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The Political Darwīsh

"... In Defense of Little Differences"

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Abstract

Maḥmūd Darwīsh spent his life as a poet, a public intellectual, and a politician working "in defense of little differences," and he is often quoted by Palestinian compatriots to explain their seemingly inexplicable history. After the Nakbah of 1948—the rules of engagement in flux, and Palestinians subject to harsh colonial conditions—Eden, Troy, al-Andalus, and Exodus became not only terrains of metaphor and political rhetoric in Darwīsh's poetic lexica, but also fleeting heterotopias, heavily employed in his public intellectualism in constructing the phraseme of "little differences." This article is not a critical reading of Darwīsh's poetry but rather of his prose texts, and argues that the would-be dichotomy between aesthetics and politics was mediated by Darwīsh through the "little differences" between the roles of poetry and prose in defending national and universal causes; and the "little differences" that make up Palestine's relation to myth and history. Triumph and defeat come to mean through Troy as a metaphor for Palestine, the fall of al-Andalus standing in for Palestine's fall to Euro-Zionist colonial projects, the location of the Palestinian ever on the periphery of modern Jewish ethics, ever re-enacting Biblical scenes. Reading the polemics of such cultural landscapes and political geographies, this article maps Darwīsh's vision for justice in historic Palestine and its diaspora.

Keywords

Maḥmūd Darwīsh – Palestine – al-Andalus – Troy – Arabic Poetry – Yāsir ʿArafāt – Jesus Christ – Native Americans – Colonialism – Exodus

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Darwīsh: The Poet, the Intellectual

Maḥmūd Darwīsh was a poet-intellectual who drew fine lines between his poetry, intellectualism, and action. Darwīsh would cite Yeats: "Those that I fight I do not hate, those that I guard I do not love,"[1] never at ease using words like "hate" and "love" as political terms. He read critiques of his work addressed to its poetic essence, yet skipped over the accolades. He loathed the Israeli occupation of Palestine, exile, and perhaps, as well, some of what this very article entails. He loathed nothing more than to have his poetry interpreted in political terms, and yet was haunted by the importance of underlining the "little differences" (*furūq ṣaghīrah*) between poetry and prose on both aesthetic and political levels; and between Palestine and other heterotopic spaces in time.

To read Darwīsh, the poet-intellectual, is not an easy task, for it begs an understanding of what he describes as a rather 'scandalous' ferment of poetry and prose; of the particularity of the Palestinian poet; the responsibilities of the intellectual; and of the role of poetry in defeating death and contributing to recording the national cause for history. Attending to not only Darwīsh's poetry, but also, and pressingly, his parallel non-poetic texts—creative prose as well as his rarely read (and even more rarely quoted) political writings, literary critiques, and interviews—complicates what is often left elided in a reading of Darwīsh.

In his celebrated prose work *Dhākirah lil-nisyān* (Memory for Forgetfulness), Darwīsh declared: "Poetry is the scandal of my life, and my life is the scandal of my poetry,"[2] while in later writings, Darwīsh would draw a sharp line between poetry and prose. "Poetry has to be cautious in saying what could be said with something other than poetry," Darwīsh asserted, continuing by asking, "However, how could we comprehend that fine line, the 'little difference,' between what is poetic and what is not?"[3] Darwīsh considered prose to be "poetry's neighbor." Poetry entails the act of hiding "ephemera from the

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1 William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 135; Mahmoud Darwish, *The Adam of Two Edens*, trans. Sargon Boulos et al. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 52.

2 Mahmoud Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness, August, Beirut, 1982*, trans. Ibrahim Muhawi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 176-177.

3 Maḥmūd Darwīsh and Sāmiḥ al-Qāsim, *al-Rasāʾil* [The Letters] (Casablanca: Dār Tūqbāl, 1990), 177-178.

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ephemeral."[4] This was a general articulation of the poetry-prose dichotomy, yet Darwīsh drew another, more specific qualification for this dichotomy in the Palestinian case in light of the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords. Darwīsh wondered why poets from other countries never faced the kinds of questions he did:

> Is it because slavery is the precondition for Palestinian creativity, or is it that freedom is not in sync with our rhythms? What does it mean for a Palestinian to be a poet and what does it mean for a poet to be Palestinian? In the first instance: it is to be the product of history, to exist in language. In the second: to be a victim of history and triumph through language. But both are one and the same and cannot be divided or entwined.[5]

Poetry and prose, hence, are not mere literary modes for the Palestinian, but rather a means of resistance. Poetics should not remain imprisoned within tragedy, and the Palestinians themselves should not be forever destined to present evidence that they are who they are, and not ghosts. For Darwīsh, poetry in particular, and art in general,

> has the potential of replacing evidence with intuition, and to inquire: Until when will our homeland remain in need of poetic evidence? Until when will poetics remain in need of national evidence? A French painter once said: "Evidence sets truth to boredom," and it's our misfortune that this saying doesn't relate to us.[6]

For Darwīsh, "poetry dictates its own theory. Poetry narrates itself. He who theorizes has to induce the poetics of a certain poet by presenting a critical reading of poetry."[7] For Darwīsh, the intellectual thus occupies a paradoxical relationship to poetry, politics, and theory. If Darwīsh recognized that "the political poem has lost its necessity, except in grand states of emergency,"[8] he at

4 Mahmoud Darwish, *In the Presence of Absence*, trans. Sinan Antoon (New York: Archipelago, 2011), 159.

5 Ibid., 127.

6 Maḥmūd Darwīsh, *Ḥayrat al-ʿāʾid: maqālāt mukhtārah* [The Perplexity of the Returnee: Selected Essays] (Beirut: Riyad el-Rayyes, 2007), 113-114.

7 Maḥmūd Darwīsh, "Kalām fī al-shiʿr [Conversations on Poetry]," interview by ʿAbbās Bayḍūn, *al-Karmal* 78 (2004), 182.

8 Maḥmūd Darwīsh, "al-Wilādah ʿalā dufuʿāt" [Birth in Stages], interview by ʿAbduh Wāzin, *al-Karmal* 86 (2006), 8-10.

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once declared that "the poet, by definition, is a politician during the state of emergency."[9]

Darwīsh's intellectual is "the human who bears 'thousands of tentacles,' who foresees the lightning from afar, feels the forthcoming storm, and senses the future that has no time. He is obsessed with not believing in his own dreams."[10] This intellectual resembles Émile Chartier's, dividing his life between the realms of intellectual pursuits as ends in themselves, and intellectual action: mapping a genealogy of evil; suggesting moral modes of resistance; righting wrongs.[11] Yet the Darwīsh-type intellectual is at the same time a Foucauldian "destroyer of certainties": "guilty about pretty well everything: about speaking out and about keeping silent, about doing nothing and about getting involved in everything. In short, the intellectual is raw material for a verdict, a sentence, a condemnation, an exclusion."[12] This type of intellectual appears in Darwīsh's elegies for his fallen comrades in the PLO and the Palestinian national movement, including Rashīd Ḥusayn (1936-1977) and Mājid Abū Sharar (1936-1981), registering a sense of remorse for something he has not done: "We are responsible for the death of poets and prophets."[13]

Darwīsh's public intellectual seems to be burdened with guilt, while the poet appears less so, yet the latter is at the same time more responsible toward public concerns and national demands. Darwīsh was in dialogue with both Theodor Adorno and Paul Celan. He takes up Adorno's question of 1949: Is it possible to write a poem after Auschwitz? Answering this question with an empathic affirmative, he justified his position by saying:

> It is true that we live in a time of harsh bestiality, a time of universal despotism, a time of anti-poetry, a time of apoetry in a universal sense. However, I believe that poetry cannot be defined except by its antithesis. Given the anti-poetic world, there is an urgency for poetry. Still, poetry doesn't fight wars, for example, for poetry is slyer and it extracts its strength from the fragility of things and its own fragility. Poetry is fragile

9 Maḥmūd Darwīsh, interview by Jīzīl Khūrī, Lebanese Satellite (LBC), *Ḥiwār al-ʿumr*, October 27, 2001, http://www.mahmoddarwish.com/?page=details&newsID=488&cat=20.

10 Darwīsh and al-Qāsim, 131.

11 Muḥammad al-Shaykh, *al-Muthaqqaf wa-l-sulṭah: dirāsah fī al-fikr al-falsafī al-faransī al-muʿāṣir* [The Intellectual and Power: A Study in Contemporary Philosophical French Thought] (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 1991), 24-32.

12 Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hochroth and John Johnson (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 225.

