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The wheel that lost its chair or how they came to bomb Palestine

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on what it means to be interpellated as threat through the European response to Hamas's success in the 2006 Palestinian elections. While you might recognise elements of securitisation in this paper, here the performative utterance of threat relies on material and discursive histories of racism, sexism and colonialism to be successful. Securitisation is successful because it reiterates symbolic and material histories of permissible violence against racialised and sexualised subjects, normalised because the 'securitised' other have always been cast as threatening. This paper emphasises the asymmetries of power that mark the encounter between the European colonialist and Hamas, and the consequences of being marked as threatening entail. The securitisation of Hamas delivered through boycott, sanction and siege meant the collective punishment and death of the Palestinians and a coordinated imperial effort to dismantle local resistance.

This paper interweaves excerpts from different performative texts: my interviews with European Union and Hamas representatives; theories of performativity and the questions of race and sex that shape contemporary developments this theory namely the works of Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed, and finally anti-colonial and anti-racist literatures, notably Toni Morrison and Frantz Fanon that describe experiences of being marked as less than human.

KEYWORDS

Performativity; securitisation; race; gender; hamas; palestine; european Union

Have you seen my chair?

Ahmed Yousef, Hamas leader and former advisor to then Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh,

'They would have a better understanding of Hamas and its issues; if we sit and talk face to face and come to a common ground where we can develop dialogue to more steps forward. But if we do not talk to each other and keep with accusation then this complicates the relations.'¹

Patrick Child, EU Commissioner, former Head of Cabinet for Commissioner for External Relation, Benita Ferrero-Waldner,

'So maybe you can say that we were being completely unfair by not allowing Hamas any wiggle room which maybe would have allowed them to renounce violence on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and

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To be successful a securitising speech act relies on the repetition of social and cultural categories. This article is concerned with the violent discursive histories that are re-enacted when the Other is named as threat. It places everyday securitisations within a temporal and spatial context, which addresses the discriminations around race, gender and sexuality that are repeated when a threat is named. Moreover, it acknowledges the hierarchies of power that exist within and over the act of securitisation. The European Union calls upon histories of discrimination to securitise Hamas, which closed down opportunities for a constructive and creative response to the outcome of the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections. The EU performed a knowing over the Palestinian elections and the success of Hamas as threatening, and in need of European intervention. Performative discourses, which have a violent history misread subjects and reproduce social and political realities that hinder alternative political arrangements. Relying on elite interviews with Hamas and EU representatives and through a performative writing method, this article follows and exposes various iterations of threat in social and political settings, and it observes how they destructively plaster bodies together.



Figure 1. Wheel collected from a bombed office building in Gaza, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, December 2012. Photo by the author.

Thursdays and we'll see how it does. But on the other hand the positions of the US and Israel in relation to their constituencies were that unless we are able to demonstrate that the Quartet's principles are unquestionably met then we cannot move forward in any sort of process of negotiation.²

Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, last stanza of the poem, 'Who am I Without Exile?'



Figure 2. Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territories. Building destroyed in November 2012 Israeli aerial bombing of the Gaza Strip. Photo by the author.

“Water
 binds me
 to your name . . .
 There’s nothing left of me but you, and nothing left of you
 but me, the stranger massaging his stranger’s thigh: O
 stranger! what will we do with what is left to us
 of calm . . . and of a snooze between two myths?
 And nothing carries us: not the road and not the house.
 Was this road always like this, from the start,
 or did our dreams find a mare on the hill
 among the Mongol horses and exchange us for it?
 And what will we do?
 What
 will we do
 without
 exile?”³
*‘Have you seen my chair?’
 asked the wheel
 I lost it here*

Interpellated into a threat on a black chair

“The mark interpellation makes is not descriptive, but inaugural.”⁴

European Union’s High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana addresses the European Parliament a few months after the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, in which Hamas was democratically elected.

“I am appearing before the European Parliament at a critical time for the future of the Middle East peace process, immediately after the forming of a new Palestinian government and the holding of elections in Israel. [. . .]

