

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations for the Study of Palestinian Society

ELIA ZUREIK

To study the Palestinians is basically to study a society in conflict and transition. The majority of the society's members live in dispersion as refugees and members of exiled communities, whether in the Arab countries or the West. Some continue to live in their homeland, such as in Israel where they live as a minority, or as a majority in highly contested political environments such as the West Bank and Gaza. Thus, it is not surprising that issues of identity, control, and resistance, among others, comprise key concerns of any intellectual enterprise purporting to render intelligent the fragmented experience of the Palestinian people.

While maintaining a particular emphasis on refugees, this paper situates recent studies of Palestinians in the context of (1) social science debates surrounding qualitative and quantitative methodologies with special reference to Palestinian society; (2) theoretical discussions of power, resistance, and subjectivity; and (3) ethnographic studies of refugee identities.

Methodological Quandaries

The long, established tradition of positivist social science, which looked to natural science as its model for theory construction and empirical testing, has dominated the social sciences off and on throughout the twentieth century. However, during the last two to three decades, positivist social science—particularly sociology—has yielded to many influences emanating from philosophy and the humanities. This cross-fertilization of ideas has brought new insights to social science, insights which have left their mark in terms of methodologies, choices of research topics, and, above all, have blurred the lines separating the social sciences from other disciplines. Sociology, for example, has acknowledged the place of qualitative and ethnographic studies as integral to the discipline and not as a “soft,” add-on component to what used to pass for predominantly hard-core positivist social science.

Even before the recent popularity of qualitative social science studies, such studies have always occupied a place in sociology, including Arab sociology. The American sociologist Howard Becker reminds us that

qualitative studies made their debut in the United States more than six decades ago.¹ Arab sociology boasts a rich tradition in qualitative social science, as in the work of the Iraqi sociologist ‘Ali Al-Wardi. Following in the footsteps of the fourteenth century Arab thinker Ibn Khaldun, ‘Ali Al-Wardi explored the interplay between urbanism and nomadism, and their impact on the development of individual personality and community life in Iraq.² Similarly, there are the valuable studies of village life by the Egyptian anthropologist Hamid ‘Ammar in which he analyzed the values and personality make-up in rural Egypt.³ Until recently, qualitative community studies in the Fertile Crescent, Egypt, and North Africa comprised the bulk of what was reported in Arab social science.⁴

Applied social science, involving the collection of social statistics, was introduced to the Arab world in the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries as part of the administrative requirements of western colonization of the region. Following political independence in the first half of last century, indigenous scholars and the government elite expanded the use of applied research techniques to meet the bureaucratic and educational needs of the fledgling states. However, not until the 1960s did western-educated Arab social scientists begin to experiment with positivist methodologies in a sustained fashion. At this time they began to carry out survey research to uncover public attitudes and orientations to current affairs and policy matters. Although this coincided with a period when positivism was under attack in western scholarship, to a very large extent the undertaking of quantitative survey research in the Arab world proceeded without heeding the problems raised by such an approach. Two different sets of problems presented themselves. The first is specific to third world regions; the second is more theoretical, and focuses on an epistemological debate concerning objectivity and knowledge claims.

With regard to the former, three such problems are worth mentioning. First, consider the meaning of “public” in the context of the developing world—or the developed one for that matter. The notion that there is a public “out there” amenable to survey research is prob-

lematic in Arab society. To respond to a questionnaire interview assumes a modicum of trust and confidence between the interviewer and the interviewee, and also assumes that one's opinions count as far as public life is concerned. In societies where, to a significant degree, the public has not felt and does not feel that it has an influence on the course of events, citizens are unlikely to see utility in divulging their views. Moreover, because of lack of trust between officials and the public at large, there is a tendency to look with suspicion at those seeking individual-based information for fear that this information may jeopardize their position.⁵ Officials are equally suspicious of data collected on a large scale for fear that it may reveal sensitive information deemed threatening to regime legitimacy.⁶ Second, the problem with large-scale survey research in third world regions generally has to do with the integrity and representativeness of the statistical universe from which the so-called public is chosen. In the absence of reliable census data and open access to such information for the sake of verification and drawing from reliable samples, it is difficult to feel confident about results that are based on quantitative research alone. Third, the gathering of public opinion data and survey research is basically an *individual* enterprise anchored in methodological individualism. People are asked to express their views individually. In a society where collectivist values are deeply rooted and where, to use the Gestalt metaphor, the whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts, it is problematic to aggregate individual responses statistically for the purpose of drawing up a picture of the collective.⁷ This is reminiscent of C. Wright Mills' criticism of abstracted empiricism in western social science, by which he meant the carrying out of quantitative research without paying sufficient attention to the historical context and the socially embedded nature of human agency.

These comments are not intended to discredit quantitative and survey research, but to sound a cautionary note concerning its limitations, particularly in the context of modernizing societies. In a lucid argument, Becker makes an important distinction between qualitative and quantitative research.⁸ Quantitative research, which includes both survey research and "official statistics," tends to be "interest laden."⁹ For example, official statistics tell us more about the process of data production, the intentions of administrators in charge of information gathering, and how records are kept, than they do about the real world. Paraphrasing Becker, Campbell points out that "we should regard official statistics as the persuasive communications of administrators and not as unbiased reflections of reality."¹⁰

Survey research, on the other hand, is decontextualized and insulates respondents from the consequences of their utterances. Unlike the natural environment, the setting for ethnographic fieldwork, survey research taps

responses removed from everyday life experiences. More importantly, according to Becker, in contrast to survey research where data collection is guided by a questionnaire schedule and pre-determined set of variables, ethnographic approaches leave the possibility open to the emergence of unexpected data in the course of doing fieldwork. Having made these distinctions, Becker goes on to note that qualitative and quantitative approaches differ mostly in terms of their goals and the kinds of questions they ask. The former focuses on the case study and seeks comprehensive disclosure of data in a natural environment, whereas the latter aims at reaching generalizations in contrived settings and through statistical assessment of group differences. However, according to Becker, "the similarities between these methods are at least as, and probably more, important and relevant than the differences."¹¹

