

Mahmoud Darwish's "ID Card" as a poem of Resistance

Tahir Habib Ganai

Assistant Professor
Government Degree College, Baramulla

Arshed Irshad

Assistant Professor
Government Degree College, Baramulla

Abstract

Resistance Literature is a kind of literature which "aims to limit, oppose, or reject hegemonic institutions and cosmologies and systems, strategies and acts of domination" (Collins, 147). It is a type of literature that raises its voice against the hegemonic practices in the oppressed nations. The literature focuses on the atrocities and exploitation meted out to the native people and how these people live miserable lives under the brute oppressive forces. The poem, 'ID Card' by Mahmoud Darwish is a great example of Resistance Literature that highlights the miserable plight of the people of Palestine. The writer through his powerful use of language debunks the ideology that favours Israeli occupation. The poet says that the land of Palestine belongs to the people of Palestine from times immemorial and no force on earth can change this fact. The poet's repeated use of the word Arab throughout the poem is a way of stamping his authority over his land and rejecting the occupation of Israel.

Objectives

- 1) To show how the poet opposes and rejects the hegemonic institutions
- 2) To show how the poet reinforces the cultural identity of the native Arabs
- 3) To analyse the reasons for the extreme rage of the poet
- 4) To analyse how the poet use of language to impose his cultural identity

Keywords: Identity, Resistance, Fragmentation, Culture, Arab

Introduction

Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish was born in al-Birwa in Galilee, a village that was occupied and later razed by the Israeli army. Because they had missed the official Israeli census, Darwish and his family were considered “internal refugees” or “present-absent aliens.” Darwish lived for many years in exile in Beirut and Paris. He is the author of over 30 books of poetry and eight books of prose and earned the Lannan Cultural Freedom Prize from the Lannan Foundation, the Lenin Peace Prize, and the Knight of Arts and Belles Lettres Medal from France.

‘ID Card’ appeared in his collection *Olive Leaves* in 1964, when he was only 23. He faced harsh criticism from Israel for writing this poem.

Discussion

The poem is a dramatic monologue and begins on a note of revolt, a powerful deconstructive counter-command to the Israeli security official, 'Write down/ I am an Arab' by the oppressed Palestinian speaker searching for the legitimate citizenship in his own homeland. The speaker, like the other Palestinians, is proud of being an Arab, for they are left only with the sense of collective identity of being Arabs and are dispossessed of their individual identities, having been individually reduced to ID Card numbers, 'My ID Card number is 50000'. The refrain, ' Write down/I am an Arab', reinforces the Palestinians cultural and national identity rejecting simultaneously the Israeli narrative of being 'the chosen' both in religion and culture. Asserting the fact that Israelis may kill them or devastate them, the speaker is fearless and proud of having eight children and rhetorically in a mood of defiance informs the Israeli official that, '... the ninth is coming after the summer/Are you angry?' The speaker, though poor, is self-sufficient; he works hard for bread and clothing and does not beg at the doors of Israelis. Though he has no status, ' a name without a title... my house is a watchman's hut', but he is proud of his national and cultural roots; his roots in Palestine are eternal and the land has been theirs even before 'the birth of time', before the beginning of civilizations. The speaker sees the parallel of Palestine in the heavens and that's been his legacy which he is proud of. Though he is lost and comes from some unarmed forgotten village with nameless streets, but he is proud of his distinguishing Arab feature- koufiyah topped by the igal. He wants the Israeli official to note down that he is a Palestinian in despair who has been robbed of his possessions (vineyards, cultivated land and children) and has been left with rocks which he defiantly and mockingly believes would also be confiscated by the Israeli government. He asserts that he does not hate or assault the Israeli populace, but if he and his children are pushed to the limits of starvation (... if I get hungry, I eat the flesh of my usurper/ Beware... beware... of my hunger/ and of my anger), they would be left with no choice but to fight. Because of these concluding lines of the poem, the Israelis judged the poem 'anti-Semitic', failing to see the connotative interpretation of despair, sense of fragmented identity and the will to endure and fight the oppression till liberation.

Speaking linguistically, the tone of the poet is clear direct and assertive. He shows his despair, his rage and his assertion of identity by the varied use of refrains and rhetorical questions like ' Write down/ I am an Arab... Are you angry? / Does that anger you? / Does my status satisfy you? / Will your government take them too, as reported?' and the distinguishing symbol of Arab culture,' koufiyah topped by Igal.' The poem is in free verse but the poet succeeds in conveying his emotional rhythm through the use of direct colloquial images.

Conclusion: The poem qualifies to be a remarkable piece of Resistance Literature wherein the poet emphatically succeeds to portray the identity of an identity-less Palestinian speaker and forecasts the seeds of revolt by the suppressed 'anonymous other' in the poem.

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