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Cultural Pride in a World of Conflict: Identity and Resistance in Nikki Giovanni's Tripping and Ziad Shallalh's Asking Iraq to Comply

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الفخر الثقافي في عالم الصراع الهوية والمقاومة في روايتي «التعثر» للكاتبة ميكي جيوفاني

و«مطالبة العراق بالمنافسة» للكاتب زياد شلال

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المستخلص

يُعدّ تراث الأمة وتاريخها عنصرين أساسيين في تاريخ المجتمعات وثقافتها. فهما بمثابة الوعاء الذي تنبثق منه معتقداتها وتقاليدها وقيمها المطلقة ولغتها وأفكارها وأسلوب حياتها. كما يؤثّران في شخصياتها من خلال الثقافة والهوية الوطنية، ويؤسسان جسراً للتواصل بين الأجيال. تُحلّل هذه الدراسة الفخر الثقافي كوسيلة للتعريف والمقاومة في قصيدتي "رحلة الأنا" لنكي جيوفاني و"مطالبة العراق بالامتثال" لزياد شلال. يهدف هذا البحث بشكل أساسي إلى توضيح كيفية فهم تجارب هذين الشاعرين من خلال شعرهما وتأثيره على الوعي الوطني، مع تسليط الضوء على وجهات النظر المتشابهة والمتباينة في الوقت نفسه لكليهما. تُحلّل الدراسة موضوعات الانتماء والتهجير والمقاومة الثقافية، موضحة كيف تُقدم هذه الأعمال رؤية قيمة حول صمود الهوية في ظلّ الضغوط، مُبرزة قدرة الإنسان على مقاومة طمس الهوية الثقافية في أوقات الشدة. يُعزز هذا التحليل فهمنا لكيفية عمل الأدب كوسيلة للتعبير عن الهوية والمقاومة والفخر الثقافي في عالمٍ مُتقلّب بالحروب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفخر الثقافي، التراث، الهوية، المقاومة، الشعر، نكي جيوفاني، رحلة الأنا، زياد شلال، ومطالبة العراق بالامتثال.

Abstract

The heritage and history of the nation are integral components of the history and culture of societies. It is the vessel from which their beliefs, traditions, absolute values, language, ideas, and way of life originate. It also influences their personality through culture and national identity, establishing a communication bridge across generations. This study analyses cultural pride as a means of identification and resistance in Nikki Giovanni's "Ego Tripping" and Ziad Shallalh's "Asking Iraq to Comply." The primary objective of this study is to elucidate how the experiences of these two poets may be comprehended via their poetry and its impact on national consciousness, highlighting the frequently analogous yet distinct viewpoints of both writers. The study analyzes themes of belonging, displacement, and cultural resistance, illustrating how these works provide vital insights into the endurance of identity under duress, highlighting the more significant human ability to resist cultural erasure during adversity. This analysis enhances comprehension of how literature functions as a vehicle for expressing identity, resistance, and cultural pride in a world fraught with war. **Keywords:** cultural pride, heritage, identity, resistance, poetry, Nikki Giovanni Ego Tripping, Ziad Shallalh, and Asking Iraq to Comply.

Introduction

Cultural identity is an expanding area of research focused on analyzing how resistance and identity are negotiated, created, and ultimately expressed within specific cultural settings. In a society marked by remarkable

