Native Anthropologist in Palestinian-Israeli Cosmopolitanism

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Abstract:

This paper will dwell on the meaning of being a native anthropologist in Palestinian-Israeli cosmopolitanism in the twenty first century. It will also explore the roles of the native anthropologist in conflicted Palestinian-Israeli society. Complex questions will be discussed, such as: Can cosmopolitanism really exist in such types of societies? Can anthropologists have a role in facilitating or maintaining cosmopolitanism? All the aforementioned issues will be illustrated by case studies from field work in Israeli and Palestinian societies.

Background:

I will begin by describing my background, in order to present my position and, more importantly, to be very explicit to you concerning myself. I was born in the Abu-Rabia tribe, a Bedouin tribe in the Negev Desert. My tribe migrated to Palestine in the seventeen century as descendants from Bili clans in the area of the Hejaz region in the Arabian Peninsula (Abu-Rabia 2001: 130-131; Al-Aref 1934; Bailey 1985: 20-49; 1989: 9-21). I have, to date, never visited the Arabian Peninsula. Nonetheless, I am a Bedouin man whose spiritual and ethical universe and worldview is based on the Arabic language and civilization, and the Islamic religion.

I grew up as part of a semi-nomadic family, and until the age of twenty I lived in a tent with my parents, brothers and sisters. My family raised livestock and camels and high-breed/pure horses. When I was a young boy I studied three to four hours a day with a tribal teacher along with half a dozen other boys. When I was eight, my father sent me to follow my three brothers, to a tribal primary school run by the Israeli Ministry of Education, situated seven kilometres from our encampment. I shared a donkey with my brothers and it was very hot in the summer and cold in winter. We were all sons of the leaders and notables of our tribe (Abu-Rabia 2001). I did not like school so much, but one day, the teacher gave me his bicycle to ride and this made me feel happy. That was the first time in my life I saw a bicycle. When I completed primary school my father sent me with my eldest brothers to the high school in Nazareth. It was one day travel by bus. There, we rented a home to live in. That was the first time I studied with Arabs who came from towns and villages (*fellahin*). It was

very difficult for me to adapt and speak in fellahin or the city dialects of my classmates. Once a term (of four months) we returned home for the holidays to visit our family. The whole tribe waited and welcomed us when we arrived in the car of my uncle - the Sheikh of the tribe. That was the best feeling. However, the last day of the holiday was very sad. We were rooted in our culture, but we were obliged for our tribe to be educated, and there was no compromise.

After four years I completed high school and was appointed as a teacher in my tribal school. I decided to go on to the university and completed a B.A. in Pedagogy, and a Master's degree in Public Health in Israeli universities. I was later granted a scholarship from the British council for one year to go to London University College to study Anthropology and Health Education for two years (the second year was at my own expense assisted by other charities and friends. I complained all the time about why the British council was so unwilling to support me for one more year since Great Britain ruled mandated Palestine as an imperialist power for thirty years).

Financial problems brought me back to Israel, to study for my Ph.D. in anthropology at Tel-Aviv University under the supervision of Prof. Emanuel Marx. I continued to work as a teacher and later on as a superintendent of Bedouin Education. For me, studying anthropology was my first priority while for my parents and community it was the last one. Above all, my job has been as a mediator[1], a go-between among my people, the Bedouin, and the Israeli authorities. The Bedouin have seen in me one of them and I stand on their side and identify with them. Since I hold a high university degree and served as a senior official in the Education Ministry, some of my people considered me as a "friend"[2] with the Israeli authorities. The more I helped them to solve crucial problems (appointing more than 1000 teachers [males and females]) during ten years, the more they considered me a "friend with the Israeli authorities." On the other hand, the Israeli authorities regarded me as their official and asked me to carry out the Israeli law and to be loyal to the state. When I hesitated, disagreed or finally opposed some of the authorities' policies, they considered me Arab, Palestinian, Muslim and not loyal to the ethos of the state of Israel. It was very difficult for me, and sometimes impossible, to convince the Israeli authorities that

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[1] For more details about mediator between the Bedouin and the Israeli authorities, see Emanuel Marx 1981 "The Anthropologist as Mediator", in J.G. Galaty, et al eds. *The Future of Pastoral Peoples*. Pp. 119-126. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.
[2] Euphemism to collaborator, a very insulting title in Arab society.

reforms can only be done slowly, and by persuasion; in order to narrow and close the gaps between the state and its minorities.

