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978-0-521-54656-0 - A War of Words: Language and Conflict in the Middle East

Yasir Suleiman

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A War of Words

Language and Conflict in the Middle East

Yasir Suleiman's book considers national identity in relation to language, the way in which language can be manipulated to signal political, cultural or even historical difference. As a language with a long-recorded heritage and one spoken by the majority of those living in the Middle East in a variety of dialects, Arabic is a particularly appropriate vehicle for such an investigation. It is also, as Suleiman's analysis reveals, an alternative and penetrating device for exploring the conflicts of the Middle East, and the diversity of its peoples and their viewpoints.

Suleiman's book offers a wealth of empirical material, and intriguing, often poignant illustrations of antagonisms articulated through pun or double entendre. During the recent intifada, for example, Gazans would frequently respond 'bomba' ('Couldn't be better!') to questions about their health. By making the phonetic connection between the Arabic 'bomba' and the English word 'bomb', they declared their defiance, their optimism in the face of Israeli bombings.

This is an important book which crosses disciplinary boundaries to offer rare and much-needed insights into Arabic linguistics, as well as contributing to broader debates on the politics of identity and nationalism.

YASIR SULEIMAN is Professor of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies, and Director of the Edinburgh Institute for the Advanced Study of the Arab World and Islam at the University of Edinburgh. His publications include *The Arabic Language and National Identity: A Study in Ideology* (2003) and *The Arabic Grammatical Tradition: A Study in Ta'wil* (1999).

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For Jerusalem, City of Peace and *Zahrat al-Madā'in*, and for
all the freedom-loving people of the world



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