TOWARD THE NEXT INTIFADA



COLLECTED WRITINGS OF BASEL AL-ARAJ

Though we don't have much of it in English—this is, to our knowledge, everything—Basel al-Araj's writing speaks for itself, both in its concrete content and in the way it hangs together, secured by a signature method of thinking. His aunt tells us that "his idea of knowing was actually trying." He understood Palestine from the vantage of an incomplete revolutionary event which drew closer with every word and deed spoken and done in its service. This loyalty was not to this or that established party, but to what the revolution in occupied Palestine could become. The result is a collection of compact, precise essays, always anchored in the tactical necessities of the revolutionary moment.

Lake Effect Collective

AN ICON FOR A LOST GENERATION

Jaclynn Ashly · Oct. 12, 2020

Since his killing, Bassel al-Araj has become one of the most recognizable icons in Palestine. The image of the revolutionary activist – a pharmacist by trade and education and unaffiliated to any of the existing Palestinian factions – his signature black-framed glasses perched on his nose, a gun strapped over his shoulder and wrapped in a checkered keffiyeh, adorns neighborhoods up and down streets in the occupied West Bank.

And al-Araj's influence on friends and fellow activists has grown even stronger more than three-and-a-half years after the 31-year-old was killed in a stand-off with Israeli forces in al-Bireh on the outskirts of Ramallah on 6 March 2017. His death was deeply disturbing to Palestinians, not least because of the role of the Palestinian Authority. His family accused the PA of complicity in his killing.

Al-Araj, along with five others, was arrested by PA security forces at the end of March and the beginning of April 2016 and held for nearly six months on allegations of planning an attack on Israelis, Israeli media reported at the time. They were subjected to torture and ill-treatment in jail, prompting them to launch a hunger strike until they were released in September 2016. He came to be known as the victim of security coordination between the PA and Israel, which he vocally opposed through his writing.

Eventually, most of the men were rearrested by Israeli forces and put in administrative detention – imprisonment without charge or trial. Al-Araj, however, had gone into hiding. It took months until the Israeli military located the activist and marched into al-Bireh where a two-hour stand-off ensued.

At the time, he was armed with a Carlo submachine gun – a homemade Palestinian gun based on a Swedish design – and an M16 rifle, the Israeli military said. It was also reported that he was killed by Israeli forces after he had run out of ammunition.

"We've been missing the spirit of revolution that we had before Oslo and before the creation of the PA," said Jamal Juma, a prominent Palestinian activist and coordinator of the Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign.

(The Oslo agreement, signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993, gave birth to the Palestinian Authority.)

"Bassel acted as a kind of mirror to those legacies of resistance. He was an intellectual; he was criticizing everything and he was brave." Juma said al-Araj was a hero for a new generation that is in need of a message: "That they are still here and still resisting – and nothing, not even Oslo, can stop this tradition of resistance."

Resistance is possible

Sheerin al-Araj remembers her nephew as a "simple and humble boy." "Bassel was very down to earth," she told The Electronic Intifada. "He didn't even believe in himself initially, but he was the most curious person I've ever met in my life. Ever since he was old enough to read, all my books started disappearing. I can't find any of my books anymore."

Al-Araj soon set out on a lifelong journey researching revolutions and figures from around the world – from Palestine, Vietnam, Algeria and South America to France – and became absorbed in various analyses, philosophies, political ideologies and theories. Among the books found at his shelter were those written by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and Mahdi Amel, a Lebanese Marxist assassinated in Beirut 30 years ago.

He had an "encyclopedic knowledge" of Palestinian history, said Ahmad, a close friend, who requested that The Electronic Intifada use a pseudonym out of fear for his personal security. "He knew every character and every little detail. He knew our whole history by heart. His storytelling was something that really affected us," Ahmad said. "It was like he lived with the characters. He would bring all these historical Palestinian figures to life. He knew the stories behind the stories."

He took this wealth of knowledge to the Popular University, an informal education project focused on teaching topics that are neglected in mainstream Palestinian university education, such as histories of resistance, settler colonial studies, the political economy of exploitation in Palestine and various other topics.

Al-Araj taught a course called "Palestinian resistance since the inception of settler-colonialism," in which the activist took students through more than a century of Palestinian resistance, from Palestinian Ottoman history up until Israel's military assaults on Gaza in 2008-2009 and 2012, in which more than 1,500 Palestinians, mostly civilians, were killed. These were not just stories or lessons for al-Araj. He believed that for Palestinians to adequately respond to their current political situation, they had to look back to their history and find direction from their own unique traditions of resistance.

"I think what we suffer from, at least on the level of the so-called political leadership, is that these people are basically now turning defeat into an

ideology and an institution called the Palestinian Authority, where they cooperate with the Israelis," Ahmad said. Defeat has also become a "way of life" in Palestine, Ahmad told The Electronic Intifada, particularly in the occupied West Bank, where society has shifted into new modes of consumerism and lives are predicated on free market capitalism and individualism.

According to Ahmad, al-Araj represented the "rejection of defeat" – and was willing to give his life for it. "We cannot accept Palestinian defeat […] because settler-colonialism doesn't leave any room for you to accept it; its aim is to eliminate you as a person and as an identity," he told The Electronic Intifada.

Al-Araj attempted to help those around him realize that "resistance is possible," Ahmad said. "Resistance is something that can give Palestinians a new horizon. Something other than these ideologies of markets, consumerism, defeat and cooperation with colonialism that the PA represents."

'Authentic voice'

Al-Araj had a great impact on those he met. Ahmad described him as someone who talked a lot, was constantly telling stories, cracking jokes, while also openly confronting those he disagreed with. "He was not shy about confronting people," Ahmad told the Electronic Intifada. That also caused people to criticize and scorn him, his friend said.

But if al-Araj was talkative and social with friends, he was considered a loner by his family in al-Walaja, the small village between Bethlehem and Jerusalem where he was born, and was often misunderstood by those closest to him. "He spent most of his time at home in front of a computer and reading," Sheerin said. "So for us, he was this isolated boy. If he speaks about anything, it's always something far-fetched. No one gave him a lot of attention and not many people could understand him."

It was not al-Araj's political thought that set him apart from other activists. In fact, many young Palestinians hold similar ideologies. But Bassel was significant because he was "truly authentic," Ahmad said. "He was true to his word and that's something we miss today in Palestine."

"Bassel's idea of knowing was actually trying," Sheerin told The Electronic Intifada. "This man was not just thinking theoretically, he was very much applying what he said. He knew that things cannot just be said. It has to be tried and applied." Sheerin recounted a conversation they'd had – one of many that would last for hours on end, debating and discussing various resistance strategies and theories. Al-Araj had asked Sheerin about her work with women in their village which is set to be almost entirely encircled by Israel's separation wall.

Sheerin explained her idea for a recycling project. It did not take long for al-Araj to begin downloading resources from the internet and litter his

house with scattered items that he attempted to recycle. "Bassel was someone who knew that you couldn't just throw words at people or encourage them to do things that you yourself don't know how to do," Sheerin said. He approached resistance and activism the same way.

In 2010, he studied the popular resistance movements that were emerging in villages like Bilin and Nabi Saleh, where weekly protests are held against the Israeli occupation. But after a few years, he concluded that the methodology was ineffective, Sheerin said. He then redirected his energy into equipping Palestinians with historical and theoretical knowledge for when the right time comes to resist. "He was generating this [sense of] heroism around Palestine and planting it in others," Sheerin explained.

He quit his job as a pharmacist partly because the pharmacy sold Israeli products when Palestinian alternatives existed and began researching full time, Ahmad said.

But an apparently spontaneous 2015 uprising – sometimes referred to as the habba, sometimes as the "intifada of individuals" – changed al-Araj's political trajectory. According to his friends and family, he believed that this was a significant uprising and decided that he wanted to be a part of it.

'The entire Palestinian story'

The young activist was outspoken about his support for armed resistance. But Sheerin had always assumed it was just another one of their theoretical debates that they had engaged in for many years. "Bassel always told me that you can't say something without doing it," Sheerin said. "You can't tell people that this is the right way and not be prepared to do it yourself. But I never thought he would take it to this step." The family was "shocked" by al-Araj's arrest and his subsequent assassination, Sheerin said.

