Shades of feeling: Human Rights, decoloniality, and Palestine

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ABSTRACT

Today, the question of human rights is powerfully and newly set by the 'percolating' global southern diaspora (mass migration), through new forms of intellectual and artistic engagement (spoken poetry, videos, music, graffiti, etc.) helped by digital media (mass mediation). These forms appeal less to the Kantian motto "dare to know" (*sapere aude*!) than to "dare to feel!" This article tries to demythify the main glorious moments of the Human Rights march as recorded by Western historiography and proposes an alternative decolonial genealogy and perspective, contextualising it within the framework of Modernity/Coloniality. Above all, having considered the 'irrational' outputs of rationality as the reliable agent on which to found a respectful attitude towards the other, it encourages, through Richard Rorty's anti-Kantian proposal, a different ground on which to pose the question of Human Rights: sympathy rather than reason. The question of Palestine is the very irrational case in point. Rafeef Ziadah's spoken poetry and Amer Shomali's multidisciplinary art, from their diasporic and mediatic dimension, may help to elucidate the proposal.

Rights theories

Traditional Human Rights theory is usually placed either in the background of European history or in the background of universal values.

According to the first epistemological stance, modern history has its beginning and meaning in Europe, while the events occurring outside are minor episodes or simply not part of history: the history of the West and the non-history of the Rest. This Eurocentric version is based on two principal founding myths: first, the idea of human civilisation departing from a state of nature and culminating in Europe (Hegel);[1] second, the idea of world peoples as hierarchically arranged by the nature of races (Renan)[2] and not by the history of power. It is exactly this history that has pushed those in hegemonic positions, like the Europeans, to take their continent as "a promontory, an advance – the avant-garde of geography and history" and, in such a position, to think they can make advances on the other: "to induce, seduce, produce, and conduce, to spread out, to cultivate, to love or to violate, to love to violate, to colonize, and to colonize itself" (Derrida 1992, 49). It is exactly this hegemonic history that has pushed "subjects that are socially located in the oppressed side of the colonial difference, to think epistemically like the ones on the dominant positions" (Grossfoguel 2007, 213).

This being said, two more assumptions follow. First, the South is less a fixed geo-

graphical location than "a mobile placeholder" (Chambers 2017, 28)[3] in the oppressed side of colonial difference (Chatterjee 1993; Mignolo 2007), which can be found both in the South and in the North. Secondly, epistemically speaking, "we are where we think" (Mignolo 2011, 83). Therefore, if the South wants to consider the world from its geo-social location, and not from the North's epistemic one, it should turn upside down the *imago mundi* inaugurated with the Renaissance (the North-West sitting on the South-East) and see the planet from its (subaltern) position. The same, of course, can be said about human rights. In Western historiography, it is commonly held that the glorious moments of the human rights march stretch from the Magna Carta (13th century) to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) after the Holocaust, passing through the three main disruptions of the Glorious Revolution (Bill of Rights, 1689), the American Revolution (Declaration of Independence, 1776) and the French Revolution (Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, 1789).[4]

In reality, according to an Afrocentric perspective, which contradicts the Hegelian narrative of Africa as a continent without History, the Africans invented human rights. We are referring to the "Kurukan Fuga Charter"[5] or what has become the written version of an oral 'constitution' proclaimed by Sunjata Keita, the founding sovereign of the Empire of Mali in West Africa, at the beginning of the 13th century. It is a 'document' probably existing prior to the Magna Carta and some of its 'articles' regarded 'human rights' inasmuch as they inhibited the maltreatment of foreigners or slaves. This is not seeking African equivalents of European achievements, as far as human rights are concerned, in a sort of "mimetic rivalry" (Amselle 2013, 89). It is to resist the mapping of the world according to a colonial Eurocentric logic. It is to reappraise the history arriving from 'there', from non-European territories invariably considered non-modern, non-developed, outside of history.[6] It is, ultimately, to undo the securities coming from 'here', from the West and its continuing appropriation of the Rest.

As to the second epistemological perspective, Human Rights theory is kept separate from the geo-historical space in which it has been constructed: it is presented not as the best theory but as 'the' theory of rights as such, i.e., as the 'universal' conception of rights. This move hides the locus of enunciation and avoids any reference to the background from which it has emerged. It is the so-called "hubris of the zero point" (Castro-Gómez 2007, 433): an epistemology through which the West has got not the best position, but a god-like position in looking at the world.