In the Occupied Territories, Hamas has taken over the reins of government. Its programme, as presented by Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, is *unfortunately unacceptable* to the international community. It does not give any clear indication that the Hamas government is prepared to respect the principles established by the European Union [. . .].

Ultimately, the unwillingness of Hamas to come into line with our principles, in spite of some very light steps, along with the fact that Hamas appears on the European list of terrorist organisations, *must inevitably have consequences* for the EU: *the impossibility* of regarding Hamas as a valid partner until it changes its stance.”⁵

“The mark interpellation makes is not descriptive, but inaugural.”⁶

Judith Butler’s reading of Althusser’s scene of the hailing policeman recognises the performative effects of the act of naming.

‘Hey, you there!’

‘Interpellation is an act of speech whose “content” is neither true nor false: it does not have description as its primary task. Its purpose is to indicate and establish a subject in subjection, to produce its social contours in space and time.’⁷

The wheel looks around . . . and says

Have you seen my chair?

Hamas unfortunately is unacceptable

[. . .]

Hamas is unwilling to ‘respect’ our line.

[. . .]

This must have unacceptable consequences.

[...]

And the wheel continued looking for its for its black chair

Frantz Fanon writes,

“‘Look, a Negro!’ It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.

‘Look, a Negro!’ It was true. It amused me.

‘Look, a Negro!’ The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.

‘Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!’ Frightened! Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.”⁸

Etimad Tashawa, Hamas member of the Palestinian Legislative Council in Gaza, Occupied Palestine, shares the following story.

A Dutch journalist had come to interview Tashawa. After the interview, Tashawa and the journalist leave the building. Etimad Tashawa proceeds to get into her car to drive home.

The Dutch journalist yells,

‘Wait, stop! I want to get a photo of a Hamas woman getting into a car.’⁹

‘s/he thought that Hamas women were not allowed to have cars.’

Jasbir Puar reminds us how forms of identification are sticky, in that they are read from the body and endowed onto the body.¹⁰ The visiting Dutch journalist performs a ‘recognition’ of a Hamas woman, calling forth an existing discursive framing which the journalist uses to undo Tashawa. Tashawa tries to get out of the way of the utterance. She looks back at the European journalist ...

How is it that you think you know me?

What kinds of relationships can emerge after and through a performative utterance of threat has reproduced the subjects in this way?

After the subject is reproduced through utterance of those whose words can kill?

‘wait/stop’?

“Hey, you there!

Hamas is unfortunate(ly) ... (un)willing

And the wheel wondered about its friend the chair.

Carried on a pair of surgical gloves

Javier Solana speaking at the Quartet meeting in London, 30 January 2006,

‘What I would like to say on behalf of the European Union is that once these conditions are fulfilled, the European Union will stand ready to continue to support the Palestinian economic development and democratic stability, *but it has to be compliant* with all these conditions which are here.’¹¹

Perform or else!

All possible relations between the EU and Hamas were governed by the conditions after their performative utterance.

Member of the European Parliament, Richard Howitt,

‘To use a religious metaphor, those principles became like the bible you could not question them. And Hamas either agreed with the principles or we wouldn’t talk to them. And that what everyone said over and over again.’¹²

Those conditions became like a Bible.

A friend walks into the waiting room of a clinic. This person is there for a regular check-up; however this is the first time they visit this particular clinic. A friend walks into the waiting room of this clinic. My friend approaches the counter and says his name. The woman behind the desk looks at the computer screen in front of her. She looks down at the screen and then looks up. She passes my friend a form to fill out. She passes my friend a form, and she passes my friend a pair of surgical gloves. My friend has AIDS.

The passing of a pair of surgical gloves. The passing of a pair of surgical gloves, which performs my friend as dirty and dangerous.

