Concord between Palestinian Resistance and Literature: A Historico-Literary Analysis of Darwish’s Works

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the last seventy years of the Palestinian Arabs’ political struggle for their recognition as a sovereign nation-state as reflected in the poetic and prose works of Palestinian national poet, Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008). Given the relationship between life and literature, the Palestinian situation can be best revealed through their own cultural productions, especially literature. Darwish has utilized his sense of exile and cultural memory to realize the ideals of Palestinian home and its requisite identity. His writings constitute an integral part of Palestinian resistance literature. His works are reflective of a deep aesthetic sense coupled with a profound political understanding of the ground facts within and outside Palestine. He contests the legitimacy of a sustained foreign occupation and at the same time stresses the need of preserving national cultural heritage. He stresses the need of both intellectual and political resistance to the gradual encroachment caused by the colonial settlement regime. The present research has sought to figure out the dimensions of Darwish’s poetic and intellectual contribution to the volatile geopolitical issue of the resistance to a hegemonic control.

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1. Introduction

Palestine lies at the crossroads of history. The historical dimension is an important part of the Arab literature in general and Palestinian literature in particular where the struggle for independence and democratic rights has consistently been discouraged by the colonial masters in the past and by the neo-colonial regimes of the present time. In the context of Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the UN sanctioned ‘two-state’ solution has been systematically undermined by the ultra-orthodox, US-supported Israeli government that refuses to admit the legal and historical claims of the Palestinians. The intricacy of the situation demands an understanding not only through tracking the annals of history but also through the exploration of recorded memory reflected in the literary texts produced in
response to the process of continued occupation and oppression that started with Belfour Declaration of 1917 almost one century ago.

Due to the lack of media and publication resources, the Palestinians have only a negligible privilege of a national sociopolitical narrative internationally. They are always seen through the coloured lens of a biased and censored media that has successfully established the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as only a ‘Palestinian problem’. The Israeli policy of continuous occupation and expansion has been portrayed as a matter of benevolent control over a people who are stone throwers, agitators and suicide bombers always taking to the streets instead of focusing on their personal and social development.

2. The rise of Palestinian Resistance Literature

When the visible structures of identity and culture are threatened, a nation conserves these through the agency of collective memory. The more complex the history, the more vistas of memory would open and hence more complex would be the ways in which a poet perceives, analyses and synthesizes his experience in words. The complexity of human situation gives rise to the density of expression which paves the way for multiplicity of interpretations. Meir Litvak suggests that the evolution of modern Palestinian collective memory has stained their identity over time (Litvak, 2009, p. 1). This has given rise to a body of literature in which the emotional roots of the Palestinians in exile, the condition of the inhabitants of refugee camps and in the diaspora have been expressed. At the time of Israel’s creation in 1948 this literature was called Adab-al-Nakba (Literature of Catastrophe) and later when refugee camps became the permanent abodes of the Palestinians and nostalgia ruled the day, a new kind of literature came into existence called Adab-al Ishtiqaq (Literature of Yearning). The writers of these traditions kept the hope of return and repossession alive in the minds of the coming generations and side by side with a political struggle, a new aspect of resistance literature emerged in 1980s called Adab-al Maqawamma (Literature of Struggle). Owing to a literary career almost as long as the Israeli occupation itself, Mahmoud Darwish has contributed to all of these genres (Milshtein, 2009, p. 80).

Webman refers to “Palestinian People’s Appeal” officially issued by Palestinian National Initiative (PNI) that was read out by Mahmoud Darwish on the fiftieth anniversary of Nakba on May 14, 1998: “We do not seek to be captives of history or victims of the past. The Palestinian people have launched a redemptive journey to the future. From ashes of our sorrow and loss, we are resurrecting a nation celebrating life and hope (Webman, 2009).” Apparently, a regional phenomenon, this intellectual revival turned into a universal appeal and carried a tremendous potential for redefining human thought.

