

THE IMAGE OF JERUSALEM IN MAḤMŪD DARWĪSH'S POETRY

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ABSTRACT: *Jerusalem's status is complex, politically and religiously. After the Six Day War it was adopted as a theme by Palestinian poets, who used in order to express their sense of loss. In the present study we shall describe the image of Jerusalem in Maḥmūd Darwī's poetry and attempt to answer the following questions: How did Darwīsh depict this city in his poetry? In what way, if at all, did his treatment of Jerusalem at the beginning of his poetic career differ from his treatment of it in his later poetry? How frequently does Jerusalem occur in his poetry, relative to the frequency of other places that he mentions?*

KEYWORDS: Jerusalem, Palestinian poetry, intertextuality, paratext, place.

Cities have clearly have come to play a novel role in modern Arabic poetry

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, under the influence of Western poetry on the one hand, and of the liberation and progress experienced by Arab capitals on the other. A similarity can be perceived between the structure of the new poetry and the development that has accompanied the revival of the Arab city: "The various genres of modern poetry are very consistent with the experience of the city. This poetry's flexibility, fast tempo and lightness is completely in line with the life of the city, since the poetry and its quick pace fits in one way or another into the accelerated pace of life in the city. They also have the same chaos. It is the city's accelerated life that has brought about this form of poetry, in addition to the absolute tendency in our days towards freedom in everything and the domination of the experimental tendency or, in other words, the inclination towards liberation in life and poetry" (ʿAqāq, 2001:160).

The city as a geographical domain affects the poet linguistically and visually: "Place in poetry is created by way of language, which in turn possesses a double nature: Language has a physical dimension that connects expressions with their sensory roots" (ʿUthmān, 1988:5).¹

The production of a place means the expulsion of another, so that the moment it enters into the poetic fabric it receives a new meaning, or confirms the meaning that it denotes outside the context of the text or the poem: "We define a place by means of a different place. This means that the present place through its features evokes its absent counterpart and alludes to it" (Munīr, 1997:153).

¹ On place in the language of poetry see ʿAqāq, 2001:270.

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Place is an extension of the idea of the home, whose warmth shapes human existence: "All truly populated places bear the core idea of a home" (Bashlar, 1996:36).² A dialectical relationship connects place and body or place and self, the body being the private space.³

Darwīsh, it should be noted, did not pay much attention to place in the first stage of his poetic career, that is, from his collection *'Aṣāfīr bi-lā ajniḥa* (*Birds without Wings*; 1960) to *al-'Asāfīr tamūtu fī al-Jalīl* (*Birds Die in Galilee*; 1970). Place constituted a "dead intertextuality" which the poet introduced inside the text or in the headings ("paratext"). An example of this usage can be found in the following poems from his first collection *Birds without Wings*: "Nāranjātī fī Ifrīqiyā" ("My Orange Tree in Africa") ("A Loving Salute to Every Revolutionary in Africa"); "ʿAnāqīd min al-ḍiyāʿ" ("A Cluster of Light") ("A Loving Salute to Algeria"); "Ilā ummī" ("To My Mother") ("From a Refugee in Lebanon").

It should also be pointed out that place does not constitute a basic constituent of the poem, although it has a direct substantive relation with the poem's title. It often serves to confirm the author's Communist identity.⁴

The poem "ʿAn al-umniyāt" ("About the Wishes") in the collection *Awraq al-zaytūn* (*Olive Leaves*; 1964) confirms this tendency. The ideology of the poet's discourse is "a reflection of reality on himself and his (the poet's) view on this reality" (ʿUthmān, 1988:113):

Do not say to me:

I wish I were a seller of bread in Algeria

So I could sing with a revolutionary

Do not say to me:

I wish I were a shepherd in Yemen

So I could sing to the tremors of time!

Do not say to me:

I wish I were a café worker in Havana

So I could sing about the victories of the sad people!

[...]

My friend! .. Our land is not barren

Every land has its birth

Every dawn has a revolutionary encounter! (Darwīsh, 1989:44-45).

