

Narratives of Diaspora and Exile in Arabic and Palestinian Poetry

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Abstract

This paper underlines the attitudes of Palestinian / Arab poets toward the issues of exile and identity integral to their traumatic experience of Diaspora and displacement. From a historical context and within the parameters of colonial / postcolonial theory, the paper advocates a new critical perspective exploring the dialectics of exile and identity in Palestinian / Arabic poetry in order to argue that exile, in contemporary world literature, becomes a signifier not only of living outside one's homeland but also of the condition caused by such physical absence. Aiming to reach a state of reconciliation rather than conflict, the poetic voices, analyzed in the paper, reflect a sense of nostalgia and emotional attachment toward their homeland. The paper argues that Palestine, for the Palestinian poets, is not a paradise or an idealistic utopia that only exists in their poetry and imagination but a geographical reality caught up in national and religious limbos and rooted in the trajectories of colonial history and diabolical power politics.

[**Keywords:** Diaspora, Exile, Poetry, Arab, Palestine]

Introduction

As a result of a history of catastrophes which leads to spiritual dislocation and ontological disappointment, the tradition of exile, an epitome of modern civilization, is deeply rooted in Jewish literature. In other words, the Jewish literary archive is punctuated with narratives of exile due to disasters of displacement, persecution and suffering culminating in the holocaust. However exile as a metaphor did not start with the Jewish Diaspora but the first story of exile is the story of Adam and Eve. Furthermore, contemporary Arabic/Palestinian poetry is also characterized by an intensive feeling of exile. For example, the great Yemeni poet, Abdullah al-Baradouni, in "From Exile to Exile" expresses his frustration at a homeland dominated by tyranny and governed by dictatorial/monolithic regimes:

My country is handed over from one tyrant
to the next, a worse tyrant;
from one prison to another,
from one exile to another.
it is colonized by the observed
invader and the hidden one;
handed over by one beast to two
like an emaciated camel (Jayyusi 1987:157)

Frustrated by the stagnant political scene in a world governed by sword and fire where prisons are stretching out all over Arab territories from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf, al-Baradouni cries in anger:

In the caverns of its death
my country neither dies
nor recovers. It digs
in the muted graves looking
for its pure origins
for its spring time promise

that slept behind its eyes
 for the dream that will come
 for the phantom that hid.
 it moves from one overwhelming
 night to a darker night. (Jayyusi 1987: 157-8).

Finally, the Yemeni poet laments a homeland overwhelmed with recurrent defeats and haunted by deep feelings of alienation and exile:

My country grieves
 in its own boundaries
 and in other people land
 and even on its own soil
 suffers the alienation
 of exile (Jayyusi 1987:158).

Moreover, the Iraqi poet Abdul Wahhab al-Bayati captures the spirit of exile which characterizes modern Iraqi poetry reflecting the plight of the Iraqi intellectuals forced to live outside their country due to the brutality of the Iraqi regimes in the post WWII era:

And we from exile to exile and door to door
 wither like the lily in the dust
 beggars we, O moon, we die
 our train missed for all eternity (Khouri / Algar 1975: 111).

In a related context, Ian Buruma, in an article entitled, 'Real Wounds, Unreal Wounds: The Romance of Exile', argues:

Exile as a metaphor did not begin with the Jewish Diaspora. The first story of exile in our tradition is the story of Adam and Eve. No matter how we interpret the story of their expulsion from the Garden of Eden — original sin or not — we may be certain of one thing: There is no way back to paradise. After that fatal bite of the apple, the return to pure innocence was cut off forever. The exile of Adam and Eve is the mark of maturity, the consequence of growing up. An adult can only recall the state of childlike innocence in his imagination; and from this kind of exile a great deal of literature has emerged. (Buruma 2001: 3)

Whether associated with the Jewish Diaspora or the fall from Eden, exile may be viewed as the forced or self-imposed moving away from one's homeland. Thus, exile becomes a signifier not only of living outside one's place of origin but also of the inner condition caused by such a physical absence. At the same time, exile may also connote the exclusively spiritual, intellectual or even existential condition of someone who is alienated from the surrounding community. Whether exile is physical or existential, spiritual or intellectual, it has always been a source of inspiration for poets and writers. As Buruma argues, the exilic experience has triggered a great deal of literature characterised by "the melancholy knowledge that we can never return to Eden" (3).

Historically, the theme of exile has occurred as a basic motif in Arabic poetry from the pre-Islamic era up to the modern time. For example, in the early twentieth century, the Egyptian poet Ahmad Shauqi, known as 'the prince of poets', explored the theme of exile in his poetry. In 'An Andalusian Exile', he says:

O bird crying on the acacia tree, alike are our sorrow
 should I grieve for your troubles or lament my own?
 what tale have you to tell me? — only that the self-same hand that laid my
 heart waste has pinioned your wind

Exile has cast us both, fellow strangers
 in a grave not our own, where our kind never meet
 parting has struck us -you with a knife, me with a barbed arrow
 child of the valley, nature has set us apart
 and yet affliction has brought us together. (Jayyusi 1987: 102)

Shauqi's romantic image of the Andalusian exile was replaced by new images in post-Second World War poetry, following major political and social changes in the Arab world. For instance, the rise of Arab nationalism as a reaction against European colonialism and Zionism and the subsequent revolutions which erupted in many Arab countries were among the radical changes that greatly affected Arab people. The anti-colonial and anti-Zionist revolutions in countries such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Algeria were associated with the emergence of dictatorial regimes which committed many atrocities against their own peoples turning these countries into prisons and places of exiles. Due to lack of democracy and freedom, many Arab intellectuals and representatives of religious and ethnic minorities in the Arab world, such as the Kurds, the Shi'ites, and the Copts, were forced to leave their countries and live in Diaspora.