An act, which is part of an injurious performative discourse, tears the bodies apart. An utterance of threat performs a distance between them. While my friend and the woman at the desk are in the same space they are torn apart by the performative act. The woman behind the desk cannot see my friend; she cannot see his pain or sadness. The woman behind the desk reads upon him an injurious discourse and misses the person in front of her. She passes him a pair of surgical gloves.

Reduced and consumed by the conditions

What kinds of conversations can be had from or after this point? How can the subjects relate to each other beyond the relationship performed through the derogatory, oppressive and threatening utterance?

Etimad Tashawa,

'It wasn't an official meeting. More like Q&A- about Hamas's ideology. But it wasn't a discussion.'¹³

A Q & A about the taboo. A Q & A about that which is performed as monstrous.

Reduced and consumed by the performative utterance that misses and marks the subjects standing in its way.

The prohibitive discourse concerning homosexual self-ascription in the US military works to fashion a relationship between bodies through its overdetermined fantasy, whereby 'the power of the magical word' fabulously misconstrues 'I am a homosexual' with 'I want you sexually.'¹⁴ Through Freud, Butler observes how the taboo, which floats around the declarative utterance of homosexuality, works to fashion a relationship between bodies and reduces the encounter to a discriminatory and threatening discourse.

Indeed, it is the incessant transferability of this desire that is instituted by the taboo, and that inform the logic of contagion by which the desire under taboo enters into discourse as a highly communicable name. If I say, "I am a homosexual," in front of you, then you become implicated in the "homosexuality" that I utter; the utterance is presumed to establish a relationship between the speaker and the audience.'¹⁵

The discourses that exist around the construed understanding of homosexuality in the military perform upon the encounter. The 'homosexual's' speech and conduct becomes reduced to and subsumed by the performativity of the discourse; everything this soldier does will be marked as being somehow gay.

Interpellated through a pair of surgical gloves.

The wheel remembers the day they arrived at the office

They shuffled around the newly laid floor

'Were they watching us that day?'

'Did they hear us, from way up there in the sky?'

Besam Naim, Hamas leader, Minister of Health,

'There was always a kind of dialogue- but most of the time it was non-official and most of the time it was not trying to hear the position of Hamas but to dictate policies. They came with already taken decisions, you have to renounce violence, recognise Israel and follow all existing agreements. I think it was more or less a continued policy of trying to contain Hamas.'¹⁶

Blue eyes in white courts

Bodies bound by a performative utterance of threat, which also tears them apart

On 27 January 2006 Members of the European Parliament delegation in Jerusalem and other EU foreign affairs officials exchange sentiments over Hamas's electoral success.

Elmar Brok, chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, stressed the need for Hamas to renounce violence. If it did not, he said, the EU should cut off its funding for Palestine. Emilio Menéndez del Valle, stressed the need for Hamas to foreswear the use of violence and called for an intelligent, tactful and flexible approach in order to integrate Hamas into the political framework. Pawel Piskorski called for Hamas to refrain from violence and to recognise Israel's right to exist. Michel Rocard warned that Hamas should not be pushed too hard and too fast, pointing out that Hamas itself was divided and that part of it had not wanted to take part in the elections.¹⁷

These statements utter varying views on Hamas, but they are all situated within a performative reading of Hamas as already illegitimate. The responses continue to perform a fantasy of Hamas as a terrorist, as a monster, as that which needs to be quarantined, fixed, conditioned, made to be flexible, made to fit in.¹⁸

Ismail al-Ashgar, Hamas founder and Minister of Interior Security, 'With the EU, what do they want us to do, have green eyes or blue eyes and change our clothes and change our skin.'¹⁹

From this departure point how can the EU hear or see Hamas?

And the wheel sat face to face with the Israeli bomb

And said ...

Have you seen my chair?

Khalil al-Haya, Hamas founder and member of the government,

'Hamas gave lots of flexibility in lots of places. We had things that were strategic and things that were fixed. For example, we had that programme with all the fractions of Gaza/Palestine- we agreed for it. And until now the EU did not catch this initiative, and see that Hamas was already very flexible. And we have the agreements with Israel with the other parties and we accept 1967 borders- with the right to return. And this is big.'²⁰

But until now the EU did not catch these initiatives.

