

# RIFTS, RUPTURES, AND FRACTURES: THE (IR) RELEVANCE OF POSTMODERN CONCEPTUAL FRAMES FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF PALESTINE'S POET MAHMOUD DARWISH

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**Abstract:** This article responds to the relative neglect of reading Mahmoud Darwish from a postmodern perspective. Inspired by postmodern theory, we suggest that Darwish after Oslo agreements in 1993 seeks to have a displaced and dialectical encounter with the collective identity; he utilizes a transition from being into becoming, from filiation into affiliation, knowing that this transition mirrors rifts, ruptures, and fractures in the Palestinian historical and geopolitical conditions in the post-Oslo era. By looking at poems written after the Oslo Accords, which were described by Bashir Abu-Manneh as “the root cause of the disintegration and liquidation of Palestinian agency,” we argue that Darwish’s persona manifests the postmodern intellectual who is tempted to leave the collective and expatriate himself to hone an independent self and thought that provides a fresh perspective and a new understanding of Palestinian collectivity. While Darwish’s pre-Oslo poetry expressed a collective voice, identification, and commitment to the national narrative, after Oslo, he gets more personal and, perhaps, detached from and critical of the nationalist political entities and narratives. Building on theoretical insights from both postcolonial and postmodern intellectuals, we also articulate ways in which the dialectical relation between postcolonialism and postmodernism appears in Darwish’s poetry. We find that the persona at times combines, and at other times, fluctuates between, singularity and multiplicity, certainty and suspicion, the collective and the personal, place and space, tradition and innovation, while seeking revision, transition, contingency, dynamism, fluidity in the contemporary, post-Oslo time.

**Keywords:** postmodernism, postcolonialism, transitions, ruptures, national narratives, Oslo Accords, Palestinian memory

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## Introduction

Instability, disorder, incoherence, disunity, fluidity, difference, and pluralism are commonly accepted as the main characteristics of postmodernity. These can promise success and prosperity for the postmodern subjects who inhabit a highly fragmented world. Postmodern subjects celebrate this sort of fragmentation and turn it into a creative force and an enabling state. They are restlessly wandering, “crossing boundaries” and “charting new territories in defiance of the classic canonic enclosures”, to quote Edward Said (1993: 384). They think of moving from filiative bonds, which are confining and restrictive, into affiliative relations which promise multiple affiliations and identities (1983: 20). To do so, the postmodern subjects need to have a displaced and dialectical encounter with their inborn identities which, at one point, constituted an integral part of their own being.

As circumstances change, it is only natural for populations, groups, and nations to reconsider their histories and to reset their priorities according to whatever requirements, contingencies, and rules the new times will bring along. Such more dynamic, revisionist views will necessarily imply that the very same fundamental narratives will be viewed differently with the advent of different contexts and contingencies; thus what was acceptable, convenient, or necessary at one time might become irrelevant, unacceptable, or even undesired in the new condition. Old narratives are significantly challenged; narratives are multiplied; collective ties loosen; monuments fracture; and mirrors splinter. In order for the postmodern subject to cope with this conflict between collective commitments and personal mobility, between circular and linear interpretations of identity, s/he will have to strike some kind of balance between the old and the new, between past loyalties and present opportunities.

Multiplicity of interpretation, supplementarity, difference, and relativist practices and attitudes have become the norm for endurance, often survival, in the postmodern world. In fact, change has become the natural state of things. As Derrida aptly describes in the conclusion of his seminal work “Sign, Structure and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” singular truths and stable realities belong to an older time that is so distant, and perhaps less familiar:

For my part, although these two interpretations [the singular and the multiple; transcendental and non-transcendental] must acknowledge and accentuate their difference and define their irreducibility, I do not believe that today there is any question of choosing in the first place because here we are in a region (let’s say, provisionally, a region of historicity) where the category of choice seems particularly trivial; and in the second, because we must first try to conceive of the common ground, and the difference of this irreducible difference. (1978: 285)

As he joyously argues for a world of freeplay, multiple signifieds, a world which has no transcendental structures or points of origin, Derrida points to the conflict such a decentered type of existence will necessarily have with history, presence, and the singular and authoritarian narratives and interpretations. Derrida subtly admits that this transition does not happen without causing much tension between the old and the new, the universal and the contingent, and the dominant and the emergent systems of thought.

