

# The Wisdom of Stubbornness

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**Abstract:** How does it feel when one's wound is an exhibit for an academic who investigates what is scripted as defeated life practices? How does it feel to deal with texts announcing victorious life practices such as human rights and progress while life is being threatened by the modern technologies of violence? How is it possible to read the texts in any hermeneutic fashion while so many familiar 'coloured' bodies are being targeted and slaughtered? These are the questions that haunt me in my academic journey. I will attempt to answer them by exploring how the project of Westernised education (developmental time) is entangled with a deeper understanding of the political that poet Murid al-Barghouti captures in his reflection: '[politics] is your memories that you fear to gaze at but you gaze at it despite it all'. I wonder how much the festering wounds and the prominence of the familiar invoke a different temporality that can be but too aware of the crimes committed against humanity in the name of progress and development. I wonder how that political act of the unwilling gaze at one's wounds and one's memory reaffirms a notion of time thought to be over, but is not.

**Keywords:** Time; Colonialism; Development; Memory; Resistance; Stubbornness.

We have never really seen the war go away (John Trudell 2005). In France I have often heard people I respect, but do not approve of, deplore [the army] burning harvests, emptying granaries and seizing unarmed men, women and children. As I see it, these are unfortunate necessities that any people wishing to make war on the Arabs must accept (Alexis de Tocqueville 1841).

I don't recall when I stopped using what my elders call the life keys: *bismi Allah* (in the name of God) and *insha' Allah* (If God's willing). I think I dropped them somewhere along the marked path of the Moroccan ministry of education, a path that often leads to Westernised education, that is learning to make sense of one's self, one's culture, and the world from a Western perspective. In my own case the attraction of that path was so irresistible that I veered off from pursuing a bachelor's degree in Arabic literature, a subject I was passionate about and dedicated to, already in middle school. Some of my teachers in Arabic who were impressed by my writing skills advised me to enrol in the Arabic studies programme at the university. That was my plan too – that is, until the very day I submitted my application to study at the University Hassan II in Casablanca, Morocco.

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I can clearly recall the day when I went to university to fill out my application for Arabic literature; yet, when I arrived there I talked myself into scribbling English Literature as my choice for a major instead. My pretext was that I needed to invest my university time in learning something new. At the same time, I checked German as the language I wanted to learn while preparing my BA in English literature. I was half aware that the other European languages were queuing in my mind's waiting room for future call. In fact, years later, when I moved to Germany to continue my studies, I made American Studies my major and beckoned to Spanish to come in. As I became fluent in English, German, and Spanish, in addition to French, the medium of instruction for scientific subjects in Moroccan schools, I acquired the title of the model European citizen. For many professors who were enthusiastic about the European Union project I came to exemplify Future Europe.

Of course, there is nothing wrong in learning these particular languages; yet I know that my choice was prompted by the feeling instilled in me that European education would provide me with the keys to uplift myself from my backwardness and exit the waiting room of history. Probably in my frantic attempt to access the real thing, I greedily lined up the European languages for a gradual conquest, expecting that I'd be catapulted into the right time. Probably the real reason why I sacrificed my passion on the threshold of the University Hassan II was due to my belief that an MA or even a PhD in Arabic literature would keep me shackled to the wrong space and time.

However, even as I started covering – or, at least, I thought that I was covering – tremendous ground catching up with the model 'Europe', what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls 'developmental time', to fill out my lack and shake off the stigma of the 'not yet' civilised/modernised/Westernised, I was aware of a gnawing unease (Chakrabarty 2010; Bhabha 1994). I attempted to disregard my unease by more devotion to my studies; these consisted of the mastery of several European languages and the digestion of dense theories that claimed to be valid for all humanity, regardless of their location and imagination (Quijano 2000; Grosfoguel 2013).

Luckily for me I was fighting a doomed battle. That's the story of this essay. If Westernised education offers me the opportunity of modernisation in exchange for some fundamental elements of my memory, that deal is incessantly interrupted by poetry, stories, songs, and intuition. These forms of knowledge stubbornly keep unweaving my efforts to believe that becoming Europe is the rescue of my (region's) plights.