Hamas is talking, but who is listening?

Hamas is talking but how is it being listened to?

In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* Butler provides a critical reading of Anita Hill's confessional statement in a US Senate hearing. Hill is speaking out against sexual harassment. Hill is an African-American woman speaking out against sexual harassment. Hill is an African-American woman speaking out against sexual harassment in a white, sexualised court space. Butler exposes the Senate hearing as 'a pornographic scene' in and of itself. Hill 'is the "example" of pornography because, as black, she becomes the spectacle of the projection and living out of white sexual anxiety.'²¹

Butler argues that the public experience of the defence hearing misappropriates Hill's words.

Hill's words cannot be taken as communicating her defence rather, situated within the white, sexualised court space, Hill's words appear as an enactment of her sexual guilt. Hill's response to her pornographic defamation, within the sexualised court space, became a further incitement of her sexual presence; 'the more she speaks, the less she is believed, the less her meaning is taken to be the one she intends.'²² The African-American, female body 'permits for spectacularization of sexuality and a recasting of whites outside the fray.'²³

Hill speaks but she is not listened to. Hill stands and speaks in her defence, but the sexualised and racial discourses, which perform upon her and her speech deform the scene and distort her words. The bodies standing in the court room may occupy the same space, but they are not there together. They are distanced by the anxious and spectacular white imaginary of the 'judicious court space' and of their place within it.

'The more she speaks, the less she is believed, the less her meaning is taken to be the one she intends.'²⁴

As I listened to my interviews from Gaza over again I could hear my own voice repeating the questions: 'Did you show signs of flexibility towards the EU?' 'Did you demonstrate your capacity to engage in politics?' In my meetings with Hamas representatives, I continuously hunted for signs

that through or after the elections there was the possibility that Hamas could change. ‘Did you demonstrate to the EU observers that you were willing to co-operate?’

From my research into Hamas I already knew that they had; I already knew about the cease of violent action prior to the elections. I already knew about the hudna (truce) affirmed and kept by Hamas. I had already read Hamas’s political party, Change and Reform’s election manifesto, which Khaled Hroub describes as being Hamas’s most encompassing political platform. And ‘it could be said that the document was designed to carry out exactly the kinds of reforms that had been demanded by Western governments and financial institutions.’²⁵

Yet my questioning of Hamas leadership demanded further reassurance, that yes indeed they were flexible; that yes indeed Hamas were capable of engaging in ‘normal politics’. I am still not sure what I was looking for in this questioning. What reassurances was I in need of finding?

Please be this [...]; I need to see you as this [...].

And who was the ‘I’ that was asking?

A chorus of white tongues with guns

The performative utterance of threat is a compressed history which (re)produces subjects caught in its injurious pathway. ‘Injurious names have a history, one that is invoked and reconsolidated at the moment of utterance, but not explicitly told.’²⁶ The performative power of the name is felt through its historicity, which continues to perform upon bodies through the injurious utterance.

‘The racial slur is always cited from elsewhere, and in the speaking of it, one chimes in with a chorus of racists, producing at that moment the linguistic occasion for an imagined relation to an historically transmitted community of racists.’²⁷

Hannu Takkula, member of the European Parliament, member of the European Election Observation Mission for the West Bank and Gaza,

‘When we say democracy, they don’t think about it in the same way. Because they have no democracy they just have theocracy.’

When you say human rights. They don’t accept. They say it is a western concept that it is not for them. So it’s challenging. It is not so that with Mr. Haniyeh you can go and grab a Starbucks and sit and talk about things. But in Israel you can contact Netanyahu, you can call Netanyahu and have coffee with him. But on the other side you can do that.’²⁸

Sara Ahmed,

‘If history is made ‘out of’ what is passed down, then history is made out of what is given not only in the sense of that which is ‘always already’ there before our arrival, but in the active sense of the gift: as a gift, history is what we receive upon arrival. Ahmed discusses the inheritance of whiteness, as an inherited history that once internalised by the subject, it forms their orientation to the world. The inherited history forms the subject’s orientation to others. The inherited history shapes the way subjects recognise others. When I meet you I use the ‘gift’ of history to make sense of you, and make sense of myself making sense of you. My recognition of you is a performance of *my already internalised history of me, and of you, and of me knowing you.*’²⁹

‘When we say democracy, they don’t think about it in the same way. Because they have no democracy they just have theocracy.’

