

THINKING **PALESTINE**



EDITED BY Ronit Lentin

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Introduction: Thinking Palestine

Setting the object of the debate¹

Not a state but rather a territory, a national entity, perhaps a state-in-becoming, Palestine occupies a central place in the contemporary political imagination. That ‘the question of Palestine’ is debated above and beyond other contemporary political questions is most probably due to the central position of ‘the Jews’ in the post-Holocaust West and to Palestine, the territory, being ‘the Holy Land’ of the three monotheistic religions; but it is also due, as Gargi Bhattacharyya argues in this volume, to the fact that the Palestinian struggle is regarded as the unfinished business of a previous imperial era and that ‘the struggle for a free Palestine has been popularized, pop-culturalized, and added to the style pantheon of the global left’. For the late Palestinian intellectual Edward Said, however, Palestine is above all a *consciousness*, built on the uniqueness of Palestinian history, which has taken a different course from Arab history due to the dialectics of its traumatic national encounter with Zionism.

This dialectic connection arguably makes Palestine a unique case study. Said’s book *The Question of Palestine*, which re-introduced the Palestinians into English-language academic and political debate, was not intended as a value-free account. It rather described ‘our night and our slow awakening’, always dialectically setting the Palestinian experience against Zionism, which ‘has meant as much to us, albeit differently, as it has to Jews. What we need to inform the world is how it

meant certain concrete things to us, things of which we collectively bear the living traces' (Said 1980: xv).

This book does not aim to discuss the question of Palestine in its entirety, nor Israel or Jewish history. The object under consideration is rather the Palestinian conception of Palestine and the representations of Palestine, the consciousness, the political idea, the territory, the history, seen, above all, as a dialectical experience positioned against its perennial other, Zionism. The starting point for this book is an analysis of Palestine in light of Giorgio Agamben's 'state of exception' (Agamben 1998, 2005), debated from different angles by contributors to this collection. This introduction briefly outlines Agamben's concept of the 'state of exception' based, among other things, on the work of the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt, the German Jewish cultural theorist Walter Benjamin, and the French theorist Michel Foucault, who in *Society Must be Defended* (2003) posits a theory of the birth of state racism. To complete this theoretical exploration, Israel is theorized, after David Theo Goldberg (2002, this volume), as a 'racial state'. I do take on board, however, Goldberg's warning against using racialization as a vague analytical tool, and the need to anchor it in regional models or mappings, rather than ideal types or broad generalizations, and in 'contours of racist configurations, each one with its own material and intellectual history' (Goldberg 2005: 88).

In view of the relationship between racial states and resistance, and because, like the other contributors to this volume, I am politically committed to Palestinian self-determination, I face a dilemma in presenting a seemingly abstract theorization of Palestine (and dialectically, Israel) in light of Agamben's state of exception. My dilemma is that – notwithstanding Agamben's positing sovereignty's subject as *homo sacer*, or 'bare life', at the mercy of sovereign power (1998) – such analysis runs the risk of erasing the active agency of the Palestinian subject, represented as either passive victim of Israeli dispossession or aggressive insurgent, but with interpretative control wrested away. As illustrated in the collection of autobiographical narratives of dispossession of Palestinian and Israeli women that I co-edited with Nahla Abdo (Abdo and Lentin 2002), I am deeply committed to the de-objectification of the Palestinian subject. I am, however, also well aware of my problematic position as (an exiled) citizen of Israel, and as such a member of the perpetrator group, in relation to representing Palestinian subjectivity.

Indeed, the question has to be asked why so many Israeli scholars are

preoccupied with researching Palestinians. While in some cases it has to do with empathy, or solidarity, it may also have to do with the tendency to orientalize the Palestinian other (Said 1978), epitomized as the orient-at-home – exotic, sensual, chaotic but also the desired ‘colonial fantasy’ (Yegenoglu 1998). In some cases an education in Arabic and Middle Eastern studies trains Israelis for intelligence work: many Israelis researching Palestinians are security services veterans (Rabinowicz 1998: 134), contributing to the colonial power/knowledge regime. The close cooperation between the security services and Israeli universities and research institutes is no secret.

Like many anti-Zionist Israelis, whose ‘road to Damascus’ tales often date back to the wake of the 1982 Lebanon war, I too have my account (Lentin 2007). In recounting these Israeli anti-Zionist Damascene tales, the moment of conversion is crucial and how this is recounted indicates our sense of self and current political positionality. However, auto/biographical accounts are ultimately about the teller rather than the told, regardless of our conviction that *our* personal auto/biography is about empathy and solidarity. Thus, despite the good intentions, in much Israeli research on Palestine the Palestinians often get erased, their voice subsumed by the voice of the powerful colonizer, leading to a degree of appropriation that we are all guilty of (see my chapter in this volume).

