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## TOURISTS AND STRANGERS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

by Lyra Spang



*Chichen Itza has mystified people for hundreds of years... A three hour journey... takes you to the most breathtaking ruins in the Maya world. The climb up the famous pyramid named El Castillo will afford you the most magnificent views over the surrounding miles of lush jungle and across what was a thriving city over twelve hundred years ago. (Chichen Itza Tours <http://www.chichen-itza-tour.com/>)*

The international tourism industry is an extreme expression of the forces of globalization, temporarily bringing peoples together who in previous eras might not even have known of one another's existence. The "eco-cultural" tours offered at Chichen Itza (see above quote) exemplify the cultural tourism that explicitly focuses on exposing clients to a different culture, usually in another country from that of the tourists. This juxtaposition creates a dynamic space where different cultures, classes, nationalities, and identities interact in new and sometimes dramatic ways.

The multiple effects of international cultural tourism force us to rethink the role and the tools of anthropology as we search for ways to understand these temporally brief yet culturally critical encounters. Tourism provides an ideal place for anthropologists to explore key questions about identity production; "the other"; boundaries between different ethnic and cultural groups; and cultural exchange, change, and commoditization. All these topics bear on anthropological thinking and theory regarding questions of identity, power, human action/agency, and culture.

A focus on tourism—whether development or cultural heritage tourism—and on the cultural, environmental and socio-economic effects of tourism emerges from an examination of the recent anthropological lit-

erature. For example, archaeological work dealing with tourism includes discussions on how to simultaneously promote tourism and yet also preserve fragile historical structures for future generations. Socio-cultural anthropologists have explored the tourism industry's negative effects, especially the problem of competition over scarce resources and the concept of relative deprivation, comparing the tourists' economic status with that of the local population. Linguistic analysis can also be applied to the construction, commodification, and exoticization of "the other" cultures as seen in cultural tourism advertising.

### Archaeology and Tourism

Archaeologists have become increasingly preoccupied with tourism, as the industry's growth has led to more and more sites being evaluated, excavated, and presented specifically for tourist consumption. In the 1970s, archaeology focused on the formation of general laws and paid little attention to the political and ethical implications of archaeological work. In recent years more socially aware and critically engaged forms of archaeology have emerged. For example, archaeologist Dean Saitta argues for an "explanatory, emancipatory archaeology" that engages with contemporary populations who have a stake in the site being researched (Saitta 2007). Similarly, Quetzil Castañeda raises the question of stakeholders, local groups that have a vested interest in or connection with an archaeological



site, and holds that they should be consulted and involved in the research that affects them (Castañeda 2008).

Castañeda's argument in favor of stakeholder involvement expresses concerns regarding ownership of heritage and diversity of voice in decision-making processes. Similar issues are raised in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) law that requires archaeologists working in the United States to respect Native American stakeholder wishes with regards to ancestral remains. Some archaeologists feel that NAGPRA, rather than being a stumbling block for archaeological research, provides an opportunity to build a positive and mutually beneficial relationship with Native American stakeholders (Dongoske 2000). Applying this cooperative approach to a broader context, both within and outside of the United States, is the goal of pro-engagement archaeologists.

Do archaeologists have a responsibility towards the way archaeological sites are marketed, especially if local stakeholders do not benefit from the tourist promotion? Do archaeologists have the power or the responsibility to address such issues as the flow of Mexican government funds into their field region? What, Traci Ardren asks, is the archaeologist's role in cases where sites may be misrepresented to the public in order to increase tourist revenue or where local stakeholders are denied access to tourism revenue that stems from an excavation. Is the archaeologist morally obligated to try to ensure that the site is accurately represented or that the local people benefit from its excavation and public use as a tourist attraction? (Ardren 2004).

The response of archaeologists to the reality of tourism has been varied. Many archaeologists now engage in outreach activities such as local educational projects and excavation site tours, attempting to ensure that both local stakeholders and government authorities appreciate the importance of a site beyond its potential to attract tourist revenue. Some archaeologists, especially those working in their home countries, have gone further, helping communities secure funds and build site museums to retain valuable archaeological artifacts in the region in an effort to develop local pride in the region's history and reap economic benefits through tourism and other activities. Archaeologists interested in how their discipline can serve living stakeholders' needs are vocal about and active in draw-

ing local communities into their work through education, outreach, and collaboration. They may even select or develop certain research projects in response to or in cooperation with involved stakeholders.

But when working in a foreign country, archaeologists rarely have the power or authority to persuade government officials to change tourist development projects so as to include the local people. In Mexico's Mundo-Maya ("World of the Maya") region, where Chichen Itza is located, archaeology, tourism, and ethics intertwine within the context of a Mexican tourism industry that inevitably benefits from the presence of spectacular monuments. In this region, the state tourism agency is closely linked to archaeological work specifically aimed at developing tourism sites. It is from such sites that important artifacts are often removed to the capital, leaving no development benefit for local populations. Archaeologist Tracy Ardren and others ask how and why it is that contemporary indigenous peoples are so often excluded from the economic and social benefits of the prehistoric sites that their ancestors built.

Many archaeologists consider their role to be necessarily limited by political, financial, and academic realities, but urge their fellow academics to take what steps they can to ensure that their sites are not misused, and that they bring benefit to the local people.

### **Socio-cultural and Linguistic Aspects of Tourism**

International tourism's peculiar form of global encounter challenges anthropologists to reconsider the nature of international forces shaping people's identity, culture, economic development, and experiences of inequality. Within this context, international tourism acts as a catalyst for producing, maintaining, and transforming identities, often fostering cross-cultural comparison, adoption, and exchange not only of money and material goods but of ideas, identities, and conceptualizations of the self and others. Unlike the flow of goods, information, and money commonly associated with globalization, the movement of tourists typically involves a high degree of face-to-face cultural interaction. Tourism creates a distinctive inter-cultural space where geographically disparate groups temporarily observe and interact with each other in what is often a carefully-structured but also power-saturated and unequal environment.

Anthropologists and other social scientists have strongly critiqued the implicit assumption that tourism always brings benefits to local populations. Some anthropologists have focused on how disparities of wealth and power are highlighted when cultural tourism fosters encounters between rich tourists and relatively poor local peoples. Tamar Wilson discusses the various effects of tourism on socio-economic, cultural, and environmental realities in Latin America, arguing that the economic disparities that commonly exist between tourists and locals in places like Mexico “produce a de facto economic apartheid” (Wilson 2008: 15).

One result of this conspicuous economic disparity is the “demonstration effect”: a sense of resentment by locals towards tourists combined with a desire to enjoy the same luxuries and advantages (Wilson 2008). The demonstration effect is closely linked to a sense of relative deprivation on the part of the economically less well-off members of the tourist encounter. Wilson claims that cultural or “ethnic” tourism can be described as exploitative by default because “tourists from core capitalist countries cast their gaze on indigenous, often poverty stricken peoples with little political power...” (Wilson 2008: 16). Malcom Crick argues that tourists visit developing countries because such vacations are cheap, thus directly exploiting the poverty and low wages of the host country and its citizens (Crick 2002).