Palestinian poet Murid al-Barghouti writes in *I Saw Ramallah*: '[politics] is your forgetfulness that surprises you with its presence and your memories that you fear to gaze at but you gaze at them despite it all' (2011: 54). This politics that arises from the familiar, the lived circumstances, the inevitable gazing at the memories one fears to gaze at, invokes an alternative form of temporality. The unwilling but inevitable gazing at the memories, containing the many losses of loved people, loved lands, and loved ways of life unsettle the Western political imaginary that slashed time into several stages, positioned their culture in the highest/best/first stage, and waged wars on the rest of humanity to fix the temporal hierarchy they invented in the first place. The act of gazing expresses, even if it remains silent, the ugliness of our time, the product of the Western imagination. I read the (un)willing gaze as constitutive of the politics of stubbornness that the oppressed, according

to al-Barghouti, can but cling to and practise. If the gaze is inevitable, then stubbornness is necessary.

In what follows, I will listen to the words of poets and storytellers, who are also, like the rest of us, (un)willingly gazing at the memories and the wounds and gazing at us and themselves negotiating our ways between Westernisation and alternative temporalities. Poets and storytellers are able through the medium of words to best express what is written on our skins and our memories. Whenever these writers rub a phrase against another, they give us our gaze back and push against modernisation's effort to flatten our pasts. Even as their texts expose our wounds, they also fire up our imagination and sharpen our will to resist. By keeping their eyes on and hearts for our wounds, recording the stories of resistance against all forms of oppressions and forging imaginative relations with subjugated others, these guardians of memory embody the wisdom of stubbornness. I will also venture beyond words and read students' sighs, mm-hmm and similar utterances in classrooms that teach modernisation as signs of wise stubbornness. I should add a note on writing in English: so much magic in the Arabic poetic texts disappears in translation. Personally, reading poetry in Arabic shows me what I need to see in myself and in the world and invites me to dare and dream; reading the same poems in English invites me to analyse and critique.

## Time of death

An Algerian Sheikh responded curtly when he was told of the good intentions of the French mission in his country in 1830: 'but why then have they brought all this gunpowder?' (cited in Almassiri 2003). The invaded always knew that the invaders did not come as guests with a message about a better way of being, but as people who lost the language of hospitality and mastered instead the language of control and death. The subjugated people also took note that the invaders liked to give noble names to their violence, which means they lied. To stay in the context of Algeria, historian Oliver Le Cour Grandmaison writes in *Le Monde Diplomatique* of June 2001 that the French army 'massacred or deported villagers *en masse*; raped women and took children hostage; stole harvests and livestock and destroyed orchards.' Yet, France named the horrors it visited upon the land and its people *la présence française* (Bennabi 1984: 21). *La mission civilisatrice* was another name France gave to its destruction of ways of life it deemed backward and beyond the pale. The civilising mission also invoked the set of laws that favoured the very ones who drafted them.

Indeed, Alexis de Tocqueville, best known for his *Democracy in America* (1835–40), which I recall studying almost reverently in many American studies courses, advocated that French military might (that is burning the land, killing men, raping women, and so on) should go parallel with the rule of law, whose primary task was to ensure massive expropriation of the land by means of what he calls 'a summary procedure and a special court' (1841: 32). The conquered land, Tocqueville recommended, should then be sold to the French and other European settlers at a low price. A successful establishment of the colonies, Tocqueville maintained, rested on providing the settlers with maximum security besides arming them and providing them with moral comforts, such as building a water

fountain, a church, a school, and a townhouse (1841: 34). With an eye on the experience of European settlers in other continents, Tocqueville advised his government on the necessity to give the settler his freedom of movement and freedom of action to maximise the incentives for him to stay and thrive (1841: 34).

What about the local people who for centuries took care of the land that fed them and housed them? The laws of the masters that unhomed people took care of this question: they offered the conquered a variety of deaths. In their seminal work that shows how poverty, uneven development, and inequality are critical components of capitalist modernity, David Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah point out (2010: 140) ‘...the natives can select one of three deaths: the biological death of extermination; the social death of bartering their culture for elements of modernity; or if they reject this barter the temporal death of being severed from the greater, historical purpose of humanity.’ The three deaths offered in the colonial period still constitute the only relationship the masters can have with their conquests. The everyday is a time of death, whether the master is committing what Tocqueville calls the ‘unfortunate necessities’ of destroying lives or applying the science of dispossession through codification and the erasure of memory through renaming. Today in the American-led imperial order, the everyday is a time of war, of dispossession, of exploitation, of racism, and epistemological colonisation. These deaths, whether social, temporal, or for real, clearly tell us, if we care to see, what the Western time is mainly about: a smooth reaping of lives and imaginations of the majority of humanity. Native American poet, John Trudell, one of the towering guardians of the collective memory of the unhomed and the murdered, tells us (cited in Rae 2005):

We have never really seen the war go away  
I mean  
If you’re dying  
If you’re dying from the 7th cavalry’s bullets  
If you’re dying from induced poverty and racism and class systems  
and sex systems  
And you’re dying from alcoholism and poverty  
Or someone has come in now in the name of maximizing the profit  
And they’re getting you to work in the mines, the uranium mines  
And you’re dying from lung cancer and you’re dying from the cancers  
and the diseases that come out of that  
You’re dying  
It’s the same as the bullet killing you  
And I see it all as a war.