3. The rationale of Historico-Literary study

Due to the onslaught of grand media narratives, an almost complete Jewish control of international broadcasting, unconditional diplomatic and financial western support, and one-sided military supremacy of the Zionist regime, history tends to be only one of the sources of true information when it comes to understand the Palestinian conflict. Alison Weir, the President of the Council for the National Interest (CNI) reports how the Israel-centric American media engineers distorted ground facts while reporting on Palestinian issue (Weir, 2013).

Under these circumstances, only those Palestinian intellectuals who are capacitated with higher philosophical and political acumen can discern the situation and express it with a desire to
preserve national history and thus resist becoming antiquity. Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish are two such names. For a major part of their lives, they remained at the colonial center but did not remain out of touch with the periphery of their origin to which they persistently returned in their writings.

Historico-Literary dimension of research demands that a street-smart approach should be adopted to cut through the partisan historical myths by reading literature in the context of diverse academic discourses including the poetics of culture coupled with Foucauldian notion of power as a shaping force in the world affairs. Louis Montrose refers to it as a reciprocity between the historicity of texts and the textuality of history. Tony Bennett supports this discursive approach as a ‘reading formation’ whereby a researcher can take into account a set of determinations, that are multidisciplinary and all-encompassing and thereby establish the relations between texts and their contexts (Castle, 2007, p. 131).

Jubran refers to the broad cultural background that necessitates a sophisticated intertextuality and which became a dominant artistic element in Darwish’s poetry. Darwish himself declares that he uses intertextuality consciously as there is no writing that begins in the present given moment. There is no clean slate of mind to write upon. Poetry always emerges out of a history or a historical context, personal or national. In a good poetic composition, the cultures mingle and multiple references to history are reasserted. Darwish is convinced that literature and its interpretation could never exist in empty space. It always has an interrelationship of what has gone before and what is present. Literature and history both are inscribed with a beginning. This always gives his poems a colour of cultural identity. Since Darwish claimed to have been writing in a situation where he and his compatriots live in a historical situation that presents itself in the international media as if there is no history of their present. He considers it a strategic move to hold on at a past which is otherwise in danger of being entirely torn away.” (Jubran, 2008, p. 91).

4. Darwish’s contribution to Palestinian Resistance

The apparent Palestinian defeatism as well as the alleged terrorism and its reprisals that the mainstream media portrays seems to take away all hope from the Palestinians and their sympathizers worldwide. But the story on ground is different. The resistance has so intricately interwoven itself with occupation that these have become inextricable. The Palestinian literature of resistance has not let the erasure of their identity take place. Darwish believes that the memory-identity dimension of struggle to cure ‘the disease of forgetfulness’ is very important. In his view the forgotten Palestinians have been disconnected from the social fabric and it is the blessing of memory that helps them applaud even the oppression that they pass through. While they are expected to forget that they are complete human beings, deserving a complete set of human rights, Darwish does not want them to fall sick to the disease of forgetting the homeland (Darwish M., 2013, p. 16).

It would not be possible to understand Darwish’s poetic essence related with identity and home without recourse to such current and counter-current historico-political arguments secured home by the Palestinian and Israeli intelligentsia of various inclinations. The text of Darwish’s works must be placed in this context to grasp the meaning of the political struggle and resistance of the Palestinians which would otherwise be invisible through the fog of diplomatic doublespeak. Without the juxtaposition of cultural poetics and historical phenomeon, the meaning of the textual narrative cannot be fully established because every expressive act is embedded in a mesh of material practices. The literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably and thus no single discourse can promise to
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expose the meta-reality of the diverse human truths. It would be naïve to assume that Darwish may be understood in an isolated space when he gives vent to his exilic pain. For example, in his poem “The Last Evening in This Land” he offers the invaders to enter the Palestinian homes where the sweet wine of Andalusian songs is ready to be drunk. He offers them hot and green tea as well as the ripe and fresh pistachios followed by beds made of green and new cedar wood. He offers them to ‘sleep on the soft down’ of the Palestinians’ dreams (Darwish M., 2000, pp. 149-150).