The Palestinians and Israel have been in a struggle over land since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. It should be noted that the conflict between them and Israel over the land has an ethnic dimension, as Israel considers the Bedouin a separate segment of the repressed Palestinians inside Israel (Marx & Meir 2005: 43). Israel views itself as the only democratic state in the Middle East, representing Western modern culture and enlightenment, and sees the Bedouin as the most backward community of Middle Eastern culture. Israel views its Bedouin citizens as Arabs, Palestinians and Muslims rather than full citizens. These citizens are not yet integrated into Israeli society. Many of their villages are awaiting basic infrastructure. More than fifty per cent of them are waiting to be supplied with running water and electricity.

It is worth mentioning that during the last several years, the Israel Lands Authority lease large parcels of confiscated Bedouin lands to Jewish settlers in "individual farms" in order to prevent what the Israeli officials call as the "encroachment of the Bedouin on State Lands". In these farms the new settlers raise goats and cows. Needless to say that these "individual farms" are immediately supplied by running water, electricity and financial supports and governmental grants. In such a situation where goats and cows have a more comfortable life and more rights than human being, there is no milieu for cosmopolitan.

Case Study:

My nuclear family and I had planned to visit Jordan and we put our baggage in our car and drove to the Eilat-Aqaba border between Israel and Jordan. At the Israeli checkpoint we were checked very carefully. The security officers examined our car, car documents, baggage and passports and asked us questions: "What is the purpose of your visit to Jordan, what is your job title, where do you work, etc." I told them that I am a lecturer in the University, showing them my university identity card. Then they gave us some instructions about security awareness, etc. We paid the travel taxes on the Israeli side. To be honest, the Israeli officials treated us with respect, although they maintained the strict security procedure. They wished us all the best in Jordan,

and said to me: "We [the Israelis] trust that you [the Bedouin] will represent us in a good manner in Jordan." I answered: "Of course, of course."

Then we moved to the Jordanian checkpoint. There, we were welcomed in English, and I answered in Arabic. The Jordanian official asked me from where we were from, and I answered from Israel. Then I added that we are Palestinians inside Israel[3]. He started checking our documents and passports. Then he turned to our baggage and ordered me in a very official way: "Open the suitcases, please. What do you have in them? Who packed them?" These were more or less the same questions that were asked on the Israeli side. While I was opening the suitcases, an officer approached us and welcomed us; asking me where I was coming from. I gave him the same answers. Then he added one more question: "Where are you living exactly?" I told him that I live near Beer-Sheva, in Abu-Rabia Tribe. The next question with half a smile was: "Are you a relative of Sheikh Hammad Abu-Rabia?" My answer: "Yes, yes, he was my uncle"[4]. The officer shook my hand warmly and asked me to follow him to his office not before ordering the official to stop checking our suitcase and uttered: "I have sworn that the luggage of Abu-Rabia will not be checked in the Jordanian land." I followed him to his office. There while drinking Bedouin coffee, he told me that he is a Bedouin, and his tribe has excellent relations with my uncle and the Abu-Rabia tribe. His sheikh knew our sheikh personally. Finally, he invited me and my family to be his guests. I thanked him very much and apologized that this time I have duties and limited time, next time would be better for me. When I approached my car I found my family was being served cold drinks by the Jordanian officials. My children felt very happy about the warm welcome. We thanked them and left to Aqaba, directed by a Jordanian police jeep to guide us until we arrived at the Kristal Hotel. I should mention that at the border they removed our car number plates and replaced them with Jordanian ones (according to the Israeli-Jordanian peace accord,

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[3] The term *'Arab al-48* is coined by the Arab countries in order to make a clear and maybe draw a line between the Palestinians who live in the West Bank, Gaza, Arab countries; and the Palestinian citizens in Israel who stayed inside Israel after its establishment in 1948.

