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WHEN HAMLET MEETS ROMEO in PALESTINE: READING ISABELLA HAMMAD'S *ENTER GHOST*¹

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Abstract

In 2019, British-Palestinian author Isabella Hammad gained attention with her debut novel *The Parisian*, followed by *Enter Ghost* (April 2023), which earned her a place on the Granta Best of Young British Novelists list. Published months before the October 7, 2023 outbreak of conflict, *Enter Ghost* has drawn heightened interest as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dominates global discourse. The novel's protagonist, Sonia, who comes from a Christian Palestinian family, seeks refuge in Haifa amid personal and collective crises. Through the lens of *Hamlet*, characters confront Palestinian history and contemporary struggles under Israeli control, exploring group dynamics and individual experiences. Hammad's work highlights the significance of the Arabic staging of Shakespeare within occupied territories. Drawing on postcolonial theory, this paper examines how *Enter Ghost* interrogates the Palestinian question, negotiating cultural resistance, political tensions, and historical trauma, and how the reimagining of *Hamlet* contributes to the construction of Palestinian narrative and acts of literary resistance.

Keywords: Isabella Hammad, *Enter Ghost*, Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Palestinian Question, Postcolonial Theory.

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Hamlet ve Romeo Filistin’de Karşılaştığında: Isabella Hammad’ın *Enter Ghost* Romanını Okumak

Öz

2019 yılında, Filistin asıllı Britanyalı yazar Isabella Hammad, ilk romanı *The Parisian* ile dikkatleri üzerine çekti ve daha sonra yayımlanan *Enter Ghost* (Nisan 2023) ile de Granta’nın “En İyi Genç Britanyalı Romancılar” listesinde yer almayı başardı. Filistin’de 7 Ekim 2023’te patlak veren çatışmadan birkaç ay önce yayımlanan *Enter Ghost*, İsrail-Filistin çatışmasının küresel tartışmalarda merkezi bir rol üstlenmesiyle birlikte daha büyük ilgi gördü. Romanın ana karakteri Sonia, aslında Hristiyan olan Filistinli bir aileden gelmekte olup, kendi kişisel ve toplumsal krizlerinden kaçarak Hayfa’ya gelir. *Hamlet*’in bakış açısı üzerinden karakterler, İsrail kontrolü altındaki Filistin tarihini ve güncel mücadeleleri ele alır, grup dinamiklerini ve bireysel deneyimleri keşfeder. Hammad’ın çalışması, işgal altındaki bölgelerde Shakespeare’in Arapça sahnelenmesinin önemini vurgular. Postkolonyal teoriden hareketle, bu makale *Enter Ghost*’un Filistin meselesini nasıl sorguladığını, kültürel direniş, politik gerilimler ve tarihsel travma bağlamında nasıl bir yaklaşım geliştirdiğini ve *Hamlet*’in yeniden kurgulanmasının Filistin anlatısının inşasına ve edebi direniş eylemlerine nasıl katkı sağladığını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Isabella Hammad, *Enter Ghost*, Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Filistin Meselesi, Sömürge Sonrası Teori.

INTRODUCTION

Palestinian-English author Isabella Hammad, born in 1992, is a remarkable contemporary author due to her biographical and intellectual position of being between two cultures. Her literary work, thoroughly shaped by her double identity, focuses on issues of identity such as colonialism, belonging, diaspora, memory, and cultural representation. Her writing frames the Palestinian question not merely as a political issue but also as a gateway to universal dimensions of human experience. Her first novel published in 2019, *The Parisian*, focuses on the story of Midhat Kamal during the First World War in Palestine, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire, and France. (Hammad & Parssinen, 2021, p. 46) Against the historical background, the novel follows a search for cultural identity and national consciousness. Within postcolonial novel conventions, and as if to invoke Edward Said’s “displaced intellectual” concept, the novel focuses on the alienation and reinterpretation of the Eastern subject, which he asserts as follows “The intellectual who considers him- or herself to be a part of a more general condition affecting the displaced national community is therefore likely

to be a source not of acculturation and adjustment, but rather of volatility and instability.” (Said, 1994, p. 50). This dual perspective on displacement, both personal and intellectual, underscores how Hammad's own in-between identity informs her nuanced portrayal of colonial subjects navigating cultural, historical, and psychological terrains.

Said defines Orientalism as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the occident’” (Said, 1978, p. 23), a distinction that situates the colonial subject in a permanent state of epistemic displacement. Hammad, through Midhat's experiences, portrays how a personal story transforms into historical and political frame. The novel plots the Palestinian colonial history and the fragile nature of identity, belonging, and representation. The author's second novel, *Enter Ghost*, portrays how Hammad's art improved and matured in its treatment of identity and resistance after the outbreak of the Palestinian conflict on October 7, 2023. Hammad, in one of her nonfictional works underlines how this outbreak changes her professional life by stating

Over the course of the past year, my reading habits have narrowed. As Israel's genocidal war on the Palestinians in Gaza expanded [...] I found myself passing over books that failed to offer me a route into thinking about the great brutality of the period through which we are living. (Hammad, 2025, p. 6).

