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## ACTION NOTE

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# PALESTINE, A TRAGICOMEDY?

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*Everybody knows that the dice are loaded . . .  
Everybody knows that the fight was fixed . . .  
The poor stay poor, the rich get rich . . .  
That's how it goes  
Everybody knows*

—Leonard Cohen

### RELIEF

On Sunday, May 30, 2010, our last night in East Jerusalem, a few of us from the faculty group I was traveling with walked from our hotel situated just outside the old city up the hill to the regal American Colony Hotel where there was rumored to be a reading by Suad Amiry from her latest book, *Nothing To Lose But Your Life* (2010).<sup>1</sup> After spending the previous nine days traveling throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, walking onto the grounds of the hotel felt familiar, like we were returning home. But “our home,” like so many homes the world over, was really a diversionary shelter—a false sense of relief—from the undeniable reality that our sense of security and comfort is too often built upon the suffering and affliction of others.

Like many things in the West Bank, such as running water and electricity, the book reading was unpredictable. Amiry resides in Ramallah, which means she is unable to travel freely to East Jerusalem—although technically it, too, is part of the Palestinian territories. Nevertheless, the crowd gathered and waited, hoping that she would arrive. The start time changed several times, but eventually the author arrived, and we all convened in an ornately decorated meeting hall on the second floor of the hotel. It was standing room only.

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**Editor's Note:** The author, Lucian Stone, received permission to use Saud Amiry's name and identifying information in this article. Stone feels, and we agree, that in cases like this the use of real names is critical for the type of social action Amiry is engaged in. As a vocal critic and activist, Amiry's writing documents the persistent obstacles faced by Palestinians and how they, Palestinians, are forced into anonymity. One of the key goals of Palestinian intellectuals, Stone explains, is to find ways to become more visible. Thus, while as social scientists we are trained to “protect” our participants’ anonymity, any attempt to “protect” Amiry with a pseudonym in this case, would undermine Amiry’s own autonomy as an author and activist.

Amiry's energy immediately brought everyone to attention, and she began, as so many authors do at these types of events, by offering us an ice-breaker; hers was about what she had to do in order to get there that evening. She held up a paper ID card that was the size of a passport. For everyone but the audience members in the first row, it was impossible to make out any of the details except that there was a picture in the upper left-hand corner of the document. She explained that the document was her dog's official identification card—all Palestinians, even pets apparently, must have government-approved documentation. She had, Amiry continued to tell us, pasted her picture onto her dog's ID card because her dog *could* legally travel from Ramallah to East Jerusalem, whereas she and her compatriots living in Ramallah and other parts of the West Bank and Gaza *could not*. As it turns out, her ploy worked, and our storyteller and the crowd—a cosmopolitan blend of East Jerusalemites, foreign dignitaries, Americans, other Palestinians who managed to cross the “border,” students, nongovernmental organization (NGO) workers and volunteers, and random travelers—burst into collective laughter.

Like a beautiful song about ugly realities, the melody of that chorus of laughter has haunted me ever since. How could we laugh at this situation—a human being “disguising” herself as a dog in order to be treated with more dignity and to have more freedom? What was funny about this? Why did we give our tacit consent to the prevailing logic that made this act supposedly funny? Oppression and outright dehumanization is nothing to laugh at, is it?

## PARC

Our group consisted of 10 American professors affiliated with ten different universities or colleges, representing diverse fields of study including history, media studies, sociology, women's studies, philosophy and religion, English language and literature, social psychology, and Arabic language. We were convened by the Palestinian American Research Center (PARC),<sup>2</sup> which advertised a competitive grant to participate in its first U.S. Faculty Development Seminar, a program funded by the Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau of the U.S. State Department. The program sought “U.S. faculty members with a demonstrated interest in, but little travel experience to, Palestine,” who, if selected, would “participate in Jerusalem-based activities [such as] lectures, workshops and visits to local universities and other related institutions in the West Bank” (PARC). The primary objective for the PARC fellows was to “learn about the region, deepen [our] knowledge of [our] particular fields of interest as they relate to Palestine, and build relationships with Palestinian academic colleagues” (PARC).

