on exchange rates became an increasingly lucrative dimension of French trade as other traditional exports diminished in significance. The complexity of this system and its development are described by Eldem with admirable clarity. In chapter 5, the actual use of bills of exchange is illustrated through the author's analysis of a large body of documents from the archives of the Venetian consulate in Cyprus, demonstrating the nature of relationships between Ottoman authorities,

consular officials and western traders upon which the whole system rested.

One of the high points of Eldem's analysis emerges in chapter 6 where the position of Istanbul in the context of European finance is defined. Without getting bogged down in financial intricacies such as fluctuations in exchange rates, the relative values of gold and silver coinage or problems related to the importation and re-minting of Spanish and Austrian *specie* by the Imperial Mint in Istanbul, the author's conclusion that the late 1760s saw "the birth of a truly competitive and international market for exchanges, linking the Ottoman capital to the major financial centers of Europe" (p. 165) signals a dramatic transformation of east-west relations and a repositioning of the Ottoman capital in relation to its European counterparts. The emergence of this *commerce de banque*, as French traders termed it, signaled that money had become a commodity in its own right.

*French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* can be split into two distinct parts. Economic historians will find chapters 1 through 7 stimulating reading, providing a detailed study of French trade with Istanbul from the early eighteenth century until Revolutionary disturbances interrupted navigation between Marseilles and Istanbul in 1793. For those *dix-huitièmists* unfamiliar with Franco-Ottoman trade relations and humanists who find graphs of textile imports and diagrams of networks of bills of exchange intimidating, chapters 8 through 10 give a global impression of how the French system of trade functioned in Istanbul, stressing the vulnerability of French merchants in the Ottoman marketplace. This is not, however, an anecdotal history and no attempt is made to flesh out the principal figures involved in managing French trade. Among these, two of particular significance crop-up at various points in the book, namely, the Marquis de Villeneuve, French ambassador to Istanbul from 1729 to 1740 and the Comte de Maurepas, Secretary of State for Maritime Affairs from 1723 to 1749.

Their intervention into the affairs of French traders in Istanbul is outlined in chapters 1, 9 and 10 and is accorded the greatest significance in the transformation of

Franco-Ottoman trade relations. In the 1730s, the ambassador and the minister colluded in the management of the Levant trade, overriding the *Chambre du Commerce* in Marseille. They compelled French merchants in Istanbul to act as a single unit in order to strengthen their negotiating position while simultaneously limiting the flow of textiles to the Levant. This system, known as the *arrangements*, forbade competition between individual French traders, creating a monopoly over the sale of Languedoc textiles that mirrored the monopsony of the Turkish guild of clothiers, the dominant purchaser of French cloth in Istanbul. The success of the *arrangements* was indisputable but succumbed in 1757 to pressure from French interests promoting free trade. Villeneuve's more lasting achievement was to renegotiate the formal regulations or *capitulations* that governed the trading relationship between France and the Ottoman Empire.

As Eldem amply demonstrates, French products were inferior to the best quality goods available in Istanbul from other sources and French traders were generally unsuccessful in penetrating the Ottoman market in any significant way. What could not be accomplished by economic or technical means was finally achieved by some deft political maneuvering that capitalized on Villeneuve's brilliant success in mediating the Peace of Belgrade between the Austrian, Russian and Ottoman Empires.

In chapter 10, Eldem stresses that it was the terms of the *capitulations* of 1740 that ultimately turned the tables and shifted the French into a position of dominance relative to their Ottoman trading partners. Fundamentally, the *capitulations* eroded the means of resistance against foreign penetration into the Ottoman market that had previously been available to Ottoman merchants. In 1783, for example, the French ambassador used an article in the *capitulations* to force the Ottoman government to dissolve the guild of clothiers that had so long colluded against French textile merchants. The following year, the guild of grocers was dissolved. Eldem concludes that: "The capitulations, and more generally the growing influence of foreign powers, had thus created a strange – and rather vicious – situation through which the Ottoman state had become the instrument of foreign implantation

and penetration against the will and interest of its own subjects.” (p. 280)

*French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* is intended as a corrective to misconceptions about the amplitude of French trade and the success of its products in Ottoman markets before the nineteenth century. In a largely pre-industrial economy, it was impossible for the French to flood the Levant with manufactured goods and Ottoman traders retained a position of market dominance because of comparative advantages such as superior information and competitiveness. Eldem’s work demonstrates how French trade in the Levant responded to the Ottoman marketplace and adjusted to changes in the regulatory framework that governed commercial activities. The vicissitudes of this history and its abrupt cessation in 1793 tend to support the thesis that French trade in the eighteenth century can hardly be regarded as part of a relentless march towards the total domination of the Ottoman marketplace by western interests that occurred in the nineteenth century.

Such domination, though perhaps desired by the French administration, could not have been seen as a realistic goal, much in the way that Colbert and his successors might have dreamed of a canal linking the Mediterranean to the Red Sea without having the slightest hope of its realization. The realization of such projects was the fruit of mentalities and techniques that only came into being in the subsequent era, the products of an entirely reconfigured economic and political order.

**Frederick N. Bohrer**  
*Orientalism and Visual Culture:  
Imagining Mesopotamia in  
Nineteenth-Century Europe*  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,  
2003

**Reviewed by Magnus T.  
Bernhardsson\***

During the spring of 2003, Iraq’s antiquities, museums, and libraries became

part of the war’s battleground and in many cases became “collateral damage.” This catastrophic and unprecedented destruction of Iraqi cultural heritage, though not nearly as devastating as originally feared, was symbolic and indicative of the challenges facing Iraq’s political future.

Yet this was not the first time that Iraqi antiquities became war trophy though certainly the degree and context was unprecedented. Archaeological artifacts have borne the brunt of other battles as well. In this theoretically dense and interesting book, Frederick N. Bohrer describes how in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Iraq, or Mesopotamia as it was then known, was a “sort of a archaeological battleground” (p. 313) amongst the various European powers who actively competed to acquire more artifacts. Though the actual “battle” on ground in the Middle East gets some attention, Bohrer’s principal interest is what happens when the objects were transported to Europe. By and large, therefore, this is not your typical book in Middle Eastern studies. This is essentially a complex study of European reception, interpretation, and circulation. Bohrer demonstrates that the European reception of Mesopotamian art was varied and multifaceted both from country to country but also within a given country. Reception and interpretation, Bohrer suggests, is a “culturally grounded experience,” and as his concluding sentence reminds us “far from a monolithic locale, the unitary “West” may be as fictive, as much a dream, as the exotic “East” of its own presumptions.” (p. 313).

Though the focus is largely European, the book is not irrelevant to students of the Middle East. It focuses on the European image of Middle Eastern objects and images. Bohrer, who teaches art at Hood College in Maryland, is interested in what ancient Middle Eastern archaeological objects meant to different people living in modern Europe. As its name indicates, it is furthermore a study of orientalism and exoticism and is suggestive of how the power to acquire and interpret Middle Eastern antiquities was intimately tied and aided by European military and political interests and presence in the Middle East. Most discussions on imperialism in the Middle East focus on its economic and political dimensions. Bohrer’s study is a reminder that culture was also part of the imperial enterprise

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such as the attempt to appropriate Middle Eastern antiquities and how that reinforced the power and prestige of the imperial state. The collection of antiquities went hand in hand with collecting countries and their natural resources.

