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"IF MY WORDS CAN STOP THIS": INTERSECTIONAL BIOGRAPHY IN RAFEEF ZIADAH'S DIASPORIC PERFORMATIVE POETRY

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Abstract

Speaking out the unspoken in life has been always framing most literary topics getting the readers to s-crutinize all what has been presented as truth. The need for telling has been a stimulus for most poets to show by imagery and rhythm that words can alter the world. Rafeef Ziadah (1979-), an Anglophone Palestinian poetess living in Canada, has intermingled in her poetry many topics that address race, gender, and identity, and succeeded in introducing them within the border lines of storytelling; something that evolved to address intersectional biography. She has also insisted on performing her poetry out facing the world with a reality no one can deny, being performed in her own voice. Repetition, tone, intonation, and even pauses are all tools of representation here. Ziadah is also keen on having her poetry performed accompanied by music that mounts to be an identifying feature of her poetry, exceeding the role of mere artistic decoration. Storytelling is introduced and performed on stage to pinpoint and contextualize a message that has been too familiar to get into people's consciousness. Literary devices, storytelling, performance, and music are all employed as rhetorics of protest in Ziadah's poetry. Ziadah mixes the verbal and nonverbal to document her intersectional biography as a Palestinian woman. Intersectional biography in Ziadah's performative poems "We Teach Life, Sir!" (2011), "Shades of Anger" (2012) and "Hadeel" (2012) is held and analyzed to show how it is presented in such a way that defamiliarizes pain, resistance and resilience.

Keywords: Rafeef Ziadah, Intersectional biography, Performative poetry, Storytelling

ملخص البحث:

دائما ما يشكل النطق بما ظلّ غير منطوق عنه في الحياة إطارًا لغالبية الموضوعات الأدبية، مما يدفع القرّاء إلى تمحيص كل ما قُدِّم لهم بوصفه حقيقة. لقد كانت الحاجة إلى البوح دافعًا لدى معظم الشعراء لإظهار، من خلال الصور الشعرية والإيقاع، أن للكلمات قدرة على تغيير العالم.رفيف زيادة (١٩٧٩ -)، الشاعرة الفلسطينية الناطقة بالإنجليزية والمقيمة في كندا، قد مزجت في شعرها العديد من الموضوعات التي تتناول العرق والنوع الاجتماعي والهوية، ونجحت في تقديمها ضمن إطار السرد القصصي؛ ذلك الإطار الذي تطور ليعبّر عن سيرة ذاتية تقاطعية. كما أصرت على أداء شعرها بصوتها هي، مواجهةً العالم بحقيقة لا يمكن لأحد إنكارها. التكرار، والنغمة، والتنغيم، وحتى الوقفات، جميعها أدوات تُستخدم هنا في التمثيل والتأثير. زيادة تحرص أيضًا على أن يصاحب أداءها الشعري موسيقى ترتقي لتكون سمة تعريفية لشعرها، متجاوزةً دور الزخرفة الفنية البحتة. يُقدَّم السرد القصصي ويُؤدَّى على المسرح بهدف توجيه وتحديد رسالة أصبحت مألوفةً إلى حد لا يثير الانتباه، وبالتالي تُعاد صياغتها لتدخل وعي الجمهور. وظفت رفيف زيادة الوسائل الأدبية، والسرد، والأداء، والموسيقى جميعًا كوسائل احتجاجية في أشعارها. فهي تمزج بين اللفظي وغير اللفظي لتوثيق سيرتها الذاتية التقاطعية كامرأة فلسطينية. تتجلّى هذه السيرة الذاتية التقاطعية في قصائدها الأدائية مثل: "نحن نُعلِّم الحياة، سيدي!" (٢٠١١)، و"ظلال الغضب" (٢٠١٢)، و"هديل" (٢٠١٢)، حيث تُحلَّل هذه القصائد لتُبيّن كيف أن الألم والمقاومة والصمود تُقدَّم بطريقة تُجدد النظر فيها وتُعيد تشكيلها في وعي المتلقي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: *رفيف زيادة; السيرة الذاتية التقاطعية; الشعر الأدائي; السردالقصصي.*

Introduction:

All that has been happening to the Palestinians since 1948, whether in the occupied homeland or in exile, is nothing but the ramifications of the tragedy of uprootedness; uprootedness of human beings from their home, uprootedness of homes from their land, uprootedness of land from its history, and uprootedness of history from its humanity. (Moslih Kanaaneh 2)

