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Place in Minority Exile Literature: The Case of Yūsuf Šiḥāda

Abstract

This article traces the concept of Place in the poetry of exiled Palestinian poet and literary critic Yūsuf Šiḥāda,¹ now a Polish citizen. The article analyzes Place as the objective correlative through which one can discern the ensemble of the intricate existential relationships in the poetry of this exiled Palestinian intellectual who is torn between its complexities. The Slavic Place and place in general in his poetry constitute the backdrop to understanding the hidden meanings, the existential dilemmas, the entangled human relationships between East and West, and the moral stance the poet reflects in his work. Šiḥāda's poetry is based on the poles of open-closed and inside-outside. It reflects loss, wandering, and emotional, intellectual, psychological, humanitarian, and existential alienation. Analysis of the types of place in his poetry – the polar, the intimate, the border, and the utopian - indicates that the poet's voice has become the voice of the minority, and through the dialectics within the different types of places, he portrays his own crises and those of his people, the various restrictions placed upon them, their dreams of a free, unfettered life, and their yearning to live in an intimate place where they can unite with the universe.

Keywords

Yūsuf Šiḥāda, Place in Arabic literature, Palestinian exile poetry, Arab-Slav relations.

Time has been the heart of a great number of literary works and theories, since it is the basis of literature and the world of fiction. And yet, the fictional world is based on both time and place, it is where spatial-temporal² elements

¹ Yūsuf Šiḥāda is a poet, a critic, a professor and a translator. He was born in Syria in 1965 to Palestinian parents from Al-Qudayriyya village. He works at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. He has Polish citizenship and lives in the city of Rzeszów. For more information, see Šiḥāda 2015, p. 93.

² Weisgerber 1978, p. 9.

intertwine. Moreover, many theories focused on characters and events, without relating to literary 'place'. This continued until Bachelard, in his work *The Poetics of Space*, brought up the existence of values expressed through places and landscapes, such as those seen from the perspective of the narrator, or of one of the characters.³ At the end of the 20th century, writers began to focus on the problems of place and space, which at least partly derive from the tangible homogeneity of place in the shadow of globalism, global capitalism, and the world of informative media.⁴ The tension between place and space on the one hand, and cultural and national identity on the other, has, in recent years, become an academic dialectic in Humanities and the Social Sciences⁵ that is expressed in the notion of 'spatial turn'. Space is the trademark of this entire era,⁶ and thus the analysis of place is not limited only to natural features, but has been expanded to include the aspect of time⁷ and the diversity of the human, social and cultural activities occurring in a place, which enrich it and its dialectic.⁸

First we must clarify the two concepts – place and space – as well as the essence of the connection between them. Place is created in the wake of the activity of a body within it,⁹ while space is singular, continuous, from the ground to the sky. It has very broad dimensions and contains objects.¹⁰ Fictional-literary space contains several spaces, such as the space of the speaker, the space of the fictional world, and the space of the reader.¹¹

The essence of Place in literature

The human aspect is usually formed by the tangible essence of things, i.e., the fact that they are in a place and in space at a given moment,¹² and henceforth, time and space have been linked through numerous reciprocal and complex interactive connections.¹³ Bakhtin claimed that time and place are what organize the realistic perception of people's lives.¹⁴

³ Mitterand 1980, p. 193.

⁴ Smethurst 2000, p. 32.

⁵ Mann 2012, p. 5.

⁶ Brady 2007.

⁷ Smethurst 2000, p. 34–39.

⁸ Lefebvre 1991, p. 37–39.

⁹ Gilles 2007.

¹⁰ Brady 2007.

¹¹ Malmgren 1985, p. 35–42; Weisgerber 1978, p. 173; Zoran 1984.

¹² German philosopher Kant mentioned this notion as early as the 18th century, Zaydān 1979, p. 81.

¹³ Mitchell 1980, p. 542.

¹⁴ Bakhtin 2007, p. 170.

Place gives fictional literary works a realistic appearance¹⁵ and plays an active role in the events.¹⁶ The narrative space appears as a complete and complex entity, and yet its existence derives from the existence of language, and hence it loses some of its perfection, because of the limitation of the language when describing its various dimensions.¹⁷ Place is the “repertoire of deep thoughts and emotions, there is a link between the person and his space, they reciprocally affect each other, analysis of the place may shed light on the entire literary work and help interpret it in depth”.¹⁸ Literary place helps the reader understand the complex dialectics intertwined within the text that are dependent upon the human entity, knowledge and culture,¹⁹ and helps reveal the subconscious life of the characters.²⁰

Place, person and identity

Literary space contains several intellectual concepts and can thus consistently help us to understand the human entity²¹ in this quest to understand the subconscious life of the characters.²² The value of a place – its essence and importance – depend on the person’s mental and emotional connection to it,²³ and place is also considered to be a major factor in constructing a collective identity.²⁴ Involuntary migration has a negative impact on the sense of human place,²⁵ and anyone who has experienced voluntary or coerced migration exchanges where he lives for his memories of it.²⁶ This migration creates a sense of foreignness and alienation towards the place that resembles the foreignness of thoughts and ideas and everything else.²⁷

In his research on German narrative, Eigler²⁸ discovered that the narrative links a certain place to either an individual or a collective identity via two horizontal dimensions – borders and intersections – the integration of the national and the transnational, and vertical dimensions, such as memories and stories linked to the residents or to these places.

¹⁵ Mitterand 1980, p. 194.

¹⁶ Rossum 1970, p. 288.

¹⁷ Zoran 1984.

¹⁸ Weisgerber 1978, p. 227.

¹⁹ Li 2011.

²⁰ Casey 1997.

²¹ Li 2011.

²² Casey 1997.

