

**Becoming Palestine: Toward an Archival Imagination of the Future, by Gil Z. Hochberg. Duke University Press, 2021. 187 pages.**

**Networked Refugees: Palestinian Reciprocity and Remittances in the Digital Age, by Nadya Hajj. University of California Press, 2021. 117 pages.**

*Reviewed by Dina Matar*

Two new different books related to Palestine and Palestinians, published in 2021, are important contributions to the growing interdisciplinary field of Palestine Studies. The books approach their subject matter from different angles and conceptual frameworks but converge to a certain extent in their approach to 'imagination' as a creative practice of recovery and as a productive space for thinking about the present and future. Both books are shorter than the average academic book and both focus on Palestinians and their practices in different contexts. Both books are timely particularly given the prolonged impasse in relation to Palestinians' lives and futures amid continued settler-colonial Israeli practices against them.

In *Becoming Palestine, Toward an Archival Imagination of the Future*, Gil Z. Hochberg engages in a conversation with Palestinian artists and their work to address how they approach the concept of the archive by shifting attention to archiving practices. This shift, she proposes, offers an alternative way of thinking of the archive, as a space for imagination, thus moving beyond dominant approaches to addressing archive as a space and practices of preserving and remembering the past. In fact, Hochberg goes further to articulate the archive as living, alive and as productive, rather than dead and closed. Inspired by the work of contemporary Palestinian artists in diverse genres, Hochberg sees the archive as opening the future to imagination and possibilities, but also as a productive temporality that is evident in artists' archiving practices not to preserve the past but to subvert the present and offer ways of thinking of the future beyond nationalism and the global market.

What sparked her interest in rethinking the archive is clear from the beginning, but particularly Palestinian artist Jumana Manna's film "A Magical Substance Flows into me (2015)" in which she examines an obscure minor German-Jewish ethnomusicologist Robert Lachmann and the archive he left behind. Manna's work, as Hochberg shows in the first chapter of the book, creates a different kind of living archive that runs counter to the very logic of archiving as a process that encloses something within a past sealed off from the present. Hochberg suggests that Manna's subversion of folders in the Israeli national archives by presenting their contents as part of a different story than the one obsessed with the pre-history of Israel and a story that offers a completely different approach to the relationship between the past, present and the future.

The interrogation of the concept of the archive continues throughout the book as Hochberg engages in a conversation with other Palestinian artists' art which she proposes is a form of creative reflection around the present, rather than just subversive as Palestinian art has often been addressed. In fact, the main theme that comes across throughout is the ways in which these artists do not simply adopt a celebratory attitude towards the subversive possibilities of archiving and the archive, but, following Emile Habibe, the artists become the quintessential pessoptimists

in the sense that they imagine the possibility of alternative access to knowledge while realising their freedom from the market and the nation-state is only relative. In making us consider the possibilities of imagination, Hochberg, of course, is playing with archive as a word and archive as a verb, to archive – in other words, to make, to create and to imagine beyond the dominant frameworks of global and national politics.

In complication our understanding of archive, Hochberg offers a response to what Beshara Doumani has called an archive fever and a response to the over-saturation of archival information mobilised by nostalgia for a fixed past as well as utopian nationalist-dominated vision of a pre-Nakba Palestine that has become taken for granted and, as such, has closed off the potential of imagination. Indeed, what comes across is the need to rethink the temporality of the archive and to resist the temptation to fit what it means into pre-given narratives, which she explores in her discussion of artists Ruanne Abou-Rahme and Basel Abbas' "Archive of the Copy" in the fourth chapter. As she suggests the idea is to shift the time of the archive to the present and not remain fixated with fixing the archive in the past. In this sense, Hochberg invites us to take note of marginal or minor archives, such as Lachmann's, that reflect processes of recovery of the present and not of the past.

