of the modern world. And we must all find ways to give voice to the children and other actors who find ways to interrupt unchilding on a day-to-day basis, despite the odds.


REVIEWED BY NATHANIEL SHILS

Three recent books, all written by professors of political science, provide new scholarly perspectives on the dynamics of Palestinian collective action at a time when avenues for meaningful diplomatic progress toward Palestinian rights and liberation are blocked. These books are valuable not only because they explain the past and present but because they provide tools for thinking about alternative pathways into the future beyond the failed formula of the Oslo Accords. Each of the authors addresses questions of political mobilization to add to scholarship on the Palestinian national movement that has flourished in the past decade.*

Yael Zeira’s *The Revolution Within: State Institutions and Unarmed Resistance in Palestine* focuses on individual-level participation in nonviolent protest. Zeira provides an explanation of why some individuals engage in nonviolent protest while others do not. A temporal focus on organized resistance during the period of 1978–89, through which the book returns to a moment in Palestinian history that has largely faded from view both in scholarship and political discussions, helps the author contribute an element of sequencing to prior theories of mobilization. Other scholars have identified organizational capacity and civil society as prerequisites for sustained protest, but this claim is not entirely correct, she argues, pointing to how “a strong Palestinian civil society developed after, and in response to, an increase in protest activity rather than the other way around” during that particular

period of Palestinian history (p. 154). Using evidence from interviews and a large-scale survey, Zeira shows that civil society organizations did not in and of themselves generate nonviolent anti-occupation resistance; but they did help to spread, coordinate, and sustain it in the form of boycotts, strikes, tax refusals, prison visits, demonstrations, clashes, graffiti, and other activities (p. 154).

At the core of the explanation for individual participation lies the role of state-controlled mass institutions—in particular, schools, prisons, and courts—in lowering the barriers to anti-regime protest. Integration into state institutions, Zeira argues, brings together segments of the population that would otherwise remain dispersed and creates entry points into civic networks that provide access to information on tactics and numbers of protestors. This information creates greater certainty around the conditions of protest and makes individuals in these networks more likely to participate. Hence, the civic networks that operate around and through state institutions constitute a “middle layer” of civil society that facilitates nonviolent mobilization (p. 158).

A notable limitation of the book is that the periodization precludes examination of longer-term variation in protest participation over time. In the context of Palestinian history, the question of what impelled those participating in nonviolent resistance to stop or otherwise change their behavior looms large. It is also not clear from Zeira’s analysis whether or how the trends she identifies recur later in time or how the Israeli occupation’s structural transformations through the 1990s and beyond affected participation in resistance. Whether the patterns of mobilization reappear in schools, prisons, and courts under Palestinian control, and whether these would be coded as “state” institutions, are important yet unexamined questions. Here Zeira and Dana El Kurd can be read together productively.

In Polarized and Demobilized: Legacies of Authoritarianism in Palestine, El Kurd presents authoritarian trends in the Palestinian Authority (PA) that will be familiar to many readers, but she analyzes the relationship between international forces in Palestine, authoritarianism, and demobilization more deeply and systematically than any other available accounts. The book is guided by two research questions that El Kurd answers, using Palestine as the central case: “What demobilizes a once-mobilized society?” and “How does international involvement amplify or suppress these dynamics?” (p. 4). Although the PA may seem like an anomalous case for the study of authoritarian regimes because it operates under Israeli occupation, El Kurd argues convincingly that her theory explains cases with varying degrees of sovereignty, including both authoritarian states and authoritarian subnational entities.

El Kurd argues that the PA more successfully demobilized the Palestinians than the Israeli occupation precisely because it is an indigenous authoritarian regime, which makes it capable of more deeply penetrating society through co-optation and covert repression. The causes of demobilization are not, however, internal, but rather were the result of U.S. involvement that encouraged authoritarian trends in the PA. By insulating its
leadership from its domestic constituency and making its enduring operation contingent on responsiveness to international pressures. U.S. involvement polarized Palestinians around the axis of regime alliance in a manner that demobilized much of society. This process polarized Palestinians around the axis of regime alliance, which in turn demobilized large segments of society. With evidence from interviews and surveys, El Kurd shows that this process was not the intentional product of decisions by Palestinian elites, but that “members of the PA became divorced from their own people in spite of their intentions” (p. xii). Many of these claims may not in themselves be new or surprising, but El Kurd explains the mechanisms through which the process operates with unprecedented depth and precision while engaging with comparative scholarship on authoritarian consolidation, social movements, mobilization, and political polarization.

