

Fadwa Tuqan's Anti-War Poetry: A Cry against Zionism

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/gijash.20220107>

ABSTRACT

Modern Palestinian resistance poetry has, since the late 19th century, been an expression of the national culture of the Palestinian people and their historic self-determination and homeland battle. This study explores Palestinian poetry of Resistance written for the ten years after the June 1967 War that triple the territory of the State of Israel. The popular Palestinian poet, Fadwa Tuqan, has been translated into English, with commentaries on Palestinian history before 1967 and on the occupation of Palestine after 1977. Her poetry is a mirror to the historical struggle against Zionism.

Through this study of the historical context of Palestinian resistance Fadwa Tuqan's poetry, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the ties between Palestinian national culture and their struggle for homeland.

Keywords: resistance poetry, diaspora, Fadwa Tuqan, exile, attachment to the land, loss and hope.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Palestine's fall to the Zionists in 1948 brought about a devastating change in both the number and social structure of the Palestinian population. Of the 200,000 Arabs still alive in their homeland, almost three quarters were peasants. In the war or soon afterwards the towns were largely evacuated. This led to a startling collapse of social conditions in Arab countries because the cities were the centers of political and cultural development. When the Zionist inhabitants closed their military ring, they were starting to enforce their repressive measures. Their main aim was to erase any

trace of Arab personality and to implant the seeds of new trends that could grow and integrate into the political and literary life of Zionists.

The Arab literature movement, which flourished in the first half of the century, had been a member of the Palestinian Literature up to that tragic fall. It had its origins and was inspired by the literary movement in the Egyptian, Syrian and Lebanese times. Even well-known Palestinian authors were largely indebted to the Arab capitals, who received them and patronized their productions. Several factors contributed in reality, at a time when Palestine was playing a prominent role on the political front and was fighting for Arab nationalism, in decreasing the value of Palestinian literature.

After 1948, the foundations of the new literary movement, which could be defined more effectively as literature on Exile, rather than Palestinian or Refugee literature, were laid in the Palestinian literature. In recent years, poetry, the main aspect of this trend, has seen tremendous advances in content and engineering. Following the short time of silence after the 1948 war, a great awakening followed. National poetry reflected the national fervor of the people. It was engaging with literary trends in Arabic and abroad, and it was breaking conventional technological codes, repudiating old feeling blasts, and emerging with a unique feeling of deep sorrow more in keeping with situation realities. Literary, 'diaspora' denotes "a group of people living outside of the age in which they lived or

lived for a long time." (Merriam-Webster.com) The word diaspora has historically been related with and dispersed by the Jewish people from the "promised land."

The study comes from addressing the very difficult question of "attachment to the land." The Diaspora name was utilized only in the late twentieth century for other groups of migrants with a dispersal in history and worldwide networks. A specific area of migration surveys, namely diaspora studies, has been described in this more contemporary use. The exact significance of the phrase was discussed in this sector about the parameters defining the diaspora. The new consensus demands interconnected groups at least two locations around the world to share their collective history of displacement or development, a common identity paired with an unpleasant relationship with the host societies. The consensus needs to be achieved. (Ibid)

However, only after the 1948 war, when Israel was founded as a Palestinian state, 800,000 Palestinian homeless people were left, came the question of the Palestinian refugee. In addition, "since the first Israeli- Arab war in 1948 the Palestinians have experienced several waves of exile and lived in various host countries. To the refugees of 1948 must be added the hundreds of thousands displaced in 1967. These refugees together constitute the Palestinian diaspora. (Ibid)

