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In Search of the Kingdom – Emerging Scholarship on Saudi Arabia. From the First Saudi State to the Present. Doctoral students and post-docs at the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies (BGSMCS); Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO), 12.06.2013-14.06.2013.

Reviewed by Nora Derbal
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In Search of the Kingdom - Emerging Scholarship on Saudi Arabia. From the First Saudi State to the Present

Research on Saudi Arabia, though previously very limited and on the fringes of disciplines such as history, anthropology and Islamic studies, has been expanding fast in recent years. The increase in publications on Saudi Arabia partially reflects a political opening *of* and easier access *to* the kingdom. It is also an expression, however, of an increasing Western public awareness and media interest. In the midst of globalization, post-Orientalism and the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia still holds to be as the exotic "other" *per se* evoking images of the desert and the Bedouin, land of plenty of petroleum and breeding ground of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Against this background, this workshop approached new research trends on Saudi Arabia from two perspectives: it aimed at fostering a substantial academic, interdisciplinary discussion within the emerging scholarship on Saudi Arabia, as well as addressing practical and methodological questions on researching the kingdom.

The closed, international workshop was jointly organized by the doctoral students and post-docs at Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) and the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies (BGSMCS). More than 20 doctoral students and post-docs from the Netherlands, the US, Germany, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia and Great Britain presented aspects of their on-going research projects. Traditionally academic work on Saudi Arabia has been focusing on the royal family, the modernization of the country and the political economy of the rentier state, the relation of *ulema* (religious leaders) and the regime and, eventually, questions of gender segregation. Other aspects such as the history of migration, social movements or the role of new media in recent discourses on state and society appear hugely underrepresented. The wide range of themes presented and discussed at the workshop exemplified that a new generation of academics is turning towards untouched themes of research. It questioned how current scholarship relates to previous studies and how it challenges old narratives. The workshop format was complemented by experienced senior scholars who - each together with a junior scholar - chaired the panels and commented on the presentations. Furthermore, the workshop questioned the process of doing research on Saudi Arabia in formal and informal activities around the research panels, such as in the public evening event, a podium discussion that was opened with stimulating key note speeches from Paul Aarts (Amsterdam) and Toby Matthiesen (Cambridge), and in a session on research agendas led by Ulrike Freitag (Berlin) with the participation of Werner Ende (Berlin), Abu Bakir Bagadir (Jeddah) and Amélie Le Renrad (Paris). Here the workshop participants discussed the specificities of doing research in the kingdom and how a researcher can cope with challenges, such as limited access to archives, he or she might face in the country. What influence do specific customs and traditions of society and politics have on the kind of empirical evidence collected and how do they influence the methodology of the researcher? For example, how could a researcher critically reflect on the scope and representativeness of his or her research in face of a heavily gender segregated society?

The first research panel of the workshop dealt with 'foundations' of today's third Saudi state. The presentations questioned traditional narratives of the evolving nation and how to interpret source material that has been passed on to us. PHILIPPE PÉTRIAT (Paris) proved great creativity in the wide range of sources that formed the basis of his account of a Hejazi merchant family, from the Ottoman to the Saudi rule. Through the life story of an African slave, who had been brought to Jeddah and integrated to a remarkable extend into the family's household, Pétriat shed quit an uncommon light on a merchant family's activities, on it's network in the Ottoman Empire and on the way the family dealt with the economic and political crisis during the first days

of today's nation state. Similarly refreshing, NATHAN HODSON (Princeton) challenged traditional narratives of the Hejazi merchant community. Meticulous archival work in the US and Great Britain allowed him to question the degree of agency and influence that the merchants were able to exert on Ibn Saud's early empire. Against these provocative presentations challenging traditional narratives, DOMENIK SCHLOSSER's (Erfurt) investigation into Muhammad Asad, alias Leopold Weiss, as a source for history, which concluded with a warning of the biased character of the protagonist, set a classical, historiographical accent. NUSHIN ATMACA (Berlin) with her original research about generational narratives of the "Generation des Aufbaus" Nushin Atmaca coined this term for her Magisterarbeit: Saudische Lebensgeschichten. Die 'Generation des Aufbaus' im Spiegel zeitgenössischer Autobiographien. Freie Universität Berlin 2012, Institut für Islamwissenschaft, unpublished. , on the basis of four autobiographical accounts, completed the panel. At the same time, Atmaca rose the awareness about the constructed character of early state formation and thereby set the tone for the next panel.