13 Darwīsh and al-Qāsim, 76.

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> by its own virtue, and if we overwhelm it with burdens to solve the problems of the universe, we break it down. What poetry is capable of is gazing at the light. It is capable of learning from the strength of the grass more than it can from that of the aircrafts of war. It is capable of reviving human astonishment, for words in poetry maintain their everlasting virginity. How could we go back to the childhood of things, and our own childhood in things, and renew it … this is the best way to defend our human existence. Poetry is incapable of fixing the world. What it is capable of is providing the human the value of feeling his own value, and further provides him with the meaning of his existence. Poetry is very modest, and it should be so as to not collapse in the face of human burdens. Poetry is capable of changing reality. It is a struggle against death, death in all its causes and forms. In this sense, poetry brings to life some of its vitality.[14]

Evoking the historical dilemma of the place and virtue of poetry, Darwīsh tries to salvage poetry's essence from the subject of poetry's presence. Along these lines, Robert Kaufman argues from within the world of post-war American poetry that modernity, perhaps, is the register of all barbarities: not only can the poem be written, but it must be written.[15]

Consonant with Celan's recommitment to critical aesthetic reflection in the midst of the brutal reality of modernity, Darwīsh challenged the cruelty of the Palestinian condition by giving voice to poetry as an act of "public morale."[16] The modes of resistance, unity, and survival for which Darwīsh advocated parallel Celan's in his statement that "there is nothing on earth that can prevent a poet from writing, not even the fact that he's Jewish and German is the language of his poems."[17] At stake here is not a comparison of suffering, but the need to reflect on a legacy of horror in order to gain a better understanding of the ethics of survival. We cannot compare degrees of violence. Instead we must explore different subject formations created under its influence.

When Darwīsh was asked whether poetry defeats death, he responded with a categorical "no," as he believed that "no one will notice the singer's death as

14 Maḥmūd Darwīsh, "al-Shiʿr ḥirfah wa-hiwāyah" [Poetry is a Craft and a Passion], interview by Ḥasan Najmī, *al-Karmal* 79 (2004), 207.

15 Robert Kaufman, "Poetry after 'Poetry after Auschwitz,'" in *Art and Aesthetics after Adorno*, ed. J. M. Bernstein et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 117.

16 For more on Adorno's dictum in the Arab cultural scene, see Nouri Gana, "War, Poetry, Mourning: Darwish, Adonis, Iraq," *Public Culture* 22.1 (2010), 33-65.

17 John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 56.

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long as the song has become communal and is sung throughout the night."[18] Yet one may concede that Darwīsh's prose writings at times evince just the opposite, as when he asserted after undergoing open-heart surgery in Paris in 1998 that it is none of "death's concern" to gaze into the poem, even if death is still responsible for the corporeal in the human. In his epic work "Jidāriyyah" (Mural), Darwīsh stubbornly insists that art can defeat death, not only in the present but also throughout the history of civilizations.[19]

Troy: The Triumph, the Defeat

To Darwīsh, "One *bayt*"—one line of poetry; also, a house—"of wood, cane, or stone is much better than all the verse of Homer, Dante, and Abū Tammām." Darwīsh declared that "the human should cease transforming blood into roses, and cease poeticizing ashes .... We must stop the self-accusation: Shall people die so that language lives?"[20] Nevertheless, Darwīsh never stopped seeking refuge within the poem:

> I don't know to what extent I am triumphant or defeated. Perhaps I am triumphant through poetic language. Perhaps my triumph is poetry's triumph, and if this is the case, then it is a cultural and civilizational superiority. The Israeli is triumphant with warplanes and nuclear weapons .... I consider myself triumphant through the poem. Warplanes crash, while the poem doesn't if it is beautiful.[21]

As a self-proclaimed Trojan poet, Darwīsh read triumph both as a moment of death and a moment of life through poetry, transformed into a grand universal narrative; poetry becomes a means not only of defeating death, but most importantly of defeating the memory of defeat itself. The tension between the actual history of the Peloponnesian Wars and the power of Troy's myth did not escape Darwīsh, and his poetic intervention reframes the trope of triumph to be, even after defeat, one that serves the Palestinian condition:

18 Darwish, *In the Presence of Absence*, 135.

19 Mahmoud Darwish, *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*, trans. Munir Akash and Carolyn Forché (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 139. See also Ḥusayn al-Barghūthī, "Jidāriyyat muḥāṣar bil-thunāʾiyyāt [A Mural of (a Person Who Is) Confined by Dichotomies]," *al-Shuʿarāʾ* 9 (2000), 250-254.

20 Darwīsh and al-Qāsim, 75.

21 Darwīsh, "Kalām fī al-shiʿr, 193.

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> I was not realistic, but I do not believe the history
> of the general's *Iliad*
> It is poetry: a myth that created a reality
> and I wondered: Had there been cameras and journalists
> over the walls of the Asian Troy
> would Homer have written anything other than the *Odyssey*?[22]

In this stanza, Darwīsh reads what poetry yielded from the events of Troy's siege, fall, and destruction,[23] and he would speak to the importance of Troy in interviews. In Jean-Luc Godard's 2004 film *Notre Music* (Our Music), Sarah Adler, an Israeli-French reporter and producer, asked Darwīsh to clarify his position on the Israeli right to the land of historic Palestine and to discuss how the complex matrix of the Trojan syndrome was embodied in both his poetics and his politics. Darwīsh answers that he is not only a poet who aspires to narrate the story of absence and absentees in ancient history, but he is also the narrator of a similar modern tragedy, in which Eurocentrism and the Jewish question reproduce a modern Trojan history for the Palestinian people.[24]

In this interview, Darwīsh repeats a notion articulated by Edward Said in *The Question of Palestine*, in which Said identified the conflict over Palestine as one waged between Palestinians and Zionists over an "idea," for "Palestine itself is a much debated, even contested notion."[25] Said drew a connection between the project of Orientalism and that of Zionism, especially in the realm of the "ideas" that paved the way for the establishment of Israel. For Zionism,

22 Maḥmūd Darwīsh, *Lā taʿtadhir ʿammā faʿalt* [Do Not Apologize for What You Have Done] (Beirut: Riyad el-Rayyes, 2004), 135-136. Translated by Sinan Antoon as "Not Like A Foreign Tourist Would," *Banipal* 23 (2005), 1-12.

23 For a comprehensive account of Troy throughout literary history, see Ṣubḥī Ḥadīdī, "Ṭurwādah: tārīkh lil-mukhayyilah [Troy: A History of the Imagination]," *al-Karmal* 83 (2005), 122-143.

24 To watch the whole interview, see http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3mro7_mahmoud-darwish-sarah-adler_news. See also Patrick Sylvain, "Darwish's Essentialist Poetics in a State of Siege," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 7 (2009), 137-150; and Darwīsh, "Kalām fī al-shiʿr," 192-193.

25 Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Times Books, 1979), 28. Since the intellectual's supreme moral imperative is to advocate for legitimate and just ideas, "Palestine" became Said's mission and obsession, especially after the calamity or Naksah of 1967. See also, Ilyās Khūrī, "al-Nakbah al-mustamirrah [The Ongoing Nakbah]," *Majallat al-dirāsāt al-filisṭīniyyah* 89 (2012), 37-50.

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the Orientalist “idea” of Palestine fostered a nationalistic language, a vehicle of unity and authenticity that could negate Jewish exilic consciousness.[26]

Darwīsh took this idea of a collaboration between European Orientalism and Zionist settler colonialism a step further by returning to the history of the fall of Troy, which he framed as an inaugural moment for the advent of Eurocentrism:

> One of the accumulative tragedies of Troy is that no one searched for the tablets on which Trojan poets wrote their narrative. I am fortunate or unfortunate because I am not Trojan. I am fortunate for I still represent a humanity that defends its poetic redemption. It is a humanity that condenses and recognizes its cultural and historical self in a passive manner, no doubt, through its relation to Athens that became Roman. In our Arabic poetry there is still much left to say .... It is about time for our language of genius poetics to prepare itself to welcome a modernity to which we have not contributed ... and to be satisfied by consuming it like all other materials.[27]

Since Darwīsh believed that history is not a judge but rather an agent in the world history of injustices,[28] he wondered about Native Americans, Armenians, and South Africans, because although history does not repeat itself, the tragedy of history does, and so do the politics of forgiveness, recognition, and reconciliation. The writing of tragedy is as fraught with contradictions as is the remembering of historical tragedies. Marc Nichanian negotiated this troubled landscape in the case of the Armenian genocide. Instead of simply recalling the facts of this event, Nichanian questioned what constitutes a “historic fact”

26 For further information on Jewish Orientalism, see Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “al-Istishrāq, ʿulūm al-yahūdiyyah, wa-l-mujtamaʿ al-isrāʾīlī [Orientalism, Jewish Scholarship, and israeli Society],” trans. Muḥammad Ghanāʾim, *al-Karmal* 58 (1999), 106-127; “Mutadayyinūn wa-ʿilmāniyyūn fī Isrāʾīl: al-ṣuhyūniyyah, al-thiyūlūjiyyā wa-izdiwājiyyat al-qawmiyyah [Religious and Seculars in Israel: zionism, Theology, and Binationalism],” trans. Muḥammad Ghanāʾim, *al-Karmal* 51 (1997), 201-215; Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Karīm, *al-Istishrāq wa-abḥāth al-ṣirāʿ ladā isrāʾīl* [Orientalism and Conflict Research in israel] (Amman: Dār al-Jalīl for Publishing and Palestinian Research and Study, 1993). To a lesser extent, see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage Books, 1978).