When discussing how Palestinians managed to maintain a strong sense of their national identity while in exile for decades, note must be made of a characteristic of the Palestinian diaspora, which enabled them have a firm footing on their lives. Because the Palestinian diaspora is characterized by considerable inter-community networks, such as strong familial links, international communication, migratory movements, and cultural exchange at several levels. These linkages make it easier for Palestinian national identities to remain and be negotiated. The Palestinian diaspora is not being discussed without mentioning the

value and meaning of Palestinian cultural and intellectual activity worldwide and the events (especially in 1948) which led to the deportation of the Palestinians. Memoirs, oral history, and creative expression developed these collective memories in the absence of national museums, school textbooks, or a state. Strong intercommunity networks define the Palestinian diaspora on several levels, including strong familial relationships, worldwide communications, frequent migratory movements, and cultural interaction. In addition to influence or challenge the domain of Palestinian studies, Palestinian intellectuals and researchers have contributed to numerous social and natural science fields without rejecting their Palestinian diaspora identity. (Slymovic, 172) In addition to the aforementioned, modern Arab critics agree that the birth of "Palestinian Resistance Poetry" is the most recognizable and significant literary product of the Arab-Israeli conflict." (Sulaiman, 196) Since the post-colonial period, "has been marked by a steady flow of immigrants from the former colonies and into Europe and North America constituting an increasingly significant postcolonial diaspora" (Shaffer, 126)

"Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience, It is the unbearable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between self and its true home,"(Said, 173) argues Edward Said in a scholarly essay about exile. It is the insupportable rift between a human person and a place of origin, between oneself and one's true home." (Ibid) Palestinian literature not only communicates loyalty to the land, but also shows Palestinian's expropriation experiences and how self-conceiving and the relationship between self and community shape the representation of land and exile in the literature. "Literature, especially poetry, plays an essential role in identifying Palestinian nationalism to the desire to return." (Dispossession)

Women, like their male nationalist colleagues, thought that the influx of Jewish

immigrants into Palestine was jeopardizing the Arab's identity, and that the most serious concern they faced was the survival of Palestinians as a community. While women's unions in other Arab countries demanded that women's marriage ages be raised, polygamy and divorce be abolished, and women's educational opportunities be improved. Whether Palestinian women's organizations adopted a set of nationalist demands while continuing to do philanthropic work for the poor. It was not that women did not see the need for change; rather, many believed that such change could not be achieved under the control of a foreign entity whose motivations were questioned.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

For this research, I will review one study conducted regarding the resistance poetry for different Palestinian poets for different times. Peggy Hutchison tackles Modern Palestinian resistance poetry has been a reflection of the Palestinian people's national culture and historical fight for self-determination and a homeland in the Third World. Hutchison looks at Palestinian resistance poetry published in the ten years after Israel's geographical extent had quadrupled in the 1967 June War. English translations of three prominent Palestinian poets: Fadwa Tuqan, Mahmud Darwish, and Samih al-Qasim, are preceded by commentaries on the history of Palestinian poetry prior to 1967, and on the post-1967 occupation of Palestine. In my study examines how some Fadwa Tuqan's poetry, which does not merely narrate the individual in liberal society or the Islamic tradition, which privileges a masculinity nationalist trajectory. Fadwa Tuqan as a Palestinian woman adopted a set of nationalist demands and at the same time continued to do charitable work for the poor. It was not that women were unaware of the need for change, but many felt that such change could not be implemented under a foreign power whose motives were suspect.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Fadwa Tuqan: Arab Women, may be the most category ignored in modern and old literature, except in crying sympathetically on the dead, or praising kings and governors.. However, they existed side by side with men poets, through history as great personalities in their love, hate, and happiness, sharing their men poets and literal production. Palestinian women were not secluded from the above statement. Fadwa Tuqan, is one of these great women poets. She was the Grande Dame of Palestinian letters, known as "the Poet of Palestine," is considered to be one of the very best contemporary Arab poets.

She is regarded as one of Palestine's most eminent female poets. She was born to a well-educated and wealthy family in Nablus in 1917. Ibrahim Tuqan, her brother, was an Arabic literature professor who was known for penning fierce anti-British poetry in Palestine. Tuqan was taught to write poetry by Ibrahim, who was her tutor. Fadwa Tuqan's early poetry writings were produced in the traditional Qasida style, which includes rigorous topic constrictions and a rigid formal rhyming style. She subsequently moved on to modern free poetry, where she became one of the most influential figures in contemporary Arabic literature. Tuqan states in her autobiography that she was heavily influenced by Mahjar Poets and Iraqi female poet Nazik Al-Malaika, who championed an era of experimentation in form for Arabic poetry (A Mountainous Journey, 72). Tuqan's early work was attacked later for its personal tones, as opposed to nationalist poetry that conveys collective resistance, while Palestinian poet Salma Khadra Jayyusi praised Tuqan's early work for its "unpretentious poetry of feminine self-discovery and self-realization." (Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature, 20). Tuqan's phase of involvement in Arab Romantic poetry with its personal tones is central to female Palestinian poets because of its emphasis on "the liberation of the erotic" (Jayyusi ,20)

