

# **Genocide and Resistance: An Analysis of Palestinian Poetry**

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Sanguinetti, A. (2004). *Portrait of Modern Palestinian Childhood*. [Photograph].

*Resist, my rebellious people.  
Write me as prose on the agarwood;  
My remains have you as a response.  
Resist, my people, resist them.  
Resist, my people, resist them*

Dareen Tatour

**Abstract:** This paper explores the complex relationship between Palestinian poetry and resilience and resistance, both in contemporary contexts and throughout history (the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries mainly). By employing a multidisciplinary approach, it intends to analyse how Palestinian poets employ language, imagery, and symbolism to articulate and resist various forms of oppression, occupation, and socio-political turmoil, under a necropolitic state and in a context of genocide. Through a comprehensive examination of a selection of poems, this project seeks to lay bare the themes, narratives, and strategies employed by Palestinian poets to express collective experiences, cultural identity, and aspirations for justice and freedom. Additionally, it investigates the historical continuum of resistance as well as of resistance within Palestinian poetry, tracing its evolution. By delving into the intersection of literature, politics, and activism, this study attempts to shed light on the enduring significance of poetry as a tool of resistance, in this case within Palestinian society.

**Keywords:** Genocide, resistance, necropolitics, poetry

**Resumen:** Este trabajo explora la intrincada relación entre la poesía palestina y la resistencia, tanto en contextos contemporáneos como a lo largo de la historia (siglos XX y XXI). Mediante un enfoque multidisciplinar, pretende analizar como los poetas palestinos utilizan el lenguaje, las imágenes y el simbolismo para articular y resistir diversas formas de opresión, ocupación y agitación sociopolítica, bajo la subyugación de un estado necropolítico y un contexto de genocidio. A través de un examen detallado de una selección de poemas, este proyecto pretende descubrir los temas, las narrativas y las estrategias empleadas por los poetas palestinos para expresar experiencias colectivas, su identidad cultural y aspiraciones de justicia y libertad. Además, investiga el continuo histórico de la resistencia, así como la resistencia dentro de la poesía palestina, trazando su evolución. Al ahondar en la intersección de la literatura, la política y el activismo, este estudio intenta arrojar luz sobre el significado de la poesía como herramienta de resistencia, en este caso dentro de la sociedad palestina.

**Palabras clave:** genocidio, resistencia, necropolítica, poesía

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### 1. Preliminaries

In the realm of literature, poetry often transcends mere words on a page; it becomes a powerful vehicle for expression, resistance, and resilience. Nowhere is this more evident than in the context of conflict, and more significantly the context of Palestine, where poetry has served as a tool for navigating the complexities of illegal occupation, exile, identity, and at present, genocide. Palestinian poets, through their verses, have woven narratives of resistance, reclaiming agency in the face of adversity, and asserting their existence in a world that often seeks to silence them, even more so in the context of genocide they are suffering since October 2023, as it can be seen in Refaat Alareer's poem "If I Must Die":<sup>1</sup>

<i>If I must die, you must live to tell my story to sell my things to buy a piece of cloth and some strings, (make it white with a long tail) so that a child, somewhere in Gaza while looking heaven in the eye awaiting his dad who left in a blaze—</i>	<i>and bid no one farewell not even to his flesh not even to himself— sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above and thinks for a moment an angel is there bringing back love If I must die let it bring hope let it be a tale</i>
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The history of Palestine is one rooted in colonialism, displacement, and ongoing conflict. From the Nakba<sup>2</sup> of 1948 to the present-day struggles for self-determination and state of siege, Palestinians have endured displacement, dispossession, and the erosion of their cultural and national identity. In this tumultuous landscape, poetry emerges as a form of resistance, offering a space for Palestinians to articulate their experiences, express their aspirations, and assert their

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<sup>1</sup> (*Out of Gaza*, 2024, p. 26). This poem reclaims death; Alareer is aware that he might die, however, he does not want others to get discouraged by his death. Although these verses were written to his eldest daughter who was pregnant at the time, it is a poem of hope for everyone who encounters it. It asks her (and any other reader) to fly a kite, which represents Gaza in many works of poetry and literature and symbolises hope. In this powerful poem, Alareer demands of others to not lose hope but to fight in his name, to hope for a better future and to use his death as an excuse to continue fighting for it.

<sup>2</sup> Nakba mean "catastrophe" in Arabic, it is a term used to refer to the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians during 1948.

humanity in the face of dehumanization.

a. Thesis and objectives

At its core, Palestinian poetry is deeply connected to notions of identity and belonging. Through vivid imagery, symbolism, and metaphor, poets evoke the landscapes of Palestine, the pain of exile, displacement and extermination, and the longing for return. By weaving together personal experiences with collective struggles, Palestinian poets forge a sense of unity and solidarity among their people.

It is essential to recognize the complexities inherent in this rich literary tradition. Through poetry, Palestinians assert their humanity, reclaim their narratives, and envision a future of dignity and freedom. In this context I claim that Palestinian poetry is a form of resistance and resilience against oppression and genocide, both historically and right now. Thus, this paper seeks to explore the multifaceted role of Palestinian poetry as a form of resistance.

b. Corpus<sup>3</sup>

In order to fulfil the objective previously stated, this paper will draw mainly on two poetry collections: the first is titled *Palestinian poetry under Occupation*, first published in 1968 by the Ministry of Culture in Baghdad-Iraq and revised and edited in 2009. This collection will help us understand the poetry written after the first Nakba as well as the developments that took place at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The second anthology is called *Out of Gaza: New Palestinian Poetry*, it was published early this year (2024) and edited by Atef Alshaer and Alan Morrison. This collection contains the voices of fifteen Palestinian voices which have suffered under the new wave of violence, some of them have been perished. Through the exploration of a diverse range of poetic voices spanning decades, both from the anthologies and other online sources, we shall analyse the themes, techniques, and socio-political contexts that shape Palestinian poetic expression. By examining the works of renowned poets such as Mahmoud Darwish, Rafaat Alareer, and Fadwa Tuqan, among others, we uncover the ways in which poetry serves as a tool for reclaiming narratives, challenging dominant discourses, and preserving collective memory.

Although there is an ample variety of anthologies regarding the Palestinian conflict, as well

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<sup>3</sup> The access to the corpus is through translations. Nonetheless, the analysis of translations is legitimate and Palestinian course is a global interest. Translation is a legitimate form of study, by which we gain access to an array of global literature (more so in a globalised world).

as including Palestinian voices, the poems chosen here exemplify the goal of this paper, which is to portray how poetry works as a tool of resistance against genocide and occupation. Each poem has been hand-picked and they complement each other, and they purport to be representative enough considering the restrictions in extension of this paper.

c. Methodology

To prove my claim, I will take a multidisciplinary approach to analyse how poets use language, imagery, and symbolism to express collective experiences and aspirations for liberation and justice. This paper will employ previously done work on postcolonial studies, political science and political journalism alongside the theoretical framework of necropolitics, genocide and poetry as a tool of resistance and interpret the poems through this critical lens.

Poems will be waved with the explanations to exemplify and portray what is being said, as well as to highlight the importance of poetry across time and better illustrate the point that the paper is trying to make, which is that poetry is being used as means to resist and challenge established narratives.

i. Poetry as a form of resistance

Language and literature serve as potent tools of resistance, offering ways for reclaiming narratives, challenging oppressive structures, and fostering solidarity among marginalized communities. In bell hooks' words:

Poetry sustains life. Of this I am certain. There is no doubt in my mind that the pain of poverty, whether material or emotional lack, can be eased by the power of language. I know this intimately. For in that misunderstood childhood of mine, I found that sanctuary of poetry. It restored me, allowed me to come back from the space of woundedness and sadness to a recognition of beauty. (hooks, 1997)

Audre Lorde wrote in her essay "Poetry Is Not a Luxury":

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. (Lorde, 1984, p. 37)

In this essay Lorde defines poetry as a form of illumination that makes sense of our lives. For Lorde, poetry is a way to control and conquer fears, as well as a means for change. Then, if we

apply this to the Palestinian question, it would mean that writing poetry about the never-ending violence and ongoing genocide is vital to continue hoping for change, therefore, to resist the oppression.