²³ Norberg-Schultz 1971, p. 19; Fūghālī 2010, p. 178.

²⁴ Yitachel 2002.

²⁵ Ḥusayn 2000, pp. 56–61.

²⁶ Darrāğ 2010, p. 246.

²⁷ Bahrāwī 2009, p. 45.

²⁸ Eigler 2012.

In analyzing the works of Šihāda, I will relate to different types of place that I believe will shed light on the essence of his poetry and the influence of his stay in Europe on the formation of his poetic endeavors. These types of places include:

- **The intimate place:** Bachelard wrote that the intimate place is not a trigonometrical or a topographical place, but rather one where a person loves, hates, and imagines all kinds of things. Typically, this place protects the people residing within.²⁹
- **The polar place:** In 1971, Lotman formulated the theory of the polarity of place. He noted that most social, religious, and moral questions that help people understand their world pertain to opposing spatial characteristics such as heaven and earth, or a moral and social hierarchical structure such as high and low.³⁰
- **The border effect:** Lotman³¹ noted that a border is an important topographical feature in literary texts since it divides the literary work into two split spaces that never meet.
- **Utopian and heterotopian places:** Foucault³² noted the existence of two types of places that contradict all other places. The first is the unrealistic ideal – utopia, and the second is the heterotopia, i.e., the real, but with ideal features. These places are outside of anywhere, and in addition, there are places the lie in-between the utopian and the heterotopian, such as the mirror.

The uniqueness of Place in classical and modern Arabic literature

Place is reflected in classical Arabic poetry mainly in the lament over the destructions (*al-ʿaṭlāl*) and the yearning for the past,³³ a lamenting that occurs somewhere between time and place. This style continues from the pre Islamic Ġāhiliyya period through the Umayyad, Abbasid and Andalusian Caliphates,³⁴ and on to the neo-classical poets such as Aḥmad Šawqī (1868–1932) and Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī (1839–1904). Hafez³⁵ claimed that modern literature could be arbitrarily divided into two temporary periods, each with its own dominant features. This division is based on socio-political changes, so that the first period begins at the start of the 20th century and continues until the late 1950s – early

²⁹ Bachelard 1958, Introduction, p. xxxvi.

³⁰ Lotman 1971, pp. 217–218.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 230.

³² Foucault 1986.

³³ Mūnsī 2001, p. 31.

³⁴ Abū Zayd 2013, pp. 79–89.

³⁵ Hafez 1994.

1960s; the second period carries on from then until the present day. The open geographical spaces that characterized the first period were replaced by closed, crowded urban spaces that reinforce the sense of foreignness and the inner conflict of the Arab in the second period.³⁶

In modern Arabic literature, the concept of place, whether real or imaginary, has been widely treated,³⁷ for example:

- **Between town and village:** Throughout the history of Arabic literature, the town, in ruins or otherwise, was a fictional place to discuss social issues. In modern literature, the town began to be shown as having negative powers and to be a fragile space when it comes to freedom,³⁸ an issue which later became a prominent feature in modern poetry.³⁹ In contrast, the village is characterized by intimate spaces similar to Bachelard's features of the intimate place.⁴⁰
- **Prison:** Prison has been a unique phenomenon as a place in the modern Arab novel since the 1960s. It is a metaphorical symbol of the native land⁴¹ and is one image of the heterotopia of perversion. This place is linked with the power of the regime and ongoing oppression in Arab and other countries.
- **Exile:** Exile literature is one of the prominent features of modern Arabic literature.⁴² Even though exile generates feelings of foreignness and alienation, it appears as a place of freedom as opposed to the native land in many literary works.
- **Andalusia:** Hundreds of narratives in modern Arabic literature have focused on the journey to al-Andalus, Spain, in a process of rediscovering the past with nostalgia for those days gone by.⁴³ Nostalgia and yearning for the past in fact intensify the bitter reality and the pain of the present.⁴⁴
- **The desert:** The desert as an active element in classical literature that, for many years, was absent from modern literature. However, in recent years it has returned to Arab life and naturally, to its literature.⁴⁵

³⁶ The space of the woman in the Arab world is presented in closed rooms in places with boundaries and houses with fences; Fūḡālī 2010, pp. 161–180.

³⁷ For more information concerning the concept of place in Arabic literature, see Hallaq 2002; Abū Hayf 2005, pp. 121–146.

³⁸ Pieprzak 2007.

³⁹ Ismā'īl 1967, pp. 328–349.

⁴⁰ Bachelard 1958, Introduction p. xxxvi.

⁴¹ Al-Mahādīn 1999, pp. 90–100.

⁴² Al-Musawi 2002.

⁴³ Bachelard 1958, Introduction p. xxxvi.

⁴⁴ Chapman 2013; Granara 2005; Stearns 2009.

⁴⁵ Al-Qāsim 2005, pp. 39–41.

- **Palestine:** Historical Palestine with its towns, refugee camps and the suffering of the Palestinians has been highlighted in many works by writers and poets.⁴⁶
- **The land:** Checkpoints and borders are one of the features during the conflict of two parties over land. Borders are an action of both time and place,⁴⁷ and their power depends on the narrative pertaining to the procedures the individual must undergo or commit to in order to pass through the space or cross the border. Hence this is one of the collective narratives that are dependent upon the construction of a collective identity,⁴⁸ which leads to the fact that borders are considered a rich source for literary works.⁴⁹ The literary chronotope bears the burden of representation in the literary place connected with real trauma of a nation that lost its land as a result of war.⁵⁰

Features of minority literature

In-depth studies on the literature of minorities have shown that there is a repeated pattern of remembering and forgetting the historical wrongs done to them,⁵¹ and one of the prominent characteristics of minority literature is politicization.⁵² There are numerous studies on minority literature, such as the research on Muslim and Jewish literature in Andalusia between the 14th and 17th centuries, which revealed it to be ambiguous. Works written by minorities promoted an ethnic and cultural identity and also symbolized resistance to oppression.⁵³

Place in minority poetry

According to his self-definition as a Palestinian, Šihāda's poetry is located within the Palestinian poetic experience, and more precisely, Palestinian exile poetry. Hence it is worth examining the concept of Place through an overall perspective of Palestinian poetry, mainly that of the Palestinian minority, whether it be within Israel or in exile. This viewpoint will pave the way to a broad

⁴⁶ Al-'Aqtaš & an-Nu'aymī 2012; Muwāsī 2001, p. 38–67.

