

# MOURID BARGHOUTI



Twice-exiled Palestinian Mourid Barghouti has published 13 books of poetry in Arabic and two memoirs. His first memoir, *I Saw Ramallah* (1997) was based on his return to Palestine after 30 years in exile. The following excerpts come from his second memoir, *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here* (released by Bloomsbury USA in July of this year), which deals with exile yet again – this time from Egypt – and centers around taking his Cairo-born son, Tamim, to Palestine for the first time.

- Rebecca Neillor

## On living under Occupation:

"Many western journalists who maintain a studied and malign blindness to the Occupation have asked me whether the Palestinian people are really ready to coexist with the Jews and I reply that we coexisted with them for hundreds of years in Palestine, the Arab countries and Andalusia, and that it is Europe, which reproves us and holds us to account, that couldn't coexist with them and sent millions of them mercilessly to the Holocaust. What is asked of us today, however, and has been ever since their military occupation of our land, is to coexist with their tanks in our bedrooms! Show me one person in this world, I say to them, who can live with a tank in his bedroom."

## On the Wall:

"Just seeing a person and this Wall in the same frame is enough to send a shudder down one's spine ... A thing of cement that winds its way among the houses, topped by army towers at irregular intervals ... What I see, over and above that, is its disfigurement of the sky. Yes! This wall disfigures the sky itself ... The Wall is surrounded by lies, some of which have been passed off on our worthless media, which repeats them idiotically. Lies such as that the Wall is a 'security' wall. The Wall has nothing to do with security. On the contrary it is the Wall of the great historic theft, the theft of more land and trees and water, the Wall of the displacement of the Palestinians following the exhaustion of their resources through the separation from their lands, crops and water basins. It is built on land belonging to the West Bank and if it were for security, as Israel claims, it would have been built along the 1967 borders."

**"THIS WALL WILL BE DEMOLISHED BY OUR REFUSAL TO BECOME USED TO IT. IT WILL BE DEMOLISHED BY OUR ASTONISHMENT AT ITS EXISTENCE."**

## On the importance of Palestinian artists writing their own narratives:

"The cruelest degree of exile is invisibility, being forbidden to tell one's story for oneself. We, the Palestinian people, are narrated by our enemies, in keeping with their presence and our absence. They label us as it suits them. The weaker party in any conflict is allowed to scream, allowed to complain, allowed to weep, but never allowed to tell his own story ... In this sense, the entire Palestinian people is exiled through the absence of its story."

WHAT IS THE ONE BIG QUESTION  
THAT ALL THESE JOURNALISTS  
ARE AFRAID TO ASK?

