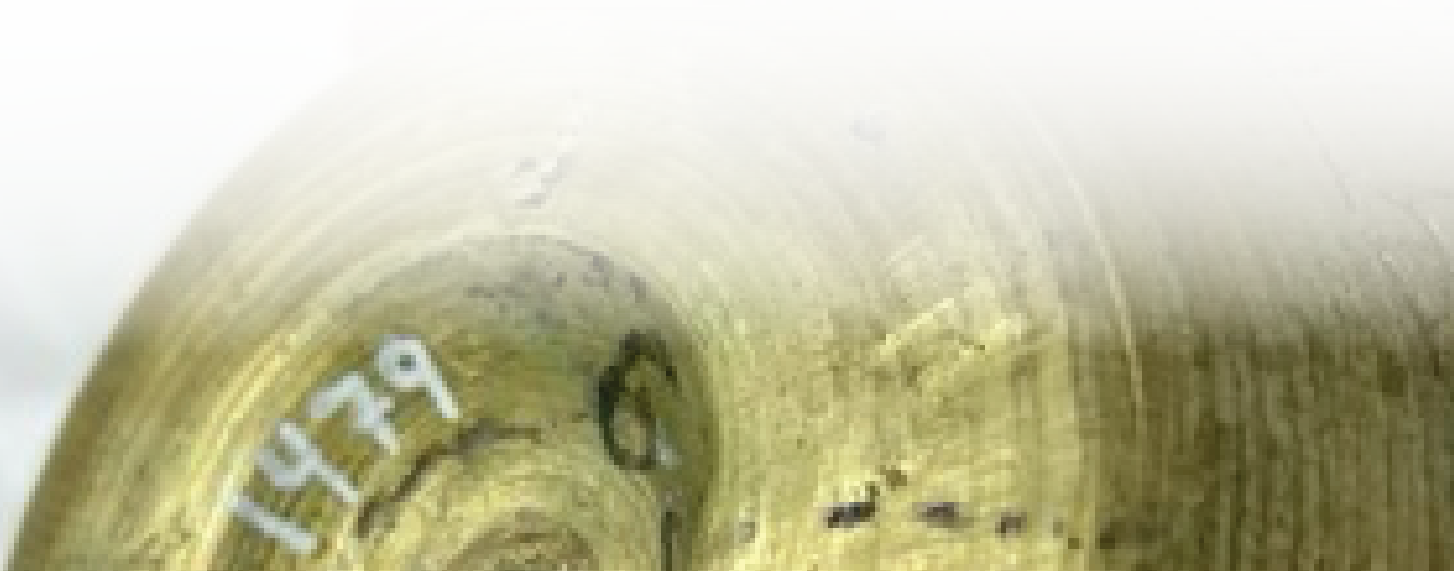


مجموعة توفيق كنعان

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The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine

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Abstract

This essay identifies four different modes of ethnographic engagement with Palestine since the nineteenth century: biblical, Oriental, absent, and poststructural. Focusing on the epistemic and political dynamics in which the recent admissibility of Palestine as a legitimate ethnographic subject is embedded, we highlight two conditions. One is the demystification of states and hegemonic groups that control them, and the concomitant legitimacy of groups with counterclaims. The other is the “crisis of representation” in the social sciences and the humanities. Combined with the rupture in Israel’s sanctity in the West since the 1980s, these developments were conducive to Palestine’s admission. We conclude by considering Palestine as a problem space that could reinvigorate the critical abilities of postcolonial language and the anthropology that it engenders.

All truths that are kept silent become poisonous.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
(Kaufman 1968, p. 228)

INTRODUCTION

The Madrid-Oslo process of the early 1990s, commonly called the peace process, brought neither security nor sovereignty to the Palestinians. Instead it subjected the population in the West Bank and Gaza to an unprecedented regime of segregation and surveillance, hindering, among other things, the possibility of ethnographic fieldwork. This situation notwithstanding, those years saw Palestine and Palestinians become increasingly admissible as subjects of anthropological inquiry.

Taking this apparent quandary as a point of departure, this essay argues that the new admissibility of Palestine is embedded in two interrelated epistemological-political conditions. First is the demystification of nations and the ethnic groups that formed them, and a corresponding surge in the legitimacy afforded to groups with counterclaims. Second is the “crisis of representation” within anthropology and beyond it. These two developments fall within a wider critique of Western modern reason and the national, colonial, and imperial sovereignties that it sustains. They also coincided, after the 1982 war in Lebanon, with a rupture in the sanctity of Israel in the West (Said 1985), where it had been previously shielded from moral reproach.

We begin by reviewing four modes of ethnographic engagement with Palestine. In rough chronological order they include (a) the proto-anthropological mode, which depicted Palestinians as residual biblical relics who can be easily incorporated into a Christian European patrimony; (b) a secularized, scientific mode of engagement that generated Palestinians as Oriental subjects; (c) a mode in which mainstream anthropology disengaged from Palestine in the decades following 1948, facilitating a predominance until the 1970s of Zionist scholarship in Palestinian ethnography; and (d) a poststructuralist mode that has

enabled, since the late 1980s, the ethnographic admissibility of a Palestine absorbed in national struggle.

