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The Public Intellectual as Exile: Representing the Self in Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*

Sumit Chakrabarti

In literary circuits and social and political debates, we frequently discuss the reasons and consequences of war and the pity that it distills. In the wake of the two world wars, we have spoken about the sense of loss and failure, the physical violence, the organised cruelty of mass slaughter and economic drainage. More often than not, such discussions have veered toward questions of morality and ethics; an encompassing debate on how to set things right and restore dignity to human civilisation. In post-humanist times, particularly since the almost meteoric rise of anti-humanist rhetoric in the latter half of the last century, these debates have taken a curious turn from the social towards the individual; from the macrocosmic sense of a clash of civilisations to the microcosmic ironies that unfold within the space of the private and the personal. The reason I associate this movement towards the personal with anti-humanism is because of the way the latter has problematised the idea of 'location' of the post-war individual both within and beyond the boundaries of the nation. The idea that war has more to do with the individual's private struggle rather than with a nation's formative or constructive consequentiality has gained increasing currency in this anti-humanist mode of thought – and thus 'location' is more of a psychological than a geographical habitation for the individual who has lived through such experiences.

It is from this individual anxiety of location that I want to examine the idea of 'exile'. My use of the word 'exile' departs from its very political meaning of forced displacement – the causes, the results, the inferences that can be drawn from them. My intention is to look at the interiority of the word as it relates to the personal loss of home and history, something that is intensely subjective and psychologically challenging. All his life Theodor Adorno had struggled with this loss of individual history within a war-torn society, ultimately seeking solace in intense privation beyond both politics and society. In *Minima Moralia* (1951) he associated complete seclusion with the only possibility of a sane and moral existence:

> The house is past … The best mode of conduct, in the face of all this, still seems an uncommitted, suspended one: to lead a private life, as far as the social order and one's own needs will tolerate nothing else, but not to attach weight to it as something still socially substantial and individually appropriate. 'It is even part of my good fortune not to be a house-owner,' Nietzsche already wrote in the *Gay Science*. Today we should have to add: it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home.[1]

The extreme reaction that Adorno advocated can be seen as a movement into nihilistic space but one also needs to understand that this 'movement beyond' was also a way of trying to exile oneself unconditionally before the individual subject be pitted into a condition of political exile that is coercive and undignified.

Adorno's phrase 'not to be at home in one's home' keeps coming back to my mind as I read Mourid Barghouti's memoir, *I Saw Ramallah* (1997). Barghouti, as a political exile, seems almost to be toying with this Adornoesque idea of complete segregation, on the one hand, and articulates his intense desire to communicate with his people, on the other. Barghouti is not a loner like Adorno, and thus his need to communicate both as a social being and as a poet who wants to stand by his Palestinian people gives the book a complexity that is both personal and political. *I Saw Ramallah* is the memoir of a poet who conditionally returns to his homeland, to the place of his birth, thirty years after he was exiled from it. In a 'Foreword' to the book Edward Said pointedly notes the apparently simple problems that Barghouti's narrative explores – simple, but unique to an exile and occasionally difficult to comprehend for those that have never inhabited such a world:

> Necessarily, there is a good deal of politics in Barghouti's book, but none of it is either abstract or ideologically driven: whatever comes up about politics arises from the lived circumstances of Palestinian life, which, most often, is surrounded by restrictions having to do with travel and residence. Both of these related matters, taken for granted by most people in the world who are citizens, have passports, and can travel freely without thinking about who they are all the time, are

[1] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, quoted in Edward Said, 'Between Worlds', *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (New Delhi, 2001), 565. C.f. Adorno's original text (item 18, under 'Refuge for the homeless': Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London, 2005), 38–9).

> extraordinarily charged for the stateless Palestinians, many of whom do in fact have passports but nevertheless, like the millions of refugees all over the Arab world, Europe, Australia, North and South America, still bear the onus of being displaced and hence, misplaced. Barghouti's text is consequently laced with problems related to where he can or cannot stay, where he may or may not go, for how long and in what circumstances he must leave, and what, most of all, occurs when he is not there.[2]

Thus, the entire narrative of Barghouti's memoir bears testimony to the extraordinariness of an ordinary life, and this is what is so peculiar about the condition of being in exile. There is no physical violence in exile; the violence is psychic, and hence indelible. At the same time, the hurt is nowhere to be seen; it is implicit and poignant.