"The minute he was arrested was when his family started learning more about him. The family didn't really understand what he was doing or why he was doing it. But it was after his death that they started to realize why he had quit his pharmacy career and that he wasn't just a crazy man who decided to do something out of the blue."

According to Sheerin, al-Araj's death also served to unite al-Walaja, which had been divided over social and political disagreements.

"We have a lot of problems with the Israelis and we were divided over how we should confront them. But everyone came together with his death. The whole village came to Bassel's funeral and mourned as if it was their own son who was killed," Sheerin said.

His assassination elevated him to the status of an icon. Many Palestinians who had never heard of al-Araj began familiarizing themselves with the

activist's writings and ideologies. Juma believes it was a combination of his personality and the manner of his death that has made al-Araj's story so resonant among Palestinians, and more powerful than those of other Palestinian activists who have been killed by Israeli troops or spies.

"Bassel was an intellectual and at the same time he believed in armed resistance," Juma said. "He brought together these two things that reminded people of the fighters of the 1960s and 1970s – like Ghassan Kanafani and Mahmoud Darwish – when the armed struggle was connected to the arts, literature, and intellectualism. And at the end he didn't surrender," Juma added. "He was killed fighting. He died with his gun next to him. Up until the last moment he was resisting."

Juma said that reflection of an oft-told past resistance as well as the embodiment of an anger that is widespread among Palestinian youths has made him a representative of an entire generation. "Young people saw themselves in Bassel. He represented the anger inside them that they can't express. They saw in Bassel the entire Palestinian story – the uncertainty of the future, the fear, the dignity and the spirit and desperation for revolution."

Ahmad says he thinks al-Araj still has an influence on a new generation of activists and youths who are "looking for different ways to confront a hopeless situation." His influence is hard to point out in a concrete way, Ahmad said, but it's "there in the background."

Sheerin told The Electronic Intifada that the central reason young Palestinians were attracted to al-Araj after his death was because "he was honest in every single thing he did or said … to the extreme. His honesty is what made him an icon," she said. "We dream of having leaders with the kind of honesty that Bassel had. He is the dream for all of us and he is the kind of person we want to lead us. He lived up to his word."

But the ones who were impacted the most, according to Ahmad, were those who knew him personally. "For him Palestine was the sole purpose of every little fiber in his being. He had this energy around Palestine and a hope in the Palestinian cause that you see in very few people. Nobody was as energetic," Ahmad said. Al-Araj's singular quality, according to Ahmad, was his optimism. Bassel, Ahmad said, saw Palestine as "the answer to his existential questions."

"He truly believed and he had hope. He committed himself 24 hours a day to the struggle … That's what made him so central and influential for a lot of us, because we saw hope in him. That energy is what we really miss."

WHY DO WE GO TO WAR?

Basel al-Araj · April 5, 2021

My dear friend,

Starting from today, I will be writing for you. I will write with the amazement of children and with a faith that the prophets have, and I will never be worried about what I am writing. If I live, I will discover either the dreams of children and their fantasies, or I will discover the visions of the prophets, and what I have written down here shall never harm me if I die.

You, my friend, are variegated. Sometimes I see you as a male, and at other times as a female. Sometimes I see you as my comrade-in-arms and struggle; at other times, I see you as a political opponent. Sometimes I see you as one of my great teachers; at other times, I see you as one of my friends. For you, my friend, are nothing short of everyone I ever knew. In any case, each letter will represent a self-dialogue with some friend, a comrade, or a professor, and perhaps sometimes the dialogue will be with more than one person.

Do you know when the most intense monologue I create in this solitude of mine is? It's when my cigarettes start to run out, and tonight, my friend, I have half a dozen left, so let me tell you what's on my mind.

My dear friend,

I don't really know why I start thinking every time I run out of cigarettes, but I remember how one of my other friends described me as "primitive." Do you recall, my dear, what I told you one day: "The city will kill both of us. My hatred for it and my longing to escape its urbanization will kill me, and you will be killed by your ever-lasting greed for the city and its urbanization"?

In all cases, I found some humor in the explanation concerning my primitivism and cigarettes: an explorer asked once an Inuit, "what is on your mind?", and so the latter answered, "there is no need to think. I have enough food for now." The Inuit starts working his mind out when the food runs out, and so is the case for me when my cigarettes start to run out.

It is unfortunate that many of the things I used to say were taken seriously, even my nonsense and jokes about feminism, for example. You would always find someone who would take them seriously and argue with them,

so I consider it my duty here to say that, unfortunately, I have no claim to the truth, so do not search for it here and subject everything I say to doubt, even if I say it with a heart full of the prophets' faith. Rather, make room for thinking, even if I formulate my thoughts with childlike terms and expressions. As Ali Al-Wardi said: "Nothing invented by the human mind is more horrible than the plot of truth and reality." Therefore, here, I will claim neither truth nor reality, for I am following the doctrine of our teacher who said, "The truth is nothing but the path that you take in your truth-seeking journey."

My dear friend,

Why do we go to war? Of course, this is a question that haunts me alone, and I believe this question is one for all humanity. This question, in the adult world, is like asking children how they came into this world. Let me be liberated from a search for the elegance of words or the flow of ideas, and let me be liberated from generalizations or particularities. This question has been my companion for more than 20 years; I searched for its answer in the depths of books and the hearts and minds of professors. I searched for its answer in the biographies of heroes and martyrs, for you, my dear friend, know that its answer is directly related to the issue of heroism and martyrdom. Finally, I found that this question doesn't baffle me alone, but almost everyone I know, friend or foe. As you know, the "counterinsurgency" literature buzzes with this question.

Perhaps it's been eight months since my life began to take its proper course, since my first disappearance, then my imprisonment, and here we are in the midst of my second disappearance. Since those days, some things began to reveal themselves to me, and I do not know the reason. Is it experience and/or fear, anxiety and/or clarity of mind and devotion—I do not know the exact reason, or even if it is a hallucination, hallucinations of solitude? Is it a break from reality or an abstract clash with reality?

Have you read Omar Al-Farra's poem, "The Men of God on the Day of Conquest in Lebanon?" He traces the footsteps of these men, so I, like Omar Al-Farra, searched and traced the path of such men, the geography of heroism, martyrdom, and the history of self-sacrifice. Oh God, how humble I am when I walk through these mountains and go down these valleys. There is no comparison to my humility when I am here, even in prayer. I have been searching for an answer to this question on a journey that has lasted me 20 years. I search "for the truth and the missing faces," as my teacher would say about me. Now, let us get back to the question.

My dear friend,

Why do we go to war?

One day, you asked me the question, "What is wrong with the motivation for struggle being an individualistic, personal motivation?" while express-

ing objection to a certain piece of paper. This is not important. What is important on that day was that you told me about the story of Jasser Al-Barghouthi's cell, that young man who commanded one of the most important resistance cells in the West Bank during the Second Intifada. You told me that he decided to carry out his first operation because he was slapped in the face by a soldier at a checkpoint. Although I kept track of everything that was published about it back then, and although I know that the creation of the cell was not motivated by that slap, I still got carried away thinking about it, and still I asked you to narrate to me the cell's story, even though I know more about it than you. The reason behind that was that I liked your narrative much more than the official one about Jasser Al-Barghouthi, and so the slap was not what determined the man's choices. Your narrative ignited my imagination, in the words of our poet friend.

Let us stand here and take a look at all the stories known to history that involved heroism, martyrdom, and self-sacrifice. The world's narratives, including those of our enemies, have a common denominator. The question that lingers is: why do we go to war? The motivations, the duty, patriotism, the escape from troubles, religious and class beliefs, the duality of good and evil, of truth and falsehood, of revenge and greed? Maybe all of these motivations do exist. But they are not what make all of humanity's narratives so similar, for every dogma of faith has one that counters it, every line of patriotism has one that nullifies it, and so on. So for each one of those motivations, there exists one that counters or nullifies it on the other side of the battle.

