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# **Forms of Exile**

## **Contemporary Palestinian Life Writing**

**Sophia Brown**

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Postcolonial Studies

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of contemporary exilic Palestinian life writing in English. Attentive to the ongoing nature of Palestinian dispossession since 1948, it focuses on how exile is narrated and the ways in which it informs models of selfhood within a context of conflict and loss. This involves adopting a framework of settler colonialism in order to understand the conflict. Broadly speaking, the thesis conceives of Palestinian life writing as a form of testimony posing an urgent and necessary counternarrative to the hegemony of the Israeli discourse on Palestine/Israel. The thesis examines life writing by different generations of Palestinians, from those who experienced the Nakba of 1948, to those born as second-generation Palestinians in their parents' adopted homelands. It does not limit itself to examining the work of those at a geographical distance from Palestine but also looks at narratives by those who live, or have lived, under Israeli occupation. This has required paying particular attention to the difference between 'internal' and 'external' exile. Recognising that Palestinians who live in Palestine/Israel still sometimes articulate their experience as a form of exiling is an integral aspect of this research. The thesis argues that while the ongoing conflict impacts the identity formation and experiences of all the writers under consideration, nonetheless each author is inevitably guided by distinct geographies, temporalities, imaginings and frames of reference, which ultimately determine their relationship to Palestine and what it means to consider themselves exiled. I am, therefore, particularly mindful of the plurality of exilic experience, even while ideas of communality are still hugely important.

The thesis consists of three author-led chapters – on Edward Said, Ghada Karmi and Rema Hammami – followed by a final chapter on anthologised life

writing, which looks at the work of seven authors. Raising questions of form and how one deals with both the commonality and complexity of exile, this final chapter aims to show recent developments in English-language Palestinian life writing. By demonstrating the distinct ways in which exiled Palestinians relate to Palestine/Israel, this thesis seeks to contribute in particular towards two areas of study that have, for the most part, failed to engage substantially enough with Palestine (or, indeed, with each other): postcolonial and auto/biography studies. These subfields of cultural criticism and their wealth of scholarship therefore provide the necessary tools for this research, but they are also held to account for the relative lack of attention paid to Palestine and the extant nature of the conflict. Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate that exilic Palestinian life writing sheds its own light on matters of great import to postcolonial and auto/biography studies – matters such as statelessness, belonging, testimony, selfhood and self-representation – and that there are intersecting aesthetic and ethical reasons for ensuring the visibility of Palestine within these areas of study.

*This thesis follows the latest (8<sup>th</sup>) edition of the MLA referencing style.*

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# INTRODUCTION

There are many different kinds of Palestinian experience, which cannot all be assembled into one. One would therefore have to write parallel histories of the communities in Lebanon, the Occupied Territories, and so on. That is the central problem. It is almost impossible to imagine a single narrative: It would have to be the kind of crazy history that comes out in *Midnight's Children*, with all those little strands coming and going in and out.

Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession* (119)

Palestine-in-exile is an idea, a love, a goal, a movement, a massacre, a march, a parade, a poem, a thesis, a novel and, yes, a commodity, as well as a people scattered, displaced, dispossessed and determined.

Rana Barakat, 'The Right to Wait: Exile, Home and Return' (145)

In conversation with Salman Rushdie, Edward Said remarks on the multiplicity of Palestinian experience – an inevitable result of a scattered existence. Similarly, Rana Barakat reflects on the diverse ways of articulating and representing Palestine-in-exile. Their words underscore the fact that there is no template for responding to displacement. Drawing on the work of these and many other authors, this thesis is an examination of contemporary Palestinian life writing in English, focusing in particular on how exile is narrated and the ways in which it informs models of selfhood in a context of conflict. It is also driven by the conviction that this life writing is a counternarrative to the dominant Israeli narrative that, to this day, erases and undermines Palestinian history, heritage and connections to Palestine.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore akin to Chinua Achebe's evocative notion of 're-storying', a much-needed process by which those in Africa and elsewhere

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis I use the term 'Palestine', which as my readings show encompasses a wide range of historical, contemporary, geographical, conceptual and imaginative meanings for Palestinians physically inside and outside of the current geopolitical territory of Palestine/Israel (the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Israeli state). I swap the terms 'Israel' and 'Palestine' to reverse symbolically the primacy of Israel. Others, amongst them Joseph Massad, Bart Moore-Gilbert, Patrick Williams, and Eyal Weizman, have also used Palestine/Israel in their work.

affected by colonial dispossession began to dispute their silencing and reclaim their voices (79).

The title of this thesis – *Forms of Exile* – has a dual meaning: it refers to the varied forms of exile that Palestinians narrate (the ‘different kinds of Palestinian experience’) but also to the varied forms of life writing used to express this experience (which Barakat, in a broader sense, draws attention to). Over roughly the last two decades, Palestinian life writing in English has emerged as a substantial category, with certain authors such as Suad Amiry, Mourid Barghouti, Edward Said and Raja Shehadeh gaining international recognition for their work. Scholarly interest has ensued but it remains noticeably modest in relation to the burgeoning output of Palestinian autobiographical narratives, which necessitates greater critical attention. This thesis, therefore, is the first sustained examination of Palestinian life writing within the English literary field, paying attention to its commonalities and complexities. By drawing on auto/biography studies, postcolonial studies and settler colonial studies in order to discuss the representation of exile within Palestinian life writing, I am also bringing together areas of study that rarely overlap. Furthermore, auto/biography studies and postcolonial studies are subfields of cultural criticism that have only relatively recently begun to engage substantially with Palestine, as well as with each other.

Central to analysing Palestinian life writing on exile is the appreciation that the conflict continues, and with it the displacement of Palestinians, the denial of self-determination and the impossibility for the vast majority to reside in or even visit Palestine/Israel. While it is beyond the remit of this introduction to present an extensive historical context of Palestine/Israel, an overview is necessary in order to situate my research. Palestine, an area considered holy to the three

monotheistic faiths – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – has long been contested and overloaded with conflicting meanings and appropriations, as Said neatly summarises:

Palestine has always played a special role in the imagination and in the political will of the West, which is where by common agreement modern Zionism also originated. Palestine is a place of causes and pilgrimages. It was the prize of the Crusades, as well as a place whose very name (and the endless historical naming and re-naming of the place) has been an issue of doctrinal importance. To call the place 'Palestine' and not 'Israel' or 'Zion' is already an act of fairly consequential political interpretation. (*Question 9-10*)

British colonial interests in Palestine, which culminated in British rule from 1923 until 1948, coincided with the rise of Zionism in Europe. Zionism was enabled in its pursuit of a Jewish sovereign state by the British government, which in 1917 issued the Balfour Declaration, supporting the establishment of a national home for Jews in Palestine. Many Jews subsequently began to emigrate there, where they had a historic connection through their faith and where small Jewish communities (unconnected with Zionism's brand of Jewish nationalism) had long existed amongst other groups of peoples, including the Arab population, which for many centuries had comprised the overwhelming majority of the population of the territory.<sup>2</sup> This emigration greatly intensified as a result of harsh anti-Semitic persecution in Europe, which culminated barbarically in the Nazi Holocaust.

These developments, as well as subsequent interventions such as the 1947 UN resolution, which advocated the partition of Palestine into a larger Jewish state alongside a smaller Palestinian state, greatly alarmed the Arab population, which

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<sup>2</sup> For an astute overview of the fractious and essentialist Israeli politics of race, religion and ethnicity as a means to assert historic Jewish ties to the land and thus claim ownership of it, see Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History* (239-70). See also Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*. In *Palestinian Identity*, Rashid Khalidi also critiques the corresponding tendency to essentialise Palestinian identity, instead of acknowledging the more complex and contingent nature of collective identity formation (34).

was agitating for self-determination following centuries of foreign rule. This led to the 1948-49 War and the establishment of Israel. By the end of the war, Israel controlled 78% of Palestine – 25% more than the UN partition plan accorded it. For Palestinians, this meant displacement and dispossession. Between 1947 and 1949, most lost their homes, land and livelihood as a result of operations by Jewish paramilitary groups, and then by the Israeli authorities, once the state had been declared. More than 500 Palestinian villages were destroyed and eleven urban environments emptied of their inhabitants, meaning that an estimated 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee, either becoming refugees in neighbouring Arab countries, or exiles in a variety of countries around the world (Pappé, *Ethnic* xiii; Flapan 216).<sup>3</sup>

This period (1947-49), which Palestinians refer to as the Nakba ('catastrophe' in Arabic) and which Israelis view as their war of independence, remains a contested and mythologised period of history for both Palestinians and Israelis. Their respective historiographies differ on many aspects of it, in particular the issue of dispossession and to what extent it was premeditated and strategised. As Kimmerling and Migdal observe: 'No one can say precisely how many of the 1.3 million Palestinians became refugees, the reckoning – like so much else in Palestine's legacy – becoming a constituent part of the Arab-Israeli conflict' (156). In the 1980s, the emergence of a group of Israeli historians, referred to as the 'New Historians', led to revisionist accounts prompted by newly declassified archival material on these disputed years.<sup>4</sup> This brought Israeli and Palestinian narratives closer together through the assertions that the expulsion of Palestinians had

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<sup>3</sup> There are now many (and often divergent) accounts of all aspects of Palestine's history and the establishment of Israel. Those I have consulted are Rashid Khalidi, Walid Khalidi, Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal, Nur Masalha, and Ahmad Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod. In addition to these, I have drawn on the work of the 'New Historians', referred to in the next footnote.

<sup>4</sup> See Simha Flapan, Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé (*Making*), and Avi Shlaim (*Collusion*).

largely been planned and that the Jewish side easily possessed the means to win the war, thus dispelling what Ilan Pappé refers to as ‘the myth of annihilation’ (*Making* 45). For Palestinians, the catastrophe of 1948 was followed by the June 1967 war, during which Israel captured the Gaza Strip from Egyptian rule, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordanian rule; these areas are today referred to as the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Since its inception, the basic laws of the Israeli state have institutionalised discrimination and racism against non-Jewish inhabitants, with over thirty laws that explicitly privilege Jews over non-Jews (Masalha, *Nakba* 43-7). The Israeli state distinguishes between nationality and citizenship, with nationality guaranteed only to those of the Jewish religion, a blueprint of exclusion that heavily influences attitudes and behaviour (Wolfe, *Traces* 251). The state has always fought for maximum land and resources for Jews, directly disinherit non-Jews. For example, the Law of Absentee Properties in 1950 legalised the transfer of Palestinian land and property to new Jewish owners; Kimmerling and Migdal observe that as much as 40% of Palestinian land was confiscated in this way (173). Palestinian citizens of Israel continue to suffer in terms of rights to land, housing, jobs, tax credits and education (Pappé, *Forgotten* 4-8). Added to this, Palestinians in the West Bank live under Israeli military rule, which catastrophically curtails their human rights, with Israel controlling all Palestinian borders and movement between towns and cities, through a complex and evolving system of checkpoints and walls. As B’Tselem explains, under military law in the West Bank, Israeli soldiers can enter any Palestinian home at any time without a permit or justification, often leading to arbitrary incursions and serious damage to property (‘Security’). Palestinians can also be arrested and imprisoned without

charge or trial under the practice of administrative detention, are subject to searches without warrant, and are routinely tortured and assassinated.<sup>5</sup> All of this takes place while they witness the steady loss of their land to Israel's aggressive policy of settlement-building, which has rapidly increased since the Oslo Accords in 1993, an interim peace agreement that was supposed to lead to full self-determination for the Palestinians but instead has been recognised by many as a disastrous capitulation on key issues by its Palestinian signatory, Yasser Arafat.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, East Jerusalem, which Israel unilaterally (and illegally, under international law) annexed in 1967, has witnessed a steady erosion of both its Arab heritage and makeup (Cohen; Ghosheh; Mayer and Mourad; Pullan et al). Jerusalem is explored in more detail in Chapter Three. In Gaza, the ongoing blockades and regular wars have led to a humanitarian crisis on an unprecedented scale (Tawil-Souri and Matar; Chomsky and Pappé). To this day, no Palestinian state has been established and dispossession continues, while attitudes in Israel harden. Referring to 'Israeli McCarthyism', in a 2016 article for *The New York Review of Books* David Shulman observes:

Anyone who opposes the occupation in word or deed is now at risk. For the right, patriotism is synonymous with occupation and all that comes with it, above all the dispossession and expulsion of Palestinians and the theft of their lands. One can hear overtly racist rationalizations of this aim any day on the public radio talk shows. Put simply, the occupation system as a whole is ruled by the logic of stark division between the privileged Israeli occupiers and the Palestinian occupied, who are totally disenfranchised and stripped of all basic human rights.

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<sup>5</sup> Regular documentation, often accompanied by images and/or audiovisual material, of these human rights abuses can be found online at Al-Haq, B'Tselem, and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: Occupied Palestinian Territory.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the Oslo Accords and its failures for Palestinians see, for example, Said, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After*, Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall* (516-30) and Shehadeh, '1993: Oslo Accords – A Post-Mortem' in *Language of War, Language of Peace* (29-41)

Unsurprisingly, the election of Donald Trump as US president has further emboldened the current Israeli government, which by February 2017 had already twice announced a significant expansion of settlements (Beaumont, 'Settlement').

For Palestinians, the Nakba remains an ongoing wound, integral to Palestinian history and memory due to its profound impact on those directly affected and their descendants. It is 'the demarcation line' between two entirely different periods: 'After 1948, the lives of the Palestinians at the individual, community, and national level were dramatically and irreversibly changed' (Abu-Lughod and Sa'di 3). Reflecting on its layers of meaning, Ahmad H. Sa'di writes:

Al-Nakba is many things at once: the uprooting of people from their homeland, the destruction of a social fabric that had uninterruptedly existed for centuries, and the frustration of national aspirations. Al-Nakba is also an unsettling counter-memory; a constant reminder of failings and of injustice. It is an unavoidable question as to the morality of the Zionist project; a constant reminder to Arab leadership and peoples of their shortcomings and failure; and a persistent questioning of world public opinion's vision of a moral and just human order. ('Amnesia' 383)

Sa'di's summary touches on three themes that are crucial to this thesis. Firstly, there is the past as a 'constant reminder' of injustice and thus the impossibility of moving on, even while the years pass. As Sa'di observes: 'After sixty years a state of normality has not been achieved; an Archimedean point from which Palestinians can reflect back and explore their past has not been reached' ('Amnesia' 390). Secondly, there is the Palestinian narrative of loss as 'counter-memory', challenging the Israeli discourse on the conflict. Thirdly, there is the broader theme of what 'a moral and just human order' looks like. As I will argue, these three themes are crucial for reading exilic Palestinian life writing.

## Internal and External Exile

In establishing a Jewish state and ethnically cleansing Palestine – ‘settler colonialism’s positive and negative dimensions respectively’ – Zionism began its ongoing process of Palestinian dispossession (Wolfe, *Traces* 229). I stress this ‘ongoingness’ because it pertains to my understanding of exile in this thesis, namely that Palestinian experience is frequently expressed (and thus narrated) as both internal *and* external exile. Barakat puts this succinctly: ‘After 1948, regardless of place or placement, all Palestinians experience exile for Palestine itself was exiled. The ship was wrecked long before many of us were born’ (142-3). This means paying attention to narratives not just by those outside of Palestine/Israel, but also those under Israeli occupation, direct victims of ongoing settler colonial activity, an experience which is often articulated as internal exile.<sup>7</sup> As Tetz Rooke observes: ‘Even those Palestinians living under Israeli occupation on the West Bank or in Gaza experience a kind of exile, mentally at least, as they are a people without a state of their own and their national identity is therefore called into question. They too are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim’ (232).

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<sup>7</sup> A few words on terminology. There are interconnected terms that abound throughout this thesis, derived from the sources under examination: exile, diaspora, displacement, dispossession, expulsion. I am guided by what authors themselves use; however, I predominantly use ‘exile’ as well as the adjective form ‘exilic’ in my own analysis. In describing the term ‘diaspora’, James Clifford states that it is not possible to define it ‘sharply’ but that ‘it is possible to perceive a loosely coherent, adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling-in-displacement’ (310). Similarly, my use of ‘exile’ is loose and adaptive, which I hope, through the specificity I pay to each context of exile, avoids any flattening or generalising of the term. My decision to choose ‘exile’ is based both on the prevalence of the term in my research, and a belief that it has a wider application than diaspora, which is also very commonly used. Diaspora, which tends to prioritise a connection with a former homeland from a place of new habitation, is arguably less accommodating to the idea of internal exile (although occasional references to experiencing diaspora at home, or being diasporised internally, are to be found). Some writers (notably Said) reject the term diaspora because of its strong associations with a Jewish Biblical narrative; this is discussed briefly in Chapter One. Exile also has literary connotations, which is evocative for the analysis of life writing as a form of literature, albeit a politicised and testimonial form.



In writing this thesis, I have endeavoured to ensure that terms such as exile and diaspora always remain contextualised, taking into account each individual's experience of displacement and how that experience relates to the broader picture of settler colonialism. As Julie Peteet cautions in her persuasive analysis of the Palestinian diaspora, the now widespread use of the term 'diaspora' means that there is a danger of it losing its specificity and thus its incisiveness as a category. Unless we remain cognisant of this, 'the term risks describing everything and nothing' ('Diaspora' 629). The same might be said of exile, whose broad definition allows the Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño to describe it as 'an attitude toward life' (39). For Bolaño, all of us set out into a certain kind of exile when we leave childhood behind, and simply by venturing into literature, readers and writers alike become exiles (51). I agree with Peteet about the need to maintain specificity when using such broad terms, especially if we are to think about their political ramifications. As she notes: 'Uncritical invocations of diaspora risk minimizing the range of traumatic conditions that fuel displacement and the way these shape sociocultural formations and subjectivity' ('Diaspora' 630).

Also instructive is Sophia McClennan's work on exile in Hispanic literature. She observes: 'I found that in many scholarly works the term "exile," having lost its reference to a painful state of being, was empty of history and an association with material reality' (1). Her book is described as a bridge between 'the exile of theoretical discourse' and 'concrete cases of exile from repressive authoritarian regimes' (1). My intention in this thesis is to be similarly attentive to exile as a material reality (specific to each individual), while also observing the presence of more abstract notions of exile as a metaphorical concept, or a permanent state of being. I am also guided by McClennan's flexibility when it comes to assessing

writers as exilic: 'In my analysis I will not question whether the exile is authentic according to some rigid and authoritarian criteria. If exiled writers use "exile," or some variation of the word, to describe their condition, and if their writing attempts to represent the experience of exile, then these writers produce exile literature' (17).

Inextricable from terms that reference exile and displacement is the notion of boundaries. How formal and informal boundaries are defined – as well as who is within and who is without – is a major area of contention within the context of Palestine/Israel, which highly problematises the notion of inside and outside; internal and external. For example, considering 'internal' Palestinians, what does 'inside' mean to a Palestinian citizen of Israel who inevitably is placed outside the allegiances of and selective protection offered by the Jewish state? What does 'outside' mean to a West Bank Palestinian whose lands have been appropriated by Israel through the building of the separation wall *inside* of the Green Line (the 1949 armistice border)? In considering 'external' Palestinians, what does 'inside' mean to a Palestinian who experiences multiple attachments to place, none of which quite adhere? What does 'outside' mean to a Palestinian who has never visited Palestine, yet feels an undeniable attachment to it? These are merely a handful of the incongruities prompted by exilic Palestinian life writing.

An instructive set of preliminary questions is posed by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur:

How are boundaries predicated not merely on a geographical and political outside (i.e., other foreign territories), but also on the internal presence of non-citizen classes, such as immigrants, economic migrants, exiles, refugees, and illegal aliens?

Second, how are geopolitical boundaries and territorial identities predicated not merely on internal exclusion (as posed in the previous question), but also on constitutive forms of externalizing exclusion (such as forced economic migration,

imposed or political exile, evacuation of refugees, and deportation of illegal aliens)? (16)

This interrelationship between internal and external exclusion is fundamental to Israel's settler colonialism. The unrelenting principles of inclusion and exclusion that Israel adheres to and the concomitant lack of resolution for all Palestinians mean that there are still fiercely debated boundaries between geographical and political 'insides' and 'outsides'. Furthermore, there are enforced internal boundaries, whether between Israelis and Palestinians within the state of Israel, settlers and Palestinians within the West Bank, or indeed between Palestinians themselves, either within the West Bank or across the Green Line (Gaza and its prison-like conditions only further complicates these issues). As indicated above, Palestine is also very much on the outside when it comes to international politics and recognition.

Saree Makdisi's *Palestine Inside Out* productively conceptualises the insides and outsides of the Israeli occupation. 'Palestine was turned inside out in 1948', Makdisi writes. 'Because of what happened that year, the Palestinians have been scattered across many different countries and around the world' (261). This notion of Palestine being turned inside out powerfully reiterates the catastrophic impact of the Nakba. Makdisi does not deal with those expelled beyond the borders of the country, but instead concentrates on examining the many different meanings of 'inside' and 'outside' *within* the Occupied Palestinian Territories. He outlines the control and destruction of the 'insides' of life, including family homes and workplaces, and the 'outsides' of life, such as checkpoints, roadblocks and the separation wall, as well as exploring the impact of the constant redrawing of the municipal borders of Jerusalem and the ways in which Gaza represents a world turned *outside in* due to the blockade. Additionally, what is interesting is Makdisi's

explicit acknowledgement of his own 'outsider' status writing the text, as he explains that he was born to a Palestinian mother and Lebanese father in Beirut, having spent his life living between Lebanon and America, inevitably isolated from Palestine, as has been the case for many Palestinians in exile. His experiences are shown to have shaped his identity, as he concludes that 'I have, in short, become far too used to being an outsider ever to feel entirely comfortable as an "insider" identifying completely with any group or nation' (xxv). Thus, the combination of his exilic background and his analysis of the occupation as a process manipulating the insides and outsides of life compellingly demonstrates the boundary complications of Palestine/Israel and their long-term impact on Palestinians: whether on Makdisi himself, forced to be an outsider outside of Palestine, or the people he writes about in his book, whom we might think of as forced to be outsiders *inside* of Palestine.

Seen as a broad spectrum of displacement, exile is crucial to understanding the Palestinian experience of Israel's settler colonial activities, past and present. It is in this sense that I am interested in different *forms* of exile: internal and external and the many varieties within those categories also. Because of the varied nature of Palestinian experience, its myriad displacements crisscrossing space and time, thinking about the plurality and prevalence of exile is crucial. Juliane Hammer puts this succinctly: 'Moving, and living in places other than Palestine, has, throughout the last century, been an important feature of Palestinian life. There is not one Palestinian family that has been unaffected by this experience' (*Exile* 2). Unsurprisingly, this has an enormous impact on Palestinian writing. In her introduction as editor of *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (1992), Salma Khadra Jayyusi repeatedly draws attention to the impact of displacement on the

development of Palestinian writing, asserting that there are now two distinct branches of Palestinian literature – one produced within Palestine/Israel and one without – with her selections for the anthology attentive to both branches (4). Her inclusion of numerous exiled writers (many of whom write in English) is indicative of both their importance when it comes to assessing Palestinian literature and the unavoidable impact of 1948 on cultural production.

Barbara McKean Parmenter, in her eloquent study of place and identity in Palestinian literature, focuses extensively on exile, the narration of which, she observes, has developed over the decades from an intense nostalgia for specific places to a fuller exploration of the *meaning* of exile (48). In his study of the Palestinian short story in exile, Joseph Farag refers to ‘the crucial dimension of Palestinian exile subjectivity that applies to the overwhelming majority of Palestinians today’, which he asserts has been somewhat overlooked in previous English language studies of Palestinian literature, notwithstanding contributions such as Parmenter’s (2). In a study of Nakba memories in Palestinian narratives, Ihab Saloul states that ‘the persistence of catastrophic output in Palestinian culture and politics is closely linked to their construction of exilic identity’, thus similarly underscoring the primacy of exile (2). He too recognises internal exile alongside external: ‘I consider both narrative themes – that of war and loss of homeland and that of the immediate political situation under Israeli occupation – as one type of Palestinian narratives, namely “exilic narrative”’ (7). Also instructive is Norbert Bugeja’s reading of Mourid Barghouti’s *I Saw Ramallah*, which views Barghouti’s memoir as accounting for ‘the *diversity* of experiences within and outside the homeland, precisely by forging specific affinities between *different* forms of exilic

conditions both within and beyond the homeland itself' (40, emphasis added).<sup>8</sup> My own study of Palestinian life writing builds on this growing scholarly attentiveness to the complexity and prevalence of exile.

### **Settler Colonialism and Postcolonial Studies**

This thesis is shaped by an understanding that exilic Palestinian life writing is part of an urgent counter-discourse to Israeli settler colonialism – hence Sa'di's reference to 'counter-memory'. Building on the work of Gershon Shafir, Nur Masalha, Gabriel Piterberg and Patrick Wolfe, I see Zionism as a form of settler colonialism and Israel as a settler state.<sup>9</sup> Studying Israel as a settler colonial entity helps orientate my research on Palestinian life writing as counternarrative in three important ways. Firstly, it indicates that since its inception and through the prior planning that brought it into being, the Israeli state was underpinned by a settler ethic, derived from European colonial narratives. Secondly, it underscores the fundamental importance of realising that morally, the intentions of the newcomers to Palestine are not as important as the outcome: whatever justifications are offered do not change the fundamental fact that the Palestinians were dispossessed. This explicit focus prioritises the injustice of the situation. Finally, it also demonstrates what Piterberg describes as 'the power and prevalence of the manner in which the Zionist Israel project tells its own story', in response to which alternative stories are subsequently essential (*Zionism* 88).

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<sup>8</sup> An interesting counterpoint to Bugeja's reading of Barghouti is Anna Bernard's analysis. Bernard criticises Said's reading of Barghouti for what she sees as its emphasis on a shared exilic identity, without also acknowledging the lack of equivalence between private and collective experience (*Rhetorics* 68-70). Taken together, Bernard and Bugeja point to more incisive ways of reading exile, Palestinian identity and its complicated relationship with notions of the collective. See also Mattar.

<sup>9</sup> Two earlier studies on the settler-colonial features of Zionism and Israel are *The Zionist Colonization of Palestine* (1965) by Fayez Sayegh and *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* by Maxime Rodinson, originally published in French (*Israel, fait colonial?*) in 1967. Wolfe offers a perceptive overview of Rodinson (alongside Shafir) (*Traces* 209-10). Another early commentary on Zionism's expansionist intentions and treatment of the Palestinians is *From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem until 1948*, edited by Walid Khalidi (1971).

In his study of the origins of the conflict, Shafir argues that the labour movement in Israel, which was instrumental in the formation of Israeli society, was the ‘inheritor’ of ‘various European models of colonization’, as established by the World Zionist Organization (xi). Therefore adopting a comparative approach, Shafir continues by demonstrating the ways in which Israel was established as a settler society, namely through the twin principles of land expropriation and gaining territorial supremacy. Piterberg describes Zionism as ‘both a Central-Eastern European national movement *and* a movement of European settlers which sought to carve out for itself a national patrimony with a colony in the East’, thus highlighting both its specific ideology, which he sees as derived from German colonisation projects before the First World War, and the actual process of settlement (*Zionism* xii, emphasis in original). Masalha outlines the same connections between European Zionist narratives and the colonial reality they engender (*Nakba* 33-43). In his reading of Theodor Herzl, one of the founders of the Zionist movement, Wolfe persuasively argues that Herzl’s ideas privileged the doctrine of race over religion and that his nationalist aspirations, while looking beyond Europe for their establishment, ‘committed Zionism to a concept of race that reflected the volkisch colonial nationalism in the midst and likeness of which he had conceived his programme’ (*Traces* 109). As such: ‘In aspiring to export its racial monolith, Zionism did not seek to undo antisemitism. It did not aspire to a race-free or a multiracial society’ (110). Thus, the colonisation of Palestine amounted to a ‘projection of metropolitan racial discourse back out onto the colonial world’ (110). If we accept that racial difference (Jews vs. Arabs) is (and always has been) a constituent part of Israeli society and the conflict – which I believe we must – then it follows that discrimination and dispossession are also

constituent to both as embedded, enduring aspects; part of the state's 'formative origins', as Piterberg describes it (*Zionism* 54). As Wolfe observes: 'elimination should be seen as an organising principle of settler-colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence' (*Traces* 33). Colonial support was also integral in sustaining this project: Israel could not have come into being without British imperial sponsorship, and it would not be able to continue its oppression of Palestinians without neoimperial support from the US, which provides military and diplomatic assistance that is unprecedented in terms of overseas spending.<sup>10</sup> As Masalha observes: 'The Israeli state was, and still is, central to the West's project in the "East"' (*Nakba* 33).

It goes without saying that Israel and its supporters are extremely hostile to the application of a (settler) colonial framework when analysing the state and its practices.<sup>11</sup> Reflecting comparatively, Shafir observes: 'If there is a potential for similarity in present-day Israel and South Africa, its roots must be found in the inability of these, and similar, societies to come to terms with the legacy of their histories of colonization' (xiii). Shafir states that his own work was provoked by reaching adulthood in 1967 and realising the invisibility of Palestinians in

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<sup>10</sup> For a comprehensive examination of US support for Israel, see *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt.

<sup>11</sup> It should also be made clear that I am not implying that the framework of settler-colonial studies enables Palestinians to understand their situation. As Piterberg observes: 'It is of course a moral imperative not to lose sight of the fact that the indigenous peoples, from the Native Americans and the Irish through the Africans and Asians to the Palestinians, who have been variously exterminated, enslaved and dispossessed for the past five centuries, did not need scholarly awareness to become cognizant of this horrific feature of modern history' (*Zionism* 55). Inasmuch as settler-colonial studies can potentially help Palestinians, this is only by illuminating the conflict for those who are yet to grasp its colonial identity and who might be encouraged to think differently about it. Palestinians are acutely aware of the colonial aspects of their dispossession, which the early work of Walid Khalidi and Fayez Sayegh, for example, makes evident. There is also an abundance of subsequent Palestinian writers on Israel's colonisation of Palestine and the colonial tactics of the occupation, many of whom are cited in this thesis. However, it is an unfortunate reality, born of the power disparity between the two sides, that Israeli historiography has been essential in raising awareness of Palestinian dispossession: the work of the 'New Historians' reached a far wider (international) audience than previous Palestinian historiography.



historical and sociological accounts of the formation of Israeli society (xi). Similarly, Piterberg describes his book on Zionism as ‘the product of a realization’, that ‘erased and buried’ beneath the affluent part of Israel he grew up in was the Palestinian village of Wadi Hawarith (*Zionism* ix). Nonetheless, not all Israeli critics are able to accept the ramifications of the Israeli state’s actions. For example, Morris and Pappé are both associated with the ‘New Historians’, yet are poles apart in terms of their assignation of culpability to Israel, with Pappé adamant that systematic ethnic cleansing took place and Morris refuting this and its moral consequences. Arguing convincingly that current politics drives historiography, Pappé identifies a ‘neo-Zionist’ trend (embodied by figures such as Morris) in Israeli historiography from 2000 onwards, connected to Israel’s intensifying embrace of right-wing ideology and the marginalisation of critical discourse:

From the neo-Zionist perspective, acceptance of the factual claims of the New Historians was accompanied by the categorical rejection (shared by the Israeli public at large) of the *contemporary* moral implications that the New Historians drew from their findings of Israel’s crimes in 1948, first and foremost the dispossession of the Palestinians. (‘Historiography’ 9, emphasis in original)

Thus what emerges alongside Israel’s increasingly hard-line political approach is a worrying gulf between incriminating evidence and responsibility in public discourse more generally: the facts of dispossession are not refuted (no longer possible given the wealth of archival evidence) but the moral implications categorically are. Similarly, Menachem Klein argues that there is ‘no need’ to use Shafir’s models of colonialism when studying Israel post-1948 because there have been no subsequent mass deportations (9). Playing an uncomfortable semantic game, Klein announces: ‘Israel is a regional power that uses imperial methods and colonial practices to pursue its national struggle with the Palestinians. (This does not mean that it is a colonial power, only that it has adopted some of the methods

used by such powers)' (129-30). In his book, Klein shirks from describing these methods and practices as 'colonial', instead opting for the far more benign-sounding 'control system'. This perfectly demonstrates the gulf between evidence and responsibility.

As Shafir sees it: 'Most Israelis are accustomed to view early Zionist history, as indeed most people view the dawn of their national histories, as a saga' (xiii). This inability to look beyond history-as-saga, with its trappings of romance and pride, is doubtless connected with the desire for amelioration following the barbarity of European anti-Semitism. Drawing on her reading of Hannah Arendt and an understanding of the dangerously messianic attitudes of the Zionist movement in its pursuit of a Jewish state, as well as the intransigence and triumphalism of many of the movement's supporters, Idith Zertal writes:

The historical proximity between the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, and the decisive role of the former in achieving the latter, yielded this kind of catastrophic messianism, and a new, or new-old, myth of destruction and redemption; of powerlessness and empowerment that was removed from both the historical and the political. The connection of Israeli power and power practices of the new, Jewish state with the history of total powerlessness and victimhood of the Holocaust had begun to be forged while the war was still raging, and developed in gradual fashion and at various levels. (167)

Zertal is worth quoting at length because she encapsulates vital aspects of nascent Israeli society that endure to this day and are fundamental to understanding Israel's difficulty in acknowledging wrongdoing.<sup>12</sup> Addressing this issue, Said observes: 'The absolute wrong of settler-colonialism is very much diluted and perhaps even dissipated when it is a fervently believed-in Jewish survival that uses

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<sup>12</sup> Isabelle Hesse provides a good overview of the impact that the creation of Israel has had on Jewish identity, especially in terms of notions of victimhood and the internal divisions within Israeli society (9-13). She also explores literary representations of the Holocaust vis-à-vis the foundational myths of the Israeli state, thus exploring some of the same issues as Zertal through a literary lens.

settler-colonialism to straighten out its own destiny' (*Question* 119). It is these potent notions of destiny and victimhood that Palestinians contend with.<sup>13</sup>

What bearing do these reflections on Israeli society have on a discussion of exilic Palestinian life writing? I would argue that this context is essential for foregrounding my research because it discloses the endemic inability within Israel to interrogate the true foundations of its state and the ongoing perpetration of violence, which in turn prolongs both the occupation itself and the Palestinian struggle for equality and dignity. In this, I am guided by Wolfe's justification for focusing on the growth of Zionism and its colonial heritage. He acknowledges that 'it may seem contrary to offer a narrative of Palestinian dispossession that dwells so obliquely on the Nakba', before explaining that the enormity of the Nakba is only understood in the context of Zionism's strategies and imperial policies: 'In the absence of that context, the Nakba would make no sense' (*Traces* 235). Similarly, I believe that my readings of exilic Palestinian life writing and its importance can only be fully understood in this context. Wolfe, whose work focuses on the actions of the colonisers, does not narrate the Nakba from a Palestinian perspective; this thesis, however, is primarily attentive to the Palestinian narration of dispossession that began with the Nakba. As Abu-Lughod and Sa'di argue: 'What happened in 1948 is not over' (18). Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Sarah Ihmoud reiterate this, positing 'the 1948 Nakba as the initiation of a structure of settler colonial violence and dispossession of Palestinian natives that *continues* to shape the

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<sup>13</sup> Tom Segev captures the devastating quality of the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians at its outset, describing the arrival of Jewish immigrants and the expulsion of Palestinians during 1948-9: 'The moment was a dramatic one in the war for Israel, and a frightfully banal one too, focused as it was on the struggle over houses and furniture. Free people – Arabs – had gone into exile and become destitute refugees; destitute refugees – Jews – took the exiles' places as a first step in their new lives as free people. One group lost all they had, while the other found everything they needed – tables, chairs, closets, pots, pans, plates, sometimes even clothes, family albums, books, radios, and pets' (161-2). This is particularly poignant when considering the narration of returning to the lost Palestinian home, which I discuss in detail in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

intimacies and everydayness of Palestinians' (382, emphasis added). Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington state that it is 'misleading' to use the past tense when referring to settler colonialism: 'the effects are permanent and the process is still current' (2).

Despite all this, there has been a surprising lack of engagement with Palestine within postcolonial studies. This is highlighted by Patrick Williams and Anna Ball in their introduction, 'Where is Palestine?', to a 2014 special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. Borrowing the question from the title of Shannee Marks's 1984 work on the status of Arabs in Israel, the authors note that the question (which Marks did not have an answer for) is arguably less easy to solve over thirty years later. It is even tempting, they argue, to answer 'Nowhere': Palestine is 'nowhere geographically, nowhere politically, nowhere theoretically, nowhere postcolonially' (127). How might we account for this invisibility? Some have commented on the challenge that Palestine/Israel poses because of its complex and overlapping spatio-temporal contradictions and tensions.<sup>14</sup> Rashid Khalidi encapsulates this complexity: 'What are the limits of Palestine? Where does it end and where does Israel begin, and are those limits spatial, or temporal, or both?' (9). These questions indicate the lack of resolution over where Palestinians belong, and the unresolvable overlap of Palestine and Israel, as well as indicating some of the similar dilemmas Makdisi evokes in his blurred distinctions between 'inside' and 'outside'. Joseph Massad argues that the spatial complexities deny the traditional diachronic process of colonialism, whereby a colonised territory transforms itself into a postcolonial one ('Colony' 312-3). He draws attention to the multiple and contingent statuses of those within the same space, from Ashkenazi

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<sup>14</sup> As well as Massad and Williams, who are discussed here, see Salah Hassan, Anne McClintock, and Ella Shohat ('Notes').

to Mizrahi Jews, to Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians living under occupation, which challenge neat categorisation of either the temporal or spatial aspects of Palestine/Israel, as well as pointing to the 'internal exclusion' that Braziel and Mannur refer to. Williams also asserts the necessity of recognising that 'Palestine/Israel constitutes in many ways a more than usually testing case for the application of certain postcolonial analytic frameworks – especially those working with a notion of straightforward chronological succession, or with the postcolonial as an achieved space of freedom' ('Said' 85). Similarly, Wolfe observes: 'For all the homage paid to heterogeneity and difference, the bulk of "post"-colonial theorizing is disabled by an oddly monolithic, and surprisingly unexamined, notion of colonialism' (*Settler* 1). Piterberg claims that postcolonial studies problematically assert the discreteness of settler colonialism but still seek to incorporate the literature into their own subfield of cultural criticism ('Literature' 47-8).

These complexities and criticisms are important, especially as they point towards the need to be truly mindful of the actualities of Palestine/Israel and its specific colonial context. But it would be misguided, as well as detrimental to postcolonial studies both ethically and conceptually, to therefore view them as somehow not being up to the job, analytically, of thinking about Palestine/Israel. After all, in their attentiveness to ideas of neocolonialism and neoliberalism, they demonstrate their ability to think incisively about contexts that are far from 'postcolonial'. Williams and Ball in fact argue this very point (128). They therefore suggest that Palestine's absence is more to do with the challenges academics face in applying theories of colonisation to Palestine, given mainstream support for Israel and the consequent intimidation of academics in support of Palestinians

(128).<sup>15</sup> This is an observation that I broadly agree with. Bernard reiterates this possibility but also rightly highlights the limited range of literary texts from Palestine/Israel, especially in comparison to Anglophone writing from former British colonies (*Rhetorics* 21, 18-9). This, of course, has a genuine impact on the circulation of ideas during postcolonial courses and conferences, and in corresponding publications. It also speaks to the relative lack of attention paid to the Middle East in general within a postcolonial context, in comparison to other geographical areas. Neil Lazarus observes that the range of writers examined within postcolonial studies has been 'woefully restricted', with many writers worthy of study both in terms of literary merit and representativeness unfairly overlooked, leading to an uninspired repetition of the same methods, concepts and conclusions across the subfield (22).

This corresponds with Ball's germane observation that postcolonial studies also struggle with Palestine conceptually because of the difficulty of situating it within a discussion of paradigmatic postcolonial terms, such as hybridity, and narrow (and yet still prevalent) ideas of nationhood and nationalism (160). Her suggestions for how we can avoid this, borne out by her study of Palestinian literature and film, by utilising Fanonian ideas of resistance, newer models of nationhood and nationalism and an attentiveness to the multi-layered realities of exilic experiences (which Ball refers to as 'diasporic space'), are, I would argue, important both for the study of Palestine and also postcolonial studies more

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<sup>15</sup> See *Out of Bounds: Academic Freedom and the Question of Palestine* by Matthew Abraham, which examines key issues such as the restrictions placed on academics by their institutions, intimidation and the denial of tenure. See also *Uncivil Rites: Palestine and the Limits of Academic Freedom* by Steven Salaita, whose tenured professorship was revoked following Salaita's criticism of the Israeli government on Twitter during the assault on Gaza in 2014. Williams also suggests that the absence of Palestine in postcolonial studies is perhaps to do with Israeli propaganda's success in denying the relevance of colonialism for discussions about the conflict ('Rerouting' 91).

generally (131).<sup>16</sup> These ideas, as well as Williams's suggestion that one could envision postcolonialism not as an achieved state but instead as an "anticipatory discourse', utilising its knowledge and understanding of colonialism to anticipate a better world, are indicative of the ongoing value of postcolonial studies ('Rerouting' 93).

While they are encouraged by the growing number of scholars engaging with Palestine within postcolonial studies, Williams and Ball assert that this is still more a case of individual academics doing what they can rather than a truly systematic attempt to address the absence, which I am inclined to agree with (128). I do not think it too farfetched to posit that an ongoing awareness of the Holocaust and Europe's shameful history of anti-Semitism perhaps leads to a relatively unthinking acceptance of the status quo, especially within the UK, the context that I am most familiar with. Therefore, despite the noticeable growth of Palestinian cultural production in recent years, I am not quite convinced that a 'tipping point' has been reached in terms of a corresponding engagement with Palestine, as Bart Moore-Gilbert claims in 2016, although we have certainly moved on from Williams's frustration in 2010 that bar 'occasional honourable exceptions' postcolonialists emphatically do not analyse Palestine/Israel ('Pessoptimism' 7; 'Rerouting' 91).

Most notably in terms of book-length works focusing exclusively on Palestine/Israel and raising the question of (settler) colonialism in their discussion of cultural production, there is *The Palestinian Novel: From 1948 to the Present* (2016) by Bashir Abu-Manneh, *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial*

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<sup>16</sup> See Massad's 'The Intellectual Life of Edward Said' (14-17) for a critique of the conservatism and right-wing tendencies in postcolonial studies, as represented by Homi Bhabha and his attitude to Said and Israel. This links with Ball's comments on the unfashionable and dated ideas within postcolonial studies.

*Feminist Perspective* (2012) by Ball, *Rhetorics of Belonging: Nation, Narration, and Israel/Palestine* (2013) by Bernard, *Politics and Palestinian Literature in Exile: Gender, Aesthetics and Resistance in the Short Story* (2016) by Farag, *The Politics of Jewishness in Contemporary World Literature: The Holocaust, Zionism and Colonialism* (2016) by Hesse, *Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature* (1994) by Parmenter, *Catastrophe and Exile in the Modern Palestinian Imagination: Telling Memories* (2012) by Saloul, as well as Moore-Gilbert's own work.<sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding these significant publications, there are still many gaps in the research on Palestinian literary production, especially in terms of monographs. While some of the above scholars, notably Bernard and Moore-Gilbert, have examined life writing, there has not yet been a sustained study of Palestinian life writing in English, which I hope this thesis can address.

### **Palestinian Life Writing and Auto/biography Studies**

In her introduction to *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (1992), Jayyusi refers to Palestinian life writing, now beginning to hold its own alongside poetry and short stories, as 'perhaps the greatest witness to the age of catastrophe' (66). Twenty-five years later, there is an impressively wide range of life writing written in English and, to a lesser extent, translated from Arabic. Works by authors such as Izzeldin Abuellaish, Suad Amiry, Mourid Barghouti, Sahar Hamouda, Ghada Karmi, Jean Said Makdisi, Sari Nusseibeh, Edward Said, Najla Said, Serene Husseini Shahid, Raja Shehadeh, Fadwa Tuqan and Fawaz Turki (this list is by no means exhaustive) provide an insight into the Palestinian predicament, as well as – ideally – impel the reader to empathise and better understand the conflict. As Hammer observes:

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<sup>17</sup> Moore-Gilbert was working on a monograph, *Palestine and Postcolonialism*, when he died in 2015. 'Palestine, Postcolonialism and Pessoptimism' was originally intended as its introduction ('Pessoptimism' 30).



'Personal memoirs constitute a literary form of non-fiction that is widely accessible to readers as it thrives on the ability of human beings to relate to the experiences of others and compare them to one's own' ('Crisis' 193). She notes the international audience they address, as they present the 'human dimension of the Palestine question' and 'make visible the hidden Palestinian dimensions of a largely pro-Israeli international historiography' (193). Similarly, Moore-Gilbert claims that Palestinian life writing aims to rectify the invisibility and misrepresentation of Palestinians, before suggesting that '[o]ne might even argue that it has become the major branch of contemporary Palestinian literature, at least in the eyes of those in the West' (*Life-Writing* 115). Echoing this, Bugeja asserts that the growth in life writing – both within the Occupied Territories and in the diaspora – has arguably given the Palestinian predicament 'its most effective form of speech on the international stage' (38). Moore-Gilbert also addresses the issue of language, observing that the choice to write in English signals a desire to influence international public opinion and put pressure on Israel. This is undoubtedly true, but of course it is also the case that some Palestinians *must* write in English because it – and not Arabic – is their first language.

Returning to Sa'di's reference to 'counter-memory', I see Palestinian life writing as providing a vital counternarrative to the dominant Israeli discourse, thus corroborating the importance that other critics accord the literature. In this estimation, Palestinian life writing adamantly testifies against the 'catastrophic messianism' that Zertal refers to, which subverts the historical and political in its vision of what Israel is and how it came to be. In his study of nineteenth-century French literature, Richard Terdiman examines the counter-discourses produced by intellectuals such as Balzac, Baudelaire and Marx in order to contest the dominant

bourgeois discourse. Despite its very different context, Terdiman's assessment of the dynamic tension between discourse and counter-discourse is nonetheless pertinent. The paradox of dominant discourses, he observes, means that because of the power needed to sustain them, a 'disguised contingency' inevitably emerges in their ongoing attempts to 'exclude their antagonists' and that 'such exclusions require the expenditure of considerable energy' (15). In his estimation, 'counter-discourses have the capacity to *situate*: to relativize the authority and stability of a dominant system of utterances which cannot even countenance their existence' (15-16, emphasis in original). Underscoring the intrinsic nature of discourse for society, Michel Foucault provides a reminder of its full force: 'since, as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized' ('Order' 52-3). The continually evolving practices of exclusion that the Israeli occupation uses (often adopting the discourse of 'security' as justification) proves this assessment of discourse as a dynamic process rooted in the real world: Israeli practices evolve and intensify *in response* to Palestinian attempts to resist and assert agency. Efforts made by Israel and its supporters to discredit academics, intellectuals and politicians in support of Palestinians, as well as their demonisation of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement, reveal an acute anxiety over counter-discursive voices, especially when these voices articulate messages of solidarity.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In March 2017, Israel's parliament, the Knesset, passed a law forbidding the entry to Palestine/Israel of any foreign national who publicly supports BDS and calls for the boycott of any Israeli institution, *including* those in the settlements. Despite calls to make an exception for Palestinians with temporary residency rights in Israel, the law does not exempt them (Lis). The previous month, Israel denied visas to staff from Human Rights Watch, a prominent international NGO, claiming that the NGO has an 'extreme, hostile and anti-Israel agenda' (Beaumont, 'Human')

Rashid Khalidi emphasises the importance of acknowledging that Palestinian identity was not simply a reactionary move in response to Zionism (154). Such assumptions ultimately render Palestinian identity a relatively new and somewhat artificial phenomenon, weak in comparison to Zionism's claims to the land (177). It is, therefore, necessary for me to stress that by positing Palestinian life writing as a counternarrative, this should not lead to any assumptions or concerns that such writing emerges *only* because of the dominant discourse and that it is shaped *exclusively* by that discourse.<sup>19</sup> As Khalidi asserts, Palestinian identity developed *in spite of*, as well as because of the obstacles it encountered (6). Through paying attention to historical specificities and emphasising the issue of agency, Barbara Harlow also provides a useful model for situating counternarratives. Her seminal work, *Resistance Literature*, investigates a category of writing that emerged out of organised national liberation struggles in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, in particular Palestine (which she explores through Ghassan Kanafani's work). A resistance narrative, she contends, 'analyzes the past, including the symbolic heritage, in order to open up the possibilities of the future', which chimes with Williams's notion of postcolonialism as 'anticipatory' (82). Noting Foucault's ideas that knowledge cannot exist outside of power and its influence, Harlow observes:

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<sup>19</sup> I also want to mention James Dorson's *Counternarrative Possibilities: Virgin Land, Homeland, and Cormac McCarthy's Westerns*, which helpfully defines and contextualises 'counternarrative' (39-44). I am particularly drawn to his assertion that we should not focus only on the idea of 'counter' as 'against', as a rupture of a grand narrative; this risks undermining the fact that counternarratives *are* narratives (in other words, they are not merely anti-narratives). This might seem obvious but it is a pertinent reminder that counternarratives, as well as rupturing meaning, are equally concerned with establishing *new* meanings. Dorson notes: 'Its meaning is thus split between signifying opposition and alternative, between rupture and reconstitution' (42). These are salient ideas within the context of exilic Palestinian life writing, which does not merely write against Israel's dominant narrative but also posits its own independent narrative of the past and present (this also connects with Harlow's view that resistance literature displays the agency of the writers and their focus on possibilities for the future). Dorson's ideas emphasise the notion of negative and positive that I think counternarratives possess.

