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## THE FUNCTIONAL USE OF MYTH AND HISTORY IN MAHMOUD DARWISH'S SELECTED POEMS

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### **Abstract:**

This dissertation will examine the functional use of myth and history in three long poems by Mahmoud Darwish: "Mural" (2000), "Eleven Planets in the Last Andalusian Sky"(1992), and "On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea" (1992). Darwish is widely considered as Palestine's national poet. He played an essential role in articulating the Palestinian identity and has come to be recognized as the unique voice of Palestine. He participated in creating Palestinian national awareness by presenting poetry that emphasizes continuity with space and time. He embraced a vision of liberation secured in history. The issues of identity, exile, and the traumatic personal and the collective Palestinian memory of Diaspora, displacement, and dispossession are integral to Darwish's works. Palestinians are struggling against the erasure of the very idea of Palestine. This is best exemplified in Darwish's poetry, especially in his intentional use of myth, history and religious allusions. His employment of myth and history was essential to make significant and symbolic parallels with contemporary events and to embed these events in history in order to tie the past of his people to their present and allow them to create a promising future. In this respect, Darwish's use of myth and history

is functional and not decorative as some have mistakenly argued (Creswell in *Harper's Magazine*, 2009). My dissertation will depend prominently on a theoretical discussion presented by the most familiar theorists in the field of post-colonialism such as Ghassan Kanafani, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and Amilcar Cabral, and in the field of New Historicism such as Steven Greenblatt and Hayden White.

**Keywords:** unique voice of Palestine, poetry, struggling, identity, post-colonialism, .etc

### **Introduction**

Resisting occupation is a prominent theme in the poetry of the Arab Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish. Fifty years of his poetic life were devoted to a lost land, Palestine. The Arab world witnessed a procession of historical events in the twentieth century among which is the unprecedented occupation of Palestine by the Israelis. The establishment of the Israeli state in 1948 and the expulsion of the majority of Palestinians was a disastrous shock to the Arab world. Resistance to such occupation came in various forms: armed resistance, civil resistance, and resistance through literature. This study will show how

Darwish employs myth and history in his writings to resist the occupation and build a national and social consciousness for his people.

The dissertation will attempt to show how Mahmoud Darwish uses myth and history to construct a collective memory as a form of resistance to dominant Zionist discourses. Darwish's poetry challenges dominant discourses as merely hegemonic structures that ignore and deny the legitimate Palestinians' right to Palestine. Darwish rewrites his people's history by reclaiming buried histories, repossessing the Palestinian past, interpreting the present and reconstructing a Palestinian future. The collective voice exists in the individual; Darwish expresses the voice of his people within his personal experiences. He uses history and religious allusions to highlight the reality of Palestine. Darwish is documenting his own and his people's experiences. The employment of history and myth in the three poems, "Mural" (2000), "Eleven Planets in the Last Andalusian Sky"(1992), and "On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea," (1992) is thoroughly analyzed to shed light on how Darwish uses these tools functionally.

Mahmoud Darwish was born in 1942 in *Birweh*, a village near Acre, which became a part of the new Zionist state of Israel in 1948. Towns and villages were totally destroyed; massacres by Zionist gangs killed hundreds of Palestinians and about 800,000 were forced out of their towns and villages (Pappe xii). The official Israeli position insisted that the refugees

fled on orders from Arab political leaders, but accounts by eyewitnesses show that they fled as a result of the evacuation plans of Zionists. There are several well-documented cases of massacres that led to a large number of Arabs fleeing their homeland. The most well-known massacre is the Deir Yasin massacre (near Jerusalem). The number of Arab residents killed in cold blood by right-wing Zionists was about 125 (Shlaim 24-94). They returned the following year and their village was destroyed and was displaced by the Kibbutz Yasur. So they lived in Deir Al-Asad as refugees with the legal status "Present Absentee," meaning they were physically present, but without legal papers. Darwish published his first collection of poems *Wingless Birds* in 1960 while still, a teenager and soon became the "poet of resistance." His best-known poem was "Identity Card". Darwish was arrested by Israeli forces many times for reciting poems protesting the occupation. In the 1967 war, which lasted for only six days, the Arab regimes were disgraced. In his book, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (2000), Avi Shlaim writes that "Israel launched the war not in self-defense as they claimed but to expand their territory" (241). In the same year, the Palestinian national movement was established. It was a political and military group led by Yaser Arafat, called the Palestine Liberation Organization. Darwish moved to Cairo in the 1970s, joined the PLO, and became very close to its leader, Yaser Arafat. After Cairo, he went to Beirut, Lebanon from 1973-1983. War began in Beirut and brought

“bloodshed, death, hatred and killing,” according to Darwish (Darwish Foundation). He lost many of his friends, but his biggest loss was the assassination of his friend Ghassan Kanafani. Darwish then went to Paris. In the 1980s and beyond, his poetry was a reflection of and look at the homeland from a distance; this period of his life is called ‘the exile’(Darwish Foundation).

In 1987, Darwish was elected to the executive committee of the PLO and wrote the Declaration of Independence of 1988 (which was read by Yaser Arafat in Algiers). The Oslo Accords was signed in 1993, establishing the principles for Palestinian self-government in Gaza and the West Bank and making major progress in the latter part of the century. The White House witnessed a historic handshake between Prime Minister Isaac Rabin and Chairman Yaser Arafat. The accords encountered loud and effective opposition within the Palestinian camps. As a result, the PLO was divided and the radical nationalists accused Arafat of abandoning his principles to seize power. Many members within the PLO resigned and aroused great opposition from rejectionists of the Oslo Accords, whether secular or religious. The belief is that the recognition of the Israeli state in Palestine is a great defeat to the resistance movement that calls for the removal of the occupation from all of Palestine. Intellectuals like Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish criticized the accords mostly because it did not carry a promise and a guarantee of an independent land (ibid). This transitional phase of the Palestinian armed resistance

to a negotiation phase in the Palestinian freedom struggle is a historic change. In fact, the aims and goals of the Oslo Accords remained unfulfilled and several factors led to the disintegration of expectations for lasting peace. The continuation and the rapidity of the building of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestine is all a result of the weakness and lack of support in the Arab world; essentially the Arabs refused to oppose Israeli activities.

Darwish lived in either Amman or Ramallah, staying in Amman to write in privacy and peace (Mahmoud Darwish Foundation). He wrote his best poems between 1995-2007. His poems are widely known throughout the world and have been translated into 22 languages (ibid). Darwish's later poetry projects a more intense kind of resistance, seeking to capture the core of the Palestinian experience (Hamdi, Yeats's Ireland, Darwish's Palestine: The National in the Personal, Mystical, and Mythological). He depicts the continuing struggle between the Palestinians and Israelis as a struggle between two memories. Darwish once stated that "every beautiful poem is an act of resistance" (Rahman, Nassar 7). Darwish's literary and political activism occurred in exile and during his travel to many countries such as Lebanon, Cairo, Tunisia, France, and Jordan. He evoked resistance within the Arabs against the occupiers of Palestine from a distance and preoccupied them with reflections of their homeland.

As for the important theorists in this dissertation, the study of Postcolonialism focuses on the opposition to occupation and against the loss of land. It is a type of cultural criticism that describes and analyzes the cultural groups and is not limited to literary texts.

Post-colonial criticism has been influenced by the Marxist thought of Michel Foucault. It is a study of the effects of colonization on cultures and societies during the postcolonial period in the late 1970s. Cultural Studies converges with post-colonial criticism and the critique of postcolonialism is redundant in both cultural and literary studies.

Edward Said is a pioneer in postcolonialism and cultural studies. Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism* (1978) exposes the political aims behind European strategies for colonization of the East by gaining knowledge of the Orient. This dissertation will employ Said's theories and essays in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (2002) and "Permission to Narrate" (1984). In analyzing Darwish's selected poems, this research will shed light on the functions of myth and history. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said argues how culture is used in imperialism and how culture is used to resist imperialism. Said considers the meaning of resistance and how the resistance movement is mobilized against the colonizer. His study of different literary texts results in the study of ideas, cultures, and histories that could not be understood without their structures of power, domination, and

hegemony. Said crafted a broad definition of culture and its relation to imperialism and said it would be impossible to understand the power of imperialism without understanding the importance of culture. Culture, for Said, is the source of identity for individuals, the people, societies and "tradition"(Said xii-xiii) . In his essay "Permission to Narrate", Said calls for a Palestinian narrative that encompasses "a socially accepted narrative to absorb, sustain and circulate them, such a narrative has to have a beginning and an end: in the Palestinian cause" (34). Said states that the Palestinians must have a narrative that involves a homeland. Darwish's narrative is poetic and embedded in history. His poem "Mural" is a complete journey. He uses mythology and history to help to struggle against the injustices against his people. At the end of this long poem, "Mural" Darwish arrives in his homeland, the place where he wants to be buried when he dies. In fact, he is buried in Ramallah, Palestine, but not in his home village, where he hoped. Darwish employs myth and history in his three poems to challenge hegemonic narratives and create alternative interpretations and imaginaries of past, present, and future.

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth: National Culture* (1961) discusses the importance of the search for a national culture which predates the colonial era to find its "legitimate reason" to exist with their people. He argues that national literature with national themes is resistance. Fanon also mentions the use of allusions in epics which are important in forming national narratives that would

help in uniting the national consciousness (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 154). Mahmoud Darwish's poems take part in resisting colonial power by achieving freedom and the return of his people to their homeland.

