

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 Introduction

I have argued throughout this thesis that reading Darwish's poetry using an environmental ethics framework breaks a novel ground and contributes to the understanding of morality issues in his works. To this end, I examine some selected poems by the poet through the lens of Robert Traer's framework of doing environmental ethics. In particular, the discussion in the previous chapter has suggested that a pattern of ethics appears time and again across the poet's late works, with morality themes frequently emerging in his poetry. The pattern also seems to speak to issues that are very much related to the challenging realities of activism, as framed by Traer, in occupied Palestine. In one way, this a consequence of the chaos that, in turn, results in an almost-human atmosphere. Violence and assault on nature prevail, while access to occupied Palestine for international environmental activists is virtually impossible. The analysis has also suggested that Darwish's late works question the range of ethical identities across the aspects of Robert Traer's four-fold system of rights, duties, moral characters, and relationships. The discussion has demonstrated that the poet addresses moral characters and questions the nature of relationships that transpire under poignantly persisting contingencies in the land of Palestine, where the only thing certain is the occupier's violations of international laws pertaining to the rights of humans and the natural environment. The analysis has also revealed that the poet understands relationships as markers of the extent to which people possess rapport that establishes a kind of bond between them. In the following pages, I shall address the title of the thesis—

what ‘almost human’ means, recapitulate the preceding five chapters, summarize the key points of my research, discuss the theoretical, practical and methodological implications of the results, and consider the limitations of the thesis. Finally, suggestions for possible future research are presented.

## 6.2 “Almost Human”

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has led to chaos in the land and uncertainties on the horizon. Fear dominates, normal life is anything but certain, and the future appears gloomy. The precarious life forms in occupied Palestine raise several questions that utterly defy not only the assumptions of environmental ethics but also the accepted principles of morality. Among other things, the rights of the Palestinian people and the natural environment are constantly violated, and the duties to preserve natural resources and spare human lives is never upheld by the occupying state. This is made even worse by characters who lack moral values, producing distorted relationships, ruptured skins and fragmented soils.

I have argued that several late poems by Darwish speak about this state of fragmentation by raising ethical questions through dialogues with the self and with the occupier. Darwish, as he reflects on and foreshadows sociopolitical uncertainties, speaks in particular to the cracks and fissures concerning “being human beings” in the Palestinian occupied territories amid the havoc wreaked by the Israeli occupier upon the land and its people. The poems foreshadow non-human qualities, with the occupier evading his duties and turning a blind eye to calls made by the international community to preserve the rights of the occupied population.

The research has set Traer’s arguments against the Palestine/Israel context, which enabled me to read in Darwish’s poetry questions related to the tumultuous

circumstances that stand between the Palestinian people and their right to decent life. For instance, several poems contemplate issues regarding the ethical obligations of a state that controls the citizens of another territory, and also raise questions concerning the land and the natural environment of that territory.

The state of “almost human” is set against Traer’s concepts of relationships, characters, rights and duties. Poems by Darwish offer what humanness means in the case of Palestine, particularly that the land and humans need one another. Yet, this principle is challenged by the occupying state. For example, Traer, informed by moral philosophy, argues that killing of humans is morally wrong. Darwish’s poems, on the other hand, assert that the condition in Palestine is one that challenges moral virtues. In its guidelines on international law in conflict areas, the UN International Law Commission stipulates that the occupying state must maintain the integrity of the occupied territory and “respect the legislation of the occupied territory pertaining to the protection of the environment” (2022, p. 5). This situation puts to test all assumptions of international law and environmental ethics. The voices of the Palestinians cannot be heard, and when heard, they receive no attention, and when there is attention, it is at best mere condemnation of the occupying state’s policies. When it comes to action against Israel, there is always the powerful veto of the United States blocking resolutions against Israel<sup>5</sup>.

The reading has shown that socio-cultural nuances surrounding Darwish's poetry stand witness to inimical transformations and far-reaching damage that the Israeli occupation has inflicted on the Palestinian landscape, all the while removing its Palestinian character and uprooting its cultural identity. The poems discussed provide

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<sup>5</sup> The United Nations cites the United States blocking 53 Security Council resolutions against Israel since 1972 (UN, 2022).

insights into the environment, ethics and literature. With this being the case, his poetry can also be taken as a call to civil movements and environmental activists to bring justice to a land that has suffered for decades.

### **6.3 What Makes a Human a Human in Relation to the Environment?**

The natural world is worthy of itself; its value is intrinsic. Among other thing, this means that humans can only use nature to an extent that does not bring devastating effects on nature itself or on humans. The grave impact of humans on the natural world has drawn the attention of environmentalists, who seek to bring “environmental justice”, which “examines how discrimination results in humans harming each other, how racial minorities bear the brunt of the discrimination, and how discriminatory practices hasten the degradation of environments” (Taylor, 2000, p. 523).

