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POPULAR CULTURE, RELATIONAL HISTORY, AND THE QUESTION OF POWER IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

REBECCA L. STEIN AND TED SWEDENBURG

The marginalization of popular culture in radical scholarship on Palestine and Israel is symptomatic of the conceptual limits that still define much Middle East studies scholarship: namely, the prevailing logic of the nation-state on the one hand and the analytic tools of classical Marxist historiography and political economy on the other. This essay offers a polemic about the form that alternative scholarly projects might take through recourse to questions of popular culture. The authors argue that close attention to the ways that popular culture "articulates" with broader political, social, and economic processes can expand scholarly understandings of the terrain of power in Palestine and Israel, and hence the possible arenas and modalities of struggle.

TRADITIONALLY, MOST RADICAL SCHOLARSHIP on Palestine and Israel has ignored questions of popular culture—or, at best, consigned popular culture forms and processes to the margins of scholarly debate and investigation. For many scholars, this act of marginalization has seemed a necessary response to the severity of the national conflict, the harsh violence of the Israeli occupation, and/or the enduring struggle for Palestinian national liberation. Popular culture's frequent appearance in commodity form has made marginalization seem all the more necessary—particularly for scholars wedded to classical Marxist analytics, where mass production and commodification are thought to render the cultural form "inauthentic." For scholars concerned primarily with questions of nationalism and national conflict in Palestine and Israel, the global circuits of the popular cultural commodity have further removed it from the scholarly agenda. Popular culture, in all these approaches, is deemed epiphenomenal to questions of politics and power.

In the last decade, scholars in Middle East studies have begun to rethink these assumptions, taking popular culture seriously as a space, practice, and/or

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discourse.¹ Our position grows out of this larger effort. In the most basic terms, we are arguing that the question of popular culture in Palestine and Israel is fundamentally one of politics and power. We further suggest that the marginalization of popular culture within progressive scholarship on the region is symptomatic of the conceptual and methodological limits that still define much of this scholarship.

What we offer in this essay is less an illustration of precisely *how* such analytics might be rethought than a polemic about the *form* that alternative scholarly projects might take through recourse to popular culture.² This polemic emerges out of, even as it speaks back to, the tradition of radical scholarship on Palestine, Israel, and the history of Zionism—by which we mean scholarship that has been framed by questions of colonization, occupation, and the Palestinian struggle for self-determination.³ In turning scholarly attention to the field of popular culture, our aim is to broaden understanding of the terrain of power in Palestine and Israel and thereby the possible arenas and modalities of struggle.

HEGEMONIC PARADIGMS

The field of scholarship on Palestine and Israel has changed dramatically over the last few decades. The changes are not in political idiom alone. Rather, a new generation of scholars has begun to take up historical questions that “move beyond the narrowly political to explore the social, economic, and cultural histories of each community.”⁴ These scholars, situated mainly in anthropology and literary studies, have begun to focus on new objects of analysis and to rethink questions of power and knowledge through critical and poststructural theory.⁵ Yet despite such innovations and despite the growing strength of a radical, decolonizing voice within the field, Left scholarship is still dominated by relatively traditional analytic paradigms. We want to suggest that the marginality of popular culture within these literatures is merely symptomatic of the narrow theory of politics and power at work in these paradigms.

What, then, are these paradigms, and what stories of power do they tell? In our estimation, two paradigms continue to dominate Left scholarship on Palestine and Israel within the U.S. academy—paradigms that are imbricated and often articulate through each other. The first could be termed the national paradigm, and the second the Marxist historiographical and/or political economic paradigm. The former is characterized by a scholarly narrative that installs the nation and/or nation-state as the inherent logic guiding the critical analysis (that is, Palestine and/or Israel). In this paradigm, the nation-state figures as both politically determinative and largely enclosed and discrete. Perhaps remarkably, this paradigm remains active both within scholarship that canvasses the international dimension and scholarship that addresses internal heterogeneity within the nation-state—along the lines, for example, of ethnonational difference (notably, Palestinian citizens of Israel)⁶ and gender. In turn, while the notion of Diaspora (both Jewish and Palestinian) has been prominent

in this paradigm, it largely functions as a sign of separation from the national rather than as an analytic tool for deterritorializing the nation-state. While the Marxist model may complicate the narrative of national conflict through attention to political economy, it tends to retain the dyadic model of Israel versus Palestine, albeit configured as a struggle over control of the state and the means of production. The presence of an international dimension in the Marxist model proceeds according to the logic of class or economic determinism (and, we noted above, often works to reinscribe the nation-state logic).⁷

Rather infrequently discussed by scholars in Middle East studies, although heavily debated in other fields,⁸ is the rather limited theory of politics and/or power that both these paradigms presume. In both, power is understood in relatively monolithic terms, and its location is presumed to be relatively singular—taking shape in the state (Israeli) and/or the ruling classes. In the Marxist paradigm, power is rooted primarily in control of the economy, with class struggle understood as the primary locus of political action. In the nation-state model, control of the economy is coupled with control of territory and the coercive and administrative bases of state power (military, police, judiciary, bureaucracy, etc.). What these frameworks share is a notion of power as something that can be “held” or at least potentially grasped. The nature of progressive political action is likewise seen as locatable and relatively singular—cohering in the practices of disenfranchised communities and actors, be they Palestinian or Israeli, and aimed explicitly at the creation or defense of the state and/or nation. Both frameworks presume a binary notion of struggle, revolving around the poles of domination and resistance, variously configured.

