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Citation for published version

Rooney, Caroline R. (2018) The First Nakba Novel? on Standing with Palestine. *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 20 (1). pp. 80-99. ISSN 1369-801X.

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2017.1401951>

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The First Nakba Novel? On Standing With Palestine

Caroline Rooney

I wish to take this opportunity to respond to Bart Moore-Gilbert's essay 'Palestine, Postcolonialism and Pessoptimism' (Moore-Gilbert 2016) through suggesting how its concerns may be amplified through a consideration of Ethel Mannin's nakba novel *The Road to Beersheba* (Mannin 1963). I offer my reading of Mannin's novel in the spirit of an unfinished dialogue with Bart Moore-Gilbert's work and as a tribute to his commitment to justice.

Palestine and Postcolonial Studies

'Palestine, Postcolonialism and Pessoptimism' addresses the belated uptake within postcolonial studies of the colonisation of Palestine by Israel, tracing the emergence of a new field of postcolonial studies in transnational solidarity with Palestine, to which the essay itself substantially contributes. In addition, Moore-Gilbert also establishes his own position within this field as supportive of a one-state solution, given that such an outcome is envisaged as the most fruitful one to overcome chauvinistic nationalisms through the possibilities of what Moore-Gilbert posits in terms of liberalism. Prior to the essay's publication, Bart, a friend of mine for over almost 30 years, asked me to read and critique the work, stating in emails to me 'Please be as critical as you can' and 'Respond in a critical manner making no allowances'. Accordingly, I responded not only with my genuine admiration of his essay, but with some critical reservations I had with respect to aspects of it: sadly though we were deprived of an occasion to debate these adequately.¹

Firstly, what I most appreciate in Moore-Gilbert's article, along with its scholarly seriousness and deeply thoughtful lucidity, is his candid personal account of how he came to engage with the Palestinian struggle regarding how he had come to revise first his reading of Orientalism and then his initial support for the two-state solution through challenges to his position that he encountered. I respect the openness of this reflective admission, where more self-defensive critics might resort to surreptitious auto-corrections. The story of an intellectual trajectory is in itself illuminating, and for my own part, just when I think I have understood something I tend to encounter a statement or work of art or undergo an experience that makes me realise the limitations of where I thought I had arrived at. In certain respects, all our work is unfinished.

That said and secondly, what I have difficulty with in the article under consideration is how, towards the end of it, a specifically cultural resistance appears to be set up against postcolonial Marxist critique with this posited as a new direction for postcolonial studies. For example, Moore-Gilbert writes: 'this essay might be interpreted as a particularly spectacular illustration of what has been identified by a

¹ I am very grateful to Anna Hartnell for her kind invitation to return to the debate on this occasion, while concerned at not being able to anticipate what Bart's further responses might have been.

range of hostile (mainly Marxist) critics as a key weakness in postcolonial studies – its alleged tendency to “textualize” and thus domesticate and downplay the material realities of what is involved in the practice of anticolonial struggles (Ahmad 1992; San Juan, Jr. 1997; Dirlik 1998).’ (25) It seemed and seems to me that this condensed dissociation stands to misrepresent somewhat the main thrust of the Marxist critique of post-structuralism with potential consequences for the reception of Palestinian literature.

Regarding Ahmad, his objection is not to forms of resistance expressed through literature and culture: for instance, he speaks admiringly of Blake as an anti-capitalist poet. (Ahmad 1992, 51) Rather, his objection is to how what loosely came to be called ‘theory’ (not ‘culture’) served to break with the liberationist horizons of postcolonial movements. His objection may be said to be that the capitalist commodification of postcolonial studies through iconic assimilated figures serves to disrupt the potential for transnational solidarities. His critique of Jameson is not over Jameson’s interest in anti-colonial left wing literature but over how this literature is positioned in relation to the West as an earlier phase of anti-capitalist struggle that the West has itself surpassed with the Third World and its aesthetic forms accordingly constituted as an object of nostalgia (105-6). Ahmad comes across as hurt to discover that he is not Jameson’s transnational contemporary in the cultural struggle against capitalism.

The term ‘textual idealism’ is one offered by Benita Parry as a critique of poststructuralist theory. As I examine in a forthcoming essay, in her defense of Marxist cultural analysis in her introduction to *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*, Benita Parry takes objection to the post-Marxist left’s assumption that the traditional left separate Marxism from culture. For Parry, it is rather that Marxists see culture as emerging from reality as opposed to the textual constructivist determinations of reality. (Rooney 2017)

While Bart Moore-Gilbert considers that latter day Marxists over-privilege the political, he finds a precedent in Cabral’s revolutionary deployment of national culture as a means of resistance. (25) However, it could be said to be critics such as Parry (2004), together with Chrisman and Williams (1994), who foreground the proponents of the revolutionary role of national culture, positioning Cabral within the wider liberationist tradition of Senghor, Césaire, Fanon, Sartre, and so on, at a time when poststructuralist postcolonial theory sought its bearings very much in terms of European philosophy (largely of an idealist heritage).

Thus when I responded to Bart, I said that surely a strand of postcolonial studies has always been concerned with the cultural expression of liberation struggles. However, he maintained that he continued to see it differently, so we agreed to respect each other’s different perspectives, something I will return to at the end of this essay. While I’m not sure if I have been able to grasp the position set out at the end of ‘Palestine, Postcolonialism and Pessimism’ sufficiently (one which the planned book would have elaborated), it appears implicitly to align culture with liberalism in ways that beg a consideration of the cultural expressions and readings of the more radical left.

