

Humanism, Nationalism and History in Michael Davitt's Gaelic Poem "O My Two Palestinians"

Said I. Abdelwahed

Professor of English Literature English Department
Faculty of Arts, Al-Azhar University Gaza – Palestine

The poetic calling develops out of a pact made between people and poet; hence the power of such invocations to an actual poem ... (1)

Michael Davitt (1950-2005) is a contemporary Irish stage producer and poet. He was born in Cork City, Ireland in 1950 and died in Dublin in 2005. His death was described as a loss of the most famous Gaelic poet in modern history.

In addition to his work in the theater, he published three collections of poetry: **Glenn ar Ghleann** (Valley by Valley) in 1982, **Bligeard Sride** (Blagard Street) in 1983, and **Rogha Dnta** (Selected Poems, 1968-1985) in 1991. The last collection was published in Dublin by Raven Arts Press. "**O My Two Palestinians**" appeared twice in the second and third collections.

This paper is an endeavour to explore some of meanings and dimensions in Davitt's "**O My Two Palestinians.**" The dimensions proposed in the poem are humanistic, national and historical. What attracted me first was the humanistic dimension. It led me to move into probing some nationalistic meanings implied in the text, a matter that allured me to go further and plunge into history, in an attempt to sort out the identity between the Irish condition of struggle and that of the Palestinians, and therefore, their resulting poetic cases. Thus, I brought into the paper extracts from the national and resistance poetry of both peoples. I endeavour to reach points of confluence between them; they reflect the hard struggle of the two nations for their freedom, sovereignty, identity, self-determination and independence.

It is interesting that at the time when Davitt had not the subject in his head, he saw a report on TV and then words began to flow down the page; it was 17-18 September, 1982. This unexpected moment of time moved the individual Irish poetic talent in Davitt to write this neat poem in elegant voice. About the occasion of the poem, Davitt wrote to me that he composed it after "having watched a television report on the Palestinian massacre in Beirut, 18/9/[19]82"(2) He made his poem in Gaelic then Philip Casey translated it into English (Gaelic and English texts of the poem appear as appendices I and II to this paper).

In this flux of writing I see Davitt's poem as a construe /construct relation between the Gaelic Irish poetry and the Palestinian question. In other words, the poem is a tableau that displays a multi-cultural model of poetry. Every line in the poem is a choice. The poem brings about the overwhelming realisation that much has been said: sometimes, human feelings break the barriers including the language, skin color, ethnic group, religious belief, etc., and that even when we speak about our most personal matters we inevitably use other people's words and situations. It is interesting to mention T. S. Eliot's words "No poet, no artist of any art has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists."(3) Furthermore, the Gaelic language gave the poem power, exactness, proximity and close relevance to the subject. It also demonstrates the poet's immense wit, sensitivity, power of tradition and convention. Thomas Kinsella

traced the relationship between Gaelic and Anglo-Irish as from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century to realize that the two literatures are treated as separate cultures and traditions.(4) Conor Kelly writes: "Domination and assimilation, in both [Gaelic and Anglo-Irish] language and politics, are seen as opposing polarities of a poetic tradition. (5)

On the Irish question, Lawrence McCaffrey's writes: "The Anglo-Irish conflict ... [is] a model of twentieth-century wars of liberation."(6) The question of freedom and independence is not only a Palestinian or an Irish, but also a universal one. Since the time Man felt the urge to end his solitude and the need to extend human solidarity, he has been writing poetry. From that still undetermined moment of time until the present day, we have been faced with the same question, what does it mean to write poetry? In this context, the question is: What does it mean to write a poem about the Palestinians? The question compels us to restore to historical conditions to explain the gestation of the poetic text and delimit its specificity, which may or may not be proper to it. Thus, the question deviates from the norm of poetic creativity and requires a different formulation: What does it mean to be humanistic? Sensitive human feelings precede national and/or aesthetic identity, by all standards. Faced with these questions, Michael Davitt has been encouraged to defend others whom he feels to be under inhumane circumstances; the armless and innocent Palestinians were massacred in Beirut in 1982.

Exactly like the Irish people, the Palestinian people had fallen a victim to the British occupation, plans and stratagem; they became subjects to its oppressive and discriminatory policy. Decades back, Palestine fall under the control of the British, thus subjected to the British Mandate, the real ruler of the country, while centuries back, Ireland fall under the British rule. In the case of Palestine, the country was given to the Jews by Balfour Declaration in 1917. In a comment on this declaration, Christopher Skyes writes: "Balfour could regard the native inhabitants of Palestine as having priority on the land, but nowhere near the subsequent authority to keep it."(7)

Britain and France worked out the secret Sykes-Picot agreement (1916-17) according to which, Gerald Butt says:

the Arab land was carved up between the two European powers, Palestine was assigned to Britain. This was merely a formality; since the fall Gaza and General Sir Edmund Allenby's sweep northwards, Palestine has been under British military control, its inhabitants governed by military rule from Jerusalem(8)

On the other side of the fence, Ireland have been victimized to the British hegemony. On this issue, Brandon Kennelly writes: "From the eleventh century on, the English broke an amazingly persistent cultural attitude existed toward Ireland as a place whose inhabitants were a barbarian and degenerate race."(9)

What added to the complexity of the situation in Ireland, Kennelly elaborates: "the Treaty of Limerick in 1691 and Catholic Ireland became enslaved."(10) The enslavement of Ireland occurred earlier than that. Angus Calder writes:

Ireland was ceded by the Pope to Henry II of England in the 1150s; he himself came to Ireland in 1171. From that time on an amazingly persistent cultural attitude existed toward Ireland as a place whose inhabitants were barbarians and degenerate. (11)

To go back to the poem, I would mention that in 1982 after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the siege of Beirut, PLO forces were evacuated from Beirut under international protection of some sort, and in introduction to a new phase of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thus, the Palestinians in Lebanon became vulnerable. Amidst the confusion of the region and under those harsh circumstances, a

carefully planned massacre was performed on innocent Palestinian refugees living in Sabra and Shatila in the suburbs of Beirut. In a dark night, unarmed Palestinians were caught in the middle with no way to run. Israeli forces led by Ariel Sharon besieged the two adjacent camps and Phalangist militia men raided the camps, mercilessly shooting, indiscriminately killing whoever they could see. Estimates say that around seven hundred Palestinians were shot to death or slain by militants' knives.

