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[untitled]

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Panel: Islam and We

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Zahiye Kundus (Israel/Palestine)

My first time in an Arab city, Ram-Allah. Everything in Arabic (Amazing!! I shouted). A friend took me and another friend (whom he was in love with), to see a Marxist panel. The lecturer was a man who spent twenty years in Israel's prisons. He tried to explain the theory of the uncertainty in life. After he finished, he asked if there was someone who wanted to ask a question, or open the panel. No one raised a hand. I wanted to save us from the silence, so I raised my hand confidently. My friend elbowed me. She knew what I was going to ask, and was embarrassed. I kept it up. "Sir, how do you think we as human beings can live without a base, the base of the ultimate truth? I know about the uncertainty of life, but that doesn't mean that life doesn't have a source. Otherwise, how could we go on without the first step?"

All the hands were raised suddenly. One after the other tried to explain to the new girl who was in charge. Economic, social, linguistic, all the explanations you could ask for were given. I didn't understand anything from what they said and kept silent during in the next ten panels. I believed in God, I just didn't have the means to defend my belief rationally. I still believe, but I stopped trying to find any answers. I am just a believer.

Unlike with the Palestinian *nakhba* (the Arabic name of the Palestinians' catastrophe), the scholars know "exactly" when and why the Islamic empire fell, basically because the fall was gradual and somehow predictable. But we are far away from understanding the Palestinian *nakhba*. We have just started gathering our pieces, but the problem is that some of these pieces have been lost forever. The first age of the *nakhba* has passed, and the few people from that time who are still alive I am not able to reach. While most of my city's refugees are in the Gaza Strip, I am a Palestinian who lives in the Israeli territories. (According to Israeli law, Israelis are forbidden from entering the Palestinian's territories, and in this case I am Israeli.)

Although we have our differences, we Palestinians, Arabs and citizens of Islamic countries are in the position of post-traumatic nations. We, the people, still cannot believe in the fall. Why? Maybe we don't want to know the answer to the question: who will take responsibility? And then what?

This situation of misunderstanding keeps us surrounded by fantasy. Failure after failure in the twentieth century wars keeps us in certain ways looking for the next Gamal Abd El-Nasser (the Egyptian leader who carried the Arab flag in the fifties and sixties), and for Muhammad, the last prophet. This belief in one savior doesn't allow us to search for the collective power, the power within the people.

I call this situation "the romance of the proud victim:" We were so proud of our history until it became our ghost; we are haunted by our splendid past. In time we will take our victim's *jalabiya* off, and stop looking for reasons in superstitions. Then we will be able to raise our heads again.

God said clearly: I will not change you, until you have changed; God said clearly: you act first, and then I'll support you. Don't wait for God, God is waiting for you.

Our intellectuals, all over, Palestinian (both sides, in Israel and Palestine), Arab and Moslem, are either in prisons or abroad. The dictatorships all over put all their effort into keeping the people silent and hungry: silence which one day will turn into a bombing of the establishment.