



OLIVE TREE:A SYMBOL OF STEADFASTNESS IN CONTEMPORARY PALESTINIAN POETRY

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Abstract

The aim of this study titled "Olive Tree: A Symbol of Steadfastness in Contemporary Palestinian Poetry" is to focus on the symbolism of Olive tree as a component of the Palestinian culture and resistance literature in general and in poetry in particular. The study is divided into an introduction which sheds light on the position of Olive tree as a symbol of steadfastness and challenges which has been utilized by Palestinian prominent literary figures. It provides a precise definition of resistance literature as a major tool that Palestinians used to defend homeland.

The study then gives a background about the position of Olive tree in the Holy Quran, in culture and a historical view, in addition to the symbolism of the tree, the study then gives a profound analysis of the poetic works of the most prominent Palestinian literary figures including Mahmoud Darwish, Fadwa Tuqan and Samih Al Qasem.

The study ends with a discussion that highlights the fact that Olive tree is not just a tree in the Palestinian memory, it symbolizes the: occupied land, resistance, encouragement to fight, the destruction of the Arab people in Palestine, peace, modernization and birth, the sanctity of highly Arabic culture, tolerance and freedom, as well as permanent green signifies life and continuous resistance. Olive refers to Palestine and its related events.

Keywords: Resistance literature, steadfastness, oppression, imperialism, cultivated, resilience.

Introduction

The olive tree in Palestine is unlike other trees, it resembles Palestinians in their steadfastness, determination and challenge, it is a form of resistance which is targeted by the colonizer in every second of the Palestinian life and it is a major part of literary discourse and takes active role in the battle of liberation. " Resistance literature is a global phenomenon created by political conflict between Western imperialism and non-Western

indigenous resistance movements. As a body of literature, it is characterized by links of affiliation with liberation struggles around the world.

According to (Parsa, 2009: 2). "Resistance Literature as movement to cope with oppression, invasion, and occupation" and Resistance Literature is a literature which is committed to reflect the heroic resistance of a nation against oppression and occupation. Proponents of freedom and patriotism have always resisted against enemies and bullying. This is a natural fact since human beings are created

in a way that they cannot tolerate oppression and invasion. "Resistance is one human values used against oppression" (Belmeshiri, 1981: 20).

Ghani considers human's effort to achieve freedom as long as history itself and pointed out to some inscriptions and paintings in this regard. The history of Resistance Literature, however, dates back to the Second World War and the role of Europe and especially France is highlighted more. "The efforts of nations to achieve freedom and release from oppression and invasion are as long as history".

To this end, Resistance Literature covers to the history of cruelty imposed by humans on humans: it traces responses to such oppressions. Undoubtedly, the history of Resistance Literature in the world is as old as human beings because Resistance Literature was born at the same time of the emergence of human race and formation of literature as well as the reaction of scholars against oppression and invasion. Therefore, all inscriptions, paintings, wall posts, whatever human beings use to show the protest against the inequalities and injustices of society, and efforts to meet such inequalities are concerns of Resistance Literature. Serious theoretical academic discussion toward resistance literature, however, dates back to the Second World War.

The Olive Tree in the Holy Quran:

Olives are the gift from heaven to mankind. Olives are also considered of utmost importance in Islam. Olive and its tree has been mentioned many times both in the Holy Quran and Hadith. Olive is considered a "blessed" fruit in Islam and apart from it being a good source of nutrition, it is also used as a healthy food. Olives have been mentioned seven times in the Quran. This indicates the worth it holds. In the following Surat:

By the fig and the olive and [by] Mount Sinai, And [by] this city of security [Makkah]. Verily, We have certainly created man in the best of stature. (Surah Tin:1-4).

In another Surah God said: *"And He it is who causes gardens to grow, [both] trellised and untrellised, and palm trees and crops of different*

[kinds of] food and olives and pomegranates, similar and dissimilar. Eat of [each of] its fruit when it yields and give its due [zakah] on the day of its harvest. And be not excessive. Indeed, He does not like those who commit excess." [Surah Anaam:141]

In Surah Nur God says: *"Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is Knowing of all things. (Surah Nur: 35).*

The olive tree, one of the blessings of the plant kingdom, not only has nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic value; it also fulfils a religious function as a sign (ayah) of Allah(SWT). *"He causes to grow for you thereby the crops, olives, palm trees, grapevines, and from all the fruits. Indeed, in that is a sign for people who give thought."* (Surah Nahl:11).

There is great significance of olives and its oil in Hadith. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: *"Eat olive oil and use it on your hair and skin, for it comes from a blessed tree."* (al-Tirmidhi, 1775)

"And [We brought forth] a tree issuing from Mount Sinai which produces oil and food for those who eat." [Surah Muminoon:20].

The Olive Tree and Culture:

The olive tree, like dates, holds great value in ancient and modern culture. In the Mediterranean culture "it has served as everything from money to medicines for several thousand years" (Zwingle, 1999). Since the 1950s, the benefits of the Mediterranean diet, rich in olive oil, have been extolled. While it has always been promoted as being beneficial in lowering cholesterol levels, it is now increasingly being linked to lowering blood pressure. The medicinal and cosmetic uses of olive products are truly astounding. The oil is extremely nutritious and is recommended by dieticians to "improve the balance of fats within the blood" (Adams, 2001) as well as in lowering cholesterol levels.