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As a result, each of us had different expectations for the program. Some wanted simply to learn more about Palestine and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to do so by experiencing the living conditions on the ground firsthand. Others came with expectations to conduct research on Palestine, or to garner information to incorporate into the classroom and their home university's curriculum. A few participants came prepared with detailed research agendas or creative projects and with the intentions of finding collaborative research partners in Palestine, while others remained open to the unexpected opportunities that might present themselves.

The program brought us to a total of six different Palestinian cities: Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron, Nablus, and Jenin. During free time, some group members traveled to additional cities such as Jericho. In each city, the group visited universities where we met with administrators and faculty members to learn about the curriculum, facilities, and challenges they face in trying to offer a high-quality education to their students while under occupation. When possible, we also met with colleagues in our own disciplines in hopes of conceiving joint research projects. Additionally, PARC arranged for us to visit Palestinian NGOs, historical and cultural sites, artists, and educators, all of whom provided us with more information about the past, present, and future of Palestine and the Palestinian people.

### **BUILDING TENSION**

Walls. Our hotel was situated just outside the fortified walls of the old city of Jerusalem near the Damascus Gate. The old city is small, entombed in a thick wall built by the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent in 1538, making its confines feel even smaller and upon which tourists giddily traipse taking photographs.

The old city is divided into four quarters: the Muslim Quarter, the Jewish Quarter, the Christian Quarter, and the Armenian Quarter. So as not to be accused, it seems, of departing from the "aesthetic," these quarters are further delineated with walls or checkpoints manned by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). One could not help but wonder how much square footage the walls and checkpoints themselves take up.

As a consequence, every inch matters. Each small piece of land holds significant value, not only for practical reasons but also due to the added weight of religious and historic symbolism. The combined effect is a strangling sense of claustrophobia: not only is the city physically suffocating from enclosures, it is also historically and politically—and therefore intellectually—asphyxiating. Like it or not, the hands of history's ghosts, global politics, religious

factionalism, economics, ideology, and simple-minded public opinion carve up the Palestinians' homeland and their daily lives.

Being a resident of the old city is no easy task; many of the families are crowded into small one-room dwellings with shared toilets and unreliable running water and electricity. Our guide through the old city, Mahmoud, grew up in one of these single-room flats, where he lived with eight family members; it is not uncommon for there to be upward of a dozen people crammed into these homes, and the Palestinian families are not able to expand their living space without permission from the Israeli government (which is rarely, if ever, granted). Many Palestinian homes, in fact, are slated for demolition by the Israeli government, often because of "illegal" expansion of the living quarters without the required permits.

As our group caravanned through the tight corridors of the Muslim Quarter, one could not help but be struck by the poor living conditions. It was hot that day, which only made the experience more distressing. The walls, like the streets, are a dusty brown—except for the occasional burst of color generously gifted by a graffiti artist. So when we came upon a home tucked away in a corner of a tight alleyway that bore signs of a lush green garden behind the gate, it caught our attention.

Mahmoud spotted one of the homeowners in the garden, and, before we could politely move on, they had invited us all in to see their garden and home, which they were visibly proud of and had put a great deal of work into maintaining. The vines overhead provided comforting shade over a narrow pathway leading to the home itself. The small, rectangular three-room concrete structure was home, we were told, to more than a dozen people. Hearing us, the matriarch of the house came outside and insisted on serving us freshly squeezed fruit juice.

During our discussion over these refreshing drinks, we noticed that the family had started to build an extension onto their home. But, they told us, the Israeli government notified them that they had to cease construction immediately, and they were given 30 days to tear down what they had built. If they did not comply, the Israeli government was going to come and tear it down and send them the bill—one that is cost-prohibitive for the average Palestinian family to bear. This was the first of many such stories we heard during our travels throughout Palestine.

A few days into our tour, we visited the Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem (ARIJ).<sup>3</sup> There, we listened to a PowerPoint lecture by Suhail Khalilieh (2010) entitled "The Geopolitical Conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories." His presentation provided us with an overview of the historical and current state of affairs in Palestine with respect to the occupation.

