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Remembering the Life and Legacy of Ibrahim Makkawi

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Remembering the Life and Legacy of Ibrahim Makkawi

Abstract

As Palestinian psychologists, clinicians, researchers, and educators we collectively come together to uplift the liberation narratives and work paved by Dr. Ibrahim Makkawi. We recognize the distance that separates us between barriers and borders on the map. However, we remember our 'sumud' (steadfastness) that transcends the weight of exile and occupation both locally and internationally. Our love for justice is rooted in our love for the land. We theorize from the flesh of those who touched us with their radical wisdom, such as Makkawi, and we further grow like our olive tree branches nourished with the memories and imprints of radical love on our hearts. The following is a memorial; a set of tributes to honor the life and legacy of Ibrahim.

Who are we?

As Palestinian psychologists, clinicians, researchers, and educators we collectively come together to uplift the liberation narratives and work paved by Dr. Ibrahim Makkawi. We recognize the distance that separates us between barriers and borders on the map. However, we remember our 'sumud' (steadfastness) that transcends the weight of exile and occupation both locally and internationally. Our love for justice is rooted in our love for the land. We theorize from the flesh of those who touched us with their radical wisdom, such as Makkawi, and we further grow like our olive tree branches nourished with the memories and imprints of radical love on our hearts. The following is a memorial; a set of tributes to honor the life and legacy of Ibrahim.

"I am from there. I am from here. I am not there and I am not here. I have two names, which meet and part, and I have two languages. I forget which of them I dream in."
-Mahmoud Darwish

Storytelling as a healing praxis

Grief is a reaction to loss, and we each experience grief individually. We channel

our grief and sadness as a reenactment of our collective resistance. We co-write for collective healing through decolonial methodology. Our narratives date back to the West Bank 1940 lands, and we continue to remember Dr. Makkawi and our lands by harvesting new seeds of radical hope and radical community love through our narrative stories. Dr. Ibrahim Makkawi emphasized to students, "we don't have to be in Palestine to do work for Palestine." From the diaspora and exile to our siblings living under occupation, we come together by creating pathways for future generations and future visions of liberation. While the weight of grief is heavily carried, we find hope in our togetherness. Yes, grief and gratitude can both coexist as a catalyst towards honoring our indigenous roots through our stories. We understand that we can honor both our grief and gratitude by centering our stories and collective voices. Even when Palestinians are made to feel inferior, our stories of radical love are alive through our collective ability to feel one another and remain steadfast in our focus towards liberation. We uplift Dr. Makkawi's story and commitment to liberation by acknowledging the roots of colonization and superiority that often occupies our native tongues and abilities to narrate as Palestinians. After all, it is our stories that

allow us to touch one another, feel one another, and heal collectively.

“Superiority? Inferiority? Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other?” ~ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*

The Story of a Revolutionary Scholar as a seed

Ibrahim Makkawi was born and raised in Tal As-Sabea' in An-Naquab desert (Negev), southern Palestinian lands Israeli-Colonized in 1948. He completed elementary and high school at an Arab local school in his town where the curriculum is due to the Israeli educational system. Makkawi personally experienced the psychological effects of education within a colonial context, including how dictative learning and alienating content, damages creative thinking and impacts identity. This experience may be what made him attracted to thinkers and theorists such as Paulo Freire and Frantz Fanon.

Coming from a small Bedouin village to the space of a large Israeli campus, Makkawi refused to be swallowed into its colonial ways. Activism became a way of life, and since the 1980s, Makkawi had to work very hard in order to be able to cover the expenses of seeking higher education at a university[1]. In the late 1980s, Makkawi entered the Ben-Gurion University to study Behavioral Science, where he joined the “Nationalist Progressive Movement,” [2] the student arm of the Palestinian “Abnaa' Al-Balad” political Movement (Sons of the Village-according to the Hebrew inaccurate translation of the name). Abnaa' Albalad is a Palestinian leftist progressive political movement that believes in the right of the Palestinian people to determine their own destination on the colonized Palestinian land from the sea to the river (Historical Palestine) towards a democratic secular state.

Makkawi was a comrade of a leftist movement that faced many political challenges, whether imposed by the Colonial Zionist state, or internal ones. Many comrades of this movement lacked an internal or theoretical\ ideological compass, have changed their minds, or backed off. Makkawi, however, insisted not only on the necessity to continue his struggle for justice and dignity against the colonial capitalist entity, but also to contribute to society from his own knowledge in community, educational, and liberation psychology. He sought to make the ideology clearer for his comrades and people, and to motivate them not to give up their own rights in the face of unjust capitalist systems erasing the indigenous natives from the land[3].

