

POETRY AND POLITICS: A STUDY OF PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE POETRY

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

MOHAMMAD ASIF. I

CENTRE FOR WEST ASIAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI 110 067
INDIA
1994



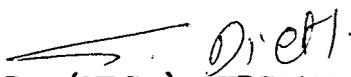
जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI - 110067

CENTRE FOR WEST ASIAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled,
"POETRY AND POLITICS: A STUDY OF PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE
POETRY", submitted by Mr. Mohammad Asif I., is in
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY of this University.
This dissertation has not been submitted for any other
degree to this University or to any other university and
is his own work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed
before the examiners for evaluation.


DR. (MRS.) GULSHAN DIETL
CHAIRPERSON


DR. MOHSIN USMANI
SUPERVISOR

CONTENTS

<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Page</i>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	i
PREFACE	ii-viii
I. CULTURAL HEGEMONY, RESISTANCE AND POETRY IN PALESTINE	1-13
II. POETRY: FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE	14-26
III. POLITICALLY COMMITTEES POETRY	27-47
IV. THE LANGUAGE OF PALESTINIAN POETRY	48-69
APPENDICES	70-76
BIBLIOGRAPHY	77-82

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Mohsin Usmani, without whose guidance and support this would not have materialised.

I also would like to thank Dr.(Mrs) Gulshan Dietl, Chair person, Centre for West Asian and African Studies, for the advice given to me during the conceptual stage of this dissertation.

Finally, my appreciation and gratitude to my friends, Raina, Mathew, Shahjahan, Pronob, Talluri, Nagesh, Biju and Ballu who helped me overcome my 'imperfections' and 'vulnerabilities'.

PREFACE

The present century has witnessed a galaxy of writers at the helm of social and political movements, playing a decisive role in redefining the socio-political relationship. Though writers and their works have, down the ages, contributed immensely to the well-being of society by focussing on the issues of their time, pointing out the ailments of society and by suggesting remedies to them, the phenomenon of writers in politics essentially belongs to the twentieth century. This is not to deny the role of writers like Milton who responded to the outstanding political questions and fought with the rulers of their time, for the voiceless. But they were few, numerically and their voices were isolated.

In this age of communication the litterateur's strength has increased manifold. The increase in literacy and the advent of technology resulted in an increase in, not only the writers' reach but also the interaction between themselves. The buttressing of communication between the more organised writers who now began to react in unison to the problems of this age was to have its effect. The might of the pen is brought to the fore to the dismay of the forces of exploitation.

Tolstoy, Chekov, Mayakovsky, Pasternake, Solzhenitsen and Brodsky in Russia, Neruda, Borges, and Marquez in Latin America and Senghor, Cabral, Cesaire, Toure, Brutus, Achebe and the like in Africa and a host of other writers in this century have showed the world how the pen could be used for the people's cause. What distinguish these

writers from others is their political consciousness, which enabled them to have a better understanding of society.

Perhaps, nowhere has literature played so crucial a role in the political affairs as in Africa, where in many countries it had a decisive role in the decolonisation process. The fact that many of Africa's liberation heroes were poets speaks volumes of the writers' contribution to politics. Amircar Cabral in Guinea, Bissau, Aime Cesaire in the Caribbean, Leopold Senghor in Senegal Ahmed Touro in Morocco, who were leaders of liberation movements in their respective countries, were also poets in their own right. Of these, Senghor and Touro even went on to preside over the post-colonial destiny of their countries.

In fact, the history of many decolonisation movements in Africa would be incomplete without the genre of poetry, which sustained and bolstered these movements over a long period of time. Even today, in the fourth quarter of the 20th century, in many parts of the world poetry and literature continues to play a decisive role in the struggle against the forces of colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism. In Palestine, Baluchistan, Jaffna, not to mention the African soil, the fight for independence and social justice is well supported by writers in these societies.

The relationship between literature and politics is well established. One of the reasons for the overwhelming participation of writers in political movements is, no doubt due to the mobilisational capacity of the 'written word'. However it is not just its 'demagogian' nature which makes it a potent weapon.

The present study investigates one of these literatures, which supports a political and militant movement for independence -- the Palestinian national resistance movement, which has as its objective, the liberation of Palestine from the Zionist settler colonialism and the restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people. The study will examine the poetry that has emanated from the struggle over the years and of which it is a part.

This literature has at its background the one century-old Arab-Zionist conflict, which began at the fag end of the last century with the Zionist demand for a homeland in Palestine and culminated in the creation of the state of Israel at the expense of Palestine. The Palestinian question is represented in Arabic poetry, ever since its inception.

The Palestinian Arab poets and poets from other Arab countries have harped on this theme since 1920s, discussing the pros and cons of the problem and projecting the sufferings of the people. However, not till the advent of a group of poets from Israel and the occupied territories (West Bank and Gaza strip), who chose to wield their pen, not from the comforts of a third country but from the place of their birth now under the occupation of the outside forces, did Palestinian poetry truly declare its commitment to the Palestinian cause.

There have been many studies on the nature and character of Palestinian poetry. But most of the studies rather than giving a holistic view of the poetry gives only a narrow account of how the problem is projected in poetry, with little reference to the politics of neither the bards, nor their creations. Literary critics often tend to treat Palestinian literature by detaching it from politics. The shortcomings of such an approach are many. First of all they tend to ignore the background of this poetry, i.e, the Arab-Israeli conflicts,

which is the real source of this genre. Secondly it fails to take into account the conditions of literary production. Literature is a social product, and its production and distribution is determined by the existing social condition. One cannot hope to have a true picture of the Palestinian resistance poetry by overlooking these factors.

Hanan Ashrawi in her study has pointed out that critics have for long ignored Palestinian literature and denied its right to responsible criticism. As Ashrawi puts it:

"It has become almost imperative for any study of this nature to offer a literary "apology" or "defence" in an attempt to justify any shortcomings or literary defects in the subject at hand. After all, the literature is "Palestinian" and this national definition has become the rationalisation for the lack of any objective study or criticism of the literature which is in itself a source of national pride, a symbol as well as means of resistance".

Ashrawi, more renowned as the Palestinian spokesperson, is also a poet and critic in her own right. She believes that the "challenge of an honest and constructive criticism (of their literature) is a mere footnote" in the long and arduous struggle of the Palestinian people, who "have been able to meet many challenges in their struggle for existence".

But unfortunately, "honest and constructive criticism" have been far and few, in the case of Palestinian literature. The present study is an earnest endeavour to that effect and it hopes to throw some new light on Palestinian literature, which deserves, as a literary entity, thorough scrutiny.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is aimed at exploring the exact role of poetry in the Palestinian people's struggle for independence. It sees poetry as a political act that springs from a specific historic context and, therefore, views it from a political angle. The objective of the study is to analyse the historical context under which it is produced, its functions, and characteristics. Some of the questions the study poses and tries to find answers to are:

1. What exactly is the role of poet in the struggle?
2. Is it just an emotional outlet of the sufferings of the people or more than that ?
3. Where does it stand as an art form ?
4. Where does it stand vis-a-vis other liberation poetry ?

The study will also examine the changes on the literary front, as a consequence of political changes.

CHAPTERISATION

The relationship between politics and poetry is discussed in the first chapter. It tries to see poetry as a response to the cultural hegemony of the aggressor. The condition of production and distribution is dealt with here.

The second chapter deals with the Arab-Israeli realpolitik and its impact on Palestinian poetry. The equation between politics and poetry is discussed in this chapter. The political changes and the corresponding changes in literary arena are discussed here.

The characteristics of the Palestinian resistance poetry, its political commitment, the subject matter and its aesthetics are analysed in Chapter Three.

The fourth chapter, besides scrutinising the language of Palestinian poetry also briefly covers some of the major poets. The imagery, symbols, Palestinian poets' use of myth, and folk elements in poetry are scrutinised here.

The study restricts itself to a time span of 30 years, that is, it will analyse material published in the years 1960 and 1990. The period before 1960 has already been covered by Ghassan Kanafani. However, the post-90 period is omitted for objectivity's sake.

METHODOLOGY

The study closely follows the concept of 'resistance literature, as first propounded by Ghassan Kanafani and later developed by Barbara Harlowe. The latter broadly categorised, in her study 'Resistance Literature', the literature that has emerged from the historical struggle against colonialism and imperialism taking place in various parts of the world. However, it was Kanafani, the noted Palestinian critic and writer, who first used the term 'resistance literature' to describe Palestinian literature, in his work 'Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948- 1966'.

Resistance literature, part of the organised national liberation struggle, is seen as a form of cultural resistance against cultural hegemony and according to its propounders defies all traditional western classification of literatures into various genres and linguistic entities. Instead it proposes its own categorisation based on its goals and functions.

CHAPTER 1

CULTURAL HEGEMONY, RESISTANCE AND POETRY IN PALESTINE

Cultural servitude is mandatory for colonialism to thrive, because taking control of the native economy and polity require prop from the cultural front. In fact, colonisation becomes complete only when the political and economic subjugation is complemented by cultural subjugation. Colonial powers of all time have followed the same formula of concurrent subjugation of the native polity, economy and culture.

As part of the colonial game-plan to capture the cultural realm, in the first place, a ruthless onslaught is unleashed against the native cultural institutions. This onslaught, which is all pervasive, has a devastating effect on the native cultural scenario. The natives are too unprepared to stave off the assault and cave in meekly. Once the supremacy is established in the cultural realm, the aggressor now legitimises its acts.

At every stage of colonisation the ill-matched battle on the cultural front continues, with the aggressor always maintaining the upper hand. The result is that not only the native economy and polity, but also their history, their present and future are at the mercy of the aggressor. Finally, the 'cultural bomb', as Ngugi wa Thiango calls, goes a long way in legitimising the colonial regime by annihilating the people's belief in their name, in their

language, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves.¹

Colonialism arrests the historical and cultural development of the colonised. The colonial situation calls a halt to national cultures in almost every field.²

"Colonialism is also cultural genocide", says a release of MPLA, one of the greatest anti-colonial movements of this century.³ The release, published in *Angola in Arms*, 2 August 1971, under the title "The Effects of colonialism on the colonised African peoples" throws further light into the cultural genocide.

"In the colonialist attempt to destroy the colonial, the intention is precisely to break the link of the individual's identification with the entity to which he belongs. In the initial phase, they start by denigrating the values of the colonised. Cultural racism is the cultural assassination and its manifestation. Similarly they deny that the colonial has a past, deliberately drawing a curtain of oblivion over the past. Then they loudly proclaim that the values of the black man (or any other colonised people) are immoral, unaesthetic or insignificant, that it is an inferior culture".⁴

¹. Ngugi wa Thiango, Decolonising the mind, The Politics of Language in African Literature, (London: James Curry-Heinemann, 1986), p. 3.

². MPLA release Angola in arms, vol.5, 2 August, 1971.

³. Ibid.

⁴. Ibid.

Frantz Fanon, Amircar Cabral, Aime Cesaire, Leopold Sedor Senghor, all critics of colonialism, who have associated with various liberation movements, expounded the theme of cultural hegemony.

The decolonisation process, which aims at transposing the colonial order and obversing to historicity, means regaining the cultural realm. The need for regaining the cultural realm by breaking the cultural and ideological hegemony of the existing power is stressed by men like Cabral, Kanafani, Cesaire, Senghor, who led revolutionary movements against the colonial and imperialist powers in their respective countries.