And you realize, my friend, that in practice, there is no revolutionary ideology or a reactionary conservative one. Nor are there religions, lines, or currents that follow the same dichotomy, not even nationalities or identities or a people's structure. All of these carry an intrinsic opposition. And it is nothing more than an interpretation. I advise you to read about the Castilian battles against the Andalusian Muslims. You will notice that you feel like you are reading a narrative that's familiar to you from the stories of the Islamic conquests: a story about that weak, barely-armed frightened minority that turned to God in the depths of the nights, crying and begging for victory, and with the sun up, those same people became knights that turned towards their strong, numerous opponents in a fierce attack that ended with the latter's defeat. All of the stories involving patriotic, nationalistic, class and religious heroism follow the same line.

My dear friend,

My grandfather used to tell me about the story of the Druze revolution against the Turks. The story that the cause of the revolution was a verse of *ataba*,* and although I know the historical "facts" about that revolution, I

* The *ataaba* is a traditional Arabic musical form sung at weddings, festivals, and other occasions

have always been amazed by my grandfather's narrative.

Take, for example, the enemy's narratives about their own heroes. Cross out the names and the fighting parties, and listen to the narrative. You will find yourself engaging with it. Man, since you are interested in movies, note, for example, the movie "We Were Soldiers" by Mel Gibson. Despite our full and unconditional sympathy for the Vietnamese, we definitely fell in love with Mel Gibson's character and his heroism. By the way, compare this matter to the movies "The Patriot" and "Braveheart" by the same actor.

My dear friend,

I apologize for stretching out the question. Why do we go to war? We go to it looking for romance. The romance of war, that creates a new type of human, for no one stays the same after experiencing war. We chase this romance, and nothing ignites romance more than war. I recommend that you read a book titled "Memoirs of Soldiers." This book has amazed me and informed me about things I couldn't express previously with human language. Maybe language has never failed you or our poet friend, and so you will never know what it's like to be unable to express your thoughts. It is true that we go to war to seek romance, and perhaps I was ashamed of admitting this to myself. You know how much of a cliché this term has turned into. I used to run away from this romance whenever it tried to sweep me away, and I used to try and make sense of all those motives. We're too arrogant to admit this reason but we all know that what draws us towards heroism and martyrdom is the same thing that we are so ashamed to admit: romance.

Retroactively, I went back to what I used to write about the biographies of those heroes, only to find out in hindsight that I used to unknowingly admit it—that we seek romance—all along through the language I used to write with. Let me also tell you that, even though I believe now more than ever in the absurdity of putting words onto paper, I still do it until this moment with romance as my motivation: the thought of seeing your smile or your tear (and I know you don't shed tears anymore), the thought of a tear or an emotion expressed by someone reading it, the thought of hearing a word of flattery, and so on. This is what motivates me to write. And so, all other attempts to explain or find an answer to the question are not answers in themselves but are escapes from the answer; they are an attempt to rationalize romance.

We behold and explain the moment with these motivations. The question "why am I here?" cannot be answered except with patriotic, religious, nationalistic, and personal motives and so on, but I can look at the past through a romantic lens, and I can see the future that way, too. Maybe the reason is that romance doesn't exist in the first place; perhaps it is only a mirage that we are doomed to forever chase. We see it when we look behind. We see it when we look forward so that we chase it again, only for it to escape us. And in the moment that we finally catch romance, it turns out to be nothing more

than a few whiffs or ephemeral moments of contemplation that end quickly before the material world submits you again to your own reality.

Romance will collapse before your eyes from the first second you start walking on your path toward it; it will evaporate between your fingers at the start of your first real collision with reality, like smoke.

And let me tell you that my romance for war collapsed with my first step into the mountains, and yet, I still used to see it in front of me. I would run behind it, entrap it, and try to catch it while it was still dragging me down, and despite all of this, those few days were the most beautiful moments of my life. As we say in our dialect, "glory is to be found on the peaks of the mountains," and while we were in prison we added to it: "Glory is to be found on the peaks of the mountains and mountains are to be found in the chests of men." And again, we found ourselves in prison following the same pattern of chasing romance. And so, do you know what hope is? It is the swift pursuit of this romance and faith that you will reach and capture it. I reach my moment where I get the urge to cough, and the smoke of my cigarette blinds my eyes. With that, my romance escapes me again, but only for me to find it in the future. Giving lectures in prison about the "modern history of Palestine," and the desire to explain that history in order to find a rational logical answer, helped me and others endure the pain of prison. All of those attempts to explain it have done nothing but give me a clear vision of the path leading to an oasis of romance.

Now, the story of our Gazan friend who was hiking in the valleys of Al-Rad and Nablus in her first experience with the mountains. It was the first time she walked on the rocks. I asked her days before the hike about her impressions of the mountains. Her impressions were purely romantic. On the day of the hike, all of her bones nearly shattered. She completely fled from the romance she had been searching for. The next day, after she confirmed that she was repentant from climbing, she wrote the most beautiful text about the experience of hiking and recalled the history of heroism and martyrdom that she knows is linked to the mountain. When she transformed her experience to the past tense, she was able to see the romance in it.

It comes to my mind to ask, "what is romance in the first place?" And I find myself as you once described me, "a man of faith, not doubtful." I am absolutely sure that I do not need to define this, as certain as Nazik Al-Malaika, the Arab nationalist poet, when she said that some things that you feel and experience do not need a definition. So I will not ask you about its meaning or its linguistic roots.

And you, the academics, are always striving to remove magic from things by defining and interpreting them, thinking that you will reach the truth.

On these rainy days, I will tell you that I do not need an explanatory framework to explain the cause of rain, whether the reason is Thor's hammer or Allah's mercy on his servants, or science's interpretation of this phenome-

non. I want none of this; I only want my constant amazement and my foolish smile whenever it rains, to seem like the first time, the experience of the wonder of children, and the magic of the world.

Why do I say this about academics? I remembered the way they write history. They remove all romanticism from history, so most people do not like to read history, even though it is possible to write history with a methodology that preserves its romanticism. These are sound and appropriate tools of analysis and a serious historical methodology, but they cannot be taken seriously by any other academic if they do not take away the magic from things, the magic of romanticism.

And honestly, I don't know why there is this hostility of modernity towards romanticism. Do you know, for example, that the first practical applications of modern chemistry and physics were originally to add magic to things? But modernity is like poison in honey. It gives you the illusion that it wants the magic, attractiveness, and romance of things, and once it takes firm control over you, it takes away all of that from you. Notice, for example, the "primitive" man's dealings with technology and the beginning of his knowledge of it. Note, for example, how wireless communications stole our minds in its beginnings (I told you about our story with the first telephone that entered our neighborhood).

At first, you see the magic of things. Then, here we are; we have taken that magic away from everything and it no longer surprises us.

Why do we need romanticism?

I would argue that if not for some man having a mad romance that is only a thread of hair away from banality, the history of humanity wouldn't have been of any importance worth mentioning. My friend, imagine how our Prophet Muhammad was on the run, chased down, frightened, and starving, and yet, when he was caught by Surāqa bin Malik, he didn't have anything but to promise Surāqa all the cavalry of Khosrow II. If Surāqa had happened to be a modernist, rational, realistic person, he would have firmly tied the Prophet, handed him over to the Quraish, and collected his bounty of one hundred camels. "Man, you're an escapee, and Quraish, with all its fools and masters, is chasing you and you're promising me the cavalry of Khosrow?" But fortunately, fate had given our Prophet Muhammad someone like Surāqa with a vast imagination, with wild dreams, and with a romanticism excessive enough for him to take the Prophet for his word and let him go. I am certain that Surāqa was told, "You naive fool!" at least once after that.

We need romance to continue our existence. I don't see how we can survive as humanity without romance.

I will tell you something about war and romanticism. When Napoleon came to Egypt, he was encountered by the Mamluks with their long mustach-

es, their Sicilian swords, and with their vessels and shields on their horses. Only a few moments afterward, the bullets and cannons of Napoleon filled the ground with Mamluk bodies.

At that time and up until recently, most historians, intellectuals, and authors described the mentality of the Mamluks as "primitive" in comparison to that of the modernist Napoleon, and they have attributed exaggerated stupidity and naivety to the Mamluks.

