Restor(y)ing Solidarity: Feminism and the Intercolonial Textual Imaginary
Kelly McGuire

This piece explores transnational solidarity with Palestine, with a focus on obstacles presented by works of fiction that feed into the colonial imaginary and deem Palestinian lives "ungrievable." As narratives of resistance, Leon Uris's saga about the emergence of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Trinity *(1976) and its sequel,* Redemption *(1995), drew upon the formula he popularized in his depiction of Israel's founding in 1948 to craft an illusory solidarity between Ireland and Israel. Contemporary Irish support for Palestine, following Indigenous decolonial practices of solidarity, deconstructs these mythologies while cultural resistance reframes grieving as a creative act and an invitation to genuine allyship, solidarity, and decolonization.*

Content warning: mentions of rape and genocide

As an adolescent in the 1990s, I remember hearing about the Intifada on the daily news program that came on after dinner. At this time, however, the so-called "Troubles" in Northern Ireland were a more frequent topic of conversation in my household. Descended from Irish Catholic tenant farmers who migrated to colonized Haudenosaunee land in the nineteenth century, my father's family nursed its grudge against the British Empire. After centuries of colonial rule, Irish Catholics were ready to throw off that yoke once and for all, so when the Irish Republican Army blew up a pub in the heart of London, the Irish diaspora stood strong in its solidarity across generations and the span of an ocean. Towards the end of the decade, a ceasefire finally created the conditions for the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement to calm sectarian violence. In occupied Palestine known as Israel, the cycle of violence and grief continued (Cavanaugh 2024, n.p.).

Over this past year, Irish politicians, activists, feminists, diplomats, and artists have rallied unapologetically and with fervour seldom seen in the west for the dispossessed of Palestine. They remind us how Britain assumed control of Palestine by establishing Mandatory Palestine with the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and subsequently promised the land to a people it turned away from its own border. This was a year after Irish rebel groups joined in the Easter Rising of 1916, incurring the wrath of the British army in the form of a bombed-out Dublin, mass imprisonment, and the summary execution of the rebellion's leaders. In the ensuing Irish War of Independence, Britain continued this brutal pattern of suppression, recruiting into its constabulary forces British World War One veterans who would infamously come to be known as the Black and Tans (Knight 2010, 529). When Britain's policies inevitably led to unrest, Britain sent the same forces to subdue the Palestinian people. Techniques of repression practiced on Irish Catholics were all too easily transferred to Britain's new subjects in Mandatory Palestine (Sinclair 2006).

Despite this well-documented history, the Irish struggle for independence was linked in my emergent political consciousness not to the first Palestinian Intifida unfolding

feral feminisms

Free Palestine!: Voices of Decolonization

issue 13 · winter 2024

Restor(y)ing Solidarity:
Feminism and the Intercolonial Textual Imaginary
Kelly McGuire

simultaneously, but to Jewish efforts to secure an Israeli homeland from the nineteenth century onward. This imagined link was forged by fiction, specifically the novels of Leon Uris—*Exodus* (1958) and *Trinity* (1976)—that shared space in my parents' paperback library. I had eagerly consumed Uris's saga about the emergence of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in an attempt to understand the 6 o'clock news, and reading backwards through his corpus, found common ground with Uris's depiction of Israel's founding in 1948. As narratives of resistance, the two novels mingled seamlessly in my wholly captivated adolescent imagination. No matter that the terms of conflict were radically different, with one story chronicling early efforts to throw off the shackles of British colonialism, while the second celebrating a twentieth-century colonial project entangled first with British and then with American interests. With the Holocaust as a backdrop and the focus on the determination of a group of Jewish concentration camp survivors to find their way to a nascent "Israel," Uris papered over the Nakba of 1948 with a tale of heroic resistance easily assimilable into anti-colonial movements playing out a world away. But in Uris's narrative, the British also played at times the role of villain on the island of Cyprus where they detained Holocaust survivors sailing for Palestine with the assistance of the Zionist paramilitary organization, the Haganah. *Exodus* is a story of a struggle for freedom, concentrated on a fictionalized account of the passenger ship, *Exodus 1947,* which, in Uris's narrative, ultimately overcomes the British blockade and brings 200 children to Palestine. The actual ship never made it to Palestine, but the plight of its passengers captured the imagination of a world just starting to come to terms with the Holocaust. Writing a decade later, Uris was able to make that story the centre of his ethnonationalist mythology, which, in conjunction with its popular film adaptation helped cement the "causal link between the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel" as well as the inspirational "concept of... 'from catastrophe to revival'" that continues to dominate western thinking about the story of Israel (Halamish 2017, 135).

