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The Articulation of Counter-Resistance in Muin Bseiso's "Footsteps"

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Abstract

The present paper argues that Bseiso's "Footsteps" is a counter-hegemonic ideological poem. Bseiso employs powerful rhetorical patterns in order to subvert the hegemonic and ideological concepts practiced and promulgated by the Zionist occupation. It also proves that "Footsteps" challenges Zionist colonial and imperial narratives and instills the Palestinian resistance poetry into the core of the national struggle against the Zionist tyranny and injustice.

It also proves Bseiso is an organic intellectual in Gramscian terms.

Keywords: Resistance Literature, Gaza, Counter-hegemonic ideological productions, Gramsci, Organic Intellectual.

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تبلور المقاومة المضادة في قصيدة «خطي» للشاعر معين بسيسو

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الخلاصة:

ترى هذه الورقة البحثية أن قصيدة "خطي" للشاعر الفلسطيني معين بسيسو هي قصيدة أيديولوجية مناهضة للهيمنة. يستخدم بسيسو في هذه القصيدة أنماطاً بلاغية قوية من أجل تقويض مفاهيم الهيمنة والأيديولوجية التي يمارسها وينشرها الاحتلال الصهيوني. كذلك تبرهن أيضاً أن "خطي" تتحدى السرديات الاستعمارية والإمبريالية الصهيونية وتغرس شعر المقاومة الفلسطينية في جوهر النضال الوطني ضد الاستبداد والظلم الصهيوني. وتثبت هذه الورقة البحثية أيضاً أن بسيسو هو "مثقف عضوي" حسب مفهوم المفكر الإيطالي انطونيو غرامشي.

الكلمات الافتتاحية: شعر المقاومة- غزة- المقاومة المضادة- غرامشي- المثقف

العضوي

Muin Bseiso was born in Gaza, Palestine in 1926. Bseiso completed his education in Gaza, and received his high school diploma in 1948. He also got the B.A in journalism from the American University in Cairo in 1952. He travelled to Iraq in 1953 and worked for a short period of time in teaching English language. Then, he came back to Gaza where, he taught English language in many local schools and refugee Camps which were run by UNRWA. Later, he was fired due to his political activities against the Israeli occupation.

In 1953 Bseiso was elected as a secretary general of the Palestinian communist party. Due to his political affiliation as a communist he was arrested twice and spent seven years in the jail. He participated in establishing the Palestinian Broadcasting Company in 1964. He worked in the literary sections of many Arab newspapers like Al-Ahram in Egypt, Al-Thawra in Syria and Usbu Al-Arabi in Lebanon. He was also appointed as the

cultural counselor to PLO president Yasir Arafat and awarded the shield of Arts and Literature due to his contributions to the literature of the Palestinian resistance. His poems tackled many topics like freedom, democracy and resistance against the Israeli occupation.

Bseiso was one of the notable poets who introduced the Palestinian suffering under occupation to the world. He was regarded as one of the influential representatives of the Palestinian resistance voice. Therefore, his literary works had been translated into many languages like English, French, Russian, German and Spanish. Among his famous anthologies are *The Battle*, *Palestine in the heart*, *The Poem*, *a Giant Made of Ears of Grain*. His commitment to the literature of the Palestinian resistance credited him the title. “The poet of people”. He died in 1984.

“Footstep” is an inspirational poem. It motivates the Palestinians to continue their long contest against the Zionist occupation. It urges the Palestinians to be steadfast and plucky in confronting colonization and repression. In other words, it is read as a scream against injustice and torture practiced systematically by the colonizers. Bseiso stimulates the Palestinians to resist the occupation even in their dark forsaken cells.

The Palestinian identity went through a radical transformation after the defeat of 1967 (Naksa). The Palestinians were left alone with their own tools and aspirations in their national struggle. Thus, remarkable repercussions emerged after the defeat of the Arab armies confronting the Zionists, including the realization that Palestine would be liberated only by the Palestinians. This detachment from Pan –Arabism paved the way to the genesis of

the Palestinian autonomous particularistic identity. Along with this national identity appeared the new rhetorical Palestinian revolutionary spirit with its notable images, narratives and techniques (Farag, 2017: 76).

