Washing words: The politics of water in Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*
David Farrier

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://jcl.sagepub.com/content/48/2/187

Published by:
$SAGE

http://www.sagepublications.com

Additional services and information for *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://jcl.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://jcl.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations: http://jcl.sagepub.com/content/48/2/187.refs.html

>> Version of Record - Jun 19, 2013

OnlineFirst Version of Record - Jan 7, 2013

What is This?

Washing words: The politics of water in Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*

David Farrier
University of Edinburgh, UK

Abstract
Water has been acknowledged as a key area of dispute in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. In particular, water stress in the occupied territories of the West Bank has been exacerbated by Israel's colonization of water resources via the Oslo II agreements and, latterly, the erection of a separation wall that articulates a hydropolitical agenda. This article argues that Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*, a memoir of Barghouti's return to the West Bank after thirty years in exile, offers a sustained engagement with the environmental politics of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, most particular the politics of water. Via his reflections on metaphor and metonymy in particular, Barghouti responds to the central question posed in the memoir — "Does a poet live in space or time?" — with the presentation of a distinctively *liquid* vision of life in exile and in the occupied territories. As such, *I Saw Ramallah* presents an instance of what Rob Nixon calls the "decentring of environmentalism" in which postcolonial insights offer a corrective to bioregional approaches that neglect politics.

Keywords
Barghouti, eco-criticism, Israel/Palestine, poetry, postcolonial, water

I Saw Ramallah, Mourid Barghouti's account of his return to Palestine after thirty years in exile, opens with Barghouti poised to cross the Jordan River:

> It is very hot on the bridge. A drop of sweat slides from my forehead down to the frame of my spectacles, then the lens. A mist envelops what I see, what I expect, what I remember. The view here shimmers with scenes that span a lifetime; a lifetime spent trying to get here. Here I am, crossing the Jordan River. I hear the creak of wood under my feet. On my left shoulder a small bag. I walk westward in a normal manner — or rather, a manner that appears normal. Behind me the world, ahead of me my world (2004: 1).[1]

Corresponding author:
David Farrier, Department of English, School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures, David Hume Tower, George Square, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, EH8 9JX, UK.
Email: david.farrier@ed.ac.uk

The bridge in question occupies a mediating position in the memoir. Its various names testify to its position at the confluence of multiple historical and territorial claims: "the Bridge of return"; "the King Hussein Bridge" (to Jordanians); "the al-Karama Crossing" (to the Palestinian Authority); "the Allenby Bridge" (its colonial incarnation, still, says Barghouti, in everyday use); and, simply, to Barghouti's mother, "the bridge" (10). More specifically, it is a point of transfer in both space and time, the catalyst for Barghouti's reflections on the fracturing influence of displacement. "Does a poet live in space or time?" (41) is the central question around which the currents of memory and politics in *I Saw Ramallah* eddy, encapsulated in Barghouti's ironic observation that the bridge is "no longer than a few metres of wood and thirty years of exile" (9). However, as Anna Bernard has noted, Barghouti's fundamentally materialist vision consistently refuses to trade in abstractions (2007: 666), preferring instead (as he has said elsewhere) to "write with a camera" (Jaggi, 2008: 13). What this metaphorical camera records, amongst other things, is the confluce of the biopolitical and the ecological in the occupied territories.

Barghouti's memoir has been read as a humanizing statement on the effects of imposed displacement on the Palestinian people; Edward Said calls it, in his preface to the English translation, "one of the finest existential accounts of Palestinian displacement that we now have" (vii). Bernard rightly qualifies Said's assertion, reading the memoir as an effort "to envision a Palestinian unity that does not rely on a narrative of shared identity" (2007: 666). *I Saw Ramallah* consistently foregrounds Barghouti's suspicion of the inadvertent role played by collective memory and metaphor in sustaining the disenfranchisement of Palestinians. Barghouti's "camera eye" shifts attention from the abstract to the material, and from the cultivation of collective memory to an acknowledgement that Palestinian nationalism is constituted by a "multiplicity of conflicting memories" (Litvak, 2009: 19). What neither Said nor Bernard attends to directly, however, is the extent to which this effort to re-animate anti-colonial Palestinian discourse is articulated via a sustained engagement with the environmental politics of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, most particular the influence of water stress. Barghouti is not alone in arguing for an environmental perspective on the West Bank. Raja Shehadeh's Orwell Prize-winning memoir *Palestinian Walks* (2007) has done much to increase awareness in Western readers of the ecological impact of the occupation. What distinguishes Barghouti is the way in which he brings an environmental focus to bear upon an incisive examination of literary form. In what follows, I shall argue that a *hydropolitical* narrative is threaded through Barghouti's more insistent reflections on memory (collective and individual), metaphor, and territory, in the course of which he advances a distinctively *liquid* vision of life in exile and in the occupied territories.

