



Uri Horesh*

Palestinian dialects and identities shifting across physical and virtual borders

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Abstract: The 1948 war created a new situation in Palestine. Palestinians became dispersed across political borders that had not existed before, and these borders continued to change in different ways into the 21st century. In many respects, these political borders have had notable linguistic effects, introducing bilingualism and multilingualism for some Palestinians but not all, and subsequently affecting varieties of Palestinian Arabic in terms of their lexica, their grammars, and their speakers' sense of identity and belonging. Newcomers to Palestine, particularly Jewish immigrants from Arabic-speaking countries, were also compelled to adapt their linguistic practices to the new reality into which they implanted themselves. Finally, traditional dialectological boundaries, delineating Palestinian dialects according to regional and local linguistic features, have been affected by population shifts, redrawing of political borders and the catastrophic consequences of the wars the region has endured. This paper attempts to tackle the complex web of borders and boundaries that have shaped much of the sociolinguistics of Palestinians throughout most of the 20th century and into the first two decades of the 21st century.

Keywords: Arabic, dialectology, Hebrew, language contact, language variation and change, sociolinguistics

1 Introduction

On May 14, 1948, new political borders were drawn in Palestine. These borders were later redrawn following the June 1967 war, and again in 1982, when Israel returned occupied land to Egypt following the signing of a peace treaty between the two countries based on the Camp David Accords (see, e.g., Anziska

Achva Academic College is located amidst the ruins of the ethnically cleansed Palestinian villages of Tall al-Turmus and Qastina.

*Corresponding author: Uri Horesh, Achva Academic College, Arugot, Israel, E-mail: urih@live.achva.ac.il

2018).¹ Additional border shifts were made between Israel and Lebanon from 1982 to the early 2000s and between Israel and the newly formed Palestinian Authority in 1993 and arguably in 2006 when Israel unilaterally closed off the Gaza Strip.

In addition to the borders having shifted – some critics of Israeli policy have named Israel a “state without borders” (see, e.g., Fincham 2014) – populations have shifted as well. Jewish immigrants have been settling in Palestine since the late nineteenth century; indigenous Palestinians have been forcefully exiled both internally and externally; citizens of Lebanon and Egypt have been forced to move due to Israeli military operations; and certain Syrian citizens – in the occupied Golan Heights – have suddenly become residents of Israel. Also, in what may seem to be a reverse phenomenon, many Palestinians have been prevented from moving, particularly in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as in refugee camps in Lebanon and (until recently) Syria.

These border shifts and population movements have resulted in intricate changes in national, and subsequently, linguistic allegiances. Approximately 3 million Palestinians now call Jordan home and have contributed significantly to new dialect formation in the kingdom, particularly in the capital Amman (Al-Wer 2002, 2003, 2007). Nearly 2 million Palestinians have nominally become citizens of Israel, acquiring Hebrew as their second language.² Due to this close contact with and newly acquired proficiency in Hebrew, the lexicon and structure of their native varieties of Arabic have begun showing contact-induced effects (Amara 2007; Geva-Gleinberger 2007; Henkin-Roitfarb 2011; Horesh 2015). In terms of the Palestinian population of the region, then, it may be said that we are witnessing a combination of political borders moving around as a result of historical events and speakers moving across virtual borders of linguistic, societal, national and ethnic orientation.

Building on an evolving corpus of Palestinian Arabic, comprising sociolinguistic interviews I conducted in various locales in Palestine, this paper examines grammatical as well as ideological variation among speakers of Palestinian Arabic. Have these border shifts and crossings caused some Palestinians to ‘become’ Jordanian and other to ‘become’ Israeli? How is this manifest in speakers’ overt and covert attitudes towards their identities, and what are some of the effects these political processes have had on language variation and change in the region? One

¹ Ansizka’s introduction (2018: 1–16) provides a concise overview of the political events relevant to this study; the rest of the book discusses them in greater detail.

² In some cases, certain Palestinians can actually be considered bilingual in Arabic and Hebrew, rather than L1 speakers of Arabic and L2 speakers of Hebrew. See Gafter and Horesh (2020a, 2020b).

thing to bear in mind is that some of these effects, both in terms of ideology and in terms of their linguistic consequences, appear to be subconscious. The details of the degree of consciousness in this context call into question some of the generalizations made by Labov (1990, 1994) regarding “change from above” and “change from below,” an issue discussed later in this paper.

2 Palestine: The path to multilingualism

2.1 Overview

Historic Palestine, the area currently comprising the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the State of Israel, has in recent decades established itself as a multilingual region. The two prevailing spoken languages are Modern Hebrew and Palestinian Arabic, but for reasons explained below, the linguistic myriad is far more complex than that of a simply bilingual situation. While the existence of regional dialects of Modern Hebrew has not been formally documented (but see, e.g., Gafter 2016 for a recent discussion of *ethnic* varieties of the language), Palestinian Arabic, like other ‘national’ varieties of Arabic, is well known for having both regional sub-varieties and “ecolinguistic” (see Cadora 1992) ones, namely urban, rural and Bedouin, the latter referring to the dialects spoken by either current nomadic tribes or sedentary descendants thereof.

A further complication is manifest in the ethnic composition of the Jewish population of historic Palestine, i.e., the Jewish citizens of current-day Israel. While Modern Hebrew is the prevailing language of everyday communication for this group, its status as a native language is confined predominantly to those Jewish Israelis born and educated in the country. The number of current Hebrew-speaking Israelis who are recent immigrants to the country can be estimated at roughly half of the entire population. These include both immigrants who have arrived in the last two decades, mostly from the former Soviet Union, whose native language is usually Russian or Ukrainian, and earlier immigrants who arrived in Palestine throughout the twentieth century, whose native languages are numerous, and include various dialects of Arabic, e.g., Iraqi, Moroccan, Tunisian, Yemeni and Egyptian. Notably, there are virtually no immigrants who speak Palestinian Arabic as their native language, and only few who speak related Levantine dialects (viz., Lebanese and Syrian Arabic).

