

THE POETICS OF RESISTANCE: MIRROR OF SOCIETY AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONS IN MAHMUD DARWISH'S QASIDAT AL-ARDH WITHIN IAN WATT'S SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Mahmud Darwish's poem "Qasidatu al-Ardh" ("The Poem of the Land") through the lens of Ian Watt's sociology of literature to understand how the text reflects and functions within the socio-political realities of Palestine. The study aims to (1) describe how the poem mirrors the social and political conditions of Palestinian life under occupation, (2) reveal the social values, nationalism, and ideological resistance expressed in the poem, and (3) explain the poem's social functions as a medium of critique, collective consciousness, and ideological struggle. Using a qualitative-descriptive method, the analysis focuses on close reading of the Arabic text supported by secondary sources on Darwish, Palestinian history, and sociological literary theory. The findings show that Darwish constructs a poetic landscape in which land, identity, memory, and the body become symbolic sites of conflict and resistance. These results demonstrate that poetry, especially within contexts of oppression, serves as both a mirror and an agent of social transformation.

Keywords: *Ian Watt, Mahmoud Darwish, Mirror of Society, Social Function, Sociology of Literature.*

ABSTRAK

Studi ini mengkaji puisi Mahmud Darwish berjudul "Qasidatu al-Ardh" melalui lensa sosiologi sastra Ian Watt untuk memahami bagaimana teks tersebut mencerminkan dan berfungsi dalam realitas sosial-politik Palestina. Studi ini bertujuan untuk (1) mendeskripsikan bagaimana puisi tersebut mencerminkan kondisi sosial dan politik kehidupan Palestina di bawah pendudukan, (2) mengungkap nilai-nilai sosial, nasionalisme, dan perlawanan ideologis yang diungkapkan dalam puisi, dan (3) menjelaskan fungsi sosial puisi sebagai medium kritik, kesadaran kolektif, dan perjuangan ideologis. Menggunakan metode kualitatif-deskriptif, analisis ini berfokus pada pembacaan cermat (close reading) teks berbahasa Arab yang didukung oleh sumber-sumber sekunder tentang Darwish, sejarah Palestina, dan teori sastra sosiologis. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Darwish membangun lanskap puitis di mana tanah, identitas, ingatan, dan tubuh menjadi situs simbolis konflik dan perlawanan. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa puisi, terutama dalam konteks penindasan, berfungsi sebagai cermin dan agen transformasi sosial.

Kata Kunci: *Ian Watt, Mahmoud Darwish, Cerminan Masyarakat, Fungsi Sosial, Sosiologi Sastra.*

INTRODUCTION

Mahmoud Darwish's poetry represents one of the most powerful literary expressions capturing the cries and hopes of the Palestinian people. One of his poems, قصيدة الأرض (*Qaṣīdat al-Arḍ* / "Hymn of the Land"), presents an emotional and symbolic depiction of Palestinian land and identity, making it a suitable formal object of literary study. Beyond its

linguistic beauty, however, this poem materially reflects the historical and social realities of the Palestinian people namely experiences of displacement, exile, occupation, and national struggle. The poem was born within the context of a prolonged conflict and the effort to defend the homeland; thus, “قصيدة الأرض” cannot be separated from the material layers of struggle, suffering, and collective hope of the Palestinian nation (Ni'mah, 2019).

This situation forms an important background for why studying “قصيدة الأرض” is academically and socially relevant. The fact that Darwish grew up in a family of farmers in the village of Al-Birwa, which lost its homeland due to the establishment of the State of Israel and became internally displaced, demonstrates that Darwish's life and works were shaped by a history of violence, dispossession, and oppression (Bamia, 2008). Because the collective identity of Palestine has repeatedly been attacked by colonialism and occupation, Darwish's poetry including “قصيدة الأرض” serves as a medium of identity affirmation, homeland nostalgia, and critique of injustice. Many studies note that Darwish's poetry functions as a form of cultural and symbolic resistance against occupation, often through the use of natural metaphors and land as representations of nationalism and existence (Ni'mah, 2019; Talukder & Ali, 2025).

For these reasons, this study is compelling: through the sociology of literature approach (referring to theoretical frameworks such as those of Ian Watt), “قصيدة الأرض” is understood not merely as an aesthetic work but as a historical document, a reflection of sociopolitical realities and an instrument of ideological struggle. By examining the poem's poetic structure and sociopolitical context, this research seeks to offer new insights into how literature can voice suffering, awaken collective consciousness, and strengthen Palestinian national identity. Amid an ongoing conflict, such a study is not only academically relevant but also humanly significant: it positions poetry as a witness and vocal form of resistance against oppression, as well as a medium of hope and solidarity.

The sociology of literature approach views literary works as socio-historical products closely connected to the realities of the society that produces them (Muhammad et al., 2022; Ryan, 2011), as seen since the emergence of the realist novel in the eighteenth century, which arose from social change and the rise of the middle class (Watt, 1957). The relationship between literature and society is dialectical because literature both reflects society and shapes social consciousness (Spasić, 2024), and as a complex social construction it requires an examination of its field of production and the ideologies that surround it (Maltz, 2023). Within Ian Watt's framework, three central aspects are emphasized: the social context of the author, literature as a mirror of society, and the social function of literature (Watt, 1957). The social context of the author includes educational, economic, and social background as well as the author's relationship with readers (Damono, 1978; Fals et al., 2023). Literature as a mirror of

society presents the values and social dynamics of its time (Jabrohim, 2001), although such reflection is always distorted by ideology and genre (Faruk, 1994; Watt, 1957).

