

# The land of identity



When I heard of the Palestine-Israeli conflict for the first time, I was astonished by the blatant injustice that came to the Arab nation. I dwelt on how I would feel if my culture and people had been eradicated from its birthplace. I felt sorry for Arab families who were forced to leave their native land in order to concede it to the Jewish. My heart weeps for thousands of Arabic refugees, deprived of homes and happiness, condemned to poverty, exile, massacre, desperation and death. That is why I have chosen this sorrowful topic, which develops the theme of hope, rooted patriotism and indefatigable longing for freedom of the Palestinian Diaspora, which still holds out hope to come in from the cold and recover poise in the shade of its olive trees. Mahmoud Darwish is a famous Palestinian poet; he was born in a Palestine village, which was attacked and later depopulated by the Zionists. Thenceforth, keen sorrow related to his perdition is the cornerstone of Darwish's poems. His bitter verses, such as "Passport" and "Without Exile, Who Am I?" invoke Arab's self-identity, which has been developed in exile and longs for the Palestinian consciousness. Ghassan Kanafani, another well-known Palestinian writer, in his novel "Men in the Sun", addresses the topic of refugees, vainly trying to find a place in a new environment after the exodus from Palestine in 1948. The main theme of this novel is the vital necessity of the Arab refugees to cherish hope of returning home. The incessant pain and suffering of the Palestinian people are worth attention and understanding; their emotional attachment to their homeland, exile as a permanent condition, the dream of return and reunion with Palestine is the main topic of my essay. Hope and despondency, dislocation and dispossession, desperateness and self-identification, as well as love for home

grounds merge in a heartfelt cry of the Palestinian people through voices of two writers of exile, who have not been able to return home to their death.

It is very hard to lose one`s self-identity, especially when you are a Palestinian refugee, who vainly seeks for normal life and a clean work outside a refugee camp. Palestinian people move from one place of exile to another, seeking for better life, and, unfortunately, endure constant humiliation and mockery. Privation of national passport and homeland often lead to loss of self-consciousness. Under such conditions, a Palestinian would forget about his identity. Mahmoud Darwish writes in his poem “ Passport”: “ They did not recognize me in the shadows / That suck away my color in this Passport / And to them my wound was an exhibit / For a tourist Who loves to collect photographs.” (1-4) In such a way, Darwish implies that he is not talking about a real Palestinian passport, but only about a travel document that the host countries often give to the Palestinian refugees. The poet himself owned an Israeli passport, while being an Arab, but he feels that this very document has eliminated his real identity, that of a Palestinian. Darwish does not want to be associated with a refugee or an Israeli, because he knows who he really is, and this impossibility to change his condition makes him feel full of pain and trauma. This reminds him of the homeland he has lost: “ All the birds that followed my palm / To the door of the distant airport / All the wheatfields [...] were with me” (“ Passport” 10-12, 18), the identity he had left behind. The poet also questions: “ They dropped them from my passpot / Stripped of my name and identity?” (“ Passport” 19-20) It seems unbelievable to Darwish, but he is sure that a country cannot make one deny who he actually is. The poet associates himself with nature, beseeching not

to ask trees and valleys who their mother is, because their nature is rooted in their soil. So is with the poet – he wants to be an Arab and impart it to his children. Kanafani in his novel “ The Men in the Sun” tells about Abu Quais, a Palestinian refugee, who was “ suddenly filled with a bitter feeling of being a stranger” (p. 22). This very feeling arose in his heart due to the fact, that he is deprived of his own land, of being a man without identity, a “ stranger” lacking something very important, which is the native land, he often dreams about. Illegal residents in the novel are treated like rubbish by the smugglers. This proves that the refugees are condemned to severe abjection, which is bound to compassion. Poor people ought to struggle for a simple crossing of boundaries to “ the other side” (p. 25), to Kuwait. Besides, in the “ Men in the Sun”, the identity of the homeless is identified with the earth of motherland, their heart and soul. Abu Quais lay with his chest on the ground of his native land and felt its heartbeats pumping hard underneath (it seems as he is being the extension of the land). His friend told him that it was the sound of his own heart, and that he could feel it when he laid his chest to the ground (p. 21). Such spiritual affection is also common to Darwish in his poem “ Without exile, Who Am I?” he realizes the strength of the confinement that ties his status as an exile and perception of his identity as a “ stranger” (1). Darwish seems to be hopeless and deeply despaired – he incessantly repeats the word “ nothing” like a spelled chant: “ Nothing brings me back from this distance to the oasis: neither war nor peace. / Nothing grants me entry into the gospels. / Nothing.” (“ Without Exile, Who Am I?” 2-4). The created distance can never be undone, in consequence of the everlasting exile, which became a state of mind. To my mind, the gap, created between the refugees and the Palestine is already unbridgeable, and