2.2 Palestinians post-1948

The aforementioned border shifts have had quite noticeable linguistic ramifications. A good portion of Palestine's indigenous Arabic-speaking population have found themselves following the 1948 war, commonly referred to in Arabic as *al-nakba* 'the catastrophe' and in Hebrew as *atšmaut* 'independence,' in one of the following new environments:

1. displaced into places other than their original communities within the 1948 borders, as Israeli citizens. This could have happened either because their original towns or villages were destroyed in the war or because, as in the case of larger towns that remained intact, they have been forced out of their existing communities into others that also remained intact. The linguistic consequence of this process of internal displacement has typically been the acquisition of Modern Hebrew as a second language, especially among the generations born into this new scenario and educated within the newly formed Israeli school system. In addition, many such Palestinians have assimilated into their new communities and adopted the local dialects thereof. Again, this is particularly true of the second generation onwards.
2. displaced within Palestine, but outside of the borders of the Israeli state. This category includes Palestinians who, following 1948, ended up in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. The former was under Jordanian rule until 1967 and the latter under Egyptian rule until that year. Linguistically, this particular type of displacement has resulted in the following:
 - a. retention of monolingualism within this speech community, the exceptions being the acquisition of foreign languages (mostly English) as taught in schools and (usually limited) Hebrew for those members of this group who have worked, following the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, within Israel – or in Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories – mostly in manual labor such as agriculture and construction.
 - b. contact with the local dialects typical of speakers' new environs. While in many cases, especially in the West Bank, the linguistic differences between the dialects that were spoken by this group and their new host dialects can be rather subtle, in the Gaza Strip the differences are much more pronounced.³

³ See Cotter and Horesh (2015) for a case study involving refugees from Jaffa (in current-day Israel) who have been displaced into Gaza City (in the Gaza Strip).

3. as refugees in neighboring countries, most prominently Lebanon and Syria. The level of assimilation of Palestinian refugees in these countries has been limited. Many of them have been confined to UN-regulated refugee camps and have not been granted local citizenships. Refugee children are educated in UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) schools with curricula distinct from those of their host countries.⁴ Contact with indigenous speakers of Lebanese and Syrian dialects is limited, and the assumption is that most Palestinian refugees still speak some variety of Palestinian Arabic. Much more research is needed to discern what precisely these varieties are, whether there has been a process of koinéization, or any other sociolinguistic phenomena; see Shetewi (2018) for one of the very few sociolinguistic studies of Palestinian refugees in Syria. Apart from Lebanon and Syria, where Palestinian refugees remain quite restricted in terms of employment, schooling and contact with local speakers, some Palestinian refugees who have remained in the Middle East ended up in such countries as Iraq, Qatar, Kuwait and Tunisia, usually not as full-fledged citizens (unlike the Jordanian case; see below), but with certain rights and privileges more favorable than those afforded to refugees in Lebanon and Syria.
4. as Jordanian citizens within the internationally recognized borders of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Unlike Palestinian refugees in most other Arab countries, the Palestinian refugees of 1948 have mostly assimilated into the political, educational and economical life in Jordan. There are a few exceptions to this rule, in the form of UNRWA-run refugee camps (see Marshood 2010 for an ethnography of these camps). But the vast majority of Palestinians in Jordan now form a prominent, active component of the country's population. As noted in Al-Wer et al. (2015: 72), “[p]recise statistics regarding the size of the Palestinian population who sought refuge in Jordan in the aftermath of the *Nakba* (1948) and *Naksa* (also known as the Six-Day War of June 1967) is not available, but it is likely that approximately 3 million Palestinians now live in Jordan, i.e., 35–45% of the current population.” While many Palestinians in Jordan have retained many of the features of their dialects of origin (for example, there is a sizeable group of former residents of the Palestinian town of Nablus living in Jordan, though many of these had settled east of the Jordan River, i.e., in current-day Jordan, as far back as the nineteenth century; see Al-Wer et al. 2015: 74–75), in places like the capital Amman they have been instrumental in the formation of essentially a new dialect, which combines features from indigenous Jordanian varieties of Arabic with those of Palestinian varieties. The

⁴ See, e.g., <https://www.unrwa.org/what-we-do/education> for UNRWA's own account of its educational enterprise (accessed June 13, 2020).

linguistic result is particularly interesting, not only because of the distinct Palestinian versus Jordanian input varieties, but also because, as noted above, Palestinian Arabic is an umbrella term for a host of local varieties, among which some are rural and others urban. Al-Wer (2003: 60) argues that “none of the linguistic features which have become focused in Amman or which play an important role in the formation of its dialect are rural Palestinian in origin.” This triumph of urban dialects over rural (at least for the Palestinian component of the new Ammani dialect) is, in fact, in line with an additional important component of this variety. “In addition to the input varieties [i.e., indigenous Jordanian and urban Palestinian], the formation of the dialect of Amman is influenced by koineisation at the regional level, involving the major cities in the Levant (particularly Jerusalem, Nablus, Damascus and Beirut)” (Al-Wer 2003: 64). The prevalence of urban features is therefore not limited to the Palestinian contribution to the new dialect formation, but it is also part of a broader trend in surrounding urban dialects regarding several linguistic features that they share. This is compounded by the initial influx of urban dwellers into the east bank of the Jordan in the 1920s and 1930s, mostly from the Palestinian cities of Haifa, Jaffa, Nablus, Jerusalem and Hebron, but also from the Syrian capital of Damascus (Al-Wer 2003: 59).

5. as refugees of varying official statuses in non-Middle Eastern countries, such as those of Western Europe, South America and North America (see, e.g., Zakharia 2016: 145 for a brief overview of Palestinian immigration to the United States). While many of these Palestinians living in the global West enjoy the rights of full-fledged citizens in their new countries of residence (this is true as well of their offspring who were born outside of Palestine), from a sociopolitical standpoint they are still considered refugees, both within the Palestinian community and among its many supporters worldwide. In some sense, their status resembles that of the Palestinians who became Israeli citizens: they can vote, be elected to office, receive state benefits and the like. Yet both groups very often suffer from institutional and societal racism and discrimination in domains such as the job market, housing and education. Linguistically, members of these communities from the second generation and younger typically adopt a language other than Arabic (e.g., English, Spanish) as their native tongue. In many families, Arabic is still used in the home as a ‘heritage language,’ but in most cases it has lost many of its communicative functions, even more so than within the 1948 borders of Israel.

The Arabic-speaking Palestinian community, however, is not the only speech community in historic Palestine for whom shifting borders have had profound linguistic consequences, or whose linguistic and extralinguistic behaviors have affected the sociolinguistic outcome of their environs. Earlier in this paper, I made

the point that much of the Jewish immigration to Palestine, particularly following the *Nakba*, that is, when Israel had already declared itself a state, and a Jewish state at that, was from countries with Arabic-speaking majorities elsewhere in the Middle East and in North Africa (see, e.g., Gafter and Horesh 2015: 338). As mentioned above, most of these Jewish immigrants spoke dialects of Arabic that are quite distinct from those of the Muslim and Christian Palestinians. However, many of them did speak varieties of Arabic that are, for the most part, mutually intelligible with Palestinian Arabic, e.g., Iraqi Arabic, Egyptian Arabic and, to a lesser extent, Yemeni Arabic.