Cultural practices, objects, and circuits sometimes have a place within these scholarly frameworks, but in highly circumscribed ways.⁹ More often than not, the relative importance of culture is directly proportional to its perceived ability to reflect, serve, and/or exemplify the political, either in the instrumental service of hegemony or when deployed as a weapon in political struggles. This has been particularly true in literature on Palestine, where much of the attention accorded to resistance culture (notably poetry, folk dance, and graffiti) has turned on its ability either to mobilize the masses or to reflect broader oppositional efforts.¹⁰ A similar logic accounts for the proliferation of scholarly work on early Zionist culture (for example the literature on *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, or Songs of the Land of Israel)—scholarship that has explored the crucial role of song in building Hebrew character and collective identity in the early state era.¹¹ Yet in much of this scholarship, culture is positioned as an effect of broader processes and forms, or in peripheral relation to (or as a symptom of) the wider “context.” And if expressive culture has figured only marginally in this literature, popular culture has been perceived as even more insignificant. This is due, we hypothesize, to assumptions made about the nature of *the commodity*—the form taken by much popular culture. Lurking here is the influence of deterministic Marxist arguments about the ways in which commodification and mass production effectively denude culture of its political role or potential, even as commodities are deployed as tools with which to control

the “stupefied” and consuming masses.¹² When coupled with the scholarly agenda of the national narrative, the problem of the commodity form becomes more intransigent still. The fact that culture as commodity is frequently produced and circulated through global circuits and interests is often thought to endow it with a troubled, even treasonous, relation to national interests and struggle agendas.

For many Middle East studies scholars, particularly those who focus on issues of Palestinian society and politics, the instrumentalization and/or peripheralization of culture is motivated by the exigencies of the occupation and the history

of Palestinian dispossession. Thus, the thinking goes, when Palestinians lack a state, when five million refugees are without a home, when West Bank residents are ghettoized in some 220 noncontiguous cantons—of what possible relevance is an academic study of Palestinian fitness clubs? In an atmosphere marked by torture, land expropriations, suicide bombings, and mass poverty, is it not simply frivolous and perhaps politically irresponsible (so the argument proceeds) to devote scholarly energies to Israeli punk bands or Palestinian villagers’ consumption of U.S. television soap operas? The violence and catastrophe that so frequently charac-

terize the landscape of Palestine and Israel give added weight to analytical tendencies to read culture as outside and/or strictly determined by the realm of the political—and thus of subsidiary importance to the radical scholarly agenda.

THE TURN TO CULTURAL POLITICS

Where, then, might one look for alternatives? In rethinking the theoretical limits within Palestine and Israel scholarship, we begin by turning to the work of the Birmingham school—also known as British cultural studies—particularly to the work of Stuart Hall and his critical engagement with the writings of Antonio Gramsci. What one encounters in Hall’s work is a persistent concern with questions of *cultural politics*, that is, an insistence on culture as a crucial terrain of both power and struggle that “articulates” with broader social forces and political economic processes. In Hall’s account, by contrast to the rigid structural determinism of orthodox Marxism, culture has no singular location or function, nor are subcultural or popular cultural forces or actors *necessarily* inscribed with counterhegemonic meanings or effects. Rather, the terrain of the cultural is contradictory and changeable, “always capable of being dearticulated and rearticulated.”¹³ It should be noted that even as British cultural studies has historically rejected both the class determinism and the base/superstructure dyad of orthodox Marxism, it has nonetheless remained within the problematic of Marxism in its attention to the ways in which culture articulates with the “materialities of power and inequality” in differently situated communities.

In an atmosphere marked by torture and suicide bombings, the argument goes, is it not frivolous to devote scholarly energies to Israeli punk bands or Palestinian village consumption of U.S. soap operas?

For scholars of the Birmingham school, the interest in explicitly *popular* cultural forms has not been incidental. Rather, the turn to the popular has been a crucial component of their attempt to rethink classical Marxist paradigms and analytics with a view toward expanding the terrain of what constitutes power and struggle. So, too, have they striven to think beyond the high/low dyad that had characterized much previous cultural scholarship.¹⁴ As Raymond Williams has suggested, “popular culture” was theorized by cultural studies in contradistinction both to “high culture” (with its attendant notions of bourgeois self-cultivation) and to “folk culture” (with its cultural authenticity and imagined location “outside of the corrupting influences”).¹⁵ And unlike the terms on either side of this imagined cultural dyad (high/low), at issue was a notion of culture stripped of rigid class location and determining function. Rather, popular culture was thought to “articulate” through multiple and sometimes contradictory modalities of difference and power (e.g., class, gender, ethnonationality, religion, and place). Nor was it thought to bear a stable political valence (i.e., no inherently counter-hegemonic or minoritarian politics), but instead, to enunciate in changeable ways that were always subject to reinscription. As Tony Bennet has argued, the unfixed nature of “popular culture” has frustrated attempts at rigid definition. Instead, popular culture (he argues) “can only be defined abstractly as a site—[as it is] always changing and variable in its constitution and organization.”¹⁶ Even in the absence of rigid definitions, scholars of the Birmingham school have long insisted on the crucial importance of popular culture in modern mass-mediated societies as a site in and through which people’s commonsense interpretations of the world and of their own identities are constructed.¹⁷