The connection between knowledge and power, the awareness of the exploitation of knowledge by the interests of power to create a distorted historical record, is central to resistance narratives. The tradition to which Foucault is referring is a tradition which these narratives seek directly to transform. (116)

Resistance narratives, therefore, are partly defined by their awareness of the interests of power *but also* by their intentions to *transform* the Foucauldian assertion that there is no stepping outside of the discourse of power. This ensures that resistance literature is presented as much more than a reactive narrative impulse, always guided by its inescapable struggle against power.

Interestingly, in her subsequent book, *After Lives: Legacies of Revolutionary Writing*, Harlow claims that in the new era of controversial negotiations and state-formation (in other words, the post-Oslo era), it is no longer possible to speak of resistance literature in the same way (1). She does, however, posit that such literature is potentially located in human rights reporting, which aims to ‘correct’ official records that obscure human rights abuses; she further observes that ‘the writing of human rights draws of necessity on conventions of narrative and auto/biography, of dramatic representation and discursive practices’ (153-4). In turn, I propose that we view Palestinian life writing in this way; it seeks to ‘correct’ dominant narratives of its past and present and it does so, of course, through autobiographical (counter)narratives. That the status of Palestinian human rights has only deteriorated since the publication of both of Harlow’s books, and that the era of dubious state-formation she assesses in *After Lives* remains very much a reality for Palestinians, only strengthens the connection I have drawn. As I demonstrate, much of exilic Palestinian life writing is deeply concerned with issues of justice and discrimination, as well as the urgent need to document Palestinian lives as they are impacted by settler colonialism. Given the international nature of

many human rights agencies, this also corresponds with Bugeja, Hammer and Moore-Gilbert's respective observations about life writing's international reach.

But *why* life writing? In an interview, Raja Shehadeh, a Palestinian human rights lawyer and writer (discussed in Chapter Four), reiterates previous arguments about the ability the literature has to connect with its audience:

I use the experience gained from being active in these fields [of law and human rights], but these are narrated in an entirely different manner from how I would do it in a human rights report. Much as these reports are important for documentation and for waging human rights campaigns, literary writing has greater power because if it is successful it involves readers in a deeper and more lasting manner by provoking their imagination, thus making the experiences that are the subject of the book part of their own. (Franklin, 'Towards' 518)

This corresponds to Hammer's assertion that '[m]emoirs appeal to a much wider audience than scholarly texts about any issue' ('Crisis' 193). Although human rights documentation might well draw on conventions of narrative and dramatic representation, it can only go so far when it comes to engaging the imagination. Shehadeh is right to invoke the power of literary writing; it is this that connects a reader to the experiences being narrated.

As a counternarrative that directly contests both the invisibility of Palestinians on the one hand and the distorted images of them on the other, life writing is particularly effective. Unlike novels and poetry, there is the assertion by the life writer (and the assumption by the reader) that these are real experiences, which generates the idea that life writers are contributing to collective testimony on the Palestinian predicament. This is significant in the context of Palestine/Israel, where Palestinian claims to the land are constantly refuted and their heritage and history erased or undermined. A prime example of this is the well-known attack on Said by Justus Reid Weiner, an Israeli-American, shortly

before the publication of Said's memoir, *Out of Place*, which attempted to discredit Said's connections to Palestine and therefore to call into question his Palestinian identity and credibility as a leading intellectual concerned with issues pertaining to Palestine/Israel.<sup>20</sup> Such instances demonstrate how much is at stake and how important narratives such as *Out of Place* are. To return to Terdiman: the exclusion of counter-discursive voices requires considerable energy and exposes the contingency of dominant discourses, leading to the possibility for counter-discourses to reckon with the structures that are intent on excluding them. The evident anxiety over the very existence of Palestinian voices and what these voices might attest to is disclosed by Weiner's shameful smear campaign.

Discussing Weiner's attack, Alon Confino observes:

A personal, everyday memory of Palestine is, in a sense, more dangerous to some Zionists' dreams than Yasser Arafat's minuscule Palestinian autonomy (and future state) because it establishes an historical connection between Palestinians and the land that is commensurable to the connection between Jews and the land. Memory, especially memory of everyday life, enjoys in our culture a sanctified status as being authentic. (190-1)

Palestinian life writers are acutely aware of the delegitimisation of Palestinian identity and memory – and in turn the potential power in their attentiveness to narrating this very identity and memory. As Hammer observes: 'Memoirs and autobiographies of Palestinians have over the last five decades contributed to the development of a Palestinian collective memory' ('Crisis' 178). Abu-Lughod and Sa'di, in their introduction to *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, state that the collection draws on oral testimony and public personal memories; it does not depend on archives or official bodies (6). In other words, the book is

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<sup>20</sup> Amongst a litany of criticisms and accusations of deception, Weiner calls into question Said's connections to Jerusalem and Palestine and denies that he was directly impacted by the Nakba, which leads Weiner to assert that it is wrong for Said to call himself an exile.

reliant on life writing strategies in order to examine Palestinian memory as it fights against the attempts to discredit it.<sup>21</sup> Underscoring this point, Abu-Lughod and Sa'di begin their introduction with a discussion of Rema Hammami's recollections of Jaffa, which are described as 'the kind of story that repeats itself among Palestinians' (I examine Hammami's work in Chapter Three) (1). While they rightly acknowledge the mediated nature of all memory, they nonetheless assert that 'Palestinian memory is particularly poignant because it struggles with and against a still much-contested present' (3). This is a conviction I share.

Also reinforcing the notion of counternarrative is the growth of Palestinian life writing alongside the increasingly dire circumstances for Palestinians and the moribund status of the 'peace process'. Moore-Gilbert observes: 'Since 1948 – and more particularly since 1967 – the sub-genre [of Palestinian life-writing] has flourished in direct proportion to Israel's ever-tightening stranglehold on Palestinian lives and resources' (*Life-Writing* 115). Hammer notes that post-Oslo, once it became clear that a Palestinian state was not going to materialise and that the diaspora Palestinians had been excluded from the terms of the negotiations, memoirs and oral history projects proliferated ('Crisis' 189-90). It is, therefore, hard to ignore the role that crisis plays in generating life writing. Hammer's assessment also emphasises that this need to respond to crises very much includes exiled writers. Many Palestinians outside of Palestine/Israel felt abandoned by the Oslo Accords; Ghada Karmi narrates this in *Return*, which I analyse in Chapter Two. Another important aspect of this need to respond to crisis is the existential quality

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<sup>21</sup> There is now a significant range of work engaged with Palestinian oral history and refugee testimonies, which themselves deserve attention within auto/biography studies. See, for example, Kassem; Lynd, Bahour and Lynd; and Sayigh. Also worthy of further study (although similarly beyond my remit) are the online sources of Palestinian oral history, intended in particular to preserve Palestinian memories of the Nakba and life before 1948. See [palestineremembered.com](http://palestineremembered.com) and [memoriesofpalestine.com](http://memoriesofpalestine.com). The American University of Beirut also has plans to digitise its considerable archive of Palestinian oral testimonies. See 'Palestinian Oral History Archive'.

that Palestinian life writing often possesses; the ‘persistent questioning of world public opinion’s vision of a moral and just human order’ that Sa’di refers to. Therefore, integral to the counternarrative that Palestinian life writers offer is a meditation on what it means to be human, to be accorded dignity and recognition and to find one’s place in the world. As such, it reflects on the impact of being the victim of the ‘frames of war’ that Judith Butler observes, which prevent certain lives from mattering or being grieved because they are not apprehended as *living*. Fady Joudah captures the anxiety of this:

There’s a moment as a child when one asks: ‘Who am I?’ or, turning to one’s parents, ‘What are we?’ And the answer is often multi-layered, encompassing ethnicity and nationality. Once a Palestinian child encounters that question-answer, his or her life enters a seemingly endless state of suspension. (152)

Part of my analysis is concerned with observing these wider themes and how they are situated alongside (or part of) discussions of exile and identity.

Encouragingly, there are now numerous book chapters and articles on Palestinian life writing, many of which are cited in this thesis, and which constitute a relatively robust, albeit nascent, body of scholarship. However, individual assessments of life writing, or articles presenting an overview of a range of texts, can only go so far. It means that Palestinian life writing is solely being looked at within a comparative framework, whether as part of a broader study of postcolonial life writing, as part of a discussion of Palestinian cultural production more generally, or as an aspect of a larger study of immigrant literature. These are all vital, too, but they cannot replace a dedicated examination of Palestinian life writing; longer studies, therefore, are still lacking. Moreover, closer attention to questions of form and the genre’s own significance is also needed, which is something that Karim Mattar observes (106). Furthermore, a great deal of



scholarship on Palestinian life writing tends to focus on the most well-known writers, such as Barghouti, Said and Shehadeh (the focus is also noticeably tilted towards male authors). This work is certainly necessary but what I hope that my thesis does is shine a light on other Palestinian writers, who have received either little or no critical attention.

For my own research, especially in terms of approaching life writing that tends to contest, or at least call into question, traditional (Western) modes of presenting selfhood, I am indebted to Moore-Gilbert and Gillian Whitlock, whose respective research on postcolonial life writing has been instrumental in helping me formulate my ideas. Drawing parallels between Western women's life writing and postcolonial life writing, Moore-Gilbert observes key similarities that distinguish these forms of writing from traditional Western (male) autobiography, highlighting the presence of relational identities, decentred models of personhood and the importance of the body – similarities which he avers holds true for both female *and* male postcolonial life writers (*Life-Writing* xx). In addition, Moore-Gilbert underscores the impact that material locations have on the formation of the self within a (post)colonial context, which again sets it apart from canonical autobiography and its privileging of interiority (*Life-Writing* xxi, 51). (Dis)location is of course fundamental to exilic Palestinian life writing. He also underscores the prevalence of political self-representation, observing that '[m]any postcolonial life-writers write from a context of deep political disempowerment', which again resonates within a Palestinian context (*Life-Writing* xxiii). Moore-Gilbert has written about Palestinian life writing too, helping establish it as an area of study within the English literary field, and his attentiveness to female life writers and the distinct issues they face deserves particular mention ('Baleful'; 'Time').

Whitlock has also written about Palestinian life writing, if to a much lesser extent. Her work has influenced my ideas about testimony and bearing witness. Discussing the potential impact of autobiographical narratives as they move across cultures, she observes: “They can produce an openness to narrative that decenters us and allows us to think beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own’ (*Soft* 13). They are also ‘fundamental to the struggle for recognition among individuals and groups, to the constant creation of what it means to be human and the rights that fall from that’, which connects with the previously raised matters of human rights documentation and the existential quality of Palestinian life writing (*Soft* 10). While always alert to how they can be commodified and co-opted, Whitlock argues that ‘[l]iterary testimonies are performative, rhetorical acts that “summon and beseech us” as readers’, potentially increasing the visibility of those who experience injustice (*Postcolonial* 8). The strategic aspects of testimony are emphasised by Whitlock:

Testimonial narratives draw on frameworks of cultural memory that elicit and nurture specific kinds of cultural recall. Memory is a cultural phenomenon, as well as an individual and social one, and the acts of recall that are elicited in testimonial cultures are performative and polemical acts in pursuit of social justice. (*Postcolonial* 138)

This applies to Palestinian life writing, which is similarly multi-layered: the presence of cultural memory, especially in terms of the Nakba and Palestinian heritage; the relationship between individual and social memory, which connects with Moore-Gilbert’s emphasis of relational selves, and the *intentionality* of life writing in order to expose injustice. Leigh Gilmore observes that autobiographical writing allows for ‘corrective readings’ and for the life writer to ‘emerge through writing as an agent of self-representation’, which also speaks to intentionality (9). Referring to ‘the politics of agency’, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe how in

a colonial context, life writing is often ‘a tactic of intervention’ (*Reading* 45). Identifying this agency, alongside the other objectives of narrating exile, is part of this thesis. I also want to point out that while I agree that memory is *always* mediated, as memory studies explore so well, and while life writing is *always* a hybrid of truth and fiction, insofar as every narrative is a subjective construct, it is very important with the texts I am addressing to avoid deconstructionist notions of self and reality, which undermine the clear objectives of testimonial writing. Nawar al-Hassan Golley addresses this in her study of Arab women’s autobiographies: ‘to treat the sort of writing that we see in such testimonials, or indeed in most texts by underprivileged persons or groups, as if they had no reference to anything outside themselves or the texts would be to lose all the political force of such writing, which is an encouragement to take action’ (62). This is not to venerate testimonial writing but to respect its intentions.

In terms of terminology, I do not use ‘autobiography’ because I am mindful of its exclusionary Western connotations. As Whitlock states:

Although ‘autobiography’ was widely used in literary criticism last century, it is now generally reserved for a literary canon that privileges a specific Enlightenment archetype of selfhood: the rational, sovereign subject that is conceived as western, gendered male, and [...] racially white. (*Postcolonial* 2-3)

Formally this is important, as many life writing scholars have now pointed out: attentiveness to autobiographies – fairly conventional narratives of individual private lives – has historically marginalised other forms of writing. This is particularly obvious within a (post)colonial and/or feminist context. ‘Auto’ – self – is particularly problematic when it comes to much of Palestinian life writing due to the latter’s notable attentiveness to a wider social and political context, which refutes the term’s clear privileging of a single identity and its inner self. As Jayyusi

asserts: 'More often than not, Palestinian writers of personal account literature are more mindful of the "external" forces at play around them than of their own private introspections or idiosyncrasies – even when very personal emotions are brought to the fore, the writing usually defines a social context' (67).

Writing more broadly, Bugeja asserts: 'A main concern of memoir-writing in the Mashriq continues to be its responsibility towards the representation both of the community the author is writing from and of the historical forces that shaped or constrained it into its current political, economic, social, and cultural makeup' (15). Therefore, the memoirist becomes 'not merely a self-narrator but a selective communal historian', which again chimes with much of Palestinian life writing (15). Nonetheless, it is important to exercise caution before asserting that something is integral to a particular collective identity, or that someone's experience is representative of a much wider context. As Moore-Gilbert warns, postcolonial life writing is not *inevitably* relational or representative, and there is a danger of homogenising experience if one prioritises the collective over and above acknowledging a text's individual differences and contradictions (*Life-Writing* 32). My intention has been to recognise both commonalities and differences, which I hope this research demonstrates.

Memoir, which should not be confused with autobiography, is generally taken to mean a less self-aggrandising narrative, more prone to critical introspection, often stemming from a moment of crisis or driven by a particular event or aspect of history; it is also arguably more likely to narrate collective identity and to maintain scepticism over rooted and concretely defined models of selfhood (Bugeja 18-9; Whitlock, *Postcolonial* 96-7). It is a discrete genre of life writing and therefore when I use *memoir* it is to refer to texts, such as *Out of Place*

or *Return*, which announce themselves *as* memoirs. Therefore, overall, I prefer to use the umbrella term *life writing*, which is a broad category referring to all texts and genres that are concerned with narrating selves, although I use the adjective 'autobiographical' to refer to the act of self-narration (as Whitlock and others do). Smith and Watson (and others) distinguish between life writing and life narrative, asserting that the latter is more specific to self-referential writing, while the former also includes novelistic and biographical narratives (*Reading* 3). I prefer the blurring of self-representation and observation of others that life writing surely implies, as well as the fact that it is now a relatively prevalent term, which is important. I am not, however, looking at novels or biographies.

Some of the narratives I have chosen are not easily categorised, or even written explicitly as autobiographical texts. This, I would argue, is partly what makes them interesting. Certainly, to discount them because they resist categorisation would be limiting. Therefore, I am particularly interested in the indistinct borders between genres and the questioning of conventions implied and indeed encouraged by the term life writing. Within the Palestinian context, there is much crossover between academic research and autobiographical narration, which is hardly surprising given that many academics working on Palestine/Israel also have personal connections to the place. This indicates a desire amongst Palestinians to tell their stories and to allow their own lives to inform their critical work. I am, therefore, appreciative of Stuart Hall's emphasis that all criticism is situated and determined by our own context and experiences:

We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context', *positioned*. I was born into and spent my childhood and adolescence in a lower-middle-class family in Jamaica. I have lived all my adult life in England, in the shadow of the black diaspora – 'in the belly of the beast'. I write against the background of a lifetime's work in cultural

studies. If the paper seems preoccupied with the diaspora experience and its narrative of displacement, it is worth remembering that all discourse is 'placed', and the heart has its reasons. (222-3, emphasis in original)

Hall rightly highlights that one's individual context can be an important (ethical) imperative for research. David Huddart argues that if done responsibly (and not too self-referentially), writing postcolonial theory can be an autobiographical act, whereby the theorist is able to utilise the autobiographical to generate and communicate their ideas in a way that resists universalising theories that should remain specified (163). In his reading of theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Said and Gayatri Spivak, Huddart demonstrates how theory and life writing often overlap within a postcolonial context, although he is clear that the autobiographical should never be the only explanation: 'autobiographical contextualisation is governed by the same laws structuring contextualisation as such: meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless' (171).

I mention Hall and Huddart because the blurring of genres they indicate is something I discuss in this thesis, especially in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. I do not, however, want to be prescriptive about terminology; the fact that one comes across a whole range of terms, including *autocritique*, *autocriticism*, *autotheory*, *autocritography*, *creative nonfiction* and *personal criticism*, when researching this area of life writing indicates to me that a concern with categorisation arguably gets in the way of simply paying attention to texts themselves and the intriguing push and pull between different genres. After all, the extent to which theory is autobiographical, or autobiographical writing is driven by theory, is impossible to determine finally, making attempts at categorisation relatively unhelpful. However, Lydia Fakundiny's entry, 'Autobiography and the Essay', in the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, usefully observes that the

'autobiographical essay' reveals 'the protean energies of the two genres', and highlights both the instability and dynamism of autobiographical and essay writing (81).<sup>22</sup> It is also important to point out that notwithstanding the work of scholars such as Moore-Gilbert and Whitlock, there is to date a relative lack of attentiveness to Palestine, the Middle East and postcolonial literature in general by academics who situate themselves within auto/biography studies, a subfield of cultural criticism that tends mostly towards Western cultural production, especially North American. I hope that this thesis contributes to redressing this imbalance.

### **Outline of this Thesis**

Each chapter of this thesis attempts to answer a range of questions that have been contextualised in this introduction. How does this author narrate exile? How does their work function as a counternarrative to the discourse of Israeli settler colonialism? To what broader themes is it attentive? Taken together, these questions will contribute to the overarching question that this thesis attempts to address: what does this body of work tell us about Palestinian life writing? Given the recent proliferation of such writing in English, there is an extensive selection of writers upon which such a study could focus. However, those under consideration have been chosen with two main objectives in mind. Firstly, to incorporate a varied experience of exile, and secondly to study works with literary merit. Nonetheless, I remain mindful of Harlow's observation that:

Palestinian literature, like the literatures of other cultures marginalized within the dominant version of world history, by virtue of its current historical situation and

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<sup>22</sup> As evidence of the lacuna in auto/biography studies, I want to mention that this extensive two-volume encyclopaedia, published in 2001, has no entry for Palestinian life writing. In fact, although there are entries for many countries, especially in Europe and North America, there are no entries for any countries in the Middle East other than Israel. This entry, 'Israeli and Modern Hebrew Life Writing', makes no reference to Palestinians or the conflict, beyond noting that Israeli autobiographies frequently reflect on Jewish settlement in Palestine and on the war of independence.

determination, is liable to uncritical consideration and identification, fated either to rejection or admission for the very fact of its being 'Palestinian'. (*Resistance* 67)

Certainly, not all Palestinian life writing is defensible as literary testimony. An alternative approach might have been to examine work that falls short of this description, but when it comes to thinking about Palestinian life writing as counternarrative, I am specifically interested in what Shehadeh refers to as the 'greater power' of literary writing. I state this, perhaps unnecessarily, to make clear that while this thesis is by no means driven by an 'uncritical consideration' of material, I have exercised literary judgement in deciding which texts to look at. I appreciate that this is a partially subjective assessment and leaves me open to criticism in terms of what exactly 'literary judgement' means. I take my cue from Golley, who in her study of Arab women's autobiographies states: 'The aesthetic is both a personal and a relative issue: aesthetic valuation of a text should not be done according to whether it is better or worse than another but according to its own de/merits or what it has to offer to the reader' (184). In making my decisions, I was attentive to this notion of individual de/merits, noting in particular the extent to which a given text contributed meaningfully to the idea of testimony as counternarrative.

Mindful that there has been more critical attention paid to male writers, an inevitable consequence of the international recognition that writers such as Barghouti, Said and Shehadeh receive, and the reality that there are more texts published by male authors, I have also ensured that this thesis is particularly attentive to female writers. Of the ten writers under consideration, seven are female. This might raise questions of imbalance but in response I would argue that one very regularly encounters studies within cultural criticism that are skewed the other way, often without a proper discussion of this fact. In an article studying



commemorative Palestinian coverage of the Nakba in 1998, Rema Hammami (a writer studied in this thesis) is struck by 'the overwhelming absence of women from the historical narratives' ('Gender' 241). Women are given almost no voice or presence in the vast amount of material that Hammami reads. She observes this as 'clearly part of the larger problematic of women's absence from narratives of war' (245). It is an absence of Palestinian women 'as actors *in* and narrators *of* the foundational experience of Palestinian nationhood' (249, emphasis added). While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to thoroughly discuss the patriarchal nature of Palestinian society and the general absence of women's narratives, I am guided by Hammami in terms of reiterating this 'larger problematic'.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the primary narration of the Nakba in this thesis is by Ghada Karmi. The focus for my exploration of internal exile, for which Shehadeh would also have been very suitable, is Hammami.

Another decision I have made is to only examine texts written in English. As a student of Arabic, through which I have developed a greater awareness of the range of texts available in the language, I am more than mindful of the limitations this places on the thesis. I am not dismissive of working in translation and the need for such work, as undertaken by Ball, Bernard, Bugeja and Hesse, for example, but I decided that the volume of life writing available in English presented an opportunity to work with original language texts that deserve critical attention. Nonetheless, given the unavoidable realities of what gets published and who attains access to English-language publishers (something that Whitlock expertly explores in *Soft Weapons*), I readily acknowledge that this restricts me to texts

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<sup>23</sup> There are now numerous works on these issues. See, for example, Hammami's article cited here ('Gender'); Kassem; Massad ('Masculine'); Shalhoub-Kevorkian (*Women*).

written mostly by middle-class writers either based in or with connections to the West. It is hoped that this thesis will inspire further and varied research.

The thesis is organised into four chapters. Chapter One looks at Edward Said's life writing, examining *After the Last Sky* and *Out of Place* in order to chart the development of what I have characterised as his *sublimation* of exile.<sup>24</sup> While much has been written on Saidian exile, relatively little has been said about *After the Last Sky* as a form of life writing. Nor has Said's illness, as dwelt on in *Out of Place*, been sufficiently discussed. I focus on Said's sublimation of exile in both texts. In *After the Last Sky* exile is sublimated for a tentative form of nationalism – 'defensive nationalism' – which provides a counternarrative to Israeli dominance at a time of particular fragility for the Palestinian cause. In *Out of Place*, exile is sublimated rather self-consciously in order to explain Said's evolution into both an intellectual dedicated to Palestine, and an individual coming to terms with irreconcilability as a governing aspect of his life. What is interesting about Said's model of selfhood in these texts is that it wrestles with the knowledge that while he is a spokesperson for Palestine in the West, morally committed to addressing the Palestinian predicament, exile is also a deeply interior experience (and an intellectual one, too). Hence he is 'out of place', and struggling to reconcile the ideas of nationalism and collective identity to which he continually returns in *After the Last Sky*.

Chapter Two examines Ghada Karmi's two memoirs: *In Search of Fatima* and *Return*. I am primarily concerned here with what I call the 'primacy of place', namely the locatedness of Karmi's memories of Palestine and how these guide her identity formation, growing up in exile in England. *In Search of Fatima*

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<sup>24</sup> While aware of the psychoanalytic connotations of the term, my use of 'sublimation' is guided by a broader definition, seeing it as a process of transforming something into a higher form. The word's Latin root, *sublimat*, meaning 'raised up', points to this figurative notion of elevation.

demonstrates the very real and continuing trauma of the Nakba on Karmi's family, especially her parents. The memoir demonstrates that settler colonialism is not a past event; the effects of the Nakba are still being painfully felt by Palestinians expelled from their homes. In *Return*, Karmi narrates another aspect of settler colonialism, namely the ongoing Israeli occupation that forces her to reconcile her childhood memories of Palestine with a completely altered landscape and polity. Her counternarrative in this instance is aimed not just at the occupation itself, but also at the bureaucracy of the ineffective and corrupt Palestinian Authority.

Chapter Three concentrates on internal exile through a study of Rema Hammami, an anthropologist whose work examines Palestinian life under occupation. Hammami has written two autobiographical essays, 'Home and Exile in East Jerusalem' and 'Virtual Returns to Jaffa'. In addition, some of her anthropological output is strikingly autobiographical, blurring the boundaries between observer and subject, between researcher and research. In particular, Hammami's work raises the issue of life writer as witness, as she charts the violent settler takeovers of Palestinian family homes in her East Jerusalem neighbourhood, as well as the significance of the checkpoint, which her anthropological work has explored in detail and which I concentrate on here. In addition, she grapples with the past in similar ways to Karmi, as she narrates returning to Jaffa, her father's hometown, and the pain of the Nakba for each generation of the family. Her work therefore demonstrates the complexity facing many Palestinians: contending with painful postmemories of expulsion while also dealing with one's own displacement.

Finally, Chapter Four considers the growth of anthologised life writing, and particularly the way in which these anthologies are often very explicitly framed as

urgent counternarratives to Israeli colonialism. I examine six anthologised examples of life writing that contribute towards an understanding of the commonality and complexity of exile, while also raising interesting questions about form. The analysis is divided into three thematic sections. Building on the previous chapter on Hammami, I first examine internal exile as a form of disrupted belonging through a contribution by Raja Shehadeh and another co-authored by Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Sarah Ihmoud. I then look at essays by Rana Barakat and Randa Jarrar that narrate the frequent experience of returnees being denied entry to Palestine/Israel. Finally, I consider what it means to 'inherit' exile and live with its legacy by examining contributions by Mischa Hiller and Najla Said. I argue that as forms of literary testimony, these texts prompt us to think about life writing beyond single-author texts through their demonstration of the power of providing a concentrated focus on a particular aspect of experience. I also discuss the anthologies as a whole, examining the rationale that the respective editors offer for pursuing publication. Overall, these anthologies speak to the issue of solidarity (usually stemming from a sense of crisis), and suggest a democratisation of life writing by allowing more writers the opportunity to explore aspects of their lives that contribute meaningfully to a discussion of Palestine and exile.

The works under consideration were published over a span of three decades, from 1986 to 2016. All but one (*After the Last Sky*) were written after the Oslo Accords, amid the further fragmentation of Palestinian territory. Each chapter pays attention to the individual expression of exile, just as each writer pays attention to the distinct geographies and frames of reference that determine their relationship to Palestine and their own experience of exile. Therefore, while the overarching theme is of Palestinian life writing as counternarrative – which

implies communality – I am careful always to privilege the text, remaining sensitive to the uniqueness of each narration of exile. Overall, I want to capture both the diversity and the unity of exilic experience. Each narrative is its own story, while also serving a wider definable context. Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian-American novelist, born in Kuwait (to refugees from Jerusalem) and who has spent most of her life in the United States, eloquently encapsulates this intersection in an autobiographical essay she contributed to *Seeking Palestine: New Palestinian Writing on Exile and Home*, an anthology discussed in detail in Chapter Four: ‘Mine has been an un-Palestinian life. Yet I have come to understand that it represents the most basic truth about what it means to be Palestinian – dispossessed, disinherited and exiled; and what it ultimately means to resist’ (14-5).

In one of the epigraphs to this introduction, Barakat comments on the commodification of ‘Palestine-in-exile’, and implies the pitfalls of representing such a diverse experience. Not just an experience of suffering, it is also textual: a poem, a novel and, yes, a thesis. My earnest hope is that *this* thesis on Palestine-in-exile within an English-speaking context avoids the pitfalls of turning Palestine into a mere project and the commodification of its narration. Instead, I hope to express its diversity and complexity, its underlying determination to impel a greater understanding of Palestine/Israel. But also beyond, through its common injunction to think about what a human is worth and what justice means. Finally, I want to affirm Moore-Gilbert’s suggestion that the growing interest in Palestine within postcolonial studies is an act of solidarity (‘Pessoptimism’ 9). This, I think, addresses the reasons why many scholars engage with Palestine/Israel in the first place, despite the potential or perceived risks. Solidarity plays its own part in the genesis of this thesis.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **‘There are things to be learned’: Edward Said’s Sublimation of Exile**

Necessarily, then, I speak of exile not as a privilege, but as an *alternative* to the mass institutions that dominate modern life. Exile is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you. But, provided that the exile refuses to sit on the sidelines nursing a wound, there are things to be learned: he or she must cultivate a scrupulous (not indulgent or sulky) subjectivity.

Edward Said, ‘Reflections on Exile’ (184, emphasis in original)

Edward Said’s description of life in exile as an alternative to the mainstream is mirrored in his vision of the intellectual. Both experiences require the acceptance of being an outsider and the ability to harness the pressures that come with this. ‘It is a lonely condition, yes,’ Said acknowledges in describing the intellectual, ‘but it is always a better one than a gregarious tolerance for the way things are’ (*Intellectual* xviii). This refusal to accept *the way things are* addresses this chapter’s focus: the sublimation of exile in Said’s life writing. This sublimation can be seen as a coping mechanism: exile is made to positively guide his interests and preferences, to be the means through which he arrives at a more ‘scrupulous subjectivity’, no longer sitting on the sidelines but now, in fact, a much-celebrated public intellectual. Exile, therefore, is a process from which one learns. I also see sublimation as driving Said’s commitment to counternarrate: that which exiled him – settler colonialism – is not something he simply accepts. On one level, there is a questioning of Israel’s actions and its devastating impact on Palestinians more generally, which runs through all of Said’s work on Palestine. On another, there is a determination to utilise the lessons learned from exile in order to personally cope with it, cultivating them in order to become the (Palestinian) intellectual to which he aspires.

My analysis of Said's life writing, which focuses on *After the Last Sky* (1986) and *Out of Place: A Memoir* (1999), looks at two interrelated issues in examining how Said sublimates exile: irreconcilability and identity. By irreconcilability, I mean Said's use of oppositions and contradictions – whether in relation to his feelings on exile, the conflict of individual and collective identity – in a way that actively avoids resolving them. In a loose sense, dialectics play their part, although Said rejects the reconciliation that classical dialectics aims for and instead underlines the necessity and inevitability of irresolution. For him, what matters is the process, even as it strives for an unobtainable goal. Closely tied to irresolution is identity, whether individual or collective, which Said grapples with in both texts as part of his counternarrative to having been exiled. Born in Jerusalem in 1935 to Palestinian parents, but brought up predominantly in Cairo before moving to America as a teenager for his studies, where he was subsequently based until his death, Said's connections to Palestine were inevitably severed in 1948. The multiple journeys and locales that this implies have a profound impact on Said and his model of selfhood, as well as how he positions himself in relation to other Palestinians. In *After the Last Sky*, Said attempts to sublimate exile for a form of defensive nationalism based on a collective exilic identity, perceived as under threat. There is a sense of discomfort running through the text, with Said trying to work through his unresolved (and unresolvable) feelings of belonging to *and* alienation from Palestine. His determination to narrate collective experience, despite these unresolvable feelings, means that fissures appear in the process of sublimation, revealing Said's difficulty in dealing with the varied nature of Palestinian lived experience alongside his own vivid perspective on exile. In contrast, *Out of Place* is significantly more interior, focusing almost exclusively on

Said's struggle to come to terms with being an outsider. His feelings and identity are no more resolved than in *After the Last Sky* but there is less discomfort with the sense of irresolution and solitariness that exile has engendered. The text, published towards the end of Said's life, deals with his terminal leukaemia diagnosis and essentially sublimates this cataclysmic revelation into an opportunity to examine his lost past in the Middle East. This leads to a narration of the sublimation of exile for being out of place, a preference that acknowledges (and finally understands why) a stable model of selfhood is not possible for him, leading to an acceptance of this permanent state of instability.

### **Exile and the Intellectual**

Making irresolution a central theme of 'Reflections on Exile' (1984), Said deliberately oscillates between both the genuine suffering of exile and its beneficial qualities. At the outset he observes that '[e]xile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience' (173). After asserting that an exile's achievements will always be undermined by loss, Said addresses our perennial fascination with exile, asking, 'if true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture?' (173). Said draws attention to the two extremes he sees as the most common responses to exile – loneliness and cynicism at one end of the spectrum and over-commitment to the state and national movements at the other. Nonetheless, his essay attempts to identify a narrow space along this spectrum where the exile can transmute their terminal loss into something more positive, mitigating (although never negating) it. Exile may seem like 'a prescription for an unrelieved grimness of outlook', but this does not always hold true, observes Said (186). One of its



pleasures is the 'originality of vision' that it can produce, a consequence of the exile's access – albeit enforced – to a wide range of perspectives and experiences (186). He asserts: 'Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is *contrapuntal*' (186, emphasis in original). Through its connotation of simultaneous contrasts and conjunctions, 'contrapuntal' indicates that the definitions an exile lives by are neither fixed nor conclusive. For Said, while this is an insecure state of being, it is also the *only* way of being.

In *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), Said asserts that the intellectual as outsider needs 'to question patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking, and a sense of class, racial or gender privilege', thus echoing his vision of the exile (xiii). Just as the exile faces the difficult task of navigating between being too solitary on the one hand and too affiliated with movements and institutions on the other, so too the exilic intellectual 'always stands between loneliness and alignment' (22). By distinguishing between '*actual*' and '*metaphorical*' conditions of exile, Said contends that even someone without experience of physical dislocation can become, through dissent and scepticism, an exilic intellectual within their own society (52, emphasis in original). That one can choose to be exilic in a metaphorical sense also underscores Said's observations in 'Reflections on Exile' on the importance of agency. Exiles and intellectuals face important choices over how they position themselves, heralding both insecurities and pleasures.

Given its greater emphasis on the actual experience of dislocation, metaphorical exile is far less emphasised in 'Reflections on Exile'. In fact, Said

insists that estrangement is particular to exile; it is most certainly *not* a general description of the alienating modern world and any attempt to see it as such is an affectation (182). Said refers to ‘the somewhat pallid notion that non-exiles can share in the benefits of exile as a redemptive motif’ (183). This may seem somewhat paradoxical considering Said’s conception of metaphorical exile; it is also evidence of one of the many unresolved contradictions in his work – Said remains unwilling to either fully synthesise the two forms of exile, or to privilege one over the other.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, his approach to both forms of exile is predicated on challenge and difficulty – the exile *and* the intellectual are variously described as unpleasant, stubborn and lonely. As he states in *Representations of the Intellectual*, ‘[e]xile for the intellectual in this metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others’ (53). His ensuing description of Adorno, celebrated by Said as extraordinarily difficult and critical, as ‘very predisposed to being a metaphysical exile’ before he lived in actual exile demonstrates this very point (55). Metaphorical exile, then, only becomes a ‘pallid’ aspiration when it seeks to gain, as Said makes clear when he dismisses attempts by non-exiles to exploit exile for their own redemption.

In an essay about Said’s legacy, Anna Bernard aptly refers to ‘the critical potential of the experience of exile as a guiding principle’ (‘Borrowing’ 82). This principle largely derives from other thinkers who, unsurprisingly, are also seen as outsiders and exiles, thus revealing the intrinsically intellectual quality of Saidian exile. Said’s approval of what he identifies as ‘the executive value of exile, which Auerbach was able to turn into effective use’, encapsulates this process of transforming exilic experience into something productive – in this case, Auerbach’s

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<sup>25</sup> Paradox is often used to describe Said’s work. See for example *Edward Said* (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia), which repeatedly emphasises Said’s paradoxical qualities in its introduction. Incidentally, Said approvingly describes Theodor Adorno as ‘paradoxical’ (*Intellectual* 55).

groundbreaking work *Mimesis* (World 8). As has been much discussed, Adorno is even more influential in Said's formulation of the ideal exilic perspective. Dwelling on Adorno's autobiographical work, *Minima Moralia*, Said asserts that 'it was his American exile that *produced* Adorno's great masterpiece', intimating that the experience of displacement is not just sometimes useful but also *essential* to intellectual activity (55, emphasis added). As Joseph Massad observes, 'one could see Said himself not only as a composer of his own work, but also as a performer of the work of others of which he took possession' ('Intellectual' 19). This model of selfhood, as it were, is arguably also driven by Said's sense of an unfinished project. In an interview, he asserts 'an eagerness to complete the work inaugurated by Auerbach, Adorno et al. that I consider to be *incomplete* by virtue of its ethnocentrism and lack of interest in the part of the world where I grew up' (*Power* 128, emphasis added). This desire to update and extend their (exilic) work underscores its impact on Said, but *also* prioritises his Arab Palestinian background ('the world where I grew up').<sup>26</sup> Finally, it is noteworthy that both Auerbach and Adorno are Jewish. Said's celebration *and emulation* of a secular Jewish intellectual tradition that he sees as emphasising permanent exile as a necessary moral position (in other words a tradition diametrically opposed to how we might read Zionism) indicates a determination to privilege traditions that suit him, over those that might be politically more expedient. Evidently, dissent and being an outsider are enormously appealing to him as a thinker – as Bernard observes, Said is 'an exile by situation and temperament' (*Rhetorics* 59).

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<sup>26</sup> We can identify this 'eagerness' in Said's attempt towards the end of his life to revise humanism as a discipline so that it finally incorporates and emancipates those who were excluded from its original ethnocentric Western vision (see *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*).

## Exile and Palestine

'Reflections on Exile' historicises and contextualises exile, describing it as a predicament 'as close as we come in the modern era to tragedy' (183). Its sheer scale distinguishes it from earlier forms of exile: 'our age – with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers – is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration' (174). To consider exiles today is to encounter 'the abstractions of mass politics': no longer about individual subjectivities but instead 'hopelessly large numbers' (176). This means: 'You must first set aside Joyce and Nabokov and think instead of the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created. You must think of the refugee-peasants with no prospect of ever returning home, armed only with a ration card and an agency number' (175-6). He also observes the irony of the Palestinians being 'exiled by exiles', positioning Palestinian exile in a dialectic with Jewish history ('the proverbial people of exile') and ongoing Israeli state building, establishing the intractability of the conflict to which Said routinely returns (178). He writes: 'It is as if the reconstructed Jewish collective experience, as represented by Israel and modern Zionism, could not tolerate another story of dispossession and loss to exist alongside it' (178).

References to Palestine in other works of cultural criticism also demonstrate the extent to which Said's Palestinian identity impacts him as a writer. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said admits that his 'background in Palestinian politics has further intensified' his sense of opposition, thus confirming the impact that Palestine and its cause has on his identity as an exilic intellectual (xvii). In the introduction to *Orientalism*, he explains his interest as follows: 'My own experiences of these matters are in part what made me write this book. The

life of an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America, is disheartening' (27).<sup>27</sup> Similarly – although not as explicit – *Culture and Imperialism* pointedly includes a range of references to Palestine as a colonised space and notes the strident efforts to counter that colonisation. Said also asserts that 'as a native from the Arab and Muslim world' living in the United States, he is especially able to mediate between different cultures in his work (xxvi). It is striking that in *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said refers to 'my background in Palestinian politics' rather than 'my background as a Palestinian'. Similarly, in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said refers to 'my involvement in the struggle for Palestinian human rights' (5). Of course, there are many examples where Said is explicit about being Palestinian (as the quote from *Orientalism* shows) but these other examples offer a noteworthy alternative perspective. As Hammer observes: 'In many ways Said is an intellectual speaking for Palestine more than a Palestinian intellectual' ('Crisis' 180n). This implies that his relationship to Palestine is also actively predicated on ethical and political grounds. In her analysis of *Out of Place*, Bernard refers to 'Said's Palestinianness as *chosen*, as a matter of belief instead of being', also recognising the significance of agency (*Rhetorics* 47, emphasis in original).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gauri Viswanathan writes: 'Let us be clear about one thing: autobiography does not often intrude into Said's works. However, when it does, as in the introductory chapter in *Orientalism*, autobiography is turned to devastating effect' (xv). I am not as 'clear' that autobiography does not often intrude but I agree with her analysis of *Orientalism*. In contrast to Viswanathan, Whitlock reads Said's postcolonial theory as 'autocriticism', asserting that the blend of autobiography and criticism 'amplifies' Said's thinking and that his 'critical vocabulary' in part emerges from his memories of Palestine (*Postcolonial* 178). Similarly, Caren Kaplan observes: 'Increasingly, his writing on exile has explored the terrain of his own displacement, forming a powerful fusion of autobiography and criticism' (113).

<sup>28</sup> There is a fascinating correspondence between choosing Palestinianness and Said's assertion that he is a Jewish intellectual in the mould of Adorno: 'a Jewish-Palestinian' (*Power* 458). Said makes a similar point in *Freud and the Non-European* when he reflects on the diasporic and 'unhoused' character of the Jewish intellectual tradition he so admires, asserting that such a perspective 'needn't be seen only as a Jewish characteristic; in our age of vast population transfers, of refugees, exiles, expatriates and immigrants, it can also be identified in the diasporic, wandering, unresolved, cosmopolitan consciousness of someone who is both inside and outside his or her community' (53). In all cases, agency (as well as the important matter of being an outsider) plays a role in forming identity and solidarity.

This speaks directly to the issue of sublimation and the urge to counternarrate: Said's Palestinianness-as-chosen represents a transformation of his origins and dislocation into something far more active, harnessing exile for particular ends.

### **Irreconcilability**

In 'Reflections on Exile', Said asks: 'What could be more intransigent than the conflict between Zionist Jews and Arab Palestinians?' (178). In a well-known interview in 2000, Said emphasises the dialectical nature of the conflict, focusing on what remains (and will remain) unbridgeable:

This is a dialectical conflict. But *there is no possible synthesis*. In this case, I don't think it's possible to ride out the dialectical contradictions. There is no way I know to reconcile the messianic-driven and Holocaust-driven impulse of the Zionists with the Palestinian impulse to stay on the land. These are fundamentally different impulses. This is why I think *the essence of the conflict is its irreconcilability*. (*Power* 447-8, emphasis added)<sup>29</sup>

In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said also addresses the issue of irreconcilability. 'The intellectual's role', he asserts, 'is dialectically, oppositionally to uncover and elucidate' the struggle between powerful, sponsored interests and an independent intellectual community, 'to challenge and defeat both an imposed silence and the normalized quiet of unseen power' (135). This is the case even if synthesis is impossible: 'Just as history is never over or complete, it is also the case that some dialectical oppositions are not reconcilable, not transcendable, not really capable of being folded into a sort of higher, undoubtedly nobler synthesis', a

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<sup>29</sup> Said's perspective on dialectics requires some foregrounding here, for which Benita Parry and Bernard are instructive. Parry believes that Said's interpretation of Hegelian and Marxist dialectics is reductive (and dismissive) in its assumption that a neat synthesis and resolution is always required (503-4). Bernard, citing Parry, agrees that Said's attitude is reductive but also persuasively shows that his own methods do not wholly reject dialectics (*Rhetorics* 49). These arguments have been helpful in tracing Said's position, although I am less concerned whether Said has interpreted classical dialectics 'correctly' and more interested in the presence in his work of a form of dialectical thinking that insists on the impossibility of synthesis.

statement which he follows with the example of Palestine/Israel (143). Following this, Said announces:

Overlapping yet irreconcilable experiences demand from the intellectual the courage to say that *that* is what is before us, in almost exactly the way Adorno has throughout his work on music insisted that modern music can never be reconciled with the society that produced it, but in its intensely and often despairingly crafted form and content, music can act as a silent witness to the inhumanity all around. Any assimilation of individual musical work to its social setting is, says Adorno, false. (143-4, emphasis in original)

The parallel being drawn here feels slightly laboured (or at least uneven) but the central message that Said extracts from Adorno is still pertinent: you cannot force assimilation or reconciliation, not when freedom (whether artistic, intellectual, social or political) is compromised as a result. This assertion of irreconcilability and the impossibility of synthesis when it comes to both the 'dialectical contradictions' of the conflict *and* being an intellectual contributes significantly to how Said narrates exile. Ultimately, if exile is to be sublimated, it is not for a reconciliation that compromises Said's freedom or integrity.

'Reflections on Exile' concludes: 'Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew' (186). These words encapsulate the tension I have outlined here: exile gives rise to an enhanced vision but also irresolution. Bernard observes that these lines leave the reader on a negative rather than positive note, with exile's enabling and disabling features essentially inseparable (*Rhetorics* 50). I would add that through its cyclical structure – unsettling forces erupting anew – this conclusion establishes a formal loop whereby one is reminded of the start of the essay (exile as compelling, yet terrible) and

subsequently its sequence of ebbs and flows.<sup>30</sup> Reading it as a cycle provides another important reminder of the difficulties of synthesis; we are left in no doubt that just as history is never over, so too does this loop continue, propelling the competing forces that give it its momentum. Nonetheless, these cycles also connote agency; the need to sublimate exile. There is a clear indication that Said has to – and does – meet each challenge anew, responding to the ‘unsettling forces’ beyond his control, regardless of their cyclical nature (and thus irresolution). In the same final paragraph he borrows from Wallace Stevens to describe exile as ‘a mind of winter’, with the other seasons ‘nearby but unobtainable’, rendering an exile’s life ‘less seasonal’ – an analogy that reinforces the idea of a cycle, yet one arrested and imprisoning (186).<sup>31</sup> But as the same paragraph also announces that ‘[e]xile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure’, there is simultaneously a *refusal* to accept being exiled – the less seasonal way of life – even if this refusal ultimately constitutes pursuit of the unobtainable (186). This chapter proceeds by analysing the narration of this process: the sublimation of exile and the irreconcilability that is part of it.

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<sup>30</sup> This is also reminiscent of Said’s preference for beginnings, which he defines as secular, renewable, innovative and active, over origins which are seen as divine, passive, and often problematically deployed for dubious ends because of the ways in which they can easily appeal to ideas of destiny and essentialism. See *Beginnings: Intention and Method*.

<sup>31</sup> What Said borrows from Stevens is the phrase, ‘a mind of winter’, which is taken from ‘The Snowman’ (10). It is worth noting that Said’s use of this phrase – the idea of being forced to remain in an arrested state of being – does not correspond with how Stevens uses it in his poem, which describes needing to have a particular kind of mindset, in this case ‘a mind of winter’, in order to truly appreciate its properties, such as frost and snow.



## *After the Last Sky*

Palestine is exile, dispossession, the inaccurate memories of one place slipping into vague memories of another, a confused recovery of general wares, passive presences scattered around in the Arab environment. The story of Palestine cannot be told smoothly. Instead, the past, like the present, offers only occurrences and coincidences. Random.

Edward Said, *After the Last Sky* (30)

Described at the outset as personal and unconventional, *After the Last Sky* marks a departure for Said in offering a meandering, contradictory and yet often moving meditation on what it means to be Palestinian (6). Key to this sense of departure is the text's form, its explicitly personal aspects and the inclusion of many photographs of Palestine and Palestinians, taken by Jean Mohr. Bernard observes that Said's extensive works on Palestine produced two texts that stand out for their reach to a wider audience – *After the Last Sky* and *Out of Place* (*Rhetorics* 42). Of the former, she remarks that 'the book occupies an odd generic niche, somewhere between coffee-table activism and illustrated prose poem, with its lyrical and sometimes discomfiting blend of autobiography, ethnography, and emotive universalization of the Palestinian experience' (42). She suggests that this generic uncertainty is a result of the bleakness of the time when it was written – shortly after the defeat of the Palestinian armed resistance in Lebanon in 1982 and before the First Intifada, which began in 1987. While *After the Last Sky* is undoubtedly less polished and cohesive than *Out of Place*, I am nonetheless interested in what it tells us about Said's conception of exile, especially as it relates to a fragile point in time for Palestinians, as Bernard rightly points out. Examining it also allows me to chart Said's narration of exile from one life writing text to another, and identify the shifts in Said's thinking.

From a life writing perspective, far more has been written about *Out of Place*, formally a relatively conventional memoir. The attentiveness towards hybrid texts within auto/biography studies encourages me to think more incisively about *After the Last Sky* as an autobiographical narrative. I am reminded of Smith and Watson's assertion of the importance of examining narratives that challenge autobiographical conventions, not least because of the ethical and political questions potentially raised ('Rumpled' 2). *After the Last Sky* is not a straightforward autobiographical narrative, but an autobiographically-inflected text attempting to negotiate other narrative strands alongside the study of selfhood. As well as the formal questions it poses, what is particularly interesting is the discernible tension between the individual and the collective that runs throughout the text. This tension derives from Said's desire to narrate Palestinians as a collective, yet his discomfort in doing this, largely derived from his sense of being an outsider and his inability to reconcile his literary and intellectual sense of exile with the actual exile of mass displacement. His difficulty in accepting this irreconcilability (which he circumvents in *Out of Place* by concentrating on the individual experience of exile) means that this tension never dissipates; he continues to conceptualise Palestinian exile more broadly, but inevitably ends up prioritising his own perspective on displacement. It is perhaps this, along with Said's very self-conscious awareness of this tension as he narrates it, that makes the text discomfiting. This also creates the fissures in Said's sublimation of exile, which aims to transmute the fragility of exilic experience for an assertion of collective identity. In attempting this sublimation, Said is caught between the intellectual analysis of what it is to be Palestinian, his own feelings about being Palestinian and the specificity of different Palestinian lived experiences.