I

Prior to discussion of the text, I shall attempt to lay out a perspective of the intellectual as exile on which I intend to build my argument about Barghouti's narrative and its political implications. Since Edward Said has written a 'Foreword' to this book, and since he has been one of those public intellectuals who have argued about the Palestine question almost throughout his career, I shall use some of his arguments as a kind of an envelope in which to place Barghouti's narrative. It is relevant at this point to note that both Said and Barghouti are 'partisan' as intellectuals. In their roles as public intellectuals there has always been a clearly defined pattern of political involvement that presupposes taking sides. This is unlike what either Adorno in his extreme privation or someone like Julien Benda (who locates the intellectual on a transcendental plane) would understand. Neither would Antonio Gramsci, for example, who sees the intellectual merely as a professional and sometimes far less. It is important to clarify the frames of reference within which I want to locate Barghouti as different from these others that I have mentioned. He is a public intellectual who, on the one hand, clings dearly to the private (in terms of personal history and memory), while, on the other, becomes extremely public in his affiliations.

[2] Edward Said, 'Foreword' in Mourid Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, trans. Ahdaf Soueif (London, 2004), ix.

Julien Benda tends to conceive of the intellectual as part of a tiny band of super-gifted and morally superior philosophers, whose words have a vatic, universal appeal. They, for Benda, uphold what might be called eternal standards of truth and justice that are beyond question, let alone subject to discursive qualifications or considerations of agency. Benda considers real intellectuals to be 'those whose activity is essentially not the pursuit of practical aims, all those who seek their joy in the practice of an art or a science or metaphysical speculation, in short in the possession of non-material advantages, and hence in a certain manner say: "My kingdom is not of this world".[3] It is evident from Benda's almost transcendental definition of the intellectual that he subscribes to a world-view that is purely humanist in its import. In Benda's hands the intellectual acquires a kind of synthetic, messianic stature; someone who is essentialized in his/her very conception. There is no way in which he/she can participate in the low political life of his/her time or stoop to become part of what might be called 'public' life. Obviously in the anti-humanist surge of theoretical writings after the Second World War, such a sterile, essentialist definition of the intellectual did not hold ground. The intellectual is now definitely, or needs to be, earth-bound in order that he/she can successfully battle the continuous attempts at co-opting him/her by myriad agencies of power that would use him/her for various political aims. It is cogent to note, however, that of all those that Benda considers to be intellectuals (namely, Spinoza, Voltaire, Ernest Renan et al), Jesus is the only non-European who gets his approval. The politics of the world around us has changed since Benda and has ceased to be one of binary opposition between the 'West' and the 'rest', and thus, issues of representation have acquired multiple polarities that could not possibly have been imagined by Benda.

Gramsci, however, sees the intellectual as a person who is nowhere near Benda's intellectual priest. For Gramsci, the intellectual is a professional who fulfils a particular set of functions in society. For him, a journalist, an academic, a management consultant, a lawyer, a policy expert, a government advisor, a labourer, are all intellectuals who perform their given functions in the society. He is rather impatient with the kind of distinctions generally made between intellectuals and non-intellectuals:

> All men are intellectuals … When one distinguishes between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, one is referring only to the immediate social

[3] Julien Benda, *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, trans. Richard Aldington (London, 1980), 43.

> function of the professional category of the intellectuals, that is, one has in mind the direction in which their specific professional activity is weighted, whether towards intellectual elaboration or towards muscular-nervous effort. This means that, although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist … There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*.[4]

That is to say that, for Gramsci, any human subject is able to pursue some form of intellectual activity or participate in a particular conception of the world and carry out conscious lines of moral conduct thereby bringing in new modes of thought. In making this claim, Gramsci does not mean that each individual has a splendidly original revelation to make but that every person is differentially unique in his or her thought and therefore also an intellectual. Although Gramsci's definition of the intellectual is far removed from that of Benda; he is also, in a sense, defining the intellectual more philosophically than politically.

In the face of these definitions, Edward Said's definition of the intellectual seems to be more relevant in terms of the 'public' role that more and more intellectuals are adopting these days, and also considering the kind of politics of representation that I am negotiating here. Said envisions a strictly public role for the intellectual, one that is neither transcendental like Benda's nor the very pedestrian one of the intellectual as professional as envisioned by Gramsci. While Benda's definition is not acceptable to Said for obvious reasons of Eurocentricity, he finds Gramsci's suggestions 'pioneering'. It is due to Gramsci's idea of associating the intellectual with the production and distribution of knowledge (that is to say his 'organic' presence in a particular field of work) that, Said thinks, the intellectual has become a subject of study:

> Just put the words 'of' and 'and' next to the word 'intellectuals' and almost immediately an entire library of studies about intellectuals that is quite daunting in its range and minutely focused in its detail rises before our eyes … There has been no major revolution in modern history without intellectuals; conversely there has been no major counter-revolutionary movement without intellectuals. Intellectuals

[4] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (Hyderabad: 1996; rpr. 2004), 9.