Amircar Cabral, who for many years, had been the spokesperson of the struggling African people believed that national liberation is "necessarily a cultural act".⁵ In his book, 'Unity and Struggle', Cabral stresses the necessity of cultural upsurge on the part of the fighting people. For it is in the cultural factor the germ of challenge, which leads to the structuring and development of the liberation movement is formed.⁶

"The liberation movement must be able to achieve, step by step but surely, as its political action develops, the confluence of the cultural level of the various social categories available for the struggle. The movement must

⁵. Amircar Cabral, Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings, tr. Michael Woplfers (London: Heinemann, 1980) p. 183.

⁶. Ibid, p. 142.

be able to transform them into the national cultural force which serves as a basis for the development of the armed struggle and is a condition for it".⁷

Cultural resistance and the assertion of the cultural personality of the dominated people are seen as a prelude to political freedom. People fighting for national independence at this stage take on the oppressor and hegemonistic culture by using their own indigenous culture as weapon. The cultural symbols and cultural institutions, which had earlier been debilitated in the colonial onslaught, are used to neutralise the aggressor. In the process of cultural unity, as Cabral put it, the total identification of the movement with the environmental reality and of the progressive cultural identification of the various social categories, which take part in the struggle is achieved.⁸

NATIONALIST LITERATURE

The struggle against cultural distortion and cultural uprooting is fought on many fronts. One crucial front is that of high culture, most particularly that of literature and especially that of poetry, where the cultural liberation movement reaches unaccustomed heights.⁹

⁷. Ibid.

⁸. Ibid, p. 147.

⁹. Frantz Fanon, Towards an African Revolution, tr. Hakon Chevalier (New York Monthly Review Press, 1967), p. 35.

The era of literary nationalism is marked by the skillful use of language by the colonised to evoke national sentiments and thereby to effect political unity in the fight against the aggressor. Incidentally, language is one of the weapons used by the coloniser, first for colonisation and then to perpetuate it. If the efficacy of the articulation is brought to the fore during the colonisation, now it is the turn of the oppressed people to employ it to reverse that order. The writers of the colonised society now begin to use their pen with an artfulness and adroitness, that was previously known only the aggressor, to undo the exertion of the latter.¹⁰

Thus language becomes the primary battleground for the colonised, who through their raconteurs and bards discover their place in history and aspire for it. The battle for the written record becomes intense once the writers among the oppressed go about doing their primary task, that is restoring the character of the society back to its history.

Fanon in his chronicle of decolonisation describes the rise of nationalist literature. He refers to that phase of decolonisation when litterateurs challenge the existing order.

"Here there is, at the level of literary creation, the taking up and clarification of theme which are typically nationalist. This may be properly called the literature of combat in the sense that it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation. It is a literature of combat, because it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because

¹⁰. Ibid, p. 1.

it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space".¹¹

CULTURAL HEGEMONY IN PALESTINE

The history of Arab-Zionist conflict in Palestine has been one of cultural fracas, where the latter initially established its dominance over the former on the cultural front, before extending it to political, economic and geographic spheres. That the Zionists were able to convince the world that their exigency for the land is more important than the survival of the Palestinians is proof enough of the hegemony they established on the cultural domain. This was before the creation of the state of Israel. And after the birth of the Jewish nation, they continued the cultural warfare with greater degree; this time to carry its expansionist policies, which it did in a series of wars.

Four decades of the existence of the Zionist state saw a sustained and systematic assault on Palestinian culture both inside its own territory and outside. Palestinian cultural institutions and cultural symbols have repeatedly been targeted by the oppressive organs of the Zionist state. They also used their resourcefulness and the predilection against the Arab in the west to their advantage to establish cultural supremacy.

Zionists created myths galore to vouch their enterprise and corroborate the inferiority and worthlessness of Palestinians. These myths magnified the Zionists' culture and

¹¹. Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, (New York Monthly Review, 1967) p. 193.

intellectual grandeur. The story of an enterprising people, who prevailed over their destiny to finally find their home in the Promised Land, where they performed miracles of construction and civilisation and fought brilliantly successful technical wars against a dumb and essentially repellent population of uncivilised Arab natives, is well established.¹²

Just as the European colonisers defined themselves by defining the "other", Zionism defined itself and its ideology vis-a-vis Palestine.¹³ They never wasted a chance to prove the Arab decadence and superiority of the Zionist ideology.

"The entire tenor of Zionist and western discourse about Palestine has been to reduce us (Palestinians) to so problematic, eccentric and unthinkable a level as to make our every effort to appear to be human only a conformation of our dehumanised permanently subaltern status."¹⁴

Edward Said said all of this was part of an orchestrated campaign to exterminate Palestine as a political presence in Palestine.¹⁵ Zionist propaganda machinery worked ceaselessly to this effect. Whenever the Israeli and the western or its national leaders referred to Palestinians, they used condemnatory racist terms with subhuman connotations.

¹². Edward Said, Question of Palestine, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1979), p. 8.

¹³. See Edward Said, Orientalism, (New York: Vintage, 1979)

¹⁴. Edward Said, "Intifada and Independence." p. 14.

¹⁵. Ibid, p. 12.

To (Menachem) Begin they (Palestinians) were "two-legged vermin", to General Egton they were "drugged cockroaches in a bottle", to (Yitzak) Shamir they were "grasshoppers", to the polite, Palestinians were "the Arab of Judea and Samaria", to the New York times they were simply "Arabs."¹⁶

CULTURAL SUPPRESSION

Cultural and ideological repression of Palestine has been one of the main features of Israeli settler colonialism. Repression in the cultural sphere ranged from denial of freedom of expression to imposition of Hebrew language on Palestinians and the distortion of Jewish and Palestinian history so as to legitimise the continued repression of the Palestinians. Israeli repression of Palestinian culture and ideology has reached such extremes that artists are prohibited from painting or exhibiting work in which the four colours of the Palestinian flag are used simultaneously.¹⁷

The Zionist state strives to use all its machinery to push the Palestinians out of history. Apart from the propaganda by the media and its political leaders to deny the Palestinians their place in history, the state sees to it that the "entity called Palestine does not exist on earth."

¹⁶. Said n. 14, p. 12.

¹⁷. Samik K. Farsoun et al "The Sociology of an uprising," Jamal Nasser and Roger Heacock (eds), Intifada (London: Praeger, 1990), p. 27.

"Palestinian Arab historic cities have been bull-dozed or pillaged. Even Palestinian folk items, traditional costumes and food are being robbed and marketed abroad as Israeli creations. The Arabic names of towns, hills and streets are being erased and changed to Hebrew names.¹⁸

As Barbara Harlowe pointed out, the colonialist and the imperialist always target the historical and cultural record. One of the first targets of the Israeli defence force when they entered the Lebanese capital of Beirut in the fall of 1982 was the PLO research centre and its archives containing the documentary and cultural history of the Palestinian people.¹⁹

This assault on historical, cultural record is all pervasive in Israel and occupied territories. Noted Palestinian scholar Mohammad Hajaj further elucidates the Zionist schemes aimed at the destruction of Palestinian culture.

"The word Palestine has been expunged from all textbooks used in the schools and methodically replaced by Israel. Many books, most of the classics of Arabic literature have been blacklisted and libraries are forbidden to possess them."²⁰

CENSORSHIP

¹⁸. Ibid.

¹⁹. Harlowe, Barbara, R.I. P.7.

²⁰. Ibid.

Israeli government uses draconian laws to prevent the dissemination of ideas from the Palestinian side that goes against its interests. Censorship is widely prevalent in Israel and occupied territories, the chief weapon of the regime being the oppressive regulation acts.

There are two main groups of directives in the emergency regulations that deal with the press. The first empowers the authorities to impose censorship on newspaper and prevent them. (The) second authorises them to suspend newspapers for a specific period or to close them down altogether. Article 87 of the emergency regulation permits the military authorities to prevent newspapers from publishing any item the censor thinks may impair "the security of the state and the public interest." ²¹

CULTURAL RESISTANCE

The hegemony of the Zionist culture and its assault on Palestinian cultural symbols have resulted in strong and militant movement on that front. Despite relentless onslaughts and hostile conditions the Palestinians were able to build up a movement; a mass culture of resistance which has steadfastness as its basic principle.

Over the years the Palestinians have turned this mass culture of resistance to a dynamic ideology and a strategy to counter the repressive Israeli measures known as

²¹. Sabri Jiryis, Democratic Freedom in Israel, tr. Merric Dobson (University of Libya, Institute of Palestine Studies, 1972), p. 67.

"sumud", which means steadfast perseverance. It seeks to end the occupation through a "elective and third way between submission and exile, between passivity and violence."²²

Challenging the aggressor, a number of forums have emerged with writers and artists at the helm. Newspapers, journals, theatre groups, musical ensembles, associations of writers and artists were some of the pillars of such forums.²³

Zinat el Bitar explains the Palestinian artists' fight against the cultural genocide:

"Palestinians are thus faced with the formidable task of not only fighting for their lives and land, but preventing the Zionists from stealing away their history and heritage. The Zionist policy has had the effect of turning popular crafts into a source of inspiration for contemporary Palestinian art. A more or less uniform graphic arts movement has thus arisen displaying harmonious political and aesthetic objectives. This movement occupies a privileged position now as the avant-garde in the struggle to save Palestine's present and future historical entity, and adds up to an interesting and original artistic experience".²⁴

²². Farsoun n. 17, p. 28.

²³. Lisa Taraki "The development of political consciousness," Nassar and Heacock (eds) Intifada (London: Praeger, 1990), p. 62.

²⁴. Zinat el Bitar, On Palestinian Art, The Breath of the Country, (New Delhi, 1989), p.14

POETRY OF RESISTANCE

The resistance to the cultural hegemony of the Israeli settler colonialism and the desire of Palestinians for a national entity found its fullest expression in Palestinian national literature, specially in its poetry. Palestinian literature, specially the genre of resistance poetry provides, outside the existing political infrastructure, the most potent and operative vehicle for spreading resistance.

The (traditional) penchant of the Arabs for poetry and its capacity for oral transmutation make it a powerful weapon in the hands of the poet. This is the reason why men like Moin Bessisso and Mahmud Darwish are as much feared and targeted by the Zionist regime as the commando leaders. This again is the reason why an extraordinarily large number of literary figures are represented in top Palestinian leadership.

Poetry is, therefore, an answer to the hegemony of the dominant culture and it challenges the existing order which perpetuates violence against the Palestinian people on the political, geographic and cultural fronts.

Poetry in the occupied land springs out of a historical situation where the Jewish state suppresses the basic rights of the people. The art, literature and culture of the colonised are not given a chance to flourish and the culture of the latter is imposed on the former, with the objective to undermine the indigenous culture. Under this condition, poetry being a cultural institution of the Palestinian people, has the historical role of challenging

the existing order as well as shielding the culture of the oppressed people. Here it is, as Barbara Harlowe said, not only a part of the struggle but an arena of struggle.

CHAPTER 2

POETRY: FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The present chapter focusses on the poetry dealing with the 'Palestinian Question' from its early stages to the present day. The various political events, which had an impact on the poets are briefly examined here. In the last part of the chapter the political ideologies, that had influenced the Palestinian poetry is discussed.

Arab-Israeli conflict in Palestine evoked responses of the poets as early as 1910, that is much before the Balfour Declaration of 1917.²⁵ The fact that poets were one of the first to react to the problem has much to do with the socio-cultural significance of poetry in the Arab history. For the Arabs, since centuries, poetry has been the primary art form. Like epics to the Greeks and music to the Romans it occupies a special position in the Arab cultural history. Ghazi A. Alghosabi in his work "The Crisis of Modern Arabic Poetry" writes about the significance of this genre.

