

Postcolonial Identity and Resistance: A Philosophical Reading of Mahmoud Darwish's "Identity Card" Through Hegel, Sartre, and Fanon

Samin Ghassabi¹, Hossein Sabouri^{2,*}

1 * Corresponding author. Department of English Literature, University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran

2 Department of English Literature, University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran

doi <https://10.22080/jlab.2026.31688.1017>

Received: 2026/03/10

Accepted: 2026/05/13

Available online: 2026/06/01

Citation:

Ghassabi, Samin, and Hossein Sabouri. "Postcolonial Identity and Resistance: A Philosophical Reading of Mahmoud Darwish's "Identity Card" Through Hegel, Sartre, and Fanon." *Journal of Literature Across Borders*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2026.

Abstract

This research provides an interdisciplinary analysis of Mahmoud Darwish's "Identity Card" through the frameworks of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's master--slave dialectic, Jean-Paul Sartre's phenomenology of "the look," and Frantz Fanon's postcolonial theory. It examines how Darwish represents identity formation, objectification, and resistance through the encounter between the speaker and the officer. Employing close textual analysis combined with theoretical interpretation, the study investigates how the poem engages with philosophical questions of recognition, alienation, and subjectivity. Although Darwish's poetry has been widely examined from political and literary perspectives, the relationship between phenomenological concepts and the representation of identity in "Identity Card" remains comparatively underexplored. This study argues that the poem transforms an act of identification and classification into a broader reflection on the struggle for reciprocal acknowledgment and the assertion of selfhood within structures of colonial domination. By bringing together Hegelian, Sartrean, and Fanonian perspectives, the study demonstrates that "Identity Card" transforms a bureaucratic demand for identification into an existential struggle over recognition, selfhood, and colonial power. Approaching the poem as a literary and philosophical text rather than advancing a political position, the study contributes to Darwish scholarship by situating "Identity Card" within broader contemporary discussions of identity, recognition, and postcolonial subjectivity.

Keywords: identity formation, objectification, postcolonial theory, recognition, subjectivity, the look, the master--slave dialectic

Introduction

Darwish develops anticolonial themes throughout his poetry, reflecting strategies of resistance articulated within Palestinian experiences of occupation (Rateb Abdullah 1290). Within "Identity Card" (1964), he constructs a representation of the Palestinian experience, capturing identity, dehumanization, and resistance within a colonial context. In his confrontation with an Israeli officer, the Palestinian man opposes colonial order by refusing the officer's attempt to define him. From this perspective, the speaker's defiance challenges colonial rule while expressing the helplessness and outrage experienced by Palestinians (Priwanda and Fanani 30--31).

This article argues that reading "Identity Card" through Hegel's master--slave dialectic, Sartre's notion of the look, and Fanon's postcolonial theory reveals how the poem functions as a form of existential challenge to the colonial system. Darwish's poetic language translates abstract philosophical concepts into the lived realities of colonial life, presenting resistance as both political opposition and existential self-preservation. Although previous studies of Darwish's poetry have examined nationalism, exile, and defiance, fewer have systematically integrated phenomenology with postcolonial theory through close readings of individual poems. Existing work on dehumanization and alienation provides an important foundation but generally examines these themes separately, leaving their philosophical relationship underdeveloped. This article builds on that scholarship by bringing these three frameworks together within a single interpretive model.

The study addresses this gap by asking: How do Hegel's master--slave dialectic, Sartre's phenomenology of the look, and Fanon's postcolonial theory illuminate "Identity Card" as a representation of identity formation, dehumanization, and anticolonial struggle? While "Identity Card" is often examined as a poem of national resistance, this study argues that Darwish transforms the encounter between the speaker and the officer into a philosophical conflict over who has the authority to define human identity. From this perspective, the poem becomes not only a representation of colonial oppression but also an examination of how identity is formed, denied, and reclaimed. In this reading, resistance becomes a transformation in the structure of consciousness: the speaker moves from being an object of classification to a

subject who produces meaning. The analysis employs close textual reading informed by these theoretical frameworks, allowing Darwish's poetic language to guide interpretation while philosophy functions as an analytical lens. This study argues that the poem portrays Palestinian opposition to colonial oppression through an existential struggle in which the speaker reclaims agency by transforming imposed objecthood into self-affirmation. In doing so, the article extends existing postcolonial scholarship while addressing its limitations, offering a more integrated account of how Darwish's poetry negotiates the relationship between politics, philosophy, and lived colonial experience. It thereby contributes to discussions of literature, philosophy, and colonialism by showing that Darwish's work extends beyond political resistance to reveal the existential struggle involved in preserving identity and subjectivity.

