

Language Of Resistance: Analysis Of Fawda Tuqani's The Deluge And The Tree (Al Toofan Wa Al Shajarah), Samih Al Qassim's Slit Lips (Al Shufa Al Maqsooma) And Eavan Boland's Quarantine

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Abstract

The three poems (The Deluge and the Tree, Slit Lips, Quarantine) that have been analyzed are from two different geographic locations. Two of the poems are from Palestine and one from Ireland. What unites these geographically different poems is the authenticity of being resistant to an occupation and its hegemony; although, the resistance is not physical but through language. The author has analyzed three poems, translated them and then explained the unity of thought between these poems. The aim of the author is explain the language of resistance and its power as a uniting force against any occupying force whether outside or from inside in the form of any fascist or authoritarian force.

The author analyzed three poems, out of which two were written in Arabic. The author first translated then into English and then the investigation for language of resistance begins with focus on specific issues regarding words like 'resistance,' 'freedom,' 'land' and related words.

Keywords: Occupation, Resistance, Fascism, Democracy, Poetry of protest, Resistance literature, Palestine Nakba, and Irish Potato Famine.

Introduction

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You who wronged a simple man

Bursting into laughter at the crime...

Do not feel safe. The poet remembers.

You can kill one, but another is born.

The words are written down, the deed, the date.

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---Czeslaw Milosz

1. Resistance through Literature/Poetry

Martin Heidegger, the great German philosopher, writes in his magnum opus *Being and Time*:

Resistance characterizes the being of inner worldly beings. Experiences of resistance factually determine only the extent and direction in which beings encountered within the world are discovered... Resistance characterizes the “external world” in the sense of inner worldly beings, but never in the sense of world. “Consciousness of reality” is itself a way of being-in-the-world. Every “problematic of the external world” necessarily goes back to this basic existential phenomenon. (195)

From the above quote’s lines, it is clear that resistance is problem of the external and is resisted by inner worldly being of a human being, whether an individual or being in its totality. One more explanation is found in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in these famous lines: “It is a difficult case. What do you think I ought to do? - resist? Eh? I want no more than justice.’...He wanted no more than justice- no more than justice.” (68) So, it is clear that resistance is an act of not following the dictates of the oppressor whether in any form. It also depends on how much is tolerated or allowed in a specific situation and how much a person is able to resist. The Jews in Germany had little freedom, so do Uighurs of Xinjiang, or people of Palestine and Kashmir. It all depends on situation of ‘what’ and ‘how much’ is allowed.

As resistance is eminent word these days because of the rise of authoritarianism and the new issues that come with it. Yet this authoritarianism does not come alone, but begets resistance with it. Mark Eiser in his article “What We Can Learn from Neruda’s Poetry of Resistance”:

As we face our own era of rising authoritarianism and new sets of complexities and injustices to resist, the question remains: Does poetry have the power to effect change? We can write “drop poetry not bombs” on fliers, but the hard truth is that one poem alone cannot protect dreamers from being deported or restrain an unfit president. (par. 19)

Harlow in her magnum opus *Resistance Literature* explains the basics of resistance in literature in these famous lines:

The distinction presupposes [occupation and exile] furthermore an exiled and subjugated, a given population and has in addition significantly intervened in the literary and cultural development of the people it has dispossessed and whose land it has occupied. Literature, in other words, is presented by the critical as an arena of struggle. (2)

2. Text of Three Poems.

The Deluge and the Tree	Slit Lips	Quarantine
When the hurricane swirled and spread its deluge of dark evil onto the good green land	It was a wish of mine to tell you A story of a dead nightingale	In the worst hour of the worst season of the worst year of a whole people

<p>'they' gloated. The western skies reverberated with joyous accounts: "The Tree has fallen! The great trunk is smashed! The hurricane leaves no life in the Tree!"</p> <p>Had the Tree really fallen? Never! Not with our red streams flowing forever, not while the wine of our thorn limbs fed the thirsty roots, Arab roots alive tunneling deep, deep, into the land!</p> <p>When the Tree rises up, the branches shall flourish green and fresh in the sun, the laughter of the Tree shall leaf beneath the sun and birds shall return. Undoubtedly, the birds shall return. The birds shall return.</p>	<p>It was a wish of mine to tell you ...The story! Were it not for this lip they cut.</p>	<p>a man set out from the workhouse with his wife. He was walking-they were both walking-north.</p> <p>She was sick with famine fever and could not keep up. He lifted her and put her on his back. He walked like that west and north. Until at nightfall under freezing stars they arrived.</p> <p>In the morning they were both found dead. Of cold. Of hunger. Of the toxins of a whole history. But her feet were held against his breastbone. The last heat of his flesh was his last gift to her.</p> <p>Let no love poem ever come to this threshold. There is no place here for the inexact praise of the easy graces and sensuality of the body. There is only time for this merciless inventory:</p> <p>Their death together in the winter of 1847. Also what they suffered. How they lived. And what there is between a man and a woman. And in which darkness it can best be proved.</p>
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3. Background

