

Time for Losers

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What is this time, *al-zman*? Its predicament is not just war, but defeat – of hopes, promises, visions. With every new proclaimed victory, defeat increasingly takes shape no longer as an event but as a regime of time.

One of the great sources of hope, a powerful generator of utopian illusions, what we call religion, has been, once again – perhaps more than ever before – largely occupied by imperial powers. Resistance itself was appropriated. The war between the Islamic Republic and a coalition of the Jewish State with the Evangelical-driven empire has a scent of nuclear doom.

One instinctive response is a return to the secular, reproducing the critique of communitarian religion and political messianism. This belief in the secular, however, has been shown to be the credo of modern religion. God bless Habermas.

To overcome tradition we must become it. Let's reoccupy hope. There's a struggle to wage not only over natural resources, but over the textual as well. There is a cause of hermeneutic ecology. We can now use political theologies of anti-oppression, social justice, cohabitation, of what used to be called the left.

In the face of the Israel-Iran war, this is the calling of a Jewish-Islamic agonistic thought. What it seeks most urgently is a subtle theory of messianic defeat.

Disappointment

Messianism of defeat, of disappointment: This is one possible title for what the French philosopher Daniel Bensaïd described in 2004 as [*Une lente impatience*](#), a slow or patient impatience (English: [*An Impatient Life*](#)). Bensaïd shaped his thought in that book as a narrative, a personal story, of himself and the 1968 generation, which is the immediate history of our time. Bensaïd's generation did not speak theology but historical materialism. In his tale, messianism dawned on Marxist thought when the revolution was disappointed, dematerialized by history.

Scripture was there all along, he tells. His narrative often makes biblical allusions, as if without them the events would not be completely intelligible, or they would not really be events. 1968 was disappointed to the point of disappearance: the year is infinitely more well known than what actually happened, and the prevalent version is that nothing actually did. Yet, in Bensaïd's memory, May 1968 was the battle for the Promised Land: "We marched beneath the walls at Renault-Billancourt factory as if they would crumble, like the walls of Jericho, at the sound of our hoarse megaphones."

The story is about the defeat. As Bensaïd repeatedly notes, the '68 revolutionaries, like Moses, never entered Canaan. The disappointment is a drama of multiple acts. There's the electoral failure of 1974, for instance. But the real demise takes place in the late 1970s. The year of the final destruction is 1979, as information about the horrors of China's Cultural Revolution and Cambodia's genocide reach Western media and the Islamic Revolution breaks in Iran, a revolution to religion.

The revolutionary idea implodes from within. Bensaïd quotes Foucault: "Is it so desirable, this revolution?" That same year the Revolutionary Communist League stopped publishing its daily, *Rouge*, coedited by Bensaïd. "Death in the soul" is what he felt. In the 1980s the revolution's death spreads through neoliberal reforms worldwide; in 1989 it erased the Soviets and in 1991 it invaded the Gulf.

Subtleties of Messianic Reason

Death opens the door for the messiah. "Faced with the collapse of horizons of expectation, we needed an aleatory materialism, allied with the subtleties of messianic reason." Messianism is for losers, for failed wannabes, proven wrong by history. For those who nonetheless still believe, the only salvation lies beyond historical reason, in another rationality, which proves the losers right in being wrong. Restoration begins with an epistemological search for intelligibility beyond historical materialism, for lucidity prior to Enlightenment. It requires "ressourcement."

The source Bensaïd goes back to in the 1980s is Jewish mysticism: Kabbalah. More precisely, he goes back to the reception of Kabbalistic ideas in German Jewish thought, where traditional Jewish knowledge was translated into the language of Enlightenment. He mentions Scholem, but also Fritz Mauthner, Gustav Landauer, Rosenzweig, Bloch, Lukacs, Tucholsky. His primary reference is Benjamin's *On the Concept of History*, the epistle of the dying prophet to the defeated left.

The core insight that Bensaïd finds in Benjamin: if history is written by the powerful, messianism offers no alternative history, but an alternative to history, a different temporality. History valorizes existence as continuity, things remaining as they are, being as inertia or passivity. In contrast, messianic time is not duration but interruption. Messianic existence is not passive but impatient; it is action, revolution. From the perspective of history, messianism exists not as being but as nonbeing, not as real but as – Derrida indicated this word in Marx, Bensaïd in Heine – *spectral*. From the perspective of messianic temporality, only losers are right.

