

The Poetics of Conflict and Reconciliation: A Narrative of Palestinian Dispossession

By Samia Costandi

Abstract

My narrative inquiry into my life and work as a Palestinian Canadian teacher, researcher, writer, and activist has allowed my students to gain insight on the much-misunderstood Palestinian history and the realities of the dispossession of our people. I hope that through the stories I relate and the writers on Palestine whose work I highlight that I will be able to shed some understanding on the complex web of issues that underpin this conflict. For reconciliation to happen, issues of racism and injustice need to be addressed with diligence, passion and compassion. I especially hope to motivate American readers to get a better education about the conflict and to gain insight by example from those, like Rachel Corrie, who refused to participate in the conspiracy of silence surrounding crimes against Palestinians.

Keywords

dispossession, Birzeit West Bank, narrative inquiry, Christian Palestinian Arab, Reverend Naim Ateek, Liberation theology, conflict, reconciliation, Zionist massacres, Sabra and Shatilla, historical Palestine, Kamal Nasir, Edward Said, Rachel Corrie, Palestinian resistance, Palestinian identity, Arab Islamic civilization



Introduction

As a Palestinian Arab Canadian teacher, I find myself nestled within a space of displacement. That displacement, aside from its being imposed on me through military occupation and a concomitant intellectual, moral, and material subjugation, has spurred my research, ignited my intellect, and impassioned my heart to search for answers to dilemmas that continue to permeate and pervade our

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educational landscape in the Arab world. It is through my personal experience and knowledge, garnered through years of teaching and learning (some in Beirut and the larger part in Canada), and through in-depth interaction with my students within diverse disciplines that I come to the issue of on the poetics of conflict and reconciliation.

I am a Palestinian Arab female who is proud of her culture and civilization, an Arab Islamic civilization that has contributed much to world civilization. My Christian Arab Episcopalian Palestinian upbringing has taught me the qualities of love, compassion, and comprehensive understanding, of building bridges and creating communication. On the other hand, I have experienced compassion through my relationships with my Muslim friends and colleagues within my Muslim Arab community. In identifying with Muslim culture through experiencing it, hence inheriting its ways of hospitality, generosity, creativity, and friendliness, I was able to see the important connections between the English West in which I studied and the Arab Muslim Middle East in which I was raised.

I use my experience to address my North American students' profound ignorance of the plight of the Muslim Arab students, some of whom were recently in Beirut studying under the threat of Civil War in Lebanon and sleeping in shelters which were being bombed daily by pro-Western forces. This ignorance leads me to feel that there is a need to explore in more depth the history of the conversation between the Arab Muslim Middle East and the English West. When as an educator I see the animosity that has been created by political events and the fanaticism that has been festering globally, generating political decisions that lead to de-humanizing confrontations between the Arab Muslim Middle East and the English West, I cringe. It is with this view and this perspective that I hope to convince us to look at commonalties between the Arab Middle East and the English West, between Christianity and Islam.

As I have already said, I am a teacher. I think like a teacher, I act like a teacher. My methodology for teaching, and for life, is best expressed in a small passage in a book titled *Narrative Inquiry*. Delineating exactly what they mean by the phrase “teachers’ personal practical knowledge,” the authors say:

What we mean by teachers’ knowledge is that body of convictions and meanings, conscious or unconscious, that have arisen from experience (intimate, social and traditional) and that are expressed in a person’s practices. We use the term *expression* to refer to a quality of knowledge rather than to its more common usage as an application or translation of knowledge. It is a kind of knowledge that has arisen from the circumstances, practices, and undergoings that themselves had *affective* [my italics] content for the person in question. Therefore, practice is what we mean by personal practical knowledge. Indeed, practice, broadly conceived to include intellectual acts and self exploration is all that we have to go on. When we see practice, we see personal practical knowledge at work.¹

Thus, I shall hence offer you glimpses of who I am in order for you to understand my insights on conflict and reconciliation as a Palestinian Arab Canadian teacher, mother, researcher, writer, and activist.

The Narrative

The trauma of dispossession has been an overriding theme in my life. Displacement has traumatized me. I am displaced in more ways than one, physically, emotionally, and culturally.