Also known as 'Poetry of protest,' is genre in literature where an author or poets vents his/her anger or frustration over different types of injustices he/she sees; and thus, includes different spheres whether economic, social, political, or colonial. The turmoil that has erupted in different regions since the beginning of twenty-first century and to be more precise, the conditions of Palestine, Kashmir, Arakan, Vietnam, Ireland, and many similar countries that face prosecution, whether by a colonial regime or a dictatorial regime, and have their voice choked by the presiding power of the country (legal or illegal). Paulo de Medeiros in "Poetry shall not serve: Poetry and Political Resistance," "The term resistance literature should be

applied to all forms of poetry that voice opposition to oppression and not just, as Barbara Harlow defended, those engaged in the anti-colonial fight of the sixties.” (81)

For resistance poetry the main aim is to speak ‘truth’ to ‘power,’ which in itself is a crucial role played by the poet in the face of political and media rhetoric designed to obscure, manipulate different racist discourses. Resistance poems call out and talk back to the inhumane forces that threaten human existence or discriminate one group from another. These poems expose grim truths, raise consciousness, and build united fronts. The poems rail against complacency and demonstrate why poetry is necessary and sought after in moments of political crisis not only in United States but in other parts of the world that are still under occupation or face a tyrant dictatorial government. Protest poetry or resistance poetry has deep roots in human world. Poets used their verses in the past to oppose slavery, in twentieth century they opposed the Vietnam War, segregation and racial oppression. In twenty-first century the American resistance poets opposed the Iraq war, and more recently, discrimination and police violence against African-Americans, Arab-American, Muslims, Mexicans and Asians. Rebecca Renner in her article “23 Resistance Poems to Express your Rage” writes:

The world has been in rising turmoil over the past few years. More people have been turning to poetry to better express their anger and frustration. Resistance poems capture the speaker’s rage at the modern world along with their desire to resist oppression. (par.1)

Fadwa Tuqan, famous for Palestine resistance, was born in Nablus, Palestine. She is well known for her representations of resistance to Israeli occupation of Palestine and thus earns a high reputation in contemporary Arab poetry. Fadwa depicts common people in her poetry who live under occupation and their day-to-day life. Fadwa identifies Palestine like a human lover, for example in these lines: “Out of quiverings/ Of life and death/ Life will emerge.” Visit Palestine. Ps: Your Guide to Palestine, an organization which guides foreigners about Palestine, writes: “Tuqan is widely considered a symbol of the Palestinian cause and “one of the most distinguished figures of modern Arabic literature.” (par.6) Samih K. Farsoun writes in his book Culture and Customs of the Palestinians:

Her published poetry collections parallel and mark the evolution of Palestinian political consciousness since Al-Nakba. Palestinian political consciousness evolved from the paralyzing feelings of shock, despair and the sense of being victims and developed into strong resistance and transformed pride and political élan. (90)

Zeina Azzam writes in her article, “Palestine Profiles: Poet FadwaTuqan”:

Al-Jayyusi writes that Tuqan “was one of the first major poets to work toward emotional veracity, laying the foundation for feminine explorations of love and social protest.” Palestine’s national poet, Mahmoud Darwish, named her “the mother of Palestinian poetry.” (par.2)

Samih Al Qasim was a Palestinian poet who lived in Israel throughout his childhood as well as adult life. Al Qasimis well known all over the world as his poetry was influenced by two main phases of his life:

1. Before and after the Six-Day War - until 1967 he was mainly influenced by Arab nationalism;
2. In 1967 he joined the Israeli Communist political party, Rakah, and later activated in the closely related Front for Democracy and Equality "Hadash".

