# Representing the State: Class, Race, History and Nationhood in an Israeli Museum[1]

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> "And then there were the Bedouin, whom the various hiking guides introduced to us both as noble savages living in a state of nature, and as remains of our dignified Biblical forefathers..." - Smadar Lavie (1990:8)

> "Zionism did not emerge out of a vacuum. It arose in an age of intense nationalist passions set loose by the French Revolution. It arose, also, at a time of colonial expansion and Western imperial arrogance. The idea of establishing a Jewish state beyond the domain of Europe could easily be rationalized as part of that larger enterprise of spreading Western civilization to backwards areas." - Richard Falk (1983:93)

While investigating museum representation of a minority community in Israel, I asked one of the 'represented' why he turned down an offer to attempt to improve the representation of his community. Without hesitation, this man responded that "a person has to be a fool to turn himself into an object of propaganda."[2] In no uncertain terms, this man stated that the representation of his community by this museum is both irreconcilable with his reality and ultimately, a *fait accompli*. Why does this man feel this way about minority representation in Israel? What does this man's sweeping statement say to visual anthropology which has, for so long, concerned itself with issues of representation? This man's bold statement is both a query and challenge to dominant theories of representation, for it raises a very important issue; the role of the state in representation.

Propaganda is admittedly a crude term which invokes both conspiracy theories and subliminal messages, and my translation a rough rendering of a nuanced statement.[3] However, accepting my translation, for the moment, ultimately means that representation implicates specific groups of people. As any dictionary will advise, propaganda reflects the views and interests of a particular group of people. It became clear, as our conversation progressed, that the particular assemblage of people to

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[1]**Important note**: This pdf file should not be cited, for all citations please use Spring/Summer 1997 issue of *Visual Anthropology Review* (13(1):14-27)

[2]Unless otherwise cited, all quotations and comments were recorded by the author during June and July of 1995 in Israel where approximately 4-6 hours a day over a period of two weeks were spent at the museum, interviewing curator, staff, and visitors, analyzing displays of information, as well as interviewing several of the 'represented.'

[3]The actual noun used was *de ᶜāyya* which translates as not only propaganda, but also publicity and advertisement.

which this man referred was the Israeli state. However, the implied subject of this critique is not the 'state' normally associated with government or with standard political terminology. Rather, the state is understood to be a set of alliances, based upon class structure and racial or ethnic hierarchies (see Gramsci 1971). This man's declaration came as a challenge, compelling a re-evaluation of both representation and state, forcing me to look deeper into the history and political-economy of Israel.

The object of this man's critique is the Colonel Joe Alon Regional and Folklore Center and Museum of Bedouin Culture.[4] This museum is located on the grounds of the Lahav Kibbutz in the northern Negev desert, about fifteen miles north of Be'er Sheva, Israel. According to the curator, a British born Israeli woman with a background in archaeology, the primary purpose of the museum is to familiarize visitors with the culture and history of the Bedouin of the Negev and Sinai deserts. The curator explained that Israel was in the process of becoming a 'multicultural' society. Thus, the museum attempts to celebrate the traditions of the Bedouin as equal citizens of a plural society by recording and preserving a rapidly 'modernizing' culture. Indeed, there can be no doubt that for the Bedouin, as with the rest of the world, the past fifty years have necessitated drastic changes. However, as will be shown, the museum's version of 'salvage anthropology' turns the Bedouin into 'primitives' through the construction of enduring tradition (Fabian 1983). This dismissal of time allows for a construction of a Bedouin identity, which serves to hide the relations of power in Israel.

The Museum uses dioramas and placards to describe 'traditional' Bedouin life. The dioramas, located on the entry level of the museum, are clearly the museum's most popular attraction. Visitors crowd around these displays, pointing to mannequins seated in tents who weave, make coffee, or await visitors, and listen to explanations provided by museum guides. Displays of riding tack, fishing and hunting equipment, as well as art and handicrafts surround the dioramas. The basement level is filled with placards, describing Bedouin origins, family life, medicine, and social structure with photographs and text. In addition, the basement houses a small theater for the projection of a slide-show about the Bedouin, and a miniature diorama of a Bedouin encampment. Outside activities take place primarily in two tents where the so-called traditional activities of story-telling, bread-making, weaving, and serving 'Bedouin coffee' in a tent are demonstrated by 'real' Bedouin. According to the curator, these activities

[4]The museum is named after Col. Joe (Yosef) Alon, an Israeli fighter-pilot, whose family donated money to establish the museum. There is no known relationship between Col. Alon and the Bedouin.

"[bridge] the gap between what was and what is," as they are traditions which still continue today.