Materials and Methods

Theoretical Framework

In "Identity Card," Darwish presents identity as a contested process rather than a fixed possession. The encounter between the speaker and the officer begins as an act of administrative identification but gradually develops into a struggle over who possesses the authority to define human identity. The poem therefore raises three interconnected questions: how reciprocal acknowledgment is denied, how objectification is experienced, and how humanity is reclaimed under conditions of domination. To examine these questions, this study brings together the frameworks developed by Hegel, Sartre, and Fanon. In *Phenomenology of Spirit* (2018), Hegel argues that self-consciousness emerges through a struggle for recognition between two self-conscious beings (78). This conflict initially establishes the master's dominance and reduces the slave to an object (80--81). Yet, through labor, the slave gradually overcomes subordination, reshaping both the external world and the self, and ultimately attains a higher form of self-consciousness than the master (81--93). Extending this insight, in *Being and Nothingness* (2003), Sartre develops Hegel's account of self-consciousness by examining how it is experienced through the look of the Other. Through this gaze, the individual is transformed from a free subject into a fixed object, producing alienation and shame as factuality is imposed upon the

self and the social self becomes internalized (222, 364). Sartre's explanation provides the philosophical basis for understanding how Darwish represents this objecthood in "Identity Card."

Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), relocates Hegel's master--slave dialectic within the historical conditions of colonialism and, like Sartre, examines how colonial power reduces the colonized to objects. Yet, he also exposes a limitation in applying the master--slave dialectic to colonial situations. Building on Hegel's account of self-consciousness, he argues that colonial authority denies the colonized the status of equal human subjects. Consequently, the struggle to affirm humanity becomes inseparable from the struggle for liberation, which he presents as the aim of decolonization (36). As Lewis Gordon argues in *What Fanon Said* (2015), Fanon reformulates Hegel's dialectic by showing that the colonial order is structured through the denial of reciprocal relations, making genuine recognition between colonizer and colonized impossible (69). Fanon further argues that colonial domination is sustained through violence, internalized by the colonized, and ultimately dismantled through decolonization, through which a new national consciousness emerges (35--61). Thus, Fanon both builds on and departs from Hegel. While self-consciousness still develops through struggle, that struggle no longer unfolds between two reciprocal consciousnesses but within the unequal structures of colonial rule.

Literature Review

Building on Hegel's dialectic, Raef Zreik, in "A One-State Solution?" (2011), links human recognition to the Israeli--Palestinian context by arguing that it cannot rest on domination alone but requires reciprocity. He suggests that the master--slave relation is not absolute, since domination is limited by ethical constraints that prevent the complete erasure of the other (794). In a broader sense, Axel Honneth's *The Struggle for Recognition* (1995) argues that identity emerges through social relations in which individuals receive acknowledgment from others (25, 38). Selfhood depends on intersubjective relations through emotional understanding, legal recognition, and social esteem (2, 13). When these forms of acknowledgment are denied, individuals experience "disrespect," which damages identity and can generate

social conflict (136). From this perspective, struggles over identity arise when social relations fail to provide the conditions necessary for a secure sense of self. This framework supports an interpretation of "Identity Card" in which the confrontation with colonial authority reflects a systematic denial of the speaker's identity rather than merely a political or national claim.

Hessa Alkahlan, in "Nationalism---a Way to Resistance" (2023), examines Darwish's poetry as a form of cultural opposition that affirms Palestinian national identity through the pursuit of autonomy, equality, and recognition (352). She identifies land and the Arabic language as symbols of collective identity (354). Along similar lines, Mahmoud Alhirthani, in "Poetry for Socio-Political Justice in Palestine" (2024), interprets Darwish's portrayal of personal humiliation as a symbol of collective suffering through themes of otherness, humanity, respect, humiliation, resilience, and, above all, identity (22--23). Shifting from political to philosophical concerns, Silverman, in *Rereading Identity Cards* (2019), observes that Darwish's early works were shaped by existentialist thought, particularly Sartrean ideas of authenticity and resistance, which informed his poetic articulation of Palestinian identity (36). Similarly, Qutaish Al Fawa'ra, in "Identity and Alienation" (2019), contends that Darwish presents alienation as an existential consequence of colonial occupation, linking dispossession from the land with estrangement from the self (420--421). This emphasis on the relationship between identity and place is echoed by Ahmed Abdullah Ahmed Al-Sakkaf, who, in "The Sense of Losing Land and Identity in Mahmoud Darwish's Selected Poems" (2021), maintains that Darwish's defiance emerges from identity, belonging, and an existential attachment to the land as much as from political opposition (46--49). More recently, Mahmoud El Bagoury, in "Mahmoud Darwish and the Quest for a Postcolonial Utopia" (2024), argues that Darwish's poetry reimagines the relationship between self and other through a postcolonial vision that challenges colonial structures of domination and opens the possibility of more equitable human relations (124).

Collectively, these studies establish the centrality of identity, resistance, alienation, and postcolonial conceptions of subjectivity in contemporary Darwish scholarship. Darwish's poetry has been examined through political, cultural, historical, and postcolonial frameworks, highlighting questions of dispossession,

national identity, and resistance. However, few studies have examined how phenomenological theories of recognition and objectification illuminate the formation of subjectivity in "Identity Card." While previous scholarship has explored the poem's representation of colonial experience, limited attention has been given to how Hegelian, Sartrean, and Fanonian perspectives explain the relationship between recognition, objectification, and the speaker's struggle for selfhood. This study addresses this limitation by offering an integrated philosophical reading of "Identity Card" that examines how identity is negotiated through reciprocal acknowledgment, alienation, and self-definition. Instead of treating identity and resistance only as political or cultural categories, the article investigates how Darwish represents subjectivity as shaped by encounters with domination and the struggle to reclaim agency. By connecting phenomenological analysis with postcolonial theory, it contributes to Darwish scholarship by showing how the poem frames domination as a philosophical question of selfhood, recognition, and agency. Broadly, it contributes to interdisciplinary discussions of literature, philosophy, and colonialism by demonstrating how literature reveals the relationship between individual consciousness and historical structures of power.