As we have noted, theories of popular culture advanced by scholars of the Birmingham school have relied heavily on the work of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci argued that the struggle for “hegemony,” as opposed to the struggle for “domination,”¹⁸ ranged over a wide array of fronts. Hegemonic power was not something that rulers “held” over the ruled, but rather was the result of complex and shifting interactions between the dominant and the subordinate. Power, in this model, was not the provenance of a static ruling class but rather was theorized as transactional, a joint construction without a fixed or permanent location, inherently unstable and constantly shifting.¹⁹ Central to Gramsci’s model was a practice of politics in which would-be hegemonic forces actively work in the domains of the economy, society, and culture in order to produce and secure power.²⁰ The political struggle between hegemonic powers and subaltern resistant forces, proceeding across the vast array of modern institutions, spaces, and practices, was termed by Gramsci the “war of position.”²¹ Culture—an essential element in the struggle for gaining the consent of the ruled, always working together with and indissoluble from coercion—was deemed integral to such political processes.²²

To take seriously the theory of cultural politics advanced by the Birmingham school, with particular attention to its reliance on Gramsci, is substantially to rethink the story of culture advanced within radical literature on Palestine and

Israel—a rethinking which, again, proceeds within the problematic of Marxism even as it pushes beyond the limits of classic Marxist formulations. The work of Stuart Hall and others²³ enables us to theorize culture as frequently constitutive rather than merely epiphenomenal, as a crucial locus of political engagement (although not in static or necessarily resistive ways), and as always working in articulation with broader social forces and political process and modalities of difference in fluid and variable ways, across a range of institutional locations. Such rethinking entails a substantial retheorization of the nature of the political field. What emerges is not merely a proliferation of sites of power, but also an expanded conception of the possible avenues and modalities of the work of resistance.

NATIONS AND RELATIONALITIES

While the work of British cultural studies does offer us an alternative to the “national paradigm”²⁴—that is, the story of a conflict between two discrete national entities—we prefer the historically specific models available within the field of Middle East studies itself. In particular, we propose a turn to what Zachary Lockman, after Perry Anderson, has termed “relational history.”²⁵ In Lockman’s work, relationality is a response to the virtual occlusion of histories of contact between Palestinian-Arabs and Jews within much Palestinian and Zionist historiography. “Relational history” opens up the space to narrate interdependence and to dismantle the Palestinian-Arab/Israeli-Jew binary (often figured as an Arab/Jew binary)²⁶ that national logics have tended to assume.

Building on the work of Lockman, we argue for a notion of relationality that works more expansively in both scale and kind. First, while we aim to consider what Lockman calls the “mutually formative interactions”²⁷ *between* Palestinian-Arabs and Jews in the pre- and post-state period, we also aim to account for divides and histories of contact *within* each nation and nationalist formation. Attention to what one might call *intranational relationality* helps to pluralize the “interaction” by considering how gender, religion, ethnoraacial identity, or (in the case of Israel) country of origin, crosscut nations and nationalisms in ways that further destabilize the convention of the Palestinian-Arab/Jew divide. Second, even as we concern ourselves with interactions and forms of relationality at the intranational and regional levels, we are also interested in the place of Palestine and Israel in larger geopolitical networks and geographies—cultural, economic, and political. At issue here is attention to what could be called *transnational relationality*—that is, to forms of contact, community, and mutual contingency that span checkpoints, walls, and histories of interstate enmity and that circulate with commodities and the media through increasingly global channels of commerce and culture.

While we deploy the key word transnational, we seek a critical distance from much of the recent scholarship on transnationalism, with its frequently celebratory narrative of politics and social forms situated “beyond the nation-state.” Instead, we insist on the continuing importance and reemergence of the

nation-state as an ideological-political form in the midst of globalizing processes—a tension that is particularly acute in the case of Palestinians and their struggle for liberation, the still-unrealized aim of which remains the nation-state. We argue that rather than illustrating a logic of deterritorialization, the present-day (and past) conflict between Palestine and Israel illustrates the ongoing violence associated with the enduring, exclusivist ideologies of the national. Thus it is that attention to transnational and intranational forms of border crossing and mutual contingency within and across Palestine and Israel must also be accompanied by attention to histories and emerging forms of division—divisions both territorial and ideological in nature. The challenge is to consider the two in tandem: both (for example) popular Israeli support for “total separation” from the Palestinians and ways in which the Israeli desire for ethnonational spatial purity is betrayed by the history and heterogeneity of the Israeli state; both the forms of spatial incarceration and division that “the wall” is forcing upon the Palestinian population and the alternative structures of transnational community made possible by new media and technologies (e.g., satellite television and the Internet).

