

Preface

We are pleased to present twelve critical essays by American and Israeli scholars, reviewing recent work in a variety of disciplines concerning modern Israel. Although structuring their contributions as evaluations of new books (in Hebrew and in English) the authors present their own perspectives on the issues in question, as well as overviews of developments in their fields of specialization—which include political science, sociology, anthropology, literature, and history. Taken together, these items constitute a survey of the current state of Israel studies, a presentation of the main questions being investigated, and a resource guide to further reading.

A particularly fecund area is that of research on Israel's history and politics. Steven Heydemann assesses controversial, "revisionist" works on Israel's history which challenge traditional interpretations on the causes and nature of the 1948 war, raising questions on the origin and meaning of the Arab-Israel conflict. He notes that this

debate is heavily influenced by contemporary political arguments and distinguishes between polemical and more temperate approaches. Even the latter often take events out of context and promote a dichotomy of heroes and villains. Still, he concludes, these works have altered Israel's historiography.

Myron Aronoff deals skeptically with the concept of binationalism as applied to Israel. The issue is the extent to which the large Arab minority in the country (and the additional numbers of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza) create an impetus toward revising Israel's definition as a Jewish state. While discussing the real transformations occurring in Israel, Aronoff concludes that the different meanings attributed to the term "binationalism" undermine its usefulness.

Gershon Shafir views works on key turning points in Israel's history. These writings lament and protest the loss of an Israeli "sense of realism," a trait said to be responsible for past successes. They reconsider early Zionist approaches to the Arabs, reactions to Israel's massive victory in the 1967 war, and the effects of the Likud bloc's 1977 triumph. "When contemplating how to use the fruits of the Six Day War," he concludes, however, "it seemed in 1967 that Israel had more freedom of choice than it actually did."

Elie Rekhess discusses the struggle between Israel, Jordan, and the PLO to shape West Bank politics since the 1967 war. It is important, he notes, to consider the socio-economic changes as well as the political developments since, in the long-run, the former provided the basis for the latter. The role of the Communist party, the student movement, and the Palestinian press in East Jerusalem were especially important. A critical area for future research will be the links between the events of the earlier years and the outbreak of the uprising in December 1987.

Stewart Reiser views the force of law and the appeal of lawlessness in Israeli politics. Struggles based on passionately held ideology tempt groups to reject the framework of

consensus which has preserved the stability of the country. In addition to rival notions of the extent to which Jews ought to accommodate Gentile power and preferences, Jewish-Israeli political culture draws on a national history of periodically refocused loyalties. This tradition means that the rich legacy of Israel, as a Jewish state, can be used as a basis for challenging the limits democracy normally places on political, religious, and cultural conflicts.

In his essay, Uri Ben-Eliezer looks at the development of independent voluntary organizations, protest groups, and lobbying movements in Israel. This is a relatively new development, since previously the public sphere has been dominated by party- and state-dominated institutions. But according to Ben-Eliezer, there may be less here than meets the eye. He rejects the idea that these new forces are "interest groups," seeing the most important among them as ideological movements seeking a change in society itself rather than a reallocation of its resources. He warns against too facile an application to Israel of concepts developed in the American context.

Israel is a highly politicized society. Contemporary Hebrew literature reflects that reality. Eve Jacobson makes an insightful study of novels by A.B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz. While explicitly dealing with "characters' interior psychological journeys," these works also explore the country's political situation, both in terms of content and the form of their construction. The characters and their situations correspond to familiar archetypes in the Western literary tradition. A central theme is of paradise lost and, perhaps, ultimately regained. At the same time, however, distinctly Jewish motifs are prominent. These authors' characters worry about the dangerous charms of messianism and utopianism, preferring, in Oz's words, the "human scale" and "calm eye" to the "grandiose fulfillment of the vision of the Prophets."

Aliza Shenhar analyzes the newer generation of Israeli writers, and particularly A.B. Yehoshua—who replace the

heroic visions of their predecessors with a view of national character and behavior which often focuses on neurosis and despair. Yehoshua's heroes are seen as being passive and unsure, detached from reality, but also as belonging to a distinctively Israeli milieu.

In her innovative treatment of the sensitive issue of *yerida* (Jewish emigration from Israel), Tamar Katriel discusses how the figure of the *yored*, or emigrant, is portrayed in Israeli literature and seeks correlations with the questions posed by Israeli social scientists studying Israelis living in New York. Her essay raises broad and fundamental questions of personal and cultural identity in contemporary Israel. One of these is the relationship of an Israeli people, including both Arabs and Jews, to a worldwide Jewish nation.

Kevin Avruch discusses right-wing political groups in Israel. Treated as marginal during three decades of Labor party dominance, they became more important after the watershed event in Israel's political history—the Likud bloc's 1977 victory—and the emergence of a “new right” animated, in large measure, by Jewish fundamentalism. These circles synthesized ultra-nationalism and religion, but displayed a variety of distinctive emphases and strategies. One crucial alliance has been between the Gush Emunim settlement movement and a series of Likud controlled governments.

Israel's foreign relations have always been a controversial subject. Ilan Peleg provides a careful examination of several reports on Israel's human rights record in the West Bank and Gaza. Pointing out that these districts, “perhaps more than any other territories today, are areas in political and legal limbo,” he also discusses the application of international law and opposing legal and political claims.

Asher Arian examines the use of survey data to report and interpret attitudes in the United States, western Europe, Israel, and the West Bank, toward various aspects of the Arab-Israel conflict. Arian shows that common stere-

otypes about public opinion in this area often do not stand up to examination. Public opinion, he contends, is more often the result of rather than the cause of national policy, even in democratic states. In addition, Arian demonstrates, the details of how a question is worded may be the primary factor in determining the response.

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