Methodology

This study employs close textual analysis combined with philosophical interpretation. Rather than treating Hegel, Sartre, and Fanon as separate explanatory models, the analysis examines how each theory illuminates a different dimension of the same encounter: recognition, objectification, and colonial domination. These frameworks are selected because they trace a movement from interpersonal acknowledgment to phenomenological experience and finally to the historical structures of colonial control. Hegel explains the struggle for reciprocal acknowledgment between unequal consciousnesses, Sartre examines how this struggle is experienced through the Other's gaze, and Fanon situates both processes within the political and racial structures of colonial rule. Together, these perspectives correspond to the poem's movement from identification to self-definition and ultimately to resistance. Although these thinkers emerge from different intellectual traditions and are not entirely interchangeable, their conceptual

intersections provide an appropriate basis for interpreting Darwish's representation of colonial experience.

The analysis proceeds through close reading of selected passages from "Identity Card," moving between textual observation and philosophical interpretation. Particular attention is given to imagery, repetition, tone, symbolism, rhetorical structure, and poetic voice, examining how these literary features construct selfhood, reduction to objecthood, and anticolonial struggle. The analysis first identifies recurring literary structures, then interprets them through the philosophical concepts of Hegel, Sartre, and Fanon before integrating these perspectives into a unified reading of recognition, subjectivity, and resistance. Although the study focuses on a single poem, "Identity Card" offers a concentrated site for examining broader questions of recognition, colonial identity, and resistance. Importantly, this research does not seek to endorse or reject political claims concerning the Israeli--Palestinian conflict; instead, it approaches Darwish's poem as a literary and philosophical text examining experiences of subjection, identity, and resistance through existential and phenomenological frameworks.

Results

The analysis suggests that postcolonial identity emerges not as a fixed national essence but as a dynamic process through which the self is continually reconstructed under colonial rule. In "Identity Card," opposition extends beyond political confrontation to become an ongoing effort to preserve humanity against colonial classification and dehumanization. The poem constructs identity through an unequal struggle for reciprocal acknowledgment. Through the speaker's movement from bureaucratic identification toward historical self-definition, Darwish presents identity as something actively produced rather than passively assigned. This progression corresponds to Hegel's account of self-consciousness developing through subordination. The analysis indicates that the poem extends this dialectic by presenting colonial domination as an assault on both personhood and political existence. The findings further show that objectification becomes the starting point from which the speaker recovers agency, corresponding to Sartre's account of the look. The speaker's struggle gradually expands from individual self-definition into a collective experience of colonial

violence. The analysis also suggests that the struggle cannot culminate in reciprocal recognition because colonial domination remains structured through violence, a conclusion consistent with Fanon's account of colonial relations. As the poem progresses from self-definition to open defiance, resistance emerges as a response to the structures of oppression that deny the speaker's humanity.

Taken together, these findings show that Darwish brings Hegel's, Sartre's, and Fanon's philosophical concerns into a single dramatic encounter. The analysis identifies parallels between the officer and Hegel's master, Sartre's observing Other, and Fanon's colonizing figure. The speaker, in turn, represents the subject struggling for recognition, confronting reduction, and asserting identity under conditions of colonial control. Read through these intersecting perspectives, "Identity Card" portrays colonial domination as a struggle over subjectivity, human dignity, and collective liberation.

Discussion

The following discussion develops these findings through a detailed reading of the poem, examining how Hegel's, Sartre's, and Fanon's theoretical perspectives illuminate the speaker's movement from recognition and objectification to anticolonial resistance.

Recognition and the Struggle for Identity

"Identity Card" stages a confrontation between a Palestinian speaker and an Israeli officer in which a demand for identification develops into a struggle over recognition. This encounter can be understood through Hegel's master-slave dialectic, with the Israeli officer occupying the position of the master and the speaker that of the slave. Subjected to the officer's demand for identification, the speaker initially occupies the position of Hegel's slave, whose conflict is directed toward achieving recognition. The identity card emerges as the medium through which colonial authority attempts to define him, while Darwish gradually allows the Palestinian voice to reclaim the authority to speak for itself. As the poem unfolds, the balance of power shifts as his voice expands beyond the narrow limits of bureaucratic identification. The opening lines establish this movement: Put it on record / I am an Arab / And the number of my card is fifty thousand (Darwish, lines 1--3). The repeated refrain, "Put it on record," provides the

poem's rhetorical framework. With each recurrence, the act of recording expands from personal identification to family history, attachment to the land, dispossession, and finally political accusation. An administrative procedure gradually develops into a testimony of lived experience. Equally significant is the order of the opening declaration. The speaker identifies himself through a collective national belonging before providing the bureaucratic details requested by the officer, allowing self-definition to precede colonial classification. The identity card therefore symbolizes a system that compresses experience into administrative categories while prompting the speaker to articulate an identity that exceeds those limits.