In devoting space to *After the Last Sky*, I am also mindful of Moore-Gilbert's observation that discussions of Said still often overlook his work on Palestine, and that even within postcolonial studies, far more attention is paid not just to *Orientalism*, but also his other works of cultural criticism, meaning that Said's explicitly Palestinian-focused output, including *After the Last Sky*, are noticeably less discussed ('Pessoptimism' 5n). To reach a fuller understanding of Palestine/Israel within postcolonial studies and the challenges the conflict poses for the discipline, Moore-Gilbert adds, studying Said's Palestinian texts is essential.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, Aijaz Ahmad, who in contrast to Moore-Gilbert is fiercely critical of Said's theory and methodology, asserts that 'when the dust of current literary debates settles, Said's most enduring contribution will be seen as residing neither in *Orientalism*, which is a deeply flawed book,' nor in his subsequent cultural criticism, but in his work on Palestine, including what Ahmad describes as 'the superbly inflected prose' of *After the Last Sky*, thus acknowledging its life writing properties as well as its quality (160-1). *Orientalism* will no doubt remain Said's enduring work (regardless of Ahmad's criticism) but it is interesting to note how a critic appreciative of Said's cultural criticism and another emphatically against it nonetheless both underscore the importance of Said's work on Palestine.

*After the Last Sky* is deliberately fragmentary, the prose broken up by frequent section breaks as well as photographs, which function as prompt and provocation for Said's thoughts. Furthermore, Said repeatedly returns to the same

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<sup>32</sup> On a related note, Bernard points out that Timothy Brennan asserts that *Orientalism* is grouped with Said's other Palestinian texts within postcolonial studies because of the discipline's impulse towards identitarian thinking, which Bernard seems to accept (*Rhetorics* 43). I too agree that the text is often interpreted through a broad identitarian lens, but I ultimately think that the specifically Palestinian aspects of the text tend to be glossed over within postcolonial studies in favour of what Moore-Gilbert refers to as the text's "'modular" applicability to the much wider range of contexts typically engaged by postcolonial scholars than those on which Said focused primarily – the Middle East, including Palestine/Israel' ('Pessoptimism' 4). In any case, far greater attention has been paid to *Orientalism* than Said's other Palestinian texts, all of which deal far more directly with Palestine.

themes, adding a sense of fluctuation and cycle (reminiscent of 'Reflections on Exile'), thus remaining faithful to his assertion that '[t]he story of Palestine cannot be told smoothly' (30). Focusing on the text's form, Said states:

The whole point of this book is to engage this difficulty [of the varied nature of Palestinian experience and identity], to deny the habitually simple, even harmful representations of Palestinians, and to replace them with something more capable of capturing the complex reality of their experience. Its style and method – the interplay of text and photos, the mixture of genres, modes, styles – do not tell a consecutive story, nor do they constitute a political essay. Since the main features of our present existence are dispossession, dispersion, and yet also a kind of power incommensurate with our stateless exile, I believe that essentially unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary forms of expression should be used to represent us. (6)

In other words, form must resemble reality – especially the reality of exile. This chimes perfectly with Said's praise of Adorno's *Minima Moralia* and its representation of the intellectual as a permanent exile, which for Said is expressed through a 'worked over' writing style and a 'fragmentary', 'discontinuous' form, with 'no plot or predetermined order to follow' (*Representations* 57). This, Said deduces, is the only way in which Adorno can honestly represent the exilic intellectual's life after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, and on the eve of the Cold War. Similarly, fragmentary forms are valorised here as the only proper way of representing Palestinian experience, given its history and circumstances. Added to these formal concerns is the use of metonyms – encapsulated by 'Palestine is exile' – to elucidate Palestinian experience. It is in a metonymic sense that the photographs express something profound, giving them an elevated status throughout the text; there is also something metonymic about the way in which Said utilises examples from literary texts to communicate a broader message about Palestine. These metonymic fragments – acts of substitution and, in some cases, idealisation – that make up *After the Last Sky* suggest the process of sublimation on

Said's part, indicating a need for the fragmentariness of Palestinian experience to become something more resilient.

### **Actual and Metaphorical Exile**

Alongside a photograph of refugee labourers packaging aubergines in Gaza for the Israeli export company Carmel, Said remarks that Palestinian peasants have always had to develop produce destined for others and elsewhere, which prompts the following acknowledgement:

This observation holds force not just because the Carmel boxes and the carefully wrapped eggplants are emblems of the power that rules the sprawling fertility and enduring human labor of Palestine, but also because the discontinuity between me, out here, and the actuality there is *so much more compelling* now than my receding memories and experiences of Palestine. (28, emphasis added)

There is a double metonym here; firstly, the aubergines (eggplants) as 'emblems' of the Israeli occupation and secondly, the image as emblematic of Said's exile – the 'discontinuity' between himself in America and the labourers in Palestine. What is particularly striking is Said's admission that this discontinuity is 'much more compelling' to him than his own memories. This sets Said's text apart from the approach taken in most other exilic narratives that deal with Palestine, which tend to focus on personal memories and the lost quotidian experiences that made up Palestinian life before 1948.<sup>33</sup> Allergic to any sense of overt sentimentality or nostalgia (qualities that many exilic Palestinian narratives occasionally display), Said resists privileging his own Palestinian memories over his interest in the discontinuity between *here* (America) and *there* (Palestine). His impatience with

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<sup>33</sup> There are too many to provide an exhaustive list but notable examples include: *The Bells of Memory: A Palestinian Boyhood in Jerusalem* by Issa J. Boullata; *The First Well: A Bethlehem Boyhood* by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra; *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* by Ghada Karmi; *Born in Jerusalem, Born Palestinian: A Memoir* by Jacob J. Nammar; *Teta, Mother, and Me: Three Generations of Arab Women* by Jean Said Makdisi, Said's younger sister; *Jerusalemites: A Living Memory* by Hazem Zaki Nusseibeh. The titles and subtitles of these works already distinguish their approach from Said's.

sentimentally memorialising the past is expressed in this same section when he refers to his father's wistful references to a particular kind of Palestinian aubergine, rendered inaccessible while in exile, as 'tiresome paeans' (28). The discontinuity serves as a reminder that some situations are simply irreconcilable; present-day Gaza cannot be made to correspond with Said's New York context. 'At best,' he remarks towards the end of the book, 'I feel about these various Palestinian existences that they form a counterpoint (if not a cacophony) of multiple, almost desperate dramas, which each of us is aware of as occurring simultaneously with his or her own' (159-60). Thus for Said, there is an awareness of each other's suffering, but not necessarily the relief of shared experience, underscored by the slippage from 'counterpoint' to inharmonious 'cacophony'.

Another reflection on memory is markedly different in tone. Alongside a pair of images of Palestinians diving into the sea at Acre, Said remarks:

I know many natives of these two coastal cities [of Acre and Jaffa] with excruciatingly nostalgic recollections of their homes, their adolescent pastimes, their family life and communal pleasures all left behind. But they do exist, as Proust says all memory exists with a solidity and durability that can be recaptured now and again. Proust did not live long enough to say that memory has become almost entirely official, conflated – as John Berger puts it – with History. And History, we all know, exists only for historians, who are accredited with responsibility for the topic in the places where power and respectability reside. (136-7)

Abu-Lughod and Sa'di observe that 'Palestinian memory is particularly poignant because it struggles with and against a still much-contested present'; it is precisely this poignancy we can detect here, despite how 'excruciating' the nostalgic memories are (3). This time, nostalgia is seen as under threat from official memory, which disparages the recollections of exiled Palestinians. As well as the incongruousness of dismissing and then safeguarding nostalgia, what is interesting

about these two 'fragments' is the fact that the nostalgia never belongs to Said. This suggests his determination to personally avoid forms of remembering that might prohibit him from sublimating exile – even if this renders him an outsider to the collective experience he is trying to narrate. While Svetlana Boym urges a recognition that nostalgia can be productive, she also warns that it can poison as often as cure and that it easily breeds dangerous dreams: impulses to neatly recover the past and to naively re-establish lost homelands, both of which are anathema to Said's way of thinking (354).

His constant shifts between pronouns add a further layer of complexity to the decision to pay attention to other voices. He explains this as follows:

As I wrote, I found myself switching pronouns, from 'we' to 'you' to 'they,' to designate Palestinians. As abrupt as these shifts are, I feel they reproduce the way 'we' experience ourselves, the way 'you' sense that others look at you, the way, in your solitude, you feel the distance between where 'you' are and where 'they' are. (6)

This corresponds with the notion of 'cacophony' referred to earlier, signalling the same feelings of multiplicity alongside discordance. The constant movement between individual and collective experience reintroduces Said's distinction between *actual* and *metaphorical* exile, which becomes a central facet (and tension) of Said's narrative. Focusing on the historical and political aspects of Said's perspective, Shohat writes:

Writing in exile is not here merely a metaphor for the "postmodern condition," but also an actual experience of the impossibility of returning to a millennial locus of community. Said in this sense brings to the often amorphous postmodernist sense of exile a telling material and historical edge. A displaced member of a displaced community, Said does not resort to a metaphysical contemplation of home and exile, nor to an aesthetic romantic-elegiac reflection on lost origins. Rather, his work brings these dimensions to an acutely political engagement, where the

intellectual is at all times called upon to examine “world politics.” (‘Antinomies’ 122)

Shohat, writing more generally about Said’s depiction of exile, is correct to highlight the ‘actual experience’ that informs Said’s narration of exile. The reality of Palestinian displacement is integral to the text; however, because of the shifts between pronouns, it often adopts an indeterminate collective voice, sometimes losing some of its ‘material and historical edge’. This means that ‘a metaphysical contemplation of home and exile’ is in fact evident. Added to this, Shohat’s observation that Said avoids ‘an aesthetic romantic-elegiac reflection on lost origins’ is particularly interesting because while Said does not dwell on origins (as already noted, a term he rejects), he nonetheless demonstrates a deep interest in aesthetics as a means to reflect on what has been lost (hence the striking black and white photography) and imbues some of his observations about dislocation with a notable sense of elegy, which contrasts to his wariness of nostalgia.

Said’s recognition that his own relationship to Palestine is to some extent reliant on metaphor reveals the challenge he faces in producing a text that pays attention to Palestinian lived experience as broadly as possible. Alongside a photograph of farmworkers, Said makes the following admission:

I am perhaps an extreme case of an urban Palestinian whose relationship to the land is basically metaphorical; I view the Palestinian rural community at a very great remove. [...] [W]hatever tenuous childhood relationship I may have had with Palestinian village or farm life is pretty much dissipated. So even though I can still note the largely agricultural roots of our society, these have no direct personal immediacy for me. I continue to perceive a population of poor, suffering, occasionally colorful peasants, unchanging and collective.

But this perception of mine is mythic, and further (de)formed by the specific inflections of our history and the special circumstances out of which my identity emerged. (88)



Said continues by drawing attention to some of these 'special circumstances', especially the Western norms imposed on Palestine and his father's acceptance of them (something *Out of Place* details in great length). The use of language is striking: metaphorical, tenuous, no immediacy, mythic and (de)formed. By distancing himself so explicitly from the land, Said suggests that to do otherwise would be disingenuous – he cannot allow himself to relate his exilic identity to common tropes such as the pastoral, or the Fedayeen, because his connections to these are entirely abstract. His description of himself as 'an extreme case' also indicates that his metaphorical connections to Palestine are atypical, again marking himself out as a solitary figure. Earlier in the text, he notes that as a result of leaving Palestine for good in 1947, 'the land is further away than it has ever been' (18). Reflecting on photographs of Jerusalem and Nazareth (his father and mother's respective hometowns), he writes: 'Exile again. The facts of my birth are so distant and strange as to be about someone I've heard of rather than someone I know' (30). Later, Said reiterates this, linking his hazy memories of the Nakba period to the issue of class: 'Most of what I can recall about the early days of the period are obscure boyhood memories of a protracted exposure to the sufferings of people with whom I had little direct connection. My immediate family was completely insulated by wealth and the security of Cairo, where we were living then' (115). Paired with his assertion that his 'receding memories' are of less interest to him than today's realities, these admissions of estrangement from his own Palestinian past underscore the fragility of his connection to Palestine.

As discussed earlier, there is a sense of intent driving Said's commitment to Palestine, detectable in his emphasis of how distanced he feels from the *actual* place, yet his commitment to still narrate it. Said's expression of metaphorical exile

therefore comes across as ethically driven; such moments illustrate not just his profound disconnection from Palestine, but also a need to acknowledge the metaphorical qualities of his memories in order to avoid the nostalgic paeans of which he is so wary. Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia observe 'a certain slippage' between the actual and the metaphorical in Said's conception of exile, which at times produces contradictions and speaks to the general sense of paradox that they see as central to his identity (43). This slippage is identifiable in *After the Last Sky*: Said does not always separate actual exile from metaphorical, instead allowing them to overlap, similar to his shifts between pronouns (which themselves often indicate a switch from actual ('we') to metaphorical ('I') exile). This underscores the central tension of the text: the sheer importance to Said of representing Palestinians as a collective that includes himself, while also being attentive to his own model of selfhood that he understands as unrepresentative of this collective.

### **Defensive Nationalism**

As already mentioned, the text is a product of its time, as is the case with other key works.<sup>34</sup> It is anchored in an acute awareness of the ongoing impact of the Nakba, alongside the fragility engendered by the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, resulting in the expulsion of the PLO from Beirut. An understandable sense of crisis and a mournful existential anxiety is evident throughout *After the Last Sky*. Using

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<sup>34</sup> Darwish's *Memory of Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982*, is a particularly striking example, published the same year as *After the Last Sky* (which takes its title and epigraph from Darwish). The prose poem makes clear the impact of the invasion and reveals how important Beirut had become for exiled Palestinians: 'Beirut was the place where Palestinian political information and expression flourished. Beirut was the birthplace for thousands of Palestinians who knew no other cradle. Beirut was an island upon which Arab immigrants dreaming of a new world landed. [...] Beirut thus became the property of anyone who dreamed of a different political order elsewhere and accommodated the chaos that for every exile resolved the complex of being an exile' (134-5). Another notable text, by the French writer Jean Genet, is *Prisoner of Love* (1986), an account of his time spent with Palestinian revolutionaries, both praising them but repeatedly asserting the futility of their cause. Genet acknowledges the effect of the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres in Beirut on him, which he covers in more detail in 'Four Hours in Shatila', a harrowing account of visiting the refugee camp shortly after the massacres.

the first person plural, Said laments that Palestinians are ‘treated as interruptions, intermittent presences’, ever unstable, expelled first from Palestine, then Jordan, and ‘now from Lebanon’ (26). Said imbues his descriptions of expelled Palestinians with a palpable sense of fragility, evident in his spectral description of them as ‘intermittent presences’. His concern over this fragility is an integral driving force behind *After the Last Sky*. In his introduction, he announces that the book is an attempt to deal with the false and damaging depictions of Palestinians: ‘Especially in the West, particularly in the United States, Palestinians are not so much a people as a pretext for a call to arms’ (4).

Trying to expose the falsity and danger of such a pretext gives *After the Last Sky* a particular kind of defensiveness reminiscent of an observation that Said makes in ‘Reflections on Exile’:

It must also be recognized that the defensive nationalism of exiles often fosters self-awareness as much as it does the less attractive forms of self-assertion. Such reconstitutive projects as assembling a nation out of exile (and this is true in this century for Jews and Palestinians) involve constructing a national history, reviving an ancient language, founding national institutions like libraries and universities. And these, while they sometimes promote strident ethnocentrism, also give rise to investigations of self that inevitably go far beyond such simple and positive facts as “ethnicity.” For example, there is the self-consciousness of an individual trying to understand why the histories of the Palestinians and the Jews have certain patterns to them, why in spite of oppression and the threat of extinction a particular ethos remains alive in exile. (184)

It is fruitful to read *After the Last Sky* as enacting this ‘defensive nationalism’ as a means to process the collective experience of exile. His urge to narrate a reconstitution of the Palestinians as a collective, both in spite and because of recent history, demonstrates this. Therefore, Said’s mournfulness leads to a sense of futility, but also propels him to sublimate this for something productive, namely an assertion that Palestinians are *not* merely a pretext for a call to arms.

Notwithstanding Said's fiercely critical stance on nationalism generally, *After the Last Sky* evokes the need – especially at the time of writing – to explore how a 'defensive' form of it can become a strategy for survival and recognition.

In keeping with the text's contradictions, this focus on nationalism is not straightforward. Said observes that the occupation provokes greater resistance and structures of opposition, most of which are nationalist in character and which succeed in disrupting Israel's pursuit of total power. His response to this begins with his concern that it encourages a form of polarisation that 'fortifies the intransigent, ritualistic, and therefore potentially empty nationalism in the other', leading to '[t]he dialectic of Jew and non-Jew mov[ing] up a notch to a narrower site' (112). However, he then swiftly celebrates the new nationalist structures opposing Israel for demonstrating resistance and *sumud* ('steadfastness'), for providing alternative institutions, such as cultural centres, and thus for having 'forced open the tight little world of the master-slave relationship first introduced in 1967' (112). This forcing open is indicative of defensive nationalism and its intention to construct and revive in a self-aware manner. Said nonetheless remains sceptical about achieving more than this. Further on he states that 'we can read ourselves against another people's pattern' (the master narrative) but ultimately, because it is someone else's narrative, 'we emerge as its effects, its errata, its counternarratives', leading Said to conclude: 'Whenever we try to narrate ourselves, we appear as dislocations in *their* discourse' (140, emphasis in original).<sup>35</sup> Said does not, however, give up on attempting to 'narrate ourselves', instead incorporating a defensive nationalism that in its nature rejects emerging as merely dislocations. Furthermore, there is an intimation that this form of

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<sup>35</sup> Given the focus of this thesis, Said's negative reference here to counternarratives is worth commenting on. As my introduction indicated, I define counternarratives as both a rupture of a hegemonic narrative *and* as a mechanism for self-narration that stands apart from this.

nationalism provides the best way of contending with the dialectic of master and slave – even if the resolution is ultimately impossible (‘forcing open’ the dialectic is, of course, not the same as resolving it). Elsewhere, he again evokes the dialectic in order to both emphasise this impossibility *and* to indicate the Palestinian response:

[I]n the world system today there is no method, no way, no perspective that gives us an existence as a people independent of, and to some small degree transcending, the very events and factors that have reduced us to our present pass. I can put this more starkly. There has been no misfortune worse for us than that we are ineluctably viewed as the enemies of the Jews. (134)

Despite this ineluctability, Said perseveres with transcending what he declares cannot be transcended. He asserts that ‘[w]hat was once a shapeless domination of one people by another has become a series of smaller, more varied configurations’, indicating once more that the dialectic has become more open and Palestinians more dynamic in their responses (112).

He also harnesses the precariousness of the Palestinian collective in order to celebrate it, using language evocative of his depiction of the exilic intellectual and his description of counterpoint:

A part of something is for the foreseeable future going to be better than all of it. Fragments over wholes. Restless nomadic activity over the settlements of held territory. Criticism over resignation. The Palestinian as self-consciousness in a barren plain of investments and consumer appetites. The heroism of anger over the begging-bowl, limited independence over the status of clients. Attention, alertness, focus. To do as others do, but somehow to stand apart. To tell your story in pieces, *as it is*.

And all of this alongside and intervening in a closed orbit of Jewish exile and a recuperated, much-celebrated patriotism of which Israel is the emblem. Better our wanderings, I sometimes think, than the horrid clanging shutters of their return. The open secular element, and not the symmetry of redemption. (150, emphasis in original)

The first paragraph is reminiscent of Said's description of the self-consciousness and self-awareness that define defensive nationalism, rendered emphatic by the short sentences. By underscoring adaptability and contingency, Said suggests that they – as a Palestinian collective – *are* capable of transcending the factors that render them merely the dislocation of a dominant discourse, even if the story is 'in pieces'. Here, their narrative is not just counter to Israel's, but occurs 'alongside'; by 'intervening' it is also ascribed greater agency.<sup>36</sup> Said's insistence that 'our wanderings' is preferable to 'their return' echoes his repeated advocacy of the moral rightness of Adorno's rejection of home and rigid ideological positions, which permanent dwelling – understood in a literal *and* metaphysical sense – entrenches ('Reflections' 184-5; *Intellectual* 57-9). Reflecting on photographs of Palestinians working and studying, Said makes a related observation: 'Far from being cheerful nonentities at work on some small project nowhere in particular, we represent a concrete force whose dispersed and uncentralized power even we cannot easily discern. But it gives what we do a fragmented dignity' (145).

This in itself is an attempt at sublimation. Loss is being harnessed in order to render what is undignified, dignified. Said's assertion that metonymically Palestine is exile, and that *all* Palestinians experience some form of exile, means that this outsider position becomes a way of drawing together incredibly varied experiences. By describing Palestinians as '[e]xiles at home as well as abroad', he

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<sup>36</sup> We can connect this assertion of autonomy and agency with Said's rejection of the term 'diaspora': 'I do not like to call it a Palestinian *diaspora*: there is only an apparent symmetry between our exile and theirs' (*Sky* 115, emphasis in original). Patrick Williams offers different reasons for Said's rejection of diaspora, suggesting amongst other things that it could be an example of paradoxical thinking on Said's part ('Said' 83). I think it is more persuasive to see Said as refusing to use a term that risks rendering Palestinian exile a less significant version of the dominant model. Williams also accepts this as a possibility but I wonder why he feels 'shock' at Said's rejection of diaspora and why he offers so many different reasons for it; it seems relatively clear why Said takes the position that he does (83). Williams's article is a response to a 1999 interview Said gave in which he expresses his rejection of diaspora in strong terms; Williams does not mention this passage from *After the Last Sky* (written much earlier).

makes it clear that exile is the binding force of identity, ultimately forming a community (11). He writes: 'To be sure, no single Palestinian can be said to feel what most other Palestinians feel: Ours has been too various and scattered a fate for that sort of correspondence. But there is no doubt that we do in fact form a community, if at heart a community built on suffering and exile' (5). Said therefore embarks on a sublimation of the precariousness of exile for a general Palestinian experience, held together by defensive nationalism, that maintains a sense of dignity even while – indeed *because* – it is predicated on fragmentation. It is a collective predicament *and* a moral position; actual *and* metaphorical exile. This assertion of a community built on exile enables Said to narrate a Palestinian collective that includes himself. However, the paradox of this narration is that what renders him part of a community – exile – is also what makes him an outsider. Said's embrace of this outsider position (an exile by temperament) means that inevitably, this comes across as an uneasy conflation of experiences, exacerbated by the constant slippage from actual to metaphorical exile and between different subject pronouns. It is hard for Said, given his temperament, *not* to privilege the singular model of exilic selfhood and *not* to prioritise metaphorical exile. In turn, his reluctance to accept the impossibility of reconciling the individual and the collective concretises the tension between them, thus calling into question Said's sublimation.

### **Intertextuality**

Said laments that 'the images used to represent us only diminish our reality further' (4). This notion of images is key to Said's use of intertextual presences to assert a sense of community; both the actual images and those generated by the literary texts he incorporates are used to re-establish a sense of dignity, however

precarious. Functioning metonymically, they are central to his message that exile can *transform* itself into a collective. Praising Mohr's photography, Said observes that, 'he saw us as we would have seen ourselves – at once inside and outside our world' (6). Said refers to this as 'double vision', represented by the fluid use of pronouns, and linked to a belief that Palestinians often feel different, or 'other', even to themselves, which again allows Said to feel part of a collective while maintaining his outsider status (6). Therefore, Mohr's photographs are introduced in a way that enables Said to shift between belonging and *not* belonging.

Alongside photographs of settled Bedouins, Said remarks: 'Exile is a series of portraits without names, without contexts' (12). Other photographs prompt similar realisations of the fundamentally dislocated and exilic nature of Palestinian life. A photograph of refugee children in Lebanon prompts the observation that 'all residence is exile' (21). Alongside a series of photographs of living rooms located inside and outside of Palestine, Said asserts that Palestinian homes reveal a strong compulsion to repeat what is familiar, whether rituals, traditions or décor, resulting in a sense of excess that only serves to illustrate that something is missing. Said connects himself to this quintessential Palestinian experience as he sees it, acknowledging: 'My own rather trivial version of this tendency toward disproportion and repetition is that I always carry too many objects – most of them unused – when I travel, which I do frequently' (60). He then observes that the oddness and excesses of these repetitions 'seem to symbolize exile – exile from a place, from a past, from the actuality of home', again illustrating the pervasiveness of exile (61). These generalised statements mean that Said is able to assert belonging, but they also render whatever sense of community there is extremely



fragile: exile as the glue that binds Palestinians together eclipses the more robust strategies for survival that must also exist in each context.

Despite his assertion that all Palestinians are outsiders to some extent, Said still continually steps back from the collective experience that he is trying to portray, rendering him a specific outsider to the generalised outsider experience he narrates. '[W]hat a distance now actually separates me from the *concreteness* of that life', he writes in response to images of street vendors in Palestine and the memories they evoke. 'How easily traveled the photographs make it seem, and how possible to suspend the barriers keeping me from the scenes they portray' (18, emphasis added). This remoteness from the material reality of Palestine is a reminder of Said's assertion that his connection to it as a physical place is metaphorical. Nonetheless, the intimation that the photographs allow him to enter the scenes they depict suggest Said's will to connect, despite the vast distance that separates them, not just physically but also experientially. This distance is once again made evident through Said's admission, alongside other photographs of market stalls, that even though everything seems exactly the same as he (thinks he) remembers it, there is 'little that is specific, little that has the irreducible durability of tactile, visual, or auditory memories that concede nothing to time' and little 'that is not confused with pictures I have seen or scenes I have glimpsed elsewhere in the Arab world' (30). Said's admission that these are images of market stalls in his parents' respective hometowns intensifies this disclosure. What these examples also do, however, is signal Said's resolve to individually connect with a collective that he repeatedly struggles to envisage as a concrete reality. This maintains the tension between individual and collective.

Furthermore, sometimes the correspondences Said draws are not able to establish the fragile community built on exile that his text seeks to narrate. In one of the longest reflections on a single photograph, Said celebrates the image of four Palestinian villagers seen at a distance as an evocation of what he describes as the Palestinian habit of 'turning inward' in order to take stock, savour experiences and stand back from the tumult of politics and ideology (46). In a noticeably different tone to his anti-nostalgic observations about the photograph of Gazan refugee labourers tending to their harvest of aubergines, Said states that '[t]his image [...] is for me a private, crystallized, almost Proustian evocation of Palestine' (47). He goes on to narrate in detail a childhood memory of Palestine, which focuses on Said's remembrance of observing people he loves, but – crucially – not being able to join them. He then notes that '[m]y private past is inscribed on the surface of this peaceful but somehow brooding pastoral scene in the contemporary West Bank', layering the images and establishing links between them, but also emphasising a vivid sense of disquiet and detachment (48). Said forges a connection between himself and what the image represents but he nonetheless remains an outsider and resists establishing stronger links; even his assertion that there is a common Palestinian habit – 'turning inward' – does not suggest community or collective endeavours so much as it implies the privileging of private feelings. Moreover, he continues by asking 'whether the four people are in fact connected', suggesting that what links the figures in the photograph might only be the 'unseen forces' that control the space they inhabit (49). This renders the image 'a photograph of latent, of impending desolation', leaving Said 'depressed by the transience of Palestinian life, its vulnerability and all too easy dislocation' (49). Said cannot commit to seeing the group of people in the photograph as belonging

to each other, nor can he avoid drawing attention to the fragility that he reads into the image. And yet, there is 'another feeling' which 'asserts itself in response' – slightly defensively – and which suggests a certain, tentative resilience (49).

These reflections encapsulate Said's shifts towards *and* away from asserting a collective identity; no sooner does he establish links than he undoes them. Such movements (which happen throughout the text as Said reflects on Mohr's photographs) reinforce the idea that Said's narration of Palestine as a community that he is also part of, is dependent on Said being able to remain an outsider. Hence Palestine as exile and a Palestinian habit being one that turns inward. The problem with this, of course, is that it cannot ever truly narrate an *actual* community. Said is too detached from the physical place (and too engaged with a metaphorical understanding of exile) to narrate the specificity of different Palestinian lived experiences and, consequently, too detached to be able to introduce the level of generalisation about these experiences that the text contains. In this sense, his sublimation of exile in order to affirm a community is undone by the paradox that conflates the collective and the outsider and attempts to reconcile experiences that cannot meaningfully be held together.

Said's incorporation of literary references is similarly complicated. Given his background as a literary scholar dedicated to culture's impact on and response to politics and society, it is unsurprising that literary references proliferate in *After the Last Sky* (the title itself is derived from a Darwish poem). In a revealing passage, Said deals with different forms of exile, evoking the distinction between actual and metaphorical forms:

Those of us who live in the West have been conditioned by education and culture to regard exile as a literary, entirely bourgeois state: We think of the great paradigmatic figures like Ovid, Dante, Hugo, or Joyce; we reflect on the inner exile

of various German or Italian writers; and in so doing we draw elucidation by analogy out of our own smaller-scale exile. But it is the mass of Palestinians dispersed throughout the Near East who, I think, really set the conditions for life in exile, and these are almost by definition silent, indescribable, utterly poignant. Most of us – those who are able to and might perhaps read this book or look at its photographs – have left the other condition behind, but the evidence for it is still there, very far away from amenities like a library, or a salon, or a bank. (120-1)

It is a measure of Said's awareness of his privileged background that he conceives of exile in this way, separating himself from those who 'really set the conditions for life in exile' (and, interestingly, implying that despite his instruction in 'Reflections on Exile' to 'set aside' Joyce and focus instead on mass displacement', his background – and temperament – makes this difficult). Yet Said also strives to establish literary texts as metonyms for Palestinian experience, including his own, which again contradicts his admission of being at a remove from Palestine. His reliance on literary texts to do the work of fleshing out Palestinian experience also means that, as with the photographs, a level of generalisation is introduced that inevitably complicates the possibility of sublimating exile for a form of defensive nationalism that would narrate a proper community.

Said's use of metonyms is clearest when he analyses Palestinian writers, who feature prominently in *After the Last Sky*, a noticeable contrast to Said's criticism as a whole, which focuses predominantly on Western cultural production. This inclusion (and the manner of their inclusion) is no doubt largely to do with the book's subject matter. As a strategy of defensive nationalism, drawing attention to prominent Palestinian writers, whose works are available in translation, is understandable; Palestine needs (and has) its own narrators, capable of articulately reframing the issues that tend to be so severely misrepresented. Perhaps mindful of this need for reframing, Said is rather

emphatic about the clarity and significance of the messages that Palestinian writers relay. He asserts that '[t]wo great images *encapsulate* our unresolved existence' (26, emphasis added). The first is the identity card, as represented by Darwish in his poem, 'Identity Card', which deals starkly with the real and existential issues raised by documentation (always controlled by other people). The second is the protagonist of Emile Habiby's *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist*, a novel whose anecdotal and ironic form Said celebrates, paying particular attention to its chaotic nature and the central character's ambivalences. Said's intention of asserting these two images and their producers as metonyms for Palestinian existence and a tentative form of nationalism is further underscored by his description of 'Identity Card' as 'our national poem' and Habiby's novel as 'a kind of national epic', as well as 'the best work of Palestinian writing yet produced' (26). His celebration of these writers is certainly not invalid but his impulse to boil representation down to two 'great images' that can encapsulate the unresolved nature of Palestinian existence feels slightly reductive given the complexity of Palestinian experience (which he himself reiterates across his work). It is also at odds with his assertion that because of the varied and scattered nature of Palestinian experience, no single Palestinian can claim to feel what most other Palestinians feel (5).

Something similar happens in Said's description of another prominent Palestinian text: 'Let Ghassan Kanafani's novella *Men in the Sun* stand for the fear we have that unless we press "them" they will allow us to disappear, and the equal worry that if we press them they will either decry our hectoring presence, and quash it in their states, or turn us into easy symbols of their nationalism' (32). Said's instruction that Kanafani's novella should 'stand for' something establishes

its metonymic function. What is problematic with this is the fact that *Men in the Sun* narrates the fate of desperate Palestinian refugees on their way to Kuwait; in other words, it is a depiction of those who 'really set the conditions of life in exile', from whom Said rightly distinguishes himself (*Sky* 121). But as well as speaking to the deprivations faced by certain Palestinians who struggle to survive, the novella also provides an account of capitalist-driven displacement which is not exclusively a Palestinian experience: that of the economic migrant. Yet the novella is announced as representative of a particular existential fear felt by *all* Palestinians that Said seems to relate to by using the first-person plural. His desire to see these texts as representative of Palestinian experience means squaring a circle by which specific Palestinian crises in the Middle East, as well as crises that apply not just to Palestinians, are described as generic Palestinian quandaries.<sup>37</sup> By not affirming his outsider status when analysing these texts, Said veers close to glossing over important differences between Palestinians. This is particularly interesting when compared to Said's responses to Mohr's photographs, which tend more towards acknowledging his different status to the subjects depicted in the images, even while he continues trying to establish a community that allows for that difference. Arguably, as a writer himself, he feels compelled to align himself in spirit and message with other Palestinian writers, even if the experiences they narrate do not correspond to his own life.

This inclusion of Palestinian writers in *After the Last Sky* is also no doubt an attempt to provide an intellectual counterpoint to Jewish culture. This, I think,

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<sup>37</sup> It is also worth noting that none of the texts analysed in *After the Last Sky* are written by women, whether Palestinian or otherwise. Said does discuss the novelist Sahar Khalifeh but within the context of reflecting on a documentary by Michel Khleifi (a male filmmaker), in which she is interviewed. Said does not comment on her literary output (83). In this instance, as well as in an earlier section in which Said laments the absence of women from Palestinian narratives, Said asserts himself as an outsider to women's experience, thus excusing himself from not dealing with gender in more detail, which ultimately the text (and its representational impulses) would have benefited from (77).

helps explain Said's desire to view the texts metonymically and make their messages inclusive, which speaks strongly to the concept of defensive nationalism as a strategy of exilic experience. Underlining the importance of culture as a means to establish and defend collective identity, Said remarks: 'We have no known Einsteins, no Chagall, no Freud or Rubinstein to protect us with a legacy of glorious achievements' (17). Cultural icons are shown here to provide the means of asserting legitimacy, pride and belonging. Even though Said laments that there are no comparable figures to intellectual heavyweights such as Einstein or Freud, the fact that *After the Last Sky* asserts Palestinian texts as iconic, tempers this imbalance. It also mitigates Said's exasperation later on in the text when he bemoans the fact that historically Palestinians have not narrated their own lives. He asks: 'While *they* were traveling, observing, writing studies and novels, paying attention to themselves, what were we doing?' (94, emphasis in original). Not enough, is Said's response. Contemporary writers, we can infer, are beginning to redress this historical imbalance.

The will to connect – to establish a tentative, defensive nationalism, predicated on a generalised exilic outlook – is integral to *After the Last Sky*. It is also clearly very important to Said. In an interview, he remarks: 'I found myself writing from the point of view of someone who had at last managed to connect the part that was a professor of English and the part that lived, in a small way, the life of Palestine' (*Dispossession* 123). When Said falls short in bringing together these two aspects of his exilic identity (the actual and the metaphorical), it is because the connections cannot survive the distances that exist and because the community he subsequently forges lacks specificity. Bernard refers critically to the 'emotional universalization of the Palestinian experience' in the text and it is indeed this

universalization that complicates it (*Rhetorics* 42). The collective is too abstract, despite Said's attempt to reify it through metonyms. From a life writing perspective, this problematises the text because the actualities of lived experience are not always distinct enough. Smith and Watson observe: 'Paradoxically, the autobiographical is a conspicuous staging arena for the public world, if one with a foot lingering in the intimate bed of the personal' ('Rumpled' 2). This paradox can be the making of an autobiographical narrative, allowing it to navigate the always blurred line between private and public; individual and communal. However, Said's struggle to accept the irreconcilability between the personal and the collective (and therefore the impossibility of generalising) means that this staging area carries too much tension; the process of sublimation consequently fractures. This is not simply Said trying to obtain what cannot be obtained, but primarily that Said's image of selfhood is so committed to (and constructed by) a particular kind of exile, with its restlessness and multiple affiliations (another important Saidian term), that he comes across as uneasy with the process he establishes: forging a collective identity predicated on a tentative, defensive nationalism. He recognises the value of this form of nationalism but cannot be truly comfortable with it, hence the oscillations that make up the text.

Permanently an outsider, Said knows that returning to Palestine is not the answer to his exile. He addresses this in a memorable passage, which is indicative of the central tension of the text:

All of us speak of *awdah*, 'return,' but do we mean that literally, or do we mean 'we must restore ourselves to ourselves'? The latter is the real point, I think, although I know many Palestinians who want their houses and their way of life back, exactly. But is there any place that fits us, together with our accumulated memories and experiences? (33)



Later on, he notes: 'Homecoming is out of the question. You learn to transform the mechanics of loss into a constantly postponed metaphysics of return' (150).<sup>38</sup> Said therefore acknowledges that other Palestinians do not all feel the same way, but by using the second-person pronoun – 'You learn' – and by asserting that return as a psychological undertaking is 'the real point', he strongly suggests that literal return is not the answer for anyone. Thus, no sooner is a collective established than it is described as permanently unhoused, potentially undermining Said's very palpable defence of Palestine as a real, contemporary place and also arguably prioritising exile as a permanent life experience – one which *transforms* loss into something metaphysical, an act of sublimation that certainly not all can commit themselves to. He continually asserts that exile defines Palestine, but what the photographs in particular attest to, as well as those moments when Said recognises collective endeavours and achievements, is that this is only part of the story (albeit an integral one) and that exile itself is too complex (and too variously experienced) for such a metonymic statement.

In her assessment of the text, Krista Kauffmann observes: 'Both text and image "look" at Palestinians, but they do not necessarily see the same thing. Thus, while they often overlap and reinforce one another, they never come together to form an entirely coherent and unified whole' (94). This in itself, of course, is not a problem (and Kauffmann does not see it as such). The issue arises because despite his constantly professed sense of being an outsider, Said cannot entirely relinquish the need to reconcile image and text by trying to draw together the individual and

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<sup>38</sup> Said writes something very similar in 'Reflections on Exile': 'This need to reassemble an identity out of the refractions and discontinuities of exile is found in the earlier poems of Mahmoud Darwish, whose considerable work amounts to an epic effort to transform the lyrics of loss into the indefinitely postponed drama of return' (179). Both texts quote exactly the same segment of a Darwish poem, 'A Lover from Palestine', making the poet's influence on Said's conception of exile and homecoming clear. It is also interesting to note that Darwish did 'literally' return to Palestine, although he always maintained that he never stopped being an exile (see Yeshurun).

the collective. Ironically, perhaps, given Said's attempts at collective narration, the photographs ensure that the text ultimately attests to this irreconcilability: the lack of correspondence, at times, between Said's generalised statements on exile and Palestinian identity and the incontrovertible range of realities that the images suggest ensure that the reader is left with an appreciation of the sheer diversity of Palestinian experience – including Said's own.

## *Out of Place*

I have argued that exile can produce rancor and regret, as well as a sharpened vision. What has been left behind may either be mourned, or it can be used to provide a different set of lenses. Since almost by definition exile and memory go together, it is what one remembers of the past and how one remembers it that determine how one sees the future.

Edward Said, 'Introduction' (*Reflections* xxxv)

By asserting that it is not just 'what one remembers' but 'how one remembers' the past, Said asserts the dynamic quality of memory. The fact that these memories (tied to exile) are future-orientated also makes it evident that intention and agency are integral to exilic memory. *Out of Place* is deeply concerned with exilic memory, tracing how the past informs the present, while also demonstrating what has been lost, both personally for Said and collectively for Palestinians. Said's endeavour to be representative is less pronounced – and less contradictory – than in *After the Last Sky*. However, it would be wrong to read the memoir as stepping back from addressing the Palestinian predicament, even if its interiority and focus on the minutiae of upper-class childhood and domestic life might tempt a reader to read the text as a significant move away from explicitly political writing, which Said can be seen to corroborate by describing his memoir as 'a project about as far from my professional and political life as it was possible for me to go' (*Out* 217). Nonetheless, the text's exceptionality for its author should not encourage any readings of it as apolitical; instead it should be viewed as complementary to Said's other work that focuses on issues of representation, power and politics. As Moore-Gilbert observes: 'At the very least, *Out of Place* anatomises the affective ground from which the adult Said's political engagements grow' (*Life-Writing* 116). Similarly, Cynthia Franklin observes that despite the absence of Said's political commitments and its adoption of 'an intensely inward approach', the memoir is

nonetheless profoundly informed by his political and intellectual concerns (*Academic* 119). Indeed, Said acknowledges that ‘my political writings about the Palestinian situation, my studies of the relationship of politics and aesthetics [...] must surely have fed into this memoir surreptitiously’, indicating the highly contingent and connected nature of his interests and commitments (xiii).

While the structure of *Out of Place* is not exclusively linear – chapters jump from one topic to another and thus back and forth in time – Said ascribes to several traditional motifs of autobiographical writing. The text is partly structured as a quest through which Said seeks to locate his inner self – a common trope in autobiographical texts – which is presented as buried underneath his assigned and eventually very public self: the ‘Edward’ constructed by his parents and from whom Said differentiates and distances himself.<sup>39</sup> However, this fairly conventional narrative tactic of separating public and private selves is complicated by Said’s constant assertion of difference, as well as the emphasis placed on a multiple, fluid sense of self by the end of the text. This notion of a quest also chimes with the concept of sublimation: Said dynamically links past experiences of dislocation to his eventual acceptance of an unstable and contingent identity, which is certainly not the traditional closure of a quest narrative.<sup>40</sup> As Tobias Döring notes in his assessment of the text: ‘While the autobiographer goes through many of the classic motions, he seems intent to set himself apart from them; they are reiterated to establish difference’ (73). I would agree; Said ascribes to

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<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, in an interview Said asserts: ‘I’ve resisted the use of the word “autobiography”. I call it a memoir, because I don’t try to account for a public trajectory’ (*Power* 421). The text is therefore clearly seen by Said as primarily concerned with his private self. This, of course, differs from *After the Last Sky*.

<sup>40</sup> Bernard refers to *Out of Place* as drawing on ‘the classical and postcolonial *Bildungsroman*’, which echoes the idea of an updated quest narrative (*Rhetorics* 43).

traditional patterns of understanding the self, which only further highlights his inability to fully conform to them.

Autobiographical texts are often provoked by crisis, and a sense of self-justification is always latent; the very earliest titles of autobiographical works (*Apologia, Confessions*) reveal this to be a far from recent development. In Said's case, this crisis is his terminal leukaemia, stated at the very beginning of the preface. He writes: 'Several years ago I received what seemed to be a fatal medical diagnosis, and it therefore struck me as important to leave behind a subjective account of the life I lived in the Arab world, where I was born and spent my formative years, and in the United States, where I went to school, college, and university' (xiii). This gives the text several important functions: a form of temporary salvation for its author, who takes refuge in writing during periods of extreme illness, and as the only and final record of how a public intellectual personally reflects on a lost world, a reflection that is valuable not just because the past is for us all unrecoverable but because for a Palestinian of Said's generation, the sites of the past have irrevocably altered. 'Many of the places and people I recall here no longer exist,' Said writes, 'though I found myself frequently amazed at how much I carried of them in often minute, even startlingly concrete, detail' (xiii). These details make up the text.

Said's self-identification as an outsider is evident from the outset: this is a memoir about someone who is out of place.<sup>41</sup> The long-term impact of this (not least the establishment of the affective ground that Moore-Gilbert refers to) and the insecurities it gives rise to are made clear in the first chapter:

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<sup>41</sup> The front covers of the US and UK editions of *Out of Place* (as well as all foreign editions as far as I have been able to ascertain) feature a striking image of a rather severe-looking young Edward staring directly at the camera, an image that is placed very noticeably at the edge of the cover, thus visually bolstering Said's off-centred approach to self and identity.

I have retained this unsettled sense of many identities – mostly in conflict with each other – all of my life, together with an acute memory of the despairing feeling that I wish we could have been all-Arab, or all-European and American, or all-Orthodox Christian, or all-Muslim, or all-Egyptian, and so on. (5)

The fact that Said's memory of despair is 'acute' indicates the past's continued impact on the present. Nonetheless, what is also apparent is that he has 'retained' a sense of fragmented self; an awareness that he cannot resolve these conflicting identities. By the very end of the memoir, being all-Arab, or all-European, or all-anything, is explicitly rejected in favour of consciously learning to feel comfortable with being 'not quite right' (295). Ultimately, being out of place is presented as a model of selfhood, established through the sublimation of exile.

There is a layered narrative to this sublimation. Firstly, his illness becomes the impetus for looking back at the past. Subsequently, this remembrance of the lost past is narrated as the *process* of learning to sublimate exile, which enables a fluid, outsider identity to emerge, one that consequently drives his intellectual pursuits and interests. I begin by focusing on the role of Said's illness in the text's construction, before analysing his narration of childhood, which reveals in often painstaking detail his deeply-felt sense of dislocation. I then move on to a discussion of Said's account of becoming politicised – the shift from being Palestinian in a passive sense to *becoming* Palestinian in an active one. This generates a hard-won confidence and a refusal to be disconcerted by what remains irreconcilable.

### **Illness and *Out of Place***

Writing in the *Independent*, Ahdaf Soueif remarks that Said's memoir was '[w]ritten in "counterpoint" to his illness (leukaemia) at times when he was recovering from chemotherapy', thus adopting Said's own term to refer to the

relationship between Said's writing and his illness ('Books'). This relationship runs throughout the memoir, with Said making it very clear that the production of *Out of Place* is intimately connected with the trajectory of his illness. Said was diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia in 1991 and he begins writing his memoir in 1994, revealing that '[t]his book was written mostly during periods of illness or treatment' (xi). The illness is therefore foregrounded in the preface, as well as in the preceding acknowledgements, which pay tribute to Kanti Rai, Said's doctor, and Mariam, his wife, for sustaining him during his illness (xii). *Out of Place* is dedicated to both. Later in the text, Said provides more details about the diagnosis and its emotional and physical impact, before observing:

These details are important as a way of explaining to myself and to my reader how the time of this book is intimately tied to the time, phases, ups and downs, variations in my illness. As I grew weaker, the number of infections and bouts of side effects increased, the more this book was my way of constructing something in prose while in my physical and emotional life I grappled with anxieties and pains of degeneration. (216)

This clearly shows how Said's writing is a direct response to his illness, the intensification of the latter leading to an increased reliance on – and real need for – the former. Sublimation is also evident in his admission that as he grew weaker, writing became a way of countering his feelings of degeneration. By 'constructing something in prose' as his health declines, Said attempts to ameliorate his sense of physical deterioration. Tightening the link between writing and illness, Said writes: 'with this memoir, I was borne along by the episodes of treatment, hospital stays, physical pain and mental anguish, letting those dictate how and when I could write, for how long and where' (216).

Running counter to these admissions is the explicit denial of his leukaemia's presence in the actual narrative. This lends weight to the idea of sublimation – the

illness drives the construction of the memoir but it is not seen as a central subject matter. Thus Said asserts:

Curiously, the writing of this memoir and the phases of my illness share exactly the same time, although most traces of the latter have been effaced in this story of my early life. This record of a life and ongoing course of a disease (for which I have known from the beginning no cure exists) are one and the same, it could be said, the same but deliberately different. (216, emphasis in original)

'Curiously' is a strange adverb choice – it implies coincidence, and is contradicted by Said's other statements, some made on exactly the same page. The description of writing and illness sharing the same time, as opposed to one leading to the other, is also noticeable. In this passage, they are united in a slightly altered sense, made to seem 'one and the same' but 'deliberately different'. This arguably signals Said's refusal to allow his narrative to replicate, or become contaminated by, the deterioration that propels his illness towards its unavoidable conclusion. Said's bold assertion that 'most traces' of his illness 'have been effaced in this story' makes it evident that the negative diagnosis is to be harnessed for a particular process, but will not be given space in and of itself within that process.

Earlier in the text, Said allows his illness to intrude, albeit only to acknowledge his attempts to 'banish' it. This passage, over a hundred pages into the text, is the first proper reflection on his illness since the preface:

As a way of getting around the discipline [imposed by his parents], illness (sometimes feigned, sometimes exaggerated) made life away from school positively acceptable. I became the family joke for being especially gratified by, even soliciting, an unnecessary bandage on my finger, knee, or arm. And now by some devilish irony I find myself with an intransigent, treacherous leukemia, which ostrichlike I try to banish from my mind entirely, attempting with reasonable success to live in my system of time, working, sensing lateness and deadlines and that feeling of insufficient accomplishment I learned fifty years ago and have so remarkably internalized. But, in another odd reversal, I secretly wonder to myself whether the system of duties and deadlines may now save me,



although of course I know that my illness creeps invisibly on, more secretly and insidiously than the time announced by my first watch, which I carried with so little awareness then of how it numbered my mortality, divided it up into perfect, unchanging intervals of unfulfilled time forever and ever. (105-6)<sup>42</sup>

The swift movements between childhood and the present day are almost startling, especially as his illness has not been discussed previously within the main text. The blame Said seems to be apportioning himself through his observation that there is a 'devilish irony' to having feigned illness as a child and to now having terminal illness is poignant (and needlessly unforgiving), as well as indicative of the tightly woven relationship between telling a life story and acknowledging illness. In Said's attempts to banish it from his mind in favour of work there is a clear indication of repressing illness instead of sublimating it. There is also a reminder of the attempt to obtain what is known to be unobtainable – Said's deadlines and writing habits will never provide the salvation he desires, but he will rely on them nonetheless.

In *The Wounded Storyteller*, Arthur Frank acknowledges 'the need of ill people to tell their stories' (3, emphasis in original). He also identifies three narrative types for illness stories: restitution narratives, which communicate a desire to be healthy again and often display a denial of the severity of the illness; chaos narratives, which are the complete opposite of restitution in futility, trauma and absence of narrative order; and quest narratives, which deal with suffering directly and seek to use it productively. Frank states:

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<sup>42</sup> There is a moving moment in the memoir *Looking for Palestine*, by Said's daughter Najla (who I discuss in detail in Chapter Four). She writes that three days before he died: 'He began to have crazy dreams, some prophetic, some just heartbreakingly profound. One night he woke up certain his watch was cracked. Another night he woke and began haphazardly throwing items into a suitcase' (233). As well as the reiteration of Said's watch as an emblem of his mortality, the anecdote about packing recalls *After the Last Sky* and *Out of Place* and his habit, derived from exile, of always packing more than he needs.

