

ON INDEGENEITY AND SUMUD: « PERMISSION TO NARRATE » GENOCIDE AND ECOCIDE IN TARIK DOBBS'S POEM WHERE EVERY BIRD IS A DRONE (2021)

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Abstract:

The settler's protracted endeavours of erasure and censorship in all its manifestations in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) have been but the ubiquitous nourishment of writers, poets and artists to pen their candid objections and to contrive avenues of ventilating the Palestinians' ongoing struggle. The paper peruses how the Arab American poet, Tarik Dobbs, subtly conceals multiple layers of meaning in the concrete poem, titled Poem Where Every Bird Is a Drone (2021). It attempts to decode how the poem narrates the interconnectedness of genocide and ecocide through the rich profusion of embedded interpretations within the word, "bird" and the graphic pattern, the tree. The post-structuralist analysis centres on the linguistic, sonic and visual dimensions of Dobbs's intriguing poem, which condemns the occupier's use of combat drones. The latter results in extrajudicial destruction of the Palestinians and their ancestral land and concomitantly implies the Palestinians' determination to remain on the land. It critically examines the two codes: the « bird » as a hermeneutic code and the « tree » as a cultural one, as theorised by Roland Barthes. It also relies on the notion of historical myth to decrypt the latent meanings and comprehend the semiology and rhetoric of the poem. Despite the apparent void the poem first conveys, the paper concludes that the poem is a plural text and once located in its geographical, historical, cultural and social contexts, becomes a three dimensional graphic space which forms an evocative scenario archiving genocide and ecocide and calling an entire ethnicity being obliterated for sumud in the oPt.

Keywords: Barthes's codes, ecocide, genocide, olive tree, sumud.

Introduction

Since the Nakba (1948), the Palestinians have been denied the right to narrate their experiences, history, identity and culture. Edward Said, the late Palestinian literary theorist, argues that they have been deprived of the permission to narrate their history and speak of their suffering. De facto, the Palestinian narrative has always been dismissed in Israeli history (Said, 1984, p. 31). This insinuates that nowhere in historical accounts do Israeli historians or politicians speak of the inhumanities including, inter alia, genocide and ecocide committed against the indigenous people, namely Palestinians. Thereupon, these extrajudicial practices will eventuate in an ethnic cleansing. Demonstrably, the dismissal of Palestinians from history has been imposed by fiat from the former prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir (1969), declaring that, they “did not exist historically, had no communal identity, and no national rights” (Said, 1984, p. 31). On this account, Meir alleges that Palestinians do not have the right to resist the coloniser or retaliate their attacks, as historically, they neither belong to nor own the land. In literary response to the allegations and the attempts of erasure and censorship, the Arab American poet, Tarik Dobbs, exposes readers to an unconventional and challenging pattern to decipher. Unlike traditional poetic forms, the totemic shape poem titled *Poem Where Every Bird Is a Drone* (2021), is a plural text revealing Barthesian codes and myth. It speaks in a thridimensional metalanguage to apartheid at the heart of the conflict between the settler and the Palestinians, embedding the narrative of genocide and ecocide and the discourse of sumud of a whole ethnicity being effaced.

Invariably, however, the Nakba (1948) signalises the beginning of the Palestinian narrative of social sufferings and injustices (Giacaman et al., 2010, p. 5). This event is rekindled with every new hostility and added to the political calendar. In the hope of archiving the occupier’s heinous crimes of mass displacement, land dispossession, and destruction of traditional society, retrieving the Palestinian history and identity from oblivion, and calling for the Palestinian resilience, linguistic means and even graphic patterns become a powerful weapon used in the midst of the Israel-Palestine conflict to narrate Palestine. The study is a probe into how Dobbs incorporates symbols or codes, which reveal an indigenous culture and historical myths when placed in a Palestinian space. It demonstrates how the concrete poem narrates the Israeli crimes of genocide and ecocide and concept of sumud through very few words and a shape rendering it a site of suggestions and different interpretations. It analyses the aforementioned concepts through studying the linguistic dimension of the word “bird” and the visual, cultural and historical dimensions of the shape of the tree and linking them to the Palestinian historical myth, to invoke Barthes (1972).

