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Review of Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History and Literature.

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As Palestinians and Israelis struggle on the pain-ridden road to necessary co-existence, to a resolution of age-old enmities, the many complex aspects of Israeli-Palestinian relations gain still greater attention in the global arena. Questions of entangled histories, physical violence, and social inequities are explored again and again, by academic scholars, politicians, and national citizens. Woven into all these discussions is one of the most significant issues of all: the question of identity.

Israeli and Palestinian identities are deeply entangled. The two peoples lay claim to the same land and locate their holy sites in the same city. Ironically, they share a history of displacement and wandering, of being identified as an unwanted, outcast body. Israeli and Palestinian identities are imbricated; they are layered into one another. Within Israel, Israeli Arab and Israeli Hebrew identities are hybridized; indeed, a complex hybrid Israeli identity has emerged during the past half century, one that incorporates elements of Arabism and Hebraism. Palestinian and Israeli identities are mutually informing; they are, in fact, so enmeshed that the transformation of the one impacts profoundly upon that of the other.

While numerous academic works have explored Israeli and Palestinian histories and literatures independently, few projects have treated the question of Israeli and Palestinian identity in a comparative context. Among recent, successful studies are Ian Lustick's *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank*, and Donald Akenson's *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa*, Israel and Ulster. Significantly, both these works address the question of Israel and the Occupied Territories in the context of postcolonial studies; the implication is that the Middle-Eastern question must be treated, like those of Ireland, Algeria, and South Africa, as a postcolonial issue. Kamal Abdel-Malek and David C. Jacobson's edited collection of essays, *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History and Literature* now takes its place among these studies. An important contribution to the study of literature, history, and culture, this volume sheds light on a long-standing struggle and offers interesting and important ways of reading it in the context of postcolonial, cultural, and identity theories. It is a frank and carefully organized collection of essays that brings together the views of Palestinian, Israeli, and American Jewish scholars on issues of identity, acknowledging both difference and sameness among the subjects in question. For these reasons, one must welcome the publication of *Israeli and Palestinian Identities*. Anyone seeking to understand the complexities of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its links to questions of literature, history, and national identity could do no better than to read this work.

The stated goal of the volume is to explore a wide range of Israeli and Palestinian identity issues from the point of view of several academic disciplines. In that, Abdel-Malek and Jacobson have most certainly succeeded. The editors, who authored two of the essays, were colleagues at Brown University, where they co-directed a conference titled, "Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History, Literature, and the Arts," in April 1997. The purpose of the conference was to allow for an exchange between scholars in the areas of Israeli and Palestinian studies, as well as others interested in the Arab-Israeli conflict and in the development of national identity as a general phenomenon. To that end, the conference included scholars in the disciplines of literary studies, film studies, history, political science, and sociology, each of whom addressed issues concerning the ongoing construction of Israeli and Palestinian identities. The present volume is an outgrowth of that conference, and it represents a selection of the papers given there. It represents, too, an ongoing effort on the part of the editors to keep alive the dialogue among Palestinians and Israelis on matters of mutual interest and importance.

Many of the essays included raise critical questions about Zionist ideology and it role in Israeli identity formation. Several authors challenge traditional Zionist ideology, re-framing the concept of classical Zionism as "post-Zionism," to delineate an evolving ideology of the present era. Sammy Smooha challenges the notion of classical Zionism, calling it "an outdated nationalist ideology" that "still conceives of Israel as the exclusive homeland of the Jewish people, leaves no room for the Arabs, and denigrates life in the Diaspora as incorrigibly abnormal and in need of normalization by return to Israel" (30). He suggests that these tenets of classical Zionism be adapted to the realities of the turn of the millennium, thereby creating a dignified and useful place for the Palestinian citizen of Israel. Neil Caplan echoes Smooha in pointing out that the old Zionist state is declining, and a new post-Zionist Israel must be born to replace it in order to clear a path toward reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled point to a conflict within Israel between "neo-Zionists, who have replenished old Zionism with a fundamentalist religious and anti-Western twist, and post-Zionists, who view the state of conquest, colonization, and state-building as over" (102). All these views present a critical, perhaps radical, but certainly innovative rhetoric with which to examine the implications for identity of reformulating Zionist ideology.

