

## **SYMBOLS OF RESILIENCE AND HOPE: UNRAVELING THE PALESTINIAN PLIGHT IN MAHMOUD DARWISH'S "UNDER SIEGE"**

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### **Abstract**

This scholarly exploration meticulously dissects Mahmoud Darwish's monumental poem, "Under Siege," unveiling its profound symbolism, depiction of the Palestinian plight, and themes of resilience and hope. Through a detailed analysis of Darwish's intricate metaphors and allegories, this study aims to reveal the poem's underlying emotions and messages interwoven within its verses.

Embarking with a concise exploration of Darwish's stature as a pivotal Palestinian poet, the paper progresses to scrutinize the symbols embedded in "Under Siege." Key among these symbols are recurring motifs like the olive tree, night, land, and sea, acting as potent representations of Palestinian endurance, fortitude, and hope amidst adversity, oppression, and occupation.

Furthermore, this research rigorously delves into the explicit portrayal of the Palestinian plight within the poem, delving into themes of loss, displacement, and the fervent desire for freedom. By contextualizing Darwish's work within the historical and political context of the Palestinian struggle, the study seeks to emphasize the universal relevance and importance of his poetic legacy. Moreover, a meticulous examination of resilience within "Under Siege" unveils Darwish's adept use of poetic devices—vivid imagery, repetition, and rhythmic patterns—to evoke perseverance and determination amid adversity. The paper intricately dissects how Darwish's linguistic finesse and poetic techniques contribute to nurturing a theme of hope, offering glimpses of optimism and envisioning a brighter future.

This comprehensive analysis encompassing symbolism, the Palestinian plight, resilience, and hope within Mahmoud Darwish's "Under Siege" strives to deepen scholarly comprehension and appreciation of the poet's significant contribution to Palestinian literature. By unraveling the poem's intricate layers, this study highlights art's capacity to elucidate human experiences, advocate for justice, and inspire resilience amid oppression.

**Keywords:** Symbol, Palestinian Plight, Resilience, Hope

### **Introduction:**

Mahmoud Darwish, revered as an eminent Palestinian poet, stands as a luminary figure whose profound resonance within the Palestinian narrative is etched deeply in his enduring literary legacy (Tayseer 2021). Among his significant works, the poem "Under Siege" stands as an embodiment of Darwish's mastery in employing symbolism to articulate the complexities of the Palestinian struggle, infusing it with themes of unwavering resilience and enduring hope (Anas 2019). In this research endeavor, an intricate dissection of Darwish's magnum opus "Under Siege" is pursued, aiming to meticulously unravel the layers of its profound messages.

The impact of Darwish's literary contributions on Palestinian literature remains unparalleled, transcending geographical boundaries and resonating globally with the collective aspirations and experiences of the Palestinian people (Sazzad 2015). This scholarly exploration endeavors to delve into the symbolic essence embedded within "Under Siege," shedding an illuminating spotlight on Darwish's profound and unparalleled contribution to the rich tapestry of Palestinian literature (Sylvain 2009).

In "Under Siege," Darwish skillfully employs the canvas of poetry to craft a mosaic of symbols that encapsulate the multifaceted facets of the Palestinian struggle. The symbolism within, such as the resilient olive tree, the encompassing challenges of the night, and the yearning for liberation portrayed through the land and sea, portrays a vivid narrative steeped in the Palestinian experience (Salameh 2015). These symbols intricately weave a narrative that reflects the anguish of loss, the turmoil of displacement, and the relentless pursuit of justice.

This research aims to navigate the historical and political landscapes contextualizing Darwish's depiction of the Palestinian struggle. Through his evocative imagery and adept use of poetic devices, Darwish not only magnifies the stark realities but also ignites a beacon of hope, envisioning a future where justice and peace prevail amidst the prevailing turmoil.

## Literature Review

Mahmoud Darwish's poetic prowess, particularly encapsulated in "Under Siege," transcends mere verses to embody the collective consciousness of the Palestinian narrative. Revered globally, Darwish's poignant works serve as a poignant testament to the intricate tapestry of Palestinian identity, echoing their fervent yearning for justice and belonging (Nawal 2021). Critics laud Darwish's unparalleled talent in navigating the labyrinthine complexities of the Palestinian struggle, memory, and the ever-evolving facets of identity.

Scholars, exemplified by Salameh (2015), delve into Darwish's masterful manipulation of metaphor and symbolism. Their analyses unearth profound layers surrounding themes like land, exile, and resistance, painting a richer mosaic that enhances the comprehension of Palestinian experiences (Nawal 2021).

