

Mahmoud Darwishe's Voicing Poetics of Resistance: A Receptionist Review

Marwan A. Hamdan
Al-Azhar University
Gaza

Abstract

This paper explores the notion of the poetic language as a tool of resistance for the Palestinians. Drawing from Mahmoud Darwishe's poetic discourse, the Palestinians construct meaning of political and rebellious language that echoes their political and human case. The paper traces Darwishe's poetics and its meaning as a method of political resistance and uprising against the Israeli occupation and oppression. Palestinians' conceptualization of the poetic language arises from the discussion of diverse strategies of struggle, resistance and durability. The aim of Darwishe's poems is to empower Palestinian and Arab readers and freedom fighters to inform them about their rights in a human dignified and decent life like many other peoples and nations all over the world. Noteworthy, although Darwishe's poems are written in Arabic, most of them are translated into many languages and deem to be a bridge between Palestine and the rest of the world's nations. The paper does all these things in the light of elective relevant assumptions from Edward Said's and Barbara Harlow's views on literature and language and their use as a means of resistance.

Keywords: Poetic language and discourse, resistance, the Palestinians, M. Darwish.

Introduction

Resistance literature is part of the cultural resistance as a whole. In current and modern history, the armed resistance is usually accompanied by cultural resistance. Its striking and most notably form is the cultural resistance that defies the invasion of the Zionist occupation. In this concern, Darwishe's socio-political poetics constitutes a textual fuel for the current language usage of the Palestinians in The Gaza Strip and The West Bank to resist the occupiers. In clarifying the poetics of resistance in Darwishe's poems, the paper draws on both Edward Said's and Barbara Harlow's assumptions of resistance literature and cultural decolonization. Noteworthy, poetic language is composed of suggestive signs and codes like many other languages. This signifying language is employed thoroughly to arouse the Palestinians' sense of revolt and resistance against the oppressive and tyrant Israeli occupation as a power of subjugation, oppression, and injustice. In this concern, poetical language is a power discourse that immensely intersects and renders the meaning of everyday national slogans and odes for the Palestinians. Bill Ashcroft (1999) argues that "the power of resistance comes in the ability of the author to write back to imperialism, to speak truth to injustice (p.39). Seemingly, Darwishe's poetics of resistance writes back to the imperialist aggressive forces of the Israeli occupation.

By the same token, in *Resistance Literature*, Harlow (1987) points out that literature of resistance is a political activity and is "immediately and directly involved in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production" (p. 29). Thus, language is a power discourse that constitutes Palestinian ideology and policy which in turn encompass suggestive poetic language. Moreover, the meaning of martyrdom gives enthusiasm and inspiration for people to keep resisting. This meaning also arouses the spiritual awareness and hope in fighting against occupiers and oppressors.

The Concept of the Poetics of Resistance: Darwishe's Poetic Language

Of course, language is a system of suggestive signs and codes that can be used in different situations and purposes. The concept of resistance in creative and cultural production becomes one of the absolute human values, especially in the Arab region whose contemporary history tries to accomplish its attachment to and interaction with values of identity, modernity, and freedom. Literature of resistance is a cultural resistance that precedes, accompanies, and follows the resisting act. The concept of resistance poetry accompanies the concept of fighting with available weapons in wars, battles and other forms of foreign occupation. In this light, poetic language of Darwish is employed for resisting the wildest and longest Israeli oppressive occupation of land and people. In defining poetics of resistance, Harlow (1987) argues that there is an "integral relationship between armed resistance and resistance literature" (p. 10). She also admits the significance of the cultural patterns of resistance, which are "no less valuable than armed resistance itself" (p. 11). Edward Said (1994) asserts Harlow's notion of the role of art in cultural decolonization. In *Culture and Imperialism*, he argues that literature of decolonization is a basic form of resisting occupation and powers of injustices and oppression. He also states that "the idea that resistance, far from being merely a reaction to imperialism, is an alternative way of conceiving human history ... writing back to the metropolitan cultures, disrupting the European narratives ... [and] replacing them with either a more playful or more powerful new narrative style is a major component in the process" (p. 216). Accordingly, Darwishe's poetics is viewed as vehicle to create resistance within his poems. Ashcroft (1999) states that "the forms of resistance that have been most successful have been those that have identified a wide audience" to whom Darwish addresses his poetics of resistance (p. 106).

The Palestinian experience in Gaza is a humanist and sensitive experience that evokes Darwishe's poems to sustain resistance and struggle against the Israeli occupation and colonialist ideology. This Palestinian community in Gaza stands up against tyranny and oppression, fighting for a just cause and human collective rights and dignity.