The officer's request for the identity card also reveals the master's dependence upon the speaker. The bureaucratic demand simultaneously establishes the officer as both Hegel's master, who seeks acknowledgment through domination, and the observing consciousness that Sartre later identifies as the source of reduction. By reducing the man to a numerical label, the officer attempts to preserve a hierarchical order grounded in colonial authority. The demand is not a neutral administrative act but an effort to replace the slave's own account of himself with an official colonial definition. Yet, as in Hegel's dialectic, the officer's authority remains dependent upon the continued submission of the man: the officer requires reciprocal acknowledgment from a consciousness that he simultaneously refuses to recognize as equal.

The speaker transforms the officer's demand for identification into an opportunity to narrate a history that cannot be contained within bureaucratic description. He does not reject the officer's demand outright; instead, he steadily enlarges its meaning. Each response extends beyond official identification toward ancestry, memory, family, and belonging, shifting the encounter from bureaucratic verification to the deeper question of what identity itself means. Significantly, the speaker does not state his personal name. Instead, he presents himself through a collective Arab identity rooted in ancestry and belonging, redirecting attention from individual biography toward shared historical experience. He continues this process by grounding his identity in lineage:

> My roots\ > Took hold before the birth of time\ >
Before the burgeoning of the ages,\ > Before cypress and

olive trees,\ > Before the proliferation of weeds.
(Darwish, lines 22--26)

This movement from bureaucratic identification toward historical self-definition reimagines Hegel's account of the slave's labor, through which the subordinate subject develops self-consciousness by transforming his relation to the world (93). Here, labor takes a linguistic form: narration becomes the means through which the speaker produces self-understanding and resists the identity imposed by colonial authority. The repeated anaphora of "Before" (23--26) slows the movement of the poem while extending the man's origins beyond recorded history. Darwish relocates identity from administrative documentation to genealogy, memory, and the landscape itself. The cypress and olive trees symbolize this continuity, presenting the land not simply as territory but as the material expression of historical belonging. By grounding the speaker's origins in a past that precedes both colonial rule and bureaucracy, Darwish challenges the authority of the officer's classification to define the limits of his existence. Abdulaali and Mohammad similarly argue that this imagery affirms Palestinian attachment to the land as an anticolonial act (43).

The speaker's account of his family history further expands his challenge to the categories imposed by the officer. He presents his origins not through social status or inherited privilege but through labor, land, and continuity:

> My father is from the family of the plough\ > Not from highborn nobles.\ > And my grandfather was a peasant\ > Without line or genealogy.\ > My house is a watchman's hut\ > Made of sticks and reeds. (Darwish, lines 27--31)

The progression from the man's children (lines 4--5, 10--13) to his father and grandfather (27--29) creates a generational structure that connects past and future. His humble circumstances do not function as signs of deficiency; instead, they become expressions of endurance, belonging, and historical continuity. The "family of the plough" (line 27) rejects aristocratic lineage in favor of cultivation and attachment to the soil, while the description of the speaker's house (lines 30--31) presents a life rooted in simplicity rather than social privilege. The contrast with "highborn nobles" (line 28) reverses conventional hierarchies, suggesting that

authority derived from status is less enduring than his relationship with the land. This refusal to measure dignity according to external status reflects the broader movement of the poem, where the speaker replaces administrative classification with a living account of history and belonging. The repeated references to his eight children place him within a continuum extending beyond the immediate encounter with the officer, suggesting that dispossession cannot erase the transmission of memory across generations (Alhirthani 23). Ahmed et al. similarly argue that Darwish transforms humble familial origins into a source of pride and belonging (11).

The speaker's account gradually shifts from self-definition to direct confrontation with dispossession. After establishing his ancestry, labor, and belonging, he turns toward the historical violence that has shaped his existence:

> You stole my forefathers' vineyards\ > And land I used to till,\ > I and all my children,\ > And you left us and all my grandchildren\ > Nothing but these rocks. (Darwish, lines 49--53)

The progression of this passage is significant. The loss extends from forefathers to children and grandchildren, transforming dispossession from an individual grievance into a historical condition spanning generations. The vineyards and cultivated land embody memory, continuity, and belonging. Their theft therefore represents not only the loss of property but also a disruption of the historical and personal connections through which the speaker understands himself. The restrained tone that characterizes the opening of the poem now gives way to direct accusation. He no longer confines himself to describing who he is but openly names the act of dispossession. This movement from self-description to confrontation reflects Hegel's account of the slave's anxiety upon recognizing subordination (81). For Hegel, this awareness does not end in fear; it initiates a transformation in consciousness, as the slave begins to recognize himself beyond the identity imposed by the master (82). The speaker's expanding account of ancestry, labor, and loss similarly demonstrates that his existence cannot be reduced to the categories imposed by colonial authority.

The speaker's gradual expansion from identification to ancestry, memory, and dispossession reshapes the

interaction with the officer into a struggle over who has the authority to define his existence. Each declaration exceeds the officer's original demand, moving the exchange beyond administrative verification. Through this process, Darwish shows that identity is not passively received from external categories but actively produced through narration and self-articulation. Read through Hegel's dialectic, this movement recalls the slave's development of self-consciousness through the experience of subordination and struggle (81--93). Yet, Darwish also exposes a tension within Hegel's model: although the master attempts to define the subordinate subject through domination, the speaker gradually reshapes the encounter by determining the terms through which he will be understood. His awareness of dispossession does not result in resignation; instead, by naming what has been taken from him, he affirms what remains beyond the officer's control---the ability to define the meaning of his own existence. The officer's authority becomes unstable because every attempt to reduce the speaker to an administrative category produces a wider and more powerful account of history, family, and belonging.

