

Towards Defetishizing 1967: Preliminary Thoughts on the Subject and the Concrete

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Our heritage befell in the hands of the strangers
The enemy's swords became the rooftops of our homes
Amal Dunqul, "The Elegies of al-Yamamah"

Introduction

Israeli and Palestinian conventional "peace camps" celebrate 1967 as mutable, while 1948 remains outside serious deliberation. In other words, 1967 is categorized as "political" while 1948 is categorized as "a-historical"; 1967 is the variable, 1948 is the constant. Nevertheless, 1967 is no less mystified than 1948. In addition, both camps see sovereignty as their ultimate end: "Jewish state", "two-state solution", etc.

I argue here that 1967 and 1948 are not so different; both are variables. "Reality" and "History" are human productions. There is nothing natural, immutable or deterministic about them. In this sense, this article argues, both 1948 and 1967 are barriers created by human beings, and as such can be removed and recreated. Moreover, statehood should be perceived as a means to an end and not necessarily an end in itself.

But this is not enough. Alongside this move, we should relinquish our fascination with swords. Power as the main narrator of history and constructor of reality should be disarmed. The rooftops in Amal Dunqul's poem, quoted above, are the creation of the swords. The origin of these rooftops should be exposed, and the swords should be put down, and not allowed to design our horizons. Beyond these artificial rooftops we might have a better chance for a better life. But there are no guarantees.

Can the object of power (oppression, colonialism, etc.), or the oppressed subject, "rewrite the conditions of impossibility as the conditions of possibility"?

The story of the Palestinians is one of mobilized agents: a continuous affirmation of subjectivities. This, however, has not resulted yet in achieving the desired goals of the collective agency (Palestinian nationalism). Subjectivity, in the narrow sense of agency, might be connected with desires, i.e. desiring specific ends. It does not, however, carry with it its conditions of success. Additionally, subjectivities do not necessarily lead to the same direction. Thus they might desire, and potentially lead to, conflicting ends.

Revolution, according to Hannah Arendt, requires three conditions: violence, pathos of novelty, and a story of a new beginning. In this sense the Palestinian story, especially since the mid 1960s, is a project of revolution and an immaterialized promise of a new beginning. The Palestinian revolution is yet to unfold.

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One can read, then, the text ("reality") of Palestinian subjectivity – or more precisely: collective agency – as a failure. Notwithstanding various significant achievements, the main goal (freedom) remains so far beyond immediate reach. One is tempted to compare this situation to Derrida's *différance*: it is deferred and it is different. It is deferred because the immediate satisfaction of Palestinian rights (the Oslo Accords) comes before freedom, and since it is deferred – so it seems – the coming of freedom to all the Palestinians (the colonization of Jerusalem and the West Bank has continued and the refugees' question has been shelved). And it is different because autonomy is not independence, and the Palestinian Authority is not a state.

Correspondingly, the text of Israeli power – as I explain below – is also a story of failure. Its goals (Palestinian and Arab submission: "security") is untenable and unsustainable. It carries with it the destiny of non-self-satisfaction.

The failures of Israeli power and of Palestinian subjectivity are invitations for creating new conditions of existence.

Has the Palestinian subject spoken? It certainly has through life and death, resistance and collaboration, violence and cultural productions, revolutionary projects and negotiations, liberation and "state-building", testimony and silence, suffering and injury, justice and rights, international law and Israeli law, torture and martyrdom, exile and resilience, demolished homes and shattered dreams, hope and despair, statism outside the homeland, etc.

Has the Palestinian voice been heard? Who are the receivers? What are the conditions for hearing? We return then to our initial question and rephrase it: Does rewriting the conditions of impossibility as conditions of possibility require the achievement of the goals of the collective agency? Or does hearing entail only the opening of possibilities that may or may not lead to the desired ends? It seems that unpredictability is one of the variables: neither the conditions of impossibility nor the conditions of possibility can produce closure.

The remnants of the colonial condition are additional obstacles to hearing the oppressed subject's voice (alongside the international division of labor, gross asymmetry of power relations, language of law, etc.). While the revolutionary project was the outcome of the refusal to fetishize 1948, the Oslo Accords have been the outcome of fetishizing 1967. Like other postcolonial nations, the Palestinians (or more accurately: the Palestinian Authority) inherited the colonial tradition, albeit not a fully developed bureaucracy as in other colonial traditions. Unlike other postcolonial nations, however, the Palestinians are still in the colonial condition. Indeed, imagining the "post-" without the colonialists leaving, bearing the responsibility of freedom without enjoying freedom, this is the Oslo accords' legacy. The Oslo process has been the recent stage for the transformation of the revolutionary project into a comprador class ("taming the beast"?). Notwithstanding the differences ("political emancipation" in Marx's terms), this state of affairs resembles the postcolonial compradors in the neo-colonial international division of labor (thus preventing "human emancipation").

