

Negotiating Self and Place: Counter-Hegemonic Discourse in Suheir Hammad's Poetry^(*)

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Abstract

Counter-hegemony is part of the process that questions or threatens dominant ideological frameworks. Particularly, Palestinian-American writers resist the American and Israeli hegemony through recovering the relationship with their homeland. For those writers, home place produces several symbols of resistance. A sense of place requires boundaries where there is an identifiable notion of what is outside or beyond one's sense of place or home. It is crucial in understanding one's identity and plays a role in the physical, emotional, and even spiritual configurations of a sense of self. Throughout such boundaries, Palestinian-American writers explore the place as a physical, psychological, ideological, historical, and environmental construct where they question and alter these constructions to challenge the dominant mainstream hegemony. Suheir Hammad, a Palestinian-American poet, attempts to recover a sense of home, identity, nation, and place in response to various forms of displacement and oppression. She creates a terrain in which she inhabits a space that allows her to challenge the dominant hegemony and create a liminal space. It is the aim of this paper to examine Suheir Hammad's *poetry* as a counter-hegemonic discourse which enables her to recover the relationship between her place and identity and to resist the mainstream hegemony. The paper argues that Hammad's poetry is not only voicing resistance against the collective silencing of the plighted Palestinians and the othering of Arabs, but as itself a form of counter-hegemony. Finally, the paper aims to explore how Hammad manipulates certain poetic form, style and tactics as tools to serve her purposes.

Key words: counter-hegemony, Suheir Hammad, Palestinian Americans, resistance, performance poetry

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ملخص :

الهيمنة المضادة هي جزء من العملية التي تشكل في الأطر الأيديولوجية المهيمنة أو تهددها. ويقاوم الكتاب الفلسطينيون الأمريكيون، على وجه الخصوص، الهيمنة الأمريكية والإسرائيلية من خلال استعادة العلاقة مع وطنهم. بالنسبة لهؤلاء الكتاب، يمثل مكان الوطن العديد من رموز المقاومة. ويتطلب الإحساس بالمكان حدوداً حيث يوجد مفهوم محدد لما هو أبعد من إحساس المرء بالمكان أو الوطن. وهو أمر حاسم في فهم هوية المرء ويلعب دوراً في المكونات المادية والعاطفية وحتى الروحية للشعور بالذات. ومن خلال هذه الحدود، يستكشف الكتاب الفلسطينيون الأمريكيون المكان كبناء مادي وإيديولوجي وتاريخي وبيئي لتحدي الهيمنة السائدة. وتحاول الشاعرة الفلسطينية الأمريكية سهير حماد استعادة الشعور بالوطن والهوية والأمة والمكان رداً على مختلف أشكال النزوح والقمع. فهي تخلق فضاء تشكل فيه الحيز الذي يسمح لها بتحدي الهيمنة السائدة وخلق حيز انتقالي. يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة شعر سهير حماد باعتباره خطاباً مضاداً للهيمنة يمكنها من استعادة العلاقة بين مكانها وهويتها ومقاومة الهيمنة السائدة. ويوضح البحث أن شعر حماد لا يعبر فقط عن المقاومة ضد الإسكات الجماعي للفلسطينيين الذين يعانون من المحن أو مقاومة التعامل مع العرب على أنهم الآخر، بل هو في حد ذاته شكل من أشكال الهيمنة المضادة. وأخيراً، يهدف البحث إلى استكشاف كيفية توظيف حماد لقوالب محددة في شعرها واستخدامها لأسلوب وتكتيكات شعرية معينة كأدوات لخدمة أغراضها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهيمنة المضادة، سهير حماد، الفلسطينيون الأمريكيون، المقاومة،

شعر الأداء

Subaltern and oppressed groups establish alternative discourses to criticize the existing structure of social domination. The dominant power of society subjugates those people to transform them into a different type of people willing to accept oppression and subjugation. As a result of this hegemonic force, oppressed groups resist it by using specific tactics. Establishing a relationship between one's self and place is a prominent tactic used by subalterns to challenge domination. For instance, Palestinian-American poets - among them Suheir Hammad - resist American racism and Israeli occupation by emphasizing the relationship between their identities as both Palestinians and Palestinian-Americans,

and Palestine as a place to return to. The Italian critic Antonio Gramsci identified this kind of domination over oppressed groups as hegemony.

During his prison years, Gramsci's concern was to explain the theoretical basis of proletarian counter-strategy. In developing his concept of hegemony, he observed that the dominant class rule with the consent of the subordinated masses. Therefore, he paid attention to the appropriate strategy that the subordinated groups can use for resistance. By hegemony, Gramsci was referring to the domination of one class over another or others, not merely through force but through social, political, and ideological indoctrination to achieve consent. The dominant class, or what Gramsci refers to as "state," achieves consent from the subordinated class through ideology, or what Marxists call the false consciousness. It sometimes uses force or power to oppress the subordinated class(es). Hegemony, in this sense, is a marriage between coercion and consent. The other part of society, "the civil society," uses consent in creating its hegemony. In other words, both state and civil society practice consent to achieve hegemonic discourse.

For Gramsci, economic as well as ethical-political phenomena establish hegemony. The leading group, through economics, politics, and culture, practices its decisive function (*The Prison Note* 161). Lee Artz and Ortega Murphy explain that hegemony addresses social practices, relationships, and structures to negotiate other diverse social forces. Economic productions, political forces, and cultural institutions play an essential role in theorizing hegemony. It explains why subordinated groups participate in practices that subjugate them (2). Therefore, the dominant class exercises a particular leadership that could be political, intellectual, or moral. For Gramsci, the hegemonic position must be related to the sphere of the superstructure (*Prison Notes* 181). He remarked that not only is economic basis necessary to maintain hegemony; but culture also has an essential role in creating a hegemonic system.