The second panel brought together papers that all - some more conscious than others - dealt with the myriad of features of '(political) representation' in the kingdom. The descriptions of TOBY MATTHIESEN (Cambridge) and CLAUDIA SCHRÖEDER (Berlin) illustrated how similar archival material can produce rather diverse accounts of a particular time and space. Both papers investigated into social movements triggered by the transformation processes of the growing oil-industry of the Eastern Province in the 1950-60s, a time period that seems distinctive for understanding today's explosive socio-political atmosphere in this - the world's oil richest - region. Thereby they proved that historians of the kingdom, especially those working on stories outside of the major Saudi capitals Riyadh and Jeddah, still face great nescience and narrational holes when trying to reconstruct "wie es eigentlich gewesen" Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) cited from Rudolf Vierhaus, Rankes Begriff der historischen Objektivität, in: Reinhart Koselleck / Wolfgang J. Mommsen / Jörn Rüsen (eds.), Objektivität und Parteilichkeit in der Geschichtswissenschaft, München p. 63-76. . With great holes of the material kind dealt the last paper in this session by MUHAMMAD BAGADIR (Manchester) on the heritage conservation discourse of the old city of Jeddah.

The third panel focused on forms of '(directed) dialogues': formally initiated by the government, such as the National Dialogue Forum, which MENNO PREUSCHAFT (Münster) turned to. SEBASTIAN MAISEL (Allendale) pointed towards informal dialogue strategies in his presentation about a resurgence of tribalism in the country, and examined the role these play within Saudi society and identity politics. Finally, in a most original analysis, NADAV SAMIN (Princeton) introduced the lifetime achievement of one of the most prominent Saudi historians, Hamad al-Jasir (1908-2000). Al-Jasir documented and published the lineages of the tribes and families of Saudi Arabia. In a country where lineage is one of the pillars of identity politics, this arose hundreds of petitioners and inquirers who send al-Jasir letters with genealogical queries. The methodology of Samin's seminal study combined archival work of the historian, treating the correspondence letters "as an entryway" Cf. Nadav Samin, The Oracle of al-Wurud: Hamad al-Jasir's Genealogical Correspondance, paper presented at the workshop "In Search of the Kingdom. From the First Saudi State to the Present (Berlin June 12-14, 2013), p .2. into the genealogical culture of Saudi Arabia, with ethnographic accounts produced on contemporary witnesses of the investigated time. Thereby Samin traced "the progressive receding of oral cultural authority and its gradual encapsulation by the bureaucratic state" Ibid, p. 17. . He convincingly argued that genealogy "had moved from a problem of heritage, identity, and history to one of social order and organization that is from the purview of al-Jasir to the purview of the state." Ibid, p. 19. Yet, the discussant of the papers, Abu Bakir Bagadir (Jeddah), acknowledged the high quality of the contributions, but criticized that they would not represent the Saudi Arabia that he knows. The controversial debate about the balance *between* and importance *of* particular cultural and political features of the kingdom, such as the question of the importance of tribalism for today's society or the actual impact of the National Dialog, and what different nuances meant for an interpretative research frame, span through the whole workshop.

In the fourth panel, that the organizers of the workshop provocatively entitled, 'constructions and constrictions', the controversial debate, sparked by a comment of GUDRUN KRÄMER (Berlin), centered around the question of how to deal with one's own sympathy - or antipathy - when representing and analyzing viewpoints and streams of thought of controversial figures. The discussion arose around the presentations of two prominent Saudi intellectuals: LUAY RADHAN (Marburg) represented the 'liberal democrat' Turki al-Hamad (1953-*) and MOHAMMAD GHARAIBEH (Bonn) introduced same theological arguments of the 'wahhabi scholar' Ibn 'Uthaymin (1925-2001). In the presentations the contrast between these two Saudi personalities was stark. Yet,

both approaches left the audience wondering how to embed and contextualize the analysis within wider fields of research and how they related to Saudi Arabian society.