Israeli and Palestinian Identities is organized in three sections: Part I, "Israeli and Palestinian Identity Formation since 1948," includes studies drawn from the disciplines of history, sociology, political science, and film studies. These chapters focus on the ongoing process of defining and redefining identity that both Israelis and Palestinians have undergone over the past fifty two years. Part II, "Israeli and Palestinian Identity in Literature," explores the use of literature as a means to glean

insights on these identity issues. Part III is an edited transcript of a roundtable discussion held at the conference, in which participants were given the opportunity to respond to identity issues that had been raised by their colleagues' papers.

The volume opens with a thematically linked pair of chapters by Salim Tamari and Sammy Smooha on Palestinian identity (Tamari writes from the perspective of Palestinian studies, Smooha from that of Israeli studies). Tamari examines the history and development of Palestinian identity, pointing to the shift from localism, prevalent in 19th- and 20th-century greater Syria, to Palestinian regional nationalism--a result of British colonial rule and of Zionism. This regional identity, he proclaims, was "riddled with ambivalence" (4). He goes on to examine the crucial points of contact between Palestinian identity on the one hand, and on the other, exile, and the new Palestinian social and state formation. Indeed, claims Tamari, the decisive marker of contemporary Palestinian identity has been the politics of exile. The Palestinian leadership, intelligentsia, and professionals, who were either expelled, exiled, or chose exile, have played a critical role in the formulation of Palestinian national consciousness out of the refugee experience in the 1948 and 1967 wars. More importantly, Tamari continues, the politics and poetics of exile--informing and informed by the tension between "inside" and "outside" (internal national forces at home, and external forces in exile)--became so dominant in this formative period that the experiences of those Palestinians who remained in Palestine were virtually forgotten. They were, ultimately, marginalized not only by Israelis, but by Palestinian Arabs. He refers to this irony as "the height of schizophrenia in Palestinian national identity" (5).

Both Tamari and Smooha consider Palestinian identity as fragmented. This fragmentation (discussed elsewhere by Edward Said) is a crucial element of identity, particularly in colonial territories. In the case of the Palestinians, it derives from the variety of historical experiences they have undergone in different geographic areas since 1948--whether as Israeli citizens inside Israel, or in exile in countries throughout the world; or, after 1967, under Israeli occupation in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. This splitting of the local Palestinian community, which Tamari calls schizophrenia, is largely responsible for the fragmentation of Palestinian identity.

Smooha's sociological survey of Palestinian citizens of Israel is a fine complement to Tamari's essay. It focuses on the segment of the Palestinian people who stayed or are descended from those who stayed in Israel after 1948 and became Israeli citizens. Significantly, he includes Arabs in his formulation of "Israeli identity"; he does so by tracing (through a series of public opinion surveys) what he calls the "Israelization" or "Palestinization" of Arab Israelis in the period from 1976 to 1995. Israelization means "the adjustment of the Arabs to their minority status, the respecting of Israel's right to exist and its territorial integrity, the adoption of Hebrew as a second language and

Israeli culture as a subculture, the conduct of struggle according to democratic procedures, and the viewing of their lot and future as firmly tied to Israel" (28). Palestinization means that "the Arabs are increasingly drawn to Palestinian nationalism and to feeling more similar and loyal to the Palestinian people than to Jewish fellow citizens" (28). Of great interest are Smooha's results, which show that between the years 1976 and 1995, Israelization among Israeli Arabs was a much stronger force than Palestinization.