3 The new wave to go

Third Wave Sociolinguistics, in the model laid out by Eckert (2012) is more than just a new way of observing and examining language variation. Eckert actually posits that the very beginnings of variationist sociolinguistics (e.g., Labov 1963, the Martha's Vineyard study) lend themselves neatly to this kind of 'new' analysis, which incorporates such concepts as Silverstein's (2003) 'indexical order.' Variation, therefore, is "a continuous process in which linguistic features of all sorts are continually imbued with a variety of meanings" (Eckert 2012: 94). One may argue that even in the kind of "first-wave" sociolinguistics exemplified by Labov's own extensive work, there is some inkling (and this is probably an understatement) of reference to meaning – definitely of social meaning.

Consider Labov's well-known distinction between linguistic changes *from above* and *from below*. We have become accustomed to take these two concepts rather at face value, viz. that the former represents processes of change of which speakers are aware (above the level of consciousness), whereas the latter refers to change that speakers are by-and-large unaware of (below the level of consciousness). But Labov's own characterizations of the two types of change, are by no means devoid of reference to social meaning. In particular, he posits: "'Above' and 'below' refer here simultaneously to levels of social awareness and positions in the socioeconomic hierarchy" (Labov 1994: 78). In this vein, he continues: "*Changes from above* are introduced by the dominant social class [...] *Changes from below* [...] may be introduced by any social class, although no cases have been recorded in which the highest-status social group acts as the innovating group" (Labov 1994: 78).

This distinction has proven crucial to our understanding of many processes of linguistic change. The issue we have, though, when dealing with variation and

change across such intricate borders (often a combination of geographical, political and social boundaries) is that it is often unclear what constitutes the “dominant social class” for a speech community. In fact, it may very well be the case that even for a specific speech community, different social groups (I am deliberately avoiding the term ‘class’ here) have different levels of dominance based on individual or subgroup circumstances and ideologies.

4 Sociolinguistic processes in Palestine

This can be illustrated with the case of Palestinian Arabic, focusing on the nearly two million Palestinians who form 20–25% of the citizenry of the State of Israel. As Peter Auer explains, the concept that “there are no nations without a territory” (Auer 2005: 3) is something of a utopian myth. This is evident, for instance, in the German-speaking region in Europe: “the German language area is rich in examples of political (nation state) borders cutting across dialect continua” (Auer 2005: 3). This, of course, becomes more complicated where more than one language – sidestepping the problematic distinction between dialects and languages and assuming some sort of intuitive differentiation between the two – are involved. In Auer’s discussion, this includes such cases as multilingual Luxembourg and Switzerland (Auer 2005: 21–24). In the case of historic Palestine – the area constituting today’s Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – Arabic and Hebrew are the main participants in this complex interplay between languages and the social status ascribed to them.

In the West Bank and Gaza, Arabic remains the dominant language. Hebrew is confined predominantly to the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and to some extent, as a component of limited bilingualism among certain Palestinians who have worked in Israeli towns as manual laborers or served time in Israeli jails, usually as political prisoners.⁵ In the areas circumscribed by the boundaries delimiting the Israeli state, however, Hebrew is the main language of government, business and the general public sphere. Arabic is usually used only among Palestinians, and as most of the country is ethnically segregated, i.e., Jewish Hebrew speakers usually live in separate communities from Palestinian Arabic speakers, Arabic is also confined by spatial constraints. But how does this square with Labov’s notion of dominance? Do we even have a basis for comparison between

⁵ In one location in the West Bank, namely East Jerusalem, there is a growing tendency of especially young residents to learn Hebrew and become active in the workplace in Hebrew-dominant West Jerusalem, as well as study at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. See, e.g., Ilaiyan (2012).

“dominant social class” and some kind of dominant language in a politically charged bilingual situation?

Palestinian Arabic is subject to contact-induced change. I have shown this for two phonological variables: the voiced pharyngeal (ʕ) and the pharyngealized coronals (d^ʕ, s^ʕ, t^ʕ) (Horesh 2015). I have also provided evidence for additional changes in progress in morphosyntax, in the preponderance of code-switching, and lexical borrowings (see also Henkin-Roitfarb 2011). Critics of such a determination that structural borrowings are indeed primarily structural will argue that lexical borrowings are often the impetus for any subsequent contact-induced change which on the surface appears to be structural. As Ruth King puts it: “the literature tends to focus on outcomes, not processes” (King 2005: 234). This is an interesting theoretical question, which will not be dealt further in this paper, but which deserves attention in future research. From a sociopolitical perspective, we can make a number of assumptions:

1. Hebrew is a colonizing language vis-à-vis Arabic (see Horesh 2016).
2. As a result of (1), Hebrew enjoys a high social status among all citizens of Israel, whether Hebrew is their native language or not; competence in Hebrew is viewed as an asset.
3. As another result of (1), among native speakers of Arabic, Hebrew is viewed with contempt, as it contributes to the political and linguistic degradation of Arabic and Arabness.

Needless to say, (1) is a controversial statement, but nonetheless one that in this paper will be treated as a truism. Assumptions (2) and (3) are seemingly contradictory to one another, yet rather than viewing them as such, I propose to treat them as describing a real conflict that many Palestinian speakers live with day in and day out. This can be framed in terms of indexical order in precisely the same manner as Eckert (2012) illustrates:

At some initial stage, a population may become salient, and a distinguishing feature of that population’s speech may attract attention. Once recognized, that feature can be extracted from its linguistic surroundings and come, on its own, to index membership in that population. It can then be called up in ideological moves with respect to the population, invoking ways of belonging to, or characteristics or stances associated with, that population. (Eckert 2012: 94)

5 A few brief case studies

5.1 Palestinians' views of Hebrew as a majority language

The Palestinian population of present-day Israel is now a numerical minority, despite being the indigenous people of that stretch of land. Since 1948, and arguably beforehand, the Jewish population of Palestine has vastly increased numerically and, importantly, became the governing class of people. Their language, Hebrew, has gained salience as well, and while it has not completely replaced Arabic, it demoted it to a *de facto* secondary language in Israeli society at large. In fact Arabic was, until July 2018, a *de jure* official language alongside Hebrew, but political efforts to overturn its status came to fruition with the passing of the so-called Nation State Law.⁶ As a minority in their own land, Palestinians strive to both distinguish themselves politically and culturally, and at the same time prove that they are, or indeed struggle to be perceived as, full-fledged Israeli citizens. For many, speaking Hebrew, and being able to speak it fluently and artfully, is a source of pride. In 2004 I interviewed Salim (pseudonym), a 56-year-old male municipal worker in the mixed (Jewish/Palestinian) town of Jaffa, who said (my translation from Hebrew):

Interviewer: After all, Hebrew is, is...

Salim: What, what, it's the mother tongue, let's put it this way: it's the mother tongue.

Interviewer: Is Hebrew really your mother tongue?

Salim: Yes! I'm a native of this country.

Interviewer: Yes.

Salim: I was born in this country.

Interviewer: You were born when, what year?

Salim: '48.

Interviewer: '48, together with the state [of Israel] you were born.

