

An Anthropological-Literary View: Painting the Missing Bride of Galilee

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I HAD NOT PLANNED to marry Fahani. I had come to watch a contemporary wedding party (*haflah*) in the village of Nakhleh in northern Israel. To many Arabs in the south of Israel, and particularly in the West Bank (Gaza Strip) and East Jerusalem, this country is only nominally "Israel," remaining the *Falastine* ("Palestine") occupied by British Mandate and, before it, the Ottoman Empire. Arabs located this far north in the Galilee would ordinarily be thought of as "Israeli Arabs," a political designation suggesting a people resigned to, if not content with, Jewish governance, a people more evidently modern in dress, custom, and outlook, its young women enrolled in colleges, its men working in professional positions; but my host Saliqh had many years ago identified himself, and by extension his family, as "Palestinian," embracing the political stance of dislocated and dispossessed Arabs, one brother imprisoned for returning to the ancestral lands, two other brothers killed. The political opinions of Saliqh's several hundred guests—Arabs, with the exception of an Israeli couple and this ethnographer—were less apparent. Despite the powerful otherness three non-Arabs represented, we received the gracious attention and homage of our host Saliqh, his family, and other villagers: we were friends. It was this friendship, and an accident of metaphors, that led to my symbolic marriage to Saliqh's son Fahani—the feted groom.

Most of the night women and men remained separate, celebrating in separate spheres bounded fiercely by gender and differentiated in design, geography, and musicality, spaces queered by custom and inequality: in old countries one finds circles within circles, margins within margins; in Israel, the lives

of Arab women lie farthest from the nucleus of power. The final pre-nuptial evening passed in eating, dancing, praise-singing, and reddening of the hands with *henna*. Only one person was markedly absent: the bride-to-be. In the climactic wedding dance, amid the ululations of the women and the hand-clapping of the men, the bride herself was missing, and the groom was partnered instead by a small, opulently dressed doll. My participation further inflected the social "text," locating me as a female feminist ethnographer,¹ a queerly colonial visitor in the circle of unveiled women and hidden desires.

I. Politics and Praxis

About a thousand people (whom Saliqh² had called "close friends") had been invited to witness the wedding.³ Held on consecutive evenings, the wedding and *haflah* celebrated a familiar contract, a liaison arranged by parents while their children were still young.⁴ Such marriages are intended to survive the needs and desires of individuals, by making tribal alliances public and permanent. The resultant extension of family, dear to *Mahgrebian*⁵ traditions, ensures financial security, moral standards, and religious obedience. In fact, as Germaine Tillion remarks, "the closer the relationship, the more satisfactory the marriage":

The occurrence of marriages with cross-cousins, matrilineal parallel cousins and other kin can be reconciled with the lineage endogamy theory only when it is assumed that marriages with cousins other than patrilineal parallel ones are not preferred any more than marriages among strangers. (Holy 21)

Traditional Palestinian matches are not Western "love matches:" the bride-candidate is as likely to be chosen for what she is not, as what she is.⁶ Absence of the bride in Nakhleh, though easily explained by Muslim custom,⁷ metaphorically reproduces the future promised a woman as daughter, daughter-in-law, wife, and eventually mother of men.

The bridal party, in Arabic *hinna*, takes its name from the herbal dye (*henna*) used to colour the skin of hands and sometimes feet for medicinal and purifying purposes. The term for bridal preparation thus reflects the word for dye,⁸ its colour a

guiding metaphor: red frames the *hinna*, beginning with *henna* and ending in a blood-stained sheet. Guests continue to party out of doors until the telltale sheet is displayed, whereupon presence of blood connotes presence of honour (female). Sometimes handled by a senior female family member, the private act of penetration is publicly revealed.⁹ A wedding devoid of this red pronouncement would be a cause for public shame, and the annulment of not only that wedding but also family bonds;¹⁰ it is not uncommon, even today, for a family member (usually a brother) to kill a woman whose sheet betrays a failed test of virginity.

In Islam as in Judaism, laws of separation determine the locus of women and men. On this night men and women were rigidly separated, men dancing in the wide, open, central courtyard of Nakhleh, and women dancing in the low-roofed, unwallied private courtyard of Saliqh's house.¹¹ The women's area was cramped, bodies crammed together and with an inner circle just large enough for five to dance. Within the men's circle there was space for hundreds. Such disparities give rise to pronouncements about social difference in Islam and the Maghreb, generalizations denounced by those born "inside"; yet space and its usage appears to be gendered, a principle extended to various forms of art and design—for instance painting, music, and architecture—and even rhythm. Women took turns playing simple *masmudi* rhythms on the *durbekha*,¹² while for the men's entertainment a professional singer had been hired months before. He came escorted by a small band of musicians and amplifying equipment, a mixture of tradition and modernity, custom, and convenience.

Rules for clothing also makes gender separation visual. Palestinian dress styles show the effects of Euro-American encroachment—and especially cable television¹³—but unlike the Jewish population one saw no lycra leggings, four-inch clunky black boots or orange hair. Most females at the *haflah* were dressed mono-chromatically, Saliqh's family in black accented with white (that being the current favourite in Israel). Girls tended oddly towards colonial attire: jackets and bodices with gold buttons, epaulettes, bows, crests, and other decorations. The major inno-

vation at this *haflah* was a lack of head coverings; also, in contrast to dress standards in the Occupied Territories, no woman was completely veiled. They were, however, entirely, it seemed, covered from elbow to calf; women over fifty wearing the traditional long-skirted *thob* (the women's dress) with *hizam* (women's belt) at the waist and *kafyyeh*¹⁴ completely covering the hair, many younger women wearing modern Western dresses and high heels. The only female in trousers was the Israeli guest,¹⁵ affecting a reference to Western masculinism and therefore visual dominance, as well as a symbolic inconsideration of her hosts. Very young boys in trousers and T-shirts might, unlike the girls, stay with the women, or move back and forth between women and men, representing a gender as indifferently or ambiguously perceived as my own. It was no stag party.