There is an enduring argument that literature fosters sympathy (Keen 2006). As far as I know, no one has been able to demonstrate how this process works and plenty of evidence has been produced to show that there is no necessary correlation between reading practices and morality. For if *Exodus* promoted sympathy for the first Israelis, it produced antipathy for the Palestinian people they displaced, dispossessed, and massacred during the Nakba. Uris's primary goal at any rate was to capture the imaginations of post-war readers eager for a new frontier and a "revolutionary hero" to rally behind as an appealing face for a young nation and ally. It was a winning formula that "ended up shaping not just generations of American perceptions of Israel, but policy, too" (Singer 2023, n.p.).

Perhaps owing to their immense popularity, Uris would revisit these themes again in *Trinity,* appealing to settlers of Irish descent eager for alternatives to narratives of simple persecution. Histories of struggle thus mingled intertextually within Uris's "romantic worldview" that proved irresistible to his readers in the second half of the twentieth century (Twersky 2023, n.p.). This was a worldview that blended disparate revolutionary narratives but could not accommodate Palestinian resistance or sovereignty. Literary scholar Aaron Kreuter points to the irony of how "Uris's indignation about Jewish persecution leads him to act unjust[ly] and abusive[ly]' toward Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims, and anybody else who dares to question the ethicality of an exclusively Jewish nation-state" (Kreuter 2023, 106). Regardless of Uris's intentions, *Trinity* reads as a kind of companion piece to the original novel—a textual pairing that shores up solidarity through intertwining stories of struggle.

Reflecting on how reading practices engender or interfere with solidarity may seem self-serving in the face of what South Africa in December 2023 convincingly characterized as

feral feminisms
Free Palestine!:
Voices of Decolonization
issue 13 · winter 2024

Restor(y)ing Solidarity:
Feminism and the Intercolonial Textual Imaginary
Kelly McGuire

genocide in the International Court of Justice. As part of the "affective dimension of civilizing terror" in which so much of Western art is complicit, reading practices help construct what Lawrence-Minh Bui Davis describes as the "hidden psychic colonial architecture inside each of us" (Davis 2022, 53). How else do we account for the silence around Israel's collective punishment of Palestinian civilians or why it is all too easy for so many to tune out the low-level hum of outcry on social media, protests in the streets, and the editorials that sporadically find their way into print? Judith Butler's decades-long reflection on "the relation between the violence by which [Palestinian] lives [are] lost and the prohibition on their public grievability" (Butler 2006, 36) grapples precisely with this question of apathy. For Butler, who likens prohibitions on lamenting mass death resulting from American (or its allies') militarism to Creon's injunction against public grieving in Sophocles' great tragedy, *Antigone,* the refusal of discourse produces dehumanization and "serves the derealizing aims of military violence" (2006, 37). Counterintuitively, our silence creates the conditions for erasure: "violence against those who are already not quite living, that is, living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark" (2996, 36). How can one become an Antigone—defying the state prohibition to honour the dead—when the dead have no substance? Letting the mass casualties of American-supplied bombs lay ungrieved beneath the rubble in Gaza only furthers the dehumanization of the Palestinians.