27 Darwīsh, *Ḥayrat al-ʿāʾid*, 129.

28 Maḥmūd Darwīsh, “Dhāhib ilā al-ʿālam, gharīb ʿan al-ʿālam [Roaming the World, Stranger in the World],” *Shuʾūn filisṭīniyyah* 14 (1972), 6-7.

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in the first place, and, therefore, a "historic reality."[29] Within the context of a court trial in France about the genocide, he explored both the juridical notions of victim and perpetrator, and how these affect the collective will toward constructing memory, questioning how we construct the memory of tragedies within the framework of history.

Darwīsh not only mocked the theft of Palestine in broad daylight, but he also questioned the politics of forgiveness:

> The slogan "Never forget, never forgive" is not of our invention. We are the victims of the one who monopolized victimhood, the one who has been transformed into our killer who will not face a trial. That notion is not of our making. Had it been ours, we would have been universally accused of our silenced desire for revenge. There still exists cheap blood and expensive blood. There still exists a merciful murderer and a cruel murderer. There still exists a valuable victim and cheap one. In such a reality, the former wins a state, endowed with a moral veto, while the latter gains a grave without a tombstone, and is rewarded with oblivion.[30]

Nichanian initially grounded his inquiry in a real court case and Darwīsh mocked the notion of a trial as long as the victims are criminalized, while Jacques Derrida explored the paradox embedded within the notion of "true forgiveness" as such. Within the immediate context of post-Apartheid South Africa, Derrida questioned both the practical and the idealistic aspects of confronting historical tragedies, the tension between mediated, conditional reconciliation and pure, unconditional forgiveness. Well aware of the many dimensions to this process—secular versus religious, historically or nationally conditioned versus universal—Derrida argued that "forgiveness must engage two singularities: the guilty … and the victim."[31] Forgiveness, then, can only be achieved on the level of two singularities. Once a third party is involved (like a juridical entity), then the goal is no longer forgiveness, but rather reconciliation. Once such a process is put into place, it implies the necessity of coming to understand the "other" (the victim understanding the perpetrator). This latter is by definition a rational process; while pure forgiveness, according to Derrida, is not a rational act. Derrida did not argue against the utility of reconciliation

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29 See Marc Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

30 Darwīsh and al-Qāsim, 108.

31 Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (*Thinking in Action*), trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London: Routledge, 2001), 42.

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to facilitate national healing, but rather he attempted to divorce reconciliation from forgiveness as he described the perhaps-unobtainable purity of forgiveness when framed through national tragedy.

Darwīsh's work provides a cynical counterpoint to this Derridian dichotomy, open as it is to being read, even despite Darwīsh's counter-proclamations, as a figuration of how the victim might be capable of providing his or her persecutor with moral aid.[32] On October 5, 2008, just two months after Darwīsh's death, several cities in the world witnessed the premiere of the grand project "Identity of the Soul." The work consisted of a five-screen live cinematic performance based on the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's poem "Terji Vigen" and Darwīsh's poem "Jundī yaḥlum bil-zanābiq al-bayḍāʾ" [A Soldier Dreams of White Tulips]. It was a broadcast of Darwīsh's performance of the two poems of revenge and retaliation. Darwīsh's antagonist in this poem, although unknown to most of his audience in Palestine and around the world, was a real person: Shlomo Sand, a professor of history at Tel Aviv University whose work had provoked considerable controversy within Israeli academic and cultural scenes.[33]

Darwīsh was paradoxically among the most eloquent advocates of the fact that victims, even when capable of doing so, should not provide moral aid to their oppressors. In a heated response to Israeli novelist A. B. Yehoshua's call for Palestinians to help Israelis become "normal," Darwīsh countered that such a process could take place only "when the victim is able to create a normal life. This will not happen unless his right to exist is recognized, after a long-overdue apology for the oppression that has been inflected upon him, followed by a righting of all of these wrongs."[34] In this statement, Darwīsh negates the very possibility of normalcy in an abnormal reality. While the war seems to have come to an end, peace is far from having begun. Darwīsh identified the ironic impossibility of achieving peace through

> a military siege on a people that chose peace as an answer to their national and existential question—after salvaging their identity from the danger of annihilation on the one hand, and the danger of isolation on the other. It is not one of peace's good attributes to prevent the Palestinian people from achieving the "geographical co-existence" of their cities, towns, and countryside, to co-exist with themselves, as punishment for interpreting

32 Darwīsh and al-Qāsim, 86-87.

33 For a full account of how Darwish and Sand first spoke to each other after the 1967 war, see Jezeil Khoury, "In Arabic: A Special Salute from Beirut to Mahmoud Darwish," interview with Layla Shahid, *Al Arabiya Satellite Channel*, August 16, 2008.

34 Darwīsh, *Ḥayrat al-ʿāʾid*, 17-18.

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> the modern history of their homeland in a way that brought about a project of mutual existence with the "other" in a shared land in a shared future. There is no need for deep reflection on the irony that simultaneously forces the victim to look for solutions to its plight while also searching for a solution to the problem of another victim whose state became its own persecutor. This will be left to the book of grand tragedies, if this era has spared it any space for this story. However, the victim within us—while having grown bored of the urge for heroism—understands that it will not concede to the debate with itself and its other to create the status of the "normal" without the graciousness of history despite the fact that it has been the victim of history.[35]

In my last personal encounter with Darwīsh, a few weeks before his death on August 9, 2008, we had a rather heated exchange on this topic.[36] The conversation revolved around an article I had written during the Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006, where I criticized Darwīsh for his belated reaction to the war and condemned him for signing a statement that conflated Israel and Hezbollah as "two competing fundamentalisms."[37] In that article, I made the comparison between that statement and another issued by the Palestinian House of Poetry that praised the Lebanese resistance without any hint of the equivocation that has become a staple of many contemporary political and cultural statements about the "conflict." The Palestinian House of Poetry condemned Israel's brutal atrocities, carried out with direct and indirect American involvement, as well as its refusal to allow any real cease-fire negotiations.

The bitterness intensified when I recalled Darwīsh's great statement that he had delivered at Birzeit University's celebrations marking the end of Israel's occupation of South Lebanon in May 2000. He had said at the time that

35 Ilyās Khūrī raised similar questions in his analysis of Said's *The Question of Palestine*, in particular regarding the victims' role in redeeming themselves and their oppressors from the historical injustice that the latter consciously committed. See Khūrī, "Su'āl al-nakbah," 56.

36 For more details, see Abdul-Rahim Al-Shaikh, "Palestine: The Tunnel Condition," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 3.4 (2010), 480-494.

37 My article, entitled "Said, Darwish, Adorno: Is It Possible to Write a Poem after Qana," was censored from being published in the *Al-Ayyām* Palestinian weekly cultural supplement to which I contribute on a regular basis. I received a note from the editor claiming that he had consulted with Darwīsh regarding the article, but Darwīsh denied this. The article was published later on several websites. http://www.arabs48.com/display.x?cid=5&sid=119&id=39135.

