

Representations of Oslo Intelligentsia: A Fanonian Reading of the Intellectual Landscape in Post-Oslo Palestine .

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Were I to use one word consistently along with criticism, (not as a modification but as an emphatic) it would be oppositional.

-- Edward Said (1983)

In order to analyze the intellectual background that has led to, justified and flourished after the signing of the degrading Oslo accords, one needs some definitions and clarifications that will clarify some of the most spectacular--and related-- events of the twentieth century, i.e., the disintegration of colonialism, the establishment of Israel as a colonial project, the spread of neocolonialism, and the globalizing spread of American imperialism in the post-colonial world, especially in the "Middle East".

The definitions one has in mind focus on the intimate relationship between economics and politics since these are the major factors that determine the characteristics of the historical conditions shaping the age. Moreover, it is undoubtedly difficult to understand the current intellectual scene without having a kind of historical perspective through which the observer can comprehend, not to say analyze, the so-called "New Middle East". I argue in this paper that Oslo intelligentsia is not different from the so-called "post-colonial" intelligentsia in terms of ideology, demagoguery, opportunism and false consciousness despite the fact that we cannot claim that we are living in a post-colonial Palestine. The conduct of those intellectuals is far from national and historical responsibility.

In their introduction to *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman define colonialism as "the conquest and direct control of other people's land [and as] a particular phase in the history of imperialism, which is now best understood as the globalization of the capitalist mode of production, its penetration of previously non-capitalist regions of the world, and destruction of pre- or non-capitalist forms of social

organization". (1993:3)

This is a representation of the capitalist desire to gain--or rather capture--new markets and control sources of raw materials regardless of the rights of the native nations, who are in many cases expelled from their lands. by the use of mythological justifications, and on the basis of their nonexistence. The early postcolonial era brought a different kind of colonialism, a kind that is named neo-colonialism, and defined as "[the] continuing Western influence, located in flexible combinations of the economic, the political, the military and the ideological (but with an overriding economic purpose)..." (Williams & Chrisman, 1993:3) The common ideological factor between colonialism and neo-colonialism, as parts of imperialism, is the presumption of the superiority of the Judeo-Christian/white/western colonial over the Oriental/ Black/native colonized, and the right of the former to oppress the latter who is created only to reaffirm the superiority of the Western race.

"Where there is power, there is resistance", Foucault's famous formulation helps us to theorize the political and, hence, the cultural resistance, represented in different forms. Within this context, it is worth quoting Frantz Fanon's definitions of the role of the "native intellectual" during the "fighting phase":

[T]he native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will... shake the people. Instead of according the people's lethargy an honored place in his esteem, he turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, and a national literature. (1990:179)

However, this is not the case with the other kind of intellectuals who, according to Fanon's theorization, "give proof that [they] [have] assimilated the culture of the occupying power. [Their] writings correspond point by point with those of [their] opposite numbers in the mother country. [Their] inspiration is European [i.e. Western] ..." (1990:178-9)

One cannot deny the fact that the Palestinian anti-colonial/resistance movement is a part, not to

say the product, of a collective national heritage, i.e. national culture. Again one here cannot but refer to Fanon who defines national culture as "the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which the people has created itself and keeps itself in existence." (1990:188) This, of course, can be comprehended when we recall the fact that the Zionist entity in Palestine is based upon the negation of the existence of the native Palestinians and, hence, the nonexistence of their cultural identity. Furthermore, national and historical consciousnesses are always accompanied by the discovery of universalizing values concerning nationalism. That is, national consciousness is a part of, not to say a step towards, international consciousness. (Fanon, 1990:198-9)

"To be or not to be" is the stark choice to which colonized peoples are pushed; in other words, the denial of the culture of many peoples (Palestinians and Africans, for example) is undoubtedly the direct result of the social Darwinist negation of the right to exist of the colonized people. In an extreme contempt for the Palestinian people, Golda Meir--the former Israeli prime minister--said: "There was no such thing as Palestinians... They did not exist." (qtd in Ribhi Halloum, 1988:37), a response that parallels Salazar's affirmation that "Africa does not exist". Of course, the negation of the "Other" leads to the negation of her/his humanity: "But they are not human beings, they are not people, they are all Arabs/[Africans]." (David Hacoheh, as qtd. in Ribhi Halloum, 1988:.37) Hence the denial of the culture and the historical development of the colonized Palestinians is a reflection of the negation of their existence. This can, in fact, be understood as the product of the colonizer's attempts to repress the cultural life of the Palestinians by either negating it, or alienating some intellectuals by assimilating them, or activating an inferiority complex. It is noteworthy in this particular case that the colonizer is not only the Israeli but also the American. The intellectuals' assimilation of the Western mentality makes them look down upon the Palestinian/Arabic cultural values as backward, and they lose any hope in the power of the masses. What such intellectuals intentionally tend to forget is what Amilcar Cabral insists on reminding us about culture:

