Poetry in the Era of Social Networks: The Case of Faraḥ Šammā

Emanuela De Blasio
Università degli Studi della Tuscia, Viterbo, Italia

Abstract　The research focuses on the linguistic and content analysis of the poems of the young poetess of Palestinian origin Faraḥ Šammā. The peculiarity of this artist consists in using the Internet and in particular videos on YouTube to recite her poems orally. As a Spoken Word artist, Faraḥ Šammā has grasped in the tool of video channels the way to transmit her compositions as she does in the course of her live performances. Starting from a reflection on the role of orality and poetry in the Arab cultural tradition and on how this literary form is inserted in the context of the new digital communication media, the work focuses on examining the thematic and linguistic aspects of the selected corpus. The goal is to extend the analysis to other forms of poetry, less conventional but which can help to open a wider glimpse into the knowledge of new literary phenomena in the Arab world.

Keywords　Faraḥ Šammā. Poetry. Spoken word. Social networks. Arabic language.

Summary　1 Introduction. – 2 Orality and Arabic poetry. – 3 Social Media and Forms of Poetry in the Arab World: A Preliminary Study. – 4 The Case of Faraḥ Šammā: Analysis of the Poems. – 4.1 Notes to the *corpus*. – 4.2 Topics. – 4.3 Language and Style. – 5 Conclusion.

1   Introduction

Poetry, linked from its origins to orality, is the literary genre par excellence of the Arab tradition and has always occupied an important role among the artistic forms of the Arab world (Allen 2006).

Today this literary genre has acclimatised in the context of the new digital media. Literature is not expressed only in written form and YouTube can be a tool for the transmission of literary content.[1] In the Arab world, Internet, among its various functions, also becomes a tool aimed at sharing literature (Pepe 2015). There are numerous sites that aim to allow the dissemination of Arabic literature in the digital reality,[2] some of these operate internationally, others aim to explore the artistic reality of a specific place. The Poetrysoup[3] site gathers an international community of more than thirty thousand poets, while the Dubai Poetics site[4] brings together poets residing in the Emirates only, in order to celebrate the artistic production of the place. The web site Ǧihat aš-Šiʻr[5] (founded in 2003) devotes its energies to the Modern Arabic poetry in its rich manifestations and transformations.

YouTube channels are increasingly becoming a popular tool for oral artistic expression: poets use them to declaim their verses through poetry performances. On YouTube it is possible to come across the performances of Slam Poetry[6] or Spoken Word[7] artists as the Syrian ʾĀmāl Kassīr, the Maroccan Muṣṭafā Ṣlāmūr and the poetess of Palestinian origin Faraḥ Šammā.

This work focuses on the peculiarities of the language and style of the latter artist and on the analysis of the themes of her compositions. The *corpus* analysed here is composed of the following poems by Faraḥ Šammā: *Kayfa ʾŪminu?* (How Must I Believe?), *Aš-Šīša* (The

---

1   The power of the Internet in Saudi Arabia is evident, which has given rise to new forms of private communication, from which the world best-seller of the Saudi writer Raǧāʾ Aṣ-Ṣāniʻ, entitled *Banāt ar-Riyāḍ* (The Girls of Riyadh, 2007), came out.

2   They will be cited in more detail below.

3   Poetrysoup: `https://www.poetrysoup.com`.

4   Dubaipoetics: `https://www.dubaipoetics.com` (2020-12-18).

5   `http://www.jehat.com`.

6   It is a poetic, declamatory form practiced in public places, which uses fast-paced acting and combines elements of performance, competition and audience participation. It is performed at events called 'Poetry Slams' or simply 'Slams'. In 1973, the Nuyorican Poets Café was founded in New York, one of the longest-running venues dedicated to Spoken Word poetry. In the same place, in 1989, the first Poetry Slam documented so far took place.

7   Form of poetry expressed orally and centred on dialogue or monologue. Generally recited according to a narrative scheme, the Spoken Word is sometimes improvised and expressed through multimedia performances that include music and dance. For further information, Eleveld, Smith 2003; Anglesey 2008.

92

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale   e-ISSN 2385-3042
57, 2021, 91-118

Shisha), *Al-Maʿḏira* (Apologies), *Al-Ǧinsiyya* (The Nationality), *Table Rase* (Tabula Rasa), *On Censorship*.

The aim of the work is to broaden the field of investigation to other forms of literature such as the Spoken Word or Slam Poetry in relation to the new means of communication, focusing attention on the examination of the language of the selected poems.

The young poetess sees a particular strength in the oral form: that of carrying a message through a true, living and immediate language. In fact, in the traditional Arab heritage, in addition to a poetic structure based on meter and verse, sound has always played a fundamental role. Today the Spoken Word and the Slam Poetry, which originated in the United States context, can find fertile ground in the Arab world, whose literary tradition has its roots precisely in the use of orality.

The poet Faraḥ Šammā has chosen as a means to disseminate her poems both videos on YouTube and live shows, recorded and then reported on social networks.

While there are several studies on oral poetry in the Arab world, as will be further explored in the next chapter, a critical literature on Arab poetry and social networks remains rather small, probably because this phenomenon is quite recent.

Social media have provided users with the opportunity to tell their stories. Therefore, this people of storytellers found the opportunity thanks to the vast virtual space to express themselves through prose or poetry with different, very rich and varied forms. Khatib, Fathy and Sweilem (2020), who analyse the impact of social media on reshaping the system of Arab literary genres, highlight that literary works circulating on social media are not limited to the works of well-known writers, but anyone who owns a computer or a mobile phone and an account on any of the social media sites, can produce a literary text and publish it.

Furthermore, Internet has made many more people interested in poetry: social media users have read literary works, or at least some quotes from them, without much effort on their part, and have reused and circulated them to express themselves, their feelings and their visions.[8]

As for the young poets who use YouTube channels to spread their poems, their language is often much simpler than that used in traditional poetry and it is also much more visual. In general, on the texts and the interaction with the media and on how the different semiotic codes transform the texts, there is a good bibliography of reference.[9]

---

[8] Among the most famous Arabic texts circulated on social networks is the poem *ʾAḥinnu ʾilā ḫubz ʾummi-ī* (I Want My Mother's Bread) by the Palestinian poet Maḥmūd Darwīš (Khatib, Fathy, Sweilem 2020, 1233).

[9] Among the works we can include: Thomas 2020; Foley 2005; Siemens, Schreibman 2013; Morris, Ballantine 2015.

Also the author examined here mainly uses YouTube as a channel for the diffusion of her performances; her videos have been viewed from all over the world, allowing citizens of distant countries to understand her struggles, identify with her sufferings and feel empathy for this young artist who lives in the particular condition of a Palestinian exile. The political situation inevitably affects Palestinian artists who, after exiles and diasporas, pour anguish, fears and frustrations into their writings. Faraḥ Šammā in her texts, as will later be highlighted, refers to the great Palestinian poets and writers of the *ʾĀdāb al-Muqāwama* 'Resistance Literature' including Mahmūd Darwīš, Fadwā Ṭūqān and Samiḥ al-Qāsim.[10]

2 Orality and Arabic Poetry

Since Faraḥ Šammā expresses herself through the art of Spoken Word, it is appropriate to examine some of the forms of oral poetry inherent in the tradition of the Arab world and then go on to mention some examples of contemporary authors of Spoken Word performances.

Poetry has always been considered by the Arabs to be the greatest form of literary expression and an instrument of manifestation of ideals and aspirations. The poetry, the first traces of which can be found in the *Ǧāhiliyya* period (V-VI century), was originally transmitted orally. The pre-Islamic society was a society with an oral tradition and considered the poet with esteem and profound respect, as the latter, inspired by the *ǧinn* ('supernatural creature, spirit), composed verses not only through the acquisition of a technique, but through the gift of speech and language that enabled him to manipulate reality and arouse images and feelings in the listener (Amaldi 2004, 15).

In the VIII century a large amount of poetic material was put into writing by *rāwiya* 'the tellers' and by Arab philologists who, in addition to transcribing, also undertook to examine and analyse the *corpus* with a critical sense.

Over time other forms of oral poetry continued to exist, an example is the *məlḥūn*: a form of poetry of Moroccan origin spread in the Middle Ages, expressed in dialect Arabic and often accompanied by music. In their verses the artists of this poetic genre deal with political issues and social injustices and tell about society in its various facets (Durand 2009).

