

The Spirit of Resistance: the Study of Mahmoud Darwish and Ramzy Baroud

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Abstract

In the contemporary period, Palestine has witnessed a colossal political unrest/s of diverse kind and nature long after the Israeli occupation and armed conflicts professing sub nationalism, religious conflicts, class conflicts, imperial domination and illegal occupation, etal. However, historical and political evolution in Palestine has also given rise to these conflicts and unrest/s or it could be argued that these have been reinforced. The theme of resistance in the literature of Palestinian writers like Mahmoud Darwish and Ramzy Baroud, against the Israeli occupation n is a dominant discourse in the Palestinian society; devoting oneself to the national struggle often means giving up on personal ambitions linked to mobility. As this dilemma is particularly urgent for young Palestinians, their various responses to it—expressed by values, attitudes, and strategies—are at the center of the analysis. Palestinian Literature spoke to other causes of oppression and discrimination across the world. In his book, one of the foremost leaders of Palestinian literature and the person who coined the term Palestinian Resistance Literature, Ghassan Kanafani says, "In my stories I give my characters the freedom to express their own positions without reservation". This sense of international solidarity can also be found in Palestinian poets' work such as in Mahmoud Darwish's poem Cuban Chants, "And the banner in Cuba.. The rebel raises it in the Aures.. Oh a nation that feels cold", and in Samih Al-Qasim's poem, Birds Without Wings. Consequently, owing to many contending discourses, most of the writings of Palestinian writers have come up with their own subjective perspectives regarding these conflicts, especially in terms of experience and reality. Setting its base in the formal categorization of resistance literature as "a force for mobilizing a collective response to occupation and domination.

Keywords- Resistance, Imperial domination, Illegal Occupation, Discrimination, Unrest

Introduction

Palestinian literature has been intensely political, as underlined by writers like Salma Khadra Jayyusi and novelist Liana Badr, who have mentioned the need to give expression to the Palestinian "collective identity" and the "just case" of their struggle. There is also resistance to this school of thought, whereby Palestinian artists have "rebelled" against the demand that their art be "committed". Poet Mourid Barghouti for example, has often said that "poetry is not a civil servant, it's not a soldier, it's in nobody's employ." Rula Jebreal's novel *Miral* narrates the story of Hind Husseini's attempt to establish an orphanage in Jerusalem after the 1948 Arab–Israeli War, the Deir Yassin Massacre, and the establishment of the state of Israel. Most of the scholarly literature on Palestine, sociologist Lisa Taraki notes, "treats Palestinians as one-dimensional political subjects. The internal dynamics, stresses, and contradictions of the social groups and communities within which people live out their lives, or the sensibilities and subjectivities of individuals as they negotiate their mundane existence away from the barricades have not received much serious attention from most researchers." (Taraki 2006: xi)

In the period between the 1948 Palestinian exodus and the 1967 Six-Day War, *Palestinian Resistance Literature* played a major role in preserving the Palestinian identity; forming a link between the two periods, which allowed the Palestinian identity to survive specially in the absence of armed resistance. In his book, *Palestinian Resistance Literature under Occupation*, Ghassan Kanafani argues, "Palestinian resistance literature, similar to armed resistance, shapes a new circle in the historical series which practically has not been cut throughout the last half century in the Palestinian life". Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen Press, 1987)

Resistance Literature is an extensive and impressive critical study of the literatures of contemporary "Third World" liberation movements as they confront and modify the literary and political categories of the "West." Hence, it is not only an introduction to Third World literature, even though that function is skillfully accomplished by Harlow's text. *Resistance Literature* also argues for the decisive political significance of literary texts and, by extension, for the necessity of an informed political commentary on those texts.

The search for identity, the sense of the loss of land and Resistance seem to be vital aspects in the literature of Palestinian writers. The literature [Poetry] of the Palestinian legend, Mahmoud Darwish

and Dr. Ramzy Baroud seems to be populated with incessant but unique cry for the loss of Palestinian identity and land. The poems of Mahmoud Darwish like “Identity Card”, “The Passport”, “A Lover from Palestine” and “On Perseverance” and the novels such as *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People’s Struggle* and *When my father was a freedom fighter: Gaza’s Untold story* are highly praised throughout the world because they exemplify emblems of the interconnectedness between identity and land.