> have been the fathers and mothers of movements, and of course sons and daughters, even nephews and nieces.[5]

However, what Said is concerned about is that in this Gramscian attempt at making intellectuals of all human beings, the intellectual becomes only another professional lost in the maze of information and detail. Instead, Said insists that the intellectual is an individual with a specific public role to play in society, whose function cannot be easily reduced to faceless professionalism or somebody who just goes about his business like anybody else:

> The central fact for me is, I think, that the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public … [He is] someone whose place it is publically [sic] to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'ętre* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. The intellectual does so on the basis of universal principles.[6]

Said thus emphasises the public role of the intellectual. It is the intellectual's duty to see to it that those around him get justice and freedom. The obvious issue of representation is enmeshed with these ideas. The state, or the nation, or the other centres of power are incessantly, in their various ways, trying to violate the sovereignty of the human subject. It is the duty of the intellectual to talk about this, to make people aware of these violations of their individual rights and freedom, and to assume the role of the public intellectual who addresses the people directly. That is to say, in spite of all barriers, the intellectual should visibly represent a standpoint and articulate this representation to his/her public.

Said mentions Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre as the kinds of intellectuals who have spoken to their people directly, articulated their likes or dislikes publicly, and been very political presences in their respective societies. Most definitely, Said does not want the intellectual to mince words, as he writes: 'least of all should an intellectual be there to make his/her audiences feel

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[5] Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London, 1994), 8.

[6] Ibid., 9.

good: the whole point is to be embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant'.[7] Said has thus charted the trajectory of the intellectual's vocation in no uncertain terms. The purpose of the intellectual's activity, he emphasises, is 'to advance human freedom and knowledge"[8] in terms of speaking truth to power, of playing the role of the *parrhesiastes*, and becoming a political reference point in the society around him/her.[9]

It is this same role of the intellectual as a public figure that Said discovers in Mourid Barghouti. As a poet and an intellectual who is allowed to visit 'home' after thirty years, Barghouti has a role to play. He represents the exiled intellectual who has a distinctly political role; that of encountering his subjectivity in a way that is both private and public. While the Adorno-like private self shuns all intrusions, the public self of the exile is almost deliberately political in its import. Said observed of this condition:

> I speak of exile not as a privilege, but as an *alternative* to the mass institutions that dominate modern life. Exile is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you. But, provided that the exile refuses to sit on the sidelines nursing a wound, there are things to be learned: he or she must cultivate a scrupulous (not indulgent or sulky) subjectivity.[10]

It is this cultivation of a scrupulous subjectivity, verging on the political, that we continuously discover in the narrative of *I Saw Ramallah*.

II

Mourid Barghouti was forced to leave his homeland in June 1967 when Ramallah, his hometown, fell to the Israeli army. By the time he had completed his education at Cairo University, he was already a much discussed and controversial poet. On the eve of Anwar Sadat's visit to Israel, he was refused entry into Palestine, and Egypt did not want to keep him.[11] He was deported

[7] Ibid., 9–10.

[8] Ibid., 13.

[9] For a detailed discussion on the notion of *parrhesia* and of the intellectual and his ability to speak truth to power, see Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles, 2001).

[10] Said, 'Reflections on Exile', 184.

[11] On 19 November 1977, Anwar Sadat became the first Arab leader officially to visit

to Hungary, was allowed to live in Budapest, and could not come back to Egypt for almost seventeen years. During most of this time he had to remain separated from his wife, the Egyptian novelist Radwa Ashour, and their only son Tamim. It was only after the Oslo Accords of 1993 that Barghouti was allowed to visit Palestine.[12] His return to his 'home' in Deir Ghassanah, near Ramallah, is the context of the memoir.