Salim: Together with the state.

⁶ For the attempts to demote the status of Arabic in Israel, see, e.g., the following April 2016 report from *Al-Jazeera English*: <http://aje.io/acf8> and the following December 2016 article from *Al-Monitor*: <http://almon.co/2s7c>. More recently, it was widely reported that among the negative ramifications of the Nation State Law was the stripping of Arabic of its official status. See, e.g., the following July 2018 report from *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/19/one-more-racist-law-reactions-as-israel-axes-arabic-as-official-language> (all links accessed June 13, 2020).

This notion of belonging based on the language of the majority is also expressed in a statement by Umm Yazid, a middle-aged female fortuneteller. In the midst of a session (also in 2004) in which she was reading my coffee grounds and informing me, in Arabic, of my forecast future, her phone rang and she shifted to fluent Hebrew. When the phone call ended I asked her about her usage of the two languages (my translation from Hebrew):

- Interviewer: Even when you speak with Arabs, you insert Hebrew?
 Umm Yazid: Yes, with Arabs... I insert Hebrew, yes. Even with my kids I insert Hebrew. Well, it's... Pay attention: the first language in this country is Hebrew, then Arabic. And I, all my life... all my friends and all my acquaintances, everyone's Israeli.
 Interviewer: So actually you end up speaking most of the day Hebrew, more than Arabic?
 Umm Yazid: Yes, yes, more than Arabic, I speak. Why, all my clients are Jewish.
 Interviewer: It's like 20%... Let's say 80% Jews, 20% Arabs.

Each of these speakers asserts their individual connection to their second language, Hebrew, in a different way. Salim goes so far as to claim that given his year of birth, which happens to coincide with the 'birth' of the State of Israel, Hebrew is in fact his mother tongue; according to strict linguistic criteria, his native language is Palestinian Arabic. Umm Yazid lectures me on the power relations between the two languages, and as Hebrew has a numerical advantage, it is, for her, "the first language." Moreover, all of her friends and acquaintances are "Israeli" – whether this means Jewish Hebrew speakers or more broadly Israeli citizens – and this, to her, justifies her extensive usage of Hebrew.

It is unknown what Umm Yazid's political views are. Her son told me his views fluctuated "between Trotskyism and anarchism," but this doesn't necessarily reflect on the entire family, of course. It is unlikely, however, that she is a staunch supporter of the Zionist nationalist movement. Why, then, would she espouse such ideas about the importance of Hebrew being the dominant language in her community? Eckert's work on language and gender (1989: 256) may provide a very convincing explanation: "An important part of the explanation for women's innovative and conservative patterns lies, therefore, in their need to assert their membership in all of the communities in which they participate, since it is their authority, rather than their power in that community, that assures their membership." I cite Eckert here less to imply that Umm Yazid, as a woman, is asserting her membership in some kind of "Israeli" community, but rather that she is doing so as a member of another disenfranchised group, that comprising the Palestinians living in Israel.

As do all of the speakers sampled for the Jaffa corpus, Umm Yazid lenites a good portion of her voiced pharyngeal fricatives (only 47% of tokens of this variable were pronounced as a true pharyngeal [ʕ]; the other fluctuate between a glottal stop [ʔ] and full deletion, with or without compensatory vowel lengthening).⁷ This is in line with the general tendency among members of this speech community to subconsciously approximate the phonemics or phonetics of Hebrew, which for most native speakers lack any pharyngeal segments. We know that Umm Yazid participates in more than one community, not only linguistically, but also socially, ethnically, professionally, and so on. There exists, however, a great deal of overlap between the linguistic aspect of these communal divisions and all the rest. She participates in some social and professional communities as a Hebrew speaker (arguably an L2 Hebrew speaker, but this is not uncommon, even among Jewish Israelis, many of whom are immigrants), and in some – in the case of professional interactions, only a fifth of the time, by her account – in Arabic. It is therefore a logical conclusion that she will exhibit innovative forms in her native language as well, to assure membership through authority, as Eckert asserts. Add to that the fact that the innovations she is exhibiting in her speech are akin to features already available in Hebrew, and the explanation is fortified.

5.2 *Mizrahi* language experiences in Palestine

The concept of borders in Palestinian social life is by no means a new one and is not limited to nation-state politics or to language. In a very personal essay, Smadar Lavie, an Arab-Jewish (aka *Mizrahi*, Hebrew for ‘oriental, eastern’) scholar and activist, visits the city of Acre on the northern shore of the Palestinian Mediterranean (Lavie 2011). The city had transformed from a Palestinian-Arab community surrounded by old walls, having been built and destroyed and rebuilt again several times over between 950 and 1814,⁸ into a quasi-gentrified city of Jews and Palestinians following the 1948 *Nakba*. Jewish immigrants from within the Middle East and from North Africa (*Mizrahim*) were settled outside of the city’s old walls, and many proceeded later on to sell their homes to Palestinians, who also needed to leave the old city due to its confining space (Lavie 2011: 103). Lavie cites the Acre case (and in passing, that of Jaffa as well, the sociolinguistic situation of which is described in Horesh 2015) as one in which two subsets of the Israeli citizenry are living under discriminatory circumstances. And while on the face of it, one group – the *Mizrahi* immigrants – are part of the newly formed Jewish colonizing majority, in fact, both they and the

⁷ See Horesh (2015) for a detailed account of this process among the Jaffa Palestinian community.

⁸ See <http://www.akk.org.il/en/Old-Acre-The-Walls-and-Wars-Route> (accessed June 13, 2020) for a quick history.

indigenous Palestinians of Acre share (dialects of) the same language, Arabic, which for each of these communities has been suppressed in different ways.

Lavie puts this in no uncertain terms:

In the Jewish state, all Jews are to be equal. Palestinians continue to speak and write and dream in Arabic. This mother tongue was cut off from Mizrahim. When they speak Hebrew with even the slightest trace of Arabic, the language of the enemy, it connotes the Mizrahi low class. (Lavie 2011: 104)

In addition, Lavie argues, Zionism, the Jewish national movement that has led historic Palestine to lose its Arabic-speaking indigenous majority in favor of that of an immigrant community that had adopted a new variety of Hebrew as its main language, has deliberately settled Jews of Arab origin alongside Palestinians in places like Acre. This juxtaposition of two populations whose mother tongue is the same – bar dialectal differences – has cunningly been augmented by a “divide and conquer” (see below for the usage of this term by both Lavie and one of the speakers I had interviewed in Jaffa) policy: *Mizrahi* Jews were led to believe that their old language, Arabic, is inferior to that of the *Ashkenazi* (European-Jewish) elite, partly because it is the language of the Palestinian enemy, as well as of hostile neighboring countries. As a direct result of this strategy, Arabic usage among Jewish immigrants to Israel, and even more so among their offspring, has seen a sharp decline. The only purpose for which some *Mizrahi* Jews were encouraged to use their Arabic in the early days of the Israeli state, was within the context of the state’s military and civilian intelligence apparatuses. Even then, there was a distinction made in these military and governmental positions between “Arabists,” who came from within the *Mizrahi* community, and “Orientalists,” who were educated in Europe or at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (see Piterberg 2001: 36–37).

