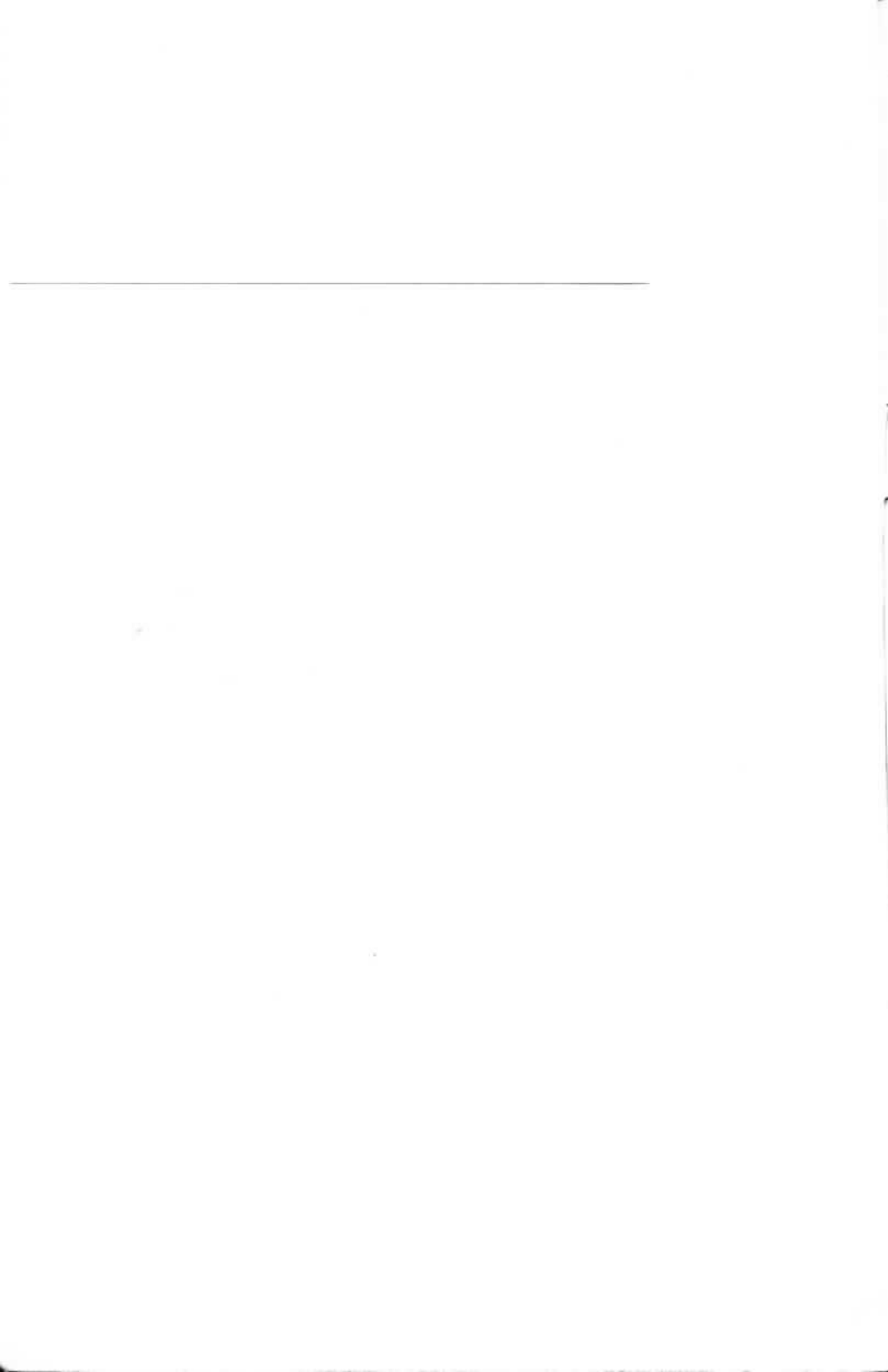


THEY CLAIM
THERE IS
NO RESISTANCE





Introducing

THEY CLAIM THERE IS NO RESISTANCE

Poetry can seldom be translated without losing much of its originality and impact. This is certainly true for this selection of poems translated from Arabic and composed by Palestinian Arab poets who have endured the yoke of Israeli, Zionist occupation of their homeland for over 20 years.

Most of these Palestinian Arab poets now living under Israeli occupation were caught up in the tragedy of their usurped country in their childhood or adolescence.

They have been dubbed as "Israeli Arabs" who have learned to accept Israel as a fact. Their poems refute the claim particularly that each line was a warrant for imprisonment. The anguish, hope and prophecy expressed in their verses is sufficient proof that the struggle for the liberation of Palestine, from within and beyond, has never stopped.

