Cracks in the Wall is an insightful, meticulously documented study of the apartheid state Israel has created in the Occupied Territories (OT) of Palestine/Israel. Ben White reveals that the peace process, which has gone on for more than two and a half decades, is a farce. He puts forth the argument that the peace process enabled the creation of an apartheid state, but he also projects into a more promising future of coexistence between the Jewish and Palestinian peoples. The book is comprised of seven chapters and a wealth of notes that provide a clear analysis of the ramifications of the status quo. White explores answers to a few major questions about the present reality: How has Israel implemented the “creeping annexation” (29) of the OT? What are the reactions of Israeli Jews to the facts on the ground? In what ways have American officials and American Jews responded to the process of the de facto apartheid? And finally, how have Palestinians in the OT and the diaspora reacted to this reality? This brief review will relate some of the answers the book narrates.

To begin with, the point of departure of the peace process is discriminatory. It has been holding “negotiations” between unequal parties, and often with the absence of Palestinians. Additionally, the peace process claims to resolve the Palestine-Israel conflict and establish peace between the two peoples. Since the early 1990s, however, the peace process has inhibited Palestinian self-determination, prolonged the occupation and prohibited the formation of an independent Palestinian state. White demonstrates how this ploy was used by Israel, with the full support of the United States administrations, to realize the long-term vision of establishing a Jewish state on the whole land of Palestine.

Since the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel began the implementation of its plan steadily and openly. Many pronouncements by Israeli officials reveal this much; the secret meeting in 1978 between Shimon Peres and Menachem Begin exposes the Zionist goal (45–46). From the annexation of East Jerusalem to land grabbing to the continued establishment of illegal settlements to the building of the separation wall and the blockade of the Gaza Strip, all actions which substantiate Zionist ideology and Israel’s long-term plan. Furthermore and in the aftermath of the Oslo
Accord, the OT were divided into areas A, B and C (10–11), the Palestinian Authority (PA) was coopted to become the repressive agent of the “natives,” and the political question was deflated into a humanitarian one by the growth of NGOs and other UN agencies.

Scholars, journalists, politicians, peace activists and UN reports have anticipated and warned against the reality of the “creeping apartheid” (25), White emphasizes. For example, renowned scholars Ian Lustick and Edward W. Said argued that Israel has crossed the “institutional” and “psycho-cultural” thresholds since 1967 (20–21; 30). The then US secretary of state John Kerry and former British foreign minister Boris Johnson stated clearly that Israeli policies would eventually create an apartheid state (27). Even former Israeli ministers, such as Ehud Olmert in 2007 and Ehud Barak in 2010 spoke of the dangers of Israel’s actions (25). Regardless of their ideological affiliations, according to White, Israeli governments have been manipulating the “illusion” (28) of the peace process, for they all share the unwavering belief in the preservation of Israel as an exclusive Jewish state, with no place for the Palestinian people.

In Chapter 3, White brings to light the divisions among Jews regarding Zionist ideology and its current implementation. When Zionism arose in the last decades of the nineteenth century, it was far from being a homogeneous movement. Similarly, in the last decades of the twentieth and early decades of the twenty-first centuries, Jewish voices are far from united. This is especially evident among the younger generation of American and British Jews. While most American Jews had responded favorably to the 1967 Israeli victory, that period is over, White states. In the west, the younger generations are dissenting from Israeli policies, and young Jews have been calling for liberation and self-determination for the Palestinian people. White writes: “Israel is fast becoming a source of division rather than unity for American Jewry” (56). American NGOs such as J Street, IfNotNow, Open Hillel and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), among others, are vocal in their calls for justice, democracy and human rights, with some variations. In fact, JVP, the largest organization that boasts thousands of paying members and followers, is a force to reckon with.