Hammad's approach to the Palestinian issue goes beyond her professional life, which she further explains “I have struggled with friends who aren't looking at the live-streamed mass slaughter and calling it by its name—who won't, in some sense, meet my eye.” (Hammad, 2025, p. 6). *Enter Ghost* is, in a way, a testament to the inability to remain indifferent to the events taking place, focuses on the artistic and cultural resistance of individuals who are trying to survive in Haifa under the occupation. Sonia, the protagonist, is a London-based actor returning to Palestine to escape from a personal crisis. Her return carries the symbolic meaning of both a physical and psychological escape. Through Midhat's experiences in *The Parisian* and Sonia's return in *Enter Ghost*, Hammad explores how this displacement theorized by Said operates not only geographically but also culturally and psychologically.

The relation between Sonia and her elder sister Haneen is plotted in the novel as a structural tension space between the diasporic subject and the local Palestinian subject rather than a familial one. Sonia's return to Palestine from London is the result of a personal fragmentation rather than a political act however, Haneen's established life in Haifa inevitably politicizes this home return. Haneen is

represented as a figure who prefers to stay in Palestine and follows her academic career and intellectual production under occupation while Sonia is a fragile, temporary, and home-returning character. Sonia's position portrays the in-betweenness defined and discussed by Homi Bhabha since Sonia neither belongs to the diaspora wholly nor can she be considered fully within the local experience. This condition resonates with what Bhabha defines as the unhomely, a moment in which "the unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own home becomes the site of the uncanny." (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9). Sonia's return to Palestine therefore, becomes not a restoration of belonging but a confrontation with an unsettled space where personal fragmentation intersects with collective trauma. Therefore, the novel, on the one hand, homogenizes Palestinian experience while on the other makes the ethical and political distance between different positionings more visible. Being an actor, she puts great effort into staging *Hamlet*³ in Palestine after her arrival. Sonia's attempt to stage *Hamlet* in Arabic with a group of Palestinian actors becomes the main narrative of the novel, which means that a Western canonical text written by William Shakespeare is reinterpreted by the local experience of a group of Palestinian actors. Therefore, *Enter Ghost* stands for as an example of reappropriation and cultural resistance on literary and political levels.

Hammad's texts, particularly *Enter Ghost*, are significant in their treatment of the role of performance in the social and psychological recovery process. The novel requires different theoretical approaches to analyze its diversity such as postcolonial theory and the field of cultural representation field. The personal narrative of Sonia parallels the collective memory of Palestinians. In this context, regarding literary narrative as a storytelling tool falls short, and it becomes necessary to regard it as a meaning-making and resistance practice. This

³ When a general evaluation of art is made, we see that the rehearsal of the performances of works of art, which we call 'high art' in the geography we call the east, in parallel with a narrative, had already been attempted before Isabella Hammad, and the most successful example of this is undoubtedly the famous Iranian screenwriter and director Asghar Farhadi. The Salesman (20196, as literature and art aficionados will have no difficulty in guessing from the title of the movie, Farhadi's film takes shape around a narrative parallel to the rehearsals of the performance of Arthur Miller's stage play *Death of a Salesman* (1949). To summarize briefly, *The Salesman* is about a couple of professional theater actors and the unpredictable events that happen to them in the house they have just moved into. Along with these events, we can witness the ups and downs of their relationship. At the same time, Farhadi makes a successful analysis by showing that social codes lead people to dead ends. Throughout the film, it is possible to see how the conditions that can happen to every person make human life psychologically difficult. While doing all this, having a solid support like *Death of a Salesman* behind him saves his story from shallowness and gives it a completely different dimension.

dimension of narrative reminds us of Cathy Caruth's definition of trauma as an "traumatic experience not only as the enigma of a human agent's repeated and unknowing acts but also as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth." (Caruth, 1996, p. 3). The intersection of individual memory with collective history and how performance makes this intersection visible are interrogated in the narrative.

The common characteristic of Hammad's body of work is to develop an alternative perspective on the Western construction of Palestine historically. While *The Parisian*, introduces an internal perspective on Western modernity, *Enter Ghost* introduces identity, representation, and resistance issues to the stage through performance and art. Hammad's literary works, thus, in parallel with Said's theoretical frame "politics of cultural representation", define Palestinian identity not through victimization but through activism and creativity. The style and language of the author are a reflection of this aesthetic and political balance. With her descriptive and distanced narrative, Hammad bridges the gap between historical context and personal experience. Her emotionality never transforms into romanticism, instead, it bears a kind of realism at the intersection of personal and political conflicts. This reality shapes a third space, according to Homi Bhabha's concept, where Eastern and Western subjects go beyond colonial duality by reconstructing identity (Bhabha, 1994).

Enter Ghost is a significant example for comprehending how performance functions as a space for cultural resistance in the Palestinian political context. Consequently, her literary work has multilayered structure bringing together personal and political, East and West, narrative and resistance. Within this structure, *Enter Ghost* shelters both the personal sorrows of Palestinian history and the transformative potential of performance. Hammad can be read as an author who writes about Palestine and as an intellectual who redescribes the function of performance and art as a form of resistance. When the Palestinian actors decide to stage Hamlet in Arabic under occupation, the narrative reproduces a Western canonical text with the lived experiences of its Palestinian background. The Elizabethan contexts in *Hamlet* such as madness, haunting, and delayed action become a way of articulating political paralysis, collective grief, and displacement. Rehearsing and performing themselves in the play transform into a form of reappropriation where colonial hierarchy, which places Shakespeare at the centre of universal culture and canonical work, is challenged by the Palestinian performers within. Focusing on postcolonial theory and the concept of cultural resistance, the essay aims to reveal how Hammad's novel is plotted as a tool for both resistance and meaning production and to answer the question of

how *Enter Ghost* transforms Shakespeare's Hamlet into a form of Palestinian cultural resistance?