The title 'Becoming Palestine' is suggestive in that the word 'becoming' is an active verb and, as such, is about continuous making, thinking and imagining – recalling to mind Stuart Hall's approach to identification and identity as a process that is continuous – but also, as Hochberg suggests, making us think of becoming as a mode of imagination or a Palestine as a temporality in which Israel and its settler-colonial practices are eliminated. As she makes clear, this imagining does not mean returning or recovering a pre-Nakba Palestine, but it is in the Deleuzian sense where becoming is not about an identity that is already in place, but as a process of realisation of a "people." The archive, she writes, citing Deleuze must "not address a people, which is presupposed already there, but must instead contribute to the invention of a people." As such, the idea of becoming means changing the stakes of the political terrain and as she powerfully put it, to reimagine differences rather than eliminate them, for this is impossible in a situation of continued violence and ethnic cleansing against the Palestinians.

In this book, Hochberg makes a powerful contribution to the important and growing field of critical Palestine studies that complicate and question assumptions about a Palestine presented in mainstream politics as a de-politicized space devoid of the reality of occupation and settler-colonialism, but a Palestine that "provides an opportunity to enact something seemingly impossible – the complete undoing of the colonial order" (p. 134).

While also dealing with imagination and creativity, Nadya Hajj, in her book, "Networked Refugees: Palestinian Reciprocity and Remittances in the Digital Age," explores how the spread of Information and Communication Technologies has facilitated Palestinian global interconnectedness while also posing new challenges. Based on extensive field research in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, online surveys and data collection on Facebook and other social media sites, Hajj addresses how new technologies make, re-make, and occasionally unmake ties between the Palestinian community living in the Nahr Al-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon and those who grew up in the camp but are currently living around the world. Nahr Al-Bared is one of the oldest Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and has a violent history. It was

established in 1949 and experienced major destruction in 2007 following armed clashes between the militant group Fatah Al-Islam and the Lebanese Armed Forces

In her analysis, Hajj moves beyond addressing questions of identity, framing, representation and resistance that have dominated some of the recent scholarship around Palestinians' use of social media platforms, instead addressing how these platforms allow and help develop what she calls practices of reciprocity and cooperative interactions tying Palestinian refugees with the international diaspora. Through her fieldwork, she suggests that "digital spaces offer further opportunities for Palestinians in the diaspora to develop economic and moral connections to their Palestinian family and village." Hajj provides many examples of the ways in which ICT platforms – mainly Facebook – funerals, births, marriages, and business openings are announced. In a story that is representative of many others and shows that ties are strong even when involving non-relatives, she recounts how an old man native to the Palestinian village of Damon died in the camp and how his family shared the news in an Internet forum and Facebook pages. Other Palestinians living in the diaspora were moved by the man's death and paid for the slaughter of animals and the food for mourning meals as well as for copies of the commemorative Qur'an distributed at the funeral.

One of the major insights is Hajj's reflections on the concept of shame which she suggests is used as a powerful tool by Palestinian refugees to retain power over the usually more affluent diaspora Palestinians. This concept comes across in her analysis of some of the Facebook pages connecting Palestinian refugees in Lebanon with the diaspora, which included frequent passive-aggressive digital posts that criticized members of the diaspora community when they were not sufficiently responsive to calls for sending money or supporting the camp. The power of shame has an effect not only on diaspora Palestinians, but also on their relatives still living in the refugee camps. An interviewee explains how a family was forced to deny its connection to a relative who had prospered abroad but had never supported his original community. Prior to his repudiation, his family had encountered many problems when doing business or arranging marriages since the family's honour had been tainted.

In a book that is thoroughly researched and conveniently enriched by interview snippets that strengthen Hajj's main arguments about the connective role of digital platforms, the book seems to be more descriptive than conceptual. The emphasis on the power of the networks somehow overshadows the agency of ordinary Palestinians to continue and to live their lives as best as they could without losing sense of community and beginnings. In addition, the conclusion seems to be out of place, departing from the preceding chapters in introducing steps for what Hajj terms reciprocal activism that seems out of place in a book focusing on Palestinians' agency. Indeed, the most powerful lessons for activism are the stories that permeate the empirical chapters rather than those proposed in the conclusion. Nevertheless, "*Networked Refugees*" is a valuable contribution to both the field of Palestinian studies and the thriving body of research on the intersection of new technologies and political and social developments.

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