Predicated on the idea of reducing tensions, that is, "security," the Israeli government continues to build a separation wall. The Israeli Separation Wall is

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about 774 km (479 miles) long and averages 8 meters (26 feet) in height.<sup>4</sup> By comparison, the Berlin Wall was 155 km (96 miles) long with an average height of 3.6 meters (11.8 feet). From the Palestinian perspective, the wall is ubiquitous. Everywhere we traveled in the West Bank, the bleak wall was visible. According to the Israeli journalist Amira Hass (2010), from the Israeli perspective, even and especially the Israeli settlers' perspective, the wall makes the Palestinians invisible, blots them out of existence. In her article "You can drive along and never see an Arab," she writes:

A person could travel the length and breadth of the West Bank without ever knowing—not only the names of the villages and cities whose lands were confiscated in order to build the Jewish settlements and neighborhoods, but even the fact that they exist. Most of their names cannot be found on the road signs. And from a distance, the calls of the muezzins and the streets empty of people (after all, there is nothing to go out for) seem like an aesthetic decoration. *A Jew traveling on the almost empty roads of the West Bank would think that there no longer are any Arabs: They do not travel on the wide roads used by the Jews.* (Hass 2003, emphasis added)

In addition to the wall itself, as of June 2010 there were 669 checkpoints (including 78 checkpoints in the H2 Area of Hebron<sup>5</sup>). Most of the checkpoints do not secure transit between the Israeli and Palestinian borders as delineated by the wall, but rather they are set up *within* Palestinian territories, thereby further dividing the Palestinians' limited space.

Khalilieh (2010) cited the 1947 United Nations resolution,<sup>6</sup> which mandated that the Palestinian Area would be 27,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Just prior to 1967 the total area of the West Bank was 5,843 km<sup>2</sup>, and the Gaza Strip was 362 km<sup>2</sup>, totaling 6,205 km<sup>2</sup>; in other words, twenty years after the United Nations resolution, Palestinian land had been reduced to only 22 percent of the original UN-mandated territory.

Each successive round of negotiations promised that more of the mandated land would be turned over to the Palestinians. In the Oslo II Interim Agreement, signed September 1995, the West Bank was classified into three areas designating various levels of control. Area A, which accounts for 18 percent of the Palestinian Territory, is under full administrative and security control of the Palestinian Authority. In Area B, which is 19 percent of Palestinian land, Palestinians have administrative control but not security control—security is administered by the IDF. The largest portion, 60 percent of the Palestinian territories, is classified as Area C, in which the Palestinians have only limited administrative capacities and the Israeli government has overriding control.<sup>7</sup> Nature Reserves accounts for the other 3 percent of the land. So if Area A is combined with the Nature Reserves, the Palestinians only have full control over

22 percent of their mandated territory. This remains the situation today, 63 years after the initial UN resolution was signed in 1947.<sup>8</sup>

On the surface level, these conditions are unfathomable. But in truth, behind the smoke and mirrors of the “progress” of the negotiations and the so-called “peace process” is further injustice. That is, the Palestinian Authority’s full “control” over Area A and its partial control over Areas B and C are always contingent upon external factors, such as the Israeli government allowing the import/export of goods and supplies, for example (there is no airport or access to waterways in the Palestinian territories). At any moment the Israeli government can cut off the valve, so to speak, thereby making the Palestinians ultimately beholden to them for mere survival. (As a poignant reminder, our group departed Palestine on May 31, 2010, the very day Israeli troops violently blockaded the flotilla organized by the Free Gaza movement and the Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief to bring much needed supplies into Gaza.) Today, in fact, as the peace negotiations erode yet again, Palestinian National Authority President Mahmud Abbas declared that the Israeli government “has effectively cancelled the Oslo agreement” by stripping the Palestinian Authority of its power through daily incursions into the territories (AFP 2010).

