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Decolonial Particularity or Abstract Universalism? No, Thanks! The Case of the Palestinian Question

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In the neoliberal imaginary of Western nations, democracy and the free market are symbiotically interwoven; the latter could not exist without the full *presence* of the former in the realm of public discourse. In addition to guaranteeing a way of life at home, neoliberalism serves in this imaginary as a global antidote to the most corrupt and tyrannical governments in the world. The neoliberal ethos, however, does not merely dominate or colonize the public or political sphere; it also structures our very mode of being. As David Harvey puts it, “[Neoliberalism] has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (Harvey 2007: 3). Nearly three decades ago, Fredric Jameson alerted us to the dangerous and alarming ways neoliberal rhetoric infiltrates not only how we conceptualize the economic field but also how we understand our place within that field: “‘The market is in human nature’ is the proposition that cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged; in my opinion, it is the most crucial terrain of ideological struggle in our time” (Jameson 1991: 263). Neoliberal ideology has thoroughly naturalized itself – appearing to its defenders and dissenters alike as the only game in town. As the argument goes, global capitalism may not be perfect – but what else is really out there as an alternative?

More recently, echoing Jameson, Slavoj Žižek has expressed a sense of urgency mixed with utter dismay at the cognitive state of the public at large, noting how “it seems easier to imagine the ‘end of the world’ than a far more modest change in the mode of production” (Žižek 1994: 1). For Žižek, one symptom of neoliberal capitalism’s triumphant reign is the alleged “return to ethics” that made its way into Western universities, particularly in the humanities. On Žižek’s account, with the return to ethics, the Left’s project of radical democracy has fallen victim to a pervasive type of intellectual blackmail:

The moment one shows a minimal sign of engaging in political projects that aim to seriously challenge the existing order, the answer is immediately: “Benevolent as it is, this will necessarily end in a new Gulag!” The “return to ethics” in today’s political philosophy shamefully exploits the

horrors of the Gulag or Holocaust as the ultimate bogey for blackmailing us into renouncing all serious radical engagement. (Žižek 2000a: 127)

For the humanist liberal, reform – rather than revolution – is the reasonable and moral way of proceeding, a position to which Žižek is entirely opposed. This “return to ethics” – fueled by a fetishization of the cultural other, a gentrified figure of otherness which is, as Jameson sardonically puts it, “merely added mechanically onto some individual psychology,” “evaporat[ing] into Levinassian sentimentalism” – is symptomatic of a more general “culturalization of politics” (Jameson 2006; Žižek 2008a: 140-44).

Two examples of such a depolitization of social reality are postcolonial theory and decolonality. In *Violence*, Žižek faults the postcolonial critique of liberal ideology for its one-sided Marxist lesson, for only demystifying the abstract universality of European modernity. And more recently in *Trouble in Paradise*, Žižek objects to decolonality’s even more categorical denunciation of Eurocentrism. Seeing themselves as correcting postcolonial theory’s Eurocentric biases – lamenting the latter’s all-too-narrow archive, its overt reliance on European modernism and poststructuralism – decolonial theorists like Walter D. Mignolo hunger for the local, a reality uncontaminated by European thought and its capitalist regime;¹ they emphasize “epistemic disobedience” and reject wholesale modernity’s universality (Mignolo 2011a) (although Žižek consistently folds decolonality under the general category of postcolonial theory).

Žižek readily concedes that postcolonial and decolonial critics are fully justified in denouncing the false ideological universality that masks, naturalizes, and legitimizes a racist and neocolonial condition and agenda, but he also insists on the need to go further, seeing these competing progressive movements as limiting themselves to resisting only false universality and abstractions such as “Man” as the bearer of human rights. At best, their intervention constitutes only half of the Marxist critique (its moment of demystification); at worst, it succumbs to “a non-reflective anti-Eurocentrism” manifested as a depoliticized call to respect authentic difference, an indulgence in a cult

¹ As Ilan Kapoor insightfully observes, “Mignolo... seems to equate non-European particularity with a certain authenticity, as though a distinct or pristine non-European identity can be retrieved in the wake of colonialism and the globalization of capital.” See, Ilan Kapoor (2018) “Antagonism and Politics Now: Three Recent Controversies.” *International Journal of Žižek Studies* Vol. 12, No. 1: 6).

of victimhood, a retreat behind communitarian boundaries, or a nostalgic desire for a return to authentic pre-colonial or indigenous realities (Žižek 2014: 183).

In this, Žižek doubles down on a Marxist approach that has come under fire in postcolonial circles, and perhaps most prominently in the debates over Jameson's infamous article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." Jameson's piece now typically serves as a warning lesson, a cautionary tale for Marxists who would export their critical hermeneutics to the Third World, who would fail, that is, to suspend the impulse to homogenize and translate colonial wounds and nationalist struggles into well-known symptoms of capitalism. Critically reacting to Jameson's argument that third-world texts "are necessarily. . . allegorical, and in a very specific way," that "they are to be read as what I will call national allegories" (Jameson 1986: 69), R. Radhakrishnan underscores the former's simultaneous will to mastery and inattentiveness to his historical differences:

During the course of this essay, Jameson talks all too glibly about "the return of nationalism" in the Third World as though nationalism were enjoying a re-run in the Third World. The confident use of the term "return" suggests that within the universal synchronicity of Western time, nationalism is repeating itself in the Third World, whereas, historically, "nationalism" is new to the Third World. Throughout this essay (in spite of an initial gesture of unease), Jameson has little difficulty in maintaining his official conviction that the Third World histories are a predictable repetition of the histories of the "advanced world"; hence, the masterly confidence with which he "allegorizes" the Third World on its own behalf.

(Radhakrishnan 1989: 329)²

Does Žižek learn from Jameson's "error"?³ "No" is the short answer. Žižek displays even less interest in investigating the specificities of the postcolonial, or

² Edward Said makes a similar argument against Marxist theorists more generally denouncing their "blithe universalism," pointing to their bad record when it came to questions of race and representation (Said 1994: 277).

³ This depiction of Jameson's work is quite widespread, reaching almost a state of consensus. This critique of Jameson's approach to postcolonial or Third-World affairs has not, however, gone uncontested. Ian Buchanan and Imre Szeman mount a compelling defense of Jameson's reading of "national allegory," pointing out the ways the essay has been systematically misread. What is meant by "national allegory" is from the start distorted. Buchanan argues that Jameson's critics dubiously conflate

decolonial, condition. Žižek repeats instead Jameson's insistence on the economic, on viewing Third-World national cultures as "locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism – a cultural struggle that is itself a reflexion of the economic situation of such areas in their penetration by various stages of capital, or as it is sometimes euphemistically termed, of modernization" (Jameson 1986: 68).

Critics invested in a cultural politics emphasizing difference and local specificity may find this repetition frustrating or puzzling to say the least, yet if one patiently moves through the layers of Žižek's argument (without, for example, getting shaken by his uncharitable conflation of postcolonial theory with multiculturalism and political correctness), one can observe valid objections to postcolonial and decolonial theories, motivated by a desire to enrich the debate on the Left, as well as a commitment to engage specificity otherwise. As we will see, for Žižek, an effective critique of late capitalism cannot proceed without a commitment to the language and practice of universality. To this, however, he adds the important qualifier: it is a universalism that has learned from and is marked by its violent colonial history. A genuinely anti-colonial, anti-racist critique requires a dialectical next step. Žižek finds the path of universality more rewarding and productive than any rigorous defense of difference, insisting – repeating Jameson's own call – that the Left must move beyond the postcolonial exposure of the processes of othering in Western discourses. If Angela Davis is right in arguing that "any critical engagement with racism requires us to understand the tyranny of the universal," this engagement cannot end with a divestment from universality and a (re)investment in particularity (Davis 2016: 87). The Left must appropriate and harness the gap between formal democracy and the economic reality of exploitation and domination. This appearance – the experience of the gap – must be re-articulated to mean more than an illusion, more than a lie. Žižek posits the pursuit of concrete universality – rather than a reactionary defense of racial or ethnic/religious difference,

"national allegory" with "nationalist allegory." Jameson never argues that nationalism is the dominant ethos of Third-World literary writers, only that they are "obsessively concerned with the 'national situation' – nationalism would be but one part of this vastly more complex problem" (Buchanan 2006: 174). Literature is an avenue for Third-World writers because, unlike their First World counterparts, literature for them continues to embody a political dimension. Whereas, in the First World, literary production is about "the private rather than the public sphere...individual tastes and solitary meditations rather than public debate and deliberation," in the Third World, such an opposition simply does not exist (Szeman 2006: 192). "National allegory" is really then "political allegory" (Szeman 2006: 200).

which can only lead to an ineffective political correctness or a defunct “identity politics” – as the real alternative to abstract, ideological universality.