One of the reasons for the neglect of Palestinian history and literature within postcolonial studies is that postcolonial studies began as an engagement with

Anglophone literature from the Commonwealth. Moore-Gilbert speaks pertinently of how the lack of Arabic amongst postcolonial scholars is an obvious drawback to a study of Palestinian writing (6). Relatedly and more broadly than this, there has been an epistemic divide between Middle Eastern studies, as tending to fall within area studies, and postcolonial studies. The academic target of Said's Orientalism may in fact be said to be area studies, with postcolonial literary studies (which did exist at the time) seemingly bracketed off.² Moreover, what Said attacks is implicitly an inherited framework of Hegelian idealism given that Hegel forecloses the non-dualism of African cultures to set up a model of history in which the West is identified both in opposition to the Oriental other and as the singularising power that stands to assimilate, usurp and surpass (in other words, colonise) the otherness of the Orient (Rooney 2000). For Hegel, the Orient bizarrely constitutes the childhood of the West, that is, its own past. I mention this in that I have touched above on the Marxist objection to the post-structuralist and postmodernist relegation of liberation movements to the past.

Indeed, the Palestinian struggle, for understandable reasons, is often presented as anachronistically belated, as if it were the last word in liberation struggles. However, seen otherwise, the Palestinian struggle can be regarded as the vanguard of the Arab Spring, and from a regional perspective there is a transnational Arab liberation struggle against both neoliberal authoritarianism and religious extremism.³

My own introduction to Arab literature came through my first cohort of PhD students (around the mid-1990's), in particular, Anastasia Valassopoulos and Maggie Awadalla. They, and subsequent students of mine, may be considered pioneering in electing to study the literature in question through the frameworks of postcolonial studies rather than through the then more conservative area studies frameworks of Middle Eastern studies. The branch of postcolonial studies that I have specialised in concerns liberation struggles approached through their creative expression and philosophies, and in working with my PhD students, I became aware of how pertinent the question of on going liberation struggles is for the MENA region.

My particular introduction to Palestinian literature was through two French friends of mine who ran a theatre company *La rose tatouée*. They had been approached by a Lebanese friend of theirs over the project of turning Mahmoud Darwish's poem 'State of Siege', which had recently been published (2002), into a performance and they contacted me about a potential English version. The project did not materialise, but from this moment I became a captive amoureuse of Darwish's poetry and I began to study it and offer classes and presentations on it. This in turn led to me supervising

² I think it is Robert Young who in *White Mythologies* (1990) establishes the postcolonial relevance of Said's work.

³ Moreover, it is not that the Palestinian struggle is an unusually protracted one, protracted as it is. For instance, the Zimbabwean liberation struggle began with the first Chimurenga (1894-7) opposing the first wave of settlers and took over 80 years to achieve its aim of independence. Comparably, if the Palestinian resistance begins roughly with the colonial settlements of 1948 (although, a little before that), it is no more protracted than the Zimbabwean struggle.

students undertaking PhDs on Palestinian literature from just after 2002 onwards and 5 of these have been completed.⁴ In addition, I supervised Palestinian researcher Hania Nashef's PhD on South African literature where she has also written extensively on Palestinian film and literature, and Anastasia Valassopoulos went on to supervise Anna Ball's PhD on postcolonial approaches to Middle Eastern (particularly Palestinian) literature and film.

The reason why I have addressed the above is that I wish to draw attention to the fact that my encounter with the Palestinian struggle and its cultural expression has been through a series of interpellations. Regarding this, what is at stake is not just a question of how and when postcolonial critics begin to discover the relevance of Palestine for their work. It is also a matter of how and when Palestinian and Arab writers and intellectuals see postcolonial studies as relevant to them. In part, this concerns a generational shift where the connection with the postcolonial in the Arab world has come to intersect with cultural studies: including global youth cultures and popular culture. A more radical generation of scholars has come to the fore, particularly after the Gulf and Iraq wars. Yet, I also wish to suggest that there have probably been a series of British-Palestinian anti-colonial exchanges from 1948 onwards that have been suppressed or forgotten.

Palestine has of course its own theorisation of anti-colonial struggle, as documented on the website *The Palestinian Revolution*, where evidence is put forward for how Palestinian revolutionaries were inspired by liberation struggles in Algeria and Cuba. By 1967, the Palestinians had already analysed their predicament as one of settler colonialism (prior to the works usually cited in a Western context), and in a Fatah essay, 'The Liberation of Occupied Countries' (1967) it is stated: 'French colonialism in Algeria is an instance of that settler-colonialism, and an even uglier example is the Zionist occupation of part of Palestine, the usurpation of that territory, and the expulsion of its inhabitants. This colonial epidemic has also spread in many other parts of the world, including Rhodesia and South Africa.'⁵

International solidarity is also highlighted in the article:

Without question, the growth of international public awareness has helped increase the possibility of liquidating direct colonialism as a phenomenon that contradicts the current stage of human development. As a result of growing international awareness of the need for liquidating colonialism, there is a rising interest on the part of many countries in aggregating the common struggle of colonised countries in a positive, effective manner.

In addition, there are records of creative collaboration between Palestinian and international artists such as the international exhibition of artists for Palestine instituted by the PLO's Plastic Arts Union (1978). The catalogue states: 'This exhibition will be a starting point for a militant cultural front that enables us through

⁴ In order of completion, these are by: Clemency Schofield; Declan Wiffen; Nora Scholtes; Azza Harass; Sophia Brown.