In this light, and in light of the chapters in this volume, I want to propose a theorization of ‘Palestinians’ not merely as victims, or as spoken for and about (although, of course, to theorize is always also to objectify). I am inspired by the Jewish Israeli sociologist Yehouda Shenhav’s (2006) re-reading of Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and of Agamben’s interpretation of Benjamin’s ‘Critique of violence’ (1921), and Shenhav’s critique of Agamben for ignoring, unlike Schmitt or Hannah Arendt, the role of European imperialism in conceptualizing European sovereignty. Shenhav’s postcolonial reading of Fanon and Benjamin may lead to the missing link in thinking about Palestine and Palestinian subjectivity, even though, surprisingly, he stops short of theorizing the State of Israel as a ‘racial state’.

I begin this introduction with a brief theoretical outline of the state of exception, state racism and the racial state. I then posit Israel as a racial state, where the state of exception with reference to its Palestinian other was instituted from its very establishment through a series of emergency laws, not yet repealed. I then read the Palestinian active agent through a discussion of Fanon, Benjamin and Shenhav. I conclude by outlining the

contents of the book, including, *inter alia*, a contestation of the applicability of Agamben's theorization of the state of exception to the State of Israel.

State of exception

According to Carl Schmitt, who posits the contiguity between the state of exception and sovereignty, a sovereign is one who determines the 'state of exception', which Schmitt understands not as a state of emergency or as merely responding to necessity (as do the Roman jurists cited by Agamben), but rather as a general concept in political science. The state of exception must be understood as a response to a condition of superior danger to the continuing existence of the state. The sovereign, according to Schmitt, is constructed by the state of exception, which the sovereign him/herself determines. But although the sovereign's action is not controlled by the legal order of the state, it becomes clear that it is the sovereign who decides both whether a state of exception exists and which action to take to overcome it (Schmitt 2005: 25–7). However, the state of exception is difficult to define precisely because of its proximity to civil war, insurrection, and resistance. Civil war, which is the opposite of normal conditions, lies in a zone of undecidability in relation to the state of exception, which is 'state power's immediate response to the most extreme internal conflicts' (Agamben 2005: 2).

Schmitt was a trenchant critic of Weimar liberalism, which he saw as 'Jewish', and he later became a Nazi ideologue who theorized sovereignty at the point of transition from Weimar to the Nazi Reich. It is tempting to link the theorization of the state of exception to the Nazi state. As Agamben reminds us, soon after Hitler took power, he proclaimed the Decree for the Protection of the People and the State, which suspended the articles of the Weimar Constitution concerning personal liberties. The decree was never repealed, making the Third Reich a state of exception which lasted twelve years. Modern totalitarianism can therefore be defined as the establishment, by means of a state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows the physical elimination not only of political adversaries, but of entire categories of citizens not integrated into the political system.

Agamben insists, however, that this voluntary creation of a state of emergency is not merely a description of the Nazi Reich. Through the state of exception, the sovereign 'creates and guarantees the situation'

that the law needs for its validity – and this circularity characterizes not only extreme regimes such as the Nazi state, but also the voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency that has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states, including so-called democratic states (Agamben 2005: 2). This involves, on the one hand, the extension of the military authority's wartime powers into the civil sphere, and, on the other, the suspension of constitutional norms that protect individual liberties (as argued by Zreik in this volume in relation to Israeli constitutionalism).

One example Agamben gives to illustrate the biopolitical significance of the state of exception as the structure in which the law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension is the 'military order' issued by the US president on 13 November 2001, which authorizes the indefinite detention and trial by 'military commission' of non-citizens suspected of terrorist activities. The US Patriot Act enacted on 26 October 2001 already allowed the attorney general to take into custody aliens suspected of activities endangering the national security of the United States, though within seven days the alien had to be either released or charged. What was new about Bush's order was that it erased any legal status of the individual; thus not only did detainees not have POW status, they did not even have the status of persons charged with a crime according to American law. As in the Nazi camps, detainees lose any legal identity (Agamben 2005: 3).

Agamben's reading of Schmitt's state of exception theory rests not only on sovereignty declaring a state of emergency in which the sovereign both stays outside the law and enacts it, but also on the notion that it is the nation (in the sense of *Volk*, rather than citizenry or residency within the state's territorial borders) which needs defending from its others. Crucially, the state of exception is a *security* state, instituting 'an unprecedented generalization of the paradigm of security as the normal techniques of government' (Agamben 2005: 14).

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), Agamben argues that the constant state of emergency or exception enables the state to turn the lives of those under state rule into what he calls *homo sacer* or 'bare life'. A Roman concept, *homo sacer* (sacred man) is he who may be killed but not sacrificed. While useful in theorizing the 'bare life' of Nazi concentration camp inmates, Agamben extends this to the lives of detainees, to whom, according to the US Administration, the American Constitution does not apply, even though the US Supreme Court ruled

otherwise in 2004. Agamben argues for the general applicability of the state of exception: 'At once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested' (Agamben 1995: 9).