Bohrer's book is based on extensive archival research that is informed by the latest theories in the social sciences and humanities, especially post-colonial studies. It is therefore a solid, intelligent, and compelling study that is likely to become the standard in its field.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The Introduction starts with an account of a young Sigmund Freud visiting the Louvre where Freud describes the Assyrian and Egyptian rooms like a "world of a dream." As the author points out, this may have been Freud's last unguarded remark on dreams. Bohrer extrapolates from Freud's concept of dream and his interest in archaeology more generally to postulate that the European museums where Middle Eastern antiquities were put on display to essentially create, much like a dream, a transformative experience.

His first two chapters, "Exoticism as System" and "The Subjects of Nineteenth-Century Exoticism: Journeys in Space and Time" contain the theoretical framework. This is not light reading and could strike some readers as jargon-filled. Bohrer's discussion is informed by the work of such scholars such as Edward Said, Michel Thevoz, Homi Bhabha, Olivier Richon, Hans Robert Jauss, and especially Walter Benjamin. What concerns Bohrer is the relation between time and space and the analysis of reception. By tracking the reception of Assyrian and other Mesopotamian artifacts as an exoticist operation, Bohrer is able to illustrate how the artifacts became the antique "other", in contrast to ancient Greek items. The Mesopotamian objects challenged the classical ideal and this, according to Bohrer was tied to class; the lower and middle classes appreciated the historical and aesthetic qualities of the Assyrian artifacts even though the cultural elite had actively condemned their significance.

Bohrer includes here also a useful discussion of the image of Mesopotamia in European art such as in the paintings of Delacroix, Turner, and John Martin and the

relationship between archaeology and exoticism. In this discussion, Bohrer chooses not to focus on the powerful religious/biblical association of Mesopotamia in European culture at the time though that was a significant undercurrent in any imagining of Mesopotamia, especially in the British context. His treatment of archaeology – as a science, philosophy, and discipline – is somewhat scanty and not addressed analytically or theoretically. This is somewhat imbalanced compared with his overall discussion. Nevertheless, the first two chapters provide a rigorous framework to understand what ultimately is a complex story and it situates the question of reception in a meaningful way.

The five central chapters focus on the unearthing of Assyrian artifacts and the transformation back to Europe. For obvious reasons, the bulk of the discussion is on Britain and France. Bohrer concentrates on the fascinating rivalry between England and France and their principal actors in this drama such as Austen Henry Layard and Paul-Emile Botta. The two countries played off each other and had contrasting reactions.

When the Assyrian antiquities were displayed in France, it initially polarized and isolated audiences and nearly erased Assyria from contemporary visual representation. It was not until much later in the century, as he describes in Chapter 7, that the Assyrian objects become more central in French contemporary art. Bohrer contends that constraint initially dominated the representation of Assyria in France. But because Bohrer concentrates on the visual displays and popular magazines such as *Le Magasin Pittoresque*, he overlooks that the French government allocated considerable funds to officially sponsor archaeological excavations and to later publish the archaeologists' findings. These publications are lavish and are intended to benefit the academic study of Assyriology and related fields. The British government, however, was more parsimonious in its sponsorship of archaeological missions and in the less glorious though important field of academic publishing.

Yet this lack of official sponsorship was not indicative of the overall British investment and interest in Mesopotamian archaeology. In Bohrer's multi-layered

account, he charts the fascinating story of Layard's discoveries and the bitter debate amongst the Trustees of the British Museum, such as Sir Richard Westmacott, whether these findings were actually art and worthy of display. In contrast to the antipathy of the cultural elite, the general public clamored to see these objects. It was actually a moment of considerable cultural significance as the very idea of a national museum and what constituted art was at stake. The Mesopotamian artifacts became popularized and circulated widely. Layard's books became best-sellers and magazines such as the *Illustrated London News* extensively featured these objects. Bohrer incorporates an array of unique materials in his sixth chapter "Representing Assyria in England, II: Varieties of Circulation" to suggest the wide range of influence the objects had in a variety of art forms, whether poetry, architecture, decorative art or theatre. This is an intriguing discussion and a very creative approach, which Bohrer calls diachronic, to study the dissemination of orientalist imagery.

His final chapter explores the case of German archaeology and orientalism. He focuses primarily on the "Babel-Bibel" controversy and the production of the opera *Sardanapal* in Berlin in 1908. Like in his earlier treatments of France and England, Bohrer situates these issues within the context of German nationalistic culture of the time.

Bohrer's book is a unique discussion of the reception of Mesopotamian artifacts in the major cultural and political centers of Europe. It is an informative account, which has utilized an impressive array of archival and other sources, that tackles the difficult questions of reception and circulation. The intricate ideas, images, and objects are given their due and their complexity is appreciated not depreciated. At times, the book would have benefited from more historical detail and a greater attention to the overall imperial rivalry. But the purpose is not to provide a political or cultural history for that matter but rather to demonstrate the difficult question of interpretation and reception. Many versions of Mesopotamia were put on display and it provoked numerous responses.

The book is well illustrated with around 80 illustrations. It would have been far

more interesting and illuminating if the illustrations were in color. It is inexcusable that a book published by a major university publisher that focuses on artistic images does not allow the reader to appreciate the image in its totality. This is particularly frustrating where the fantastic paintings of John Martin, Georges Rochegrosse, and Jean-Leon Gerome are concerned.

Ultimately, Bohrer's ambitious study is a reminder of the importance of culturally conditioned interpretation of artifacts and an important contribution to the study of the European views of Middle Eastern art and artifacts.

### "How Many Miles Back to Venice?"

Anne Wolff

*How Many Miles to Babylon? Travels and Adventures to Egypt and Beyond, from 1300 to 1640*

Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003, 296pp.

### Reviewed by John Hayden\*

With *How Many Miles to Babylon?* historian Anne Wolff had a simple goal in mind: to expose her readers to a panoramic view of medieval and early Renaissance Egypt. Throughout her expansive survey of period European travelogues, Wolff paints that picture with fine brushstrokes. Whether in the dockyards of Alexandria, in Cairo's labyrinthine streets and markets, in audience with Mamluk and later Ottoman court officials or in the splendid mansions of Venetian consuls, the reader has much here to explore. Various figures like Christopher Harant, a nobleman from Prague, undertake arduous journeys across the Sinai, suffering many privations in search of Christian monasteries like St. Catherine's. Explorer Samuel Keichel of Ulm descends into the dark tunnels of the pyramids in order to satisfy his insatiable curiosity and more numerous, merchants like Lorenzo Morosini of Venice drop anchor at the port of Alexandria, unloading barrels of cargo to trade on the markets. Wolff's research on commercial activities undertaken between

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Western traders and their Egyptian counterparts is particularly fascinating, as are her explanations of social customs, laws, urban architecture, her careful portrayals of the ruling hierarchies of Mamluk and later Ottoman Egypt and her inclusion of maps, illustrations, charts and timelines. But there is a dearth of Wolff's own commentary or analysis. Like an earnest tour guide rather than a historian working from a firm theoretical perspective, Wolff aims to provide her readers with all of the general history they need to know and generally stops at that. In this way, the reader is left to draw their own conclusions from these memoirs and travelogues.

