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the afore-mentioned rivalry over the grave of Moses. There is also an important discussion on the definitions of the borders of the Holy Land, and the use of *hadith* materials in a political context to prove the superiority of each location. The study indicates historical aspects too as reflected in the Merits of *al-Sham* which are more detailed in compilations from the Ottoman period than in those of the Mamluk period (which cleave more to traditional themes and forms). Besides the discussion on the geographical definitions of *al-Sham*, there is also a discussion on geographical aspects of visits to holy places, such as the proximity to a certain location or its geographical connection to the *hajj* from Syria. Specific customs in Jerusalem at the time of the *hajj* are noted also. An important contribution relates to urbanisation, especially in Damascus, and its holy sites, and those in the neighbouring towns and villages. The topographical relations between 'village' and 'town' enjoy detailed treatment. The contribution of the holy places to demographic development and the growth of places is analysed, with historical survey of Damascus in that context.

The last part of the book is the presentation of three manuscripts of books by al-Bakri al-Siddiki al-Dimashqi (d. 1749) about holy tombs associated with prophets and saints.

In addition to the importance of the book under review regarding holy places in *al-Sham*, it makes a significant contribution to the subject of Muslim holy places in general. It offers a more complete picture of the subject based on a thorough examination of different aspects related to local sentiment, the importance of religious, economic and political causes, along with the other matters discussed above. A very important observation made by the author is that old traditions, even those that were a part of ancient debates (and could have been expected to disappear) might re-emerge in a later period, and that the various factors that caused the creation of traditions and tales surrounding holy places are not limited to the periods under discussion. They 'continued to exert their influence in creating appropriate tales and traditions'. I would suggest the preparation of an English version of this book that could bring this knowledge to broader audiences.

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Academic Freedom is the Issue

Why Boycott Israeli Universities? (London: British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP), April 2007). Pp.35. Paperback. ISBN: 978-0-9555536-0-8

The last time this issue received such attention was in the 1960s, concerning the victimisation of two South African academics. British academics, normally content quietly to get on with their work, decided the behaviour of the South African government and universities was unacceptable and voted to take a collective, principled stand in calling for a boycott of South African institutions. Now the issue is being revisited concerning the appalling treatment of Palestinian academics. But this time the situation is far, far worse, as discussed in a concise, 35-page publication by the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP).

The BRICUP publication is a discussion document, written by British academics in response to a call in 2004 by a broad cross-section of Palestinian institutions. These

included several unions and federations of Palestinian university professors, journalists, physicians, engineers and artists as well as numerous non-governmental organisations and community groups. Their message to academics was articulated eloquently by the well-respected Palestinian scholar Omar Barghout in a December 2004 article:

I wish to emphasize the necessity of applying an evolving, comprehensive, institutional boycott against Israel's academic, cultural, economic and political organizations. Without principled and effective support for this minimal, non-violent form of resistance to oppression, intellectuals and academics will be abandoning their moral obligation to stand up for right, for justice, for equality and for a chance to establish the primacy of universal ethical principles.⁴

The publication by BRICUP outlines in clear and unambiguous language the legal and moral arguments explaining why taking a stand against Israeli academic institutions is justified. It shows how academic freedom is under hostile attack by policies and actions of the State of Israel and by, or with the complicity of, the policies and actions of Israeli academic institutions. This is illustrated by numerous examples of institutional victimisation and the broader security regime imposed by Israel that systematically violate human rights and humanitarian law (pp.12-19) reinforcing the underlying message of boycott as 'a combination of symbolic protest, material intervention and political action' (p. 21).

Carefully measured comparisons are made with the system of racialised apartheid in South Africa. This is crucial. As mentioned earlier, there is arguably no other event in recent history that has so mobilised British academics to take such a position.

If anything could be said to be missing, it is additional detail that would further reinforce the document's central arguments justifying an academic boycott. For example, it is elsewhere documented that the rule of law in Israel is absent for so many Palestinians. This is particularly the case for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza who are discriminated against by a separate legal and administrative regime that does not apply to the several hundred thousand Israeli settlers living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The settlements and 'associated regime' were confirmed as illegal by the International Court of Justice. This state of illegality has even been reinforced by the Supreme Court of Israel.⁵ Discrimination also exists in Israel itself, for Palestinians who have Israeli citizenship. While the Israeli 'law of return' allows Jews from all over the world to settle in Israel, hundreds of thousands of ethnically-cleansed Palestinians who lived in the territory for centuries, and their descendants, are denied their right to reclaim and return to their property and lands, confiscated on various occasions and notably during the war in 1948.⁶

References in this concise publication to further reading make clear that the absence of additional perspectives was merely intended to give the publication a crucial focus on the core issue, namely denial of the academic freedom of Palestinians. Unlike the knee-jerk responses of the boycott detractors, the publication shows that much reflection has taken place. The document comprehensively deals with various 'claims' that have been made against calling for a boycott and seeks, as the authors argue, to 'disentangle fact from myth and innuendo' (pp. 24-31). The authors make clear that the focus of the boycott

4 'Boycott as Resistance: The Moral Dimension', *The Electronic Intifada*, 28 December 2004.

5 Susan Akram and M. Lynk, 'The wall and the law: a tale of two judgements', *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 24(1), 2006: 61-106. See also editorial, 'Making the law a laughingstock', *Huaretz*, 31 December 2006.

6 Nur Masalha, *The Politics of Denial: Israel and the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (London: Pluto Press, 2003); Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2006): -.

is not individual academics as such, but the institutions they work for and 'to provide a compelling moral or practical argument against the continuation of deplorable practices' (p. 20).