Interestingly, my American Studies did not take me along the path in which I could see the everyday as a time of death. It did not allow me some reflections on the three deaths. I don't blame it, for its prophets were scholars like Tocqueville who offered Arabs, Native Americans, and African people either temporal death or death *tout court* ([1840] 2012: 307–79; 1841). I should say that this Tocqueville, the destroyer of the worlds, was not the one I got to know as a student, but the historian and political science scholar who analysed American institutions and laws as well as argued for the centrality of equality of condition in democratic societies. But then I might have been an inattentive student and it was totally my fault that I rarely noticed the deal of deaths in many texts I studied, including Tocqueville's; or it could be that this particular story about the time of death could emerge only once it has been tightly hugged by the scholarly language of social sciences and law. Today, I realise that most of the modern texts exhibited an obscene choreography of death. I was tutored to read the intricacy of its movements, the rationale of its flow, and the beauty of its performance. I was also taught to critique its sequences, explore dissonances in its composition, and argue for alternating some parts. The critical reading always sought to make the dance of death better and more enjoyable. My growing commitment to this deadly dance meant forgetting the wounds and trading parts of my culture for some elements of modernity.

It is ironic that after having bartered many pieces of my memory, I find myself encouraged, thanks to my background as an Arab, African Muslim woman, to tell my story and play what critic Gayatri Spivak calls 'native informant' in order to raise awareness about something I am myself in need of becoming aware of. How could I educate through the very system of Westernised education that turns its disciples into copies of Europe? The very beast that swallows our bodies, memories, and tomorrows becomes our main interlocutor and even our ultimate saviour.

How can telling my story in any way institute a new time that breaks out of the three deaths, even as the choices might have been reduced today to two or even one? I honestly don't know, but I'd like to suggest that for me it is poetry, especially poetry about Palestine, that incessantly interrupts the memory mutilation. That interruption was always happening as long as I can remember, even when I did not know it. I recall learning at school Mahmoud Darwish's 'Identity Card' (1964) and feeling so much pride, even though I never knew exactly in what. Darwish was not only present in Arabic classes, but also in the streets and homes, especially his poems that were set to music by Lebanese artist Marcel Khalifa. No wonder that some banners held in *Tahreer* Square in Cairo in 2011 were inscribed with the last lines of 'Identity Card', which say:

Beware...  
Beware...  
Of my hunger  
And my anger!

I do not recall much what the teacher said about 'Identity Card', but how we children recited it. I should add it is no easy thing to remember how my classmates and I recited 'Identity Card' since the school curriculum in Morocco required the recitation of Arabic poetry beginning with pre-Islamic poetry until the very recent publications of contemporary poets. Yet, I can still recall that many of us children in what is the equivalent of the seventh grade recited 'Identity Card' with so much defiance and bravery, as if we were standing in front of the executioners. We enacted the opening line: 'Write Down! I am an Arab', which is repeated at the beginning of the three first stanzas, as if just by the mere utterance of each letter we were already defeating all the enemies bent on messing with our identity or dreaming of writing us out. The poem was all over our bodies. We were the poem. I have a feeling that we identified with the poem, because the teacher identified with it too and because our streets and our homes must have echoed that lesson before we sat down in the classroom to learn it. With the words and spirit of 'Identity card' engraved into my memory, my attempts at memory erasure through Westernised education were luckily doomed to stumble.

Another poem by Darwish alerted me to a mode of resistance I was seeing all around me without paying too much attention to it. His poem 'On Man', published in *Olive Leaves* (1964: 17), the same collection that contains 'Identity Card', opens up with the familiar encounter between the oppressor and the oppressed:

They put chains on his mouth  
They tied his hands to the rock of the dead,  
And said: You are a murderer!  
They took his food, clothes and banners  
And threw him in the prison cell of the dead,  
And said: You are a thief!  
They threw him out of all refuges,  
They took his young sweetheart,  
And said: You are a refugee!  
O you, the one with the bleeding eyes and palms!  
The night is soon to be gone,  
Neither the interrogation room is going to last  
Nor the chains are!  
Nero died, but Rome didn't  
With its eyes, it's fighting!  
And the seeds of a dead wheat,  
Will fill up the valley with more wheat!