As I was exposed to this historical panorama, I recalled at once the cautionary words of the late Edward Said that in the Egyptian landscape "general grandeur and passion inspire[s] a transcendent sense of things and little patience for actual reality."<sup>13</sup> On the whole the travelogues that Wolff has highlighted here are fairly sober and convincing but generally, Wolff's reluctance to provide critical analysis of the evolving trends in early European-Egyptian relations or regional economic and political development detracts from the scholarly significance of the book. After all, Samir Amin for one has provided an important Marxist critique that locates the decline of Arab economic activity to the early sixteenth century, in the very dockyards and marketplaces that Wolff describes. But the book offers no real engagement with this or any other contentious scholarship. Wolff has missed an important opportunity to evaluate in particular the unique diplomatic role played by Venice in cross-Mediterranean relations. But of course this particular book is about recreating a social geography of Egypt- and as the great Kublai Khan once said to Marco Polo of certain fantastic tales, "*When I ask you about other cities, I want to hear about them. And about Venice, when I ask you about Venice.*"<sup>14</sup>

It bears mentioning briefly that the format of the book will frustrate serious

historians. Sub-sections of each chapter are cited in chapter endnotes but in a very broad and non-specific manner, more like a "works consulted" list. This seems unnecessarily obscure. Historians wishing to go to Wolff's secondary sources are thus faced with thousands of pages of reading if they wish to discern whose ideas or whose- although I have no doubt that the lack of clarity was the result of a simplified format required by her publishers (Liverpool University Press) and not of Wolff's own carelessness.

The first chapter seems to establish a pattern of analysis (presentation of primary source materials, commentary on general trends and a final conclusion) yet none of the subsequent chapters follow this example or end with any summary remarks. In fact the chapters tend to vanish suddenly like so many expeditions to the headwaters of the Nile. Without a guide or an interpreter, the reader is left to navigate the dangerous ways alone.

#### VENICE REMEMBERED

"Once did She hold the gorgeous East in fee,  
And was the safeguard of the West: the worth  
Of Venice did not fall below her birth,  
Venice, the eldest Child of Liberty."

-William Wordsworth

*On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic*, 1802.

Constantly confronted with the uniqueness of Venice, Wolff reflects on its importance at least initially. The obvious prominence of the Venetian Republic and its citizens in cross-Mediterranean relations could have guided her presentation of the material and provided an intriguing theoretical focus. Instead, Wolff casually speaks of "Europeans" generally- as if through the *prism* of Venice one may glean Europe at large, "Shakespeare's merchant Antonio rightly observed of Venice 'that the trade and profit of this city / Consists of all nations'" (pp. 4-5). To contend that this secular, mercantilist power can so easily stand for European society at large deserves some qualification.

*The uncritical presentation of these travelogues in an epoch described as "after the crusades" seems somewhat misleading as well. I think that Wolff feels safer situating her readers at a distance from both the violent*

13 Said, Edward. *Orientalism*, (New York: Random House, 1979) p. 102.

14 Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*, trans. W. Weaver, (London: Harcourt Inc., 1974) p. 87. This is from a wonderful work of fabulist fiction that depicts the Emperor Kublai Khan in mysterious conversations with Marco Polo at the twilight of empire.

*dramatizations of the earlier crusades and  
the political implications of the current  
discourse on modern orientalism.*

Wolff suggests that the Crusades produced “positive gain[s] ... namely the increased peaceful communication through commerce between Christian and Islamic people” (p. 59). Wolff places Venice at the centre of a new positive relationship emerging between Christian Europe and the Muslim East. She seems to imply that this relationship was premised on the normalizing influence of trade consolidated in 1238. The Venetians had concluded a treaty with the sultan guaranteeing the security of “persons, ships and chattels.”<sup>15</sup> Throughout the book, the Venetians engage themselves in profitable enterprises while explorers and naturalists embark on free-spirited adventures to Egypt and beyond. “Travelers to Egypt,” Wolff writes, “gradually saw for themselves the extent of Saracen hospitality, the efficient administration, the sumptuous buildings and opulent wealth” (p. 60).

The Venice depicted in Karen Armstrong’s *Holy War: The Crusades and their Impact on Today’s World* (which also examines Muslim-Christian relations) provides an interesting counterpoint here. In Armstrong’s *Holy War* one finds a Venice all too willing to provide zealous Crusaders with the ships and supplies they needed to mount an invasion of the East. The motivations of the city-state, which Armstrong explores, appear much more complex and much less benign.<sup>16</sup> Indeed the sack of Alexandria by Peter of Cyprus in 1365 suggests that the friendship of the Doge and his clients was fickle at best. Venetian enterprise, like Dutch trade with Habsburg Spain in the late sixteenth century was shaped by considerations of risk and profit rather than by the bonds of friendship, the imperatives of religion or the stirrings of a national imagination.

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15 These agreements, which allowed Venetian representatives various extra-territorial, religious and consular rights are interesting pre-cursors to the later capitulations signed off by the Ottoman Empire to various European powers.

16 Armstrong, Karen. *Holy War: The Crusades and their Impact on Today’s World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York: Anchor Books, 2001) pp. 384-6.

Wolff seems to shatter Antonio’s prism by writing that “in Europe, propaganda [of Peter’s pillaging] showed a different slant” demonizing the “Saracens” and glorifying the invaders (p. 68). This implicitly suggests that in Venice -the home of our cast of loveable protagonists- there was sorrowful regret and sympathy felt for the wronged Sultan. Armstrong offers no such vague apologies. In her work the very idea of a dark and looming Venice works to deconstruct the moral assumptions of the Crusades. I would argue then that Venice is important insofar as it establishes a precedent of cynical European exploitation of regional Middle East resources- the beginnings, perhaps, of an interpenetrated system. Armstrong is eager to engage the world of ideas and perceptions and is guided by a critical view of Christian-Muslim relations, in which the Muslim (and the Jew) evolves into the unspeakable Other of the Christian imagination. Alternatively, Wolff is staunchly committed to simply retelling the fascinating tales of adventurers and generally restrains from commenting on the social psychology of cultural relations. Nevertheless Venice emerges as a city of cultural envoys who establish the first meaningful ties between East and West. The portrait is generally glowing: Venice produces favorable biographies of Mamluk sultans (p. 26.); is disappointed by Peter of Cyprus’ avarice (p. 67); is favored by the Mamluks over all other Christians (p. 85). I like to think that the true Venice lies somewhere in the tension between these two versions.

#### PERSPECTIVES AND PREDECESSORS

“...but our predecessors’ was a larger day, in which the seeing of Arabia was an end in itself.”

-T.E. Lawrence,  
FOREWORD to *Arabia Felix*, by Bertram  
Thomas.<sup>17</sup>

The jacket notes claim that the book provides a “fascinating picture of the people, customs and culture of Egypt.” Before actually reading the book I had fully expected Wolff to delve into the implications of using these early travelogues as primary evidence. This never

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17 Thomas, *Arabia Felix*, (Toronto: Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 1932) p. xvi.

really happened. She seemed content to assure her readers that the accounts are reliable and unexaggerated (p. 283). While her work on the whole was instructive, something about the book made me uneasy. Perhaps it was the late discovery of Bernard Lewis, haunting the bibliography like a shadowy Hermes Trismegistos. Feeling the pangs of retrospective unease I had cause to revisit some of the chapters of *How Many Miles to Babylon?* In doing so I began to realise just how involuntarily sympathetic I had been to the characters Wolff had proposed- even in scenarios that seemed to spring outright from the pages of *The Arabian Nights*. I was won over by the rational and unassuming tone of the monograph as nobles and aristocrats suffered the whimsicalities of lawless Bedouins, unruly Arabs, intransigent Jewish customs officials, corrupt authorities of the Mamluk Sultanate and other familiar caricatures. One must, however remain consciously aware that in some histories these first pious pilgrims and pioneering merchants are really the mythic warrior-naturalists of “our Judeo-Christian heritage” humbly playing their small part in a wider “civilizational” drama that has gained mythic and millennial significance.<sup>18</sup> I suppose though, that until the names “Emanuel Piloti” and “Prospero Alpini” become as familiar as “T.E. Lawrence” these subtle issues may remain unexamined.