The theory is based on a particular kind of principal-agent problem in which the agent—political elites in the regime—comes to have multiple principals: both the society it purports to represent and international patrons. The effects of international involvement are conditional on the preferences of the international patron, which might be for democracy, stability, or some mix thereof, and which interact with the preferences of the local society. This preference divergence between the regime and its society combines with dependency on the international patron to encourage authoritarian practices that generate polarization, which inhibits social cohesion and leads to demobilization. Both inclusionary authoritarian strategies (co-optation) and exclusionary ones (repression) generate polarization, but repression does so to a greater degree. This part of the research involved “lab-in-field” experiments conducted at Birzeit University using students as the sample, and El Kurd is admirably transparent and honest about the obstacles to data collection and the limits of what the experiment can demonstrate. She also includes brief case studies of Islamist groups and leftist parties to illustrate how repression of the former and co-optation of the latter increased polarization and inhibited cooperation by intensifying insularity within groups and grievances between them. Her findings are further supported by an original dataset on mobilization in the West Bank that she uses to track geographic and temporal variations in protests. The data demonstrates that although the level of grievances against Israel across all three areas of the West Bank are comparable, political mobilization has declined systematically in areas under PA control and is most prevalent in areas under direct Israeli control.

In contrast to Zeira’s and El Kurd’s books, which were both the culminations of doctoral dissertations at universities in the United States, Arafat and Abbas: Portraits of Leadership in a State Postponed is a short, accessible book that collects and expands upon writing that Menachem Klein has published in various outlets, mainly the Palestine-Israel Journal, +972, and the Hebrew-language Local Call. The book is an account of the role of the two successive leaders in shaping the trajectory of the Palestinian national movement, but it
can also be read in dialogue with scholarship on the role of national movement leaderships in facilitating or constraining collective action. It complements El Kurd’s structural account of authoritarianism and demobilization with a more personalized perspective on leadership. The profiles of Arafat and Abbas are not biographies. Klein’s comparison of the two leaders serves as an interpretive lens to assess the development of Palestinian politics over time. Although Klein includes some consideration of Arafat and Abbas’s individual backgrounds, most of the discussion is about the Oslo years onward and, as the book progresses, Arafat’s presence recedes to become primarily a point of contrast with Klein’s depiction of Abbas.

The question of how each leader approached national liberation is pervasive, and Abbas receives the most attention in this regard. Klein portrays Abbas as a “deserted peace seeker” who understands the process of liberation to entail the gradual emergence of the state of Palestine from a national, rights-based discourse guided by three underlying principles: operation of the PA as a rational and responsible entity, expansion of international support for state building and recognition, and “imposition” of a peace agreement on Israel (pp. 28, 89–90). This approach has been predicated on a belief that moderation and clarity about goals would be rewarded with international support and would help to mobilize Israelis in favor of a two-state solution (pp. 43–44). But the international sympathy Abbas garnered came without sufficient support for the political agenda, and Israel did not become the partner he sought. What diplomatic successes he did accomplish have not compensated for the lack of progress toward independence, and his foreign policy has reached a dead end. Klein portrays both Arafat and Abbas as “weak authoritarian presidents” with similarly tragic positions at the ends of their lives insofar as neither achieved a liberated Palestine.

It is no secret that domestically, Abbas’s political base has shrunk and left an isolated ruling apparatus, weakened democratic institutions, and a polity far from independence. Echoing critical voices in Palestinian politics, Klein provides accounts of personalization, clientelism, and authoritarianism of the regime. He explains that the ruling apparatus actively prevents the popular mobilization that would be required to revitalize the national movement and the collective struggle for liberation: “Abbas considers the Palestinians incapable of running an unarmed intifada,” yet he has not allowed the necessary organizational capacity to develop such a process, and he has “consistently rejected Marwan Barghouti’s request to establish a central apparatus to coordinate non-violent popular resistance” (p. 32). The security forces block regular nonviolent civil society demonstrations and prevent the spread of those they allow, which become “anti-occupation ritual and catharsis rather than a snowball gathering momentum” (pp. 32, 85–86). Nonetheless, Klein deems the rule of the PA “incomplete authoritarianism” (p. 110) and cites as evidence various instances of resistance, including strikes and protests over the past five years, judges fighting the usurpation of their powers, and the presence of autonomous armed groups in refugee camps. Like El Kurd, he notes that Palestinians living outside of PA control, mainly in Jerusalem and Gaza, have at times taken the initiative to resist into their own hands, with most of the popular nonviolent protests occurring in these areas.

Klein presents a mixed assessment of activists of the younger generation. On the one hand, he recognizes their potential as agents of change but, on the other, he judges that they lack political and organizational skills. Despite the inspiration that the Arab Spring provided some young
Palestinians, he views discussions on the internet as devoid of institution building or coordinated action beyond the anti-normalization campaign. He suggests that although the adoption of the settler-colonialism model and native rights discourse links up with Western academic and activist networks, and provides both a language for rights claims and a sense of intellectual liberation, young activists “do not translate these abstract concepts to a detailed alternative political programme, nor do they provide convincing answers to the heavy cost of giving up the two-state solution” (pp. 121–22). What the native rights discourse does establish, however, is a discursive foundation for partnership between Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and the Palestinian citizens of Israel. Klein sees this as part of a trend in which Israeli-Palestinian relations have shifted from territorial border conflict to ethnic conflict, as he theorized in his book The Shift: Israel-Palestine from Border Struggle to Ethnic Conflict (Hurst, 2010).