Moses and Marx

Restoring begins by re-storying, by retelling the past so as to redeem those who lost. Bensaïd retells 1968 by reframing communism not as material history but as a messianic happening. The point of departure is the first prophecy. The communist Moses is Marx. Bensaïd reads *The Capital* as the Old Testament, the revelation of creation: “At the beginning was the commodity.”

Following a central motive in 20th-century Jewish thought, Bensaïd understands the story of creation, both by Moses and by Marx, and by all their later prophets and messiahs, as affirming not the eternal order of the world, but in contrast the possibility of reshaping. Mosaism and Marxism are not religions but – a word dear to Bensaïd – *heresies*, they are not conservative, but impatient. Just as Moses’s Torah mobilized a popular liberation movement, Lenin translated Marx’s revelation to revolution.

What is the story? What is the great threat to the prophetic revolution? It is nothing outside of itself. Here lies the subtlety. The end of becoming is being, and the death of the revolution is its institution. The messianic movement, resisting historical mechanism, in itself becomes history and so generates its own enemy: counterrevolution.

After revelation, the heavy desert heat – *Thermidor* – sets again, and the fire of Sinai rematerializes as a mountain. The revolution's demise is its own historical success: it becomes a state and turns against itself. Moses's liberation movement became the Kingdom of Judea. Communism turned into the Stalinist Empire. The state puts heresy to sleep, retransforms critique into dogmatic slumber and impatience to passivity. In kabbalistic terms, the vital light gets buried in the shell, in the *qelippah*.

Redemption: Mao and Paul

The main dilemma of any messianic movement, the central challenge of messianic reason, is how to respond to the necessary transformation of interruption to history, of revolution to state, of Marxism to Stalinism. The question is how to counter the counterrevolution, how to end it, or – as the question often arises in history – how to interpret and respond to its end. This is the dilemma of the year 70 CE, which brought the demise of Jerusalem, and of the year 1968, which portended the end of the USSR.

Bensaïd's analyses reveal two main possible responses, based on two different interpretations, two narratives about the end of the counterrevolutionary state. The first response interprets the fall of the messianic state as the end of history.

It tells it as an event of redemption, of a messianic coming that restores the purity of creation before or beyond history. This is how Bensaïd understands the Maoist end of Stalinism. Mao's cultural revolution countered the institutionalization of communism with the "fetishism of the event without historicity," seeking to generate "absolutely new humanity." If Stalin petrified Marxism in pure passivity, Mao dissolved it in pure impatience.

In post-1968 France, Bensaïd attributes the Maoist position to Alain Badiou, who in a "theological inversion" withdrew revolutionary action from history and invested it in a miracle-like event "beyond all calculation." Bensaïd criticizes that this event-theology divests history from political meaning and so paradoxically acknowledges the historical right of the empire. Bensaïd does not mention Badiou's [Paul](#), but his critique echoes criticism common among French Jewish thinkers (such as [Levinas or Benny Levy](#)) against gnostic Christianity that banishes God from the world and delivers history to the hands of Rome.

Destruction: Trotsky and the Old Jews

The second response to the fall of the messianic state – Judean or Soviet – does not interpret it as the redemptive end of history. On the contrary, it tells the story of destruction, which opens the history of messianic action as counter-statist existence, as *galut*. The second response to the counterrevolutionary empire does not depart from history, but reconfigures messianism as resistance to power, as a discontinuous tradition of interruptions, a holy history of losers. Against pure passivity and pure impatience, Bensaïd posits a messianic temporality of "patient impatience."

He traces this messianic tradition back to the Old Testament, invoking Moses, who “never reached Canaan,” and Jeremiah, the prophet of the first exile in Babylonia, who announced that “it will be long.” Patient impatience is historical messianic agency in the form of *galut*. Bensaïd’s reading of scriptural tradition is however shaped not by Babylonian Judeans. Linking messianic patience to “the *Bilderverbot* of the old Jews,” he refers not to the Talmud Bavli but to German Jewish thought.

Among the prophets of Marxism, in contrast to both Stalin’s counterrevolution and Mao’s ultimate revolution, Bensaïd discerns patient impatience in Trotsky’s permanent revolution. He himself became a messiah of post-1968 Trotskyism, carrying on political action in the Revolutionary Communist League and the Fourth International. The Trotskyists (note how the German *trotz*-kysts means ‘stiff-necked people’), who in general refrained from recruiting, are compared by Bensaïd (also commenting on Jewish overrepresentation in Trotskyist organizations) to “a ‘chosen people’ with little inclination to proselytism.”