A few ways to rectify these problems include contextualizing the research problem in question; complementing survey research with in-depth interviews; and combining, where possible, quantitative with qualitative and ethnographic data by incorporating symbolic and cultural evidence in the data gathered.¹² A final way, in the words of Egyptian sociologist Sa'ad Eddin Ibrahim, is to adopt the group rather than the individual as the unit of analysis:

An alternative [to the western-based approach] is to take the group as the unit of analysis in survey research, since in traditional or modernizing societies the decision-making unit may not be the individual. The individual may not initiate action. He or she may not be a free agent. In this respect, the difference between western and Arab societies is one of degree rather than of kind, but it is great enough to call into question the assumption that the individual is always the most appropriate unit of analysis. Alternatives can and should be considered, such as using a social network or some other kind of collectivity.¹³

Interest in ethnographic research is experiencing a revival, and occupies a central place in the diverse methodologies encountered in the post-positivist era. The thrust of ethnographic research in general, in the words of Paul Willis, is to understand the relation between three elements: "creative meaning-making in sensuous practices; the forms, i.e. what the symbolic resources used for meaning-making are and how they are used; the social, i.e. the formed and forming relation to the main structural relations, necessities and conflicts of society."¹⁴ Thus, ethnography is the analysis of meaning-making as a cultural production of everyday practices. As such, its focus is the creative use (implicitly and explicitly) of a symbolic and material repertoire to comprehend and decode the world, cope with it, and understand it as a creative endeavor. From a standard positivist angle, the problems with ethnography, and all

qualitative work for that matter, are measurement, validity of the data collected, and generalizability of the conclusions reached. A rather different criticism of ethnography comes from the postmodern camp, and centers on the authorial problematic of the text. Willis encapsulates this stance by describing the “postmodern and poststructuralist critique of ethnographic methods as constituting rather than reflecting their subject matter.”¹⁵ The postmodern critique of ethnography questions the finality and authoritative nature of the text and stability in meaning. The emphasis on difference and juxtapositioning in postmodern writings is taken to mean that, in the study of culture, the line separating the global from the local is becoming blurred. The global is not “out there,” but is increasingly becoming part of the local.¹⁶

With regard to quantitative research in Palestine, the most noticeable surge in the use of attitudinal surveys and other kinds of applied research techniques occurred after the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by Israel in 1967, and more particularly after the signing of the Oslo agreement between Israel and the Palestinians in September 1993. While there is some research that is carried out by independent researchers and academics, the bulk of such research is interest-laden and funded either by international organizations or donor countries, both of which have a vested interest in gathering such statistics for policy purposes. Included in this surge of quantitative research is the gathering of public opinion data in the West Bank and Gaza that is intended to gauge Palestinian public opinion on various facets of the Middle East peace process. Here is how Hammami and Tamari describe the connection between survey research and policy-making in the aftermath of the Palestinian-Israeli peace agreements in 1992 and 1993:

The impetus for these surveys at this time was described by one [Palestinian] pollster as an attempt to provide the Palestinian negotiating team, as well as the PLO in Tunis, with a sense of the community’s “red line”; that is, what issues could and could not be compromised on...applied social science in the study of Palestinians, particularly in the post-Oslo period, have resulted in uncritical acceptance of empiricist social science tailored to meet the needs of funding agencies and careers of individual researchers.¹⁷

A glaring example of this policy-oriented research was aptly described by the *New York Times*. Immediately after the signing of the Oslo agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel in 1993, the newspaper dubbed the role of the Institute of Applied Social Science in Oslo—an organization that was, and remains, intimately involved in survey research on Palestinians on behalf of the Norwegian and other donor governments, while at the same time facilitating secret negotiations between the two sides—as “peace through

survey research.”¹⁸

Theoretical Considerations

Official discourse such as government reports, commissions of inquiry, and censuses, are but a few of several means for insuring state legitimacy.¹⁹ Equally relevant in the construction of state hegemony are the writings of social scientists, intellectuals, and media commentators, as demonstrated by Herman and Chomsky, and Said.²⁰ Until recently, the focus of critical research has been on decoding and deconstructing elite discourse. But understanding resistance and counter-hegemony is not only a function of decoding and deconstructing the discourse of the powerful; it is also linked to revealing “unrecorded” histories as experienced by the less powerful, those in whose name intellectuals and governments speak. Ethnographic studies and oral histories have played a major role in giving voice to agency and marginal groups in society. In the case of the Palestinians, such studies assumed special significance when describing the world of Palestinian refugees and those living in exile and under Israeli occupation. I provide below an overview of several recent ethnographic studies of Palestinian refugees to demonstrate how such an approach can capture subjectivity and nuances of the phenomenon under investigation.

Analysis of power and resistance is crucial in assessing systems of control. Michel Foucault analyzed the deployment of power in terms of subjectivity, administrative practices, and knowledge production. What distinguishes Foucault’s work is the shift from viewing the state as the main carrier of power to considering the “microphysics of power” that is reflected in day-to-day disciplinary measures of population control—whether in the workplace, school, family, hospital, or elsewhere. It is customary to remark that Foucault’s important analysis of normalizing the self (that is, how individuals unwittingly discipline themselves by acting on their bodies and thoughts) falls short of addressing the role of resistance by agency.²¹ For Foucault’s defenders this may have been true of Foucault’s earlier work, where, according to Gordon, he “seemed to give the impression of certain uses of power as having an almost absolute capability to tame and subject individuals.”²² It is certainly not true of his subsequent work on governmentality and the use he makes of the “biopolitics” and “strategic reversibility” of “power relations.”²³ Power here is conceived in its “productive” capacity. It is precisely because of its capillary forms, whereby governmentality involves itself in intimate aspects of people’s lives (body, sexuality, reproductive ability) that it renders visible multiple locations of power, thus making it possible to design counter strategies. According to Foucault,