By all means, the massacre hurt the feelings of the high spirited people, regardless of their nationalities, ethnicities, political affiliations, religions, or skin colors. In elaboration, clarification and explanation of the humane aspect of his poem, Davitt wrote: "It was a very graphic news report of the aftermath of the killings. The subsequent equally graphic images of death in my poem were based on my recollection of the news report that night in September 1982." (12) Then, on seeing the "blood," Davitt passes a moment of metamorphosis to represent the climax of his feeling, sensitivity and humanity; he demonstrates that moment in his poem. The movement of Davitt's feelings from the opening of the documentary film, and back to his consciousness, is characteristic: the history he documents is a history that will make sense of his presence too. Actually, the movement is structured by a firm intellect, no doubt, but it has fire to it as well. His soul, and formal necessity are obvious in the text.

Sabra and Shatila were not the first mass murder for the Palestinians. From the beginning, in 1948, under cover of the British Mandate, the Palestinian entity was shattered by a military occupation and followed by exodus of an uprooted people. This miserable situation was transformed into a protracted struggle by the Palestinians to return to their homeland.

Davitt has been moved by seeing a report of the massacre. The innocence of those Palestinian children moved him deeply specially that their enemy has completely ignored their human-ness. The two Palestinians of the documentary film were a boy and a girl living in miserable conditions far away from their homeland. Were they murdered because of their Palestinianism? Was it because of their calls for their right to live with honor and dignity in an independent state? It may be because of the two reasons together. After all, they are human beings who deserve to live innocently and freely. However, who cares about them? Yes, a humanist poet like Davitt does. Like the poets of Palestine, he hates seeing murder of innocents.

Though Davitt's education, and everyday language is English, he wrote "**O My Two Palestinians**" in the language of his fathers so as to re-portray historical and cultural Gaelic features and contours for the Irish upcoming generations. In a confirmatory statement about the vitality and conspicuousness of the Irish Gaelic; the propensity and predilection towards it, Davitt wrote to me: "Are you aware that Irish Gaelic is the oldest vernacular Literature in Europe? There has been a great revival here of poetry and music since 1960's." (13)

Davitt has felt the situation at Sabra and Shatila. It has become difficult for him to strike a balance between the beauty of poetry and its efficacy, and more difficult to reconstruct what is crumbling inside him, with mere words. The situation is more difficult than poetry to regain. The report was so hard on the poet; he describes his feelings by words and tries to re-portray the horrible scene of the human blood spelt for a crime that has never been committed by those victims. While Man butchers sheep for food, why he butchers the Palestinian children? Was it because they demand their freedom, cultural identity, historical movement, and homeland? They did not search for a homeland in a legendary dream. It's the homeland of their fathers. They found themselves 'pulsing' in his blood and flesh, and 'marrow-ing' in his bone, so that

he is theirs, and they are his. Thus, those sad historical moments of murder will not eliminate the Palestinian dream.

The poem is a brave outcry against ruthlessness, savagery and bloodshed. Davitt opens his poem with a simple and innocent daily practice when he "pushed open the door," but what for? It was to "let light ... on them [children]." Shockingly, they look in a miserable condition as the enemy shot them dead. The girl looked partly stripped off as "her nightgown tossed above her buttocks," and that "her blood smears her knickers;" the blood comes from a hole in the back of her head where she was shot. Next to her is a dead boy with "intestines slithered from his belly." This disgusting scene of the murder is carefully portrayed by Davitt so as to keep alive, in the memory of the world, the savagery and brutality of the colonial forces against humanity.

Davitt's writing in Gaelic conveys his pride in his native language, culture and country, and expresses a nostalgia to his past. It also reveals a conspicuous desire to bring back to life the Gaelic culture. On Ireland and its language, Kennelly writes

English rule in Ireland went a long way towards destroying the Irish language, and, therefore, writing [is] in Irish; but the language never died completely, and in fact is still alive. It is fair to say that the Battle of Kinsale in 1601 brought to an end the glorious native tradition in the literature of Ireland.(14) These historical facts and Davitt's determination to write in Gaelic reflect the poet's love of his culture and homeland. The attempts of the Irish to keep their culture and identity alive had been very old. They endeavored to reorganize themselves in national movements like the **United Irishman** (founded in 1791 in Belfast by Wolfe Tone), the **Irish Home Rule League** (established in 1874 in Dublin),(15) and the Gaelic Movement. W. B. Yeats was a major supporter of the Gaelic Movement. He strongly believed that the movement was to represent the Irish national character, and to maintain Ireland away from becoming "an imitation England."(16) He was an associate of Dr. Mark Ryan,(17) the main organizer of the **Irish Republican Brotherhood**, which could be seen as a contribution of the Fenians of the 1850s and Clan na Gael of the 1880s, and something of a precursor of **Sinn Fein**, set up in 1905, and the later **Irish Republican Army**".(18) Moreover, Yeats believed that the Irish have to revive their language and to teach it in schools and wherever possible. Therefore, he cooperated with Douglas Hyde and other enthusiast friends in March 1902, and organized a march in support of Gaelic language teaching. They called it "a language procession." They marched around Dublin and the major Irish cities and towns to collect money for the purpose of teaching Irish language and literature.(19) Also, there were other Irish groups and movements founded in search of identity and independence. These movements include: **Ulster Defense Union** (founded in 1893), **Sinn Fein** (founded in 1902), **Irish Republican Army [IRA]** (founded in 1919). Furthermore, Irish nationalists founded other nationalistic organizations to search for a culture and identity. They reflect the Irish dream of a free homeland and an independent state.(20) However, things never went smooth and easy with the Irish nationalists; they encountered oppression, harsh judgment, unjust treatment, raids on their living places, and imprisonment of the citizens, all the time, by the various British governments. For example, the 1916 rising of the Irish republican prisoners including the IRA members resorted to the hunger-strike policy against their jailers and to achieve their demands of freedom.(21) In prison, many prisoners died due to the bad treatment and as a result of their confrontations with the prisons administrations. Danny Morrison mentions that "Terence MacSwiney MP, Lord mayor of Cork died on the seventy fifth day of hunger-strike in Brixton

