

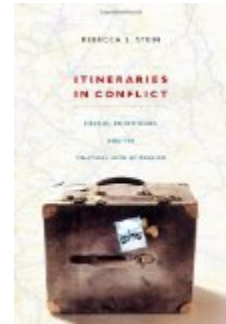
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Waleed Hazbun. *Beaches, Ruins, Resorts: The Politics of Tourism in the Arab World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. xli + 337 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8166-5491-8; \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8166-5492-5.

Rebecca L. Stein. *Itineraries in Conflict: Israelis, Palestinians, and the Political Lives of Tourism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. ix + 219 pp. \$79.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-4251-9; \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-4273-1.

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Rethinking Middle East Tourism

Waleed Hazbun's *Beaches, Ruins, Resorts: The Politics of Tourism in the Arab World* and Rebecca Stein's *Itineraries in Conflict: Israelis, Palestinians and the Political Lives of Tourism* are groundbreaking studies of tourism in the Middle East. Both are noteworthy for demonstrating tourism's critical importance for a deeper understanding of political and economic processes in the region. Hazbun establishes that tourism is key to a better comprehension of the dynamics of globalization in the Middle East, while Stein shows that the practices and discourses of tourism offer critical insights into how Israeli national identity was reimagined during the height of the "peace process." If they receive the audience they truly deserve, these volumes should give a significant boost to the status of tourism studies within Middle East studies.

My own—impoverished, it turns out—perspectives on Middle East tourism are much informed by Tunisian director Ridha Behi's memorable feature film, *The Sun of the Hyena* (1976). It tells the story of how a Club Med, and the bloated and sunburned German tourists it attracts, transform a peaceful, self-sufficient Tunisian fishing village into a neo-colonial dependency, where locals abandon their traditional ways of life in order to serve and perform authenticity for the Europeans. Hazbun informs us that this sort of tourism, and the dependency

model critiques that accompanied it, are the products of a specific, Fordist, historical period known as "beach tourism." Dependency models continue to dominate critical understandings of Middle East tourism, but according to Hazbun, they are decidedly out of date and wholly inadequate. Instead, he offers a new and more dynamic framework for making sense of contemporary Middle East tourism, one that he ably applies to the cases of Tunisia, Jordan, and Dubai.

In Tunisia, tourism has been key to the survival and vitality of the dictatorial regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who seized power in 1987. Tourism not only furnishes substantial revenues for the state, but it has also helped to construct and perpetuate an image of the country as open, secular, and pluralistic, as a kind of cultural bridge between the East and the West. This view of Tunisia, widely held in the West, is largely a product of the country's tourism propaganda, serving the essential function of dissimulating the regime's severely anti-democratic and authoritarian character. Nonetheless, as Hazbun sees it, Tunisian tourism is no longer characterized by a relation of dependency or what he terms "detritorialization," that is, the domination by transnational corporations that characterized the industry in the sixties and seventies. Since the 1980s, Tunisian tourism has

witnessed substantial “reterritorialization,” or an assertion of local economic interests, and the state has spurred this transformation. It has promoted tourist development that emphasizes local culture and heritage, nature tourism, and eco-tourism. It has used tourism to mitigate regional differences within Tunisia, by encouraging the development of tourism throughout the country, including peripheral and economically underdeveloped zones. The state has fostered the building of integrated tourism complexes that are oriented inward, providing everything tourists might desire on site. According to Hazbun, such projects serve to prevent the most negative sorts of socio-cultural and environmental impacts that often accompany foreign visitors. Tourism in Tunisia therefore is a complex phenomenon. It has developed in relatively responsible cultural and environmental directions, promoted development in previously marginalized parts of the country, and increasingly operates to the economic benefit of local interests. Tunisian tourism represents one way in which the country is at once more integrated into global economic networks, and at the same time, is less “dependent” on transnational corporations. At the same time, Tunisian tourism serves as an economic and ideological prop for a regime with one of the worst human rights records in the Arab world.