Palestine is the beautiful land of my grandparents. Birzeit in the West Bank is my mother’s village, where her family established an elementary school, a high-school, and then a university. Birzeit is not far away from me. It has lived within me since 1966, the last time I visited with my cousins and aunts, the last time I climbed my favorite tree, picked delicious figs dripping with syrup and crunched

¹ Clandinin and Connelly 7.

green grapes twinkling with early morning dew. Jaffa, on the other hand, is ethereal and distant. It lurks in my imagination as a collage of constructed images through the stories I heard from my father and his family: a friendly, cultured, educated, indigenous Palestinian community whose life was stemmed without prior notice.

The community in Jaffa that my paternal grandfather's family belonged to was a middle-class one. My paternal grandfather was a teacher; he was called "Teacher Bichara." Educators are very well respected in our Palestinian Arab tradition. My paternal grandmother was an orphan who had been educated in a German missionary school. She was one of the warmest and most affectionate women I have ever known. Her name was Tharwa, which means "treasure" in Arabic. My youngest uncle affectionately called her "Clara." That same uncle is the one who taught me when I was three to recite around ten lines from a Shakespearean play *The Merchant of Venice*.

My paternal grandmother and I were very close until her death. I turned eighteen that year. I was the only female granddaughter until uncle Emile's Clara came along. No one will ever be able to emulate the flavor of Teita Tharwa's cooking. Its smells filled my nostrils as I threw my schoolbag and ran to her house two streets away every Friday afternoon in Beirut during my elementary years.

I remember with fondness my indomitable Aunt Linda, the tom-boy, as my maternal grandfather used to call her, who led us children on long walks to the Marj, my maternal grandparents' fields in the West Bank, to pick figs and grapes at five in the morning. She gave us females examples in resilience: she was diagnosed with skin cancer and given only three years to live in the early sixties. She lived for a long thirty-three years after that, but died eventually of lung cancer. I myself had breast cancer in 2003. I had a lumpectomy, and then had twenty four lymph nodes around my left breast removed. I wrote my doctoral dissertation while receiving chemotherapy. It was my personal statement against that cancer,

my signature, my Palestinian stamp of resistance. Vicariously, it was also Aunt Linda's stamp.

The word *marj* literally means "green field." *Ahlan Wa Sahlan*, the traditional welcome greeting in Arabic, is an abbreviation of a phrase that means "You have come unto your own people, and you have trodden on green pastures." Palestinians and other Arabs are known for their hospitality. When the CBS television station came to Beirut in 1973 to do the first program ever on Palestine (which they simply titled "The Palestinians"), they interviewed a family within the camps and then decided to draw a contrast by exploring the profile of a family that was "successful," or living outside the camps. Some members in the Palestinian leadership decided they should interview our family, the family of Kamel Costandi, producer, director, radio anchor, since my father was able by professional default to critique and evaluate the work of the CBS team.

I remember the producer, Leslie Flynn, sitting with my mother and crying over the stories my mother related to her regarding her experiences as a child living under British colonialist rule. Her father having been the mayor of Birzeit, my mother's house was subjected to raids at night by the British army. The children would be woken up by a kick from the boots of an English colonial officer while he and his men searched the house for guns. My maternal grandfather, Mousa Dawood Nasir, did help the Mujahideen, or the freedom fighters. They would hide in the mountains and come down at night to his house to eat. My grandfather was imprisoned in a well with a hundred other people for months where they were fed only water and dry bread.

My mother eye-witnessed the massive diaspora of Palestinians into the West Bank from what is today Israel proper. In short, she witnessed the 1948 occupation of Palestine. My father's family of eight was forced to flee in boats to Lebanon after the military gangs of the Stern and the Irgun went on their killing rampages in Deir Yassin (245 villagers were killed, including men, women and children, April

9-11, 1948).² These massacres were also documented by Israeli revisionist historians, one of whom is Ilan Pappé,³ who has been described by John Pilger as "Israel's bravest, most principled and most incisive historian."⁴ In another massacre in Kafr Qassem, 48 civilians were killed on October 29, 1956.⁵ In fact, my mother remembers her family telling her about Kafr Qassem when she came to visit the West Bank after having resided in Cyprus and England with my father for a couple of years. It was said that a curfew was declared and many villagers working in the fields had not heard about it. Hence, on their way back, the villagers were intercepted by Jewish militia who machine-gunned them all in cold blood, based on the pretext that they had contravened the curfew. This campaign was geared to create great fear in the hearts of Palestinians living under the British mandate. It achieved its purpose—most Palestinian Arab families were terrified that their daughters would be raped and that their sons, parents, and children would be executed.