"Arabic poetry was born in an environment which knew no other forms of literature or fine art. Unlike the numerous other civilisations which were fascinated by singing, dancing, acting, painting, sculpture and music, pre-Islamic Arabs knew no other medium of expression other than poetry. To

²⁵. Khalid A. Sulaiman, Palestine and Modern Arab Poetry, (London: Zed Books, 1984), p. 4.

the Arabs regardless of its social and political role, poetry represented what the other fine arts combined stood for other cultures".²⁶

Apart from the pleasurable spiritual ecstasy that it provided, poetry also played an important role in shaping the Arab mind, over the centuries. Arabs used poetry, not only to make their idle hours beautiful, but also to react to the issues of the time.

The historical significance of the genre, poetry's destructive capabilities apart, lies in the involvement of the poets in the Palestinian struggle in such large numbers. As Hanan Ashrawi put it, the strong oral tradition in Palestinian culture and the fact that the Palestinians are a verbal people make poetry a formidable weapon in the Palestinian struggle.²⁷

This chapter traces the responses of the poets to the Palestinian problem at various stages. The influence of the political changes on the literary arena is highlighted here.

EARLY POEMS ON PALESTINE

²⁶. Ghazi A. Algozaibi, "The crisis of modern Arabic poetry," Arabian Essays, (KPIS, Wiltshire), p. 101.

²⁷. Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi, "The contemporary Palestinian poetry of occupation," Journal of Palestine Studies, Berkeley, vol.10, no.1, 1980, p. 84.

The Balfour Declaration of 1917 was the one political event which gave a new dimension to the Arab-Israeli relations. The Declaration, the letter sent by the then British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothdchild suggesting the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people was to sow the seeds of a lasting conflict between the Arabs and the Jews. The next three decades following the Balfour Declaration witnessed a series of political activities with more and more Jewish settlements in Palestine and the subsequent riots which culminated in the creation of the state of Israel, in 1948.

This period of intense political activity, when the external players like Britain and France played a big role, is reflected in the the poems written during this period. Poems criticising the policies of Britain, the mandatory power were many. Wadi al Bustan, who himself worked for the British administration, until he resigned in 1930 wrote many such poems attacking the questionable policies of the British in Palestine.

Ibrahim Tuqan (1905-1941), Kamal Nasir (1925-73) and Al- Dabbagh (1880-1946), all prominent poets of the time put the blame on the British for its betrayal of Palestinian people.

O my homeland! it was my fault that I loved them

Here is my heart, I offer to you to stab ²⁸

Khalid Sulaiman writes about the poetry of this period: "The image of Britain as an oppressor and unjust power which came to dominate the poetry of this period can be

²⁸. For the text of the poem, see Sulaiman, n.1, p. 10.

illustrated further by many poems. There was hardly a poet who did not write in this vein".²⁹

The major Palestinian poet who dealt with the Balfour Declaration are Iskander- all Khuri al- baytjaoi, Ibrahim al- Dabbagh, Muhyial- din al- al hajj Isa, Abdal Rahim Mahmud and Ibrahim Tuqan. Each of these poets saw a plot to deceive the Palestinian people in Balfour Declaration.

There were also poems praising the bravery of the Palestinians under the oppressive mandate as well as the elegies on the martyrs. Ibrahim Tuqan's 'al- Thulatha al- Hamra', which commemorates the hanging of three Palestinians in Acre in 1930 (bloody Tuesday) can be cited as one of the best elegies written during this period.

The acquisition of land by the Zionists prior to the creation of Israel also figure prominently in many poems:

It goes without saying that selling the land causes poverty

It leads to the valley of perdition

If I am strutting about clothed today

Tomorrow I shall be stripped to the open sky³⁰

²⁹. Ibid.

³⁰. Ibid, p. 115.

warns Ibrahim Tuqan in one of the poems. Abu- Salma was another poet who wrote about land selling and its consequences. Bustani's Diwan 'al- Filastiniyyat' published in 1946 is said to be the first collection of poems on Palestine. Himself a political man, who actively figured in "Palestinian Arab Executive" and "Istqlal party", Bustani is perhaps the first of the poet politicians of Palestine.

REFUGEES

The partition of Palestine in 1948 and the subsequent wars between the newly created state and the Arab countries saw the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their land. While many thousand were forced to live as second class citizens on their own soil under the Zionist regime, others were turned into refugees. For the next two decades we see the problems of the Palestinian Arab refugees and their longing for the return becoming the main themes. Non-Palestinian poets also joined the Palestinian poets in poignantly presenting the case of the Palestinians refugees. Poets blamed the Arab rulers for not doing anything for the cause of the Palestinians and held them equally responsible for the sufferings of the Palestinian people.

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, who himself was a refugee explains the conditions of the refugees:

In the deserts of exile
Spring after spring passes
What are we doing with our love

While our eyes are full of dust and rhyme ³¹

Fadwa Tuqan's 'With a refugee woman at the Id'(1951) and Ruqayya, and Kamal Nasar's 'Sarkhat al khiyam'(Cry of the Tents) also express the sufferings of the refugees.

³¹. For the text of the poem see Sulaiman, n.1, p. 38.

THE POETRY OF EXILE AND OCCUPATION

As mentioned earlier, the creation of Israel and the Jordanian attempt to annex the remaining part of Palestine divided Palestinian society into two; the Palestinians in Israel, under the Israeli rule and Palestinians under the Jordanian regime. If the conditions of the former under the Israeli oppressive regime was really bad, the latter's condition was no better. While the Palestinians in Israel, with their political and civil rights denied was treated as second class citizens, those under Jordanian rule also had to struggle under the hostile conditions. There was also a substantial number of Palestinian refugees in other Arab countries.

This fragmentation of Palestinian society resulted in the development of two streams literature. Though practically both dealt with the same theme, that is the suffering of the Palestinians, these two streams of literature, the 'literature of occupation' and the 'literature of exile' came to stay, independent of the other, as the writers residing outside Israel, those in West Bank, which was a part of Jordan; Gaza, hither to an Egyptian territory; and of course, the various others in the large Palestinian diaspora, spread across the globe had no interaction with each other.

It was Ghassan Kanafani, the noted Palestinian writer and critic, who first made the distinction between the two streams of literature of the Palestinians, grown under two different conditions, but has much in common to be categorised into one. Again, it was Kanafani who, for the first time applied the term 'muqawa mah', that is 'resistance', a term

which has since then become the label of a whole genre of literature associated with the liberation movements in different parts of the world.³²

Literature of occupation (Taht al-ihtilat), because of repression and censorship (as mentioned in the previous chapter) was largely unknown to the outside world until Kanafani threw light in his study. 'Exile' ('manfa') literature also had a similar sort of existence. Palestinian writers in West Bank were subjected to almost the same kind of treatment, as Hanan Ashrawi describes:

"The Hashimite rule of the west bank was overtly and directly involved in suppressing the publication of worthwhile literature, especially that of political social significance. Direct censorship, combined with control over education and social institutions, clubs, and all cultural activities along with relentless political repression succeeded in maintaining a standard of ignorance and superficiality of alarming dimensions. Only the regime's mouthpieces or writers of trashy third-rate literature succeeded in getting their works published while underground literature remained scarce and did not reach a significant audience".³³

The writers of west bank were more severely handicapped than those in Israel, as there was no forums or literary journals to voice their opinion in.

³². Barbara Harlowe, Resistance Literature, (London: Methuen, 1991), p. 2.

³³. Ashrawi n.3, p. 78.



POST-1967 PERIOD

The year 1967 was a landmark in the history of Palestinian poetry. Politically it was the year Israel attacked and annexed the territory of west bank and Gaza. On the literary front the resistance to Israeli aggression gained considerable momentum following the war. This was because the war finally enabled the literary figures of west bank and Gaza to interact with the Palestinian writers in Israel. What made the literary unification possible was the absence of serious literary forums in west bank and Gaza which made the writers of these places heavily dependent upon the journals produced by Palestinians in Israel. The most important literary forum that enabled the Palestinian writers to exchange their experiences were the journals al-Jadid and al-Ohad and the newspaper al-ittihad, all published from Israel.

By the 1970s with the appearance of literary pages in the local newspapers, al-shad, al-quds Palestinian poetry began to reach the mass audience. This was also helped by the founding of a few literary journals in the early 70s and the starting of the journal al-bayadir in Jerusalem in 1976. The publications al-Muntada al-Adabi (Gaza, 1975), al-Kitab (Jerusalem) and al-Fajs al-adabi (Jerusalem, 1980) also played a big role in popularising Palestinian literature, especially its poetry. The publishing houses, notably Salali al-Din also contributed substantially in bridging the gap between the Palestinian writers and the masses.³⁴

³⁴. Lisa Taraki, "Development of Political consciousness in the occupied territories," Nassar and Heacock (eds) Intifada, (London: Praeger, 1990), p. 63.

One of the major changes one notices in the poems of the sixties is the increasing assertion of Palestinian identity on the part of the poets. This is in contrast to the earlier phase, when the poets generally bemoaned the loss of land and put the blame on the forces, who the poet thinks were responsible for the sufferings of his people.

If in the earlier period the poet always looked and prayed for some forces to rescue his people, it quickly paved the way for a new era when the poet saw a role for himself in deciding the destiny of his people. The reasons for the poet's change of attitude was the realisation that the master of his destiny is himself. The moment of truth came after let down by the outside world time and again. Whatever hope the poet had of a 'duex machina' quickly evaporated giving way to a new determination. Thus the most militant part of the Palestinian poetry starts in the sixties.

It has to be noted that the militancy now visible in the poets was a reflection of the general attitude of the society. By the 1960s Palestinians society, thanks to the hardship suffered over the years, was ready to take the battle in to the enemy camp. The birth of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation was a pointer to that.

Mahmud Darwish expresses the transformation the Palestinian poet and society had undergone:

I shall declare in the face of my foe

A fierce struggle of liberation

In the name of free men everywhere.....³⁵

³⁵. For text of the poem see Sulaiman, n.1, p. 19.

INFLUENCE OF MARXISM

The poetry on Palestine till 1948 had a strong Islamic flavour, and this was evident in the poems of all the major poets of this period. On the other hand, nationalist and humanitarian factors acquired far greater significance in poetry written after 1948.

One of the notable features of the poetry of the sixties is its strong leftist leanings. This is the outcome of the circumstances dominating Palestinian poets in Israel and the unique experience poets have undergone. The bad living conditions Palestinians had to endure, the discriminations they suffered could be the reason for this. Ghassan Kanafani suggested that the Palestinians were sympathetic to communism, mainly because it was the ideology fighting capitalism and imperialism, which they held responsible for the creation of the Jewish state and their sufferings.

Israeli government's anti-communist policies, which resulted in repression of the communists made the Israeli communists and the Palestinians comrades-in-arms. The leftist press' sympathetic projection of the Palestinians are also cited as the reasons for the leftist character of Palestinian resistance poetry.

However, this apart, the influence of the many leftist fronts which were an integral part of P.L.O is also instrumental in giving Palestinian poetry of the sixties leftist colouring. Many Palestinian poets, including Mahmud Darwish, were members of the Israeli Communist Party.

The obvious reason for the secular character of the resistance poetry is the leftist influence. The social vision of the poets (which is discussed in the next chapter) is also shaped by the influence of Marxism.