The study therefore shows the literature of Mahmoud Darwish And Ramzy Baroud profusely coloured with resistance within a broad pattern of Resistance Literature. Setting its base in the formal categorization of resistance literature as “a force for mobilizing a collective response to occupation and domination and as a repository for popular memory and consciousness”, the focus will also lie on to explore how the art of these two prolific writers tends to cater more towards a trans-national ethos critiquing imperialism in its myriad forms including the various ideological state apparatuses that sustain it. The existence attempts are voiced first through the writers call to rebel and resist Occupation, and later, after building a comprehensive perspective of the political and historical surrounding, through the mature writers demand for justice. Mahmoud Darwish: The Poet’s Art and His Nation by Khalid Mattawa analyses the tensions within Darwish’s feelings about literature during the early days of Israeli state. It explores how Darwish’s work eroticizes and feminizes Palestine: she is a beautiful , desirable woman, lost or stolen away. To a detached reader, these could be simple romantic poems, but the context of Palestine makes their subtext becomes clear. The ambiguity was also a means to struggle nationalist sentiments past the Israeli censor.

To begin with Mahmoud Darwish, he evolves a unique lexicon which is far removed from the musical and highly formal traditional Arab aesthetic. Mahmoud Darwish’s poetry, especially during the initial phase of his career, is an amalgamation of anger, nostalgia and most importantly an unwavering refusal to accept Israeli occupation of Palestine. With the poet’s multifaceted personal and family stories, disparate geographical location, ideological kinship and poetic legacy, the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish emerges as an adequate representation of a politically surcharged metaphor that blends the aesthetic with activism. His poetry, like other resistance poetry, is a strong condemnation of Israeli society and its stance toward Palestinians. It reflects firm resistance to their conditions and a refusal to accept the *fait accompli*. Darwish was sentenced to jail several times and his freedom of movement was constrained for several years. Many of his poems were written in prison.

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Darwish, despite his revolt against the challenge of what he views as an oppressive system, continuous throughout much of his writings to stress the outlook of co-existence and pluralism as alternatives to exclusivism. His poetic language was novel in the sense that it creates a metaphoric and symbolic atmosphere that transforms the ordinary meaning of words and contains hidden meanings that can only be discovered in that atmosphere. The atmosphere is Palestine, in whose context words assume new meanings and new symbolic values and induce different concepts and relationships. In the poetry of Darwish, love of the land, the woman, and the homeland (Palestine) merged together and became symbols of dignity, life, and the future. Darwish's poetry of resistance became widely publicized and utilized by the Palestinian resistance as did the poetry of other resistance poets.

Darwish left the occupied territories in 1971. In the poem "Psalms", the first poem of the book of collected poems "Do I Love You or Not", he insists on drawing the form of his homeland and he repeats the sentence "I want to draw your form" in the second part of the poem:

"I want to draw your form
You're scattered among the files and the surprises
I want to draw your form
You're shredded on missiles' shrapnel and bird wings
I want to draw your form
But the sky steals my hand
I want to draw your form
You're entrapped between the wind and the dagger
To find my form in you"

The quest for the motherland is incomplete till it becomes possible to draw his shape. This exploration is a mean to find an image for the self in the image of the homeland, as signified in the end verse: "To find my form in you". The poet (cannot find) his form, as if his features were lost when the homeland was lost, when the people were denied the right of living in it.

Likewise, one of his famous poem "Identity Card" is about Palestinians' feeling and restriction on expulsion. Darwish repeats "put it on record" and "angry" every stanza. This reveals Darwish's feeling against foreign occupation. "Record" means "write down". Darwish wanted Palestinians to pen down this history event down and don't forget that they have been excluded. People feel angry when their property and rights were taken away. Palestinians had lived in that land from generation to

generation. They took many efforts on their land, so the Palestinians would not want to give up their land.

Darwish finishes off his book of collected poem “The trace of the Butterfly” - the last book he published before his death – with two poems: the first entitled "You are from now on another" and the second "you are from now on yourself". The first poem describes the change that happened to the Palestinians and had disastrous consequences as it modified the norm and turned the Palestinian brothers into enemies, fighting amongst each other. Darwish depicts this move in thought, personality, and behavior by reversing the popular sayings and drawing new, inhumane values:

“The stranger and I against my cousin, my cousin and I against my brother, and my priest and I against myself. This is the first lesson in new civic education of the dark cellars”

Similarly, there is a phrase in the poem: “There might be an enemy to whom your mother gave birth”. It reminds us of a similar phrase of Darwish’s describing the shocking attitude of the Arabs towards the Palestinians in the "Praise to the Tall Shadow": “My friend resembles me and kills me”.

The second poem “You are from now on yourself”, the human preserves his identity only when he tries to be confident and sense the place with all its beauty and feel spiritually that he belongs: “I am here. Excluding this fact, all is rumor and gossip!”. This is the real reunion and the real sense of ownership; “the master of words becomes the master of the place” and the city embraces its dear person: “Haifa tells me: ‘You are from now on yourself!’”