In the presence of Absence is a fictional account of Darwish’s sojourns in Gaza with his own young self or his alter-ego. It is a self-elegy that tries to build some sense out of the binaries of body and soul, home and exile, life and death, reality and imagination, and past and present. While he stands on the threshold of mortality and immortality, he says he wants to shriek over the loss suffered at the moment of Nakba and ever after. But he soon realizes that his shrieks do not break the universal silence. This futile effort rather increases the obstinacy and the intensity of silence. He declares that his next destination is to knock at the ‘world’s conscience’ but he is afraid that he would not be able to break the silence of the elements that have ‘not mastered speech’ (Darwish M., 2011, p. 74).

Violent uprooting and exile have had deep psychological effects on Palestinians over the last seventy years of foreign occupation and dispossession which is now touching the bounds of complete annihilation of national identity. Palestine is fast slipping out of the grips of the present and is at the verge of sinking into the folds of history. Darwish has tried to record this predicament by interweaving his art of poetry with the story of his life, his political struggle, Palestinian national sentiment and history along with its various human dimensions.

The task that he set before himself was so vast that he employed a hybridity of the available literary genres. His life-long desire to write in a new genre of literature that bordered at the fronts of poetry and prose led him to compose Absent Presence which he admits is a baffling text, not entirely verse or prose, between subjectivity and objectivity. He claims to have tried the very capacity of human language by crossing the interpretative borderlines between poetic and novelistic discourses, one reason being, as he asserts: “When I tell a part of my story, it intersects with the public story, because the public, here (in Palestine), is the personal, and the personal is the public (Darwish M., 2010).

From the narrativization of personal political consciousness, Darwish successfully passes into a universal collective unconscious. In his poem “The Red Indian’s Penultimate Speech to the White Man” Darwish establishes a correspondence between the dispossession suffered by Palestinians and the Red Indians. He makes use of anachronism of modern military technology in the backdrop of Rome and Sparta as a symbolic literary device to stress that civilizations may be wiped out and history may be white-washed many times but the memory cannot be obliterated. He prophetically declares that it would take a very long time to turn the Palestinian present into a forgotten past. He holds the trees on the land and the moon in the sky as his witness that despite “the technology and ideology of madness”, he believes that they would ‘escape from an age we haven’t yet prepared anxieties for (Darwish M., 2009, pp. 158-159)!’

Darwish’s poetry has a complex aesthetic setting. The freedom that he could not see around him in reality had its links in the memories of the past and in the hopes of the future. In view of the prevailing hopelessness and the inherent cruelty meted out to his people, he calls this to be an unnatural world without any semblance of recognizable structures. He calls such a world an abysmal land without a sky. He challenges the camera lens of media that can never record the screams and the
pain when bombs explode and the shrapnel and the drops of white phosphorus pierce and singe the bodies. He finds that the screams of the Palestinians are the only proof of their life. He advises the invention of ‘a wish for speech ... to prolong the hope’ for freedom (Darwish M. , 2009, p. 191).

As a young man, Darwish went through a very varied and uniquely diverse assortment of circumstances. The Nakba of 1948 pushed him into an exile which led to homecoming in disguise followed by several imprisonments and restrictions of mobility, the provision of a Palestinian identity and the consequent revocation of it, falling in love with an Israeli girl of Jewish origin, political activism, statesmanship, politics, poetic publications and public reading of his poetry, worldwide recognition and finally, death in exile. Consistent exile helped him to transcend his personal experiences and group consciousness and he was able to transform the personal example into a universal message of everlasting human toil.

