

The Voice of the Displaced: Harun Hashim al-Rashid and the Poetics of Palestinian Resilience

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Abstract

Palestinian resistance literature stands as one of the most emotionally powerful literary traditions in modern Arabic literature. Among its most prominent figures, Harun Hashim al-Rashid occupies a central place as a poetic chronicler of displacement, exile, and resilience. Often referred to as the "Poet of the Nakba" and the "Poet of Return," his works capture the psychological and cultural trauma of Palestinian displacement while simultaneously affirming hope and national identity. This study explores the thematic dimensions of resilience, exile, resistance, and collective memory in al-Rashid's poetry. By analyzing major works such as *Al-Ghuraba (The Strangers)* (1954), *Gaza in the Line of Fire* (1957), and *The Rebellion of Stone* (1988), this research highlights how poetry becomes a cultural instrument of resistance and historical preservation. The paper concludes that al-Rashid's poetry transforms grief into resistance and memory into cultural survival.

Keywords: Palestinian literature, exile, Nakba, resistance poetry, identity, resilience, Arabic poetry

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I. Introduction

Modern Arabic literature reflects the political and cultural transformations of the Arab world, particularly the Palestinian experience of displacement and resistance. The poetry of Harun Hashim al-Rashid occupies a significant position within Palestinian resistance literature, where poetry functions as a tool of survival, remembrance, and political expression.

Born in Gaza in 1927, al-Rashid experienced the catastrophic displacement of Palestinians during the Nakba, an event that forced hundreds of thousands from their homes. His early experiences in refugee camps shaped his poetic voice, transforming personal trauma into collective memory. Unlike many poets who expressed despair, al-Rashid's poetry consistently projected hope and determination. His famous motif, "Sanarji'u" (We Will Return), symbolized not merely a political aspiration but a cultural promise. His works were later adapted into songs performed by celebrated artists such as Fairuz, making his poetry accessible to a broader Arab audience.

This research paper explores how al-Rashid's poetry articulates resilience, memory, and resistance, positioning poetry as both artistic expression and national testimony.

II. Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this research are:

- To examine the thematic representation of displacement and exile in the poetry of Harun Hashim al-Rashid.
- To analyze the role of poetry as a tool of resistance in Palestinian literature.
- To study the symbolism of return and homeland in his poetic works.
- To explore the representation of resilience and hope in refugee narratives.
- To evaluate the relevance of al-Rashid's poetry in contemporary socio-political contexts.

III. Research Questions

- How does Harun Hashim al-Rashid portray displacement and exile in his poetry?
- What literary techniques does he use to represent resilience?
- How does the concept of "Return" function as a recurring motif?
- In what ways does his poetry contribute to Palestinian national identity?

IV. Literature Review

Scholars of Palestinian literature have consistently recognized poetry as a central medium of resistance and national identity formation. The works of poets such as Mahmoud Darwish and Samih al-Qasim have been widely studied, yet the contributions of Harun Hashim al-Rashid require deeper thematic exploration.

Key Scholarly Perspectives		
Scholar	Focus Area	Key Contribution
Kanafani (1966)	Resistance Literature	Identified literature as a form of political resistance
Suleiman (1999)	Palestinian Identity	Highlighted memory as central to national survival
Harlow (2002)	Resistance Narratives	Examined literature as a voice of the oppressed
Jayyusi (2007)	Modern Arabic Poetry	Recognized refugee poetry as cultural preservation

Earlier studies emphasize the role of Palestinian literature in documenting historical trauma, but fewer works focus specifically on al-Rashid's poetic structure and thematic resilience. This research fills that gap by focusing on resilience as a central literary theme.

V. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative literary analysis method.

Research Approach

Textual Analysis: Close reading of selected poetic collections.

Thematic Analysis: Identification of recurring themes such as exile, resistance, and memory.

Historical Contextualization: Linking poetry to socio-political events such as the Nakba and Intifada.