Its people invoke the poetic language of Darwish to give them motivation and fuel to keep resisting this occupation and its inhuman tyrant practices. Here are a few lines from one of the most favorite Darwish's poems "A Rhyme for the Odes," "I am my language. I am words' writ: Be! Be my body! ... No land on earth bears me. Only my words bear me, A bird born from me who builds a nest in my ruins." (L. 9-16).¹ Here, the poet says a lot of revolutionary suggestive words that establish the discourse of both national identity and resistance against the oppressive occupiers. Erica Mena (2009) points out that Darwish seeks to develop "an identity rooted in community as constructed through words (p. 115). Accordingly, resistance is by not only fires or bullets but also by invigorating diction, that leaves a strong impact of incitement and revolution sense among the Palestinian different classes. According to Harlow (1987), a basic feature of resistance poetics is that "the poets, adherents and partisans of given organizations with national identities, manifest in their poems a consciousness of the larger arena within which they write" (p.46). In this regard, Darwish's poetic themes include liberation, rebellion, and justice. Ahmed (2012) argues that Darwish's poetics of resistance suggests "an organic bond of both humans and people" (p. 96). This is clear in "The Passport," in which he says:

Do not ask the valleys about their mother
The sword of light cleaves from my forehead
And from my hand springs the river's water...
All the hearts of people
Are my nationality
So take away my passport. (L. 26-31)

Here, Darwish evokes the image of the passport to defy the Israeli attempts to extirpate the Palestinians from their land of birth and nationality. In addition, the evoked images of the sword, light, hands, and water metaphorically suggest the sense of resistance. Further, Hamoud Ahmed (2012) views in these lines "the seeds of resistance" manifested in "the bonded elements of nature and human identity" (p. 97).

Furthermore, Darwish's poetic discourse and visionary language definitely play a vital role in disseminating and invigorating the feelings of resistance among the Palestinian people to maintain their righteous resistance against the Israeli colonial occupation and dispossession. Darwish's poetic language has inspired solidity and hope of the Palestinian masses; it constitutes an influential tool for provoking resistance and arousing feelings of anger to revolt against the Israeli occupiers. In his own vision, Edward Said (1994) argues that literature of resistance, "far from being merely a reaction to imperialism, is an alternative way of conceiving human history" (p. 42). Thus, Darwish's poetics functions as a tool of resistance and cultural decolonization, it is "contextualized within the corresponding social and political struggles" (Azank, 2012, p. 5). Similarly, Harlow (1987) pinpoints that "the role of poetry in the liberation struggle itself has...been a crucial one, both as a force for mobilizing a collective response to occupation and domination and as a repository for popular memory and consciousness" (p.34). This implies that Darwish's poetics gains a particular significance as it becomes a means for restoring, expanding, and perpetuating the collective national memory. Supporting this idea, Mounir Ben Zid (2014) views Darwish's poetics as a combat against obliviousness and struggles to "reconstruct memories of his homeland ... reflects the communal desire for freedom, mirrors Palestinians' feeling of up-rootedness, and dream of an identity that transcends the 'no-exit' position" (p. 49).

Significantly, Darwish's poetics is a surviving call against forgetfulness and resistance. For instance, in his poem "The Raven," Darwish emphasizes this call and reaffirms his right of the land saying,

We are the grand children of the beginning
We are the descendants of the beginning
We only see the beginning. (L. 29-31)

Seemingly, Darwish insists that he and his people are the authentic rightful landowners of Palestine, the land of ancestors and grandfathers. In addition, Ben Zid (2014) asserts that Darwish's poetics is "a tribute to Palestinians' **resistance** and desire for freedom," believing that poetry is of a great power and "a means of **resistance** that cogitates his aspiration for freedom" (p.56). In this sense, Darwish evokes images that work as a weapon and deliver meanings of struggle, resistance, and freedom. In "From One Sky to Another, Dreamers Pass," Darwish evokes images of a butterfly to fortify the Palestinians' strong and divine desire for freedom:

Butterfly sister of yourself be what you desire
Before and after my nostalgia.
Let me be your wing so that my madness might remain fevered
Butterfly born of yourself,
Don't let others decide my fate, don't abandon me. (L.7-11)

It is obvious that this freedom cannot be attained without strong and faithful struggle against the brutal occupiers. So, Darwish says in "A Non-Linguistic Dispute with Imri' Al Qays," ask his people of all classes to resist the occupation to restore their freedom:

Take Caesar's path
Through the black smoke, that rises from time
Take Caesar's path
Alone, alone, alone. (L45-48)

Cognitively, Darwish employs the national poetic language of resistance with which he wrote a set of poems of resistance such as "Mohammad," "The Sacrifice" and "A State of Siege."