The same questions of representativeness stood in the room during the fifth panel, 'religion contested'. Doing research on a country with a rather restrictive socio-political culture when it comes to academic freedom and human rights, such as freedom of speech and expression, poses particular difficulties to a qualitative research approach. For example, in this panel ANNEMARIE VAN GEELEN's (Nijmegen) chose as the empirical basis of her well-grounded analysis qualitative interviews, which she conducted during three field trips with students, young working women, business women, female Islamic preachers, and activist in Riyadh and Jeddah. This rose the question, in how far her hypothesis, namely that in Saudi Arabia "women's attitudes towards *ikhtilat* [gender-mixing] and women-only public spaces are motivated by one common goal, namely the enhancement of the participation of women in public life" Annemarie Van Geelen, To Mix or not to Mix? Defining and Strategising Gender Segregation, Ikhtilat and Khilwa in Saudi Arabia, paper presented at the workshop "In Search of the Kingdom. From the First Saudi State to the Present (Berlin June 12-14, 2013), p. 11. is the expression of a very particular socio-economic, elitist group and not representative for larger parts of society.

The question that lied at the bottom of this continuous debate about representation, that is who is allowed to speak for the other, reached its climax in the sixth panel on '(intellectual) fictions'. After stimulating papers by ZEINA G. HALABI (Chapel Hill/ Berlin), TAREK ELARISS (Austin/ Berlin) and YUKA KADOI (Edinburgh) on contemporary cultural developments in the kingdom, MAHA AL-SENAN (Riyadh) in her presentation about the future of an art market in Saudi Arabia criticized that most contemporary aesthetic discourses in the Middle East would (still?) obey Western tastes and are not an expression of local identity. This, according to her, had been aggravated by an "intellectual trend of contents and questions such as: We (Europeans) cannot understand how you (Arabs) can go directly from the tent to the skyscraper and from camels to six-cylinder vehicles" Maha Abdullah al-Senan, The Worth of Art. The Future of the Art Market in Saudi Arabia, paper presented at the workshop "In Search of the Kingdom. From the First Saudi State to the Present (Berlin June 12-14, 2013), p.12. .

The wealth of presentations, that could not even all be mentioned in this report, and the diversity of topics and approaches raised during the workshop makes an overall conclusion of the academic debates an impossible endeavor. On the one hand, further workshops might limit the scope of topics further, in order to allocate more time for each section and research field, thereby giving the participants more space for self-exploring and discussion. On the other hand, the high and very positive resonance, that the event received, showed in itself that research on Saudi Arabia is evolving fast. Particularly in disciplines such as history, Islamic studies and anthropology, that traditionally excluded the kingdom, appears to be a high interest in research from the region. The interdisciplinarity within emerging scholarship on Saudi Arabia presented at the workshop stood out remarkably - be it within single research projects or that scholars from different disciplines investigated into similar topics from different perspectives using specific methodologies, thereby complementing each other.

Given the increasing interest in research on Saudi Arabia, one of the aims of the workshop was to foster a critical self-reflexivity, particular among non-Saudi researchers working on the kingdom. As Amélie Le Renard put it in the final session on research agendas, we should ask ourselves more, why we are doing research on Saudi Arabia. The scientific community should also ask, why none of the presentations at the workshop dealt with the very large presence of non-Saudis in the country.

The wish of the organizers to do research *with* each other, rather than speaking *about* Saudi Arabia and its citizens, was met by intense debates about representation, representativeness and authority. 35 years after the publication of Edward Said's 'Orientalism' (1978), debates about othering, degrees of exceptionalism, culturalism, and the need to self-defense still seem to be shaping the process of doing research to a remarkable extend. Are we, then, as a new generation of researchers as 'enlightened' and 'progressive' as we seem to think, and what would that mean for doing research on a country like Saudi Arabia? The workshop showed that both sides have a lot of catch-up work to do. The best way for this would be to continue working together.