The Seed that Grew from Defeat (استدخال الهزيمة)

According to Paulo Freire, from his text “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, alienation produces psychological inferiority. Dr. Makkawi experienced alienation from oppressive systems, and learned the importance of activism and liberation as part of a global movement. He analyzed the psychological importance of practicing the collective identity, and years later he described the reality of Palestinian parties who are choosing to merge in the Knesset, as “internalizing the defeat”. This analysis accompanies psychoanalyst Mustafa Hijazi's description of the reality of psychological interactions among the colonized and the persecuted. He spoke about the phenomenon of collective “learned helplessness” and “internalizing inferiority” against a reality of injustice, persecution, and inferiority; all practices of colonization that attempt to maintain an internal colonized collective psyche-self.[4]

Ibrahim Makkawi sculpted and defined “Internalizing the defeat,”[5] within the Palestinian context as. Here are some of his words:

a psychological process whose result is that the human being [individuals or communities or both] reaches a self-conviction that the injustice and oppression that befell him is nothing but a natural and inevitable thing, and he only has to convince himself and the others around him that this is the given status of things, and accordingly to whom internalized the defeat devises new methods of work and thinking.

Makkawi touched on this phenomenon, describing the situation of the Palestinian political parties that internalized defeat, adopted it, designed themselves, and built or reconstructed their vision according to the defeat left by the Oslo Accords and the “solution”, referring to the concessions and divisions, proposed by the treaty.

This internalization of the defeat has necessitated the adoption of the "Palestinian state" and the “Jewish state” project, with the benefit it brings to a small party of the Palestinian people, depending on the salvation that this provides for this group, regardless of the fate of the rest of the people. According to Makkawi, looking at collective salvation and adopting it as a path is a matter of great significance that is greater than the capacity of those who internalized helplessness and defeat. Whether directly or indirectly (by influencing other comrades and people) Makkawi has affected the Abnna’ Albalad movement’s decision to join the Knesset. The movement continued to oppose running in Knesset elections and actively engaged in boycotting these elections[6]. The movement believes it is necessary to establish a parliament of Palestinians, to be elected

directly by the Palestinians living in the lands colonized in 1948 (Israel), Gaza, WB, refugee camps and the diaspora.

The Blossoming Praxis of Liberation Rooted in Cooperative Learning

Makkawi wrote on cooperative learning[7] as a recommended way of learning. Cooperative learning is a process through which a conversation and a common research driven by a group motivates interaction and group curiosity. According to Makkawi this way of learning allows all of the participants to express themselves, where they are each equally respected, and where they get to experience themselves as productive contributors to the group of learners. Makkawi brought this way of learning and implemented it within the youth political camps of the Abnaa’ Albalad movement till the year 2017.

Dr. Makkawi drew on the concept of community as a responsibility and not only as a resource[8], where members of the group learn their responsibility each step within a collaborative effort, involving each member to be proactive and reflective learners. This allowed everyone the ability to contribute to a more conscious way of learning and discovering through community engagement. Makkawi had always encouraged his peers, especially youth, to dream and to visualize the future of liberation.

The Flower that Grew Through Academia & Activism

“Dr. Ibrahim Makkawi’s research interests include Community social work, Policy change, promotion of legislation, corporate social responsibility, and Leadership and empowerment within the community.”

During his experience of establishing and directing the “community psychology”

program at Birzeit University, he had written an article[9] on “The rise and fall of academic community psychology in Palestine and the way forward”. The article examines the inception of a decolonised community psychology programme in the Palestinian colonial context and its subsequent decline and setback. Dr. Makkawi wrote about the “theoretical inspiration for the programme by the shortlived experience of grassroots organising during the first Palestinian Intifada is illustrated. Specific pedagogical and research activities, marked by the influence of the Latin American liberation psychology model, are presented and discussed. These include a focus on praxis, dialogical education, conscientisation and community participatory action research. I consider the influence of the South African experience on the programme principally in reference to Steve Biko’s notion of Black Consciousness. This translated to Palestinian collective-national identity, as well as relevance in psychological knowledge. Dr. Makkawi appraised the setback of the programme in light of administrative and epistemological debates with related disciplines that shifted from psychological individualistic reductionism to social-cultural reductionism.

Harvesting Narratives of Liberation & Radical Love within A Global Context

السياق العالمي؟

What is liberation in a global context?

Dr. Ibrahim Makkawi emphasized that unless we focus on anti-colonial praxis towards liberation, a decolonized global psychology has minimal chances of surviving. This was a critical reflection I learned from Makkawi’s work while obtaining my community counseling master’s degree in the diaspora. Ibrahim Makkawi’s article, “The rise and fall of academic community psychology in Palestine and the way forward”, was an important reading as a graduate student that allowed

me to understand the importance of national identity, collective community engagement, and liberation in psychological contexts. Shortly after graduating with my master’s degree and being accepted into a clinical psychology doctorate, I still found myself reading the work of Palestinian scholars in Palestine who have contributed to a decolonized psychology.