The museum's visitors are primarily Israeli school children; however, visitors also include Israeli families, groups of Israeli soldiers, foreign tourists, as well as an occasional Palestinian from northern Israel or those Palestinians who are represented in the museum, the Bedouin. The museum also houses, in a separate building, a small library on the Bedouin, a re-creation of Palestinian peasant (*Fallāḥ*) 'cave dwellings,' and a floor dedicated to a display about the Jewish National Fund. These two additional displays are important in that they are indicative of both the history of the museum and its outlook on the Palestinians, which is discussed in a later section of this article.

The fulcrum of this investigation of museum representation is a unified analysis of class and race, challenging the 'common sense' view that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is composed of two groups; Jews and Arabs. A critical understanding of the relations between non-Western or *Mizraḥi* Jews[5] and Palestinians living within the 1948 borders of Israel can be gained by arguing that certain forms of museum representation create, reflect, and legitimate a complex system of inequality, where racial or ethnic identities run parallel to those of class. This is revealed and reflected by a museum's representation of a Palestinian community, which widens racial or ethnic divides between Arabs and Jews, and reifies life-style differences between Palestinians, while minimizing the class-based similarities of *Mizraḥi* Jews and Palestinians in Israel. The state, as a reflection of the interests of dominant classes, is understood to 'sponsor' representational strategies, which serve to hide and legitimate relations of inequality upon which the functioning of state and class hegemony is dependent.

## A Political Economy of Museum Representation

Museum studies have recently begun to examine the role of the state in representation. However, the vast majority of these studies have been concerned with state-based ideologies, such as nationalism, understanding museums as a "ritual of citizenship" (Duncan 1991:89-94; see also Coombes 1988) or as playing a major role in the formation of an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983). Investigating the relationship between museum representation and nationalism is indeed necessary and useful. However,

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[5] *Mizraḥi* and *Sephardi* (plural; *Mizraḥim* and *Sephardim*) are frequently used interchangeably. *Mizraḥi* translates as Eastern or 'Oriental,' meaning any of those Jews from the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia or other non-European locale. *Sephardi* refers to those Jews who were originally of Spanish origin, expelled or forcibly converted in 1492.

these studies tend to subsume the state under nationalism or other state-based ideologies, isolating ideological production from economic production. Herein lie the failure of most museum studies. Nationalism or any other ideology, does not make a state. Rather, representation must be seen in relation to the political economy of a particular state. If, as Antonio Gramsci (see Buttigieg 1995) has argued, the state is an amalgam of political and civil society, then economy plays as important a role in state-craft as ideologies of nationalism. These bifurcations of the ideal and material continues the structuralist legacy of binary oppositions, and reduces representational analysis to ideological analysis. The remainder of this essay attempts to address this problem, suggesting that the interpretation and production of the visual must be understood not solely as an ideological affair. Rather, representational analysis must also examine the historic and economic forces which are located within the complex of the modern state.

Studies of representation can reveal and de-mystify not only ideological but also material formations of inequality within and between states. Similar to studies of the relationship between power and knowledge (see Foucault 1982), representational analysis is primarily concerned with the connection of communication to power through visual, textual or aural media. In this sense, representation is a central aspect of state and class hegemony. As Michael Wallace, in his essay "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," argues; "most history museums were constructed by members of dominant classes, and embodied interpretations that supported their sponsors' privileged positions" (1981:63) which "were considered commonplaces of their class's culture" (1981:63, parenthetical). Wallace is describing the struggle for hegemony, the attempt to impose one class's ideology as the 'common sense' of a nation. Representation, whether in museum, text or visual media, is a site of contestation, where one particular class or alliance of people attempt to institutionalize their ideologies for the duration of their hegemony, struggling to make them 'common sense.' Wallace goes on to argue that museum representations of history change in response to shifts in state economy, political struggle and ideology (Wallace 1981:88-90). Thus, shifts between various forms of Industrial Capitalism, New Deal Populism and McCarthyism in America are reflected by differing visions of history in museums, which are part of these competing classes' 'common sense' or hegemonic understanding of their world. Representations then, are produced not by discrete individuals outside of

power structures or economy, but by individuals who are grounded in the material and ideological base of a state.

In her essay "Teddy Bear Patriarchy," Donna Haraway places the American Museum of Natural History within the political, economic and ideological *zeitgeist* of turn-of-the-century America (1989:26-58). Linking representation of 'natural history' to the eugenics movement, xenophobia, colonialism, and racism, Haraway argues that the American Museum of Natural History was a representation of state and upper-class interests, that served to reaffirm 'Anglo' dominance in the wake of rising 'non-White' immigration and class struggle. Like Wallace, Haraway understands the museum to be a product of the economic and ideological needs of particular classes, for both argue that representation reflects the struggle for control of the state. These essays are instructive, as they argue that museum representation is linked not only to nationalism, but to the complex hegemony of racial and class inequalities which are contested within the state. The state is not to be understood as a reified entity standing aloof to internal struggle. Rather, the mechanisms of state power are used by dominant classes and alliances for material gain and ideological hegemony (Gramsci 1971). To assert that the economic and ideological needs of the state, hence the needs of dominant groups, determine, to a large extent, forms and ideologies of representation, is to affirm that representation reflects the struggle for hegemony.

