TRANSNATIONAL PALESTINE

ARTICLES

2  The Thorns that Exist and Resist: Black-Palestine Solidarity in the Twenty-First Century
Andy Clarno

10  Morocco’s Palestinian Politics
Zakia Salime and Paul Silverstein

14  Managing Security Webs in the Palestinian Refugee Camp of Ain al-Hilweh
Erling Lorentzen Sogge

SPECIAL REPORTS

18  Juan Goytisolo: Tangier, Havana and the Treasonous Intellectual
Hisham Aidi

32  The Arabic Fantastic and ISIS Terror: The Aesthetics of Antiterrorism and Its Limits
Jamil Khader

41  What Is Prevent?
Mezna Qato

REVIEW

43  Ghada Hashem Talhami, American Presidents and Jerusalem
Suheir Abu Oksa Daoud

EDITOR’S PICKS

44  New and Recommended Reading

PHOTOS/GRAPHICS


COVER Participants in a delegation of Black American activists and artists led by the Dream Defenders pose in the Palestinian town of Nazareth, Israel, January 2015. (Christopher Hazou)
For Palestine, 2017 is a year of anniversaries. One hundred years since the Balfour Declaration gave imperial imprimatur to the Zionist project. Fifty years since the beginning of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. And thirty years since the start of the first intifada, the popular uprising against that occupation. We will soon reach the seventieth anniversary of the nakba, the displacement and dispossession of most of the Palestinian population. These anniversaries remind us of the long entanglement of Palestine in global imperial networks. They highlight the extended, and seemingly endless and bottomless, suffering that Palestinians experience both inside and outside of historic Palestine. They also confirm that despite the forces arrayed against them, Palestinians have struggled, collectively and individually, for a liberated future.

Even as we mark these anniversaries, it is vital to recognize that we do not mark them simply as events, but as processes that continue. The idea of the ongoing nakba (al-nakba al-mustamirrah) has increasingly been a way for Palestinians to describe the continuing nature of their dispossession and displacement. It also offers an analytic and political framework that connects the experiences of Palestinians across borders and boundaries. Palestinians share a common experience not only of suffering, but also of resistance. Given the political experiences of the past few decades, it may be difficult to speak of a continuous intifada. But the culture of sumoud (steadfastness) and the grassroots, popular and innovative forms of resistance that characterized the first intifada do continue to destabilize the Zionist project while reinforcing the place of Palestine within global circuits of resistance.

Palestinians have not been alone in their struggles. For decades, social and political movements challenging colonialism, apartheid, racism and imperialism have expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people and built relationships of mutual support with Palestinian communities in struggle. In the 1960s and 1970s, socialist, communist and national liberation movements built ties with the Palestine Liberation Organization. During the first intifada, popular movements around the world organized support for grassroots organizations in the Occupied Territories while challenging the pro-Israel bias of Western governments and mainstream media outlets. During the second intifada, thousands of social justice activists travelled to Palestine to participate in direct action campaigns against the occupation. And, since 2005, the call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) has built on this history by providing an effective framework for solidarity in which local organizers mobilize campaigns based on a set of core principles established by Palestinian civil society organizations. BDS has proven effective as campaigns proliferate among trade unions, student groups, co-ops, academic associations and religious organizations. Indeed, support for the Palestinian struggle in the West is more widespread and more powerful than ever before.

On the ground in Palestine, however, conditions continue to deteriorate. Colonization and displacement continue unabated—with Jerusalem, Hebron and the villages of the West Bank as sites of the most aggressive settler colonial expansion. As Jewish Israeli society continues its sharp turn to the right, pervasive anti-Arab racism is manifest in demands for accelerated settlement construction, the expansion of Jewish access to sites of Muslim worship in Jerusalem and the expulsion (“transfer”) of Palestinian citizens of Israel and residents of Jerusalem. As Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu panders to the far right and...

 Continued on page 44.
The Thorns that Exist and Resist
Black-Palestine Solidarity in the Twenty-First Century

Andy Clarno

Black-Palestinian unity and solidarity is at its absolute height in the US, because both peoples recognize that the racist nature of the US government and the racist nature of Israel are the same. When I saw those white racists marching in Virginia, all I could think of was the white settlers in Israel burning Palestinian children to death or marching to attack my people in Jerusalem.

—Rasmea Odeh

On August 12, 2017, more than 1,200 people gathered in Chicago to bid farewell to Rasmea Odeh, a Palestinian-American community organizer facing deportation due to US government efforts to repress struggles for social justice and support for Palestinian freedom. At the gathering, Angela Davis honored Rasmea’s lifelong commitment to revolutionary struggles against racism, Zionism and imperialism. A week later, Kristian Davis Bailey, a Detroit-based activist with the Black4Palestine network, stood outside Rasmea’s sentencing hearing with banners that declared: “From Assata to Rasmea, We Fight for Freedom/Hurriya.” These moments highlight the black-Palestine unity that Rasmea celebrated in her final days.
During the conference, tens of thousands of nearly 50 grassroots organizations endorsed Arab Political Imaginary, Atlantic slave trade and on Israel as a racist and apartheid state. Against Racist and Political Repression. Building on these other historical connections, movements for black and Palestinian liberation have intensified the bonds of solidarity in the last three years.

Two recent books provide powerful reminders that black-Palestine solidarity has deep roots in transnational struggles for liberation. In Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary, Alex Lubin provides a long history of black American political engagement with the question of Palestine. As far back as the late nineteenth century, black diasporic visions of return to an African homeland were influenced by the idea of Jewish emancipation through Zionism. For more than a century, Lubin demonstrates, black writers, activists and organizers have built political imaginaries—ways of conceptualizing the present and envisioning the future—through comparisons and connections between formations of racial capitalism in the US, Europe and Palestine/Israel. During the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, the Black Panther Party articulated a politics of “intercommunalism”—arguing that the Palestinian struggle for national liberation and the black freedom movement were both targeting the same global system of US imperialism. More recently, he argues, black-Palestine solidarity has reemerged in a context defined by neoliberalism and securitization.

Keith Feldman extends this analysis in his new book, A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America, which argues that struggles for racial justice in the US from the late 1960s through the mid-1980s were deeply shaped by contested interpretations of the political situation in Palestine/Israel. Feldman focuses on the role of cultural producers who influenced these debates. During deliberations on the United Nation’s 1975 Resolution 3379 declaring Zionism a form of racism, for instance, the US ambassador to the UN was Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Moynihan is known in the US for insisting that poverty in black communities is the product of a pathological culture grounded in matriarchal family structures. At the UN, Moynihan confronted powerful critiques of Israeli settler colonial racism produced by the Palestine Research Center (PRC), including comparisons between Israel and South Africa. Insisting that Israel was a bastion of liberty, Moynihan rejected the PRC analysis as an anti-Semitic tool of totalitarian communism. Yet the PRC analysis prevailed and the UN General Assembly approved Resolution 3379.

**Solidarity from Durban to Ferguson**

Importantly, Feldman and Lubin both conclude their books with discussions of the 2001 World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in Durban, South Africa. Two of the most important debates at the WCAR focused on reparations for the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and on Israel as a racist and apartheid state. The US and Israel undermined the official WCAR forum by withdrawing their delegations in protest over discussions of slavery and apartheid. But the unofficial NGO forum attended by thousands of civil society representatives from around the world produced a powerful report condemning Israel as a racist, apartheid state and demanding comprehensive reparations for slavery. During the conference, tens of thousands of black South Africans marched through the streets of Durban declaring their solidarity with Palestinians, black Americans and other people fighting racism, discrimination, xenophobia and genocide. The WCAR was an important moment in the ongoing effort to forge transnational political imaginaries and movements that connect struggles against racism in Palestine, the US, South Africa and around the world.

Another key moment in black-Palestine solidarity took place in the summer of 2014. In July, Israel launched a seven-week assault on the Gaza Strip, killing more than 2,100 Palestinians and injuring 10,000. On August 9, while Israel bombed Gaza, Officer Darren Wilson killed Michael Brown, an unarmed black youth, in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri. Outraged over the repeated killing of black people at the hands of police in the United States, protesters took to the streets of Ferguson in an uprising that soon spread to Baltimore, Chicago and other cities where the devaluation of black life is on constant display. In a joint statement, black and Palestinian activists described this moment:

In the course of resilience against the merciless edge of state-violence, protesters in Ferguson held up signs declaring solidarity with the people of Palestine. In turn, Palestinians posted pictures on social media with instructions of how to treat the inhalation of tear gas. Organically, an analysis emerged highlighting similarities, but not sameness, of Black and Palestinian life, and more aptly, of their survival.

Over the last three years, activists, artists and educators have reinvigorated the bonds between struggles for black and Palestinian liberation.

In August 2015, more than 1,000 black organizers, activists, scholars and artists released the Black Solidarity Statement with Palestine. Nearly 50 grassroots organizations endorsed the statement, including the Dream Defenders, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, Assata’s Daughters and the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center. The same year, more than 60 black and Palestinian activists came together to produce When I See Them, I See Us. This powerful video declaring mutual solidarity between black and Palestinian liberation featured dedicated freedom fighters such as Angela Davis, Rasmea Odeh, Omar Barghouti, Cornel West, Rafeef Ziadeh, Robin D.G. Kelley, Linda Sarsour and Kristian Davis Bailey.

In August 2016, the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL)—a collective of more than 50 grassroots organizations representing black people across the US—released a detailed M4BL platform outlining demands for political, economic and social transformation. Alongside calls for community control, political

---

**MIDDLE EAST REPORT 282 • SPRING 2017 3**
power, economic justice, reparations and an end to the war on black people, the platform demands divestment from prisons, police and the military, and investment in the education, health and safety of black communities. As part of this demand, the M4BL platform provides a searing critique of the US empire, the military industrial complex, the global “war on terror,” AFRICOM, US interventions—in Libya, Somalia, Haiti and Honduras—and US military aid to Israel. The US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, Jewish Voice for Peace and the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel endorsed the M4BL platform while the Palestinian BDS National Committee declared its commitment “to firmly and consistently stand in solidarity with our black sisters and brothers in the United States and around the world by supporting the demands and policy proposals in this platform.” These public expressions of mutual solidarity provide a forum through which black and Palestinian activists articulate the relationship between struggles and outline visions for collective liberation. As Lubin would expect, the deepening political imaginary is grounded in a critique of state violence and neoliberal racial capitalism.

At its base, this political imaginary involves a mutual recognition of the systematic racist oppression confronting Palestinians and black Americans. This recognition is perfectly captured in the video’s refrain—“When I See Them, I See Us”—and in its juxtaposed images of police violence, displacement, imprisonment and death in the US and Palestine. Similarly, the Black Solidarity Statement draws parallels between the forms of state violence confronting Palestinians and black Americans: “Israel’s widespread use of detention and imprisonment against Palestinians evokes the mass incarceration of black people in the US, including the political imprisonment of our own revolutionaries. Soldiers, police and courts justify lethal force against us and our children who pose no imminent threat.” Rather than reducing similarity to simple equivalence, however, the authors of these statements recognize that structures of domination are context-specific. “We respect the uniqueness of our struggles and our varied histories,” declares When I See Them, I See Us. The Black Solidarity Statement points out that, “the apartheid configuration in Israel/Palestine is unique from the United States (and South Africa).”

Going further, the solidarity statements highlight the links between the US and Israel that connect the oppression of Palestinians and black Americans. One of the key links involves joint training exercises and the circulation of military and policing strategies between Israel and the US. As the Black Solidarity Statement testifies, “while the US and Israel would continue to oppress us without collaborating with each other, we have witnessed police and soldiers from the two countries train side-by-side.” They also share intelligence, technology and tactics. Similarly, the M4BL platform focuses on the impact of US military support for Israel. It argues that US military aid “not only diverts much needed funding from domestic education and social programs, but it makes US citizens complicit in the abuses committed by the Israeli government.”

Kristian Davis Bailey, a Detroit-based writer and activist, describes black Americans and Palestinians as “the thorns that exist and resist from different ends of the US colonial and imperial project.” He explains:

The descendants of enslaved Africans constitute one of the first and largest oppressed national groups on colonized territory on Turtle Island [North America] and Palestinians are the largest target of
the world’s most recent colonial entity, which serves as an arm for US imperialism in the Middle East. Collectively, we are struggling internally and externally against the world’s biggest and most racist capitalist, colonial and imperial powers. The political imaginary of contemporary black-Palestine solidarity, therefore, is grounded in an analysis of similar yet distinct structures of domination connected through a global network of imperial power. Similarly, the visions for liberation emphasize the importance of conjoined struggles. According to the joint statement by black and Palestinian activists that accompanies the *When I See Them, I See Us* video, “We choose to build with one another in a shoulder to shoulder struggle against state-sanctioned violence. […] We choose to join one another in resistance not because our struggles are the same but because we each struggle against the formidable forces of structural racism and the carceral and lethal technologies deployed to maintain them.” The Black Solidarity Statement declares that “we aim to sharpen our practice of joint struggle against capitalism, colonialism, imperialism and the various racisms embedded in and around our societies.” And the M4BL platform expresses a global vision for liberation:

> Until we are able to overturn US imperialism, capitalism and white supremacy, our brothers and sisters around the world will continue to live in chains. Our struggle is strengthened by our connections to the resistance of peoples around the world fighting for their liberation. The Black radical tradition has always been rooted in igniting connection across the global south under the recognition that our liberation is intrinsically tied to the liberation of Black and Brown people around the world.

**Connecting Communities in Struggle**

Statements of mutual solidarity are merely the most visible expressions of the deepening relationship between Black and Palestinian communities in struggle. In recent years, these relationships have been strengthened through delegations and educational exchanges, popular art and education and workshops bringing together scholars and activists. Delegations are among the most important mechanisms for generating connections between communities and movements. Since 2008, Interfaith Peace-Builders (IFPB) has taken six delegations of Black, indigenous and other people of color on two-week educational and solidarity visits to Palestine/Israel. In 2011, a group of indigenous women and women of color—including Angela Davis, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Barbara Ransby, Chandra Mohanty and Waziyatawin—visited Palestine on a solidarity delegation. Dream Defenders organized delegations to Palestine for Black, indigenous and immigrant rights activists in 2015 and 2016. These delegations enable activists to witness Israeli apartheid and experience first-hand the oppression confronting Palestinians on a daily basis. They also help delegates deepen their understanding of the experiences of African Palestinians, Mizrahi Jews and African refugees. And they create opportunities for Palestinian, Israeli and US-based organizers to meet, learn from one another and stand together at demonstrations. Reports issued by these delegations include calls for an end to the Israeli occupation, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, equal rights for Mizrahi Jews and African refugees, an end to US aid for Israel and support for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaigns.
Members of the Movement for Black Lives who joined the 2016 IFPB Indigenous and People of Color Delegation released a statement reiterating the vision of a conjoined struggle:

In the fight for dignity, justice and freedom, the Movement for Black Lives is committed to the global shared struggle of oppressed people, namely the people of occupied Palestine and other indigenous communities who for decades have resisted the occupation of their land, the ethnic cleansing of their people and the erasure of their history and experiences. In this violent, political climate, it is urgent that we make clear the connection between violence inflicted on Black people globally that is encouraged and permitted by the state and the profiling, harm and genocide funded by the United States and perpetrated by Zionist vigilantes and the Israel Defense Forces on Palestinian people. Our collective oppression mandates that we work together across geography, language and culture to decry and organize an end to capitalistic, imperialist regimes.¹¹

While most delegations take North Americans on visits to Palestine, a delegation of Palestinian activists also visited the US in 2014 through the Right to Education campaign at Birzeit University, in the West Bank. The delegation met with activists and grassroots organizations in Ferguson, St. Louis, Detroit, Philadelphia and other US cities. Coordinated by Students for Justice in Palestine, the delegation was organized “to create linkages between the student movement in the US and Palestine; to build long-term, institutional relationships between our universities; and to exchange information between Palestinians and US social movements fighting related issues of racism, colonialism and attacks on education (e.g., indigenous, migrant and black struggles).”¹²

Black-Palestine solidarity is also being forged through art, music, poetry and popular education campaigns. Lubin’s analysis of black-Palestine solidarity in the context of neoliberalization and state violence highlights the spoken-word poetry of Suheir Hammad and the music of the Palestinian hip-hop group DAM. Poets such as Rafeef Ziadah and Rami Kenazi have provided powerful voices drawing connections between the Palestinian struggle and movements against racial capitalism in North America, Great Britain and Europe.

Kenazi’s poems—such as #InsideOut and #NoLessWorthy—weave together incidents of racialized and gendered violence from Gaza, Ferguson, Iraq and Paris to highlight the global connections between racialized regimes of dehumanization and expendability. As Kanazi points out, “The same impetus that drives me to act against Israeli occupation and apartheid motivates me to stand against US militarism, the prison industrial complex, police violence and the expulsion of undocumented communities. Similarly, this work can’t be separated from battling transphobia, misogyny and ableism. It’s to affirm that people deserve freedom and justice, whether in occupied Palestine or brutalized Baltimore.”¹³

In 2015, the Abu Jihad Museum in Abu Dis launched an exhibition titled George Jackson in the Sun of Palestine organized by Greg Thomas.¹⁴ A member of the Black Panther Party, Jackson was murdered by prison guards in San Quentin in 1971. Among the possessions found in his cell were poems by the Palestinian poet Samih al-Qasim. Bringing together books, drawings, political posters and other artwork, Greg Thomas’s exhibit builds on the connection between Jackson and al-Qasim to highlight the deep historical links between Palestinian and black American revolutionary movements. After opening in
Abu Dis, the exhibit has travelled throughout Palestine and the US—from the African Cultural Center in Jerusalem to the Black Panther Party 50th Anniversary Conference in Oakland, California. It has generated public conversations about political imprisonment, caging and the relationship between black and Palestinian struggles against racism and colonialism.