### Tourism and Development

Some anthropologists examine how the contribution and effects of tourism on local economies and cultures can be improved. A topic of particular interest is the intersection between tourism and development. Brazilian anthropologists Roberto Bartholo, Mauricio Delamaro, and Ivan Bursztyn note that not all tourism is equal, and that smaller-scale tourism projects that directly involve local communities are much more likely to benefit marginalized groups than are large-scale resort developments, especially if the latter are internationally owned. The international tourism industry, however, continues to favor large projects and foreign investment by the “global elite.” This results in fewer benefits for local peoples and the concentration of tourist development in key regions, leaving others deprived of tourism revenue.



*Tourists at Chichen Itza. Photo courtesy Traci Ardren.*

Within this context of conspicuous consumption and economic disparity, the capacity of tourism to fundamentally alter conceptualizations of the self and the “other” should not be underestimated. The temporary proximity of “tourist” and “local” allows for the close comparison of different lives, identities, economic statuses, cultures, and values. Participants in the tourist space exchange, contest, adopt, transform, and reconstruct identity markers and

*(continued)*

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draw conclusions about the identity, culture, and relative economic status and power of both themselves and others. Both tourists and locals are exposed, via the tourism encounter, to “the other.” The power dynamics of such exposure are unequal from the outset. Aside from the common experience of economic disparity and accompanying differentials in power, local groups that are objects of visitor interest suffer from the exoticizing stereotypes of tourist industry advertising that prefigure tourist expectations about the “other.” According to Toby Alice Volkman, under this tourist “gaze,” the question of who defines cultural “authenticity” becomes fraught with power struggles as different stakeholders seek to determine the form and expression of the marketed group’s cultural identity (Volkman 1990).

Benedict Anderson’s concept of imagined communities provides a useful way to look at the new connections that are forged in some cultural tourism encounters (Anderson 1983). Because of tourism, people from Wisconsin and the highlands of Ecuador who would otherwise never meet may form connections that bridge cultures and continents and create new cross-cultural but imagined communities. Thus cultural tourism fosters encounters that result in both increased separation between different culture groups and a struggle over identity ownership and forging of new cross-cultural linkages. This results in some cases in the creation of new imagined communities that can span substantial geographic space.

### **Tourist Advertising**

Tourist advertising comprises a transnational, cross-cultural genre whose lingua franca is usually English and whose objective is the commodification and sale of people and places deemed appropriate for tourist consumption. Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of speech genres as being defined by their “own relatively stable types of utterances” is easily applied to the cultural tourism industry, where semantics and framing are important tools used in marketing the tourist product (Bakhtin 1986: 60). Although advertising may differ depending on the tourists’ background, for the most part the genre is amazingly homogenous despite its broad global dissemination. The messages and meanings of this tourist advertising function to create a cultural commodity palatable to the targeted tourist groups.

Cultural tourism is especially known for its exoticization of different groups via images and words that essentialize the cultures being commoditized. The tourist is presented with a coherent package of exotic otherness, enticingly described in a way that implies adventure, a dive into “the other,” and often, a trip back in time. Key words such as “exotic,” “native,” “natural,” “traditional,” “untouched,” and “ancient” help to focus on an image of “the other” that contrasts sharply with the tourist’s own personal identity.

Most tourists participating in cultural tourism are relatively well off and from developed, westernized countries. The construction of the exotic other as a primordial, natural being from the past is juxtaposed against the supposedly “modern,” “cosmopolitan,” and “urban” (or at least suburban) tourist. This implicit contrast is a fundamental component of the cultural tourism genre. For the tourist, the attraction lies in the “otherness” and the exotic nature of a place and its inhabitants. In order to adhere to the requirements of cultural tourism advertising, traces of modernity or signs of cosmopolitan identity are removed. Native peoples are always dressed in traditional garb, forests are described as “untouched,” temples as “ancient,” and local customs as “traditional.” Words and images are combined to create a timeless exotic sense of place, which represents a previous, more “natural” era, always in contrast to the tourist’s modern, hectic, and sophisticated life.

By creating and then juxtaposing the backwards, traditional, untouched, natural past represented by the tourist attraction—be it a culture group, an archaeological site, or a natural setting—with the modern, cosmopolitan, developed present embodied by the tourist, cultural tourism advertising emphasizes the exotic nature of what is being sold. At the same time, such advertising maintains the image of the tourist as modern and progressive.

The tourist advertising genre is found everywhere that tourism takes place. For the Mundo Maya region mentioned earlier, Ardren describes the “double whammy” of the simultaneous exoticization of gender and “the indigenous other” used formulaically by the Mexican state tourism agency in its advertisements (Ardren 2004: 108-111). Images of indigenous women, often partially nude, are juxtaposed with pictures of jaguars and Mayan ruins, explicitly linking today’s indigenous people with the past and with nature, and simultaneously divorcing them from any participation in the modern present.

## The Tourist “Gaze”

Linguistic ideologies play an important role in the framing of the generic traits of tourist advertising. Volkman and Adams discuss an example of this in their analysis of cultural tourism and the Toraja people of Indonesia (Adams 1997; Volkman 1990). Volkman describes what she calls the “tourist gaze.” This gaze, the result of the contrast between “modern” and “traditional” created by tourist advertising, reflects the ideologies behind the tourist industry that create stereotyped images of native or local peoples as natural and pre-modern. The way that the tourist advertising genre is deployed in Tana Toraja emphasizes the powerful position of the modern, westernized tourist and denies modernity to local inhabitants, who are objectified and marginalized as “primitive” and “traditional” (Adams 1997: 312).

The local groups, however, are not passive and often fight back against such stereotyping, albeit in sometimes subtle and indirect ways. Often people will try to distance themselves from the exoticized images of the tourist trade. By drawing tourist attention to the aspects of their identity that do not fit with the image portrayed by tourism advertising, these heavily marketed culture groups assert their own identities and express their own abilities to act for themselves (a phenomenon often called “agency” in current anthropological literature).

Alexis Celeste Bunten describes an example of “agency” in her analysis of native Alaskan tour guides. Arguing that culture itself must be simplified for tourist consumption, she details how the local tour guides both use and resist the imposition of what she calls a “commodified persona” (Bunten 2008: 386 and 381). Because their jobs as tour guides require them to express a stereotyped image of native Alaskan culture in order to achieve their economic goals, resistance to certain strands of the tourist narrative takes place covertly. As Bunten puts it, “...Native guides have the power to choose how to respond to the tourist gaze” (Bunten 2008: 382). They strike a delicate balance between emphasizing the grand history of the Tlingit people and selling tours on the strength of their cultural “authenticity” as Tlingit natives. At the same time, they attempt to ensure that tourists understand that the Tlingit people do not exist solely in a romanticized past, but also in the contemporary and modern American present. Guides

actively situate themselves in the modern day through references to television, business ownership, the Internet, and other aspects of mainstream American culture (Bunten 2008).

