

The Shift: Israel-Palestine from Border Struggle to Ethnic Conflict

By Menachem Klein

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The Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains one of the most intractable, globally sensitive and over-studied of national disputes. The past few decades have witnessed a deluge of scholarly and polemic writing covering the history, nature, and causes of the violence, as well as those exploring future obstacles to peace.¹ While the quantity of literature often masks a paucity of academic quality, Menachem Klein's book, *The Shift: Israel-Palestine from Border Struggle to Ethnic Conflict*, offers a timely and provocative prognosis of the current facts on the ground. Klein, a lecturer in political science at Israel's Bar-Ilan University and advisor to the Israeli negotiating team during the last decade of peace talks (from Camp David in 2000 to the Geneva Accords in 2003), draws on a range of primary sources and personal insights to outline a radical shift in the nature of the conflict from a national territorial dispute to an ethnically inspired system of Israeli control over all the Palestinian territories. In so doing the author seeks to challenge the traditional "occupation" paradigms and dispel illusionary hopes of a future "unitary non-ethnic democracy" (p. 4). His critical lens is rather fixed on the stark realities of Israeli hegemony, evidenced in settlement expansion, increasing security operations and the diminishing power and influence of the Palestinian Authority (PA). The result is an empirically rich, albeit theoretically light, reading of the contemporary Israeli-Palestinian struggle, which contributes to the on-going debates surrounding future

peace negotiations and permanent resolution.

The Shift comprises five chapters, including a brief historical and theoretical overview and a concluding chapter which assesses how the changing pattern of the conflict ultimately affects the prospects of a one-state or two-state solution. The remaining three chapters uncover and critique the modus operandi of Israel's system of control. From the co-optation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) as an "administrator of an Israeli protectorate" (chapter two, p. 21) to the institutional collaboration of the religious settler movement (chapter three) and finally, the differential levels of state supervision of Palestinians through territorial fragmentation, bureaucratic rules, and disparate citizenship (chapter four), Klein's analysis is reliant on a rich variety of Israeli and Arab sources, newspapers, polls, government statistics, local NGO reports, as well as international research by UN agencies (UNOCHA) and global think-tanks (from the International Crisis Group). While such facts and figures provide an authenticity to the writing, they at times overshadow Klein's argument, which is lost amidst large citations (pp. 62-3; p. 71; pp. 139-40) and derivative analysis. The author's fluid and succinct writing style provides an accessible and engaging read but the brevity of the book (142 pages) sadly detracts from its scholarly rigor.

The Shift, however, represents Klein's most critical work to date,² arguing that there has been both a radicalization of Is-

raeli state policy toward the Palestinians through “graduated systems of control” (p. 19) and a polarization of mainstream Jewish Israeli attitudes (p. 7). Klein’s analysis of Israel’s “ethno-security regime” is both perceptive and persuasive, particularly in his examination of Israel’s “strategy of differentiation” which seeks to splinter and control Palestinians by “creating commonalities while at the same time maintaining differences” (p. 117). Israel’s differential treatment of Palestinians, with regards to security, movement, civil rights and benefits, has helped to consolidate five territorial/legal groups: Israeli Palestinians (1948 Arabs), East Jerusalemites, Seam zone Palestinians (between the separation barrier and the Green line), West Bankers, and Gaza Strip Palestinians. As Klein rightly argues this not only weakens collective Palestinian resistance but enables Israel to deflect “international criticism” (p. 120) by claiming “to be a democratic state in the territory while defending itself in the Occupied Palestinian Territories” (p. 117).

Another significant contribution of the book is its insights into what Klein terms “the settlement-security symbiosis” (p. 47). This is the institutional collaboration of state agencies and national religious settlers—through financial aid and military protection—to “create a continuous block of Jewish habitation in East Jerusalem” (p. 59) and to present on-going West Bank settlement as a part of Israel’s national “defense strategy” (p. 53) and a “critical means in the war on terror” (p. 81). Klein’s sobering assessment of settlement expansion extends to the growing power and influence of religious military academies (*hesder yeshivot*) and ultra-nationalist rabbis in shaping army alle-

giances and ultimately IDF policy with regard to future possible West Bank withdrawals. Strangely this internal military dilemma receives scant acknowledgement in Klein’s final conclusion, in which he affirms that “the only really viable solution” is “two ethnic states, Israel and Palestine” (p. 142) but provides little in the way of detail as to how 500,000 settlers (p. 49) could ever be evacuated from the West Bank.