Hegel's dialectic, however, also reveals its own limits. It assumes that self-consciousness ultimately develops through reciprocity between self and other. Darwish's colonial setting complicates this assumption because the officer refuses any reciprocal relation, treating the man as an object of observation rather than another self-conscious subject. This limitation opens the way for Sartre's phenomenology of the look, which examines how selfhood is affected when another consciousness attempts to define the self as an object.

Objectification and the Experience of the Other's Look

The poem's movement from identification to self-naming reveals that the speaker's conflict is not only over political status but also over the experience of being defined by another. The officer's demand for identification places the speaker within a relation of observation in which his identity appears to be determined externally. Sartre's phenomenology helps illuminate this dimension of the encounter by examining how the look of the Other transforms the individual from a subject who experiences the world into an object fixed through another's perception. Sartre thus begins where Hegel reaches his limit, shifting attention from the possibility of reciprocal acknowledgment to the lived

experience of becoming an object for another consciousness. As Welten explains, "For myself, I am nothing but a free consciousness... Through the look of the Other, I become something in the eyes of the Other... I have become the object of his consciousness" (777). In this process, oppression emerges when the individual is reduced to an object beneath another's gaze, producing alienation and limiting the subject's sense of agency (Berenpas 11). In "Identity Card," this framework reveals how the officer's act of classification attempts to reduce the speaker to an administrative category while the poem's language continually exceeds that imposed identity.

In "Identity Card," this process is embodied in the encounter with the Israeli officer, whose authority depends on the power to observe, record, and define the speaker. Hegel explains authority as a social relation between master and slave; Sartre reveals the phenomenological mechanism through which it operates. The colonial gaze renders the man an object of observation, definition, and control. The same Israeli officer who functions as Hegel's master therefore now appears as Sartre's observing Other. Yet Sartre also insists that the Other's consciousness remains fundamentally inaccessible (273--274). He therefore confronts an authority that sees him while remaining itself beyond reciprocal understanding.

Although the initial encounter with the Other is experienced as becoming an object, it does not reveal the Other's authentic nature because it disregards an essential aspect of existence (Sartre 252, 256). In "Identity Card," treating the colonized man as an object ignores the fact that the colonized exceeds the limits of objecthood and cannot be manipulated or dismissed as a thing. Sartre's concept of the look explains how this misperception sustains colonial power. Darwish gives poetic form to this process through the movement between documentary language and self-expression. The officer's implied demand for identifiable information is answered with factual statements such as "the number of my card is fifty thousand" and later "Color of hair: jet black. / Color of eyes: brown" (lines 37--38). These details imitate the language of official records, presenting the speaker as a collection of observable facts. They are repeatedly interrupted, however, by declarations that exceed bureaucratic description, including "I am a name without a title" and "My roots / Took hold before the birth of time"

(lines 19, 22--23). Darwish therefore exposes the limits of the colonial gaze by revealing that lived existence always escapes those categories through which it is documented.

Sartre further argues that shame arises from becoming aware of oneself through another consciousness (262). In the Other's eyes, the individual appears as an object, like an inkwell on a table or a tree bent by the wind (262). The gaze therefore forces consciousness to perceive itself as fixed and predetermined. Alienation follows as the possibilities through which one once related freely to the world seem to belong to the Other instead of oneself (263). The numerical code on the identity card places the man in precisely this position, confronting him with an identity that appears imposed and unchangeable, much like Sartre's inkwell or tree. His freedom is experienced through the officer's reducing perspective, making his possibilities seem to belong to the Other rather than to himself.

This experience is reflected in his question, "Does my status satisfy you?" (Darwish, lines 33), which momentarily adopts the officer's evaluative perspective. The question is not a request for approval but a dramatic expression of Sartrean shame, as consciousness becomes aware of itself through another's judgment. Likewise, the declaration that he remains "Patient in a country where everything / Lives in a whirlpool of anger" (lines 20--21), illustrates the distance between lived consciousness and the hostile world constituted through colonial surveillance. He remains conscious of the gap between his own experience and the categories through which colonial authority seeks to define him. Darwish reinforces this distinction by moving from administrative description to ancestral memory, giving poetic form to the tension between bureaucratic visibility and lived consciousness. Sartre therefore develops Hegel's account instead of replacing it. The labor through which Hegel's slave acquires self-consciousness now unfolds internally, as consciousness itself struggles against the identity imposed by the master's gaze.

A turning point in "Identity Card" occurs when the speaker's reduction to an object becomes the very condition of his self-assertion. Instead of allowing the officer's gaze to determine the meaning of his existence, he recognizes his capacity to transcend the identity imposed upon him. Darwish dramatizes this movement when the objectified man preserves his sense of self

through the declaration, "I am a name without a title" (Darwish, line 19), paradoxically accepting his abasement while reclaiming the authority to define himself. He does not protest the absence of social status but states it with striking restraint, separating his lived existence from the institutional titles through which colonial authority classifies individuals.

