

Yitzhak Reiter. *National Minority, Regional Majority: Palestinian Arabs Versus Jews in Israel*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009. xxx + 403 pp. \$49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8156-3230-6.



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Published on H-Genocide (March, 2016)

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Yitzhak Reiter's *National Minority, Regional Majority: Palestinian Arabs Versus Jews in Israel* attempts to provide further nuance to scholars' understanding of the construction of Arab citizens of Israel as a minority population in the years following 1948. Reiter maintains that his departure from previous scholarship is his insistence that the relationship between the Israeli state and its Arab citizens and their minority status needs to be understood as a conflict interlocked with other regional struggles, such as the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian struggle and the regional strife between Israel and its Arab neighbors. This contrasts significantly with other works that tend to emphasize structural problems within the Israeli state (namely its paradoxical self-identification as both Jewish and democratic) and discriminatory policies and programs embraced by the Israeli state.

Reiter's monograph is structured in such a fashion as to demonstrate the impact of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the larger Arab-Israeli conflict on the Arab citizens of Israel. The first two

chapters outline much of the author's argument and situate the origins of minority status for Arab citizens of Israel as part of the establishment of a democratic yet explicitly Jewish state in Palestine following 1948. Here Reiter argues that the prevailing mistrust between Jews and Arabs in Israel is a direct byproduct of Israel's conflicted relations with its Arab neighbors following 1948 as well ongoing debates surrounding Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967. Together these chapters, which cover the years from the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948 through the first significant mass protests orchestrated by Israel's Arab minority in the 1970s, serve as an introduction to the rest of the text. Chapters 3 through 9 each focus on discrete time periods in Israeli history based on the tenures of governments within Israel. Each of these chapters is divided into five sections that explore the impact of interlocking conflicts on Arab minority status in Israel. Reiter addresses the political setting, the Palestinian (as distinct from Arab Israeli in Reiter's schema) dimension, government policy, Arab

political behavior, and Jewish political behavior. The result is a meticulously organized monograph that allows the reader to proceed easily through decades of complex history and to begin to appreciate the role of interlocking conflicts in creating and maintaining minority status for Arabs in Israel. The material covered in the body of the monograph quite adequately supports Reiter's thesis, even though seasoned scholars of Israeli and Palestinian history will not find much new information in it. The author concludes the book with a chapter that ties together the main themes raised in the body of the text and articulates a theory of interlocking conflicts that could easily be applied to minority politics elsewhere in the world.

Reiter, who served as a deputy advisor on Arab affairs to the Israeli prime minister from 1978 to 1987, has certainly made some helpful contributions in *National Minority, Regional Minority* that go a long way in increasing scholars' understanding of how Arab citizens of Israel have been constructed as a minority and how other regional factors have affected this. However, he implicitly and explicitly accepts and legitimizes the paradigm that Israel has an unequivocal right to exist as an exclusively Jewish state, thus denying the Arab past of the land that forms the state and reinforcing the dominant Israeli paradigm that all too often informs scholars' views of the region. This dramatically colors how one views the construction of Arabs as a minority population by the Israeli state. As an example, Reiter's strong insistence on treating Israeli Arabs (Arab citizens of Israel) as a completely separate category from Palestinians living in the occupied territories offers both a strength and a weakness. On the one hand, scholars often tend to erase the differences between these two groups that have arisen out of the historical processes since 1948. However, demanding a strict analytical separation between the two reinforces the idea that Palestinians (i.e., residents of the occupied territories) are a foreign element to Israeli policy and denies them the right

to have a stake in Israeli policy toward its Arab citizens. It further reinforces Israeli discourse that denies residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip access to citizenship, even though many of them are former residents of the territory that now constitutes Israel. Moreover, the author's choice to divide the book based on successive Israeli governments undermines his claim that government policy is not the ultimate source of tension between the state and its Arab citizens and enforces an ahistorical notion of the Israeli state as the prime actor in this history, with Arabs lacking any real agency of their own. Finally, Reiter ultimately concludes that there need not be a tension between Israel being a Jewish state and being a democratic state. Rather, he wishes that the state's democratic institutions could be strengthened to better incorporate minority populations (like the Arabs) without denying the Jewish nature of the state. This in effect reifies an understanding of Arabs as a minority, and an inferior minority at that, the very notion that Reiter claims he wishes to deconstruct.

In spite of these paradigmatic difficulties, *National Minority, Regional Minority* can still serve as a helpful tool for seasoned scholars capable of sorting through its weaknesses in order to gain a greater understanding of how interlocking conflicts such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Israel's tense relationships with its Arab neighbors, and the difficult relationship between Israel and the broader Muslim world has impacted minority status for Arabs in Israel. The body of Reiter's work contains much rich information that, while not entirely new, considered together offers a better understanding of the complex existence of Arab citizens of Israel. Thus it would be entirely inappropriate to dismiss *National Minority, Regional Minority* completely; rather, as with any scholarly text (especially those on controversial subjects such as Palestine), readers need to deconstruct the biases and worldviews that shaped the

author's argument in order to reach a more full-orbed understanding of the subject at hand.

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Citation: Jeffrey Barnes. Review of Reiter, Yitzhak. *National Minority, Regional Majority: Palestinian Arabs Versus Jews in Israel*. H-Genocide, H-Net Reviews. March, 2016.

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