Wolff has presented this research elsewhere in combination with other papers on Egyptian travellers from antiquity to the present and has undoubtedly benefited from the insights of her colleagues and fellow historians.<sup>19</sup> In light of her experience it is disappointing that she would not cast even a furtive glance to the future careers of other orientalists. This may of course be a tactic to avoid controversy, but to readers familiar with orientalist literature the ghosts of Burton, Speke and Livingstone will constantly volunteer themselves into the narrative regardless of whether they are invited in or

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18 The imagery here is from Lewis' 1992 article, *The Roots of Muslim Rage*, “This is no less than a class of civilisations- the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the world-wide expansion of both. It is critically important that we on our side should not be provoked into an equally historic but also equally irrational reaction against our rival.”

19 Denys. “Desert Self-Discovery.” *Al-Abram*. 10 May 2001.

not. As Alan Moorehead wrote in the EPILOGUE to *The White Nile* (perhaps too sentimentally) “...with such strong characters one is tempted to make comparisons and classifications.”<sup>20</sup> After all, the tale of seafaring commercial powers seeking profitable markets and strategic advantage in the eastern Mediterranean is not unique to Wolff's medieval/early-Renaissance time period. Certain other examples of European “moments in the Middle East” continually come to mind as one traces the miles to Cairo and Alexandria although Wolff is silent on these matters. That the Venetians had designs to construct a canal at Suez to place them at a strategic advantage over other European maritime powers should be enough to pique the interest of historians of British imperialism in the Middle East.

Beyond even the concerns of international relations is perhaps an even more deeply compelling layer. At one point in the narrative, a fleeting glimpse of a peasant girl on the banks of the Nile caught hold of my attention, as did a boy who danced before a homosexual audience in a Cairo coffee house (p. 120). Hidden in the accounts that Wolff has compiled so comprehensively is a completely different cast of characters scarcely seen amidst the pageantry of royal processions. It would be interesting to comb through the pages of these travelogues in a way that Prospero Alpini and Emanuel Piloti could never have imagined. A more daring analysis (perhaps from the subaltern or feminist school) could be applied to the evidence at hand to produce a more intriguing dialogue.

As a fireside companion *How Many Miles to Babylon?* is certainly a pleasant read. The inclusion of amusing drawings of chameleons, ichneumons and giraffes adds to the attraction of the book. I only wish that Wolff had dwelt a little while longer with Pietro della Valle on the vertiginous heights of the pyramids, or with the caravans of pilgrims on their way to Mecca, whose guides “followed the stars like mariners at sea” (p. 239). There are a few instances, hidden

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20 Alan Moorehead, *The White Nile*. (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1971) p. 256. I bring up this example partly because both Moorehead and Wolff look at European travellers in Egypt, but also because they both employ the same non-specific citation system in their chapter endnotes.

between extensive paragraphs describing more ordinary matters where one catches a glimmer of such beautiful scenes unfolding. Regardless of much misinterpretation of the orientalist critique, a writer's genuine affection for these things need not be repressed. On the other hand, at least to post-colonial historians this book may already appear suspect. Wolff (the daughter of an Egyptian cotton merchant) is prone to occasionally relate her personal admiration for these European adventurers. She writes, (again perhaps too sentimentally) "we will never know how many Europeans died during their Egyptian travels. Those who lived to tell the tale faced up to their hardships with *heroism*, stemming from optimism and sturdy common sense" (p. 282, *italics mine*).

Finally, the early time period (1300-1640) will be somewhat unfamiliar ground to many historians otherwise engaged in nineteenth and twentieth century orientalism or Middle Eastern studies who would be more than interested in reading this book. With this in mind, Wolff ought to have been more willing to assist such readers with her insights, observations and comparisons- especially in the unique case of Venice and its place in both the history of orientalism and the politics of the region. A chapter devoted to general reflections on medieval and modern orientalism would have established her perspective and greatly enriched the rest of the book. Yet as it stands, the impressive array of evidence compiled from primary sources in *How Many Miles to Babylon?* will in its own right provide excellent material for future research and discussion.

But why *Babylon*, you ask?

Wolff explains in her introduction that medieval Cairo was often mistakenly referred to as "Babylon of Egypt," a "strange muddle of a name used by medieval pilgrims visiting the lands of the Bible." She relates various theories as to why this quaint belief persisted, some of which point to the fact that Jews had lived on the Nile since the days of Babylonian exile and that Strabo (c 58 BCE - c 24 CE) in his *Geographia* wrote of Babylonian refugees erecting a fortress on the site. But it seems to be as much a nineteenth century fantasy as a medieval one, as Wolff includes the following excerpt (from 1805) in her prologue:

"How many miles to Babylon?  
Threescore miles and ten.  
Can I get there by candle-light?  
Yes, and back again.  
If your heels are nimble and light,  
You may get there by candle-light."<sup>21</sup>

Babylon has an eerie way of creeping up on you, when (as the great Khan might have said) "your journeys take place only in the past."<sup>22</sup>

**A. Holly Shissler**  
***Between Two Empires: Ahmet***  
***Ağaoğlu and the New Turkey***  
London, New York: Palgrave  
Publishing, 2003, vii + 280 pages

**Reviewed by: James H. Meyer\***

A. Holly Shissler's *Between Two Empires: Ahmet Ağaoğlu and the New Turkey* marks the first full-length account in English of Ahmet Ağaoğlu's life and ideas. Ağaoğlu (known as Agaev in Russia), the Paris-educated scion of an Azerbaijani *bey*, gained fame as a journalist and political activist in both the Russian and the Ottoman empires in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In Western historiography, Ağaoğlu is chiefly known for his contributions to the Turkist (or "pan-Turkist") journal *Türk Yurdu*, edited in Istanbul by the Volga Tatar Yusuf Akçura.

*Between Two Empires* is an intellectual history which relies heavily upon Ağaoğlu's own writings in its discussion of his development into one of the best-known Turkist intellectual figures of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Following a generally chronological sequence, Shissler—currently an assistant professor at the University of Chicago—divides Ağaoğlu's intellectual life into four

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21 *Songs for Nursery*, 1805. (quoted in Wolff) It is important to point out that the first text to appear in the book falls outside of Wolff's proposed timeline.

22 Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, p. 28.

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periods: Paris (1888-1895), Baku (1895-1909), the Ottoman Empire, and the Republic of Turkey. In the first three settings, short introductory chapters describing the historical and intellectual contexts of the period precede longer chapters devoted to Aġaoġlu's writings. In the book's final chapter, entitled "Applied Turkism", Shissler's discussion includes both an analysis of Aġaoġlu's writings and a detailed analysis of some of the political power struggles which took place in the first decade of the Republic.

*Between Two Empires* is the latest contribution to a small but growing literature devoted primarily to the subjects of Turkism and the *Türk Yurdu* circle. Related studies in English and French include Uriel Heyd's *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp* (1950), Serge Zenkovsky's *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia* (1960), François Georgeon's *Aux origines du nationalisme turc: Yusuf Akçura 1876-1935* (1980), and Jacob Landau's *Pan-Turkism in Turkey* (1981). Recently, several works on these subjects have also appeared in Turkey, including a Latin script re-issue of the earlier volumes of *Türk Yurdu*.

Shissler's work differs earlier scholarship on the Turkists mostly through its emphasis upon change, rather than continuity, with regard to Aġaoġlu's personal understanding of what constituted the community to which he belonged. Whereas the scholarly focus of earlier studies centered more strictly upon the issue of "Turkism", *Between Two Empires* is more concerned with the subject of identity. In a manner similar to William L. Cleveland's works on Sati al-Husri and George Antonius, Shissler complicates the narrative of an archetypal nationalist figure by recording the different national identities with which Aġaoġlu identified himself over the course of his long career. Thus, whereas previous studies of Turkism and Turkist figures have tended to view individuals as rather unproblematic carriers of a nationalist message, Shissler provides a somewhat more nuanced account which allows for the role of personal choice in the adoption of an identity formulation.