Another forum for deepening the connections between black and Palestinian struggles are workshops and conferences that bring together scholars and activists. In 2016–2017, the University of Illinois at Chicago hosted a series of transnational workshops on “Geographies of Justice” that provided space for political organizers, public intellectuals and interdisciplinary scholars to examine connections and build links between struggles for justice in Palestine, the US and South Africa. The first workshop focused on prisons, policing and violence; the second emphasized education and pedagogy; and the third addressed wealth inequality and economic justice. Participants from three continents provided overviews of emergent actions and movements, discussed frameworks and infrastructures of resistance and generated political analyses of the current conjuncture. Attentive to the uniqueness of each context, workshop participants interrogated the overlapping structures of racial capitalism and envisioned possibilities for expanding connections between struggles.

In December 2016, organizers and scholar-activists travelled to Brazil for a two-day workshop called “The Arab Spring meets Black Lives Matter in Rio de Janeiro.” Black Americans, Palestinians, Egyptians and others met with black Brazilian organizers and community members, including a group of students occupying university buildings in a struggle against racism and privatization. Tracing the interconnected histories of slavery, racism, colonialism and capitalism, participants learned about ongoing struggles and built connections between their movements.

These workshops highlight the internationalism underlying black-Palestine solidarity. Rather than a narrow focus on the US and Palestine, the movement is part of an expansive global network of organizations fighting racial capitalism, settler colonialism and empire. In 2014, Ana Tijoux and Shadia Mansour released “Somos Sur,” a celebration of musical movement and political solidarity across the Global South. During the 2016 Olympics, a delegation of Black Lives Matter activists from the US travelled to Rio de Janeiro to connect with Brazilian activists fighting police violence and displacement. Later that year, women from five continents joined the Women’s Boat to Gaza in an effort to break the Israeli siege. After the Israeli military seized the boat and deported the activists, South African participant Leigh-Ann Naidoo declared: “People
The withdrawal of G4S represents an important victory for the liberation of Palestine. In 2015, the Black Solidarity Statement identified G4S as a target for joint struggle, noting: “G4S harms thousands of Palestinian political prisoners illegally held in Israel and hundreds of black and brown youth held in its privatized juvenile prisons in the US. The corporation profits from incarceration and deportation from the US and Palestine, to the UK, South Africa and Australia. We reject notions of ‘security’ that make any of our groups unsafe and insist no one is free until all of us are.”

Working together, BDS activists and prison abolitionists convinced Columbia University to divest from G4S. The Gates Foundation and the United Methodist Church also divested. Under growing pressure from the BDS movement, the British company G4S sold all of its operations in Palestine and Israel to the Israeli equity fund, FIMI, in December 2016. The withdrawal of G4S represents an important victory for the BDS movement, as another international business realizes that there are costs associated with supporting Israeli apartheid. Nevertheless, FIMI has retained all of its existing operations as well as the name G4S Israel. In July 2017, vehicles marked with the G4S logo provided the surveillance technology that Israel installed at the entrance to the al-Aqsa mosque. Moreover, the multinational corporation Group4Securicor continues to operate prisons, migrant detention centers and youth incarceration facilities, and to provide security services to governments and corporations around the world. For this reason, activists point out, it is important to continue challenging the company.

Like the black freedom movement, Native American organizations fighting settler colonialism as well as immigrant justice and prison abolition movements have a long history of mutual solidarity with Palestine. Under the Trump administration, movements fighting state violence and racial capitalism are working to strengthen the connections between efforts to resist the incarceration and death of black youth, the detention and deportation of Latinx immigrants, the surveillance and harassment of Arabs and Muslims and the intensification of both exploitation and abandonment of working class communities. The liberation of Palestine is part of the political imaginary animating all of these movements.

In the US, Palestine solidarity work is under attack. State and federal governments are attempting to criminalize support for BDS. Student organizations and activists face repression from university administrations. The FBI continues to raid the homes of Palestine solidarity activists. Palestine remains an exception to free speech. And Rasmea Odeh has been deported. The intensification of repression is an organized response to the expansion of Palestine solidarity and the success of the BDS movement. In the face of this repression, Omar Barghouti notes, there is only one way to respond: “We need to expand, mainstream and build on our many inspiring BDS campaigns, academic, cultural and economic, as the most effective way to respond to the new McCarthyism designed by Israel’s regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid and exported to states where its lobby groups enjoy massive influence.” The work by black and Palestinian organizers to build principled, historically grounded relations of solidarity is key to the success of these efforts.

Endnotes

1 “This is the court statement Judge Drain didn’t want you to hear,” Justice for Rasmea, August 18, 2017: http://justice4rasmea.org/news/2017/08/18/court-statement/


3 Keith Feldman, A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).


8 The Movement for Black Lives platform: https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/.


Morocco’s Palestinian Politics

Zakia Salime and Paul Silverstein

Hirak movement activists protesting the neglect of the Rif region by the Moroccan state compare their plight with that of the Palestinians. While expressions of solidarity with Palestine were once the province of the hegemonic state consolidating its legitimacy, it has also been used at various times by leftists, Islamists and now Amazigh Rifians—each activating the tragedy of dispossession for its own purposes.

“Yo u are not in Gaza, this is al-Hoceima!” This title describes a video clip of tear gas in the streets of al-Hoceima, the epicenter of the ongoing protests by the Hirak movement in the mountainous Rif region of northern Morocco. Hirak protesters risk their lives demonstrating against corruption and for civil rights and state investment in the peripheral Berber-speaking region. Protests have been ongoing since the October 28, 2016, death of local fish seller Mohcine Fikri, who was crushed in a garbage compactor while trying to retrieve 500 kilograms of illegally-caught swordfish police had confiscated. Solidarity demonstrations spread across Morocco and the Moroccan diaspora in Europe. As tensions between the movement and the Moroccan state (al-makhzen) have intensified, protestors have drawn on the Palestinian question to suggest a reading of state violence, tracing parallels with the Israeli war machine’s actions in the occupied Gaza Strip. They build on an older, broader narrative in the region by which local residents—even economic elites—liken themselves to Palestinians subject to the symbolic...
and actual bulldozers of the makhzen’s predations. The Rif, like Gaza, is geographically insulated, politically isolated, economically marginalized and militarily controlled.

Invoking Gaza enables Hirak activists to symbolically close the gap between Israel as a settler colonial state and Morocco as a post-colonial formation that deliberately marginalizes part of its population. Support and solidarity with the Palestinian cause has strikingly shifted from being an expression of Arab nationalism consonant with hegemonic state rhetoric, to an oppositional discourse that likens the Rif to Palestine, and the struggle against the hogra (disdain) and humiliation by the makhzen, to the Palestinian fight for rights and self-determination. The state-controlled media seems to be amplifying the parallelism of this conflict by deriding the Hirak protestors, and particularly its spokesman Nasser Zefzafi, as “separatists” and “terrorists.”

While some, mostly non-Rifian, secular elites in the broader Berber (Amazigh) movement for language, cultural and political rights have over the past several decades sought to forge real or imaginary ties with Israel, in general Palestine has broadly nourished the imagination of resistance and opposition to the Moroccan state in ways that go beyond the occasional rally, political gathering or activist speech. For instance, in the Gharb region of Morocco, the women who are fighting for access to communal land spoke about the uprooting of their olive trees in privatization projects. They evoked images of Palestinians hugging their trees, spoke about home demolitions in their shantytowns and villages and asked, “Are we Palestinians?”

In the long fight for Western Saharan self-determination, Polisario militants and fellow-travelers have similarly compared their struggle to that of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Invocations of Palestine by ordinary Moroccans in their struggle against the state machinery reflect decades of state official discourse, but also constitute heartfelt solidarity with Palestinian resistance.

The Palestinian Question as State Business

Since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Morocco has been the platform for meetings and summits about the fate of Palestine. As a state hegemonic discourse, the “Palestinian question” illustrates late King Hassan’s promotion of Pan-Arabism, and post-independence Moroccan elites’ embrace of an Arab nationalist ideology. The country hosted several conferences, including the 1969 meeting following the arson attack on the pulpit of al-Aqsa mosque. This meeting set the ground for the birth of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1972, and the Committee of al-Quds headed by King Hassan, then inherited by King Mohamed VI. It was in the capital Rabat that the eighth Arab Summit of 1974 recognized the PLO as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.” The (leaked) role of King Hassan in the Camp David Agreement did not disturb the state’s hegemony over the narratives around the Palestinian question. However, the 1993 Oslo Accords legitimated Morocco’s move to openly connect Rabat to Tel Aviv through liaison bureaus in both capitals, and the king hosted an unprecedented Arab-Israeli economic summit in Casablanca in 1994.

Succeeding his father in 1999, Mohamed VI reiterated Morocco’s commitment to support the Palestinian struggle for self-determination while simultaneously moving towards normalization with Israel. On the one hand, he closed down the liaison bureau with Israel in response to the Israeli invasion of Jenin in the occupied West Bank in 2002. On the other hand, the prominence of the US-led global war on terror, especially after the Casablanca attacks of May 2003, and the importance of the Western Sahara question in international forums, has pushed the Palestinian issue down the agenda and out of the rhetoric of the Moroccan state, except in the occasional messages of condemnation or support, as during the summer 2017 confrontations over Israeli security measures at al-Aqsa mosque. Moreover, Western Saharan claims for self-determination since the 1976 Spanish withdrawal have created a shift in the direction of Moroccan diplomacy toward Africa and, according to unofficial sources, closer to the pro-Israel players in the US State Department and Congress. Morocco’s normalization with Israel, already taking place in Euro-Mediterranean platforms and in bilateral free trade agreements—notably with the US in 2004—pushes Palestine further down the list of Moroccan state priorities.

Palestine and Political Groups

Despite the resilience of the Palestinian question in popular representations of oppression and justice, the current mood is far removed from the 1970s political climate, when Palestine was the main item on the agenda of campus activism, which equated Zionism and imperialism. The atmosphere now is also different from the 1980s when Islamist activism capitalized on popular sentiments about Palestine and redefined it as an Islamic question, rather than an Arab question. Despite their ideological differences and political divides, both leftists and Islamists appropriated the Palestinian tragedy to enlarge their base of support, build popular legitimacy and make claims on the state.
Spearheaded by the Islamist movements in the decade of 2000, massive rallies took place to protest Israeli aggression and violence against Palestinians. The Jamaat al-‘Adl wa al-Ihsan (Justice and Spirituality, also called Charity) and Harakat al-Tawhid wa al-Islah (Unification and Reform) movements organized calls, rallies and fundraising campaigns against the Israeli blockade of Gaza, the invasion of Jenin (2002), military operations in Gaza (2008–2009, 2012, 2014) and the war with Hezbollah in Lebanon (2006). They mobilized street rallies and renewed calls for boycott, generating new spaces for Palestinian solidarity and activating anti-normalization sentiments among new professional, urban elites.

To Islamist groups, notably the banned organization of al-‘Adl wa al-Ihsan, these rallies serve both as a test of popularity and a show of force to demonstrate to the makhzen their large base of support. In the same way in which the current Hirak movement’s reference to Gaza in the video complicates assumptions about an Arab-Amazigh divide, which has often served as a master narrative about the Rif, the Islamist movements’ support for both Hamas and Hezbollah troubles the simple Sunni-Shia sectarian lens through which the broader region has been framed since the Iran-Iraq war.

The integration of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) into the government in 2011 drove a wedge between the “Islamists of the makhzen,” as some activists of al-‘Adl wa al-Ihsan like to call JDP members, and those in civil society, BDS groups and cyber-activists who support campaigns of boycott and calls for anti-normalization. While Moroccan support for Palestine is still alive, it is now less concentrated, more dispersed and more often activated through small online initiatives and limited street-level protests.

Palestine and Amazigh Activism

Even if references to Palestine by Hirak protestors (often in an Islamic rhetorical vein) can be read simply as allegorical calls for self-determination, they seem to stand in stark contrast to the ways in which Amazigh activists elsewhere in Morocco have, over the last two decades, tended to disavow expressions of solidarity with Palestine. These Amazigh activists, particularly in the south and the southeast, and among the secular elites based in Rabat, viewed expressions of solidarity as yet another aspect of the makhzen’s hegemonic Arab nationalist discourse. The general critique, as it has been articulated over the years, was that the Moroccan state’s focus on the Palestinian struggle was a means of drawing attention away from inequality and marginalization within Morocco.

In a presumably apocryphal story recounted by Amazigh activists during the early 2000s, a Palestinian law student
studying in Fez in the 1990s spent his holiday traveling through the High Atlas mountains, from one poor Berber village to another, without electricity or running water. Everywhere he went, villagers asked what they could do to aid the Palestinian cause. Exasperated and moved by living conditions worse than he had ever witnessed in Palestine, he eventually responded, “Stop asking what you can do for us; instead ask me what I can do for you.”

The Palestinian issue eventually caused a break between many Amazigh activists and the Moroccan opposition left. Fights broke out in universities between militants of “Palestine” in Morocco is ultimately less about Palestine than about Morocco. As an ideological prop, it has, on the one hand, underwritten the state’s management of an impoverished and potentially recalcitrant populace. On the other hand, it has served as a powerful rhetoric of critique of that very same state and its historic hogra for peripheral populations, like Riffians, who have long seen themselves outside of, or even in opposition to, the makhzen, and today struggle minimally for long denied rights and maximally for self-determination. Solidarity with Palestine has effectively shifted from a hegemonic national discourse that, if anything, divided the Moroccan opposition (leftist vs. Islamist vs. Amazigh), to one which increasingly seems to unite them. The invocations of Palestine during the 2011 demonstrations for social justice and dignity led by the February 20 movement, as continued by the Hirak activists more recently, constitute a poignant critique of makhzen state policy and geopolitical imaginary, including its de facto normalization with Israel.

There are also clearly regional dynamics to this within Morocco, as Palestine may make a better allegory for marginality and aspirations of self-determination in the former Spanish colonies in the Rif and Western Sahara than in other rural Berber-speaking areas. All of which points to one of the ongoing tragedies of Palestine, namely that the instrumentalization of the Palestinian nakba (catastrophe) to serve state purposes and domestic politics in places like Morocco, while ostensibly broadening the base for Palestinian solidarity, tends to fossilize actual Palestinians as perpetual, if useful, victims.

Morocco’s Palestine

“Palestine” in Morocco is ultimately less about Palestine than about Morocco. As an ideological prop, it has, on the one hand, underwritten the state’s management of an impoverished and potentially recalcitrant populace. On the other hand, it has served as a powerful rhetoric of critique of that very same state and its historic hogra for peripheral populations, like Riffians, who have long seen themselves outside of, or even in opposition to, the makhzen, and today struggle minimally for long denied rights and maximally for self-determination. Solidarity with Palestine has effectively shifted from a hegemonic national discourse

"Palestine" in Morocco is ultimately less about Palestine than about Morocco.

Endnotes

3 Interview with Zakia Salime, May 28, 2016.
4 It has since been reported that King Hassan II also leaked recordings of Arab leaders’ discussions of their military preparedness during a 1965 Arab League meeting in Casablanca to Israeli agents, thus providing key intelligence during the 1967 war. Sue Surkes, “Morocco tipped off Israeli intelligence, ‘helped Israel win Six Day War’.” Times of Israel, October 16, 2016.
5 If many Amazigh activists have, over the last twenty years, disavowed expressions of Palestinian solidarity as little but state hegemonic discourse, many Palestinians—especially Palestinian citizens of Israel—have continued to view Amazigh efforts to secure language, cultural and political rights as a close parallel to their own struggles as an internal, marginalized minority.
8 Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, “Morocco’s Berbers and Israel,” Middle East Quarterly 18/1 (2011); “Moroccan amazigh Poet: Arab World is Imperialist, ‘Palestine’ is Jewish” Kabylia.me https://kabylie.me/2014/09/22/moroccan-amazigh-poet-arab-world-is-imperialist-palestine-is-jewish/
Managing Security Webs in the Palestinian Refugee Camp of Ain al-Hilweh

Erling Lorentzen Sogge

Palestinian refugee camp communities in Lebanon today are self-governed by a complex web of political factions, exile leaderships and militia groups. In Ain al-Hilweh, where violence has long been a problem, the establishment of the Joint Palestinian Security Force is intended to provide stability. Navigating the needs of key players inside and outside the camp is proving to be a challenge.

On May 31, 2017, Fatah commander Col. Bassam al-Saad was juggling three telephones—two mobile phones and one landline—at his office in Lebanon’s largest Palestinian refugee camp, Ain al-Hilweh. As the commander of the Joint Palestinian Security Force (JPSF), the defacto military police of the self-governed camp, the colonel was in the process of overseeing the deployment of his roughly 100-strong force. Entering a particularly sensitive area in the war-torn Tiri neighborhood following devastating clashes in April between the JPSF and a local Islamist group, he was also juggling the ratio of police from each political faction to ensure a smooth operation.

Erling Lorentzen Sogge is a Ph.D. fellow based at the Center for Islamic and Middle East Studies at the University of Oslo, Norway.
**Turbulence in the Capital of the Diaspora**

With more than 75,000 inhabitants, Ain al-Hilweh hardly resembles a refugee camp in the traditional sense. Originally set up after the exodus from Palestine in 1948 by the International Committee of the Red Cross on the outskirts of the Lebanese southern coastal city Saida, the makeshift tent villages have been replaced over the years by urban landscapes with an aura of permanence. Renowned for its long, winding shopping streets and a prosperous vegetable market, Ain al-Hilweh certainly lives up to its nickname as the “Capital of the Diaspora.”