CULTURAL RESISTANCE AND POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

The Orientalist theory, whose foundations were clearly articulated with Edward Said's *Orientalism*, examines how the West constructs the "East" as the Other, how it establishes ideological dominance through processes of representation, and how this discourse is sustained within cultural spheres. According to Said, colonialism is not merely a form of economic and political domination but also a mode of cultural hegemony exercised through the production of knowledge (Said, 1978). In this context, cultural resistance emerges as a means through which postcolonial societies reconstruct their own narratives, reclaim their identities, and challenge the epistemological supremacy of the West.

In *Enter Ghost*, this regime of representation is problematized particularly through silence and invisibility. The novel explicitly foregrounds what the theatre staged in Palestine fails to articulate: "It didn't talk about the occupation, it didn't talk about the military, it didn't talk about resistance" (Hammad, 2023, p. 197). Hammad also illustrates how occupation and political tension infiltrate personal relationships, as seen when Sonia and Haneen hesitate to speak openly, creating silences that mirror the structural constraints imposed by colonial presence as follows:

Sonia: 'I don't understand why you choose to live here.'

It came out by accident. I expected a cutting retort. She [Haneen] wavered, then said: 'I don't understand it either.'

We'd hit the corner of something in this exchange. During the days that followed we edged around it with our silence, like a piece of furniture knocked in the dark. I worried that if we spoke too openly on the subject then something would disintegrate. Or maybe I was just afraid of upsetting her, and of what she might say to me if I did. (2023, p. 52)

As is obvious from the quote, Hammad critiques the mechanisms of representation by highlighting what is left unsaid. The theatre staged in Palestine deliberately omits discussion of the occupation, the military, and resistance. This silence and invisibility are not accidental, they reveal how colonial power controls not only what can be expressed but also what is rendered unspoken. As Said argues, Orientalism operates as a system in which representation becomes a tool of domination. In this regard, Bryan S. Turner also contributes to and further

develops such arguments by stating "to know is to subordinate" (Turner, 1994, p. 21). Hammad's emphasis on what remains unsaid thus exposes the mechanisms through which Palestinian narratives are disciplined within cultural production. By focusing on these absences, the novel demonstrates that political and cultural domination operates as much through omission as through articulation. This statement also concretizes Said's emphasis on the politics of cultural representation on a literary level, demonstrating that colonial power determines not only what can be said, but also what is rendered unsayable.

Homi Bhabha a significant and influential contributor of postcolonial theory also introduces critical concepts that help us gain a better understanding of the dynamic nature of cultural resistance. According to Bhabha, postcolonial identity does not emerge from a fixed essence but is formed through "hybridity" and "third spaces" (Bhabha, 1994). This space of hybridity destabilizes the authority of colonial discourse, as it undermines the West's claim of absolute superiority over the Other. Accordingly, cultural resistance is not merely a reaction against the West but a creative sphere in which meaning is renegotiated. In Bhabha's terms, resistance also occurs through "mimicry," whereby the colonized subject employs the language of colonial structures to transform them from within. In *Enter Ghost*, the Arabic staging of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* produces precisely this "third space." The tension between the text's affiliation with the Western canon and the bodies and voices of the Palestinian actors generates a hybrid field of representation. The text is neither entirely "Western" nor fully assimilated into the local context.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* (2002) explain one of the fundamental strategies of postcolonial literature through "re-writing" and "counter-discursive practices." To them, the rewriting or restaging of Western canonical texts in local contexts is an act of questioning the colonial cultural hierarchy. Those text types transform them by using the language and aesthetic forms of the centre. The Arabic staging of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in *Enter Ghost* is the very contemporary example of what Ashcroft et al have described as a counter narrative. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the novel is repositioned as a text which cannot exist without domestication instead of being conventionally presented as a universal tragedy. This strategy aligns with Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's definition of postcolonial rewriting as a practice that unsettles colonial authority through language and form. As they argue, "the metonymic gap is that cultural gap formed when appropriations of a colonial language insert unglossed words, phrases, or concepts from a first language" (Ashcroft et.al 2002, pp. 122–123). The Arabic staging of *Hamlet* does not merely translate Shakespeare's

language but reconstitutes it through Palestinian bodies, accents, and spatial constraints, transforming the play into a counter-discursive act.

Hamlet staged in Arabic invalidates the claim that the Western canon is neutral, atemporal, and universal. The meaning of the text is transformed through the bodies, accents, and movements of Palestinian actors, as well as through their physical struggle to reach the stage while passing military checkpoints. This transformation aligns with Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's formulation of postcolonial cultural production as a practice of "writing back," through which "post-colonial literatures are a body of writing which responds to the discourses of colonialism" (Ashcroft et al 2002, p. 2). In this sense, the Arabic staging of *Hamlet* does not merely revise the text at the level of language but enacts what the theorists describe as abrogation, namely "a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication" (Ashcroft et al 2002, p. 37). Simultaneously, the performance exemplifies appropriation, a process through which the colonial language is made to "bear the burden of one's own cultural experience" (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 38). Rather than functioning as a universally abstract tragedy, *Hamlet* is thus reconstituted as a historically and politically situated narrative under occupation. By relocating a canonical text within an embodied, local performance, the staging transforms Shakespeare's tragedy into a site of epistemological resistance, one of the central concerns of postcolonial literature, realized through theatre.