Shihadeh (2008) contextualizes Darwish's poetry within the framework of survival and resistance. He highlights the pivotal role Darwish's poetry plays in resisting political and cultural oppression, empowering Palestinians to reclaim their narrative (Almog 2011).

Edward W. Said (1994) offers a panoramic view of Palestinian literature, unraveling themes of dispossession and self-determination. Said's insightful analysis contextualizes Darwish's poetry, emphasizing its monumental role in shaping Palestinian identity and experiences (Salam 2013).

Moreover, critical analyses by Hirsch (2006) and Barghouti (2007) meticulously dissect specific themes within Darwish's poetry, encompassing elements of exile, longing, memory, and resistance. These analyses contribute significantly to a comprehensive understanding of Darwish's expansive thematic spectrum.

This robust scholarly engagement underscores Darwish's pivotal position in Palestinian literature. The thorough exploration of symbolism, themes, and political undercurrents in his works provides

a sturdy foundation for comprehending "Under Siege" and its profound portrayal of Palestinian struggles, resilience, and hope.

### **Methodology**

This research paper utilizes a qualitative research methodology to analyze Mahmoud Darwish's poem "Under Siege" to explore the symbolism, portrayal of the Palestinian plight, and themes of resilience and hope. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth examination of the poem, providing a nuanced understanding of its underlying messages and emotions.

The primary data for this research paper is derived from the close reading and analysis of "Under Siege" itself. The analysis of the poem will involve a systematic and thematic examination of the selected stanzas and symbols, focusing on their meaning and significance within the context of the Palestinian struggle. The researcher will identify and categorize the symbols, themes, and messages conveyed by Darwish, paying particular attention to the connections between them. The analysis will involve comparing and contrasting different sections of the poem to identify patterns and recurring motifs.

### **Limitations**

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. Since this study focuses solely on the analysis of a single poem, the findings may not be generalizable to other works by Mahmoud Darwish or other Palestinian poets. The interpretation of the poem is subjective and may vary depending on individual perspectives and experiences.

### **Symbolism in "Under Siege"**

Symbolism in literature serves as a potent tool employed by writers to convey deeper meanings, emotions, and societal perspectives beyond the literal words on the page. Within Palestinian literature, symbolism assumes a profound significance, encapsulating the collective experiences, struggles, and aspirations of a people enduring protracted conflict and occupation. Palestinian writers adeptly utilize symbolism as a means of portraying their realities, often weaving intricate metaphors and allegories to articulate the multifaceted dimensions of their plight. Symbolism in Palestinian literature resonates with historical contexts, cultural heritage, and the ongoing struggle for self-determination, offering a lens to understand the complexities of their lived experiences and the yearning for freedom amid adversity (Salameh 2015).

This symbolic language, prevalent in Palestinian writings, transcends the literal, encapsulating various motifs representing resilience, resistance, exile, and hope (Kamal 2004). It becomes a means of expressing the unspoken, providing a voice to the silenced, and fostering a collective identity within the Palestinian narrative. The utilization of symbols and allegories in Palestinian literature, including Mahmoud Darwish's "Under Siege," serves as a poignant testament to the struggles, aspirations, and enduring resilience of a people under duress, fostering a profound connection between the written word and the lived realities of Palestinians.

In Mahmoud Darwish's poem "Under Siege," the effective use of symbolism enhances the depth and impact of the poem, allowing readers to explore the multifaceted layers of the Palestinian plight, resilience, and hope. Several recurring motifs, including the olive tree, the night, the land, and the sea, contribute to the rich symbolism within the poem.

The following stanza from the poem 'Under Siege' by Mahmoud Darwish showcases the powerful use of symbolism to convey deeper meanings and evoke emotions related to the Palestinian experience of conflict and occupation.

A country preparing for dawn. We grow less intelligent  
For we closely watch the hour of victory:  
No night in our night lit up by the shelling  
Our enemies are watchful and light the light for us

"A country preparing for dawn": This line symbolizes the hope and anticipation of a new beginning. The idea of "preparing for dawn" suggests that despite the darkness and turmoil, there is a sense of resilience and the belief that a brighter future is on the horizon.

"We grow less intelligent": This line can be interpreted symbolically to represent the toll that prolonged conflict and occupation take on society. It suggests that the constant state of vigilance and the focus on victory can lead to a decline in intellectual and emotional growth.

