

Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge

Volume 7

Issue 5 "If I touch the depths of your heart ... ": The
Human Promise of Poetry in Memories of Mahmoud
Darwish

Article 29

1-1-2009

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Recommended Citation

Alahmed, Nadia (2009) "An Anthem for the Dream Land: The Legacy of Poetry for the Palestinian and African-American Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*: Vol. 7: Iss. 5, Article 29.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.umb.edu/humanarchitecture/vol7/iss5/29>

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An Anthem for the Dream Land

The Legacy of Poetry for the Palestinian and African-American Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s

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Abstract: The article is an introduction to a larger project seeking comparisons in origin, ideology, aesthetics and political agendas of two artistic movements: The Black Arts Movement and the Palestinian Culture of Resistance, in 1960s and 1970s. The Bandung Conference in 1955 and the rise of the anti-colonial movement in Algiers and Africa in the 1950-1960s shaped the establishment of the Third World Movement, which brought forth the rise of radical political and literary nationalism in the Occupied Territories and within the African-American community. This research is an attempt to reveal the resemblance between these political ideologies and their formative impact on the political consciousness and literary expression of these two peoples. With poetry as its primary focus, the article elucidates similarities in the literary traditions, mythology and aesthetics that united African-American and Palestinian poetry in the 1960-70s in their struggle for self-determination, sovereignty and global justice.

“We have a country of words. Speak speak so I can put my road on the stone of a stone. We have a country of words. Speak speak so we may know the end of this travel.” —Mahmoud Darwish, “We Travel Like All Other People”

I. INTRODUCTION

The 1960s and 1970s appear as a symbol of revolution in the African-American history and stand out as a period of a crucial ideological, political and cultural change in Palestinian history as well. The decade brought about revolutions of numerous kinds and various levels all around the globe, but a specific political phenomenon holds the most profound impact in the polit-

ical consciousness of African Americans and the Palestinian community alike. The decolonization movement with the rise of what Frantz Fanon called “consciousness of the colonized” and the Third World Movement became raw material for the new Palestinian and African-American political agendas, saturated with revolutionary and nationalist ideas.

The major event that is thought to have inspired the anti-colonial movement is the Afro-Asian conference held in Bandung, Indonesia. It is the first example of active collaboration between the Third World countries that manifested their will to struggle for sovereignty and equality of all nations and races. A few years after the

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conference all the ideals of Bandung were brought to life as the world was witnessing the rise of new independent nations and the intensive process of decolonization throughout the Third World. Just two years after the event, in 1957, Ghana became the first African nation to gain independence from the British Empire. Ghana's Leader, Kwame Nkrumah, affirmed his position as a major figure in the anti-colonialist movement and became the leader of the first independent African nation. Another leader of liberation and nationalist struggles arose when Gamal Abdel Nasser became the first democratic leader of Egypt in 1956. Nasser not only encouraged a great number of uprisings and liberation struggles in various places on the African continent but also brought about the rebirth of the Arab nationalist ideology, which culminated in the creation of the Arab League in 1964. By 1970s each and every North African country became a member of this organization.

In 1962 the Algiers gained independence fulfilling the life-long dream of Frantz Fanon, a prominent Black scholar and psychologist from Martinique, who made a profound contribution to the anti-colonization and anti-racist struggles in Algeria and throughout the African continent. At this point it is difficult to ignore the strength of historical connections between Arab and African nationalisms and political struggles. Where does the Middle East or Arab World end and Africa begin? Do countries like Egypt, Algiers, and Morocco, as well as other Muslim and Arabic speaking countries on the African continent belong among the African nations or do they embody the Pan Arab ideals of Nasser and constitute a part of the Arab world? It is not my intent here to provide the answers to either one of these complex questions. My focus rather is to reveal the connections between African and Arab nationalisms and the struggle for self-determination and dignity, using the example of African-American community and the Palestinian people, each of whom

without a doubt made an enormous contribution to these struggles. In many ways, the African American and Palestinian Diasporas created by exile and displacement, as well as the Palestinian people under occupation and the ones living within Israeli borders, provide a powerful link between the vast territories of Middle Eastern and African continents and the Western world through their cultural and political activism.

I am obliged to emphasize the enormous scope of work embedded in a proper survey of my thesis and affirm that this article is only a brief introduction to a much larger project dedicated to African American/Palestinian collaboration and similar tendencies in their political and aesthetic ideologies. I also acknowledge that my analysis is not historical, but rather political, artistic and cultural, even though political background is essential to understanding of both Black Arts Movement and the Palestinian Culture of Resistance.