If we analyse the poetic tradition following the *Nahḍa*, the tendency to transmit the compositions in written form would seem to predominate, a fact that suggests that orality has lost, with the literary

---

[10] For further information on the authors of the resistance literature: Camera D'Afflitto 1998.

94

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale
57, 2021, 91-118

e-ISSN 2385-3042

evolution, the traditional role it played in ancient Arab society. In fact, there are numerous cases in which orality is still the favoured means; an example of oral poetry that still survives today is *nabati* poetry: a type of vernacular poem widespread among the Bedouin communities of the Gulf. Al-Ghadeer (2009) studied this little known phenomenon, analysing oral poems previously collected by the poet ʿAbd Allāh ʾIbn Raddās who, in the fifties, spent ten years travelling in the desert. This type of compositions constitutes a thread capable of connecting the modern era and ancient tribal poetry; the funeral elegies and themes such as those of the trip and the camp recall the *qaṣāʾid* (poems) of the poets of *Ğāhiliyya*.

Another example of oral poetry still practiced is that which takes place during ceremonies and special occasions. Yaqub (2007) in her study collected testifies to the poetic duels that took place in the nineties during the celebrations of the wedding eve between Galilee and the West Bank. The compositions in question constitute a predominantly male type of poetry that has the function of celebrating the groom on the evening of the wedding. These are real duels in which the participants improvise on the theme of the event, brag about their skills and mock the opponent. They make use of quotations from religious sources, proverbs, vocabulary linked to rural life and classical references such as anecdotes about the poet ʿAntara and the Banū Hilāl tribe.

We also find other types of contemporary oral poems in Yemen, such as *bālah* used as a form of entertainment and performed by artists who compete with each other, or *zamīl* usually composed in the imprint to convey a particular message, often also used to mediate conflicts between the tribes (Caton 1993).

Orality is historically inscribed in the history of Arab literature and poetic recitations are an intrinsic part of the Arab heritage (Herzog 2012). It is not surprising, therefore, that the American Slam Poetry movement,[11] after having landed in Europe, has also found widespread support in the Arab world. It is a format created in the United States and spread over the last fifteen years also in many European countries. This poetic form is expressed during the so-called Poetry Slam, a contest of words, in which the performers are judged by juries drawn from the audience; a situation that brings to mind the typical verbal duels that were held in the Arab world already in pre-Islamic times. The genre proposed during a Poetry Slam cannot be inscribed solely in the wording 'poetry', but more generically in that of Spoken Word.

---

11   Among the previous studies on spoken word it is worthwhile to renew Fisher 2003: in this article the scholar explores the spoken word in the black community and its importance for the development of cultural identity.

95

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale
57, 2021, 91-118
e-ISSN   2385-3042

The Iraqi poet Muẓaffar an-Nawwāb fits perfectly into this tradition and his case demonstrates how much the oral poetic performances are still current and gain approval in the Arab world. During his performances in the streets, an-Nawwāb sometimes declaims verses in the dialectal variant of southern Iraq, accompanying them with a personal recitative style made up of screams, tears and the use of foul language. The artist is also becoming very famous in other Arab countries, where other authors quote him and take up stanzas from his poems, for example the following verses of Nawwāb were also taken up by the Syrian rapper singer ʾAbū Ḥažar in his song entitled *Zhəᵈna* (We are Fed Up):

ʿāriḍ ʾin ši'ta malāʾikat al-ʾamn tuḥīṭu-ka | maṭlūb ḫams daqāʾiq wa tadḫulu ʾinsān-an | taḫruǧu lā šayʾ min al-ʾinsāniyya fī-ka sawā l-ṣamt | wa tasʾalu ʾayna Allāh

Oppose if you want, the angels of the secret services surround you | and you are required for only five minutes, you enter as a human being | and you leave that there is nothing left of your humanity but silence | and you wonder where God is. (translation by the Author)

The link between poetry and revolutions in the Arab world is strong and there are several studies on this topic.[12] Mahmoud (2014) shows how, after a long interlude, during which the oppressive censorship of dictatorial regimes meant that the square was no longer the main meeting place between poets and their public, the so-called Arab Spring forcefully brought political and revolutionary poetry back to the streets as an instrument of struggle. Precisely during the Arab revolutions, in some cases the poems are used in an oral form and recited aloud. During the riots in Yemen, the verses of poets were used in the streets by protesters who recited politically engaged poems and, despite tribal divisions, emphasised a Yemeni identity. In Tunisia, poem *ʾIrādat al-ḥayā* (Will to Live) by ʾAbū Al-Qāsim Aš-Šābbī (1909-1934) was the soundtrack of many Tunisian protests, in fact some verses of this poem were sung in the streets and written on banners.

As in the past, even today the protest is often expressed through poetry in dialect Arabic, an example is the poet Hišām Al-Gaḫḫ.[13] He gained popularity across the Arab world through his appearances on televised poetry contests. Being from southern Egypt, the dialect that Al-Gaḫḫ speaks is considerably different from the mainstream (Cairene variety). The poet has produced some very powerful poetry

---

[12] For further information, Athamneh 2017; Younis 2016.

[13] Al-Gaḫḫ (1978-) is a very popular poet from southern Egypt.

96

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale
57, 2021, 91-118
e-ISSN 2385-3042

in the few years following the rise of the Arab Spring; *At-Taʾšīra* (The Visa) which he presented in 2011 is one of his most famous poems.

Within the slogans repeated during the demonstrations in Taḥrīr Square there were some verses of the Egyptian poet ʾAḥmad Fuʾād Naǧm (1929-2013), known as El-Fagommi:

> *iš-šaʿb yurīd isqāṭ in-niẓām! Ḥusni Mubārak fēn fēn? Humma byak-lu ḥamām wi frāḫ w-iḥna l-fūl dawwaḫna w-dāḫ*

> The people want the government to fall! Ḥusnī Mubārak where are you? You eat doves and chicks, we beans and our heads spin. (translation by the Author).[14]

El-Fagommi writes most of his works in dialectal Arabic and is known for his collaboration with the Egyptian musician Šayḫ ʾImām and for his revolutionary and patriotic poetry.

The performances of these artists can be found on the web and on social networks. YouTube is becoming more and more a popular tool even for poets, who use it to declaim their verses through poetry performances, which, in the Arab world, from the times of the *Ǧāhiliyya* poets to today, has often represented also a tool of struggle and personal expression to convey messages of criticism. In particular, the reality of Spoken Word and Slam Poetry finds space on YouTube; Poetry Slams competitions are often recorded via video and published online on YouTube channels[15] in order to significantly increase the audience.

---

14 The verses are taken from the poem entitled *Humma mīn iḥna mīn?* (Who They Are, Who We Are?).

15 Some YouTube channels for the publication of Slam Poetry: Poetry Slam Inc, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/user/thisispoetryslaminc; Button Poetry, YouTube https://www.youtube.com/user/ButtonPoetry/featured; BankstownPoetrySlam, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/user/BankstownPoetrySlam/featured.

3 Social Media and Forms of Poetry in the Arab World: A Preliminary Study

Advances in information and communication technologies in the Arab world are proceeding apace, generating important socio-cultural changes. From 2006 to 2011, the number of Internet users in Arab countries grew steadily by 23% annually; by comparison, the percentage of Internet users globally grew by only 14% (Sabbagh et al. 2012, 8).

A report by the Cairo organisation The Arab Network for Human Rights Information,[16] drawn up in 2015, estimated the presence of 157 million users in the region from Mauritania to Yemen. The same document showed that about half of them had a Facebook account, while Twitter was growing rapidly, with seven million users in Saudi Arabia and four million in Egypt.

Social networks offer contents of all kinds: tutorials, music, blogs, television series. The use of these contents therefore becomes much freer: viewers no longer have to adapt to the offer of television programming, being able to enjoy the contents where and when they prefer.[17]

New media have the ability to reproduce and contain old media. The Internet is a chameleonic and flexible medium capable of re-presenting the typical elements of traditional media (voice, text, images and sound) but is endowed with a more participatory and immersive nature. Consequently, the web can also be a useful tool for carrying out various literary activities.[18]

---

16 https://www.anhri.info/?lang=en.

