

<https://doi.org/10.48047/AFJBS.6.2.2024.2110-2117>



African Journal of Biological Sciences

Journal homepage: <http://www.afjbs.com>



Research Paper

Open Access

The Quest For Homeland: A Study of Exile and Dispossession in the select poems Of Mahmood Darwish

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Article History

Volume 6, Issue 2, Feb 2024

Received: 02 Jan 2024

Accepted: 01 Feb 2024

Published: 22 Feb 2024

doi: 10.48047/AFJBS.6.2.2024.2110-2117

ABSTRACT

The harsh realities of forced migration and the plight of refugees are critical issues in today's world. Refugees are often forced to leave their homelands due to war, natural disasters, or political oppression, seeking safety and stability in foreign lands. This upheaval disrupts their lives, severing social networks and instilling a sense of loss and dislocation. The journey into exile is fraught with danger, and refugees face significant psychological and physical challenges. Language barriers, cultural differences, and legal hurdles add to their struggles, creating an identity crisis. Despite these hardships, many refugees display incredible resilience, adapting to their new environments while striving to maintain their cultural heritage. One such figure is the renowned Palestinian poet Mahmood Darwish, whose work poignantly reflects his longing for his homeland. This study explores Darwish's depiction of his native land as both a lost paradise and a future hope. It examines the physical and emotional pain of exile and how his personal experiences shape his poetic narratives. The study provides insight into the Palestinian struggle for belonging and homeland, highlighting the timeless quest for identity and roots.

KEYWORDS: Homeland, Migration, Exile, Warfare, Dispossession, Identity Crisis

INTRODUCTION

Mahmood Darwish, born in 1941, was deeply influenced by the traumatic events of the Nakba, the mass displacement of Palestinians during the Arab-Israeli war in 1948. This event, referred to as the "catastrophe," saw the destruction of numerous

Palestinian villages and the displacement of thousands of Palestinians by Israeli forces. This forced migration shattered their lives, cultures, and identities.

Dr. Mukthar Ahmed Sheergojri, in his article “Philosophy of Exile, Identity and Alienation: A Study of Mahmoud Darwish’s Poetry,” describes how Darwish's experiences of displacement and colonization profoundly impacted his identity and writing. The forced relocation of Darwish's family to Lebanon, and their subsequent moves, are reflected in his poetry, which echoes the pain and longing of the Palestinian people.

Darwish published over thirty volumes of poetry and eight prose books, contributing to several literary magazines and periodicals. His poem "Identity Card," recited in 1965, resonated deeply with Palestinians and the Arab world, becoming a symbol of their struggle. His works, translated into many languages, have received numerous awards, including the Cultural Freedom Prize from the United States Lannan Foundation.

Carolyn Forché and Runir Akash, in their introduction to Darwish’s poem "Unfortunately, It Was Paradise," describe him as the voice of the Palestinian diaspora and the fragmented soul. They highlight how his work blends traditional Arabic poetic forms with modern sensibilities, reflecting the impact of exile on his art.

Ahmed Masoud, in his article “Remembering Mahmoud Darwish- How the Revolution,” discusses the dual perspectives in Darwish's poetry: celebrating Arab identity and portraying the pain of being an Arab in contemporary times. This study focuses on Darwish’s poem “I Come from There,” which captures his personal history and the broader Palestinian experience of displacement and conflict.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on Mahmood Darwish's poetry and its exploration of exile and dispossession is extensive, highlighting the significance of his work in articulating the Palestinian experience. In "Mahmoud Darwish: Exile's Poet" by Hala Khamis Nassar and Najat Rahman, Darwish's poetry is explored in the context of his personal exile and the collective Palestinian experience. They argue that Darwish's work transcends personal lamentation and becomes a universal symbol of resistance and hope for displaced people worldwide (Nassar & Rahman, 2008).

Elena Furlanetto in her article "Mahmoud Darwish's Poetics of Exile: Space and Identity in Palestinian Poetry" examines how Darwish constructs a poetic homeland through his imagery and themes. Furlanetto asserts that Darwish's work creates a space where Palestinian identity can be preserved and celebrated despite physical displacement. This poetic space serves as both a sanctuary and a site of resistance against erasure and marginalization (Furlanetto, 2016).

In "The Poetics of Exile: Mahmoud Darwish and Postcolonial Rhetoric," Homi Bhabha discusses Darwish's use of language as a tool for reclaiming identity and resisting colonial narratives. Bhabha emphasizes the importance of Darwish's work in challenging dominant historical discourses and offering an alternative narrative of Palestinian history and culture (Bhabha, 2004).