The question about being, which the poet sought and constantly attempted to achieve, bears many answers in his poems. We choose to conclude with an insightful dream from the “Mural”, drawn in words by a poet and man who wanted to become an idea to embrace the universe and be embraced:

“I will become someday an idea. No sword bears it
To the wasteland, neither does a book...
Like the rain on a mountain that’s cracked
By a burgeoning blade of grass,
Neither the force triumphed
Nor the stray justice
I will become someday what I want”

Mahmoud Darwish experienced all the tragedies of an undecided destiny: “Neither the force triumphed nor the stray justice” and sent in his last sentence: “I will become someday what I want” an inspiration to pursue existence, and an utter belief that the power of the will and the work will result

change. His last sentence also reflected his belief that he who seeks justice and truth will eventually get what he desires in a way or in another. Perhaps Mahmoud Darwish, the poet who spent his life in an attempt to be, he will one day become “the idea” that he portrayed with the most beautiful words in his art.

Moreover, Darwish's poems are characterized by exceptional features on account of appropriate and extensive use of symbols. Accordingly, new Arabic poems, relying upon symbolic styles have reached perfection in their originality and innovation that they deserve to be equated with the world's greatest poems and odes (Abu-Haqa, 1979, p. 650).

Before explaining some symbols used by Darwish, it should be borne in mind that each symbol used by him may have different meanings and interpretations. This section tries to interpret some of the symbols employed by him as a discovery and explanation of all his symbols is not possible in a single study.

Wind

The wind was traditionally regarded in the literature as a symbol for fertility and productivity. Darwish has also employed it frequently as a symbol: I am a descendant of lily flowers and crosses. The wind becomes pregnant and then it gives birth to me as an honorable thing. (Darwish, A., 1983, p. 437) However, for Darwish, wind is a symbol for resistance as the enemies are destroyed through its resistance against them.

Trees, birds and plants stand for peace and resistance. Therefore, the poet wishes that the trees and branches grow up and produce green leaves. The tree will stay unwavering. The tree and its branches will remain steadfast. In the light of the sun, it will grow and become green. The bird will come. Tree is used as a symbol for the Arabic nation. As long as the roots of the tree are firm on the ground, it can grow more and more. A Palestinian man will grow like a tree till he lives in his homeland. That is why the sentence “The bird will come” is repeated again and again as it is the greatest proof of self-confidence, hope for victory, and the anticipation of a bright future by God’s permission of God (Atawat: 1998, p. 655

The bird will fly.

The bird will fly.

Land belongs to me to rest on it.

I love you; I love even your fatigue.

My beloved and I are like two souls in one body.

When my beloved is sleeping, I wake up to look after her.

She seems in her dreams;

The bird will fly.

The bird will fly (Darwish, B, 2000, pp. 420 and 419).

Birth

The word birth in some poems by Darwish symbolizes hope for freedom and resistance as the birth of a Palestinian child means consistency of resistance which will lead to freedom (Al-Qasim B. D. T., p. 128). As such, Darwish in his poem book, Olive Leaves, refers to this fact in a symbolic checkpoint:

Write down: I'm an Arab.

My ID number is fifty thousand

I have eight children. And my ninth child is going to be born after the summer

Are you getting mad? (Darwish, A., 2000, pp 36 and 35).

Poetry

Poetry has long served as a promotional medium in the literature and poet acted as the language of his own tribe. Thus, in the resistance literature, poetry has never been not far from its mission. Samih al-Qasim states that the function of poetry is to teach social, political, and revolutionary issues. According to him, poetry is not just for the joy and pleasure. So poetry, in his opinion, is a symbol for humane movements and social and revolutionary activities. It can be also used as a tool for training and educating people in the community (Samih al-Qasim A. D. T., p. 12): They have put you behind bars. But is it really possible to imprison you? Are you going to be hanged at the dawn light? They have put you behind bars. But are the prison walls are so powerful to suppress your poetry? Darwish is also of the same opinion. He states that odes that are not useful for the purpose of educating the community should be thrown away. An ideal poetry is a poetry that is intelligible to the public so that people can learn from it. Otherwise, it is better to remain silent:

Our poems have no color

If the big ear, the laities, fail to understand them,

They are worthy of being disposed of.

And become immortal by our silence (Darwish, A., 2000, p. 28). 5.