Such careful description might not be necessary in a discussion of ritual or performance, but becomes significant in view of the ambiguity of social and political identity and allegiance in Israel. How can one portray a queer/colonial narrativity here without subjecting people and event to misinterpretation, especially given that the structure of the *haflah* suits and maintains Palestinian heteronormativity? In negotiating Palestinian rituals I do not wish to become liable for the same charges of colonialism and misappropriation I decry. It is with these particularities that I strive to illuminate a singular picture of life at a specific time, circumventing a Western tendency to dichotomize Arab culture at large, and particularly along the binary lines common to field studies in the Orient. One difficulty is the seeming veracity in structural oppositions such as male/female, public/private, insider/outsider, especially in the context of Middle Eastern studies, and anthropology in general.

To begin an inquiry into the subject [male/female relationships in Arab society] by taking the public/private scheme as a "given" is, in my opinion, to run the risk of distorting data by forcing them into one or the other of the two categories, and more important it draws attention away from the central fact that Arab men and women live in one world, no matter how much it seems to be separated into two domains. The challenge is to understand the normative and structural imperatives that produce and reproduce this seeming dichotomy. (Rasam 125-26)

While Rasam's argument against importing ready-made "schemes" (into any field) has some validity, there is more to be said about the multiplicity of worlds in the Middle East. In Israel, there are at least two countries. One is a Third World country¹⁶ where goats walk the streets, people live in tents, many women (and some men) are illiterate, and evil spirits are still repulsed by colours, words, and signs. Another world is a Second World country trying desperately to be First World, to "Americanize"¹⁷ —or "materialize." In this world, inter-city buses stray across roads into opposing traffic, businessmen (and some businesswomen) sit at computers in global conversations, buildings continue to go up and up,¹⁸ families play the lottery and lawsuits, and graffiti often appears in English.

While implying a desire to escape from a dead-end situation to "another place" (the title of one of Amos Oz' novels), the structuring of introverted solitude, alienation, and the search for identity comes to allegorize Israel itself as a nation shunned by many countries, alienated from the Middle East, closed within its geographical and mental borders, and borrowing much of its political and cultural identity from the West. (Shohat, *Israeli Cinema* 238)

Negative and positive, these attributes together produce the kind of ambivalence or duality queer commentary¹⁹ chooses to examine: Israel, with its Zionist, religious, non-Jewish, and immigrant population clashes is a prime example of queer national politics, gender-bending, and multiple identities; even the word "religious" carries a variety of definitions and reproaches. Unfortunately, the charge of "Orientalism" seems to inhibit queer appraisals in Mahgrebian studies.

In both worlds, the young carry rifles. The dollar is respected and the sheqel considered disposable.²⁰ The two countries do not only live side by side and are in some cases relatively integrated, but must eat from the same plate, share the sun, the moon, and fear of bombings. They suffer the same illnesses, inflations, elections, and shortages. In the making of one united Jerusalem the idea has spread to the world that there will be peace in the Middle East, but as I speak here the terrorism continues. Unification does not produce unity, and even in name there are two countries.²¹ Israel hosts a plenitude of cultures, metaphorically unified by Modern Hebrew (and increasingly

English); with increasing numbers of *olim hadashim* (new immigrant) and non-Hebrew speakers, many whose Jewish identity was obtained shortly before immigration, the twenty percent Arab population is more unified.²²

One way to circumvent lack of unity in any anthropological study is location of the anthropologist in the “timeless present.” (This theory has largely gone by the wayside, and about time.) It proposed a mythical site of continuous, unaltering ritual, a kind of Oz where a community’s “restored behaviour” (Schechner) was securely set, its sacred rituals unaltering. Because of the absence of this “aphoristic present,” the notion that to study a culture one must sink oneself down for twenty years or more is slowly passing; journals boast articles on nightclub-hopping, watching action flicks, or on-looking in surgical theatres. The past itself has vanished, leaving only the future to be “read.”

But what is it to “read?” I intended to negotiate a “reading” of the “text” of this ritual, as Clifford Geertz says, but I am determined first to expose Geertz’s definition as part of a Western masculine lexicon in which cultures and texts *can* be equated because they maybe “read”—known, evaluated, printed—and simultaneously imprinted by hegemonic readers. The violence of this type of “reading,” transparently colonialist, participates in fomenting hierarchies, granting special authority to outside “readers” while suggesting that a certain “cultural literacy” is derived from wielding economic power over it and others. Although texts are cultures, I resist the apposite assumption that cultures are texts; in offering this commentary, then, I do not make myself its reader.

As a Jewish woman in Israel, I am consciously rooted in my apartness from the Palestinian community. I know of no one here performing feminist symbolic anthropology who is truly from an “inside” community and not bred or trained in the linguistic order of the West. The plurality of identities the ethnographer meets—and herself bears—requires intellectual flexibility. In addition to using the tools of the ethnographic trade, I seek to control “outside” interpretation by using hosts’ own materials (such as the ethnographic footage I discuss later). Unlike “indigenous anthropologist”²³ Soraya Altorki—who

notes that at no point did she find “the methods developed in social anthropology were inadequate for an ethnological study of the position of women in [her] own [Egyptian] society” (68)—I contend that anthropological field methodology developed by imperial males in years of colonial visitations lacks cultural sensitivity, overlooks or universalizes metaphors, and fails to ask certain questions. The nature of those “absent,” or unasked, questions is itself a clue—at times an answer—to an unwritten history.