⁵ The Palestine Revolution website:
<http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/learn/part/12>

art expression to convey our voice and cause to all peoples and enable these peoples to participate in our struggle and for us to participate in their struggle too.’⁶

There is continuity across decades between this position and current Palestinian positions. For instance, at the point at which I had finished a draft of this, an email from the Freedom Theatre reached me, stating:

Cultural resistance means different things to different people...Some people argue that cultural resistance is limited to the practice of using symbolism and meaning to combat oppressive forces. However, we believe that cultural resistance also has a role to play in creating a collective identity of the ‘rebel against injustice.’⁷

Thus, the Freedom Theatre encourages both the ‘textualist’ approach to cultural resistance alongside a more radical approach, stating too that both have a common goal (as Moore-Gilbert registers in passing). I would like now to turn to an early instance of transnational solidarity in the work of Ethel Mannin, very much ‘a rebel against injustice’.

The Road to Beersheba

While Ethel Mannin was a prolific and popular author during her lifetime, her work has swiftly been forgotten. As I mention in an earlier article (Rooney 2015a), I discovered her existence by means of a personal circumstance through which I inherited a correspondence from my South African grandmother, Lady Marguerite Robinson who was married to Sir Victor Robinson, a Rhodesian Attorney General and a colonial diplomat. That is, my grandparents were part of the colonial ruling class, although they were positioned on its liberal side, my grandfather working with British PM Harold Wilson to try and thwart the far right quest for Rhodesian white supremacy. My grandmother enjoyed contributing to local newspapers, in particular, articles bringing to life episodes in Rhodesian history and she also wrote short stories. As a liberal and a writer, she entered into correspondence with her British contemporaries, that is, women novelists whom she admired, namely Anna Buchan, Elspeth Huxley and Ethel Mannin.

Here are some excerpts from one of two letters from Ethel Mannin to my grandmother.

June 25, 1964

Dear Lady Robinson,

⁶ The Palestine Revolution website:

<http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/uploads/sources/588da8858e641.pdf>

⁷ The statement ‘Towards Fulfilling the Dream of Cultural Resistance’ can be found on the Freedom Theatre website: <http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/news/april-4-statement/>

I don't know if you've given up expecting to hear from me [...] I returned from the US tour on May 3st, and here at long last I am. I flew to Washington as the guest of a group of young Arab diplomats, who conceived the idea of inviting me to fly out to inaugurate the coming out of BEERSHEBA there [Mannin's first Palestinian novel]—the ambassador for Kuwait, himself a Palestinian, was giving a reception for the book, and they got the idea that a reception for the book without the author present was Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark—so! I went on to Chicago and New York, and in all three places appeared on radio and t.v. with Zionist-Jews, which was useful for the book, and for letting in the light on the Palestine tragedy, but which was a Very Great Strain. I was to have returned to Cairo this week, to attend the Palestine Women's Conf. in Gaza, and also in connection with the filming in Cairo of Beersheba, but I find I've no nervous energy left, and just can't. From all of this, and from your reading of Beersheba, you'll gather it is the Middle East which preoccupies me now [...]

Thank you for liking BRIEF VOICES. I would now like you to like my recently published REBELS' RIDE, which is about rebels and nonconformers throughout the ages, and is dedicated to RR [Reginald Reynolds, her husband], and has a lot to say about our increasingly horrible times. I have a book about Egypt coming out at the end of the year, and must now write a novel by Sept. 21 for publication next year. It will have a Nubian background as I was in the Nubian villages (yes) last year and it was a nightmare of heat and flies and exhaustion, and of drinking the Nile neat, as there were no wells in some of the villages.

She goes on to explain why she hasn't visited colonial Africa, in spite of her husband's work on Africa.

A thing that has always inhibited me from visiting Africa is the colour-bar business. I'd hate it! But Reginald said he found more liberals among the whites than he'd expected, and many v. good and decent ones—he called his book 'A Journey in Quest of Hope,' and felt that he'd found it.

She concludes the letter saying:

Did you read my book A LANCE FOR THE ARABS? Gen. Kassim [then Communist leader of Iraq] was murdered the day the first copy—which I intended for him—came from the press (there's a picture of me with him in the book, but it does neither of us justice, certainly not him, for he was the handsomest man I ever saw.) I had an interview with Nasser last Nov. and was impressed by his evident sincerity and [h]is unassumingness. But he hasn't the charm poor Kassim had. (But is vastly more intelligent).

All good wishes, Sincerely, Ethel Mannin

In the piece I first wrote about Mannin, I state: 'On reading these letters, I had the strange feeling that Ethel Mannin, this woman of my grandmother's generation, was a kind of contemporary of ours' and that, 'As I was to go on to discover, the reason for this is that she was what may be termed "a revolutionary woman", one who could be considered, in many respects, before her time: as a committed feminist, as a persistent

believer in social revolution, as an anti-colonialist, as a supporter of Arab liberation and pro-democracy causes and as an activist for the Palestinian cause.’ (2015a 142)

In the above Mannin refers to the following travelogues about her Arab journeys: *A Lance for the Arabs: A Middle East Journey* (1963) and *Aspects of Egypt* (1964), that relates her meeting with Nasser and visit to the Nubian villages, while she is also the author of a number of novels set in various Arab countries. Amongst her Arab causes, Mannin reserves a special place for the Palestinian struggle, as initially emerges in *A Lance for the Arabs* where she writes of her encounters with Palestinian refugees. In Gaza, she visits a Palestinian UNRWA school for girls, to be delivered a lecture by them on the creation of Israel in Arabic. She recounts: ‘Suddenly from the massed girls a block called out in English, “Palestine is our country!” It was followed by a burst of clapping, in which I joined as vigorously as I knew how, as the only way of demonstrating my solidarity’. (*Lance* 301) Mannin also meets a young Palestinian man who she says cries out bitterly to her: ““What are Palestinians to the British? They gave up their mandate and forgot our existence!” She replies: “Some of them haven’t forgotten [...] I’m here because I care.”” (306) And it is obvious she cares a lot, like Jean Genet she is ‘a prisoner of love’ in this transnational map of revolutionary affections and affinities. Mannin bemoans the fact that she can’t wage a one-woman fight against the British government but her weapon is clearly her writing. While Palestine comes up in various places in her writing in the 60’s and 70’s, her main work in this regard is her novel *The Road to Beersheba* (1963), followed by her second Palestinian novel *The Night and its Homing* (1966), Palestine also being one of the settings of her novel *Bitter Babylon* (1968).