Within the Palestinian and Arab world context, poetry emerges as a particularly powerful form of resistance. Poetry has served as a potent form of resistance in the Islamicate world<sup>4</sup>, evolving from praising the virtues of the ruling classes to embodying anti-colonial and anti-state sentiments (Plys, 2020, pp. 1-2). Dating back to pre-Islamic Arabia Peninsula, poetry has been a vehicle for political expression, inspiring and mobilizing communities across regions. In the face of political repression and authoritarian rule, poetry emerges as a powerful tool for solidarity building, generating emotional bonds and reinforcing the centuries-old tradition of Islamicate verse. This tradition has been particularly evident in national independence movements from Bangladesh to Algeria, anti-colonial resistance in Palestine and Kashmir, and various other struggles against oppression: “In the context of these anti-state movements, poetry was employed to build solidarity within anti-authoritarian resistance movements by making it known that a sentiment of opposition against the state was widespread and growing” (Plys, 2020, p. 5). By circulating poems that express opposition to colonialism and advocate for self-rule, poets empower movement participants, fostering a sense of unity and purpose during adversity. Through poetry, the spirit of rebellion is propagated, offering consolation and strength to those confronting political repression, ensuring that the flame of resistance continues to burn bright in the face of oppression, in the words of Mohammed El-Kurd:<sup>5</sup>

*A woman tells him a pen is a sword. What's a pen to  
a rifle? Another fed him a sonnet. If Shakespeare was  
from here he wouldn't be writing.*

Through different devices, Palestinian poets and writers articulate the collective longing for justice, dignity, and freedom. Poetry, then, becomes a place of solidarity; Hala Alyan<sup>6</sup> says “*If you say Gaza, you must say Gaza. / If you look, you must look until there is no looking left to do*”. Poetry is the place where voices silenced by occupation and oppression find a place to

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<sup>4</sup> “The term Islamicate refers to the social and cultural complex that is historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, including the function and participation of non-Islamic and non-Muslim individuals and groups within that complex” (Waldman & Zeghal, 2024). Thus, cultural, social, and political aspects that have been influenced by Islam, even if they are not strictly religious in nature.

<sup>5</sup> (El-Kurd, 2021, pp. 34-35).

<sup>6</sup> (2024, p. 36).

articulate themselves and to be validated, forging bonds of empathy and resistance across borders and generations, as it is seen in Marwan Makhoul's poem "New Gaza".<sup>7</sup> In the face of ongoing colonialism and political repression, literature stands as a testament to the enduring power of words to inspire change, amplify marginalized voices, and envision a future rooted in justice and liberation. In a different poem Makhoul<sup>8</sup> writes: "*We may not change the world with what we write / but we may shame it*".

Poetry challenges dominant narratives, confronts injustice, and puts marginalized voices on the spotlight, not only in the context of Palestine and the Arabic world but all around the globe. This is illustrated by several poetry anthologies such as Alarcón's *The Poetry of Resistance: Voices for Social Justice* (2016). This collection showcases the work of contemporary poets who, through poetry, confront social, political, and environmental injustices, thus illustrating how poetry is a tool for resistance and advocacy. Or Eisner and Escaja's *Resistencia: Poems of Protest and Revolution* (2020). Their work features poetry from around the world that engages with themes of protest, resistance, and revolution. Thus, these anthologies support my claim that poetry is a form of resistance, both in Palestine and other geographical areas.

#### d. State of the art

Palestinian poetry occupies a unique and vital space within the broader landscape of Arabic literature, embodying Palestinian history, culture, and struggle. It emerges from the experiences of dispossession, exile, occupation, and resistance. From early pioneers like Mahmoud Darwish, whose poetry articulated the Palestinian experience, to contemporary voices such as those of Naomi Shihab and Rafeef Ziadah, whose work reflect the diasporic reality and the ongoing struggle for justice.

In the last ten years, several anthologies featuring Palestinian poetry have been published, reflecting the ongoing diversity of Palestinian voices. Among these anthologies are: *A Bird is Not a Stone: An Anthology of Contemporary Palestinian Poetry* edited by Henry Bell and Sarah Irving (2014), *Gaza Unsilenced* edited by Refaat Alareer and Laila El-Haddad (2015); *A Blade of Grass: New Palestinian Poetry* edited by Naomi Foyle (2017); *A Map of Absence: An Anthology of Palestinian Writing on the Nakba* edited by Atef Alshaer (2018). This last anthology does not exclusively focus on poetry, but it also includes other forms of writing.

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<sup>7</sup> (2024, p. 50). In this poem, Makhoul is talking to his unborn child, and he is scared that they will not get to see their country as it is.

<sup>8</sup> (2024, p. 57).



These collections have not been chosen to be discussed in this paper because their focus is not resistance, but an enormous variety of other themes.

In terms of scholarly production, the most prominent article regarding poetry published recently is “Resistance through the Language of Palestinian” Poets by Nora F. Boayrid (2019), which analyses the language of resistance in the poems of Samih Al-Qasim, Mahmoud Darwish and Tawfiq Zayyad. Regarding Palestinian history, in the last decade numerous academic articles, books, and documentaries have delved into various aspects of Palestine history and Palestinian poetry. Some of the most prominent books regarding history include: *On Palestine* by Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé (2015) and *Ten Myths About Israel* by Ilan Pappé (2017), which have been used to provide a comprehensible historical context in this paper.

Although Palestine and the Palestinian question have been explored exhaustively, thanks especially to the great labour of certain institutions such as The Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS), established in 1963, or The Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy (PIPD),<sup>9</sup> there are topics which have not yet been explored in depth, such as the poetry of women.

## 2. Context

### a. Key historical points: from Napoleon to the 2010s

The concept of a Jewish state has a long history, with discussions dating back to Napoleon's proposal of offering Palestine as a homeland for Jews in 1799 (Weider, 1997). Zionism,<sup>10</sup> from its inception, has been a colonialist project (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015; Hitchens & Said, 2001; Pappé, 2017). The first wave of Jewish settlers who reached Palestine in the 1800s were looking to expand the land they had been given but were stopped by the native Palestinian population (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015). Despite these colonising attempts, it was not until the period of the British Mandate for Palestine (1917-1948) that the groundwork for the establishment of Israel<sup>1</sup> truly began: “On November 17, 1917, the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur J. Balfour, indicated in a written declaration that Britain viewed with favour the establishment of a national

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<sup>9</sup> IPS is an independent non-profit research institution while PIPD is a non-governmental independent Organization. PIPD owns Rābet, a digital platform which serves as a hub for amplifying Palestinian voices.

<sup>10</sup> Pappé is adamant that the meaning of Zionism changed from the pre-state to the post-state period: “From 1948 on, Zionism meant the ideology of the state. A state religion.” (2015, p. 55). There is a sense of agreement in this regard, Köse stated that “Zionism, since the last decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century, was/is a worldwide Jewish organization aimed to build a national home/Jewish Nation state in Palestine” (2018, p. 727). A Zionist is someone who advocates for an independent Jewish state where Jews can live in safety. To many religious Jews, Israel is ‘the promised land’. However, although Zionism does want an independent state for Jewish people, it is by no means equal to Judaism and to conflate them is inaccurate and dangerous (*Are All Jews Zionists?*, 2022).

home for the Jews” (O’Neill, 1978, p. 19).<sup>ii</sup> In 1947, the United Nations adopted Resolution 181, which outlined a partition plan for Palestine, aiming to create separate Jewish and Arab states. While the Jewish leadership accepted the plan, Palestinians rejected it, leading to tensions and ultimately to the 1948 conflict known as Nakba, which resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, and still affects them to this day “About 70% of Gaza’s inhabitants are Palestinian refugees driven out of their homes and lands during the genocidal assaults waged by Israel since 1948.” (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2024, p. 2). This event is referred to as the “original sin” by the antizionism movement, further explored in the study *Israel's Original Sin* written by French pro-Palestinian journalist Dominique Vidal. Numerous Palestinian poets have written about it, for instance Salem Jubran in “Safad”:<sup>11</sup> “*I am a stranger Safad<sup>iii</sup> / And you too, / The Houses greet me / But their dwellers / Order me to go away / [...] / Your relatives had been here / Then went away / And nobody stayed*” and Amelia Mohammed in “original sin”<sup>12</sup>, where she writes: *Where do I put all of these things? / Why must you play God and, / How many will bleed for this original sin?*”

The conquest of the West Bank and the establishment of Israeli military control over the Occupied Palestinian Territories followed in 1967, further exacerbating the conflict. The First Intifada (1987-1993) marked a significant uprising by Palestinians against Israeli occupation, reflecting growing frustration due to the hardships faced, such as, restrictions on movement, trade, employment and access to resources, land confiscation, home demolitions, arbitrary arrests, limited opportunities... As it is portrayed by Tawfiq Zayyadd:<sup>13</sup>

*Because I am always hunted  
And my House is always raided.  
Because I cannot own a piece of paper  
[...]  
I shall carve the serial number  
Of every stolen piece of land  
The place of my village on the map  
And the blown-up houses,  
And the uprooted trees,*

<sup>11</sup> (*Poetry of resistance in occupied Palestine*, 1968, p. 12).