17 In the Arab world, as in other countries, we are witnessing a real revolution in storytelling, linked to the production of web series, mini-fictions that can only be enjoyed online. The web series inherit some peculiarities of the TV series but exploiting the enormous possibilities of the web, where viewers can autonomously organise their viewing and, above all, interact with each other and with the creators. ʾAmīn Dura is the director of *Šankabūt* (Motorbike) produced in 2010 and the first tv series in the Arab world of Lebanese production. The series, broadcast via YouTube, Facebook and other social networks, consists of five-minute episodes and is aimed at young people. Acted in the Lebanese dialect, a factor that guarantees realism and authenticity, the series deals with social and taboo topics of the Arab world and opens the doors to an exchange of views among young web users. *Šankabūt* in fact offers interactive functions in English and Arabic: games and linked sites where users can even come up with ideas for future episodes. In this new narrative technique, called digital interactive storytelling, the interaction between narrator and audience is central. A merit that is due to this series is the fact that it has stimulated the debate on sometimes burning issues that find little space on institutional channels such as radio and TV.

The creation of a free space – in which taboo issues, such as the use of drugs, political corruption, racism, violence against women, can circulate – allows different opinions to emerge and is the mirror of a constantly evolving society.

18 Today, more than 20,000 teenagers post their work on the Canadian social reading site Wattpad (https://www.wattpad.com/) and around thirty poems are uploaded daily to the Movellas website (https://www.movellas.com/).

98

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale   e-ISSN 2385-3042
57, 2021, 91-118

According to Pepe (2015), a scholar of the Egyptian blogosphere, blogs make it possible to transform ʼ*adab* 'literature' into an interactive game between authors and readers, far from traditional literary institutions.

Donohue (2006) conducted a research aimed at evaluating the literary activity of the Arab world on the web, taking into consideration different categories: periodicals, online magazines, libraries, personal pages, groups of poets (from the Gulf, the Libya, Egypt, Morocco, Palestine and Algeria), women's poetry, Nabati poetry, classical poetry etc. The analysis conducted on some promising online sites demonstrates, in fact, that even in the Arab world the Internet fulfils, among its various functions, that of a tool aimed at sharing literature. There are numerous sites of interest with the aim of allowing the dissemination of literature in the digital reality. Among these we can mention the Arab Union for Internet Writers, The Encyclopedia of Arabic Poetry, the Arabic Short Story, with contributions coming mainly from Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, al-Warraq, site repository of classical Arabic works; the sites of the unions of writers from different Arab countries, such as the Arab Writers Union in Damascus or The Emirates Writers Union,[19] or other sites like the ones already mentioned, such as Poetrysoup and Dubai Poetics.

These examples, which little represent the richness of digital poet communities, demonstrate that poetry finds ample space on the web. Poetry is one of the literary forms that is most able to acclimate to the new digital publication format, so much so that a composition can be shared in different forms: text (blog, PDF), video (YouTube) or images (Tumblr).

Writing plays a primary role on the web, but orality also occupies a considerable position. On YouTube it is possible to come across the performances of numerous spoken word artists including the Palestinian Tirīz Slīmān, the Egyptian ʻAlī Ṭālibāb, the Lebanese rapper known as El Rass, and the Syrian Hānī as-Sawāḥ. Particularly interesting is the contribution of the Palestinian journalist and writer Dīma al-Ḥaṭīb who, in addition to being the executive director of Al-Jazeera and one of the very few female leaders of the Arab media sphere, also stands out for her poems.

Although her poems are only in English, it is also necessary to mention the spoken word artist ʼĀmāl Kassīr, whose performances are visible online. This young American girl, of Syrian origins, has gained a lot of visibility in the English-speaking world, performing in numerous events and bringing many issues such as the war in Syr-

---

19 Arab Union for Internet Writers `http://www.arab-ewriters.com`; Arabic Poems `http://www.arabicpoems.com`; Arabic story `http://www.arabicstory.net`; al-Waraq `http://www.alwaraq.net`.

99

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale   e-ISSN 2385-3042
57, 2021, 91-118

ia, intolerance, machismo, interreligious dialogue, to public attention.

Sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, are extremely popular in the Arab world and have often been used as tools to fight for democracy, social respect and basic freedoms.

In the wake of the so-called Arab Springs, many young people have resorted to blogging as a means of expressing their literary creativity or, simply, their opinions. The contents of the blogs allow us to glimpse the daily life, feelings and aspirations of youth and are indicative of the significant social and political developments in the Arab world. The relationship between online blogging activism and Middle Eastern political mobilisation is crucial. Numerous Egyptian bloggers spoke out about the demonstrations in Taḥrīr square, while Tunisians made blogs a political tool in the years of the Jasmine Revolution.

During the Arab revolutions, some oral artistic expressions spread through the web played a fundamental role in mobilising people and gathering support for protests against governments. A striking example is the musical genre of rap. One of the fuses that sparked the revolution in Tunisia is represented by a song by the well-known rapper Hamada Ben Amor, better known by the stage name of El Général: the artist with the lyric *Rayes lebled* (The President of the Country) denounced the harsh reality of unemployed youth. The Egyptian rapper Rāmī Donžewān through the web denounced the government in his famous song *Ḍidd il-ḥukūma* that has become an anthem for the demonstrators in Egypt: *ḍidd il ḥukūma ḍidd il-balṭaga w-ẓ-ẓulm ḍidd il-ḥukūma ḍidd il-ḥākim w-l-ḥukm* (Against the government, against the use of violence and injustice, against the government, against the ruler and the authority).[20]

Even in Syria, young people have resorted to a commitment at both a political and cultural level through various forms, especially through the production of videos and songs. Several Syrian rappers, some anonymously, have disseminated songs in favour of the revolution through social networks, denouncing the political-social conditions in which their country lived and manifesting a desire for renewal: first of all ʾIbrāhīm Qāšūš of Hama, author of the song *Yalla ərḥal, ya Baššār* (Go away, Bashar). In 2011 the singer was later found dead with his throat and vocal cords cut because of this song.

Palestinian rap also manifests itself almost completely through web channels and in particular YouTube. This genre continues the tradition of artistic protest developed by Palestinian communities since the early years after the Arab-Israeli war of 1948; the current poetic and musical performances of Palestinian rappers recall the efforts of previous generations of artists who expressed a political critique of their condition, experimenting with new artistic forms.

---

20 For further information, see Fischione 2013; Swedenburg 2012.

100

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale   e-ISSN   2385-3042
57, 2021, 91-118

McDonald (2006) notes that a tradition of songs about resistance developed in Palestine during the British Mandate period and then focuses attention on the analysis of the Palestinian rap group DAM.[21] Massad (2005), in investigating the support given by nationalistic songs to the Palestinian liberation struggle, argues that the Palestinian folk song is not a phenomenon subservient to politics, but a stimulus to generate political sentiment in many areas. Palestinian rap is grafted into this traditional context, through the use of a new language that often resorts to poetry and draws on a traditional artistic repertoire, adapting these components to the musical style that distinguishes rap and using the Palestinian dialect.

Oral communication has some strengths that sometimes make it more effective than written communication. With this in mind, video can be a form of communication that, using different semiotic resources, is able to create a multi-sensory experience, much more engaging for the user.

4 The Case of Faraḥ Šammā: Analysis of the Poems

Faraḥ Šammā[22] was born in 1994 in the United Arab Emirates. Her father, born in Damascus, after his studies in Egypt settled in Dubai, as did her mother, of Palestinian origin. Faraḥ begins to devote herself to writing around the age of thirteen and, although Arabic is her mother tongue, she composes verses in English, a language used in various sectors in Dubai. After a few years, Faraḥ publishes her compositions on the aforementioned Poetrysoup website.

However, her real experience in the literary field begins in 2008, following an encounter with the well-known Palestinian poetess Hind Šūfānī, founder of the Dubai group The Poeticians.[23]

At that time, a sense of frustration emerges in the young poetess for having composed only poems in English and she begins to use Arabic language. So she composes *Kayfa ʾŪminu?* (How Must I Believe?) (2013), her first poem in Arabic which, once published on YouTube quickly travels around the world, gaining millions of views.

---

21 The DAM (acronym for 'Da Arabian MCs', but in Arabic *damm* also means 'blood'), from Lidda, are the first Palestinian rap group (founded in 1999) and among the most famous rap groups both in Arab countries and abroad.

22 Information on the life and artistic production of the author is taken from the following sites: https://www.dubaipoetics.com (2020-12-18), https://www.soundcloud.com, https://www.arabnews.com. Her Facebook page is no longer available.