II. ARTISTIC MOVEMENTS IN COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is a difficult task to define a clear historical framework for an artistic movement, and the Black Arts Movement is not an exception. Nevertheless, its emergence is connected to the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965 and poet and playwright Amiri Baraka's coming to Harlem to fulfill the deceased leader's dream of establishing a center for Black Arts. Consequently, Baraka became one of the key figures in the Black Arts Movement and shaped many ideological and political characteristics of the Black artistic struggle for justice and self-determination, contributing to the transformation of "Arts" into a "Movement." A year later, in 1966, Ghassan Kanafani, a prominent Palestinian poet, writer, and politician for the first time applied the term "resistance" to Palestinian literature (Harlow, 5). Kanafani

coined a concept delineating the major literary movement in the Palestinian literature, creating a solid ground not only for the literary mode of resistance, but also for establishing and affirming the entire phenomenon understood as the Palestinian Culture of Resistance.

In order to trace the historical development of the Black Arts Movement and the Palestinian Culture of Resistance, it is necessary to take a closer look at the Palestinian and Afro-American historical standpoint at that time.

The African-American community along with the oppressed Palestinian population were profoundly influenced by the anti-colonization struggles exploding everywhere in the Third World. Malcolm X emphasized the crucial necessity for the sovereignty of African Americans and the unity with African nations, and made an enormous impact on the African American political consciousness. Nationalist ideas, as well as the revival of African heritage and the connections with the African countries, became the creed and political goal of Black Artists. The 1960s-1970s was a crucial period in the history of Palestinian nationhood and political consciousness as well. The Palestinian political ideology became imbued with radical nationalist ideals. To a major extent, this phenomenon can be attributed to the rise of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the 1960s and the growing prominence of Yasser Arafat, and the rise of Nasser and Nasserism amid the Suez Canal crisis in 1956, both promoting the Arab Nationalist ideology. As the Israeli army defeated Egyptian and Jordanian troops in 1967 who earlier had control over the Gaza Strip and West Bank respectively, in 1967 the idea of Arab unity faced a large setback and the Palestinian question became the priority as the key conflict impeding the dream of Arab unity. Nevertheless, this development granted Palestinians a chance for unity and self-determination as a sovereign state or at least in favor of autonomy, since the territo-

ries were no more torn apart by different authorities (Ashrawi, 1978:77-78). The decade was also characterized by the rise of Rakah, the first political party organized by the Palestinians living within the Israeli borders, a party that won Palestinians recognition throughout the Arab world, as Ashrawi (1978) points out in her essay.

The late 1960s and early to mid 1970s were generally characterized by widespread revolutionary struggle which manifested itself in a series of uprisings in 1973-76 (Ashrawi, 77). Edward Said delineates this period in Palestinian history as characterized by "daring frankness, an unusual new cosmopolitanism in which figures such as Fanon, Mao and Guevara entered the Arab political idiom, and the audacity (perhaps even brashness) attendant upon a political movement proposing itself as capable of doing better than many of its benefactors and patrons" (1991:6). This passage prompts an important characteristic of both Black Art and the Palestinian Culture of Resistance. Fanon, Guevara and Mao were just as relevant for construction of the Palestinian political orientation as the African American one. Fanon was one of the original Black thinkers to emphasize the connection between Arab and African colonial oppression. The author of the idea of the rise of the "consciousness of the colonized," he was also one of the scholars teaching the crucial role of culture for the anti-oppression struggles. Mao was not only a legendary Communist leader but also a poet and an historical figure whom Baraka actively embraced in the process of his political growth, in turn embraced by Kanafani and many other Palestinian Marxist and Communist thinkers. Guevara was one of the first figures connecting the history of African American and Latin American revolutionaries. Guevara also became a symbol of revolutionary communist ideals adopted by the Popular Front of Liberation of Palestine—Kanafani, for example, belonged to the Communist Party. The Communist and

Socialist nature of Palestinian nationalist ideology was also one of the major ideological forces that inspired the nationalist thinking of the African-American community. James Smethurst, the author of *The Black Arts Movement*, points out that it was the Communist Party of the United States of America that first declared the need for an independent republic for African Americans, due to racial and class segregation and injustice imposed upon the people. Larry Neal, another prominent figure in the history of Black Arts movement, in his famous essay with the identical title, defined the movement as an “aesthetic and spiritual sister of Black Power movement.”

Harlow's essay mentioned earlier reveals the connection between the armed and artistic struggles. Quoting Kanafani, she writes: “extreme importance of the cultural form of resistance is no less valuable than armed resistance” (1986:10). Henceforth, the relationship between Black Art and Black Power movements was similar to the one between the Palestinian Culture of Resistance and the armed anti-occupation struggle.