Descartes' philosophy ("I think, therefore I am") required the awareness of rational thinking as the precondition of one's existence, but neglected the geo-social origins of thought. In this way, God's point of observation was secularized and metaphors of universal concepts were spread by a transcendental philosophy of consciousness. As a matter of fact, Ramón Grosfoguel insinuates: "behind the door of Kant's transcendental subject hides a White Man" (2009, 90). And Aníbal Quijano, while speculating on the long Western tradition of universalism, asks: "How can one seriously claim to be a universalist if one is ethnocentrically unaware

of the ideas and values of other belief systems and traditions?" (2007, 177). In other words, the concealed bond of the supposed 'universality' to a particular location of culture is to be laid bare, in order to undermine the legitimacy of false universal declarations. If not, historiography will tell the same old story, going

from the 16th century characterization of "people without writing" to the 18th and 19th-century characterization of "people without history", to the 20th-century characterization of "people without development" and more recently, to the early 21st-century of "people without democracy". (Grosfoguel 2007, 214)

The *right* things

As José-Manuel Barreto (2012) reminds us, Western Human Rights theories are to be both 'provincialised' and 'deparochialised'. Provincialisation means demystifying their pretence to be contrived by 'peoples endowed with everything' and, in such a universal completeness, having the power to impose the never-ending choice: "do the right thing or I shoot you" – an *aut aut* historically translated by Grosfoguel in this compelling way:

During the last 510 years of the "Capitalist/Patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric Modern/Colonial World-System" we went from the 16th Century "christianize or I shoot you," to the 19th Century "civilize or I shoot you," to 20th Century "develop or I shoot you," to the late 20th Century "neoliberalize or I shoot you," and to the early 21st century "democratize or I shoot you." No respect and no recognition for Indigenous, African, Islamic or other non-European forms of democracy. (2011, n.p.)

Secondly, in order to re-write a geography and a history of human rights as truly 'universal' or global, Western Human Rights concepts have to be 'deparochialised' by re-contextualising them within the framework of the modern/colonial world. As a consequence, the crisis of Human Rights did not primarily emerge with the Holocaust. Famously, Aimé Césaire reminded the Europeans or

the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century[:] […] what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not the crime in itself, the crime against man, it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the "coolies" of India, and the "niggers" of Africa. (2000, 36)

The Holocaust, as a consequence, was a boomerang effect of a terrific and wider practise that had begun much earlier, with the conquest of America. Nazism was nothing but a continuation of European colonialism within European territories. No wonder then if, as Paul Gilroy notes, on Human Rights issues a relative silence characterised the lapse of time between late 18th century and early 20th century, the period of major expansion of European colonialism. The debate was then resumed by figures like G.H. Wells at the start of World War II,[7] which eventually led to the Universal Declaration of 1948. Hence, a different genealogy for Human Rights is needed. Gilroy puts it forcefully and contrapuntally:

It should begin with the history of conquest and expansion, and must be able to encompass the debates about how colonies and slave plantations were to be administered. At its most basic, this agonistic, cosmopolitan enterprise must incorporate the contending voices of Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. It should be able to analyse the contrapuntality of Hobbes's *Leviathan* with England's Navigation Acts and illuminate the relationship between Locke's insightful advocacy on behalf of an emergent bourgeoisie and his commitment to the improvers' doctrine of the *vacuum domicilium*. (2010, 57)

To put it in decolonial terms, only if we place the discourse on Human Rights within the frame of modernity/coloniality, that is to say, within the frame of coloniality as the invisible and constitutive side of modernity, do we realise that the human rights of the other are totally absent. They are absent because the modern/colonial paradigm "made it possible to omit every reference to any other 'subject' outside the European context, i.e., to make invisible the colonial order as totality, at the same moment as the very idea of Europe was establishing itself precisely in relation to the rest of the world being colonised" (Quijano 2007, 173). The colonised other was invisible even when he fought to claim the same rights the metropolitan 'enlightened' coloniser claimed for himself, as happened with the Black Jacobins in the Republic of Haiti, which Napoleon tried to suffocate, unsuccessfully.