In opposing the camp of cultural/ethnic difference and championing that of Marxist universality, Žižek arguably returns us to the now classic exchange between Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon over the status and long-term viability of the *négritude* movement. “Black Orpheus,” Sartre’s preface to Léopold Sédar Senghor’s 1948 *Anthology of négritude* poetry, and Fanon’s critical gloss of it in his 1952 *Black Skin, White Masks*, stage an encounter between existential-Marxism and anti-colonial theory. Sartre clearly praises Senghor’s anthology, seeing it as a productive form of engaged literature. But Sartre also highlights its shortcomings, namely its philosophical insufficiency, how “Negritude appears as the weak state of a dialectical progression” (qtd. in Fanon 2008: 112). *Négritude* suffers from a “particularistic logic” (Penney 2004: 54). On the road to emancipation, *négritude* is only the point of departure, not the final destination. For Sartre, a truly emancipatory critique does not preserve but dissolves all differences; accordingly, anti-colonialism must “lead to the abolition of racial differences” (Sartre 1988: 296). Fanon objects to Sartre’s paternalistic reading, rejecting Sartre’s “helleniz[ing]” of *négritude*, his “Orpheusizing” of the black colonial body (Fanon 1998: 163). Against Sartre’s interpretive machinery, Fanon affirms the sufficiency of his singular otherness:

The dialectic that introduces necessity as a support for my freedom expels me from myself. It shatters my impulsive position. Still regarding consciousness, black consciousness is immanent in itself. I am not a potentiality of something; I am fully what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. (Fanon 1998: 114)

Fanon’s objection to Sartre’s dialectical reading is twofold. First, Fanon denounces Sartre for the latter’s unmarked and unqualified universal perspective, which, he argues, blinds Sartre to a careful consideration of the specificity of the black lived experience, of “the fact of blackness.” He decries that “Sartre forgets that the black man suffers in his body quite differently from the white man” (Fanon 1998: 118). Sartre’s intervention, predicated on a European *telos* of history, ends up “destroy[ing] black impulsiveness” (Fanon 1998: 113). Second, Fanon points to a deficiency in the application of the

dialectical method. Sartre's cognitive explanatory framework – which dutifully discerns the epiphenomenal from the real determinants, the symptoms from the causes – fails to account for the affects of *négritude*, for the movement's impact on Fanon's psyche: "When I tried to claim my negritude intellectually as a concept, they snatched it away from me. They proved to me that my reasoning was nothing but a phase in the dialectic" (Fanon 1998: 111). That is to say, subjecting *négritude* to a cold dialectical reading neglected to record the movement's affective appeal, the utter joy "in the intellectualization of black *existence*" (Fanon 1998: 116).⁴

Mignolo might have been thinking of such an exchange in his response to Žižek's 1998 article provocatively titled, "A Leftist Plea for 'Eurocentrism.'" In his dismissal of Žižek's relevance (for decolonial subjects), Mignolo singles out the opening sentence of the essay: "When one says *Eurocentrism*, every self-respecting postmodern leftist intellectual has as violent a reaction as Joseph Goebbels had to culture – to reach for a gun, hurling accusations of protofascist Eurocentrist cultural imperialism" (Žižek 1988: 988), to which Mignolo righteously counters:

A self-respecting decolonial intellectual will reach instead to Frantz Fanon: "Now, comrades, now is the time to decide to change sides. We must shake off the great mantle of night, which has enveloped us, and reach, for the light. The new day, which is dawning, must find us determined, enlightened and resolute. So, my brothers, how could we fail to understand that we have better things to do than follow that Europe's footsteps." (Mignolo 2013a)

In Mignolo's version, Fanon's message for fellow anti-colonialists is loud and clear: Europe is a relic of the past, even a detriment to our intellectual growth. Decolonizing the mind necessitates a rupture with Europe. Whereas Sartre, according to Mignolo, recognized this shift in Fanon, today's Sartre (Žižek) fails to acknowledge the anti-colonial's need for a different path of resistance, one that does not follow the script of modernity. Casting Žižek exclusively as the would-be Sartre of "Black Orpheus," however, only gives us part of the picture, and Mignolo's attempt to recruit Fanon to the

⁴ As Penney puts it, "Fanon held firmly to the view that racially based identity claims on the part of non-European subjects in colonized situations carried an irreducible, cathartic importance" (Penney 2004: 56).

cause of decoloniality is, at best, forced or one-sided, and, at worst, self-defeating. Protecting Fanon from Western contamination is a fool's errand. In his rebuttal of Mignolo's reading, Žižek points out that, far from authorizing a decolonial retreat from universality into non-Western particularity, Fanon frequently engaged with European thinkers and was hospitable to Western thought: "Fanon himself. . . dealt extensively and intensively with Hegel, psychoanalysis, Sartre, and even Lacan" (Žižek 2014a: 184). Indeed, making Fanon available only for decolonial identification is arguably un-Fanonian to the extent that it ignores the author's complex intellectual heritage and, more importantly, passes over his investment in a global solidarity that did not exclude Europeans.

A Universalism Otherwise than Exclusionary

Hamid Dabashi defends Mignolo's line of argumentation by saying that there is plenty of Fanon to go around, that Žižek can keep his Europeanized Fanon: "Žižek can have his Fanon all to himself. There is plenty of Fanon left for others" (Dabashi 2015: 7). Yet, this is an odd line of defense, for Dabashi does not then elaborate on what such a decolonial Fanon, a Fanon for the rest of us, really looks like. Is this an essentialist Fanon, whose decoloniality can be neatly decoupled from the European thought he engages? Is this a Fanon who repeats Western discourses before moving away from this error, or is it a Fanon who repeats with a difference, who means something wholly different by the Western concepts he deploys? Though Dabashi's central argument is certainly true – that "the point. . . is not to have any exclusive claim on Fanon, or to fetishize him (or any other non-European thinker for that matter) as a frozen talisman for Europeans to cite to prove they are not philosophically racist. The point is not to dismiss but to overcome the myth of 'the West' as the measure of truth" – this does not advance our understanding of Fanon's contribution to this overcoming (Dabashi 2015: 8).⁵

⁵ Unfortunately, Dabashi also undermines his case against the West as the sole measure of truth, by misattributing to Žižek a quotation that is actually from Fanon: "I am a man and what I have to recapture is the whole past of the world, I am not responsible only for the slavery involved in Santo Domingo, every time man has contributed to the victory of the dignity of the spirit, every time a man has said no to an attempt to subjugate his fellows, I have felt solidarity with his act. In no way does my basic vocation have to be drawn from the past of peoples of color. In no way do I have to dedicate myself to reviving some black civilization unjustly ignored. I will not make myself the man of any past. My black skin is not a repository for specific values. Haven't I got better things to do on this earth than avenge the blacks of the

Rather, Dabashi's suggestion that a "Western" Fanon can be neatly cordoned off from a "decolonial" one again produces something of a decolonial blackmail at work here: either we (the non-Europeans affected by the legacies of colonialism and imperialism) criticize Western modernity and try to escape its hegemonic orbit by reorienting our gaze to non-European thinkers, or else we are celebrating its virtues, turning our back on our specific history and locality. A Žižekian answer to Mignolo's implicit question, decolonial particularity or abstract universalism? is a resolute, *No, Thanks!*

Rather than advocating identity politics – Mignolo's wrong answer to a wrong question – Žižek formulates a model of universality that confronts the exclusionary logic of Eurocentrism, a logic that produces subjects who count and others who do not, subjects who benefit from the "Rights of Man" and those who fall outside the liberal umbrella, deemed less relevant, less grievable and so forth. In opposition to an ideological universalism, Žižek turns to Saint Paul's statement from Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Žižek 1998: 1002). To be clear, what Žižek privileges in Paul is not his religious message, that is, his displacement of Judaism with Christianity, but his formulation as an endless source and locus of negativity. It is Paul's principle of *adiaphora* (ethical indifference toward ethnic and cultural particularities) that Žižek harnesses in his politics of subtraction.