Following Haraway and Wallace this essay will attempt to outline a way in which representation can be understood as an aspect of the state. I attempt to wed this museum's representation to the political economy of the Israeli state, showing that representation is associated not only with identity formations, but also with the economic concerns of the state. Beginning with a brief interpretation of the Israeli political economy, I attempt to explain three objections raised against the museum by a group of the 'represented.'

## A Political Economy of Israel

In 1991 the Bedouin made up approximately 10% of the 18% Palestinian minority living within the 1948 borders of Israel (Association for Support and Defence 1991:1). During the 1947-49 Israeli War of Independence large groups of Palestinians fled to Trans-Jordan, Syria, Gaza, and Lebanon, among

other places. A number of Palestinians however, remained in what would become the Israeli state. Israel is a liberal, bourgeois democracy,[6] with many similarities to both England and the USA.[7] Class structure in Israel runs parallel to racial or ethnic identities. A quick glance at Parliament (*Knesset*) membership, ownership of agricultural land and industry indicates that Israelis of European descent (*Ashkinazim*) dominate the upper levels of class, income and power. Factory workers, agricultural workers, and the unemployed are primarily non-Western Jews (*Mizraḥim*), Palestinians, and recently, migrant workers from South-East Asia. I understand Israeli society as one polarized by racial or ethnic divisions, which ultimately parallel class stratification.

This racial or ethnic hierarchy is often legitimized and obfuscated by two connected ideologies; Eurocentrism (Shohat 1988) and the divine right of being a 'Chosen Person' (Gran 1996:251-53; Sharif 1983)[8]. In these ideological complexes certain groups of people have been given God's manifesto that they are indeed a 'holy' and unique people, thus having the right not only to the land (*Eretz Yisrael* in the case of Israel) but also having God's blessing in all of their endeavors. Not only are the Palestinians excluded from Israeli society, as they are not a 'Chosen People,' they are also regarded as the eternal, biblical enemy of the Israelites, the Philistines (*Filistinim*). In a similar manner, *Mizraḥi* Jews are excluded by being seen as not 'authentically Jewish,' or no longer a 'Chosen People.' In the words of David Ben Gurion, "the divine presence has disappeared from the Oriental Jewish ethnic groups" (quoted in Shohat 1988:5). One need only look to governmental and academic pronouncements regarding 'primitive' or 'Arabized' *Mizraḥi* Jews, 'terrorist' or 'fundamentalist' Palestinians, and recently 'AIDs infected' Ethiopian Jews to realize that what Edward Said has written about Israeli Orientalism is applicable to both Palestinian and non-Western Jew in Israel:

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[6]I use 'Bourgeois Democracy' rather than just 'democracy' to indicate, following Gran (1996:250-56), that the term 'democracy' implies both freedom and equality (as opposed to fascism), and a historical continuity with the Greek notion of democracy. Modern Bourgeois Democracy is a form of Liberalism (as in John Locke and Ronald Reagan) which, if Gran is correct, has particular parallels with racism.

[7]Israel is often compared to apartheid South Africa (e.g.: Davis 1987). While I do not deny the similarities between apartheid South Africa and Israel, the singular identification of racism with one state often is understood as a denial of the pervasiveness of racial hierarchies elsewhere. Similarly, the American south is often identified as racist, thus denying the importance of racial hierarchies to the American north.

[8]While it is obvious that the 'chosen people' ideology exists within Jewish theology and through out the Old Testament, it must be stressed that this ideology serves political purposes in Israel. Sharif (1983) argues that the 'chosen people' ideology is prevalent in England, being partially responsible for English 'non-Jewish' Zionism. Gran argues that the 'chosen people' ideology is also prevalent in South Africa and America, and has definite resonances with racialized hierarchies.

> ... the Palestinian was either a stupid savage, or a negligible quantity, morally and even existentially... [If] they seem not to have the same rights it is because they are 'less developed.' Orientalism governs Israeli policy towards the Arabs throughout... (1978:306)

The relationship between a state which adopts a Eurocentric 'Chosen People' ideology and a mode of capitalist production which needs and creates an inexpensive and disposable labor force through racial or ethnic hierarchies clearly indicates the interconnections of ideology and economy.