The basic notion of the theory of hegemony is that force and ideas rule the masses. It centers on the emergence of power and resistance. Peter D. Thomas, in his book *The Gramscian Moment*, explains that

hegemony is a mechanism of mediated subordination. Accordingly, “hegemony/consent is conceived as the opposite of direct domination/coercion” (161). Gramsci’s theory of hegemony illustrates how the dominant classes build and maintain their power, and therefore, how subordinated groups resist this power. Thomas points out that “Hegemony is understood here not as the ‘antithesis’ of domination,” rather, it “constitutes a moment of domination” (163). Such groups have been deprived of their independent cultural pattern because of the dominant hegemony, so their resistance to this hegemonic system involves manipulation and redefinition of dominant cultural categories, meanings, and ideologies.

The resistance of the dominant hegemony leads theorists to look at the relation between power and ideology within societies. Ideology creates hegemony. It – as false consciousness – reflects how individuals represent themselves while consciousness is the system of mind that reflects those representations. Therefore, hegemony as a linking mechanism mediates between dominant ideology and consciousness (Lull 33). This relationship serves power relations within societies. The dominant hegemony sometimes loses the consent of the subordinated group. In this case, the state practices coercive power to protect its position. Thus, “the elements of coercion are always inherent in a hegemony” (Im 135). In other words, power manifests itself when consent is not enough to subjugate the subordinated group. Hence, power and hegemony are similar because they are tools of domination. Both of them help the dominant group to exercise domination over those opposing it. The former is found within political society, the latter within civil society. For Gramsci, the only way to resist the dominant hegemony is via civil society, which he considers a public sphere.

That is to say, hegemony and power exist only in a relationship between two individuals or groups. Both require the subordinate to accept the authority of domination. In other words, according to John Downing, hegemony is always under negotiation between superior and subordinate social classes (16). It is, in this sense, a political-cultural phenomenon in which ideological domination of one class over others through the possession of a monopolistic cultural power position enables

the dominant class to define and construct reality. The dominant class successfully uses political, cultural, and intellectual leadership to create and establish its view of the world as a universal one.

Hegemony and power are connected concepts. Using power enables the dominant to create hegemonic discourse. For Gramsci, the dominant creates it by presenting its world view as common sense and reality. The mass media, educational institutions, family, governmental agencies, religious groups, and other social institutions help the dominant to support such hegemonic relations within society. Therefore, subaltern groups approve the oppressive ideology that marginalizes them. For John Chalcraft and Yaseen Noorani, hegemony is not “a matter of brainwashing,” or “false consciousness;” rather, it is the ability of a dominant class to impose its hegemonic discourse depending on the ideological elements of a given social formation (3-4). In this sense, hegemony emerges as “common sense” that produces moral and political passivity. Individuals are responsible for their subjugation. Thus, consent plays an essential role in exercising hegemony. That is why political and social subjugation is not sometimes investigated. According to Nadia Urbinati, this situation of subordination of both individuals and groups is mainly described as hegemony. She adds that subordination leads to the deprivation of individual self-reliance as a person and a citizen. It is a condition of powerlessness and lack of representation (370).

Chalcraft and Noorani remark that the dominant group needs more than political and strategic relations to create hegemonic discourse. The dominant group needs moral and intellectual leadership too. They add that, hegemony as a product of an ideological struggle is related to economic and cultural areas (3). Accordingly, the dominant group attempts to manipulate others to make them more consent to its hegemonic practices. However, as Michel Foucault points out, “where there is a power, there is resistance;” resistance to such hegemonic practices appears as a form of counter-hegemony. Counter-hegemony questions or threatens dominant ideological frameworks. It is a medium that subordinated groups can pass beyond fixity. Racial, patriarchal, and capital logics work to place the subaltern outside the concept of citizenship, and sometimes of humanity itself. These logics serve as hegemony, which enables the dominant group to maintain its power.

Therefore, Gramsci presupposes that the dominant group enforces its ideology through a multitude of power relations.

As power is not hierarchal but discursive, the subordinated groups can create counter-discourse through stories, myths, and folklore. For Gramsci, everyday social interaction is connected to ideological representation to create hegemony. So the cultural and social interaction of the subordinated groups helps them create their counter-hegemony by revisiting their folkloric and ritual practices. Jean-Pierre Reeds points out that folklore, religion, and common sense stand against the formal conceptions of the world, and help to move toward the counter-hegemonic direction. (564). In other words, these cultural aspects empower subordinated groups to challenge the reality.

As hegemony creates reality, the role of counter-hegemony is to challenge social and political common sense. It offers other ways for the subordinated groups to speak and represent themselves. Postcolonial studies, for example, provide an insight into how the subordinated groups use alternative discourses to resist the dominant hegemony. According to Gramsci, the counter-hegemonic process offers alternative ways to challenge the existing condition. Reeds remarks that the concern of counter-hegemony is to enhance the sense of human liberation. The counter-hegemonic process can achieve its role only through the "organic intellectuals." They aim, unlike traditional intellectuals, to replace the existent conception of the world (563). Their role as leaders of counter-hegemony is to feel, understand, and appreciate people's feelings. In *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci argues that passion and understanding can explain and justify a particular historical situation. Therefore, as he comments:

One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of such a nexus the relations between the intellectuals and the people-nations are, or are reduced to, relationship of a purely bureaucratic and formal order. (418)

In other words, creating counter-hegemony depends on the passion of people. According to Reeds, leaders of counter-hegemony must emotionally feel and understand the lived experience of the subaltern

(571). That is because feeling and passion are essential for people to conceptualize their world and help them resist the dominant hegemony.

The struggle for alternative hegemony aims to deconstruct existing hegemonic discourse to construct a new one. To establish an alternative hegemonic discourse, the subalterns need to pay attention to the political and ideological situations that serve their case. For example, the counter-hegemonic project for the Palestinians is based on the issues related to their homecoming, and claiming their historical rights of their homeland. Palestinian poets and writers in the diaspora act differently towards the Zionist hegemony. They also face issues related to racism and nationalism in their demand for a homeland. They try to rewrite their lost home in poetry. Throughout their poems, they challenge the American and Israeli dominant discourses that attempt to deprive them of their right to return to their homeland. They create what bell hooks calls “the politics of location.” As she remarks, “the politics of location” is necessary for those who create counter-hegemonic discourse. She argues that the “politics of location” is essential because it helps “to identify the spaces where we begin the process of revision” (145). Therefore, as she concludes, “One needs a community of resistance” (149). Poems about the homeland, for Palestinians, act as a strategy of resisting the Israeli hegemonic discourse.

