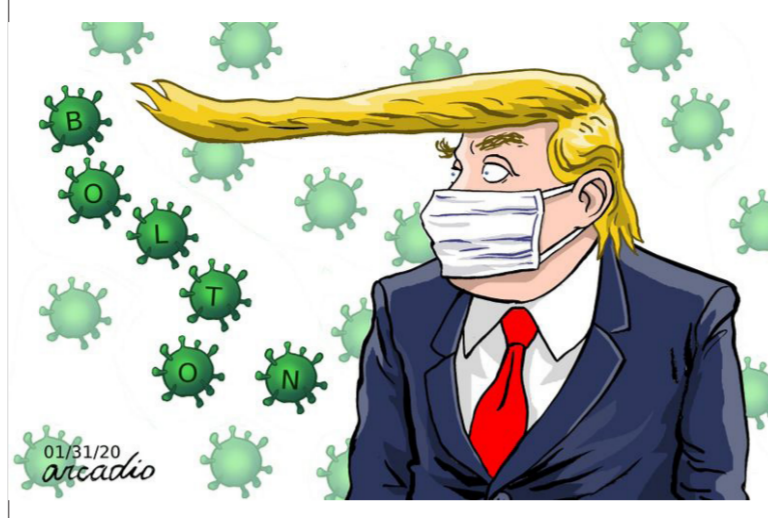


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NO HOLDS BARRED



Once a political movement is framed in constitutional terms, with a universal guarantee of rights and freedoms, it is no longer rhetorically handicapped. It need not restrict itself to the abstract language of the Constitution. It is free to co-opt language that has always been the preserve of the majoritarian nationalist

Constitutional Patriotism

When Bullets Are Aimed at the Constitution, Who's the Patriot and Who's the Traitor?

"Deshkegaddaronko, golimaaronsalonko."
Anurag Thakur, Union minister of state for finance and corporate affairs

RAGHU KESAVAN
The Wire

In the minds of nationalists like Mr Thakur and his superiors Mr Modi and Mr Shah, constitutional protections are obstacles to their goal of transforming India from a constitutional republic into a Hindu rashtra. This is the ideological backdrop against which the Bharatiya Janata Party and its push for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) must be understood. The CAA, which will be followed inevitably by a nationwide NRC, seeks to destabilise Muslim citizenship and is the first step towards formally making India a Hindu state.

While the spectacle of a government minister exhorting his party's supporters to shoot their fellow citizens no longer seems as shocking as it once did, we have not yet become inured to the spectacle of a young man firing a gun into a crowd of peaceful protesters.

We should treat this as a teachable moment: it tells us what the BJP and its fellow travellers think of dissent, but more importantly, like the chants of "Lock her up" at Trump rallies, and newspaper headlines designating judges and MPs "Enemies of the people" in the UK post-Brexit, it reveals the majoritarian nationalist's disdain for the constitutional order.

In the minds of nationalists like Mr Thakur and his superiors Mr Modi and Mr Shah, constitutional protections are obstacles to their goal of transforming India from a constitutional republic into a Hindu rashtra. This is the ideological backdrop against which the Bharatiya Janata Party and its push for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) must be understood. The CAA, which will be followed inevitably by a nationwide NRC, seeks to destabilise Muslim citizenship and is the first step towards formally making India a Hindu state.

We tend to use terms like nation, state and country interchangeably. To understand the disorder that currently plagues our politics we need to discriminate between them. The state is the physical and imagined organising infrastructure of a political community. It is the border, the various levels of government, the legal system and the police among other things. It is the infrastructure that allows, in Max Weber's framing, the state to maintain a monopoly over violence within its territory.

The nation, on the other hand, is a community of people, usually defined as sharing a common language or religion, a shared history and culture, and often some or all of these together. The nation-state, then, reflects the idea that each nation has the right to self-determination and by implication, its own state. Hindutva's project is to turn the state into an instrument of the Hindu nation.

In an essay called "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man", Hannah Arendt describes this project in European countries in the interwar period, "...the transformation of the state from an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation had been completed; the nation had conquered the state, national interest had priority over law long before Hitler could pronounce, 'right is what is good for the Ger-

man people."

This is not a crude comparison; it is the crux of the Hindu nationalist project, the aspiration central to any majoritarian nationalism. At its simplest, it is the attempt to frame the desires of the majority as the interests of the country, without regard for the legal and constitutional order.

The traitors Mr Thakur refers to are the ordinary women and men who have thronged the streets across the country in their hundreds of thousands over the last few weeks. An assortment of symbols has gained currency with protesters. Faiz's Hum Dekhenge, Rahat-Indori's Agar khilafain hone do and Varun Grover's Kagaznahidikhaenge are recited or sung routinely; ChandrashekharAazad, chief of the Bhim Army, did his historical namesake proud by mobilising massive numbers of people at Jama Masjid and making fools of the Delhi police; protests are vivid with images of figures from the freedom struggle and heave with chants of azadi; places like JamiaMilliaIslamia, ShaheenBagh and JNU have become symbols of national resistance.