Tuqan's topics in poetry shifted after the death of her brother Ibrahim, and then her father, to fiery and charged resistance songs against Israeli occupation, and her poetry took on a more "collective," nationalistic tone. Mahmoud Darwish, a prominent Palestinian poet of resistance and her friend, comments on this contradiction between the personal and the political: "it is true that Fadwa wrote poetry about the Palestinian tragedy, and why would she not! But her subdued voice was different: it was the voice in love, in pain, the contemplative, and the lonely, which does not resemble another voice; she was simultaneously in and out of the group" (qtd in Shackleton 8)

Fadwa Tuqan was awarded the Palestinian Liberation Organization's Jerusalem Award for Culture and Arts in 1990 and the Honorary Palestine Prize for Poetry in 1996 (Abdelmotagally 213). When she passed away in 2003, Darwish eulogized her legacy and stated that:

She was a contemporary of the Nakba Poets and was not part of them; she was a contemporary of the Arab modernist poets and was not part of them; and she was a contemporary of the resistance poets and was not part of them. She kept up her own poetic identity. And she maintained what resembles the 'constant' in poetry – that is the romantic tendency. And she also guarded what resembles the 'constant' in romanticism – love. (Qtd in Shackleton 8)

Tuqan's art reveals a profound reflection of the loss, rage, and grief she and her people felt during the conflict that forced them to abandon their safe haven and seek sanctuary in a distant place as refugees. Tuqan gains the confidence to utilize her poetic intellect to encourage Palestinians to collect strength and return home as a result of this traumatic event. Despite the fact that the majority of Tuqan's works deal with the aftermath of wars caused by Israel's unlawful actions, she has had great success tackling the problems of women in a male-dominated Arabic culture. Her work progressed from a more organized and formal style that dominated early twentieth-

century poetry to poems that were more loose in both form and presentation.

By the time of her death (2003), Tuqan had developed a strong contact with the concept of the attachment to land, which explains why her works, including 'the Deluge and the Tree,' "Enough for Me," "A Prayer to the New Year," and, most importantly, "Labor Pain" exits at the top of poems that are deeply rooted in this concept.

Tuqan's poem "Labor Pain" is an example of a literary work that explores the concept of a Palestinian woman's relationship with land, as is evident from the poem's title. The poem opens on a light note, leading the reader through the natural process of plant reproduction, in which pollen grains are carried by the wind over "...homes" to a location where biological infusion causes new life. The author emphasizes the topic of the poem in the first two lines of the first stanza, which illustrates the connection between the human body and "...ruin of fields," which Tuqan symbolically utilizes to express the natural state of the land vs "...homes." Tuqan can use this relationship to put the connection between humankind and land into context, noting the impact of human progress and settlement on nature. Tuqan defines the process of lovemaking as "Earth shaking with love," which refers to the delicate woman's body, which goes through a spectrum of emotions from overwhelming pleasure to painful agony in order to keep the cycle of life going. The poem takes a turn for the worst when the persona refers to the "him" as a "conqueror," implying Tuqan's opposition to the Israeli domination of Arab society. She goes on to advise "Arab Aurora," a female character in the poem, to assert her status in society by reminding her that she, like "the hallowed earth" that absorbs and nourishes the thorny rose plant's seeds, offers life through pain and blood. (Hadeed 41)

Fadwa Tuqan appears as a participant force and a female voice in the second half of the twentieth century, providing visions unique to her about women, love, and motherland. She manages

to combine love and nationalism with a heartfelt depiction of her hometown. She uses symbolic tactics to achieve two goals: the elevation of a country and the identification of women working alongside males in the face of Israeli occupation. She admits:

*"In my homeland, O poet,
In my precious homeland,
There waits a lover,
A fellow countryman;
I shall not waste his heart ...
I am a female, so, whenever you whisper
Stroke, my heart, please
Forgive its vanity."*

Fadwa Tuqan is the poet of love and pain as well as nationalism within the two emotions. Her poetry deals with the depiction of personal and national love showing the role of women in the resistance. Fadwa Tuqan, one of these poets, with her words, produced a picture of the resistance of the Palestinians. After the June War, the poetry of Fadwa Tuqan is full with wound. Its first work, which is composed soon after the June War is entitled **"The Night and the Knights."** It was published in Beirut in 1969 and is dedicated to the Palestinian martyr/fighter "Confirmation of the 'voice of resistance' (Palestine)", (Salma al-Khadra, 812) the poetry of Tuqan is written from her own occupational experience. **"Words from the West Bank,"** she begins the work.

"My Sad City" describes "the day of the occupation of the Zionists" in the opening verse. She writes:

*The day we saw death and betrayal
The tide withdrew
And the windows of heaven closed
And the city held its breath.
Day of the wave of defeat, forsaken day
The grotesqueness of the bottom of the sea
Uncovered its face to the light.
Hopes are burned to ashes
And my sad city
Is choked by the torment of being put to
the test."*

Death, betrayal, and defiance are the wounds sustained. The Arab forces who left the battlefield as the tide withdrew from the shoreline assisted the Palestinians. This explains the betrayal Professor Edward Said: "I have said that the 1967 war was a momentous event. Not only did it discredit the conventional Arab approach to Israel; it also made clear to most Palestinians that their quarrel with Zionism could not be resolved on their behalf by proxy armies and states." (Said, 133)

The city is characterized as a breathtaking and choked at the end, in these verses, there are no signs of hope; even God seems to have turned away: **"the windows of heaven closed"**. The poet continues:

*"Children and songs died away
No shadow; no echo
The sadness in my city creeps heavily, bare
Its steps are smeared with blood
The silence in my city
The silence, like mountains resting
Like the night hiding, the tragic silence
Carrying
News of death and destruction
Oh my silent, mourning city
Is it so that in the season of gathering
the harvest
The crops and fruit are burned?
Moaning, oh end to the final destination."*

Songs and children, life and celebration symbols, are gone. There is nothing left of them, no echo or shadow. The city's grief is depicted as a fluttering, wounded animal with bloody steps. It is not a serene silence, but the terrible silence, bringing word of death and ruin. Tuqan expresses her attachment to the land by expressing her sorrow that the summer harvest, which is usually plentiful and earnings a perpetual life, is burned. Even in the fields, the battle has brought death.

Tuqan equates the Zionist occupation with "the plague that spread in my city." in the second poem of this collection, called **"The Plague."** However, the poet goes on to supplicate instead of quoting a litany of death and ruin.

*"The day that the plague spread in my city
I went out to the barrenness
Opened my chest to the heavens
Shouted from the depth of my sad heart:
Move me and make the clouds travel in our
direction, oh spirit,
And bring the rain
Cleansing the air in my city
And wash the houses and the mountains and
the trees
Bring the clouds in our direction, oh
spirit
And let the rain come!
And let the rain come!
And let the rain come!"*

In the midst of the plague and the destruction, she goes out. She opens her chest to the sky, so that God can see and pray the depth of her agony. The poet has a feeling of hope as she pleads for rain to purify the town, the soil and herself.

Another poem by Tuqan "**Hamza**," presents with the topic of solitude, devastation and loss, Tuqan treats some of the problems in her community gently. In the poem "**Hamza**," the poet constructs a man who loves Palestine intensely and appreciates the land as much as he can. He speaks of his patriotism by telling that in Palestine he is going to live and die. Hamza is a "normal man" that may imply that the Palestinian common man is love just of his own country (in this case, Hamza represents the common man).

