

Introduction

The relatively young field of “Israel Studies” continues to thrive. The essays gathered in this volume showcase sixty-five recent books (more than half of them published in languages other than English) on a wide range of topics relating to Israel. In the tradition of the preceding five volumes in the *Books on Israel* series, this collection is interdisciplinary in nature, encompassing contributions from social science and the humanities. Each chapter goes beyond the limits of the standard review “essay” to use selected works as starting-points for original examinations of the state of scholarship within various fields dealing with Israel. At the same time, the contributors explore recent changes in Israeli society and politics as revealed through their respective fields of expertise.

Volume 6 includes several distinctive features, reflecting the changing interests among Israel Studies researchers and writers. One is the scholarly “trialogue” that opens the volume. A reassessment of Israel’s policies leading to the 1956 Sinai/Suez War, this tripartite exchange takes the debates involving the “new historians” onto new ground. A second innovation is the inclusion of essays specifically devoted to recent publications dealing with political, social, and educational changes among Arab citizens of Israel. Another novel feature is the closing series of essays offering perspectives on Israel Studies from around the world.

Many of the essays in volume 6 are themselves explicitly interdisciplinary, and readers will note that the volume is not divided, as in the past, into sections on literature, politics, history, or other traditional disciplines. Rather, many essays offer multiple approaches to pressing issues in both academia and in Israeli society in general. So, for instance, Rachel Feldhay Brenner’s essay on the Holocaust and the post-Holocaust generation encompasses history, literature, and psychology, while Ruth Amir and Leah Rosen’s essay on multiculturalism deals with law, anthropology, sociology, history and philosophy. In similar fashion, David Newman discusses space and territory by combining questions of geography, sociology, and political science. These are but a few examples. The multifaceted essays col-

lected in this volume offer not only interdisciplinary breadth but also reflect, and contribute to, an exciting integration of scholarly approaches in the field of Israel Studies.

Scholarship about Israel is no stranger to controversy, criticism, and self-criticism, and this volume explores and fully reflects many current issues of contention in Israeli academic circles and society at large. Volume 6 of *Books on Israel* grapples, inter alia, with the complex problems of multiculturalism in the Jewish State, inequalities in the political and economic status of Arab and Jewish citizens, the relationship between the state and Jewish religious identity, the best path to peace, and the impact of newly available archival material on the treatment of Israeli history. Thanks to the variety of perspectives adopted by the volume's contributors, readers will not find dull dogma or predictable uniformity, but will rather get an authentic taste of the lively clash of ideas and visions that increasingly characterizes the field. Whether this is a sign of the robust state of Israel Studies or an unhealthy penchant for self-excoriation is itself a question in dispute. The persistence of a post-Zionist perspective among many of the essays reflects the domination of Israel Studies in the 1990s by a wave of scholars questioning the ideological and cultural foundations of Zionism. Evidence of a scholarly backlash had already begun as this collection was being prepared for publication. The editors of the next volume of *Books on Israel* will no doubt want to explore the emergent stream of work that challenges the current dominant school of "post-Zionist" analysis. Whatever the merits of the post-Zionist and anti-post-Zionist arguments, the essays in this volume reflect the fact that some of the sharpest criticism of Israeli society and politics comes from within Israel—at the very time, paradoxically, when writers in Germany, Italy, and China seem to be abandoning many inherited anti-Israel positions in favor of a more nuanced and sympathetic understanding of the country and its people.

Since the preparation of this book, Israel and the Palestinians have become locked in another round of sustained violence, with the "Madrid/Oslo" peace process in tatters. Clearly, these new events have significant social, political, economic and cultural implications that no academic writing can safely prophesy; yet, our understanding of Israel in both calm and troubled times is enhanced with the benefit of the background provided by the academic contributions gathered together here.

We, the editors, have endeavored to produce a volume that conveys an accurate overview of the issues and the scholarship in the arena of Israel Studies at the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In editing individual submissions, we have sought to help each author articulate his or her own views, regardless of our personal visions of how we would like to see the field or Israeli society develop. The opinions of the contributors are their own. Our mandate, as editors, has been to accurately convey the vigorous discussions that mark, and contribute to, the evolving field of Israel Studies.