prison in 1920."(22) In the modern time, the Irish freedom fighter and poet Bobby Sands, the IRA volunteer died on a hunger-strike when he was imprisoned in H-Blocks of Long Kesh prison on May 5th 1981.(23) A hundred thousand mourners attended Bobby Sands' funeral on May 7th of the same year. Then history repeats itself, and "Joe MacDonnell replaced Bobby on the hunger-strike after his death and who himself eventually died after sixty-one days on the 8th July 1981,"(24) and by August 1981, nine blanket prisoners(25) died in the British jails."(26)

Bobby Sands' poetry book, **Prison Poems** contains sixteen poems and a trilogy on the theme of freedom, nostalgia and identity. Two of the poems are on the miserable situation of H-Block where the poet, later on went on a hunger strike for sixty seven day and met his end in defence of his freedom the the Irish people.

Palestinian political prisoners in the Israeli jails went on several hunger-strikes, either to protest bad jail conditions and jailers' mistreatment, or to express a political situation; a number of those prisoners died striking (27)

A great identity does exist between the circumstances of the Irish and the Palestinians. Such feelings and nostalgia, love of country, and determination to fight for the land, constitute unquestioned belief to the Palestinian; they appeared in many of their patriotic situations. A famous poem of this type was an early one called "The Martyr" by Abd al-Raheem Mahmoud (1913-1948).

Though the technique of the poem is weak, its subject, created fame and popularity for its poet. It opens with these lines

I shall carry my soul on the palm of my hand,
tossing it into the cavern of death!

Either a life to gladden the hearts of friends
or a death to torture the hearts of the foes! (28)

Later, Abdallah Radwan (b. 1949), composed a short patriotic poem entitled **"You Are Everything (For Palestine)."** It reads:

I saw in you a mother, a sister, a wife
I saw in you my family
The warmth of the tribe was on your lips
telling the tale of a heart
dead for many years
but growing now
as a child in your arms (29)

A third poet, Abu Salma [Pseudonym for Abd al-Kareem al-Karmi] (1907-1980) expressed his dream of returning to his homeland in a poem entitled "We Shall Return." He writes:

Beloved Palestine, how can I sleep
when phantoms torture my eyes?

We'll return some day while generations listen
to the echoes of our feet. (30)

By time, national Palestinian poetry, paid more attention to the content of the poem away from redundancy and verbose. Samih al-Qasim (b. 1939), is one of the foremost contemporary Palestinian poets. His love to Palestine appears in a poem entitled **"Love Poems."** He writes:

I love you
I whisper "I love you"
I scream "I love you"
Be the beginning of time!

Be the end of all space (31)

Also, "**Identification Card**" by Mahmoud Darwish (b. 1942) is a defense of his Palestinianism. He writes:

My roots

Were established before Time was born

And before eras.

And before olive-trees and cypress

My father belongs to the plough family

He was not highly born! (32)

As he advances and improves his style and writing technique, Darwish composes a poem on Land's Day (a yearly event celebrated by the Palestinians on 30 March). The first Land Day was in 1976 when the Israelis confiscated lands of two Palestinian villages, namely Ikret and Kufr Bur'um, and killed six Palestinian protesters. In his poem "**Poem of the Land,**" Darwish writes:

A small evening

A neglected village

Two sleeping eyes

Thirty years

Five wars

I witness that time hides for me

an ear of wheat

The singer sings

Of fire and strangers

Evening was evening

The singer was singing

And they question him

Why do you sing?

He answers them as they seize him

Because I sing.

And they have searched him:

In his breast only his heart

In his heart only his people

In his voice only his sorrow

In his sorrow only his prison

And they have searched his prison

To find only themselves in chains

..... (33)

Furthermore, Salma Khadra Jayyusi draws our attention to other experiences, by Palestinian writers. She writes:

Personal account literature by Palestinian writers is perhaps the greatest witness to the age of catastrophe. ... Memoirs, reminiscences, diaries, and autobiographies alike reveal a burning wish to establish the identity of the protagonist and delineate their personal experience. (34)

The history of the Palestinian struggle was interrupted by different kinds of mass murder, destruction, pogroms, and calamities practiced on them. Edward Said writes:

The principle of 'armed struggle' derives from the right of resistance accorded universally to all peoples suffering national oppression. Yet like all peoples (including, of course, the Jews) the Palestinians resorted on occasions to spectacular outrages, in order to dramatize their struggle and to inflict pain on an unremitting enemy ... Certainly Israeli violence against Palestinians has **always** been **incomparably** greater in scale and damage.(35)

One contemporary Palestinian poet, F. H. Mikdadi, could not forget gloomy days

of massacres in the modern Palestinian history. In **"The Dying,"** he writes:

They are so hard;

Those names.

Deir Yassine.

Tal Zaatar.

Karameh.

They are so hard.

