

## Native Americans and Palestinians Occupation, Exile, and Resistant Poetry

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### Abstract

This study analytically presents a clear description of similar experience and responses of dispossession of people in North America and Palestine. Native Americans (the Red Indians) and Palestinians have both faced the same situation of colonization; the first one by the Europeans (the white), and the second one by the Zionists.

The conditions of Native Americans, isolated in reservations within the boundaries of their native **land, are extensively similar to the current situation of Palestinians**, who are compelled to stay in refugee camps, and Arab ghettos inside the borders of Palestine.

One can easily observe other points of convergence and divergence between them, not only in the processes of events, but also in the subject of writing poetry; the feeling of nostalgia, and the idea of resistance.

**The objective** is to show both the victims of those two unfairly ruled and oppressed nations by the occupants.

**Keywords:** The Europeans, Palestinians and the red Indians, occupation, and resistant poetry.

السكان الأصليون لأميركا (الهنود الحمر) والفلسطينيون  
(الاحتلال، والمنفى وشعر المقاومة)

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المستخلص

تبحث الدراسة في العلاقة المتقاربة تحليلاً بين شعبي أميركا وفلسطين من حيث أحداث وتجربة التهجير والغربة في عدة نواحي، فالسكان الأصليون لأميركا والفلسطينيون عاشوا نفس قسوة الاستعمار، الأول عانى من احتلال الأوربيين (البيض) لهم، والثاني من قبل زمر من الصهاينة.

لقد طرد الشعبان من قراهم ومدنهم. فكانت ظروف الفلسطينيين بعد طردهم وعزلهم وعيشهم في مجتمعات ضمن حدود أراضيهم الأصلية تشبه إلى حد كبير حالة الهنود الحمر الذين أُبِيدوا وأجبر العديد منهم أن يعيشوا في عنابر ومجمعات كلاجئين داخل حدود بلادهم الأصلية، أميركا.

ويمكن بوضوح أن نلاحظ نقاطاً من التشابه والاختلاف ليس فقط في مجريات الأحداث ولكن في مجالات ثقافية كما في كتابة الشعر، وكذلك الشعور بالحنين لوطنهم وفي الرفض بل والمقاومة لنيل حقوقهم.

هدف البحث: توضيح صورة الاحتلال والضحايا في كلا الشعبين الفلسطيني والهندي الاحمر من قبل المحتلين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأوربيين، الفلسطينيون، السكان الاصليون (الهنود الحمر)، وشعر المقاومة.

## 1. Introductions

In North America and Palestine, the colonists "claimed the continent as their heritage," and "battled on behalf of the destiny of the race" as they conquered them. "North America and Palestine were the Promised Lands, whereas the European settlers (the Jews) are the Chosen People."<sup>1</sup>

Native Americans, according to historians, are people who have come from Asiatic families. They are rather Mongols who have come across Bering strait. Other views say that most of the indigenous population who have come to America via canoes, crossed the ocean by boats and travelled along the Asian coast[1].

These people were socially known for their bravery and hospitality. They had no diversity of appearance, manners or languages as were described by Christopher Columbus in 1492. Native Americans who lived in North America seemed mainly to have been eight distinct nations known to the early settlers: Huron, Iroquois, Cherokee, Algonquian, Cataub, Unche, Vatachez, Dakota or Sioux. They actually lived on farming and pastures[2].

Palestine, on the other hand, is situated at a strategic location between Egypt, Syria, Arabia, and it is the birth place of major Abrahamic religions. Palestine was among the earliest in the world to see human habitation, and agricultural communities. Arab people settled this place and took part in achieving many pre and post – Islamic civilizations.

Both nations, Palestinians and Native Americans, were similarly dispossessed of their ancestral lands though in different periods of time.

After the discovery of America (1492), massive immigration of Europeans occupied vast territories of North America, whereas Jewish settlements continued after the Second World War to occupy Palestine (1948). They were relocated to two

regions; The west Bank and Gaza. In both cases, "security" is the common justification that has been used.

Between 1947-1949 there were reported massacres against the Palestinians; Dahmashi, BeitDaras besides DeirYasin (1945). 85% of the Palestinian population left their homes, either by force or by fear in 1945, and more than 417 villages were destroyed. Moshe Dayan, former commander in chief of the Israel Army, said: "There is not one single place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population"[3]. The red-Indians similarly become this dispossessed minorities with their lands, and were forced to live in reservations in order to control their movement on and off them.

In addition to land occupation in North America, restriction, servitude and other aggressive acts, including obliteration of native language culture were committed. Incidents such as 'The Trail of Tears', 'Sand Creek Massacre', and 'Massacre of the Yuki' are notoriously known in the history of U.S.A. The reduction of North American population, later on, from an estimated 12 million in 1500 to 237,000 in 1900, subjected to vast genocide.