...culture - the creation of society and the synthesis of the balances and the solutions which society engenders to resolve the conflicts which characterize each phase of its

history - is a social reality, independent of the will of men, the color of their skins or the shape of their eyes. (1993:61)

Such assimilated intellectuals never try to open up new possibilities for the future because what they see is only the civilizing values of modernity which they see as imperialism's positive, reconstructive and basically human face; hence their faith in the Imperialist American mediation. They can never create new ways of seeing and experiencing reality except the Western way. That is to say, their approach does not look away, like resistance approach, towards an alternative future. The late Edward Said, whose writings were banned in the PA areas in the early 1990's, Mahmoud Darwish, Hisham Sharabi, Adel Samara, Ahmed Qatamesh, Azmi Bishara, Mustafa Barghouthi, Abdel Bari Atwan--to mention but a few-- offer the alternative.

As Said would argue, the role of this intelligentsia

has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them) to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. (1994:11)

Conscious organic intellectuals--to use Gramsci's term (1986)--bear the Palestinian past as, what Said calls," scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices, as potentially revised versions of the past tending towards a post-colonial future, as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance, from the colonist." (1993:.256) The process through which, then, the revolutionary intellectual passes is an awareness of one's self as belonging to a subject people, i.e. the discovery of the insight of nationalism. (Fanon, 1993) Nationalism, within this context, "is a mechanism for liberation, unity, development [...] and not the chauvinistic nationalism of the reactionary classes." (Samara. 2003:27) Decolonizing cultural resistance insists on the right to see the Palestinian history whole, coherently, integrally. It also

reflects a kind of national and historical consciousness that Palestinians are in a position to do something about their own present and future history.

The political consciousness of oppositional Palestinian intelligentsia reflects the general development of the Colonized Palestinian national consciousness. On the other hand, the lack of accurate political consciousness and the search for individual solutions--the major characteristics of the complicit intelligentsia--contradict the collective national situation of the colonized Palestinians. Political consciousness usually follows action in a dialectical spiral movement; political consciousness starts with the rejection of conditions of life in camps and Diaspora; of rejection of the objective alternatives which should change with the change of the individuals; of rejection of what is offered to a small sector of the people. Indeed, class consciousness plays a crucial role in the intellectual's understanding and involvement in the struggle in the sense that it is dialectically related to the struggle for national liberation.

When the intellectual's society reaches a historical cross roads-- "to be or not to be"--in its fight for a clear definition of its identity, the intellectual should be involved in the whole socio-political process and leave his ivory tower, a remark made by the Hungarian philosopher George Lukacs. Given the clear-cut Manichean situation witnessed by the older colonial period and the hard-won self-definition, that the older colonial period witnessed, and the hard-won self-definition of the first period of resistance, i.e., in the 60's with the emergence of the Contemporary Palestinian Revolution, the gains of the two Intifadas ought to be kept, defended and sacrificed for. Both kinds of intellectuals, conscious/organic and complicit/traditional, reflect a kind of political awareness, from different angles--the former progressive and the latter reactionary. In fact, historical, political, national and ideological records of both, separately, intertwine and illustrate each other.

The Question of Palestine: One vs. Two-State Solution

One of the major differences between the two intellectual camps is the suggested solution to the Palestinian question; that is the two-state versus a unitary state solution. Oslo intelligentsia argues that the only solution to the Israeli-Palestine conflict is the establishment of two-states; an

