

FORCED OR VOLUNTARY LOYALTIES

Surrounded: Palestinian Soldiers in the Israeli Military, by Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009. 112 pages. Afterword to p. 125. Acknowledgments to p. 131. Notes to p. 181. Bibliography to p. 213. \$24.95 hard.

Reviewed by Nabla Abdo

In *Surrounded: Palestinian Soldiers in the Israeli Military*, Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, a visiting scholar at New York University's Department of Social and Cultural Analysis, discusses a contested area in the lives of Palestinians in Israel: Arabs—albeit a minority—joining the Israeli military. Considering the preexisting rigid national/ethnic conflict and contradictions between Palestinian and Jewish citizens within a state that defines itself as Jewish, the author skillfully asks why some Palestinian Arabs voluntarily join the Israeli military. Although the phenomenon of Arab soldiering in Israel represents only a minority of this group, it remains worth exploring and this is what Kanaaneh undertakes in this book.

The book provides an interesting analysis of the class considerations and economic circumstances of individuals choosing to join the Israeli army. Indeed, the majority of Kanaaneh's interviewees rationalize their service as a means to improve their economic status. Operating from the belief—albeit questionable—that “you must give to

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receive," they see their involvement in the army and other security services as a means to upgrade their citizenship status and gain employment. For some, joining the military is understood as a way to acquire a piece of land, a decent pension, a good salary, or subsidized education for their children. For others, especially those from unrecognized villages, it is seen as a tool to avoid expropriation from their land or to procure a building permit. Although a few individuals were able to obtain some of the perks offered by the military, Kanaaneh's research suggests that the hopes of many others were dashed.

In the military, Arabs are minoritized and ethnicized along religious lines (they are restricted to a Druze and a Bedouin unit), making it difficult, if not impossible, to be promoted or even assume high positions in the military. This difficulty is eloquently captured by Kanaaneh, who asserts that military policies and actions mimic those used by the Israeli state at large: divide and rule. Having said that, Kanaaneh does not discuss whether these individuals have tried employment alternatives outside of the military. Such a parallel would have been useful given the common knowledge that less- (or non-)educated Palestinian citizens are relatively more absorbed in the Israeli labor market as cheap laborers than educated ones.

This brings us to the second theme of the book, namely that the colonial policy of divide and rule is inherent in the indoctrination process that Arab soldiers (or policemen and border guards) undergo and that this policy sheds light on the rise of local armed conflicts among Muslims, Christians, and Druze. Like their fellow Jews, Arab soldiers are required to demonstrate loyalty to the State of Israel, the Israeli flag, Magen David (the star of David), and the principle of Zionism, a process that turns them into "good Arabs." While still considered second-class citizens in a state that excludes them from its own definition, the military fosters a sense of masculinity in these soldiers—an Arab man with a gun! In the past few years, several family and clan feuds have erupted in Arab villages, including Ramleh and, more recently, Shefa Amr, where homes were burnt, cars destroyed, and people killed based on what was described by official Israeli media as their religious background. Druze men with guns were involved, but the state and police turned deaf

ears to these incidents. Kanaaneh argues that this state silence was little more than a calculated policy intended to show the advantages of carrying arms and to entice others to enlist.

Explaining away this phenomenon at the individual level, as this book does, provides only a partial understanding of the increased phenomenon of violence within the Arab community in Israel. The case of Shefa Amr, which I witnessed during a field visit in summer 2009, suggests a more complicated problem. The incidents erupted during the anniversary of the killing of residents by the Israeli military. As most Arab critics have pointed out, the violence was stirred from "above" as a means to avoid any collective act of solidarity planned by the Arab Higher Committee in protest of state racism in general, and of the setting free of the Jewish perpetrators in particular. In this case, Arab men (especially Druze) in the military were used by the state to flaunt religious "differences" over national unity. It is important to note that because of their mandatory conscription, the Druze feel, or are made to feel by their fellow Palestinian Arabs, that their national identity is suspect. These incidents highlight not only the sense of masculinity bestowed on Arab soldiers by the military but also the state's overt and covert policies aimed at breaking apart Palestinian national identity.

An equally strong theme addressed in this book is Kanaaneh's insistence on treating the concept of identity as fluid and not as fixed in time or space as is often assumed. While the literature on identity politics and the critique thereof have adequately dealt with this issue, the question of national identity, especially under colonialism or occupation, has hardly been discussed within the Palestinian context. Nationalism is often taken for granted and is left unquestioned. Kanaaneh, however, maintains that living conditions and harsh circumstances are bound to alter one's sense of identity and force one to choose different loyalties. She insists that Arab men's first loyalty is to their families and that if they fail to provide within their national boundaries they move beyond such spaces and join the "other." The pressures placed on this marginalized minority by practical needs and living conditions therefore make notions of national loyalty and identity of secondary importance to the

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economic and social security to be gained by joining the military.

In this book, Kanaaneh dispels the myth that ethnic conflicts between Jews and Arabs have existed from time immemorial and argues that while Palestinians join the military to improve their citizenship status, those who are resentful are so not because of “personal animosity or a clash of civilization—but as a result of experiences of structural ethnic discrimination in the military. Ethnic conflicts thus emerge as a product rather than simply a precursor of militarization” (pp. 91–2).