The dissection and deracination of a people who are still living continues in other guises as well. The first such method is the politically and, more importantly, morally divisive Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Since 1967, 199 settlements have been constructed in the West Bank.<sup>9</sup> Using satellite-imaging systems, ARIJ has discovered that the settlements, Jewish *only* areas that are home to more than 580,000 settlers, occupy 189 km<sup>2</sup> (or 3.3 percent) of Palestinian land (Khalilieh 2010). The Jewish settlers act with impunity. They annex Palestinian land with the support of the IDF and Israeli government. Once settlers and settlements are in place, such installations force Palestinians to live fragmented lives, even sometimes having to put fences around themselves for their own protection. For example, when we visited Hebron, we walked through the marketplace where Palestinian shopkeepers had to put fencing and tarps overhead to catch the debris—garbage, bricks, sticks, urine, and even acid—thrown at them by settlers who live in the surrounding buildings.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, systems of roadways are built, the use of which is for settlers only, unless, of course, the Palestinians “are good children and accept the dictate of the settlements”; then they can use the roads. “If,” however, they “are bad children” they will be locked “into the tiny prisons that these roads so cleverly created” (Hass 2003). In other words, the settlement roads are walls, too. And they, likewise, are built on Palestinian land.

The second of these techniques is the less publicized outposts. “The Outposts Technique involves capturing land on Palestinian hilltops or in close perimeter of

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existing settlements and setting up mobile caravans, declaring the site as a new settlement or a new neighborhood of [an] adjacent settlement” (Khalilieh 2010). According to Khalilieh (2010), between 1996 and 2001, 79 Israeli outposts were constructed. Since March 2001, 153 outposts have been erected.

It does not take an especially attentive witness to see the obvious outcome of this procedure of encroachment and separation. Irrespective of intentions and rationalizations, the consequences of these “hard, brutal, and unbelievable facts” are clearly dehumanizing—“a degenerating sense of ‘nobodiness’”—and result in violent tension. To cite Martin Luther King Jr.’s relevant response to the systematic oppression of black Americans, inevitably there “comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the blackness of corroding despair” (King 1992:85, 88, and 89).

There has been a sustained and systematic attempt to demarcate the Palestinians’ otherness.<sup>11</sup> Another major breaking point in the most recent direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine, for example, was Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s insistence that, “if the Palestinian leadership will say unequivocally to its people that it recognizes Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people,” then he “will be prepared to convene [his] cabinet and request an additional suspension of [the] building [of settlements] for a limited period of time” (BBC 2010).<sup>12</sup> In other words, the Palestinians must officially acknowledge their otherness. But it is precisely this otherness that, once established in the collective conscience of a people, is pushed to the extremities, resulting in so much oppression, violence, and war:<sup>13</sup>

Holding certain aliens responsible for the ills of society, the scapegoaters proceed to isolate or eliminate them. This sacrificial strategy furnishes communities with a binding identity, that is, with the basic sense of who is included (us) and who is excluded (them). So the price to be paid for the construction of the happy tribe is often the ostracizing of some outsider: the immolation of the “other” on the altar of the “alien.” (Kearney 2003:26)

## THE DEAD SEA

The PARC program organizers mercifully recognized that the intensive itinerary would be intellectually, physically, and emotionally exhausting. Thus they scheduled two days for us to explore freely on our own—a reprieve.

Six members of the group, including myself, decided to make an excursion to Jericho, where it is believed that Jesus was tempted by Satan to deviate from his mission to bring peace to earth (Matthew 4:1-11 [NIV]). After a surprisingly short drive, we arrived at a typical tourist office at the base of a mountain, which included a souvenir shop replete with overpriced merchandise. There we



purchased tickets for the funicular ride to the top of *Qarantal* (the Mount of Temptation). As the funicular cab swayed back during its ascent, below we watched dedicated pilgrims under the unforgiving desert sun make the climb up the path they believe Jesus walked. At the top, built above the cave thought to be the site of Jesus's 40-day fast, the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Temptation is open to visitors. While at the top of that "very high mountain," in the cool shade offered by the caves and the monastery, I looked upon "all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour" that the story says the devil promised Jesus in return for his obedience, and I reflected upon the hellish conditions people endured as a result of the present conflict (Matthew 4:8-10 [NIV]).

