

## Preface

This volume is dedicated to research and theory in postcolonial studies. It is the product of a Workshop for Advanced Studies held at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, in September 2005. All the articles in this volume were presented and debated at the workshop, and later underwent a long process of writing, peer review, editing, and preparation for publication. The articles offered here represent a small selection of the many papers presented on this occasion. (For a list of over forty papers and responses given there, see the Appendix at the end of this volume). Collectively, however, these contributions give a sense of the creativity, intellectual diversity, and excitement that accompanied the discussions throughout the three-day event. The papers included here cover broad and varied areas of knowledge: history, gender, cinema, literature, spatial studies, race, globalization, sociology, anthropology, political science, and political theology. The impressive collection of articles featured here as well as the contributions of the students who participated in the workshop and of scholars active in this field serves to heighten the absence of programs in postcolonial studies at Israeli universities, none of which offer more than isolated courses in postcolonialism, primarily in departments of literature and cinema. Additionally, the collection gives clear evidence of the variety of disciplines that were brought to bear on the discussions in the workshop, and the complex and varied ways through which it is possible to define the body of material referred to as “postcolonial studies.”

Indeed, the participants defined the nature and epistemology of the field in different ways. Some thought, for example, that postcolonial studies create an epistemological space, otherwise lacking in the academy, for Mizrahi studies. While the academic establishment has long recognized the need to create departments of gender studies, Mizrahi studies have never attained such recognition, and it is reasonable to assume that the field will not attain recognition in the near future. This assumption is valid despite the increasing flow of papers in the field and notwithstanding the large number of students, Mizrahim and non-Mizrahim, who are reading and writing on Mizrahi-related topics in Israel (referred to by Louise Bethlehem as “Mizrahi revisionism”). A similar feeling characterized the interventions of the Palestinian students who took part in the workshop, and who pointed to the absence of “Palestine studies.” Other participants noted that postcolonial studies

clearly signify the connection between academic studies and the political sphere. As proof, some researchers are developing paradigms for the study of the Occupation, for addressing forms of biological and cultural racism, and for the consolidation of political criticism both in academe and in public discourse. One way or the other, it is clear that the workshop's participants represent an active segment of an animated intellectual field. However, such spirited participation also has limitations and calls for extra caution.

In her paper "Towards a Different Hybridity," *Louise Bethlehem* deals with the establishment of a local language nurtured by postcolonial consciousness. She constructs her critical argument as an interrogation of the "quiet and largely unexamined consensus concerning the *inevitability* of postcolonial theory as a scaffold for the promotion of identity politics and canonical revisionism on the part of local academics and activists alike." Bethlehem calls for special vigilance in the use of postcolonial discourse and in the assimilation of its founding assumptions. Without detracting from the objectives of the pedagogical and sociopolitical activity underlying the use of this discourse, she seeks to "recall an increasingly domesticated Hebrew postcolonialism to the challenges of its own radicalism." She asks, for example, "How is it that 'hybridity' has become, in some of its local inflections, a synonym for bland multiculturalism?" and "How might we conduct ourselves as postcolonial researchers without pressing a thin model of hybridity into service in order to consolidate our ritual claims of entitlement over 'the postcolonial'?" In recommending caution against rendering the field banal, Bethlehem challenged participants in the workshop to preserve the strength of postcolonial discourse in the face of the cultural institutionalization that has marked its reception in many places in the West. A reading of the articles in this volume, all of which were written by graduate students, indicates its success in signposting the need to preserve theoretical and empirical salience without sacrificing "political considerations."

This volume contains seven articles. *Dafna Ruppin*, in an article entitled "The Open Wound of Colonial Nostalgia," focuses on two postcolonial movies, *Chocolat* and *Outremer*. Rather than consider them texts of nostalgic yearning for the past (nostalgia is, after all, a "bright fetish in the service of unsatisfied desire" and is therefore "reactionary and non-reflexive"), Ruppin examines how the films she studies undermine the nostalgic drive. Analysis of these cinematic texts, she argues, allows the roles played by women and girls in building the colonial project to be held up to scrutiny. In her opinion, the films convey the female directors' criticism of the

historical processes in which they were personally implicated and their subsequent efforts to come to grips with their past.