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> there is neither an ultimate victory, nor is there an ultimate defeat, for these two concepts command the game of succession, so that the Master-history completes his perpetual movement and cracks his final joke. What's important is what the victor does with victory and what the defeated does with defeat. Some defeats, perhaps, have the potential to elevate human beings to a certain phase of moral and spiritual maturation. Yet, some victories are more dangerous to some than defeat, for it absolves them from the necessity of listening to the voice of time. Israel has claimed victory over the Arabs beyond its capacity to endure the consequences of its victory. Therefore, Israel's military brain became larger than its actual body. It ended up enslaved to overabundant, greedy power without taking into account popular resistance's capacity to overcome this overwhelming power … As for the question of what the Israelis will make of what happened to them in South Lebanon, it depends on the dynamic of learning the lesson. If they view the withdrawal as a victory, then let them be victorious on all fronts …. Let them withdraw from the West Bank, Arab Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. Let them victoriously withdraw or withdraw claiming victory; we have no problem with its naming. What harm is there if human beings triumph over their own stupidity? That is the dawn of reason and the promising prelude to enter a normal peace with one's self.[38]

Darwīsh avoided confronting my comparison of the two statements and the idea that against the backdrop of Palestinian cultural politics in the post-Oslo era—where collective amnesia rather than collective memory seems to be the mission—the moral imperatives of intellectuals during times of national and human crisis lie within the analogies between Said and Adorno, Qana and Auschwitz. Darwīsh, however, took a different path, and argued, using the example of Shlomo Sand's work as the basis for his theory, that the evils of nationalism in the postcolonial era are as damaging as colonialism itself.

By my reading, over the course of his political and intellectual life, Shlomo Sand proves the fact that Zionism digs its own grave, both as an exclusivist and fascist nationalism, and as a colonial project. Zionism has victimized Palestinians as well as Jews, Israelis and non-Israelis alike. Sand reveals his precarious relationship with his own victim status, from his lasting memory of being victimized via the suffering of his Polish parents as Holocaust survivors, to his torment as a "little Eichmann" in the service of the Israeli Occupation Forces, to his current distress as a scholar under fire from Israeli academia and

38 Darwīsh, *Ḥayrat al-ʿāʾid*, 52-53.

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the media. Sand negated Zionism's foundational myth of the God-given ancient national right of the Jews by exposing its "retrospective invention" in the nineteenth century.

In the face of a "moral equivalency" between victim and oppressor, Darwīsh wrote:

> They will ask you: if a thief breaks into a house, and he was surprised by the hat the house's owner hung on a hook, and he fell dead from the fright: Who would be accused of the crime of murder? The hat, or the house's owner who hung it on the hook? As usual, the thief will be named innocent. However, if an Israeli soldier kills a Palestinian child, who will be the killer? Is it the soldier or the child who provoked the soldier with the toy rocks, forcing him to kill him, then redeeming his troubled conscience with tears? As long as the murderer is crying, he is innocent. And as long as the victim is made incapable of crying, the victim is accused of causing his own murder and the death of conscience.[39]

Part of the historiography of this "conflict" is the immoral task of pursuing moral equivalency between the oppressor and the oppressed. Part of Darwīsh's mission was to scream in the face of this hypocrisy. In so doing, he gave voice and agency to the Palestinian victim by refusing the language of the oppressor and redefining morality on new terms.[40]

Al-Andalus: 1492/1992

Postcolonial theorists and continental philosophers addressing the Palestinian question utilize literature and cultural artifacts, and yet they often in turn depoliticize literature, ridding it of its political charge "for aesthetic reasons."[41] What then of the fall of al-Andalus and the conquest of America in 1492 in

39 Darwīsh and al-Qāsim, 187.

40 See also Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004); *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009); Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens, eds., *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (London: Verso, 1988).

41 See Ṣubḥī Ḥadīdī, "Maḥmūd Darwīsh fī 'Khuṭbat al-hind al-aḥmar': istrātijiyyāt al-taʿbīr wa-tamthīlāt al-maʿnā [Maḥmūd Darwīsh in 'Speech of the Red Indian': Strategies of Expression and Representations of Meaning]," *al-Karmal* 90 (2009), 37-53; and Ben White, "Dispossession, Soil, and Identity in Palestinian and Native American Literature," *The Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 12.2/3 (2005).

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Darwīsh's work? A recent paradigm shift in scholarship surrounding the quincentenary of 1492 merits reflection. 1492 may be read as a key moment in establishing global history, one that continues to reverberate in contemporary politics and culture. According to Munīr al-ʿAkash, the events of 1492 inaugurate the Euro-American colonial enterprise and prepare the way for Zionism. Since then, the idea of America has enabled a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant hegemony that Zionist mythology and practice reproduced in constituting Israel as a settler colony. This process involved the familiar patterns of invading the land, replacing the indigenous population with immigrant settlers, and constructing a fabricated history and culture to forcibly replace that of the natives.[42]

Steven Salaita conducted a thorough comparative analysis of the Eurocentric colonial project in both the New World and the Holy Land.[43] He exposed the dynamics through which settler colonial societies in both areas managed to transform theological narratives into national ones to legitimate their imperial political aims. According to Salaita, the displacements of the indigenous peoples, both in Palestine and in America, have many historical parallels.

A reading of Darwīsh's first encounters two decades ago with these historical analogies reveals his fascination with this crucial chapter of world history. Distinguishing between the "[historical] register and the archive," Darwīsh believed that poetry's only possible alliance could be with victims. For Darwīsh, "choosing Native Americans or Granada" as the topic of his diwan *Aḥad ʿashar kawkaban ʿalā ākhir al-mashhad al-Andalusī* [Eleven Stars over the Last Andalusian Scene] entailed "a contribution to the new universal reading of the year 1992 on the premise of its grand establishment in 1492."[44] Darwīsh

42 Munīr al-ʿAkash, *Ḥaqq al-taḍḥiyyah bil-ākhar: Amīrkā wa-l-ibādāt al-jamāʿiyyah* [The Right to Sacrifice the Other: America and the Genocides] (Beirut: Riyad el-Rayyes, 2002); *Talmūd al-ʿamm Sām: al-asāṭīr al-ʿibriyyah allatī taʾssasat ʿalayhā Amīrkā* [The Talmud According to Uncle Sam: On the Founding Hebrew Myths of America] (Beirut: Riyad el-Rayyes, 2004); and "Zaḥf al-qiddīsīn: namḍī ilā al-ḥarb lākin ʿalā maḍaḍ [The March of Saints from Reality to Metaphor: We Go to War, Yet in Spite of Ourselves]," *al-Karmal* 85 (2005), 94-129.

43 Steven Salaita, *The Holy Land in Transit: Colonialism and the Quest for Canaan* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006); "Demystifying the Quest for Canaan: Observations on Mimesis in the New World and Holy Land," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 11.2 (2002), 129-150.

44 Maḥmūd Darwīsh, "Lā makān lil-shiʿr khārij al-niẓām [There Is No Place for Poetry Outside the (Poetic) Order]," interview by Ṣubḥī Ḥadīdī and Bashīr al-Bakr, *al-Karmal* 47 (1993), 142.

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was aware of the historical meaning of the year 1492 in Western Christendom, especially "the two events that changed history and predicated the West as a concept: Columbus' expedition and the fall of Granada." For Darwīsh, "the first event is a conquest, an eradication project and an extension of the spirit of the crusader wars; while the latter is a final establishment of the concept of the West[,] forcing the Arabs out of the region both physically and metaphorically to pave the path for the construction of the West within its constructed historical narrative."[45]

While Darwīsh was not in favor of any political reading of his poetry, one cannot overlook the detailed accounts he gave regarding the reading of Arab history in al-Andalus and that of the Native Americans. Darwīsh echoed the Benjaminian wisdom that there is no document of culture that is not at the same time a document of barbarism.[46] The barbarity committed against both the Natives and the Palestinians allowed Darwīsh to

> reincarnate the character of the Native American to defend the innocence of things and the childhood of humanity; to warn of the inflation of the military machine that [not only] sees no limits to its horizon, but [also] uproots all the inherit meanings and greedily devours the globe—the surface and the bottom.[47]

Darwīsh declared that his "poem tried to reincarnate the Native American in the moment of him seeing the furthest edge of the sun, yet the white [man] cannot rest and sleep quietly because the ghosts of things, nature, and victims will continue to haunt his existential place in the world."[48] There are several intertextualities in his poem "Speech of the Red Indian," which is representative of his counter-narrative against the attempts of the colonial theological narrative to consolidate historical and political legitimacies:

> Our names: branching leaves of divine speech,
> Birds that soar higher than a gun.
> You who come from beyond the sea, bent on war,
> don't cut down the tree of our names,
> don't gallop your flaming horses across the open plains.

45 Ibid.

46 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 253-264.