The quest narrative affords the ill person a voice as teller of her own story, because only in quest stories does the *teller* have a story to tell. In the restitution narrative the active player is the remedy: either the drug itself [...] or the physician. Restitution stories are about the triumph of medicine; they are self-stories only by default. Chaos stories remain the sufferer's own story, but the suffering is too great for a self to be told. (115)

These differentiations are very useful for thinking about *Out of Place*, not least because of its adherence to the common life writing trope of shaping the narrative as a quest.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, while Said does not commit himself fully to a restitution narrative, there are elements of this too in the repression of his illness, his 'ostrichlike' compulsion to banish his illness and his vain hope that his commitment to work might overcome it. There are glimpses, too, of a chaos narrative in Said's acknowledgement of the helplessness and sinking feelings that his illness inevitably engenders. Ultimately, though, such feelings are not allowed to unduly influence the memoir's overall message of acceptance – of both illness and a fluid identity. Frank observes that 'the quest is defined by the ill person's belief that something is to be gained through the experience' (115). Added to this, '[t]he quest teaches that contingency is the only real certainty', echoing Said's preference for contrapuntal thinking, which recognises the contingency and provisionality of experience (126). Quest narratives, and the communicative individual that Frank sees as writing them, demonstrate the importance of '[b]eing open to crisis as a source of change and growth', which resonates with Said's

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<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, Frank argues that quest narratives are very often memoirs: 'The *memoir* combines telling the illness story with telling other events in the writer's life. The illness memoir could also be described as an interrupted autobiography. Most of the authors are persons whose public status would make them candidates for formal autobiography writing, but illness has required what would have been written later to be done earlier' (119-20, emphasis in original). This idea of an interrupted autobiography also fits with *Out of Place*, which acknowledges the role of Said's illness in the writing of the memoir. This writing ultimately supersedes – 'interrupts' – Said's academic commitments and other approaches to life writing that may have emerged.

intention to allow his illness to catalyse an understanding of his past and exilic identity (126).

While Said asserts that most traces of his illness have been 'effaced' from his narrative, ultimately it is neither absent nor easily overlooked. Its presence as the driving force of the narrative, which Said returns to several times, and the striking – albeit very occasional – references to his leukaemia indicate his inability to repress it. One of the most striking references is his description of arriving in New York in 1948, the first of many extended visits to America: 'Palestine had fallen, unbeknownst to us our lives were turning us toward the United States, and both my mother and I were starting the process of life and cancer that would end our lives in the New World' (133). There is something startling about this narration of a relatively uneventful family trip in 1948 (a hugely significant year in Palestinian history): Said's diagnosis is not for over forty years, nor is his mother's cancer imminent at this point. But Said establishes a clear teleology here, implying that his life story (including its conclusion) has been mapped out by his illness, which he also uses to bind himself to his mother, with whom he has an intense and often problematic relationship.<sup>44</sup> This makes the idea of a quest narrative even more relevant – if Said sees his illness as a defining feature of his *entire* life, a latent force that eventually emerges as a known and unavoidable obstacle, then learning to accept it and its message of provisionality (which echoes so many of Said's thoughts on exile and identity) is crucial. His earlier reference to his first watch and how it 'numbered my mortality' is another example of this union between

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<sup>44</sup> Shortly after Said's diagnosis, he begins writing a letter to his mother, who had died a year and a half earlier. He describes catching himself midsentence, feeling confused and embarrassed. '[S]omehow the urge to communicate with her overcame the factual reality of her death', he notes, signalling their closeness and his enduring reliance on her (215). In another example, Said reveals that when his father becomes seriously ill, Said convinces himself that he too is ill, asking exasperated doctors at Harvard to examine what he thinks are malignant lumps (261).

childhood and present-day illness. Thus Said's cancer, and what he makes it stand for, becomes the means of facilitating an understanding of being out of place. It is surely not incidental that there is a swift move from 'Palestine had fallen' to 'starting the process of life and cancer', as if the two were somehow related, inexplicable as this may seem. That an awareness of his diagnosis provokes his memories of Palestine is further evidence of this.

Said explains that after a week of absorbing the initial impact of his diagnosis, '[i]t took me another month to understand how thoroughly I was shaken by this "sword of Damocles," as one volubly callous doctor called it, hanging over me' (215). What *Out of Place* attests to is the refusal to see his diagnosis as purely precarious in this Damoclean sense, instead enabling him to convert that precariousness into something productive. Said notes that after his diagnosis, '[a] vague narrative impulse seemed to be stirring in me', which he pursues after the initial anxieties and fears recede (215). This impulse takes him back to Palestine and the Middle East, not just through the rush of memories, but also literally: 'So many returns, attempts to go back to bits of life, or people who were no longer there: these constituted a steady response to the increasing rigors of my illness. In 1992 I went with my wife and children to Palestine, for my first visit in forty-five years; it was their first visit ever' (215). These returns – to memories and to sites of the past – are Said's response to his illness and they set in motion the quest to understand his exilic self.

One of the main responses to his illness, Said notes, is 'a new kind of wakefulness', which leads to the following observation:

The underlying motifs for me have been the emergence of a second self buried for a very long time beneath a surface of often expertly acquired and wielded social characteristics belonging to the self my parents tried to construct, the "Edward" I

...speak of intermittently, and how an extraordinarily increasing number of departures have unsettled my life from its earliest beginnings. To me, nothing more painful and paradoxically sought after characterizes my life than the many displacements from countries, cities, abodes, languages, environments that have kept me in motion all these years. (217)

His illness, therefore, provides the means for crucial revelations – a buried self (albeit an unstable one) emerges, alongside an acute awareness of how traumatic but also how *necessary* displacement has been for him. There is a reminder of Bernard’s pronouncement that Said is an exile by temperament as well as situation. Intriguingly, his illness is also described as a form of exile, a point of no return, which inspires him to write: ‘By the time I began treatment in March 1994 I realized that I had at least entered, if not *the* final phase of my life, then the period – like Adam and Eve leaving the garden – from which there would be no return to my old life. In May 1994 I began work on this book’ (216). Like exile, illness is a form of displacement for Said. And as with exile, he recognises in his illness the possibility of transmuting that displacement into something productive. In this case, it becomes the reason for articulating his complicated, exilic identity, so bound up with his Palestinian past.

### **Being Out of Place: Becoming Palestinian**

For the most part, *Out of Place* elaborately – and thoroughly – narrates the formation and growth of Said’s feelings of alienation. He asserts that his memoir is an attempt to ‘explore implicitly’ the impact of his very early memories, before stating:

The main reason, however, for this memoir is of course the need to bridge the sheer distance in time and place between my life today and my life then. I want only to mention this as an obvious fact, not to treat or discuss it, except to say that one of its results is a certain detachment and irony of attitude and tone, as I have set about reconstructing a remote time and experience. (xvi)

Said's description of the past as something to be explored only 'implicitly', alongside his matter-of-fact approach, are immediately noticeable. It is rather strange to announce a 'need' to bridge the gap between the present and the past, and then to state that it is unworthy of discussion. Perhaps this is a coping mechanism, a means of warding off excessive nostalgia or mourning, as Said deals with the onrush of memories while facing a terminal illness. But the result is that at times, the catalogue of memories and the way they are quite systematically outlined becomes slightly repetitive, occasionally giving the memoir an oddly flat and controlled tone, despite Said's evident honesty throughout. Therefore, it is when Said allows himself to directly – and not just implicitly – explore the impact of his memories and when he eschews detachment in order to bridge the gap between past and present that *Out of Place* comes across as a rich and generous text. Such instances can be detected in Said's narration of becoming aware of what happened to Palestine, which steadily politicises him and eventually becomes inseparable from his assertion of exilic identity. This is a sublimation (which can be thought of as a form of bridging the gap between past and present) of Said's early and quite generic sense of feeling out of place, for a more specific outsider stance as an exilic Palestinian intellectual. This process ultimately gives rise to a constantly fluid and contingent identity (the memoir's quest), thus uniting the various strands in *Out of Place* – a childhood of *being* an outsider, a national identity that *imposes* a sense of being an outsider, and an intellectual and temperamental *preference* for being an outsider – which are brought together by an illness that forces Said to confront the provisionality of experience.

Said's observations about his early life are permeated with feelings of dislocation, loss and uncertainty. On his family, he describes 'our peculiarly

fractured status as Palestinian-Arab-Christian-American shards disassembled by history, only partially held together by my father's business success, which allowed us a semifantastic, comfortable, but vulnerable marginality', acknowledging his class privilege while observing that it is no guarantee against displacement or insecurity (268). He asserts that life began with a 'primal instability' due to not knowing whether he spoke Arabic or English first (4). A typically strict colonial education, predominantly in Cairo but also briefly in Jerusalem, means that English dominates, especially at Cairo's Victoria College, intended to be 'the Eton of the Middle East', a place that indoctrinates the ideology of empire (180). At Victoria College Said experiences a profound alienation, becoming a victim of the colonial attitudes he will critique so firmly as an adult. 'Being and speaking Arabic were delinquent activities at VC,' he writes, 'and accordingly we were never given proper instruction in our own language, history, culture, and geography' (186). Unsurprisingly given the family's Palestinian background, '[a]long with language, it is geography – especially in the displaced form of departures, arrivals, farewells, exile, nostalgia, homesickness, belongings, and travel itself – that is at the core of my memories of those early years' (xvi). These central themes run throughout *Out of Place*, geography playing a particularly important role as the journeys multiply, both within the Middle East, and then between Egypt and America. The narration is propelled by Said's acute awareness of being unusual, whether because of his complicated Palestinian background (he professes to feeling like an outsider not just in America, but also in Egypt and Lebanon), his size (he is considerably larger than most other boys), or his parents' constant assertions of his abnormal deviances, which to the reader come across as rather typical misbehaviour.

On balance, Said's professed sense of being out of place in early life feels appropriately expressed. There are times, though, when he comes across as somewhat precious. His unpopular preference for Mozart over Brahms during a conversation with Lebanese friends is described as 'a chastening reminder of my being an outsider' (175). He also strikes a rather petulant and elitist tone when expressing gratitude to his mother for expanding his horizons 'in what our Cairo environment had no conception of, namely books and music', a criticism he follows with an expression of joy at the Russian novels she gives him for providing 'a bulwark against the anxieties of daily reality' (220). Similarly, reading *Hamlet* with his mother is described as 'one of the great moments in my childhood' for cementing a closeness between mother and son (52). While Said expresses a fondness for Cairo and Egypt in *Out of Place*, this is diluted by his cultural preferences: Said's predilection for Western literature and classical music is abundantly clear throughout. He also impresses that this marked him out as different and thus out of place, referring at one point to 'my secret musical and literary proclivities' that intensify his sense of feeling unconventional (191). His cultural preferences are enhanced by notable disdain for Egyptian culture, such as his damning description of the voice of the renowned Om Kulthum as 'horrendously monotonous' and akin to 'the unending moans and wailing of someone enduring an extremely long bout of colic' (99). There is also a notable dismissiveness of ancient Egypt during a sightseeing trip with his mother to the Valley of the Kings and other sites, 'whose silence and awful brooding emptiness put me off ancient Egypt forever' (208). The trip is only positive insofar as he is able to spend time alone with his mother, often reading.



These examples of difference and alienation, feelings only really ameliorated by his closeness to his mother (a closeness partly mediated by Western culture), feel rather self-absorbed and slightly judgemental. His feelings of being out of place are overemphasised, or at least lack the force of other anecdotes, such as his narration of his education and the instability generated by the multiple journeys he is forced to make. Conversely, other aspects of Said's early life are not expanded on at all, such as the lives of Said's four sisters, who never come across as real individuals, or having any impact on Said, and whose notable absence arguably helps establish the debilitatingly lonely atmosphere that *Out of Place* is so concerned with narrating. Another notable narrative absence concerns Said's father, who otherwise features heavily in the memoir as an authoritarian parent, disdainful of failure or displays of emotion. Said recalls how painful it was as a young man in America to deal with the memories of places rendered inaccessible, citing Jerusalem – understandably – but also Cairo. With no pause for reflection, Said briefly explains his absence from Cairo as the result of a legal ban from entering Egypt for fifteen years (between 1960 and 1975), which Said vaguely calls 'one of those cruel coincidences', but does not expand on (217). Towards the end of the memoir, however, he finally does. Employed temporarily at his father's business in Cairo, Said is asked by his father to perform a rare task – the signing of a contract – which leads to Said's expulsion from the country:

I recall clearly not giving the transaction any further thought. Yet for the next fifteen years I was unable to return to Egypt because that particular contract, and I as its unsuspecting signatory, were ruled to be in contravention of the exchange-control law. My father told me that police officers came to his offices looking for me, one of them once threatening to have me brought back in handcuffs from abroad. But there, too, I did not for a very long time feel that my father was to blame for this surprising lapse by which he put his son up to do something basically illegal. I always assumed that the Egyptian police were to blame, and that

it was their zeal, not my father's ostensible indifference to my fate, that had led to my being banned for fifteen years from the one city in the world in which I felt more or less at home. (289)

There is something remarkable about Said's relative lack of emotional engagement with this episode. Given the narrative's attentiveness to Said's outsider status, and the fact that he is still in his twenties when banned from a place he considers home (and where his family still reside) it is striking that this does not feature more prominently. As it stands, this concrete example of exile – due to his father's negligence, or something worse – neither factors into Said's criticisms of his father (of which there are many), nor into his articulation of feeling out of place.<sup>45</sup> In fact, Said's final reflection on his father is that 'the more I think about it, the more I believe he thought the only hope for me as a man was in fact to be cut off from my family', thus revealing a desire to view his father as someone who wanted him to succeed, even if this meant further exile (294).

This overemphasis of alienation on the one hand, and absence of reflection on the other, increases the sense of detachment that Said admits is part of his approach to dealing with distant memories. There is no doubt that Said feels out of place during his early life, but what also comes across is an author very consciously choosing how best to narrate that alienation, carefully curating the negotiation between past and present that is the central tension of *Out of Place*. This contributes enormously to the notion that Said's exile is being sublimated – a particular narrative has been chosen, one that emphasises Said's sense of being an outsider (and a nascent intellectual) and demonstrates how this transmutes into his adult identity as an exilic intellectual, committed to Palestine. And so perhaps we can surmise that the overall message of extreme self-sufficiency and coming to

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<sup>45</sup> Prioritising a psychoanalytic framework, Franklin persuasively reads Said's complicated relationship with both parents as Oedipal (*Academic* 120-1).

terms with being a permanent outsider entails certain exclusions. Ultimately, Said's quest narrative is focused on harnessing his memories of being exiled and out of place in order to articulate the fluid identity that most productively utilises his exilic background, creating room in the text for Palestine and its monumental narrative of displacement, but not for siblings or lengthy visa bans that might have more to do with a parent's plotting than actual discrimination. That his father was protecting business interests no doubt detracts further from the episode's ability to inform Said's profound sense of displacement.

Said's steady politicisation – becoming Palestinian in the active sense – is instrumental to the formation of the fluid identity asserted by the end of the text. Despite its focus on the tedium and tensions of childhood and domestic life, it is clear that Said is recuperating the past in order to grasp its political significance, something he was not aware of when it actually came to pass. He refers to 'off-and-on sojourns in Palestine', describing idyllic times spent with extended family that represent a welcome respite from the strictures of Cairo life, until the Nakba prevents these visits (20). Said admits: 'My early memories of Palestine itself are casual and, considering my profound later immersion in Palestinian affairs, curiously unremarkable' (20). Later on, he observes: 'What overcomes me now is the scale of dislocation our family and friends experienced and of which I was a scarcely conscious, essentially unknowing witness in 1948' (114). These observations provide an important (and surely deliberate) contrast to his subsequent political awareness and later fame as a champion of the Palestinian cause in the West, because they underscore the effort on Said's part to engage with aspects of his identity and past that were not available to him at the time. Therefore, a central thrust of the quest narrative is to rectify his parents' – and his

own – passive assimilation into a colonised bourgeois existence and to refute the fact that '[p]olitics always seemed to involve other people, not us' (117): essentially, the process of becoming a *knowing* witness.

Looking back on this period of 'depoliticization', Said expresses his astonishment that his parents could live as if nothing had happened:

It seems inexplicable to me now that having dominated our lives for generations, the problem of Palestine and its tragic loss, which affected virtually everyone we knew, deeply changing our world, should have been so relatively repressed, undiscussed, or even remarked on by my parents. (117)

As a means of coping with trauma, such repression seems understandable. But perhaps Said's parents' attitudes are so perplexing to him because he also grows up with adults who *do* acknowledge Palestine. A tireless defender of Palestinian refugees in Egypt, Said's paternal aunt, Nabiha, plays a particularly instrumental role in Said's life. Visiting her home one day, Said describes feeling 'a powerful shock' at seeing the crowds of people waiting (119). Thus: 'It was through Aunt Nabiha that I first experienced Palestine as history and cause in the anger and consternation I felt over the suffering of the refugees, those Others, whom she brought into my life' (119). However, the longevity of this process should not be overlooked. Said is only thirteen when he encounters these refugees, and unable to make the connections that would allow him to identify their common loss, despite his class privilege. He states that upon seeing the refugees: 'I do not recall ever clearly thinking that all this woeful spectacle was the direct result of a politics and war that had also affected my aunt and my own family' (120). This is an interesting counterpoint to Said's discomfort in *After the Last Sky* of firmly asserting communality with those who experience mass displacement. Evidently, a sense of separation endures, even when Said begins to understand the politics that connect

him to other Palestinians; a sense of Palestinians, especially refugees, as Other, remains, which links with Said's awareness of his privileged class background (Said also admits to the discomfort of being called a refugee). Another key figure for Said is Farid, a half-Palestinian doctor and communist, who works for Nabiha and is eventually killed in police custody in Cairo. Said is much younger than Farid: a naïve teenager when the older man becomes embroiled in politics. Said thus only truly learns about him in retrospect, but he nonetheless declares: 'Farid's life and death have been an underground motif in my life for four decades now, not all of them periods of awareness or of active political struggle' (124).

In complete distinction to Nabiha and Farid is Charles Malik, his mother's cousin's husband, who initially inspires Said before becoming dangerously dogmatic, politically extreme and anti-Palestinian. Reflecting on Malik's support of Lebanese Christian alliances and communities at all costs and his intense prejudice against Islam, Said recalls deeply uncomfortable conversations between them, through which 'the inherent irreconcilability between intellectual belief and passionate loyalty to tribe, sect, and country first opened up in me, and have remained open' (280). It is this irreconcilability – such an important term for Said – that leads him to remark that Malik's ever-hardening approach is 'the great negative intellectual lesson' of Said's life, one that endures for decades (264). This lesson is the realisation that he will always value intellectual inquiry over and above nationalist or tribal affiliations (Malik's negative influence on *Representations of the Intellectual* seems obvious in this context). This communicates that solidarity, for Said, should not be predicated on identity in the passive sense of automatic loyalty, but instead should be constantly queried and actively asserted based on morally defensible reasons. This is very similar to his

celebration of exilic Palestinian identity in *After the Last Sky*, which asserts it as a moral position, one that emphasises contingencies and openness.

Said's realisation of the significance of Nabihah and Farid's work, and the example that they set as exilic individuals committed to the Palestinian cause, is only grasped in retrospect. In terms of Malik, it is only through discord and discomfort that Said grasps the complications of political causes and the dangers of loyalty; nor is able to articulate his feelings at the time. The text, therefore, does not embark on a smooth or idealised journey towards deeper understanding.<sup>46</sup> In addition, Said shows how the process of grasping Palestine's history of displacement jostles awkwardly with his background; he self-deprecatingly describes himself at eighteen as 'a Princeton freshman, oddly combining the appearance of a crew-cut American undergraduate and an upper-bourgeois colonial Arab interested in the Palestinian poor' (123). Underscoring the personal cost of his political awakening, Said reveals his parents' fierce disapproval of his involvement in politics: "It will ruin you," said my mother. "You're a literature professor," said my father: "stick to that." His last words to me a few hours before his death were: "I'm worried about what the Zionists will do to you. Be careful" (117). As if to confirm what is ultimately at stake, the stuttered trajectory narrated in *Out of Place* manages to remain guided by what Said refers to as his 'growing sense of Palestinian identity', indicating that it has become an active process (195).

It is the June 1967 war that most explicitly marks a change in Said and reifies his sense of being out of place. Reflecting on the catalogue of displacements

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<sup>46</sup> Coming to terms with the relationship between his Arab background and the Western aspects of his identity is not a smooth process either, adding a further layer of difficulty to his growing awareness of being Palestinian. *Out of Place* reveals a surprisingly late acceptance of certain issues. For example, in relation to his name he states: 'it took me about fifty years to become accustomed to, or, more exactly, to feel less uncomfortable with, "Edward," a foolishly English name yoked forcibly to the unmistakably Arabic family name Said' (3). Similarly, as a result of exile and a history of poor teaching of the language in his youth, he observes: 'Only now can I overcome my alienation from Arabic caused by education and exile and take pleasure in it' (198).

that his family and relatives suffered as a result of ‘the continuing loss of Palestine’, he writes: ‘I was no longer the same person after 1967; the shock of that war drove me back to where it had all started, the struggle over Palestine’ (293). In an article about the functioning of memory for exiled Palestinian refugees, Randa Farah observes: ‘Memory and by implication identity are political arenas and can be sparked by important structural shifts, or major events such as the Intifada, which can rekindle private memory and move it back into public space’ (247).<sup>47</sup> For Said, 1967 is the catalyst for understanding his past and, in due course, making that understanding public.<sup>48</sup> Said excavates his memories and examines them in a new light, now acutely aware of why he was exiled. This notion of excavation is similar to Ioana Luca’s reading of the text in conjunction with Pierre Nora’s term *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), a term that represents the attempt to preserve memories (through anniversaries, museums or writing, for example) when the actual environments of memory no longer exist (136). She observes that through personal recollection, discarded moments of history return to Said’s memoir, rendering it ‘a Palestinian “site of memory”’ (137). Cataloguing these sites is Said’s way of demonstrating how he became Palestinian in an active sense, impelled to comprehend the wider significance of the past.

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<sup>47</sup> By using Farah’s work, I am not suggesting that Said is a refugee. Despite her essay’s focus on refugees, I nonetheless find her comments on memory to have a broader application. It is also worth noting that Said did not see himself as a refugee. In an interview he asserts: ‘[T]he term refugee has a very specific meaning for me. That is to say, poor health, social misery, loss and dislocation. That does not apply to me. In that sense, I’m not a refugee. But I feel I have no place. I’m cut off from my origins. I live in exile. I am exiled’ (*Power* 456). It is important to note both the rejection of refugee status and yet the emphasis on being forced into exile.

<sup>48</sup> In relation to Said’s awareness of Palestine following 1967, Bernard rightly observes: ‘Said can certainly be criticized for representing his political epiphany as particular to him alone, when the events of 1967 were to have the same effect on virtually all Palestinians and Arabs’ (*Rhetorics* 64). She then quotes Said’s sister, Jean Said Makdisi, who in contrast emphasises that it was absolutely a collective experience. This relates to my earlier point that Said seems to stress his individual, often isolated experiences, leaving his siblings (and, in this case, Palestinians and Arabs more generally) in the background.

The 'shock' of 1967 propels Said into politics, which he describes as an experience that ignites 'the agitated, largely hidden side of my prior life' (293). In part, this denotes the need to embrace his antiauthoritarianism but, most intriguingly, is characterised as 'above all the need to draw back to a sort of original state of what was irreconcilable, thereby shattering and dispelling an unjust Establishment order' (293). Here, Said closely correlates the Palestinian conflict with the struggles of his private life, emphatically heralding his political awakening. This suggests that all that was needed was an opportune fusion of his model of selfhood and politics: the temperament he needs in order to *be* Palestinian has long existed. 1967 simply provides the trigger. Becoming Palestinian, therefore, is both a continuation of being out of place and a now far more conscious process of harnessing the various tensions and revelations produced by exile.

### **Out of Place: 'A form of freedom'**

The conclusion of Said's text has a sense of closure, or at least acceptance, about it; paradoxically, this is generated by the articulation of a continually shifting, decentred identity. In this way, the quest narrative rejects a fixed autobiographical self and resolves itself by declaring irresolution:

I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance. These currents, like the themes of one's life, flow along during the waking hours, and at their best, they require no reconciling, no harmonizing. They are "off" and may be out of place, but at least they are always in motion, in time, in place, in the form of all kinds of strange combinations moving about, not necessarily forward, sometimes against each other, contrapuntally yet without one central theme. A form of freedom, I'd like to think, even if I am far from being convinced that it is. That skepticism too is one of the themes I particularly want to hold on to. With so



many dissonances in my life I have learned to actually prefer being not quite right and out of place. (295)

What is notable is Said's doubt that freedom can be derived from viewing the self in this way, and yet his insistence that identity can be asserted no other way. This is strongly reminiscent of his observation in 'Reflections on Exile' that one strives for what one cannot achieve, the seasons that are unreachable when stuck in a permanent winter; the importance is the striving, not the arrival, which is constantly deferred. As Tobias Döring observes about *Out of Place*, Said writes 'in order to perform continuous displacement' (75). Of course, this displacement stems originally from his exile from Palestine, something unchosen and unavoidable. But as Döring correctly reflects on the text's conclusion, '[t]he condition imposed on him by history is here, at last, declared to be a preferred position, not just an acquired but also an adopted stance', thus highlighting the agency and determination that goes into Said's transformation of his exilic past into a preference for being out of place and having a fluid self (75). There is also an acknowledgement that exile is absolutely essential to reaching this preferred self. 'My search for freedom,' he writes, 'for the self beneath or obscured by "Edward," could only have begun because of that rupture', referring here to his separation from his family and the Middle East (294). This rupture is described as 'fortunate' – despite the attendant loneliness – because of what emerges from it (294).

Something similar is asserted in relation to his illness, which he compares directly to exile, indicating that both must lead to an acceptance of what is provisional in order to recuperate a sense of positivity:

I have not lost the acute sense of vulnerability to illness and death I felt on discovering my condition, but it has become possible – as with my early exile – to regard all the day's hours and activities (including my obsession with my illness)

as altogether provisional. Within that perspective I can evaluate which activities to hold on to, perform, and enjoy. (244)

Said combines illness and exile here, two challenging experiences from which he is nonetheless determined to learn. This can be connected to his sense of detachment. Midway through the text Said recalls how his mother often spoke about the 'coldness' and reserve that she declared ran through her family (165). Said transforms this rather unpromising family trait into a survival strategy, announcing: 'For most of my life I have in an ambivalent way cherished and disparaged this core of icy detachment that has seemed impervious to the tribulations of loss, sadness, instability, or failure I have lived through' (165-6). Said's oscillation between cherishing and disparaging his detachment is indicative of the irresolution that exile creates. No sooner is a positive asserted than its opposite must be recognised. In its emphasis of a fluctuating process that nonetheless prioritises resilience, this observation somehow encapsulates Said's quest: exile will be learned from, not mourned; it will be sublimated, even if this is to accept continuous and inescapable uncertainty. Finally, it is worth thinking about this uncertainty as a tentative attempt at national allegory, or at least an act of solidarity, distinguishable from the more complicated defensive nationalism of *After the Last Sky*. If the ongoing conflict, seen by Said as irreconcilable, is unable to resolve the issue of Palestinian self-determination, then he too is unable to resolve his personal identity in a conclusive fashion. 'I learned from Adorno that reconciliation under duress is both cowardly and inauthentic', Said observes in 'Between Worlds' (567). Through its insistence on – and eventual embrace of – uncertainty and instability, *Out of Place* testifies to this learning.

## Conclusion

There is a fascinating moment in *Out of Place* when Said reflects on *After the Last Sky*, demonstrating his acceptance of instability:

Thirteen years ago I wrote in *After the Last Sky* that when I travel I always take too much with me, and that even a trip downtown requires the packing of a briefcase stocked with items disproportionately larger in size and number than the actual period of the trip. Analyzing this, I concluded that I had a secret but ineradicable fear of not returning. What I've since discovered is that despite this fear I fabricate occasions for departure, thus giving rise to the fear voluntarily. The two seem absolutely necessary to my rhythm of life and have intensified dramatically during the period I've been ill. (217)

Returning to the idea of cycles, Said's observations about travel establish an ongoing loop: despite (or because of) the fear of being unable to return, departures are voluntarily sought. Given the importance of return to Palestinian politics and identity, it is worth thinking about the relationship between Said's fear of not returning and the attempts to orchestrate departures, as opposed to resisting them. *After the Last Sky* primarily presents return as a metaphorical process achieved, to borrow from Luca's use of Pierre Nora, through sites of memory rather than actual return. *Out of Place* reiterates this, making it clear that going back is out of the question, while also demonstrating a greater focus on (and acceptance of) never fully arriving elsewhere. Wail Hassan aptly encapsulates this by observing: 'What is central for Said is the experience of *leaving* home, rather than *coming to* the U.S.' (120, emphasis in original). This is evident in the passage above, which highlights Said's discovery since writing *After the Last Sky* that alongside the fear of not returning is the compulsion to leave, and thus the determination to remain unsettled. This can be read as a survival strategy; a sublimation of exile in order to cope with it. Said's illness then transforms the fear

of not being able to return into a fear of no longer being mobile at all. The journeys are narrated as a matter of life and death, with Said revealing that he now tells himself before each trip that not travelling will mean being unable to do so next time and thus marking a steady retreat from being alert and alive (218).

This process of sublimation indicates that displacement becomes a precondition for knowing oneself; such interiority has led to criticism of Said's perspective. Building on Bernard's work, Karim Mattar argues that Said's interpretation of exile is idealised because of its tendency to render it abstract or universalised, thus overlooking key specificities of Palestinian displacement and lived experience (which my reading of *After the Last Sky* corroborates). This leads Mattar to recognise 'the critical value of post-Saidian exile', which instead places these specificities at the forefront (104). Joan Cocks rather sardonically argues that 'the fact that the beam he shines on the exile as adventurous rebel shows off Said to radiant advantage must not blind us to the feats he accomplishes with it', a statement that wryly expresses Said's shortcomings alongside his achievements (55). It is also hard not to recognise what Lazarus describes as 'his intermittent tendency to romanticise the uncommitted, exilic, individual vocation of intellectualism' (202). Said's approach is also highly specific to himself and his coping mechanisms, which his work certainly does not always acknowledge. The fact that his observations about exile (as well as about intellectuals) often come across as general pronouncements, rooted in western secular criticism, is indicative of this. Kaplan refers to the 'rhetorical slippage' between refugees and exile, encapsulated by Said's assertion that now is the age of the refugee, alongside his ongoing focus on the literary (120). Reflecting on this slippage in relation to 'Reflections on Exile', she observes:

[T]hroughout the essay Said often abandons his reference to a global phenomenon and returns to a mystified figure – the solitary exile. Rather than elucidating the modes of representation that arise in an age of refugees, immigrants, and the homeless, Said returns to a figure more closely associated with classical Western traditions as well as modernist myths of authorship. (120)

As a result, the relationship between the solitary exile and the mass displaced ‘remains uneasy and unresolved’, something that my reading of *After the Last Sky*, in particular, supports (120). This is central to the criticisms of Said’s perspective on exile: he is not always able to synthesise the broader political context with his individual subjectivity. The way in which Palestine is tightly woven into his life writing demonstrates that he tries to keep the two united, even as he oscillates between being an outsider and belonging to Palestine. But as Bernard points out in her reading of *Out of Place*, Said’s trajectory of coming to terms with his identity relies on his own ‘exceptional talent and resilience’, preventing his narrative from providing any kind of model for coping with displacement (*Rhetorics* 58). The fact that Said narrates exile as almost prohibitively challenging demonstrates the exceptionality required for surviving – let alone enjoying – it. As Boym observes: ‘Only a few manage to turn exile into an enabling fiction’ (256).

Rightly or wrongly, Said is impatient for exile to be useful to him, both in terms of formulating his identity and becoming an intellectual in the mode of those he admires. Undoubtedly there is something inward-looking about this approach. Nonetheless, I would argue that what Said is trying to show in his narration of exile, however self-congratulatory it might come across, is that for him to become (and remain) the Palestinian intellectual so firmly committed to *and capable* of producing counternarratives to Israel’s hegemony, he needs to navigate this interior (and open-ended) process. We can see this process in the rather self-conscious oscillations between the personal and collective that make up *After the*

*Last Sky*, where Said counternarrates Israel's colonisation of Palestine alongside attempting to forge a collective identity that he is not entirely comfortable with. *Out of Place* does not contain such an explicit counternarrative, but it narrates the important process whereby Said becomes the intellectual capable of developing his influential criticism of Zionism and settler colonialism. This, he shows in *Out of Place*, is what I sublimated in order to become that person. Without such sublimation, there is no counternarrative. Finally, it is also important to acknowledge that Said *does* provide a model of committed political engagement for many, especially the exiled Palestinian middle class. His ideas on worldliness and humanism similarly continue to resonate.

Whether we agree with him or not, it is important to recognise that Said does not see any incompatibility in asserting the conflict as irreconcilable while striving for Palestinian self-determination and dignity; nor in repeatedly emphasising exile's difficulties and the urgent political issues that it raises alongside relishing the challenges that exile provides for him personally. Identity may never be fluid enough, but that does not mean giving up on a valued model of selfhood. And though exile may intrinsically be the mind in winter, the point is not to settle into winter. It is this attitude that drives Said's compulsion to sublimate and learn from exile, even though this learning will always be inconclusive. This is part of the complexity of Said's counternarrative; both implicated in and driven by his vision of exile. This counternarrative thus both underscores the urgency of collectively resisting Israeli settler colonialism, while being equally attentive to the permanence of exile and the impossibility of reconciliation.

Rather than seeing this as problematic or permanently dispiriting, Said harnesses the irreconcilability of exile to define who he is. Odd as this may sound,

Said grows into his Palestinian identity; he is suited to its instability. Or rather, he has made precariousness an integral and enabling feature of his identity, rendering it 'productive anguish', as he describes the impact of exile on Jonathan Swift (*Intellectual* 53). He does this, quite simply, because he can; because he has the temperament and willpower for it. These ideas are eloquently expressed in the final lines of *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, published posthumously:

I conclude with the thought that the intellectual's provisional home is the domain of an exigent, resistant, intransigent art into which, alas, one can neither retreat nor search for solutions. But only in that precarious exilic realm can one first truly grasp the difficulty of what cannot be grasped and then go forth and try anyway. (144)

This is the real point. There can be no retreat and yet there are no solutions in the 'precarious exilic realm' that he has learned to live in. But the goal is the effort; the bravery of grasping for what cannot be grasped. For Said, this is all there is.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **The Primacy of Place: Exile and Return in the Work of Ghada Karmi**

I was of that generation of Palestinians who still retained a memory of the homeland, however fragmented and shadowy, and still knew it as their real country. Nowhere else could take its place, and by definition could only be a temporary stop, standing in for the real thing. And living in such a stopover place, was I not also temporary, a stand-in, no more than a good actress so long as I did not find my real self, placed in its real setting?

Ghada Karmi, *Return* (18)

The question Ghada Karmi poses here encapsulates the anxiety that runs throughout her life writing: how to reconcile her memories of Palestine with her life in exile? Having fled Palestine during the Nakba when she was eight, Karmi has spent by far the greater part of her life in exile; yet what dominates her work is her overriding sense of commitment to the generation 'who still retained a memory of the homeland'. As a result, there is a tension between alienation and belonging that produces a great deal of uncertainty and angst over Karmi's place in the world. Central to her life writing is a preoccupation with determining her 'real self' and the complicated relationship it maintains with the lost places that live on in her memory: the 'real country' and 'real setting' that are contrasted with exiled life in England. The primacy of place – the locatedness of memories and experience – as a guiding principle for identity formation is the most significant aspect of Karmi's life writing, and from which the key themes of return, solidarity, belonging and alienation emerge.

Born in Jerusalem in 1939 to a Palestinian father and a Syrian mother, Karmi and her family fled Palestine during the Nakba, living briefly in Damascus before settling in England where, apart from extended visits to the Middle East, she has lived ever since. Through many years of activism, she has established herself as



a prominent advocate of the Palestinian struggle within the UK, which features meaningfully in her life writing. She is the author of two memoirs, *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (2002) and *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (2015), both of which I examine in this chapter. As the subtitles already indicate, place is hugely important, closely tied to the notion of belonging to a collective history and identity. The titles also connote journeys, both actual and psychological.<sup>49</sup> These journeys – travels back and forth to Palestine and emotional quests in order to understand the self and its place in the world – anchor the narratives in their attempt to make sense of being an exiled Palestinian. Place, memorialised and longed for, is therefore the focus of this chapter.

My analysis begins with *In Search of Fatima*, which poignantly outlines the impact of the Nakba on the Karmi family and their ensuing attempts to adjust to life in England. Initially, I focus on the way Karmi evokes a distinctive sense of place – Jerusalem – and comments on its loss, partly by contrasting it to the new place – London – that Karmi finds herself in. Woven into this narrative of exile is a deep trauma, particularly when it comes to Karmi’s parents, which demonstrates the irreversible repercussions of the family’s expulsion from Palestine and lays the psychic groundwork for the sensitivities, allegiances and, at times, antagonisms that Karmi later develops. In light of such developments, I then turn to the reawakening of Karmi’s Palestinian identity as she grows older: an identity now fully politicised and driving her subsequent activism. This requires paying attention to the shifts (often back and forth) between a sense of alienation and a sense of belonging. Finally, I consider Karmi’s first return journeys to the Middle East and Palestine, which close the memoir. Through its examination of family life

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<sup>49</sup> The covers of both memoirs also feature the same map of Palestine, a further indication of the importance of locating these narratives.

in exile, *In Search of Fatima* provides a compelling record of the Nakba as both lived experience and ongoing wound, therefore indicating both the immediate impact and lasting legacy of Israeli settler colonialism.

The second part of the chapter looks at *Return*, which details Karmi's attempts to re-establish herself in her homeland through working for the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Ramallah, Palestine's de facto capital in the occupied West Bank. Given the memoir's theme (and title), I focus more concretely on what return means for Karmi, a contested issue of huge importance to Palestinians, especially those of the Nakba generation who have not seen their personal losses directly ameliorated. By once again addressing the themes of belonging and alienation, I delve into Karmi's uncertainty, and eventually pessimism, over the role exiled Palestinians can play in determining the future of Palestine. I ask how and why Karmi reaches her sobering conclusion that return – and thus an end to exile – is ultimately unachievable for her. This involves looking at the disconnection Karmi feels between herself and those Palestinians currently living under Israeli occupation, whose conception of Palestine is, unlike Karmi's, neither rooted in the past nor cultivated at a distance. Once again place figures heavily, with Karmi realising the extent to which she has reified her childhood memories and family stories of localities that no longer exist, which – crucially – do not provide the means to relate to Palestinians living under occupation. What is therefore significant about *Return* is its narration of the qualitative difference between the identity and outlook of Karmi – conditioned by exile – and that of those Palestinians who have grown up in Palestine/Israel. In so doing, the memoir animates and interrogates an issue that is central to this conflict: the disparate nature of Palestinian experience. The counternarrative that Karmi establishes in

*Return* works on multiple, interrelated levels. Firstly, it shows the ongoing impact of settler colonialism on the Nakba generation through Karmi's continuing sense of alienation, despite her 'return'. Secondly, it reveals how ongoing settler colonialism has perpetuated the fracturing of Palestinian collective identity. Thirdly, it exposes the direct impact that Israeli occupation has on Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. And fourthly, it rejects the validity of the PA as a political entity able to protect and advocate for Palestinians.

### **Place and Space**

Karmi's focus on particular places and what renders them important raises the question of how exactly a specific space becomes imbued with a sense of significance. Henri Lefebvre's groundbreaking work, *The Production of Space*, which probes his central assertion that 'physical space has no "reality" without the energy deployed within it', is particularly instructive because it forces an acknowledgement that there are *always* various qualities (and levels of influence) that contribute to defining a given space (13). His insistence that a unification of the physical, mental and the social is needed in order to properly decipher spaces demonstrates his attentiveness to the psychological and the political alongside the material, and this triumvirate is a useful blueprint for analysing Karmi's narration of place (11). Lefebvre's work is vital because it avoids the abstract thinking that allows descriptions of space to be separated from the mental elements, social practices and discourses of power that fill and define that space. For Lefebvre, these aspects are conjoined and ultimately *produce* the space. A complement to Lefebvre's large-scale analysis is Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, which examines our relationship with space more intimately by focusing on the home and the human need for familiar places. Exploring the ways in which humans are

profoundly affected by the private spaces they inhabit and remember, Bachelard coins the term 'topoanalysis', which he describes as 'the systematic psychological study of *sites* of our intimate lives' (30, emphasis added). For Bachelard, the priority is to elucidate the complex interplay between the mind and its surroundings. 'A house that has been experienced is not an inert box', he writes. 'Inhabited space transcends geometrical space' (67). While we may be tempted, Bachelard observes, to think of a house as merely an object that demands rational and non-metaphorical analysis, in fact 'transposition to the human plane takes place immediately whenever a house is considered as space for cheer and intimacy, space that is supposed to condense and defend intimacy' – as space that contains our dreams, desires and subjectivities (68).

Spatial theory is not just instructive for thinking incisively about distinct spaces, whether the city or the home, but also for considering how that space is narrated and memorialised. Edward Soja, a theorist who owes much to Lefebvre's work, emphasises the need to always apply a spatial understanding to narrative. In other words, 'to spatialize what we normally think of as biography, to make life stories as intrinsically and revealingly spatial as they are temporal and social' (7). Bachelard takes this further, insisting that memory is only abstractly temporal and thus better understood through locating the intimate spaces that a given memory is tied to – where the memory is *produced*, to borrow Lefebvre's term:

Memory – what a strange thing it is! – does not record concrete duration, in the Bergsonian sense of the word. We are unable to relive duration that has been destroyed. We can only think of it, in the line of an abstract time that is deprived of all thickness. [...] Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are. [...] For a knowledge of intimacy, localization in the spaces of our intimacy is more urgent than determination of dates. (31)

This guides how I read Karmi's attachment to places. Needless to say, it does not mean discounting the temporal (a crucial aspect of this chapter) but instead allows me to accord specific spaces a fuller analysis.

To think meaningfully about space in relation to time – to *spatialise biography*, as Soja urges – is particularly important given the focus in Karmi's work on generational differences and the changes to Palestine over time. Her memories of pre-Nakba Palestine mean that her conception of places within this lost homeland are inevitably different from those of a young Palestinian born in the West Bank who has never known anything other than Israeli control. In addition, the place she is most attached to, West Jerusalem, is now part of Israel and so her 'return' to Palestine in her second memoir means living in Ramallah in the West Bank, a place to which she has no meaningful connections. In this context, *Palestine* is a deeply complex and fragile term, subject to change and contestation. The changes forced upon places mean that Karmi's relationship to these sites is vulnerable to alteration – and politicisation. Parmenter draws attention to the process whereby Israeli control of the land has a profound impact on Palestinians:

The Israelis are not only physically reshaping Palestine into Israel, they are forcing the Palestinian to reshape his or her emotional and spiritual attachments to the land. The land necessarily becomes part of the political argument. Its trees, houses, fields, and hills are no longer unquestioned elements of the places where Palestinians dwell; they must do battle with the places that the Israelis are constructing. (87)

This reshaping of attachments is evident in both of Karmi's memoirs, especially *Return*, which narrates the full force of realising how different the landscape, culture and society of Palestine is from the time when Karmi experienced it. Spatial theory's emphasis on the fluid and contingent nature of space, as well as on the emotional and subjective relationships we form with specific spaces, makes it

especially pertinent for analysing how Karmi narrates the places that are significant to her, especially her lost family home and the city of Jerusalem. While there is a clear attempt to root her identity in particular places, there is also at times a deep sense of alienation in her writing about sites of significance, especially when she returns to them after a long period of time. Lefebvre's idea of space as produced – never static – and Bachelard's insistence on the intimacy and emotional attachment we develop with 'geometrical space' help in analysing this alienation, produced by exile and the ongoing conflict.

Recalling a meeting in Gaza with an internally displaced refugee who tells her Nakba story, Karmi acknowledges her need to hear such narratives:

The events surrounding the Nakba had fascinated me for years, not least because they were never fully documented. The Nakba was a seminal event in every Palestinian's life, the root of all the sufferings that followed, and I hungered to reach back for its elusive history through first-hand accounts of that time; how else to unseal its memory, so dim and unattainable, and draw it back into *a communal space* that could be shared, examined and compared? (*Return* 212, emphasis added)

This idea of a *communal space* is central to Karmi's writing and politics. Her desire for the past to be firmly part of a shared (Palestinian) space is at once personal and collective. She is driven by a deep personal sorrow over her own circumstances and a need to come to terms with her identity; this establishes the belief that the Nakba can unite her with other Palestinians. The collective thus comes through in her hope of establishing solidarity with other Palestinians within this communal space, and to somehow make their disparate experiences analogous, not least while Palestinian lives continue to be compromised by settler colonialism. Taken together, *In Search of Fatima* and *Return* narrate her attempt to fight exile and the burden it places on her identity, by trying to locate this communal space.

## *In Search of Fatima*<sup>50</sup>

Like a body prematurely buried, unmourned, without a coffin or ceremony, our hasty, untidy exit from Jerusalem was no way to have said goodbye to our home, our country and all that we knew and loved.

Ghada Karmi, *In Search of Fatima* (123)

Competing notions of home and identity are integral to *In Search of Fatima*, which is split between a narration of Karmi's early years in Palestine and life in exile in England. The memoir tracks back and forth between Jerusalem and London; Palestine and England; being Arab and being English; belonging and not belonging. The cause of these oscillations is 1948 and its continuing repercussions. Karmi portrays fleeing Jerusalem as not just a bewildering experience, but as an intensely painful one, which she deliberately narrates in minute detail in order to assert its prominence. The family leave Jerusalem in haste, her parents assuring Karmi and her siblings that their departure is only temporary. However, the Karmi family – like so many exiled Palestinians – soon have to come to terms with the reality that their homeland has been lost and that there will be no return. These early memories – very clearly located – are the fulcrum of the memoir and its structure depends on them. Karmi narrates a process through which she moves away from her origins in an effort to assimilate, before seeking to recover the past and come to terms with her Palestinian identity. To borrow Karmi's own phrase, the past has been prematurely buried and an integral part of the memoir is how Karmi excavates it in order to make Palestine central to who she is as an adult. Thus, we

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<sup>50</sup> The title refers to the family servant in Karmi's Jerusalem house, a Palestinian peasant-woman who is described as a surrogate mother to Karmi and her siblings, especially when her parents are too preoccupied by the political situation to fulfil their parental duties. As an adult in England, Karmi recalls the images of refugee camps and notes that, 'whenever I have seen such scenes, I would remember Fatima and wonder where she ended up and how she died' (21). The title functions as a metaphor for delving into the past; hence its use, too, as the name for the final part of the memoir, which deals with Karmi's return to Palestine. *Return* includes a chapter about what happened to Fatima and her family (259-75).

end where we started: Jerusalem, albeit this time with an awareness of all that has come to pass and the psychological impact of that passage of time on Karmi.

The lost family home in Jerusalem is central to her reflections on the impact of exile. This focus on the private sphere and its environs brings to mind Soja's description of specific sites functioning as 'geographical *madeleines*' (18, emphasis in original). Memories of Palestine are unlocked in a Proustian fashion, with a precise place as the starting point – the *madeleine* that inspires the narrative. This lost past in Palestine is completely at odds with Karmi's life in exile, which is narrated as predominantly a disorientating experience of contending with the challenges of assimilation into post-war British society, with its discrimination and racism, and the harmful silences that engulf the traumatised family. Jayyusi argues that Palestinian expatriate writers focus on a fixed point, searching for a significant place of origin and hoping for anchorage (47-8). Such is the case for Karmi, an expatriate writer whose memoir, with its image of a map of Palestine on its cover, steadily leads the reader back towards the lost homeland.

### **The Loss of Home: Trauma and its Repercussions**

The word 'home' carries multiple connotations in the Palestinian context. It is elusive and dynamic, even mobile; nostalgic in its past, contested in the present. Home has both personal and collective meanings – it is at once a private and a public political space. It is a place of safety and danger; a place of life and death. Home is concrete and physical, but always imagined and deeply symbolic: a stone building or a pile of rubble.

Fatma Kassem, *Palestinian Women* (235)

My sense of home begins with the spoon knocking against the rim of the pot of lentil soup and spreads like ripples in the village pond and licks at the edge of the *duwara* and limns the view from the southern window and touches my skin from within. All of the houses I've lived in since then have hardly touched me.

Anton Shammas, *Arabesques* (149)



Memories of home are inevitably evocative. When the home and the era it is associated with are irretrievably lost, memories take on a different hue, often affected by nostalgia and symbolism, as Kassem points out. Such symbolism is also evident in Shammas' poetically rendered evocation of home, located in a Palestinian village that becomes part of Israel.<sup>51</sup> As outlined in my introduction, the loss that families such as Karmi's suffered during the Nakba is a fundamental aspect of Palestinian history, whether experienced first-hand or learnt of and memorialised by younger generations. The narration of these memories reveals their complexity, bound as they are with the pain of loss and the passage of time which increasingly separates home *then* from home *now*.

Karmi's early years are spent in Qatamon, a neighbourhood of West Jerusalem described as 'a desirable residential area where the better-off Palestinians lived', although Karmi is quick to point out that her family were amongst the least wealthy (25). Qatamon's residents at the time of Karmi's birth were predominantly Christian Palestinians, although there were also Muslims such as the Karmis, and a considerable number of foreigners, including English people who worked for the British Mandate government (for whom Karmi's father also worked) and a small number of European Jews. She depicts an affluent and mixed neighbourhood, with wide streets and large villas built of the well-known sand-coloured Jerusalem stone. The family home is spacious, with a beautiful rear garden and a much-loved veranda at the front, overlooking the street. It is a building almost startling in its difference from the terrace house in London that the family live in after the chaos of 1948 and a brief spell in Damascus.