*Smadar Sharon* discusses spatial planning in Israel in the 1950s, a decade in which the fate of two fundamental political questions was sealed: the manner in which the Jewish-Palestinian dispute would be dealt with, and the handling of the Mizrahim. Sharon asks a dual empirical question: How was the connection between the two questions shaped, and how were the relations between the state and its planning experts arranged? Contrary to many critical studies which view planners as the mere implementers of government policy, Sharon shows that planners acted as a professional group whose conception of their task was shaped in the context of the internal logic of the partly autonomous field in which they were active. Sharon relates a complicated story that poses a greater challenge to researchers of spatiality than we are used to concede. She questions how, despite the experts' partial autonomy, the spatial arena was nevertheless shaped according to the fundamental colonialist assumptions of social engineering, which organizes space in accordance with ethnic and racial considerations.

*Fatmeh Kassem*, who writes under the mantle of Subaltern Studies, seeks to give a voice to urban, illiterate Palestinian women living in Lod and Ramle. Kassem examines the manner in which their language defies, or at times adopts, Zionist discourse or that of Palestinian patriarchy — the languages in which the events of the *Nakba* are described. The result is complicated and multidimensional. These women create a unique language that distinguishes between them (“I am from here”) and the Palestinian immigrants who came to Lod and Ramle after 1948, a language that describes the occupation (“the Jews entered”) in gender, and not military, terms. The unique language of these women can and must be interpreted not only as a repository of historical memory, but also as a speech-act that constructs a Palestinian female subjectivity in Lod and Ramle which is distinct from the Palestinian description of the *Nakba* in national and political terms.

*Shlomit Benjamin* presents the social history of the Kfar G'virol neighborhood, which was established on the ruins of the Palestinian village Qubeiba. The article revolves around the way that spatiality serves as a tool for ethnic differentiation and population administration. The Arab Jews who were settled in the “abandoned” Qubeiba reveal the “third space” so endemic to colonial projects. On the one hand, their very embodiment as Jewish occupiers perpetuates the removal of the indigenous residents; on the other hand, these immigrants themselves experience colonialism:

spatial regulation forces them to the margins of Jewish nationalism. This marginality is marked, as Benjamin shows, by means of social labeling and orientalizing, hybridization, and social cleansing. The dialectic internal to the marking of the marginality of these immigrants imagines them as part of the Jewish nation and yet, at the same time, as its colonial “other.”

*Noa Lavie* deals with the various ways in which a globalized economy interacts with the state to shape ethnic identity in Israel. More specifically, Lavie shows how the dichotomy “First World”–“Third World” exists as an axis of the Israeli economy. The dichotomy exists in a reciprocal relationship with this economy, being shaped by it and shaping it simultaneously. In opposition to the prevailing view, Lavie argues that the state plays a major role in shaping the processes and consequences of globalization; that the state and globalization are the principal agents of the racialization, gendering, and ethnicization of the labor market; and argues further that increasing the minimum wage does not necessarily lead to an increase in levels of unemployment, as public economic discourse customarily claims.

*Avi Shoshana*, in his article, monitors the creation of an identity category of so-called special-care gifted pupils, a category that lies between “gifted” and “special-care pupils” and which arose with respect primarily to Mizrahi children as an institutional response to the Wadi Salib revolt. This category achieved practical expression in the founding of a boarding school for special-care gifted pupils in Jerusalem in the 1960s. The article depicts the kinds of justifications that accompanied this project. Along with the enhancement of personal traits, such as individuality and goal-orientation, and alongside the development of preferred cognitive skills (all of which resulted in the de-politicization of ethnicity), this educational intervention sought to instill in its students a series of values and cultural motivations that ostensibly negated their ethnicity. His article, like that of Lavie, isolates the inherent paradox of state and institutional treatments of Mizrahi ethnic identity which sought to eradicate the latter through reshaping it in new cultural or economic terms.