That said, the general public might not so readily accept the prevarications of mass media had it not been conditioned by the culture industry to look upon Arab and Muslim lives with indifference or to reject any objection to Palestinian oppression as antisemitic (Chomsky and Herman 1988), while academic institutions have similarly worked hard to promulgate both within Israel and abroad doctrines that devalue Palestinian human life (Wind 2024). As Edward Said stated in his 2001 essay, "Propaganda and War," "Palestinians are viewed neither in terms of a story that is theirs, nor in terms of a human image with which people can easily identify" (Said 2001, n.p.). Instead, the story that has prevailed, the "main narrative model that dominates American thinking still seems to be Leon Uris's 1950 novel *Exodus,*" Said goes on to note in the same essay (Said 2001, n.p.). Perhaps it is a uniquely generational phenomenon. Writing on this subject in the *Chicago Tribune,* John Warner reflects on how in the 1970s and 1980s, popular authors "reliably pumped out epic historical novels that served as definitive texts of a particular time and culture" (Warner 2021, n.p.). Although the neglect of *Trinity* in his hometown library is the catalyst for his opinion piece, Warner shares that *Exodus* was also his "main source of information on the state of Israel" (n.p.). While he keeps geopolitics firmly at bay, one can't help but infer that Warner's conclusion that the neglect of books like *Trinity* "is an illustration that we no longer need to rely on single, fictional sources for our knowledge of history," offers a commentary on the lasting and harmful effects of the miseducation of North American reading publics as it relates to American foreign policy (2021, n.p.).

I don't disagree with his conclusions. But as I reflect on the list of bestselling authors of historical fiction that figure prominently on Warner's list alongside Uris—John Jakes (1982), James Michener (1974), and James Clavell (1986)—I think of other reasons why it might not be such a bad thing that historical fiction of this grain is no longer fashionable. Baked into the resistance plots of these works—Michener had his place in my parents' paperback library as well—is the kind of rugged masculinity that powered frontier myths and still characterizes the celebration of American individualism pervasive in popular culture. I wonder about how those growing up in the shadow of World War II also absorbed the gender politics of these works, and how, specifically in the writing of Uris, a robust and vigorous alternative to antisemitic stereotypes of Jewish men as "weak" and

Restor(y)ing Solidarity:
Feminism and the Intercolonial Textual Imaginary
Kelly McGuire

"unmanly" (Bregoli 2023, n.p.) melded with the "pioneering" ideology of the newly founded state that signified security and strength for a people sick of persecution.

Uris understood that nation-building projects rely on gendered mythologies for "nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope" (Enloe 2014, 106). Accordingly, Ari Ben Canaan is the exemplar of this new virile national Jewish hero (played commandingly by Paul Newman in the cinematic melodrama adaptation), which also played an important role in shaping popular understanding of the "events leading to the establishment of the State of Israel" (Halamash 2017, 123). Described as "a fighting Jew who won't take shit from nobody," he became, in the words of one writer, a "sort of sexual golem designed to save the Jewish people, with defined pectoral muscles, twinkling blue eyes, and a tenderness that thrillingly coexisted with his tendency toward violence" (Singer 2023, n.p.). His sensual appeal contrasts sharply with conventionally orientalizing portrayals of Arab characters as sexually voracious and predatory towards Jewish women, in particular. Over the course of the narrative, we learn that Ari's first love, Dafna, also a member of the Haganah, is sexually assaulted and murdered by Arab "fanatics" after helping to establish the first Jewish settlement in the north of Galilee (Uris 1959, 281). Her death prefigures that of Karen Hansen Clement, a young Ashkenazi Jewish settler who is murdered by a "gang of fedayeen" while fortifying the Nahal settlement outside of Gaza (Uris 1959, 582). The brief reporting on Karen's murder does not explicitly name rape, but readers with imaginations primed by anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab racism nonetheless often interpret her death as signifying an ongoing threat in the form of Arab sexual violence (Singer 2023, n.p.).