Building on the question of representation and the dynamics of voice highlighted by Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the "subaltern" further illuminates the stakes of cultural resistance. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1993), Spivak examines how marginalized voices, particularly women's, have historically been silenced in postcolonial societies. For her, cultural resistance entails rendering these silenced voices audible once again. Thus, postcolonial theory investigates not only the critique of cultural domination but also the conditions of liberation through representation, identity, and narrative. In Hammad's novel, the Palestinian characters speaking in their own language on stage provide a literary response to Spivak's crisis of representation. As Spivak discusses, "The problem is that the subject's itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual." (Spivak, 1993, p. 80) and through this very idea, the stage becomes one of the rare spaces where the subaltern can speak not on behalf of others but for themselves.

Cultural resistance is not merely a form of physical or political opposition, but also a practice of meaning-making and re-presentation carried out through language, art, literature, and performance. For postcolonial thinkers, culture

serves as a stage for resistance. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon emphasizes that cultural resistance plays a central role in the process of liberating the colonized subject. According to Fanon, the most destructive effect of colonialism lies not in the subjugation of bodies but in the colonization of consciousness. As he further asserts, "every effort is made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his culture" (Fanon, 1961/2004, p. 45). In *Enter Ghost*, this colonization of consciousness becomes visible in the characters' suppressed emotions in everyday life and their hesitation to step onto the stage. Theatre, in contrast to this repression, creates a space of psychological liberation in Fanonian sense. The novel makes it clear that resistance should not be conflated with passive endurance: "Resilience was not the same as detachment" (Hammad, 2023, p. 42), showing cultural resistance is not only survival, but a deliberate process of meaning-making.

bell hooks, in *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (1995), treats art not as an aesthetic creation space but as a practice at the intersection of political consciousness, collective memory and healing practices. To hooks, art is capable of revealing experiences of oppression in addition to providing a space for the subjects to reinterpret themselves. In this context, art represents both testimony and intervention. For marginalized societies, art means bringing silenced experiences into the public sphere, or in other words:

The uses of time, the choices we make with respect to what to think and write about, are part of visual politics... As we think and write about visual art, as we make spaces for dialogue across boundaries, we engage in a process of cultural transformation that will ultimately create a revolution in vision. (hooks, 1995, p. xvi).

The function of theatre in *Enter Ghost* can be considered from this two-dimensional structure. The stage is an aesthetic expression space as well as a political space for the expression of oppressed emotions, fury, and grief. hooks' emphasis on art and its function aligns with Hammad's depiction of the stage in the narrative not as a safe space but as an antagonistic space of confrontation.

Enter Ghost does not introduce theatre as a romanticized resistance space, instead it frames the stage as an aesthetic risk space trying to exist under continuous threat, fragility, and surveillance. In the novel, the fact that theater is never neutral means that performance inevitably becomes a political act under occupation. Yet, this political dimension is not a safe or completed resistance type. For the actors, the stage means both visibility and vulnerability simultaneously. This binary nature of the stage in the occupied land also aligns with bell hooks' emphasis on the nature of art which is inherently not only healing but also unsettling and

shocking. As hooks argues, “the choices we make with respect to what to think and write about are part of visual politics [...] a process of cultural transformation that can create a revolution in vision” (hooks, 1995, p. xvi). In *Enter Ghost*, theatre is thus not a safe but an unsettling space where visibility entails risk and confrontation rather than resolution. Unlike the conventional perspective presenting art as a hope for solution, Hammad’s narrative discloses the fragility and cost of resistance, so that performance is not a space for escape but for confrontation. *Enter Ghost*, among similar narratives, stands out since it does not romanticize art rather it puts an emphasis on how risky, fragile and transformative it is.

In the novel, theatre functions as a postcolonial “third space,” where identity, trauma, and collective memory are reconstructed since “The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy.” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 36). The intersection of the protagonist Sonia’s personal crisis with the societal trauma of occupied Palestine concretizes Fanon’s conceptualization of cultural resistance as psychological liberation and Bhabha’s Third Space. Hammad further observes that calamity is normalized in Palestinian life, suggesting that enduring constant crisis shapes both personal resilience and collective capacity for resistance because “calamity was itself the condition of normal life.” (Hammad, 2023, p. 249). The roles Sonia performs on stage allow her to reconstitute her own identity and sense of belonging. Sonia’s hesitation to confront her personal life mirrors the fear of performing under occupation, where exposing oneself carries both psychological and political risks

Maybe, having watched my own parents’ marriage fail, I was particularly reluctant to admit my own was failing. [...] because to discover life anew was terrifying, [...] as similar to that common nightmare of walking onstage without your costume, forgetting your lines. (2023, p. 129).

