IN OUR ART WE STILL DENY THE EMOTIONAL TRUTH OF COLONIAL HISTORY

More political stuff which I find not fun to write but sometimes that's just what the morning calls for.

I am not an activist, and I do not engage with the political world beyond an intellectual way. I don't think I ever will. Some people are born for the political world, and for a while I thought I might be too, but I don't think I am. I am an aesthetic person at heart. And this is not wrong. Better to stick to your lane without shame, so that you don't get in the way of people who are serious about their own lanes.

I'm sure you do not disagree with me. What I'm about to say is wholly popular and non-threatening, at least in the circles that read my blog. But trust me here, you're going to get something out of this.

The point I eventually make about art may very well be something you haven't actually thought about.

Emotional Truth: "Denmark's a prison," Hamlet Act 2 Scene 2

Literal Truth: Gaza is a prison.

Hamlet must change himself in order to change his situation. Shakespeare takes the context of a sully-fleshed Dutch prince in order to express an emotional truth around one person's inability to cope with the death of their father. Which is a literal truth (or will be) for almost every human being. *Hamlet* is a pinnacle example of "write what you know." Who knows what it's like being a Dutch prince in the 16th century? But who can't relate to the death of a father?

The people of Gaza do not hold their destiny in their hands. They are victims. Acts of violence on their part come from a desperation that could only occur in those totally stripped of their humanity.

If the Israeli Knesset wants peace it will have peace, as evidenced by the history of the region. The 1973 peace treaty (still holding strong) between Egypt and Israel is the only successful negotiation in the history of the saga, and it came because Israel wanted it--seeing Egypt as its only true military threat (despite the David v. Goliath mythology its mythmakers purport as being "surrounded" by enemies; every war Israel has fought, like its benefactor the United States, has been a guaranteed win from the outset... we count the number of countries that go against them as if that is the only factor; it in fact is not a factor at all, because lines we see on a map do not represent anything beyond a political reality, which is the whole message of anti-colonialism anyway, and the factor that makes a true difference is power). And ironically that "peace" only spelled more disaster for the Palestinians, who are abandoned from all sides. And currently the

power plays of state craft between Israel and the surrounding gulf states (all whom have their own atrocious human rights records, sanctioned and enabled by the United States government) are sealing what can only be short of the massive and slow execution of the millions of people who live in the world's largest concentration camp--not to mention their siblings across in the West Bank, who's own conditions make 20th century South African apartheid look liberal by comparison. As the only true mini super power in the region (the only one with nuclear weaponry), it is within Israeli's every power to put an end to this.

Just like it is within the United States' power to stop enabling terrible human rights abuses there or anywhere else (or in its own territory) by supporting the power players that guarantee our country's corporate interests. Our country still tortures people maniacally, literally and figuratively. I know that what I'm saying here is not unpopular, at least in the circles that read this blog, but the reality on the ground, for the Palestinians and many others, is *the situation has always been and still is GETTING WORSE.* So clearly there is a discrepancy between what we are beginning to acknowledge and the way we allow state powers to pull the wool over our eyes.

I am almost finished with the first season of an Israeli tv show called *Shtisel,* which I am really enjoying. I live in the United States and enjoy its art and culture and am an active participant in it. I imagine I would have the same ambivalence in that if I lived in England, say. My point in bringing this up is because human rights abuses are a collective responsibility of *all* state powers (and not just the "white" ones either). And it is possible to acknowledge that reality while also staying seriously active in a privileged state's artistic culture.

The reality of Israel and Palestinians is unique to me because... Gaza might be the worst humanitarian crises in the world. What is happening in Yemen is terrible, but people in Gaza literally cannot escape or gain the means of fighting back in a collective way. I don't want to compare the two (or any humanitarian crises) because really they go back to the same issue. State powers looking after their own interests while assuming that the lives of normal people don't matter. But isn't it strange how our culture almost immediately began to acknowledge the reality in Yemen (though still perpetuate it), or say Iraq (post ISIS only though, never mind the three decades of American genocidal activity) and yet it has (and is) taking so long for public opinion in regard to the advancement of Palestinian people to shape into a concrete acknowledgment of their victimhood at the hands of others and not "their own leadership"-- that tired and aggravating and frankly racist excuse? When arabs are being killed by whites, its a "complicated issue," but when arabs are being killed by other arabs (because of what the white people are doing) we know very clearly who the victims are.

It goes back to a misunderstanding of how public opinion and political action actually work in the United States. With enough money, the interest of any small group of people... rapture obsessed evangelicals say, or greedy corporate executives who may or may not believe in "god"... can become the culture's dominant narrative. "Protect Israel at all costs" the only "true democracy" in the region. Never mind that the Palestinians have no democratic rights. And never mind that over the last century, Arab peoples' determination to create the conditions for

democracy, from Ramallah to Beirut to Cairo to Khartoum to Ma'rib to the Western Sahara, have been thwarted by the efforts of greater state powers (like the United States) to preserve their interests in the region.

