

cally, an embarrassment even to the parents who bore and raised what they had created. Homosexuals have also always been marginalized, not only by their enemies, but also by parents eager to disown their own children.” Other shining examples of modern Yiddishkayt, according to Karlen, include Lennie Bruce, Meyer Lansky, Sandy Koufax and Woodie Guthrie. Go figure!

Karlen says that the future of Yiddish and Yiddishkayt may well

rest in the mouths of the gay community and Khasidic families, those who continue to use the language in daily conversation, and especially not in the mouths of the “professional smarty-pants;” “these academics ensure that Yiddish these days is largely seen but not heard.”

Karlen writes in a populist, in-your-face style, deliberately avoiding academic terms, and can sometimes sound very “catty”, as when denigrating Barbra

Streisand at length (and for what purpose?). Editing seems almost nonexistent, which is shameful from as prominent a press as HarperCollins.

Instead of this book, I recommend two others that truly capture the soul of the Yiddish experience: *Yiddish: a Nation of Words*, by Miriam Weinstein (also a journalist) and *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish*, by Dovid Katz, the preeminent Yiddish scholar. ♦

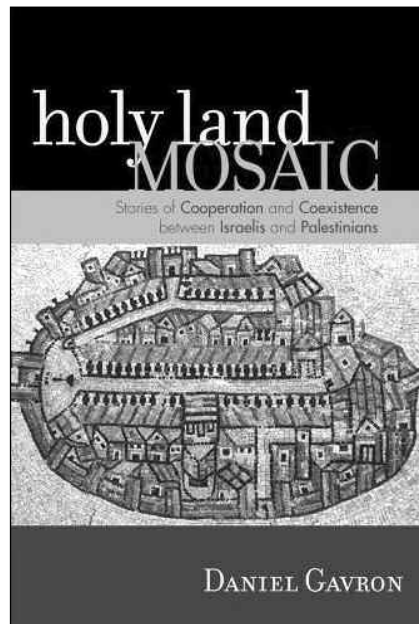
## HOLY LAND MOSAIC: STORIES OF COOPERATION AND COEXISTENCE BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS

Daniel Gavron. Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008, 197 pages.

Reviewed by Yakov M. Rabkin

Unlike many books about Israel/Palestine relations, this one conveys some optimism. The author, a British-born journalist who settled in Israel several decades ago, sets out to show that cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians has been viable and productive. He begins by quoting Dwight Eisenhower: “... people in the long run are going to do more to promote peace than our governments. Indeed, I think that people want peace so much that one of these days governments had better get out of the way and let them have it.” The book shows that the government that has to get “out of the way” is the government of Israel, which used to prohibit all contacts with the PLO and continues to isolate Israelis from Palestinians by intricate regulations and, of course, by the Separation Barrier, also known as the Apartheid Wall. The reader will see how detrimental the dominant attitudes of the Israeli elites have been for both Israelis and Palestinians. Presenting facts of Israeli aggression against Palestinians, the author abstains from condemning it, which helps him avoid

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sounding polemical. (See, for instance, his account of a house demolition on p. 26.)

While he brilliantly outlines the political history of Israel, Gavron focuses mostly on the individual rather than on the political and social system that developed in Israel. This is admirable in its own way, even if it reminds the reader of those who tried to help South African Blacks without questioning the regime of Apartheid. Moreover, the desire to engage Palestinians in cooperation tends to obscure the asymmetry of power and wealth that characterizes this relationship. Invited to debate with

Israelis, one Palestinian produced a telling image. An Israeli and a Palestinian sit, each on his chair, in front of each other. The Israeli is disappointed that the Palestinian does not appreciate the opportunity to talk. But the Palestinian points out that the Israeli’s chair sits on his foot: “First get off my foot and then we shall talk.” Occupation and economic disparity make dialogue difficult and suspect of trying to perpetuate the domination by making it more palatable. Gavron quotes Razi Suleiman, a Haifa University psychologist, who observes: “it is always Arab participants who bring up topics such as discrimination, inequality of opportunity, and confiscation of Arab land” (p. 68).

Gavron is a long-standing advocate of one-state options, i.e. of political arrangements that would ensure equality of all individuals between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. It is natural for him to believe that all genuine dialogue must tackle the fundamental inequality of the Zionist state; such a dialogue may logically lead the participants to envisage a single political space for Israelis and Palestinians (p. 69).