Palestine as a homeland, and Palestinians as its native inhabitants both defy conclusive definition. Additionally indeterminate are anthropology as a field of inquiry, and ethnography as its main method. Mindful of these difficulties but cognizant of the epistemological, disciplinary, and political significance of boundaries that set the scope of a review like ours, we begin by clarifying these terms.

Most of this review sustains the distinction between anthropology as discipline and ethnography as its constitutive practice, with occasional evocation of the latter as a metonym for the former. Our inclusion of works by nonanthropologists reflects that, in Palestine as elsewhere, nonanthropologists also employ ethnography.¹ Defining “ethnographic engagement” broadly, we thus include proto-anthropological writings of late-nineteenth-century Western travelers, missionaries, and colonial officers who used some of the methods that later came to be associated with ethnographic fieldwork in anthropology. Members of this cohort were the first to use such methods to represent Palestine in the modern West; they also had considerable influence on subsequent anthropological encounters with Palestine.

Prior to 1948, Palestine had been the homeland of a predominantly Arab-Muslim native population with a rich genealogy traceable to the antiquity of numerous imperial and local civilizations,² including Canaanite,

¹Within a fragmented and politically besieged Palestinian condition, some have doubted the suitability of quantitative research for studying Palestinian society and emphasized the particular amenability of qualitative, read ethnographic, research (Tamari 1994, Zureik 2003). While we agree with these authors' view, we believe the reasons lie elsewhere, not in supposed cultural orders (Arab versus Western, industrial versus nonindustrial). It is out of the distance from the state and its statistical normalized subject that the stateless and discredited Palestinian condition may find greater receptivity.

²In early 1948 Arabs, then a majority, constituted almost 1.4 million out of nearly 2 million people in British-ruled Palestine (see Khalidi 2006, p. 1; for earlier years showing similar figures see Abu-Sitta 2004, p. 11).

Edomite, Israelite, Greek, Roman, Nabataean, Arabian, Philistine, Phoenician, and Egyptian (Rainey & Notley 2006).³ This multiplicity notwithstanding, Palestinian cultural and social forms, which emerged with the beginning of Muslim sovereignty in the seventh century A.D. (Doumani 1992, p. 8), endured for more than thirteen centuries, disrupted only by the Crusades.

In the early twentieth century, as the region was pulled into a regime of nation-states, Arab Palestinians still formed a predominantly peasant society with an elaborate oral culture, entrenched politics of kinship, and a rooted sense of place.⁴ Alongside this peasant population, the social fabric included Bedouins and a diverse and vibrant urban population of landowners, tax farmers, merchants, government functionaries, artisans, and religious leaders.

Until the modern era this predominantly peasant society had “an indissoluble bond with the land” (Said 1992, p. 8), which has come under continuous assault since the onset of Western expansion into Palestine. This expansion entailed British colonial rule over a dissolving Ottoman province that facilitated a Jewish and later Israeli colonial-settler society, forcing Palestinians to a national path that is yet to culminate in a sovereign state. With this sequence in mind, we identify Palestinians as currently inhabiting three types of locales.⁵

First are Palestinians who remained—either in their original communities or elsewhere as internally displaced persons—within those parts of their homeland on whose ruins Israel was established, and who were eventually granted formal Israeli citizenship. Second

are Palestinians living in the lands that Israel occupied in 1967—both those who had lived there prior to 1948 and those who came as refugees in 1948. Third are Palestinians who became refugees, residents, or citizens in Arab countries and beyond. Within these locales, Palestinians have various degrees of formal citizenship, different kinds of identification with their respective host states and a corresponding range of rights and limitations in residence, employment, property ownership, movement, and political agency.

With these definitions in mind, we trace the development of Palestinian ethnography from the nineteenth century to the present, with particular attention to the admissibility of Palestine as a prevalent ethnographic subject since the late 1980s. We conclude by considering how Palestine as a conceptual space could contribute to the critical potential of ethnography in colonial conditions and to postcolonial inquiry.

FOUR MODES OF ETHNOGRAPHIC ENGAGEMENT

Biblical Palestine

Propelled by a desire to gain ground in the Levant at the expense of the ailing Ottoman Empire, European interests often mobilized the Bible as a self-explanatory legitimizing text for European influence in the Holy Land. Doumani (1992, pp. 7–9) suggests that the biblical rediscovery of Palestine triggered more European writing on Palestine in the nineteenth century than on any other Arab territory save Egypt. Christian theology, folklore studies, and philological inquiry played an important role in this endeavor.