Such tension is even more intense in the case of colonial and postcolonial subjects who have had to cope with failed state apparatus, economic distress, political corruption, bad governance, multiple displacements, various forms of mobility and fragmentations, instability and disorder, and, on top of all, the lack of present options. The absence of a coherent and stable narrative, which reflects the lack of closure in colonial contexts, would compromise their past lives and their existence in the present. Accordingly, such matter-of-fact transitions in the postmodern condition are often perceived as problematic by colonial and ex-colonial subjects who suffer oppression, marginalization, and identity crisis.

This aptly applies to the Palestinian writers who responded to postmodernity in multiple ways that correlate with the various forms of displacement, fragmentation, and identity crisis they and their people have lived, provided that Palestinians still live in “the colonial present” and their postcolonial state is “not in any sense an achieved condition, but . . . an ‘anticipatory’ discourse, looking forward to a better and as yet unrealized world” (Gregory, 2004; Williams, 2010, 93). While the ways in which Palestinian writers have reflected on postmodern condition are of significant value to both postcolonial and postmodern fields, this issue has been understudied. The Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008), for example, is exemplary of Palestinian writers whose contributions constitute a dialectical relation with postmodern thought, and examining his work in this light will yield new insights and fresh perspectives.

The article therefore constitutes a response to the relative neglect of reading Mahmoud Darwish from a postmodern perspective. Inspired by postmodern theory, we suggest that Darwish after the Oslo Accords in 1993 seeks to have a displaced and dialectical encounter with the collective identity; he utilizes a transition from being into becoming, from filiation into affiliation, knowing that this transition mirrors rifts and fractures in the Palestinian national narrative and fabric. By looking at poems written after the Oslo Accords, which were described by Abu-Manneh as “the root cause of the disintegration and liquidation of Palestinian agency” (2016: 159), we argue that Darwish’s persona manifests the postmodern intellectual who is tempted to leave the collective and expatriate himself to hone an independent self and thought that provides a fresh perspective and a new understanding of the Palestinian collectivity. “The Owl’s Night” (1995),

“The Mural” (1999), “Counterpoint” (Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading, 2007a), and “The Cypress is Broken” (2007b), provided us with ample evidence on Darwish’s treatment of concepts such as fragmentation, freeplay, relativism, contingency; the poems also feature innovative approaches and schemes for coping with transiency and situationality.

## The Duality of the Old and the New

Since the Nakba of 1948, which marks the birth of the Palestinian expulsion, Palestinians have struggled to cohere a national narrative that combines their personal stories together. The Palestinian national narrative includes key archetypes such as the olive tree, the father figure representing history, the unity of the Palestinians across geographies, the keys to their homes, the *fidā’i*, the mother, etc. These components of the national discourse became collective symbols which are endowed with national significance; they constituted the collective memory for two generations of Palestinians since 1948. Palestinian writers from these years of expulsion have contributed heavily to creating and sustaining this narrative. The archetypes of the Palestinian nation feature repeatedly in the works of Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmoud Darwish, Samih Al-Qasim, Jabra I. Jabra, Ghada Karmi, and Edward Said, to name a few. These national icons featured throughout Palestinian writing until early 1990s when the Oslo Accords were signed. The consequences for this destabilizing moment were grave for the Palestinian national narrative. Palestinians had to reexamine their narrative in light of the new realities.