Fanon practices this kind of *adiaphora* when he sustains a critical distance from *négritude* and other similar movements, resisting the impulse for rootedness, the phantasmatic impulse to ontologize or homogenize black experience:

No, I have not the right to be black. It is not my duty to be this or that. [...] I acknowledge one right for myself: the right to demand human behavior from the other. [...] The black man is not. No more than the white man.
(Fanon 2008: 205-206)

The shift from difference as experiential rootedness (the stuff of tribalism and identity politics) to difference as experiential relatedness helps to revive a universalist humanist

17th century?" While Dabashi misreads this as a symptom of Žižek's assimilative Western logic, what Fanon resists here is another form of reductionism: namely, his interpellation as a *black* intellectual, one who could only be responsible for and responsive to black matters. Fanon insists that his fellows include not only blacks but others as well.

framework where what ultimately matters is to be treated humanly. It also might be tempting to read Fanon as offering his own version of Pauline cosmopolitanism: *there is neither White nor Black*. But here we must not forget about the material conditions of colonial life. There is no transcendence of race without the dismantlement of the colonial system, and there is no dismantlement of the colonial system without an affective and cognitive transvaluation of the *difference* of the colonized. Coloniality is not destiny, but it is lived as if it were. A politics of subtraction weakens coloniality's hold on the psyche. This is the Eurocentrism – synonymous with a universalism at odds with (the ideological complacency of) identitarian thinking – that Žižek unabashedly defends.

The Neighbor and the Feminine Logic of the Non-All

But Žižek's investment in the universal does not stop here. He supplements his account of Pauline cosmopolitanism with his Lacanian musings on the neighbor. Žižek turns to the biblical figure of the neighbor, which he considers the “most precious and revolutionary aspect of the Jewish legacy,” stressing how the neighbor “remains an inert, impenetrable, enigmatic presence that hystericizes” (Žižek 2006a: 140-141). Žižek foregrounds the challenge posed by the injunction to “love thy neighbour!” This injunction confounds universalist thinking; it disturbs ethics as such. The biblical injunction might be better characterized as an “anti-ethics” (Žižek 2008b: 16) to the extent that it radically deviates from a humanist orientation, where ethics invests itself in a fetishistic ideal of humanity – a gentrified view of Man as the bearer of rights, endowed with a moral sensibility and so forth – disavowing any knowledge of suffering or man-made evil in the world. Jewish law, for its part, de-gentrifies the other, calling us to confront the Real of the other in its figuration of the neighbor. If Greek philosophy neglected the hysterical presence of this other (“Nothing is farther from the message of Socrates than *you shall love your neighbor as yourself*, a formula that is remarkably absent from all that he says,” as Lacan says (qtd. in Žižek, Santer, and Reinhard 2006: 4), Jewish law avows the Real of the neighbor, the neighbor as the “bearer of a monstrous Otherness, this properly *inhuman* neighbor” (Žižek 2006a: 162).

The neighbor derails my sovereignty and exposes the fantasy of my masculine logic. In Seminar XX, *Encore*, Lacan implicitly draws a distinction between two

modalities or orientations in his discussion of the formulae of sexuation: a “masculine” logic of exception and a “feminine” logic of the “non-all” (*pas-tout*). Rather than referring to anatomical differences, these terms describe instead the ways a subject’s enjoyment (*jouissance*) is organized or structured. For Lacan, the masculine logic of exception takes there to be a subject who has unlimited enjoyment, who stands outside the law of castration that governs social symbolic existence; it is the sovereign exception (Freud’s example of the primal father in *Totem and Taboo*⁶) that proves the universal rule of castration (Lacan 1998: 79). The feminine logic, by contrast, sees no exception to the law of castration; it declines the illusion of an uncastrated Man (and with it the possibility of absolute *jouissance*), but at the same time takes castration to be non-all, never complete or whole. The non-all articulates the logic of the Real, pointing to what is irreducible to a society’s symbolic representation of reality. Or, as Žižek puts it, “the Real is not external to the Symbolic: the Real is the Symbolic itself in the modality of non-All, lacking an external Limit/ Exception” (Žižek 2003: 69). The non-all gives the lie to society’s phantasmatic and ideological pretention of wholeness. It orients us not only to the harshness of being (the reality of the Real), but also compels us to take an interpretive stance appropriate to a being understood as *a becoming* (a being that lacks), to a social reality that never coincides with the Real.

The neighbor is, then, a concretization or embodiment of the Real, a reminder and remainder of this Real, an intolerable or traumatic stain which remains untranslatable, irreducible to my interpretive mastery and (humanist) universality. From this vision of the neighbor emerges an ethico-political injunction: “to love and respect your neighbor . . . does not refer to your imaginary *semblable*/double, but to the neighbor qua traumatic Thing” (Žižek 2006a: 140). The Real of the other is impossible, but it is an impossibility that paradoxically needs to be sustained:

The Real is impossible but it is not simply impossible in the sense of a failed encounter. It is also impossible in the sense that it is a traumatic encounter that *does* happen but which we are unable to confront. And one

⁶ For Lacan, Freud’s primordial father in *Totem and Taboo* “is the father from before the incest taboo, before the appearance of law, of the structures of marriage and kinship, in a word, of culture” (Lacan 1990: 88).

of the strategies used to avoid confronting it is precisely that of positing it as this indefinite ideal which is eternally postponed. One aspect of the real is that it's impossible, but the other aspect is that it happens but is impossible to sustain, impossible to integrate. And this second aspect, I think, is more and more crucial. (Žižek and Daly 2004: 71)

The real neighbor is neither assimilable to that which we already know, nor a radical alterity mysteriously exempt from symbolic mediation. For Fanon, similarly, we must guard against the temptation to think the neighbor's singularity outside mediated relation, the temptation to insist on a radical difference that is tantamount to reified sameness, that eschews or denies this encounter, this relation. Singularity comes about through history (through history as non-all), through the particularizing movement of history, and to forget this is to mistake history for destiny, to reify being and renounce the possibilities of becoming: "If the question once arose for me about showing solidarity with a given past, it was because I was committed to myself and my neighbor, to fight with all my life and all my strength so that never again would people be enslaved on this earth" (Fanon 2008: 202, translation modified). Fidelity to a "given past" motivates solidarity and action yet also risks arresting this movement. Fanon's neighbor is not *reducible* to a *semblable* (the other with whom I share a colonial past). This neighbor's universality is of a different order: the biblical exhortation to love is not grounded in a shared humanity with the other (my imaginary/symbolic counterpart, which always risks congealing around an identity), but in the acknowledgement of the *inhuman* (the inaccessible, untamable, and anxiety-inducing Real) as condition of/for universality:

The most difficult thing for common understanding is to grasp this speculative-dialectical reversal of the singularity of the subject *qua* Neighbor-Thing into universality, not standard "general" universality, but universal singularity, the universality grounded in the subjective singularity extracted from all particular properties, a kind of direct short circuit between the singular and the universal, bypassing the particular. (Žižek 2008b: 16-17)

Conceptualizing the neighbor in this way extends our ethico-political obligations to those who have gone unrecognized as neighbors precisely because they are not sufficiently

like us. Sameness or shared humanity need not be pre-requisite to neighborly love; correlatively, we must reconsider who counts as our neighbors, and who has been excluded from that relation.

