

Arab in Diaspora and Exile: Reading Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish Today

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Abstract- *This research tries to investigate the intricate politics of diaspora, exile and recent refugee issue all over the world by looking at Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish's memoir. Representation of exile by writing memoir, therefore, is significant as it narrates the experience of displacement and homelessness which resonates others. This article examines how Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish aesthetically respond to exile and displacement both within the borders of their own nation space and outside. I argue that the idea of home and homelessness, place or out of place "in setting without real connection" dominates the mind of every exile; every refugee and exile can be both physical and psychological. In today's context, both Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish's works express the solidarity and legitimization towards the struggle of distinct temporalities. Every de-territorialized community seeks for an identity and their lost homeland is always t heart. This study shows how Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish's identity are blurred where they have been living in Exile and Diaspora. That is why; both of them develop a contrapuntal consciousness in understanding their split identity which represents millions of others. From that point of view, Mahmoud Darwish's memoir *Memory for forgetfulness, August, Beirut, 1982*, and Edward Said's *Out of Place: A Memoir* can be representation of all recent refugee and exile issue.*

Keywords- *Diaspora; Exile; Displacement; Refugee*

1. INTRODUCTION

"I'm not sure that memoirs are particularly important for cultural theorist. Said's is, of course, because his life was so vital a context for his work. His personal career embodied various public or 'world-historical' shifts and conflicts, and his work represents a quite extraordinarily subtle, intimate point of intersection between a general history and an individual one".

--Terry Eagleton (Edward Said, Cultural Politics, and Critical Theory, an Interview)

In today's situation, diaspora and exile has none of the beauty of rich tapestry of history, it is day to day struggle to fit into life, in new city, reconcile the conflicting demands of family and friend and come to terms who s/he is. On the other hand, refugee, the rigorous one is the result of violent displacement by any RSA (Repressive State Apparatus). But, what about the homeland? Isn't there any quest for the homeland among the diasporas, exiles or refugees? Isn't there any sigh? Or the Diaspora, Exile or Refugee is pleased with their new shift identity? The question is being answered by both Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish's memoir. As Palestinians living abroad, both Edward said and Mahmoud Darwish

experienced the pain of dispossession. They solidify the spirit of the exilic population. Their feelings of being exiled are compellingly present in their memoirs. Their works also symptomatically present their personal and collective identity crisis. Both of them were born in Palestine but they had to leave their homeland after 1948 like many other Palestinians. Both Said and Darwish's experience of exile, displacement and homelessness is skillfully expressed in their writing of critical theories and poetry. Although both Said and Mahmoud have engaged with the theme of displacement in many of their works, my essay will primarily focus on Edward Said's *Out of Place: A Memoir* and Mahmoud Darwish's *Memory for Forgetfulness* which portray the writers' personal and collective experience of exile and diaspora, their anguish for being displaced from their birth place. Their predicament of being geographically foreign, out of place shape the tone of their autobiographies—the tone that is simultaneously rigorous and volatile.

Said observes that exile is predicated on the existence of love for, bond with, one's native place. The notions of home and homelessness, place and out of place have integrated in his mind and this has helped him for developing an identity distinct from the idea of exile and diaspora. On the other hand, all throughout Darwish's poems, he sought to return to home and stop his struggle in placeless space of exile. This identity crisis has become apparent in his prose *Memory for forgetfulness, August,*

Beirut, 1982, where he has written about the besieged people of Palestine in exile (Lebanon) by narrating his own personal and public experience. This shift in identity and exile gave a different dimension in Darwish's quest for homeland. Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish's individual story of being displaced from their home land is not the individual story rather it is the collective struggle and history of Millions of Palestinians who have been exiled, displaced and bound to relocate from their native soil. It is a story of common loss, sorrow and pain yet the quest for belonging and identity is always at heart. Ironically, the term diaspora was coined for Jews, who in turn forced Palestinians to experience the plight of a diasporic existence. This collective and private loss is revealed in Edward Said's *Out of Place: A Memoir*, Mahmoud Darwish's *Memory for forgetfulness*, August, Beirut, 1982.