Amilcar Cabral, like Frantz Fanon, focuses on the notion of culture as an essential element in the liberation of decolonized societies. Cabral redefines the relationship between history and culture because the culture is the product of the history of a people. The multiplicity of social and ethnic groups must be united to empower the culture in the liberation movement. Cabral's arguments apply to Darwish's use of myth and history. The mythical stories, heroes, historical events and characters used in Darwish's poems establish cultural awareness and reclaim a people's history that is in the process of erasure. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) has had a great effect on postcolonial communities, helping them invent a self-imagined image as an action for liberation from oppressive imperial powers. Anderson conceptualizes the nation as an "imagined political community"(6) which is partially dependent on literature. Literature can create an experience of 'unisonality' between the members of a nation (ibid).

Despite the scientific objectivity of historiography, some scholars of sociology would challenge the fact that it is objective. History for them is more than a simple ordering of events; a historical narrative extracts a plot out of various collected facts. Historians are compelled to

make decisions about what to exclude, include, and emphasize to arrange the narrative. (White 39-40) Current political agendas influence such narratives, especially when the subject matter involves a contested land, Palestine. Therefore, interpreting what lies behind the choice to produce certain narratives is beyond scholars and theorists. Hayden White's New Historicist vision, metaphysics looks beyond history and introduces new views on historical narratives: "To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself"(White, "Form and Content", 1). White argues that historians' imagination and assumptions destroy historical material. Stephen Greenblatt adopts a new model of universal history involving humankind and resolving the problem of ethnocentrism by interpreting and evaluating narratives according to their socio-historical situations. Greenblatt developed and coined the term "poetics of culture" that seeks to expose the relationship between texts and their socio-historical contexts. Social, economic and political issues dictate the literary works of any society. He regards literary texts as historical texts. In addition, he assumes that history and fiction are stories and thus are textual. In this light, this analysis of poetry will show that Darwish uses history and historical figures to contest the dominant narrative, thus shaping a new and complex Palestinian identity. Darwish endeavors to construct an identity that can endure destruction and extermination.

Ghassan Kanafani, a Palestinian writer and critic, in his study *Literature and Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966* was the first to coin the term "resistance literature" in describing Palestinian literature in the 1960s, during the time the Palestinians have been struggling to repossess their occupied land. For Kanafani, armed struggle is equivalent to resistance through literature. Through Kanafani's efforts, Arab readers outside Palestine were introduced to what he called "poets of resistance." Mahmoud Darwish, Tawfiq Zayyad, and Samih al Qasim were first discussed within this context by Ghassan Kanafani. However, Darwish is considered the "poet of resistance" and the "voice of the Palestinians" because of his significant contributions in defending the history, myth, and identity of his people.

'Myth' and 'history' are two common words used to present contradictions because, in any sense, the story is either true or false. If it is true, it is history; but if it is false, it is a myth. But there is no doubt that myth and history are interconnected. "They fertilize each other" (Muntz, 1956). Different meanings are given to the word 'Myth'. The word derives from the Greek word *mythos* and it can mean 'saying', 'story' or 'fiction' (Britanica.com). It is defined in Dr. Wheeler's "literary terms and definition" as a "system of stories about the gods, often explicitly religious in nature that was possibly once believed to be true by a specific cultural group" (cn.edu). To really understand what is meant by the word 'myth' one needs to gain knowledge of its

history and the range of meanings assigned to it to examine those ideas against actual examples. People search for narratives—stories about origins, about contact with the divine, and about great leaders of the past--about the defeat, the ethical, the moral and the human codes that give them purpose. The scholarly study of myth may shed light on the influence of traditional myths of cultures and may allow for an understanding of the continuation of myth-making. The real myths or 'charter myths' as Kirk names them, are "myths as representations of realities exterior both of nature and human society, realities which are gods that cause entities in nature and have effects on a human being" (Connell, 85). Walter Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers* argues that all cultures are based on myths. At the same time, myths are not the same as lies. John Thorn argues that "historians have an obligation to embrace a myth as a people's history" (qt. in Klein 4). Engagement of myth within the arts establishes meanings in the relationship between past and present. History absorbs constant change, but myth maintains relative stability. The history of the Jews starts with a religious myth and only stops after it erases historical facts, including Palestinians. It would seem that nothing had ever existed before the history of the Jews and that after the Jews nothing would ever exist again. Darwish employs a number of myths that are related to Palestinian culture: Anat, the goddess of the sun and fertility, the Phoenix, the Narcissus, and many others. Darwish rewrites these myths to create a

relationship between the past and the present.

Darwish alludes to numerous contexts from Islam, the contemporary world, and the displacement of the Palestinians into a tiny space within his poems. Religious contexts and Islamic allusions are not common to the sensibility of Western culture. In addition, he uses representations of other Abrahamic religions in his poems, such as other canons: *Paradise Lost*, and the *Midrashic* traditions of Judaism. The retelling of Jewish stories in the poetry of Darwish's post-colonial use of myth reminds us of William Butler Yeats' work and his similar need to document and expand the collective memory of his people by employing myth and history to restore and revive Ireland's cultural awareness. Yeats hoped to revive a Celtic past, the history of Ireland. This is clearly shown in his poem "To Ireland in the Coming Times"(Hamdi 7).

It presents a rich array of experiences, both personal and collective. The reader can feel the intensity of his language and pronounced resistance. For Darwish, "Mural" is a journey from the past to the present in order to reach a more promising future for him as an individual, and ultimately as a collective. He wanted to finish this experimental journey to attain the ambition of every Palestinian--the return to the land of his ancestors, to be buried on the land of his birth and have the right to be buried there, not in exile. In the second chapter, "Eleven Planets in the Last Andalusian Sky"(1992) represents the

movement between the past and the present. The representation of Al-Andalus in the poem is used in order to draw a historical parallel with Palestine's history. Darwish uses history and myth and shows how he attempts to rewrite history and retrieve elements from the past to construct anew a Palestinian nation.

Finally, chapter three will analyze Darwish's poem "On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea" (1992). Darwish employs biblical and pagan myths, such as Anat. This chapter will examine the myths and history used in this poem to show how Darwish searches for ancient myths, gods and goddesses aimed at keeping the idea of Palestine alive.

#### Chapter One: Mural (2002): Rewriting History

"I had to defend the land of the past and the past of the land, the land of language and the language of the language. I feel that the past is subject to blunder... the past is more ambiguous than the future." (Darwish 1999)

Poetry in Arab culture is related to historicity and place. Walter Benjamin states: "Memory forges the chain of tradition that passes events on from generation to generation" (qt. in Jameson 62). To engage in the past indicates redefining and rewriting the present. In the situation of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, intellectuals were motivated to reconsider Palestinian culture. Poets in the

present still hold on to the past, not only for their values and ethics but because it has significance for the present. The past is recalled, authorized, shaped and legitimized according to the present situation and demands. Antony Giddens argues that tradition is not static because it has the ability to be reclaimed by the new generation and to be appropriated to its cultural “inheritance” from their antecedents to establish identity and lineage (Al-Musawi 2). Darwish, like any exilic poet, utilizes resources from political scenes of chaos and ruins. His poetry expresses and exemplifies the bitterness and sufferings of his physical dislocation and his sense of alienation: “I find myself in the fullness of absence /Every time I seek myself, I find others/When I look for them, I see only my strange self” (Darwish 125). In this sense, poets see the possibility of survival through their poems, body of images, myths, histories, and the names of great places that are lost in a humiliating reality of occupation, cruelty, and dislocation. Darwish deviates from classical norms to make an opposed assertion of belonging, even if this belonging needs the rewriting of facts to comfort the grief of the self. He has to depend on his ancestors’ experiences. The poet returns to an existing tradition to comfort himself even though the moment of return to the land with its ruins from the past is painful. Darwish believed that his poetry is more powerful than great armies. More importantly, he believed that if he did not tell the story and the history of the defeated, villages would be erased from the world’s consciousness, and his own

people’s consciousness, making defeat more certain (Behar 190). His rebellious soul is tempered by distrust of any political or social agenda (Al-Musawi 168).

It combines many strands of Darwish’s poetry together with many movements. It moves between lyric and epic like a grand classic with a discontinuity of narratives. It is a state of mind of a weak poet fighting his path through the tunnels of death and life parallel to Palestine, captured between existence and non-existence. Darwish’s lyrical epic expresses nationhood by reflecting existence and exile by reclaiming personal and collective history. Darwish uses multiple voices and relies on allusion to various spiritual traditions.

The critical study of Mahmoud Darwish’s later style is rarely found in English as well as in Arabic. The critical studies of his early style were of significant focus, linking Darwish with resistance. Darwish’s later poetry conveys an elaborate desire to create new poetic forms and to reproduce poetry as an expression of both survival and possibility. He created a form by experimenting with a lyric, epic, long poem, prose poem, and others. Fady Joudah writes in his essay “Mahmoud Darwish’s Lyric Epic” that Darwish’s transformation phase or as he calls it the “late style” displays a:

[...] shift in diction from a genomic and highly metaphoric drive to a stroll of mixed and conversational speech; the paradoxes between



private and public, presence  
and absence;  
the bond between the  
individual and  
the earth, place, and nature.  
(9)

Fady Joudah explains in his article "Epic" that Darwish's late style is a fruitful experiment of a lyrical epic of completion of an entire life "in dialogue that merges the self with its stranger, the 'Other'." It is as if Darwish was remembering all his private life, in conversation with himself and at the same time, he was conversing with all the world, the universe, expanding the limits of human dignity continuously renewed. Darwish has desired to assure a collective voice in his own personal reflection of death and love: "Poetry can be a form of testimony when it offers itself as an alternative history" (Nassar and Rahman 3). Edward Said's "On Mahmoud Darwish" examines Darwish's later style and describes his poetic quality as "...an instance of what Adorno called 'late style', in which the conventional and ethereal, the historical and the transcendental aesthetic combine to provide an astonishingly concrete sense of going beyond what anyone has ever lived through in reality."(112-4) .