Did they not see me working late in the office?

Did they not see how I glided across the floor?

The following are excerpts from secret documents of conversations between Israeli and American security operators. They express their position on Hamas following Hamas’s success in the elections.

Major General Amos Yadlin and American Ambassador Richard H. Jones, held on 12 June 2007, The leaked report entitled, ‘Gaza Fighting Not Israel’s Main Problem’ states the following, ‘Gaza Fighting Not Israel’s Main Problem’

‘The Ambassador commented that if Fatah decided it has lost Gaza, there would be calls for Abbas to set up a separate regime in the West Bank. While not necessarily reflecting a consensus GOI [Government of Israel] view, Yadlin commented that such a development would please Israel since it would enable the IDF to treat Gaza as a hostile country rather than having to deal with Hamas as a non-state actor.’³⁰

Israel Security Agency Chief Diskin comments on the situation in the Gaza strip in a meeting on 11 June 2007 with the Washington state department.

‘Hamas had succeeded in stealing some “Doshka” heavy machine guns from the Presidential Guard. [Diskin] said that this is an example of why he does not support “at this time” United States Security Coordinator, Lieutenant General Dayton’s proposal to supply ammunition and weapons to Fatah: “I support the idea of militarily strengthening Fatah, but I am afraid that they are not organised to ensure that the equipment that is transferred to them will reach the intended recipients.”’³¹

‘Diskin’s aide said that the [pro-Fatah] security forces at the Rafah crossing are strong, but are demoralised with the overall situation in the Gaza Strip. [...] “They [pro-Fatah security forces] are approaching a zero-sum situation, and yet they ask us to attack Hamas. This is a new development. We have never seen this before. They are desperate.”’³²

Israel Security Agency Chief Diskin, “‘It is something in their blood”, he said, “the leaders of the West Bank cannot rule the Palestinians in the Gaza strip and vice versa.”’ ‘Diskin warned that Palestinian society is disintegrating, and that this bodes ill for Israel.’³³

... one chimes in with a chorus of racists.

‘What, they think women in Gaza can’t drive?’

Tashawa asks me,

‘As a European, why do you think, where do you get this information, that Eastern or Gazan women are not free? That she is in a black tent, and that she does not participate in the political life. Why do you think this?’³⁴

“‘It is something in their blood’,

‘the leaders of the West Bank cannot rule the Palestinians in the Gaza strip and vice versa.’”

We are not what you think you are.

Fanon,

‘My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, re-colored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a it’s cold, the is shivering, the is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the the is shivering with cold, that cold goes through your bones’

Fanon continues,

‘The handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother’s arms: Mama, the going to eat me up.’³⁵

The handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the black man is quivering with rage. ‘Western governments seem frightened and perplexed in equal amounts by the Hamas victory.’³⁶

The handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the black man is quivering with rage. Fanon is shivering because he is cold.

Fanon came in and sat down at his desk ... his chair was missing a wheel ...

‘I mean things became really dangerous for us after the elections. Friends of mine were killed. Democratically elected leaders were put in jail. I was afraid to walk down the street. It became worse after the elections than before.’³⁷

Butler calls forth Hegel to reaffirm the material importance of recognition within the liberal normative framework. ‘There is no possibility of separating the life and death struggle from the struggle for recognition.’³⁸ The subject who is denied recognition as human or denied being a subject with rights, lives in a state of precarity.