This is not to say, the author concedes, that support for Israel is on the wane. Although the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) continues to have influence in Washington, especially among republicans and right-wing conservatives, democrats and left-wing liberals have been shifting position. Furthermore, under the current US administration with President Donald Trump at the helm, liberal progressives have been alienated from the Israeli-US right-wing politics. As White puts it, “Israel has been wedded to settler colonialism; the left (or at least a significant portion of it) has embraced decolonisation” (81).
What role have Palestinians played in disseminating their reality and resisting the permanent occupation under which they live? White emphasizes that the Palestinians in the OT and outside have been steadfast. Their reality and consciousness inform their resistance and solidarity on both the local and global levels. The launching of grass roots movements, which embrace passive resistance, has had an impact on public opinion worldwide, especially with the platforms that modern technology provides. Organizations such as the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, Al-Shabaka think tank, the Palestine Strategy Group (PSG) and Adalah, among other forums, have been instrumental in speaking truth to power across borders and generations.

The last three chapters of Cracks in the Wall narrate the successes of these organizations. BDS, whose mission and strategy are inspired by South African resistance to apartheid, is an organization that has caused controversy, according to White. Readers will find White’s analysis enlightening as they learn about these non-profit organizations. Their tireless efforts are a microcosm to the macrocosm of the Palestinians at large. He concludes his study with a vision for the possibility of a “single democratic state” (147) where all its citizens share a home, leading an ordinary life.

Cracks in the Wall is a must read. It would appeal to students and scholars of Middle East studies, the Palestine-Israel conflict, international politics and conflict resolutions.

Wannous, Saʻdallah. *Sentence to Hope.* Translated from the Arabic with an introduction by Robert Myers and Nada Saab.
Hardcover $38.00

*Sentence to Hope* is a valuable introductory reader of Syrian playwright, essayist and cultural critic Saʻdallah Wannous (1941–1997). Hailed in the Arab world as one of the greatest Arab playwrights in the second half of the twentieth century, this reader is a timely translation for the English-speaking world. The book is organized into two sections: four complete plays make up the first section, while the second includes speeches, essays and interviews. Along with an excellent introduction, the second section provides the needed historical, intellectual and literary contexts that have helped shape the playwright. In the midst of the turmoil and destruction that have engulfed Syria and the Arab world at large in the modern and post-modern periods, this reader is a breath of fresh air. In the interest of space, this brief review will focus on three of the playwright’s concerns, underscored in the second part of the reader, entitled “Speeches, Essays, and Interviews.”
“The Dream Falls Apart”

The above title of an essay by Wannous, published in 1988, alludes to the first novel by the acclaimed Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe. *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which has been translated into 50 languages, is the first postcolonial novel by an African writer. Now a classic, the novel explores the ramifications of the arrival of British colonialism in Nigeria in 1851. Achebe had been inspired by W. B. Yeats’ poem, “The Second Coming” where the following metaphor appears: “Turning and turning in the widening gyre /The falcon cannot hear the falconer; /Things fall apart, the center cannot hold; . . . .” Yeats’ poem was published in 1919, in the aftermath of World War I; it dramatizes the human condition after the Great War. The translator-editors’ rendition of Wannous’ essay is pertinent, given the Arab defeat that befell the region after the 1967 June War. In the Six-Day War that began on the June 5th, Israel defeated the joint armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan in a pre-emptive attack and occupied the remaining land of historic Palestine, the Sinai desert and the Golan Heights. Across the Arab world, the feeling was one of disillusion, humiliation and deep tragedy.

Wannous speaks of how the early to mid-1960s were years of high Arab nationalism, with Gamal Abdel Nasser as the unifying leader of the Arab nation—the playwright was an Arab nationalist and admirer of Nasser. However, Wannous writes that by about the mid-‘60s, he felt the problematic relationship with language; the ’67 defeat exposed the illusion, inauthenticity and betrayal of Arab leaders. Not only was the reality, the dream, shattered but the language itself was also pre-empted of meaning. He writes: “words were defeated and language had collapsed,” and this “sand-like structure” just “evaporated . . .”; the playwright’s “problematic relationship [with language] began to emerge more clearly, revealing itself under a fierce and penetrating light” (391–392).