This attention to relationality in its multiple forms is also an attempt to rethink Israel's place in Middle East studies. Historically, much scholarship in the field has avoided sustained engagement with the State of Israel apart from its legacy as a Western colonial outpost.²⁸ Such avoidance was thought to do the work of radical anti-Zionist critique, in effect virtually removing the Jewish state from the map of the area. Perhaps ironically, this practice echoed the hegemonic colonial logic and imagined geography of much Zionist ideology—that is, the notion of a European nation-state *within but not of* the Middle East. We propose a different cartography, one that reinscribes Israel within the region and within the purview of Middle East Studies scholarship. Thus, while we agree with the critique of area studies—one that challenges the arbitrary borders of “the area”—we are also interested in questions of interiority and the logic of inclusion within a given area. At issue in the case of the Middle East is not simply the area *per se*, but the question of what has been excluded from within its parameters and the conditions that make this exclusion possible.

Scholarly avoidance of Israel in Middle East studies has echoed the colonial logic of much Zionist ideology: Israel as a European state within but not of the Middle East.

POPULAR CULTURE AND THE CHALLENGE TO HISTORY

Central to our project here is the claim that attention to popular culture configures both politics and history differently—providing a significant alternative to some of the political narratives and paradigms that have dominated academic, activist, and popular discourse on Palestine and Israel. The history of the last decade is a case in point, for while the major political shifts and struggles have been carefully documented and critiqued by scholars and activists alike, concurrent changes in cultural production and consumption have been

granted far less attention. Attention to such cultural trends, we argue, yields a fuller chronicle of politics and power than political economy or diplomatic history models alone can provide.

The “Middle East peace process” of the 1990s profoundly affected popular cultural trends in the region even as it was, in part, propelled by these trends. Within Israel, the changes were significant. The Israeli film industry underwent a process of radicalization: after a history of largely phobic engagements with Palestinian Arab culture, feature films and documentaries began critically to reassess the founding myths of Zionism.²⁹ Such new forms of representation were not merely the effects of the post-Oslo reality but also spawned political support for, and resistance to, the ambiguous trajectory of post-Oslo “peace” developments. One also saw the emergence of a new Euro-Jewish curiosity in the commodity value of Arab things (food, music, dress) and places *qua* tourist sites—a curiosity made possible by Israeli diplomacy with its Arab neighbors.³⁰ At the same time, as Mizrahi political power grew, Mizrahi cultural figures acquired greater visibility within Israel and the broader Middle East.³¹ Shifting demography also altered the popular cultural landscape. By the turn of the twenty-first century, the massive influx of Russian immigrants beginning in the early 1990s, combined with a growing population of legal and illegal workers from the third world, was introducing new musical forms, sports practices, and culinary traditions into the Israeli metropolis (e.g., South Asian cricket teams and Thai and Chinese groceries in Israel’s new urban peripheries).

The Palestinian popular cultural landscape was also changing, although in very different ways. With the onset of peace talks, the “intifada culture” of struggle, sacrifice, and austerity gradually lifted, and new or repressed forms of everyday culture (re)emerged.³² Weddings were extravagantly celebrated and pop music groups that had been disbanded during the uprising reappeared. New sites of cultural consumption sprang up (though selectively and often in the face of popular opposition) that catered to the growing middle class, with bars in Ramallah, and cinematheques and cinema clubs in Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Gaza City. As part of its state-building efforts, the Palestinian Authority fostered new national media institutions that made possible the creation and dissemination of both new and submerged cultural forms (songs, radio talk shows, television serials, and movies).³³ Although few cultural commodities crossed the Green Line during this period, audiences in both Israel and Palestine were conjoined through the consumption of shared global commodities, media, and popular icons. At the same time, the proliferation of satellite television allowed Palestinians in the territories to turn away from Israeli Arabic-language TV and toward satellite networks based in the Arab world (like al-Jazeera), which effectively incorporated Palestinians into pan-Arab cultural and political trends.

Since the onset of the al-Aqsa intifada in October 2000, both Israeli and Palestinian societies have returned to conflict mode. In the West Bank and Gaza, frequent curfews and closures, army violence, extreme restrictions on mobility, and the decline in disposable income have virtually closed down the spaces

of popular sociality and consumption that had expanded during the 1990s—save those in cosmopolitan Ramallah and (to a lesser degree) Bethlehem. In Ramallah, cultural institutions³⁴ have continued to flourish, testimony to the continuing growth of the emerging middle class, while audiences have remained strong at film showings, art exhibits, and concerts (when not interrupted by curfew and invasion).³⁵ Elsewhere in the territories, the second uprising has produced an interiorization of the social, as families and individuals locked in the domestic sphere turned to television, video games, and the Internet as modes of entertainment and communication between communities separated by the (re)occupation—trends that intensified after the Israeli military incursion of March 2002. At the same time, Palestinian society has witnessed the emergence of a popular culture of “martyrdom operations” (“suicide bombings” in Western parlance) celebrated in posters, graffiti, popular music, and song—all of which significantly challenge the secular nationalist culture that developed during the 1990s.³⁶