The social function of literature affirms its role as a medium of social transformation, critique, resistance for oppressed groups, and a space for symbolic expressions of freedom (Faruk, 1994; Nandisa et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, literature has long served as a tool of critique against those in power, from the colonial era to the Reformasi period (Endraswara, 2013), just as in the Victorian era literary works revealed problems of poverty, industrialization, and class inequality (Watt, 1971). In line with Marx's view that material life shapes human consciousness, literature both reflects and shapes modes of social thinking (Faruk, 1994), and this also aligns with Plato's theory of imitation (Faruk, 2011). In *Myths of Modern Individualism*, Watt (1996) emphasizes that modern literary characters such as Robinson Crusoe cannot be separated from the social construction of their era. The relationship between literature and society can also be analyzed through extratextual factors and the social structures that shape literary production (Damono, 1978), including the influence of economic systems and readership classes (Watt, 1996). Literature records social phenomena such as poverty, pollution, and family disorganization (Maghfiroh & Mustofa, 2023), as well as depicting class conflict and economic transformation (Watt, 1971). Beyond reflection, literature may also function as symbolic resistance against power (Saputra & Yuwana, 2025), voicing criticisms that cannot be expressed openly (Endaswara, 2011), and in the Romantic tradition it is even regarded as a form of moral revelation (Faruk, 2011).

An example of the application of Watt's analytical method appears in his study of Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo*, where Watt reveals themes of class irony, materialism, imperialism, and the effects of revolution in South America as reflections of the socio-historical conditions of the time (Watt, 1988). Nevertheless, Watt's approach is not without criticism, as it is often considered reductionist, insufficiently attentive to the role of the reader, Eurocentric, and more suitable for realist works (Warner, 1998). Therefore, its application to different contexts requires adaptation, as seen in studies of Tere Liye's novels that reflect contemporary Indonesian social dynamics (Meiryssa & Wardita, 2021), or in Arabic poetry such as Darwish's works, which are embedded in themes of colonialism and Palestinian nationalism. Despite these limitations, Ian Watt's sociology of literature remains a powerful approach that bridges literary aesthetics and social reality, enabling literary works to be read both as historical documents and as agents of social change (Damono, 1978; Faruk, 1994).

The researcher identified several previous studies indicating that research based on the sociology of literature, particularly those using Ian Watt's approach has consistently been employed to reveal how literary works reflect social realities and perform their social functions

across various contexts and genres. Muhammad et al (2022) demonstrate that *The Great Gatsby* reflects the materialism and class conflict of 1920s America, while Fajriani et al (2024) reveal the social realities of migrant laborers and economic inequality in the novels of Mahfud Ikhwan. The study by Izazi & Nashiruddin (2024) highlights four forms of suffering experienced by Palestinian refugees in the short story *Al-Qamish Al-Masruq*, whereas Grimm & Mauthofer (2025) show how language shapes social reality in the context of violence in Gaza. Sawitri & Fitriani (2023) underline criticisms of patriarchy in the novel *Al-Iftthor Al-Akhir*, and Singh (2023) illustrates how Mahmoud Darwish's poetry becomes a voice of resistance and a manifestation of Palestinian identity. Syawaluddin et al (2025) read the drama *Bait Al Asybach* as a critique of the spiritual degradation of modern society, while Azizah & Ardiyanti (2024) position *Persepolis* as a social documentation of the Iranian Revolution. Mustika et al (2024) show the function of poetry as an instrument of resistance through *Pidato Seorang Demonstran*, while Maghfiroh & Mustofa (2023) identify nine forms of social reflection in *Sampah di Laut, Meira* and emphasize the role of literature in character education. Prawesti & Sari (2024), in their study of the film *Atap Padang Mahsyar*, highlight social values such as empathy and responsibility, and Pramudyaseta & Azmin (2021) demonstrate how Joko Pinurbo's poetry reflects the impact of globalization and linguistic change. Collectively, these studies show that literature whether in the form of novels, poetry, drama, or film consistently acts as a mirror of society, capturing social dynamics, identity conflicts, injustices, cultural shifts, and human aspirations, while simultaneously performing social functions such as critique, documentation, education, resistance, and the formation of social consciousness. These findings reinforce the relevance of the study *Reflection of Social Reality and the Social Function of Literature in Mahmud Darwish's Poem Qasidatu al-Ardh*, which follows the academic tradition that views literature as a meaningful and complex field of social representation.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on Mahmud Darwish's poem "قصيدة الأرض" using Ian Watt's sociology of literature an approach typically applied to narrative works such as novels or short stories rather than poetry with dense symbolic and metaphorical structures. Unlike previous research that focuses on themes of exile, suffering, or the broader collective experience of Palestinians in Darwish's works, this study specifically uncovers how "قصيدة الأرض" represents Palestinian socio-political reality through a network of symbols, land metaphors, and the construction of an imagination of resistance. This study also introduces a new contribution by emphasizing the poem's social function as an ideological tool that shapes collective consciousness and strengthens national identity, filling a research gap in connecting Darwish's poetic aesthetics with Ian Watt's framework of social critique in a systematic manner.