Nonetheless, life in the camp is marred by unemployment and isolation. In fact, the area is largely fenced in by armed checkpoints, where Lebanese soldiers routinely check the papers of any visitor entering or leaving. This situation is indicative of the Palestinians’ place, or rather lack thereof, in the Lebanese republic. The fragile sectarian system of governance has little room for the roughly 300,000 Palestinians in Lebanon, almost all of whom are Sunnis. Over half of these refugees live in the 12 recognized camps. All have been left on the socio-economic margins of their host state, where they have fewer rights than most visiting foreigners.

Despite these destitute conditions, Palestinians within the camps enjoy a political autonomy that remains unmatched in any other Arab state. The unique autonomy of the Palestinian camps dates back to the Cairo Accords of 1969. In these agreements, the Lebanese state not only allowed the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to continue its resistance against Israel from Lebanese soil, but it was also given sole responsibility over the camp dwellers. The Palestinian guerrillas proceeded to build elaborate quasi-state structures within these societies, ranging from revolutionary councils to hospitals and police forces. The camps still function like “states within the state.” However, since the PLO’s crippling military defeat during the Israeli invasion of 1982, determining who the legitimate leaders of these “states” are has been a delicate matter.

In 1983, a growing dissatisfaction with Yasser Arafat’s leadership culminated in a coup within his Fatah movement. As a result, many of the camps fell into the hands of a band of smaller Palestinian rejectionist factions aligned with the Syrian Baath party. As for Ain al-Hilweh, the camp experienced another major mutiny following the signing of the Oslo Accords ten years later, when some of Arafat’s most loyal followers, displeased with the peace process, turned against him and tried to purge his forces from the camp. The PLO and the Fatah movement have since reestablished their presence in Lebanon (as of 1999), but no longer enjoy hegemony within the Palestinian camps.

As the Lebanese authorities remain largely committed to a self-imposed policy of not entering the Palestinian camps, the communities today are self-governed by a complex web of political factions, exile leaderships and militia groups, which all compete for influence. The prevailing power vacuum has also paved the way for more extreme actors to emerge. While the other 11 camps are peaceful for the most part, Ain al-Hilweh has gained a reputation as a violence-prone society and a haven for Islamist militants. The stability of the camp is constantly upset due to a decade-long power struggle between Fatah’s militias and a number of smaller jihadi networks.

---

**The stability of Ain al-Hilweh is constantly upset due to a decade-long power struggle between Fatah’s militias and a number of smaller jihadi networks.**

---

**Policing the Diaspora**

With the end of Syria’s surrogate reign over Lebanon in 2005, the country’s new government reached out to the PLO in an attempt to improve the relationship between the parties and to discuss the situation of the refugees. More than 12 years of talks hosted by the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) have resulted in almost no solutions to the most contentious issues, such as the nearly complete lack of civil rights for Palestinians in their host country and the proliferation of illegal arms in the camps. Nonetheless, the Lebanese state and Palestinian factions have recently concluded informal agreements on security arrangements in the country’s largest camp.

The JPSF largely resulted from debates between the head of Lebanon’s General Security Bureau, General Abbas Ibrahim, and Palestinian leaders in the spring of 2014. The JPSF, which initially consisted of 17 armed Palestinian groups ranging from the Marxist-Leninists of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) to the militant salafis of Usbat al-Ansar, was intended to restore a power balance at a time when the fault lines of the Syrian war were threatening to spill over into the camps of Lebanon. Moreover, the original 150-strong unit, mostly funded by the PLO, was to coordinate its efforts with the Lebanese army stationed outside of the camp.

It would soon become clear that the parties had different visions for the project. While the Palestinian factions tended to view the JPSF more as a peacekeeping force able to broker internal conflicts and to “solve the problems of the people,” as
one faction’s official put it, the Lebanese army expected the force to primarily arrest and hand over outlaws and fugitives holed up in the camp. Commanding a military police force composed of political rivals has proved to be a difficult task in its own right. The JPSF collapsed in February 2017, when Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, frustrated with its lack of progress, fired its commanders, withdrew his contingent and sought to deploy his own security branch in the streets of the camp. Not surprisingly, both Lebanese authorities and oppositional Palestinian factions protested the move. In April, following rounds of negotiations, the Joint Force resurfaced with 100 fighters under a new leadership. Upon its deployment, however, it came under attack by jihadi militants, resulting in the killing of one JPSF member and the injury of two others. The events triggered a six-day war between the JPSF and a jihadi cell, largely laying waste to the Tiri neighborhood in the eastern part of the camp.

**Bilal Badr Still at Large**

The militant thought to be in charge of the cell that attacked the JPSF was Bilal Badr, a shadowy figure with whom the Lebanese media has been infatuated for years. The 30-something jihadi warrior is surrounded by much mystique—numerous news reports have speculated about his upbringing and how he presumably became radicalized. In Ain al-Hilweh, however, locals couldn’t care less about the gossip of these headlines. Here, Badr and his armed entourage of roughly 30–50 youths are viewed as little more than Mafioso types in jihadi clothing who, depending on the request, are willing to rattle their Kalashnikovs or put them down, for a little bit of cash.

The idea of a wildcard like Badr roaming freely around the streets of the camp has become a thorn in the eye of both Palestinian and Lebanese authorities. Thus, when the clashes broke out in April, the Lebanese army reportedly opened the heavily guarded gates of the camp, allowing busloads of Fatah fighters from the movement’s stronghold in the southern Rashidiyeh camp, to assist the JPSF in the battle. Badr’s cell was dispersed, but the man himself escaped unscathed and is thought to be hiding somewhere in the camp—much to the embarrassment of Palestinian leaders. Adding insult to injury, the eastern Tiri district now resembles a bullet-riddled ghost town reminiscent of the war-torn Yarmouk district of the Syrian capital. Hundreds of civilian camp dwellers are currently unable to return to their homes, and harsh discussions are raging over who should pay for the damages estimated at a staggering 6 million dollars.
Who Will Pay?

Ain al-Hilweh’s Troika leadership—consisting of the PLO, the Damascus-based Alliance of Palestinian Forces (APF) and the Islamic Forces (a coalition of local Islamists)—has lately sent separate delegations to both local and international NGOs to discuss the prospect of rebuilding the Tiri neighborhood. In this matter, these parties have put pressure on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is in charge of infrastructure in the camps. UNRWA, however, which has been contending with cutbacks and financial crises, is not eager to embark on a costly project of this caliber—particularly as none of the Palestinian factions are able to guarantee that the clashes will not erupt anew and bury the neighborhood in rubble once again.¹⁴

For once, UNRWA seems to have the backing of the camp’s civilian population. Frustrated residents of Tiri have blocked off Upper Street, one of two main streets running through the camp, with a large tent and a pile of garbage, to protest the inaction of their leadership. “Let’s be very clear,” said a young woman who lost her family home in April’s clashes. “It was not UNRWA that fired shells at our house. I call on Hamas. I hold them responsible. I won’t back down before they repay every lira. They have the means.”¹⁵

However, in Ain al-Hilweh the boundaries separating armed factions from civilians, and aggressors from victims, are not always clear-cut and obvious to everyone. When I visited the camp last May, a commander from the Palestinian Liberation Front (PLF) took me on a tour of his family home in Tiri, which he had begun rebuilding with his own hands. “The only thing I want is to move back here with my children,” he said, with hope and despair in his voice. “We just want to live in our house. That’s the only thing that matters now.”¹⁶

Small Victories

Back at the JPSF offices, the force’s new leader Col. Bassam al-Saad was working hard to figure out the logistics of redeploying his force in the Tiri district. For weeks factions had debated how best to retake the Qaaet al-Yousef checkpoint, which is on the edge of the neighborhood and in a particularly sensitive spot due to being in the vicinity of the home of Bilal al-Arqoub, Bilal Badr’s right-hand man. The effort was not without an element of danger. Fearing that an over-representation of Fatah militiamen would provoke new acts of aggression, al-Saad made sure to fill up the checkpoint with members of other political factions. “I need one from Hamas, one from Islamic Jihad, and give me three from [the pro-Syrian group Fatah] al-Intifada,” he instructed his affiliates over the phone. At one point, too many Fatah members had deployed, and were immediately and firmly asked to pull back by the colonel. “Finding a sense of balance between the factions is essential,” said al-Saad,

describing a process that seemed nearly as complicated as that of forming a Lebanese cabinet.¹⁷

The JPSF retook Qaaet al-Yousef without a hitch. For a conflict-ridden society like Ain al-Hilweh, small victories like these matter. For the time being, the responsibility of the Joint Force seems to rest safely in the hands of Colonel Bassam al-Saad. In fact, the JPSF’s April operation was the first time the camp’s nascent military police had managed to stay together and not disintegrate during a crisis.

Nonetheless, hardly anyone around these parts believes that a force of about 100 armed members will be able to treat the substantial, underlying socio-economic circumstances that continue to drive tensions in the overpopulated and impoverished camp. As Palestinians in Lebanon find themselves living on the margins of their host state, without the right to own property or inherit, where work permits are generally hard to come by, it is no surprise that young and disenfranchised camp dwellers find an outlet for their frustration in militant networks such as that of Bilal Badr’s group. Therefore, it is particularly worrying that Lebanese authorities are currently in the process of completing construction of a five-meter tall cement wall around Ain al-Hilweh. The Lebanese authorities say the wall is intended to entrap the outlaws of the camp—a measure deemed necessary because the JPSF has not lived up to their expectations in handing over criminals.¹⁸ However, as inhabitants of Ain al-Hilweh are quick to note, the last thing these refugees need now is more isolation.

---

Endnotes

1. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the number of Palestinian refugees registered with the agency in Lebanon is more than 449,000. However, UNRWA acknowledges that many have since left the country and that the number of “registered” refugees does not reflect the actual number, which is thought to be 300,000 or less. (Author’s interview with UNRWA’s Press Office in Beirut, September 29, 2015.)
2. “In the island of Ain al-Hilweh, the remnants of factions and the vanguards of al-Qaida,” NOW Media, January 13, 2014. [Arabic]
5. Author’s interview with Munir al-Maqdah, former head of the JPSF, Ain al-Hilweh, September 21, 2015.
6. Author’s interview with Abu Sharif Aqal, a leader from the salafi group al-Bitar al-Ansar, Ain al-Hilweh, September 22, 2011.
7. Author’s interview with an official from Lebanon’s General Security Bureau, Beirut, June 1, 2017.
15. Author’s field notes, May 16, 2017.
16. Ibid.
18. Author’s interview with Lebanese security chief, Beirut, June 1, 2016.
Juan Goytisolo
Tangier, Havana and the Treasonous Intellectual

Hisham Aidi
For over half a century, the Spanish novelist Juan Goytisolo made Tangier, Morocco his adopted home. Just as Tangier exerted a profound influence on the author and his writing, Goytisolo himself had an effect on Moroccans and their understanding of Spain and of their own history. What was the nature of this relationship and how did it develop?

For the past 25 years, every evening around sunset, an elderly man could be seen gingerly crossing the Boulevard Pasteur, Tangier’s busy main thoroughfare. Shuffling toward the Grand Poste, he would walk slowly down the pavement to Café Maravillosa. Regulars would stand up to shake his hand. “Marbha, Si Juan.” Waiters would greet him, “ja’izat Nobel dyalna, our own Nobel laureate,” and set him up at a table with a pot of green tea. For the next two hours, a steady rotation of old acquaintances, students and tourists would stop by to chat or take a photo. Before his death on June 4, 2017, Juan Goytisolo, the acclaimed Spanish novelist, was the last of his breed, the lone survivor of the American and European writers who settled in Tangier in the post-war years, constructing the myth of the northern Moroccan port as a literary and epicurean capital. (The Lower East Side Beat poet Ira Cohen died in 2014, and Larbi Yacoubi, the Tangier-born theater actor who played Juan the Landless (re)conquest of Franco’s Spain, resulting in his classic novel Don Julian (1971). It was at the large-windowed café of Sidi Hosni in the casbah where he hand-drew his elaborate maps of the medina and jotted down his observations of the American hippies sitting on straw mats. It was in the medina’s cafetínes—where he immersed himself in North African music, drank mint tea with crumbled hash and tried to “shed his Spanish skin.”

Goytisolo strictly avoided the cafés frequented by his Spanish compatriots, and claimed that it was that sort of European presence that ultimately drove him south to Marrakesh in 1997. But he always spent his summers in Tangier; as he writes in his memoir, the coastal city was the refuge to which he returned when feeling melancholy.¹

Of the myriad writers and artists who have settled in Morocco over the last century, Goytisolo was the most appreciated by Moroccans. In 2003, he was inducted into the Moroccan Writers Union, the only foreigner ever to be granted that status. No expatriate writer tried as assiduously to integrate into Moroccan society, learning the local vernacular, leading conservationist efforts and even adopting Moroccan children.² Yet since his death the Moroccan press and social media have been abuzz with debate about his relationship to his adopted homeland.

The broad contours of Goytisolo’s life are well known. He was born in Barcelona in 1931 to an affluent Catholic family. His great-grandfather had made a fortune through sugar plantations in Cuba. Family life was upended by the Spanish civil war. Juan’s mother was killed in a bombing raid sent by Franco’s ally Mussolini in 1938 (though Goytisolo père told the children that Republican fighters were the culprits). It proved a life-scarring experience. “I am the son not of my mother,” Goytisolo would say, “but of the civil war, its messianism, its hatred.”³ After university, Goytisolo left for France and spent the rest of his life blasting Spanish conservatism—Franco’s regime and ideology, but also the nationalism, historiography and sexual mores of (post-1975) democratic Spain. Arriving in Paris in 1957, he met his wife-to-be Monique Langue. An influential editor at Gallimard, she introduced him to Jean Genet, who became his mentor. Mandatory military service brought Goytisolo back to Spain and took him to Andalusia. He published two political travelogues about the poverty and isolation of southern Spain, Countryside of Níjar (1960) and La Chanca (1962). In love with the Andalusian landscape, but loath to live under Franco’s regime, he traveled to Algeria, viewing North Africa as a cultural and topographic extension of southern Spain. In Paris, he had discovered Arab music in the city’s Algerian cafés, and also fallen in with the French Communist Party and with members of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) coordinating the war back home against French colonialism. He and Monique kept a suitcase of cash in their apartment, from which they dispensed funds to undercover operatives. Once Algeria gained independence in 1962, he moved to Algiers at the invitation of the FLN government. From there he moved on to Tangier.

In Tangier, Goytisolo penned his famous trilogy of autobiographical novels—Marks of Identity (1966), Count Julian (1970) and Juan the Landless (1975)—that lambast “official Spain.” Other novels followed, along with literary essays, memoirs and a volume of dispatches from the wars in Chechnya, Algeria and Sarajevo, titled Landscapes of War (2000). By the mid-1980s, a decade after Spain’s transition to democracy, he was the country’s most renowned and celebrated contemporary writer. Contrary to Tangier lore, Goytisolo never won the

¹ Hisham Aidi is a lecturer at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs, and Fellow at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
Nobel, but in 2015, Spain did award its enfant terrible the prestigious Miguel de Cervantes literary prize.

“A Paradise Lost”

Less well known is that Goytisolo settled in Tangier after breaking with the Algerian and Cuban revolutions. The Spanish novelist had thrown in his lot with Fidel Castro’s revolution in hopes of seeing a more egalitarian Cuba, and to purge the guilt he felt over his family’s role in Cuban slavery. Goytisolo had grown up dreaming of Havana’s grandeur; the “tobacco-colored photographs” of the family mansion in Cienfuegos had fired his young imagination. “The colonial images of Cuba, the rebels’ clothes and appearance, mass farewells to the volunteers embarking for Havana are an integral part of a kaleidoscope of memories that are closely linked to my childhood,” he writes in his memoir Realms of Strife. “The myth of Cuban adventure would thus assume for me, until adolescence erupted, the form of a paradise lost, of an Eden glowing before my eyes only to vanish afterwards like a mirage.” The chimera of Havana was first lost when, in his early twenties, Goytisolo discovered a trove of letters from the family plantation of slaves pleading for their freedom, and of his great-grandfather Don Agustín bragging to a relative that he had just invested in “50 Negro slaves and 20 Chinese coolies.” Castro’s revolution was thus a chance to purge ancestral guilt and reconcile with the fabled island.

The Spanish novelist took several reporting trips to Cuba after 1959 and, by happenstance, lived through the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 in Havana. By the mid-1960s, Goytisolo began to distance himself from Castro because of the revolutionary government’s suppression of Afro-Cuban religions (the Abakuás and Lukumi, in particular) and persecution of homosexuals. The jefe maximo was sending gay men to labor camps. Fidel, Goytisolo would write, had turned the “ex-paradise” of Cuba “into a silent and lugubrious floating concentration camp.” Havana was thus a paradise twice lost. The Spanish novelist would depart Algiers for similar reasons. Both pre-1959 Havana and colonial Algiers were playgrounds for European and American aristocrats, racketeers, artists and writers, with alarming rates of sex tourism and prostitution. And in both Cuba and Algeria, the nationalist movement would denounce sexual exploitation by white settlers and crack down on prostitutes and homosexuals upon assuming power. Goytisolo quit Algiers—for Tangier—shortly after Ahmed Ben Bella, the founding president of Algeria, was deposed in a coup by Gen. Houari Boumedienne in 1965, who began backing a conservative Islamist discourse. In a sign of the times to come, Jean Sénac, the pied noir nationalist and openly gay poet, would be refused Algerian citizenship, and in 1973 he was murdered.
And so Goytisolo settled in Tangier. “Tangier is one of the world’s few remaining pleasure cities: and no questions asked,” quips the narrator of *Don Julian*. With their endless beaches, flashy casinos and weak, pro-Western governments that rarely enforced the law on non-natives, Tangier and Havana had both long captivated writers, anarchists, mobsters and the Western jet set. “[P]robably next to Tangiers, Habana was the vice capital of the world,” wrote Amiri Baraka in 1955 when he landed in Cuba. A handful of Westerners—particularly New York left intellectuals—circulated between Tangier and Havana and panicked as it became evident that the “sin cities” were in the crosshairs of nationalist movements.