THE IMPOSSIBLE

Tawfeeq Zeyad

It is much easier for you
To pass an elephant through a needle's eye
Or catch fried fish in galaxy,
Plough the sea,
Or humanize a crocodile,
Than to destroy by persecution
The shimmering glow of a belief
Or check our march
One single step.

As if we were a thousand prodigies
Spreading everywhere
In Lidda
In Ramlah
In the Galilee.

Here we shall stay,
A wall upon your breast,
And in your throat we shall stick
A piece of glass,
A cactus thorn,
And in your eye
A blazing fire.
Here we shall stay,
A wall upon your breast,
Cleaning dishes in your bars,
Filling cups for your masters,
Sweeping your sooty kitchens,
To snatch a bite from your blue fangs
For our hungry children.
Here we shall stay,
A wall upon your breast,
Facing starvation,
Struggling with rags,
Defying,
Singing our songs,

Swarming the streets with our wrath,
Filling your dungeons with pride,
Rearing vengeance in new generations.
Like a thousand prodigies
We roam along
In Lidda,
In Ramlah,
In the Galilee.

Here we shall stay
Go then and drink the sea.
Here we shall stay
Unblinking sentinels on our earth and trees.
Here we shall stay
To ferment our cause as yeast does dough.
Here we shall stay with ice-cold nerves,
Red hell in our nerves and hearts.
We squeeze the rock to quench our thirst
And lull starvation with dust,
But we shall not depart.
Here we shall spill our dearest blood.
Here we have
A past
A future
Here we are the unconquerable.
So strike deep, strike deep,
My roots.

Nazareth (Sept. 1965)

LOVER FROM PALESTINE

Mahmood Darweesh

A thorn in the heart are your eyes,
Lacerating, yet adorable.
I shield it from the storm
And pierce it deep through night and pain,
The wound illuminates thousands of stars,
Transforms my present into a future
Dearer than my being

And I forget as our eyes meet
That once we were twins behind the gate.

Your words were my song:
I tried to sing again
But winter had settled on the rosy lip.

The sparrow flew.
My doors and wintry threshold followed behind,
Our mirrors broke, sorrows embraced,
We collected the splinters of sound
We only learnt how to lament the fatherland.

We shall plant it together
Over the breast of a guitar
Play it on weeping roofs
To distorted moons and stones,
But I forgot, dear forlorn, was it your parting
Or my broken voice that rusted the guitar.

I saw you last on the quay,
A lonely voyager without a bag,
I ran to you like an orphan searching
For an answer among ancestral wisdom:
How could an orchard be banished to a quay
And yet remain as ever green.

I wrote down:
I stood on the quay,
The wind was pouring,
We only had the peel of the orange,
Behind us stretched the endless sand.

I saw you on the thorny peaks,
A sheepless shepherd running a chase
And in the ruins where once you were the green branch
I stood a stranger knocking the gates,
The gates, the windows and cemented stones
Reverberated.

I saw you in fathomless wells
I saw you in graneries, a broken face,
I saw you in night cafés washing dishes
I saw you at the mouth of a cave
Hanging your orphan's rags,
I saw you in chimneys, in the streets,
In cattle folds, in blood dripping
From the sun,
In the salt of the sea
In every grain of sand
And yet you were as beautiful as Earth.

I swear
From eyelashes I shall weave a kerchief for you
With words sweeter than a honeycomb,
Palestinian you are
And so will you remain.

I flung the doors wide open to the storm
And saw the bronzy moon,
I turned to backstreets where light was dead.

Virgin mate, faithful wheat,
We shall pierce the air with our songs
And plant fertility in dormant seeds,
And you will always be
The braided palmtree of the heart
Unbending to storm, heedless of the cutter's blows
Beyond the fangs of wolves.

Palestinian are your eyes, your tattoo,
Palestinian is your name,
Palestinian your thought, your clothes,
Your feet, your form,
Palestinian the words,
Palestinian the voice,
Palestinian you live,
Palestinian you will die.

I hold you in my books
The fire of my songs,
And in your name my cry reverberates:
I once met the Roman horses
And once destroyed the big idols:
Hooves and stones, beware,
The thunderbolt has stamped the flint.
Let maggots eat my flesh:
Ants cannot breed eagles
And snakes hatch only snakes.

(May 1966)

THE EXILE

Salem Jubran

The sun walks through the border,
Guns keep silent,
A skylark starts its morning song
In Tulkarem
And flies away to sup
With the birds of the kibbutz;
A lonely donkey strolls
Across the firing line
Unheeded by the watchful squads,
But for me, your ousted son, my native land,
Between your skies and my eyes
A stretch of border-walls
Blackens the view.