In *Aspects of Egypt*, she writes the following of her second visit to Gaza:

There were two places I wanted to revisit on this return to Gaza: the Beersheba road, along which I had only looked the previous year, but which had started up in me the idea of writing a novel entitled *The Road to Beersheba*, which would be in some sort a ‘reply’ to the Jewish-Zionist novel, *Exodus*, with its lies and distortions—a novel which would tell of something of the story of the other exodus, the exodus of a million Palestinians from their homes and lands in 1948, in thousands of cases compulsorily, and often at machine gun point. This novel I duly wrote; it was published in November, 1963, and was totally boycotted by the national press.’ (*Aspects*, 229)

In *Proust Among the Nations: From Dreyfus to the Middle East*, Jacqueline Rose maintains that Elias Khoury’s novel *Gate of the Sun* ‘is the first novel to tell the story of 1948 from the point of view of the Palestinians’. (16) She goes on to say that ‘Palestine lacked its epic. From Khoury’s perspective, *Gate of the Sun* “came to fill a gap and to open a debate on Palestinian memory”.’ *Gate of the Sun* was published as late as 1998, appearing in English in 2005, whereas Mannin’s novel on the nakba appeared decades earlier in 1963, and as can be seen from Mannin’s explanation of its origin, it was conceived precisely to counter the Zionist epic narrative with a Palestinian one: so it considerably pre-dates *Gate of the Sun* as a pro-Palestinian nakba novel written to open a debate on memory. Indeed, this is an explicit theme of Mannin’s novel, one that is revolved in a number of ways. I should note that I don’t think that Mannin was concerned with writing ‘the first’ nakba novel at all, but rather that she was, as she says, motivated to address the disavowals of historical reality on

the part of Exodus. In fact, more that, the dedication of the novel ('to and for the Palestinian refugees') explains that the novel arose from an interpellation on the part of Palestinian refugees she had met who specifically asked her to write 'the other exodus' for Anglophone readers. (n.p.)

The novel's protagonist is a half-Palestinian, half-English boy called Anton Mansour, and we learn that his father Butros, a Christian Palestinian, and his mother Marian had met through Marian's father who had run a school for blind children during the British mandate. We are told that Marian marries Butros because she finds in him the same qualities she loves in her father. That is, Butros is not exotically 'other' to her, and, in comparison with Southern African fiction, it is really refreshing to see a cross-racial relationship treated in a way free of introjected racism (resulting in the portrayal of such relationships as guilty, abject and doomed). It is also quite inspired on the part of Mannin to place an English person in the position of being on the receiving end of the settler occupation as Marian is through her marriage.

The story begins with the family's personal experience of being traumatically evicted by Israeli Haganah militiamen from their home in Lydda, and forced to endure a trek of much hardship to Ramallah and on to Jericho. Mannin presents the experience of eviction through a rape scene—Anton's sister and a servant girl are raped by the soldiers/terrorists—which could be seen to stand metonymically for the rape of Palestine. I say 'metonymically' in that the novel does not sublimate the rape scene as if it were addressing merely a symbolic rape of Palestine (although metaphoric resonances remain possible), but presents the scene in terms of the violence suffered specifically by the Mansour women as an instance of the much wider violence of the nakba. Similarly, the first part of the novel that is entitled 'Exodus', focuses on the particular exodus of the Mansour family as metonymically a case of the wider exodus. While Mannin begins with the feminine trauma of rape, she also attends to the masculine trauma experienced by Butros, as one of humiliated helplessness as he is unable to help vulnerable mothers, children and old people whom he witnesses as they flee. While presented as his personal experience, it speaks for a sense of masculine shame widely shared by other Palestinian men.

While Mannin's novel may be said to be written in the style of the Third World realism that interests Jameson, what is at stake in the above is something other than 'national allegory'. What draws Jameson to the literature concerned is how personal experiences are not just personal in acquiring a collective or national dimension. However, the term 'allegory' is not always adequate for this in that the transmutation of the personal into the symbolic differs from the use of realism to depict a shared history.⁸ Mannin's text is a testimony to the nakba as a very real experience: one that needs to be seen as a lived history not as a mere allegory of loss or myth of displacement.

While the Mansour family set up a new home in the West Bank, the health of Butros is undermined by his despair over their fate issuing in his death. This leads to the second section of the novel called 'Exile' in which Anton goes into an English exile

⁸ It is worth noting that Bashir Abu-Manneh in his recently published book *The Palestinian Novel: From 1948 to the Present* draws on Western Marxism and argues that 'realism and emancipation are born together in the Palestinian novel.' (24)

with his mother, before returning to Amman in the final section called 'Return'. Thus, Mannin structures her novel to according to three of the most persistent shared reference points of the Palestinian struggle—exodus, exile and return—while turning them into specific, actual trajectories for the characters of her narrative. That Anton goes into exile in England is also an inspired way for Mannin to present the English as seen through Palestinian eyes.