As a mist of perspiration clouds Barghouti's vision, the bridge "shimmers with scenes that span a lifetime" (1), and his experience of memory takes on a kind of liquid mutability: "Memory is not a geometric shape", he says later; rather, "Our homeland is the shape of the time we spent in it" (73, 41). The memory of the exile here is figured as the turbulence of displaced waters, as a heterogeneous, non-linear mesh of flows and counter-flows. As Barghouti puts it, in one of the most direct statements of his liquid vision, "Displacements are always multiple. Displacements that collect around you and close the circle. You run, but the circle surrounds you" (131). In reflection of

this, water assumes a structuring influence in the memoir, as Barghouti's account of his return frequently gives way to the inflow of memories of his time in exile in Cairo, London, and Budapest. The work done here by water is not limited to organizing the narrative, however. It also reflects the lived experience of Palestinians in what Eyal Weizman has called the "anarchic geography" of the occupied territories (2007: 7). Weizman cites the numerous forms of temporary and transportable synonyms for the border deployed by Israel in the West Bank — such as "separation walls", "checkpoints", "road blocks", and "closed military areas" — whose effects are "dynamic, constantly shifting, ebbing and flowing [...], stealthily surrounding Palestinian villages and roads" (2007: 6-7). The "shape" conferred upon the West Bank, whether it is by the action of memory or of the "structured chaos" of Israel's "architecture of occupation" (Weizman, 2007: 5), is thus distinctively liquid.

Such a statement, however, must immediately be qualified by an acknowledgement that these expressions of liquidity are profoundly antithetical. Weizman's assertion is, in effect, an instance of Zygmunt Bauman's description of fluidity as a "prime technique of power" in the era of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000: 11). Bauman characterizes modernity as the pursuit of a frictionless world. In an age of liquidity, the capacity to move efficiently through space is cultivated as an attribute of power — as Bauman puts it, "In 'liquid' modernity, it is the most elusive, those free to move without notice, who rule" (2000: 120). Inevitably, the pursuit of such liquidity comes at the expense of the liquidity of others, who are forced to endure the viscosity of what Bauman calls "heavy modernity" (2000: 114). Such indeed is the tenor of Palestinian experience in the West Bank. The 1995 Oslo II interim agreement divided the West Bank into three areas of administration: area A under exclusive Palestinian control; area B, under the dual control of the Palestinian civil authority and the Israeli military; and area C, under exclusive Israeli control. On the ground this division produced a compelling asymmetry in which, as Derek Gregory has noted, a Palestinian leaving Jenin for Hebron (both in area A) would need to change zones up to fifty times, whereas an Israeli could travel across the West Bank without ever leaving area C (2004: 99-100). Weizman observes that between 1994 and 1999, Israel installed 230 checkpoints in the West Bank as an expression of "its ability to block, filter and regulate movement" within the occupied territories, the rationale being that "the less Palestinians are permitted to circulate through space, the more secure this space will be" (2007: 143, 147).

In this context, however, Barghouti's use of liquidity takes on a counter-intuitive force. Liquidity, according to his formula, is neither the preserve of the occupying force nor even determined by its regime of power. Rather, his presentation of a liquid vision of both Palestine, and Palestinian experience in exile and in the occupied territories, contests the malleable architecture of power by turning attention to the environmental politics of the occupation, and the politicization of water in particular.

I Saw Ramallah opens at what is both a political and a natural boundary, as well as one marked by personal rupture. It is the place from which Barghouti left Palestine, in 1966, to study at Cairo University (an absence extended by the consequences of the Six Day War). It is also a site of ecological calamity. In 1953, 1,250 million cubic metres of water flowed annually beneath the Allenby bridge; in 1994, three years before Barghouti's return in 1997, this was reduced to between 152–230 million cubic metres (Isaac and