Palestinians and Palestinian-Americans, as a subaltern group, recover their relationship with their homeland as an alternative discourse. The Israeli hegemony aims to normalize occupation by attempting to separate Palestinians from their land and territory. This process includes collective punishment, closure, house demolition, and administrative detention. However, Palestinians are not passive towards the Israeli hegemonic process. They create their counter-hegemony, which represents different forms of resistance such as the first and second Intifada.

Palestinian-American writers resist the oppressive hegemony by writing about their sense of displacement, exile and homecoming. In doing this, they hope to create a new future where they can achieve justice and peace. Returning to the homeland is the main theme in their literature. The word return has different connotations according to the

context. However, for the Palestinian-American poets “the need to return to a long-denied historical and family legacy may be experienced largely on an emotional level” (Majaj 116). According to Lisa Suheir Majaj, the Palestinian-American women poets deal with political issues as personal. Therefore, the struggle for freedom, justice, and peace is not separate from the struggle for women’s rights which is embedded in human rights (115). They challenge the dominant mainstream culture to create a new future. By revisiting the past and remembering the painful trauma, they attempt to create a Palestinian culture in diaspora, and move toward future. For Majaj, return means “to go forward, to create a new future from the fragments of a reclaimed past” (116). Suheir Hammad represents the Palestinian-American women poets who attempt to challenge the dominant reality and create a counter-hegemonic discourse.

As a poet and political activist, Suheir Hammad, in her poetry, voiced various concerns both political and cultural. She also managed to overcome multiple barriers to interact with marginalized groups. Palestinian-American poetry narrates afflictive refugee stories told by outcast Palestinians who lived a deprived life. Hammad narrates her own memories as a refugee child who was surrounded by terror and violence and whose existence was denied and even threatened by the Zionist endeavor. She states in an interview:

[T]he thing that stands out to me, as a Palestinian, about my birthday is that the year before on October 25, 1972, Golda Meir had delivered a speech where she says – and I am not paraphrasing – “I cannot sleep at night knowing how many Arab babies are being born this same night.” This was a speech delivered to her countrymen and women as a nationalistic call to ethnic and national pride. (Knopf-Newman 72)

In these sentences, Hammad highlights the dominant point of view of the Zionist hegemony which leads the US political activity towards the Palestinian-Israeli struggle. It also oppresses Palestinians and denies their right to life. Hammad believes that the role of her poetry is to expose this hegemony that appears as common sense in international politics.

In her poetry, Hammad uses different tactics and techniques to challenge the dominant hegemony and to establish a counter-hegemonic discourse that enables her and other oppressed groups to speak against

the grain. To do this, Hammad connects herself – as a Palestinian – with other minorities in the United States, especially African Americans. In her introduction to *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, Hammad suggests that the word “black” has a different connotation depending on the hegemonic discourse of a given society. She argues that it is not an ethnic sign but a political position. She devoted a number of poems in this collection to discussing and reflecting upon the issue of blackness and the oppression and racial discrimination of black people in the American society.

Both Palestinians and Blacks are subject to an ideology that marginalizes them and deprives them of returning to their homeland. The colonial hegemony imposes a vision of a world where those people have no home or history. In this sense, those subaltern groups create a counter-hegemonic discourse that pays attention to the historical counter-narrative and the folkloric items in their culture. Collective identity plays a central role in constructing the counter-hegemony for the subaltern group. Ingo W. Schroder explains that culture and tradition define hegemony that also “establishes a vision of collective identity” because it specifies who belongs to “us” and who does not (30). Accordingly, the subaltern group needs to emphasize their culture and tradition to challenge the existing hegemony and create a community of resistance. In the poem entitled “taxi,” Hammad focuses on the importance of the cultural heritage of both Palestinians and African Americans. She decides, “so when we read baraka and listen to malcolm / let’s read darwish and keep on / listening to malcolm” (*Born Palestinian* 28). She believes that Palestinians and African Americans share the source of suffering, and both must keep their cultural heritage as a source of resistance.

In her poetry, Hammad redefines geographical, discursive, and communal locations and revises processes of racialization that are related to white Americans and ethnic minorities. By searching for a place, she gathers others into a new collective identity. This collective identity resists the dominant hegemony by returning to their cultural heritage. In the political struggle, defining cultural identity plays a central role. The dominant cultural hegemony manipulated others to shape their identities

to serve the dominant group's interest. To resist this hegemony, the subordinated groups need to redefine their collective identity. In a poem entitled "dead woman," Hammad states that "I am a dead woman / until we inhale our collective breath" (*Born Palestinian* 51). As a victim of displacement, oppression, and social racism, she believes that the only way to overcome these feelings is to move toward home by returning to the collective cultural heritage.

Hammad counters the dominant hegemony that dehumanizes Palestinians by focusing on the denationalizing feeling of subjugation. She believes that one problem that occurs within Palestinian-Israeli struggle is that Palestinians "do not make the connections to the other struggles that happen within the continental United States" (Knopf-Newman 75). In her poetry, Hammad discusses questions of identity from a local and transnational point of view. She relocates the Palestinian struggle within a transnational framework of shared suffering. She asserts that "we have liberation struggles through this entire nation and you have the environmental movement you have the movement to abolish prisons. And because I was raised at the time of hip-hop, I was able to make these connections because I had to, you know" (Knopf-Newman 76). Hammad aims to make this connection between the Palestinian suffering and the global experience of the powerlessness of colonized people within the hegemonic discourse. She engages with a tension between hegemonic authority and subaltern narrative when she voices an Arab-American sentiment on 9/11 as a broader transnational articulation of frustration with American exceptionalism. In "first writing since," Hammad states:

more than ever, i believe there is no difference
the most privileged nation, most americans do not know the
difference
between indians, afghanis, syrians, muslims, sikhs, hindus
more than ever, there is no difference (no pages)

Her contestation of binary dichotomies enhances her vision of humanism, which she adopts to oppose ideologies of racial supremacy. She tries to "use vernacular and aesthetic to humanize and to illuminate the Palestinian experience (Knopf-Newman 76). In "Beyond Words," she declares "this is about light and dark / there is no black and white in

humanity” (6). Hammad challenges the white dominant ideology by deconstructing the binary opposition between black and white and establishing a counter-hegemony that depends on humanity.