And this reminds us of the dangers of a ‘liberal’ model of recognition. That life so easily could left wanting.³⁹

Black Gaza Driving a Boat

In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison explores Ernest Hemingway's novel *To Have and Have Not* as an example how his writing of blackness is construed in a violent white imaginary. 'That is,' Morrison says, '[Hemingway] has no need, desire, or awareness of [black persons] as either as readers of his work or as people existing anywhere other than in his imaginative (and imaginatively lived) world.'⁴⁰ Morrison explains that the black man in the novel remains nameless for five chapters. He is then introduced as a crewman on Harry's boat, but he is not even hired, he is simply someone "we had getting bait".⁴¹ In Hemingway's text the black 'men' are written in order to serve the 'literary needs' of the white character. When Harry, the white character cannot be at two places at once the black man steps in.⁴²

Morrison explains that Hemingway *goes to great lengths* in order to rid the black man of any possible agency or actual character traits. 'The logic of the narrative's discrimination prevents a verbal initiative of importance to Harry's business coming from this nameless, sexless, nationless Africanist presence.'⁴³ Therefore, rather than allowing the black man to sight the flying fish beyond the prow of the boat, Hemingway writes, 'was still taking her out and I looked and saw he had seen a patch of flying fish burst out ahead.'⁴⁴ The black man cannot speak, so Hemingway *relies on the improbable syntax* of trying to 'say how one sees that someone else has already seen.'⁴⁵

Following the sanction of the Hamas government, after its success in the 2006 Palestinian elections Hamas agrees to a National Unity Government. The 11th government is formed. This is a moderate and balanced government.

Where is the EU in relation to these actions?

How is it possible for the black character and Harry to have any kind of relationship or communicative exchange when the black character is performed only to fashion an idea of whiteness?

They are there. But they are not there together?

The white discursive imaginary already produces the black body as that which cannot speak, as that which cannot have his own ideas, as that which cannot have agency.

How may the characters interact from this starting point?

'In part two, Harry and the black crewman do engage in dialogue, and the black man talks a great deal. The serviceability of the black man's speech, however, is transparent. What he says and when he says it are plotted to win admiration for Harry. Wesley's speech is restricted to grumbles and complaints and apologies for weakness. We hear the grumbles, the groans, the weakness of Wesley's response to his gunshot wounds for three pages before we learnt that Harry is also shot, and much worse than Wesley is. By contrast, Harry has not only not mentioned his own pain, he has taken Wesley's whining with compassion and done the difficult work of steering and tossing the contraband overboard in swift, stoic gestures of manliness.'⁴⁶

Javier Solana, EU, High Representative, Common Foreign and Security Policy speaks of the EU's process with Hamas,

'So I think that *we* have started a process – a process that may be long and that may be adapted by Hamas – to see how we can restore the relationship with the Government. For the moment we are going to maintain the same position that we have maintained in the past. We are going to make contact with members of the Government with whom we met before such as Fayyad. We are not going to cut off relations but we will maintain the members of Hamas outside of our contacts.'⁴⁷

We are not going to cut off relations but we will maintain the members of Hamas outside of our contacts.

The improbable syntax of saying you are not going to do what you are going to do.

Hamas agreed to the formation of the national unity government. Hamas agreed to dismantle its government. Hamas agreed to a power sharing arrangement with Fatah.

Did the EU see?
 Did the EU listen?
And the black chair sinks
Into a the white sea

Lord Crickhowell, House of Lords, EU Committee asked Robert Cooper, the EU's Director-General for External and Politico-Military Affairs, the following question,

"Have up to this point any of the EU's policies or activities had the effect of increasing the divide, the factionalism and the rivalries between Fatah and Hamas? Have we by our approach so far actually made things worse?"

Cooper, 'Certainly not intentionally, not knowingly. I am tempted to say one answer to that question, is we might have done that by encouraging elections and by monitoring them'⁴⁸ (Cooper 2007, 88).

Cooper performs an awareness that EU policy could distort Palestinian governance, and that such a move would be in direct contradiction to EU interests and policies.