Although he is alive, he also experiences the world of the dead. The mural is a kind of. The word "eschatology" deals with matters of death, judgment day and the destiny of humankind, specifically with the resurrection of the dead to reunite with the divine (Britannica.com). His later style is seen as progressive experiments in

creating a new language and form under the obscurity of death.

Bassam Frangieh argues that Darwish, like Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, writes poetry as a reflection of reality. The dark reality of the Arab society is reflected in the poem, but at the same time, hope remains an aspiration for salvation and for the awareness of the spirit. In fact, al-Sayyab believed that his own death will be his people's salvation; a redeemer and another Christ, "My death is the victory" (Nassar and Rahman 33-40). Similarly, Darwish hoped that his writing and attitudes on national, social and political issues within the Arab World would result in positive change.

As a protector against disappearance and erasure, the poetry of Darwish contributes to the history and he presents his poetic works as historical records, all the while bearing witness. In his later works, Darwish affirms that his ties to his 'homeland' had become historical. In "Mural", the examination of complex connections between poetry (epic and lyric), myth and history will explore the functions that Darwish wishes to establish through pre-Islamic, Andalusian, Canaanite, and other Arab heritage. In this sense, he wants to assert his right to return and proposes that those historical moments are historically determined through nationalistic and religious readings of inherited narratives. Darwish's counter-hegemonic writings against the Israeli and Western discourse are developed through resisting the colonizer's non-recognition of Palestine as a nation and the Palestinian

people as human beings. He focuses on documentation in both his earlier poems as well as his later poems because remembrance is all that is left for the Palestinians in the face of erasure as he writes in "Mural": "We--- who are capable of remembrance --- are capable of liberation"(Darwish 151). He also writes in the same poem in which he is documenting the memory of Palestine: "My present, like my future, is with me /I also have my notebook /Every time a bird grazes a cloud I write it down" (148). Darwish's later style with lyrical poems is more aesthetically refined and always rejects the non-existence of the Palestinian identity. The theme of reclaiming identity is the main theme in all his works.

Darwish's phase of transformation began during the first half of the 1990s in Paris by engaging with historiography and myth-making (Nassar and Rahman 273). He uses history and myth in order to recall certain events that help highlight current events. He dives into the politics of "narrating history" and reviving myths to unveil "the complications and possibilities" that history-writing and myth-making create for affirming national identity (ibid). Darwish writes in "Mural": "Myth has already taken its place---a plot within the real" (148) and "keeps our past newborn/it's the only remembrance, we have of you." Anat is Darwish's controlling myth in "Mural" and "The Phases of Anat" and other poems. The moon goddess Anat, in the Canaanite epics, is well-known for her courage and strength. She was known to be a warrior and recognized for her fertility and also

identified as the goddess of life (Cohn 4). "Every time I turn to face my gods, there is a land/of lavender and I bathe in the light of a moon ringed by Anat"(Darwish 147). The cult of Anat spread from Phoenicia and Canaan to Egypt. Anat is a controversial figure whose elusivity is embraced by many different cultures. It is observed that there are many places in Palestine (called Israel by Zionists) that are named after Anat (ibid). Darwish employs Anat differently and in his own way by restoring his own culture and intervenes between the past and the present to offer a new narrative, a counter-narrative discourse of the colonized (Khamis and Rahman 282). As Celik points out in his article "Alternative History, Expanding Identity: Myths reconsidered in Mahmoud Darwish's Poetry", colonialists use the past to divide and rule. So, the past has to be rewritten by the colonized and the oppressed (283). Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) argues that the colonizer uses the past (Greek antiquity or tradition) as a determinant of national identity and seeks to produce "pure even purged images to support his cause of a privileged, genealogically useful past, a past which we exclude unwanted elements, vestiges, narratives" (Said 15). Darwish deconstructs the old myth of Anat as a way of challenging the use of this myth within the Zionist discourse. The land of lavender is the land of Canaan and refers to Palestine, specifically the coast of Acre, or the "land of purple." The term comes from the Canaanite's use of a purple dye that comes from shellfish along the Palestinian coast (Encyclopedia

Britannica.com). Edward Said also states that it is necessary for this culture to "search for authenticity, for a more congenial national origin than that provided by colonial history, for a pantheon of heroes and occasionally heroines, myths and religions"(Said 226). The myth of Anat in Canaan is evoked by Darwish to legitimize the Palestinians' origins, denied by Western powers and Israeli occupation. It is worth noting that the village of *Saffuriya* was the largest city in population and land size in Galilee. After the expulsion of the inhabitants in 1948, it was totally destroyed and an Israeli settlement, Kibbutz Nahum, was built in its place. The denial of both the Canaanite and Islamic heritage of the land by a manufactured Israeli heritage in the form of archeological theme parks is clear in *Saffurya* today. Israeli occupation resettled in the village and made sure to eliminate its history and diverse cultural heritage. (Masalha 193). As Nur Masalha points out "archaeology has shown that the site holds a rich and diverse historical and architectural legacy that includes Canaanite, Assyrian, Hellenistic, Jewish, Babylonian, Roman, Crusader, Palestinian Arab and Ottoman influences" (ibid). In this light, Darwish is reclaiming Palestine not only on the ground but also at the level of myths and history. Walid Khalidi's *From Haven to Conquest* (1971) states that in about 1224 BC, the Israelites made their Exodus from Egypt and after their forty years wandering in the desert, they invaded Canaan about 1184 BC. Akash writes in the introduction of Mahmoud Darwish's selected poems *The Adam Of*

*Two Edens*: "By this story of Anat we are transported to another lost Palestinian realm--the timeless realms of the gods, the soul, and the very origin of life"( 37). When Anat took the journey to the underworld, she took with her the powers and mysteries of death and rebirth. Anat appeared on the earth when everything was gloomy and dark and her appearance saved the earth from destruction (ibid).

The Osiris and Gilgamesh myths are also included in Darwish's "Mural": "One who was without shape said: "Osiris was like you and me" (146). When he rises from the dead, all will be united and inherit eternal life through magic. Here Darwish uses the Western myth of Osiris and biblical allusions. The Western myth used in his poem indicates his worldly knowledge of the Western culture. In this sense, his Western and Eastern Myths travel across cultures, to enhance dialogue between different cultures and civilizations. In "Mural", myths travel across time, place, and cultures. In Darwish's journey between death and eternity, he employs many figures who tried to defeat death and achieve eternity. He dealt with Gilgamesh, who is distressed by his friend's death, Enkidu. Darwish and Gilgamesh intertwined in the face of death, reminding him of Enkidu's death and of Darwish's own experience with it by searching for answers which were of no interest before and made Gilgamesh the unsuccessful searcher for eternity. Darwish like Gilgamesh had a painful and ultimate personal experience; both tried to fight off death. Darwish's personal experience is parallel to the Palestinian people's who are

in danger of losing their identity and the idea of liberation. Palestinians are enduring the ongoing occupation, and at the same time, they struggle till the end even if death is their destiny because, by their death, the next generations will also fight until they regain their freedom.

Darwish's, "Mural", then is structured around myths, religious allusions and intertextualities from different cultures. Morgan Thais states that an intertextual reference is never "innocent or direct, but always transformed, distorted, displaced, condensed, or edited in some way in order to suit the speaking subject's value system" (Landwehr).

The Narcissus myth in Ovid's version died for love because he was in love with his own reflection in the water. In that spot, a Narcissus flower appeared. Darwish considered his poem as "green" just like Narcissus, giving him immortality and hope after his personal experience with death. But also his land is green, Palestine, which will live and be immortal through the hopes of its people and their determination to return. This is exemplified in the following lines: "Green is the land of my ode/green and fertile/beloved by lyricist from generation to generation from my ode I received a Narcissus"(Darwish 142).

Darwish, like other Arab poets, employs myths out of his concern for culture under the threat of erasure, a culture that has to be reclaimed for the sake of liberation and freedom. Darwish used myths in forty-two poems out of a

total of 292 poems (Sha'ath 45-6). Darwish's myths of Osiris, the Phoenix, Gilgamesh, Narcissus, Anat and many others all deal with the idea of death and resurrection, rebirth and reclamation. He uses a vast array of myths and mythological figures to emphasize this renewal, rebirth, reclamation, and repossession. Darwish's renewal comes from death, his own experience with death and the collective Palestinian experience. Darwish's refusal to surrender in the face of death aroused his creativity and his inspiration to overcome death and live again. Darwish recolors the Phoenix as green (while in the original myth, it is the color gold), reviving it every time it dies. Christ's resurrection is every human's resurrection, and in his revival, life gets to its peaceful nature.

Darwish uses religious allusions to highlight the idea of revival after death and describes the Palestinian nation and its repossession through struggle against hegemonic discourses that deny its existence. Darwish writes: "The Son of Mary was like you and me" (Darwish 146). Darwish has been resurrected just like Osiris and Jesus Christ; they both came back to life to unite people. (Darwish 156).

Mahmoud Darwish writes about historical moments which express the crisis as a sign of the cultural and political anxieties that resulted in the Palestinian condition post-1967 war. In his early style, Darwish adopts a conception of liberation deeply embedded in history and participates in forging a Palestinian

national awareness by proclaiming survival within space and time. In the 1990s, the interest in defining the nation's borderlines began to fade. The poet came out of time and space after the Oslo Accords. Darwish situates his poetic voice between myth and history, a voice that allows for continuity inside and outside of history. For example in "Mural", Darwish says:

Death, is history your twin or  
your enemy, rising between  
two abysses?

A dove may nest and lay eggs  
in iron helmets.