The questions Agamben teases out in *State of Exception* are whether we are talking of a territory which exists outside the rule of law, and whether the state of exception is inside or outside the law. Judging by Israel's intricate regime of emergency regulations and the play between the judiciary, the legislature and the executive with regard to both Israel's Palestinian citizens and those Palestinians living under occupation, it does not take a major leap of the imagination to extend the analysis to Palestine and Israel.

Racial state

Michel Foucault (1990) argues that when life becomes included in mechanisms of state power, politics turns into biopolitics, the territorial state becomes a 'state of population', and the nation's biological life becomes a problem of sovereign power, which he terms 'biopower'. Through a series of governmental technologies, biopower creates 'docile bodies' and the population – its life, welfare, longevity, health – becomes the ultimate object of government. Foucault dedicated his 1975–6 Collège de France lecture series to the birth of state racism (2003), charting the transition from sovereignty's power to kill unwanted people in the regulatory modern state, which directs its biopower at living beings and, more specifically, at their mass – as population. Put simply, Foucault posits a transition from the sovereign power of the old territorial state, 'to make die and let live', to modern biopower, 'to make live and let die'. The duty to defend society against itself (and by extension defend 'the nation' from its indigenous and immigrant others) means that the state can scarcely function without racism, which Foucault sees as 'the break between what must live and what must die' (Foucault 2003: 254). According to this analysis, racism has two functions: the first is separating out the groups that exist within a population; the second is making it possible to establish 'a relationship between my life and the death of the other that is not a military or warlike relationship of confrontation, but a biological-type relationship: the more inferior species die out... the more I – as species rather than

individual – can live, the stronger I will be’ (Foucault 2003: 255). Rather than serving one group against another, race – understood not in biological but rather in classificatory terms – becomes a tool of social conservatism and state racism – a racism which society practices against itself. As opposed to scapegoat theories of racism, which argue that sub-populations are cordoned off under economic and social duress, Foucault sees racism as an ongoing social war, nurtured by biopolitical technologies of purification. This sheds light on the ongoing plans, since before the establishment of the State of Israel, to ‘transfer’ Palestinians outside the state’s borders (see e.g., Pappe 2006).

In Goldberg’s (2002) theorization of all modern nation-states as racial states, the state is a state of power which excludes in order to construct homogeneity. Through governmental technologies – such as constitutions, border controls, the law, policy making, bureaucracy, population census, invented histories and traditions, ceremonies and cultural imagining – modern states, each in their own way, are defined by their power to exclude and include in racially ordered terms, aiming to produce a coherent picture of the population by keeping racialized others out and by legislating against the ‘degeneracy’ of indigenous minorities. In constructing homogeneities, the state not only denies its internal heterogeneities, it is also a normalizing biopower state.

If we concur with Goldberg’s theorization of all modern nation-states as racial states, and with Foucault’s view of racism as intrinsic to all modern, normalizing states (through the use of biopolitical technologies ranging from social exclusion to mass murder), there is little doubt that Israel can be theorized as a racial state par excellence, where the state of exception was instituted prior to its establishment in relation to its Palestinian other. As Shenhav reminds us, ‘In Israel there is a constant state of emergency. The state inherited the British Mandate’s “Emergency Regulations” under which it continued the anomalous suspension of the law, within the law... We must remember what this system enables: one rule (life) for the majority of the state’s citizens, and another (death, threat of death, threat of expulsion) for the state’s subjects, whose lives have been rendered “bare”’ (Shenhav 2006: 206–7).

Israel as a racial state

Goldberg writes in this volume that ‘Israel cannot live with the Palestinians, purging them persistently from green-line Israel, but

cannot live without them, conceptually as much as materially, existentially as much as emotionally.’ However, theorizing Israel as a racial state is not merely about its relations with its Palestinian other. Following Foucault’s general idea about the need to defend society – interesting here also is Burleigh and Wiperman’s (1999) theorization of the Nazi state as the ideal-type racial state, where the object was the *protection of the body* of the *Volk* – and remembering that Zionism was articulated as the imperative to protect the nebulous body dubbed ‘the Jewish nation’ from antisemitic persecutions, we begin to understand the inevitability of theorizing the State of Israel, from its very inception, as a racial state. Indeed, the prominent Israeli genetics professor Rafael Falk reads the entire history of Zionism as a eugenicist project, aiming to save the Jewish genetic pool from the degeneration forced upon the Jews by diaspora existence (Falk 2006: 25). Falk argues that understanding Judaism as a racial essence became an integral part of Zionist thought towards the end of the nineteenth century. While many European Jews struggled against the idea that Judaism is a race, just as the antisemites justified the persecution of Jews by biological reasoning, seeing Jews as a separate ‘race’, prominent Zionist thinkers such as Herzl, Hess, Bialik, Nordau and even the liberal philosopher Martin Buber adopted the terminology of *Volk* – a racial nation shaped by ‘blood and soil’ (Falk 2006, 18–19).²

This race thinking, albeit without ‘race’, has serious consequences. The prevalent thinking about racist discrimination in Israel rejects the notion of ‘race’, preferring, as does the influential geographer Oren Yiftachel, to theorize Israeli schisms in ethnic terms and the State of Israel as an ‘ethnocracy’ (Yiftachel 2006). However, in terms of the racialization of Palestinians,³ such thinking supports the theorization of Israel as a racial state and Goldberg’s ‘racial palestinianization’ argument in this volume.

