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The Political Work of Suffering: A Transformative

Examination

An Introduction

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The encroachment of violence and pain into all aspects of life, added to the unavoidability of cruelty apparent in the witnessing and experiencing of atrocities and unbounded suffering prompt us to write, frame, and archive individual, social, political, and legal violence. This special issue of Borderlands is an extension of critical epistemologies and analyses on the politics of suffering that advance bottom-up approaches to resistance. The contributors to this special issue, whose writing speaks to the witnessing and experiencing of atrocities embedded in individual, social, political, and legal violence, exemplify how suffering and pain are embodied in research on colonial legacies, settler colonialism, and Empire, which furthers our understanding and opens a path to new visions.

The contributors' sharp modes of seeing, investigating, and writing define the meanings ascribed to suffering and un-suffering, crystallizing technologies and meanings collaborated to generate subjects of violence, and modes of violent policies, actions, laws, and regimes. They examine what constitute violence, indignity, torture, and pain, and assess who is caught in various violent traps, emblemized as non-human, expressed and positioned as an antagonistic monstrous entity, registered as a dangerous and unwanted Other. The special issue suggests that marking bodies and lives with constant uprooting and maintaining zones of agonies are deeply structured by global, regional, and local geopolitics and sovereignty. These authors point to the ways in which those who suffer injustice and pain are governed by sacralized fetishistic racializations mobilized through mundane regimes of control and relations of power.

The special issue began in a workshop that took place in occupied East Jerusalem in April 2014 entitled: 'The Politics of Suffering in Colonial Contexts', which was funded by the LUCE Foundation and run by Nadim Rouhana and myself. This was not a typical academic workshop, but rather, one that ventured into the depths of the Palestinian experience living under military occupation in occupied East Jerusalem, to examine the political work of suffering in an ongoing settler colonial context. Participants met with Palestinians who were being forcibly evicted by Israeli Jewish settlers from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, and community activists in Silwan facing ongoing policies of military invasion and eviction to pave the way for a biblical 'City of David'. These experiences and more shape the urgency with which this special issue unfolds, as such questions are not merely intellectual inquiry, but grow out of the everyday, lived experiences of those 'wretched of the earth' on the ground who are actively and continuously resisting injustice and oppression. The workshop gathered critical scholars from around the world to utter ontological, ethical, philosophical, and socio-political articulations of political trauma, technologies of violence, and the inscription of pain and injustice against Palestinians, as Otherized entities suffering from historical and contemporary injustices. With the generosity and kind support of two wonderful scholars, Professors Suvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese, and their proposition to write and speak truth to power, we decided to gather papers presented at the workshop, incorporate additional invited papers, and produce a counter-hegemonic analysis articulating the politics of suffering. I would also like to acknowledge the very professional and attentive work of the special issue's copy editor Surjani Uthayakumaran, as well as the work of Einas Odeh Haj, Sarah Ihmoud, Areen Hawari, and the wonderful staff at Mada al-Carmel—Arab Center for Applied Social Research for their assistance in organizing the workshop.

The special issue includes a selection of contributions from across geopolitical spaces, be it Sri Lanka, the former Yugoslavia, India, Australia, Canada, the US, Israel, and Palestine. The origins of the workshop's conveners and other contributors, their variant racialized locations, academic writings, as well as their own histories and practices against injustices and dispossession enabled the expression of invisible and unspoken complexities. The multidisciplinary analyses brought about new insights and opened up new analytical perspectives to the study of suffering and pain to further understand the geo-political work of state and imperial criminality, humiliation, and suffering and to debunk hegemonic a-politicized, ahistorical claims. The contributors' critical examination of war, citizenship, settler colonialism, military occupation, displacement, disownment, and other modes of violence is forging new paths of sharing and challenging the embedded normalization of geographies of pain and suffering.

