

Identity, Culture, and Resistance in the Poetic Expressions of Mahmood Darwish: A Study

Zikrah¹, Research Scholar, Department of Languages (English) FHSS, Integral University, Lucknow-226026

Mohammad Tariq², Assistant Professor of English, Department of English Studies and Research, J.S. Hindu P. G. College, Amroha-244221(MJPR University, Bareilly, UP, India)

Hafiz Mohammad Arif³, Associate Professor of English, Department of Languages (English), FHSS, Integral University, Lucknow-226020

Abstract

The paper draws attention to the Palestinian culture and identity expressed in poetry to resist Israeli occupation. It shows how the Zionists have been trying to uproot Palestinian history by erasing their identity and culture. The main concern of the paper is to discuss Mahmood Darwish as a Palestinian resistance poet. Darwish in his poetic imagination reflects on Palestinian resistance and the erasure of Palestinian history. He puts forward his poetic voice as the voice of the voiceless Palestinians. This paper, therefore, discusses the Palestinian resistance by representing their lost identity and culture as a weapon of resistance. The paper offers a critical analysis of Mahmood Darwish's poetic works available in English or English translation.

Keywords: Palestinian Identity, Culture, Resistance, Colonization.

Resistance is a stubborn stand for liberation, and equal rights, it emerges against the reaction of domination and occupation. It provides a voice to the voiceless people against the violation of human rights. Jasbir Jain in his book *Theorizing Resistance: Narrative in History and Politics* (2012) defines resistance in the following words: "any act of questioning or assertion is a way of resistance" (16). He further explains that "resistance is born out of anger, frustration or/ despair; a basic unhappiness pushes people to it." (17)

In the Palestinian context, in resistance literature writer writes about the loss of their land and describes the condition of their people. It talks about the existence of the colonized people and, their terrible experience of surviving in occupied territory. Palestinian writers like Samih-al-Qasim, Adonis, Khalil Gibran, and Gassan Kanafani represent the experiences of Palestinians, their lost identity, and land occupied by the Zionists, Mahmood Darwish is also one of them who chose to write about his land and people. This paper, therefore, aims to discuss Mahmood

Darwish as a Palestinian resistance poet and his poetic imagination as the representation of Palestinian everyday life under occupation. Mahmood Darwish, one of the prominent poets and beloved voice of Palestine was born in Upper Galilee, Palestine, on March 13, 1942. When he was six years old, the Israeli army occupied and destroyed his village Birwa, therefore, his family had to flee to Lebanon. After one year of exile, when he returned to his land, he was unable to be considered an Israeli Arab, therefore, he was identified as a present-absent alien, internal refugee, and infiltrator. He lived in his land as a stranger, in State of Siege (2010), he talked about his identity: "I was refugee in Lebanon and now I am a refugee in my own country" (1). Darwish was a journalist and a member of the Communist Party in Haifa. He worked as the editor of the *Journal Palestinian Issue* and became the Director of the Palestinian Research Center. He was also the chief editor of the prestigious literary review *Al-karmal*. He published more than 30 collections of prose and poetry, which were translated into many other languages like French, Hebrew, and English. He was awarded many prizes like Lenin Peace Prize, the Lannan prize for cultural freedom, and the Prince Claus Fund award. His poetry plays a vital role in documenting the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Munir Akash, a translator of Darwish poetry, appreciates his way of writing in the following words, "no poet has pictured the manifold landscapes of Palestinian oblivion more vividly than Darwish" (xxiv). He died on August 9, 2008, during a heart operation in the United States of America.