Solidarity with the Palestinian Neighbor

The question of who counts, and how to relate to their universal singularity, animates Fanon's work. Fanon's solidarity is always supplemented by a universalist orientation; even when accounting for one own's trauma or the trauma of a people, Fanon fights hard against the myopic impulse to fetishize that suffering, to reify the singular into the particular, preferring to orient his discussion toward a universalist framework that takes up the plight of the dispossessed, of those who *do not count*, the "part of no-part."⁷ Decolonial critics have adopted a narrower perspective on solidarity, however. Mignolo's intervention on the Palestinian question will serve as a case study for thinking solidarity today, for imagining solidarity or decolonial relationality beyond universalism and Eurocentrism. In Gianni Vattimo and Michael Marder's edited volume *Deconstructing Zionism*, which also includes an essay by Žižek, Mignolo attends to the dispossession of the Palestinians, laying out a convincing case against Zionism's logic of coloniality, linking the source of the conflict to Zionism's alignment with European thinking, with its unwavering attachment to the idea of the nation-state: "To solve the conflict of Palestine/Israel would require more than peace agreements – it would require decolonizing the form of the modern European nation-state" (Mignolo 2013b: 57). Zionism is the ideological commitment to the slogan "one state, one nation" that forecloses any possibility of co-existence between Palestinians and Israelis. What is needed, for Mignolo, is a decolonization of the State of Israel, which "means first and foremost unveiling the logic of coloniality implicit in the state form, along with its rhetoric of salvation and democracy" (Mignolo 2013b: 60). With the creation of the State of Israel, the formerly dispossessed did not become the purveyors of democracy but rather the dispossessors of the Palestinians, reaping the benefits of "the modern/colonial racial

⁷ See, Fanon 1965. "It is inadequate only to affirm that a people was dispossessed, oppressed or slaughtered, denied its rights and its political existence, without at the same time doing what Fanon did during the Algerian war, affiliating those horrors with the similar afflictions of other people. This does not at all mean a loss in historical specificity, but rather it guards against the possibility that a lesson learnt about oppression in one place will be forgotten or violated in another place or time" (Said 1996: 44).

matrix” (Mignolo 2013b: 63). Racialized as Europe’s barbaric other, the Palestinian (and the rest of the Arab population) stood on the other side of modernity, dutifully kept in check by Israel – itself racially upgraded and now fully enjoying the privileges of whiteness – as an outpost of European civilization/coloniality.

Phantasmatically shielded by a belligerent messianism – that is, by the myth of a sacred origin and manifest destiny, the return to the Promised Land – Israel, far from being immune to the contradictions of the nation-state, displays (in an amplified form) all the ills and shortcomings of European modernity. It has been plagued from the start with the intractable problem of every modern nation-state: “to look after the well-being of its citizens and to deem everyone else as suspicious or as a lesser human and dispensable in relation to a given nation-state” (Mignolo 2013b: 61). Israel’s self-definition as a Jewish State only compounds the problem, or more precisely, reveals and reinforces the ideological lie of European democracy, which is at heart built on exclusionary self-other binaries. There is no solution to the conflict unless Israel frees itself from “the prison-house of religion, the nation, and the state,”⁸ unless it jettisons the rhetoric of “one state, one nation” (Mignolo 2013b: 65). This requires “the politicization of civil society” (Mignolo 2013b: 72). But this is where the limitations of decoloniality come into view. Mignolo’s envisioned politicization can only be conceived as a clear break with European thinking and its logic of the nation-state. Palestinians and critics of Zionism must look elsewhere for alternative models of nationalism and co-existence (for example, Ecuador’s or Bolivia’s pluri-national states). Mignolo omits from analysis European counter-discourse to the legacy of nationalism. He talks of the nation-state as if it is withering on its own (“what is known as the form nation-state is nearing its exhaustion”), unaffected, as it were, by any critique *from within* (this is of course not to say that a critique *from within* is sufficient on its own, only that foreclosing it a priori is unhelpful and unwarranted) (Mignolo 2013b:71). In this (European) counter-tradition, for example, the diasporic Jew – anathema to Zionism’s identitarian logic – has been a foil to the organicity of the nation. And perhaps more surprisingly, Mignolo fails to take up the idea of binationalism (likely due to its European origins), the radical alternative to the

⁸ Mignolo, “Decolonizing the Nation-State,” 60.

“two-state solution” (though in 2007 he signed his name in support of the one-state solution).⁹

An alternative model of solidarity and resistance interweaves a critique from within and a critique from without, drawing precisely on a diasporic or exilic mode of critique to conceive of solidarity as a form of radical relationality. In one of his last interviews, Edward Said boldly affirmed such a model of the self in solidarity. Responding to his Israeli interlocutor’s observation that “[he] sound[ed] very Jewish,” Said concurred: “Of course. I’m the last Jewish intellectual. You don’t know anyone else. All your other Jewish intellectuals are now suburban squires. From Amos Oz to all these people here in America. So I’m the last one. The only true follower of Adorno. Let me put it this way: I’m a Jewish-Palestinian” (Said 2001: 458). By adopting and adapting the figure of the diasporic Jew, Said embraces an exilic modality of being, harnessing the force of a Jewishness other than Zionist, of a Jewishness defined by its negativity, by its power of subtraction. This is precisely what Žižek champions in the Jewish tradition:

The privileged role of Jews in the establishment of the sphere of the “public use of reason” hinges on their subtraction from every state power. Theirs is this position of the “part of no-part” in every organic nation-state community, and it is this position, not the abstract-universal nature of their monotheism, that makes them the immediate embodiment of universality. No wonder, then, that, with the establishment of the Jewish nation-state, a new figure of the Jew emerged: a Jew resisting identification with the State of Israel, refusing to accept the State of Israel as his true home, a Jew who “subtracts” himself from this State, and who includes the State of Israel among the states towards which he insists on maintaining a distance, to live in their interstices. (Žižek 2013: 6)

The “part of no-part,” a notion Žižek freely borrows from Rancière, stand for “true universality,” representing “the whole of society”: “we – the ‘nothing,’ not counted in the order-are the people, we are all, against others who stand only for their particular

⁹ “The One State Declaration,” 29 November 2007. Available at <https://electronicintifada.net/content/one-state-declaration/793>.

privileged interest” (Žižek 1998: 988). They challenge the existing order of things. They recognize that the authority of symbolic order is not absolute – “there is no Other of the Other, no ultimate guarantee of the field of meaning” – unsettling political sovereignty à la Carl Schmitt, defined by its capacity to decide the exception, to determine the friend/enemy dyad (Žižek 1994a: 200). The “part of no-part” enacts politics as such. The notion articulates and affirms what Étienne Balibar calls *égaliberté*, equality-freedom, as an unconditional demand (Žižek 1998: 988).

The cosmopolitan Jew who resists interpellation by and identification with the State of Israel comes to occupy “the empty principle of universality” (Žižek 1998: 988). Praise for this “uncanny Jew,” of course, comes with a risk (Žižek 2013: 6). If the praise is done by non-Jews, the charge of anti-Semitism tends to follow. If it is done by Jews, the choice is pathologized as emanating from self-hatred (or in more patronizing terms, the person deemed a “useful idiot of anti-Semites.”)¹⁰ Contemporary Zionists treat any Jew who *disidentifies* with Israel as a “foreign excess disturbing the community of the nation-state” (Žižek 2013: 6). In declining any organicist attachment, this universalist Jew experiences a new form of racism, which Žižek aptly dubs “Zionist anti-Semitism” (Žižek 2013: 6).

Against the attempt to counter Israeli (European) identity with Palestinian (Indigenous) identity, Žižek sees a greater chance for emancipatory politics if Palestinians (like Said) align themselves with those Jews who reject the phantasmatic lure of their insular communities. Palestinians are “today’s ‘universal individual’” (Žižek 2006b: 56). They are the globally excluded, Israel’s historical other, occupying the position of the “part of no-part.” As Jamil Khader rightly observes: “Precisely because Palestinians have been reduced to this undead position in the global capitalist system, Palestinians can be said to represent the truth of the system, its constitutive injustice and inequality. In their inherent exclusion and abjection, therefore, Palestinians can be considered, in Žižek’s words, the ‘very site of political universality’” (Khader 2015). Palestinians are ethically invisible to many Israelis, and for some they are only visible in

¹⁰ This is how Richard Landes and Benjamin Weinthal labeled Judith Butler after her publication of *Parting Ways* and her comments on Hamas and Hezbollah (Landes and Weinthal 2012).

their destruction, experienced as an utterly obscene source of enjoyment.¹¹ Palestinian existence thus registers and embodies the void in Israel's social body, functioning simultaneously as a threat and obstacle to Israel's Zionist dream of fullness, and as an index (to rest of the West) of Israel's restless domination and *undemocratic* regime. But the solution to Israel's democratic woes is not a two-state solution, which would only legitimize and fortify Israel's regime of ethnocracy, as well as perpetuate its fantasy of wholeness, of a social life without Palestinians (even now the Palestinians legally living in Israel are transfigured as Arab Israelis), keeping Zionist privilege invisible while encouraging Palestinian nativism – a retreat into identity politics, patriotic fervor or a reactionary defense of difference. The other solution is binationalism.