² See: al-Maḥādīn, 2001:20.

³ See al-Wahībī, 2005:31. Place is also present in ancient Arabic poetry, where lines of poetry (*bayt* "house") are compared to the home. In addition, numerous poetic terms evoke this connection between poetry and place, such as *ṣadr* ("breast" and also "first hemistich") and *'ajz* ("rump" and also "second hemistich") (See Kaḥlūsh, 2008:135).

⁴ See al-Naqqāsh, 1971:282-283; Darwīsh, 1963:4. On the latter's connection with place see: al-Nābulṣī, 1987:192-194; Dakrūb, 1969:20; Bayḍūn, 1991:13, 426; Badrān, 1991:17-26.

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The use of place in this poem, and the frequency with which it occurs, indicate the predominance of the ideological element in it. Its cosmopolitan Communist character is revealed by the specific places the poet names, showing his support for every revolutionary. In addition, the entire poem is dominated by a direct declarative style and a universalist formulation, through his repetitive use of the word "every", showing his support for all those who rebel against injustice.

The places to which Darwīsh refers in his poetry can be divided into three spheres: Palestinian, Arab and global. The following table shows that places in the Arab world take precedence, then Palestinian places and finally places elsewhere in the world.

Title of the collection	Palestinian places	Arab places	Other places	
<i>Birds without Wings</i> , 1960	0	0	3	
<i>Olive Leaves</i> , 1964	0	2	2	
<i>A Lover from Palestine</i> , 1966	2	0	3	
<i>End of Night</i> , 1967	9	0	0	
<i>Birds Die in Galilee</i> , 1970	1	4	12	
<i>My Lover Sighs in Her Sleep</i> , 1970	12	1	1	
<i>I Love You and I Love You Not</i> , 1972	28	41	20	
<i>Attempt no. 7</i> , 1973	20	37	1	
<i>That Is Her Picture and This is the Lover's Suicide</i> , 1975	5	0	0	
<i>Spouses</i> , 1977	9	6	3	
<i>Praise of the High Shadow</i> , 1983	3	64	13	
<i>Siege of the Praises of the Sea</i> , 1984	4	72	9	
<i>A Rose Less</i> , 1986,	0	8	4	
<i>It Is a Song, It Is a Song</i> , 1986	0	5	1	
<i>I See What I Want</i> , 1990	0	8	4	
<i>Eleven Stars</i> , 1992	3	29	9	
<i>Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?</i> , 1995	6	6	1	
<i>The Foreign Woman's Bed</i> , 1999	1	7	4	
<i>Mural</i> , 2000	2	2	2	
<i>State of Siege</i> , 2002	1	0	3	
<i>Do Not Apologize for What You Have Done</i> , 2004	3	17	3	
<i>Like Almond Blooms or Further</i> , 2005	2	2	1	
<i>I Do Not Want This Poem to End</i>	3	10	3	
Total:	117	297	84	= 498

It would thus appear that Darwīsh's interest in place in the *initial phase* until his collection *Ākhir al-layl (End of Night)* was insignificant. At the time he lived in Israel and his poetry was

focused on defending his own issues and himself, rather than the place, from which he distanced himself only after he left Israel in 1970. This can clearly be seen in his collection *Birds Die in Galilee*, published in 1970 in his *exit phase*, where a significant increase in his use of place can be discerned. The fact that he left Israel may very well have played a role in this, since now he was distant from his place and was preoccupied with thoughts of it, because he could not return to it. This became associated with the concept of exile that emerged as a general theme in Palestinian poetry and in Darwīsh's in particular. Exile from one's original place arouses existential questions for a poet.⁵ In fact, it has been observed that Darwīsh during this phase of exit from his homeland was "not only haunted by the place alone, but also by the place's spirit" (ʿUthmān, 1988:135).