1965

SAFAD

Salem Jubran

A stranger am I, Safad,
And you, a stranger too:
The houses smile at me
But their dwellers

Drive me out.
Why are you roving,
O Arab, why
Will nobody answer your salute?
Your kin had once been here
But they took flight.
I carry requiems between my lips,
And in my eyes
The lion's humiliation.
Dear Safad,
Adieu.
Adieu.

1965

MOTHER

Salem Jubran

Curse my mother.
She gave her breast to a foreigner
Who feeds upon her
And I remain hungry.
Cursed is she,
Who gave my bed to a foreigner,
And I cannot sleep
Because I shiver.
Cursed is she,
She gave her heart to a foreigner
And kept me out,
A loveless fugitive.
Curse my mother,
Curse her,
Curse all women.

1965

REPORT OF A BANKRUPT

Sameeh Al-Qassem

If I have to forfeit my bread,
If I have to hawk my shirt and bed,

If I have to work a stone cutter
Or porter
Or sweeper,
If I have to clean your warehouses,
Or rummage in dung for food,
Or starve
And subside,
Enemy of man,
I shall not compromise
And to the end
I shall fight.

Go and filch the final strip of my land,
Ditch my youth in prisonholes,
Plunder my legacy,
Burn my books,
Feed your dogs in my dishes.
Go and spread your net of terror
Upon the roofs of my village,
Enemy of man,
I shall not compromise
And to the end
I shall fight.

If you blow out all the candles in my eyes,
If you freeze all the kisses on lips,
If you fill my native air with lisping curses,
Or silence my anguish,
Forge my coin,
Uproot the smile from my children's faces.
If you raise a thousand walls,
And nail my eyes to humiliation,
Enemy of man,
I shall not compromise
And to the end
I shall fight.

Enemy of man,
The signals are raised at the ports,
The air is thronged with beckonings,

I see them everywhere.
I see the sails at the horizon
Striving,
Defying,
The sails of Ulysses are veering home
From the seas of the lost,
The sun is rising
Man is advancing,
And for his sake,
I swear
I shall not compromise
And to the end
I shall fight
I SHALL FIGHT.

1964

THE REACTION

Mahmood Darweesh

Dear homeland.
My chains breed within me
The rigour of the eagle
And the tenderness of the optimist.
I did not know that behind the skin,
Our skin,
Storms could loom
And rivulets wed.
They shut me in a dark cell,
My heart glowed with sunny torches.
They wrote my number on the walls,
The walls transformed to green pastures,
They drew the face of my executioner,
The face was soon dispersed
With luminous braids.
I carved your map with my teeth
Upon the walls
And wrote the song of fleeting night.

I hurled defeat to obscurity
And plunged my hands
In rays of light.
They conquered nothing,
Nothing,
They only kindled earthquakes.
They only see the glow of foreheads
And hear the rattle of chains.
And if I die
Upon the cross of my cause
I am a saint,
I am a struggler.

1967

THE OLIVE TREE

Tawfeeq Zayad

Because I do not knit wool,*
Because I am always hunted
And my house is always raided,
Because I cannot own a piece of paper,
I shall carve my memoirs
On the homeyard olive tree.

I shall carve bitter reflections,
Scenes of love and of yearning
For my stolen orange grove
And the lost tombs of my dead.

I shall carve all my strivings
For the sake of remembrance,
For the time when I shall drown them
In the avalanche of triumph.

(*) Reference is made to Madame Lafarge who used to knit the names of traitors for French Revolutionaries.

I shall carve the serial number
Of every stolen piece of land,
The spot of my village on the map
And the houses
And the trees
And all the wild blooms
That are blown up
Or uprooted.

I shall carve the names
Of all connoisseurs in torture,
The names of their prisons,
The trade-marks of their chains,
The archives of the jailors
And the maledictions.

I shall carve dedications,
To memories threading to eternity,
To the sanguine soil of Dair Yasin
And Kufur Qasem.

I shall carve on top of all
The intense heights of the tragedy,
The pounding and the bitter strife
Which I bear
Up the ladder of grief
To the peak.

I shall carve the sun's beckonings
And the moon's whisperings
And what a skylark recalls
At a love-deserted well.

For the sake of remembrance,
For the sake of all
And every thing
I shall continue to carve
On the homeyard olive tree.