1. Literature Review

Most of the scholarship available on genocide literature in relation to Israel-Palestine conflict does not thoroughly analyse the connection existing between genocide and ecocide, the destruction of nonhuman nature, as interrelated consequences of war. Numerous scholars have invoked the crime of genocide and ethnic cleansing committed against the Palestinians in their writings. In literary criticism, Said (1984), in *Permission to Narrate*, cogently writes that Israel is deemed guilty of “attempted ‘ethnocide’ and ‘genocide’ of the Palestinian people” (p. 27), but these acts of aggression are either forgotten or “routinely denied in press reports” (p. 27). However, writers have attempted to document such practices in their texts but a few of them has considered the occupier’s practice of genocide as concurrently being ecocide. Though the concepts are semantically different, they do intersect. Some instances of genocide involve the deliberate destruction of the ecosystem in order to target a certain indigenous group and control territory.

In Palestinian literature, the late Palestinian poet, Mourid Barghouti (2009), chronicles in his memoir titled, *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here*, the aftermath of the Nakba and underscores the inseparability of the olive tree, as an element of the ecosystem and a significant aspect of Palestinian culture, and the Palestinian family tree, as part of ethnicity. He says,

With each olive tree uprooted by the Israeli bulldozers, a family tree of Palestinian peasants falls from the wall. The olive in Palestine is not just agricultural property. It is people’s dignity, their news bulletin,... It’s the identity card that doesn’t need stamps or photos and whose validity doesn’t expire with the death of the owner but points to him, preserves his name. (p. 10-11)

Olive trees are not mere botanical elements; they are incontrovertibly reminiscent of heritage, dignity and belongingness to the ancestral land, Palestine.

In Jewish studies, references to genocide and ethnic cleansing committed against the Palestinians are present, yet differently. In this context, Hannan Hever (2019) closely examines the Israeli poet Nathan Alterman’s poem “Al zot” (1977) which however, initially seems “to be a condemnation of the massacre, is in fact used by Alterman to bolster the prevalent hegemonic position, which portrayed the 1948 War as a just war” (p. 16). For Herver, Alterman’s poem conspicuously conceals the military’s immoral crimes during The Nakba against the Palestinians instead of incriminating the army.

In genocide studies, ecocide is separated from genocide, yet in *Ecocide Is Genocide: Decolonizing the Definition of Genocide*, Lauren J. Eichler (2020) argues, “ecocide and the genocide of Indigenous peoples are inextricably linked and are even constitutive of the same act” (p.104). She also rightly states that “The majority of genocide literature does not seriously or thoroughly analyse the

connection between genocide and the destruction of nonhuman nature, otherwise known as ecocide” (p. 107). For her, most of the studies about genocidal violence and human rights are basically anthropocentric (p. 107). Subsequent to this being stated, ecological violence remains an under-theorised subject.

Interestingly, more recent studies have emphasised the need of regarding genocide and ecocide through the same critical and incriminating lens. In *Imagining Palestine: Culture of Exile and National Identity*, Tahrir Hamdi (2023) cogently writes, “Israel’s geographical and ecological violence should be seen in tandem with its brutal psychological and physical violence against the Palestinian population” (p. 170). Accordingly, in an armed conflict area, genocide and the destruction of the environment, namely olive trees, are a systematic plan to coerce Palestinians into leaving their territory as such an egregious violation amounts to a war crime against both the land and its indigenous people.

Moreover, in discussion of *Dancing on the Tarmac*, Hannah Karau (2021), in an Interview with Tarik Dobbs, states that Dobbs declares the chapbook is based on a research in Israel and is a critique of Western empire (Karau, 2022). This declaration incites the reader/critic to consider thoughtfully the issues that the poet intends to criticise and the messages he attempts to convey through the visual images of the condemnatory concrete poems. However, Dobbs does not explain the poems or the codes they entangle; neither does he allude to the concepts of genocide and ecocide.