Like the aforementioned political movements, these cultural counterparts were parts of a much larger Third World liberation struggle. Barbara Harlow further writes about the significance of the Third World context in Kanafani's work: “Ghassan Kanafani, referring to Palestinian literature as resistance literature, is writing within a historical context, a context which may immediately be situated in the contemporary liberation struggles against Western imperialist domination of Africa, South America, the Middle and the Far East” (Harlow,10). The global nature of artistic liberation struggles was also an extremely important aspect of the Black Arts Movement, as Larry Neal points out in “Any Day Now”: “The Black Arts movement...reasons that this linking must take place along lines that are rooted in an Afro-American and Third World historical and cultural sensibility. By ‘Third

World,’ we mean that we see our struggle in the context of the global confrontations occurring in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. We identify with all of the righteous forces in those places which are struggling for human dignity” (1972:149). The significance of the Third World movement was inevitable, taking into account the homogeneous nature of the historical roots of the Black Arts Movement and the Palestinian Culture of Resistance. Both movements emerged as a result of political self-awareness and self-education conducted by people struggling for a nationalist cause, and both were under the powerful influence of Pan-Arab and Pan-African thought. It is important to note that just as the Palestinian cause became a symbol of Arab Nationalist-struggle, African nationalist moods adopted by Black Americans brought about the rebirth of African nationalist ideas.

These two ideologies of resistance refer to similar tendencies of ideologies of oppression faced by African Americans and Palestinians alike. In his most controversial book, *The Question of Palestine*, Edward Said dedicates a great deal of attention to the similarities embedded in imperialist Western and Zionist thought. Said emphasizes the idea of the “pioneering spirit” of American as well as Israeli immigrants as the major ideological cause of unconditional support of the Zionist project by the United States government. Said draws an even clearer parallel between the Palestinian and African American experience in his article “Reflections on Twenty years of Palestinian History.” The author reveals the horrific conditions Palestinian workers faced while working in newly created State of Israel. Even though, unlike African slaves, Palestinians were paid for their work, those were less than minimum wages; workers were exploited almost to death and did not have any rights, despite their inhumane toil. Said describes terrible practices of Israeli employers, revealing that the workers who could not return home and had to spend the

night were not given any freedom within Green Line (Israeli borders) and were sometimes buried alive when locked at the dark rooms for the night. The author notes a shocking detail of Palestinian history as he points out that these workers often identified themselves as “slaves.” This inhuman treatment is not only an echo of the terrifying practices of the slave owners during the antebellum era in the United States, but also is reminiscent of the great turmoil and painful irony of African American history: just as in the case of the Palestinian “slave,” it was the Black slave, displaced from the native land, who built the ground for United States the way Palestinian slaves built Israel’s prosperous capitalist system. Both African Americans and Palestinians were not only stripped of nationhood but were also forced into building the wellbeing of their oppressor. Said draws more and more parallels between Palestinian and African-American history as he deepens his analysis of the Palestinian experience: “the entire tenor of Zionist and Western discourse about the Palestinians has been to reduce us to so problematic, eccentric, and unthinkable a level as to make our every effort to appear to be human only a confirmation of our dehumanized, permanently subaltern status” (Said, 1979:31). Said notices another aspect of Zionist ideology that is painfully reminiscent of the racist ideology of the United States towards African Americans, pointed out by W.E.B. Du Bois in his 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk*, when he asks his famous question “how does it feel to be a problem?” “Demographical problem” is the way that Zionist thinkers described Palestinian population long before the creation of Israel. This locution is still used by extremist Zionists.

Arabs in Israel or Arab-Israelis, who remained on their land after the partition was executed in 1948 and the 1967 exodus, became second class citizens in the country and faced multiple levels of economic, social, and political segregation. Even having

obtained some political power in the Knesset, the status of Arab Israelis still resembles the African-American one. The famous Zionist motto “Land without people to people without land,” as pointed out by Said in *The Question of Palestine*, is the best possible example of the dehumanizing nature of the Zionist attitude towards Palestinians. The concept is also reflected in the terrible portrayals of Black Americans that allowed dehumanizing practices to take place during antebellum and later Jim Crow eras.

III. AFRICAN AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE CAUSE OF PALESTINE

Given their own history of oppression by the West, it is not surprising that African Americans were one of the earliest communities to express solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Many members of the Black Arts Movement and African American thinkers in general instantly recognized the neo-colonial nature of the state of Israel, while almost the entire world community was still viewing Jewish people and Israelis solely as victims. African-Americans openly protested against its creation. As early as 1968, Larry Neal wrote: “The Negro leadership voiced strong support of the Israelis during the conflict and they were given a great deal of exposure in the racist press. But the nationalists had no adequate means of presenting the Arab side of the conflict. So powerful was the pro-Israeli propaganda that most pro-Arab militants were labeled as racist ‘anti-Semites.’ Popular approval of Zionist aspirations in the Middle East is not based on Biblical mysticism, but on the cumulative results of good propaganda for over forty years. An analysis of international realities clearly indicates that Zionist interests are decidedly pro-Western and that these interests are neo-colonialist in nature and design” (1968:143).