Tristram’s (1894) narrative of Palestine, for example, oscillated between observations of contemporary Palestinian village life and evocations of analogous biblical episodes.⁶ Robinson (1841) and Wolf (1839, 1860) explicitly mobilized natural history, geography, and agricultural economy of Palestine for

³The late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish repeatedly invoked this multiplicity to signify Palestine. See for example Darwish (2004, p. 205).

⁴Palestine in 1931 had an Arab-Palestinian population of 861,211 (calculated from Abu-Sitta 2004, p. 12). Out of this total, 602,387 were peasants (Abu-Sitta 2004)—a figure representing nearly 70%.

⁵For further discussion on definitions of Palestinians, see Abu-Lughod (1971), W. Khalidi (1971), R. Khalidi (1997), Kimmerling & Migdal (1994), Smith (1988), and Tamari (2000, 2009).

⁶See for examples Tristram (1894, pp. 69, 96–98, 111, 125).

a better understanding of biblical stories. Ritter (1860) and Palmer (1872), preoccupied with the route of the Israelites from Egypt to Palestine and with the borders between the territories of the Israelite tribes, similarly constructed their paleogeographic arguments on contemporary Palestinian life. Conder (1889) was drawn to philological proximities between Palestinian Arabic and biblical Hebrew. Claremont-Ganneau (1875) compares Palestinian folktales to heroic stories of the Bible,⁷ while Baldensperger's studies (1899, 1901a,b) of the lives of Palestinian women informed his essays on the lives of women of the Bible. This conjuring of biblical time objectified contemporary Palestinians as living fossils, mumming a historiography that serves Europeans (Rabinowitz 1998).

Proto-ethnographic work in Palestine involved contemporary European writers animating their own patrimony by following the footsteps of emblematic biblical figures. This conveniently supported a European claim to shape Palestine's administrative reality and to morally incorporate it in a European universe (Monk 2002), which is mentally and politically external to the lands of Islam. One consequence of this "biblical anthropology" was validation of the nascent Zionist claim of a "historic" return to a "promised" land (for example, Moors et al. 1995, p. 2). In the first decades of the twentieth century, this systematic usurpation of Palestinian identity and history for European ambitions had immense political implications.

Oriental Palestine

In the first four decades of the twentieth century, a secularized and "scientific" interest,

⁷Claremont-Ganneau (1875, p. 209–13) cites a story told by Palestinians of the blind hero Abu-Maizer, who collapsed a house on its loathsome Christian inhabitants and died with them, a replica of Samson's Gaza tale. Other episodes he cites include Imam Abu-Taleb's miraculous destruction of the seven walls of a town near Jericho and his "arrest" of the sun to stop the enemy from fleeing after dark, and the story of a woman raped by her hosts, whose husband takes revenge of them along the lines of the biblical story known as *A Concubine on the Hill* (*Judges* 19–21).

supplemented by a change in vocabulary (e.g., order, socio-cultural regularities, customs, habits, manners, and so forth) and methods, displaced theological motives for observing the Palestinians. The ideals of objective methods, systematic data collection, and extended periods in the field underwrote the new research paradigm. Associated with the spreading logic of the nation-state, this paradigm eclipsed earlier terms such as the Holy Land, heathens, and Mohammedans, introducing new ones such as Palestine, primitives, races, Moslems, Orientals, and Arabs.

Permeated by functionalist and evolutionary presuppositions, many works display a preoccupation with stability, rules, integration, differentiation, and devolution of social forms. The subjects broached include "Eastern customs" (Baldensperger 1913), religion (Canaan 1927), water (Canaan 1929), the significance of light and darkness (Canaan 1931), architecture (Canaan 1932), race (Finn 1923), hospitality (al-Barghouthi 1924), colonization (Hanauer 1900), music (Macalister 1900), marriage (Granqvist 1935), child rearing (Granqvist 1950), death and burial (Granqvist 1965), madness (Stephan 1925), and erotic expressions (Stephan 1922).

Two figures illustrate the tacit place of theory and the epistemic standing of Palestine in this period particularly well. Finnish anthropologist Hilma Granqvist, who had been trained in participant observation at LSE before she came to Palestine, conducted ethnographic work in Artas near Bethlehem in the 1920s and 1930s. She was initially interested in the lives of women of the Old Testament, but once introduced to Artas, she became interested in how Palestinian society coheres and how this coherence is eroded by westernization. For her, "field ethnological work" that captures the traditional social fabric before its dissolution became a scientific "duty" (Granqvist 1935, p. 2)—an interesting case of salvage anthropology.