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<sup>51</sup> Shammas's narrator (arguably autobiographical) does not have to flee Palestine/Israel as the Karmis do, but it is nonetheless fascinating to observe a similar narration in terms of how beloved the Palestinian family home is and how affected memories of it are by political upheavals.

Part of asserting this difference is through a certain romanticisation of the family home in Jerusalem. Instead of a house hemmed in on both sides by other houses, the family home in Qatamon is detached and framed only by trees and flowers. In contrast to the dark, dreary monotony of English streets that Karmi is struck by when she first arrives, her Palestinian locale is a world of vibrant colour and light. The brightness of the stone is set off by the green shutters and the tiled veranda; there are roses blooming, apricot trees, almond, lemon, pear and plum trees, and vines bearing heavy bunches of grapes which Karmi and her older sister pick at. The sense of spaciousness within the home is emphasised frequently which, coupled with the abundance of the fruit in the garden, depicts a built and natural environment answering effortlessly to the needs of the family. Summer nights are spent on the veranda and during the day the intense heat is not unwelcome as it allows siestas to be taken. In winter the house adapts again, as rugs are placed on the tiled floors to retain warmth. Delicious Palestinian and Syrian cuisine, which her mother prepares, the daily coffee rituals, the constant stream of visitors relaxing in the communal living space of the *liwan*, the games played in the garden with siblings and neighbours – all these aspects of daily life which occur in and by virtue of the house are recorded in loving detail and set forth a home life that is conducive to and synonymous with the whole family's wellbeing. Bachelard writes that 'our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word' (26). Such an analogy fits perfectly in this context: the house as its own invigorating and comforting world.

In an article about the Palestinian middle-class in Qatamon, Itamar Radai observes that 'against the backdrop of the consequences of the 1948 War,

recollections by former neighbourhood residents tend towards idealization' (963). Although he does not say so explicitly, given his reliance on her memoir (which he cites throughout his article) it is hard not to infer that Radai might be levelling this charge against Karmi. While there is an idyllic quality to Karmi's descriptions of Qatamon and the family home, I would argue that there is a deliberateness to this that works to underscore the huge sense of loss experienced by her family, and the rupture in their lives that exile instigates. This desire to commemorate the past is integral to Palestinian narratives of loss.<sup>52</sup> Such counternarratives also seek to provide testimony of the shock and violence of the Nakba. Parmenter underscores similar intentions when she writes that '[Palestinian] [l]iterature's emphasis on the routines of everyday life becomes a means for preserving an intimate knowledge of local environments, whose character the Israelis aim to refashion into their own places' (77). In the case of Qatamon, its character has already been wholly refashioned into an upscale Jewish neighbourhood; Karmi's reminder that this has not always been the case (as well as the violence and trauma that went into such a refashioning) is crucial. Given the frequent accusations by Israel and its supporters that Palestinians left Palestine either willingly, or with no real desire to keep their homes, and that the Nakba did not amount to an act of ethnic cleansing, counternarratives such as Karmi's constitute a vital collective rebuttal. She painstakingly charts the changing political climate and rising tensions, which

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<sup>52</sup> In terms of idealisation, it is interesting to contrast *In Search of Fatima* with another work of Palestinian life writing: *Once Upon a Time in Jerusalem* (2010) by Sahar Hamouda. Hamouda's account of her mother's family home in Jerusalem before the Nakba comes across as far more idealised. Perhaps this is to do with Hamouda narrating postmemories – she herself was born in Egypt and has very few of her own memories of visiting Jerusalem, and so the account she gives is mediated by her mother's memories and sense of loss. I think it is also fair to suggest that to a certain extent, idyllic descriptions are probably accurate: Jerusalem – its architecture, climate, fauna and flora – is undeniably picturesque. That this beauty is intensified when one is at a distance from it and mournful of its current status as a divided and occupied city is not surprising. The house Hamouda describes is a fifteenth-century house built into the walls of the Haram al-Sharif and overlooking the Dome of the Rock; in other words, a unique property.

steadily alter Karmi's perception of home – alterations that speak to Lefebvre's insistence that space is determined by the dynamic combination of physical, mental and social elements, each liable to change.

By the end of 1947, the Karmi home and its local area are no longer an idyllic safe space. Government schools close, as it is deemed too unsafe for children to reach them, and so the Karmi siblings must remain at home. Haganah, a Jewish paramilitary organisation, bombs the Semiramis Hotel located on the street behind the Karmi house, killing at least thirty people and causing many others to flee the neighbourhood. By March 1948, the decline in public services is so severe that law and order has broken down and thefts are commonplace. Karmi notes that the family were also terrified regularly by 'armed Jewish men who ran through our garden and even onto our veranda, as if our house were a public highway' (101). One morning, as the children sit on the veranda, a Bedouin man selling cheese in the neighbourhood is shot dead right in front of them. Increasingly, the home is also cut off from the rest of Jerusalem: their aunt, nearby in the Old City, can no longer visit them, nor can they reach her. Communication channels with relatives in Tulkarm and Damascus are severed. These examples reveal how, at a gathering pace, the house becomes a threatened and isolated space, recalling Kassem's words that home, within the Palestinian context, 'is at once a private and a public political space' (235).

Following a protracted period of violence in Qatamon, the family flee Jerusalem in April 1948. In the Prologue – written in the third-person – Karmi narrates this moment and describes how 'every nerve and fibre of her being raged against her fate, the cruelty of leaving that she was so powerless to avert' (2). This use of the third-person creates distance between Karmi as the adult articulating

these memories, and the child raging against her fate, as if to assert that this rage is not something the 'I' writing is projecting onto the child. It is also highly significant that Karmi chooses to begin her memoir in this way, ensuring that the reader grasps how integral it is to her personal history. Later on, when Karmi deals with the episode at greater length, she writes poignantly about the significance of the home: 'I lingered, looking back at the house. The shutters were all closed and silent and the garden seemed to hug the walls, as if to retain their secrets. Enclosed in that space was all the life that I had ever known and I thought what a dear, dear place it was' (121). The home encloses her formative memories and her knowledge of herself and her family, which are inscribed as much in a specific space as they are in a particular time, indicated by Karmi's choice to explicitly link her knowledge and experience to the structure – the house – that once contained and produced this knowledge. In relation to memories of one's childhood home, Bachelard observes that '[w]e are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house, and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme', which is an instructive way of thinking about Karmi's relationship to her Jerusalem home, especially as it is narrated here (36). What the first part of the memoir makes clear is that a blueprint for family life is created in Palestine, one utterly disrupted by the Nakba. How this alters – and yet cannot erase – the 'diagram' produced by Karmi's connection to her Palestinian home is a central aspect of the ensuing narrative.

That the family finds itself somewhere entirely different is made abundantly clear in the opening to the second part of the memoir: 'London looked like nothing that I had ever seen. Neither Jerusalem nor Damascus had prepared me for this cold northern city' (173). Even though Karmi is struck by 'the rich

verdance of England', a richness of colour that she notes Palestine lacks, she still concludes that its effect is to make her feel 'overwhelmed by the strangeness' (173). Home is a dark, cold terraced house in Golders Green, one of London's principal Jewish neighbourhoods, a decision that Karmi's father took without any knowledge of the city, and which seems hugely ironic to Karmi in later years (*Return*, 88). The impression Karmi gives of her early life in England is of feeling unanchored, uncertain and lost, feelings exacerbated by her parents' attitudes and behaviour. Her father, who retreats to his study every evening and weekend, is emotionally distant; nor is he able to help the Karmi siblings establish themselves in such a new environment. Karmi asserts that although he was adamant that they all work hard enough to progress to university, 'he thought very little about the other aspects of life in England', meaning that '[h]e had little awareness of the psychological damage this attitude might have on vulnerable youngsters like us, striving to establish a new identity' (208).

Karmi's depiction of her mother produces some of the most significant moments in the memoir in terms of elucidating life in exile. 'Rejecting every aspect of life in England,' Karmi writes, 'she was in no position to help us integrate either' (208). Caught between their father's reserve and their mother's ineptitude, the Karmi siblings are forced to make sense of life in exile without any proper guidance. What stands out is Karmi's narration of her mother's relationship to her new home, upon arrival at which she decides 'to recreate Palestine in London – as if we had never left' (174). This desire to recreate the past instead of adapting to her new surroundings leads Karmi to observe that '[l]ike some Palestinian Miss Havisham, for her, the clock stopped in Jerusalem in April 1948' (174). Slightly further on, Karmi remarks: 'The daily routine of our life at home was as Arab as my

mother could make it, just as if we had never left Jerusalem at all' (183). While her mother might physically be in England, her emotions and behaviour are determined by another location entirely. A particularly striking example is her decision to remove the carpets in their London home, despite the insulation they provide during cold English winters, and to have the floor laid with tiles 'to simulate our house in Jerusalem' (175). Within the context of exile, this simple act demonstrates how alienated Karmi's mother is from the reality within which she must now conduct her life, where the version of home that she is attached to is no longer relevant, nor available. Similarly, she refuses to buy a refrigerator, arguing that "I never had such a thing in Palestine where it was hot, why should I need it here where it's freezing?" (187). Convinced that their stay in England is merely temporary, she seems to live in suspended time, where changes cannot be made and traditions of the past in Palestine are mapped onto the present in England; ultimately, she is waiting until time finally corresponds with (Palestinian) space again. Bachelard writes: 'An entire past comes to dwell in a new house. [...] Thus the house is not experienced from day to day only, on the thread of a narrative, or in the telling of our own story. Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days' (27-8). The 'entire past' has indeed come to dwell in the new home, particularly for Karmi's mother. But this does not manifest itself positively, as Bachelard imagines it can under normal circumstances, because the context of conflict and exile means that this past – 'the treasures of former days' – underscores both what has been lost and how impossible it is – at least for Karmi's parents – to move on from this loss. For the Karmis, the overlap between different dwelling-places is a site of trauma; London

is not Jerusalem, and what they know and remember of the latter cannot help them adapt to their new environment. But neither can they let go of it.

Focusing on the impact of this trauma, Karmi describes how in Palestine her mother was lively and sociable. Once in England, she is isolated, yet refuses to make real friends or to learn English, as such undertakings would mean accepting that their stay in England is not temporary. Psychologically, this affects her hugely, which Karmi is only able to recognise in hindsight:

With our coming to London, she had changed. Whereas in Jerusalem, she had been house-proud and energetic, rushing noisily round the house in the mornings, organising the cooking and cleaning, here in London she sometimes found it hard to even get out of bed. [...] Perhaps we should have realised that her whole life had collapsed around her. In coming to England, my mother had lost everything that to her made life normal and worthwhile. Its whole fabric had been destroyed and she could not come to terms with its loss. She never expressed any of this overtly, and each of us, trying to cope with one's own sense of loss, was in no position to help her. (182)

Karmi makes it evident that for all of them, exile is faced alone – the parents cannot emotionally support their children or help them make sense of their new surroundings, nor can the children comprehend their parents' inevitable anguish. Karmi's disclosure that her mother never expressed how she felt about losing Palestine is part of a repeated motif in her recollections of early family life in England: unspoken trauma. While news from the Arab world and its politics are a regular part of her father's conversations with friends, 'there was nothing personal in any of this, no reference to our life in Jerusalem' (209). She also reveals that her parents 'never once used the words Israelis or Israel to the best of my knowledge', and even though they often refer to the Nakba, when Karmi asks them to explain the word's meaning, they respond with, "Never you mind about that. It's something that happened in the past" (182, 183). These suppressions and



dismissals mean that '[n]o one spoke about the circumstances which had prompted our departure from our home, or explained the history and politics of it' and thus 'the memory of Palestine grew ever more distant' (209). Nonetheless, the sense of living in suspended time remains, manifesting itself in the state of their home: after almost ten years in exile, Karmi reveals that '[o]ur gloomy house was no better decorated than when we had moved in' (251).

In her study of the limits of autobiography in relation to trauma, Gilmore points out that there is often agreement that trauma is somehow unrepresentable, that 'trauma is *beyond* language in some crucial way, that language fails in the face of trauma, and that trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency' (6). Such insufficiency is apparent in the Karmi household as they struggle to adapt to life in exile. Her parents' inability to explicitly articulate what they have lost *and why* leads Karmi to acknowledge: 'What private memories, reminiscences, griefs our parents entertained, we never knew. Palestine had become a faded dream, a place of the buried past scarcely ever brought to mind' (210). Unsurprisingly, Karmi's relationship to Palestine is affected: 'This played directly into my own loss of memory. In some subtle, insensible way, I found that I had wiped out all remembrance of Jerusalem. [...] This was not a conscious process; I simply put away the past as if it had never been' (210). Palestine ceases to be a real place. Pausing to consider whether she grieved during this time for what she had lost, Karmi admits that, 'I don't think I did, because I had by then already closed off the Palestine of my childhood', rendering Palestine both private and 'frozen in time' (174). Her youth enables her to 'close off' Palestine in this manner – in contrast to her mother. While Karmi documents the difficulties of trying to assimilate into post-war England as an Arab (with a name nobody seems able to pronounce), she

also acknowledges that her life in England steadily acquires a measure of stability, once she has become fluent in the language, made friends and begun to explore London and appreciate English culture. Indeed, before too long, Karmi notes: 'I had formed the opinion that anything Arab or connected with the Arab world was inferior and of no interest. These ideas were almost wholly derived from my English surroundings. Unwittingly, I had absorbed them together with the English culture which I was so eagerly embracing' (227).

The absence of open, honest relationships in the family results in a reliance on acting out certain roles, or conforming to rigid paradigms of behaviour. As Karmi gets older and expectations of her intensify, the negative impact of this increases. Against her will, she pursues her studies in medicine, admitting that 'when it came to confronting my father or opposing his wishes, the cultural imperative prevailed' (295).<sup>53</sup> This means behaving in ways that do not come naturally to Karmi: 'though I went through the motions expected of an Arab woman, it was like acting a part' (342). When, later, she pursues a relationship with an Englishman, John, whom she eventually marries, her parents coerce Karmi's brother into intervening to stop the marriage, despite his own values being more Western than Arab. Thus Karmi becomes further alienated, with her brother 'playing the untypical part of the heavy-handed Arab brother' and her sister asserting to John that, "Ghada's an Arab and a Muslim" and thus expected to make different choices (354). These episodes reveal how alienated she is by her family's expectations (and their patriarchal undertones). They also draw attention

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<sup>53</sup> In his reading of the memoir, Moore-Gilbert argues that 'Karmi's text is as much a feminist coming-of-age narrative as it is an exploration of the way diaspora rearticulates Palestinian identities differently according to generational differences' ('Baleful' 61). Although I think this slightly overstates the case (I would not say that it is 'as much' a feminist narrative as it is a focus on different articulations of exilic identity), it is important to recognise the gender tensions.

to the enduring nature of trauma and the difficulty in moving beyond it: still deeply affected by the loss of their homeland, Karmi's parents clearly reject assimilation and thus anything that might (further) compromise their Arab way of life, even if this has a detrimental effect on their children, no longer in the Arab world and struggling to reconcile the different aspects of their identity.

Even though she is honest about the harm done by her parents' behaviour, Karmi nonetheless makes it clear that their family life must be seen through the lens of enforced exile and its ensuing traumas:

My parents' cultural isolation should not be understood simply within the context of migration. [...] My parents did not choose to leave Palestine and they never willingly acquiesced in its loss. They did not see England as a place of the future, but only as a staging post on a route to where they could never go. And it could not have been otherwise, for abandoning that view was tantamount to accepting the irrevocable loss of Palestine. (220)

Clearly her parents see their resistance to assimilation as an important rejection of what happened to Palestine, which continues to haunt them. Karmi even speculates whether 'a sense of shame for having deserted the homeland' drives her parents' behaviour (210). There is something rather relentless about these dynamics, especially given Karmi's reference to her parents being 'on a route to where they could never go', which chimes with the reiterative nature of trauma. As Gilmore notes, 'the extent to which trauma can be understood as repetition raises an important question: where does harm done in the past end?' (27). This resonates with the conviction that we cannot speak about settler colonialism in the past tense – not just because it continues through present-day actions but also because its past continues to have an impact.

Under these circumstances, Karmi is somewhat trapped – her Palestinian past is inaccessible to her and its traumas unspoken, yet she is compelled to

conform to generic Arab conventions that do not correspond with growing up as a woman in England. This eventually precipitates a need to confront what her parents cannot: Palestine as a contemporary place, with a specific identity and heritage. In this respect, it is important to note Karmi's disclosure that while she lived in an 'inflexibly Arab environment at home', nonetheless '[t]o this day and despite my attempts at self-education, I am still ignorant of customs, sayings and social attitudes which would be considered basic to Palestinian culture', which reveals perhaps most profoundly the extent to which there was silence about Palestine at home (220, 219). Karmi attributes this to the pretence her parents seem to maintain that they have not actually left Palestine and thus have no need to discuss or explain it. Reflecting on this pretence, Karmi concludes that, 'I suppose it was for this reason that neither of them told us much about our culture, customs or religion' (219). Her tumultuous family life and the competing models of selfhood produced by the overlap between her Arab identity and her 'carefully cultivated Englishness', lay the groundwork for her increasingly urgent need to undo this silence (266).

### **Palestine: 'The tortured love affair that waited inescapably for me'**

While Karmi makes it clear that there is an absence of proper dialogue about Palestine, she does gradually learn from her parents the importance of place. Karmi's father has regular visitors, and politics is a mainstay of conversation, even if its personal implications are scrupulously avoided; Karmi recalls that '[o]ur home soon became a refuge for lonely Palestinians' (184). She notes that her mother would prepare Palestinian food and ask the key questions: where were they from and who were they related to? As she grows older, she realises the importance of these conversations:

For years, I thought this obsession with places and family names and ‘who was related to whom’ was just a quirk of my parents. [...] It took me years to realise that after 1948, establishing a person’s origin became for Palestinians a sort of mapping, a surrogate repopulation of Palestine in negation of the *nakbah*. It was their way of recreating the lost homeland, as if the families and the villages and the relations they had once known were all still there, waiting to be reclaimed. (186)

Through these early encounters with Palestinians who continue to visit her parents, Karmi seems to absorb the lesson that identity is somehow tied to place – that for each of them there is a specific physical space that is part of who they are. Identity is *mapped*.

However, the ongoing silences in the family home mean that this ‘surrogate repopulation’ does not expose a deeper understanding of *how* she is tied to certain places and what these places signify *now*. Nor does it allow her to feel kinship with her family: in an atmosphere of denied grief, generational differences and the challenges of assimilation, ‘[g]radually, we learned as a family to go our separate ways, as if we did not belong together’ (225). Karmi’s deeper understanding of Palestine and its contribution to her identity emerges not through her family but through events in the Middle East, beginning with the Suez Crisis of 1956, which initiates what Karmi describes as ‘the first stage in a painful process of realisation and discovery which would continue for the rest of my life’ (247). At this point, though, she is only sixteen and unable to yet make sense of how political tensions relate to her complicated identity. Her feelings are therefore compartmentalised, although we learn that their emergence is but a matter of time: ‘It would require another decade and yet another major crisis for my personal edifice to finally crumble. But without my knowing it, in the aftermath of Suez, the process had already begun’ (295). From this point onwards, we read with the knowledge that Karmi’s gaze is shifting back to Palestine. The intimation of another major crisis in

a decade's time reveals to an informed reader that it will be the war of 1967 that causes Karmi's identity to crumble, and so there is a clear sense that the memoir is building inexorably towards this cataclysmic moment in Palestine's history. What is interesting about Karmi's narrative structure at this point is that there are some seventy pages before 1967 is narrated, which noticeably deal with Karmi's increasing alienation from her family, her dismissal of Arab culture and social expectations and her embrace of English customs and culture, especially those that challenge the Arab way of life her parents expect her to adhere to. The fact that we know the Suez crisis has initiated an unavoidable process of change, means that these reflections on rejecting her Arab identity are understood as temporary; Karmi's structure ensures that this rejection is read with the knowledge that it cannot withstand what is to come.

During her university years at Bristol, Karmi continues to feel remote from her origins, commenting that this 'harmonised with the prevailing English ignorance about Palestine, which was now even more total than it had been during my schooldays' (314). Thus when people ask her where she is from, instead of naming Palestine or Jerusalem, she answers, 'Somewhere in the Middle East' (314). This serves to demonstrate the magnitude of the realisation to come, a realisation very specifically provoked by *place*. While watching television footage of the June 1967 war and in particular Israel's capture of the Old City in East Jerusalem, Karmi's attachment to Palestine is reformed:

Memories, dormant for years, of visiting my aunt's house in the Old City and playing with other children in the giant forecourt of the mosque on hot, still afternoons, stirred inside me. [...] As the memories came back, I felt a dull ache, as if an ancient wound, which was thought to be long healed, had just been reopened. I had a sense of deep perturbation and the first stirrings of anger at what had befallen us. (370)

The use of the collective pronoun at the end of this paragraph is significant – it indicates her shift towards a collective identity that prioritises Palestine; a notable contrast to the more solipsistic narration of 1967 that Said offers in *Out of Place*. Karmi goes on to write that '[t]he war had uncovered a political dimension to my life more important than I had ever suspected' (375). The immediate impact of this is on her relationship with her English husband and then, by extension, with English society.

Having tried for years to manage her 'sense of dual loyalty', Karmi now finds this impossible, given the outright hostility to Arabs in the English media and even amongst her friends and colleagues (375). This hostility goes hand in hand with support for Israel's victory, which forces upon Karmi an awareness of what she describes as 'the extent to which the *idea* of Israel had entrenched itself in the English mind', produced by the familiarity of Biblical associations with Israel and Jewish ties to Palestine, as well as post-war sensitivities towards anti-Semitism (373, emphasis in original). Her husband's inability to understand Karmi's personal rage, in addition to his admiration for Israel when pushed to voice an opinion, signal the breakdown of their short-lived marriage. Karmi admits that their union had been embarked upon for the wrong reasons, confessing that she had married John 'in pursuit of a sense of belonging', a pursuit in need of rerouting back towards Palestine (363). 'I may have become English in culture and affinity,' Karmi realises, 'but in all the ways in which it mattered I was not' (377). In the aftermath of separation, Karmi agonises over what the future holds for her and whether she will find love again. Strikingly, it is Palestine that is depicted as the new relationship, an emphatic assertion that ends the second part of the memoir: 'I suddenly knew the answer. I suppose it had been shadowing me all my life. [...]

[T]he tortured love affair that waited inescapably for me, as for all Palestinians, was the one with Palestine. And, for good or ill, it would last a lifetime' (380). Again, a collective identity is posited; not with her family, with whom relationships remain strained even though they have shared in the horror of 1967, but with a grander evocation of *all* Palestinians, united against the injustice they have been dealt. It is thus through politics that she attempts to establish a sense of belonging that she can believe in: one that prioritises Palestine.

Establishing Palestine Action in 1972 with other likeminded activists, Karmi commits herself to solidarity work. She describes how her previous neglect of Palestine and the insensitivities and judgement of English society 'drove me like a demon', dedicating her 'heart and soul' to the cause (399). Her family offer no encouragement and her father is described as 'horrified': 'His ambition to keep all of us shielded from the conflict that had caused our exile and see us settled in safe and respectable occupations had been thwarted', demonstrating his ongoing trauma over the Nakba (399).<sup>54</sup> It also signals a preoccupation with the political and the territorial over the filial, given that Karmi's determined embrace of Palestine does not bring her closer to her family. Her decision to prioritise Palestine as a tangible place is emphasised by her realisation, when visiting a camp for Palestinian resistance fighters in Libya (all of whom are refugees from the camps in Lebanon), of how disconnected her experience of 'prosaic tranquillity' in England is from theirs. All of this leaves her feeling deeply ashamed, as if her life in London, albeit now driven by politics, is still 'nothing but an act' (404). 'I was playing at being Palestinian,' she continues, 'unwilling to soil myself with its

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<sup>54</sup> This is very similar to the attitudes of Said's parents – similarly wary of politics – which I discussed in Chapter One. More generally, there is a similarity between Said and Karmi's narration of how their pre-political lives are fully ruptured by 1967 (although as mentioned, Karmi subsequently articulates much more of a collective identity).



reality' (404). Karmi's language is significant – her conclusion that it has been a shortcoming on her part not to 'soil' herself with the 'reality' of being Palestinian reads as a strong need (and duty) to return to the actual land.

This return begins with time spent in the refugee camps in Lebanon, before moving to Syria and Jordan for two years, which function as an essential preamble to the final return journeys narrated in the memoir to Palestine itself. The narration reveals an oscillation on Karmi's part between a sense of belonging and a sense of alienation, reminding us that there is no resolution for an unstable exilic identity. Karmi admits that part of her desire to move to Syria and then Jordan is driven by wanting to find a relationship with an Arab man, which she quickly acknowledges is an 'illusion' born of 'the almost desperate need I had by then to find my roots' (413). Once she is in the Middle East, she admits that 'I looked and sounded Arab, but in myself I was not' (414). Karmi also struggles with what she perceives as a lack of awareness about the difficulties of her experience, which further alienates her. 'Astonishingly,' she writes, 'no one understood the human effects of exile or displacement; what I took to be a self-evident case for sympathy left them indifferent' (414). Whether these people are actually being insensitive, or simply preoccupied with their own issues – and it seems fair to raise both possibilities – there is no doubt that Karmi is left isolated. This back and forth between being part of the Middle East and being an outsider exposes Karmi's uncertainty about what exactly she needs and where she belongs. The narration of these journeys is important structurally, because it emphasises to the reader that even though they are also Arab countries, Syria and Jordan are *not* replacements for Karmi's former homeland, and that if she is to find a measure of belonging, or at

least come to terms with her displacement, she will have to return to 'where it all began' (422).

### **'The source, the origin, the very place': Returning to Palestine**

Perhaps, I concluded desperately, I would have to go to the source, the origin, the very place, shunned fearfully for years, where it all began in order to find [home]. The truth I could not face as yet was that I was truly displaced, dislocated in both mind and body, straddling two cultures and unable to belong in either.

Ghada Karmi, *In Search of Fatima* (422)

Returning to Palestine is an experience frequently narrated in Palestinian fiction and autobiographical writing. Indeed, Sa'di even asserts a genre of what he calls 'visiting/returning' accounts, which he sees as having been inaugurated through fiction by Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*, which narrates the return of a refugee couple to their former hometown, as well as to their former home ('Exile' 235). In considering such accounts, Sa'di asks whether they are purely personal or whether they have implications for the Palestinians as a nation, as well as for our understanding of exile and return (238). He concludes that they are *not* merely personal, offering the example of Kanafani and the way in which the act of return in the novella calls into question key concepts for Palestinians, such as belonging, homeland, social ties and resistance. That there are urgent implications ensuing from these narratives should be obvious. Considered against the backdrop of persistent calls for the right of return for those who had to flee Palestine, these personal journeys are inevitably inseparable from the emotional charge of those calls and the ongoing conflict. In terms of life writing, there is a wide range of writers who have documented what is understandably a pivotal experience (I discuss this in relation to other writers in Chapter Three and Chapter Four).

Sa'di also points out that some are unable to return. As well as the possibility of being denied entry by Israel, there are psychological barriers that

prevent the journey from being undertaken: 'many Palestinians refused to return; either it was too painful for them to encounter these sites of memory and emotion, or they rejected the humbling aspect of returning as visitors to their homes or land' ('Exile' 238). Karmi's parents maintain such a refusal, unwilling (and unable) to witness how much the place has changed:

They lived on their memories and consigned Palestine to an irrevocable past which it would be futile to reincarnate. None of that generation ever considered visiting Israel, though, technically, they could have done so using their British passports. My parents even shunned seeing pictures of Israel and avoided any mention of travel there. For them, it was a place frozen at the moment of their departure in 1948, like a photograph – an Arab country with Jews in it, not the other way around. They could not have borne seeing its familiar landmarks, the nostalgic haunts of their youth, despoiled, as they would see it, in Israeli hands. (393)

Karmi readily accepts that all of her parents' energy goes into surviving the Nakba and establishing a life in England; facing up to how Palestine has changed is a step beyond them. Eventually, though, this refusal to visit Palestine or even articulate their loss becomes deeply problematic for Karmi. Establishing a clear generational difference, she disavows her parents' 'phobia' of Israel and her long-held (inherited) belief that it is a 'forbidden place' (423). Having thus decided to reject this inculcated belief that Israel is 'a place that was out of bounds, a bizarre entity, without a concrete existence and nothing to do with "our" Palestine', Karmi reveals a need to *make concrete* what has remained abstract and buried for so long – and also disassociates herself from her parents' version of Palestine by disputing the collective pronoun (423).

Karmi's first return to Palestine is in 1991, over forty years after the Nakba. Reflecting on the common reactions to such return journeys, Sa'di notes: 'Such visits spurred a variety of responses and emotions. Among the dominant emotions are grief, sorrow, and helplessness' ('Exile' 236). These emotions are dominant for

Karmi, too. Even with her understanding of the political situation, she is disturbed by the relationship she witnesses between Palestinians and Israelis – ‘colonised and colonisers’ – before noting, ‘I realised then that I too, no less than my parents, had preserved an internal picture of this country as the Arab place it had been’ (429). Being forced to register that her parents’ images of the past are still part of her outlook is a central aspect of Karmi’s first trip to Palestine. In this sense, it is indicative of what Sa’di describes as the ‘anxiety and fear that [the returnees’] mental images might be dissimilar to what they will find; a fear that all the longing and emotions they felt for long years would turn out to be divorced from the actual site of the memory’ (‘Exile’ 237). Travelling the country, the overriding impression that Karmi relays is one of feeling tremendously disturbed by the inequality and the dilapidated nature of the Palestinian towns that she visits, coupled with the erasure of the Palestinian past to make way for the Israeli present. There is a gulf between her ‘mental images’ of Palestine and the reality that she encounters, a product of the massive impact on the landscape and society wrought by settler colonialism. The desolation produced by such an experience is clearest during the two visits she makes at the end of her trip to her former West Jerusalem neighbourhood, now predominantly Jewish. Unable to locate her former home in a now unfamiliar environment, she feels ‘a sense of frustrated hopelessness’ (445). This gives way to the conclusion that her family are irrevocably rootless: ‘Flotsam and jetsam, I thought, that’s how we ended up, not a stick or stone to mark our existence. No homeland, no reference point, only a fragile, displaced and misfit Arab family in England to take on those crucial roles’ (445). Thus the narration of Karmi’s first return journey to Palestine culminates in a continued reliance on place, this time by evoking a sense of extreme and debilitating *placelessness*.

However, on a second visit to Jerusalem in 1998 – half a century since she last saw her family home – she finally finds the house, an experience that forms the epilogue of her memoir and provides an arresting conclusion to her story. Living in the Qatamon house is an American Jewish family, who cautiously allow Karmi in. As she walks through the garden and explores the ground floor, she wishes for a moment to herself, ‘to be alone so that the memories could seep back. So that the ghosts could return and let me touch what I had buried for so long’ (449-50). But the two women who let her into the home do not give her space, obviously nervous about her presence and alarmed by Karmi’s questions about who owns the house. It transpires that they are renting it, and at Karmi’s request for the owner’s contact details, the younger woman insists on consulting her absent husband on the phone. His objection is relayed in the form of a denial, both of Karmi’s simple request but also, surely, of their role in the ongoing conflict that began with Karmi’s exile: “‘I’m sorry, but he says we don’t want anything to do with it. It’s nothing to do with us’” (450). Disappointed as Karmi is that she cannot spend longer in the house, the tone of the narrative as she recounts this experience is measured, expressing a clear awareness of how much has changed. Familiar traces remain but the house has been significantly modernised, the rooms ‘distorted’ and ‘unrecognisable’ (449). The space that she knew has been altered physically, and thus also psychologically. The different elements that make up the space of the house – the physical, mental and social, if we return to Lefebvre – are no longer produced by Karmi or her family. Karmi knows this, acknowledging that the loss is irreversible. This impact on the space is further emphasised in her description of visiting the house again in 2005 in *Return*. Looking around the house once more, she remarks that ‘all I could think of were the many alien people who had lived in

these rooms after us, and how *each one erased more and more of our presence there*' (122, emphasis added).

Leaving the house, she notes how overgrown 'our' garden is, before concluding that 'of course it wasn't ours any more and had not been for fifty years. Our house was dead' (450). Here, Karmi intimates that a house has a living quality, and that it is its occupants who breathe life into it. No longer her own space, the house as she knows it has ceased to exist. The epilogue to *In Search of Fatima* is a reminder of Kassem's assertion that '[h]ome is concrete and physical, but always imagined and deeply symbolic'. The changed nature of the space means that Karmi's profound sense of dislocation, woven throughout the memoir, is presented as irresolvable, a reality which she must continue to live with, and entailing a permanent loss of home. In particular, it is provoked by the symbolism of the space – which Karmi realises with full force is a symbolism built on the past – and the material reality of the home now, which does not correspond with what the space means to her. Reflecting on temporality, Bachelard observes: 'Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another' (28). In the case of Karmi's Qatamon home, these dynamisms are very much oppositional, as past and present clash. Neither does the space around the home – the neighbourhoods of West Jerusalem, now so clearly a Jewish-Israeli urban environment – enable her to feel connected to her place of birth.

In an act of solidarity that underscores the counternarrative of her memoir, Karmi closes *In Search of Fatima* with the call to prayer from the Haram al-Sharif, which wakes her in her hotel near the Old City. What she hears as she stands on her balcony is 'the unmistakable sound of another people and another presence,

definable, enduring and continuous. Still there, not gone, not dead' (451). She experiences a sense of 'awe and relief', a realisation that '[t]he story had not ended, after all' (451). There is a revelatory quality to this experience, rather like Karmi's earlier awakening to her Palestinian identity during the 1967 war, although the tenor here is stronger, both due to its religious aspect and the depth of feeling that Karmi expresses at realising that the Palestinian cause is not yet lost. As so many have done before her, Karmi asserts the sanctity of Jerusalem, as a site of religious significance and as a place sustained by community and heritage, establishing a specific counternarrative to the dominant Israeli discourse that celebrates the city as unequivocally their eternal Jewish capital. This revelation is contrasted, finally, with her ongoing sense of profound exile, despite the significance that *place* still holds for her. She describes her experience of exile as 'undefined by space and time, and from where I was, there would be no return' (451). These words close Karmi's memoir, no doubt to afford them the greatest impact and to emphasise the irremediable loss precipitated by a lifetime in exile – a loss that ultimately neither time nor space can repair. She cannot return to the Palestine of her childhood, and nor can she relate to a much-changed Palestine of the present. There are strong parallels here with Said's characterisation of his own condition of exile, also narrated in terms of an impossibility of return. His life must be lived, he claims, '[o]n a constantly shifting ground, where relationships are not inherited, but created. Where there is no solidity of home' (*Power* 457). The crucial difference between the two is Said's concentration on the *potential* provided by this shifting ground (and thus exile's evolution into a metaphorical concept), whereas Karmi, despite reaching such a similar conclusion about the permanence of exile, nonetheless continues to remain tied to the material reality of Palestine as a

crucial point of origin; her second memoir makes this particularly clear. Therefore, the directions they move towards an unreachable goal are qualitatively different: Said strives to *arrive* at an end to exile, while Karmi strives to *return* home.



## ***Return***

Whether what I found in this denuded Palestine would be enough to restore my sense of self and heal the other rifts in my life, I did not know, but would soon discover.

Ghada Karmi, *Return* (19)

*Return*, published thirteen years after *In Search of Fatima*, is a compelling text, corroborating Karmi's earlier conclusions about exile and return, while also going some way to destabilise them, or at least call them into question. The text reignites the same dilemmas over identity and belonging, as well as the unhealed wound of 1948, but looks at them from the different perspective provided by Karmi's decision to narrate her return to Palestine in 2005. Thus, while *In Search of Fatima* offers a long narrative arc, based on a timeframe of many decades, *Return* focuses on the events that take place during a single year, concentrating on what it means to be back in Palestine, this time to live and work. Karmi's family history and circumstances – in particular her father's ill health and eventual death – are still part of the telling, but no longer Karmi's main concern. Instead of examining exile primarily alongside the issues of competing cultures, assimilation and domestic discord, *Return* produces a sustained exploration of the divisions between exiled Palestinians, such as Karmi, and those under occupation – an unfortunate outcome of ongoing settler colonialism and its fracturing of the Palestinian collective. This strained relationship, I would argue, is the most important feature of *Return*, along with Karmi's critique of the PA, which is a significant part of her counternarrative.

Sa'di's statement that exile and return represent 'two opposite states of being and two geographies' for Palestinians, is instructive in this context ('Exile' 216). For the most part, Karmi also articulates exile and return as opposite terms that depend on each other for meaning. This binary is evident throughout her

work as she oscillates between trying to settle into life in exile and desiring a return to Palestine, with all the crises of identity that such oscillations provoke. These longstanding crises mean that return is presented as an opportunity to 'restore my sense of self' (19). Therefore, another important aspect of *Return* is this ongoing issue of identity, informed by her exilic experiences and thus inseparable from them, but also driven by the possibilities that return presents. The evident strength of feeling that goes into Karmi's commitment to Palestine, makes her eventual pessimism and realisation that a restoration of the self is not to be found in her homeland, all the more profound in its disappointment. As I show, however, this does not ultimately diminish her attachment to place.

### **Compelled to Return**

For readers of *In Search of Fatima*, *Return* feels familiar from the very beginning. The prologue opens with a description of Karmi at her dying father's bedside in Jordan, prompting memories of her early childhood, life in England, difficulties with her father, and the tumultuous history of Palestine, much of which he lived through. Interweaving her father's long life with the trajectory of Palestine, Karmi writes:

Looking at his skeletal state now, pyjama jacket unbuttoned to show his bony ribcage, his sad hollow stomach with its overlying empty folds of skin, I put away those bitter thoughts. Whatever my disappointments about his personal relationship with me, I passionately did not want him to die, not just for *who* he was but for *what*. His final days would be drawn-out, overshadowed by family squabbles, as happens at such times. But hanging over that period was the haunting knowledge that an era, not just for his family, but for Palestinian history, was drawing to a close. My father was born in Palestine at the time of the Ottoman Empire, lived through its demise and its replacement by the British Mandate that ruled Palestine, endured the establishment of the State of Israel thereafter and was forced into exile. His life encompassed a century of conflict, a period of Palestinian

history that demolished everything he knew and overturned the old order forever.  
(2, emphasis in original)

The prologue narrates events in 2007, several years after Karmi's return to Palestine. Thus the experience of living in Palestine and the sombre revelations it provokes have already taken place – his death is not the instigator of Karmi's journey. Yet mapping her father's life onto Palestine in this way serves as an ideal precursor to the rest of the narrative. By establishing a parallel between the disintegration of her father's physical body with the fracturing of the body politic of Palestine, Karmi not only reiterates the inseparability of her family's identity from Palestine (its *locatedness*), but also fittingly sets the tone for her subsequent account of the 'denuded Palestine' that she returns to (19). The fragility of her father's health is mirrored in the fragility of the Palestinian 'state' that Karmi's narrative goes on to describe.

Creating a bridge between the two memoirs, Karmi addresses the painful memories of her first return as she embarks on her new journey back to Palestine:

I had sworn never to return to this torn-up, unhappy land after that first trip in 1991 when I broke a long-standing taboo against ever visiting the place that had been Palestine and then became Israel. It had always been too painful to contemplate, too traumatic an acknowledgement of our loss and the triumph of those who had taken our place. (7)

By linking the narratives in this way, Karmi reminds us at the outset of the still-unresolved issue of identity and her ongoing anxiety over this. The private self, attempting to reconcile a steadfast commitment to its origins with the realities of many decades in exile, continues to navigate this process with a great deal of uncertainty and restlessness. This is made particularly clear when recalling the words that close *In Search of Fatima*: 'from where I was, there would be no return' (451). Going against what she has already concluded to be impossible, Karmi

redoubles her elusive search for belonging, hoping that Palestine *is* the answer. That *Return* ultimately closes with a very similar sentiment to *In Search of Fatima* concerning the impossibility of return should be noted here, because it underscores what Karmi cannot help resisting: the unavoidable precariousness of her exilic identity.

Disavowing any enjoyment of what is usually a central aspect of exile, at least in the peripatetic form it often takes, Karmi declares a deep-seated fear of travel:

I was not one of those people who found it exciting to live in other countries. Even when I was younger and supposedly more adventurous, I had never gone to summer camps or joined student groups on jaunts to foreign places. Aside from two years spent in the Arab countries at the end of the 1970s, when I had forced myself to go with much trepidation, I had never strayed far from England. That visit, first to Syria and then to Jordan, had been all about my quest for belonging, to find my roots and a credible identity. Perhaps I was too eager at the time, too intense in my search, but my journeys ended in failure on both counts. (12-13)

This trepidation over undertaking journeys indicates her vulnerability in exile, no doubt stemming from a fear of what distance from a familiar terrain might imbalance in her personally, while also reaffirming place as a central signifier in shaping the self, revealed through her assumption that a 'credible identity' might be found in returning to the Middle East. This sensitivity to place is quickly directed towards Palestine. Addressing this at the beginning of *Return*, Karmi notes: 'Like many Palestinians, my greatest pursuit, indeed obsession, for most of my adult life had been Palestine. There was no room in it for much else' (13). Such is the obsession that for Karmi, 'being a Palestinian was the only thing that felt real', a further indication of the need to latch onto something 'credible': to an identity, I would argue, that is *grounded* (13). Her characterisation of Palestine as 'a place which I knew more in theory than in practice, more as an abstract cause

than a living reality', which she feels compelled to return to, is a key foregrounding statement (9). It firmly asserts that place is both an integral aspect of identity and yet not fully understood or explored.

Karmi makes her reasons for this fuller exploration of place clear throughout her narrative. Reiterating what *In Search of Fatima* reveals in such painstaking detail, Karmi notes that both the past and their Palestinian roots are 'taboo' in her family (267). She acknowledges once more the trauma that has led to this suppression of Palestine: 'My parents, despite their unwillingness to dwell on the past, had not forgotten, but I suspect they could not encompass the pain of remembering' (267). Yet Karmi cannot sustain this suppression, as *Return* forcefully emphasises: 'For decades I carried my parents' attitudes unthinkingly, but then began gradually to reject them. It was not true that Palestine had gone: it was still there, albeit in others' hands, and to banish it from our lives was to accept the Zionist claim to its ownership' (268). Rejecting the defeatism of her parents thus becomes a clear justification for return, framed here as a necessary counter to the Zionist narrative that erases Karmi's ties to the land. In this sense, *Return* is also a counternarrative to her parents' silence – or, looked at another way, it is the narrative they themselves could not produce.

Another crucial factor is the status of Palestinian politics and governance which, as indicated earlier, becomes part of her counternarrative. Her sense of not belonging, of no longer having access to Palestinian experience, especially as it pertains to political decision-making and nation-building, is central to her wish to live in Palestine. Despite the initial euphoria and sense of community that activism in England provides her with, Karmi admits to eventually feeling 'irrelevant' (13). This is primarily driven by the Oslo Accords of 1993, which saw the return of

Yasser Arafat and the PLO to Palestine and, as Randa Farah outlines, failed entirely to deal with the question of Palestinian refugees, prompting a demobilisation and exclusion of Palestinians in exile more broadly (229-33). As Karmi asserts, 'the centre of gravity of the Palestinian cause and the real political action shifted inside', leaving activists such as herself excluded from the discourse of Palestinian self-determination they felt they were contributing so importantly towards (14). Prior to this, 'the cause had been with us in exile', driven by a PLO that was formed in exile (14). Karmi emphasises how significant this major development was for her by assigning the PLO a metonymic identity: 'As its power grew, the PLO acquired, however unconsciously, the status of *a substitute homeland* for the refugees in their camps and most of us in exile, *even of signifying Palestine itself*' (14, emphasis added). This admission firmly positions her initial political activism within the framework of return and the primacy of place that I have discussed. If Karmi's severed connection to the physical land is assuaged during her early years of activism by the assumption that Palestine *is* the political work she and many other exiles are committed to – if the PLO signifies Palestine itself and she steadily sees herself as tied to the PLO through her political awakening post-1967 – then this activism must be seen as a metaphorical return.

Making her sense of grievance very clear, Karmi describes the PLO's establishment in Palestine as a development that 'made the rest of us still promoting the cause outside Palestine feel left behind, like people trying to catch a train that has long departed' (14). Indeed, she continues, this development 'was for us outside an abandonment' (15). This initiates the separation between Palestinians in exile and Palestinians 'inside' that develops throughout the memoir; the Oslo Accords are a line demarcating her experience from that of

Palestinians in Palestine/Israel, a line that grows ever more distinct and harder to cross. While she readily acknowledges that prior to the Oslo Accords, Palestinians living under Jordanian and Israeli rule within Palestine/Israel 'were often sidelined in this national awakening' that the PLO instigated during its years in exile, she does not ruminate further on how this must have felt – perhaps because she feels unable to do so (14). Still in exile, now without the sense of community that the PLO previously provided, Karmi feels truly distanced from Palestine. It is this distance, rendering the cause abstract to her, that she strives to overcome, hoping that the disparate nature of Palestinian experience as she sees it can somehow be ameliorated, along with her own unresolved identity. Thus her return to Palestine is precipitated by both political concerns and a more existential insecurity over her place in the world and who she is truly connected to. As she notes: 'My decision was not just motivated by fears of political irrelevance, but also by the old, unresolved conflicts that still haunted me and which my abortive trips to Syria and Jordan had done nothing to resolve: the desire to belong, to be part of the community, to fit into my skin' (18). Her preoccupation with the possibility of a 'real self' emerges distinctly here. The anxieties laid bare in her first memoir are echoed in these sentiments, particularly evident in the desire 'to fit into my skin', a metaphor that aptly recalls the range of dislocations Karmi has experienced, from ethnic discrimination in England and her failed attempts to fully assimilate, to her alienation from Arab culture and customs and, more specifically, from her place of birth. Reiterating the need to connect to something real, she recalls the 'galling' thought that 'in this changed world I was likely to end up a kind of second-hand Palestinian, an armchair windbag, whom no one listened to because of my distance from the *real thing*' (17, emphasis added). The need to 're-establish my connection

with the people who lived there, my people, whose lives I would share, even if only for a while' thus becomes essential (17).

### **'This denuded Palestine': Returning 'home'**

I remember growing up with a sense that life in England was temporary, and there would come a time when we would all be going 'home'.

Ghada Karmi, *Return* (18-9)

Reflecting on her mother's view of their life in England as a temporary phase, Karmi argues that her own intention of living in the Occupied Territories is not an echo of her mother's unfulfilled aspirations:

I did not fool myself into believing that I would find this 'home' in modern-day Ramallah, anomalous and artificial as it was, distorted by four decades of Israeli military occupation; nor that it could re-create the lost childhood of long ago. But it was still a Palestinian place, and the towns and villages nearby still retained the old ways, the food, the customs and traditions that defined them as Arab. (19)

The divergent timeframes – 'modern-day Ramallah' and rural locales that retain 'the old ways' – introduce one of the main challenges that Karmi faces when she returns to Palestine. Despite her awareness of the irreversibility of the impact of the Israeli state on Palestine, Karmi still maintains a belief that there will be something familiar about the landscape that will connect her to the homeland that she remembers; in other words, Palestine pre-1948. Her preference for the 'old ways' and traditions of the pastoral over Ramallah, dismissed as 'anomalous' and 'artificial', make it clear that she is seeking reminders of the past. While she dispels the notion that her intention is to resurrect her lost childhood, there is more than a hint of yearning for the idyllic in the contrast drawn between past and present. What emerges in the narrative from this point onwards is Karmi's entanglement with what Palestine is now and what it was in the past.



Her hopes for what return might signify come across as muted right from the beginning. Despite her emphasis on needing to locate her 'real self', there is an evident expression of uncertainty running through the opening chapter, 'Journey to Ramallah', encapsulated in its opening line: 'What the hell was I thinking of?' (7). Reflecting on her previous decisions to live in the Middle East and how they were driven by a search for her roots and a sense of belonging, she notes that, 'I supposed my trip in 2005 was a search of the same kind, but it was more inchoate, not properly thought through, as if I were groping to find my way through a fog', thus alerting the reader to the unstable foundation upon which Karmi's hopes rest (13). When she arrives at her apartment in Ramallah, she admits to immediately wanting to return to Amman, where she has been staying with her father, and has to 'will myself back into the mood that impelled me to leave England' (8). Her descriptions of how 'imposing' the building is, how her footsteps echo through the otherwise silent space, and how her apartment is far too large for her, with rooms that will never be used, are a stark contrast to her descriptions of her former home in Jerusalem (8). There is no sense of the 'soul of the house' that Bachelard speaks of when interpreting the relationship we form with our first home, nor of the 'positive values of protection' it should embody (39, 38). This is not to imply that her temporary Ramallah apartment should automatically feel like home; nonetheless, it is still noticeable how the new home space fails to generate *any* feelings of wellbeing. To use Lefebvre, there is a negative energy being deployed within the space by Karmi, who professes such a sense of disconnection from it; nor does she acknowledge that she could relate to it more meaningfully over time. Contemplating the spacious double reception room, she wonders 'when on earth I would ever be inviting the hordes of people needed to fill them', making it clear

how unsuitable her new home feels (8). Even the fridge seems somehow an affront when Karmi describes how ‘massive’ it is and how ‘the few items of food I had bought the day before huddled pathetically in a corner’, a use of personification that draws attention to how she is feeling (24). Reflecting on the sleepiness of the neighbourhood, instead of enjoying the calm, she states that ‘[i]t emphasised the sense of isolation I already felt’ (24). This cautiousness – bordering on outright gloominess – makes Karmi’s return all the more complex. Her narration of the need to be in Palestine is inseparable from a sense of disquiet over what will come to pass.

