



**Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh.** *Surrounded: Palestinian Soldiers in the Israeli Military.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009. 224 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-5858-1.



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**Published on** H-Levant (November, 2011)

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## Citizenship Maneuvers among Israel's Military 'Other'

In *Surrounded: Palestinian Soldiers in the Israeli Military*, anthropologist Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh shares with us a partial but important glimpse into the lives of Palestinian citizens living within the state of Israel, and in particular, those who have either chosen to serve, or who have been conscripted by, Israel's security apparatus, including the Israel Defense Forces. The Palestinians living in the state of Israel are a population differentiated from Palestinians living in the militarily occupied and "autonomous" territories of the West Bank and Gaza, as well as those living in exile, and beyond those borders and around the globe.

A slim volume, the book has a total of nine chapters with the titles "Embattled Identities," "Conditional Citizenship," "Military Ethnification," "The Limits of Being a Good Arab," "Broken Promises," "Boys or Men? Duped or 'Made,'" and "Blood in the Same Mud," as well as a reflexive afterword entitled "Unsettling Methods."

According to Kanaaneh, Palestinians represent approximately 18 percent of Israeli citizens. Of those, fewer

than 1 percent serve in the Israeli security forces. Between 2000 and 2005, and over the course of ten months, Kanaaneh interviewed more than seventy Palestinians involved in the Israeli security services, including soldiers, policemen, and border guards. Three were women; most were from the lower end of the economic scale. Kanaaneh also interviewed community members, including soldiers' relatives, neighbors, and community activists, among others. At least one intermediary was used to make contact and to coordinate her interviews.

Kanaaneh appears to be writing for a lay audience that would be open to learning more about Israel's internal politics. She offers a brief but important overview of the state's relationship to Palestinians by carefully orienting the reader to key issues that emerged with the establishment of the state of Israel, namely the displacement of Palestinians in 1948 and since; their relegation to "non-Jewish" status and its implications; and the political alliances some Palestinian leaders made with the state which led to the fragmentation of the Palestinian community into "Christian," "Muslim," "Druze,"

and Bedouin identities.

For the anthropologist interested in soldiering and the state, it is intriguing to see how the question of citizenship is deployed in Kanaaneh's book. While other scholars have documented the role and disenchantment of second-class citizens (for example, African Americans, First Nations) who have participated in the military, Kanaaneh poses a rather novel question with this book: what of those who are not only second-class citizens but who have also been labeled enemies of that state? How, and even more importantly here, *why* might they choose to enter the world of soldiering for a state that does not recognize their national identity, their political and social histories, or their plight?

Kanaaneh notes that, in general, Palestinians inside Israel ... are forced to deal with a state that problematizes their very existence within its borders and prioritizes members of another religion, but constantly requires compliance, acquiescence, and paperwork (p. 4). Furthermore, she asserts, "Time and again, Arabs try to succeed in a game in which they desperately grasp at rules that promise them contingent rewards, even as many other rules fundamentally foreclose that possibility" (p. 6). She suggests that we understand these practices as an expression of their resolve to be treated as equals in an army that is, like the state it serves, biased against non-Jews.

Determined to move away from the claim that Palestinians engaged in the security services are simply collaborators, Kanaaneh seeks to understand what frames their decisions. Should the men and women who choose to work in the security forces be held to a different standard than other Palestinians who face a range of contradictory challenges, she asks? At least one interviewee feels otherwise: "How do you think you can get ahead as a schoolteacher? By teaching the [resistance and nationalist] poetry of Samih al-Qasim or Mahmoud Darwish? No, you have to lower your head and march with the flow" (p. 20).

In the hopes of revealing the complexity of the relationship between Palestinian soldiers, Druze conscripts, and Bedouin volunteers, Kanaaneh outlines some of the rationalizations that the soldiers use to assert their *right* to serve in the Israeli army. At one point, Kanaaneh turns to the official word of the Ministry of Defense, which promises "improved rights" after three years of service: "[T]he administration of the Ministry of Defense feels it is our duty and deep privilege to help you integrate into social and economic life" (p. 34).

Kanaaneh is also careful to note that those she interviewed are well aware that their practices are repugnant to their compatriots. In response, many claim that they are less brutal than other soldiers; that they moderate the excesses of their Jewish comrades (p. 22). She goes so far as to suggest—in keeping with her theme throughout the text—that these choices are made in the absence of other options and that they reveal the incredible creativity of the marginalized in trying to escape that marginality (p. 25).

