

RECENT BOOKS

THE ISRAELI STATE AND INTRA-PALESTINIAN VIOLENCE

Not Just a Soccer Game: Colonialism and Conflict among Palestinians in Israel, by Magid Shihade. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011. 224 pages. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Grant Aubrey Farred

Magid Shihade's *Not Just a Soccer Game: Colonialism and Conflict among Palestinians in Israel* turns on a "small" incident. On 11 April 1981, a football ("soccer") match took place between teams from Kafr Yassif (predominantly Christian) and Julis (predominantly Druze), two Arab villages in Galilee, Israel. "During the match," fighting broke out between the rival supporters, causing injuries, and one fan from each village was killed (p. 2). Despite an early promise of a negotiated resolution, the Julis leadership later refused to engage in *sulba* (reconciliation) so that a *hudna* (truce) might be achieved. Eventually, "aggressors from Julis" attacked Kafr Yassif—causing considerable damage to the village—while "police forces . . . stood watching the violence unfold and did not intervene" (p. 6). Calls for an independent investigation were ignored, and eventually the Israeli government absolved the tactics of its police force, at once angering the Kafr Yassif community and affirming their view that the Israeli state supported the Druze, in no small measure because of their conscription into the Israeli army.

Though Shihade insists that the Arab community assume responsibility for the lack of unity among its various constituencies, the main target of his argument is the Israeli state: "Although there has been much work on Israel, its role in sectarian violence among Palestinian Arab citizens is barely discussed" (p. 152). In the event of Kafr Yassif, the Druze from Julis were able to attack

their Christian neighbors because of the direct and indirect support of Israel's repressive forces. The Israeli police, who would not allow such violence to take place among Jews, stood by idle and indifferent while the armed Druze laid waste—for at least two hours—to Kafr Yassif.

Shihade uses the ill-fated Kafr Yassif-Julis football match as his first point of critique of intra-Arab conflict in Israel, locating the event within the larger project of Israel's antipathy and hostility to its Arab population. It is not, Shihade emphasizes, that Israel might or might not be a democracy; that matter is settled. Israel has no intention of granting equality before the law to its Arab citizens, a political misnomer if there ever was one. What Shihade demonstrates is the effects, at both a historic (the Nakba) and an everyday (Kafr Yassif) level, of Arab-Israelis' peculiar non-status. Arab-Israelis are a historical anomaly, native-born citizens who are lacking in citizenship because they are not Jews. They are citizens whose history and right to land and equal education are routinely ignored or trampled upon; they are citizens who have considerably fewer rights than Jews who have never been to Israel, but can, at any moment, "return" as full Israeli citizens because they are Jews.

The accomplishment of *Not Just a Soccer Game* is that it locates Druze exceptionality in its proper historic place and brings to light the full pernicious consequences of Arab vulnerability. Shihade's is not a work that denounces the Druze, although he rightly and repeatedly calls into question this community's collaboration with the Israeli state. *Not Just a Soccer Game* is a considered explanation of why *sulba* fails and why a *hudna* cannot hold. Kafr Yassif is placed within the larger context of Arab—Christian, Druze, Muslim, in all their various articulations—politics, in a lineage that extends far beyond the Nakba. The problem with *Not Just a Soccer Game* is that, far too quickly, the event—the game that makes the thinking of these issues possible in the first

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instance—is overwhelmed by critiques that are all too familiar. Justified, and necessary, yes, but Shihade's line of attack is well known and does not lead to a new thinking of the violence that attended the game. However, in this way Shihade's work is inadvertently instructive because it is symptomatic: *Not Just a Soccer Game* belongs, before itself, to a particular mode of thinking that is politically explicable, anti-Zionist, insistent in its demand for full citizenship for all non-Jews in Israel, and not without a broad swath of international support.

In the very recognizability of the argument lie its political limitations. In order to fashion an effective critique of the violent disenfranchisement that is at the very core of the Zionist project in Israel, it will be necessary to think out of the event (Kafr Yassif) an argument that does not already know itself, an argument that we do not already know, or recognize too quickly. The extant arguments against Israeli violence have struggled to achieve their desired goal not because they lack veracity (here one need only think of the assiduous labor of an Ilan Pappé). Nor is it because they do not have a claim to the moral high ground: the violence done to the Palestinian people is unarguable. Not for nothing has the analogy between Zionism and apartheid been evoked.

Not Just a Soccer Game is a solidly researched work. What its argument lacks is originality: the author already knows, well beforehand, what the tenor and “destination” of the argument is going to be. As a result, there is nothing in the research that can surprise the author (all the sources support his position) or give him pause to consider another possible line of thought. The only way to make a more engaging argument—that is, one that draws the reader in by demonstrating how to think without an endpoint that is already established—would require the author's intellectual openness to new possibilities: to think every condition, even the most familiar one, as if it were being taken up for the very first time. Under no circumstance should the argument know itself so obviously in advance. Every argument can only

benefit from a thinking that gives itself (wholly) over to the game in which it is involved.