Ziadah is a Palestinian poet who was born in Beirut in 1979. She left with her family in 1982 to Tunisia after the siege of Beirut. Ziadah went to Canada for her PhD and was granted Canadian citizenship (Farooq). Now, she lives in London, where she teaches in the Politics department at SOAS University of London. Ziadah always releases her work in album form rather than print, insisting on delivering her sense of pain with the sorrow held in her voice. She wants her audience to share her the pain even if they do not attend her live

performance on stage. Ziadah's poetry depends on performance, getting into the genre of spoken word poetry; something that adds to Ziadah's rhetorics of protest. The power of the spoken word in her poetry brings in the spirit of freedom to both the reciter and the audience. This "foregrounds the relationship between performer and audience, considering the ways in which each poet mobilizes the form's characteristic emphasis on directness and sincerity to solicit not just the reader's empathy, but also their anger and sense of political responsibility" (Bernard 3). Consequently, voice becomes a literary device used to call on the empathy of the audience to act. The action here is not necessarily to fight, but to believe in the Palestinian cause so that the collective identity is never erased. Actually, her poetry, being performed and displayed on YouTube, gives Ziadah a prominent position among diasporic poets by opening wide the demographic range of her audience.

The research aims at presenting an intersectional reading of the autobiography in Ziadah's three representative poems, focusing on analyzing the ways she has used to deepen the literary effect of her poetry on readers. Performative poetry is attributed to be a tool through which Ziadah shows her rhetorics of protest together with inducing music as a key factor that crystalizes her poetic literary identity. Apart from tackling the Palestine issue in Ziadah's poetry and her use of the spoken word poetry, the research spines together gender, politics, history, ethnicity in an autobiographical context that rests on voice and music to speak more about the dilemma of a whole nation.

Within the context of intersectional biography, rhetorics of protests are meant to be investigated here as the literary tools used by Ziadah to deepen her collective revolutionary Palestine identity. In her poetry, storytelling is put forth as a method of answering back the attempt at "erasure, silencing and censorship of the Palestinian narrative" (Ziadah,*Outside the Multicultural* ii). Her chosen three poems are written in an autobiographical first-person singular or plural voice emphasizing her identity and claiming her right to restore her homeland; to get back her dignity and to propagate for the Palestinian call for freedom. Here, storytelling serves to consolidate the cause and to keep its unique identity. In this regard, Angela Davis identifies storytelling with solidarity writing about their inseparability saying, "Our histories never unfold in isolation. We cannot truly tell what we consider to be our own histories without knowing the other stories" (139). Consequently, solidarity, according to her, comes as "a dialectical process that requires us to constantly retell our stories" (Davis 139). If not retold from different sides, stories will be lost and identities will be eradicated. Solidarity comes when all stories are held together complementing each other and preserving true, though different, the identities projected to destruction.

Here comes storytelling as a significant aspect of Rafeef Zeyada's performance poetry, in which she fuses her personal experiences with the histories of her people to create a sense of emotional resonance and political urgency. Through her use of storytelling, Ziadahseeks to give voice to those who are often silenced or marginalized. One of Zeyada's most powerful storytelling performances is "We Teach Life, Sir," which tells the story of a Palestinian woman, Ziadah herself, who is stopped and questioned by a journalist "don't you think that everything would be resolved if you would just stop teaching so much hated to your children" (1.24- 1.30). The poem is a powerful protest against the violence and oppression faced by Palestinians, and it uses storytelling to create a sense of emotional urgency and political resonance. Through her use of vivid and personal language, Ziadah paints a picture of the daily struggles faced by Palestinians living under occupation and emphasizes the importance of resistance and solidarity. A second notable storytelling performance by Ziadah is her poem "Shades of Anger." The poem explores the complex emotions felt by those who have experienced trauma and oppression. The poem uses storytelling to create a sense of emotional depth and resonance, drawing on personal experience and history to convey the many

different shades of anger felt by those who have faced injustice. By using storytelling in this way, Ziadah emphasizes the importance of collective memory and solidarity as tools for resistance and social change. A third storytelling performance by Ziadah is her poem "Hadeel", in which she tells the sad story of a young girl whose life is tragically cut short by the violence of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in Gaza. The poem is a poignant and powerful commentary on the realities of daily life for Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. Storytelling is a key political tool in Ziadah's performance poetry, allowing her to create a sense of emotional resonance and urgency while challenging dominant narratives and power structures. By drawing on personal experience and the histories and realities of her people, Ziadah is able to create powerful and transformative performances that speak to the deep emotional and political realities of oppression and resistance.

