



Massad: The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians

by *Reviewed by Anne Norton*

The Palestinian, The Jew

The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians, by Joseph A. Massad. New York: Routledge, 2006. x + 178 pages. Notes to p. 214. Index to p. 218. \$125.00 cloth; \$35.95 paper.

Reviewed by Anne Norton

The title of this book does not do justice to the contribution this book makes to the history of Zionism, Israel, and the Jews. Massad's brilliant and scholarly work is profoundly illuminating not only for the history of Palestine and the discourses surrounding it, but for the history of Europe and the United States and, finally, as an account that raises compelling theoretical questions.

The Palestinian question is important enough to command attention in its own right: the politics of half a century have been moved by shockwaves from this epicenter of conflict. Massad offers invaluable information drawn from an array of carefully documented sources coupled with superb political and historical analysis that contributes directly to the study of Palestine.

The core of the work is a careful and compelling articulation of the interdependence of Palestinian and Jewish histories, especially manifest in the dual project of Zionism. Readers within and outside the academy have long recognized the centrality and intensity of the Zionist effort to reshape Jewish subjectivity, creating a "new Jew" to inhabit the anticipated Jewish state. The Israeli of their hopes was to be strong, willful, and landed, capable of self-determination, self-defense, and self-provision. The independence of the anticipated Israeli citizen, the new Jew, reflected an anticipated sovereignty, mastery over the land and its people. It turned on a double subjection: the disavowal of the landless, stateless Jews of the Europe, and of the Palestinians, who were assigned the attributes Zionists endeavored to strip from themselves. The Palestinian Arab became the European Jew: landless and stateless, bearing the

traits that had marked the Jew as subject. Massad's reading of the often harsh Zionist texts on Arabs, Mizrahi, and European Jews is careful, marked by scrupulous, well-supported scholarship, and presented with a calm generosity.

Massad's work will be an invaluable resource to several fields in comparative politics. The conflicts and fault lines within Israeli politics are clarified by Massad's mapping of the constellation of constructed genealogies upon which Israeli identities depend. Israeli perceptions of their "rough neighborhood" and the global order are clarified as well. Massad, along with Gil Anidjar, is forcing a reconsideration of European identity. The place of Jew and Arab in European discourse, the European imagination, and historical and contemporary European understandings of extant life-worlds, are all illuminated by these essays. Students of postcoloniality have learned to provincialize Europe; Massad reminds us of the presence of the European in the East and the Eastern. We can begin to chart the processes that give the Palestinian the forms and attributes of the *galut*, that make the once Eastern Jew the form of European presence in the East.

Studies of the malleability of subjects and subjectivity at a given historical and political site are rarely so attentive to the multiples dimensions on which identity is constituted and articulated. Massad attends to temporality, space, language, the collective, and the individual. His attention to sex, gender, and sexuality deserves special notice. Massad has no brief for the self-serving gender myths prevalent in Israel and Palestine. He details the sexing of race and nationality that informs European and Zionist discourses and Palestinian collaboration in the subjection of women as well as the more palatable forms of gendered and sexualized national discourses.

Theorists should read this book with particular care, for it enriches extant critiques of authenticity, extends the literature on identity, deepens ethical and political inquiries, and contributes to the revived concerns of political theology. Massad's book shows how assigning traits of a rejected self to others permits the simultaneous preservation and rejection of a constitutive past. Memory figures in both Zionist and Palestinian narratives as offering the means of self-preservation and the promise of redemption, as an always ethical enterprise. Massad questions the ethical status of memory. In detailing the partial but decisive Zionist excision of religion from the figure of the Jew, Massad opens Marx's Jewish question—the relation of the citizen, the theological and the political—once again.

Weber, at the close of "Politics as a Vocation" describes political work in a time of crisis as the "slow drilling through hard boards." Those who work in Middle Eastern studies know the temptation to self-censorship and the costs that too often attach to honest scholarship in this field. I could not close this review without recognizing that this study demanded more than intellect of its author. Massad has shown what Weber called "that steadfastness of heart which can brave even the crumbling of all hopes" and maintained all the scholarly virtues in the face of this almost unanswerable demand.

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Shahin: Palestine: A Guide
 by *Reviewed by Lisa Taraki*

INDIGENOUS GUIDANCE

Palestine: A Guide, by Mariam Shahin, photography by George Azar. Northampton, MA: Interlink Publishing, 2005. xi + 471 pages. Appendices to p. 490. Index to p. 500. \$27.95 paper.