Furthermore, the Palestinian tragedy which resulted in the exodus of Palestinian refugees after the 1948 and 1967 wars between the Arabs and Israel deepened the wounds of exile in the Arab psyche. Many Arab regimes were little better than Israel in their treatment of the Palestinian refugees. The disputes among Arab governments over the Palestinian refugee problem created a state of anger and prompted widespread self-examination and questioning in Arab countries. Arabs were disappointed because the new revolutionary regimes failed to achieve their dream of unity and prosperity. Instead of fighting the enemies of the nation, many Arab regimes established enormous police forces and a repressive apparatus to oppress their own citizens. The armies of these regimes were shamefully defeated in wars with Israel, and many Arabs realized that it was time for them to abandon what the Iraqi poet, Buland al-Haydari, in "The Journey of the Yellow Letters", calls "the long sleep of history" (Asfour 1987: 82). The Arab defeats in 1948 and 1967, as well as the rise of Arab dictatorial governments, left Arab people in a state of shock and they became sceptical about the validity of their socio-political systems.

Due to the new political realities, particularly the partition of Palestine, the creation of Israel, and the emergence of repressive Arab regimes, two main categories of Arab poets may be described as 'writing in exile'. The first category includes poets who were members of ethnic and religious minorities living in various Arab countries or representatives of political opposition groups. The second category constitutes Palestinian poets, both those living under Israeli occupation and those who have been compelled to leave their country. This category may be divided into two sub-groups. The first includes poets such as Mahmud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim and Tawfiq Zayyad who have lived under Israeli occupation and who constitute the core of Palestinian poetry of exile and revolt. This group of poets has been dedicated to writing what is called the 'Palestinian poetry of resistance' since the 1960s. In spite of censorship, banning of books, jailing, torture, and assassination, the Palestinian resistance poets succeeded in continuing their poetic production, and their poems were smuggled into every Arab house. The Israeli regime inside Palestine, like the Arab regimes outside, has censored the rights of the Palestinian refugees to express their feelings about their plight. Even poetry of lamentation and elegies are considered forms of political and protest poetry.

The second sub-group includes Palestinian poets such as Kamal Nasir, Tawfiq Sayigh, Izz-al-Din-al-Manasira, Fadwa Tuqan, and others who left their country after the second exodus following the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, the defeat of the Arab armies, the occupation of Eastern Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Golan

Heights, and the Sinai Desert. Nevertheless, Palestinian poets, whether living inside or outside their country, are able to participate in the modernist poetic tradition in the Arab world. They convey the angry voice of refugees living in exile through their haunting lyrics. The Palestinian poets in exile have suffered both physically and psychologically, and their poetry is coloured by feelings of death, tragedy, and defeat. However, they are not susceptible to despair or disappointment or frustration. These poets, living either in exile or in prisons, have never lost hope of having a homeland of their own. This dream recurs in their poetry as they talk about the pain and anguish of living in exile. They reflect this sense of anguish and use poetry as a means of facing their personal and national disasters. These poets, who belong to the community of the dispossessed, have a firm hope that they will one day achieve the dream of returning to their villages and cities after the resurrection of Palestine.

The dream of return which haunts these 'prisoners of fate' and these exiled poets is epitomised by the image of the reunion of families and lovers. In Palestinian poetry, the poet's own homeland, village, or city is personified as a fertile woman, a beautiful mistress, a beloved, a wife, or a mother. The metaphorical device which manipulates feminine personifications is integral to the Arabic poetic tradition. Mahmud Darwish, for example, in 'A Lover from Palestine', portrays his homeland, Palestine, as an innocent and beautiful beloved, and as a mother and a widow who has lost her husband in the battle for freedom and independence. Moreover, Palestinian poets, living in internal or external exiles, have struggled to affirm the Arab identity of their homeland and subvert the hostile image of the Palestinian as a terrorist. It is noteworthy that one of the most damaging ways in which Palestinians, living in exile and refugee camps, are presented in the West is through the image of terrorism, an image so pervasive that it seems to reflect "an almost platonic essence inherent in all Palestinians and Muslims" according to Edward Said's essay, 'Identity, Negation and Violence' (Said 1988: 52).