As a student in Paris, for example, Aġaoġlu wrote a series of articles entitled *La Société persane*. Shissler reasons that, since the

author of these articles presents himself as "a Persian writing about his native culture" (p.82), Aġaoġlu was espousing, through his authorship, a "basically Persian identity" (p. 119). This Persian identity of the Parisian Aġaoġlu is then contrasted with other national identities Aġaoġlu would adopt later in his career, such as his tendency in Baku to speak in the name of "Russian Muslims" and "Russian Turks", and his later Turkist identity in Istanbul.

Yet *Between Two Empires*—despite its innovation of juxtaposing Aġaoġlu's later Turkism with earlier, non-Turkist, permutations of his concept of community—retains much of the static conception of "national identity" that typifies most of the existing literature on the subjects of both Turkism and Turkish nationalism. One important reason for this is that Shissler's Aġaoġlu is almost entirely a product of his published articles. The national and religious communities Aġaoġlu writes about are then interpreted by Shissler to constitute his "identity". With the exception of the chapter on Aġaoġlu's activities in the Turkish Republic, the background material provided to give context to Shissler's discussion of ideas tends to be rather superficial.

Nowhere is this more the case than in Shissler's treatment of the fifteen years (1895-1909) Aġaoġlu spent in Russia prior to his immigration to Istanbul. Holding to rather dated scholarly paradigms of Russian Muslim communities, Shissler's discussion of this period suffers from her apparent unfamiliarity with not only Russian-language sources, but also contemporary western literature regarding the late imperial history of the Russian borderlands.

An example of this can be seen in Shissler's discussion of Muslim cultural reform in the Russian Empire, one of the key areas of struggle between Muslim reformers and their traditionalist rivals. Indeed, Shissler's account of the state of traditional Muslim education during this period at times reads as if it were itself a reformist brochure from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In describing traditional Muslim schools, for instance, Shissler emphasizes their dependence upon "blind memorization" (p. 108), the physical abuse of their students, (p. 47), and the "poor educational level" of their

instructors (p. 47). Implicit in this account is that it was “reasonable” or “natural” for reformists like Ağaoğlu to target traditional educational methods. Yet surely, the issue of reform—part of a cultural civil war taking place in Russian Muslim society—involved a much more complicated set of dynamics. In the case of Ağaoğlu, participation in the reform movement—which involved both speaking in the name of the community and challenging much of the traditional leadership of Russian Muslim communities—is intimately connected to community identity formulation, which is why this part of Ağaoğlu’s life deserves more rigorous inspection.

Shissler’s discussion of Ağaoğlu’s years in Baku strikes a sharp contrast to the more assertive and critical stance she adopts vis-à-vis Ağaoğlu’s earlier identification with Persianism in Paris. Whereas Shissler is quick to attribute this Persianism to factors such as Ağaoğlu’s association with Ernest Renan and the greater prestige afforded then to “Aryan” civilizations, no such effort is made to deconstruct Ağaoğlu’s emergence in Baku as a spokesperson for “Muslim Turks” or “Russian Muslims”. This prompts one to ask: Does Ağaoğlu’s identification with Persianism receive more scrutiny because it has been retrospectively recognized by Shissler as a “false” identity, in contrast to the more “genuine” Turkic-Muslim identities of Ağaoğlu’s later career?

Shissler’s discussion of the Ottoman and Republican Turkish contexts of Ağaoğlu’s career is considerably stronger. Yet within the section devoted to the late Ottoman Empire, Shissler makes a number of questionable claims which, at the very least, would seem to have required greater amplification. These include Shissler’s assertion that, for Ziya Gökalp and Yusuf Akçura, Islam was “an element of culture in the service of nationalism and nothing more” (p. 181); her observation that Ottoman modernizing intellectuals “tended to view religion as genuinely harmful” (pp. 181-182); and her view that in WWI “the Ottomans had in mind a Turkist vision that included creating a greater Turkish state extending into Transcaucasia” (p. 161). The first of these assertions is highly tendentious at best; the second makes sense only if we define, as Shissler seems to do, the term “Ottoman modernizing intellectuals” to mean “Young

Turk intellectuals” specifically; and Shissler’s observations on Ottoman aims in WWI, taken from Tadeusz Swietochowski’s *Russian Azerbaijan* (1985), have been the subject of revision for some time.

Finally, Shissler’s understanding of the concept of “identity” is a narrow one, perhaps too narrow to do justice to a figure such as Ağaoğlu. Identity, as it is discussed in *Between Two Empires*, is limited strictly to national and religious communities. To be sure, national and religious communities factor prominently, to say the least, in Ağaoğlu’s work. But Ağaoğlu was also involved in a number of cultural, political, cultural, and discursive communities whose boundaries often transcended religious and national communities. Indeed, at the end of *Between Two Empires*’ first chapter, Shissler briefly appears to imply as much, writing:

The questions remained: was he a *Rus musliman*, a Shi’i, a Tatar, a Turk, a Persian, a Cedidist, a bey, a socialist revolutionary, or perhaps the Tsar’s loyal Muslim subject? (p. 63).

What exactly constituted “identity” to someone of Ağaoğlu’s time and place? Russian Muslim reformists such as Ağaoğlu were simultaneously valorizing Russian culture, working with Russian politicians, bitterly fighting much of the traditional leadership of the Muslim communities, and attempting to organize themselves on an empire-wide basis through the all-Russian Muslim congresses. Religious and national identity questions, and the tendency of would-be Muslim leaders to speak in the name of their communities, fed careers of the sort led by Ahmet Ağaoğlu, who in many ways personified this close collaboration between cultural politics and community identification.

Despite its constructivist approach to the issue of Ağaoğlu’s community identity, *Between Two Empires* actually reinforces the hegemony of national and religious conceptions of identity through its almost total reliance upon these categories to explain Ahmet Ağaoğlu’s understanding of community. While Shissler successfully deconstructs the narrative of Ağaoğlu as a “consistent” or life-long Turkist, *Between Two Empires* leaves unexplored broader—and

potentially much more illuminating—issues regarding the composition and formation of modern community identity formulations.

The primary strength of *Between Two Empires* is, then, its discussion of Aġaoġlu's ideas, rather than its contextualization of these ideas. While many attributes of Aġaoġlu's thought and rhetoric—his emphasis upon the themes of “unity” and “progress”, his claim that his reformist views are based on “real” Islam, his views on the “women's question”, his liberalism—will sound familiar to students of Muslim reformism (and of nationalism more generally, for that matter), Shissler's discussion of the intellectual continuity between the “Ottoman” and “Republican” versions of Aġaoġlu is insightful and compelling.

Despite its limitations, *Between Two Empires* constitutes a valuable empirical contribution to scholarship regarding the Turkist movement and the Türk Yurdu circle. Individuals interested in the intellectual history of the late Ottoman Empire more generally and the political and intellectual history of the early years of the Turkish Republic will also find this book useful.

**Naseer H. Aruri**

*Dishonest Broker: The US Role in Israel and Palestine*

Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2003.

265pp.