advancements in science and technology, with continuous migrations and global mobility, cultural identity is far from static. This discipline focuses on varied cultures, where identity emerges as both a site of contestation and a battleground for conflicting notions of humanity and society. In his paper, "Search in the Caribbean via Literature," Gordon Rohlehr asserts: The idea of a quest for identity often leads to the belief that identity can be defined in clear-cut terms or that one discovers it near the side of a road somewhere and then keeps it in cold storage to be brought out and displayed on the appropriate occasion. However, one continually expresses identity, and artists explore, some superficially and others in-depth. (quoted in Rupert 187) This perspective posits that identity possesses an ethereal aspect, as it cannot be precisely defined. Several characteristics, including personality, religion, culture, history, or an entire nation can characterize it. The above quote indicates that identity is intrinsically linked to expression. While identity can manifest in several forms, language in general, and the language of poetry particularly, remains the primary vehicle of expression. Poetry has the gravitas to assemble a city square full of people and the bite to grab notice on social media. Poets continue to play an essential role in challenging political and media discourse that seeks to conceal, manipulate, or do worse by speaking truth to power. Numerous authors employ their literary language as a dependable means to convey their uniqueness within their creations. In response to dominance and occupation, resistance takes a firm stance in favor of freedom and equal rights. In the fight against human rights violations, it gives a voice to those who have none. According to Jasbir Jain's book *Theorizing Resistance: Narrative in History and Politics*, "every act of questioning or assertion is a means of resistance" (16). "Resistance is generated out of rage, frustration or/despair; a basic dissatisfaction leads individuals to it," he continues. (17). This way, resistance literature effectively allows authors to explore their identities. The two selected poets, Ziad Shalla and Nikki Giovanni, challenged the aim to erase their history and their own country's resistance to that removal through lyrical imagination. They presented their poetic voice as a conduit for the voiceless. Endeavoring to cultivate a new national consciousness, articulating their perspectives within this framework. Each poet addressed the subjects they deemed most significant for their nation while also expressing their sentiments on matters of national importance. Both poets confront the difficulties people and groups encounter while striving to preserve their identity under external influences, conflict, and social demands. Giovanni's art encapsulates the internal odyssey of self-discovery and the significance of embracing one's heritage, examining how cultural pride may function as a wellspring of resilience and affirmation. Conversely, Shallal's poetry addresses the effects of political and foreign influences on Iraqi identity, highlighting the resilience inherent in resistance and the commitment to safeguarding cultural legacy. Giovanni and Shallal present diverse yet complimentary viewpoints on the issue of cultural pride through various voices and literary methods. Giovanni's *Tripping* guides readers through a contemplative exploration, highlighting the importance of cultural heritage and self-empowerment. Asking Iraq to comply by Shallal highlights the collective endurance of a people under duress, depicting cultural pride as a means of resistance against persecution and erasure. Collectively, these works encourage a profound comprehension of how literature facilitates the human imperative to maintain identity and legacy, illustrating that cultural pride transcends mere heritage representation, serving as a mechanism of resistance and survival in a tumultuous and evolving world.

Analysis

History demonstrates that tyranny and oppressive acts against any group are the primary catalysts for uprisings or revolutions. The authoritarian factions utilize these individuals' vulnerabilities, insignificance, ignorance, and lack of self-confidence to humiliate them. The tyrant endeavors to annihilate their identity, eliminate their culture, and extinguish their past by numerous means. These marginalized populations persist in enduring severe poverty, injustice, inequality, discrimination, and the deprivation of their rightful entitlements, ultimately leading to the loss of their innocent lives. This relentless persecution persists until the critical moment when the oppressed individuals break their silence and apathy, even at the cost of their lives, to overthrow this tyrannical regime. The researcher must acknowledge the perspectives of many writers and activists who have dedicated their lives to advancing the principles of revolution, violence, and resistance against oppression. Nikki Giovanni Jr., born in June 1943, is an American poet, writer, critic, activist, and educator. As one of the most renowned African-American poets globally, her oeuvre includes poetry collections, audio recordings of poetry, and nonfiction articles, addressing themes from racism and social concerns to children's literature. Referred to as "the Princess of Black Popularity," Giovanni is regarded as one of the foremost African American poets of the twentieth century, advocating for herself, her race, and her gender as a woman, black individual, and black woman (Abdul Ameer-AlHusseini 88). Nikki Giovanni's poetry "Ego Tripping" exemplifies resistance, the