The urgency to document Palestine as a source of Europe's beginnings was also apparent in the work of Tawfiq Canaan, a Jerusalemite dermatologist who conducted

extensive ethnographic research.⁸ Canaan, with a circle of mostly Christian contemporary Palestinian intellectuals, (e.g., Totah, Stefan, Haddad, al-Bargouthi), portrayed Palestinians as a vibrant, cumulative assemblage of modern and ancient civilizations that included Israelites, Egyptians, Syrio-Aramaics and, not least, Arabs (Canaan 1931, p. 34). This depiction was strategic. It challenged a colonial British version of Palestinian history that saw Arabs in Palestine as transient and ephemeral, offering a narrative that contested the endorsement by the Balfour Declaration of a national Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Within the biblical and Oriental modalities of ethnographic work on Palestine we have reviewed, Palestine as the cradle of Christianity and the contemporary Orient as the key to understanding the Bible's inception was *the theory*. Paradoxically, by the time Europe began to doubt its own secularization in the 1960s, ethnographic Palestine ceased to be the theological exterior where Europe's truths ostensibly began. Instead Palestine became the "empirical" shore for applying, measuring, modifying, and normalizing critical theoretical tools generated in the North. In this period, theory was traveling out of Palestine, relegating it to a nontheoretical terrain of "facts" (Abu-Lughod 1989, Tamari 1994). One of these facts came to be a state whose national logic of secularized Zionism permits only a single Jewish sovereignty.

Absent Palestine

The decades immediately following the Palestinian demise of 1948 and the concomitant

establishment of the state of Israel coincided with the expansion in the 1950s of Middle Eastern area studies. But hegemonic interests that permeated academic circles on both sides of the Atlantic (Mitchell 2003) shifted focus away from Palestine. Scattered across half a dozen new states, mostly as refugees, Palestinians and their predicament became marginal to social science inquiry, echoing their exclusion from political agency.

Work in two particular research areas—peasant and refugee studies—vividly illustrate this silence about Palestine.⁹ Prior to their dispossession in 1948, most Palestinians had been peasants, whose centrality to Palestinian society and culture was registered as early as the nineteenth century and discussed above. Yet in the 1960s and 1970s, even as anthropologists sought "to place peasantries within fields of power" (c.f., Wolf 1969, Scott 1976) and mobilized "village studies" as a means for joining political debates such as the one on US involvement in Vietnam (Roseberry 1995, p. 161), studies of Palestinian peasants were almost nowhere to be found. This disregard is ironic given that the Palestine Liberation Organization constituency in Lebanon was predominantly comprised of peasants and their descendants, who found affinity with struggles against imperialism the world over, including in Vietnam (Sayigh 1979). It would be another twenty years before the pivotal role of peasants in the construction of national Palestinian identity became the focus of an ethnographic study (Swedenburg 1989, 1990).¹⁰

Another example of the silence over Palestine is refugee studies. Among refugees worldwide, Palestinians constitute the longest-standing and largest population still awaiting resolution. This notwithstanding, Palestinians

⁸Tamari (2009) notes that unlike a revived native Palestinian ethnography in the 1970s–1980s, which anxiously negates Zionist history in response to the 1967 occupation and the subsequent expansion of Jewish settlement, the nativist ethnography of 1920s–1940s did not emphasize a pre-Israelite (e.g., Canaanite) past to the Palestinians. Rather, he suggests, by positing the Palestinian *fellah* as the living heir of a Hebraic patrimony, which was in turn heir to an even older and plural (e.g., Egyptian, Mesopotamian) antiquity, this early nativist ethnography carried a more subversive claim against Zionism.

⁹While anthropologists were relatively silent on gender in Palestine, women's studies conferences were more receptive to hearing talks in this domain (J. Peteet, personal communication with Khaled Furani, December 6, 2010).

¹⁰Tamari (1981), although trained as a sociologist, used ethnographic work to study peasants in the context of colonial formations.

have been largely absent from the interdisciplinary field of refugee studies, an absence Peteet (2005, p. 19) found “remarkable.”¹¹ This observation, incidentally, seems to hold also for anthropologists, at least until the mid-1990s. An *Annual Review of Anthropology* article on studies of refugees (Malkki 1995, p. 519) referred to only one study of Palestinian refugees. This belated silence illustrates the reluctance of Western scholars to confront the quagmire of Palestinian refugees. Like the admission that later ruptured it, which we discuss below, silence over refugees and peasants was embedded in the larger epistemic political configurations of the question of Palestine.

The relative silence among ethnographers about Palestinians in the aftermath of 1948, while occasionally interrupted by works such as Lutfiyya (1966), Nakhleh (1975), and Sayigh (1979), must also be understood in terms of the success of Zionism.¹² The establishment, international recognition, economic growth, and demographic expansion of Israel branded it a stellar example of modernizing national awakening in an age of decolonization. The narrative of Israel as a place offering physical haven, identity, and solidarity to endangered refugees from Europe and beyond completely overshadowed the moral and material injuries of Palestinians in the aftermath of 1948. Moors et al. (1995) note that Western discourse on Palestine was “determined largely by images, themes and values that projected the Jewish Zionist version of history . . . [and] was untouched and unaffected by the Palestinian Arab version of history” (1995, p. 2).