Tourism was also a critical feature of the so-called New Middle East (NME) model of development adopted by the Jordanian monarchy in the 1990s. Massively promoted by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres after the inauguration of the Israel-Palestine peace process, and quickly embraced by the Clinton administration as its model of Middle East policy, the NME promoted neo-liberal capitalist market relations which, it was claimed, would eliminate political barriers and completely “re-map” the Middle East. In Jordan, Hazbun shows, tourism was not merely central to the NME model of development, it was constitutive of it. Tourism helped create enthusiasm for the NME, and tourism officials were leading promoters of NME-style regional cooperation. Tourism was at the center of the Jordanian monarchy’s plan to promote neo-liberal economic development and integrate the country into the global economy. Jordan’s government heavily encouraged tourism after it signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, and tourism (in the form of Israeli visitors) was hailed as a key symbol of the arrival of the NME era. In the wake of the peace treaty, Jordan, viewing tourism as a vehicle that would bring quick economic benefits to the country, initiated rapid development of tourist infrastructure. In Hazbun’s analysis the Jordanian state is not as central-

ized as Tunisia’s, and therefore much of the development was uncoordinated and not centrally regulated. At Wadi Musa, for instance, the site of guest accommodation for Petra, Jordan’s central tourist attraction, unorganized development spawned a tawdry atmosphere full of “visual horrors” (p. 149). Moreover, a backlash soon erupted against Israeli tourists, who were widely criticized for short stays, stingy spending habits, and cultural insensitivity. The flow of Israeli tourists and the warming of relations with Israel was short-lived, however, as the Israel-Palestine peace track collapsed and Israelis voted in a rightist government in 1996. In the meantime, Jordan’s tourism infrastructure was overbuilt, non-integrated, and failing to yield the expected economic benefits promised by NME cheerleaders. The economic non-achievements of tourism development projects, plus the emergence of a critical discourse about Israeli tourists as economic and cultural threats to national sovereignty, created a political opening for Jordan’s opposition forces. The anti-normalization movement concentrated much of its political critique on the purported dangers of Israeli tourism. In response, by 2000 the Jordanian government had shut down its limited experiment with political liberalization. Tourism, as Hazbun demonstrates, is therefore key to understanding the appeal of, as well as antagonism to, Jordan’s important but short-lived embrace of the NME development model.

Whereas political conflicts had a negative impact on Israeli tourist visits to Jordan, the terror attacks of 9/11 and the U.S. invasion of Iraq, paradoxically, helped fuel a boom in Middle Eastern tourism. Those of us who bemoan the continued salience in the West of negative, Orientalist stereotypes (terrorist, Muslim fanatic) about the Middle East and who advocate the promotion of “positive” images, should be aware that the Middle East tourism industry is already doing an excellent job of combating Orientalist images—and making huge profits at it. Dubai (until recently) successfully marketed its international sporting events, beaches, and mall shopping, Beirut its trendy nightlife, Jordan (bouncing back from the NME experiment) its ecotourism, and so on. In part this is because, post-9/11, big Arab capital shifted investment away from the United States and toward local projects, while Arab tourists increasingly sought local rather than Western leisure sites. Regional Arab firms, like the luxury hotel chain Rotana and Gulf Airways, have flourished, profiting from local expertise and business contacts. Post-9/11 Arab tourism has also tapped new global markets, attracting substantial numbers of visitors from eastern Europe and East Asia.

Dubai is the most spectacular post-9/11 winner, a city whose image is tied up with tourism like an up-scale Las Vegas. It attracts a diverse clientele, with British visitors first on the list. In the past few years, Dubai has had immense publicity success with high-profile projects, such as indoor skiing facilities, the iconic Burj Hotel, and plans to open branches of the Louvre and the Guggenheim museums designed by top-drawer architects, all receiving overwhelmingly favorable coverage in the Western media. Commentators like Thomas Friedman have come to regard Dubai, with its reputation as a “cosmopolitan oasis,” as a model for Middle Eastern globalization, through economic liberalization, “dynamic free trade zones,” and “sound economic management” (p. 213). It is as if the specter of Islamic terrorism has helped transform the negative stereotype of the “rich Arab oilman” into a positive one. Yet Hazbun reveals that Dubai’s fabled cosmopolitan spaces are anything but open. Instead, they are rigidly controlled, carefully segregating Dubai’s workers (mostly migrants from South and Southeast Asia) from the contained spaces reserved for tourists. Moreover, the state has successfully purchased its citizens’ acquiescence by extending almost free housing, due to its near total control over urban development and land rights.