Barghouti's narrative is stark in its frankness, and the shock the reader might feel is necessarily qualified more by the author's experience of exile and a sense of seething and despondent psychological anxiety at his rootlessness (born out of an aporetic absence) rather than by the immediate physical consequence of a war between two nations and its political effects. War, by its disruptive nature, separates one physically, uproots a person from the familiarity of a 'home', creates new borders, and prohibits passage. All of this unfolds in Barghouti's memoir in the form of a complex, psychological narrative that uses language as a mechanism of disruption. In a sense, this linguistic disruption counters the physical/geographical/locational disruption of war and becomes a potent weapon in the hands of the author. He does not use complex metaphors, or the literary art of rhetorical suggestions, or symbolic nuances with complicated meanings. His purpose is to shock his reader out of complacently engaging with the narrative as an objective observer. His account is straight and simple and therein lies the disruption. He says what he sees, almost in the form of a report, as he comes back to a familiar city rendered completely unfamiliar by the pity of war. Barghouti knows the simple use of language, and its power to disturb and disrupt. This deliberate method of disruptive intervention through language is Barghouti's way of avenging his personal cause at being thrown out of home by political exigencies that were beyond his control. He takes it out through his, perhaps somewhat exaggerated, comparisons between what was and what is, and a language that is meant to annihilate all presumptions of a possible peace process initiated by the Oslo agreements. He speaks for

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Israel when he met with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and spoke before the Knesset in Jerusalem about his views on how to achieve a comprehensive peace to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which included the full implementation of UN Resolutions 242 and 338. This was considered by the entire Arab world to be a serious blow to Arab nationalism.

[12] The Oslo Accords, finalised on 20 August 1993, officially called the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements or Declaration of Principles (DOP) was a milestone in Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was the first direct, face-to-face agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. It was also the first time that the Palestinians publicly acknowledged Israel's right to exist.

his countrymen but, more overwhelmingly, he speaks for himself – the assault on his individual autonomy as a Palestinian – and this is perhaps the reason behind his subtle, but deeply embedded intention of politicising the subject position of the individual, the marginalised, the exile:

> I marginalised myself in order to put a distance between myself and the slightest hint of cultural or political despotism. The intellectual's despotism is the same as the despotism of the politicians of both sides … They stay in their positions forever, they are impatient with criticism, they prohibit questioning from any source, and they are absolutely sure that they are always right, always creative, knowledgeable, pleasant, suitable, and deserving, as they are and where they are.[13]

Barghouti is vacillating between two locations – the personal and the political – and his 'moment of politics' is perhaps defined by a heterogeneity that is beyond him.[14] Returning to Ramallah, Barghouti feels like an exile that belongs nowhere; he is rootless and insecure. His sense of estrangement is both an affectation (in the political sense) and a reality (in its intense subjectivity) and he tries consciously to maintain this differential between himself and those that live in his village now. They are his kin, yet far removed by the simple fact of his position as an exile; a fact through which he discovers the potential of a distant gaze – an objectivity that empowers him to comment on the fate of *those* people and *their* homeland. It is also his reality but he guards this under a controlled language, only to reveal it brutally at key moments in the text. In his essay, 'Reflections on Exile', Said wrote:

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[13] Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, 125.

[14] I borrow the phrase 'moment of politics' from Homi Bhabha. At this 'moment' he tries to create an ambivalent, heterogeneous political space of (non)-representation. What he is trying to do is to enunciate a political moment for the individual that is differential in its import and ever-vanishing in its non-representativeness. This is a conception of subjective politics in the postmodern sense, where the subject incessantly eludes representation. I find a similarity between Bhabha's attempt and Barghouti's in the sense that the latter is continuously vacillating between the private and the public, the personal and the political in order that he is never caught within the paradigms of essentialist politics. However, this is my personal opinion, and I do not think that Barghouti is exactly aware of the game that he is playing. This struck me as a possibility within his representative politics; a position that he has unconsciously, yet successfully assumed. For a detailed discussion on the 'moment of politics' see, Homi Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory', *The Location of Culture* (London and New York, 1994; rpr. 2004), 28–56.

> Clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong…
>
> Willfulness, exaggeration, overstatement: these are characteristic styles of being an exile, methods for compelling the world to accept your vision–which you make more unacceptable because you are in fact unwilling to have it. It is yours, after all.[15]

This sense of not belonging is used as a strategy of resistance against all assimilationist techniques – political or otherwise – and Barghouti creates a doppelganger for himself, who looks at him self-reflexively, as if from the beyond of engagement. It seems, at times, there are at least two Barghoutis at work: the individual, the subjective presence that walks the streets of Deir Ghassanah, and the writer of the memoir, the poet who reports what he sees, exactly as it is, without a hint of the political agency that is so much a part of the implicit agenda of the book:

> Writing is a displacement, a displacement from the normal social contract. A displacement from the habitual, the pattern, and the ready form. A displacement from the common roads of love and the common roads of enmity. A displacement from the believing nature of the political party. A displacement from the idea of unconditional support. The poet strives to escape from the dominant used language, to a language that speaks itself for the first time. [16]

He refers to the political and the personal and the two are suddenly inseparable in their belonging to the self that is physically walking on the streets of Palestine, separated from the writer of the memoir who is located beyond the margin and who becomes the 'stranger'. Barghouti is a poet, and this kind of ambivalent poetic dimension to his thought is perhaps intrinsic to his narrative style; the quality that enables one to engage from the outside, yet remain central to the core of the narrative.

It is difficult to miss the masochism in Barghouti's narrative, either when he speaks about Israel as a political construct or the Allenby Bridge as a personal/locational construct. The difference lies in the tone/persona in which the exile addresses a political question as distinctly separated from the personal one. In a tone of detached, impersonal commentary he writes about Israel:

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[15] Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile' in idem, *Reflections on Exile,* 182.

[16] Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, 132.

> Israel allows in hundreds of elderly people and forbids hundreds of thousands of young people to return. And the world finds a name for us. They called us *naziheen*, the displaced ones.
>
> Displacement is like death. One thinks it happens only to other people. From the summer of '67 I became that displaced stranger whom I had always thought was someone else.[17]

It is this deliberate distancing from the self that forces Barghouti to remove 'himself' from the dynamics of memory as he stands in front of the bridge after thirty years of separation. He consistently refuses to define himself in spite of an overwhelming urge to do so and that is where the narrative acquires such a stark and poignant complexity.

Throughout the entire text he vacillates between the self and its doppelganger, paralysed at the thought of any nominative certainty that would lead to the myriad kinds of essentialism that serve to locate an exile. In the opening chapter, he stands in front of the Allenby Bridge, the entry point to the West Bank:

> A distant childhood. The faces of friends and enemies. I am the person coming from the continents of others, from their languages and their borders. The person with spectacles on his eyes and a small bag on his shoulder. And these are the planks of the bridge. These are my steps on them. Here I am walking toward the land of the poem. A visitor? A refugee? A citizen? A guest? I do not know … Is this a political moment? Or an emotional one? Or social? A practical moment? A surreal one? A moment of the body? Or of the mind? The wood creaks.[18]

The moment of exile is also the moment of history, the coalition of the private and the public, the moment when the history of the nation is neatly sutured into the history of the personal; the body-politic. It is a moment of homogeneity that the autonomy of the self tries in vain to resist; the moment where the self becomes the nation, the geography, the roads you walk or cannot walk, the houses you leave behind, never to return, or return to under exceptional circumstances. It is a moment of politics that subsumes the self along with relationships, familiarity, and the security of an existence that is 'performed' everyday, unconsciously, by the family. Pitted against these tensions, Barghouti

[17] Ibid., 3.
[18] Ibid., 10–11.

prefers to locate himself in the realm of the political that is beyond essentialist historiography; the political that one carries with oneself to ward off the psychic violence that unfurls everyday in a war-torn socius. It is the moment of politics within the family that dissolves the private and the public and opens up the socio-personal situation to an unforeseen heterogeneity:

> Politics is the family at breakfast. Who is there and who is absent and why. Who misses whom when the coffee is poured into the waiting cups … Politics is the number of coffee-cups on the table, it is the sudden presence of what you have forgotten, the memories you are afraid to look at too closely, though you look anyway. Staying away from politics is also politics. Politics is nothing and it is everything.[19]

It is within this paradigm of the contingency of representation that Barghouti frequently plays out the subtle differences between the private and the personal. The personal is the family, relationships that are formed or broken, paths that one walks, houses that are no longer there. The private is an engagement with each one of these in one's mind; a complex interplay of memories that cannot always be articulated. The personal is where politics is incessantly at work; it is capable of creating deep furrows of loss, regret and, in times of emergency, mistrust. The private sits still deeper within the unfathomable recesses of the mind, untouched by politics and, in the case of an exile, touched at the core by insurmountable sadness. Politics as the semiotic at the level of the private is frequently qualified by the one at the level of the personal or the realpolitical: the exile can never escape the feeling of a continuous and uncontrollable vacillation from the personal to the private as he is increasingly torn away or segregated from the familiar registers that qualify meaning. Mourid Barghouti is exiled in Budapest; his wife and son come to visit him from Egypt. The son does not know the father and thus the personal (with all its political implications) explodes as the private is born again in this moment of politics:

> This boy – born by the Nile in Dr Sharif Gohar's Hospital in Cairo to an Egyptian mother and a Palestinian father carrying a Jordanian passport – saw nothing of Palestine except its complete absence and its complete story. When I was deported from Egypt he was five months old; when Radwa brought him with her to meet me in a furnished flat

[19] Ibid., 43–4.