Edward Said is well known scholar, activist and public intellectual. He was born in Palestine but he had to leave his homeland after 1948 like many other Palestinians. Said's experience of exile, displacement and homelessness is skillfully expressed in his writing of critical theories. Edward Said depicts that rigorous discomfort by this autobiography. He represents the nation of Palestine, which is a Promised Land that seems to be evaporating from the geographical map since *al-Nakba*ⁱ, after which, within the discontinued mode of existence the Palestinians are forced to survive by only reminiscing about the past. Since then, Palestinians have existed in two conditions. The first mode of existence is often referred to as "*al-manfa*" which implies forced exile and the second one is known as "*al-sahat*" or diaspora, which means scattering or, to be more specific, forced scattering. Consequently, four million registered Palestinians now live in exile and many of them live in Lebanon, Jordan and other Arab countries because of forced diaspora. Said has attempted to speak for these dispossessed people whose human existence is annihilated after the Nakba. Their territory, identity, self-respect, traditions, culture and nationhood everything washed out after this terrifying event.

Out of Place illustrates the aftermath of that terrifying event by portraying the writer's personal loss (homelessness) which is multifaceted and contradictory. To Said, home is a place where family and friend exists. Therefore, Palestine is a place or country which Said considers his homeland. Like many other Palestinians, Edward Said's displacement has taken two stages. He has been displaced from Palestine twice. He was born there in Jerusalem in 1935 and regularly visited Palestine till his twelve years old as his father already has shifted to Cairo. So, Said states, "Palestine acquired languid almost dream like aspect for me" (21). He missed the freedom that he had in Jerusalem. To him, "being in Jerusalem was pleasant but tantalizingly open, temporary and even transitory. (22) Thus, Palestine was a place from where he was, which he already has lost. In his writing, *Out of Place*, Said claims and depicts this personal and collective

loss of his homeland. He cannot forget that period of his life time when along with his family, spent time in *Talbiyah* and admitted to a local school where he felt totally at home for the first time in his school life in 1947. He states in his memoir, "for the first and last time in my school life I was among the boys who were like me". (22) After leaving Jerusalem with his father in December 1947, he never returned and never felt at home. He was brought up in Cairo and his struggle in Cairo was of a lonely boy often confronted by the teacher. He was isolated, pinpointed and transfixed. Then he was sent to an American school and later admitted to Victoria College which is a kind of British elite school. In this regard Armstrong articulates in his essay, "These and similar incidents lead him to construct two selves: the public "Edward" who is chastised, criticized, and categorized and "my inner, far less compliant and private self, who could read, think, and even write independent of Edward". In 1967 Arab- Israeli war also changed his life when he suddenly found himself in an environment averse to Arab, Arab ideology and nation where Arab seemed to be getting their deserved consequence. In that situation he also had become an outsider and target in his working place at Columbia University where he again started to feel himself as exiled. That is why he wrote in *Out of Place* "I had suddenly step outside every circle I had once inhabited". (209)

The main argument of this memoir is in place or out of place. Yes, Edward was not living in a refugee camp like many other Palestinians, he was fortunate enough to have a house yet Said is completely out of place. To him, out of place means the misery of being without a country or a place to return, no national authority to protect him and the family, there is only bitter, helpless past. He cannot mesmerize by reminiscing the past. (109) In Cairo, in School, in US everywhere he was out of place. When he was in Cairo, he was out of place because he was not Muslim, he was not Egyptian either. He was also forbidden to speak in Arabic in his English spoken British school. He was out of place in the city Cairo because they had to keep silent on Palestine yet he always felt an obligation to identify as Palestinian. From that point of view, Edward Said's *Out of Place: A Memoir*, is more than the historic events rather it is the tale of the displaced people and their exile, nostalgia and longing for own home. This memoir explains Said's liminality or "in-betweenness" and the liminality that he lives in as an exile at the border of inter-cultural identity yet he looks his position as an advantage from where he can speak, a writer down subversively, because for him the intellectual or cultural theorist is always an 'exile or marginal' (16) and Palestinian cause is always his cause. Said defines the intellectual as responsible and 'oppositional' citizen who always tries to put his views outside the domain of dogmas and rigid party positions and he takes active political positions in his writing. These are locations which indicate how he sees the importance of critical consciousness in intellectual work. In *Out of Place*,