⁴⁷ Casey 2007.

⁴⁸ Passi 2005, pp. 20–28.

⁴⁹ Casey 2004.

⁵⁰ Bahun 2010.

⁵¹ Amoko 2000.

⁵² Deleuze & Guattari 1985.

⁵³ Ibrahim, A. 2008. For expansion, see Padolsky 1996.

theoretical understanding of the phenomenon that Šihāda represents in this article and that in retrospect, supports part of the textual analysis of Šihāda's poetry.

Place is one of the main causes of the conflict in which the exiled author is immersed. This conflict is considered one of the factors in building a collective identity.⁵⁴ Šihāda, like many Palestinians who left their land voluntarily or otherwise, became part of the minority in different countries, and thus Palestinian literature in general, and Palestinian minority exile literature in particular, prominently features Place, which is expressed in the theme of land or in the conflict between East and West. This feature is expressed in nostalgia for the past and its places, and in possession of the land as a place of proving roots and personal and national identity. In addition, place is revealed in the names of trees and plants,⁵⁵ of geographical locations such as villages, towns or countries, in order to highlight the exile of the Palestinian, or as a symbol of struggle, brotherhood, or even of imperialism.⁵⁶ Various studies confirm these features. Focused on Palestinian poetry in general, Parmenter's⁵⁷ study indicated that Place shifted between two obvious poles: native land versus exile. Exile appears in places such as desert, town, and camp, all symbolizing the 'no-place'⁵⁸ where the Palestinian lives. The native land appears in rural locations indicating the strong bond between the Palestinian and his land.

In his comprehensive study on Palestinian poetry as a whole, Miḡnāḥ⁵⁹ indicates the existence of Place in this poetry along two main axes; the first having a physical feature, and for which the land is the nucleus. This is reflected in the inclusion of names of plants and towns as well as the feminine presence represented by the Nakba. Exile is another aspect of this axis, which is expressed in the gateways to the native land that open and close, as represented by the sea, the desert, the cities of exile, and the refugee camps. The second axis is reflected in places of mystery and introspection and is represented by a prison, a dream, or the world of the poem as a kind of refuge.

Al-Mūsā⁶⁰ pointed out the reflection of Place in Palestinian poetry along several main axes, the main ones being: the native land with all its major and minor details; the tent and exile symbolizing the pain and suffering of

⁵⁴ Yiftachel 2002.

⁵⁵ Ashrawi 1978; Elmessiri 1981; Kāmil 2001, pp. 23–35.

⁵⁶ Al-Yāsīn 2010; al-Ḥasan 2008.

⁵⁷ This is the main idea in his book *Giving voice to stone*. For further expansion see Parmenter 1994.

⁵⁸ For further details concerning Non-Places, see Augé 2009.

⁵⁹ This notion is the summation of a doctoral dissertation on the meaning of place in modern Palestinian poetry after 1970. See Miḡnāḥ 2007–2008.

⁶⁰ His research relates to Palestinian poetry as a whole, focusing on Samīḥ al-Qāsim, Tawfīq Zayyād, Rāšid Ḥusayn as exemplifying the poetry of the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel. See al-Mūsā 2007.

the Palestinians; the Arab states and the continents symbolizing exile in two opposing poles – fraternity and identification with the Palestinian, as opposed to the torture, tyranny and alienation the Palestinian experiences in exile. In his study on the poetry of the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel after 1967, Bawardi⁶¹ noted that this poetry began to represent the masses of the Arab minority, adopting the collective identity reflected in the national Palestinian-Arab identity. This led to the reflection of place-related themes such as descriptions of ruined villages as a symbol of the ruin of the Palestinian with all his hopes and dreams; this description included the past and nostalgia on the one hand, and the theme of the refugee camp on the other. These themes are connected to a lexicon focusing on the word for land – *'ard* and several other words in this semantic field such as roots, plants and so forth.

The concept of space in the poetry of Yūsuf Šihādi

This section sheds light on the personal and human geography of poet and critic Yūsuf Šihāda. The term ‘human geography’ refers to the places that are interconnected in Šihāda’s poetry, and which he deliberately employs to reflect his feelings, attitudes and life experiences. Knowledge of these places helps the reader to understand the correlative dialectics in the text that are related to the concept of the human self, knowledge, and education. Moreover, these places reveal the real meaning of the poetic texts. From this perspective, the places are parallel to the poesy of absence that is hidden behind a simultaneously maneuvering and misleading poetic presence. The places constitute the compasses of the text and serve as a componential tool that assists in reflecting and understanding the real existence that is latent in the text. Place or space plays a significant role in Šihāda’s poetry because, in my opinion, it reflects a constant dispute between two worlds: the East and the West, the existing but stolen native land and exile/diaspora and alienation.

Šihāda’s inherited memories from al-Qudayriyya,⁶² the village of his fathers and forefathers in the Galilee, Damascus, to which his family evacuated from Palestine in 1948, Kiev in the Ukraine, Rostov on the Don River, Taganrog in Russia, The Dnieper River, Krakow and Rzeszów in Poland constitute stops and stations in Šihāda’s journey of life that extends beyond a real place topography;

⁶¹ Bawardi 2007, pp. 87–98.