In this way, Hammad transforms the process of individual healing into a component of collective resistance. Moreover, the novel directly engages with the process that Said defines as the politics of cultural representation. While Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* occupies a central position in the Western canon, Hammad brings this text onto the stage of a Palestinian theatre troupe, thereby enacting a postcolonial re-representation. This transformation serves as a concrete response to Spivak’s call to make the voice of the subaltern heard. The Palestinian characters speak in their own language, on their own stage. In this sense, *Enter Ghost* exemplifies cultural resistance both textually and aesthetically. Hammad’s

understanding of art demonstrates that it is not merely an aesthetic pursuit but also a form of historical consciousness and political resistance. Similar to Arna Mer Khamis's documentary *Arna's Children*, theatre in this context functions as a space of healing and a site for producing counter-narratives. In her novel, once again the stage concretizes Bhabha's notion of the "third space," creating a new universe of meaning outside the colonial discourse.

Consequently, cultural resistance lies at the heart of postcolonial theory as a practice of both individual and collective liberation. Isabella Hammad's *Enter Ghost* reconstitutes this practice through theatre. The novel demonstrates that art, especially performative art, is not only aesthetic but also a political act in postcolonial societies. The stage of resistance can be as symbolic and powerful as the theatre stage itself. In this regard, Hammad's work synthesizes Said's critical understanding of representation, Bhabha's theory of hybridity, and Spivak's emphasis on the subaltern. *Enter Ghost* stands as a literary projection of postcolonial struggles over identity and cultural resistance: a memory brought to the stage, a speaking history, and a resistance rewritten. Therefore, this focus on theatre naturally leads to an examination of how performance itself becomes a site of resilience and resistance in the novel.

RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE THROUGH THEATRE

In understanding/interpreting the role of art in resilience and resistance, we come across with a historically shared responsibility of art; increasing awareness, preservation of identity and culture, empathy and connection. It is through these qualities that art reaches people transcending time and space. Art has the capacity to transform individuals and societies, to speak out against injustice and to create hope. It has been a tool to criticize oppressive regimes, injustices and social problems. Resilience and resistance through art present alternative views and realities, often in opposition to existing power structures. A well-known and acclaimed example of such a characteristic is undoubtedly Picasso's *Guernica*. Picasso's famous painting "Guernica" was painted as a reaction to the Nazi German bombing of the town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War. This work powerfully expresses the horrors of war and the suffering of innocent people.

Picasso's *Guernica* depicts how art is capable of testimony against violence. However, *Enter Ghost* moves this tradition a step further and emphasizes art is not mere representation and testimony but a risky space, too. In Hammad's narrative, theatre does not provide the safe distance between artists/actors and

audience, on the contrary it moves danger, surveillance, and fragility on to stage, which is ostensibly disclosed in the narrative, too: “Theatre was never neutral here. Everything that gathered people together was suspect.” (Hammad, 2023, p. 89). This expression actually highlights how art can be regarded as a threat in occupied lands, here particularly in Palestine. In *Enter Ghost*, this border almost exactly disappears and stage becomes the direct object of political surveillance.

Hammad emphasizes the unrepresentability of the atrocities of occupation. The fears and hesitations of the actors on the stage reveal the limitations of art “It felt dangerous to pretend, but it felt more dangerous not to.” (Hammad, 2023, p. 112). Here, performance is both an escape and a confrontation space, and art is a direct encounter with danger itself. Furthermore, the novel also problematizes the role of performance on collective memory by saying “They were not only performing a play; they were rehearsing how to stand together.” (Hammad, 2023, p. 134). In more conventional narratives, resistance is told through rhetorical and loud slogans with finished actions. However, *Enter Ghost* introduces a resistance narrative with experiences of exposure and standing together. Unlike what is expected, in the narrative, theatre does not end with a victory. Rather than proposing a victory at the end, it problematizes and narrativizes the fragility, fears, and hesitations of the characters in order to depict a more realistic nature of resistance. In this context, resistance does not become a final destination but a continuously repetitive action. The stage falls short of solving the problems of the past yet circulates them as a collective experience. From this perspective, theatre becomes a space where historical, memorial, and political responsibilities are revealed, and resistance comes to mean to being willing to bear the cost of voicing as well as remaining silent.

Resilience and resistance through theatre constitute method of resistance that is frequently used in the trauma theories, migrant crises and adaptation processes of contemporary world. Art can go beyond being merely a form of aesthetic expression and become a tool for social change, political protest and cultural resistance. In other words, art offers a creative platform for expressing human experiences. In colonial and postcolonial contexts, performing arts go beyond aesthetic expression and become a medium for political narrative, a stage for cultural conflicts and a tool for reconstructing collective memory. In occupied Palestine, the stage potentially creates a counterspace against the hegemonic oppression of theatre, resistance, identity, and narrative. In this context, Hammad’s *Enter Ghost* offers a compelling example of how performing arts can both reflect and shape the experiences of individuals living under occupation. A relevant example from the novel is:

“Someone just asked me to be in a play here.”

‘In Haifa?’

‘No. In the . . . in the West Bank. Do you remember the Mansour family? The daughter, Mariam, directs. She and Haneen seem to be very close. She’s doing Hamlet in Arabic.’

‘You’ve never been in an Arabic play.’ (Hammad, 2023, p. 52)

The quote illustrates how performative art can be used in the occupied lands of Palestine for identity construction and cultural resistance. Trying to perform *Hamlet* in Arabic enables a group of actors to face the trauma they have historically internalized and to help them construct a collective cultural memory. That restaging, as also noted in *Arna's Children*, (Mer Khamis & Danniell, 2004) illustrates how the universal forms of Western literary canon can transform in conflict with local realities. Therefore, in Hammad's piece performance is not merely an aesthetic experience, but an active stage for the production of identity, resistance, and historical consciousness production. In the case of Palestine, the idea of theater as a means of resilience and resistance is not new at all.