"No night in our night lit up by the shelling": Here, the symbolism lies in the contrast between "night" and "lit up by the shelling." While "night" typically represents darkness and fear, the shelling, which usually brings destruction and chaos, ironically illuminates the night. This symbolizes the constant presence of conflict and the inability to find solace or respite even in the darkness.

"Our enemies are watchful and light the light for us": This line carries multiple layers of symbolism. The enemies being "watchful" implies constant surveillance and threat. The phrase "light the light for us" can be seen as a metaphorical representation of the enemies unintentionally revealing the truth or shedding light on the reality of the situation.

This stanza employs symbolism to depict the complexities, struggles, and aspirations of the Palestinian people living in a state of protracted conflict and occupation. It captures the themes of hope, resilience, the toll of war on society, and the blurred lines between enemies and allies.

The essence of the ongoing conflict and struggle faced by Palestinians resonates through Darwish's depiction in the following lines.

When the planes disappear, the white, white doves  
Fly off and wash the cheeks of heaven  
With unbound wings taking radiance back again, taking possession  
Of the ether and of play. Higher, higher still, the white, white doves  
Fly off. Ah, if only the sky  
Were real [a man passing between two bombs said to me].

The above lines present powerful symbolism depicting the fleeting moments of peace and the yearning for a brighter future amidst the ongoing conflict. The imagery of the 'white, white doves' serves as a symbol of peace and purity, contrasting with the violence and destruction that surrounds the speaker."

This opening sentence establishes the focus on the symbolism of the doves and their significance in conveying the desire for peace. It also highlights the contrast between the doves and the ongoing conflict, setting the stage for further analysis of the stanza.

The olive tree holds significant symbolic meaning in Palestinian culture and serves as a powerful representation of the deep-rooted connection to the land and the enduring Palestinian identity. In "Under Siege," the olive tree symbolizes resilience, steadfastness, and the unwavering spirit of the Palestinian people in the face of adversity. Darwish portrays this symbolism when he writes:

"Peace be upon the olive branch that stubbornly defies the fire, and the olive grove, which insists on embracing the earth despite the death that surrounds it."

Here, the olive branch defying the fire signifies the resilience of the Palestinian people, while the olive grove embracing the earth represents their unyielding attachment to the land, even amid death and destruction. The olive tree symbolizes the collective strength and resistance of the Palestinian people, embodying their determination to endure and thrive.

The night is another potent symbol in "Under Siege." It represents the darkness and challenges faced by Palestinians living under occupation and serves as a metaphor for the difficult circumstances they endure. Darwish utilizes the night as a symbol throughout the poem, depicting the struggles and hardships faced by his people:

"Under siege, the night is a gorgeous field of stars that wither in the dawn."

Here, the night's beauty juxtaposed with its fading presence at dawn conveys the fleeting moments of hope and beauty experienced by Palestinians under siege. The night symbolizes the persistence of oppression and the constant struggles faced by Palestinians, while also highlighting their ability to find moments of beauty and hope amidst the darkness.

The land and the sea are two additional symbols that feature prominently in "Under Siege." They represent the Palestinians' longing for freedom, justice, and a brighter future. The land serves as a symbol of Palestinian heritage, history, and the desire to reclaim their homeland. The sea, on the other hand, symbolizes the yearning for open horizons, exploration, and the pursuit of dreams beyond the confines of occupation.

Darwish portrays the significance of the land and the sea in the following lines:

"And the sea we have crossed is not an obstacle for us; we shall cross this too."

Here, the sea is depicted as a barrier to be overcome, emphasizing the Palestinians' determination to transcend their current circumstances and achieve liberation. The land and the sea symbolize the Palestinians' aspirations for self-determination, freedom, and the restoration of their rights.

"The lines 'A woman told the cloud: cover my beloved / For my clothing is drenched with his blood' employ symbolism to convey the profound grief and anguish experienced by the woman, as well as the desire to protect and preserve the memory of her beloved."

These lines introduce the central theme of grief and the use of symbolism to depict the emotional impact of loss. It highlights the woman's plea to the cloud as a symbolic representation of her longing for solace and the need to shield her beloved's memory from further pain.

The symbolism employed by Mahmoud Darwish in "Under Siege" adds layers of meaning to the poem, encapsulating the Palestinian plight, resilience, and hope. The olive tree, the night, the land, and the sea all contribute to the profound message of endurance, steadfastness, and the yearning for a better future, making "Under Siege" a powerful reflection of the Palestinian experience.