<sup>12</sup> This is the last verse of the poem, which is one from a collection of three submitted by the author and written on the 9th of October of 2023. The poem talks about violence and this last verse questions its legitimacy.

<sup>13</sup> (1968, p. 16).

*And every blood that was crushed  
And all the names of experts in torture  
The names of the prisons...*

To this we must add the lack of progress in political terms towards Palestinian self-determination and the failure to address key issues such as the right of return for Palestinian refugees and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state (Haddad, 2023, p. 165). The continued expansion of Israeli settlements and undermined prospects of a two-state solution led to a sense of hopelessness amongst Palestinians regarding the possibility of achieving a just resolution.

During this period, Harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya (Hamas), a Palestinian Islamist militant group and political organization operating primarily in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, was born with the goal of establishing an Islamic state in historic Palestine and opposing Israeli occupation (Abu-Amr, 1993, p. 5; Pappé, 2017, p. 112). Amidst the First Intifada, Hamas also provided social services and operated as a political party winning legislative elections in the Palestinian territories in 2006.

In the 1990s, peace negotiations between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel resulted in agreements such as the Oslo Accords, though these failed to bring about lasting peace (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015, p. 26) – it is important to note that these were secret negotiations carried out in Oslo and by no means represented the will of the Palestinian people: “we should acknowledge that the Oslo process was not a fair and equal pursuit of peace, but a compromise agreed to by a defeated, colonized people” (Pappé, 2017, p. 103). The early 2000s witnessed the eruption of the Second Intifada (2000-2005), leading to increased violence and unrest, which can be seen in Najwan Darwish’s poem “There” (2008):

*killed since the Mandate years are at night  
listening to the BBC and sobbing.  
The detained in Acre Prison have  
yet to break the hunger strike of the 1936 revolt  
And people at Mandelbaum Gate are still waiting  
For Hell to open.  
There,*

*a language is trying to mend a land  
that it may embody the naked  
waking up  
in this hallowed exile  
at the world's end.*

*There,  
droplets of blood are seeping  
from a word as if it were the foot  
of Jesus Christ.*

Subsequent military operations, such as “Operation Cast Lead” in Gaza in 2008 and “Operation Protective Edge” in 2014, further fuelled tensions and casualties, particularly in the Gaza Strip. In 2015, Benjamin Netanyahu, stark nationalist Israeli politician and chairman of right party Likud, was re-elected as Prime Minister, the political situation reflecting the enduring complexities and challenges in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Overall, the history of Palestine and the Palestinian and the illegal occupation they suffer is marked by a series of events and developments that have shaped the ongoing struggle for self-determination, sovereignty, and peace in the region:

The last paradox is that the tale of Palestine from the beginning until today is a simple story of colonialism and dispossession, yet the world treats it as a multifaceted and complex story—hard to understand and even harder to solve. Indeed, the story of Palestine has been told before: European settlers coming to a foreign land, settling there, and either committing genocide against or expelling the indigenous people. The Zionists have not invented anything new in this respect. (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015)

b. The situation at present<sup>14</sup>

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of October of 2023, Hamas led a simultaneous wave of attacks taking 252 hostages to which the Israel government answered with extreme and disproportionate violence. Current PM Benjamin Netanyahu and his governments alleged, and still maintain, their goal is to protect and retrieve the hostages. However, there are three important things that go

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<sup>14</sup> This paper will cover up to the beginning of 2024. It is important to understand the most immediate context to fully comprehend the claim that what is currently happening in Palestine is not only apartheid and ethnic cleansing but a genocide, which informs the reading of the poetry as a form of resistance.

unmentioned about the hostages. First, Netanyahu and his government of far-right politicians have had the chance to bring the civilian hostages home right from the very beginning. The Washington Post reported at the end of October that

Hamas was proposing to release all foreign civilian hostages in exchange for a five-day cease-fire. Israel civilian hostages would be released if additional demands were met including the release of Palestinian women and children in Israel prisons and the opening of the Rafah border crossing. (Berger, Fahim, Dedouch, Parker & DeYoung, 2023)

Second, the claim that “ Hamas could end this war if they released all the hostages ” is a fallacy; Israel officials and their allies in American politics have stated that the war will not end until Hamas is destroyed, regardless of whether the hostages are released. Senator Lindsey Graham said in an interview with NBC News:

the line that struck me the most in the State of the Union: He [Biden] told Hamas, “ If you release the hostages, the war will be over. ” I literally about fell out of my seat. Is the president saying that if the hostages are released by Hamas, they can stay in power? That ends the conflict? I want to be very clear about this: President Trump believes it's non-negotiable when it comes to Hamas. They have to be destroyed militarily. They can't be in charge. (March 10, 2024)

Third, the hostages at the core of this wave of violence are not just Israelis but also Palestinians. Although 252 hostages were taken by Hamas, and 130 remain in Gaza, there are hundreds of Palestinians who have been abused, incarcerated without trial in the prisons of Israel, and not just since October the 7<sup>th</sup> but for long before that. According to B'Tselem “ at the end of September 2023, the Israel prison system (IPS) was holding 1,310 Palestinians in administrative detention ” including children (2023). And as of April 2024, the data provided by IPS indicates there are 9,300 Palestinians in Israeli custody not including the Palestinians from Gaza detained since 7 October 2023 (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], #150).

To summarize, the Netanyahu government chose not to do a deal to release the hostages: even if Hamas released all hostages, everything seems to suggest Israel has no plans to end the assault on Gaza; and the hostages are on both sides.

Meanwhile, as of April 1<sup>st</sup>, Gaza's Health Ministry has reported that 28 children have died due to malnutrition and dehydration (OCHA, #150). By 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2024, more than 5 months into the military operation, the reported death toll in Gaza reached 30,878 deaths and

it is believed that at least 72,402 Palestinians have been injured in Israeli attacks since October 7. However, it is believed that the toll is much bigger since many more were reported missing and are likely trapped or dead under the rubble (OCHA, #136). On account of this violence, Leila El-Haddad published a very short poem on her X account (2023):

*Under the weight  
of 10,000 children in Gaza  
Birds of heaven  
Murdered,  
their deaths move no one*

### 3. Theoretical frame

#### a. Necropolitics

Necropolitics, as conceptualized by Achille Mbembe, refers to the exercise of power over life and death by sovereign entities. In his theory, Mbembe argues that in some contexts, sovereignty is not only about fostering life but also about determining “who may live and who must die” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 11). Necropolitics thus involves the manipulation of life through the control and regulation of death or, in other words, the “subjugation of life to the power of death” (Mbembe, 2003).

In the case of Palestine, necropolitics manifests in various ways, as Mbembe himself explains:

The most accomplished form of necropower is the contemporary colonial occupation of Palestine. Here, the colonial state derives its fundamental claim of sovereignty and legitimacy from the authority of its own particular narrative of history and identity. [...] The late-modern colonial occupation in Gaza and the West Bank presents three major characteristics in relation to the working of the specific terror formation I have called necropower. (Mbembe, 2003, p. 27)

The Israeli occupation exerts control over Palestinian lives through military occupation, siege, and restriction of movement, which not only reduces freedoms but also subjects Palestinians to constant threat, humiliation, and violence. The construction of barriers, checkpoints, and settlements further reinforces the division and subjugation of Palestinian communities. Moreover, the use of disproportionate force, arbitrary detention, and extrajudicial killings perpetuates a state of necropolitical domination, where Palestinian lives are systematically

devalued and deemed disposable.