Resistance is integral to power. The existence of power relationships depends on a multiplicity of

points of resistance which are present everywhere in the power network. Resistances are the old terms in relations of power: they are inscribed in the latter as irreducible opposite.²⁴

Although Foucault acknowledged (non-sovereign) power and resistance, the critics rightly point out that he did not fully recognize agency's reaction to and interpretation of power, let alone modes of resistance. Foucault's analysis "misses any relation between power and resistance. Specifically, it misses any antagonistic relation in which the means of power take shape against resistance."²⁵ Julie Peteet makes a similar point, noting "Foucault's view of the body as a text, as a site of inscription and exhibition by dominant forces, shows little concern with people's responses to having their bodies appropriated and designated as sites of inscription."²⁶

If ethnographers provided a methodology for delving into subjectification as a way of revealing the effects of power relations, social theorists articulated a theory of resistance. With regard to the latter, Anthony Giddens' work on structuration stands out as an important contribution in this respect. According to Giddens' structuration, "the dualism of the 'individual' and 'society' is reconceptualized as the duality of agency and structure."²⁷ Structuration theory portrays human beings as knowledgeable agents who are capable of acting upon and reproducing social systems across space and time, and through the deployment of an array of material and non-material resources. According to Giddens, "in the production/reproduction of interaction, agents draw upon corresponding elements of social systems: signification (meaning), domination (power) and legitimation (sanction)."²⁸ Giddens' conception of agency is premised on the ability of human agents to make choices and intervene in the course of events by making a difference. As he says, agency implies "that a person could have done otherwise," and that "an agent who has no option whatsoever is no longer an agent."²⁹ The knowledgeability of agents refers to what actors believe or know about the context of their actions and those of others, including the reservoir of knowledge, tacit as well as explicit (discursive), which actors rely upon in the production and reproduction of structures.³⁰ Actions in which agents engage can be rationalized (i.e., supported by explanations if the need arises), or reflexively monitored (i.e., they are part of "the flow of activity") in the sense that action does not consist "of discrete acts involving an aggregate of intentions, but a continuous process."³¹ Structure refers to the "rules and resources recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems."³² The resources (material, symbolic, and legal) at the agency's disposal can be both enabling and disabling. In Giddens' words, "structuration theory is based on the proposition that structure is always both enabling and constraining, in virtue of the inherent relation between

structure and agency (and agency and power)."³³ Social reproduction, which is contingent upon practices carried out in the context of "space-time distancing," is a key element in Giddens' structuration theory. The more differentiated a society is, the higher it is on the time-space continuum, as, for example, in modern industrial societies. Tribal societies are low on the distancing scale because of co-presence and face-to-face communication.

Giddens rejects the proposition that power is an "out there" entity that is unidirectional, and flows in a causal manner from an "objective" source to a subject. Thus, power is not a zero-sum, but "the means of getting things done, very definitely enablement as well as constraint."³⁴ Notwithstanding Foucault's relational treatment of power, Giddens rejects Foucault's analogy of the "microphysics of power" or the "capillary of power." In place of the ubiquitous and dualistic conception of power, he substitutes the "dialectic of control," which refers to "the two-way character of the distributive aspect of power," and denotes "how the less powerful manage resources in such a way as to exert control over the more powerful in established power relations."³⁵ The concept of resistance is explicit in his portrayal of agency and structure.

While from the Foucauldian perspective subjectification is achieved through governmentality (i.e. by disciplining the population through non-coercive means), the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza is subjected to routine coercive practices which evidence violence as a spectacle. In commenting on Foucault's treatment of power, Diane Macdonnell appropriately comments that Foucault's conception of power "does little to help us consider how power is at work in the deadly forces of physical repression, especially the army and the police."³⁶ Criminologist Stanley Cohen remarks that Israel's secret service has been engaged in applying psychological and physical pressure to extract confessions from Palestinian prisoners since the early 1970s. A landmark government commission headed by an Israeli Supreme Court judge recommended in its report that when "nonviolent psychological pressure" fails to extract information from detainees, "the exertion of a moderate amount of physical pressure cannot be avoided."³⁷ The ethnographic case studies presented below highlight the dialectical nature of power: violence is inscribed on the body, but at the same time it triggers resistance.

Ethnography of the Refugee Experience

With more than half of the Palestinian population existing in a transitional state—as refugees, migrants, and displaced people—time, place/space, and memory are bound to play a role in the constitution of these collectivities. Palestinian society stretches across time

and space through the production of locales/spaces, in the shape of refugee camps, or as segregated and exiled refugee communities in several host societies and nation-states. The Palestinians in *al-ghurba* (diaspora) have recreated their society in what amounts to virtual spaces that correspond to identifiable locales drawn from the continuum of time-space distancing. Here I am thinking of the Palestinian experience in refugee camps where villages belonging to a different social system prior to exile (in pre-1948 Palestine) are recreated in today's camps as a social space and locale representing specific cultural and political reproductions. For Palestinians at large, as for any exiled group for that matter, the implication of distancing for memory and identity is quite significant. While the camps acted as a symbol of severance from one's homeland, they became the site for the social construction of memory and identity. The camps, to borrow the phrase of Robert Bellah and his colleagues, become the "community of memory." These communities, into which one is born, link the present to the past, but also "turn us towards the future as communities of hope."³⁸ "In order not forget that past," say the authors of *Habits of the Heart*, "a community is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative, and in so doing, it offers examples of the men and women who have exemplified the meaning of the community. These stories of collective history and exemplary individuals are an important part of the tradition that is central to a community of memory."³⁹ More importantly, it is in these communities where the self is constituted.