⁶² Al-Qudayriyya (Arabic: القديرية) was a Palestinian Arab village in the Safed sub-district. The village was located in the eastern Galilee Mountains in an area that sloped southeastward and overlooked the Sea of Galilee. It lay about 1 km east of Wādī al-‘Āmūd, a perennial watercourse whose waters flowed from the vicinity of the city of Šafed, in the north, down to the Sea of Galilee, to the southeast. The village was depopulated by the Israeli troops who occupied it in the War of 1948. (See: <http://www.villagesofpalestine.com/Al-Qudayriyya.htm>). For more information about the village, See, Khalidi 1992, p. 75.

it is the topography of the spiritual existence of a poet who suffers from constant powerlessness in his exile and life in the Diaspora. Tracing of these existential and spiritual clues reveals the suffocating existential frustrations that are indicative of the general position of the Arab poet in exile whether voluntarily or involuntarily. In other words, the indications and representations of these places and spaces reveal the distances of helplessness that the dumb poem penetrates with a ray of light that quickly fades.

The importance of Place for the human being lies in the events and emotional and existential experiences connected with it. The daily life issues that are connected to the human geography become a horizon for identification between the private symbolism of the place on the one hand, and the compound human condition on the other. Besides, Place is considered an important element in the formation of the collective identity. In our case, coerced changes related to the space of the human place affects a person's sense of place and the relationship between them. On the one hand, the operations of mandatory evacuation and displacement of people confuses their consciousness of place. On the other hand, someone who emigrates from his native land, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, replaces the place he lived in with memories of it. Migration from one's hometown, the place where one was born, generates a sense of alienation that resembles the feelings of alienation in regard to thoughts, values, and metaphysical obligations.

Place serves as an *objective correlative*,⁶³ which the poet invents in order to lean on in expressing his emotions, far from being a direct superficial lamentation. It is also a changing objective correlative depending on its types and indication. Dialectically, it represents the open and narrow horizon, love and hate, suffocation and freedom, war and peace, good and bad memory, fertility and barrenness, white, black and grey, past, present and future; it is the cushion of the feelings and emotions that the poet tries to represent in a deep and dialogic text. Place is a voice that coexists with other voices in conditions of contrast or identification. Multiplicity of places, in my opinion, intersects with multiple voices and creates what Bakhtin calls in the novelistic text a dialogue (dialogism)⁶⁴ that allows us to probe the foundation of the text in depth.

The Voice of Place, if we may say so, in Šiḥāda's poetic text goes beyond casual, transient, realistic events in order to reflect the entity of presence or absence

⁶³ The term and theory of the 'objective correlative' and its relation to literature was developed through the writings of the poet and literary critic T.S. Eliot (1888–1965). Eliot spoke about this term in his essay "Hamlet and His Problems" (1919). Republished in Eliot's book, *The Sacred Wood* (1921). He said there that "[t]he only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." (Quoted in: J.A. Cuddon 1998, p. 647).

⁶⁴ Bakhtin 1978.

between migration and return or settlement. In view of this, we can say that the stronger presence of place in his text exists in the explicit or implicit dialogue between East and West. We are likely to imagine that East and West in his text constitute a ‘binary opposition’ that produces an existential polarity or regions of exclusion between two sides. However, an in-depth reading of his texts leads me to believe that Šiḥāda coexists with this binary opposition in a compound and multi-faceted manner, not through exclusion of the East from the West or vice versa, but through establishing an intermediate hybrid area between the two sides in an attempt either to bridge his presence and conflicts, or to achieve a shrewd critical vision that stems from his true knowledge of the two sides, or to introduce a questioning of the issue of identity and belonging. In this context it should be noted that the poems I have chosen to discuss come mainly from two anthologies, *Al-‘Awda ilā sayyidat al-maḥār* (The Return to the Lady of the Oysters) published in 2005 and *Qaṭarāt gāwiya* (Alluring Drops) published in 2015.

The First Snow of Kiev

In Šiḥāda’s texts, the definitions of place and space of the fragmental internal self-intermingle. It is the polar world of East and West and the repeated movement between the existing borders of memory. In my opinion, his approach to the concept of the West has undergone a cardinal and radical change. The West in his early poems represents the meaning of the ‘hearth’ from which the poet draws his hope of achieving his wishes. It is the creative nature that encourages the poet to take decisions which he would not take without the Place and its nature. In Kiev, he addresses the First Snow, which becomes a shelter for his soul. This is warm snow, as the poet describes it in his complaint, though it is difficult to complain. Kiev becomes the Place of the Soul that gives him safety and allows his emotions to flow and his soul to purify itself. He says:

The night, the autumn-love and me!⁶⁵
 And these are our homeless days between the exiles of caves
 And these are the secrets of the heart, scattered on the sheets of snow!
 Oh Snows of Kiev! The heart is beating warmly in your panting!!
 Oh Snows of Kiev! My yearning is melting, and melting your eyes!
 Oh how often the whipper made the body absent in the cell of nothing!
 These are the secrets of the heart, scattered on the moans of snow!
 And this is the blood whose food the renegades ate in the middle of the desert!
 The night and I are waiting for the love that doesn’t come; the night and me,
 I wait; the night waits [...] and the snow of Kiev cries!⁶⁶

⁶⁵ This translation of this and the subsequent poem excerpts is mine.

⁶⁶ Šiḥāda 2005, pp. 103–104.