Bunten gives an example of how a guide displays “traditional” Tlingit knowledge within a modern frame. “Discussing local bear sightings on a tour, one guide explained that bears eat salmon berries, blueberries and huckleberries, but a major part of their diet comes from salmon. ‘They will rip the heads off and eat the fatty part of the body. They will eat 35 to 40 salmon a day until they reach what they call their fat content and then they will go into a waking hibernation and then into sleeping hibernation. Do you want to know where I learned all of that from? The Discovery Channel!’”

In telling this joke, this guide positions herself as someone who learns about nature by watching television (just like the tourists) rather than by an innate oneness with nature or through the lessons about bears offered by a wizened elder, observes Bunten (2008: 390). The tour guides depend financially upon the commodification, exoticization, and marketing of their culture and personal identity to interested tourists. Through jokes and other indirect methods, they simultaneously present a “commodified persona” and subvert the tourist advertising genre, asserting themselves as both Tlingit AND modern Americans.



*Tourists watching folk dances near Chichen Itza. Photo courtesy Traci Ardren.*

In Tana Toraja, Indonesia, tourism focuses on the elaborate funeral rites of the local population. Funerals are advertised to tourists the way festivals are in other parts of the world: joyous occasions of authentic cultural expression that a visitor should not miss (Adams 1997). Some people have altered their funeral rites to emphasize their Christianity, Western efficiency, and international connections, thus affirming their participation in globalized (Westernized) life as modern and cosmopolitan actors (Adams 1997). Their reasons for doing so recognize the colonially rooted fact that "Christianity... carried the prestige of world religion as opposed to primitive, backward, animist, locally rooted paganism" (Volkman 1990: 93).

Kathleen Adams explains how an important funeral in 1997 drew three very different audiences: locals, international tourists, and government officials from Java. The family faced a dilemma as to how to demonstrate social status and enact a meaningful ceremony while also presenting Toraja culture and identity to outsiders (Adams 1997). To avoid the usual stereotypes of primitive paganism long leveled against the Toraja and their elaborate funeral rites, the family assigned Adams as their personal anthropologist to greet the dignitaries and explain the ceremony to them (Adams 1997). Adams was explicitly instructed to emphasize the funeral's Christian nature, to downplay the elements that referenced long abandoned practices such as slavery and to emphasize the charitable nature of the large-scale sacrifices of buffalo, which were often deemed wasteful by government officials (Adams 1997: 313-16).

By using an academic outsider to disseminate their message, the family both demonstrated their high status and ensured that the officials would interpret the funeral in a way that reinforced the family's modern, cosmopolitan identity. At the same time the funeral remained an important cultural event for the family as Toraja people and an "authentic" experience for participating tourists.

## Conclusion

Cultural tourism challenges the discipline of anthropology through its politicized nature; its close relationship with archaeological sites; and its offering of new opportunities for examining cross-cultural processes of contact, identity formation, group boundary maintenance, and cultural exchange. Resistance to the stereotyping of tourism advertising

provides another focus for new research. Future work should more clearly illustrate the effects of international tourism on identity creation and change. Archaeologists will continue to face challenges and opportunities for pro-active engagement as tourism industries drive and co-opt archaeological research and develop sites for tourist consumption. Examining the use of language in tourism advertising opens up research for linguistic anthropologists interested in the intersections among language, culture, and identity. International tourism provides a new and dynamic space for anthropological research that will challenge and stimulate archaeological, socio-cultural, and linguistic anthropology for years to come.

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*Lyra Spang earned a Masters Degree in the Anthropology of Development from George Washington University and is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Anthropology at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana.*

## GOING NATIVE: THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS ADVOCATE

by Robert M. Laughlin



In 1989 after studying the Tzotzil Maya culture of Chiapas, Mexico for almost thirty years, I decided to become an advocacy anthropologist and helped create the Tzotzil-Tzeltal cultural cooperative Sna Jtz'ibajom, The House of the Writer, in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas.

The House of the Writer cooperative has published many bilingual books, hosted national and international conferences, and provides courses in native literacy. Its Teatro Lo'il Maxil, Monkey Business Theatre, is world-renowned. I have translated into English a dozen of their plays, written in Spanish, which revive ancient beliefs and confront current social, economic, and political issues (Laughlin, 2008). These plays were not purely Tzotzil-Tzeltal because often I participated in crafting their texts and settings (see website listed on page 9).

The House of the Writer was and is a unique organization for the State of Chiapas and perhaps for all of Mexico in that it was founded, administered, and staffed by Indians. One ladino (mestizo) member of the group aided (and still aids) in organizing trips, contacting government institutions for financial aid, and helping in various ways to carry out the group's mission. In recognition of my role in helping to found the cooperative, I was awarded

the State of Chiapas Science Prize in 2002.

I first came to Chiapas as a member of Evon Z. Vogt's Harvard Chiapas Project. All project members were required to learn the Mayan language spoken in the town under investigation. In my case it was the Tzotzil language with the dialect used in the town of San Lorenzo Zinacantán.

I resolved to immerse myself in Zinacantán's culture, adopting their clothing and following, as best I could, their way of life. This was a great challenge, for at that time the importance of virtually any dialogue was strictly measured by the quantity and quality, i.e. strength, of the *pax* or cane liquor that was offered and shared by two people. Many a night of fieldwork ended with me in an inebriated state!

My original focus was on folk tales (Laughlin 1977) and dreams (Laughlin 1976). I made a large collection of each in Tzotzil, along with my English translations. The next task – compiling a dictionary of the language spoken in Zinacantán – took 14 years as it was done before computers were used for this type of work. This dictionary, *The Great Tzotzil Dictionary of San Lorenzo Zinacantán*, when published in 1975, received Senator William Proxmire's



*Jaguar addresses toad.*

Golden Fleece Award for “absurd waste of federal funds.” It was at the time the most comprehensive dictionary that existed of a Native American language. It was also through this work that I came to know the deeply paternalistic Tzotzil and Tzeltal cultures.

Because of the paternalistic nature of the Tzotzil culture, even in the 1990s it was revolutionary for women to be accorded equal status in the cooperative and theater that I helped the people develop. The cooperative, in fact, made sure early on that there was an equal number of female and male members. In the beginning, the women found it difficult to express their views in the cooperative meetings. When the women first performed in San Cristóbal de las Casas, they overheard male audience members accusing them of being prostitutes or lesbians. The men in the House of the Writer responded by electing a woman to be the group’s president, not just once but several times for several years.

Two of the female members of the cooperative, feeling that their voices were not heard by the men, resigned to form a new women’s cooperative, FOMMA (Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya or Strength of Mayan Women). Their theatre focuses on women’s issues, such as domestic abuse and economic disadvantages. They also provide native literacy courses, and, in addition, workshops in health education and job skills training such as breadmaking.