23 Founded by Palestinian director and writer Hind Šūfānī, The Poeticians group has been active since 2007 and performs in Beirut, Amman and Dubai. Poets of different nationalities share poems in English, Arabic and French in front of an audience of listeners. The Poeticians: https://www.poeticians.com.

101

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale | e-ISSN 2385-3042
57, 2021, 91-118

After realising that the Emirates poetic community is expanding rapidly, Šammā begins to undertake personal projects and organise poetry evenings, using social networks. During her college years, Šammā comes into contact with Paul D[24] (real name Dorian Rogers), award-winning poet and hip hop artist, considered a pioneer for introducing the reality of the Spoken Word to the UAE capital; when Paul D moves to Abu Dhabi in late 2011, he finds a huge void there in the Open Mic Nights field.[25] Paul D introduces Faraḥ to the evening poetry events organised by him. In recent years, Faraḥ Šammā's interest in promoting the art of Spoken Word among university students has grown and she herself encourages poetic performances through various initiatives in universities. Today Faraḥ is an active member of the Dubai Poetics community, founded by Ǧamīl ʾAdās in January 2016, with the aim of creating a free sharing space for aspiring poets. This community ensures visibility to artists: at the end of each month it prints their poems, publishes them regularly on social networks, organises Spoken Word evenings and hosts workshops on poetry and writing.

The author recites her poems by heart, charging them with energy and motivating them through recitation; her performances are sometimes accompanied by music, but usually it is only the sound of her voice that gives power to her compositions. Her lyrics are made to be recited, pronounced and unread, she does not carry sheets of paper on stage and prefers to perform poems in a spontaneous, improvised way.

Faraḥ Šammā understood that the enormous potential of the YouTube platform also makes it suitable for sharing literary production. She joined YouTube in September 2013; to date her official channel has about 12,500 subscribers, has obtained more than 700,000 views, but offers only about twenty videos. However, if we type her name on YouTube, the results are much more numerous: the videos of her poems, in fact, were also published by fans who attended the spoken word performances and by several other channels. Among these, we can mention "How we flex", a channel that offers a direct look at the music and entertainment industry of the Emirates. The latter was responsible for the online publication of the video *Kayfa ʾŪminu?*, which obtained more than 280,000 views when it came out in 2013. Šammā's videos were also uploaded by the Samarmedia channel which deals

---

24 Dorian Rogers is considered one of the best performance poets in America. In 2007 winner at the National Poetry Slam in the 'groups' category with the Slam Charlotte team and in 2005 individual winner at the Southern Fried Poetry Slam.

25 Derived Open Mic Night (from the expression 'open microphone') is a live show (at a coffeehouse, nightclub or pub) at which audience members who are amateur or professional may perform on stage, often for the first time or to promote an upcoming performance.

102

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale   e-ISSN 2385-3042
57, 2021, 91-118

with the publication of videos in Arabic, English and French and by Dan Malak, the director who shot the *aš-Šīšā* video.[26]

4.1 Notes to the *corpus*

The *corpus* under examination is composed of six poems: *Kayfa 'Ūminu?*[27] (How must I believe?, 2013), *Aš-Šīša*[28] (The shisha, 2014), *Al-Maʿḍira*[29] (Apologies, 2014), *Al-Ǧinsiyya*[30] (The nationality, 2014), *Table Rase*[31] (Tabula rasa, 2014), *On Censorship* (2015).[32]

The poems have been transcribed and translated in their entirety, however only the verses under analysis are reported here. The entire performances of the author's poems can be listened on the sites indicated in the notes.

In the analysis of the topics, the quotations of the verses of the poems are reported directly in translation as the goal is to focus attention on the issues addressed by the author, in the part concerning the analysis of language and style the verses are reported in transcription with the translation between parentheses.[33]

4.2 Topics

Faraḥ Šammā's poetics are mainly introspective and the boundary between political and personal themes is often blurred. The intention of the poetess is to write on any subject she has at heart, in such a way as to convey her emotions. Probably, the fact that she has dedicated herself to philosophy studies leads her to reflect on many topics, digging deeply.

---

26 https://www.youtube.com/user/SamarMediaTv; https://www.youtube.com/user/DanMalak.

27 Farah Chamma, *How Must I Believe?* / أؤمن؟ كيف. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-RXWy1zcbU.

28 Farah Chamma, *The Sheesha* | حرة شما – الشيشة. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=582st3X949U.

29 Farah Chamma, *Apologies* | المعذرة -حرة شما. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOjJ54yAGFQ.

30 Farah Chamma, *The Nationality* | حرة شما – الجنسية. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bF7FNoJfGs.

31 Farah Chamma, *Table Rase*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOzJBl_AyjI.

32 Farah Chamma, *On Censorship* | عن الرقابة -حرة شما (Live Performance). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIOjN0IhVnk.

33 Regarding the transcription in this work the short vowel of the cases and the suffixed pronouns are placed after the word with a dash.

103

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale | e-ISSN 2385-3042
57, 2021, 91-118

While not focusing on a single topic, her poems seem to be united by the desire to explore all existing forms of injustice and, in particular, the deep cracks that run through the Arab world. Her compositions focus on dictatorships, corruption, fundamentalism, the Palestinian cause, political frustration and the hope of young people for a better future.

In *Kayfa ʾŪminu?* Faraḥ Šammā is the spokesperson for the disillusioned and tired Arabs of dictatorships and hypocrisy practiced in the name of religion. In this song of disappointment for the current condition of the Arab world, the poetess throws stinging questions at those who have exploited religion and destroyed the fundamental freedoms of people in the name of the ancient Islamic *ʾumma*. In this poem she writes:

> How must I believe if you have made faith more like atheism | you have separated countries, spread corruption, killed men | and all this in the name of religion and devotion?

With eloquence, Faraḥ highlights the evils suffered by the Arab peoples and accuses those who preferred the madness of extremism to wisdom and reason. The author has been severely criticised for this poem, in which some have grasped a controversial relationship with religion. In the same poem the frustration of the poetess finds echo, in fact she feels she has been abandoned by her Arab identity: "My Arabicity is my enemy" or "I sat between myself but I couldn't find myself | I too have been colonized". Arabicity, which wanders the streets looking for a foreign government to protect it, wanders from one officer to another, from one embassy to another, symbolises the condition of those refugees forced to wander relentlessly and without finding refuge. The feeling of bewilderment, alienation, estrangement and isolation (*ġurba* in Arabic) has always been felt by the Palestinian intellectuals both when they are away from their homeland and when they remain in their own land.

This topic constitutes the central theme of the poem *Al-Ǧinsiyya* in which, once again, the dramatic situation of the Palestinian refugees, who are prevented from returning to Palestine, is represented. The history of this tormented land has become part of the memory of the world thanks to the verses of the poets who express the feelings of what was perceived by the Arab world as a catastrophe, the *Nakba*.[34] Faraḥ does not want to fall into the trap of dealing solely with the Palestinian cause in her poems, but, inevitably, the attempt to investigate

---

34 *Nakba* (Catastrophe): this term refers to the foundation of the State of Israel (1948) which marks the loss of Palestine for the entire Arab world with the consequent exodus of Palestinian refugees (Camera d'Afflitto 1998, 260).

104

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale | e-ISSN 2385-3042
57, 2021, 91-118

what it really means to be a Palestinian in a diaspora is the centre of her life and her art. It is precisely the distance from the country of origin that, according to her, gives the Palestinians a form of attachment to the homeland that is even stronger than traditional patriotism.

In *Al-Ǧinsiyya* she describes the physical and spiritual uprooting of an exile far from her homeland, forced to emigrate to a foreign land, Brazil in this case, that accepts her and provides her with documents:

> They welcomed me into their country, like a Palestinian woman | exiled from her own country | who have been promised a false right of return.

Despite the warm welcome that the Brazilian government offers to Faraḥ, the young woman suffers from the indifference of the Arab countries in the face of the unfortunate fate of the Palestinians. We review this attitude in various authors such as the poet Ibrāhīm Ṭūqān[35] who several times in his compositions denounced the ambiguous behaviour of the Arab world. Even his sister, the famous poetess Fadwā Ṭūqān,[36] in the poem ʾIlā sayyid al-Masīḥ fī ʿīd-i-hi (To Christ on His Birthday) stresses that the world is numb to the tragedy of the Palestinians:

> The world is adamant to the tragedy | The light has departed from that lost ruthless master | Who did not light one candle | Who did not shed one tear | To wash the sorrows of Jerusalem.[37]

Similarly in Faraḥ's poem, the Arab world, which preaches pan-Arabism and unity, is deaf to the plea for help from exiled Palestinians; the poetess writes:

> I found refuge in the country of exile | and was not accepted by the Arab countries | they denied me a stamp, they deprived me of my documents | and today I am in an exile that has become my home and my identity.