The writer crosses from the borders of the Familiar Place to the borders of the Foreign Place; the Snow, which is the opposite of the desert sand and the expected cultural environment, becomes a ‘hearth’ and a ‘castle’ for his Self that comes from the country of the whipper, where he experienced feelings of darkness, injustice and oppression. It is true that Kiev is an ‘exile’ but it is a ‘hearth’ for his private feelings, the exact opposite of the desert that caused him more pain and moaning. It seems that the contradictory outcome that Šihāda describes in this poem stems from the bad condition of the familiar place, the desert. His feelings about the places are confused and the exile with its pain changes into an instrument of a wakeup and a rising while the homeland becomes a place to escape from. Thus, the borders are penetrated and the landmarks of polarity between the two paces disappear.

From the Inspiration of the Dnieper River

In an early poem, the West is seen as the poet’s hope in his existential difficulties. The Dnieper⁶⁷ is a greenhouse where the capacities of the poet grow till he becomes aware of the necessity to join the resistance movement in order to return to the West Bank; it is the general Western cultural nature and atmospheres that embrace the poet and his wishes and thus, he overcomes his helplessness through his realization of that helplessness. He says:

*To the Dnieper River that granted me the power to raise up my eyes and see
hope to reach the stolen West Bank of the Jordan River*

I love you,

When I say I love you, you might grow!

You might run to the lap of this Dnieper alone

I love you... You smile and forget that you are a smile of sand,

And slip drops of silence into the heart of the Dnieper and sleep, [...]

But now you are not ignorant that you are on the impossible bank

And some day, you will rush west of the range of the river,

And like love, you will shine on my free heart,

Like a thunderbolt you will fall and burn in my eyes a tear of fire...

I love you when you smile and forget that you are a legend,

When you laugh and forget that, some day, I will hold your shadow a rifle
on my shoulder,

And in my body, you will sleep a shred,

Over the waters of the Dnieper!⁶⁸

⁶⁷ The Dnieper is one of the major rivers of Europe, rising near Smolensk, Russia and flowing through Russia, Belarus and Ukraine to the Black Sea. It is the longest river of the Ukraine and Belarus and the fourth-longest river in Europe. See, Law 1975, pp. 14–15.

⁶⁸ Šihāda 2005, pp. 105–106.

The Palestinian West Bank represents for the poet an intimate stolen place which he dreams of reaching; it is a space for love and beautiful life, though the poet cannot actually live that decent life even in his imagination. Here, like in Kiev's snow in the previous poem, the Dnieper inspires the poet with hope to cross and take part in the struggle in the West Bank of Palestine. The Dnieper is an efficient instrument in the aspired existential change and in turning the Romantic dream into a fact. In this context, the waters of the Jordan mix with the waters of the Dnieper to create an existential unity that helps the poet achieve his existential tranquility and rid himself of his anxiety and sleeplessness. The Dnieper water transforms the poet's passivity into active and productive dynamism that enables him to continue his movement on the road of hope. The Dnieper, in this context, is not a traditional trigonometrical place but an existential place that inspires positive changes and work; it is the place that raises the morality of the poetic 'I' in such a way that it changes from a grim legend into a smiling reality full of activity and hope. In this poem, as in the previous one, exile functions as an intimate, embracing, accepting place, but the Dnieper gains even greater importance by serving as an incubator of safety filled with promise. The intimate place, as we saw earlier, enables one to reside there to realize one's dreams, or at least, it constitutes a space for identification to realize those dreams. Moreover, in this poem the presence of place is particularly obvious; the border and the polar place. The poem indicates the presence of the poet; he is on the far side of the border that separates him from his dream. The border is a place that separates two poles that symbolize the poet's mental schism more than anything else. He cannot cross the border to reach his dream, to return to the land of his forefathers. The Jordan River, which, even if only symbolically, separates the two river banks is the border that separates him from the brightness of his life. This border pulls the poet in the opposing directions of two existential poles: to remain in exile as a refugee, or to return to the land of his forefathers and be the owner of the place. In such a situation both the border and the polar place actually reveal the lack of place.

In my opinion, the framework of the two poems above starts from the concept of the 'journey' that the poet undertakes. He leaves his country, voluntarily or involuntarily, the spaces of his knowledge increase and new alternative existential images are revealed and are substituted for the human geography in his native land. The calls of queries rise in his pained soul and lead to a condition of cognitive fondness, a dynamic passion whose source is "the Other Place": Kiev's snows and Dnieper's waters. The two poems imply that 'cognitive dialogue', if we may say so, between what existed at home or in the native land and what exists or is available in the Slavic places to develop his knowledge of himself through the 'Other Place'. In fact, we notice here the disappearance of geographical borders and polarities of places. In both poems, the Slavic place becomes a source of security and life that carries signs of hope,

but his home and native land did not provide him with these life components, as we understand from the two poems. In this case, the home and native land become places of hopelessness while exile is a space where it is possible to achieve existential aspirations and ambitions.

On the way to Taganrog

The poet sets out to talk about his existential and poetic conditions within the borders of the Slavic place, which affects his human entity in general. The Slavic Place is a greenhouse for poet's outpouring of emotions where his soul interacts with all types of spiritual feelings. In the poem 'On the way to Taganrog,'⁶⁹ the speaker (poet) travels through the fields of Rostov⁷⁰ to communicate with Anton Chekov (1860–1904) in Taganrog. This journey inspires him and the inspiration leads to the creation of the poem. On his journey, the poet reveals the power of Place in the creative poetic process, turning it into an established reality. Thus, Place embraces the poetic Self and constitutes a strong motive for its formation and crystallization. He says:

Nature came to me like an invisible caller,
An angel of poetry who knocked on the door of the heart and overcame
My dream.

