

A Proposal for a Thesis in Creative Writing

Qasida

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שירה

הצעת מחקר לתיזה בכתיבה יוצרת

המחלקה לאנגלית

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Introduction

"You are only free when you realize you belong no place—you belong every place—no place at all. The price is high. The reward is great." - Maya Angelou

I live in Israel. I was born in an Israeli hospital in which my mother was given my birth certificate written in Hebrew. It is not my mother tongue, but it is something I gained through living here in Israel. The Hebrew language has been imposed on my daily life since it is the formal language of the country. I encounter it wherever I go to the university, on the street, in the beauty shop and even when I don't go anywhere, for it is on the very small ID card in my pocket. I got used to Hebrew somehow, though I didn't choose it; yet very often I find myself choosing it to define me even in a simple conversation with a friend. I work as a teacher in school and I avoid assigning exams to my students in the Jewish holidays since we (my students and I) sit at home in these days. Therefore, there is always a sense of belonging to a place, a language and a culture that is not mine originally.

My soul lives in Palestine. I wake up in the morning and eat homemade Palestinian hummus with an omelet and drink Arabic dark tea together with the family. When I want to go out, I dress up like Palestinian women do in an Aba'aa with a shawl. I speak the Arabic language, which is the language unifying all the Palestinians around the world. Arabic is a decisive element in my everyday life. When I go to a wedding I feel blessed hearing the words of the Sheikh addressed to the groom and the bride. My Palestinian culture is one of the powerful pillars in my life. This duality of my identity, between Arabic and Hebrew, as well as being a Palestinian and a citizen in Israel, is the center of my writing project.

Aims and General Description

"It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation;

I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained".

-Salman Rushdi, Imaginary Homelands

Qasida is the Arabic term for a poem in English. The project will consist of a collection of poems that depict my experience as a Muslim, a young teacher in high school, and as a female Palestinian poet living in Israel. The poems will vary in theme and style. For example, I will use litanies poems to evoke spiritual feelings and prayers that relate to different rituals in Islam. Odes will also be included in my research; they will praise different and special Palestinian food. In addition, I will use free verse and pastoral poetry to express the dual perspectives of my social identity; the Palestinian culture and the Israeli citizenship.

The project will be divided into three sections: Language, Food, and Spirituality. These three categories express my dual identity. Included throughout each of these sections will be different texture of the subject matter: Being a Muslim –poetry that will display life style features and spiritual traditions of a Muslim person. Being a young teacher—poetry that will narrate the experience and challenges of a Foreign language teacher in high school. Being a Palestinian female poet--here most of the poems will examine challenges (e.g: language barrier) and benefits of a writer living in another country.

Conceptual Background

"Poetry and beauty are always making peace, when you read something beautiful you always find coexistence; it breaks walls down." Mahmoud Darwish

Mahmoud Darwish uses poetry to construct a philosophy of being not only for himself as a Palestinian poet, but also for all Palestinians around the world. The "attempt at being" is so much related with the attempt to do or make an action in which an individual can accomplish one's potential and create one's own human existence (Najami and Ajjawi 276).

Darwish shows resistance throughout his poetry and he attempts to implant the idea of self search for an identity in writing despite his exile from his own country, Palestine. For example, "Identity Card" is one of his earliest poems that speak to all Palestinians around the world who are exiled geographically and figuratively from their Palestinian identity. Darwish shows throughout his poetry that the Palestinian identity is not only attached to a land or a place (which in a sense could be), but to the great culture of homeland ancients.

Indeed, Darwish ends his work by a powerful titled poem "You are from now on yourself" in which, as the title may suggest, a man conserves his social self identity once he rethinks and restructures the life he lives by his keen futuristic vision (Najami and Ajjawi 283).

Furthermore, Darwish uses different kinds of poetry forms to convey his view of self multiple identity, but mainly he focuses so much on anaphora, litany and prose poetry forms. Consequently, I intend to adopt Darwish's approach; thematically and structurally. I will depict the reality as it is; the way I experience it every day, however, I intend in looking at it from different angles. This is what my poetry aims to depict; the advantage of

being adhered into two identities. And I will use a lot of anaphora style in the different threads of my poetic texture.