Non-Jewish Jew

Bensaïd’s narrative dives deeper. Moses and Marx do not just develop structurally analogous messianic projects. They belong to the same revolution. This intertwinement or genealogy is crucial for understanding the post-1968 era to the present moment not only through the dialectics of Marxist positions, but through the more complex articulation of leftist and Jewish positionalities, in which Bensaïd situates himself.

The key lies in the way that Bensaïd understands the concrete historical deployment of Jewish messianism as “patient impatience,” namely his concept of galut. His inspiration is kabbalistic, with German Jewish mediation. He offers no explicit exposition, but seems to draw on the Lurianic-Hassidic notion of redemptive action in the world as “descent” into the *qelippa*, the “shell,” in order to release or “elevate” the sparks of light trapped in it. Messianic agency does not turn away from the sinful world to a purified existence. On the contrary, the righteous must leave the holy land and work in exile. Galut is impatience submerged in patience.

The messianic militant must therefore turn their back on their own community. For Bensaïd, the seminal Mosaic gesture, the corner stone of Jewish tradition, is heresy. The protagonists of his galut history are Jewish heretics, such as Sabbatai Zevi and Jacob Frank. The galut Jew, the authentic one, is accordingly – Bensaïd quotes Isaac Deutscher – the non-Jewish Jew.

This conception harks back to theo-political responses to unprecedented phenomena of Jewish assimilation in modern non-Jewish societies, first as conversos in the Iberian church and later as citizens in secular European states. It interprets assimilation not as the end of Jewish galut. On the contrary, assimilation enhanced galut, by erasing not only Jewish life but the Jewish mind of the conversos, thereby exiling their Jewishness, exiling them as Jews into the unconscious, into spectral nonbeing. Upon entering modernity, messianic Jewish militants do not entirely vanish, they continue to exist as secret, dormant agents, unbeknownst even to themselves.

It is as such a state of dormancy that Bensaïd portrays his own non-Jewish Jewish childhood, hanging out in his father’s bistro in Toulouse, where on

Monday mornings “the floor would be scattered with shells and lupin pods, looking like the aftermath of a battle or the qelippot of the Kabbalah.”

Marranism as Anti-Anti-Semitism

The wake-up call comes from no transcendence, it is immanent. The qelippot being qelippot, goodness turned evil, Marx turned Stalin, the revolutionaries, even dormant, find no peace in the world. Their passivity, within the existing order of things, within the state, turns against them, necessarily becoming suffering, passion. The assimilated, non-Jewish Jews are called back to their Jewishness by persecutions, by the call of anti-Semitism, just like Bensaïd and his father before him. Anti-Semitism rejudaizes conversos into Marranos, who for Bensaïd are the paradigmatic messianic Jews: “The Marrano is both patient and impatient. Slowly. He bets on the long run.”

The Marranos, disillusioned conversos, have no positive Judaism, no tradition, no knowledge, no identity. Their Jewishness emerges as the negation of their non-Jewish identity, which is their only identity, such that for them being Jewish means having no identity. Marrano Jewishness draws its meaning from its response to anti-Jewish hatred. Bensaïd describes his father as Jewish “by defiance.” Marranism is the modern regeneration of Judaism through the power of anti-anti-Semitism.

The multiple positionalities of modern Jewishness, in the sense of Jewish existence that assimilated into the modern state, may be mapped based on divergent anti-anti-Semitic attitudes. For the post-Holocaust generation, [Jean-Paul Sartre](#) distinguished two basic attitudes. One kind of Jewishness is based

on utter denial of the anti-Semitic call. This Jewish position responds to anti-Semitism by denying its Jewishness and so generates a self-denying, or *inauthentic* Jewish consciousness. In contrast, *authentic* Jewishness internalizes the anti-Semitic designation and takes a Jewish stance against anti-Semitism.

For Sartre in 1945, it was obvious that the Jewish fight against anti-Semitism was allied with the fight against all racism. Authentic Jews were obviously leftist and Zionism represented a form of Communism – it was the one and same messianism.

Post-1968 Decision

This alliance, if there ever in fact was one, lost its obviousness in 1967-1968. Marxism and Zionism fell ontically apart: while the Communist State was fading into nonbeing, the Jewish State emerged as the triumph of military power in history. This was a moment of crisis and split within the Jewish left, a moment of decision, which brought to the surface inner tensions of modern Jewishness and determined the different directions for its development to this day.