Finally, we have to demythify Western Human Rights history and theory and replace them with a counter-narrative that encompasses the historical anti-colonial pursuit of liberation from imperial domination and the contemporary decolonial struggles of Indigenous Peoples for their survival as free subjects and for the survival of their historical and natural context (from the Zapatista liberation movement and the enduring Palestinian struggle). The activism of Mahatma Gandhi, the fracture of Marxism in its encounter with the colonial world (Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon), the border thinking of Gloria Anzaldúa, and the indigenous women's movement of Rigoberta Menchú may support, among others, the epistemic decolonial shift, in order to "delink" (Mignolo 2007) southern epistemology from the colonial matrix that has governed conventional Human Rights theory since the 16th century.

The rational way to rights

Although fifty states somehow participated in the writing of the drafts of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued in 1948, this document was the output of a restricted panel of hegemonic Western powers – essentially the United States, Great Britain, and France. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration is quite telling in this regard. It reads:

All *human beings* are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with *reason* and conscience and *should* act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. (my emphasis)

Although the phrase "human beings" is inclusive and large enough to hold each single featherless biped living on earth, it is marred by the fact that s/he should be endowed with 'reason'. This reveals the Platonic-Kantian genealogy of the notion of the human being based

on Western foundational philosophy, which deems reason superior or 'stronger' than senti-ment. In this respect, neo-pragmatic philosopher Richard Rorty contrasts Hume and Kant. If, in Kant, morality is a question of obedience to universal rules of pure reason, in Hume the grounds of morality do not rest on rational faculties but on sentimental ones. Moreover, Rorty, who tries to develop his view of Human Rights on a practical ethos, claims that constructing morality on reason is a good means for secularizing the Christian principle of brotherhood, but

outside the circle of post-Enlightenment European culture, the circle of relatively safe and secure people who have been manipulating one another's sentiments for two hundred years, most people are simply unable to understand why membership in a biological species is supposed to suffice for membership in a moral community. (1998, 178)

In short, Rorty's philosophical arguments try to go beyond the limits of Western mainstream metaphysical speculation and meet the decolonial thinking's ones. To Grosfoguel, any discus-sion on Human Rights today, above all in times of continuing Palestinian massacre in Gaza Strip, should admit at least three postulates:

1st Postulate: Human Rights in the mid 20th century is a continuation of the Western Global/Colonial designs of Rights of People in the 16th century and Rights of Man in the 18th century.
2nd Postulate: The notion of "human dignity" in the first article of the UN Declaration of Human Rights is a Western-centric notion that privileges the individual over community-based definitions.
3rd Postulate: Human Rights rhetoric was always applied against enemies of the Western Imperialist United Front and overlooked when dealing with friendly regimes. (2009, 89-90)

While the first two postulates have to do with the provincialising and the deparochialising of Western human rights, the third one has to do exactly with the scandalous limits of a theory grounded on the Kantian project of the transcendental rational subject. With reference to Yugoslavian slaughters in the 1990s, Rorty argues that although Serbians murderers are endowed with "reason and conscience," as the Universal Declaration proclaims, they

do not think of themselves as violating human rights. For they are not doing these things to fellow human beings, but to Muslims. They are not being inhuman, but rather are discriminating between true humans and pseudo-humans. They are making the same sort of distinction the Crusaders made between humans and infidel dogs, and Black Muslims make between humans and blue-eyed devils. The founder of my university [President Thomas Jefferson] was able both to own slaves and to think it self-evident that all men were endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. This was because he had convinced himself that the consciousness of blacks, like that of animals, "participates more of sensation than of reflection". Like the Serbs, Mr. Jefferson did not think of himself as violating human rights. (1998, 167)

On the contrary, limiting the case to Serbs, they thought they were acting rationally and their cleansing was done in the interests of true human beings like themselves and not of pseudo-human beings like the Muslims. The ways to bring about distress to our fellow human beings goes beyond the scope of human reason or, perhaps, it falls exactly within its dialectic, as Horkheimer and Adorno (2007) would have it, when reason becomes instrumental.