Primary Sources

- Al-Ghuraba (The Strangers) (1954)
- Gaza in the Line of Fire (1957)
- The Rebellion of Stone (1988)

Secondary Sources

- Scholarly articles on Palestinian resistance poetry
- Literary critiques on refugee literature
- Historical accounts of Palestinian displacement

VI. Thematic Analysis

6.1 Displacement and Exile: The Refugee Experience

One of the dominant themes in al-Rashid's poetry is displacement. His early collection, *Al-Ghuraba (The Strangers)* (1954), vividly portrays the psychological trauma of losing homeland and identity. The refugee camp becomes a symbolic landscape of memory and longing. Through vivid imagery, the poet describes homes transformed into ruins and families scattered across unfamiliar territories. Displacement is not portrayed merely as physical relocation but as emotional fragmentation.

6.2 The Motif of Return: "Sanarji'u"

The recurring phrase "Sanarji'u" (We Will Return) functions as a central motif in al-Rashid's poetry. Return is depicted not as a distant dream but as an inevitable destiny. The homeland exists simultaneously as memory, imagination, and aspiration. Through repetition and rhythmic structure, the poet reinforces collective belief in return as a form of resistance against historical erasure.

6.3 Resilience and Resistance

Unlike purely lamentative poetry, al-Rashid's works often transform sorrow into strength. His poems celebrate everyday resilience, portraying farmers, students, and elders as guardians of memory. In *The Rebellion of Stone* (1988), the poet depicts children throwing stones as symbols of courage. This imagery reflects resistance emerging from ordinary lives rather than military power. Resilience becomes both psychological survival and political defiance.

6.4 Memory as Cultural Preservation

Memory functions as a cultural archive in al-Rashid's poetry. The past is preserved through references to:

- ✓ Olive trees
- ✓ Village landscapes
- ✓ Family traditions
- ✓ Cultural rituals

These symbols act as anchors of identity, preventing cultural disappearance.

6.4 Musicality and Popular Influence

Many poems by al-Rashid were transformed into songs performed by Fairuz, extending his influence beyond literary circles.

Music amplified the emotional impact of his poetry, turning personal sorrow into collective solidarity across the Arab world.

VII. Discussion

The poetry of Harun Hashim al-Rashid represents a unique blend of artistic expression and political commitment. His works demonstrate that poetry can function as:

- Historical documentation
- Cultural resistance
- Emotional healing
- National identity formation

His portrayal of resilience distinguishes him from poets who emphasize despair. Instead of surrendering to hopelessness, his poetry consistently affirms survival and return.

The transformation of poetry into song also contributed to mass cultural mobilization, allowing his themes to reach wider audiences.

VIII. Findings

The study reveals several important findings:

- Displacement serves as the foundational theme in al-Rashid's poetry.
- The concept of "Return" functions as both emotional and political symbolism.
- His poetry transforms grief into resilience through rhythmic and symbolic techniques.
 - Cultural memory is preserved through recurring imagery of homeland and tradition.
 - Musical adaptations expanded the influence of his poetry beyond literary audiences.

IX. Significance of the Study

This research contributes to Arabic literary studies by:

- Highlighting the poetic legacy of Harun Hashim al-Rashid
- Demonstrating poetry's role in national identity formation
- Providing a thematic framework for analyzing Palestinian resistance literature
- Encouraging further study of refugee narratives in Arabic literature

X. Conclusion

The poetry of Harun Hashim al-Rashid stands as a powerful testament to the resilience of displaced communities. Through themes of exile, return, resistance, and memory, he transformed poetry into a voice of national survival.

His works reveal that literature is not merely a reflection of reality but an active force in shaping identity and sustaining hope. By preserving memory and reinforcing collective belief, his poetry continues to inspire generations facing displacement and injustice.

Ultimately, al-Rashid's poetic legacy affirms that while physical spaces may be lost, cultural identity survives through language, memory, and art.

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