[4] Sheikh Hammad Khalil Abu-Rabia was my cousin, but I never referred to him like that, but rather by the title of uncle as a show of respect for him in that position. Sheikh Hammad was the sheikh of Abu-Rabia tribe since 1948; he was elected by the Bedouin in Israel as a member of the Knesset [the Israeli Parliament] (from 1973 to 1977 and 1979 to 1981) until he was murdered by a Druze in 1981. During his term, he became the leader of the Bedouin throughout the country, and helped many Palestinians, solving their problems with the Israel authorities - mainly the military administration in Gaza and the West Bank. After his murder, sheikhs and leaders of the Bedouin and urban Arabs from all over the Middle East came to console our family, notably the sheikhs of Jordan and the representative of King Hussein (Abu-Khusa 1994: 124-25; Abu-Rabia 2001: 130-131).

for high security reasons for the Israeli cars). In the hotel reception they welcomed us and asked for our passports, "Are you Israelis please?" I answered in Arabic, "We are from Israel, but we are Palestinians - *Arab al-48*." The official answered, "Yes, yes I know that," then he said, "Welcome to the Palestinians in Jordan," The next day on our way to Petra, we met some Bedouin and talked to them for some time before arriving at our hotel in the centre of Amman. At the reception they asked me the same question and I gave the same answers. The receptionist told me that he is originally from Jerusalem. I kept talking to him in the Palestinian dialect of the Galilee. In Amman, Jarash and Irbid I kept talking with people in that same dialect.

One evening near the reception of the hotel in Amman, I met a group of Arab teachers on an organized trip coming from Israel talking mixed languages, namely Arabic, Hebrew and English. One of the teachers approached me asking me if I am Aref. I told him, yes. He shook my hand and welcomed me. He told me that I appointed him as a teacher in the Bedouin schools in the Negev when I used to be the superintendent. He and the other with other teachers invited me for a coffee and we chatted for a long time. One of the teachers said that he was happy to meet me there in Jordan: "Where the Bedouin find each other in any place, they greet each other as brothers [*alakhow*] even when not acquainted, we feel sympathy and commitment for each other - like the Jews כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה - which means "all the Jews are responsible for each other"- We are brave and maybe one day we will control all the Middle East, …. .. We [the Bedouin] need to be like them [the Jews] and to have their smart mind and their money. What do you think, Aref?" I said without any hesitation: "We need to be highly educated like them and to have all the petrol money of the Middle East, and then we can join the Jews to control the world." The group burst out in laughter. We did not notice that the Palestinian receptionist stood nearby and overheard us. He looked at us seriously and said: "Really I don't care if you control the world or not, but please make your friends - the Israelis - leave my Palestine. Who said that you are Palestinians?" and he left in complete silence. I went back to my bedroom, thinking about that.

After some days we came back from Jordan to Israel through Sheik Hussein checkpoint. We were checked by the Jordanian officials, with the same routine process. They removed the Jordanian car number plates and brought back the Israeli car number plates as we moved to the Israeli side. There we underwent more or less the same routine in addition to checking my car by a special monitor device to detect

any sabotage material. The official ordered my wife to get out of the car, and asked her to take off her eye glasses comparing the passport photograph to the real colour of her eyes. Then the official asked my eldest son (8 years old), Amir to get out of the car. Amir refused and told the official that he has the right to stay in his father's car and to be checked there, saying that in Hebrew. I tried to intervene but the official refused and called a patrol policeman to come. They asked Amir, "Where did you learn such stupid rights?" Amir answered: "In a Beer-Sheva Jewish Kindergarten."[5] His teacher Golda had taught them the rights of children in Israel. Surprisingly, the police and the official burst out in laughter and told Amir: "You are a clever boy but you have Israeli *chutzpah*," and left us. After that we were checked by the customs and excise section. After this unpleasant procedure we found ourselves free of this border ordeal. The temperature was above 41 degrees. After three and half hours we arrived in our tribe. They were waiting for us, more than happy to receive us and were astonished as to why we were such a long time (one week) away from the tribe.