To live under late modern occupation is to experience a permanent condition of 'being in pain': fortified structures, military posts, and roadblocks everywhere; buildings that bring back painful memories of humiliation, interrogations, and beatings; curfews that imprison hundreds of thousands in their cramped homes every night from dusk to daybreak; soldiers patrolling the unlit streets, frightened by their own shadows; children blinded by rubber bullets; parents shamed and beaten in front of their families; soldiers urinating on fences, shooting at the rooftop water tanks just for fun, chanting loud offensive slogans, pounding on fragile tin doors to frighten the children, confiscating papers, or dumping garbage in the middle of a residential neighborhood; border guards kicking over a vegetable stand or closing borders at whim; bones broken; shootings and fatalities—a certain kind of madness. (Mbembe, 2003, p. 39)

Therefore, necropolitics is the exercise of power over life and death, often manifested through the state's control over populations and their vulnerability to violence and death. It weaponizes death as a means of governance, shaping social relationships and hierarchies through the threat or infliction of mortality. Thus, the concept of necropolitics provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of power and violence in the Palestinian context, highlighting the ways in which sovereignty is exercised through the regulation of death.

#### b. Genocide

Although not all manifestations of Necropolitics result in genocide, they often amount to it. Genocide is an internationally recognized typology of crime since December 9, 1948, when the UN approved a written international agreement known as the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Under act II of the Convention, genocide is recognised as “acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group”, either by killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (United Nations, 1948).<sup>iv</sup>

Israel has been accused of violating the Genocide Convention in Gaza and Palestine, as “The current assault in Gaza constitutes a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, especially the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide” (Institute of Palestine Studies, p. 4-5).

South Africa brought the case Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (v Israel) (International Court of Justice [ICJ], 2023) before the International Court of Justice on 29 December 2023, and although a case like this may take years to prove and the ICJ has not yet taken a decision on whether a genocide has been committed, on January 26th 2024, the ICJ issued six provisional measures to Israel that could not be refused or contested (Rashmin Sagoo, Chatham House, 2024). However, challenges persist due to the United States' power of veto.<sup>v</sup> As a result, no significant action has taken place, resulting in the ongoing loss of Palestinian lives on a significant scale.

#### 4. Genocide and Palestinian identity

##### a. Antecedents

Israeli actions in Palestine contribute to the erosion of Palestinian identity by systematically dispossessing Palestinians of their land, culture, and rights, while simultaneously promoting and asserting Israeli dominance in the region. Such control is maintained by means of settlements expansion: "Israel has occupied Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem since June 1967" (UNCTAD, 2024, p. 2). Israel's policy of building settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories is seen by many as an attempt to alter the demographic makeup of these areas. By establishing settlements, Palestinians are displaced from their homes and land, leading to a loss of cultural and historical ties to their ancestral lands. This massive displacement is the main theme of the following poem by Farid Bitar:<sup>15</sup>

<i>I think of you day and night</i>	<i>Looking at the same sea</i>
<i>I think of the brutality inflicted</i>	<i>You are being slaughtered at</i>
<i>I think the enemy is never relenting</i>	<i>I think of you, day and night</i>
<i>I am the child of Jerusalem</i>	<i>I will return to Jericho</i>
<i>Reaching out to you</i>	<i>To sip mint tea</i>
<i>I was the child of Jericho</i>	<i>To smell the rain evaporating</i>
<i>When the war came walking</i>	<i>In hot summer nights</i>
<i>To my sleepy town in '67</i>	<i>Sleeping at my balcony</i>
<i>I am the child of Haifa</i>	<i>I don't know when you will return<sup>v</sup></i>

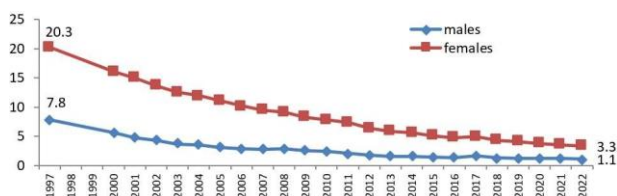
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<sup>15</sup> (2024, p. 40).



In addition to home demolitions, which is done frequently, especially in East Jerusalem and areas deemed as 'unauthorised' by Israeli authorities, there is the resulting displacement of families and the erasure of physical symbols of Palestinian presence in the region. Not only that, but these practices are also accompanied by cultural suppression, whereby Palestinians suffer restrictions on their cultural and religious practices, including limitations on access to holy sites such as the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Moreover, Palestinian cultural events are often suppressed by Israeli authorities, further marginalizing Palestinian identity. Israeli policies and media often portray Palestinians in a negative light, reinforcing stereotypes and dehumanizing Palestinian individuals and communities. This narrative control contributes to the erasure of Palestinian identity on a global scale.


And yet, despite Israeli efforts to maim and destroy the Palestinian people, and even if Palestinian schools often face funding shortages and restrictions on curriculum, limiting educational opportunities for Palestinian youth, "The illiteracy rate in Palestine is one of the lowest rates in the world" (PCBS, 2023):



Amid this campaign of cultural annihilation, survival has become a powerful form of resistance, and each act of perseverance becomes a testament to the determination of the Palestinian people. In Mosab Abu Toha words, "*and raising in the morning, / trying to survive / another day, is coming back / from the dead.*"<sup>16</sup> To attest to this, in July 2011, the children of Gaza broke the Guinness record Book of World Records by achieving the most kites flown simultaneously at an event organized by UNRWA, which illustrates their will to fight and their hope for a future. A poem by Eleonore Christine<sup>17</sup> celebrates this achievement:

<sup>16</sup> (Abu Toha, 2022).

<sup>17</sup> (Sunday Mornings At the River, 2024, p. 112). Although Eleanore Christine is not a Palestinian poet or author, she is featured in this heartfelt anthology: "'Songs of Revolution' is not merely a collection of words; it is a journey into the hearth of human emotion, charting a course through the scars of conflict and survival. In these pages, we confront the haunting legacies of empires, their enduring influence over contemporary crises" (Introduction).



Sarhan, S. (2011). Gaza. UN [Photo].

### Kites in Heaven

*One day in late July 2011*

*12,350 kites soared over Al-Waha beach*

*a new world record set by the children of Gaza*

*that hasn't been broken since.*

[...]

*I hope there are kites in heaven*

*because they seem to have vanished*

*from this hell on earth.*

b. Destruction of Palestinian society / identity

i. Loss of lives and heritage

The erasure of edifications and the systematic killing of Palestinians and Palestinian youth constitute a deliberate assault on Palestinian culture, aimed at eradicating their heritage, identity, and existence. Through the destruction of historical landmarks and the targeted elimination of Palestinians, the oppressors seem to be seeking to dismantle the very fabric of Palestinian society: “Damage has been done to archaeological sites, historical towns, mosques, churches and religious shrines, museums and libraries, manuscript centers, cultural and artistic centers, universities and academic institutions” (Institute of Palestine Studies, 2024, p. 9). Cemeteries, city landmarks, ancient sites and other infrastructures have also been targeted and / or destroyed, either partially or totally.



Human, E.-M. (2024). *Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor*.

Regarding the loss of human lives, the (illegitimate) state of Israel has been systematically killing Palestinians for as long as they have occupied Palestine. Evidence indicates that they have taken upon themselves to erase any signs of them. This is not exclusive of this last wave of ethnic cleansing and genocide, rather it is a pattern that has repeated over and over again in the past 75 years (Institute of Palestine Studies, 2024, p. 7), which Bitar mentions in “Unexplained misery”:<sup>18</sup> *“The wars of Palestine are never ending / Insisting to never leave anytime / [...] / The wars keep coming up with vengeance”*.

The already mentioned military operations held

in Gaza, in 2008, 2012, 2014, 2022, May 2023 and October 2023 caused internal displacement and recurrent destruction of physical infrastructure, residential buildings, capital stock and productive assets, including agricultural land, crops, livestock sheds, greenhouses, fruit trees, storage facilities, boats, fishing equipment, agribusinesses, irrigation canals, water pumping systems, electricity networks, Internet networks, factories, office buildings, housing units, educational facilities and health-care centres.” (UNCTAD, 2024, p. 4)

destroying the Palestinians livelihoods, economy, means of living, sites of cult, etcetera. These conditions are expressed in Darwish’s “Identity Card”:<sup>19</sup>

*Write down I have been robbed of my ancestral vines  
And the piece of land I used to farm with all my children  
Nothing remained for us and for my grand children  
Except these rocks  
Will your government take them?*

The latest siege to a medical facility took place in the largest medical facility in Gaza: Shifa Hospital, built in 1946, which has been left destroyed and inoperable. Israel does not only want to destroy Palestine, but destroy its people, obstructing humanitarian aid from reaching Gaza (OXFAM, 2024) and creating “the most acute hunger crisis anywhere in the world according to the IPC” (Stancatti, 2024), which is not new nor exclusive to the last wave of violence, Sameeh Al Qassem wrote *“I may collapse, naked and starved / Enemy of light / I will not*

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<sup>18</sup> (2024, p. 38).