One of the most important and one of the most successful examples of such initiatives is, of course, the 2004 French-Israeli co-production *Arna's Children*, a documentary film. It is worthy of referring to since they both make use of invocations of Shakespearean archetypes while highlighting the intersection of performing, identity, and political resistance. Documented in 2004 in the Jenin refugee camp and directed by Juliana Mer Khamis, this film is about a children's theatre project founded by the director's mother Arna Mer Khamis. *Arna's Children* combines the stories of children growing up in the shadow of war and conflict. It focuses on the story of Arna Mer Khamis's artistic and educational work with children in the Jenin refugee camp in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. As a Jewish Holocaust survivor, Arna strives to improve the lives of Palestinian children. The film reveals the lives of the children in Arna's theater group and the difficulties they face (Qabaha, 2020, p. 75). By using a mother's sacrifices and faith in art to present a powerful narrative, the documentary reveals the devastating effects of war on individuals and the power of art by highlighting Arna Mer Khamis's quest for peace and justice through her courage.

Like a torchbearer who lights the way for Hammad two decades later, Arna encourages the children of the Jenin camp caught in the middle of war and conflict to resist and heal by acting Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In the Jenin camp, Arna and her son Juliana Mer Khamis, the director of the documentary, form a theater with a group of children helping them overcome the devastation

they have experienced, and aiming to make use of the “transformational potential.” (Fişek, 2012, p. 105) One of the scenes in the documentary, Ashraf, one of these children, is asked to say that he wants “to be the Palestinian Romeo”.

[The] desire to identify the young Palestinian body as claiming a privileged moment of European ‘high art’: the abandon and passion of the Shakespearean hero whose antics have spurred centuries of theatrical reproduction and become a barometer of actorly talent and knowledge. (Fişek, 2012, p. 105).

Upon being asked to express his wish to be the Palestinian Romeo, Ashraf seems to understand this theater tradition and feel an emotional attachment to it, which acts as concrete proof of its supposed universality: a Palestinian Romeo.

Though different in medium, what connects *Enter Ghost* and Arna’s Children on common ground is their invocations of Shakespearean archetypes, Hamlet and Romeo. What is interesting is that Arna’s Children is essentially a documentary about the young children in Jenin Camp in Palestine where an Israeli television crew and the members of Arna’s theater group come together in the ruins of the destroyed city. A dialogue scene between a Palestinian actor, Ashraf, and a member of the crew exposes how representation is shaped by external interventions. In the scene, young actors are excited when they see the camera, yet the language barrier prevents communication and causes some confusion. At that particular moment the voice of an unseen member of the crew tells Juliano, Arna’s son, with reference to one of the young actors “Tell him to say he wants to be Romeo.” which is an external expectation to reshape local preferences. The dialogue flows as follows:

Juliano: He doesn’t know Romeo.
Interviewer/s: Never mind . . . He can do it ten times, I don’t care.
Juliano: (to Ashraf, in a near whisper) Say, I want to be the Palestinian Romeo.
(louder) Ashraf, what role do you want to play?
Ashraf: (smiling) I want to play the Palestinian Romeo . . . I guess you mean Romeo and Juliet? That’s what I understood.
Juliano: Say it again, but now straight.
Ashraf: I want to be the Palestinian Romeo!

A remarkable analysis on Arna’s Children and particularly on this scene is undeniably Emine Fişek’s article “I want to be the Palestinian Romeo: Arna’s Children and the Romance with Theatre” (Fişek, 2012, p. 105) which is also functional in comprehending *Enter Ghost* since it also presents a Western

canonical text as a tool to reflect local reimagining. The fundamental similarity between *Enter Ghost* and Arna's *Children* emerges not in their emphasis on the transformative potential of performance, but in their shared interrogation of the ethical limits of that potential. In both of them, theatre is associated with both danger and healing. In Arna's *Children*, the expression space provided by performance reveals the risks of an aestheticized resistance narrative. Similarly, *Enter Ghost* avoids idealizing the political meaning of theatre, performance becomes a practice open to failure and continuous negotiation, not a rescuer. This correspondence shows that performance does not only create hope but also requires representation, expectation, and responsibility.

Arna's *Children* and *Enter Ghost* can be given as two solid examples of how performance can be transformative individually and collectively while also being equally conflictive. In these two pieces, Shakespeare's everlasting characters, Hamlet and Romeo, turn into Palestinian Hamlet and Palestinian Romeo. They provide a mutual ground to transform universal literary texts into tools of expression and the reframing of local political realities. Emine Fişek, analyzing Ashraf's words "I want to be the Palestinian Romeo" in the documentary, questions the romantic dream of freedom and the positioning of the theater/performance as a freedom practice. To Fişek, this romantic figuration has the potential risk of idealizing the function of performance as a means of expression since this idealization might render the reality of life under occupation invisible as well as the liminalities of performance. The connection of the young actors with performance enables a space for personal expression of traumatic experiences while it problematizes the ethical relationship with the audience since the experience is aestheticized. Fişek notes that performance is not only a tool of healing but also a scene of political representation conflict.

