Gaza from *PMLA*'s October 2009 issue on war (126.1 [2010]: 243–45), Srinivas Aravamudan, coeditor of that issue, concedes Ra'ad's criticism but goes on to muddle the topic with talk of heroic monumentalization (126.1 [2010]: 245–46). Ra'ad's point is simple: we should talk about Palestine, Lebanon, and Gaza. And the end of such conversation would be, well, the opposite of not having such a conversation and being silent about Palestine, Lebanon, and Gaza. Whatever else Troy and Guernica might be brought to signify, their representations in art are first acknowledgments that certain events took place.

Petar Ramadanovic
University of New Hampshire, Durham

Reply:

I thank Petar Ramadanovic for his letter. In response to his concern that I conceded Ra'ad's criticism but am muddling the issue with talk of heroic monumentalization, I can only remind him of the complex nature of literature as both imaginative and referential.

Literature is neither history nor politics, even though literature and literary criticism are much the poorer if not in constant conversation with both. But this conversation cannot be obligatory: it has to be voluntary, which means some might choose to enter it, and others might take a pass. Ra'ad's simple point—as Ramadanovic puts it, "*we should* talk about Palestine, Lebanon, and Gaza" (emphasis mine)—is not so simple. Who is "we"? Antiwar activists? Certainly. Literary critics? Not necessarily. The moral imperative carried by "should" is coercive. Should everyone? Why? And while some may, others might not. Why should everyone agree to discuss one particular (even world-historical) conflict to the implicit exclusion of others, given that time and space are always limited?

Does focusing on one conflict universalize priorities for everyone, and what would "we" say if someone else counters that "we should" instead, at this very moment, be talking about the Arab Spring or the much greater human toll of the civil wars in Libya, the Sudan, and the Congo, or break the deafening silence about the recent genocide of the Tamils in Sri Lanka? Of course, we can't talk about everything at once: the Jakobsonian principle of the axis of selection teaches us that. An infinite conversation may include everything, but everyday attention spans are brutally finite.

Naming something or talking about something does not necessarily acknowledge that "certain events took place"—witness the way the Nazis manipulated the Reichstag fire. Conversely, world history and even current events are littered with many genocides and wars that are hardly ever brought up for moral contestation in our imperfect forums—but that does not mean they did not occur. I would insist (maybe this is *my* moral imperative) that we *also* imagine damages and losses beyond our capacity to render justice by positively acknowledging specific wars, which are legion.

Srinivas Aravamudan
Duke University

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900168440 Published online by Cambridge University Press