---

35 Ibrāhīm Ṭūqān (1905-1941), Palestinian poet, was born in Nablus where he studied and then moved to the American University of Beirut. Brother of Fadwā Ṭūqān, he is known as the first spokesman for the Palestinian cause in the twenties and thirties. Most of his poetry, which ranges from nationalistic to personal poetry, was published in Arab newspapers and assembled after his death in a single volume *Diwān* (1988) (Meisami, Starkey 1998, 786).

36 Fadwa Ṭūqān (Nablus 1923-Nablus 2003), Palestinian poetess, was initiated into literature by her brother Ibrāhīm, also a poet. Her artistic production, initially focused on individual themes, such as love, hope, loneliness and affections, after 1967 took on tones of serious social and political commitment to the Palestinian question. For further information see Canova 1971; 1973; Colombo 2007.

37 Translation by Sulāfa Hiǧāwī (Hijjawi 1968, 18).

Although gratified to have obtained a passport, the poetess feels alienated, does not identify with her new Brazilian nationality and experiences a deep sense of loneliness. The passport constitutes for the Palestinian exiles an emblem of identity and the symbol of a denied belonging.

The poem ends with the declaration of one's Arab identity:

> And even if I obtained hundreds of citizenships | in my heart there would be only one nationality | whether I want it or not | Arab.

This affirmation of belonging to the Arab world brings to mind the well-known poem *Bitāqat huwiyya*[38] (Identity Card) of the famous Palestinian poet Maḥmūd Darwīš,[39] in which the author underlines his link with all the Arabs. Through her political commitment to the Palestinian cause, the young Faraḥ is inscribed, in fact, in that type of literary production called *ʾĀdāb al-Muqāwama* 'Resistance literature' which has had, in various ways, feedback in all the literatures of Arab countries and which has prompted writers to opt for a politically and socially engaged literature and poetry.

The theme of nationality also finds space in Šammā's compositions which are coloured with more intimate and personal tones such as *Table Rase*, in which the poetess claims:

> Don't ask me where I come from | where I was born | do not try to know what is written on my documents. | I am nobody, a nomad, a lost soul, a simple wandering spirit.

And "No homeland for me on earth | I found a homeland in the sky | a free and pure cloud". Given her particular condition as a Palestinian exile, the poetess feels she has to reinvent the traditional concept of nationality, that is, belonging to a nation as an ethnic, political and cultural entity, making cultural hybridisation the constituent element of her being.

The Palestinian question is also the central theme of *Al-Maʿḏira* in which the poem itself becomes a metaphor for the harassed country of origin of Faraḥ Šammā. The poem is described as a victim of a siege, forced to live in tunnels, to rhyme with bombs, forced to evacuate the house and suffocated by chemical gases. The metric of the poem becomes a commodity sold on the slave market, in exchange for an imported poem. The nature of the poem, like that of her country, is altered to the point of making it unrecognisable:

---

[38] https://www.aldiwan.net/poem2290.html.

[39] For further information on the concept of national identity in the poem by Maḥmūd Darwīš, see Nofal 2017.

> Excuse me | if they have circumcised your parts | they killed your little letters […]. Excuse me | if they have destroyed your verses | they turned you away from them | and deleted the letters from your words […]. Excuse me, poetry | if they sold you cheap | for an imported poem.

As in the Palestinian lands, the soldiers take sides among the hemistiches of poetry, take control of it and establish the metre that the composition must follow. Poetry, like Palestine, is transformed by foreign hands, so much so that the author herself loses the rights to the verses she composed, just as the Palestinians have lost the rights to their land.

In *On Censorship* the author describes the control and limitation of freedoms of expression, thought and speech by the authorities of Arab countries:

> They want to cover my lines with cloth | and cut off the tips of my pens | they want me to praise the kingdom of their thoughts | and declaim tasteless verses, again and again.

Faraḥ Šammā represents the condition of the poet as the one to whom the vocal cords have been tied: "am I allowed to speak these words? | Or have my vocal cords been tied?"; likewise the poet Samīḥ al-Qāsim[40] in his poem *Aš-šafāh al-maqṣūṣa* (Slit Lips) wrote: "I would have liked to tell you the story of a dead nightingale | I would have liked to tell you a story | if they hadn't cut my lips!".[41]

Intellectual repression is particularly harsh when writers try to deal with issues such as politics, religion and sex; within the poem *Faraḥ* she wonders ironically: "Maybe I should consider writing poetry about seahorses or T-Rex!". The poetess reflects on the limiting condition of Arab countries: "In my country we fear ideas like tanks | crusades against words are being waged in my country"; the world has transformed into what she bitterly defines "a silent apartheid".

In a context of repression and censorship, the younger generations often show an attitude of indifference and detachment, become careless and impassive, do not express their opinions and do not act to change the situation. This is the theme of *Aš-Šīša*, a poem in which Faraḥ Šammā reproaches her generation for the inertia that causes them to sit in cafes, to smoke *šīša*, staring at cell phone screens, without talking about anything except frivolous topics like football:

---

40   Samīḥ al-Qāsim (Palestine 1939-Galilee 2014), Palestinian poet who lived under Israeli occupation. After dedicating himself to teaching, he worked as a journalist for numerous political newspapers. His vast poetic production focuses mostly on the theme of the Palestinian question.

41   Al-Qāsim 1958 (translation by the Author).

They are not interested in wars, oppression, invasion | they are waiting for a slim and slender bride, with her head held high […]. At the café, we see the guys at their best | they do nothing else except what relaxes the mind. […]. The *šīša* instead gurgles | the screens of the telephones light up their faces […]. Maybe they are tired of talking about unemployment | of the increase in prices, of money | are tired of politics and revolutions | in which they have lost all hope | and of course they prefer to talk about Barcelona or Real.

4.3   Language and Style

The experiences abroad that Faraḥ makes in the course of her life converge today in a type of poetry that breaks down linguistic boundaries. This recourse to multilingualism in compositions is not just a specific stylistic choice, but an expressive necessity. At a young age, Faraḥ chose the English language for her compositions, used in various fields of Emirates in daily life. Before dedicating herself to academic studies, the young artist moves to Brazil and quickly learns Portuguese. After her experience in Brazil, she travels to France where she studies philosophy and sociology, also learning French. In addition to Portuguese, French and English, she attends German and Spanish courses. Today the young poetess writes and speaks six languages, but for her compositions she favours Arabic, English and French. The transglossia[42] is a factor that unites most of Faraḥ's performances; in the poems reported in this work clear examples of this linguistic phenomenon can be seen in *Table Rase*, in which the author passes from a strophe in French to one in Arabic and *On Censorship* in which there is an alternation between stanzas in English and Arabic.

Faraḥ Šammā, in her poems, chooses to express herself in standard Arabic (*al-fuṣḥā*), paying attention also to *ʾiʿrāb* albeit not in a systematic way; nevertheless the language sometimes slips towards the dialect variant only in one case, in the poem *On Censorship* which will be analysed later.[43]

---

[42]   In transglossia, speakers switch from one language to another without specialising roles or areas and without it being possible to identify particular contexts for the use of one or the other language (Durand 2009, 95).

[43]   In two texts, however not analysed here, the author uses Palestinian Arabic: in *I am no Palestinian*, in which she recites *ʾanā miš falasṭiniyye* (I am not Palestinian), we observe the negation *miš*, typical of the Palestinian variety; the poem *Saḥar* (from the name of her mother to whom the poem is dedicated), in which the poetic performance is accompanied by the musician Marwān Betāwī, is entirely in Palestinian Arabic. The performances can be viewed on: Farah Chamma, *I Am No Palestinian*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_djdVQfFVU; Farah Chamma and Maruan Betawi, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u72I32EERRQ.

108

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale
57, 2021, 91-118

e-ISSN   2385-3042

In general, in Faraḥ's poems there is an intertextuality that often links her poems to passages by other poets or writers through allusions, quotations or similar expressions, as in the cases already seen in which the author makes more or less direct references to the works of Samīḥ al-Qāsim, Maḥmūd Darwīš, Fadwā Ṭūqān and 'Ibrāhīm Ṭūqān.

