

## Brief Reviews

**The Arab Public Sphere in Israel: Media Space and Cultural Resistance.** By Amal Jamal. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009. 182 pp. \$24.95, paper.

The problems with this book begin with the title as the book is not at all about “the Arab public sphere.” It is a superficial review of the differences between the Hebrew and Arabic media operating in Israel, one overflowing with bias and anti-Israeli bile.

Jamal, an Israeli Druze from the Galilee area, is one of a minority of Druze intellectuals who identify themselves as Palestinian Arabs. Thus his aim throughout is to twist things to conform to his conspiracist take on Israeli society, in which Tel Aviv plots to manipulate the minds of its Arab citizens and subjugate them by means of media control.

Relying on two unscientific surveys, Jamal essentially shows that Arabs read and listen to the Hebrew media less than do Jews, who in turn listen to and follow the Arabic media less than do Arabs. This conclusion is not only trivial but self-evident. But Jamal is not content with printing a few tables and statistics taken from surveys.

His agenda is apparent everywhere in the book in his choice of rhetoric:

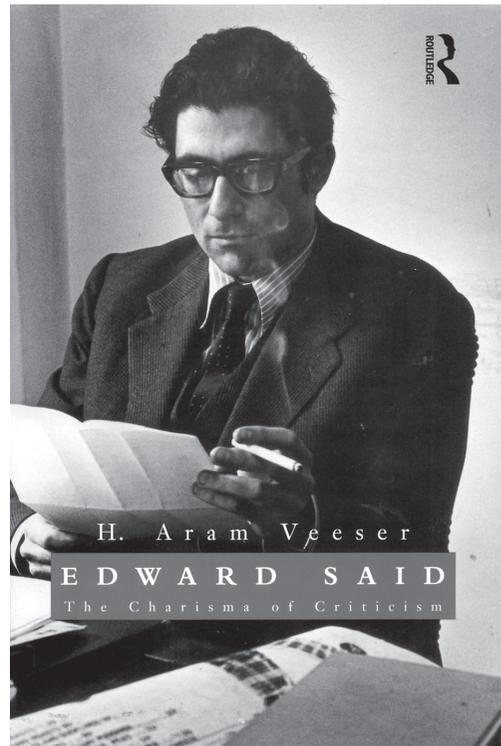
He uses the term “hegemonial” with regularity while Israel has a “ferocious military government” engaged in “cultural imperialism” via its “media policy” against its “Palestinian” minority. Pity the poor reader who does not realize that the Israeli government does not control any of the country’s Arabic media. With no sense of his own self-contradiction, he insists that Jerusalem is obsessed with the control and surveillance of the Arab media, but at the same time, faults it for ignoring Arab opinion and the Arabic media altogether.

The book is most notable for what it attempts to hide: Israel is the only place in the Middle East where Arabs enjoy a free press, so free it is often openly seditious. The Israeli me-

dia, for the most part, are owned by the private sector, which is predominantly leftist. Besides, the explosion of Internet technology and countless Arab and Arabic blogs from inside and outside Israel, make his claims about “control of the media” and “mind control through the media” simply laughable.

Jamal’s book is an ideological assault against Israel disguised as an academic exploration that ill-serves his readers and mocks his academic pretensions.

Steven Plaut  
University of Haifa



**Edward Said: The Charisma of Criticism.** By H. Aram Veesser. New York: Routledge, 2010. 260 pp. \$39.95.

In this hagiography of the late Edward Said, Veesser, of the English department at City Col-

lege of New York, purports to present the man behind the myth, a devotee of Savile Row tailors who, at the same time, allegedly chastised the West and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) with equal gusto.

To his credit, Veesser unmasks several contradictions within the character of his icon, acknowledging, for example, that despite his wish to “preserve a distance” from the PLO, Said eventually supported it. The author sees this somehow as a “political error” in which Said stole “victory from youthful fighters” and, by cooperating with the PLO, mistakenly handed it to “corrupt old men.” Never mind that these “youthful fighters” were financially and morally supported in their butchery of Israeli civilians by the “old men”; Said’s change of heart was a “tragic irony” that came a “decade too late.”