Darwish believed that the truth always comes out. Data generated by the media portals and the fact-finding missions of the UN may be strong and legally useable but for him, the truth is stronger and more striking than these. In his poem “Truth has Two Faces and the Snow is Black”, he despairingly refers to a fictional, albeit suggestive international ‘treaty’ being signed for the obliteration of Palestinian identity as its final provision. He laments his incapacity of despairing any more. Identity is shown to have been personified and moving towards the fence barricading his countrymen from the freedom that the invaders are enjoying. He finds that the entire earth in the region is wet with tears as a ‘treaty of despair’ is being signed, an allusion to the Oslo Accords of 1990s (Darwish M. , 2009, p. 62).

Darwish has the art of completely transforming of the perspective by referring to the historical dimension of the narrative. In his poem “To a Killer” there is a representative subjective voice that speaks to an Israeli soldier and admonishes him for not looking clearly into the face of the Palestinian victim that he has just shot. He believes that if he had seen clearly and enough, he might have remembered his mother in the Gas Chamber. He advises him to free himself ‘from the rifle’s prejudice’ and scolds him for the way he is asserting his identity (Darwish M. , 2010, p. 43). This reverberates Said’s idea that the Zionist regime has wanted Palestinians to forget that they have been dispossessed by the people who taught everyone the importance of not forgetting the past. Said refers to this situation as becoming ‘the victims of the victims, the refugees of the refugees’ (Said E. , 1999).

The universal ethos that Darwish has observed in his poetry reflects other conscientious writers of both Israel and Palestine who like to see the ongoing crisis as a matter of human suffering and try to wake up to the need of the hour and do something about it. As a result of Darwish’s presence on this front, there has been a stirring on both sides. In his epic poem “Forest of Holm Oak”, he refers to the two imaginary belligerent groups and tries to find something in common and soon discovers that acrosses the pitted walls and trenches both communities share the same moon (Darwish M. , 2009, p. 19).

Darwish dedicatedly tries to find an unwavering definition of a nation for his people as a clear and recognizable geopolitical entity that ensures survivance rather than eventual extinction. His poetry has been the record of Palestinian plight, a manifesto of their struggle, and is destined to be the celebration of their history when they realize their dream of freedom and ultimate statehood guaranteeing sovereignty. The term ‘survivance’, coined in the field of Native American Studies has been used by Gerald Vizenor in Manifest Manners (1999), denotes an active presence and continued dignity of native peoples, despite the ‘ethnocidal’ policies of a settler colonial state. Palestinian
survivance continues to be subverted at the most fundamental levels, so much so that by virtue of the callousness with which their case of dispossession has lingered beyond the alleged claims of international justice, the Palestinians have to be recognized and treated as fully human (Calis, 2015). This clearly shows the deep-rooted contempt for the Arab population ingrained in the Zionist philosophy whose main proponents, according to Noam Chomsky, have variously labeled the Palestinians as ‘uncivilized race, savages, Red Indians, squatters for thirteen centuries, a cancer in Israel’s body’ etc. The Palestinian issue has been taken as “a conflict between culture and wild men”. According to Irving Howe, when Zionists referred to “underpopulated Galilee” meaning that the place has too few Jews and too many Arab citizens who have pointless and valueless existence (Chomsky, 1999, pp. 804-805).

On the one hand, Palestinians have to resist ideological erasure and on the other they have to explore and exploit all the available means of justice for their cause. They have to knock at all the doors with the force of an organized assemblage. In *Memory for Forgetfulness* Darwish hails all those who have stood fast to the ideals of freedom and the love of land and dared to “clutch the last stone and the last ember.” Referring to the birthplace of the Messiah in Bethlehem, he prays that the Palestinian charred glooms may be allowed to turn into the ashes of a phoenix from which a new life may rise, “that you may create from these ashes and yourselves a manger for a child to be born” (Darwish M., 2013, p. 49).

In her book *The Arab Spring*, Amelia Smith hails Darwish’s poetry as a combination of nature, pain and anger in so much as he describes his forced separation from the olive groves, orchards, rocks and plants of Palestine to which he cannot return. She recalls his words: “I thought poetry could change everything, could change history and could humanise... but now I think that poetry changes only the poet.” She asserts that Darwish’s poems are often read as deeply personal journeys of discovery into the state of exile. Whether or not his words have changed the listeners may be questionable, but that they have moved millions is indisputable (Smith, 2015).

