

Circling ghosts that will not cease

"Every beautiful poem is an act of resistance."

Mahmoud Darwish



By Ali Amiri

Staff writer

On the evening of October 29, 1956, the villagers of Kafr Qasim, after spending a hard day working in the fields, longed to return to the

comfort of their homes. Little did they know that the Israeli authorities had imposed a 5 p.m. curfew with a shoot-to-kill order on Palestinian villages. When the unsuspecting Palestinians attempted to return, they were ruthlessly shot down, resulting in the heartrending death of forty-eight innocent villagers.

While this incident may have gone down in the annals of Palestinian history and faded as yet another atrocity committed by the murderous Israeli army, it is immortalized in Samih al-Qasim's poem, 'Kafr Qasim'. Reading this powerful poem is akin to being struck by a fast-moving

train. It comes as no surprise, as he was one of Palestine's most proficient, beloved poets of resistance, whose steadfast voice resonated for decades from within the occupied land.

Poetry, as the 18th-century German philosopher Johann Georg Hamann once put it, "is the mother-tongue of the human race." The primacy that Hamann attributes to passion, symbolism, imagery, and metaphor in his discourse on language is perhaps most apparent in Palestinian poetry of resistance, where each word becomes a bullet teeming with the distilled complexities of the Palestinian experience under occupation and suppression.

In the introduction to his book, 'A Map of Absence: An Anthology of Palestinian Writing on the Nakba', Atef Alshaer states that literature for Palestinians "has been a source of national rebirth, documentation and emancipation, engaging with a burdened reality and an ongoing tragedy." Palestinian literature, Alshaer argues, emerged as a response to the colonization of their land, with a focus on asserting historical continuity and the connection to the wider Arab world. Over time, Palestinian liter-

ature evolved in response to internationalism and modernization, going beyond strict nationalist loyalties. This evolution liberated the literature from ideological constraints, enabling it "to express the plight of humankind – all of our struggles, frustrations, insecurities and aspirations – in fluid, and sometimes subversive, ways."

Poetry, for as long as it has existed, has been a powerful tool in the hands of the oppressed and marginalized, allowing them to rise above adversity and reclaim their agency.

In this special issue, we commemorate the resilience and fortitude of Palestinian poets who have made out of their words mighty weapons of defiance. Each poem in this anthology serves as a testament to the unconquerable spirit of resistance, confronting the injustices of the Israeli occupation and illuminating the struggle of the Palestinian people. May these poems awaken our conscience and ignite within us a sense of urgency to pursue justice for all the oppressed, wherever they may be.



Samih al-Qasim (1939-2014)

Was a prominent contemporary Palestinian poet, who wrote prolifically throughout his life, exploring various literary forms and leaving behind a vast collection of over seventy published books. Despite facing persecution from Israeli authorities for his activism against the mandatory conscription law imposed on Druze Arab youth and his involvement in politics, al-Qasim's poetry gained international recognition. His powerful verses captured the essence of his people's struggle, finding their way into popular songs and chants.



Kafr Qasim

No monument raised, no memorial, and no rose.
Not one line of verse to ease the slain
Not one curtain, not one blood-stained
Shred of our blameless brothers' clothes.
Not one stone to engrave their names.
Not one thing. Only the shame.

Their circling ghosts have still not ceased
Digging up graves in Kafr Qasim's debris.

Fadwa Tuqan (1917-2003)

Was a contemporary Arab Palestinian poet, whose verse is known for distinctive chronicling of the suffering of her people, the Palestinian, as well as representations of resistance to Israeli occupation. She has sometimes been referred to as the "Poet of Palestine."



Labour Pains

The wind blows the pollen in the night
through ruins of fields and homes.
Earth shivers with love,
with the pain of giving birth,
but the conqueror wants us to believe
stories of submission and surrender.

O Arab Aurora!
Tell the usurper of our land
that childbirth is a force unknown to him,
the pain of a mother's body,
that the scarred land
inaugurates life
at the moment of dawn
when the rose of blood
blooms on the wound.