The Oslo Accords created the Palestinian Authority (PA) and gave them only a limited responsibility of self-governing some areas of Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Issues such as sovereignty, the rights of refugees, and the status of Jerusalem were, however, delayed. Joseph Massad argues that the signing of the Oslo Accords served to make the different interests of the Palestinians living, variously, in what is now Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, and the diaspora, incompatible, if not contradictory: “Although the Palestinian people remain one spiritually, their material interests are different” (Massad, 2006: 114, 127). In the lead-up to the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian leadership began preparations to establish an independent state, promised as part of the peace process, while marginalizing their main national and collective rights, including the rights of refugees to return to their homeland. By only agreeing to negotiate with the Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza in Madrid in 1991, Israel effectively destroyed the political unity of the Palestinian people, leaving Palestinian refugees living in the diaspora bereft of leadership and profound presence. The supposed “peace process” instigated by the Oslo Accords proved to be a false promise for an unrealized future; it completely

failed to achieve the national aspirations of Palestinian people, and it widened the disunity between their various communities.

In dividing Palestinians into new categories and zones, the Accords reinforced the division and displacement of Palestinians in the catastrophes of 1948 and 1967. Instead of putting an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people, the Oslo Agreement formalized the occupation of their land. The PA is powerless and ineffective against the enforcement of increasingly encroaching borders and checkpoints by Israel; it has instructed Palestinians, especially in the West Bank, that they have no power to resist the atrocities of the Israeli army, and that it would be less harmful to submit to its military power. The current political discourse of the PA leadership subscribes to passive resistance, or even defeatism (Fox and Qabaha, 2020).

Accordingly, the 1990s and beyond represented a new phase where old collective identities were challenged; relativist and fluid meanings crept into the scene; dreams were deferred; collective, inherited archetypes, once universal symbols, have now become more transient. In light of this new condition, the national narrative needed to be revisited and transformed in some form. A body of knowledge, argumentation, agendas, splits and divisions started to appear, triggered by the new realities.

### **“The Owl’s Night” and the Symptoms of a Rupture**

This section delimits the crisis caused by the duality of the old and the new conditions as depicted in the poem “The Owl’s Night” which was written only a few years after the signing of the Oslo Accords. The poem depicts the unsettling nature of the new realities and the uneasy process of negotiating collective memories, dreams, and woes at this transitional period in the Palestinian history.

The poem presents a rupture with the collective ties and the universal meanings that the Palestinians had carried ever since their first exile in 1948. Tension appears in the nervous relation the persona has with his condemned father, who, unlike his son, does not seem to have any problem with carrying a hundred-year-old olive tree on his back. The persona lives a state of utter confusion and misrecognition because these universal symbols, are now losing much of their collective force. He confuses the letters of his name; his mirror splinters as the eternal tent looms in the horizon.

The return of a few thousand Palestinians to their homeland under the Oslo Agreements is paradoxically described as “absence” not “presence”. The return home will ordinarily signify unity with the land and people for the Palestinian exiles. However, in this case, it will only push millions of the Palestinian diaspora into eternal exile. The Oslo Agreements postponed the fulfillment of the right of

the refugee to return (*ḥaq al-'awdah*), and thus prolonged their exile. Even those who returned to Palestine, in search of their roots in order to reaffirm and perform their heritage, or to find out more about themselves and their ancestry, had to confront the reality of the transformation of Palestine into Israel.

One of the distinctive features of Palestinian narratives of return is that the returnee protagonist is almost always in search of an icon of collective and national significance such as a person, a tree, stone. These are all figures of recognition and belonging that the exiled protagonists need to find in order to reconnect with the roots from which they were torn after the 1948 Nakba. As the narratives proceed, we encounter the protagonists' tones of loss and deracination. Instead of a successful reunion between the protagonists and the figures of belonging, we notice that these figures become more estranged from the protagonists or less visible to them. As Darwish states, "I shall not return, as I went, and I shall not return . . . not even from time to time" (2014: 57).

The terminology Darwish uses shows that he views the return of Palestinian refugees, including himself, in the future as something uncertain, indefinitely deferred, and precarious, although he strongly believes it is a fundamental Palestinian right. "The temporal displacement or dispossession" of Palestinian refugees, their exclusion "from past and future time", as Mattar calls it (2014: 109), has irrevocably obstructed Palestinians from returning to their roots. Their return is not only "impossible" because Israel obstinately refuses to acknowledge their *ḥaq al-'awdah* (right of return), but also due to the fact that the gap in time of many years in our collective history since then, as Ghada Karmi asserts, "had made us different people, with new lives and new identities" (2016, 314).