This kind of travelling through places in exile gives the poet the opportunity to fulfill his appetency for poetry. Poetry knocks the door of the heart and overcomes the poet's dream, which implies that poetry has a dominating power over all his senses, his consciousness and his subconscious. It also implies that the call of poetry constitutes a powerful component in his existence. All this takes place in the presence of the Slavic place that inspires him with art and creativity. Exile and alienation in the above poems constitute an instrument that achieves hope and a visionary solution. The spiritual attitude the poet takes in his first poems seems clearer. The exile, with its fascinating beauty, introduces the poet to existential opportunities that his native land never did.

⁶⁹ The poet wrote this poem in 1988 and was translated into Russian. However, he lost the original Arabic version and translated it in Arabic and rewrote it in 2016. About the Russian translated text, he says on his Facebook page: "This is what remained in my Archive of my poems that were published in Soviet magazines and newspapers, which were translated into Russian by Dina Alexanderovna Antonian, Professor of Literature at the University of Rostov on the Don. *The Don Newspaper*, which was published and distributed in the Rostov region, devoted its literary page to a number of my poems with some information about me." (See Šihāda's Facebook Page on 4/12/2016.)

⁷⁰ See, "About the City". Official website of Rostov-on-Don (in Russian). Archived from the original on August 13, 2013.

Place and Identity in Šihāda's Collection: *Qaṭarāt gāwiya* (Alluring Drops)⁷¹

It appears that the daily life of the poet in his exile, mainly in Poland, changed his existential attitude and his approaches towards the exile, the Slavic Place and the West in general. In his last collection *Qaṭarāt gāwiya* (Alluring Drops), the poet's existential identity is confused and compared to a labyrinth, and characterized by ambiguity regarding everything related to the West. As we shall see, in many of the poems we also witness the noticeable presence of the dichotomous place and the border indicating the profound existential fragmentation of the poet, and the spiritual alienation between where he is living (Poland) and the yearned for, but bleeding East. His is a tortured soul in both places, but only Palestine as a place remains a dream, or a utopian place. Under the subtitle of *Laylāy* (My Laila), Šihāda says in the poem of *Tawqī'āt* (Signatures):

My Laila
 Is in an East that doesn't set
 My night rose in the tear of my Laylā
 In a West that doesn't rise
 My Self set in the loneliness of my complaint⁷²

The poet expresses in this poem cultural and existential belongings that have clear landmarks. Laylā, who represents the Eastern Arab culture, is the vehicle of sunrise and radiance or happiness despite the sufferings of love. His soul rose in the East and his emotional participations that delight his soul appeared in the East, too. In the West, the poetic speaker, the 'I', suffers from a cruel existential loneliness. No one shares his Eastern feelings that are brimming with love. The exciting point in this poem is that it separates between East and West in order to represent the emotional separation between the two opposites in the torn sentiments of the poet. East and West here represent the features of the buried spiritual conditions of the poet. The polarity of place here is the *objective correlative* to the clarity of belonging and fragmentation between two sides. Inside the soul of the poet and his feelings, East and West do not meet; the Self is divided between the 'I' and the 'He'. It is divided between the Eastern spiritual satisfaction and the emotional shortfall in the West on the one hand, and a miserable livelihood in the East versus the developed civil rights in the West, on the other. As we see, the issue is not the misery of daily life in the East; it is the spiritual aridity and the cold human relations in the West.

⁷¹ Šihāda 2015.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 13.

***Ḥulum wa-layl* (A Dream and a Night)**

In the poem *Ḥulum wa-layl* (A Dream and a Night), the poet narrates the journey of his failures and concepts of manliness and femininity using the mask of the female of the wild life that escaped from the shackles of oppression of any kind. He says in *Ḥulum wa-layl*:

And you insert yourself between his drowning thighs
 Into a blind wine
 A sun with extinguished breasts
 Its beginning is a worried East
 And its end is a feverish West⁷³

The poem might imply a person's pursuit of lust or description of parts of a wet dream but actually, it represents sighs of a journey that is full of failures yet loaded with hope. The poet stands at the boundary between two edges – a worried, sleepless East with its established concerns, and a West that is hit by an excessively high burning fever. This description of the two sides bears the indications of a labyrinth and the hint of a journey into an existence that knows no decision or settlement.

***Mawt šams* (Death of a Sun)**

In the poem of *Mawt šams* (Death of a Sun), the feeling of labyrinth and wilderness deepens even in death. He says:

I frequently go to death between two exiles
 That call
 My wreckage that is dwelled by the ashes of homeland!
 Don't ask me about sunrise that is lost in the vases of sunset!
 And don't ask me about a sunset that went astray from the coffee of his first sun
 And died on the shadows of the East eastward
 And eastward and eastward
 Without sunrise and without tears!⁷⁴

Like other poems by Šihāda, this poem is engulfed by an atmosphere of sorrow. The source of all these tracks is the Place or, rather, the fierce dispute between the contrasting sides. Everything in existence has become mixed up. All his efforts to find existential comfort are in vain. Death on both sides exists

⁷³ *Ibidem*, pp. 52–53.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

in the beginning and in the end, in the East and in the West. It is the fate that the wretched miserable person par excellence reached because he did not gain anything except 'pain' and 'death'.

Fī ḥaḍrat al-baḥr (In the Presence of the Sea)

This cultural conflict in Šiḥāda's soul is also reflected in the poem of *Fī ḥaḍrat al-baḥr (In the Presence of the Sea)*, where the poet says:

O tent of the despotic lover
 The fugitive from the sand to the sand
 From the lurking place of the Arabs who desperately fight
 For their love for the Bedouin wilderness
 Till Rome,
 Where the shade died and flattery survived!
 I have forgotten those Bedouin deserts
 And divorced the yearnings of my old love
 I splashed their interiors on the bits of the soul
 That is thrown on the space of the lamenting paper

The traces of dispute erase the memory and make the lover abandon his old love and the circles of his emotional affiliations without resorting to new alternative circles. It is this wilderness and labyrinth that make the poet move in empty, futile circles.