Ziadah's form of spoken word poetry is introduced as another method of expressing protest against oppression and enhancing solidarity. She is one of those poets who use art to propagate their cause. Holding on the oral tradition of societies and cultures, spoken word poetry helps "performance artists to address the modern human condition by bringing to life (and the spotlight) personal, political, social, and spiritual concerns while knocking the socks off an audience through the artful and entertaining application of performance" (M. Smith 5). In her recent online performance at the 'Palestine Writes festival', Ziadah stated that "it's really hard to read these poems alone in your room" (Palestine Writes, 2020a). Her spoken word poetry works on getting both the speaker and the listener into the same circle of affection and emotional rage that characterizes the Palestinian experience of occupation. Such poetry "highlights the capacity of literature and its circuits of circulation to serve as a space of solidarity production, and to promote a solidarity with the Palestinian struggle that is simultaneously self-reflexive and committed." (Bernard 3). Ziadah is promoting for a cause that needs people to act (fight, support, boycott, etc.)

Ziadah is herself an activist supporting the Palestinian solidarity movement (PSN) in Canada, where she used to live for a long time. She employs storytelling and holds it as the positive reacting side of a storytelling/silence dichotomy. In this regard, it is important to note that concerning the Palestinian case, silence is criticized in two senses. The first one is intended to address the silence held by Nations as itself an attempt toward tolerance, imagining that turning a blind eye may keep things going towards a better ending. In this regard, Ziadah strives to send her messages against silence. She wants to liberate 'solidarity' from the passiveness of reception towards the wider scope of action. In "Hadeel", she dramatizes the process of familiarizing people with death. Hadeel died and still everything is happening the way it was before. Hadeel's death changed nothing as people continue to "check emails and sigh over another Palestinian gone"; solidarity has become like "a sick joke or a bad story" (3:16). Ziadah addresses this silence in her PHD dissertation aiming "to open a space for a counter-narration so that racialized groups can organize to gain meaningful recognition that disavows official practices based upon mere tolerance" (Ziada, *Outside the Multicultural* 48). The second sense in which silence is addressed is that related to silence as a precautious procedure practiced by the colonizer on the colonized to forbid and prevent rebellions. Ziadah insists on using her performative poetry to speak out what is intended by the Israel American policy to keep hidden and buried with the dead bodies of the Palestinian martyrs and in the hearts of their oppressed people. She insists on standing on stage to tell and act her poetry as if saying 'you will never make us stop'.

Intersectionality: Theory & Application

Ziadah's poetry has been analyzed from a feminist, racist, political perspectives. What is held here in this research is how her poetry is a product of all these perspectives and approaches intermingled together. For this reason, intersectionality as a theory that proposes

that oppression is never one sided is perfect here. It proposes that oppression does not originate from just one area of injustice. In other words, oppression is not only politically, religiously, racially, socially, or gender oriented. It is always the output of all these together. It is all "about the conjunctures of race and class and ethnicity and nationality and sexuality and ability" (Davis 139). As a result, it comes up at the intersection point between two or more unjust practices of power. Intersectionality, thus, is typically applicable when delving deep into the biographical literary statement of Rafeef Ziadah of her experience as a Palestinian woman, who was forced, like many others, to leave her land searching for a 'Home'. Intersectionality, as a term, has been first introduced in 1989 by the Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, who further elaborated it in 1991 before it moved to be universalized as a common intellectual project, addressed to speak about all women, not only Black ones. Moving into a wider circle of identification, intersectionality has become "conflated with identity politics, in the sense that it is perceived as a narrow identitarianism that militates for the visibility of subjects caught in the intersection of race, gender, and other "axes" of oppression." (Carastathis 24). Consequently, it becomes a socially bound term used by many scholars to speak about the intermingled factors of oppression, whether political, religious, ethnic, social, etc.