Anthropologists have been at the forefront of researchers working on refugee camps. The studies we have of Palestinian refugee communities, whether in the host countries or in their homeland, demonstrate the powerful influence of the so-called "imagined community"⁴⁰ on sustaining Palestinian identity and attachment to the homeland. Rosemary Sayigh's pioneering studies of the Palestinian community in Lebanon's refugee camps show vividly the transmission of identity from one generation to the next in a community that is now well into its third generation, and how this identification plays an important role in mobilizing the refugee community to cope with adverse conditions.⁴¹ Recent studies show important changes taking place in the identity of Palestinian refugees compared to two earlier generations. These changes are shaped by the factors of gender, generational differences, and the impact of the surrounding political environment.

In a series of perceptive articles,⁴² Julie Peteet provides theoretical insights with which to examine gender, body, place, and rituals as possible sites and resources of mobilization for dealing with both ontological insecurity and the production of resistance subjectivities in the lives of Palestinian refugees:

Resistance to exile itself and resistance to the legal designation 'refugees' are central motifs of Palestinian exile culture. Resistance as an analytic concept is a point of entry to understanding these refugee communities. They insist on specific connection between space, place, culture and identity. Yet this connection between a time and a place in the past and contemporary struggles to return to it should not gloss over the experience of exile itself, which also evinces a clear connection between place, space, and culture. Palestinians are desirous of a specific territorialization of place, space, culture and power, one rooted in the past but oriented toward the future. Reterritorialization is only conceivable through resistance and empowerment.⁴³

Peteet's subaltern work makes full use of oral history and the quotidian experience of Palestinian refugees to show how, in this case, identity is negotiated across Lebanon's changing political and civilian-military landscape, where Palestinian refugees live in highly controlled environments, and with the traumatic experiences of uprisings against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinians reject the discourse which portrays refugees as helpless and dependent people and embrace a discourse of resistance in which refugeehood is replaced with the refugees' call for their right of return to their homeland. Since Palestinian refugees are not a homogenous group in terms of their generation, class affiliation, or place of origin in Palestine, not to mention gender, differing contours of identity construction will likely emerge. Although being a Palestinian refugee seems to have a leveling effect on these differentiated identities, important variations emerge in interpreting subjectivity. This is where ethnography's fine-grained analysis proves extremely useful in capturing the nuances of subjectivity.

Peteet examined the meaning of rituals and rights of passage to manhood among Palestinian male youth who had experienced imprisonment and torture at the hands of the Israeli occupation forces during the first intifada, which lasted from 1987 to 1993. While the body is the site of violence, it is also treated as a locus of power and a resource of "resistant subjectivity."⁴⁴ According to Peteet, ritual is not necessarily conservative by reaffirming the status quo, but can also become a weapon of the weak in the context of asymmetrical power relations between oppositionary national/ethnic groups. Inscription of violence on the body in a collective fashion "was read as a collective assault and a commentary on suffering," thus "upsetting established hierarchies of generation, nationality, and class yet reproducing and reaffirming other hierarchies such as gender."⁴⁵

Peteet pursues the theme of subjectivity and resistance in a subsequent paper by questioning the need to "essentialize" women's emotions as an overriding, uni-

versal aspect of maternal sentiment. She demonstrates how Palestinian women negotiate political-national space for themselves in a highly patriarchal society by reconciling “maternal activism” with traditional “maternal imagery.”⁴⁶ The sites of her research cover refugee camps in Lebanon, the West Bank, and Gaza, where she interviewed around fifty women. Peteet’s research challenges the dominant domestic image of mothers as the “national icon” usually identified with a caring labor ethic and reproductive roles. As mothers of male martyrs, Palestinian women occupy a special place in Palestinian society, whether in Lebanon or the West Bank and Gaza. They have managed to transform the meaning of their traditional roles and endow them with political activism directed not only at the Israelis and the Lebanese state, but also at the Palestinian leadership itself, by raising issues of gender equality and citizenship rights in the nascent Palestinian state. This transformation has been far from successful, however, for Peteet shows how “[a] female practice and emotion are transformed in a way that empowered mothers as political actors but did not challenge the gendering of either citizenship or caring labour.”⁴⁷ Considered within the specific Palestinian context, where periodic assaults on refugee camps, regional wars, and economic hardships predominate, Peteet discusses what she calls practices of “othermothering.” This involves extending help through “fictive kinship” to other mothers of martyred youth, or intervening to rescue Palestinian youths from arrests and beatings by Israeli soldiers. In so doing, the mothers connect motherhood to the national struggle, and even to the class struggle, as reflected in the peasant and impoverished background of Palestinian refugees from whom the bulk of victims come.

Writing in the same ethnographic tradition and concentrating on “the connection between cross-subjective self-articulation and the nascent [Palestinian] state,”⁴⁸ Jean-Klein supplements Peteet’s analysis by taking into account younger as well as older men drawn from sixty households in the West Bank city of Ramallah. In the case of the former, instead of diminishing the moral standing of the subject, as would be expected in a highly masculine culture, physical abuse at the hands of Israeli soldiers enhanced the stature and moral standing of the young. However, among older men, torture “was publicly accorded the value of passive reception.”⁴⁹ The differentiated impact of victimization shows that “victimization is a partial signifier of virtues associated with manliness and honour.”⁵⁰ To account fully for the constitution of the “heroic selves” among the young, the role of mothers and sisters becomes crucial in understanding how “the discourse of cross-subjectivity involves a discourse of gender complementarity and equality that specifically excludes senior men.”⁵¹ Mothers, and to a lesser extent sisters, become the main vali-

dators of the prison experience of their sons and brothers, who “were expected to perform great deeds,” but were “equally expected to show humility and modesty” when they returned home.⁵² The silence is a testimony to the “absence of self-reflexive testimonials by youths returning from prison or hospital [and] constitutes the most compelling ethnographic evidence of their reliance on familial cross-subjectivity.”⁵³ What is also absent in this cross-familial subjectivity is any reference to father-son relationships. Jean-Klein points out that fathers resented their wives for neglecting their familial obligations by engaging in extra-familial tasks which took them away from the home. The diminution of the social status of senior men, and the iconic place of young people as carriers of the national struggle, with mothers acting as the main narrators of their sons’ experiences, all coalesced to produce significant empowerment in women’s moral standing in the family, community, and society generally.⁵⁴