In "A State of Siege," the poet describes the siege of the Palestinian land with condensed images that invoke daily life in a suggestive and vivid way:

¹ All quotations of Darwish's poems are from <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/identity-card/>

A woman asked the cloud: please enfold my loved one
 My clothes are soaked with his blood
 If you shall not be rain, my love
 Be trees
 Saturated with fertility, be trees
 And if you shall not be trees, my love
 Be a stone
 Saturated with humidity, be a stone (L.1-8)

Contextually, the poem's poetics implies a clear denouncement of colonialism, in which Darwish shows conscious effort for cultural decolonization to articulate cultural identity that suggests a quest for self-determination. In this regard, Natasha Azank (2012) argues that "resistance takes a variety of forms of the poetic discourse," in which Darwish substantiates "a strong political sensibility and participates in the ongoing decolonial struggle" of the Palestinians (p. 4).

Furthermore, Darwish emphasizes his national belonging to his ancestors' land and culture evident in his poem "Passing in Passing Words," "So leave our land. Our shore, our sea. Our wheat, our salt, our wound. Take your portion of our blood and go away" (L. 47-52). This poetic discourse definitely bears a strong impact on the public audience and instigates their sense of resistance and revolution against the occupier. Darwish himself admits that every beautiful poem is an act of resistance, a thing that is concretized in his poems like "Identity Card" in which he says "Write down, I'm an Arab!" crystallizing his Palestinian tone of resistance against Israeli occupation which tries to delete the Palestinian identity and history (L.1-2). As such, Darwish becomes the loud voice of the occupied to incite for resistance and defend his national identity. Mena (2009) asserts that Darwish's poetic language is "home and self—it is outside of place and time" to form a national identity from words, portable and untied to a physical nation" (p.115).

This is manifested in the national tone of his poems in Arabic. Arabic language is a major constituent of the independent Palestinian national and cultural identity. This fact is clarified when Darwish exploits language as a weapon for resistance. This socio-political adoption of language offers Darwish's poetry a considerable value as a postcolonial discourse. Darwish establishes his poetics of resistance as a cultural discourse that invigorates his masses' feelings of resistance and challenge. In this light, Ashcroft (1999) indicates that "primary resistance ... is succeeded by ... ideological or cultural reconstitution" (p. 108). Obviously, Darwish's poetic language exerts a prompt role in inciting and sustaining the national affiliation and resisting the Israeli occupation. In this sense, Said (1994) states that language is an "encoded system," used to "express, indicate, exchange messages and information.... In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presentation, or a representation" (p. 88).

Certainly, Darwish's poetry is an exercise in language in a patriotic populist and plain-spoken tone. He uses tropes and imagery familiar to Palestinian people; he says in "Passport,"

All the wheat fields
 All the prisons
 All the white tombstones
 But they dropped them from my passport (L.13-18)

In these lines, Darwish poetically exercises his language with the power of words such as wheat fields, prisons, tombstones, and passport. These images denote the poet's awareness of his resistance against the occupiers who destroy the wheat fields which suggest his belonging to a fertile land of freedom fighters and reviving life despite the pains caused by these occupiers. In this regard, Ahmed (2012) asserts that Darwish evokes the image of the wheat as a form of resistance to the occupation and to signify "the immortalization of his ecoresistance" (p. 103). Thus, Darwish's poetics emphasizes the sense of resistance and the intention to immortalize it by evoking images from the homeland nature. Darwish's poetics also plays a significant role in the Palestinians' "decolonial struggle and poetic tradition of resistance," manifested in his cited and quoted poems in this paper (Azank, 2012, p. 44).

In addition, in his sharp-toned poem "Passing in Passing Words," Darwish employs the poetic language of a resisting cry against the occupiers,

O, those who pass between fleeting words
 Carry your names, and be gone
 How a stone from our land builds the ceiling of our sky. (L.1-7)

He also continues his poetic cry to rid the light of land's occupiers and settlers,

O those who pass between fleeting words
 From you the sword—from us the blood
 From you steel and fire—from us our flesh
 From you yet another tank—from us stones (L.8-12)

These lines show Darwish's poetic language which resists and invigorates the resistance of the public masses against the oppressive occupiers. He evokes images familiar to these masses such as stone, blood, flesh, fire, land which suggest his poetic language of resistance and rebel. Thus, Darwish's poetics shows "a stronger emphasis on the global effects of colonialism on humanity" and incorporates resistance (Azank, 2012, p. 6).