Jasmine

The term jasmine symbolizes the blood and sacrifice. The fighters, who are killed martyred when facing the enemy, are like jasmine blossoms which fall down gently on the water or ground with a

farewell. Shaker al-Nablesi says: “Jasmine in Darwish's poetry can be a symbol for Palestine. The term is similar to Palestine in some letters and rhymes (al-Nablesi: 1987, p. 314

Mother

The word mother in poems of most poets of the resistance movement especially Darwish and Samih al-Qasim is used as a symbol for the land of Palestine and a land whose sons must protect it (Darwish, A., 2000, p. 56)

Carolyn Forché and Runir Akash noted in their introduction to *Unfortunately It Was Paradise* (2003) that “as much as [Darwish] is the voice of the Palestinian Diaspora, he is the voice of the fragmented soul.” Forché and Akash commented also on his 20th volume, *Mural*: “Assimilating centuries of Arabic poetic forms and applying the chisel of modern sensibility to the richly veined ore of its literary past, Darwish subjected his art to the impress of exile and to his own demand that the work remain true to itself, independent of its critical or public reception.”

Poet Naomi Shihab Nye commented on the poems in *Unfortunately It Was Paradise*: “[T]he style here is quintessential Darwish—lyrical, imagistic, plaintive, haunting, always passionate, and elegant—and never anything less than free—what he would dream for all his people.”

On the other hand, Ramzy Baroud despite his slightly divergent quests for an idealized utopian national culture shaped by memory and longing, engaged in a recovery of devalued pre-colonial memory. The study explores the fault lines manifest in the dystopian systems best represented by a chaotic the Al-Nakba (The Catastrophe) in Palestine. Minute focus lies on the the literature of the Ramzy Baroud committed as he is to rootedness in a native landscape. The resultant art of Ramzy Baroud *When my father was a freedom fighter: Gaza's untold story and The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle* emerges charged with the politics of his nation. The study also traces how the literature of Ramzy Baroud has tried to use art as an instrument of political and social change and it has inspired a feeling of anti-imperialism and the evolution of a sensibility of resistance across the world. Addressing the most controversial issues, including the alarming escalation in suicide bombings, and the construction of the Separation Wall in the book –*The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of People's Struggle*-Ramzy Baroud reports on the huge rate of unemployment and hunger in the Occupied Territories — statistics so critical that NGOs compare their magnitude to African nations such as the Congo. From the brutality of the Israeli army to the ever-compromising nature of the Palestinian Authority, few are spared Baroud's thoughtful critique. The book is clear and concise, with one chapter dedicated to the major events of each year, and includes a comprehensive timeline. Simultaneously the

attempt lies to delineate the universality of his anti-tyrannical stance that transcends the boundaries of time and space, and remains relevant as a valid theoretical tool to map out the discourses of illegal occupation and its aftermath. Since resistance dominates the national discourse in Palestine and thus forces young people rising up here to interpret daily life in its framework, there are various ways of resisting. While discussing with young Palestinians, Ramzy Baroud observed many were eager to point this out when I asked what resistance meant to them: “There is a number of ways. There is the armed struggle, the political struggle, and there is the economical and social struggle.” “Palestinians resist the occupation on different levels. “From afar,” writes Ramzy Baroud, “Gaza’s reality, like that of all of Palestine, is often presented without cohesion, without proper context; accounts of real life in Gaza are marred with tired assumptions and misrepresentations that deprive the depicted humans of their names, identities and very dignity.”

After analyzing the novel “*When my Father was a Freedom Fighter*” as the title suggests, Baroud relates the life of his father, Mohammed Baroud. The story is thoroughly located in a larger familial, social, economic and political context, one distinguished by eyewitness accounts and made concrete by an almost encyclopedic wealth of detail. But neither the book’s detail nor its deep reflection conflict with its compulsive readability. It’s quite an achievement. Describing the outbreak of the first Palestinian intifada, Baroud writes of “a culmination of experiences that unites the individual to the collective: their conscious and subconscious, their relationships with their immediate surroundings and with that which is not so immediate, all colliding and exploding into a fury that cannot be suppressed.”