<sup>19</sup> (1968, p. 13).

*compromise / And to the end / I shall fight.*"<sup>20</sup>

The IOF (Israel Occupation Forces) has abused its power, terrorised the elderly, the young, men and women equally. They have virtually destroyed Gaza and Palestine, targeted universities, schools, residential areas, sites of interest, mosques, churches. "The Israeli army has killed 94 university professors, along with hundreds of teachers and thousands of students, as part of its genocidal war against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, ongoing since 7 October 2023" (Euro-Med Rights Monitor, 2024).

ii. Children

Generation after generation, the Palestinian people have been traumatised, stripped of their rights and their dreams. Markhoul wrote "*There was our wounded childhood / begging a dog / 'kill me'*". According to a mental health report published by Save the Children in 2022, 800,000 children in Gaza have only ever known life under blockade and 80% of the children in Gaza suffer depression. Further,

Since October 7, more than 10,000 children have been killed or are lost under rubble and presumed dead, according to a report by the Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor. At least 24,000 children have lost one or both parents in Israeli attacks and about 18,000 have been injured with some in critical condition. (Maram Humaid, 2023)

Kids have become guardians of even younger kids; they have said goodbye to their parents and grandparents forever. Which again, is not exclusive of the genocide and ethnic cleansing being carried out since the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2023. Already in 1988 Hanan Mikha'il Ashrawi wrote in "From the Diary of an Almost-Four-year-Old" (Abou El Naga, Ashrawi & El Musa, 2000):

<i>Tomorrow, the bandages will come off. I wonder will I see half an orange, half an apple, half my mother's face with my remaining eye? I did not see the bullet but felt its pain</i>	<i>I hear a nine-month old has also lost an eye, I wonder if my soldier shot her too – a soldier looking for little girls who look him in the eye – I'm old enough, almost four, I've seen enough of life,</i>
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<sup>20</sup> (1968, p. 13).

*exploding in my head.*

*[...]*

*but she's just a baby*

*who didn't know any better.*

Medic Nick Maynard, who visited Gaza to bring medical aid reminisced in the United Nations

One child I'll never forget had burns so bad you could see her facial bones. We knew there was no chance of her surviving that but there was no morphine to give her. So not only was she inevitably going to die, but she would die in agony". (*Al-Jazeera*, 2024)

By persisting against all odds, Palestinians assert their right to exist and their commitment to preserving their culture and heritage, defying attempts to erase their identity from the pages of history. Dareen Tatour, who spent more than two years in jail and house arrest after releasing a video of one of her poems, wrote:<sup>21</sup>

*I will keep dreaming for as long as I live*

*as I long as I want*

*this is how I live*

*the dead are those who do not dream*

*I will not stop my dreams... no*

*I am staying*

*I will not die*

## 5. Poetry

Nour is a young 16-year-old Palestinian writer and singer who, like many others, has seen her house destroyed and her city torn down. In an interview with Palestinian journalist and activist Bisan Owda (in collaboration with Rābet)<sup>22</sup> she shared: "My land is aching, it's a shame, enough of sorrow and promises lame" and added that "This isn't solely my story; it's the narrative of all the young, talented souls in this camp" (2024). When her house was bombed all her books and writings were destroyed, yet another proof of the desire of Israel to erase any signs of culture and identity.

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<sup>21</sup> (2024, p. 94).

<sup>22</sup> See footnote <sup>8</sup>.

Despite all efforts to obliterate the Palestinian cultural identity, the young generations, like Nour herself, refuse to put their pens down. The new wave of writers and poets is stepping up and following the footsteps of their predecessors. The aim of this section is to analyse in depth some of the motifs in both generations of poetry, thus, this analysis will be carried out through poems from different times to support the claim that Palestinian poetry is and has been, in fact, a tool for resistance.

a. Motifs

Palestinian art, in any medium, has very distinctive symbols and themes, ranging from the watermelon to historical narratives and joy. Kamal Zeidan states that “Liberation, peace, hope and future are represented by the dove, olive branch and broken chains. Martyrdom, suffering, revolution and identity are represented by prison bars, barbed wire, Kafieh, martyr, stone and gun” (2013, p. 1). In Zeidan’s paper other symbols are mentioned, for instance, the old key is a symbol of hope and longing for return as, after the Nakba, many families held onto the keys of their old homes refusing to accept their exile (2013, p. 5); Jerusalem is the sacred city that has inspired painters, writers and poets alike (2013, p. 22); and women in art represent motherhood, fertility, and homeland (2013, p. 24).

This paper will analyse four motifs in depth: remembrance and history, Palestine and womanhood, numbers, and hope and joy.

i. Remembrance and history

“I am You” by Alareer (2024)

*Mark this bullet and mark your gun.  
If you sniff it, it has your hand and my  
blood.  
It has my present and your past.  
It has my present.  
It has your future.  
That's why we are twins,  
same life track  
Same weapon  
Same suffering*

“The Olive tree” by Zayyad (1968)

*Because I cannot own a piece of  
paper,I shall carve my memoirs  
On the home yard olive  
tree.[...]  
I shall carve the serial  
numberOf every stolen  
piece of land  
The place of my village on the  
mapAnd the blown up houses,  
And the uprooted trees*

*Same facial expressions drawn  
On the face of the killer,  
Same everything  
Except that in your case  
The victim has evolved, backward,  
Into a victimizer.  
I tell you.  
I am you.  
Except that I am not the you of now.*

*And every bloom that was crushed  
And all the names of the experts in  
torture The names of the prisons...  
[...]  
For the sake of  
remembrance, I shall  
continue to carve  
All the chapters of my  
tragedy And all the stages of  
Al- Nakbah On the home  
yard olive tree!*

Both poems “I am you” by Alareer and “The Olive tree” by Zayyad deal with the motif of remembrance and history. To begin with, Alareer’s poem draws a parallelism between the Holocaust and the genocide being carried out in the present in Palestine “*The bullet-shaped scar expanding / Like a swastika*” and “*like it did to you / 70 years ago / Or so*”, which is also seen in other poems such as “The Journalist” by Farid Bitar, where we read: “*This enemy is insisting to relieve / Days of Warsaw ghettos of WWII / Vengeance is their calling*”. In “I am You”, Alareer describes both himself and his attacker as victims of unspeakable atrocities (“*we are twins*”), which makes them the same. However, he brings into the conversation the fact that his attackers are no longer victims but victimizers. Despite this, Alareer seems to sympathise with his aggressors: “*I resist like you resisted*” but vehemently interpolates them:

*“The very same gun / The very same bullet / That killed your Mom / And killed your Dad / Is being used, / Against me, / By you”*, which I can only interpret as asking them to revise history and not forget what it is like to be on the other side of the barrel of a gun, which Alareer summarises in the last four lines: “*I am you. / I am your past. / And killing me, / You kill you*”. Alareer’s strives to create a connection with his attackers as to humanise his people and remind them of the losses they suffered not so long ago. In fact, Hala Alyan recalls in one of her poems: “*My grandfather learned Hebrew because they learn Arabic*”, indicating that their past is not far behind them, but quite recent.

Zayyad’s poem also portrays the way in which Palestinians are treated “*Because I am always*

*hunted / And my house is always raided*". Nonetheless, his poem emphasises that despite everything, they still live and go on and record the events in any possible way as to not forget them. It is of utmost importance to pay close attention to the symbology: the Olive Tree. Whilst the olive branch represents liberation, peace and hope, the olive tree symbolises resistance and strength to the pass of time and wars. Olive trees live an average of 500 years, hence, by recording the events of his life, the violence endured, and investing his hopes and dreams in this tree, he is making sure that they remain even when he is gone. As the olive tree is also a symbol of Palestine, inscribing his story in the tree means to inscribe it in Palestine itself, almost as a reminder that history is attached to the land despite all efforts to erase it.