The theatre, which has performed in every corner of Chiapas, in Guatemala and Honduras, particularly appeals to the corn farmers in these countries. Especially popular is the play “When corn began to grow.” The performance shows how the gods, irritated by the way men ignored them and failed to give them offerings, decided to give them the job of raising corn for a living, a job that required heavy labor and constant attention through most of the year.

While this theatre’s most frequent audience is composed of fellow Indians, Mexican and foreign tourists are welcomed and offered an intimate view of the native culture.

A significant element of Tzotzil culture is the people’s deep knowledge of ethnobotany. It was not unusual for a native person to recognize and know the Tzotzil names for 500 plants. Accordingly, I enlisted Dennis E. Breedlove to make the scientific identifications. Our ethnobotany (Laughlin, Breedlove, 1993) has been described as the most comprehensive for any native culture.

Currently I am finalizing my translation of 42 folk tales that I recorded in 2007 in the colony of San Felipe in San Cristóbal. The storyteller, Francisca Hernández Hernández, is a grand-daughter of a Chamulan shaman and a Zinacantec lady. Many of her tales are, for me, new



versions of tales I earlier recorded in Zinacantán, while others are particular to San Felipe.

Hence I have come full circle, still working with folktales as I did in my early days as an anthropologist, but also working in collaboration with the Maya who have enriched my life in so many ways. I have tried to give back to this extraordinary culture by working with its people to help them support and transmit their traditions and language, while they also adapt to modern life. Anthropology has changed in many ways since I first entered the field in the 1960s. Perhaps my work as an advocacy anthropologist not only reflects the growing acceptance of such work within the discipline, but may even push the discipline to further change in these new directions.

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*Robert Laughlin is curator emeritus of the Smithsonian's Department of Anthropology.*

## BACKYARD ETHNOGRAPHY: STUDYING YOUR HIGH SCHOOL

by Carolyn Gecan and Amanda Hurowitz



Ethnographic fieldwork is a foundation block of cultural anthropology. The syllabi of introductory courses in cultural anthropology often include reading one or more of the ethnographic classics. Works such as Richard B. Lee's *The !Kung San: Men, Women, and Work in a Foraging Society*; Napoleon Chagnon's *Yanomano*; Colin M. Turnbull's *The Forest People*; or Elizabeth Marshall Thomas' *The Harmless People* can be found on many an undergraduate reading list. Professors who have experienced the challenges and joys of conducting research in the field enliven their lectures with data, anecdotes, and illustrations from their field work.

But how might a high school social studies or anthropology teacher, who has quite likely never experienced ethnographic field research first-hand, teach about it? How might that teacher provide a hands-on fieldwork experience that simulates the type of data gathering common to ethnographers in the field?

My colleague Amanda Hurowitz and I are history teachers who have grappled with these questions in the five years we have collaboratively taught an anthropology elective course at our high school in northern Virginia. Confronted with practical realities imposed by time constraints and budget—there's never enough time in a semester and rarely any funding for such “frills”—we have successfully implemented the project described below. A primary goal of this activity is encouraging students to investigate a macro culture by identifying and exploring the micro cultures within their high school community. They do this by employing a tool of anthropological fieldwork, the interview.

After reading the description of our project you might want to read about a similar activity discussed in “Fieldwork in the Classroom” by Martha Williams, a former Fairfax County Public School teacher. That article, originally published in the Winter 1981 issue of *AnthroNotes*, discusses anthropology students interviewing the students in an ESL class (English as Second Language) at a suburban high school in Northern Virginia with a large immi-

grant population. Appropriate timing for either of these activities would be after your students have been introduced to concepts associated with the study of culture, the nature of ethnographic fieldwork, and the role of participant observation in gathering data. The project described below fits comfortably into two 90 minute class periods, but can easily be expanded.

### **Fieldwork in Your School**

To prepare our students for the fieldwork experience, we begin with a brainstorming session. Encouraging students to think of the school as a micro-culture, we ask them to list questions that can help us learn more about our school's population. The brainstorm list is then vetted by removing questions that are insensitive, intrusive, too personal, or ethnocentric. Over the years, our students have consistently produced variations on the list of questions that Martha Williams' students created in 1981. Paraphrased, they are:

- What are the clubs, organizations, and sports teams to which you belong?
- How do these different organizations operate? What are the rules, written or unwritten, governing the behavior of the participants in each group?
- When you first joined these organizations, how did you identify or figure out their rules?

Additional inquiries we have used expand upon that platform:

- In what ways did you moderate or change your participation to fit in with the organization's traditions?
- How has your participation in clubs, organizations, and sports teams changed during your years in high school?
- What do you think are the contributions of such institutions to the life of the school community?

We urge our students to limit the length of their interview to about 10 to 15 minutes. Although the list of questions seems brief, many students report that their interviews extended well beyond the suggested time limit.

The class collaborates to construct a questionnaire that all will use in their research. Typically at the top of the

page are spaces to record basic information about the interview subject such as name, gender, and grade level. Beneath that data we include a reminder to ask the interview subject for permission to take notes on or to record the session. There is also space for the interview subject to sign or initial giving their permission. The remainder of the document consists of the interview questions with space beneath each one for notes on the subject's response. We urge our students to take notes even if they have opted to use a recording device to capture the conversation. A few students have chosen to video their interviews. In addition to allowing students who want to record or video tape their interview with the informant's permission, we also encourage our student ethnographers to take a photo, if their informant agrees. All students are required to bring their interview notes, transcripts, and photos to class on the due date.

We also work on helping our students build confidence about conducting interviews. For some, this type of data gathering is new. Practicing briefly on each other within the safety of their own classroom is a good first step. Questionnaires in hand, the class divides into pairs or trios to practice asking the questions and taking notes on responses. Everyone gets a chance to be both interviewer and subject. Following the practice session, the class is assembled to discuss the students' observations about the process and the answers they received. It is also a good time to answer questions about the assignment.

Identifying a subject to interview is a big hurdle faced by our budding "ethnographers." We urge them to find a subject with whom they are comfortable, but we once again use the brainstorm technique to widen our horizons beyond the level of immediate acquaintances. Since we are doing this research in order to gain insights into our school as a culture, the entire population of the school community comes into play. Some students opt to interview acquaintances in their same grade because doing so keeps them within their comfort level. Others may be interested in talking with students in grades higher or lower than their own. Although we expect all of our students to attempt this assignment, we do not force any particular interview subject on anyone. We think that students exercising choice have a more satisfactory experience overall.

If you and your class are interested in developing a study of the whole school, then members of the adult

community should also be interviewed. We suggest brainstorming a separate questionnaire for use with teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, custodians, secretaries, security officers and cafeteria workers. Students who are comfortable taking on this pool of informants should be the ones to undertake this part of the project. The questions on this questionnaire might inquire into the nature of the person's job, how he or she learned about the job, what rules and regulations they follow, what are the important values and traditions the school represents, and what are their contributions to the school community.