From a stylistic point of view, the poetess is not limited to the use of free verse and, in most of her poems, attempts to recreate rhymes and assonances.

Faraḥ Šammā's poems are real performances that flow into the art of the show: the Spoken Word combines theatre and the word. As with theatre, even in the context of the Spoken Word, the artists are motivated by the desire to engage in an authentic exchange with the public. Faraḥ Šammā is aware of having the innate ability to feel at ease on stage, even though she has not studied the theatrical arts directly. When she speaks, she is moved and amused, while she excites the spectators and gives life to a unique, sometimes interactive show. The intervention of the public is often explicitly requested, as viewers are sometimes invited to answer questions or repeat verses, for example in *On Censorship*: "I want you all to repeat the word 'abide' | one, two, three… | 'abide'!".

In *Kayfa 'Ūminu?* we can find a refined vocabulary suitable also for the solemnity of the treated theme. The author recites this poem entirely in classical Arabic, also paying attention to *'i'rāb*. From a stylistic point of view, the suffix rhyme *-ād-a* recurs with the final vowel of the *'i'rāb*:

> *fa-faraqtum bi-hi l-bilād-a wa našartum bi-hi l-fasād-a wa qataltum bi-hi l-'ibād-a | wa kull-u hāḏa bi-'ism-i d-dīn-i wa l-'ibādat-a*

> You have separated countries, spread corruption, killed human beings | and all this in the name of religion and devotion.

In the same poem, the sense of tiredness and frustration of the Arabs is expressed by the anaphora: we observe repetitions in several verses of the verb *sa'imnā* 'we are tired' and the expressions *fī dāḥil-ī* 'inside me', *tu'ādī-nī 'urūbat-ī* 'my arabicity is my enemy'.

The poetess frequently employs rhetorical questions: *kayfa 'u'minu*[44] *wa qad ǧa'ltum al-'imān 'ašbah bi-l-kufr?* (How must I believe if you have made faith more like atheism?); *kayfa 'u'minu wa qad 'aṣbaḥa fī dāḥil-ī 'uduww lā yafza'?* (How must I believe if there is an enemy inside me who is not afraid?); *kayfa 'u'minu mā dumtu 'aṭmaḥu bi-'an*

---

44 In standard Arabic the correct rendering is *'ūminu*, here the poetess pronounces clearly *'u'minu*.

109

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale | e-ISSN 2385-3042
57, 2021, 91-118

ʾaʿīša fī bilād-i laysat hiyya bilād-a-nā? (How must I believe as long as I want to live in a country that is not ours?).

The poetess also uses the allocution to attract the attention of the listener: ya man bi-sm-i llāhi saraqtum wa kaḏabtum, wa hadamtum bayt man ʾašāda (You who in the name of God have stolen, lied and demolished the house of those who built); fa-hal sa-tagību-nā iyya-hā l-munādā? (Are you going to answer us, you who are invoked?).

In this poem there are numerous rhetorical figures; similes as in the following cases: ʿurūbat-ī tuʿādī-nī | taḏūbu fī ṣadr-ī ka-ṯ-ṯalǧ ka-ḥarb bāridat-in ṯānya (My arabicity is my enemy | it melts in my chest like ice, like a second cold war), kayfa ʿuʾminu wa qad ʾaṣbaḥat ʿurūbat-ī ka-ʾimrʾamaqṭūʿa fī š-šawārʿ-i zānya? (How must I believe if my arabicity has become like a desperate prostitute on the streets?); personification as in the following verses:

tuʿādī-nī ʿurūbat-ī tamnaʿu-nī min at-tagawwul | lā tasmaḥu l-ī bi-l-ʿubūr, lā taḥtimu l-ī ʿalā ǧawāz as-safar | tuʿādī-nī ʿurūbat-ī, tilka ʾallatī tadūru fī aš-šawārʿ-i | bāḥiṯa ʿan ḥukūma ʾaǧnabiyya taʾwī-ha | tadūru bāḥiṯa min ḏābiṭ ʾilā ḏābiṭ, min safāra ʾilā safāra | wa lā ʾaḥad mulāqī-ha

My arabicity is my enemy, it does not allow me to move | blocks my passage, does not print my passport | my arabicity is my enemy, it who wanders the streets | looking for a foreign government to protect it | it wanders from one officer to another, from one embassy to another | and no one goes to meet it.

Finally we also observe metaphors: fī dāḫil-ī ṭāʾirāt-u wa tafǧirāt-u (Inside me there are planes and explosions), hadamtum al-bayt man ʾašāda | li-taʿīšū fī quṣūr ʾušīdat min ṭūb aẓ-ẓulm wa l-istiʿbāt (You demolished the house of the one who built | to live in buildings built with bricks of injustice and slavery).

In Aš-šīša the final climax is built on the rhyme of the ending of the masculine plural -īn:

fa-yā šabāb al-yawm | fal-nušayyiš maʿa-an | mā dumnā ǧālisīn | fal-nušayyiš li-l-waṭan | fal-nušayyiš li-l- maẓlūmīn fal-nušayyiš li-ṭ-ṭuġāt-i | wal-nušayyiš li-l-mustaʾmirīn | wal-nušayyiš li-l-ʿilm wa ṯ-ṯaqāfa wa-d-dīn | wal-nušayyiš | wa nabqā fī-l-maqhā ǧālisīn | laʿalla-nā fī yawm nušayyiš | fī Falasṭīn

Come on guys today | we smoke together as long as we are sitting here | we smoke for the homeland | we smoke for the oppressed | we smoke for the oppressors | we smoke for the settlers | we smoke for science, culture and religion | we smoke and sit here at the cafe | maybe one day we will smoke | in Palestine).

110

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale
57, 2021, 91-118

e-ISSN 2385-3042

We observe the verb *šayyaša* (built directly from the noun *šīša*) rather than the more classical expression *šariba š-šīša* or *daḫḫana š-šīša* 'smoke the hookah'. In these verses we find the repetition at the beginning of the verse of *wal-nušayyiš* ('let's smoke', with exhortative function) to reiterate the sarcastic invitation to the Arab brothers to persevere in their attitude of idleness.

From the point of view of the figures of speech, in this poem we observe the simile, for example in the verse *'ammā ru'ūs-u-hum fa-ka-l-ǧalīd-i* (their faces are like ice), and the alliteration, as in the following case with the repetition of the syllable *la* and the phoneme /l/: *lā mawḍū' yuṭraḥu wa lā su'āl, tuqarqiru š-šīšat-u badal-an 'an-hum* (No arguments, no questions come from them, the *šīša* gurgles instead). The quadriconsonantic verb *qarqara, yuqarqiru* ('mutter, grumble, gurgle') is also used here in an onomatopoeic function to remember the noise of the bubbles that the smoke generates when passing through the water of the *šīša*; in this verse, irony arises from the juxtaposition of the silence of the young and the noise of the *šiša* alone.

The poem *Al-Maʿḏira* (Apologies) is characterised by a freer line, consisting of short phrases that give the composition a tight rhythm. While there is no systematic rhyme, the ending *-ār* returns every two or three lines throughout the poem: *damār, ḥiṣār, nār, dūlār, 'inḏār* etc. We observe the rhetorical figure of the anaphora, in fact the verb *katabtu-ki* (I wrote you) is repeated at the beginning of three consecutive verses and *maʿḏirat-an* (excuse me) returns systematically in the course of the composition; repetition, as well as being a formal figure of speech widely used in various oral productions and in poetry, can also represent a means to detach oneself from physical and real suffering, through an almost cathartic procedure (Corrao 2007, 24). The entire poem is built on the personification of poetry, to which the artist addresses, invoking forgiveness: *maʿḏirat-an qaṣīdat-ī | lam 'aša' la-ki l-wilāda | fī hāḏa d-damār* (Sorry poem | I didn't want you to be born | in this destruction), *maʿḏirat-an 'in quṭiʿat 'an-ki l-kahrabā' wa ṭalabū min-ki 'iḫlā' ad-dār* (Excuse me | if they have disconnected your electricity | if they asked you to evacuate your home), *maʿḏirat-an qaṣīdat-ī | lam 'aša' | 'an yuǧʿala min-ki 'arḍat-an li-l-ʿār* (Sorry poem | I did not want | that you were the target of shame), *Maʿḏirat-an | 'in ḫatamū 'aṭrāf-a-ki | wa qatalū ḥurūf-a-ki ṣ-ṣaġīra* (Excuse me | if they have circumcised your parts | and they killed your little letters) etc. The language of this poem is full of expressive power and the use of metaphors allows the poetess to carry on her invective, in a more veiled way: *katabtu-ki | bi-dam wa nār | katabtu-ki | bi-yūrānīyūm | wa bi-ḥibr ḫām yubā'u bi-dūlār* (I wrote you | with blood and fire | I wrote to you with uranium | and with raw ink sold in dollars), *maʿḏirat-an qaṣīdat-ī |'in ḥuširat kalimāt-i-ki fī qiṭā' | lā maǧāl fī-hi li-l-istiʿārāt | qāfīyyat-u-hu ṣawt midfaʿ wa 'inḏār* (Excuse me poem | if your words have been piled up | in a sector | with no place for