In addition to affirming the Arab identity of Palestine, these poets attempt to create some meaning out of a disintegrated world based on nationalistic illusions. They articulate their feelings of exile in poems which criticise Israeli policy and attack the passive attitudes of some Arab regimes toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Like the radical black American poets of the 1960s, who replaced their points of reference in the American avant-garde with those of black revolution, Arab poets, such as Nizar Qabbani (a poet of sex and erotica) and others, turned into militant political poets due to the failure of the Arab dream. For example, Qabbani in "Marginal Notes on the Book of Defeat" criticizes a nation whose warfare consists of the "oriental cults of rhetoric and false heroism which never killed a black fly" (Asfour 1987:96). Like Qabbani, all the revolutionary Palestinian poets living in internal or external exile expressed their feelings of disappointment after they lost their country. As a result of the 1948 war, more than 1.5 million Palestinian citizens were scattered throughout the Arab world to live in permanent refugee camps. More than that number were forced to leave their cities and villages in Northern Palestine and live in refugee camps in Gaza and the West Bank. The remaining Palestinians were destined to live in exile outside the Arab world or as a minority inside the state of Israel. In their Israeli exile, Palestinians were cut off from their cultural roots and were dealt with as second-class citizens. In spite of having Israeli nationality, Palestinians, inside Israel, were poorly educated and were denied any right to have an identity or a culture of their own.

For Palestinians, exile has become a permanent condition in which they have attempted to express the wounds of a lost homeland and of a people transformed into a nation of refugees. In 'The View from No-Man's Land', Kamal Boullata recalls how Palestinians were forced to live in internal exile in their own land:

I was less than ten years old when the meaning of no-man's land first found its way into my life. At the time, Jerusalem, the city in which I was born, had just been divided into two separate worlds. On one side, the city's Jews began to live in a state all their own. On the other side, Arabs, regardless of their religion, staggered together under the burdens of their newly-broken lives. Barbed wire marked the borders beyond which we were now forbidden to cross. Sites which grown-ups started referring to as no-man's land became the only terrain linking two segregated sides. Through the coils of barbed wire, we began to see what looked for a time like an irremediable wasteland haunting our neighbourhoods. Trespassing through wild shrubs to recover a ball that strayed into what only yesterday was a relative's courtyard now meant risking stepping on a mine or being shot by a sniper. (Boullata 1992: 579)

Boullata adds that, with the passage of time, Palestinians had to accept exile as a basic reality in their lives:

Within a decade, the rest of Jerusalem fell to Israeli annexation. The declaration that crowned the city 'the eternal capital of the Jewish State' condemned all Palestinians like myself as outsiders in the city of our birth. No-man's land was now hurriedly eradicated by Israeli bulldozers. That former commons that had been turned into a bit of nowhere had finally become the permanent site and symbol for the state of exile in which I found myself. It is not in figurative terms, however, that I primarily see the fusion of those two formative experiences in my life. The sense of foreboding created by Jerusalem's division and the daily predicaments of that experience confirmed the inevitability of my actual exile. In time, the interrelatedness between the two conditions became fused when on the very day that Jerusalem's no-man's land was eradicated, exile became a central reality in my life. (Boullata 1992: 580).

The Palestinian concept of living in exile (no-man's land) whether inside or outside their land reached culmination during the sixties. In fact, the 1960s was a crucial time not only for Palestinians living in refugee camps under Israeli occupation but also for those living in Diaspora and external exile. Palestinians not only voiced protest on the streets but also screamed it in their poems. The Palestinian exile poetry since the post 1948 war era was a reflection of what was happening in the socio-political arena. Poetry was used as an agent, a weapon in the battle for freedom and independence. All the frustrations and bitterness which had been suggested by earlier Palestinian poets have erupted into an angry outspoken protest particularly in the 1960s. Some poets were criticised for militancy and didacticism but the majority of Palestinian poets were not merely angry militants but creators of new techniques and forms. Proud of their identity the Palestinian poets – since the sixties- wrote for their own people in their own language and in their own way portraying the experience of a nation forced to live in exile.

Engaging the Exile and Diaspora Motifs in Palestinian Poetry

Engaging the theme of exile and Diaspora, punctuating Palestinian literature, Darwish, in "Earth Scrapes Us", evokes images of nostalgia for his motherland: "we wish we were its wheat, to die and live again / Wish it were our mother / Our mother would be merciful to us / Wish we were images of stones that our dreams carry like mirrors" (Jayyusi 1987:207). In the same poem which is collected in his anthology *Poems After Beirut*, Darwish states:

Earth scrapes us into the last narrow passage, we have to dismember ourselves to pass,
 Earth squeezes us.
 We have seen the faces of those who will be killed defending the soul to the last one of us.
 We wept for the birthday of their children. We have seen the faces of those who will throw.
 Our children from the windows of this last space of ours. Mirrors that our star will paste together (Jayyusi 1987:207).

Because the Palestinians, like the Jews, were destined to live in Diaspora - moving from exile into exile - Darwish wonders about the location of the next refugee camp. Nevertheless, he reveals that the bleeding wounds of the Palestinian refugees will blossom into fields of olive trees:

Where shall we go, after the last frontier? Where will birds be flying, after the last sky?
 Where will plants find a place to rest, after the last expanse of air?
 We will write our names in crimson vapor.
 We will cut off the hand of song, so that our flesh can complete the song.
 Here we will die. Here in the last narrow passage. Or here our blood will plant - its olive trees (Jayyusi 1987:208).