She not only confronts the dominant hegemony by connecting herself and her issue thematically to the suffering of other minorities but also uses one of the most prominent techniques in African Americans culture in writing her poetry, namely the hip-hop technique. It is an African-American cultural form used to counter racial discrimination. The movement emerged as a cultural mode developed by black and Latino youth of New York City who were trying to protest against their marginalization by American society and police brutality as well as express their attitudes towards the history of their ancestors, slavery and racial discrimination. It was later appropriated by various communities inside and outside US, thus becoming a mode of transnational communication.

Hammad and other Arab-American writers embraced hip-hop for many reasons. For some, it was a medium for “self-representation” and “political expression.” It was also seen as “a blueprint to create a voice and be HEARD!” For others, it was a means that allowed them build bridges with other people and communities as well as a way to easily and safely convey political messages (Youmans 47-8). It was for all of them a public space or a platform they used to defy the subordinate status and advocate their rights (Hanley 146).

Appropriating hip-hop allowed Hammad to first, draw attention to the marginalization of the Palestinian case throughout the world as well as the marginalization of the Arab-Americans and other minorities within the American society, and second, imply a connection between the historical experiences of Palestinians and those of African Americans. Hip-hop technique, hence, helped her write about the history of her motherland and the plight of her people long before the Israeli occupation and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians just like how black rappers traced the history of their community and the plights they have been through.

Poetry has always been a desired form of expression during protests and different gatherings. It can serve as a form of counter-

hegemony. Countering the manipulative rhetoric appropriated by oppressive powers remains a responsibility of the poet. Through poetry, the poet can narrate the suffering of subaltern groups and express their sense of exclusion. Hip-hop enables Hammad to construct a kind of narrative that delegitimizes dominant ideology and resists cultural domination. It provides her with the space needed to express Palestinian pain and invisibility and connect them with the suffering of other subaltern groups. As hip-hop depends on performance rather than written words, so does Hammad's poetry. While performance poetry necessitates the live presence of an audience who, in themselves, form a diverse community, it is through engaging the verbal and non-verbal feedback of her audience that Hammad manages to create a feeling of gathering. Performance poetry enables her create a connection between her as a poet and the audience which differs from the connection created by written poetry. While the page is the main source of the poem for written poetry, performance poetry depends highly on rising and falling intonation. The voice of the poet is instrumental for delivering his message to the audience.

Moreover, performance poetry engages with emotions which is a central element in social life and is also effective in making social change. Both performance poetry and emotions are means to establish alternative spaces for people living in marginalized situations. Through performance poetry, Hammad narrates her experience fighting against injustice while aspiring for social change. Her marginalized social position as a Palestinian-American Muslim woman affects how she feels about oppression, activism and getting involved in movements calling for social change. She mixes feelings of hope, love and dignity with those of fear, anger and disappointment as a way to involve her audience and call for action and change. In his *Pedagogy of Hope*, Paulo Freire argues that the feeling of hope alone is not enough. Both hope and anger are instrumental for social change. These feelings, in his view, energize people and allow them to exercise power (2). Hammad, thus, aims to shift the feelings of the audience from that of acceptance of the status quo into taking action and working towards social change.

The passionate connection Hammad establishes with her audience

identifies her – in a Gramscian sense – with an organic leader. In performing her poetry about Palestine, Hammad finds a means of self-expression and a way to discover her identity. In her poem “open poem to those who rather we not read ... or breathe,” Hammad challenges the dominant hegemony that she calls “fascism” to emphasize her aim to connect all subaltern groups in their search for humanity and freedom:

we children of children exiled from homelands descendants of
immigrants denied jobs and toilets carry continents in our eyes
survivors of the middle passage
we stand and demand recognition of our humanity (*Born
Palestinian* 73)

For Hammad, giving voice to the silenced group is essential in exposing the evils of the imperial hegemony. She is able to share the Palestinian traumatic experience with her audience to challenge the mainstream media in the United States. Performing poetry paves the way for Hammad and other poets to defy social and political injustice. She is able to address the political and social problems through speaking to the audience who can feel her suffering.

By performing poetry, subaltern groups establish a kind of resistance, in which performance enables interaction between race, poetry, and identity. Susan Somers-Willett asserts that in performing poetry, poets come to express themselves. She adds that “spoken word poetry” is affected by the search for identity and stems from categories of marginalization (98). Therefore, poems, in performance, are often in the first person and are based on personal experiences. In other words, they involve self-expression to draw the attention of different audiences to the problem of oppressed people in society. Hammad engages in searching for identity by connecting herself to other races in the US.

In her poem “daddy’s song,” Hammad passionately identifies with the black American singer, songwriter, and civil-rights activist Sam Cooke whose song “A Change is Gonna Come” does not only represent the suffering of African Americans, but, for Hammad, the suffering of Arab Americans as well. By claiming Sam Cooke’s song as hers she thus shares with the blacks their experience of pain and struggle for justice.

Influenced by African American hip-hop rhythm, Hammad wrote “daddy’s song” that reflects her father’s impact upon her and their shared experience of listening to Sam Cooke. She writes: “all the time Sam Cooke could sing Sam Cooke sang real songs / simple and good.” Michelle Hartman argues that “[t]he connection of the father and then the daughter to Sam Cooke is a true love of his music, and this cultural gift allows the two to find a shared space” (159). This space created by the song is not only for Hammad and her father, but also for all Arab-Americans and Palestinian Americans who were displaced of their home land. Thus, the African Americans and Arab Americans share the same experience of struggle against hegemonic power and African American music can be a healing force that helps them resist hegemony and struggle against injustice and racism.