Binationalism as a Universalist Project

As Judith Butler points out, binationalism originates in the writings of early European Zionist intellectuals (including Martin Buber, Judah Magnes, and Arthur Ruppin), and its relevance as a political position – its answer to the then Jewish question – has been “occluded by the changing history of the meaning of Zionism” (Butler 2016: 185). The sad irony is that now binationalism is an index of anti-Zionism, or even anti-Semitism (Butler 2016: 187). Though binationalism was first introduced in the lexicon by Jewish intellectuals prior to the creation of Israel in 1948, Said re-appropriated the concept – which in its original formulation did not fully break with settler colonialism – deploying it for emancipatory ends in a significantly different context: its status as potential answer to what is now the Palestinian question. Said's binationalism solicits the labor of decoloniality, calling for a decolonized view of European nationalism and the abandonment of any mythic or transhistorical pretensions of origins and exclusionary claims of rooted identity. You can still live your life as a Zionist (be emotionally attached to the land) but you must not preclude others from sharing and caring for the same land. You must decline the rhetoric of Israeli exceptionalism, disaffiliate from the state's racist practices, give up your colonial/Zionist privilege, and transform the system that sustains

¹¹ As Journalist Patrick Strickland notes: “Many Israeli Facebook users have posted violent and disturbing content on their personal accounts. Talya Shilok Edry, who has more than one thousand followers, posted the following ‘status’: ‘What an orgasm to see the Israeli Defense Forces bomb buildings in Gaza with children and families at the same time. Boom boom’” (Strickland 2014).

it. Your claim is not metaphysical (the appeal to Scriptures) but *historical*, just like mine. “They can be Zionists,” Said writes, “and they can assert their Jewish identity and their connection to the land, so long as it doesn’t keep the others out so manifestly” (Said 2001: 451).

Similarly, Žižek cautions against phantasmatic appeals to the past: “The lesson is simply that every legitimization of a claim to land by reference to some mythic past should be rejected. In order to resolve (or contain, at least) the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, we should not dwell in the ancient past – we should, on the contrary, forget the past (which is in any case constantly reinvented to justify present actions)” (Žižek 2017a: 130). What the past needs is not fetishization but (re)interpretation:

According to the standard view, the past is fixed, what happened happened, it cannot be undone, and the future is open, it depends on unpredictable contingencies. What we should propose here is a reversal of this standard view: the past is open to retroactive reinterpretations, while the future is closed, since we live in a determinist universe. . . . This does not mean that we cannot change the future; it just means that, in order to change our future, we should first (not “understand” but) change our past, reinterpret it in a way that opens up toward a different future from the one implied by the predominant vision of the past. (Žižek 2017b: 160)

Against the hermeneutics of “manifest destiny,” which interprets historical contingencies teleologically as necessities – and thus solidifies Israel’s past while seamlessly foreclosing Palestinian futurity – Žižek turns to the past in order to demythify it, to dereify it, so as to unsettle the present horizon of possibilities. To open the “determinist universe” of the Palestine/Israel conflict, to combat the cruel optimism of the two-state solution, Žižek returns to the lost cause of binationalism. Against the grain (the common objection that it is not practical; it cannot be done and so on), Žižek points to the current reality that a one-state model is already in place: “What both sides exclude as an impossible dream is the simplest and most obvious solution – a bi-national secular state comprising of all of Israel plus the occupied territories and Gaza. To those who dismiss the bi-national state as a utopian dream disqualified by the long, Manichean history of hatred and violence, one should reply that, far from being utopian, the bi-national state

already is a fact” (Žižek 2013: 9).¹² Israel and the Occupied Territories constitute a single state, but one that habitually abjects, racializes, and pathologizes Palestinians. Palestinians’ perceived lust for violence and disregard for their own (collateral damage is always blamed on the Palestinian resistance, on their willingness to let their own die) is deemed incompatible with Israel’s European way of life), and thus only Israelis count as fully human, and fully citizens. Jewish Israeli lives are in this framework the only liveable and grievable lives.

So, again, we must resist false oppositions. The question is no longer, if it has ever been, a one-state versus a two-states solution, a European versus a non-European solution (for the decolonial critic), but what kind of one-state should prevail. As it stands, Israel as a Jewish State, Žižek argues, aggressively discriminates in access to land and housing, and is wholly incompatible with the universality of democracy, captured by the civil rights slogan, “one person, one vote” – whence the need “to abolish the apartheid and transform it into a secular democratic state” (Žižek 2013: 10). In politicizing *égalité*, Palestinians make clear that they are not satisfied by merely demystifying Israel as a democratic state, by denouncing its rhetoric of equality as a falsehood or an illusion. Rather, they delegitimize Israel as a racist state by performing concrete universality, by transcending local (religious, national) identities.

As an intervention into the hegemonic reality of the Occupation, Žižek proposes something of a thought experiment: What if Jerusalem became a site for such coexistence? What if Israelis and Palestinians severed their phantasmatic attachment to Jerusalem and renounced their exclusive claim to the land? What if Jerusalem became “an extra-state place of religious worship controlled (temporarily) by some neutral international force” (Žižek 2008a: 127)? This would constitute “a true political act,” an act that “renders the unthinkable thinkable,” the impossible possible (Žižek 2008a: 126). Whereas Donald Trump’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel only reinforced the predominant vision of the past (despite the cries of Western liberals in the United States and abroad who mistakenly claim that this unilateral action was a game-changer, jeopardizing the protocols of negotiation, the status quo, the pacifying

¹² Butler insists that it is a “wretched fact” that is “being lived out as a specific historical form of settler colonialism” (Butler 2012: 30).

pragmatism of the two-state solution), Žižek's proposal would derail the logic of sacrifice and compromise: "both parties should experience it as by giving something [political control, religious claim over holy places] we are all gaining" (Žižek 2011: 178). For both Israelis and Palestinians, this political act would entail traversing their fundamental fantasy of an "ethnically 'pure' nation-state" (the dream – or rather nightmare – of living without others), and would thus be tantamount to undoing their ego – a "strik[ing] back at themselves" – to short-circuiting their affective investment in exclusionary nationalism (Žižek 2008a: 127, 126).¹³

Undoing Sovereignty, or Neighborly Love

I believe Israel's *refuseniks*, those soldiers who refuse to complete their compulsory military service in the Occupied Territories, give us a glimpse of what a binational reality would look like. Declining to perpetuate Israel's state of exception, their government's necropolitics, the *refuseniks* seriously take up, if not fulfill, the impossible injunction to "love thy neighbor." Their actions call for a reinvention of the Symbolic, and constitute something of a "miracle" in the current socio-political climate:

What the *refuseniks* have achieved is the passage from *Homo sacer* to "neighbour": they treat Palestinians not as "equal full citizens," but as *neighbours* in the strict Judeo-Christian sense. And, in fact, that is the difficult ethical test for Israelis today: "Love thy neighbour!" means "Love the Palestinian!" (who is their neighbour *par excellence*), or it means nothing at all. (Žižek 2002a: 116)¹⁴

To see the Palestinians as neighbors is, of course, not simply to acknowledge their ontological opacity, to acknowledge, that is, the truth that "we are all opaque subjects" – *it is that and more*. It is to acknowledge their historically particular opacity, their state of "precarity," or, in other words, the symbolic order's contingent distribution of vulnerability and unfamiliarity (an unfamiliarity increasingly taken as bestial and threatening).