His work exemplifies the poetry of resistance that for decades emanated from inside the territories occupied by Israel in 1948. Al-Qasim has published several volumes and collections of poetry. Issa J. Boullata writes in his article "Sadder than Water by Samih al-Qasim" published in *World Literature Today*:

Al-Qasim has produced a prolific oeuvre that has won him a prestigious position in the Arab world. Rich in its imagery and its evocation of Palestinian heritage and identity, his poetry remains lyrical although it deals mostly with the painful political reality of Arab life under Israel's harsh domination, especially in earlier poems. (par.3)

Eavan Boland is considered one of the leading voices in Irish literature, especially from female voices. Born in Dublin in 1994, Jody Allen Randolph in her book *Eavan Boland* quotes her confession about writing poetry in Ireland as she says:

To start a poem on an ordinary Dublin afternoon was anything but simple. I didn't know how to weigh ideas about poetry. Nothing in life I lived as a student- and later as wife and mother at the suburban edge of Dublin- suggested I had the wherewithal to do so. [I] began writing in a country where the word woman and the word poet inhabited two separate kingdoms of experience and expression. I could not, it seemed, live it both. (xvii)

Furthermore, Poetry Foundation in their article entitled "Eavan Boland" write:

Boland's poetry is known for subverting traditional constructions of womanhood, as well as offering fresh perspectives on Irish history and mythology. Her fifth book, *In Her Own Image* (1980), brought Boland international recognition and acclaim. Exploring topics such as domestic violence, anorexia, infanticide, and cancer, the book also announced Boland's ongoing concern with inaccurate and muffled portrayals of women in Irish literature and society. (4)

4. Analysis of Slit Lips

This poem is one of the many Palestinian resistance poems that encapsulate the repression in occupied Palestine in best possible way. The poet asserts that there are issues that needed to be told to the outside world to know about what is happening in Palestine due to the repression and silencing of the writers, journalists and media personals, doesn't allow him to speak. These lines need to be put into a situational context of Palestine. Human Rights Watch in their article "Israel and Palestine: Events of 2018" write that, "Between March 30 and November 19, security forces killed 189 Palestinian demonstrators, including 31 children and 3 medical workers, and wounded more than 5,800 with live fire." (par.2)

Zena Tahhan writes in her article, "The Naksa [Nakba]: How Israel occupied the whole of Palestine in 1967Palestinians are marking 51 years since the 1967 occupation of their remaining lands this week," published by Al-Jazeera:

More than 50 years ago, the state of Israel shocked the world when it seized the remaining Palestinian territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, as well as the Syrian Golan Heights and the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula, in a matter of six days. (par.1)

Zena further writes:

I don't see any likelihood of Israel withdrawing from the occupied territories and ending its settler-colonial enterprise as long as it enjoys a culture of impunity and is never held to account by the international community for its violation of international law and human rights; and as long as the cost of its occupation is lower than the price of ending. (par.55)

Committee to Protect Journalists in their article, "Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory / Middle East & North Africa" write that 18 journalists have been killed and 3 imprisoned by Israeli soldiers since 1992, with hundreds of journalists being injured with impunity. Yaacov Bar-Natan in his article "Is Censorship in Israel Getting Worse?" writes, "During the past three months of turmoil in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, there has been a marked difference between what Israeli Television (ITV) has shown its viewers and what the foreign TV networks operating in Israel have been transmitting to the rest of the world." (149) Glenda Abramson in her article "Theatre Censorship in Israel":

A culture can turn nasty on us all, it can become censorious and anti-democratic, and viciously proscriptive: "not this kind of book, not this kind of play"; then audiences and readers cannot find their way to their writers and performers. The wall between the aesthetic and the political, against which so many English writers have been wrecked, is such a proscription. What to do? Well... a wall has come down in Europe. Surely, we can dismantle a wall that is really only in our heads. (iii)

It was a wish of mine to tell you

A story of a dead nightingale

It was a wish of mine to tell you

...The story!

Were it not for this lip they cut.

These lines from Samih Al Qassim if placed in a proper context of how surveillance works in Palestine, will explain why a voice of resistance doesn't possess much scope in Palestine. Who Profits, an independent research center dedicated to exposing the role of the private sector in the Israeli occupation economy write in their flash report entitled, "Big Brother" in Jerusalem's Old City: Israel's Militarized Visual Surveillance System in Occupied East Jerusalem":

In this flash report, Who Profits examines the 'Mabat 2000' visual surveillance program implemented in the occupied Old City of Jerusalem by the Israeli state and for-profit corporations. Launched in the year 2000, 'Mabat 2000' – an acronym in Hebrew which stands for "technological & surveillance center," and also a word which means "gaze" – is the Israeli police's most comprehensive visual surveillance project in the Old City, saturating every street and alleyway with Close-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras. (2)

5. Analysis of The Deluge and the Tree

The poem begins with allusion to Nakba (genocide of Palestinians by Israeli occupation forces in 1948). The words are:

When the hurricane swirled and spread its deluge of dark evil onto the good green land

'they' gloated. The western skies reverberated with joyous accounts:

"The Tree has fallen!