The relationship between ideology and economy extends beyond the confines of the labor market. Talal Asad (1975), Soheir Morsy (1983), and Toine van Teeffelen (1978), among others, have asserted that Israeli anthropology is a product of the state-building and colonial project of Zionism. Recent internal critiques of Israeli academia, such as those of the 'Post-Zionist'[9] school, have both re-affirmed and continued earlier criticisms. Many of these criticisms have suggested that an "overall commitment to the viability of Israeli society" (van Teeffelen 1978:79-80) constructs an idealized, partial, and incomplete vision of Israeli society and history. In these critiques the material or ideological needs of the state influences academic knowledge production, and, by extension, anthropological or historical museums.

The Col. Joe Alon Museum of Bedouin Culture is not isolated from other forms of knowledge production. This museum's particular form of Orientalism reflects 'common sense' Israeli and Western views of both Palestinians and non-Western Jews. As I have stated, a 'common sense' view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict sees it as composed of two opposed and homogeneous groups: Jews and Arabs. As my brief discussion of the Israeli political economy indicates, 'reality' is much more complex than 'common sense.' Understanding Israel as a state composed of heterogeneous identities and ethnicities obfuscated by dominant ideologies questions not only simplistic media understandings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but ultimately provides a critique of representation.

## A Political Economy of the Col. Joe Alon Museum of Bedouin Culture

I interviewed twenty Bedouin men who had all visited the museum, half were university students, three were unemployed, the remainder working as manual laborers, truck drivers, engineers or school teachers. While I interviewed eight Bedouin women, all school teachers, I was unable to locate any who

[9]The details of the 'Post-Zionist' critique of Israel are far too complex to be dealt with here, see Ilan Pappé (1997).

had visited the museum.[10] I attempted to make up for this gender gap through detailed interviews in which I described the museum, using photographs and brochures. Overwhelmingly, the group of interviewed Bedouin stated that the museum's representation of Bedouin culture could not be accurate for two reasons. First, the museum is understood to be a profit-making institution, which they connected to stereotypical images of the Bedouin as 'primitive.'[11] Second, the museum is understood to be an example of Israeli propaganda against Palestinians in particular, and Arabs in general. There were three specific objections concerning the displays inside the museum. Their first was that the role of the Israeli military in forced settlement and land seizures is absent. Their second objection concerned the accuracy and political implications of a placard stating that most Bedouin migrated to Palestine approximately 250 years ago from what is now Saudi Arabia. Their last objection concerned the inability of material culture to represent an entire culture. These three concerns are dealt with in detail below, where I attempt to contextualize them within my interpretation of the political economy of the Israeli state.

The first concern, the role of the Israeli military in forced settlement and land seizures, is notably absent from the museum. The only explanation of the settlement of Bedouin is a slide show's comment that "the hand of fate cannot be moved, nor the wheels of progress stopped" (Filsof, no date). Yet, the 'hand of fate' is an anthropomorphized term for human action, and the 'wheels of progress' are turned by a human, if not a political, motor. Ian Lustick (1980) and others have argued that Green-Line Palestinians[12] or 'Israeli-Arabs' have faced significant economic discrimination, land confiscations by Israeli military or paramilitary groups (such as the deceased Meir Kahane's *Kach*) and exceptional forms of racist discrimination. In the early part of the 1950s, shortly after the Israeli War of Independence, the Israeli Government forced all of the Negev Bedouin onto a 'reservation' (Hamaisi 1990:Preface) similar to those which the U.S. Government constructed for the American Indian population. Many of the

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[10]The gendered dimensions of museum visitations have not been well explored. It is quite clear that, at least for this group of Palestinians, very few women participated in this form of tourism. Clearly, this discrepancy needs to be investigated.

[11]The curator and staff were very reluctant to discuss the actual financial situation of the museum so I was unable to gather much substantive information. However, the Museum and Kibbutz are financially separate institutions. The Kibbutz depends on agricultural and software production, and apparently has little interest in tourism. The Museum depends upon state grants and entrance fees.

[12]Green-Line indicates the 1948 borders of Israel, signed into history in Rhodes, through the General Armistice Agreement of 1949. Thus, Green-Line Palestinians, often called 'Israeli-Arabs,' are Palestinians living within the 1948 borders of Israel. They are citizens of the state of Israel, allegedly with all of the rights of a Jewish Israeli.

Bedouin were up-rooted from their territory, which had been in their family's possession for centuries, and were forced to live in smaller areas where they were unable to sustain the animals needed to support a large group of people. As a result many of the Bedouin were forced into wage-labor (Marx 1984:1-15) and a highly exploitative structure of income gradients based on 'Arab' versus 'Hebrew' labor (Lustick 1980:7).

