

I Saw Ramallah by Mourid Barghouti

Discussion themes, associated passages, and questions for contemplation

Please note page numbers *should* roughly correspond to the page numbers of the English print edition.

Displacement

"Displacement is like death." p.3

"A person gets 'displacement' as he gets asthma, and there is no cure for either." p.4

"After how many more thirty years will the ones who never came back return? What does my return, or the return of any other individual mean? It is their return, the return of the millions, that is the true return. Our dead are still in the cemeteries of others. Our lives are clinging to foreign borders. On the bridge, that strange border unmatched on any of the world's five continents, you are overwhelmed by your memories of standing at the borders of others." p.39

"We weighed our oil in jars. It looked ridiculous in small green bottles like Coca-cola. But when absence grew long and going back to Deir Ghassanah became impossible, I exercised the first simple and serious humiliation when I put my hand in my pocket in a grocer's shop and bought my first kilogram of olive oil. It was as though I confronted myself, then, with the fact that Deir Ghassanah had become distant." p.58

"I wanted someone to know me. Even that old man walking slowly and thoughtfully along the street did not know me. And I did not know him, and I did not ask. How stupid in your own birthplace to ask a tourist's question: who's this and what's that?" p.66

"We had had to bear the 'clarity of displacement' and now we had to bear the 'uncertainty of return' as well. And we did." p.73

"They lived their time here and I lived my time there. Can the two times be patched together?" p.85

"Bodyguards—or your luck, or our intelligence—can protect you from terrorism, but the displaced person can never be protected from the terrorism of the telephone." p.127

"It is enough for a person to go through the first experience of uprooting, to become uprooted forever. It is like slipping on the first step of a staircase. You tumble down to the end." p.131

Questions to consider:

- In what ways does the displacement described by author Mourid Barghouti seem similar to and different from the exile that Thích Nhất Hạnh and Sister Chân Không have shared about in their teachings?
- How can we think of displacement as an experience beyond the physical separation of an individual from their homeland?
- Have you or your ancestors faced displacement of any kind?
- Have you looked deeply into the possibility of displacement in your own lifetime? Why or why not?

Intellectualization of the topic of Palestine

"Is this a political moment? Or an emotional one? Or social?" p.11

"And now I pass from my exile to their...homeland? My homeland? The West Bank and Gaza? The Occupied Territories? The Areas? Judea and Samaria? The Autonomous Government? Israel? Palestine?" p.13

"They speak of politics as 'facts.' As though no one had explained to them the difference between 'facts' and that 'reality' which also includes triangular time (the past of moments, their present, and their future). They speak of politics as the decisions of governments and parties and states, like the eight o'clock news." p.43

"The long Occupation had succeeded in changing us from children of Palestine to children of the idea of Palestine." p.62

"The Palestinian has his joys too. He has his pleasures alongside his sorrows. He has the amazing contradictions of life, because he is a living creature before being the son of the eight o'clock news." p.119

"The Jerusalem of religions, the Jerusalem of politics, the Jerusalem of conflict is the Jerusalem of the world. But the world does not care for our Jerusalem, the Jerusalem of the people." p.142

"But I cannot accept any talk of two equal rights to the land, for I do not accept a divinity in the heights running political life on this earth. Despite all this, I was never particularly interested in the theoretical discussions around who has the right to Palestine, because we did not lose Palestine in a debate, we lost it to force. When we were in Palestine, we were not afraid of the Jews. We did not hate them, we did not make an enemy of them. Europe of the Middle Ages hated them, but not us. Ferdinand and Isabella hated them, but not us. Hitler hated them, but not us. But when they took our entire space and exiled us from it they put both us and themselves outside the law of equality. They became an enemy, they became strong; we became displaced and weak. They took the space with the power of the sacred and with the sacredness of power, with the imagination, and with geography. Can I hold on to Tamim's right to this space? Let him enter this summer, let him enter after two or three summers, let him enter after twenty summers—the important thing is that he should have the right to live here one day. Even if he should choose to live elsewhere after that. The stranger who can return to his first place is different from the stranger whose displacement plays with him without his having a say." p.157

Questions to consider:

- Intellectualization can be defined as a defense mechanism by which reasoning is used to block confrontation with an unconscious conflict and its associated emotional stress—where thinking is used to avoid feeling. What is the effect of intellectualizing the issue of Palestine?
- What other local or global events and situations do you recognize are intellectualized at times, by yourself or others? What conditions impact whether something is intellectualized or not?
- What could help you connect with Palestinians and others who are experiencing profound suffering that may differ from your own experience of suffering—across the world and in your own community—on a deeper level than the intellect?