The involuntary absence of Palestinian refugees from their past home for more than half a century is a substantial force that could obscure the link between Palestinian refugees and their native place. Richard van Leeuwen asserts that "conceptions of space are a unifying, structuring force that is fundamental to our sense of identity and our relationship with the material world. Consequently, a disruption of the ties with the environment inevitably leads to various forms of fragmentation" (2004: 178). Physical and psychic fragmentations are the defining features of the lives of Palestinians expelled from their land in the 1948 Nakba (and 1967 Naksa) and the prevention of their return. This resonates with Said's following comment in *After the Last Sky*, the title of which is quoted from Darwish:

All of us speak of *awdah*, "return", but do we mean that literally, or do we mean "we must return ourselves to ourselves?" The latter is the real point, I think, although I know many Palestinians who want their houses and their way of life back, exactly. But is there any place that fits us, together with our accumulated memoirs and experiences? (1986: 33)

Palestinian refugees sustain an image of home that is irreconcilable with the real home they confront upon return, the return which triggers other forms of displacement. Whereas the return of Palestinian exiles is supposed to turn their disconnection from their roots, their home, their land, into a connection with them, the practical circumstances of their return after Oslo thwart their repatriation and instead convert them into nomadic people.

In light of such mismatch between the imagined narrative and the post-Oslo realities, the imagery in “The Owl’s Night” is unsettling, symptomatic of the destabilization and the fragmentation of the single unifying narrative. The wind polishing the flute does not produce music; it rather creates the nightmarish atmosphere of deserted castles. The owl sits undisturbed by human presence while the persona sends bad omens about the condemned Father into the night, “Was that condemned man my father who burdens me with his history?” Temporal continuity has been severely disrupted, if not severed—the nation is a group where no one remembers when it all started. Spatial continuity has likewise diminished with the division of the Palestinian populations into three distinct groups. The speaker feels the burden of memory, weighing heavily on his back. He is not any more able to carry the father on his back and roam the world of exile. Paris will have to lay Priam to rest.

Marianne Hirsch’s notion of “postmemory” is invaluable to the exploration of how inter-generational memory is significant to the formation of both collective and individual identities in Darwish’s poetry:

“Postmemory” describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. (2012: 5)

Darwish’s speaker oscillates between past and present and uses a displaced relation with his father to convey the tensions between these two temporal states. He enfolds his past completely and in doing so, he is left with a sense of being “unrooted”: his memories embodied in his father, which ties him to the past, to his nation, and to his relationship with his family, are integral to the formation of his identity. However, his attempt to forget, or to enfold, the past is unsuccessful as he recounts that: “We saw absence heaping up its selected things and pitching its eternal tent around us.” Enfolding his memories uproots and relocates him in a refugee tent; which paradoxically becomes a site that constantly reminds him of

the traumatic Nakba that made him a refugee. This endless cycle of remembering and forgetting enacts what Ihab Saloul calls “ongoing memory” which represents “a memory that harks back to a traumatic originary event (*al-Nakba*) and, at the same time, is constantly reworked, reactivated by new events and rearticulated in new acts of memory” (2012: 211). Darwish therefore explores the possibility of exiting history into the space of myth, “forming letters on the space of the night”. The atemporal space of mythology allows for a state less conditioned by history. Only there can the story be preserved and its validity sustained. Darwish once wrote that “it is imposed on the Palestinian to pass through the mythic in order to reach the familiar . . . [to be] confined to a mythic writing of everyday reality, of the Palestinian present” (1997: 27–28). In this way, he also puts some distance between the poetic persona and the real. While he is still strongly identified with the Palestinian collectivity, he started to get more personal, perhaps detached from, and critical of, the nationalist political entities and narratives which, for many, he represented. His use of the word *imposed* shows the extent to which he feels the necessity of transition into mythic figures.