Among the most interesting commentaries are those Kanaaneh elicits from the soldiers about life in the army. For example, she shares what one particularly bitter veteran tells her about the limited role of Bedouins in the military: "They have us shining shoes. You know how close we get to the air force? They have us sitting on F16s shooting away the pigeons" (p. 54). And later, in a discussion with a Druze soldier she learns: "The policy of co-opting the Druze works in that most are no longer Arab, but we aren't Jews either. We are with the state. But the state is not with us" (p. 72). With respect to the challenges and limitations that Palestinian soldiers face, Kanaaneh draws the following comment: "As bad as it is in there, I only wish we would be treated the same way outside the military" (p. 98).

Kanaaneh's most poignant commentary on the relationship of the state to these soldiers comes late in the book when we learn what happens to the bodies of Palestinians killed in action. While memorial sites are ethnically organized, all dead soldiers are wrapped in an Israeli flag. "But," she writes, "even the ardently collaborative family of Yusif Jahaja covered the body of their deceased son with a blanket so as to conceal the flag" (p. 102).

But, to the main point and key to the question of *why* Palestinians might join the security services, Kanaaneh tells us: "the answer is economics." The majority of those interviewed acknowledge that their primary motivation for joining the security forces was to improve their material conditions (p. 35), through such incentives as financial assistance in the area of education, professional training, housing, and starting a business, as well as exemption from or reduction in municipal property taxes, credit points on income tax calculations, free driving courses, and so on (p. 39). While carefully attending to soldiers' stories, Kanaaneh seems no more convinced than I am as her reader. Is this really an assertion of citizenship rights? Or is this a betrayal of the Palestinians' collective rights to *human security* by cit-

izens who happen to be Palestinians themselves? Is this a harsh indictment? Perhaps. Let me explain: What appears at the beginning of the book to be the Palestinians's rational and even radical challenge to the Israeli state's promise of equality becomes, several chapters later, a means to material gain. If economic wealth—not a democratic impulse—forms the basis for choosing to join Israel's security services, can we still discuss this choice within the framework of resistance (as an example of the "weapons of the weak," following James Scott) that Kanaaneh wishes us to consider? While I am sympathetic to the arguments that weak citizens may use surprising methods to resist, nonetheless I think the participants of this study emerge as collaborators. And, it seems to me that those who serve know this well enough, comparisons of such practices to the constraints that Palestinians may feel when teaching in Israeli classrooms (as above) notwithstanding.

That said, a key point Kanaaneh wants to make comes late in the book when she asks us to seriously consider how "Stories of endemic Arab animosity to Jews, and the assumption that Arabs naturally hate Jews (or vice versa) and therefore fight against them, become less tenable. Seen in this light, binaries that at first feel satisfying, even commonsensical (us/them, loyal/traitor, mercenary/ patriotic soldier, resistance/acquiescence, good Arab/bad Arab), are no longer so. They become more problematic and much more messy, complicated, and embattled" (p. 109). In other words, one cannot imagine the kinds of contradictory and rich scenarios that Kanaaneh provides in this ethnography if one assumes there can only be the simple and binary position: Israeli Jew vs

Palestinian. For Palestinians living within the borders of Israel and choosing to participate in the security institutions of the state, the meanings of Israeli citizenship, greater access to financial security or career opportunities, as well as gender and nationalism, all form the basis for negotiating their identity and their relationship to that state.

One area that I wish Kanaaneh would have examined relates to the recent shift in prestige associated with Israel's security services. For example, there is evidence that since the late 1990s, the IDF has reported low morale among its troops. We have also seen the rise of several organizations, including New Profile, which has been accused of treason by members of the political elite for offering to assist Israeli Jewish youths who have little or no sense of obligation to the military and who want to avoid military service altogether. Is it possible that these shifts have had any impact on Palestinian participation rates, and more specifically on Druze recruits?

In the end, Kanaaneh's book is a serious indictment of Israeli practices and relations with respect to Palestinian citizens of the state of Israel. There is little doubt that "Judaization policies target all Arabs—whatever their loyalties, military service, or political affiliations—and largely override any attempts to co-opt, Israelize, or integrate small groups within the Arab population" (p. 77).

Having read Kanaaneh's remarkable book, *Birthing the Nation* (2002), I was looking forward to reading *Surrounded* and I was not disappointed. This is a worthwhile book that raises many questions for future research.

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**Citation:** Jasmin Habib. Review of Kanaaneh, Rhoda Ann, *Surrounded: Palestinian Soldiers in the Israeli Military*. H-Levant, H-Net Reviews. November, 2011.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=30618>



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