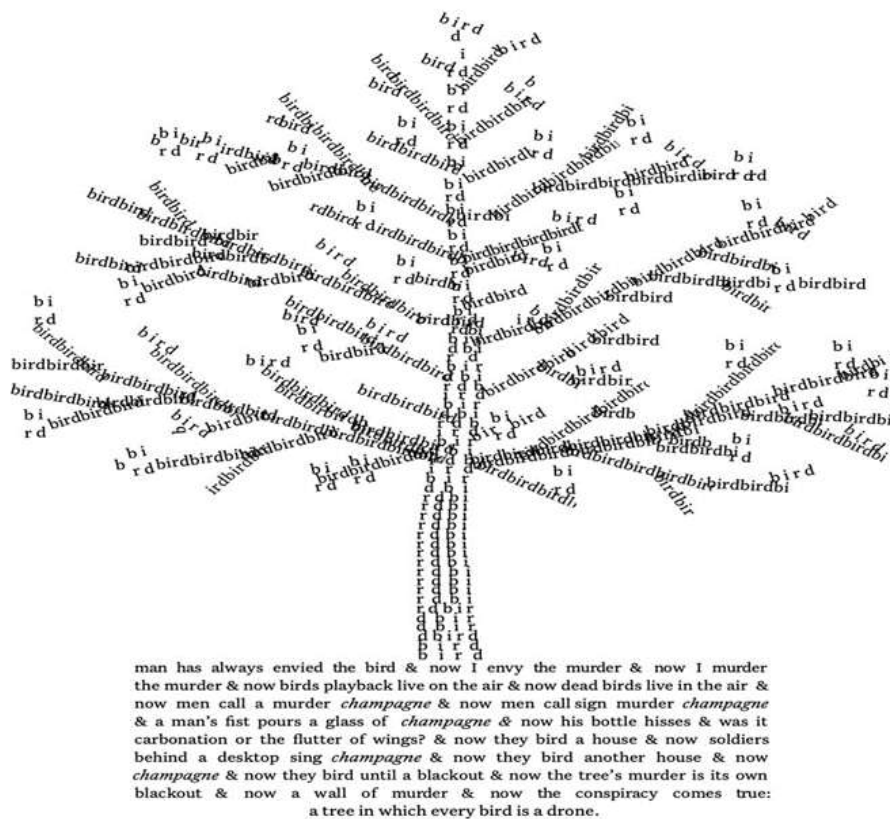
In the Israel-Palestine war, the simultaneous occurrence of the undeclared, yet evident ecological apartheid and genocide has not captured enough attention in ethnic literature. Interestingly, it is germane to mention that Dobbs’s poem has not been subject to any prior research. In addition, while the existing scholarship about the Palestinian history has been predominantly dedicated to genocide and ethnocide since the Nakba, this study attempts to offer a semiotic reading through the deconstruction of the codes embedded in the poem. It aims at linking the decrypted codes to the settler’s practice of ecocide in tandem with genocide. More precisely, it shows how Dobbs has succeeded in building a three-dimensional model, which bears the signature of Israel’s violations towards the Palestinian ethnic group and their ecosystem. Thereby, the concrete poem, titled *Poem Where Every Bird Is a Drone* (2021), forcibly seises permission to narrate genocide and ecocide in the oPt and call for resilience.

2. Case Study and Methodological Tools

The study centres on a concrete poem by the Arab American writer and text artist, Tarik Dobbs (1997-). *Poem Where Every Drone Is a Drone* belongs to the poetry chapbook, entitled *Dancing on the Tarmac* (2021), which is a winner of the 2020 Yemassee Poetry Chapbook Contest. In the collection of poems, Dobbs invites the “readers into a deeply conflicted world, one where environment and being are, at every turn, being oppressed and destroyed” (New Pages Winter, 2022). The artist covers topics including “the terrors of war, the

natural world, and humanity's very behaviour in existence" (New Pages Winter, 2022), highlighting how occupation, political violence and armed conflicts can affect both humans and the environment. In the chapbook, Dobbs writes poems with an implicit reference to Palestine; the poem, under study, drawn in the form of a tree, is the focus of this study. It is a tacit depiction of Palestinians' life and land as a war zone always threatened by drone strikes. As the poet lived and studied in Sakhnin, a city in occupied Palestine now, the Palestinians' immense physical, emotional, and psychological distress have been quotidian occurrences.

Poem *Where Every Bird Is a Drone* falls into the category of concrete poetry in which the poet conveys his intent by graphic patterns of letters, words, or symbols rather than by the meaning of words (Britannica, 2024). According to Enikő Bollobás's definition (1986), the concrete poem "turns on the identity of image and idea, where the visual image itself is the idea" (p. 280). As such, the performative nature of the concrete poem serves "as the focal point capable of uniting the claims about the poetics of visual enactment, poetry as action, poetry as ritual relying on magic, the solidity of language, and the text as a spatial configuration" (Bollobás, 1986, 279). The graphic poem then subtly commingles the image, the words, sound, and codes offering a thought-provoking historical myth. In truth, Dobbs's poem *Where Every Bird Is a Drone*, uses an embedded discourse, wherein the shaped verse displays the poet's anxieties and objections.