The research questions were formulated to explore three main aspects: how “قصيدة الأرض” reflects the social and political realities of Palestinian society within the context of occupation and resistance; what social values, nationalistic elements, and forms of resistance are criticized and advocated by Mahmud Darwish in the poem; and how the poem’s social function as a medium of critique, collective awareness, and ideological struggle can be understood through Ian Watt’s sociology of literature. Thus, the research questions are designed to ensure that the study aligns with its primary goals: demonstrating that literary works, particularly Darwish’s poetry, serve not only as mirrors of social reality but also as instruments for shaping consciousness and resistance in the context of the Palestinian national struggle.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach. Qualitative research aims to uncover social phenomena through the interpretation of meaning embedded within a text or event (Sugiyono, 2015). In this context, the research is intended to understand the social meaning and the social function of literature in Mahmud Darwish’s poem “*Qasidat al-Ardh*” by applying Ian Watt’s sociology of literature. The primary focus lies on two essential aspects of Watt’s theory, namely literature as a mirror of society and the social function of literature. Through this approach, the study seeks to capture the ideological and historical complexity reflected in the poem, particularly in its portrayal of the collective experience of the Palestinian people.

The primary data in this research consist of the original Arabic text of “*Qasidat al-Ardh*”, which is analyzed in depth. Meanwhile, the secondary data include theoretical books, journal articles, and other relevant documents related to the sociology of literature, the biography and works of Mahmud Darwish, and the socio-political history of Palestine. Several digital sources are also utilized to strengthen the contextual understanding of the poem, particularly those derived from accountable academic publications and official websites.

Data collection is conducted through documentation techniques and close reading. The researcher reads the poem repeatedly to identify structures, symbols, and social expressions contained within it. Each stanza is examined to identify representations of social conditions, collective struggle, and ideological resistance articulated by Mahmud Darwish. Notes and annotations are made throughout the reading process to highlight parts of the poem that strongly correspond to the theoretical framework and the contextual background of the study.

To ensure validity and reliability, several validation techniques are applied, including increasing persistence in reading and systematically reviewing both the text and references. Additionally, theory triangulation (using multiple theoretical perspectives from literary studies

and sociology), source triangulation (comparing primary and secondary data from different viewpoints), and methodological triangulation (combining documentation with close reading) are implemented. Discussions with peers and academic supervisors are also conducted as a reflective measure to minimize interpretative bias and strengthen the arguments developed in the research.

The data analysis technique refers to the model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). In the data reduction stage, the researcher filters stanzas relevant to social and ideological themes, such as oppression, identity, and the Palestinian struggle. Data display is carried out by organizing significant textual excerpts and interpreting them within the framework of the sociology of literature. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher synthesizes textual interpretation, Ian Watt's theoretical framework, and the socio-political context surrounding the poem, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of Mahmud Darwish's poetry as a medium of social critique, historical testimony, and a symbol of collective resistance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table (1): Summary of Data Analysis

Ian Watt's			Social & Ideological	
No.	Sociological Aspect	Data / Poem Excerpt	Analytical Finding	Meaning
1	Literature as a Mirror: Violence & National Identity	"في شهر آذار... قالت لنا الأرض أسرارها الدمويّة"	The land is personified as a witness to the violence of the Intifada.	Documents colonial violence and collective trauma; affirms the land as part of Palestinian identity.
2	Mirror of Society: Gender & Resistance	"خمس بنات... افتتحن نشيد التراب"	Five young girls become symbols of sacrifice and the beginning of the "song of the land."	Women's bodies as symbols of resistance, vulnerability, and collective struggle under occupation.
3	Mirror of Society: Land-	"أنا الأرض والأرض أنت"	Deep identification between poet and land.	Land is not property but national identity; political

Ian Watt's				Social & Ideological
No.	Sociological Aspect	Data / Poem Excerpt	Analytical Finding	Meaning
	Body Identification			struggle is fused with existential identity.
4	Mirror of Society: Historical Trauma	"أعوذُ ثلاثين عاماً وخمسين حروب"	The poet returns to "thirty years and five wars."	Highlights structural cycles of violence; memorializes national suffering as continuous history.
5	Mirror of Society: Identity Crisis	"أعيدوا إليّ الهويّة"	A plea to restore a stolen identity.	Reveals colonial erasure of personhood; poetry becomes a medium of reclaiming existence.
6	Mirror of Society: Rebuilding Communal Hope	"بأنا الأمل والسهل والرحب – قالت لي الأرض"	Literature becomes a symbolic space for healing, guiding collective imagination toward regeneration despite destruction.	Shows Palestinian resilience and the persistence of hope amid occupation and trauma; land becomes a source of emotional and national continuity.
7	Social Function: Symbolic Resistance	"سنطردهم من إناء الزهور" ...	Resistance permeates domestic and public spheres.	Literature mobilizes collective resistance through everyday symbolic imagery.
8	Social Function: National Identity Formation	"أعيدوا إليّ يدّي"	A demand for dignity and agency.	Poetry strengthens national identity, dignity, and the right to self-determination.
9	Social Function: Emotional &	"بلادي البعيدة عني.. كقلبي"	A paradox of longing and pain toward the homeland.	Poetry becomes a symbolic home for Palestinians in