As just noted, place came to be mentioned with considerable frequency after the poet left Israel, as reflected in his collection *Birds Die in Galilee* (1970). In fact, the collection's very name is proof of this. The same is true of his *I Love You I Love You Not* (1972) and *Attempt no. 7* (1973). Mention of place becomes very frequent once more during his *Beirut phase*. In his *Praise of the High Shadow* (1983) and *Siege of the Praises of the Sea* (1984) there are more mentions of place than anywhere else: 165 occurrences out of a total of 482, that is, more than thirty percent of all mentions of place in Darwīsh's poetry are to be found in his Beirut phase. The explanation for this lies in the siege which the city suffered and the exodus of the Palestinians from it, including the poet himself. These two collections are dominated by an atmosphere of loss: "Place is not absent from Darwīsh's poetry. It alternates with time and memory. In his previous poetic works, before leaving Beirut, he addressed Palestine and treated the data and vocabulary of place in a direct and occasionally oratorical and declarative manner. This approach underwent a qualitative change in the poetry he composed subsequently. Before 1982 Beirut was perceived as contrasting with Palestine. The loss of Palestine and the subsequent loss of Beirut created a change in the form of place and the nature of its presence, so that Darwīsh was driven to turn to history, where he sought images corresponding to the present, as justification for what had happened or as a prediction of what will happen in light of what had happened" (ʿAtūm, 1999:129).

Place appears once again quite prominently in the collection *Eleven Stars* (1992), as the table above shows. The entire collection is devoted to the Arabs' loss of place, identity and culture in Muslim Spain. In most of the collection's poems place is used discursively and directly. In the poet's third phase, *the phase of introspection*, place is used not only with meanings in the national or political dimensions. Perhaps this was the reason why he made more use of foreign places at this stage, confirming the poet's more inward-directed in dealing with place. A fundamental difference may be said to exist between the treatment of Palestinian place and that of places of cultural significance for Arabs such as Andalusia and Samarqand. The poet's ego is fully present in the Palestinian place and shows no human weakness. To the contrary, it evinces clear signs of rejuvenation. With respect to places in Arab history, especially Andalusia and Samarqand, on the other hand, we find that the poet's ego is weak and that its discourse expresses his inner thoughts and feelings. Longing may be a factor in this. Thus if we wish to become acquainted with the poet's mental state it is better to do so in non-Palestinian places, since the self is more objective in its judgments and observations when it is outside itself. That is why Darwīsh in his phase of introspection expressed his observations by evoking Andalusia.

⁵See al-Bāziṭ, 2004:42.

Jerusalem as a Palestinian place appeared in various different periods in Darwīsh's poetry. The city became a theme in Palestinian poetry after it was occupied in 1967 (Mawāsī, 1996:23, Sharrāb, 2006:367). The city is a place of spiritual encounter between all the revealed religions (al-Kīlānī, 2005:15) and has multiple names. Before 1967 it was evoked mainly as a religious symbol, with a focus on its sanctity and purity. But after the Six Day War the city came to be invoked mainly in nationalist poetry (al-Khabbāṣ, 1990:59, 91, 131).

Jerusalem in Palestinian poetry has been given numerous meanings, including captivity⁶ and loss, but also resurrection, liberation, etc. According to Mawāsī it first became a theme in songs after the Six Day War, and subsequently also in poetry: "Jerusalem continued to be mentioned occasionally here-and-there in modern Arabic poetry in general and especially in Palestinian poetry, until the events of 1967, when the poem of the brothers Raḥbānī "Zahrāt al-madā'īn" ("Flower of Cities"), sung by Fayrūz, appeared, in what I think was a response to the Hebrew song "Jerusalem of Gold". Subsequently we see poems devoted entirely to Jerusalem, beginning with Nizār Qabbānī's "al-Quds" ("Jerusalem") (Mawāsī, 1996:23).

According to al-Shawmalī divides the use of the theme of Jerusalem into four semantic stages:

1. Purpose and dream: For many thinkers and writers the city was a religious, cultural and historical beacon, the center of the world, God's city, that imbues those who belong to it with spirituality;
2. Jerusalem as legacy and identity: Difficult beginnings, the Mandate period, the government of Palestine and the conflict between Jews and Arabs;
3. Divided and occupied Jerusalem: Suffering, poverty and disgrace, accompanied by the pains of rage and oppression;
4. Jerusalem the city of a cultural project: Judaization (al-Shawmalī, 1996:482).