Consequently, this critical period after Al-Naksa opens the door to the new literary period to emerge, a period which asserts that the Palestinian struggle for liberation has a distinctive feature: the armed resistance goes hand in hand with cultural resistance. In this since the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1972) clarifies that, "Palestinian history, at least from the 1930s, is marked by both armed and cultural resistance. And just as the revolutions undertaken by the Palestinian people produced names such as Ezz el-Din al-Qassam, for instance, so too did resistance literature, before, during, and after the revolutions, produce names that Arab citizens continue to recall with great fondness, most prominent among which were Ibrahim Tuqan, Abdulrahim Mahmoud, Abu Salma"(Kanafani, 2015: 10). In fact, Kanafani coined the term "Resistance Literature" in 1967 in a lecture he gave in Beirut, and focused on the pivotal role that literature can play in the confrontation against the Zionist propaganda (Holt, 2007: 1). It is defined as literature that challenges the imperial and colonial narratives. It includes literary works that incite and encourage the colonized to resist the colonizers and seek to create a new social order. Kanafani proposes to introduce the Palestinian resistance literature to the world and put it equally with the global movements of liberation in Asia, Africa, African American and Latin America with their subversive aesthetics.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, The Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) clarifies that hegemony and domination are the two tools used by repressive states in order to control any social class

or group. He adds that domination can be achieved by might, whereas hegemony can be done by consent (Gramsci, 1996:71). Therefore, one of the essential tasks of hegemony is to regulate the subordinate class and construct a consensus environment on which this fragile class can move, and create a collective awareness of the class's conflicts and needs (IM,1991: 131). In this sense, Valeriano Ramos, Jr explains that ideology in Gramscian terms is a domain of standards, rituals and creeds. These beliefs and practices have concrete and foundational features. Their function is to institute personal topics as soon as they are put into such an oriented domain (Jr, 1982: n.p)

Thus, cultural hegemony can be accomplished by the imperial and colonial powers through their repressive agencies like media and educational establishments. Also, cultural hegemonic powers employ the intellectuals in order to control the subaltern classes. Their mission is to transmit and persuade these fragile and oppressed people to particular repressive and biased concepts. In this sense, Gramsci clarifies that, "The intellectuals are the dominant group's "deputies" exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government" (Hoars and Smith, 1971:145). Therefore, Kanafani's *On Zionist Literature* (1967) came as a severe castigation respond to imperial and colonial narratives in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, Benjamin Disraeli's *David Alory*, Arthur Koestler's *Thieves in the Night*, Leon Uris's *Exodus*, Yael Dayan's *Envy The Frightened* and Theodor Herzl's *The Old NewLand*. Kanafani exposes the ideological and hegemonic concepts and perspectives in these propagandist and imperial narratives which support the Zionist claims and allegations and strive to obliterate the Palestinian heritage, culture and identity.

Furthermore, Kanafani's *On Zionist Literature* (1967) and *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine* (1966) are classified as counter-hegemonic ideological productions. This term is coined by the American Scholar Carl Boggs in his book *The Two Revolutions: Antonio Gramsci and the Dilemmas of Western Marxism*. In fact, Boggs clarifies that this term is never used literally in this formula by Gramsci himself, but from Boggs's perspective this term is the minute interpretation and projection to Gramsci's intention in this concern. Boggs believes that this translation is much better than literal and biased oriented interpretations that could exploit the translation for their interests. (Boggs, 1984: 14-16). This term is defined as perspectives and views that contest and defy the prevalent ideologies. This cultural force confronts the dominant ideological notions and norms, dismantles its repressive and oppressive policies, and creates instead ideologies and concepts that subvert the Zionist oriented and hegemonic tendencies and ideas.

The present paper argues that Bseiso's "Footsteps" is a counter-hegemonic ideological poem. Bseiso employs powerful rhetorical patterns in order to subvert the hegemonic and ideological concepts practiced and promulgated by the Zionist occupation. It proves also that "Footsteps" challenges the Zionist colonial and imperial narratives and instilled the Palestinian resistance poetry into the core of the national struggle against the Zionist tyranny and injustice. It proves Bseiso also as an organic intellectual in Gramscian terms.

The significance of the study lurks in introducing the scholars to resistance literature. The researcher believes in the necessity to identify this genre of literature to a broad scope of readers. The researcher feels the sheer need to write about the Palestinian

resistance literature particularly after the events of the 7th October 2023. It is necessary to know that in Gaza, cultural and armed resistance are twins that cannot be separated.

Shrewdly, Bseiso decides to use the power of the word in order to refute the Zionist hegemonic and colonial propaganda. The decision to use poems that will be published widely and read publicly is a bold step since reading generally is considered as a powerful tool that broadens the Palestinian awareness and incites them to resist the occupation. The paper for the colonized is a source of serious risk: it is seen as a lethal weapon that is capable to strip them from their civil rights and properties. In other words, the papers are used by the colonial power as a nefarious hegemonic tool that can tame and repress the colonized and keep them under control. In this sense, the Peruvian politician Hugh Blanco explains that it is necessary to understand that for centuries the oppressors of the peasants made them regard paper as a god. Paper became a fetish: Arrest orders are paper. By means of papers they crush the Indian in the courts. The peasant sees papers in the offices of the governor, the parish priest, the judge, the notary - wherever there is power; the landowner, too, keeps accounts on paper. All the reckonings you have made, all your logical arguments, they refute by showing you a paper; the paper supersedes logic, it defeats it" (Blanco, 1972:84).