Clearly, the recent history of these Palestinians is both controversial and important. Why then does the museum's representation not include it? As the curator herself remarked, the museum's mission is a historical one, attempting to familiarize visitors with the culture and history of the Bedouin of the Negev and the Sinai deserts. When pressed on the issue, the curator replied that the museum was not political, and that controversial political issues were best left to politicians. However, leaving politics to the politicians is a political act. No one, to my knowledge, denies that the Bedouin were forced into reservations; rather, this act is relegated, like so many of the world's inhumane deeds, to oblivion by calling it an internal security concern (see Levy 1996). These 'security concerns' provided the Jewish National Fund and the Israeli state a means to land seizure (Lehn 1988). By choosing not to represent these controversial histories, the museum is complicit in their obfuscation.

It is an odd contradiction that the museum, which immortalizes the Bedouin as nomad, also contains a shrine to the Jewish National Fund (JNF), which was the most effective tool in their sedentarization. The JNF was responsible for most of the seizures of Palestinian land. The JNF used the excuse that 'absentee landlords' did not have the right to own land, often when the owners, the so-called present-absentees, had been forced off by the military authority. It is no surprise then that both the kibbutz and the museum are on JNF land. In this context, the JNF's much quoted motto of 'making the deserts bloom' can be understood as a serious aspect of the state-building project of Zionism. The realization that Palestine was not a 'land without a people,' and that many Palestinians could not be convinced to leave their land, necessitated a way of removing Palestinian land rights. The JNF provided such a tool (Lehn 1988).

In connection to land rights and seizures, the second objection concerned an explanation of the 'tribal' origins of the Bedouin. The museum placards state that most Bedouin migrated to Palestine approximately 250 years ago from the *Ḥijāz* (now Saudi Arabia). Whether true or not, one man argued,

the political effect is a removal of their claims to their land. The work of Clinton (Yitzhak) Bailey, an Israeli academic consultant to the Col. Joe Alon Museum of Bedouin Culture, has been primarily concerned with dating the arrival of the Bedouin to the Negev and Sinai deserts. An examination of Bailey's writing and its representation in the museum indicates a significant discrepancy. Bailey argues that the earliest migrations of Bedouin to the Sinai and Negev occurred more than 1,375 years ago, prior to the advent of Islam (*Hijra*) in the seventh century, which contrasts the museum's dating of the mid-eighteenth century (Bailey 1985:20-21).

Clearly the museum is inaccurate, but considering the close relationship between Bailey and the museum,[13] I can only assume that this was a conscious decision on the part of both curators and academic advisors. This misrepresentation is of significance, not only for the political reasons outlined by my informants, but also as the creation of a Bedouin 'ethnic' group separated from other Palestinians. What both the museum and Bailey fail to acknowledge is the constant movement between peasant-hood and nomadism.[14] As has been pointed out by Fenster (1991:101-116), there exist within the so-called Bedouin tribes former slaves from Africa (*ʿabēd*) and former Palestinian or Egyptian peasants who became nomads. What then can be said about the museum and Bailey's calculation of the age of Bedouin roots in Palestine? Certainly that these estimations are inaccurate and more importantly, are informed by political goals. By creating an autonomous Bedouin identity, the relationship between Bedouin and Palestinian is obfuscated.

The differences between Palestinian and Bedouin are of recent origin, having a basis in the British and Israeli policy of divide and conquer. To see the Bedouin as external, and not Palestinian, is historically, culturally, and economically inaccurate. As Eickelman (1981:73-94) has pointed out, an economic analysis and understanding of the Middle East is contingent upon an understanding of the interdependency of city, rural (peasant), and pastoral (Bedouin) production. Bedouin does not mean a specific nation, ethnicity or race. Rather, it connotes a specific strategy for living. No one would deny

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[13]I spoke with Bailey at the museum, as he was examining the very placard I describe, yet he seemed indifferent to its inaccuracy, despite my inquiries.

[14]I suspect that much of the problem here is Bailey's methodology. Bailey takes oral histories (of things which happened, according to him, between 250 and 1,400 years ago!) and poetry literally, rather than understanding them as part of an ideological system. In addition, he apparently does not realize that 'Bedouin identity' is a social construction, filled with contradictions like any other 'identity.'

that a French peasant is French, despite differences in life-styles between Parisians and villagers in Provence. Peasants in Palestine are as Palestinian as a person living in a city such as Hebron. Why are Bedouin denied this? It is of paramount importance to realize that the conceptualization of a Bedouin identity is recent and of political origins. Indeed, according to the standard Arabic-English dictionary the noun *'arab* means: "Arabs; true Arabs, Arabs of the desert, Bedouin" (Wehr 1961:601).