Absinth may sprout and grow  
in wheels of a broken  
carriage.

So what effect will History,  
your twin or enemy, have on  
nature

(Darwish 144)

Darwish's struggle with competing versions of history, the struggle in the present over the past is echoed in his poems. Benjamin states: "Only that historian had the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And his enemy has not ceased to be victorious" (Benjamin 255).

Mahmoud Darwish, like most exiled poets, utilizes as resources the disturbed political scenes that are in chaos: "Who is next after Babylon? /Every time

the road to heaven becomes clear, /every time the unknown discloses a certain end,/the song shatters, prayers decay and turn into prose" (Darwish 124). Darwish stresses the historical and contemporary value of Iraq and addresses Babel as a way maybe of condemning the Arab regimes for the destruction of Baghdad by a dependency on the USA. Darwish sees the possibility of survival through his poems, the body of images, myths, histories, and names. Through the great names, places are lost and dispossessed in a degraded reality of occupation, cruelty, and extermination. Darwish's "Mural" is calling for justice that haunts his poems; it is the discussion of justice in the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation. Darwish reevaluates history, tradition, and civilization to allow for multiple (often divergent) testimonies and evidence. The poet negotiates the past by resisting the loss of memory.

Darwish forged for his people a unique national identity which he hoped would protect his Palestine from the belligerent hostile forces of erasure. The tragedy of his people's history motivated the poet to claim for his poetry the ability to offer a counter-discourse against the dominant Zionist discourse. Darwish uses historical events, figures, and religious allusions to unite Palestinians around a national heritage and identity. Darwish's "Mural" is teeming with historical and religious stories to guide the people to national unity. Darwish writes: "bear the burden of my future and grant me my past" (Darwish 2003:123). The poet wants to reclaim his past to be able to give his

nation the history and heritage to belong to. The relics of the Egyptian obelisks hold history and the people of Egypt will never vanish because their ancestors wrote history. So, Darwish's poems write and record the history of his people as shown in the following lines: "the echo said: only the past of the mighty comes back climbing/ the obelisks of that expanse./Their relics are made of gold."(ibid).

In "Mural", Darwish can be interpreted as an archeologist searching for a Palestinian genesis, a Palestinian culture with rich artifacts buried in the earth. This is the Palestinian evidence which was replaced by Israel. Darwish, by his poetic, archeological format calls for retrieving elements from the past in order to construct anew a Palestinian nation. His poem insists on the events that took place in ancient Palestine and the continuing occupations and crusades that Palestine has experienced throughout history, saying "I was born in spring to keep the orators from endlessly speaking /about his heartbreaking country, about the immortality of fig and olive trees in the face of time and its armies."(ibid). The fig and olive trees symbolize the ancient land of Palestine. By observing the historical and religious allusions that highlight the historical moments of Palestine, Darwish emphasizes Palestinians' sufferings from several destructive armies. On the other hand, we find a glimmer of hope and expectation even though the memory is endangered and culture is being replaced by another. In his late style, Darwish's very personal and the collective

experiences are symbolized by the historical themes that deal with the Arabs and their future. The ancient land, the original land of Palestine, the land of Canaan, marks the beginning of the Palestinian genesis. In "Mural", Darwish is able to penetrate the depths of ancient history, not only Canaanite, so he could encompass all the history of the land of Canaan. Darwish's lost land, the land which revives his body and merges with his soul, is weakened by Babel's captivation, the Egyptian exodus, Sodom's destruction, and the Temple's barricade. The place which awakens the wandering exilic soul and the subjugation of time puts an end to the unsettling of self and soul. For Darwish, the place names in Biblical texts function as an appeal for the unsettled Palestinian present. He delves into the ancient historical myths to heal his peoples' grievances against denial and dispossession. At the same time, Darwish deals with ancient places to reflect the contemporary Arab situation in the present. Christian and Qur'anic allusions also depict religious figures who give evidence of the land of Palestine and the true story behind the Jews' original story. Darwish employs stories and figures from the Quran and the Torah. Much of the Biblical story in Hebrew was distorted:

Two very accomplished Jewish religious philosophers, Martin Buber

and Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who called themselves Zionists, were

nevertheless appalled at the way they saw Ben-Gurion manipulating

the Jewish religion for narrow political ends (Rose 12).

Zionists, then, distorted Hebrew history to fit the political and secular Zionists' interests and enterprise to occupy Palestine and reside in a land that never was theirs. The undeniable influence of the Hebrew Bible on Darwish shows the dense employment of Biblical figures to voice Palestinian grievances. The main textual source of the Israeli sense of the land is the Hebrew Bible, especially the Old Testament: "I told Satan: no, do not inflict your tribulations upon me. /Do not corner me into dualities. /Leave me as I am, uninterested in the Old Testament version. / Let me ascend to heaven, where my kingdom is."(Darwish 133). The evolution of Zionism in the nineteenth century involved the invention of tradition, the creation of national culture, and the construction of national identities from a mixture of folk history and historical myths. As the Zionist movement evolved, they began to assert the biblical myth as valid history. This is to forget the Western efforts at validating the historicity of the Bible. The efforts of both secular and religious leaders influenced many fields of study, especially archeology. This secularization of the Bible is a national enterprise in Israel and a source of reliable historical information of a secular political kind (Sand 64-123). According to the Zionists' prophetic vision, Abraham who

is the first immigrant to Canaan parallels the first immigration of Jews in the late nineteenth century and the killing and expulsion of the Canaanites merge into the 1948 war in Palestine in Darwish's poetry. In addition, King David's conquest of Jerusalem possibly represents 1967, six-day war through which Israel came to occupy the holy city and the West Bank. In this sense, Darwish alluded to the Jewish religion as a policy of narrating the history and sustaining a myth, in order to reveal the complexities within that history. The Hebrew Bible is employed by Darwish as a "politically significant act"(Nassar and Rahman 169). Darwish alludes to the Hebrew Bible as the canon of the hegemonic majority in the young Jewish state that legitimized the expulsion of the Palestinians and his poems are considered to be a counter-discourse (169). Krakotzkin's "On the Right Side of the Barricade: Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem and Zionism" presents a debate between Benjamin and Scholem which shows their criticism of the "utopian return", "redemption" and "Messianism" within the Zionist movement. Krakotzkin's study shows that this return is not just a nationalistic myth, but a settler-nationalistic one (378). John Rose writes in *The Myths in Zionism* (2004):

One of Ben-Gurion's most sensational uses of myth-making, one would eventually so antagonize his critics, was his play on the messianic theme. At first, this may seem preposterous. After all, Ben-Gurion denied the

centrality of religion as an integrating force in modern Jewish nationalism(10).

Prophetic statements by Ben-Gurion incorporate political language, historical heroes, even when they disagree with God. Ben-Gurion stated in 1939 that: “the Bible is our mandate”(nytimes.com). What makes the argument more surprising, Rose states that an Israeli archeologist discovered that the united monarchy of David and Solomon, which was described in the Bible, was a small tribal kingdom of far less significance than expected. In fact, they adopted the dominant Canaanitic cultures and religions (Rose 12). Darwish writes:

Once upon a time,  
Solomon...

What may the dead make of  
their names?

Does gold shine to my vast  
darkness

Or Ecclesiastes

Or the Song of Songs?  
(Darwish 156)

In the above lines, Darwish deals with the Hebrew Bible as a literary text to deconstruct it in order to retrieve a Palestinian nation endangered by erasure. “The Song of Songs of Solomon for Darwish are only poems of the ancient Middle Eastern (Canaan and Babel). Solomon for Darwish is the god of fertility (the legendary King David) and Sholmit is the maternal goddess of fertility (Akash

37). Darwish included a number of prophets known to be in the Old Testament, New Testament and the Qur’an, such as Adam, “Do not go near the borders of God. He alluded to a Quranic text to mirror his own experience of death when the angel of death came to ask him “What have you done there in the earthly world?”(Darwish 119). Therefore, religious allusions in this light function as both reclaiming the heritage of his homeland, Palestine, and the affirmation of his identity as an Arab first and then as a Palestinian. In Darwish’s poetic form, he evokes religious themes associated with practices of faith and conveys narratives with the command of the Scriptural and Qura’anic allusions. It is interesting that Darwish structures his poems to articulate the Palestinian experience and serve political objectives.

Darwish writes of his land and the Canaanite people who always stand opposed to the denial of their being. In “Mural”, Darwish asserts this truth by insisting on “Green---the land of my ode is green... /A single river is enough tempting all ancient myths to ride falcons’ wings/... In contrast to other Arab countries, Palestine has a peculiar history of struggle, resistance, and deprivation characterizing its history. Darwish's poetry takes different expressions, anger, resistance, exile, and death, but his poetry refuses to surrender in a world dominated by internal disloyalty and external hegemony. His poetry has the capacity to challenge Zionist forces and liberate the Palestinian collective consciousness from fear and pain. In the above lines, Darwish has represented the



optimistic spirit of the Palestinian people and embodies an eternal Palestinian dream of return, rebirth, and liberation.