My Father was a Freedom Fighter details a life that is implacably harsh. Zarefah, a pragmatic lives on weak tea and garlic soup. Mohammed and Zarefah’s first son dies of a high fever and poverty. Later Mohammed sells carpets in Ramallah and buys scrap metal in Israel, but the siege imposed during the first Palestinian intifada, as well as Mohammed’s strange decision to send his daughter to study in Syria, plunges the family back into penury. Zarefah dies aged 42. However, the novel is an invaluable social history of this people. It charts the Muslim Brotherhood’s influence on Gaza from the 1930s, the ferment of new ideologies in the 1960s, the rise of a class society and also of Palestinian-led nationalism, and then the reawakening of the Islamic movement in the 1970s and its evolution to armed struggle. The book examines the continual struggle between Palestinian masses and co-opted elites as well as between Palestinians and Israel. It gives an account of endlessly repeated assassinations, demolitions, expulsions and massacres, but the largely the picture is one of a people growing stronger, or at least less fearful,

because Mohammed Baroud's was the generation which moved from being intimidated and idealistic to being clear-sighted and self-assured.

By putting his father at the center of his narrative Ramzy Baroud takes us a step into novel territory. The reader not only understands Mohammed's position cerebrally, but can also fully identify with the resistance choices (sometimes inevitable) which Mohammed makes. This is because the character, though attractive, is an unidealized and entirely solid human being.

The novel traces the story of the Palestinian people since 1948 when a highly-trained army of 65,000 attacked them, making over 700,000 of them refugees. Therefore, the novel shows the heroic will of Palestinians to live, to educate themselves, and to provide for their families. It is also the story of constant persecution and agony that culminates in the apocalyptic destruction of Gaza during Israel's monstrously-named "Operation Cast Lead".

"For the besieged who taught the world the meaning of freedom. We dedicate this to those who resisted, to the ones who treated the injured and buried the dead under shelling. This is for the children who lost their parents, and the parents who will not see their children again. We dedicate this book to the city that has become a legend. To Gaza, Palestine." – Samah, Ramzy and Jehan.

Ramzy's art is grounded in justice for Palestine, yet the fierce intellectual refinement and range of his poetry knows no borders in its fusion of the personal within the global and universal:

And just when you think I am defeated,
My fist will rise from the charred earth,
In a painting by Naji Ali,
Through the thick walls of Louisiana State Penitentiary In the streets of Hanoi,
Amid the rubble of a Gaza mosque . Even on my dying bed .

Dr. Ramzy Baroud's new book, *The Last Earth: A Palestinian Story* is an intimate encounter, wherein new friends are entertained; having the privilege of listening to, savoring and indeed treasuring the rarely heard Palestinian stories flooded with the fears, joys, suffering, triumphs of the human spirit. Baroud's approach and praxis of a people's history debunks the traditional accepted notion of Carlyle's *Great Man theory* which proposes, "The history of the world is but the biography of great men" with the Elite Hero as its absolute focal point. Baroud, however, by honoring the archetypal hero within our deepest selves connects us to the shared aliveness of the Palestinian Other; of Khaled, Jamal, Tamam, Um Marwan, Kamal, Hana, Sara, Ali, Leila and many more as well as solidarity friends like Joe.

With alchemical brilliance, he has purified, through his sublime art, hours of recorded interviews on love stories, generations of births, childhoods, disappearances, adversity, torment, deaths into the essence of Love and Truth and the magic is – we too are purified and illumined by a powerful knowing that can never be un-known.

As an activist, author, and editor Baroud’s phenomenal energy equals his phenomenal sense of responsibility to Palestine’s struggle for political and human rights. His articles have an intellectual discipline to fine analysis and facts, whilst under the poetic sheen of *The Last Earth*, honesties are excoriated and refined through a powerful emotional turbulence; tender and intolerable.

Of his 2006 book “The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People’s Struggle”, Prof. Fred Wilcox of the Ithaca College writes: “This is not a book for those seeking a facile, sanitized account of the Palestinian Diaspora. Ramzy Baroud is committed to truth telling, and his new book will unquestionably disturb, upset and infuriate his readers.” Besides, his writings have been praised by Noam Chomsky as “sensitive, thoughtful and searching”,

Conclusion

The study shows how Mahmoud Darwish and Dr. Ramzy Baroud through their art guide Palestinians to the path of reconciliation with the world through their call of action. The most crucial thing that can be deduced in both the writers is their candidness to show the injustice and tyranny done to the people of their Motherland. Whether it is the art of Mahmoud Darwish or Dr. Ramzy Baroud the spirit of Resistance in their literature against Israeli illegal occupation and domination is the central to them. The entire artifact of both the writers is replete with such illustrations that conspicuously highlight the overall trauma in Palestine. The search for identity and sense of loss of the homeland seems to be one of the major concerns of both the writers and more importantly they have been equally capable in vindicating it. One of the greatest writers of the last half-century, their works evoke the loss of their homeland and is suffused with the pain of dispossession, exile and loss. Their Literature also display a brilliant acuity, a passion for and openness to the world and, above all, a deep and abiding humanity.

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