The perspective of cinema studies and critical theory is brought to *Israeli and Palestinian Identities* by Nurith Gertz. Her analysis of Israeli Zionist propaganda films of the 1940s and 50s, and later works of Israeli film since 1960, creates an identification between Holocaust survivors, Israeli Arabs, and women as marginalized figures in modern Israeli history. This is an important connection, showing the impact of gender, nationalism, and colonialism on identity, and the ways in which the politics of occupation--whether under colonialism or fascism--so often involve the rhetoric of feminization as a means of subjugating an occupied people (Ashis Nandy and Homi Bhabha have illustrated this rhetorical strategy in their works on colonial politics in British India). Gertz argues that the national heroic cinema of Israel feminizes survivors and describes a process of psychological and sexual maturation that amounts to a physical, spiritual, and national rebirth on the land. The role of the Arab and the woman in these films is, in essence, to provide a contrast to this process; for, unlike the male Jew the Arab is, as Gertz puts it, "ineligible" for transformation and therefore is more closely identified with the Israeli woman than with the heroic, transformed Israeli Hebrew. Significantly, the act of cultivating the land is portrayed, in these films, as an erotic act; the male Holocaust survivor therefore demonstrates his virility and his ultimate superiority over the Arabs by going to war and by having sexual relations with a woman. Ultimately, the Zionist identity overtakes and dominates him, and he becomes the ideal, reborn, Israeli male. Yet, Gertz points to an important difference between the depiction of Arabs and women in the films and literature of the period: unlike the Israeli woman, who eventually does take part in the Jewish male's change in identity (from Diaspora Jew to Israeli), the Arab is condemned to remain the "other," left outside the main metamorphosis of the films" (50).

Neil Caplan discusses the ideology of victimhood as an obstacle to Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation, arguing that "victimhood," for both Arabs and Israelis, is a form of identification which has become a hindrance to the Mideast peace process, a further obstacle is the set of competing and ingrained self-images that many Israelis and Palestinians have of themselves as the victim of the other party's aggressiveness and hostility. Moreover, there is a degree of psychological entanglement occurring when self-identified victims struggle against another group of self-identified victims. This

notion is vital to understanding the imbrication of Palestinian and Israeli identities within and beyond the borders of Israel. Caplan is careful to illustrate how pervasively Jewish, Zionist, and Israeli history and identity are informed by a sense of victimization; he believes the victim identity has become both politicized and militarized in the Arab-Israeli conflict, most especially in what he calls "the well-known Israeli security obsession." Ultimately, Caplan expresses the need for change in this unhelpful self-identification as victim.

Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled take a hard look at Israeli economic and political policy toward Arabs, from the days of the Yishuv (the late 19th- and early 20th-century Jewish settlements in Ottoman and British Palestine) and onwards. Basing their discussion in the tradition of Western political thought, they argue that Israel was founded on an incorporation of three categories of citizenship discourse: liberal, republican, and ethno-nationalist. Furthermore, they suggest, this "incorporation regime," the unique system of "ethnic democracy" in Israel, and the important similarities between Zionism (as a settlement movement) and European colonialism (characterized by territorial struggles with native peoples)--are all largely responsible for the complex nature of Palestinian-Israeli relations in Israel today. They cite the ethno-nationalist discourse as primarily responsible for marginalizing both Arabs and Jewish Israeli women, excluding them from the republican political community in Israel. Among their remarks is the significant observation that a conflict has arisen within Israel between "neo-Zionists, who have replenished old Zionism with a fundamentalist religious and anti-Western twist, and post-Zionists, who view the state of conquest, colonization, and state-building as over" (102). This observation outlines clearly what is at the very center of so many debates over the future of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

The second half of the book opens with a pair of essays by David C. Jacobson and Arnold J. Band, on Jewish Israeli writers who deal with issues of Israeli identity. They raise meaningful questions about Zionist narrative and ideology, questions that have emerged forcefully in Israeli Jewish cultural discourse over the past several years, but have been developing virtually since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Jacobson pays particular attention to the ways in which writers of post-1948 and 1956 war literature explore the tension between the Zionist ideals and patriotic rhetoric that justify the occupation of land, on the one hand, and the moral conscience of the individual soldier, on the other. Through a close reading of stories by early Hebrew modernists Yehoshua Bar-Yosef, S. Yizhar, Yitzhak Orpaz, and Aharon Megged, Jacobson points to the troubling contrast between the collective ideology governing military practice, and the acts of war in which the soldiers in these stories engage. The tension between the moral code of peacetime and the conduct of soldiers in wartime is

palpable in these stories, which are particularly breathtaking in a country where writers are also soldiers.