Darwīsh wrote a prose text about Jerusalem entitled "Hākadhā kataba al-sajīn qaṣīdatahu al-ūlā 'an al-Quds" ("This Is How the Inmate Wrote His First Poem about Jerusalem"; Darwīsh, 1987:109-116). In it he expresses the awfulness of its loss: "Why Jerusalem tonight? Because the baby was snatched from the grotto in Bethlehem and was hung on a piece of wood here before it was born" (Darwīsh, pp. 112-113). He explains the city's importance: "Jerusalem is in the heart. Jerusalem is details of prophets and martyrs. A rock that returns to its original elements leaks a goddess, hymns and a wall. Jerusalem is the book of mankind" (Darwīsh, 1987:115). Darwīsh speaks about Jerusalem's sad fate and his hopes for it (ʿAbbād, 1996:459). Jerusalem is thus present in his oeuvre, although it is only sparsely mentioned in his poetry, where the city's name appears no more than twenty-three times.

The poet first refers to Jerusalem in his *initial phase*, in his collection *End of Night* (1967), in the poem "Taḥt al-shabābīk al-ʿatīqa" ("Under the Old Windows") and then in a parallel text entitled "Ilā madīnat al-Quds wa-akhawātihā" ("To the City of Jerusalem and Its Sisters"). A consideration of the external context in which the parallel texts were composed shows that the collection was published in 1967, that is, after the occupation of Jerusalem:

Standing under the windows,
 Standing on the street
 The abandoned stairs do not recognize my steps

⁶ See ʿAbbād, 1996:455-478; al-Shawmalī, 1996:479-497; Mughniya, 2004:40.

No, nor does the window know.
I try to catch a cloud from a palm frond
When a fly falls into my throat
Over the debris of my humanity
The sun and the feet of the storms pass (Darwīsh, 1989:169).

In the above text the poet expresses his feeling of estrangement. He is not inside the house but outside, in a public space, and therefore feels wary. The abandoned stairs that he left snub him: the "do not recognize my steps", in addition to the window, thus enhancing the poet's sense of alienation and frustration: "Over the debris of my humanity the sun and the feet of storms pass". The word "feet" evokes destruction on the hand, and carries the meaning of erasure and oblivion on the other.

In the same poem Darwīsh says:
When the wind explodes on my skin
I will give everything its name
I will crush grief and night with my shackle
O my ancient windows...! (Darwīsh, 1989:171).

The above text is the poet's reaction to the occupation of Jerusalem. He uses the motif of naming merely in order to confirm his desire for liberation and for asserting the identity of the place that he had lost. His response takes place in the semantic field of acoustics: "explodes", "wind", "I name", "I crush", and the vocative particle "O". The poet thus uses references to sound as an act of resistance in his attempt to purify himself from the shock of the defeat.

In his second phase, *the exit phase* in which he left the country, he describes Jerusalem negatively in the poem "Mazāmīr" ("Psalms") from the collection *Love You Love You Not* (1972), as false/fleeing/absent. He then goes on to confirm its state of exile by mixing the Arabic spoken there with another language, by which he means Hebrew. But the singers and merchants in the poem all speak pure Arabic:

We write Jerusalem:
Capital of false hope ... fleeing revolutionaries ... the absent
Star. Foreign words have mingled in its alleys,
Dissociated from the lips of the singers and merchants of tribes
Past (Darwīsh, 1989:398).
He then uses the biblical text in order to express history through the present:
We sing Jerusalem:
O children of Babylon
Born in chains
You shall return to Jerusalem soon
You shall grow soon
And soon shall harvest the wheat from the memory of the past
Soon the tears become spikes of grain
Ah, o children of Babylon
Soon you will return to Jerusalem
Soon you will grow
And soon
And soon and soon

Hallelujah

Hallelujah (Darwīsh, 1989:398-399).