¹³ I pursue these questions in greater detail in Zalloua 2017.

¹⁴ Similarly, Žižek observes: "In the electoral campaign, President Bush named as the most important person in his life Jesus Christ. Now he has a unique chance to prove that he meant it seriously: for him, as for all Americans today, 'Love thy neighbor!' means 'Love the Muslims!' OR IT MEANS NOTHING AT ALL" (Žižek 2002b).

Moreover, the *refuseniks*, on Žižek's account, decline the liberal or humanist remedy. They refuse to conceive of the neighbor merely as "equal full citizens," terms that still rely on a logic of sovereignty, a structure through which a sovereign power dictates who is included in Israel's modern state (applying the Law of Return), and who is excluded from it (denying the right of return). The enlightened sovereign self decides on the exception; he or she is driven to act by a masculine logic. That self would make the Palestinian other grievable on the basis of an implicit identification with the formerly excluded, now brought into the realm of intersubjectivity and sameness, under the umbrella of an inclusive humanism. By contrast, the injunction *to love thy Palestinian neighbor* insists on the challenges posed by the other. The Palestinian as neighbor continues to arouse anxiety, compelling a different kind of affective relationality. The neighborly injunction de-completes Zionist reality, subjects it to a feminine logic of incompleteness. The non-all is figured by an affective excess, a visceral ethical feeling, that is, a non-coincidence between a compulsory hatred of Palestinians (what cultural norms tell soldiers they should feel for the enemy) and how they actually respond to the (real) Palestinians – to these faceless neighbors. Epistemically speaking, then, the example of the *refuseniks* delegitimizes the Zionist/colonizer settler narrative that frames or structures Israeli knowledge and experience of the Palestinians.

If the *refuseniks*, from a position of power, offer one response to this intractable conflict, countering Zionist nationalism with agapic love, and frustrating a nationalist sovereignty obsessed with its securitization by dismantling the friend/enemy dyad, Palestinian writer and poet Mahmoud Darwish proposes another, one that shifts registers from agape to eros, where the question of power is more dynamic and less asymmetrical. In *Memory for Forgetfulness*, a collection of poems dealing with Israel's siege of Beirut in 1982, Darwish's narrator recounts a scene with his Jewish lover, which brings to the forefront the dilemmas involved in relating to your enemy at the erotic register, that is, when that enemy is also your enigmatic lover.

Anxiety permeates the poem: after making love to his Jewish lover, the narrator becomes preoccupied with having to check in with the Haifa police in order to avoid being jailed or permanently banned. This impending reality along with the more generalized existential knowledge that "*each would kill the other outside the window*"

weigh heavily on the narrator. A shared compulsion to return to vexed topics (Do you hate Jews? Do you love Arabs?) only exerts further pressure on the imaginary barrier separating them from the social conflict outside, a barrier immunizing their love from intractable difference. Suspicion and resentment accompany desire and tenderness. When they try to engage in small talk for example (he asks her what she usually dreams about), her answer sparks a digression to biblical times:

- I usually don't dream. And you? What do you dream about?
- That I stop loving you.
- Do you love me?
- No. I don't love you. Did you know that your mother, Sarah, drove my mother, Hagar, into the desert?
- Am I to blame then? Is it for that you don't love me?
- No. You're not to blame; and because of that I don't love you. Or, I love you. (Darwish 1995: 125)

Butler comments on “this final conjunctive disjunction,” on the paradoxical formulation of loving and not loving the other: how the narrator's relation to his Jewish lover entails “both proximity and aversion; it is unsettled; it is not of one mind. It might be said to be the affect, the emotional tenor of an impossible and necessary union, the strange logic by which one wishes to go and insists upon staying” (Butler 2012: 53). Butler at once negates and offers a connection between this version of love and binationalism: “Surely binationalism is not love, but there is, we might say, a necessary and impossible attachment that makes a mockery of identity, an ambivalence that emerges from the decentering of the nationalist ethos and that forms the basis of a permanent ethical demand” (Butler 2012: 53).

I appreciate Butler's hesitation, her reluctance to easily identify love with binationalism. Postcolonial critics might also credit Butler for not repeating Jameson's problematic third-world hermeneutics, which would make reading Palestinian literature as national allegory. And yet Butler arguably closes the door too quickly on national allegory and the connection between binationalism and love. If binationalism is not strictly speaking identical to love, it might be said to be at once the embodiment and the need for a particular kind of love, one that is akin to neighborly love, that is, to a love

that interpellates and hysterizes the proximate other. So, we might ask again: What kind of love is binationalism? What kind of love does it solicit from the Palestinians and the Israelis? In this light, reading Darwish's poem as a national allegory *about* binationalism attests to the poem's political saliency and overtones without simultaneously denying its inventiveness and singularity. The poem's staging of the "national situation" is precisely *not* a repetition of a tired and predictable European narrative (Jameson 1986: 65). Quite the contrary, Darwish's poem does not merely use sexual relationality to talk about national/racial identity. Rather, the two are deeply interwoven in the poem, each affecting and supplementing the meaning of the other.

As Žižek reminds us, "since sexuality is the domain in which we get closest to the intimacy of another human being, totally exposing ourselves to him or her, sexual enjoyment is real for Lacan: something traumatic in its breathtaking intensity, yet impossible in the sense that we cannot ever make sense of it. This is why a sexual relation, in order to function, has to be screened through some fantasy" (Žižek 2006c: 49). But fantasies are not foolproof; they do falter, making dissatisfaction constitutive of sexuality as such. Moreover, Žižek argues each subject is from the start "barred," incomplete: "'Man' and 'woman' together do not form a Whole, *since each of them is already in itself a failed Whole*" (Žižek 1994a: 159-160). Likewise, the enemy – as the "timeless" source of antagonism – is always already within me:

To grasp the notion of antagonism, in its most radical dimension, we should *invert* the relationship between the two terms: it is not the external enemy who is preventing me from achieving identity with myself, but every identity is already in itself blocked, marked by an impossibility, and the external enemy is simply the small piece, the rest of reality upon which we "project" or "externalize" this intrinsic, immanent impossibility. (Žižek 2005: 252)

Failure here is, then, not the result of an incompatibility between two identities or races: *Israelis are from Mars, Palestinians are from Venus*. Rather, the problem is real and structural, both in myself and compounded by my relationality: "there is no automatic, unmediated, or untroubled connection between sexual partners. . . . Because each subject connects with others only through fantasy, no natural coupling of man and

woman can take place” (Dean 2001: 26). As a deadlock in the Real, sexual difference is an interpretive impasse that necessitates its own paradoxical hermeneutics/ethics of the Real.

What follows from the impossibility of sexual relationality is not only the lack of a harmonious resolution to amorous relations but the possibility of excess, of love as a supplement: “What makes up for the sexual relationship is, quite precisely, love” (Lacan 1998: 45). Here love as supplement can be read in two ways, mapping onto two ways of understanding binationalism. The first interpretation of love remains purely at the level of the Imaginary. Love phantasmatically covers over the disjunction between sexual partners; love purports to heal, removing the “barredness” of sexual relationality. Love reassures and promises the fusion and union of the lovers. Its correlative version of binationalism reads as follows: it entails a commitment to an ideal, postracial Oneness, a removal of all antagonisms, a healing and resolution of prior wrongs and traumas. This is the version of binationalism that political realists love to dismiss as unreasonable and utopian, a deception or dangerous lure for liberals,¹⁵ arguing instead for a pragmatic separation over an idealistic union of the two communities.

