

ISRAEL

Strangers in Their Homeland, by Ra'anan Cohen. Brighton, UK and Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2009. ix + 226 pages. Appendix. Figures. Map. Tables. Notes to p. 240. Bibl. to p. 254. Index to p. 277. \$34.95 paper.

National Minority, Regional Majority, by Yitzhak Reiter. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009. xxx + 298 pages. Notes to p. 342. Bibl. to p. 360. Index to p. 403. \$49.95.

Reviewed by Ian S. Lustick

While providing testimony to the Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry into the problem of Palestine in 1946, David Ben-Gurion sought to convince the panel that the Arab minority that would come to live within the Jewish state would be well treated. Far from being oppressed or discriminated against, Ben-Gurion predicted that Arabs in the future Zionist state would enjoy a privileged status. He based his argument on a rather amazing thought experiment. "When things in Palestine change," he declared,

The Arabs would be a minority and we would become the majority, but the Arabs here would still be in a privileged position. They would have nothing to fear because they are surrounded by Arab countries that are independent ... Imagine that in the neighborhood of Poland there were a big State like Russia, with 180 million Jews, the Jewish minority in Poland would not be persecuted, they would be perhaps in a privileged position. I am sure the Arabs will be in such a privileged position here.¹

Well, not all thought experiments lead to

correct conclusions. The two books reviewed here testify to Ben-Gurion's error. They portray an Arab population within Israel that has been persecuted and compelled to surrender most of its resources, all of its national aspirations, most of its desire for equality of opportunity, and any legal basis for opposing the Jewish-Zionist character of the state or for demanding a proportional share of political power. What is striking about these books is not this analysis, which recapitulates what dozens of studies have confirmed about the structural, institutional, and policy-enforced domination of Arab Israelis, but that it is delivered by former apparatchiks in the system of control whose very existence was for so long and with such vehemence denied by those who operated it.

Since 1948, the (Jewish) men who have operated this system have been known as "Arabistim (Arabists)." Most came to their positions along one or more of three paths — from the military and the security services, from the ranks of academics with specializations in Middle Eastern area studies, Arabic language, or Islam, and/or as Arabic-speaking Mizrahi Jews with political aspirations or connections. Indeed the newest and most interesting material in these books is the sometimes detailed autobiographical accounts of bloody infighting among succeeding generations of Arabists for power and influence within a portion of the Israeli bureaucratic maze (that dedicated to monitoring and supervising the affairs of the Arab minority) to which are consigned political dead-enders — military officers, civil servants, party operatives, or academics destined never to rise to the top ranks of power or prominence within the power centers of the Jewish state.

Cohen was born in Iraq. When appointed to head the Labor Party's Arab Department he describes himself as "completely unprepared ... [M]y only references were my friendly relations with several figures in the Israeli Arab and Druze sector..." (p. 44). His account of selecting individuals as parliamentary representatives of the Arab population provides insight into the typical "colonial officer" type mix of condescension and frustrated good intentions that mark the liberal-minded of the Arabists:

1. *The Jewish Case: Before the Anglo-American Committee on Inquiry on Palestine as Presented by the Jewish Agency for Palestine* (Jerusalem, 1947), pp. 77-8.

In 1981, I managed to include an Israeli Arab in the Labor Party list of candidates for the Knesset: Muhammad Khalaila from Sakhnin became a member of the tenth Knesset. He was neither a university graduate, nor particularly young, and to the new generation he represented exactly the same generation of yes-men whose influence they were trying to shake off. For the next election campaign, I decided to go for the “real thing”, and focused on a man with strong nationalist opinions, a member of the younger generation, who was not connected to any clan (p. 46).

After his service in the control apparatus Cohen went on to pursue a doctoral degree in political science. Much of his book — though not the interesting parts — is reproduced from his dissertation, focused on detailed reporting of voting patterns in the Arab sector in each Knesset election between 1948 and 2006.

In similar fashion, Reiter entered academia after his stint as a government Arabist. In 1977 he was appointed by Moshe Sharon as Deputy to the Advisor to the Prime Minister on Arab Affairs. (Traditionally the “Advisor on Arab Affairs” was the key supervisory post within the control system.) Sharon, a professor of Islamic Studies at the Hebrew University, had himself recently been recruited for the Advisor’s post in the new Menachem Begin government. Instructively for the level of training assumed to be required for administering the affairs of the Arab sector, Reiter was recruited for the post solely on the basis of having been an undergraduate student of Sharon. He remained in that position under three Prime Ministers, until 1986. Five years later Reiter graduated from the Hebrew University with a PhD in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies.