When Aazad outwitted the police and evaded them to appear at Jama Masjid, he held up a copy of the Constitution. I watched it live on TV and through the exhilaration and fear (of what might happen if the police tried to enter the mosque), I saw that his copy had Ambedkar's face on its cover. It struck me then that what we were seeing, what we have seen at protests across India where readings of the Preamble have become commonplace, is a form of constitutional patriotism.

Constitutional patriotism, as the name suggests, is patriotism expressed as an attachment to the rights and values enshrined in a country's constitution. Historically, it emerged out of the attempt to neuter nationalism and create a form of fellow feeling not susceptible to the kind of nationalist excess that defined the middle of the 20th century. It should surprise no one, then, that it emerged in post-war Germany.

The term (Verfassungspatriotismus) was coined by DolfSternberger in 1979, and later popularised by JurgenHabermas. It has never enjoyed much traction as an academic category, with the main criticism being that only a "thin" attachment can be created to a set of abstract values. A second, related, critique points out that if the attachment is to universal values like liberty, equality, plurality and justice, values which have equal currency in countries all over the world, how can attachment to them generate an Indian sense of fellow feeling. How would it differentiate itself from a German, French or British sense of solidarity?

The anti-CAA/NRC protests point us towards a

possible answer. People value the rights they have, but to build a resonant political movement around those rights, we need to remember that they weren't given to us; they were fought for and won. Our constitutional rights and values may be universal, but the struggles through which they were won belong only to us. There is no German Ambedkar, nor is there a British Gandhi. People, places and songs become symbols for these values. There is nothing "thin" about our connection to the Indian Independence struggle; nothing "thin" about the emotional connection people feel towards Ambedkar, Gandhi, Nehru and Patel.

Once a political movement is framed in constitutional terms, with a universal guarantee of rights and freedoms, it is no longer rhetorically handicapped. It need not restrict itself to the abstract language of the Constitution. It is free to co-opt language that has always been the preserve of the majoritarian nationalist. So, perhaps as an homage to RahatIndori, Varun Grover wrote, "Mittikokaisebaantoge, sabka hi khoontohshamilhai." Blood and soil are two of the oldest and most evocative symbols of ethnic nationalism; here they are metaphors for harmony, for unity and pluralism. "How will you divide this earth, haven't we all bled for it?"

It is a mistake to think of constitutional patriotism in the abstract, to try to theoretically purge nationalism of its susceptibility to majoritarianism. Constitutional patriotism, like nationalism, is a form of political practice. Using the idea of a nation as a large, imagined family to wrest power from monarchs and to break up empires was an enormously successful political strategy. There is no way to know whether constitutional patriotism is a viable political project other than by doing it. There is no guarantee that it will not be twisted to serve ends its current proponents would find distasteful: it isn't a magic bullet, nor a permanent solution. We need only to look at that other great constitutional republic – the US and its mad and precious Second Amendment – to see this form of patriotism twisted into a form of literalist dogmatism.

But there is hope to be had. We have had success with this kind of politics before; our republic was constituted by it. And if the poetry of a communist in exile, written in Urdu and made famous in the lands of the old enemy, can be an anthem of this movement then perhaps some of the pluralist spirit of the founders still moves us. Perhaps some will be enough.

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The first impression that sprang to mind upon reading the first few pages of this collection of Mahmoud Darwish's poetry is the impossibility of quantifying the sense of nostalgia that knows its roots in love. There is no need to search for Palestine's mention in this collection – the omniscience pervades in every word chosen by the poet to impart Palestine and love as inseparable. In the context of the poet and his poetry, to exclude one is to annihilate the other.

"I Don't Want This Poem To End" is a collection of Darwish's poetry translated into English and published for the first time. It facilitates an understanding of the poet who was claimed by the Arab world as a poet of resistance, without allowing him the possibility of articulating his own definition. Palestine is never absent in Darwish, yet the impositions of labels to the point of exploitation risked stifling the poet's expression to emerge from its source: the profound and eloquent language of a man deeply intertwined with Palestine and exiled from his homeland.

To impose definitions upon the poet is to throttle expression. In his contribution titled "Translator Reflections", Mohammad Shaheen, who is also the translator of this collection, shifts away from the mainstream image of Darwish by showing that what might seem contradictory in the poet's own aspirations for his work, is an evolution on the personal, political and linguistic levels.

Shaheen writes: "The anthology aims to show that the shift from the simplicity of the early poetry to the complexity of the later one is not an act of betrayal, on the poet's part, of the poet of resistance, but rather an ambition the poet had to develop his poetry."

Shaheen also quotes Edward Said's view of Darwish's poetry as one that transforms "the lyrics of loss into the indefinitely postponed drama of return". To differentiate between what Shaheen terms "factual consciousness" and "possible consciousness" in Darwish's work is to negate the poetic journey and sever the ties between one form and the other.