Thus, these poems highlight the fact that poetry is a site where history is recorded, remembered and contested.

ii. Palestine and womanhood

"Hello Beit Hanoun" by Makhoul

(2024)

*The homeland having fallen down a  
well  
after sixty years, it's up to us  
to raise the rope a little, then let it fall  
again,  
for only thus will hope learn patience.  
\*\*\*  
My country is the rape víctima  
I will marry.*

"A Lover from Palestine" by

Darwish(1968)

*I shall write a phrase more precious than  
honey and kisses:  
'Palestinian she was and still  
is'. [...]  
Her eyes and the tattoo on her hands  
are Palestinian,  
Her name, Palestinian,  
Her dreams, and sorrow, Palestinian,  
Her Kerchief, her feet and body,  
Palestinian, Her words and her silence,  
Palestinian,  
Her voice, Palestinian,  
Her birth and her death, Palestinian,  
I have carried you in my old  
notebooks As the fire of my verses,  
The sustenance for my journeys.*



Although both “Hello Beit Hanoun” and “A Lover from Palestine” are written by men, these poems focus on women in Palestine. Poets often represent Palestine as a woman, along with the Palestinian culture and resistance, as it is obvious in Darwish’s poem. However, women mostly appear as the beloved, or the mother, and often as an allegory of Palestine. For instance, Markhoul’s last lines represent Palestine as a ‘rape victim’, thus, not only a woman but a vexed one for that matter. Women are often featured, but they rarely have agency.

In the first poem, Marwan Makhoul mimics a conversation with the city of Beit Hanoun. He recounts the news he has heard: a massacre has taken place. As the poem advances, Makhoul loses connection with the city “*Hello...? / Hello...? Beit Hanoun? / Can you hear me? / I think its phone’s not working*”. At the end, he draws a parallelism between Beit Hanoun (Palestine) and a rape victim; the city has become a woman who has been vexed and abused.

In the second one, Darwish uses nature to express the connection between himself – the lover – and Palestine, and showcase how intertwined they are. Nonetheless, the woman in this poem serves him as “*The sustenance for my journeys*” rather than portraying her as a being with agency who also participates in armed resistance and the liberation movements. His beloved represents the Palestinian culture “*Her eyes and the tattoo on her hands are Palestinian, / Her name, Palestinian / [...] / Her voice, Palestinian, / Her birth and her death, Palestinian*”, yet she seems to have no control over herself, she is an object of desire, an idolised version that fits a narrative.

Women are often featured as mothers who lose their children “*Child upon child goes, and someone’s mother / is no longer a mother*” (Luthun)<sup>23</sup>; “*His mother did not wash it for this, / for him to be carried dead by two friends / across the thirsty ground of Gaza.*” (Shihab Nye)<sup>24</sup>; or guides “*each day I ask my mother / what we do*” (Luthun)<sup>25</sup>. Nonetheless, they rarely have a voice.

Representing Palestine as a woman or as a mother is not exclusive to male writers, many women have also done so. For instance,

“The child and the sea” by Tatour  
(2024)

“Enough for Me” by Tuqan<sup>26</sup> (1985)

<sup>23</sup> (2024, p. 41).

<sup>24</sup> (2024, p. 71).

<sup>25</sup> (2024, p. 45).

<sup>26</sup> (Beinin & Stein, 2006).

*O sea*

*I am the child*

*I am a refugee to you from death and  
war, from shells and killing...*

*I call out, with a wish in my voice,  
asking for mercy...*

*I hope to return to the homeland from  
deprivation.*

*O sea,*

*I am the child,*

*tell me,*

*my breath didn't move that soldier to  
declare his victory by bombing my  
house and turning my body into pieces?*

*Enough for me to lie in the earth,*

*to be buried in her,*

*to sink meltingly into her fecund soil, to  
vanish...*

*only to spring forth like a flower*

*brightening the play of my countrymen's  
children.*

*Enough for me to remain*

*in my native soil's embrace,*

*to be as close as a handful of*

*dirt, a sprig of grass,*

*a wildflower.*

Dareen Tatour was imprisoned for her poem “Resist, My People, Resist Them”, broadcasting to the world that Palestinian women are an active part of the liberation movement and resistance. In the poem above, Tatour seems to have a conversation with the sea – Palestine borders on the Dead Sea –. She calls herself ‘the child’ and says that she is ‘a refugee to you’, which I interpret as her talking about being the daughter of Palestine, therefore, portraying Palestine as a mother, and the sea as the medium to escape death. About the fact that she is a woman writing political poetry already give agency to Palestine, in a recent interview she pronounced: “Palestine in my poems is me and I am Palestine” (IADL, 2024).

Fadwa Tuqan’s poetry is also known for being strongly political and for chronicling the suffering of her people and her country. In this poem, she expresses a deep love for her homeland and a deep bond with the land, as she does in other poems such as “Ever alive”. She finds consolation in becoming one with the land. It reflects the period in which it was written, when many Palestinians were dispossessed of their land and exiled. Tuqan sees Palestine as a woman, as she uses feminine pronouns, however, she speaks of dying in her homeland and

becoming one with it, then coming back as a flower, portraying the power of regeneration of the land and her country.

### iii. Numbers

“Naturalised” By Alyan (2024)

*All of those numbers on the side of the screen.*

*Here's your math. Here's your hot take,*

*That number isn't a number.*

*That number is a first word, a nickname, a birthday song in June.*

*I shouldn't have to tell you that.*

“Identity Card” by Darwish (1968)

*Write down*

*I am an Arab*

*My card number is 50,000*

*I have eight children*

*[...]*

*Write down*

*I am an Arab*

*I am a name without a title*

This symbol is very transparent and clear in meaning. A number, either the number of deaths as in the first poem or the number in your identity card as in the second, is a way of depersonalising and dehumanising a human being. It is the same tactic Nazis used during the Holocaust, where prisoners were tattooed a number, and their names were never said again. Using a number removes their identity; they have names given to them by those who loved them, they have dreams and hopes for the future, but they are reduced to a digit. As Alyan points out, “*that number isn't a number*” but a real person experiencing unimaginable violence and suffering. In the words of Lena Khalaf Tuffaha, “*A people have gone / A world in each of them*”.

As it happened in the Black Lives Matter movement, it is imperative to say the names of the victims, as Bitar demands, “*Naming all of them one by one*”, which has happened in plenty of demonstrations around the globe where protestors have carried a scroll with all the known names of Palestinians who have died since October 7.

### iv. Hope and joy

“Life” by Al-Naffaar<sup>27</sup>

*Knives might eat  
What remains of my ribs,  
Machines might smash  
What remains of stones,  
But live is coming  
For that is its way,  
Creating life even for us.*

“Letter from a Bankrupt” by Al-Qassem  
(1968)

*Enemy of light  
the signs of joy, and the  
tidings shouts of happiness  
and anthems are there at the  
port  
and at the horizon  
a sail is defying the wind and the deep  
sees overcoming all the challenges.*

Here, Saleem Al-Naffar's poem highlights how endless and continuous violence cannot stop new life from beginning. This poem is a statement of hope which reminds the reader of Alareer poem “If I must die”. The message within is that even if a generation is killed another will emerge; despite the cycle of brutal violence, the next generation will rise and inevitably exists. At first glance it might seem a very pessimistic message, however, it contains hope for a future, and hope is a sign of resistance. This motif has been used by other poets such as Ibrahim Tuqan, who writes: “*The youth will not get tired / their goal is your independence*” which exemplifies the unwavering will of generations of Palestinians to fight against their oppressors. Palestinian poets seem to have a tireless hope that the future ahead is better than the past behind.

In Al-Qassem's poem, he emphasises that he might lose everything: “*I may lose my daily bread, [...] You may rob me of the last span of my land / you may ditch my youth in prison holes [...] You may burn my poems and books / You may feed your dog on my flesh*” but he will never lose his will to fight for his country “*I shall not compromise / And to the end / I shall fight*”. This will to fight adds to Al-Naffar and Tuqan's idea that they will never stop rising. Moreover, the lines selected represent how the people still find joy despite the abhorrence of their situation and mistreatment suffered. Ultimately, as joy is heavily policed and criminalised in Palestine, joy is political, joy is resistance.