Dubai has emerged as the most successful tourism model in the Middle East, a kind of enclave where tourists are insulated, where security for visitors—a priority since 9/11—is highly visible, and where the potential negative social and cultural impacts of tourism are mitigated. Since the book was published, the Dubai economy has collapsed, though the tourism model remains an eminently viable one, as recent reports of the revival of Beirut’s nightlife niche tourism (now depicted as gay-friendly) suggest.

Stein’s ethnography of Israeli tourism deals just as incisively with significant political and social trends as Hazbun’s survey, and is equally crucial. She concentrates on the post-Oslo period (1992-96) of political openings ushered in by the “peace process” that created a moment when political/national identity in Israel could be reimagined. Israel’s signing of peace treaties with the Palestinians and Jordan, its moves towards increased normalization with other Arab states, and the apparent likelihood of the emergence of a NME, in turn made possible a reconceptualization of the nature of relations of Jewish Israelis with their closer neighbors, Palestinian citizens of Israel. But whereas in Jordan, tourism was in the vanguard, even constitutive of the NME, internal tourism in Israel was, as Stein shows, belated.

Only *after* Israeli tourist visits became possible in Jordan, expanded in Egypt and Morocco, and anticipated in other Arab countries like Syria, could local Palestinian communities—previously seen as hostile and off-limits—be reconfigured as potential sites of visiting and leisure.

Stein devotes the most important part of her study to tourism in Palestinian “rural” villages in the Galilee by a mostly upper-middle class, and left-liberal-leaning Ashkenazi Jewish clientele. Their visits coincided with an important political shift, as the ruling Labor Party adopted a kind of multiculturalist policy and increased state funding to Palestinian communities, which in the past had been starved of funds. The state also devoted greater resources to the Ministry of Tourism for the purpose of promoting internal, Arab-targeted tourism.

Tourist discourses incorporated Palestinians into the national imaginary in the course of visits to the Galilee by packaging them on a small scale at the level of “intimacy.” Stein argues that by placing the Galilee Palestinians in the manageable “container” of the rural, the village, this diminutive scale allowed Israelis to allay their anxieties about the flows of culture and people that were the result of the neo-liberal trajectory of the Oslo accords. The “containment” of Israel’s Palestinian citizens within the enclosed spaces of the everyday was also necessary because internal, Palestinian-targeted tourism was potentially much more threatening to Israeli identity than tourism to Arab countries. Such local tourism might, if not carefully supervised, suggest that “Arabness” was in fact internal to Israel, rather than simply external.

Israeli “internal” tourist discourses and institutions also downplayed or erased the Palestinian-ness of the Arab citizens who lived in the new sites of leisure. Accordingly, Palestinians who were motivated to profit from the opportunities that this new form of tourism offered, played up their “authenticity,” in the form of ruralness and heritage. At the same time, many effaced the oppressive histories and systematic policies of economic underdevelopment that had produced the rundown village atmosphere, which tourists experienced as quaint and picturesque. Tourist discourses emphasized local Palestinian culture—food, daily life, architecture—but not local history or politics. The Galilee was to be consumed and enjoyed as “Arab,” not Palestinian. Sometimes Palestinians inserted their history and politics into the tourism experience—but this did not promote an atmosphere of leisure and relaxation and was discouraged by official tourism bodies until they became infrequent. In any case, the mostly left-leaning Israeli Jewish tourists

in the Galilee, Stein shows, did not want to learn about Palestinian grievances, especially about land expropriations, which by 1993, had resulted in Arab losses of 80 percent of their land (p. 51).

The other form of Oslo-period internal tourism that Stein examines involved a more mainstream and less privileged class of Israeli Jews who patronized the restaurants and bakeries of Abu Ghosh—a Palestinian-Israeli village near Jerusalem with a reputation of “collaboration” with the Zionist movement dating back to the Mandate era. The rapid growth in popularity of Abu Ghosh cuisine was a product of the fact that previously patronized restaurants and bakeries of the West Bank were off-limits after the outbreak of the first intifada in 1987, of the boom in gourmet and international cooking trends in Israel during the nineties, and of how Oslo implicitly authorized the consumption of Arab culture. Also key to Abu Ghosh’s success with mainstream Jewish culinary tourists were the performances of loyalty to the Israeli state that village residents staged repeatedly in its bakeries and restaurants.