47 Darwīsh, "Lā makān lil-shiʿr khārij al-niẓām," 143.

48 Ibid.

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> You have your god and we have ours,
> you have your religion and we have ours.
> Don't bury your god
> in books that back up your claim of your land over our land
> don't appoint your god to be a mere courtier in the palace of the King![49]

Perceiving the "land" (as a historical category), and certainly not the "territory" (as a political category)—the essence of the struggle for both the Native Americans and the Palestinians—Darwīsh declared that his upbringing as a native linked him to the land and its elements. Hence, he asserted that "when I read about their culture, I realized that they represented me in a better way than [I did] myself. I will be honored if my defense of Palestinian rights is elevated to the level of the defense of the Native American, for it is a defense of the balance of the universe and nature that is violated by the behavior of the white [man]."[50] "The Palestinian," according to Darwīsh, "has an alert sense of tragedy to a degree that enables him to identify with any tragedy since the Greeks. The only difference is that the dimension of fate is absent as long as the conflict is open."[51] The openness of the Palestinian wound is what makes Darwīsh's poetry epic in the aesthetic sense yet not mythic in the historical sense. Palestine is a "Lost Paradise" yet with "little differences."

In 1973, Darwīsh published one of his most significant works on the figure of al-Andalus. The fall of his hometown, al-Birwah, is remembered through an analogy between Palestine and al-Andalus. In this early phase, Darwīsh regarded al-Andalus as a historic artifact that could not be recovered in spite of the political, cultural, and historical comparisons to Palestine. While al-Andalus could not be recovered, Darwīsh remained adamant that the same fate would not befall Palestine:

> The difference between a lost paradise in its absolute sense and the lost paradise in the Palestinian sense is that the former understanding would keep the condition of longing, and psychological and rightful belonging, out of the sphere of the conflict. As long as the struggle continues, the paradise is not lost, but remains occupied and subject to being regained .... Palestinians cannot look at their homeland from the perspective of the lost paradise, as the Arabs look back on al-Andalus or as the faithful look

49 Mahmoud Darwish, "Speech of the Red Indian," trans. Sargon Boulos in *The Adam of Two Edens*, 132-133.

50 Darwīsh, "Lā makān lil-shiʿr khārij al-niẓām," 143.

51 Ibid.

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> forward to their reward in Paradise. Between Palestine and al-Andalus is a difference that resembles death. The idea of the lost paradise is tempting to those who are not possessed by a pressing question, but inflicts upon the Palestinian condition an accumulation of tears and weakness in the blood. This is my homeland [that] surpasses Paradise: it is like Paradise, but is it also attainable.[52]

After the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, Darwīsh's view of the resemblance between al-Andalus and Palestine underwent a dramatic shift. Darwīsh became more modest in his comparisons, as his poetic enterprise that twined the two paradises reached its zenith in *Aḥad ʿashar kawkaban ʿalā ākhir al-mashhad al-Andalusī*. When Darwīsh was asked about the resemblance between Granada and Jerusalem, he replied:

> I neither wanted to say this, nor [did] I intend to bear a legal or political similarity whatsoever between the so-called "Lost Paradise" and the [Palestinian] paradise—the subject of conflict. If there ought to be a resemblance and if I am permitted to say that Palestine is a Paradise in a context of conflict rather than a rigid image in a dormant memory, then Palestine is a Paradise in aesthetic terms, hence it is eligible to be regained. Yet, recalling al-Andalus should not be restricted to the intellectual level, for it could be recalled by a tear, a dance, a lasting embrace of a woman. Al-Andalus is universal property—that is, an artistic and aesthetic domain, whereas Jerusalem is an aesthetic, spiritual, and legal claim.[53]

One reading of this shift is that Darwīsh came to consider himself an heir to the collective memory of peoples and civilizations, to Troy, al-Andalus, or Palestine. Yet he defined his national and aesthetic enterprise as one of reconfiguring the homeland through poetry: "I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a single word: *bayt*."[54]

Al-Andalus signifies the (im)possibility of return. For Darwīsh, return had another meaning as well, no longer the eventual outcome of a long journey and the conclusion of "a state of waiting in exile," but rather a pilgrimage

52 Mahmoud Darwish, *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*, trans. Ibrahim Muhawi (New York: Archipelago Books, 2010), 8-9.

53 See Mahmoud Darwish, "On the Possibility of Poetry at a Time of Siege," interview by Najat Rahman, in *Mahmoud Darwish: Exile's Poet*, ed. Hala Khamis Nassar and Najat Rahman (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2008), 319-326.

54 Darwish, *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*, 7.

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toward the future. The return "is eternally deferred and belated," perhaps for meta-historical divine reasons, as Darwīsh suggested:

> If God punished Adam by driving him out of eternal life into time, the earth is exile and history a tragedy. It began with a family quarrel between Cain and Abel, then developed into civil wars, regional wars and global wars, which are continuing until history's descendants have [been] wiped out of history. So what's next? What comes after history? It seems that the right of return to paradise is encompassed by nothingness and divine mysteries. The only smooth road is the road to the abyss, until further notice … until the issuing of a divine pardon.[55]

In his search for al-Andalus, Darwīsh was a Sufi traveler, as concerned with the poetics, and the hardships, of the *ṭarīq* (path) as with the arrival at God—the primordial "home" par excellence. During the first phase of this travel, the poet is an empty vessel, *qaṣabah shāghirah*, that is capable of being filled with anything, while in the second phase he becomes a poetic vessel, *qaṣabah shāʿirah*, a flute with which reality is versified into songs. Darwīsh inverts the convention in which these songs value the way home more than home itself when he declares:

> O Martyrs, you were right!
> In spite of the deception of flowers,
> home is more beautiful than the road home.
> Even though windows have not yet opened onto heart's heaven
> and exile is still exile, here as well as there,
> we have not endured exile in vain
> and our places of exile have not been in vain.[56]

Drawing upon literary and cultural tradition, Darwīsh wrote this diwan to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of the fall of al-Andalus. The publication of the work in the early 1990s coincided with the Madrid Peace Conference and the signing of the Oslo Accords. The collection expresses tremendous feelings of remorse for the loss and betrayal of al-Andalus. The title of the collection *Aḥada ʿashara kawkaban* encompasses two intertextual references: an internal reference to a poem by Darwīsh himself entitled "Anā Yūsuf

55 Mahmoud Darwish, *A River Dies of Thirst: Diaries*, trans. Catherine Cobham (London: Saqi, 2009), 121.

56 Darwish, *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*, 191.

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yā abī" (O My Father, I'm Joseph) that was written in 1986 after the Palestinian exodus from Lebanon, which lamented the betrayal of the Palestinians by the Arab regimes; and an external reference to both the Genesis narrative and the Qur'ānic *sūrah* about the prophet Joseph. The collection presents three pairs of betrayed: the prophets Adam and Joseph, with Adam's loss of paradise and Joseph's betrayal by his eleven brothers; the two leaders Abū ʿAbdullāh al-Ṣaghīr, the last king of Granada who signed the treaty of its surrender in 1491, and Yāsir ʿArafāt, who signed the Oslo Accords in 1993; and, finally, the two nationalist poets of tragic causes, Federico García Lorca and Maḥmūd Darwīsh himself. This grand historical trope is present in the first part of the poem, "The Last Evening in This Land."[57]

This collection appeared while the PLO was involved in both the 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence (written by Darwīsh), and the signing of the Oslo Accords. This paradigm shift in the political and ideological foundations of Palestinian politics was justified by national, regional, and international conditions and demands. The Declaration of Independence, presented in Algiers, was not only an announcement of the birth of the independent state of Palestine in exile, but also implied the PLO's recognition of Israel. However, when the clandestine Oslo negotiations of 1993 abandoned the principles addressed in the Declaration of Independence (and which had been reaffirmed in a speech at the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991), Darwīsh resigned from the PLO. Along with other intellectuals and prominent figures in the PLO, Darwīsh denounced the agreement on the grounds that it solved the Israeli security problem rather than bringing the Palestinian tragedy to an end.