**Reviewed by Markus Bouillon<sup>23</sup>**

*Dishonest Broker* is a revised and updated version of Aruri's earlier book, *The Obstruction of Peace: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians*, which was published in 1995 and won much praise from scholars such as the late Edward Said (“no concerned citizen should pass up the opportunity to read this remarkable work of scholarship”) and Noam Chomsky (“a powerful corrective to illusion and misrepresentation”). Indeed, *Dishonest Broker* falls into the same category as much of the writings by Said and Chomsky on the Middle Eastern ‘peace’ process and, in its core

arguments, strongly reminisces of Chomsky's *Fateful Triangle*, an updated version of which was published in 1999. Yet Aruri's book has the particular benefit of stretching well into the new Intifada, the post-9/11 era, and the war on terror under President George W. Bush, and thus guarantees new insights as well as a markedly interesting read.

*Dishonest Broker* offers a powerful and uncompromising critique of US policy towards the Palestine conflict and aptly deconstructs the Washington-sponsored, flawed peace process from 1967 to the present day, focusing in particular on the inbuilt shortcomings of the Oslo process. As Aruri, Emeritus Chancellor Professor of Politics Science at the University of Massachusetts, outlines at the very beginning of this book, US policy towards Israel and Palestine suffers from the irreconcilable contradiction between the central objectives determining policy, Washington's engagement as the unrivalled and allegedly impartial chief conciliator and peace-maker on the one hand, and its strategic alliance with Israel on the other (see p. xii and p. 3). The result is a fundamentally biased approach that has, despite the appearance and media representation of the Oslo peace process to the contrary, made peace impossible to achieve and that has ultimately led the flawed process to its natural and inevitable final destination: failure and burial.

Aruri outlines the striking continuity of US global policy vis-à-vis the Middle East ever since World War II, which according to him primarily seeks to ensure that the region remains in the US sphere of influence and which is endangered by Arab and Palestinian nationalism. He thus explains the ‘special relationship’ and strategic alliance between Israel and the US not with ideological factors or domestic political considerations, but with global policy elements, including Israel's significance as a military ally (“Israel is, in effect, the biggest US aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean,” p. 46). This argument fits in well with the disregard the US has shown for international legal instruments and the preferences of the international community, as manifested in an entire body of UN resolutions (and the many Security Council resolutions vetoed by the United States), which is the subject of chapter 4. Aruri forcefully demonstrates how the Oslo process,

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beginning with the 1991 peace conference in Madrid, instead of addressing and resolving the Palestine question, actually marginalized it and therefore inherently carried the seeds for its demise with it. Developments prior to the presentation of the Declaration of Principles in Washington in September 1993 had already pushed the Palestine question out of the focus, as manifested most obviously in the Egyptian-Israeli Camp David agreement, which instead of providing a comprehensive settlements resulted in a separate peace agreement that neglected the Palestinian issue in its entirety (see chapter 5). One of the outcomes of Camp David and later a basis for the Oslo peace process was the re-interpretation of UNSCR 242 turning the *Occupied Territories* into *disputed* areas, sovereignty over which became subject to negotiation. Oslo took advantage of the PLO's weakness after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its pro-Iraqi stance in the Gulf crisis, and ultimately consolidated an apartheid system based on the "existence of two separate entities with separate legal standards for the indigenous population and for the Israeli settlers," legitimized by a "legal framework and Palestinian approval" (p. 97).

Having laid out the fundamental flaws of US 'mediation' and of the Oslo process, Aruri recounts the story of Oslo's demise in its various stages and considers in greater detail some of the important questions Oslo failed to address (or rather, addressed in the most convenient way for Israeli and US leaders, namely by continuously deferring them), such as the issue of Jerusalem (chapter 8) and the refugee question (chapter 9). The latter, in particular, has been increasingly marginalized and remains one of the central problems in the conflict that has never been addressed satisfactorily in any official agreement or informal blueprint (including the Beilin-Abu Mazen Agreement, the more recent Geneva Accords, or the Ayalon-Nusseibeh statement of principles) – nor has the input of five million Palestinian refugees ever been sought or solicited (p. 155; for more information on the centrality of the refugee question and its marginalization in peace diplomacy, see the recent report by the International Crisis Group, *Palestinian Refugees and the Politics of Peacemaking*, ICG Middle East Report No. 22, Amman/Brussels, 5 February 2004). Aruri, therefore, proposes the convention of a "Congress of Self-Determination and Return,"

an "assemblage of representatives of the five million living in the diaspora and the two million in the West Bank and Gaza," in order to declare all acts denying the Palestinian people its national rights null and void and to undo the surrender of the Oslo process (pp. 161-163).

The book does not end here, however, and continues to outline the breakdown of the negotiations at Camp David in the summer of 2000 (much of the analysis of chapter 10 is based on the now famous critique by Robert Malley and Hussein Agha on the one hand, and Benny Morris' interview with Ehud Barak on the other), as well as the blatant failures and shortcomings of Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian leadership that all but fatally undermined the nationalist aspirations of the Palestinian people. Aruri then goes on to put the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, into their Israeli-Palestinian context and outlines how the "war of terror" has legitimized Israeli actions in the Occupied Territories on the one hand, while all efforts to end the bloodshed have failed on the other due to their essential failure to address the grievances of the Palestinians living under occupation. Aruri concludes his critique of American brokerage in the Middle East and of the American-led Oslo 'peace' process with a call for the establishment of a single, bi-national state, pursued through a two-pronged strategy of redressing of Zionist ideology and the activism of international civil society. While Aruri leaves no doubt as to the difficulty involved in this task and its utopian nature (at least for the time being), his analysis of the increasing territorial integration of the area under consideration for the 'two-state solution,' as manifested in the increase in the number of settlements and the settler population or in the construction of Israel's security wall, may rightly point towards the sole possible solution of the conflict in the end. The two tactical elements he mentions may also be necessary ingredients for any kind of peace process (even if resulting in two states in peace co-existence) in the future, as a change of historical narratives and constructed collective self-identities have inescapably much to do with resolving the conflict successfully, while international activism may provide the necessary pressure to correct the official course of international 'peace' diplomacy in the Middle East.

Naseer Aruri's book thus presents an important corrective to conventional wisdom and as such may be directed primarily towards an American audience, though its wider appeal also lies in the overview it provides over a good forty years of US 'mediation' policy in the Middle East. It should become essential reading for all those interested in US foreign policy towards the Israel/Palestine issue and should complement, if not supplant, more traditional (ie., less critical) interpretations of the US role. It should also be mentioned positively here that *Dishonest Broker* includes colour reproductions of the maps Jan de Jong has been drawing for the Jerusalem-based Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA) for a number of years, which are among the best and most illustrative maps of the various peace proposals, redeployments, and the realities of 'peace' on the ground.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Aruri's critique actually stretches beyond the American role in the peace process, as the Arab regimes, which Aruri calls "the principal tools of US foreign policy in the Middle East" (p. 6), are implicated in and supportive of the flawed peace process under the aegis of the United States. It is in this regard, however, that one may question Aruri's perspective, as his normative concerns seem to lead him to expect a more positive role from the governments of Arab states, whose main considerations have always been first and foremost their own individual interests and regime survival. It also would have been interesting to see the powerful critique Aruri offers complemented with a deeper analysis of the domestic political structures and processes constraining both US and Israel policy-makers and resulting in the continuity of a flawed approach for several decades. The failure of peace diplomacy, as recounted in much detail and reference to individual proposals by Aruri, may indeed have much to do with underlying structures of power and domestic discursive practices in both the US and Israel. Aruri actually alludes to this when advocating an approach tackling the ideological content of Zionism, but refrains from delving deeper into this interesting and important question, particularly with regard to the United States.