Euro-Americans justify their harmful policies against native Americans. They undoubtedly saw themselves as the torchbearers of civilization. Let's remember Roosevelt, president of U.S., who warned once that " if we fail to act on 'superior people' theory ... barbarism and savagery and squalid obstruction will prevail over most of the globe"[4]. However, the same methods of massacres, forced eviction, relocation, and starvation used to colonize native lands in the U.S., have been used in Palestine.

But Palestinian and Native American poets have significantly been concerned in their poetry with the issues of

land and identity. For that reason, they attempt to resist imperialistic forces that seek to remove them outside history, and they developed a counter-hegemonic poetic mechanism.

## 2 -Poetry and Identity:

Though Native Americans are members of non- western cultures, the conviction about human identity with the land has shaped after 1960 much of their poetry, particularly the modern generation, whose poems refer mainly to the subjects of exile, loss, love, and longing for homeland. Whereas American poetry took its early inspiration from Europe. Yet they took response to the new world; the inhabited as their subject.

Palestinian and Native American literatures, which stand obviously apart from other post - colonial literature, engaged with questions of identify and exile though poetic expression by others – native Americans, slaves, and settlers who spoke Spanish – was rarely acknowledged.

Early Native American poetry is generally thought of in terms of traditional songs, and tribal performance, and rituals. Their tradition, for example, is full of tales, legends, and have tribal symbols as an eagle, and the wolf which have beautiful qualities. Moreover, oral cultures relied on the spoken word whether chanted or sung, are rather used as a way to communicate with nature. It was performed accordingly as a way of passing down the poem from generation to generation. The followings are some of their quotes: 'To touch the earth, is to have harmony with nature', Oglala Sioux. 'Remain close to the Great Spirit', and 'Knowledge is rooted in all things-the world is a library', Lakota[5].

Indeed, Native American poetry encompasses a large variety of types, styles, authors, and topics. It includes contemporary and traditional verse, that is either written by or composed about

Native Americans. Like most bi-cultural identity, colonization made Native American culture live in two different cultures.

In this respect, Native American literature can be critically classified into three stages:

1. Early work of Native American authors, who published works of fiction in the nineteenth century, such as William Apess, Pauline Johnson and Simon Dogakon.
2. Other writers like Mornery Done, John Oskison, and Charles Eastman published their literary works in the years prior to the onset of Second World War.
3. The Renaissance of American Native writing is represented by reclamation of heritage through literary expansion:

**The first to come**

**Among the birds**

**I bring the rain**

**Crow is my name**

(Song of crows, T.N.A.L., p. 965)

Another generation of Native Americans were coming of age after 1960. They were the first of their respective tribal communities to receive a substantial English – language education, particularly outside of standard Indian boarding schools. These writers tried to document the history of invasion, and to express their feeling of pride towards their identity, which inspired a great deal of public interest of native American communities:

**Our home is this country**

**Across the windswept hills**

**With snow on fields**

**The cold air**

**I like to think of our native life,**

**Curious, free;**

**And look at the stars**

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**Sending icy messages, (Rita Joe)**

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In modern Native American writing, poets such as N. Momaday (1934), Sherman Alexie, James Welch, and Louise Erdrich (1954), held their deep subjects of exile and occupation. This following song belongs to Chippewa, one of the largest groups in North America[6]:

**The blood that courses through my veins  
Runs true to the Cherokee  
I am the blood of my people  
I am the Cherokee**

The poet, being Cherokee, is proud of stressing on his identity until he says: "I will regain what my forefathers lost".

Then he says: "My right I do reclaim "(Mange Tindal – 1999).

The idea of that land-human relationship is mostly expressed by Native American poets through their poems, because they "want freedom from the white man rather than to be integrated"[7].

In similar aspects of literary development, many critics have also theorized Palestinian literature to three branches since 1967:

- 1- From Inside Palestine.
- 2- From Outside.
- 3- From among the Palestinian Diaspora throughout the Middle East, besides a fourth branch that includes English language works written by Palestinians in the United States.

According to Selma K. Jayyosi, Palestinian literature can mainly be political. But, if the Native Indians are passionately in contact with nature, which is a symbol of God's greatness, and with the ceremonies which are based on the local purified world, modern poets of both nations have joined between poetry and

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politics, because they need to express their collective identity which is the current issue of their struggle against the occupants[8].

### 3 -Exile and Resistant Poetry:

"Exile, according to Edward Said, is strongly compelling to think about but terrible experience. It is unbearable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home"[9].

Mahmoud Darwish, the famous Palestinian poet more than most, has eloquently expressed the Palestinian experience of dispossession, and exile. He invested Palestine with its metaphorical symbol as we see in his poem 'A lover from Palestine':

**Palestine are your eyes and tattoo  
Palestine are your dreams and concerns  
Palestine are your words and your silence  
Palestine is your voice. (R. P. Sulafa H.:78)**

Therefore, the modern thinker E. Said praises the oppositional indigenous voice in colonies literature.

