
This volume uses the majority-minority framework to analyse the dynamics of the historical relationship between the founding (and later the national) institutions of the state of Israel, Israeli society and the Palestinian Arab Citizens of Israel, termed PAI in the volume. This acronym incorporates a marker of national identity and of political belonging and is used here to indicate “an indigenous and national minority” (pp. 1 and 10). One of the questions which this book tries to address is when PAI politics in Israel become ethnonational, especially considering that the relations between the majority and the minority started off on the basis of the minority’s quiescence in the 1950s and 1960s, a statement that recurs in the volume (pp. 13, 32, 67, 70–72, 82). Within this framework, Haklai looks at which factors contributed to the transformation of PAI politics from a struggle that he categorizes in terms of class—not by chance historically, the minority was mobilized through the Communist Party—to one of ethnicity, thus making “ethnonational demands on the state” (p. 1).

One of the answers can be found in the changes that the institutional structure of the state of Israel underwent: the more the majority fragmented politically and retreated from key areas of public and economic life—e.g., with the liberalization waves of the 1980s—the more the political activism of the minority took an ethnonationalist turn, voiced by organizations which claimed to speak on its behalf. And while this structural explanation certainly plays an important part in Haklai’s argument, the author also discusses a more broadly intended cultural dimension, which becomes central for the argument in the second part of the volume: the global emergence of the ethnonationalist discourse in the 1990s, starting for example from the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and culminating in the 2007 UN “Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.” In this context, it is worth highlighting the fact that Haklai does not adopt the paradigm of uniqueness so often applied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; as he states, majority-minority relations “are of global relevance” (p. 10) and the lack of a comparative perspective would hinder more than advance understanding.

This volume is divided into six chapters that cover the history of relations between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority in the 20th century, from the British Mandate into the first decade of the 21st century. Chapter one, entitled “Transitions in Minority Political Activism, Grievances, and Institutional Configurations,” falls outside of the chronological timeline, as it expands
the theoretical argument. Central to this chapter, and thus to the book, are various notions and/or variables which are explained and articulated in the first part of the chapter and then checked against the PAI case in the second part. Among them, the notion of the autonomy of the state, i.e. its ability to realize objectives beyond the “demand and interests of organized social groups” (p. 14); secondly, the idea that “a minority can react differently to institutionalized disadvantage in different time periods” (p. 17); thirdly, the concept that there is no correlation between economic disadvantage and ethnic grievance; and fourthly, the role played by minority leaders in reacting to the policies of the majority. We are then led through an analysis of two last variables: state extensiveness and cohesion. The former is defined as “the variable range of social and territorial space occupied by the institutional infrastructure that constitutes the state”; the latter refers to “the extent to which the polity in question behaves as an integrated and unified entity” (p. 26). To support the comparative approach, Haklai discusses each of these variables, comparing the case of PAI in Israel with various other national European or extra-European cases. It is in this section that Haklai summarizes the history of the relationship between Israel and its PAI minority from his theoretical standpoint.

In an ethnically dominated state, an institutional balance in which political fragmentation and state withdrawal from public space infringe on central government capacity to control the minority—but not to the extent that the dominant group is forced to renegotiate its dominant position, despite organized minority opposition—is conducive to the formation of minority political organization that champion minority nationalism and make assertive ethnic demands on the state. (p. 27)

Chapter two, entitled “State Formation and the Creation of National Boundaries,” looks at the formative period of both the State of Israel and of the Arab-Israeli (and Israeli-Palestinian) conflict, i.e. the British Mandate. Here Haklai again uses a comparative framework to downplay the uniqueness of Israel’s process of state formation and to explain how in Israel, as in various other places, one section of the population—usually the elite—came to own and dominate the state, affirming its ethnic connection to it through the process of state formation. With the partial exception of this comparative perspective, this chapter does add much to what historiography has already produced on the period of the British Mandate. Not by chance, Haklai focuses on land, immigration and institution-building (World Zionist Organization [WZO], the Jewish Agency, the Histadrut, and Mapa’i), topics which have been widely explored. The use of Ronen Shamir’s “double colonialism” interpretative frame-