These directions can be differentiated by using Bensaïd's dialectics of messianic reason. For the Stalinist approach, which invested its redemptive action in state power, the USSR was replaced by the State of Israel. This attitude can be observed in Sartre himself, but it generated French Jewish positions in thinkers such as [Emmanuel Levinas](#) and the post-1968 "nouveaux philosophes" such as Alain Finkielkraut and Bernard-Henri Lévy. In contrast, the Maoists, such as Benny Lévy, turned away from secular politics and proclaimed a return to original Jewish orthodoxy, beyond state and history. Bensaïd's insight about the

counterrevolutionary complicity of Stalinism and Maoism may help understand how in 2000 Benny Lévy, Alain Finkielkraut and Bernard-Henri Lévy cofounded in Jerusalem the *Institut d'études lévinassiennes*.

The year 2023 made visible this complicity – and along it the need for an alternative, a third post-1968 Jewish position. In contrast to the alliance of Stalinist history and Maoist posthistory, of Rome and Church, Jewish State and Jewish Community, Bensaïd offers the Trotskyist messianicity of Jewish heresy. This kind of Marranism does not counter anti-Semitism through the foundation of positive Jewish identity, statist or metaphysical. Rather, it performs Jewishness as the resistance to all identity, as the foundation of universalism.

Bensaïd follows [Yirmiyahu Yovel](#) in identifying Spinoza as the paradigmatic figure for this performance, who produced the basis of modern subjectivity. He concurs with Derrida in indicating this Marrano logics in Marx's internationalism, reading Communism as the late-modern Jewish performance of Mosaic messianism. Other figures dear to Bensaïd are Arendt's conscious pariahs – Heinrich Heine and Bernard Lazare.

However, in the post-1967/8 era Trotskyist messianism required, to counter the new Israel-related Stalinist-Maoist counterrevolution, a new kind of Jewish heresy: Jewish anti-Zionism. This messianic agency consists in solidarity not with the victors of history, not with the Jewish State, but with the losers, the victims of Jewish state power: the Palestinians. Bensaïd tells that the first time he demonstrated as a Jew was in the 1982 protests against Israel after the Sabra and Shatila massacres, and again during the Second Intifada in 2000, in a group that included other French Marranos such as Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Gisèle Halimi and Michael Löwy.

If we follow the “subtleties of messianic reason” in Bensaïd’s narrative, the most authentic post-1967/8 embodiment of messianism, both Mosaic and Marxist, in its Trotskyist-Jewish form, namely as patient impatience, that is as militant *galut*, is the anti-Zionist Jewish-Arab organization that operated in the State of Israel itself, *Matzpen*. Applying Benjamin’s messianic temporality, we have today no difficulty agreeing with Bensaïd that the activists for Jewish-Arab internationalism have all along been right, since they have never been historically so clearly wrong.

The Arab Revelation

How does the Jewish-Arab cause look from a Palestinian perspective? In 1971 Leila S. Kadi published in the series of the Palestine Liberation Organization’s Research Center in Beirut a book in Arabic on the organization *Matzpen*. The militant intellectual Ghassan Kanafani opened his preface by writing that emergence of this group is “one of the most historically significant events to occur in Israel since its establishment.”

He also formulated critique, pointing out that the group had no concrete action plan, avoided solidarity in the armed struggle and remained a small circle of visionaries rather than a real political movement. The fundamental problem, however, was *Matzpen*’s insistence on analyzing the situation as a bi-national conflict between two nations, one Arab and the other Israeli or Hebrew, avoiding asking the basic questions: “Who is a Jew? Who is a Zionist? Who is an Israeli? And who is a Palestinian?”

Who, indeed, is a Palestinian? Kanafani's writings open perspectives on the Palestinian as a key figure in the contemporary moment of the messianic horizon, which suggest something like Palestinianism as a current form not only of Marxism but of Mosaism. At the present time, Palestine has become central for theo-political visions. For the left, it emerged as the major symbol of defeat in the history of anti-colonial struggle. The weak messianic power in its contemporary spectrality, in its current state of non-being, is Palestinian.

Defeat, catastrophe, *Nakba*, has been the seminal revelation generative of the Palestinian subjectivity. The ideology, the prophecy, the Torah given to the Palestinians in this negative revelation was itself negative, an anti-Torah, that is Zionism, which Kanafani had started studying in his earlier years at the University of Damascus. Prior to being the Jewish state, he understood, Zionism was "literature," a form of Jewish thought, a new iteration of Israel.