To sum up, at the end of “Mural” when he writes “I am not mine,” Darwish is expressing that he does not belong to himself. Darwish’s possession of the land at the end of “Mural” is obsessive. By reclaiming every piece and particle of Palestine in its history from Anat to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Darwish is constructing a foundation for the Palestinians that has the power to survive and thrive. By constructing this version of the nation, through imagination Darwish is announcing the birth of a nation and at the same time proclaiming the death of another (Israel). Israel’s restrictive and racist policies must lead to this end because whatever nation excludes people cannot survive (Hamdi, Darwish’s *Geography: Space, Place, Identity: Under Construction*. Unpublished). When Darwish makes this declaration, he means the state of Israel, not the Jewish religion. The Jews lived as neighbors alongside Muslims and Christians in Palestine before Zionism was established. All of the people lived together in harmony. Darwish once said in an interview: “History would serve as a scene through which peoples, civilizations and cultures could circulate freely.[...] I want this hymn to take root in the open space of history.[...] I know that its origin is the multiplicity of cultural origin. In such a project, poetry comes up

against cultural racism and rejects any culture based on the purity of blood” (Darwish, *Boundary 2* 82-3)

Darwish’s use of myth, ancient and contemporary history and allusions from the Qur’an lays the foundation for the construction of a successful nation. Edward Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) that culture in postcolonial resistance reveals itself in the literature that is liberating to humans (Said 273). Darwish’s poetry shows how “history is made by men and women, just as it can be unmade and rewritten” (Said, 1994 xviii).

#### Chapter Two: Eleven Planets in the Last Andalusian Sky (1992): Rewriting History

Darwish’s poetic project in his Paris stage underscores the unity of myth and history. In this stage, he wrote the following poems: “On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea”, “A Horse for a Stranger, Eleven Planets”, “The Phases of Anat”, “The Well” and “Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone”. Darwish’s account is an effort to promote history and myth as “reconciliatory rather than hostile,” (Nassar and Rahman 275) for both the Palestinians and the worldwide audience, where all cultures can converse. During his Paris period, the aftermath of the Beirut War (1982) and the expulsion of the Palestinians and the PLO from Beirut was a certain milestone for the Palestinians’ self-dependent policy. This period began with the PLO’s move to Tunisia and ended with the consequential signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993; essentially a national

movement committed to armed struggle morphed into a peace negotiation process. The PLO came to describe a group of people who institutionalized itself and became a state, even if it lacked the real control of its own territory. Darwish was a member of the PLO's Executive Committee throughout the eighties and was very close to Yasir Arafat. He resigned from his PLO position in opposition to the Oslo agreements, saying "My conscious will not tolerate participation in this adventurous decision" (Lindsey, n.p.).

Additionally, Edward Said wrote in his essay "On Mahmoud Darwish" that Darwish's "Eleven Planets" was written as a consequence of three occasions: the quincennial commemorations of 1492, Darwish's first visit to Spain and the PLO's decision to enter the US and Russian sponsored peace talks that had begun with the Madrid conference of October 1991. Darwish had an uneasy feeling about this agreement. He knew that the liberation movement would die and the struggle to free Palestine would end. Darwish, like Edward Said, rejected the Oslo Accords because they were sure that there would be alarming chaos in the Palestinian leadership (Shlaim 247). In the Oslo preparation period, Darwish was prophetic to what would follow as this is clearly shown in his poem "Eleven Planets".

Darwish refers to the Arab defeat and exodus from Spain in 1492 as a foreshadowing of the Palestinians' fate in 1992. Before the

Oslo Accords, Darwish had his own doubts that one day they would wake up to find their history erased. In Beirut during the Israeli bombardment of 1982, the Arab poets (Saadi Yusuf and Ali Ahmad Said) felt the urgency of history and the necessity to narrate history in opposition to the official history written from Western perspectives. In "Eleven Planets," Darwish does not feel at home, not in ancient Egypt or Damascus, which for him were his double, his Palestine a second home from exile: "There is no Egypt, in Egypt, no/Fez in Fez, and Syria is too far away" (Darwish 164). Darwish's "Eleven Planets" portrays Arab cities, but not contemporary Arab cities; instead, he invokes Arab and Muslim historical cities in Spain, such as Andalusia and Cordoba. Darwish turns to history, digging through the chronicles of crusaders, occupiers, victories, and failures to use his rich resource of knowledge and criticize a continued state of ambivalence and dispossession. This focus on history and myth is to enable a restoration of social unity for a new Palestinian era that also required a new poetic articulation. In the mid-1980s, Darwish knew that the fight for Palestinian statehood and self-determination had to take a different route and strategy, requiring long-term action. Darwish and many Palestinian intellectuals sensed the need for their literature, while negotiations with the enemy were being held on the global stage, as a strategy that retains the

historical records of the Palestinian right to the land. Barbara Harlow wrote in *Resistance Literature* (1987) that the Israeli Defense Forces entered the Lebanese capital of Beirut, targeting the Palestinian Research Center and its archives which contained the documented cultural history of the Palestinian people. In this sense, the struggle over historical records is seen as important as the armed struggle. Harlow stressed that the political function of the poet to be fundamental in the strategies of “cultural resistance” in the national liberation movement and the access to history by those peoples who have been historically denied a political role in the international sphere (16). Arab intellectuals used organized resistance through prolific cultural production, which Said referred to as “repressed or resistance history” in “Orientalism Reconsidered” (Said 1985 99). This political activity involves showing the oppressed as admirable by their actions, their culture, their past, present and future (ibid). The greatest need is to represent their historical and social importance in the international arena.

Darwish’s “Eleven Planets” was a new project for the poet, who became the representative and cultural agent of the Palestinian people. He began to investigate history and myth, looking through them for explanations for the occupation of his homeland, his people’s failures and their

alienation from their land. As Darwish writes: “The problem with Palestinian poetry is that it set out –without extra resources, without histories, without anthropologists; it, therefore, had to equip itself with all the necessary baggage needed to defend its right to exist” (Darwish, *Boundary* 2 82). Darwish defends his right to write about his people’s “mythic narrative” as the Israelis wrote their national myth and history from the Bible. Darwish invokes myths of historical Palestine to include a valid history.

The title of the poem “Eleven Planets” is quoted directly from the Qur’an in Surat Yusef: Yusef’s father warned him not to mention his dream with his eleven brothers so that they would not harm him because of his gifts as a prophet. Later Yusef was informed that he had been blessed with the divine power of prophecy. Likewise, in “Eleven Planets”, Darwish assumes both the privileges and the dangers of seeing what others cannot. Quite amazingly, Darwish in effect, predicted the events of the following year (Oslo Accords 1993) when Israel and the PLO signed their historical document. Darwish declares his people’s fate represented by the fall of Granada in 1492. He provides unusual insight into the molded order, but a painful fusion of poetry and collective memory to a threatening reality. Darwish inscribed the national into the international by referring to the crusaders and the Mongols.

Palestine does not limit itself to Palestine. As Darwish writes: “Conquerors come, conquerors go” (164). The conquerors in the past came and went; therefore in the present, the conquerors (Israelis) will also go someday, just like the conquerors in the past.

Darwish stated in an interview by Helit Yushurun in 1996 that Andalus, in the Arab tradition, is the collective mourning for paradise lost, a dramatic attraction to the past. It is similar to pre-Islamic poetry; one weeps over the place, over a home that is gone. He said that he did not claim that Andalusia is theirs, but describes Palestinian exilic feelings using the pain and tears of Arabs who lived there for 500 years. Darwish spoke of Andalusia as a meeting place for all strangers for constructing human culture. The Arabs and the Jews coexisted in Spain and were also expelled at the same time; their exilic fates were the same, their exile from Andalus. However, the Jews were forgiven by the Spanish government, but the Arabs were not. This shows the balance of power. Andalusia for Darwish is the realization of the dream of the poem, a humanistic and cultural golden age. Palestine for Darwish and the Palestinian figure is a son of all cultures that have passed through the land--Greek, Roman, Persian, Jewish and the Ottomans. A presence exists at the very core of his language. Every power left a powerful culture and left

something behind. He says “I’m the son of all fathers, but I belong to my mother”, but that does not mean that my mother is a prostitute, but my mother is the earth. She was both a witness and a victim” (Darwish, Interview, 1996). Darwish does not draw back from a comparison or a place of competition; he knows well where he belongs, saying “time turns around in vain to save my/ past for a moment that gives birth / to the history of my exile / and others and in myself” (163). Darwish states that the Jewish people or most recently Jewish generations living in Europe or America do not remember their exile or have a concept of a homeland, but the Palestinians do feel such belonging.

Darwish implores both historical and modern figures, calling for historical spaces and the duality of identities that resembles his own and his people’s tragedy (Nassar and Rahman 201) like Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936) and Averroes (Ibn Rushd, 1126-1198). *Eleven Planets* is a love poem that embraces time and place, touching the deep bond Darwish had with Garcia Lorca and his Bedouin moon: “I’ll shed my skin and from my language/words of love/will filter down through the poetry of Garcia Lorca/who’ll dwell in my bedroom/and see what I’ve seen of the Bedouin moon” (Darwish 153). His love and mutuality with the early nineteenth-century poet Lorca, who borrowed from the same well of

language, in the way love drinks from the “Bedouin moon”. Lorca became a prominent figure in Arabic poetry. Arab poets were aware that Lorca considered himself to be an Andalusian poet whose poetry conveys strong sympathy with classical Arabic poetry. Lorca declared this in his lecture “The Duende: The Theory and Divertissement” (1933) and confirmed that Spanish poets and poetry are inspired “exclusively” from their “cultural heritage” in the Arab Peninsula and from their enchanted prayers (Lorca). In addition, Darwish was greatly influenced by Lorca’s revolutionary poetic attitudes and his revolutionary struggles. He portrayed Lorca, as a role model for Darwish’s own national struggle and for Spain as his own motherland: “With Garcia Lorca/ under my olive tree” (Darwish 154). But Lorca is described differently in *Eleven Planets*, not as in previous poems where Darwish allowed him to die a heroic and brave death. Death now is the death of a poet, exhausted by decades of struggle and fight. Darwish came to an understanding that not every battle can be won. Darwish’s death has now been different; he simply wants to die while looking at the moon and embracing the image and poetry of Garcia Lorca because he is aware that death is an important pre-condition of writing poetry; death is behind all true poetry. In the article “In Your Name This Death is Holy”, Yair Huri does

not mention Darwish’s optimism and his determination. Even though Darwish’s poem is about death, he also affirms that his identity, land, and history belongs to the Palestinians. Darwish always mentions death in connection with the rebirth of the Palestinian memory and identity: “The keys belong to me, as well as the minarets and the lamps/I even belong to myself” (Darwish 154).