In his long farewell to Darwīsh after the poet's death, Akram Haniyyah addressed Darwīsh's political and literary role, the circumstances of Darwīsh's resignation from the PLO, his return to Palestine, and his refusal to take part in the newly formed Palestinian government:

> in the spring of 1994, Maḥmūd Darwīsh and I were among other members who accompanied Yāsir ʿArafāt on a visit to South Africa to celebrate the end of the Apartheid regime and the appointment of Nelson Mandela as president of the country. During the flight, the President called me [over] … to discuss the formation of the first Palestinian government. Then, the issue of "return" was approaching, and it was demanded that the PLO start nominating ministers. After discussing a number of names, Abū ʿAmmār [i.e., ʿArafāt] told me: "Of course Maḥmūd Darwīsh takes [the ministry of] culture." I hesitated before I answered: "Brother Abū

57 Darwish, *The Adam of Two Edens*, 149-150.

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> ʿAmmār, in the modern history of our people there are two icons, you and Maḥmūd Darwīsh. You the national and the political, him the cultural. Maḥmūd will return home, and it might be better if he continues his cultural project away from the complications of the next period." Uncharacteristically, Abū ʿAmmār didn't argue for long, yet characteristically he didn't give in immediately, and said, "Let's ask Maḥmūd." Maḥmūd declined. This didn't affect the strong relationship between Abū ʿAmmār and Maḥmūd, who had just resigned from the Executive Committee of the PLO a few months earlier to openly express his critique of the Oslo Accords. The critique which proved to be correct didn't make Maḥmūd Darwīsh hesitate in packing his suitcases from his Parisian exile to return to the available territory of the homeland.[58]

With all the polemics of return that forced Darwīsh to say, "I came, but did not arrive. I came, but did not return,"[59] he did not refuse to come back to Palestine even though true "return" for himself and for the six million Palestinian refugees was still unattainable. In addition, Darwīsh considered the only "actual return" to be to his hometown—to al-Birwah, in the Galilee. The anecdote about his conversation with ʿArafāt has an ironic element as well, as seen in Simone Bitton's 1997 documentary *Mahmoud Darwish: As the Land Is the Language*. Darwīsh narrated the exchange between ʿArafāt and himself regarding joining the Palestinian cabinet as follows: When ʿArafāt asked the poet, "What harm was there in Malraux becoming a minister in the cabinet of Charles De Gaulle?" Darwīsh replied without hesitation, "There are at least three differences: first, France is not the West Bank and Gaza Strip; second, the stature of Charles De Gaulle is not that of Yasser Arafat; and third, Mahmoud Darwish is not André Malraux. These, you may say, are little differences, but if the state of Palestine becomes as great as France, Yasser Arafat becomes Charles De Gaulle and I reach the stature of Malraux, then I would prefer to be Jean-Paul Sartre!"[60]

To understand Darwīsh's cynical attitude toward taking part in a Palestinian cabinet under Israeli occupation, one should compare it with his acceptance of becoming a member of the Executive Committee of the PLO in 1987. Darwīsh was in France when he was nominated to the post. In an article titled "Before

58 Akram Haniyyah, "Ṣaḥrāʾ Hiyustan: al-shāʿir fī riḥlatihi al-akhīrah [Houston Desert: The Poet on His Last Journey]," *al-Karmal* 90 (2009), 128-129.

59 Darwish, *In the Presence of Absence*, 130.

60 Simone Bitton, *Mahmoud Darwish: As the Land Is the Language* (1997).

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the Letter of Resignation," he complained about such an "honorary punishment," and wondered:

> What should I do? What would a poet do in the Executive Committee of the PLO? Can I write a book on love when the color falls down on the dirt in autumn? Or should I refrain from accepting the new post? I have no choice but to conform to the national will … I'll be, like I always was, a little soldier in the battle for freedom, and the battle for the epic. I'll defend little differences and continue to describe trees.[61]

Darwīsh, in such a heterotopian condition, was neither a prophet who claimed the land of words, nor a poet who claimed the word of the land, for he was both at once in "Arḍ al-qaṣīdah" (The Land of the Poem). His dual roles inspired Simone Bitton to compare Darwīsh to Moses on Mount Nebo in the prelude to her documentary: "How to film exile? A Palestinian poet looks out over his homeland from the slopes of Mount Nebo on the east bank of the Dead Sea and the River Jordan. It was from here that Moses is supposed to have contemplated the Promised Land which he was never to enter. Palestine is just across the river: so near, yet so far."[62]

Exile: The Sarah-Hagar Complex

At the junction of this heterotopia, having Palestine closer to him than it was to Moses or Halevi, Darwīsh reminds us of the power of narrative and of how power shapes narrative. He speaks, as well, to the intimacy of colonized peoples with narratives older than colonialism:

> In one ill-fated hour, history entered like a bold thief through a door as the present flew out through a window. With a massacre or two, the country's name, our country, became another. Reality became an idea and history became memory. The myth invades and the invasion attributes everything to the will of the Lord who promised and did not renege on his promise. They wrote their narrative: We have returned. They wrote

61 Maḥmūd Darwīsh, *ʿĀbirūna fī kalām ʿābir* [Passing between Passing Words] (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1994), 160.

62 Simone Bitton, *Mahmoud Darwish: As the Land Is the Language* (1997).

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> our narrative: They have returned to the desert. They put us on trial: Why were you born here? We said: Why was Adam born in paradise?[63]

By Fayṣal Darrāj's reading, Walter Benjamin—in his critique of both theology and history—argued that human history is the history of the victor no matter how many uprisings have temporarily broken its continuity.[64] The victor writes his own history as he sees fit, and also writes a history of the victims that excludes their realities, experiences, and aspirations. Hence, Darwīsh urged the victimized "not to write history as poetry."[65] The defeated do not need history unless they employ it in battles that do not renew their defeat; for otherwise they prove their loyal adoption, through poetry, of the (dominant) 'History' of their oppressors who have inherited the land, defined the official narrative, and ignored, distorted, or debased the dreams of those who were forsaken by victory.

The intertwined fabric of identities addressed by Shlomo Sand and others, and the power that Zionism succeeded in having over the Jews of the world, were perplexing topics for the Palestinian who tasted the bitterness of the racialized Zionist regime in Israel. Within such a milieu, Darwīsh never hesitated to draw a clear distinction between the regime and the people:

> I used to live in Haifa … and the neighborhood was mixed: Arabs and Jews. Since my early childhood, I had lots of Jewish friends. I had neither stereotypical nor dogmatic views about them. My story with Jews is manifold. The military judge who punished me for my poetry was Jewish; the teacher who taught me Hebrew and inspired my love for literature was Jewish; my English teacher, who was a stern man, was Jewish; the female judge who presided over my first trial was Jewish; my first beloved was Jewish; my next door neighbor was Jewish; and my political comrades were Jewish…. There is the good and the evil among Jews. They are neither angels, as they wish to portray themselves, nor devils. This indicates that they are a normal people. Their virtue is that they are not either angels or devils, they are a group that encompasses both. I didn't look at

63 Darwish, *In the Presence of Absence*, 46.

64 Fayṣal Darrāj, "Fāltar Banyāmīn wa-lāhūt al-tārīkh [Walter Benjamin and the Theology of History]," *al-Karmal* 86 (2006), 155-171.

Gauri Viswanthan, ed., *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said* (Pantheon Books: New York, 2001), 447.

Maḥmūd Darwīsh, *Dīwān Maḥmūd Darwīsh Vol. 2* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1994), 433.

65 Darwīsh, *Lā taʿtadhir ʿammā faʿalta*, 97-99.

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> Jews as a separate entity. From the beginning, for me, coexistence has seemed possible both psychologically and culturally. The main problem is political.[66]

Darwīsh celebrated René Char's axiom of the poet transforming enemies into adversaries, yet his cynicism regarding pre-historical jealousies and mythical wars was never deferred. Against a Biblical backdrop, the Arab seems to be fated to be eternally trapped within the Sarah-Hagar complex of a Eurocentric Biblical taxonomy. Palestine, as a landscape, in her presence and absence, cannot be located outside of a Biblical cartography; and the Palestinians, in their home and exile, cannot be imagined but within the everlasting exilic 'state of waiting' as figurative Jews.

Constructing conjoined genealogies that enable and label the Palestinian as an aesthetic offspring of the grand Jewish trajectory of suffering, performed in the guise of Jewish ethics, is becoming something of a fad. If Saʿīd was "the last Jewish intellectual," then Darwīsh is, perhaps, the last 'Jewish' poet of all times. Here, Hillel the Elder's verse "If I am not for myself, who will be? And when I am for myself, what am 'I'? And if not now, when?" and Darwīsh's "As you express yourself in a metaphor, think of others, those who have lost the right to speak" become one. While confirming the theoretical claim that no collective identity is possible without a political other, Darwīsh is aware of the collective's eclipse: "their history would have been ours, our history would have been theirs, were it not for the dispute over the exact date of Doomsday."