In conclusion, both *Enter Ghost* and *Arna's Children* exemplify the intricate balance between the transformative and the ethically precarious potential of theatre under conditions of occupation and conflict. While performance offers a space for resilience and resistance, it also exposes participants to risks, surveillance, and the ethical challenges of representation. In Hammad's novel, the stage becomes a site where danger and resistance coexist, highlighting the fragility and continuous negotiation inherent in acts of cultural and political defiance. Similarly, Arna's *Children* demonstrates how young actors navigate the tensions between personal expression, collective memory, and external expectations, revealing that theatre's power lies not only in what it accomplishes but also in the responsibilities it demands. Together, these works illustrate that performance in contexts of oppression is never neutral or purely cathartic and that resilience and resistance are lived practices rather than guaranteed outcomes.

Finally in Palestine, the legacy of theatre transforms Hamlet and Romeo from distant literary figures into living embodiments of struggle, courage, and the enduring quest for voice and justice.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined Isabella Hammad's *Enter Ghost* as a postcolonial narrative in which theatre serves as a site of cultural resistance, identity formation, and historical negotiation within the Israeli–Palestinian context. *Enter Ghost*, together with *Arna's Children*, foregrounds the fragile and ethically complex role of performance under conditions of occupation. In both works, theatre appears as a space shaped by exposure rather than resolution. Performance enables moments of articulation and collective presence while remaining inseparable from surveillance, risk, and loss. Resistance therefore emerges as a process marked by uncertainty and negotiation rather than as a stable or completed act. In *Enter Ghost*, the stage functions as a site where personal rupture intersects with collective trauma. Sonia's participation in the Arabic staging of *Hamlet* does not restore coherence or belonging; instead, it exposes the tensions produced by displacement, language, and historical violence. By relocating a canonical Western text into a Palestinian theatrical context, the novel destabilizes claims of universality attached to the Western canon and situates cultural production within the politics of representation. This gesture aligns with Said's critique of Orientalism, Bhabha's articulation of hybridity and the Third Space, and Spivak's concern with the conditions under which marginalized voices can be articulated.

Arna's Children extends this interrogation by revealing the ethical limits of theatrical expression in contexts of prolonged violence. While performance offers a means of articulating trauma and imagining alternative subjectivities, it also exposes participants to external expectations and the risk of aestheticizing suffering. Emine Fişek's analysis of the figure of the "Palestinian Romeo" underscores how performance can oscillate between empowerment and appropriation, drawing attention to the responsibilities embedded in acts of representation. Read together, these works resist idealized accounts of art as a protective or redemptive space. Theatre appears instead as a field of tension where visibility carries consequences and where expression entails vulnerability. Performance does not resolve trauma or dismantle structures of domination; it renders visible the conditions under which resilience is enacted and collective memory is negotiated. In occupied Palestine, the stage becomes a site where cultural memory is carried forward while remaining exposed to interruption and

control. This essay has argued that cultural resistance in *Enter Ghost* operates through sustained acts of presence and rearticulation rather than through symbolic closure. The transformation of *Hamlet* into a locally situated performance demonstrates how theatre can participate in the production of historical consciousness and political awareness. Performance emerges as a practice shaped by risk, accountability, and relationality, where resistance takes form through continued engagement rather than resolution. Western canonical authority is, therefore, rewritten through the voices, bodies, and lived experiences of Palestinian actors in *Enter Ghost*. In portraying displacement and collective trauma and cultural resistance of Palestine, the narrative offers a counter-discursive and hybrid space instead of a universal tragedy. The novel facilitates a reading of the politics of representation through a postcolonial lens as an account of resistance through performance and lived experiences. Its literary contribution lies in demonstrating that Hammad's novel does not present theatre as a romanticized form of redemption as well as a risky and unfinished practice, which distinguishes *Enter Ghost* from more conventional narratives of artistic resistance.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Amaç: Bu makale, Isabella Hammad'ın *Enter Ghost* (2023) romanını, Shakespeare'in *Hamlet* oyununu işgal altındaki Filistin'in siyasal, kültürel ve tarihsel koşulları içinde yeniden yorumlayan sömürge sonrası bir edebî bir söylem olarak incelemektedir. Çalışmanın temel amacı, romanın Filistin meselesini tiyatro, kültürel direniş ve Batı kanonunun yeniden yazımı üzerinden nasıl ele aldığını ortaya koymaktır. Filistinli oyuncuların *Hamlet*'i Arapça sahnelemesine odaklanan makale, *Enter Ghost*'un Shakespeare'e geleneksel olarak atfedilen evrensellik, tarafsızlık ve zamandan bağımsızlık iddialarını sorguladığını savunmaktadır. Romanda sahneleme, işgal koşullarında siyasal anlam taşıyan bir anlam üretme eylemine dönüşmektedir. Hammad, tiyatroyu romantikleştirilmiş bir özgürleşme alanı olarak sunmak yerine, kimliğin, travmanın ve direnişin iç içe geçtiği kırılğan, riskli ve etik açıdan karmaşık bir alan olarak ele almaktadır.