Hard as the hearts that made them.(36)

The list of the pogroms, carnages, massacres and mass murder, committed against the Palestinians is a long one. In addition to those atrocities mentioned by Mikdadi there is the pogrom of Al-Buraij refugee camp in Gaza Strip in 1954. There, the Israeli attackers slaughtered more than twenty Palestinians, and killed fourteen Egyptian soldiers, then, savagely burnt their bodies in Gaza Wadi. Moreover, in 1956, the Israelis committed three massacres in Gaza Strip: The first was at the Railway Station of Gaza, the second was in Khan Younis town, and the third was in the high school for boys in Rafah town. Sadly enough, those mass killings are not documented, except verbally by elderlies who either lived the situations or escaped them to their lives. Khan Younis town witnessed one of the most savage mass murder in the history of the Palestinian people. It was November 3rd, 1965 when the Israeli forces ran over the town killing over five hundred Palestinians.(37) On that day of the massacre, a contemporary Palestinian poet, Ez-ed-Din Al-Manasra said:

Fifth of June,

Sixth of June,

Tenth of June,

All the stupid cities paid tribute

Except Khan Younis

"Tear apart its hair tresses,

Turn it upside down"

Red death stretches

Eyes of young ladies weave tomorrow's dreams

Our women throw anger;

anger flames all the tanks;

fire storms all aeroplanes;

and sings in the dark night

Red death stretches. (38)

And on those days of massacres in Khan Younis and Rafah, a report of the director of the UNRWA for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (Covering the period 1 November 1956 to mid-December 1956) made it clear that civilian Palestinian refugees in the camps of Khan Younis and Rafah together with local citizens were killed and wounded by the Israeli army.(39)

Thus, it became obvious that, in front of all the people of the world, the Israelis massacred the offspring of the exodus, the children of the long march of struggle, and the witness. Those Palestinians add to the never ending reserve army of Palestinians killed for their dream of freedom and homeland. The Palestinian witness has engaged himself in the reconstruction of this crumbled world of collective childhood. The Israelis and other colonialist powers deprived those children of the right to flourish under normal conditions.

For more than fifty years, the enemies of the Palestinians have driven them from exodus to exile and stacked them in concentration camps and collective graveyards. They have worked out all the means they could afford, to banish the Palestinians even from their own dream! Thanks to Egypt and other Arabs who stand in defense of the Palestinians.

A multitude of problems concerning the Palestinian survival among human beings include the problems of freedom and independence. The Palestinian encounters difficulties to find answers to some questions: Where to go? Sleep? Work? Learn? Where to write poetry? Where to be buried? Hunted by the forces of aggression everywhere, the Palestinian is always on the firing line. He is targeted, and sometimes he is in the zero point, and in certain moments, shows a nostalgia mixed with some kind of a desperate feeling. Consider those verses by the Palestinian poet M. F. Mikdadi, who writes:

Now I am dead think only this of me:
That I died friendless, homeless, nationless.
That I died hated, forgotten, prejudiced.
That I died without prayer for Palestine.
That I died in bitterness and in blood.(40)

Looking onto the tableau from a different angle we see Waleed al-Halees (b. 1952), a contemporary Palestinian poet from Gaza currently lives in a compulsory exile, composed a poem entitled, **"A Poem on a Closed Summer"** in which — among other things — he mentions the hardships and agonies he encounters, but he never despairs:

Gaza ... You come to me
I feed the bread of desolation
And watch the entrance of Gaza
(Gaza's entrance is a graveyard
Your grave is my rib
And I know no grave for me
All things deny me now)... (41)

Also, Maryam Qasim al-Sa'd is a Palestinian poetess living in USA. In "A Vision," she expresses nostalgic feeling and perpetual longing for her roots. She writes:

Years pass and
the waiting continues
Unwavering faith remains
a halo illuminating generations
The vision stays alive. (42)

In 1984, 1986, and 1995 Ann M. Lesch — an American professor of political science — visited Gaza under the Israeli occupation. There, she saw the situation first hand and she still remember how the Israeli soldiers prevented and punished some Palestinian kids because they were flying their kites.(43) In one of her articles, she writes: "Nevertheless, the Palestinians still long for independence, and the refugees continue to dream of returning to their homes."(44)

The Irish and the Palestinian people suffered from the British occupation. Despite the complexity of the current situation in Ireland, segments of the Irish people still fight for their freedom from the British hegemony. The Palestinians also fight for their dream of a homeland that has never abandoned their imagination.

The Irish and the Palestinian histories of struggle for a life from tyranny are extremely hard. Their circumstances are complicated and their struggle continued longer than the struggles of other nations. Davitt writes: "our two historic nations are poised on the precipice between war and peace...." (45) The whole situation should explain why a modern Irish poet, as well as modern Palestinian poets, became hymns for those trying to demolish the walls of their solitude. They want to build their national and cultural identity. They confirm Philip Larkin's idea that there is a link between "the two primitive" phenomena: "poetry and sovereignty."(46)

The Palestinian's guilt is that she/he refuses to suffer voluntary amnesia attached to their right and humanity. In the eyes of the West, the Palestinian is almost always in the negative. Edward Said writes: "In his resistance to foreign colonialists the Palestinian was either a stupid savage or negligible quantity, morally and even existentially."(47)

The Palestinian pays the price all the time. Time proved that the enemy has not changed his masks. In 8th October, 1990 fanatic Jewish settlers under protection and cover of the Israeli police, attacked thousands of Palestinian prayers at the Al-Aqsa Holy Mosque in Jerusalem, killing twenty two and injuring over one hundred worshippers.

On the other hand, the industrial complexes that manufacture human conscience, justify the Israeli terrorism. In addition to the Israeli individual terrorist acts, the Israelis practiced their state terror against civilians in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and elsewhere. Consider what happened in the southern Lebanese village of Qana. There, the Israeli army mass murdered innocent civilian when hundreds of them took refuge in a shelter to escape the heavy fight between Israel and the Lebanese Resistance force. The Israelis could site the shelter and bombard it with artillery to kill more than a hundred people! In 28 July 1995, an Israeli young man hijacked a public transportation bus, in Germany, killing two passengers, and injuring a German policeman and an Austrian tourist. The terrorist was claimed to be mentally ill.