In Ziadah's poetry, intersectionality is literally brought on two levels. The first one is related to the content: gender, race, and place and how they all intersect as three areas of oppression. The second one is concerned mainly with the form of presentation since the poetry of Ziadah is performed on stage accompanied with musical tones. All this is foregrounded by the storytelling technique that is involved here to compress history, politics, gender, geography into one entity of a multiple form of poetry, drama, and music. Here, Ziadah echoes Paula Gunn Allen's words: "My life is history, politics and geography. It is religion and metaphysics. It is music and language" (A. Smith 1). All these areas are brought together in an attempt from Ziadah to tell her collective story with all its overlapping sources of oppression. She has inherited a burden of shame that keeps on growing from one generation to another. As Ella Shohat notes, "For artists and cultural critics on the margins, speaking, writing, and performing are a constant negotiation of this burden," with each of them acting for "synecdochically summing up a vast and presumably homogenous community" (169). Here, the word 'synecdochically' is indicative in proposing that each of these actions appears to be just a part, but really turns to be summing up a whole experience. Palestinian poets are in a continuous turmoil trying to get their historical burden off through writing and performing poetry speaking of the shame all Palestinians carry on their backs wherever they go. Writing and performing poetry remain to be signifiers, encoding a whole collective experience of suffering and injustice along many generations in and outside Palestine. Consequently, their "claims regarding the need for preservation is not motivated by naive romanticism or the desire to restore a pure origin. They are rather part of a communal attempt to "save" by establishing and reasserting an Arab cultural presence, in the face of the challenge of continual colonial effacement." (Shohat 169)

Actually, it is in "Shades of Anger" that Ziadah's intersectional biography is brought typically related to the theme of protest. She puts it clear when she introduces the three areas of marginality she faces i.e "Arab", "woman", and "of color" at the same time with "shades of anger". In this line, she invokes 'race', 'gender' and 'ethnicity' as three universal circles of oppression to introduce for the idea of anger which comes as a direct response for this oppression. She, thus, investigates the complexities of oppression that unite to formulate a new modified one tackled in direct relation to the extra oppression she delves deeper into along the poem i.e. the extra oppression of the Palestinians. Here, the plural form of the word 'shades' gives a way for Ziadah to introduce her audience to the multi-faceted oppression

Palestinian women are subjected to. This oppression is brought into the circle of intersectionality as it does not evolve only from one being an Arab Palestinian (race) or just being a woman (gender) but also from being colored (ethnicity).

Ziadah's "Shades of Anger" is a poetic speech that tells the story of oppression in a first personal narrative. She begins the poem asking for permission as if she is used to taking permissions because she is not free to act, behave or even talk without having one. She asks for permission to speak in Arabic for nothing but for her fear that her tongue may one day lose its Arabic sounds the same as her people lost their freedom, land and national Identity. She possesses nothing now to protect but the Arabic sounds on her tongue that may be occupied by another language the same as her land was occupied. Speaking it out is the only way of saving her Palestinian Arabic language "before they colonize her memory as well" (Ziadah, *Shades* 0:58). The possessive adjective 'her' here refers to the Arabic language being personalized as it is threatened to die or be killed as a human being. Personalization here is employed to propose the idea that the Arabic language, being originally an inanimate noun, moves from the neutrality of the pronoun 'it' to be cursed when identified with the femininity of the Palestinian woman, who faces all types of oppression. In this poem, Ziadah confronts the possibility of losing her mother tongue and reclaims it back as a defining factor of her own existence. She identifies Arabic, contexualized in the adjective 'Arab', with her own self: "I am an Arab woman of color/ and we come in all shades of anger" (1:01). This line will be a refrain to divide her poem as she separates her talk about the grandmother and the mother on one hand and the rest of the female images mentioned in the poem by this line. This helps in classifying her female characters in two categories of existence. One is related to those who experienced a land of their own, and the other is related to living on a land that is stolen and occupied. Ziadah demarcates her poem "Shades of Anger" with this line that functions as a defining refrain.

In "Shades of Anger", refrains come each time to conclude Ziadah's talk about female characters. The first refrain comes to conclude her talk about her Arabic language which is introduced as her first female character. The second refrain comes to conclude her talk about her grandmother and her mother. The third concludes her talk about her sister Amni Mona. The fourth refrain line concludes her talk about terrorism as she is accused by Israelis of bearing terrorists: "you tell me, this womb inside me/ will only bring you your next terrorist"(Ziadah, *Shades* 2:01). Here, it comes smart of her not to limit violence and terrorism to practiced only against her people. Her talk about terrorism extends to cover other practices of terrorism held by the Americans, who are the main supporters of the Israeli' cause. She brings in the CIA that "killed Allende and Lumumba/ and who trained Osama in the first place" (2:20). Ziadha then delves into the American history of slavery praising her grandparents who had never been the American grandparents behaving "like clowns/ with the white capes and the white hoods on their heads lynching black people" (2:27). Here, the "analogy between Palestinian and Black identities leads us from a specific site of solidarity to a broader invocation of a common humanity" (Bernard 6). Her political vision enlarges to encapsulate other histories and resonates more widely to involve more universally oppressed people.