POETRY OF THE INTIFADA

Presenting an anthology of poetry on Intifada the Egyptian poet Thoraya Mahdi Allam writes:

"The number of poems that have been written about the children of the 'Intifada', since it began in December 1987, is truly amazing. Hundreds of poems have been composed all over the Arab world. They are in fact a literary record that will go down in history as a true and throbbing account of this exceptional event".³⁶

Like the novel and the exceptional struggle itself, which angered, perplexed and exasperated the aggressor, the response of the poets has also been unprecedented. The image of Intifada, the image of the child with stone in his hand captured the imagination of the poets.

The chief weapon of the Intifada, the stone, is glorified in Ahmad Yusuf Helder's poem 'The language of the stone':

How wonderful that the stone should become

³⁶. For text of the poem see Sulaiman, n.1, p. 8-9.

a lantern, which with light
Can paint the walls of darkness in the night,
And that the stone should turn
Into the alphabet, and that
we should now learn
The language of the stone,
From a child, whose age is
the same as the stone.³⁷

In fact "the stone" and "the child", the two central images of Intifada figure prominently in the poems on Intifada.

³⁷. For text of the poem see Sulaiman, n.1.

CHAPTER 3

POLITICALLY COMMITTED POETRY

"In the world today all culture,all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake,art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics"³⁸

Poetry in the land of Palestine,as elsewhere,is a political act stemming from a specific historic situation. As it was mentioned in the previous chapter it is the product of a definite socio-political condition,where the political and civil rights of the Palestinian people is suppressed and the cultural symbols and institutions are targeted. Poetry,under these conditions,being the most popular and expressive cultural symbol has the historical role of taking on the aggressor and its hegemonistic culture.

Poetry here,like in other parts of the world where it participates in the decolonisation process, takes part in that historical process. It has a clearly defined political end of redefining the social relationship, so as to accommodate those people, who hither to are in the periphery,in the core of history.

³⁸ Mao Tse Tung, On Literature and art (Peking:Foreign Language Pres, 1967), p.25 ³⁸

It was concluded, in the previous chapter, that it originates from the Jewish-Arab conflict in Palestine, more specifically, Palestinian resistance poetry is an answer to the Zionist 'cultural siege' in Palestine.

Thus Palestinian resistance poetry, like African poetry, is politically committed. What Peter Nazareth, an East African critic once said of African literature, is also relevant for Palestinian poetry:

"I would say that no African who writes about society in present-day Africa can avoid being committed and political not in the sense of party-politics but in the sense that every attempt to reorganise society in Africa is a move which affects everybody, the figures at the top and bottom"³⁹.

Commitment in literature can be 'explicit' or 'implicit'. In the first case it openly states its objectives, and may even be used as a political propaganda. It can also be implicit in the writer's verbal structure, mood, tone, and the general rhythmic pattern of his work.

Palestinian poetry's commitment is more explicit than implicit. Many poems are explicitly committed to the extent of being called propagandist poetry. This is not surprising at all with Mahmud Darwish, the Palestinian national poet and Moin Bsisso holding important positions in PLO. Darwish was till recently the chairman of the cultural committee of PLO. Other major Palestinian poets like the late Moin Bsisso and Samih al Qassim also held important positions in PLO at one time or the other. When the poet and the politician

³⁹ Hudu R.N. Modern Poetry and the African Predicament (London : Macmillan, 1978).

is the same person, the pen and the gun and the platform serve the same ends. Perhaps this would explain why literature such as Palestinian resistance poetry is committed explicitly.

Poets like Darwish never hides his goal in his poems. In 'I Declare', he stoutly declares it:

I shall declare in the face of my foe!
A fierce struggle of liberation
In the name of free men everywhere
Workers-students-and poets-
I shall declare-
And let the cowards-enemies of the sun
Be satiated of the bread of shame
As long as myself remain
My words will remain-
Bread and arms-
In the hands of freedom fighters!⁴⁰

Other poets too, like Darwish, proclaim through their poems, in no unequivocal terms their commitment to the cause. Here is Rashid Hussein:

"I refuse that a child become a hero by the age of ten

⁴⁰ Abdullah al Udhari, victims of a map tr. (Al Saqi books, London, 1984)

I refuse that tree trunks harbour explosives
I refuse the branches of my orchard trees be used as gallows
I refuse that the rose squares in my garden be used by
firing squads
I can refuse whatever you like--- but
When my country has burned
Along with my friends
And my youth
Then how can my poems not become weapons"⁴¹

(Condemnation, The Birth of a Country, 1989)

A correct assessment of the role and functions of poetry can be made only by analysing the poems and their ideology. Here one has to bear the following questions in mind before proceeding with:

What does poetry represent for the general masses in Palestine who are subjected to a subhuman level of existence under the Israeli yoke ?

Is this Poetry more than mere sloganeering ? or where does this poetry stand as a work of art ?

And finally what is the social vision that emerges from the Palestinian resistance poetry ?

⁴¹ For details of the text see Bhim Sahini, The Breath of the country, New Delhi, 1989.

Starting point to this discussion is 'The Breath of the Country' an anthology of resistance poetry from Palestine, brought out by Afro-Asian Writer's Association. This anthology presents wide representation of Palestinian writers, deceased and martyred as well as those living poets, who continues to fight the occupied regime.

Major Themes

Love for land, resistance to the foreign yoke and the preservation of Palestinian identity are the most recurrent themes in Palestinian poetry. However these above mentioned themes are so inextricably interwoven that, more often than not, it is difficult to draw a line between them. For example, a single poem can contain all these three themes or two of them. Nonetheless considering its significance these are discussed under different heads.

1. RESISTANCE:

The opposition to Israeli rule, it has already been mentioned, is most vocal and vehement in Palestinian poetry. The reasons for this, as it is found in the early part of this study, are the historical significance of poetry in the Arab land and the capacity of the poetic genre for self expression and mobilisation. Since poetry appeals to the emotions, among all art forms, genres of literature and other mediums of expression, it's mobilisation capacity is one of the highest.

The poems presented in the anthology have one unifying feature that binds them together, that is the poignant portrayal of Palestinian reality. Palestinian reality means the untold misery of generations of Palestinians uprooted and homeless, who were,

let down, repeatedly, by destiny . Palestinian reality also means the unflinching opposition and protest of a people against violence on all fronts, geographical, political and religious and their resolve to fight it out.

Ali Al Batiri's poem 'Manifest for the Martyr of the Intifada' presents this in a powerful manner in an equally powerful language:

You still must
Boast of justice
In the outbursts of your oppressive acts
But....
Do you know why my father
Rose up from Palestinian soil
To inquire about his wounded son
In the city
When you assassinated the poem
On the pages of the soul
He led me
To my final resting place
Of sadness
And spreads my love among the remains
Of the long-buried dead.⁴²

⁴² Ibid. pp.45-46.

Al Batiri's poem highlights the tyranny of the Israeli rule, amidst all their talk about justice, the defiance of the Palestinians against an outrageously oppressive state system and the cruel destiny of the Palestinians.

This spirit of protest and the anger against the marauder is also visible in Moin Bisso, whose poem 'Three Walls of a Torture Chamber' is marked by the determination to end the Israeli rule and to end the suffering of his people. In the poem 'When Noon Strikes' he, once more, declares this:

They have placed the papers in front of me
They have placed a pen in front of me
They have placed my house key in my hand
The pages they wanted to dirty
Told me: Resist!⁴³

The Palestinian poet's determination to fight the oppressor is shared by all other resistance poets.

Mahmoud Darwish gives a new dimension to the theme of resistance in his powerful poem "O those who pass between the fleeting words". The poem, one of the most forceful written by Darwish, decrees the aggressor get out of his native land.

O those who pass between fleeting words
Carry your names, and be gone
Rid our time of your hours, and be gone
Steel what you will from blueness of the sea and the sand of memory
Take what pictures you will so that you understand
That which you never will

⁴³ Ibid. p.78.

How a stone from our land builds the ceiling of our sky.⁴⁴

This poem published in The Jerusalem Post in 1988 evoked strong reactions from both Palestinian and Israeli ends. Significant for its direct assault on the aggressor the poem is extremely powerful in the last stanza, where the poet most ably wounds the aggressor with a stroke of his pen.

We have the past here
We have the first cry of life
We have the present, the present and the future
We have this world here, and hereafter
So leave our country
Our land, our sea
Our wheat, our salt, our wounds
Everything, and leave
The memories of memory
O those who pass between fleeting words!⁴⁵

The philosophy articulated here is not abstract, but concrete based on the poet's participation in the struggle. Showing as much animosity and disrespect to the enemy as the fighter in the battlefield, the poet here fully demonstrates what V called "the destructive capabilities of poetry". The sheer number of responses this poem evoked from the Jewish quarters itself is a testimony to the potency of the poem.

Here is one of the furious reactions the poem drew:

⁴⁴ New out look, 1992 p.39.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

"I re-read your poem and did not find in it your misunderstood intentions. And when it is a matter of life and death, it is forbidden even to a poet to be misunderstood. Poetic license ends at the place where death begins. What I understood from your words was a proposal to transfer the Jews from their land. But you know very well that I will not leave here of my own free will. You will have to come and try and expel me by force. In other words, you will have to shoot me. And so Mahmud Darwish, with a stroke of pen you have mortally wounded Israelis like myself, which may be, is not so terrible - we are used to it".

Mahmud Darwish could do with a stroke of pen, as the Jewish reader put it, what many fighters with the gun couldn't do, that is, to strike at the psyche of the aggressor.⁴⁶

If Darwish's Poems are typified by rare belligerence, Samih Al Qasim is characterized by implacable of obduracy. Al Qasim, who unlike many others refused to move out of the occupied areas and chose to face the aggressor, symbolises the fighting spirit of the Palestinian people. His poem 'Travel Tickets' displays all the Qasimian trites, bitter irony, doggedness and anger.

On the day you will kill me
You'll find in my pocket
Travel Tickets
To peace,
To the fields and the rain
To the people's conscience Don't waste the tickets⁴⁷

Commenting on Al Qasim's poetry Miriam Cooke says,

⁴⁶ Ibid. p.40.

⁴⁷ Sahani, n.4p.69.

"Bitter irony pervades Al Qassim's poetry, a mock humility and self effacement that is almost always accompanied by anger and defiance. What the world ignores, despises, and sometimes even finds amusing is his suffering, but this suffering is dangerous because it can explode at any moment like a bomb. Within this defiance, however, is desperation at the absurdity of the world and of his situation".⁴⁸

Samih Al Qassim and Mahmud Darwish, the two most respected Palestinian poets represents the two streams of Palestinian poetry. There may be differences in tone and style between these poets but there is something that unify not only the two most renowned Palestinian poets, but other lesser known poets, who hold the pen for the same reason, the theme of resistance.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

2. ATTACHMENT TO LAND

Concomitant to the theme of resistance is the theme of attachment to the land. In very many cases both the themes either run parallel or is inextricably mixed. In fact it is one the oldest themes in Palestinian poetry, as the apprehensive poets started singing about this as early as 1920's. Premonition of a possible Zionist take over and concern for the motherland permeate in the poems on Palestine, written till the creation of Israel. Passionate pleas by, not only the Palestinian poets but other Arab poets also, to save the land from being colonised. Land is the heart and soul of all the Palestinians. In fact it is with the purchase of land by the Zionists the conflict started. Palestinians believe that once they recover their rights over the land the problem will be solved. The poet who sang

And even if I had to starve to death
Never would I be brought to sell my land⁴⁹

goes on to conform this:

"It is not just soil, it is our identity... it is bound up with our spirit. And not surprising it is present in all Palestinian literature. It is the very essence of our current conflict"⁵⁰

The poet who tries to build a home land out of words does it because, their right to exist, to fight, even to bury their dead and just every thing about the struggle is linked to the land. Here is Darwish, again:

Said my father one day
He who has not a home land

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.95.