After our descent, we decided to visit the Dead Sea. Several of my colleagues came prepared with their bathing suits and towels. As our bus pulled into the parking lot at the beach, I noticed something different than the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories—most notably, there were large numbers of international tourists who had been conspicuously absent from other major sites of cultural and historical interest located in the occupied Palestinian territories that we had visited. As it turns out, this was no mere coincidence. Guided tours booked through Israeli organizations and companies intentionally divert people from the Palestinian areas, or at the very least minimize their exposure to them. One significant consequence of this, among many, is that the Palestinian economy does not benefit from the tourist income. Entry to the beach was not free. At the queue to purchase tickets, I asked whether the beach was Israeli- or Palestinian operated. It was, I was told, Israeli owned and operated, the ticket-taker being an armed guard.<sup>14</sup>

One of my colleagues and I decided that we would not pay to enter. The other four went in while she and I stood at the front gate keeping watch over the others' belongings. As we sat in the shade outside the gate, we noticed Palestinian families coming to the beach. At the gate, however, they were denied entry. In one hour's time, we witnessed roughly 25 Palestinians be denied entry—including a young couple who had a toddler and an infant eager to enjoy the day at the beach.<sup>15</sup>

When our colleagues emerged from the gated beach and told us about their rejuvenating swims in the Dead Sea, we recounted to them what we had just witnessed. At that very moment another Palestinian family was being turned away, and one of my colleagues approached the guard and asked him why they had been denied entry to the beach. Without hesitation, the armed guard replied, "Because they are small animals, and there are humans inside." When she reproached him for such vile racism, he shooed her away as if he suddenly realized that she, too, was vermin.<sup>16</sup>

"Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes," wrote King (1992), "are unjust . . . It gives the segregator a false sense of



superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority” (1992:89). And yet, there appears to be less and less shame associated with collective punishment and blatant acts of segregation, such that it is now used as a negotiating tactic in internationally mediated venues with the world media watching.<sup>17</sup>

The deafening silence of the international community aids and abets the quarantine of the Palestinian people.<sup>18</sup> With the indelible mark of otherness—not a benign otherness, but a supposedly malignant, monstrous otherness,<sup>19</sup> drawn around and in between Palestinians with concrete borders—frustrations boil over and some individuals act out in ways that perpetuate the stereotypes imposed upon the collective. “This is not a threat,” as King (1992) made abundantly clear, “it is a fact of history” (1992:94).<sup>20</sup> Individual acts are met with collective retribution, where due process is yet another piece of collateral damage. And this vicious cycle repeats itself indefinitely.

### BORDER CROSSINGS

The deprecating comments of the armed soldier guarding the Palestinian beach from Palestinian families at the Dead Sea caused us shock, dismay, and even outrage; but the self-deprecating humor of Suad Amiry sent us into a fit of laughter. The former was meant to demarcate the limits of “purity” and “acceptability,” whereas the latter broke through the limits and carried us across alienating borders into *sensus communis*.

As Simon Critchley (2002) has argued, “[T]rue humour can be said to have a therapeutic as well as a critical function” (2002:15). Simultaneously Amiry’s anecdote relieved the tension in the room—rather, the “joke” transformed it into creative tension<sup>21</sup>—and it did so on the bases of common sense and a sense of community.

Our shared world was defamiliarized, especially for those of us who, unlike Amiry and her Palestinian compatriots, live happily in oblivion of these oppressive conditions. Amiry’s demeaning living conditions and the threatening route she took to arrive at the book reading that night stood in sharp contrast to our immediate surroundings at the unfortunately named American Colony Hotel, the cosmopolitan audience, and especially the person herself, an elegant, witty, and passionate woman, who was both the subject and teller of the story. Everyone in the room immediately understood the absurdity of it all. And in the same breath everyone recognized the undeniable incongruity between this tragic reality and the ideological mechanisms used to justify its infliction upon the Palestinians—namely, the bloated and blood soaked terminology, “justice,” “democracy,” “security,” and so forth, or “words with capital letters,” as Simone Weil (1986) called them. “Each of these words,” she wrote, “seems to represent for us an absolute reality, unaffected by conditions, or an absolute objective,

independent of methods of action, or an absolute evil [for instance, currently en vogue words such as “Islamofascism” and “terrorism”]; and at the same time we make all these words mean, successively or simultaneously, anything whatsoever” (Weil 1986:222). That is to say, lost behind the rhetoric of politicians and pundits are the perverse cruelties endured by our fellow citizens of the world. Like the Birmingham police (who the clergy praised while denouncing King’s actions), the self-appointed vanguards of Western “civilization” are not “innocent” or “helpless” defenders who resort to violence only as a last resort (King 1992:98-99). This much is clear to those who have crossed the borders with open eyes and who have witnessed the plain truth.