Western accounts of October 7 perpetuate this mythic construction of Arab sexual depravity. So shocking were the reports of Hamas' and linked groups' atrocities that they gave pause even to those who would celebrate resistance, and for those who seek Palestine's annihilation, provided further justification for the catastrophic assault on civilians that followed. There are many who point to the factual errors in the reporting, not to dismiss the reality of sexual violence but to condemn rather the outright fabrications and fictions eagerly disseminated by mainstream media. In a March 2024 article, Maureen Tkacik asks "why did the media go to such lengths to concoct gruesome X-rated versions" of the attack (Tkacik 2024, n.p.)? Tkacik goes on to muse, "it is almost as though the Israelis channeled all of the efficiency and efficacy that failed their military on October 7 into the deployment of a vast edifice of insta-mythology designed to bolster a notion of Palestinians as an inherently subhuman people" (Tkacik 2024, n.p.). However, the eager consumption of these accounts by western audiences that to this day refuse to question their veracity when presented with evidence to the contrary suggests that the colonial imaginary requires minimal material to serve as fodder for its fictions. Strikingly, this same imaginary cannot accommodate evidence of sexual violence perpetrated with impunity against Palestinians in Israeli prisons or detention centres, even when reported on by the very sources that spread misinformation about October 7 in the first place (The New York Times and CNN, among others).

Revisiting Exodus in these times gives me access to my own colonial imaginary forged through intertextual happenstance. Uris invites his reader to see Gaza through the eyes of the novel's central character, Kitty Fremont, the Presbyterian American nurse whose sympathy converts to Zionism after Karen's death. The portrait of Gaza in these final chapters of the novel, named for specific plots of stolen land, is telling:

> The toughest of these frontiers was the Gaza Strip, the finger of land which was
> left jutting into Israel as an aborted border at the end of the war. Ancient Gaza,

feral feminisms
**Free Palestine!:
Voices of Decolonization**
issue 13 · winter 2024

*Restor(y)ing Solidarity:
Feminism and the Intercolonial Textual Imaginary
Kelly McGuire*

where Samson had lifted the gates, had new gates now, the gates of the Palestine refugee camps. The victimized Arabs were allowed to wallow in listlessness and become wards of world charity while they were pumped full of hatred by Egyptian administrators. Gaza was the principal base and training ground of the Egyptian sponsored fedayeens (Uris 1959, 582).

This depiction of Palestinians as helpless pawns of a vicious and corrupt Arab ruling class and of self-serving neighbouring Muslim nations is all too familiar, although in the contemporary western political imaginary, Hamas now stands in for the bloodthirsty Muftis, and Iran has replaced Egypt as Israel's external antagonist. As Sarah Ihmoud observes, this racist imaginary "constructs Palestinian women, girls, and queer kin either as necessary sacrifice or benevolent rescue … as hypersexualized pawns of a national liberation movement, the terrorists who deserve to be killed, or passive victims in need of saving from our own culture and religion" (Ihmoud 2022, 292). One rationale for the destruction of Gaza we are witnessing today subscribes to precisely this saviour narrative.

Western feminism is not immune to this colonial fantasy. As Lila Abu-Lughod, Rema Hammami, and Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian observe in their introduction to *The Cunning of Gender Violence: Geopolitics and Feminism* (2023), "Combatting gender violence no longer can be seen simply as a feminist project gone global. It is inextricable from the political projects that carry it forward … [and] may evict from the frame imperial complicity in the production of the very violences feminist activists are seeking to prevent, mitigate, or eradicate" (Abu-Lughod et al. 2023, 9). The "well-meaning" liberal project inspired by post 9/11 "securofeminism" (Abu-Lughod's term) has become a "global regulatory biopolitical project" (6) focused with particular intensity on the Middle East as an analytical site in a manner that serves other western political agendas. The academic suspension and "political arrest" of Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian in April of 2024 for drawing a contrast between the sensationalizing of Hamas violence and the concomitant minimizing of IDF/IOF brutality reminds us how the co-opting of gendered violence tyrannizes over and suppresses the speech of Palestinian women. Writing in defence of Shalhoub-Kevorkian in a recent essay, Ihmoud rejects the "cunning" rhetoric of gendered violence upheld by colonial narratives that use the "the very language and discourse of feminism … to justify [Palestinians'] own elimination as a people by the very powers decrying gendered violence" (Ihmoud 2024, n.p.). Feminism is once again, as in its post 9/11 imperialist appropriation by the Bush administration, pressed into the service of "restoring the presumption of First World impermeability" at the expense of Arab women (Butler 2006, 41). In these times of genocide, "cunning" is perhaps too kind a word to describe the treachery of this project.

