

INTRODUCTION



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This volume of critical essays is part of a series that comments on issues within Israeli culture, literature, politics, scholarship, and society. The series is sponsored by the Association for Israel Studies, which was founded in 1985 by scholars from several disciplines to provide a framework for the discussion of all aspects of Israeli society. This association was formed to provide a place where the study of Israel from widely differing perspectives could be presented. In this structure there would be room for scholars with a wide range of differing opinions, but who could agree on the importance of academic discourse. The three volumes published so far in this series reflect at least some of this divergence of opinion. Obviously the views expressed in each chapter are solely those of the author. They do not represent the outlook of the association, of SUNY Press, or of the editors.

The authors in this volume were called upon to identify a series of recently published books, or one book of importance to their field of inquiry. Then, they were requested to shape a critical essay which was to be based upon consideration of the book(s), but which would reach beyond the scope of a usual book review, or even a review essay. They were to use the work(s) as an opportunity to comment upon the state

of scholarship, or the state of society in the subject area in question. The result is the collection of essays in this volume, which is divided into four sections, Literature and Language, Culture and Society, Social Analysis, and History and Politics. Many of the works are related to the essays in the earlier volumes in the series.¹

I. Literature and Language

The essays on literature generally follow those in earlier volumes, which related literary works to changes in national ideology and political discourse (Divine in volume 1, Katriel, Shenhar, and Jacobson in volume 2). Those essays were primarily concerned with the decay of secular Zionism, the turn away from a view of Israel as a utopia, and the increased attraction of life abroad. In the present volume, other themes are considered. Raz shows how Israeli authors have changed their treatment of the Holocaust since the Second World War and how they have increasingly identified with the victims. This has accompanied other changes in Israeli national ideology.

Zenner and Marthan deal with a single author, Amnon Shamosh. Zenner, like Raz, analyzes literary works sociologically. Both Zenner and Marthan look at Shamosh in relationship to Shamosh's search for his ethnic roots. One looks primarily at a single work by the author, while the other looks at his corpus of poetry and relates it to a more general consideration of the Sephardic tradition.

Bolozky's chapter is the first essay on linguistics for this series. His essay deals with the work of Paul Wexler, who has proposed a provocative thesis that both Yiddish and modern Hebrew are intrinsically based on an extinct Slavic language, rather than classifying them in the usual manner as Germanic and Semitic languages respectively. Bolozky analyzes this thesis in a straightforward fashion on purely linguistic grounds. While the chapter may appear technical, it is not difficult to follow, especially for those who know modern Hebrew. The technical linguistic meaning of classification and affiliation is, of course, based on intra-disciplinary con-

sideration. Still, propositions like those of Wexler have potentially social ramifications in terms of how peoples view themselves in relationship to other nations, ethnic groups, etc.

II. Culture and Society

The chapters in the second section continue some of the themes discussed in the first section, since they also deal with Israeli Jewish self-image and the foundations of communal cohesion. Tress's chapter is the first one in this series dealing with the important topic of gender. In a highly critical manner it shows how the status of women in Israeli society is related to security policy. Tress's theoretical orientation is derived from current "post-modernist" paradigms in the social sciences, as are the authors dealt with by Armstrong.

Weiker's chapter on ethnicity utilizes a more traditional social scientific orientation. His chapter reviews theories of ethnicity as they have been applied to Israel and thus continues a discussion begun by Zenner (volume 1). This chapter is particularly concerned with relationships between different Jewish origin-groups. Although class has not been at the fore of the analyses of stratification in Israel, several of the social scientists discussed by Weiker have analyzed the relations between European and Middle Eastern Jews in Israel as those between distinct classes.

While this topic was foremost on the agenda of anthropologists studying Israel before 1980, it has been replaced by other interests of late. Armstrong's review of works on the "mainstream" gives attention to one such trend. These works deal with the manner in which political ideology and nationalism have been internalized by Jewish Israelis, particularly but not solely those of Ashkenazic background. The works in this section can be seen as reviewing how the sociology of Israel reflects general interests in race, class, and gender.

III. Social Analysis

The chapters by Ram and Ben-Zadok and Goldberg deal with the analyses of the Israeli polity by two political analysts.

One is the sociologist, Yonathan Shapiro, who broke away from the structural-functional paradigm of Eisenstadt (discussed by Lustick in volume 1). He is considered one of the chief proponents of conflict-sociology in Israel. Yehezkel Dror has been a practitioner of social policy analysis and has served as a government advisor. His criticism comes from within the Israeli political establishment. In fact, his analyses are in the form of memoranda to the prime minister. Shapiro, unlike the historical revisionists, unequivocally accepts the legitimacy of the state and its underlying ideology.

IV. History and Politics

The final section is dominated by a discussion of Israeli historical revisionism which has questioned the previous dominant interpretation of Israel's conflict with the Palestinians. The former paradigm saw the Yishuv and Israel as reacting defensively against the Arabs and did not question the Zionist claims to the land. The revisionists, discussed by Slater (also see chapters by Peretz and Heydemann in previous volumes), question both premises. Levy and Peled seek to extend revisionist interpretation to the Six Day War. They also extend the discussion of Israeli sociological thought, which we find in the previous sections.

Peleg deals with social psychological concomitants of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He finds this in the view of both Arabs and Israelis that their enemies are totally "Other." This demonization is particularly symbolized by the Israeli identification of Palestinians with "terrorism" and the Arab image of Jews as "Zionists." This process of stereotyping is not unidimensional and may go through various phases, as Rejwan (in volume 1) showed with regard to Arab analyses of the rise of Israel (also see Peretz in volume 1). Peleg, however, sees this demonization reaching its apex in right wing extremism within contemporary Israel.

Inbar, in the final chapter in this volume, discusses the Intifada as an intercommunal struggle. He sees it as one dimension of the conflict between Israel and the Arabs. He

tries to give us a balance sheet on the costs to both Israelis and Palestinians. He also gives us a sense of both divergence and convergence between Palestinian and Israeli commentators on the Intifada.

Note

1. See Ian S. Lustick, ed., *Books on Israel*, vol. 1, (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1988); and Ian. S. Lustick and Barry Rubin, eds., *Critical Essays on Israeli Society, Politics, and Culture: Books on Israel*, vol. 2, (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1991).