Hammad counters the dominant hegemony through performing poetry and using the pronoun “I” to personalize her refusal of the American hegemonic discourse that subjugates other races. She rejects the American slogan of “war on terrorism” because it becomes the medium for oppressing other races, among them Arabs and specially Palestinians. Hammad realizes that “war on terrorism” is a justification for American imperialist interference in the Middle East. Therefore, she attempts to deconstruct such imperialist hegemony to create her counter-hegemonic discourse. She refuses the American justification for war in Iraq and Afghanistan. In her poem “what i will,” Hammad declares that she will not follow such a concept because it is not her war. She opens the poem:

i will not
dance your war
drum. I will
not lend my soul nor
my bones to your war
drum. ...
i know that beat (*Zaatar Diva* 60)

War drums, in this poem, are a symbol of both US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and US support for Israel’s occupation of Palestine. The last lines emphasize the idea of resisting US imperial hegemony by

insisting on “i / will not forget where / i come from.” She argues that she needs to create her counter-hegemony to resist the evil of imperialism: “i / will craft my own drum. Gather my beloved.” She crafts her drum to be able to “dance / and resist and dance and/ persist and dance. This heartbeat is louder than / death” (61). Hammad’s repetition of the pronoun “I” gives her a space to personalize her refusal of the dominant hegemony and helps her to win the sympathy of her audience.

Countering the dominant hegemony depends not only on resisting existing political and social conditions but also on constructing an identity that can challenge it. As a Palestinian in the diaspora, Hammad emphasizes her position as one among many who bear the sorrow of not belonging. She becomes part of a community of exiles who remind her of injustice. In her poem “we spent the fourth of july in bed,” Hammad sympathizes with and supports women in their struggle all over the world. She starts from Iraq:

even now
young walking girls are exploding legs
stepping on the shells of
american hatred left
dug in Iraqi soil. (*Born Palestinian* 78)

The repetition of her phrase “even now” serves as a constant reminder of the overflow of persisting sad memories. She goes on to portray a picture of the common suffering of women from different nationalities. There we see the “malaysian girls [who have to] choose between the sex trade and / hunger.” Then we see “philipinas [who] / go blind constructing the computer disks;” “Somali eyes” out of which “ants crawl;” “a Puerto rican woman” who becomes blind in “an all white prison cell” and her crime is “self-determination;” and finally “Yemeni eyes” that “search out concrete / bodega walls to feed / homesick elders” (78). All of the women mentioned in the poem are non-white women who share the experience of suffering which is a universal bridge that connects all of them. Hammad, thus, through portraying the shared experience of these women suggests their solidarity and support to each other against worldwide cultural and political hegemony exercised against them.

Hammad challenges the dominant hegemony by breaking down the usual style of writing poetry. She writes some of her poems using conversational English rather than rhymed lines. Additionally, she sometimes prefers to use slang rather than standard language to situate herself within ethnic minorities in the United States. In her poem "first writing since," Suheir Hammad feels the suffering of the 9/11 victims to the extent that she identifies with them:

first, please god, let it be a mistake, the pilot's heart failed, the
plane's engine died.
then please god, let it be a nightmare, wake me now.
please god, after the second plane, please, don't let it be anyone
who looks like my brothers. (no pages)

In these lines, Hammad does not use rhyme, yet, unlike her usual poetry, she uses conversational language, long sentences, and punctuation because she wants to connect herself with the ordinary Americans to convey sympathy with them. However, she suddenly becomes the victim when she realizes that the hegemonic ideology and stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims will place her and her brothers, representatives of Palestinians and Arabs, in the position of the terrorist. To explain her marginality she turns back to the repetition of the pronoun "I" in order to distance herself from the position of the perpetrator by declining violence:

i do not know how bad a life has to break in order to kill.
i have never been so hungry that i willed hunger
i have never been so angry as to want to control a gun over a pen.
not really.
even as a woman, as a palestinian, as a broken human being.
never this broken.

By intersecting the suffering of the Americans and the suffering of the Palestinians, Hammad thus connects two geographically distant peoples. She enhances the connection by asserting that it is the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza who understand the suffering of the Americans: "if there are any people on earth who understand how

new york is / feeling right now, they are in the west bank and the gaza strip.” This connection not only identifies the Palestinians and Americans with the victim but also implies an identification of the Israeli forces with terrorists.

In her poetry, Hammad connects various subaltern groups who share the painful and traumatic experience based on colonial and imperial hegemony. She also connects different places to shed more light on racism as common sense and dominant hegemonic discourse in the United States. While Hammad connects New York with the Gaza strip to share her sympathy with the Americans who view her as terrorist, she connects Palestine with Africa. For her, both places share the same history of suffering and struggle against occupation, marginalization, and invisibility. The interconnectedness between Palestinians and Africans is further strengthened in her poem “the necklace”:

the necklace
diamonds of South African rock
piercing shine caught in eyes
charred bone of *der Yassin's* massacre
carried memories of my grandfather's
chocolate and nuts shop (*Born Palestinian* 40)

The juxtaposition of the African origin necklace and *Der Yassin's* massacre evokes a connection between the plights and oppression of the African ancestors by colonialist forces and the oppression of the Palestinians by the Israeli forces. Thus the necklace that originated in Africa and passed through generations of her family is a symbol of her double consciousness, of being Palestinian and black. In this poem, Hammad argues that the source of suffering in both cases is colonialism. It is the hegemony that subjugates both Palestinians and Blacks.

Like African Americans, Palestinian-Americans also suffer because of racial discrimination, stereotyping, and invisibility. They challenge the dominant hegemony that is related to the Palestinian-Israeli struggle as well as the issues related to racial discrimination in United States' mainstream culture which oppresses them and increases their sense of

displacement. Majaj asserts that in the United States, the Palestinian right of return has historically been rendered almost invisible (114). Moreover, Israel's oppressive military power prevents Palestinians from creating their hegemony and representing themselves. Therefore, Palestinian and Palestinian-American literature become a way to challenge this kind of oppression and to produce counter-hegemonic discursive practices by rewriting history to maintain one's subjectivity.