It would be misleading, however, to imply that Karmi is entirely trapped by the past, or unable to meet any of the challenges posed by the present. Nor is she unappreciative of her living arrangements (she quickly rebukes herself for not feeling more grateful) (8). While her unease and professed uncertainty cannot be ignored, Karmi’s desire to devote herself to helping Palestinians and their cause still comes across. Thus another central theme of the memoir is Karmi’s – eventually unrealised – hope that she can make a difference to the *future* of Palestine, from within Palestine itself. Determined not to work for a non-governmental organisation, which she regards as full of ‘hangers-on’, ‘marginal “researchers”’ and ‘foreign “experts”’, she instead takes up a position at the PA, working for the Ministry of Media and Communications (19).<sup>55</sup> She states: ‘at the Palestinian Authority I reasoned that I would be at the heart of things, and would learn the inner workings of the institution that organised life in the Occupied

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<sup>55</sup> The issue Karmi draws attention to here is often called the ‘NGOisation’ of Palestine, whereby collective action is compromised because issues are dealt with by NGOs (usually dependent on aid from the West) in isolation from the broader political, social and economic contexts within which they arise. This has a significant impact on society and resistance movements. As Islah Jad argues, ‘NGO-ization has a cultural dimension, spreading values that favour dependency, lack of self-reliance and new modes of consumption’ (177). See also Andrea Smith.

Territories, although they were under Israeli rule' (19). Keeping in mind this reality of the PA's subservience to the Israeli state, Karmi cautiously expresses hope that her new role at 'a government-within-a-government' might still allow her to contribute to alleviating suffering (19). She associates this hope with the restoration of her identity. She admits that once she decides to live in Palestine, 'I discovered a longing in myself, not just to reverse my sense of irrelevance by going there, but to draw from the experience the sense of purpose I had so lost' (17). This desire for a renewed sense of purpose connects *Return to In Search of Fatima* through its indication of how important Palestine is as a political cause, something both memoirs are keen to stress, even while maintaining a brutal honesty on the tribulations of her solidarity work. Her fervent hope that she can regain her previous enthusiasm demonstrates that activism still endures as an integral aspect of her identity, even after the despondency of the Oslo Accords. However nebulous or fractured, her model of selfhood remains predicated on an awareness of the collective.

Much of *Return* attests to Karmi's intention of trying to locate a sense of belonging that is communal and collective. This is already hinted at by many of the chapter titles: 'The Separation Wall', 'Hebron', 'Gaza', 'Qalqilya, the Walled City' and 'The City of David'. To a reader with a working knowledge of Palestine's current circumstances, they suggest from the outset a collective, politicised narrative. The chapters demonstrate that one of Karmi's objectives is to provide eyewitness testimony of the Israeli occupation at key sites of contestation, imparting to her reader evidence of the deleterious impact of settler colonialism on the Palestinian people and landscape. They also demonstrate that formally, the memoir is not exclusively a personal account. These trips throughout the Occupied Territories

are, with the exception of her visit to Gaza, nothing to do with her work for the PA, which becomes an increasingly frustrating experience, isolated from the realities of Palestinian life that Karmi is so desperate to learn about. Notably, both strands of the memoir – her personal journeys across the Occupied Territories and her work for the PA – enhance a sense of disconnection from Palestine, even though they represent very different experiences and aims (the former predominantly to do with charting the material and psychological impact of Israel's actions, the latter to do with trying to work with other Palestinians). *Return* works by alternating between these two main strands; indeed, it would be a rather claustrophobic and potentially tedious text if it was too concentrated on the PA. Nor would it necessarily feel distinct enough from the wealth of academic work now written about the conflict if Karmi only concentrated on the effects of the occupation. The balance between the two is therefore productive, ultimately rendering it a more hybrid work of life writing that seeks to accomplish more than just an account of the self. Karmi's attentiveness to both strands is also an indication of her determination to counternarrate – targeting both the Israeli occupation and the PA.

### **Disconnections and Despondency**

Karmi narrates a rapid disenchantment with her role as a consultant at the PA, which throws her into a world of unpleasant internal politics, needless bureaucracy, and a lack of meaningful achievement. Having returned under a programme developed by the UN to encourage Palestinians in exile to work in the Occupied Territories, Karmi soon finds herself unwanted by many of her colleagues, some of whom outwardly express hostility towards her. Realising that she is not there to undertake vital work and very much surplus to requirements,

she quickly sinks into despondency. Echoing the reaction to her new apartment, Karmi expresses a sense of dismay right from the beginning. Upon first entering her place of work, the Ministry of Media and Communications building, she declares that 'my first view of it filled me with gloom' (20). Reminded of miserable London buildings that housed the NHS when she worked for them during her medical career, she cannot muster any excitement for this new place. The minister, Dr Farid, whom Karmi knows and likes, is not there to welcome her and apparently is rarely there, and so '[t]hat first glimpse gave me a sense of foreboding about the time that lay ahead' (20). Determined to update the ministry's media strategy, she immediately makes enemies amongst her colleagues, who do not seem to appreciate what they evidently interpret as interference. Karmi is therefore soon caught between wanting to forge ahead with projects, feeling that this is why the UN hired her in the first place, and upsetting her colleagues, whose difficult circumstances – a ministry rife with distrust and the repercussions of operating without financial security – Karmi does not readily appreciate until later.<sup>56</sup> She is soon left feeling 'wrong-footed and defensive' in an atmosphere hostile to the work she proposes to do (33). Rebuking herself, she concludes on the matter of rushing ahead with her first project that 'I could only think that, outside that familiar British setting [of office politics at the NHS], I had lost my bearings', thus alerting the reader to her sense of uncertainty in Palestine and her struggle to recognise and interpret discord outside of the familiar setting she is used to (34).

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<sup>56</sup> This financial insecurity stems from the fact that the PA has no independent means and must rely on international funding in order to function (*Return* 20). See Sari Hanafi and Linda Tabar, who discuss in detail the further fragmentation of Palestinian society post-Oslo due to a complex range of issues, including the agendas of Western NGOs funding the PA, corruption and a lack of inclusivity within the PA, Israeli attacks on PA institutions, and the tendency of most Western NGOs to contribute to the peace process only via job creation at the PA. Ultimately, instead of empowering ordinary people, this situation has created a very narrow elite.

Karmi soon becomes caught between two senior figures, the minister and deputy minister, who do not recognise each other's work and continually issue conflicting instructions. Thus in due course, Karmi is left deeply dispirited, seeing her work as pointless and in no way allowing her to feel as if she is contributing to the cause of Palestine. Instead, she feels as if she is part of an elaborate – and expensive – game of make-believe that she has made the mistake of taking too seriously:

I wondered why I was trying to be so correct in my dealings when no one else was. There was no reason to have taken my commitments so seriously, because these were pretend places like the rest of the PA's 'ministries', indeed like the 'Palestinian state' they were supposed to be part of. Everyone who worked in them was also pretending, playing a part in a charade created by the international donors who encouraged Palestinians to believe that they needed to have all the appurtenances of statehood ahead of attaining their state. (102)

The separation Karmi establishes here between herself (taking her commitments seriously) and her Palestinian colleagues (who do not, or rather *cannot*) exposes a central reason for her feelings of isolation. Coming from the entirely different experience of activism in London and the relative efficiency of British bureaucracy, Karmi cannot relate to her colleagues or their attitudes, no doubt hardened by how entirely hampered they are by the system put in place by occupation. Her frustration at this situation and how it paralyses Palestinians from actually achieving anything within their putative 'government' makes a very important point, especially for readers less aware of the disastrous political outcomes of the Oslo Accords. Karmi reveals both how supposedly self-governing Palestinian institutions are utterly controlled by Israel (and its supporters), and how certain individuals within these institutions exploit them for their own ends, as opposed to collective goals. Karmi's assessment of the 'Palestinian state' corresponds with

what Farah aptly refers to as ‘the Oslo “statelet”’, so called to better represent the fragmented nature of the state and its extremely limited scope (230). In such a place, Karmi is unsurprisingly unable to achieve what she wants. Nor does she feel any happier in her apartment as time passes, describing it much later on as ‘my lonely flat and its echoing rooms where I did not want to go’ (186). Thus her life in Ramallah working for the PA is, for almost the entirety of the memoir, narrated as a frustrating and lonely experience, with little to enliven it.

Karmi’s journeys around the Occupied Territories are therefore a welcome change – for herself, as well as for the reader, for it is clear early on that Karmi will derive little satisfaction or inspiration from her time at the PA. These journeys allow her to reconnect with the Palestinian landscape, making Palestine feel less abstract. However, they are also almost entirely disheartening. Going to Abu Dis, a village outside of Jerusalem, for a protest against the separation wall, Karmi is struck by the violence done to the landscape by the settlements, which look ‘as incongruous in that landscape as if they had dropped out of the sky’ (44).<sup>57</sup>

Reflecting on the changes to the land, she thinks of her father:

I stared at this ungainly carve-up of what had been a harmonious, gentle landscape with its wide spaces and open skyline, its huddles of old villages and mosques in the valleys, and wondered what my father, who had known Jerusalem and its unfettered hills long before there was an Israel, would think of this sight. (44)

As during her first visits, Karmi is continually struck by how different Palestine is today. There is little potential for reconciling what she remembers (and what she knows from her parents) with what she sees now. In fact, she remarks sombrely

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<sup>57</sup> Abu Dis is currently separated from Jerusalem by the separation wall, which has divided families living on either side of the wall. Many Abu Dis residents no longer have access to Jerusalem. Village land has also been confiscated for the construction of the wall and Israeli settlements. For more information, see ‘Abu Dis Town Profile’ by the Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem. Sari Nusseibeh writes informatively about Abu Dis and Al Quds University (partly located in Abu Dis and affected by the divide between Jerusalem and the West Bank) and the separation wall in his memoir, *Once Upon a Country* (519-27).

that 'each time I went [to Jerusalem] it seemed more built-up and unrecognisable as the Arab place of my childhood' (44). In a discussion of power, Lefebvre makes a useful distinction between those who produce space, such as a workforce, and those who control it, such as the ruling class. Inevitably, it is those in positions of power who possess and have influence over what others produce (48). It is this distinction that Karmi is forced to recognise. Abu Dis and the other locales Karmi visits are still recognisable as Palestinian spaces, inhabited by Palestinians who do their best to cope in the compromised circumstances that they find themselves in. But the balance of power is such that Karmi, with her own visual memory, cannot help but be struck by the fragility of Palestinian space and the way in which it has been – and continues to be – altered. Thus she confesses to feeling 'haunted' by the wall, describing it as 'a symbol of something indefinably cruel, a brutal expression of Israeli entitlement' (48).

Another aspect of these journeys are Karmi's encounters with fellow Palestinians. During the protest against the separation wall, she is pleasantly reminded of the camaraderie of protests in London and feels at home (45). Yet she experiences a sense of disquietude that there are not more protesters and notes how many of them are foreign. As the narrative continues, Karmi begins to experience greater tension and unease on her journeys. Visiting Nablus, following an encounter with a friendly and enthusiastic Palestinian who was brought up in America, she rather unfairly comments that Palestinians 'like him' disconcerted her because '[t]hey did not come across as Arabs but as part of the "enemy camp", the country that had nurtured Israel for decades and was its most loyal friend' (85). He seems, to her, like 'an interested tourist or outsider' (85). Karmi immediately feels guilty at this line of thinking, forcing her to consider whether she



too perhaps comes across as ‘something of a tourist’ and, due to her English accent, as also part of the enemy camp (85). Building on the anxiety that has been an underlying part of *Return*, this episode establishes a sense of separation on Karmi’s part, both from the Palestinian-American who unsettles her, and from Palestinians under occupation, who she worries are judging her and do not recognise her as part of their society.

At a dinner party in Ramallah, following an affecting trip to Hebron, Karmi relays what she has seen to her fellow diners, most of whom she views as part of an educated elite unwilling to commit to activism:

Khalil, the journalist, and his wife, who had lived in Ramallah for many years, were looking at me as if I were some curious specimen. ‘Didn’t you know all about Hebron before, Doctora?’ he asked with an edge of disbelief. ‘I thought you people outside kept up with everything that happens here.’

‘Well, yes,’ I said. ‘But seeing it close-up like that is different.’ Why did I have to justify what seemed to me obvious? He smiled faintly and shrugged his shoulders, and it made me wonder when was the last time any of them had visited the places I had seen that day. (142-3)<sup>58</sup>

What comes across as a lack of tact on Karmi’s part betrays a clear defensiveness and insecurity. For all her insinuations, Karmi knows that those living under occupation deal with their own localised problems of Israeli control, leaving them either unwilling or unable to go to Hebron, or weekly protests at Abu Dis. Indeed, she admits this right after the exchange with Khalil, stating that ‘people like me were irrelevant to this place, far removed from the reality of daily life with the

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<sup>58</sup> Hebron, a city in the West Bank of religious significance to both Jews and Muslims, has become a stronghold for the most fundamentalist strand of Zionism, leading to serious contestation between Palestinians and Israeli settlers, who are heavily protected by Israel Defence Forces (the settlers are also able to carry arms). It is important to note that the settlements are not merely adjacent to the city, as is the case with the majority of Israeli settlements, but actually inside Hebron’s Old City, which is now under Israeli control (Area H-2), while the rest of Hebron municipality (Area H-1) is ostensibly under Palestinian control. The division of the city and the presence of violent ideological settlers has led to a serious socioeconomic deterioration for Palestinians. Hebron is arguably the most explicit example of ongoing settler colonialism, as is well documented. See, for example, Saree Makdisi (209-21).

Israelis' (144). That she nonetheless voices her disquiet reveals, I would posit, how difficult she finds it to witness the varied – and varyingly unfair – ways in which Palestinians experience occupation. While the attitudes of her fellow diners are understandable, there is a distinction between understanding their motivations (which she does) and accepting them (which she cannot). Such moments reveal a certain honesty, which is particularly brave given her potential Palestinian readership. They also display an acknowledgement of the difficulty of truly relating to *any* Palestinians living under occupation, whether in Hebron or Ramallah. This honesty is evident throughout the memoir, revealing Karmi's legitimate fear of the apathy, or at least complacency, of some of the Palestinians she meets and the implications of this for a fractured Palestinian society and the wider conflict. Ultimately, these encounters reveal her despair, highlighting the impasse that Karmi witnesses during her stay in Palestine.

Despite her criticisms, Karmi recognises that this impasse is both encouraged and maintained by overarching Israeli control of the territory. She comes to realise that for most people, the 'charade' of life in the 'Palestinian state' provides 'ways for an occupied people to survive and maintain some integrity against a force that unceasingly tried to rob them of it' (314). Indeed, she notes that 'even the antics of Dr Farid and his PA colleagues were attempts at wresting some sense of purpose for their existence out of the subordination Israel imposed on them' (314). Her narrative is a complex web of Palestinian failures, rivalries and everyday survival, held in place by Israel's hegemony over all aspects of Palestinian life. Karmi always remains cognisant of this fact, even though she feels impelled to ask what more Palestinians themselves could do. This, I would suggest, is a product of her activist background, constantly questioning whether any of the

endeavours she herself embarks on actually make a difference; it is important to note that Karmi is as *self-critical* as she is critical of others.

Neither strand of the memoir – her demoralising experience at the PA and the difficult interactions and journeys throughout the Occupied Territories – can enable her ‘return’. This gives the text’s conclusion an incredibly sombre feel, even though it is anticipated almost from the beginning. Reflecting on her time spent in Palestine, Karmi concludes:

Why on earth did I ever come back to this place, I asked myself again? What had made me imagine that there was anything here for someone like me? I looked back on my whole assignment in ‘Palestine’ and realised that I had achieved none of my aims because it would never have been possible in the Palestine that I found. I had travelled to the land of my birth with a sense of return, but it was a return to the past, to the Palestine of distant memory, not to the place that it is now. The people who lived in this Palestine were nothing to do with the past I was seeking, nor were they a part of some historical tableau frozen in time that I could reconnect with. This Palestinian world I had briefly joined was different: a new-old place, whose people had moved on from where I had them fixed in my memory, had made of their lives what they could, and found ways to deal with the enemy who ruled them. (313)

The opening question of this paragraph – ‘why on earth?’ – is a dispiriting bookend to the question that initiates the narration of her journey to Palestine: ‘what the hell was I thinking of?’ (7). Even though her conclusions do not come as a surprise, their starkness is undiminished. What stands out are the notable similarities between Karmi and her parents, something that *In Search of Fatima* only hints at, when Karmi narrates her first journeys to Palestine at the end of the memoir. By returning to live in Palestine, Karmi realises that she too is trapped by the past; she too is part of the generation unable to let go of what they experienced in 1948, unable to move beyond the pre-eminence of that moment. In his evocative study of Iranian exilic communities in Los Angeles, Hamid Naficy writes: ‘In exile,

synchronicity dissolves, and more than any other affliction one feels out of step and out of sync with the new world' (xii). This, I suggest, is what has happened to Karmi; time and distance have left her very much out of sync with Palestinians under occupation. While, unlike her parents, she has been able to confront the past, talk about Israel and witness first-hand the depredations of the occupation, her attachment to a past version of place makes living on the present-day territory impossible. Karmi is not debilitated by the trauma of 1948 – she is no Miss Havisham – but nonetheless, just as her mother does, she stops the clock, holding onto a version of Palestine frozen in time.<sup>59</sup> Yet it is important to also acknowledge that her realisation (or rather, the confirmation) that she cannot return is based not only on an attachment to pre-Nakba Palestine, important as it is, but also on an extreme disillusionment at the political, social and geographical reality of post-Oslo Palestine: the expansion of Israeli control, the dissemblance of much of the Palestinian population, the ineptitude of the PA. Therefore, she narrates not just the *impossibility* of return to a historic homeland that no longer exists, but also her *rejection* of return under the present political circumstances. These circumstances essentially distort whatever possibility there might have been for Karmi to return.

Addressing the disparate nature of Palestinian experience and the primary difference between Palestinians in exile and those who live in Palestine/Israel, Karmi writes:

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<sup>59</sup> It is interesting to compare Karmi's perspective to Barghouti's narration in *I Saw Ramallah* of his first return to Palestine after thirty years. As well as criticising the occupation and its impact on the landscape, he is able to see some of the changes to Palestine in a different light, and also able to avoid too great a reliance on a past vision of Palestine (which Karmi cannot quite manage, as she readily admits). For example, when describing Ramallah, he writes: 'Ramallah is content with what she is. She knows what she has lived through. [...] She has gone her way, sometimes as her people willed, and more often as her enemies willed. She has suffered and she has endured' (35). This description (which reads as a tribute) is a marked contrast to Karmi's dismissal of modern Ramallah as 'anomalous' and 'artificial' in comparison to the pastoral.

What the outcome of this struggle would be no one could know, but it was certain that out of it a new reality would emerge, and it was they, the people on the ground, who would be its heirs. Not those like me who no longer belonged here, who lost out in 1948 and were scattered all over the world, never to return. The gap in time of over fifty years in our collective history since then had made us different people, with new lives and new identities. (314)

Underscoring the enormity of this for her personally, Karmi continues by stating that her return to Palestine challenges 'the two fundamentals I had always lived by': a viable national cause and a unified struggle for return (316). Yet despite this, Karmi refuses to relinquish the significance that place has always had for her. She may emotionally be attached to a version of place that is now lost, but ethically and politically, Palestine as a present-day space remains crucial to her. In the epilogue, Karmi describes her father's death and how 'unutterably saddened' she feels that his long life was lived entirely 'in the shadow of strife and loss', never witnessing an end to the conflict (319). Again, she connects his life to the trajectory of Palestine, declaring that his having lived for more than a hundred years represents a 'holding out for some resolution to take place before he died' (319). Demonstrating her undiminished commitment to Palestine and its liberation, even if it must now be maintained at a distance, she closes *Return* with a resolution that her father's absence of closure, of not living to see the wrongs of 1948 reversed, will not be inherited by her, or her daughter (319). Her decision to underscore this at the end of her narrative is an important act of counternarration, asserting that even though she remains exiled, she will never relinquish the struggle for justice.

## Conclusion

In his article about the representation of exile and return in Palestinian literature, Sa'di claims that because of the dependence between the two terms, exile 'cannot be sustained for a considerable length of time independently of an attendant project of return, which underscores its temporality' ('Exile' 216-7). He continues by stating that exiles with merely 'an undefined dream of return' can only sustain this for so long before 'this dream fades and the relation to the homeland becomes sentimental and increasingly confined to scattered cultural manifestations and occasional solidarity activities' (217). In these cases, where the project of return is relinquished, exiles become immigrants or citizens, a claim that suggests these terms are somehow mutually exclusive. Sa'di's binary of exile and return is applicable to much of Karmi's writing. She continually oscillates between them, committed to the principle of return and occasionally hopeful that return might also be her destiny, too. But this is certainly not always the case, and as the endings of both memoirs reveal, Karmi knows that she has to reject return for herself. In a study of British-Palestinians, Dina Matar observes that they demonstrated 'a continuous movement between essentialising and more open positions' ('Diasporic' 133). A similar movement can be detected in Karmi's attempts to make sense of her complicated exilic identity. The process she narrates in both texts reveals a deconstruction of identity politics; she is constantly torn between driving for a fixed identity and realising that she cannot establish one. Her dream of return, and the subsequent failure of this dream, are part of the same process.

To follow Sa'di's argument is to view her inevitable rejection of return as a decision to move on from exile, 'to succumb to the demands and contingencies of the everyday' (217). But this is not at all how it comes across. Ultimately, return

does not function to underscore the temporality of exile, but instead to indicate the *permanence* of exile through the impossibility of achieving return. Exile has become an inescapable reality, made particularly clear in her description of it as ‘undefined by space or time’ (*Fatima* 451). The same, of course, is true of Said, who never entertains a project of return akin to what Sa’di discusses, but for whom exile remains ‘a condition of terminal loss’ (‘Reflections’ 173). Furthermore, Karmi’s relationship to Palestine does not become sentimental or confined to uncomplicated cultural activities, as Sa’di suggests it does for Palestinians who relinquish a specific intention to return. Nor is her solidarity work something that becomes sporadic, or merely an exercise of duty. This is not to suggest that Sa’di’s comments do not apply to other writers (indeed, his essay is mostly an eloquent analysis of texts that *do* prioritise the importance of return) but to caution against generalising statements on the nature of Palestinian exile. Karmi’s memoirs, with their many moments of tension, discord and incompatibility of perspectives, indicate on only a small scale how complex the experience is. She writes about exile and the Nakba that ‘so many years later, the feeling of loss had never gone, nor the longing for the home that had been there’ (*Return* 258). As Gilmore observes: ‘The power of trauma to outlast the duration of its infliction is crucial to the sense of wounding that makes the term so resonant’ (27). Citizenship and a stable existence in London do not, and clearly will not, fully heal this wound. The *ongoingness* of the Nakba for Karmi and her family is startlingly apparent, and refutes any suggestion that settler colonialism in this context can be spoken of in the past tense.

In the introduction to this chapter, I drew attention to Karmi’s narration in *Return* of meeting a Gazan woman who tells her story of 1948, a moment that

prompts Karmi to reassert how important the Nakba is to her, along with her desire for a *communal space* in which Palestinians can unravel the significance of the past. Yet what emerges from this encounter is a realisation that comes to dominate *Return*: the divide between Palestinians in exile and those under occupation. The woman's recollections are described as follows: 'Um Jaber did not look unhappy telling this story, and I doubted that it connected with her emotions any longer, the blind panic and terror she must have felt at the time. Whatever spontaneity there had once been in the telling of it had long gone and robbed that terrible experience of its power' (212). Karmi learns that Um Jaber's retelling of her Nakba experiences is a common occurrence; it is a duty amongst many others, readily undertaken, which for Karmi renders the narration somewhat flat. But it is clear that Um Jaber and her family have other concerns now, concerns that eclipse the willingness or ability to be part of a communal space dedicated to the past. Living under occupation is qualitatively such a different experience to living remotely in exile that the creation of such a space no longer feels possible – at least not under the present circumstances. As Karmi describes it during a different encounter in the Occupied Territories: 'Whatever had happened in the past made no difference to the immediacy and harshness of the occupation people now endured. To them, my memories of what had caused the initial problem were all very well, but in the scale of things, much less important' (144).

These encounters and Karmi's overall experiences of returning to Palestine sharpen this contrast between past and present, cementing her relinquishment of return as a personal solution for her conflicted identity. The conclusions to both memoirs balance the rejection of return with the ongoing significance of place, through the importance of maintaining a sense of communality with Palestinians.



*In Search of Fatima* ends with a strong sense of relief that a Palestinian way of life is still identifiable in Jerusalem; *Return* with a determination to see an end to the conflict. Structurally, this is very important: both works of life writing conclude with a (fragile) sense of hope – and, arguably, an ethical imperative to the reader to acknowledge that the colonisation of Karmi’s homeland continues.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Returning to Internal Exile: Rema Hammami's Negotiation of Inside and Outside**

The outside world is exile,  
exile is the world inside.  
And what are you between the two?

Mahmoud Darwish, 'Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading' (177)

Darwish's question reintroduces the binaries of inside/outside and internal/external explored in my introduction. As indicated, the ongoing contestation over the borders of Palestine/Israel (the key binary) blur the distinctions between all of these binaries. This chapter examines these distinctions by focusing on the work of Rema Hammami, an anthropologist and writer born outside Palestine but who returned for her schooling and then again as an adult, often experiencing what she articulates as a form of internal exile. Triggering this is her exposure to the Israeli occupation in her East Jerusalem neighbourhood, and her experiences at Israeli checkpoints. She also narrates her complicated relationship with the city of Jaffa, from where her Palestinian family originally came, but have long since been exiled. Trying to assess where Hammami situates herself 'between the two' – the inside and the outside world – and the ways in which she expresses her sense of exile, drawing attention to the related themes of return and resistance, is the focus of this chapter.

In her assessment of Palestinian life writing, Jayyusi writes: 'Palestinian personal account literature is conceived as an eyewitness account of contemporary Palestinian life, presented with the view, first, of grasping a sense of identity within the chaos of the communal tragedy, and, second, with the view of speaking out to the world' (67). This captures some of the key aspects of Hammami's life writing.

Firstly, it provides eyewitness testimony of life under occupation and the mechanisms that control and dispossess Palestinians, evoking Harlow's reference to human rights documentation as an updated form of resistance literature. Secondly, it concentrates on making sense of identity within a complicated communal context. Finally, Hammami's decision to write autobiographically about her experiences, to dedicate herself as an academic to researching the repercussions of Israeli occupation on Palestinian society and inevitably to publish that research, demonstrates a desire to speak about her own circumstances *and* the collective impact of Israeli colonisation, which clearly establishes her intentions to counternarrate. While collective narration is certainly not Hammami's only objective, her work is notably attentive to other lives and reveals a need to expose the suffering of those around her. In this respect, her life writing can be seen to correspond with Whitlock's assertion that: 'In testimonial narrative a narrator speaks publicly on behalf of the many who have suffered, and lays claim to truth and authenticity in accounts of social suffering' (*Postcolonial* 67).

Hammami describes her life as 'a typical diaspora story', and her catalogue of lost homes and upheavals is in many ways emblematic of the displacement attendant to much of Palestinian experience (Interview). Born in Saudi Arabia to a Palestinian father and an English mother, Hammami's early life was typically dictated by external events. Due to a lack of girls' schools in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s, Hammami and her sister were sent to board at Schmidt, a school run by German nuns in East Jerusalem, just opposite the Old City's Damascus Gate. Two years later, the June 1967 war occurred, during which Israel breached the 1949 Armistice Line and subsequently annexed East Jerusalem. The young Hammami sisters were trapped at the frontline, where their school was located, and initially

feared dead. The family relocated to England, after which Hammami lived in the US and Belgium, before returning to Jerusalem in the late 1980s just as the First Intifada, a major Palestinian rebellion against Israeli occupation, erupted. She is a longstanding associate professor of anthropology at the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University in the West Bank.<sup>60</sup>

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part, 'East Jerusalem', deals with Hammami's narration of life in Sheikh Jarrah, the neighbourhood she has lived in for many years. My focus is her anthologised essay, 'Home and Exile in East Jerusalem' (2013), which details the day-to-day reality of living under occupation, in a particularly volatile environment, and the attempts to cope with and ultimately change this reality. It is both explicitly autobiographical and a clear collective testimony of the degraded circumstances that many Palestinians find themselves in. The second part, 'Qalandiya Checkpoint', examines Hammami's work on checkpoints, focusing in particular on two journal articles published in *Jerusalem Quarterly*: 'Waiting for Godot at Qalandya: Reflections on Queues and Inequality' (2001) and 'Qalandiya: Jerusalem's Tora Bora and the Frontiers of Global Inequality' (2010).<sup>61</sup> This part concentrates on how she narrates the experience (both for herself and Palestinians more generally) of negotiating Qalandiya checkpoint, which Hammami is forced to cross every time she goes to the West Bank. These journeys are a fundamental aspect of her life (as for all Palestinians living under occupation) and contribute significantly to Hammami's sense of internal exile and her sensitivity to the occupation's underlying principles

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<sup>60</sup> These biographical details are taken from an interview I conducted with Hammami in East Jerusalem in 2013 (transcript and recording available).

<sup>61</sup> As it is an Arabic name, 'Qalandiya' can be transliterated differently and Hammami herself uses both 'Qalandiya' and 'Qalandya', as the titles of these journal articles indicate. I have chosen to use 'Qalandiya' when referring to it myself, because this spelling is more prevalent and because it is also what Hammami uses in her most recent work.

of discrimination and dispossession. In these three texts, the Israeli dominance over the territory, through its spatial, temporal and linguistic politics, is both severely critiqued and shown to be the driving force rendering Palestinians internally exiled. But what also comes through is that a key component of an internal exile's identity, as represented by Hammami's daily life moving between East Jerusalem and the West Bank, is a constant *resistance* to this very exiling. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, a defining feature of internal exile is a *disavowal* of it, in particular the compromised existence that Israel foists on Palestinians living under occupation. This resistance is an integral aspect of Hammami's counternarrative.

The final part, 'Jaffa', examines Hammami's relationship to the once-prosperous Palestinian coastal city and former hometown of Hammami's father and his ancestors, which is now subsumed into the municipality of Israel's Tel Aviv. My focus for this section is an article Hammami co-authored with Salim Tamari, who was born in Jaffa in 1945 and who, like Hammami's father, had to leave with his parents in 1948. This article, 'Virtual Returns to Jaffa' (1998), published in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, comprises their individual contributions to a wider project, initiated by Tamari, which compiled a series of 'memoirs/reflections' by a group of twelve Jaffa exiles living around the world (65). Hammami's reflections on Jaffa, which include a narration of returning to the lost family home, reveal the burden of family memories and the ongoing impact of the Nakba. Her fragile ties to Jaffa are narrated as complicated and inevitably steeped in family history, calling into question the meaning of return and also displaying a significantly different conception of exile to the one found in her writing on negotiating daily life between East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

This chapter division is primarily to ensure that the issue of form is prioritised. As discussed in Chapter One, Said reflects on this in *After the Last Sky*: 'Since the main features of our present existence are dispossession, dispersion, and yet also a kind of power incommensurate with our stateless exile, I believe that essentially unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary forms of expression should be used to represent us' (6). My decision to include a chapter based on short – and varied – pieces of life writing by one single author is based on a belief in the importance of not overlooking these forms of expression; indeed, this also underpins my decision to focus on anthologies in the next chapter. Being attentive to these short pieces (and not dismissing Hammami as a writer worthy of consideration because she has not published a book-length work of life writing) enables me to think more expansively about both life writing *and* exile. From a life writing perspective, the texts under consideration raise distinct questions about form. The articles in the second part of this chapter are primarily examples of academic research and thus very different to the highly personal essay examined in the first part – which should not, however, be read as 'strictly' personal. As discussed in my general introduction, distinctions between texts that can be read as life writing are not hard and fast, especially when it is apparent that an author has multiple objectives and their work could inevitably be categorised across multiple genres. The articles I examine in the second part are particularly interesting, I would argue, because there is *something other* than strictly academic research being put forward, which speaks to notions of collective identity, witnessing and testimony, and thus lends itself to being read through a life writing lens. It also prompts a formal consideration of autoethnography (understood as a

form of life writing).<sup>62</sup> A method of fieldwork that recognises the researcher's personal experience, autoethnography is a valuable hybrid term for describing texts, such as Hammami's, that balance the intellectual with the personal – without compromising methodological rigour, as Tony Adams, Stacy Holman Jones and Carolyn Ellis point out (2). The value they place on self-reflection, social justice and the researcher's relationship with others, fits with Hammami's anthropological work (1-2). The autobiographical features of her articles, I would argue, stem from her dual status (as is also the case when she narrates life in East Jerusalem) as both an observer and a victim of the practices she is critiquing; her fieldwork is also her daily life, with all the challenges it poses. One of the articles also contains striking photographs of Palestinians at Qalandiya, further contributing to the discussion of form. Formal questions are raised by the article I look at in the final part of the chapter, which is co-authored and structured as a back and forth between two Palestinians with personal ties to Jaffa (and a clear bond of friendship), who both narrate very personal memories of journeys to Jaffa, some taken together. Finally, my chapter structure also allows me to elucidate different forms of exile. As I show, Hammami's meditation on Jaffa draws forth a noticeably different articulation of exile from her narration of everyday life. Therefore, within the life writing of one person, which addresses both internal and external exile, as well as the question of return, we are faced with the multiplicity of exile.

This chapter focuses extensively on the Israeli control of space and time, which directly produces Hammami's sense of exile and underscores the territorial

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<sup>62</sup> In her study of autoethnography, Heewon Chang refers to the 'diverging evolution of this genre' and provides a helpful overview of the different forms of writing it intersects with (48). She is also particularly attentive to autobiographies and memoirs, comparing them to autoethnographies and studying their similarities and differences. Smith and Watson also provide helpful contextualisation within the framework of auto/biography studies, especially in terms of locating autoethnography by (post)colonial subjects within their commentary on agency (*Reading* 45, 107, 185-6).

dimension of the conflict. Echoing the language used by critics such as Piterberg and Wolfe to describe the settler-colonial identity of the Israeli state, Hammami observes that 'land – its physical control and sovereign identity – stands at the core of this conflict' ('Godot' 15). Echoing this, Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman, who both write instructively about Israeli occupation at the macro level and its evolving tactics, assert that Israel's maximisation of space constitutes 'the vernacular of occupation' (23). Peteet reiterates this spatial binary by noting that 'Palestinian space shrinks as Israeli space expands. In addition, Palestinian immobility is hitched to a nearly unhindered Israeli mode of mobility', emphasising the disparity between the different 'spaces' of Palestine/Israel, and also implying the uneven experience of time, with the mobility/immobility binary dictating the ease of travel for Israelis compared to Palestinians ('Cosmopolitanism' 87). Along with the control of space, the uneven experience of time is a central aspect of Hammami's life writing.

Hanafi goes further in developing a neologism that refers exclusively to the battle for space. The Israeli occupation, he claims, perpetrates 'spacio-cide', as opposed to direct genocide: 'In every conflict, belligerents define their enemy and shape their mode of action accordingly. In the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, the Israeli target is the *place*' ('Spacio-cide' 109, emphasis in original). The objective of taking land has as its (deliberate) corollary the eradication of a viable Palestinian state and the dispersal of its people. Hanafi's work accommodates this logic of direct and indirect action, stating that spacio-cide entails a 'deliberate exterminatory logic employed against space livability' ('Spacio-cide' 111). Hammami echoes this when she claims that 'the system of spatial control is not simply about controlling and containing resistance but is primarily *a mechanism of*



*disinheritance*' ('Qalandiya' 33, emphasis added). This, again, reiterates the analysis of Israel as a settler-colonial state, compromising the legitimacy of Palestinian space. Whether writing in personal terms or reflecting more broadly on Palestinian society, her work persistently addresses the growing challenges facing Palestinians under occupation and demonstrates that the experience of exile is not limited to those beyond the borders of Palestine/Israel.

## East Jerusalem

As I pulled into my street, I suddenly realized that a flying checkpoint had been thrown down just below my house. Before the soldier manning it even had a chance to open his mouth, my window was rolled down and I was screaming at him that this was *my home right here*.

Rema Hammami, 'Home and Exile in East Jerusalem' (131, emphasis in original)

As indicated in my previous chapter on Karmi's life writing, paying attention to Palestinian narratives of Jerusalem is a vital task.<sup>63</sup> Writing over twenty years ago, Said (who was also born in Jerusalem) laments Israel's plans for the city as 'an assault not only on geography, but also on culture, history, and religion', thus indicating the far-reaching consequences of the principle of erasure and exclusion ('Keynote' 7). Given the ongoing encroachment into Palestinian space and the denial of non-Jewish ties to the city, these are consequences that continue to be suffered. Keith Whitelam, referencing Serene Husseini Shahid's memoir, *Jerusalem Memories*, reflects on the suppression of Palestinian voices and laments that narratives about the city are sidelined:

[T]he stories of Serene Husseini Shahid, and the many more like hers, have been ignored all too often in favour of a much more exclusivist claim that Jerusalem is the sovereign capital of Israel that is deeply rooted in Western imagination and its view of the past and the immediate present. Their right of belonging and return is either denied or ignored by an unthinking acceptance of the exclusivist claim to and history of the city. Yet the counter-stories of Serene Husseini Shahid, and many Palestinians like her, illustrate that the real and imagined are ever subject to contest, particularly in the case of Jerusalem. (272-73)<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Other notable examples of Palestinian life writing on Jerusalem, other than Karmi and Shahid's, include: *The Bells of Memory: A Palestinian Boyhood in Jerusalem* by Issa Boullata, *Once Upon a Time in Jerusalem* by Sahar Hamouda, *The Storyteller of Jerusalem* by Wasif Jawhariyyeh, *Born in Jerusalem, Born Palestinian* by Jacob Nammar, *Once Upon a Country* by Sari Nusseibeh, and *Jerusalem and I* by Hala Sakakini.

<sup>64</sup> Whitelam includes a footnote at this point to indicate that the phrase 'the real and imagined are ever subject to contest' paraphrases Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht's *To Rule Jerusalem*.

As Whitelam indicates, Palestinian ‘counter-stories’ about Jerusalem contest the real and the imagined. These narratives seek to contest both the imagined version of Jerusalem that dominates (an exclusively Israeli city, premised on a selective reading of history), and the real situation that this imagined version generates; namely, a city that not only undervalues but actively seeks to disinherit its Palestinian inhabitants, while denying the right of return to those such as Karmi and Shahid who were forced to leave. Hammami’s essay, ‘Home and Exile in East Jerusalem’, is also a ‘counter-story’ to the false – yet powerful – narrative of exclusivism, dealing primarily with the present. The essay is part of an anthology of Palestinian writing, *Seeking Palestine: New Palestinian Writing on Exile and Home*, which I examine in more detail in Chapter Four.

Hammami is a long-time resident of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem, a predominantly Palestinian neighbourhood just outside the Old City that, since Israel’s unilateral annexation of the eastern side of the city following the June 1967 war, has had to contend with not just the rapid growth of encroaching Israeli settlements, but more recently the violent settler-takeovers of Palestinian family homes. As Hammami points out, these properties belong to refugee families who were resettled in Sheikh Jarrah by the United Nations after the Nakba (‘Home’ 133). In other words, the neighbourhood is witnessing the violent internal exiling of refugees who were displaced from elsewhere within the country after 1948. Hammami describes Sheikh Jarrah as ‘my most constant home’, and her essay concentrates on the fragility of home within the Palestinian context (111).

In ‘Home and Exile in East Jerusalem’, Hammami begins by describing her return to the city as a struggling graduate student, living with other students and solidarity workers. Initially, Jerusalem functions as a form of escape from her

studies, which take her into occupied Gaza, a far more volatile environment due to the intense violence of the First Intifada, Israel's punitive measures and the increased Islamisation of the area:

Recklessly, I had chosen Gaza as the place to do my fieldwork in anthropology, a year after it had exploded in the first uprising's fog of tear gas and black tire smoke. The only way I could make it through a week of Gaza's heavy mix of Intifada violence and social repression was by knowing that on my horizon were a few days in the little apartment on the Nablus Road where I could grab some oxygen, a few sips of Gold Star beer, and remember what it was like to have bare arms. Sheikh Jarrah was a haven, but a rather odd one. (111)

The oddness of life in Sheikh Jarrah, characterised by a lack of progress and the lost and lonely Palestinians that Hammami has for neighbours, becomes increasingly pronounced as the narrative unfolds. Her perception of the locality shifts from a strange sanctuary to a claustrophobic and constantly threatened space, with Sheikh Jarrah eventually exiled from both Gaza and the West Bank. She charts her experiences in the city, from the 1980s to the present day, focusing on the changes to her neighbourhood effected by overarching Israeli control.

Hammami narrates a steady succession of Israeli incursions, and consequent Palestinian attempts to resist them. This resistance entails learning to cope with 'the inexorable spread of our unwanted West Jerusalem neighbor-occupiers', as well as the sharply contrasting paralysis enforced on Palestinian East Jerusalem, a twin-system designed to enable Israeli growth and control (112). Evidence of this enforced standstill is part of Sheikh Jarrah's landscape, an eerie reminder of how progress has been deliberately stalled:

[T]he neighborhood was sleepy. Or, more exactly, it was in a paralysis that began when Israel stopped the clock in 1967. New buildings were totally absent. Looking around, you could make out an odd assortment of weathered concrete skeletons protruding from buildings: unfinished projects that had waited despondently for twenty years for an elusive Israeli building permit. (112-3)

Hammami's apartment is adjacent to 'the largest frozen project', a huge pile of rubble referred to by everyone in the neighbourhood as 'the cemetery' – so called because of the fatal heart attack its owner suffers following the protracted court battles that culminate in the denial of a permit to build a hotel (113). This directly demonstrates the impact of Israel's unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967; all progress is arrested, even if projects, such is the case with the hotel, are well underway.

This 'stopping of the clock' is made even clearer when Hammami describes her neighbours, presented as lonely imitations of the unfinished building projects, focused only on preserving 'the family shrine' of generations of photographs, souvenirs, icons and ornaments:

Most of the residents of the quarter were also surviving remnants of a more genteel past. My immediate neighbors were assorted versions of Palestinian Miss Havishams: spinsters and widows from Jerusalem's 'good' families who had been left behind when other family members passed away or moved on to more promising futures. [...] It struck me that as long as these old ladies rattled around these over-stuffed rooms wielding their feather dusters and frying garlic for today's lunch, family members at the far corners of the universe could live in the certainty that their ancestral city was still a breathing part of their being. (113)<sup>65</sup>

By describing this freezing of time, with both buildings and people paused in mid-development and tethered to a lost past, Hammami demonstrates the extent to which ordinary opportunities and freedoms are denied by Israel's control of civic life. Her implication that time only continues if one leaves East Jerusalem serves as a poignant reminder of how progress is needed in order to measure time and offer hope of a 'promising' future, as opposed to a perpetually insecure present. By observing how 'over-stuffed' the homes of her immediate neighbours are,

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<sup>65</sup> Hammami's reference to Miss Havisham as a means to describe Palestinian women struggling to cope with the trauma of the Nakba corresponds with Karmi's description of her mother as a 'Palestinian Miss Havisham' (see Chapter Two for a fuller discussion).

Hammami parallels Said's observation in *After the Last Sky* that Palestinian homes often display excess when it comes to décor, with too many pictures and objects littering too small a space. He observes: 'the oddness of these excesses, and asymmetries, their constitutively anti-aesthetic effect, their communicated insecurity seem to symbolize exile – exile from a place, from a past, from the actuality of a home' (61). These excesses and the overcompensation they betray illustrate that something important – living, breathing, free life – is missing. In the case of Hammami's neighbours, their obsessive care over the 'family shrine' also suggests exile – both the exiling of family members, but also the exiling *in situ* of the elderly women themselves, now so estranged from their loved ones – exiled, as Said describes, 'from a past, from the *actuality* of a home'. The reference to a 'shrine' – with its connotations of relic and memorialisation – further underscores this point.

The literary allusion to Miss Havisham, a traumatised woman defined (and destroyed) by her inability to escape the past, highlights the emotional impact of living in an unstable environment still defined by previous cataclysmic events. Despite not having to leave Palestine, the Palestinian Miss Havishams continue to be haunted by the past, most crucially because the initial loss of the homeland in 1948 and Israel's stopping of the clock in 1967 have not been undone or ameliorated. In this sense, they are as stuck as Karmi's parents; for all of them, there is a constant reversion to the point of rupture and the stable, pre-Nakba way of life that preceded it. Abu-Lughod and Sa'di refer to the catastrophic events of 1948 as 'the focal point for what might be called Palestinian time', a notion that is highly relevant in relation to the experiences of the elderly residents of Sheikh

Jarrah (5). For these Palestinians, their conception of time is controlled by what they feel irrevocably linked to – 1948.

Acknowledging the reality of internal exile, Boym observes that ‘the experience [of exile] is not unique to those who actually left their homeland; people who lived through major historical upheavals and transitions can easily relate to it’ (256). Hammami shows that the Miss Havishams of Sheikh Jarrah, who witnessed major upheavals without leaving what they considered to be their homeland, are examples of this. Boym continues: ‘Exile is both about suffering in banishment and springing into a new life. The leap is also a gap, often an unbridgeable one; it reveals an incommensurability of what is lost and what is found’ (256). This incommensurability – between the actualities of family life and the lonely guarding of ‘an overstocked souvenir shop’, between the homeland they have lost and the loneliness they have ‘found’ under occupation – is indeed unbridgeable (113). As with Karmi’s parents, there is a reminder of Gilmore’s emphasis of the repetitive nature of trauma; the fact that harm done in the past does not end. Given these exilic circumstances, an enduring sense of loss reigns throughout the neighbourhood, continually exacerbated by the occupation, which is a reminder of the Palestinian struggle for justice.

Despite this combination of enforced stasis and unresolved grievances, which runs throughout the text, Hammami deploys a clear chronological structure, with each section – other than the first and last – named after a year. This gives the text a diaristic quality, reminding us that Hammami is a direct observer of her surroundings. Adopting this form effectively elucidates the dynamics of the struggle, contrasting the sense of standstill within the Palestinian community with the unstoppable succession of events that *do* mark the passing of time; namely, the

myriad and intensifying threats to the neighbourhood. Consequently, we realise that any major change that takes place in Sheikh Jarrah is never a result of meaningful Palestinian action (more or less entirely prohibited) but due to Israeli action. Palestinian activity, if it is ever condoned, happens elsewhere in the Occupied Territories, which ultimately exacerbates Hammami's sense of living in exile. Therefore, once the First Intifada ends and the Oslo Accords are signed in the early 1990s, Hammami struggles to synthesise the enforced stasis of Palestinian life in Sheikh Jarrah with 'the dizzying changes that constituted "state-building" in Gaza and the West Bank, and the concomitant rise in Israeli settlement-building (120-1). The temporary checkpoint on her way into the city now seems permanent – a deliberate military policy that Weizman neatly describes in *Hollow Land* as 'permanent temporariness' (103). An abandoned Palestinian home becomes a base for Mossad agents, who deny entry to its elderly owner when he is finally able to visit Jerusalem after a long enforced absence. Hammami returns from holiday in 1996 to see an Israeli flag waving from the roof of a nearby house – the first settler takeover of a Palestinian family home. The following year, she assists a desperate neighbour when settlers attempt to take over his house. In 1999, another neighbour has a Molotov cocktail thrown into her house by settlers, setting fire to the property and almost killing its inhabitants. Israel's extension of Highway One (a development that grants direct access from Tel Aviv and West Jerusalem to Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank) transforms Nablus Road, on which Hammami still lives, making it one-way and thus curtailing its use as a straightforward (Palestinian) route into East Jerusalem from the West Bank. Such alterations to the landscape serve to remind Palestinians of Israel's control of movement, especially between Palestinian communities. They also make it



apparent to a reader less aware of Israeli tactics that their carving up of the landscape has less to do with security and everything to do with making life easier for Israelis and more challenging for Palestinians.

In *Language of War, Language of Peace*, Shehadeh reflects on the language used to describe Palestinians and how this has changed over time – ‘from “citizens” in Mandate Palestine to “infiltrators” and “absentees” under Israeli law and then to “meddlers” and “terrorists”’ (3-4). He observes that the language of war has now permeated everyday life, used to exacerbate differences and conceal injustices. ‘A new vocabulary of oppression keeps creeping in and we adopt it,’ he warns, ‘growing so accustomed to it that we stop noticing’ (52). He laments that he himself has ‘become used to the language of occupation and oppression that determines our small world...to the extent that I have stopped thinking about it’ (5). This entrenched criminalisation of Palestinians – ‘the turning of outcasts into outlaws’ as Caroline Rooney puts it – is also evident in Hammami’s work (‘Prison’ 134). Like Shehadeh, Hammami is cognisant of the way the language of oppression permeates her life. At one point, she acknowledges that in retrospect, the Israeli establishment of a Border Police station in Sheikh Jarrah was a warning of the huge changes to come. However, she admits that ‘[b]y then, I was so fully absorbed in the neighborhood’s ethic that I simply ignored it whenever I drove by’ (120). While she knows that despite appearances, this is not simply a local police station for maintaining law and order, but an outpost of Israeli control over Palestinian life, she initially chooses not to see it for what it represents, until she is forced to. Later on, she admonishes herself for not remaining more alert to the signposts of (unwelcome) change: ‘I should have known by now: in East Jerusalem a bad incident always comes with grand ambitions and a master plan’ (125).