In his citation of published academic work on the subject and in his effort to mobilize some social science categories for locating or justifying his analytic position, Reiter’s book honors the standards and expectations of scholarly monographs in ways

that the Cohen book does not. Both books, however, tell much the same story in much the same voice. They offer details of discrimination, manipulation, and control policies over Arabs that are effective enough to prevent the discontent of the Arab population from seriously burdening the state, but clumsy, cruel, and inefficient enough to have generated considerably more Arab and Muslim frustration with the Jewish state and its Zionist mission than the authors think would attend wiser policies. Each book also presents, and bemoans, a seemingly endless chronicle of proposals, programs, committees, high level commissions, etc. that have been set up in response to incidents of Arab unrest or to Arabist insistence that some comprehensive, rational, and public policy finally be adopted toward the Arab sector. These recommendations typically included demands that such policies be seriously funded; and, not so incidentally, that they be implemented by a ministerial-level apparatus that would significantly elevate the status and power of the Arabists themselves. The voice of the author in each book is the loyal, but frustrated and long-suffering complaint of virtually all Arabists, both while they are operating the system of control or while, sitting in universities and think tanks, they observe and comment on its performance. It is a whining voice, but also a self-serving one, insisting that 1) left untended by sophisticated and carefully implemented government policies, the growth of the Arab population along with its aspirations and discontent will sooner rather than later raise catastrophic problems; 2) that the Arab minority is incubating dangerous “extremist” threats, but that elements within it can be identified and persuaded to cooperate with a formula for Israel’s future that finesses the contradictions to democratic and liberal values inherent in the Jewish-Zionist nature of the state; and that 3) their recommendations for liberalizing some aspects of government policy toward Arabs do not reflect any softness toward them; any slacking in their Zionist commitment to the special Jewish vocation of the state; or any willingness to respond positively to Arab demands for the return of internal refugees to their villages, restitution or return of confiscated

land, or for a State of Israel that would be “a state for all its citizens.”

A price that each author pays, or seems to think it is necessary to pay, in order to maintain his credibility with the Israeli establishment, is to adhere as closely as possible to the official Israeli narrative, and to the categories and vocabulary of that narrative. This produces a degree of disingenuousness and stigmatization that will lead most scholarly readers to code these works as at least 50% propaganda. For example, Cohen’s analysis of changing Arab political behavior imagines them moving “between the ‘Arab’ approach, according to which rights would be achieved through surrender, and the ‘Western’ approach, according to which rights must be demanded” (p. 151). Cohen suppresses massive and calculated Israeli government manipulation of legal categories and forms of documentation as means to seize Arab lands by writing of Negev Bedouin that “the state does not recognize their claims, since they are not based on documented proof of ownership” (p. 173). Cohen refers to the communities Bedouin have created on their historic lands that the state refuses to recognize as “squatter settlements” (p. 223). Ignoring the impossibility for Arabs to operate effectively or rise to power within Jewish-Zionist parties, he approvingly quotes the Orientalist Raphael Israeli for objecting to Arab parties as “detrimental to Israeli democracy because ... there are enough political parties to work with” (p. 85). His account of an Israeli operation in Gaza in early 2008 — an operation that was a precursor to the much larger “Operation Cast Lead” ten months later — could win a prize for euphemism. “Israel’s military activity against terrorist organization in the Gaza Strip during the early months of 2008 ... resulted in the death of 120 Palestinians and a reduction in the supply of merchandise to the Strip.” (p. 222).

Reiter describes Arabs who do not mobilize, such as the Bedouin before the late 1970s, as “peaceful, moderate, and compliant” (p. 87). On the other hand, he describes every instance of Arab political mobilization as either “riots” or “violence” (pp. 54, 94, 111, 121-22, and 296). For example, a peaceful general strike on “Land Day” in 1976 that