Selby, 1996: 21).[2] Water stress has had a critical role in the history of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict: Sharif S. Elmusa has observed the role of water in the boundary proposals put forward by the Zionist Organization at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference (1996: 70); that water is an issue where practical imperatives commingle with ideological ones is borne out by the Zionist promise to "make the desert bloom". The Oslo II agreements delayed a decision on water rights as part of "final status" negotiations, further prolonging a near-thirty year situation in which Israel engineered what Mark Zeitoun has called an "extreme asymmetry" in access to regional water resources (2012: 14). In 1996, per capita consumption among Israeli settlers in the West Bank was seven times that of Palestinians; in 1997, at the time of Barghouti's return, 45% of localities in the West Bank were without a regular water supply, affecting 12% of the population (Isaac and Selby, 1996: 22; Zahar, 2001: 97). Despite the fact that resources in the Jordan River Basin are both finite and transboundary, Israeli and Palestinian access to water does not reflect their status as co-riparians. Rather, Israel's control of the region's major water resources, including the River itself and the major aquifers, as well as expropriation of wells belonging to absent Palestinians and rigorous control over the drilling of new wells, has resulted in a consumption ratio as high as 6:1 in Israel's favour (according to Zeitoun, rising to 9:1 in terms of agricultural use (2012: 14)). This situation has been markedly exacerbated by the construction of Israel's separation wall. René Backmann notes that the 12.8% of the West Bank annexed by the wall coincides with the most promising sites for future wells (2006: 184). The path of the wall thus articulates at least in part a hydropolitical agenda, representing a significant threat to both regional biodiversity and agricultural cohesion (Isaac and Hilal, 2011; Tamini, 2011). As Barghouti remarks in *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here*, the sequel to *I Saw Ramallah*, it is "the wall of the great historic theft, the theft of more land and trees and water, the wall of the displacement of Palestinians following the exhaustion of their resources through their separation from their lands, crops, and water basins"; to encounter the wall is to see nature "subjected to a cruel and disfiguring intervention", the purpose of which is to "separate the olive tree from the one who planted it" (Barghouti, 2011: 128, 129).

This effective colonization of water resources is in marked contrast to the transboundary distribution of water in the Middle-East region as a whole.[3] The Jordan River Basin is "a naturally defined area that cannot be artificially subsectioned" (Zahar, 2001: 94); that is, a bioregion. Barghouti acknowledges as much when he remarks, "There is no topographical difference between this Jordanian land I stand on and that Palestinian land on the other side of the bridge. That, then, is the "Occupied Territory" (5). Advocates of a bioregional approach to land argue for the integrity of the ecosystem over and above that of any political structure which inscribes the space. The value of such thinking is the counterpoint it offers to the politics of nationalism and territoriality, advocating a biocentric rather than androcentric perspective on place. However, a bioregional reading of the occupied territories brings with it certain difficulties, not least the association of bioregionalism with the US-dominated deep ecology movement. The privileging of wilderness space that characterizes bioregionalism often yields, as Rob Nixon has observed, "a style of spiritual geography premised on […] spatial amnesia" (2005: 236); precisely the kind of elision of contested spaces that Barghouti's memoir disputes. While a bioregional reading forcefully exposes the way the environment is co-opted in the drive to create

"facts on the ground", it also risks rehearsing as universal an understanding of place and ecology that is in fact deeply localized (even, in Ramachandra Guha's term, "uniquely American" (1989: 72)). Guha's criticism of the tendency among advocates of bioregionalism to apply the situated values and understandings of western conservationism to universal contexts, casts deep ecology as tantamount to ecological imperialism, which ignores the local, often social and political (that is, deeply *human*), imperatives in scenes of ecological stress. Barghouti's engagement with hydropolitics thus refers *I Saw Ramallah* to the debates surrounding the complementarity of postcolonial and ecocritical discourse, the main charge of which is the need to engage with ecological questions, as Elizabeth Deloughrey and George B. Handley put it, in more globally nuanced terms (2011: 9).

In the West Bank that Barghouti encounters, a bioregional reading of transboundary space must compete with a biopolitical one:

> The pollution of language can get no more blatant than the term *West Bank*. West of what? Bank of what? The reference here is to the west bank of the River Jordan, not to eastern Palestine. The west bank of a river is a geographical location — not a country, not a homeland. (2003: 34)

Barghouti's questions, *West of what? Bank of what?*, highlight a disorientation in which history — specifically, the history of the State of Israel — supplants all other understandings and experiences of place. In effect, it articulates the consequence of what Michel Foucault called "the entry of life into history", life's induction into a regime of power and knowledge (1990/1978: 141). Barghouti's questions situate the West Bank as a place where Palestinian life is simultaneously "outside history, in its biological environment", and "penetrated" by the stratagems of knowledge and power which constitute "human historicity" (Foucault, 1990/1978: 143). Israel's colonization of West Bank water supplies thus amounts to an expression of biopower, to the extent that the social and political significance of water is expanded to existential proportions. Such is the chronic nature of water shortages and difficulties surrounding water storage in the West Bank, as to have a constitutive influence on "the experience and idea of being Palestinian", as Heather Chappells, Jan Selby, and Elizabeth Shove have remarked. In the West Bank, Palestinian experience is, in part, made distinctive by a lack of access to the most basic commodity of human existence. Thus, "in the West Bank, water is not simply water, but a conspicuous and politicised form of water" (Chappells, Selby, and Shove, 2001: 163, 164). It is difficult to envision a more compelling setting for power to "invest life through and through" (Foucault, 1990/1978: 139).