Is the obvious solution to leave anthropology in the hands of indigenous anthropologists? Altorki believes so:

the Western frameworks used to interpret the relationship between men and women in Arab society misrepresent social reality. Such conceptual problems could perhaps be most readily recognized and solved by an indigenous anthropologist. To understand the role of the “invisible” woman in the domestic politics of Saudi Arabian society required that the data be gathered by one who had a place in their midst. (68; see also Zinner)

Mikhail Bakhtin takes an opposing view, simultaneously questioning what “inside” is:

There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy idea that in order better to understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one’s own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture. . . . [However] *creative understanding* does not renounce itself, its own place and time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding—in time, in space, in culture. In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding. (6-7)

Elsewhere Altorki, too, recognizes limitations imposed upon her *by virtue of* that special knowledge and cultural sensitivity she is presumed to possess—and therefore to display:

Living at home meant that I had to assume the role expected of a family member in my position within the household group. The ordinary field situation reversed itself . . . to observe became an incidental privilege. My status did not afford me immunity from observing all the taboos and attending to all the obligations my culture prescribed for me—an immunity usually granted to foreign anthropologists. I had to accept severe restrictions on my movements and on my interaction with other people. (56)

Because of her increased access to linguistic and cultural signs, the indigenous anthropologist cannot pretend to misread them. As long as Altorki remains inside, “literally at home in Jiddah” (52), she is denied the freedoms of a guest. Her status, she admits, dictated even her field of research.

The ability to traverse freely separations between male and female spaces (see Rasam’s caveat) is no ordinary feat, but one sometimes accorded to someone in my position—an outsider, and a woman. While the Israeli male (in most other contexts the dominant party) was not allowed to enter the female space at Nakhleh or watch the women dancers, Saliqh accepted my movements as trespass of-a-sort, unfeminine and un-Arab, derived outside the rules of proper deportment but within those allowed me as their queer guest. What words have we to describe what exists outside our culture, outside our knowledge? Foreign.²⁴ Queer. Alien. I never asked to see what the men were doing; Saliqh knew I would be interested, and took me with him. My identity itself was liminoid, as if I were a boy.²⁵

Folklorist Haya Bar-Itzhak reports on this phenomenon, admitting that once she asked why *she* was permitted to see things that only men were allowed to see. “They [my informants] said, ‘But you *are* a man.’”²⁶ This radical difference may make a solitary non-indigenous ethnographer—particularly a woman—more palatable to an observed population: we are *too* dissimilar to be held to the same standards of behaviour, and therefore represent worlds so foreign/queer/alien that the power to convert or sexually aggress is neutralized: we do not endanger their women. Once one proceeds to articulate a position, one is necessarily “outside,” even if one were previously “inside,” a supposition easily verified by asking Arab students in Israel what they experience when they go home from university. I have yet to meet a Palestinian for whom this is unproblematic. Eventually Westernized Arabs either stop going home, or abandon the language and affects of their Other.²⁷ For many Israelis (indigenous or not), Palestinian Muslim culture is not only “alien” but “enemy.” The “Otherness” of Muslim and Christian Palestinians²⁸ is an issue of great political concern for Israelis;²⁹ in writing about that “Otherness” one may evade political stances,

but the writing of ethnography in politicized areas necessarily becomes a part of what one writes *about*.³⁰

I speak here of modern Israel rather than of the Biblical projection, consciously confining myself to reporting on the present; yet some historical clarifications are necessary. It is significant, for the *atmosphere* of the gathering I report on, rather than for any ritual affect, where and when the event took place—in the late 1990s in the Galilee—that is, in an Arab village not under curfew, in a site not under watchful patrol by marauders or law enforcers. Political scientists and postcolonial scholars might also locate this *haflah* in terms of *timing*—for instance, terrorist activity, sanctioned and not—in Jerusalem, the Territories and abroad: the *haflah* occurred before Israeli Prime Minister Rabin's assassination, while the Peace Agreement was still a bright and believable hope.

To complicate discussion of Third World politics and colonialization in Israel, there is the volatile history of this new seat in the Old World, and the fact that the geographic "Israel" has existed only since 1948, except as a Messianic vision of the "people Israel" (in *galut*, the Diaspora). Prior to *Milchemet Ha-Tsmaut* (the War of Independence) in 1948, the area had been the site of a series of Occupations, the most recent being British. Naturally, the Jews of Palestine were also under Occupation (although to my knowledge Jewish productions of literature and art have never been studied as those of a colonized people, *anywhere* or *anytime* in the world). Only since that time has it been possible to speak of an *Israeli* Occupation. While I refer the reader elsewhere for historical commentaries (my bibliography includes several), it is essential to delimit forcibly the duration of an Israeli "Occupation" from nearly six thousand years (the entire period of Hebrew history) to nearer fifty.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty outlines the symptoms of the operation of imperial rule thus:

- (1) the ideological construction and consolidation of white masculinity as normative and the corresponding racialization and sexualization of colonized peoples; (2) the effects of colonial institutions and policies in transforming indigenous patriarchies and consolidating hegemonic middle-class cultures in metropolitan and colonized areas; and (3) the rise of feminist politics and conscious-

ness in this historical context within and against the framework of national liberation movements. (15)

She then resumes discussion of the British colonization of India, cautioning us that the material is specific yet “this analysis suggests methodological directions for feminist analysis” (15).