I read 'On Man' as a song to the wounded nations that have gone through the experiences of colonisation, dispossession, and renaming by the rule of law. One man uses military violence to get what is not his and then uses the law to commit another violence: call the owner of the land murderer, thief, and sentence him to death or exile after carving on his body and soul some messages of what he can do. All aspects of that encounter announce defeat, but not to the poets who record peoples' and even places' everyday resistance. After adding 'with its eyes, it's fighting' to my knowledge of the modes of resistance, watching the news about Palestine went beyond listening and commenting on the different competing narratives. I found myself paying attention to the place: a cobblestone street, a field, a piece of the sky, a half-open shutter of a house, rubble, crammed checkpoints, etc. I gazed at places in Palestine gazing at me 'with its eyes, it's obviously fighting.' The time of death is always already a time of resistance. Resistance exceeds the human element.

### **Singing to the burning time: mm-hmms, hums...**

Again Darwish: during the Israeli siege of Beirut in summer 1982, Darwish, who was at that time living in the Lebanese capital under the torrential rain of US-supplied bombs, found himself wanting to break into song. He writes: 'Yes, I want to sing to this burning day. I do want to find a language that transforms itself into steel for the spirit –a language to use against these sparkling silver insects, these jets. I want a language that I can lean on and that can lean on me, that asks me to bear witness and that I can ask to bear witness, to what power there is in us to overcome this cosmic isolation' (1995: 51–52). Darwish's desire to sing to the burning day and his search for a language that transforms itself into steel for the spirit might seem pointless under the jet fighters. Yet, he surely makes a point: he does not bow to the time of death. He looks for the words that can help the bombed emerge with the spirit intact despite the deaths encircling them. The language Darwish strives for is not only about survival, which is already so much to ask for in time of war, but also about widening our imagination with the visions for endurance, resistance and victory. His quest is to articulate the 'power there is in us to overcome this cosmic isolation.' I take note here that Darwish uses the word *power* as the energy in people to address the injustices they suffer and not the ability of Israel to bomb and destroy with impunity.

During the US reinvasion of Iraq in 2003, a large number of Arab people as well as those who opposed that war with all their hearts must have felt the need for the language that transforms itself into steel for the spirit. It is true that US violence has become part of our daily existence, for as sure as night follows the day, the US bombing some place follows its bombing somewhere else; yet, the reinvasion of Iraq felt like trampling on my own body. Time stood still. Without time, it was the smell of death that hung around. Unlike Darwish's desire to break into song as he witnessed the Israeli-inflicted carnage in Lebanon, I constantly broke into tears and felt magnetised towards silence while witnessing another carnage on TV. I was not the only one. Later I read a young poet, Tamim al-Barghouti, who, alerted by the gravity of the situation, wrote *Maqam Iraq* (2005). In its beginning he urges those who retreat into grief:



Silence the tongue of requiems because it is a luxury

Among all deaths, this death is different...

Al-Barghouti understood all the battles waged by the US in 2003: what the US sought to break was not only the land of Iraq and Iraqis but the Arab people's spirit. Depression, he told journalist Amira Howeidi, 'has reached our language – we think our language and moral codes are not good enough' (2005). He composed his poem for Iraq and on Iraq to prove that this could not be true. As he said in another instance, in the middle of a massacre and carnage, the victims do not sit and grieve, they resist in any way they can and salvage what they can. True to the poetic tradition of his ancestors, al-Barghouti reminds his readers and listeners in *Maqam Iraq* that the minarets in Iraq burst into *Adhan* (call to prayer) when the US unleashed its bombs on already devastated Iraq (2005). The *muezzins*, like Darwish, broke into song to counter the US sparkling silver insects.