Yöntem: Çalışmada, sömürge sonrası edebiyat kuramına ve kültürel çalışmalara dayanan disiplinlerarası bir yöntem benimsenmiştir. Kuramsal çerçeve; Edward Said'in Oryantalizm ve kültürel temsil eleştirisi, Homi Bhabha'nın melezlik,

“üçüncü mekân” ve kendi evinde yabancı hissetme (*unhomely*) kavramları, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak'ın madun kavramı ve temsil süreçlerinde susturulmaya ilişkin yaklaşımı ile Frantz Fanon'un kültürel direnişi psikolojik ve siyasal özgürleşmeyle ilişkilendiren görüşleri üzerine kurulmuştur. Ayrıca Ashcroft, Griffiths ve Tiffin'in sömürge sonrası yeniden yazım ve karşı söylem oluşturma yaklaşımlarından, bell hooks'un sanatı bir tanıklık, müdahale ve kolektif bilinç alanı olarak değerlendiren görüşlerinden yararlanılmıştır. *Enter Ghost*'un yakın okuması aracılığıyla anlatıcı sesi, karakterler arasındaki ilişkiler, sessizlik, sahneleme ve mekânsal kısıtlamalar incelenmiştir. Filistin'de tiyatro yoluyla yürütülen direnişin etik ve siyasal sınırlarını değerlendirmek amacıyla roman, Juliano Mer Khamis'in *Arna's Children* (2004) belgeseliyle karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alınmıştır.

Bulgular: Analiz, *Enter Ghost*'ta tiyatronun sömürge sonrası direnişin temel bir metaforu ve uygulama alanı olduğunu, ancak romanın bu alanın kırılğanlığını da görünür kıldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Başkarakter Sonia'nın Londra'dan Hayfa'ya dönüşü, arada kalmışlık ve kendi evinde yabancı hissetme duygularıyla şekillenen diasporik deneyimi yansıtmaktadır. Bu deneyimde, kişisel düzeyde yaşanan parçalanma kolektif travmayla iç içe geçmektedir. Sonia'nın Hamlet'i Arapça sahneleme girişimi, Batı kanonunun otoritesini sorgulayan ve Shakespeare'i Filistinlilerin yaşam deneyimleri içinde yeniden yorumlayan melez bir kültürel alan yaratmaktadır. Oyun, Filistinli oyuncuların bedenleri, aksanları ve hareketlerinin yanı sıra askerî kontrol noktaları ve gözetim gibi işgalin getirdiği mekânsal kısıtlamalar aracılığıyla dönüşmekte, böylece Arapça sahneleme sömürge sonrası bir yeniden yazım pratiği hâline gelmektedir. Hammad'ın anlatısında sessizlik, söylenmeyenler ve tereddüt önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Bu anlatım tercihleri, sömürgeci iktidarın hem söylenebilenleri hem de dile getirilemeyenleri nasıl belirlediğini göstermektedir. *Enter Ghost*'ta tiyatro, kesin bir kurtuluş ya da bütünlüklü bir direniş imkânı sunmamaktadır. Oyuncuların görünürlük kazanması, onları aynı zamanda daha savunmasız hâle getirmekte ve çeşitli risklerle karşı karşıya bırakmaktadır. Bu karmaşık durum, *Arna's Children*'da da görülmektedir. Belgeselde Romeo gibi Shakespeare karakterleri birer ifade aracına dönüşürken temsil, beklenti ve direnişin estetikleştirilmesi konusunda etik sorular da ortaya çıkmaktadır. Her iki eserde de sahneleme, özgürleşmeyi güvence altına alan bir yol olmaktan çok, tehlike, korku ve sorumlulukla şekillenen, sürekli bir müzakere süreci olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

Sonuç ve Tartışma: Sonuç olarak *Enter Ghost*, tiyatroyu siyasal ve etik sorumlulukların üstlenildiği, çatışmalara açık, değişken fakat gerekli bir alan

olarak ele alarak sömürge sonrası edebiyatta kültürel direnişe eleştirel bir bakış kazandırmaktadır. Hammad, *Hamlet*'i Arapça yeniden yazarak ve işgal koşulları içinde sahneleyerek evrenselliğe ilişkin egemen anlatıları sorgulamakta, kültürel temsili biçimlendiren siyasal ilişkileri görünür kılmaktadır. Tiyatro, kimliğin, belleğin ve direnişin kesin bir sonuca bağlanmadan sürekli yeniden şekillendiği bir üçüncü mekâna dönüşmektedir. Roman, sanatın bütünüyle iyileştirici ya da özgürleştirici bir güç olarak romantikleştirilmesine karşı çıkmakarak sömürgeci baskı altında sanat üretmenin kırılğanlığını, bedelini ve sınırlarını vurgulamaktadır. Sömürge sonrası kuramla kurduğu ilişki ve *Arna's Children* gibi eserlerle kurduğu etkileşim sayesinde *Enter Ghost*, dayanıklılığın ve direnişin ulaşılmış sonuçlardan çok, yaşam içinde sürdürülen pratikler olduğunu göstermektedir. Sahneleme hem yeni olanaklar yaratmakta hem de oyuncularını tehlikelere açık hâle getirmektedir. Bu alanda konuşmak, sessiz kalmak ve bir arada durmak, güçlü anlamlar taşıyan eylemlere dönüşmektedir. Hammad'ın romanı, tiyatroyu travmadan kaçmadan ve onu kesin bir çözüme kavuşturmadan tanıklık etmeyi, sese yeni ifade olanakları kazandırmayı ve devralınan anlatıları işgal koşullarında yeniden yazmayı sürdüren bir tarihsel bilinç ve kültürel direniş biçimi olarak ele almaktadır. Bu yaklaşımıyla çağdaş sömürge sonrası tartışmalara önemli bir katkı sunmaktadır.

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