After the CBS interview with my parents and me (my brothers were too young at the time), my mother set the table for lunch. The CBS cameraman turned his camera to my mother's table and I heard my mother proclaim in a dignified but firm voice, "Please turn your camera away from my table!" I was shocked, and so was the team. When the cameraman apologized, saying he did not mean anything by it but that since the table looked so aesthetically pleasing he wanted to film it, my mother said to him: "This is for you. This is a lunch for the team. It is not an advertisement. It is part of our tradition and heritage. This is not for display. And when you put it on film like that, it will be misinterpreted and used against us. The

² Khalidi, *All That Remains* 289-92. Khalidi's extensive and thorough research indicated that the number of victims was more than was usually believed. Usually it was underestimated and quoted as between 107 and 120, but multiple sources revealed to Khalidi that it was more than that. See also Khalidi's *From Heaven* 761-66, wherein these facts are corroborated by Jacques De Reynier's "Deir Yassin: April 10, 1948."

³ Pappé 90. Pappé, an Israeli revisionist historian, describes the Deir Yassin massacre that took place west of what is known today as Givat Shaul. Jewish militias burst into the village of Deir Yassin, opening machine-gun fire on everyone in cold blood. A Palestinian eye-witness who survived and who was 12 years old at the time, Ibrahim Zaidan, described how his brother Mohammad was shot. When his mother kneeled over her son crying, holding her young daughter Hadra, they shot her also. Anyone who screamed when a loved one was shot was killed immediately, too. Pappé says that thirty babies were killed and that women were raped and bodies were molested (90).

⁴ See the paperback cover of Pappé's book.

⁵ *Palestinian Encyclopedia* 652-54.

Americans will say: ‘Look they have so much food! What are they complaining about?’ We have seen enough examples of that kind of abuse.” Flynn agreed and said, “In fact, we were invited for lunch in one of the camps last week and were astonished at the amount of food that our hosts offered!” My mother answered: “Well, that family might stay one week without food in order to fulfill its duties towards a guest. This is the way we are.”

I welcomed you to my home and land
With open arms
But I do not understand
How you can betray me
Like that, how you dispose of me like an old shoe . . .
What have I ever done to you?

You were not supposed to stay
Come what may, you were supposed to let me go
To release me from the colonial yoke
To set me free, To let me be
Autonomous and strong
Oh, I was so young, so in-experienced in the
Savvy world of politics, of international games
You sold me to the wolves and stealthily slipped away
Claiming no responsibility, giving no excuse
Never issuing an apology
Never officially recognizing your crime
Against *my* humanity . . . sixty years and some now . . .

“Inalienable rights” they say . . .

I guess that means the right to wake up in the morning in your own home

To sit on your porch
 To drink your coffee without a gun pointing to your temple
 To laugh without a bulldozer roaring in your other ear
 To hold your son or daughter so dear
 Not fearing this might be the last time
 You see them come back from school alive

"Inalienable rights" they say and the "other" is building a WALL
 A WALL constructed by Palestinian hands out of Israeli FEAR
 Enmeshed in Palestinian HUMILIATION and PAIN
 How can an "apartheid" WALL be a dispenser of dreams
 Of a common destiny?
 Animosity, rage, and revenge
 Feed the cement that ruthlessly severs the arteries of what ought to be
The heart feeding two nations, sculpting them into one state,
 A democratic dream, not one of hate
 This house of cards will fall when a Palestinian mother wails
 When an Israeli grandmother retells the story of the "Holocaust" with a
 Warning to never forget
 To never relent . . .
 Difference needs to be celebrated . . . Suffering has no place on a hierarchy
 Two wrongs don't make a right. Pain should unite us . . .