By incorporating generational difference, social class, religious activism, and locale, another body of ethnographic research on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan highlights important points of rupture in the construction of identity and its link to mobilization strategies.⁵⁵ This rupture is what characterizes the subaltern nature of the discourse—a discourse of resistance that is fragmented and lacks unity.⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that the defeat and subsequent eclipse of the PLO from Lebanon and elsewhere in 1982 fragmented the refugee discourse. By the same token, the Oslo agreement and the talk of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza are considered by the refugees themselves as capitulation and abdication of their right of return to their original homes in Israel.⁵⁷

Dorothee Klaus carried out a qualitative study of Palestinians in Lebanon using a longitudinal analysis of interviews in Greater Beirut over a 12-month period involving a sample of equal numbers of Lebanese and Palestinians.⁵⁸ She examined Palestinian identity through the relationship between, what she calls, “self-referential designation” and the designation given to Palestinians by others, in this case their Lebanese hosts. The dialectical relationship between reflexivity of the self and Othering, and the contrast between the opposing forces of integration and exclusion experienced by the Palestinians in Lebanon, allow the writer to trace the shifting boundaries of Palestinian identity. The identity with which she is concerned is the national/regional one and how it juxtaposes Palestinians to Lebanese. Palestinian society is viewed from a heterogeneous vantage point: bourgeoisie vs. proletariat and refugees; city people vs. village people; and young vs. old. These social-structural cleavages enable Klaus to locate the shifting boundaries of Palestinian identity—considered in the context of the changing role of the Palestinian national movement.

Contrary to expectations, the author finds that, after half a century of exile, camp refugees are more willing to quell the desire to return to Palestine than the bourgeoisie who, at one time thought of themselves as Lebanese in the making by carving up for themselves a niche in the economic and cultural landscape of Lebanon. Over time, middle-class Palestinians went through drastic changes in their identity. These changes ranged from privatizing, if not concealing, their Palestinianism so as not to disrupt their attempts to integrate into Lebanese society, to thinking, more recently in the post-Oslo period, of returning to Palestine through their checkbooks (i.e. by investing in property and businesses in Palestine). Palestinian camp refugees, on the other hand, most of whom are of peasant origin, carried the torch of return to Palestine in earlier years, particularly between 1967 and 1982, but such a desire seemed to wane after the 1982 debacle. Their narrative reflected their yearning for the land in Northern Palestine from where the majority came. However, with the passage of time, during which they experienced several crises of survival, the youngest among them, now three or four generations removed from the original Palestinian peasants, began trading their Palestinian identity for a place in Lebanon's political maze. Here is how Klaus puts it:

Whereas on the one hand the memories of the village and the orange grove have been transferred into a political claim for return, which after its perceived failure has lost its meaning and thereby its founding moment of identity construction, the individualistic memory of the bourgeoisie, conserved in black and white photography of the lost mansions, has led to an individualist, non-ideological strategy of return in the sense of reclaiming economic and private property.⁵⁹

In another study, Stephanie Latte-Abdallah examines the nature of family links in two refugee camps in Jordan: the Gaza camp near Jarash, and the Jabal Hussain camp near Amman.⁶⁰ It is important to note that the two camps are administratively and socially different. The Jabal Hussain camp consists of the 1948 refugees, all of whom have Jordanian citizenship. The Jarash camp consists primarily of Bedouins from Palestine who were expelled by Israel from Gaza for the first time in 1967, and those who first became refugees in 1948 but remained in Palestine and were expelled for the second time during the 1967 war. Thus, the Jarash camp contains Bedouins and peasants, whereas the Jabal Hussain camp contains rural and urban refugees from 1948 who originated from "the heart of Palestine." Here too, we have first and second-time refugees. The theme of heterogeneity of Palestinian society emerges again: Bedouin vs. peasant vs. city people; 1948 refugees vs. 1967 displaced; female-headed households vs. male-headed nuclear families. This is a unique study in which The

United Nations Relief and Works Agency's (UNRWA) administrative practices are examined in terms of their impact on Palestinian refugee life. It is an excellent example of Foucault's "biopolitics" where a proxy state, a United Nations agency created more than fifty years ago specifically to cater to Palestinian refugees, is engaged in disciplining the Palestinian refugee population. Not all refugees fall under the same administrative regime. Only the 1948 refugees benefit from UNRWA's services. So-called displaced individuals, refugees from the 1967 war, receive assistance from the Jordanian government. Those who came directly from Gaza to the Jarash camp, around forty percent of the current inhabitants of the camp, are not registered with the UNRWA, and have neither passports nor official family registration records, which are the basic means for determining refugee status and entitlement for assistance.

Several key concerns emerge from this study. First, the issue of identity is visited again here. How are familial, gender, and, indeed, national identities negotiated in the context of an overwhelming administrative apparatus woven around Palestinian refugees—an apparatus in which the Jordanian government and the UNRWA play leading roles? Second, as is well known, the Palestinian family in the camp is mainly a collectivist family. As such, bonds are shaped by marriage to kin belonging to the same extended family, *hamula*, or *'ashira*. The interplay between family bonds and the administrative structure of UNRWA further fragments the extended Palestinian family and accelerates the emergence of the nuclear family. Here, Latte-Abdallah shows how UNRWA's classification scheme, which has undergone several iterations since the agency's inception, has ramifications for family structure. For example, in order to be classified a hardship case, a needy refugee family must not have an adult male between the ages of 18 and 60 living in the household. UNRWA's definition of economic hardship is not determined according to employability or availability of work opportunities, but by the projected ability of the agency to deliver food rations. Thus, the administrative need to control expenditure by reducing the number of hardship cases led to splitting up extended households; increasing nuclear households (more so in the Jabal Hussain camp, compared to Jarash camp); early marriages (and divorces); and the emergence of female-headed households (around fifteen percent of the families are female-headed). There is thus a disjunction between the reality of the family unit created out of administrative necessity, and the bonds of refugee family life.