In technique, Palestinian early poetry followed classic pre-Islamic forms, but after 1948 exodus, it was transformed into a vehicle for political activism. Sameeh Al- Qasim, one of the distinguished resistant poets, addresses the occupant:

**You may impose a nightmare of your terror  
On my village  
.....  
Enemy of light  
I shall not compromise  
And to the end  
I shall fight (R. Poets: S. Hijj.:98)**

At that time, a school of resistance poetry was born, that included some main poets, who refused to leave their homeland, such as M. Darwish, Sameeh al Qasim, and Tawfiq Zayyad.

Along with the poetry of exile, the Palestinian poetry held completely a revolutionary spirit, and resistance poetry witnessed heavily a change not only in purport and poet effect, but also in form and technique. For example, the love for woman, is completely integrated with the love of the homeland. Satire is also used to ridicule the enemy and its followers. Tawfiq Zayyad says with bitter irony in his poem 'The impossible'[10]:

**It is much easier for you  
To push an elephant through needle's eye  
Catch fried fish in galaxy  
Blow out the sun,  
Imprison the wind  
Than to destroy by persecution  
The shimmering glow of a belief  
Or check our march**

**Towards our cause, one single step (R.Poets P.:Sulafa Hijj.:65)**

However, all acts of suppression are expressed with bitter irony. Therefore, contemporary fiction, and poetry as written by native Americans have been a significant influence in their resistance against the dominant culture's teachings. Native American poems are highly characterized by deep feeling of nostalgia to a pre-frontier past, and a paradise that is lost.

The two nations in response to the colonial discourse, have developed a counter poetics of resistance. If Native American poems are characterized by nostalgia, the Palestinian poetry is rather dominated by revolution and anger. Native American

writer W. Laughing says in response to the 'Trail of Tears' in his poem 'The Great Mother's Lament'[11]:\*

**They pull my hair  
Never to grow again  
They poisoned me and my life streams  
Yet, still they take  
So, I shall give no more** (D.L.:The L. L..p89)

Many of the native American poems currently stress on the conflict between native and non- native cultures, poets such as Jack lights (1984) and Lousie Erdrich (1954) explore native American themes, particularly the Indian heritage, and their poems are peopled with shadows of figures from the past myth. Jay Ork, a native American poet, says:

**You lay buried for two thousand years  
Until a farmer saw you in a furrow  
And claimed you for his own** (T. L. Literature, p. 89)

On the other hand, the hostile attitude towards the Red – Indians can be seen in some American writers as W.C. Bryant's colonial discourse, which view European invaders of America as 'seraphs of benign reform' and carries of the banners of civilization. By ignoring the pre- colonial civilization of the Indians, the white colonizers' narrative seeks to dismiss them outside the realm of human history. Commenting on the relation between nature, and the Red – Indians 'life, the American critic, Ronald Ringe, says that" the white disrupt the native life and bring havoc with natural scene"[12].

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\* The poet heard the song 'The Trails of Tears', and wrote this poem in response to the tragic episode of Native Americans in 1831: In winter, the Cherokee began the thousand-mile march on foot, and were forcibly removed from their lands in the southeastern United States. It resulted in the deaths of nearly 4,000 Cherokees.

Moreover, the Afro American poet, Nikki Giovanni, expresses her concern for the plight of the Palestinian people, who are equated in their historical pain with other victimized and colonized races, such as the Red Indians and the Africans. In her poem entitled 'Their Fathers', She draws an analogy between the Nazi holocaust of European Jews, and the suffering of the Palestinian people at the hands of the Zionist /Israel army. Whereas, in the poem of R. Frost and Bryant, an obvious distortion of history is detected, because some of their poems deeply rooted in colonial myth, and reflect the tendency of the white colonized nation. They intend to say that they come to dominate the 'land of the barbarians of the west.'<sup>13</sup>

However, three similar distinctive aspects in the life of the two nations can notably be detected as a result of the process of colonization:

- It harmed their cultural identity adoption.
- Regardless of the wide cultural religious and historical differences, the two nations are so impressive that both people have been strikingly subjected to genocide and persecution.
- Occupying both North America by the white, and Palestine by the Zionists, was justified that the belief of colonization is ordained by God.

Finally, both nations engaged poetry and politics. They also suffered of various oppressive acts, and of a crucial experience of dispossession, which influenced their literary writing.

But the Palestinian Intifada poetry challenges 'the culture of tyranny advocated by the colonizers and their allies, and laments the absence of a unified attitude against the Zionism'[15].

إذا عطشنا نعصر الصغرا  
ونأكل التراب ان جعنا ولا نرحل

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