Ian Watt's				Social & Ideological
No.	Sociological Aspect	Data / Poem Excerpt	Analytical Finding	Meaning
	Collective Bonding			diaspora; maintains emotional cohesion.
10	Social Function: Political & Moral Education	"خمسُ بناتٍ يخبئن حقلًا من القمح"	Girls hide "a field of wheat" under their braids as a metaphor of hope.	Educates younger generations on resilience, continuity, and the legacy of the struggle.
11	Social Function: Collective Healing (Therapeutic Function)	"أنا شاهدُ المذبحة وشهيدُ الخريطة"	The poet becomes a witness and symbolic martyr.	Poetry serves as social therapy; transforms trauma into collective strength and solidarity.
12	Social Function: Archive of Resistance & Memory	"أعوذُ ثلاثين عاماً وخمسين حروب"	The poem records decades of war and suffering.	Literature acts as an alternative historical archive that preserves marginalized narratives.

Literature as a Mirror of Society in "قصيدة الأرض"

Literature reflects society not as a flat, objective mirror, but as a fractured surface shaped by ideological bias, authorial subjectivity, and the constraints of genre. Mahmud Darwish's "قصيدة الأرض" illustrates how literature both shapes and is shaped by socio-political realities, particularly within the context of Israeli colonialism in Palestine. Ian Watt's sociology of literature is especially relevant here, as it emphasizes the reciprocal relationships among literature, author, and society (Damono, 1978). In Darwish's poem, the text becomes a social artifact that records oppression, constructs identity, and articulates collective resistance through symbolic and metaphorical language.

Documentation of Violence and National Identity

"في شهر آذار، في سنة الانتفاضة، قالت لنا الأرض أسرارها الدمويّة" (درويش، 1970)

(In the month of March, in the year of the Intifada, the land told us its bloody secrets)

This line foregrounds the violence endured by the land of Palestine and situates the poem within the historical context of the Intifada. By making the land itself the narrator, Darwish signals that colonial violence is not limited to human bodies but extends to the environment, memory, and history. The land as a speaking subject becomes both witness and victim. The choice to personify the land functions as an ideological intervention: it reclaims the land as an active participant in resistance, not a passive object of colonization.

Within Ian Watt's framework, this is a form of *realism as an ideological project* (Watt, 1957), where literature not only depicts social reality but also reshapes consciousness by embedding historical trauma within symbolic structures. This aligns with Watt's concept of literature as a mirror of social and political conditions (Muhammad et al., 2022).

This interpretative pattern is reinforced by research conducted by Amar Izazi and Muh. Nashiruddin, who highlight Palestinian suffering in *Al-Qamish Al-Masruq* using Ian Watt's sociology of literature, demonstrating literature's ability to document the impacts of conflict (Izazi & Nashiruddin, 2024). Similarly, the work of Sawitri & Fitriani (2023) on Egyptian women in *Al-Iftthor Al-Akhir* affirms the function of literature as a repository of socio-historical realities.

Through this personification and historical anchoring, Darwish positions the poem as a historical document that transcends journalistic narration, embedding collective memory and framing national identity and resistance as essential components of Palestinian existence.

Representation of Women as Symbols of Resistance and Fertility

"خمسُ بناتٍ... سقطن على باب مدرسة ابتدائية... افتتحن نشيد التراب" (درويش, 1970)
(Five girls... fell at the gate of the elementary school... they opened the hymn of the soil)

This verse recounts the death of five girls at the gate of a school during the Intifada. Though victims, they are portrayed as inaugurating the "hymn of the soil," symbolizing both resistance and fertility. They stand at the intersection of violence and renewal, confronting "the rifle" and "the violet" simultaneously. Darwish constructs a dialectic in which female bodies represent vulnerability, memory, and resistance all at once.

This expands Ian Watt's notion of literature as a mirror of society by showing that society is composed of vulnerable groups whose experiences are crucial in understanding social struggle women, children, and the marginalized (Damono, 1978). Darwish's portrayal aligns with the sociological approach that treats representations of women in literature as reflections of social realities (Sawitri & Fitriani, 2023).

The symbolic use of women as social and moral agents is echoed in the film study by Wulan Defi Prawesti & Raras Hafidha Sari (2024), which identifies values such as care, cooperation, and responsibility. The idea parallels Jamali's analysis (2020) on how literature represents social values.

By transforming the five girls into multidimensional symbols that transcend victimhood, Darwish highlights both the precarity of women in conflict and their indispensable role in the continuity of resistance and national identity.

The Relationship Between Body and Land: Revolutionary Poetic Identification

"أنا الأرض والأرض أنت" (درويش, 1970)
(*I am the land and the land is you*)

This declarative statement unveils a radical identification between the self and the land. The poet claims to *be* the land, and the land to be *the beloved*, suggesting that the land is not property but the collective body of the nation. Under Israeli colonial rule, land becomes a site of violence, displacement, and erasure. Thus, identifying oneself with the land is a political declaration: to harm the land is to harm the people.