Ran Cohen, a retired Israeli politician, who had served as a member of Knesset and cabinet minister, recently published his memoirs under the title *Said* (Cohen 2016). Upon migrating as a young boy from Baghdad to the newly established Israel, Cohen was encouraged by his older brother to change his name, as it was an Arabic name.⁹ Cohen recalls that his brother explained to him that David Ben Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, had been adamant that Jewish Israelis change their names to “get rid of the signs of exile” (Cohen 2016: 80, my translation from Hebrew). Ben Gurion himself, a native of Poland, had changed his surname from the Germanic Grün to the Hebrew name by which he became known. While the Grün–Ben Gurion example itself may seem to imply that Jews of various origins were persuaded to change their names, there is a preponderance of arguments in

⁹ Cohen’s original first name was Sa‘īd, which means ‘happy’ in Arabic. His chosen Hebrew name, Ran, connotes ‘cheerful singing.’

the literature that this phenomenon has been more pronounced among *Mizrahim* than among *Ashkenazim*, and that *Mizrahi* name changing was motivated by stigma, rather than as merely to appease a charismatic leader. Literary scholar Reuven Snir comments the following when discussing various forms of assimilation among *Mizrahim* (or as he calls them, “Arab Jews”): “In order to escape their Arab identity, many of them have also hebraicized their names” (Snir 2006: 392). Other strategies Snir mentions in this regard are hair dyeing, wearing jewelry or headgear with Jewish symbols, and adjusting one’s accent so that pharyngeal segments are replaced by “softer,” less Arabic-sounding sounds. This is done, Snir tells us, “in order to avoid being mistaken for [non-Jewish] Arabs” (Snir 2006: 392).

Ran Cohen was sent to live in Gan Shmuel, a kibbutz in north-central Israel. In another chapter in his memoirs, he recalls the arrival of a well-dressed newcomer from Iraq, who was assigned to be his school’s Arabic teacher. Cohen remembers that he felt a sense of camaraderie with the new teacher, as they both hailed from the same country and shared certain habits and norms. Yet he chose allegiance with his fellow classmates and ridiculed the teacher for his foreign ways to the point where he decided to kick a student out. The student he chose was Cohen himself, at whom the teacher cried (in Arabic), “ḥmār, ḥmār!” ‘donkey, donkey!’ This was young Cohen’s last Arabic class in Gan Shmuel, though Cohen the elder now regrets having abandoned his native language:

I convinced my home room teacher that I spoke Arabic, and that got me out of this chore. True, I knew the language, but the decision was mistaken. For many years afterwards I hadn’t used Arabic, and I lost my mother tongue entirely. Fortunately, within my voluntary political activism as an adult, I have come across opportunities to make use of propaganda and friendship meetings in the Arab villages of Wādi ‘Āra in order to regain partial command of Arabic. But to this day I feel the void, and I am definitely ashamed of having lost my mother tongue. (Cohen 2016: 98, my translation from Hebrew)

10 I am making an exception here and mentioning Dr. Jday’s full name, as he was a prominent figure in Jaffa’s Palestinian community, and spoke publicly both to other researchers (e.g., anthropologist Daniel Monterescu, who cites him in his 2005 doctoral dissertation and later in his 2015 book, in which he names Jday “the only surviving member of the pre-Nakba elite” [Monterescu 2015: 103]), as well as by news organizations such as Al-Jazeera (see <https://youtu.be/6P7hgGkYPIQ>) and by oral history projects such as Zochrot/Dākirāt (see <http://zochrot.org/ar/testimony/56294>) (Both links accessed June 13, 2020).

11 “Unfortunately” actually refers here to the sectarianism prevalent today, rather than to the situation “back in the day.” The pragmatics of this phrase are to be understood to pertain to the entire context of the utterance, not to the adjacent constituent.

5.3 Zionism as an agent of division

The notion of “divide and conquer” mentioned by Lavie (or “divide and rule,” see below) is expressed by local speakers as well. One person I interviewed back in 1999 was Dr. Fakhri Jday, aka Abu Yousef (1926–2014), who was a pharmacist in Jaffa and a symbol of the old guard in town.¹⁰ His views were very clear, as can be inferred by the following excerpt (my translation from Palestinian Arabic):

Abu Yousef: Unfortunately,¹¹ back in the day, unfortunately, back in the day, no one would say, “this guy’s a Muslim,” and “that guy’s a Christian.” We’d all say, “We are Arabs.” Nor would anyone ask anyone else, “what are you?” Or [while] traveling, “what are you?” – by God, “I’m a Palestinian!”

Interviewer: And that way [was] better, in your opinion?

Abu Yousef: Of course [it was] better. Now, would you say to an Englishman, “what are you?” He’d tell you, “I’m English.”

Interviewer: Of course.

Abu Yousef: A Frenchman will tell you, “I’m French.” He won’t tell you, “I’m this” or “I’m that.” They’ll answer you with, “I’m English,” “I’m Fre-,” he’s proud of his nationality, of his country. And this is how it used to be. Someone was asked, “What are you?” They’d say, “Palestinian!”

Interviewer: Of course.

Abu Yousef: There were no other things, because these are foreign things, which were inserted later on, according to the policy of “divide and rule.”

Interviewer: Mhm.

Abu Yousef: Today we have, first of all, we had Arabs and Jews. Then the Arabs became, because of mass media and encouragement from the authorities, [we] became Muslims and Christians. [Instead of] Arab we started saying, “Muslim and Christian.” Later on they started saying, “Muslim and Christian and Druze.” And after a little bit, “Muslim and Christian and Druze and Bedouin.” And God knows what they’ll want tomorrow, what other thing will come out, what other nonsense. This distinction is something we weren’t familiar with. There was true camaraderie, true friendship, mutual respect among all.

Interviewer: Aha. When did all this change occur?

Abu Yousef: Definitely, it all happened gradually, after [19]48.

There appears to be a contradiction between Abu Yousef's critical approach to the processes that commenced after the *Nakba* of 1948 and the views expressed by Umm Yazid and Salim, for whom acceptance of the Hebrew (and by extension, Jewish) nature of the state is so obvious that they appear puzzled by any attempt to question it. True, neither Salim nor Umm Yazid say anything explicitly political, and Abu Yousef's comments aren't overtly about language. Yet both issues are intertwined. For as historian Orit Bashkin aptly argues: "Within the new nation-state, Hebrew was the language through which the national project was to be revived, and consequently Jewish migrants were encouraged to forsake the languages of the Diaspora, like Yiddish, Ladino, and especially Arabic, the language of the Arab, now the enemy" (Bashkin 2016: 139). Moreover, Abu Yousef's commentary does indirectly relate to language use, as it refers to the terminology, the very nomenclature of groups within Palestinian society, which has become more sectarian and more divisive ever since Zionism became synonymous with (allegedly) good citizenship.

