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Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change. Edited by Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer and Stephane Lacroix. New York, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 351. ISBN: 978-0-521-18509-7

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Saudi Arabia in Transition is a collection of works by scholars from various backgrounds who have carried out in-depth research on one of the most obscure countries in terms of its cultural identity and political system. Since the Arab Uprising which started in 2011, countries in the Middle East have had to look into the mirror and reformulate their claim to legitimacy. While Saudi Arabia did not have the same revolutionist fervour as did its neighbours to the east and west, it cannot escape pockets of rising dissent in its own community. While this book was published in 2015, it may provide important insights into how Saudi Arabia is changing, and more importantly, provide a background to help understand the direction and pace of reform that is undertaken by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman who has been the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia since 2017.

The book is edited in such a way that it reads like a textbook for academic purposes. Therefore, the style of writing in this edited book is academic in nature with political theories and concepts that aimed at providing readers with enough information to make a sound judgment. It is divided into four main parts that discuss pertinent issues in the country: Politics, Oil, Islam and Islamism, and Social Change. Within each part, there are three to four chapters which allow readers to focus on specific issues of interest. For example, under Oil, the chapters are divided to discuss three different but interrelated topics namely the oil market, national cohesion and the place of oil in the culture of the country. The contributors of the book make their argument based on their expertise and field work inside the opaque country.

In the introduction it is argued that Saudi Arabia faces four imminent challenges. The first challenge is the need for the country to find a capable successor. In 2017, we witnessed the rise of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman as heir apparent to the throne. Since then, there have been controversial decisions made that are giving mixed signals to the international community. Secondly, like other countries in the Middle East, the kingdom must cater to the youths who are seeking quality jobs. Third is the fact that Saudi Arabia is not totally immune to the calls for greater democracy and transparency that swept the region since the Arab Uprising. Finally, the country is also entangled with other crises within the region as it seeks to establish its role as a regional power. These challenges, however, did not materialize overnight. They have been brewing for at least three decades, which have led previous rulers to propose reforms to placate the people. Nevertheless, the most recent and jarring challenge for Saudi Arabia is to keep further demand on liberalization at bay.

A chapter of the book that would shed light on the peculiarity of Saudi Arabia is Chapter 2, “Oil and Political Mobilization in Saudi Arabia”, in which F. Gregory Gause points out that despite the country’s dependence on oil money, Saudi Arabia does not fall into the cycle of other countries in the region that had to offer political reforms when oil price declines. Gause argues that political mobilization in Saudi Arabia has happened during times of high or steady price of oil, which goes against the literature on rentierism. The reason for this is twofold: “(1) the government had revenue cushions that allowed it to sustain higher levels of deficit spending during low oil revenue period... (2) Saudi Arabia is the only oil producer that can, by its own actions, affect the price of oil” (p. 24). To support this argument, the Gause points to the peak of the *Sahwa* movement in the 1990s. Although there was a period of economic downturn in the 1980s, the *Sahwa* movement’s critique of the government did not materialize until after the Gulf War. Regional issues, as opposed to domestic economic issues, are better predictors of political mobilization. The significance of this chapter is that it provides a framework to understand how Saudi Arabia is unlike her neighbours which are at the mercy of the oil market, and thus it can delay calls for reforms in the political system.

The book also points to a similar argument found in literature on other countries—such as Egypt—that the co-optation of religious

movements by the government has little to do with religious piety but more towards the survival of the regime. The Saudi government encouraged the development of the Muslim Brotherhood-influenced *Sahwa* movement to reduce the effect of leftists and Arab nationalists in the 1960s and 1970s. The *Sahwa* is also in direct opposition with the *al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba* (JSM) in terms of the JSM's rejectionist attitude towards the government and its institutions. Stephane Lacroix's explanation of different Islamist movements allows the readers to appreciate and understand that Saudi Arabia is a country with multiple Islamist currents instead of a monolithic country with a population that provides feudal loyalty to the regime. Another example provided in Chapter 8 is the divergence between Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (QAP) and the *Sahwa*-linked *jama'at*. Lacroix argues that "the *jama'at*'s opposition to the QAP...partly accounts for the QAP's growing inability to recruit followers after late 2003." (p 177)

Another interesting observation in the book is about the role of women in Saudi Arabia as a tool to legitimize the government. In Chapter 14, Madawi Al-Rasheed writes "As the state is gradually losing its Islamic identity, both the ulama and the government have embarked on a process whereby the visible signs of adherence to Islam need to be promoted...and women in particular are doomed to be such signs [of piety]" (p. 296) For observers of Saudi Arabia and the Middle East in general, that is an important argument to grasp to make sense of the conservative nature of the government especially when it comes to issues relating to gender segregation. However, not much is changing in Saudi Arabia in terms of liberalization of women. For example, while the ban on women driving has been lifted on 24th June 2018, there have been arrests on women activists since May 2018. All these events prove the tendency of the Saudi government to compartmentalize similar issues into different contexts, and thus creates contradictory policies. Even if change is taking place in social media (p. 334), it is very difficult to make the argument that Saudi Arabia is on a trajectory of transition if the regime's legitimacy continues to rely on morality and piety instead of popular support.

The book provides a multitude of narratives to paint a picture of the 'real' Saudi Arabia. While it is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in the country in general, the book's title may be a bit misleading. The authors tried to sprinkle the book with 'evidence' of a country in

transition, but if one is to know the history of the country, the content of the book does not really provide a clear argument on how exactly Saudi Arabia is transitioning. Most of the facts in the book appear to be a rehashing of what scholars on Saudi Arabia are already familiar with but without a framework to indicate that it is going through a process of change in any direction whatsoever. Nevertheless, if one is to separate and read each chapter independently, the book may contribute to a better understanding on specific issues. While this book may need updating given the many changes that have taken place in the country since it was published, there is still value to those who want a deeper understanding of the country's recent past without much expectation on what the future holds in Saudi Arabia.

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In 2015, Wan Kamal Mujani, a Professor of Islamic History and Siti Nurulizah Musa, a postgraduate student in Arabic and Islamic Studies, both from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia published an edited book entitled ‘Arab Spring’: Factor and Impact (‘Arab Spring’ Faktor dan Impak). Written in Malay and published by the Faculty of Islamic Studies of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). This volume comprises of fourteen chapters on the ‘Arab Spring’. They approach this phenomenon from different perspectives in order to guide the readers understand selected issues arising arose from those momentous events that shook the Arab world between 2011 and 2012.

The first part of the book (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) is devoted to an analysis of the terminological and linguistic validity of the term ‘Arab Spring’ as well as the factors that contributed to the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria. Drawing from these chapters, a number of themes can be identified that largely constitute the causes of the uprisings, namely, economic development, social demography,

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