In the wake of the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the creation of a discrete Bedouin identity separated from other Palestinians may differentiate "good Arabs (the ones who do as they are told) and bad Arabs (who do not, and are therefore terrorists)" (Said 1978:306). Indeed, it is frequently remarked that the Bedouin are 'good Arabs,' (certainly not 'good Palestinians') since they, allegedly, retain their traditional hospitality, and do not challenge the authority of the Israeli state. Through the creation of these independent 'ethnicities,' which is reflected by the museum's display, a Bedouin identity is created and legitimized.

The last objection on the part of these Bedouin concerned the inability of material culture to represent an entire culture. One man asked: "Are they really worried about coffee pots and sheep, or is that what we are to them?" Differentiating 'material' culture from 'ideological' culture questions the very validity of this museum's representation. Most, if not all, 'cultural' museums use material culture to describe communities. Yet, ultimately, is this an adequate form of representation? For the Bedouin, it is not. As I have argued, the term Bedouin refers to a life-style. Material culture reifies the distinctions between Bedouin and Palestinian. Shared cultural characteristics are minimized in the museum's display. For instance, language and religion[15] are barely mentioned. Market interactions between peasants, city dwellers, and Bedouin are minimized, and are inaccurately portrayed as occurring only between Bedouin. How can the similarities between peasant, city dweller and Bedouin be displayed? This cannot be done through material culture, for it speaks more of day-to-day modes of survival than any other form of culture. Indeed, it may be argued that the museum's concentration on materials relating to nomadism, such as tents and camel and horse tack, further reifies these separations. The Bedouin in Israel are no longer nomadic. As tents and camels disappear, and as the Bedouin become

[15]The museum houses a re-creation of a 'Sheikh's Tomb,' as the site of pilgrimage to worship an 'unofficial' saint. This stresses the difference between 'Bedouin religion' and 'Standard' Sunni Islam, furthering the distinctions between Palestinians and Bedouin.

sedentary, the differences between life-styles disappears. The display of women's embroidered dresses (*thob*) inaccurately suggests that they are a uniquely Bedouin folk art. These embroidered dresses are to be found throughout Palestine, where differences in embroidery pattern signify differences in region, kin, class and fashion. Most of these embroidered dresses sold as Bedouin handicraft in the Jerusalem tourist market or the Be'er Sheva Thursday market are actually made by peasants from Gaza or the West Bank. The museum's concentration on material culture of the past continues the distinctions between peasant and nomad, even if they are of little relevance today.

As these Bedouin suggest, the museum does not concern itself with their present, less 'noble' situation. When confronted on this issue, the curator remarked that when it was deemed necessary to deal with the present, it would be done. However, she was quick to point out that the museum is apolitical, attempting to avoid issues of contention. Had a group of critical Bedouin stepped forward, and agreed to work with the museum, the curator suggested that changes could be discussed. The conversation which began this essay was an outcome of this discussion, implying that the representations of Israeli 'subordinates' in this museum are not only state propaganda irreconcilable with reality, they are also extremely pervasive.

The pervasiveness of these representations are well demonstrated by a brief discussion of the Bedouin Heritage Center, a second museum of Bedouin culture located in the nearby Bedouin city of Rahat. Unlike the Col. Joe Alon Museum of Bedouin Culture, the Bedouin Heritage Center is run by Bedouin. Both museums are primarily concerned with Bedouin material culture of the past. The Bedouin Heritage Center in Rahat makes no attempt at textual historical representation. Rather, it relies upon a representation of cultural 'heritage' through displays of weavings, folk art, camel tack, and clothing. Indeed, even the architecture of the Rahat museum appears to be in the shape of a caravanserai (*Khān*), an open-roofed structure with smaller closed rooms around the sides, which in a begone era served as a rest-area for travelers. This museum, run by a Rahat resident, is in practice no different from the Col. Joe Alon Museum of Bedouin Culture. Both museums reify Bedouin identity, and locate it within a 'noble' past. Both museums are essentially dependent upon profit derived from visitors for operating costs, and both museums appeal to stereotypical visions of Bedouin hospitality and 'primitive' culture to attract visitors. The difference then, is not to be located either within museum economy, or

within the representation of a partial and idealized vision of history. Indeed, there are few, if any differences. Is this false consciousness? The appropriation of dominant discourse as resistance? Or the use of Orientalist stereotypes to 'make a shekel'? Clearly, the pervasiveness of these representations is problematic, for they seem to be equally wide-spread in both Israeli and Palestinian run museums. The similarities between these museums must be seen in the context of class interests. The Bedouin Heritage Center is owned and run by a very wealthy Bedouin who is featured in a film, which is available but rarely shown, at the Col. Joe Alon Museum of Bedouin Culture as an example of the success of 'modernization.' Thus, museum representation in Israel can reveal not only racial and ethnic hierarchies, but also class structure.

