

## Imaginations and representations

### Summary of the third session

#### Participants

Moderator: Joëlle Marelli ;

Dr. Tania Forte, anthropologist, Ben Gurion University of the Negev (Beer Sheva): "Between Suspicion and Hope: how Israeli and international journalists report on the conflict" ;

Eyal Sivan, filmmaker (Paris): "The Politics of Memory: the Israeli model" ;

Hassan Khader, Khalil Sakakini Centre (Ramallah): "Representations of the other in Israeli and Palestinian literature" ;

Prof. Ella Shohat, professor of comparative literature, Tisch School of Arts, University of New York: "Kidnapped Memories: rewriting Arab Jews and Palestine" ;

Prof. Musa Budeiri, professor of political science and international law, Bir Zeit and Al-Quds Universities: "Tensions in the formation of collective Palestinian identity in the pre- and post-Oslo periods" ;

Prof. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, professor of history, Ben Gurion University of the Negev (Beer Sheva): "Binationalism versus Zionism seen as theological colonialism".

#### Introduction

In her preamble to the session, Joëlle Marelli briefly touched on the ambitions "Convergences Palestine / Israel," which seeks to allow the public to become aware of the work being done in Israel and in Palestine, often jointly between Palestinians and Israelis. These projects – whether in an academic or institutional framework or not, sometimes carried out by proactive or research-focused NGOs, sometimes by individuals such as writers, filmmakers, artists – rival one another in developing and refining new tools for analysis, reflection and action, which should make it possible to avoid sliding back into worn-out grids of analysis offering no genuine understanding, and thus no real way forward; they make it possible to get away from the false idea that the "conflict" is, if not downright eternal, then at least inscribed in a historical timeframe of such magnitude that there is no point even hoping for a way out. Moreover, "Convergences Palestine / Israel" has deliberately chosen not to focus on the current state of the conflict.

For this third session, the moderator called upon all the speakers to shift this perspective and to demonstrate that what is taking place today is intelligible; it must be historicized, and a thorough examination be conducted of the narratives that have led to the most

recent events.

## **Part One**

### **First sequence**

#### ***Tania Forte: "Between Suspicion and Hope: how Israeli and international journalists report on the conflict"***

Issam Nassar – with whom Tania Forte is jointly researching how the conflict is represented in the media – being absent, our guest chose to discuss the presuppositions and principles which govern the production of information amongst Israeli and Western journalists.

She began with the notion of “transparency,” sought after by most people when they watch or read the news. It is important to identify the production practices that underlie this transparency of news, sought after by Israeli audiences (styles of reporting familiar to the reporters’ respective audiences, referred to as “pre-fieldwork”). To this end, local discursive themes must be analysed, as must also their media treatment. From this study, a double thematic emerges: that of suspicion coupled with hope – a thematic that can also be seen in the guidelines of European (particularly French) and American reporters.

Until approximately ten years ago, suspicion was the general attitude which characterised the authorities’ relationship to the media in general. Since then, there have been relatively cozy ties between the media and the army, which is described in Hebrew by a term meaning “committed press.” This military censorship is omnipresent and well accepted: one example of censorship practice is based on the certification and control of journalists.

Recently, there has been an American-style liberalisation of the production of information (a new judge was appointed to the Supreme Court), along with the development of new technical means: commercial channels, cable, cellular telephones, video cameras in the hands of non-professional reporters. New sources of information: Internet, NGOs. At the same time, one has observed a stiffening within the army: army spokespersons organise tours for reporters; cities targeted by intensive “operations” are closed off to journalists.

The Israeli public is falling back today on a position of suspicion and no longer puts up with critical discourse. This attitude is at once the result of a policy of opacity and what makes such a policy possible.

#### ***Eyal Sivan: "The Politics of Memory: the Israeli example"***

“The politics of memory” is an expression borrowed from the historian Raoul Hilberg. One question constantly arises: how can it be that a people who have suffered so much

(the Jews), who have made a veritable cult or even a culture out of memory, are capable of in turn inflicting such suffering upon other people?

The word memory implies, in negative, forgetting. Memory is a screen, in other words, making possible a triple negation: 1. The negation of the diasporic character of the Jews, or what is known as the “negation of exile,” the forgetting of the Jewish culture of exile. This is, amongst other causes, the work of the Zionised Rabbinical Judaism of the 1950s through the highlighting of several events, held up as memorial dates. 2. The negation of Judeo-Arabic culture and the Westernization of Israeli society. Beginning in 1967, there was a transfer of stigmas affecting the Jewish communities of the Orient onto the Palestinians. 3. The negation of the Palestinians’ “Naqba,” the “catastrophe” ensuing from the expulsion of 1948. It is on the basis of this triple negation that the “competition between victims” could develop, in which an “us” – made up of the heirs of the Jewish martyr, to the exclusion of Oriental Jews and Palestinians, but also of such realities as the Warsaw ghetto resistance – takes upon itself the rewriting of the history and geography of the region.

## **Second sequence**

### ***Ella Shohat: "Kidnapped Memories: rewriting the Jewish Arabs and Palestine"***

Zionism has constructed a false East-West, primitivism-civilisation dichotomy. What meaning does the idea of Jewish colonisation conceal?