But I see things from a different perspective. I can see that the Mamluks were aware that they were only a few moments away from certain annihilation, and yet, they refused anything except to welcome that annihilation. Do you know what it is like for a person to be raised their whole life on the values of knighthood and bravery? And then someone comes in and tries to take all that away from them. The Mamluk knights knew that, and they refused to give up the romance of confrontations, knighthood, bravery, and death.

Somewhere else, and decades after that event, a similar event to that of the Mamluks came into existence. It has been portrayed in the movie "The Last Samurai," and by the way, the soldier that fought alongside the Samurai was French, not American. The movie portrays the epic of the last battle, and similar to the battle between the Mamluks and Napoleon, one can notice the romanticism in the scene that portrays the killing of Katsumoto.

Several decades later in World War I, two-thirds of the British army was annihilated in the first two months of the war. Do you know why? The memoirs of English officers of the British military aristocracy tell us the answer. There, they realized that the war as they knew it had ended, and there was no longer any possibility or place for the knights and the brave after this day. After the Germans slew them in the same manner as their Maxim machine gun (the pride of their military), there they realized that they were finished. However, a large number of that military aristocracy did not want to abandon the romance of war and chivalry, only to fall dead to miserable suicidal missions of the nature of the heroics of last stands, and they went to their deaths with all courage.

In World War I, Europeans knew that the first thing that modernity killed was romance. So what does it mean when you sit for months in trenches and death snatches you without looking into the eyes of your killer or feeling the rush of his spear in your chest? There, they were snatched away by death, by shells falling from the sky that they could hardly see, or by the whistle of an officer ordering them to advance one yard to die outside their trenches. Modernity killed romanticism, and it is still destroying it.

Note, my dear, that you can tell the story of the martyrdom of any martyr in the Second Intifada, and that the climax of the event is not their life but the moment of their death, except for those who were martyred by smart missiles from planes. One can narrate the life of Ahmed Yassin with exces-

sive romance and absorb the lightness of the sheikh's spirit into your own being. However, at the moment of his martyrdom, in his last battle, you cannot describe it in more than ten words in 30 seconds, unlike the martyrs who fell during direct confrontation and armed clashes with the enemy. Do you remember our conversation about the martyrdom of Louay Al-Saadi?

Even your observations and criticism of the paradoxes of the 2014 war were that it made most of society a passive audience awaiting death. You objected to a death that is not surrounded by a romantic narrative. You know that the balance of power between nations is determined by the "potential energy" and "kinetic energy" (a crushing energy). And you know that potential energy—and its function in war—is to transform into a crushing force. I believe that the possibility of creating romantic narratives around martyrdom and heroism is one of the most important elements of potential energy, in which we outperform our enemy.

We can narrate ten thousand romantic stories about heroism and martyrdom in the last decade alone, narratives that, once picked up by society, can transform from a buried, potential energy into an enemy-crushing force. On the other hand, our enemy does not have more than 50 similar stories from 2006 until now. This is an actual manifestation of our professor's saying that the enemy has lost every ability to produce heroes. The age of post-modernity or liquid modernity—it is not important to me what you refer to it as. What is important to me is that this is the era of the death of romance and the end of heroism. And surely you know that we, Palestinians, live outside of this era. We live in a colonial Palestinian era, surrounded by a post-colonial, post-modern world, and so, we are still able to produce romantic narratives.

Allow me to address you and our poet friend: do you remember our friend's statements about how much the narratives found within the '48 Palestine communities are charged with imagination? And how this disappears in other narratives? Notice how stories about heroism and victory are the ones that are filled with popular fantasies and romanticism, like the story of the wheat seeds inside the pocket of the martyr from Kafr Kanna.* Whilst the narratives that retell the stories of victims are swift, rigid, dull, boring, and nothing more than documentations devoid of any imagination.

And notice, too, how the stories of heroism are narratives lush with romanticism, while the ones about victimhood are brief. This for me can only mean that nations are vanquished when they give up romanticism. Sometimes after admitting defeat, the defeated party tries to hold on to what is left of its dead romance, and so what does it produce? We here can see some sort of a banal fantasy being produced, something akin to superhumans that we usually see in Bollywood or in mid-70s and mid-80s Hollywood. And I am not talking about superhero comic movies such as

* Kafr Kanna is a Palestinian village in the occupied interior ('48 lands).

Superman, Batman, and Spiderman, where that kind of wild imagination should be allowed; no, what I mean here is works like Rambo, for example. I am fully convinced that Rambo, and Arnold Schwarzenegger's movies and other movies from that era, were nothing more than mere attempts to salvage that American romanticism we have seen killed by the guns of Vietnam. And so, all of these movies, in addition to their bad quality, have a rude, offensive, and corny character to them, and on top of that, they resort to appropriating their enemy's romanticism in order to feed their own narratives. A clear example of this is the tricks that we see Rambo use in Vietnam, which were stolen from the actual Vietnamese.

Or perhaps, we can look to Indian movies, which exaggerate in vulgarizing the heroism they portray and make up ridiculous romantic stories because, and I am not quite sure here, the popular imagination in India has no other choice left but to save its lost romanticism. For me, this phenomenon correlates with the caste system found in India.

It is worth emphasizing here that there is a fine line separating romance from vulgarity, and there is also a fine line between constructive romantic narratives and mythological narratives that lack sound analytical tools. When asked about the martyrs of this Intifada, you will only see men rushing with all their speed, carrying their knives and rifles, as if they were trying to grab something that they see and that we do not see. This phenomenon is nothing but the romance of war.

"Such is the craft of knights, to revolt without guarantee. The spirit of a man is not enthusiastic, but combative. We are fighters, we are not shopkeepers," as stated in the novel "Freedom or Death" by Nikos Kazantzakis. This was the answer of the fighter, the Caribbean teacher, to Commander Kambata Ross, when he asked for firm facts before moving Russian and Greek ships, supplies, weapons, and soldiers. The teacher called this spirit "insight." Perhaps it is the same as Ali Shariati's "shrewdness," and it is perhaps a descriptive abstraction of what romanticism is.

And I find myself smiling when I accuse Nikos of stealing that saying from our popular Walaji chant called "Waw."* We say:

Do not consider us foreigners, O Waw
We do not sell spices...
We are the protectors of the women
On the day that there is a raid on the women.

Finally, perhaps the friends who experienced my anger in my attempt to defend the path of the martyrs would forgive me when they were scratching the outer surface of the romanticism of the martyr and the heroism in my consciousness.

* From Walaja, Basil's home village near Bethlehem. Waw" is the penultimate letter of the Arabic alphabet and constitutes the only letter of the word "wa," meaning "and."

EXITING LAW AND ENTERING REVOLUTION

Basel al-Araj · 2024

People ran at the sound of bullets. They partook in the fray, not asking why or how. The countrymen against the French. All is clear and it takes place even if the dispute is over a triviality or if the fight is between drunkards. The French colonizer is then an enemy, and resisting the enemy is a duty. In those days, as I moved from one house to the next, I understood the meaning of Ibrahim Al-Shankal's words about resistance against the colonizer, about national spirit, enthusiasm, initiative, solidarity, about hatred in the eyes, mouths, and hands, the hatred for everything that is French and anyone who cooperates with the French, be they landowners or Aghas, commoners or those who are weak in spirit and conscience. As for those who fought in battle and escaped arrest, they were honored by the city and I was among them. I, the one who had been in one world and suddenly found himself in another. I, the one who became a patriot without understanding the meaning of patriotism as the others whom God had blessed with consciousness and courage had understood it.

Hanna Mina, *The End of a Brave Man*

In the literatures examining peoples' revolutionary history, there recur some exceptional and divisive individuals who fuse revolution with heroism, crime and violations of law with tradition and custom. The accounts of their lives are often similar in terms of origin, circumstance, trajectory, and ending. Most crucially, they are similar in how they are received: in all of these cases, the public is divided over how to deal with these accounts. Some consider these individuals to be petty criminals and outlaws, while others see them as heroes.

The Arabs were familiar with this phenomenon since well before Islam, as it was represented by the groups of vagabonds known as Sa'alik, the most famous of whom was Urwa bin al-Ward, nicknamed Prince of the Sa'alik. These groups of men who broke with custom and tradition, confronting the economic, social, and political systems of their tribes, were either shunned by the tribe, or themselves fled the tribe. When hard times fell on the tribespeople, they would gather around the Sa'alik, who tend-

ed to their needs. When normality was restored, the tribespeople would again repudiate the Sa'alik and forsake them.