Darwish employs Averroes (Ibn Rushd), a Muslim philosopher who wrote many summaries and commentaries on most of the Greek philosophers and had a great influence on European philosophy, theology, and science. In fact, many of the thinkers and practitioners of Al-Andalus were translated into Latin and passed into Europe’s consciousness, fueling both the Renaissance and the age of the Enlightenment. Darwish wants to confirm the Muslim Andalusian cultural thoughts, devices and artifacts of Europeans. He also mentioned the writings of a Muslim poet, Ibn-Hazm who wrote “The Necklace of the Dove”, a romantic poem which clarifies the various forms of chivalry and its joys and sorrows. “I’ve nothing left but a manuscript by Averroes, /The Necklace of the Dove. /Various works in translation” (Darwish 158). Darwish links the historical knowledge of the great scientific discoveries by Arab Muslims to the claimed discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus in the same

year the Arab Muslims were expelled from Spain (1492): “I know who I was yesterday, / but who I will be tomorrow/ under the Atlantic flags of Columbus” (Darwish 163). Darwish demands a reconstruction of the falsified history of the claimed discovery of the Americas. History does not do justice to the indigenous people of the Americas who were the first to discover America 12,000 years before Columbus (Noakes 2-9). In fact, the Muslim Arabs in Andalusia (Ibn-al Zarqawi) during their golden age were the ones who discovered scientific tools and crossed the continents before the Europeans.

Darwish instinctively creates his own poetry with the full knowledge of history, offering universal ways of seeing and showing unique ways of thinking and provoking thoughts. We are compelled to dig through history to understand the demystifications of history that befell the Palestinians. Much historical unpacking is needed to understand the following line: “Castille raises her crown above Allah’s minaret./ I hear the jangling of keys/in our golden history’s doorway” (Darwish 156). In this verse, Darwish recalls the stories of the descendants of Muslims who were exiled from Spain after the fall of Granada in 1492 as a parallel to all Palestinian exiles who still possess the keys of their houses which they were forced out of, hopefully, to return one day and repossess them. The Cathedral today, which was once a

great mosque with schools and hospitals attached to it, was built by an Ummayyad prince, Abdul-Rahman II, in 756 at Cordoba on the site of a Roman temple. Although its minaret was replaced by a bell tower in the reign of King Ferdinand II of Castile in 1236, its Islamic architecture is still visible today (Jamzari 131-140). Around the time of the Arab defeat in Spain, the Mongols erupted from the East to attack the heart of the Muslim world, destroying Baghdad and its libraries when the city was captured in 1258. As Jamzari points out, “centuries of civilization was razed to the ground” (ibid). The Mongols were a tribe of nomads who relied on and “attacked on their horses” (ibid). Mahmoud Darwish wrote: “No hawk on the flag of my people, / No rivers running East of a palm tree besieged/ by the Mongols swift horses” (Darwish 164).

Arab Muslim civilization in Spain was the foundation of civilizations. Darwish is against any erasure of civilization and against the erasure of the Palestinian history in their land by the Israeli occupation who currently possesses Palestine and influences its history. The loss of Palestinian land and the Zionist occupation threatens the continuity of the Palestinians; this has led to the revival of Arab nationalism. To a people who are left only with memories of the recent past (al-Naqba 1948) and is now exiled, their present state is only the remainder of their

shattered conditions. Darwish attempts to construct a collective memory and voice by accessing a historical memory which must acquire a political function. Edward Said states that Palestinians need to reconstruct their fragmented lives, "by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology designed to reassemble the nation's broken history" (Said 2000). Ilan Pappé is an Israeli's He unmasked the myths that lead to the Jewish state's founding. Pappé accuses the politicians of facilitating (and the military generals of accomplishing the ethnic cleansing of Palestine) crimes against defenseless people who wanted to live in peace in their own land.

Darwish's knowledge of history even takes him back to an ancient peace treaty, called "Peace of Calliance" between Greece and Persia in 449 BC which historians argued was agreed by the Greeks to protect them from the Spartans as a shield signal: "I was Athen's peace and Persia's, /east embracing west/ on a journey to a single essence" (Darwish 157). The peace treaty was a failure because the Persians supported Hippias who had been expelled from Athens (Raubitschek 158). Darwish employed such a treaty to assure that the Oslo Peace Accords with Israel would not succeed because Darwish viewed it as intensifying the conflict rather than producing a reasonable solution for the Palestinians: "An accord which did not provide a

minimum level for the Palestinian to feel that he owns his identity, nor the geography of his identity" (Darwish and in Antoon 76). He also said that they had no share in writing their own course of history. Even before Oslo, he was afraid that the Palestinians would wake up to find they had no past. He also argues that a work of art is a product of a set of "manipulations, some of them our own" (ibid). It is the responsibility of a critic to find hidden places of "negotiations" and exchange (ibid). Darwish is negotiating the cultural aspects of his people and bringing history into his works to prove his people's right to a land that once was theirs and from which they were expelled as well as denied their history and identity by erasure. I know that its origin is the multiplicity of cultural origins. In such a project, poetry comes up against cultural racism and rejects any culture based on the purity of blood" (Darwish Boundary 1999:81-83)

Darwish evokes the theme of exile and dispossession, the feeling of exile from different cultural perspectives, saying "Who am I after these paths of exodus? /.../Time turns around in vain to save my/ past from a moment that gives birth/ to the history of my exile/ in others and in myself" (Darwish 163). He is referring to the exiles of Arabs, Jews, gypsies and even Berbers from Andalusia. He invokes the gypsies' migration differently, but the exile theme is the same, the feeling of strangeness,

expulsion, and dispossession: "Violins weep with Gypsies on their way to Andalusia,/violins weep with Arabs leaving Andalusia" (Darwish 169). The exile of Muslim Arabs is from Andalusia to Fez and Tunisia. We are compelled to experience exile in all its dreadfulness, which is explained by Edward Said in "Reflections of Exile" (2000): "It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a nation place, between the self and its true home;" he also says that "the achievement of exile is permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind" (Said 141-2). The scene of expulsion appears again in his poem "Eleven Planets" that brings together the past but returns to haunt the present as a reminder of a vision for a just future for the Palestinians. As Hunaida Ghanim points out, "Darwish wrote about Andalusia and the expulsion of Muslim Arabs, not for nostalgia but for retrieving the past to return to it different" (75). The feeling of exile and expulsion is imagined by Darwish in the 'Last King' of the Muslim Arabs in Andalusia as painful and difficult: "I'm the decay's last King/I leap off my mare into ultimate winter. /I'm the last gasp of Arab" (Darwish 155). The last Nasrid king of Granada, Muhammad XII, after his defeat and at the mountain, looked behind at the last view of Granada and wept. The Spanish engraved it on a stone, "Here was the last sigh of the Moor." The king's mother pushed him to fight

even though she knew that he would lose and she recited "You cry like a woman over a kingdom that you did not defend like a man" (Jamzari, n.p.). Darwish relates to this king identifying with his feeling of loss, saying "After the stranger's night who am I?" (Darwish 161). In asking the question "Who am I?," Likewise, Darwish's disappointment with his Arab brothers in not aiding in the Palestinian fight against Israel is clear in this verse: "My people betray my people/in wars defending salts. /But Granada is gold, /silken words embroidered with almonds" (Darwish 151). Poetry constantly listens and recalls voices from the past, voices that are no longer there. Recalling the history of the Palestinian struggle is to convert the present into a promising future. This future, however, is based on a past that determines the present situation of dreaming of a return to the land.

Chapter Three: On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea (1992): "All the Prophets are My kin"

The land of Palestine, in the eyes of nineteenth-century European historians, had a unique religious and symbolic significance; it was the home of Judaism, the birth of Christianity and the core of the Crusader adventure. While historical geography and travel guides, cast light on Palestine's physical features and biblical events, the study of its inhabitants was overlooked. Their intentional strategy to study the land without discovering its



people harmonized with early Jewish visions. In the minds of many Europeans, especially the Zionists Jews, Palestine was “empty” before the first wave of Zionist settlers arrived in 1881-84. The famous Zionist’s slogan, “a land without people for a people without a land,” was coined by the British Zionist Israeli Zangwill in 1918 (Siddiq 489). Thus, Golda Meir, the Prime minister of Israel, said, to the *Sunday Times* of London in June 1969 that “Palestinians do not exist” (ibid). Therefore, it became an ideal land for racial superiority and imperialistic ambitions. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1979) shed light on Western misrepresentations which he called “Orientalism” and defined as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the ‘Orient’”(3). Throughout this century, the interaction between power and knowledge produced a series of avenues; each question the legitimacy of the other. Writing the historiography of the indigenous people of the land of Palestine into a Palestinian history for a fuller understanding of the present reality is a necessary endeavor. Recording and providing physical evidence and oral history were not just the work of Palestinian historians, but the work of a poet. Darwish’s work is as important as any historian’s work. Darwish, on the other hand, is similar to an archeologist who digs for ruins to provide evidence of reality on earth; there existed a land called Palestine and a Palestinian people with a great civilization (Canaanites), a great past, and a present and a glorious future of return and

freedom. His poems can be identified as “writing back,” a “counter-discourse” or “oppositional literature.” Darwish’s use of myth became a space to rewrite and construct the Palestinian narrative and to produce an alternative to the Israeli national discourse which relied heavily on the Bible. Angelika Neuwirth perceptively states:

Poetry is essential to strive to rewrite or to create its own Book of Genesis, to search for beginnings and to interpret myths of creation. It is through these myths that the poet can return to his origins and ultimately touch upon daily life in the present. History and myth have become an unavoidable detour to comprehend the present and to mend the gaps created by the usurpation of the land and its textual representations. (Neuwirth qt. in Nassar and Rahman 174)

The narrative of the powerful has to be rewritten as Darwish has endeavored to do through his poetry.