It is difficult for me to understand that everything of my childhood in Palestine has been taken away by the Israeli soldiers. Villages have been razed to the ground. Four hundred and eighteen villages were demolished in 1948 alone.⁶ This year was the year that marked "the ineluctable climax of the preceding Zionist colonization and the great watershed in the history of the Palestinian people,

⁶ Abu-Sitta 243.

marking the beginning of their Exodus and Diaspora.”⁷ Salman H. Abu-Sitta, in his *The Return Journey*, was able to reconstruct the geography of Palestine prior to the occupation. He pointed out, “Wherever you drive in Israel, you will find parks, forests and cactus trees. [. . .] In most cases, these mark the sites of depopulated and mostly destroyed Palestinian villages.”⁸ The rebuilt villages have been given new names, a new history. The whole of historical Palestine has been erased.⁹ This modern Palestine has been given a future vision that does not include us. But perhaps if I ask to be buried in Birzeit or Jaffa and my friends, especially the Americans among them, insist, and the NGOs make a big issue of it, perhaps someone will pay attention that my soul needs to eternally hug the olive tree that sheltered me as a child and that my blood needs to nourish the soil that I loved so much and which smell I continue to hold dear.

Years ago, under the twinkle of a star that was courting a moon-shadow on that beautiful night, my first love and I walked home together. I was thirteen, he sixteen. He planted a magic kiss on my cheek before letting me go. That memory still refreshes me with the coolness of a Palestinian breeze. I learned how the heart beats so fast when you are young and when it is touched by that magic of love. I have yearned to recapture that feeling for the past forty-four years but to no avail. Now, my heart beats fast when I see the media images of war, plunder, and gratuitous killing. My doctor says that the cancer was enough, that I should not stress myself. How does one do that in this day and age? I guess what haunts me, what slips away from my fingers and what I keep chasing within my stream of consciousness, is the serenity of home—that warmth of being where one belongs. For me, this is where weddings are held for a full five days, where the rituals are

⁷ Khalidi, *All That Remains* xxxi.

⁸ Abu-Sitta 243.

⁹ Naim Stifan Ateek speaks of how the face of his village Beisan changed. The original villagers were expelled from it in 1948, and when for the first time, ten years later, they were allowed to go and visit Beisan on Israel’s Independence Day in 1958 without a military permit, this is what they found: “Israeli Jewish families were living in Palestinian homes. Some homes had been pulled down. Our little church was used as a storehouse. The Roman Catholic church and its adjacent buildings had become a school. The Orthodox church was left to rot. The Beisan we knew was left to gradually become a ruin while a new Israeli Jewish town was sprouting on the edge of it. Our homes were still standing and several families were occupying them. I still remember that when we asked permission to go inside, just to take a look, our request was turned down. One occupant said very emphatically: ‘This is not your house, it is ours’” (12).

celebrated and trays of food and sweets continue to roam around happy faces, where special anecdotes are shared between the bride and her maids and the groom and his friends while the elderly roar with laughter as they reminisce and sip Arabic coffee. I yearn for the clap of the hands and that assertive thud as young men's feet swing into the air and touch the ground with the rhythm of Dabke dances.

I chase Palestine and I comfort myself with these images to fend off the reality of the nightmares, the massacres—the six months' siege of Tal Al Zaa'tar in 1976 and the final downfall, and the Sabra and Shatilla Massacres of September 1982. The Sabra and Shatilla massacres took place from the sunset of Thursday September 16 throughout the whole day of Friday September 17 and until the mid-day of Saturday September 18, 1982.¹⁰ These nightmares are etched in my memory and Palestinian memory forever. To forgive does not mean to forget.

How can I forget when my friend Salway Al-Samra pounded on my apartment door in a safe sector of Beirut one September day in 1982 after having walked for two full days. Her eyes twitched with terror as she described to me in detail the slashing of her sister's neck in front of her, while the perpetrators, the Lebanese Phalangist militia, laughed hysterically and shouted: "Go, bitch, tell everyone what we have done!" Her father, who was paralyzed and in bed, was thirsty, and the militia cynically said, "Your brother can bring him water." The twelve-year-old boy got the glass of water and held the cup to his thirsty father's lips when the militia torched father and son with flamethrower, a weapon Salwa had never seen or heard of before. And they made her watch, refusing to give her relief as she begged them to kill her too.¹¹

And what of Aida Kaddoura Issawi, who worked as a maid for many years raising four sons? The eldest of these sons, Nizar, was the first Palestinian with a

¹⁰ Al-Hout 275-96. Al-Hout includes the names of the victims (see p. 906) and the names of the abducted and missing (484). The total number of victims gathered through different research methods amounted to 3500.