The contributing authors drew from various theories and used numerous testimonies, methodologies, and epistemological tools. The special issue embodies the numerous and distinctive articulations as it opens with Rosemary Sayigh's contribution addressing the suffering

of Palestinians. Sayigh stresses her initial position that 'any project to record suffering should be initiated with the people of the camps' when 'Palestinian refugee camps form nonetheless 'communities of memory' in that they incorporate stateless people who trace their origins back to Palestine' (Sayigh, this issue). To Sayigh, the Palestinian camp is a location that not only exemplifies the limits of locating trauma in the individual, but also its inherent history and historicity, as its present and future. From centering the analysis on the camp, as Sayigh suggests, the special issue continues with the work of Rema Hammami, and her focus on another Palestinian location: the checkpoint. In her analysis, Hammami demonstrates how the checkpoint is a settler colonial technology that memorializes power to challenge suffering as un-suffering. Hammami concludes by explaining that: 'For Palestinians under the particular logics of Israeli colonial violence self-mastery and the careful cultivation of a self able to elude subjection as part of a collective creation of a resistant moral community is perhaps the only option available to them' (Hammami, this issue).

From the memorialization of pain, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian examines the memories of those facing the exterminable power of the Israeli state laws, regulations, and power of dispossession during the period of the 1948 Nakba and beyond. She looks closely at the political work of suffering and states that 'the term "political work of suffering" intends to capture how marking pain over bodies, geographies, and lives can create a space of 'overkilling': the constant degradation and maiming of collective identities and lives that works in a structurally controlled and politically oppressive manner against the very nature of being human with rights' (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, this issue). The paper is followed by Sarah Ihmoud's contribution that examines suffering from a gendered perspective, while sharing with the reader the sexualized and racialized inscription of pain over the gendered Palestinian body and life in occupied East Jerusalem. From Ihmoud's analysis of sexualized violence in Palestine, Goldie Osuri takes us to the 2012 gang rape of Jyoti Singh Pandey in Delhi to suggest that Jyoti's gang rape case unraveled the 'complexity of feminist, queer, Hindu nationalist, and legal discourses in India', as it prompts a serious investigation into the state's investment in gaining from the sexualized violence and suffering in Kashmir. Osuri analyzes the gendering of human rights in the 'borderlands' of Kashmir in the context of postcolonial India and concludes by stating: 'It is here, in keeping vigilant about an international blind eye regarding India's occupation in Kashmir, that we may need to voice our anger against the (il)legitimacies of state occupation and violence' (Osuri, this issue).

From the body/life of pain, and its buffering space of the camp, the checkpoint, and the lost/preserved homeland; and from the gendered and sexualized violence in Palestine and Kashmir, the special issue goes on to discuss the 2009 atrocities in Sri Lanka, while thinking through the ways in which visibility, suffering, accountability, and disposability unfold. As Suvendrini Perera explains: 'The relations

between the necro-geo-politics of global institutions and the patchworks of local and transnational movements that attempt to materialize peoples' suffering and realize the possibility of justice within fragile and compromised frameworks' (Perera, this issue). Perera's contribution and superb analysis of the mass deaths of tens of thousands of civilians on the beaches of Mullivaikkal in northeast Sri Lanka poses critical questions about the politics and political work of suffering by wondering which atrocities of the past and present enter the order of international justice. Perera asks: What are the limits and possibilities of an international order of justice? What are its economies of visibilizing or invisibilizing suffering and atrocities?

Joseph Pugliese's paper takes Perera's theorization on the limits of justice further and delves into the complex colonial and corporeal economies of suffering to theorize the multi-dimensional matrices of suffering. He examines the multi-dimensional matrices of suffering in the context of Israel's drone-enabled regime over Gaza and occupied East Jerusalem. Pugliese explains: 'In my theorising of the multi-dimensional matrices of suffering, I proceed to conceptualise the suffering experienced in occupied zones as, crucially, both relational and distributed ... In the occupied zone, suffering encompasses ... complex, multi-dimensional vectors that bind humans, animals, animate and non-animate objects and entities, buildings and land'. By doing so, Pugliese examines suffering through its 'spatio-temporal dimensions, differential intensities, site-specific nuclei, and its relational distributions across a broad range of entities that encompasses more than the human subject' (Pugliese, this issue). Pugliese's theorization is followed by Jaspir Puar's insightful analysis on what she calls 'the right to maim', which she defines as yet another exercise of sovereignty. By offering her analysis on the right to maim, Puar explains: 'These practices of bodily as well as infrastructural debilitation, loosely effaced in concerns about 'disproportionate force', indicate the extension of the 'right to kill' claimed by states in warfare into what I am calling the 'right to maim'. Maiming as intentional practice expands biopolitics beyond simply the question of 'right of death and power over life'; maiming becomes a primary vector by which biopolitical control is operated in colonized space and hence not easily demarcated 'necro' as it is mapped in Mbembe's reworking of biopolitics'. Puar's contribution insists that 'through the practice of maiming, stunting, and debilitation, Palestinians are further literalized and lateralized as surface, as bodies without souls, as sheer biology, thus ironically rendered non-human, part of creating surface economies of control, and captured in non-human temporal calculations' (Puar, this issue).