Another multicultural poet is called Andrea Chedid. Chedid is from Cairo originally, and at the age of twenty six she moved to Paris. Her poetry was written in French and then published in English although her mother tongue was Arabic. Chedid uses a different language to construct her "being" in the world. "Being in the world" is "what is more than language / but which language sets free" (Bancquart 140).

Chedid attempts to convey two aspects of the human self identity; its loss and its blessing. This sense of duality can assure the poet's attempt to create peace of mind and a sense of totality through poetic words. For example, "A Double Country" is the title of one of her poems in which the poet emphasizes the dual sense of belonging to two places, two cultures and to two languages which she extends further to the conception of a universality (Bancquart 143).

A third remarkable guide in my research is the poet Sam Hamod. He is an Arab Muslim living in America and throughout his poetry he attempts to reflect on his dual identity in an American family. Most importantly, Hamod highlights the issue of Palestinian food in his poetry and draws a parallel between ethnicity and food. For example, "Leaves" is a titled poem of him in which he describes the way his father cooks leaves and passes his wisdom to the younger generation, like his son (Cates 2).

Food in Hamod's poetry serves as icons and cultural emblems that mirror the Palestinian identity of him. Similarly, I will adopt this technique in my poetry project; I will use different kinds of food recipes as a way to reflect on my Palestinian and Muslim heritage.

Interestingly, Hamod also relates to the language whereby he writes his poetry, however, in his eyes it is called the American language and not English language. He believes that language is a crucial part of any one's identity, thus as a part of being American he describes lots of aspects of the American family tradition through his poetry.

Consequently, I will narrate through my poetry the experience of being in a Palestinian family, yet sharing the Jewish Israeli families in lots of very simple every day traditions and habits.

Furthermore, I will be guided by a young female Palestinian poet who is called Mona Kareem. She is from Kuwait, however, she studies Literature in New York university. Her poetry is written in both languages, Arabic and English. In her poetry, Kareem discusses lots of themes, such as, marriage, males and females roles in the Palestinian culture, but mainly she deals with minority constraints and obstacles in society. She criticizes society tradition and illogical policies: "Is a Holako egg a real egg, unless it is only an entertaining egg?!" (Kareem n.p.). This is an introductory fixed title in Mona's blog since she began writing online. Also, she uses lyric poetry such as, Haikus and Ghazals to describes her feelings and emotions toward the memories of love and loss that she witnesses in different events and periods in life.

As a result, I will embrace Mona's thematically and structurally in research. In some of my poetry I will use Haikus and Ghazal to describe my memories and experience as a female writer in the community.

Shape of the Project

"Poetry: the best words in the best order."- Samuel Taylor Coleridge

The project will be organized in theme and style through three different sections: Language, Food, Spirituality. These three categories express the dual perspectives of my identity, being a Palestinian and a citizen in Israel. Also, I will use mixed words of Arabic and Hebrew ones besides to the English poetic lines in order to enforce the subject matter. In addition, topics such as love, loss, nature and other personal philosophies will be drawn throughout the three sections.

Poems in the first section "Language" will deal with language barrier and everyday situation I encounter through language. I will explain my perspective as a Palestinian poet, an English language teacher and as a Muslim citizen who deals with three different languages in daily life not only in my poetic lines. Besides, the poems in these sections will vary in style; litanies, free verse and Ghazal will be used mostly in this section.

The second section is called "Food" which will shape the largest part of the project. Thematically, this section will cover many and different kinds of Arab Palestinian food such as, food in special occasions. Structurally, odes is so common in this section of my project beside to the very used style in my writing style-the litany poem.

The third section of the project will depict my Islamic religion and spiritual beliefs. Poetry in this section will depict how being a Muslim takes a great part in defining myself identity. A diversity of poems will discuss my relation with the creator Allah through his Holy book, the Quran and the daily prayers during the day, and other special rituals. Hikus and litany will be used to cover this thematic part.

I intend to create a fabric of documentary poetry that will address the impact of social and language complexities on the construction of self identity of the female Palestinian poet living in Israel.

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