As a result, if the doctrine and practice of Human Rights is not applied globally but only to a part of humanity, as Grosfoguel reminds us, it follows that rationality is not enough to guarantee rights to everyone but only to our 'friends'. Moreover, Rorty suggests that it is not a good idea to encourage people

to label "irrational" the intolerant people they have trouble tolerating. For that Platonic-Kantian epithet suggests that […] we good people know something these bad people do not know and that it is probably their own silly fault that they do not know it. All they had to do, after all, was to think a little harder, be a little more self-conscious, a little more rational. (1998, 179-80)

Finally, all they have to do is be a little more "like us" in the West. But, who are we? We are those 'fundamentalist' creatures believing that the idea of reason lies only in the West while non-reason lies only in the Rest. This sort of epistemic racism is as old as the colonial matrix of power, according to which non-Western epistemologies and cosmologies are inferior forms of knowledge (Mignolo 2007) and Western epistemology the only source to define human rights and the related concepts of civilization, democracy, citizenship, etc.

Not surprisingly, the humanist Renan was convinced that Semites (Arabs and Jews alike) were anti-philosophic and anti-scientific in their nature. Even more surprising, thanks to the whitening process in Western metropolitan centres, the Jews have been assimilated as "whites", and as a result modern, developed and capable of founding a democratic westernised state right in the middle of an irrational, backward, underdeveloped region (Said 1992). So we are told by mainstream media that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East. A democracy, though, that does not respect the democracy of the other.[8] The Israeli conduct is justified under the name of the fight against Islamic terror or fundamentalism. This is another example of how a Human Rights rhetoric centred on rationality may give birth to irrational outcomes, as it does not consider those regarded as 'irrational' worthy of being respected.

The sentimental-mediatic way to rights

Can there be anything more irrational than this? A people who suffered mass genocide, because of their Semitic belonging, is now carrying out another kind of genocide towards another Semitic people, accusing them of being a threat to the Jews' existence. Rationality, then, does not seem a reliable agent on which to found a respectful attitude towards the other. Therefore, Rorty advocates sympathy rather than reason:

By "sympathy" I mean the sort of reactions Athenians had more of after seeing Aeschylus's *The Persians* than before, the sort that whites in the United States had more of after reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* than before, the sort we have more of after watching television programs about the genocide in Bosnia. (1998, 180)

In short, the proposal is for a moral culture inspired by a marginal stream of modern ethics, namely the theory of moral sentiments. This cultural form appeals less to the Kantian

motto "dare to know!" than to the motto "dare to feel!" of the Age of Sensibility, dominant at the end of the 18th century. That sensibility was nurtured through sympathetic imagination.[9] To Rorty, the best answer to the question "Why should I care about a stranger?" is "The sort of long, sad, sentimental story that begins, 'Because this is what it is like to be in her situation – to be far from home, among strangers…'" (1998, 185). Barreto talks of "the sensibilisation of the epoch by its poeticisation" through stories that, further to strengthening the capacity to sympathise with those who suffer, contribute to form an impulse to act, transforming this sentiment into effective human or political solidarity (2011, 111). These stories may belong to literary genres but also to any art that relies on stories that help the moral subject turn into a warm and sympathetic human being.

The question of human rights is powerfully and newly set by what in the call for this paper has been referred to as the "percolating South," that is to say, by the global southern diaspora (mass migration), through new forms of popular artistic engagement – like spoken poetry, video and graphic arts, music performances, etc. – helped by the use of digital media (mass mediation). Such is the case of hip hop activist singers, independent film makers, spoken word artists in the context of the Palestinian diaspora or the Israeli apartheid regime. Human rights, diasporic processes, and the issue of the nation-state are deeply related. Giorgio Agamben exposes the ambiguity of the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man (already implicit in the very title of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of 1789) in the nation-state system, where you have rights if you are a citizen. As a result, refugees, according to Agamben, represent a disquieting element in the order of the modern nation-state, "above all because by breaking the continuity between man and citizen, *nativity* and *nationality*, they put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis" (1998, 131). It goes without saying, then, that the question of the "bare life" of the Palestinians is, in the first place, connected to the protection of a state, which is lacking because of Israeli settler colonialism. In the second place, as Arjun Appadurai has also noted, the nation-state is entering a crisis (although recent political events on both sides of the Atlantic seem to point to a different direction) and "a postnational imaginary must be around us already" (1996, 21). Particularly, his general argument is that there is a link to be found between the work of the imagination and the emergence of a postnational political world:

As mass mediation becomes increasingly dominated by electronic media (and thus delinked from the capacity to read and write), and as such media increasingly link producers and audiences across national boundaries, and as these audiences themselves start new conversations between those who move and those who stay, we find a growing number of diasporic public spheres. (Appadurai 1996, 21-22)

The terms "popular" or "mass" culture are complex *per se*, but even more so in the global southern context, where they are mostly associated with Western culture, especially if con-nected with the use of the new media. For example, there is a controversy over 'tradition'

versus 'modernity' in the Middle Eastern and North African context that goes hand in hand with the debate on the history of colonialism. As Walid El Hamamsy and Mounira Soliman point out, popular culture "becomes suspect in the eyes of many as an 'alien' form of cultural production that does not suit Middle Eastern and North African tastes, values, or 'traditions'" (2013, 1-2). Nevertheless, dichotomies like "elite/popular" culture are common to both the West and the South and we know, after Stuart Hall (1998), that popular culture is the arena both of consent and of dissent, both in the West and in the non-West.

Southern diasporic mediations: Rafeef Ziadah

As to Palestine and its related diaspora, in the last decade 'the people' has raised its voice of dissent and resistance. Hiphop singers (like Omar Offendum, Shadia Mansour, DAM, the first Palestinian hip hop crew), film makers (like Amer Shomali and his award-winning animated documentary *The Wanted 18*, Sharif Waked and his seven-minute video *Chic point*), spoken word artists (like Rafeef Ziadah) are some instances of such creative resistance, which cross the borders between mass culture and traditional culture, between Western and Middle Eastern culture. Let us now focus on the case of Rafeef Ziadah.

She is a third-generation Palestinian refugee, born in Beirut, brought up in Canada and now living in London. As a spoken word poet and human rights activist, Rafeef Ziadah belongs to one of the "diasporic public spheres" that Appadurai speaks about. And as a public intellectual, she has participated in the late debate about Israel as a settler colony:

Understanding Israel as a settler colonial state [...] helps us to move beyond the Oslo narrative of conflict resolution and dialogue between two equal sides to a serious analysis of the Zionist project in Palestine. That project is rooted in dispossession, and maintained through a sophisticated matrix of apartheid policies against Palestinians everywhere, not just in the territories occupied in 1967. (Bhandar and Ziadah 2016)

For this reason, she stresses the commonalities and the distinctions of anti-colonial resistance the Dakota and Palestinians pose, likewise, as indigenous in settler societies.

She has released two CDs: *Hadeel* in 2009 and *We Teach Life* in 2015. As an active member of BDS (the "Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions" movement), Ziadah's primary purpose is, as she states, "to seek equality and justice against racism and extreme Zionist ideologies" (quoted in Farooq 2012). She does it through political activism *and* poetry. The Canadian-Palestinian performer clarifies in an interview that it is difficult to separate the politics from poetry because they are deep-rooted in her entire history: "being born into a war and invasion in Lebanon, growing up undocumented as a Palestinian refugee, seeing the first intifada, the second intifada, the current popular uprising that's going on the ground – [the combination politics/poetry] speaks to me" (Barrows-Friedman 2015). Therefore, her spoken poetry bridges art and politics. In another video-interview, she states that what she loves "about spoken word is that it is oppositional in its form and its content [... and] hopefully can bridge

that gap between the political and the artistic, between culture and politics" (Ziadah 2015).

Despite its undeniable hard matter, reality is often reduced to a textual battle of competing representations. Rationality, we have said, cannot prevent irrational actions, just like Mr Jefferson, who, though he rationally thought the blacks were endowed with some inalienable rights, could not help violating those rights. However, it can be claimed that while historical interpretations of the massacres in Sabra and Shatila (1982) or in Jenin (2002) refugee camps may be open to some debate, it would be difficult to deny that a personal experience has not been lived. In brief, there is "a poetic truth that the act of utterance" may convey through living words, rhythm, body language, ultimately, through "an ethic of aurality" (Rooney and Sakr 2013, 211), in our case, an ethic of "listening" to human sufferings.