Applying the dichotomy of virtue versus immorality, this analysis of several Darwish poems has scrutinized the behavior of the occupier and the way it has turned the entire landscape into a state of all-and-all chaos. My discussion of Darwish’s poetry has uncovered the inhuman, cruel conditions the occupier has created in occupied Palestine, yet despite the ongoing pain, the poet does not stop believing in peace and, therefore, he appeals to the conscience of the world to rise to moral standards and show sympathy with the victim.

In occupied Palestine, apart from Israel’s settler policies against the indigenous population, “concerns about soil, water, air, waste, and flora and fauna are in fact central to the functioning of Israel’s occupation” (Braverman 2021, p. 3). This situation needs to be addressed at different levels. Individuals, states and organizations are called to assign values to their action and test such values through expectations of the

consequences as well as through weighing them against a framework of environmental ethics.

#### **6.4 Overview of the Five Chapters**

In Chapter 1, I specifically detail the background of the study and provide an overview of the theoretical framework- first originating in deep ecology- that informs the analysis, especially the contextualization of environmental ethics, the notions of moral duties, and the ethical responsibility of a state. My research supports that repertoire with another dimension: moral duties as represented in literature, especially in the poetry of Darwish.

Chapter 2 presents a review and appraisal of the literature on Darwish's works, particularly his reflection on ethical issues. Of particular importance are the critical accounts that discuss the themes of resistance to the occupier, exile, mythologies, human values, ecocritical readings and studies of identity, with the poet often seen drawing boundaries of a two-facet relationship: one between Palestinians and their homeland, and another between the occupier and the land of Palestine. These critical works are then discussed in terms of their themes, approaches and findings. I then position my research by presenting several criticisms against existing research, so that my contribution to the field becomes clear to the reader.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the historical sociopolitical contexts to contextualize Darwish's poetry. I then provide a summary of the state of the conflict to unpack the clash of Palestinian-Israeli narratives. Later in the Chapter, I discuss the 1948 Nakba and the way it has informed, or even shaped, Palestinian contemporary literature. Finally, the chapter discuss the literary position of Darwish and his contribution to the

Palestinian intellectual landscape. This dissertation, I argue, may not be understood without these nuanced rich contexts.

In Chapter 4, I first look at the corpus used in the analysis and examine the selected poems from the lens of moral philosophy and the extent to which the selected poems address moral duties toward human and non-human worlds. I then provide an overview of the conceptual framework of the research, particularly Robert Traer's model of doing environmental ethics. Later, I discuss the extent to which this framework can be used to provide answers to the research questions. Finally, I operationalize the four terms/concepts in Traer's framework.

In Chapter 5, the examination of the extent to which Darwish's poems exemplify the notion of "almost human" has been employed against Traer's four-fold model of doing environmental ethics seen as rights, duties, characters and relationships. The analysis has demonstrated that Darwish makes visible the atrocities and harshness that are fertile for questions that challenge theorizations and norms of environmental ethics. In addition, the analysis elaborates upon environmentalist assumptions concerning rights, duties, good characters and productive relationships. By arguing that the implication of reading Darwish from environmental ethics is so much pertinent, I demonstrate that this research is one step toward setting the stage for ecological ethics regarding the assumptions about people and the new combat fields to which environmental activists can turn their attention.

## **6.5 Implications of the Research**

The results have different implications at the theoretical, methodological and practical levels. The following elaborations reveal important precepts drawn from the analysis.

### 6.5.1 Theoretical Implications

The analysis has revealed that environmental ethics is very much relevant in reading Darwish's poetry in the context of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Firstly, approaching Darwish's poetry from the perspective of environmental ethics contributes to the understanding of morality issues and human's (ir)responsible behaviour toward the natural environment. In the context of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, Darwish's poetry destabilizes and challenges the current landscape of and prospective research on environmental ethics. Darwish's poetry does not only challenge the realities of activism but also interrogates spaces of ethical identity in terms of characters and relationships with the environment. Environmental ethicists, when addressing the issue of human's destruction of nature, assume that their arguments are heard, and that campaigning for initiatives to reduce that destruction will somehow pay off. These assumptions are challenged in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The reading not only lays bare the state of moral chaos in occupied Palestine but also questions and provides insights into the spaces of ethical identity with respect to rights, duties, characters and relationships.

