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ANTHROPOLOGY IN ISRAEL: PROFESSIONALS IN STORMY DAYS

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This overview seeks to draw the history of anthropology in Israel in broad strokes and with a contextual perspective from the mid-1920s to the beginning of the 21st century.¹ Studies of the characteristics of national anthropologies have assumed that the state—a social/political/bureaucratic/cultural/national body—is a legitimate unit of analysis. National anthropologies deal with the sociopolitical and historical context of producing anthropological knowledge. The linkage between processes of nation building and anthropology in 50-year-old Israel makes the literature on anthropologies in the new independent states and the developed world relevant to the Israeli case (Ben Ari and Van-Bremen, forthcoming; Alatas, 2001). Some works that deal with the complex center-periphery relations in anthropology, such as Gerholm and Hannerz (1982) and Gupta and Ferguson (1997), shed light on the discipline in Israel. As a national anthropology, anthropology in Israel should be viewed in the light of wider social processes in Israeli society, the changing agenda of world anthropology, and the human nature of its carriers, the anthropologists. My investigation of Israeli anthropology has been inspired by studies in the history of anthropology which show the complexity and multifaceted situations within which anthropology was done, such as those by Kuklick on British anthropology (1991) or Schumaker (2001) on the Rhodes-Livingston Institute in Central Africa.

Anthropology as an idea entered the domain of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem from the mid-1920s, as that institution was being established, but only in the mid-1960s did it begin to be institutionalized in Israeli universities. Why was it neglected, even rejected, while its importance and relevance to the new society was recognized? The discipline's rejection by academe for many years is testimony to the intellectual and ideological preferences of the Jewish community of pre-state Palestine and of the state itself during its first decade. The reversal in attitudes towards the discipline which took place after that was based on utilitarian reasons, reflecting changes in Israeli society's objectives, as well as the availability of manpower and resources for attaining those objectives. The gradually increasing strength of the discipline becomes clear against the backdrop of the expectations placed upon it on the one hand, and the personal, social, political and global agenda of its members, on the other.

Anthropological research in Israel had its beginnings in the early 1920s, when the country was governed under the British Mandate established by the League of Nations. During this period, ethnographic field studies of small communities of Palestinian Arabs were conducted, which were soon followed by sociological and ethnographic studies of the Jews of Palestine. Hilma Granquist, (1891-1942) a Finnish anthropologist, came to the village of Artas near Bethlehem anticipating that the life patterns of the Palestinian villagers could serve as a source for the understanding of everyday life in Biblical times (Granquist, 1935). She shared her interest in their daily life, folklore and material culture with Tewafiq Canaan (1882-1964), a local physician (Canaan, 1927, 1932).

A few years later, two Jewish researchers, Zionist immigrants from central Europe Erich Brauer and Raphael Patai, became the pioneers of ethnographic research on Jewish groups in Palestine (Abuhav, 2003). Both were products of the Orientalist scholarship and tradition in Germany and Hungary, and their interest was Jews who had immigrated to Palestine from the Middle East—"Oriental Jews"—focusing on those who lived in Jerusalem (Brauer, 1934, 1992; Patai, 1946a, 1946b). The researchers of both groups, Jewish and Palestinian alike, sought to document cultures which in their view had preserved traditional life patterns for centuries, and which now stood on the threshold of great changes. Like many anthropologists of their generation, they viewed their principal role as recording ways of life that would supposedly soon disappear. They did not address the social changes that were being effected in Palestine because of the constant flow of immigrants and the efforts of British Mandate authorities, changes that the researchers saw merely as destructive influences that made their salvage efforts crucial. Eventually, Patai would be influenced by American anthropologists' studies of acculturation and would discuss life in contemporary Palestine (1946a).

Conspicuous by their absence from the Palestinian field were British anthropologists, who spread themselves over a broad geographical area, but they showed no great interest in the eastern tip of the Mediterranean. Perhaps the peoples of the region, Jews and Arabs alike, were not considered sufficiently "primitive" for the functional-structural approach that dominated British social anthropology at the time.