For us Americans, to open ourselves to this message as meaningful necessitate[s] conscious acceptance of realities—5 percent of the Iraqi population destroyed by US attacks and the ongoing embargo, persistent US opportunism in its Middle East foreign policy, double standards of political, economic and human rights, support for Israel despite its colonialist oppression of Palestine—realities that have been in front of our eyes and ears for decades, but the code of American self-understanding with its master signifier of innocence [has] effectively blocked out as meaningless. (Buck-Morss 2003:24)

Amiry’s joke gave us all “a sense of *thereness*,” that is, it “illuminate[d] a social world that is held in common” (Critchley 2002:86). But more important, the break that humorous anecdote made from the destructive tension caused by this situation opened us up to creatively imagining things otherwise. As Critchley (2002) cogently argues, “[H]umour might be said to project another possible *sensus communis*, namely a *dissensus communis* distinct from the dominant common sense” (2002:90).

Perhaps, in the final analysis, the exhalation of our collective laughter that night in May was an opening of passageways for border crossings. As I mentioned at the start of this essay, it feels impossible to breathe under the present circumstances. I mean this both literally and metaphorically. Palestinians are increasingly enclosed in smaller spaces and are isolated from each other and the world.

But laughter is subversive. It speaks truth to power. “Many indispensable truths, which could save men,” wrote Weil (1986), “go unspoken for reasons of this kind; those who could utter them cannot formulate them and those who could formulate them cannot utter them” (1986:64). When the threat of force and fear no longer abide in the witness, they laugh. They breathe. They create a vital space. And in that space many ask, “What can we do?”

Historically this has been and remains a loaded question, one that is answered most frequently by those with power who also “have a monopoly of language” (Weil 1986:64). As Asef Bayat (2010) has pointed out, there has never been a

dearth of so-called “realistic solutions” for the problems in the Middle East, and Palestine in particular (2010:1). The proposals most frequently contend that there is need for extraordinary and drastically visible shifts—euphemisms for regime change—and that the most effective means come in the form of social *movements*.<sup>22</sup> They advocate for revolutions, nonviolent resistance movements, and outside intervention (Bayat 2010:1-2). What we need, these pundits insist, are spectacular turns of events.

But these phantasmagoric spectacles are lost causes. “Suffice it to say for now that what is needed, when confronted with extreme tendencies to demonize or deify monsters, is to look into our own psyches and examine our consciences in the mirror of our gods and monsters. We need,” Richard Kearney (2003) suggests, “to explore further the *spaces* between polarities, to dwell on the thresholds which mediate between the vertical and the abject. We need to look to the middle way” (2003:42-43, emphasis added). When Amiry told her “joke” we all immediately understood the twisted and painful ironies tied up in that event; and in unison we laughed at the utter ridiculousness of it all; we laughed not only at the tragicomic circumstances of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but at the human condition in total. Therein we had a *sensus communis*—an every day experience of “trust with one another”; what Bayat (2010) calls “everyday cosmopolitanism” (2010:13).

Free social interactions such as these are the real enemy of the discourse of power, for they subvert “the language of clash” (Bayat 2010:13). Dialogue, in all of its forms, ultimately exposes those with power for their false sense of superiority. Perhaps a time will come when we collectively laugh at the emperors standing naked before us. But in order for this to happen, we need free, open spaces so that the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary” changes the dominant order (Bayat 2010:14).

The opening of such spaces (global spheres), however, requires border crossing—whether it be physically, intellectually, or imaginatively, including uses of new media like the Internet.<sup>23</sup>

Creatures which hang around borders, and disrespect their integrity, are traditionally known as “monsters.” They comprise a species of sinister miscreants exiled from the normative categories of the established system. A species of nonspecies, as it were. Alien monsters represent the “unthought” of any given point of knowledge and representation, the unfamiliar spectre which returns to haunt the secure citadel of consciousness. “There are monsters on the prowl,” writes Michel Foucault, “whose form changes with the history of knowledge.” (Kearney 2002:119)

The borders will become increasingly porous, not through *extraordinary movements*, but, as Bayat (2010) argues, through our “mundane doings” that are

“closely tied to the ordinary practices of everyday life” and are “bound to lead to significant social, ideological, and legal imperatives” (2010:14). Those who cross the lines will undoubtedly be labeled as “monsters”; but many of us have stopped believing in the bogeyman long ago, thankfully.