The fifth refrain comes to conclude her talk about that brown woman (woman of color) who is not supposed to scream or demonstrate in the first place because this goes against the stereotypical mold Arab women are put into. Here, she is excusing herself saying, "I forgot to be your every orientalist dream/ Jinnee in a bottle, belly dancer, harem girls, soft spoken Arab woman"(Ziadah, *Shades* 2:50). At that point Ziadah's sarcastic tone gets higher as she portrays how she is supposed to tell her colonizers: "yes master, no master" echoing the African American slavery language, bringing it as a signifier of a typical experience of

oppression into her own scene. Again, she expresses her apology for not thanking "for the peanut butter sandwiches raining down on us from your F-16's master", or her joy for welcoming the military forces, calling, "my liberators are here to kill my children; she apologizes for not being able to "call them 'collateral damage'". The refrain "I am an Arab woman of color and we come in all shades of anger", is repeated five times, but is broken at the end to conclude her statement of warning that she is a woman whose warm womb will carry the next rebel. Instead of "and we come in all shades of anger", Ziadah says, "Beware! Beware my anger". The last line comes as a climatic expression of anger that equalizes her sense of oppression with her reacting sense of protest being spoken out in her threat.

Again, geography is brought into the scene to complement the circle of intersectionality as Ziadah starts to list her female Palestinian images. The reference to her grandfather's wish to watch her grandmother pray in a village hidden between Jaffa and Haifa, and her mother's birth under an olive tree on a soil that is no longer hers, highlights the connection between the Palestinian people and their land. The use of the phrase "damn apartheid walls" and the call to "cross their barriers, their checkpoints" reflect the anger and frustration of Palestinians who are unable to freely move within their own land due to the presence of Israeli military occupation. Ziadah' s strong determination to return to her homeland despite the obstacles she faces also speaks to the human spirit's resilience and perseverance. Ziadah emphasizes the ways in which the Palestinians continue to contribute to their communities and resist the occupation, despite the significant barriers they face.

Again, it is worth referring to the relationship brought here between geography (place) and women. Ziadah begins with her grandmother who "kneel and pray/ in a village hidden between Jaffa and Haifa" and moves to her mother who "was born under an olive tree/ on a soil they say is no longer mine". She, then, tells of her sister who "gave birth at a checkpoint". A fourth female character is brought into her poem "screaming behind the present parts as they teargassed her cell". All the time, each female character is related to a certain place as if using them to draw the spatial frontiers of oppression: Jaffa, Haifa, under an olive tree, a checkpoint, a cell. Female bodies become geographic signifiers of oppression ranging from the land in Haifa represented by the grandmother who witnessed how the Palestinian land was taken, to the mother who was the last of Ziadah's line to be born on a Palestinian land, before people are forced to migrate, under an olive tree that is deeply rooted in and historically linked to the Palestinian cultural heritage. In Ziadah's poetry, women bodies are brought to map the spatial boundaries of the Israeli oppression of the Palestinians.

This idea of the female body being a geographic frontier of the oppression Palestinian women are subjected to is brought more elaborate in Ziadah's "We Teach Life, Sir". She starts her poem with the refrain: "Today, my body was a TV' d massacre". It is extended literally as Ziadah keeps on adding to it till it reaches a full statement of accusation. In the next line, she says, "Today, My body was a TV'd massacre that had to fit into sound-bites and word limits". Here, she confines the massacre to one that is to be announced, but kept neglected; a massacre that is to be displayed on TV, but is to be held familiarized just as to trigger the same words the Arab world reacts with each time the Palestinians' existence is violated: "we condemn and we deplore and we reject". Her female body becomes a site of terrorism and human criminality. However, she is denied the right to speak it out, the right to tell her children the whole story back. In the poem, the audience meet this anonymous "Sir", who asks her, "don't you think that everything would be resolved if you would just stop teaching so much hatred to your children?". Unwillingly, she answers, "We teach life, sir" and she remembers to smile. She knows she must have been more patient, but she tells her audience that her patience exploded with these bombs dropped over Gaza. She performs it on stage as if she had been taught the lesson of patience, but that they had forgotten to teach her how to be patient while

being bombed. For that reason, she sarcastically remembers to smile. "We Teach Life" calls against the demand for "soundbites and word limits filled with enough statistics" (Ziadah, *We Teach Life* 2:02).The poem "enumerates Palestinian grievances, but makes it clear from the outset that it does so not to solicit the listener's empathy, but to command their rage" (Bernard 7). Here, the injustices mentioned are not new or unknown as much as they are represented and retold differently to remind but curb the anger implied in them by releasing it.