In the land will have no grave⁵¹

Love and attachment to the land is overwhelmingly present in most of the Palestinian writers. Abou Selma, a young poet proclaims his love:

Each time it was for you I fought
I could only love you all the more
What other land than this
Is moulded from musk and amber ?
What other horizon on the globe
Blossoms with earth's most heady scents ?
For having defended my home land
My branches have remained ever green
And my wings, O Palestine
Have soared above the summits⁵²

Here is the exaltation of a proud soldier, devoted his life for his mother land. For a moment the intensely patriotic poet forgets the plight of his country and countrymen. He is contented that he got a chance to serve his mother land. What if his country is still colonised and his brethren still chained, as long as he get a chance to serve her.

⁵¹ Thorayam Allam Pave the path to liberty (Tunis, P.L.O. Department of Culture, 1990).

⁵² Sahani, n.4 p.48.

The land as lady-love:

Mother land in many poets is a lover, the lady-love, with whom the poet pines to have communion, but never able to have that. Undeterred, the poet becomes all the more determined to have his lady love, and still futile.

In Abd Lati Aql's Love Palestinian style mother land is the inamorata, in whom the poet takes solace:

When there was nothing
I brought you pigs and oil
And dreamed of the perfumed finery
In the ruins of your eyes
My future once lay
Dead. I adore you still
When hungry I savor the thyme
In your hair and wipe my tears away⁵³

Samih al Qassim's 'My Becoming' is an ardent poem, which can be taken as a love poem if removed from the context of the Arab- Israeli conflict. Here, again, the mother land is projected as a woman the poet loves, and loves passionately. The poet, amorous, erotic but at the same time somber and plaintive represent the Palestinian destiny.

If my joy at having you will not gladden me
Then let me rejoice
In the sorrow you inspire
You are fading and lie so still

⁵³ Allam, n.14, p.28.

I kiss you

I become you

Tottering on the verge of madness⁵⁴

In the Gazan poet Walid al Hallees's 'A poem on Closed Summer' Khanyounes and Gaza are the women the poet loves and desires, yet their presence for the poet is a painful experience. This poem is a fusion of an intense personal love and desire with the intensity of the attachment to the land which is also painful.

3.NATIONAL IDENTITY

The longing of the Palestinian people to stay as a united entity, and their demand for nationhood is adequately expressed in Palestinian poetry.

In the first chapter it was found that, in the countries undergoing decolonisation process, national consciousness is most obtrusive in nationalist literature, and especially in its poetry. Palestinian poetry is no exception to this, with professedly nationalistic poems in plenty.

The poems discussed here are Harun Hashm Rashid's 'Palestinian', Tawfiq Zayyad's 'A national hymn', and Abou Selma's 'I loved you all the more'. The last poem is a profuse patriotic one and teeming rhetoric:

Palestine, behold your people

Is there any more marvelous sight ?

The poet goes on invoking his motherland

When your swift-winged name

⁵⁴ Sahani, n.4, p.42.

Upon my ear alights
Each syllable resounds in me
Like the sweetest of verses
My poems sow your love
In every refugee camp
My poems like a torch light up
Every wasteland, every land of exile
O Palestine, never will there be
More beautiful, more precious
Each time I have fought for you
I could only love you all the more

Palestinian nationalism is at its zenith in Harun Hashim Rashid's fiercely nationalistic poem 'Palestinian'.

Palestinian, I am
Though they trample me and my name
Palestinian, I am
Palestinian, I am
Though they betray me and my cause
Palestinian, I am
Though they sell me in the market
For what they please
For thousands of millions
Palestinian, I am
Though to the gallows they drive me

Palestinian, I am

Though to the walls they bind me

Palestinian, I am

Palestinian, I am.....

The refrain Palestinian is repeated fifteen times in the poem

SOCIAL VISION

The goal of the resistance poetry does not end with liberation. The objective of national liberation and nationhood apart, it has a social vision, a vision about the post-independence society. It does not envisage a society, which creates its own hierarchy after fighting against hierarchy all the while.

Palestinian resistance poets and their Arab colleagues are engaged in a conflict not only with the Israeli occupation of the land of Palestine, but with traditional, social, political and literary codes as well argues Barbara Harlowe.⁵⁵

"It is through internal contradiction, the conflicts and dynamics within their own social order, as well as through the military and cultural confrontation with external forces of hegemony which oppress that order, that revolutionary movements and their people discover and manifest their historicity, concretise their demand for access to the world historical order".

Ahmad Abed Ahmed, in an hygienic analogy proposes the purpose of poetry. According to him Poetry is a "wash basin" " removing the dirt of things". The poetry is called for

⁵⁵ Barbara Harlowe, *Resistant literature* (London:Methuen, 1991) p.91.

removing the inequalities with in the society. Another poet Yaqoub Hijazi is equally philanthropic:

Because I write poems for the human being,
Peasant, oppressed, worker
My letters I shall always make known
Cross the bridge of my tragedy to the more beautiful
Write its story....
So that my people may rise to the better
To the better.

POETRY AND GENERAL MASSES

The primary audience of the resistance poets is the workers, peasants, and the struggling people, not the intellectual elites, academics, and leisure time readers. Their use of simple, prose-poetic diction, with local and informal flavor, itself is a testimony to this (the language of the Palestinian poetry is discussed at length in the next chapter).

Poetry in the Palestinian society is not the preserve of a few. In fact this is true of others societies which seek to liberate itself from colonial and imperialist forces. FRELIMO, the revolutionary movement which led the African country Mozambique to independence, in its introduction to the anthology of poems written by the fighting soldiers, proclaims this:

"One of the revolution's great merit is precisely that of allowing the people to produce and set free their creative energy, which was suffocated for such a long time. And when it is freed, how this energy explodes and we see then how the people produce marvelous things in all fields, in politics, art, technology and science".

"While in colonialism and capitalism, culture and poetry were amusements for the idle hours of the rich, our poetry of today is a necessity, a song which goes out of our heart to raise our spirit, guide our will, reinforce our determination and broaden our perspective".

The language and artifacts along with other artistic and scientific efforts become the part of the society and it becomes part of the popular culture. That it becomes a potent weapon in the hands of the struggling people speaks of its wide appeal.

Poetry in Arab society has always been a part of the popular culture and it was not totally inaccessible to the downtrodden, though for long it was patronised by the elite, as elsewhere. But under the Israeli yoke, which tried its best to hinder all the artistic venture of the local people, this patronisation also stopped. In this context people became the sole clients and patron.

AESTHETICS OF PALESTINIAN POETRY

Dismissing the contention that art and literature do not have a realm beyond its own, critics of neo-colonialism and imperialism, the Kenyan Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiango maintain that there is no art that is free of politics and all art either side with the forces of imperialism in perpetuating violence against the oppressed or becomes an instrument in the hands of the latter in challenging oppressor. Any art that claims neutrality, according to this school, qualifies to be on the ranks of the oppressor.

Thus anti-neo-colonial, anti-imperialist writers and critics, on the basis of their role in the people's movements for liberation, broadly categorises art and literature into two; that which sings hymns to colonialism and imperialism and that which combats these. Hence,

there are just two kinds of aesthetics; the aesthetics of oppression and aesthetics of liberation and two kinds of literature; literature of oppression and literature of liberation.

Palestinian poetry, like poetry in other parts of the where it challenges aggression and oppression, falls in to the second category.

Aesthetic of liberation:

Critics, who judge Palestinian poetry by the yardsticks of European criticism may point out that this genre has no aesthetic value other than its sloganeering value and that it will not stand the test of time, which is the final test for a work of art. The words of Leopold Senghor, which he spoke defending the African poets against the same charges, are apt in this context

"Because he is committed, the artisan-poet is not concerned to make a work for eternity. The work of art is perishable. The style and the spirit are preserved, but the old work is quickly replaced and realized as soon as it becomes antiquated or destroyed. Thus in Africa art for art's sake does not exist. all art is social".³.

Poetry, here, since it has a task to perform, as Senghor puts it, is not concerned about its longevity. It may not mean any thing to posterity, or for that matter to peoples other than Palestinians, and to those who share Palestinian experience. But under this specific historic conditions Palestinian poetry performs its well defined role, which is countering the cultural aggression and keeping the momentum of the struggle alive.

The poetic world of the Palestinian poet begins and ends in Palestine. It is not that he is unaware of the things outside his bereaved country, but he is too preoccupied the sufferings of his people to talk of sweeter things.

To the question why his poetry lacks finer aspects Mahmud Darwish, the Palestinian national poet replies in his own inimitable style:

Don't expect me
To be whispering lyric
Because, flowers have to become wild
In the over powering jungle.

Darwish, as the fighter that he is, defines the aesthetics of resistance poetry. He had stated elsewhere that his role in no way consists of entertaining or inebriating people through his poetry.⁴ Though the same poet in another poem said that a poet extracts flowers and gun powders from two letters, meaning a balance has to be struck between "beauty and effectiveness", at the core of his aesthetics and the aesthetics of resistance poetry is the 'potency' to give vent to the aspirations of the people.

In another poem, 'Roses and Dictionary', Darwish further expounds the aesthetics of Palestinian poetry. In this poem he advocates for a 'new poetry' and new aesthetics, radically different from the conventional poetry and aesthetics:

Be that as it may,
I must...
The poet must have a new toast
And new anthems.

The poet, rejecting the words of dictionary, further specifies the necessity for a metaphor:

Be that as it may,
I must refuse death
Even though my legends die.

In the rubble I rummage for light and new poetry,
Did you realise before today, my love,
That a letter in the dictionary is dull?
How do they live, all these words?
How do they grow? How do they spread?
We still water them with tears of memories
And metaphors and sugar.

Be that as it may,

I must reject the roses that spring
From a dictionary or a dewan.
Roses grow on the arms of the peasant,
on the fist of a laborer,
Roses grow over the wounds of a warrior
And on the face of a rock.

The poet talks about an aesthetics emerging out of the resistance movement, from the "arms of the peasants", "fists of a laborer" and the "wounds of a warrior". And this sums up the aesthetics of Palestinian liberation poetry.

CHAPTER-4

The Language of Palestinian Poetry

The present chapter tries to throw some lights into the language of Palestinian poetry. The imagery, the symbols the verse form and other aspects of this political poetry are discussed here. As has already been mentioned in the introduction some of the subtleties of the language might be missed as the poems looking into are, at least most of them, are not the original. Arabic ones, but the English translations. The last part of this chapter discusses some major Palestinian poets. For want of space only five poets are discussed out of hundred, equally representative of Palestinian poetry.

Images of settler colonialism abound in Palestinian poetry. From major poets like Samih al-Qassim and Darwish to young and upcoming poet like Rashid Hussain, every single poem by the fighting poets presents, through vivid imageries the Palestinian predicament. Fright, repression, deportation and death, the images that dominate the works of these poets present a terrifying picture. Nowhere is the image more plaintive and poignant than Samih al-Qassim.

I would have liked to tell you

The story of a nightingale that died.

