

BDS

The New McCarthyism

On June 5, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo issued an executive order requiring all state entities to boycott businesses and divest their money from institutions that “participate in boycott, divestment, or sanctions activity targeting Israel, either directly or through a parent or subsidiary.” Channeling the disgraced anticommunist crusader Joseph McCarthy, the governor will create a blacklist for the growing number of companies joining the BDS movement. After dismissing the movement as inconsequential for years, influential donors have now applied pressure to government officials and funded a string of anti-BDS bills in state legislatures over the past year. These people include Sheldon Adelson, who decries BDS as anti-Semitic, yet has no problem endorsing the same presidential candidate hailed by David Duke. Both the Koch brothers and Haim Saban attended one of Adelson’s infamous Las Vegas summits to plan strategy and raise funds to combat BDS. Like the Palestine Festival of Literature, which Laila Lalami describes at right, the growth of the BDS movement indicates that the dominant paradigms governing the debate over the continued Israeli occupation of Palestine are being reconfigured and reimagined on both sides.

—Samuel Metz



Laila Lalami



Letter From Palestine

The Palestinians in Hebron are locked in a nightmare.

“**W**hat’s the purpose of your visit?” the officer asked. The epaulets on his blue button-down shirt hung over his narrow shoulders.

His eyebrows joined above the bridge of his nose.

“I’m here to give a reading,” I replied. I had come to Palestine with a group of writers and poets for a literary festival, with scheduled stops in Ramallah, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nablus, and Haifa.

The officer glanced at the line behind me.

“How many are in your group?”

“I don’t know.”

“How many US passports?”

“I don’t know.”

He raised a suspicious eyebrow. “Everything is ‘I don’t know?’”

But I really didn’t know. I had met the other writers at a hotel in Jordan the night before, and it hadn’t occurred to me to count them while we were on the bus from Amman to the Allenby border crossing, nor to ask how many were American. He swiped my blue passport in the machine, then looked up at me with surprise. “You were born in Morocco?”

Here we go, I thought. It had taken me 20 hours to travel to Palestine. I dreaded being deported by Israeli immigration, as had happened to some of my Arab friends. “Yes, that’s right.”

“My grandparents were born in Morocco.”

“Whereabouts?” I asked, grateful for the diversion.

“Casablanca,” he said. Then he looked at the screen again. “How old were you when you moved to the United States?” he asked. “Did you move with your parents or by yourself?... Is your husband American?... Are your children American?... Do you miss your husband and children?”

Then it occurred to me that I could ask questions of my own. “Your grandparents are from Casablanca, you said. Do they go back to Morocco for Hiloula?”

His face lit up. “You know Hiloula?”

“Of course.” The veneration of saints is part of Jewish Moroccan culture.

“Do you know this song?” He sang a few words in Hebrew.

I took a wild guess: “‘Sami al-Maghribi?’” I don’t think I got it right, but he nodded anyway. Then he played a YouTube video of Moroccan Jews dancing

at a party on his smartphone. A minute later, he printed out my visa and handed me my passport.

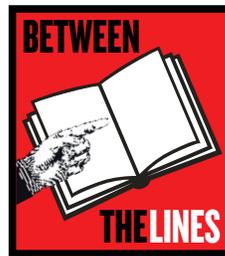
Not a dozen steps behind me, another writer from our group stood waiting. His name was Ahmed Masoud, and he was traveling on a UK passport. But because he had been born in Gaza, he was taken to a special room where he was asked for his Palestinian ID and interrogated for several hours. There was no discussion of music, no YouTube videos or fond remembrances, only forms and questions about the purpose of his visit. When he insisted that he was a UK citizen, he was told, “*Enta Falesteeni, khabeebi.*” You are Palestinian.

Masoud was deported that afternoon. He was prevented from reading his work to audiences at the cultural center in Ramallah or walking through the Old City of Jerusalem or taking selfies by the beach in Haifa, the way all the British and American writers did that week. Instead, he was sent back to London.

I had gone to Palestine fully expecting to see occupation and degradation, but I had not expected to witness my own privilege so starkly. My birth in Morocco had made the Moroccan-Israeli immigration official see me for who I was, while Masoud’s birth in Palestine had been enough to strip him of his individuality, enough to label him a threat.

The next morning, at the Qalandia checkpoint, I was stuck in line while the soldiers argued with another writer ahead of me. There, at eye level on the blue metal railing, I saw white and pink stickers displaying the Ayat al-Kursi, a Quranic verse that Muslims recite in times of extreme fear or distress. Every morning, Palestinian workers line up to go through these metal cages, and there is never any guarantee they will make it through. I thought of the people who had put the stickers on the metal, to give themselves courage or to inspire it in others.

In the Old City of Jerusalem, I was walking down the street with the journalist Sharif Abdel



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