The intersectionality in Ziadah's poetry is directly related to its autobiographical sense which is manifested greatly in its diasporic nature. Such a nature implies the attempt of diasporic poets to "dramatize victim testimonies and draw attention to the suffering of women, children, and the elderly, yet they also frequently invoke a collective struggle and draw analogies with predecessor movements like the US Black civil rights movement and the struggle against South African apartheid" (Bernard 3-4). She is speaking as a Palestinian woman, who is part of a larger community that has being subjected to violence and discrimination. Through her storytelling, she is able to highlight the intersectionality of her experiences and those of her community. She speaks about how she has perfected her English and learned about UN resolutions, highlighting the intellectual and educational aspects of her identity. She then talks about her experiences of violence, as bombs drop over Gaza, emphasizing the physical and emotional pain of the conflict. Ziadah's intersectional approach to storytelling helps to create a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the Palestinian experience. By highlighting the various aspects of her identity and experiences, she is able to convey the complexity and depth of the conflict, as well as the resilience and strength of her community. Through this intersectional storytelling, Ziadah is able to give voice to those who have been marginalized and oppressed, and to remind us of the importance of recognizing and valuing the interconnectedness of people's social identities. Ziadah tells her stories and performs them not only for her people or other people who can feel what it is to lose one's land. Instead, it is performed in faraway places that lie outside the dilemma context i.e. it is not performed in Egypt, or any Arab country. Instead, it is performed in countries, such as Canda and London, where people never experienced a stolen homeland being shut in front of its own people. Ziadah is one of the diasporic poets whose lives have been "marked by migrations precipitated by the travels and migrations of their families. These poets of the diaspora have their poems, which map complex relationships with their mother tongues, languages of colonial inheritance and languages of myriad spaces they have inhabited" (Kumar and Dwivedi 15513). Their poetry, thus, documents for all the languages, identities and memories that merge to formulate their entities.

The autobiographical is again solidified in "Hadeel" as Ziadah sets the scene stating that what she is going to recite really happened when Hadeel died and her brother lost his eyesight. In her poem "Hadeel", Ziadah dramatizes the death incident of Hadeel, a nine-year old girl. Ziadah proposes how the problem here is not the death of Hadeel as much as it is the problem of telling Hadeel's mother, who is baking bread and za'ater, of her daughter's death. Ziadah clarifies before reciting her poem that the Israeli and American forces debated over how to tell of the little girl's death. She says that they finally decided that it would be more accepted if a woman not wearing a military uniform is the spokesperson for the social media. Again, Ziadah brings in the notion of usurping and making use of women to send the message that is double-faced. The Israeli forces officially show remorse for the death of Hadeel, on one hand, and warn of more attacks on Gaza, on the other, if the Palestinians would not stop the acts of resistance; something which the Israeli forces called terrorism. When it comes from a woman, the message that the Israelis want to send is much easier; it is much lighter on the hearts of people when delivered by a weak entity; one who is stereotypically marginalized as

their victims are. She explains, "death is softer coming from a woman" (Ziadah, *Hadeel* 1:44). The weak speaks of the weaker and this is a woman telling of a dead Palestinian girl.

In “Hadeel”, Ziadah says, "rockets must stop, terror must stop, resistance must stop or they will continue, they will continue, they will continue, they will continue to shell Gaza" (1:09). Repetition in Ziadah's poetry is always a source of music. However, the number of the word "die" is later repeated more when she says that the Palestinians must die in silence. The attempts of the Israeli people continue on many levels, political, economic, social, etc, but the Palestinians die in much more ways. They die physically and spiritually; they die when they stay home, and they die when they immigrate; they die when they revolt, and they die when they keep silent; they die when they say 'yes' and they die when they say 'no'. The music produced by repetition in Ziadah's poetry is that of pain. She keeps on repeating as if trying to show how much this pain is repeated once and again. Repetition shows how the Palestinian experience is not a one-shot dilemma; instead, it is an extended and overlapping panorama of suffering and oppression. Here, and as Sophie Fenella Robins states, one could find “repetitions in performance poetry to be a method of breaking a word’s normative signification, which uncovers a plurality of possible meanings” (14) unveiling all the signifiers populating the unconsciousness of the poet and the readers.

