

RECENT BOOKS

UNFULFILLED MODERNITY

Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture, by Salim Tamari. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. xi + 189 pages. Notes to p. 214. Bibliography to p. 222. Index to p. 237. \$34.95 hard.

Reviewed by Ellen Fleischmann

Salim Tamari, professor of sociology at Birzeit University and the director of the Institute of Jerusalem Studies, has produced an erudite, entertaining, and engrossing study of Palestinian society and culture. More than once in the text, he admiringly describes educator Khalil Sakakini's "crisp" writing in Arabic (p. 2). In this volume of essays, many of which have been previously published, Tamari often writes pretty "crisply" himself, honing in on themes that define Palestinian history, social fabric, and experience. He is concerned, above all, with modernity, and the elements that have contributed to the making of an "unfulfilled" (p. 3) Palestinian modernity. Situating Palestinian urban life, society, intelligentsia, and culture within an eastern Mediterranean context, he examines how Palestine fit into this milieu, yet, ultimately was "set[] apart," due to its being "forcibly separated from that context" (p. 4) in 1917. Although most of the essays are historical or have a strong historical bent, they also include material on contemporary Palestinian society, integrating it within its historical background and tracing historical influences that have shaped contemporary phenomena. The book showcases a valuable and rich treasure trove of Palestinian historical and literary material, including personal memoirs and diaries produced by an interestingly diverse sample of Palestinian intellectuals from the late Ottoman period. Tamari, in collaboration with other scholars such as

Issam Nassar, has performed a real service in recovering, publishing, and utilizing this material.

The book consists of, roughly, two types of essays. The first group interprets social changes in Palestinian society by examining phenomena such as the conflicted relationship of Palestinians to the sea; the cultural divides between coastal and inland peoples; the evolution of a reification of "authentic" and mythologized Palestinian rural culture and folk life begun by the work of "nativists" such as physician-ethnographer Tawfiq Canaan; and debates on idealized and selectively constructed Nakba/Awda memories among three generations of Nakba victims. The second group consists of essays based on the biographies of Palestinian intellectuals: educator and self-described "Prince of Idleness" Khalil Sakakini; musician-hedonist Wasif Jawhariyye; the "last feudal lord" Omar as-Saleh from Deir Ghassaneh; Arab Jewish writer Ishaq Shami; and Palestine Communist Party cadre Najat Sidqi. There is a little unevenness among a few of the essays; some are more fully and richly developed and explored than others, due primarily to the nature of the primary sources. (The kinds of material provided by the biographical sources vary considerably. Some notable lacunae are the absence of female memoirs or diaries, and, in some cases, personal information about the male writers.)

Certain threads and themes connect these essays. A recurring theme, along the lines of unfulfilled modernity, is how, as one of the major consequences of the Nakba, Palestine was "de-urbanized" and "physically stripped from its coastal cities and culturally removed from a cosmopolitan, urban tradition" that had been "transmitted . . . through its press, political parties, trade unions and secular culture" (p. 45). Tamari is interested in ostensible dichotomies and conflicts between cosmopolitanism and localness; coastal and mountain communities; and, above all, the internal tensions and contradictions produced by Palestinian responses to and interactions with social transformations and modernity. He deftly deconstructs basic assumptions about "tradition," simplicity, or passivity on the part of historical actors

Ellen Fleischmann, associate professor of history at the University of Dayton, is the author of *The Nation and Its "New" Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920-1948* (University of California Press, 2003).

and groups, instead demonstrating the fluidity, dynamism, and ambivalence that inform their actions and responses to their experiences. In the chapter on Khalil Sakakini's 1907–8 sojourn in the United States, for example, Tamari reconciles the seeming paradox of the urbane, nonconforming literati's conservative reaction and aversion to aspects of U.S. society and culture (male-female interactions being a major one). Describing how the influx of rural migrants has complicated the exploitive relationship between the city and countryside, he writes how, on the one hand, "the culture of rural society invaded the city, while [on the other] 'urban' commodification and monetarization permeated rural society" (p. 48). Tamari's explorations reveal no juxtaposition or polarity between "tradition" and "modernity"; these concepts are mutually constitutive and mediated by disparate and uneven influences that flow in multiple directions.

One of the more delightful aspects of this book is the collective portrait of a particular moment in Palestinian history (late Ottoman–early Mandate) that is created out of the biographical material. Tamari's depiction of Palestinian society is of a more complicated, dynamic, and diverse one than has been previously presented. The individuals he features and the character of the city of Jerusalem he renders are especially vivid. Jerusalem, far from being the "grim, conservative and joyless city" (p. 88) depicted by some, comes across as an urban milieu that accommodated hedonism (as exemplified by Wasif Jawhariyye, who participated in "org[ies] with gangsters and thugs" [p. 80]); idleness (the major philosophy of Vagabond Party member Khalil Sakakini); young men's coming of age (Omar as-Saleh's transformation from rural privilege to cosmopolitanism); communism (Najat Sidqi); and intercommunal relationships, to name a few features. Would that this culture and society flourished today. But fortunately, in this fine volume, we have Salim Tamari's recreation of this unique moment in Palestinian history.

HYDRO-HEGEMONY

Power and Water in the Middle East: The Hidden Politics of the Palestinian-Israeli Water Conflict, by Mark Zeitoun.

London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008. xvi + 164 pages. Appendices to p. 178. Notes to p. 190. Bibliography to p. 208. Index p. 214. \$89.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Jan Selby

Writing about water politics is not easy. One can either write primarily for water specialists, who approach their subject in a quite technical and apolitical fashion, or write for students of politics and area studies, who tend to be more attuned to power but much less comfortable with the technicalities of underground aquifers and tariff structures. And one can either write almost exclusively on water issues and face the risk of presenting these issues as politically determinant, or spend a fair amount of time framing these issues in relation to various political, economic, and social contexts—and end up writing as much about these as about water itself.

Mark Zeitoun's book treads a careful path through these difficulties, presenting a rich multiscaled and theoretically informed analysis of the nexus of power and water in the Israeli-Palestinian context. His central thesis—which is unlikely to surprise either water specialists or political scientists—is that "power is the primary determinant" (p. 2) of the water conflict. The book's real value, however, lies in its identification of the multiple dimensions of power over water and of the various methods through which Israel exerts power over water and over others' access to it, especially the Palestinians'. Zeitoun quickly dismisses claims that "water wars" are likely, or have already taken place, in the Middle East. As he correctly notes, agriculture, for which most water is used, is of declining economic significance in that region, and with that the likelihood of water wars is also declining. The important variable, for Zeitoun, is not violent conflict but power—or what he and colleagues in the London Water Research Group refer to as "hydro-hegemony"—which can be exercised as much through subtle mechanisms of cooperation as through direct coercion.

Jan Selby, a senior lecturer in the Department of International Relations, University of Sussex, is the author of *Water, Power and Politics in the Middle East: The Other Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (I.B. Tauris, 2003).