The methodological edge that Mohanty walks is indicative of the ambivalence permeating postcolonial theory: at some point the writer must identify herself, usually as an academic—which is to say, someone in the middle class. Interpretation is necessarily violent, a containment, a closing of other doors; to interpret is to silence. Addressing the relationship between anthropology and feminism, Lila Abu-Lughod notes “the inequality inherent in the anthropological self’s position as (usually) a Westerner studying non-Western Others”:

To be feminist entails being sensitive to domination; for the ethnographer that means being aware of domination in the society being described and in the relationship between the writer (and readers) and the people being written about. (*Writing Women’s Worlds* 5)

But along with the danger of over-reading, and reading-into, in cultural analysis, is the danger of over-looking—*not* reading—the cultural signs available.³¹ This is perhaps the gravest effect of postcolonialism—to restrain the range of analysis to a combination of over-justification, apology, or confession, where nothing may be said without qualification—in a queer way the opposite of postmodernism’s move to flatten, dislocate, minimize difference, reduce everything to text—a text readable in one language such as this one. Mohanty’s theoretical difficulty in assigning solutions or meanings to another culture’s signs is the one anthropologists experience: we travel to new countries but carry our old maps.

II. Never a Bride

The wedding’s traditional purpose is to acknowledge publicly ownership of fertility rights and lineal obligations. The bride’s non-visibility before the wedding presumably originates in the effort to heighten a groom’s anticipation, linked through sexual commission (consummation) to a proper marriage and thus the

banishment of evil spirits who might create trouble, but the custom of guarding unmarried females from sexual contact has left us only the trace of superstition. Given the separation of women and men among Palestinian Muslims, the groom's risk of seeing the bride appears minimal. Yet the bride was also absent from the women's party—that is, *her* party, if it *was* her party.

Late at night, the men struggled to plant a red velvet couch in the circle's centre. Now the wedding crown appeared, a mound of fuchsia flowers held aloft by Fahani's mother and brother and eventually Fahani himself.³² In the absence of a bride, the brightly-dressed, groomed and painted doll sitting among pink flowers provided an ironic bridal surrogate—bereft of Middle Eastern features, instead fair-skinned, blonde-haired, and light-eyed. Her physical appearance was, in fact, grotesquely colonial—the little European fetish presiding over the festivities. Of all the women at the party, the Israeli woman most resembled the doll.³³

As his mother danced, holding the little queen aloft, Fahani's hands were ritually washed. Then he sat back upon the red couch in the company of several male friends, and his right hand was painted *with English letters* amid jokes and play. Accepting Saliqh's invitation to be hennaed with Fahani, I watched a henna heart appear in my right palm, with my own first initial (the English "R") inside. Two months later, when the video commissioned by Saliqh circulated to me as an honoured guest, the henna had left my palm but still brightly stained two fingernails; I sat and tore the nails away, taking off thin orangey strips of nail as I watched.³⁴ Four months later, the henna was still apparent in the nail, a small flame. Saliqh had warned me—"Wear a plastic bag to bed"—that night, "to make it permanent." I had not believed him—then.

Taken together, these video scenes create a curious sub-text. Although during the second day one can see that several people have had their hands painted with henna, only Fahani's and my ritual painting are shown. One of the cameraman's most curious effects is the fusing of the groom's hand with my own, something proscribed by the separation of men and women. The video circulates the faces and bodies of the small Israeli contingent as

inimically part of this celebration and family—seemingly a subversion or at least redirection of the forces of colonial power, and a poaching *by Palestinians* of their cultural other as exotic at the night's festivities. To look at that video as an artistic document using European structuralist, "postmodern" and "colonial" tactics of analysis may seem inappropriately "Orientalizing" (Said, *Orientalism*), but one has few recourses when analysing film for modern academic purposes: the very method of thinking, of formulating opinions, is already suspect. To say that one is utilizing "postcolonial" methods is to place oneself in a category created, named, defined, and guarded by academics, and postcolonial theory's premier writers were born with or married into acceptable nomenclature, regardless of actual genealogical descent, economic class, or provenance.

These are worthy considerations; they should guide us, not stop us in our tracks. The "impossibility" which Jacqueline Rose speaks of in terms of children's literature—a genre written by adults and for adult consumption—is applicable to ethnography. Historically, this kind of literature equates women and natives with children or, as subjects of imperial inquiry,³⁵ primitives. In neither division are women able to speak or write for themselves. This has naturally generated assumptions about what women would say given the opportunity, as well as the charge of co-optation that Spivak and Abu-Lughod too briefly address. Physical geography is only one identifier for a speaker, and not a consistent one: people move. The dream of a common language being realized is not Adrienne Rich's. The capabilities of global technology paradoxically make it "impossible" for a woman to speak "from the Middle East;" instead her voice, her face, is beamed up, digitized and flung across satellites; what she has written goes instantly to print, spews from computers in Massachusetts or Monrovia; she becomes a symbol, even as her anonymous sisters have been, only now they represent each other.³⁶

III. Reading Queer Culture

One of many things I essay to understand is how a person who uses the language of the "centre," in this case the privileged

vocabulary of the West, can profess to be outside of it, on the margins. In the paradigm of academic marginalism, all the trappings smack of Western mentality and subsidy. How is “otherness” maintained when identity can so easily be worn—and closeted? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “closet of epistemology” (*Epistemology of the Closet*) conceals and protects a diversity of identities, derivatives, and sub-cultural masks beyond that of lesbians and gays: culture may be one more disguise in the closet. The more the “marginalized” authors speak, the more they are published, paid, read, serialized, endowed, shot on 16mm, the less they can continue to claim the margin; as Judith Butler reminds us, assimilation into dominant culture destroys the critical apparatus of even the most radical thinkers (*Gender Trouble*).³⁷ Abu-Lughod³⁸ side-steps the issue of her own marginality in her opening apology, narrating her *readers*’ intended position:

I expect the audience—which I assume will be mostly Western or Western-educated, coming to the text informed by anthropology (and its current critics), feminism (and its internal dissenters, including Third World feminists), and Middle East studies (with its awareness of the problems of orientalism)—to approach the book critically, keeping in mind questions about the politics of ethnographic representation and sociological description, problems of feminist aspiration and method, and assumptions about the Muslim Middle East. (*Writing Women’s Worlds* xvii)

These certainly are great expectations.