The similarity between the revolutionary and the outlaw consists in their decision to deviate from accepted "systems" and "laws." The outlaw's transition to national or political action—organized or spontaneous—is a smooth one. It is not marred by the same complexities of the transitions of members of the bourgeoisie, for example, which require a rejection of their social class and of the rituals, customs, and material comfort it provides. The outlaw, by way of his experience in the fields of theft and fraud, masters ways of operating outside of that law, acquires skills to deal with arrest and investigation, and carries out operations that require high degrees of prior planning. These experiences are similar in their practical logic to resistance action, even if the end goals differ.

Frantz Fanon was alert to this overlap and wrote the following about these outlaw figures in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

> *In the same way the people make use of certain episodes in the life of the community in order to hold themselves ready and to keep alive their revolutionary zeal. For example, the gangster who holds up the police set on to track him down for days on end, or who dies in single combat after having killed four or five policemen, or who commits suicide in order not to give away his accomplices—these types light the way for the people, form the blueprints for action and become heroes. Obviously, it's a waste of breath to say that such-and-such a hero is a thief, a scoundrel, or a reprobate. If the act for which he is prosecuted by the colonial authorities is an act exclusively directed against a colonialist person or colonialist property, the demarcation line is definite and manifest.*

As a crucial sign of his attachment and love for community, his sense of justice, and his acquisition of analytical tools which furnished him with a lucid and serious vision, the martyr Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam said of the outlaws: "Let them do their work because there is a manhood in that work which we will one day transform into holy struggle, and as long as the colonizer wants to kill our souls, these people are closer to God and to the love of holy struggle than are those who submit."

The Marxist historian Eric J. Hobsbawm understood the significance of the outlaw or "social bandit," whose particularities contradict the logic of law in modern liberal states, which is based primarily on the "social contract" and the "natural rights" of man to property, freedom, and life—as outlined by John Locke. According to this understanding, banditry is an assault on private property; it is a "criminal" act in the terminology of the state and the classes affected by said "criminal" act.

One of Hobsbawm's books is based on a long and mythologized history of what he refers to as "social banditry," traceable in the popular imagination of various societies, and centered around the heroics of thieves

and bandits such as Robin Hood, Rob Roy MacGregor, and Jesse James. Hobsbawm addresses the phenomenon through its social context, wherein the outlaw or thief's social role is one of revenge, especially if he defrauds or steals from a member of the dominant and tyrannical classes in society. Hobsbawm labels this thief the "noble robber." In other cases, such as the Mafia in southern Italy, the outlaw provides an alternative to the dominant social order and relations imposed by the ruling class through the police and other forces of oppression and containment. Hobsbawm finds a similarity between social bandits and revolutionary heroes, such as Che Guevara, or Võ Nguyên Giáp and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, or in the Arab and Islamic context, those such as Abdul Karim al-Khattabi, Omar al-Mukhtar, Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, Wadih Haddad, and others.

In many cases, the outlaws become figures of agitation in societies that persist in a state of submission, as they are the most capable of existing outside of the system that imposes humiliating conditions on the living. They also possess sufficient knowledge to live and sustain themselves outside of the dominion of unjust law. They set for themselves strict rules that organize their world with just traditions, granting the human being their dignity and the right to live a decent life in return for fulfilling one's duties. For example, if one of the outlaws confesses to the authorities or informs on one of his companions, this is sufficient to end his trajectory with the group.

Because outlaws are at the bottom of the social pyramid, their world is explicit. They are not fooled by authority's tricks and lies, nor are they subject to its discourses, tools of mediation, and manufacturing of public opinion. The world in which they find themselves is one that is pristine in its reality, with all its hardships, miseries, poverty, and injustice. One thus finds that they hold justice in the highest regard and that they are the most contemptuous of its absence.

It is important here to mention the enormous connection between any covert movement or revolution and the underground world which exists outside of the law. The law is a tool for normalization and hegemony at the hands of power, which reserves the right to interpret or revise said law. Therefore, revolutionary, covert movements exist on par with the outlaw "underworld." Revolutionary movements have always relied on this underworld to acquire know-how, logistics, and arms, as well as tactics of maneuvering and methods of obtaining financing, in order to confront the enemy.

Arab, Palestinian, and International Figures

The figures that we will discuss all hail from the poorest and most oppressed classes in society, which are subjected to the greatest degree of persecution. Most of their stories also share similar sets of circumstances

that lead to the creation of a new humanity and to moments of birth and transformation.

We are talking about individuals whose consciousness is formed by material experience and whose life begins with rejection by society. Yet they come to be heroes: women sing of them at weddings and men hail their names and virtues, as they become models of heroism and rebellion. We are speaking here of individuals who are nothing but revolutionaries from the first moment. In their qualities, virtues, and psychological composition, they are marked by courage, rebellion, boldness, and intelligence. They are not deceived by embellishments nor are they ever domesticated.

Have you heard of Ibrahim, the boy who was killed in 1913, the one who loved Fatima, daughter of the feudal lord, and who was chased and persecuted as a result? He realized the extent of the injustice and oppression imposed by the state and feudal lords on the peasants and the poor, so he formed a gang that robbed the rich and gave the poor their rights. That boy was Hekimoğlu Ibrahim, one of the most famous dissenters in the Ottoman Empire, who became one of the most renowned icons of popular epics, whom people sing of and whose story grandmothers retell to children in order to instill in them the highest values—deepening their concepts of struggle, freedom, justice, equality, and love.

Hekimoğlu bears some resemblance to the English folk hero Robin Hood or to the Prince of the Sa'alik, Urwa ibn al-Ward, but he most closely resembles the Scottish revolutionary William Wallace, depicted in the movie Braveheart, in whose case love was also the engine of revolution. And just as Hekimoğlu's life inspired people, so did his death. The picture of him as a dead man cradling his Martini–Henry rifle made all the youths in the Ottoman Empire covet that same rifle. To this day, our popular songs and chants in Palestine recall Hekimoğlu through that Martini rifle.

These outlaw figures are distinguished from revolutionaries only by consciousness and political mission. The latter, whose social base and political projects are created by material conditions, become a nation's hope and model. In his book *Guerrilla Warfare*, Guevara noted this great similarity when he said:

> *The guerrilla fighter counts on the full support of the local people. This is an indispensable condition. And this is clearly seen by considering the case of bandit gangs that operate in a region; they have many characteristics of a guerrilla army, homogeneity, respect for the leader, bravery, knowledge of the terrain …*

According to Guevara, if the people rally around these gangs, they will be transformed into revolutionaries.

This can be demonstrated by the story of the martyred Iraqi militant Suwaiheb, the peasant who was killed by gangs hired by feudal lords in

al-Ahwar, near the al-Kahla River, in Iraq in 1959. He was the first martyr after the revolution of July 14, 1958, commemorated by Muthaffar al-Nawab, in the poem Suwaiheb, sung by Sami Kamal.

Although the people embraced these individuals as icons and heroes illuminating the way, the state and its law were unable to account for the logic at work. Even when the authorities used these icons as myths in their own state projects, they continued to consider them outlaws. Here we may refer to the popular epic of the Egyptian folk hero, the martyr Adham al-Sharqawi, whose memory the Egyptians still commemorate in their popular songs to this day, about whose life two TV series were made. His story was deployed during the Nasser era, as the tide of socialist pan-Arabism swept over, and a film about his life was made, starring Abdullah Ghaith and directed by Hossam El Din Mustafa, with Abdel Halim Hafez singing the film's mawil and folk songs. And yet, the clothes of Adham al-Sharqawi, who was killed in 1921 at 23, are still displayed in the "Notable Criminals" section at the National Police Museum.

The revolutionary martyr and theorist Malcolm X is one of the most famous examples of the revolutionary outlaw. He was born to a small and impoverished Black family, growing up under a racist system that no sound person could accept. In 1931, when he was six years old, his father was killed by a white supremacist group. Four of his uncles were then also killed at the hands of whites, without trial. His mother was placed in a psychiatric hospital.