## 6. Conclusions

Taking into account its historical context, and research conducted in different areas, including political science and postcolonial studies, this research paper has highlighted the role

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<sup>27</sup> (Poem per Diem, 2023).

of poetry in portraying the harsh living conditions, the violence and the hope for a better future that are imbedded in Palestinian poetry.

As it has hopefully been demonstrated through my research, Palestinian poetry is indeed a powerful tool of resistance both in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has served as a tool of resistance as well as a tool of solidarity. In the present, poetry has woven a wide web of solidarity, with personalities such as Brian Cox reading Alareer's poem "If I Must Die" (The Palestine Festival, 2023) giving visibility to the issue, reaching thousands of people – grossing 80k views on YouTube in three months. This has given the nerve to some other celebrities to become vocal about the genocide taking place in Palestine: A-listers such as Mark Ruffalo, Nicola Coughlan and Susan Sarandon have been showing their unconditional support and have been seen in strikes and marches, while other less-known artists, such as Renée Rapp, have followed and have used their platform to speak against Israel.

Poetry is also present in the students' encampments around universities all over the world. In many universities, such as University of Barcelona or Depauw University, there has been a corner with poetry books and / or poetry readings, showcasing how students globally view poetry as a means of resistance against oppression.

a. Call to action and further research

In recent years, Palestinian poetry has emerged as a powerful vehicle for exploring intersectional perspectives and underlining the interconnected struggles for justice and liberation within Palestinian society. Poetic voices from marginalized communities, including women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and refugees, have gained prominence, showing the multiplicity of experiences within Palestinian society and amplifying voices that have historically been silenced. Moreover, poetry has served as a bridge for fostering and promoting solidarity with other oppressed peoples globally, forging connections across borders and amplifying collective resistance movements, as mentioned in the *Black Agenda Report*: "the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has shown unwavering support for the Palestinian cause with the understanding that the U.S. is using the same resources and strategies to maintain our oppression" (2023). The proliferation of digital platforms has revolutionized the diffusion and accessibility of Palestinian poetry, allowing poets to reach global audiences and engage in transnational dialogues. Through digital activism and virtual poetry readings, Palestinian poets put to use the power of technology to amplify their messages of resistance and solidarity.

Additionally, Palestinian poets are increasingly addressing environmental and ecological concerns, bearing witness to the impact of occupation on the natural world – including land confiscation, resource exploitation, and environmental degradation – and advocating for sustainable alternatives rooted in indigenous knowledge.<sup>28</sup> By linking environmental struggles with themes of colonialism and dispossession, Palestinian poetry highlights the interconnectedness of social, political, and ecological justice.

Despite facing challenges such as censorship, surveillance, and political persecution, Palestinian poets continue to demonstrate resilience and creativity. Opportunities for collaboration and solidarity, facilitated by international solidarity networks, cultural exchange programs, and literary festivals that provide avenues for amplifying Palestinian voices and fostering cross-cultural understanding. For instance, Marwan Abdelhamid, who is best known as Saint Levant, is a Jerusalem-born Palestinian rapper who performed at Coachella. In this festival, which is attended by more than half a million people, he sang “From Gaza with love”, despite knowing that he might well face backlash.

Future research in the topic of Palestinian poetry should further explore these intersections between poetry, social justice, and activism, and focus attention on the transformative potential of poetry in shaping narratives of resistance in Palestine and beyond.

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<sup>28</sup> See for instance Mohsen et al. “Eco Resistance in the Poetry of the Arab Poet Mahmoud Darwish”.

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a. Poetry anthologies

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8. Annexes

- a. The Letter to the Jewish Nation from the French Commander-in-Chief  
Buonaparte

Translated from the Original, 1799 in Ben Weider, 'Napoleon and the Jews', International Congress of the International Napoleonic Society, Alessandria, Italy, June 21-26, 1997.

General Headquarters, Jerusalem 1st Floreal, April 20th, 1799, in the year of 7 of the French Republic

**BUONAPARTE, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMIES OF THE FRENCH  
REPUBLIC IN AFRICA AND ASIA, TO THE RIGHTFUL HEIRS OF PALESTINE.**

Israelites, unique nation, whom, in thousands of years, lust of conquest and tyranny have been able to be deprived of their ancestral lands, but not of name and national existence!

Attentive and impartial observers of the destinies of nations, even though not endowed with the gifts of seers like Isaiah and Joel, have long since also felt what these, with beautiful and uplifting faith, have foretold when they saw the approaching destruction of their kingdom and fatherland: And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isaiah 35,10)

Arise then, with gladness, ye exiled! A war unexampled In the annals of history, waged in self-defense by a nation whose hereditary lands were regarded by its enemies as plunder to be divided, arbitrarily and at their convenience, by a stroke of the pen of Cabinets, avenges its own shame and the shame of the remotest nations, long forgotten under the yoke of slavery, and also, the almost two-thousand-year-old ignominy put upon you; and, while time and circumstances would seem to be least favourable to a restatement of your claims or even to their expression, and indeed to be compelling their complete abandonment, it offers to you at this very time, and contrary to all expectations, Israel's patrimony!

The young army with which Providence has sent me hither, let by justice and accompanied by victory, has made Jerusalem my headquarters and will, within a few days, transfer them to Damascus, a proximity which is no longer terrifying to David's city.

Rightful heirs of Palestine!

The great nation which does not trade in men and countries as did those which sold your ancestors unto all people (Joel,4,6) herewith calls on you not indeed to conquer your patrimony; nay, only to take over that which has been conquered and, with that nation's warranty and support, to remain master of it to maintain it against all comers.

Arise! Show that the former overwhelming might of your oppressors has but repressed the courage of the descendants of those heroes who alliance of brothers would have done honour even to Sparta and Rome (Maccabees 12, 15) but that the two thousand years of treatment as slaves have not succeeded in stifling it.

Hasten!, Now is the moment, which may not return for thousands of years, to claim the restoration of civic rights among the population of the universe which had been shamefully withheld from you for thousands of years, your political existence as a nation among the nations, and the unlimited natural right to worship Jehovah in accordance with your faith, publicly and most probably forever (Joel 4,20).

b. Further context: Palestinian Resistance Movement

In order to understand this poetry of resistance is also imperative to understand the movements behind it. Instrumental violence and armed resistance are legitimate forms of defence against oppression and occupation. This paper has provided a very comprehensive account of the most relevant historical events, however, to better understand the developments and the poetry chosen in this paper, it might also be interesting to delve into the Palestinian resistance movement and some of its highlights. This movement has felt alone and abandoned by the rest of the Arab world:

The Arabs insist that the absorption of the Palestinians into adjacent lands would imply Arab approval of continued Israeli retention of refugee property and would thereby indicate a tacit Arab recognition of Israel. The Palestinians are thus denied the opportunity to settle anywhere in the Arab world [...] Consequently, they view their resistance movement as their only alternative to life and death in the refugee camps, (Wolf, 1971, p. 27)

The Palestinian resistance movement has its roots in historical injustices, particularly coming from the partition of Palestine in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and subsequent actions by the Zionist

movement (Wolf, 1971, p. 27). In 1917, the Balfour Declaration favoured the establishment of a national home for Jews in Palestine, disregarding the rights of the existing Palestinian communities. Regarding the 1947 UN partition plan,

[w]hen the Palestinians rejected the plan, fighting ensued between the two sides. Taking advantage of the absence of a UN plan to implement the partition, the Zionists seized the initiative by acquiring weapons and training the forces necessary not only to defend their communities, but also to sustain a state that would be established after the British withdrew in May 1948.” (O’Neill, 1978, p. 19)

In response, organizations like the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Al-Fatah emerged in the 1960s, aiming to rectify the disorganized Palestinian response. However, internal divisions plagued and still plague Palestinian unity, hindering effective resistance.

