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Arab-Israeli Conflict

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The Bitter Year: Arabs under Israeli Occupation in 1982. Washington, DC: The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, 1983. Contemporary Issues in the Middle East. 88 pages. Appends. to p. 276. \$5.00 paper.

Reviewed by Linda A. Malone

In *Salvador*, Joan Didion remarks: "All numbers in El Salvador tended to materialize and vanish and rematerialize in a different form, as if numbers denoted only the 'use' of numbers, an intention, a wish, a recognition that someone, somewhere, for whatever reason, needed to hear the ineffable expressed as a number."¹ In centers of seemingly endless tragedy, such as El Salvador and Lebanon, the dimensions of the tragedy have become "ineffable." Persistent efforts to quantify the ineffable through documents, numbers, lists and other demonstrative evidence inevitably end in frustration for those who are looking for some absolute resolution, some final quantification pointing toward who is right

and who is wrong. In this sense, any attempt to quantify the ineffable is significant more for the personal viewpoint expressed of the tragedy than the absolute certainty of its projections.

In *The Bitter Year: Arabs under Israeli Occupation in 1982*, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee posits its own evaluation of the evidence of human rights violations in Israeli-occupied Lebanon, West Bank/Gaza and the Golan Heights. The book follows the format used in the annual *State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. The authors emphasize the neutrality of their sources—the International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty International, the United Nations Human Rights Commission—and their reliance on reports in the Israeli daily press. Based on these and other sources, the book documents human rights violations with respect to the integrity of the person, civil and political liberties, failures to investigate alleged violations, and economic and social discrimination. Of particular interest to international lawyers and political scientists is the conclusion of the report on Israel's failure to comply with international conventions and treaty obligations with the United States government. For example, since 1967 the United States and most of the international legal community have agreed that Israel's treatment of the Arab population in the occupied areas is governed by the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions. As noted in an appended memorandum from the Israeli League for Human and Civil Rights, Israel utilizes an emergency ordinance to detain thousands in Lebanon without granting them protected status as prisoners of war under the Third Geneva Convention. Also, the conclusion to the report convincingly demonstrates Israel's violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention protecting civilian populations under military occupation. Unfortunately, the study lacks a complete summary of conclusions to be drawn from Israel's alleged violations of its legal obligations to the United States, or any proposals for steps by the United States government toward remedying the situation.

¹J. Didion, *Salvador* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), p. 61.

Over 180 pages of the text are appendices to document the alleged human rights violations. A perhaps unanticipated by-product of the appendices is a personal, small-scale picture of the effect of the Israeli occupation on the day-to-day life of the Arab residents. From the increase in child labor to book censorship, the reader gets a sense of the strictures of living in an occupied country that do not rise to the level of newsworthiness for international publication. An appended article from the *Christian Science Monitor* on the expanding "suburbanization" (p. 256) of the West Bank due to Israeli settlements takes on a more compelling dimension when viewed in the context of frequently reported incidents of violence by Israeli settlers against Arab residents and property.

The Bitter Year provides a useful source of documents, lists, and reports to substantiate claims of human rights violations by Israel in 1982. In that sense it will satisfy the "need to hear the ineffable expressed as a number." This function aside, the report conveys a viewpoint, a sense of Arab life under occupation, of importance beyond the accumulation of data. The long-range effects of the violence and human rights violations are even less quantifiable.

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