But such a point is marginal and should not distract from that fact that this book is not only a great piece of critical scholarly interpretation, but that also makes a significant contribution to the understanding of why the Oslo process failed. Written in a clear and concise manner, this work may prompt the American audience at which it is primarily addressed to question the sense and alleged impartiality of US policy towards the Palestine-Israel conflict. It provides a great deal of detailed historical background alongside the analysis and interpretation of underlying objectives and considerations and serves as a useful and important corrective to the mainstream discourse on the US role as 'mediator' and 'facilitator' in the peace process.

**Nathan J. Brown**  
*Palestinian Politics after the Oslo Accords: Resuming Arab Palestine*  
Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003. 324pp.

**Reviewed by Markus Bouillon\***

*Palestinian Politics after the Oslo Accords* provides an intriguing analysis of Palestinian state-building efforts. Focusing on the threefold resumption of Arab Palestine (in terms of the historical continuity of a Palestinian entity, the re-integration into the Arab world, and a return to political normality domestically), Brown analyzes five areas in particular; the legal framework and court development; the Palestinian constitution; the Palestinian 'parliament,' Palestinian civil society; and the Palestinian education curriculum.

Brown, who is a professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University and an adjunct scholar at the Middle East Institute, is a well-known specialist for the constitutions and legal frameworks of the Arab world. He has written books on basic laws in the Arab world viewed from a comparative perspective and on the rule of law in Egypt. His recently published

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commentary on the new Iraqi constitution (or 'transitional administrative law') is the most authoritative account of plans for the post-Saddam political regime in Iraq to date.<sup>24</sup>

In the context of Palestinian politics and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Brown first rose to prominence with an in-depth study of the Palestinian education curriculum and of the textbooks introduced under the Palestinian Authority (PA). Brown's work in this field, now providing the basis of chapter six in *Palestinian Politics After the Oslo Accords*, addressed a highly contested issue in the conflict, as many critics from both inside and outside charged that Palestinian education incited, rather than educated, and did little to foster democratic and productive citizens. In contrast to many of these critics (Brown successfully traced the source of most accusations of incitement to the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, led by a resident of the West Bank settlement of Efrat, Itamar Marcus, who was appointed by Benjamin Netanyahu to head a joint Israeli-Palestinian committee on incitement), Brown argues in his work that Palestinian education has indeed suffered from problems inherent in the curricula used in Palestinian schools, yet not because these incite to violence and against peace, but because they have merely been geared towards strengthening national identity and legitimising the authority of the existing Palestinian leadership.

In many ways, Brown's work on Palestinian education and textbooks sets the pace and orientation for the other themes he deals with in *Palestinian Politics After the Oslo Accords*. The attempt to construct a Palestinian political entity in the context of the Oslo process has suffered from many problems, but has also been characterised by a number of continuous themes across all fields. These three themes, identified by Brown in the first chapter of the book, Resuming Arab Palestine, revolve around resumption (which gives Brown's book its very apt title): Firstly, Palestinian state-building efforts were aimed to resume and complete the state-building project in Palestine that had begun under the British mandate. Instead of seeing the

construction of a political entity in Palestine as something entirely new, many Palestinians view the state-building venture as the last stage of a long, albeit often interrupted, project. Secondly, the resumption of Palestine relates to the resumption of Palestine's Arab identity and to the reintegration of the Palestinian people and their common political destiny into the fold of the wider Arab world. This theme has been reflected not only in the many instances in which Palestinian leaders and legislators resorted to borrowing legal provisions, institutional arrangements and political structures from neighbouring Arab states, but also in the occurrence of many of the negative trends, processes and tactics prevalent in Arab politics. Thirdly, the continuity of Arab Palestine has been grounded in the resumption of 'normal' politics, according to Brown: normal in the sense that Palestinian politics are no longer necessarily or inevitably shaped exclusively by the struggle for national liberation and self-determination, but can indeed proceed beyond that towards a 'normal' state-building project (though the Intifada of course reminded Palestinians and outside observers that the conflict remains the decisive factor shaping the Palestinian political destiny).

In many ways, this argument provides the intriguing and highly original basis for Brown's critical yet enlightening analysis of Palestinian politics: Brown is well aware of the difficulty and inherent limits placed on a study of Palestinian politics that views political processes and structures among Palestinians in relative isolation from the occupation, the conflict with Israel, and the 'peace' process. However, his focus and emphasis on Palestinian politics as at least partially separable from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict makes it possible to understand the evolving Palestinian political entity as both modelled on the experience of other Arab states and progressing far beyond those models, often providing a role model itself.

This should not lead one to think that Palestinian political structures and processes have not been beleaguered by myriad problems, often mirroring the experience of neighbouring Arab countries. But Palestinians did achieve, in many ways, a higher degree of civil society activism, participation and open contestation of the emerging political order

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<sup>24</sup> See his website, <http://www.geocities.com/nathanbrown1/interimiraqiconstitution.html>

under the PA. At the same time, one cannot, as many of the upper echelons of the Palestinian leadership have often done, justify all the shortcomings and restrictions emanating from the PA by pointing to the limits placed on the authority by the Israelis and the Israeli-Palestinian agreements. Instead, in many fields, difficulties and problems have been the outcome of the self-interested pursuit of the proto-state and its officials to impose their authority over Palestinian society, which itself was striving to create social and political space for active participation in the shaping of the emerging political order. In the chapters on the Palestinian legal framework (chapter 2), the constitutional debate (chapter 3), the creation of a Palestinian parliament (chapter 4), and Palestinian civil society in theory and practice (chapter 5), Brown outlines in much fascinating detail the struggles between different stakeholders and interests, the historical continuities and disruptions, and the consequences of the outcomes in the respective fields.

What emerges is an intriguing (though hardly surprising for scholars of Palestinian politics and society) account of the dynamics underlying and accompanying the Palestinian state-building project during the years of the Oslo process. This entire project was severely shaken, but not destroyed completely, by the eruption of the second Intifada in September 2000. As Brown argues, the attempt to resume normal politics in the emerging Arab Palestine was rudely reminded that Palestinians could not afford to ignore the role Israel played and the political framework that had been established between Israel and the PLO. The venture of resuming Arab Palestine was forcefully and rapidly reversed to a “nearly total concentration on nationalist issues” (p. 245). It is here that Brown’s relative isolation of internal Palestinian dynamics from the inter-societal level is most problematic, as one could argue that indeed, the PA’s domestic policies in many ways actively contributed to undermine its own legitimacy and with that, the peace process it was pursuing. Thus, the Intifada, initially an uprising by ordinary Palestinians against the enduring occupation and a dissatisfying ‘peace’ process *and* against the corrupt and authoritarian rule of the PA, was in a way a manifestation of the ongoing

contest over the nature of the evolving Palestinian political order, and not simply an exogenous factor, as Brown seems to suggest (but of course, the PA then took over the reins and began directing the Intifada itself).

Yet such an argument should not contradict Brown’s analysis, but merely complements and completes it. Brown’s account ends with an outlook on the resumption of the resumption: Perhaps somewhat optimistic and even premature, Brown nevertheless correctly argues that the home-grown efforts to achieve political development and reform (which long preceded the joint American-Israeli call to institute reform measures) have continued since. As Brown writes, “the work of the post-1993 period showed far more staying power than might have been expected. Even in the midst of political violence, those who pursued the various projects to resume Arab Palestine could point to real and lasting accomplishments” (p. 252).