Within Sharon’s Israel, the pervasive fear (real and imagined) of random Palestinian violence has, since the turn of the twenty-first century, increasingly curtailed customary rituals and geographies of consumption even as it has generated new ones. Flight from the urban periphery to escape possible attacks has catalyzed the growth and popularity of American-style “malls” as loci of middle class consumption and leisure—sites of consumption that emerged for the first time in the 1990s as the fruits of “peace through globalization.”³⁷ In the last few years, these carefully guarded and fully contained spaces have acquired new kinds of value as safe havens from terror.³⁸ The 1990s popularity of “Arab” culture, restaurants, and places among Ashkenazi Israelis has now been eclipsed by anti-Arab racism and the nostalgic return to canonical Zionist cultural practices (as in the renewed popularity of the “sing-along”). Among Palestinian-Israeli youth, an angry culture of hip-hop has emerged—one that foregrounds issues of Jewish-Israeli racism, unemployment, and endemic poverty. And even as army violence has swelled (along with growing numbers of conscientious objectors and army evaders), Israel has witnessed the growth of cultures of escapism centered on trance music, drug use, and the aesthetics of the (so-called) “Far East” among Jewish-Israeli youth.³⁹ The recent period has also seen the decline of cooperative cultural projects between Israelis and Palestinians from the occupied territories.⁴⁰ Yet on both sides of the Green Line (or the separation wall), the nationalist tendencies of popular culture coexist with the ever increasing globalization both of media and culture⁴¹ and, in Israel, of labor (e.g., the growing populations of non-Palestinian foreign workers).

Finally, in the period since the outbreak of the second intifada, we have also witnessed a significant change in the ways in which Palestine and Israel are understood and deployed as popular signifiers within regional and international arenas. In the Arab world, an antinormalization discourse has arisen, often

Yet on both sides of the Green Line, the nationalist tendencies of popular culture coexist with the ever increasing globalization of media and culture.

targeting popular cultural forms and institutions (film, television, and music), even as “Palestine” continues to circulate as a tragic-heroic fetish object.⁴² In the United States, as anti-Arab discourses have acquired renewed popularity, a renaissance in antiterrorism movies on cable television have returned the iconic figure of the “Arab terrorist” to popular culture’s center stage. Simultaneously, the popular culture of the Christian Right, with its apocalyptic Zionist message, has grown in scale and consumer popularity in the form of comic books, graphic novels, and film. The complexities of these cultural landscapes defy a singular reading.

RAP AND THE HORIZON OF THE POLITICAL

As a means of more fully illustrating the alternative analytics of power that the study of popular culture can provide, we turn to a brief discussion of rap—more pointedly, rap produced by Palestinian citizens of Israel. Palestinian-Israeli rap is a musical form that has emerged over the last few years from poor and working-class communities that have suffered a history of underdevelopment and state-sponsored neglect. Several bands have acquired particular prominence, most notably Dam (from the city of Lod), and MWR (from the city of Acre).⁴³ Both bands have deployed the rap medium to enunciate pressing issues facing Palestinian-Israelis—including issues of Israeli-Jewish racism, lack of economic and educational opportunities, and rampant drug use in their communities—and have propelled these accounts into both the Israeli and international public arenas through underground recordings, Internet sites, and concerts. Both bands rap in Arabic, Hebrew, and English, using all three languages in highly idiomatic ways, replete with slang and obscenities, local and international references.⁴⁴ Through the polyvalence of their music, language, and lyrics, they are able to attract multiple audiences: Palestinian Arabs (in Israel, the occupied territories, and the diaspora), Israeli Jews, young people in the Arab countries, and international hip-hop devotees.

In a sense, both these bands traffic in a kind of canonical Palestinian nationalism, given their shared interest in the histories of anti-Palestinian oppression and dispossession that span Green Lines and borders. Yet, at the same time, the music’s insistent dialogue with Israeli society, often through the use of the Hebrew-Israeli vernacular, refuses this canonical logic: it demonstrates the place of Palestinians within the Israeli state even as it suggests ways in which Israeli-Jewish culture and linguistic idioms can be repossessed by Palestinian-Israeli culture, thereby fracturing and heterogenizing Israeliness from within. Nor does the rappers’ lyrical rage toward the State of Israel preclude artistic collaboration with Israeli Jews. Among the examples of such collaboration is a recently recorded duet by Dam’s lead singer Tamer Nafar and Israeli rock star Aviv Gefen (strongly identified with the Israeli peace camp) that sharply criticizes the Israeli police’s brutal attack on Palestinian-Israeli protesters during solidarity demonstrations at the start of the al-Aqsa intifada in October 2000,

during which thirteen Palestinian citizens were shot dead.⁴⁵ In turn, even as Dam and MWR persistently address a politicized audience concerned with the violence of the occupation, they also appeal to transnational hip-hop communities through their use of recognizable hip-hop sounds propelled by beats and instrumentation rooted in African American culture and melded with Arabic music samples and referents.⁴⁶ Indeed, the global media coverage they have received has not only increased their audiences in Israel but raised international awareness of the problems facing Palestinian-Israelis.

In keeping with arguments made by scholars of the Birmingham school, the meanings of these musical forms are by no means fixed or static. They vary, as do their audiences, circuits of consumption and production, and contexts of enunciation. At moments, and for certain audiences, the form and context of their music challenges traditional renderings of both Israeli and Palestinian nationalism, identity, and politics. So, too, does their engagement with Hebrew-Israeli vernaculars and idioms complicate traditional registers of Palestinian protest and the foundational notion of the Palestinian/Jewish divide within Israel. At the same time, such engagements work radically to rewrite hegemonic notions of Israeliness (mapped, as they are, on Euro-Jewish culture and ideology). And through its borrowings from international musical forms and traditions, the work of Dam and MWR insistently situates Palestine and Israel within a global theater of culture and politics that moves beyond notions of bounded nations and/or regions.