Further, in a sequence of poems, the famous Palestinian poet, Mahmud Darwish, depicts the miserable conditions of his people living in exile, in Beirut, exploring the massacres of Palestinian refugees caught up in the web of the Lebanese civil war. In his poetry, Darwish narrates the whole story of Palestinian suffering in their Lebanese Diaspora. The refugee camps of Palestinians living in Lebanon were brutally attacked by the Israeli army and its Lebanese allies - the right wing Christian militias. After the evacuation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization troops from Lebanon, during the Israeli invasion of the country in 1982, the vulnerable refugee camps were attacked and thousands of disarmed women and children were slaughtered by Lebanese Christian militias supported by Israel. The same militias were responsible for the mass murder of Palestinian refugees during the Tel-Al-Za'tar massacre which took place during the Lebanese Civil War. The Palestinian refugee camps were also besieged for more than six months by the Shi'ite Muslim militias, supported by the Syrian army, during which hundreds of exiled refugees died of starvation.

In a poem titled "Brief Reflections on an Ancient and Beautiful City on the Coast of the Mediterranean Sea", Darwish used the sea image as a symbol of the Palestinian exile. Displaced from their homeland, the Palestinian refugees have lived in exile in Lebanon since 1948. During the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Palestinian refugees were forced to leave their camps in Lebanon and move to a new place of exile: "We have to sing for the sea's defeat within us / or for our dead lying by the sea / and wear salt and revolt to every port / before oblivion sucks us dry", writes Darwish (Al-Udhari 1986:130). In this long poem, the poet describes the Palestinian refugees, who were evacuated by sea, as follows:

We are the leaves of tree
 the words of a shattered time
 we are the moon light sonata
 we are the other river bank that lies between the voice and the stone
 we are what we produced in the land that was ours
 we are what's left of us in exile
 we are what's left of us in exile
 we are the plants of broken vase

we are what we are but who are we?
(Al-Udhari 1986:130).

sing the sea as an image of Palestinian exile, Darwish continues:

Greetings oh ancient sea
you, sea that have saved us from the loneliness of the forests
you, sea of all beginnings (the sea disappears) our blue body, our happiness,
our soul tired of stretching from Jaffa to Carthage
our broken pitcher, tablets of lost stories, we looked for the legends of
civilizations but only could find the skull of man by the sea
(Al-Udhari 1986:134).

In the same poem, Darwish highlights the duration of Palestinian suffering. Palestinians were forced to leave their country twice, in 1948 and in 1967, after the occupation of all the Palestinian territories. In their third exodus in 1982, the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were subjected to more suffering: "The sea cannot take another immigration / oh, the sea has no room for us". The remaining Palestinian refugees who survived the genocide of the camps and whom Darwish calls "the generation of the massacre" (Al-Udhari 1986: 136) are doomed to move from one exile to another just to be killed: "Every land I long for as a bed / dangles as a gallows" (Al-Udhari 1986: 136).

Even in the Arab countries where Palestinians live in exile "a knight stabs his brother in the chest" and there "my dream leaves me only to make me laugh / or make people laugh at someone leading a dream like a camel in a market of whores" (136). In their exiles, located in neighbouring Arab countries, the Palestinian refugees have been slaughtered by Arabs such as the Lebanese, the Syrians and the Jordanians, just as they were massacred by the Zionists in Israel: "We walk from one massacre to another massacre", says Darwish, (Al-Udhari 1986:138). Thus Darwish expresses his sympathy with the Palestinian people and he apologises to what he calls "the land / victim", for all the atrocities inflicted upon the Palestinians and their homeland:

Whenever a prophet rises from our victims
we slaughter him with our own hands
I have the right to speak
and the priest has the right to kill
I have the right to dream
and the executioner must listen to me or open the door to let my dream
escape (Al-Udhari 1986: 138).

In 'Victim No. 48', Mahmud Darwish describes the experience of a Palestinian refugee living in exile in Lebanon who becomes a symbol of all Palestinian refugees in the Arab world. These refugees are not only subjected to the pains of exile and alienation but also to the danger of war and genocide: "He was lying dead on a stone / they found in his chest the moon and a rose lantern / They found in his pocket a few coins / A box of matches and a travel permit" (Al-Udhari 1986:125). As a Palestinian refugee, the victim, in the poem, is deprived of a national passport and is instead given a travel document by the host country. After his death, "his mother kissed him / and cried for a year" (Al-Udhari 1986:125). The poor mother, in the poem, like all Palestinian mothers, is destined to witness the death and agony of her sons and daughters, either at the hands of the Israeli soldiers or in Arab countries where Palestinian refugees are dealt with as aliens: "His brother grew up / And went to town looking for work / He was put in prison / Because he had no travel permit / He was carrying a dustbin / And boxes down the street" (Al-Udhari 1986:125).

The victim's brother is arrested and sent to a Lebanese jail because his status as a refugee does not enable him to obtain a job outside the refugee camp. Even if the Palestinian refugee attempts to earn his living by working as a dustman, the laws of the host countries prevent him from practising this simple human right. The plight of the Palestinian refugees, in the poem, reflects the miserable and inhuman conditions of those who live in exile, particularly if this exile is a refugee camp, a ghetto where they are forced to stay for years. The title of the poem, 'Victim No. 48', refers to the 1948 Arab-Israeli war which resulted in the occupation of most of the Palestinian towns and villages and the dramatic exodus of half of the Palestinian people who were scattered in refugee camps in neighbouring Arab countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Iraq. Darwish reminds us that the Palestinian refugee problem started in 1948 and, since that time, Palestinians have been subjected to massacres, suffering, alienation, exile and death: "Children of my country/that's how the moon died" (Al-Udhari 1986:125).