In the USA and apparently to some extent in Britain as well the argument raised by detractors of a boycott is that such actions are 'anti-semitic'. Here in The Netherlands it is different, with a sense of collective guilt felt at the deportation of 80 per cent of Holland's Jewish population. This has led to a kind of self-censorship and refusal to engage in a critical dialogue, where criticisms of Israel and especially talk of boycotting Israeli institutions are felt to betray the memory of these events. Rather than confront the guilt, people, including academics, simply turn a blind eye to Israel's atrocities committed against Palestinians. A similarly deceptive situation exists in other European countries.

The principal message contained in the BRICUP publication is that Palestinians are denied their fundamental human rights, including a systematic denial of academic freedom, through the policies of the State of Israel and Israeli academic institutions. The publication provides a compelling argument that these institutions be held accountable both for their discriminatory policies and for their complicity in these violations. As the publication clearly states, if a normal mechanism to resolve grievances was in existence, then 'there would be no need for a boycott' (p. 21).

Informed in large part by this publication, on 30 May 2007, the University and College Union (UK) called on branches of the union to 'consult all of their members on the issue' of a boycott.

It is sincerely hoped that academics in Britain, The Netherlands and other countries will have the courage to undertake this very important discussion and consider similar actions to protect the academic freedom and other human rights of the Palestinians.

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Language and Politics in the Middle East

Yasir Suehlman, *A War of Words: Language and Conflict in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Pp. 270. Paperback. ISBN 0-521-54656-7.

This book continues the seminal work of Yasir Suleiman, who is currently the incumbent of the Sultan Qaboos Bin Sa'id Chair of Modern Arabic Studies at Cambridge University, on the sociolinguistics of Arabic, on which he has edited three valuable collections (1994, 1996, 1999). The current volume forms part of a trilogy, which started with *The Arabic Language and National Identity* (2003) and is set to culminate in (the provisionally entitled) *Translation and the Nation: The Politics of Intercultural Relation in the Middle East*. In more ways than one the present work complements the former as both deal with the relationships between language and identity, with the present work doing so through the spectrum of conflict. As the author deftly points out, *A War of Words* looks at language 'as a form of cultural practice and as an inevitable site of ideological contestation involving

asymmetrical power relations between groups and individuals' (p. 7).

The book consists of six parts. The introduction sets the tone by providing some perceptive examples of language as a weapon in conflict through satire, with examples from Libya and Palestine. This is followed by a brief overview of the subsequent chapters. All the chapters are set out in a highly structured and reader-friendly way, with a succinct preamble setting the scene, which is subsequently further expanded, with the main points distilled into a short conclusion.

In the second chapter 'Language, power and conflict in the Middle East' (pp. 7–57), Suleiman discusses the use of language in power relations, particularly as a means of subversion. Here, as in other places in the book, the author often has recourse to personal experiences as a Palestinian to underscore a point, and thus offers invaluable insights into the sociolinguistic mechanics underpinning and/or concomitant to the various processes involved in the contexts of personal interaction. The chapter opens with a case study on the procrustean policies employed by the Ottoman administration to impose Turkish, and its effects on Arabic. This is followed by an account of foreign influences on Arabic (specifically in shop signs) and code switching, which is also one of the rare instances in the book where the author devotes attention to North Africa and the French-Arabic bilingualism that is rife there. Of particular interest is the contradiction between perception and practice of code switching, with the majority of people both condemning it and practising it. The second case study of the chapter is on a recent – and much underexplored – phenomenon, i.e. Gulf Arabic pidgin, the link language used between Arabic speakers in the Gulf and the many guest workers from the Indian sub-Continent. The final section of the chapter examines the conflict between language modernisers and traditionalists (though one might argue that 'reactionaries' might be more appropriate in this context), and the various calls for reform over the past two centuries.

In the third and fourth chapters, entitled, respectively, 'When language and dialects collide: Standard Arabic and its 'opponents'' (pp. 58–95) and 'When dialects collide: language and conflict in Jordan' (pp. 96–136), Suleiman looks at Arabic from within. In the former chapter, he concentrates on the 'manichaeism' that has dogged the debate pitting Standard Arabic (*fushḥā*) against the use of the colloquial (*āmiyya*). A discussion of the evolution of this controversial issue takes the reader through clashes with 'the external front', i.e. actions by 19th-century Orientalists such as Francis Newman and William Wilcocks, and those involving 'the internal front', i.e. Arab scholars. The author provides a wonderfully eloquent analysis of the interests of the various protagonists, teasing out the strands – many of them contradictory – of the conflicts (including the issue of the so-called 'linguistic *shurūḥiyya*'). Suleiman ably views the entire issue through the prism of 'the use of language as a proxy to discuss issues of national and state identity construction' (p. 86). The topic is further elucidated by a case study of the views on Nabati poetry in Saudi Arabia and the pragmatic solutions to the *fushḥā-āmiyya* issue in choices made for the Arabic dubbing of the popular children's programme *Sesame Street* (aptly translated as *Iftāḥ Yā Simsim*, 'Open Sesame'). Chapter 4 is essentially made up of a dialectological-cum-sociolinguistic study of the linguistic situation in Jordan, a country the author, of course, knows well. The bulk of the section is taken up by a very detailed study of the various realisations of the Standard (Classical) Arabic (voiceless uvular plosive) /q/, which thus functions as a distinct sociolinguistic marker, with the author examining a raft of parameters – geographical origin, gender and political affiliation. In this context, code switching is, of course, revisited, and the author links it to speech accommodation, applying relevant theories to the data he has used, which leads onto a novel view of code-switching and its role in 'nation-state identity formation' (p. 134).