'Personally, I think we should be a little bit careful about saying we are prepared to do business with one half of the Government and not the other because we have, after all, been urging the Palestinians to form a National Unity Government and, again personally, I think that is probably a condition of the peace settlement in the end.'

The white man speaks graciously and heroically
And the wheel, alone is left to listen

'First, the Palestinians need to get their act together and then they need to negotiate with Israel. Our only reservation is that we need the Palestinians to get their act together in a way that enables a negotiation with Israel rather than one which closes it off, and that is why we are in this delicate balancing act that we are at the moment.'⁴⁹

Hamas leader, Ghazi Hamad relays,

'They never thought about the big issues, they put us in this cage, in the prison and they refuse to let us see the light from the sun. So our priorities completely changed and they diverted to how to make people survive here. To prevent starvation. You know at that time we had to bring the money in bags; through tunnels, with persons- because at that time; Israel, US all EU they prevented all transfer of money to the banks here in Gaza.'⁵⁰

Ahmed Yousuf, a moderate Hamas leader who had worked to convince his brothers in the movement to agree to the formation of the national unity government, shares the loss of expectations with me.

'I feel very disappointed. Because I and Ghazi Hamad- were behind giving the boost for the idea of having a unity government, because the European promised to take Hamas off the Terrorist list. So we kept telling our people that that is the European position and we convinced our people to accept the National Unity Government- but after the failure of the National Unity Government we lost even our credibility. We lost our credibility with our people and we paid a huge price. We paid the price as individuals. We tried to build confidence and trust around this topic and we lost it. They were saying that if we have a Unity Government then the Europeans will open the doors to us and we made the Unity Government and they kept their closed door policy. Within the movement, if you were pushing forward this policy and it failed- you feel very disappointed.'⁵¹

'What would Israel do or be without the ongoing dispossession of the Palestinians?'

What
 will we do
 without
 exile?'⁵²

I am at the Ministry for Prisoners in Gaza. I have just finished conducting a group interview with some young civil servants working for the Ministry. I am sitting in an office waiting to meet the

Minister for Prisoners, Abu al-Sebah, Attallah. I am chatting with an older member of the government who also works in the Ministry. I ask him about the elections. I ask him about the EU's response to the elections. He shares his excitement about the elections with me and he shares his dismay about the external response to Hamas's success.

I then ask him,

But what if?

'What if Hamas had said to the EU: "Hamas will refuse to deal with the EU unless the EU decides to be more just and fair with Hamas?"'

His eyes open wide. He stares at me. A small smile creeps across his face. His smile breaks into a laugh.

The wide eyes, the glance, the peculiar laugh, all perform a reaction to the absurdity of my question. The question itself appears to be so 'out of question' that the only suitable response seems to be a laugh.

Mahmoud Darwish,

'What will we do without exile?'⁵³

'The questions seek to open up a future under the conditions in which the future has been foreclosed or in which the future can only be thought as repeated subjugation.'⁵⁴

'What would Israel do or be without the ongoing dispossession of the Palestinians?'

Butler observes that Darwish's poem takes the reader into an unimaginable and yet imaginable space: 'Palestinian life without exile'. The poem itself wants to imagine a different future; a future which is not born out of the threat to life and destruction of the Palestinians.

'What shall we do without exile?'

This line reveals how the exiled life of the Palestinian is what has come to shape it. But the poem urges that there may be a way that a viable Palestinian life can be imagined beyond the repetition of the continued forced exile. 'Exile is the name of separation, but alliance is found precisely there, not yet in a place, in a place that was and is and in the impossible place of the not yet happening now.'⁵⁵

Can we imagine an alternative encounter between Hamas and the EU? Where the European may be able to hear and see Hamas otherwise? Such an encounter might demand that we wander and wonder into *an unknown world*.⁵⁶ Such a 'coming together' might require that we abandon particular epistemological framings, which already demarcated what was possible?⁵⁷

"Hamas will refuse to deal with the EU unless the EU decides to be more just and fair with Hamas?" Smile.