Band opens his chapter with a useful statement about identity, borrowed from James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture*: "identity is not stable and reifiable, but rather a flexible concept contingent upon changes in a person, his circumstances, and those he interacts with." Taking up Clifford's idea of identity as mutable, Band rejects the term "identity crisis," often used in discussions of identity, in favor of the term "transformation." The transformation that interests him here is a gradual movement away from "the so-called Zionist narrative that reigned supreme in the Jewish society of pre-Israel Palestine and subsequently in Israel through the 1950s" (124). He argues that the ideals of Zionism no longer play a vital role in Israeli culture, and that this shift is explored by writers who are aware of the gap between the dreams they have inherited and the realities with which they must live. Band quickly dismisses the question of national identity and Arab-Israeli tension--explored in much Israeli literature of the 1960s (but which Band sees as a minor theme in the literature of the period)--as less relevant overall than the intergenerational conflict between the founding fathers of the nation and the first generation of Israeli writers. It is worth mentioning that Band's chapter is framed as a response to a 1990 essay by Israeli literary critic Hanan Hever, entitled, "Minority Discourse of a National Majority: Israeli Fiction of the Early 1960s," which relies heavily on postcolonial theory, as well as the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Most of Band's chapter explores the dynamic shifts in works during that period by Amos Oz, A. B. Yehoshua, and Aharon Megged--from optimism and triumphalism, to disenchantment with the dreams of the state's founders. In this regard, Band's essay forms a strong complement to, and a natural outgrowth of, Jacobson's study of disillusionment and moral tension in the prior two decades of Israeli writing.

Ami Elad-Bouskila's essay on Arab writers in Israel creates a bridge between Jacobson and Band's essays and the next cluster of essays on Palestinian literature. Elad-Bouskila highlights the unique identity issues facing Arab citizens of Israel, and provides a useful commentary on links between the politics of language and those of identity; he also addresses the important implications of translation projects from Arabic to Hebrew and vice versa. He observes that Palestinians who write in Hebrew are part of a universal phenomenon in which authors write not only in their native tongue or the local language of their adopted country, but also in the language of the conqueror. In this regard, Arab Hebrew writers are not unlike James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, and their Irish contemporaries, who wrote in English, the language of their British colonial conquerors. Elad-Bouskila carefully outlines the history of Arab Hebrew writing, dividing it into two categories: from 1948 to the late 1960s, and from the 1960s until today (evoking Shafir and Peled's study, he cites the process of

Israelization of at least some Israeli Arabs as allowing for the emergence of many Arab writers writing in Hebrew). The links between language and identity, so critical to the production of Arab Israeli writing, merit even greater attention than they receive here. These Hebrew Arab writers (Atallah Mansur, Anton Shammas, Naim Araidi, among others), are playing a critical role in the re-definition of Israeli literature. Their novels and poems deserve further, in-depth study.

Issa J. Boullata's chapter on Mahmud Darwish begins a trio of essays on Palestinian literature, identity, and exile. Boullata traces changes in Darwish's poetic expression of his identity as a Palestinian throughout the various stages of his life. Darwish's concept of identity has been strongly related to the land of Palestine, its past and its present. An interesting connection comes to mind between Darwish's Palestinian verse and Zionist Hebrew poetry of the Yishuv period: metaphorical associations are made in both poetic traditions between the land and woman, especially the body of a woman. In an innovative trope, Darwish also identifies his own, male, body with the land, as in poems where parts of the poet's body are unified in a struggle against the conquerors, ultimately leaving the impression that the homeland and the poet are one. Darwish's relationship to the land, Boullata observes, evokes anger at Israel, feelings of love for the land, calls for resistance against Israel, and (in later works) feelings of existential despair.