Veesser dilates upon Said’s magnum opus, *Orientalism*, but critical examination is absent. Throughout his life’s work, Said substituted one stereotype for another. Indeed, European influence in the Middle East and North Africa did exist for a few hundred years, but before, during, and, to some degree, after the influence of Europeans began to be felt, it was the Ottoman Empire, another active and aggressive colonial power, which had the greatest influence in the region.

Thus Said’s true legacy is one of defending Islamic imperialism and indulging in politicized rhetoric heavy with accusations and resentment, an appraisal not shared by Veesser. Said’s work was intellectually shallow and several of his assertions about his background are apparently fraudulent.<sup>1</sup> One is never quite sure whether his support for Arab violence was due to tribalism, insecurity about his origins, or to his undoubted capacity for self-pity, an unattractive characteristic not rendered invisible by the cut of a Savile Row suit.

Reut R. Cohen  
Van Nuys, Calif.

1 Justus Reid Weiner, “My Beautiful Old House’ and Other Fabrications by Edward Said,” *Commentary*, Sept. 1999.

**The Goldstone Report: The Legacy of the Landmark UN Investigation of the Gaza Conflict.** Edited by Adam Horowitz, Lizzy Ratner, and Philip Weiss. New York: Nation Books, 2011. 480 pp. \$18.95, paper.

Ever since its release in September 2009, the Goldstone “Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict” has been the catalyst for contentious debate over the legitimacy of the Jewish state. With the overwhelming thrust of the report condemning Israel for war crimes and crimes against humanity, it is invoked by the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel and drives a lawfare campaign against the country’s leaders, using the law and legal systems for strategic political ends. Supporters of Israel from across the political spectrum have criticized the mission for its biased mandate, lack of objectivity, and duplicitous methodology. With the report already thoroughly scrutinized and dissected, is there anything significant to add?

There is, but readers will not find it in this book.

There is nothing, for example, about the challenges to the assumption that the vast majority of Gazan fatalities were civilian. The authors never mention reports indicating that many of those killed in Gaza were young men who fit the age and gender profile of combatants. Indeed, Hamas’s recent revelations confirming many combatants among the fatalities underscore these findings, confirm Israel’s original estimates, and invalidate the Goldstone report’s central thesis that Israel was intentionally targeting civilians.

But the authors, all journalists, find no room for facts that might undermine the underlying assumptions of the report. Instead, they devote the bulk of the book to reprinting large sections of the report, interspersed with excerpts from witness testimonies although this material is readily available in its entirety online. There is no serious attempt to probe the report or analyze its shortcomings. The last quarter of the book consists of eleven selected essays, written by prominent anti-Israel activists or emotional pro-Palestinian advocates, with one ex-

ception. Their arguments are tiresomely familiar: “The real purpose of the 2005 withdrawal of Jewish settlements in Gaza was to consolidate Israel’s continued occupation”; “Israeli forces deliberately targeted civilians and civilian objects”; “None of the Goldstone Mission’s major factual findings have been successfully refuted,” etc. Actually such claims have been widely disputed, but these arguments are not included.

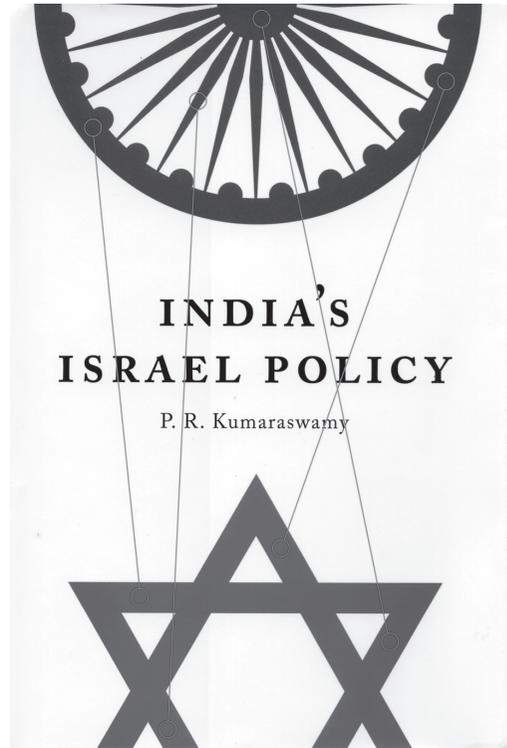
The single negative assessment—a reprint of an article by Moshe Halbertal—contains thoughtful if relatively mild criticism but is immediately followed by an attempt to discredit it. Its inclusion does not succeed in masking the book’s overt, political agenda—to bolster the pro-BDS-delegitimize-Israel position.