The second interpretation of love does not iron out the disjunction. It insists on the Real, on the fact that there is no sexual relationality. Love requires “an acceptance of this truth”; the subject must be “willing to live with the antagonism” (Johnston 2005: 75; Kornbluh 2004: 128). Consequently, for a correlative version of binationalism this lack of relationality does not prompt a reductively pessimistic assessment of human relations (a narcissistic wound – the trauma of realizing that you are not my specular image, that your fantasies are not mine), but enacts the condition for binationalism as such. Binationalism supplements the lack of a harmonious existence between the Palestinians and the Israelis. It is an ethico-political response to the existential fact that “fantasies cannot coexist peacefully” (Žižek 1992: 168). Binationalism fosters a relationality that is non-all, *otherwise than nationalistic*: it is a relationality that, as Said might put it, does not exhaust itself through filiation (relation which “belongs to the realms of nature and ‘life’”) but also insists on affiliation (relation which “belongs exclusively to culture and society”) (Said 1983: 20). It is a form of relationality at odds

¹⁵ See, for example, Tamari 2000: 83-87.

with a nationalism myopically defined, a nationalism aligned exclusively with a particularist identity (one nation, one people).

In Darwish's poem, the union of the lovers is socially prohibited (*each would kill the other outside the window*); the Imaginary opens itself as a temptation – their forbidden love functions as a fetish. The world outside can be in ruins as long as they are together. But when the fantasy of immunity falters – he has to return home and resents her people for putting him in that situation; she wants to understand his frustration, but is also narcissistically driven by her own insecurities, and so on – the “barredness” of their relationship takes on a more “real” or permanent dimension. The poem ends with the Jewish lover asking again for the recognition of his love:

– And you don't love me?

– I don't know.

And each is killing the other by the window.

For the decolonial reader, the narrator's doubt could be construed as evidence of his “colonial difference,” producing a kind of subaltern knowledge: knowledge of life under Israeli hegemony, a life that voices its irreducible objections to the coloniality of power, to the colonial order of things (of which his Jewish lover is an agent). What we have here, Mignolo might say, is a shift from Descartes's “I think therefore I am” to the decolonial thesis, “I am where I think.” Whereas Descartes's saying produces a unity in thinking and being, and helps to foster and promote an economy of sameness (we all have the same *cogito*), Mignolo's formulation brings to the forefront Darwish's “border thinking” (“the moments in which the imaginary of the modern world system cracks”), and foregrounds geography in any questions of knowledge and biography (Mignolo 2000: 23). The word “where” pluralizes (= democratizes) meaning, legitimizes subaltern experience, and thus declines “the universality to which everyone has to submit,”¹⁶ reorienting us to history and locality, to the narrator's positionality in relation to “the epistemic and ontological racism of imperial knowledge” (Mignolo 2011: 161, 174).

But if “where” is meant to counter modernity's fantasy of a universal “I,” Darwish's poem complicates the decolonial elevation of “where” by figuring place as entangled

¹⁶ Mignolo, “I Am Where I Think: Remapping the Order of Knowing,” in *The Creolization of Theory*, eds. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shi (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 161.

with the Real. The last line positions the reader in the room, marking a move from the virtual to the actual: each sexual partner now is in the process of killing the other *by* the symbolic window. The threat is no longer coming from the outside but from within, a grasp that the deadlock of sexual difference is *in* the Real. What form of binationalism will supplement the lack of complementarity between Palestinians and Israelis is, I believe, the poem's allegorical question.

The couple's failure is of course not yet a fact. They *are killing* each other – they haven't *killed* each other. The narrator's doubt, which rewrites his earlier *I don't love you/I love you*, continues to offer no certainties or guarantees. "I don't know" indexes the logic of desire, since for Lacan, "so long as I desire, I know nothing of what I desire" (Lacan 2014: 82). Binationalism supplements this situation (Palestinians and Israelis are killing each other) not by offering the certainties and guarantees that are lacking, but by soliciting both communities to will/desire the impossible. Analogous to Žižek's thought experiment on internationalizing Jerusalem, willing binationalism can be said to constitute an act. It suspends "the reign of the pleasure-reality principle"¹⁷ and performs a kind of madness, the madness of the decision: "the moment of decision is the moment of madness' precisely in so far as there is no big Other to provide the ultimate guarantee, the ontological cover for the subject's decision" (Žižek 2002a: 142; Žižek 2000b: 258). For the Palestinians, opening themselves to the unknown, giving up what they *cannot not want*¹⁸ (international recognition of their identity), is what one deciding on binationalism wills. The subject of binationalism is willing to desire something that goes against the interest of their would-be-nationalist ego, against the committed belief that an independent state will put an end to their daily miseries. This subject is willing to traverse the fantasy of the two-state solution: the transparent background for many Palestinians that structures the way they relate to the Occupation and their attitude toward futurity. This belief that things will get better – the debilitating pragmatism¹⁹ of

¹⁷ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 142.

¹⁸ This is akin to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's formulation of the double bind as "a persistent critique of what we cannot not want" (Spivak 1999: 110).

¹⁹ The cowardice of pragmatism – ramped up by the dubious saying that the Palestinians have never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity – captures the ethos that informed the peace process. The Palestinian Authority acquiesced time and time again to the will of Israel and the international community: make compromises (give up more of your land), be a peace partner (don't behave like Hamas), renounce terrorism (don't put up any resistance to Israel's will), and so on. The peace process is currently stalled;

the two-state solution that grips the Palestinians – must be countered by what Žižek calls the “courage of hopelessness” (a formulation that he borrows from Agamben²⁰). Traversing the fantasy of the two-state solution does not mean to see through it and “perceive the reality obfuscated by it, but to directly confront the fantasy as such... [F]antasy remains operative only insofar as it functions as the transparent background of our experience – fantasy is like a dirty intimate secret which cannot survive public exposure” (Žižek 2014b: 29). Palestinians overcome the fantasy the moment they have the courage to realize that the light at the end of the tunnel is not statehood but more dispossession, killing, and maiming – that is, the moment their attitude toward their current environment and future is effectively denaturalized, taken not as a given (of course, we want a Nation) but as a problem (what does co-existence with my neighbor look like?).²¹

From the Culturalization of Politics to the Politicization of Culture

But isn't binationalism for all of its radical demands just the last culturalization of politics? To be sure, it might be preferable to the current hegemony of “Levinassian sentimentalism” (to evoke again Jameson's, along with Žižek's, disdain for the subordination of politics by ethics), but isn't it still a superstructural concern that, not unlike the ones emanating from decoloniality, does little to confront society's economic antagonisms? Or to state the question more bluntly: What is the relationship of binationalism to class struggle? We might respond to this question in a couple of ways. First, binationalism can be described as “class struggle at the level of ideas,” to borrow from Terry Eagleton (Eagleton 1991: 80). Binationalism is an *idea* – a lost cause – that possesses the force of a political act, capable of re-structuring the very symbolic coordinates of one's situation. At the very least, a superstructural concern can still impact

the next “breakthrough” (through some maneuvering to get the Palestinians back to negotiations) will most likely return to an earlier horizon of possibilities, which will do little to redress Israel's historic wrongs and current mistreatment of Palestinians.

²⁰ See Giorgio Agamben (2014) “Thought is the Courage of Hopelessness: An Interview with Philosopher Giorgio Agamben,” Interview by Jordan Skinner. Verso Books, 17 June. <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1612-thought-is-the-courage-of-hopelessness-an-interview-with-philosopher-giorgio-agamben>. Accessed May 17, 2018.

²¹ As Žižek puts it, “the true courage is to admit that the light at the end of the tunnel is most likely the headlight of another train approaching us from the opposite direction” (Žižek 2017a: xi-xii).

the economic base. Žižek himself revisits Marx's much-discussed base-superstructure metaphor, and gives it a Lacanian twist, turning again to Lacan's claim that there is no sexual relationality: "If... there is no sexual relationship, then, for Marxism proper, there is *no relationship between economy and politics*, no 'meta-language' enabling us to grasp the two levels from the same neutral standpoint" (Žižek 2006d: 320). Indeed, this is what Žižek calls the "parallax view," a "constantly shifting perspective between two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible" (Žižek 2006d: 4). If parallax is commonly understood as "the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position," for Žižek, the parallax gap signifies far more, enabling him to reconceptualize the interpretive scene itself. As he puts it:

The philosophical twist to be added [to the standard definition of parallax] . . . is that the observed difference is not simply "subjective," due to the fact that the same object which exists "out there" is seen from two different stances, or points of view. It is rather that . . . subject and object are inherently "mediated," so that an "epistemological" shift in the subject's point of view always reflects an "ontological" shift in the object itself. (Žižek 2006d: 17)

In parallax thinking, the classic infrastructure/superstructure couple takes on a new meaning:

We should take into account the irreducible duality of, on the one hand, the "objective" material socioeconomic processes taking place in reality as well as, on the other, the politico-ideological process proper. What if the domain of politics is inherently "sterile," a theatre of shadows, but nonetheless crucial in transforming reality? So, although economy is the real site and politics is a theatre of shadows, the main fight is to be fought in politics and ideology. (Žižek 2006d: 315)

Though the economic remains the "ultimately determining instance" (repeating Althusser-Jameson), Žižek allows for the politicization of culture, for superstructure to be a space for critical inventiveness, an engine for genuine transformation (Jameson 2006).