*"Hamza was just an ordinary man
like others in my hometown
who work only with their hands for bread.
When I met him the other day,
this land was wearing a cloak of mourning
in windless silence. And I felt defeated.
But Hamza-the-ordinary said:
'My sister, our land has a throbbing heart,
it doesn't cease to beat, and it endures
the unendurable. It keeps the secrets
of hills and wombs. This land sprouting
with spikes and palms is also the land
that gives birth to a freedom-fighter.
This land, my sister, is a woman."*

Again, the poet links her attachment with her attachment to the land to the two

children. In her "**Letter To Two Children On The East Bank**", she compares Karema in the fields to wheat. The Israel Military is shown as a sinister curse lining the country, banning the crossing, preventing the poet from seeing the children. The poem tells us of the grief that separates the poet from two very dear children. They live in the East Bank and she remains in the West Bank, not allowed to cross.

*"Oh my Karema, I wish I could fly
On the wing of longing I wish I could fly
However longing, my little one, is
shackled, captive
I am unable, oh my Karema, to cross
And the river cuts the way between us.
And they are here lining up
Like a black curse they are here lining up
They have blown up the bridges
And they deprive me of you my little one
And they prohibit the crossing.
Death perches upon the river
Death waits for everyone who crosses
Oh Karema, oh my gazelle
The pure honey shines in your eyes
I long so much for you
And the cluster of blonde hair like wheat,
like
The seas of harvest in our fields
I miss it, I miss it so much
I wish I could fly oh my gazelle
Across the expanse, I wish I could fly."*

The poet recounts more injuries of death, dread and defiance in his poem "**To My Strange Friend**." The Israeli occupation is the "strange friend":

*"My strange friend
If only my path to you were as it was
yesterday
If only the deadly serpent was not
Spreading terror in every path
Digging a grave for my family and my
people
Sowing death and fire
If only the defeat was not pouring rain
now
On the land of my country
Stones of disgrace and shame
If only my heart, which you know.
Were as it was in the past, not dripping*

*Its blood on the dagger of defeat
If only I were, my friend, as yesterday
Then I would prove by my people and my
house and my strength
Then I would be beside you now
upon the shores of your love, anchoring
Ship of my life
We are like two hatched pigeons...."*

Apart from Tuqan's intense sorrow, disgrace and shame, she seems to reach back to an era when, before the modern state of Israel was created, indigenous Palestinian Arabs and Jews were able to live together harmoniously, and in the country, they both loved. Tuqan expressed a certain sense of terror and death by Israel's occupiers. One can wonder whether friendship between the occupier and the occupied can exist in the middle of the wounds inflicted. Tuqan pulls together this mix of despair and optimism in her poem **"To My Strange Friend"**. Despair, rain now spreads horror; digs graves to the Palestinian people, and sinks the knife of defiance into the heart of Palestine : and hope "If only I were, my friend, as yesterday", I would prove, my people would prove, our existence would prove we could live side by side in a land we both love ("the shores of your love"). At the end of the poem, Tuqan end with a note of hope and possibility: "We are like two hatched pigeons..."

Tuqan expresses the wounds sustained by the war. She continues to question what happened to the Jaffa inhabitants' goals, plans and projects. There is no answer but "formless figures" that "strange" and "extended roots in the house" are providing orders. Again, the poet links pain to her own home attached and her identity, the Zionists are alien and the Palestinians native. Then Tuqan expresses, embarrassed by her emotions, the relevance of the relationship between Israel's 1948 Palestinians and the contemporary Israeli occupation:

*"My dear friends
I wipe the mist of tears from my grey
eyelid*

*So I can meet you
And in my eyes a light of love
And the faith
In all of you, in the land, in the
humanity.
Oh how embarrassed I would be if I were to
come
To meet you
My moist eyelids shaking
And my heart hopeless and forsaken.
And look, oh my dear friends
In order to borrow live coals from you
To take
The lights of darkness from
A drip of your oil
For my lamp."*

She keeps portraying her Palestinian identity. Just as Palestinians after 1948 and after 1967 are interwoven, so they are both entrenched in the homeland.