Darwish believes that "all beautiful poetry is an act of resistance" (130), he, therefore, uses his poetic talent to witness the Israeli colonization and oppression and as a tool to resist the same. In *Resistance Literature*, (1987) Harlow writes about the vital role of resistance poetry in the following manner: "Poetry is capable not only of serving as means for the expression of personal identity or even nationalist sentiments. Poetry as a part of cultural institution and historical existence of people is itself an arena of struggle." (33)

After Israel's establishment as an independent state, to remove the Palestinian's identity, home and culture, Zionist

destroyed the Palestinian land, consequently, some Palestinian enforced to live in exile to live their life peacefully, as Darwish in his poem in *River Dies of Thirst*(2009) captures the image of Palestinian leaving their land, he writes: "that hurrying woman, crowned with a wool blanket and a pitcher of water, dragging a boy in her right hand and his sister in her left, followed by a herd of frightened goats, that women fleeing from a cramped war zone to a non-existed refuge" (154). Mahmood Darwish was also one of them who chose to live in exile because he wanted to raise his voice against the Israeli colonization but he also understood that while living in his land (Palestine) he cannot write and recite poetry against Israel, he said: "I carry exile everywhere, as I carry my homeland"(14). It is representing the fact that he believes that Palestinian's connection to land determines their identity, as Fawaz turkey (1981) writes about the Palestinian deep connection with the land and identity in the following manner: "the Palestine relation with his land is an ideal one, it has solid relationships with the basic concept of a place of his existence and without his land, the Palestinian cannot determine his identity"(371). Darwish, therefore, decided to use his words and language as the apparatus for expressing his identity, in his work *State of Siege* (2010), he writes, "I am my language / I am my words" (xix) and started resisting to get back the Palestinian's existence, identity, and land where everyone should be free to choose everything whatever they want, as in his poetic collection he writes: "We agree on one thing; to be. / Beyond that everyone should free to choose / whatever goal he or she desires."(83)

The Palestinians, who decided to stay at the land turned into a minority or the second-class citizen and were also deprived of equal rights, Rashid Khalidi in his book *The Hundred Years 'War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance* (2020) writes about the discrimination between Israel and Palestine, "within Israel, certain rights are reserved exclusively for Jewish citizens and denied to the 20 percent of citizens who are Palestinian. Of course, the five million Palestinians living under an Israeli military regime in the occupied territories have no right at all" (242). Darwish, therefore, resists equal rights, and depict the diversity between the lives of Israeli and Palestinians, in one of his poems he presents the cry of a Palestinian boy and raises the issue of inequality by writing that "you have a house, I have none, you have a celebration, I have none" (16). It represents the fact that in Palestine, Palestinians are living terrible life which Darwish documented as a tool of resistance against the Israeli colonization.

Darwish also tries to represent the everyday life of Palestinian under Israeli occupation, and their strategy to uproot Palestinian's existence, for instance, in 1948, Zionists besieged Palestinian land and intending to erase the history

of Palestine and their identity and culture, they started destroying their land and people by throwing bombs at their homes, as he writes: "to confront an undesirable reality they simply /adjust it with bulldozers" (133), consequently, it becomes routine of Palestinians to get up every morning and burry someone, as he writes in a poem, "individuals, if they wake up alive, can still say good morning, then go off to their normal jobs: burying the dead" (58). It signifies that Palestinian even don't know whether they will wake up alive the next day or not, because since Israeli settlement are being attacked every day, and to defend themselves they have to be awake and aware every moment. So, Darwish presents the picture of Palestine and their resilience at night when Israeli throws bombs on their home, for instance, in his poetic collection *The State of Siege*(2010), he writes:

There is no night in our night kept lit
By the glitter of artillery-
Our enemies stay up late
They fill our dark cellars
With light (5)

The above lines portray the gloomy image of Palestine where Palestinians are being attacked by invaders and Palestinians who stayed up late at night to defend their land and people, which are indicating the courage of Palestinians, who are ready to bear oppression instead of accepting defeat. John Berger, a translator of Mahmood Darwish's poetic collection *Mural*(2009), describes the same picture and writes, "day and night bombs, shells, phosphorous arms, mortars, machine-gun rounds are being fired by the Israeli army from air, sea, and land against a civilian population of 1.5 million." (4)

Darwish through his poetry also documents the image of Palestinian victims and witnessing the cruel act of Israelis, for instance, he portrays the condition of Palestinian victims after the Israeli attack:

Our daily victims are
Between two and eight martyrs ten
wounded
Twenty homes
Fifty olives trees
And the structural destruction of the ode,
the play
And unfinished painting (61)

Edward said also describes this kind of situation in Palestine in his book *Culture and Resistance* (2003) and said "Today, three more Palestinian were killed' we are killed like flies and nobody says anything" (176). Darwish in this way portray the image of disaster and pain of Palestinians so that everyone can understand the situation of Palestine and Palestinians and can also feel their pain and start supporting them in their act of resistance, he writes: "memory of the

people who no longer have them and of the objects that no longer have the people-destroyed in a minute, our things die like us" (30).