1. Poem Where Every Drone Is a Drone from Dancing on the Tarmac (Dobbs, 2021, p. 10)

The current analysis is a post-structuralist reading with intent to underscore the manipulation workings of the minimal linguistic units and symbolic codes, the sound effect, and the visual to contrive a concrete poem not only for contemplating but for generating a galaxy of interpretations as well. It draws on the French philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes's hermeneutic code and cultural code as explained in his seminal work *S/Z* (Barthes, 1974, p. 19-20). To understand the underlying structure of the poem, the study considers the word "bird" in tandem with the word "champagne" and the enigmatic tree to explain how they operate simultaneously and intersect in the meaning-making of the poem. The theoretical concepts provide a useful framework for scrutinising the relationship between the codes as they all correlate with history, space, culture, and the military's inhuman crimes, namely ecocide and genocide.

The analysis also draws on Barthes's concept of historical myth introduced in his influential work *Mythologies* (1972). The Barthesian myth disproves the notion of objective reality as it accentuates how cultural symbols and narratives are essential in the decoding of meaning and how they shape the individual's understanding of the world. Barthes's exploration of the myth "as a type of speech" (Barthes, 1972, p. 107), constantly offers readers new insights

into the ways in which meaning is constructed and communicated in contemporary society. Thus, objects, people, concepts can be transformed into symbols with semantic and cultural interpretations. Ergo, the shape poem under consideration, lends itself to different interpretations as it presents symbols, which can be linked to a specific geography, society and history. It, through the shape of the tree as the material of mythical speech (p. 113), criticises the settler's apartheid regime.

3. Discussion:

Dobbs artistically merges the linguistic into the sonic and the visual inviting the reader to embark on a sensory journey via a concrete poem. Dobbs incorporates nature and environment to convey a political reality about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He chooses a particular graphic pattern, a tree made up of the word "bird" and a brief text under the tree as the soil to narrate the occupiers' inhumanities against the Palestinian land and its people. To illustrate the core arguments of this research, the analysis considers two key elements: the word "bird" and the tree which are the forces that take over the poem resulting in a network of voices (Barthes, 1974, p. 20-21). Once their "metalanguage" is decoded and associated with history, space, and culture, they become tacit references to ecocide and genocide practiced in the oPt.

In contemporary Palestinian resistance poetry, nature imagery becomes a prevalent literary device used to portray the Palestinians' dependence on land and connectedness to nature. For that matter, the literary critic, Barbara McKean Parmenter (1994) observes, in her book *Giving Voice to the Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature*,

The use of place imagery in literature helps Palestinians... to maintain a sense of belonging to a particular place and milieu. But it also sends a message to the outside world by incorporating nature and the local environment into the political argument. Poets and novelists depict the microworld of rural life, for example, to emphasise the Palestinian's close link to nature and the land. This link is, in turn, a fundamental buttress of their argument for self-determination. (p. 77)

Accordingly, authors have resorted to symbolism as their best ally in an endeavour to shed light on the bond between the Palestinian people and their land for political purposes. The presence of environmental aspects in artistic works may seem, on the surface, to be politically neutral, yet the Israeli censorship is deemed partly responsible for the emergence of this "conventional symbolism", to use Parmenter's terminology (Parmenter, 1994, p. 78-79). In this vein, Dobbs's poem when first viewed, an extended metaphor of land, nature and culture is unlocked.

3.1. “Bird” as a Hermeneutic Code: What Do You Hear “Bird” or Burned?