And once again, writing is directed to the wrong audiences. Lower-class women, or Third World women without First World education not only have no access to this discourse, but are queered by visible and invisible bounds of difference which gridlock them into economic subservience. Why is the realm of women’s writing only granted postcolonial status through nationality (or, in the case of Western academics, birthplace) and not by virtue of gender difference and its own exclusion? This is a region in which postcolonial scholars have permitted a grave disservice to women writers, omitting an inquiry into the citizenship of gender. Perhaps a later wave of postcolonial study, secure in its inclusion of Third World literature and thought, will rectify or at least investigate this continuous exclusion.

Beyond the accepted queerness of Arab events, the utilization of customs no longer questioned or viewed as marginal (such as

gender separation), one could discern evidence of a queer culture at this *haflah*, the existence of

a homoerotic undercurrent that has always lurked . . . in the West's fantasies of an eroticized, decadent, Arabic world whose perverse pleasures are matched only by its pansexual acrobatics.

(Boone 150)

This Derridian *différance* upon examination seems alien to the beliefs of Middle Eastern men,³⁹ although even Arab products, including television commercials and highway billboards, exploit the exotic Orientality of Arab bodies, male and female. Western cinema is largely responsible for having reinforced Orientalist visions of the Middle East not only in Arabic countries but in Israel as well:

[T]he historical possibility of sexual contact among males within Arabic Muslim culture has often covertly underwritten the appeal of "orientalism," or the pursuit of things Eastern, as a Western mode of male perception, appropriation and control. (150)

No doubt it is partly our awareness of the essentialist and primitivist values of Orientalism, and the protective aura cast by the name of Said, that precipitates the neglect of Arabic culture in the locating of queer culture. Furthermore,

Deconstruction, founded as a very science of *differ(e/a)nce*, has both so fetishized the idea of difference and so vaporized its possible embodiments that its most thoroughgoing practitioners are the last people to whom one would now look for help in thinking through particular differences. (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 23)⁴⁰

Yet even the "traditional" Palestinian *haflah* sported many instances of what Alexander Doty (here, correctly) describes as "queer pleasure"⁴¹—for instance, the two men who danced "together" American-style. In contrast to the Arabic custom of male dancing, where men collectively hold hands and face the circle, these men danced facing each other, in a closed circle of two, and without embarrassment. Although this style was not duplicated by any others, the same two men danced together in this fashion later in the evening, and several men danced while seated on other men's shoulders. During the marriage, when the entire male assemblage ate together, Fahani passed from man to man down the long table, as the men fed him by hand from their

own plates. Finally, as Saliqh rested next to me, outside the chain of male dancers, he played a physical joke of some duration, dipping a finger into a rear trouser pocket of each dancer moving slowly before us. Based upon prescriptions for masculinity in the West, where masculinity defines itself *in opposition* to an effete, weak, and subordinate Other constituted as feminine, and given the heightened chauvinism of Middle Eastern males, an observer might expect some instinctual recoil. Instead, there was the appearance of a non-reaction.

The men did notice—every man glanced behind himself—but the looks were brief, calm, and without rancour. Not one dancer released the hand of the man next to him, or warned the next in line; faces registered curiosity, and most smiled. A few of the older men responded by wiggling their butts. Clearly the men did not perceive the touch of another man as an assault upon their sexuality.⁴² It may be in part this ignorance of a “threat” to Maghrebian masculinity that has generated Western phobic speculations about Arab homoeroticism.

I do not ascribe homosexual motivations to the party guests, but caution the reader to distinguish, with Sedgwick, between the “homosocial” and the “homosexual,” reminding readers that

defining and categorizing “the homosexual” as such is very much a Western enterprise . . . [and while] the presence and practice of male sexual relations may be an appreciable aspect of Muslim culture, the fact that there is no Arabic word equivalent to “homosexuality” . . . points to the differing social and psychological constructions that various cultures lend to sexuality itself. (Boone 152)

I am also uninterested in gendering the Arab male as female in any respect, for this is an enterprise of colonization. But such intersections of behaviour and identity are precisely the junctures where interpretation fails, and experience must begin. That is, not everything in culture is explicable, except *as* culture.

IV. Mapping Queerdom in Palestine

Extant material does not rigorously support the queering of Arab—specifically Palestinian—culture. As I earlier alluded, the Palestinian Said is responsible both for naming “Orientalism” (if not exactly initiating a field of inquiry) and simulta-

neously closing the Arab world from a wealth of scrutiny. Orientalism, as an early manifestation of what we now find “queer”—meaning other or Other, different, effeminate or hyper-masculine, abnormal, sick, perverse—deliberately and solitarily locates the Eastern body as the site of Western hegemonic discourse, literary and artistic aggrandizement, and sexual permissiveness. Said’s influence has been so powerful that a re/view of the Eastern body, or incorporation of Eastern culture into queer commentary, has been inhibited if not obviated. It was never correct (though it was possible) to discuss the “Araby” of cinema depicting “The Sheik” without commemorating Italy: Rudolph Valentino lay beneath the drapery. Little has changed, according to Boone, who remarks on modern-day cinematic substitution of Italians for Arabs. In other words, most Westerners may never have seen an *Arab*, but rather the representation of one.