This rare example of support for the Palestinian cause at such early stage is not the only instance of the African-American

community openly proclaiming sympathy with the Palestinian community. In fact, the Black Arts Movement contained the largest number of African Americans declaring the right for a Palestinian sovereignty and the racist and neo-colonial nature of the Zionist discourse. In 1970, the founding convention of the Congress of African People (CAP), one of the most important Black Power organizations, was held in Atlanta, Georgia. The congress gathered a great number of important black political figures from all over the country and beyond its borders including the ambassador of Guinea, Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam, Imari Obadale from the Republic of New Africa, African Liberation Army spokesmen, Jesse Jackson, and many others. The Congress was a brilliant example of African-American unity and readiness for sovereignty. The congress produced a great number of documents touching upon technological, social, educational, religious and artistic issues essential for the creation of an independent republic, and made a clear affirmation of their ideological and political standpoint (Baraka 1970: 7-10). Howard Fuller, the president of Malcolm X Liberation University in North Carolina, expressed a radical and complete support of the Palestinian cause and directly compared the history of the creation of Israel and the United States: "Israel is a settler colony. There is no such place as Israel. It is Palestine, and so that all of you, all of you niggers who saw fit to sign that document saying that you support Israel, you are supporting nothing. We must understand that those Europeans, who call themselves Jews moved to Palestine, took the land in 1948. This is what it's all about, and America is a settler colony. So that while we're dealing on that level, then we will understand that we are Africans, Europeans are Europeans, not Americans, not Israeleans, not Afrikaners, they are Europeans, and it is these people that we must address ourselves to" (Baraka, 1970: 59). It is impossible to talk about the history of African-American and Pales-

tinian relations without mentioning the African American man who was one of the designers of the Partition Plan and supporters of the idea of a "Jewish Homeland" in Palestine. Ralph Bunche, a prominent scholar, civil rights activist, prominent NAACP member, the first African American honored with a Noble Prize for Peace in 1949 and one of the key designers of the UN Declaration of Human rights, was in fact the first public figure in United States to support the Palestinian cause (Mann, 166). Peggy Mann describes his journey to Palestine as a part of a United Nations Special Committee on Palestine. Mann describes the complexity of the research process and the prolonged hesitation of Bunche, who while in Jerusalem realized the historical importance of Palestine for the three major monotheistic religions. And even though he chose to support the decision to create Israel, he was one of the very few to realize the catastrophic effects of this decision for the Palestinians. As early as 1951, Bunche gave a speech at the National War College in Washington, declaring the solidarity with the Palestinian people: "The real victims of this whole conflict—and they have been successfully at each stage more victimized—have been the Arabs of Palestine" (Bunche, 1970). Bunche was one of the very few who could see beyond the discourse victimizing the Jewish European population, and even though he recognized the horror of the Holocaust and sympathized with the Jewish cause, he did not fail to see the unjust and imperial nature of the creation of the Jewish Homeland in Palestine.

IV. THE ROLE OF CULTURE AND THE ARTS IN THE TWO LIBERATORY MOVEMENTS

The history of prolonged trauma shared by African Americans and Palestinians finds its traces in the Black Arts Movement and the Palestinian Culture of Resistance. The

dehumanizing practices and, even more significantly *ideas*, found in Zionism and the racist ideologies of the United States became the target of African American and Palestinian revolutionary artists. Fanon wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) that to destroy a culture means to destroy its people. Said dedicated a large portion of his work *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) to the discourse between culture and empire. Both Palestinian and African-American experiences are illuminating examples of the fact that culture is one of the main targets of the oppressors. African Americans were stripped of their language, religion, and traditions, Palestinians were denied any manifestations of their national identity under Jordanian and Egyptian rule which became even harsher and all-penetrating as the West Bank, and Gaza strip came under Israeli control. Hanan Ashrawi, a Palestinian woman, activist, poet, and scholar, provides a detailed description of cultural oppression in her "The Contemporary Palestinian Poetry of Occupation" (1978). She reveals the strong literary surveillance and forbidden nationalist symbols, censoring even the colors of the Palestinian flag. Arabs in Israel did not escape that fate as well, and unfortunately a portion of them lost a great deal of their cultural connections with Palestine.

Malcolm X realized the importance of culture for African American nationhood at a very early stage, encouraging his fellow African Americans to get rid of the "religion of the white devil" and embrace Islam. X is also one of the first African American leaders to criticize the creation of the state of Israel and the neo-colonial nature of this project. The artists who dedicated themselves and their work to the creation and burgeoning of the Black Arts movement saw culture and art as an essential aspect of their nationalist struggle. Larry Neal wrote in the essay titled "Any Day Now: Black Art and Black Liberation": "The Black Arts movement preaches that liberation is inextricably bound up with politics and culture.