As we traveled throughout the West Bank, we frequently saw the poster<sup>24</sup> pictured below in Palestinian shops, office buildings, and homes.



Poster Design: Franz Krausz (1936)

Originally designed as Zionist propaganda, the Palestinians have adopted this poster and its slogan in all of its glorious (and hilarious) irony. Indeed, visit Palestine. Visiting is an ordinary act, enacted in many ways beyond physical travel, such as through art, literature, and film.<sup>25</sup> Until the constant physical, intellectual, and imaginative movements back and forth wear down the walls, including the ones we build around ourselves, tragically the joke is on all of us, and we obscure the horizon that could humanize us all.



Poster Design: Amer Shomali (2010)<sup>26</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Her previous book is the highly acclaimed *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006).

<sup>2</sup>For full details, see: <http://parc-us-pal.org/>.

<sup>3</sup>For more information, visit: [www.arij.org](http://www.arij.org). Projects of ARIJ are financially supported by the European Union and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

<sup>4</sup>All statistics and data provided in this section are taken from Suhail Khalilieh's presentation, "The Geopolitical Conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories."

<sup>5</sup>The city of Hebron (al-Khalil) is divided into two quarters, H1 and H2, designating the varying degrees of control the Palestinian Authority and the Israelis have over the sectors.

<sup>6</sup>United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 (A/RES/181) was adopted on November 29, 1947.

<sup>7</sup>Here I rely entirely upon Khalilieh's wording about the distinguishing characteristics of the three areas. Area C, in particular, is a subject of controversy; some insist that the Palestinians have no control whatsoever over this area.

<sup>8</sup>There is a great deal of dispute over the exact percentages of Palestinian land that are occupied, settled, etc. I have drawn exclusively from the ARIJ report presented to us during our visit by Suhail Khalilieh. Another source for current statistics is *B'tselem: The*

*Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories*, <http://www.btselem.org/English/index.asp>.

<sup>9</sup>There are even financial incentives for *aliyah*, the return of the Jewish Diaspora to Israel, especially in settlements. See Barbara Slavin's article "Unsettled," in *Foreign Policy* (July 2, 2010). Slavin was prompted to write this article when she received an email offering "\$14,000 in cash and numerous other benefits" for moving to the Golan Heights or other Israeli settlements.

<sup>10</sup>We were given a tour of the city by the Temporary International Presence in the City of Hebron (TIPH), "a civilian observer mission stationed in the city of Hebron. The mission was called for by the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities in 1997, to support them in their efforts to improve the situation in Hebron." For more information, see <http://www.tiph.org/>.

<sup>11</sup>This is part and parcel of the rampant spread of Islamophobia throughout the world. Recently a feature article was published in the *New York Times* about Pamela Geller, who gained fame through her vitriolic opposition to the building of Park 51 in New York. "In the war between the savage and the civilized man,' Ms. Geller says, 'you side with the civilized man'" (Barnard and Feuer 2010). As Richard Kearney writes, "[W]e witness a disturbing tendency to endorse the dualist thesis that divides the world schismatically into West and East. This thesis echoes the 'Clash of Civilizations' scenario, famously outlined by Samuel Huntington in the summer 1993 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, subsequently developed and republished as a best-selling book in 1996. Here one finds a personification of the West versus Islam dichotomy, making for what Edward Said has called a 'cartoonlike world where Popeye and Bluto bash each other mercilessly, with one always more virtuous pugilist getting the upper hand over his adversary'" (Kearney 2003:113).

<sup>12</sup>It is impossible not to recall King's statement about the white political leaders during his time: "But the political leaders consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation" (King 1992:85).

<sup>13</sup>Sam Keen chronicles the archetypes used to construct the enemy in his book *Faces of the Enemy: Apparitions of the Hostile Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), Part I. For a more recent study of the formation of the enemy, see Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup>As it turns out, the Kalia Beach is a private beach run by the nearby Kibbutz Kalia. See the *Corporate Watch* report of May 20, 2010.