In England, Anton meets his Arabic-speaking English grandfather Robert Melby (and Mannin's novel is peppered with learner's Arabic, *marhaba*, *yan 'i*, *insh 'allah*, *ma 'as-salama*, *yalla*). Melby introduces Anton to various writers including Marmaduke Pickthall, the British convert to Islam who translated the Quran, and Anton reads both his *Oriental Encounters* and his picaresque *maqama*/novel *Saïd the Fisherman* (a text that Emile Habiby's later *Saeed the Pessoptimist* echoes in a number of ways, not least on the 'oriental imagination' of Pickthall's wily protagonist who like his own protagonist is a fisherman and compromised everyman). The Mansours consider Pickthall's work to be sympathetic yet flawed (still too Orientalist), perhaps Mannin's own view as a writer. At any rate, it is interesting to note that it is possible that Mannin and Habiby may both be engaged in re-working *Saïd the Fisherman*, itself seeming to draw on Arab folk literature.

In London, Anton writes to his close Palestinian friend Walid of his experiences of English life. For instance, he narrates an anecdote in which his mother refuses to buy gladioli from a florist because they are from Israel. Anton writes of how his mother explains to the florist that Israel is really Jewish-occupied Palestine where over a million people lost their homes and jobs with no compensation. He goes on to write:

'The flower-shop woman was very surprised at what my mother told her and said she had no idea, and agreed it was very terrible. She even used the word "shocking". But next time we passed the shop she was still showing gladioli in the window, and the fruit side of the window was stacked with Jaffa oranges. I think that most people here don't know what "Israel" is and how it came about, and even when they do, they don't care. The Jews are real to them; they are meeting them all the time [...] but Arabs are strange faraway people who wear Biblical clothes and live in deserts and go about on camels.' (190)

Here is Ethel Mannin in 1963 anticipating the BDS movement, staging a refusal to buy Israeli goods: maybe the first fictional representation of such. And here she is also anticipating the critique of Orientalism that Said was later to mount. Not only that, *The Road to Beersheba* is animated by debates as to whether the Palestinians should form their own IRA-style resistance movement, where the pros and cons of this militancy are aired in ways that are still significant in our times around the activities of Hamas. It is worth pointing out that Mannin's novel pre-dates the formation of the PLO by a year. Mannin, who visited refugee camps in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, is clearly drawing on the conversations she had with Palestinians there. At the same time, however, Mannin who was a born socialist, in her words, (*Aspects* 17) and revolutionary from an early age, on the evidence of her writings, could have been a source of inspiration for some of those she engaged with. In her letter to my grandmother, she speaks of how she is sought out by young Arab diplomats, as well as invited to the women's conference in Gaza. At the same time, Mannin gives us the

flipside of this when she states her Palestinian novel was boycotted by the British press.

The American publisher of Mannin's novel was Henry Regnery (1912-1996) and in *Memoirs of a Dissident Publisher* he situates the publication of her novel amongst a series of works he was publishing at the time. He refers to Nejla Izzedin's *The Arab World* (1953), with its support for Palestine; to Freya Utley's *Will the Middle East Go West?* (1957), with its critique of imperialism; to Swedish Per-Olow Anderson's *They Are Human Too* (1957), a photographic essay of Palestinians in Gaza that could be seen as a precursor to Edward Said and Jean Mohr's *After the Last Sky*. Regnery also draws attention to his publication of Alfred M. Lilienthal's *What Price Israel* (1957), a book in which Lilienthal, we are told, 'took the position that as an American Jew he owed no political allegiance to Israel.' (119) He argued also that Israel should not be an exclusively Jewish state and that Jerusalem should be an international city as sacred to three faiths. In a way, he too sounds like our contemporary, given current Jewish debates which refuse the conflation of Judaism with Zionism.

I will in a moment present Regnery's account of his publication of Mannin's novel. However, firstly, what is interesting to note is that while he is a dissident publisher of anti-colonial and, in Mannin's case, radically anti-capitalist writers, he was himself a New Deal conservative, or we might say liberal conservative. Regarding this, in an article entitled 'When Conservatives Loved the Palestinians', Jeet Heer notes that the recent promotion of a 'clash of civilisations' supposed to extend as far back as the Crusades obscures the fact that: 'within the lifetime of our parents, conservatives were surprisingly pro-Arab'.⁹ He gives the case of Regnery publishing as one of his examples, and he speculates that this early pro-Palestine stance was because conservatives were anti-Semitic and anti-liberal. Yet this is very dubious, given that Regnery in his book is not anti-Semitic, rather agreeing with Lilienthal that not all Jews are necessarily Zionist. Nor is he reactionary and anti-liberal in his anti-colonial conservatism, with his enthusiastic receptivity towards writers of a range of political positions.

Heer sees that a turning point was reached in the late sixties, with conservatives switching their allegiance to Israel. This is more to the point where 1967 is a crucial date. Of course the 1967 war dealt a considerable death blow to Nasser's Pan Arab socialism, while Israel's success in the war led to the replacement of socialist Labour Zionism (as had prevailed as the post-1948 government) with the far more right wing forms of Revisionist Zionism and Religious Zionism that have come to dominate Israeli politics. Also of note is that in the late sixties, American neo-conservatives, originally centre left, found themselves at odds with the more radically left Democrats over the latter's anti-Vietnam pacifism and their anti-capitalism, and so aligned themselves with the Republican right, the neo-conservatives being ardent Zionists. So the late sixties saw the emergence of a militant hard right Zionism in both Israel and America, while this was swiftly accompanied by the rise of neoliberalism. It is this

⁹ Jeet Heer, *sans everything*, February 25, 2008.

<https://sanseverything.wordpress.com/2008/02/25/when-conservatives-loved-the-palestinians/>

configuration that serves to oppose and censor the pro-Palestinian cultural activism of both a radical leftist like Mannin and a liberal conservative like Regnery.