Terrorism became a tool for the Palestinian cause, seeking to challenge the Zionist regime and gain international attention: “revolutionary terrorism involves the threat or employment of extranormal forms of political violence in order to effect fundamental change in the political system” (O’Neill, 1978, p. 28),

Palestinian terrorism has served a number of aims. Over the long term, terrorism, along with political action and guerrilla warfare, has been viewed as a means to achieve the revolutionary goal of creating a secular, democratic, non-sectarian state in Palestine (or, if one prefers, destroying the Zionist regime). (O’Neill, 1978, p. 35)

In the short term, terrorism serve different purposes in the Palestinian resistance movement: publicizing the activity; demonstrating that successful actions can be carried out in defiance of the enemy; provoking Israel to take harsh measures and therefore secure support; weakening the state in order to contribute to its eventual demise; dissuade states from making concessions to Israel, among others (O’Neill, 1978, p. 35).

Despite all efforts, the Palestinian resistance is, at best, fragmented. Nonetheless, it persists, fuelled by Arab sympathy and a commitment to reclaiming their homeland. Guerrilla warfare emerged as a strategy, “By choosing guerrilla war as the means to obtain the goals defined in their motto: ‘National Unity, National Mobilization, and Liberation,’ the Palestinians are admitting that their struggle will be both protracted and bloody” (Wolf, 1971, p. 30). Through it all, the Palestinians remain resolute in their quest for liberation and national identity, defying efforts to erase their existence from history.

While the Arab states have shown a rhetoric of support for the Palestinian cause and their liberation, their actions and commitments have fallen short of expectations. For instance, Arab states were not prepared to immediately fight Israel and instead focused on organizing themselves and the Palestinian refugees (first Arab Summit Conference held in January, 1964). Moreover, they were / are unwilling to pursue exclusive Palestinian interests when faced with the power of Israel, since

Al Fatah members declare that they will persist in their struggle to regain Palestine regardless of the damage that may be inflicted by Israeli retaliatory raids against their bases in host countries of the Arab world, and regardless of the unwillingness of Arab states to pursue exclusive Palestinian interests when Israeli power can be used against them” (Wolf, 1971, p. 26)

Despite their verbal support for Palestinian liberation, there has been a lack of concrete support from neighbouring Arab countries, which has forced Palestine to rely heavily on their own resilience and efforts in their struggle.

c. Other works

Although these works have not been featured in this paper, either because the extension of the paper did not allow it, or because they were deemed not relevant enough for the particular topic at hand, they are very informative pieces of literature. The memoirs read encompass decades, which is very helpful when it comes to finding the similarities between the tactics Israel used in the past and is currently using. They are written by Palestinian authors, putting Palestinian voices at the forefront of the Palestinian question.

The poems and anthologies listed here did not feature in the body of the paper for different reasons, however, they are beautiful, and I would highly encourage everyone to read them. Lastly, a new anthology is in the works and will be published in the following months (2025), it is being edited by Palestinian-American poet and journalist Noor Hindi and Palestinian-American poet George Abraham.

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>GENRE</b>	<b>AUTHOR / EDITOR</b>	
<i>I saw Ramallah</i> (1997)	Memoir	Mourid Barghouti	1994-2021



<i>I Was Born Here, I Was</i>			
<i>Born There</i> (2012)	Memoir	Mourid Barghouti	
<i>Out of Place</i> (1999)	Memoir	Edward Said	1935-2003
"A Small Eternity" (2021)	Poem	Mourid Barghouti	
"It's also Fine"	Poem	Mourid Barghouti	
"In The Deserts Of Exile"	Poem	Jabra Ibrahim Jabra	1919-1994
"My Homeland"	Poem	Ibrahim Tuqan	1905-1941
"Fuck Your Lecture on Craft, My People Are Dying"	Poem	Noor Hindi	1995-present
"From the Diary of an Almost-Four-Year-Old"	Poem	Hanan Mikha'il Ashrawi	1946-present
"How I kill Soldiers"	Poem	Ahlam Bsharat	1975 -present
"Occupied"	Poem	Mejdulene Bernard Shomali	
"They steal your bread"	Poem	Ghassan Kanafani	1936-1972
"A woman tells him" ( <i>Rifqa</i> )	Poem	Mohammed El-Kurd	1998-present
<i>Things You May Find</i>			
<i>Hidden in my Ear</i> (2022)	Poetry collection	Mosab Abu Tora	1992-present
"Longing for Haifa"	Poem	Mohammed al-Qudwa	
"Hard Exercise"	Poem	Mosab Abu Tora	survivor of Gaza 2023
"I struggle to breath"	Poem	Laila El-Haddad	
"Resist, My People, Resist"	Poem	Dareen Tatour	1982-present

"Life"	Poem	Saleem Al-Naffar	1963-2023
<hr/>			
<i>Return: A Palestinian</i>			
<i>Memoir (2015)</i>	Memoir	Ghada Karmi	1939-present
<hr/>			
<i>The Tent Generations: Palestinian Poems (2022)</i>	Anthology	Selected, Introduced, and Translated from the Arabic by Mohammed Sawaie	2022
<hr/>			
<b>TBR</b>	Anthology	George Abraham, Noor Hindi	2025

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<sup>i</sup> Baldwin in “Open Letter to the Born Again” about the creation of Israel:

But the State of Israel was not created for the salvation of the Jews: it was created for the salvation of the Western interests. This is what is becoming clear (I must say that it was always clear to me). The Palestinians have been paying for the British colonial policy of ‘divide and rule’ and Europe’s guilt Christian conscience for more than thirty years. (Baldwin, 1979)

<sup>ii</sup> However, it must be emphasised that Balfour was openly anti-Semite: “In 1905, he supported laws to restrict migration into Britain – laws that were largely anti-Jewish in focus. Once he met Weizmann, however, Balfour felt that Zionist plans for a home in the Middle East might nicely cohere with British interests both domestically – to keep Jewish people out of Britain – and internationally – as the English sought to keep the French far from their colonial territories.” (Hariri, 2023).

<sup>iii</sup> Safad is a city occupied by Israel and its colonies. After the British withdrew, on April 30th, 1948, Operation “Yiftach” was launched to capture the town. After 1948, mainly new immigrants from different countries settled in Safd (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*. 2007).

<sup>iv</sup> Israel has committed all the acts that constitute Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, act II. These acts have been carried out since the last escalation in violence as well as in the past: Amnesty International published in 2014 “Attack on UN school in Gaza”; *Al-Jazeera* in 2024 “‘Massacre’: Israel forces attack crowds waiting for aid” – both articles showcase that the Israeli forces are targeting and knowingly killing Palestinian people. Parry wrote for *The Telegraph* (2024): “Gaza conflict is creating a traumatised generation of child amputees” – which points toward causing serious bodily and mental harm to the Palestinian population. *Haaretz* published Khoury’s article (2023) “58% of Palestinians Show Depression Symptoms, New World Bank Survey Reveals” which also focus on the mental harm caused by Israel to the Palestinian people. Not only that, but Palestinians are also being purposefully starved: *The Guardian* published in 2012 “Israel used ‘calorie count’ to limit Gaza food during blockade”. And it is preventing births, as stated by the Palestinian Centre for Human rights (2024) “Israel’s Measures intended to Prevent Births”.

<sup>v</sup> See “US vetoes Algerian resolution demanding immediate ceasefire in Gaza.” (2024, February 20) *UN News*.

“Israel’s refusal to acknowledge the authority and jurisdiction of the International Court – Israel defying ICJ ruling”. (2024, February 26). *Amnesty International*.

<sup>vi</sup> In this poem, Bitar mentions three important Palestinian cities whose population was deeply affected by displacement. Palestinians were forced out of Jerusalem during the Battle for Jerusalem, which started in 1947 (Jewish Virtual Library). Jericho has been occupied by Israel since the Six-Day War in 1967 (Prusher, 2004). Haifa is a city with an extremely important port, taken by Israel in the Palestinian war in 1948-49. “Of more than 50,000 Arabs living in Haifa before the war, only about 3,000 subsequently chose to remain under Israeli rule” (Britannica, 2024).

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## **Bionote**

Judit Salas Adell obtained a Degree in English Studies from the University of Barcelona in 2024. Currently she is pursuing a master’s degree in Construction and Representation of Cultural Identities, also from the Universitat de Barcelona. Her academic interests focus on literature and poetry as a form of resistance, with a particular interest in diàspora studies and transnationalism.

Judit has been involved in social movements, including those advocating for Palestinian rights. She participated in the university encampments for Palestine, a collective action aimed at raising awareness about the ongoing conflicts and fostering solidarity with the cause.

Beyond her academic work, Judit has a passion for writing and reading, as well as for community organizing.