Israel, constructed as the state of the ‘Jewish nation’, grants automatic citizenship to anyone who can prove s/he has a Jewish mother, while depriving of citizenship those Palestinians born on the land, who happened to be absent on census day – this applies to both 1948 and 1967. Palestinians not expelled during the 1948 Nakba, numbering some 160,000,⁴ were re-dubbed ‘Israeli Arabs’ and put under military rule, based on British Mandate Emergency Regulations issued in 1945. These regulations virtually abolished basic rights of expression, movement, organization and equality before the law,

though they left Palestinian citizens of Israel the right to vote and be elected. A series of laws, including the Law for Absentee Property (1950), the JNF (Jewish National Fund) Law (1953) and the Law of Agricultural Settlement (1967), barred – by legal means, demonstrating the salience of the state of exception – the selling, leasing, sub-letting and owning of land by ‘non-Jews’, for which read ‘Palestinians’. Though officially abolished in 1966, to all intents and purposes the emergency regulations are still in place – controlling 20% of Israel’s citizens (Pappe 2006: 220–2).

Contributors to this volume provide many examples – here as elsewhere – of this ongoing anomalous situation. One example is Ilan Pappé’s discussion of the Jewish National Fund (JNF), the agency in charge of land ownership, forestation and the Hebraicization of Palestinian place names. Founded in 1901, the JNF was the principal Zionist tool for the colonization of Palestine, first buying Palestinian lands upon which it settled Jewish immigrants, before becoming the main instrument in the Zionization of Palestine. The JNF was entrusted with perpetuating the Zionist myth of Palestine as an ‘empty’ and ‘arid’ land before the arrival of Zionism. One consequence is that 93% of land in Israel, established on 78% of historic Palestine, previously owned by dispossessed Palestinians, is owned by Jews, while to this day Israel’s Palestinian citizens are prohibited from establishing new settlements. In 1948 the JNF prepared the ground for the Nakba with the ‘village files’ – a complete mapping of each Palestinian village that served the actual plans, culminating in Plan D, devised by the Zionist leadership, aimed at killing the Palestinians’ elite, damaging their sources of livelihood and water supply, and bringing about their systematic and total expulsion from their homeland. Pappé documents this process in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006), putting paid to the argument, by so-called Israeli ‘new historians’, that the expulsion of the Palestinians was an unfortunate consequence of war, which today would be dubbed ‘collateral damage’.⁵ To illustrate further, Pappé highlights the central role of Israel’s national parks, where forests of imported European conifers replace indigenous Palestinian olive, almond and fig trees, erasing the memory of the Nakba and of pre-Nakba Palestinian life. The parks, built on destroyed Palestinian villages whose ethnically cleansed inhabitants now reside in refugee camps or in exile, replace Palestinian sites of trauma and memory with Israeli ecologically correct spaces of leisure and entertainment (Pappe 2006: 229).

This is an example of the processes which have led Palestinian scholars such as Honaida Ghanim (2005, this volume) to posit the reduction of the occupied Palestinians to biological subjects. In a biopolitical regime, Ghanim argues, while the life of the subject-citizen is protected by the state, the life of the occupied subject is akin to 'bare life' that may be killed at the state's whim. Sari Hanafi (2005) argues that biopolitics is being deployed by Israel to categorize Palestinians into different 'states of exception' that render them powerless in a process he describes as spacio-cide intended to appropriate land, rather than eliminate people.

Agamben stresses the centrality of the security imperative to the state of exception. Security is indeed central to the self-perception of the Israeli state, where the military occupies a central place (Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999: 3), leading Kimmerling (1993) to posit 'cognitive (Israeli) militarism' and argue that during times of war the system puts routine activities 'on hold', mobilizing all its resources to deal with what it sees as the ongoing 'existential threat'. As the State of Israel sees itself as a haven for the 'Jewish nation', the control of the Palestinians is viewed as an imperative born of necessity, and an ongoing state of emergency, which, to paraphrase Agamben, 'creates and guarantees the situation' that the law needs for its validity, enacted to defend (Israeli Jewish) society against its indigenous others.