Edward Said traces his ambivalent and contradictory location with an increasing sense of being outsider which exactly matches with the recent Syrian refugees in Europe. They are constantly trying to cope with new identity in new location without forgetting their past - Arab Muslim with a Muslim surname, a tag of refugee residing in Europe. Said also felt out of place as a Palestinian in Egypt, as Christian in a Muslim world, and as an Arab, holding an American passport in a colonial world. All his life, he held an “unsettled sense of many identities”—mostly in conflict with each other. In this regard Ashcroft and Ahluwalia in their analysis of Said mentions,

His own place as an exiled Palestinian intellectual is inflected in his work. He is a distinguished academic and American citizen, this identity as a Palestinian is extremely paradoxical and demonstrates just how paradoxical and constructed all identity is, particularly that of people scattered throughout the world away from their homeland. ‘Said’s paradox of identity is indicative of the complex identities of diasporic and post-colonial peoples throughout the world today. Paradoxes linked to this question of identity run throughout this writing, but far from being disabling, such paradox is a key to the intellectual force of his writing’ (05).

His is the ‘contrapuntal’ approach inherent in the sensibilities of an exile or ‘the new migrant’ who always believes that the power of playful imagination change forever of our perception of how things are. This may be called ‘*the intifada*’ of the imagination- a holy war’ against the established order created by the powers that be. From that time onward, he could no longer uphold two identities, and the experience began to reflect everywhere in his work. This significance of this transformation in Edward Said’s life lay in the fact that for the first time he began to construct himself as a Palestinian, consciously articulating the sense of cultural origin which had been suppressed since his childhood and diverted into his professional career. So Said explains,

So, beginning in America I resolved to live as if I were simple, transparent soul and not to speak about my family or origins except as required, and then very sparingly. To become, in other words, like the others, as anonymous as possible. The split between “Edward” (or, as I was soon to become, “Said”), my public, outer self, and the loose, irresponsible fantasy-ridden churning metamorphoses of my private, inner life was very marked. Later the eruptions from my inner self grew not only more frequent but also less possible to control. (137)

The poignancy of displacement is captured in his other book on Palestine as well, when he says:

Identity—who we are, where we come from, what we are—is difficult to maintain in exile—we are the ‘other’, an opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement, an exodus. Silence and destruction veil the hurt, slow the body searches, and soothe the sting loss (*After the Last Sky*, 16-17).

We have to remember that *Out of Place* is not a mere autobiography but a significant narrative of Said’s personal, political and social engagement and disengagement with his surroundings. Moreover, he tries to set up a link between his personal identity and his political realism, which is one more way to say that Said instrumentalizes diaspora and exile for developing colonial discourses. Through the lens of his own personal history in exile and diaspora, he upheld a very significant revision of the essentialized position of the colonial subject, especially the centrality of the self/other dichotomy in colonial discourses. Said’s experiences of exile, displacement and homelessness have informed several themes and notions in Said’s critical repertoires including ideologies of home (Palestine: nation and land); diaspora and exilic placement and displacement; politics of multiculturalism; predicament of being geographically foreign; out of place; globalization; and identity question (belonging, ‘national origin’, incorporation, integration, acculturation). In particular, in *Out of Place* Said shows a personal interest in addressing the Palestinian diaspora when he attends its own reflections on his body and mind. In *Out of Place* Said also produces a narrative that reacts conversely to the western monolithic discourse of power relation and his complicated role connects diaspora with the ideologies and culture both East and West. A fundamental component of Said’s identity is his sense of exile, of being, as he defines it, “somewhere you don’t wish to be”. He has lived away from his childhood home in Cairo and his national home in Palestine. This genuine feeling is deeply conveyed in the memoir. According to Said, Exile has two important characteristics. It is not only an actual state but a metaphorical one as well; you even don’t require to be uprooted from your home to feel an exile in society. It is a sense of “restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others” Which is a continuous situation in Palestine at present started from 1947. “You cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and alas you can never fully arrive, be at one with your new home or situation”. (40) So, he tries to set up a link between his personal identity and his political realism, which is one more way to say that Said merged up Diaspora and Exile for developing colonial discourses.