The culture gives us a revolutionary moral vision and a system of values and a methodology around which to shape the political movement. When we say 'culture,' we do not merely mean artistic forms. We mean, instead, the values, the life styles, and the feelings of the people as expressed in everyday life. The total liberation of Blues People cannot be affected if we do not have a value system, a point of reference, a way of understanding what we see and hear every day around us. If we do not have a value system that is, in reality, more moral than the oppressor's, then we cannot hope to change society" (1972:159). Culture similarly presents a major source of national identity for Palestinians and African-Americans alike. Ashrawi (1978) reveals the profound significance of culture for Palestinian nationalism when she notices that while independence was still a dream in the political realm it constituted reality in the cultural sense. The independent Palestinian state and a sovereign African-American republic gained cultural presence before the actual political realization, drawing the actual borders of these states by means of cultural expression.

V. THE SPECIFIC ROLE OF POETRY

Culture is an extremely complex concept comprising a great scope of artistic and ideological constituents; my specific area of concentration for this article is poetry. This choice is indicated by the cultural traditions of both groups of people, as well as the political and artistic characteristics of the Black Arts Movement and the Palestinian Culture of Resistance. Poetry is the most ancient genre of Arab artistic tradition, and goes back to the century-long experiments with linguistic and poetic forms that fascinate and still inspire the modern and postmodern Arab poets. Legends are told about blind Palestinian poets at the refugee camps in Lebanon, uneducated and sometimes even illiterate, who compose verses of amazing poetic skill that keep the tradition

alive. Abdelwahab Elmessiri, a distinguished Egyptian scholar and professor of English, writes about the unifying power of poetry that kept Palestinian poets inside Israel connected with their fellow poets beyond the borders and checkpoints: "Palestinian poets, even as they were being harassed and at times terrorized in Israel, even as they were experiencing the pains of exile outside their homeland, still participated in a living historical process that helped them maintain a sense of belonging, thereby overcoming the deep sense of alienation resulting from dislocation, dispersion, and oppression" (1981:78). Further in his argument, Elmessiri provides an overt explanation of this phenomenon, revealing that Palestinian resistance chose poetry over any other artistic mode due to its great history that became a way of asserting its Arab identity (79). The artists of the Black Arts Movement who were also striving for the resurrection of African tradition chose poetry with the exactly same motif, for oral tradition is also considered a major genre of African cultural tradition.

Oral as opposed to written nature of African and Arab poetry is not the only aspect of those poetic traditions that manifests itself in Palestinian and African-American nationalist poetry of the 1960s and 1970s. In "The Palestinian Wedding" (1981) Elmessiri points out the way Palestinian poets would allude to mythology and especially heroic epics of Arab poetic and oral tradition in order to awaken a sense of national pride and a sense of dignity after long years of subjugation and dehumanization. These figures include great poets such as Al-Mutanabi and Antar (79). Antar is a son of African woman and a rich Arab man. Born as a slave, Antar wins his freedom and a high social status after demonstrating his might and noble qualities as a warrior and a distinguished poet whose character is reminiscent of the ideals of African American and Palestinian national struggles in the '60s and '70s. Another common mythological reference

found in African-American and Palestinian nationalist poetry is the allusions to Egyptian mythology, specifically the gods Osiris and Isis, which is widely used by Ishmael Reed and Darwish, and many other African American and Palestinian poets of that period.

At its founding convention, Congress of African Peoples held a special session on creativity and art emphasizing its crucial importance for the creation of an independent African republic in the United States. Much discussion there was dedicated to poetry, its prophetic and changing powers, its uniqueness and features distinguishing it from the Western poetic tradition (mainly its strong connection with the oral tradition) and its importance for affirming of the African identity. As a result a set of resolutions were made granting unconditional support of the poetry editions such as *Cricket*, *Journal of Black Poetry* and encouraging the creation of newer and newer ones (Baraka, 1970:215). As Smethurst points in *Black Arts Movement*, the importance of poetry for the nationalist struggle of African Americans did not need any introduction or reassurance as Amiri Baraka ended the conference with a poem as opposed to a conventional conclusive political speech. The poem titled "It's Nation Time" provided a quintessence of the Pan African and revolutionary nationalist ideas, reaffirming the significance of ideology and even metaphysical nature of their revolutionary struggle and once again revealing the global nature of the change that they are seeking:

Time to
get
together
time to be one strong fast energy space
...
black genius rise in spirit muscle
...
the black man is the future of the world
...
come out niggers

all niggers negroes must change up
 come together in unity unify
 for nation time
 it's nation time (Baraka,1970:101).

"It's Nation Time" becomes the motto of the Conference and reaffirms the overwhelming spirit of unity and readiness for political self-determination.