There is, therefore, a perceptible rise in tension as Hammami's narrative progresses, which alerts the reader to a worrying trend. A Palestinian family house is designated 'enemy property', confiscated and converted into a base for Israeli security agents (118). The aforementioned restrictions placed on Nablus Road and the introduction of Highway One are a consequence of the 'peace process', demonstrating one of the many reasons why Palestinians have come to distrust such negotiations (120). She passes a nearby West Bank hilltop being flattened in the name of 'natural growth' - another settlement in the making (120). A Palestinian family who have been assigned West Bank identity cards are named 'absentees' in an attempt to seize their Jerusalem home, leading to a court case that only collapses when other family members come forward with US citizenship (125). A row of handicapped parking spaces mysteriously appears on Hammami's road - which, it transpires, is for the exclusive use of the (able-bodied) settlers residing in the first Palestinian house that was taken over, now expanded and with armed security guards manning the roof (128). One year, on 'Jerusalem Day' - a specifically Israeli national holiday marking the annexation of East Jerusalem following the Six-Day War - Hammami and her husband are woken up by settlers celebrating on her street with 'menacing chants' proclaiming their exclusive rights to the neighbourhood, all under army protection (129). While Shehadeh admonishes himself for having reached a point of no longer noticing the extent to which he has internalised the language of oppression, Hammami narrates a trajectory of becoming increasingly well versed in such language. She becomes conscious of every change in her neighbourhood and is able to see through the rhetoric, or the seemingly innocent signs used to justify these changes; for example, she immediately recognises the handicapped parking spots as 'downright

ominous' (128). Understanding these occupation tactics is narrated as essential; they also serve to further alienate Hammami from home.

The uncertainty of life in East Jerusalem, encapsulated by the manipulation of language and the disconnection between signifier and signified is understood by Hammami and her neighbours as a means to disrupt and disavow notions of the city as a multi-ethnic, multi-faith environment. Ariella Azoulay observes that Jerusalem 'has witnessed the loss of the clear metaphysical distinction between the original and its simulacra, between territory and map, between the "thing itself" and its representation' (175). As such: 'Israel administers the city to fit its desired map, and it draws the maps to fit its desired city' (175). The assertion of Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel is a further example of this rupture between the 'thing itself' and its dominant representation. This is made particularly clear by the grotesque dissonance in asserting the unification of a city alongside erecting ninety kilometres of concrete wall in and around it, separating nine Palestinian neighbourhoods from the city, many of whose residents carry Jerusalem identity cards (Amirav 120). The rhetoric of unity also ignores the importance of different names for particular spaces and the distinctness of these spaces; Azoulay aptly refers to Jerusalem as 'a heterogeneous ensemble of spaces, events, and meanings' (165). Similarly, Ian Lustick points out that 'Jerusalem' is a misleading catch-all Western/Christian term, implying a unified space that belies the reality of the area (298). Yet there is simply no room within Israel's primary vision of Jerusalem for an acknowledgement of the Palestinian spaces that make up East Jerusalem (nor, of course, to admit that West Jerusalem neighbourhoods such as Qatamon, where Karmi grew up, or Talbiya, where Said was born, were predominantly Palestinian until the Nakba). A natural consequence of this is a refusal to accommodate the

rights of Palestinian Jerusalemites (who nonetheless pay municipal taxes, receiving very little in return).<sup>66</sup> According to Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Nahla Abdo, ‘overcrowding, poverty, spatial strangulation, and depleted housing conditions provide stark examples of the particularly hard and complex living conditions of East Jerusalemites’ (30-1). They draw attention to the ‘state of limbo’ that East Jerusalemites live in and the ‘major dilemma around identity’ that this provokes (37). Such challenges are found in Hammami’s counternarrative of life in Sheikh Jarrah, which points to the personal and emotional cost of this strangulation.

The precariousness of life – what Shalhoub-Kevorkian refers to as ‘the terror of everydayness’ – is clearly communicated by Hammami (‘Trapped’ 25). A major factor is the steady exiling of Palestinian life out of the city. Firstly, ‘[t]he stream of friends visiting from Gaza dwindled to a small handful that had enough connections to get a permit’ (123). Secondly, West Bank Palestinians begin to face the same obstacles. National events are no longer held in Jerusalem and friends in the West Bank no longer find it easy to reach the city. Hammami notes that, as with many other Palestinian Jerusalemites who have witnessed the departure of friends and the forced transfer of cultural and political institutions out of Jerusalem and into the West Bank, ‘the main ingredients of my life were on the other side’ (130). While this other side is slowly rehabilitating the institutions that have been forced out of Jerusalem, Hammami’s side is shutting down – or, to borrow from Sari

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<sup>66</sup> The former mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, admitted in an interview with the Israeli newspaper, *Ma’ariv*, after he left office, that East Jerusalem’s Palestinians had been severely marginalised during his long time in office, becoming second and third class citizens: ‘For Jewish Jerusalem, I did something in the past 25 years. For East Jerusalem? Nothing. What did I do? Schools? Nothing. Sidewalks, nothing. Old age homes, nothing! Yes, we did install a sewage system and improve the water supply. You know what? Do you think that was for their benefit? For their welfare? Think again! There were a few cases of cholera there and the Jews were afraid it would reach them so a sewage system and water network were put in’ (qtd. in Amirav 115). As Amirav points out, generally only 5% of the municipal budget is allocated to East Jerusalem (117).

Makdisi, the city is deliberately being turned *inside out*. The negative impact this has on Hammami stresses to the reader the necessity of remaining connected to the West Bank and the elements of her own suffering city, whether cultural, political or personal, that have relocated there. Without this crucial link to the majority of Palestinian society, culture and business, essentials such as solidarity, morale and employment are seriously compromised, making her own exiling from Jerusalem that much harder to bear.

Remaining connected to the West Bank, however, becomes all but impossible during periods of intensified violence. With characteristic black humour she notes: ‘The Second Intifada was as if the relentless pace of the “peace process” had been harnessed to the four horses of the apocalypse’ (131). Journeys become insurmountable – where once there was only one checkpoint, there is now ‘a dense thicket of them’ and so daily life, in particular the drive to and from her place of work in the West Bank, becomes ‘a pitiless odyssey through the brutish maze they had made of the landscape’ (131). East Jerusalem, having been placed in ‘the off-limits bin’ during the ‘peace’ talks that led to the Oslo Accords, thus steadily begins to feel as if it is exiled from Palestine (121). Hammami’s narrative demonstrates that what is taking place is not just the disruption of her own physical experience of the territory, but also the fracturing of the body politic of a still-sought Palestinian state, with the part that she is living in violently disconnected from others. Under such circumstances, with Sheikh Jarrah becoming progressively more isolated, the emotional toll of trying to maintain links between East Jerusalem and the West Bank is sometimes unbearably high:

Against this annihilation of our familiar links between time, place and matter, like everyone else, I doggedly made the journey, believing I could defy the physics of despair. Until one day when, at the first checkpoint, I finally broke down. I couldn’t

do it anymore. I just couldn't go on. My hands slowly steered the car to the side of the road and I sat as if in shock, trying to comprehend what had just happened. *Khalas*, I would go home. No more fighting this hopeless battle. (131)

This moment of temporary collapse (the journeys of course continue) poignantly demonstrates the impact of a fractured, colonised environment on emotional wellbeing, as the various sites of daily life are carved up into disconnected localities. The violence and intensity of Hammami's language here – the fact that her familiar links have been *annihilated* and that she consequently experiences a breakdown – indicates how compromised her sense of belonging has become.

This disconnectedness is reminiscent of Hanafi's description of the 'torn networks' amongst the Palestinian diaspora, which lacks convenient and viable locations in which all parties can easily meet, thus breaking or compromising relationships between families, friends and communities ('Rethinking' 174). Similarly, Hammami's relationships are often torn and the networks she relies on suddenly inaccessible, depending on the current political climate. Thus, the weak centre of gravity that Hanafi identifies in the diaspora can in fact be found in many of Hammami's descriptions of life in East Jerusalem. This once again problematises the distinction between internal and external, given that similar experiences of dislocation from loved ones and community are identifiable both 'inside' and 'outside' of Palestine. Under these extreme conditions, the meaning of home alters immeasurably. It becomes an insecure space, isolated from the wider context (a safe neighbourhood and a support network) that would guarantee its safety and the sense of it being a true refuge:

But what was there at home? It had become the cave where I hid from the horrible world outside. And it was lonely. My friends, once close by, had at some imperceptible point begun to inhabit another country just a few miles down this

miserable road. Jerusalem and my home had been made strangers to them. I had been fighting the fact of their exile, and of my own. (131)

By comparing her own home to a lonely place of hiding and describing her friends as now living in 'another country' – geographically close but agonisingly inaccessible – Hammami underlines the instability inherent to her conception of home and even of what Palestine is. Again, the insides and outsides of life are exploited; home is as manipulated as the roads that Hammami must attempt to travel along in order to reach the 'other country'. During times like these, Hammami's experience becomes a complex combination of internal and external exile, as she struggles to make sense of where she belongs and what home means. This demonstrates the extent to which the occupation (literally *and* symbolically) enters through the front door, influencing the meaning of what should be a private space, but which often becomes imbued with a sense of threat and loneliness. This trespassing furthers Hammami's sense of exile – her sense that both her friends are exiled from her and she from them. This severing of familiar links and the impossibility of maintaining regular friendships reiterates the extreme state of limbo and crisis that Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Abdo emphasise, as Hammami is caught between her alienation from Palestinian civic life in the West Bank and an awareness that she and her fellow Palestinians are being forced out of Jerusalem. Either eventuality – staying or leaving – produces a form of exile.

This awareness means that paradoxically, a defining feature of Hammami's internal exile in East Jerusalem is a *disavowal* of exile – a *resistance* to the conditions of life imposed upon her by the occupation. There is, therefore, a sense of contest underpinning her articulation of internal exile. Acknowledging and paying attention to this resistance is crucial to understanding Hammami's exilic identity and recognising how Palestinians collectively react to the occupation. This

is particularly important within the context of such a fiercely contested space as Jerusalem. Embedded deep within the psyche of the Palestinian community of Sheikh Jarrah is an instinctive pushing back on all attempts to exile any of them from the city. We are made aware of this at the very outset of Hammami's essay: its title, 'Home and Exile in East Jerusalem', is itself emblematic of this battle to stay in the city and maintain a sense of home against all odds. Hammami's anthropological work pays attention – and contributes – to the comprehensive theories about spatial and temporal control that Hanafi, Weizman and others have developed. What makes Hammami's work particularly salient, though, is its attentiveness to what oppression engenders – namely the creativity of Palestinians in response to their situation. She narrates a personal, located experience of *resisting* spacio-cide, demonstrating in detail the effect that such discriminatory and evolving practices have on individual lives and how people cope. Her work personally attests to the experience of being the target, providing a counternarrative of what it means to be on the receiving end of what Weizman identifies as the *architecture of occupation* and what Jeff Halper refers to as Israel's comprehensive 'matrix of control' (64). Thus, I would argue that it is precisely the life-writing qualities of her work – whether her essay on East Jerusalem or her work on checkpoints – that give her analysis its power.

Interestingly, Hammami criticises some analysts of the conflict, including Weizman, for what she perceives as a failure to properly acknowledge Palestinian agency ('Qalandiya' 37-8). After all, much of Israel's control is a response to Palestinian resistance; to elide this symbiosis is to overlook the dynamics of internal exile as experienced by someone like Hammami, caught between a sense of belonging and a sense of dislocation. A broadly positive *Journal of Palestine*



*Studies* review of Segal and Weizman's *A Civilian Occupation* highlights precisely this issue, noting that the work's clear qualities notwithstanding, 'the lack of a Palestinian perspective makes it easy to forget that Palestinians themselves have attempted to build and control the space of the country' and that '[t]hey were far from passive objects of Zionist/Israeli planning, and variously have resisted, emulated and occasionally overcome the much more powerful institutions of Zionist/Israeli architecture' (LeVine 125). Writing specifically about Palestinians in Jerusalem, Hillel Cohen observes: '[T]heir struggle to survive in the city and live in it has become part of the Palestinian struggle to preserve the city's Arab nature. The struggle to build another home is a struggle for space. The battle for a blue Israeli identity card is a battle for the right to remain in the city' (133).

Hammami narrates resistance as an individual and collective need to protect Palestinian space (whether personal or communal) and to withstand the incursions into it. It is essential to note that a sense of collective identity is an integral aspect of Hammami's counternarrative. Whether intervening on behalf of a very young girl arrested for throwing stones during a protest, or assisting a neighbour whose house has been attacked by settlers, or comforting an exiled returnee who has been refused entry to his former family home, Hammami contributes to what she terms 'the quarter's healing kindness' (116). Her community is depicted as a group of real people, who Hammami clearly cares about. Even the Miss Havishams are individually named and their difficult lives and backgrounds explained; Hammami does not present them as mere oddities, cleverly encased in a literary allusion. Towards the end of her essay, when she reveals that they are beginning to pass away, she admits: 'Each time one of them died the quarter seemed to lose a little more of its memory' (126). Hammami thus

realises that ‘they had been the keepers not just of their own homes, but of the entire quarter’ (127). In this respect, she demonstrates that their compulsion to hoard and over-decorate, while still a futile attempt to make up for what the present lacks (namely real Palestinian family life), nonetheless performs a crucial and urgent political function. Notwithstanding the obvious similarities, it is this that distinguishes it from Said’s assessment of what he sees as a quintessential Palestinian impulse to hoard, one that he himself partakes in. Hammami explains that when these women die, their homes would be ‘stripped, renovated and rented out as offices to anonymous foreign agencies and NGOs that came to promote the amnesia of “peace”’ (126). Therefore, while the shrines that these elderly women keep are never compensation enough for the actualities of home life, nonetheless they perform an important memory act *in the present*, especially within the hostile context of Jerusalem, where Palestinian memory is constantly refuted and erased. By showing that these shrines are replaced with anonymous NGOs that articulate an empty message of peace, Hammami illustrates that what matters most, fundamentally, is a Palestinian presence in Sheikh Jarrah and that her community are very much struggling alone to achieve this.

Hammami brings Sheikh Jarrah’s predicament to life, giving its struggle depth and personality.<sup>67</sup> Whether the Miss Havishams, or the local shopkeeper, Abu Ramon, or her neighbour Adel, Hammami – with a novelist’s eye – narrates

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<sup>67</sup> Hammami’s concern for – and narration of – her neighbourhood and the lives of fellow Palestinians evokes another autobiographical work, *Sharon and my Mother-in-Law* (2005), by Suad Amiry, which also documents community life and the support networks generated under occupation, in her case in Ramallah. Both writers emphasise the importance of communality on a profound level, which serves as a reminder of the decentred and relational identities often found in postcolonial life writing. Just as Hammami and her neighbours assist each other, so too do Amiry and hers, whether by sharing goods and resources, especially throughout the curfews imposed during the Second Intifada, or providing emotional support. Incidentally, Amiry and Hammami are close friends. *Sharon and my Mother-in-Law* (which is dedicated to Hammami and Amiry’s husband, Salim Tamari, who is the co-author of ‘Virtual Returns to Jaffa’) began as a series of emails Amiry sent to a supportive network of female friends, including Hammami, during the Israeli invasion of Ramallah in late 2001.

their trials and despondencies, as well as their oddities and affectations. Her own struggles and the psychic toll of living so precariously are also made evident. This calls to mind Shehadeh's assertion of the power of literary writing, which distinguishes itself from human rights reports (of which there are many about East Jerusalem's Palestinians). It is this power that renders Hammami's narrative effective (and *affective*) as testimony. As in her anthropological work on checkpoints, she narrates a dual role as witness to the occupation and victim of its tactics. Her commitment to the collective is underscored by the essay's epilogue, which outlines the current status of the people she knows and whose lives she has detailed, almost all of whom remain under the threat of eviction by the Jerusalem municipality, if they have not already been evicted from their homes. It is both a sobering reminder of the difficulties of life in East Jerusalem, and a call to recognise the ongoing injustice.

## Qalandiya Checkpoint

*Intimacy*: one land, two people, four hands. The only intimate exchange left between Palestinians and Israelis takes place across the smooth surface of a concrete block. One set of hands is assertive and expansive; it demands and takes. The other set is reticent and self-controlled; it waits and offers up what is demanded. The pattern never changes, only what is being demanded and offered; an I.D. card, an open briefcase, a voluptuous black plastic bag, a backpack, your portly belly. The roles are fixed; you are either a wait-er/present-er or a demand-er/taker. And the script that you repeat endlessly everyday is as monotonous; wait-demand-present-take-wait-demand-present-take...There are no other roles and no other scripts between the four hands on the one land of the smooth surface of the concrete block.

Rema Hammami, 'Lifta' (Hammami and Halawani 101)

As already noted, alongside the discriminatory binary of maximising Israeli space and minimising Palestinian space is the equally inequitable binary of Israeli mobility and Palestinian immobility. The vast apparatus created to impede and regulate movement is part of the practice of spacio-cide and its accompanying principle of disinheritance. As someone who commutes regularly between East Jerusalem and the West Bank, Hammami is all too familiar with Israeli strategies for controlling Palestinian movement. In their introduction to a special issue on global checkpoints in the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, David Fieni and Karim Mattar state that 'wall-building, as in Israel's so-called "separation fence", suggests an ongoing project of neocolonial expansion with the barbarism of "others" – their lack of political accountability, their primitive culture, their insurgency/terrorism, etc. – used as justification' (1). While underscoring the settler-colonial dimensions of the conflict, they acknowledge 'the contemporary passion for wall-building and omnipresent monitoring', which of course goes well beyond the context of Palestine/Israel (1). The 'global checkpoint' is also a site of clear contest: 'as manifest in the increasingly visible practices of violent transgression, demonstration and cultural activism there, checkpoints are also where resistance

to such power is enacted' (2). As with the case of Sheikh Jarrah, Hammami's narration of the checkpoint experience strongly emphasises resistance. This section examines two of Hammami's articles on Qalandiya checkpoint and the journeys it impedes, in order to explore how the 'fixed role' that a Palestinian plays as a 'wait-er/present-er' at checkpoints provokes an articulation of internal exile.<sup>68</sup>

Checkpoints, along with the separation wall, remain the most visually explicit examples of the occupation. They also challenge the notion of inside/outside, operating as international border crossings (albeit with far greater brutality) and yet more often than not, situated *within* Palestinian territory. Helga Tawil-Souri emphasises the significance that checkpoints now hold for Palestinians, both in practical terms (how best to negotiate them) and symbolic (an explicit reminder of Israeli power). In their control of movement and breaking up of territory, checkpoints function 'as contemporary legacies of the Nakba', a description that further emphasises their power, placing them within the sobering context of past incursions into Palestinian space and the long history of exiling ('Non-Place' 45). Mindful of this context, Tawil-Souri avers that '[c]heckpoints, which litter the Palestinian landscape, speak to a central Palestinian predicament of a disordered experience of geography and space-time', an experience which is certainly identifiable in Hammami's accounts of Qalandiya, situated on the main route between East Jerusalem and the West Bank ('Non-Place' 27). Problematizing the division between inside/outside, Hammami describes it as a crossing 'between the arbitrary line Israel has drawn there, between two parts of what it considers "Greater Jerusalem"' ('Godot' 9). Now a highly-developed apparatus of

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<sup>68</sup> Hammami has written two more recent articles on checkpoints, which I am not examining in detail here. However, it is worth noting that both of these articles similarly balance personal anecdotes, a sense of collective identity, and theorisation of the checkpoint as a space of inequality and a representation of ongoing dispossession. See 'On (not) Suffering at the Checkpoint' (2015) and 'Precarious Politics' (2016).

watchtowers, turnstiles, x-ray machines, biometric scanners and loudspeakers, crossing Qalandiya is a deliberately drawn-out process, defined above all by uncertainty and insensitivity, expressed through the disregard for Palestinian time. As B'Tselem points out, given that most of the people who cross the checkpoint are doing so in order to reach work, school or medical treatment, the regular delays at Qalandiya have serious consequences ('Qalandia').

The sense of standstill and futility that this so often generates is perfectly illustrated by the title of one of Hammami's articles: 'Waiting for Godot at Qalandya: Reflections on Queues and Inequality'. This reference to Beckett evocatively frames Hammami's analysis, hinting at the disturbing normalisation of what in most contexts would seem like an absurd and clever metaphor.<sup>69</sup> Hammami's article begins with an explanation of her personal experiences of checkpoints, which situates her not merely as a researcher on the phenomenon of policing movement, but as someone directly affected by it:

My almost daily commute is between home in East Jerusalem and work at Birzeit University, outside the West Bank town of Ramallah. I am among those Palestinians who hold the right papers allowing one to cross the checkpoints that randomly dot the main arteries from the West Bank into Jerusalem. (8)

This act of self-narration is rendered particularly significant because it opens the article; Hammami immediately makes it evident that she is not looking at a macro structure of control from any kind of distance, but is primarily examining a disturbing aspect of her own experience that also impacts many of her fellow Palestinians. Highlighting the instability of language within the context of

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<sup>69</sup> This sense of the absurd is not unusual in Palestinian writing, given that such writing is often reactive to a complex and often existentially troubling political reality. In *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*, Darwish also makes a striking reference to Beckett's *Godot* as a way to explain the Palestinian predicament: 'And when the critics started to argue about the absurdist identity of *Godot*, you did not understand what the fuss was all about. You were smarter than all the critics and even Beckett himself, for he who has waited twenty years knows *Godot*' (99).

Palestine/Israel, as explored earlier, Hammami continues by explaining that the rhetoric used to justify the checkpoints is to prevent 'Palestinian terrorists' from entering Israel, which again draws attention to the criminalisation of Palestinians en masse (9). She then notes that 'Qalandya' once signified a small village (now rarely referred to), before coming to denote the large refugee camp near to the village, and finally taking on yet another meaning: 'Qalandya, to those who have to go through it, now represents their own personal nightmare of Israeli vengeance' (9). This escalation of terminology (village, to refugee camp, to militarised checkpoint) signals the direction the conflict is moving in: the steady dismantling of Palestinian space.

Hammami then illustrates the extent to which her own experience guides the theoretical work she is undertaking: 'While waiting in the long line of Palestinian cars at Qalandya checkpoint, I began to think about the idea of queuing as a mechanism for inequality' (9). Such a statement demonstrates that the two – her experience and her academic research – are not in any sense mutually exclusive. Her experience drives her research and in turn, the research helps her make sense of her own experience – as well as that of many others. It is also, she makes clear in another article, a coping mechanism – a means of survival. Explaining the early (and formative) impact of her commute between East Jerusalem and Birzeit University, she writes: 'After a year of this grinding decathlon, on the verge of breaking down I found the way to cope was by objectifying my subjugation—turning my checkpoint-ridden commute into an ethnographic project; an anthropologist's "weapon of the weak"' ('Suffering' 15n). It is in this respect that I am persuaded to view Hammami's work on checkpoints as, in part, a form of collective life writing (as testimony): this, she shows her

reader, is how *we* have to live. There are even echoes of Said's sublimation of exile: similarly, Hammami transmutes her negative experiences into a productive commentary on that very experience. In reading Hammami's articles in this way, I am mindful of Gilmore's reference to 'the *productivity* of the limit' in relation to autobiography (14, emphasis added). Working at this limit, Gilmore argues, reveals the point at which autobiography blurs with other forms of writing (potentially exposing the formal constraints of autobiography). Gilmore examines texts that are more strictly autobiographical, which she reads as blending into fiction and other forms at their 'limit'. The case here is one of examining theoretical work that at *its limit*, I would argue, includes autobiographical interventions. This limit can also be read as evidence of *autoethnography* – the intersection of self-narration with ethnographic work, such as Hammami undertakes at Qalandiya. Furthermore, I would argue that these articles speak to Fakundiny's description of the autobiographical essay as 'a movement between the narratively self-centred imperatives of the former and the worldly discursiveness of the latter' (80). Hammami's articles do indeed move between autobiographical articulations and a much broader gaze that assesses Palestinian experience through the anthropological lens that Hammami is trained to use.

One of the first *limits* of theory encountered in Hammami's article is her disclosure that she has been asked to write a response to a paper published in the Israeli journal, *Hagar*, by the American political theorist Charles Tilly. Her indication that standing in line at Qalandiya prompts the beginning of her own theorisation is linked to her consideration of Tilly's work. Hammami explains that Tilly uses the idea of queuing as a metaphor for how inequality manifests itself. While she broadly agrees with his analysis, she chooses – unsurprisingly – to look



beyond the queue-as-metaphor and instead to focus on 'the experience of being in an *actual* queue' (10, emphasis added). She begins to dispute certain aspects of Tilly's theorisation as she compares them with the Palestinian experience of negotiating checkpoints and the interminable queues they are kept in. Her own intimate knowledge of the checkpoint *over time* allows her to recognise which aspects of his theory apply and which do not, cautioning against a broad application of theory to a specific context. The fact that her analysis is predicated on a long-term view of escalating Israeli control further reveals that it would not have been possible to merely survey the checkpoint at a particular moment in time before drafting an assessment of it. As Hammami notes, observing their development 'through time' helps understand how they function as 'reproducers of inequality' (11). This situates the article at the limit of theory, I would argue, because her response to Tilly's more abstract, macro-analysis of queuing is specifically derived from *sustained* personal experience.

Central to 'Waiting for Godot at Qalandya' is a concentration on the experience of time, which also reveals a formal limit:

For those operating the checkpoints (and those giving them orders), time is not coeval. Palestinian time is 'cheap' and infinite, while Israeli time is a valuable, finite resource. [...] The notion that Palestinians might have useful and productive things to do is inconceivable, given the nature of the relationship. We can only have value in relation to necessary or useful things we provide for those whose time is counted. Our value to ourselves, the tasks we perform, and the things we produce for our families and our own communities are beyond the soldiers' conception. (14)

Hammami's language indicates the extent to which Palestinians are treated as if they are valueless; neither their own self-worth, nor the work they do, nor the relationships they forge with their own communities are recognised. The use of the first person plural subtly – yet perceptibly – asserts Hammami as part of this

collective experience of discrimination; it is also *her* value that is denied, her time that is 'cheapened'. While not wanting to labour the point, it is still worth observing that this use of the first person plural is obviously deliberate. Given that in general the article refers to 'Palestinians' when assessing checkpoints, these moments when Hammami chooses to switch to the first person, whether 'I' or 'we', indicates a need to affirm – to *testify* – that there is an intimacy for her in what she is analysing. This calls to mind Stuart Hall's assertion, quoted in my introduction, that *the heart has its reasons*. Albeit from a much closer position (and with less prevarication), this can also be compared to Said's switching of pronouns in *After the Last Sky* and his own commitment to narrating Palestinian lives.

In an article about Palestinian women's life-writing, Moore-Gilbert makes the pertinent point that while the theft of Palestinian land and the displacement of its inhabitants will continue to dominate debate and analysis, it is important to also recognise 'that the theft of Palestinian time (and, indeed, history) is an equally deleterious consequence of the experience of colonial dispossession' ('Time' 199). Azoulay also reflects on the temporal (as well as spatial) features of the conflict as they relate to Jerusalem. This leads her to criticise Foucault's term heterotopia, which she claims incorrectly conceives of space because it requires emptying it of time through the strict division of the two concepts, making time a singular, diachronic experience (170). Hammami's descriptions of Palestinian time (both at the checkpoint but also in her own neighbourhood, where progress is arrested) are indicative of the theft that Moore-Gilbert mentions, as well as Azoulay's emphasis of the plurality of time. Waiting contributes profoundly to a sense of being internally exiled; it is not merely the territory that is being controlled but also *how* and *when* one moves across it. Crossing Qalandiya (as well the many other

checkpoints) extinguishes any feeling of progress, reproducing Hammami's depiction of the paralysed Palestinian community of Sheikh Jarrah. Thus Hammami reveals how the occupation works to manipulate Palestinian space *and* time, slicing through both.

A final example of a formal limit in 'Waiting for Godot at Qalandya' also concerns the distinction between Palestinian and Israeli time. Hammami writes:

Twice, in fits of pathetic anger, I told soldiers at checkpoints outside Birzeit to think about why they are there; I got the exact same immediate, defensive response: This is my job, I have to do it. In these cases, I assume I found those fighting their conscience. It would be impossible for them to retort that their sole function in being there is to make Palestinians' lives untenable by making our everyday movement impossible. Instead, by locating themselves in their necessary and useful 'jobs,' they simultaneously locate themselves outside of our time – thus enabling the process of objectifying us into so many units of matter that they cause to move or stop at will. (15)

This *autobiographical insertion* into her more overarching analysis of how checkpoints express the coloniser–colonised relationship is revealing for a number of reasons. Her admission that she has shown 'pathetic anger' discloses the psychic impact of her 'almost daily commute' and underscores the fact that no matter how well versed she is in the mechanisms of control and their dangers – in fact probably *because of* this – she is impelled to show her feelings. Her status as a human being is made evident. Within a generalised study of Israeli checkpoints this is a notable intervention – it reminds the reader that her experience of waiting in line at Qalandiya is not merely mildly frustrating, or a chance for her to develop theories. Instead, the experience is a stark reminder of inequality and her presumed insignificance. It is the same reminder that Hammami is repeatedly served in Sheikh Jarrah, where her presence, and that of her neighbours, is asserted as unwelcome. She also addresses the 'fixed roles' taken on at the

checkpoint and the strange intimacy of this exchange – as the epigraph to this section refers to – and suggests the tension this produces. On her part, or those of other Palestinians, there is the anger, potentially dangerous to express. On the part of the Israeli soldiers, there is the compartmentalisation required to objectify Palestinians, as Hammami interprets it. There is something of a reminder, in Hammami’s reference to ‘those fighting their conscience’, of S. Yizhar’s narrator in the 1949 novella, *Khirbet Khizeh*, and his attempts to quell the disquiet he feels over the process of ethnic cleansing in which he, as a soldier, is taking part in order to establish the Israeli state. To return to Piterberg and Wolfe and their assertions that an analysis of settler colonialism must focus on the *outcomes* rather than the processes of such endeavours, Hammami’s observation about these encounters at the checkpoint demonstrate that this conscience cannot truly mean anything if the outcome is nonetheless the continuation of ‘the process of objectifying us into so many units of matter’.

A sense of interminable waiting similarly characterises the opening of ‘Qalandiya: Jerusalem’s Tora Bora and the Frontiers of Global Inequality’, which provides an account of Qalandiya at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, it also begins with an autobiographical intervention, firmly situating the author as someone who experiences what she theorises:

Heat, wind, dust, garbage. Cars stuck in line, jammed bumper to bumper – probably a two-hour wait. I squeeze through the few inches between an articulated lorry and the next car. On the other side is a porter shifting two television sets tied to his cart weaving in between the oncoming traffic. *Ramallah, Ramallah, Ramallah*, the calls of a van organizer. I shake my head – and point toward the checkpoint. Up through the first set of blocks, the wind blows up white dust from the quarry, the peddlers clutch their sun umbrellas. I pick up my pace, it’s rush hour. Through the second row of blocks and I can see the crowd up ahead, spilling out from under the zinc roof and concrete pens of the crossing. I reach

them and ask an old man, how long he's been waiting: 'From the time I was born'.  
(29)

As effectively as fiction, Hammami pulls her reader straight into the day's heat and strong wind, its rush hour and noise. She then stalls this energy and restlessness with her short interaction with the elderly man, whose response to her question introduces the broader quandary of statelessness in which Palestinians continue to find themselves and the extent to which waiting is intrinsic to Palestinian experience – both in terms of daily life and long-term aspirations. This, in particular, undoes the metaphor of Godot. Furthermore, this opening paragraph is a good example of Shehadeh's assertion of the unique work that literary writing does; statistics and reports on Qalandiya do not provide a sense of what it actually *feels* like, as Hammami does here. I would argue that by prefacing her theoretical assessment of Qalandiya in this way, she gives it greater meaning. The sights, sounds and textures of the checkpoint are vivid, allowing the reader to better grasp the experience. The elderly man's response is an important reminder of the *long history* underpinning such mechanisms of inequality.

As with her essay on East Jerusalem, 'Qalandiya' delineates the Palestinian response to structures that seek to control and ultimately exclude them, which alludes to another formal limit through its attentiveness to narrating a collective response to their predicament. She demonstrates that a major aspect of Palestinian resistance is the struggle to achieve freedom of movement. This has required a redefinition of the popular concept of *sumud* – steadfastness – which connotes the strategies of survival adopted in order to survive the occupation and the ongoing attempts to displace Palestinians. Hammami observes that '[i]n the 1970s, *sumud* meant refusing to leave the land despite the hardships of occupation; now, it connotes something more proactive' ('Thugs'). Resistance, therefore, is not just

about standing firm but about striving for normality by remaining mobile on the territory. As Hammami notes in her article, 'movement, itself, has become central in the struggle between Palestinian survival and Israeli domination' ('Qalandiya' 34). We might infer from Hammami's remarks that this redefinition of *sumud* aims to better connect movement through space with movement through time; in other words, to counter the standstill enforced by Qalandiya (as well as to counter the paralysis enforced upon Sheikh Jarrah) by continuing to make journeys that refuse to accept the cheapening of Palestinian time. Her work on Qalandiya, I would argue, represents a counternarrative of mobility, demonstrating a defiance against the seizure and control of Palestinian space. The fact that she has continued to work on this topic, charting the sinister development of Qalandiya into the securitised superstructure it now is, reveals its centrality to her thinking on the occupation, both her own experience of it and that of other Palestinians.

This redefining of *sumud* demonstrates the dynamic quality to Palestinian resistance. What is particularly interesting about Hammami's article from a life writing perspective is her focus on what she describes as the 'everyday tactics of survival, which in and of themselves create infinite tension points and resistances to the smooth functioning of systems and technologies of domination' ('Qalandiya' 38). These tactics mean that there can be positive experiences under dire circumstances – or at least the temporary alleviation of pressure. In particular, she praises the informal workforce in and around Qalandiya, especially the peddlers, who reclaim the space by imbuing it with humanity and sociability. They are not able to eradicate the checkpoint but they do transform it from 'a space of pure brutality and oppression to one in which their own dispossession could be redressed' ('Qalandiya' 46-7). By striving to provide services and resist being

exiled from the site, they help to create 'an atmosphere of normality' under extremely abnormal conditions ('Qalandiya' 45). Again attentive to small details that situate her as a regular inhabitant of the space, Hammami describes how amidst the barbed wire, concrete and guns there is the smell of coffee, perfume stands, lingerie blowing in the wind, and piles of green almonds and strawberries ('Qalandiya' 45-6). Another anecdote reveals a perceptible reduction of tension, as well as a touch of humour: 'At one point waiting in the hellish pedestrian line to cross – it struck me that almost everyone was chomping on roasted peanuts as if they were at the cinema – the whole area where the soldiers stood was enveloped by the smell of three nut roasters steaming away at the entrance' (45). She observes that whenever she interviews Palestinians on what makes them laugh at Qalandiya, it is almost always 'the craziness of the peddlers', looking for an opportunity (46). Their ingenuity is celebrated and Hammami humorously refers to the name of 'Qalandiya Duty Free' that the growth of informal trade inspires (41).

However, she is quick to remind her reader that this all very much functions within a context of survival – a 'quest for dignity in the face of the destruction of their regular livelihoods' (46). While she draws attention to the camaraderie, support and communality that the checkpoint engenders, she is also very clear about the fact that when it comes to the actual experience of crossing Qalandiya, there can be no collective survival strategies: 'commuters when facing the checkpoint ultimately face it in a situation of extreme powerlessness, as individuals without the possibility of a collective strategy' (47). As in 'Waiting for Godot at Qalandya', she makes it clear that the checkpoint is an evolving structure, placing an ever-tightening stranglehold on Palestinian lives. Her article finishes

with a postscript that details the development of Qalandiya into a much larger – and more heavily securitised – ‘Terminal crossing’ (49). This compromises much of the informal infrastructure that Palestinians created around the checkpoint, with the peddlers, for example, now unable to get as close to the mass of people queuing (50). Despite these ongoing setbacks and the impossibility of a collective strategy for dealing with the soldiers, Hammami underscores the importance of what she terms ‘individual psychological strategies’, as well as ‘micro-strategies of agency’ (47, 48). These strategies, she claims, vary according to gender, status, age and character. She explains these different strategies; how men differ from women (the latter usually more patient and tactical given their experiences of learning to cope with living in a patriarchal society); how some are more assertive than others; how some verbally interact with the soldiers and others do not. These snapshots of Palestinian survival strategies are an integral feature of what we can read as Hammami’s eyewitness testimony of Qalandiya. The varied behaviours narrated impel a consideration of what one’s own response might be, in effect identifying with those for whom this is daily life. While these ‘micro-strategies’ have to be individually decided and acted upon, they nonetheless contribute to Palestinian resistance:

There is a collective understanding that the checkpoints are there to stop life, to destroy livelihoods and education and ultimately defeat the will of a nation. Thus, simply continuing to cross them becomes encoded not as an individual experience of victimization but as part of a collective act of defiance and ultimately national resistance. (48)

This is a mirror of what also takes place in Sheikh Jarrah: individual actions driven by the imperative of national survival. Each act of resistance is not merely about fighting individual exile but also about fighting the collective exiling of Palestine as a polity; as a longed-for space of freedom; as a future nation, yet to be defined.



Finally, it is worth remarking on the article's inclusion of black and white photographs of Qalandiya, taken by Rula Halawani, who also provides strikingly haunting images of the depopulated village of Lifta, which Hammami then responds to, in their co-authored article, 'Lifta: The Cipher of the Landscape – A Photographic Essay'. The images of Qalandiya (seven in total) are mostly of Palestinians. In fact, there are only two long shots revealing more of the overall structure of the checkpoint, a suitable parallel to Hammami's attentiveness to the specificity of experience. Faces are seen clearly – some of them directly addressing the camera – and their expressions are readable. In one, depicting a queue of people penned within a cage-like structure, a woman looks back and smiles, while a child in the foreground stares into the camera in surprise, a slight hint of challenge to his expression. In another, a street vendor offers a pair of ladies' sandals, with a slight smile. They serve as a reminder of Said's observation of the photographs in *After the Last Sky*: 'I would like to think that we are not just people seen or looked at in these photographs: We are also looking at our observers. We Palestinians sometimes forget that [...] we too are looking, we too are scrutinizing, assessing, judging. We are more than someone's object' (166). This corresponds aptly with the layers to Hammami's articles on checkpoints. She is subject to Israeli attempts to control her daily life but she is also an observer of – and witness to – the manipulation of her surroundings and community, trying to communicate to her readers (some of whom, inevitably, will only ever access Qalandiya via English-language texts such as hers) the significance of the checkpoint: its emotional impact and colonial identity.

Her decision to include (auto)biographical interventions in her anthropological work – her 'weapon of the weak' – impels her to take on the

collective pronoun in 'Waiting for Godot at Qalandya' (which she embodies with far greater ease than Said does in *After the Last Sky*), to be very clear about her own experiences at Qalandiya and to be attentive to the different lives, livelihoods and behaviours she encounters there, as well as to assert that she is *looking, scrutinising, assessing* and *judging* the occupation that seeks to dispossess Palestinians. In their assessment of autoethnography, Adams, Jones and Ellis aver: 'In contrast to memoirs, autobiographies, personal diaries, and blogs, autoethnographic projects seek to contribute to a *scholarly conversation*' (36-7, emphasis in original). This is very much true of Hammami's fieldwork, which first and foremost is aimed at furthering knowledge and understanding of the Israeli occupation within an academic context. In addition, I would argue, through its insertion of the autobiographical and attentiveness to storytelling as a central mode of critiquing the occupation, it also reaches beyond this context (at least potentially), therefore corresponding with the assertion made by Adams, Jones and Ellis that autoethnography is, ideally, concretely committed to matters of social justice and improving lives (2).

## Jaffa

I always go to Jaffa with a sense of emotional trepidation and leave with diffuse anger and resignation. My final feeling on the way home to Jerusalem is generally that I don't want to go back.

Rema Hammami (Tamari and Hammami 67)<sup>70</sup>

The port city of Jaffa, situated on the Mediterranean coast of today's Israel, occupies a prominent place within Palestinian memory and geography. Rashid Khalidi argues that the population of Palestine began to imagine itself as a political entity at the beginning of the twentieth century, with Jaffa as integral to this as Palestine's de facto capital, Jerusalem (28). As Khalidi points out, both Jaffa and Haifa (another port city) had larger Arab populations than Jerusalem by the end of the British Mandate period, and were growing in importance economically and politically (36). Tamari also notes the rapid growth of coastal cities during this period, with a new class of merchants and manufacturers taking root in Palestinian society. He observes that 'Jaffa had the fastest rate of growth, even before the Mandate. Its size quadrupled between 1880 and 1922 as it became the economic and cultural nerve center of Arab Palestine' (*Mountain* 9). 1911 saw the founding in Jaffa of the influential newspaper, *Filastin* ('Palestine'), which espoused anti-Zionist beliefs and promoted Palestinian nationalism, indicating both a clear Palestinian political community at this time and the fact that an active part of this community could be found in Jaffa.

The process from 1948 onwards of turning the country 'inside out', to return to Makdisi's description, utterly transformed Jaffa. Around 100,000 Palestinians were expelled and fled from the city, the vast majority unable to

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<sup>70</sup> As explained in my introduction to this chapter, this is a co-authored essay by Tamari and Hammami, entitled 'Virtual Returns to Jaffa'. It is clearly divided into individually authored sections. All subsequent references will be made using page numbers only, or 'Virtual' if further clarification is needed, in order to avoid constantly repeating both surnames for the in-text citations.

return and reclaim their homes, due to the establishment in 1950 of the Custodian of Absentee Property and the approval of the Absentees' Property Law, which assigned the houses to new (Jewish) owners. Makdisi notes: 'All that remained of Jaffa after 1948 was the central district, whose homes were parceled out to new Jewish residents: European Jewish immigrants got the pick of the choicest residences in Jaffa; Sephardim and Mizrahim – Arab Jews – got the rest' (235). Tamari reflects on the wide-reaching effects of losing the coastal cities, such as Jaffa, Acre and Haifa, explaining that 'Palestinian society as a whole experienced the demise of an urbane metropolitan culture that was developing in these cities, and the relocation of its intelligentsia and dominant classes, not to the highlands of Palestine, but to the Arab diaspora' (*Mountain* 44). The Hammami family were part of this exodus into the wider Arab world. It was initially to Lebanon that Hammami's then-teenage father Hasan fled by boat, along with his other siblings and parents, a departure intended only as a temporary escape from the bombardment of the city. Hasan did not see Jaffa again until forty-five years later, when he finally undertook a visit to the city.<sup>71</sup> Just as there are 'counter-stories' of Jerusalem, so too are there similar narratives of Jaffa. As Makdisi observes, the city's violent past haunts its present: 'All of Israel is marked by the signs of the incomplete erasure of the Palestinian presence; this absence that stubbornly remains present. Nowhere is this more obvious than in old Jaffa, once Palestine's ancient port town, and now merely a part of greater Tel Aviv' (234). The incompleteness of this erasure, which goes hand in hand with the very fact that such an erasure is *still* taking place, can be connected to the impulse to memorialise and counternarrate.

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<sup>71</sup> These biographical details about the Hammami family are taken from *City of Oranges: Arabs and Jews in Jaffa* by Adam LeBor, a modern history of Jaffa, explored through the respective fates of several Palestinian and Jewish families. LeBor extensively interviewed Hasan and Rema Hammami.

'Virtual Returns to Jaffa', co-authored with Salim Tamari, is divided into six sections, all of which detail various visits to the city – most undertaken together. This narration of visiting Jaffa is interspersed with family history and memories, both personal and inherited. As a co-authored testimony of Palestinian connections to Jaffa, there is an interplay between different perspectives on and experiences of the city, as well as a sense of affinity and mutual support. While I obviously focus on Hammami's narrative, I draw on Tamari's writing where necessary. What arises out of the article is a meditation on memory, loss, the erasure of history and the difficulty in reconciling the past with the present. Unlike Hammami's work on checkpoints, 'Virtual Returns to Jaffa' is much more straightforwardly autobiographical, driven by personal reflections and disclosures on the part of both writers as they *testify* to their (often fraught) connections to Jaffa. In its narration of politically charged journeys, from an occupied space to a colonised one (both authors live in the Occupied Territories), it is also worth positioning the article as a form of (post)colonial travel writing. In *Postcolonial Travel Writing*, Justin Edwards and Rune Graulund – borrowing from Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan – use the term 'countertravelers' to refer to those writers who use the genre to provide alternative narratives to those that exist within Western knowledge production (3). We too can read Tamari and Hammami as 'countertravelers', contesting the discourse that began with European Zionism's focus on creating a Jewish state in Palestine and continues with today's promotion of 'making aliyah' (Jewish immigration to Israel), while simultaneously denying the right of return to Palestinians exiled by the Nakba. Given the fraught nature of travel for Palestinians, as demonstrated by the previous section, thinking about Hammami as a 'countertraveler' is persuasive. The journeys she and Tamari take

deliberately contest the Israeli state's presentation of Jaffa as an exclusively Jewish space. The trenchant regulation of space and journeys and the 'continued presence of Empire', with its attendant inequities, as Edwards and Graulund point out, call for a (post)colonial approach to travel writing (9).

'Virtual Returns to Jaffa' begins with a section by Tamari entitled 'A History Lesson', in which he describes walking through the city and details the erasure of the Palestinian past. He characterises these returns to the city as versions of Christ's Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, the 'Way of Grief', ruefully indicating that they are both painful yet necessary undertakings (65). Guiding the reader through the city, he points out that an Arabic inscription has been sandblasted from an old Palestinian soap factory, with Hebrew motifs and a Star of David added (65). Old Palestinian buildings have been replaced by upmarket cafes, restaurants and art boutiques (66). The archaeological museum's narration of the city's history 'manage[s] to expunge virtually all traces of Arabs' (66). Following these details, Tamari notes that such a walking tour almost always ends with the 'ritual' of dinner at a fish restaurant: 'After being slapped by the gentrified and de-Arabized city and treated to a laundered version of their history, [Palestinian returnees] treat themselves to a sumptuous meal by the sea in order to forget' (67). For a reader unfamiliar, or less aware, of Israeli attempts to rid Jaffa of its Palestinian heritage and presence, Tamari's succinct 'history lesson' provides an important frame of reference for the personal reflections that follow, lending them greater weight. The use of black humour throughout by both writers further personalises their accounts of Jaffa, persuasively suggesting that humour is a coping mechanism – which is also the effect of the wry tone in Hammami's 'Home and Exile in East Jerusalem'.

Following Tamari's opening section is Hammami's first narrative, which very quickly indicates the difficulties that Jaffa poses: 'My feeling of being burdened by Jaffa, this place that exists only in the world of lost paradises, is no different from that of any other child of a Jaffaite. For there are no "former" Jaffaites – they never really left in 1948 but still carry it around with them everywhere and always' (67). Hammami's description of being burdened by the city speaks to a central, unavoidable tension within many Palestinian families: the transmission of memories from one generation to the next one, a process rendered far more fraught when these memories invariably deal with loss. As shown in Chapter Two, this painful transmission (as well as its painful *suppression*) is very evident in Karmi's *In Search of Fatima*. Discussing the challenges that 1948 poses for Palestinian identity and the complexity of inheriting emotionally-charged memories, Abu-Lughod and Sa'di state: 'There are processes of transfer from one generation to another – of stories, memories, foods, and anger; there is inheritance of the identity and burden; but there is also some resistance across the generations to the great significance of the past' (19). The pursuit of this 'inherited' identity by Hammami is especially apparent in her decision to make her life in Palestine, even though her parents and siblings remain in exile. Speaking to LeBor about these identity issues, which she and her siblings faced while growing up in England, Hammami asserts: 'We all think of ourselves as Palestinians. I had wanted to come back to Palestine since I was in my teens. I was never treated as though I was British. I was dark, I had a funny name, kids used to call me "Paki". I became a born-again Palestinian' (264). This process of 'returning' to her Palestinian identity – being *reborn* into it – indicates the huge emotional (and surely ethical) pull of the memories transmitted to her when growing up; again, a reminder of Karmi's life

writing. It is therefore also important to acknowledge Karmi's realisation that she is ultimately *unable* to return, alongside Hammami's longstanding residence in East Jerusalem; despite their clear similarities, it is nonetheless very obvious that their respective experiences of exile take different forms.

As Abu-Lughod and Sa'adi observe, this inheritance of identity can also produce resistance to memories of the past. In his study of diaspora, Clifford refers to 'the utopic/dystopic tension, of diaspora visions that are always entangled in powerful global histories' (302). Such tensions and entanglements are in evidence in Hammami's writing on Jaffa. The visions of the city that she has inherited predominantly posit a now-ruined utopia that she knows has never been a reality. Hence Jaffa is described as a place 'that exists only in the world of lost paradises' (67). Today's reality, both in Jaffa and for herself in East Jerusalem, intensify the sense of Palestinians living in dystopic conditions. Thus, the loss of a utopian past continually mourned by former residents of Jaffa inevitably places a burden on Hammami as she tries to make sense of her own connections to a much-changed city, while also living under Israeli occupation. This creates a layered effect across her work, as she deals with her diasporic background – as she describes it – her family history, her connections to Gaza and the West Bank, and her daily life in East Jerusalem. Underpinning all of this is the fact that a fair resolution to the conflict, whether for Jaffa's former residents, such as her father, for Jerusalemites, such as herself and her neighbours, or for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, such as her colleagues and friends, has not been achieved.

A significant aspect of this layering in 'Virtual Returns to Jaffa' is the dual vision of the city that both Tamari and Hammami have to manage: the inherited version of Jaffa alongside the reality of it today. Unsurprisingly, the two versions



do not correspond, as Tamari observes: 'Jaffa is really a figment of the imagination. There is no connection between the city of our parents and this bleached ghost town. But Arab visitors construct the past from their memory (or their parents' and grandparents' memory), using the rubble as their nodes' (73). Tamari's words indicate both the precariousness and preciousness of exilic memories of Jaffa. The pressures of this are apparent for Hammami, as she describes how she grew up with the city as 'an iconic myth', to which the real city, unsurprisingly, could never match up (67). Throughout her reflections on the city, this dual vision means that she narrates Jaffa even-handedly, managing to acknowledge her aversion to a blinkered, uncritical nostalgia for the city alongside her clear awareness of what befell it and the impossibility of avoiding its past. She expresses gratitude towards Tamari for maintaining a similar perspective: 'I also like visiting Jaffa with Salim because he harbors many of the same resentments about the oppressive reverence with which children of Jaffaites are supposed to react to the place, as well as the desire to resist the overwhelming bitterness one feels about the subversion of Jaffa's history' (74). Having also earlier referred to her sense of burden being 'no different from that of any other child of a Jaffaite', Hammami points to the broader implications of her own experience (67).<sup>72</sup> What she is narrating, she suggests, is the huge strain placed on the younger generations of exiled families, who must learn to negotiate the trauma and anger of their elders while also dealing with their lost heritage on their own terms.