Invoking the older meaning of “queer,” there is little gay affect to be seen at mixed or public Arab events—for obvious reasons: if lesbian and gay subcultures appear absent in other parts of the world, how much more so in the hyper-masculinized Middle East. As always, those not in some way identified with homosexuality are less likely aware of the queers around them. Gays are not visibly present at most mixed events throughout Israel⁴³ though they certainly are present, and may be homophobically ignored for invitational events in the sacred sphere (circumcisions, weddings, memorial services, burials). Finally, homosexual behaviour is punishable by death, as the Quranic *hadith* makes effusively clear.

Monique Wittig has written that the social contract underwriting class/capitalism/world economy is the heterosexual one by which property, including the female body, is vested in the hands of men. Thus this marriage *haflah* reaffirms both Arab social economy and that of the host culture in which Palestinians play a lower-class role. If concentric spheres in Israeli life place Arab women at the furthest/weakest/queerest point, by extension we celebrated a queer woman who could not even appear (to “show her face” would have been another issue) at her own wedding party; we gathered *on behalf of* her invisibility, which means that her queer heterosexuality, heteronormative in the

Palestinian world, is essential to the success of her future (defined in terms of generations to come from her body) as well as that of the Israeli masculine economy. Joseph Ginat points out that “among both Bedouin and rural Arabs in Israel, the members of the bride’s family do not attend her wedding ceremony” (Holy 122), which he interprets as symbolizing that she “has not left her home and that she continues to belong to her family of origin.” This supports my theory of the bride’s absence and moreover negates the presence of the wedding itself. The Palestinian bride lives in a state of denial.

As a Jewish woman, it was difficult for me to imagine someone whose *sacred* culture queered them more in the global market. Jay Geller writes that in the late eighteenth century the political culture of bourgeois society was characterized “as an exclusively masculine order, a *Mannerbund* forged preeminently by Christian heterosexual men,” putting Jews, with “others,” in a realm of “sexual difference . . . unmanly or effeminate” (243). But in the economy of Israel, the economy that *is* Israel—also a nation of multiplicitous religious fields, among them a startling number of varying Jewish fields—the Arab is the queerer.⁴⁴

Several factors must be overlooked here in the equation of Jew as “queer,” in its current theoretical sense. First, Jewish queerness derives from anti-Semitism just as homosexual “queerness” derives from homophobia, initiating an historical construction of the Jewish body as less-than Christian and therefore less than whole; cut, edited, or desexed (through the initiatory act of circumcision); effeminate or unmanly, unmuscled and studious (the “People of the Book”) but, contradictorily, fat (rich); mysterious (the “Chosen People”); hidden (the Orthodox or Chabad costume) and therefore unknown; oppositely, hidden (concealed by resistant others during pogroms) and, since World War II at least, possibly also tortured and permanently inscribed (altered by Nazi perversions). After such a long list one scarcely needs get to a second factor—that the historical image of the Jew has continually changed. The Jewish body has always reflected the culture or country of the Jew’s inhabitation; thus Jews are pale, golden-haired and blue-eyed (half my own family) and dark, olive-skinned and dark-eyed (the other half). Chinese Jews

look Chinese; Ethiopian Jews look Ethiopian. Inter-marriage was an essential, regardless of its desirability. As Jews we do not call it racial impurity. We call it survival.

There is a third reason. Acculturation has also brought assimilation, a progressive state of culture which many Jews have chosen or have been forced to choose. Discrete Jewish sects existed since before the Romans occupied Israel; grouping of Jews into four major lifestyles is only a first step. The Orthodox remain closest to the historical formula, yet comprise only about 25% of Israel's population; to speak of Jewish populations "worldwide" is, of course, no longer feasible. As I first remarked, it is necessary to ignore many facts which militate against a view of Jews as "queer" because of some *ontological*, rather than *cultural*, difference; to the latter I would freely admit. And one is still left with the political and economic disparity of Jews and Palestinians, dequeering Jews and queering Arabs, whose bodies also carry an historical reading—the homoerotic compulsions against which Orientalism inveighs.

Separation of men and women at this Galilean *haflah* generated the appearance of separatist communities—a political definition not applicable to daily life as lived but perhaps appropriate for discussion of public appearances. The arrival of Israeli Jews physically and linguistically representing occupational forces and the operation of imperial rule in Israel queered gender categorizations on this evening, contributing to the collective memory of the colonized while introducing another value for "woman" as well as for "man." My location at this event, moreover, as a truly foreign/alien/queer observer, carrying more queer currency, could hardly be read neutrally, but contributed to the collective memory of the colonized.

This *haflah* also placed two native English speakers at the site of an originally English wound. My appearance from "beyond" Israel, wearing a sympathy for Arab culture many Israelis cannot abide—or permit—may suggest why I was also asked—even urged—to replace the bride and, however symbolically, marked in her absence. Months later the henna still overpowered the skin, a row of orange dots and blotches across my hand. Often people wondered what had happened; when I answered

“henna,” they smiled knowingly. “But I’m not married!” I initially protested—until I realized that this only aroused their pity: “A woman of my age unmarried? *Haval*. Shame.”

When people ask me what I am doing, it is as if they seek to see into that very distance I struggle against. But the ability to stand outside is denied one who lives, profits, and swears by a culture; this vantage may be granted to one who passes through, one who is able to ask uncomfortable questions and to accept harsh answers and telling silences. When the ethnographer goes “home,” she bears native baskets and artful needlework, foreign tastes, and queer designs; these lie among her notes and memories to peruse for meaning. I can offer back the images I see only because I do not see them enough: the familiar fades from view, becomes invisible—a bride. Perhaps the distance I resist is also the gift I bring.