The great trunk is smashed! The hurricane leaves no life in the Tree!"

Nakba comes from the Arabic word that means 'catastrophe/ disaster' and the word is now used to remember the exodus of 700,000 Palestinians who were forced to flee as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. They were forced to settle and seek refuge in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, often without citizenship being granted. Casa Árabe in their article, "The Deluge and the Tree":

Through her poem "The Deluge and the Tree," she highlights the violence committed by Israel in the Palestinian Territories, especially as of 1967, the year when the Six-Day War took place, after which Israel occupied Gaza and the West Bank. This situation, portrayed through Tuqan's verses, allows us to see a glimmer of hope for existence and re-existence. The tree which grows again out of the bottom depths of the rubble is the symbol representing the Palestinian people's desire to remain. (par.1)

In this poem, the poetess has symbolized Palestinian identity to a tree which has been uprooted and now has lost its identity. Although, according to the poetess, the tree still has its roots intact and those very roots will one day lead to the comeback of the Palestinian people to their homeland. She has symbolized people to birds, and thus writes:

When the Tree rises up, the branches
shall flourish green and fresh in the sun,
the laughter of the Tree shall leaf
beneath the sun
and birds shall return.
Undoubtedly, the birds shall return.
The birds shall return.

Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe, Leo Spitzer write in their book *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* about these lines of Fadwa Tuqan:

In her poem "The Deluge and the Tree," Fadwa Tuqan portrays Palestinian collectivity itself as a tree whose trunk has been knocked down and smashed by the storm of the 1967 war, which brought the populations of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights under Israeli occupation, and sent new waves of refugees into exile. The Palestinian/tree has not been killed, however because of the deep roots that sustain it, and the poem looks ahead to an idealized future in which natural harmony is restored by the re-Palestinianization of the land. (151)

6. Analysis of Quarantine

In order to understand the poem, it is important to explain the effects of Irish Potato Famine of 1847 in which almost more than one million died because of potato blight and the interventionist policies of Britain towards the Irish people. Charles Cockell in his book *Dissent*,

Revolution and Liberty Beyond Earth writes, "Running for close to seven years, between 1845 and 1852, the Irish Potato Famine resulted in some one million deaths. Estimates vary from about 800000- 1.5 million, but one million seems a safe estimate." (159) Mark Thornton in his article "What Caused the Irish Potato Famine?" published by Mises Institute explains the more fundamental reasons of the famine:

Was the Potato Famine an ecological accident, as historians usually say? Like most famines, it had little to do with declines in food production as such. Adam Smith was right that "bad seasons" cause "dearth," but "the violence of well-intentioned governments" can convert "dearth into famine." In fact, the most glaring cause of the famine was not a plant disease, but England's long-running political hegemony over Ireland. The English conquered Ireland, several times, and took ownership of vast agricultural territory. Large chunks of land were given to Englishmen. (par.3-4)

The poem is about a couple who are leaving because of the circumstances created by the famine. The woman is ill and her husband is taking care of her and because of the harsh conditions and frigid temperature, they both die. The poem on the one hand portrays the horrors and crisis during the famine in Ireland and on another level it explains the value of true love does not reside in traditional and cultural gestures but in sacrifice. The poem highlights the level of devotion the husband has for his wife and her feet are found over his chest while both of them are dead, thus proving that the husband used every way to give his body heat to his wife so that he can save her. This shows devotion that supersedes traditional level.

The poem begins as: "In the worst hour of the worst season/ of the worst year of a whole people/ a man set out from the workhouse with his wife." The worst hour and worst year here refer to the Irish Potato Famine. While figuring out the setting it is easy to understand pain and suffering that the couple experienced. However, the lines, "In the morning they were both found dead" (line 9), makes the reader realize that there was a different kind of emotion behind this story.

7. Conclusion

The three poems that have been analyzed are from two different geographic locations. Two of the poems are from Palestine and one from Ireland. What unites these geographically different poems is the authenticity of being resistant to an occupation and its hegemony; although, the resistance is not physical but through language. The author has analyzed three poems, translated them and then explained the unity of thought between these poems. The aim of the author is explain the language of resistance and its power as a uniting force against any occupying force whether outside or from inside in the form of any fascist or authoritarian force.

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