

Between conflict and collegiality: Palestinian Arabs and Jews in the Israeli workplace

By Asaf Darr, ILR Press, 189 pp., ISBN: 13: 9781501770753, Price \$125.00, h/b

Özgür Sayın 

Bilecik Şeyh Edebalı University, Bilecik, Turkey

Correspondence

Özgür Sayın, Bilecik Şeyh Edebalı University, Bilecik, Turkey.

Email: ozgur.sayin@bilecik.edu.tr

Disputes between Israel and Palestine: It is arguably one of the most tragic and complex war-like conflicts in recent history. With so much written and said about the matter in the political and academic spheres, one might reasonably wonder if there is still room for further discussion. Looking beyond macro-political and sociological analyses, however, it is clear that very little is actually discussed about Israelis and Palestinians, and even less about the everyday experiences of Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel. Asaf Darr has well identified this gap and has set the scene in a novel and hitherto unfamiliar context, exploring the impacts of the ongoing political crises between the two states on workplace relations between Jews and Palestinian Arabs.

Based on a comprehensive interview dataset with a diverse range of Arab and Jewish employees working in ethnically and religiously mixed workplaces in the Israeli labour market, the book is structured around two central themes. The first concerns the extent to which ethnic and religious factors influence the experiences of individuals in the workplace, particularly minorities, from cross-cultural interactions to career progression, from political expression and language use to the observance of religious rituals. The second theme addresses whether growing tensions between the two opposing poles cause fluctuations in these experiences. In doing so, it also offers valuable comparative insights into how these experiences vary across different sectors (manufacturing, medical and healthcare, and high-tech), occupations, company profiles (e.g. national vs. multinational, public vs. private) and employee demographics.

The book comprises six empirical chapters, with each chapter focusing on a specific aspect of workers' day-to-day experiences. The debate opens with an examination of how political events affect the workplace, creating tensions between Arab and Jewish colleagues. It then explores how employees, particularly those from minority groups, develop long- and short-term coping strategies in response to the negative consequences of such tensions. The subsequent chapters shift the focus from exceptional circumstances to more ordinary and general matters of professional life, such as career expectations and opportunities, representation of cultural and religious

identities, and social relations and ties that exist between different ethnic/religious groups within and beyond the workplace.

The empirical findings of the study clearly prove that cultural dissimilarities and political conflicts somehow manifest themselves within the workplace, yet not in a singular, definitive form. Rather, they demonstrate strong variabilities across different work environments, contingent on a range of factors, such as the nature of the work, perspective of the organization, profession, income and education levels of the employees. Nevertheless, the interviews also reveal that individuals belonging to minority backgrounds are subjected to implicit or explicit discrimination and exploitation in any case, manifested in various forms, including extended working hours, reduced compensation and restricted career advancement opportunities. Such situations are often mediated by the written and unwritten rules that govern the work environment, as well as the power relations that exist between employees, compelling minority workers in most cases to avoid direct confrontation and to submit implicitly to discriminative and even hostile attitudes from colleagues, supervisors and the public at large.

Besides empirical richness, Darr's book represents a significant contribution to the sociology of work and organizational studies. Conceptually, it bridges the gaps between intergroup contact and diversity management approaches by introducing 'split ascription' as a strategy that minority workers use to navigate ethnic-religious pressures and systemic workplace discrimination. The discussions of the literature embedded in each chapter are effectively integrated into the interview anecdotes, enabling a focus on the theoretical debate without detracting from the narrative — a challenging task for a subject as grounded in everyday experience as this one. Darr's strong comparative methodology is also worth the mention, seeking to understand the differences and commonalities between very different sectors, occupations and worker demographics, instead of focusing on a more homogeneous and smaller group of employees. By doing so, it provides meaningful insights into not only the Israeli labour market but also diverse segments of Israeli society, from secular individuals to religious ones, nationalists to more liberals, talented white-collar to low-paid, low-educated workers, urbanites to villagers and so on.

Despite displaying considerable conceptual and methodological strengths, Darr's book could have been more enriched with a couple of minor touches on some points. First, the deployment of terminological words such as 'ethnonational' and 'ethnoreligious' is somewhat excessive throughout the text, especially within the introductory section. Such terminological overload may prove distracting and tedious, given the topical nature of the subject matter and its appeal to a popular readership. It would have been beneficial for readers less familiar with the subject matter if the text had devoted more space to providing fundamental explanations of the concepts under discussion, underlying their distinct characteristics from those of analogous and more widely applied terms, such as 'ethnic', 'national' or 'religious'. Finally, the discussions in the last four chapters, which address more general circumstances in the workplace, should have been supplemented with anecdotes on whether the general outlook had undergone any alterations during periods of heightened tensions.

In summary, 'Between Conflict and Collegiality', as the title suggests, offers readers a slice of life. The text reminds us that life is not simply dichotomous, but full of grey areas beyond black and white. It is within these grey areas that workers find their own ways to survive against the backdrop of racism, discrimination and exploitation. It also reminds us that the notion of life encompasses not only macro and micro aspects, but also mediations by showing that workers with different ethnic/religious backgrounds, supposed to be sides of a political conflict, may demonstrate solidarity and forge social ties. However, it also shows how these social connections are so fragile within a highly segregated society like Israel, and how broader crises, whether

deliberate or inadvertent, exacerbate this fragility, rendering some more susceptible to violence and exploitation.

ORCID

Özgür Sayın  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2111-6152>