celebration of identity, and empowerment. The poem, spoken by a commanding and self-assured narrator, guides the reader through extraordinary achievements, honoring the depth and individuality of the speaker's life. "Ego Tripping," implying an ego of such magnitude that one is stumbling over it. Upon closer examination of the poem's context, it becomes evident that it does not pertain to an individual with an inflated ego but to a woman commemorating her lineage and background. "Ego Tripping" is replete with assertions and straightforward remarks. According to Meon Basiso, the goal of resistance poetry was to "invade new horizons of the masses which elevate their awareness and their creative taste" (494), not only to instigate change but also to expand people's horizons. As a result, Giovanni draws on her poem to educate the world about the heritage of her homeland, which she hopes would inspire her people to fight for their rights. As a poet who advocates for positive resistance, the poem starts with her emphatic assertion of her nationality and her identity as a citizen of the Congo:

I was born in the Congo

I walked to the Fertile Crescent and built
the Sphinx

I designed a pyramid so tough that a star (Giovanni 1-4)

Black and modern poets of the Harlem Renaissance can hear the impact of improvisational jazz in "Ego Tripping" through its varied rhythms. Giovanni's poetry's unusual overall sound, when said aloud, is reminiscent of jazz improvised tunes, thanks to his intentional use of repetition, internal rhyme, and consonant syllables that vary in weight. The subsequent use of the first-person singular pronoun "I" further stresses their inherently personal character. On the one hand, the complete thought is a single line of poetry that conveys a single, straightforward message; on the other, it is two or more lines long and intricate, diverting the reader's focus from the speaker to the details of the achievement or event recounted. Yi-Fu Tuan, a distinguished humanistic geographer, underscores humans' subjective experiences and perceptions within their environment. He contends that "locations possess importance not just in physical aspects but also as reservoirs of memories, identities, and emotions"(22). His study examines the interplay between mindscape, landscape, and humanity's connection to the homeland. The primary focus was on people as rational entities endowed with the capacity for thought and perception rather than as simply respondents to stimuli. Tuan analyses how cultural landscapes include symbolic meanings and evoke emotional responses. He asserts that "each human is concurrently a biological entity, a social being, and a distinct individual"(25). He illustrated how environmental perceptions and attitudes originate from and influence all three dimensions of humanity. Giovanni initiated the same awareness that the nuances of personal interactions with space are generated through her usage of the term "I," alluding to Africa since they are connected.

I am so perfect, so divine, so ethereal, so surreal

I cannot be comprehended

except by my permission (Giovanni 45-47)

This refers to the belief held by several anthropologists that contemporary Homo sapiens evolved in Central Africa. Giovanni asserts that Africa is the origin of humanity. She persists with the notion of walking, which connects to the origins of humankind, where the earliest people originated in Africa and gradually dispersed around the globe. The fertile crescent denotes the region around the Tigris, Euphrates, and Nile Rivers. This region is the origin of several significant major civilizations. This description cultivates a sense of continuity and pride in her heritage. Giovanni employs vivid imagery and rhythmic language to urge readers to contemplate the limitless potential of identity and the significance of acknowledging one's greatness. The speaker establishes a link to a profound heritage by asserting an African background and contests dominant myths of inferiority and subjugation. Menno Spiering (1999) observes that poetry "functions as a communal psyche by mirroring national ideals, practices, and goals"(90). To enhance a feeling of group identity, authors often include historical personalities, national mythologies, and cultural symbols in their narratives, like the legendary feats used by Giovanni, which include "constructing pyramids," "seizing the unicorn," and "embodying God," illustrating the boundless possibilities of black identity and creativity. Through these imaginative visuals, Giovanni undermines conventional power hierarchies and reasserts agency for marginalized voices, and only a supernatural being can go from the Congo to the Fertile Crescent in the Middle East with such nonchalance. In the poem, Giovanni portrays the figure as immense as the planet. Indeed, in several lines of the poem, the figure is depicted as the ground :

I got hot and sent an ice age to Europe to cool my thirst

My oldest daughter is Nefertiti
The tears from the birth pains
Created the Nile (Giovanni 10-11).