Why were the promising beginnings of Palestinian and Jewish anthropology nipped in the bud? Brauer and Patai tried to establish anthropology in the Hebrew University, the only university teaching humanities or social science at the time, but their efforts were defeated. One of their problems was that it was difficult to define anthropology. Was it physical? cultural? both? Where would it be housed in the university? Another of their problems, linked to the first, was an ideological-ethical one: anthropological inquiry had long been linked with race theories. There had been many debates about whether the Jews were a single race, a number of races, or whether they should be viewed in terms of race at all—and about whether there was reliable evidence that could be used to resolve questions of Jewish identity (Efron, 1994; Hart, 2000). Nazism and World War II made physical anthropology that 'measured' Jews a questionable enterprise (Goldberg and Abuhav, 2000). Ultimately, Brauer's untimely death and critical views on Patai's anthropology shut the window of opportunity on the establishment of anthropology in Jerusalem.

During the time of pre-state Israel, the Jewish community was built upon a project of massive Zionist emigration. With the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the Jewish population tripled in only a few years, enlarged by both immigrant refugees from post-war Europe and immigrants from the Middle East. Israeli society underwent dramatic changes: the Arab-Jewish armed conflict in 1948 (Israel's War of Independence); the expulsion and flight of the majority of the Arabs from the new state; the economic hardship that was part of Israel's first years; and changes in state institutions. New social and cultural orders were emerging, and with the establishment of the state, numerous resources were diverted to the training of a professional cadre of public servants who required a basic academic education—from which anthropology was excluded.

During the 1950s, anthropological activity was effectively limited to a few individuals from abroad who came to conduct research or to explore possibilities for work. In the 1960s, however, a few anthropologists and sociologists undertook research missions deriving from Zionist objectives: state settlement and integration of new immigrants. As people

whose image was 'experts on Others'—the new immigrants from the Middle East—social scientists were given the task of understanding what had gone wrong with programs of modernization, settlement and immigrants' absorption. Later, anthropologists of this generation were called to task for having been recruited to the Zionist project and having been blind to power relations and the colonial aspect of their work. For example, Van Teeffelen (1977, 1980) Berenstein, (1980), and Ram (1995) criticized Jewish anthropologists of European origin who studied Oriental Jews, and Rabinowitz criticized Jewish anthropologists who studied the Palestinians (Rabinowitz, 2002). But these critiques ignored the complex products of this anthropological endeavor. Researchers had not simply provided recommendations for controlling the immigrants to the Jewish Agency or other bodies that had employed them; rather, they created a nuanced and sophisticated ethnography that gave voice to the emigrants and their dilemmas, although this did not run counter to basic Zionist positions (Weingrod, 1966; Willner, 1969; Deshen and Shokeid, 1974). Looking at the making of anthropological knowledge through the narrow lens of power and colonial relations sterilizes it from human agency, serendipity and other motivations which I shall discuss later. At the time, it was therefore hardly surprising that the establishment chose to put anthropology on hold and prevent its development. This decision fell into line with the internal balance of power within the only academic institution that then existed, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The impressive 1970s breakthrough of anthropology in Israeli academe was a consequence of the aspirations of an Anglo-Jewish philanthropist, Lord Bernstein, to assist national Israeli-Zionist projects, and serendipitously he greatly contributed to the development of anthropology. He enlisted Max Gluckman, who then headed the Manchester University Department of Anthropology, to guide and supervise ten Ph.D. studies on Israeli society. Gluckman's theoretical influence and that of the Manchester school left their mark on Israeli anthropology for many years (Marx, 1975). The significance of this project is worthy of comparison with Gluckman's influence on the anthropology of Central Africa at a later period in his career (Schumaker, 2001).

