



Saudi Clerics and Shi'a Islam

By Raihan Ismail

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The Saudi "ulama" are known for their strong opposition to Shi'a theology, Shi'a communities in Saudi Arabia, and external Shi'a influences such as Iran and Hezbollah. Their potent hostility, combined with the influence of the 'ulama' within the Saudi state and the Muslim world, has led some commentators to blame the Saudi 'ulama' for what they see as growing sectarian conflict in the Middle East. However, there is very little understanding of what reasoning lies behind the positions of the 'ulama' and there is a significant gap in the literature dealing with the polemics directed at the Shi'a by the Saudi religious establishment.

In *Saudi Clerics and Shi'a Islam*, Raihan Ismail looks at the discourse of the Saudi "ulama" regarding Shiism and Shi'a communities, analysing their sermons, lectures, publications and religious rulings. The book finds that the attitudes of the "ulama" are not only governed by their theological convictions regarding Shiism, but are motivated by political events involving the Shi'a within the Saudi state and abroad. It also discovers that political events affect the intensity and frequency of the rhetoric of the ulama at any given time.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Ismail gives an in-depth...view of the Saudi 'Wahhabi' clerics on Shi'ism from the founding of the first Saudi state in the 18th century until the present day..."--*Middle East Journal*

"Ismail has written a ground-breaking study on one of the key issues in the contemporary Islamic World: The attitude of Saudi clerics towards non-Sunni Muslims. Based on a close reading of sermons, books, and online discussions in Arabic, Ismail shows how Saudi clerics have embraced anti-Shiism as a cornerstone of their campaign to impose Wahhabi religious orthodoxy on Muslims around the world. An essential reading for anyone interested in the root causes of the religious conflicts that are reshaping the Middle East." --Toby Matthiesen, Senior Research Fellow in the International Relations of the Middle East, The Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College

"Raihan Ismail's work presents, for the first time in English, comprehensive coverage of portrayals of Shiism in Saudi religious thought and preaching for both establishment and non-establishment 'ulam?'. An examination of both theological and political influences upon portrayals of Saudi Sh?'a and their interactions with other Sh?'a in Iran, Bahrain, Iraq, and Yemen, Ismail's book is a welcome addition to the corpus of work on Saudi religious thought and practice." --Natana J. DeLong-Bas, Editor-in-Chief, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Women*

"This is an authoritative, richly textured inquiry into Saudi Salafi clerical discourse toward Shiism. It challenges many of our previously-held assumptions about Saudi clerical views on the Muslim 'other.' A great strength of Raihan Ismail's work is her deft handling of clerical primary sources and her illumination of the ways in which religious doctrine is constantly being shaped by political context, personalities, and regional events. A must read for anyone interested in Saudi Arabia, clerical authority, and sectarianism." --Frederic Wehrey, author of *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings*

About the Author

Raihan Ismail is based at the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies. She works on sectarian politics in the Middle East and the dynamics within and between Islamic institutions. She regularly appears in the Australian news media commenting on Middle Eastern politics and Islam.

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