While all the little worlds I established in Dresden, Germany, were calmly collapsing, a door was opened for me to teach American Studies at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. I hurriedly packed and left to think with young people about the questions that were burning me about our time still constituted by colonialism and Western violence: What does it mean to read texts, theoretically progressive as they may be, when our humanity is still put in question, our bodies degraded, and our future squandered with impunity? How is it possible to read texts in any hermeneutic fashion while so many familiar brown bodies are being slaughtered? I spent weeks attempting to draft a syllabus for my course on US–Arab encounter in a way that could do some justice to my questions. Yet, I had at the same time to stick to the rules of introducing my students to US perspectives and stories, and there are too many before I can begin with my questions. I felt like someone whose house was on fire and whose sons and daughters were queued up for slaughter and rape, while I pensively twirled my hair and talked about how the one bent on burning my house and destroying my clan once helped an elderly lady cross over a busy road and how he had a daughter who wrote a moving piece against the violence committed by her father. Each syllabus I drafted was a stab at my sense of urgency. It could only bury my questions and ignore them. However, as I was pacing the corridor outside my office, trying to figure out what to do, a fleeting chat foreshadowed that my students already had an answer for me.

A frustrated American colleague told me that his students kept bringing themselves into everything he taught them. For instance, he recounted that while he was teaching them the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary in connection with Panama at the turn of the twentieth century, they kept interrupting him by their 'mm-hhms, hums, and ahas.' Banking on my consent, for I am educated and should know the nuanced differences between then and now, he interjected 'imagine, I was talking about last century!' The ones who are on the receiving end of bullets and bombs might not be responsive to that kind of understanding of time, but have a different sense of temporality. I imagined that my progressive colleague taught his students that the US government declared Latin America its private sphere, helped Panamanians to liberate themselves from Columbia, which did not agree with the building of the canal on US terms, and then signed a deal



not with the liberated Panamanians, but with Philippe Buneau-Varilla, who represented the French Canal Company (LaFeber 1996). Even though the students were highly likely ignorant of that particular story, they knew all too well the US/North global application of violence, which has been borne by their bodies and etched in their memories. Unlike the teacher, the students could not but sense an affinity with subjugated others. And it is precisely this sense of time and relationality that is being destroyed through the injunction of being modern. If becoming modern is a process of ontological and physical death, it also involves the death of relationality with certain others. The students' (un)willing gaze at their memories interrupts the time of modernisation and affirms their commonality with their Latin American cousins.

I had my own relation with Panama: George W. Bush declared in his speech on 16 January 1991 his intention to reverse Iraq's aggression against its tiny neighbour Kuwait, so that it is 'the rule of law, not the law of the jungle [that] governs the conduct of nations.' Yet, his own administration invaded tiny Panama in December 1989, an act for which the US was condemned in the UN by 75 votes. Before that his country invaded tiny Granada in October 1983, also condemned by the UN by 109 votes (in Dumbrell 1997: 158). I am fully aware that that these numbers do not matter much and the President's shameless contradictions are irrelevant. His speech and conquests are in line with his ancestors' vision of time and being. Almost five hundred years prior to the time of the President's speech, Christopher Columbus wrote a letter to Queen Isabelle and King Ferdinand in which he suggested carrying out the *conquista* practices across the Atlantic. He pointed out: 'Your highness completed the war against the moors, after having chased all the Jews... and sent me to the said region of India in order to convert people to our Holy Faith' (Cited in Shohat 2006: 209). The US invasion of Grenada, Panama, and Iraq added another war, another chasing. The minor change is that since the time of the Enlightenment, waging wars and chasing people out of their homes has to be done to convert people to the rule of law, the very one Tocqueville was turning into a science.

Even though I didn't share my concerns with my well-intentioned colleague, I was grateful for his sharing his concerns with me. I was looking forward to meeting my Panamanian students. Their body language and mm-hmm would be there to interrupt me if I, as I knew I would, sought to modernise them.

## The stubbornness party

In his Elegy to his wife Radhwa Ashour, literary scholar, academic, novelist, storyteller, and fighter, poet Murid al-Barghouti says (2016):

She gave a hand to her heart  
Equitable it shakes the hands of the weakest  
And slaps the tyrant's sentence and his half sentence  
A hand that stays awake at nights to correct reality and the test  
...

She takes you by the hand and walks you to Tantoura [a Palestinian coastal village, the site of a massacre by Israeli forces in 1948 and the title of Ashour's novel (2010)]

And tells you 'put your heart here,

And leave it here,

And paint your tomorrow from here,

So that you will come back here,

To the first coast'

...

She did not give us a false hope

Instead she invited us and invited herself to endure and she endured

Radhwa Ashour left us behind her not in order to grieve but to prevail.