For the notion of 'rights', Traer based his argument on principles enshrined in religious teachings and international law, maintaining that for each single right there is a duty in what seems like a system of dichotomies. If, for example, a group of people is entitled to the integrity and cohesion of their lands, then another related group is obliged to maintain such integrity and cohesion. This also entails different things, not the least the obligation of the latter group to refrain from occupying another nation, changing the eco-system in the occupied territory, manipulating its natural resources, or making such a territory a landfill for its waste. In occupied Palestine, a gap in environmental justice

persists. The Palestinians have no means to access environmental justice, and the concept remains vague in the context of occupied Palestine.

Traer discusses rights and duties within issues related to ethical identities, assuming that people should possess moral worth, freeing themselves from political corruption. The same also goes for the concept of 'characters', seen again from an ethical identity perspective. Being a good person entails possessing some virtues such as frugality (reducing both consumption /depletion of natural resources and ecological footprint), gratitude (toward other people and the natural world) and integrity (avoiding corruption, exploitation and taking advantage of others). These personal merits should also transpire in the behavior of humans toward both human and the non-human worlds.

The concepts may overlap: being good cannot be detached from its opposite, and possessing rights is not separable from upholding duties. The idea of fostering good 'relationships' is seen within a framework of ethical identities and demeanor: willingness to sympathize with the natural world, showing a kind of solidarity that binds us as human beings, feeling with those who suffer, and responding responsibly to ethical problems, such as oppression and injustice.

In short, borrowing Traer's ideas of environmental ethics has enabled an interpretation of Darwish's poetry as lessons of morality. I hope my work on teasing out environmental duties may generate more works that engage in issues related to the environment, where people and land are prominent. For example, the issue of animal rights in occupied Palestine remains a lacuna for research. A recent report by Middle East Monitor states that Israel's Separation Wall (in the West Bank) has detrimental effects on the environment and animals. The report concluded that:

Animals have been passing through these lands for millennia, migrating according to the seasons, and dispersing plant seeds along the way, thus ensuring the vitality of this ancient ecological corridor. Ever since Israel's

started to build the Wall in 2000, though, these migratory routes have been disrupted and halted abruptly, cutting animals off from their native feeding and breeding grounds. Causing devastation to the environment and driving many species to the brink of extinction, the Israeli Wall and occupation are two of the biggest threats to animals and the environment in the West Bank today. (Middle East Monitor, 2018)

My work stops at problematizing humans. In this sense, it is limited, but it opens up dialogues for animals as well.

Finally, the work on environmental ethics does not stop here. Environmental ethics could be very much applicable in regions and contexts beyond the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. As long as injustices continue around the globe (especially in Asia, Africa and the Americas), environmental duties will continue to raise questions, problematize voices and propose solutions that may remedy such grievances.

### **6.5.2 Methodological Implications**

I have situated the research within the broader philosophical framework that addresses issues of morality, but I have narrowed down the scope of investigation to contextualized environmental ethics. This has provided insights into the state of fragmentation at human/non-human levels. However, one should be aware of the fact that environmental ethics does not deal with literary texts per se, as it focuses more on the relationship between human behavior and the natural world. Environmental ethics takes as its central investigation the problems humans bring to the natural world, and leaves the door open for different fields that can help identify and tackle such problems. In other words, it is this interdisciplinary, open-ended nature of environmental ethics that gives a room for literary criticism. Environmental ethics originates in philosophy, and philosophy can be brought to readers through literature, and so it is safe to assume that literary criticism could rely on environmental ethics to interpret a literary work.

My methodology is limited to textual analysis, namely Darwish's poetry, especially his late works. The question whether environmental ethics can be used to investigate his early works or works by other Palestinian writers— or beyond— needs further investigation. The question is left to future research initiatives, which might find Traer's framework relevant. Generally speaking, however, his system is of high potential and very broad scope, and can cover as diverse contexts as conflict zones and areas/regions where the natural world is being degraded.

However, some aspects of Traer's environmental duties can still be expanded. The moral problems in occupied Palestine cannot be solely addressed by mere reference to Traer's framework, since the more-than-human implications of Israel's occupation of Palestine—especially the degradation of the natural world—have brought numerous injustices to humans and nature. For example, environmental justice can be integrated into Traer's model for broader, more in-depth investigation of environmental ethics. Such integration, which can be added as a fifth dimension, requires the involvement of diverse fields such as international law, human geography, ecology (the relationship between humans and nature), economics (the feasible but safe modes of production), and anthropology (human behavior, culture and biology) to investigate the issues at stake in occupied Palestine. Critical scholars from these fields could work, individually or collectively, to draw a linkage between justice and the non-human world.