In Ian Watt's sociological framework, this represents ideological realism that uses bodily imagery as a historical medium (Damono, 1978). Darwish elevates personal suffering into a collective and universal narrative. Watt's mirror-of-society concept also includes literature's role in critiquing social structures and advocating transformation (Fajriani et al., 2024).

This poetic identification mirrors the findings of Moh. Fachrul Mustika, Jumiati Lanta, and (Mustika et al., 2024), who read *Pidato Seorang Demonstran* as reflecting socio-political conditions. Likewise, (Syawaluddin et al., 2025) demonstrate how drama can reveal shifting societal values.

The fusion between the poet's body and the land becomes a revolutionary gesture that transforms land ownership into identity itself. This asserts that the struggle over land is simultaneously a struggle for existence, every assault on the land is an assault on the body and nation.

Historical Trauma and Critique of Recurrent Violence

"أعودُ ثلاثين عاماً وخمسة حروب" (درويش, 1970)
(*I return thirty years and five wars back*)

This line highlights the cyclical pattern of violence and defeat experienced by the Palestinian people over a span of thirty years and five wars. The speaker's act of "returning" to this past functions not as nostalgic longing, but as a reminder that trauma is an unresolved collective memory, persistent, inherited, and continuously reactivated through recurring conflict.

Trauma in Darwish's poetry is not a melancholic recollection; rather, it is a collective memory of repeated losses and systemic violence. By making the past the poetic landscape, Darwish signals that Palestinian history is defined by an unending wound. This aligns with Watt's argument that literature can elevate everyday experience into historical experience, a process that shapes national, class, and even spiritual consciousness (Watt, 1957). The poem therefore becomes both a memorial and a subaltern archive, an alternative record that challenges dominant historical narratives.

The concept of collective trauma and historical memory is also emphasized in the study by Devi Laila Maghfiroh and Arif Mustofa, which analyzes social reflections in *Sampah di Laut, Meira* and highlights literature as a medium for exploring social experience (Maghfiroh & Mustofa, 2023). Similarly, the research of Amar Izazi and Muh. Nashiruddin on conflict-induced suffering also indirectly intersects with the theme of historical trauma (Izazi & Nashiruddin, 2024).

Darwish's poem transcends the documentation of individual events; it constructs a recurring historical narrative, revealing violence as a systematic pattern that engraves collective wounds, while positioning literature as an essential medium for preserving memory and demanding justice for marginalized histories.

Loss of Identity and Cultural Encirclement

"أعيدوا إليّ الهويّة" (درويش, 1970)
(*Return to me my identity*)

The cry "Return to me my identity" is a powerful declaration that reflects the forced dispossession of the right to live, move, study, love, and own land, rights taken away by an external power (Israel). Under colonial rule, Palestinian identity becomes an object manipulated and defined by the occupier. In this context, identity is not merely administrative (an ID card), but a symbol of human rights and existence.

The plea for identity is thus a critique of Israeli domination that erases Palestinian subjectivity both symbolically and legally. Darwish's use of poetry here is not ornamental but confrontational a form of resistance against erasure. This reflects Watt's perspective that

literature mirrors structural inequalities and acts as a tool demanding social transformation (Damono, 1978).

Issues of identity and critiques of dominant power structures also appear in the research of Nur Fajriani, Anshari, and Juanda, who examine the social context of authorship and literature as a mirror of society, showing how literary texts critique real social conditions (Fajriani et al., 2024). Additionally, the concept of “cultural encirclement” resonates with the analysis by Sya’aban and Tike, who identify the loss of identity under external pressures in their study of social issues in fiction (Sya’baan & Tike, 2022).

Through this plea for identity, Darwish asserts that identity theft under colonialism is a form of existential erasure and that poetry is a vital medium for defending fundamental human rights and reclaiming recognition forcibly denied.

Rebuilding Communal Hope

"أنا الأملُ والسهلُ والرحبُ – قالت لي الأرضُ" (درويش, 1970)

(I am hope, the plain, and the vastness — the land said to me)

This line marks an emotional turning point amid the poem’s tragedy, where the land itself speaks to the poet and identifies as hope, openness, and possibility. Through this personification, Darwish illustrates that even in the midst of destruction, the Palestinian land continues to offer regeneration and optimism.

Amid ruins, literature becomes a symbolic space for cultivating hope. Here, literature does not simply mirror society, it elevates it, creates new meaning, and directs collective imagination toward future possibilities. This embodies the transformative dimension of Ian Watt’s mirror-of-society: literature does not merely reflect but guides (Watt, 1957). This is aligned with the idea that literature carries a social function enabling awareness and change (Pramudyaseta & Azmin, 2021).

The constructive function of literature, especially its ability to inspire solutions or direction, is also reflected in the study by Hastab Nur Amalia Nensilianti and Ridwan, who analyzed social problems and inspiration in literature (Nensilianti et al., 2023). Likewise, Sya’baan & Tike (2022) emphasize how social critique ultimately aims at positive transformation.

Despite the wounds and suffering portrayed throughout the poem, this moment embeds seeds of hope through the voice of the land, affirming that literature is a force that not only documents pain but also guides communities toward healing and the possibility of a better future.