> in Budapest he was thirteen months old and called me 'Uncle'. I laugh and try to correct him. 'I'm not "Uncle", Tamim, I'm "Daddy"'. He calls me 'Uncle Daddy'.[20]

One sometimes feels that Barghouti is keenly aware of the kind of heterogeneous space that he has opened up within the politics of representation – a space that Homi Bhabha frequently talks about in his writings. The theoretical is born out of experiential contingency, and Barghouti realises this after a poetry reading session in his village, Deir Ghassanah. The moment of the theoretical is also the moment of the political, and each member of the audience is 'enunciatively' aware of the complex dynamic of location within a society rent apart by war and exile.[21] As Barghouti reads out his poetry in front of a village audience consisting of ploughmen, and shepherds, and mothers, and grandmothers, he becomes keenly aware of the differential quality with which his poetry touches each one of them. As an exiled intellectual he is exhilarated at such knowledge about his own people as seen from a distance. He writes, 'there is no completely innocent audience. Each person has his own experience of life, however simple'.[22]

Ultimately, Barghouti is talking about representation – the implacable trauma of trying to locate oneself within the unfamiliarity of a life lived piecemeal. Such an awareness constitutes the heterogeneity of the experience of exile; the presence of the moment of enunciation that refuses all essentialist agendas. The exiled is always in a movement, and each individual subject-position is differentially linked to his/her history. Barghouti might not have been theoretically aware of this, neither did he need to be. What his experiences entail, however, is the consolidation of this complex position of the exiled intellectual. As he describes his life in hotels around the world, for example, the contingency of representation and its consequent anxiety becomes apparent:

> I felt comfort in hotels. They taught me not to hold on to a place, to accept the idea of leaving … In a hotel you are not responsible for the

[20] Ibid., 130.

[21] I have borrowed this idea of enunciation from Homi Bhabha who writes that 'politics can only become representative, a truly public discourse, through a splitting in the signification of the subject of representation; through an ambivalence at the point of the enunciation of a politics.' Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory' in idem, *The Location of Culture*, 36.

[22] Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, 84.

> plants or for changing the water of the vase … You have no books to worry about giving to friends and neighbors [sic.] before your enforced departure, a departure planned by others. There is no cruelty in leaving the paintings hanging on the walls of your room. They are not yours and mostly they are ugly.[23]

I Saw Ramallah thus constantly reminds us of life lived in the instant, transient and slippery, each differential slice of time qualified by a meaning uniquely its own. The moment is also hybrid and heterogeneous, where representation constitutes anxiety; there is a strained effort in the self of the intellectual (poet, memoir writer) to evade its doppelganger in the self of the exiled subject who is being essentialised at every moment by the various workings of politics. This is indeed a complex process of (non-)representation which cannot, perhaps, be entirely successful. The game continues throughout the narrative and it is not always easy to reach reconciliation.

However, one could also argue from a postmodern perspective that Barghouti problematises the position of the power-centre, in this case Israel, as a nation that has to deal with the dialogic presence of the exiled. The Janus-faced heterogeneity and the shifting subject-position of the Palestinian exile cannot be subsumed into a unitary register of binaries, and this opens up the political space of a new and complex hybridity that belies simplistic assumptions of power or resolutions of conflictual spaces. That is to say, by talking about the hybridity or heterogeneity of Israel, its complex history, and its idea of the nation, the debate about Palestine and its exiled intellectual can be further problematised. I particularly emphasise the intensely subjectivist and therefore arbitrary nature the debate might assume, and hence the possibilities of exploring the moments of politics that involve minutely differential anxieties about place and space. The opening up of various and multiple possibilities of representation in Israel, and their theoretical imports, could lend newer perspectives to the very claim that it makes about nation and nationality and reclaiming of the lost land. Yet perhaps, in this memoir, Barghouti is too caught up in the struggle for self-representation to examine these possibilities of the politics of representation, and nobody can blame him.

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[23] Ibid., 92–3.