Tangier never saw a revolution, but it wasn’t for lack of trying. In the 1950s, the Algerian FLN and the Moroccan Army of Liberation (the latter backed by the exiled Cairo-based Rifian leader Abdelkrim Khattabi) joined forces hoping to drive French and Spanish troops out of Morocco, often coordinating their efforts through the International Zone of Tangier. In May 1957, two ships—the British-owned *Barra* and the Lithuanian-owned *Red Witch*—were blown up in Tangier’s harbor by French ultra-nationalists who believed the vessels were shipping armaments to the FLN in Algeria. In 1958, as the pan-Arabist Istiqlal party, Berber nationalists and monarchists battled for the control of Tangier, an Algerian police chief, the FLN-affiliated Mustapha Cherifi, was appointed to “clean up” the city. Intent on preventing Tangier from becoming a “brothel” like Algiers, Cherifi launched a purge, jailed owners of brothels, shut down gay bars and arrested Western homosexuals and their associates. Paul Bowles fled to Portugal. Ahmed Yaqubi, his partner, was thrown in prison for months. Less than a year later, the Algerian police chief was removed, and Bowles was back. But the clampdown rattled the expatriate community, and a number of Westerners began leaving, particularly after October 1959, when the Royal Charter guaranteeing a free money market in Tangier was abrogated and the city began to be integrated into the kingdom of Morocco.

When Fidel Castro came to power on January 1, 1959, several tycoons relocated to still-international Tangier, as did a handful of Cubans living in Franco’s Spain, like the singer Antonio Machín, who suddenly found themselves personae non grata. The Beat writers, however, who had made the International Zone a base in the 1950s were lured by the Cuban revolution. The poet Allen Ginsberg left Tangier for the last time in July 1961, a few months after the city was integrated into Morocco, and began visiting Havana. Other Beats who circulated between Tangier and Havana were poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, author Irving Rosenthal, Howard Schulman, who had launched the leftist *Palanté* magazine, and journalist Marc (Abdallah) Schleifer, the editor of *Kulchur* magazine and who had covered the revolution for *The Nation* magazine, before going on to become a reporter for NBC in Cairo. As the Cuban revolution turned dictatorial, the Beats would begin to look elsewhere—some returning to Tangier again. Ginsberg would be deported from Havana to Prague in February 1965 (after protesting the regime’s oppression of homosexuals, and saying he thought Che Guevara was “cute”). Schulman and Schleifer would travel to Tangier.

For a few years, Mohammed V, sultan of the newly independent Morocco, flirted with Bandung and the Afro-Asian solidarity movement, and for a moment communist publications, including the Cuban *Granma*, began appearing at Tangier’s newsstands. But upon his father’s death in 1961, Hassan II would place Morocco in the pro-US camp and make every effort to show the West that, unlike “revolutionary Algeria,” Morocco was “moderate” and welcoming of (non-leftist) foreigners. Leftist and communist agitators were locked up, often at the behest of the US government. In late November 1963, shortly after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the FBI appeared in Tangier looking for Schulman and Schleifer because of their association with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, a group founded in New York in 1960 to support the Cuban revolution, and to which Lee Harvey Oswald had claimed a connection. Schleifer, who had joined Cuba’s National Revolutionary Militia, had returned to Havana, but the Moroccan police did manage to locate Schulman at a café in the medina, and arrested him for “peddling pro-Communist propaganda” and inciting Moroccans to revolution. As the monarchy steeled its control over the former International Zone, bureaucrats from southern Morocco assumed top positions in the city government, and the dirham became the currency of the city. But Tangier’s social hierarchy remained intact, with the British, Americans and French occupying the upper rungs, and Moroccans at the bottom (and the centuries-old Spanish community a notch above the natives). The city—and the kingdom—remained a playground for white Westerners. The jet-set crowd around Barbara Hutton, and the writers’ colony headed by Bowles and David Herbert on the “Old Mountain,” continued to hold their *Arabian Nights*-themed soirées with full state protection (and in the 1970s would be joined by a new Gulf elite that settled in the villas around the city.)

Goytisolo thus arrived in Tangier with the Cold War well underway, and relations between Cuba and Morocco deteriorating. Radio Havana was beaming Communist propaganda directly to Tangier in an effort to liberate northern Morocco and Spain from Franco. (The US had set up a Voice of America relay station in Tangier in 1949.) As border disputes broke out between Morocco and newly independent Algeria, Cuba backed the revolutionary republic. Amidst the intrigue, Goytisolo seemed to be still searching for the Havana of his boyhood reveries, hoping the North African town would be the paradise he had lost. Places in Tangier evoked the Cuban capital. In his early writing about Tangier, he moves poignantly across the Atlantic, interweaving the two cities, segueing from Havana’s *malecon* to Tangier’s Avenida de España, from Verdado to the Hotel de Cuba just off the medina. He would invite prominent Cuban writers, such as Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Severo Sarduy, to Tangier. The blend of Spanish colonial
and mudéjar architecture, the religious and musical syncretism, the constant hum of Spanish radio all reminded him of Havana. One anecdote Goytisolo enjoyed telling—to illustrate his love of cultural mixing, or “Babelization”—was upon arriving to Tangier in 1965, he saw two boys walking up a hill singing the old Cuban guajira, “Guantanamera.” Except the Moroccan kids, not knowing what a guajira or “Guantanamera” was, had changed the lyrics to, “Levante la nevera! Juanita, levante la nevera (Lift the fridge, Juanita, lift the fridge).”

The City Palimpsest

At the northern entrance of Tangier’s medina, directly across from the old port, sits what tourists call the Terrace Café (and what we Tanjawis call the Fishermen’s Café). On the establishment’s western flank is a wall decorated with floral carvings, at the center of which is a red and yellow plaque with a crown and a black eagle. The plaque is Franco’s coat of arms, complete with St John’s eagle and the Yoke and Arrows, the symbols of the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile. It is framed by the motto, “Una, Grande y Libre” (One, Great and Free). Placed on the wall after the generalissimo’s forces conquered Tangier in June 1940, when soldiers built the Spanish public library on the beachfront, the coat of arms stands as a quiet reminder of the subsequent occupation. The great powers had been competing for influence in Tangier for generations. The contest had escalated in 1923, when the city became an International Zone ruled by a committee of Western powers. Franco seized Tangier shortly after France, his main rival in North Africa, fell to the Nazis in May 1940. As Hitler’s army blitzed across Europe, Franco’s officers changed Tangier’s street names from French and English to Spanish. The wall with the coat of arms is all that is left of the public library that Franco built. But it is these steps, just off Rue de Portugal, that Goytisolo’s narrator in Don Julian climbs, before stealthily entering the library, working his way into shelves of “classics,” and inserting insects between the pages of a book, thus defiling the Spanish literary canon.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, when I was in my teens, Goytisolo spoke often at local bookstores and the Instituto Cervantes. Terse, soft-spoken, poker-faced, he would move from topic to topic, book to book, and then tell a joke—and the audience would sit quietly, until he would inform them, “C’était une blague,” then people would laugh. “I have always believed that the role of the intellectual is the critique of ‘your own,’ and the respect of the ‘other,’” he would say, “and that is the opposite of nationalism, which is about promoting ‘us’ and rejecting the ‘other’—and if that is treason, then so be it, que así sea.” It was from these appearances that I learned about the plaque in the medina and so much more about Tangier’s Spanish past. To us, Ali Bey was just another dirt-poor, mud-caked street in the south of town, until Goytisolo explained that it was named after Ali Bey (né Domingo Badia), the famed Spanish Arabist and explorer who had traveled to Mecca, and
that a statue of Badia had stood in the neighborhood until the 1930s, when it was knocked down by the Istiqlal party; when it was discovered that he had worked as a spy for France. From Si Juan, we also learned that the Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí had come to Tangier in 1892 and drew up plans to build a majestic, multi-spiraled religious building named the Catholic Missions of Africa—similar to La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona—but it was never realized because an insurrection in Melilla, the Spanish enclave in northeastern Morocco, disrupted Spanish-Moroccan relations.

Northern Morocco, coveted by many empires and states, has long been restive. In 1921, the revolutionary Abdelkrim Al Khattabi launched a revolt against Spanish rule and declared the independent Republic of the Rif in the country’s northeast. France and Spain joined forces, crushing the newborn state in 1926. In 1936, when Morocco gained independence, Spanish Morocco was handed over to Mohammed V. In late 1958, another revolt erupted in the Rif against the Arab nationalist Istiqlal party, and the region was bombed into capitulation by Crown Prince Hassan. Along with Tangier, the Rif would become the target of decades of economically punitive policies. In 1975, King Hassan laid claim to the formerly Spanish Sahara. To this day, the formerly Spanish parts of Morocco have a tense relationship with the government: The conflict with the Polisario movement in the Western Sahara is ongoing, and the northeastern Rif region has been racked with protest and unrest for almost a year now.

Until recently, the north’s particular history was not taught in schools or portrayed in the media. The official version was that the ruling Alawite dynasty had liberated northern Morocco from Spanish and French domination. The truth is that, from the 1970s to 1990s, King Hassan II ran a brutally repressive state that liquidated adversaries and was particularly punishing of Berber nationalism. An Arabization policy was put in place, and as Rabat gained control over Tangier, state officials began to erase the Spanish colonial past, knocking down colonial buildings—streets named after Spanish figures like Cervantes and Quevedo would now bear the names of Arab caliphs or Saudi rulers. People would joke that as soon as a street was given an Arab name, it would deteriorate (‘uribat, khuribat). From the 1970s onward Tangier went into decline: tourism dried up, infrastructure deteriorated, water shortages became routine and criminal gangs emerged in the city’s bidonvilles doing battle with Islamists. Soon clandestine immigration to Europe started, with people boarding boats at night (or the occasional jet ski), trying to cross the Strait to the Spanish coast.

For those of us growing up in Tangier, Spain was Eldorado—its trajectory seemed the exact opposite of Morocco’s. As our former colonizer made the transition to democracy, took off economically and joined the European Union, Tangier youth dreamed of España. A perverse nostalgia also took hold, as our elders pined for the “International Zone” days when the streets were cleaner and safer. We would spend hours watching Spanish television picked up by makeshift antennae at home or in cafés. Youth in Tangier have elaborate seasonal café routines; there were the cafés on the Boulevard where we sat with our fathers for breakfast, the cafés to play cards or checkers, the rowdy spots in the medina to watch Spanish soccer, the quieter center-town cafés where we sat to watch Spanish news or American television series dubbed in Spanish (we knew Baywatch as Los Vigilantes de la Playa). It was in these late-night café sessions that many of us discovered Si Juan. On Friday nights, as we waited for TVE2 to begin its live broadcast of NBA games, Goytisolo would appear on the screen, introducing that week’s episode of his documentary series “Alquiblah,” which ran from 1989 to 1993, and was his attempt to introduce newly democratic Spain to the cultures of the Islamic world. There was the Spanish author in his crewneck sweater, standing in a cemetery in Cairo’s City of the Dead, or in a Sufi zurkhaneh club in Tehran, or outside a mosque in Timbuktu. The first time we ever saw an image of Abdelkrim, the great Rifian leader, or learned that Spain had used poison gas against Riffian soldiers in 1923, was when Goytisolo broadcast an episode titled “Abdelkrim and the Epic of the Rif.”

Once the coffeehouses closed around midnight, we would go out to the straw chabolas (shacks) on the cliffs, light up kif cigarettes and gaze at the lights of the Spanish coast twinkling at us. The ramshackle shanties where we sat were often named after the corresponding Spanish town right across the water. So when we said, “Let’s go hang out in Tarifa,” we meant the hillside cabin near the Roman tombs where we could see the Spanish town of Tarifa; the same with Cadiz, and the Portuguese town of Faro, which we could discern from the R’milat terrace. There were no televisions at these shacks, but every table gathered around a transistor radio. And sometimes Goytisolo’s voice would come on the radio as well, on Radio Nacional de España or our local Medi 1 station, talking about Cervantes, Bosnia or Algeria. In short, Goytisolo was a larger-than-life figure in 1980s and 1990s Tangier. He was the first “intellectual” I met. Many expatriate writers had made Tangier their home, but few sat in the cafés with locals. Often, we did not understand what he was talking about (“always view your language in light of other languages”14), but we admired him for his vast erudition, humility and equipoise. He was so solidly pro-Muslim, so invested in the legacy of Moorish Spain. He viewed al-Andalus, particularly in its later years, as a metaphor for the human self—fluid, fragile, kaleidoscopic.15

Unlike most Westerners studying Arabic, he had taken the time to learn our Hispano-Arabic-Berber vernacular, probably the most looked-down upon of dialects in the Arab world.16 And he was keenly aware of our socio-economic precariousness. We absorbed Spain daily through television and radio, and dreamed of crossing the Strait, but needed a laissez-passer to enter the Spanish enclave of Ceuta an hour east of Tangier, a visa to enter Tarifa and two visas—one Spanish and one British—to reach Gibraltar, eight miles across the water. He
advised us to study, saying that Tangier (“the city palimpsest”) was built on layers of writing that we could burrow into, and that when he was a teenager he had found freedom in reading. “You can travel without moving.”

Goytisolo’s writing gained a special significance once I came to boarding school in the United States on a scholarship. In March 1990, my Spanish literature class took a trip to Querétaro, Mexico, and we visited the Casa de la Marquesa, a stunning historic building (now a hotel) in the city center. I recall looking up in awe at the Moorish arches, the Arabesque stucco calligraphy, the bright alzulejo tiles, the fountain in the middle of the courtyard. This Mexican edifice was the exact replica of Dar Niyaba, the Moorish-style building on the Rue Siaghines in the medina of Tangier, where my grandfather worked as a notary for decades. I could almost see my grandfather’s office in the Casa de la Marquesa. Our literature professor, Aleyda, mentioned something about the building being an example of mudéjar architecture, and I recalled Goytisolo’s talk of social and literary mudéjarismo (the amalgam of Islamic, Gothic and Romanesque styles that emerged in twelfth century Iberia).

As the Gulf War began in 1991, and “clash of civilizations” rhetoric mounted in the US, Goytisolo’s warnings about the dangers of nationalism and “petro-crusades” proved prescient. And so I immersed myself in his work and the literature of Latin American authoritarianism by authors he recommended and knew personally—García Márquez, Juan Rulfo, Octavio Paz. In any Latin American city I would visit, I would seek out the places mentioned in Goytisolo’s writing. The first time I went to Havana I visited the Centro Andaluz. I even had a drink at the Hotel Habana Libre’s bar, the spot where, in July 1967, the author Virgilio Piñera quietly passed a note to Goytisolo informing him of the location of a concentration camp where 6,000 prisoners were being held (Piñera then burned the bit of paper). At the José Martí Library, I was delighted to find Spanish translations of the works of Edmond El Maleh, the Moroccan novelist, blurbed and prefaced by Goytisolo (who had pushed for the translations). I went on to write my dissertation comparing Arab and Latin American authoritarianism.

Ghettoes and Mudéjarism

For all his savaging of Spain’s literary canon—particularly the Generation of 1898, who neglected the voices of moriscos, Jews, atheists and other intocables—Goytisolo saw himself as a descendant of Cervantes. Held captive by the Ottomans in Algiers (1575–1580), Cervantes had not returned to Spain with a hatred of Muslims, but rather transfigured by North Africa’s heterogeneity and linguistic diversity, and inspired
to produce his magnum opus Don Quixote. Goytisolo saw himself in El Quixote's protagonist Alonso Quijano, a border-hopping, slightly mad idealist in an unjust world. He also admired Cervantes' novel as the epitome of literary mudéjarism—evident in the text's familiarity with Muslim life, the variety of subaltern voices represented (the morisco, the Turk, the Jew) and the playful interweaving of texts. Goytisolo was convinced that Cervantes, like Fernando de Rojas, author of La Celestina, was a converted Jew, a converso, hence his sharp, "peripheral" view of Spain.

If one had to distill Goytisolo's large corpus of work into three words, it would be: mudéjarism, periphery and anti-orthodoxy. "I have the periphery under my skin," he would say to explain his obsession with the international periphery—the "Third World"—which he saw, with its polyglot, heterogeneous variety of subaltern voices represented (the morisco, the Turk, the Jew) and the playful interweaving of texts. Goytisolo was convinced that Cervantes, like Fernando de Rojas, author of La Celestina, was a converted Jew, a converso, hence his sharp, "peripheral" view of Spain.

As a champion of the underdog, Goytisolo would skewer the nationalism and other orthodoxies of the left and right, but like Cervantes, he would deploy the denizens and tales of the periphery. For instance, in Don Julian, he lampoons the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood, replacing the grandmother with an Arab with a handlebar moustache ("Oh granny, what big ears you have! The better to hear you with / Oh Granny, what big ears you have / The better to hear you with, my little sweetheart /...Oh Granny, what a big snake you have! The better to penetrate you with, you stupid little idiot"). This rendition is rather reminiscent of the American "ghetto version" of Little Red Riding Ho: "Oh Grandma, what big eyes you have...What big teeth you have." "Just then the wolf jumps up in the granny attire and says, "Little Red, Little Red, I'm gonna pull up your little dress and pull down your little panties and screw you." "Little Red pulls out a silver gun and says "AW HELL NO!! You're gonna eat me like the book said you would!!"