independent Palestine on 22% of Mandatory Palestine. And yet this solution does not take facts on ground into account. They maintain that the only way to reach independence is through negotiations, though such negotiations for ten years have not moved the Israeli position at all. The impasse negotiations have reached has proven the oppositional camp correct. The establishment of a Palestinian state is not mentioned in any of the clauses of the Oslo agreement, thus leaving the matter to be determined by the balance of power in the region. This balance tilts in favor of Israel, which rejects the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state, in spite of its recognition of the Palestinian people and its national movement (PLO). No Israeli party, neither Labour nor Likud or Kadima, is ready to accept a Palestinian state as the expression of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. The Labour Party is prepared to negotiate with the Palestinians in order to give them an advanced form of self-rule that will be called a state, and through which the Palestinians will be enabled to possess certain selected features of independence, such as a Palestinian flag, a national anthem and a police force. This was Ehud Barak's 'generous' offer in Camp David. The Kadima Party, on the other hand, is not prepared to give the Palestinians anything like self-rule. Their vision of the future, like that of the Likud, is rather that the Palestinians should be allowed to run their own affairs under strict and binding Israeli tutelage.

Inevitably, as Said pointed out, the Oslo agreement did nothing to limit Jewish settlement activity in the West Bank. On the contrary, it has continued since the signing of Accords, as do the confiscation of land and the opening of zigzag roads to service these settlements. (There are roads for settlers and roads for native Palestinians.) Israeli governments, including Labour, have never been willing to commit themselves to the evacuation of all settlers from the West Bank. Yet this is a basic pre-condition for the creation of an independent Palestinian state, especially in the light of Israel's obligation towards the settlers which drives it to control the greater part of the West Bank, in order to guarantee the security of the settlements and ensure their future development. Furthermore, in any future solution it is certain that Israel will invoke its security needs to justify continuing to tighten its control over the Jordan Valley, thus rendering the Palestinian project impossible. Add to that the return of 4.5 million refugees living in the Diaspora, and the question of Jerusalem.

So the real question is whether a sovereign, independent Palestinian state is indeed unattainable? If not, for the reasons mentioned above, is there then an alternative solution? Here comes the role of the oppositional intellectual. One answer that is increasingly to be found in the writings and pronouncements of certain Palestinian intellectuals and politicians is the idea of a binational, secular-democratic state in Mandatory Palestine in which all citizens are treated equally regardless of their religion, race or sex.

Such a program poses a very serious threat to the ethno-religious nature of Israel as “the state of the [Ashkenazi] Jews”. Put differently, this solution calls for a secular definition of the state-- “the State of all of its Citizens.” Recognizing the exclusivist Jewish nature of the State is the precondition for being welcomed in the Israeli parliament, Knesset. There is no Israeli nationality, while Israel continues to define its national character as Jewish and not Israeli, which effectively excludes all Palestinians and "non-Jews" living in Israel. This, as noted by numerous UN Committees and Human Rights Organizations, encourages discrimination and accords second class status to Israel's non-Jewish citizens.

A serious comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question will not, therefore, neglect the 1948 Palestinians and those who were expelled and dispossessed of their lands in 1948, namely, refugees living in miserable camps. The mechanism by which such serious issues can be resolved is not a Bantustanization *a la* apartheid South Africa, as suggested by the signatories of the Oslo Accords. Rather, a secular democratic binational state where all citizens are treated equally regardless of their religion, sex or color, is the right solution that would bring an end to the conflict.

The anti-Oslo intellectual is what the Oslo intelligentsia is NOT, i.e. commitment combined with a political vision and a clear-cut ideological program. The latter is prepared to recognize a

"Jewish state" alongside a Palestinian State regardless of what this means, namely the discriminatory practices applied by Israel against its non-Jewish, i.e. mainly Palestinian citizens

and residents since 1948. Whereas, the former's program makes the necessary link between all Palestinian struggles against the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank and against Israel's ethnically-based displacement, dispossession, discrimination and rights violations of more than one million Palestinian citizens, as well as the 1948 externally displaced refugees, who are entitled to return, restitution, and compensation¹

Ideological Underpinnings

The two different ideological prescriptions offered to us by both intellectual camps force one to reflect on the validity of each. Studying the two prescriptions leads to a dangerous area full of ideological Western mines that are not ready to accept and even exclude the "they" that is not a part of "us". This is the product of the accumulation of a racist colonial mentality that has controlled the Western mind since 1492, i.e., the beginning of colonialism, as we have been taught by Said and Fanon. Nowadays, determining to prevent regional "Third World" consensus from emerging, after the success of many national liberation movements, the West has renewed the old form of colonialism with a new kind of imperial colonialism--the Gulf war is a good example.