Moreover, Darwish never misses the poetic compass of resisting and defying the occupiers, maintaining his national and cultural pure identity. He says in his ode "My Mother," "I long for my mother's bread, My mother's coffee" in which the poetic-linguistic sign of mother suggests his land and its people who share with him his "childhood memories" (L.1-3). This is the language of resistance that Darwish sustains in his poetic discourse, invigorating the feelings of struggle, resistance, and solidity among the Palestinian masses.

Darwish succeeds to formulate “a culture of resistance [that] has arisen among Palestinians to defend their legal and cultural identity” (Said, 1994, p. 123). In her own words, Harlow (1987) argues that literature is the propagation of the armed decolonization struggles that the oppressed and occupiers practice,

Culture...and language are critical as an arena of struggle, no less than as a part of that struggle, as one of the weapons....The use of language is crucial, both as challenge to the antagonist and in redefining the identity of the protagonist, to the strategy of any resistance movement. (p. 55)

Here, Harlow asserts the significance of cultural patterns of resistance manifested in the inciting poetics of the occupied. To this end, Mena (2009) argues that national identity is essential for Darwish; he establishes it in his poetic words for “identity exists first in language, outside of the restrictions of time and geography; it is unconquerable, indestructible, and transportable” (p. 116).

By the same token, Darwish enriches his poetic legacy with odes that inspire the emotions and faith of resistance in the mentalities of the youth and freedom fighters. For example, in his ode "The Moon Fall," Darwish expresses his vision about defending his land and calling for resisting the aggressive occupiers who stole his homeland from its original owners. He says in the opening lines, "There's a song on my mind, There's a song on my mind, sister, about my country, why don't you sleep, So I can write it?!" (L. 1-5). In these lines, Darwish employs the plain language of resistance in a poetical way to remind his people and others of his right to fight the occupiers and dismiss them from their land. This ode is being sung by generations to maintain their resisting tone against the Israeli occupiers and for the hope of returning and reuniting with the land and the people with freedom, peace, and dignity.

It is worthy to evoke influential lines from Darwish's "Ahmad Al-Arabi" poem, in which he establishes his intense poetic discourse of resistance which uses techniques of suggestive displacement and condensation, "From the oozing old wound to the contours of the land I descend, and the year marked the separation of the sea from the cities of ash" (L.5-6). Here, Darwish insists on his right to descend and return to his homeland despite lots of wounds and pains; he sets his poetic language of resistance against the occupation everywhere. In the same poem, Darwish keeps addressing the freedom fighter Ahmad and encourages him to keep fighting and resisting,

O boy distributed between two windows
Do not exchange my letters with each other
Resist. (L.60-62)

In these lines, Darwish addresses Ahmad, the fighter boy, to rise up and fight fiercely without wasting time as the blood of the fighter is full of bullets and enthusiasm to win the battle. This language is the language that Darwish maintains to feed the fighters and the youth with feelings of resistance and triumph. Thus, Darwish efficiently and effectively masters the language of resistance in his poetic discourse since he is certain that his sort of language complements the thresholds or gushes of bullets and weapons.

Furthermore, Darwish uses symbolic suggestive words that signify physical resistance against the aggressive and oppressive occupation and its violent practices and siege of the land and the people. The poetic informative persona in "Roses and Dictionaries" refuses the roses that traditionally come from the dictionary, rather he addresses the masses that "Roses sprout from a peasant's arm, a worker's grip; Roses sprout on a warrior's wound, On the forehead of a rock" (L. 23-25). This poetic fiery language expresses that the unity of land and hand is an essential factor to fight and resist the occupiers. Darwish's poetic language is full of images of fire, blood, death, and resurrection that imply symbolic on-going resistance that continues from generation to another for resistance ensures continuity as a nation. Such poetic revolutionary language enables Darwish to resist the amnesia imposed by Israel on different levels.

Doubtless, Darwish is for ages the poet of resistance and inspiration. In this sense, this naming immediately signifies the intense value of emotional, affective, and ideological sensitivity ingrained in the depths of the naming and its essence. This naming also embodies the strength of the presence and empowerment of the psychological, mental, and emotional Arabic sensitivity. In this light, Ahmed (2012) describes Darwish as “the father of Palestinian resistance poetry,” in which he employs natural images as a form of resistance; it is a form of “eco-resistance” (p. 94). Basically, Darwish gained the strength of an exceptional attendance that approached a lot to the mythical strength. Also, this naming fuses inspirational poetic performance in the Palestinian case in which poetry becomes an aesthetic and tactical weapon as a compound suggestive vehicle to incite people against the Israeli unjust and oppressive occupation. Darwish intelligently engulfed this naming to reach various classes of the public who in turn sing and chant his poems as slogans for resistance.