Following Said's argument about the dialectical relationship between Palestinian consciousness and Zionist politics, it is crucial to reiterate that Israeli preoccupation with state security determines not only the prevalence of the state of exception in governing the territory occupied in 1967, but also the lives of Palestinian citizens in the Israeli state proper, as argued, for instance, in Sabagh-Khoury and Sultani's essay on the trial of the Israeli-Palestinian leader of the National Democratic Assembly, Azmi Bishara (2003, see also Pappe in this volume). According to Agamben, 'A state whose main preoccupation is security, and for whom security is the main legitimization, is a brittle organism; such a state will remain vulnerable to terrorism and will ultimately become terrorist itself.' Shenhav adds that the state of exception does not pertain only to the 'enemy', but refers to all social strata and institutions, making it ultimately undemocratic (Shenhav 2006: 217).

This analysis fits Israeli reality. Israeli obsession with state security is fed by a deep sense of Jewish victimhood and vulnerability. However,

Said reminds us in *The Politics of Dispossession* (1994) that ‘the question to be asked is... how long are we going to deny that the cries of the people of Gaza... are directly connected to the policies of the Israeli government and not to the cries of the victims of Nazism.’

‘Insurrection of subjugated knowledges’

In order to think beyond the objectification of ‘the Palestinian’ as either victim or terrorist, I want to consider Foucault’s notion of the ‘insurrection of subjugated knowledges’ that he used during his lecture at the Collège de France in 1976 (Foucault [1976] 1980: 81–2).⁶ Foucault insists that ‘subjugated, local, regional knowledge’ that stands in opposition to professionalizing, medicalizing, and state knowledge is the only way of enabling criticism to perform its work. This resonates with Goldberg’s insistence that the racial state encompasses the potentialities of resistance, and Agamben’s argument that the state of exception includes a potential right of resistance. While juridical theorists have debated whether the right of resistance should be inserted into the constitution, Walter Benjamin’s and Frantz Fanon’s theorizations of violence help us think the Palestinian subject not merely as *homo sacer*, but rather as active resistant staging an ‘insurrection of subjugated knowledges’ through both theory and practice.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) Fanon introduces the idea of the internalization of blackness by the black subject in a racist society, through dehumanization, invisibility and lived experience. Not content with constructing a history or an identity of the black subject, Fanon insists on ‘lived experience’ as the central focus of a politics of resistance (A. Lentin 2006). It is thus not surprising that his later book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (2001 [1961]), written while he was deeply involved in the Algerian struggle, posits violence as a crucial phase of decolonization.

Unlike Audre Lorde’s well-rehearsed feminist dictum that ‘the master’s tools will not destroy the master’s house’ (2001), Fanon instructs his insurgent readers to use the master’s tools to destroy the master’s empire, since ‘decolonization is always a violent phenomenon’. Fanon recognized that the prolonged establishment of large forces of occupation cannot last and that for the colonized natives the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land (2001: 34). The colonizer’s argument, that the colonized understand

only force,⁷ means that colonial violence aims not only to keep the enslaved at arm's length, but also to dehumanize them. The settler's preoccupation with security reminds the native out loud that he alone is master. As a result, 'the settler keeps alive in the native an anger which he deprives of outlet; the native is trapped in the tight links of the chains of colonialism...' But the native's muscular tension finds its outlet in bloodthirsty explosions. 'Thus collective auto-destruction in a very concrete form is one of the ways in which the native's muscular tension is set free' (2001: 42), because violence, according to Fanon, leads not only to trauma and hence submission, but also to the colonized making violence their own: 'by their ever present desire to kill us... they have become men', according to Sartre's preface. As the colonist army becomes ferocious, as the country is marked out and there are mopping up operations, transfers of population, reprisal expeditions, and massacres of women and children, the colonized – becoming the child of violence – draws from violence his humanity' (Sartre 2001: 20). The colonized, according to Fanon, 'of whom they have never stopped saying that the only language he understands is that of force, decides to give utterance by force. Indeed, the argument the native chooses has been furnished by the settler, and by an ironic turning of the tables it is the native who now affirms that the colonialist understands nothing but force...' (Fanon 1970: 15–16; see also Abdo in this volume). As Europe and the West benefit from colonialism, the humanitarian chatter of the liberal intellectual obscures the fact that the European has only been able to 'become a man' through rendering the colonized slaves and monsters.

Fanon had probably not read Walter Benjamin's essay 'Critique of violence' (2004), which influenced Schmitt's work on the state of exception. According to Benjamin, the law cannot tolerate the existence of violence outside the law: 'if violence is also assured a reality outside the law, as pure immediate violence, this furnishes proof that revolutionary violence – which is the name for the highest manifestation of pure violence by man – is also possible' (2004: 252). Schmitt refutes Benjamin's notion of 'pure violence' as entirely outside the law, arguing instead that in the state of exception it is included in the law through its very exclusion. Schmitt's response to Benjamin proposes the state of exception as a figure that neither makes nor preserves the law, but suspends it (Agamben 2005: 54). However, according to Benjamin, it is precisely 'pure violence', that is violence which stands outside the

law, which is appropriated for the benefit of the sovereign by the declaration of a state of emergency, or a state of exception.