Ziadah's spoken poetry is a pure example of the sensibilisation/poeticisation of an age. "Shades of Anger" is the second track of her 2009 debut CD *Hadeel* and was successfully performed in London in 2011. It went viral up to 293,572 YouTube visualisations as of May 23, 2017.[10] The backstory was told by the poet herself before the performance:

I wrote this poem when we were doing a direct action at my university […] a Zionist came by... as I was lying on the ground this guy came and kicked me right in the gut really hard and said "You deserve to be raped before you have your terrorist children." At that time, I said nothing but then I wrote this poem for this young gentleman. (Ziadah 2011)

The poet starts by asking for permission to speak first in her mother tongue, then in English, before her language is occupied, too. Afterwards, calling herself "an Arab woman of colour," exactly situating her subject's position as far as race and gender are concerned, she goes on with a breathless rhythm:

Allow me to speak my mother tongue
before they colonise her memory as well
I am an Arab woman of colour
and we come in all shades of anger
All my grandfather ever wanted to do
was wake up at dawn and watch my grandmother kneel and pray
in a village hidden between Jaffa and Haifa
my mother was born under an olive tree
on a soil, they say, is no longer mine
but I will cross their barriers, their check points
their damn apartheid walls and return to my homeland
I am an Arab woman of colour and we come in all shades of anger
And did you hear my sister screaming yesterday
as she gave birth at a check point
with Israeli soldiers looking between her legs
for their next demographic threat
called her baby girl "Janeen"
And did you hear Amni Mona screaming
behind their prison bars as they teargassed her cell
"We're returning to Palestine!"
I am an Arab woman of colour and we come in all shades of anger
But you tell me, this womb inside me
will only bring you your next terrorist

beard wearing, gun waving, towelhead, sand nigger
You tell me, I send my children out to die
but those are your copters, your F16's in our sky
And let's talk about this terrorism business for a second
Wasn't it the CIA that killed Allende and Lumumba
and who trained Osama in the first place
My grandparents didn't run around like clowns
with the white capes and the white hoods on their heads lynching black people
I am an Arab woman of colour and we come in all shades of anger
"So who is that brown woman screaming in the demonstration?"
Sorry, should I not scream?
I forgot to be your every orientalist dream
Jinnee in a bottle, belly dancer, harem girl, soft spoken Arab woman
Yes master, no master
Thank you for the peanut butter sandwiches
raining down on us from your F16's, master
Yes, my liberators are here to kill my children
and call them "collateral damage"
I am an Arab woman of colour and we come in all shades of anger
So, let me just tell you this womb inside of me
will only bring you your next rebel
She will have a rock in one hand and a Palestinian flag in the other
I am an Arab woman of colour
Beware! Beware my anger.

The poem ends echoing the final lines in *Bitaqit Hawia* (Identity Card) by the Palestinian national-al poet Mahmoud Darwish:

Beware…
Beware...
Of my hunger
And my anger! (quoted in Said 1992, 156)

This time, though, the words are spoken live and blend the learned written literary canon with the oral folk tradition practiced in the Arab regions. Now the words are scattered from the stage over the audience, who cannot help participating with thrilled applause and cheers. Thus, the feeling aroused is turned into potential human or political solidarity.

The audience reaction to the delivery of the poem, one of delighted cheers and whoops, could arguably be translated as 'Yes! You've done it! You've put into words what they are trying to silence!' And, in turn, with this audience response, what the camera captures is Ziadah's facial expression of joy at the success of her performance. But in fact the success of the performance is that it is not just a perform-ance: it succeeds precisely because it comes across as for *real*, meaning as a *genuine*, *heartfelt* response. (Rooney and Sakr 2013, 212; my emphasis)

Though this comment was for another powerful performance ("We teach life, sir": almost one million YouTube visualisations as of May 26, 2017), this is exactly what happens in every single Ziadah's 'delivery', as the critics specify, in its auratic present tense dimension. She dares to feel and dares to make the audience feel! She makes the audience feel what she feels. But more: all the grief of an oppressed people has been felt by the 293,572 more viewers,

seeing and listening to the poet online afterwards. While losing its present tense live dimension, the video *mechanically reproduces* and spreads in viral ways the feeling she lives as "an Arab woman of colour," dispossessed of her *human right* to a homeland, because of a late settler-colonialist project transcended into the 21st century.

