

EDITOR'S NOTE

From the Editor

The events leading up to the Palestinian Nakba in 1948, and the Nakba itself are amongst the most traumatic events in Arab history. The Nakba was not only significant for the Palestinians who were forced off their land en masse but unleashed a chain of events in the Arab world. Yet despite this reality, the events leading up to the Nakba itself and the particular controversies associated with it are still hotly debated. We start this issue of *AlMuntaqa* with two studies that critically explore how the Palestinians themselves documented and historicized the Nakba and the events leading up to it.

In the paper “History told by the vanquished: A critical reading of 1947-1948 war diaries as historical sources,” Bilal Shalash critically assesses the autobiographies and memoirs of prominent Palestinian figures and elites as sources of historiography. He does so in light of the archival documents of the garrisons of Jaffa. He finds that these archives cast a doubt over many of the claims of the autobiographies and memoirs of influential Palestinian figures and elites, and urges being cautious and judicious when using them as sources of Palestinian historiography.

Alex Winder continues exploring these memoirs and autobiographies in his article “Nakba Diaries: Unsettling the Scale and Temporality of Historical Writing,” focusing in particular on the diaries of two Palestinian figures: Khalil al-Sakakini and Muhammad ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Shrouf. He finds that reading these diaries as histories rather than as historical documents offers new perspectives from which to understand Palestinian experiences of the Nakba. Overall, the assessment of these two works will place Sakakini and Shrouf’s diaries within the context of Palestinian and Arab diaries, discussing their generic distinction from other kinds of personal accounts and even other published diaries, before discussing what in particular may be gained by reading these diaries as Nakba histories.

Moving on from the Nakba, the third article by Azmi Bishara, titled “Remarks on External Factors in Democratic Transition,” examines the external factors that affect democratic transition in the Arab world. He in particular discusses American foreign policy, refuting the thesis that the US became a supporter of democratic transformation after the Cold War, and makes the point that the “democratic realism” that guided American policy in the Middle East is a continuation of Cold War policies with new enemies. Most importantly he finds that international and regional external factors impeding democratic transformation in Arab countries are less prevalent if the country is less important in geostrategic terms, especially concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict and oil production.

In the fourth article titled “The Elite in Confrontation with Geography: Actors, Structures and Qatari Foreign Policy,” Marwan Kabalan, assess the challenges that face and determine Qatar’s foreign policy as a small

state. He finds that the strategies adopted by the Qatari elite since 1995 did alleviate many of the structural constraints which the country would otherwise have faced. Moreover, during the short-lived Arab Spring of 2011-2013, Qatar tried to reshape the political landscape in the Middle East in its favor, challenging the two regional hegemony Saudi Arabia and Iran, in Egypt and Syria respectively. The paper concludes that geopolitical factors and the relative capabilities of states remain instrumental in assuring a state's sustained capacity to continue playing a key role. This is particularly true in a region where elite thinking continues to be defined by realpolitik.

The final article of this issue, titled "Transformations of Manama: Equations of Demography, Islamization and Commercialization," discusses the recession of the pearl trade and the discovery of oil in relation to the oil boom since the mid-1970s, and how they both contributed to the rapid urbanization of the Bahraini capital Manama. Furthermore, it examines the arrival of large numbers of foreign workers, including the poor, unskilled or middle class, who have been inching towards having a dominant presence in much of the old city and the surrounding area, and how in the midst of these transformations, the political arena witnessed new, unprecedented dynamics. The most important of these dynamics was the growth of political Islam currents after the decline of nationalist and leftist trends, the emergence of cultural challenges related to the Bahraini identity, and the attempt to transform old Manama into a popular destination for domestic and foreign tourism.

The section on the Arab Opinion Index features an article by Dana El Kurd, titled "The Military in Public Opinion: Data from Algeria and Sudan," which investigates the opinions of Sudanese and Algerian respondents on democracy as a model of government in their countries. It focuses on a group of questions: How much do Algerian and Sudanese citizens trust the army? Do citizens agree that 'democratic regimes are not good at preserving public order?' And what do they think of democracy as an overall system of governance?

Finally, the book review section features a review of Omar Al-Shehabi's important new book titled "Exporting Wealth and Entrenching Alienation: A History of Productive Imbalance in the Gulf States," and released by the Center for Arab Unity Studies. It also features the late Faleh Abdel Jabbar's key new book on ISIL titled "The Caliphate State: Advancing Towards the Past, ISIL and the Local Community in Iraq."