Writing in the wake of America's own ruthlessly disproportionate and misdirected response to an attack within its borders, Judith Butler insisted, "It seems more crucial than ever to disengage feminism from its First World presumption and to use the resources of feminist theory, and activism, to rethink the meaning of the tie, the bond, the silence, the relation, as they are imagined and lived in the horizon of a counterimperialist egalitarianism" (2006, 42). For Butler, recovering a sense of shared vulnerability as the ethical foundation for "reciprocal exchange" and recognition of a common humanity are necessary "conditions of possibility for an international feminist coalition" (2006, 46, 49). That recognition itself is predicated on identifying the "cultural barriers against which we struggle when we try to find out about the losses that we are asked not to mourn" (2006, 46) and ultimately grieving the other, Antigone style.

feral feminisms
Free Palestine!:
Voices of Decolonization
issue 13 · winter 2024

Restor(y)ing Solidarity:
Feminism and the Intercolonial Textual Imaginary
Kelly McGuire

Uris recognized that grieving can take the form of solidarity too, however disingenuously. Towards the end of the 1960 film adaptation of *Exodus*, Paul Newman's Ari Ben Canaan stands over the graves of the "good Arab" of the film, Taha, and Karen Hansen, wistfully imagining a day in which Arabs and Jews might live in peace: "But the dead always share the earth in peace. And that's not enough. … I swear, on the bodies of these two people, that the day will come when Arab and Jew will share a peaceful life in this land that they have always shared in death" (Preminger 1960). The shrouded bodies in the shared grave symbolize somehow the possibility of a prescriptive future peace that absolves Israeli state violence and erases the history of coexistence between Jewish and Muslim peoples in Palestine prior to the period Uris fictionalizes. Within the grave of this cinematic scene, the two bodies are "equally grievable," in the way Butler posits, but only insofar as the body of the Arab is deemed non-threatening to the Zionist cause. Grievability, then, is contingent in this scene on one's political alignment, on one's refusal of resistance, in a way that critics have attributed to Butler's own response to October 7. In her initial response to the violence of that day, Butler called for a "wider compass of mourning" that does away with hierarchies of grief to acknowledge the "equal grievability of lives and gives rise to an outrage that these lives should *not* have been lost, that the dead deserved more life and equal recognition for their lives" (Butler 2023, n.p.). Yet, as Abdaljawad Omar responded in one of many critiques that followed, Butler (despite their earlier work on the topic) seemingly ignores that grief is foreclosed to Palestinians as subjects occupied within a "space of relentless revulsion that erects barriers, redefines boundaries, desecrates bodies, and takes lives arbitrarily" (Omar 2023, n.p.). Indeed, how does one grieve within that space and under those conditions? For within the unrelenting killing fields of Gaza, grieving is perpetually deferred, denied, and disrupted.

In fairness, though, Butler clarifies in a subsequent interview that grievability also belongs to a future tense in which colonial and racist structures are fully dismantled (Yancy 2023, n.p.). That work is undertaken by the very political communities to which grief gives rise, as Butler insisted in *Precarious Life,* their foundational work on the transformative effects of loss (Butler 2006). Grief becomes a precondition of empathy if one can move beyond individual pain and colonial complacency; indeed, as Lawrence-Minh Bùi Davis shows us in his discussion of "solidarity arts economies," it can be a radical act that opposes and disrupts the deadening effect of America's "civilizing terror" (Davis 2002, 52). Creative grieving derives its affective power from its ability to undo us in precisely the way Butler describes (2006). For Palestinian artists, embodied grief practices have long been a part of cultural resistance for a people whose grief; is often beyond language (Kattoura and Abuasi, 2023, n.p.). For Palestinian artist, Liz Bajjalieh, outpourings of support for Gaza in the last year have enabled her to feel "like the world was watching. For the first time, I fully realized it was my right and duty to express the grief and rage living inside of me. From that, came this art" (Bajjalieh 2023, n.p.). There is an agency to this expression that reclaims "grievability" and reserves the right to "wreck our fucking afternoons" in the way Bùi Davis attributes to the most evocative expressions of public grieving.