Deeply listening to every word al-Barghouti utters about Ashour, I find myself again in the presence of poetry and its quality to best translate our feelings, realities, and possibilities. The Egyptian writer Ashour, who spent 35 years of her life fighting cancer and even more years fighting tyranny and injustice, declared in 1994: 'I am an Arab woman and a citizen of the third world, and my heritage in both cases is stifled ... I write in self-defence and in defence of countless others with whom I identify or who are like me' (cited in Warner 2013). Ashour, who wrote to protect herself and others, produced a body of knowledge that embodies the spirit of stubbornness, which she considers a tradition, a heritage, and a party (2013: 391-93).

In her inimitable investigative style, Ashour (2013: 263) wonders why schools in Egypt, be they French, English, or public, suppress stories that could inflame the imagination of generations. It is no coincidence, she writes, that Egyptians do not know, for instance, the exact location of the house of Ahmad Urabi, the leader of the revolt against the British colonisers. Ashour uncovers that his house, which is in Bab al-Louq Square, adjacent to Mohammed Mahmoud Street, just off the legendary Tahrir Square, was turned to a hospital after the British invasion of Egypt. She retrieves this information from *Illustrated London News* of December 1882, which means that three months after the invaders defeated Urabi they erected a hospital on his house. The illustrated news of that day, which can be easily looked at online, displayed pictures of the noble work provided by Lady Stangford Hospital, which stood on Urabi's house, to the sick Egyptians. I agree we must be either helplessly sick or totally drugged by European medicine, for the colonisers erected a hospital on the house of a hero, took pictures of their civilising mission at work; yet even after their departure, there has been so far no sign or a line about Urabi's house.

Ashour's purpose is not only to remind her readers of what colonisers do: 'they kill him and walk at his funeral', as an Arabic saying goes, but to reveal the continuities be-

tween violence then and now, and more importantly, between the stories of resistance then and now. She points out that the very space that was home to an Arab hero was witness to the massacre of thousands of Egyptians in November 2011, that is after the uprisings of January 2011 that succeeded in toppling fear from our hearts. Ashour maintains that with this piece of information she wants her student Salma Said, who was attacked by an armoured police vehicle that fired three cartridge rounds in her body, each firing sixty metallic balls at once, to know that she was hit near Urabi house. She also wants Said's children and grandchildren, as well as the children and grandchildren of hundreds of others who were hit or killed in that place, to know that their parents were making a new history while being in touch with their untold or half-told history. Literally writing against the linear time of development, Ashour explains that she needs to bear witness to those massacres, 'so that when high buildings are erected and people frequent hotels or companies, or fitness centers, they won't ignore, whether deliberately or not, that these buildings stand on a land filled with blood. A lot of blood' (2013: 267). Through the story of Urabi, Ashour unravels the violence of both colonisers and local authoritarian regimes, as well as the spirit of stubbornness that has been defiantly displayed through the ongoing resistance from anticolonial fighters to their grandchildren today and tomorrow.

In her keynote speech at a conference entitled 'Narrating the Arab Spring', held at Cairo University on 18–20 February 2012, Ashour reflects on several highly mediated images from Tunisia and Egypt during their uprisings. Ashour again in her unique way focuses on the stories that show the beauty and the greatness of the subjugated. Ashour reminds the audience of the scene that took place in *Tahreer* Square in January 2011: protestors breaking into a frenzied dance when US-made F16 jets hovered above their heads. She points out that the planes, flying extremely low over the square, 'could have easily led to panic, or at least apprehension and confusion. People could have pushed against each other. Yet, while the jet fighters were hovering over peoples' heads, a genius suddenly called "Hosni [Mubarak] has gone crazy, Hosni has gone crazy!" In seconds a multitude of people echoed him "Hosni has gone crazy!" Their outcry spread and they turned it into a dance and applause. Then whistles and drums appeared followed by another outcry "Condoleeza [Rice], Condoleeza, give Hosni a visa!" Ashour looks at the dance as a popular celebration that exposes and disgraces the ugly face of tyranny. It turns fear into confidence, anxiety into sarcasm, and apprehension into dance. 'It was as if the F16 jets were made of paper,' Ashour concludes, 'and the threatened protestors were a legendary creature that, if bombed and burned, would be born from its own ashes in the wink of an eye and with a smile.' Is that how Darwish viewed the F16 jets flying over the streets of Beirut? Does power reside in music, songs, dance, and humour in front of which the deadly language of military violence becomes dumb?