I would have liked to tell you

The story

Had they not slit my lips.⁶⁶

The poet, who was born, and grew up amidst the tragedy, in the short but wonderful poem unravels the plight of his countrymen. The 'nightingale' generally associated with song and happiness here symbolises his motherland, now lifeless thanks to the aggressor. Samihul Qassim's *Sons of War* Which tells the tragedy of a palestinian soldier is an equally evocative poem:

On his wedding night
They took him to war
Five years of hardship.
One day he returned
On a red stretcher
And his three sons
Met him at the port.⁶⁷

From marriage to the war front, here, the imagery evokes painful experience.

FREE VERSE:

Free verse is the most widely used metrical form in Palestinian poetry. Breaching the age old tradition of classical Arabic poetry which adhered to strict prosody many poets write in Free Verse.

Free Verse has many advantages over other metrical forms. first of all, of all the meters, free verse is the closest to spoken language. Thus it has an increasing appeal among the readers and at

⁶⁶. Abdullah al Udhari, tr. *Victims of a map*, (London: Alsaq, 1984), p. 54.

⁶⁷. Ibid, p. 55.

the same time enable to the poet to communicate to a wider audience. even a semi-literate person can grasp this verse poem, unlike other meters, which require some familiarity, on the part of the reader to understand.

For the poet, this verse form, allows free flow of thought. Though, admittedly, it has robs charm and elegance, for which Arabic poetry has been renowned for centuries, and which used to be the hall mark of classical Arabic poetry, it allows the poet much freedom and precision. This is keeping in line with the objective so resistance poetry, the sole purpose of which is efficacy and not entertainment.

Hanan Ashrawi citing the merits and demerits of this metrical form states:

"The prevalent use of free verse in Palestinian poetry has given freedom to the good poets and license to the weak ones. Many poets end up writing prose arranged on a page like poetry, while others string together the familiar series of images and symbols to come up with a nationalistic poems. These poems remain fragmentary without any internal unity and development, relying mostly on the emotional appeal of the topic itself".⁵⁸

FIRST PERSON POINT OF VIEW

The first person point of view in much of the Palestinian poetry is also significant. The term 'I', with which the poet addresses is important. Here is a man who is pushed to the wall by "forces" from "outside" speaking for the aggrieved people. The poet is at once the spokesperson and the

⁵⁸. Hahan Ashrawi, "Contemporary Palestinian poetry of Occupation," Journal of Palestinian studies (Berkeley, vol.10, 1978), p.90.

advocate of his people and is out to grab justice from the aggressor, for his people for whom the same is denied.

In this mode the poet is a fortuitous witness to the events he relates, as in Ezzedine el Manasra:

I envy the blood-stained oasis, this night

I envy friends

I envy the spectator and the ancient time-worn tables ⁶⁹

and in Toufiq Zayyad:

I spend my summers in emptiness

My winters in horror

My life a train passing between them

Whistling

And then ? ⁶⁰

The first person point of view make this poetry highly personal and individualistic. The poet is never a detached observer. He is an active participant in the events taking place around him and it is his experience he narrates. His experience is also the experience of the thousands of others who have a similar fate. Thus an amalgamation of the 'individual' and 'national' and 'universal' is achieved.

Poets like Darwish turns his personal experience to 'Palestinian experience' and again transforms it into 'universal, by sheer craft and sensibility.

SYMBOLS

The most common symbols used in Palestinian poetry are palm tree, almond, fig, jasmine, lily, ear of corn, orchard, garden, orange, sun, sea, eagle, wolf, chain, tartar, Christ, Knight, storm, thunder, lightning etc.. Apart from these conventional symbols poets also use personal symbols.

⁵⁹. Bhim Sahani, The Breath of a country, (Afro-Asian Writers' Association, New Delhi), p.10.

⁶⁰. Ibid, p.44.

Among these symbols, palm tree, almond, jasmine, lily garden etc are used to express the organic relationship between the land and human beings. While Sun, Sea and eagle represent the spirit of rebellion and rejuvenation. The widely used symbols to denote the oppressor, are al-Tatar (the tartars) al-Wash (the monster), al-Dhib (the wolf). and the mythological and historical figures like ulysses, Sindbad and Christ stand for the Palestinians.

In Mahmud Darsih's 'A Forehead and an Anger', the metaphor eagle ("O Eagle that sheathes its beak of flame/in my eyes") symbolises the spirit of the Palestinians, who are heavily lingers in letter For no reason".⁶¹

The pony in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra again is another familiar symbol that denotes the spirit of freedom of this countrymen. The poet is addressing his countrymen.(Pony)

Run run
from hunger to hunger
and from hunger to greed
Whinny and resist
Spread seduction from the hips
Spread emptiness and spread boredom
run run
among walls that do not end.⁶²

⁶¹. Issah J. Boulatta, Modern Arab Poets, (London: Haenemann, 1979) p. 112.

⁶². n.4, p. 31.

Olive tree ⁶³ is an important symbol repeatedly used in Palestinian poetry. Olive has important Place in the lives of the Palestinians.

The sun reproaches us
It came, as usual
Asking us to be patient
To remain like olive branches
Deep in the soil
Are the roots of the olive tree
To remain
Like the roots of the olive tree

Olive here stands for Palestine the land and the will of the people to remain. Mahmoud Awad Abbas in "Pisces played on the Psalms of Winter" (Melodies with a Short Rhythm), Samira al-Khatib in "The Salesman of Heroes" (The Adulterous Village) and Kalil Touma in "The Martyrs" (Songs of the Last Nights) uses this symbol strikingly.

Apart from the above mentioned conventional symbols common in Palestinian poetry, poets also use private symbols. Samih al Qassim is the one poet who uses private symbols very effectively. His poem "Conversation Between an Ear of Corn and a Jerusalem Rose Thorn", where using the symbols 'Rose Thorn' and 'Ear of Corn' unfolds the Jewish-Arab conflict needs to be studied.

Ear of corn:

Don't kill me before my tome is up

Jerusalem Rose Thorn:

⁶³. Ibid, p. 44.

To kill for nothing is only profession

EC: But your lovely flower

Is honey.....

JRT: My unchecked desire

Is a road its end is your death

EC: Live and die as you wish

With your sad flowers

And the gloom of your cursed desire

Live and die but spare me

JRT: It's our fate I die so you may live

Or your die so I may live

EC : There is enough room for both of us in the field ⁶⁴

Jerusalem Rose Thorm here represents a Jew and Ear of Corn stands for the Palestinians. The poem in the last three lines using these symbols, explains the classical Jewish and Palestinian positions in a nutshell.

Qassion has written a verse play 'Qaraqash', symbolising the state of Israel. Qaraqash, historically was the influential Amir of Saladin.

⁶⁴. n.1, p. 68.

MYTHS

Myths are also very widely used in Palestinian poetry. Palestinian and Arab writers were deeply influenced by English writers like TS Eliot who used the myth of grail legend, tellingly, to try and test it in their poems.

The use of myths and archetypes such as Odysseus, Sindbad, Adonis, Phoenix, Osiris, Prometheus and Sisyphus have come to dominate Palestinian poetry over the years. Palestinian poets have turned to various mythical and religious sources, such as Greek, Babylonian, Phoenician, Egyptian, Islamic and Christian.

Fadwa Tuqan's poem *Nubu'at al-Arrafa* (Prophecy of the Clairvoyant woman), written on the background of the fighting between Jordanian forces and P.L.O. is modelled on the 'Madame Sosostris' episode of TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*. At the beginning of the poem the clairvoyant tells that the evil spirit encircle Palestine will be foiled only by a knight, who will enter the scene in the future: Tuqan's Knight invites comparison with Eliot's 'Fisher King'. Apart from the Fisher King myth, there are many other striking similarities in Tuqan's poem. For instance, like 'The Waste Land', *Nubuat al-'Arrafa* also has allusions and references to myriad mythologies.

The poem ends with a prophesy, which has references to the myth of Adonis and his resurrection:

Yet still the clairvoyant of the winds calls at my sad door every
morning
and says to me:

"When the cycle of seasons is completed the seasonal rains will bring
him back and March will set him
in carriages of flowers and blossoms" ⁶⁵

FOLK ELEMENTS

Folklore has become an integral part of literature. Folklore, which include among other things, legends, superstitions, songs, tales, proverbs, riddles, nursery rhymes, flourishes more on societies where a strong oral tradition existed. Palestinian Arab society has a large folklore which have been handed down through generation. The use of the folk-treasure by the resistance poets is worth studying. Khalid Sulaman explains why folk elements figure prominently in Palestinian poetry.

"The continuous socio-geographic dislocation of the Palestinian Arabs since 1948 has led to the reorganisation of the political and social structure of the Palestinian. Because of this, their folk heritage is threatened with extinction. This may explain why Palestinian poets draw heavily on folk tradition since, by keeping it alive, they may preserve their identity."⁶⁶

Sulaman in his study goes on to mention the three aspects of the folklore elements embodied in the Palestinian poetry: customs and folk traditions, popular songs, and folk tales.

Folk elements, since it is associated closely with the life of the common man, help the poets communicate most effectively and forcefully. To put it in another way, folk elements are inextricable

⁶⁵. For details see Khalid Sulaiman Palestine and Modern Arab Poetry (London: Research Books, 1984)

⁶⁶. Ibid.

part of the life of the general people, and hence the poets reproduce it keeping in with their cultural significance and wider appeal.

Poets like Samihal Qassim and Tawfiq Ziad have employed folk songs with great effectiveness. Al Qassim's "Muganii al-RAbaba ala Sath min al Tin" (The Rebabd singer on a Mud Roof) and Zayyad "Like the Slab Thrusts of the Girls of Nazareth are classic examples for this genre. The first poem portrays the plight of the Palestinians as they wait for the return of their dear ones fled during 1948. Zayyad's poem about the life of the beautiful, black-eyed women of Nazareth also modelled on a popular fold song. The poem idealises the pastoral life of the peasant women and their contribution to the struggle. Zayyad describes the women , who like "Moving Flowers" coming back from the field, "Some heavy with child", and "Some Virgin Still":

And at the Waists
of nursing mothers with
Babies on their backs are
Sheaves of wheat
From the Fields come
Sounds of harvest
Evening spent around the fire
Singing age-old songs
About the Turkish war and
Hordes of deserters and
Officers injustice
How rings and bracelets were sold

To bug revolutionary arms ⁶⁷

The poem unfolds the Palestinian life that strive to achieve beauty even in the midst of tragedies. The Folk rhythm, and the effective use of Palestinian vernaculars and its superb lyrical quality make this a powerful poem.

Quaranic and Biblical allusions are also plenty in Palestinian poetry, Tawfig Zayyad's "The Sermon on the Mount" has references, as the name itself indicates, to Moses and Magdala and the poem in a fitting manner ends with the Biblical quotations "Blessed are ..."

MAHMUD DARWISH

Uncomplicated phraseology and clarity of imagery are the hall mark of Darwish. The Palestinian national poet's immense popularity has a lot to do with his language, where in lies his strength. Many things related to Darwish's aesthetics and language have already been discussed in the previous chapter and in the early part of this chapter. However some aspects his language, which is not highlighted need to be discussed here.

Mahmud Darwish who championed for a new aesthetics for the struggling people in 'Dictionary and Roses (this poem was discussed in the last chapter) bases his poetry on the same aesthetics. Darwish's language is free of complexities and intellectualisation, as it is meant for the common people. The target of his poetry, for that matter of all resistance poets, is not the leisure time readers, but the oppressed people. Hence it speaks their languages, and the language of the oppressed people is devoid of all ornatation and hyperboles. When Darwish says in Identity card:

⁶⁷. Ibid.