The ethnographic silence on the Palestinians living in Arab countries opened a space for a generation of Israeli anthropologists. Guided

by Zionist sensibilities, these anthropologists, working with a “fragmented conceptualization of the Arabs” (Nakhleh 1977, p. 63), conducted research on a residual community within Israel whose Palestinianness they did not recognize. The 160,000 Palestinians who remained and became citizens of Israel after 1948 were labeled “Israeli Arabs,” a term designed to abrogate their history and bond with the land (Rabinowitz 1993). Representing approximately 16% of Israel’s population in 1949, this community became accessible to Zionist anthropologists trained in the United Kingdom and the United States (Cohen 1965, 1969; Ginat 1982, 1987; Kressel 1984; Marx 1967; Rosenfeld 1958, 1964; Shokeid 1982). Propelled by an Israeli culturalist desire to fabricate a secular and modernized Israeli identity, many of these writers worked within the dual dismissal of the Jewish diaspora and Arab culture. They largely generated functionalist accounts that portrayed Palestinians as “traditional,” resistant to modernization and politically detached—a trope diametrically opposed to the self-image of a rational, forward-looking, modernizing Israeli (Rabinowitz 2002).

In these accounts, modernity figures as a political project juxtaposed with tradition as its Other, as modernist anthropologists seek to uncover “traditional” elements, such as the hamula (clan), “honor killings,” subsistence economy, and feuds. Once established, these elements work to legitimate the modernity of Zionism, thus ignoring or pathologizing Palestinian nationalism.

Gil Eyal (1993), for example, has convincingly shown how in the 1940s, Israeli intelligence researchers working for the proto-state Haganah forces, and mainly orientalist, engaged with Palestinians through what came to be known as “village files” (Eyal 1993, p. 49). He shows how, within these studies, idioms such as the hamula (clan) became a prominent conceptual tool for orientalizing Palestinians as “backward” and “traditional” (see Eyal 2006, pp. 158–59). This trend relied, at times, on individuals, including in the 1950s–1970s some

¹¹One way to account for this silence could be the specific racial arrangements in the West, which, in the decades immediately following World War II, more readily placed European Jews, as refugees than they did distinctly non-European Palestinians (Massad 2006, p. 84).

¹²Zionism is by no means monolithic. The Zionism we are concerned with here, however, is the project of establishing Jewish sovereignty in Palestine which would cohere with European interests in the region.

anthropologists, whose affiliations and professional loyalties as academic researchers and as state officials often overlapped (Rabinowitz 2002).

The Poststructural

Turning the state from a silent, self-evident category into an object of inquiry, a new generation of anthropologists began to question Israel's effort to repress Palestinian nationalism and to normalize its own colonial and racial character. This facilitated the emergence of a Palestinian subject whose national identity and colonial predicament are probed rather than silenced.

Asad (1973), the author of *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, was the first to point at functionalist anthropology's disregard for the colonial dimension of the Palestinian predicament. Asad's (1975) critique of Cohen (1965) extends his earlier point that "anthropology does not only apprehend the world in which it is located, but the world also determines how it apprehends it" (Asad 1973, p. 12). This early intradisciplinary observation gathered a much celebrated cross-disciplinary momentum with the publication of Said's (1978) *Orientalism* and *The Question of Palestine* (1979). Able to work against what Said (1984, p. 29) diagnosed as "virulent American hostility to Palestinian nationalism" and their "inadmissible existence", ethnographic studies of Palestine and Palestinians with time became institutionally less hazardous (Swedenburg 1989).

These critical trajectories created space for ethnographic engagements with Palestinians struggling for national sovereignty that reflected mainstream anthropological preoccupations. An impressive number of studies looked at memory (Swedenburg 1991; Slyomovics 1994, 1998; Ben-Ze'ev 2002; Allen 2006; Collins 2004; Robinson 2003; Feldman 2006; Saa'di & Abu-Lughod 2007; Davis 2010). Much attention went to spatial segregation (Weingrod & Roman 1991, Torstrick 1993, Bornstein 2002, Abowd 2007, Monterescu 2009). Gender grew into a major research topic (Antonius 1979; Sayigh 1981; Hammami