He might give himself a new birth outside time and place. He might as well choose a new name for himself. By connecting the original state with the birth outside history, Darwish explores the space of myth offered by language. The realization that the original state cannot be recovered is the underlying assumption in both cases. By all means, his options are symptomatic of the crisis between the old and the new conditions. The duality is divisional at this point. The old is set against the new condition, and the persona seems to fail to contentedly marry the two. This state of anxiety will yield discontent with relativism. Will the Story disperse into stories? Can the persona substitute new meanings for the old Story? Will he find the letters for a new name? Will the speaker demonstrate ability to transform the fractured and discontinuous narrative into a vehicle for self-fashioning and for inhabiting the world at large? It will require innovative means to circumvent the doubt and skepticism and to simultaneously allow enough room for the new, yet essential birth.

## Relativism and the Broken Cypress

Darwish addresses the concept of relativism directly in his more recent poem, “The Cypress Broke”. He defies the menace of relativism which by now had crept into the Palestinian political discourse, and which had been for a long time an established tradition in postmodern theory and practice.

Postmodern subjects are commonly encouraged to pursue their own truths and to abandon metanarratives and overarching global solutions. Lyotard argues that all grand narratives should be viewed with suspicion as human experience



is so disparate and varied. The way people interpret the world is contingent upon their different cultural backgrounds and individual experiences. Every supposed “metanarrative” derives from a very specific context and promotes a subjective way of seeing the world; they are not actually objective or universal at all (Lyotard, 1984).

In light of these subjective and relativist trends, truths have become more contingent and therefore less stable. Relativism has the potential to break History into histories, Truth into truths, the singular into plural, and exile into exiles. If applied to the Palestinian context, such relativist delineations will throw into doubt the story of a Palestinian nation. Perhaps there was a Palestinian exodus; perhaps the Palestinians voluntarily left their villages into exile; the right of return may apply to the first generation of Palestinian refugees but not to the second and third generations. Perhaps there was nothing called the Palestinian people who could claim right to land, state and nationhood; perhaps they should accept any solution even if it compromises their existence as a nation.

“The Cypress Broke” directly engages with such potentially precarious relativist logic:

And a boy said: I used to draw it perfectly,  
 its figure was easy to draw. And a girl said: The sky today  
 is incomplete because the cypress broke.  
 And a young man said: But the sky today is complete  
 because the cypress broke. And I said  
 to myself: Neither mystery nor clarity,  
 the cypress broke, and that is all  
 there is to it: the cypress broke!

According to the relativist logic, even the simplest, most direct, matter of fact events will be subjected to endless interpretations; as such, the broken cypress turns into a floating signifier which accepts a wide range of signifieds that are both subject- and context-dependent. If viewed in relation to the garden, the cypress might be the odd object which takes away from the harmony of the scene; therefore, it is better if it goes. If viewed in relation to the sky, the broken cypress will leave an empty spot which takes away from the beauty of the sky; therefore, it leaves behind a vacant spot. From the point of view of a child, it means an easy object to imitate in drawing; for users of the road, its body will constitute a barrier; lovers will not even notice the disappearance because the cypress never provided them with enough shade to sit in private. Relativism in its crudest sense will allow for infinite interpretations for this one single event. No one is entitled to judge any response or attitude as right or wrong. All views are equally valid.

This relativist logic should probably remind us of Said's discussion of knowledge and power wherein he argues that knowledge is created by those in power. This kind of knowledge is political and it might destroy nations and build others. The history of Palestine has been rewritten across ages by those in power; they have been spoken for and represented in ways that justified their colonialism. As Said argues "history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and re-written, always with various silences and elisions, always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated"(1978: p. xviii). Palestinian history was unmade, silenced and rewritten by colonial powers; colonial shape and disfigurements were imposed on it by Israeli-settler colonialism. Palestine has become the Palestine of the colonizer to possess, direct, and control.