In her study of Palestinian identity and literature, Salma Khadra Jayyusi discusses the centrality of the collective in Palestinian identity and its expression in Palestinian Diaspora writing. The collective nature of Palestinian identity is an integral part of the national narrative. The confirmation of Palestinian identity, Jayyusi argues, has been strengthened by the necessity to confront a strong Israeli identity, which she calls "belligerent, overreaching, and self-imposing" (173). Palestinian literature takes on this clash of identities, producing, in turn, a meaningful change in the cultural identity of Palestinian poets and fiction writers, especially since 1948. Jayyusi observes that the Palestinian historical experience has served to give Palestinians a more clearly defined sense of themselves than can be found among other Arabs; she ascribes the greatest developments and contributions of Palestinian literature to the experience of exile. Ironically, as painful as exile has been for so many Palestinians, their literature has actually benefited from it. Jayyusi claims that, unlike Palestinian writers before 1948, writers of the Diaspora have been exposed to trends in world literature; as a result their works have reached new heights of sophistication, originating and developing new literary trends. Yet, she does not acknowledge the significant contributions of Palestinian writers in Israel, who have been exposed to Israeli as well as western literary traditions, and have therefore created their own literary revolution. Interestingly, the greatest contributions of Israeli Palestinians have been in fiction,

while poetry, according to Jayyusi, is the site of creative potency for Diaspora Palestinians.

Kamal Abdel-Malek closes Part II with an exploration of marginality, liminality, and borders in literary depictions of war and exile by Palestinian writers. Abdel-Malek makes good use of discourses from postcolonial and border studies in suggesting that major works by Palestinian writers "include characters, techniques, and literary tropes that can be characterized as liminal entities that, in turn, represent the central Palestinian experience of living a marginal existence on literal and figurative borders" (180). In his analysis of Palestinian Diaspora literature, he argues that "[b]orders spell death" for the characters in the texts (whether figuratively or, in the case of Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, literally); "borders are *hudud*, not only in the sense of limits, boundaries, but also, as in the Islamic legal terminology, penalties" (183). Finally, Abdel-Malek captures the essence of the Palestinian exile experience in a quote from author Fawad Turki: . . . "the diaspora for me, for a whole generation of Palestinians, becomes the homeland. Palestine is no longer a mere geographical entity but a state of mind" (184).

A major problem with this section of the book is that it neglects Israeli literature of the past thirty years. Literary texts during this period frequently depict political and social developments, military occupation, and the treatment of Israel's Arabs. Israeli writing (fiction in particular) has moved from its early stages as the provincial literature of a small nation dealing with its own, internal issues, to a literature rapidly gaining international status, and dealing with matters of global import. Additionally, current writing in Israel has made significant innovations in narrative and poetic technique, and in the uses and advancement of modern literary Hebrew. Conspicuously absent from the volume, in particular, are treatments of literary works by Israeli women, whose contributions to fiction during the last thirty years has been vital (e.g., Shulamit Hareven, Ruth Almog, Amalia Kahana-Carmon, as well as Shulamit Lapid, Michal Govrin, Leah Aini, or Eleonora Lev). Along with Arab Israeli writers, women authors are reshaping the Israeli literary canon; they must, therefore, be included in any serious consideration of Israeli literature.

The roundtable discussion on Israeli and Palestinian identities features most of the contributors to the volume. It revolves around matters of individual and collective identity, and the impact of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on identity formation. While the subject matter is clearly relevant, this is the least successful part of the book. The discussion, which would have benefited from the presence of a moderator, is rambling and somewhat unfocused. There is more professional and political jabbing, and rehashing of the material in the book's chapters, than academic exploration of the issues on the table. It would have been useful to see the discussants provide a working

definition of the term "identity," as an important theoretical concept, and to take on the idea of identity and its political implications.

The essays in *Israeli and Palestinian Identities* are well researched and informative; they provide frequently illuminating explorations of identity issues from the perspectives of historical, sociological, and literary studies. The writers included in the volume exhibit a sophisticated and thoughtful understanding of the questions of identity as they touch upon, influence, and in turn are influenced by Arab-Jewish relations in Israel over the past fifty-two years. The first of what we must hope will be an ongoing, comparative study of an always-evolving hybrid culture, *Israeli and Palestinian Identities* is a vital and long-awaited volume.