The second class period, about a week after the interview, is the due date when all the interview data are brought to class for sharing and analysis. You might have one or two class periods for sharing. One way to stimulate thoughtful discussion is to begin with a writing activity based on the interview transcripts. We have used prompts such as

- What did you learn about your subject?
- What did you learn about yourself as an interviewer?
- What traditions, customs, and values of the school culture became apparent through the interview?
- What did you learn about doing an ethnographic fieldwork interview?

Transitioning from the writing activity to small group discussion allows students to discuss details from their interviews and their writings in a more intimate setting. They also are able to compare experiences. Groups then report out to the entire class. Another technique is to follow the writing activity with a seminar by seating the students in a discussion circle. Starting from the writing prompts, students in our classes have always been excited to talk about their discoveries.

We like to extend the "fieldwork" activities described above by discussing our school as a macro culture and figuring out if there are micro cultures within it. Since our school is a community of around 2,000 people, we always manage to identify several micro cultures. Commonly our students discover micro cultures that identify with certain places or activities within the school such as the SysLab (the systems lab dominated by computer programmers), the drama

department (which subdivides into "techies" and actors), and inter-mural sports practice areas (jocks subdivided by sport). There are also micro cultures that the students identify by club participation: Model UN, Quiz Bowl, Debate, Math Team, Islamic Alliance, and Fellowship of Christian Athletes—to name just a few of the numerous organizations present at our high school. We follow up by looking for evidence in our interview data of social hierarchies, initiation rites, gender roles, customs, and rituals within these micro cultures.

In conclusion, we have found the fieldwork project to be a very worthwhile activity for our anthropology students. In their end-of-course reviews this project stands out as a consistent favorite semester after semester.

#### NOTES:

1. The authors are indebted to the article "Fieldwork in the Classroom" by Martha Williams, a former Fairfax County Public School teacher. The article was originally published in the Winter 1981 issue of *AnthroNotes*, vol. 3, no. 1. Available online at [http://anthropology.si.edu/outreach/Teaching\\_Activities/pdf/ieldworkinClassroom2009.pdf](http://anthropology.si.edu/outreach/Teaching_Activities/pdf/ieldworkinClassroom2009.pdf)

2. For a different view of teaching the fieldwork process to university level students, see "Collaborative Ethnography" by Luke Eric Lassiter, published in *AnthroNotes*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Spring 2004.

[http://anthropology.si.edu/outreach/anthnote/anthronotes\\_2004spring.pdf](http://anthropology.si.edu/outreach/anthnote/anthronotes_2004spring.pdf)

3. A brief article about fieldwork that our students have enjoyed reading and discussing prior to commencing their own project is Richard B. Lee's "Eating Christmas in the Kalahari." First published in *Natural History*, December 1969, pp. 14-22, 60-64, this article can be downloaded in pdf format from several sites. <http://www.windward.hawaii.edu/facstaff/dagrossa-p/articles/EatingChristmas.pdf> Another article is George Gmelch's "Lessons from the Field." <http://home.earthlink.net/~youngturck/LessonsFromtheFieldArticle.htm>

4. To explore the ethics of conducting fieldwork, read an excerpt from Chapter 3, "Cases and Solutions," of Sue-Ellen Jacobs' *Handbook on Ethical Issues in Anthropology*, go to <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ch3.htm>

*AnthroNotes* editor Carolyn Gecan and Amanda Huowitz teach anthropology at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, Virginia .



## BEING A REFUGEE: HUMANITARIANISM AND THE PALESTINIAN EXPERIENCE

by Ilana Feldman



*“Someone put a piece of cheese in my pocket and sweets in the other pocket . . . . At that time, I felt myself as a strange beggar. I was 12 years old and I was crying. . . . The people there brought food to us like beggars. . . . Can you imagine how a man who lived in a great city such as Yaffa and then came to live in a tent and had nothing would feel? . . . It was humiliation and misery of the most horrible kind . . . . We lost everything, and we had never imagined we would experience such conditions.”*

[Daoud Ahmed, retired civil servant in Gaza, describing in 1999 his experience as a displaced Palestinian refugee in 1948 and his consternation and sense of degradation when, as a person used to caring for himself, he first received food aid. Both displacement and the humanitarian response to it have profound and long-lasting effects on the people who go through this experience.]

In 1948 approximately 750,000 Palestinians were displaced from their homes during the first Arab-Israeli war. Today, several generations later, there are 4.6 million Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees [UNRWA], the agency charged with providing assistance to Palestinians across the Middle East. The original refugees, displaced by war and its aftermath, traveled both to neighboring countries such as Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, and to the parts of Mandate Palestine that became the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The conditions in which these refugees live differ dramatically, depending on the laws that regulate possibilities for refugees (Lebanon is particularly restrictive), as well as the countries' political conditions (Iraq is a prime example of how changes in political circumstances can dramatically affect the Palestinian refugees' status). Yet, despite the different conditions and the length of time since the 1948 displacement, there is an undeniable feeling of community among this dispersed Palestinian population.

As an anthropologist, I am studying how communities and individuals create and maintain both identity and a sense of community in these conditions. A number of factors—social practices, family ties, religious convictions, and political organizing—have shaped the Palestinian community-in-exile. Humanitarianism also has shaped the Palestinians' sense of themselves and their community. Humanitarianism refers both to the provision of relief aid (food, clothing, housing, medical care, and education) and to the institutional mechanisms that make such delivery possible (administrative structures, ration card systems,

population categories, and international legal systems).

From the first months after the 1948 war, humanitarian agencies made decisions that have had long-term impacts on Palestinian society such as deciding who counted as a refugee and who did not, who got aid and who did not, how eligibility for refugee registration was passed down through generations, and what sorts of records were used to track people's status. At the same time, both the material artifacts of humanitarianism (rations and ration cards, tents, and clothing) and its discursive elements (the language of victims and compassion) provided tools through which Palestinians have sought to engage politically and to exert some influence over their lives.

The longevity of the Palestinian relief regime is distinctive, but the forms of humanitarian aid that this refugee population has received have been fairly typical and have influenced humanitarian practice in general during the post-World War II era. It is precisely because of the unusual length of their experience living within a humanitarian order that Palestinians offer an excellent window into understanding humanitarian practice over the past sixty years.

This paper focuses on one aspect of the Palestinian experience: the condition of being a refugee. There is no simple answer to the question: what is a refugee? A refugee is, variously, a legal/institutional category, an affective experience of displacement and loss, and a discursive creation. Understanding the refugee experience requires attention to each of these three facets.

## Refugee Law and Humanitarian Institutions

Displacement—the loss of home—is not a new feature of human experience. The existence of an internationally recognized category of persons called “refugees” and the international institutions that provide aid and protection for them are more recent phenomena. The first efforts to develop an international refugee regime occurred during the period between the two world wars when the League of Nations (precursor to the United Nations) established an office of High Commissioner for Refugees and issued travel documents known as “Nansen passports” (named after the first High Commissioner for Refugees who created them). During this period, refugee conventions were established to respond to particular displacements: Russians fleeing the aftermath of their country’s revolution, Armenian survivors of Turkish massacres, and other displaced European minority communities. Agreements extending protections to displaced persons defined refugees as a group of persons, specifically an ethnic group. To gain access to protections, an individual needed to prove that he or she was a member of a specific group. In this inter-war period, refugees became a subject of international concern, but there was not yet a universal definition of a refugee.