Conference Overview:

Welcome Address:

Ulrike Freitag, director of the ZMO / Gudrun Krämer, director of the BGSMCS / Nora Derbal on behalf of the doctoral student initiative

Panel 1: Foundations

Chair/Discussant: Ulrike Freitag (Berlin), Claudia Schröder (Berlin)

Nathan Hodson (Princeton): Business-State Relations Under 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud: A Study in Development and Political Consolidation in Early Saudi Arabia (1902-1953)

Philippe Pétriat (Paris): A Hejazi Merchant Family, from the Ottoman to the Saudi Rule

Nushin Atmaca (Berlin): Constructing Saudi Arabia: Generational Narratives of Global Training and Local Development

Domenik Schlosser (Erfurt): Muhammad Asad as a Source for Saudi History in the Early Twentieth Century: A Critical Perspective

Panel 2: (Political) Representations

Chair/Discussant: Matthias Determann (Berlin)

Toby Matthiesen (Cambridge): A Democratic Experiment and the Struggle for Local Administration in Saudi Arabia: Municipal Elections in the Eastern Province, 1954-1962

Claudia Schröder (Berlin): A Tamed Urban Revolution: The 1967 Riots in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province

Muhammad Bagader (Manchester): Jeddah's Historic Core and the Evolution of the Saudi Built Heritage Conservation Discourse since the 1970's until 2012

Panel 3: (Directed) Dialogues

Chair/Discussant: Abu Bakir Bagader (Jeddah), Nora Derbal (Berlin)

Menno Preuschaft (Münster): Religion, Plurality, and Identity: Inner-Islamic Implications of the 'National Dialogue' in Saudi Arabia

Sebastian Maisel (Allendale): Power to the Tribes: A New Wave of Tribalism in Saudi Arabia

Nadav Samin (Princeton): The Oracle of al-Wurud: Hamad al-Jasir's Genealogical Correspondence, 1992-2000

Panel 4: Constructions and Constrictions

Chair/Discussant: Gudrun Krämer (Berlin), Katharina Mühlbeyer (Berlin)

Luay Radhan (Marburg): Liberal Democrat Turki al-Hamad: Politics between Religiously Allowed and Religiously Forbidden (licit and illicit)

Mohammad Gharaibeh (Bonn): Constructing true Islam: The Wahhabi Scholar Ibn Uthaymin (d. 2001) on the Divine Attributes and the Path of the Pious Ancestors (Salaf)

Podium Discussion at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP):

In Search of Saudi Arabia - A Rock in a Stormy Sea? Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring

Keynotes: Paul Aarts (Amsterdam), Toby Matthiesen (Cambridge)

Further Participation: Abu Bakir Bagadir (Jeddah), Sebastian Maisel (Allendale),

Moderation: Gudrun Krämer (Berlin)

Panel 5: Religion Contested

Chair/Discussant: Amélie Le Renard (Paris), Nushin Atmaca (Berlin)

Takao Kenichiro (Kyoto): Reconsidering the Social Role of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice in an Evolving Saudi Arabian Society

Annemarie van Geel (Nijmegen): Contesting Women-Only Public Spaces in Saudi Arabia

Katharina Mühlbeyer (Berlin): From Sahwa to Self-Help - 'A'id al-Qarnis Islamic Books

Panel 6: (Intellectual) Fictions

Chair/Discussant: Julia Clauss (Berlin)

Zeina G. Halabi (Chapel Hill/ Berlin): The Ghost, the Body, and the Text: Refiguring the Saudi Political Novel in Seba al-Herz's The Others

Tarek El-Ariss (Austin /Berlin): Virtual Arabia: Fiction in the Age of Violence

Yuka Kadoi (Edinburgh): Between Neo-Islamic and Global: Saudi Art and the Visual Culture of 21st-Century Arabia

Maha Al-Senan (Riyadh): The Worth of Art: The Future of an Art Market and its Impact on Saudi Culture

Panel 7: Transnational Connections

Chair/Discussant: Paul Aarts (Amsterdam), Saud Al-Zaid (Berlin)

Chanfi Ahmed (Berlin): Encounter of 'Ulama from South Asia, West Africa and Egypt in the Dar al-Hadith of Medina at the beginning of the Ibn Sa'ud's regime

Jörg Matthias Determann (Berlin): Scientific Networks, Evolution and the Saudi Wildlife Commission

Panel 8: Global vs. Local Transformations?

Chair/Discussant: Bettina Gräf (Berlin), Sebastian Sons (Berlin)

Saud Al-Zaid (Berlin): Salafi Aesthetics: The Bedouin Bourgeoisie

Nora Derbal (Berlin): Making-of: Productive Citizens - Charity for the Poor in Saudi Arabia

Closing Session: Research Agendas

Introduction: Ulrike Freitag (Berlin), Abu Bakir Bagader (Jeddah), further participants: Werner Ende (Berlin), Amélie Le Renard (Paris)

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