Like Palestinians, Zionist consciousness too was called to life by hostility, that is by anti-Jewish racism. Similarly to Bensaïd, Kanafani also defined Zionism as a reactionary response to anti-Semitism: a response to oppression that reproduces oppression. However, whereas Bensaïd identified Zionist reaction as turning Jewish exile into statehood, Kanafani saw how in colonizing Palestine, Zionism converted anti-anti-Semitism into anti-Arab racism. Like Bensaïd's Marrano, and all victims of European racism, Palestinian subjectivity too was awoken by oppression. It was called to nationhood by negative election.

The chosen have their own choice to make. Sartre traced the basic choice open for Jews who were negatively elected by anti-Semitic racism. It also applies to the Arab victims of anti-anti-Semitic, Zionist racism. First, they can choose to deny the call, reject the anti-revelation, refuse to assume the role of the

defeated. In one of Kanafani's first short stories, "Letter from Gaza," written in 1956 after Israel heavily bombarded Gaza's city center, a young man writes to his friend: "I was going to leave this Gaza behind me and go to California where I would live for myself, my own self which had suffered so long. I hated Gaza and its inhabitants...I would liberate myself..., there in green California, far from the reek of defeat which for seven years had filled my nostrils...I must flee!"

Yet, after visiting his thirteen-year-old niece who lost her leg in the bombing, Kanafani's protagonist decides "to learn from Nadia's leg, amputated from the top of the thigh, what life is and what existence is worth." He does not reject the call but answers it as a new subject, as an anti-colonial Arab militant: "This Gaza in which we had lived and with whose good people we had spent seven years of defeat was something new. It seemed to me just a beginning...I imagined that the main street that I walked along on the way back home was only the beginning of a long, long road leading to Safad. Everything in this Gaza throbbed with sadness which was not confined to weeping. It was a challenge: more than that it was something like reclamation of the amputated leg!"

The Palestinian Cause

In the 1950s, a young Kanafani joined the Arab Peoplehood Movement (حركة القوميين العرب) that engaged in the pan-Arabic anti-colonial struggle announced by Nasser's revolution. This was a slave revolt led by Egypt. The ambiguity of messianic statehood, turning revolution to its contrary, as it did in Stalinism, operated in Nasserism as well. The moment of this truth arrived shortly before

1968, with the defeat of the 1967 war that signified the collapse of the Arab Kingdom.

Kanafani was the thinker of the '67 defeat, which he considered to be worse than the demise of 1948. History failed the Arab revolution. It now needed "subtleties of messianic reason." Kanafani found them in Mao's dialectics. The revolution needed to face the enemy from within, that is the counterrevolutionary threat posed by its own being. The critical prophet of "Zionist literature" was now seeing the reaction within Arab peoplehood itself — what may be called Arab Zionism.

Kanafani offered an anti-racist understanding of Zionist racism, not as specific to Judaism, but as the ideological instrument of imperialism. In a study he wrote just before his assassination by the Mossad in 1972, he traced back the 1967 defeat not to the battle against Israel in 1948, but to "The 1936-39 Revolt in Palestine" against the British Empire. Zionism was just one instrument of the empire, next to others, Arab ones, such as feudal local leaders and reactionary Arab states.

1967 marked the end of pan-Arab rejection of the Zionist state and the beginning of Arab-Israeli alliance – "peace" – against anti-imperialist struggle. Kanafani's last famous novella, "Returning to Haifa," features, as the embodied catastrophe, a sort of anti-messiah, an abandoned Arab baby raised by Holocaust survivors to become an Israeli soldier, Khaldun, "the everlasting," transformed into Dov, "bear." Anti-racism does not pass in Arab genes. Arabism was mirroring Zionism mirroring anti-Semitism.

It is the Arab-turned-Zionist who, in Kanafani's novella, by demonstrating that racism is not racial, at the same time paradoxically speaks out the anti-racist,

revolutionary revelation: “Man is a cause, *qadiyya*.” This is the Torah that constitutes the anti-imperialist Arab struggle, whose chosen people are called after the defeated world, the lost land, the spectral messianic non-being — Palestinians. After Judea, Israel, Nazareth and Zion, the same place sends its impatience now under the name Palestine.