5.4 Dilemmas of belonging

The next two excerpts illustrate the very dilemma faced by Palestinians who are also citizens of Israel. The two speakers I will cite below are Jamila, a 30-something schoolteacher from Jaffa, and Abu Shafiq, an undereducated manual laborer in his 60s from Umm al-Fahm, a village-cum-city in the north-central Palestinian valley known locally as *Wādi 'Āra*, populated entirely by Muslim Palestinians. I interviewed Jamila in 2004 and Abu Shafiq in 2015. Both of them express sympathy with their fellow Palestinians living under occupation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, but also note differences between their own selves, carriers of Israeli ID cards, and other Palestinians, who may on occasion "cause trouble." The excerpts below are translated from Palestinian Arabic (by myself), with words originally uttered in Hebrew appearing in italics.

12 The original Hebrew phrase, *sug daled*, refers to perceived level of citizenship of various groups of people, e.g., Palestinians, Ethiopians, Mizrahim. The word *daled*, denoting the fourth letter of the Israeli alphabet, is sometimes replaced by names of other letters, most notably *bet* (the second letter of the alphabet) and *zain* (the seventh letter, also a colloquial word for 'penis'). Piterberg (2001: 36) simply says the state has defined internally displaced Palestinian refugees as "(second-class) citizens."

13 The Arabic word *barra* literally means 'outside,' but also connotes a meaning of 'abroad.' In a portion not cited in this excerpt, Abu Shafiq mentions Lebanon in this context, but in the excerpt itself he refers to such places as *al-Quds* 'Jerusalem' and *l-ḍaffe* 'the [West] Bank,' which are part of Palestine, but whose Palestinian residents are not, as he is, citizens of Israel.

14 The speaker is using the original Arabic name of the city now known as Hadera (Hebrew *Ḥadēra* or *Xadēra*), once a Palestinian town and since 1948 a Jewish one.

- Jamila: We, the people of Jaffa, we don't have *an identity, in my opinion*. Like, what should I say, I'm Israeli, but I'm not Israeli. In the *ID card* it says I'm Israeli, but I'm not really very close to y'all. Y'all have all of the *rights* to yourselves, and because I haven't been in the army, and it's known that we, the Arabs, in your eyes, or never mind, in this country, we are *Class D*.¹²
So I can't say, "I'm Israeli;" I'm Palestinian. My ancestors were born in Palestine; Palestine was the state then. So, when I want – I'm Palestinian – and when I'd go to demonstrations [in solidarity] with my brethren in Gaza, and with everything that's happening here, they [Israeli authorities] arrested us.
[...]
- Abu Shafiq: The problem is the crisis both here and "outside"¹³, not just here; the crisis begins here and there. It begins "outside," and whatever happens "outside" reflects on the situation here.
[...]
Nowadays, when I go to l-i-Xḡēra¹⁴ or Tel Aviv, I'm scared. Honestly, when I go to *the public clinic*, or to run errands or to work. Back in the '90s, we used to go freely, the entire family, to the beach, to Tel Aviv, to Jaffa. I've got relatives in Jaffa. Or to Netanya, there's a place there that I like.
[...]
But now people are hostile towards you, because you're an Arab. I'm scared, even on the street, you go to *the clinic* and you're scared. So problems "outside" reflect on what's happening here. Why is it so hard? Because we coexist with one another. And we can't dispense with one another. For instance, personally, my interactions with Jews at work are better than my interactions with Arabs. You go to a company, they honor their word, their *contract*. Even if you haven't written a *contract*, they give you their word and honor it.
[...]
So interacting with them at work is good. But interacting with them "there" – that's tough. We used to go to the beach in Haifa: no fear. Today, things aren't right. In my opinion, the way to achieve stability and prosperity and for people to be good to each other is that they must give the [West] Bank, seal the deal, this will be one state and that will be another state. "Good morning, neighbor! You're on your own and I'm on my own."

[...]

Today, if someone causes trouble in Jerusalem, in the West Bank, I bear the responsibility. Why?

Interviewer: But aren't you one people, the Palestinian people?

Abu Shafiq: Listen, buddy, true, there's a Palestinian people, but there's a thing in existence called the State of Israel. The State of Israel is strong. Today the whole world recognizes the State of Israel. Can I tell you to go away from here?

Jamila's dilemma is relatively straightforward. She identifies two obvious components to her political predicament. On the one hand, she is a citizen of what today is known as the State of Israel. On the other, her immediate ancestors were born into the Palestinian people in a territory that had been known as Palestine long before a political entity named Israel came into existence. As such, she has, in her words, "brethren in Gaza," Gaza being a part of the Palestinian territories occupied (and in the Gaza case, heavily besieged) by Israel and its military. It is this duality, in part, that leads to the inferior status in and attitude of the Israeli state and, more crucially, the majority of the (Jewish-) Israeli people, which she laments.

Abu Shafiq's narrative, in my view, is more complex. When prompted, he acknowledges the existence, and his affiliation with, the Palestinian people. But during the bulk of this portion of the conversation I had with him, he only distinguishes between "Arabs" and "Jews," categories which have been made official by the state in its records. Every citizen in Israel has a notation in their file at the Ministry of the Interior regarding "nationality," which is not equivalent to "citizenship." Citizens of Israel have different "nationalities," and the two most common are "Jewish" and "Arab" (see White 2012: 13ff for a discussion of "nationality" vs. "citizenship" in Israel). It is worth noting here that while the term "Palestinian" denotes for most people worldwide any and all descendants of the Arab population that existed in Palestine until 1948, regardless of their current place of residence, in mainstream Israeli parlance, it almost always excludes those Palestinians who are currently citizens of Israel. Mainstream media and the public typically refer to them as "Israeli Arabs" or "Arab Israelis." Abu Shafiq does not use either of these latter terms, but I find his use of "Arabs" in this context to connote some degree of separating himself and his community from that of the occupied territories. In this regard, his view differs sharply from Jamila's account.

Abu Shafiq's attitude differs from Jamila's not only in terminology, but also in the implications in his narrative. Rather than showing solidarity with fellow Palestinians (e.g., in Jerusalem or other parts of the West Bank), as did Jamila when mentioning having participated in demonstrations to support Palestinians in Gaza, he attributes the fear and discrimination he suffers in the hand of Israelis and the

Israeli authorities to “trouble” or “problems” caused by people in those places. For him, it seems, the aspiration to “give them the West Bank” and for two independent states to exist side by side is a solution to his own semi-privileged community of Palestinians in Israel, perhaps more than it is a remedy for the much greater suffering of Palestinians living under military occupation and siege.