Therefore, we can say that in *Out of Place*, he attempts to establish a connection between his personal identity and its political and social realities. Said’s pain and “powerlessness” are intensified more in his exile in the United States. He reasoned that his life in diaspora, in particular in the United States is a contradictory and conflicting life, filled with many mental clashes and sorrowful moments. In his early life Said suffered from what he called ‘the Palestine of remote memory, unresolved sorrow, and uncomprehending anger’ (Said 141). His feeling of a home which is not obtainable makes him live “a great distance,” not only from Palestine, but from his exilic self. However, in some time in his life, he showed the subconscious “desire to leave no traces, to

live without history or the possibility of return"(138). The split between his desire of home or homelessness, between placement and displacement leaves him with "a sense of distance, apartness." Said's "growing sense of Palestinian identity" comes together with his consciousness of his marginality, seclusion and isolation. He also felt remote from his exile; in most of the time Said felt "marginal", "non-American" and alienated. The relation between identity and place or, out of place, becomes a central issue in Said's Memoir. "Permanently out of place" (19). This is how Said concludes his first phase in exile and it is caused by the extreme, rigid and monotonous regime of disciplines imposed by his father or the curricular education he got in different schools in his life. According to him it is "the disparity in perception and reality" (45). However, Said's work complicates this analysis because Said's Memoir, in every sense of the word, is not only about place, but it is rather about "out of place" which could be a way intended by Said to reflect the complexity of the diasporic self. In *Out of Place*, however, we can trace the genealogy of a lost tale; the unsettled displacement of Palestinians in the world's diaspora for more than sixty-five years which is being retold in the personal diasporic experiences of Edward Said's *Memoir*. Here Armstrong says, "*Out of Place* shows the possibility of resistance by demonstrating double identity formation which allows a critical consciousness to develop in opposition to the definitions that the dominant authority would impose on the subordinate subject".

Unlike Said's whose book develops around the idea of out sidedness and intellectual exile, Darwish's book builds up on a shared experience of common Palestinians who found their material conditions dramatically changed after the birth of Israel. After *al Nakba* Darwish suffered from the feeling of internal exile and blurred identity. With the birth of Israel, he was ousted from his homeland at the age of six. When the family returned to their erased village, they were declared infiltrators; in official Israeli term, they were 'present-absentees'. As he grew up, he was increasingly in trouble with the authorities for his resistant poetry. Consequently, he left Israel in the 1970s and roamed across various Arab cities. After Israel's 1982 massacre in **Beirut**ⁱⁱⁱ, he took refuge in Paris, where his poetic life flourished to the fullest. Naturally because of being a 'wandering exile' (Said, "on Mahmoud Darwish" 112), the Israeli colonialism and American imperialism that uprooted him became key questions in his writings.

Mahmoud Darwish was born in the village of Birwe, district of acre, in upper Galilee on 13 March 1942. In 1948, after its inhabitants, including the child and his family, had fled to Lebanon, the newly formed Israel destroyed the village. Though Darwish's family stole back into the homeland, it was too late to be included in the census of the Palestinian Arabs who had remained in the country. Until 1966 the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel were under military rule and subject to a complex set of emergency regulations, including one that

required them to secure a permit for travel inside the country, an exilic situation in his own motherland. Lacking identity papers, the poet was vulnerable and was kept under constant watch by Israeli military. Darwish left Israel for Cairo in 1971, where he worked for the leading Egyptian daily, *al Ahram*. In 1973 he joined the Palestine liberation Organization as assistant to the director of the Palestine research center in Beirut, and helped to edit its scholarly journal *Shuun Filas Ti:niya* (Palestine affair)