Furthermore, Darwish's poetic language implies a very special and qualitative concept of resistance. It is simple and commonly and mostly operates on a poignant emotional and inspirational glamour. It also actively and intensely contributes to charge the Arab masses with a tactical energy and power in order to create a sound exemplifying environment that is patriotic, nationalist, and human to resist the occupier. Darwish's poetics intends to resist the tyrant occupation is full of contextual artistic and creative values. In general, Darwish's poetry lies in the framework of an act of poetic resistance to resist the occupier. For example, in his highly musical poem "Identity Card," he starts with “Record I am an Arab” which has the act of incitement, mass motivation and instigation. This shows the poet's determination to let the public identify with him and his enthusiasm to resist the inhuman occupation that robs them their liberty and right of land. This musicality provokes the human sense and invigorates people's spirit of resistance and endurance. Moreover, Darwish's musical poetics of resistance elucidates to his public readers that poetry manifests a power to resist the oppressive occupation and its aggressive practices against the Palestinians. In this sense, Azank (2012) states that music in poetry is a means of resistance, a trope that the poet evokes in his poetics which “transcends geographical, cultural, and even temporal boundaries and ultimately leads to transformation (p. 126). Ultimately, Darwish's poetics seeks the act of incitement and inspiration to resist the Israeli occupier and settlers. His poetic revolutionary language prevails itself and remains associated with Palestine and its Zionist occupiers.

Darwish poetically developed the concept of resistance and empowered it with words that denote resistance and struggle. In his poem "Silence for Gaza" (2008), Darwish seems totally involved in revolutionizing and invigorating the Palestinian masses' feelings of resistance against the Israeli aggressive and brutal occupation,

In Gaza time is not relaxation ...
 But storming into the blazing noon...
 Values in Gaza differ...
 differ and differ...
 Occupied men's only value...
 Is the extent of their resistance against the enemy...
 This is the only competition that is there...
 The honorable and hard truth Gaza is addicted to... (L. 28-36)

Here, Darwish exalts the heroic resistance of the Palestinians in Gaza while Israel is rocketing its whole landscape and buildings, killing lots of the children and aged. This poem strikingly and explicitly substantiates the politics and poetics of Darwish's language. Yet, Palestinians never surrender and receive Darwish's words as fuel to keep resisting this ugly face of the occupation. His poetic language is again a revolutionary tool to invigorate resistance and fighting against the most brutal occupation in modern time. In addition, Harlow (1987) emphasizes the invigorating and revolutionary role of the poetics in the process of liberation and self-determination. She asserts that poetry is "a force for mobilizing a collective response to occupation and domination and as a repository for popular memory and consciousness" (p. 34). This is clear in Darwish's poetics which maintains the national collective memory and offers a significant tool for recovering, expanding, and perpetuating this cultural ingrained memory of homeland and resistance. Darwish's poetics gives "a voice to people's pain and resistance, liquidates Palestinians' memory" and incites feelings of "rebellion [that] finds solace in art" (Ben Zid, 2014, p. 51). Yes, it Darwish's human and national task to publicize a strong deep-rooted nationalist tone that incites his people's feelings of striving against the Israeli brutal and tyrannical colonial and occupational force.

Conclusion

Darwish's poetic language of resistance is spontaneous and alive and reflects national belonging to the landscape of the place and the hardships of the people. Further, Darwish's poetics exposes the catastrophic effects of colonialism and calls people to keep resisting it. He constructs condenses cultural and national resistance within his revolutionary lines by invigorating the feelings of resistance of the masses. He also authenticates the Palestinian people's miseries and deprecates and resists the occupiers' injustices against them. Darwish's involvement in the poetics of resistance is one of the key qualities of his overall poetry. Certainly, his poetics challenges the occupiers' atrocities and massacres against the Palestinians embodying the spirit of resistance he poeticizes and publicizes. Thus, his poetics signifies the power of resistance against oppression and reminds the masses of their right to resist and to never forget their homeland.

Darwish's poetic language utilizes expressions and diction that expose and condemn the injustices of all kinds committed by the occupiers. His poetics is pregnant with juxtaposed codes and homeland-nature images to sustain the language of resistance and rebellion against the occupation. Moreover, Darwish maintains his poetics of national history and memory as another way of resisting any sort of both ideological and cultural colonialism towards achieving the dignified self-determination. Eventually, Darwish's poetics is a striking mature cry for resisting the colonizers of his homeland. His poetic language is publicized among the Palestinians inside and outside Palestine to invigorate their sense of resistance for the Israeli occupiers and their aggressive and unjust practices against the original owners of the land.

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