Malcolm's presence at a school for whites was sufficient to compel him to comprehend the extent of injustice experienced by Black people, even at the tender age of six. The seeds of rebellion and revolution were planted in him at a young age. He learned to shout in anger, as did the character of Mufid al-Wahsh in Hanna Mina's novel *The End of a Brave Man*. Malcolm X has said of this phase of his life: "So early in my life, I had learned that if you want something, you had better make some noise."

As he reached puberty, these protestations took on a more violent and rebellious form. He undertook burglary and theft, and was imprisoned for it, continuing his high school studies in prison. Afterwards, he left prison for Boston and New York, where he dove into a world of violence, crime, and drugs, before returning to prison.

His moment of rebirth took place in prison and he emerged a new human. His consciousness about the injustice which Black people are subjected to across the United States had expanded. The cruelty of life in prison gave him the knowledge and art of interpreting society's deviant behaviors as Fanon and Ali Shariati did, and not as the half-educated people who considered them pathologies or genetic mutations do.

Malcolm X forged his path towards becoming one of the most influential Black leaders, partaking as well in the struggles of other nations, such as

the Algerian Revolution. His was a critical mind that could not accept lies, deception, and quackery. He maintained that thought and theory must be subjected to social conditions. Then, the hunt for his life began, and multiple assassination attempts were made on him until one was successful on February 21, 1965.

As for the Algerian martyr Ali La Pointe: born in 1930, he knew injustice, poverty, and exploitation on the colonial farms in his town of Miliana in Algeria. Then he moved to Algiers, the capital, to practice boxing, soon stepping outside of the colonial law and being thrown in prison. There, he was reborn. How many national heroes were born in prison? Abu Jilda, Al-Armit, Farid Al-'As'as, and Abu Kabari were also prison births, later becoming national symbols.

La Pointe: that name which attached itself to our hero, the hero of the Battle of the Casbah, the arena over which he, Ali La Pointe, exerted his control before his rebirth, he who led several operations against the French occupation in Algiers, aiding the revolution in its move from the mountains to the cities. On October 9, 1957, the French blew up his hideout. He was martyred along with three other heroes: the young woman Hassiba Ben Bouali, Talib Abdel Rahman, and the child Omar, who also became one of the many symbols of the revolution.

And here we mention the martyr hero Hussein Al-Ali, from the Arab Saqrs of the Beisan valley. He is one of the most important Palestinian examples. Al-Ali killed a cousin who had done him an injustice. (Most of the Palestinian examples similar to Hussein Al-Ali begin their stories in a clash with authority starting from the bottom of the pyramid, such as the mukhtar, then the feudal lord, and then the bourgeoisie which takes on the face of the colonizer and its comprador.) He was chased after by the British authorities and went underground until the Great Revolt of 1936, then becoming one of its leaders and most important symbols. Hussein was later martyred in a crushing battle with the forces of the British enemy. He was immortalized by the poet Tawfiq Ziyad in his epic *Sarhan and the Pipeline*, sung by the 'Ashiqin band.

The beginning of every revolution is an exit, an exit from the social order that power has enshrined in the name of law, stability, public interest, and the greater good. Every social and economic authority necessarily intersects with and is an extension of political authority. This is how these heroic figures can be understood and appreciated by the general public, who are overpowered, as though by instinct. From there, we understand the hostility of social, economic, and political authority towards these figures, and its use of the law as a tool to tarnish their image and criminalize them. We therefore also understand the smooth transition from the outlaw into the revolutionary—the one who resists.

DISMANTLE IT AND LET THEM FALL

Basel al-Araj · Oct. 12, 2020

I was writing an article with the title "Why the Palestinian Authority must be dismantled" when a friend of mine shared with me the program of the Israeli Herzliya Conference taking place that year. I was surprised to learn that senior Palestinian Authority figure Saeb Erekat, along with Prince Hasan of Jordan, were taking part. I decided to change the title to "Dismantle it and let them fall."

So why must we abolish the PA and bring down its leaders?

The Harkis

During the Algerian war of independence, many Algerians – at least 150,000 – joined the French army and secret police, and fought against the revolution. These so-called Harkis have a share of the blood of a million martyrs on their hands. The majority of them belonged to the class that benefited from the French occupation.

The situation in Palestine has many of the same features of what was happening in Algeria shortly before the revolution.

It is no secret that there is a comprador class directly benefiting from the existence of the occupation, and the current situation gives great privileges to that small fraction of society. Let us avoid taking up arms against one another. Let us dismantle it and let them fall.

The state is the death of the revolution

Following the success of the Cuban revolution, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro disagreed over this dialectic. Guevara believed that revolutionaries needed to be freed from the burden of the state so they could export the revolution. Castro disagreed. But the reality is that Guevara was right and Castro was wrong.

Their disagreement concerned a state with all the attributes of a state. So what about half a state? Guevara's analysis can be applied to the Palestinian question as well: After the 1993 Oslo accords were signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the obligations and duties

of the state became a burden on the back of the revolution, at the expense of liberation.

And after the Zionists fled Gaza in 2005, Hamas was incorporated into the Palestinian Authority and became constrained by a truce that was constantly renewed in deference to its governmental responsibilities and duties. So that we may be free of this burden, dismantle it and let them fall.

Corruption

There is a lot to be said, but I will focus here on political corruption, as it is the most widespread form of corruption, found wherever you look, from the top of the pyramid all the way to the bottom.

From the Palestinian Authority to the legislature, all the way down to the national level, through parties and factions, the institutions of the Palestine Liberation Organization, public organizations and trade union groups — all have lost their legitimacy.

According to the Basic Law, we must wait for elections in order to choose alternatives, so we became hostages to Hamas' anger over Sakher Habash spouting blasphemies or Habash's anger for someone being 30 minutes tardy.

When they agreed on anything, it was to strip 41.8 percent of refugees (according to 2008 UNRWA statistics) of their rights to elect representatives in the national council, in order to maintain the stability of the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan.

And they removed 1.4 million Palestinian citizens of Israel from their agenda. So to end this corruption, dismantle it and let them fall.

A contractor from within

The Oslo accords transferred all the burdens and duties of the occupation to the PLO without restoring any rights, making it the cheapest occupation in history. Let us get rid of those burdens. Dismantle it and let them fall.

The culture of Oslo

When I hear stories from elders about the culture and morals of Palestinian society during the first intifada, I'm genuinely shocked. It's as if they are talking about a totally different world.

When I look at this society, I see it overrun by consumerism and individualism, a lack of morals and principles, the spread of feelings of inferiority and colonized thinking.

Joining a political party has become about reaping the benefits, not about offering sacrifices and struggle. When I see all this I realize that in order to rid ourselves of this shame we must dismantle it and let them fall.

Security coordination

I cannot say that I know what security coordination with Israel is because I haven't read any official document describing what occurs during those meetings (which violates the most basic principle of good governance, transparency). But it is enough for me to cite Issa Qaraqe in his article on the end of security coordination. Dismantle it and let them fall.

Begging

We started to beg for anything, for what is worth having and what is not, especially after Arab states started giving large sums to the PLO and major countries started paying despite themselves just to pacify the revolutionaries. This affected the independent decision-making ability of Palestinians that Yasser Arafat fought his whole life to protect without giving in. So to end the begging, dismantle it and let them fall.

The legitimization of gangs

After Oslo, settlers were given the legitimacy to be on our lands. But the worst is perhaps yet to come, where dreaming of Acre will be a crime, owning Ghassan Kanafani's story Return to Haifa will be against the policy of the state and the horse of Mahmoud Darwish, which was left behind, will become an illegal migrant.

Is it any wonder that PA leader Mahmoud Abbas insists he does not want to undermine Israel's legitimacy? What I find most strange is Abbas' constant apologies for our people's struggles. So dismantle it and let them fall.

In order to determine everything it would take to dismantle it and let them fall, I would need all 20 years of negotiations and the number of words spoken by Saeb Erekat at the Herzliya Conference, but these eight points are enough to create a charge sheet against those who must fall.

We will become like the ancient Israelites roaming in the desert without shelter if we remain in this condition between profiteers.