Olives in History:

Native to Asia, cultivation of the olive tree spread to the Middle East around 6,000 years ago. The olive tree was one of the earliest plants to be cultivated in early Islamic civilization, due in large part of its hardy underground root system, which allows it to thrive in arid regions by tapping into deep sources of groundwater. Some olive trees in Palestine are up to 4000 years old. They account to the oldest trees on the planet and for generations Palestinian families cultivated those trees. Historically, the olive tree always was associated with a special meaning – it's robustness symbolically stands for resilience, resistance and peace.

Olives as a Source of living:

Nowadays, olives account for (70%) of the fruit and vegetable production of Palestine generating around (14%) of the economic income. More than (80000) families depend on those green and juicy stone fruits. Still, although olive trees form the base of income for many Palestinians, their cultivation leaves some bitter side effects behind. The strong focus on olive cultivation results in an oversupply leading to a drop in prices. Hence, also the lucky farmers whose olive trees have not been destroyed in the conflict increasingly have to face precarious conditions of production.

The olive tree, in contrast, is cultivated throughout the hills of the West Bank, making it a symbol of those steadfast Palestinians who remain on a portion of historic Palestine (Bardenstein, 1999). More recently, Palestinians have leveraged the olive tree economically Performing Rootedness (Buheiry 1981), as olive oil is produced for local consumption and marketed abroad as a national product of Palestine.

The Symbolism of Olive Tree:

Olive tree is a full symbol that means peace, fertility, refinement, force, victory, and reward. Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. *The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light*

upon light. Allah guides to His light that He wills. And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah knows all things. [An-Nur/35] This verse shows the holy nature of olive.

Resistance Poetry:

"Resistance Poetry is one of the most important factors playing a major role in preventing the remaining Palestinians in the occupied territories with reality and tragedy. Therefore, as long as poets transfer this tragedy by their technical and artistic nature in occupied territories, they will prevent any distortions in the case of Palestine. Simply, the issue of Palestine does not fade from memory with the passage of time but will become more and more important" (Naghash, 1972: 230-231).

The symbolism of olive in the poetry of Arab contemporary poets:

Mahmoud Darwish is one of the leading Palestine resistance poets who frequently benefited from "olive" symbol. In addition to olive, he used other symbols in his resistance poetics. Various studies indicate such issue. I only focus on "olive".

Mahmoud Darwish:

The first time Mahmoud Darwish used olive in his poetry was in (1964) in his collection called "Olive Leaf".

If olive tree knew his creator

The olive would become blood (Darwish, Olive Leaf, 1989: 40).

Since the beginning, olive was the symbol of occupied territory where its green nature is the symbol of life. Olive is an ever green tree.

Olive will stay ever green

Like a shield for the universe (Darwish, Olive Leaf: 41).

Olive is sometimes the symbol of encouragement for revolution.

For the olive jungle I heard a sound while

I was on the fire telling crows not to destroy my body

I may come back home

Sky might change (Darwish, The lover of Palestine, 1989: 112).

And it is sometimes a symbol for Arab human degradation in Palestine.

The olive branch cried started to search for his originality

Also, from the sun and rain

Do not cry my love (Darwish, The last night, 1989: 188).

It is sometimes a symbol for peace and friendship. It is apparent in one of his famous poetries.

It destroys lilies By olive branches

With a chest full of leaves in the contemporary era

It is sometimes the symbol of green. He likes to search for lilies Like a bird which welcomes the morning Thus, olive branch fell. It is sometimes the symbol of renewal and birth of Palestine. Some Palestinians are killed every day and some are born. While he was writing some poetries

Olive tree will get its green nature again

And will pass the light from my home country again

(Darwish, 1989: 280).

In another collection, he used olive as the symbol of freedom and resistance for Palestine.

Hey friends, become unified

We do not feel homesick,

we do not smell good adore

We move toward our eyes and against the country

And against the sky the poor become rich

Against the courts of the dead And against the heredity of olive and Martyrs

(Darwish, 1989: 563).

Casualty:

Even more tragic is "Casualty" by late Mahmoud Darwish. This poem marks the (1956) massacre of fifty Palestinians from the Palestinian village of Kufr Qasem during the Israel's military rule over areas with a large Arab population between 1949 and 1966. Not realizing that the Israeli army had changed the curfew by several hours, the workers returned home from work outside the village and were all shot and killed on sight. The poem is written from the perspective of one of the dead men, whose wedding was to take place several days later. In the poem he addresses his bride:

The olive grove was once green,

At least it used to be...and the sky

was a blue forest...at least it used to be, my love

What changed it that evening?

The olive grove was always green.

At least it used to be, my love.

Fifty victims, at sun down

Turned it into a red pool...fifty victims.

[Mahmoud Darwish, in Bardenstein 1999: 153-154]

Fadwa Tuqan :

Tuqan is among female poets who has talked about the sorrow and suffering of Palestinians and encouraged people to fight. She calls her friend, olive, a lot whom she has slept under its shadow. She request olive tree to review her memories. Reviewing her poetry, we will realize that olive is a symbol of unity with nature and probably a symbol of renewal and birth of Palestine.