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even the emerging “ peace” cannot help to prevent it. Dispersal and dispossession had affected and molded the Palestinian collective awareness. The fact that they are not physically present on their native land has given impact on the impossibility of their personal “ restoration’, or regeneration as identities (Said, 2000, p. 173-186).

Hope is the last to abandon people`s feelings. The state of hope often lures people on desperate actions, especially if this concerns recreation of a refugee`s reunion with his fatherland. Kanafani does not depict the homeland of the three refugees from his novel as a distinct place, but the feeling generated by it is well illustrated in the efforts of three men to reach desired home. “ Even when the earth turned into shining sheets of yellow paper he did not slow down”, this is how Kanafani depicts Assad`s endeavor to cross the desert (p. 31). Since desert in the novel is an allusive place of desolation, dispossession and alienation, the refugee, who tries to trespass the frontier is a symbol of unceasing human hope. Darwish writes about his hope in a desperate fashion: “ Don`t leave / The palm of my hand without the sun” (“ Passport” 7). Here the word “ sun” defines the motherland the poet in exile longs for, his last hope, the unique desire. “ Don`t leave me pale like the moon!” (“ Passport” 9) is addressed to the ailing pallor of a man that is bound to come to terms with his pain, but the hope is still in his heart, for he does not lament for the death of his dreams, but pleads for mercy. Darwish transforms his Palestine in a beloved woman, whom he caresses (“ Without Exile, Who Am I?”); the dispossessed land becomes the “ Land of Identity”, the land of hope, an unapproachable Eden. A conversation of a passionate with his true love makes a conversation, where “ one” becomes “

two". Hope is also presented in the "Men in the Sun", when the writer depicts the thoughts and hopefulness of Abu Quais: "On the other side of the Shatt, just the other side, where all the things he had been deprived of. Over there was Kuwait. What only lived in his mind as a dream and a fantasy existed there." (p. 25). In my view, the story, related to the three men in the novel is close to life and there should have been precedents of such terrifying story. Abu Quais, Marwan and Assad take to the perilous road, place reliance on the only possible driveway that can lead them towards changes, which could bring happiness, material help for their families and respective freedom. This is a selfless act - to taste to the dregs the last hope, despite death. Still, the death of three men, who represent the three generations of the Palestinian people, symbolizes their end, the impossibility to reach the desired goal. Therefore, there is no hope for the Palestinian to get out of the "water tank" their government has led them in.

The "Land of Identity" (23), the "roses of Samarkand" (17), a "stranger" (30) for a refugee is his homeland, the place whose olive trees and legends bring reminiscences, the land, which is worth the purest love ("Without Exile, Who Am I?"). The birthplace, which tantalizes Kanafani and Darwish, is Palestine. The emotional attachment to it makes these writers integrate the mourning of all people in their works. Deep pain pierced my heart when I read the words, addressed to Abu Quais from his friend, Assad: "In the last ten years you have done nothing but wait. You have needed ten big hungry years to be conceived that you have lost your trees, your house, your youth, and your whole village." I believe that exile coerces to think about nothing but depressive to undergo, it is an irremediable rift within the lute,

constrained between a native place and a human being, between the true home of the latter and his self.

Struggle and sacrifice are predominant topics in the modern Palestinian national identity, as for many years its self-identification has been unkindly repressed. Darwish`s poetry and Kanafani`s novel acquainted me with a new culture, which is self-sacrificing, dedicated to its past, and ready to defend its future. The Palestinian American Council is a charitable political organization, which helps the Palestinians to strengthen their ties with their fatherland and provides economic and cultural cooperation between the USA and Palestine. Consequently, we are connected with this nation and every American should be aware of the flagrant injustice, focused on Palestinian refugees. Through profound emotions of sympathy, which I experienced, reading the poems and the novel, I have learned that we are all one big family, and we should befriend one another.