Darwish, through his poetic imagination also tries to present the cause of conflict between Israel and Palestinians, he believes that Palestinian are being executed and oppressed by Israeli because of having diversity in their ideology culture, and beliefs, he writes: "If you were not, you and I were not I/we might be friends" (135). Rashid Khalidi in his book *The Hundred years War on Palatine: a History Of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance*(2020) quoted the words of Lukud Knesset member Miki Zoher, who also believes that the Palestinians are bearing oppression and injustice in their land because they were born in a Palestinian family, he writes like this "I regret to say it but they suffer from one major defect: they were not born Jews" (244). Edward Said also felt the same discrimination and openly spoke about it in his book *Culture and Resistance* (2003) and writes that "there was a massive sense of being discriminated against for the simple reason that they are not Jews. It's kind of racism that affected the community." (49)

As Meon Basiso (1981) describes the aim of Palestinian resistance poetry, "the responsibility of poetry was not only an instigating one, it is that commitment to invade new horizon of the masses which elevate their awareness and their artistic taste" (494). Darwish, therefore, uses his poetry to make aware of the Palestinians as the cause of the brutal act of the Israeli military and to raise conscience in his people to stand up for defending themselves.

Being an optimistic resistance poet, Darwish has faith that one day Palestine will be free from the clutch of Israeli occupation and Palestinians will get back their identity and land, as in the poetic collections, *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise: Selected poems* (2013), he writes: "one day I will be what I want to be" (120). Darwish, therefore, with the hope of liberation not only tries to raise the conscience of Palestinians to raise voices against the oppression but he also tried to raise the conscience of Israeli to stop oppression because he believes that just as Palestinians are besieged under Israeli occupation, the Israeli military is also besieged in occupying them, in his poetic collection *State of Siege*(2010), he states that "this siege will not end until/ those who are lying siege, like the people under siege,/ accept boredom as the part of human nature" (81). He also tries to make Israeli realize that the Palestinians, their feelings, and emotions are not different from them so that they could understand the pain of Palestinian and stop oppressing them, he says, "sip some Arab coffee with us! / You may feel you're as human as we are" (21). Darwish also hopes for reconciliation and expresses his dream for the future of Palestine in his poetic collection *Unfortunately It was Paradise: Selected Poems* (2013), he writes:

I dream of white tulips, streets of song, a house of light.

I need a kind heart, not a bullet.

I need a bright day, not a mad, fascist Moment of triumph.

I need a child to cherish a day of laughter, not a weapon of war. (168)

Darwish dreams of a land where both Palestinian and Israeli will be able to live happily and no one has to be afraid of being killed, he also gives a solution for the peaceful future of Palestine and tries to convince Palestinians to accept the reality that the land of Palestine and its identity cannot be the same again as it was before the occupation, Darwish writes: "I will not be "I" twice. / When yesterday has taken the place of my tomorrow" (103). So, he offers a solution for the reconciliation of the ongoing conflict between them and suggests establishing a land where Palestinians and Israelis could live together by following their way of life, he states, "Let us go together in our separate paths. / Let us go together / Let us be kind." (104)

Darwish's poetic collections witness that, he has every quality to be called a Palestinian resistance poet because he devoted his life to accomplishing his dreamland, and turned his poetry into the apparatus to preserve Palestinian identity, culture, and land, he documents the memory and history of Palestine, tries to transform his pain into poetic imagination and represents the cause and consequences of occupation and the impact of occupation on Palestinian culture, tradition and language. He was imprisoned, and threatened by the Israeli government many times for writing and reciting poems still he continued writing poems and used that as a weapon to resist the domination and oppression of the Israeli government and to get the whole world's attention toward the Palestinian issue.

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