### **6.5.3 Practical Implications**

I have cited the poetry of Darwish as a call for bringing scholarship and decision-making bodies to focus on doing ethics. Environmental ethicists advocate for responding to threats to the ecological hazards from as diverse fields as politics, biology, economics, botany, zoology, ecology and technology, which can be appropriated to

alleviate the adverse effects of human interventions in the natural world. The discussion in the present thesis fits into a niche where literature can also contribute a lot to such efforts. In this vein, many Darwish's poems can be read as calls to the international community, and in particular environmentalists, to hold the occupier accountable—in the media and before international forums—for their crimes against the Palestinian natural landscape.

This is a universal call where all concerned parties are responsible for correcting the wrongs as much as they can. Our ethical/moral responsibility toward others and also towards the natural world could be realized at the individual level, if not at the state/organizational level. Having lost hope in politics and political-state-level action, the individual dimension could be seen as markers for activism. It is not only the responsibility of organizations to bring change, it is also the individuals' behavior/attitude that can help remedy the state of injustice in occupied Palestine. Individuals, through actions and protests, can expose transgressions by the Israeli occupation, and in doing so, they can lean on religious teachings, philosophical principles and international laws.

#### **6.5.4 Limitations of the Study**

The research has some limitations in terms of theory, methodology and scope. First, drawing on Traer's model of doing environmental ethics has demonstrated to be relevant and viable in analyzing Darwish's late poetry. The model is vigorous in the sense that the four concepts can reasonably be deliberated across a range of Darwish's poems. However, Palestinian literary works, including Darwish's works, are generally political, and no matter the themes (be it social, economic, geographic, historic, cultural, etc.), politics is always there, characterizing and giving shape to the experience. Thus,

drawing solely on a philosophical model, that of Robert Traer, is likely to leave some questions unanswered.

Second, as far as methodology is concerned, I wish I could have the time and the resources to stage some interviews with renowned Palestinian writers, such as Tamim Barghouti, Sahar Khalifeh, Remi Kanazi, Ibtisam Barakat, Farah Chamma, Huzama Habayeb, and Elias Sanbar (to name some). Such interviews would have given more insight into environmental ethics in Darwish's poetry. Their worldview, experience (most of them are in Diaspora) and personal ties with the late Darwish would have definitely improved the analysis and discussion of the poems.

Third, the research is limited to Darwish's late poetry. One question that emerges is: Can the results of this research be generalized to all poems by the poet? The answer needs further investigation. I thus urge critics of Darwish to read his early works and try to analyze them using Traer's framework. Doing so can perhaps answer many questions. Future critics can replicate my work and go deeper into other poems—both late and early—to elicit answers and expand on the employed theoretical framework.

#### **6.5.5 Suggestions for Future Research**

The findings of this research rebound to the advantage of two groups: literary critics and people engaged in research related to building and developing ecological ethics—a domain that is still in its infancy.

For literary criticism, the poems can be investigated by using a combination of Traer's model and approaches to animal and plant studies. A range of questions could then be asked: What are the forms of ecological barriers as contemplated in Darwish's poetry? How does the situation in Palestine-Israel pose a challenge to the ecosystem? How is Israel taking Palestinian flora and fauna to distinction?

The research has shown the applicability of environmental ethics to reading literature in spite of the challenges persisting in environmental ethics. In this sense, environmental ethics could help the field to expand its scope, so that it could address the Israeli military and its colonial settlers' ever-increasing transgressions against the environment and human rights in occupied Palestine, particularly those of women, children and vulnerable groups (those with no political agendas).

Furthermore, more research is still needed to expand the field and apply its theories to more literary texts. For example, the discussion in the present research has focused on Darwish's poetry, leaving out his prose. Darwish's prose is as beautiful as his poetry, and the themes that he brings to his prose intersect with those in his verse. Critics should thus read his prose and carry out an analysis informed by environmental ethics, focusing on rights, duties, characters and relationships.

With more and more research initiatives on environmental ethics, the field could enormously expand to accommodate more concepts that speak to environmental concerns in regions and contexts that Traer has never discussed in his theorizing. On the one hand, Traer's main focus is either in the United States or in areas affected by actions taken by the United States. Future research could take Traer's concepts to the universal level, where challenges persist but are often unnoticed. On the other hand, environmental ethics could also be brought to inform discussions in conflict zones. This could be possible through raising moral questions underlying human behavior, solidarity, tolerance and co-existence. The efforts could urge existing civil organizations for action, but they could also create and perpetuate sustained national and global movements in support of the environment. Well-organized movements, with clearly defined goals, can resist and stop the devastating changes to the natural world.

The movements can also draft and advance agendas aimed at empowering oppressed

communities, both in Palestine and across the globe. To realize such goals, there must be some form of mobilization of the masses that believe in the issue and are ready to fight for it against all forms of oppression with peaceful, innovative methods.