The last four contributions in the special issue examine the politics of suffering in Palestine and the former Yugoslavia, ending with the settler colonial regime in Canada. The first paper in this last section examines the mode in which Palestinians inside Israel experience and face constant settler colonial indignities. In his contribution, Nadim Rouhana examines the Israeli political expressions of indignity marked over Palestinian lives and entities, particularly those

emanating from denying the Palestinians' relationship with their homeland and Zionism's claim of exclusive relationship and ownership of the homeland. In essence, Rouhana's contribution theorizes Palestinians' modes of resisting settler indignities by invoking their indigeneity and transforming it to nationalism that claims back the Palestinian homeland. Rouhana shows how this is expressed in political discourse and public attitudes and how it guides collective political action. He argues that such nationalism emerged in a context in which the future of the Zionism as a settler colonial project is yet undetermined. Sunera Thobani's analysis looks at the issue of citizenship, and expands on the relation between violence and citizenship within the settler colonial polity in the Canadian context. The strength of her paper lies in placing indigenous, immigrant, and white women in the same analytical frame to argue that processes of racialization foundational to the Canadian settler colonial state and national formation shape their subjection to violence. By sharing cases of missing and murdered women, Thobani expands on the way these women negotiate with citizenship to reveal the mode in which 'the institution of citizenship remains vital to the reproduction of particular forms of violated and violent gendered subjectivity' (Thobani, this issue). Thobani's contribution prompts a critical reading of citizenship, mainly in relation to particular forms of racially and violently gendered subjectivity that shapes gendered responses to violence. She finds that as the settler is transformed into the rights-bearing citizen of the nation-state, his/her claim to this status/space remains predicated on protecting the singularity of their claim to belonging. Immigrants, racialized as outsiders, therefore seek parity on the grounds laid down by the nation-state. Indigenous politics, however, are transformative of the entire edifice of this nation-state. The significance of this difference cannot be underestimated, and is, in fact, reiterated in Dino Abazovic's contribution, which focuses on Bosnia and Herzegovina. He looks closely at the fusion between religious claims and nationalism, and their expressions in the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Abazovic suggests that conflict and post-conflict societies, particularly if they are characterized by a plurality of confessional groups, are more suitable for the processes of increased religiosity. He explains how political institutions in his case study not only discouraged cross-ethnic cooperation; rather, they furthered human suffering by institutionalizing ethnic discrimination.

The final contribution, written by Magid Shihadeh, ties together the special issue by bringing the analysis back to where it started—the Palestinian context—but with a more global analytical lens, in order to 'deprovincialize the question of Palestine and Palestine studies' (Shihadeh, this issue). By engaging and theorizing around the concept of rupture, he argues that Israeli settler colonialism can be better understood in its full local, regional, and global dimension and impact, both in its origin and its present development. By invoking John Collins' analysis, Shihadeh suggests that Palestine has been serving several global questions for millions of people that refused

injustice, when global Israel ruptures the mobility, normalcy, and many basic needs and aspirations of millions of peoples around the world.

The various contributions, with their different modes of identifying the logics and technologies of violence of the state, will allow other critical scholars to unravel the immense terror that has silenced the circulation of counter-hegemonic discourses and narratives. With a heavy focus on Palestine, the special issue hopes to center the Palestinian case/cause as a moral, legal, and political test to the world's critical analyses. This special issue furthermore highlights the racialized, religiocized, and gendered positions and positioning of those suffering from the asymmetries of power. The analyses promoted by the various contributors emphasize the moral responsibilities of scholars, and their refusal to accept suffering as a normal violent act against communities living in spaces of suffering and slow death.

This special issue presents as a fundamental production of contributors who refuse to work with the master's tools, and instead look for and create new modes of scholarly resistance.