Skillfully, Bseiso deconstructs this imperial and colonial ideology. He writes many resistant poems that are published enormously and read extensively by the Palestinians. Papers are no more seen as weapons that are going to slaughter them and rob their properties. Conversely, in Bseiso's counter- ideologies, resistance poems that are written on papers are used as an influential tool against the Zionist policies and agenda. So, the

Palestinians are no more afraid of papers: papers are now a new resistance weapon that are used effectively and intensively in their battle for liberation.

The first powerful rhetorical pattern is uttered in the first stanza. Bseiso depicts the image of the Palestinian resistant who confronts the Zionist occupation audaciously and bravely:

*Brother! If they should sharpen the sword on my neck,
I would not kneel, even if their whips lashed
my bloodied mouth
if dawn is so close to coming
I shall not retreat.
I will rise from the land that feeds our furious storm!*(Bseiso 1-6).

So, the first counter- ideology is articulated expressively. Bseiso opens the poem by pleading his Palestinians brothers not to surrender or subdue in the face of their colonizers even when their colonizers slay them mercilessly. Thus, expressive and meaningful rhetoric is employed in these lines. The image that is depicted knowingly by Bseiso in the first stanza is the image of the Palestinian fighter that will not yield under harsh and tough circumstances by the Zionist colonizer. So, the language of rhetoric is employed here artistically and it launches the initiative of linguistic resistance that goes hand in hand with the armed one. In this respect, the American scholar Tess Lewis mentions that, “language is the ultimate crystallization of human civilization, and tempered by the cultural traditions of its speakers, it can, through a writer’s creativity, be adapted to articulate human feelings that it has not adequately expressed before” (Lweis, 2008:658). Due to its great importance and effectiveness in the Palestinian liberation, Bseiso plunges the Palestinian resistance literature with

its subversive aesthetics into the armed resistance as in “*If they should sharpen the sword on my neck*”. He believes that resistance poem as a counter- ideology springs from these rhetorical and linguistic initiatives. Beseiso realizes that it is crucial for the Palestinian reader to find motivational resistance contents in their daily speech and language.

Metaphorically, “Footsteps” is interpreted as a critique of the Zionist brutal policies against the Palestinians. In addition, it is read as a counter- hegemonic literary production because it includes a basic arena of details. It is considered as a part of Palestinian resistance archives, since it narrates their steadfastness and sacrifice under the Zionist occupation as Beseiso encourages his comrades to do:

*Brother! If the executioner should drag me to the slaughterhouse
before your eyes to make you kneel,
so you might beg him to relent,
I'd call again, Brother! Raise your proud head
and watch as they murder me!
Witness my executioner, sword dripping with my blood!
What shall expose the murderer, but our innocent bleeding?
(Beseiso 7-12)*

Thus, Beseiso throughout this poem urges his readers to immerse into the Palestinian counter- hegemonic cultural history and to realize its powerful rhetoric as well as its political aims. Furthermore, this poem is considered an echo, a record of the Palestinians’ determination to free Palestine from the Zionist occupation. In this respect, the Kenyan critic Ngugi WaThiong’o in his article “Literature in School” clarifies:

In literature there have been two opposing aesthetics: the aesthetic of oppression and exploitation and of acquiescence with imperialism and that of human struggle for total liberation. The literature of all those who cherish and fight for freedom is our literature: the literature of all who hate, and therefore struggle against exploitation, oppression, diminution of the human creative spirit is our literature (Thiong'o, 1981: 38-39).

Added to that, the metaphor that is portrayed in, "Brother! If the executioner should drag me to the slaughterhouse before your eyes to make you kneel," visualizes the subversive transition of the Palestinian social reality and mirrors Bseiso's endeavor to confront the Zionist repressive hegemonic ideologies and policies through the power of the rhetoric. In addition, the rhetorical question in, "What shall expose the murderer, but our innocent bleeding?" (Bseiso 11-12), also reflects the Palestinian self-determination and independence: their sacrifices and bloods are the new weapon that is going to scandalize the Zionist atrocity and barbarity and its covert agenda. "Footsteps" is added to the literary history of resistance literature because of its effective participation in the genesis of the counter-hegemonic literary productions.