Discussion:

The word 'cosmopolitan', is derived from the Greek, meaning 'citizen of the world', and has been used to describe a wide variety of important views on moral and socio-political philosophy. The core idea is that all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, do belong to a single community[6].

According to Hage (1998: 200-202)[7], the term cosmopolitan has been used to describe individuals that are well travelled and can immerse themselves comfortably in various cultural settings. Hage portrays the "cosmopolites" as elites who are "white" "class figures" that are "open to all forms of otherness" and consume "high quality" commodities and cultures, including "ethnic" cultures. Furthermore, Calhoun

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[5] Amir was born in Beer-Sheva where I lived throughout my Ph.D. studies, so he studied in a Jewish Kindergarten, then we moved him to a Bedouin primary school, the main reason was for him to study his mother tongue, Arabic. Needless to say, that Amir was the only non-Jew in his Jewish Kindergarten, but his teacher as well as his classmates treated him very well anyway. I could not forget when his teacher – Golda - called me urgently to her office. She needed my consent that Amir will participate in the trip to the Beit Knesset [synagogue]…. and you know …. he needs to put on a kipah [skullcap] only when he is inside the synagogue. I agreed without hesitation, calming her that all of us must respect holy places: synagogues, churches as well as mosques.

[6] *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2002.

[7] Hage, Ghassan 1998. *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*. Sydney: Pluto Press.

(2002: 86-109)[8] maintains that cosmopolites have citizenships beyond affiliations with local places or nation-states, and this form of cosmopolitanism is often achieved by elites and rarely by others. Hiebert (2002: 212)[9] argues that cosmopolitanism is a way of living based on openness to all forms of otherness associated with appreciation and interaction with people from other cultural backgrounds. He uses this term not in a sense of a disconnected elite, but in the sense of the capacity to interact across cultural lines.

I would argue that most of the mentioned scholars have white Europeans in mind; only Hiebert acknowledges the possibility that others can also be cosmopolitan.

Arab-Muslim Empires established cultural and scientific centres that in their golden age comprised aspects that could be called cosmopolitanism. For example the Abbasid[10] court in its golden age in the eight and ninth centuries, and Muslim Spain, - al-Andalus[11] period in the eight to the fifteenth centuries are examples of cosmopolitan centres. In such cosmopolitan milieux, Muslims, Jews and Christians participated in translating and inventing arts, literature, medicine, philosophy, music, poetry and other sciences from different cultures and civilizations from Greece, Persia, Arabia as well as Europe. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Alexandria[12] was one of the cosmopolitan centres or what is called by Zubaida (2002: 32-41), "the golden age of Middle Eastern cosmopolitanism," which occurred in the political context of European imperial dominance. I believe that caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions about cosmopolitanism on the basis of conditions in

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[8] Calhoun, Craig. 2002: 86-109. The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Towards a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism. in, Vertovec, Steven and Cohen, Robin (eds.) *Conceiving Cosmopoloitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[9] Hiebert, Daniel. 2002: 212. Cosmopolitanism at the Local Level: The Development of Transnational Neighbourhoods. in Vertovec, Steven and Cohen, Robin (eds.) *Conceiving Cosmopoloitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[10] For five centuries (750-1258) the Abbasids, based in Baghdad, dominated the socio-political life of the greater part of the Muslim world. Countless manuscripts, particularly those written in Greek, were collected and stored in *Bayt al-hikmah* (The House of Wisdom, established in 830, by the Caliph al-Ma'mun), where scholars worked to translate them into Arabic (Hitti 1952: 311-312; Ullmann 1978: 7-40).