¹¹ Al-Hout 46-72, 297-324 (see especially 302-16). Israeli revisionist historians' voices are added to our own in protest, particularly when it was proven beyond doubt that Israeli forces facilitated these crimes and surrounded the camp lest anyone come to help the Palestinians. Pappe reviewed the whole strategy of the creation of the State of Israel (Plan A, B, and C) and was unequivocal in clarifying the terrorist policies used to intimidate the Palestinians (see Pappe's first chapter, *passim*).

Palestinian ID refugee card ever to get a scholarship to the American University of Beirut Faculty of Medicine. On May 25, 1986, while waiting for his ride to the university at the crossroads of the Burj Al Barajneh camp, he was brought down by a sniper's bullet from an enemy Lebanese faction supported by Syria. He was shot in the forehead. When they brought him to his mother, she refused to believe that he was dead. Two days later, while receiving condolences, his three brothers were sitting in the porch outside a shack in the camp. A rocket fell and killed the second of Aida's sons and maimed the youngest. The two deaths fell two days apart.

A couple of months later, fighting broke out in the Burj Al Barajneh camp where Aida Kaddoura Issawi lived, and Aida's third son was shot in the legs and paralyzed. He was later sent to an East European country to be treated. But the most tragic moment of all this occurred when the youngest son begged his mother to go on a trip on a bus bound to the south of Lebanon after a cease-fire had been declared in the refugee camps in Beirut, a cease fire that was four years in the making. Having not left the camp for four years, her youngest had been chiding Aida for having chosen to live in the Burj camp when she came to Beirut as a refugee. He blamed her for all the misery that had been incurred on them. She had become so protective of him that she refused to let him out of her sight. Finally, after much nagging by him and the insistence of the neighbors on her to be flexible, she succumbed. Everyone told her not to worry, that it was only a day's trip and back. On that very day, on May 4, 1991, Israel decided to bomb the road on which that bus was bound south to the historical city of Tyre. Aida's youngest son, Atef, was killed.¹²

I recently read a short story by Rahat Kurd in which she says that "Muslim women are not yet allowed to be complicated human beings in cultural

¹² Aida Kaddoura Issawi documents her youngest son's death on May 4, 1991. When I looked for citations in newspapers, including the *New York Times*, I could not find a bombing by Israeli air force on that specific date; however, I found two other articles, two on April 13 in *NYT* titled "Israel Kills Four in Raids in Lebanon" and "Three Killed as Israelis Hit PLO Site in Lebanon." Both these articles describe bombardments of areas near Sidon. It was also not unusual for Israel to continually bomb moving vehicles in the South in villages and on roads near Sidon, Tyre, as well as around the Palestinian camps in nearby areas in its attempts to maintain its occupation of Southern Lebanon. Its air force constantly targeted those to stem resistance to its occupation. I actually witnessed such an attack when I was visiting relatives in Ain El Helweh camp near Sidon.

representations.”¹³ I can say the same of Palestinians as depicted in Western media. In fact, there are ideological constraints that govern the depiction of Palestinian Arab men and women and the Arabs in general in the Western media. Edward Said describes them well in his book *Covering Islam: How the Media & the Experts Determine How we See the Rest of the World*.¹⁴ There are many Aidas, and there are thousands of similar stories. I want the West to hear them. My people want the West and whoever supports the Israeli military practices to hear them, to visualize them, to understand them, to never forget them. For the political Zionist movement has denigrated and dehumanized, caricatured and ridiculed Palestinians. The dehumanization continues. It is brutal and well-calculated, using a plethora of resources in the existing system to keep misconceptions thriving.

Something must be thwarting the testimony of truth, for how can the world forget—or choose not to see—the killing of Muhammad Al Durra by the Israeli police in Jerusalem as he was hiding his head against his father’s chest (September 30, 2000), a terrible occurrence filmed by a Palestinian journalist.¹⁵ And what about the murder of the American young activist Rachel Corrie (March 16, 2003) by an Israeli bulldozer driver who pretended not to see her while she stood clad in a bright orange overcoat protecting a Palestinian home from being demolished?¹⁶ Rachel Corrie made a conscious statement through the sacrifice of her body. Why has this not incited enough rage in the world, in Israel or among Israeli friends to create a transformation of consciousness? From whence this conspiracy of silence?

On the early morning of April 10, 1973, in an operation called Operation Spring of Youth, the Israeli Sareyet Matkal (General Staff Reconnaissance Unit) attacked my uncle Kamal Nasir’s home in Verdun in Beirut and assassinated

¹³ Evaristo and Gee 54.