One of the aspects of this question is the theme of “Jews returning to their land.” The discourse of a return to origins was not used in other colonial endeavours, for instance by France in Algeria. One finds frequent recourse to essentialist notions of identity. Ella Shohat referred to the interview with Benny Morris in the New York Review of Books (23 May), who recalled Barak’s remark to the effect that truth was a Judeo-Christian category, which (implicitly) did not exist for Palestinians.

She also brought up the problem of the hyphen in the expression “Judeo-Christian,” suggesting that it would be interesting to find out if there did not also exist something like a “Judeo-Muslim” culture.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, Arab Jews (Jews from Arab countries) were used against the Palestinians. Thus, in 1908, a project was devised to “import” the Jews from Yemen, in other words, “Jews in the form of Arabs.” 1948 saw the beginning of the “demographic” problem and the importation of Jews from Arab countries as low-cost labour. Herzl’s remark should be borne in mind: “We will be an outpost of the West in the East.”

## **Part Two**

### **Third sequence**

### ***Musa Budeiri: "Tensions in the formation of collective Palestinian identity in the pre- and post-Oslo periods"***

The only Palestinian speaker who was able to follow up on our invitation (Hassan Khader encountered the worst difficulties in his attempt to leave the West Bank; Rema Hammami chose to remain with her students in a period of hardship, where their curriculum has suffered terribly from the latest events), Musa Budeiri spoke about Palestinian identity, its historical constitution, its transformations and its diversity, the relationships that its definition maintains with the issue of the absence of rights, and lastly, the relationships that it maintains with the question of the right of return. Musa Budeiri began by retracing the history of the constitution of a Palestinian identity since the First World War. The arbitrary drawing of new borderlines in what had previously been Ottoman Greater Syria after the First World War had considerable consequences for the population of Palestine – or what had formerly been Southern Syria under the Ottoman regime. The effect of the Naqba – the Palestinian catastrophe constituted by the defeat at the hands of the Israelis following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 – was the separation of history from collective memory. Palestine subsequently had a different fate than its neighbours. The Naqba marked a rupture which was at the same time one of the fundamental milestones of Palestinian identity. The history of this progressive consciousness of national identity remains to be written. Before the first Intifada, Palestinians were considered to be those “outside” – the refugees living essentially in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. The residents of the West Bank, occupied in 1967, were considered Jordanians by Israel. With the Intifada that started in 1987, the Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza asserted their Palestinian identity. The dream of a return was progressively abandoned and replaced by a demand for an end to the occupation (of the West Bank and Gaza). It was thus the shift from the idea of return/liberation to the acknowledgement that what was being sought after was a two-state solution, the Palestinian state destined to be founded on the 22% (of the historic or mandate-era Palestine) of available territory. It was then that the West Bank and Gazan Palestinians became representative of the Palestinians as a whole, despite the fact that many Palestinians live far from Palestine.

He subsequently turned to the question of the evolution of Palestinian political identifications. Both the religious and Marxist currents have the same mythical heroes, just as the language of the national movement is replete with religious images. The current Islamic movements make use of the same slogans as those of the PLO, using virtually identical terms.

### ***Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin: "Bi-nationalism versus Zionism seen as theological colonialism"***

It was first of all pointed out that the term bi-nationalism should be understood here as a critical tool and not in the sense of any political programme advocating a one-state or two-state solution, the point being to open a perspective: the present is still part of the peace process. The term is a tool in view of the decolonisation of Israeli consciousness. Coming back to Ella Shohat’s analysis of the hyphen in “Judeo-Christian” or “Judeo-

Arabic,” Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin sought to establish that there already exists a bi-national Jewish and Judeo-Palestinian reality. To do so, he focused his talk in two directions: critical bi-nationalism is opposed at once to the idea of separation (between Jews and Palestinians) and the idea of secularism construed as embodying an enlightened and pacifist West against an obscurantist and bellicose Orient. The tendency to identify those in favour of peace with the secular left inhibits us from seeing the reality. This identification is the construction of secular Israelis themselves, disregarding far more historically subtle positions amongst theologians, but also in ignorance of what the Zionist discourse – even its secular variants – borrows from theological vocabulary. The outrageous simplification is thus a problem that concerns the very foundation of Israeli Zionist identity. Secularism is not separable from theology, in particular from messianic notions. Zionism has partially assimilated Western theological mythology – above all from Protestantism. The return to the promised land, the identification with the West both push, in this sense, toward a separation of Jewish identity from Arabic-Muslim identity. Thus, Zionism denies that the land itself can have any history independent from its Jewish settlement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The history of the country is not taught in schools, with the exception of the period of the Crusades, and the waves of Jewish immigration in the framework of the Zionist movement. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin concluded with the need to rethink a Jewish identity not construed in opposition to the Arab world, to adopt a different approach from that which has prevailed in Zionist Israel. This is not impossible and our guest provided several examples drawn from recent history: the “Brit Shalom” movement in the period just prior to the creation of the state of Israel, or the subtle position put forth by the Sephardic Jews living in Palestine in the nineteenth century. The bi-national perspective aims above all at putting an end to the oppression of the Palestinians.

*Summary by Joëlle Marelli*

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## **Notes**

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