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Christoph Schumann. *Nationalism and Liberal Thought in the Arab East: Ideology and Practice.* London: Routledge, 2010. 198 S. ISBN 978-0-415-55410-7; ISBN 978-0-203-85836-3.

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C. Schumann (Hrsg.): Nationalism and Liberal Thought in the Arab East

This is the second set of papers presented at the conference on the "Roots of Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean" held in Erlangen in 2005. The first set was published in 2008 by Brill Academic Publishers under the title *Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean: Late 19th Century Until the 1960s.* Both volumes were edited by the organizer of the conference, Christoph Schumann, Professor of Middle East politics and history at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg in Germany.

This volume comprises two parts: a first part devoted to "Nationalism and liberal thought" and a second part dealing with "Arab intellectuals and liberal thought." According to the editor, the focus on liberal thought is meant to compensate for the dearth of attention paid to this trend of thought in the study of the eastern Mediterranean, particularly the Arab East. "Liberal" is understood here, he writes, not as a coherent, self-contained doctrine, but rather as a variety of ideas and demands that stem from very concrete historical situations, such as those of "inter-confessional tolerance and secularism[,] the goals of education[,] constitutionalism and the rule of law[,] popular participation and the notion of democracy; and last but not least, the criticism of authoritarian thought and practice" (p. 5). Situated in specific settings of the Arab East in the twentieth century, these "liberal" concerns are looked at in connection with ideas and practices rather than in terms of persons and organizations and are assessed in relation to different periods and epochs.

The volume aims at challenging the claim about the absence of liberal voices in this part of the world, a seeming absence that is in reality due to the censorship and repression that were practiced by the authoritarian regimes which came into being in the late 1960s. Not all criticisms of authoritarian regimes were liberal, adds Schumann, but some of them were though. Moreover, liberal discourses were regarded to be "Western" and "inauthentic," and so less worthy of attention in the study and understanding of the region (p. 174). One of Schumann's important theses is that the liberal ideas were born from the actual local experience of authoritarianism and not simply copied and imported from the West: "I contend that liberal thought arises, in most cases, not from a direct encounter with Western liberalism but rather from negative personal and collective experiences with authoritarianism. These experiences are universal, and they make liberal thought intrinsic and authentic in any culture. Of course, engagement with the Western tradition of liberalism can inspire liberal thought, but it is not a necessary requirement for its coming into existence." (p. 174) The existence of these local and quite vocal liberal demands was indeed corroborated by the dramatic ongoing Arab uprisings that were to follow the publication of the book since the end of 2010.

Another claim that the book wants to challenge is the illiberal character of all forms of nationalism. The five essays composing the first part bring to the fore some of the liberal ideas and party politics which accompanied the nationalist projects in the region. Whether in Iraq, Syria or Palestine, a number of thinkers and activists championed religious tolerance, liberal and even subversive education, as well as freedom, for their emerging nations. In the first essay, Thomas Eich shows the efforts of the nationalist Haras al-Istiqlal party to advocate a non-sectarian, Sunni-Shi'i tolerance policy in the 1920s during the Iraqi struggle against the British - efforts that were inspired, according to him, by its close affiliation with the Rifa'iyya Sufi order and thanks to one of its leading figures, Yusuf al-Suwaydi. In the second essay, Peter Wien discusses the diversity of views on education and nationalism that were presented in the Iraqi public debates in the 1930s and 1940s. He looks in particular at two opposite speeches regarding the nation and the individual, namely those of Sati' al-Husri, giving priority to the community over the individual and of Fadil al-Jamali,

emphasizing the importance of personal liberties. In the third essay, Fred Lawson sheds light on the Syrian Hizb al-Sha'b party and its endeavors to champion republicanism, constitutionalism and reform in post-independence Syria before the takeover of the Ba'th party in 1963. In the fourth essay, Dalal Arsuzi-Elamir follows the intellectual and political itinerary of a prominent Syrian Arab nationalist, Zaki al-Arsuzi, who becomes in the 1950s and 1960s increasingly attentive to individual liberties and democracy. In the fifth and final essay, Orit Bashkin reminds us of the subversive stories of Palestinian novelist Ghassan Kanafani in which established narratives of nation, family and school are critically challenged. She ends her piece by saying: "It seems that from the 1950's onward [...] historians have tended to equate nationalism with the success (or failure) of certain political projects, such as the politics of 'Abd al-Nasser or the wars with Israel. Yet such scholarship neglects to pay the attention due to writers, men of ideas and intellectuals, who, despite living under antidemocratic conditions, wrote and debated the meanings of nationalism in ways far more sophisticated than those of their political leaders." (p. 105) This is precisely what the book wants to do and succeeds in doing so by pointing to a diversified post-independence Arab political and intellectual landscape that awaits further exploration.

In the second part of the book, four essays look at individual Arab intellectuals and concepts. Alexander Flores analyzes Farah Antun's perception of the West and his conception of secularism. Flores shows that Antun's relationship to Europe was a complex one, informed as it was by Europe's colonial policies and power politics on the one hand and Europe's ideas of universal freedom, reason and humanism on the other. He also shows the intricacies of his defense of secularism and his heated debate with Muhammad 'Abduh about it, rooted in the local realities of the Arab East - an issue that is as pressing today as it was a century ago. Thomas Philipp investigates the notion of "progress" as it was discussed in three of the most prominent periodicals of the *nahda* period, *al-Hilal*, *al-Manar* and *al-Muqtataf*. "Progress" was at the center of the nahda preoccupation with reform, improvement and advancement, and the issues of political freedom and intellectual freedom were at the heart of this preoccupation. Philipp sheds light on the debates surrounding them. In the third essay, Israel Gershoni traces the changes in Salama Musa's opinions from an initial appreciation of German national socialism as an ideal model for Egyptian and Arab development to a strong commitment to liberal democracy. Finally, Christoph Schumann follows the political positions of three intellectuals, two Syrians and one Jordanian, born in the 1920s. He highlights their turn to constitutionalism and democracy, as they experience the increasingly repressive and authoritarian regimes of their countries.

Schumann concludes his essay by saying: "It is unlikely that an 'Arab liberalism' will become a political force in the Middle East anytime soon, but there is a recognizable tendency from below to question authoritarian regimes while relying on liberal modes of argumentation: individual rights, rule of law, political plurality, civilian rule, transparency in decision-making, and openness to self-criticism" (p. 188f.). It is exactly with these modes of argumentation that suddenly huge numbers of Arabs took to the streets shortly after the publication of this volume, confirming beyond the shadow of a doubt the existence of these demands. The rest remains for history to say and perhaps even judge upon.

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