This can be summarized and rephrased within the context of borders. There is currently a societal border, as well as a linguistic one, between Jewish Israelis, who predominantly speak Hebrew, and Palestinian citizens of Israel, who predominantly speak Arabic, but are proficient (to different extents) in Hebrew as well. There is another, perhaps softer, societal border between Palestinians living as nominal citizens of Israel and those living in the West Bank and Gaza. The latter are usually not citizens of any country, they speak Arabic (and typically, no or little Hebrew), and “cause trouble,” which then permeates that border, as it boomerangs on Palestinians like Abu Shafiq, in the form of discrimination, violence and subsequent fear of traveling across Israel. Thirdly, there is the political border between Israel and the territories it has occupied since 1967, viz., the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Unlike most other international borders, Israeli soldiers, as well as civilian settlers, perpetually encroach upon this border and facilitate further animosity.

6 A different type of border: Isoglosses – from 1915 to 2016

One final type of border I wish to present is the linguistic border, the *isogloss*. The only complete linguistic atlas that includes Palestine is now over a century old. Bergsträßer (1915) includes forty-two maps of Palestine and surrounding areas in today’s Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, charting individual towns and villages with respect to their pronunciation of certain variable phonemes, as well as lexical items and morphological features that may vary from community to community within this region. In the cases of large stretches of area that share a specific linguistic feature, isoglosses are drawn to delineate the boundaries of their use. Figure 1 is a reproduction of Maps 3 and 4 in Bergsträßer’s atlas. Map 3 plots the reflexes of the Classical Arabic voiceless velar stop /k/ – as either [k] or one of the affricates [tʃ] (č in his notation) or [ts]. Map 4 deals with the Classical Arabic voiceless uvular stop /q/, which has a wide range of dialectal reflexes, of which Bergsträßer notes [kʰ, k, ʔ, g, dʒ] (in his notation: k, k, ', g, ğ, respectively). Note that most locales fit neatly into the regions delineated by just a few isoglosses. But this comes with two caveats. Firstly, Bergsträßer distinguishes between “Ansäsige” and “Beduinen,” (‘sedentary’ and ‘Bedouin’ speakers, respectively). Secondly, within the sedentary regions, some locales have their own ‘private’

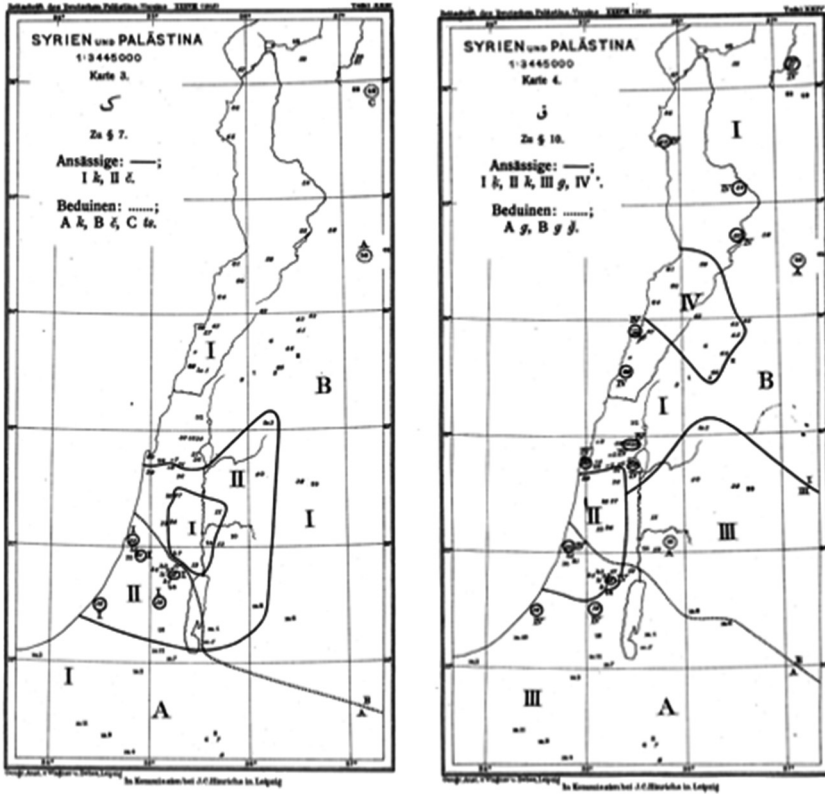


Figure 1: Maps 3 and 4 from Bergsträber (1915).

isoglosses (shown on the maps as circles around the numbers that index the locales). These are urban dialects, which are usually more similar to one another across regions than they are to the rural parts of their own regions. This supralocal nature of many urban features is pervasive in the Arabic-speaking world (see, e.g., Al-Wer 2014: 406).

As Bergsträber's maps do not include political borders – the entire region was part of the Ottoman Empire when it was published – I thought it would be useful to try to overlay these two maps with a map that includes the borders between Israel and the territories it occupies: the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The reason these two maps were chosen is that in many cases they represent two components of one consonantal chain shift:

4. $q > k$

5. $k > tʃ$

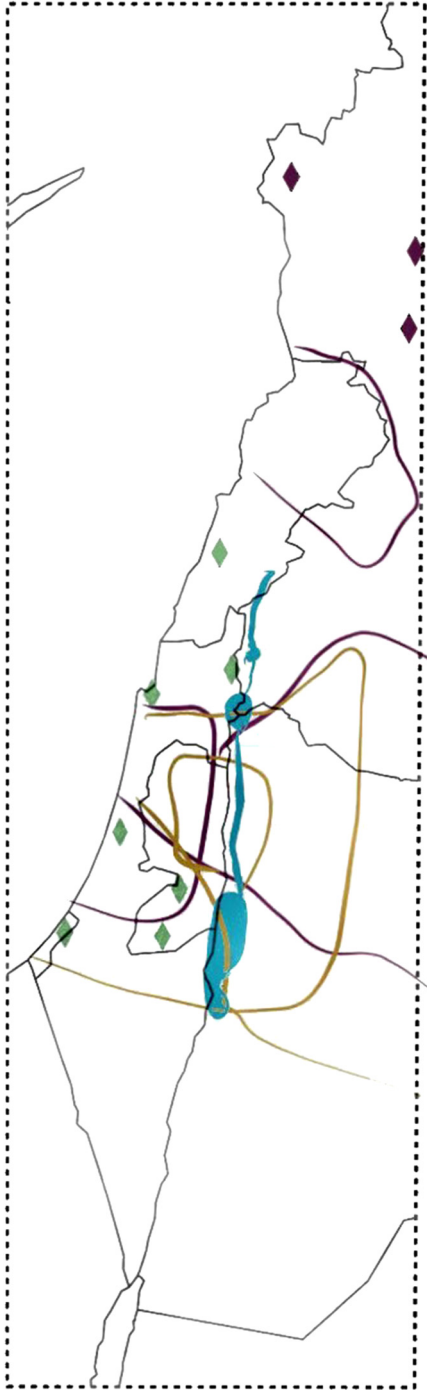


Figure 2: Modified map with political borders and isoglosses for /k/ and /q/.