Aesthetically, Bseiso transforms the Zionist desolate forsaken cells into a source of inspiration and a sign of resilience. By following this strategy, he reconceptualizes the repressive status quo that is drawn and imposed by the

colonizers as he writes:

*At night their guns kidnapped him from his trench.
The hero was flung into the cells' darkness
where, like a banner flutter above chains, he stayed.*

*The chains became flaming torches,
burning the ashes which coat our shining future.
Now the hero lives, his footsteps ringing triumphantly
within the closed walls of every prison (Bseiso 13-19)*

In this respect, Barbara Harlow clarifies that the resistance poetry targeted the repressive establishments of the totalitarian state. Many resistant poets who participated in the conflicts to liberate their countries have undergone the merciless power and passed through bitter experiences in these establishments. Therefore, these poets through their poems strive to have a new modified societal reality. (50). Bseiso defeats the Zionist hegemonic oppressive tools and reestablish the Palestinian autonomous and creative spirit. Confinement and imprisonment in Bseiso's counter-hegemonic ideology are no more conceived as barriers and restrictions, on contrary they are the new subversive aesthetics that are going to institute the basis of the Palestinian resistance sense. In a parallel gesture Fredrick Jameson expects the emergence of what he calls the "new pedagogical culture" and defines it as, "Aesthetic of cognitive mapping which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system" (Jameson, 1991:92). This new counter- hegemonic culture is the cornerstone of Bseiso's counter-hegemonic aesthetics and ideologies that he articulates boldly and strives to promulgate through "Footsteps".

Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* classifies intellectuals into two groups: traditional and organic (Gramsci, 1971:206). He defines the traditional intellectuals as the leftover of a previous historical period, which still holds a notable social consideration, but has no direct effective role in the dominant class such as philosophers and religious men. While the organic intellectuals

appear from a particular societal class, and their role is to illustrate on their class's productive activity as a body of standards (Martin n.p). In this respect, the Palestinian writer Nassar Ibrahim defines the organic intellectual in Gramscian terms as, "The one who consciously and decidedly leaves the spaces of "culture" to engage in the struggle to change class structures and systems that produce poverty, unemployment, occupation, exploitation, injustice and oppression in all their manifestations"(Martin, 2023:n.p). Bseiso as an organic intellectual resists the general literary orientations that are spread and encouraged by the colonial powers, which try to disassociate the Palestinian from his identity, culture, and struggle for freedom. These hegemonic colonial power support literature that dismantle the oppressed people from their milieu and turn them voiceless, marginalized and submissive.

In this respect Ngugi WaThiong'o in "Writers in Politics," writes, "Haven't we heard critics who demand of African writers that they stop writing about colonialism, race, color, exploitation, and simply write about human beings? Such an attitude to society is often the basis of some European writers' mania for man without history - solitary and free - with unexplainable despair and anguish and death as the ultimate truth about the human condition" (Wa Thiong'o, 1981:76). Thus, Bseiso, the organic intellectual in his literary productions, challenges the Zionist hegemonic imperial literary trends that strive to deprive the Palestinians from their lands, heritage, culture and freedom, and instead he offers a new substitute vision in his literary works like, *Che Guevara's Tragedy* (1969), *Gaza is always Resistant* (1972), *Samples of Contemporary Israeli Novels* and *Samson and Dalila* (1941), that defies the Zionist biased and distorted narratives.

Bseiso makes a transitional jump of the Palestinian resistance poetry. His resistance poems zealously and effectively participate in the armed and cultural struggle for freedom against the Zionist cultural repression and hegemonic ideologies and policies. In this sense, Barbara Harlow argues that, "Poetry is capable not only of serving as a means for the expression of personal identity or even nationalist sentiment. Poetry, as a part of the cultural institutions and historical existence of a people, is itself an arena of struggle" (Harlow, 1987:33). Bseiso believes strongly in the latent power of the Palestinian resistance poetry and its ability to cast off the Zionist conducts and hegemonic ideologies. Added to that, in Bseiso's counter- hegemonic ideologies that he spreads through his poetry and his role as an organic intellectual can be able with much might, enthusiasm and more sensitivity to incite the Palestinians to deconstruct and refute the imperial notions that go for a long time unquestioned and unconquerable.

In conclusion, "Footsteps" stands as a powerful counter-hegemonic literary production against the Zionist hegemonic ideologies. Bseiso employs the Palestinian resistance poetry and incorporates it into the core of the Palestinian struggle for liberation. Bseiso as an organic intellectual does believe in the subversive aesthetics of the Palestinian resistance poetry, since it has the same essential and vital role in liberating Palestine from the Zionist colonization as guns, rockets, and canons.

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