In the current moment, Palestinians and Israelis are “trapped between what is unachievable today—a two-state solution—and what is unrealistic to accomplish—a unitary non-ethnic democracy based on the principle of one-man one-vote” while “an egalitarian federal state with two ethnic components is also not on the horizon” (p. 37). This situation makes Abbas a “Sisyphian leader” who “is destined to carry on a mission while his qualifications and international and domestic circumstances make this mission almost impossible to accomplish” (pp. 33–34). “Politics for him is the art of the possible, where all desirable outcomes are impossible” (p. 70).

Despite this unpropitious characterization, Klein sees possibilities for change in both the moderation and institutionalization of Hamas and the succession struggle for the post-Abbas era. As regards the latter, he identifies five types of successors in this struggle: “the alternative movement, the Abbas-compatible leader, the security service man, the ousted, and the popular leader in captivity” (pp. 153, 153–66). Although he does not provide much guidance on how to think about the likelihood of any one of them coming into power, he devotes the most space to the “popular leader in captivity,” in other words, Barghouti.

Klein reconstructs Barghouti’s political program based on a 2016 document he acquired, which he says sets the same goals as those of Abbas and the Arab Peace Initiative but proposes alternative means, namely turning from internationalization to action in the Palestinian arena (pp. 162–65). This shift would entail “recruiting the masses to a concerted, sustained and popular nonviolent struggle” with consecutive stages of protest and transforming the PA into an organization that would support this struggle (p. 163). Klein is forthright about the obstacles to the plan, including Israeli and U.S. opposition, but he also suggests that it is too important to dismiss out of hand. History rarely unfolds according to such blueprints for action, but Klein clearly thinks that such plans should be deliberated over since they can be adapted to the circumstances in which activists will find themselves in the future.

Each of the reviewed books contains further implications for what lies ahead. Zeira persuasively argues that state institutions are going to remain an important site of organizing and mobilization despite technological change and new forms of media that might make her theory appear obsolete. The implied conclusion is that anyone interested in renewed mobilization should keep an eye on state institutions. Despite his reserved enthusiasm for the Barghouti camp’s agenda of popular nonviolent struggle, Klein concludes that “de-colonization is harder today than ever” (p. 173). As the Israeli right bears down on annexation, he thinks the implementation of its plans would likely lead
to balkanization of the region with consequences similar to the breakup of Yugoslavia (p. 169). This vision represents a real fear, but it looms as an undertheorized threat. Presumably, Klein means an intensely violent escalation of the conflict with attempts at ethnic cleansing that would ultimately be stopped by outside intervention. Yet the precise dynamics of such a deterioration are underspecified, and he has little to say about the forms of Palestinian agency that might contribute to or prevent such a catastrophic course of events. All he suggests is that these difficulties may “fertilise the ground for a future heroic liberation struggle,” though he predicts that based on the trajectory of post-colonial Arab states, post-colonial Palestine would likely remain presidential-authoritarian, with leaders who justify their power on the grounds of preventing the indirect return of Israeli colonialism (p. 173). These two visions appear as less desirable alternatives to the possibility that renewed nonviolent popular politics could both liberate and democratize Palestine.

El Kurd treats trends among the younger generation of Palestinian activists more generously. While she agrees with Klein that young people engaging in collective action and civil disobedience are unconnected to existing institutions, making their protests fleeting and depriving their demands of staying power, she thinks the disconnect means there is room for the development of new organizations and creative strategies of dissent (p. 146). El Kurd writes favorably of initiatives to revive the Palestine Liberation Organization, which encompasses institutions she deems capable of holding the PA leadership accountable. Like Klein, she sees the greatest promise among Palestinians living in areas outside PA control, as well as in the renewed activism among Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the reconnection between them and Palestinians living under occupation.

Nevertheless, as discussed above, the preferences of international patrons impose powerful constraints and incentives on certain segments of Palestinian society and leadership. Neither the current U.S. administration nor likely the next is disposed to support mass mobilization or radical leadership change. It may be possible to shift the focus of Palestinian strategy back to the Palestinian arena, but even if mass mobilization were to occur, there is great uncertainty as to whether it would be channeled into the strategic framework required to drive a successful liberation project. Of all the authors whose books are under review, Klein is the only one to directly address questions of national strategy, and he does not do so in a systematic manner. Future research might link scholarship on mobilization, leadership, and movement organization to develop more systematic ways of thinking about the formation of Palestinian strategy.

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REVIEWED BY OMAR ZAHZAH

Theoretical paradigms are both instruments of ontological clarification and objects of hermeneutic scrutiny. The latter function keeps the former provisionally intact while ultimately preventing the total calcification of outmoded epistemologies within intellectual formations. This becomes especially