In the aftermath of World War II, and in the framework of the new United Nations, efforts were made to develop a more general definition of a refugee. These efforts culminated in the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. This Convention defined a refugee *as a person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.*

Despite the move from particular to general in refugee law, the Convention was, in fact, far from universal. Faced with the threat of limitless obligations to accept displaced persons, the drafters developed clearly specified parameters for acquiring refugee status (persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group) and limited the Convention’s applica-



*Palestinian refugees. Photo courtesy American Friends Service Committee [AFSC] Archives.*

bility to those who left their countries “as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951,” with individual signatories given the option of interpreting that clause to be limited to events in Europe or to include events elsewhere. It was not until the convention was amended in 1967 that temporal and geographic restrictions were removed. Even if the 1951 Convention was not immediately universal, it did mark a shift from identifying refugees as members of groups to identifying refugees as individuals (even if the cause of their persecution was their membership in a group).

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (the successor to the League of Nations’ office) is charged with responding to refugee crises worldwide. In many countries it adjudicates whether persons qualify for refugee status under the terms of the refugee conventions, though some countries, such as the United States, manage the adjudication process themselves. The UNHCR mission includes protection and assistance. Protection entails advocacy on behalf of displaced persons, working with states to strengthen laws on asylum and refugee status, and training for persons and institutions charged with these tasks. Assistance involves both emergency aid and longer-term projects such as infrastructure support and income generation ([www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)).

*(continued)*

## **The Palestinian Refugees**

Aid to Palestinians displaced in 1948 was shaped by the same principles that defined the new international refugee regime, particularly the crucial distinction between “refugee” and “citizen” that underpinned aid delivery. But it is important to note that Palestinians have an awkward place in this regime. After protracted discussions about the importance of acknowledging special UN responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem, as well as concerns about extending the convention beyond European populations, the 1951 Convention “temporarily” excluded Palestinian refugees. They did not come under the authority or protection of the UNHCR, but rather received aid from the separate United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East [UNRWA], which was established in 1950 ([www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org)). To the extent that Palestinians receive legal protection, and it is a very limited extent, this protection is derived from UN resolution 194 and its demand for a resolution of the Palestinian refugee condition.

Furthermore, there is no legal definition of a Palestinian refugee, just the working definition formalized by UNRWA in 1952 to determine eligibility for relief. The definition states that: “A Palestine refugee is a person whose normal residence was Palestine for a minimum of two years preceding the outbreak of the conflict in 1948 and who, as a result of this conflict, has lost both his home and his means of livelihood.” This definition of eligibility for relief does not, and was not intended to, cover all those who were displaced from their homes and who might qualify for return. It did not, for instance, include those persons who either left the area of UNRWA operations or who were not in need. Rather, it was an instrumental definition, intended to assist UNRWA in responding to the enormous humanitarian crisis among displaced Palestinians. In the absence of anything else though, it has served *de facto* to define Palestinian refugee status. The longevity of what might seem like a stopgap measure is a common feature of the Palestinian experience.

When UNRWA and the UNHCR were established and their respective jurisdictions defined, there was nowhere near the number of international humanitarian organizations as there are today. The International Committee for the Red Cross [ICRC] has existed since 1863, but the pro-

liferation in Non-Governmental Organizations [NGOs] that are part of what is often called the “new humanitarianism” (to distinguish its practice from the old humanitarianism of the ICRC) is a product of the latter part of the twentieth-century. These organizations, of which Doctors Without Borders is arguably the most prominent, do not have the same jurisdictional constraints as UN-affiliated bodies. So, while refugee law and UN institutions may distinguish Palestinians from other refugees and populations in need, these new humanitarian organizations need not. Indeed, one finds a vast array of these organizations at work with Palestinians, particularly in the West Bank, but also in other places where Palestinians live.

The experience of being a Palestinian refugee in relation to international legal systems and institutions has been one of both inclusion and exclusion. It has been at once distinctive, even exceptional, and exemplary. There is, of course, no such thing as a generic refugee – no single experience that can stand for all others – but the Palestinian experience sheds enormous light on the broader system in which it holds an awkward place.

## **Experiences of Displacement and Loss**

Legal systems and institutional structures create the conditions for recognition as a refugee. The experience of being a refugee (whether recognized or not) is, among other things, one of loss and instability. Although we may think about the experience of becoming a refugee as a singular, dramatic event – the sudden destruction of homes in a natural disaster, the quick flight in the face of war – for many people becoming and being a refugee is a process. And part of that process is learning to live without one’s home. For one window into the experience of being a refugee, we can turn to the stories of loss and dispossession that Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip shared during my research there in the late 1990s. Their experiences are, of course, uniquely theirs, but they also shed a broader light on the dynamics of becoming a refugee.

When Palestinians became refugees in Gaza, it happened almost without awareness. To get to Gaza, they crossed no international border; they simply went down the road. This crossing was temporal, rather than spatial, as a border was established *ex post facto* between this territory and the rest of Mandate Palestine. Further, even as





*Palestinian children. Photo courtesy American Friends Service Committee [AFSC] Archives.*

they left their homes, few people imagined they would be gone for longer than a few days or weeks. Some people left their homes and then went back only to be expelled later, as happened in Majdal (now Ashkelon), which was not entirely emptied of its native inhabitants until 1950, when Israel ordered their removal. More commonly, people left their villages and moved through many places—from Gaza to Rafah into Egypt and back—before finally “settling” into one of the many refugee camps springing up on Gaza’s landscape. In these camps, often former British military bases transformed for a new purpose, refugees were housed in tents and given aid, first by the American Friends Service Committee and then by UNRWA. This modicum of stability took time, however, and the first few months of people’s displacement were chaotic.

The chaos of the *hijra*—as this experience is known—is reflected in the stories that people tell about their experiences. Fear, danger, hunger—these are the dominant tropes in all the stories of the *hijra* I heard in Gaza. In these narratives of flight and confusion, as people express their loss and define what was lost in the loss of their home, the idea of home itself is given shape. While these stories form part of a broader national narrative, they are profoundly personal. The idea of home that they articulate is both communal and individual. People tell stories about

their displacement for many reasons: to pass on that knowledge to their children, to stake claims to their lands left behind, and to maintain a connection, even if only in memory, to their lost homes.

Im ‘Amir, now living in Khan Yunis, told me the story of her family’s *hijra* experience one afternoon when I, along with her grandson and another friend of mine, visited her at home. She told the story as much to her grandson as to me, often addressing him directly as she narrated. Im ‘Amir’s story of repeated departures and of frequent moving around trying to escape bad conditions and looking for better ones is typical of other *hijra* stories I heard in Gaza.