The state of exile helps an individual to explore that he “is an outsider in every aspect of the word. He does not belong anywhere but to the place of his first memory. The memory becomes a homeland and identity (Darwish M., 2017, p. 218).” Commenting on Darwish’s book of journals *A River Died of Thirst*, Fady Joudah asserts that for Darwish extreme individuation as an exile dissolves into its otherness. His long journey into the self, with the stranger, the humanized enemy, and the collective "we", is a sufi’s "I", metaphysical and existential, simultaneously interior and exterior (Joudah, 2009).

Darwish compares the living generation of Palestinians with the modern-day Native Americans whose past is within their each but they are unable to visit it or even shed a tear at the loss of it (Darwish M., 2017, p. 219). Having been subjected to exile for a major part of his life, Darwish seems to hand over the struggle to his compatriots, the coming generation of Palestinians. He suggests to them to follow their heart’s desire. He cries out for the triangle of earth made of ‘Egypt, Syria and Babylon’ that threw him out of its earth till the poet found only his own ghost to complete himself. He wants to come out of the emptiness of his existence to greet his compatriots (Darwish M., 2014, p. 34).

The narrative structure of his poems becomes dramatic with the frequent use of internal and external dialogue. Most of the time he is talking to a second-person-singular ‘you’ that has various interpretations. For this quality, his actual words must be read, not just to be indirectly quoted. It is because his poetry is narrative in nature but its tone is dialogically nuanced. At times, he establishes a dialogue with the reader and appeals to his or her finer intellectual perceptions. His objective is to
register his presence as a representative voice of a people who have been rendered voiceless through an incessantly negative media campaign. Darwish's words go into making an alternative universal chronicle.

The exercise of writing poetry merely on aesthetic grounds cannot explain or rectify the human condition and therefore it cannot bring about a revolutionary change in the general perception of the world. The postmodern world is an intricate maze with layers of information and enigmatic interpretations. Being a politically conscious and conscientious writer who has experienced a Palestinian home and the consequent homelessness, Darwish has been able to trace the reality of life in occupied territories that never receive adequate presentation in popular media. His words become more plausible as he has seen the political and historical shifts, suffered the after-effects of occupation, undergone the pangs of memory and seen his homeland from the vantage point of an exile in a distant land. Edward Said had clearly envisioned that only the victims have to take initiatives and to initiate a way out from despondency and instinctual retrogression (Said E. W., 2002, p. 397).

Darwish took this timely initiative of describing the Palestinian narrative to the world. It is like maintaining a sacred record-keeping of all that goes in and about Palestine. In a place where they are unable to keep their normal existence intact for long and where they cannot even guarantee the very safety of themselves or their children beyond the next hour, and where the emblems and symbols of their culture are systematically being annihilated, the only way to contribute is to leave a legacy of words for the generations to come so that, in their time, they may decipher the codes of pain and hope in these chronicles and rebuild their identity. Darwish believes that his poetry is a puny voice trying to carve a shape in the rocks that he has left behind in Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). As his home turns into a perpetual prison, the dimensions of exile become more and more explicit. The poetry, he believes, cannot compose a linear history of the people. It cannot substitute the real home either. But it has the capacity of preserving the memory of the past and a possibility for the future (Darwish M., 2010, p. xv).

Darwish calls for the simultaneity of the historical experience and the present prospects for the solution of Palestinian enigma. For him. It is an intellectual, ideological and national project. Darwish hands it down to the present and the future generations of Palestinians. At times, he is nostalgic and tired but quite hopeful at the same time. He hands down the legacy in a fatherly manner when he says that the exiles suffered by the generations of Palestinians have not gone waste and therefore, they would not regret. He believes that the windows of possibilities should be kept open and the relationship of the past with the present should be consistently turned to. He asks his countrymen to weep only quietly so that the enemies never know the anguish they have successfully caused: “Lest our enemies hear / Broken shards clattering within us” (Darwish M., 2000, p. 191).