In her poetry, Hammad attempts to construct a Palestinian identity that can confront both Zionist and American hegemony. The reconstruction of such identity depends mainly on remembering the Palestinian past and connecting to the homeland. Her poetry reveals how the Palestinian identity, especially for those who are in the diaspora, depends on Palestine as a nostalgic place and collective memory as a space for resistance. For instance, in her poem "dedication," she nostalgically recollects the memory of her displaced father:

standing on a mountaintop in jordan
looking over the vast sea
saw the land his people had come from
land of figs and olive trees
what should've been his *phalesteen* (21)

The memory strikes us with the paradise-like homeland "*phalesteen*" seized from its righteous inhabitants, leaving them displaced and outcasts in refugee camps. This memory becomes hers, and she, like her father, becomes dispossessed of her homeland to which she feels deeply rooted.

The image of Hammad as a representative to all displaced and uprooted Palestinians who long to return to their lost land of Palestine is articulated in her poem "Patience":

for these flowers & butterflies
these rivers & this soul
belong to this land
you cannot own them (76)

She warns the Israeli subjugator that if they seized the land, they cannot seize the souls that are deeply ingrained in this land which is still Palestinian and will remain as such forever. To emphasize this idea, Hammad constructs a counter-hegemonic narrative through rewriting stories about Palestinians. To create this counter-hegemonic narrative, Hammad personalizes these stories. Majaj remarks that Palestinian memory and identity “are rooted in contested ground” because both personal and political return cannot be separated. She adds “Palestinian memory, like Palestinian history, is always already political” (118). Therefore, Suheir Hammad narrates the story of occupation as a personal one.

She realizes that the dominant discourse erases Palestinian history, and so decides to write about it for justice and transformation. Hammad struggles to keep the Palestinian cultural identity and memory in her poetry. Culture plays a role in hegemony; it leads to it through the consent of the institutions of civil society. Israel, through force and media, attempts to destroy Palestinian cultural memory and history. She attempts to secure the Palestinian cultural memory by connecting her poetry to the lost stories about homeland, which are erased by the dominant narrative. She is aware that these stories are in danger of being lost and deleted from the national memory, therefore; she revives these stories as a kind of resistance. In her poem “taxi,” she shows us the oppression and terror practiced by Israeli forces against Palestinians:

in my father’s city
there’s a baby girl
whose beautiful brown eye
(centuries ago inspired poetry)
was eaten out by a fat Zionist rat (26)

The metaphor of the baby girl eaten by a fat Zionist rat evokes the destructive effect of the atrocities practiced by Israeli soldiers against innocent Palestinian girls and young women. Hammad deconstructs the dominant narrative of the Zionist hegemony by retelling small stories about Palestinian mothers who suffer because they lost their children. She introduces a passionate image of Palestinian mothers who “cry enough to fill a million seas” (*Born Palestinian* 22) to highlight their

suffering, to create sympathy for her case, and to counter the dominant hegemonic discourse in American media. In “our mothers and their lives of suffer,” she summarizes the suffering of all Palestinian mothers who pray for their families and “when your family / loses all faith you/ pray for their souls” (*Born Palestinian* 66). However, Hammad encourages them to stop crying because they cried enough; “enough tears mama / enough cause your tears / won’t clot any blood” (37). She believes that all Palestinians need to challenge the dominant hegemony by preserving their memories about their homeland.

Hammad aims to reveal the ills and evils of the dominant Israeli and American hegemony by writing about the silenced voices of the Palestinians whose homeland was “occupied” and their “freedom denied” (*Born Palestinian* 49) by “American made bullets / .. from Israeli hands” (50). She reclaims her identity by remembering her father, a representative of Palestinians, and his displacement because of the Israeli occupation. Because of the “genocide” they witnessed, Palestinians had to flee away; “so used to running / we are it seems / we Palestinians are always running” (49). She emphasizes that her father is “the son of [this] land” but it was “forbidden to him” as the Israeli occupation prevents him from returning to it (21).

In writing these memories, Hammad challenges the traditional poetry style. Instead of using stanza, she uses short sentences and broken lines to keep the tension and anxiety of the displacement and the injustice of racism alive in the mind of her audience. This style is suitable for spoken rather than written poetry. It helps her to negotiate her space as a subaltern in the United States with other races.

Hammad retrieves her sense of self via the space of memory. Remembering the Palestinian past helps her and other Palestinians to recall their identities and be able to resist the dominant hegemony. She writes: “we read futures in search of our past / in coffee grinds and tea leaves” (*Born Palestinian* 38). Palestinian collective identity and history enable Hammad to rewrite about the ignored history of the Palestinians and her sense of displacement. According to Majaj, “[w]e seek to return to our starting point, in person or in memory, in order to reconstitute ourselves, for it is through memory that we understand who we are and

that we lay a foundation for who we hope to become” (118). Hammad creates her counter-hegemonic discourse throughout the memory of Palestinians’ collective identity. She asserts that this remembrance of the past is part of their cultural identity. As Majaj points out; “[w]e return in order to remember and remember in order to return” (118). In this sense, Hammad struggles to keep the memory of Palestine alive in her poetry.

The relationship between memories, either individual or collective, and the homeland as a nostalgic place enables Hammad to counter the dominant hegemony. In her poetry, she sheds more light on the ignored cities in Palestine to challenge the mass media that tries hard to erase them. In “jabaliya,” she recalls the name of Palestinian cities: “back shatilla back ramleh back jenin back il khalil back il quds / all of it all underground in ancestral chests she rings / a bell promising something she can’t see” (89). In the last part of *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, she entitles her poems in the name of these cities to keep them alive in the mind of readers or audience. She believes that there is no resistance without identity, and there is no identity without a place to return to. In “zeitoun,” she emphasizes that in these places, “there are bodies here / micro mosaic children / a triptych exile against wall” (92) to give her reader an idea about how dominant hegemony excludes those people from the mainstream media.