The book covers several areas of cooperation such as study, work, human rights and media. It is well written and conveys a sincere desire for mutual understanding. Gavron relates the story of a Druze who objects to the use of the Israeli term *du-kiyum* for coexistence because it means

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## HOLY LAND...

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coexistence between two entities. He argues for a more inclusive term that would mean equality and coexistence among all the different groups who inhabit the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean.

Stories of a school that teaches in Arabic and Hebrew make one share the author's optimism. The students come out fluently bilingual and apparently devoid of the stereotypes that plague Israeli society. At the same time, one cannot help wondering if the graduates of such a school will have a tangible impact in real life. Many German Jews brought with them admirable ideas of interethnic equality and common decency in the 1930s, but their impact on Israel's political and social reality has been negligible. Nowadays, it is the hospital—where all by definition are sick—that remains perhaps the only island of sanity in an otherwise segregated society (p. 73).

Gavron remains positive as he shows many people of good will among Jews and Arabs. Moreover, he brings back memories of harmonious relations that had existed prior to the Zionist settlement in Palestine, and particularly before the unilateral Israeli declaration of

independence (p. 90). Gavron, just like Zeev Sternhell, Ruth Gavison and a few other Israeli intellectuals, aims at rehabilitating Zionism that, one may recall, brought him to Israel in the first place. His is the humanistic variety of Zionism that has all but disappeared from the scene: Jabotinsky and his disciples have clearly won out in both politics and public discourse. Gavron has defended the concept of a common state for Israelis and Palestinians, and in this sense finds himself in the venerable company of Judah Magnes and Martin Buber. Gavron affirms that he is a Zionist and aims at "the integration of the Zionist enterprise into the Middle East" (p. 196). He also quotes one of the activists of cooperation for whom "the task of Zionism today is learning to live with our Palestinian citizens and our Palestinian and Jordanian neighbours" (p. 196). On the other hand, Gavron seems to give up on Israeli public opinion and expects that only international action can bring the occupation and segregation to an end.

Occasionally imprecisions spoil the otherwise excellent narrative: for example, the author confuses Zionists and Jews (the settlers are called "Jewish" rather than "Zionist" on p. 37 and 152) and places Göttingen in Sweden rather than Germany (p. 5). The author also

often refers to "Jews, Christians and Muslims" as if the problem were of a religious rather than an ethnic or racial nature. (e.g., p. 71) Better editing would also help (e.g., the use of "all volunteers" twice in the same sentence, p. 109). In spite of these minor imperfections, it is an eminently readable and honest book that leaves a bitter-sweet taste, which is what the author must feel after many years in the country of his choice. ♦

## AMIR...

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more explicitly, the debt that I owe him for my writing? Whether or not he really stood over his secretary's shoulder, and whether or not he called to me in his own handwriting, "Where have you been hiding all these years? Where have you been all these years?"

In time we developed a good relationship. He invited me to participate in the jubilee issue of *Keshet*, in honour of the fortieth anniversary of the quarterly, in 1998. And when he decided to launch *New Keshet* he saw me as an obvious player. I never forgave him the rejection letter, but neither did I forget the excited acceptance letter. I even tried, once or twice, in a friendly phone call, to remind him of those long ago days, but he didn't cooperate. "What you remember, you remember," he told me in his spare conversational style, "I don't look back." I dedicated one of my later poems to him, one that appeared in my book of poems *The Dinosaurs of the Language*. And near the beginning of last winter, at the poets' festival in Sdeh Boker, was the last time I saw him. His illness had changed him very much. We exchanged a few words, and in a moment of inspiration I decided to dedicate a poem to him as I read it on stage. I was emotional as I read, I was a little hoarse and I mixed up the words. He sat right in front of me, in the first row. I don't know what he felt as I read the poem, but I know exactly what I felt. I had been granted the privilege of repaying my debt to him. ♦

Translated from the Hebrew by  
Cindy Eisner

## IMAGES FOR A CHANGING WORLD



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## WATER...

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decision-making processes." WHO is probably over-optimistic. The fight for empowerment will have to be fought over and over again, and long after the fight to obtain rights has been won.

## Conclusion

Gwendolyn MacEwen is right. Water is so fundamental to our livelihoods and lifestyles, to life itself, that we often forget what a complex substance it is, and that its complexity has political as well as physical dimensions. Almost any generalization about water will have many exceptions. However, as MacEwen's poem went on to say, "Water . . . always knows its way back home." ♦