I was grateful to cross paths with Dr. Hana Masud, who is a community psychologist and revolutionary feminist scholar in the U.S. Having taught a community psychology course, she often reminded me that we’re doing this work for Palestine and that despite the deeply rooted colonial challenges of doctoral training in the diaspora, this program is merely a checkpoint to pass. She continually reminded me to be unafraid, to take up space, and to speak up in my spaces. Shortly after her radical pedagogy in this course, we learned about the passing of Dr. Ibrahim Makkawi. I recently learned that he was an important figure in her life at Birzeit University, as a former professor, mentor, friend, and chosen family to her. It did not take much time to reflect more intentionally on Makkawi’s work, and truly see the impact he had on Masud like the reflection of a heart in the mirror. Makkawi’s mentorship, research, and legacy are deeply rooted into Hana’s praxis in community psychology as a decolonizer, anti-colonial educator, and liberation fighter for Palestine in exile.

I recollect Hana sharing heartfelt reflections with me about Dr. Makkawi’s unshakeable solidarity with female students regarding the complexities he knew women faced due to patriarchal systems. With an open heart, she shared with me how he dedicated his life to his two children, and as a single father, he wholeheartedly felt with women and the daily struggles they face. In deep conversation, we reflected on revolutionaries in our field and beyond, such as Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmoud Darwish, Edward Said, etc. We began to talk

about the impact of these revolutionaries to society and questioned the impact of revolutionary souls such as Makkawi who have impacted many hearts both locally and internationally. Masud continued to share that the revolutionary voices that our society places on a pedestal are sometimes inaccessible, however, Dr. Makkawi made himself accessible and available to students. Hana recollected sitting and having coffee with him, and that's the kind of revolutionary scholar that society doesn't often hear about. Makkawi made significant contributions to global community psychology, however, he still made the time to be there for students, to listen to students, and embodied the humility that transcends titles and pedestals that come from being a prestigious academic.

Dr. Ibrahim Makkawi's scholarship and humanistic approaches decolonized psychology for students in Palestine and in the diaspora. Franz Fanon, another important figure in decolonial liberation psychology stated, "an authentic national liberation exists only in the precise degree to which the individual has irreversibly begun his own liberation." Dr. Ibrahim Makkawi challenged colonialism with his own pen, a pen that will never run out of ink. How powerful it is to learn about his work in the diaspora oceans away from home. How powerful it is to witness his scholarship embedded in the decolonial praxis of those who he taught such as Dr. Masud. As a clinical psychologist in training, I am doing this work for Palestine, for our people, for our children, focusing on our livability and future. From Dr. Ibrahim Makkawi to Dr. Hana Masud, this work is because of all radicals who remind us that we are a family of the (watan/وطن) meaning homeland. Dr. Masud's words engrained in my heart; "we have become a family of radical Palestinian fighters, living in a village together, a village that exists in the future, our descendants will surely run into us in the streets." In honor and celebration of Dr.

Makkawi's radical scholarship, life, and soul – we will continue to build for our homeland, for our villages, for our people, and for our future in Palestine and beyond borders. In his work, there is a revolution towards global liberation that we have a duty to carry on – with steadfast radical love.

Understanding Activism's Roots in Decolonial Framework

If we study any socio-political experience regardless of its size and impact, we find individuals who were instrumental in steering social change and empowerment, and they don't necessarily have to engage in actions on the ground. I was an active member of a social-cultural movement led by graduate students, and not many people knew that Dr. Ibrahim Makkawi was one of our emergent strategists and mentors. In 2014, I co-founded the grassroots collective based in Ramallah city, in the occupied territories of the West Bank. Our purpose was generating and promoting anticolonial practices, embodying democracy, and centering the people on the margins, especially women. Ibrahim has always emphasized the need to learn from our own experience and not abandon the fight against politicians but be critical to not replicate their dominant structures.

Guided by Fanon's teachings on accompaniment and a reorientation of subjectivity "what we want is to walk in the company of man, every man, night and day, for all times". He argued for a new start, a new beginning, and never adopted old tools in the process of creating new settings and structures, in pedagogical responses to coloniality of body, mind, and spirit. Before his death, Fanon wrote that "we need a model, schemas, and examples" different from the ones we have inherited from Europe and America, models that will allow us to join in "projects and collaboration with others on tasks that strengthen man's totality".

Our actions were guided by these dialectical and dialogical interactions to develop a praxis where it does not entertain the settler's future. It does not re-center racism. Our work cannot graft onto pre-existing discourses and frameworks, even if they are critical and justice-oriented frameworks.