To sum up, an analytical reading of Place in Šiḥāda's texts motivates the reader to try to decode the puzzle of their deep existential sadness. In my opinion, this sadness stems from the dispute and the ripping of place in the poetic Self and the loss of the ability and power to resolve this insoluble dilemma. Like many people of his generation, Šiḥāda cannot return to his native land, his East, yet at the same time, he cannot achieve full spiritual coexistence with the caring and embracing West.

Discussion and conclusion

Šiḥāda's poetry reflects the Palestinian entity in exile, which was greatly influenced by his living in Slavic countries. Šiḥāda is deeply ambivalent towards the Slavic Place – is it accepted it as a place to stay and an intimate existential space, or is it a barren place that cannot satisfy the spiritual experiences of his profoundly and existentially torn personality? The textual reading reveals the centrality of Place in his poetry as a tool of existential goading, or honest expression of his spiritual struggles and the struggle to build an identity. The

Slavic Place and place in general in his poetry constitutes the key to understanding the hidden meanings, the existential dilemmas, the entangled and complicated human relationships between East and West, and the moral stand the poet himself conveys through his poetic text. In his poem *Qaṭarāt mağd* (Drops of Glory), the poet reconstructs the circles of belonging. Throughout the poem he asks “Are you from the tribe of Ya‘rub?”; a symbol of being Arab, recalling the days of Arab glory. However, the very fact that he asks the question raises doubts about this belonging at this time. While he does want to belong to that ancient Arab glory, his reality does not convey that glory; on the contrary, it radiates inferiority and disappointment.

This is the desired utopian place where the poet will experience existential serenity and safety. In the current Arab status quo, it is impossible to be in this place and the poet is left in a place of nothing more that longed for expectations:

I saw you pour over the alienation of the passion of the manhood’s tears [...] The sins of your hymn send in your impossible war / the embittered prisoners toss at your fifties an arrow / an arrow that precipitously rushes to Andalusia yet is disappointed in Gaza / the bow must keep silent and the blades must transfuse the blades.

[...] Do you come from Ya‘rub?! [...] and in Ya‘rub, the summit of power, still a war that is raged.⁷⁵

The utopian place in Šiḥāda’s poems is portrayed as the desired place in which one cannot live a beautiful, clean place that hints at its former glory. And yet, when the poet describes it, he detaches it from the current Arab situation, from the exploitation and the cruel rulers. In the poem *Qaṭarāt musta‘āda li-Su‘ād* (Reconstructed Drops for Su‘ād)⁷⁶ he intertextually recreates the names of enlightening places and cultural symbols in Arab history and hopes that they will one day exist again so that he can part of them.

In the poems *Našid Qāsyūn al-Mu‘ağğal* (The Postponed Hymn of Qāsyūn)⁷⁷ and *Fī Dimašq* (In Damascus)⁷⁸ we see frequent mentions if the names of places and types of plants and animals, and stories of love for the place of the family’s innocent memories of youth, but we must note in this context that the intimate place and the desired utopia that is so evident in Šiḥādi’s poetry are reserved for Palestine, the land of his forefathers. In the following poems, *Al-Mindīl al-‘aḥīr* (The Last Headgear),⁷⁹ *‘Ilā Ṭīfl Ġazza* (To Gaza Child)⁸⁰, *Ilā*

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 81–83.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 84–85.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 55–56.

Ġazza (To Gaza)⁸¹ *Šahīd waṭan* (Homeland Martyr),⁸² *Šabāḥ al-ḥayr Miryām al-Filasṭīniyya* (Good morning Miriam the Palestinian),⁸³ *Kafr Qāsim*⁸⁴ and *‘Alā raḍād Ṭabariyya* (Over the Drizzle of Tiberias),⁸⁵ he aspires to exist once again in his own country. In these poems, the places are the desired optimum for his existential experiences; they are places through which the poet feels a deep inner tranquility. These places are open fields, horizons, sunlight, flowing rivers, rooftops, seas and waves. In contrast to these, we see closed places that weigh heavily on the poet’s inner peace and joy – cemeteries filled with the victims of the Arab rulers and Israel, prisons, detention cells, the dark alleyways of the refugee camps. In the one hand, these places are a dream, but it is one that the dark of Arab coma hinders its fulfillment. However, in all these places, the intimate and the utopian place is a tool with which to offer harsh criticism of the exiting situation and the disappointing silence and apathy of the Arab states that make no effort to change their situation and benefit from the loss of his native land: “Today I weep not for Kafr Qāsim / Today I weep not for the remains (*‘aṭlāl*) and tents / for the body of the Ġāhiliyya / I weep not for our openly profaned blood / I weep because of the silence of those capital cities”.⁸⁶

In summation, we can see that Šihāda’s poetry is based on the poles of open-closed as well as those of inside-outside. It reflects loss, wandering, and emotional, intellectual, psychological, humanitarian, and existential alienation. Closure is reflected in the circles of alienation and human distance that surround the lyrical ‘I’; these circles are not a topographical place, but rather an abstract place of the mind located within the poet, a place in which intellectually, emotionally and existentially the poet feels like a prisoner. These circles of alienation are a continuation of the circles of human alienation in a place with negative characteristics where the lyrical ‘I’ resides. These characteristics are not actually true of the place, but rather of the people in which it exists. Hence, Place provides continuity for those who live there,⁸⁷ it is a social entity, and it bears some of the principles of the people living there, so that it identifies with them.⁸⁸

The openness is reflected in many places connected to the Palestinian homeland and Syria and places in the Slavic world where he initially saw hope, such as the open rivers, outstretched pastures, the sun and the sky. The meaning

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 57–58.