KERCHIEFS

Mahmood Darweesh

Like the tombs of martyrs is your silence,
Flowing, outstretching.
Now I remember how your hands
Used to hover upon my heart
As a bird.
Do not worry, my love,
About the labour of lightning,
Leave it for the gloomy horizons
But train yourself for other thoughts:
Thoughts of bloody kisses
And days of drought
And death, my death
And all the woes of mourning.

Our farewell kerchiefs
Are but shrouds,
And as the wind blows in the cinders
Blood gushes in the deep valleys
And yearning weeps
In the sails of Sinbad
Upon the call of a certain voice.

Return to me, my love,
The kerchief sighs of our parting,
Return them a call of a lute
Not parting sighs.
Our reunion in joy is a promise
Growing and growing in my exile.
And do not cry at repeated death,
I have nothing except your eyes
And do not wear our parting kerchiefs
As souvenirs of love songs,
But rather wrap with them, my love,
A wound in my homeland.

TO CHRIST

Fadwa Tuqan

Lord, father of universe,
Jerusalem's feasts are crucified
This year.

On your day,
All the bells. O Lord
Are silent!
They rang
And rang
For two thousand years
But now
They are dumbfounded.

The domes are black,
Blackness overwhelms all.
Jerusalem walks
On the path of agony,
Jerusalem groans
On the cross,
Jerusalem bleeds
On the hands of torture!

And the world is shut
My Lord
Against the agony,
The world is adamant,
The sun's eye is gouged,
The world is lost and torn!

The world, my Lord,
Hasn't raised a single candle
Hasn't shed a single tear
To wash away
Jerusalem's grief.

The vinedressers, my Lord,
Killed the heir

And the bird of sin
Fledged in the world of sin
And flew
To smear Jerusalem's chastity.

O Lord, Jerusalem's glory,
Out from the well of agony
Out from the deep recesses of night
Out from the darkest folds of grief
Jerusalem's groaning

Comes to you.
Mercy, Lord,
Mercy on Jerusalem,
Spare her this chalice.

1968

ANTIGONE

Sameeh Al-Qassem

One,
Two,
Three,
Forward,
Forward,
Victim of wreckless gods,
Immolation ram
In the lustful altars
Of this black age.

One,
Two,
Three,
My hand is in your hand,
We cross together
Demoniac paths.
Your eyes, my father, are still bright,
Your feet are firm in earth.

Go on
And fling away sorrows unmatched
In man's long strife,
And let's create
Our new dawns.

The sling of arrows
Has gouged your eyes.
Nevertheless, father,
I am your night lamp,
I feed on the oil of faith
And fill your hands
With ceaseless light.

And I'll restore to you,
I swear I shall,
The pirate's loot,
I swear
In God,
In Man,
I swear I shall.

One,
Two,
Three,
Forward,
Forward.

THE FLOOD AND THE TREE

Fadwa Tuqan

When satanic hurricanes broke loose,
When the black flood was vomited
From barbarous shores
Upon the green good earth
Satan bellowed through the air:
The tree was felled,

The tree has fallen,
The glorious trunk is wrecked
By the hurricane,
The tree is dead.

Tree, tree,
Can you die?
Red rivulets asked.
Your roots, dear tree,
Are flushed with wine
Brewed from young limbs.
Arabian roots, dear tree,
Never die,
They stretch deep
Beyond rock
And feel their way
In deep earth.

Tree, tree,
You will grow,
Your leaves will burst
So green and lush
Under the sun.
Laughter will ring
Among the leaves
Up to the sun.
The larks will veer
Homeward.
Homeward.
Homeward.

Nablus (Sept. 1967)

LETTER FROM EXILE

Mahmood Darweesh

Greetings and a kiss, my beloved,
Words are futile,

How to begin
And where to end
The wheel of time keeps rolling.

I am cold,
I am lonely,
I only have a crust of bread,
A bunch of love and a note-book
Which shares with me my heart's burden
And holds the flow of my grudge.

How to begin
And all that is said
Or will be said
Cannot end with an embrace
Or the touch of a hand,
Nor can it bring the fugitive home
Or fledge the wing of a forlorn bird.

How to begin:
Greetings, a kiss
And then what?

I say to the radio,
Radio, tell her
I am all right.
I say to the sparrow,
If you went there,
Dear sparrow,
Do not forget
To say I am all right,
All right.
I can still see things,
The moon still shines,
I wear my old shirt,
Its sleeves are torn
But I patched them.
It is all right.

And I have grown into a man,
Imagine me,
I am now a man of twenty,
And I am like all men, mother,
I encounter life,
I carry the burden as men do,
I work at a restaurant,
I wash dishes,
I make coffee to customers,
I fix smiles to please customers.
And like all men, mother,
All men of twenty,
I smoke,
I lean against walls
And sigh for pretty girls.