### **Portrayal of the Palestinian Plight**

In Mahmoud Darwish's poem "Under Siege," he skillfully portrays the Palestinian plight, capturing the themes of loss, displacement, and the yearning for justice. The historical and political context surrounding the Palestinian struggle is reflected in the poem, providing a poignant depiction of the challenges faced by the Palestinian people.

Darwish's portrayal of loss in "Under Siege" evokes the profound impact of the Palestinian experience. The poem conveys a sense of collective memory and remembrance, emphasizing the weight of history and the enduring pain of displacement. For instance, Darwish writes:

"Under siege, life is the moment between remembrance of the first moment, and forgetfulness of the last."

This line highlights the constant struggle to preserve memories and maintain a sense of identity amidst the challenges faced by Palestinians. It speaks to the loss of homeland, the disruption of lives, and the ongoing struggle for recognition and justice.

Displacement is another central theme in "Under Siege." The poem captures the experiences of Palestinians living under occupation, forced to leave their homes and communities. Darwish's words convey a sense of longing and the yearning for return:

"We have on this earth what makes life worth living: April's hesitation, the aroma of bread at dawn, a woman's opinion of men, the works of Aeschylus, the beginning of love, grass on a stone, mothers living on a flute's sigh and the invaders' fear of memories."

These lines depict the resilience of the Palestinian people in the face of displacement, emphasizing the importance of cultural heritage, human connections, and the longing for a homeland.

The historical and political context surrounding the Palestinian struggle is intricately woven into the fabric of "Under Siege." The poem reflects the realities of occupation, oppression, and the ongoing quest for justice. Darwish's words capture the collective aspirations and demands of the Palestinian people for self-determination and freedom.

The historical context of the Palestinian struggle, including the impact of the Israeli occupation and the displacement of Palestinians, is reflected in the poem's imagery and language. The references to memories, invaders, and the longing for return allude to the historical injustices faced by Palestinians and their ongoing struggle for recognition and liberation.

Furthermore, the political context of the Palestinian struggle is subtly conveyed in "Under Siege." The poem serves as a powerful critique of the oppressive forces that perpetuate the siege and deny

Palestinians their rights. It highlights the resilience and determination of the Palestinian people in the face of adversity, emphasizing their unwavering commitment to justice and freedom.

"Under Siege" by Mahmoud Darwish masterfully portrays the Palestinian plight, capturing the themes of loss, displacement, and the yearning for justice. The poem reflects the historical and political context surrounding the Palestinian struggle, providing a poignant depiction of the challenges faced by the Palestinian people.

### **Themes of Resilience and Hope**

In "Under Siege," Mahmoud Darwish effectively conveys themes of resilience and hope through his masterful use of language, poetic devices, and rhythmic patterns. These themes inspire readers to find strength and endurance in the face of oppression. The poem's impact lies in its ability to evoke a sense of collective determination and the belief in a brighter future.

Darwish's use of language in "Under Siege" is powerful and evocative. He employs vivid imagery and metaphors to convey the resilience of the Palestinian people. For example, in the lines:

"Here on the slopes of hills, facing the dusk and the cannon of time  
Close to the gardens of broken shadows,  
We do what prisoners do, And what the jobless do: We cultivate hope."

These lines depict the Palestinians' unwavering commitment to hope and their refusal to succumb to despair. The use of the metaphor of cultivating hope emphasizes the active and intentional nature of their resilience. Despite the challenges they face, the Palestinian people persist in nurturing hope as a means of survival and resistance.

Poetic devices such as repetition and parallelism further enhance the themes of resilience and hope in the poem. Darwish's rhythmic patterns create a sense of unity and solidarity among the Palestinian people. The repetition of phrases like "We cultivate hope" and "A country preparing for dawn" emphasizes the collective effort and shared vision for a better future. This repetition serves to reinforce the themes and inspire readers to join in the struggle for justice and liberation. The impact of these themes on the reader is profound. "Under Siege" resonates with individuals who have experienced oppression or faced adversity in their own lives. The poem's message of resilience and hope serves as a source of inspiration and encouragement, reminding readers of the power of perseverance and the possibility of a brighter future.

The significance of these themes lies in their ability to inspire resilience in the face of oppression. By highlighting the strength and determination of the Palestinian people, Darwish encourages readers to find their inner resilience and to stand up against injustice. The poem serves as a call to action, urging individuals to cultivate hope and work towards a more just and equitable world.

In another stanza of the poem Darwish very effectively explores the theme of resilience and the concept of home further nurturing hope.

Resisting means assuring oneself of the heart's health,  
The health of the testicles and of your tenacious disease;  
The disease of hope.