¹⁴ For more on Western media’s depiction of Palestinian (and generally) Arab men and women, see Said, *Covering Islam* 1-68. Said also analyzes the way Zionism depicts Palestinians (*Peace and Its Discontents* 56-77). Here he discusses how Zionism presents itself as synonymous with Judaism and how both “regard Arabs in ‘the land of Israel’ as aliens and barely tolerated intruders” (56).

¹⁵ Journalist Tala Abu Rahma, who works for France. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_al-Durrah> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France_2#Muhammad_al-Durrah_shooting>.

¹⁶ see <<http://www.rachelcorrie.org/>>.

him.¹⁷ This operation was code named Operation Spring of Youth. He was my mother's cousin, a Christian Palestinian poet and writer who was the spokesperson of the PLO at the time. He was found crucified post-mortem on the floor of his apartment with tens of bullets savagely shattering his mouth (a symbol: he was the spokesperson of the PLO) and with his thumb and index finger severed (a symbol: he was a writer). My life was changed forever when the PLO representatives called at 4:00 a.m. to ask whether Kamal was sleeping at our house or any of his relatives' houses. The sun refused to shine for years and years in my world. Ehud Barak executed this operation and has never been brought to justice for assassinating a poet and writer, a gentle and beautiful human being. Prior to Kamal Nasir, the Israelis brutally murdered Ghassan Kanafani, another brilliant poet and writer on July 8, 1972. He was only thirty-six, and a young niece, Lamise, died with him when the Israelis planted a bomb in his car that exploded upon ignition.¹⁸ This was an onslaught on our culture, our heritage and our humanity. Moshe Dayan has never been indicted for all the wars of occupation he launched, nor has Menahem Begin for the massacres of Deir Yassin and Kafr Qasim, nor has Ariel Sharon received his due punishment for the massacres of Sabra and Shatilla that he facilitated¹⁹

The Vision

Reconciliation is a rich, complex, deep, expansive and weighty word. It carries connotations of hard work over years and years of struggle. It cannot happen through sheer political will because it needs much preparation on the moral, emotional, and human levels. For reconciliation to happen there needs to be acknowledgement by the Israeli of the Palestinian in an authentically human fashion. There needs to be acknowledgement of Palestinian history, of the physical

¹⁷ See Rosemary Radford Ruether's "'We Have No One to Talk To': Israel's Targeted Assassination Policy," *Counterpunch* 3 June 2006 <<http://www.counterpunch.org/ruether06032006.html>>. See also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1973_Israeli_raid_on_Lebanon> and <<http://cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/14/israel.lebanon.timeline/>>.

¹⁸ Cattan 127.

¹⁹ Nuwayhed al-Hout 46-72, 297-324.

massacres the Israelis committed against the Palestinian people, of the psychological massacres committed against the Palestinian right to an identity, of the colonizer's conscious acts of uprooting one people and replacing them with another. There needs to be acknowledgement of the usurpation of Palestinian inalienable legal, civil, and human rights. There needs to be a conversation about suffering, about pain, about shed tears, about lost loved ones and lost loves. There needs to be talk about the constant never-ending plowing of the Israeli bulldozer into Palestinian homes, territories, roads, and villages, the plowing into the stream of consciousness of our people's psyche.

Palestinians need to have truth-and-reconciliation committees set up where the victims face the perpetrators, where the perpetrators are put to shame, where the murderers are named, where the oppressed look into their oppressor's eyes without fear. Israel needs to officially recognize that it has wronged the Palestinians and needs to commemorate that through a designated Palestinian Day of Remembrance. Only after that is done can genuine dialogue begin. The indigenous inhabitants of Palestine need to be honored, respected, apologized to, and invited to return to their homeland. They need to have the right of return even if many might decide not to, even if this is coming sixty years too late.

In fact, for reconciliation to take place there needs to be an acceptance of Palestinian resistance as a legitimate right to life, to self-preservation, to dignity and integrity, and to the attainment of a people's civil, legal, and humanitarian rights. Palestinian resistance needs to be understood and interpreted within the framework of legitimate struggle for freedom, independence, homeland, dignity, and integrity. The world needs to see it and honor it with the same lens as French, English, Jewish, South African and other resistance movements have been perceived and honored.