Harvesting New Seeds of Decolonial Justice

At the beginning of establishing our group, we wanted to counter the “cultural invasion” (Freire, 2000) of internal colonialism, in the community organizing and mobilizing, that involves modes of control, silencing, and minoritization of women. Ibrahim offered us an analysis of decoloniality, identifying and clarifying the different layers, moments, and areas involved in our production of liberated spaces and relationalities. In one of our conversations, he pointed out the need to observe the cultivation of decolonial thought, in contexts where coloniality can perpetuate itself through multiple forms of deceptions and confusion. Makkawi questioned the role of women in our collective, and how women should have not only equal opportunities to the opposition, but rather a significant role in our liberation due to their historical exclusion in society.

Throughout his mentoring, Makkawi modeled the need to shed off the professionalized role of expertism, and the need to deviate from our mainstream pathways to walk with those on the margins, to be with them, and be present on our journey as we construct and generate liberating knowledge. This was a prime example of how Dr. Ibrahim Makkawi was invisible to the grassroots collective in body, but his decolonial analyses represented a crucial step in our plans for a better future. Despite his bottomless service to the academy, organizing conferences, panels, and publications, he was committed to push us forward, protecting our rights to create our

praxis, and continued to support our different modes of knowledge production.

سلام لروحك ايها المعلم

Concluding Remarks

To shift away from the coloniality of being, and established meanings of sensing, feeling, and rejection of modern/colonial human experiences requires different containers. Ibrahim created containers grounded in love and understanding, as key elements of a decolonial attitude designed to generate authentic forms of interpretation and action. According to Adrienne Maree Brown; “when we are engaged in acts of love, we humans are at our best and most resilient, the kind of love that makes us better people, the love of community that makes us work tirelessly with broken hearts.” Dr. Makkawi walked, talked, and engaged in radical pedagogy built on the foundations of love.

In spite of the profound wound he carried after losing his wife to cancer, and raising his kids alone as a single father, he continued to navigate all of his spaces with radical love towards everyone he encountered. These expressions of love in teaching and mentoring were seen as enactments of resistance, and affirmations of decolonial attitudes. His practices had a profound impact on his students, and the community psychologist movement he started in Palestine. The strength of his movement is in the strength of our collective relationships, which can only be measured by their depth. We have emerged as questioners, writers, and thinkers, from the wisdom that he has passed down to all of us. Through our tribute, we come together to uplift the story of Dr. Ibrahim Makkawi that has no ending in our hearts. In our collectiveness, we are creating possibilities of return, journeying back home together, as we envision a future of liberation and wholeness. In his passing,

we center our grief and gratitude by honoring our interconnectedness through our radical and complex vulnerability of weeping, navigating our feelings, and further seeking a road of continued love and liberation from these very feelings. The roadmap that Dr. Makkawi's imprint left on us is one that allows us to continue working towards growth and commitment to live, honor, and continue his legacy beyond each border on the map drawn to separate us.

Rest in 'Noor' (Light), Ibrahim

"O Allah, O mother earth, O ancestors, place light in his heart, and on his words light, and in my grave light, above him light, and below him light, and to his right light, and to his left light, and before him light and behind him light. Place in his soul light. Magnify for him light. Make him light, and make him light. O Allah, O mother earth, O ancestors grant light in his grave and in his bones.

Grant him Noor upon Noor

NOTES

- [1] According to his comrade and student in Ben-Gurion University back then, Suhail Saleibi.
- [2] Rohana, N. & Sbbagh-Khoury, A. (2018) "The Palestinian is Israel: Reading in history, politics and society". Mada al-Carmel, Vol. 2 P-p 149-174.
- [3] Makkawi, Ibraheem. "The discourse of the defeat phase has reached its own end" January 2004, ALjeel Aljadeed (The new Generation), Vol. 10 p 8-9. (Arabic)
- [4] Hijazi, M. (1985). Social Retardation: Introduction to the Psychology of the Oppressed. The Arab cultural center. Beirut, Lebanon

[5] مكاوي، إبراهيم. "مواقف في النقاش مع الفكر الذي استدخال الهزيمة". مجلة إنتلجنسيا الرقمية. تم استرجاعه شباط 2016

[6] Ibraheem, Makkawi. "Academic Boycott in the context of resisting normalization with the Zionist entity" August 18, 2004 (Arabic)

[7] Makkawi, Ibraheem. "Cooperative learning is small groups". ALjeel Aljadeed, issue 13. May 2003, P 50-52. (Arabic)

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[8] Nowell, Branda; Boyd, Neil, "Viewing Community as Responsibility as well as Resource: Deconstructing the Theoretical Roots of Psychological Sense of Community," Journal of Community Psychology 38, no. 7 (September 2010), 828-841.

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