The Social Function of Literature in the Poem “قصيدة الأرض”

Mahmud Darwish’s “قصيدة الأرض” carries a profound and powerful social function. Within Ian Watt’s sociological theory of literature, literary works do not merely mirror social realities; they also play an active role in shaping public opinion, building collective consciousness, and directing collective energy toward social transformation (Watt, 1957). As the national poet of Palestine, Darwish does not write for entertainment but to awaken, resist, and unite. His poem becomes a symbolic weapon against colonial domination and oppression, embodying the social and political aspirations of his people.

Literature as a Medium of Symbolic Resistance

“سنطردهم من إنباء الزهور وحبل الغسيل / سنطردهم عن حجارة هذا الطريق الطويل / سنطردهم من هواء الجليل.” (درويش، 1970)

(We will drive them out of the flower pot and the clothesline / We will drive them out of the stones of this long road / We will drive them out of the air of Galilee.)

These lines express a total form of resistance that extends far beyond the battlefield, penetrating every corner of daily existence: the flower pot, the clothesline of the domestic sphere, the stones of the long road, and even the air of Galilee itself, including the natural environment. The collective “we” represents the Palestinian people, united in their determination to “drive out” the occupiers from all aspects of life. This imagery reveals how deeply colonial violence has invaded even the most intimate and fundamental elements of daily experience, and therefore, resistance must also unfold in every space and moment.

Darwish’s use of domestic and natural imagery transforms the everyday into a battlefield, asserting that life itself becomes a site of struggle. In this sense, literature functions as a form of positive propaganda, awakening collective resistance and political awareness. This resonates with Ian Watt’s perspective that literature not only reflects society but also influences and shapes social consciousness (Watt, 1996). The poem exemplifies how literature critiques power structures and mobilizes people through evocative symbolic imagery, fulfilling the social function of literature emphasized by Watt (Fajriani et al., 2024).

The social function of literature as symbolic resistance parallels findings from Moh. Fachrul Mustika, Jumiaty Lanta, and M. Nurzin R. Kasau, who analyzed social critique in the poem “*Pidato Seorang Demonstran*”, showing literature as a platform for socio-political protest (Mustika et al., 2024). Similarly, Cika’s study of social critique in film demonstrates how artistic media like literature can highlight injustice and inspire resistance (Cika, 2023).

Through these images, Darwish transforms domestic and natural elements into sites of struggle, asserting that colonial oppression permeates every inch of Palestinian life. Correspondingly, resistance must also live within everyday life itself, with literature serving as a catalyst for universal collective consciousness.

Literature as the Guardian and Disseminator of National Identity

“أعيدوا إليّ يديّ!” (درويش, 1970)

(Return my hand to me!: Return my identity!)

The plea “Return my identity!” is more than a demand for administrative recognition. It expresses a plea for the restoration of existential and human rights: the right to be recognized as a person, as a citizen, as part of one’s homeland and history, and to regain the agency symbolized by “my hand.” The speaker the embodiment of the Palestinian people demands the return of identity and agency stripped away by colonial power. This takes place in a context of ongoing colonialism and diaspora, where identity is continuously shaped and constrained by external authority.

Under colonial rule, identity erasure becomes a strategy of domination. Thus, literature becomes a medium to assert existence, reject erasure, and reassemble national narratives from the perspective of the colonized. This aligns with Ian Watt’s argument that literature mirrors societal realities including the struggle for identity, an essential dimension of social reality (Watt, 1957). Literature’s social function also involves constructing national and collective consciousness, as highlighted by Muhammad, Sudardi, and Susanto, who emphasize literature as a mirror of society (Muhammad et al., 2022).

Issues of identity and resistance to existential erasure are similarly addressed in the study by Nur Fajriani R., Anshari, and Juanda, which examines literature as a tool for social critique and identity formation (Fajriani et al., 2024). Azizah and Ardiyanti’s analysis of social portrayals in revolutionary contexts also resonates with the reconstruction of identity and competing narratives amid social transformation (Azizah & Ardiyanti, 2024).

Darwish’s call for the return of identity and agency stands at the heart of Palestine’s existential struggle. Literature, in this context, becomes the final fortress safeguarding humanity, history, and the right to an authentic narrative against systematic erasure imposed by colonial power.

Literature as an Emotional and Collective Anchor

“بلادي البعيدة عني.. كقلبي! بلادي القريبة مني.. كسجني!” (درويش, 1970)

(*My homeland that is far from me... like my heart! / My homeland that is close to me... like my prison!*)

This verse articulates a profound emotional contradiction toward the homeland: distant yet close, a source of longing yet simultaneously a source of pain. The speaker (“I”), representing the Palestinian people in diaspora, embodies this dual awareness. The homeland whether physically distant or transformed into a “prison” under occupation remains the center of emotional, cultural, and existential identity. Through this paradox, Darwish captures the layered experience of Palestinians whose connection to their homeland persists despite separation, restriction, or exile.

In the context of displacement, exile, and prolonged occupation, the homeland becomes both memory and aspiration. Through this paradoxical imagery, Darwish positions the poem as a *symbolic home*, a space where displaced Palestinians can return emotionally and spiritually, reconstructing a sense of belonging despite geographical rupture. This resonates with Ian Watt’s view that literature functions as a mirror that both reflects and shapes collective experience, especially in contexts of trauma, longing, and identity suppression (Watt, 1957).