Serpents and Grottos

When Goytisolo arrived in Tangier in the fall of 1965, he was (as he put it) in a "destructive mood," disillusioned by the Cuban and Algerian revolutions and the Spanish communist party, and filled with rage against Franco's regime. Sitting in the Café Hafa, contemplating the coastline of the "filthy stepmother" that is Spain, he felt a sudden identification with Don Julian, the Count of Ceara, who had helped the Arabs seize Tangier and then facilitated Tariq ibn Ziyad's conquest of Spain in 711. For Goytisolo, Julian—the most famous traitor in Spanish history—was a hero who had helped usher in a glorious period of mudéjarism, terminated by Queen Isabel the Catholic. In the novel, Julian—the narrator's alter-ego—wanders through Tangier's streets with his friend Tariq (a reference to Tariq ibn Ziyad) and imagines another Moorish invasion from Tangier. The Muslim hordes will sack la España sagrada, but first they will storm the vagina of the fair-skinned Isabel the Catholic, her "cavern" being "the national emblem of the country of stupid cuntery." The Moors will "savagely lash the blood-stained body of the damsel," and then repeat this act of sexual aggression "on a national scale" across the peninsula. Says the narrator: "Virgins made by centuries of modesty and decency are impatiently awaiting...crying out to be attacked, to be beaten...violate the sanctuary and grotto, the citadel and cavern, the bastion and alcazar." The assault on Spanish women is akin to a retaking of the country's fortresses and citadels. "You will liberate the mosque of Córdoba, the Giralda and the Alhambra." This act of collective rape will taint and infect Spanish blood, eventually "improving the circulation of Hispanos."

The imagery is disturbingly vivid: as Isabel's "Stupid Vagina" is cleaned out by Don Julian's "serpent," Moors overrun Spain, everything turns to green and Arabic overwhelms Spanish. The sounds of Arabic will then thunder across the Atlantic to Latin America, everywhere that Hispanic caudillismo (dictatorship) reigns—"in the pulque-bars of Lagunilla in Mexico City, in the Calle de Corrientes of Buenos Aires, in the Jesús María district of Havana." An Islamic reconquista, Goytisolo believed, would pull Spain out of its "prehistoric" place and cure its general cultural and demographic anomie. Yet throughout this massive bacchanal of violence, women are mute. The women of Spain, whose reproductive organs are invariably described as "grottos," "mires" and "abysses," are portrayed as silent housewives "shitting" babies here and there. In the early 1970s, Goytisolo's silencing of women—and recurrent negative references to women as cavernous plants, spiders spinning lethal webs, foul stepmothers with a "mire" or "abyss" between their legs—began to draw criticism.28 By the 1980s, critics were asking why femininity is almost always portrayed negatively in Goytisolo's fiction—whether it is through "feminine" Catholic Spain, wild Moroccan prostitutes or overweight American women roaming North Africa.

In 1981, Goytisolo published Saracen Chronicles, a volume of essays on Spanish and Latin American Orientalism, intended as a sequel to Edward Said's Orientalism (1979), which had not addressed Hispanic Orientalism.21 Goytisolo had befriended Said while teaching at NYU in the 1970s. The resultant book was a tour de force, exploring literary mudéjarism in Latin America, and tracing the influence of Cervantes on authors from Quevedo in Spain to the Mexican and Cuban writers...
Carlos Fuentes and José Lezama Lima, and authors of the Latin American literary boom of 1960s. Yet the book was also a preemptive move: Orientalism had become a political issue in American and Spanish academe, with scholars increasingly noting Goytisolo’s rather cliché representations of the Orient as a world of liberating chaos and carnality.

In Chronicles, Goytisolo responded to critics, saying that he had fought for Arab freedom “for years,” since his days in Paris. He explained that while his literary criticism and political essays about Morocco were written from a clearly “anti-colonial, democratic and emancipatory perspective,” his novels maintain the age-old “Europe/Islam” binary, and do not use “flesh-and-blood” Moroccans as characters, but rather deploy the age-old “shadows” and “freak[s]” created by the “white imagination.” The aim of this approach was to destroy the anti-Islam discourse that runs through Spanish history; thus, the assault on Queen Isabel was meant as an attack on the myth of the “pitiless” Moorish rapist. Finally, he said, his fiction was meant for Spanish, not Moroccan, readers: “the sound of a flute, and sees Tangier’s “hallucinatory geometry” as being “entirely foreign to both the laws of logic and European common sense,” in his documentary about the city, the narrator fantasizes about “the undulations of a young boy’s body” to the sound of a flute, and sees Tangier’s “hallucinatory geometry” as being “entirely foreign to both the laws of logic and European common sense,” in his documentary about the city.

Goytisolo dismisses the “mystery of Tangier” as the “fantasy” of nostalgic Westerners, who have a superficial, stereotypical view of the city, saying “I had the opposite experience.” The charge of Orientalism never went away; but unlike with Paul Bowles—with Goytisolo, it never stuck. In 2006, the New York Times Magazine ran a cover story about the novelist titled “The Anti-Orientalist.”

“**The Anti-Orientalist**

What a wretched misfortune to be born in Catholic Spain…

If only our own mothers had shut us a thousand leagues from there, in Ottoman lands or tranquil Africa?

There we’d have grown up free and lush, and nobody would have interfered with our lives or terrorized us with punishments and threats!

—A Cock-Eyed Comedy (2005)

Although friendly with Paul Bowles, Goytisolo was careful to distance himself from Morocco’s most famous expatriate writer. He also insisted that it was Jean Genet who had inspired him to come to Tangier, and that it was the Frenchman, not the American, who had popularized the idea of Tangier as sanctuary, and had in 1948 christened the city as a “den of traitors” (un repaire de trai
tres), a place of “subtle, skilled harmony,” and the “very symbol of treason.” After Genet’s death in 1986, when Bowles and Goytisolo remained the last literary giants standing in Tangier, the Spaniard often seemed to be trying to one-up his American neighbor. The two had a lot in common. Both saw themselves as “outsiders” and liked to wander through North African cities—often in a drug-fueled state—in order to escape a world of Western order and rationality and enter a world of myth and chaos. (In Juan the Landless, the narrator advises the reader to “lose your bearings in Fez,” “rid yourself of the oppressive space-time binomial” and “make love voraciously with the first person you stumble upon.”) Both Goytisolo and Bowles were homosexuals, but rejected the label claiming that a practice does not make an identity. Both discovered North Africa—specifically Algeria—in the cafes of Paris. Both landed in Tangier after a dalliance with Latin American communism and breaking with the Communist Party: Bowles returned to settle in Tangier after a detour through Mexico where he was trying to locate Leon Trotsky for the American Communist party. Both lamented the Westernization of Moroccan culture, and tried to preserve it. Both liked illiterate, working-class men, though Bowles preferred the violent or criminally inclined, like Larbi Layachi and Mohammed Mrabet, with whom he got into personal and legal disputes.

Yet there were also crucial differences. Bowles, while contemptuous of French colonialism, was not opposed to other forms of imperialism; he called for a greater American presence in Tangier in the 1950s, and was sympathetic to the Spanish colonialism in Morocco, seeing it as the continuation of a centuries-old Hispano-Muslim encounter. Goytisolo, on
the other hand, loathed Spanish imperialism. In fact, he often seemed to position himself as a progressive Spanish version of Bowles and a counter to the Beat writers, as an unwavering anti-imperialist, someone who understood and tried to repent for his country’s crimes in Morocco—and deigned to sit in cafes with the locals. (Bowles, after 1960, famously stopped sitting in Tangier’s cafes, claiming that they were crawling with regime informants.) Goytisolo would call out the Beats’ superficial takes on Tangier, especially William Burroughs’ prejudiced attitudes, noting the latter’s tendency to walk through the medina with a machete under his overcoat.

The most critical difference between Goytisolo and Bowles is that while the American’s writing, fiction and non-fiction, is speckled with negative references to Moroccans as “primitive,” “purely predatory” and “essentially barbarous,” and he hated the Moroccan anti-colonial movement, saying Muslims aim for world domination through “the sword and the bomb,” Goytisolo’s journalism and travel writing is remarkably free of such antipathy.

Goytisolo shared Bowles’ fascination with gore and sexual violence, inflicted by “Moors” on weak white Westerners. For Bowles, the violence showed the depravity of humanity and the futility of cross-cultural dialogue. For Goytisolo, the violence was redemptive and emancipatory. In his fiction, images abound of emancipatory rape, such as when the Moors re-enter Spain: “Women of every sort, all of whom reject the pricks and limp as lettuce leaves offered them by Spanish males and dream of Arab serpents and the leisurely, sumptuous feasts they offer.” In Don julian, Goytisolo imagines himself as a child—“Alvarito, blond blue-eyed child with curly eyelashes”—being raped by a Moroccan dock worker, as a way of “liquidating” his Francoist upbringing and Spanish identity. Goytisolo’s linking of sexual aggression with liberation suppresses women but also does no service to Muslim men. Critics would see his depictions of Moroccan men as “savage untamed warriors,” “instinctively cruel Arabs” “horsemen with coarse lips, jugular veins” with “savage Arab virility,” as perpetuating the worst stereotypes at a time of mounting hostility in Spain and Europe. Goytisolo’s linking of sexual aggression with liberation suppresses women but also does no service to Muslim men. Critics would see his depictions of Moroccan men as “savage untamed warriors,” “instinctively cruel Arabs” “horsemen with coarse lips, jugular veins” with “savage Arab virility,” as perpetuating the worst stereotypes at a time of mounting hostility in Spain and Europe.

The truth is that the same memes that run through Goytisolo’s fiction—of the “Orient,” Morocco specifically, as a land of freedom, sexual bliss, egalitarianism; and Arab culture as an antidote to Spanish and European parochialism—as well as his political writing and travel writing, in his novels, essays and documentary work, Islam is consistently preferable to Christendom: The world of Islam is more tolerant of ethnic and sexual diversity; more sensuous (because of the Quranic conceptions of paradise); people are cleaner (because of the tradition of public baths); even the Muslim creed is lighter, less cumbersome than that of Christianity. His insistence notwithstanding, the boundary between Goytisolo’s fiction and journalism is hazy and rather porous. In his essays, he speaks of the public square of Marrakech, Jamaa El Fna as a pluralistic, liberating, fraternal medieval space that disappeared from the West centuries ago; in his novel Makbara, about a storyteller from Jamaa El Fna who migrates to France, the square is again characterized by an “anonymous freedom and permissiveness” and a “temporary suspension of hierarchies, joyful equality of bodies.”

The demeaning of Moroccan men also cuts across genre. In Makbara, a “leprous” Moroccan migrant whose ears have been gnawed off by rats and who has a colossal penis, roams the streets of Paris sowing horror; he lives in the city’s subterranean metro system surrounded by rats who masturbate him. The same hyper-sexualization exists in more prosaic form in Goytisolo’s non-fiction. In his memoir Realms of Strife, the Spaniard relates how in April 1963, he wandered up to the North African neighborhood of Barbès in Paris, where he ends up meeting an illiterate man named Mohammed. The novelist states that his knowledge of French, and overall “cultural superiority,” led him to become a scribe, “a good Samaritan,” to Mohammed and his friends, helping them fill out Social Security forms or write letters home, and they would pay him back with sex and Arabic lessons. As he writes: “I have loved or had an interest throughout my life in illiterate men or in men with only a rough elementary education. … [T]he primordial factor in my friendships with hillmen, peasants or Moroccan infantry soldiers whose features corresponded to darkly ancestral tastes was my need to compensate for the mental refinement required in the act of writing with their exhilarating, pervasive rawness: possessed by them and their rough pleasure, I instinctively looked for a way to counterbalance my physical submission with an intellectual domination capable of establishing an equilibrium between both scales.” Thus, by his own admission for “darkly ancestral reasons,” Goytisolo liked to be around illiterate, impoverished types that he could write about even if they would never understand what he was saying. In the novel Makbara, he notes that the freakish Moroccan migrant roaming Paris is “still good-looking despite his satirical lopping-off of his useless, botherless ears,” while the novel is dedicated to “those who inspired it and will not read it,” meaning his culturally inferior associates who cannot read.

Most of the criticism of Goytisolo’s depiction of the Muslim men and Morocco came from scholars in Europe and America. In the Arab world, he was still celebrated as a sharp critic of Spanish Orientalism. This was because it was largely his essays and war reporting that were translated into Arabic. He was best known for Saracen Chronicles, translated as “On Spanish Orientalism” (Fi al-Istishraq al-Islami). Only two of his novels were translated, Arba’ina (1994) [La Cuarentena 1991, The Quarantine (1994)] and Mashahid Ma Ba’da al-Ma’raka (2013) [Paisajes después de la batalla (1982), Landscapes after the Battle (1982)]. His best-known novels, Marks of Identity, Count Julian and Juan the Landless—the “trilogy of treason”—and Makbara, were never translated. As college students, we were engaged by his political writing and generally indifferent to his
fictional representations of Moroccans (there are worse things a celebrity author could say about a troubled country’s youth than that they had “stout scepters”). But we were perplexed by his representations of Morocco as a land of freedom and Spain as an incurably benighted place.

“Years of Lead”

In 1959, it was not just the FLN that was trying to liberate Tangier from colonialism and feudal rule. Fidel Castro would also turn his attention to the port city. The Rif had been part of the Cuban nationalist imagination for almost a century. In 1893, the Cuban poet and nationalist José Martí, had famously written in support of the Berber uprising against Spanish rule in northern Morocco: “Seamos moros! Let us be Moors...we who will probably die by the hand of Spain.”

Likewise Abdelkrim’s historic defeat of the Spanish at the Battle of Annoual in 1921 riveted Castro and his associates. In November 1956, when Fidel and his fighters set up camp in the Sierra Maestra mountain range and launched a guerrilla war against Batista’s army, they were taking a page from Abdelkrim’s playbook. They were trained by Cuban-born Spanish colonel Alberto Bayo, a veteran of the Rif war who later fought on the Republican side of the Spanish civil war. As Castro notes in his biography, Bayo (whose “best student” was Che Guevara) essentially applied lessons from the Rif war, particularly the tactics of “the Moroccan guerrillas of Abdelkrim, in the war of the Rif, [who] broke the Spanish sieges,” which enabled Castro’s fighters to push out of Sierra Maestra and seize Oriente and Las Villas.

Upon assuming power in June 1959, Guevara, now Cuba’s ambassador-at-large, flew to Cairo and met with Abdelkrim twice at the Moroccan embassy to discuss guerilla warfare. (“Flying over the Rif by airplane, I looked out from the window,” Guevera wrote, “The region is an ideal zone for guerrillas.”) It was a moment when newly independent Morocco was dallying with socialism and the Non-Aligned Movement. Radio Havana began broadcasting anti-Franco propaganda directly to northern Morocco and Spain, as Cuba extended its support to the FLN in Algeria and other African liberation movements. When Hassan II ascended the throne, the Cuban-Moroccan romance came to a quick end, as the
young monarch placed the kingdom in Washington’s orbit, and Cuban troops would join forces with Algeria and fight Morocco in the border war of October 1961. The Moroccan revolutionary Mehdi Ben Barka, who supported Cuba as it came under an American embargo, and organized the Tricontinental Conference of Havana in 1966, was exiled and assassinated in Paris. Morocco would subsequently break off diplomatic ties with Cuba after the Castro regime recognized the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (with ties only reestablished in April 2017).

Yet Castro would continue his efforts to gain influence over Tangier, seen as a depraved colony akin to Havana under Batista. He began to woo the expatrine writers, including Paul Bowles and Jean Genet, inviting them for a two-month paid holiday in Cuba. Both would rebuff the overtures. Goytisolo was in Tangier as the Moroccan regime tightened its grip upon the formerly Spanish provinces, and as Tangier went from a Latin city to an Arab city. He closely followed the repression in Morocco and Cuba. In March 1971, Goytisolo, Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa and Argentine novelist Julio Cortázar launched the quarterly magazine *Libré* in Paris to promote writers banned in Latin America, particularly Cuba; the first issue contained pieces by Octavio Paz, Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes and Che Guevara. That same month, Goytisolo was riding in a taxi from Tetouan to Tangier when he read in the paper that Cuban writer Heberto Padilla had been arrested, and had written a public confession letter to Castro saying that he was “eternally repentant.” In *Forbidden Territory*, Goytisolo notes that he and Cortazar scrambled to draft a letter to Castro—sent privately to the jefe maximo—that included the signatures of a bevy of intellectuals including Jean-Paul Sartre, Susan Sontag, Simon de Beauvoir and Gabriel García Márquez. But as Goytisolo would wryly note, the author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, a close friend of Castro, was a “genial strategist” and “with his consummate skill of wriggling out of tight corners” quickly distanced himself from the letter, saying he had not given his approval. Yet the Spanish novelist himself would prove a consummate strategist when dealing with Arab authoritarianism. *Saracen Chronicles* concludes with a survey of countries in Latin America and the Soviet bloc where literature can constitute a crime, and where authors can face death and imprisonment, yet oddly there is no mention of the same phenomenon in the Arabic-speaking world.