Ricki Hollander  
CAMERA

**India’s Israel Policy.** By P.R. Kumaraswamy. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. 376 pp. \$55.

India’s bilateral, under-explored relationship with Israel is wrapped in myths that Kumaraswamy, associate professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, debunks in his authoritative study. He also answers a number of questions: Why did India wait for far-reaching international changes before modifying its policy of non-recognition toward Israel? Is there a pattern in India’s new-found relationship with Israel? How relevant has the role played by the domestic Muslim population been in shaping India’s Israel policy?

Kumaraswamy covers the period 1920-92, dividing it into four phases: (1) India’s nationalist struggle and an unfavorable disposition toward Jewish political aspirations in Palestine; (2) the formation of the state of Israel in May 1948 and Prime Minister Nehru’s assurances in March 1952 of normalized relations with Israel; (3) the decision in 1952 to defer recognition of Israel while Delhi’s attitude toward Jerusalem hardened; (4) Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao’s reversal of the traditional policy and establishment of full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992.



Kumaraswamy demonstrates the relationship’s complexities with its public and private realms frequently diverging. New Delhi’s non-recognition of Israel in 1949 did not prevent it from seeking agricultural assistance from the Jewish state. Nor did public denunciations of Israel prevent Nehru from seeking military assistance from David Ben-Gurion in 1962 during the Sino-Indian conflict. The lack of diplomatic relations between the two countries did not prevent India’s external intelligence arm—the Research and Analysis Wing—from sending its personnel to Israel for specialized training, especially following the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984.

Kumaraswamy’s chronological divisions could use some fine-tuning. As the author himself notes, the groundwork to establish diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992 was prepared during the tenure of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who undertook a number of significant, conciliatory initiatives toward Israel. Thus the rather long third phase (1952-92) should perhaps have been divided further.

Additionally, while the author does examine the role of international factors on the bilateral relationship between Delhi and Jerusalem, he treats them as too minor a factor. As one of the first countries to escape the yoke of colonialism, India sought to burnish its “anti-imperialist” credentials. In the period following the Suez crisis, when Israel worked together with former colonial powers Britain and France, New Delhi was compelled to adopt an anti-Israeli stance so it could be seen as a leader of the anti-imperialist forces. The study would have benefited from an expansion on this international context and how the external environment constrained New Delhi’s foreign policy in its bilateral ties with Israel.

Despite this minor critique, the book remains the definitive account of bilateral relations between India and Israel and serves as the authoritative study on the subject.

Hussein Solomon  
University of the Free State, South Africa

**Language, Memory, and Identity in the Middle East: The Case for Lebanon.** By Franck Salameh. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010. 289 pp. \$80.

Most books on Lebanon crafted with sympathy and discernment are exercises in exploring the spirit of this singular country and its people. Salameh, a language professor at Boston College, demonstrates a unique approach to understanding that singularity. The essence of his thesis is that language—one rooted in the distant past and leavened with a multiplicity of more contemporary influences—continues to leave its imprint both on how the Lebanese communicate in the popular domain but also on what makes Lebanon the extraordinary human venture it is.

Salameh attempts to solve this puzzle by contending that there is no “single homogenous Arab cultural mass” but a diversity of ethnicities, languages, and peoples across the Middle East. In fact, Arabic, the supposed glue that holds together this disparate mass of humanity, “is a dead language.” No Arab really speaks Arabic: Different peoples in their respective countries speak Egyptian, Tunisian, Moroccan, or Lebanese.

FRANCK SALAMEH



LANGUAGE, MEMORY,  
AND IDENTITY IN THE  
MIDDLE EAST

THE CASE FOR LEBANON

There is no cohesive Arab nation, no collective Arab memory, and thus no living “pure” Arabic language.