Stein identifies a central contradiction haunting Abu Ghosh’s “condition of edibility.” Jewish visitors came for Palestinian food, but denied that the village was “really” Arab or Palestinian—because Abu Ghosh identified with the Zionist order. Though not a problem for Jewish customers, it was for Abu Ghosh residents, generating a sense of “melancholy” for the villagers. Despite efforts to demonstrate their loyalty to the state and to disaffiliate from other Palestinians, the village was still the victim of the underdevelopment that characterized the Arab sector in general, and, when young Abu Ghosh men got into the clutches of Israeli police, they were treated just like any other Palestinians. This melancholy was, by necessity, expressed privately, and not within earshot of the tourists.

Just as Israeli tourism to Jordan began to dry up with the coming to power of the Likud in 1996, so too did internal Israeli tourism, as the Netanyahu government stopped financing its development and sharply cut back funding for Palestinian communities. The eruption of the second intifada in 2000 spelled the complete collapse of the local tourism moment. Stein’s last chapter details how, as that era came to an end, the Israeli press focused on the café, a prime target for suicide bombings (martyr operations, in the Palestinian lexicon), as proxy for the Israeli nation. Israel’s outdoor cafés, with their long history as quintessential tropes of European-style Zionist leisure, were marshaled as signs of the civilizational

struggle that Israel was imagined to be engaged in. Moreover, the fact that Israelis increasingly eschewed downtown leisure sites in favor of heavily securitized neighborhood malls and eateries, reflected the change in spatial politics that attended the demise of Oslo. Instead of its promotion of open borders, economic and political flows, the post-Oslo era produced demands for checkpoints, separation walls, and an interiorized leisure, intensively policed.

Neither Stein nor Hazbun are under any illusion that tourism automatically leads to “greater understanding” or “cultural contact,” and both astutely demonstrate the limits to such a simplistic notion. Yet neither dismiss tourism offhandedly. Stein shows how mainstream Israeli accounts depicted the Ashkenazi (European Jew) as the subject of the tourism narrative, but at the same time, substantial numbers of Israeli tourists to the Arab world were in fact Mizrahi (Arab Jews) or Palestinian citizens of Israel. This sort of “Israeli tourism” was also not part of Jordanian discourse, whether official or oppositional. Although not much developed in either book, further examinations of Israeli tourism focusing on Mizrahi Jews and Palestinian citizens could further the project of breaking down the Arab/Jew binary. Hazbun’s brief but enlightening discussion of the Egyptian writer Ali Salem’s Israel travelogue (*A Drive to Israel*, 2003) shows some of the possibilities. Salem emphasizes the heterogeneous character of Israel, recounts how he spoke Arabic to Mizrahi Jews and Palestinians, emphasizes the kinship he felt with Egyptian Jews he encountered, and suggests that Israel should not be regarded by Arabs as homogeneously foreign and alien. Hazbun argues that Salem’s text shows the potential for alternative tourism to enable pluralized connections between people and make light of prevalent notions in the Arab world about the threat of an Israeli cultural invasion. Hazbun also makes some brief, but very useful, suggestions in his conclusion, about how tourism in the Arab world might be made truly open, by moving away from enclave tourism, fostering more people-to-people contact, and encouraging a greater overlap of tourism and non-tourism spaces.

Stein too suggests that even though the Oslo opening was of short duration and although Israeli officials made every effort to keep it carefully managed, the development of tourism presents the possibility of “alternative futures” for Israel. Israeli tourism, she argues, was “itinerant,” a process without teleology, involving both the maintenance of borders and their calling into question. Adnan Abu Raya, for instance, the tour guide at the Palestinian Heritage Museum in Sakhnin, informed Jew-

ish tourists quite frankly about the history of the village and issues of concern to Palestinian citizens in general—some of whom did feel the pain. The “melancholic” stories Stein hears in Abu Ghosh about discrimination and second-class status were more muted, but they too point towards another kind of opening, an alternative way in which Israeli-ness might be imagined.

Tourism, both Stein and Hazbun suggest, isn't sim-

ply a matter of dependency, one-way globalization, and cultural and national boundaries. “Reterritorialization” is a distinct possibility, as are meaningful, as opposed to managed, limited, and securitized, interchanges. The trajectory of tourism itineraries, moreover, is not simply determined by politics or economics. The practice of tourism itself also has an important role to play, and one which Hazbun and Stein are to be credited for helping us understand.

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