Similarly, in singling out the patterns of leadership recruitment in the camps, the study locates several actors, primarily the Jordanian government which controls the camps, but assisted and followed by UNRWA, and various organizational groups (such as women's groups,

youth clubs, and students). The analysis reveals different patterns of local elite co-optation by the Jordanian government. In the Jarash camp, for example, the traditional structure of the *'ashira* and *qabila* remains intact, and the Jordanian authorities rely on these pre-1948 Palestine structures to insure social control. The Jabal Hussain camp exhibits a different social structural composition. The refugees are a mixture of urban dwellers and peasants. While the role of the village *mukhtar* is perpetuated and is transplanted to the camp, traditional family bonds weaken due to the increasing mobility of individual family members, in particular the younger generations who sought advancement in education and occupational qualification. Here the author detects another contrasting pattern of family bonds: the case of the Jarash camp presents a continuation of more or less existing patterns, which were strengthened after the Oslo agreement, that led to the return of refugees from Gaza to work for the police force of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

Latte-Abdallah also analyzed marriage patterns with a view to determining the contours of identity. Endogenous marriages remained in effect in both camps, but they were not confined to the customary parallel patrilineal cousins. As a matter of fact, parallel-cousin marriages were in a minority, but endogamy within the wider kinship system remained high. She noticed that marriage outside the family lineage increasingly became the norm among refugees in Jabal Hussain. The village of origin in Palestine became a reference point for sustaining identity, and social space was expanded to the level of "national space." Thus, to marry a Palestinian became the new substitute for traditional kin relations.

Marriage patterns among Jarash camp inhabitants showed a cleavage peculiar to the camp. Bedouin refugees refrained from marrying refugees of peasant origin, and Palestinian refugees in the camps almost never married Jordanians. Only four such cases were documented in Jabal Hussain. If national considerations affected family structure, they also permeated a deeply-held concept of family honor as defined in terms of symbolic and biological identity. While family honor remains tied to female sexuality, Latte-Abdallah shows how the land, as a symbol of national honor, came to challenge the traditional definition of family honor based on defending female virginity. However, consistent with earlier findings noted above, in the larger scheme of things, the activist discourse regarding the role of women during the first intifadah failed to make a lasting dent on the gendered roles of men and women in Palestinian society, thus supporting Latte-Abdallah's claim that women's histories have been appropriated by others—mainly men.

Very much in line with the previous discussion, Randa Farah's work focuses on the rupture between the

promise and reality—the promise of return to Palestine and the reality of the post-Oslo agreement where, according to the refugees, their cause has been marginalized.⁶¹ She draws upon life-histories and oral narratives, rather than historical, positivist "data," in order to capture the "statement of culture and identity" as living experiences. Farah, who carried out her field work in Jordan's Baq'a refugee camp between 1995 and 1997, opts clearly for ethnographic rather than positivist methodology, thus giving a subaltern character to her work. It is a study of identity formation using popular memory as its basis.

Construction of Palestinian identity is viewed as an outcome of several competing forces having to do with interests of the Jordanian state, the PNA, UNRWA, the refugees themselves, and the Oslo agreement. Superimposed upon these are internal divisions within the Palestinian community: class, gender, and generation. Capturing popular memory through oral narratives reveals to Farah the contrasting, if not conflicting, "beginnings" upon which the various actors draw in telling their stories. For Palestinian refugees the "beginning" was the collective life of the village in pre-1948 Palestine; for UNRWA, the "beginning" was the Nakbah of 1948, which defined in terms of precise date and location who is to be considered a refugee and who is not. Thus, for UNRWA the construction of refugee experience has its beginnings in administrative practices, while the refugees resort to collective historical experience. Here is how Farah expresses it:

the very fact that both Agency [UNRWA] and the refugees have narratives with different "beginnings" implies conflict. For the Agency, the beginning of its history is "after" the 1948 Catastrophe, when it embarked on assisting a "helpless" and dispossessed people rise above their predicament. The "beginning" for refugees is in the village of origin. For refugees there is individual and collective histories and politics; for UNRWA there are the "refugees."⁶²

With no immediate promise of return to Palestine, the camp came to symbolize "the ethos of the village." In other words, the camps "became the metaphorical universal 'original village.'"⁶³

Similar to what I noted earlier, here too Farah discovers the sense of exclusion Palestinian refugees feel due to discrimination in the wider society. This discrimination is subtle and informal. Just being labeled a camp resident, one respondent told Farah, already jeopardizes job prospects. The camp is defined by its members as the hub of a moral community, a space which decries rampant materialist culture in the surrounding society. People outside the Baq'a camp talked about the camp in language laden with violent imagery, so much so that one respondent accused the outside world of trying to give the camp "a Chicago image...with people running

around with knives and raping women.”⁶⁴ The camp overwhelms the lives of its inhabitants socially, psychologically, and existentially. The camp sets Jordanians apart from Palestinians (very few Jordanians live in the camps). The camp becomes the terrain on which Palestinian identity is reconstructed, and it acts as a social leveler of some sort, where socioeconomic status differences are “cloaked” with the national symbolism of the camp.