The case of Lebanon’s language and its authenticity was elevated to a sacred mission by Saïd Akl, poet, linguist, and philosopher, who assumes a central role in Salameh’s narrative. He paints a vivid human portrait of the great man (born in 1912 and still living) who, among other things, proposed a Lebanese alphabet to replace the Arabic, thus liberating the spoken language from its Arabic moorings, much like the decision by Atatürk to write Turkish in Latin characters. For Akl, that alphabet is nothing more than a Phoenician creation, so that introducing Latinized characters into Lebanon would actually be an act of cultural recovery. For most Muslims and Arabs, however, it would be a separatist rebellion and viewed as a declaration of war against the Arab world.

The sub-text of the language controversy then is the struggle of a Christian community in Lebanon to survive and flourish in the Muslim

Middle East that is experiencing a sweeping Islamist tidal wave. Also, the debate as to whether the Lebanese are really Arabs has yet to be resolved. Akl and other intellectuals—for instance, Charles Corm and Michel Chiha—hammered away at the notion that the Lebanese are not Arabs at all. For them, and now for Salameh, the neighborhood norms of Islam and Arabic have no authority to overwhelm or suppress the specific features of Lebanon.

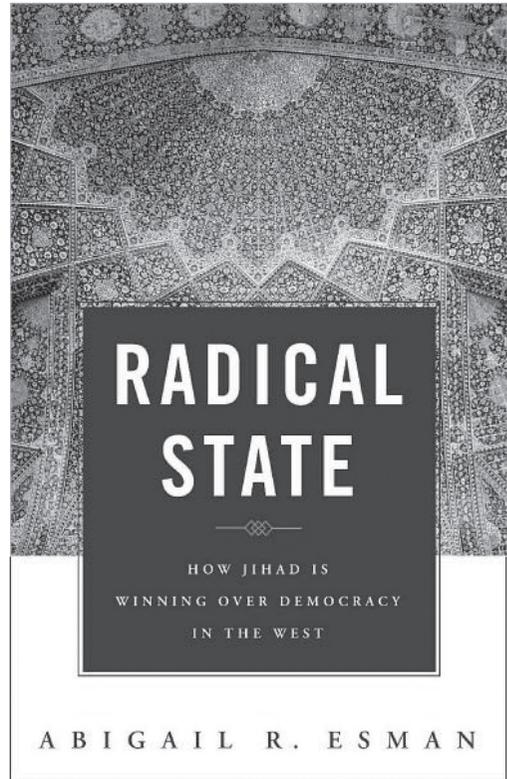
Salameh’s meticulous research makes for a most worthy book that makes a significant contribution to the literature. His study elucidates a core aspect of national identity with repercussions for all the Arabic-speaking countries. The author questions a conventional and sanctified concept of an Arab world which, battered and bruised by internecine political rivalries and animosities, is as desiccated as a Middle Eastern desert in the heat of summer.

Mordechai Nisan  
The Rothberg International School  
Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Radical State: How Jihad Is Winning over Democracy in the West.** By Abigail R. Esman. Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2010. 245 pp. \$34.95.

With an artful interweaving of the Netherlands’ past thirty years, plus her own experiences as a resident there, and personalized accounts of interactions with prominent Dutch leaders in politics, art, and academia, Esman offers a clear and powerfully evocative account of the process whereby Islamist political agitators, violent Muslim criminals, and Muslim terrorist ideologues are, step by step, bringing about the demise of a Western democracy.

Her book charts the descent of both Dutch society and government into a self-intensifying spiral of increasing submission to Muslim intolerance. Honor killings, genital mutilation, child and forced marriages, violence against homosexuals, the silencing of criticism through intimidation and murder, and a meteoric rise in high-profile incidents of anti-Semitism all combine to transform what was once one of the most stable and



tolerant nations in Europe into a dark and inhospitable home for non-Muslim Dutch.

Perhaps as threatening as the events themselves are the responses, or lack thereof, from Dutch leaders. Esman skillfully examines the government’s inept and counterproductive legislation and the refusal of many in positions of leadership in media, academia, and education to deal with these Muslim-inspired, socio-religious dynamics. Muslim threats to Dutch civil liberties and democracy are unquestionably a dire menace, but the way in which Dutch officials dismiss these threats is itself of even greater concern.