Again, being an activist in the PSN (Palestinian solidarity movement) supports the intersectional biographical note in Ziadah’s poetry, as she takes her poetry as a platform to call for solidarity as a goal of the movement. Her poetry is intended to be an artistic form that can widely circulate the globe asking for support. As mentioned in *Palestine Writes*, a major literature festival that was held online in December 2020, “art challenges repression and creates bonds between Palestine and the rest of the world,” in spite of the “lack of linguistic access, the severe restrictions on the movement of Palestinians, and the censorship and repression of Palestinian speech” (*Palestine Writes*). Ziadah, through her poetry, is trying to enforce a liberationist rather than a mere humanitarian approach to solidarity. While the first aims at proposing that the Palestinian cause is just a part of a greater movement for liberation previously held by many Arab countries in the early 20th century against colonialism while the second approach is mainly stimulated by that charitable act of helping Palestinian individuals out of a common sense of humanity. For that reason, Ziadah is keen on getting the black woman into the scene in “Shades of Anger” in an attempt to universalize the Palestinian problem by linking it to another historically claimed experience of oppression. She wants to say that the Palestinians are entitled to the same rights other people and nations claimed and achieved, addressing what Lubin called the “cultural politics of comparison” (246) aiming at establishing a “transnational construction” of Palestinian identity.

In "Hadeel", the individual girl, Hadeel, comes to stand for the collective entity of the Palestinian martyrs. It is important to emphasize here that it is not an individual that Ziadah is lamenting; it is the Palestinian history that she is lamenting as she condemns all attempts "to cast us out of a history we carry on our back" (2:51). All the time, she is linking the girl’s name that means the cooing of doves, to the disappearance of doves from the Palestinian sky. Doves, a symbol of peace and innocence are gone forever with the death of Hadeel as Ziadah keeps on repeating "the doves will not fly again over Gaza" (3:33). Alternating from sorrow to anger while performing her poem on stage does not allow Ziadah’s audience the luxury of “an elegiac reading of the work” but forces them to share the “outrage at the social, political, and historical conditions” (Harb 89) that killed Hadeel in the first place. Ziadah’s cadence grows up, together with the music played in the background, from mourning to furious just to keep the audience alert while taking them along her tour of pain and oppression, not of an individual but of a whole nation. Hadeel is a girl child turning nine years old. Ziadah starts her poem stating this fact using the present simple tense “is” before she apologizes painfully

and uses the past tense "was". The past tense comes to dominate when speaking of a history of a nation that has become imprisoned in the past; a culture that is buried under the heavy weight of oppression and injustice, the same as Hadeel. Hadeel's mother, baking bread, symbolizes the Arab world, busy working on feeding its people unwilling to admit that one of its countries is being stolen and killed. The allegorical implication of the poem goes on as Ziadah asks for who would tell the mother that the death of her daughter has changed nothing and that everything will go the same it was before Hadeel is gone. In "Hadeel", Ziadah calls for action; no more silence is needed. The only silence Ziadah desires is that needed over the death of Hadeel. She complains that her people always ask her to stop crying and carry on fighting against oppression; against injustice; against tyranny. However, she asks: "for Hadeel, give me a moment of silence"(3:54); "a moment of sincere resistance" (4:05).

The "olive tree" in "Shades of Anger" and the "Zaa'tar" in "Hadeel" bring in the biographical aspect of the Palestinian peasantry life that helps in establishing the authentic self that the Palestinians are in need for. Those images and symbols of the peasants come hand in hand with the past to set a lasting dialogue with the present of the Palestinian cause. The peasants themselves become, as Anthony Smith calls them "quasi-sacred objects of nationalist concern" (85). It is in the peasants' memory that all the national treasures of myths, songs, ballads, proverbs, folktales, etc. are kept intact. Consequently,