the authorities tried to stop by declaring a curfew enforced by army units using deadly force is described as “a violent mass protest that was dispersed by the security forces, resulting in numerous injuries as well as the death of six Arab citizens” (p. 54). No matter that the “violence” was almost entirely that of the army, killing Arab citizens for simply standing on their doorstep or looking out a window. Reiter characterizes the first Intifada (by West Bank and Gaza Arabs) as three years of “large-scale violence,” involving “a large number of Israeli casualties, about 50 per month,” without mentioning a Palestinian casualty rate that, even according to the Israel Defense Force, was more than 12 times higher (p. 111). Reiter describes the demographic reality of an Arab majority turning into an Arab minority in what became Israel as the result of the “departure” of the Arabs. Combined with the “arrival of Jews,” this demographic transformation “necessitated the reallocation of land resources” (pp. 16-7). Thus are packaged the bitter realities of the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Arabs, the destruction of hundreds of villages, and the massive theft of land. Reiter describes the laws passed to enable this theft as permitting the state to take over “‘abandoned’ lands belonging to Palestinians who were not present in the country in 1949 and therefore were defined as ‘absentees’” (p. 17). Aside from the disingenuousness of this formulation, it is directly contradicted by evidence he provides elsewhere concerning Arab “internal refugees” — Arab inhabitants who never left the country but were treated as absent even though they were present. In the Orwellian officialese of Israel, but avoided by both Cohen and Reiter, these were “*nifkadim nochachim*” (present absentees).

Cohen’s book sustains no particular argument or claim beyond the portrait of threatened and uncomfortable Jewish domination over an Arab population increasingly drawn toward radical or rejectionist postures with respect to Israel as a Jewish-Zionist state. He summarizes his position quite pessimistically, observing that “the Jewish-Arab rift is too multi-faceted for attempts on the part of Jews and Arabs to overcome the discrepancy between Israel’s definition of itself as a Jewish state and its concept of itself as a

democracy to succeed” (p. 225). At the end of the book, however, Cohen offers recommendations for the future which together are almost a *non-sequitur* to the entire volume, including the summary observation I have just quoted. After showing that all previous plans for setting Arab-Jewish relations on a clear foundation have been shelved or ignored, he outlines his own new plan for doing so, including a social charter that would “determine agreed-upon rules on issues of dissent ... the charter will become a binding administrable document;” include the Arab parties in governing coalitions; granting of a measure of “political autonomy” to the Arab-Palestinian minority; build Arab language and culture into Jewish curricula; and, most amazingly, establish compulsory national service that would create “a melting pot” for “as many youngsters as possible, Arabs and Jews” (pp. 215-16).

In Cohen’s treatment, peace between Israel and the Palestinians will do nothing decisive to solve the problem of Arab discontent and inequality within Israel. The one particular argument that Reiter does advance in the book is an extension of this position. While providing just as much evidence as Cohen does that the deep dissatisfactions of Israel’s Arab citizens stem from its definition as a Jewish-Zionist state, Reiter is at pains to argue that the domination and discrimination to which Arab citizens are subject increasingly have been the result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more broadly. In this respect, Reiter’s position, as expressed in the title of his book, is exactly the opposite of that predicted by Ben-Gurion. While Ben-Gurion predicted that the Arab minority would be privileged as a result of being part of the regional majority, Reiter argues that they are, for that reason, oppressed.

In sum, while the Cohen book provides some juicy tidbits about inter-Arabist rivalries and his own foibles as a would-be manipulator of Arab political behavior, and while Reiter’s book offers a rather well-organized presentation of events and trends in political relations between the Arab minority and the Israeli government (periodized mainly by changes in the composition of the ruling coalition), these books are most valuable as data about how the discourse among

Israeli experts on the “Arab problem” has changed and how it has not over the last 60 years. Each provides fascinating and previously undocumented details associated with the author’s personal engagement with the issue, but neither breaks new ground conceptually or empirically.

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MAGHRIB

The Politics of Food in Modern Morocco, by Stacy E. Holden. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2009. 218 pages. Gloss. to p. 224. Notes to p. 262. Bibl. to p. 275. Index to p. 285. \$69.95.

Reviewed by Sahar Bazzaz

What can explain the rise and resilience of authoritarian states in the Arab-Islamic world? This is the overarching question informing Stacy E. Holden’s *The Politics of Food in Modern Morocco*. Breaking with interpretations that locate the roots of authoritarianism in ethnicity or religion, Holden argues that the largely authoritarian political systems in the Arab-Islamic world have evolved within the context of “the unique shortcomings of geography and climate” (p. 5). Holden turns to the case of Morocco, which, compared to its regional neighbors, has been defined by political stability and the continuation of the ruling dynasty (albeit a modernized version) throughout the period of the country’s transition to modernity from the late 19th century. Focusing on the city of Fez between 1878 and 1937 — a pivotal period in the Moroccan transition to modernity and a time of almost perpetual drought or famine in Morocco — Holden traces the “construction of the modern state via urban food provisioning” (p. 9) before the establishment of the French Protectorate in 1912 and through critical years between the First and Second World Wars, when Moroccan nationalism emerged and spread among the masses. Yet, she cautions her reader against simplistic or mono-causal ex-

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