This chapter deals with Darwish’s poem, “On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea”. It narrates the tragedy of the Palestinians throughout history. In addition, it discusses Darwish’s employment of myth and history as a way of resisting the Zionists' appropriation of

Palestinian tradition, history, and myth. He writes his poems from the perspective of a community envisioning the past. Most of Darwish's work was centered on Palestine and for the Palestinians. Darwish attempt to construct a Palestinian consciousness enabled him to become the voice of his people. In his poetry, he aspires to establish a collective Palestinian identity despite the Palestinian's separation from his/her land. Darwish, alongside other Palestinian writers, calls into question the colonial narrative through which the Zionist state's existence is justified. Darwish's mythic, imagined worlds encourage readers to look beyond the dominant reality. The Zionist strategy is to eliminate the Palestinians from their historic homeland by stealing the Palestinians' land, history, and culture. The erasure of Palestinian history is termed by the historian Ilan Pappé, in his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, as a state-organized "memoricide" (17).

Darwish's assertion of the Palestinian identity through reviving history is shown in the following line from "The Hoopoe" (1993): "Athenians/Mother of Plato. Zarathustra, Plotinus, mother of Suharawardi/ Lure us to you like the unfortunate partridge is lured to the net, and embrace us" (Darwish 2003, 47). Searching and reviving the Palestinian identity by linking Palestinians to their heritage reduces the feeling of loss and uprootedness as Jerry Diller points out: "Only by looking back to their roots and sources can individuals truly understand who and where they wish to go in the future" (Introduction iii).

The land of Palestine was dominated for thousands of years by Canaanites, Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, Muslims, Turks and the British. Darwish considered himself to be the inheritor of the various civilizations that have passed through his land and extends himself to the Arab Peninsula, to the Canaanites and the Islamic Empire enriching his Palestinian heritage: "My Mother is a Canaanite and this sea/ is a bridge leaping to Judgment Day" (Darwish 77). Darwish gathered themes from the Palestinian past to reveal basic facts about Palestinian life and ambitions. Apparently, the past for Darwish and all Palestinians is an archive of old victories and glories, collective sufferings and past memories. The past is an avenue for renewing the nation's awareness and igniting their power for unity and victory. Frantz Fanon in "On National Culture" stresses the responsibility of the native intellectual to speak of their nations in defending their culture and reclaiming it against foreign domination that "distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (37). Amilcar Cabral, like Frantz Fanon, in "National Liberation and Culture", emphasizes the value of culture as a keystone of resistance against imperialism, stating: "Culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people's history and the determinant of history" (53).

As well as history, Darwish employs myth to transmit Palestinian identity to the next generations. The ancient gods of the Canaanites are referred to in his poem, "On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea", to trace modern Palestinian

origins. In many of Darwish's poems, there are references to Anat (the Palestinian Moon Goddess), ancient Canaan's most beloved deity. Anat was the Queen of Heaven and Earth, the goddess who passed through seven successive gates and gave up all she had accomplished in life until she was stripped naked, with nothing left to her but her will to be reborn (Akash and Moore, Introduction 34).

Anat, for Darwish, is an avenue for recalling the origins of the Palestinians who are descendants of the Canaanites, the ancient inhabitants of the land of Palestine who came from the Arab peninsula, and whose history predated the history of the Israelites in Palestine. Darwish connects the Canaanites' past with Anat to the Palestinians' present: "My Mother is a Canaanite" (Akash 77). He intentionally merges the character of the goddess Anat with his mother Hooriya, who became united as one (Hamdi, *Yeats's Ireland, Darwish's Palestine: The National in the Personal, Mystical and Mythological* 10). Myths in Darwish's poem are expressing an individual as well as a collective crisis in a poetic narrative to relate the mythic world to the real one, merging both worlds in space and time.

Darwish's merging of the past with the present is clearly indicated in the following: "I am myself despite being shattered on metallic air/I've been handed over by the New Crusade/to the God of vengeance and The Mongol/skulking behind the mask of Imam" (ibid). He employed the "Crusades" to take the readers back hundreds of years but

substituted it with the word "New" to compare it to the new and present. Yehoshua, wrote a novella called *Facing the Forests* (1996) in which his themes of the Crusades mirror the most recent Israelis who destroyed Palestinian villages.

Even the title, *On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea*, implies that Darwish's message to the world is that Palestinian heritage stems from Canaan. The stone has two meanings. Firstly, the stones that Palestinians used in the first Intifada (1987-1993) against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinians threw stones to fight back against their shrewd enemy and protest against the killing of civilians. Secondly, the stone may mean the carvings in stone (ruins) that are used to document the entire history of the Canaanites. Darwish states: "I write: 'The land is my name / and the name of the land is the Gods who share my place on its chair stone'" (79). A similar idea is displayed by Khaled Mattawa in *When a Poet is a Stranger*. For Mattawa, the "stone" may have referred to the Dead Sea scrolls that were discovered in 1947 by a Palestinian shepherd. Mattawa also believed that Darwish's stone may have been the relics which are evidence of the native's existence before the Jewish invasion (305). Darwish suggests that the rigid, defined Biblical accounts prevent any kind of dialogue (between the community of the same heritage) in order to reach the depth and history of the sea. Accordingly, the Dead Sea lives dead in the memory when the relationship with those around it is purely spatial not narrative.

His artistic strategy of incorporating long passages from the ancient books of the three main monotheistic religions hints at the elements of a new mythology of Palestine. Darwish affirms his heritage, despite the fact that all the Crusaders, invaders and new occupiers that have entered Palestine were defeated in the history of wars: "I myself, despite being shattered on metallic air" (Darwish 80). The Zionists will disappear and be defeated like other invaders in the past: "I am myself, despite my defeat /With elusive time." (ibid). Darwish asserts the Palestinians' belonging, determination, and attachment to their origins and land. His powerful words seek to unify the land with the words, "The one who imposes the story inherits the earth of the story" (Ghannam and El-Zen 8). Darwish asserted his people's belonging to the land despite their defeats in the past and the present: "No one occupies the sea/Cyrus, Pharaoh, Caesar, the Negus, and all the others/ came to write their names with my hand/on its watery tablets/I write: the land is in my name" (Darwish 79).

Hobsbawm argues that British and Western imperialism invents traditions outside their nations' borders and imposes these traditions on its colonies to justify their exploitation. With Palestine, a nation that must be fought for, Darwish's works are similar to the work of a nation-building strategy which questions the construction of the colonizer's narrative by his artistic tactics of resistance against the imperialistic narrative. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983)

regards the nation as imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know its members: "yet in the minds of each life in the image of their communion"(49). He argues that the nation is limited, defined by limited boundaries. As Anderson believes "the beginnings of an answer lie in the cultural roots of nationalism". Anderson argues that the nation is sovereign by imposing itself "by territorial stretch"(ibid) and a community that is willing to die for the sake of their nation. Therefore, the creation of national myths (Anat, the moon goddess) the nations from others; this myth-making functions as a unique creation of national awareness. It motivates and revives a common story of origin for all the people in its asserted sovereignty. For Irish people, they identify themselves with their cultural ancestors, the Celts. The function of myth-making and evoking history in Darwish's poems is decisive in restoring his community as a self-determined entity that distinguishes itself as a unique community that people are willing to die to defend. Darwish calls for a continuity with the past which is clearly felt in his works: "I am myself" which is repeated in his poems, especially in "On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea".

For Darwish, the land and poem are united. The repetition of the original name of his land (Canaan) can elicit change and transform future generations by reminding his people and bringing its history back into existence (ibid). Edward Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) that the first step to decolonization

is the restoration of the land and its history, "...its geographical identity must, therefore, be searched for and somehow restored" and "the land is recoverable at first only through imagination" ( 225).

A question arises of whether Darwish wanted a secular or a spiritual state. That is to say, can imagine Palestine incorporate numerous communities? Can this coexistence of both secular and spiritual be achieved? The fact that human beings are social and religious beings and cannot exist as isolated individuals creates the need for religion to authenticate a certain community and reinvent their roots. In this sense, the desire to return to integral myths that can be reconstructed for new circumstances satisfies basic religious needs. In "On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea", Darwish keeps repeating "All the prophets are my kin" (Darwish 74,77,81). It is possible that the poet wants to return to what preceded--the truth of things, the achievement of human dignity and the origin of being in the original land of all religions-Palestine. Darwish wants his people and his readers to reclaim their origins historically and spiritually through religious themes to trace their belonging to the land and regain their dignity. Darwish assumes that all the prophets are his relatives by blood relationship. It is mentioned in all three monotheistic religions that a multitude of prophets lived, died and was buried in the sacred land of Palestine while others have passed through the land leaving their holy traces in it.

Darwish's fascinating use of Biblical narratives through symbols and

allegories and his artistic expression in his own words offer comfort to his people through the words of God. His outstanding religious knowledge grants him access to historical knowledge of origins and ensures his competence in cultural bargaining with the enemy and accessing the global plane. Darwish says in the poem:

Has Noah passed from one  
place to another

Just to say about the world,  
"It has two separate doors"

But the horse flies with me,

And I fall like a wave

That eats away the foothills

....