Acknowledging the potential perilous impact of the relativist logic on powerless populations, Darwish, similar to Said, views this logic with suspicion. To draw attention to the event itself, Darwish's persona declares in a matter of fact assertion: "no vagueness, no clarity, no metaphors; the cypress broke and that is all there is". His closure sounds highly emphatic. In the lure of multi-interpretations, nobody seems to remember the event itself. Infinite interpretations, the subjective views of the child, the lovers, or the commuters on the road cannot distract attention from the event itself. The fact remains that there is an action caused by an agent. By the same logic, no matter how you look at it, there was a Palestinian exodus in 1948. Palestinian men and women had homes from which they were expelled and, no matter how complex the story is, it originates from a watershed in Palestinian history, the Nakba of 1948. Darwish's persona contends that the dispossession of Palestinians in 1948 by Jewish Zionists is the root of the ongoing Palestinian suffering. The Palestinian suffering began with that dispossession, the story that Israel continues to subvert and occlude.

### **Personal Histories: "And my Name is Mine"**

The subjective world of postmodernism is heterogeneous, destabilizing, chaotic, decentered, fragmented, incoherent, asymmetrical, and non-predictable. It constitutes a serious threat to overarching national, racial, and tribal narratives that are essentially homogeneous and symmetrical. Truth falls into truths; History into histories; Nation into nations. As we demonstrated in the previous section, highly vulnerable populations often show resistance to the annihilationist orientations of the relativist logic of postmodernism.

The Palestinians, dispersed in almost every country in the world, are tied together by the anchors of one national narrative. Across geographies, they have experienced the nation, as Anderson puts it, as "a deep, horizontal comradeship" (1991: 7). Millions of them may have never seen each other, yet they bond around

a common past and a shared future. In a highly unstable national context, it is expected that the individual will belong to the group. The imagined ties to a common destiny make subjectivity a far-fetched option.

The subjective, contextual interpretations crept into the post-Oslo discourse, which often showed a good deal of pragmatic, contextual vigor. We are the weaker side; we are under siege; take and then ask more; we have lost much along the way; let's rest from war for awhile. Such rationalizations, often with solid and sound logic, will have annihilationist effect when it comes to the grand nation narrative. The basis crumpled and the fissure became more conspicuous. The one narrative splits into many; the center slips and many supplementary narratives start to surface.

The crack in the wall which was experienced after Oslo required a reverse in roles. The destabilizing force of the historical event called for new ways to cope with the sudden collapse of the Palestinian metanarrative. Subjectivity presents itself as one likely option. It provides the means by which to resist collective amnesia, to preserve the story, and to ensure an open ending. Grand narratives mask the contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in any practice, and they homogenize different stories that reflect different experiences that are necessary to remain different to reflect various aspects of the collective narrative. Postmodern "mini-narratives" are always situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality, reason, or stability.

This paradoxical, reverse movement from the collective to the subjective importations occurs in "The Mural". The persona reclaims ownership over his own name. Now, he clearly remembers the five letters of his name and so definitively writes them in a horizontal fashion on the page. He spells out the significance for each single letter. The package of signification includes the traveler, the adventurer, the disappointed lover, the homeless, the orphan, the agonized soul, the confused mind, the exile, the homesick, and the one loyal to every new birth. These meanings provide a full summary of the whole package of significance for Darwish's own life as national figure. As the persona reclaims authority over the whole package of signification, collective memories become personal and private. His name is his and so is the sea of exile:

This sea is mine  
The wet air is mine  
And this paved harbor road  
My steps and my sperm on it  
is mine.  
And my name, though I misspelled it, in five horizontal letters, is mine.  
(Darwish, 2017)

The persona certainly sounds less collective and attaches personal significance to his name. This transition marks the transition from a state where memory belongs to a nation to a state where it belongs to the individual. As it becomes more personal, memory disperses across geographies.

Paradoxically, the subjective positioning provides the speaker with a more liberating and subversive space. The subversive space would practically mean that each one of the millions of Palestinian exiles claims authority over his/her own memory. The singular gives way to the multiple. Memory falls into memories. Each Palestinian exile carries one version of the story. The key, the stones of the old house, the orange tree, the tent, the harbor will infinitely multiply. As it becomes more subjective, Palestinian memory defies obliteration. The son can now lay his father to rest without much tension.

