AN ESSAY BY THE EDITOR

Imagining Palestine:
From The Margin to the Center

Narrating Palestine begins with the material conditions of life in which Palestinians find themselves. The imaginary is expressed in multiple forms: novels, poems, short stories, memoirs, oral traditions, political cartoons, plays, music, etc. Ghassan Kanafani narrated Palestine in multiple forms including the novel, always proceeding from his own reality. His experience of Palestinian life in exile led him to theorizing Palestine and becoming a politically engaged intellectual. In his poetry, Mahmoud Darwish also defied exile and his words shook the edifice of the Zionist occupation in the Palestinian imaginary.

Resistance, it is said, is born in the margin where the downtrodden, the oppressed, and the forgotten are placed by the imperialist, the occupier, and the bully, to be forgotten, to rot, then disappear. But the oppressed and the occupied continue to resist despite the odds. They fight with their words, their oral tradition, their poetry, their dance, their music. They also fight with the gun against an enemy armed to the teeth and supported by capitalist nuclear powers that created the Zionist entity in Palestine through ethnic cleansing. The Palestinian multifaceted struggle expands in all directions to inform the collective imagination and deepen it based on Palestinian daily experiences. Put another way, the dialectical relationship among all forms of struggle gives strength and additional impetus to intellectual and political production that, in its totality, educates and motivates the oppressed.

Tahrir Hamdi’s Imagining Palestine, takes on the formidable task of interrogating what Palestinians call Adab al-Muqawamah (Resistance Literature). She utilizes Edward Said’s postcolonial oeuvre and his decolonial theory and highlights those theorists within the Resistance Literature genre (Franz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Aime Cesaire, Ghassan Kanafani, bell hooks et al.) as well as activists, writers, poets, artists, and musicians who actively engage in the anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist struggle. Roger Waters as well as other activists, see the humanist dimension of the struggle against Zionism and imperialism and regard it as inseparable from their own struggle against the imperialist beast. Interestingly, Tahrir Hamdi succeeded in including Edward Said’s intellectual production while utilizing his theory to interrogate that literature. This coup is most welcome and

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absolutely necessary to show that the subaltern can not only speak and represent themselves, individually or collectively, but must also theorize independently of the Occident.

Theorizing is a central part of the Palestinian imaginary. It is critical to note that given the exilic nature of Palestinian existence, the process of theorizing highlights and deconstructs the conditions of oppression that compel those residing in the margin to respond to those injustices and to resist. Theorizing interrogates, rejects, and challenges the oppression being committed by the colonial, imperialist forces dominating the global capitalist system. We are all Others when we are in the same fight against Orientalist representations of our collective struggle against the enemies of humanity in the Orient or the Occident. The struggle, therefore, is collective. So is literary production. Theory is the cement that holds together the struggle on all fronts. In this way, theory travels full circle, returning to human experience from where it originated. It elevates the imaginary to higher levels of knowledge, resilience, and resistance against tyranny. To remain true to the meaning of their exile, the exilic intellectuals, must remain, as Said firmly believed, “on the other side of power.” Soja’s “Thirdspaces” are instructive here as the term relates to exile. Exile, as the “world inside,” is “besiegement.” It occurs in the margin historically, spatially, and socially. From sites of oppression these Thirdspaces become sites of resistance (31).

Exile is tragic. As exilic intellectuals theorize, their theorizing is, as Tahrir Hamdi maintains, (post)catastrophic. However, as this theory is counter-hegemonic, one could easily argue that it engages the enemy in the present, therefore, it is informed by current catastrophic experiences. As an example, the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people did not only occur in 1948, but continues to this day. What has been occurring in Jenin and Jerusalem in 2023 is ample proof of those crimes. The resistance still continues. That was how Said understood “Late Style” (113). Late Style expresses the integral relationship between theory and practice, what Marxism refers to as “praxis.” Late Style is directly related to exile in this sense as well. Palestinians are in exile whether they live on the margin inside or outside Palestine. In Palestine, they are under occupation. Outside of Palestine, they have been ethnically cleansed. Therefore, exile is the world inside and the world outside (121).