The contemporary human society has been placed on the threshold of a qualitatively new era that is at present controlled by the assimilated intellectual's alternative, especially after the collapse of the pre-Stalinist model of socialism.² Of course, the Western/Zionist "Enlightenment" project cannot be understood without understanding the development of capitalism from the industrial to the post-industrial stage of electronics and information; a stage at which there is no place for "Third World" peoples, according to the complicit intelligentsia. However, the challenge presented by the early success of the Soviet Union and the victories of a series of national liberation movements as a whole, are factors which seem to support the revolutionary potential for a radical change. Moreover, the failure of the attempts at capitalist development in a series of "Third World" countries, including many Arab countries, leaves many questions unanswered concerning the validity of such advices.

The primacy of industrial production and the omnipresence and universality of class struggle are the ideological labels of the missions of both kinds of intellectuals. Each of them, in their own

concrete approaches, focuses on the economic domination and its social product of power and resistance; in this sense, the underside of colonial and neo-colonial culture is blood, torture and death. In fact, the traditional intellectual's acceptance of the role and the dictation of the imperialist powers is contradicted by the oppositional intellectual's affirmation that there is a need to rebel against the already existing system controlled by the rich and powerful.

The ideal model of the assimilated intellectual--i.e. the West-- representing the rich, powerful North has invented and devised all means and subterfuge to keep what it has unjustly gathered, and to exploit and abuse the work of the South/"Third World". It then legitimizes these unjust gains through such post-colonial complicit intelligentsia--"America has the solution; "Oslo is the only option left for us";" Gaza will be the Singapore of the New Middle East!;" If the labour party wins the elections, we will be able to establish an independent state"; "Likud is the reason behind the failure of Oslo"... etc.

One really doubts the efficacy of the so-called neo-liberal projects, defended by some intellectuals, in the Developing countries, including the PA areas. If we are invited to adopt the system which is claimed to be the only system that deals with (wo)man as s/he is, we are, then, led to the Western model of capitalism. However, if the Western model of capitalism is the only way of achieving prosperity, one should not forget how this victorious civilization materialized and was shaped regardless of the price paid by humanity. The establishment of the contemporary Western civilization, and its "democratic copy" in the Middle East, was crystallized on the corpses of millions of people and through inhuman exploitation of hundreds of millions of human beings in the colonies. Today Black Americans still confront racism on a daily basis; the Palestinian economy is still dependent on Israel, and the South African government was "forced" to ignore its RDP "Reconstruction and Development Programme" which mobilized the Black masses, and adopt GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution)--the neo-liberal programme accepted by the World Bank and the IMF.

As Samir Amin argues convincingly((1976; 1977), this advice has led many Developing Countries to corruption, fundamentalism, consumption, low living standard, huge class gaps,

national debts and--most importantly--dictatorial regimes supported by the West. The "post-colonial" world is a world that is controlled by a huge gap between the North and the South in such a way that the masses in the South cannot find any hope in a real peaceful socio-economic change. Again, the oppositional conscious intellectual should offer the alternative that takes the social and historical objective conditions into account; an alternative which affirms that Jaber Ibn Hayyan and Averoes are as much a part of the human heritage as they are of the Arab Islamic one.

Many anti-globalization activists have been arguing that what we should do is depend on our powers in a relentless struggle against the existing order with all its injustice and hegemony. This is a motivation for the people to seek an alternative to what, for example in the Palestinian case, the Oslo Accord and the Road Map are offering, by proceeding on the basis of their own concrete reality, cultural heritage, and history without losing the straightforward historical movement.³ Fanon again: "The colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope. (1990:187) What Oslo intellectuals offer us has nothing to do with such a positive agenda; on the contrary, in the name of pragmatism and realism we are asked to accept our slavery and appreciate it as long as it has the USA trade mark.

Notes

¹ For a better understanding of the one-state solution see Edward Said's "Third Way" in Al-Ahram Weekly, 2001 source: <http://www.mediamonitors.net/edward9.html>. And his article "One State" January 10, 1999, Sunday, Magazine Desk, New York Times. Virginia Tilley's *The One-State Solution* is another thorough research on the feasibility of such solution.

² Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* and Francis Fukuyama's *End of History* are the major components of such ideological orientation.

³ See Adel Samara's *Epidemic of Globalization: Ventures in World Order, Arab Nationalism and Zionism* (2002) for a comprehensive debate on Globalization, neo-liberalism and the Israel/Palestine conflict.

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