With his multifaceted personal and family story , Darwish represents the 'state' of the Palestinians in the second half of the twentieth century – continuously in exile under siege : exile from the Galilee to Lebanon in 1948, return to his destroyed village and life as a present absentee , life as a Palestinian citizen of Israel under the military government , departure for exile in Palestinian diaspora , joining PLO, the siege in Beirut and the exit from it , life in Tunis, the life in exile in Paris , living in Ramallah after the establishment of the Palestinian authority , and living in Amman. His broad personal experience and its connection to so many of his people's experiences have established him national poet. His poetry is an expression of exile. Exile and its consequences (sufferings and pain) and has contributed to the development of his writing because psychological aspect of exile is traumatic. He often wrote under siege. He wrote under the military government of nascent state of Israel when he was required to appear before government officials to prove that he had not left Haifa and was later imprisoned for leaving Haifa without permission in order to read poems at the Hebrew university of Jerusalem. That is his life in exile in his own motherland like other common people of Palestine.

Memory for Forgetfulness is written in 1982 during the invasion of Lebanon by Israelis and it was originally published in 1986 by *Al-Karmel*. It is book length prose poem which mourns on the loss of n already broken city. In this work, Darwish depicts a crucial day during the civil war, when Israel invades Lebanon and attacked Palestinians in West Beirut. *Memory for Forgetfulness*, a memoir written in poetic form and experimental narrative techniques. In this memoir Darwish says it is not the analysis of political situation, it is narrative on the role of victim and victimizer. Here, he retells the collective story of those victims and how they encounter 6 august, 1982. He depicts his own fear of being hit by the American plane. There is constant panic on death and daily existence. The memoir is the kind of diary which narrates the collective story of the victims in Beirut. Darwish also explains the reason of writing the memoir in an interview published in *BOMB*:

I wrote it four years after the event. A t the time I was living in Paris. I managed to do it in record time- in a matter of two to three months. I was unable to liberate myself from the effect of the siege, from the memory of Beirut. I was unable to write poetry. It was similar to the state I am in now. So I liberated myself through writing that book of prose. I had a personal motive. I was not a

historian or an analyst. I was doing it for personal reasons. By writing it, I got over my writer's block. I wrote it four years after the event. At that time I was living in Paris. I managed to do it in record time- in a matter of two to three months. I was unable to liberate myself from the effect of the siege, from the memory of Beirut. I was unable to write poetry. It was similar to the state I am in now. So I liberated myself through writing that book of prose. I had a personal motive. I was not a historian or an analyst. I was doing it for personal reasons. By writing it, I got over my writer's block. The siege of Beirut was much more intense and dangerous than the situation now. It was a war in the classical sense of the word. There was not a street that was out of danger. Those who came out of that war alive were simply lucky. One's life was in danger in Beirut. Everyone's life. Here it is all happening in installments. There are short, intense dangerous periods and longer periods when it is just painful and difficult to take. During the worst time, the month of April, I happened to be in Europe. So I missed the most dangerous time, when there was active bombing and shooting taking place every day (Shehadeh 55).

Memory for Forgetfulness opens with the need for a cup of coffee, by keeping aside the difficulty occurred due to siege. He looks at everyday issues through the prism of the Palestinian diasporic experience, which he chronicles, interrogates, and, more importantly, lives. His description of himself stranded in the hallway of his exposed apartment under intense bombardment one August morning is also a description of the collective Palestinian condition of exile at a particular moment in history, when the only places possible are intermediary and constantly narrowing, while the only space expanding is the minefield between "here" and "there," between exile and homeland. Later he describes how he became a poet seeking the past and how he searched for the moments when he was a child on the beaches of Lebanon after he and his family were exiled from the Galilee, after the beginning of the siege but before he understood his life is under siege in exile which is his last moment of innocent: "and I had grown up. I had become a poet searching for the boy that used to be in him, whom he had left behind some place and forgotten, the poet had grown older and did not permit the forgotten to grow up.