However, Farah detects transformation in the discourse of Return. While it is not couched in abstract terms, the path of Return to Palestine now goes through the soul of the “Arab” citizen, a soul that must be purified, according to one respondent. In a remark made by one respondent, it appears that the liberation of Palestine and the right of refugee return are contingent on the adoption of democratic practices in society at large, and the right to say what one wants without fear of persecution. This is reminiscent of an old theme in Arab nationalist discourse. The business of Palestine is being re-cast as the concern of every Arab. It is being revived in the face of deep disappointments felt by the refugees over the conduct of the PLO in the aftermath of the Oslo agreements. If such a discourse has failed to be translated into reality in the past, what guarantees do we have that it will not fail again in the future? Farah, and indeed most of the memory literature, pins hopes on the power of memory. It is portrayed as restorative, that is, it is capable of restoring the right of return in this case. Memory is a necessary, but not an all-sufficient, condition for return. According to one refugee by the name of Nidal, “We will pass on to our children not only what our parents told us about the oranges of Palestine and so on, but we will pass on the memory of the camp and how the camp was a symbol of Palestine...look, many Palestinians went to the USA...but they did not forget Palestine.”⁶⁵ Indeed, one wonders how many refugees in these far away places are prepared to return to Palestine? More importantly, how many have developed a strategy of return? None were mentioned by the refugees who were interviewed above.

Jason Hart, in his research on young people from the Hussain camp in Jordan, provides us with a contrasting glimpse of refugee views on the right of return, with age playing an important role. Hart, who interviewed Palestinians between ten and sixteen years old, departs from traditional socialization approaches which view the young as passive agents whose cognitive map consists of a tabula rasa, or, as the author calls it, an “empty vessel.”⁶⁶ Rather, the view which Hart adopts is that the young, who are subjected to traditional, authoritarian teaching methods, where rote learning predominates, are nevertheless able to develop an oppositionary style of thought which is influenced by their generational location as camp members, the surrounding Islamist climate,

and the specific context of the UNRWA schools—the site for the reproduction of these oppositional styles of thought.

Hart questions the “naturalness” of the assumption that is based on a one-to-one correspondence between the parents’ and children’s views on Palestine. By interrogating this taken-for-granted assumption, which is near-sacred in the literature on Palestine, he shows that while young Palestinians under specific contexts are able, indeed expected, to reproduce parental imagery concerning the temporality and geography of Palestine, the picture which emerges from his research is quite different. Third generation Palestinians depart drastically from their parents and grandparents in terms of their Palestinian identity. Hart uncovers disdain by the young towards their elders—contrary to the view which depicts familial authority as the embodiment of respect for the elders by the offspring. After all, for the young it is the elders who lost Palestine. Moreover, these young Palestinians know very little about Palestine, although they have been taught to regurgitate the names of places from where their grandparents came. When asked to draw a picture of Palestine, the overwhelming majority of the children chose an Islamic emblem and drew Jerusalem’s Dome of the Rock. Few drew the Palestinian flag, for example. For those able to articulate a vision of return, it was couched in a “cosmic, trans-historical view of the battle between Jew and Moslem to liberate the sacred land of Palestine, and most specifically the holy sites of Jerusalem.”⁶⁷ For Hart, this represents a clear transformation of the secular, nationalist discourse produced in earlier times by the Palestinian national movement. The Islamization of the discourse on Palestine reflects a displacement effect in the Palestinian conflict, where the liberation of Palestine is viewed by the young as the responsibility of every Moslem in the first instance. Finally, when asked about the future, few (only one-third) expressed the desire to return to Palestine; among those desiring to return even fewer had any notion of how to do this.

Conclusions

This paper situates the study of Palestinian society in the context of recent theoretical and methodological advances in social theory. Particular attention was devoted to ethnography in order to understand the refugee experience. It was demonstrated that ethnographic research allows the practitioner to interrogate the dialectical relationship between power and agency, and show how agency is capable of resisting power. Resistant subjectivity was facilitated by cross-subjectivity where women, mothers in particular, played a leading role in validating the experience of the male youth. Ethnographic research on Palestinian refugees produced unexpected results with regard to national identity. There

were ruptures in the discourse of return to Palestine, created in response to existential crises faced by the refugees. This rupture (whether the 1982 war in Lebanon or the Oslo agreement) was manifested among refugees living outside historical Palestine by their rejection of the Palestinian national movement, and by turning to Arabism and Islam as sources of inspiration for the redemption of Palestine. Similarly, discontinuity in the transmission of national identity across generations of Palestinian refugees raised questions about the assumption regarding socialization and the moulding of personality.

NOTES

¹Howard S. Becker, "The Epistemology of Qualitative Research," in *Ethnography and Human Development: Context and Meaning in Social Inquiry*, ed. Richard Jessor, A. Colby, and R. A. Schweder (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 53-72.

²Ali Al-Wardi, *Dirasab fi tabi'at a-mujtama' al-Iraqi* [Study of the Social Conditions of Iraqi Society], 1965.

³Hamid 'Ammar, *Growing Up in an Egyptian Village* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954).

⁴A. Lutfiyya and C. Churchill, eds., *Readings in Arab Middle Eastern Societies and Cultures* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1970).

⁵S. Tamari, "Problems of Social Science Research in Palestine: An Overview," *Current Sociology* 42, no.2 (1994): 67-86.

⁶M. Suleiman, "Challenges and Rewards of Survey Research in the Arab World: Problems of Sensitivity in a Study of Political Socialization," in *The Evaluation and Application of Survey Research in the Arab World*, ed. M. Tessler, M. Palmer, T. Farah, and B. Ibrahim (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987), 57-65.

⁷See, for example, Sa'ad Eddin Ibrahim, "The Agony and Ecstasy of Survey Research in the Arab World," in *The Evaluation and Application of Survey Research in the Arab World*, ed. M. Tessler, M. Palmer, T. Farah, and B. Ibrahim (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987), 27-34.

⁸Becker, "The Epistemology of Qualitative Research."

⁹D. T. Campbell, "Can We Overcome Worldview Incommensurability/Relativity in Trying to Understand the Other?" in *Ethnography and Human Development: Context and Meaning in Social Inquiry*, ed. Richard Jessor, A. Colby, and R. A. Schweder (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 153-172.