metaphors | rhyming between the sound of shots and the alarms), *lam ʾaša' li-ʿarūḍ-i-ki | ʾan tuṣbiḥa ʿarḍ-a-ki | ʾan tabā'iya fī sūq ar-riqq* (I didn't want your metric | became a commodity | to sell at the slave market), *maʿḏirat-an | ʾin lawanū-ki | bi-l-ʾazraq wa l-ʾabyaḍ* (Excuse me | if they colored you | of blue and white). In all verses the poetess refers to the difficult socio-political situation in Palestine, with the clear final reference to the colours of the Israeli flag.

In *Al-Ǧinsiyya*, as the title anticipates, the rhyme is built on the feminine ending *-iyya*:

muniḥat ǧinsiyya brāzīliyya | muniḥat ǧawāz safar-in wa biṭāqat hu-wiyya | muniḥat ʾiqāma dāʾima wa biṭāqa ṣaḥiyya | wa-biḍʾat awrāq ʿalay-ha ṣūwar-ī š-šaḥṣiyya

I was granted Brazilian citizenship | I was granted a passport and an identity card | I was granted a permanent residence and a health card | and a few documents with my personal photos on them.

In the previous verses we also find the rhetorical figure of the anaphora with the repetition of the verb (*muniḥat*) at the beginning of the verse.

The poem is coloured with a particular emotional charge thanks to the simile of the bird, used to describe the sad condition of the exile:

fa-ʾanā l-ġarība bi-hāḏihi l-ġurba l-ʾazaliyya | ka-ṭayr-in qad quṭiʿa ʿan sirb-i-hi | fa-bāta yuḥāwilu l-luǧūʾ ʾilā ʾayy sirb-i yuqābilu-hu | fī samāʾ baʿīda mansiyya

In fact I am a stranger in this eternal exile | like a bird cut out of her flock | that continues to seek asylum in any flock that accepts it | in a distant and forgotten sky.

The poem *al-Ǧinsiyya* closes with the allocution of the poetess to the Arab brothers in exile:

ʾayyā ʿArab-an fī š-šatāt-i | ʾa sa-narǧiʿu yawm-an ʾam taḥkumu-nā l-ʾabadiyya?| ʾAyyā ʿArab-an fī s-Suwīd-i wa fī d-Danimārk-i wa fī n-Nurwīǧ-i wa fī Faransā | ʾa sa-narǧiʿu yawm-an ʾam taḥkumu-nā al-ʾabadiyya

Oh Arabs in Diaspora | will we come back someday or have you condemned us forever? | Oh Arabs of Sweden, Denmark, Norway, France | will we come back someday or have you condemned us forever?

In the poem *Table Rase* the author passes from French to Arabic through an interphrastic transglossia, altering sentences in Arabic and French. As in an attempt to define her own identity, Faraḥ uses, at the beginning of the verse, the repetition of words *je suis* ('I am'):

je suis la langue sans mètre, sans rime | je suis l'arabe, le persian, le latin, le germanique | je suis la langue non-maîtrisée [...]. *Je suis la neige | le désert | je suis la terre, l'univers | je suis le calme des océans, des mers | je suis les mots qui se suivent dans un vers.*

I am the language, without meter, without rhyme | I am Arabic, Persian, Latin and German | I am the uncontrolled language [...]. I am the snow, the desert, I am the earth, the universe | I am the calm of the oceans, of the seas | I am the words that follow each other in a verse.

In this poem, Faraḥ Šammā addresses the listeners directly:

prenez tout ce que je sais | et jetez-le dans le Nil | comme la mère de Moïse a fait | ne me demandez pas d'où je viens | ni où je suis née | ne cherchez pas à savoir qu'est-ce qui est écrit sur mes papiers.

Take all I know | and throw it into the Nile | as did the mother of Moses | don't ask me where I come from | where I was born | do not try to know what is written on my documents.

In order to describe her own nature, Faraḥ resorts to the use of similes based on free associations of thought, with a strong evocative power:

lā waṭan l-ī ʿalā l-ʾarḍ | ʾaǧidu l-waṭan fī s-samāʾ | ġaymat-un ṣūfiyyat-un ʿaḏrāʾ | tamtaddu ka-l-baḥr ʿalā ʾarǧāʾ| al-ʾazraq-i l-lānihāʾī

no homeland for me on earth | I find my homeland in the sky | a soft and pure cloud | that extends like the sea | towards the vastness of the infinite blue

ʾanā ʾIbrāhīm yuḥaṭṭimu ǧahl al-ʾaṣnām | ʾanā kawkab durriyy-un yūqadu min ḥibr-i l-ʾaqlām

I am Abraham who destroys the ignorance of idols | I am a shining planet that is lit by the ink of the pens.

113

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale | e-ISSN 2385-3042
57, 2021, 91-118

The linguistic aspect of poetry characterised by multilingualism and its content perfectly bring out the fracture of the poet's identity; in the poem she declares: *ʾanā Darwīš, I am Poe, je suis Baudelaire*[45] (I am Darwish, I am Poe, I am Baudelaire). Here we see an example of code-mixing through the passage from Arabic to English and to French within the same sentence. Regarding the rhymes, as also emerges from the examples above, in this poem the author uses final rhymes even if not in a systematic way.

In *On Censorship* there are stanzas in Arabic and stanzas in English (the two languages, however, are never found in the same verse) and we observe the presence of the rhyme in the verses in English as in those in Arabic:

> *or have my vocal cords been tied? | I have been condemned only because I have nothing to hide.| They want the world to be a silent apartheid,* […] *you can't speak about neither politics nor religion nor sex | maybe I should consider writing poetry about seahorses or T-Rex! | Like this, I'd have bigger chances of becoming the next Mandela or Malcolm X; fī bilād-ī naḥāfu l-fikra ka-ḫawf-i-na min ad-dabābāt | fī bilād-ī tušannu ḥurūb ṣalībiyya ḍidda l-kalimāt | fī bilād-ī naḥfaẓu suwar kāmila | wa lā natafakkaru šayʾ-an fī l-ʾayyāt*

> In my country we fear ideas as we fear tanks | crusades against words are being conducted in | in my country we remember suras complete | and we don't think about the verses at all.

We also find cases of consonant metathesis (*kalimāt* and *kāmilat*) in which the order of phonemes /l/ and /m/ is reversed.

This is the only poem among those analysed in which we find some verses in Palestinian Arabic: the author plays with the levels of the Arabic language, the register used moves away from the standard and tends to the dialectal variant, *mā bidd-hom yānī ǝḥkī | lā ǧins w-lā siyāsa wa lā dīn | huwwe ḍall išī ḥkī fī-h? | bass bāqī yiḥkū-lī* (They don't want me to talk | neither sex, nor politics nor religion | but what is left for me to say? | but they keep telling me).

We observe the rhetorical question both in Arabic *huwwe ḍall išī ḥkī fī-h?* and in English: *Am I allowed to write this poem? | Or has my ink been replaced with cement? | Am I allowed to speak these words? | Or have my vocal cords been tied?*

Moreover, the poetess repeatedly reproduces the direct speech in the course of the composition: *bass bāqī yiḥkū-lī | mamnūʿ tiḥkī ʿan ayy ʾišī bi-ḫaṣṣ l-banī ʾādamīn* (But they keep telling me | 'It is forbid-

---

[45] The poetess is clearly referring here to Maḥmūd Darwīš (1921-2008), Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) and Charles Pierre Baudelaire (1821-1867).