As exiles, Palestinians have multiple experiences of exile. Those who are exiled within Palestine differ in their experiences depending upon whether or not they collaborate with the Palestinian Authority (PA) that collaborates with the Zionist occupier. Mahmoud Abbas and the other PA officials do not experience exile the same way as those who resist and confront the Zionist enemy on a daily basis in defense of their land. It is apparent that the PA has exiled itself from the struggles of the Palestinian people. The Palestinian living in a refugee camp in East Palestine
(the “West Bank”) experiences exile differently from someone living in a mansion anywhere in Palestine. Similarly, Palestinians living outside of Palestine differ in their exilic experiences depending on their geographic location and economic conditions. What unites them (or at least their overwhelming majority) is that their varied experiences allow them to imagine Palestine and project multiple scenarios of return and defeat of the Zionist occupier.

Tahrir Hamdi’s *Imagining Palestine* propels us forward in appreciating the collective Palestinian imaginary in its exilic state and what it has accomplished on its road to liberation. In so doing, Tahrir Hamdi proceeds from Palestinian reality and unpacks it. She highlights and discusses luminaries in the postcolonial and decolonial literature in reference to the struggle against imperialism and settler-colonialism, as it is manifestly demonstrated in occupied Palestine. Similarly, but on a different plane of resistance, the Palestinian military operation, The Sword of Jerusalem, in response to the Zionist entity’s attack on al-Aqsa, demonstrates another form of resistance.

As I began to write this essay, the Palestinian resistance forces were being engaged militarily with the Zionist enemy as a retaliation for the enemy’s attack on civilian targets in Gaza. The Arab coverage of the Revenge of the Free (the name of the Palestinian military operation in response to the assassinations of Palestinian leaders of Islamic Jihad and the bombing of Gaza by Zionist forces), points out clearly the integral relationship between cultural production and the gun. Poetry and eloquent prose fueled the dynamic of the military engagement. Since then the Zionist entity has been encountering continuing defeats. From the two Jenin confrontations with the Palestinian resistance to the current (June/July 2023) events on the Lebanese borders, the Zionists are wallowing in the mire of their own machinations, and successfully being prevented from achieving strategic goals.

The clarity of the Palestinian imaginary is critical to revolutionary collective consciousness. In describing his journey to Ramallah, Mourid Barghouti (*I Saw Ramallah*), chose his language carefully. He did not title it a “return” to Ramallah. As Barghouti sees it, one can only “return” to Ramallah after Palestine is liberated. Words emerge from the revolutionary imaginary, and “return” to that imaginary to elevate and buttress revolutionary consciousness. Seeing Ramallah or seeing Palestine is yet another exilic encounter. Such an encounter is painful, tragic, and surreal. While in Ramallah, Barghouti endured the pain of seeing and his inability to return. This type of exilic experience that Barghouti endured was at once the “world inside and the world outside.”

The exilic nature of the Palestinian people provides them with the impetus to resist and be oppositional while residing in the margin within and outside of Palestine. In fact, as *Imagining Palestine* maintains, it is critical for the Zionist
enemy to do its utmost to not allow the Palestinians to imagine Palestine “… Israel hopes to make the imagining of Palestine impossible” (68). However, *Imagining Palestine* is a bold demonstration that the Zionist project is failing.

The Palestinian imaginary compels one to ask a question: Given the exilic nature of Palestinian existence, what would allow the marginalized to storm the center and take it over?

The integral relationship between the literature of resistance and more broadly, the culture of resistance in concert with the armed struggle will empower the marginalized in realizing this objective. Tahrir Hamdi’s *Imagining Palestine* reaffirms this thesis of LIBERATION.

**Note**