For Hammad, those cities are related to Palestinian history and identity. She believes that the world is blind to the Palestinian suffering; therefore, she attempts to rewrite the history and reasons behind it. The source of this suffering is “the Nakba,” which did not enter Western Historiography. Hence, The Nakba is a recurring theme in Hammad’s work. She attempts to represent the exclusion of Palestinians from the mainstream American public sphere. The suffering of Palestinians because of the Nakba remains a subaltern narrative, which Hammad attempts to challenge in her poetry by recalling Palestinians’ collective memory. In her poem “the necklace,” she rewrites the story of occupation in relation to these cities:

before 1948 fifty-six
arab towns sighed breath in
the ramleh sub-district of palestine

within a year of israeli birth
bastard birth
all fifty-six were demolished
two cities allowed a weak
palestinian presence (40)

In these lines, Hammad offers an alternative history to the Nakba or the Israeli occupation to Palestine. The dominant hegemony ignores this part in history because it does not see Palestinians as human beings. She aims to create a new world of justice and peace. In "Beyond Words," she declares that they are human beings and:

there is still enough resistance in us
to create a world where there is no
your people or my people
but our people
our people who kill our people who killed (8)

Hammad refuses to be passive in the face of dominant hegemony that subjugates Palestinians among other ethnicities. She sees that the main stream media treats Palestinians as criminals and terrorists; therefore, in her "Letter to Anthony," she declares that "i have always loved criminals / it is a love of self" (*Zaatar Diva* 73).

By resisting the dominant hegemonic discourse, the subordinated groups secure their cultural preservation. This counter-hegemonic discourse and its related cultural discourses enable the subordinated group, according to Henri Giroux, to articulate dialogue with themselves and the world around them (195). To resist dominant hegemony, Palestinian-American writers rewrite their lost history and identify it with their lost homeland. Israel destroys the historical Palestinian documents and prevents Palestinian schools in the occupied territory from teaching their history. Hammad also observes that in Israeli school system "there was no representation of a human Palestinian society" (Knopf-Newman 74). In her poem "dedication," she writes about her uncle whose "enemies never / believed he was human." Later, the Israeli occupation killed him and "his blood never reached the soil of no palestine / his body never reached home" (*Born Palestinian* 22-3). Perry points out that

“historical knowledge functions as an alternative mythmaking process that rearticulates the experiences of subalterns” (826). Hammad sees that her role is to keep this ignored history alive. In “blood stitched time,” she declares; “i stitched the story / *phalesteen* / into a kafiye” (*Born Palestinian* 25). For Palestinian-American writers, the purpose of their writing is to keep the national memory alive, especially for those who are in diaspora.

Subjugation in the American society appears as a common sense. Therefore, popular culture can be a site of resistance against dominant hegemony. Consequently, popular culture must have a dialogic interaction with the mythology and folklore of the subordinated groups. In other words, popular culture creates an alternate cultural form, which can be a tool for counter-hegemony. To create her counter-hegemonic discourse, Hammad connects the suffering of Palestinians with African Americans through a symbol related to both cultures. She attempts to challenge the dominating common sense of mass media which treats Palestinians and blacks as “Others.”

Drawing on the concept of hegemony, the dominant class rules the masses through different institutions. One of the most important institutions in practicing hegemony is media because it creates what Gramsci calls the “common sense.” Mass media ignores Palestinians’ right of return to their homeland as it ignores the suffering of the Blacks in the middle passage. In her poetry, Hammad connects Palestinians and African Americans by enhancing the sense of diaspora and loss of home. She emphasizes the sense of displacement and desire to return to her homeland. For Hammad, Palestine is her homeland and she will return to it even if the mainstream mass media ignores this truth. She counters it by focusing on the denationalizing feeling of subjugation. Also, Hammad insists on using the word “*phalesteen*,” the Arabic counterpart of Palestine, in her poems to clarify the idea that this place is belonging to her and is part of her identity. For oppressed groups such as Palestinians and African Americans, the relationship between collective identity and homeland space plays an essential role in creating counter-hegemony.

Although Gramsci himself never used the term “counter-hegemony,” it has become fairly common among writers who attempt to

challenge dominant ideological frameworks (Downing 15). In this sense, Palestinians create both passive and active resistance as a result of the ideological clash between them and Israelis. Not only do Palestinians not have access to cultural imperialism, but they are also silenced from the mainstream culture and media. The US helps Israel through media and different kinds of institutions to impose its hegemony and oppress and subjugate Palestinians. Suheir Hammad, in her poem "Beyond Words," emphasizes the relationship between the American and Israeli hegemony that subjugates Palestinians:

For 56 years Israel has legitimized
This type of behavior
Sanctioned violence in the name of a god
Who does not have enough love for us all
A god who chooses sides
A god who has favorites and chosen ones
A god who cuts deals and shuffles souls
The type of god who does not answer prayers
Who understands only one language
A god who does not worry his beautiful mind with
Such ugliness
I am told this is America's god (5)

Hammad condemns Israel's manipulation of religious hegemony that depends on the idea of Palestine as a holy place for Israelis to oppress Palestinians. She explains that this is not religion; this is not god, but "this is America's god." The United States, as she observes, helps Israel in oppressing and subjugating Palestinians. Zionist hegemony uses religious justification to exercise power over others. It creates a god who understands one language and chooses one side. For Hammad, this is not a god but a hegemony that Israel and the US use to subjugate others. She attempts to deconstruct such hegemony regardless of its name. In her poem "good words," she refuses bloodshedding in the name of god. She states: "my knees bloody / from kneeling forever / pages of all the holly books stained my hands red." She only advocates good and peaceful words: "then they come to me / asking for a good word" (*Born Palestinian* 60-1). Rupe Simms points out that "religion was a source and

system of political power, a form of hegemonic culture designed to accomplish social control through voluntary consent” (96). Similarly, Gramsci focuses on religion in its institutional form. The dominant group uses religion for political purposes and to exercise domination over others. Gramsci argues that religions are sources for the legalization of the status quo and a medium for political struggles.

