

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.

Grief

"Joy needs training and experience. You have to take the first step. Ramallah will not take it. Ramallah is content with what she is. She knows what she has lived through. The near ones are near and the far ones are far. She has gone her way, sometimes as her people willed, and more often as her enemies willed. She has suffered and she has endured. Is she waiting to rest her head on your shoulder or is it you who seeks refuge in her strength?" p.35

"My troubles in exile were no worse than the troubles of my friends in their homelands." p.41

"They will not allow us to develop our village so that it shares features with the city, or to move with our city into a contemporary space. Let us be frank: when we lived in the village did we not long for the city? Did we not long to leave small, limited, simple Deir Ghassanah for Ramallah, Jerusalem, or Nablus? Did we not wish that those cities would become like Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and Beirut? The longing always for the new age." p.69

"What do your people know of you now? What do they know of the things that you have been through, the things that have shaped you, your acquaintances, your choices, the good and the bad in you throughout the thirty years that you have lived far from them? What do they know of your language? Your language that in some ways is similar to theirs and in some ways different, the language of your mind, of your speech, of your silence and isolation, your language in conflict and contentment?" p.85

"There is less green now since Israel has been stealing the water since 1967, but even so the green still resists." p.118

"How many talents have been broken since '48 in these lands? How many cities have wilted? How many homes have not been kept up? How many bookshops could have been set up in Ramallah, how many theaters?" p.147

"Our dead are scattered in every land. Sometimes we did not know where to go with their corpses; the capitals of the world refuse to receive us as corpses as they refuse to receive us alive." p.161

Questions to consider:

- What is your understanding of grief? How does that interact with the author's writing of grief?
- What aspects of life does the author apply grief to? Are there other aspects of life where you feel grief?
- Can the land itself experience grief? The water? Animals? Plants? Microbiome? Minerals?
- What is your relationship with shared grief and resistance? Does it feel embodied or theoretical for you?
- How has witnessing the genocide of Palestinians impacted how you understand and tend to your grief?