Palestinian poetry is also characterized by a prolonged political history. Mahmoud Darwish is known for editing a great number of political documents produced by the PLO. The trace the poetry left on the political documents of the Palestinian Liberation movement is profound. Olivier Carre, a French scholar specializing in the Middle East, dedicated his research to the analysis of conceptual combinations in selected political documents issued by the PLO and a structural analysis of Mahmoud Darwish's poetry. He attributes his motivation to a great number of historical peculiarities of the African-American struggles and those of the Palestinian community within the state of Israel, the Occupied Territories and the global Palestinian Diaspora. Even a brief review of Palestinian history of the 1960s and 1970s will reveal that all the key political figures such as Darwish, Kanafani, Zayyad, Jubran, Ashrawi and many others are also the most prominent and the most influential poets in the history of the Palestinian Literature. A similar tendency is found in the history of the Black Arts Movement when poets such as Neal, Baraka, and Sanchez were active participants in the political life of the African-American community. Nikki Giovanni describes the dangers involved in her revolutionary political and poetic activity in "My Poem":

my phone is tapped
 my mail is opened
 they've caused me to turn
 on all my old friends
 and all my new lovers (2003:86).

Exile and imprisonment are also an integral part of many Palestinian poet activists such as Darwish, Mutawakkil Taha, and many others. Poetry was now not a purely artistic expression, but often a major political crime. The Black Arts Movement and the Palestinian culture of Resistance became movements to erase the borders between poetry and politics. Their revolutionary aesthetics forever transformed Palestinian and African-American poetry.

The key members of the Black Arts Movement had a clear set of standards for what poetry ought to be and ought to do. Maulana Karenga, an African-American theorist and activist, clearly identifies requirements and functions of African American poetry: "Art must be functional, collective, and committed. Collective: done by Black people, about Black people and for Black people. Black art must expose the enemy, praise the people and support the revolution" (Baker,9). In her essay "Palestinian Poetry of Occupation," Ashrawi points out the need to address "simple people" in order to become an "effective instrument of resistance" as realized by Palestinian poets and described by Mahmoud Darwish in "Concerning Poetry":

A poet
 says
 If my poems please my friends
 And anger my enemies
 Then I'm a poet.
 and I shall speak! (Ashrawi, 1978:87).

Further on, Ashrawi clearly defines the role of poetry through the role of the Palestinian poets: "...They are national figures, symbols of resistance and political as well as aesthetic consciousness, who are wielding their mighty pens in the face of the enemy" (1978:82-83). Such an overt lauding of the resistance poets is contrasted with the poets whose art is detached from the community and the political struggle. Ashrawi points

out that their art finds its inspiration in the Western tradition and not in the ancient Arab poetic realm, and she appears overtly critical of this kind of poetry, describing it as abstract and “incomprehensible” (84)

The figure of a poet inevitably undergoes a great transformation as a result of these new aesthetic demands during the 1960s. Etheridge Knight describes the mission of the African American poet in “Black Poets Who Think of Suicide”:

For Black Poets belong to Black people. Are
the flutes of Black Lovers. Are
Organs of Black Sorrows. Are
The Trumpets of Black Warriors.
(Knight, 52)

He reveals the essential importance of the poet, and that more than any artist during any other historical period the poet unconditionally and completely belongs to his/her community and to the revolutionary nationalist cause. African American as well as Palestinian poets gain a status of tremendous importance, they are dignified and praised, raised to a prophetic, almost divine status and are simultaneously an integral part of their community. Ahmad Dahbour speaks about his mission as a poet with a true poetic beauty:

I'll do it. I'll tell the trees to unite
I'll tell the sorrows to join forces
I'll tell the motherland to unite
And I promise
To do likewise
...From here, the new begins, and
childhood shall return to
Laila's womb, be born in the camp, and the
camp, and the camp shall grow
And grow, then it will run
In the direction of the water spring and
engender a world
And I shall have time to write a different
poem (1992:141).

Dahbour places himself as a spiritual

leader, calling for unity and simultaneously identifying himself with the people in his promise “to do likewise.” He also affirms his devotion to the revolutionary struggle, saying that he will not write of anything else until the victory is achieved. As poets are transformed into politicians and, more significantly, active fighters in the national struggle, it is not shocking to anyone that the traditionally lofty and fragile poem obtains a firm iron form and turns into a weapon. Rashid Husain recognizes the horrors of the occupation, and even though he appears to regret the new militant function of his poetry, he affirms its inevitability:

Against a child becoming a hero at ten

Against a tree heart sprouting mines

Against my orchard's branches becoming
gallows

Against erecting scaffolds among the roses
of my land

Against what you will—

But after my country, my comrades, and
my youth were burnt,

How can my poems not turn into guns?
(1992:174-175)

Amiri Baraka's “Black Art,” anthem of the movement, describes the transformation poetry underwent as a result of the Black Arts Movement. Poems are also compared to weapons, torn away from tidy white pages and sent right into the crowded streets; poems are no longer metaphysical but material, active participants—moreover, “The Right Arm of the Revolution”:

Poems are bullshit unless they are
Teeth or trees or lemons piled
On a step...
Fuck poems

And they are useful, they shoot
 Come at you, love what you are,
 Breathe like wrestlers...
 We want live
 Wards of the hip world live flesh &
 Coursing blood. Hearts Brains
 Souls splintering fire. We want poems
 Like fists beating niggers out of Jocks
 Or dagger poems
 ...
 We want "poems that kill."
 Assassin poems, Poems that shoot
 Guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys
 And take their weapons leaving them
 dead...
 Knockoff
 Poems for dope selling wops or slick half-
 white
 Politicians Airplane poems.
 ...setting fire and death to
 whities ass...
 Poem scream poison gas on beasts in green
 berets
 Clean out the world for virtue and love,
 Let there be no love poems written
 Until love can exist freely and
 Cleanly...
 We want a black poem. And a
 Black World.
 Let the world be a Black Poem
 And let All Black People Speak This Poem
 Silently
 Or LOUD (Baraka, 1968:302-303).

The poem is a quintessence of the Black Arts Movement aesthetics. It reflects their transformation of aesthetic form and functions, erasing the traditional connotation of poetry as a metaphysical concept. The poets of Palestinian Resistance and the Black Arts Movement breathe life into poetry. A poem is beautiful not only if it rouses us into an aesthetic frenzy, but also if it can empathize with people's pain, encourage and support the people, be a helping hand, and a Molotov cocktail when needed. A poem does not belong on a tidy page of a book, but on dirty walls of ghettos and refugee camps. A poem

is not only heard during a reading, a poem is shouted at the demonstration to shatter the oppressor. A poem cries with a widowed woman and marches alongside the guerrilla fighters on a victory day. A poem was an anthem for the dream land that African Americans and Palestinians were striving for in the 1960s and 1970s.

In order to achieve this goal, it is not enough to transform the essence of poetry, and give it a new life. It is also essential to turn poetry into a movement, a public property. Poetry readings broke out of the walls of theaters into the streets and started to be heard all over the country, especially in Denver, New Orleans, Chicago, and Harlem. Street performances, plays, debates, a whole street culture sprung out as a major artistic and political phenomenon in the history of the United States. Palestinians were denied such means of artistic expression, but even under strong Israeli surveillance they managed to organize an entire underground movement, gathering large groups of people all around the occupied territories for poetry reading sessions, panel discussions, seminars and lectures with Birzeit University as their main setting. The Black Arts Movement, like the Palestinian Culture of Resistance, proved their intention of creating art "for the simple people" in every way possible, to spread the message of freedom while often risking their own.

The new connotations, functions, and profound political influences brought about a number not only of thematic but also stylistic characteristics to the African American and Palestinian poetic tradition alike. The functions of resistance poetry, as described earlier by Karenga, meant that poetry represents the entire African American community, with all the cultural peculiarities that distinguish it from the rest of American society. The essential aspect of these features is of course the linguistic tradition of African Americans. Instances of this tendency are found in every single piece of poetry written during the Black Arts Movement. The poets

no longer see the vernacular criticized by both African-Americans and the rest of the population as a sign of ignorance or illiteracy; the poets embrace it as their own language as it becomes a significant tool in creating a distinct national culture. Other poets such as Ahmed Leghraham Alhamisi would not only write using the African American vernacular but also use African languages seeking connection to their linguistic tradition, like in his poem titled UHURU.

Another prominent figure of the Black Arts Movement, Marvin X, sees Arabic language and Islamic culture as essential aspects of African cultural heritage that are lost among the dominant Western traditions. The poet seeks to deconstruct the racist dialectic through reminding the reader of the African origin of human civilization, evoking pride in African ancestry and the color of the skin that has been turned into a stigma through the racism ideologies of the West. The poet calls for reunification of ancient African culture with Arabic language as its vital component. Only when this heritage is resurrected can the ideals of the revolution be achieved:uhuru (freedom.now.swahili.east african lango)

MUSIKmusikMMMUUUsikMUSIK-
MUSIK
MUSIKMUSIKmusikmusikmusikMUSIK-
musikkk
You have taken up
the ole folks burden.sent
forth a stronger breed POWpow.powpow-
pow. crackcrack
crack.CRASHCRASH.
BOOM.BOOMBOOMBOOMBOOM-
BOOM.tearing down
The Master's need. With buildings of BLK
minds.the east
African language
Hujambo Bwana Nigger.Binti
Nigger.Bibi Nigger.YALL NIGGERS
(go forth baby.&let yr beauty
Shine. &shine & shine (1968:424-425).