Fanon produces the colonized viewpoint in the spirit of the very same 'revolutionary violence' that Benjamin speaks of: the colonial sovereign declares a state of emergency, positioning himself outside the law, while remaining the very incarnation of the law itself. But if the colonial sovereign makes the state of exception a paradigm of the normal – blurring exception and the law – there is little point in obeying that law. Shenhav's postcolonial reading suggests that Fanon enables us to locate the missing piece in the current European debate about the state of exception.

Despite its usefulness, I want to go beyond Shenhav's postcolonial argument that inserting 'vacuums of sovereignty in the colonies' creates patchy sets of ad hoc, extra-territorial legal arrangements, making the state of exception the paradigm of occupation. My argument is that if we read the State of Israel as a racial state, established in order to re-affirm the superiority of 'the Jew' over 'the (Palestinian) native', reading Palestine as a state of exception (in terms of 'condition' rather than 'nation-state') allows us to re-invest the Palestinian subject with the potentiality of the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges', which includes, inter alia, violent resistance to colonial oppression as a means of re-assuming subjecthood. While hugely disturbing for those contemplating the arbitrariness of armed resistance, and for the victims of such resistance, this reading makes way for discursive and interpretative control by Palestinian subjects who, even in empathetic readings, have hitherto been theorized largely as mere victims, or 'bare life'. That such a reading is no longer acceptable is evidenced, inter alia, in the recent 'future vision' documents published in 2007 by leading Israeli Palestinian organizations, calling for the abolition of the Jewish character of the state, which, their authors argue, stands in the way of their equality (see e.g., Ghanem 2007; and Pappé in this volume).⁸

In Edward Said's introduction to *The Question of Palestine* he articulates his aim to put forward a representative Palestinian position, 'something not well known ... even now, where there is so much talk of the Palestinians and of the Palestinian problem' (Said 1980: xi). This could have been written today, as talk of the 'Palestinian question' is often limited to the 1967 occupation, and subsumed by the broader neo-imperialist discourse of the 'new Middle East', and as the West (and Israel) opt to empower the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority while

ignoring the elected Hamas government. On the fortieth anniversary of the 1967 war, Samera Esmeir calls for the reintroduction of ‘the question of Palestine’ by remembering that the 1967 occupation is but the latest cycle of occupation: ‘although in many official narratives Israel uses the term “occupation” for the 1948 events, this has been largely omitted from the international vocabulary, legitimating the existence of the state of Israel and erasing the violence of its establishment’ (Esmeir 2007).

Said bases *The Question of Palestine* on what he calls the Palestinian experience, which, he argues, ‘became a self-conscious experience when the first wave of Zionist colonialists reached the shores of Palestine in the early 1880s’ (Said 1980: x). Despite what he identifies as Palestinian weaknesses and failings as a people, and their inability to interest the West in the justice of their cause, Said identifies, already in the late 1970s, Palestinians constructing a political identity and will of their own. Furthermore, despite their geographic dispersal and fragmentation, Palestinians have achieved a degree of unity, because, as Said sees it, ‘the Palestinian *idea* (which we have articulated out of our own experience of dispossession and exclusionary oppression) has a coherence to which we have all responded with positive enthusiasm’ (Said 1980: x). This Palestinian idea, which relies by no means merely or even mostly on violent resistance, can be theorized – in that theorization is never closed or final but rather open-ended – as arising out of what Foucault calls ‘the insurrection of subjugated knowledges’ and of what Fanon calls ‘lived experience’, as is argued by the contributors to this volume.

The book

While offering original theoretical approaches to thinking Palestine, all the contributors to this collection – Palestinians, Israelis and internationals – are also politically committed to Palestinian liberation, beyond the currently advocated two-state solution (see Lentin 2005a, for discussions of the one-state solution), and to thinking ‘the Palestinian’ as active agent.

The book is divided into three parts: the first premised on Goldberg’s concept of the racial state, the second developing and debating the notion of thinking Palestine along Agamben’s theorization of the state of exception, and the third discussing some contemporary representations of Palestine.

In the first part, centring on the palestinianization of race, Goldberg develops his argument that all modern nation-states are 'racial states', each in its own way, to discuss first Israeli 'racial historicism' in presenting itself as modernizing in opposition to Palestinian pre-modernity. He then posits 'racial palestinianization', based on a 'revulsion and repulsion related to dispositions of abjection, horror, hatred, anger, inferiorization'. Racial palestinianization, he insists in the spirit of Foucault and Agamben, is the prevailing response to a state of perpetual war. Indeed, it *is* a state of war declared perpetual, a war made the normal state of affairs, enabling a state of emergency and suspending all rights for the target population. Goldberg's argument that Palestinians are treated by Israel not *as if* a racial group, not simply *in the manner* of a racial group, but *as* a despised and demonic racial group, puts paid to the theorization, by Yiftachel and others, of Israeli schisms as merely 'ethnic', an argument that considers 'race' to be ultimately biological.