This is, therefore, a minimal chain shift, as described in Labov (1994: 118), which can be formalized as follows:

6. $q > k > tʃ$

The resulting map (Figure 2) is quite interesting in this regard. I will preface this section with stating that it would be obviously preposterous of me to say anything definitive about dialects, isoglosses and borders based on the political borders of 2016 and the linguistic boundaries of 1915. I am merely using this as an exercise, which would have to be replicated, once more data are gathered and analyzed in 21st century Palestine. Keeping this in mind, the following generalizations can be made:

7. There is considerable overlap between the regions where shift (4) occurs and the ones where shift (5) occurs, confirming the hypothesis that chain shift (6) is in play there.
8. City dialects (e.g., Jaffa, Haifa, Nazareth, Jerusalem) form a string of varieties which are incongruous with their otherwise rural regions. In our case, they consistently have the [k] reflex for the phoneme /k/ and the glottal [ʔ] reflex for /q/. This is similar to many other urban dialects north and west of Palestine.
9. With the exception of Gaza, whose dialect is an interesting mixture of urban Palestinian, Bedouin and Egyptian elements, there is little, if any, bearing on these phonological features of the current political borders within Palestine. For more on the variable (q) in Gaza, see Cotter (2016).

I'll stress again: this is merely an exercise. Some points on Bergsträßer's maps are no longer sites where Palestinian Arabic is spoken (e.g., the city of Tiberias). Others have seen vast shifts in their populations, bringing together speakers of different varieties of Palestinian Arabic. New sociolinguistic variables have since emerged, particularly in places where contact with Hebrew has been inducing variability and what appears to be instances of change in progress (see Henkin-Roitfarb 2011; Horesh 2015). Such changes in the landscape have, effectively, created a sociolinguistic boundary of a kind Bergsträßer's maps could not have captured at the time – that of bilingualism and language contact. But this is, in my view, what makes updated empirical studies of sociolinguistic variation so important for our understanding of the social, even political, meaning of variation.

If a new *Sprachatlas* of Palestine were to be created nowadays, it would only be accurate if it took into account the intricacies of dialectal variation, of language choice, of language contact, and of population movements across the region. It would be a very messy atlas, and perhaps this is why we do not see much by way of this kind of unidimensional dialect geography. In their Foreword to the first issue of *Journal of Linguistic Geography*, the editors write: "It [linguistic geography] is a

linguistics outwardly defined to include the social, historical and economic contexts in which language is formed and used. Thus we expect to find maps reflecting population growth and movement, out- and in-migration, political trends and voting records as well as highway and railroad networks” (Labov and Preston 2013: 2). This is also in line with Labov et al.’s assertion that the “renewed connection between dialect geography and general linguistics was stimulated to a degree by the development of sociolinguistic research and the systematic study of variation within speech communities” (Labov et al. 2005: 4). If we take this a step or two further, the kind of maps we will be drawing – not just for Arabic or for Palestine – will be “third-wave maps,” whatever that might look like.

7 Conclusion

Arabic dialectologists and sociolinguists – actually perhaps linguists dealing with Arabic at all levels of analysis – tend to view the language, its speakers and the regions in which it is spoken as *special*. That Arabic is uniquely diglossic is a common misconception (see, e.g., Saiegh-Haddad 2005). Diglossia is by no means unique to the Arab World, as Ferguson himself has told us over the decades (e.g., Ferguson 1959, 1991). In the first chapter of *The Routledge handbook of Arabic sociolinguistics* (Al-Wer and Horesh 2019a), Enam Al-Wer and I critique what we posit used to be “received wisdom that there is a dichotomy between Standard Arabic and the dialects, and that regional variation was the sole force behind the classification of dialects” (Al-Wer and Horesh 2019b: 8). Indeed, dialect geography has laid crucial foundations for the study of the sociolinguistics of Arabic (more on this in Horesh and Cotter 2016: 370–371). But as I tried to illustrate in this paper, geography is not the be-all-and-end-all of variation in Arabic dialects – as it is not for other languages. Even when borders are concerned, we must extend the scope of what a linguistic border means beyond its place on a map and the division between political entities. In other words, it is the *speakers* of the language that shape not only matters of ‘attitude’ and ‘identity,’ but also how the languages they speak evolve and orient toward one another.

By the same token, Palestine and Palestinian Arabic aren’t unique. Language contact and multilingualism are common worldwide, including elsewhere in the Arab World, and Arabic is but one of many languages to have been colonized by other languages. An interesting case, which is somewhat analogous to the Palestinian situation discussed in this paper, is that of the many indigenous languages of South Africa. In the most recent installment of his publications exploring the sociolinguistics of post-apartheid non-White South African Englishes, Mesthrie (2020) discusses the emergence of varieties (plural!) of Black South African English within

colonial and post-colonial contexts. Unlike those Palestinians who became minoritized in Israel from 1948 onwards, Blacks continued to constitute the vast majority of South Africans. This has had linguistic ramifications as well, with “over 80 per cent of the populace having an African language as main language of the home” (Mesthrie 2020: 3). All of the Palestinians still living in historical Palestine – whether it be in Gaza, the West Bank or what has become Israel – are still living under varying degrees of colonization. Yiftachel (2006) argues that Zionism, the Jewish national movement that led to the founding of Israel as an independent state, has had colonialist characteristics from its inception: “If early Zionism was indeed a colonial movement of emigrants and refugees seeking survival, its later version became a calculated and exploitive state colonialism. The Zionist state was constantly using and abusing the survival and security rhetoric for goals of expansionist ethnocratic rule and for the dispossession of local Palestinians” (Yiftachel 2006: 67).

I tried to illustrate this here using mostly qualitative data and analysis from various sources: recent sociolinguistic interviews, a century-old linguistic atlas, and my humble attempt to crisscross old and new material, as well as to apply theoretical observations others have made about other languages and about language in general to the study of Arabic in Palestine. This paper cannot be anything but a prologue. It must be followed by the collection of a lot more empirical data and much more refined applications of both quantitative analysis and theoretical reasoning. The plight of the Palestinian people, as it is often referred to in humanitarian and political contexts, can shed much needed light on the linguistic consequences of shifting borders and the kinds of forced or semi-forced multilingualisms such process can impose.

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