Al Asl Suddi
The Origin of Blackness
SUDAN La al lawn
Black is not color
Lon kuli min Sudan
ALL colors come from Black
Sudan al harakat
Black is the rhythm.
Al marna tambura
Anata
Ancient
Assi
Primitive
Al awwal sudan kalam
The first word was Black.
Al awwal rajuli sudan
The first man was Black.
Allah sudan
God is Black.
Sudan ilmi akhi
Black knows its brother
Anta mufail mashay min sudan
You can't run from Black.
Anta mufail ghaybay min sudan
You can't hide from Black.
Ka umma sudan
Your mother is Black.
Ka abu sudan
Your father is Black
Ka burka sudan
Your shadow is Black.
Al atun ra'a wa sami sudan
The things you see and hear are Black.
Al atun mufail ra'a wa sami sudan
The things you can't see and hear are Black.
Sudan al asil
Black is reality.
Wahabi, hurriya, adil, masawati
Unity, freedom, justice, equality (1967:33).

Palestinian Resistance Poetry was also written with a deep sense of Arab identity and Arab history. Abdelwahab Elmessiri reveals the richness of images from ancient Arab history in Darwish's "A Lover from Palestine":

I have seen Byzantium's horses
 Even though the battle be different.
 Beware, oh beware
 The lightning struck by my song in the
 granite.
 I am the flower of youth and the knight of
 knights!
 I am the smasher of Idols.
 I plant the Levantine borders
 With poems that set eagles free. (1981:79).

Anyone familiarized with ancient Arab history will recognize the figures of poet-activists such as 'Antar (525-619), al-Muttanabi (915-965) and al-Barudi (1840-1904). Along with the profound sense of connection to the histories of their ancestors that the Black Arts Movement poetry and the Palestinian Poetry of Resistance have in common, Palestinian poetry is also characterized with the wide usage of vernacular as opposed to the Classical Arabic language, the language of the Holy Quran. Ya'qoub Hijazi manifests his determination to dedicate his art to the masses, as Ashrawi points out in "The Other Face":

Because I write poems for the human being,
 Peasant, oppressed, worker
 My letters shall always be known,
 Cross the bridge of my tragedy to the more
 beautiful
 Write a story...
 So that my people may rise to the better
 (88).

The common use of the Black dialect can also be justified by the attempt to distinguish their experience and poetic creation from those of contemporary Arab poets. Examples of the overt support of the Palestinian cause by the African-American community are not limited to open political statements of support, but also are found in examples of artistic cooperation between the artists of the Black Arts Movement and the Palestinian Culture of Resistance. In 1968 Askia Toure, a guest editor of *The*

Journal of Black Poetry, included works by the key figures of the movement in an issue: Salim Joubran, Samih el-Qassem, Tawfiq Zayyad and Mahmoud Darwish. Journal identifies the poets as "poet, guerrilla fighter of occupied Palestine." This gesture, an extremely important aspect of the cultural and political history of both nations, unknown by very few, once again reaffirms the fact that the two nationalist movements have strong connections, silenced by popular history and in strong need of research and revival for the sake of both of these liberation and anti-racist struggles.

VI. CONCLUSION

The history of the Black Arts Movement and the Palestinian Culture of Resistance do not only resemble and intertwined with each other, they are both a part of the same struggle for independence and self-determination that emerged in the 1960s. The movements are born out of the same historical circumstances and nourished by the same ideals and hopes. They emerge and consciously see themselves as a part of the Third World revolutionary movement, aiming to unify all the oppressed nations in their struggle for independence and equality. The Black Arts Movement and the Palestinian Culture of Resistance seek a sense of belonging and connection to the cultures of their ancestors, which prove to have similar historical and therefore aesthetic traditions. Their struggles are global and all-inclusive, reaching out to all who seek justice, stand out and speak out against dehumanization, strive for the liberation of not only occupied lands but also occupied minds. Palestinian and African American poetry manages to create a powerful sense of unity with the help of the beauty and wisdom of their ancestors.

By using their own cultural forms and language, African-American and Palestinian poets manage to create physical spaces that are unreachable for the enemy and to

embody their nationalist dreams not only metaphysically, often transcending this realm and fulfilling the dreams of sovereignty for as long as a poem would last, keeping the dream of independence alive. The movements gained the best from their aesthetic roots and combined them with new revolutionary innovative forms that affirm and fascinate with their poetic skill, originality, and enormous scope of potential and revolutionary energy. Moreover, The Black Arts Movement is the first major example of a strong and open cultural and political support for the Palestinian cause in the history of the United States. Even though it is silenced and seemingly unknown it is a great starting point for the revival for the Palestinian/African-American cultural and political relations.

Despite the enormous scope of political legacy traced in these movements, its most significant achievement does not lie in the ability to transform a poem into a political document, not even into a revolutionary figure, but to mix poetic beauty with passion and hope and transform it into a country.

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