1994; Peteet 1992, 1994; Moors 1995; Faier 1997; Jean-Klein 2000; Forte 2001; Sa'ar 2001; Kanaaneh 2005; Erdreich 2006; Monterescu 2006; Hart 2008; Sa'ar & Yahya-Yunis 2008; Allen 2009). More ethnographic accounts appeared about Palestinian refugees (Sayigh 1979, 1995; Hammami 1994; Bisharat 1997; Rosenfeld 2002; Farah 2006; Khalili 2005; Peteet 2005; Feldman 2008) and prisoners (Bornstein 2001, Rosenfeld 2004, Khalili 2008, Nashif 2008). Recognizable attention was given to how Palestinians cope with law and other bureaucratic aspects of the occupation (Bisharat 1989, Hajjar 2005, Kelly 2006, Feldman 2008), to martyrdom and suicide bombing (Laird 1998; Pitcher 1998; Hage 2003; Hasso 2005; Allen 2004, 2006), and to collaborators with forces of occupation, including Palestinian citizens of Israel enlisting in the Israeli army (Kanaaneh 2009, Kelly 2010). Studies also addressed Palestinian migration (Escribano & al-Joubeh 1983, Gonzales 1993); reproduction (Faier 1997, Kanaaneh 2002); visual media, popular culture, and poetry (Muhawi & Kanaana 1989; Peteet 1996; Stein & Swedenburg 2005; Bishara 2006, 2008; Furani 2008); and cultural erosion at large (Qleibo 1992). Humanitarian aid (Feldman 2007, Fassin 2008, Rosenfeld 2009) and the development of civil society (Faier 1998, Giacaman 1998, Jean-Klein 2003, Bowman 2006) became research topics, as were economically and symbolically pertinent enterprises like tourism (Bowman 1996, Clarke 2000, Stein 2008) and olive agriculture (Meneley 2008).

The burgeoning of ethnographic studies since the 1980s, which came after decades of relative silence on the part of anthropologists regarding Palestinians, is reflected in data from a survey we conducted on ethnographic publications on Palestine since the middle of the nineteenth century.¹³ Our survey indicates that prior to the late 1980s the study of Palestine was

¹³Our survey yielded close to 420 relevant articles, chapters, and books. Obvious criteria for including an item were the author's formal training, identification, and employment as an anthropologist, and the extent to which a journal, a publisher or a series carrying an item is identifiably

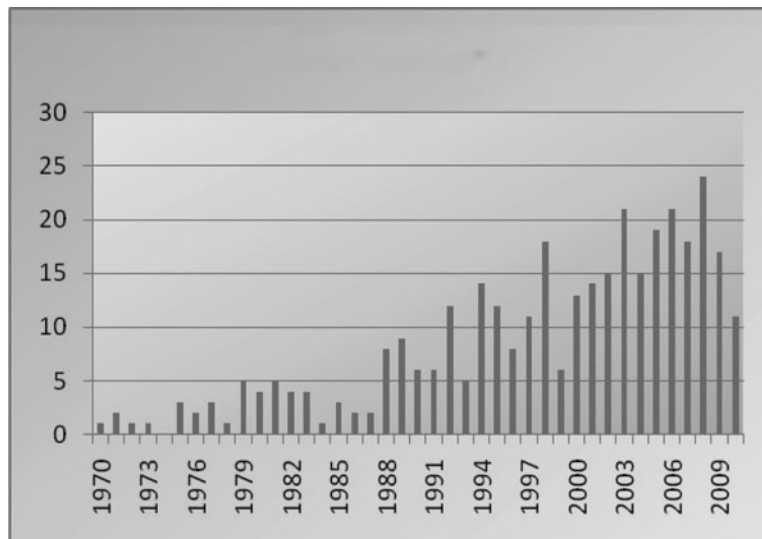


Figure 1

Anthropological and ethnographic publications on Palestine and Palestinians per annum, 1970–2010. The figure for 2010 pertains to items published between January and June only.

almost nonexistent in the social sciences and the humanities, including anthropology. Between 1870 and 1970, proto-anthropological, anthropological, and ethnographic publications on Palestinians appeared at an average rate of 0.6 items per annum (pa). The figure rose to 1.6 pa in the 1970s, and to 3.25 pa in the first eight years of the 1980s. Then in 1988—the first full calendar year following the outbreak of the 1987 Intifada—the rate climbed to 8 items pa. It grew further in the 1990s, with an annual rate of 9.9, and doubled in the following decade (2000–2010) to 18.8 items pa. **Figure 1** presents items per annum between 1970 and 2010.

ADMITTING PALESTINE

Our main argument is that the admissibility of Palestine as an ethnographic subject since

anthropological. About two thirds of the items included in our survey meet these criteria. The balance is made of items written by researchers in the adjacent fields of sociology, political science, geography, history, regional studies and more, whose work patently employed ethnographic methods. Space limitations in this essay prevent us from presenting the entire list of publications surveyed, which is accessible at <http://tinyurl.com/6ya2ypp>.

the late 1980s was embedded in two related epistemological-political transformations that took place in the West. One is the demystification of nationalism, states, and those who happen to control them, and the concomitant rising credibility of subaltern groups making counter-claims. The other is the shift known as the “crisis of representation” in the social sciences and the humanities. Offering a critique of modern reason, these epistemopolitical events challenge national, colonial, and imperial forms of power on which the nation-state sustains its claims of sovereignty. These transformations, which had considerable impact on anthropological writings, took place at a time when Israel’s unsailable position in the West was beginning to falter following its 1982 invasion of Lebanon (Said 1985, p. 38). This process gained even more momentum with the 1987 Intifada, the popular Palestinian uprising, in which youngsters and women hurled stones at Israeli occupation forces, refrained from using firearms, and garnered widespread Western support for their national struggle.

Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, Hobsbawm & Ranger’s *The Invention of*

Tradition, and Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*, which all appeared in 1983, offered new critiques of the constructed nature of nations and states. Revisiting a phenomenon previously taken for granted as an inherent and unproblematic component of the modern human condition, these works and others that followed (e.g., Bhabha 1990, Chatterjee 1993, and contributions to the newly established journal *Nations and Nationalism*) historicized the nation and the state, illustrating how hegemonic ethnic groups, in colonial as well as metropolitan settings, design "their" states, suppressing potential contenders in the process (Williams 1989).

This deconstruction was concurrent with the emergence of ethnicity as a theory of difference based on culture (Barth 1969, Smith 1986, Hall 1996), and with concepts like recognition (Taylor 1992) and identity, which informed work on the politics of multiculturalism (Kymlicka 1995, 2001) and indigeneity. Drawing on the "twin discourses of rights and authenticity" (Lee 2006, p. 455), authors have theorized, articulated, and deployed indigenism as an ideological universe (Churchill 1999, Niezen 2003) and a political instrument (Jung 2008) outside and within anthropology in contradictory ways (Beckett 1996, Lee 2006). Although not yet significantly incorporated into anthropological work on Palestinians, indigeneity's relevance to Palestine, where attachment to place is paramount in the articulation of rights, is self-evident.

We do not wish to imply that Palestinians themselves were at the time demystifying nationalism and the nation-state, nor that they do so now. If anything, Palestine was admitted as an ethnographic space at a time during which Palestinians brought their struggle for self-determination to fruition. The demystification of nations and nationalism to which we refer is locatable in intellectual circles in the West, a locus of the discipline, not in the locale of study.

The second transformation, the "crisis of representation," (Clifford & Marcus 1986, Fabian 1983, Marcus & Fischer 1986) em-

anated from critiques of modernity outside and inside anthropology. Outside anthropology, critiques of European Enlightenment (e.g., Foucault's notion of discourse that subverts a liberal distinction between pure and political knowledge) were used by Said (1978) to criticize Western knowledge of the Orient. At the same time, anthropologists began to recognize the place of power and history in the production of anthropological knowledge (Asad 1975, Hymes 1974, Wolf 1964). This turn, and its attendant arguments (e.g., postcolonial, poststructural, and postmodernist) offered an "enabling vocabulary" for the ethnography of Palestine.¹⁴ Admitting Palestinians to anthropology's purview in turn facilitated recognition of their dispossession.

An important instance of this enabling vocabulary is memory. Said's (1978) *Orientalism* helped inspire the editors of *Writing Culture*, whose critique of anthropology's old tropes hinges on the notion of "partial truths" (Clifford & Marcus 1986).¹⁵ Swedenburg's (1989, 1995) study of silenced truths and contemporary fears in Palestinian memories of the 1936 peasant revolt advanced memory and representation as prominent subjects in the study of Palestine.

Memory as a dwelling for precarious yet persevering truths of the Palestinian condition is evident more recently in an anthology of memories of the Nakba (Sa'adi & Abu-Lughod

¹⁴The term enabling vocabulary comes from Said (1984, p. 35). Our use of it here is akin to Massad's point that "emergence of postcolonial discourse is helping to create a new discursive space for Palestinians" (2006, p. 95). However, it is illuminating to note that poststructuralist sensibilities, notably Deleuze's rhizome, proved useful also in the planning and execution of Israeli military actions against Palestinians (Weitzman 2006). Poststructural formulations, in other words, must not be essentialized as necessarily amenable to subalterns.

¹⁵In November 1987 Edward Said addressed the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, speaking of a "crisis of representation." Ironically, this took place just weeks before the outbreak of the 1987 Intifada—a political event with ongoing epistemic and representational reverberations. Interestingly, the next occasion in which Said addressed an anthropological conference was when he delivered a keynote address to the annual meeting of the Israeli Anthropological Association in Nazareth, 1999.

2007), in which five out of the ten contributors are anthropologists. This ethnographic focus on memory affirms Said's (1979, p. 5) observation that Palestine no longer exists except as memory. In vindicating Palestinian memories (or counter-memories), ethnographers thereby respond to Foucault's appraisal of Nietzsche, in which Foucault (1977, p. 139) advocates the tools of "genealogy" to overcome historians' traditional disregard of "unpromising places . . . without history."

If recognizing Palestine after years of silence in anthropology is embedded in the enabling vocabulary of the crisis of representation, then this enabling is embodied in the loss of confidence in the notion of the nation-state. The irony here is that the recognition of Palestinians' struggle for national sovereignty coincides with a time in global history when the conceptual and practical gaps between the nation-state and sovereignty become increasingly apparent. Three decades after Hannah Arendt found nation-states' concept of sovereignty bankrupt (1970, p. 6), states find it increasingly difficult to claim total sovereignty over the entirety of their own territory (Mitchell 2003, p. 16).