The figure can initiate an ice age in any location on Earth. The poetry lacks a distinct character because of the uniting idea that unites the entire nation, irrespective of gender, shape, color, or origin. The stanza's concluding line emphasizes the meaning, "I am a gorgeous lady." The objective here is to establish oneself as a self-assured lady, confident in her identity and content with her femininity. The poet continued in the subsequent stanza, asserting her unparalleled power alongside formidable deities such as Hannibal and Noah; here, she consolidates her supremacy, detailing the relatively straightforward responsibilities akin to her, characterized by more incredible speed, strength, and power. At that moment, she asserted her inability to be subdued, unlike the prominent leaders of Rome and Greece; in fact, she surpassed them by referencing her son as Noah and Newark, N.J., a city tormented by internal turmoil:

My son Noah built a New/ Ark, and
I stood proudly at the helm
As we sailed on a soft summer day
I turned myself into myself and was Jesus (Giovanni 12-15).

Giovanni provided further insight into the reference to Noah and his mission to save humanity. She refers to his vessel as "New Ark," which carries several meanings. It is the birthplace of Amiri Baraka, the African American dramatist who, as a poet and writer, was a political avant-garde and highly regarded by Giovanni. He contributed to the Black Arts Repertory Theatre, which he founded in Harlem in 1958, facilitating the production of works by Black playwrights. Giovanni implicitly indicated his role in her statement, "My son Noah built New/ Ark" (Giovanni 12). Another depiction of Newark is that it was the location of six days of racially motivated riots in 1967 that profoundly impacted the city. Following the riots, numerous white residents relocated to the periphery, while black residents were afforded a voice in politics for the first time. It constituted a rebellion against harassment, regardless of the meaning of the "New Ark," Giovanni uses her poetry as a rhetorical method to celebrate the Black Art Movement as a part of the African heritage and literature (Rude Walker 34). On the surface, she appears conceited; nonetheless, the poem's deeper meaning reflects the poet's intent to illustrate her self-perception and encourages the reader to engage in similar contemplation. "Ego Tripping" is a poem that celebrates black femininity and empowers the girls for whom it was initially written, possessing the ability to (re)shape history. Giovanni, in this poem, "revels in her joy of being an African American, being part of a community that, over the years, lives according to its strength and determination" (Vishnupriya 2735). The hyperbole in 'Ego Tripping' dramatically enhances the speaker's ego and self-esteem, transforming mundane assertions into monumental, exaggerated statements emphasizing strength and identity themes. Hyperbole, as a deliberate exaggeration for rhetorical impact, is integral to this poem by Nikki Giovanni. It enhances the speaker's pride and self-esteem, elevating mundane comments into magnificent, larger-than-life assertions. The speaker asserts, "I sat on the throne drinking nectar with Allah" (Giovanni 9), an embellished declaration intended to express unparalleled majesty and divinity, and "My nose giving oil to the arab world" (Giovanni 39). These exaggerated components underscore the speaker's profound confidence and grandeur, rendering the poem's themes of empowerment and identity vivid and compelling. As for the Iraqi literature after 2003, it has been changed as a reaction to the political and social turmoil resulting from the US-led invasion. Iraqi literature has historically been crucial in shaping national identity, particularly with internal and external social and political interference. Shallah has used his literary works in this environment to depict these transformations, particularly about modern Iraqi literature's cultural and creative accomplishments. Iraqis regard poetry as a powerful means of resistance; historically, poets have served as rebels. Editor Dan Veatch states in the introduction to the collection of *Iraqi poetry, Flowers of Flame*, "Poetry is not a luxury in Iraq, but a vital part of the struggle for the nation's future. This is poetry feared by tyrants and would-be tyrants" (Sakek vii). For Iraqis, poetry serves as a means of healing or catharsis and a tool with an immediate and pressing societal purpose. Consequently, while Iraqi poetry may be examined and valued for its aesthetic qualities, it possesses a culturally significant role firmly established in Iraq. The same is accurate in Zeiad Shallah's poem "Asking Iraq to Comply," which is about resisting external pressures for compliance, a proud monument to Iraq's cultural legacy, strong identity, and continuing. The poet skillfully integrates aspects of history, mythology, and national pride to depict Iraq as the birthplace of civilization. By referencing ancient Mesopotamian accomplishments such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, the inception of written language, the