Lastly, *Shimrit Peled* suggests a critical reading of four Israeli novels published between the 1967 war and the 1973 war. Peled describes the opposition between novels written from the Ashkenazi point of view (*Daniel's Journey*, by Yitzhak Orpaz, and *The Man From There*, by Yitzhak Ben-Ner) and those written from the Mizrahi perspective (*Clarification*, by Shimon Balas, and *Equal and More Equal*, by Sami Michael), with the objective of discussing the link between spatiality and ethnic identity in Israel. Peled's main argument is that, while Orpaz and Ben-Ner construct

their fictional worlds so as to represent the linear time of the nation and succeed in conveying a stable national identity, Balas and Michael are more ambivalent and challenge underlying nationalist ideological templates through their presentation of Mizrahi and Ashkenazi ethnicity.

In addition to these seven articles, the volume contains four essays that were presented at the workshop. Louise Bethlehem, as noted above, proposes a critical reading of the institutionalization of the term “hybridity” in Hebrew postcolonial discourse. *Gadi Algazi* sketches out a ramified network of connections between the state, the economic elite, and the colonialist settlements around the separation fence. The activity of the Matrix company in Bil’in reflects, in Algazi’s opinion, an economic and political project that links real estate speculation and the settlements. In Modi’in Illit, the old economy of building contractors meets the new economic developers of hi-tech companies. The two economies are intimately linked to the state, and both interact to shape a particularly colonialist domain. Colonialism in the Occupied Territories is not composed only of fanatic settlers, Algazi states, but constitutes a complex coalition “that stretches from the Messianic nationalistic Right to the defense industries and receptive members of the economic elite, from the Kahanists of the settlement of Tapuah to those living on both sides of the Green Line who seek a privileged lifestyle that is segregated and pollution-free.”

It is the notion of the exception, drawn from political theology in a trajectory that runs from Carl Schmitt via Walter Benjamin to Giorgio Agamben which *Yehouda Shenhav* puts to the empirical test of history. Through an analysis of the work of Frantz Fanon and by emphasizing the tension that ostensibly erupts between his two principal books — *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* — Shenhav argues that it is impossible to understand the complicated identity politics of post-colonial Europe, which has become “the colony of all colonies,” without a proper understanding of genealogy of the state of emergency with respect to specifically colonial settings since the end of the nineteenth century. *Tal Kohavi*, like Louise Bethlehem, uses her essay to stage the need for epistemological and methodological caution in the face of the forms of postcolonial discourse that have developed in Israel. She particularly notes the danger of creating a discourse based on *a priori* assumptions, on taking too much for granted, on distancing the discussion from postcolonial subjectivities, and on “a renewed capitulation to the selfsame problematic methodologies which catalyzed the need for the creation of a new path in the first place.” Both Kohavi and

Bethlehem caution against the creation of epigonic forms of knowledge which are devoid of appropriate context.

The Books Reviews section, edited by *Tal Arbel*, *Ronna Brayer-Garb*, and *Orna Yoeli* is dedicated to postcolonial literature. *Julie Peteet* and *Maya Rosenfeld*, each of whom has conducted research in Palestinian refugee camps, read one another. Peteet writes primarily about the Shatila refugee camp whereas Rosenfeld writes about Daheishe. It is not only the case that each of them has produced deeply insightful ethnographies, but it is also evident that this rare reciprocal reading itself constitutes a resonant and disturbing echo-chamber. *Eitan Bar-Yosef* uses his essay to interrogate the meaning of reading and writing about Africa in Israel in the twenty-first century. His discussion relates both to publicist writings and to prose. *Ariella Azoulay* surveys “Disengagement,” an exhibition at the Tel Aviv Art Museum. Azoulay also reviews *Gannit Ankori*’s book *Palestinian Art*, examining how the forced abandonment of the home and the violent carving up of space has shaped Palestinian art. Lastly, *Galit Hasan-Rokem*, *Vered Madar*, and *Dani Schrire* survey Mizrahi discourse over the course of the past decade.

The volume was edited by:

Louise Bethlehem

Tal Kohavi

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