Even worse, Palestinian endeavour to find out, under an international umbrella, a way out of those crises and stalemates, towards a comprehensive and lasting peace that secures the right of self-determination for the Palestinians and a security for the whole region. However, at the Muslims dawn prayers in 27th day of the month of Ramadan, Israeli religious extremists attacked worshippers in the Ibrahimic Holy Mosque (Cave of Patriarchs) at Hebron, to exterminate the souls of twenty nine Palestinians. The terrorist ring leader was a fanatic Zionist physician Baruch Goldstein. He was claimed, by the Israeli police, to be mentally unstable. The event was a bloody crime and a flagrant provocation to Muslim feelings worldwide. What added insult to the injury is that, on the first anniversary of that massacre, in a popular celebration, to confer honor upon Goldstein, his disciples and students erected in Kriat Arba' settlement of Hebron, a statue of Goldstein to glorify him and memorize the day of his "brave" deed. Last year Blake Morrison, a contemporary English novelist and poet was visiting with the West Bank and Gaza. After his visit he wrote in **The Independent** (22 March 1998) under the title: **"Blake Morrison, who was in Hebron last week, believes Israel has become a nation of abusers: See it and believe it"**:

In Hebron, Jewish settlers have erected a shrine to Baruch Goldstein, in commemoration of a man they regard not as a mass murderer but as a saint and hero. It is the equivalent of putting up a statue of Thomas Hamilton in Dunblane. How the Palestinians endure this insult, along with all the others, I can't imagine. (48)

Instead of encouraging refrain calling for murder, and abrogating terrorism, Israeli police, security and governmental circles remained silent with no objection against the celebration! It was a decisive proof of the Israeli hidden intentions, and single-handed policy.

Whats more? Last year, two agents from the Israeli secret security service, holding Canadian passports, were caught after their attempt to assassinate a Palestinian political cadre in Jordan, a country which signed a peace agreement with Israel! Strangely enough, the European media minimized those crimes to the lowest profile!

The situation has reached the peak of intolerability, thus, it remains to say that the Palestinian and the Irish people have to remain ready on the line, ready to fight in a battlefield and different battles. Otherwise, they will remain easy victims for the forces of aggression. Identical situations encounter the Irish and the Palestinian. While the colonialist powers have been accusing the Palestinians of being all the time savage and terrorists, the situation of the Irish is not any better. Agnes Calder says: "The idea of murdering Gaels was from the start 'as part of a royal army or with royal approval,' patriotic, heroic, and just."(49) And Edward Said writes:

"[S]ince Spencer's 1596 tract on Ireland, a whole tradition of British and European thought has considered the Irish to be a separate and inferior race, usually unregenerately barbarian, often delinquent and primitive. ..."(50) Hence, the Palestinians and the Irish have to transform the terms of Shakespeare's **Hamlet** quest into a definitive answer. Not to ask, "To be or not to be, that is the question," but to affirm, "To be or not to be, this is the decision!"

Interestingly, in June 1998, the Irish people have achieved some kind of success on the way of their destiny, Parliament, and a say on their home affairs. They reached an agreement with the British government followed by a secret ballot held for the Irish people on that agreement. The outcome of their ballot gave an approval to the British-Irish agreement, and gave rise to new hopes for a new future of Northern Ireland. However, due to accumulated political and religious reasons, after the ballot, some Protestants protested against the agreement. They took to the streets barricading them and setting blaze into cars causing turmoil and clashing with the police. The Irish still have to settle the question of Ireland.

"O My Two Palestinians" is certainly a humanistic poem. Davitt confirms this statement in his letter as he says: "Although I sympathize with the Palestinian cause, I may well have written the same poem about Israeli children or even British."(51) The poem houses intricate conversation between the poet and two innocent Palestinian children slain in Beirut. In more polemical converse with itself, the poem dramatise the context over humanistic terms and values; and as time goes by, it brings hidden force and also shapes a canon. Hence, I can argue that the poem is multi-cultural. The spirit of poetry was alive in Davitt — that very moment — on seeing the documentary film. **"O My Two Palestinians"** came in a natural overflow; inciting and outstanding. It reiterates a story of enormous griefs. Peter Forbes says: "Poetry infiltrates our daily consciousness, some-times providing a direction, a slogan to encapsulate a world-view."(52) This statement is applicable to Davitt's poem.

The poem is a new addition to the catalogue of the humanistic, and anti-imperialist Irish poetry. It secured Davitt a name in the long list of those Irish writers and poets who used their verbal expression and written word to fight for humanity and freedom of man.

Appendix 1 **ó Mo Bheirt Philistíneach**

-- 18/9/[19]82, iar bhfeiscint dom tuairisc theilifise
ar shlad na bPailistíneach I nBeirut.

Poet: Michael Davitt

Bhrúigh me an doras
oiread a ligfeadh solas cheann an staighre

orthu isteach:
na héadaí leapa caite díobh acu
iad ina luí sceabhach
mar ar thiteader:
a gúna oíche caite aníos thar a mása
fuil ar a brístín lása,
as scailp I gcúl a cinn
a hinchinn sicín ag aiseag ar an bpiliúr,
putóg ag úscadh as a bholgsan
mar fheamainn ar charraig,
ae ar bhráillín,
leathlámh fhuithéachta in airde.
ó mo bheirt Phailistíneah ag lobhadh sa teas lárnach.