Write down!

I am an Arab

I work with comrades of toil in a quarry,

and I have eight children,

for them i wrest a loaf of bread,

clothes and school books

From the rocks,

and do not ask for alms at your door

or lower myself at your door step.

Does this anger you? ⁶⁸

There is nothing that a common man cannot understand. The poem is all about the oppressed their day to day life, and equally important in their own language. In another poem, the poet addressed the 'simple' people and speaks for the necessity of carrying the lantern from house to house:

Our verses

Have no colour

No taste

No Sound If they do not carry the lantern

From house to house!

And if the 'simple' cannot understand our poems

Better for us to shed them

And resort to silence

If only these words were

A plough in the hands of a peasant

⁶⁸. n.6, p. 98.

A shirt, a door, a key
If only these words were!
A poet says
If my poems please my friends
And anger my enemies
Then I'm a poet
And I shall speak!⁶⁹

The message is clear. Reach the 'simple' people. The easiest way to reach 'simple people' is by speaking their language. His use of Palestinian vernacular can be justified in these grounds. His use of colloquial language (Darwish is also a master of colloquialism) gives his poetry a flow which not many other Palestinian poets (can claim to possess).

The pre-Islamic poet Al-Moutanabbi, the Chilean Pablo Neruda and the Turkish exiled poet Nazim Hikmah have played a big role in shaping the style of Darwish. About Moutanabbi he says:

"I often quote or mention Moutanabbi, for I find in his work, among other things a pleasing blend of chivalric and heroic, added to such exaltation of words as to practically make of them an end in themselves. Fuelled by pride and ambition, and unable to find one country that could contain him; that was Moutanabbi. He aimed at something and could see no one in his way. One departure to another. There is something of Moutanabbi in me"⁷⁰

⁶⁹. Ibid.

⁷⁰. Ibid.

Salma Kahdra Jayyusi, another Palestinian poet and critic, in her study "Contemporary Arabic poetry, visions and altitude" rates Darwish very high, along with Nizar Qabbani.

"His lyrical fantasy transcends all the easy cliches of patriotic poetry in Arabic to give his words a new attraction. It is not a poetry of ideas and analysis, but of vision and passion, revealing an immense inner excitement and a heightening of sensibility. Because of his fluid rhythms, his lucid images, his familiar tone, his warmth and ardour and above all his simpler language, he is perhaps the most popular poet writing now after Nizar Qabbani."⁷¹

Coming from Darwish's comrade-in arms another poet of great reputation, it is an accolade the Palestinian national poet well deserves. For, more than anybody else, it was Darwish, who responsible for taking Palestinian poetry beyond the borders of occupied territories.

Samih al Qassim

Like Mahmud Darwish Samih al Qassim is also widely popular in the Arab world and is also a great friend of the former, whom he called "daffodil on the edge of my heart". However, as far as their poetry is concerned both belongs to two different schools, though both write in free verse and in first person narratives. Qassim is one of the pioneers in symbolism, who having influenced by western writer, especially the Anglo-American poet T.S.Eliot applied it in Arabic poetry. Symbols in Qassim is discussed in the later part of this Chapter. He is one of those poets who first used fold elements in poetry.

⁷¹. Destroyed the world, n. 6, p. 102.

A truly modernist poet who is also influenced by the modernist elements in Hebrew literature, Qassim also employs myths to drive his points home.

The Palestinian in Qassim's poetry is a rebel, for whom "at the end of the road" all doors are shut. Before his evolution into a rebel he was a "mysterious man", lifeless, all doors shut before him.

While the tone in Darwish is aggressive and offensive Qassim is dour and tenacious. He is one of the many poets who refused to move out of Palestine in the wake of the Zionist assault. This stubborn and obdurate character is reflected in his poetry also.

Qassim's poems are characterized by simple, eloquent images taken from daily life:

I speak to the word tell it
About a house, whose lantern they broke
About an axe that killed a lily
And a fire which destroyed the world

Fadwa Toucan

Fadwa Toucan the sister of the famous poet Ibrahim Toucan is one of the foremost poetesses of Palestine. Toucan matches her male counter parts not only in range but in quality and quantity as well. She is of the first poet to introduce folk elements in Palestinian poetry. Toucan's folk song is discussed later in this chapter.

Fadwa Toucan's poems have a dramatical quality as she uses passages of prose and word from other languages as in 'To my Friend Rosemary'

This dark and treacherous night
- Iftakh it Hadilet - open the door
- Iftakh bab - Ourvre la porte
- In all the world's languages
soldiers voices resound at the door ⁷²

Many of her poems, including the above mentioned one gives tongue to the sufferings of the Palestinians in general and Palestinians Women in particular under the Zionist regime.

Although, she is equally good at lyric poetry prose-poetry is Fadwa Toucan's forte. While male poets like Darwish and Qassim equates land with lover, Fadwa Toucan also does the same, but with a little difference where as in most male poets land is addressed as female, Toucan, being a woman, equates the love for land with love for her man.

O Poet, in my country
In my beloved country
I have a sweet heart waiting
He is my countryman I won't squander
His heart
He is my country man, I won't sell
His love
For the World's treasures
For the shining stars
For the moon⁷³

⁷². n. 14, p. 56.

⁷³. Mounah A. Khuri and Hamid Aloar, Modern Arb Poets, (University of California, 1979), p. 89.

Tawfig Zayyad

Tawfig Zayyad is considered as the father of Palestinian lyric poetry. In popularity he ranks next to Mahmud Darwish and Samihul Qassim.

Zayyad in his poems very effectively achieves approximation to the Palestinian vernacular and the stimulation of the rhythms of folk poetry. His poems "Like the Slab Thrusts of the Girls of Nazareth", which is discussed later in this chapter is wonderful example of folk rhythm.

The Unique thing about Zayyad is that he is equally good at lyric poetry and prose-poetry. However it is lyric poetry the, poet really excels. The poem "Voice, Fragrance and Shape" where, he addressed the country, is an ample testimony to his superb lyrical quality:

In cracks of rocks
In thorns and Olive-tree blossoms
In brightly - coloured butterflies
In shadow and echo
In winter's mud and summer's dust
In gazelles' path and birds' nests
The threatening storm will guide my way
And my veins
Throbs the rhythmic call of the land
I will return⁷⁴

⁷⁴. Ibid.

The exile of the Palestinian is in Zayyad's poetry also an exile from the kingdom of Heaven, from love, from the established literary world, i.e., from all sorts of experience that give roots, security and assurance. He is capable of a polarity of approach which is unique and illuminating".

The main criticism against is that his poetry is marred, at times, by certain stylistic weakness such as verbosity and lack of precision in his choice of words, which lessen its general effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

The present study, set out to examine the Palestinian resistance poetry, it is believed, has thrown some light into many aspects of the subject which hitherto has not been focussed. In the beginning it was mentioned one of the objectives of the study was to have a holistic approach to this political poetry. For appreciation of this genre certain prerequisites are necessary. They are,

1. An understanding of the socio-political and economic conditions which gave birth to the literature. In Palestinian poetry's case, it is the Jewish-Arab conflict.
2. A minimum understanding of the objectives of the poems. However this is not to say that one has to read thick volumes of the Jewish and Arab history of thousands of years or gauge the intricacies of the present day international politics before reading Palestinian poets. What is meant here is that a background to the politics will enable one to overcome certain fallacies, which will otherwise creep in to one's reading.

Certainly, it does require a different kind of sensibility for the appreciation of these poems. Otherwise the dangers are many. One will be tempted to brand it as sloganeering. And one may be delving deeper and deeper into these poems and still may not be finding any aesthetic value in it. Analysing these poems with the sensibilities of a traditional literary critic will ultimately prove to be a hindrance to an objective analysis.

Some of the observations made in the process of this study are:

The present study began by examining the cultural scene in the Israeli Occupied Palestine. It is found that apart from the apparent political and economic warfare there is a cultural battle between the Jewish and Palestinian people, which is almost a century old and which still continues. Even before the political and economic dominance was established on the cultural front the Zionists were able to score a point over the Arabs, thanks to their resourcefulness. It is the victory in the cultural front that enabled them to establish supremacy on the political and economic fronts.

Ever since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Zionists were able to maintain their cultural hegemony over the Palestinians, whose cultural institutions have now come under assault. In doing so, the Israeli plan was to reduce the Palestinians to nonentity, which ultimately will make Palestinians, as the Zionists hoped, perennially subjugated. Poetry, one of the cultural symbols targeted by the Zionists becomes a cultural shield under these circumstances. It not only becomes a symbol of the cultural assertion of the Palestinians but also a cultural weapon to fight the offending culture. Poetry's historical importance in the Arab land and its emotional appeal make it an effective weapon in the struggle against cultural hegemony.

The second chapter of the study focussed on the Arab-Israeli conflict and its impact on Arabic poetry. It was found in this chapter that the poet's response to the problem precedes that of the novelists and dramatists and since 1920s the poets have been highlighting the issues. This chapter also discussed the various twist and turns in the turbulent Jewish-Arab relationship and the subsequent impact it had on the poetry. All the major political events are reflected in Palestinian resistance poetry. For example it is no coincidence that most militant phase of the resistance poetry begins with the formation of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. Poetry of this period is marked by an assertion of the Palestinian identity and challenges to the Israeli regime. The strong leftist leaning of the Palestinian poetry of this period is the influence of the Marxist elements within P.L.O.

The basic character of the Palestinian poetry is discussed in the third chapter. The major findings here are :

1. Palestinian resistance poetry is a politically committed literature, with a clearly defined political goal.
2. It proposes a different set of aesthetics, radically different from the traditional aesthetics.
3. This poetry has a broad social vision and it looks beyond political freedom.
4. In the Palestinian society no art form is a privilege of the few and poetry is no exception to this.

The study revealed that Palestinian poetry is explicitly committed to the cause of Palestinian revolution, which has the goal of liberating the Palestinians. Unlike many works where the political commitment of the author is hidden and implicit the resistance poets choose to loudly proclaim their goal.

The polemics of the politics of the writers, makes their works extremely polemic, even to the extend of being branded as sloganeering. But a society like Palestine, which is battling to free itself it is not only justified, but a necessity as well.

Poetry, being the most popular and dominant genre and the one closest to the people as a whole, has been instrumental in resisting the onslaught of the dominant culture as well as keeping the tempo of the political battle the people are waging. It has the dual functions of serving as an 'emotional outlet' to the woes of the people and acting as a cultural shield.

The poet's role in the Palestinian context is manifold. He is painter portraying the distress, anguish and aspirations of the people; he is a protestor shouting against the injustice done to his people by the oppressor and those in connivance with them; he is an armed soldier leading the battle from the front; and finally provides the cultural shield against the hegemony of the oppressor.

Resistance poetry is "poetry of combat", to borrow the term from Fanon. Because as Fanon says "it moulds the national consciousness", "calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation" and "because it assumes responsibility".