In addition to the pains of exile, Palestinians, in Diaspora, and in the occupied territories, suffer from a loss of identity. The victim's brother, in the above-mentioned poem, is sent to prison because he has no Lebanese identity card which would enable him to find a suitable job. As a refugee and an exile, he is only allowed to look for work inside the boundaries of the poor refugee camps. When he was arrested by the police, in Beirut, he was "carrying a dustbin and boxes down the street". This indicates that the refugee is either a dustman or someone who looks for remains of food and clothes in the rich people's garbage. Being deprived of an independent homeland and a national passport, Palestinian people suffer not only from a deep identity crisis but also from humiliation and ridicule, particularly when they are forced to move from one place of exile to another. Darwish depicts this painful experience in 'The Passport': "They didn't recognize me / the passport's darkness / Erased the tones of my photographs / They put my wound on show / For tourists who love collecting pictures" (Al-Udhari 1986:125).

Obviously, "the darkness of the passport" is due to the fact that it is not a genuine Palestinian passport but a travel document given to Palestinian refugees by the host countries. Unlike Palestinians living in Arab countries, Mahmud Darwish himself has Israeli nationality and an Israeli passport, despite being an Arab. However, the poet indicates that his Israeli passport has eliminated his Palestinian identity and became a reminder of a homeland which he has lost. This negation of identity leads to pain and trauma because the poet does not want strangers to identify him either as a refugee or an Israeli. Darwish takes pride in his Palestinian identity and it is sufficient for him that the Palestinian "boxthorn" and the Palestinian "rain songs recognize me" (Al-Udhari 1986: 125).

Further, in his journey of exile, the poet still remembers "all the dark eyes" of his own people, "all the wheat fields", "all the waving handkerchiefs", and all "the birds that followed my hand to the barriers of a distant airport" (Al-Udhari 1986: 126). Being "deprived of a name, of an identity / in a land I tended with both hands" (Al-Udhari 126), the Palestinian poet has to live in exile after the colonizers turned his homeland into "prisons" and "graves". In his exile, the Palestinian refugee/poet has become a symbol of suffering: "Today Job's voice rang throughout heaven" (Al-Udhari 126). The Biblical / Quranic allusion to Job provides an insight into Palestinian suffering, linking the Palestinian ordeal to the human history of pain and to other persecuted people such as the Jews and the Afro-Americans. In these intense moments of misery, the speaker in the poem finds no need for his refugee passport or the nationality of a host country because "the hearts of people are my nationality / Take away my passport" (Al-Udhari 1986:126).

In "A Poem About The Land," Darwish states that it is useless to change the miserable conditions in an Arab world dominated by dictatorial regimes : "No more

shall I protest at the Sultan's Gate/ All who have died, all who shall die at the gate of the Day/ Have embraced me, have made of me a weapon'(2002) . He reveals nostalgia for his beloved country which was lost due to Arab-Arab conspiracies and imperialistic complacencies: " Ah my intractable wound!/ My country is not a suitcase/ I am not a traveller/I am the lover and the land is the beloved (Jayyusi1987:202) . Nevertheless, the poet still has hope for a better future for his people, who have been part and parcel of human civilization:

The archaeologist is busy analyzing stones.
In the rubble of legends he searches for his own eyes
To show
That I am a sightless vagrant on the road
With not one letter in civilization's alphabet.
Meanwhile in my own I plant my trees.
I sing of my love.
It is time for me to exchange the word for the deed
Time to prove my love for the land and for the nightingale:
For in this age the weapon devours the guitar
And in the mirror I have been fading more and more
Since at my back a tree began to grow (Jayyusi1987:202).

Thus, in "Psalm 2", Darwish reveals his nostalgia for his homeland, Palestine, a "country, turning up in songs and massacres" (Al-Udhari1986:127). He addresses his homeland: "Why do I smuggle you from airport to airport / like opium / invisible ink / a radio transmitter?" (Al-Udhari1986:127). In his Diaspora, the poet also takes great pains to recall the memories of a country "trapped between the dagger and the wind" (Al-Udhari 1986:127). He reflects his painful experience of exile as he addresses his homeland:

I want to draw your shape
you, scattered in files and surprises
I want to draw your shape
you, flying on shrapnel and birds' wings
I want to draw your shape
to find my shape in yours
there isn't a name in Arab history
I haven't borrowed
to help me slip through your secret windows
all the code-names are kept
in air-conditioned recruiting offices
will you accept my name- my only code name-Mahmud Darwish
(Al-Udhari 1986: 127)

Speaking about life in the Diaspora, the poet in "Horses Neighing at the Foot of the Mountain" refers to an exilic experience which turns into a "journey in which a martyr kills a martyr" (Al-Udhari 1986 : 140). In this journey, the Palestinian refugees "travel like other people but we return to nowhere / we travel in the carriages of the psalms, sleep in the tents of the prophets and come out of speech of the gypsies" (Al-Udhari 1986 : 142. The reference to "the tents" and the analogy between the Palestinians and the gypsies in Darwish's poem "We Travel Like Other People" signify the state of homelessness and alienation which characterizes the life of the Palestinian refugees: "We have a country of words speak, speak so I can put my road on the stone of a stone / speak so we may know the end of this travel" (Al-Udhari 1986: 142).

