

of Jewish life to the Levant as a space of communal imagination, of coming together rather than separation. The “danger of Levantinism” has been a stock phrase of those in Israel who have viewed the conflict from an Orientalizing perspective. Hochberg joins some of the authors under discussion in presenting Levantinism as one of the most interesting and promising options for the future—as it had been in the past. The discussion of Shmmas and Swissa is especially fascinating, as both write in Hebrew, two “others” of the Israeli *polis* who subvert its Zionist inbuilt bias. The one, a Palestinian Arab, uses Hebrew to speak about the linked identities of the people involved in the conflict, employing the language of his “enemy” with such skill and sensitivity that his arguments are penetratingly painful to the separatist even as they outline the potentialities of the relationship. The other, an Arab Jew, represents the other “other” of Zionism: the historical Jew, an embarrassment to Zionism with its Westernizing project, a “mere Jew,” but also an Arab Jew—two problematic, censored identities, yet exactly the identities offering some potential for reconciliation in the future.

Hochberg joins a large group of scholars who have recently examined the conceptual foundation of the unitary definition of Judaism, used by Zionism as part of its arsenal, which supposedly justifies whatever is done by Israel. Such challenges of the accepted wisdom of Zionism were recently made by Shlomo Sand in his work on the invention of the Jewish people as a political and ethnic identity; by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman in their work reinterpreting the Bible as a source for historical data; and by Nur Masalha in his work on the Biblification of the conflict. Such work is resonant with the urgent need to deconstruct Zionist mythologies before any lasting solution to the conflict can be found. This new addition is a thoughtful, well-researched, and carefully constructed argument about the nature of the relationship between Arab and Jew, in its many apparitions and configurations. As such, it is an important addition to the progressive discourse around the future, as well as the past, of Palestine.

## WALLS OF WAR

**Blood and Religion: The Unmasking of the Jewish and Democratic State**, by Jonathan Cook. London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006. xiv + 179 pages. Ap-

pendix to p. 182. Notes to p. 208. Select Bibliography to p. 211. Index to p. 222. \$85.00 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

### *Reviewed by Gil Anidjar*

A number of terminological pairs—Zionist fighting words—are deftly decoupled under the impeccably thorough journalistic gaze (and prose) of Jonathan Cook, a British freelancer based in Nazareth whose aim, in this book, is to document the “long, slow process of ethnic cleansing” of Palestinians on all sides of Israel’s walls and fences (p. xii). First among these pairs are the words “Jewish and democratic,” indexed in the book’s subtitle and still resilient in some circles. An illustration of Cook’s style in challenging them: a state in which over 25 percent of citizens are opposed to (rather than disillusioned with) democracy might consider rethinking its “democratic” educational system (p. 105).

Another pair that dominates the saturated air of Middle East commentaries is “left and right,” words intended to serve as relevant political markers. Cook quotes Arnon Sofer who candidly clarifies: “There is no right and left at the moment. It is Jews versus Arabs. The wide center is behind the idea of separation. When it comes to separation, I think only of the Jewish side” (p. 137). This is a reminder that “unilateral separation,” the enduring policy of recent right-wing Israeli governments, “was a policy born of the traditional Israeli left, particularly of the Labor party, not of the right” (p. 145), one that continues to influence the majority of the political spectrum. When it comes to “the state of the Jewish people,” in other words, disagreements are of the order of family quarrels: Israel concerns itself with the precise location of (self-unrecognized) borders—and of Palestinians (and other non-Jews)—but not with the possibility of equality. This is borne out, among other indicators, by the consistent fact that “there is no immigration policy in Israel apart from the privileges afforded solely to Jews under the Law of Return” (p. 125).

A third terminological pair is “religious and secular,” an opposition of ever decreasing significance as both “sides” come to the

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Gil Anidjar teaches in the department of religion at Columbia University. His most recent book, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature*, was published by Stanford University Press in 2008.

same general agreement, namely, that the one clear and present danger (the militarization of rhetoric is everywhere) for the Jews remains the Palestinian enemy. After all, religious Zionists have done no more than take “to its ruthless conclusion the commonly expressed views of Israeli leaders since the birth of the Jewish state” (p. 174). The role of the state in this peculiar and strenuous enterprise of “Judaization” (of religious and secular Jews alike) testifies to the enduring confusion that renders necessary, for the umpteenth time (its exemplarily limpid formulation notwithstanding), the following explanation:

What exactly is the nation of Israel? In other countries, the answer is relatively simple: the French nation, for example, is the collection of people who hold French citizenship; it is, in other words, the sum of French citizens. But the Israeli nation is something different. According to Israel’s founding laws, the state belongs not just to the people who live in Israel, to its citizens (one in five of whom is ethnically Arab), but to the Jewish people wherever they live around the world and whatever other nationalities ... they consider themselves to be. (p. 15)

The confusion, as Cook shows, is strategic (that is, institutional; disciplinary). It is, again, part of a long and systematic process of “Judaization.” Ehud Olmert explains: “To maximize the number of Jews; to minimize the number of Palestinians” (quoted on p. 103). It is hard to imagine any context in which this “demographic” dictum would not sound terribly ominous. Cook demonstrates (with his investigation into the thirteen Palestinian Israelis who died when confronted by Israeli police in October 2000) that the threat is hardly contained to some remote future. A fourth terminological pair here crumbles that was dividing “the occupation” from the “Jewish state” and its (again, self-unrecognized) borders with respect to the Palestinians. What seems to be left out is the pair “blood and religion.” Having insisted on the dominance of a “Jewish consensus,” Cook returns to the opposition between those who define Israeli Jewishness as a matter of ethnicity (“blood”) and those whose program appears to be “religious.” One could argue that the book as a whole aptly demonstrates that the distinction between these two is equally shrinking as both “constituencies” continue to undergo “Judaization.” This is the massive work—the massive war—of state apparatuses devoted to birth management, changes to the already infamous Nationality law, constant propaganda (the “fifth

column” and so forth), financial incentives, education policy, the building of walls and the considerable growth of the “security establishment,” constant government secrecy, and more. Ultimately, and ever so sadly, “Judaization” means that there is no more than another “glass wall” (p. 4) between the “religious” and the “secular”—not quite a threat of civil war perceived by some (p. 176). On the other side, meanwhile, iron and concrete walls grow ever thicker.

## INTRODUCING THE CONFLICT

**Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer**, by Phyllis Bennis. Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2007. ix + 185 pages. Index to p. 196. \$10.00 paper.

### *Reviewed by Adel Samara*

Phyllis Bennis, a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC, and a long-time Middle East analyst, has produced a simple and educational work about a highly complicated conflict. *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer* is—as its title suggests—targeted to newcomers to the issue. It is written in direct question-and-answer format, with questions (and answers) distributed among six parts. Parts 1 through 4 cover, respectively, the current crisis, the players, the recent history of the conflict (from Oslo to the second intifada), and pre-Oslo history from 1967; part 5 addresses current proposed “solutions,” including the road map; and part 6 provides a list of resources for additional information.

The answers that Bennis provides to her self-posed questions get important aspects of the history of Palestine right. As a result of horrific massacres against Jews in capitalist Europe (culminating in the Holocaust), and as a result of Western Europe’s need for a watchdog in Arab homeland to protect its colonial, capitalist interests, Europe assisted the settler colonial Zionist movement to evict Palestinians from the most of their country in 1948 and replaced them with Jewish immigrants. Recent researches shows that mercantile (and later capitalist) Europe was the “pioneer” of a Jewish state in Palestine, a few centuries before Herzl’s political Zionism.

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**Dr. Adel Samara** is an economist living in Ramallah.