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The Stand-Tall Generation

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deep in the back pages of supplements' or 'broadcast in a way which neutralised [their] meaning'.

In the final chapter of the book Dor attempts to ask why the Israeli media report in this manner. He suggests that it is not simply a question of the media being a malleable tool of political or military elites, rather he proposes that it is related to questions of how newspapers construct Israelis' sense of social identity. In particular it is related to Israelis' awareness of how they are perceived in the court of international public opinion. The media, he suggests, are reflecting a sense of insult felt by Israelis over the perception that they are being accused of crimes of which they are not guilty. This, he argues, leads to a suppression of information which would imply Israeli culpability for the continuation of the conflict. This attempt to avoid guilt, he maintains, is vitally important because it prevents the media from developing what he describes as an 'alternative discourse of responsibility' which 'regardless of the struggle over the origins of the conflict, understands that Israel, and Israelis, have to assume responsibility for the solution of the conflict, because at present, in reality, the Palestinians are under Israeli occupation and not the other way around'.

In a 2003 lecture at Georgetown University Israeli historian Avi Shlaim commented that after 1948 Israeli historians had put forward a narrative of the conflict which was 'selective, simplistic and self-serving'. This narrative, he suggested, served two important purposes in that it 'instilled a sense of nationhood in Jews from various countries of origin' and 'elicited support and sympathy for the fledgling state of Israel'. However he noted that 'the one cause it emphatically did not serve was that of mutual understanding and reconciliation between Jews and Arabs'. Daniel Dor's book, written in an accessible style and backed up strongly with empirical evidence, levels similar charges against Israel's media. It is an important contribution to the debate over media coverage of the conflict and deserves to be widely read.

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The Stand-Tall Generation

Dan Rabinowitz and Khawla Abu-Baker, *Coffins on Our Shoulders: The Experience of the Palestinian Citizens of Israel* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2005). Pp.221. Paperback.

Coffins on Our Shoulders plots the troubled contours of Jewish-Arab relations in the Holy Land over the past century through two interweaving narratives. The first, intimate one comprises the stories of its two authors' experiences of being Israeli – one a Jew, the other a Palestinian Arab – and the separate paths that led their ancestors, willingly and unwillingly, to their citizenship in the new state. A second, related narrative provides a series of contextualising analyses of ethnic politics in Israel. In sum, these parts create a slightly unwieldy but nonetheless instructive map revealing the inadequacy of the Zionist left's slogans about 'coexistence' and suggesting that Israel's much-vaunted status as a 'liberal democracy' has been camouflage for a cynical and oppressive form of ethnic rule inside its own borders.

The authors are eminently equipped for the task they have set themselves. Dan Rabinowitz, an anthropologist, has explored the features of the ethnic divide inside Israel at first hand, and Khawla Abu-Baker, a family therapist, knows, professionally and personally, the cost of living with a Palestinian identity in a Jewish state. The personal and family narratives help us understand how ordinary people have been swept up in the region's much larger historical drama. The pair rightly identify Israel's core struggle from its earliest years as the attempt to 'de-Palestinianise' its unwelcome citizens, to crush their 'intellectual energy and political awareness in a futile effort to cultivate docile, depoliticized, submissive subjects'.

The book also highlights the dangerous ideological shift among the Israeli leadership during the current Intifada, one that overtly and unashamedly characterises the Palestinian minority as both a fifth column and demographic threat to the Jewish state. The authors warn that Israel is 'on a slippery slope that could easily let it slide toward various forms of ethnic cleansing'. In conclusion, Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker set out a convincing manifesto of reforms they believe are necessary to prevent such a descent.

The authors' central premise is that, in the wake of the Oslo agreements, a generation of Palestinian citizens emerged whom the authors refer to as 'The Stand-Tall Generation' – the title of an earlier edition of the book published in Hebrew. Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker contrast this new generation with the two that preceded it. The first they call the Generation of Survivors, those who emerged from the wreckage of Palestine to find a new state that did not want them as members. A second generation dared to take a bolder political stance in the 1970s and 1980s, demanding that Israel honour commitments made in the Declaration of Independence to equality of citizenship. They led a political and civil struggle that made superficial achievements but failed to challenge Jewish hegemony and end their exclusion from the centres of power. In the end they became the Worn-Out Generation.

While such neat categorisations usefully allow the authors to explain distinctive shifts in the Palestinian minority's relationship with the state, their assessments may prove to be a touch premature, as they seem to recognise in the later, updated sections of the book. The pair originally formulated their ideas about the Stand-Tall Generation in the immediate aftermath of demonstrations by Palestinian youths in solidarity with the Palestinians of the occupied territories at the start of the second Intifada. Those youngsters paid a heavy price for their assertiveness: 13 were killed and hundreds seriously wounded by a panicked police force, which did not hesitate to use rubber-coated bullets and live ammunition against unarmed demonstrators.

In Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker's opinion, 'Disillusioned with the prospect of ever becoming equal citizens in Israel, members of the Stand-Tall Generation are no longer interested in being marginal hangers-on of the Zionist project. They tend to see citizenship as a collective entitlement, not just a personal affair'. Certainly, this is the perception among Israeli Jews. As the authors correctly conclude, the fears evoked at the prospect of an emerging Palestinian nationalism among the country's Arab minority risks a dangerous rift. 'The emotional energy [these apprehensions] might unleash could undo the fragile inner balance holding Israel together'.

But what is the evidence that these youths can be characterised as a differentiated generation, in the sense that they possess their own distinctive voice, political consciousness, and ideological strategies? Can their assertiveness be contrasted so easily with their grandparents' submissiveness and their parents' exhaustion?