If the idea of binationalism is to mobilize change, and infuse life in today's "theater of shadows," Palestinians must remain attentive to the "antagonism *inherent*" in their social structure, and not lose track of their true enemy. Žižek's cautionary tale is the rise of Nazism and the failure of the German people to identify their true antagonism and enemy: as a result, "class struggle is displaced onto the struggle against the Jews, so that the popular rage at being exploited is redirected from capitalist relations as such to the 'Jewish plot'" (Žižek 2009). The real antagonism is externalized as a struggle between Aryans and Jews, as "a struggle for *domination* between *us* and *them*, those who cause antagonistic imbalance" (Žižek 1993: 210).

Can we speak of a similarly displaced but irreducible social antagonism in Palestine? How are Palestinians to understand the violence directed toward them? What is the fundamental antagonism spurring the Israeli drive for domination? On the one hand, it is impossible to ignore the reality of Israeli brutalization, and thus the enemy has *not* been misperceived: it is the Israeli government and its unrelenting state violence, described by Žižek as Israel's "Kafkaesque network of legal regulations" where "the condemnation of 'illegal' settlements [Israel's performance of justice as fairness to the Western world] obfuscates the illegality of the 'legal' ones" (Žižek 2009). Here binationalism becomes the culmination of a fight that seeks to end Palestinian racialization, to abolish Israeli apartheid, and to put pressure on the world to see Israel as a neo-colonial regime, as an undemocratic and unjust state. On this account the only enemy is the racist Zionist, the Israeli colonial settlers, fighting for their exclusive right to the land, which the binationalists want to share peacefully. The problem with this account is not with its content, but its *insufficiency*. Naming Israeli governments and colonial settler politics the enemy is at once necessary and incomplete. In this it is reminiscent of the decolonial critique of Israel.

Exposing and criticizing Zionism as an ideology that seeks to *dominate* the Palestinians only gives a partial explanation for the continuing brutality of the Israeli government. Žižek follows Jameson in stressing that the struggle against domination is, as Jameson put it, "an essentially moral or ethical one which leads to punctual revolts and acts of resistance rather than to the transformation of the mode of production as such" (Jameson 2011: 150; qtd. in Žižek 2012: 1003). There is also an important

economic disincentive to halting Israel's necropolitics – its regulation of Palestinian death and maiming.²² If, according to Israel's imaginary narrative, Israel would be happy living side by side with its peaceful Arabs, without irritant Palestinians (a stain on its moral profile), Israel's highly successful and influential military-industrial complex turns the irritant Palestinian into a necessity, a justification for its existence and perpetuation. For to sustain itself, the military-industrial complex needs the Palestinian "threat," fueling, in turn, a permanent war model, a permanent state of exception. Hamas (an organizational embodiment of the most irritant Palestinian) guarantees Israel's permanent militarized identity. The eleven-year blockade of Gaza offers Israel a large number of unemployed, disposable, and unassimilable bodies, a racialized surplus population, to test and showcase its latest awesome weapons to a global audience. Yotam Feldman's 2013 documentary film, *The Lab*, makes a compelling case for economic profit driving hawkish Israeli policies. "Israel's weapons industry has tripled its profits to more than [US] \$7 billion a year over the past decade, making a country about the size of New Jersey into the fourth largest weapons exporter in the world," writes Max Blumenthal (2015). Israel's profitable necropolitics thus complements quite smoothly the Zionist-colonial fantasy of *terra nullius*, as long as it remains purely an ideological fantasy: *it wants a Palestine free of Palestinians – but not quite*.

At this juncture, keeping with the economic focus requires a further step, a parallaxic shift on the enemy in order to better apprehend the scene of Palestinian struggle. What sustains the misery of the Palestinians is not only the Israeli government and its draconian policies, but also the economic structures that currently regulate Palestinian life in the Occupied Territories. In *The Battle for Justice in Palestine*, Ali Abunimah warns of the neoliberalization of Palestine, of the ideological traps of political domesticity:

²² Israel's necropolitics took the form of a spectacle on May 14, 2018, the day of the U.S. embassy opening in Jerusalem. The world watched on split screen the jubilant celebration of mostly white bodies on one side, and the defiant brown bodies of teenagers shrouded by tear gas and subjected to live fire on the other. Israeli Brigadier General Zvika Fogel gave a remarkable justification for the practice of shooting at unarmed civilians, deeming this violence a preemptive measure justified by the future guilt of the victims: "Anyone who could be a future threat to the border of the State of Israel and its residents, should bear a price for that violation." And the price borne is unambiguous: "His punishment is death" (qtd. in Bennis 2018).

In tandem, with the assistance of the United States and Israel, the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah built a repressive police-state apparatus that sought to suppress and disarm any resistance to Israeli occupation and to crush internal Palestinian dissent and criticism with increasing ferocity. [...] But behind a smokescreen of “state-building” rhetoric and flag-waving, a small Palestinian elite has continued to enrich itself by deepening its political, economic, and military ties with Israel and the United States, often explicitly undermining efforts by Palestinian civil society to resist. This catastrophic assault on Palestinians has been masked with the language of “technocratic” government and marketed as nothing less than the fulfillment of the Palestinian “national” project. [...] If these are indeed the foundations of a future Palestinian state, then a people who have struggled for so long for liberation from Zionism’s colonial assault can only look forward to new, more insidious forms of economic and political bondage. (Abinumah 2014: 78-79)

The consequences of Palestinian neoliberalization are significant. First, by making the status quo economically lucrative for *some* – those in power, those especially in charge of security cooperation with the Israeli government – neoliberalization forecloses, or at least minimizes, possibilities for imagining social reality and co-existence with the Israelis outside the framework of a two-state solution. Second, by opening the Occupied Territories to global capitalism (under the terms set by the Oslo Accords), “economic ‘development,’” as Abunimah alarmingly observes, “has been channeled away from indigenous Palestinian business and into industrial zones where foreign and Israeli exporters can exploit unskilled Palestinian workers cheaply and without any accountability, a model enthusiastically financed and promoted by the United States, the European Union, Turkey and Japan” (Abinumah 2012).

Taking “capitalism itself as the ultimate horizon of the political situation” enables us to reframe binationalism and the Palestinian question (Jameson 2006). It helps to underscore binationalism as a universalist project, engaged in a fight against domination and exploitation. Seeking economic justice at home invariably links the Palestinian plight to other labor movements in Israel and elsewhere in the region. The

solidarity of workers can effectively challenge the interests of the few, *denaturalize* their exploitation (that is, contest the ways exploitation is effortlessly built into the functioning of the economy), and foreground binationalism as a socio-economic project, not limited to its own particularist interests, but “grounded in the ‘part of no-part,’ the singular universality exemplified in those who lack a determined place in the social totality, who are ‘out of place’ in it” (Žižek 2012: 831). If decoloniality and others fetishize the enemy (“the elevation of Zionism into the neo-imperialist racism par excellence”), over-emphasizing his or her exceptionality (Israel as the embodiment of modernity/coloniality and its racist ideology), and thus always risk reifying the antagonism, binationalism, if it is to be transformative, must embrace its role as a supplement to the Palestinian/Israeli antagonism, taking the task of co-existence, of living together with each other’s (real) neighbor, as an urgent ethico-political challenge, fully cognizant that there is no guarantee of success (Žižek 2014a: 108). *And each is killing the other by the window.*

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