This movement corresponds to Sartre's argument that the Other's negation can awaken an awareness of the self's capacity to transcend and affirm its own existence. Sartre describes this as a "wrenching away" from the Other, signifying consciousness becoming aware of its own spontaneity (285). The Other's gaze therefore does not completely determine consciousness; instead, it becomes the condition through which the subject recognizes its own freedom. Through the look, the Other overcomes this limiting objecthood and becomes a "presence in person" (253). Being reduced to an object therefore no longer signifies the end of freedom but functions as the condition through which freedom is reclaimed. Sartre does not reject Hegel's account of labor; instead, he relocates it within consciousness itself. The struggle now concerns not only overcoming domination from the master but also reclaiming the self from the Other's objectifying gaze.

Sartre argues that the look reveals the self through the perspective of the Other, exposing the vulnerability of becoming an object for another consciousness. He illustrates this through the example of hearing a creak behind oneself, which suddenly produces the awareness of being seen (259). In "Identity Card," Darwish represents this vulnerability through the repeated declaration, "I am an Arab." Each repetition is significant not only because it asserts identity but because it shifts the poetic voice from the object of observation to the subject of enunciation. Although the speaker cannot prevent himself from being seen and classified by the officer, he retains the authority to define himself through speech. The colonial gaze may determine the conditions of the encounter, but it cannot completely control the meaning the speaker gives to himself through language. In naming himself, he exposes the limits of the officer's perception; Darwish transforms an imposed identity into a declaration of dignity even under dehumanization (Al Areqi 35). The poem consequently shifts the emphasis from visibility to speech: the officer looks, but the voice names. By refusing to internalize the image imposed upon

him, the speaker illustrates that consciousness remains irreducible to the perspective of the Other.

What initially appears as submission emerges as an act of self-authorship, as he appropriates the reduction imposed by the colonial gaze instead of internalizing it. Humiliation is therefore transformed into a declaration of self-worth. The source of freedom is not the disappearance of the Other's judgment, but the subject's refusal to allow that judgment to become the final definition of the self. This movement resembles Dobrez's description of Sartre's philosophy: "The Other is master but if I will to be his slave, even though I have no choice, does not my slavery become self-imposed? In this case I am no longer a slave; I regain my freedom and, conceivably, make an idiot of my master" (222). Darwish reaches a similar conclusion through poetic voice. By accepting the condition imposed upon him without allowing it to determine who he is, the poem demonstrates that the officer's look cannot exhaust the meaning of his existence. Instead of reducing him to a passive object, the gaze becomes the point from which he recovers his sense of self. The repeated act of self-naming therefore continues the Hegelian movement toward self-consciousness while giving it a Sartrean form: freedom is reclaimed not by escaping the Other's gaze but by transforming the experience of objectification into self-assertion.

Sartre locates this struggle within the encounter between two consciousnesses; however, his account remains focused on the interpersonal relation between self and Other. In "Identity Card," the speaker is not simply objectified through an individual gaze; he is already positioned within a system of administrative classification and colonial power before the encounter begins. Sartre's account therefore explains how objectification is experienced, but it cannot fully explain the historical structures that produce this reduction. This limitation requires Fanon's analysis of colonial structures, where the gaze operates not only through individual perception but through institutional systems of power.

Colonial Power and the Formation of the Colonized Subject

In "Identity Card," the officer's action represents more than an individual act of observation; it reveals how colonial order attempts to define the speaker through externally imposed categories. The encounter therefore

reflects the tension between bureaucratic classification and the speaker's attempt to preserve a historical and cultural identity that cannot be reduced to administrative definition. Fanon's critique of the colonial gaze helps explain this process by showing how colonial control extends beyond interpersonal relations into systems of racial classification, political control, and violence (Fanon 3, 7, 39). While Sartre examines how the gaze reduces the individual to an object through the encounter with the Other, Fanon argues that the colonial gaze operates within a wider structure in which the colonized subject is already shaped by racial and political categories imposed by colonial power (7). As Fanon observes, "The settler is right when he speaks of knowing 'them' well. For it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence" (36). In "Identity Card," Darwish represents the officer's attempt to classify the speaker as an encounter in which institutional authority appears to define the boundaries of personal identity. The officer therefore functions not only as an observing consciousness comparable to Sartre's Other but also as an agent of a wider system that claims authority over the meaning of the speaker's identity.

The contradiction of colonial classification becomes further visible in the speaker's description of his address: "I'm from a village, remote, forgotten, / Its streets without name" (Darwish, lines 44--45). Although the officer demands precise identification, the speaker's place of origin exists outside the official systems that seek to categorize him. The village is not absent because it lacks historical significance; rather, it has been rendered invisible within colonial structures of naming and administration. Darwish therefore exposes a tension within colonial classification: it seeks to record and control the colonized subject while simultaneously denying recognition to the spaces, histories, and communities that constitute his existence.