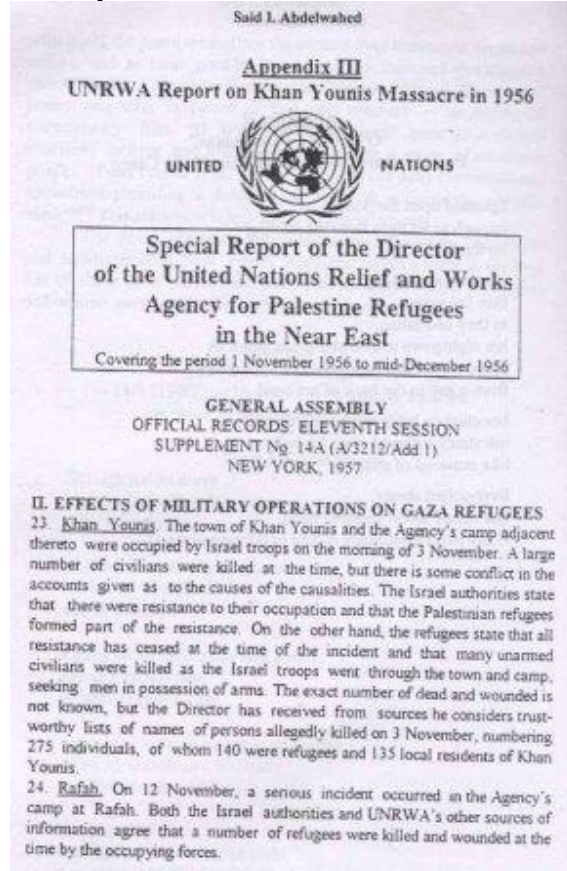
Appendix II
"O My Two Palestinians"

Poet: Michael Davitt. Translator: Philip Casey

I pushed open the door
enough to let light from the landing
on them:
blankets kicked off
they lay askew
as they had fallen:
her nightgown tossed above her buttocks
blood on her lace knickers,
from a gap in the back of her head
her chicken brain retched on the pillow,
intestines slithered from his belly
like seaweed of a rock,
liver-soiled sheets,
one raised blood smeared hand.
O my two Palestinians rotting in the central heat.

Appendix III

UNRWA Report on Khan Younis Massacre in 1956



Appendix IV A Letter from Michael Davitt to Said I. Abdelwahed

Said I. Abdelwahed

Appendix IV

A letter from Michael Davitt to Said I. Abdelwahed

32 Abbey Road, Kesh, Co. Down, Republic of Ireland.

Tel: 01-491 0252

10th May 1996

Said I. Abdelwahed,
PO BOX 1110,
Gaza - via Israel

Dear Said I. Abdelwahed,

Firstly may I offer you my sincere apologies for the long delay in replying to your correspondence. Unfortunately I mistook the paper you sent me last year but found again yesterday in another file. However I am now giving the matter my full attention. I am indeed very pleased that you read my poem in translation and am honoured that you liked it enough to write your paper on it.

Allow me first to say a little about my country, and the Gaelic language which I use as a literary medium and speak on an everyday basis at home and at work (I earn my living not by writing poems but as a producer of television programmes in Gaelic, or Irish, as it is commonly known here). The Republic of Ireland is an independent state which broke free from British rule in 1921 after hundreds of years of struggle. But the north western part of the island has remained in British hands. This province in the north is called Northern Ireland. It has a population of about 1,000,000 the majority of which are Protestants and see themselves as British. The minority are Catholic and nationalist and it is from this community that the IRA emerged to carry out an armed struggle since 1968. As you know, there has been more constitutional activity of late which will, hopefully, arrive at some agreement between the two allegiances which will enable them to live in peace and reconciliation. Personally, I am not a believer in war as a means of resolving political or cultural conflict, although as a realist I can understand why the minority nationalist community in north were pushed by forty years of religious and social oppression to take up arms.

The poem, 'O My Two Palestinians', as you rightly say in your paper is a humanist response to the horrific slaughter of innocents at the Sabra and Shatila camps in Beirut. It was a very graphic news report of the aftermath of the killings. The subsequent equally graphic images of death in my poem were based on my recollection of the news report that night in September 1982. I went up stairs having watched the report to check on my own two children - I suppose you could call it paternal instinct. The poem is in the realm of reality for the first five lines in the girl and boy are asleep in the bedroom. But in the second line of the third verse the scene undergoes a metamorphosis with the word 'blood'. Now the poem is in the realm of metaphor in the children are not asleep now, they are two Palestinians from the TV newsreels and here they are in my own bedroom in Dublin, their bodies rotting in the central heating. I suppose it was my own way of saying, you slaughtered Palestinians in Beirut, you are my children, and you my children up stairs asleep in bed you could be those dead Palestinians.

Although I sympathize with the Palestinian cause, I may well have written the same poem about Israeli children or even British. I think it is a poem about the futility of war. Well this is the background to my poem which has reached you in far away Gaza and confirms to me once

Said I. Abdelwahed

more the great spiritual power of poetry and how it can reach through all the political and linguistic divides of the world.

As our two historic nations are poised on the precipice between war and peace this is an intriguing correspondence for me and I hope it is only the beginning of a more thorough exchange between us. I will send you some more material in the near future which will explain further to you the present position of Gaelic literature, music, and culture. Are you aware that Irish Gaelic is the oldest vernacular literature in Europe? There has been a great revival here of poetry and music since the 1960's. You have probably heard of Seamus Heaney who has recently been awarded The NOBEL Prize for literature. He is a great poet and lives not far from me here in Dublin.

So please look forward to receiving more literature from me soon. Maybe you can write and tell me more about yourself and modern Palestinian poetry and music.

In the meantime I wish you and your countrymen freedom and peace.

Beir bua is beannacht,

Michael Davitt

NOTES

1. Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 282.
2. Michael Davitt, Selected Poems, 1968-1984. (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1991), 18-19 [Appendices 1 and 2].
3. T. S. Eliot "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in Selected Essays. (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1980), 15.

