

Human Rights & Human Welfare

Volume 9 | Issue 1

Article 11

2009

Nigel Parsons on Israel's Occupation by Neve Gordon. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2008. 318pp.

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Recommended Citation

Parsons, Nigel (2009) "Nigel Parsons on Israel's Occupation by Neve Gordon. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2008. 318pp.," *Human Rights & Human Welfare*: Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 11.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/hrhw/vol9/iss1/11>



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Abstract

A review of:

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Keywords

Human rights, Humanitarian action, Israel, Palestine

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In his acknowledgements, Neve Gordon tells of a meeting in Jerusalem at which the "Humanitarian Action in Catastrophe" group identified an "urgent need to theorize Israel's occupation" (xiii). The result is this book, Israel's Occupation. It is an impressive and important achievement, and one to which future analysts will be obliged to refer. Remit in hand, Gordon turns to Foucault, specifically his tripartite division of power: sovereign power (law and punishment); disciplinary power (surveillance and correction); and biopower (population management). These conceptual lenses are brought to bear on a raft of historical and contemporary empirical data, including military orders and various reflections by staff from the Israel Defence Forces' (IDF) bureaucracy of occupation, the Civil Administration. Much of the material is brought into English from Hebrew for the first time. The result is a detailed and penetrating historical analysis of four decades of military rule and colonization in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

Three features of Israeli rule are emphasized. First, the occupier is constrained: following Timothy Mitchell, Gordon stresses that state power—even IDF power in the OPT—is not without limits. It follows that Gordon is mindful of Palestinian agency. Second, the occupation is dynamic: perhaps the book's major achievement is to illustrate the ways in which Israeli rule has evolved over four decades. Gordon's "genealogy of control" (17) traces a shifting emphasis within the Foucauldian spectrum. Third, Israeli policies have often been ill-chosen, mutually incompatible, and consequently prone to backfire. In Gordon's terms, the "excesses and contradictions" (15 and throughout) operating between Israel's forms of control have variously cancelled each other out or, worse still, generated the very resistance they sought to preclude. Two intifadas and the rise of Hamas—for which Gordon provides a cogent and persuasive structural account—attest to that.

The key to occupation is captured in Israel's approach to human rights. Flush with victory in 1967, IDF Advocate General Shamgar advised the government *not* to apply the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention to Palestinian lands. It was, however, to be applied selectively to Palestinian residents. The 1907 Hague Convention was upheld, in accordance with which Israel used the pre-occupation legal order in the West Bank and Gaza, but only within a framework of IDF military orders. Gordon builds on Lisa Hajjar's analysis to show how the occupier systematically distinguishes between land and people and then selectively interprets the law to promote Zionist colonization. The "excesses and contradictions" inherent to this land/people dichotomy will later determine the malfunctioning of the Palestinian Authority (PA): as Gordon puts it, "how can one manage a population without controlling the space it occupies and the resources within this space?" (172).

The main body of the book is organized into eight chapters. Chapter One addresses Israel's machinery of control, the legal and institutional organization of the occupation. This is followed in Chapter Two by an examination of the first years of occupation up to 1980, during which the operative word was "normalization." In this phase, disciplinary methods and biopower prevail. The latter becomes evident in multiple policies at odds with contemporary experience: Palestinian women are encouraged to give birth in the sanitized conditions of a hospital;

Palestinian cattle are inoculated by Israeli veterinarians; the IDF monitors the indigenous food basket, and takes evident pride in improvement. This is in part because healthy Palestinians provide essential cheap labor for the core economy. Nevertheless, the contrast with the early twenty-first century is striking. Tertiary education is permitted to expand by way of cementing an image of normalcy. But the edifice is unstable and, in Chapter Three, the dynamics that generated the first Intifada become evident. Living standards have risen, but without economic development: absent colonial investment in the Palestinian economy, and with remittances from the Israeli core and the Gulf diminishing, educated nationalist cadres prepare for mobilization.

Chapter Four documents the occupier's fruitless struggle to squelch Palestinian national identity, while Chapter Five addresses the colonial manipulation of space through civilian colonization. The eruption of the first Intifada marks a new emphasis on hard, sovereign power, explored in Chapter Six. The final two chapters explain the institutional innovation of the PA and its almost inevitable failure. Chapter Seven casts the PA as a means of "outsourcing the occupation" (169). Chapter Eight examines the post-al-Aqsa intifada "separation principle" (197), in which Israel abandons all interest in (and responsibility for) Palestinians in favor of withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and construction of the separation wall in the West Bank.

Gordon's taut analysis is periodically leavened with some engaging analogies. Israeli settlers are likened to turtles with extra-territorial "personal jurisdiction" as protective Israeli laws follow them around the OPT (28). Israel's General Security Service (aka Shabak or Shin Bet), operates "like the mythological Indian character Ravana, the ten-headed king who has twenty hands" (31). Less charmingly, the IDF's practice of using "human shields" reduces Palestinians to a source of biological "flak jackets" (207).

In light of the book's focus, the restriction of analysis to the occupation is apposite. In the longer run, one does wonder if Zionism and Israel *per se* might not be read constructively from a biopolitical perspective. Demographic adjustment, after all, has been central to the Zionist project from the outset, and demography continues to figure large on the list of contemporary Israeli anxieties (as Gordon notes in his treatment of the separation wall, 215). Demography also raises the matter of the right of return: Gordon identifies service delivery failures behind the PA's "legitimation crisis" (192), but there might have been scope here for disaggregating Palestinian society to highlight the causal significance of refugees in the uprising. One minor quibble: for a reader looking to take the agenda forward, a bibliography would have been helpful. In sum, as model of applied conceptualization, this book looks set to inform future research- and research agendas-for some time to come.

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