Darwish’s friend and translator Sinan Antoon notices that the poet’s ghost hovers along the drones that hover over occupied Palestinian territories. Both demand recognition. In a destitute atmosphere, reading Darwish’s words come to him as an antidote. His words celebrate life in all its dimensions and beginning anew becomes possible albeit ‘afflicted with hope’ (Antoon, 2013, p. xix). In his poem “Road to Where” Darwish states, “We are the residents of a long road to a destination, which still bears a single name: Where?” (The Butterfly Effect, 2008). To a question about the demand of the entire historical Palestine, Darwish responded that wanting all of Palestine and the possibility of it are two different things. He underscored the reality and the idea of balance of power. He suggested that a plan of salvaging of what is left is more important than asking for something that cannot be attained
Darwish thus strikes a balance between the resistance and the attainability of freedom.

Under the influence of Darwish’s continuous ‘resistance-for-identity’ oeuvre, several important Israeli writers like Ilan Pappe and Morani Kornberg Weiss, Amira Hass, Peretz Kidron etc. have turned to write and propagate a counter occupation narrative. In his book *How Israel Lost*, Richard Ben Crammer asserts that Israel has become a victim of the occupation no less than the Palestinians, who must have an identity of their own. He reasserts the *humanity* of the enemy group by ironically saying: “If the Palestinians were not less than human, then how would the occupation make any sense? ... Give back the land – the West Bank and Gaza. East Jerusalem (and the Dome of the Rock) for the Arabs, West Jerusalem (and the Western Wall –let that be the triumph) for the Jews (Cramer, 2005, p. 237).”

Israeli intellectual, Amira Hass believes that the aesthetics of literature have an edge of social responsibility and also that the literary landscape must register a positive note towards moral human evolution. According to Susan Sontag, the courage to act or say something itself has no moral value unless we see it in the context of moral necessity that distinguishes it from something amoral (Sontag, 2004, p. xiii). Upholding the moral values, she declares, is like refusing to enter the space where illegitimate orders are given to oppress and humiliate Palestinian civilians while their houses are demolished, groves uprooted, markets bulldozed, cultural centers looted and nearly every day, civilians of all ages are fired on and killed (Ibid. p. xiv).

Marrouchi believes that the greatest contribution that Darwish has rendered to the Palestinian cause is the very act of remembering. Memory, he believes, reconstructs the homeland. He transcribes Darwish’s celebrated phrase “memory for forgetfulness” as an act of remembrance against the act of forgetfulness (Marrouchi, 2004, p. 169). In his book of the same title *Memory for Forgetfulness*, Darwish brushes away the spiderweb of military jets and helicopters and cries “Enough!” He refers to the opponents’ muscles of metal, laser beams and cluster bombs that are there to make an uninhibited show of strength that chews up the cities and the nerves (Darwish M., 2013, p. 173). This poetic desire did not fulfil in his lifetime and he died in exile imagining his country to be free of the alien occupation and control. But he wants to turn that time and space of exile into a moment that absorbs all eternity (Darwish M., 2000, p. 188). Darwish has thus successfully provided us with an aperçu of an unfolding opportunity where the resistance is qualified to match the possibility of achievement.