In this context, *I Saw Ramallah* acts as an invitation to seek an accommodation between anthropocentric and biocentric imperatives. Yet, as Barghouti acknowledges, the two are not so easily extricated: "how to distinguish between ideologies and conflicting opinions and political theories on the one hand and this green fig that covers a third of the hill next to Abu Hazim's house on the other?" (37). It is important here to acknowledge that a simple binary of the bioregional and the biopolitical is redundant. Timothy Luke's application of Foucauldian biopolitics to the production of "the environment" as an historical artefact makes it clear that *all* efforts to define place ("to environ" being, in every instance, "a disciplining move") results in the "policing of ecological spaces"

(Luke, 1995: 64). Yet this does not preclude a reading of ecological space in the West Bank, particularly the politicization of water, as an example of, in Luke's words, "an environmental regime", one that advances "eco-knowledges to activate its command over geo-power as well as to re-operationalise many of its notions of governmentality as environmentality" (1995: 69). As Barghouti's question about the pollution of language makes clear, Palestinian environmental experience in the occupied territories is wrapped in a nexus of territoriality and abstraction commensurate with the reduction of life to a series of biopolitical calculations.

My approach to reading Barghouti's eco-aesthetics follows that of Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's path-breaking *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, in taking a lead from Anthony Vital's observation that ecocriticism must be "rooted in local (regional, national) concerns for social life and its natural environment", but also must account for the "complexities" of "local pasts" and responses to the "currents of modernity" (Vital, 2008: 88; see Huggan and Tiffin, 2009). Attention to the presence of multiple histories is a central concern of Barghouti's memoir. One of the main affective currents of *I Saw Ramallah* is Barghouti's sense, as part of the diaspora, of an irrevocable separateness from those who spent the years since 1967 on the land but with whom he claims a common national identity. To the extent, then, that it functions as an index of collective memory (to borrow Maurice Halbwachs' phrase (1992)), for Barghouti, 1967 marks the point of his *divergence* from the main current of Palestinian collective memory, suggesting therefore also multiple experiences of place and environment. One consequence of this is a recurring anxiety that the mutability of memory has produced a concurrent mutability of place: the troubling suspicion that his recollections of the landscapes of the West Bank have lost their definition induces a sense that his purchase on the land itself is also weakened.[4]

Barghouti's response is to privilege *precision*:

> I once said that a poet should have some hot water and liquid soap and a sponge to wash words like we do greasy dishes. So I would like every abstract noun to be broken down into what it means in concrete terms in the real world. The freshness of a word does not come from its being poetic, it comes from it being *precise*. We have to be *precise.* (2008: 21)

The most pressing aspect of a renewed attention to local contexts, Vital suggests, is the need to take account of the ways in which language shapes and reveals the "complex interplay of social history with the natural world" (2008: 90), a point also made by Barghouti in his deconstruction of the phrase "West Bank". Vital's attention to the particular and local via language is thus cognate with Barghouti's own assessment of his role as poet. As with his comment on the pollution of language, Barghouti is alert to the manner in which the problem of colonial modernity is a linguistic one in as much as language both ties a speaker to place and substantively gives shape to that place. Consequently, he expresses a profound dissatisfaction, bordering on contempt, for the tendency in Palestinian literature towards symbol-making. "I have always believed", he states, "that it is in the interests of an occupation, any occupation, that the homeland should be transformed in the memory of its people into a 'bouquet of symbols'" (69). Barghouti's suspicion of metaphor can be located in developments in Arabic literature since 1967, a period during which, according to Salma Khadra Jayyusi, Palestinian poetry was shaped by two significant influences: "the great adventure in language"

pioneered by the Syrian Adonis, principally in terms of extended experimentation in the scope of metaphor; and the increasing co-option of poetry by discourses of resistance (1992: 49-53). The result, according to Jayyusi, was a debilitating disorientation in much Palestinian poetry — marked by strident rhetoric and increasingly abstracted metaphors — which distorted the capacity of literature to contest the occupation.[5]

In this context, *I Saw Ramallah* sounds a much more cautious note akin to Seamus Heaney's acknowledgment that "no lyrics has ever stopped a tank" (2002: 189). As Barghouti ruefully puts it in his long poem "Midnight", "Can you oppose the muscles of this world / with an army of metaphors?" (2008: 60). This scepticism informs the emphasis on precision, washing words of the abstracted accretions which artificially inflate their potential to generate political agency. Barghouti's project, in effect, is to recover the "worldliness" of metaphor, to paraphrase Said (Said, 1991/1982: 35). As noted above, Anna Bernard has demonstrated how *I Saw Ramallah* works to re-ground Palestinian poetry in the material effects of the occupation. A recurring tactic involves "creating distance between vehicle and tenor" in metaphor, a strategy that "demands that the reader recognise the image as an artificial one", leading their attention "back to the material consequences" of life in the occupied territories (Bernard, 2007: 671). There are many instances of this — "Politics is the family at breakfast. Who is there and who is absent and why"; "His gun is my personal history" (43, 13) — in which Barghouti explores the production of Palestinian subjecthood via a re-coding of the play of presence and absence within metaphor. Through this process, Palestine ceases to be the heavily emblematic "golden map hanging on a golden chain adorning the throats of women in exile" and instead "stretches before" Barghouti, "as the print of shoes" (23, 6).