Hope

One symbol of a hopeful moment in the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the creation of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, a project that grew out of the friendship of Daniel Barenboim, an Israeli citizen and talented musician, and the late eminent Palestinian American scholar, Edward Said. Another sign of hope is the publication of Ilan Pappé's *Palestinian Ethnic Cleansing*. Indeed, the whole movement among Israeli revisionist historians is a very serious and noteworthy step forward that needs to be used as a platform from which to launch the truth-and-reconciliation committees. Such historians need to be on these committees giving their input, creating the landscape of reconciliation with Palestinian historians and writers, and delineating the first steps in the genuine and authentic Palestinian Israeli dialogue towards building a democratic non-military state. Sam Keen's *To a Dancing God* needs to be read to counter the backlash of authoritarian mechanistic voices of technology and the consumerism that globally dominates academia. The discourse of technology has not been helpful as it should be in enhancing dialogue between peoples. The discourse of compassion and the search for an authentic human identity need to be nourished in the classroom. Biographies, autobiographies, and narratives of Palestinians and other Arabs need to be read carefully.²⁰

Let me remind the reader that many of the great thinkers and intellectuals in the Arab World who have articulated with authenticity and transparency the history of the Arab Muslim civilization and what it means to be a nationalist Arab with a great history, heritage, culture, and contributions to world civilization have been Arab Christians. Indeed, greatly influential writers like Edward Said, Issa Boullata, Albert Hourani, and Naim Ateek have been Arab Christians. Let me remind the reader that in our Palestinian past, when a Muslim person used to die in any village, the Christians would carry this person to the mosque and the cemetery.

²⁰ I am thinking specifically of Said's *Out of Place* and of G. Karmi's *In Search of Fatima*. These works fall within the framework of educational biography. They serve as pieces of literature as well as chronicles of a personal history within a cultural context of dispossession. I am also thinking of Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*, a bold and important work that is searing in its portrayal of an Arab, Muslim Egyptian reality, and *Map of Love*, which is an epic novel about the complexities of love and friendship across cultural boundaries.

When a Christian villager died, the Muslims would carry the corpse into the church and the cemetery. That is what my mother witnessed and grew up with in Palestine. That is the vision I want to revisit as an educator in the Arab world, the vision I want to convey to the West.

Conclusion

In Beirut in 1982 at battle in the South of Lebanon, as the Israeli troops were approaching, young Palestinian fighters (the oldest, I believe, was 14) lay on the road, spreading their bodies as a deterrent to the advance of the military tanks towards a Palestinian camp in the south of Lebanon. The Israeli leader of the advancing battalion went out of his tank, stood in front of these children and rendered them a military salute. This is the kind of respect that one would have expected between the Palestinians and the Israelis over the past forty-two years. Instead, today, the occupation is much more brutal, there are eleven thousand Palestinians held in Israeli prisons, there has been no withdrawal at all by Israel from the West Bank, and the withdrawal from Gaza was merely theatrical; Israel came back after two years of a fierce siege to bombard Gaza viciously using white phosphorus (against the Geneva Conventions), killing more than one thousand people and wounding more than five thousand. Two-thirds of those killed were children. Human Rights organizations have accused Israel of committing international war crimes and crimes against humanity. On the other hand, Palestinians have become more radicalized, more disillusioned, and more angry. They see no hope of achieving liberty and freedom based on justice or living within the framework of an independent democratic state next to Israel.

Hope is being lost. We need to work vigilantly on creating opportunities for more dialogue, for a deeper conversation that is authentic, inclusive, and comprehensive in its portrayal of Palestinian needs and aspirations. Americans, particularly those who are outspoken about their Christian faith and their belief in

the compassion of Jesus Christ, need to examine carefully America's unconditional military support to Israel and educate themselves about the question of Palestine.

Rachel Corrie died under the wheels of an Israeli bulldozer trying to protect a Palestinian home from being demolished. Palestinians honor her death and her life. But in reality the majority of Americans are not being asked to make the same kind of sacrifice. What they are being asked to do in order to save lives is merely to open their eyes, to educate themselves about the issues, to speak out with courage, and to be committed to seeking a just peace.

*~I dedicate this article to Rachel Corrie, the American
who refused to be part of the conspiracy of silence
that has surrounded the Palestinian question.*



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