Her tale began in her hometown of Yibna, a destroyed village in what is now Israel, where security was disrupted. As she remembers it, Yibna was the last village in the area occupied by Zionist forces: “We were sleeping at sunset time when we heard shooting and asked what was going on. They said that the Jews had taken al-Qubayba....The people of al-Qubayba had fled.” She went on to name each of the villages that had been depopulated before Yibna. Then, she said, “we heard from a megaphone a call that people of Yibna should leave the village and go to the orchards, so we slept there...we did not take a mattress or a quilt, only a blanket on my husband’s shoul-

der.” Just as destruction was a process that went through several villages, so too was escape, and Im ‘Amir named each of the villages she and her family passed through.

At repeated moments in this narrative of movement, Im ‘Amir and others like her were faced with difficult choices about what to take and what to leave, whether to stay put or to move on. Sometimes a “choice”—to move again—was imposed, as when native Gazans demanded rent for further use of their property. Then those from elsewhere, having no money, had to leave. At other times it was internally driven, as when Im ‘Amir objected to one stopping point: “I told my husband that I do not want to stay.” Each “choice,” each movement reconfigured people’s relationships to their homes. Objects that might have been equally significant, or insignificant, acquired new and distinct value when they were left behind or taken with them. Having to pay rent for the first time, or not being able to do so, introduced a new factor into thinking about home. And every time people had to move again, to seek another space of refuge, their original homes were that much further away.

Im ‘Amir’s description of how she and her family lived when they first came to Gaza further shows how people adjusted to displacement and began to attempt to make a semblance of home in exile:

The Egyptian army brought tents for us – the tent was like a room with pillars. Each family had a part of a tent.... It was raining heavily.... They moved us to a camp, which was full of lice. When we slept, lice, bedbugs and fleas crawled on us. Then they sprayed us with disinfectant. We left for Rafah. I said that I wanted to remain in Rafah and I told my husband that we shouldn’t stay in an open tent. We made bricks of clay and put the bricks together and surrounded the tent with them.

This stop in Rafah was only one of many before her family eventually settled in Khan Yunis. No food, no privacy, no house—these were the living conditions in Gaza in the aftermath of the Palestinians’ removal from their homes. While food relief began relatively quickly (within a few months), people lived in tents for several years until UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency) replaced them with more permanent structures. Im ‘Amir’s recollections of the discomforts of this time were not con-

trasted with an idealized view of life at home. She spoke quite soberly about the conditions of life in Yibna, recalling an absence of services and a lack of amenities in the home. The security of life at home was not, then, that of a presumed perfection. This security was derived both from the fact of some predictability in life—that one could make judgments based on past experience and have a reasonable expectation that they would have some relevance for future conditions—and from the capacity to have influence over one’s life.

From Im ‘Amir’s description of making and putting bricks around their tent, it is clear that she did attempt to exert some control over their living conditions—to make the refuge more like a home. That her family did not stay long in Rafah is a reminder of the tenuous nature of these efforts. As for many other Palestinians (and displaced persons elsewhere), displacement was a process for Im ‘Amir’s family. Part of this process was coming to recognize themselves as refugees. This recognition involved a relationship with both the legal and institutional frameworks described above and the different ideas to which I turn next.

## **Refugee Discourse**

Images of refugees circulate widely in the media, in fundraising appeals, among humanitarian personnel, and within refugee communities themselves. In humanitarian discourse refugees appear primarily as victims. For communities such as the Palestinians, where refugees make up a majority of the population, the figure of the refugee figures prominently in a nationalist idiom.

### **Refugees as Victims**

The concept of victimhood is, of course, central to legal and institutional definitions of refugees. It is a key part of what distinguishes refugees from other kinds of migrants. Even as refugee conventions may appear to have relatively clear statements about what constitutes a victim, in practice discerning victimhood is often extremely challenging and is influenced both by political considerations and by ideas about victims that circulate in broader discourse. Humanitarian aid relies on the identification of vulnerability to determine who needs assistance and to compel people to donate to this assistance. In doing this kind of identification work, though, it also introduces new sorts of vulnerability, as the victim category is a relatively narrow one.

People risk losing their identification as victims—and therefore their position as proper objects of compassion—if they do not appear “innocent” enough, or if they otherwise do not conform to the narrative demands of this category. To express this idea bluntly, in order to qualify as a victim in popular opinion, and sometimes to gain formal recognition, people need to appear as largely passive objects of compassion.

This narrow conception of the refugee victim has sometimes created problems for Palestinians, who are often deemed too politically active (in ways that make people uncomfortable) to appear as victims. A lot of the discussion about the meaning of and proper response to both the Israeli imposed blockade of the Gaza Strip and the military assault on Gaza in January 2009 focused on the question of whether Gazans, having voted for Hamas in parliamentary elections, forfeited their right to be considered victims deserving humanitarian assistance and concern. Even though humanitarian principles suggest that aid should be distributed with no consideration of politics—that aid should be impartial and the humanitarian actors neutral—in practice it is often the victims who are required to be apolitical.

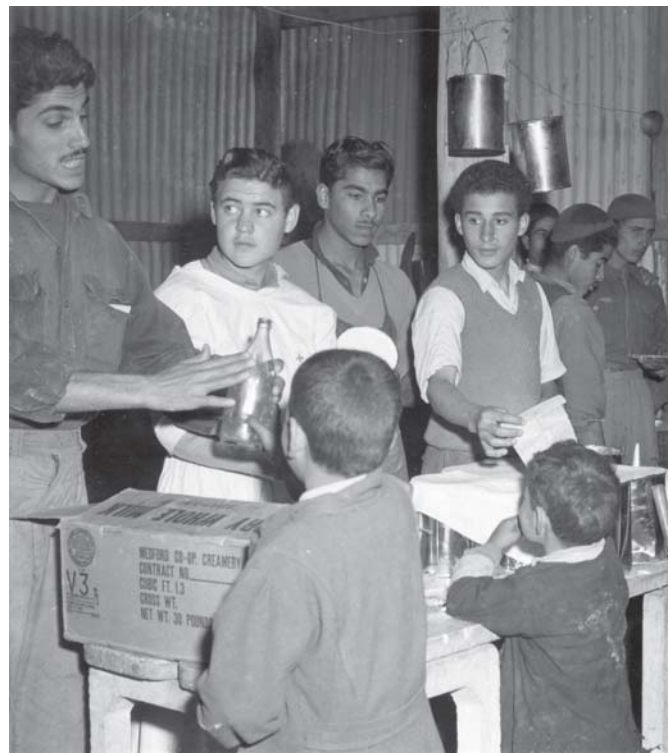
That the status of victims is a general problem in humanitarian giving became dramatically apparent in the response, or lack thereof, to devastating floods in Pakistan in the summer 2010. As news organizations puzzled over the possible causes of extremely low giving rates, *The Washington Post* ran a poll asking readers if they had or planned to donate. As of the end of August, 66% of respondents indicated that they did not intend to give anything, and the comments illuminate why. In a fairly typical comment one person said: “I would not lift a finger to help these people. Our government has been wasting billions of our tax dollars on these ingrates for years. Let their fellow muslims send them some of the millions of dollars they get for their oil. Besides, that part of the world is terribly overpopulated anyway. If a million or so die, the remaining survivors will be better off.” Another commentator addressed the compassion question directly: “Pakistan should have played nice long ago in order to have sympathy credit it needs today.” One or two commentators expressed shock at the vitriol on the electronic bulletin board, but the overwhelming sentiment was that these Pakistani Muslims were not deserving of sympathy. The reliance of the humanitar-

ian industry on the generation of compassion means that its capacity to act is limited by the vagaries of public sentiment. For displaced persons, being named as a victim can provide access to crucial assistance and recognition, but the need to retain that label can also limit options for acting in the world.