It is notable that Bernard's primary illustration of this effect is a reference to water stress: the river Jordan that Barghouti encounters as he crosses the bridge has been so depleted as to become "a silent river, a river like a parked car" (5). This is a moment which offers itself to multiple symbolic abstractions — the dwindling river standing for lost time, for example — but which Barghouti resists, simply observing instead that "Nature had colluded with Israel in stealing its [the river's] water" (5). Bernard's insightful reading of *I Saw Ramallah* persuasively describes how Barghouti eschews abstraction in order to reanimate the political force of metaphor in Palestinian writing. However, I believe that the extent to which this re-animation depends upon an extended articulation of the centrality of water stress in the formation of Palestinian subjecthood bears further consideration.

Barghouti finds in metaphor a reflection of Palestinian ontology:

> Israelis may feel sympathy for us but they find enormous difficulty in feeling sympathy for our "cause" and our story. They will exercise the compassion of the victor over the loser. In Palestine the symmetry between the two sides is complete: the place is for the enemy and the place is for us, the story is their story and the story is our story. I mean, at the same time. (156-7)

As many critics have observed, metaphor obtains via the play of similarity and difference: in Paul Ricoeur's words, "one must continue to identify the previous incompatibility *through* the new compatibility" (Ricoeur, 1978: 148). However this play does not, in the Palestinian context, give rise to the kind of hybridization or synthesis commonly

professed in postcolonial discourse. Stuart Hall's conception of an identity "which lives with and through, not despite, difference" (1990: 235) applies here only as a frustrated dialectic which also plays out in the exilic subject's relationship with place, to which s/he is "attached" and "repulsed" at the same time (3). In Barghouti's account, "Palestine" and "Israel" represent different expressions of the same contested region.[6] Jonathan Culler's description of metaphor as "a space, articulated by unmasterable distinctions" (1981: 207) can thus also be made to bear witness to the "radical unevenness", which Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee has said defines postcolonial environments (2010: 16). Although Mukherjee's focus is on the irregularities of capitalist development, his observation is equally applicable to the distribution of natural resources and territory in Palestine. This unevenness is markedly evident in the post-Oslo II distribution of space in the West Bank that Barghouti encounters on his return — according to Derek Gregory, a "landscape of colonial modernity", "wrenched by brutal spatial torsions" (Gregory, 2004: 101).

In *I Saw Ramallah* Barghouti's transboundary or co-riparian sensibility ("One gust of wind", he notes, "moves both flags" on either side of the river (11)) is routed through his investigation of the potential of metaphor to give expression to this radical unevenness. He is not, therefore, simply rejecting metaphor, but re-tooling it in order to better express his sense that the fundamental *material* reality of the occupied territories is also an *environmental* one; and that this particular material reality profoundly shapes the everyday in the occupied territories. Barghouti remarks that, "There is very little water under the bridge. Water without water. As though the water apologized for its presence on this boundary between two histories, two faiths, two tragedies" (11). Here, Barghouti's ecological awareness is expressed via his concern for the exhaustion of metaphor; but the environmental context which underpins the rather clichéd image of political stasis — as Barghouti observes, "the absent are so present — and so absent" (19) — serves also to re-invigorate the dead metaphor by an ironized inversion in which the natural boundary defers to the political.

It might be noted that while Barghouti's relationship with metaphor is not that of Derek Walcott, whose rejection of "dead metaphors" (Walcott, 2007: 21) in favour of an originary position before the noun casts the Caribbean poet as Adam naming his world, we can nonetheless say of Barghouti as Walcott does of the new world writer, that his "sense of history […] lives rawly along [his] nerves" (1998: 40). If metaphor can be said to give shape to Palestinian environmental experience, then, it does so to the extent that it also gives shape to the experience of *memory. I Saw Ramallah* opens with Barghouti poised to make a much longed-for crossing, over a significantly depleted natural boundary. But the memoir also insinuates alertness to the *depletion of boundaries* in the presentation of a liquid vision of time and space. Barghouti's liquid vision of memory is invested in challenging the deracinating influence on Palestinian life imposed by Israel's shifting landscape of roadblocks and closures. This is not to say that Barghouti looks to divest this organization of space of its power simply by wishfully describing it differently. His antipathy to abstraction has been established, and beyond the absurdity of such an endeavour it is also important to say that the material expressions of Israel's spatial dominance never lose their force in *I Saw Ramallah*. Weizman cautions that their malleability does not imply that the border formations themselves are "soft or yielding"; not "metaphors for new forms of domination", then, but rather "components of its ubiquitous