Reviewed by Lisa Taraki

This book is not a guide as in a “tourist guide”; its considerable weight alone (at 500 pages, printed on heavy paper) would discourage the traveler from throwing it in a knapsack on a journey through Palestine. It is, in the words of Shahin, “a guidebook to the homeland of the Palestinian people, a primer to the largely ignored indigenous narrative of Palestine, its people, their culture, and their history” (p. 91). Being cognizant of the minefield in which she has thrust herself, Shahin makes an important caveat: in view of Palestine’s “bizarre state of being in the 21st century,” the book is “a search for all things Palestinian—past and present—in historic Palestine” (p. ix).

With these qualifications behind us, we find a highly engaging and beautifully illustrated book that is indeed useful as a general guide to Palestine. Shahin and Azar are perfectly paired to execute this difficult project; Mariam Shahin is a well-known writer on Palestinian politics and culture, and George Azar’s sensitive photographic work has been published widely. The other contributors and co-authors (writing sections or parts of sections) are all knowledgeable in their fields: Taufic Haddad, Inea Bushnaq, Christiane Dabdoub Nasser, Haifa Shawwa-Masri, Norman Ali Khalaf, and PENGON (the Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network).

The book is organized into four parts; part 1 includes chapters on history, geography, flora and fauna, literature and music, culinary traditions, dress, and jewelry, as well as a chapter on refugees and refugee camps and another on the “conflict” and the wall. The other parts are devoted to the different regions of Palestine (northern, central, and southern), followed by four appendices and a useful index of places. Editorial choices are not clearly explained; why is there a chapter on refugees and refugee camps, while villages and cities do not receive any special examination? Why are crafts—and the ubiquitous olive and its significance—not highlighted in the

“cultural” section?

The author of an “indigenous narrative” of Palestine faces difficult decisions of another sort: what to do about place names, how to describe the developments preceding and following 1948, how to present places that are devoid of a Palestinian presence in the present, and how to deal with the turbulent history of relations between the Palestinians and Arab regimes. Shahin has skillfully maneuvered around these contentious issues, presenting a very credible profile of Palestine as a lived reality in the past and present. However, the generally serious tone of the volume is somewhat compromised by the ever-present temptation of sentimentality, expressed in homey formulations such as “the multiculturalism that exists like a second skin in Palestinian society,” or how outsiders became part of “the Palestinian family” in a discussion of the multicultural composition of the people of the country (p. 25). Overall, however, the various chapters—and especially those having to do with “culture”—steer clear of the kind of essentialism that plagues many works on the society’s past and present (usually focusing more on the past in the form of timeless “traditions” than on the present). Thus, we find refreshing references to contemporary patterns in dress, cuisine, and art, both in part 1 and interspersed in the regional sections.

It is regrettable that Shahin or her editors decided not to provide the reader with selected references for further reading beyond the few references in the section on literature (pp. 50, 53–55). While the absence of documentation in the form of footnotes is understandable in a book of this genre, it would have been useful to have major works on Palestinian history, politics, and society listed in a special section at the end. This is particularly relevant in view of the contested history of Palestine, both ancient and contemporary, where the Zionist narrative is hegemonic. The book could have benefited from more rigorous copyediting of place names and terms, especially to make sure that there is consistency in transliteration across the different sections of the book. One does not want to be too picky about an excellent book, but it adds to the credibility of a work such as this to be consistent and correct in matters of transliteration and other factual details.

Overall, this is a delightful and aesthetically outstanding book that helps deconstruct many stereotypes about Palestine. The dramatic photography, especially of daily life in cities, refugee camps, mosques, churches (including a photo of a woman with a Muslim headscarf kneeling in front of the Grotto of the Nativity in Bethlehem), and a university campus, captures both the mundane and the extraordinary in Palestine. The book lives up to its description as an indigenous narrative, giving useful information and guidance to both the novice and the seasoned scholar.