[11] During the Umayyad rule (from 661-750 in the East, based in Damascus), many ancient medical works began to be translated. In the western part of the Islamic empire, the Umayyads of Andalus (Islamic Spain) made their capital at Cordoba. Areas of Cordoba and Granada became centers of learning (Al-Najjar 1994: 159-229; Johnstone 1998: xxxi-xxxii).

[12] "Cosmopolitan Alexandria included clubs, bars and cafes and many social milieu. Native Egyptian provided servants, functionaries and prostitutes for the cosmopolitan milieu. The native Egyptians were inferior and despised. It was no coincidence then that the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 in al-Ismailiya, in the Canal Zone, and had as its founding program the rescue of Muslim youth from the corruption of European dominance, of drink and prostitution" (Zubaida 2002: 37-38).

Western countries. Even when considering a single state, caution should be exercised in drawing analogies from one period to another. The processes of socialization, modernization, and integration are related to that of cultural adaptation. It behooves one to remember that Arab-Muslim civilization, spanning as it has several millennia, cannot be superseded in a single modern century.

A person has many layers of identification which may be private or revealed to the public. Due to the fact that the native anthropologist belongs to multiple worlds, both professionally and personally, he becomes bi-or multicultural in this sense (Narayan 1993: 673-682)[13]. According to Bauman (1996)[14] one often settles with a combination of overlapping identities and lives on the strength of this combination. The cosmopolitan paradigm can be explained on the basis of the post-national distribution of labour[15] and wealth (Elkins 1995)[16]. Whereas cosmopolitanization blurs identities and boundaries, identities on the other hand, fix boundaries and eliminate ambivalence (Beck 2002: 81)[17]. I would adopt and support the argument of Narayan. While Waldren (1992: 751-93)[18] argues that it is all very well to be a cosmopolitan if you are a white American academic. To this argument I would add: "or play according to their violin."

Boundaries of countries in the Middle East are barriers that two World Wars have established. Usually borders shift, become fluid and hold varying meanings for different peoples and identities. Boundaries include symbolic and social dimensions associated with the border divisions that appear on maps or other dividing lines that cannot be found on any map at all. According to Migdal (2004: 5-6)[19] "One may think

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[13] Kirin Narayan 1993. "How Native is a "Native" Anthropologist?" American *Anthropologist* vol. 95, 671-685.

[14] Bauman, Gred 1996. *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-ethnic London*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[15] The globalization of the job market between rich and poor countries means that the rich countries export their low skill jobs to poor countries, while high skilled jobs are located in sparsely populated and highly skilled countries (Elkin 1995).

[16] Elkin, David 1995. *Beyond Sovereignty: Territorial and Political Economy in the Twenty-first Century*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

[17] Beck, Urlich 2002. "The Cosmopolitan Perspective: Sociological in the Second Age of Modernity," in, in, Vertovec, Steven and Cohen, Robin (eds.) *Conceiving Cosmopoloitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[18] Waldron, Jeremy 1992. "Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative." *University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform* 25 (3): 751-793.

[19] Migdal, Joel 2004. "Mental maps and virtual checkpoints: Struggles to construct and maintain state and social boundaries" In Migdal, Joel (editor), *Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp.3-23.

of people's acting according to a set of laws on one side of a state boundary, and others acting on the basis of a different code on the other side of the boundary."

Carrying my many identities or mixed identities I crossed the borders between Israel and Jordan, through the Palestinian Western Bank. In crossing these borders, one of my identities was minimized, the other ignored, the third was more profound, but in other situations that identity was ignored. Each one was used in the checkpoints, hotels, etc., according to the situation. I felt that I need all of them, so I kept them in one "mind box" applying each one according to the situation in Jordan and Israel as well as with Palestinians.