Linguistically, the word “bird” as the main element in the drawing of the tree and as it appears in the text seems to be what the post-structuralists term as an “impasse”, yet it connotes destruction of the Palestinian land and its population. The hermeneutic code or the enigmatic code is an element that is unexplained by the author. It rather arouses curiosity (Barthes, 1974, p. 19), and creates a sense of ambiguity in the reader’s/visualiser’s mind. It is a perspective which refers to every drone strike lived in oPt (Barthes, 1974, p. 20). Taking into account the title of the poem, Dobbs invites the reader to read the poem “where every bird is a drone”. This means the reader should substitute the “bird” by a military drone or drone strikes. This is the initial and crucial hint Dobbs gives us to answer the enigma in the title and the text as well. In the sentences under the shape of the tree: “& now they bird a house & now soldier behind a desktop sign champagne & now they bird another house & now champagne & now they bird until a blackout” (Dobbs, 2021, p. 10), the use of the word “bird” is semantically wrong, yet phonetically correct when we discount the writing system. Dobbs employs homophones to hook and intrigue the reader, but clearly documents the occupier’s demeaning acts committed against the Palestinian nation. At the phonetic level of analysis, the word “bird”, when pronounced, can be confounded with the word “burned”. The “birding” sounds to be an alternative spelling of the “burning” of houses, which reveals how Palestinians are disproportionately affected by both genocide and ecocide.

As such, the word “bird” subtly embeds a latent content of burning, razing, and destroying houses thus, villages. This also entails a lack of security and peace for the inhabitants. In other more accurate words, these acts align with the crime of genocide which is “the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups,... and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups” (Lemkin, 1944, p. 79). This definition stipulates that genocide is not only the physical destruction of national groups, but also all the practices targeting the destruction of the foundations of life to historically and culturally annihilate such groups. Notwithstanding that, the definition does not patently include the destruction of the ecosystem but leaves room for it as when houses are “bird”, nature is burned. The seemingly undecipherable enigma is being step-by-step decoded. Eventually, the physical destruction of national groups coincides with their removal from their land, which is treasured in the Palestinian culture.

“Champagne” is another word that permeates the text of the poem as in the previously stated lines. It is found in the speech of the soldiers which forms “a single thematic grouping” (Barthes, 1974, p. 19), and suggests a connotative meaning. It is an allusion to genocidal violence and evidence of the military’s sinister sense of victory. Literally, “champagne” means “a white sparkling wine from Champagne in NE France” (Oxford Dictionary, 2024). In world’s culture,

champagne is a symbol associated with celebration (Oxford Dictionary, 2024). Moving this significance to a military context, champagne is a symbol of triumph and festivity after the successful accomplishment of missions. The text, mirroring the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, suggests deliberate references to the fact the IDF soldiers are ruthlessly celebrating victories after each drone strike. Champagne thus connotes the successful plans of “birding” Palestinian houses as the IDF soldiers “behind a desktop sign champagne” (Dobbs, 2012, p. 10); they drink happiness for extirpating entire villages, and exterminating the Palestinian people and their ecosystem. It seems that Dobbs is trying to impart how the soldiers destroy the land and nature with a criminal sense of victory as they are inflicting violence and murder upon non-combatants.

Without directly telling the reader that the Palestinian houses are being burned, the text under the tree hints at the eventual destruction of villages. Dobbs provides us with a tragic scenario in which the protagonist/tree is being obliterated. This code has operated on the level of the reader’s knowledge and understanding of metaphorical language. To illustrate further, the Israeli historian Benny Morris (2003) cogently writes that Israeli soldiers were authorised to clear the populace out of certain villages and urban districts and if military need be, they raze them (p. 256). Throughout history, the coloniser has never explicitly declared the apartheid policies used, in all their forms, to subject the colonised to daily oppression. Since 1967, apartheid, as an institutionalised regime of oppression and domination, has been established in oPt to control the Palestinians’ lives and prevent them from exercising their basic human rights (Amnesty International, 2022).

Hence, unlike traditional poetic forms, Dobbs’s shape poem introduce readers to a more challenging pattern to decode. The poem narrates the story of genocide, ecocide and terror, and goes beyond the limitations of the text to condemn the coloniser. Birds/drones, as Dobbs invites the reader to substitute the word bird by the word drone, are but mere representations of death and destruction. He also draws the reader’s or rather the visualiser’s attention to war injustices; he questions the legitimacy of the use of advanced technology in war zones and discloses how the Israeli armed forces outweigh the Palestinians’ in every measure. However, the enigma is only partially resolved as deciphering the hermeneutic code in the title and the text is not sufficient when dealing with a concrete poem. Considering the sonic element, the visualiser becomes more intrigued when hearing the poem being performed.