Angelika Neuwirth presents a problematic account of this phenomenon, carving a Jewish poet out of Darwīsh and attributing his cause to the properties of the Jewish question. She claims that:

> Darwish's poetical rereading of the Hebrew Bible, pursued on different levels, must be considered as a politically significant act. The Bible is at once the canon of the hegemonic majority in the young Jewish state in which Mahmoud Darwish grew up and—in its Zionist reading—a document used to politically legitimize the exile of the Palestinians. An Arab poet's critical rereading … can amount to a counter-text, a kind of replacement of the original text by a new understanding, thus enabling the reader to confront the canon of the 'other' with a newly established or newly affirmed canon of its own[, b]ut may equally serve the opposite purpose: to dissolve the antagonism between the other and the self,

66 Maḥmūd Darwīsh, "Lā qadāsah li-jallād [No Holiness for a Slaughterer]," *al-Karmal* 52 (1997), 221.

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> by relocating both in the same world of estrangement, in the ghurba—the particular condition humana … it is hardly surprising that in such a context kindred spirits make their appearance, thus the great Jewish poet Paul Celan, who in German tradition figures as the poet of exile par excellence, and his disturbing reading of the Hebrew Bible find a place in Darwish's new poetry.[67]

Rendering the classic Orientalist reading of the 'stages' within the Arab ode, Neuwirth superimposes a Biblical taxonomy on the trajectory of Darwīsh's poesy: Genesis, Exodus, and an unqualified Exile. Palestinian Genesis is a sort of Arab romanticism recreating and yearning for an ideal past. Though Neuwirth believes "the task of the poet [is] to reconstruct the disrupted Palestinian identity," she concedes that "in Darwīsh's case … poetry is a response to a pre-existing writing that is inscribed on the land serving to assert the legitimacy of the dominance of the others: the Hebrew Bible."[68] This reassertion of the hegemonic Zionist narrative of the land of Palestine contributes to a re-inscription of the Zionist narrative of the land of Palestine as the Holy Land. By this reading, the landscape of Darwīsh's Genesis is merely putting a Palestinian accent of sorts on the language of the land—the Hebrew Bible. In turn, Neuwirth reads "ʿĀshiq min Filasṭīn" [A Lover from Palestine] as a prelude to the Palestinian Exodus: "It is no exaggeration to state that the poem … recreates Palestine." She perceives this 'reinvention' as more than the naming of the land of the 'sacred' landscape; it is the elevation of Darwīsh, charting his Exodus to render the *fidāʾī* (freedom fighter) as a Palestinian Moses.

The final stage in Neuwirth's Judification of Darwīsh comes through a re-writing of the Song of Songs. Neuwirth's Darwīsh 'overcomes' his Palestinianness and moves into the universality of the great poets of exile from Aragon to Celan. As the critic of his former self (he who named Palestine), Darwīsh becomes cosmopolitan, transcending borders and national struggles, where home is in words, not in the soil of the land. In his re-writing of canonical texts, Neuwirth tells us, "the poet will leave Sodom, the contemporary Israel, for Babylon, the land of exile par excellence."[69] Such readings collapse specific political legitimacies into an Orientalist-informed genealogy of legitimacies of narratives and the right to narrate. Neuwirth here aspires not only to read Palestine as a metaphor, but also to conjure a Biblical-based, a-historical, meta-poetic

67 Angelika Neuwirth, "Hebrew Bible and Arabic Poetry: Mahmoud Darwish's Palestine—From Paradise Lost to a Homeland Made of Words," in *Mahmoud Darwish: Exile's Poet*, 169.

68 Ibid., 172.

69 Ibid., 187.

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paradigm. Therein, the Palestinian endures an everlasting journey of self-negation to enter the historical registrar as a figurative Jew; Aden, Troy, and al-Andalus collapse into Babylon; and there, the ghosts of Hagar and Salma loom under the mask of the metapoetic figures of Sarah and Shulamit.

Through a deconstruction of the mislocation of the Jew and the Arab within the Eurocentric grand narrative, Gil Anidjar offers a poignant critique of how the process of secularization reinvented both 'the Jew' and 'the Muslim' as enemies through the hegemony of European and Zionist settler colonial projects. Anidjar begins his first book with Darwīsh's poem "Fī al-masāʾ al-akhīr ʿalā hādhahi-l-arḍ" [In the Last Evening on This Earth] contemplating universal heritage and relational identities, alongside the "many mirrors" and the many instances of "conquest and counter-conquest" by invaders and conquerors from "Europe" or the "New World." Anidjar introduces his second book with Darwīsh's poem "ʿIndamā yabtaʿid" [As He Draws Away], making manifest a politics of love and hate from Lorca to Yeats. Anidjar asserts that the enemy is the one who defines both the 'Jewish Question' and 'Muslim Question,' both of which have been officially excluded from western Eurocentric scholarship. He argues that the difference between the concept of 'the theological' and the concept of 'the political' (later the 'religious' and the 'secular') did not come into existence until the time of the definition of the Jew as the theological enemy, and the Arab as the political enemy of Europe.

Throughout his work, Anidjar reveals the Orientalist overtones of the enemy from the nineteenth century, such that the Arab became the archetypical political enemy, while his fellow Jew became the theological enemy. In such a context, 'anti-Semitism,' which had encompassed both Jews and Arabs as enemies of Europe, is transformed into 'Islamophobia' upon Israel's reconciliation with the European understanding of an anti-Semitism predicated on getting the Jews out of Europe. Hence, Zionists were willing to be the realization, even the practical means, for the realization of the anti-Semitic dream—that is, to colonize Palestine as a national homeland for Jews. Anidjar harshly criticized Israel's adoption of western Christian policies in distinguishing between 'citizenship' and 'nationality' so as to differentiate between 'Jew' as a religious category, and 'Arab' as a race. This was adopted to overcome the Arabs as a 'demographic threat' to the very existence of Israel which desires to define itself, and obtain recognition, as a 'pure' Jewish state.

Anidjar labors to unify the struggle against the imperial nature of the Eurocentric, Orientalist, western knowledge matrix, a hegemonic vehicle of settler colonialism in Palestine. What Ella Shohat describes as a 'relational identity' of al-Andalus and Palestine, and what Munir Akash demonstrated throughout the grand metaphor of 'the idea of America,' is in turn historically

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(de)constructed by Gil Anidjar as he reads a series of grand historical narratives of conflict from 1492-1948: the Muslim question; the Jewish question; the Arab question; and the Palestinian question; consecutively.

Darwīsh: The First Palestinian, the Last Palestinian

In the last stage of Darwīsh's personal transformations, when he assumed the identity of the poet as the political intellectual, he expressed his political views unabashedly. As Palestinians witnessed the construction of a new national political entity in the form of the Palestinian Authority, the role of the PLO became less clear and more controversial. Darwīsh's political pragmatism became more apparent as his poetic enterprise became less sentimental and more driven by grand universal metaphors, a trajectory leading to al-Andalus. His fate and that of Yāsir ʿArafāt appear intrinsically connected.[70] In both subtle and straightforward ways, Darwīsh pontificated on the fate of the Palestinians, in historic Palestine and in diaspora.

Darwīsh was just as controversial in his views on the question of Palestine as his comrade Edward Said: from the one-state solution, to two states, to the Palestinian state on part of the historic homeland. While Palestinian political discourse since the establishment of the PLO was rhetorically a rights-based discourse, with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, Palestine itself became a metaphor. Even so, Palestinians took up new modes of resistance and launched new initiatives to claim their political rights, gaining tremendous international support through the Boycott, Disinvestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement that calls for ending Israel's occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall; recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and respecting, protecting, and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.[71] Darwīsh's allegiance to the

70 In addition to the special relationship between Darwīsh and ʿArafāt and the strong personal and national ties between them that was revealed in the poem of *Madīḥ al-ẓill al-ʿālī* [In Praise of the Lofty Shadow], after the Palestinian exodus from Beirut in 1982 Darwīsh wrote three articles in praise of ʿArafāt; two of them were tributes after ʿArafāt's assassination in 2004. See *Ḥayrat al-ʿāʾid*: "Yāsir ʿArafāt: Fājaʾanā bi-annahu lam yufājiʾnā [Yasser Arafat: He Suspired Us by Not Surprising Us]," 89-94; "Taʾakhkhara ḥuznī ʿalayhi [My Grief (for Him) Came Late]," 95-99. See also "Yāsir ʿArafāt wa-l-baḥr [Yasser Arafat and the Sea]," *al-Karmal* 10 (1982), 4-9.

