Mashriq & Mahjar 1, no. 2 (2013), 143–147
ISSN 2169-4435

LEIF MANGER, *The Hadrami Diaspora: Community-Building on the Indian Ocean Rim* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010). Pp. 220. $60.00 cloth. ISBN 9781845457426.

REVIEWED BY DANIEL MARTIN VARISCO, Department of Anthropology, Hofstra University, email: Daniel.M.Varisco@hofstra.edu

> The present book is thus the end result of a rather long anthropological journey, filled with interesting moments of discovery but also a feeling of anxiety as I struggled with my inclination to deal with the "totality" of Hadarami (sic) immigration history: My anthropological instincts told me to settle for a discussion of things less speculative, more focused on stories in which we can see real people (x).

Before I prepared to live in North Yemen in 1978 to conduct ethnographic fieldwork on tradition irrigation and water rights, I benefited greatly from earlier ethnographic work on irrigation in South Yemen's Hadramawt from Abdulla Bujra's *The Politics of Stratification: A Study of Political change in a South Arabian Town*.[1] Based on a year's research in the town of Hureidah in 1962–63, Bujra provided one of the few on-the-ground anthropological studies of Yemen at the time. Bujra's residence at the University of Bergen had a profound influence on Leif Manger, whose current book expands on the earlier study of Bujra, as well as anthropologist Engseng Ho, in tracing the dynamics of Hadramis in diaspora.

The focus of Manger's innovative account can best be summed up by the first question he asks: "Is there a Hadrami ethnic identity in the diaspora?" (8). The anthropological journey that the author makes through his narrative takes him literally to Singapore, Hyderabad, Sudan and Ethiopia, as well as the Hadramawt itself. Part One contains four chapters with details on four diasporic communities of Hadramis. Part Two provides three chapters focusing on Hadrami identity

formation, including the homeland-diaspora dynamics and Hadrami efforts in resisting the West. A lengthy bibliography is provided, but the author does not use footnotes.

Newly arrived in Singapore, Manger immediately encountered the ethnic smorgasbord of Muslims in a local "Hadrami" mosque: Hadramis from Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, a Sudanese working in the Saudi embassy, a Pakistani working for Shell, an Egyptian graduate of al-Azhar and the Malaysian High Commissioner to Singapore (20). Not surprisingly, the anthropologist was soon aware that there can be no disaporic Hadrami "everyman" in the present and thus the idea of such an ideal Hadrami in the past is brought into question. In Singapore there was a shift in the early 20th century from Hadrami identity as Arab to that of Malay Muslim (36). Since 1965, a local version of "Asian values" creates a potential for future conflict between diasporic Hadramis and a variety of local ethnicities (40–41).

Although Singapore has long been a launch point for Hadramis heading for other parts of Southeast Asia, Hyderabad is also an important diasporic location. By the late 18th century, Hadramis were serving in the Asaf Jah dynasty. Manger discusses the autobiography of Sayed Ahmed el Edros, an early 20th century soldier who served in British Aden and rose to the rank of Major-General. Hadramis, as Manger notes, were certainly caught up in the bloodshed following India's partition in 1947. Later, especially after 1977, many Hyderabad Hadramis migrated to the Gulf for work. Those Hadramis who remained in Hyderabad were strongly influenced by local Deccan Muslims and Hindus and are under pressure to establish an "Indian" rather than "Arab" identity.

Manger's previous research in Sudan brought him into contact with a number of diasporic Hadramis. The early migration of Hadramis occurred during the unrest of the Mahdist rebellion in the late 19th century. The coastal town of Suakin, not overrun by the Mahdi, was in British control. When Port Sudan replaced Suakin as the major Sudanese port in the first half of the 20th century, Hadrami migration increased. Manger not only describes the local social and economic contexts of both coastal towns, but also explains the role of the British in creating the education system in both Sudan and Hadramawt.

