

The Review Section: On Arab People and Constraints in the Levant

Wael Abu-ʿUksa and Yonatan Mendel

The current issue includes three reviews that highlight the differing responses of Arab communities and individuals to internal and external conflicts in the Arab world. **Yehouda Shenhav's** review of Yasir Suleiman's *Arabic, Self and Identity: A Study in Conflict and Displacement* stresses the personal, self-oriented aspects of language identity in general, and that of Arabic speakers in particular. He argues that language politics and resistance are found in our everyday lives, and he presents examples that range from personal names of Palestinians in Israel to code-switching between Arabic and English around the Middle East. In order to demonstrate the politics of language, Suleiman examines autobiographies of exilic Arab figures as well as his own experience conducting Arabic-language teacher training in Qatar. Shenhav follows Suleiman's footsteps and in his review delves into his own "language anxieties" as a Jew of Arab origin. He reviews his ambivalent relationship with Arabic in an attempt to "reclaim it."

The second review deals with Arab writing but from a different perspective: that of emphasizing the focus given to interpretation of Arab-Islamic texts. **Yoav Di-Capua** looks at Hashim Salih's *Al-insidad al-tā'rikhi: Limadha fashila mashruʿ al-tanwir fi al-ʿalam al-ʿArabi?* [The historical deadlock: Why did the Enlightenment project fail in the Arab world?], a collection of essays originally published in Arabic. In his work, Salih—a Syrian intellectual who works in Paris—argues that nothing less than an "epistemological revolution" can "release" Arab-Muslim societies from the constraints of Arab-Islamic ontology, and takes the Protestant Reformation in Europe as an example for the needed religious revolution in Arab-Islamic thought.

The last review takes us to the Lebanese nation state and to the conflicting ways of commemorating and attributing meaning to the Lebanese Civil War. **Christian**

Thuselt examines Sune Haugbolle's *War and Memory in Lebanon* and stresses the contribution of the book to the interdependent relationship between social change and the political arena. Haugbolle emphasizes different "memory cultures" that have evolved in Lebanon since the war and calls his readers to acknowledge that the act of commemorating the war serves, in different ways and in different communities, notions of the imagined nation.

Despite the fact that the three books have different focuses and methodologies, their juxtaposition sheds light on the various social and political layers of coping with changing realities of the Middle East. This is demonstrated through the struggle over memory and commemoration in Lebanon, as examined in the work of Haugbolle; the use of place-names and language for either blurring or emphasizing a national identity, as highlighted by Suleiman; and the call to revisit and historicize Arab-Muslim religious texts as part of an Islamic reformation, as discussed by Salih

Furthermore, the manner in which some Arab intellectuals depict their socio-cultural shackles through the use of the term "internal colonialism," as do Hashim Salih in *The Historical Deadlock* and Leila Ahmed as quoted in Suleiman's *Arabic, Self and Identity*, serves as an example of the vicious dialectic between the Arab world and Europe, and the language as well as political constraints that have yet to be removed.