71 For the full text of the Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS, see http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1801.

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ever-transforming national political project of the PLO prevented him from formulating a full-fledged political project that defended these rights. Darwīsh expressed skepticism about the PA being an effective successor to the PLO, stating, "How large the revolution, how narrow the journey. How grand the idea, how small the state!"[72]

In his elegy for Edward Said's teacher Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Darwīsh explored the possibility of having a relationship with Palestine that is "an amalgam of Sufism and pragmatism," accepting the impossibility of a "just solution" for the Palestinian plight, for "solution" and "justice" are contradictory concepts.[73] The "solution" for Darwīsh had to be a comprehensive one that would address all the Palestinian grievances in historic Palestine and its diaspora. The meaning of the Nakbah for Darwīsh was illustrated in the "Palestinian People's Appeal on the 50th Anniversary of the Nakbah," in 1998. He narrated the tragic Palestinian condition of exodus, statelessness, and deprivation of all political and human rights by the settler-colonial state of Israel, including the right to self-determination. After praising the choices of the Palestinian national movement and the PLO in the struggle, "from the gun to the olive branch," he laid out one rationale after another for the transformation of both programs.[74] The most crucial part of this speech emphasized that, regardless of political realities and power imbalances, the historic, political, and poetic rights of the Palestinians in their homeland are not negotiable.

In a speech delivered at Kufr Yāsīf high school, from which he himself had graduated many years earlier, Darwīsh mapped out the tragedy of the Palestinians in the region of Palestine occupied in 1948.[75] Darwīsh asserted Palestinian belonging to the land and its history, and he criticized the Zionist attempt to eradicate the Palestinians by forcing them to fight for the legitimacy of being. The fight is not only over place, but also over time. For Darwīsh, the battle of being was not restricted to surviving ethnic cleansing during the Nakbah, but continued through the battle for the impossible "state of all its citizens."

Darwīsh conceded that there is no contradiction between the right of the indigenous minority of 1948 to belong to the grand Palestinian collective memory, and their having citizenship in a racist, colonial state. He strongly

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72 Darwīsh, *Dīwān Maḥmūd Darwīsh*, 123.

73 *Ḥayrat al-ʿāʾid*, 73.

74 Maḥmūd Darwīsh, "Nidāʾ al-shaʿb al-filasṭīnī fī al-dhikrā al-khamsīn lil-Nakbah [The Palestinian People's Appeal on the 50th Anniversary of the Nakbah]," *al-Karmal* 55/56 (1998), 6-10.

75 Darwīsh, *Ḥayrat al-ʿāʾid*, 33-34.

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believed that the dilemma of conjoining "the national question with that of democracy"[76]—and therefore confronting the impossibility for Israel of being Jewish and democratic at once—had trained Palestinians to delay the search for a theoretical or practical solution to the tension between nationality and identity. Rather, the question of remaining in the country took priority over all else.

On the fifty-third anniversary of the Nakbah, in the midst of Israeli atrocities during the al-Aqsa Intifada, Darwīsh read to the world a message in the voice of the Palestinian people:

> Our wounded hands are yet capable of extracting the wilting olive branch from the rubble of massacred groves, but only if the Israelis attain the age of reason and concede our legitimate national rights, defined by international resolutions foremost among which are: the right of return, complete withdrawal from Palestinian land occupied in 1967, and the right to self-determination and an independent sovereign state with Jerusalem as its capital. For just as there can be no peace with occupation, neither can there be one between masters and slaves.[77]

While addressing the grievances of the Palestinians living in historic Palestine, Darwīsh never failed to address the refugee question. The right of return was far more than a political right; it was a human and aesthetic right, a natural right, and a topic that defied negotiation: "You ask: What is the meaning of 'refugee'? They will say: One who is uprooted from his homeland. You ask: What is the meaning of 'homeland'? They will say: The house, the mulberry tree, the chicken coop, the beehive, the smell of bread, and the first sky. You ask: Can a word of eight letters be big enough for all of these, yet too small for us?"[78]

Concerning the political rights of the Palestinians ruled by the PA, in addition to his epic *Ḥālat ḥiṣār* [State of Siege], Darwīsh published two articles in 2002 in the midst of the military siege on Palestinians. In both speeches he

76 Ibid., 35.

77 Mahmoud Darwish, "Not to Begin at the End: Tomorrow Begins Now—The Message of the Palestinian People on the 53rd Nakba Anniversary," delivered on May 15, 2001. The original Arabic text of the speech is available at the website of the Palestinian Information Center: http://www.idsc.gov.ps/arabic/quds/arabic/statement/old/quds_bayan135.html. An English translation of this speech is available on the website Mid-East Realities: http://www.middleeast.org/read.cgi?category=Magazine&num=198&standalone=&month=5&year=2001&function=text.

78 Darwish, *In the Presence of Absence*, 38.

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retreated to the well-known motto that he had advocated since the Intifada of 1987—which is crueler: the occupation, or the struggle to end it? The first article was a salute to the International Parliament of Writers for their solidarity visit to Palestine. Darwīsh reiterated his political stances as a responsible victim of history, along with his call for all Palestinians, Arabs, and friends of the Palestinian people to help in sustaining "the incurable malady of hope":

> I know that the masters of words have no need for rhetoric before the eloquence of blood. Therefore, our words will be as simple as our rights: we were born on this land, and of this land. We knew no other mother, nor any mother tongue but its own. And when we realized that it has too much history and too many prophets, we understood that pluralism is an all-embracing space and not a prison cell and that no one has a monopoly over land or God or memory. We also know that history is neither fair nor elegant. But our task, as humans, is to humanize history, as we are simultaneously its victims and its creation … our state of affairs today is self-evident, it is not a case of a struggle between two existences, as the Israeli government would like to portray it: either them or us. It is a question of ending an occupation. Resisting occupation is not only a right, it is a national and human duty that transforms us from the condition of slavery to the condition of freedom. The shortest road to averting more disasters and to reaching peace is to liberate the Palestinians from occupation, and liberate Israeli society from the illusion of controlling another people. Which is crueler: the occupation or the fight to end it.… Hope in liberation and independence. Hope in a normal life where we are neither heroes nor victims.[79]

While this call was yet another assertion of Darwīsh's reformulation of the difference between heroism and victimhood, the atrocities of the Israeli occupation continue; "Unhappy is the land that has no heroes. Unhappy is the land that needs heroes."[80]

Through his unique relationship with ʿArafāt, Darwīsh was able to conjure a grand trope in which he identifies ʿArafāt, as a symbol of Palestine and a leader of the Palestinians, with his fellow Palestinian, Christ. Despite the burden implied in this image of ʿArafāt, Darwīsh did not give up on the idea

79 See Mahmoud Darwish, "An Incurable Malady: Hope," *al-Ahram Weekly* 580 (2002), modified translation. http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/580/cu1.htm.

80 Bertolt Brecht, *Life of Galileo*, in *Collected Plays: Five*, trans. John Willett, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (London: Methuen, 1980), 115.

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of "dismantle[ing] the hero, for the hero grew bored of heroism," but rather suggested it was time for the Palestinian victim to descend from the cross of Israeli occupation. For Darwīsh, the Palestinians "fear the heights" and "keep silent about the Apocalypse," as he declared in the poem "Jidāriyyah [Mural]."[81] It was time to strip David's image from Goliath's shields. It was time to urge Goliath to let go of David's rock. And certainly it was time for Darwīsh to shout his final cry, in which he figured an understanding of Palestinian suffering as a precondition for understanding one's true moral identity:

> Between one beat of a wounded heart and the next we ask: how long will we carry on cheering as Christ ascends to Golgotha? Is the Palestinian side all that is left of the famous "Arab-Israeli struggle"? Does this account for such neutral incapacity before so lurid a black and red scene? How we fear now that Yasser Arafat's cries will be pinned forever to a wooden cross: present events contain enough of the aesthetics of martyrdom to make a whole nation's mourning superfluous on an endless Good Friday. Tears purify the soul, cleansing the body even as they sting with salt, and tearful spectators now await live coverage of the moment when the tragic hero is crowned with an appropriate end, making the tightly wrought elements of the story into myth, the hero ending, as Arafat has put it, "a martyr, a martyr, a martyr." From this day on, he who does not become Palestinian in his heart will never understand his true moral identity.[82]

81 Darwish, *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*, 160.

82 Mahmoud Darwish, "A War for War's Sake," *al-Ahram Weekly* 581 (2002), http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/581/fr2.htm.

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