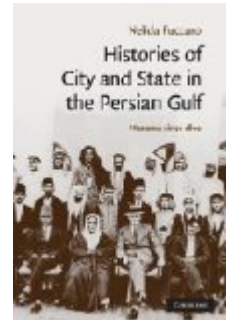




Nelida Fuccaro. *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama since 1800.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. xvi + 257 pp. \$99.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-51435-4.



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Published on H-Levant (July, 2010)

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In many ways, the city of Manama (now the capital of Bahrain) shares affinities with other Gulf city-states. Like Dubai, Kuwait, and Muscat, the port city drew vitality from the local economy (through pearling and fishing), as well as its status as a long-distance entrepôt (whose merchants could rely on trading relationships with India, Iran, and other parts of the world). Bahrain's modern history and state formation was influenced by the arrival of branches of the Bani 'Utub tribal confederation from Arabia in the late eighteenth century, a factor shared with most modern Gulf states. As elsewhere in the Gulf, Bahrain's pre-oil politics was defined by the complex web of client-patron relations between the ruling family, the British, and the merchant class. The rise of the petroleum economy, which occurred in Bahrain earlier than in the other Gulf states, resulted in a shift of power towards the ruling family as oil revenues made them more independent of the claims of the British and the merchants.

Yet, Bahrain's similarities to other Gulf states must be counterbalanced against significant dif-

ferences. The identification of many Bahrainis with Twelver Shi'ism dates back to the Safavid era, when Iran controlled much of the island's politics. The collapse of Safavid imperial might in the 1700s left the door open for Arab groups from the interior of Arabia to stake out coastal claims. Only in Bahrain did these groups find a substantial number of settled inhabitants that they had to compete with, resulting in the establishment of a separate Sunni stronghold at Muharraq island, off the coast of Manama.

Until recently, Bahrain's history has also been one of the most actively studied of the modern Gulf states. Archeologists have focused upon Bahrain due to its location as the site of the ancient Dilmun culture that dominated the pre-Islamic Gulf. In the modern era, Bahrain has drawn the attention of historians due to its unique position with regards to oil and the British. It differs from the other Gulf states in that it became the first oil producer in the Gulf in the 1930s. Bahrain also had the most complicated relationships with Britain out of all the Gulf states, emerging as the

seat of British authority in the region after the abandonment of Bushehr in Iran in 1946.

The historiography on the modern Gulf states (Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Oman) has often focused on the transformational role that oil has played since the mid-twentieth century, with the pre- and post-oil eras looming as an impenetrable boundary. In the minds of many scholars, the post-oil Gulf definitively ended social relationships that had endured for previous centuries. This presumed rupture functioned as an explosive event which brought about the “modern” state characterized by urban renewal, industry, and social welfare networks (all fueled by growing oil revenues). As a result, researchers assumed that politics faded into the past as various sections of Gulf society were “bought off” by the new oil-driven modernity. Nelida Fuccaro’s work is a refreshing attempt at revising this historiography, demonstrating the persistence of politics and pre-oil identities in Bahrain until the early 1970s.

While acknowledging the importance of petroleum in changing the relationship between ruler and ruled in Bahrain, Fuccaro’s work emphasizes the oil economy as modifying older client-patron relationships that existed as far back as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Her discussion of the evolution of both Shi’a and Sunni identities in the aftermath of the Safavid and Bani ‘Utub occupations is well grounded in both English and Arabic sources. One gets the sense from her writing that two types of Bahraini nationalism are in formation. On the one hand, the al-Khalifa increasingly saw their rule over the island as providing the necessary stability and expertise to usher Bahrain into the global oil era. On the other, Shi’a Arabs viewed the arrival and domination of the al-Khalifa family and their retainers as disrupting a cultural “golden age” exemplified by links with Shi’a communities in Iran and elsewhere in the Middle East.

The first chapter of her book, entitled “Indigenous State Traditions and the Dialectics of Urbanization in Bahrain, 1602-1923,” is especially rich in Arabic source material which Fuccaro uses to evoke the sense of loss among Shi’a Bahrainis after the Safavid withdrawal from Bahrain in 1717. The resultant instability and fear of an Omani attack led to the flight of many Shi’a intellectuals. Fuccaro later intimates that following the installation of the Sunni al-Khalifa in Bahrain in the late eighteenth century, this led to the longing for a past “golden age” of Shi’a belief. When this merged with the powerful ritual of ‘Ashura (the Shi’i commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn at the hands of Sunni armies at Karbala), it resulted in the creation of a peculiar urban form in Manama: the *ma’tam* (or house of mourning) which maintained a separate Shi’i identity in the face of the al-Khalifa conquests. Fuccaro then discusses the arrival of the al-Khalifa tribe in the 1780s, skillfully shifting to a group of Sunni Arab authors to describe the events.