With writers like Ashour keeping our memory alive and with people heroically standing their ground, smiling, and dancing while the ghost of death is literally circulating above their heads, the time of death may triumph momentarily, but it is doomed to lose. Ashour reminds her reader that whenever despair roams around her, she tells herself that 'This is not acceptable for I am from the party of the ants, the party of the drowning per-

son clutching at a straw that I never let go... the party of stubbornness. We abhor defeat. We don't accept it. If it gets us, we die standing like trees. This way, we leave two beautiful achievements: the honor of having tried and priceless experiences, a legacy we bequeath with a lot of care to those coming after us' (2013: 393).

These precious stories and priceless legacy handed down to us amidst war and a culture of disconnectedness sharpen our senses and tune our eyes, ears, and nose to the blood spilled and demand from us to never let go of the pursuit of justice. With her fearless spirit, Ashour infected a whole generation, starting with her only child, the legendary young poet Tamim al-Barghouti, who alerted us during the US invasion of Iraq and its continuing wars that time is not for grief, but for endurance and resistance. Grief is a luxury. The battle today, as Tamim al-Barghouti maintains, is between the oppressors and those who resist injustice and oppression. Coalition building among communities that have experienced the injustices of colonisation, Westernisation, and local tyranny, al-Barghouti points out, broadens the possibility of what can be done (2008).

## Pine Ridge in Belfast

Another point Radhwa Ashour mentioned in her keynote address of 18 February 2012 is that when the young Egyptian revolutionaries were preparing their anti-government protest for 25 January, they overlooked the impact of what happened in Tunisia on their fellow Egyptians. They did not realise 'the magnitude of shared feelings between the oppressed here and the oppressed there and the magnitude of self-confidence that moved from there to here.' She concluded that those shared feelings settled the matter and turned an opposition demonstration into a revolution. Yes, feelings move swiftly in the Arab world. The very notion of Arab brothers and sisters was, before the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, evocative of a shared feeling of oppression and doom, tragicomically articulated in Tamim al-Barghouti's 'In the Arab World You Live' (2002: 90):

In the Arab world you live

A match going on for a thousand years.

The players run right and left

And the ball, all the time, is in the hands of the referee.

...

In the Arab world you live looking at the watch afraid to miss the news

So that you can watch people

In the Arab world

dying.

The feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood through the shared experience of Western violence and local oppression exceeds the Arab world; that's why the students at the American University of Beirut were quick to identify with the invaded, the dispossessed, and the silenced in Latin America. Many are the poets who use the medium of the word to keep alive our collective memories, understood not so much as confined to any particular nationality or ideology, but as expressive of a political imaginary rooted in global suffering and the ongoing quest(ions) for justice (Kumar 2011). Mahmoud Darwish could best circle the wound that is Palestine by imagining a speech given by a Native American after losing a battle in his poem 'The "Red Indian's" Penultimate Speech to the White Man' (1992). In the speech-poem, the Native American Chief invites the white man 'to memorize a bit of poetry to halt the slaughter' (1992).

Poet Ahmed Fuad Negm, known as 'am (Uncle) Negm and the poet of the people, chose to write his poetry in colloquial Egyptian Arabic; yet, his texts, many of which were set to music and sung by Sheikh Imam, continuously left the borders of Egypt and travelled all over the Arab world and beyond. For instance, the duo Negm-Imam had a strong presence at University Hassan II in Casablanca and other campuses, especially in the 1970s. The students, who usually donned the *kufieh*, wore dreadlocks, danced to Bob Marley's reggae music would be reading and singing Negm's poems, all of which were solid signs of wise stubbornness. Negm's poetic texts, to which Imam's music and voice add more beauty and texture, are truly a Pandora's box of memory. Remembering for Negm means writing from the sites of pain and writing about global suffering. Remembering also means celebrating peoples' resistance against injustice throughout history and across continents. Above all, he was the poet whose body was tortured, beaten and incarcerated for over eighteen years in total; yet, he firmly prophesied the victory of the oppressed. No wonder his poetry was present in *Tahreer* Square, where he himself stood, a frail eighty-two-year-old man, but a fearless spirit dancing at the rendezvous of victory he always confidently walked towards. From celebrating Vietnamese resistance against US invaders, Guevara's greatness, to Palestinians' struggle for independence, Negm's poetry opens up alternative temporalities and forges imaginative relations with all the oppressed through the affinity of our wounds, history, and memories. In his poem 'Pablo Neruda', Negm starts with a call to (armed) struggle to counter the coup against people's will in Chile's 9/11 by 'the fabricators of the age of prosperity' (1973). I put 'armed' in parentheses, because the word 'shoulder', with which the poem starts, also signifies 'Chile' the country in Egyptian dialect. Indeed, another translation of the poem starts with 'Chile's gunpowder':