What Regnery says of the publication of Mannin's *The Road to Beersheba* is that 'its purpose was to show the impact of the Palestinian Arab exodus on the people involved' and he explains that he took on her work when her usual American publisher was reluctant to publish it. He quotes Arnold Toynbee's view of the novel in a letter sent to Mannin as follows: "'you have succeeded in doing what is perhaps the most important thing a Westerner can do for an Arab: you have made it impossible for a Western reader to go on supposing that Arabs are not human beings like himself... In this book you are exposing one of the biggest pieces of injustice in the present day world.'" (123)

While Mannin speaks of the press boycott of her novel in the UK, it is being slowly recovered as an anti-colonial or postcolonial novel. Phyllis Lassner offers a reading of it in *Colonial Strangers: Women Writing the End of the British Empire*, where Lassner also attends with an emphasis on gendered perspectives to writers such as Elspeth Huxley, Olivia Manning, Muriel Spark and Zadie Smith. More recently, Marie-Violaine Louvet's *Civil Society, Postcolonialism and Transnational Solidarity* (2016) touches on Mannin's work in the context of Irish-Palestinian solidarity (Mannin being of Irish descent), and Ahmed Al Rawi in his article 'The post-colonial novels of Desmond Stewart and Ethel Mannin' (2016) considers both writers to be unique in pioneering postcolonial perspectives of the Arab world. However, Al Rawi judges their writings to be one-sided which he equates with 'sentimentality'. (262) I disagree with such an evaluation of Mannin's style, and James Canton, in discussing Mannin's *A Lance for the Arabs* maintains: 'This is no romantic jaunt through the desert... Her sincerity and sympathy drive the narrative.' (122)

Although Mannin can be seen as repeatedly avoiding stereotypes in her work, she is sometimes subjected to them as a writer. Because her writing is down-to-earth and sincere, she is treated as a woman novelist who writes out of 'feelings' rather than out of 'thought'. However, her writing is certainly intelligent even if her simplicity of style prevents readers from realizing its astuteness. As a schoolgirl, she was in love with a female teacher who taught her Shaw and Fabianism, and she went on to study Paine, John Stuart Mill, William Morris and Peter Kropotkin. Her friends included Yeats, Maud Gonne, Bertrand Russell and Emma Goldmann (on whom her novel *Red Rose* is based), and Albert Meltzer speaks of her profound understanding of anarchist thought which he considers her to disseminate through her writing in an accessible and 'consummately crafted' manner.¹⁰ An example of this craftsmanship can be found in the concluding section of *The Road to Beersheba*.

In this section, when Anton has returned to Palestine, Mannin shows sensitivity to the predicaments of young Palestinian men in ways that resonate with the work of Kanafani. That is, she shows that the choice for them is whether or not to join the emerging Fedayeen movement, a choice that could lead to their deaths. While friends of Anton are keen to become liberation fighters, Anton is hesitant since a part of him yearns for marriage and a career (most likely as a Professor of Literature, given his

¹⁰ <https://libcom.org/library/on-ethel-mannin-albert-meltzer>

interests, as if envisaging an Edward Said). Eventually, though, he decides to join Walid in Hebron on Operation Beersheba, a return to Walid's hometown, captured by Israel in 1948 and bordered by an Israeli kibbutz. Walid goes on ahead and when Anton tries to join him during a night journey he is set upon by a pack of dogs and shot down by settlers: 'He was dead before he hit the ground.' At this point Mannin leaves a blank space in the text as if time had frozen, and then life goes on: 'People came running through the dust, word having gone around that they were bringing an infiltrator back across the border. Munir Hussein and his son Saïd were among the tense silent crowd who waited, straining their eyes along the road to Beersheba.'

(256)

There is no melodrama in the ending, which reminds me some of Elias Khoury's novelistic endings in that the understatement creates a multi-layered silence and quiet sympathy. While Mannin's novel began with a vision she had looking along the road to Beersheba, at the conclusion of the novel she hands this over to Palestinians of the present and future in an open-ended way. While Mannin's work might seem less literary than the modernists and postmodernists of her day, placed alongside realist Palestinian writing, it is not out of place. In this context, especially when writing is bearing witness to realities beyond itself, literary self-consciousness could well be counter-productive. Put another way, Mannin's style is appropriate to her position as an organic intellectual.

There are traces of there being a Special Branch file on Mannin although it no longer seems to exist.¹¹ No doubt this was due to her socialist, anarchist, revolutionary, anti-colonial and pro-Arab commitments, while through the influence of her Quaker husband (a friend of Gandhi and his official representative in the UK), she became a pacifist.

Topographies of Resistance

The Palestinian poet Salem Jubran writes: 'From a philosophical point of view I am a Marxist... because I view the social dream as parallel to the literary dream'. (Caspi and Weltsch 1998, 55) Another prominent poet Sami Al Qasim who was a Communist speaks in an interview of his wish to reach and unite the Arab world particularly through culture.¹² Equally, the important Palestinian novelist, Ghassan Kanafani was a Marxist and a nationalist whom, according to Amy Zalman, considered literature to be the shaping spirit behind his politics. (2003, 17). And Emile Habiby, author of *Saeed the Pessoptimist*, was a member of the Communist party for decades and someone who in his novels makes a case for what I term 'imaginative resistance'. Moore-Gilbert briefly aligns his culturalist position with textualism, but I wish to explain how the notion of 'imaginative resistance' that I raise in relation to Habiby's work could not be considered the same textualism.