Bhattacharyya develops the argument of the palestinianization of race to think of the contemporary impact of Israeli representations of terrorism on the politics of 'race' in Britain and other places. Her chapter considers the central role played by the figure of Palestinian terrorism in policy relating to the 'war on terror', the transferral of Palestinianized conceptions of minority communities into the racial politics of Britain and other European nations, and the convergence of renewed state racisms and participation in the 'war on terror'.

The second part of the book, which takes Agamben's 'state of exception' as its starting point, begins with Ghanim, who develops Foucault's notion of biopower, developed to analyse population management in the modern European nation-state, to suggest biopower's opposite – thanatopower – as the appropriate conceptual frame for understanding the management of colonized occupied spaces and subjugated populations. Ghanim posits thanatopower putting Palestinian activists and political leaders to death through targeted assassinations. In its more subtle form it exposes the Palestinians to the ongoing destructive power of the occupier through closures, curfews, the destruction of cultivated fields and agricultural lands, the bombing of cities and populated neighbourhoods, the operating of bypass roads and the separation by spaces of Palestinians and Jewish settlers. Following the second Intifada, Ghanim argues, the imaginative geography of these spaces of exception was activated through the construction of physical systems that include the construction of the Separation Wall, the establishment of permanent and

temporary checkpoints and other obstacles that mark the Occupied Territories⁹ as 'abnormal spaces', the antithesis of Israeli 'normal space'.

Hanafi's chapter takes the notion of the space of exception further to posit the refugee camps in Lebanon not only as a space of exception but also as an experimental laboratory for control and surveillance by several actors involved in the different modes of governance, who have been contributing to the suspension of this space under the cover of the law. Besides the Lebanese authorities, these actors include the PLO and the United Nations Refugee and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), but also Islamist groups and different local political commissars. While Hanafi differentiates between closed and open refugee camps, suggesting that the camp setting as a closed space is not a 'natural' setting but rather has its *raison d'être* in disciplinary power, control and surveillance, and in deploying the state of exception, he also suggests that the camps foster an urban rather than a national Palestinian identity.

Khalili's chapter, also set in Lebanon, focuses on the Ansar detention camp, which, she argues, is a relevant subject of study, not because of its uniqueness as a concretization of the state of emergency (or exception), but rather because of its very familiar ordinariness as an instrument of control. The wide array of the practices used at Ansar was perfected in past colonial settings. In a sense, Ansar was the historic outcome of a whole series of strategies of counterinsurgency, institutions of domination, and technologies of control perfected through decades of colonial rule, beginning in the late nineteenth century. Khalili concludes by arguing that philosophical discussions which see sovereign power over life and death replaced gradually by disciplinary power often obscure the fact that relocating the site of power beyond a state's own borders, as in the case of the Ansar zone of exception, ultimately enables the state to designate people outside the law, and to effectively appropriate liminal territories through re-definitions of sovereignty, which give agency to powerful colonial/imperial actors.

Drawing on the conceptual differences between prison and ghetto, Korn's chapter theorizes the Palestinian territory as a ghetto. Using the Oslo process as a turning point, she argues that from then onward a dominant form of Israeli control of the population of occupied Palestine has emerged, including ghettoization, spatial confinement and restriction of Palestinians to their villages and towns. This concept of ghettoization is understood against a backdrop of the decrease in the use of Israeli prisons and of mass incarceration to assure efficient control.

The debate on the applicability of Agamben's state of exception paradigm becomes acute in the chapters by Zreik and Pappe. While Zreik's highly theoretical chapter takes the State of Israel as an example of the state of exception, Pappe argues against the applicability of Agamben's model, positing Israel instead as a *mukhabarat* (security) state of oppression. Zreik argues that although Israel is an extreme case, it does nevertheless fall within Agamben's paradigm, and his chapter aims both to read the case of Israel in light of the paradigm and to read the paradigm in light of the case of Israel. Tracing the genealogy of the relation of rule and exception, fact and norm, chaos and order, Zreik first draws attention to the dark side of the modern liberal constitutional state, and then discusses Israeli constitutionalism in light of the nature of the 'state of exception'. In not wishing to conceal its (exclusively Jewish) ethnic nature, Israel did not manage to push the exception to the margins. As a result, what surfaces in other countries only in cases of national emergency appears in Israel on an almost daily basis. The persistence of the exception in Israel, the ongoing state of emergency, the violent moment of birth, and the persistence of its ethnic nature are features that one might find in some countries at some points in time. Israel is unique in that all of them are present within it most of the time.