TODAY'S WARS ARE STRUGGLES BETWEEN SOCIETIES

Basel al-Araj · 2023

Since there is talk of a ground operation, several points must be considered:

1. The Palestinian resistance consists of guerrilla formations whose strategies follow the logic of guerrilla warfare or hybrid warfare, which Arabs and Muslims have become masters through their experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Gaza. War is never based on the logic of conventional wars and the defense of fixed points and borders; on the contrary, you draw the enemy into an ambush. You do not stick to a fixed position to defend it; instead, you perform maneuvers, movement, withdrawal, and attack from the flanks and the rear. So, never measure it against conventional wars.
2. The enemy will spread photos and videos of their invasion into Gaza, occupation of residential buildings, or presence in public areas and well-known landmarks. This is part of the psychological warfare in guerrilla wars; you allow your enemy to move as they wish so that they fall into your trap and you strike them. You determine the location and timing of the battle. So, you may see photos from Al-Katiba Square, Al-Saraya, Al-Rimal, or Omar Al-Mukhtar Street, but do not let this weaken your resolve. The battle is judged by its overall results, and this is merely a show.
3. Never spread the occupation's propaganda, and do not contribute to instilling a sense of defeat. This must be focused on, for soon, we will start talking about a massive invasion in Beit Lahia and Al-Nuseirat, for example. Never spread panic; be supportive of the resistance and do not spread any news broadcast by the occupation. (Forget about the ethics and impartiality of journalism; just as the Zionist journalist is a fighter, so are you.)
4. The enemy may broadcast images of prisoners, most likely civilians, but the goal is to suggest the rapid collapse of the resistance. Do not believe them.

5. The enemy will carry out tactical, qualitative operations to assassinate some symbols of resistance, and all of this is part of psychological warfare. Those who have died and those who will die will never affect the resistance's system and cohesion because the structure and formations of the resistance are not centralized but horizontal and widespread. Their goal is to influence the resistance's support base and the families of the resistance fighters, as they are the only ones who can affect the men of the resistance.
6. Our direct human and material losses will be much greater than the enemy's, which is natural in guerrilla wars that rely on willpower, the human element, and the extent of patience and endurance. We are far more capable of bearing the costs, so there is no need to compare or be alarmed by the magnitude of the numbers.
7. Today's wars are no longer just wars and clashes between armies but rather are struggles between societies. Let us be like a solid structure and play a game of biting fingers with the enemy, our society against their society.
8. Finally, every Palestinian (in the broad sense, meaning anyone who sees Palestine as a part of their struggle, regardless of their secondary identities), every Palestinian is on the front lines of the battle for Palestine, so be careful not to fail in your duty.

LIVE LIKE A PORCUPINE, FIGHT LIKE A FLEA

Basel al-Araj · March 24, 2018

In the year 1895 the psychologist Baldwin coined the term "Social Accommodation," to describe the social balance (of a biological or physical accommodation) created as a form of negotiating with the surrounding environment. Social accommodation is defined as a social process aiming to minimize or avoid conflict. It's a social adjustment process that stops conflict between groups, by way of temporary or permanent consolidation of peaceful interaction.

The psychological aspects of social accommodation indicate individual or collective behavior that aims to reconcile conflict through avoiding aspects of negativity or animosity. This could happen through material (economic), social or psychological compensations to a section of a minority group. Sociologists differentiate between accommodation and adaptation which is defined as the adaptation to natural or organically existing conditions.

Accommodation could also take different forms; it may be voluntary or forced. It could also happen through arbitration, conflict resolution or endurance. Later Ernst Haeckel used the concept of "the ecology" to indicate the relation between humans and the organic or non-organic environment. Ecology became the science that studies the interrelationship of organisms and their environments.

I can't tell why and when this relationship started between the Palestinian (I use it here broadly to include the Levantine and not just mandate Palestine) and the porcupine. Was the animosity due to interest in hunting it for its delicious meat, and the myths about its healing properties including for male fertility? Or was it simply because porcupines were damaging to farmers and their agricultural crops?

The porcupine is a rodent mammal and is very similar to hedgehogs but is bigger and has multiple names. In fus-ha Arabic it's called Al Shayham and its scientific name is Hystrix indica. Its body is covered with spikes 10 - 35 cm long (4 to a little over 13 inches) used for self- defense. It weighs

4 to 16 kilograms (9 to 35lbs) and I do recommend trying out its meat.

Porcupines are night animals that live underground in relatively large hole that connect to a network of tunnels, where it also creates rest spots. The porcupine uses various techniques to get in and out of its hole, making the animal seem paranoid, or, what we call in Palestine, has a "high sense of security" . A scientist named Prater is one of the most renowned scientists that studied porcupines. The porcupines that live in our region are fully vegetarian, mostly eating the colocynth plant known for its bitterness, which is why it is not recommended to hunt porcupines with guns, if bullets hit the liver or the spleen it makes its meat very bitter.

The porcupine has a significant presence in the Palestinian popular memory and folk stories. Palestinians told endless stories about the porcupine, they describe it as a strange creature; it cries and wails like humans, it has hopes and wishes. It is said that it is like humans in that if it gets upset it aims its spikes on its predators to hit them. It only wanders around at night; lonely and solely contemplating, getting attracted to smells, to fruits, and roots. The porcupine is quiet and isolated. Though it can wail, it is lonely; its pain is deep, but its grudge is deeper still--just as it is with its hunter.

When hunting, the first lesson to learn is to observe the prey's behavior closely. Palestinians studied the porcupine closely and learned everything about it (I went out on two hunting trips on which we were very lucky but we did not share our kill with anyone). The hunter needs to learn how to adapt (not to accommodate) with the life and behaviors of its prey to be able to hunt it. But what happened is that the Palestinian took on the porcupine's behaviors completely, including during danger, becoming a porcupine himself.

One Eid-al-Adha my family slaughtered five sheep, and I took part in the event; I helped in skinning and cutting of the meat. Unfortunately, the sheep had fleas and I got some on me. I tried really hard to catch them and kill them but it was exhausting, it made me paranoid. I was only able to get rid of them by taking a bath where my battle with the fleas was terminated through combing my body with hot water and soap.

The flea is a tiny flightless insect of the Siphonaptera order, mostly living as a parasite on other animals, mostly mammals. It's about 1 to 4 mm. (0.04 to 0.16 inches). It normally moves through a pair of long back legs and stings its host causing itchy red spots.

The flea has fascinating fighting strategies and techniques; it stings, jumps and stings again avoiding hands or feet trying to stomp it. It does not kill its host (meaning it does not kill the entire functions of a dog host for example), what it does is exhaust its host and consume its blood, causing constant disturbance, eventually preventing the host from being able to rest. It makes the host nervous and demoralized. For that to happen, fleas

need to procreate, so what begins as a regional infection becomes a more comprehensive problem when the flea procreates, stinging more areas that are more proximate.

Mao Zedong says: the enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue. His theorizing on guerilla warfare can be described as a the flea war.

The conundrum of "how would a nation that is not industrial win over an industrial nation" was solved by Mao. Engels saw that nations that are able to provide capital are more likely to defeat its enemies. Meaning that economic power has the final word in battles because it provides the capital to manufacture arms. Mao's solution however was to emphasize non-physical (or non-material) elements. Powerful states with powerful armies often focus on material power; arms, administrative issues, the military, but according to Katzenbach, Mao emphasized time, space (ground), and the will. What that means is to avoid large battles leaving ground in favor of time (trading space/ground with time), using time to build up will, that is the essence of asymmetrical war and guerilla war.

Now if we're to go back to animals for our comparison, we see that the guerilla fights it's wars like fleas causing the enemy damage similar to what the host experiences when attacked by fleas. A huge area to defend, a small enemy (the fleas) spread out everywhere, fast and hard to capture. If the battle lasts long enough to exhaust the host then it will fail in the battle due to its weakness while unable to locate the flea(s).

Robert Taber explains it:

> *In practice, the dog does not die of anaemia. He merely becomes too weakened (in military terms, over-extended; in political terms, too unpopular; in economic terms, too expensive) to defend himself. At this point, the flea, having multiplied to a veritable plague of fleas through long series of small victories, each drawing its drop of blood…*

Live like a porcupine, fight like a flea.