The distance from the collective has a potentially liberating power as well. Darwish's distance from the collective liberates him from the power and control of the stagnant narrative. Darwish's detachment therefore allows him to hone an independent identity that depends on "resistance" to the sense of being submerged within existing modes of containment that are incapable of accommodating the continued colonial reality wherein the real does not go hand in hand with the symbolic. The existing structures of the prospective nation seem to stop making sense and speak to the imagined community. The lived reality in this context is no longer productively "ordered" by existing symbolic systems.

This move in many ways parallels the wider understanding of the Palestinian crisis that many Palestinian writers observed in the wake of the repeated experiences of loss and displacement; Ghada Karmi, for example, described this moment as one where language stopped connecting the Palestinian protagonist (and also the reader) to the world of imagination. Importantly, Darwish claims that his distance from the collective benefitted him in terms of his national identification since it allowed him to reestablish his connection and identification with Palestine, the Palestine he imagined in his poetry. As the persona in "Counterpoint" says: "he loves a country and he leaves: I am what I am and shall be. I shall choose my place by myself, and choose my exile . . . and defend a country hijacked by myths" (Darwish, 2007a). The persona reflects on the tension of the postmodern postcolonial subject who is tempted to leave the collective site and expatriate himself to hone an independent self, thought and perspective that provides a fresh perspective and utilize a new understanding of that collectivity.

According to Anderson, the national self emerges from the destabilization of a unified, coherent subjectivity; it comes out of an "estrangement" from one's self. Anderson explains that "nationality is necessarily an effect of the narratives we tell in the face of an incoherent sense of one's self, a literal alienation from one's self" (1991: 204). What comes "out of this estrangement", Anderson writes, is

“a conception of personhood, identity, which because it cannot be ‘remembered,’ must be narrated”. The conception of personhood in Darwish’s poetry is the final product of his search and discovery of the self that has nothing to do with the name or narrative imposed on him, which is a false, even ideological identity—devalued and doomed self, not quite right, and indeed very wrong and out of place, but one that relies on the slowly forming identity of another self beneath the surface. This search and discovery were inextricably bound with the constant revival and resurrection of his Palestinian memories, cause, identity and context.

### **A New Sense of Exile Emerges**

Whereas Palestinian authors stress the historical and political specificities of their exile and tend to view it as a colonial condition, they share with postmodern authors the notion of exile as a vehicle for self-fashioning and inhabiting the world. Like postmodern writers, Darwish believes that, “despite everything, exile has contributed greatly to the development of my writing”; exile becomes an enabling condition and intellectually enriching experience for Darwish as it allows him to “manage a journey between cultures, between peoples, between cities”, and, for that matter, between narratives (Yeshurun, 2012: 49). For Darwish, exile is a human state and all humans in this planet earth live as exiles, the story of which they seek to tell, yet in different ways as our experiences differ. As his persona argues, “Perhaps I’ll look after myself here. Perhaps I’ll give birth, now, to myself, with myself and choose for my name vertical letters . . .” Here Darwish’s persona seeks to reflect the rift in identity and the fact that identity is never fixed or even stable.

Stuart Hall’s concept of “identity in process” is pertinent in this context. Hall argues that “instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact,” we should think of identity “as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (1996: 4). This is to emphasize that, postmodernists tended to reject the idea that we have a singular, stable, and rational “self,” or they even had a horror of fixed identity. What we think of as our self is actually a collection of different experiences. We are constantly changing and we have no fixed identity. The lack of fixed self is something that Foucault thinks we should embrace rather than fear. He requested “do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same.” Similarly, he said, in an interview with a journalist in 1982, that “I don’t feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning” (Gutting, n.d.). This applies to Darwish. In “Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading,” he ventriloquizes Said by saying:

What about identity? I asked.  
 He said: It's self-defence . . .  
 Identity is the child of birth, but  
 at the end, it's self-invention, and not  
 an inheritance of the past. I am multiple . . .  
 Within me an ever new exterior. And  
 I belong to the question of the victim. Were I not  
 from there, I would have trained my heart  
 to nurture there deers of metaphor . . .  
 So carry your homeland wherever you go, and be  
 a narcissist if need be/  
 The outside world is exile,  
 exile is the world inside.  
 And what are you between the two?