CONCLUSION

To read the history of Palestinian and Israeli popular culture over the last two decades through the lens of Birmingham school analytics is to be attentive precisely to the variable relationship between popular culture and political processes. Such a reading highlights the ways in which popular culture has constituted a site of struggle against hegemonic discourses (as in post-Zionist cinema and Palestinian-Israeli rap music). It also makes clear popular culture's crucial importance in processes of class formation and class consolidation (as in the growth and expression of middle-class Palestinian taste), and as a tool both to fortify nationalist ideologies and hatreds and to undercut the hegemony of secular-nationalist ideologies (as in "martyrdom" culture). Finally, this approach is attentive both to the ways in which popular cultural forms necessarily "articulate" with broader social and economic processes and historical moments, and to the perpetually changeable functions and circuits of popular cultural forms—always open (however contingently) to reinscription at the hands of its multiple consumers in the multiple historical moments of redeployment. The popular cultural moments and forms reviewed above, however variable in their forms and effects, problematize the fiction of popular culture as the self-consolidating "other" of politics. At the intersection of national, regional, and global circuits, the diverse histories of such forms and practices

help us rethink and remap Palestine and Israel, suggesting ways of enunciating politics and nations differently.

NOTES

1. New and foundational monographs on Israeli and Palestinian popular culture include the following: Husayn al-'Awdat, *al-sinima wa-al-qadiyah al-Filastiniyyah* (Cinema and the Palestinian question) (Damascus: al-Ahali, 1987); Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Nurit Gertz, *Shevuyah Ba-Halomah: Mitosim Ba-Tarbut Ha Yisre'elit* (Captives of a dream: Myths in Israeli culture) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1995); Yosefa Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989); Raz Yosef, *Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalisms in Israeli Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Walid Shamit and Guy Hennebelle, eds., *Filastin fi al-sinima* (Palestine in cinema) (Beirut: Fajr, 1980). As this list suggests, there has been considerably less new work on Palestinian than on Israeli popular culture. Recent monographs on Middle Eastern popular culture in broader terms include the following: Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-West, *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (London: Saqi Books, 2000); Joel Gordon, *Revolutionary Melodrama: Popular Film and Civic Identity in Nasser's Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) and *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Viola Shafik, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (Cairo: American University Press, 1998); Martin Stokes, *The Arabesk Debate: Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
2. This polemic anticipates arguments and analyses made in our upcoming edited volume, *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming).
3. The work of Edward Said has been most formative in this regard. We provide a comprehensive review of this scholarly trajectory in the introduction of our upcoming volume.
4. Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 8.
5. An instance of the former includes Susan Martha Kahn, *Reproducing Jews: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception in Israel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). Instances of the latter include Daniel Bertrand Monk, *An Aesthetic Occupation: The Immediacy of Architecture and the Palestine Conflict* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) and Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
6. As Robert Blecher has argued, recent scholarship on the state's Palestinian citizens still privileges political formations, struggles, and alliances *within* Israel's borders, rather than beyond them.
7. Examples of the national paradigm include the following: Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (New York: Verso, 1995); Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York: Pantheon, 1987); 'Abd al-Wahhab Kayyali, *Palestine: A Modern History* (London:

Croom Helm, 1978); Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992); Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Muhammad Y. Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); William Quandt, Fuad Jabber, and Ann Mosely Lesch, eds., *The Politics of Palestinian Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949–1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Examples of Marxist-inflected scholarship include: Joel Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There? Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel, 1948–1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Adel Samara, *Industrialisation in the West Bank: A Marxist Socio-economic Analysis, 1967–1991* (Jerusalem: Al-Mashriq Publications for Economic and Development Studies, 1992); Michael Shalev, *Labour and the Political Economy in Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origin of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: 1882–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Elia Zureik, *Israel: A Study in Internal Colonialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979). It should be noted that (a) these two trends are often closely connected and (b) even the literature that is critical of the nation model is still guided by its logic.

8. Although rethinking the parameters of “the political” was arguably at the center of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), this concern remains marginal to most scholars on Palestine despite Said’s enormous influence. On the other hand, critical literature in other areas has extensively addressed in recent decades the limits of both nationalist and Marxist paradigms with regard to the question of “the political.” In our discussion, we particularly draw on the work of postcolonial theorists aimed at

conceptualizing power beyond progressivist and determinist Marxist narratives. For a particularly clear articulation of how postcolonial theory has tried to move beyond these frameworks in its account of coloniality, see David Scott, *Refashioning Futures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). It should also be noted that, in the last decade, scholars in the field have begun seriously to rethink the conceptual limitations of the nation-state paradigm, just as they have the area studies rubric more generally, with a concern for the ways in which the fiction of a hermetic nation-state forecloses attention to forms and processes not contained by its real and imagined boundaries. The work of Zachary Lockman is of particular importance in this regard. We take up his argument in the next section of this essay.