Southern 'postcolonial' mediations: Amer Shomali

Another way to 'sensibilise' the age about human rights is provoking smile or laughter through the use of irony. This is what the Palestinian multidisciplinary artist Amer Shomali tries to achieve through his posters, drawings, paintings, cartoons, and films. Born in Kuwait, forced to live in a Syrian refugee camp, after his studies in animation design in the UK, Shomali moved to Ramallah (Palestine), where he is currently based. As we can read on his website, he wants to contribute to the collective consciousness by reproducing "history and heritage while being critical of the present; doing so with an emphasis on the aesthetics of the artwork and its ability to be contemporary."[11] He also believes "that a nation that can't make fun of its own wounds will never be able to heal them" (Fox 2015).[12]

That is why in 2014 he co-directed an award-winning animated documentary called *The Wanted 18*, humorously telling the Palestinians' struggle for justice and autonomy through the eyes of four cows. *The Wanted 18* is a true story about four cows bought from an Israeli kibbutz by some Palestinians who tried to boycott Israeli products and independently provide milk to their community, earning, thus, the title of 'lactivists'. As a result, after being officially declared "dangerous for the security of the state of Israel," the cows played an unexpected role in the First Intifada in the late 1980s. Of course, as Shomali made clear in an interview, "it was a bit dangerous to have a mother telling a story about her kid dying in a demonstration next to some animation of farting cows, but we needed this mix of sadness and comedy."[13] It was a risk he had to take if he wanted to attract attention to Palestinian scars, and open wounds, in a new way.

Shomali also tries to 'poeticise' the historical question of Palestine through the postmodern and 'postcolonial' (if the word may be uttered *sine glossa* in an apartheid-regime colony) appropriation of canonical art. In 1995, in a gesture of hope in the post-Oslo Accords period, David Tartakover, an Israeli artist known for his opposition to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, obtained Franz Krausz's permission to reprint his popular 1936 poster "Visit Palestine." An Austrian Jewish immigrant to Palestine in the 1930s, who fled Germany before the Holocaust, Krausz designed graphics for Zionist advertising in Palestine before and after 1948, when the Arab-Israeli war and *Nakba* (the catastrophe, that is to say the expulsion of much of the Palestinian population), occurred to make room for the state of Israel. Why is the reprint of the "Visit Palestine" poster so significant? Because, despite countless Israeli denials, the poster testifies that Palestine and Palestinians do exist.

The importance of Krausz' poster, beyond the slogan "Visit Palestine," stems from his

choice of making the Dome of the Rock – a Muslim shrine built in the 17th century – and the area around it the most recognisable part of the poster. As a matter of fact, as the Palestine Poster Project Archives shows, by hosting 114 Zionist pre-Israeli state posters,[14] a lot of material produced by Israelis for touristic consumption includes the Dome of the Rock and the word "Palestine."

Following the reprinting of the "Visit Palestine" poster, a myriad of other posters and artworks were produced by revising the original. Among them, we find Shomali's "Post (Visit Palestine) or The Guillotine" (2009), where, satirically appropriating the original, he places the Israeli separation wall between the landscape and the tree, the point of viewing.

Fig. 1. Franz Krausz, "Visit Palestine" (1936). Published by the Tourist Development Association of Palestine.

Fig. 2. Amer Shomali, "Post (Visit Palestine) or The Guillotine" (2009). Silk screen printing on acid free paper, 100*70 cm.

On the poster image, Shomali credits Krausz and writes: "I agree that adding the wall is vandalism and a rude intervention. The Designer." Thus, it is ironically left to the viewer to decide which vandalism he is referring to: either the artist's or Israel's. As he says on his website: "After the failure of the peace process [Oslo Accords] it was the time for a third print declaring the failure of the previous two prints."[15] Talking about the failure of the prints is, of course, ironic. But to Shomali, the main irony or the heterogenesis of ends stems from the poster's provenance (the second print of which, Shomali tells us, is still available in the Tel Aviv Museum), of which the Palestinians take advantage "to thumb their noses at the Israeli government that for decades claimed there had never been such a place."[16] A further irony is

that also this work of art has been *mechanically reproduced* and spread virally, because it has been printed and sold in huge numbers in Jerusalem as a souvenir gift from the Holy Land.