114

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale   e-ISSN   2385-3042
57, 2021, 91-118

den to talk about anything relating to human beings'), *'Sir, why was there a tree of knowledge in the story of Adam and Eve?' | 'Sir, why did Abraham ask to see God in order to believe?'*.

In general in the poems, about the lexicon we find various references to historical, cultural and religious elements: the author recalls in her verses characters from history such as Malcom X and Nelson Mandela, she remembers the apartheid policy of racial segregation, mentions famous poets from different countries and periods such as Maḥmūd Darwīš, Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire, cites biblical characters such as Abraham, Adam and Eve and refers to the Koran citing the the *suwar* ('suras').

5 Conclusion

In the frenetic era of digital communication, the connection with other web users would seem to annihilate the moments of personal reflection necessary for the creation of literary content. However, behind the apparent superficiality of the new media, a complex reality hides, in which poetry, with its slow times, its pauses, its weighted words, still finds space. In the Arab world, poetry has always played a role of great importance, starting from the pre-Islamic era when poets challenged each other with strokes of verse in the square to contemporary literature.

The analysed artist Faraḥ Šammā has chosen to express herself through poetry, grasping all the potential of this sublime artistic form and perceiving the strong link with all the Arab cultural heritage. The young artist from Spoken Word, employing the emotional force of the *kalima manṭūqa* (the spoken word), has used the tool of the web and above all YouTube to transmit her compositions in a more immediate and lively way, just as she does during her live performance.

Faraḥ Šammā's videos have gained views all over the world: citizens of countries far from her have been able to understand the struggles and sufferings of a young girl who lives the particular condition of a Palestinian exile. Her poems convey the feeling of loss and bewilderment of the birthplace, the abuses and contradictions that Arabs live in their countries.

In general, in addition to multilingualism, the role that diglossia plays in the course of the creative process is a factor not to be underestimated. In the process of literary creation, the subjective choice of the register to use is linked to the communicative purpose; a minority of poets opts for the *lahǧa* or *'āmmiyya*, spoken variety of the language, closer to the reality of the reader/listener, others prefer standard Arabic as a 'high', cultured variant of the language. The author examined here prefers standard Arabic for her poems, probably to emphasise a sense of belonging to all Arabs and to resume the tra-

dition of poetic production generally rendered in the high register of the language, even if in one case she slips towards the spoken Palestinian Arabic (in a few lines of the poem *On Censorship*).

In *Table Rase* and *On Censorship* we observe phenomena of transglossia from Arabic to French (and vice versa) and from Arabic to English (and vice versa).

As for the syntax, she prefers simple phrases, consisting of a single sentence or paratactic structures.

Overall, Faraḥ Šammā's style is clear and direct, rich in images and rhetorical figures such as metaphors, similes, alliterations, anaphoras, allocutions. The poetess often uses the rhyme, even if not in a systematic way, focusing on the sound plot, also through expedients such as repetitions and pauses.

Faraḥ Šammā has found a way to ensure that her message is received directly and immediately by as many listeners as possible, understanding that this is the potential of the web and transforming her personal experience from a simple expression of herself to a common heritage.

Bibliography

Al-Ghadeer, M. (2009). *Desert Voices: Bedouin Women's Poetry in Saudi Arabia*. London: I.B. Tauris. https://doi.org/10.1163/1570064x–12341247.

Allen, R. (2006). *La letteratura araba*. Bologna: il Mulino.

Al-Qāsim, S. (1958). *Muwākib aš-šams - qaṣāʾid* (The One who Accompanies the Sun - Poems). An-nāṣira: Maṭbaʿat al-ḥakīm.

Amaldi, D. (2004). *Storia della letteratura araba classica*. Bologna: Zanichelli.

Anglesey, Z. (2008). *Listen Up!: Spoken Word Poetry*. New York: Paw Prints.

Athamneh, W. (2017). *Modern Arabic Poetry: Revolution and Conflict*. Paris: University of Notre Dame Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpj7f2w.

Camera d'Afflitto, I. (1998). *Letteratura araba contemporanea*. Roma: Carocci Editore.

Canova, G. (1971). "La poesia della resistenza palestinese". *Oriente Moderno*, 51(6/8), 583-630.

Canova, G. (1973). "Due poetesse: Fadwà Ṭūqān e Salmà ʿl-Khaḍrāʾ Al-Ġayyūsī". *Oriente Moderno*, 53(10), 876-93.

Caton, S. (1993). *Peaks of Yemen I Summon: Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe*. Berkeley: University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/605400.

Colombo, V. (2007). *Non ho peccato abbastanza. Antologia di poetesse arabe contemporanee*. Milano: Mondadori.

Corrao, F.M. (2007). *In un mondo senza cielo: Antologia della poesia palestinese*. Firenze: Giunti.

Donohue, J. (2006). "Arab Literature on Internet". Gonzalez-Quijano, Y. (éd.), *La société de l'information au Proche-Orient*. Beirut: Presses de l'Université Saint Joseph, 201-11.

Durand, O. (2009). *Dialettologia Araba*. Roma: Carocci Editore.

116

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale
57, 2021, 91-118

e-ISSN 2385-3042

Eleveld, M.; Smith, M.K. (2003). *The Spoken Word Revolution Slam, Hip-hop, & the Poetry of a New Generation*. Naperville (US): Sourcebooks MediaFusion.

Fischione, F. (2013). "Le canzoni di Rāmī ʿIṣām: una cronaca musicale della Rivoluzione egiziana". *La rivista di Arablit*, 3(6), 28-48.

Fisher, M. (2003). "Open Mics and Open Minds: Spoken Word Poetry in African Diaspora Participatory Literacy Communities". *Harvard Educational Review*, 73(3), 362-89. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.73.3.642q2564m1k90670.

Foley, J.M. (2005). "From Oral Performance to Paper-Text to Cyber-Edition". *Oral Tradition*, 20(2), 233-63.

Herzog, T. (2012). "Orality and the Tradition of Arabic Epic Storytelling". Reichl, K. (ed.), *Medieval Oral Literature*. Berlin: De Gruyer, 629-49. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110241129.629.

Hijjawi, S. [1968] (2009). *Poetry of Resistance in Occupied Palestine*. Baghdad: Ministry of Culture.

Khatib, S.; Fathy, S.M.; Sweilem, G.K. (2020). "The Impact of Social Networking Sites on Arab Literary Genres". *Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/ Egyptology*, 17(9), 1230-6.

Mahmoud, H. (2014). *La poesia nelle piazze. I versi di protesta della primavera araba*. Roma: Edizioni Ensemble.

Massad, J. (2005). "Liberating Songs: Palestine Put to Music". Stein, L.R.; Swedenburg, T. (eds), *Palestine, Israel and Politics of Popular Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822386872-011.

McDonald, D.A. (2006). *My voice Is My Weapon: Music Nationalism and the Poetics of Palestinian Resistance*. Champaign (IL): University of Illinois Press.

Meisami, J.; Starkey, P. (1998). *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, vol. 2. London: Routledge.

Morris, T.; Ballantine, P. (2015). *Social Media for Writers: Marketing Strategies for Building Your Audience and Selling Books*. Ohio: Writers Digest Book.

Nofal, K.H. (2017). "National Identity in Mahmoud Darwish's Poetry". *English Language and Literature Studies*, 7(3), 66-77. https://doi.org/10.5539/ells.v7n3p66.

Pepe, T. (2015). "When Writers Activate Readers. How the Autofictional Blog Transforms Arabic Literature". *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 15, 73-91. https://doi.org/10.5617/jais.4652.

Sabbagh, K. et al. (2012). *Understanding the Arab Digital Generation*. Booz & Company.

Siemens, R.; Schreibman, S. (2008). *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Swedenburg, T. (2012). "Egypt's Music of Protest From Sayyid Darwish to DJ Haha". *Middle East Report*, 42, 39-42.

Thomas, B. (2020). *Literature and Social Media*. London: Routledge.

Yaqub, N.G. (2007). *Pens, Swords, And the Springs of Art: The Oral Poetry Dueling of Palestinian Weddings in the Galilee*. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004152595.i-380.

Younis, E. (2016). "Manifestations of the Arab Spring in Literature: 'Video Clip Poems' on YouTube as a Model". *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 6(1), 33-42. https://doi.org/10.17265/2160-6579/2016.01.005.