<sup>15</sup>For documentation regarding other Israeli measures of preventing Palestinians from accessing the beach in their territory, including strategically placed roadblocks, see Macintyre (2010).

<sup>16</sup>"In the scale of dehumanization, we drop from the midpoint of the subhuman barbarian to the nonhuman, from the savage to the animal. 'A running dog of capitalism,' 'a Nazi swine,' a 'Jap rat,' a 'Commie bear,' are clearly dangerous, irrational animals, capable of cunning, whom we are morally justified in killing without mercy" (Keen 1986:60-61).

<sup>17</sup>The "leading US legal and human rights activists and intellectuals—Alan Dershowitz and Michael Ignatieff chief among them—openly, publicly, eloquently, and with detailed analysis supported, endorsed, rationalized, theorized and sought to legalize the systematic torturing of people—"the lesser evil,' they called it. Their civilization, they argued, was in danger, and they had to defend it against the barbarians" (Dabashi 2008:7). See also, Keen (1986), Part I, especially pages 39-48.

<sup>18</sup>Again, we cannot help but remember King's admonishment of the white clergy for urging him and the black American community to "wait." Israeli Foreign Minister

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Avigdor Lieberman presented the United Nations with a proposal for a “two-staged” solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that ‘could take a few decades.’ In his proposed plan, Palestinian Israelis would be moved to Palestinian territories in exchange for the evacuation of Israeli settlements” (Horn 2010).

<sup>19</sup>As Simone Weil wrote in her powerful essay *The Power of Words*, “our political universe is peopled exclusively by myths and monsters; all it contains is absolutes and abstract entities” (Weil 1986:222).

<sup>20</sup>Earlier in his letter, King lists a series of readily observable truths about the “unconscious development of bitterness” that such social-political conditions inevitably produce: “[W]hen you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen [soldiers] curse, kick, brutalize and even kill your . . . brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your . . . brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty . . .; when you . . . see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in [your child’s] little eyes . . .; when you are humiliated day in and day out . . .; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are . . . living constantly at tiptoe stance never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of ‘nobodiness’; then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait” (King 1992:88-89). As an example of the daily experiences of Palestinians, see Juan Cole’s *Informed Comment* blog posting from October 5, 2010, which chronicles two degrading incidents: the first is the arson of a Palestinian mosque and Qurans by Israeli settlers, and the second a video posted on YouTube by Israeli soldiers in which an IDF soldier belly dances around a captured and blindfolded Palestinian woman (Cole 2010).

<sup>21</sup>See King (1992:86-87).

<sup>22</sup>Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman’s proposal to the UN cited earlier, transitioned seamlessly to his telling UN delegates that “Iran can exist without Hamas but Hamas can’t exist without Iran,” thereby suggesting Israel and its allies take preemptive actions against Iran, even to the extent of instigating regime change (Horn 2010).

<sup>23</sup>“If we are to think to think our way to a future different from the insensate scenario of unlimited warfare that has been prescribed for us, then culture needs to imagine alternative forms that are not even dreams at present—produced for a public that extends beyond the initiates, and ‘political’ in the sense of relevant to worldly affairs—with confidence that a truly unforced cultural project will be free of both the fundamentalist intolerance and the commercial libertinism that, from partial perspectives, are now so feared . . . . Lacking a homeland, such a project may first consist of a radically cosmopolitan republic of letters and images, electronically connected, digitally displayed, and also circulating as books-in-translation. The contradiction of such a project, which needs to be made productive, is that it will rely on the protection of the very enclaves of freedom—academic and cultural institutions—that at present keep intellectual work isolated from political effect” (Buck-Morss 2003:10-11).

<sup>24</sup>See *The Palestine Poster Archives* at: <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/>.

<sup>25</sup>See Dabashi (2006) for a wonderful collection of essays on Palestinian film. See also note 23 above.

<sup>26</sup>Image courtesy of artist, Amer Shomali; for more information, see <http://www.zanstudio.com>. Also, I would like to thank Dan Walsh, director of *The Palestine Poster Archives*, available at <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/>.



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