It should be noted that the attitude of Israel towards the Palestinian citizens in its midst was determined according to one central goal, to supervise them (Lustick 1985)[20]; to control them and render them manageable and transparent to state power (Kemp 2004: 80)[21]; using the state's security needs as a pretext for suppressing them. The policy of limiting access to national membership based on racial distinctions, has become common rather than the promotion of greater inclusions of all the citizens, as what happened in the USA in the nineteenth century (Basson 2004: 176)[22]. Held (1995: 233)[23] argues that some bureaucracies fail to comprehend that people have come to enjoy multiple citizenships and political membership in diverse political communities and have become citizens of both their immediate political communities, and of the wider regional and global communities, thereby becoming more cosmopolitan.

Theories of globalization and multiculturalism imply a process that assumes that dominant and minority cultures will become "integrated," and this can be challenged by individuals living exclusively within the domains of their cultural communities. Furthermore, as argued by Hiebert (2002) as people interact more between dominant and minority cultures and become more multicultural, the more they become cosmopolitan. Therefore, cosmopolitanism has been depicted as complimentary to

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[20] Lustick, Ian 1980, *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority*. Texas: University of Texas Press.

[21] Kemp, Adriana 2004. "Dangerous Populations: State territoriality the constitution of national minorities" In Migdal, Joel (editor), *Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[22] Basson, Lauren 2004. "Challenging boundaries and belongings: Mixed blood, allotment at the turn of the Twentieth century" In Migdal, Joel (editor), *Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[23] Held, David 1995. *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governanc*e. Cambridge: Polity.

globalization and the movement of people around the world, particularly in major cities like Paris, London, New York, etc. These cosmopolitan cities in the 21st century are closed for most of peoples coming from Asia and Africa because of reasons like illegal immigration, security, terror, etc. As the European Union becomes more united and there are fewer border checkpoints between member countries, the more border checkpoints will be erected to prevent Asians and Africans from migrating there and participating in the "cosmopolitan theatrical play." The famous saying: "If they don't have bread let them eat cakes" captures such a situation. I would say: "If they don't have free access to the West, let them dream about the 'white cosmopolitan' cities, beyond the 'black' checkpoints".

The Palestinian citizens in Israel have the feeling that, 'when we are in Israel we miss the Palestinian people, but when we are in the Palestinian territories or Arab countries they consider us as Israelis or Israeli friends; then we miss Israel'. I personally feel very bad that most of the time we feel that we should apologize that we stayed to live (*samidun*[24]) in Israel or what is called the "captured Palestine" by Arab countries. We feel that something is wrong with us, maybe we have collaborated with the Israeli authorities, or betrayed our Palestinian people!!! That bad feeling reminds me of the Jews who survived the holocaust, when they were faced with such questions, after the Second World War. How could they survive when six millions of Jews were killed by the brutal Nazis? Needless to say that there are no comparisons [at least by my self] between Israeli Authorities/State of Israel and the Nazis.

The attitudes of the Bedouin and the Israeli authorities towards me caused me to feel like a stranger. My academic profession and position as a senior government official and academic made me more and more a stranger. Simmel (1950b) suggested in a most interesting way how to view the stranger, that in the modern cosmopolitan world every individual becomes a stranger (Simmel 1950b). This idea appeared in the work of many native and non-native sociologists and anthropologists, like Bauman (1995), Coser (1965), Kurt (1950) Lipman (1997), Lofland (1973), Marx (2005), Nakhleh (1979), Narayan (1993), Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) and others. To sum up this feeling of strangeness, clearly, I am not a stranger like Simmel, neither the 'stranger of Simmel' but I am the stranger of Aref, in my

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[24] *Samidun* this brave term means steadfastness [in the face of the Zionists] used to describe Palestinians citizens in Israel. For more details about political, national meaning, see: Bardenstein (1999:148-170), Khalidi (1997: 177-209), Pettet (2000:195-6), Sayigh (2000: 464-94), Schulz (2003:105-7).

community, in my academia, in Israel, among the Palestinians, and among the Arabs. But I am a part of most of these communities [I hope] with my "own cosmopolitanism." I would argue that repressed segments of the Palestinian citizens in Israel may be as cosmopolitan as the elites in business, religious movements, politics, media, arts, and academia.

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