Here, here, in the shadow of my olive, the soul destroys all evils

And the body becomes excellent in its isolation and silence kills vain things

Here, here in the shadow of my olive in this region and mountain slope

I listen to the universe which narrates the eternity

I wish I could feel that the death would take you from me

I can see you while you have forgotten me here and you feel far away from me?

This body belongs to the soil and got a prize from my old hands

A power needs to get up from my grave and inspire the olive tree

The roots of olive tree are from my soil and they are always fresh

Its lights are emitted from my heart and it is inspired

Until my creator filled my nerve, root, and body

So he got up while shaking its leaves due to maturity created within him (Tuqan, 1993: 22-23 and 18-20)

Samih Qasem:

"He is the poet of resistance with multiple odes to defend his home country and occupied Palestine. Olive points out to Palestine first and the bright future and secondly Palestinian refugees to return to homes" (Nezam Tehrani and Vaez 1992: 88).

Those who are against me, you cannot keep me silent

Have you become angry at me? So I encouraged the city against you

These revolutionary individuals do not accept heart, they take oath to fathers and sunrise To change prison cells into tombs for prisoners and keys

God's light need to shine to the darkness and lighten friendship and happiness

It brings happiness for the olive as well and birds come back to the forests again

I fight against those who tried for the revolution (Ghasem 1993: 141)

Season of Harvest or Terror:

The olive harvest season is the most important for a large segment of Palestinian society.

The joy experienced at this time is often tempered by fear and anxiety because of increasing attacks on olive groves by colonial-settlers intending to sabotage the harvest. The suffering of the Palestinian farmers is exacerbated by the actions taken by the Israeli settlers, which restricts their movements and prevents them by means of the apartheid wall and check-points from reaching their fields. The Israelis subject the farmers to lengthy inspections. The harvest season is usually a time of hectic settler activity, especially by those who live near olive groves owned by Palestinians. On one occasion, a leaflet was distributed by an extremist association urging settlers to cut down the olive trees and attack Palestinian farmers. The same leaflet regards the olives grown on 900 square kilometers of the West Bank as being contradictory to the rights of the settlers to use the land of what the settlers call Judea and Samaria.

Of the large body of Palestinian poetry that uses the olive tree as a symbol of the Palestinian struggle, these poems illustrate the idea of the olive tree as a living memory of the Palestinian village and its people and as a silent witness of their suffering (Bardenstein 1998: 28). The olive is depicted as growing where drops of Palestinian blood have been spilled, standing for the Palestinian by bearing witness for what has been erased and is no longer there. Numerous other Palestinian accounts refer to the olive as an embodiment of the Palestinian's absent condition. In this very literal sense, the olive, still firmly rooted in the land from which its planter was uprooted, re-presents the Palestinian. "The olive tree, among other trees, also figures prominently in Palestinian attempts to construct memory maps of villages that were depopulated and destroyed during the 1948 and 1967 wars. Although most of the houses in these villages were demolished, the trees and vegetation sometimes survived. In these circumstances, the trees have served as an anchoring device for the exiles who visit these places seeking signs of their families' previous life their. (Bardenstein 1999:157; Slyomovics 1998).

Discussion

Studying the collection of contemporary Arab poetry especially after the attack of Zionists and the occupation of Palestine, I conclude that the symbol of olive is frequently used. Some of the usages are as follows: occupied land, resistance, encouragement to fight, the destruction of the Arab people in Palestine, peace, modernization and birth, the sanctity of highly Arabic culture, tolerance and freedom, as well as permanent green signifies life and continuous resistance. Among poets, Mahmoud Darwish used the olive the most as symbol. Olive refers to Palestine and its related events.

Olive Trees, more than just a tree in Palestine. Olive trees carry more than an economic significance in the lives of Palestinians. They are not just like any another trees, they are symbolic of Palestinians' attachment to their land. Because the trees are draught-resistant and grow under poor soil conditions, they represent Palestinian resistance and resilience.

The fact that olive trees live and bear fruit for thousands of years is parallel to Palestinian history and continuity on the land. Palestinians are proud of their olive trees; they take care of them with care and appreciation. Palestine has some of the world's oldest olive trees, dating back to 4,000 years. Some families have trees that have been passed down to them for generations and the olive harvest season in October bears a socio-cultural meaning where families come together to harvest olive trees bearing in mind that their forefathers and mothers had tended to the same trees several years ago. In addition to their symbolic meaning, olives are a main source of income for around (80,000) Palestinian families.

According to UN figures, around (48%) of the agricultural land in the West Bank and Gaza is planted with olive trees. Olive trees account for (70%) of fruit production in Palestine and contribute around (14%) to the Palestinian economy. (93%) of the olive harvest is used for olive oil production while the rest is used for olive soap, table olives and pickles. Much of the olive production is for local consumption with a small amount of olives being exported primarily to Jordan. With the growing interest in organic food and fair trade, Palestinian

olives are now also reaching European and North American markets.

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