emergence of algebra, and the scientific advancements of the Abbasid era, Shallah portrays Iraq as a representation of humanity's foundational achievements—a legacy of excellence now eclipsed by incessant calls for subservience and sacrifice. In the introduction to the Iraqi poetry part of the tenth issue of Poetry International, Saadi Simawe, the compiler and editor of the significant anthology *Iraqi Poetry Today*, states that “Iraqis are proud of their suffering and their struggle to overcome it through their poetry; to them poetry is their dialectical triumph over suffering ... Iraqi people conceitedly claim that Iraq has more than two major rivers ... there is a third river, that is, poetry” (Simawe and Weissbort 102).

A decade ago, the words: comply, comply, comply,
hundreds of thousands of Iraqi men dead, generations
of Iraqi children sanctioned to graves, and still, comply, comply,
comply; how much death is ever enough compliance? (Shallah 1-4) The repeated words “comply, comply, comply” function as an accusing refrain, encapsulating the burdensome nature of these demands: “How much death is ever enough compliance?” In these lines, Shallah denounces the incessant demand for Iraq to acquiesce despite the “hundreds of thousands of Iraqi men deceased” and “hundreds of thousands of Iraqi men dead”(Shallah 4). These lyrics encapsulate the tragic contradiction that Iraq—a nation that has significantly given to the world—now endures demands that result in innumerable death rates. The poet also utilizes hyperbole to underscore the devastating effects of war and sanctions on Iraq. Hyperbolic expressions, such as “generations of Iraqi children condemned to graves” and “thousands of sortie campaigns”(Shallah3), magnify the human and cultural toll of these occurrences. Through hyperbolic language, the author highlights the sorrow and devastation experienced by a people with a remarkable legacy. The assertion that Iraq represents “the first science, the first math” amplifies its historical achievements, emphasizing the author's perspective of Iraq as an indispensable foundation of global knowledge. This passionate commemoration of the motherland attains its furthest expression in Shallah's statements about its historical importance:

Iraq is the world's first love poem
is the Epic of Gilgamesh scribed onto tablets three millennia ago
is Sumerian is Akkadian is the first written language(Shallah 9-11) The poem utilizes elaborative figurative language to emphasize Iraq's unique historical and cultural importance. The poet employs metaphors to liken Iraq to enduring icons of beauty and intelligence, referring to it as “the world's first love poem.”(Shallah 9) This metaphor designates Iraq as the cradle of civilization, a wellspring of inspiration and pride for humanity. Moreover, the depiction of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, characterized as “flowing into Eden, into Genesis,” interlaces Iraq's topography with essential religious and cultural traditions. These evocative depictions elicit a profound awareness of Iraq's influence on ancient and contemporary cultures. The references to “The Epic of Gilgamesh” and “Hammurabi's Code” highlight Iraq's heritage as the origin of human history, law, and literature. The transition from the previous romantic expression to a more historical context occurs in the first words, ‘is the Epic of Gilgamesh,’ The poet, here, anchors Iraq's identity in enduring achievements, contrasting the heritage of ancient civilizations with the humiliation of contemporary acquiescence. These lines emphasize a shared cultural pride anchored in “the first poetry, the first pottery”(Shallah 10), reminding readers that Iraq's contributions to human civilization are significant and unparalleled. Also, the poet examines Iraq's complex identity, encompassing religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity. As for religion's diversity, the poet celebrates that Iraq is the birthplace of Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, Arab and Jew, Christian and Muslim, of the Koran and the Bible. In this way, Shallah depicts Iraq as a nexus of significant world faiths and a birthplace of cultural crossovers, which sharply contrasts with its contemporary afflictions. His reference to Iraq as a:

