

We learn of the coalescing of conditions that by 1930 made a Yiddish encyclopedia both necessary and possible: the maturing of secular Yiddish language and culture, the flourishing of Yiddish institutions and scholarly publishing, the rise of Diaspora nationalism, and the emergence of an educated worldwide Yiddish readership. Trachtenberg informs us that the encyclopedia “was to be a means by which to further anchor Yiddish-speaking Jews to the modern world and assert their rightful place in it” (41) and that, despite the lack of state support enjoyed by most other national encyclopedias, “the encyclopedia was nothing less than a declaration of the transnational sovereignty of Yiddish and the Jews who spoke it” (85).

As in all matters Jewish, the encyclopedia was conceived as a compromise between the universal and the particular, with the balance struck at ten-to-one so that it might serve as a “bridge to the modern world” (17). Not surprisingly, the Holocaust forced a reversal of these priorities, and all of the postwar volumes were directed inward. Trachtenberg relates that the surviving encyclopedists reconceived their work toward a “fourfold set of tasks—salvaging the cultural treasures of Eastern Europe, maintaining a transnational community of Yiddish speakers, documenting and memorializing the Holocaust, and transmitting Yiddish culture to American Jewish audiences” (163)—all in resistance to the post-Holocaust “exile of Yiddish,” as Trachtenberg aptly titles his work.

If a quibble must be found, it is that the impetus to do justice may also lead to overinclusion. Yet this is a matter of taste. Some may be oversatated; others will surely *lekn di finger* (lick their fingers) at every detail. In either event, the author may rest easy in the knowledge that justice has been done. And, finally, a quibble with the publisher: the dust jacket is every author’s nightmare—the title of the book is in bold white letters on an equally bold off-white background so that, on a bookshelf, the spine is unreadable from any distance greater than one foot. But Trachtenberg may rest easy here too; with luck, the scholarship and dedication within will shine through.

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Rebecca L. Stein. *Screen Shots: State Violence on Camera in Israel and Palestine*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021. 234 pp.

Rebecca Stein’s 2001 *Screen Shots* is an ethnography of the camera. The book charts the relationship and respective agency between the camera, its bearer, and the photographic subject(s), set against the often violently and politically contested spaces of Israel-Palestine. While Stein’s source material is now several years old (collected since 2010), this book is as much a glimpse into the future of the Israeli-Palestinian context as its recent (2000 to present) history. Interviews with Israeli NGO B’tselem employees, numerous Palestinians, Israel Defense Forces

## Book Reviews

(IDF) officials, and Jewish settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) create a rich ethnographic narrative that grapples with the realities of the ever-more complicated ethical and legal frameworks of violent footage.

Stein's writing is lucid; presenting the reader with a well-constructed and considered argument. Despite the book's quality and readability, it is not, however, a text for Israel-Palestine studies beginners. For educators, supplementary texts on Israel's occupation over Palestinians such as Saree Makdisi's *Palestine Inside Out* (2008) are advisable. The need for additional material is compounded by Stein's minimalist introductory outline of related literature. This is not a criticism but worth noting.

As a researcher/educator working in Israel-Palestine, I found that Stein's work evidences extensive ethnographic research potential. In chapter 1, Stein begins her thesis framing the camera as an agent caught between being a tool for change or further conflict, alluding to later discussion regarding Israeli and Palestinian claims of legitimacy and authenticity. In doing so, Stein sets out for the reader the human stakes in the study context, most poignantly how possession of mobile phones (and therefore portable cameras) in Gaza between 2008–2009 made Palestinian civilians "legitimate" targets for aggression under IDF policy. Although detailed and well written, Stein's early analysis can at times be repetitive, and could be sharpened. The introductory chapter brings the reader's attention to the second of many photographs included in the book, notably that of Elor Azaria on the cover of *Makor rishon* magazine as "Man of the Year." Here is as good of a place as any to note that, given the content of the book, Stein's use of pictures throughout is refreshing in that it does not seek to entertain images for a shock factor. Stein's interpretation of photographs is sophisticated, considered, and multifaceted. This is a strength of Stein's work that should not be overlooked.

In the second chapter, Stein continues to follow the work of B'tselem in the OPT. In an important shift of policy, Stein highlights the significance (and rightly so) of B'tselem's 2016 decision to "cease all formal work with the military law enforcement system" (60). This decision has continued to shape the conflict and the pathways to justice and/or retribution for those oppressed by the Israeli military. Early in chapter 2, the reader is struck by the parallels of Stein's content with the events of May 2022, wherein Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian American journalist, was shot dead while working—in full "PRESS" attire—in the northern West Bank city of Jenin. Abu Akleh's death symbolizes a continuation of the patterns of IDF violence against Palestinian camera bearers outlined by Stein. Paradoxically, Stein notes that Palestinian camera bearers well known to the IDF during the 2010s seem to have been met with more leniency.

Chapter 3, "Settler Scripts," presents a complicated scene of truth determinism. Stein portrays a reality whereby both Palestinians and Israeli settlers feel their narrative is being silenced, which only leads to further refusals to listen and observe. Chapter 3 neatly displays the echo chambers of knowledge formation different groups operate within, and the dangers such isolation can foster. The main example Stein presents of conflicting narratives around recorded footage is the evolution of Israeli responses to footage of violence against Palestinians. Despite the severity of the video content, Stein notes, an Israeli retort of "what came

before”—meaning what Palestinians did to deserve being beaten, arrested, killed, etc.—became commonplace in the last decade. Palestinians therefore struggle to raise substantial sympathies among the Israeli public. Concurrently, Stein highlights Israeli accusations of “Pallywood” (staged, and therefore insincere, scenes of violence) which play into age-old colonial expectations of bodily compliance among colonised populations. The analysis here is excellent.

Stein’s penultimate chapter tracks the inner workings of B’tselem, Israel’s most well-known human rights NGO. The narrative details the processes involved in obtaining, verifying, editing, and then distributing footage from the OPT. An increasing reliance upon such material has emerged, as Stein suggests, from the reputational damage oral testimonies have received in the last decade. Hard visual evidence is now a prerequisite for an inquiry into illegal acts of violence, let alone justice. Yet there is a further catch for Palestinians seeking justice within the Israeli state system. As the chapter goes on to suggest, the regularity of incriminating footage from the OPT has blunted its effects upon the Israeli public, who are now accustomed to images of violence. Only *extreme* footage makes its way to Israeli news broadcasting or subsequent attempts at legal retribution.

Stein’s final chapter recognizes the inevitable: that the powerful resources of the Israeli state were sooner or later going to deploy the same methods of documentation in the OPT as a “resolution to the crisis in Israeli legitimacy, posed by enemy cameras” (127–28). This discussion echoes Richard Falk’s 2017 work on “legitimacy” in the international arena and is a pressing issue in the region.

Above all, Stein’s work raises important questions regarding the future of conflict, particularly within “domestic” settings. How are morals and rules of engagement affected by the proliferation of media and cameras? How can those who are oppressed keep the upper hand over their oppressors, vis-à-vis the dissemination of images of violence? How do we determine truth among instantaneous reporting and technological manipulations? When, how, and why do we believe victims, even if evidence is partial or unreliable? For students of Jewish studies, Israel-Palestine, conflict resolution studies, or settler-colonial studies, most significant is how technologies can simultaneously play a role in both resistance and oppression. Stein’s work is a thought-provoking and original contribution and is a worthy addition to any relevant reading list.

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