A conversation between myself and an EU commissioner who maintained a prominent position in EU foreign policy initiatives at the time of the 2006 elections.⁵⁸

"Him asking me- Do you feel we made a big mistake and should have given Hamas a chance?"

Him- That is where I hear you coming from.

Me- Hypothetically . . . that would that have allowed Hamas to come in in a way which was more constructive to the Palestinian cause . . .

Him- But you then make huge suppositions how Israel would have reacted to that. And it requires excellent good behaviour on both sides for your scenario to have worked. And perhaps we all regret an opportunity that was missed, if that is what we believe, it does sort of allow for a sort of *re-inventing history*.⁵⁹

I asked Christopher Patten, former EU commissioner for External Relations, the following question, 'what capacity did the EU have at this point to develop a different response?'

He responded,

'Oh every! We could have laid out a more thoughtful list of criteria to determine whether or not we could have contact with the national unity government. Other states, like the Saudis, put all their effort into creating national unity, a national unity government. And, we poopooed it. And we would have had the support of the Gulf states, several . . ., the Arab league and a huge number of other countries at the UN.'⁶⁰

There was an alternative response to Hamas's success in the elections.

Ahmad Khalidi, Senior Associate Member of St. Anthony's College, Oxford University, stated the following,

'If – a big "if" – Hamas had been given a chance to govern in the wake of its electoral victory, if the international community had dealt with it differently, then my guess is that you would have had a completely different situation today.'⁶¹

If . . .

What if . . .

Let's stay in the 'what if' for a moment? In this moment we may be permitted to ponder the unthinkable, the not yet realised, the perhaps possible. From this departure point, we may begin to think of an alternative politics, which does not repeat the relations of threat and discrimination that had ordered Palestinian, Gazan and Hamas life previously.

What if . . .

Perhaps in the space of the 'what if' our imaginations are allowed to reconstitute a form of coming together in politics which does not replicate already oppressive relationships.

Perhaps here a different form of conversation can be had.

If Hamas had been given a chance to govern in the wake of its electoral victory . . .

If the international community had dealt with it differently . . .

Khalidi responds to his own fictive question,

'You would have had a situation where the Palestinian internal political process would have been relatively stabilised, where Hamas would have been put in a position of responsibility.'⁶²

The 'what if' provides *an alternative departure point*, whereby the political interjection seeks to imagine an improbable world. This imaginative interjection seeks to break away from a present ordered way of thinking.

An alternative departure point.

Butler continues,

'So it is not a question of cleaning up the act of present-day Israel or implementing reforms, but overcoming a fundamental and ongoing structure of colonial subjugation that is essential to its existence. So in asking, what would Israel be without its subjugation of the Palestinians, we pose a question that underscores that Israel as we know it is unthinkable without that subjugation.'⁶³

What does a future look like without the ongoing subjugation of the Palestinian people?

Jamil al-Khalidi, head of the Central Elections Commission for Gaza responded,

"I believe if the Europeans particularly dealt with Hamas as a winner in the elections, or if they accepted the coalition government that included ministers from Hamas and Fatah, I think this was a precious opportunity that the EU had foregone. And if this had happened, it would have been possible to reach common grounds between the Europeans and the coalition government that included Hamas. This would have saved the region lots of troubles and it could have been possible to reach at least an interim solution that can be the beginning to a comprehensive solution. I think a movement like Fatah or Hamas can't be ignored when we come to find a solution to the conflict. The coalition government was an excellent chance to reach a solution that can be accepted by all the parties involved.

If Hamas government was given the chance to rule in normal conditions, (Hamas thinks it was really given the chance to rule normally and everybody besieged it and made efforts to fail it), the people would have more confidence in the next elections and they would be able to judge which party is good for them. And we as people, would be able to know if the problem is in the agenda of Hamas or the agenda of Fatah.'⁶⁴

The wheel remembered the day they arrived at the office

They shuffled around the newly laid floor

Notes

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