Moreover, in a poem entitled "Speech of the Red Indian", collected in his anthology *The Adam of Two Edens*, Darwish draws an analogy between Palestinians

and Native Americans, nations that were forced to live in Diaspora in their own land. Darwish speaks to the colonizers of his land using some Quranic versus as an inter-text: “you have your God/ and we have ours/ you have your religion and we have ours/ Don’t bury our God/ in books that backup your claim of land over land” (Darwish 2000:132). He continues: “you have come from beyond the seas, bent on war, / Don’t cut down the tree of our names, / Don’t gallop your flaming horses across/ the open plains” (Darwish 2000:132). In the same historical context, the poet associates the loss of Palestine with the fall of Granada after the defeat of the Muslim/Arab invaders who stayed in Spain for more than seven centuries. Both catastrophes, according to the poet, led to suffering and Diaspora on the part of the Arab people. In spite of the Arab history of pain in ancient Spain, Darwish who compares Palestine with Spain, identifies himself with the famous Spanish poet, Federico Garcia Lorca: “the keys belong to me, / as well as the minarets and lamps. / I even belong to myself/ I’m the Adam of Two Edens lost to me twice/Expel me slowly. Kill me slowly/ with Garcia Lorca / under my olive tree” (Darwish : 154).

In “Pride and Fury”, Mahmoud Darwish reveals nostalgia for his homeland: “O my home land / we were born and raised in your wound / and at the fruits of your trees / to witness the birth of your day break / O eagle unjustly languishing in chains” (Khouri / Algar 1975: 229). In “We Travel Like Other People”, Darwish laments a paradise lost and a homeland made of words: “we have a country of words. Speak so I can put my road on the stone of a stone / we have a country of words / speak so we may know the end of this travel” (al-Udhari 1986:142). Expressing nostalgia for a country “turning up in songs and massacres (al-Udhari 1986:126), a country “trapped between the dagger and the wind” (al-Udhari 1986:127), Darwish, alluding to Shakespeare’s Hamlet, says, in “ Psalm 2”: “Now I find myself denied / like trees growing out of books / the wind is just a passing thing / shall I fight or shall I not fight? / that is not the question / shall I work or shall I not work?/ that is not the question: (al-Udhari 1986:126).

In “Brief Reflections on an Ancient and Beautiful City on The Coast of the Mediterranean Sea”, Darwish addresses his homeland saying “Greetings, imprisoned land / God’s punishment within us” (al-Udhari 1986:135). Further Darwish, alluding to the fall of the Islamic Empire in Spain in the fifteenth-century, cries in agony : “our soul tired of stretching from Jaffa to Carthage, our broken pitcher / tables of lost stories, we looked for the legends of civilizations / but could only find the skull of man by the sea” (al-Udhari1986:134). Darwish also states: “we have died many times/ and the priests / were servants of the sword from the first temple / to the last revolution” (al-Udhari1986:135). Lamenting the Palestinian exodus from Beirut after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Darwish says: “the sea cannot take another migration / oh, the sea has no room for us / an idea gives birth to another idea / the green becomes an instrument, not a miracle / not a religion of flowers” (al-Udhari 1986 :137). He adds: “we travel like other people but we return to nowhere. As if travelling is the way of the clouds / we have buried our loved ones in the darkness of the clouds between the roots of the trees” (al-Udhari1986:142).

In a poem titled “We Move on to a Country”, Darwish describes feelings of alienation experienced by the Palestinian refugees living in exile :

We move on to a country not of our flesh. Its chestnut trees not part of our marrow.
 Its stones are not goats in the song of mountains, its pebble eyes are not lilies of the valley.
 We move on to country that suspend no singular sun over us.
 For us the women of legend clap their hands: a sea for us and a sea against us.
 If wheat and water are cut off from you, then eat our love drink our tears.

Black handkerchiefs for the poets. A line of marble statues will raise our voices up.

And a stone mortar to guard our souls from Time's dust. Roses against us and roses for us (Jayyusi 1987:208).

By the end of the poem, Darwish says that the Palestinians prefer to die and be buried in their poor native homeland rather than to live in prosperity in external countries of exile:

You have your glory and we have ours. Ah, how we are troubled by a country of which we see only what is invisible: our secret.

Ours is the glory: a throne carried on feet torn by roads that have led us to every home but ours.

It is for the spirit to find spirit in itself, or to die here (Jayyusi 1987:208).

Scrutinizing the above-cited poem, it becomes obvious that the Palestinian poet living in exile under Israeli occupation is forced to create poetry in the context of a complex of factors which subtly affects the nature of his / her work. Moreover, the position of Palestinian poet, living in Diaspora, offers him / her a special insight into his/her social and political milieu. S/he views objectively what are called the antithetical colonial and colonized cultures in the Palestinian occupied territories. The result is a portrait of an ambiguous grey world in which irrational horrors and contradictory tensions are in operation. This poetry graphically describes the individual's place in a social and cultural context - the hopelessly interwoven fabric of living in occupied Palestine. Because the Palestinian poet is a member of an oppressed group, defined by the majority culture to the latter's own advantage, the thrust of his creativity runs counter to the majority definition. That is to say, his work, if faithful to life, must challenge the superiority assumptions advocated by his oppressors (the Zionists). Palestinian poetry will also reflect a cultural background that is fundamentally different, in many ways, from the dominant Israeli culture. It reflects the identity of an oppressed and exiled nation that struggle for dignity and honour. Further, the Palestinian poet, in challenging the definitions of their oppressors and in choosing to correct these definitions/images, reclaim the historical right to self-determination and thus, his work is perceived, on some level, by the dominant group, as either revolutionary or propagandist.