Intrinsically, human beings tend to communicate using words and sentences, which carry meaning. According to Barthes, connotations associated with a signified open the door to polysemy of texts (Barthes, 1974, p 8). When contextualised, the sign, word or image involves the cultural, historical, social and ideological associations shared with certain members belonging to the same (Barthes, 1972). Therefore, connotations establish a fictive dialogue between the author and the reader. After replacing the word “bird” by the word drone, the

first enigmatic code has been deciphered as a narration of how the drone strikes lead to the extermination of people and their environment. In the text, this substitution has resulted in a meaningful action, yet when the poem is being performed, the produced sounds of the repeated word “bird”, intrigue the listener.

De facto, whether weaponised or not, drones operate as a form of psychological pain and constant fear for the people living under them on a daily basis. Dobbs conceals another meaning beneath the word “bird”, which represents a quotidian terror lived by the Palestinians. In the absence of sound, the particularities of the language, action and code used by Dobbs are not clear enough to establish links between terror, birds and drones in the tree. As concrete poems are called “verbiocovisual expressions” and intended to be multi-sensory experiences (Britannica, 2024), Dobbs has taken it further by performing the poem with the word “bird” to mimic the traumatising sound of the drone warfare. A sort of onomatopoeia is created when Dobbs and others collectively and rapidly pronounce the word “bird”, another sensory experience is lived and a substantial amount is added to its effect. The produced sound is annoying, distressing, or rather traumatising.

“Bird” is then a reference not only to destruction, genocide and ecocide, but also to a daily terror experienced by the living. The sonic element, in the poem, becomes very crucial, especially when pairing visual poems with audio recordings. The sound of the unremittingly flying drones represents a horrifying noise and an omen of an imminent danger and death. In this regard, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (2023) documents and condemns “Israel’s almost daily use of drones over Gaza... their loud and irritating sound create [sic] a constant state of panic and anxiety among more than two million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip”. Extrajudicial killings, evacuation and forced displacement, and destruction of homes and land are all being recalled when hearing the drones hovering overhead. The word “bird”/drone and performance, when organised in meaningful relationships, they unearth the Palestinian collective sense of constantly lived insecurity, anxiety and terror.

3.2. The Cultural Code: the Tree as a Historical Myth Born in Palestine

The poem linguistically and acoustically narrates a non-fictional story with all its main elements including, the setting, the main characters and the conflict. As for the setting and conflict, they have both been revealed from the onset of the study; the reader is placed in oPt where the tragedy began in 1948 and continues until now. As regards the main characters, the apparent antagonist is the “bird”, the occupiers’ drones, which seeks to “bird/burn” the “tree”, the occupied land, which is a symbol of resistance with a cultural value. Notwithstanding the decoded voices, the visualiser is still intrigued by the graphic pattern, the tree, which undoubtedly refers a cultural code. Dobbs sets another code before the reader. The reader is exposed to a symbolic nature imagery, which is, in Barthes’s words (1972), a historical myth telling the story

of a hero tree being assaulted by a villain bird through the delineation of the Palestinian narrative of ecocide and genocide anew.

Whereas outwardly, the poem presents a simple image of a tree, the ideogram reveals that it is fraught with meanings arising from the settler's regime of apartheid in oPt. Dobbs aims to address the viewer's conscience by means of different sorts of associations and expressions. His poem is patterned in the shape to resemble a tree, which, in turn, depicts the subject matter, ecocide and genocide. Demonstrably, the elements of the poem, the bird and the tree, "are linked by associative relations" (Barthes, 1972, p. 120). In the field of cultural studies and semiotics, various cultural symbols embed several distinct hidden meanings and ideologies. The tree, in Palestinian literature, is the olive tree, a myth of Palestine, identity, culture, and its people's steadfastness.

In consideration of the graphic pattern, now, the birds/drones are perching on the tree. Following Dobbs's guidance in the title of the poem per se, every "bird" is a warfare drone befalling on the tree, the Palestinians' "beloved olive tree" (Tahrir, 2023, p. 68). Parmenter states, "The olive tree is a convenient means of signifying Palestine without using the actual world" (Parmenter, 1994, p. 79). In view of this, the "bird" or drone strikes are thus at the service of the Zionists' undeclared agenda of ceaseless land dispossessions, uprooting of Palestinian olive trees, and extermination of a national group.