4. Thomas Kinsella. *The Dual Tradition: An Essay on Poetry Politics in Ireland*. (London: Carcanet, 1996), 36.
5. Conor Kelly. "Tradition and the Individual Irish Talent" in *Poetry Review*. vol 86, no. 2 (Summer, 1996):47-49.
6. Lawrence J. McCaffrey, "Components of Irish Nationalism" in *Perspectives on Irish Nationalism*, Eds. Thomas E. Hachey and Lawrence J. McCaffrey (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1989), 16.
7. Christopher Sykes, *Crossroads to Israel* (1965, Rept; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 5.
8. Gerald Butt. *Life at the Crossroads: A History of Gaza*. (Essex: Rimal Publications, 1995), 124.
9. Brandan Kennelly, ed. with intro., "Introduction" in *The Penguin Book of Irish Literature*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 30.
10. Ibid. 30.
11. Angès Calder. *Revolutionary Empire: The Rise of the English-Speaking Empire from the Eighteenth Century to the 1780s* (London: Cape, 1981), 14.
12. "Letter" from Michael Davitt to Said I. Abdelwahed on 10th May 1996 [Appendix 3].
13. Ibid. 2.
14. Kennelly, "Introduction" in *The Penguin Book of Irish Literature*, 29.
15. For information on the rise and development of the Irish nationalism and national movements from the eighteenth century on, see R. F. Forster. *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*. (1988, Rept; London: Penguin Books, 1989), 215, 239n, 608, and T. W. Moody & F. X. Martin, eds. *The Course of Irish History* (1967, Rept. Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1992), 238-9, 242-5. Franklin L. Ford. "Europe 1780-1830" 2nd ed. in *A General History of Europe*. Gen. Ed. Denis Hay. (London and New York: Longman, 1989), 147, 169. Raymond Pearson. *The Longman Companion to European Nationalism 1898-1920* (London and New York: Longman, 1994), 165-170.
16. W. B. Yeats. "The Gaelic Movement and the Parliamentary Party," in *The Echo*, April 25, 1902, in *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*, vol. 2, coll. and Eds. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson, 1987-1983. (London: Macmillan Books, 1975), 298.
17. Denis Donoghue, ed. *Memoires*. London: Macmillan, 1972), 82.
18. Alasdair D. E. Macre. *W. B. Yeats: A Literary Life*. London: Macmillan, 1995), 57.
19. Ibid. 298.
20. For good information on the Irish national movement see Raymond Pearson. *The Longman Companion to European Nationalism 1889-1920*. (London and New York: Longman, 1994), 165-170.
21. Dany Morrison "Introduction" to *Prison Poems by Bobby Sands*. (Dublin: Sinn Fein Publicity Department, 1981), 7.
22. Ibid. 7.
23. Ibid. 7.
24. Ibid. 6.
25. Blanket prisoners is the term that the Irish nationalists in the British prisons, gave to themselves when they stood against the prison's administrations when those authorities denied the prisoners refused the prisoners access to toilets and washing facilities and forced the prisoners to live in filthy conditions. Those prisoners were Francis Hughes, Raymond McCreech, Pasty O'Hara, Joe McDonnell, Martin Hurson, Kevin Lynch, Kieran Doherty, Thomas McElwee and Micky Devine.
26. Morrison, "Introduction" to *Prison Poems by Bobby Sands*, 5.

27. Since the Israeli occupation of West Bank and Gaza Strip, Palestinian prisoners went on several hunger strikes. For example, 1969 Askalan Prison hunger strike (lasted for 30 days in which died Mohamed Abu Al-Fahem), 1976 general hunger strike in all the Israeli prisons (lasted for 45 days), 1977 general strike in all the Israeli prisons (lasted for 20 days), 1980 Nafeha Prison strike (lasted for 32 days. In it died Issac Maragah, Rasem Halawa and Ali Jaafari), 1984 Junid Prison hunger strike (lasted for 32 days. In it died Mahmoud Arabi Fretkh), 1987 general hunger strike in all the Israeli prisons (lasted for several days), 21st June 1994 general hunger strike in all the Israeli prisons (lasted for 17 days), 19th Dec. 1998 general hunger strike in all the Israeli prisons (lasted for 7 days).
28. 'Adb el-Raheem Mahmoud "The Martyr" trans. by Sharif Elmusa and Naomi Shihab Nye in Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature. Ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 209.
29. Abdalla Radwan, "You Are Everything (For Palestine)" trans. by Sharif Elmusa and Naomi Shihab Nye in Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature. Ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 264.
30. Abu Salma, "We Shall Return" trans. by Sharif Elmusa and Naomi Shihab Nye in Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature. Ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 96.
31. Samih al-Qasim, "Love Poems," trans. by Sharif Elmusa and Naomi Shihab Nye in Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature. Ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 257.
32. Mahmoud Darwish, "Identification Card" in "Awraq al-Zayytoun" in The Dewan of Mahmoud Darwish. 12th ed. (1964, Rept; Beirut: Dar Al-Awdah, 1987), 73. The English translation of this poem was made by the writer of this paper, so as to be quoted in it.
33. Mahmoud Darwish, "Poem of the Land" trans. by Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton in Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature. Ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 249-50.
34. Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed with intro. "Introduction" in Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 66.
35. Edward Said, "The Essential Terrorist" in Blaming the Victim, Eds. Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens. (London and New York: Verso Books, 1988), 153.
36. Mikdadi, F. M. A Return: The Siege of Beirut. (London: Martin Brian & O'keeffe, 1983), 14.
37. Those days remained in form of verbal anecdotes and stories until most recently when a researcher collected names of murdered people by means of verbal evidence from eye-witnesses of incidents and other sources like newspaper clippings for a book. Moreover, the writer himself lived that time at Khan Yunis and saw with his own eyes some of those happenings. See, Ihsan al-Agha. Khan Yunis and its Martyrs: 1956 massacre and steadfastness. Cairo: Markaz Fajr for Printing, Publishing and Editing, 1987.
38. A poem by Ez-ed-Din Al-Manasra, quoted in Ihsan Al-Agha, Khan Yunis and its Martyrs: 1956 massacre and steadfastness, 132, and translated by the writer of this paper.
39. UNRWA. Special Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (Covering the Period 1 November 1956 to mid-December 1956. General Assembly: Official Records: Eleventh Session. Supplement No. 14A (A/3212/Add. 1). New York: 1957 [See Appendix III to this paper]
40. Mikdadi, F. M. A Return: The Siege of Beirut. 33.