Shomali's parodic poster, in a very postmodern manoeuvre, "operates as a hinge between past, present and future by becoming a palimpsest […]. The wall testifies to the attempt by the state of Israel to not just incarcerate the Palestinians but to wall off the past" (Ashcroft 2017, 54). Colonialist Israel incarcerates the past and, above all, the present: the right of the Palestinians to exist in the present. Finally, it is a walling of the horizon, of the future of a people. It is a theft represented very clearly in Shomali's palimpsest-poster, which is, as Bill Ashcroft puts it, "both visual, political and spiritual and only a utopian view of the horizon of the future can offer the prospect of freedom" (2017, 54). We would add that a decolonial utopian view and an anti-colonial struggle will help the Palestinians gain the prospect of freedom, their right to exist, their right to return to their land.

Depicted by the widely known (and allegedly assassinated by Mossad agents in London in 1987) cartoonist Naji El-Ali as a ten-year-old boy forced to leave Palestine, the figure "Handala" is the iconic symbol of the Palestinian silent witness of injustice.

Fig. 3. "Handala" by Naji El-Ali.

We know that Palestine will be free only when he grows up and he will grow up only when allowed to return to Palestine.[17] We know that that the time will come when he will no longer turn his back to us. Until then, our consciousness should follow him wherever he decides to go with his hands clasped behind his back, as a sign of denial of Palestinian and global human rights.

Notes

[1] "The history of the world travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of history, Asia the beginning" (Hegel 2010, 103), while "Africa is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature" (Hegel 2010, 99).

[2] "Nature has made a race of workers, the Chinese race, who have wonderful manual dexterity and almost no sense of honour; govern them with justice, levying from them, in return for the blessing of such a government, an ample allowance for the conquering race, and they will be satisfied; a race of tillers of the soil, the Negro; treat him with kindness and humanity, and all will be as it should; a race of masters and soldiers, the European race. Reduce this noble race to working the ergastulum like Negroes and Chinese, and they rebel" (E. Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale,* 1871, quoted in Césaire 2000, 38).

[3] "It conjoins multiple localities and temporalities, from the zones of rural poverty in nineteenth-century Europe that conjoins Scandinavia, Scotland and Ireland with Italy and Greece, to the colonial rampage unleashed by Europe on Africa, Asia and the Americas since 1500" (Chambers 2017, 28).

[4] Iain Chambers, talking about the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, sarcastically calls a similar chronology "the model of 1776, 1789, 1848, 1917," where "the necessary stages and temporalities [are] understood, the standard established" (2017, 63-64).

[5] This charter has been inscribed in 2009 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity kept by UNESCO: see Kouyatis 2009.

[6] At the Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar, the French President Sarkozy, still in 2007 and while apologizing for European colonialism, stated that "the tragedy of Africa is that the African has never really entered history" (quoted in Wynne-Jones/Fleisher 2015, 23).

[7] According to Marina Svensson (2000), in his *The Rights of Men* (1940) Wells insisted on the importance of a true universalisation of human rights.

[8] As to the Israeli democracy, Albert Memmi has noted: "Every colonial nation carries the seeds of fascist temptation in its bosom" (1967, 62), while the very voice of a liberal Zionism, David Grossman, emphasises how "it is impossible for a state to maintain true democracy while simultaneously upholding a regime of occupation and oppression" (2008, 115).

[9] Lawrence Sterne gave a famous parodic example in the passage of the starling in the cage, which made Yorick think of the the millions of his "fellow creatures born to no inheritance but slavery" (1984, 72).

[10] Rafeef Ziadah, "Shades of Anger," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2vFJE93LTI, accessed July 14, 2017.

[11] See http://www.amershomali.info/biography/, accessed July 14, 2017.

[12] See "The Wanted 18: a tale of talking cows and Palestinian rebellion," *The Guardian*, 22 March 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/mar/22/the-wanted-18-a-tale-of-talking-cows-and-palestinian-rebellion, accessed July 14, 2017.

[13] See "The Wanted 18: a tale of talking cows and Palestinian rebellion," *The Guardian*, 22 March 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/mar/22/the-wanted-18-a-tale-of-talking-cows-and-palestinian-rebellion, accessed July 14, 2017.

[14] Palestine Poster Project Archives, https://www.palestineposterproject.org/, accessed July 14, 2017.

[15] A. Shomali, http://www.amershomali.info/post-visit-palestine/, accessed July 14, 2017.

[16] A. Shomali, http://www.amershomali.info/post-visit-palestine/, accessed July 14, 2017.

[17] See http://www.handala.org/handala/, accessed July 14, 2017.

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