Solidarity can be transformative, but may also, as in the case of Uris, elide fundamental differences between the stories of two peoples. If there is a truth to Uris's portrait of Israeli's emergence as a nation state, perhaps it is the sense of urgent, restless energy that impelled the work of Jewish settlers in the shadow of the Holocaust but also deferred the work of mourning to an elusive and unrealizable time of security. Aligned with weakness and femininity, grief was deemed incompatible with a quest for securitization that from its outset sought out Palestinian erasure and deracination. This is a recursive position that can only lead

feral feminisms

Free Palestine!:
Voices of Decolonization

issue 13 · winter 2024

Restor(y)ing Solidarity:
Feminism and the Intercolonial Textual Imaginary
Kelly McGuire

to more death and devastation within a space that cannot accommodate alternatives or even a vision for the future not predicated upon the brutalizing of Palestinians.

As the world has already been seeing with the powerful outpouring of support from the Irish, today's global expressions of solidarity—many of which were concentrated on university campuses this past spring—dramatically shatter the imaginative bonds Uris sought to forge through his resistance sagas (primarily for his diasporic Irish readership in North America). They call for a recalibration of solidarity that rejects dehumanization and the damaging distortions of fiction and the media. As theorized by Roseann Liu and Savannah Shange, solidarity in its ideal form is "thick" in that it "layers interpersonal empathy with historical analysis, political acumen, and a willingness to be led by those most directly impacted" (Liu and Shange 2018, 196). An additional layer that feminist theorists of solidarity name is that of specificity (Mohanty 2003, 242) and sensitivity towards difference and positionality in the place of solidarity's worst universalizing tendencies or the "narrow and exclusive understandings of solidarity" that characterize the Eurocentric tradition (Garbe 2022, 31). I would add one more: that of humility for settlers aspiring towards a solidarity that acknowledges not only the intolerability of silence but also the "violent universality" and exclusions that inhabit the positionality of the referent "we:" as Robyn Maynard demands (citing Sylvia Wynter), "if 'we' are responsible, who is presumed to be included within the parameters here?" (Maynard and Simpson 2023, 19).

Indigenous writers across Turtle Island have long been telling a different (from Uris's) story of shared struggle and interconnected cultures of resistance that models the possibilities of authentic decolonial solidarity. Paying tribute to anti-colonial Black and Indigenous activists like Angela Davis and Lee Maracle who spoke out for Palestinians long before the current genocide, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes, "Our movement elders knew colonial solidarity is international, strong and unrelenting. They knew that Indigenous liberation movements also had to be international, strong and unrelenting, and that strength comes from coalitions of anti-colonial struggle. They knew it was important to build relationships with each other so we could undo the lies we have been told about each other" (Simpson 2023, n.p.). What Simpson describes is a kind of restoration through solidarity, a radical *restorying* to fill up the spaces within discourse swept clear of propaganda. Such a restorying might also cut through "the smoke and mirrors of reconciliation" (Simpson 2023, n.p.) or the "cunning of gender violence" (Abu-Lughod et al. 2023), and similar colonial obfuscations. At any rate, as Ihmoud insists, colonial peace processes should be rejected in favour of a kind of radical worldmaking engendered by new ways of thinking and creating (Ihmoud 2022, n.p.). Perhaps new ways of reading and listening might help in this regard, as well, particularly for non-Indigenous settler-descendants in the west whose flight from British colonialism contributed directly to Indigenous dispossession and genocide on Turtle Island. Leaving twentieth-century forms and fictions behind will be a crucial step to creating the conditions for genuine accompliceship (Meyerhoff and Thompsett 2017, 235) and decolonial feminist solidarity for those still caught up in the colonial imaginary.

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feral feminisms

Free Palestine!:
Voices of Decolonization

issue 13 · winter 2024

Restor(y)ing Solidarity:
Feminism and the Intercolonial Textual Imaginary
Kelly McGuire

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Kelly McGuire

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