Claiming that the poem is a narration of Palestine and the tree is a direct reference to the people's resilience without sufficient evidence can be problematic and invalidate the conclusions of the analysis. However, in an interview with Dobbs, intrigued by the reasons behind writing *Dancing on Tarmac*, Hannah Karau inquires about what has inspired Dobbs to produce such chapbook. The artist elucidates that while studying abroad in "Sakhnin, which is in historic Palestine, a city in what's now Israel territory" (Karau, 2022), the research project has primarily aimed at investigating the inequalities and injustices in the "Israel-Arab" education system. Dobbs clearly states that "The manuscript opens and closes with these images of: first, with a view of an Israeli settlement in the West Bank, and then it closes with the image of a parade in Gaza, where a child is holding up a settlement model" (Karau, 2022). This is a clear declaration that the chapbook has a political subject matter and narrates Palestine, the land and its people.

To a certain extent, the poet's biography can persuade the reader of the possibility of linking the poem in general and the tree in particular to Palestine. However, to explore the metaphorical usage of the tree, it is imperative to revise some language-specific cultural models. Visually, the poem, at first, seems to be empty and indecipherable; however, when the analysis moves "from the linguistic sign to the mythical signifier" (Barthes, 1972, p. 116), the poem becomes equipped with meaning which contains a whole system of values including history and geography (p. 116). The materials of the myth of the tree, be it pictorial or written, "presuppose a signifying consciousness" (p. 108).

In *A Dictionary of Symbols*, the symbolism of the tree, in a general sense, “denotes the life of the cosmos: its consistence, growth, proliferation, generative and regenerative processes. It stands for inexhaustible life, and is therefore equivalent to a symbol of immortality” (Cirlot, 1971, p. 347). However, in an effort to reach another layer of meaning, this symbol should be historically, spatially, socially and culturally studied to unravel and comprehend the myth it conveys. On this account, Barthes define myth as “a mode of signification, a form” (Barthes, 1972, p. 107), to which we should assign “historical limits, conditions of use, and reintroduce society into it” (p. 107). He adds that “myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of things” (p. 108). Thereupon, it is substantial to place the myth of the olive tree in the Palestinian space in order to decode it as the literal meaning of the “tree” in the concrete poem is “deformed” by the presence of myth (p. 121). Following Barthes’s line of thought, “the meaning of the myth... belongs to a history, that of the” (p. 116), Palestinian and occupier’s apartheid. Conclusively, the tree, in a Palestinian context, symbolises rootedness and survival.

The Palestine’s national poet, Mahmoud Darwish (1994), echoes the idea of survival, steadfastness and rootedness, which are cognate with the general idea of immortality, through the olive tree. In his poetry collection *Olive Leaf*, he writes that despite the soldiers attempt to besiege and uproot the olive tree with bulldozers, “Olive is an evergreen tree; Olive will stay evergreen; Like a shield for the universe” (Drawish, 1989. p. 40). As the morphology of olive trees enables them to protect themselves and keep their leaves green, Palestinians are able to resist occupation. In a scientific context, olive trees have an effectively “internal defence mechanism” and “can also withstand intense internal water deficit” (Tangu, 2014, p. 900). This symbolic code and its power of being a drought-tolerant tree can be likened to the Palestinian people’s ability to survive difficult conditions, namely to resist the Israeli rule.

The existence of myth completes meaning, “it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions” (Barthes, 1972, p. 116). The interpretation of myths can be achieved through placing it in a specific space, history and society. As indubitably, all human beings’ subsistence is contingent on nature; Palestinian people have always depended on the land for their survival. Relevant to this context, Hamdi elaborates on the concept of the olive tree in Palestinian literature and culture. She asseverates that the Palestinian life depends on the olive tree (Hamdi, 2023, p. 166), which has been routinely the main target of the settlers. Uprooting the trees becomes their undeclared practice to denude families of their land, living, and life.

3.3. The Olive Tree Paving the Way for a Thirdspace Sumud

As “there is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely” (Barthes, 1957, p. 119), Barthes’s metalanguage vehicles the myth of the olive tree which paves the way for the

discourse of sumud and voicing the Palestinian Cause challenging occupation. Sumud, translated as resilience, is a cultural and national concept and a political strategy that the olive tree alludes to. The historical and mythical tree as a cultural code, which is, in this context, a body of knowledge with a historical reference (Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 20). This referential code suggests a deeper layer of meaning or rather a collective consciousness, which is the necessity of sumud. The latter is a national Palestinian concept, which “carries the meaning of a strong determination to stay in the country and on the land” (Rijke & Teeffelen, 2014, p. 86). It is regarded as a Palestinian cultural, ideological and political value. It is the persistent desire to struggle for and cling to the land. Thus, “The olive tree with its deep roots in the land” (p. 87), has become a widely used metaphor alluding to the discourse of sumud. The discourse of Sumud is born in Edward Soja’s Thirdspace as it relates historicity, spatiality and sociality (Soja, 1996), wherein Palestine, the crimes of genocide and ecocide are narrated.