In late modern colonial occupation there is a center of power: it is a machine that produces pain, death and destruction. The agents of this power are visible to the colonized: the bulldozer storms your home. Even though the power claims and aspires to be everywhere at all times, this desire remains unfulfilled. For sixty and forty years

Israel has served as a central author of the Palestinian “reality” and “history” inside the 1948 and then the 1967 borders. Achille Mbembe argues that the “most accomplished form of necropower [the power of death] is the contemporary colonial occupation of Palestine” since it combines “the disciplinary, the biopolitical, and the necropolitical.” The main Palestinian agency, however, emerged primarily outside the Israeli control system, among the refugees. Therefore, Israel’s writing capabilities have remained limited. The Oslo Accords, however, increased this authorship. Yet, a multiplicity of resistances has emerged in the face of the array of power strategies. New levels of authorship invite new forms of resistance. Thus, increasing authorship neither dictates deterministic consequences, nor entails irreversibility; quite the contrary, it exposes the limits of power.

What seems to me urgent these days on the 40th anniversary of the 1967 war is a twofold mission: Firstly, defetishizing the concrete: both the Zionist and Arab discourses are largely captured in the grip of a spatio-temporality that is presented as fixed, without note being taken of its inherent contingency and thus its instability. It is not clear to me why a man-made “reality” should become a prison of thoughts when planning and discussing other potential man-made realities. In this sense 1948 and 1967 are not so different. The only significant difference to my mind is the response of the dominant power structure (i.e. the international community). Both 1948 and 1967 have been mystified by the concerned parties, but the main achievement, from a Zionist perspective, of 1967 has been to further mystify 1948 and erase most of the traces of contingency. The concrete is assured long durability; i.e., the concrete is further concretized. But this project cannot do more than to fetishize the concrete by presenting it as immutable. Ultimately, however, the concrete remains the concrete (i.e., the mere conditions of existence), and as such it can be reconstructed. The concrete represents a particular configuration of power and this can be displaced and replaced without fetishizing sovereignty (the “two-state solution”, “one-state solution”, the “Jewish state”, etc.).

Defetishizing the concrete does not mean that the concrete will vanish or be deconcretized (the external constraints on the powers of the subject will remain, waiting for challengers). It just means that it will no longer look natural, necessary, or self-evident. In short, the concrete is exposed as arbitrary and artificial; it becomes one reading of “reality” of many, or even one “reality” of many.

The second mission is disenchantment with power. Three notable rhetorical strategies have emerged within the Zionist discourse on 1967 war: the first focuses on the repetition of the narratives of 1948 to allow the assailant to claim victimhood (these are partly challenged by revisionist history). Second is the appropriation of the “universal” as the particular: legal and textual absurdities (the famous “the” in resolution 242) that try to conceal an ideology of power and expansionism (this discourse does not mention the colonial war of 1956 and no connection is established with 1967). The third strategy is a paradigmatic distinction between the war and its consequences (occupation and colonization) to allow moral distinctions to follow: no matter what you think about the aftermath, the war was just. According to this argument, the war is just not only in view of what preceded it but also in view of what could have happened had it ended otherwise than it did. This argument allows a broader intra-tribal consensus.

This discursive medium relies on manufacturing power and anxiety. It reveals enchantment with power as well as anxiety from both the possibility of defeat and

viewing Zionism's own deeds and existence as unjust. Perhaps paradoxically, actual defeat, as in July-August 2006, might drive the colonizing subject to greater enchantment with power. Actual victories, as in 1967, and ambiguous wars, as in 1973, have also contributed to this fascination. Likewise, subjects disempowered by this enchantment – regardless of victory or defeat – are more likely to themselves become haunted by the phantasm of power. This vicious circle should be broken, and the evil spirit of power should be exorcised. If power is the moving force of "history" then dethroning power means dethroning "history".

So far, the Palestinian journey has not been a Kantian-Hegelian-Marxist optimistic story: the harmonious movement of "history" towards human freedom. Nietzschean elements of regress are as many as the checkpoints and obstacles Israel has established in the Occupied Territories. Both the colonizer and the colonized can remove the existing obstacles and change the current modes of production of "reality". Like the checkpoints on the ground, 1948 and 1967 should not be perceived as necessary or immutable. After all, we should not leap to conclusions: if it is only forty years, then it is only sixty years.

The call to defetishize 1948 and 1967 is a call to defetishize "history".