The theme of exile is also explored in the works of Samih al-Qasim, another prominent Palestinian poet. Samih al-Qasem, in "The Will of a Man Dying in Exile" points out:

Like the fire so I can see my tears
on the night of the massacre
so I can see your sister's corpse
whose heart is a bird ripped by foreign tongues
light the fire so I can see myself dying
my suffering is your only inheritance
my suffering before the jasmine turns
into a witness
the moon
into a witness (al-Udhari 1986 : 108).

Moreover, in 'The Will of Man Dying in Exile', he says: "light the fire so I can see my tears / on the night of the massacre / so I can see your sister's corpse / whose heart is a bird ripped up by foreign tongues / by foreign winds" (Al-Udhari 1986: 108). In this poem, which was written after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the Israeli occupation of the rest of the Palestinian territories, al-Qasim refers to the plight

of exiled Palestinians who almost lost hope of returning to their homeland particularly after the appalling defeat of the Arab armies in war with Israel. The Palestinian, in the poem, who is both a refugee and an exile, is depicted as a 'scarecrow' without a name. al-Qasim's refugee image is not only a reflection of Yeats' scarecrow in the 'Byzantium' poem, but it carries more pathetic overtones because the Palestinian refugee is a victim of both Israeli aggression and Arab indifference: "At the end of the road he stood / like a scarecrow in a vineyard / at the end of the road he stood / wearing an old coat / his name was the unknown man" (al-Udhari 1986: 108). The Palestinian refugee has no name and no identity because the Palestinian dream of having an independent homeland and returning to their own country has been frustrated. Even in exile, Palestinian refugees are brutally attacked by the Israeli army and hostile militias in host countries. In 'To Ariel Sharon', al-Qasim speaks about the massacres of Palestinians by the Israeli army, not only inside Palestine but also in the refugee camps in the Lebanese Diaspora:

The general's tank has five mouths
under the tank a boy of five, a rose
a boy and five stars adorn the general's shoulders
under his tank five roses and five boys
the tank has countless mouths (al-Udhari 1986: 109).

Like al-Qasim, Mu'in Besseisso describes the hopeless life of the Palestinian refugees, torn apart due to living in exile. Subjected to feelings of suffering and pain, the Palestinian refugees, in Diaspora, get tired of waiting for "Godot" for a breakthrough in their miserable situation. In a poem titled "Traffic Lights", Mu'in Besseisso, the Palestinian poet, captures the feelings of disappointment and frustration experienced by the Palestinians living in internal exiles: "Red light, stop/ Green light go / where's the green light? / A pregnant woman in a car / gives birth in a car / the boy grows up / falls in love / and gets married in a car / has children / and reads magazines and newspapers / in a car / they round him up / and put him in the boot of a car/ they draft him and he dies a martyr / Behind the windscreen of a car / they bury him under the wheels of a car / and the car is still in the street / waiting for the green light" (al-Udhari 1986:113).

Likewise, Jabra Ibrahim, in "The Desert of Exile", expresses a sense of nostalgia for his homeland in Palestine saying: "Our land is an emerald / but in the deserts of exile / spring after spring / only the dust hisses in our face" (Khouri/ Algar 1975: 229). Jabra refers to the suffering of the Palestinian refugees who live in exile appealing to a homeland they lost forever: "remember us / with our eyes full of dust / that never clears in our careless wandering" (Khouri / Algar 1975: 227). Jabra incorporates season imagery as he recalls memories of Palestine in the pre-colonial era: "May is our rustic song / which we sing at noon / in the blue shadows / among the olive trees of our valleys" (Khouri / Algar 1975: 225) and "in the ripeness of the fields / we wait for the promise of July / and the joyous dance amidst the harvest" (227). Apparently, Jabra reveals nostalgia for a country that only lives in his imagination: "Our Palestine, green land of ours / its flowers are as if embroidered of women's gowns / March adorns its hills / with the jewel-like peony and narcissus / April bursts open in its plains / with flowers and bride-like bosoms" (Khouri / Algar 1975: 225).

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon points out that there is a moment at which "the colonialist reaches the point of no longer being able to imagine a time occurring without him. His eruption into the history of the colonized people is deified, transformed into absolute necessity" (Fanon 1969: 159). The attempt of the colonizers (the Zionists) to erase the history and culture of colonized peoples (Palestinians) by dismissing their poetry of exile as propagandist, is a part of what Edward Said calls "the moral epistemology of imperialism" (Said 1979: 18). In *The*

Question of Palestine, Said argues that the approved history of colonialist nations such as America, Australia, South Africa, and Israel started with what he calls “a blotting out of knowledge” of the native people or the making of them into “people without history” (Said 1979: 23). In other words, the colonizer seeks to turn the colonized (blacks) or the native (Palestinians) into a non-entity, in order to erase their identity.

