

Editor's Note

The nation-state order in the Levant has been under constant challenge since its establishment. While the writing of an obituary for nation-states may be premature, critical discussion regarding both the logic of the international arrangements and the changing reality on the ground that created the countries in the Middle East has intensified since the 1990s. At the same time, the unification of Europe into one political construct, despite its inherent difficulties and the massive immigration challenging the Christian character of public spaces, contributes to the critical discourse on the one-dimensional logic that characterizes national thought and states. This discourse has developed alongside the growth of interest in and research on diaspora, often understood as the negation of the concept of nation.

Diasporas, classically understood through a direct relation to “the motherland,” have been studied in various contexts and through different disciplines. Today diaspora studies allow researchers to challenge the conventions related to national sovereignty and allow additional options for framing the nature both of communities and of the immigrants’ need to adopt the dominant ethos of the host society. The articles in this issue offer a fresh discussion of diaspora. The authors propose multidimensional alternative views on both the process that created nations and the construction of diasporic stances. As scholar Matthias Lehmann has shown, diasporas themselves are in fact imagined communities, in much the same way that nations are. They should be viewed, therefore, as a dynamic concept that should not be essentialized.

Jonathan Ray challenges the assumption that the Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula created a defined, distinct Spanish identity immediately after their deportation. In “Creating Sepharad: Expulsion, Migration, and the Limits of

Diaspora,” Ray examines the exiles’ sense of longing and argues that consolidation of the Spanish diaspora began only in the second or third generation following the expulsion. The deportees adopted various strategies for coping with their new situation and used various symbols and practices that in many cases belonged to previous localities and loyalties, which suited their practical and emotional needs in their new location. Moreover, Ray offers the view that such multiple and varied cultural practices were a form of resistance to the attempt to make the deportees a homogeneous diaspora. Like Lehmann, he warns us against viewing diasporas in substantialist terms and prefers to examine diasporic stances.

Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin believes, like Ray, in the need to discover diverse voices and to make room for polyphonic societies. As a historian he looks for an alternative to the national, one-dimensional perspective on diaspora and seeks to challenge the linear relationship between the place of origin and the place of destination. Thus, he contributes to the building of a diasporic perspective based on multiple histories and multiple identities. In “Exile, History, and the Nationalization of Jewish Memory: Some Reflections on the Zionist Notion of History and Return,” Raz-Krakotzkin addresses the teleological Zionist narrative that negates the Diaspora and that sees in the nation-state the only possible form of sovereignty. By examining the use of two fundamental concepts, “return to history” and “negation of exile,” both of which originated in Christian theology, he demonstrates the inherited paradox of Zionist discourse. Following the genealogy of the two concepts in the historiography of Zionist writings, he exposes the Orientalist dimension of Zionist discourse and suggests the possibility of using exile and diaspora as a resource for developing alternative views of the possible forms of Jewish existence.

A versatile perspective of diaspora is also evident in the article by **Ariel Sheerit**, which traces the ambiguities in the concept of “diaspora” as they play out in two Arabic novels. In “Deterritorialization of Belonging: Between Home and the Unhomely in Miral al-Tahawy’s *Brooklyn Heights* and Salman Natur’s *She, the Autumn, and Me*,” she analyses the works of Bedouin Egyptian writer Miral al-Tahawy and Israeli Palestinian writer Salman Natur. Her subversive reading of the characters in the novels reveals the same complexity that was noted in Ray’s article: the elements of identity can be understood as primarily fluid and flexible rather than as a rigid system of fixed values and identities. The novels are an expression of the polysemousness of diaspora, inscribing a collection of liminal ties that repeatedly contradict any attempt to determine a clear picture of “here” versus “there,” of home and away.

Is it possible to be in exile in your own homeland? In some cases the disintegration of empires and the creation of new boundaries created a situation in which native communities became “foreign” in their own land. The construct of nation-states took no consideration of the complex social and demographic nuances and borderlines that often separated members of the same communities. Some communities, such as those who became the Palestinian citizens of Israel, found themselves minorities for the first time. **Tal Ben Zvi**’s “Landscape Representations in Palestinian Art and Israeli Art Discourse: The Case of Asim Abu Shaqra,” examines the politicized Israeli art scene through a study of visual art created by Palestinian Israeli artists.

Focusing on landscape imagery, Ben Zvi analyzes works by Asim Abu Shaqra and follows the ways in which his work, considered iconographic in Palestinian art discourse, was received by the Israeli artistic milieu. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed an escalation of violent reactions, resulting from the failure of the political process, and an oscillation between hope and fear. Against this background Ben Zvi demonstrates how the rivalry over ownership of land and the claims of both Israeli Jews and Palestinians for nativity were embodied symbolically in the image of the *sabra* (prickly pear cactus), which no longer represented only the native-born Israeli.

Defying the national logic is also evident in attempts to frame alternative visions for the region. **Carola Cerami** presents a critical analysis of how Turkish foreign-policy makers, who never rid themselves of dreams of empire, constructed a new regional agenda. In “Rethinking Turkey’s Soft Power in the Arab World: Islam, Secularism, and Democracy,” Cerami explains how Turkish foreign policy challenges the existing nation-state order and borders. She discusses the attempts of policymakers to project soft power in Arab lands that were previously part of the Ottoman Empire. Cerami’s main argument is that Turkey’s quest for “soft power” is the result of a meeting between the secular project, Islamic movements and thought, and the democratization processes. The government’s failure to sustain the delicate balance between the three, along with the events following the Arab Spring, has created a large gap between Turkey’s desire to have an impact in the region and its ability to actually do so.

Wael Abu-Uksa introduces the reader to a century-old discussion on the development of the concept of tolerance in the Arab world and presents a translation from Arabic of one of the more interesting early twentieth-century debates between two leading intellectuals, **Farah Antun** and Muhammad Abdu. In responding to Abdu’s rejectionist, conservative critical approach, Antun focuses on the problematic

connection between religion and tolerance and on the options offered by the nation-state. We hope this translation will well serve students of the history of concepts, secularization, and Islamic ethics in the Arab Middle East.

As in all JLS issues, our dock-ument section presents an original contribution: an essay written by journalist and writer **Marzuq al-Halabi**. Al-Halabi highlights the complex political-linguistic situation of Arabic speakers vis-à-vis the hegemonic, not-very-tolerant, Hebrew-speaking Israeli state institutions and society. Presenting his personal experiences of navigating a Hebrew-dominated space, al-Halabi offers a window into the lives of Arabic speakers as a linguistic minority.

A fresh account of the relationship between Jews (in periods and places they were a minority) and Arabs is presented in the Reviews section. The reviews relate to three locations—Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine—during the late Ottoman period and offer an interesting view on a world and socio-economic logic conveniently forgotten in the nation construct.

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