The most famous derivative Hadrami migrant of the latter part of the 20th century was Osama Bin Laden, who lived in Sudan for a spell. Osama was born in 1957, seven years after his father had moved

to Saudi Arabia in what Manger characterizes as "the most recent historical wave of Hadrami migration, to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf" (80). Manger argues that Osama's career is part of a broader religious diaspora of Muslims, some of whom advocated violence and others who preached peace and toleration. Osama's pragmatic flirtation with Hassan el Turabi, Manger shows, did not last because "there was no shared ideological platform" (84). The issue of how Hadrami migration has recently been pitched against Western capitalism and politics is explored further in chapter seven.

The last diasporic community covered by Manger is that of Ethiopia with information also provided on trade through Somalia. Hadramis played an important role in the local trade and as Islamic educators, but many were forced out with anti-Arab sentiment after Somalia's independence in 1960. As elsewhere, the Hadrami community could not escape local political developments, which became increasingly complex in the Horn of Africa. In recent years, many Hadramis in Ethiopia have migrated for work in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. Those that remain, given the international concern over extremist groups like al Qaeda, are now in danger of being stigmatized as "terrorists" (104).

In his final three chapters, Manger argues persuasively that there is no fixed identity of the Hadrami in diaspora. Being "Hadrami" must also be in relation to the other potential identities as Muslims and contested identities of "others" in every diasporic location. While certain cultural markers, such as use of Arabic and dress, survive in private venues, they are rarely advertised in public, so that it is often possible to blend into the local culture. Choosing wives from the homeland or from other Hadrami families in diaspora is balanced with the opportunity to marry local women. In addition to kin networks, which may link back to the Hadramawt, there are often major non-kin based "welfare" organizations. But those Hadramis who are *muwallad*, of mixed parentage, often are discriminated against back in the Hadramawt, which prompts Manger to observe that "it is puzzling that in a society where migration is of fundamental importance, the human products of such movements are persistently regarded in a negative light" (124). As a result, some contemporary Hadramis in diaspora may not feel at home anywhere.

In chapter six, Manger deconstructs the notion of Hadrami "social stratification," arguing that he prefers "an empirical finding rather than a theoretical postulate" (130). Here he returns to the seminal sociological analysis of Bujra on status in Hureidah, especially the role

of having a defined equality between marriage partners. The aristocratic Sada (descendants of the Prophet) maintained their dominance during the days of the British protectorate, but there were profound changes after the formation of the socialist state of the Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen. Recently, the traditional role of Sada as Islamic scholars and teachers has changed. Following unification in 1990, class-based struggles still exist, although with more explicit religious overtones.

In some ways the final chapter on the Hadrami role in "resisting the West" (152) is the most original contribution of the book. Hadramis no longer are bound by an unchanging ethnic identity as they are by a dynamic defining of "Muslim universalism" in light of Western cultural, economic and political impact on the Indian Ocean states. The earliest Hadrami migrants to Southeast Asia encountered Hindus and Buddhists as they assimilated, but today the most significant other has become the "West." His approach is best summarized as follows: "we should build our understanding of Muslim communities less on the notion that Islam is static and more on the notion that these are dynamic communities engaging in 'world systems interrelationships'" (154). Ironically, the Hadrami community in diaspora benefited from the British Raj, but now finds itself in virtually every context in conflict, at least symbolically, with Western neoimperialism. Manger rightly cautions that we should not assume a "universal spread of *homo economicus*" (172), since the forms of capitalism in Southeast Asia are shaped in large part by local and regional factors.

Manger provides a readable, first-person account of his own encounters with Hadramis in diaspora. His focus is on the recent past, although important historical factors are given to contextualize the current dynamics of diasporic communities. As such this is a useful companion to the earlier historical analysis by Engseng Ho in his *The Graves of Tarim*.[2] Although at times the details on specific Hadrami families may be of interest mainly to family members, the narrative overall blends examples into the theoretical discussion. The tendency to homogenize global capitalism, as well as Muslim resistance to Western impact, is systematically challenged in Manger's study. While the book will be of most use to those who have an interest in Yemen and the Indian Ocean network, the findings have implications for other regions.

NOTES

[1] Abdulla Bujra, *The Politics of Stratification: A Study of Political Change in a South Arabian Town* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971).

[2] Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).