However, "the postmodern postcolonial" intellectual combines the collective and the personal, the past and the future, the place and space, the tradition and the innovation, in their modes of displacement and misplacement. "The self-invention" of their identity responds to the conditions of the past, although it does not necessarily accommodate it. As Hall argues, "[Identities] seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being" (1996: 4). Hall's premise informs our arguments that the persona's experience of becoming is connected with the history, language, culture, and geography of the place (Palestine) where Darwish was born and from where his family and people were expelled. "The postmodern postcolonial intellectual" has a twofold perspective on multiplicity. First, they invest in this multiplicity and they find delight and pleasure in moving from one place into another, from one exile into another, as this widens their perspective and yields fresh insights. At the same time, multiplicity reflects collectivity in the sense that they are descendants of people who are torn between countries, histories, and cultures as a result of collective catastrophes. The above passage shows a nationalist aura and a tendency to turn rupture into connection. Such eternal fluctuation between desiring one thing and craving its opposite can be described as "ambivalent", a term adopted into colonial discourse theory by Homi Bhabha (2004) as a simultaneous desire for and revulsion from an entity or an act. Exiles' feelings of belonging to both sites are ambivalent because such feelings are neither opposites nor complementary to each other. It is a perpetual limbo of "homing" and resistance which ends up disturbing any preconceived understanding of both actions. They seem to aspire

to reconnect with their places of origin, and hope to experience freedom of movement between the two realities, or perhaps overlap them into a new one with the possibility of transcending geographical certainties.

## Conclusion

The post-Oslo national condition is symptomatic of a crisis that resulted from the divergence between national narratives and personal histories. The researchers examined the means by which Darwish positioned himself in relation to such discontinuity. We argued that, as the more global national narrative falters, Darwish counters the risk of relativism and yet he simultaneously repositions his memory into the personal space. One of the distinctive features of more contemporary Palestinian writing, including Darwish's, is that the narrative of the (exiled) Palestinian contributes significantly to the reconstruction of the Palestinian national narrative outside the collective domain. Darwish's displacement from the collective enabled him to open himself to the deeply disorganized state of his real history and origins as he gleaned them in bits, and then tried to reconstruct them in a new, more personal order. Indeed, Darwish's detachment from his people enables him to reconstruct remote time and experience he had in Palestine, and piece together all the different narrative fragments to articulate the Palestinian story.

Said argues, in *The Politics of Dispossession*, that the "voyage in" of the Palestinian in exile, including himself, to the Palestinian context allows a "transition from being in exile to becoming a Palestinian once again" (1995: 4). Priscilla Wald notes the "dynamic interaction" between the lost nation and the seeker for it produces an imagined and reconstructed national/positional identity. Said adds that the output of the dynamic interaction between national and personal narratives is that "national narratives actually shape personal narratives" (1995: 4). One can extend Wald's point by arguing, as well, that in Darwish's case and in the case of Palestinian exiles in general and peoples who were exposed to deracination, the personal narratives acquire a disruptive power of their own.

These personal memories provide counter-memories, and thus counter-histories, to official totalizing versions of history, and these counter-histories can resist and break limitations over the indigenous Palestinian national narrative. They continue to act as a means of resistance to official versions of history imposed by Orientalist conceptions, settler colonialism, and the post-Oslo calls to annul the right of return for the Palestinian exiles. Preserving the story becomes an existential call for the exiles. Unless Palestinian counter-narratives chronicle their story, the Palestinian existence and their struggle for self-determination in the present will be incomprehensible, for as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin suggest, "[w]hat it means to have a history is the same as what it

means to have a legitimate existence: history and legitimation go hand in hand; history legitimates us and not others” (1995: 335). Along the same lines Said argues, the power to narrate is “the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history” (1994: p. xiii). Thus, paradoxically, the preservation of the exile story can conveniently happen by positioning it in the personal story.

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