> The symbology associated with the peasantry therefore represents a form of digging in, a response to the deracinating thrust of the Zionist movement . . . In response to the Israeli state's radical, material denial of their existence, Palestinian poets . . . confected an array of symbols—the fallāh, . the kūfīyya (Palestinian headcovering), the olive tree, the embroidered dress, the orange tree, and za 'atar (wild thyme)—connected with a rural way of life. These figures were readily understood by readers and listeners as allegories for Palestine, the land, and the people's intention of remaining permanently on that land. (Swedenburg 20)

As a result, the reference to peasantry life is set in the poems on such a continuum that links the Palestinian past and present with the goal of carrying on the fight and resistance for an authentic right for existence on land, one's homeland. Rafeef's poetry is highly infused with nature that is again part of peasantry life. In "Hadeel", the doves, which are related to the Palestinian culture, as a symbol of peace, immigrate from the sky of Gaza in lament for Hadeel, the symbol of innocence.

Among all Palestinian diasporic poets writing spoken-word poetry, Rafeef Ziadah is different as she is keen to set her poetry in music; something that goes with the tradition of the Palestinian resistance music that records a long history of subjugation to occupation. Believing that music as "a system of signification and expression is universal and eternal, defying the dividing boundaries of space and time" (Kanaanah 2), she collaborated with the Lebanese-Australian producer and guitarist Phil Monsour in her second and third albums. She wants her words to soar higher with music transgressing all boundaries or Israeli checkpoints. All the time, the audience are captivated by the pain and anger in Ziadah's words as well as by the furious music whose pitch gets higher and higher the moment her voice does so. The musician here shows clearly that he is not playing music as much as he is playing politics. As music constitutes a crucial part of any culture, in general, and of marginalized and colonized ones, in particular, it is practiced to show the colonized difference from the colonizer. Consequently, the message delivered in Ziadah's poetry is functionally two-fold, corresponding to the working mechanism of words, on one hand, and that of music, on the other. Again, it is important to note here that the audience are partners in formulating the message as long as they are capable of decoding the linguistic and musical codes of the poet.

To investigate it more thoroughly, the music brought into the Ziadah's performance poetry helps in getting it a bit closer to the '*dabke*' groups such as Sharaf and El-Funoun whose performances were often raided by the Israeli forces. As Nicholas Rowe writes, "Since the Israeli military often raided performances to try and arrest performers, being a dancer in such a group became perceived as a heroic act of resistance against the occupation" (151). Ziadah, here, is trying to perform the same act of resistance replacing the dance with reciting poetry set in music. She is throwing her own stones in the face of the Israeli occupation bringing all her people with her in her poetry.

In her essay "Performing Self: Between Tradition and Modernity in the West Bank", Sylvia Alajaji writes about how the trajectories through which one constitutes his\her identity provide extra space for formulating an imagined self-image that defy all limitations. Such trajectories as poetry and music offer people sane alternatives to experience the hoped-for triumph in a world that denies them access to freedom. She writes: "When identity itself operates as a site of contestation, the channels through which it is mediated and negotiated—music, art, dance, literature, poetry, and so on—become spaces in which the Self is imagined and performed into being and thus become sites of contestation themselves" (98). As they are forcibly banned from their places, Ziadah, together with other diasporic poets, finds in literary production the space that could hold their hopes and revolutionary intents safe along their journeys from one country to another, searching for support for their cause. In other words, poetry set in music in Ziadah's poetry is employed "as a form of resistance, insisting upon a sense of identity that directly counters the narrative that invalidates, for the Palestinians, claims to nationhood." (Alajaji 102)

The autobiographical element in Ziadah's poetry proves itself to be one of the rhetorics of protest used by her to prove that she still exists and that her people will go on telling their story; the Palestinian story will go on and it will never die. In her three poems, under discussion, Ziadah puts forth a documentation of the two main components that constitute the Palestinian experience of oppression, "the first is subjugation to occupation, with all that entails of oppression, harassment, deprivation, loss, and life hardships in general; and the second is resistance to occupation, with all that entails of suffering, sacrifices, loss, and life hardships in general" (Kanaanah 8). She, together with all other Palestinian artists, faces the challenge of proving that not only that the Palestinian identity does exist, but that it really existed in the first place answering back the Golda Meir's claim that "there was no such thing as Palestinians . . .. They did not exist" (Sunday Times). Actually, investigating the autobiographical element in Ziadah's performance poetry calls on the importance of analyzing the Palestinian diasporic literary discourse as a counter-narrative to the Zionist literary production that propagates for the Zionist claimed right for existence on a stolen Arab land.

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