41. Waleed al-Hallees "A Poem on a Closed Summer," quoted by Ann M. Lesch, in *The Gaza Strip: Heading Towards a Dead End. Part One: History and Politics*, in *Universities Field Staff International*. no. 10 (Hanover: UFSI, 1984), 2
42. Maryam Qasim al-Sa'd, "A Vision" in *Earth and Stars* (London: Aurora press, 1991), 61.
43. An interview with Ann M. Lesch, by Said I. Abdelwahed, in *Gaza* on September 4, 1995.
44. Lesch, "The Gaza Strip: Heading Towards a Dead End. Part One: History and Politics," 1.
45. *Ibid.* 1.
46. Philip Larkin's *Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973. Larkin attempts to present this relationship in the modern English poetry from Hardy to Yeats and Eliot.
47. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 306.
48. Blake Morrison, a contemporary English poet and novelist. He won. In 1996 he won The Booker Prize for his novel *When Did You Last See Your Father*.
49. Angès Calder, *Revolutionary Empire: The Rise of the English-[S]peaking Empires from the Eighteenth Century to the 1780's*, (London: Cape Press, 1981), 36.
50. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 285.
51. Michael Davitt's "Letter to Said I. Abdelwahed" on 10th May 1996 [See appendix 3]
52. Peter Forbes. "The Secret Life of Poems" in *Poetry Review*. vol 87, no 1. (Spring, 1997), 5.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdelwahed, Said I. "An Interview with Ann M. Lesch." *Gaza*, September 4, 1995.
- Al-Agha, Ihsan. *Khan Younis and its Martyrs: 1956 massacre and steadfastness*. Cairo: Markaz Fajr for Printing, Publishing and Editing, 1987.
- Al-Hallees, Waleed "A Poem on a Closed Summer" quoted by Ann M. Lesch, *The Gaza Strip: Heading Towards a Dead End: History and Politics*, in *Universities Field Staff International (UFSI)* no. 10. Hanover: UFSI, 1984.
- Al-Sa'd, Maryam Qasim, "A Vision" in *Earth and Stars*, London: Aurora Press, 1991.
- Butt, Gerald. *Life at the Crossroads: A History of Gaza*. Essex: Rimal Publications, 1995.
- Calder, Angès. *Revolutionary Empire: The Rise of the English [S]peaking Empires from the Eighteenth Century to the 1780's*. London: Cape Press, 1981.
- Darwish, Mahmoud. *The Diwan of Mahmoud Darwish*. 12th ed. 1964, Rept; Beirut: Dar Al-Awdah, 1987.
- Davitt, Michael. *Selected Poems, 1968-1984*. Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1991.
- "Letter to Said I. Abdelwahed." 10th May 1996.
- Donoghue, Denis, ed. *Memoirs*. London: Macmillan, 1972.
- Drake, Nicholas. *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats*. London: Penguin, 1991.
- Forbes, Peter. "The Secret Life of Poems" in *Poetry Review*. Ed. Peter Forbes, vol 87, no 1. (Spring, 1997): 3-6.
- Ford, Franklin L. *Europe 1780-1830 in A General History of Europe Series*. 2nd ed. Gen. Ed. Denis Hay. London and New York: Longman, 1989.
- Forster, R. F. *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*. 1988, Rept; London: Penguin Books, 1989.

Jayyusi, Salma Khadra, ed. with Intro, *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

Kelly, Thomas. "Tradition and the Individual Irish Talent" in *Poetry Review*, Ed. Peter Forbes. vol. 86, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 47-49.

Kennelly, Brandan, ed. with intro., *The Penguin Book of Irish Literature*. 2nd ed. London: Penguin Books, 1981.

Kinsella, Thomas. *The Dual Tradition: An Essay on Poetry Politics in Ireland*. London: Carcanet, 1996.

Larkin, Philip. *Philip Larkin's Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Lesch, Ann M. *The Gaza Strip: Heading Towards a Dead End*, 2 vols. in *Universities Field Staff International (UFSI) no. 10*. Hanover: UFSI, 1984.

Macare, Alasdair D. F. W. B. *Yeats: A Literary Life*. Gen. Ed. Richard Dutton. London: Macmillan, 1995.

McCaffrey, Lawrence J. "Components of Irish Nationalism," in *Perspectives on Irish Nationalism*. Eds. Thomas E. Hachey and Lawrence J. McCaffrey. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1989.

McDowall, David. *The Palestinians: The Road to Nationhood*. London: Minority Rights Publications, 1994.

Mikdadi, F. M. *A Return: The Siege of Beirut*. London: Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1983.

Moody, T. W. & F. X. Martin. *The Course of Irish History*. 1967; Rept; Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1992.

Morrison, Blake. "Blake Morrison, who was in Hebron last week, believes Israel has become a nation of abusers. See it and believe it" in *The Independent Daily Newspaper*, London, 22 march 1998.

Pearson, Raymond. *The Longman Companion to European Nationalism 1889-1920*. London and New York: Longman, 1994.

Said, Edward. *Culture & Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

----- "The Essential Terrorist" in *Blaming the Victim*. Eds. Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens. London and New York: Verso Books, 1988.

----- *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1987.

Sands, Bobby. *Prison Poems by Bobby Sands*. Introduction by Danny Morrison. Dublin: Sinn Fein Publicity Department, 1981.

Sykes, Christopher. *Crossroads to Israel*. 1965, Rept; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973.

UNRWA: *Effect of Military Operations on Gaza Refugees*. Special Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (Covering the Period 1 November 1956 to mid-December 1956). General Assembly: Official Records: Eleventh Session. Supplement No. 14A (A/3212/Add. 1). New York: 1957 [Appendix III to this paper].

Yeats, W. B. "The Gaelic Movement and the Parliamentary Party" in *The Echo*, April 25, 1902, in *Uncollected Prose of W. B. Yeats, II 1897-1939*. Eds. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson, London: Macmillan Books, 1975.

----- "Easter 1916" in *W. B. Yeats Collected Poems*. 1933 Rept; London: Macmillan Books, 1982.