In Israel there are organizations created by Israeli citizens committed to the advancement of the Palestinian people. There are Israeli ex-military who dedicate their lives to building Palestinian homes. They are acting despite the aggression of their own government. Just as Jews were acting despite the aggression of the United States government in the 20th century Humanitarian movements in our country. Just like activist communities in our country today act despite the aggression of our government. But in the United States we still hesitate in acknowledging the reality of the Palestinian people because it is clouded with the assumption that we are criticizing all Israelis, or calling for the destruction of an entire country, even an entire people. What an atrocious assumption. Even organizations like the PLO or Hamas or Hezbollah or the Muslim Brotherhood who get branded "terrorists" because they do not have the "legitimacy" of a state power, despite not even coming close to the terrorism of their surrounding state powers, are made up of human beings who have never actually had a problem with "sitting at the table" with state powers that routinely brand them as bloodthirsty, uncompromising monsters. Many of these monsters possess impeccable educations and records of serious humanitarian involvement (why do you think all three organizations were democratically elected? No other reason than arabs' insatiable thirst for Jewish blood, I presume). I am not condoning any violence these organizations perpetuate, much of which is horrific (like for any entity that possess the will to employ violence) I am just telling the truth--one so many people are blind to because we live in a racist culture. The state powers these organizations hold in enmity routinely refuse to compromise, routinely break their treaties and agreements, and routinely work to infiltrate and suppress the self-determination and livelihood these organizations *sometimes* represent. That is not to deny much of the bumbling self-sabotage routinely displayed by these organizations as well (a characteristic of many "99%" movements, including this country--and that might be the most "unpopular" thing I say in this post, but it is absolutely true).

Israeli citizens have more diversity in their activist community than we could ever see, because our racist culture see the "Jews" and the "Arabs" as monoliths. And when I reflect on a place like Turkey for example, a state power with a terrible human rights record, and yet a community of people with a genuine and culturally systemic desire to help others, the reality that we *all* live in the same story... real people fighting the mythology and the falseness of the "state" ("Jewish" or otherwise) becomes all too clear.

And we assume that Palestinians have always had strong vocal support from activist communities, we go so far to say they get some sort of special treatment. Again the facts of the matter, the reality that the situation of the Palestinians continues to get worse, shows completely otherwise.

We exploit the narrative of the Holocaust and general persecution of Jews in Europe as if it is a burden that Palestinians must bear (some of whom were Jews living in Palestine before there

needed to be a "state" for them there anyway). Their plight is a dagger slowly penetrating its way through the heart of all Arab peoples, from Ramallah to Beirut to Cairo to Khartoum to Ma'rib to the Western Sahara.

I could be talking about the plight of so many people. Not the least to say the history and plight of indigenous peoples in this country. But these are *my* people, and excuse me if my vocal (if not physical) support for them comes from a place of emotional priority. And anyway, I am just using them as an example for what I see as a general truth about our art making in this country... a reality which is already "popular" to see I guess, but this morning I felt like articulating it in my own way--and I will articulate it, eventually.

I grew up with the narrative that Palestinians were people who were supposed to be abandoned, incarcerated, tortured, and slaughtered, and no one was supposed to care because the better people were "ensuring their security," which is a guaranteed euphemism for *any* state power wishing to abuse innocent people for their own interests. When we hear that word "security" tossed around, our ears should perk up seeking out what atrocity the state using it is about to pull--and literally every state power uses that blasted term. This narrative gave me an idea of my own place in the world. That I was a threat to all the people who were more utopian than I could eve be. I identify, as an Egyptian through my mother's line, with the collective colonial turmoil of the African continent as well. It is not a denial of my own agency and privilege in having been granted this American life to say so. And I am grateful for that agency and that privilege. Again, I'm about to make a point about this as it regards to art and not to myself.

I bring all of this up, though, because it affects our art in a serious way as well.

My point is not to make you feel sorry for me. My point, in all of this, is to say that we still have not allowed the literal truth of colonial holocausts to infiltrate the emotional truth of our storytelling with the same depth that the narrative of the terrible suffering endured by those who went through the Holocaust(s) in Europe. That narrative produced, and continues to produce, an amazing cultural landscape of art. A cultural landscape I grew up in. And one that I love. One that informs my own approach to art and has been the source of much excitement in my life. It must exist. There are no demands for "the other side" or calls against a "victim narrative" or a need for "complexity" (in arts communities at least) when we appreciate this art. We all accept its given circumstances; its reality. But we are still maddeningly hesitant to delve artistically into the emotional depths of colonial history because we, even among the most well-meaning, intelligent and talented people, are not on the same page when it comes to the literal truth of the matter.

We are an ensemble in a play all acting in response to a different set of given circumstances. And when we don't know what play we are all in, the play dies.

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Mohammad Shehata's blog. mohammadshehata.com