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Gorenberg: *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967–1977*
 by *Reviewed by Diana Buttu*

MASKING THE OBVIOUS

The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967–1977, by Gershom Gorenberg. New York: Times Books, 2006. xi + 375 pages. Notes to p. 424. Bibliography to p. 436. Acknowledgements to p. 439. Index to p. 454. \$30.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Diana Buttu

Wars have an interesting way of both exposing and masking the obvious. Israel's failed summer foray into Lebanon was no exception. The month-long display of military prowess cast light on many realities in the Middle East: Israel's continued belief in force in response to legitimate Palestinian and Arab demands; the flawed structure of the UN that allows Israel to fly in the face of international law; the United States' intention to create a "new Middle East"; and the fallacy of "Arab brotherhood." But throughout the summer, as the major networks alarmingly proclaimed that "Israel is fighting a war on two fronts," Israel's actions on the third front—the West Bank—were largely ignored. Peace Now recently reported that throughout the war, Israel not only continued to expand its colonies, but accelerated their construction.

Today, more than 145 "recognized" Israel colonies and more than 100 "outposts" (which are often quickly legitimized by the Israeli government) sit on the occupied West Bank. The population of these colonies is roughly 430,000 and growing, as substantial financial incentives entice Israelis to move to occupied Palestine. Ma'ale Adumim and Ariel, colonies located in the heart of the West Bank, are now considered "integral" to Israel.

As Israel's colonies expand, the question of their origins is too rarely examined. This question is addressed in *The Accidental Empire*, the latest book from Gershom Gorenberg, a journalist and former columnist and associate editor of the *Jerusalem Report* who has authored two other books on Israeli politics. Extensively researched and skillfully written, *The Accidental Empire* provides a liberal Zionist perspective on Israel's colonization. For Gorenberg, the marriage between territorial expansionists of the Labor Zionist movement and religious extremists fueled both the colonial actions in occupied Palestine and the government's paralysis in concretely

addressing them. As he suggests by the book's title, Gorenberg believes that Israel's colonial project was not the result of an overall strategy, but rather, the absence of one. Describing the birth of the colonies as the result of "a policy of postponed choices" (p. 359), Gorenberg believes that Israel's colonial enterprise emerged gradually as Israeli leaders put off decisions regarding the status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip for domestic political reasons rather than being the result of a planned strategy. Aiding this policy of "a national evasion of choices" was Arab belligerence: "Whatever the intent of the [September 1967] Khartoum decisions, their bellicose language convinced Israel's government that peace was out of reach" and thus "encouraged the growth of settlements" (p. 360).

But Gorenberg's own recounting of the events of the summer of 1967 undermines his thesis. As Gorenberg notes, even before the war was over, Yigal Allon, then minister of labor, had begun pushing for greater territorial expansion and by July 1967 had drawn up his now famous "Allon Plan" that called for the annexation of the Jordan Valley to the Dead Sea, the Hebron hills, and Jerusalem with colonies "camouflaged as military strongpoints" until the annexation process was complete (pp. 80, 81). Gorenberg further demonstrates that the Eshkol government did not follow a policy of "postponed choices" when it came to colonizing East Jerusalem. Within weeks of the start of Israel's occupation, Eshkol rushed to annex East Jerusalem. A few days later, in order to create a plaza for Jewish worshippers of the Wailing Wall, PM Eshkol ordered the razing of the entire Moroccan neighborhood of the Old City, thereby displacing hundreds of its Palestinian residents. Later that month, Jerusalem was "unified" under Israeli sovereignty.

Nor were choices postponed in the Golan Heights. By July 1967 Israeli settlers were moving into the area. And, as Gorenberg notes, "the purpose of settlement, since the day in July 1967 when the first Israeli settler climbed out of a jeep . . . had been to create facts that would determine the final status of the land, to sculpt the political reality before negotiations ever got underway" (p. 364).

All of these actions not only fly in the face of the "policy of postponed choices" but also predate the 1 September 1967 Khartoum Arab Summit, described by Gorenberg as the "tipping point" in Eshkol's thinking regarding Israeli colonization of occupied Palestine. At that summit, Arab leaders spelled out "no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it" while calling for the "withdrawal of aggressive Israeli forces from the Arab lands" (p. 111). Thus, while the Khartoum summit may have been the stated excuse to justify the colonization, it was certainly not the catalyst to begin construction.

Gorenberg refuses to acknowledge Israel's settler-colonial nature, ignoring both the colonial actions leading up to Israel's creation and the rampant dissatisfaction among Israeli civilian and military leadership with the 1949 armistice lines. Gorenberg glosses over a widely held Israeli belief that *all* of historic Palestine belongs to the Jewish people and that the 1949 armistice lines were temporary in nature, instead focusing on Eshkol's post-1967 statements (though not his deeds) regarding Israel's action in occupied Palestine. Gorenberg's account, though

gripping, has ignored the obvious.

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