Two possible answers can be inferred from the book. The first is that the very act of young Palestinian citizens taking to the streets in support of the second Intifada

marked a new stage in the evolution of their awareness of their political and national identity. In other words, Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker appear to believe the protests of October 2000 were markedly and categorically different from the previous large-scale clashes with the authorities, 24 years earlier, during Land Day, when six Palestinian demonstrators were shot dead by the security forces as they opposed a wave of land confiscations in the Galilee? But to what extent is this true? Many of the youngsters I have spoken with saw their protests in 2000 motivated as much by frustration at their marginalisation from Israeli society and a policy of house demolitions as by an identification with Palestinian nationalism. And can it not be argued that the land protests three decades ago were not also a kind of Palestinian nationalism, if one dressed up in different garb? Land and steadfastness have always been defining themes of the Palestinian struggle.

An important issue not addressed by the authors but which might have thrown light on these questions are surveys showing an overwhelming reluctance on the part of Palestinian citizens to consider a future political arrangement in which they would be allocated to a Palestinian state – even if they did not need to leave their homes and land. It may be that these findings reflect their distrust of Israel's intentions towards such a future state. But equally they may also suggest some lingering identification, even among the young, with the limited privileges promised by Israeli citizenship.

The second possible answer is that the authors believe the existence of a new national awareness among Israel's Palestinian youth can be deduced from the minority's recent political campaign for transforming the Jewish state into 'a state of all its citizens'. But where is the evidence that this agenda has been shaped by the Stand-Tall Generation? Were not their parents – the 'Worn-Out Generation' – the ones to articulate this stage of the minority's struggle? The earlier generation's role in formulating this strategy may help to explain why the slogan of a 'state of all its citizens' has come to be interpreted – ambiguously – both as the demand for the establishment of a state that protects individual rights in a non-discriminatory manner and as the demand for equal recognition by the state of minority group rights.

Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker contend of the Stand-Tall Generation: 'The confused ambivalence that plagued their parents' generation, a generation that belonged and was excluded at the same time, has vanished. Their point of departure – a clear sense of not belonging – is their first step toward emancipation'. This marked change is important and worthy of highlighting. But the idealising thesis of the Stand-Tall Generation risks implicitly accepting the argument – even if it rejects the conclusions – of Israeli leaders like Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon that the new generation of Palestinian citizens are 'Palestinianised' and dangerously 'radicalised'. It reimagines the October 2000 protests inside Israel as a parallel, internal Intifada, not as civil protests.

It may be that Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker are overestimating the convictions of the Stand-Tall Generation while underestimating the achievements of their own generation. Most members of the Palestinian minority have been grappling with how to make sense of their Israeli citizenship for some time – and with a renewed intensity since first the PLO and then the Palestinian Authority ignored them entirely in their vision of the region's future. Periodically, Palestinian citizens have chosen direct confrontation with their state; afterwards, as they lick their wounds, they are forced to consider other strategies. As Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker admit, the minority's enforced quiescence following October 2000 and Israel's subsequent and ruthless suppression of dissent on both sides of the Green Line suggest the Stand-Tall Generation is for the time being as broken-backed as its own parents were after Land Day.

The authors are right to argue that many Palestinian citizens are belatedly rediscovering their Palestinian identity after the damaging decades of military government and in the face of the Shin Bet's continuing and pervasive interference in the minority's education. But this change is not obviously generational; it is a widespread phenomenon. It has emerged partly out of the significant role of satellite television in bypassing the deadening hand of the military censor and partly out of a realisation that Palestinian citizenship inside a Jewish state will always be temporary.

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Gender and Religion in the Middle East

Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Ingvild Flakerud (eds.), *Gender, Religion and Change in the Middle East: Two Hundred Years of History* (Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2005). Pp.230. Paperback.

There is a company in Britain that sells wood treatment products that tries to make its somewhat mundane wares more attractive by using the byline 'it does exactly what it says on the tin'. This book carries a somewhat mundane title, and although 'it does exactly what it says on the cover', it does so in a far more useful, interesting, and stimulating fashion than the title might initially suggest, providing a snapshot of the intersection between gender and religion in the broadest sense, surveying changes in a variety of specific areas over the last two centuries.

Essay collections often fall into one of two categories: those that focus on a relatively narrow theme and seek to illuminate it from various angles, and those that spread themselves widely, using broad definitions of terms to cover as much territory as possible. The danger with the former is that the collection will only be of interest to a relatively small group of readers, whilst the second category runs the risk that the essays, because they cover such a diverse range of topics, will of such a superficial nature that they will not be of interest to the specialist. This book belongs to the second category, but does not fall into the trap of superficiality.

Topics covered include gender in Sharia courts, men and women in the military, education and welfare, women and Islamism, gender and religious orders, women and political resistance, war and peace, and gender roles in a 'formal Islam' and 'popular belief' setting; it is worth noting that the publisher's blurb on the back does not accurately reflect the contents of the book when it speaks of the attempts to contextualise 'women and religion' in the Middle East – the authors understand their task much more widely, reflecting on both women's and men's roles in the region. The regional context, too, is understood widely, covering Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and the eastern Mediterranean countries, with the authors being primarily engaged in anthropological and historical disciplines. This connection between the disciplines works well, so that whilst not every reader will necessarily expect to find every article of direct interest, the obvious connections that arise in the diversity of accounts and historical analyses invites the reading of many of the essays, making this a collection that works well as a complete book – a real compliment to the editors.

1, Author of *Blood and Religion: The Unmasking of the Jewish and Democratic State* (London: Pluto Press, April 2006).