*"And there I am, oh dear friends
I extend my hand to your hand
I put down my head where your heads are.
And I raise my forehead with you to the sun
And here you are strong as the rocks of our
Mountains
Like the flowers of our lovely country.
And how come the injury is crushing me?
And how come the hopelessness crushes
me?
I swear, after that day I'll never cry."*

Tuqan develops the topic of resurrection from injuries, resistance to destruction and death, as in many of her earlier poems. It symbolizes liberty, insurrection and regeneration using the image of a horse. Tuqan employs symbolism of the melting ruby (**its blood**) and the cut off limb offered by the horse as sustenance for the transformation from agony to death, to the resurrection and to the new life, that is, the horse feeds on the blood and death of its martyrs. She also uses wheat grains that die and are sown to be reincarnated. It is in the wound, then, where "the secret of the heaven" or the rising up is found.

*"Oh my dear friends, the horse of the people
rose from
Yesterday's fall."*

*Suddenly the noble one rose up indignantly
Shaking off behind the river.
Listen here is the people's horse.
He whinnys confident of his desires
And he escapes from the ominous siege
And he gallops in the direction of his
harbor in the sun
And those meetings of the knights who
stayed together
They bless him and sacrifice him
And from the melting of the ruby and from
The blood of the precious stone they give
him to drink
And from the abundance of the severed limb
he is given to feed.
And they call out to the noble horse
galloping
Oh horse of the people
And you the symbol and the flag
And behind you, the army
The tide and the agitation and the rage
Will never retreat from the tide
The fatigue will never spread in the
battlefield
Over our forehead
And we will never rest
Until we drive away the phantoms
And the crows and the darkness.
My dear friends, lights of darkness
My brother
In the wound...
Oh secret of the leaven, oh seeds of wheat
He dies here in order to give us
And to give us
And to give us
On your path I shall follow you
And I shall plant, like you, two feet in my
country
And in my land
And I shall plant, like you, my eyes
In a path of light and the sun."*

Tuqan shows her people's great devotion for their land through her poem **"She Is Forever."** Through resistance and tenacity, she explains the healing or transformation of the wound:

*"Oh my beloved country
No matter what streams to you in that place
of injustice
where there is no way out*

*The mill grinders of torture and pain
Will never be able, oh our beloved
To gouge out your eyes.
Never let them kill dreams and hopes
Never let them crucify the freedom of
building and working
Never let them rob the laughter from our
babies
Or destroy, or burn.
From our suffering
From our great sorrow,
Blood on our walls
From the trembling of death and life
Life will resurrect in you anew
Oh our deep wound
You torment us
Our only love."*

The poets are gaining strength from Palestine, as do their fellow citizens, as well as those who continue to suffer and poets suffer before them. As Denys Johnson-Davies points out, referring to the poet Mahmud Darwish "The spirit of resistance is strengthened by the wounds that Palestine has undergone, just as his love for the woman who is Palestine is nourished for the poet by the deprivation he suffers." (Johnson-Davies, p. xi)

CONCLUSION

To summarize, land can be seized, but the oppressor will never be able to break the hearts of the oppressed sons and daughters. Palestinians are born with a love for their homeland that cannot be changed, even if they are forced to leave it. Furthermore, Palestinian poets have been able to convey concerns of identity and self-regeneration that are linked by their shared affection for and identification with their homeland's soil.

Fadwa Tuqan expresses the sense of loss in her poems, since Fadwa lived through and experienced the beginning of the Israeli occupation of her land. No one can, however, dispute that, despite her adversity, she did not abandon her homeland or her hope of returning to and reuniting with it.

Poetry, as seen in the poems addressed above, are seen as a means of surviving the death that comes with being uprooted from one's home. This is true not only for the poet, but also for those who share her fate. Returning to the homeland is nothing less than a return to one's roots, not only for the poet but also for the entire nation that suffered a common fate of exclusion; a return that attempts to preserve memory, identity, and hence survival.

Acknowledgement: None

Conflict of Interest: None

Source of Funding: None

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How to cite this article: Raghad Shakir Deair. Fadwa Tuqan's anti-war poetry: a cry against Zionism. *Galore International Journal of Applied Sciences & Humanities*. 2022; 6(1): 44-52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/gijash.20220107>