She concludes that tolerance of intolerance is not tolerance but appeasement, and appeasement emboldens the aggressor. Thus Holland’s decades-long forbearance with intolerant Islamists has resulted in the growth of a young, radicalized, Muslim population that is pushing the Netherlands into a form of national and cultural suicide.

Esman’s message concerns not just the Neth-

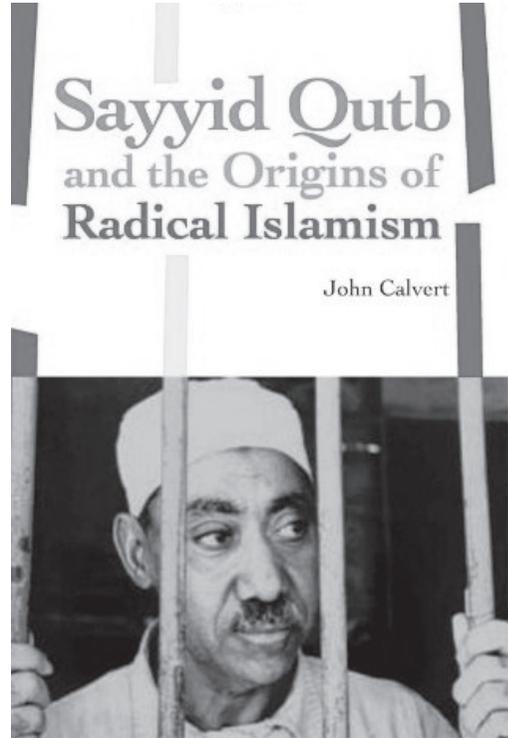
erlands but, as her title suggests, the West as a whole.

David Meir-Levi  
Scholars for Peace in the Middle East

**Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism.**  
By John Calvert. London: Hurst & Co., 2010. 377 pp. \$29.50.

Undoubtedly, the Egyptian radical Sayyid Qutb (1906-66) has been one of the most influential thinkers in the history of Islamism. It is therefore surprising that despite the frequency and volume of references made to him, this is the first comprehensive biography of him in English. Calvert, an associate professor of history at Creighton University, Nebraska, has produced a biography that is lively, sensitive, and methodical, and represents a landmark study of serious value to students, academics, and general readers alike.

Qutb lived through eventful times, and Calvert's study is as much a political history of modern Egypt through the prism of Sayyid Qutb as it is a biography of the man and a study of his thought. A rare intellectual within the movement, Qutb is a figure whose life narrative is every bit as important as his ideological output. "I preferred the clamour of the storm to the silence of tranquility," he once maintained, but he said this when he was a prominent literary critic—long before he became an Islamist radical. Qutb's radical articulation of Islamist ideology during his final years usually receives the most attention, but Calvert places such thinking within the wider context of Qutb's life as a whole and details how it evolved to this final incarnation. Qutb laid the foundations for Islamism's most extreme manifestations following his execution. Still, Calvert is careful to observe that Qutb himself would have been horrified by the Islamist excommunication of self-proclaimed Muslims and the resulting wanton slaughter and indifference to noncombatant status witnessed today. True, Qutb popularized the condemnation of Muslims in the culture and civilization around him as living in a state of "ignorance" or "barbarism" comparable to the pre-Islamic era. However, he never characterized them



as "infidels" as his successors did. Likewise, though he was clearly a dissenter who endorsed revolutionary violence, his radicalism was not stagnant but was a position he embraced gradually following years of systematic abuse.

Civil servant, literary critic, revolutionary icon, Qur'anic commentator, persecuted dissenter, feted martyr: Calvert's biography captures the many faces of Qutb. For his followers, Qutb's persecution by Nasser's regime is an ordeal comparable to the trials of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855) or Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). Yet Qutb was not a cleric, and the literalist heirs of Ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyya have frequently denounced Qutb's figurative and spiritual readings of Islamic scripture as deviant. Examining the breadth of Qutb's prolific writings, Calvert concludes that it is the ambiguity of Qutb's thought that is the key to his dangerous legacy.

Richard Phelps  
Quilliam Foundation, London