¹¹ <http://booksurfer.blogspot.co.uk/2005/11/ethel-mannin-researching-in-national.html>

¹² Interview with Liam Brown. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/essays/samih-al-qasim-and-language-revolution-1095441705>

My essay 'Prison Israel/Palestine: Literalities of and Imaginative Resistance' appears in the special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing on Palestine* co-edited by Anna Ball and Patrick Williams that Bart discusses in his article and in which an essay of his appears. In the introduction to the special issue, my argument is summarized as follows: 'Rooney reveals ... extensive forms of imprisonment encircling Palestinian existence – from the literal experiences of imprisonment prevalent amongst Palestinian men in particular, to the self-imprisoning nature of Israel's denial of individual consciousness and indeed of humanity to Palestinians. Ultimately, though, Rooney's textual analyses of Palestinian prison narratives reveal how individual imaginative insight can break through this imprisoning "settler logic": a powerful affirmation of postcolonialists' long-standing belief in creativity as a form of resistance.' (130)

First of all, I wish to take the opportunity to amend emphases in the above in an important respect. My attention was not to privilege individual consciousness, for I argue rather that the Israeli policy is to break the collective spirit of individual Palestinians. Israel does this through criminalizing not only any attempts to resist the Israeli occupation but through making Palestinian collective (not individual) consciousness a crime. One of the Arab terms for this collective consciousness is *sumud*, which is a form of spiritual solidarity. Israel seeks to crush this in order to deny the Palestinians as a people, allowing only for intimidated individuals who surrender their hope of nationhood.

'Palestine, Postcolonialism and Pessimism' could be seen to address and recast the above question in terms of 'culturecide', but if so I think that the term requires some hopefully useful clarification. 'Culturecide' is a word that derives from 'cultural genocide' and it is put forward to mark its difference from genocide and ethnic cleansing. What it centrally refers to is the destruction of tangible cultural heritage as that which marks the existence of a people, as opposed to direct destruction of a population group. Chris Miller uses the term in this sense in the following:

Hundreds of Palestinian villages were destroyed. Pine forests were often planted over their remains. Where villages were repopulated by settlers, their names were changed ... Mosques and churches were frequently destroyed. A Culturecide was attempted. Efforts were made to efface all traces of Palestinian habitation. (2009, 11)

It is also in this sense that Ilan Pappé (2015) also uses the term to talk of the destruction of Palestinian mosques.¹³ When Moore-Gilbert refers to the assassination of Kanafani and Naji Al Ali as culturecide or the administrative detention of writers as culturecide, (26) I think this is arguably too broad a usage of the term, while Hanan Chehata also broadens the application of the term in this way.¹⁴

¹³ Al Jazeera <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/10/israeli-colonisation-root-violence-palestine-151019142927288.html>

¹⁴ 'The Cultural Genocide of Palestine'. <http://www.syriawide.com/chehata.html>

I would emphasize that the murders of Kanafani and Al Ali are murders (the destruction of lives not just symbols), carried out of course because Kanafani and Al Ali were dissidents. Israel does not only seek to destroy the collective consciousness of Palestinian artists, but much more widely of each generation (and not just known dissidents), as William Parry and I explore in our documentary *Breaking the Generations*, which shows how the Israeli prison system deliberately aims to re-engineer the psychologies of prisoners, resulting in the induced breakdown of the mental health of many Palestinians. This goes beyond culturecide in being an assault on the existential creativity of the human spirit, as some would consider tantamount to a form of ethnic cleansing.

When I take up Habiby on what he writes of as the 'oriental imagination', this is to show how creative spirit becomes a matter of survival in outwitting the enemy. I think Habiby may well have been influenced by Saïd the Fisherman in that Pickthall's text is concerned with this improvised ingenuity, where his Saïd comes from the class of the illiterate folk. The escapism that I consider in regard to this is not cultural but ontological; what it means to escape with your life. In Habiby's novel this resourceful escapism is connected with *sumud*, and also with the spirits of the ancestors, the *umma* of the undead. Of course the creativity concerned can take cultural forms, but it is beyond this a question of life, death and the sacred.

What is interesting to note, is that while Edward Said takes great offence at the stereotype of the Devious and Mystical Oriental, Emile Habiby re-interprets it in his own terms, as discussed above.

When Bart Moore-Gilbert depicts the field of postcolonial studies in terms of its 'post-structuralist', 'materialist' and 'left-liberal' branches, aligning himself with the latter, (9) the difficulty I have with this is that the kind of post-colonial studies that my work has long engaged with rather fails to appear on this map. I think that Moore-Gilbert accurately depicts the dominant tendencies of the Western epistemic formation of postcolonial studies, and this after all is his focus, but what is missing is the question of postcolonial studies outside of Western epistemic formations. The post-structuralist position may be aligned with 'textual idealism', as proposed by Benita Parry, and it seems to me that the post-structuralist approach is often a liberal one as opposed to the anti-capitalist materialist approach. However, regarding Bart's work, the difference is that his textualism is not so much theoretical as historical which is what makes it less idealist and at least somewhat materialist.

Regarding the above, my work on the creative expression of liberation struggles is anti-capitalist and aligned with the revolutionary left. However beyond this, outside of the West these anti-colonial movements cannot be adequately accounted for in materialist terms because they are not atheist as Marxism is. In brief, different spiritual philosophies are at stake, as I have explored, ranging from animism and Ubuntu, Hinduism, Sufism and different forms of Islam.

The Palestinian struggle has always had both secular and religious strands. Moore-Gilbert warns against the danger of Hamas as a Muslim Brotherhood or Islamist movement. However, Hamas have distanced themselves from such positions, and do not currently stand for an Islamic state in the way that ISIL does or in the way that Zionism stands for a Jewish state. In the party's most recent charter religious

tolerance is insisted on and it is said that the spiritual umma is for all the believers of different faiths.¹⁵ In addition, the Hamas charter argues for gender equality. However, of course Hamas needs to guard against those who might wish to hijack it for Islamist ends.