Shoulder your gun  
And consign your promises  
And excuses  
To the dustbin.  
They massacred the roses  
On the cheeks of the girls

And the greenery  
In their hearts.  
There can be no peace  
Oh fabricators of the age of prosperity  
With the ogres all around.  
Wounds are still fresh;  
They  
History,  
And memories  
Have not been forgotten:  
Imam Hussein,  
Spartacus,  
Allende,  
Lorca,  
Abdel-Rehim,  
A peasant from our country  
Who was burnt before doomsday  
In the hell of betrayed Sinai,  
Constantly betrayed.  
Ernesto Guevara  
The great.  
Khamis and Baqari,  
Shafie,  
Adham  
With his old *Mawwal*,  
And Qotb, the pivot of religion himself,  
Punished for reciting the Qu'ran.  
A garnet necklace, beaded with martyrs  
From the time of Socrates.  
Today, a diamond has been added:  
Neruda, the morning piper,  
The pipe of the breeze.  
...

And justice was  
And remains  
At all times  
The cause  
And the bet.  
And from a long time  
The earth has been the stage of fighting nights  
Imam Hussein,  
Spartacus,  
Guevara,  
Lorca,  
Abdel-Rehim,  
Neruda, the morning piper,  
Neruda,  
The pipe of the breeze.

I read this poem as Negm's own commitment to shaping a collective memory rooted in global suffering. It includes both international revolutionary icons, such as Ernesto Guevara and poet Federico García Lorca and local heroes such as Abdel Rehim, an Egyptian soldier killed in the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, and the workers Mustapha Khamis and Muhammed al-Baqari, who were hanged by the Free Officers in 1952. The genealogies of this collective memory go as far back as the slave uprisings led by Spartacus and the massacre of Imam Hussein in the battle of Karbala in 680. His elegy to the memory of Pablo Neruda becomes a eulogy to all those for whom justice is the cause and the bet.

This phenomenon of poetic resistance on a global level emanates from several cultures. John Trudell writes in his 'Rich Man's War' (2000):

... Industrial allies cutting the world  
as though they cannot see blood flowing  
rich man's war  
Central America bleeding  
wounds same as Palestine and Harlem  
Three Mile Island in El Salvador  
Pine Ridge in Belfast

Trudell's words offer another song to wounded nations that suffer the vision of the industrial allies, 'cutting the world', and their lack of vision to see the blood flowing, as a result of an imaginary trapped in greed. Yet, the poets, as Corinne Kumar (2004) writes



in her epic poem about the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, send their words to the ones waiting for them. People deeply listen ‘understanding the story of the barbarians across time/knowing the wisdoms written on our skins, in our memories.’ The wisdom that is written large on our skins and on our memories, I believe, calls for the politics of stubbornness that poets, storytellers, protestors, martyrs, etc. embody in so many fashions. Similarly, these ongoing conversations across cultures and traditions interrupt Western time through their reviving our relationality, rewriting our history, reimagining our collective memory, all of which consolidate the spirit of stubbornness.

## Whose land? Native land!

It is not appropriate to conclude what is an ongoing struggle. I understand my own piece of writing as polishing a piece of memory that was disappeared by the fogs of Westernised education. I keep deeply listening to the poets, reading stories, learning from my students and people around me, and intercepting good news. This morning as I was looking for another story to conclude my essay, Amy Goodman, the host of *Democracy Now*, gave me great material. Goodman is in Toronto talking with Indigenous and black activists about their coalition against state brutality (DN 2016). Desmond Cole, a journalist and columnist for the *Toronto Star* and radio host on *Newstalk 1010*, says: ‘There’s a huge change happening right now. There were a series of attacks against Muslim people in Toronto last winter, immediately after the attacks in Paris, France, and Muslim women being accosted on the subway, being attacked while picking up their children from school. And a solidarity rally took place. And while people were marching in that rally, they were saying, “Whose streets? Our streets!” But they were also saying, “Whose land? Native land!” And I have never heard that at a protest in Toronto.’ Is this Toronto, ‘with its eyes, it’s fighting’? Or is it the dance of the oppressed that defies all forms of forgetfulness and deaths? Or something else? To me, Cole’s story, which is my story too, teaches me that when the subjugated come together, they are bound to release an energy in front of which Western time is doomed to be flooded by alternative temporalities that can then all swim freely in the grand river of time.

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