Despite Klein’s deliberation on both the ethnic nature of the conflict and the potential of an ethnic solution his discussion of ethnicity is surprisingly weak. In his account, ethnicity is historically reified, a reversion to 1948 (p. 119), ignoring the complex dynamic process of modern identity construction and the intersecting trajectories of Zionism, Arabism and Palestinian and Israeli nationalism. The book also avoids providing sufficient scholarly discussion or literature on an ethnic conflict resolution which would help substantiate arguments for an ethnic two-state solution. Some critics may observe that Klein’s conclusions, while valid, remain empirically weak, and somewhat disconnected from the main body of his argument. It is difficult to imagine, given the current PA weakness and deepening Israeli hegemony, that Klein himself outlines, that “as soon as the economic, diplomatic and military costs of ethnic conflict become too high, Israel will inevitably exert itself once again to achieve a two-state accommodation” (p. 142). While the author’s optimism for a future two state-solution requires more detail (borders, Jerusalem, refugees, 1948 Arab rights, security) his dismissal of a “single non-ethnic... liberal democratic state” (p. 137) perhaps deserves a more balanced reading. To

dismiss growing Palestinian support for a one-state solution as the choice of radicals (“mainly young people and left-wing intellectuals”, p. 137), or as a cynical tactic to force Israeli acceptance of 1967 borders “in the face of the demographic threat” (p. 136), may be over-emphasizing ethnicity and undervaluing citizenship. Yet Klein remains resolute in his conclusion: “a state founded on citizenship alone will not satisfy the ethnic-national needs of either community” (p. 138).

In summary *The Shift* provides a valuable contemporary reading of Israel’s evolving ethno-security regime. It synthesizes much of Klein’s research and attempts to provide realistic ways forward to an intractable ethnic conflict.

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Endnotes

1. For a selection of such work see Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Ilan Pappé (ed.), *The Israel/Palestine Question* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-1999* (New York: Knopf, 1999); Joseph A. Massad, *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians* (London/New York: Routledge, 2006); and Raja Halwani and Tomis Kapitan, *Israel, Palestine, One-state Solution: Philosophical Essays on Self-determination, Terrorism and the One-state Solution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

2. See Menachem Klein, *Jerusalem the Contested City* (London: Hurst & Company, 2001); *The Jerusalem Problem: The Struggle for Permanent Status* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003); *A Possible Peace between Israel and Palestine: An Insider’s Account of the Geneva Initiative* (Chichester, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007).

The Contradictions of Israeli Citizenship: Land, Religion and State

Edited by Guy Ben-Porat and Bryan Turner

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One might be forgiven for presuming that a new book called *The Contradictions of Israeli Citizenship* would present innovative insights about the place of Palestinian Israelis—and their stateless West Bank-dwelling brethren—in modern Israeli society. Given the long paper trail left by past scholars seeking to understand the practical and philosophical dilemmas of a codified ethno-religious identity existing alongside a liberal democratic ethos, one might reasonably anticipate new conceptual frameworks and a fresh evaluation of a long-examined problem.

The volume’s editors, Guy Ben-Porat of Ben-Gurion University and Bryan Turner of the City University of New York, seem keenly aware of these expectations. Two essays that focus heavily on the Palestinian Israeli segment of society appear back to back, near the end of the volume, as if the book were constructed to whet readers’ appetites for the novel conclusions contained within. Before turning to the central question, Ben-Porat and Turner present essays on the Israeli republican equation, Ashkenazi-Mizrahi dynamics, Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jews’ interactions with the state, and civic en-