In his book *A River Dies of Thirst* (2008) published shortly before his death in the same year, Darwish recalls and summarizes his findings regarding the shrinking intellectual and geopolitical borders of his homeland. He feels that the dead are being born in Palestine who live on with their dreams for some time before they rescind dreaming and return to the valley of death and forgetfulness. He recalls how once having fallen from his bed in sleep, he started groping for his own body that was itself trying to search him out. Such is the condition of a man uprooted from his land and dispossessed of his identity. He reminds himself that his only illness is his incurable longing to forget (Darwish M., 2009, p. 35) There is no final solution that Darwish has suggested to solve the plight of his people but the pathos of life under occupation, and the growing hopelessness of return and the growing indifference of the possible political allies makes him think that the river of resistance is slowly drying up and may die of thirst. He paints a beautiful picture of a river that once flowed with all its might intact but its enemies ‘kidnapped’ the mother-cloud that used to nurse it with raindrops. The prognosis of the Palestinian crisis becomes rife everywhere in Darwish’s poetry and literary prose. History comes hand in hand with the spirit of literature in Darwish’s works and provides a plausible stage to watch the
Darwish’s sense of loss is always coupled with a deep longing of return which is integral to Adab al-Muqawamma, ‘the literature of struggle’. In his poem Ummni (My Mother) he craves for the bread of his mother's hand, the stars of his Palestinian childhood, the bird-like journey of return and the nest of love in the homeland (Milshstein, 2009, p. 79). Milshstein chooses to call Darwish one of the “poets of return” i.e., the poets who do not content themselves only by reminiscing about their lost world but also have a resolute desire to return to their homeland through the achievement of statehood. Darwish’s image of home is the search for a space to prove his identity first to himself and then to the world at large. His exilic perspective is often liberating as reflected in his poem “We Travel Like all People”. He claims that the Palestinians travel on the path of life like everyone else, but they return to nothing. He names this path of sociopolitical obliteration ‘a path of clouds’ (Darwish M. , 2013, p. 11).

5. Conclusion

In addition to the UN resolutions on Israel-Palestine imbroglio and the academic debates and counter-debates, the imaginative power of literature has remained influential and sustaining. This literature is unique as a source of first-hand information about the conflict as well as a matter of spiritual healing for the Palestinians who are wasting away in the eventless lives of cramped camps and in the overseas diaspora for generations in the hope of return.

Despite his perpetual physical dislocation and political estrangement, it was Darwish’s memory preserved in his poems and journals that provided him with a means of intellectual escape, emotional survival and cultural intactness. He balanced his personal philosophy, his inherited national ideology and his resolve of a complete and graceful sumud (perseverance) in his writings to prove to himself and to his people that a strong ontological ethnos of struggle is more stable than the acquisition of land and consequent national political institutions.

In his welcome speech of Palestine Festival of Literature shortly before his death in 2008, Darwish referred to a Palestinian writer’s duties when it comes to the description of the precarious Palestinian situation. Darwish suggested that the first and foremost thing to be done is to challenge the fabrications that have come to overwhelm Palestine’s contemporary history meant to erase Palestinians from the ‘memory of history’ and the regional map. He sees the Nakba or the ‘disaster’ of 1948 not as a lost memory but as an ongoing process of uprooting, continuous and existential dread-mongering. He says that the Nakba continues as long as the occupation holds sway. The presence of occupation is the absence of freedom and hence a continued resistance: “This war that Israel wages against us is not a war to defend its existence, but a war to obliterate ours” (Darwish M. , 2008, p. 7). In his poem “Counterpoint” Darwish imagines a dialogue between himself and his friend and compatriot Edward Said. When asked about his identity, Said answers that he is not one person but manifold, he is from here and from there, he has two languages and he dreams in both. There is only one thing that he feels sure about, “I belong to the question of the victim” (Darwish M. , 2009, p. 88).

Keeping this ‘question of the victim’ alive is Darwish’s most significant contribution. It is the answer to this question that ensures a hopeful future for the people of Palestine with a distinct identity, national culture, a proud history of resistance, optimistic national aspirations and collective memory. Palestinian collective memory, according to Edward Said, “has a serious and even scientific meaning” and should not be taken as an emotional slogan. It is an integral tool to safeguard identity (Said E. , 1995). Darwish firmly believes that the Palestinians have not forgotten ‘the keys of their houses that
they left behind’ nor the ‘lanterns of the journey that made them refugees’. They remember their yesterday as well as their tomorrow because their tomorrow is already in the making (Litvak, 2009, p. 54).

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