is Chaldaeans and Kurds, Nestorians and Turkmen, is the place
of the first Gods, the first laws of Hammurabi code, giving
order to the first societies - now forced to comply,
the place of the first Kings saying to their sons
over 3000 years ago, "How long will it be necessary
for us to continually guide you?" (Shallah 23-28)

He is honoring the nation's profound historical foundations in governance and ethical principles. These accomplishments represent a kind of cultural resistance, affirming that external influences cannot obliterate Iraq's profound heritage. Shallah's historical allusions encompass accomplishments in the arts and sciences, portraying it as the country of the first science, the first math, al-Jabr, and a center of early knowledge with the earliest colleges. Formerly illustrious Baghdad. The poet laments the loss of their contributions, as Iraq is now

compelled to infuse plutonium into its crops and children, delivered by aircraft. The disparity between Iraq's historical and intellectual prominence and its current ruin intensifies the poem's condemnation of acquiescence. Shallah underscores that the expectations for conformity are obliterating Iraq's cultural heritage, which initially contributed to human growth. Shallah's remarks on Iraq's legacy underscore an enduring cultural pride:

Iraq is the Bedouin, and his proud history is his honor and loyalty

traveling through the first caravans on camels,

the first trade routes bringing coffee,

bringing spices, bringing a celebration of foods (Shallah 29-32) The cultural landscape of Iraq is remarkably diverse, distinctive, and rich, with each region showcasing unique customs, dialects, civilizations, beliefs, and artistic expressions. The poet conveys Iraq's identity as profoundly embedded in honor and tradition, highlighting the country's and its populace's resilience. Shallah's mention of the "first Christians of the East, who coexisted alongside Muslims as Arabs" underscores the diverse and harmonious essence of Iraq's identity, juxtaposing it with the differences and turmoil created by contemporary wars. The poem finishes with a heartbreaking review that integrates parental affection and intergenerational obligation into the narrative:

How do you go about demanding

compliance without HRST making amends? (Shallah 51-2) Shallah equates Iraq's resistance to a parent's perpetual love for their offspring. This contrast indicates that Iraq's pride, identity, and resistance are expressions of love and obligation, guaranteeing that future generations will remember and inherit their legacy. Furthermore, the rhetorical inquiries in the text interrogate the ethical implications of the actions taken against Iraq. Also, the question "How much death constitutes sufficient compliance?" (Shallah 62) critiques the rationale underlying the enduring violence and sanctions. These devices interrogate the moral ramifications of assaulting a region profoundly connected to the foundations of significant world religions and civilizations. These rhetorical tactics stimulate critical analysis and enhance the poem's emotional impact.

Conclusion

Ego Tripping by Giovanni and Asking Iraq to Comply by Ziad Shallalh exemplify the introspective strength that cultural pride provides during conflicts. These two selected poems reveal that identity, deeply entrenched in cultural tradition, serves as a foundation of resilience and a mechanism for resistance against any forces that seek to diminish it. Kikki Giovanni's poetry journey emphasizes individual self-authorization via the affirmation of one's heritage, praising cultural pride as a personal act of rebellion in a society extensive with conflict and threats to authenticity. Shallalh, from another perspective, presents a celebration of cultural adaptability as proof of the collective pride that resists external forces. Upon analyzing these poems, the researcher concludes that the two selected poets intend to emphasize that the cultural pride of any community is not a passive phenomenon. Throughout their poems, the poets convey to the readers that cultural pride can endure identity, cultivate unity, and incite resistance. Despite the war and the power of occupation, cultural legacy may serve as both a shield and a sword, safeguarding national identity while resisting oppression.

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