Similarly, mass media shapes the identity of the masses. Hammad observes that the American mass media does not tell the truth about other subjugated groups, but rather hides the reality of the Palestinian Israeli struggle. According to Hammad, Americans believe that “we do not have compassion and civilization. That what comes down to: who is and is not civilized and what civilization means” (Knopf-Newman 75). The mass media is important for the dominant hegemony. The effectiveness of it depends on the acceptance of the subordinated mass. So, the dominant group can classify people into “us” and “them.” James Lull remarks that media can produce and reproduce ideological content to accomplish its goal (34). The mainstream media tends to marginalize other minorities and ethnic groups. According to Charles Miller, this produces “the global system of white supremacy,” which contains “an epistemology of ignorance” (18). Hammad as a representative of the multiplicity of marginal voices because of gender, ethnicity, nationality, race, and culture, attempts to challenge the misrepresentation of excluded voices: Palestinians/Blacks/women. That is why she resorted to the widely spread and increasingly popular hip-hop as a medium through which she can raise awareness of issues marginalized by the media.

Hammad uses hip-hop as a public space from which she can resist and ignite emotions and resistance in people of all ages, sexes, races and ethnicities against hegemonic ideology. As hip-hop allowed those different people to share the same space and respect each other’s voice, so does Hammad’s poetry which encompasses all minorities. Like hip-hop, it democratizes the marginalized voices and provides them with a space to share their experiences. Hip-hop allows her to take the Palestinian issue to a wider audience who may or may not have heard of it. She introduces Arab and Palestinian culture to this audience. In her poetry performance, she performs accompanied by the music of Arabic

instruments such as 'oud' and 'tabla' thus giving hip-hop "a new, Arab character" (Youmans 53). However, the use of Arabic instruments is not the only addition to the hip-hop form. Hammad also develops her own language which is for her a means of resistance.

Hammad's language of her poetry is unique. It enables her to create ways to challenge the hegemonic power. The poems became a space for recognizing power structure and mediate the understanding of self. Hammad talks back in language that neutralizes the Eurocentric conceptual framework of Arabia as it creates its hybridization of a register that celebrates cultural alterity. The connection between Arabic and English languages in Hammad's poetry magnifies the dialectics of language as an absent presence. In her poetry, Hammad inserts Arabic words such as "*ib rohi, ib dami, kohl, table, phalesteen, amreeca,*" or complete sentences such as in her poem "silence":

Ishad ya alam alena wa a Beirut

Ishad il harb il shabiyeh

(Bear witness world to us and to Beirut

Bear witness to the War of Liberation) (*Born Palestinian* 48)

By using Arabic words, Hammad challenges the Eurocentric culture, and she attempts to construct her identity as both American and Arabic. In her poem "Ismi," she refuses to renounce her name or Arabic language: "please / learn to pronounce / the name of my spirit / the spirit of my name / correctly" (71).

Language is the vehicle of the dominant hegemony because it shapes people's perceptions. It provides a powerful experience in exercising domination over the subordinated groups. It also can reflect political and social changes. According to Jackson Lears, language contains the elements that provide a conception of the world. He adds that "the available vocabulary helps mark the boundaries of permissible discourse, discourages the clarification of social alternatives and makes it difficult for the disposed to locate the source of their unease, let alone remedy it" (569-70). Therefore, Hammad's use of Arabic and colloquial language within her poetry is considered an alternative discourse. She aims to recover it within the culture of diaspora to challenge the legitimacy of American cultural hegemony. Hammad's infusion of

Arabic words and phrases within her English written poetry not only denotes her emotional attachment and longing for homeland, but also reflects her hybrid identity. By blending various languages in her writing, she creates a creolized language counter to the hegemonic Standard English spoken by white Americans. This creole language represents the various cultures Hammad is seeking to merge in a transnational culture.

Moreover, her poems lack punctuation marks such as commas and periods. Yet, sometimes one may find double spacing where you may expect a comma or a period. This double spacing instead of a comma or a period can be seen as echoing the loop in hip-hop thus managing to connect two subsequent actions without ending the first one. That is to say, Hammad's abandonment of punctuation and her use of double spacing allow her to join the past and present of Palestinians which prolongs the effect of their suffering. The lack of capitalization in the titles and lines of her poems including names of people and cities such as "for Jason / his rap poetry more eloquent than any shakespeare / for mike / ... for suzan sabrine sameeh omar" and "gaza," "jabaliya," and "rafah" (*Born Palestinian* 54-55, 87-90) also supports and strengthens the idea of the endless pain of Palestinians.

To conclude, Hammad recovers her sense of home, identity, and nation by challenging the dominant hegemony and creating a counter-hegemonic discourse in her poetry. She resists the mainstream hegemony by rewriting the history of Palestinians and telling the stories about their suffering. She also attempts to universalize their suffering by connecting it to the suffering of other subordinated groups all over the world and standing in solidarity and support with them. By connecting her poetry to the lost stories about homeland, Hammad advocates the sense of humanity for all minorities and ethnic groups and their right to secure their own cultural memory and establish collective identity. Moreover, struggling to keep the Palestinian cultural identity and memory in her poetry which depends on the idea of Palestine as a nostalgic place and collective memory as a space of resistance, Hammad thus challenges the dominant hegemony. She writes about the sense of displacement and exile to create a space for all subordinated groups. In her poetry, Hammad counters the mainstream media that dehumanizes and subjugates Palestinians as well as African-Americans. She attempts to

create an alternative discourse to enlighten people about Palestinian suffering and empower them to move toward a new future of peace and justice. To do this, Hammad challenges the traditional poetry style. She uses a unique language and appropriates different techniques such as inserting Arabic words and phrases to her written works, using Palestinian cultural elements and symbols, and adopting hip-hop technique in her poetry.

As a communication tool that attracts large audience, hip-hop provided Hammad with a platform through which she could depict the experiences and reality of marginalized groups thus making their voices, views and ideas heard by those sharing their experiences as well as those in power. Hip-hop in Hammad's poetry not only brought Arab communities together but it also facilitated connections with other non-Arab communities especially African Americans and Latino. It was the medium that enabled her to negotiate her space and identity thus inspiring and empowering youth to get involved, take action and initiate change in the American society to make themselves a better life, and bring to light and advocate the Palestinian case that has long been marginalized by American hegemony.

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