A friend once asked me:
Do you have a loaf?
I am hungry, he said.
Ah mother,
What's a man for
If he sleeps hungry every night?

I heard on the radio
The greetings of fugitives one to the other,
Everybody said:
We are all right,
Nobody is sad.
Tell me, mother,
Does father still pray and drink
And love children and olive trees?
And my brothers,
Are they now employees?
I heard my father once say
They must all become teachers,
I starve to buy a book for them.
Nobody reads a book in my village, mother.
And my little sister,
Has she grown into a young woman and receives letters?

And does grandmother still
Squat near the sunny gate
To give her blessings right and left?
And the old house,
And the smooth threshold,
And the stove and the wide doors...

I heard on the radio
Messages from fugitives one to the other,
They all say they are all right,
But dear mother,
I am sad,
I am haunted by bad thoughts;
The radio brought me no news from any of you,
Not even sad news.

(Haifa 1964)

FOR EVER PALESTINE

Fadwa Tuqan

Great,
Great country,
The millstone may turn
And turn
In the dim nights of agony,
But they cannot
And are too small
To destroy your light.

For out of your trodden hopes
Out of your crucified growth.
Out of your stolen smiles,
Your children's smiles,
Out of the wreckage,
And the torture,
Out of the blood-clotted walls,
Out of the quiverings
Of life and death,
Life will emerge.

O great land,
O deep wound
And sole love.

Nablus (Sept. 1967)

INVESTIGATION

Mahmood Darweesh

Write down,
I am an Arab,
My card number is 50,000
I have eight children
The ninth will come next summer.
Are you angry?

Write down,
I am an Arab,
I cut stone with comrade labourers,
I squeeze the rock
To get a loaf,
To get a book
For my eight children.
But I do not plead charity
And I do not cringe
Under your sway.
Are you angry?

Write down,
I am an Arab,
I am a name without a title,
Steadfast in a frenzied world.

My roots sink deep
Beyond the ages,
Beyond time.

I am the son of the plough,
Of humble peasant stock.

I live in a hut
From reed and stalk.
The hair: Jet black.
The eyes: Brown.
My Arab headdress
Scratches intruding hands,
And I prefer a dip of oil and thyme.

And please write down
On top of all,
I hate nobody,
I rob nobody,
But when I starve
I eat the flesh of my marauders.
Beware,
Beware my hunger,
Beware my wrath.

(Haifa 1964)

LETTER FROM PRISON

Sameeh Al-Qassem

Mother,
It pains me, mother,
That you burst in tears
When friends knock
Asking about me.

But I believe, mother,
That the splendour of life
Is born in my prison,
And I believe that
My final visitor
Will not be
An eyeless bat.

It must be the day.
It must be the day.

THIS WORLD

MUEEN BSAYSO

In brief, Fateh,
A bullet shattered the still of the night.
Blood spurted.
Our blood gushed out.
We recognized the color of blood.

They made us forget the color of blood.
They made us doubt
If veins carried water or blood.

Yet all colors had remained familiar:
The color of the eyes of passport officials,
The color of money,
The color of the Black List...
All were familiar,
Except the color of blood.

But now that blood has poured forth,
It has ploughed our path.

Let's bleed, Fateh,
For we shall succumb
If we were to treat the wound.
Let our blood taint the world's window panes.
Let it taint the face of the world,
This world.
Let us plant a dynamite stick
Under the pillow of the world
As long as on barbed wire, Fateh, we rest.

This world shall not rest on a bed.
This world has, for long, eaten
The flesh of Palestine
With a fork and a knife.
The ears of the world,
The eyes of the world,
The heart of the world,
The throat of the world,
Are boiled apples,
Stolen apples,
In the fruit basket of the occupiers.

Woman of the world:
Our blood taints the doll of your child.
Our blood shadows your steps.
Be with us now!
Man of the world:
Be with us now!

Men and women of the world:
Be with us now!
Black, White, Red, Yellow
Races of the world:
Be with us now...
For we shall give you the dignity of Man,
The birth-certificate of Man
And the name of Man.

RESIST

MUEEN BSAYSO

They slapped down a paper
And a pen before my nose.
In my hand, they thrust
The key to my house.

The paper they wanted me to blemish
Said: RESIST.

The pen they wanted me to disgrace
Said: RESIST.

The key to my house
Said: In the name of every stone
In your tiny house, RESIST.

A tap on the wall,
A massage across the wall
From a mutilated hand
Intimated: RESIST.

Every drop of rain
Dribbling over the ceiling
Of the torture room
Screached: RESIST.