Darwish's representation of this encounter also reflects Fanon's account of colonial space as divided through unequal relations of power. For Fanon, colonial violence is not limited to physical force but is embedded within political and social structures that separate the world of the colonizer from that of the colonized (38--40). The colonial world is "cut in two," with the colonizer's world characterized by privilege and excess and the native's world by deprivation and subordination (39--40). This structural division can be further understood through

Patrick Wolfe's account of settler colonialism as a structure rather than a single historical event, where settler colonial power operates through ongoing political, institutional, and symbolic practices aimed at managing and replacing Indigenous presence (Wolfe 388, 393--94). In "Identity Card," this perspective illuminates how bureaucratic classification functions within a broader structure of domination. From Fanon's perspective, however, the identity card represents more than interpersonal domination; it reveals how colonial institutions transform classification into a broader structure of control. Within this structure of domination, the colonized subject is forced into conditions of limited agency; as Syed Kazmi observes, colonial subjects are often left with few possibilities beyond survival, endurance, or displacement once their rights have been denied (51).

Fanon further argues that internalizing this reduction to objecthood can produce psychological alienation, as the colonized subject confronts an identity imposed from outside (40). While Sartre examines alienation through the experience of becoming an object under the gaze of another consciousness, Fanon extends this analysis by showing how colonial structures produce and sustain such alienation through racial, political, and historical systems. In relation to "Identity Card," Fawa'ra observes that Darwish portrays this alienation through the separation between Palestinians, their land, and their sense of self, while his poetic voice resists this condition by reaffirming historical and cultural continuity (420).

The closing lines of "Identity Card" mark a decisive turning point in the poem. After repeatedly asserting his identity, ancestry, and dignity, the speaker moves from self-definition toward direct confrontation:

> I don't hate people,\ > I trespass on no one's property.\ > And yet, if I were to become hungry\ > I shall eat the flesh of my usurper.\ > Beware, beware of my hunger\ > And of my anger! (Darwish, lines 58--63)

Darwish does not begin with a threat. The speaker first establishes an ethical position before introducing the possibility of retaliation, which remains conditional upon the continuation of dispossession and injustice. This movement marks a decisive departure from both Hegel and Sartre. The speaker no longer seeks recognition from the officer but confronts the conditions that deny his humanity. Fanon's account of colonial relations helps

explain this transformation. While Hegel's dialectic remains oriented toward the possibility of reciprocal self-consciousness and Sartre's phenomenology examines the struggle to recover freedom from the objectifying gaze of the Other, Fanon argues that colonial relations prevent genuine reciprocity because domination is maintained through structures that deny the humanity of the colonized subject. Resistance therefore moves beyond the struggle for acknowledgment toward confrontation with the system that produces domination. The speaker's warning thus represents not simply anger toward an individual officer but a response to a broader structure of dispossession.

The poem's closing warning marks a shift from self-definition toward open confrontation. Fanon places violence at the center of this transformation, arguing that it preserves the colonial order, while decolonization requires confronting both its physical and psychological structures (37, 94). He argues that the colonized must confront colonial domination through radical action, seeking to dismantle the conditions that sustain oppression: "The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it... This will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists" (37). He further contends that violence is not an accidental feature of colonial rule but one of its inevitable consequences. The conflict between settler and native therefore emerges from the logic of the colonial system itself, as the settler compels the native to respond through resistance (84).

Standing before the officer, the speaker experiences dispossession and dehumanization, yet his response gradually develops into open confrontation. Throughout "Identity Card," Darwish represents endurance not as passive acceptance but as a process through which accumulated injustice transforms into defiance. Fanon's theory helps explain this progression, arguing that the violence inflicted by the colonizer must be endured before genuine self-knowledge can emerge (61). Resistance therefore emerges not as an initial desire for destruction but as the consequence of prolonged oppression. What Hegel describes as the struggle for recognition and Sartre understands as resistance against the objectifying gaze reaches a different conclusion in Fanon: the conflict becomes a struggle to transform the conditions of colonial domination. If injustice persists, the poem redirects

suffering toward the colonizer, turning deprivation into a source of resistance.

Although "Identity Card" culminates in an openly confrontational voice, Darwish anticipates this development earlier through the image of the keffiyeh "Scratching him who touches it" (line 41), suggesting that colonial contact already contains the possibility of revolt. Fanon expresses a similar idea when he writes, "Colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence" (61). The warning therefore extends beyond an individual opponent to the colonial order that has produced hunger, dispossession, and violence. Sartre similarly observes in his preface to Fanon that "Violence has changed its direction... It's our turn to tread the path" (28--29). Darwish's closing lines give poetic form to this reversal, presenting violence first as a product of the colonial system and ultimately as the means through which the colonized confronts that domination.

This recovery of dignity constitutes an active challenge to the colonial regime. The changing power dynamic initiated by the question, "So will you be angry?" (Darwish, line 15), marks a decisive shift away from the officer's authority. The Palestinian voice no longer seeks the officer's approval but claims the right to define itself. The poetic voice grows increasingly forceful, and its language carries the power to unsettle the listener (Al Areqi 36). This tonal shift reflects the speaker's transformation from object of colonial authority to an active participant in his own liberation, a movement that reflects the psychological and cultural dimensions of Fanon's decolonization, through which the colonized recover both their humanity and political agency (37).

This transformation is already anticipated in the speaker's refusal to submit: "And beg for no alms at your door, / Lower not myself at your doorstep / What's there to be angry about?" (Darwish, lines 14--16). By rejecting victimization, the speaker directly challenges the colonizer's expectation of submission. As Fanon observes, "the native is overpowered but not tamed; he is treated as an inferior, but he is not convinced of his inferiority" (52). The repeated question, "What's there to be angry about?" (Darwish, lines 6, 16, 46), marks the progression from restrained endurance to open defiance. The speaker therefore moves beyond asserting his

identity before the officer to confronting the structures that sustain his oppression.