ARMED STRUGGLE IN PALESTINE

Basel al-Araj · 2023

Strategy

Yezid Sayigh says in his book on the Palestine Liberation Organization that the Fatah movement never took the military conflict seriously, and never viewed the armed struggle as an end in itself or the only path to liberation. Rather, the armed struggle was a means by which to negotiate a diplomatic solution. I believe that Hamas's experience in Gaza follows the same approach. Their political leadership views armed struggle exactly as Arafat viewed it.

This is an essential difference between Hezbollah's experience, for example, and our experience. It is also the difference between the Algerian, Chechen, Vietnamese, and Cuban experiences, and our experience.

In these other experiences, they believed that they could defeat the great powers that were their enemies. We came to the conviction that it was impossible to defeat Israel, and we never believed that returning to Palestine would involve changing the reality on the ground, but rather by appeasing the capitals of influence in the world.

On the allegation: "The Intifada ruined us"

At the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, the Black Hand uprising began in Palestine. It was completely crushed and its participants were eliminated within 4 months. They were either martyred, imprisoned, or exiled. During the same period, the Communist Party attempted to launch an uprising in Vietnam, which was also suppressed and the Communist Party was almost extinguished.

The important thing is that these two uprisings were two of the most excellent uprisings that humanity has ever seen: The Black Hand uprising, which was one of the most important factors leading to the 1936 Revolt, and the Communist Party uprising, which was one of the most important factors leading to the Vietnamese rebellion against France. The leaders learned from their mistakes, dealt with them, and corrected them.

People at that time did not renounce the option of armed struggle, nor

did they brood over the colonial discourse regarding the usefulness or uselessness of armed struggle. Rather, they reviewed their experience, analyzed it, and launched subsequent uprisings that avoided the same mistakes. In contrast, Palestinians brood over the destruction the Second Intifada brought, and are reluctant to engage in any future uprising for fear of the same results.

I do not know whether Palestinians have sat down to evaluate the results of the Second Intifada in a scientific manner, especially the results of the Intifada's military experience. Usually, when you hear a person talk about the destruction, the tragedies, the losses, and the setbacks, he is reproducing Zionist propaganda, but in his own language. This propaganda is constituted by multiple mechanisms and begins altering the Palestinian discursive space in a way that does not end only with the official line of the Palestinian Authority (the line of Mahmoud Abbas). The war against us has still not ceased, nor has the symbolic violence and hidden oppression that are the real masters of the situation. Usually when any experiment fails, the criticism focuses on the execution of the experiment, and not on the theory or ideology behind it. The results were not what we could have imagined. Was Gaza not completely emptied of settlers? And is Gaza not reaching a stage of fortification and hybrid warfare as a result of the Second Intifada? Were Tel Aviv and Jerusalem not hit hard by the early iterations of rockets that resembled cans of bug spray? Were settlements in the West Bank (in Jenin and Nablus) not dismantled because the occupation was no longer able to protect them and could no longer afford the cost of their continued existence? Did the Intifada not cost the enemy billions of shekels? And do we not realize what the Intifada did to delay the tragedy awaiting our people? Personally, I believe that the Intifada temporarily delayed a new expulsion process that was being prepared.

Evaluating the military experience of the Intifada, it appears that the armed experience of the Intifada was not actually the reason for its setbacks. Rather, there are other factors that led to this. The leadership was not able to deal with the responsibility of organizing society and preparing it for a sustained popular war. Some also had a naive understanding of armed struggle, and they flattened its essence to the extent that it did not affect the surface tensions. Recall the expression: "Carry a rifle and shoot, who will stop you?"

In addition to a lack of consciousness, as well as a lack of psychological and social readiness, there was no proper organization of the fighting forces. This led to incompetent leadership after the elimination of the first rank. As this social base was completely absent, there emerged a rift between the masses and those carrying out military action.

In addition to this, there was the counterrevolution against Yasser Arafat, and secret contacts and treasonous agreements were made under the

table with the enemy. There was also an absence of preparations, equipment, strategy and combat tactics. The objective was the Oslo Accords (the homeland reduced to Gaza and the West Bank). And let us not forget here the Palestinian Authority's dependence on the occupation for its financial, employment, and administrative system. Finally, there was a lack of conviction by some that armed struggle can change the reality on the ground. Rather, they were convinced of its use in improving the terms of negotiation, and nothing more.

In conclusion, the first thing that colonialism does is establish what is possible and impossible for oppressed peoples. Some elements of the oppressed people usually assist in this. This is done through direct and indirect brainwashing techniques, so do not trust this discourse that is transmitted and planted into our minds. Judge instead the testimonies of our people based on trusting logic and the power of liberation.

Is Palestine beautiful?

I am frequently asked this question. As easy as the question seems, it is one of the most difficult questions. It is more difficult than the question "How are you?" It is difficult to answer once you realize that the real meaning of the question is: "Is this narrow coastal strip worth all this blood?" We all know that beauty is relative and that one's environment shapes one's aesthetic sensibilities, and that this differs from person to person. Here you have to resort to comparison to arrive at an easy answer.

But Palestine, in my opinion, is actually the most beautiful place; not because of her greenness, blueness, yellowness, redness, crops, bounty, or nature. Her beauty is that she is the one who answered my search for meaning, and she is the one who answered my existential questions, and who justifies my existence and cures my chronic anxieties.

THE WILL OF THE MARTYR BASEL AL-ARAJ

Greetings of Arab nationalism, homeland, and liberation,

If you are reading this, it means I have died and my soul has ascended to its creator. I pray to God that I will meet him with a guiltless heart, willingly, and never reluctantly, and free of any bit of hypocrisy. How difficult it is to write your own will… For years I have contemplated such texts by martyrs, and I have been bewildered by them. Succinct, and without eloquence, they do not satisfy our burning desire for answers about martyrdom.

Now I walk to my death, satisfied that I have found my answers. How foolish I am. Is there anything more eloquent than the actions of a martyr? I should have written this months ago, but what kept me was that this question is for you, the living. Why should I answer for you? You should search for it. As for us, the people of the graves, we seek nothing else but God's mercy.

This document was recovered from the room in which—after a two-hour standoff and a shootout—Basel al-Araj was executed by Israeli soldiers. It was written in a hurry, on a dirty scrap of paper.

The texts in this document have been collected from various sites and publications. Dates refer to their publication in English. Attribution follows:

BASEL AL-ARAJ: ICON FOR A LOST GENERATION

This short article was originally published on the Electronic Intifada website (**electronicintifada.net**). It has been reproduced here with only minor stylistic edits. It might not be very pretty or theoretically incisive, but the editor thinks we can tell a lot about someone's character from how their friends and family remember them.

WHY DO WE GO TO WAR? & WILL

This essay and several others were only published posthumously in a collection of Basel al-Araj's writings titled *I Have Found My Answers*. The essay is unfinished, recovered in manuscript form. Translation courtesy of the Jisr Collective, reproduced here with minor edits.

EXITING LAW AND ENTERING REVOLUTION

This essay was translated and published by The Bad Side during the opening months of the last years' genocide in Gaza. It is reproduced without edits. You can find it digitized at **thebadside.net**.

DISMANTLE IT AND LET THEM FALL

Translated and published on the Electronic Intifada in 2020. Retrieved from **theanarchistlibrary.org**.

TODAY'S WARS ARE STRUGGLES BETWEEN SOCIETIES

Posted to Workers World in November of 2023, originally translated and posted to Resistance News. Retrieved from **workers.org**.

LIVE LIKE A PORCUPINE, FIGHT LIKE A FLEA

First published in Arabic on Al Quds Media Network, later translated and circulated by PYM in March of 2018. Retrieved from their website at **palestinianyouthmovement.com**.

ARMED STRUGGLE IN PALESTINE

These three pieces were translated in 2023 by Arpan Roy, under the title "Is This Narrow Coastal Strip Worth All this Blood?." You can find them on **focaalblog.com** with a large translator's introduction. 'Strategy' was left untitled by the translator. The second was published by Basel on Sept. 26, 2013, the first and third were left undated by the translator.

If we missed anything, or if you have a new translation you'd like included in here, let us know at **lakeeffect@riseup.net** and we'll update this zine!

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SO-CALLED
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