NOTES

- 1 For the difference between classical and feminist anthropology compare Mary Douglas with Henrietta Moore, Elspeth Probyn, and Marilyn Strathern. On representation of the other in women’s writing, see Jennifer Robinson.
- 2 The names of individuals and sites have been altered throughout this article, in accordance with standard anthropological practice.
- 3 By today’s standards, the *hinna* was comparatively large; families in the Middle East are as prey to economic considerations as those in the West: while it would be unthinkable to exclude a family member no matter how remote, the *hamula* (family clan) already comprises five generations. The ritual *hinna*, or wedding party—especially the evening party for the bride (Lewis 133)—was once at least three days and often a week (Stillman 7); see Herbert Lewis; and Yedida Kalfon Stillman. For general explications of marriage in the Muslim world, see Muhammad Abdul-Rauf; S. Khuda Bukhsh; and Lila Abu-Lughod’s courageous project *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* and succeeding work, “Writing Against Culture.”
- 4 Weddings are arranged as early as birth (*atiyet il-jora*, literally “a gift from the pit”), and held as soon as the female is considered reproductive. In cases where the girl has not yet experienced the onset of her menses (linked with reproductive capacity), the wedding is held but not consummated until that time. There are cases of girls being married at eight and becoming mothers at twelve, or even earlier.
- 5 An area thought of as North Africa, and particularly Morocco. In Israel, it is the Moroccan (Jews) who are called Mahgreb; see 24 ff.
- 6 The fundamental indication of worth, or value, for women has not changed for thousands of years: virginity, sexuality as property; among some Arab populations, the essential marital consideration can be distilled to the question of blood. In *Writing Women’s Worlds*, Lila Abu-Lughod discusses a Bedouin patrilineal parallel-cousin marriage (the most desirable kind, for strengthening fam-

ily ties); the woman "Sabra" explains,

For us Bedouins this is the most important moment in a girl's life. No matter what anyone says afterward, no one will pay attention as long as there was blood on the cloth. They are suspicious of her before. People talk. . . . But when they see this blood the talk is cut off. This is one of the things wrong with the Arabs—they don't like their girls to go out. But once they've seen the cloth, she can come and go as she pleases. They love her and everything is fine. (202)

The assumption here is obvious—that once the girl has been rightfully deflowered (by the accepted purchaser, her husband—who has indeed paid her bridewealth) she is free from danger (including sexual danger from other men). Of course, once pregnant, the *literal* issue of a woman's chastity is ensured, as Napoleon Chagnon comments about the Yanomamo (personal conversation, March 1995).

- 7 Most significant is the injunction against a bride being seen by the groom, a superstition also found among Christians.
- 8 This includes the bridal "term," or chronological period.
- 9 See Rasam's remarks in this article, on the dichotomy of public and private in contemplating Arab worlds.
- 10 One still hears stories of brides having been sent home from their weddings—outcast—despite their relatives' pleading to let the girl stay a few weeks in order to spare family honour, and girls arriving home in this way may still be murdered by male family members. For a fairly contemporary reading of Palestinian Arab family relationships, see Ginat.
- 11 For an excellent consideration of the sacredness of space itself, see Chidester.
- 12 This traditional Arab drum, once made of clay and hide (like the kind now sold to tourists) is made these days of less-traditional materials—molded steel, with a thin plexiglass head.
- 13 Similarly, men's styles have come to "pass" (for dominant culture), and only a couple of men could be found wearing the traditional *gabiyeh* (gown), *hizam*, and *kafiyeh*, with its black double-ringed *aqal* (headcord); these men, senior in the *hamula*, did not leave the house but lounged comfortably on the carpeted and cushioned floor, as is their custom.
- 14 Head scarf worn by men and women. For the women's headscarf one might hear the word *mendil*.
- 15 On the day of the *hinna*, when the women reddened their hands, one Arab female—Widad—wore trousers. Apparently her position in the family permitted her this affectation. The older women disapproved.
- 16 I have chosen the definition provided by Mohanty, Russo, and Torres:
While the term third world is a much maligned and contested one, we use it deliberately, preferring it to postcolonial or developing countries. Third world refers to the colonized, neocolonized or decolonized countries (of Asia, Africa and Latin America) whose economic and political structures have been deformed within the colonial process, and to black, Asian, Latino, and indigeneous peoples in North America, Europe, and Australia. (ix)
- 17 Compare Trinh T. Minh-ha's statement that "What is at stake is not only the hegemony of Western cultures but also their identities as unified cultures: in other words, the realization that there is a Third World in every First World and vice versa." Cited in Pines and Willemen 26-27. For a composite of excerpted readings in postcolonialism, see Ashcroft et al.
- 18 The eyesore Eshkol Tower on the University of Haifa campus is some twenty-four stories tall, and "built for the future." That it in no way reflects the present is an

aesthetic burden which people must bear, from Haifa all the way to Rosh Haniqra (where it can still be seen).