Palestinian poet chosen as symbol of Arab culture in 2018
Elias Khoury's introduction to this collection describes in minute detail the search for Darwish's unpublished manuscripts, giving the reader a vivid insight into the poet's ambience. Of Darwish, he declares: "This man is not just a poet; he breathes words, he makes rhythm part of the circulation of his blood, his heart throbs with images, it is as if he

I Don't Want This Poem To End: Early And Late Poems

RAMONA WADI

were painting with rhythm."

One striking reflection by Khoury is the following: "The poet of Palestine became the poet of the Arabs because he took us to Palestine in order to return it to us." Within the context of this English translation of Darwish's poetry, it is worth noting that, according to Shaheen, Darwish had "no wish" for his poetry to be translated. Quoting the poet's words: "I write in Arabic and there is no requirement that my poetry should be read in another language."

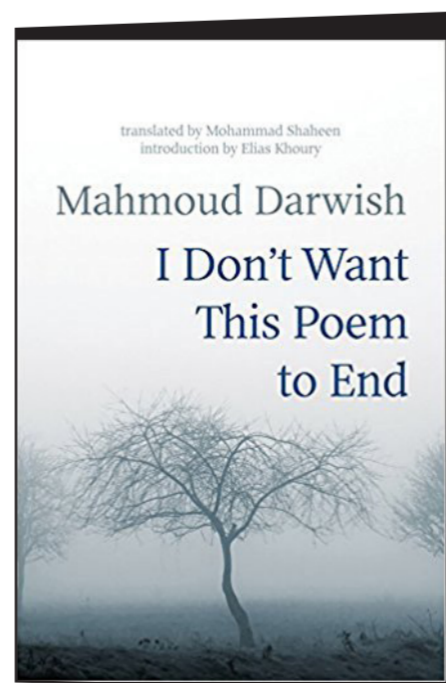
Darwish is right – there is no requirement. However, there is also no impediment. If Darwish, through his poetry written in Arabic, was able to extend the politics of nostalgia and return, the translation bequeaths such a treasure to a global audience at a time when Palestine's isolation has also inversely rendered it an international obligation.

The personal experience of history and memory mingles with the collective in this poetry collection, to construct the dream of return. In the poem "To a lost love" Darwish writes: "And I shall believe that a small window/ In my homeland was/ Summoning me and recognising me."

In "The Flowers of Blood" Darwish imparts the collective memory of the KafirQasim massacres, remembering the victims who were murdered by Israeli soldiers after an intentional delay in communicating a curfew order. He writes: "The executioner's sword taught me to walk on my wound."

Edward Said's Concept of Exile: Identity and Cultural Migration in the Middle East

The physical separation from Palestine caused by exile is another recurring theme. It is not only longing, however, that Darwish imparts. The personal experience of exile which becomes infused with the identity of the poet brings out the contrasts between living in exile and the longing of return. While the former is a lived experience that asserts itself continuously and explicitly: "And you and I are



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travellers... and refugees, you and I." The longing of return is a powerful abstract which is only impeded by politics regarding its fulfilment: "Who remembers words when they illuminate a homeland/ to one that has no door?"

Darwish's consciousness with regard to exile is powerfully expressed in "This Is My Autumn, All of It". His awareness of the cyclical questions which call for an understanding from within prompts many impacting metaphors: "I looked for myself, and the question sent me back to a/ landless land." Possibility mingles with elusiveness, creating an infinite expansion of identity, belonging and emotion, as the poet states: "That I may open the window to the window in myself."

Of particular note is the prose poetry, "Four Private Addresses", which illustrates Darwish's powerful observations of life, love and exile. Each reading presents a new perception and understanding of exile as a philosophical concept. It is not only the poet who has experienced exile. Every human being carries a personal exile shaped by experiences. In mundane details there is always an underlying profound sentiment that encourages not only understanding but connection – the awareness of continuity and how it shapes our experience of the phenomenon.

The book also includes a letter which Darwish wrote to his brother from prison, describing the humiliation inflicted upon political prisoners by Israel and how it debased Palestinian resistance. "On Exile", an essay by Darwish included in this anthology, narrates the complexity of exile particularly due to its expansion in experience and emotion. He writes: "The distance between internal and external exile has never been visible enough."

Reading Darwish's poetry is also a particular journey into the power of observation and memory. This is affirmed by Darraj, who narrates the last meeting with the poet and says of Darwish: "He would joyfully recall details, and then, encouraged by harmless satisfaction would dwell lovingly on the details of those details."

In an interview with Shaheen, which is also part of this anthology, Darwish explains the dynamics of poetry and identity, refuting the notion that his poetry should be read solely "from the perspective of the Palestinian cause". However, he also states that there should be no dispute with regard to his "dual loyalty – to poetry and to Palestine". Perhaps there is no clearer assertion of this loyalty as explained by Darwish than his verse from "Songs for the Homeland": "You will remain as our love wishes I see you."

Middle East Monitor