Jericho sleeps under her  
ancient palm tree.

There's no one to rock her  
cradle.

Their caravans settle down.  
So sleep. (80)

Noah and his ark, mentioned in the three Abrahamic religions, is a metaphor for exile and dispossession of the land by the great flood. Darwish bears in mind the image of al-Naqba (1948) when the Palestinians were expelled by force from their homes by boats. Darwish employed these stories to determine their ideological positions and their spiritual values, especially in the case of the Palestinian

conflict. Darwish stated in an interview in 1996:

As a good Palestinian, all religions are found within me. I am a man who has inherited the earth, the landscape, culture, and history. I live in a paradise of symbols. So, I speak as a Christian without hesitation, and without hesitation, I use Jewish mythology and heritage (A landmark 1996 interview).

To speak as the voice of his people is to reach his people with poetry that speaks of their story in a particular context, molding a contemporary Palestinian identity that is deeply rooted in Palestinian soil and experience.

Darwish took unaltered speech directly from the Qur'an, specifically from *Surat Mariam* as recorded in *Tafsir al-Mizan*: "And shake the trunk of the palm tree towards yourself, it will drop on you fresh ripe dates...refresh your eye" (Verse 25). Mary, Christ's mother is the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'an. God is telling Mary not to grieve. Darwish's purposely mentions this *Surah* to inform the reader that Jesus was even born in Palestine and that God promised her hope as He also does to the Palestinians. Darwish says in the Poem: "Jericho sleeps under her palm tree/There's no one to rock her cradle/Their caravans settle down. So sleep" (Darwish, 2003, 73-4). Quranic

allusions and biblical narratives are embedded in real history. In 1939, David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister and the essential founder of the state of Israel declared: "The Bible is our mandate (For Palestine)" (Shlaim 16-22). This biased claim was made for obvious ideological and political ends. For Darwish and thousands of Palestinians dispossessed from their lands, his private experience and his personal suffering did not silence him, but on the contrary, he employed extensive biblical narratives, as stated in many of his interviews, to concentrate on "Palestinian identity." This identity includes the whole history of Palestine from the ancient era to the present, specifically the Israelite phase of the historical records. Darwish re-examines and exposes Israeli identity, negotiating it through his poetic imagination. Palestinians, due to their dispossession by the Israeli occupation, are threatened of losing their sense of self, a complete cultural, historical and geographical erasure. Despite the exilic state of Darwish and many Arab intellectuals, they believed themselves to be politically-committed writers and poets whose works in literary fields served political purposes.

Darwish insists that Palestinians did not surrender or even leave of their free will in the past, and will never surrender in the present or future. Darwish opposes the perception of an Arab surrender in the writings of the fourteenth-century historical figure, Ibn Khaldoun (Hamdi ). He asserts in his poem "On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea" that the Arabs have never surrendered, neither in

the past nor in the present, "I say: We're not a slave nation/with all due respects to Ibn Khaldoun"(Darwish, 2003 80). This brings to mind Yasser Arafat's common expression: "O Mounts, winds will never rock you." Darwish attempts to reclaim Palestinian self-identity and confidence in the face of the excessive challenges, saying "I'm growing greener with the passing of years"(ibid).

### Conclusion

A thorough study of Mahmoud Darwish's remarkable poems "Mural", "Eleven Planets in the Last Andalusian Sky", and "On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea" shows that Darwish's poetry becomes a metaphor for history's devastation of Palestine. By addressing a variety of historical experiences, narratives, and myths, he places the Palestinians' legend within the broader context of postcolonial tragedies. The Palestinians are witnessing and experiencing the erasure of the very idea of Palestine, and this is clearly indicated in Darwish's poetry, particularly in the poet's use of myth and history. Darwish's deliberate (not decorative as some may claim) use of myth is essential in evoking the national consciousness of his people and articulating a collective memory of a whole nation.

The collective memory has played an integral role in counter-hegemonic discourses, cultural resistance, decolonization, liberation, and the nation-building process. For Darwish, as for the Palestinians, reclaiming the past from a

specific point in time has become an eternal present. The politicized collective memory of the *Nakba* represents an intrinsic part of Palestinian cultural resistance and the struggle for self-determination.

Darwish's own experience of displacement that marks the life of a refugee is parallel to the experiences of other Palestinians. He was deeply aware of the responsibility of being the voice of the Palestinian people and of the risk that his poetry might be applauded without the essential awareness of and the affinity for its political context. He stated in an interview: "I am worried that my audience will not appreciate my works in the way I want them to" (Wafa Amro). In his poetry, Darwish is bearing witness to ignored and suppressed histories. He is recording historical events and effecting political change. He is searching for lost land, a land filled with actual ruins of a people stripped of their homes, identities, and history. In his poems, there is a richness of reminiscent antiquity buried just beneath the surface; there is also evidence of inhabitants and places that have been totally erased. His poetry is a challenge to the erasure of an entire nation. It is a defense of past, present, and future, a Palestinian genesis.

His responsibility as a poet is to restore and defend a stolen history, to reunite the divided self that resulted from dispossession, and to allow them to return to their homelands. In an interview Darwish declares:

A poet in our conditions [...] had to be the historian, the geographer, the mythicist, the negotiator, and the fighter, [...] it should tell the story from the beginning to the happy or tragic ending [...] you are facing a problem of an erasure. (Darwish 98)

According to Fanon, all forms of cultural productions – songs, novels, poems, short stories, etc. – turn into political allegories where national and communal concerns become intentional goals. When these are threatened and delegitimized, the writer works from history and tradition (209).

The collective memory and commemorations have a crucial role in nation-building. They are a means of conveying the injustices forced on the victims and of narrating their experiences of sufferings and struggles. As Nur Masalha argues in his essay “Sixty Years After the Nakba: Historical Truth, Collective Memory, and Ethical Obligations” (2009), the *Nakba* is still used to describe the endless degrading policies against the Palestinians. As a result, the Palestinian side of the story of how they became refugees in their own lands becomes unveiled. Accordingly, recording and rewriting oral stories of the *Nakba* generation and the following generation unmask the power of these testimonies in uncovering historical truths. Due to the lack of written sources as a result of the 1948 war, the Palestinians sought to rewrite their history in various

means; literature, arts, music, films and oral history that describes the lives of the Palestinians before, during and after the *Nakba*. Their stories of displacement offer the world a broader perception of what really happened and is still happening.

Examples of such testimonies, taken from my interviews with people from the first generation of the *Nakba*, underscore the importance of oral history. Abu Ali was a young man who lived in a village called Al-Shajarah, west of Tiberias. Recalling the bitterness of the catastrophic moment with tears in his eyes, he said:

I used to have my own house and my garden; I even remember my father's rocking chair resting in front of the house. Everything was beautiful; the family and the neighbors were all happy. But when the Israeli army drew near, we got ready for them and sold our precious things to buy old guns. We resisted until we thought we won and saved our village. Remorsefully, we were forced to surrender and leave our land. I went with my family to a refugee camp in Lebanon with all its miseries and intolerable conditions. We got back after one year. Life was impossible because they did not let us return to our



house. So, we had to live with neighbors. I was very furious and insisted on going back to Lebanon again in order to immigrate to the USA. From that time until the present, I have lived in the USA. My home is in Palestine and we will come back someday. I dream of getting back home; if not me, then surely my children and grandchildren will. I want to be buried in my village (my translation).

The second story is by Samira. She was just a child (11 years old). She lived with her twelve family members in al Ramleh. Her father worked with the police and was out of town when it all happened:

I will never forget the day when I heard my mother telling us to wrap our necessary things in sheets. Did I ask why? All she said was "quickly bring your brothers and sisters and stay in one room until the truck comes." I remember that she had arranged for a truck to take us from our home to someplace. My father was not at home, so we had to go to the police station and tell him. On our way, we heard that some of our neighbors were shot and screams were heard. My

mother gathered us around her so we could not see or hear anything. The police station told us that my father was not there, so we had to travel without him. I remember we went to Hebron to my grandfather's house until my father came back after two weeks

The second war I witnessed was the *Naksa* in 1967. I was in Jerusalem in Wadi al Joz. My husband was a doctor helping to save the injured people in *Al-Haram*. The sixth day, I had to leave for Amman to save my children. I feel very guilty for leaving my house and land, but we are a nation that is destined to be dispossessed and in exile (My translation).

Abu Ali and Samira are among thousands of Palestinians who suffered the forced expulsion by Zionists. We must not forget the many others who were murdered by Zionists while trying to return to their homes from which they had been expelled.

Mahmoud Darwish's poems are teeming with common images of an everyday occurrence from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict such as exile, dispossession, violence, wars, and injustices. At the same time, Darwish challenges these hegemonic actions, as his poems also express happiness, hope, and aspiration for

political change. The Oslo Accords (1993), the beginning of the possibility of coexistence with Israel shocked intellectuals such as Darwish and Edward Said. However, at the same time, these events revealed the beginnings of a new genre of Palestinian texts. They did not abandon anger and reflective writings, but it signaled a more advanced stage of seeing and handling history with more deliberation (Masalha, 2014, 253). Darwish left us with responsibility and his legacy resides in our hands. Our responsibility is to rewrite, reclaim and fight with words to defend the victims against their oppressors, to do justice to Palestinians who suffered and are still suffering from Israeli occupation.

Ending my analysis, I am hoping to conduct further critical studies so that Darwish's best works will not fall into neglect. I hope that I have fulfilled my personal promise to Mahmoud Darwish and Palestine by reiterating the Palestinians' strong will to survive and emphasizing the unending struggle to their return to that sacred land.

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