The generous (colonial?) contributions to anthropological research brought about the introduction of the discipline to Tel Aviv University. The early 1970s saw a heightened demand for higher education worldwide and in Israel, and large resources were diverted to its advancement. Immigrant anthropologists, motivated by their Jewish identity and Zionist ideology, came to fill posts and reinforce their few Israeli colleagues who had initially shouldered the burden of the discipline. Tel Aviv was followed by the other new universities—Haifa, Bar-Ilan and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev—which all included anthropology, and left with no choice Jerusalem followed suit. However, to this day not one of them has given anthropology organizational autonomy, and with the exception of Ben-Gurion (where anthropology is part of behavioral sciences, including psychology), anthropology and sociology are joint departments.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were also when a window was opened in Israeli society for the expression of ethnic diversity and a relinquishing, if only rhetorically at first, of the ideals of a "melting pot" and a "merging of the diasporas." There were the beginnings of a willingness to look into the mirror and see Israel's pluralistic and multicultural image. In the new climate, the anthropologists were given the opportunity of creating knowledge compatible with their agenda without clashing with the establishment credo. Employing accepted anthropological tools, they studied other Jewish immigrants on the one hand,

(Deshen, 1970; Shokeid, 1971; Goldberg, 1972; Lewis, 1979; Palgi, 1983), and Palestinians on the other (Cohen, 1971; Marx, 1977; Ginat, 1980).

Another focus of anthropological work was the kibbutz that emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century. It was prominent in the growing Jewish society in Mandatory Palestine and in the Zionist ethos leading to the establishment of the state. The kibbutz was studied intensively by anthropologists from abroad, like Melford Spiro (1963, 1972) and Stanley Diamond (1957), and ethnographically by the local sociologist Yonina Talmon-Garber and her students (1972). Researchers were curious and fascinated by the unique collective ideological "social experiment" on issues such as family, social roles, children, education, economic equality, and so forth. The kibbutz and the Moshav, a cooperative village which was the setting for major projects of settling immigrants, were perceived as small, isolated, integrated communities and therefore an ideal field for anthropological field research.

The new approaches gained impetus from the 1970s onward, while Israeli anthropology began to diversify in line with trends in the discipline elsewhere. Consciousness of the role of the state and other formal institutions led to the continued study of bureaucracy, such as the welfare system (Marx, 1976; Handelsman, 1980; Hertzog, 1999). The arrival of the Ethiopian immigrants in the 1980s and 1990s brought in its wake studies of ethnic communities, some of which emphasized the bureaucratic power relationships and dependency that shaped the experience of these immigrants.

The role of social power in defining identities and relationships is well documented in the gender studies that were developed in the 1980s. These studies emerged against the background of feminist awareness and writings both in Israel and the world at large, in divergent contexts: the family, the community, the labor market, the army, and so forth. These studies highlighted the ways women dealt with their inferior status in society and in the family by mobilizing alternative power resources and manipulating them in a society that structured women's social and economic weakness and marginality. Women's voices were expressed in multiple works (Katzir, 1983; Wasserfall, 1990; Abu-Rabia, 1994; El-Or, 1994; Sered, 2000) which shed new light on female endeavors to maneuver in settings in which they lacked formal power. Attention to gender also boosted the study of subjects like masculinity and war (Weiss, 1998; Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari, 2000), or the family and the welfare state.

During the same period of time, anthropologists turned the middle class into a research subject. Research in the 1980s and 1990s posed questions regarding the cultural discourse and social patterns created and consumed by the members of this category. Some examples are: culture and communication (Katriel, 1991), wedding gifts (Abuhav, forthcoming), birthday parties (Shamgar and Handelsman, 1991), Arab women forging new roles through shopping patterns (Forte, 2002), and Israelis living in New York (Shokeid, 1988).

These social developments and research foci also called for new research paradigms and methodologies. In contrast to the early years of anthropology during which "classic" fieldwork in defined settings (often villages and small towns) was the major method, new orientations were utilized to deal with urban life, its populations and settings, such as the social world approach (Hazan, 1990), or an emphasis on life stories and life-history (Lomsky-Feder, 1995; Bilu, 2000). The overlap between anthropology and other disciplines also became more apparent, for example in many sociological studies based on ethnography and social historical studies (Deshen, 1989; Goldberg, 1990), in works that bridged anthropology and folklore (Salamon, 2001), or in analyses of rabbinic tradition that utilized anthropology

(Cooper, 1987).