While most Bedouin are highly critical of both museums, they are often used by a younger (male) generation, who were only children during sedentarization, as a means of exploring the life which their parents lived. They have no illusions that they or their children will one day return to nomadic life, nor do they desire to do so. It is, importantly, this younger, museum-going generation that has re-established ties with other Palestinians. For all their flaws and politically informed misinformation, these museums are understood as a reminder of times long past. For those who have never lived in a tent or herded animals, the age of nomadism appears as a past age to be remembered as a criticism of the present.

I found through my observations and interactions with non-Arab visitors that none of these guests questioned the accuracy of the Col. Joe Alon Museum of Bedouin Culture. Their understanding of the Bedouin reflected preconceived notions which the museum made no attempt to correct. For example, I heard several very telling comments, recorded after the visitors had toured the museum. The first was a comment by an Israeli tour guide to a group of primarily British tourists. A tourist commented on the coolness of the tent in which they were sitting, and the Israeli guide responded by saying, "The life style they live we think is stupid, but it's natural." The same tour guide made a joke about a Bedouin (who was sitting next to the guide, but did not speak English) buying one of the female tourists for twenty camels. In response, this tourist said in all earnestness that she would like to live in nature like the Bedouin. Clearly, the museum did not dispel or question the romanticization of the Bedouin or 'primitive' culture.

The museum did not familiarize visitors with recent Bedouin culture and history. The Israeli children I spoke with after having toured the museum appeared to have almost no knowledge of recent Bedouin life. One adolescent girl asked if there was 'Bedouin Money,' indicating that she had no idea that the Bedouin are part of the Israeli economy and are citizens of the state. Many visitors also inquired how the Bedouin earn money, again indicating that the museum did not clarify that many Bedouin live, like much of the world, through wage-labor. Most tourists were surprised that there are schools and educated Bedouin. In sum, the visitors were unaware that the Bedouin's day-to-day existence is quite similar to their own. For those who looked closely and noticed that the Bedouin are 'modernizing,' modernization means progress and equality, and not the creation of a racialized under-class. Most Palestinians live in poverty and exist on the lowest rung of the Israeli class-structure.

## History and Myth, Nation and Tribe: An Analysis

As mentioned above, the museum also houses a re-creation of a Palestinian peasant 'cave-dwelling.' Like the museum's representation of Bedouin, these 'cave-dwellings' make peasants look 'primitive' by ignoring other aspects of their lives and cultures. Why represent peasants using caves and not houses? Perhaps the answer is one of the state's interest in creating a 'primitive Other.' As Smadar Lavie's quote at the beginning of this article suggests, the Bedouins are understood, in dominant Israeli thought, as savages and relics from another time, perhaps even as the remains of the Israelite tribes who escaped Pharaonic bondage and wandered in the desert for 40 years (Lavie 1990:8). Undoubtedly the museum capitalizes on this image, catering to visitors who come to see the 'primitive' and leave without questioning their misconceptions. The visitors are able to do so because the history of the Bedouin since 1947 has been ignored.[16] Rather, their history consists of mythological 'tribal' origins. In contrast, the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora in Tel Aviv articulates specific historical occurrences in the context of a Jewish 'nation.' Thus, in these museums the differences between Jews and Arabs are the differences between history and myth, and the differences between nation and tribe.

These binary oppositions, tribe and nation, myth and history speak not only of the false division

[16]This would be the case for Bedouin of the Negev, in the Galilee region the process began with the British Mandate (Falah 1983). Smadar Lavie suggests that the process began in the Sinai during the early part of this century (1990:5). However, in light of other sedentarizations in the Middle East, this seems too early. I suspect that it would be more accurate to begin with the second Israeli occupation of the Sinai in 1967.

between modernity and tradition, but also to the colonial legacy of anthropology. Seeing tribes or ethnic groups as proto-nations (see Smith 1986), constructs a world where the primitive and the modern coexist. If tribes are understood as 'primitive,' and therefore somehow less capable of self-rule than nations, then the delineation of tribe and nation is a political act. Indeed, to see that this division is essentially political, one need only look to Stalin's definition of the nation;[17] a tool used to legitimize Soviet state expansionism. The division of myth and history creates two incompatible cultural forms. Myth is seen as some 'pre-scientific' form of history. Again, divisions between modern and primitive inform these distinctions, making them political acts.

