

Egyptian state has been trying to subjugate and control the religious sphere from the rule of Muhammad Ali in the early 19th century onwards, but markers of religious piety such as beards and the *hijab* are now more visible in Cairo's streets than they have been for decades, while the Muslim Brotherhood enjoys widespread popularity. In Turkey, although the system of state-sanctioned "official Islam" propagated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk has survived, the complete separation of politics and religion that he envisioned has not. Lee argues that with the emergence of Islamist parties in the 1970s, appealing to the pious rural hinterland and Kurdish minority, "the gradual process of reconciliation of Islam with Turkish identity" that begun in the 1950s was accelerated.

The Islamic Republic of Iran would at first appear to be an entirely different story. As Lee says, there are few states where "national identity depends as heavily on religion as Iran". And yet, he argues, "religion and politics have become entangled for political reasons", with Shi'i Islam harnessed as part of the opposition movement to the shah. The religious establishment took control of the state, but the government has in turn "transformed the relationship between religion and politics in Iran by claiming a monopoly on truth." Lee suggests that, like Israel, the religious and political spheres are so tightly interlinked in Iran that any movement towards greater democracy would have to involve a radical change in the country's character.

Israel, despite being the only non-Muslim state studied by Lee and the only nation founded on the basis of a religion, shares many of the same characteristics as the three previous countries. Religious parties such as Shas have grown significantly in popularity in recent decades, drawing their support from *Mizrachi* Jews, settlers and others. Even in the early days of Zionism, ostensibly a secular movement, its leaders found it necessary to "invoke religion" as a bond to tie together a common Jewish identity. However, Lee's argument is that "Israel has transformed Judaism", providing a political centre for the first time since the destruction of the second temple and giving state law precedence over Jewish religious law, the *halakha*.

Lee succeeds in demonstrating to readers that in the four countries he profiles, modernity has not necessarily been linked to secularism, and that the power relationship between religion and politics has varied across time and space. Where he falls down is in communicating his point in a coherent fashion. In trying to cover a topic as large and complex as religion and politics in the Middle East through a brief comparative study, the book lacks both nuance and a strong line of reasoning. The 25 hypotheses put forward at

the beginning are too numerous to provide the reader with a clear analytical lens through which to view the case studies, and it is not clear how he believes religion can help (or hinder) the promotion of bureaucratisation and constitutionalism.

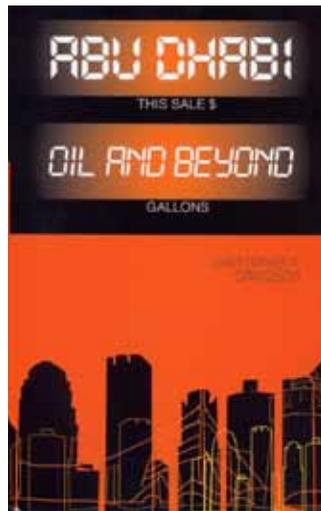
Despite this, Lee's broad argument is inherently sensible: religion remains a force to be reckoned with in the Middle East, but nation states usually have the monopoly on power. The state must therefore be held largely responsible for fostering productive relationships with the religious establishment if political development is to occur.

Caroline Anning

Superseding Dubai

Abu Dhabi – Oil and Beyond
Christopher M Davidson

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There is an abundance of literature on the United Arab Emirates, much of it driven by the spectacular emergence of Dubai over recent years. Its enforced need to diversify from an oil-based economy into a post-modern international city has become a well-known chapter in the Gulf's history. Less reported, but arguably of greater relevance in the coming years, is the progress and activities of

its far more powerful neighbour and UAE capital.

Undisputedly the real powerhouse of the UAE, Abu Dhabi sits on 8% of the world's oil and 3% of the its gas reserves, and has the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, estimated at \$1 trillion. With the concluding event of the 2009 Formula One motor racing season held at the brand new track on Yas Island, and international brands such as Guggenheim, Louvre and Ferrari signed up to open outlets there, Abu Dhabi is beginning to truly emerge from the shadow of its glitzier neighbour.

Yet few books have dealt exclusively with the

emirate, preferring instead to focus on the more frantic and colourful recent past of its neighbour, Dubai, or the federation as a whole. Building on his previous related work, *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*, Davidson's book aims to redress this imbalance with a comprehensive overview of Abu Dhabi's history. From its earliest incarnation as a small desert sheikhdom in the 18th century to its current position as the pre-eminent component of the UAE, Davidson charts its growth and aims to put it in a wider context, complete with its achievements and failings.

Far from a state-sanctioned history or snapshot of the emirate's development, *Abu Dhabi – Oil and Beyond* recounts how the Al Nahyan became the ruling family, emerging from the Bu-Falah sheikhs of the Bani Yas tribe. It also explores the internal power struggles among various tribal factions, the fratricides, the Wahhabi threat from the Arabian interior, and how Britain's desire to secure safe trading routes through the Gulf benefited the emirate at a time when it was facing pressure from northern sheikhdoms.

Other chapters deal with the emergence of Abu Dhabi, its decline and renaissance as a prosperous and united state through Sheikh Zayed bin-Sultan, before dealing with the ruling dynasty and how it has evolved and provided much-needed stability to the emirate, enabling it to grow and become poised to supersede Dubai.

Davidson examines the form of "tribal capitalism" under which key representatives of other powerful families and loyal clans are placed in directorial roles overseeing new economic sectors. He also describes how the system has evolved for the post-oil era with members of Abu Dhabi's elite, forged from centuries-old alliances, reconfigured as development-focused boardroom executives alongside their roles as tribal sheikhs.

Refreshingly, Davidson does not avoid the problematic areas of Abu Dhabi's future, both external threats and internal failings. These range from border disputes and terrorism to a lack of political reform and democratisation, an inadequate education sector, invasive media censorship and a poor human rights record. But if these were to be addressed, the author concludes, there is no reason why the city's economic and political future cannot be a flourishing one.

Without the urgent need to diversify like Dubai and other GCC economies, Abu Dhabi has been able to pace itself, becoming a leading player in the search for alternative energy. It has also introduced non-oil activities such as high technology heavy industries, a luxury real estate sector and cultural tourism. In one chapter, the author outlines the extent to which these new industries will play a key part in the emirate's future. However,

his conclusions are based on official statistics issued by government departments and gathered from local sources, in particular newspapers. Self-censorship in Abu Dhabi is strong, so the figures need to be treated with caution.

The same is true of passages dealing with future developments, particularly real estate projects. As in Dubai, the sector has been severely affected by the global economic crisis, with several projects cancelled or adapted to cope with the shortage of private investment. Therefore, while the Abu Dhabi market is in far better health than Dubai's, the reader should note that things may have changed as the book was being published.

As an introduction to the emirate, Davidson's book provides an excellent overview with a good balance of history and contemporary and future issues. Readers may also gain a greater understanding of the wider Gulf region. The author's concerns over the emirate's future suggest a follow-up will be required to see whether much-needed reform has occurred.

Christopher Sell

Divided and conquered

Mountain Against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture Salim Tamari

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A vast body of literature about Palestine revolves around the events of 1948. So much has been said about the *Nakba* (Catastrophe) that few contemporary writers have found new stories to tell about a familiar, tragic narrative. But Palestinian sociologist Salim Tamari does precisely that in *Mountain Against the Sea*.

Through 11 essays that marry social history with biography, Tamari paints a tapestry of the socio-cultural environment in Palestine