and fractalized logic" (2007: 7, 153). Instead, in the same counter-intuitive way he treats metaphor, Barghouti conveys the full force of the materiality of the occupation by claiming liquidity as the shape of experience for Palestinians subjected, variously, to the disorienting displacements of exile, the difficulties of moving through the changeable post-Oslo II landscape, and the deprivations of water stress.

In *I Saw Ramallah*, Barghouti pursues a figurative language suited to an expression of the material and hydropolitical realities of everyday Palestinian experience in the West Bank, but which also accounts for the fact of his thirty-year absence. Barghouti's narrative of discovery is thus also a narrative of loss. In light of this, it is instructive to consider Gérard Genette's description of metaphor as "the stylistic equivalent of the psychological experience of involuntary memory" (1982: 204). Metaphor for Genette does not obtain to memory by itself, but via its "crossing" with metonymy:

> the indestructible solidarity of writing […] cannot only result from the horizontal link established by the metonymical trajectory; but one cannot see how it could result from just the vertical link of the metaphoric relation either. Only the crossing of one by the other can subtract the object of the description, and the description itself from "time's contingencies", that is, from all contingency; only the mutual crossing of the metonymic net and the metaphoric chain ensures the coherence, the necessary cohesion of the *text* (Genette, quoted in Laclau, 2008: 62).

For Genette (following Proust), metaphor recovers lost time via analogy, whereas metonymy "re-animates it, puts it back into movement" via the chain of contiguity (in Laclau, 2008: 63). The crossing of metaphor and metonymy is the occasion for involuntary memory, in which the analogic moment is accompanied by a chain of contiguous relations. For Barghouti, this crossing results in a memoir shaped by his liquid vision in a manner that invests the experience of involuntary memory in the hydropolitical setting of the occupied territories. Here, a narrative of memory emerges less from the crossing of metaphor and metonymy than from the concurrent lack Barghouti finds in each to adequately resolve the contradictions he encounters in accounts of time and place.

Barghouti is as alert to the limitations of metonymy as he is of metaphor. This is most evident in the recurring instances of green: while the green eyes of his mother and Umm Adli (26, 59), and his mother's green fingers (102), refer to a sense of rootedness in place, green also recurs as a metonym signifying variously the unreliability of the exile's memory ("I used to tell my Egyptian friends at university that Palestine was green and covered with trees and shrubs and wild flowers. What are these hills? Bare and chalky" (28)), the appropriation of a pastoral rhetoric by Israel (the "green soldier" (16), whose poster depicting the beauties of Massada Barghouti suspects is a statement of colonial resolve), and most crucially the intrusion of biopolitics upon any bioregional reading of the occupied territories (Barghouti's reunion permit is "A green-plastic-covered card, holding my name, the name of Ramallah, the word "married", the word "Tamim", and a Palestinian stamp" (138)). Cumulatively, the ambivalence surrounding the use of green as metonym undermines the efficacy of a straightforward bioregional approach as a means to recover a sense of place and *placedness*.

Barghouti's reflections on metaphor and metonymy are oriented towards the construction of a narrative of memory — both his sense of Palestinian collective memory as

multiply-constituted and of the disparities between his own experience as an exile and those who remained on the land. "They lived their time here and I lived my time there", he reflects. "Can the two times be patched together?" (85). In particular, he considers an earlier return, his reunion with his family in Cairo after seventeen years of separation, and the extent to which one return can stand for another. Here, the narrative of memory is assembled via Barghouti's acknowledgement of the insufficiencies of both metaphor and metonymy. Just as analogy cannot suffice to overcome the distance of seventeen years — "You do not arrive unchanged at the moment of joy dreamt of for so long across the years. The years are on your shoulders. They do their slow work without ringing any bells for you" (72) — neither can metonymy do more than account for the unease which characterizes the family's increasingly strained efforts to come together. Although initially, "The three of us chattered our separated lives in houses that came together to become one house", Barghouti realizes that the "clarity of displacement" gives way under the pressure of proximity to the "uncertainty of return" (72, 73):

> Dividing the memory between an old weariness and a new-found comfort was impossible. [….] The scales of need were unbalanced despite us all. The three of us needed the same nearness at the same time to the same degree. Sensations of a new beginning and of the resumption of a broken past jostled with each other. (73)

Barghouti's experience of the family reunion illustrates the fluid nature of "liv[ing] in time" (91). As noted above, his statement, "Displacements are always multiple" (131), testifies to the manner in which a liquid vision provides the shape for his experience of being Palestinian. Crucially, this is as much in spatial as in temporal terms, as Barghouti himself acknowledges: "the places we desire are only times but conflict is over place. The whole story is about place" (88). In particular, it is impossible to read his statement, "I move in patches of time" (87) and not also be reminded of the "radically uneven" distribution of space under Oslo II.