The stanza delves into the theme of resilience and the idea of home, highlighting the strength and determination required to withstand adversity. It also introduces the concept of hope as a powerful force that sustains individuals in challenging circumstances.

The opening line establishes the focus on resilience and home as the central themes of the stanza. It also acknowledges the presence of hope as a defining element within these themes.

The stanza employs powerful metaphors to convey the resilience of the human spirit. The phrase 'assuring oneself of the heart's health' suggests the importance of emotional well-being and inner strength in the face of obstacles. The mention of 'the health of the testicles' symbolizes physical vitality and the determination to endure. These bodily metaphors represent the speaker's affirmation of their resilience and determination to persevere."

Furthermore, the concept of "the disease of hope" is mentioned in the stanza, highlighting its significance in the context of resilience and home.

The stanza introduces the intriguing concept of 'the disease of hope.' Here, hope is portrayed as a relentless force that persists despite challenging circumstances. The use of the word 'disease' suggests that hope can be both burdensome and essential, acting as a source of strength, but also potentially overwhelming. It symbolizes the deep-rooted desire for a better future, for a sense of home, and the refusal to succumb to despair."

The last stanza vividly portrays a serene and harmonious scene, using nature imagery to convey a sense of tranquility and beauty. The mention of "cups of coffee" suggests a moment of shared warmth and comfort, symbolizing the resilience of the Palestinian people who find solace and strength in their collective experiences.

The imagery of "Birds green trees / In the blue shade" represents the enduring presence of life and growth amidst adversity. The vibrant colors and natural elements symbolize the resilience of the Palestinian people, who continue to thrive and find hope in the face of oppression.

The comparison of the sun's movement to that of a gazelle evokes a sense of grace and agility, signifying the resilience and adaptability of the Palestinian people in navigating their circumstances. This imagery suggests that, like the sun, they are capable of moving through obstacles and finding moments of joy and freedom.

The mention of "water in the clouds" with its "unlimited shape" symbolizes the infinite possibilities and potential that remain within the Palestinian people, even in the face of limitations and challenges. It reflects the indomitable spirit and resilience that persists despite the hardships they endure.

The reference to "suspended memories" implies the weight of the past, but also alludes to the hope and strength that can be derived from these memories. It suggests that the Palestinian people draw upon their history and heritage as a source of resilience and hope, finding inspiration in their collective memory.

The stanza concludes with the affirmation that "this morning is powerful and splendid" and that "we are the guests of eternity." This proclamation signifies the unwavering belief in the enduring nature of their struggle and the hope for a better future. It encapsulates the resilience and hope that the Palestinian people embody in their quest for justice and liberation.



Through his use of language, poetic devices, and rhythmic patterns, Mahmoud Darwish effectively conveys themes of resilience and hope in "Under Siege." The poem's impact lies in its ability to inspire readers to find strength in the face of oppression and to actively cultivate hope as a means of resistance. It serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring human spirit and the possibility of a brighter future.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Mahmoud Darwish's poem "Under Siege" serves as a powerful testament to the Palestinian plight, while also embodying the themes of symbolism, resilience, and hope. Through intricate symbolism, Darwish sheds light on the oppressive conditions faced by Palestinians, emphasizing their struggle for freedom and justice.

The poem depicts a landscape under siege, where the Palestinian people are confined and oppressed. The use of powerful metaphors and vivid imagery conveys the immense suffering and loss experienced by the Palestinians. Darwish's words evoke a sense of despair and confinement, highlighting the daily struggles faced by those living under occupation.

However, amidst this darkness, the poem also presents a message of resilience and hope. Through his verses, Darwish emphasizes the indomitable spirit of the Palestinian people, who refuse to be silenced or defeated. He portrays their unwavering determination to reclaim their land, culture, and identity.

The poem's symbolism extends beyond the physical world, encompassing the collective consciousness and shared experiences of the Palestinian people. Darwish's use of allegory and metaphor invites readers to delve deeper into the layers of meaning embedded within the poem, encouraging a greater understanding of the Palestinian narrative.

Ultimately, "Under Siege" serves as a call to action, urging readers to empathize with the Palestinian plight and work towards a just and peaceful resolution. It reminds us of the importance of resilience, hope, and the power of art to shed light on the struggles faced by marginalized communities.

In conclusion, Mahmoud Darwish's "Under Siege" is a profound and thought-provoking poem that captures the essence of the Palestinian experience. Through its symbolism, exploration of resilience, and portrayal of hope, the poem offers a powerful depiction of the Palestinian plight and catalyzes dialogue, understanding, and change.

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