9. This is not to deny a history of scholarly engagement with other forms of daily cultural practices in Israel and Palestine, particularly in the work of anthropologists, including the following: Eyal Ben Air and Yoram Bilu, *Grasping Land: Space and Place in Contemporary Israeli Discourse and Experience* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Jonathan Boyarin, *Palestine and Jewish History: Criticism at the Borders of Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996); Virginia R. Domínguez, *People as Subject, People as Object: Selfhood and Peoplehood in Contemporary Israel* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Birth of the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Dan Rabinowitz, *Overlooking Nazareth: The Ethnography of Exclusion in the Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Susan Slyomovics, *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

10. An example of such a reading is Hanan Ashrawi’s article, “The Contemporary Palestinian Poetry of Occupation,” *JPS* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1978), pp. 77–101. Ashrawi divides Palestinian poets into the “nationalist, committed, and

politically aware poets, who view poetry primarily as a means of moving the masses" and the "individualistic" poets, whom she essentially dismisses. The latter, among whom she includes Anton Shammas (subsequently much celebrated for his novel *Arabesques*), are accused of being "totally detached from their setting." (p. 84). See also Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (London: Routledge, 1987).

11. For an excellent review of the history of the Shirei Eretz Yisrael, see Motti Regev and Edwin Serousi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 49-70.

12. We hasten to add that such arguments are understandable given the brutal transformations in the region's economy resulting from the penetration of the region's markets by a newly reinvigorated global capital managed by foreign consultants and backed by U.S. military might.

13. Lawrence Grossberg, "History, Politics, and Postmodernism: Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 158.

14. Tony Bennett, "Popular Culture and Social Relations," in *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, eds. Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), pp. xi-xii.

15. See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Society and Culture*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). Hall goes further to refuse the myth of folk culture: "Since the inception of commercial capitalism and the drawing of all relations into the net of market transactions, there has been little or no 'pure' culture of the people—no separate folk-realm of the authentic popular, where 'the people' existed in their pure state, outside of the corrupting influences." (Grossberg, "History, Politics, and Postmodernism," p. 163).

16. Bennett, Mercer, and Woollacott, *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, p. 8.

17. Lawrence Grossberg, "Pedagogy in the Present," in *Popular Culture, Schooling, and Everyday Life*, ed. Henry Giroux and Roger Simon (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1989), p. 94.

18. All systems of rule, in Gramsci's schema, were based on a combination of coercion and persuasion. "Domination" (*dominio*) was the term Gramsci used to identify a mixture of persuasion and coercion decisively weighted in favor of force and repression (i.e., dictatorships, monarchies, and colonial regimes). "Hegemony" (*egemonia*), in turn, identified systems of political authority (i.e., modern "bourgeois democracies") where persuasion, or gaining the active consent of the ruled, was the predominant feature. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970) and Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, eds. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

19. Given the expansion of civil society characteristic of the modern nation-state, these locations and modalities, sites and institutions included educational establishments, the mass media, workplaces, legal apparatuses, government bureaucracies, spaces of consumption and entertainment, and so on.

20. The hegemony of a class or class fraction depends upon its capacity to actively win consent and thereby to gain the ability to claim that it represents the "universal" interests of the entire society (Anne Showstack Sassoon, "Hegemony, War of Position and Political Intervention," in *Approaches to Gramsci*, ed. Anne Showstack Sassoon [London: Writers and Readers, 1982], p. 111).

21. According to Gramsci, in political systems characterized by *dominio*, open political struggle involved two relatively fixed sides, in opposing and discrete trenches. Such a struggle he termed "war of maneuver."

22. Clearly, the work of Michel Foucault and his conceptualization of power are also critical to a rethinking of popular culture, and his influence informs our reading of Gramsci. For Foucault, disciplinary power proliferates throughout society, operating through an array of institutions and mechanisms. Disciplinary power is essential to the production of subjects, yet at the same time is equally resisted by subjects. Popular cultural artifacts, practices, and institutions, in this conception, are or can be important sites for the reproduction of power as well as

resistance to it. It is important to stress, however, that Foucault's notion of disciplinary power cannot simply be assimilated to Gramsci's hegemony; see Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics," *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991), pp. 77-96. Given our concern with "the national" and "the popular," as well as the fact that the scholarly move to popular culture has been made by scholars who have worked through Gramsci, it is this tradition we have employed in our rethinking here. To turn to Gramsci to do this work is also to suggest ways in which radical scholarship on Palestine and Israel scholarship can work "within shouting distance of Marxism" (as Stuart Hall argues), with the Gramscian concern for the articulation of popular culture with the economic and the political, even as such scholarship rethinks the more orthodox tenets associated with the Marxist tradition.

23. Important texts include: Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, eds., *The Subcultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997); Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978); Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance through Rituals* (London: Routledge, 1995); Dick Hebdige, *Subculture* (London: Routledge, 1981); Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); and Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

24. Arguably, the critique of such national paradigms is at issue for scholars of the Birmingham school, particularly Paul Gilroy. See his *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

25. Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 8.

26. On the history of this binary in Zionist thought and ideology and the ways it has rendered the Mizrahim invisible, see Ella Shohat "Reflections of an Arab Jew," *Emergences* 3, no. 4 (Fall 1992), pp. 39-45; and Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

27. Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, p. 9.

28. The emergence of Israel studies as a field outside of Middle East studies is symptomatic of this partial mapping.

29. See Ilan Pappé, "Post-Zionist Critique on Israel and the Palestinians, Part III: Popular Culture," *JPS* 26, no. 4 (Summer 1997), pp. 60-69, and Livia Alexander, *Conflicting Images: Palestinian and Israeli Cinemas, 1988-1998* (Ph.D. thesis, New York University, Graduate School of Arts and Science, 2001).