In an interview with Helit Yeshurun (1996), Mahmoud Darwish states: 'As a good Palestinian, all religions are found within in me.' (2012/13) In the same interview, when asked if he considers himself the national poet of Palestine, he responds that this depends on what is meant by 'national', adding that 'the collective voice exists within my individual voice' and that 'the national poet is the one who expresses the spirit of the people.' He does not say 'national identity' of the people for 'the spirit of the people' concerns rather the fears, hopes, desires, loves, aspirations of the people, as current and changeable moods: a question of subjectivities rather than identity. It is this that a national poet is attuned to, as Darwish certainly was.

While Bart is opposed to nationalism, I think this is because he considers nationalism particularly in terms of what I see as 'narrow nationalism' (undesirable to be sure). In a postcolonial context though, I think that the national struggle needs to be seen in terms of a movement towards a wider universality (beyond the race-nationalism of the colonizer). Atef Alshaer (2016) maintains of Darwish that he was both a Fanonian nationalist and a universal humanist (like Freud and Said). I don't think there is a contradiction in this if nationalism is not a matter of ring-fenced identity politics. What is important for the above perspective is that the nation should not be conflated with the state.

The difference between Moore-Gilbert's orientation and my orientation is that his intriguing concern is to read Palestinian literature in terms of what it pre-figures for a post-liberation future of a potential state. I found his suggestion that he was able to see the lineaments of a one-state solution in Palestinian literature fascinating and wish we could have his particular readings of the texts concerned. Influenced by Ghada Karmi's *Married to Another Man*, I too have supported a one-state solution. However, when I speak of a different orientation, it is because my kind of utopianism perhaps differs from the utopianism that Moore-Gilbert refers to in envisaging an eventual state.

In being drawn to writers like Genet and Mannin, it is because I can see something of myself in them, and what I think we have in common is that we are 'permanent revolutionaries'. Utopianism from this perspective concerns what does not take place (as u[n]-topos): what does not end, what continues in being unfinished. Of course, I hope for an end to the Israel/ Palestine conflict, but this would not be the culmination of but continuation of emancipatory aspirations or beliefs.

Writing this, and thinking of the distinctions between the radical left and the liberal left raised for me by Moore-Gilbert's essay, what came to mind was *A Passage to India* and the friendship between Fielding and Aziz. Putting aside the readings of the perceived queer and Orientalist aspects of the friendship, what could be seen to be at

¹⁵ A preview of the charter (2017) appears here:
<http://mondoweiss.net/2017/04/translated-leaked-charter/>

stake is the difference between Fielding as a liberal and Aziz as an eventual liberationist. In spite of this unfolding difference between them, the two maintain a genuine friendship, united not only by their common rejection of British colonialism but by a mutual ethics of respect for and attentiveness to others: a kind of ethics of decency. In the famous closing scene of the novel, at the very same time that the two friends affirm their bond, a paradoxical distancing force intervenes, a law that the novel posits as a natural law not a human or political one, and articulates in terms of 'not here' and 'not now'. That is, on the level of the real, liberalism and radicalism are of necessity topographically and temporally separate. The attempt to force them into the same space would either counter-productively result in the one displacing the other or, more problematically, lead to the usurpation (appropriation or mis-prison) of one by the other.

What I have come to realize in trying to think through the respective differences between Moore-Gilbert's position and my own is that for the liberal position, radicalism tends to be placed in the past or else positioned as something to be surpassed, while for the 'permanent revolutionary' it is liberalism that is belated in keeping up with the revolutionary vanguard (a figure such as Mannin). Interestingly, Ilan Pappé in a reading of Edward Said (2006), sees something of this dual direction as constituting a split within Said (also a split noted by Parry, 2015): that is, the topographical divide can occur within an individual, as indeed a question for many of us.¹⁶ For Pappé, there is the Said that is the liberal humanist, the exilic intellectual, and there is the Said who is the Palestinian exile and rebel. As Pappé indicates, for Said such a split was something that emphatically should not be reconciled. As with the ending of Forster's novel, the spacing apart is a topographical necessity. There would be many ways of accounting for the dynamics at stake, but one would be to speak of a crossroads of desire, the way that the road to Beersheba constitutes a crossroads in Mannin's imagination as her character Anton has to decide between incompatible trajectories concerning what he hopes for in different ways.

For any trajectory chosen, the not chosen might appear surpassed by it, but not necessarily conclusively so. The one final thought I should like to add to this is that the topographical irreconcilability that I speak of perhaps emerges as a necessary way of certain liberal and certain radical positions guaranteeing each other's freedoms.

Going back over my email correspond with Bart in writing this, we say several times to each other that we respect each other's differences where this does feel like friendly support especially in our awareness of common causes, even if differently approached. One abiding memory I have of Bart is when I attended the inaugural London meeting of the academic boycott. Waiting for it to begin I looked around the audience and noted the presence of well-known Jewish intellectuals, while I asked myself 'where are the postcolonialists?' At the moment this thought came into my mind Bart walked through the door with his eye-catching panache. I saw him survey the audience for familiar faces and then he saw me, and we smiled broadly at each other. I much miss him as a comrade in the meeting places of transnational solidarity

¹⁶ In saying this, I acknowledge that Bart Moore-Gilbert has acted as a rebel (for instance, in his brave exposure of Michael Gove's attempts to censor the outreach activities of the Tottenham Palestine Festival).

but he continues to be an ally in what remains unfinished in more than one sense of the term.

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