Goytisolo arrived in Tangier at the beginning of the “years of lead,” a period of attempted coups and horrific state violence against dissidents, as King Hassan II imprisoned leftists, burying opponents and their children in the notorious underground prison of Tazmamart. Yet for Goytisolo, right up until his death, Morocco was always represented as a hybrid, diverse, sexually tolerant country, juxtaposed to a parochial, historically stuck Spain. Claudia Schaef er-Rodriguez observed decades ago that for Goytisolo’s literary characters, the Arabs never seem to inhabit a “social reality.” They are simply a foil, “the image of the other,” upon which a character (like Alvaro Mendiola) can project his rage against Spain; and the Orient/Occident division is maintained so that the characters “can hop over to the other side” whenever it suits them. This seems like an apt description of Goytisolo himself. Like his idol Cervantes, he praised the “Orient” for being diverse and polyglot, a reverse image of the modern West where nation-states had extirpated minorities from their midst and imposed a dominant language and identity. Goytisolo, however, lived and traveled in an Arab world undergoing a violent process of war and state formation, with regimes cracking down routinely on minorities and imposing Arabic on non-Arabic speaking populations, all in the name of nationalism. Yet even as the Moroccan state killed off dissidents, oppressed Amazigh movements, criminalized homosexuality (with the anti-gay legislation applied to Moroccans, rarely to foreigners), the brutality of state formation rarely figured in his writing, as he continued to quixotically portray the Orient as superior to the Occident. It is not clear if Goytisolo was simply over-generalizing from his privileged status as a regime-approved European writer living in Marrakesh, or if his idea of Spain remained stuck in Queen Isabella-qua-Franco’s messianic, exclusionary periods—just as his description of North Africa remained anchored in the fifteenth century (lauded by Cervantes), or perhaps the mythical 1950s Tangier (when foreigners enjoyed extra-territorial rights).

At any rate, Cuba and Algeria in the 1970s shifted their attention from liberating northern Morocco to backing the Polisario movement in the Western Sahara, and this conflict would in some ways become Goytisolo’s Achilles heel, compromising his relationship with the Moroccan, Spanish and Latin American left. In November 1975, as Franco was dying, King Hassan II launched the Green March sending 350,000 Moroccans and 20,000 troops to claim the province of the Spanish Sahara. Fearing a new colonial war that could destabilize the regime in Madrid, Spain hastily withdrew, ceding the province to Morocco and Mauritania. War broke out between Morocco and the Sahrawi Polisario Front, gaining an international dimension as Western states and their allies supported the Moroccan position, and Non-Aligned states—led by Algeria—backed Sahrawi self-determination.

The Western Sahara conflict, a product of Francoist colonialism, would become a political cudgel between the Spanish left and right. In May 1978, Goytisolo published a series of articles in *El País* clearly identifying himself with the Moroccan position: He excoriated the Spanish left’s knee jerk solidarity with “progressive Algeria,” writing that Spanish public opinion was shot through with colonial anti-Moroccan prejudice, talking up Morocco’s “historic rights” and highlighting the hypocrisy of Algeria’s “hegemonic maneuvering”—noting that Algiers wanted...
self-determination for Sahrawis in the Western Sahara but not for the Sahrawi population within its borders. These columns, reproduced in the Moroccan publication *al-Âlam* in 1979, made the Spaniard a star in Moroccan nationalist circles and set in motion initiatives to translate his work. But it drew the ire of the Spanish left. One international relations scholar called him a wannabe Don Julián, who did not tell the truth for fear of losing his beautiful “perch” in Tangier. The socialist politician Pedro Costa Morata denounced Goytisolo’s “selective” humanitarianism, his silence regarding repression under King Hassan II. He noted Goytisolo’s reluctance to sign manifestos in support of Moroccan political prisoners, stating that an “anti-repression stance would liquidate the writer’s enthusiastic Moroccan experience.” In the early 1990s, Goytisolo would start writing critically of the regimes in Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Algeria (and in 2009, famously refused Qaddafi’s literary prize), but Morocco still figured more prominently in his fiction than in his journalistic writing.

**“Homecoming”**

On June 5, 2017, Juan Goytisolo was buried in the Spanish cemetery of Larache in northern Morocco, his tomb overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and right next to that of Jean Genet. Spanish and Moroccan officials and local writers and artists paid homage to the Spanish author, reading extracts of his work. The Moroccan media celebrated the novelist who had shown the world that the “spirit of al-Andalus” was alive in Morocco, and who had mobilized renowned intellectuals—like Carlos Fuentes—in his (successful) campaign to have Jamaa El Fna declared a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Ironically, Goytisolo passed away during a period of protests in Morocco which had started in the Rif region and spread south, and when talk of the “betrayal of the intellectuals” was in the air. As the regime cracked down, arresting bloggers, artists and youth activists en masse, journalists pondered which of the celebrity intellectuals who lived in Morocco would back the *hirak* movement—and a stocktaking of Goytisolo’s career began. His defenders claimed that while he may have not defended the Marxist-Leninist group Ila al-Amam and similar groups crushed during the 1970s, he did—along with other Spanish intellectuals—sign a letter following the 1981 strike and crackdown in Casablanca that appeared in *El País*, and that as recently as 2015, he had signed a letter in defense of Ali Lmrabet, the Moroccan journalist exiled in Spain. Goytisolo’s detractors, on the other hand, pointed out that, manifestos aside, in a series of columns the novelist had denounced the “political-financial mafia” ruling Algeria at the height of that country’s civil war, and excoriated Ben Ali’s “omnipresent” secret police in Tunisia, but rarely called out Moroccan authorities. Moreover, his silence throughout 2011, as protests rocked the kingdom, and his failure to support that year’s February 20 movement, also struck many as calculated and “deliberate.” Activists were similarly bewildered when, in August 2013, he did not support a protest against the palace’s Crown Day pardon of a notorious Spanish pedophile who had barely served two years of a 30-year prison sentence. Sex tourism and child prostitution have become huge political issues in Morocco in recent years, and Goytisolo’s silence on this was deafening.

In late March 2015, a few weeks before traveling to Spain to accept the Miguel de Cervantes prize for lifetime achievement in literature in the Spanish language, Goytisolo returned to Tangier to speak at the Spanish public library, which was named for him in 2007. Before an audience of students and dignitaries, he apologized for speaking a more Marrakshi than Tanjawi dialect of *darija*, explained how the medina of Tangier had enraptured him in the early 1960s, and then launched into one of his favorite topics—the Spanish words and proverbs that had made their way via Tangier into Moroccan Arabic, and the Moroccan proverbs that over the centuries had found their way into Spanish. During the question-and-answer session, a student asked why his works of fiction were not better known in Morocco. The Spaniard answered that his style of writing—experimental, collage-like, stream-of-consciousness—was very difficult to translate into Arabic. A more accurate answer would be that Goytisolo’s fiction simply has not aged well. Scenes of a “Nubian domestic slave” creeping in to rape a little Spanish boy, or extolling the Basque country (a region with historic sympathy for the Western Sahara and the Rif), an audience member asked Goytisolo how he could live for so long in a country where there was no freedom. The novelist responded, “People have reproached me, asked me, ‘How can you live in a country with no human rights?’ And I say the only countries where human rights are fully respected are Finland and Iceland—and I have no desire to live in any of those countries.” Pressed on the Western Sahara, he said, “It’s a very difficult situation,” and placed the onus on Morocco’s neighbor: “Algeria is run by a military junta that needs a strategic enemy to justify heavy military spending. Algerians have no interest in decreasing tensions.” Asked again about the absence of freedom in Morocco, he deadpanned, “A writer chooses to write in a country that provides creative possibilities.”

Why did this lover of freedom not raise his voice for the freedom of his adopted homeland? It is hard to avoid the conclusion that like the other celebrity intellectuals who profess...
love for Morocco and spend extended periods there—such as Bernard-Henri Levi, Dominique Strauss Kahn and Tariq Ramadan, all shirk proponents of freedom, albeit from disparate ideological positions—Goytisolo had made a bargain with the Moroccan regime. As long as he described the makken as “tolerant,” they would view him as “moderate.” The Moroccan regime has an unparalleled capacity to coopt intellectual firebrands, with a combination of intimidation and lavish treatment (villas, tajines, chauffeurs), and to welcome writers who are admired around the world but are quietly resented in the kingdom. By the early 1990s, Goytisolo had—wittingly or unwittingly—become part of a coalition of actors (domestic and international) who have portrayed Morocco as tolerant, “forward-looking,” “a feast for the senses,” a model of reform.

The writer who built his reputation lashing the mythology of firebrands, with a combination of intimidation and lavish treatment years before. It was beautifully done, especially the links drawn watch the episode I did on rai music. I got to meet Cheikha who are admired around the world but are quietly resented in the kingdom. By the early 1990s, Goytisolo had—wittingly or unwittingly—become part of a coalition of actors (domestic and international) who have portrayed Morocco as tolerant, “forward-looking,” “a feast for the senses,” a model of reform. The writer who built his reputation lashing the mythology of firebrands, with a combination of intimidation and lavish treatment years before. It was beautifully done, especially the links drawn watch the episode I did on rai music. I got to meet Cheikha who are admired around the world but are quietly resented in the kingdom. By the early 1990s, Goytisolo had—wittingly or unwittingly—become part of a coalition of actors (domestic and international) who have portrayed Morocco as tolerant, “forward-looking,” “a feast for the senses,” a model of reform.


Endnotes
The Arabic Fantastic and ISIS Terror
The Aesthetics of Antiterrorism and Its Limits

Jamil Khader

The current style of Middle Eastern cultural production about ISIS and terrorism reflects an impasse in the Arab Islamic world’s approach to counterterrorism. What are the aesthetics governing the latest productions and what alternatives would allow viewers to more effectively grapple with the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism?

The US-led global war on terrorism in the Middle East is entering a post-ideological phase, in which everyone is allegedly united in the fight against an Islamic pandemic of violence, regardless of religious creed, political persuasion or ideological conviction. Throughout the Islamic world during Ramadan, the site of the struggle against this fundamentalist violence in general, and ISIS terrorism in particular, shifts from the battlefield to popular culture. The antiterrorism aesthetics of Ramadan cultural productions are evident in their treatment of the twin issues of terrorism and violence. These aesthetics are the rhetorical, discursive and representational strategies that aim to renounce Islamic terrorist practices as antithetical to the message of the true and authentic Islamic religion and repackaging the Islamic faith in the language of religious and cultural tolerance, love and peace.

Jamil Khader is dean of research and professor of English at Bethlehem University, Palestine.
The aesthetics of Ramadan cultural productions are symptomatic of a post-ideological impasse in the Arab Islamic world’s approach to counterterrorism. Presenting the struggle against Islamic terrorism in post-ideological terms thus obfuscates the role played by US imperial interventionism and the global war on terrorism in the rise of terrorist groups in the region. The contradictions in this approach are best exemplified in the Kuwait-based telecommunication corporation Zain’s anti-terrorism music video advertisement, “Worship your God with love, not terror,” and satellite broadcaster MBC’s TV drama series Black Crows.1

Islamic fundamentalist terrorist organizations, particularly ISIS, market themselves as first and foremost instruments of fear, savagery and terror. Yet, Zain’s music video and the TV series Black Crows fail to immunize viewers against the trauma of terrorism in all its horror and ugliness. Trauma, according to Cathy Caruth, has a paradoxical structure: It can be seen, but it cannot be known and articulated, hence its effects are registered belatedly.2 These programs miss an important opportunity to tap into the unspeakable collective fears and repressed anxieties among the Arab public about terrorism and its cult of death. The productions not only replicate the language of ISIS’s political theology, they also appropriate postmodern discourses that frame savage terrorist practices within a paradigm of moral relativism and ambiguity, which leads them to represent the humanity and suffering of the terrorist. Utilizing the genre conventions of the fantastic in programs such as these could offer a way out of this impasse by making it possible to recodify the image of the terrorist in the tropes of monstrosity, thus leaving it up to the viewers to make sense of Islamic fundamentalist violence based on their own subjective experiences.

The Horror of Islamic Terror and the Power of Zombies

Critics of Zain’s anti-terrorism video, “Worship your God with love, not terror,” overlooked an important and distinctive feature of this video. It draws on the conventions of the horror genre, especially ghost and zombie tropes, to represent the terror that results from the confrontation between the potential suicide bomber and his future helpless victims. The video is structured as a framed narrative in which a child promises to rat out ISIS to God about the senseless destruction, unimaginable calamities and the utter darkness with which it filled the streets. As the voice-over narration of the child unfolds, the camera pans out and zooms in on a suicide bomber hunching over and constructing an improvised explosive device that he will use to blow himself up.

Interestingly, on his way to execute his abominable act, the potential suicide bomber is chased by the ghosts of his future victims whose faces are covered with blood and ash. As they chase him down the street, on the bus and in other public spaces, they look more like the zombie hordes of horror films. The video then resurrects the stories of specific victims of terrorism in different Arab cities, breathing life and humanity into their tragic deaths.

Appropriating ghost and zombie tropes is a step in the right direction, but the video fails to utilize the full potential of the horror genre in dealing with the repressed collective fears associated with terrorism. First, there is nothing uncanny about the victims—they return to life in their typically warm and fuzzy humanity. The terror of the zombie lies in its image as a shadow of its former self—despite its recognizable human form it acts in inhuman ways. Moreover, the ghost trope is evacuated of its uncanny power. Nothing could have traumatized the terrorist more than the shock of encountering the ghosts of his victims, who would neither look nor act like typical human beings. The horror genre substitutes terrifying real-life atrocities and horrors for metaphorical monsters. Nonetheless, the video still represents the suicide bomber in his unadulterated human form as a terrorist. As such, the video bypasses the possibility of offering viewers a protective screen to filter and work through the trauma of terrorism and the horrors of the Islamic State.

The Delusions of Humanitarian Bombs

The message of Zain’s video rejects terrorism as un-Islamic and celebrates Islamic teachings that promote tolerance for, and love of, others. That message, though, is undercut by the same language that the video seeks to criticize and from which it tries to distance and extract itself. As he exhorts the suicide bomber to “worship God with love, not terror,” the Emirati entertainer Hussein Aljasmi, who is leading the victims in their chase of the terrorist, extends a helping hand to the suicide bomber while calling for “bomb[ing] violence with mercy” and “bomb[ing] delusion with truth.” Aljasmi continues to urge viewers to “bomb hatred with love” and “bomb extremism for a better life.”

Unfortunately, the song does not use the word “bomb” in only this metaphorical way; it also employs this word in its literal sense: “The more they bomb out of hate, we will sing out of love.” The true opposition here is not between two types of bombs, but between the bomb/hate and song/love dyads. Consequently, any positive, metaphorical humanitarian meaning of the word bomb collapses in the indeterminacy of the violent referent of the signifier itself. Ultimately, the video conflates the literal and metaphorical meaning of the word bomb and undermines the opposition between the meaning of radical extremist and humanitarian bombing.

Unbearable Realism

In one episode of MBC’s drama series Black Crows, a captive Yazidi woman refers to the brutal events outside the ISIS fighter’s apartment, where she is used as a maid, as “horror movies.” Dropping all pretensions to the horror genre, however, the series opts for the conventions of realistic representation in its critique of the savagery, millenarianism and memento
mori of the oppressive theocratic rule of the Islamic State. Black Crows’ logline markets the series as the stories of different women who join ISIS with various psychological motives and pretexts, even though their stories intersect with stories of some men. These women (an Egyptian former belly dancer in search of her son, a Syrian refugee, an undercover journalist who happens to be Christian, a fugitive Saudi woman convict who bludgeoned her husband to death for cheating on her and two Gulf spinsters who are looking for marriage) soon realize the depth of the trap into which they have fallen and become disillusioned as they witness the true horrors, savagery and inhumanity of ISIS.

By amply, even excessively, documenting every aspect of savagery and brutality under the rule of ISIS, the series compulsively repeats these overwhelming and fear-inducing traumatic experiences in every episode ad nauseam. In their apocalyptic ideology, ISIS political and military leaders in the program endlessly try to establish the link between ISIS and fear and terror, arguing that ISIS is nothing if not about darkness, cruelty, murder, stoning, crucifixions, massacres, explosions, executions and death.

The excessive realism of the series offers no respite or protection from the daily horrors and atrocities of the Islamic State. In many horror films, major social and political catastrophes are represented in mediated forms—viewers do not see the catastrophe itself, but are introduced to it obliquely. In Roger Romero’s Dawn of the Dead (1978), viewers witness the evils of consumerism and its effects on citizens through the image of the mindless zombie. It thus makes it possible for viewers to filter the numbing effects of consumerism and cope with them in allegorical or metaphorical forms. No wonder the actress Samar Allam reported feeling depressed as a result of her participation in this program. Although “she hoped the program would make people think in a way that news reports about the Islamic State’s violence could not,” she overlooked how this well-researched series ends up, ironically, reworking many journalistic reports and newspaper headlines about ISIS. Like Allam, viewers may risk experiencing the disintegration of their symbolic universe and falling into the trap of acting out, rather than working through, the trauma of the savagery of ISIS.

It came as no surprise that part of the reason for MBC’s decision to take the series off the air after only 20 episodes was the unprecedented, mounting public outcry over the treatment of ISIS’s capture of the Jordanian pilot Muath Alkasasbah, who was burned alive in a cage on camera. Restaging the horrors of the pilot’s execution would have forced viewers to relive the trauma of the savage incineration over and over again without any protective screen.

At certain moments horror techniques intrude into the real world of ISIS, but these are few and far between. In Episode 13,
In this sense, the masquerade—"only a woman, the very embodiment of the indiscernability of the eternal feminine, the cult of womanhood, or the feminine mystique into existence where that truth does not exist at all. They tamper with images of dead jihadists to sustain the myth of the saved martyr who dies with a smile on his face, “joyful as if they saw heaven.” They produce commercials celebrating the boons and blessings of market life in Raqqa, editing out the attempt of the resistance cell to assassinate the prince. They film the falsely happy faces of the Raqqa residents as they witness public executions or stonings, while fully armed fighters make sure that all congregation members participate in these death orgies. They record interviews with locals who tell the world how happy they are under ISIS rule.