The social function of literature as an emotional collective anchor is affirmed in the study of Devi Laila Maghfiroh and Arif Mustofa, which highlights how literary works serve as vessels for exploring collective experiences and shared identities that shape communal consciousness (Maghfiroh & Mustofa, 2023).

Darwish transcends geography by capturing the longing and wound of the Palestinian diaspora, making the poem an emotional anchor that reunites dispersed hearts. Through shared poetic memory, he rebuilds collective bonds and reinforces the emotional ties to a homeland that is both lost and deeply yearned for solidifying literature’s role in preserving collective identity.

Literature as a Means of Educating Political and Moral Awareness

“خمسُ بناتٍ يخبئنَ حقلًا من القمح تحت الضفيرة” (درويش, 1970)

(*Five girls hide a field of wheat beneath their braids*)

The image of “a field of wheat beneath their braids” symbolizes the preservation of struggle, hope, and the future of the Palestinian nation. Wheat signifies fertility, life, and continuity, while the braids represent youth, beauty, and potential. Through gentle yet powerful symbolism, Darwish conveys lessons about safeguarding heritage and nurturing the seeds of the nation’s future.

The poetic message emerges within a context of national resistance where political and moral education is essential for sustaining identity and collective resolve. Darwish uses symbolic imagery to illustrate the transmission of values such as courage, hope, and responsibility to younger generations. The poem thus becomes an educational space where history, identity, and resistance are taught with emotional depth.

Through this poetic instruction, Darwish urges readers not to forget their history, to love the homeland, and to remain ready to defend the oppressed. Literature here functions as an educational medium that instills moral and political values, aligning with Ian Watt's view that literature carries a social function in shaping consciousness and moral orientation within society (Damono, 1978).

The educational role of literature is also explored in the study of Pramudyaseta and Azmin, which analyzes how poetry reflects social reality and conveys values that can be learned by society (Pramudyaseta & Azmin, 2021). Likewise, Wulan Defi Prawesti and Raras Hafidha Sari show how artistic texts such as film transmit moral and social lessons effectively (Prawesti & Sari, 2024).

Through the imagery of young girls carrying "fields of wheat," Darwish subtly instills profound lessons on endurance, hope, and the preservation of the nation's heritage. He demonstrates that literature is a powerful medium for educating new generations about the importance of guarding their history and striving for their collective future.

Literature as a Therapeutic Function or Collective Healing

“أنا شاهدُ المذبحة وشهيدُ الخريطة” (درويش، 1970)

(I am the witness of the massacre and the martyr of the map)

By declaring “I am the witness of the massacre and the martyr of the map,” the speaker positions himself as both a symbolic martyr and a carrier of historical memory who bears the collective suffering of his people. This function allows the Palestinian community to articulate their trauma collectively, rediscover meaning within the wounds they carry, and transform pain into symbolic strength and solidarity. This becomes especially relevant in the aftermath of repeated violence, displacement, and deep suffering, as the poem provides a space for processing emotions and negotiating trauma.

Through the act of bearing witness, Darwish transforms individual experience into collective consciousness. Poetry becomes a therapeutic instrument that helps Palestinians confront the trauma of massacres, dispossession, and loss while reframing suffering into a source of resilience. This aligns with Ian Watt's understanding that literature reflects and

processes collective experiences including trauma and contributes to psychological and social recovery (Watt, 1957).

The therapeutic function of literature parallels findings in studies on social reflection within novels, which demonstrate how literary works help readers process experience and derive meaning from social realities (Maghfiroh & Mustofa, 2023). Likewise, the work of Izazi and Nashiruddin on the suffering of Palestinians implicitly highlights the need for articulation and processing of trauma, which literature enables through symbolic healing (Izazi & Nashiruddin, 2024).

By taking on the burden of history as a witness, Darwish turns poetry into a space for collective healing allowing Palestinians to articulate trauma, reclaim agency through narrative, and discover the transformative strength hidden within suffering, while simultaneously building solidarity through shared memory.

Literature as an Archive of Resistance and Collective Memory

“أعودُ ثلاثين عاماً وخمسن حروب” (درويش، 1970)
(I return thirty years / and five wars)

This verse retraces a dark historical span marked by thirty years and five wars, emphasizing the cyclical nature of violence. The speaker (“I”), acting as a guardian of memory, journeys into the past not as an act of nostalgia but as a deliberate effort to document pivotal events and the suffering of the Palestinian people. Unlike journalistic reporting, Darwish employs poetic depth and emotional resonance to preserve voices that risk being silenced by dominant historical narratives.

In doing so, literature becomes an alternative archival mechanism ensuring that the voices of the oppressed remain alive and remembered. This function aligns with Ian Watt’s view that literature not only reflects reality but also shapes historical understanding and collective memory, particularly for marginalized narratives (Watt, 1957). By chronicling historical events through poetic discourse, literature safeguards collective memory while offering a source of truth distinct from institutional narratives (Muhammad et al., 2022).

The concept of literature as an archive and vessel of collective memory is also identified in the work of Muhammad, Sudardi, and Susanto, who argue that literature mirrors society and preserves its social dimensions (Muhammad et al., 2022). Moreover, studies on social critique and societal realities in literature reinforce the idea that literary works store valuable information and lived experiences, especially for marginalized groups (Pramudyaseta & Azmin, 2021).