For the poet, the battle of memory is no less important than the battle on the ground. This insight is best seen in Darwish's look about the siege of Beirut: *Memory for Forgetfulness*. *Memory for Forgetfulness* was written in Paris after Darwish left Beirut and it describes a single day after siege. Palestinian life in Lebanon after 1948, which nowhere to return to, is paradoxical as everyone reminds "the Palestinian refugees of their double lack of belonging, saying "you are not going there and you don't belong here" (Darwish,11-12) and a new generation born with in this discourse. Thus one cannot call 1982 is the beginning of the siege of the Palestinian lives in exile rather its tragic and paradoxical continuation, because after 1948 the Palestinian refugees

in Lebanon "were still being born without a reason, growing up for no reason, remembering for no reason and being put under exile and siege for no reason"(14). Darwish wrote about his childhood also in *Almond Blossoms and Beyond* (74-75):

*I always thought the place was identified,
By the mothers and the aroma of sage.
No one said to me,
The placed is called a country,
Around the country are borders,
And beyond the border is another lace,
called diaspora and exile for us
I did not yet need an identity
I did not remember the words to defend the place
From its removal, from its strange, new name
Hedged with eucalyptus.
The sign says to us,
You were not here*

Hence, we can say that Darwish's contribution is deeply personal and honest, while at the same time expressing a suprapersonal Palestinian nationalist consciousness that has contributed to the success of his discourse as a cultural icon. When 'the fighter planes' and the 'bombs' become the dominant reality under the sky, Darwish wants his suffering people to look above. Amidst the trauma, rage, injustice, and violence, something has to soothe the wounded Palestinian hearts. Something has to pave the way for the healing process so that they can start believing in reconciliation. Something has to be the source of strength for them. That is why Darwish's poetry creates a calming effect by knitting the beauty of nature in his verses in order to keep the hope for a better future alive amidst the most impossible situation: sustaining the inner strength of his people by singing the song of common humanity of both the besieged and the besieger is the ultimate Darwishian way of fighting against the forces of darkness.

In conclusion, Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish's writing focuses on the identity crisis of their personal and collective Palestinian. By offering autobiographical background in *Out of Place: A Memoir* and *Memory for Forgetfulness August, Beirut, 1982* both help the readers to understand those particular circumstances in Palestine that turned them into exile and prompted them to be political activists. Mahmoud Darwish and Edward Said like all exiled poet attempt to affirm his existence, home, land and identity by recollecting it in their work. They have traced the contours of modern Diasporic Palestinian identity through their rigorous writing and political engagement as they personally faced the trauma of being exiled. They never felt at home as well as they could not identify themselves as out of their national identity. Revealing the consistent desire to talk about their land and to own it, they declare their intention to never give up Palestine, despite all the physical, psychological and cultural traumas. Because of the collective memory of Palestinians regarding their nation, they have kept Palestine alive, generate discourses

around it, and tries to give a new shape and new identity to Palestine. Therefore, both Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish tried to reflect the pain of Palestinian people through their seminal work to define Palestinian people with history and culture who are deprived of their homeland for long.

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iii BEIRUT, Lebanon, Sept. 25— The massacre of more than 300 Palestinian and Lebanese men, women and children at the Shatila refugee camp began Wednesday, Sept. 15, and continued until Saturday, Sept. 18, raise questions that focus particularly on the role played by the Israeli Army in what is certain to be regarded as one of the most important events in the modern history of the Middle East.

ⁱ The creation of Israel in the 1948, known to Palestinian as al-Nakba, was built on a systematic destruction and depopulation of more than four hundred villages, massacres, looting and displacement from the region. This catastrophe of 1948 marked the beginning of the Palestinian dispossession and continued amidst the 'tears,' wound' and 'bleeding' of the occupied Palestine.

ⁱⁱ The Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The first intifada lasted from 1987 to 1993, and the second began in 2000.