    The territorial asymmetry imposed by Oslo II is a significant factor in the corresponding asymmetry in access to water. Barghouti's "patches of memory" thus carry not just a spatial but more particularly an *ecological* resonance. Having spatialized Palestinians' liquid experience of time, Barghouti contrasts the hydropolitical division of space with his account of "*Ammi* Abu Muti'", Ein al-Deir's "master of water" whose eighty years of experience "sowing and watering and cutting canals and dividing the slope of the hill into graded ledges, permitting the water to settle and preventing the soil from sliding away" (87, 86) presents an image of sustained agro-ecological harmony. In a later account of the care he lavished on his house plants while in exile in Budapest, Barghouti finds an ironic contrast with Abu Muti'; yet, ultimately, both result in loss, the "ruined" Ein al-Deir reflected in the fact that Barghouti's plants are always surrendered ("I give them light and air and friendship and then I leave" (87, 92)). The crossing of metaphor and metonymy thus gives rise to a narrative of memory that replaces the "solidarity" of writing with a liquid vision that is profoundly affected by water stress. The map of the West Bank produced by Oslo II created, as Gregory says, a "site of amnesia" rather than memory (2004: 98). Here, both analogy and contiguity acquire a marked colonial resonance. Barghouti notes that time is not

a "length of calico" to be stitched together, but rather a "mist that never stops moving" (76). In the expression of time in these terms — inchoate, forming and reforming where it encounters the friction of material surfaces — Barghouti finds a means to articulate an experience of memory that carries with it the temporal and spatial dislocations both of exile and Oslo II.[7] In contrast to the landscape of colonial modernity produced by Oslo II (and, latterly, the separation wall), Barghouti proposes an alternative approach to the environment. No less an example of "environmentality" in Luke's terms, perhaps, nonetheless Barghouti's "agro-ecology", as it privileges the shaping of the non-human for the benefit of the human, also lays bare the biopolitical ordering of the ecology of the occupied territories. *I Saw Ramallah* thus presents a (perhaps tentative) instance of what Nixon calls the "decentring of environmentalism" in which postcolonial insights offer a corrective to bioregional approaches which neglect politics (2005: 243). Despite his claim to writing a kind of ecopoetry,[8] his memoir doesn't self-consciously advance the interests of the environment over the human. What he does offer however is an invitation to consider the viability of an accommodation between anthropocentric and bioregional imperatives in the context of the hydropolitical network of the occupied territories. In relation to Laurence Buell's affirmation that "humanness is ecosystemically imbricated" (2005: 103), we might think of this as exploring means to "think disjunctively about the human" as Dipesh Chakrabarty has said of the challenge of climate change (2012: 2) — although here understood in terms of revising an environmental domination predicated on perpetuating the infrahumanity of others. In doing so, Barghouti's tactic of seeking precision — "washing words", exploring the capacities of metaphor and metonymy — gives rise to a hydropolitical consciousness. The bathetic contrast between Barghouti and Abu Muti' deepens the resonance of the former's assertion that Jerusalem, the icon of the struggle, is also "the Jerusalem of houseplants", "ordinary like water is water" (143). Barghouti's constant recourse to the quotidian does not efface the fact that water is never simply water in the occupied territories, but rather highlights how it is intimately bound up with the politics of occupation.

Funding

Notes

1. First published in Arabic in 1997. Subsequent references are to the 2004 translated edition and will be cited parenthetically by page number in the text.
2. Isaac and Selby have more recently calculated that annual discharge from the Jordan River into the Dead Sea has declined to 50 million cubic metres (Isaac and Selby, 2011).
3. Weizman notes that Israel's assertions of control over the airspace above the West Bank and the aquifer beneath it constitute a "revisioning of the traditional geopolitical imagination" (Weizman, 2007: 12).
4. This sense of loss is confirmed in *I Was Born Here, I Was Born There*, when Barghouti declares, "my geographical memory has faded during the years of exile; the sad and certain truth is that I no longer know the geography of my own land" (Barghouti, 2011: 10).

5.   Barghouti is not alone in expressing dissatisfaction here. Joe Cleary quotes Mahmoud Darwish and Fadwa Tuqan in comparing poetry unfavourably with the novel. "Poetry alludes", as Tuqan put it during the first *intifada*, "but oblique reference does not seem to be enough at this moment" (Cleary, 2002: 190).

