What is the mental health status of Palestinians in Israel? The subject of this book is the Palestinian minority living within the confines of the State of Israel. This book is an open window on the social and psychological realities that come into play in a deeply wounded Palestinian society. Within an overarching theoretical framework of historical narratives, culture and conflict, the articles successfully link a diverse range of subjects including distress, well-being, psychopathology and suicide, but also national trauma, continuous stress, sexual abuse, war, terror, discrimination and racism, politics, ideology, national narratives, gender and age issues, cultural specificities and acculturation processes. This is quite a challenging task. Written mostly by Palestinian academics and scholars, the book succeeds in establishing a congruent and empirical picture of this reality. After reading it, one apperceives that the longstanding conflict between Jews and Palestinians living in the State of Israel, when viewed through the lens of both the historical background and cultural differences, as well as through the way in which this conflict has developed politically and geopolitically, has led to the development of significant problems of the mind, the heart, and the social fabrics of the Palestinian minorities living in Israel. This should therefore concern all the citizens of this state.

There are many lenses through which to observe how this ongoing strife affects a society, and the current book uses an impressively broad range of them, easily discernible in the titles of its articles and different parts. Part one focuses on the cultural and sociopolitical determinants of mental health. This chapter draws a picture of how different conflicts that played out before, during, and after Israeli independence – what some refer to as the “Nakba narrative” – have affected the resilience, mental health, and well-being of Palestinians at various empirical research levels. The last article in part one provides a detailed sociological analysis and historical overview of the structural processes in Palestinian society and how they are affected by tensions, conflicts, wars and politics. Part two concentrates on family and gender in relation to mental health in a collectivist-oriented society. It also emphasizes and helps the reader understand the importance of grasping the cultural dynamics and conflicts that affect therapeutic processes. Part three focuses on psychiatric and behavioral health-related problems among Palestinian citizens in Israel, focusing on epidemiological data in children, adolescents and adults. It also highlights attitudes, beliefs and stigma, family values, community orientation and its impact on help seeking, including a very interesting analysis of hospitalization. Part four places emphasis on issues of neglect, abuse and violence and their risk factors in Palestinian society – including cultural aspects as well as sociopolitical risk factors that play out in community, family and school, as well as violence against women, children and older persons. Furthermore, this book does not shy away from an in-depth analysis of suicide and suicidality, which showcases some basic differences between Palestinian minorities in Israel. Part five targets the importance of understanding cultures, narratives, and social structures and their interplay with sociopolitical risk factors in the request for and provision of help. The articles focus on therapeutic opportunities, the process of treatment and its sociocultural intricacies and what is needed in the domain of psychotherapy and rehabilitation to provide culturally relevant interventions. It emphasizes that training and supervision are paramount, especially for those less versed in Palestinian culture.

This book is a seminal work, an important, readable, dense summary of many of the empirical, but also theoretical and historical, studies on the impact of the Israeli-Arab conflict in relation to the well-being of the Palestinian citizens living in Israel. In addition, it offers new empirical data, including community studies and clinical insights. It is a rich container of documentation, research, theoretical underpinnings, and clinical insights, and is a call for social justice.

This book is important for both academics and clinicians. It enables much better understanding of psychological and familial issues in therapy, of how to work with issues of violence and abuse and offers a firm epidemiological ground to assert the significant health-related disparities in society. In addition, it will be helpful for all mental-health-related stakeholders, clients, providers, services, public health authorities and mental health activists, who can learn from the presented information.

On a sadder note, this book also conveys the reality that, as long as this conflict lasts, it will continue to affect the mental, physical, and social health of not only Palestinians, but all Israelis.

Prof. Marc Gelkopf
Department of Community Mental Health, University of Haifa
Email: emgelkopf@013.net