Appendix

SAMIH AL-QASIM (1917)

Major collections:

Muwakib al-shams (Processions of the sun), 1959

Aghani al-durub (songs of Alleys), 1964

Islam (Islam), 1964

Dani ala Kaffi (My blood is on my palm), 1967

Dukkan al-Barakin(The smoke of volcances),1968

Suqut al-Aqnia(The fall of Masks), 1967

Fi intizar Tair al-Raid(Waiting for the Thunder bird),1969

Marathi Samih al-Qasim (Eligies of Samih al-Qasim), 1967

Quran al-Maut wal-Yasmin (The of Death and Jasmine)

Ilahi Limatha Taqtalouni (God Why are you Killing me)

Abibouli Kama Yashtahi al-Maut (I love you as Death Desires)

Shakhs Gheir Marghub Fihi (Persona Non Grata)

FADWA TUGAN (1917)

Collections:

Wahid Min Al Ayyam (Alone with Days), 1955

Ajadathuha (I Have Found it), 1957

Afina Hubban (Give us Love), 1960

Amam al Bab al Mughlaq (In front of the Closed Door), 1967

Al Layl al Fursan (Night and Knights), 1969

Alaa Qimat Eddouniya Wahidan (Alone at the Peak of the Earth)

Tammouz Wa Chai il Akhar (July and Other Things)

Auto-tiography-RihlatJabalia,RihalSooha (MountainPath, Difficult Path)

MAHMUD DARWISH (1942)

Born in al Barwa in 1942. In his youth he was a member of Rakah fraction of the Communist Party. Palestinian national poet. Till recently he was the Chairman of the Palestinian cultural committee.

Collections:

Asafir bila Ajniha (Birds with out Wing),1960

Awraq al Zaytun (Olive Leaves),1964

Ashiq min Filastin (The end of the Night),1967

Habibiu Tanhadu min Nawamiha (My sweet heart is Rising from her sleep), 1969

Al Asafir Tamutu Fil-Jalil (Birds are Dying in Galilee),1970

Yaumiyyatu Jurhi Filastini (Diary of Palestinian Wound),1971

Uhibbuki al La Uhibbuki (I love You or I Don't Love You),1971

Muhawala Raqin (attempt No 7),1974

The music of Human Flesh,1981

SALMA AL-KHADRA AL-JAYYUSI

Al-Awda min al-Nabal-Halim (Return from the Dreamy Fountain),1960

Asraf al-Rih (The Soothsayer of the wind),1970

Al-Shir wal Tajriba, Translation of Arcibald MacLeish's Poetry and Experience

TAWFIQ SAYIGH

Thalathun Basida (Thirty Poems),1954

Al-Qasida 'Ka' (The Poem 'K'),1960

Muallaqat Tawfiq Sayigh (The Suspended Ode of Tawfiq Sayigh)1963

Translations Qamsun Qasida min al Shir al Amriki al Muas,1963

Rubaiyyat Arba (Four Quartets)1970

Study:

Adwa Jadida ala Jibran (New Lights on Gibran),1966

JABRA IBRAHAM JABRA

Thammuz Fi al-Madina (July in the city),1959

Al-Madar al Mughlaq (The Closed Circuit),1964

Translations

The Sound and the Fury (Falkner)

Hamlet

King Lear

RASHID HUSSEIN

Born in Masmis in 1936. Considered as one of the pioneers of Palastinian poetry in the occupied territories.

Major collections:

Ma'el Fajr (With the Dawn)

Sawarikh (Rockets)

Qassaid Filastiniya (Palestinian Poetry)

Ana I Ard La Tahrimouni al Mata (The Earth Does Not Deprive Me of Rain)

Al Guds fi Ainain (Jerusalem is in My Eyes)

MOHAMMAD AL ASSAD

Collections

Al ghina fi Aqbia Amiqa (Songs in Deep Shelters)

Hswiltu Rasmuki fi Jasadi al-Bahr (I Tried to Draw You in the Body of the Sea)

Li Sahibuki Al-Ana Tati Attouyour (Birds Land No won Your Shore)

Mamlakatu al-Amthal (Kingdom of Ideals)

Critical works

Al-Fann al-tachkili al-Filastini (Palestinian Plastic Arts)

Makala fil-lugha Ach-chiriyyal (On Poetic Language)

GHASSAN ZAGTAN

Born in 1954

Collections

Early Morning

Banners

The Heroism of Objects

FAWWAAZ'ID

Born in Samakh in 1943

Collections

Fi Shamsi Douwar (My Dizzying Sun)

Anaq Al-Jiyad An-Nafira (The Necks of Wild Horses)

Min Fawq Anhallu min Anin (From Above I Dissolve into Grief)

AHMAD DAHEOUR

Born in 1946 in Haifa

Major collections

Eddawari Wa'ouyam al Atfal (Wild Animals and Children's Eyes)

Hikayat al Walad al Filastini (The Story of a Little Palestinian Boy)

Ta'er al Wihdat (Wihdat's Bird)

Ri Ghayr Haza Jit (I Came Otherwise)

Ikhtilat al Layl Wa Nnahos (Intermingled Night and Day)

Wahid Wa' Ishroun Bahran (Twenty one Seas

Shahada bil Assabe'Khams (Five Fingers sworn-in)

Al Harun Ilalanfa Lawaval (Nostalgia of a First Exile)

HASSAN AL BOU HAIRI

Collections

Al Aga el Wal Ashar (Twilight)-1953

Afrah Er Errabi (Pleasures of springtime)-1944

Ibtissam Eddouha (Morning Smiles)-1946

Haifa Fi sawad el'lou (Haifa Through Black Eyes)-1973

IBRAHIM NASRALLAH

Al Khouhoul Ala Macaharif al Madinal (Horseson the Cityy'sEdge)

Matar Fi Eddakhil (The Rain Inside)

Al Hiwar al Akhir Gahi Maqtal al Qusfour Bidaqqiq (The Last Dialogue Before Killing the Bird)

Naaman Yastariddu Lawnahou (Naaman Gets His Colour Back)

Al Fata Ennahr Wal General (The Child, the River and the General)

EZZEDINE AL MANASRA

Born in Rani Naim in 1945, Holds a doctoral degree in humanities.

Professor of comparative literature at Algerian University.

Collections

Ya'Inab al Khalil (O, Vines of Al Khalil)

Al Khourof Min Al Bahr Al Mayyit (Out of the Dead Sea)

Lan Yafhimadi Ahadun Ghayr Az-zaytoun (On the Olive Tree can Understand Me)

Jafra (Jafra)

ABD LATIF AGL

Major collection

Hia Awa al Mout (Her or Death)

ATEF JANEM

Lizaman Sayaji (For Times to Come)

KAMAL NASSER

The poet assassinated by a Israeli Commando during the Verdun Operation in 1973.

Published several poems in news papers and Journals.

ZAKARIA MAHMUD

This young poet is a member of the Palestinian Union of Writers and Journalists and is the Editorial Secretary of the Palestinian Al-Hurrayah Magazine.

MO'IN BSISSD

Winner of the Afro-Asian award for poetry, Lotus Prize in 1980. Worked as an Assistant editor-in-Chief for The Lotus Review.

YOUSEF ARDELAZIZ

Collections

Al Khourcuj Min Madinat Er-Ramad (Out of the City of Ashes)

Haifa Tatiru Ila Ech-Qhaqif (Haifa Rushes to Help Ech-Qhaqif)

Nachid Al Hajar (Song of the Stone)

Watan fil Mikhayyam (A nation in a Camp)

Dafatir Al Ghaym (Records of Clouds)

MOHAMED EL QAISI

Major Collections

Ma'm Al Ghoraha (Among Foreigners)

Awdat al Ghoraba (The Return of the Foreigners)

Ghazza fi Khatt En-nar (Gaza in the Line of Fire)

Ardh Eth-thowrat (Land of Revolutions)

Hatta Ya'odcu Cha'abouna (That Our People Might Return)

Fidayyoun (Fedayins)

Mazamir Al-Ardh Wad-Damm (Songs of Land and Blood)

Rihlatu Al 'Asifa (Stormy Journey)

Ar-Roujou' (Return)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Achebe, Chinua, Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-87
(London: Heinemann, 1988).

Ahmad, Aijaz, In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures (London: Verso, 1992).

Badawi, M.M, A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry, (Cambridge,
London: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

Boullata, Issa J., (ed.&tr.) Modern Arab Poets, 1950-1975 (London: Heinemann, 1976).

Rahv, Philip, Essays on Literature and Politics 1932-1972, Boston: Houghton Milton
Company, 1978).

Cabral, Amilcar, Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings, tr. Michael Woplfers
(London: Heinemann, 1980).

Cachia, Pierre, An Overview of Modern Arabic Literature (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990).

Egejuru, Phaniel Akubueze, Towards African Literary Independence: A Dialogue with Contemporary African Writers, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Westport, 1980).

Fanon, Frantz, The Wretched of the Earth, tr. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1980)

Fanon, Frantz, Towards an African Revolution, tr. Hakon Chevalier (New York: Monthly Review, 1967).

Glad, John, Literature in Exile (London: Duke University Press, 1988).

Jiryis, Sabri, Democratic Freedom in Israel, Tr. Meric Dobson, (University of Libya, Benghazi: Institute of Palestinian Studies, 1972).

Hudu, R.N Modern Poetry and the African Predicament (London: Macmillan, 1978).

Jahn, Janheinz, A History of Neo-African Literature (London: Faber and Faber, 1966).

Jayyusi, Salma Khadra, Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry, vol 1&2 (Leiden: E.J Brill, 1977).

Johnson, Nels, Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism (London: Kegan Paul International, 1982).

Jones, Eldred Durosimi, African Literature Today (London: Heinemann, 1986).

Kanafani, Ghassan, Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1968 (Beirut: Institute of Arab Research, 1982).

Walder, Dennis, Literature in the Modern world (London: Oxford University Press, 1990)

Lockman, Zachary and Beinin, Joel ed., The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation (London: I.B Tauris Publishers, 1990).

Mazrui, Ali A., Violence and Thought, Essays on Social Tensions in Africa (London: Longman, 1969) .

McDowal, David, Palestine and Israel, The Uprising and Beyond (London: I.B Tauris & Co Ltd, 1989).

Ngara, Immanuel, Ideology and Form in African Poetry (London: James Curry Ltd, 1989).

Obiechina, Emmanuel, Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

Ostle, R.C, ed., Studies in Modern Arabic Literature (Warminster, Wilts, England: Aris & Philip Ltd, 1975).

Ostle, R.C; ed., Modern Literature in the Near and Middle East, (London: Routledge, 1991)

Ramas-Rauch, Gila, The Arab in Israeli Literature (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989).

Said, Edward W., Orientalism (New York: Vintage, 1979).

Said, Edward W., The Question of Palestine, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1979)

Gugelberger, Georg M, ed., Marxism and African Literature (Trenton, N.J: Africa World Press, Inc, 1985).

Senghor, Leopold Sedor, Prose and Poetry, tr. John Reed and Clive Wake (London: Heinemann, 1965).

Sulaiman, Khalid A., Palestine and Modern Arab Poetry (London: Zed books, 1984).

Thiango, Ngugi wa, Writers in Politics (London: Heinemann, 1981).

Thiango, Ngugi wa, Decolonising the Mind, The Politics of Language in African Literature (London: James Curry-Heinemann, 1986).

Touri, Sekkou Toure, Revolution, Culture and Pan-Africanism, (Conakry, Republic of Guinea: State House, 1978).

Wauthier, Claude, The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966).

ARTICLES

Ashrawi, Hanan Mikhail, 'New trends in Palestinian Poetry', New Arab, n.7, July 1978.

Ashrawi, Hanan Mikhail, 'The Contemporary Palestinian Poetry of Occupation', The Journal of Palestinian Studies, (Berkeley, vol.7,n.4, 1978).

Das, Krishna, 'When the Poet becomes historian and torch-bearer,' Deshavimani, (Calicut) vol.17, n.3, 1983.