In these "psalms" Darwīsh alludes to the biblical narrative, whose cultural concepts he considers to be at the core of the Palestinian legacy: "The Jews' being taken as captives to Babylonia became a captivity and an issue for the Palestinians and "Hallelujah" became the current expression of praise, instead of its original use as a Hebrew expression in the Psalms. It is therefore not to be wondered at that the poet chooses to call these passages in his poetry collection "psalms"" (Mawāsī, 1996:12).

In the poem "Qatalūka fī al-wādī" ("They Killed You in the Gully") in the same collection he says:

I present my memory to you through the mirror of time.

I present my memory to you

What does the sun say in my homeland

What does the sun say?

Are you dead without a shroud

And I without Jerusalem? (Darwīsh, 1989:413).

The poet describes his feelings of alienation and exile in dualities. Some are presented as allusions (memory parallels erasure and the sun is the counterpart of darkness) while others are given overt expression (the poet's dead lover is contrasted with the ego and the shroud parallels Jerusalem). The poet seems to be saying that without Jerusalem he is like a dead man without a shroud. He cannot live without it and implicitly wishes to die like his beloved in Jerusalem. Therefore he explicitly gives away his memory, that is, he gives up his identity. The technique of asking questions also serves the state of doubt in which the poet finds himself. In his poem "Khuṭuwāt fī al-layl" ("Steps in the Night") in the same collection he says:

Jerusalem and the lost cities are

But a she-camel which desert life rides

To the famished authority.

Jerusalem and the lost cities are

But a podium for sermons

A storeroom of pain.

Jerusalem is but a bottle of wine and a tobacco box ...

... But it is my homeland (Darwīsh, 1989:452).

The poet disapproves of using Jerusalem as a mount or as a means for attaining one's personal ends by exploiting its status. He criticizes useless speech, for Jerusalem, whatever it may be, is the poet's homeland. In his *phase of introspection* Darwīsh wrote another poem about Jerusalem, "Fī al-Quds" ("In Jerusalem"), which appeared in his collection *Lā ta'tadhir 'ammā fa'alta* (*Do Not Apologize for What You Have Done*; 2004):

In Jerusalem, I mean inside the old wall,

O walk from time to time without a memory

To direct me. The prophets there divide

The history of Jerusalem among themselves ... rising to heaven

And coming back less frustrated and less sad. Love

And peace are holy and come to the city (Darwīsh, 2004:47).

The key to this text appears to lie in the word *aʿnī* ("I mean"), which serves to give definition to an opaque meaning in the reader's mind. In this way Darwīsh confirms his sense of foreignness as he walks with no memory to guide or direct him. In the city he sees an accumulation of temporal layers of other civilizations or faiths. He also uses other names for Jerusalem, including the biblical "Jerusalem", which perhaps testifies to the conflict of legitimacy over it and the different views of the city in Darwīsh's poetry.⁷

"In Jerusalem" can be considered one of the most important of his poems that contain Jerusalem as a theme. The poem is complete on its own and structurally not part of a larger work. It also constitutes a qualitative change in the way Darwīsh deals with place. While during his *initial phase* the theme of Jerusalem was dominated by a discourse of longing built on reaction and occasional elegy, during Darwīsh's last phase of poetry the discourse took on a visionary aspect, touching on Jerusalem's religious, historical and cultural essence. Here Darwīsh moves from external depiction to detail. He observes the response to exposure to the determinism with which the root overcomes the branch. He does this using the principle of transformation: The Palestinian identity has undergone an fundamental cultural cross-pollination, yet has remained Palestinian. Darwīsh expresses this using the symbol of the changing father and the constant mother: "I was born near the sea, of a Palestinian mother and an Aramaean father, from a Palestinian mother and a Moabite father, from a Palestinian mother and an Assyrian father, and from a Palestinian mother and an Arabian father" (Darwīsh, 1994:69).