Significantly, the colonized subject's revolt embodies Fanon's conception of decolonization as the "creation of new men" (36). This rebellion represents more than the recovery of an individual identity; it signals the emergence of a collective political consciousness. Decolonization, in Fanon's account, restores those once treated as objects to the position of active participants in their own history (36). Darwish's repeated assertion of Arab identity therefore extends beyond personal affirmation, becoming the collective voice of a people shaped by dispossession and shared struggle. In this respect, Fanon relocates their ideas within the historical reality of colonialism, arguing that decolonization requires changing not only the colonized but also the political structures through which the colonial system is maintained.

Rather than completing Hegel's and Sartre's models, Fanon demonstrates that recognition and freedom cannot be understood apart from colonial domination. Read together, these perspectives reveal how Darwish transforms the struggle for recognition into a struggle for decolonization. By embedding these philosophical tensions within a dramatic encounter between the speaker and the officer, Darwish illustrates how poetry can render abstract questions of recognition, objectification, and liberation as lived human experience. Accordingly, "Identity Card" recovers the speaker's humanity while imagining a collective future in which colonial definitions of identity no longer determine Palestinian existence.

Works Cited

- Abdulaali, Wafaa, and Ghada A. Mohammad. "Mahmoud Darwish and Tanure Ojaide." *Ars & Humanitas*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2020, pp. 41--53. doi:10.4312/ars.14.1.41-53.
- Abdullah, Mohamed Saad Rateb. "Post-Colonial Transformation as a Mode of Resistance in the Poetry of Mahmoud Darwish." *Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Fayoum University*, vol. 15,

- p. 1269--1338. doi:10.21608/jfafu.2023.194790.1867.
- Ahmed, Hamoud Yahya, et al. "Identity and Land in Mahmoud Darwish's Selected Poems: An Ecopostcolonial Reading." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, vol. 1, no. 6, 2012, pp. 7--19. doi:10.7575/IJALEL.V.1N.6P.7.
- Al Areqi, Rashad Mohammed Moqbel. "Home, Homeliness and Search for Identity in Mahmoud Darwish's Poetry." *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014, pp. 32--41. doi:10.5430/ijelt.v1n1p32.
- Alhirthani, Mahmoud. "Poetry for Socio-Political Justice in Palestine: Mahmoud Darwish's Translation and Re-Narration of Palestinian-Israeli Encounters." *Linguistica Antverpiensia*, vol. 23, 2024, pp. 17--35. doi:10.52034/lans-tts.v23i.794.
- Al-Sakkaf, Ahmed Abdullah Ahmed. "The Sense of Losing Land and Identity in Mahmoud Darwish's Selected Poems." *TEHAMA Journal*, no. 13, 2021, pp. 43--59.
- Berenpas, Martine. "Jean-Paul Sartre on Oppression and Violence." *The Moral Psychology of Terrorism*, edited by Jalil Roshandel and Nathan Lean, Cambridge UP, 2013, pp. 30--43.
- Darwish, Mahmoud. "Identity Card." Translated by Denys Johnson-Davies, *Third World Resurgence*, no. 310--311, 2016, p. 56.
- Dobrez, Livio A. C. *The Existential and its Exits: Literary and Philosophical Perspectives on the Works of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter*. A&C Black, 2014.
- El Bagoury, Mahmoud. "Mahmoud Darwish and the Quest for a Postcolonial Utopia." *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2024, pp. 109--26. doi:10.3366/hlps.2024.0328.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington, Grove Press, 1963.
- Fawa'ra, Loiy Hamidi Qutaish Al. "Identity and Alienation." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2019, pp. 420--23. doi:10.22161/ijels.4.2.33.
- Gordon, Lewis R. *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought*. Fordham UP, 2015.
- Hegel, G. W. F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Michael Inwood, Oxford UP, 2018.
- Honneth, Axel. *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Translated by Joel Anderson, MIT Press, 1995.
- Kazmi, Sarah Syed. "Poetics of Resistance." *Review of Human Rights*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2022, pp. 46--57. doi:10.35994/rhr.v8i1.213.
- Priwanda, Rakhmania, and Abu Fanani. "Understanding the Palestinian Struggle through Mahmoud Darwish's 'Identity Card.'"

Proceedings of the National English Undergraduate Student Conference (NEUSCO), vol. 1, 2024, pp. 22--32.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes, Routledge, 2003.

-----, Preface. *The Wretched of the Earth*, by Frantz Fanon, Grove Press, 2018, pp. 7--31.

Silverman, Netanel Haim. *Rereading Identity Cards*. 2019. University of Toronto, PhD dissertation.

Welten, Ruud. "Sartre and the Transformation of Victimhood." *Philosophy Today*, vol. 65, no. 4, 2021, pp. 773--88. doi:10.5840/philtoday2021726419.

Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2006, pp. 387--409. doi:10.1080/14623520601056240.

Zreik, Raef. "A One-State Solution?" *Social Identities*, vol. 17, no. 6, 2011, pp. 793--810. doi:10.1080/13504630.2011.606675.
