



## ZMO-Kolloquium

Thursday, 17 September 2009, 6 pm

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### **The Saudi Pot: Melting or Boiling! National Identity, Power Structure and Future Prospects in Saudi Arabia**

**Lecture by Prof Saad A Sowayan**

#### Venue

Zentrum Moderner Orient  
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

The presentation is a deconstruction of the socio-cultural components of Saudi Arabia. It takes a critical look at how these components affect political practice, with special emphasis on how of the political discourse articulates with the conservative religious outlook and tribal ethos. The aim is to show how the clerical and merchant classes, along with the tribal elements affect domestic policies, and how this leaves little room for intellectuals to disseminate their liberal views. Tribes, clerics, and to a certain extent merchants are the only organized groups who, each as an independent and discrete block, could act to influence government policies. On the other hand, liberals and intellectuals enjoy neither power base nor popular support. In short, Saudi society is divided into two camps. The majority camp of conservatives who see danger looming everywhere because the society is changing too fast. Then there is a small but growing camp of liberals who also see danger but because they think society is not changing fast enough to keep pace with the rest of the world. The presentation will outline the internal and external pressures on Saudi Arabia to move forward, and will conclude by striking a more optimistic note for the future prospects of the country.

**Saad A Sowayan** is a graduate of UC Berkeley, now professor of Anthropology & Folklore at King Saud University in Riyadh. His main interest is oral literature and the desert culture of the Arabian nomads. He has lectured widely and published extensively on the subject in Arabic & English. He spent many years doing field work among the nomads of Northern Arabia tape recording hundreds of hours of poems, narratives, genealogies and ethnographic information on desert culture and tribal oral history. Among his publications: *Nabati Poetry: the Oral Poetry of Arabia* published by UC University Press (1982) and *The Arabian Oral Historical Narrative: An Ethnographic and Linguistic Analysis* published by Otto Harrassowitz in Weisbaden (1989). Prof. Sowayan has also been engaged in transferring to Arab audience the intellectual and theoretical heritage of Western thinkers in the fields of Anthropology and social philosophy. For more on his work you can visit his website: <http://www.saadsowayan.com/>

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