- 19 Connotations of the ambiguous term “queer” may be found in Lauren Berlant; Diana Fuss (esp. Judith Butler); Martha Gever, Pratibha Parmar and John Greyson; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick; Michael Warner. For an extension of “queer” in which sexuality is de-essentialized, see Ella Shohat and Robert Stam.
- 20 The children taught me this in Jerusalem’s Muslim Quarter, saying “What’s this? Nothing” in refusal of my sheqels when they had pointed me down the maze of the Old City. They knew very well the dollar’s value, and assumed from my clothes—and location—that I would pay for information in American currency. (They accepted the sheqels when faced with the alternative of getting nothing.) All of us were misinformed: I had also assumed from their helpfulness that they were giving me correct directions.
- 21 The bibliography for the subject of Jewish-Muslim relations in Israel/Palestine is immense and would consume this article. I recommend a few more or less objective but opposing accounts: Ibrahim Abu-Lughod; Orayb Aref Najjar and Kitty Warnock; Marilyn P. Safir and Barbara Swirski; David K. Shipler; Russel A. Stone and Walter P. Zenner; Alex Weingrod; Wedad Zeine-Ziegler.
- 22 As the recent—and premier—election for Prime Minister and political party just proved.
- 23 This term, used by Altorki et al., reflects the judgement that an anthropologist born in a specific culture, region, or country, is best suited to study the culture in that same place; Altorki, for instance, is an Egyptian woman working in an Egyptian society. The tendency towards “indigenous writing” is the working premise of much modern anthropology—and literature—in the Third World. The authors concentrate upon their greater linguistic and behavioural access, while minimizing restrictions. For the most part I would agree; my project, however, is precisely to discover what is *not* being seen. I maintain that absences persist *because* of cultural strengths, not despite them.
- 24 In Arabic, the words “West” and “foreign” come from the same *shoresh*, or root letters, “gh,” “r,” “b,” hence the word “Maghreb.”
- 25 Based upon gender separation, roles and expectations, I would say that girls are not allowed the “transgression” and “liminality” of space and movement accorded boys.
- 26 Private conversation, March 1996.
- 27 Few Palestinian Arabs emigrate from their family homes; of those who do, most return. Compare the earlier studies of Moshe Shokeid.
- 28 I do not wish to travel into the territory of political explanation or justification. My specific reference here to *Muslimim* is in acknowledgement that Christian Palestinians have their own issues, not addressed in this article; even Said (*The Politics of Dispossession*) tends to exclude their discussion (though he is one), favouring the more general plight of “Palestinians,” which most people take to mean *Muslimim*.
- 29 The Israeli population is primarily Jewish-identified if not, precisely speaking, recognized as Jewish by the State.
- 30 See especially Ivan Peleg; David K. Shipler.
- 31 Throughout the evening the men danced in a circle with a repeated pattern of six-beat steps, concluding the sixth beat with a flat-footed stamp on the ground, of varying degrees of vigour. The dance step is common, repetitive and used for a diversity of occasions. To compare Tadashi Suzuki’s writings about “stomping

of the feet" in the Noh theatre (for riddance of evil spirits) provides the kind of cross-cultural "reading" anthropologists find heinous: it does not hold that foot-stomping as banishment of evil can be extrapolated to this or any other culture. On the other hand, that may be precisely its purpose in any number of cultures. Cross-cultural investigation may inform readers without leading to universalization.

- 32 Compare wedding crowns and headdresses made of floral wreaths, precious gems, coins, and lit candles.
- 33 This observation has caused one reviewer to comment that the doll probably was meant to be a reflection of the Israeli female present. This is highly unlikely; until she arrived, Saliqh's family did not know that she would attend; also, throughout the north, at least, I have found white dolls on Arab porches and in salons, said to be an expression of aesthetic beauty where "whiteness" is synonymous with purity.
- 34 Israelis refuse to watch this videotape with me: as one thirty-year Haifa resident responded, "Thanks, I live in the area." This does not represent a lack of interest in my enterprise. I am frequently asked what I saw in the tape and at the *haflah*, and what I feel about the culture itself. My theoretical and practical version exceeds, for many, the "authentic" source material.
- 35 See especially Sara Mills's discussion of the imperial British woman traveller of the nineteenth century.
- 36 I do not in any way mean to minimize the fact—or possibility—of Palestinian women speaking for themselves, something that Said (for all his studied brilliance) as an Arab Christian male also cannot. Nor can I (for all my empathy) as a Jewish daughter of refugees, or Lila Abu-Lughod (as a Muslim American)—though this is, in some ways, precisely what *Writing Women's Worlds* succeeds in doing. I direct readers to the works cited throughout this paper (esp. Najjar and Warnock; Altorki); to Fatima Memissi; Spivak, "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman"; and the Haifa Feminist Center, particularly its alliance project with "Arab women."
- 37 This no doubt implicates such writers as Spivak, who moved from Boston's "margin" to New York City (see Jacoby). Spivak remarks herself on having spoken before an academic assembly:
- I received no personal criticism in public, of course. Taken aside, I was told I had used my power unfairly by posing as marginal; that I could criticize the establishment only because I spoke its language too well (English, masculine, power play?) . . . About the worst of these asides even I feel obliged to remain silent. (*In Other Worlds* 105)
- 38 Although I prefer the consistency of specifying authors only by last name, readers should note that I have cited the work of Ibrahim Abu-Lughod in my bibliography, while Maghrebian scholars will of course also be familiar with the writings of Janet Abu-Lughod.
- 39 Although I have heard Derrida identify himself as "Maghreb."
- 40 I disagree, however, with Segwick's casual usage of the word "fetishized." For a remarkable discussion of this subject, see Gamman and Makinen.
- 41 Briefly, "queer pleasure" is an appearance of homosexuality between intimate (but presumably non-sexual) friends, a voyeuristic construction permitting those watching to fantasize about the sexual consummation of those watched. The argument is that this enhances our watching pleasure—particularly for those who argue a stake in this type of intimacy.
- 42 If we run the risk of "Orientalizing," there is equally the danger of "Occidentalizing"—that is, generically assigning behaviours across cultures. For a description of this problem see particularly Carrier.

- 43 A recent lesbian wedding in Tel Aviv was treated as a "joke" by lesbian friends who could not imagine such a thing happening in Israel—even though the hall chosen was a lesbian nightclub. Lesbian and gay communities exist in Israel, but only in larger cities, and families of members do not attend.
- 44 This is only because of the Palestinians' minority position, and would hardly be the case in an Arab state.

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