

contested categorisation of religion and ethnicity and state formation” in the MENA region.

When all is said and done, it is worth noting that the chapters in this collection have fulfilled the objectives that the editors have set at the beginning of the book. What we see is a collection of rich and in-depth analyses and explorations of the different social and political contexts and development within the framework of identity politics. This collection, as put by Ishtiaq Hossain in his blurb, is “(g)eared toward experts and ordinary readers”. In addition, from the perspective of the “ordinary reader”, the collection is one that has enriched our knowledge about a region that is known, yet still so difficult to grasp for many. However, while no obvious complaints are registered in light of what has been presented within this collection itself, readers would benefit from contributions from other contexts within the MENA region – perhaps in later editions – owing to the interesting developments that are taking place in places like Tunisia, which itself is currently undergoing a rebuilding process post-Arab Spring, Iran, with its unique ethnic and religious features and its growing influence in regional politics, and others.

The red minaret: Memoirs of Ibrahim Ghushah (ex-spokesman of Hamas). By Ibrahim Ghushah. Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2013, pp. 288, ISBN: 978-9953-572-24-6.

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The Red Minaret: Memoirs of Ibrahim Ghushah is the autobiography of Ibrahim Ghushah, the official spokesman of Hamas during 1991-1999. Originally written in Arabic, the work was translated into English by Hassan Ibrahim and Salma al-Houry. Since it is an autobiography, the volume should be considered against the general aims and objectives, and the main features of an autobiography. Freeman defines an autobiography as the specific kind of text that results from the first-person interpretive reconstruction of either a life in its entirety, or a significant portion of it with the aim of not merely recounting what happened but also of

understanding, from the vantage point of the current time, the meaning and movement of the past (Mark Freeman, "Autobiography," in Lisa M. Given (ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2008: 45-46). All these points will be kept in mind while the book is reviewed.

The *Red Minaret* is considered by many as an important book because it is the first book of its kind written by a leader of Hamas. Therefore, it is expected that the author would be describing not only his life and experiences with Hamas but also the important events of the Middle East throughout his lifetime. Perhaps more importantly, the author would express his opinions linking the past and contemporary events of the Middle East. It is also expected that Ibrahim Ghushah would throw light on the inner workings of Hamas. Like any other autobiography, *The Red Minaret* covers the significant part of the life and times of Ibrahim Ghushah. Although Ghushah was born in old Jerusalem in 1936, the book examines his life from 1948 to 2001.

The author is in a good position to write about the events in the Middle East with a focus on Palestine. Ghushah grew up during a period when events happened in the Middle East that affected directly or indirectly, either the fate of the Palestinians or that of Hamas. One such event is *Yawm an-Nakhba*, meaning the "Day of the Catastrophe", remembered every year on 15 May, one day after Israel's declaration of independence on May 14, 1948. This day is remembered yearly by the Palestinians to highlight the exodus of Palestinians before and after Israel's declaration of independence. The author offers a passionate description of when his own family had to leave his birthplace in Jerusalem. Ghushah witnessed many other key events, such as the 1967 war in the Middle East, the expulsion of Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) from Jordan in 1970, the Ramadan (October) War of 1973, Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1979, the Gulf War of 1991, the Oslo Accords of 1993, and the assassination attempt on Hamas Chief, Khalid Mishal, in 1997 in Jordan by agents of Mossad among others.

The book is entitled *The Red Minaret* not to underline the author's revolutionary credentials but the book is so titled simply after the red-coloured minaret of a small mosque that faces the author's home in Jerusalem's old city. Like millions of Palestinians who were uprooted from their homeland following Israel's declaration of independence in 1948, childhood memories such as those of the immediate neighbourhood

or in this case, the colour of a small mosque are all that remains with those Palestinians. Ghusheh joined the Muslim Brotherhood when he was in the seventh grade when the movement began to regain its momentum in the West Bank and the East Bank as *Hizb ut-Tahir* gradually became unpopular because of its insistence on directing all movements towards achieving an Islamic State. Ghusheh does not deny the ideological links between the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. Unlike many of his compatriots living in the refugee camps scattered all over the Middle East who do not have access to higher education, Ibrahim Ghusheh became a civil engineer. He worked in several Arab countries like Jordan and Kuwait and visited various Arab capitals as a member of Arab delegations promoting peace in the Middle East. The opinions of Ibrahim Ghusheh as expressed in his autobiography are honest and direct. Some readers may not agree with all of his observations and opinions but most will certainly respect them as those of a person who has intimate knowledge of these events.

The organisation of *The Red Minaret* is based on a chronological order of key events occurring in the Middle East between 1948 and 2001. The year 1970 occupies an important place in the history of the Palestinians in Jordan, when the leadership and members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) were driven into Lebanon by the Jordanian military. The author blames reciprocal provocations between the Palestinian fighters and the members of the Jordanian military for the military action against the Palestinian fighters based in Jordan. The author is of the opinion that these provocations developed because the Palestinian forces set up bases in Amman, Irbid and other Jordanian cities. The author is forthright in discussing this issue, but was careful not to mention the involvement of military personnel from a non-Arab Muslim state in driving the Palestinians out of Jordan.

The author's views on the 1973 October War and the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran are short and insufficient. The October War was a game changer in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It seemed that the Egyptian military had taken important lessons from their defeat in the 1967 War and employed the same pre-emptive and surprise tactic as the Israelis in their 1967 war against the Egyptians. In 1973, the Egyptian military initially had the upper hand but soon the tide of war turned against the Egyptian military. Like millions of Arabs, Ghusheh was very happy with the initial stage of the war when the Egyptian

soldiers successfully crossed the Suez Canal and broke through the Israeli Defence Wall known as the Bar-Lev Line. The joy of the Arabs soon turned into serious concerns when the Israeli forces crossed the Suez Canal and landed troops on Egyptian territory threatening to march on Cairo. With the intervention of the Americans, a cease-fire was arranged that stopped the war. A more detailed discussion was warranted from Ghushah about the reaction of the Arab masses, especially the Palestinians, to the October War. Ghushah's handling of Iran's Islamic Revolution reflects the cautious approach later taken by Hamas on the question of developing its political and economic relationship with Iran.

The Oslo Accords of 1993 is one of the most controversial treaties in the history of the Middle East peace negotiations. While the PLO, Israel, and its Western allies, like the US and the UK, hailed the Agreement as a positive step towards an ever-lasting peace by having a two-state solution, serious reservations have been expressed about the Oslo Agreements by various Palestinian quarters and Arab countries like Syria. They point to the continued lack of progress towards a final settlement between Israel and the Palestinians as proof of their stand on the Oslo Agreement. Ghushah considered the 1993 Oslo Agreement as a mechanism to build a strong and effective Palestinian police force to clamp down on opposition to the Palestinian Authority (PA). Ghushah adds yet another conspiracy theory about 9/11. According to him, the agents of Israeli Mossad and neo-conservatives of the US were behind the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. However, he did not provide any evidence to support such claims.

Without doubt, *The Red Minaret* is an important contribution towards explaining the Middle East through the eyes of a Hamas leader, which over the years has appeared as an important political force in Palestine. The book is a key publication because perhaps for the first time an autobiography of a leader of Hamas has been made available to the English-speaking world. However, the readers would have benefitted more if the author was more forthcoming in expressing his opinions on the key events of the Middle East. It is hoped that the book will be well-circulated.