Pappe, however, argues that although the dark side of democracy as described by Agamben seems to prevail everywhere in the oppressive Jewish state, including doomsday scenarios of persons stripped of any human or civil rights, the rule of emergency regulations and the overall state of siege, Israel cannot be theorized as or in a state of exception because its very inclusion within the parameters of this debate assumes that Israel belongs to the family of western liberal democracies dangerously deteriorating to the abyss dreaded by Agamben. Instead, Pappe posits Israel as a *mukhabarat* state of oppression, which exists mostly within the Arab world, characterized as a mass mobilizing state, run by an all-pervasive bureaucracy and ruled by military and security apparatuses. Pappe extends the analysis of Israel as a militarist state to the state within the State of Israel: the state of the Palestinians within the Jewish state. This, however, is a hybrid with another model, the settler-colonial state, which can be presented as a mixture between an Arab postcolonial model and a colonialist model such as South Africa during Apartheid, rather than as Agamben's western democracy descending into a state of exception.

The final part of the book concerns some contested representations of Palestine. Agamben, as argued by Hanafi, falls short of addressing the agency of the actor resisting the 'total institution', conceiving the camp as a paradigmatic place of modernity, using concentration camps such as Auschwitz as examples. Likewise, Agamben also fails to address the gendered implications of *homo sacer*, which, in view of his emphasis on the link between 'birth' and 'nation', I have termed elsewhere *femina sacra* (Lentin 2005b). In this book, Ghanim's chapter uses the gendered example of a Palestinian woman about to give birth at an Israeli check-point to discuss Palestine as state of exception. Abdo's chapter, based on interviews with female Palestinian resistance fighters, or *munadelat*, challenges the representation of Palestinian women by western feminists as 'uneducated', 'powerless', 'controlled by their men' and 'willing to die and be rewarded in the after-life in Paradise'. Using Palestinian women's own voices, experiences and narratives, Abdo powerfully explores the role played by the colonial state (Israel) in promoting Palestinian women's racialization with the aim of contributing to de-orientalizing and de-racializing Palestinian *munadelat* (see also Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2005a, 2005b).

Landy's and Lentin's chapters centre on the representations of Palestine by its western and Israeli supporters: in Landy's chapter, participants in activist tourism, and in Lentin's, Israelis dedicated to commemorating the Palestinian Nakba in Hebrew. Both chapters, each in its own way, suggest a degree of appropriation and silencing of 'the Palestinian' as active agent of Palestinian experience. Landy's chapter examines the representations made by activist study tours and their effect on participants' understanding and future activism. The representations these study tours make of Israel, Palestine and the participants themselves are important in framing political discourse in the Palestinian solidarity movements in Europe and America. While these tours succeed in their central aim of granting agency to foreign activists to speak in favour of Palestinian rights, the means by which study tours enable them to speak out may at the same time work to silence Palestinian subjectivity. Lentin's chapter locates the Nakba as a specific site of contested commemoration through an exploration of *Zochrot*, whose activities include 'Hebraicizing' the Nakba by creating a space for it in the written, spoken and public discourse of Hebrew Israel, and promoting an 'alternative discourse on memory'. Lentin asks whether *Zochrot* ultimately appropriates Palestinian memory and perpetuates

Palestinian victimhood, a position most Palestinians reject. The two chapters question whether both activist tourism and *Zochrot's* activities serve in some ways to efface the Palestinian right of return, which, in the case of the former, goes largely unmentioned, and in the case of the latter remains on the level of the symbolic.

The final two chapters offer two further angles on the contested representations of Palestine in today's world. McCarthy's chapter is a detailed exploration of the attitude of the foremost Palestinian thinker, Edward Said, to the state, both in his literary-cultural work and in his more directly political work on Palestine. Importantly, McCarthy reminds us, Said was at different times an advocate both of the two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict and of the bi-national state solution, famously saying that he wished to argue for the setting up of a Palestinian state, and that he would be its first critic.

Al-Hardan's chapter re-affirms Palestinian subjectivity in being articulated from her own 'Palestinian Arab ontological displacement and erasure, dual when gendered, which is only evident if rescued from the margins by the woman-narrator of an embodied, "situated knowledge"'. The chapter is a comparative historical study of the contemporary discourse on Palestine at the highest echelons of world power, as heir to a discourse born out of a specific Western European historical experience and world-view. Its justifications for the domination of Palestine, al-Hardan argues, manifested in the 1917 British occupation, continue to serve the exclusive colonial-settler Zionist Jewish rule at the expense of the indigenous Palestinian population.

Omar Barghouti (2005) argues that by constructing the Palestinians as 'relatively human', Israel, supported by the USA and other world powers, has managed to get away with its taken-for-granted assumption that the Palestinians cannot have equal needs, aspirations, or rights with Israeli Jews. This collection, through the political, but also theoretical, commitment of its contributors, is a step towards reversing this relative humanization and recognizing that the 'moral Palestinian challenge to their colonial existence' is not an existential threat for Israelis but rather 'a magnanimous invitation to dismantle the colonial character of the state' (Barghouti 2005: 43).