¹⁰Campbell, "Can We Overcome Worldview Incommensurability," 161.

¹¹Becker, "The Epistemology of Qualitative Research," 53.

¹²See, for example, Tamari, "Problems of Social Science Research in Palestine," 78; Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 287; and J. Olmstead, "Telling Palestinian Women's Stories," *Feminist Economics* 3, no.2 (1997): 141-51.

¹³Ibrahim, "The Agony and Ecstasy," 32-3.

¹⁴Paul Willis, *The Ethnographic Imagination* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 109.

¹⁵Willis, *Ethnographic Imagination*, 113.

¹⁶E. Marcus, "What Comes (Just) After 'Post'? The Case of Ethnography," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1995), 563-74, 566.

¹⁷R. Hammami and S. Tamari, "Populist Paradigms: Palestinian Sociology," *Contemporary Sociology* 26, no. 3 (1997): 275-9, 278.

¹⁸A. Cronin, "Citizens-in-Waiting in Gaza and the West Bank: The Palestinians Who are They?" *New York Times* (12 September 1993), E3.

¹⁹A. Ashforth, "Reckoning Schemes of Legitimation: On Commissions of Inquiry as Power/Knowledge Forms," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 30, no. 1 (1990): 1-22.

²⁰See E. Herman and C. Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); E. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

²¹E. Said, "Traveling Theory," *Raritan* (Winter 1982): 41-67, 63-64; Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 172.

²²C. Gordon, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, with Two Lectures and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, ed. Graham Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1-52, 4.

²³Gordon, "Governmental Rationality," 4.

²⁴M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1979), I: 95-6.

²⁵Diane Macdonnel, *Theories of Discourse: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 121.

²⁶Julie Peteet, "Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian Intifada: A Cultural Politics of Violence," *American Ethnologist* 21, no. 1 (1994): 31-49, 33.

²⁷Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 162.

²⁸Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 19.

²⁹See J. Thompson, "The Theory of Structuration," in *Social Theory and Modern Societies: Anthony Giddens and his Critics*, ed. David Held and J. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 56-76, 73.

³⁰Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 375.

³¹Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 376.

³²Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 377.

³³Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 169.

³⁴Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 175.

³⁵Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 374.

³⁶Macdonnel, *Theories of Discourse*, 121.

³⁷Quoted in Stanley Cohen, "Talking about Torture in Israel," *Tikkun* 6, no. 6 (1991): 23-30 and 89-90, 25.

³⁸Robert N. Bellah, R. Marsden, W.M. Sullivan, A. Swidler, and S.M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

³⁹Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 153.

⁴⁰Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso Press, 1994).

⁴¹Rosemary Sayigh, "The Palestinian Identity among Camp

Residents,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6, no. 23 (1977): 3-22; Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians from Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Press, 1979).

⁴²See, for example, Peteet, “Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance”; Julie Peteet, “Transforming Trust: Dispossession and Empowerment among Palestinian Refugees,” in *Mistrusting Refugees*, ed. Valentine E. Daniel and J. Knudsen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 168-86; Julie Peteet, “Icons and Militants: Mothering in the Danger Zone,” *Signs* 23, no. 1 (1997): 103-29.

⁴³Peteet, “Transforming Trust,” 171.

⁴⁴Peteet, “Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance,” 31.

⁴⁵Peteet, “Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance,” 33-4.

⁴⁶Peteet, “Icons and Militants,” 105, 110.

⁴⁷Peteet, “Icons and Militants,” 104.

⁴⁸I. Jean-Klein, “Mothercraft, Statecraft, and Subjectivity in the Palestinian Intifada,” *American Ethnologist* 27, no. 1 (2000): 100-127, 102.

⁴⁹Jean-Klein, “Mothercraft, Statecraft, and Subjectivity,” 102.

⁵⁰Jean-Klein, “Mothercraft, Statecraft, and Subjectivity,” 102.

⁵¹Jean-Klein, “Mothercraft, Statecraft, and Subjectivity,” 104.

⁵²Jean-Klein, “Mothercraft, Statecraft, and Subjectivity,” 115.

⁵³Jean-Klein, “Mothercraft, Statecraft, and Subjectivity,” 114.

⁵⁴Jean-Klein, “Mothercraft, Statecraft, and Subjectivity,” 121.

⁵⁵Dorothee Klaus, *Palestinian Identities in Lebanon*, paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (Chicago, December 1998); Jason Hart, *UNRWA, Children and Childhood: Questions of Identity in a Palestinian Refugee Camp in Jordan*, paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (Chicago, December 1998); Stephanie Latte-Abdallah, *History and Difference: Family Links in Palestinian Camps in Jordan*, paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (Chicago, December 1998); Randa Farah, *Palestinian Identity, Refugees and UNRWA: Changing Political Context and Issues*, paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (Chicago, December 1998).

⁵⁶Samadar Lavie, “Blowups in the Borderzones: Third World Israeli Authors’ Groping for Home,” in *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*, ed. Samadar Lavie and T. Swedenberg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 55-96, 92.

⁵⁷Farah, *Palestinian Identity, Refugees and UNRWA*.

⁵⁸Klaus, *Palestinian Identities in Lebanon*.

⁵⁹Klaus, *Palestinian Identities in Lebanon*, 4.

⁶⁰Latte-Abdallah, *History and Difference*.

⁶¹Farah, *Palestinian Identity, Refugees and UNRWA*.

⁶²Farah, *Palestinian Identity, Refugees and UNRWA*, 5.

⁶³Farah, *Palestinian Identity, Refugees and UNRWA*, 6.

⁶⁴Farah, *Palestinian Identity, Refugees and UNRWA*, 7.

⁶⁵Farah, *Palestinian Identity, Refugees and UNRWA*, 11.

⁶⁶Hart, *UNRWA, Children and Childhood and UNRWA*.

⁶⁷Hart, *UNRWA, Children and Childhood and UNRWA*, 15.