30. It should be noted that only certain forms of "Arab" culture became popular among Euro-Jewish consumers: those whose story or semiotics of Palestinianness did not pose a fundamental threat to the Jewish state. See Rebecca Stein, "National Itineraries, Itinerant Nations: Israeli Tourism and Palestinian Cultural Production," *Social Text* 56 (Autumn 1998), pp. 91-124.

31. On the growing popularity of Mizrahi popular rock during this era, see Motti Regev, "Musica Mizrahit, Israeli Rock and National Culture in Israel," *Popular Music* 15 (1996), pp. 275-84.

32. On the everyday culture of the first intifada, see Rema Hammami, "Women's Political Participation in the Intifada: A Critical Overview," in *The Intifada and Some Women's Social Issues* (Women's Studies Committee/Bisan Center, Ramallah: Bisan Center for Research and Development, 1991), p. 77.

33. See Lena Jayyusi, "The Voice of Palestine and the Peace Process: Paradoxes in Media Discourse after Oslo," in *After Oslo: New Realities, Old Problems*, eds. George Giacaman and Dag Jund Lonning (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 189-211.

34. For instance, the National Conservatory of Music.

35. Expressive culture at these venues tends to draw from the paradoxes, tragedies and even comedies of intifada quotidian life. One example is Vera Tamari's art installation, "Going for a Ride?" at the Friends Boys School Playground in al-Birch, 23 June-23 July 2002, created out of cars destroyed in the April 2002 invasion of Ramallah (Penny Johnson, "Ramallah Dada: The Reality of the Absurd," *Jerusalem Quarterly File*, no. 16 [November 2002], pp. 52-56).

36. Lori Allen, "There Are Many Reasons Why: Suicide Bombers and

Martyrs in Palestine," *Middle East Report* 223 (Summer 2002), pp. 34–37.

37. On the growth of McDonald's culture in Israel, as part of the Americanizing trend, see Uri Ram, "Glocommodification: How the Global Consumes the Local—McDonald's in Israel," *Current Sociology* 52, no. 1 (January 2004), pp. 11–31.

38. At the same time, Israeli consumptive practices—deemed an affront to Palestinian terror and its labors of disturbing the Israeli everyday—have been invested with a discourse of Israeli patriotic defiance. See Rebecca L. Stein, "Israeli Leisure, 'Palestinian Terror,' and the Question of Palestine (Again)," *Theory and Event* 6, no. 3 (2002).

39. This aesthetic is a relic of the popular postarmy trip to India, which constitutes the "Far East" within this idiom. For an intimate portrait of this Israeli tourist phenomenon, see the documentary *Thank God for India*, directed by Nisan Katz (2000).

40. On everyday life in Ramallah during the al-Aqsa intifada, see Raja Shehadeh, *When the Birds Stopped Singing: Life in Ramallah under Siege* (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 2003). For intifada life in a refugee camp, see Muna Hamza-Muhaisen's Dheisheh Diary at <http://xii.net/intifada2000/deardiary/>.

41. On general trends in satellite television consumption and popularity in the region, see Naomi Sakr, "Satellite Television and Development in the Middle East," *Middle East Report* 210 (Spring 1999), pp. 6–10.

42. Boycott campaigns, often coarticulating with classic anti-Semitic rhetorics, have been increasingly launched against cultural producers accused of collaborating with "Zionist forces"; indeed, such campaigns have preoccupied the cultural arena in Egypt—and to a lesser degree in Jordan, Lebanon, and Algeria.

43. On the work of Dam, see Joseph Massad, "Liberating Songs: Palestine Put to Music," in Stein and Swedenburg, eds., *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Discussion of Dam and MWR in the Western press includes Igal Avidan, "Peaceful Rage," *The Jerusalem Report*, 5 May 2003, p. 42; Stéphanie Le Bars, "Les juifs ont pris mon pays et ma liberté," *Le Monde*, 15 January 2003, p. 4; Jason Keyser, "Israel's Arabs Find Revolution in Rap," Associated Press, 25 June 2002; Hartwig Vens, "Hip-Hop Speaks to the Reality of Israel," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Zurich), 20 November 2003 (Reprinted in *World Press Review* 51, no. 1 [February 2004]). On the history of the relative invisibility of Palestinian-Israeli music in Israel, see Motti Regev, "Present Absentees: Arab Music in Israeli Culture," *Public Culture* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1995), pp. 433–45. For a general history of Israeli music and the relationship between folk and popular music and notions of Israeliness, see Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel*, which, while enormously impressive overall, includes only a very marginal discussion of the music of Palestinian citizen communities.

44. For downloads, articles and photos of MWR, see <http://www.mwr-rap.com/>. For more information and downloads of Palestinian-Arab rap, consult <http://www.arabrap.net/>.

45. Michal Palti, "Notes to the Prime Minister," *Ha'Aretz*, 11 March 2003. Another example of such collaboration is Dam's video, "Min al-irhabi?" (Who's the terrorist?), directed by Israeli video artist and advertising pioneer Udi Aloni, son of Shulamit Aloni, former leader of the leftist Meretz party (Avidan, "Peaceful Rage").

46. Palti, "Notes to the Prime Minister." Internet searches of MWR and Tamer Nafar will show the media attention received by these groups.