The poem "In Jerusalem" may be divided into three movements: A. A description of the place, the object of desire, as shown in the image of Jerusalem as the personification of love and peace. B. The evolving ego which confirms the Palestinians' ability to rise up from the ashes, as confirmed by the verbs "I walk, fly, hasten, gaze...". As we noted with respect to his initial phase, Darwīsh in his poetics moves from the auditory to the visual, to a contemplation of the Palestinian self. This is emphasized by the use of verbs in the imperfect, which reflect the individual's concern about its present state, by the use of questions, and by the use of light as a symbol that distinguishes two times, day and night, and two situations: Night alludes to the city's outer aspect while day symbolizes its Palestinian essence. When the ego becomes transformed it can see its reality with great transparency and depth: "I become another in revelation", because revelation emphasizes the self's true state in isolation from the projections of external circumstances. This leads him to reveal the external manifestations of the conflict, represented by the details, and masks that occasionally show one the Palestinian self in its interaction with them and also point to the essence of the conflict, in which the other of necessity is unable to understand that it is impossible to make the Palestinians disappear. Darwīsh therefore summarizes the Palestinian journey in Isaiah's warning to his people, Christ's sacrifice and Muḥammad's ascent to heaven:

I was walking on a slope and mumbling to myself: How
Do the storytellers differ speaking of the light in a rock?
Can wars break out from a stone with meager light?
I walk in my sleep, gazing in slumber. I do not
See anyone behind me. I do not see anyone before me.
All this light is for me. I walk. I hasten. I fly
Then I become an other in revelation. Words

⁷ Among the names he uses are "Ūrshalīm" ("Jerusalem") (Darwīsh, 2000:95) and the ancient name "Yabūs" ("Jebus") (Darwīsh, 2004:49). See Mansson, 2003:179.

Sprout like grass in Isaiah's prophetic mouth: "If you do not believe you shall not be secure".
 I walk as if I were someone else. My wound is a white
 Evangelical rose. My hands are like my dove
 Hovering over the cross and bearing the earth.
 I do now walk, I fly, I become an other in
 Revelation. In no place and in no time. So who am I?
 I am not I in the presence of the ascent to heaven. But
 I think: The Prophet Muḥammad alone
 Spoke perfect Arabic" (Darwīsh, 2004:47-48).

C. The third movement in the poem consist of a return to reality; the poet's question "what now?" contains a digest of the essence of the conflict over place and a digest of the self through the details of the conflict, as the poet declares that the Palestinian self has gone beyond death, so that the death of a Palestinian parallels his life. As a result, the act of forgetting as expressed by the female soldier becomes something positive: "I forgot like you to die". The words "like you" create an equality: death, whatever its form, overtakes the victor and the victim equally. The meaning of forgetting in this context means the constant transformation of the Palestinian self which refuses to be erased:

And what now?
 What now? Suddenly a girl soldier shouted:
 It's you again? Didn't I kill you?
 I said: You killed me ... and I forgot like you to die (Darwīsh, 2004:48).

CONCLUSIONS

The study has shown that Darwīsh made less use of Jerusalem as a theme than some other places, Beirut for example. In his initial phase of writing poetry Jerusalem plays only a marginal role. This changed in the wake of the war of 1967, when mentions of Jerusalem increased both numerically and in the quantity of text devoted to it, reaching a culmination in a poem dedicated wholly to the city, "In Jerusalem", which appeared in Darwīsh's collection *Do Not Apologize for What You Have Done* (2004) in the third phase of his poetic career. We also found that expressions of alienation, exile and longing were common in the initial phase of the poet's career as well as at the beginning of his second phase, after he left the country in 1970, when his poetic lexicon was focused on the voice as an act of resistance. In the third phase, that of "In Jerusalem", we find that the basic theme is that the Palestinians cannot be driven away, and that the poet uses religious and historical allusion to make this point, and a poetic lexicon that focuses on sight as an act through which Darwīsh explores the eternal connection of Palestinians to this place, into whose elements they blend.

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