6.   As Weizman has also observed, "The two political/geographic concepts of Israel and Palestine refer to and overlap across the very same place" (Weizman, 2007: 15-16).

7.   Barghouti remarks in *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here*, that since Oslo II, "a road paved with tar [has] become the dream of a nation" (Barghouti, 2011: 22).

8.   Barghouti states that the collection of poems he carries with him into Ramallah, *The Logic of Beings*, "is built on the idea that creatures — inanimate, plant, animal, or human — 'speak'. My role is to listen to what they say" (161).

References

Backmann R (2006) *A Wall in Palestine* (Trans. Kaiser A). New York: Picador.

Barghouti M (2003) Verbicide. *New Internationalist* 359: 34–35.

Barghouti M (2004) *I Saw Ramallah* (Trans. Soueif A). London: Bloomsbury.

Barghouti M (2008) *Midnight and Other Poems* (Trans. Ashour R). Todmorden, UK: Arc.

Barghouti M (2011) *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here* (Trans. Davies H). London: Bloomsbury.

Bauman Z (2000) *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Bernard A (2007) "Who would dare to make it into an abstraction?": Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah. Textual Practice* 21(4): 665–686.

Buell L (2005) *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Chakrabarty D (2012) Postcolonial studies and the challenge of climate change. *New Literary History* 43: 1–18.

Chappells H, Selby J and Shove E (2001) Control and flow: Rethinking the sociology, technology and politics of water consumption. In: Cohen MJ and Murphy J (eds) *Exploring Sustainable Consumption: Environmental Policy and the Social Sciences* Vol. 1. Oxford: Elsevier Science, 157–170.

Cleary J (2002) *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Culler J (1981) *The Pursuit of Signs*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Deloughrey E and Handley GB (2011) Towards an aesthetics of the earth. In: Deloughrey E and Handley GB (eds) *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3–37.

Elmusa SS (1996) The land–water nexus in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 25(3): 69–78.

Foucault M (1990/1978) *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1 (Trans. Hurley R). New York: Vintage.

Genette G (1982) *Figures of Discourse* (Trans. Sheridan A). New York: Columbia University Press.

Gregory D (2004) *The Colonial Present*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Guha R (1989) Radical American environmentalism and wilderness preservation: A Third World critique. *Environmental Ethics* 11: 71–83.

Halbwachs M (1992) *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hall S (1990) Cultural identity and diaspora. In: Rutherford J (ed) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Heaney S (2002) *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971–2001*. London: Faber.

Huggan G and Tiffin H (2009) *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literatures, Animals, Environment*. London: Routledge.

Isaac J and Selby J (1996) The Palestinian water crisis: Status, projections and potential for resolution. *Natural Resources Forum* 20(1): 17–26.

Isaac J and Hilal J (2011) Palestinian landscape and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. *International Journal of Environmental Studies* 68(4): 413–429.

Jaggi M (2008) Interview with Mourid Barghouti. *The Guardian*, 13 December.

Jayyusi SK (1992) Introduction: Palestinian literature in modern times. In: Jayyusi SK (ed) *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1–80.

Laclau E (2008) Articulation and the limits of metaphor. In: Bono JJ, Dean T and Ziarek EP (eds) *A Time for the Humanities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 61–83.

Litvak M (2009) Collective memory in the Palestinian experience. In: Litvak M (ed) *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1–26.

Luke TW (1995) On environmentality: Geo-power and eco-knowledge in the discourse of the contemporary environment. *Cultural Critique* 31(2): 57–81.

Mukherjee UP (2010) *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Nixon R (2005) Environmentalism and postcolonialism. In: Loomba A et al. (eds) *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 233–251.

Ricoeur P (1978) The metaphorical process as cognition, imagination, and feeling. *Critical Inquiry* 5(1): 143–159.

Shehadeh R (2007) *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape*. London: Profile Books.

Tamini AA (2011) Socioeconomic and environmental impacts of the Israeli separation wall. *International Journal of Palestinian Studies* 68(4): 557–564.

Said EW (1991/1982) *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. New York: Vintage.

Vital A (2008) Toward an African ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, ecology and *Life & Times of Michael K. Research in African Literatures* 39(1): 87–106.

Walcott D (1998) *What the Twilight Says: Essays*. London: Faber.

Walcott D (2007) *Selected Poems*. London: Faber.

Weizman E (2007) *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. London: Verso.

Zahar BAAA (2001) Water crisis in Palestine. *Desalination* 136: 93–99.

Zeitoun M (2012) *Power and Water in the Middle-East: The Hidden Politics of the Palestinian-Israeli Water Conflict*. London: I.B. Taurus.