Nowhere is this scandal of the ISIS masquerade more evident than in their obsession with veiling women and their fetishization of the cult of the so-called true woman. By veiling women, ISIS generates the impression that the concealed scandal of Islam is the belief that women to be veiled, in order to sustain the illusion of its own truth, since the truth of the veiled woman can reflect back on the self-proclaimed Caliphate is nothing but an imaginary and mythic, even textual, construct that never existed in the first place the way that ISIS imagined. The masquerade becomes constitutive of ISIS’s world, a fact that is registered in the production of the glossy image of the ISIS spectacle which, like all spectacles, is all image and no substance.

Technology, the series suggests, plays an important role in sustaining this masquerade, leaving no doubt that Islamic fundamentalism is not archaic but compatible with modernity. Through technology, the electronic jihadists and media producers use Photoshop and edit their truth to show the attempt of the political economy of ISIS to sustain the illusion of its own power and authority of the self-proclaimed Caliphate and the ISIS fighters set the instruments ablaze. The masquerade proves that the self-proclaimed Caliphate is nothing but an imaginary and mythic, even textual, construct that never existed in the first place the way that ISIS imagined. The masquerade becomes constitutive of ISIS’s world, a fact that is registered in the production of the glossy image of the ISIS spectacle which, like all spectacles, is all image and no substance.

The masquerade is not simply about, as critics have suggested, the hypocrisy of those who pretend to embody the highest moral and religious values. That interpretation would be too simplistic. Rather, the masquerade proves that the self-proclaimed Caliphate is nothing but an imaginary and mythic, even textual, construct that never existed in the first place the way that ISIS imagined. The masquerade becomes constitutive of ISIS’s world, a fact that is registered in the production of the glossy image of the ISIS spectacle which, like all spectacles, is all image and no substance.

Technology, the series suggests, plays an important role in sustaining this masquerade, leaving no doubt that Islamic fundamentalism is not archaic but compatible with modernity. Through technology, the electronic jihadists and media producers use Photoshop and edit their truth to show the attempt of the political economy of ISIS to sustain the illusion of its own power and authority of the self-proclaimed Caliphate and the ISIS fighters set the instruments ablaze. The masquerade proves that the self-proclaimed Caliphate is nothing but an imaginary and mythic, even textual, construct that never existed in the first place the way that ISIS imagined. The masquerade becomes constitutive of ISIS’s world, a fact that is registered in the production of the glossy image of the ISIS spectacle which, like all spectacles, is all image and no substance.

The masquerade is not simply about, as critics have suggested, the hypocrisy of those who pretend to embody the highest moral and religious values. That interpretation would be too simplistic. Rather, the masquerade proves that the self-proclaimed Caliphate is nothing but an imaginary and mythic, even textual, construct that never existed in the first place the way that ISIS imagined. The masquerade becomes constitutive of ISIS’s world, a fact that is registered in the production of the glossy image of the ISIS spectacle which, like all spectacles, is all image and no substance.

The masquerade is not simply about, as critics have suggested, the hypocrisy of those who pretend to embody the highest moral and religious values. That interpretation would be too simplistic. Rather, the masquerade proves that the self-proclaimed Caliphate is nothing but an imaginary and mythic, even textual, construct that never existed in the first place the way that ISIS imagined. The masquerade becomes constitutive of ISIS’s world, a fact that is registered in the production of the glossy image of the ISIS spectacle which, like all spectacles, is all image and no substance.

The masquerade is not simply about, as critics have suggested, the hypocrisy of those who pretend to embody the highest moral and religious values. That interpretation would be too simplistic. Rather, the masquerade proves that the self-proclaimed Caliphate is nothing but an imaginary and mythic, even textual, construct that never existed in the first place the way that ISIS imagined. The masquerade becomes constitutive of ISIS’s world, a fact that is registered in the production of the glossy image of the ISIS spectacle which, like all spectacles, is all image and no substance.

The masquerade is not simply about, as critics have suggested, the hypocrisy of those who pretend to embody the highest moral and religious values. That interpretation would be too simplistic. Rather, the masquerade proves that the self-proclaimed Caliphate is nothing but an imaginary and mythic, even textual, construct that never existed in the first place the way that ISIS imagined. The masquerade becomes constitutive of ISIS’s world, a fact that is registered in the production of the glossy image of the ISIS spectacle which, like all spectacles, is all image and no substance.

The masquerade is not simply about, as critics have suggested, the hypocrisy of those who pretend to embody the highest moral and religious values. That interpretation would be too simplistic. Rather, the masquerade proves that the self-proclaimed Caliphate is nothing but an imaginary and mythic, even textual, construct that never existed in the first place the way that ISIS imagined. The masquerade becomes constitutive of ISIS’s world, a fact that is registered in the production of the glossy image of the ISIS spectacle which, like all spectacles, is all image and no substance.
of truth and lie, can guarantee Truth. For this reason, she has to remain veiled.”

In the series, ISIS leaders and morality police brigades are seen strictly enforcing the veiling of women under dark cloaks, veils and gloves. Graffiti on the walls declare that “the veil is a symbol of chastity and purity.” The dress code in ISIS country is intended to cover every allegedly shameful part of a woman's body, lest they become fitna (temptation) and seduce ISIS fighters. Women are forced to cover their faces and hands, even though the female teacher in an all-girls classroom denies that covering the face and hands is a Quranic injunction. Every female form, including images of fairy tale princesses (Cinderella) and Disney cartoon characters (even Dory the fish) must be thoroughly covered in order not to provoke men. Women who contest these orders, such as the fish vendor who had to remove her glove to clean the fish, are summarily executed. The ISIS world in the series constitutes a hyper-sexualized libidinal economy of phallic pleasure in which women exist but without the privilege of or access to feminine pleasure. As the Islamic law professor comments, “while the religion forbids a woman from exposing her body to believers, the believers use the same taboos to promote the idea of heaven—that each man gets 70 Paradise Mermaids.”

Žižek maintains that Islam does not simply erase women, but readmits them “in a closely controlled universe,” which needs the myth of the Paradise Mermaids, or houris, as a phantasmatic supplement for this hypersexualized economy to work. He thus remarks that, “The fantasy is here that of the undivided and undisturbed reign of the phallic jouissance, of a universe in which all the traces of the feminine autre jouissance are erased.” This is precisely what the two Gulf Arab women, who function as comic relief characters in the first few episodes of the series before they are disillusioned about their function under ISIS rule, discover about their role as “sexual jihadists.” They are there only to offer themselves voluntarily to male jihadists, in order to help them maintain their chastity, lest they be tempted to engage in any illicit sexual liaison with unlawful women, captives or war spoils.

ISIS views women simply as instruments and vehicles for the fulfillment of the male jihadi’s ultimate goal of endless phallic pleasure in heaven with the houris. As one member of the al-Khansaa morality police brigade informs these women, the women’s job is to give their “pure body” to the male jihadist to satisfy his desires, but “true pleasure awaits him in heaven.” Therefore, women are forbidden to apply makeup and use their sexuality to entice their jihadi mates—their agency is good only insofar as women offer themselves to these fighters in marriage and sexual slavery.

Women’s agency and empowerment in ISIS country, in short, are as illusory as the mythic eternal feminine subject itself. The story of the female electronic jihadist Um Qutaiba is a case in point. When she challenges a male counterpart, she is told that her place is in the kitchen. Later, he hacks into her computer and infects it with a virus that only he can remove. When he is taken to the female electronic jihadist department to clean her system, he tells her that the hacker must have used her “ignorance and weakness in
The committee declared that “the apostate’s life is empty,” adding that “It came out from some of the wrong religious teachings that have been going on in our societies for a very long time.” He leaves only after he hands her orders to complete a job for him in an hour, leaving no doubt as to the role and place of women in this organization.

The Political Economy of ISIS and Beyond

The series also reveals that capitalist discourse, rhetoric and tropes are constitutive of the way ISIS operates.

Political Theology

Black Crows, like the Zain advertisement, cannot extricate or distance itself from the religious language and politico-theological discourses for which it criticizes ISIS. Indeed, the theological beliefs espoused by ISIS leaders and militants throughout the series, such as eschatological doctrines like retribution in the grave and apocalyptic visions of the final showdown with non-Muslims in Dabiq, seem to be identical to what the majority of Muslims accept as the basic tenets of Islam. The debate about the program’s title and its Quranic origins demonstrate this impasse. Many considered it offensive, even sacrilegious, for the series to use a phrase from the Quran to describe ISIS as black crows—this reference has been interpreted not as indictment of ISIS in the name of the Quran, but quite the opposite, as a Quranic validation of ISIS and its terrorist savagery.

In an interview with NPR, MBC program director Ali Jaber hints at this impasse in the representation of ISIS in the program. He states that “ISIS did not come out from emptiness,” adding that, “It came out from some of the wrong religious teachings that have been going on in our societies for a very long time.” It would thus be almost impossible to condemn these teachings as wrong, notwithstanding all the squabble about interpretation. It would also be impossible to offer any alternative or counter-religious and theological narrative since ISIS has completely hijacked the Islamic faith.
and wrapped its basic beliefs in its black flag. Jaber notes: “We are fighting against very formidable enemy because they are using the words of God and they are using the basic instincts of people to lure sympathizers and to lure soldiers. And this is dangerous. And somebody has got to really stand up and say something against this.”

It becomes very hard, however, to establish a platform from which to stand up to ISIS and to criticize its beliefs without throwing Islamic beliefs as a whole under the bus. The most the program can do is to renounce terrorism and periodically preach that ISIS does not represent the true Islamic faith. Most of the comments of the Islamic law professor fall into this category—he distinguishes between true and false Muslims, claiming that the actions of the former should even help win ISIS militants back to the true faith. There are other minor characters who assume this position as well. In one episode, an imam of a mosque in Raqqa proselytizes about the truth of Islamic beliefs to a group from the Youth of Heaven or the Cubs of the Caliphate brigade who desecrate the mosque, kill worshippers and ransack holy books. He refutes every major belief espoused by ISIS, offering what he sees as the true Islamic interpretation of it. This imam was murdered in the mosque by the pedophile leader of the brigade after he kicked him out of the mosque. A female school teacher in an all-girls classroom also acts in this capacity when she argues with the French female jihadist, a new convert and a member of the morality police brigade. The teacher responds to the French jihadist that she is permitted not to cover her hands and face, clarifying the Quranic position on the veil and full cover. As expected, the scheming French jihadist plants contraband cigarettes in the teacher’s bag, which leads to her arrest.

Even worse is that the program is ambiguous about and even falls into idealizing ISIS. For example, at one point the Islamic law professor vaguely discusses how an idea can end or be reformed. He ambiguously states that “Nobody can kill a concept except the one who believes in it, he kills it when he loses faith in it. This happens surely but slowly.” It remains unclear whether he means the followers of ISIS in particular or Muslims in general. Nonetheless, the implications of this statement to the critical reformation of the Islamic faith remain unexplored. The issue gets even murkier when the professor poses the problem of ISIS within a framework of moral relativism that idealizes ISIS militants as possibly more authentic and pious than many other Muslims. As the surgeon Thunyan contemplates killing the wounded leader of the electronic jihad department, who happens to be the professor’s son-in-law, the professor tells him: “We and they have the same beliefs—we testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is his prophet; maybe their devoutness during prayers and their abandonment in life, their desire in the afterlife, is bigger and better than all of ours…” The professor soon substitutes the true/false Muslim for the human being/monster binary opposition. He says, “…what make us human beings and what makes them monsters is that religion for us is based on good ethics, mercy, humanity and moralities. Once we abandon those we will lose our cause against them; we will lose the battle.” Interestingly enough, religion now is evacuated from its theological content and posited instead in terms of ethical and moral values. This begs the question of the need for religious identity in the first place, if the litmus test is first and foremost ethical conduct.

What complicates matters even more is that some of the characters, who have in some way become disillusioned with ISIS, end up censoring themselves and internalizing ISIS beliefs and ideas. In one telling scene, for example, one of the comic relief characters, Ghadeer, attempts to entertain her stepchildren by telling them classical Western fairy tales. She suddenly succumbs to the propaganda of the morality police brigade and censors herself. First, she tells the children Rapunzel’s story, but stops when her stepdaughter protests that the princess is not veiled. Ghadeer is completely unable to respond. She then begins to tell them the story of Snow White, but has to eat her words quickly, murmuring that she could not tell a story of “a girl sleeping with seven men in the same room.” It never occurs to her to reinterpret Snow White’s cohabitation with seven men as an allegory or metaphor for women’s sexual slavery and sexual jihad, in which the same woman could be rotated among a number of militants in ISIS country. The parallels between Snow White and stories about group sex and the sexual abuse of children under ISIS could easily have been established.

Abandoning Palestine

The series is equally ambiguous about the struggle for freedom in Palestine. The recurrent critique of ISIS within the series is its reluctance to declare jihad against Israel. In one real-life communique ISIS has stated that jihad in Palestine, which it refers to in metonymic religious terms as baytul magdis (holy house), is just one dimension of the world jihad, rejecting the idea that it should “take precedence over jihad elsewhere.” In an early episode of Black Crows, Khalid, the new Egyptian recruit and hacker in the electronic jihad department, responds to a question about the position of ISIS on Israel and “fighting the Jews.” Khalid answers that “we should start with those among us until we rebuild the degenerate Arab countries; your sinner must be before the Jews—they are hypocrites; they belong in the depth of hell. We should purge our countries from lewd, liberals and secularists.” Later, a member of the morality police brigade explains to Khalid’s mother that the “Rawafid and Shia are not clear enemies like the Jews,” and therefore they deserve to be exterminated first.

Two major critiques can be made of the series’ approach to Palestine. First, it conflates Judaism as a religion and Zionism...
as a political colonial-settler movement that is responsible for the continuing *nakba* in Palestine. The series misses an important opportunity to mark the difference between the two and to refute that the language of political struggle in the Middle East is a reified religious discourse. Second, the series completely ignores the parallels between the abandonment of Palestine in ISIS ideology and the recent normalization efforts of many Arab countries with Israel. Moreover, the series overlooks recent reports that Israel is directly supporting ISIS and al-Qaeda terrorists in Syria. One report indicates that wounded ISIS fighters in Syria receive medical care in Israel and collaborate with Israeli authorities in return for securing the fence at the border.  

In other words, the approach of ISIS merely mirrors the same position and policy of Arab states toward Palestine. The series cannot condemn one while maintaining silence on the other. The problem is that the series over-identifies with state power in the Arab world, for example by making one of the major figures of resistance to ISIS an undercover Syrian military officer. It is important here to note that MBC program director Ali Jaber participated in a Ministerial Plenary for the Global Coalition Working to Defeat ISIS on March 22, 2017 in Washington, DC, with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and the Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar Al-Abadi. Jaber was scheduled to speak about “how to achieve victory” in the electronic fight against ISIS and its electronic jihad, without making a direct correlation between US imperial interventionism and the rise of terrorist groups in the region.  

It is no surprise that critics dismissed the series for trivializing the rise of ISIS as a regional and global power, focusing instead on the sensational aspects of the private sphere, including sexual jihad, personal intrigues and the power struggles among various members of ISIS in Raqqa. Critics contend that the series decontextualized ISIS and offered no substantive treatment of the Islamic state. ISIS will not perish until repressive authoritarian Arab states, some of which have colluded with ISIS in the first place, are reformed.

**Postmodern Pretensions**

The series’s attempted critique of ISIS is further undercut by its appropriation of postmodern discourses that reframe savage terrorist practices within a paradigm of moral relativism and re-present the terrorist ISIS fighter, especially the prince, in his humanity. On their own, these techniques can help viewers question society’s assumptions about good and evil, morality and heroism. In the larger context of the moral and discursive ambiguity of the series, however, these techniques muddy the message even more and undermine the demonization of ISIS as an evil terrorist organization.

The question of right and wrong is raised throughout the series, but at certain points it is reframed in ambiguous terms. In one scene, the al-Khansaa morality police brigade
murders the older female owner of a store for refusing to let them confiscate plates decorated with animals. On the way back from their tour with the brigade, the comic relief characters talk about what happened, clearly shocked by the brutality of the women’s action in light of the trivial nature of the issue. However, one of the characters tells the other who was expressing her disbelief about what happened: “We consider some things wrong, while they might be right and vice versa, we consider some things right, while they might be wrong.”

The handsome prince of the ISIS cell in Raqqa, who is clearly a sociopathic monster, is represented as compassionate, charismatic, romantic and even a victim of some familial psychological drama. In an early episode, the prince is seen walking with his henchmen over piles of dead bodies in one neighborhood on his way to the morning prayer. He stops suddenly and motions to his men not to march further. He bends down and when he stands up again, he says: “Don’t step over the house of ants.” The contrast between his genocidal tendencies and his compassion for animals may have been used to symbolize the prince’s vast moral depravity and perversity. Nonetheless, in the context of the other techniques, his compassion for animals can only redeem him in the viewers’ eyes.

The prince is also idealized as sexually charismatic, the object of several women’s desire in ISIS headquarters. For example, the prince approaches the leaders of the al-Khansaa morality police brigade and asks their hand in marriage for the older mufti of the cell. Before they realize who he was asking their hand for, the women were thrilled, proclaiming that marrying him would be a privilege and a win in this world and the afterlife. Little did they know that the pious and handsome prince was already engaged in an illicit relationship with a Tunisian woman, Malika, whom he smuggled into his chamber in a wooden box.

