The Grandeur of Mahmoud Darwish

Special issue – Summer 2025

Childhood is raised in me,
Day upon day in me
Mahmoud Darwish

K dedicates a special issue to the disappearance of Gaza: *The Grandeur of Mahmoud Darwish*. It certainly does not interest anyone, but conceiving such a dossier was not a decision like any other: what to say about that for which words are often lacking? How to face with the unspeakable of the final solution committed to erasing Gaza from the land of Palestine? For Gaza, today, in the summer of 2025, do we still have a remainder to say?
One thing is certain: today there is nothing left to think about but Gaza.
We know this: the catastrophe (*Nakba*) does not begin today, it does not begin with the genocide currently underway, its history has been going on for decades, and yet something has happened in the last two years, a new rupture in the vortex of violence against the Palestinians has taken place. It is difficult to think, but evidently even in the folds of catastrophe there can be an aggravation, to the point of a seemingly hopeless equation: to be Palestinian is to be exterminated. That is not all: what is happening in Gaza reveals that the world can tolerate the massacres, it can deny, if not with a few exceptions, the reality principle: the reality of the Palestinian final solution.
So, if it is true, as Gilles Deleuze wrote in *The Grandeur of Yasser Arafat* (1983), that «the Palestinian cause is first and foremost the set of injustices that this people has suffered and continues to suffer», it is equally true that Israel's decision to wipe out Gaza, to let starving people be slaughtered in search of a piece of bread, causes a further laceration, a trauma without escape, a leap into the apocalypse (in fact, as far back as 1983, Deleuze *saw* the genocide of the Palestinian people and Israel's true intention: «to make a vacuum in Palestinian territory»).
How to rise to the occasion of total destruction? How can we not make the pain of Gaza a chapter of our culture? How can we not make our voice, with this dossier, an opportunity to wash our conscience? How can we cope with the extreme colonisation that coincides with an act of total devastation?
Walter Benjamin asked himself, in 1933, in a short, formidable speech, *Experience and Poverty*, «what value, then, does the entire cultural heritage have, if experience itself does not unite us with it?». Benjamin with the poverty of experience, linked to the development of technology, to the legacy, specifically, of the Great War, does not only think of a private dimension, but of misery «in the experiences of humanity in general». The poverty of experience, which renders all «cultural heritage» useless, sterile, sinister, coincides exactly with what Benjamin considers barbarism. But, in the face of this barbarism, Benjamin imagines another one: he thinks of «a new positive concept of barbarism», called upon to finally «clear the air» of barbarism incapable of experiencing what happens, of what has happened. It is a matter, then, of having the strength and courage to take leave «of the traditional human image»; to abandon the idea that one can live and resist in the name of humanity, because it is always in the name of man in general that catastrophes are produced. We would like to say that in Gaza, once again, we do not see the idea of humanity in tatters, but, on the contrary, we experience the terrible triumph of it. For it is in the name of man, of democracy, of our wellbeing, that a destructive and criminal form of colonialism prevails.
Benjamin was thinking of the German cultural heritage, which in the age of industrial warfare becomes a meaningless simulacrum. What are we to do with Western philosophy and art as Gaza vanishes? After Auschwitz, authors of Jewish origin have deepened, sharpened our critique of the subject, of belonging, of identity, of the state, contributing to a genealogical decipherment of the violence of the *logos*. Perhaps it was from them, after all, that we departed when Europe counted only rubble. However, today, we ask ourselves, *what value does the entire cultural heritage have then, if experience does not connect us with it?*
To give just one example: the great philosopher of Jewish origin, Emmanuel Levinas, the philosopher of difference, who goes so far as to think of otherness to the point of replacing the «I» with the «you», bends in the last stretch of his life to a very ambiguous reading of the Jewish-Palestinian conflict, casting a sinister light on his theses on vulnerability and ethical responsibility. In Levinas, in fact, we find both a political and an ethical vindication of Zionism (indeed, it is here that the antinomy between ethics and politics, according to Levinas, would be broken): «the Zionist idea, such as we see it now, disengaged from all mysticism, from all immediate false messianism, is nevertheless a political idea that has its own ethical justification [...]. One defends one's neighbour when one defends the Jewish people; each Jew in particular defends his neighbour when he defends the Jewish people» (E. Levinas, A. Finkielkraut, *Israël: éthique et politique*, radio conversation, 28 September 1982).
What to do with the philosophy of otherness when it attributes an ethical, original foundation to the politics of a state? Does not Levinas' Zionism interrogate, as it did, for example, for Heidegger's Rectorate, the status of philosophy? In the current barbarity of culture and history, does not even *thinking otherwise* manage to reconnect us with experience? Here then, to start again, to begin anew, but from where to think (with and from) Gaza?
We do not know if Gaza will survive its end. Where is Gaza now as it disappears? Perhaps in some verse by Darwish? In some fragment of a Palestinian poet who has just been killed? In some image removed from the catastrophe by those who inhabit it? Let us hypothesise that Gaza's political escape from its end today may lie in a gesture of radical defection against those who destroy it. But how to desert? Is it possible, really, by writing, by reading poetry, by reviving images from the horror? There remains, indeed, only language, or rather the invention of a *spectral language*, as Refaat Alareer wrote:

The hearts are not hearts.
The eyes can't see
There are no eyes there
The bellies craving for more
A house destroyed except for the door
The family, all of them, gone
Save for a photo album
That has to be buried with them
No one was left to cherish the memories
No one.
Except freshly baked souls in bellies.
Except for a poem.

«Poetry does not change anything. Nothing is certain but write» (Franco Fortini). We say this with great simplicity: poetry is here the name of that which cannot be captured; that which remains when nothing remains, the trace of a survival, a spectre, the sign that was the people without a state. Poetry alludes, within the catastrophe, to a possible other form of life when no life seems any longer possible, and perhaps not even desirable; it is an obstacle to the probably deeper, at times unmentionable goal of the final solution underway: the disappearance of Palestinian memory; the erasure of a trace that might remind us that life was otherwise lived in Gaza. Poetry here is not only the name of a gesture of resistance, a form of testimony, of an existence consigned to the terrible need to survive but materialises another story: it is the image of another world, where life exceeds history, and becomes absurdly political.

Send contributions to **krevuecontact@gmail.com** by August 31.

North Gaza City, 24 June 2025, photo by Abdul Hakim Khaled Abu Rayas (archivio gaza_fuorifuoco_palestina)

