

## INTRODUCTION



*Walter P. Zenner and Kevin Avruch*

This is the fourth volume to be published under the aegis of the Association for Israel Studies which brings together scholars from a variety of disciplines and perspectives in reviewing recent work on modern Israel. The previous volumes in this series, all published by the State University of New York Press, are: *Books on Israel*, vol. 1 (I. Lustick, ed.), 1988; *Critical Essays on Israeli Society, Politics, and Culture* (Books, vol. 2) (I. Lustick and B. Rubin, eds.), 1991; and *Critical Essays on Israeli Social Issues and Scholarship* (Books, vol. 3) (R. Stone and W. Zenner, eds.), 1994. Although no volume by itself pretends to offer a comprehensive coverage of this broad topic, as a series, *Books on Israel* offers interested students of contemporary Israel a “state-of the art” view of current literature in selected fields—perhaps most usefully literature outside the field of the reader’s own specialization—and of the important questions being asked in each. Each chapter is especially written for this volume, and, while the authors have structured their contributions as “review essays,” this format is intended to serve as a platform for a critical reflection on the work or works reviewed, and on their importance for an understanding of Israeli society and culture.

When the third volume of this series, *Critical Essays on Israeli Social Issues and Scholarship* went to press in 1994,

the peace process among Israel, the Palestinians, and the Arab states seemed to be dead in the water. How differently the situation looks today. While the peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians is still unstable, it has resulted in the establishment of a PLO-led authority in Gaza and Jericho, the virtual withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) from some West Bank towns, open diplomatic contacts between Israel and several Arab states, and a treaty between Israel and Jordan. However, it has led also to a new round of violence, including the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 by a disgruntled Jewish law student with extreme religious-nationalist leanings (and, perhaps most disturbingly, with the apparent blessing of some Israeli and other rabbis).

Nevertheless, the issues on which diplomats, politicians, scholars, and the general public have been fixated for forty-odd years have been transformed. Instead of concern with how obdurate each side is on these issues, they can now turn to the solution of specific problems, one of the most crucial of which will be water resource management, the subject of Ofira Seliktar's chapter in this volume. Meanwhile, Mohammed Abu-Nimer focuses on the human dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process by examining the dilemmas which face peace activists on both sides. His chapter continues an exploration of themes taken up by Ilan Peleg's essay in the third volume of this series to which we have previously referred—"The Arab-Israeli Conflict and the Victory of Otherness"—and, in the same volume, by Efraim Inbar in "The Intercommunal Dimension in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Intifada." Abu-Nimer shows in particular how difficult Jews in the peace camp have found the bridging of the "Great Rift Valley" that separates Jews and Arabs in Israel. In this vein, readers should also consult the essay by Myron Aronoff in "The Ambiguities of a 'Binational' Israel" found in the second volume of the series,

Turning to issues of government and society, the chapters in this volume by Efraim Ben-Zadok and Samuel Krislov direct our attention to institutions that have been neglected

previously by students of Israeli government. In contrast to the more usual concern with Israel's national government and politics, Ben-Zadok concentrates on local governance. He reviews some of the current literature on local government and protest movements, showing the new dynamism in local governance in Israel, and how closely government on the local level reflects ethnic and other rifts within the body social. Krislov focuses on the courts, and places issues surrounding the court system and Israeli legal culture in general within the larger context of Israel's multicultural—and particularly its Judaic—background.

Jeff Halper's contribution, reviewing studies of Jerusalem, is a departure for this series in that it concentrates on one locality. Jerusalem is, of course, unique among Israeli cities, but review articles could be written about other localities as well. While never losing sight of the particular policy and planning problems that the city faces and creates, Halper brings out many aspects of this city's character, both sacred and secular, and Jewish and Arab. Each of these chapters in some way, engages questions of ethnicity in Israel, which are also considered in previous volumes, such as by Walter Zenner in volume 1 in "Ethnic Factors in Israeli Life," and Walter Weiker in volume 3 in "Studies on Ethnicity."

Three chapters in this volume deal with Judaism and Israeli society, particularly relating to ethnic and gender issues. Zvi Zohar considers the relationship between Orthodox Judaism and secular Jews, crosscut by the division between European and Middle Eastern Jews. He analyzes the views and philosophy of a respected Sephardic Orthodox rabbi, especially as they touch on politics. His sophisticated analysis leads us away from thinking of all Orthodox Jews as either zealous anti-Zionists or as irredentist religious nationalists. (For a view of the latter, see, Kevin Avruch's piece on "Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel" in the series' second volume.) As is Zohar, Walter Zenner is concerned with the plurality of views within Sephardi Orthodox Jewry. He deals with this in relationship to issues of ethnic identity among Jews in Israel. (See also the essays on ethnicity already

mentioned above on this introduction as well as in earlier volumes of this series.) Zenner's essay, as does Zohar's (and Nancy Berg's, to be discussed later), points to the need to deal with Sephardim as authors—indeed, as *agents*—rather than merely as objects of research by Ashkenazim. Taking up the theme of “locality” emphasized in different ways by Ben-Zadok and Halper, Kevin Avruch argues for the need to pay attention to localized forms of Judaic expression. As was Zenner, Avruch is concerned with Orthodoxy, but Orthodoxy now refracted through the lens of gender. He reviews two books by anthropologists on Orthodox women, one of Middle Eastern origin, and the other Ashkenazi *haredot*. Both ethnographies give voice to the subjects of study, rather than viewing them simply as victims of male domination. (See also Madeleine Tress's essay—“Does Gender Matter?”—in the third volume of this series.)

The three essays in the last part of this volume take multifaceted approaches to large issues in Israeli literature, cinema, and culture. Ostensibly reviewing three examples from the genre of autobiography and memoir—all written by former generals in the IDF—Pnina Lahav ranges far (and critically) to explore decision-making processes of more than twenty years ago, at the time of the Yom Kippur War. Reflecting on the uses and abuses of memory and memoir, Lahav offers a cultural critique of top military leaders during that period. She analyzes them, and the period, in psychocultural terms.

Nancy Berg's chapter on *ma'abara*—or immigrants' transition camp—literature points to the division between European and Middle Eastern Jews in Israel, which is considered by Zohar and Zenner in religious terms. In showing how the Middle Eastern immigrants were introduced to a heavily Europeanized Israeli society, Berg also argues for the new “voice” which the Middle Easterners have now found, partly through literature, to recover aspects of their own past. This reiterates points made by Walter Zenner and Abraham Marthan in their essays on Amnon Shamosh in volume 3 of this series.

Nurith Gertz deals with Israeli literature and cinema of the 1980s and 1990s, but she also takes up some problems

broached by Abu-Nimer in his discussion of the dilemmas of the peace process. Gertz, that is, focuses on some prominent films made by members of Israel's "peace camp." As was Lahav, Gertz is sympathetic to a fairly radical critique of Zionism from within this intellectual segment of Jewish Israeli society—a critique, incidentally, covered in previous volumes of this series in articles that dealt with the beginning of revisionist historical treatments of the founding of Israel. See, for example, Steven Heydemann's "Revisionism and the Reconstruction of Israeli History," in the second volume of this series. In addition to Heydemann's essay, works by Donna R. Divine in volume 1 ("Political Discourse in Israeli Literature"), and Aviad Raz in the third volume ("Rewriting the Holocaust: An Israeli Case Study in the Sociology of the Novel"), also exemplify the series' ongoing attention to culture and the arts, particularly in literature, in contemporary Israel.

In sum, we are pleased to present these eleven critical essays on diverse aspects of Israeli society, religion, and government as the fourth in a continuing series sponsored by the Association for Israel Studies.