Such an outlook may serve as consolation to many of those observers who see the entrenched Intifada and ongoing Israeli settlement activity as the end of the realization of the two-state solution and even to many of those who fear that the Intifada (or rather, the Israeli response to it) may put an end to the realisation of Palestinian political aspirations. Even though Palestinian politics are embattled and battered, the Palestinian political entity still continues to live and evolve, if only on a much diminished scale for the time being. As Brown ends his book, “The resumption of Arab Palestine was based on a wishful reading of the past and an optimistic reading of the future. It has been punctuated by failure, violence, and frustration, but it will be difficult to reverse” (p. 254). There may, thus, still be hope for the successful completion of the state-building enterprise in Arab Palestine, albeit on a very different footing and under very different conditions that between 1993 and 2000, in the future. The lessons of the internal Palestinian debates and dynamics during the Oslo period, however, will one day help to make the state-building project stronger and more successful. Brown’s book makes a very important contribution to understanding the dynamics of state building in the Palestinian conflict and successfully complements the many studies

that view Palestinian politics through the lens of the conflict.

**Edward W. Said and David Barsamian**  
*Culture and Resistance:*  
*Conversations with Edward W. Said*  
Cambridge MA: South End Press, 2003

**Reviewed By Sean Monaghan\***

The recent passing of scholar and activist Edward Said adds an affecting poignancy to this collection of 6 radio interviews, given over a 4-year period from February 1999 to February 2003, and originally broadcast on independent radio, entitled, appropriately for Said's life and work, *Culture and Resistance*. Though inevitably there will be posthumous collections, correspondence, and further critiques and challenges to his long career and enormous output, it is befitting that Said's efforts come to a close in this informal exchange with David Barmanian, founder and director of Alternative Radio in Boulder, Colorado. Befitting in the sense that it is his passionate voice, and his vision of the role of the committed intellectual in the public sphere - which he himself had argued for in his 1993 *Representations of the Intellectual* - that are highlighted in this book: "I think one of the roles of the intellectual at this point is to provide a counterpoint, by storytelling, by reminders of the graphic nature of suffering, and by reminding everyone that we're talking about people. We're not talking about abstractions" (p. 187). Though the ink may be dry, the book closed, it is the voice that will continue to resonate; and, in a strange irony, while speaking of his long illness, Said, defiantly addressing his critics who have vilified him, remarks: "I think they want my silence. Unless I die, it's not going to happen" (p. 82).

Edward Said has had a long history of advocacy of the Palestinian cause and this volume is no exception. Its tone is characteristic of Said, a combination of scholarship, rumination and moral indignation, and it touches on the whirlwind of subjects that he addressed over the last few

decades. The first of the interviews, "A One-State Solution" finds Said's slings and arrows aimed at the power brokers of the various governments and advocates of the seemingly endless, fraudulent "peace plans" and accords. The media in the United States suffers his opprobrium for its cultural insensitivity and bias and, at times, outright contempt, or what Said refers to as "the arsenal of Oriental clichés that are designed to alienate, distance, and dehumanise a people" (p. 165). Said's argument for a bi-national state in historical Palestine, though by no means new, is persuasive because of its straightforward sincerity and humanism. He had only been able recently to visit the Occupied Territories. Once on the ground he was confronted by an inalienable fact: Israelis and Palestinian lives are inextricably bound together through the simple fact that they live on the same land and encounter each other everyday. He notes that "[t]he Palestinians and Israelis are so integrated, the territory so small that you can't have a situation in which one population imposes itself militarily upon another...The economies and histories are so intertwined that I still think that in the end a binational state is the only long-term solution" (p. 63). The viability of such an ideal, however intrepid or altruistic it may be, remains purely speculative in the face of conflicting nationalisms and the overwhelming disparity in force and finance.

The interview "The Origins of Terrorism" given, it may be noted, on September 24, 2001, must necessarily address the attacks against New York and Washington. And it is interesting to note how prescient Said's critique is, formulated literally days after this epochal event, and how it foreshadows arguments that would appear much later. He argues persuasively that the "War on Terrorism" and the invasion of Iraq are "magnified and blown up to insensate proportions that have nothing to do with their real power and the real threat they represent. This focus obscures the enormous damage done by the United States, whether militarily, environmentally or economically, on a world scale that far dwarfs anything that terrorism might do." (p. 116). Hegemonic military projects and totalising narratives serve, in Said's view, to obscure the pluralism present in many Middle Eastern countries, and dehistoricize conflicts, resulting in

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reductionism and generalizations, propagated by spin and the news-spot format. He points up the vacuity of the endlessly invoked “War on Terrorism” and the “fight for democracy,” and how in turn “people’s analytical powers are dulled and anaesthetized” (p.191). The rhetoric of conflict has begun to take on the dangerous aura of the metaphysical, has become the binary discourse of “us” and “them,” with its invocation of religious justification, its demagogy, and has fallen into the “realm of crazy abstraction and mythological generalities” (p. 114).

Symptomatic of the will to view the world in bipolar terms is the lack of desire on the part of both the monolithic “West” and Arab countries to engage in any critical thinking on each other. Moreover, Said rightly bemoans the wilful disdain in countries such as Egypt and Jordan toward Israel and “the unhealthy quality of public discourse in the Arab world” (p. 59). The estrangement and sense of isolation from the outside world of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza is even more pronounced by the stubborn refusal on the part of other Arabs to visit Israel/the Occupied Territories and to engage and support Palestinian institutions. He laments this obstinacy, what he terms “provincialism” and “intellectual quiescence,” observing that in the Arab World “[t]here’s too much defensiveness, too much sense of the aggrieved” (p. 20).

Said touches on a plethora of issues, and iterates numerous injustices and absurdities rife in the world. Yet his optimism, in spite of his failing health, shines through. He takes heart in the open-minded approach of upcoming generations of activists and underlines the importance of the exchange of ideas and acculturated understanding in approaching interaction in the world. His rallying cry is ultimately that of the late Caribbean poet and political thinker, Aime Cesaire: “there is room for everyone at the rendezvous of victory.” Despite the bleak pictures of inequalities and endemic incomprehension that are portrayed in the book, the last two interviews demonstrate Said’s hope residing in a dogged faith in people’s capacity to overcome adversity through dialogue and culture, in films like Elia Suleiman’s “Divine Intervention,” in the

music of his friend David Barenboim, in small gestures of defiance.

The themes which weave themselves through the book are familiar to both students of the Middle East and readers of Said: the length and nature of the military occupation; American complicity in Middle Eastern dictatorships; the deception of some media in representing the Palestinian struggles and the paucity of dialogue and depth in the media in general; the minefield of Anti-Semitism, both historically and culturally; the apportioning of blame on the Palestinian leadership for the failures of Oslo and Camp David; the UN resolutions 242 and 338; the demographics, the maps, the skewed historiography, etc. The inescapable strength of this book is again its voice. Said’s purpose is to articulate a defiant counter narrative and counter memory to the perceived history of the Middle East, and of Palestine in particular. For memory holds the key to survival - and here Said might well have been talking of himself: “[o]ne has to keep telling the story in as many ways as possible, as insistently as possible, to keep attention to it, because there is always a fear that it might just disappear” (p. 187).

However hazardous it may be to suggest, it is unlikely that readers already well versed in Said’s work will find any great revelations here, as no real new ground is broken. His passionate voice, his tireless advocacy and defiant optimism, will, however, ring familiar. Though it may seem pedantic to criticize what are ultimately unrehearsed conversations, a reader may have hoped for a robust role on the part of Mr. Barsamian whose questions rarely, if ever, challenge Said, acting merely as timely prompts and convenient cues to the interviewee’s arguments. At times, the dialogue meanders with many comments open to argument and very much in need of background and detail; the historical interpretations are at best pointers and signposts and can in no way be considered authoritative. That said, as a primer and introduction to Said’s critiques of mainstream media’s portrayals of Palestinian struggles for self-determination, his contrarian role of the intellectual, as he envisages it, and his defiance in the face of power, *Culture and Resistance* may offer the way in.