Fuccaro’s second chapter examines Bahrain in comparison with the rise of other port cities in the Gulf during the nineteenth century. The chapter is framed chronologically by the earliest series of “Trucial” agreements reached between Britain and the variety of local Arab rulers in the early 1800s. Here, Fuccaro describes the often contentious relationships between ruling families and merchants as they adapted to the “Pax Britannica.” The latter sought to bolster revenues through customs duties and other taxation, given the lack of other resources. Merchants actively resisted such efforts by employing a *hawala* (change) strategy which entailed shifting locations from country to country (or coast to coast) to avoid overzealous efforts by the state to regulate their trade. Such strategies damaged Gulf states’ status as merchant ports, deprived rulers of important customs revenues, and made their positions more tenuous. British military intervention and the establishing of informal control over much of the Arabian coast of the Gulf created a

more stable environment from which to strengthen local trading networks based on fishing and pearling, as well as long-distance trade with the Indian Ocean.

The third chapter is devoted to a spatial mapping of the sectarian relationships described in earlier chapters and their economic corollaries in the decades prior to the First World War. Manama's economic vibrancy then depended upon local and transnational trading patterns. The city's merchants controlled this trade and used its profits to develop Manama as well as gain financial leverage with the al-Khalifa rulers and their retainers. Fuccaro describes how the architecture of Manama benefited from its position as Gulf entrepôt. Wealthy Shi'i merchants, in particular, used the proceeds from this trade to construct large *ma'tams* as religious and social gathering places. Considering that Bahrain was then an extractive, not distributive, state, the al-Khalifa themselves relied heavily upon the merchants for loans and taxation in the form of customs duties. The position of the ruling family was thus more tenuous and open to challenge than it would be after the exploitation of petroleum. For instance, the *al-sukrah* collections were seen as a hated imposition by the merchants of Manama. As Fuccaro points out, these collections of money and goods by the *fidawiyah* (retainers of the ruling family) often reflected competition between the different branches of the al-Khalifa who used them to jockey for power. Ever more important since the late nineteenth century, the British government and its representatives influenced Manama's political map by offering protégé status to various merchants and others in the capital.

In her fourth chapter Fuccaro expands upon the British role in Bahrain in the twentieth century. Great Britain established firm treaty relations with Bahrain at the outset of World War I due to its geo-strategic position and speculation about its oil reserves. Although their primary base in the Gulf continued to be in Iran until 1947, the British

embarked upon a project of state-building in Bahrain that Fuccaro remarks was unique in the history of the Gulf up to that time. The struggle to impose a more rigorous administrative structure upon Manama (characterized by the institution of the *baladiyyah*, or municipality) made the city's politics even more contentious.

Having examined the urban fabric of Manama in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Fuccaro turns to a discussion of how dissent and protest played out in the public sphere. The fifth chapter demonstrates how evolving religious and class-based loyalties shaped social protests and Bahraini political associations. She argues that earlier disputes over wages between *dhow* owners and the pearl divers who worked for them set the stage for labor relations in the oil era. The professional solidarities that bound the pearl divers together continued to inform their goals and actions as pearlers became BAPCO (Bahrain Petroleum Company) employees. While British interference destabilized Bahrain during the early twentieth century, Gamal Abd al-Nasser (and his radio mouthpiece, *Sawt al-'Arab*) catalyzed Bahraini political fervor by the 1950s. These external influences, whether British or Pan-Arab, seem to have played a decisive part in the increasing politicization of Bahraini religious and ethnic identities, leading to uprisings from the 1920s to the 1950s.

By the 1960s the oil economy had stimulated the emergence of new political relationships and urban forms as described in Fuccaro's sixth and final chapter. The vast sums of petroleum revenues flowing into Bahraini coffers fostered land registration and speculation on a large scale, leading to the first example of a modern Gulf metropolis. Older ethnic solidarities (such as those pitting the Sunni al-Khalifa rulers against the Shi'i Baharna peasantry) come into focus throughout this chapter as Fuccaro wades into the controversy over nationality and wealth distribution characteristic of most political analysis on Bahrain. In-

terestingly, she claims that the administrative and legal structures set up earlier in the twentieth century were increasingly used to promote al-Khalifa and wealthy Shi'i property interests at the expense of Bahrain's rural population and economy. Much of the evidence that Fuccaro presents to support her claims emerges from archives related to Britain's Foreign Office and India Office. The lack of Arabic sources (written or oral) to complement the British record is unfortunate, leading to Fuccaro's acknowledgment later in the chapter that a comprehensive analysis of property relations in Bahrain is still lacking.

Overall, Nelida Fuccaro's work is a valuable resource for those scholars seeking to understand modern Bahrain. Although the British and Pan-Arab forces she describes throughout her book have waned in importance over time, the ethnic mosaic of Manama and Bahrain in general continues to shape Bahraini society and politics. In terms of Bahrain, her work complements and expands research done by James Onley on transnational merchant families and can be usefully compared to studies on the formation of modern Gulf polities from Kuwait to the United Arab Emirates, by Mary Ann Tétrault, Christopher Davidson, and Andrea Rugh.

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Citation: Thomas DeGeorges. Review of Fuccaro, Nelida. *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama since 1800*. H-Levant, H-Net Reviews. July, 2010.

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