Like Yeats and Achebe before him, Wannous set out in search of a new language that could articulate the naked reality of defeat. In an emotional frenzy, he wrote “An Evening’s Entertainment for the Fifth of June,” the first play in the reader. As Myers and Saab tell us, the play was written in Paris during the volatile period that would lead to the 1968 student revolt across France. Wannous’ style was “revolutionary and innovative,” unprecedented in Arabic drama. He had hoped the play would translate itself into action. Although the play’s production in Damascus in 1969 was successful as a dramatic production, the playwright was disappointed, for it didn’t cause the “eruption” into revolutionary action. He then realized the bitter conclusion that “a word is not action and the theater is not an arena for an uprising” (394), hence the title of the essay. However for Wannous, the journey of discovery continued, with new questions arising: How can he form “the word as action”? (394). What is the theater? This brings us to the next segment of this brief review.

www.plutojournals.com/asq/
The Performer–Audience Dynamic

Wannous’ essay, entitled “It All Begins with the Audience,” summarizes the playwright’s concept of theater as a “social event” (406; emphasis in the original). In his plays, he writes and enacts the dynamic relationship between the performer and the spectator; participation of the audience is paramount. In this essay, which was published in 1988, Wannous explores answers to three questions that spell out his conceptual framework of theatrical composition: Who does the playwright write to? What is the play’s message? And how does the play connect with the audience?

Wannous’ discussion is most enlightening, especially as he speaks of the marginalization of the theater and the cultural crisis the Arab world has been experiencing. Being the committed playwright he is, he advocates “a theater for the people, for the working class” because the play is based on the reality of their life and their living conditions (410).

As he tries to answer the questions he has raised, his point of departure is clearly the audience. First and foremost, therefore, the playwright needs to define the audience’s sensibility in terms of their identity, social structure, cultural circumstances and problems (407). The message in turn is contingent on the audience; the audience determines the content of the work and the ideas to be presented. Finally, the style is also governed by the audience to ensure the interaction between the performer and spectator. Thus all three elements will produce a whole, a process that is not simple or which can be fulfilled by employing ready-made clichés or borrowed forms. Rather, it’s a dynamic process that encompasses deep knowledge of all aspects of life (410) so that the exchange between performer and spectator is a two-way street, engendering dialogue. Theater, according to Wannous, is a revolutionary, transformative agent. He insists:

_We want to change attitudes so that they will progress and improve, because we want to deepen our communal awareness of our historical destiny._ (411; emphasis in the original)

Wannous could be writing these words now, in 2019. The significance of dialogue in theater and to humanity at large accords Wannous, in my opinion, the label of basically being a humanitarian. Dialogue is one idea that has circulated among modern humanitarians for a while, and there is a special exigency for it in the twenty-first century. The playwright elaborates on the implications of dialogue in the address he was asked to give at the International Theater Institute of UNESCO, in 1996.
“Thirst for Dialogue”

To celebrate World Theater Day and a year before his early death as a result of cancer, Wannous chose to underscore the urgent need for dialogue among individuals and societies, dialogue that is “multifaceted, complex, and comprehensive” (387). The address is a short piece that perhaps sums up the essence of theater as he perceives it and as he has practiced it. As mentioned above, the major characteristic of Wannous’ idea of theater is the interaction between performer and audience. This process is dynamic and continual, one that creates movement that will expand its limits so that both performer and spectator learn from each other. The result will be an understanding and appreciation of the human condition whereby actual problems will be resolved (414). What better place to exercise that than in the theater! Theater affords humans the communal setting on many levels, the nuances of which are detailed remarkably by Wannous.

For the playwright, the crisis in theater represents the micro crisis of the macro human condition at both the personal and collective levels—he being almost at his deathbed, and human society being torn apart at the turn of the century. He affirms that “the crisis of theater is at once specific to it and part of a more general crisis of culture” (388). Whereas theater has been marginalized, human society is plagued by war, injustice and “egocentric globalization” (389). He rightly describes the lack of the human dimension in today’s world, despite the fact that the global village is now a reality. Wannous affirms the essential need for theater to rebuild the human community by repairing “the fissures and mend[ing] the factionalisms” that seem to spell the end of history. He concludes the UNESCO address on a hopeful note, saying: “We are sentenced to hope that what is happening today is not the end of history” (389–390).

Sentence to Hope is a great addition to the repertoire of translations from Arabic to English. Students and scholars of Arabic, Middle Eastern and world literatures would be enlightened by this gifted playwright from Syria.

Notes