“قصيدة الأرض” thus emerges as more than a poem it becomes a living archive that challenges dominant narratives, ensuring that the truths and suffering of the Palestinian people remain unforgettable. It stands as a poetic monument of resistance and an alternative historical record that preserves collective memory against attempts at erasure.

Synthesis of the Poem’s Social Functions within Ian Watt’s Sociology of Literature

The social functions of “*Qasidatu al-Ardh*” demonstrate that literature not only reflects Palestinian socio-political realities but also actively shapes collective consciousness and ideological struggle. Through symbols of land, the body, women, and historical trauma, Darwish constructs a poetic space in which Palestinians can reinterpret their experiences of oppression. Within Ian Watt’s framework, literature possesses a transformative dimension; it does not merely record reality, but directs its readers to evaluate, critique, and resist structures of domination. Thus, the poem’s social role is inseparable from efforts to preserve collective memory and reinforce national identity in the midst of colonial displacement and erasure.

Beyond its critical function, the poem serves as a catalyst for collective awareness that unites Palestinians across geographic and emotional distances. Through paradoxical imagery, assertions of identity, and the personification of land as a bearer of hope, Darwish develops a symbolic discourse that binds readers to a shared experience as a fragmented yet resilient nation. In Watt’s perspective, literature plays a crucial role in generating social cohesion by articulating communal emotions such as grief, longing, endurance, and moral strength. Consequently, the poem becomes a symbolic home that nurtures solidarity and fortifies the collective self against dispossession.

Furthermore, “*Qasidatu al-Ardh*” performs an ideological function by acting as an archive of resistance that counters dominant narratives. Darwish transforms the poem into a repository of historical memory, including five wars, decades of trauma, and the loss of identity, which are often silenced or sanitized in global political discourse. Through dense metaphoric language and emotive narration, he constructs an alternative archive that enables readers to perceive Palestinian history not merely as data but as a lived and embodied struggle. Within Watt’s theoretical lens, this demonstrates literature’s capacity to critique hegemony and offer interpretive models that empower marginalized voices.

Ultimately, the poem’s social functions transcend aesthetic boundaries and merge with the broader national struggle. Through symbolic critique, moral education, emotional restoration, and historical documentation, “*Qasidatu al-Ardh*” becomes a powerful medium of political and ideological resistance. From the viewpoint of Ian Watt’s sociology of literature, the poem illustrates that literature can shape political consciousness, strengthen moral and communal values, and mobilize society toward solidarity and sustained resistance.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms the importance of examining Mahmud Darwish's poem "*Qasidat al-Ardh*" as a literary work that functions not only as an aesthetic expression, but also as a historical record and critical reflection of the sociopolitical realities of Palestine under ongoing occupation and resistance. The application of Ian Watt's sociology of literature to this poem offers a significant methodological contribution, expanding a theoretical framework typically used for realist novels into an effective analytical tool for understanding the symbolic and ideological power embedded in poetic texts. Thus, this research bridges the structure of the text, the collective experience of the Palestinian people, and the social function of literature as a medium of consciousness-building.

Regarding the first objective, the study demonstrates that "*Qasidat al-Ardh*" clearly reflects the social and political realities of Palestine through metaphors of land, body, and home, symbols that manifest the profound bond between Palestinians and their homeland. Images of displacement, occupation, resistance, and loss constitute the central elements that reveal how the poem mirrors the lived condition of Palestinians under colonial pressure. Darwish not only depicts suffering but also exposes the dynamics of power, historical trauma, and the struggle to maintain national identity, allowing the poem to serve as an authentic representation of the ongoing conflict.

In line with the second objective, the study reveals that social values such as solidarity, sacrifice, courage, and resilience stand at the core of Darwish's critique and ideology of resistance. Nationalism in this poem emerges as an organic awareness born from shared experience rather than mere rhetoric, for each image of land, dignity, and Palestinian humanity carries a collective message about the importance of preserving identity. The forms of resistance displayed by Darwish are multidimensional: physical, symbolic, intellectual, and emotional. Through his poetic voice, Darwish not only rejects external oppression but also constructs a narrative of unity that strengthens the memory and courage of the Palestinian people.

Based on the third objective, Ian Watt's sociological approach shows that this poem serves a social function as a medium of critique, collective awareness, and ideological struggle. The poem acts as a social document that records the historical experiences of Palestinians while shaping readers' perceptions of colonialism, national identity, and justice. This social function is evident in the way the poem voices injustice, evokes empathy, and affirms a collective commitment to resistance. Through Watt's framework, the poem is understood not merely as a passive reflection but as an agent of social transformation that strengthens political consciousness and solidarity.

In conclusion, the study successfully achieves all research objectives, including describing the sociopolitical representation of Palestine, identifying the values and ideology of resistance, and explaining the social function of the poem within the context of national struggle. Future research is expected to expand the study of modern Arabic literature by applying sociology of literature to other works of resistance. It is recommended that future studies integrate Ian Watt's framework with postcolonial or semiotic perspectives in order to deepen the analysis of symbolism and resistance narratives in Darwish's poetry and that of other Palestinian writers. Through such developments, literature can continue to serve as a bridge between aesthetics, history, political consciousness, and the broader struggle for human dignity.

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