⁸² Šihāda 2005, p. 31.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, pp. 107–113.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 82–85.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

⁸⁷ Weisgerber 1978, p. 227.

⁸⁸ Brady 2007; Weisgerber 1978, p. 227; an-Nuṣayr 2010, pp. 70–71.

of the polarity in this poetry matches that of Lotman,⁸⁹ which claims that height is parallel to width – both connected to the spiritual world, as opposed to low, which is parallel to narrow – both connected to the material world. He claims that the open pole connects to feelings of safety, intimacy and love, while the closed pole reflects negative feelings such as hate and estrangement. Thus we see that the dialogue in the poetry between the two poles of closed/inside versus those of open/outside symbolizes two contrasting aspects: The closed/inside place symbolizes the reality of the poet's life, with its alienation and distance, boundaries and restrictions, foreignness and loss, disrupted identity, and mental, existential and emotional crises. In contrast, the open/outside place symbolizes the dream, the native land, home, love, freedom, knowledge, and existential self-actualization. Furthermore, unlike Place in Arabic literature, which represents the native land as a place of alienation and borders as opposed to exile as a place of freedom,⁹⁰ the native land in this poetry is of a different nature in that it is a bitter reality, a dream and freedom all together. As for the place of the border, I believe that the obvious polarity in the poetry requires the existence of borders that separate two worlds that never meet, according to Lotman.⁹¹ Although he mentioned that a border has topographical features, I saw more than one that was not topographical but that nevertheless bore the features he mentioned. The first– the human as a border: I believe this border is reflected in the Nakba. Moreover, there is a moral-emotional border reflected in feelings of love that the lyrical 'I' experiences, feelings that constitute a kind of bridge between ignorance and knowledge, and personal awareness.

The presence of the intimate place is reflected in two topographical areas that exist in the poet's native land – the village of his forefathers, al-Qudayriyya, and Palestine in general. These places provide moments in which the spirit of the poet and his beloved merge to form a single entity that will then merge with the universe, so that this place enhances the presence within protected borders.⁹² Moreover, this place appears as a sacred mythical image dependent upon two time frames: the past and the nostalgia for it and the future. From the duplication of this time derives a third time – the present as reflected in exile and estrangement.⁹³

The appearance of the topographical places transport Šihāda's poetry from the human collective to the specific case of the Palestinian, and from the absolutely personal and individual identity to the collective identity of the Palestinian in exile in general. This voice of the poet becomes the tortured voice that projects his dreams from within the place, and it expresses the many

⁸⁹ Lotman 1971, pp. 218–229.

⁹⁰ 'Azzām 2011; Wal'a 2010, pp. 100–102.

⁹¹ Lotman 1971, p. 230.

⁹² Bachelard 1958, Introduction p. xxxvi.

⁹³ Fitter 1995, p. 19.

crises, the suffering, the distress and the dreams, which, according to Padolsky,⁹⁴ characterize minority literature. In Šihāda's poetry, we see the utopian place as a dream or as a broad imaginary space that is tranquil, and mentally and spiritually free. Such a place does not actually exist and thus it has features of the utopian place that is not found anywhere.⁹⁵

In conclusion, while the concept of place as revealed in the analysis of the poems of a Palestinian poet living in exile corresponds with various concepts and features of place in world and Arabic literature, it also corresponds with the features of the concept of place in world minority literature. This is expressed in the dialectic between the polarity of place, whether it is a dialectic of high and low, open and closed, or a dialectic of light and darkness, or, of course, the dialectic between movement and immobility. The first element of all these dialectics symbolizes the spiritual world, the dream of the Palestinian poet in exile who wants to realize that dream, his yearning for states of love, freedom, release from all earthly boundaries and his desire for the self-actualization of his being, his essence. In contrast, the second part of each dialectic symbolizes the material world that is the poet's bitter reality. This reality is filled with alienation, wars, sieges and restrictions. Likewise, it symbolizes the existential mental crises and states of loss, the poet experiences in addition to the crises ensuing from the loss of his identity. The second feature shared by Palestinian poets and world literature regarding the concept of place is the existence of a border. This feature, I believe, is connected to the intensity of the dialectic between the two poles of place; this border is topographical, physical, and moral and it separates the different poles. The existence of Bachelard's intimate place is considered an additional feature; it is embodied in topographical places that exist in the poet's native land, are usually characterized by their trees, which are a metaphorical symbol of the native land. The world and the universe come together in these trees, and thus the spirit of the poet merges with the universe. Unlike this intimate place, there is also the utopian place the poet yearns for, seeks and finds in 'no-place', an imaginary location, and in a dream to be realized.

The analysis of the poems reveals yet another feature of the concept of place in the poetry of the Palestinian minority in exile as opposed to the concept of place in modern Arabic literature, and that is the native land, which symbolizes two opposing poles: freedom versus restriction, death versus life. In contrast, in modern Arabic literature, the native land is mostly a symbol of restriction, slavery and prison, and freedom can only be realized outside its borders. At the same time, the concept of place in Palestinian exile poetry is similar to the features found among minorities everywhere in that it shifts from the general

⁹⁴ Padolsky 1996.

⁹⁵ In his study on modern poetry, Soni noted that the utopia in these poems is located nowhere, Soni 2010.

human condition to the unique situation of the Palestinian in exile. The poet's voice becomes the voice of the minority, and through the dialectics within the polarity of place, he portrays the crises of his people, the restrictions placed upon them, their dreams of a free, unrestricted life and their yearning for a life in an intimate place where they can unite with the universe.

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