### Refugees as National Subjects

If the victim label can be a double-edged sword, so too can the centrality of the figure of the refugee in national discourse. Given that a sizable majority of the Palestinian population is displaced, it is not surprising that the figure of the refugee has come to play a large role in Palestinian national identification, but it is not a simple role. To a certain extent Palestinian and refugee have become synonymous in Palestinian political discourse. Many of the symbols of Palestinian national identity reference the refugee experience—such as replicas of keys to Palestinian homes in pre-1948 Palestine or the figure of the barefooted refugee child, Handala, created by cartoonist Naji Al-Ali.

The emergence of the figure of the refugee as crucial to the idea of the Palestinian national subject was



Dispensing aid. Photo courtesy American Friends Service Committee [AFSC] Archives.



directly connected to humanitarian practice. Given the absence of a political resolution to the problem of displacement, being registered as a refugee became one of the key forms of international recognition of Palestinian losses. The material artifacts of the humanitarian system, particularly ration cards, came to be not only bureaucratic tools for managing relief distribution, but also symbols of national belonging. As important as these papers have been, they fit somewhat uncomfortably within the field of national iconography. Unlike other images of Palestine and Palestinians that speak either about a longed-for past—the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and smaller-scale icons such the olive tree or the prickly pear (*sabr*) plant or the heroic fight for the future, whether the *fedai* (guerilla) and his rifle or the *shabab* (young men) and their stones—ration cards evoke Palestinian dependence. Even as people have fought to retain their cards and with them their rights, they also have been discomfited by their need for them. In some ways, to be a refugee, to be in need of a ration card, has come to symbolize Palestinian failure.

Given this complex symbolic field, it is not surprising that even as refugees are often valorized as quintessential Palestinian subjects, other ideas circulate among Palestinians. Refugees are thought of as poor (which they often but not always are), as lower-class, as less sophisticated. Especially in the early years after displacement, refugees were sometimes charged with having betrayed the nation by leaving their homes. Im 'Amir described how native Gazans sometimes reminded refugees that they did not belong: "They made us sleep under the olive trees. In the morning we told them that we wanted water to wash and drink, but they told us that we had to leave them—that we were the Palestinians who had left our villages and had come here, and that we had to leave them." And another refugee in Gaza told me how natives sometimes used the word "refugee" as an insult: "They used to say to the donkey, 'your face is like the refugee's.'"

Just as humanitarianism played a role in making refugees so central to Palestinian national identity, so too did it play a role in creating these tensions. Not all Palestinians who suffered losses were eligible for UNRWA recognition and for its ration cards. The grounds for eligibility were not only related to 'need' (the avowed purpose of

humanitarianism), but to 'kind' (native Gazans, for example, no matter how destitute, were not eligible for relief). Some Palestinians more than others carried 'proof' of the loss they all had suffered. It is no surprise that these humanitarian distinctions have led to tensions within the Palestinian community.

## Conclusion

So what can we conclude about what it is to be a refugee? It is certainly not one-dimensional. It is in some ways to live a constrained life: to be deprived of home, to be politically and physically vulnerable, to be in need. But this is not all it is. People who find themselves displaced continue to influence the direction of their lives, to care for their children, and to advance their communities.

Anthropological research and perspectives on humanitarian practice and refugee experiences bring the multiple facets of the refugee condition to light. They also help the outside world better understand the complexities and contradictions inherent in being a refugee in the world today.

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*Ilana Feldman is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and International Affairs at George Washington University.*

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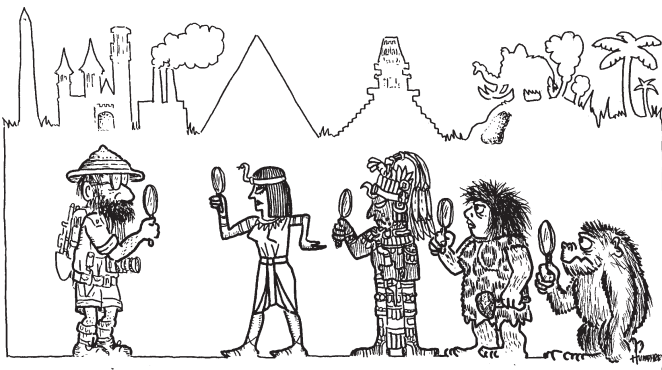
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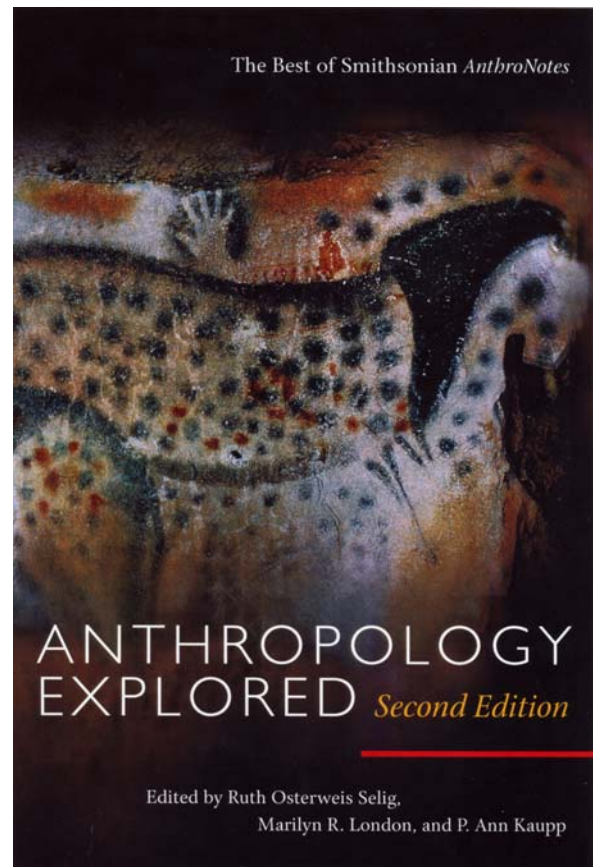
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