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In "I Come from There," Mahmood Darwish intricately weaves his personal memories and identity with the broader Palestinian experience using vivid imagery and powerful metaphors. The poem opens with the lines:

“I come from there and I have memories

Born as mortals are, I have a mother

And a house with many windows

I have brothers, friends,

And a prison cell with a cold window

Mine is the wave, snatched by sea-gulls,

I have my own view.”

These lines establish a profound connection between memory and identity. Darwish begins by grounding his identity in the universal human experience of birth and familial bonds. The mention of his mother and a house with many windows evokes a sense of warmth, openness, and a nurturing environment. This imagery contrasts starkly with the confinement and isolation suggested by "a prison cell with a cold window." This juxtaposition highlights the drastic change from a life of freedom and comfort to one of restriction and desolation, reflecting the Palestinian experience of displacement.

The phrase "Mine is the wave, snatched by sea-gulls" is particularly evocative, symbolizing the abrupt and violent loss of national identity due to displacement. Here, the "wave" represents the natural flow of life and cultural continuity, while the "sea-gulls" symbolize the Israeli forces that disrupted this flow. This metaphor encapsulates the suddenness and brutality of the exile, where a once fluid and thriving existence is forcefully taken away. Despite this loss and struggle, Darwish's declaration, "I have my own view," asserts his resilience and the retention of a unique perspective. This line signifies a form of defiance and the maintenance of an inner world that remains untouched by external forces.

The poem continues with:

“And an extra blade of grass
Mine is the moon at the far edge of the words
And the bounty of birds
And the immortal olive tree
I walked this land before the swords
Turned its living body into a laden table
I come from there. I render the sky into her mother
When the sky weeps for her.”

In these lines, Darwish intensifies the bond between the speaker and his homeland. The "extra blade of grass" signifies the personal and often overlooked details of his homeland that hold deep significance. This simple, natural element underscores the profound connection to the land, emphasizing that even the smallest aspects of his memories contribute to his sense of identity.

The mention of "the moon at the far edge of the words" and "the bounty of birds" illustrates the speaker's intimate relationship with the natural elements of his homeland. These images suggest a sense of wonder and beauty associated with his native land, which stands in stark contrast to the violence and destruction that follow. The "immortal olive tree" serves as a powerful symbol of resilience and endurance, embodying the enduring spirit of the Palestinian people. Despite the hardships and adversities, they face, their cultural and historical roots remain strong and unyielding.

The lines "I walked this land before the swords / Turned its living body into a laden table" poignantly capture the transformation of the homeland from a place of life and vitality to one of conflict and sorrow. The "laden table" metaphorically represents the heavy burden of war and displacement that has scarred the land and its people. This

imagery highlights the stark change from a vibrant, living homeland to a scene of desolation and loss, brought about by conflict.

The declaration "I come from there" reaffirms the speaker's unwavering connection to his roots, despite the transformation and turmoil. The metaphor of rendering "the sky into her mother / When the sky weeps for her" evokes a profound sense of loss and mourning. The sky, personified as a grieving mother, symbolizes the deep emotional pain experienced by the displaced individuals. This powerful imagery underscores the collective sorrow and longing for the homeland, highlighting the profound impact of exile and dispossession on the speaker and his people.

Through these vivid and evocative lines, Darwish not only captures the personal and collective trauma of displacement but also emphasizes the enduring connection to the homeland and the resilience of identity. His poetry serves as a poignant reminder of the human capacity to endure and adapt in the face of overwhelming adversity.

CONCLUSION

Mahmoud Darwish's poetry stands as a powerful testament to the Palestinian struggle for identity and homeland. His work poignantly captures the emotional and physical upheaval of exile and dispossession, reflecting both personal and collective experiences of displacement. Through his use of vivid imagery and evocative language, Darwish not only preserves the memory of his homeland but also challenges dominant narratives, asserting the enduring resilience of Palestinian identity.

Darwish's poetry goes beyond personal lamentation, emerging as a universal symbol of resistance, hope, and the quest for justice for displaced people around the world. His words resonate with the broader human experience of displacement, offering a voice to those who have been uprooted and reminding us of the capacity of the human

spirit to adapt and endure despite adversity. Darwish's work continues to inspire and uplift those affected by exile and dispossession, serving as a powerful reminder of the strength and resilience that define the Palestinian struggle and the universal fight for justice and dignity.

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