As post-destruction, post-traumatic agency, of ongoing oppression, the Palestinian body in Kanafani’s writings is, like Nadia’s leg, amputated, shattered. One deep rupture, splitting Kanafani’s own thinking and acting, runs between exilic and occupied Palestinians. The two distinct subjectivities generate two different forms of struggle, which Kanafani analyzed in his 1966 study on “Resistance Literature in Occupied Palestine, 1948-1966.” The difference is comparable to Bensaïd’s distinction between Maoist and Trotskyist responses to the historical defeat of Marxist messianism.

Palestinian literature in exile, Kanafani thought, tended to “tears, lamentations, or despair.” Against this melancholic tendency, his own exilic literary project sought to turn the total loss of reality into a vision of radical liberation through revolutionary redemption, inspired by Mao and Ho Chi Minh. Exile was to be resurrected as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Resistance Literature in Occupied Palestine, in contrast, was still in Palestine. It struggled first and foremost for staying. Its impatience was an exercise of endurance, of patience. The primary challenge Palestinians under occupation were facing was not melancholic denial of reality, but the acceptance of it. Against this threat, Kanafani indicated, the struggle of occupied Palestinian literature consisted in refusing to accept reality as it is, by regenerating spectrality within history – that is, in one word, resistance.

Under the conditions of Israeli occupation, which heavily censored publication, the very existence of Palestinian literature, that is in Kanafani's sense, essentially the outspoken spirit of struggle, was the core act of resistance. This condition defined the literary form, necessarily unpublished, unwritten, immediate. In Occupied Palestine, resistance came into being on "the lips of the people." Under occupation Palestine lives on in popular poetry, which gives life to all struggle: "If liberation springs from the barrel of a gun then the gun itself springs from a desire for liberation, and desire for liberation is but the natural, logical, and inevitable result of resistance in the broadest sense: refusal and firm adherence to roots and positions."

Agonistic Thought, Jewish-Islamic

In the contemporary constellation of the Mosaist movement, Israel has become another name for the inversion of liberation struggle into an oppressive state, another metonymy for counterrevolution. In contrast, Palestine emerges as the spectral site of counterhistorical messianism, as the land of galut, which means resistance or more precisely, in the face of destruction, erasure and genocide — the long impatient patience of withstanding, *sumud*.

The historical form of Mosaism which is most immediately related to Palestinianism is neither Jewish nor Christian but Islamic. There is here a set of questions. When we consider the shift of liberation movements from historical materialism to messianic reason we must reflect on the ascendance of Islam as the anti-colonial religion. This requires the full scale of dialectic subtlety. Bensaïd followed Foucault in pointing out what to him seemed like the oxymoron of the Islamic Revolution. We need to think more carefully of the

counterrevolutionary, Stalinist dynamics at work in the emergence of the postcolonial Islamic Republic of Iran, in analogy and in direct conversation with the Jewish State of Israel.

We might be witnessing the end of these messianic kingdoms, too – different forms of ending. What are the possible responses to this complex and ongoing event of demise? Are there any other imaginable Islamic-Jewish analogies and conversations, which point beyond destruction, beyond militarized states, beyond imperialism, racism and racist anti-racism? Are there any real or virtual sites for such agonistic thinking to emerge, any available, perhaps still covered sources?

Hidden water takes digging – sometimes stomping. When Bensaïd is digging Jewish sources for his Trotskyist-Benjaminian-Kabbalistic notion of patient impatience, one of the Mosaic texts that he refers to is the Book of Job. “In the Book of Job, the word *sabreen* refers to ‘those who have patience’,” he writes about his ‘68 generation. “We too have had to learn this biblical patience, this old Jewish patience going back more than five thousand years, and transformed today into the patience and endurance of the Palestinians.”

But the word *sabreen* does not appear in the Book of Job, it is not Hebrew, but Arabic. It’s unclear why Bensaïd mentions it here, and what book exactly he was reading, what revelation. Of Algerian descent, Arabic was not foreign to him. “The exotic ‘Ben’ —,” he writes about his last name, “meaning ‘son’ in both Hebrew and Arabic — often led to my being taken for an Arab.”

There is one Arab prophecy that describes Job as a model of patience, using the very same lexical root of *sabreen*. Sura Sad, the 38th of the Quran, dated by tradition to Muhammad’s rejection by his own tribe, talks, among others, about

the trials of earlier prophets, such as Job. From the “hardship and torment,” from his demise, Job calls his God, and God responds, like he responded in the desert to Moses: “Stomp your foot: here is a cool spring for washing and drinking.” It is perhaps this fresh water in the midst of Thermidor that Bensaïd was imagining, and that we may still imagine now, life in the midst of dying, granted to Job because “We truly found him patient.”