I take the juxtapositions of history with myth, and nation with tribe as a starting point for my analysis.[18] These terms are a crude opposition derived from the museum's representation of Palestinian and (implicitly) Israeli. I suggest that the opposition of tribal myth with national history is one which says a great deal not only about the current situation of the Bedouin and other Palestinians, but also reveals a crucial aspect of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Fit into larger issues of class formation and racial or ethnic hierarchies in Israel, this opposition has two contradictory implications. The opposition of myth with history, and nation with tribe can certainly be understood as a denial of the Palestinians' status as a colonized minority with legitimate national aspirations. In addition, by turning Israelis into a nation, individual Israeli histories are denied, homogenizing Israeli experiences. This is particularly relevant in the wake of recent criticism that official Israeli history hides the relationship between the immigration of non-Western Jews and the creation of a racialized Israeli under-class (see Shohat 1988; Shafir 1996) However, it is clear that this homogenizing tendency does not play out within an 'official history' of the Palestinians. Rather, Palestinians are broken into tribes and factions, having no internal cohesion or epicenter of power. My reading of the characterization of these two groups through museum representation presents two opposing images: Israelis are united and homogeneous, while Palestinians are disunited and factional.

This analysis, however, is incomplete. The relationships between non-Western Jews and Palestinians as well as their position within Israeli class-structure and racial or ethnic hierarchies are not

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[17]"A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make up manifested in a common culture" (Stalin 1994)

[18]I define both tribe and myth in nonstandard ways, using them more as heuristic devices than objects of study.

only relevant to this analysis, they are essential. I have described the Bedouin in isolation, which serves to reify their identity as an ethnic group. While I have argued that the Bedouin are, historically, culturally, and economically, part of Palestinian society, the class-based similarities between Palestinians and non-Western Jews in Israel remain unexplored. The vast majority of social research in Israel has isolated Palestinians and non-Western Jews from one another by virtue of their different ethnic and political identities. Recent writings however, argue that the ethnic and class-based inequalities of non-Western Jews and Palestinians must be understood in relation to one another, not isolation. Plantation owners' 'importation' of cheap, non-Western Jewish labor from the Yemen in the early part of this century, and later from the rest of the Middle East, began the modern formation of racialized hierarchies and class structure in Israel (Shafir 1996:91-122). Thus, non-Western Jews and Palestinians in Israel are historically and economically linked through the construction of a segmented working class, divided by ethnic or racial identities. Therefore, an analysis of representation not only reveals the processes by which the Bedouins are isolated from other Palestinians, it also alludes to the means by which the Bedouins are isolated from the rest of the Israeli working class.

## Conclusion

I understand this museum's representation of the Bedouin as part of a larger effort to create a separate Bedouin identity. By refusing to acknowledge the tripartite model of Levantine lives, the museum's representation constructs a fragmented Arab existence which can be construed as a denial of Palestinian nationhood. This denial reaffirms the decree that Palestine was a 'land without a people,' and that this land should be populated by a 'people without a land.' In a similar vein, understanding the 'Jewish nation' as homogenous denies the essential inequality between Western and non-Western Israelis. Thus, for a state such as Israel, torn between internal inequalities and external hostilities, the construction of identities is of paramount importance, for they legitimize, naturalize and obfuscate day-to-day inequalities.

These inequalities underpin and define representation. It is no coincidence that Palestinians are depicted as the 'primitive' Other in Israel, nor is it a coincidence that the inequalities between *Mizraḥim* and *Ashkinazim* are hidden behind a veneer of nationhood. It is in the best interest of the state to keep

these 'Others,' both Arab and Jew, in check. In an economy where profit is based upon the creation and exploitation of cheap labor, and where the working class is racially or culturally defined, it becomes clear that the manufacture of identity is linked not only to ideological formations, but also to the economic and material needs of the state. If, as Gramsci has argued, hegemony serves to legitimate relations of inequality, and in turn is legitimated by those very relations, then the nexus of these connections is the state (Gramsci 1971).

The representation of the Bedouin, or of any group, cannot be contextualized until the framework is enlarged to incorporate ideology, economy, and the state. The objections of these Palestinians to their 'tribal' origins and lack of recent history indicates that they are very much aware that more is at stake then 'misinformation.' To speak of representation outside of history, the state, ideology, class and race formation is meaningless. The Col. Joe Alon Museum of Bedouin Culture clearly reflects the state and classes which have created it. The opposition between nation and tribe, history and myth disguises racial, ethnic, and class formations in Israel and can be understood partially as a means of disguising the class and racial position shared by non-Western Jews and Arabs in Israel.

As Feminists realized in the 1970s, the solution to the problem is not to add the missing element, in this case Bedouin, and stir (di Leonardo 1991:6-10). Adding the 'voice' of the represented will not solve the problem. Representation is a complex reflection of social relationships. The solution to the so-called crisis of representation is not to be found in new means of representation. The solution of this crisis is only to be realized through the resolution of the complex social relations of inequality.

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