The prince is also seen as a deeply wounded human being who struggles with his monstrosity and identity as a terrorist. In one scene, the prince is seen cuddling with his lover Malika, who offers to help him in his rule over the cell. The prince answers in the negative, saying that “if you wish to help me, let me feel that I’m a human being,” adding that, “Outside this room I’m not a human being; I am a monster, I do horrible things, horrible.” He makes it clear that “This is the only place where I feel that I am a human being capable of love.” In episode 13, the prince is seen not only as haunted by nightmares of his past victims, as discussed earlier, but also as a victim of family trauma. After he shoots the fish vendor in the market for defying the veiling order, he adopts her son, entrusts Malika with it clear that “This is the only place where I feel that I am a human being capable of love.” In episode 13, the prince is seen not only as haunted by nightmares of his past victims, as discussed earlier, but also as a victim of family trauma. After he shoots the fish vendor in the market for defying the veiling order, he adopts her son, entrusts Malika with it clear that “This is the only place where I feel that I am a human being capable of love.” In episode 13, the prince is seen not only as haunted by nightmares of his past victims, as discussed earlier, but also as a victim of family trauma. After he shoots the fish vendor in the market for defying the veiling order, he adopts her son, entrusts Malika with it.

When Malika mildly protests his methods, he informs her that the boy reminds him of himself as a child when he was a victim of some unknown tragic family trauma. His mistreatment of the child is regarded merely as a function of projective displacement and reveals the extent of his victimization.

Toward an Arabic Fantastic

The Zain video advertisement and the MBC drama series Black Crows complement each other and suggest that attention to the fantastic might offer productive ways to mediate and mitigate the shock and trauma of terrorism and violence. Rather than simply reflecting the surface of socio-political reality and historical events, new fantastic modes and genres can help uncover the hidden truths and underlying antagonisms that might be too ugly or distressing to confront in their pure form, thus allowing viewers to work through the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism.

Hollywood productions that utilize the fantastic, including ghosts, vampires and zombies, are already a major staple on the entertainment menu in the Arab world. The genre is not completely alien to the Arab world’s own cultural and art productions either. In fact, some classical Arabic texts have been credited with ushering in certain types of fantastic literature. Recent novels, such as the Iraqi author Ahmad Saadawi’s Frankenstein in Baghdad, have already experimented with this genre with interesting results. Most importantly, films utilizing the mode of the fantastic can help viewers immunize themselves against the trauma that results from the way terrorism is processed in the unconscious. In addition, they could develop an international media literacy that is able to critique cultural productions, regional and international alike, within the geopolitical context of their production.

Endnotes

1 “Worship your God with love, not terror,” music video advertisement by Zain telecommunications company. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UgqEBFyvo8. Black Crows, MBC TV serial: https://shahid.mbc.net/ar/series/216510%DA%98%DA%88%DA%97%DA%95%DA%97%DA%98%DA%97%DA%99%DA%97%DA%99%DA%97%DA%98%DA%95%DA%97%DA%99%DA%98%DA%97%DA%99%DA%97%DA%95%DA%98%DA%97%DA%9A%DA%9A%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7%DA%95%DA%9A%DA%96%DA%97%DA%9A%DA%96%DA%97%DA%95%DA%98%DA%97%DA%99%DA%97%DA%95%DA%98%DA%97%DA%9A%DA%9A

2 Cathy Caruth, “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History,” Yale French Studies, 75 (January 1991)


4 “Why did the show ‘Black Crows’ stop at Episode 20?,” Arab 48, June 15, 2017 [Arabic].


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.


11 Dow Lieber, “Islamic State explains why it doesn’t attack Israel (yet),” Times of Israel, March 24, 2016.


13 Ibid.


15 “Why did the show Black Crows stop at Episode 20?” Arab 48, June 15, 2017 [Arabic].
What Is Prevent?

Mezna Qato

In the spring of 2016, a small group of academics at the University of Cambridge put a motion before Regent House, the governing body of the university, to hold a discussion on the Prevent program—the British government’s counter-radicalization scheme. The scene during the discussion was palpably grim, with scholar after scholar imploring the university to refuse implementation of a program that had already spread across most public institutions and universities in the country. Priyamvada Gopal, a lecturer in English, warned that the lack of collective academic protest over the Prevent Duty meant “sleepwalking into inequality and racial profiling.”

Ross Anderson, professor of security engineering, reminded the university that surveillance of online research is ultimately unworkable and against multiple human rights conventions, including the European Convention on Human Rights and the Treaty of Rome. The European Court of Justice ruled in 2014 against bulk surveillance without suspicion in a case brought by Digital Rights Ireland. The university discussion was too late. By fall of 2016, all 31 Cambridge colleges had a Prevent mechanism and committee, and the university had set up a permanent Prevent taskforce of legal counsel, a vice-provost and a university-wide oversight committee.

What is Prevent? After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the British government developed the Prevent program as one part of an overarching counterterrorism strategy known as CONTEST. Led by then Home Secretary Theresa May, the strategy was revised in 2008, 2011 and 2015. CONTEST consists of four elements: “Pursue: to stop terrorist attacks; Prevent: to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism; Protect: to strengthen protection against a terrorist attack; and Prepare: to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack.”

Its latest iteration, the 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, imposes a legal duty on public bodies, and anyone who works for them, to identify the early warning signs of terrorist sympathy in individuals, and report them to an authority. It is a legally binding demand that if you see something, you must say something. The idea is that the radicalization process must be stopped by targeting those still at the stage of so-called non-violent extremism before it ends in violent extremism.

What is radicalization according to these statutes? “Vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces.” According to the government’s counterterrorism strategy, ideology, or extremist ideology, results in terrorism. Studies prove otherwise. At the Cambridge discussion, Surabhi Ranganathan, a law scholar, described the Prevent legislation as both “extraordinarily intrusive and extraordinarily vague.” It allows for regulating and criminalizing thought, not just actions.

How does one spot so-called extremist thought? There is no comprehensive list of possible indicators that someone is, as the government terms it, “vulnerable to terrorism,” but the government has published a partial list in the official guidance that accompanies the primary legislation. These include identity crises, low self-esteem, having a sense of grievance, a personal experience with racism, a feeling of failure, experiences with imprisonment, poor re-adjustment, unmet aspirations and “searching for answers to questions about identity, faith and belonging.”

Once you are flagged as “vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism,” you are reported—or as official sources phrase it, referred—to the police. Referrals can come from anyone. Teachers, council workers, social workers, doctors, university lecturers, nurses or librarians all have referred someone under the Prevent Duty. Once referred, people are sent to courses under the Channel program. It is supposedly voluntary and offers social and psychological remedial training to de-radicalize young British Muslims and steer them off the “path to extremism.”

With an annual budget of £40 million, Prevent’s reach has been expansive and its consequences brutal. Children aged nine and under were among the 3,955 people reported under the Prevent Duty in 2015 alone. Although Muslims are five percent of the British population, they make up 70 percent of all Prevent referrals. By December 2016, more than 7,500 people were referred, including 3,100 under the age of 18. These figures are no surprise. As Frances Webber of the Institute of Race Relations has noted, the context for Prevent is an “increase in racist violence and ‘extremely negative stereotypes..."
of Muslims’...Islamophobia and far right extremism have become more mainstream, with nearly one third of young children believing Muslims are taking over England and over a quarter believing that Islam encourages terrorism.”

As expected, local enforcers have dismissed as “hysterical” community fears that it unfairly targets Muslims. What has been more distressing is the relative quiet from institutions otherwise keen on protecting freedom of speech, particularly universities. It is at universities that the full power of Prevent is exercised, while administrators do little more than promise that they are seeking to mitigate the potential pitfalls of the Duty by using what many administrators wink will be a “light touch.”

This supposedly light touch has obligated university staff, like all public sector employees, to impose ritualistic risk assessment forms and action templates in order to demonstrate compliance. “Training manuals, guides and slides, workshops, seminars and online courses, accompanied by conflicting and copious literature, official and unofficial guidance, published at regular intervals, with updates, new suggestions and more forms— all of which come with dark warnings of the trouble ahead if you don’t (or won’t) fill in the forms or carry out the required activities.” Privatized courses by boutique firms offer games of snakes and ladders to help trainees better understand the path from extremism to radicalization, and courses for schools on so-called British values. Non-compliance could lead to loss of funding or legal action for individual violations of the Prevent Duty.

But as Karma Nabulsi notes, “Prevent has turned ordinary citizens and public sector workers into an auxiliary surveillance militia. Talking or texting in Arabic on a plane, speaking a foreign language in a doctor’s waiting room, wearing a hijab while walking down the street near your house, wearing a free Palestine badge at school—people doing all these things have been reported to police under the Prevent programme.”

This has impacted the capacity of students and scholars to organize, deliberate and speak, with approval of rooms being denied or stalled, courses monitored and professors asked to record their lectures on Islam and the Middle East and to explicitly report their content and the discussion afterwards. Pro-Palestine ideas or activities in particular have been identified as key risks to keep an eye on. The inevitable result has been self-censorship. Students avoid certain research topics, limit their online searches on university-owned computers and confine their discussions of foreign policy to increasingly narrow safe zones, such as their homes or those of friends. Parents avoid discussing politics at the dinner table for fear that their children may mention it in school. And university students are removing pins saying “Free Palestine” or simply “End war.” Prevent, in other words, has served as a primary state mechanism by which to de-fang political protest.

What have academics done collectively? Not much. There have been pockets of individual acts of refusal, with lecturers refusing to take Prevent training courses or fill out the endless risk assessment forms. But there has been no substantial collective mobilization to dismantle the legal architecture of the Duty. Each academic year the program becomes more entrenched and harder to extricate. As it grows, it is monetized and implants mechanisms that incentivize its implementation by increasingly powerful administrators. Part of this is a result of the very success of Prevent as it is geared towards a minority that is under-represented in the university. Though it is comically vague, it is also efficient in dividing Muslims from other parts of the British public. Protests only seem to gain traction once the liberal distaste for impingement upon a particular scholar’s speech is invoked. Fiery emails are sent to the University Council and petitions are sent around, but once a student or lecturer is referred, the Prevent Duty mechanisms are activated with little protest. The confusing nature of its legal obligations on individual staff members renders potential objectors fretful and unwilling to defend values as long as they continue to have access to their rights.

There has been some good news. The National Union of Teachers, obligated by Prevent to report on their students, passed a motion in October 2015, rejecting the Prevent Duty, saying the legislation caused “suspicions in the classroom and confusion in the staffroom.” Though not attached to any particular union recommendation, it has sent a clear message of protest from teachers who are a primary sector for its implementation. The National Union of Students has called Prevent “fundamentally racist and Islamophobic” and is part of an increasing number of unions and organizations calling for its repeal or overhaul—including the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU), Students Not Suspects and a wide range of civil liberties and Muslim organizations. It is communities, students and organizers beyond the university who will, as ever, need to push the university to abandon what is by most estimates the single greatest threat to liberties in Great Britain in a generation.

Endnotes
1 All quotations in this essay by participants at the University of Cambridge discussion are from “Report of Discussion,” Cambridge University Reporter (May 10, 2016).
2 “Almost 4,000 people referred to UK deradicalisation scheme last year,” BBC News, March 6, 2015.
3 Ibid.
8 “Almost 4,000 people referred to UK deradicalisation scheme last year,” The Guardian, March 10, 2016.
12 Ibid.

Jerusalem has been the focus of an increasing number of academic publications in the past several years. Most of these publications focus mainly on the city’s history, identity and changing architectural features since Israel occupied its eastern section after the June 1967 War. Few serious attempts have been made to discuss the human aspect of the city’s united, yet divided, population and even less attention has been paid to US policies toward the city. Ghada Hashem Talhami’s book *American Presidents and Jerusalem* achieves both tasks by offering the reader a serious and comprehensive study of the evolving policies of American presidents toward Jerusalem as well as the experiences of the Palestinian population during and after the 1967 war. The book comes out during a sensitive period of struggle over the city between the Jewish and Palestinian populations and in the context of renewed assurances by President Donald Trump of his commitment to Israel’s hegemony over a “united” city. Trump’s repeated vows to move the US embassy to Jerusalem adds to the publication’s timely importance.

Talhami draws upon archival documents, memoirs, US foreign relations documents and secondary sources to discuss various American presidents’ policies toward Jerusalem and the Arab-Israeli conflict. She focuses on the implications of the 1967 war, Israel’s occupation and annexation of the eastern sector of the city and the regional and international ramifications of Israel’s actions. Talhami moves from President Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat, and his romantic view of Jerusalem, to later presidents who adopted a more realistic political foreign policy towards Jerusalem. Her account goes up to President Bill Clinton’s failed efforts to achieve his goal of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Talhami discusses select administrations based on their degree of involvement in the area, with special and appropriate emphasis on the Lyndon B. Johnson presidency because of his role in the 1967 war, the event that changed the fate of Jerusalem and the face of the Middle East.

One of the book’s most significant merits is the author’s examination and illustration of the human cost of occupation on the Palestinian population in 1967, during and after the unification of Jerusalem. Talhami presents a comprehensive picture of the suffering of Jerusalem’s native population and the new wave of refugees as a result of war—the looting, relocation, humiliation, departure and deportation, the theft of property and lack of compensation. Interestingly, the process intensified after the war officially ended.

In addition to examining American presidents and their advisors in the US State Department, this study also looks at other actors who have influenced the status of Jerusalem, including Israeli and Palestinian officials, the UN, the Jewish Agency, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the CIA, regional Arab states and significant players (such as King Abdullah of Jordan, King Mohammed VI of Morocco and Ahmed Zaki Yamani, the Saudi oil minister) and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and other supporters of Israel in Washington. She also discusses the role of oil politics and an international community that continues to regard East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

Another significant strength of the book is the author’s exploration of differences and contradictions inside American presidential administrations and an examination of the pressures they face in shaping the US position toward Jerusalem and the Arab-Israeli conflict. For example, Talhami describes President Harry S. Truman’s skepticism of the need for a Jewish state and President Theodore Roosevelt’s concern about Arab reactions and the potential negative consequences for oil supplies when several Jewish politicians rose to prominent positions during his presidency. Talhami elaborates on several widely unrecognized factors about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including various US administrations’ internal discontent with Israeli measures in Jerusalem and also with the IDF’s misconduct toward Palestinian civilians. The author points out dilemmas and contradictions that shaped the policies of American presidents. For example, US officials during the Lyndon Johnson administration were alarmed by the departure of many Arabs from the city but when they demanded Israel allow them to return and retain their property, their demands were not met, including for Arabs with American citizenship. On the one hand US administrations claimed neutrality and presented themselves as decent brokers of the conflict and the status of Jerusalem, yet on the other hand continued to emphasize unwavering US support for Israel and its security.

This ambivalence toward Jerusalem was apparent not only among American presidents but also in the actions of other players. For example, there were differences of opinion within the Jewish Agency on the fate of Jerusalem (whether the solution should be partition, internationalization, or a mix) and on its acceptance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 181, which it later rejected.

Talhami has provided valuable insight into US policy towards one of the thorniest topics complicating the Arab-Israeli conflict—the status of Jerusalem. The book concludes with the Clinton administration and its Jerusalem Embassy Act of November 8, 1995 that states Jerusalem should remain an undivided city and be recognized as the capital of the State of Israel. President Trump’s waiver in June 2017 of that congressional act, which mandates that the US embassy be moved to Jerusalem, coincided with Israeli celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Jerusalem’s reunification, or occupation. Evidently, at least up until now, Trump’s policy toward Jerusalem will not be dramatically different from that of the other US presidents. Talhami discusses in her important book.

—Suheir Abu Oksa Daoud

Editorial continued from page 1.

US President Trump provides unconditional support, Palestinian life becomes increasingly precarious and conditions ripe for another major military assault. Young Jerusalemites nonetheless took to the streets to suppress resistance within the scattered Palestinian enclaves. Recent strikes by low wage Palestinian teachers and other public employees have called attention to the neoliberal austerity policies of the PA, the corruption of Fatah and the consumption of the new Palestinian elite. Refugees remain vulnerable to the targeting of supporters of Palestinian insurgency practices. Faced with resistance and anger from their own marginalized populations, governments from Morocco to Brazil seek to learn from and build connections with the Israeli war machine.

In the United States, the politics of the Trump-era have supported a rhetorical alliance between racist, anti-Semitic and Nazi politics and support for Israel. Not only are white supremacists such as Richard Spencer explicit in their support for the Zionist “ethno-state” of Israel—Spencer describes Israel as a model for the white nationalist state he would like to see in the US—the Israeli government and many of its supporters in the US have been relatively quiet about the actual displays of anti-Semitism that have been part of Trump times. This quiet stands in marked contrast to the targeting of supporters of Palestinian rights by these same parties.

Simultaneously, Palestine remains an inspiration for resistance movements around the world. People confronting racist violence and colonial domination find hope in the expansive humanity and determination of the Palestinian people whose everyday existence—in Palestine and in the diaspora—is resistance to settler colonial elimination. From Morocco and South Africa to the US and Brazil, Palestine is not only a symbol of resistance but a core component of freedom dreams and visions of liberation.
Subscribe

Use the form below or order online. www.merip.org

Order back issues of MER by logging on to a secure server at www.merip.org; by writing to MERIP (address below); or by phoning the MERIP editorial office (202-495-0597).

Order form

Name

Institution/Organization

Address

City State/Province/Country ZIP Postal Code

Email Address Telephone

Check/Money Order Enclosed (Prepayment is required, payable in US dollars only)

MasterCard VISA

Start Subscription One year Two Years (Please see subscription rates at left.)

Order Back Issues–MER issue number(s):

Subscription $______ Back Issues $______ Donation $______ Total Amount $______

Card Number Expiration Date

Signature Date

Checks and money orders payable to MERIP/Middle East Report
To subscribe or order back issues, complete the order form and send to:

MERIP/Middle East Report
UR 0074
University of Richmond, VA 23173
MIDDLE EAST REPORT.
CLEAR-HEADED.
HARD-HITTING.

MORE THAN 40 YEARS OF NUANCED,
NO-NONSENSE REPORTING AND ANALYSIS.

Middle East Report can afford to be critical because it is independent.
No ties to any government, corporation or special interest.
No big advertising accounts to lose.
The magazine that takes on all the players—no exceptions.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!