Therefore, in Palestinian poetry of exile, there is a focus on the issue of identity. In a poem entitled “Palestinian”, Harun Hashim Rashid affirms his own identity as a Palestinian, proud of his people, of his struggle, and of his just cause: “Palestinian/ is my name/ On all battlefields/I have inscribed my name/ Palestinian/ Such is my name, I know/ It torments and grieves me/ Their eyes hurt me/ Pursue me, wound me/ For my name is Palestinian” (Khouri/ Algar 1975: 231). The Palestinian poet is not ashamed of his identity, regardless of all the prejudices against him: “Jails with their gates flung wide / summon me / And in all the airports of the world / Are found my names and titles” (Khouri /Algar:233). He insists on showing the world the real identity of the Palestinian people who have been suffering in the attempt to gain their independence even after most of the Arab governments have abandoned them: “Palestinian I am / Though they betray me and my cause / Though they sell me in the market / Though to the flames they cast me” (Khouri / Algar 1975: 233).

Conclusion

In his introduction to *The Occupied Homeland Anthology / Diwan al-Watan al-Muhtall*, Yusuf al-Khatib observes that

by the end of the catastrophic year [1948] which brought about the most obnoxious defeat that could befall a nation, the concept of the land took two forms in the eyes of the Palestinian people: ‘exile’ and ‘prison’. While ‘exile’ includes all lands where Palestinian refugees live whether inside Palestine or outside it, ‘prison’ involves the Palestinian land that came under the Israeli flag. (cited in Sulaiman: 1984: 118).

Some people wonder why Palestinians living in rich Arab countries have failed to be assimilated into these countries. In fact, Palestinians, whether living in refugee camps or in rich Arab countries or elsewhere, have deep and strong spiritual links with a country they believe is their rightful homeland. They long to return to their homeland simply because their relationship with Palestine is not based on material or political assumptions. This attitude toward their homeland is peculiar to the Palestinian people in exile. The Palestinians are attached to their homeland because Palestine, to the Palestinian poet, is a reality that exists; it is a land which has been usurped by a ruthless enemy, a mother, a sister, a wife raped by the colonizer, a refugee camp ravaged by Zionist tanks and American-made Apaches and F-16 bombers.

To Mahmud Darwish, the most famous Palestinian poet, Palestine is personified as a refugee woman forced to live in exile. In “A Lover from Palestine” Darwish says: “yesterday I saw you at the harbour / travelling without relations or provisions” (Cited in Sulaiman 1984: 160). Palestine is also a mother:

I ran to you like an orphan
questioning the wisdom of our forefathers:
“How can the green fruit grove
after being dragged to a prison
an exile and a harbour, remain green
in spite of its travels

and in spite of the scent of salt and longing?" (Sulaiman 1984:160).

In the same poem, Darwish portrays Palestine as a Christ figure: "I saw you on the mountains covered / with thorny plants / a shepherdess without sheep / harried amidst the ruins" (160). After the loss of Palestine Darwish's homeland and which is depicted as "the lungs in my chest/ the voice of my lips/ the water and the fire for me", the poet is forced to live as an exile in alien countries: "I, who have been turned into a stranger". Thus, he weeps tears and blood after the loss of his homeland: "I saw you in rays of tears and wounds" (Sulaiman 1984:160).

In Darwish's poem, Palestine also takes the shape of a widow who has lost her husband in the never-ending battle for freedom and independence: "I saw you at the mouth of the cave / hanging the rags of your orphans on a line". Darwish further portrays Palestine as an orphan who lost his/her father in the war with the colonizer: "I saw you in the songs of orphan-hood and / misery". By the end of the poem, Palestine takes the identity of the poet's beautiful beloved: "I saw you in every drop of the sea / and in every grain of sand / beautiful as the earth / beautiful as children / beautiful as jasmine". In the final lines of the poem, Darwish promises his innocent and beautiful beloved to sacrifice himself for the sake of her eyes:

I swear to you: I shall weave a scarf from my eyelashes embroidered with
verses for your eyes
and with your name on it
A name when watered
with the praises of my chanting heart
will make the trees spread their branches again
I shall write few words on the scarf
more precious
than kisses and the blood of the martyrs (Sulaiman 160).

Darwish's magic words are a reminder that Palestine is an Arab country and will remain so: "Palestinian she was / and Palestinian she remains" (Sulaiman 1984: 160). There is no doubt that the Palestinians are more directly bound to their homeland than any other people. However, the Jews who returned to Palestine escaping from the holocaust and from western / European anti-Semitism are also an oppressed people who have a historical right to establish their own homeland in Palestine. The well-known Israeli poet, Yehuda Amichai expresses this hope for a new era of peace and love between the Palestinians and the Israelis on the land of Palestine:

An Arab shepherd searches for a lamb on Mount Zion,
And on the hill across I search for my little son,
An Arab shepherd and a Jewish father
In their temporary failure.
Our voices meet above
the Sultan's pool in the middle of the valley.
We both want the son and the lamb
to never enter the process
of the terrible machine of 'Chad Gadya'.
Later we found them in the bushes,
and our voices returned to us crying and laughing inside.
The search for a lamb and for a son
was always
the beginning of a new religion in these hills. (Cited in Coffin 1982:341).

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