The new admissibility of Palestine into anthropology's mainstream naturally carries institutional dimensions. As academic politics became more open to critical work on Palestine, and as such work was increasingly published, researchers whose ethnographic careers had been committed to Palestine and Palestinians were offered academic jobs and started training others. The establishment of The Palestinian American Research Center in 1998, and the inauguration of the Center for Palestine Studies at Columbia University in 2010, also attest to this institutional currency.

There is an emancipatory dimension in admitting Palestinians as subjects of anthropological inquiry. However, this admissibility does not entirely escape entrapment. While the sheer physical existence of Palestinians and some facets of their political reality gained recognition, denial of the content and the costs of subjugation to Israel still persists. Yet to be conducted is an ethnography of Pales-

tinian life under the horrors of 1948. Likewise, proportionate attention has not yet been given to Palestinian citizens of Israel,¹⁶ to the return of Palestinian refugees,¹⁷ to the consistent eradication and fragmentation of Islamic historic presence,¹⁸ and to daily life in Israel. Clearly, still ensnared by the logic of the nation-state, the admissibility of stateless Palestinians reaches only but so far.

POTENTIALITIES OF PALESTINE

The ethnographic work that emerged after Palestine's admission into mainstream anthropology since the 1980s exhibits understandable preoccupations with memory, violence, law, nationalism, and resistance, to name but a few. In all of these realms truths about Palestine have been repressed, with Palestinians struggling to reveal them. This direction tended to produce depictions of Palestinians as locked in a bind between repression and resistance, ubiquitously struggling for national sovereignty.

This politically attentive and grounded work over the past two decades has provided important contributions to understanding the Palestinian predicament, lending itself to continued valuable inquiry and theoretical insight. And yet, Palestine can surely also serve as a site for ethnographies receptive to stories beyond the struggle for national sovereignty. Such studies could delve into "prosaic" but still politically crucial issues that are yet to be thoroughly addressed, including the environment, land alienation, employment, language ideologies, music, sexuality, piety, schooling, food, and health. Detailing how this important work

¹⁶Few ethnographies venture to study Palestinian citizens of Israel, thus perpetuating Israel's sense of sovereignty as a "Jewish State." The vast majority of anthropological works that came after the silent decades focus on Palestinians "outside" Israel, especially in zones of globally approved Palestinian sovereignty.

¹⁷Works by anthropologists that have addressed this issue so far include Khalili (2005) and Rabinowitz (2010).

¹⁸See Abu El-Haj (2002) for ways Israeli archeology works to deny Islamic history.

could develop is beyond our scope here. Instead we argue that Palestine could become a site for conceptual reinvigoration that may influence wider ethnographic debates. Our pursuit of new potentialities in Palestinian ethnography stems from three realizations: languages of liberation have lost efficacy; the value of national sovereignty has plummeted; and the national struggle does not pursue every kind of freedom.

Concerned with the limits of postcolonial language, Scott (1999) suggests the notion of “problem-space”—where new questions expand the conceptual terrain in which an object is located—as a way forward. Palestine-as-problem-space could help transcend a situation whereby Palestine as an ethnographic field site is but a shore for more deliberations, however critical, of Western theory. Geared towards conceptual invigoration, Palestine, located outside European truths as well as close to their beginnings, could become a place of *theoria* (seeing beyond). Recognizing it as a birthplace of monotheistic traditions but no longer oblivious to Islam, ethnographers can use Palestine to probe Western genealogies of reason and power.

We propose an ethnography that draws upon postcolonial critique but goes beyond its common concerns by questioning, for example, secular reason’s claim to self-evident authority. Formulated along such lines, a future ethnography of Palestine could examine the theological

underpinnings of the secular state, as a particular embodiment of sovereignty. To what extent does such a state enable cohabitation of people with different religions or with none at all? What are the regimes of tolerance that national sovereignty requires and how are they produced? How might the Palestinian notion of *summud* (persistence) address the prevalent devaluation of patience in classical and contemporary analyses of power? What ethics of freedom does *summud* demand from Palestinians who ascribe to it? How might Palestinian narratives of return (*‘awdab*) challenge the self-evident linearity of the secular sense of time? How might practices of Palestinian oral culture (e.g., memorized poems, Qur’anic verses, and proverbs) defy the ocular propensities of truth in Western modern reason? Can the predicament of modern Palestinians help rehabilitate a forgotten vocabulary of social theory that includes idioms such as silence; invisibility, finitude; revelation, fate; exile, and absence?

Finally, there is an irony we need to register. Admitting Palestine takes place as the West is losing confidence in its established structures of power, not least the nation-state, as consummate expressions of sovereignty. Palestine arrives as the glitter and glamour of Nietzsche’s “new idol” (the state) fades out. Given this irony, a major challenge associated with future research is to thwart the temptation to assimilate Palestine into the hegemonic language of the secular-liberal Islamophobic West.

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