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Introduction

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Introduction

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This dossier gathers papers by four social scientists – in anthropology, political science, and international relations – based in Portuguese research centres and who are conducting research with direct observation in Israel/Palestine. Their common field is Israeli society and its Jewish population, whether within the borders of the State of Israel or in settlements in the Occupied Territories. All four authors are concerned with making intelligible the complex, contradictory and conflicted dynamics of Israeli society, and all agree that intelligibility can only be reached through ethnographic approaches that take seriously the life experiences of, and the construction of meaning by, real people on the ground. Hegemonic narratives of the State of Israel, state institutions, social movements, ethnic and class conflicts, and the Occupation, are at the core of the authors' concerns. In a wider anthropological sense, the dossier wishes to contribute to the much-needed critical understanding of complex contexts of conflict, avoiding the tendency to approach them only through the lenses of ideology, identity or solidarity, whatever the side taken. Instead, they take seriously the challenge of making intelligible the lives of those who are voluntarily or involuntarily involved or caught in situations that are highly charged with political and ethical iniquity, historically and in the present, as is the case of the Israeli-Palestinian relations and the situation of Occupation.

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