Almost all of the anthropologists who worked in the post-Brauer and Patai phases of the discipline are still alive, and interviews with them show that the search for the exotic and romantic were only secondary incentives for Israeli anthropologists. Anthropological science in Israel had never dwelt in remote castles or ivory towers. The combustible materials that fueled the research of these individuals were greater commitment to the subject studied (rather than to the body that commissioned it), curiosity about The Other, intellectual stimulus, and a connection with universal scientific endeavor. These factors were complemented by the drives, motivations, choices, and randomness of anthropologists' experience as human beings, some of which were no less decisive in scientific practice than rational considerations and intentional actions.

Anthropological work in Israel is characterized by 'anthropology at home' on Israeli society and within its geopolitical borders. Initially, Israeli anthropologists constructed their 'Other' as Middle Eastern Jews and Palestinians. With the changes taking place in world anthropology and Israeli society, 'The Other' and the researcher moved closer to one another and the research subjects became 'Us'. The idea of 'Anthropology at home' contributed to Israeli anthropology's status in anthropology internationally. The 'home' of the first anthropologists was the national home that enlisted them, emotionally and practically, to participate in its formation. The close familiarity with the people studied and the fact of speaking their real and symbolic language imbues Israeli anthropology with insights that a foreigner would have difficulty producing. This close proximity also creates problems that originate in acceptance of, resemblance to, and participation in basic Zionist/Jewish assumptions, and which emanate from the researcher's commitment to and involvement in the subject population. But it does not keep anthropologists from posing trenchant questions about the social situations in which they are involved. The anthropologists' play of identity, between national and global identities, between Judaism and Israeli-ness, or between Ashkenazi-ism and Sephardi-ism, is strongly manifested in their work on Israeli society. The researchers' subjects are beset by similar questions of identity and thus are able to identify with the anthropologists' studies.

Anthropology in Israel was and is an arena for an epistemological encounter between British social anthropology and American cultural anthropology. (There are only a few instances of anthropologists trained in France.) Israeli anthropology was sufficiently broad and flexible to absorb both schools which, from the 1960s, moved closer to one another in world anthropology. The influence of the Anglo-American world centers of knowledge was manifested in the introduction of critical approaches developed in the 1980s. These challenged the anthropological status quo with regard to its borders, the nature of ethnography, researcher-subject relations, and its methodology. All of these brought about changes in the research agenda of Israeli anthropology, from the adoption of innovative methodologies of narratives and life stories, to methodologies borrowed from cultural studies and textual analysis, and to renewed definitions of research fields. The majority of Israeli anthropologists have studied abroad, although by now there are some who have done their doctoral work at Israeli universities, and they view themselves as part of an international community of professionals.

In the wake of the dismantling of collective identities in Israeli society, for veteran and new anthropologists alike, both subversives and the establishment-oriented, a certain distancing from local identities, national and Zionist, took place. The structuring of identities occurs in an interaction with social processes, circumstances and influences unique to Israeli society—a demanding and ideological society that was collectivist in the past and which,

with the passing of the years, placed more and more emphasis on individualism. If the monolithic identity has been dismantled into the numerous identities running around inside us, then the professional-anthropological identity surely has a contribution to make to the understanding of these processes in light of the social changes taking place. It is desirable not to ignore the tension between intentions, planning, aspirations, desires, ideology and motivation on the one hand, and the randomness that cannot be controlled, the personal choices that are not directly linked to career, and the aleatory dimension of randomness on the other. Despite these tensions, Israeli anthropologists still engage in involved and committed anthropology, if not for national causes then for social struggles and ethical objectives.

Defining anthropology as a science dealing solely with 'the Other' restricts the field of vision. Much can be learned from anthropology, not only about the Other, but also about ourselves. The discipline possesses unique characteristics deriving from the context in which anthropological knowledge is produced and processed. It influences, assists, undermines and shapes the definition of national objectives and is at the same time shaped by those objectives. The Israeli case calls into question the possibility of imposing the model of colonialist anthropology on it, and it challenges the model of center-periphery relationships between the powerful exploiters and the powerless dominated. The relationship between academe and society in Israel is linked to changes that have taken place in the nature of expectations of anthropologists during the eighty-odd years of the presence of the idea of anthropology in Israel, in the dramas that accompanied the development of Israeli society, and the crucial changes in world anthropology.

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RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

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