The myth behind the incorporation of the olive tree, as a cultural and historical value for Palestinians, in the concrete poem including, rootedness, resistance, survival, resilience, nationalism and sumud all contribute in the “deformation” (Barthes, 1972, p. 121), of the linguistic meaning of the word/image “tree”. It is here that the myth is born weaving the threads of geography, history and culture. This conceptual formulation echoes Soja’s notion of the Thirdspace (1996) wherein “everything comes together... subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable... everyday life and unending history” (p. 57). The concrete poem reimagines the reality of Palestine in modern war practices and claims a renegotiation of poetic, linguistic, visual, cultural and historical boundaries. The Thirdspace is born out of “the rebalanced trialectics of spatiality–historicity–sociality” (p. 57). That is to say, the historical and spatial contexts of the Nakba, marginalisation, oppression, apartheid, genocide and ecocide define sociality in the “lived space” (p. 10). Dobbs’s poem contrives a Thirdspace in which the discourse of sumud is being negotiated.

And “now the conspiracy comes true: a tree in which every bird is a drone” (Dobbs, 2021, p. 10). After analysing the voices and decoding the historical myth, the reader/visualiser may apprehend that the visual is a “brute reality” in a concrete poem (Bernstein, 2001, p. 125), as the objects, the “bird” and the tree, within their mythical and historical framework seem “to make a claim to exist outside of language, silent exemplars of physical fact” (p. 125). The semiotic analysis, considering the visual, verbal and sonic elements, unravels the unpalatable reality of occupation and its undeclared genocide and ecocide through commingling history, geography, culture and society to comment on the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Conclusion

Arab American poets have very often narrated the story of Palestinian genocide and ecocide in their works. Dobbs's shape poem opens wounds and opens the gate for the plurality of meaning through Barthes's hermeneutic and cultural codes. It is simultaneously a historical account archiving the occupier's atrocities and a testament of the Palestinians' unwavering sumud. On the one hand, the poem draws the world's attention to the silenced and suffering people in warzones in general and the Palestinians' in particular as it embeds several arrays of meanings. In essence, the word "bird" condemns the settler's crimes of genocide and ecocide against the Palestinian people. It is also a portrayal to the daily-lived terror caused by, whether armed or not, drone warfare. In other words, it is an allusion to the quotidian ghost of death affrighting the Palestinians' lives as the sound of the word "bird", when performing the poem, incarnates the traumatising effect of the drone in the sky of Palestine and the psychological terror Palestinians' are subject to.

As for the graphic pattern, the tree, Dobbs attempts as well a more subtle representation of the settler's undeclared ecological apartheid as the poem amalgamates the traumatising sound of the military drone apparatus with genocide and ecocide in the oPt. Taking into consideration the ecological dimensions of the visual poem, the destruction of the olive tree, as a fundamental element in the Palestinian ecosystem and a national and historical myth, connote the extermination of the Palestinian people and their land. Interestingly, Dobbs has succeeded in illustrating political tensions and in building a model, which bears the signature of the coloniser's extrajudicial activities of genocide and ecocide. Both metaphors, the bird and the tree, are reminders of the settler's intentions of the complete eradication of Palestinian land and its people, namely ecocide and genocide. Dobbs's poem becomes a spatial configuration wherein the voice of oppressed Palestinians is perceived and heard. It is a reminder of a people that have not known respite from suffering for decades.

Through the multivoiced concrete poem, Dobbs demonstrates that inevitable yet significant environmental degradations including deforestation and destruction of ecosystems ensue from wars and military operations. Considering the analysed codes, the poem is eventually a critique of the war practices during the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; the "birding" of houses and olive trees amount to apartheid and become the material of mythical speech. The poem is, on the one hand, an attestation of the settler's crimes of genocide and ecocide in oPt and on the other hand, a representation of the Palestinians' rootedness and Thirdspace sumud. It even seems to mirror Dobbs's awareness and anxiety about the effects of modern war practices and man's cruelty towards man and environment.

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