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<sup>72</sup> Shehadeh, whose father is also from Jaffa, relays similar experiences of being deeply affected by Jaffa's past, corroborating Hammami's claims about the burden faced by many of the younger generations who trace their origins back to the city. In his memoir, *Strangers in the House*, Shehadeh outlines the difficulties of making sense of Jaffa's significance and loss when growing up in the Jordanian-controlled West Bank. Able to see Jaffa on the horizon, he has no means of getting there until after the 1967 war, by which point it is an entirely different place, the realisation of which radically changes his father after he finally returns to the city. Shehadeh acknowledges that 'I became a hostage to his historical memory', deferring to the acute importance of his father's past over and above 'my right to my own past' (64).

The tension that her dual vision inevitably creates can also generate clarity. Narrating her father and aunt's childhood memories of Jaffa, she reveals important gender and generational differences, which demonstrate a resistance to a more sentimental approach to the lost Palestinian past:

There were many things about Jaffa that my aunt was unable to explain to me – nor did she really know even the Jabaliyya neighbourhood where she had grown up. At first I attributed this to her youthfulness in 1948, to the fact that she had only a child's memory of her environment. Though this was partly the case, it was also due to the fact that she had been a girl in a conservative community and could not roam about freely like my father who had been only a few years older. (69-70)

This conservatism and the limits it places on Hammami's aunt perceptibly alters Hammami's view of her aunt's subsequent exiling. Notwithstanding the devastation of losing Jaffa, the reality is that Beirut, to which the family flees in 1948 was 'a far more open environment than [Hammami's aunt] ever could have experienced in Jaffa', providing freedoms and opportunities that women might never have had in Jaffa (67-8). Hammami describes rather glamorous photographs of her aunt and her friends on the beach at Beirut, wearing '1950s movie-queen bathing suits', before noting that '[i]n Jaffa, she was never even taught to swim like her brothers because she was a girl' (68). Hammami also emphasises the lack of proper education that her aunt, as well as other young girls, received in Jaffa. The inclusion of these details in a relatively short piece of writing is telling; it suggests the importance to Hammami of narrating Jaffa without uncritical celebration, especially when it comes to the lives of women.

The complexity of honouring the past is further explored in a description Hammami offers of her grandmother's needlepoint: 'I gave my sister in Boston the only thing we inherited from our grandmother: a garishly colored petit-point embroidery of an eighteenth-century French lady in a pastoral scene. The piece

was such a dilemma – ugly and kitschy yet something to be cherished as having belonged to my grandmother’ (70). This dilemma speaks to a broader issue facing so many of those who fled, or whose families fled, to live a life in exile: the dearth of concrete belongings, of tangible and realised hopes that reconnect the past with the present in an enabling way. Thus, one keeps hold of what one has, knowing that its value lies not in what it is, but in its connection to a lost past, bringing to mind the family shrines that the Miss Havishams keep in East Jerusalem. In this anecdote about the needlepoint, there is another intimation of the dual vision that the text continually expresses. The reality of exile is thrown into sharp relief in these lines: distances in time and space are travelled, from pre-1948 Jaffa to post-1948 Boston, and the desire to let go of a garish item clashes with the need to hold onto it, given that it is the only inheritance on offer – the only version of the past there is, which somehow needs to be worked into the present.

A focal part of Hammami’s narrative on Jaffa – and, indeed, a focal part of the article as a whole, I would argue – is her narration of locating the lost family home. As discussed in Chapter Two, this is a frequent motif in Palestinian writing. This ‘problematic quest’ is undertaken on Hammami’s first visit to Jaffa in 1989, which she makes with her aunt (68). Hammami mentions a previous, failed attempt by her sister to find the house, indicating how challenging these quests can be.<sup>73</sup> Eventually, they find it:

We kept circling and turning back down the same narrow residential road, while my aunt pointed out Said Hammami’s house, the Kanafani family’s pink stone house on the adjacent corner, and so on. Then she would recalculate, confused:

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<sup>73</sup> In *In Search of Fatima*, Karmi describes several futile attempts to find the family home in Jerusalem, before her sister finally locates it on a separate trip (447). In an article for *Al-Ahram Weekly* in 1998, Said also expresses the difficulty of locating his family home, given the huge changes to the neighbourhood, Talbiya (‘Revisited’). These anecdotes reveal how challenging this process can be when the passage of time is so long, adding additional pain to an already intense experience.

“Our house should be here...” Suddenly it struck her: the grotesquely ugly two-story pebble-brown Israeli building was actually *our house*, now concealed under a hideous facade of pebbled concrete. We got out of the car and she started crying. “They’ve buried it! Our house is in a tomb!!” (68, emphasis in original)<sup>74</sup>

This description of the reconfiguration of the house, from Palestinian family home to an almost unrecognisable Israeli building, forcefully underscores the sense of loss. Her aunt’s pronouncement that it is now a tomb also reiterates this, implying with a sense of finality that it is irrecoverable. She returns to the car, too distraught, according to Hammami, to enter her former home.<sup>75</sup> The building has been renamed *Beit Nurit*, ‘House of Light’, which is written clearly across the upper part of the house in Hebrew and English.

As Hammami approaches the house alone, she is transported back to the pre-Nakba period:

When I saw the arches I had a sudden shock of recognition based on an old family photograph taken in front of this veranda, which back then had a huge asparagus fern growing up one side. The photo had that slightly out-of-focus, dreamlike quality peculiar to old photos. It showed a large family, with young girls in white frocks and bows in their hair lined up in the front row. I always noticed how innocent they looked, but perhaps that was something I read into their expressions, knowing what was going to happen to them a year later. (68-9)

In their analysis of this passage, Abu-Lughod and Sa’di observe that ‘[w]e have in the second-generation “return” to the site of the parents’ and grandparents’ former life, the imaginative workings of “postmemory” provoked by a historical family photograph’, referring to Marianne Hirsch’s term. Developed to describe how the

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<sup>74</sup> The reference to Kanafani is to the writer, Ghassan Kanafani. Hammami notes later on that he was her aunt’s playmate and that her aunt recalls his enthusiasm for games of make-believe (70).

<sup>75</sup> Serene Husseini Shahid’s *Jerusalem Memories* narrates a similar return to the family’s former home in Jerusalem. In her case, it is herself and her sisters who are too upset to enter the house and their mother who walks through it alone after its current owner, an understanding Iraqi Jew, lets her in (196). Said similarly refuses to enter the former family house in Jerusalem, once his cousin is finally able to locate it; Said describes the cruel irony, as the child of Palestinian Christians, of finding out that the house is now in the possession of a right-wing, pro-Zionist and fundamentalist Christian organisation (‘Revisited’).

traumatic memories of Holocaust survivors are passed down from one generation to the next, 'postmemory' refers to the type of memories produced by those who grow up with powerful family narratives about events that took place before their birth. These narratives are often dominating, even while they remain difficult to fully understand, making postmemory 'a powerful and very particular form of memory' that compels the individual to attempt to relate directly to events and places they are inevitably less connected to (Hirsch 22). Its intensity derives from the fact that its connection to the past is mediated 'not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation' (22).<sup>76</sup> Central to provoking this imagination is photography, which Hirsch sees as 'perched at the edge between memory and postmemory' (22). Despite this implied meeting point, she nonetheless swiftly returns to the impossibility of truly bridging the gap between past and present. For her, photographs 'affirm the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable distance' (23). This unbridgeable quality in Hammami's assessment comes across as a form of protection, perhaps because of the intimacy of the (post)memory: innocence is read into the past and thus the pre-Nakba way of life is honoured. The deliberateness of this, which Hammami acknowledges, implies a sense of duty to that past. As she notes earlier: 'I would love to be able to walk through the city without being weighed down by its past and my duty to that past' – something she concludes is not possible (67).

This visit becomes increasingly traumatic. As she enters the *liwan*, the central, open area of Arab home, she struggles to synthesise the past with the present:

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<sup>76</sup> The strength of this imaginative investment can be found in many Palestinian texts which narrate the experience of dealing with what can be defined as postmemories. One striking example is Amiry's assertion in *Sharon and my Mother-in-Law* that '[i]t is true I have never *physically* been to our house in Jaffa but I feel I know it so well' (13, emphasis in original).

I found myself in the large *liwan*, the womb of the house, which still had its columns and original Italianate tile floor. It was full of people who somehow didn't enter my field of vision: I was remapping the *liwan's* former reality, a process that excluded objects and people not part of that earlier moment. Then someone spoke to me in Hebrew, and I was brought out of my dream. A woman in a white medical coat was asking me things I didn't understand. (69)

Hammami's compulsion to remap the new reality of the space with her postmemories demonstrates the power of these memories, which are able to guide her in seeing what remains of the former family home and what has radically changed. There is a sense here of the 'imaginative investment' that Hirsch refers to, which compensates for a lack of personal recollections, which Hammami's life in exile from Jaffa has made inevitable. This need to reconnect with the lost past, to bridge that gap between it and her exilic reality, is movingly communicated by the impact it has on her field of vision. Coming out of this 'dream' of pre-Nakba family life, she realises that the house is now a care home for mentally disabled children. After explaining to an agitated and flustered matron that she wants to look around her grandfather's former home, she is told that she must be mistaken about its former ownership and ushered upstairs, to the new part of the house, to meet the director.

This alienating encounter lays bare the transformation of Jaffa and the impact of the Nakba. The director of *Beit Nurit*, who is described as 'emitting an aura of deep and expansive self-confidence', immediately begins to intimidate and lecture Hammami (69). His pronouncements force Hammami – and the reader – to feel the loss of the home and the vulnerability of its Palestinian history:

'Sit, sit, come in, come in. Yes, yes, do come in,' he said in that pushy way that Israelis seem to understand as warmth. 'Here, I want to show you something.' I followed him to the landing where he indicated an odd colored frieze on the wall. He asked me to look closely and then proceeded to explain with what seemed to be

glee that the frieze depicted the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel and the creation of the Jewish state. He ended with a kind of hymn to the success of the Zionist dream. I was speechless at what I could only take as a form of sadism and mumbled something like: 'Look, I just want to look around the house.' (69)

There is no acknowledgement from the director that constitutive of the 'Zionist dream' he celebrates is the suffering and displacement of another people. His lack of compassion towards Hammami demonstrates that he simply does not recognise her loss as his – and by extension Israel's – problem. There is also something quite striking about the fact that this distressing conversation for Hammami takes place in the newly constructed part of the house, a space that Hammami's grandfather had nothing to do with – and which she has no postmemories of – but which now imposes itself from above upon the former Palestinian home, just as the director imposes himself and his rhetoric on Hammami.

Hammami recalls other visits to the city, of which 'the most painful perhaps' is the one that she takes with her father on his first visit to Jaffa since leaving in 1948 (74). She does not, however, disclose any details about this visit herself. In what reads as a supportive act, it is Tamari who provides a brief account of it, which he narrates from Hammami's telling of it as they visit the harbour from which her father had to flee; a telling, Tamari avers, that was one of the most moving moments of that particular visit to Jaffa (72). This indirect narration is a further indication of the difficulties of these return journeys, as well as the importance of sharing them – and sharing their narration. Interestingly, Tamari does not relate returning to *his* family home, where he lived before having to flee in 1948. Instead, he only mentions very briefly – as he describes literally passing the building – that he once attempted to visit it with his wife (Suad Amiry) but that he was denied entry by the two Moroccan Jewish families living there (72). This

follows directly from his narration of Hammami's father, as well as from Hammami's own narration of returning to the family home with her aunt. In this context, Tamari's brief mention of being denied entry to his former home is lent greater pathos.

Thus, the sections that make up 'Virtual Returns to Jaffa' constantly overlap in terms of events and themes, producing collaborative life writing that is sustained by its dialogue between the sections. This speaks to what Smith and Watson refer to in their discussion of memory and life writing as 'collective remembering' (19). They observe: 'Memory is a means of "passing on," of sharing a social past that may have been obscured, in order to activate its potential for reshaping a future of and for other subjects. Thus, acts of personal remembering are fundamentally social and collective' (20-1). In the dual vision both writers maintain – trying to honour Jaffa's past alongside a recognition of the struggles faced by its contemporary Palestinian population – this sense of sharing crucial memories and thinking of ways to address the future is very much in evidence. It is also a reminder of how 'Virtual Returns to Jaffa' came to be – through a series of 'electronic memoirs' initiated by Tamari and exchanged by a group of Jaffa exiles (65). Therefore, the impetus for their collaborative life writing is collective remembering; this is honoured in the dialogue sustained in their shared authorship.

At the very end of her reflections on Jaffa, Hammami admits the following:

[I]t seems clear that I am also not ready or able to visit Jaffa as the contemporary place it is. I am still too overwhelmed by the desire to uncover that past, to find the Jaffa hidden under the new signs, and to make it live again through the stories of my father and other exiles, then connect them back to the pavement I walk on, a storefront now boarded up, a clump of old cypress trees in a front garden. (76)



Ultimately, Hammami's loyalty to her father's exilic background – and by extension her own – means that even while she acknowledges how burdensome and mythologised the version of the city that she must live with is, she knows that she too is primarily tied to its pre-Nakba identity. There is a strong reminder here of Clifford's assertion of diaspora's links to powerful global histories and its utopic/dystopic tension. Boym describes nostalgia as the desire 'to revisit time like space', which resonates with Hammami's assessment of not being able to let go of Jaffa's past and her compulsion to seek out this past in its pavements, storefronts and trees (xv). Both Clifford and Boym deal with distance – in time and space – as they assess those who are removed from the object of longing and loss. The applicability of their theories to Hammami's perspective on Jaffa underscores the qualitative difference between her articulation of exile in relation to Jaffa and her narration of internal exile as she negotiates life between East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Her journeys to Jaffa (which, as she states, always provoke a feeling of never wanting to repeat them, as she travels back to Jerusalem) reveals her shifts between inside and outside, internal and external conceptions of exile.

## Conclusion

In 'Home and Exile in East Jerusalem', Hammami recounts the attempt made by a former resident of Sheikh Jarrah, who after many years in exile in Jordan returns to the neighbourhood, to see his family home. The building has become a base for Israel's secret intelligence agency, the Mossad. Hammami accompanies him to the large gates at the entrance to the house and tries to assist him in his quest:

He looked nervous as I rang the speaker bell. A gruff voice responded in Hebrew, "Who is it?" I explained that the owner of this building was visiting from Jordan and wanted to see his home. The voice on the other end went silent and then said, "Wait a moment," before cutting out. Within minutes the whole brigade of the building was out on the second story balcony or opening windows to peer down on us. I wondered to myself what they thought they saw: two threatening apparitions, two pathetic exiles or just an old man and a woman in jeans. Having been through this before when I visited my family's home in Jaffa, I sensed the anxiety that bordered on panic in my exiled neighbour, and gently patted his shoulder. He gave me a pale smile but his eyes kept scanning the building hungrily. Then the speakerphone came on and delivered the curt reply, "It's not possible," before shutting off. (122-3)

Enmeshed within this episode are many of the issues raised by Hammami's articulation of Palestinian experience. We have here: exile as an identity marker; settler colonialism and the theft of property this entails; return journeys to lost homes and the negotiation of the past; the importance of communality. Abu-Lughod and Sa'di observe that 'Palestinian memory is, by dint of its preservation and social production under the conditions of its silencing by the thundering story of Zionism, dissident memory, counter-memory' (6). Hammami's narration of the lost family home in Jaffa, alluded to here as she tries to comfort the former resident of Sheikh Jarrah, is a clear example of this; her (post)memories are not recognised or respected by the new occupants of the house, who use an exclusionary discourse to invalidate her history. Thus, she asserts a counternarrative, a

*dissenting* account in order to speak back to the discourse that disinherits her, just as in her narration of life in East Jerusalem and in her research on Qalandiya. All three (counter)narrative strands entail speaking out against displacement – of the past, the present and the future.

A way of encapsulating the position Hammami occupies as she narrates these multiple displacements is to think about the term ‘present absentee’. Referring to an internally displaced Palestinian who remained within the boundaries of what became Israel, but who, in the state’s eyes, forfeited their legal right to their own home, Hammami’s experience embodies this paradoxical legal category. In her presence and absence – *present* in Jerusalem and *absent* from Jaffa; *absent* from much of Palestinian civic life in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as excluded from the vast majority of services provided by the Jerusalem municipality – she epitomises the history of Palestinian dispossession that began with the loss of her father’s home in Jaffa in 1948 and continues with the occupation’s attempts to exile her from Jerusalem. Having been born outside of Palestine/Israel, strictly speaking Hammami does not belong to the category of ‘present absentee’. However, I am influenced by Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Sarah Ihmoud, who note in their article, fittingly titled ‘Exiled at Home’ (which I discuss in Chapter Four): ‘Our understanding of this term is not limited to those “internally displaced” Palestinians whose land and property were confiscated by the settler state, but also extends to those of us in the occupied Palestinian territories and throughout the diaspora who have been denied a home space and right to return to Palestine’ (396n). As well as invoking the history of displacement, the term reinforces the unavoidable issue of language and the linguistic politics of the occupation, which Hammami explores. To be simultaneously present and absent reiterates the

manipulation of inside and outside. We must recognise 'present absentee' as part of a comprehensive Israeli system of neutralising a legacy of exile through linguistic tactics and which, to reiterate Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud, denotes those who are forcefully 'denied a home space'. Hammami is one of many.

Finally, related to this is the issue of (post)memory. Abu-Lughod and Sa'di note that while postmemory is useful for referring to some Palestinians of the post-Nakba generations, for others it is not sufficient on its own to explain their relationship to the legacy of 1948 and its ongoing impact on Palestinian society, because many Palestinians now have their own direct experiences of discrimination, racism and violence. Thus, there is 'a doubling of memory and postmemory' (21). This layering of memory (which echoes the dual vision mentioned above) is extremely pertinent for Hammami, who has been affected on different levels by the development of the Israeli state and its occupation – affected by growing up outside of Palestine, by her father's severed connections to Jaffa (and Palestinian society more broadly), and by the continuing loss of stability in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. While her father has had to come to terms with life outside Palestine, Hammami must cope with her own feelings of exile *within* Palestine, while remaining connected to a globally exiled family network. As her father Hasan Hammami notes in an autobiographical piece published on 'Memories of Palestine', a website that collates life stories by Palestinians in exile: 'This Diaspora is not unique to me. Today, we, nine Hammami brothers and sisters and their children live in twenty-two different cities, in seven different countries on three continents'. This is the reality of her family background, whether or not she lives in East Jerusalem; the simple fact is that even though she has 'returned' to Palestine, it is not to an established family network, which remains dispersed.

Darwish states that both the outside world and the world inside produce a sense of exile, asking how identity can then be negotiated. As this chapter has outlined, Hammami also shifts between different experiences of estrangement, even while she continues to resist not just internal exile, but also Jaffa's idealised past, creating a tension between her exilic background *and* her own experiences of occupation, as well as a tension between competing narratives of belonging and exile. These experiences produce a survivalist aesthetic in her writing, whether testifying to the challenges faced by Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah or at Qalandiya, or the pressures imposed by inherited exilic memories of Jaffa. Here, then, is surely something akin to Darwish's shifts between inside and outside, both of which shape Hammami, and between which she must manoeuvre.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **The Commonality of Exile: Anthologised Palestinian Life Writing**

We can only move forwards, not backwards. We are already re-imagining a Palestine that reflects who we are now and who we hope to become. In time, hopefully, it will prevail.

Mischa Hiller, 'Onions and Diamonds' (185)

Recent crises, in particular the wars on Gaza and the intensification of Israeli state violence, have only seen an increase in Palestinian narrative responses, notably in the form of anthologies, which have followed the proliferation of single-author texts during the previous quarter-century or so. These anthologies often combine life writing with poetry and, to a lesser extent, short stories. The purpose of this chapter is to examine this trend towards anthologising Palestinian life writing. Often to a greater extent than single-author texts, anthologies powerfully underscore that while the predicaments faced by Palestinians are individually experienced, they are widespread and shared. Notably committed to a vision that explicitly looks forward, their message of counternarrative is one that seeks to combat past and present injustice and create a more equitable future. Hiller's words, taken from his anthologised text (studied in this chapter) encapsulate this. His use of 'prevail' strikes a note of ongoing struggle, alluding to the dominant Israeli narrative and the oppression built into it. Yet what will hopefully prevail, it is implied, is not just the counternarrative, but Palestine itself – and with it, a better vision of humanity.

Anthologies of Palestinian writing constitute a collective counternarrative to the ongoing impasse Palestinians find themselves in; it is a response and a rejection of injustice. They also represent a counternarrative to canonical

anthologies, which shape and define literary studies. In her study of multi-genre anthologies by marginalised groups of women writers in America, writing primarily against the grain of white middle-class models of feminism, Franklin observes that these anthologies cross boundaries between theory and activism, seeking to build communities based on fluctuating, yet powerful politics of identity (*Writing 3*). This is a reminder of the decentred and relational selves that Moore-Gilbert identifies in both women's *and* postcolonial life writing. Franklin also draws attention to the 'social function' of the anthologies she examines, thus placing them within a framework of community and solidarity similar to how I read anthologised Palestinian life writing (9). Reflecting on the differences between the anthologies she examines and canonical anthologies, she remarks:

Anthologies like these make their agendas explicit, and insistently locate contributors' viewpoints. In contrast, canonical anthologies practice an identity politics that is covert or unconscious. And while it might seem obvious to claim that canonical anthologies are identity-based and political, the extent to which canonical anthologies continue as staples in literature courses, and the degree to which they perpetuate business as usual under the guise of a cheerful pluralism also suggests the need to discuss rigorously their ideological function, both in the classroom, and in our scholarship. (10)

While it is beyond the remit of this thesis to properly critique canonical anthologies and their ideological function, Franklin usefully underscores how institutionalised (and unquestioned) canonical anthologies are. Anthologies outside of the canon, by contrast, create a sense of 'writing back' to a perceived centre of influence – an idea I return to at the end of this chapter.

I begin by providing an overview of anthologised Palestinian life writing in English, paying particular attention to the stated aims of edited collections. Subsequently, I examine six anthologised examples of life writing, which productively contribute towards an understanding of Palestinian exile. The

analysis of these texts is divided into three thematic sections. Building on the previous chapter on Hammami, I first examine internal exile as a form of disrupted belonging through a contribution by Raja Shehadeh and another co-authored by Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Sarah Ihmoud. I then look at the frequent experience of returnees being denied entry to Palestine/Israel through the essays of Rana Barakat and Randa Jarrar. Finally, I consider what it means to 'inherit' exile and to live with its legacy, examining contributions by Mischa Hiller and Najla Said. These themes and writers have been chosen in order to demonstrate a range of experiences, perspectives and narrative styles. Naturally, this should not be read as an indication that these are the only writers and themes worth examining, or that either are representative of Palestinian exile. Rather, I hope to initiate a new conversation about Palestinian life writing and how collected voices are now a vitally important aspect of the subgenre – one that demands greater attention.

### **Anthologising Palestinian Life Writing**

As already mentioned in my general introduction, Jayyusi describes Palestinian life writing in her *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* as 'perhaps the greatest witness to the age of catastrophe'. During the latter stages of assembling an already lengthy anthology of poetry and short stories, Jayyusi explains that, 'I had also realized that another genre, that of personal account literature, had grown to such dimensions among Palestinian poets and writers – in terms both of sheer quantity and of fine literary quality – that its inclusion in this anthology became an absolute imperative' (xviii). This acknowledgement is testament to the growth of Palestinian life writing and its ability to hold its own amongst Palestinian poetry and fiction. She also insists on the importance of seeing Palestinian life writing as committed to communal experience:



Memoirs, reminiscences, diaries, and autobiographies alike reveal a burning wish to establish the identity of the protagonists and delineate their personal experiences. However, the inner life of the individual does not function in a void, and this is especially so in a period of communal upheaval, where no good personal account literature can ever be strictly “personal”; inevitably it will spring from the age that produces it and from a communal identity defining the contours of life around the writer and reflecting the social and political preoccupations of the time. It is thus tied to perceptions and situations that transcend individual life; and this, indeed, is where its significance, poignancy, and appeal lie. (66-7)

Jayyusi’s focus on the communal speaks to the ethos of anthologies, which seek to bring together connected, yet distinct voices. Thus, while Jayyusi’s comments address single-author works and not collections of Palestinian life writing, her assessment is relevant for (indeed, arguably *anticipates*) the anthologies that I examine. These anthologies predominantly contain stand-alone contributions written specifically for them. This is particularly important (especially in terms of form) and it is why, for example, I am not examining any of the life writing in Jayyusi’s anthology, which are all excerpts from much longer single-author texts (including Said’s *After the Last Sky*). Therefore, the life writing included in Jayyusi’s anthology and her presentation of it serves more as an early assertion that the genre exists and that memoirs by Palestinian authors deserve a wider readership.

Life writing features in subsequent anthologies to varying extent: sometimes it plays a small part alongside other forms and other times it is the *only* form. A notable recent anthology that includes life writing amongst other forms of writing is *Extraordinary Rendition: (American) Writers on Palestine* (2015).<sup>77</sup> Focusing predominantly on poetry and short stories, the collection of mostly

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<sup>77</sup> The title is a reference to the common practice of covertly detaining someone for interrogation abroad, where regulations for humane treatment can be bypassed, but is also a defiant reclamation of the term, referring instead to a noteworthy rendering of experience by writers speaking out against the denial of human rights. This title is borrowed from one of the poems in the anthology, written by Tomas Morin, which eloquently moves back and forth between these two meanings (188-9).

American writers also features examples of life writing, although these are almost exclusively written by non-Palestinians and so not under discussion here.<sup>78</sup> In her introduction, editor Ru Freeman traces a specific lineage from anthologies of Palestine *now* to those relating to the Vietnam War and Franco's fascism, situating *Extraordinary Rendition* as merely the latest instalment of writers uniting to voice their opposition to injustice (16). Freeman's words elucidate a key motivation for the editors of all these anthologies: solidarity, especially during times of crisis, namely the Israeli military offensive on Gaza, 'Operation Cast Lead' (2008-09).

*Letters to Palestine: Writers Respond to War and Occupation* (2015), which contains examples of life writing alongside poetry and essays, also characterises itself as a response to the bombardment of Gaza, in this case the more recent 'Operation Protective Edge' (2014). The editor, Vijay Prashad, begins his introduction with statistics and anecdotes about the most recent assault on Gaza, before noting: 'Wars come in a sequence: 2014, 2012, 2009, 2006...This chain of numbers says nothing of the everyday war that eclipses the smiles of ordinary people who have to make bare lives in extraordinary times' (5). His allusion to Giorgio Agamben's concept of 'bare life', which refers to those denied political agency and exposed to violence through the governing state's assumption that such lives are expendable, links with Freeman's desire to combat a deep injustice that she states is partly upheld by America's failure to recognise Palestinian human rights. Prashad also draws attention to America's complicity in Israel's occupation and establishes the anthology as a response to this. Thus, the 'letters' that make up the collection are described as 'whispers from corners of the United States of

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<sup>78</sup> This is not to dismiss the quality of life writing in *Extraordinary Rendition*; a particularly fine example is the Egyptian writer Ahdaf Soueif's essay, 'Last Stop to Jerusalem', which recreates the eloquent fusion of personal reflection and political urgency that characterises her nonfiction writing, in particular her memoir, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*.

America, whose government has been Israel's great enabler' (14). Prashad's use of 'whispers' here is striking; it seems to imply the imbalance between the vocal nature of American support for Israel and the modest number of opposing voices. But there is also the suggestion of speaking in confidence and addressing privately-held sentiments, which fits with the epistolary form that the title evokes. This dynamic between public and private – essential, too, to life writing and its impulse to make (aspects of) private lives public – is also a reminder of Jayyusi's assertion that Palestinian life writing can never be strictly personal and will always be implicated in the communal and socio-political.

The act of writing is also described by Prashad as a commitment to humanity as much as to Palestine specifically; both he and Freeman thus assert that raising one's voice is about responding to a recognisable ethical imperative to speak out. Both editors (neither Palestinian) echo Jayyusi's assertion that part of the value of Palestinian literature is that it is not simply a response to a specific political situation: 'What we are rather concerned with here is the question of justice and human happiness' (71). This question is central to the aims of both *Extraordinary Rendition* and *Letters to Palestine*. Prashad's anthology, however, provides a greater concentration of Palestinian voices than Freeman's does, which inevitably makes it feel more balanced, and adds poignancy. There are also more original pieces (*Extraordinary Rendition*, which at 450 pages is longer than most other anthologies, contains far more previously published material). This chapter examines two texts from *Letters to Palestine*: 'Imagining Myself in Palestine' by Jarrar and 'Diary of a Gaza War, 2014' by Najla Said.

Specialist magazines have also published dedicated issues on Palestinian literature, which have included life writing. *Banipal*, a magazine of Arabic

literature in English translation, has produced multiple issues relating to Palestine.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, *Wasafiri*, a magazine of contemporary writing that specialises in promoting postcolonial literature, in 2014 published 'Beautiful Resistance: A Special Issue on Palestine', an arguably long-overdue focus on Palestine through its postcolonial lens, guest-edited by Rachel Holmes. Using similar language to Freeman and Prashad, Holmes declares that her contributors to the special issue share 'the common cause of writing as an act of beautiful resistance' (3). She also asserts the importance of being attentive to 'stories of people living, loving and dying in Palestine and Israel', as well as to narratives that explore the emergence of 'diasporic Palestinian identity', which again reiterates Jayyusi's assertion of the two branches of Palestinian literature (2).<sup>80</sup> *Words without Borders*, an online magazine for international literature, has also produced a special issue on Palestine, 'New Palestinian Writing' (2015), edited by the poet and writer Nathalie Handal, whose own work is anthologised elsewhere ('Guide'; 'Heart'). Outlining the varied backgrounds of the writers included in the special issue, Handal observes that 'Palestinian letters today is a composite of vast thematic, stylistic, and linguistic traditions' ('Shape'). Integral to this diversity of tradition is the fact of exile – many of the writers have grown up elsewhere.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> See 'Feature on Palestinian Literature' (Issue 15/16, 2002-03); 'Mahmoud Darwish' (Issue 33, 2008); 'Celebrating Adonis' (Issue 41, 2011); 'Writers from Palestine' (Issue 45, 2012). Palestinian writers are also included in issues dedicated to short stories, prison writing, and women writers.

<sup>80</sup> In 2006, *Wasafiri* also published a special issue on life writing (issue 48), thus indicating a growing interest in the form within a postcolonial context. This included Döring's article on Said (cited in Chapter One), as well as an article by Moore-Gilbert on the relationship between western autobiography and colonial discourse, ideas he explores more fully in *Postcolonial Life-Writing*.

<sup>81</sup> One of the strongest contributions is 'A Map of Jerusalem', an autobiographical essay by a young Palestinian-American writer, Sousan Hammad, which charts the author's exploration of Jerusalem based on her grandmother's memories and a hand-drawn map. Hammad has written other impressive online pieces of life writing, in particular on her father, who left his family in America and returned to Gaza when the author was a child. Hammad was denied entry to Gaza at Erez Crossing while attempting to visit her father for the first time in many years; her father died several months later. See 'Personal Essay: When the Sea Comes to Gaza' and 'Waiting in Palestine'. Hammad also contributes an essay to *Being Palestinian* ('Mirror').

Another notable phenomenon is the anthologising of Palestinian life writing in more academic publications, or of academic essays that are inflected with the personal. As discussed in my introduction, Palestinian scholars often draw on personal experiences of injustice to illuminate their work. A recent publication on Gaza is a good example of this (*Letters to Palestine*, which includes a range of essays written by academics is, in many ways, another).<sup>82</sup> *Gaza as Metaphor* (2016), edited by Palestinian academics Tawil-Souri and Matar, offers recognisably ‘academic’ essays alongside more diaristic or impressionistic pieces.<sup>83</sup> I would argue that this places it alongside the other anthologies I have discussed thus far. Similarly, the collection seeks to highlight the Palestinian predicament – Gaza being a metaphor for ‘the contemporary condition of Palestinians, in particular, and the condition of dispossession, in general’ – through a diverse range of voices and styles (8). Again, there is a sense of the existential value of work that deals with Palestine – universal concerns of dignity and identity are being probed. Unsurprisingly, the bombardment of Gaza in 2014 is also given as the reason for the collection’s inception.

Another important example of this intersection of academic and autobiographical writing is *Life in Occupied Palestine* (2014), edited by Cynthia Franklin, Morgan Cooper and Ibrahim Aoudé, a special issue of *Biography*, a

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<sup>82</sup> A further example is *My Jerusalem: Essays, Reminiscences, and Poems* (2005), also edited by Jayyusi (and Zafar Ishaq Ansari). It includes academic essays on Jerusalem, alongside other forms of writing (including an extract from Barghouti’s *I Saw Ramallah*).

<sup>83</sup> ‘Academic’ is placed in quotation marks here to indicate that boundaries between different forms of nonfiction often blur and need not be seen as mutually exclusive (as my chapter on Hammami hopefully demonstrates). ‘Fighting Another Day: Gaza’s Unrelenting Resistance’ by Ramzy Baroud offers an interesting short example of how life writing can productively inform more theoretical work in its blend of different forms, beginning with a description of Baroud returning to the refugee camp he grew up in, before broadening out to observe how the obliteration of Gaza’s infrastructure and family homes has always engendered specific resistance groups and movements. Another good example of this is Tawil-Souri’s own work. Her essays on checkpoints are an interesting combination of personal anecdote and research, comparable to Hammami’s work. See ‘Qalandia Checkpoint: The Historical Geography of a Non-Place’ and ‘Qalandia: An Autopsy’.

leading auto/biography studies journal.<sup>84</sup> Alongside more scholarly work, including articles that deal with historical and anthropological research, there are personal essays and interviews aimed at shedding light on the challenges of – and strategies needed for – surviving life under occupation. In the introduction by the editors, the issue is framed as ‘a collective testimony’ intended to challenge Zionism and complicit mainstream news sources and institutions that privilege Israel’s narration of the conflict over Palestinian stories and suffering (xi). They also make it clear that while the dominant narrative obscures and distorts Palestinian stories, these stories and the lives they draw attention to are nonetheless ‘abundant outside of mainstream channels’, thus exhorting their readers to be more attentive (xxxvi).<sup>85</sup> By naming ‘resistance’ as an integral element of the special issue, the editors align *Life in Occupied Palestine* with many of the anthologies already mentioned, whose respective editors make it explicit that to publish Palestinian voices is a much-needed act of solidarity, especially within a North American context (xiv). The introduction also highlights the broad and diversifying range of styles and forms that life writing now takes:

This special issue tells stories about the everyday and extraordinary lives of Palestinians as well as the Zionist efforts to delegitimise, disempower, and eradicate those who live these lives. And it does so through a variety of life narratives that include and often intermix diaries, letters, Facebook updates, oral histories, memoir, interviews, poetry, photographs, analysis, and theory. (xiv)

This provides an important reminder not to overlook sources that ‘intermix’ different forms. A good example of this is the co-authored essay, ‘Exiled at Home:

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<sup>84</sup> It is worth pointing out that Franklin is also the author of the study of anthologies mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

<sup>85</sup> What is also interesting about the introduction is that all three editors comment on the fact that *Biography* is published by the Center for Biographical Research at the University of Hawai’i (where Franklin, a co-editor of *Biography*, and Aoudé both work), before drawing attention to the ongoing American colonisation of Hawai’i. Parallels are then drawn between this colonisation and the (US-sponsored) Israeli occupation.

Writing Return and the Palestinian Home' by Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud, which I examine in this chapter. Blending personal history, photography, theory and analytical thinking, it provides a compelling example of how lives can be narrated in a non-conventional manner. The fact that it is a collaborative essay also raises important questions about self-representation and solidarity, thus providing a different perspective on these crucial issues from single-author contributions to anthologies.

Finally, I want to discuss two anthologies that both prioritise life writing and the issue of exile – *Seeking Palestine: New Palestinian Writing on Exile and Home* (2013) and *Being Palestinian: Personal Reflections on Palestinian Identity in the Diaspora* (2016). *Seeking Palestine* is comprised of fifteen contributions, many by well-known Palestinian writers, such as Susan Abulhawa, Mourid Barghouti and Shehadeh (also one of the co-editors). Hammami's essay, examined in Chapter Three, is included as well. By asserting the centrality of exile and including contributions by writers living under occupation, the editors make it explicit that exile does not just affect Palestinians outside of Palestine/Israel – indeed, Shehadeh's own contribution includes 'internal exile' in its title. This recognition of internal exile is central to the collection, along with an understanding that wherever Palestinians find themselves, whatever generation they are, the ongoing nature of dispossession generates commonality between them. This is also evident in co-editor Penny Johnson's observation in her introduction that when reviewing the material for *Seeking Palestine*, 'it seemed very much like our writers were conversing with each other – and with Palestinian writers before them' (ix).

Nonetheless, Johnson also points out that the anthology was never intended to be representative – in contrast, she says, to Jayyusi's 'magisterial' collection –

but instead to encourage Palestinian writers to respond to specific questions that rely on imaginative thinking (x). As a result, these questions are ‘laced with wonder’, and the writing firmly situated ‘outside the archives’ in recognition of the memories, stories and imaginings that cannot be neatly catalogued or evidenced (ix).<sup>86</sup> The questions they raise are posed as follows:

How do Palestinians live, imagine and think about home and exile six decades after the dismemberment of historic Palestine and in the complicated present tense of a truncated and transitory Palestine? What happens when the “idea of Palestine” that animated so many around the globe becomes an “Authority” and Palestine a patchwork of divided territory? (ix)

These are questions inviting dynamic contributions that look forward *and* back, while encouraging attentiveness to ‘the complicated present tense’. There is an indication here of the interlinked spatio-temporal issues raised in my introduction and in Chapter Three in particular, which Johnson manages to encapsulate. The ‘theft’ of time alongside the compromising of space that I discussed in relation to Hammami’s work is echoed here through the description that as time passes, space truncates. Johnson celebrates the contributions to *Seeking Palestine* for not relying on iconic images, simple nostalgia, or fixed memories of the past. She also corroborates one of the contributors’ astute observations that memories of a lost Palestine can seem alien and alienating to Palestinians who live on the territory now, thus demonstrating a further sensitivity to those who might consider

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<sup>86</sup> Johnson evidently has in mind the limitations of archives, which have been widely discussed. See, for example, Jacques Derrida, Foucault (*Archaeology*), and Thomas Richards. Johnson implies that memories which cannot be traced back to an archive should not be discounted – her opening anecdote about one of the contributors, who struggles to find evidence of a particular song he associates with the city of Haifa, is indicative of this (ix). Thinking about Johnson’s emphasis on imagination and her insistence on recognising memory that is not nostalgic or obsessively trying to reclaim the past, it is also interesting to consider Derrida’s concept of ‘archive fever’, which asserts that such an intense interest in archives is due to a compulsion and nostalgia for origins, trying to connect with a past that we can never truly access (91). Johnson’s comments read as a rejection of this ‘fever’ – indeed, she refers to Said’s distinction between beginnings and origins as a way to show the importance of looking forward as opposed to backwards to a fixed point of origin. The idea of origins is, of course, pertinent within the context of Palestine/Israel and the politics of trying to establish a narrative of origin in order to assert a territorial claim.



themselves internally exiled (x). By avoiding these various pitfalls, Johnson asserts, the contributors are able to reflect on the past in order to think incisively about the present and the future – to try to understand what Palestine was, is and could be. It is in this sense that the title is future-orientated: Palestine is still a place that is *sought*. Overall, *Seeking Palestine* is impressively consistent and engaging, a testament both to the editors' carefully conceived aims and the calibre of the writers. This chapter examines three contributions from *Seeking Palestine*: 'Diary of an Internal Exile: Three Entries' by Shehadeh, 'The Right to Wait: Exile, Home and Return' by Barakat, and 'Onions and Diamonds' by Hiller.

The final anthology under discussion, *Being Palestinian*, pursues its title's statement by asking what this means today. Its editor, Yasir Suleiman, describes the project as 'a form of personal therapy' in response to his own sense of rootlessness (2). Born in Jerusalem, Suleiman has lived in the UK for many decades and identifies strongly with the idea of a Palestinian diaspora, while also acknowledging that some of his contributors find the term problematic (leading them to use 'exile' instead). His introduction foregrounds many of the key themes that have come to characterise the experience of diaspora/exile: identity struggles, displacement, loss and belonging. He also initially conceives of 'diaspora' as a broad term, asserting that it 'encompasses the diversity of Palestinian lived experience' (2). This means a recognition of internal exile, albeit articulated as an aspect of diaspora experience, with Suleiman highlighting the impact of 1948 for Palestinians who remained on the territory, which he describes as a process of 'diasporising them in situ' (2).<sup>87</sup> The ongoing reality of occupation is a continuation of this, with Palestinians 'stranded' between the failure of Palestinian rule and the

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<sup>87</sup> Patrick Williams similarly refers to the conditions of isolation and separation resulting from the experience of internal exile as amounting to a form of 'diaspora on the spot' ('Said' 84).

Israeli occupation (2). However, despite this broad definition of diaspora, Suleiman's contributors live outside of Palestine/Israel. This returns us to a narrower definition of what displacement looks like and misses the opportunity, I think, to explore how the diaspora 'in situ' contributes to what 'being Palestinian' means today.

There are also a range of problematic distinctions in Suleiman's framing of the collection:

This is not a book of memoirs. It is a book of personal reflections. The contributors were asked to avoid formal politics as much as possible and to focus on what it means for each of them to be Palestinian in the diaspora. They were also asked to speak from the heart without the overly obtrusive intervention of the intellect. (4)<sup>88</sup>

Suleiman swiftly admits that there is something 'unrealistic' about these stipulations but that they were made in order to encourage contributors to avoid the public in favour of the private (4). While I understand that Suleiman is attempting to ensure that the contributions are as contemporary as possible – concerned with identity *today* – and not just a stock narrative of the past, this seems to draw an unworkable division that equates memoir with the past and reflection with the present, as if these terms and timeframes were mutually exclusive. Firstly, as memoirs continually demonstrate, reflecting on the past (as, for example, Said does in his memoir) requires simultaneously paying attention to the present and the 'I' who is narrating the past now. Secondly, whatever Suleiman thinks 'memoir' is – purely a retelling of the past? – inevitably seeps into the

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<sup>88</sup> Suleiman made a similar distinction at an event for the Palestine Book Awards at P21 Gallery, London (17 November 2016). He asserted that *Being Palestinian* is not a book of memories, it is a book of reflections – at times, contributors reflecting on memories. Possibly this is just a matter of semantics but I would posit that a book of memories (and memoirs) *is* a book of reflections – memories and life stories are always mediated and are thus reflected upon as they are narrated. Similarly, reflections must reflect *on* something, making it impossible to entirely avoid memory or personal history.

contributions that make up *Being Palestinian*. For the vast majority of the contributors, to articulate their diasporic identity is to reflect on its origins and their family history, as well as the wider context of displacement, making the contributions analogous with the approach that memoirs take. It also means that distinctions between private and public collapse. Finally, Suleiman seems to imply that an intellectual perspective would hamper these reflections, again revealing a relatively rigid way of approaching life writing, this time in terms of form.

A further problem is the fact that there are 102 contributions in *Being Palestinian*, each contributor asked to respond in only 1000 words. Despite the insight in many of the contributions, the cumulative effect is an unfortunate flattening of experience. The brief swiftly begins to feel too prescriptive, leading to repeated motifs and ideas, not least the stock phrase, 'being Palestinian'. Even the strongest responses would have benefited from being longer. To return to Johnson's view that the contributors to *Seeking Palestine* imaginatively demonstrate what 'being Palestinian' means, it is clear that the broader and more complex brief that she and Shehadeh gave their contributors, as well as their less rigid perspective on displacement, narration and temporality – along with the longer word count – has allowed for more nuanced contributions. Publications such as *Letters to Palestine* and the special issue of *Biography* are similarly engaging because of their inclusive and imaginative remit. By comparing these two anthologies in detail, it becomes evident how important this is. As a result, I am only examining one contribution from *Being Palestinian*: 'A Heavy, Unwieldy Bag' by Najla Said. My primary focus for Said is her contribution to *Letters to Palestine*, with this shorter piece examined alongside.

## Disrupted Belonging: Narrating Internal Exile

This section examines the narration of internal exile by looking at ‘Diary of an Internal Exile: Three Entries’ by Shehadeh and ‘Exiled at Home: Writing Return and the Palestinian Home’, co-authored by Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud. They reveal the everyday impact of occupation and how their sense of belonging in Palestine is thus constantly disrupted. Finding ways to counter and look beyond this disruption is central to both texts. There is also an interesting contrast in structure and form: Shehadeh adopts the diary form, whereas Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud intersect personal stories with theory. Therefore, I am particularly interested in the ways in which structural and formal choices have enabled the writers to relay the experience of internal exile.

### Raja Shehadeh

What does one do when you see massive changes taking place before your eyes, turning you into a stranger in your own country, allocating the resources of the land to the citizens of the country in occupation of your own? When as a Palestinian under occupation you have no voice? Your reality is represented by others in a false and distorted manner. And when you begin to speak out you find that you are overwhelmed not only by events taking place all around you but also by the long process of misrepresenting your history and how you got to where you are.

Raja Shehadeh, ‘Towards a New Language of Liberation’ (Franklin, 517)

Shehadeh’s questions, posed in an interview for the *Biography* special issue, are indicative of the deeply affective nature of internal exile, having to bear witness to one’s own estrangement from home and knowing that this process is liable to gross misrepresentation. They also reiterate the notion of Palestinian writing as counternarrative. Shehadeh’s body of work has made him one of the most popular and well-received Palestinian writers in the English-speaking world. Best known for *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (2007), which won the

Orwell Prize for Political Writing and which he describes as ‘a double biography, of the land itself and the writer’, Shehadeh has also written numerous other works that combine life writing with commentary on the conflict, often touching on issues of human rights and international law (Franklin, ‘Towards’ 520).<sup>89</sup> A lawyer and co-founder of Al Haq, a Palestinian human rights organisation affiliated with the International Commission of Jurists, Shehadeh frequently narrates his experiences of encountering (and attempting to defeat) discriminatory Israeli laws, especially as they aim to legitimate the theft of Palestinian land and curtail freedom of movement. It is within this context that Shehadeh describes his life as a form of internal exile. On his decision to stay in Palestine, despite the catalogue of setbacks and the opportunities and insights that leaving would have provided him with, he reflects: ‘I did not want to leave, because leaving felt like the ultimate abandonment and I was not prepared to do this. Instead, I settled on becoming an internal exile, re-directing my energies to my literary writing’ (‘Vision’ 5). This writing, for which he is now widely celebrated, is in English, thus contributing substantially to the growing body of work available for (and aimed at) international audiences.

‘Diary of an Internal Exile: Three Entries’ focuses on life under occupation in the West Bank city of Ramallah, where Shehadeh has lived for most of his life. Uniting the three diary entries is Shehadeh’s focus on a specific building, which becomes the central motif of the text, allowing an exploration of Palestine’s history and the stultifying effects of the occupation. The use of the building – a physical structure providing the narrative structure – enables Shehadeh to pull his various

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<sup>89</sup> See *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank* (1982); *The Sealed Room: Selections from the Diary of a Palestinian Living under Israeli Occupation* (1992); *Strangers in the House: Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine* (2002); *When the Bulbul Stopped Singing: A Diary of Ramallah Under Siege* (2003) and *Occupation Diaries* (2012).

narrative strands together, giving his text a sense of cohesion. Now known as the Muqataa, this building is the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority but was formerly an Israeli military court and prison, and originally a British Mandate-era police fortress – one of many such structures established in Palestine by the British. They were known then as Tegart Buildings, after Sir Charles Tegart, the colonial British officer who launched their construction. In the first diary entry, Shehadeh describes the building's history:

Thirty-five years ago, the victorious Israeli army entered this British garrison, took it over from the Jordanian army and stationed itself here. Seven years ago, the army left the building, handing it over to the Palestinian leadership. Not long after this, Israeli tanks and planes returned to topple it over the heads of Arafat and his retinue. Still, the resilient Palestinians refused to go. They continue, despite all the odds, to operate a shabby administration in the shambles of a destroyed tower. (87-8)

Unsurprisingly, given its succession of owners and its association with violence and destruction, it is a building that has attained 'layers of meaning', which Shehadeh's text examines, both in order to scrutinise the past and to imagine the future of Palestine and Shehadeh's trajectory of internal exile (88).

Describing his work as a lawyer, Shehadeh explains that when the building was the headquarters of the Israeli military governor of Ramallah, it became 'the site of my legal battles' (88). He further notes that the building 'was the place where many of my most formative experiences took place. The Tegart Building thus honed my character and made me the person I've become' (88). He grasps the mechanisms that allow for the expropriation of Palestinian land; he learns about political prisoners and their experience of torture; he encounters hate but also humanity; he formulates his commitment to human rights. Crucially, a broader picture emerges from trying to comprehend the real meaning behind the

succession of military orders being issued. In this sense, his work becomes not just about defending individuals but also his 'persistent attempt to fathom the nature of this Israeli Occupation and its particular brand of colonization' (88). It is through his sensitivity to this deliberate process of colonising Palestinian land that his deep feeling of internal exile emerges.

The first entry combines these memories of his legal battles with his observations of the building's current state. In 1996, following the 1994 Oslo Accords, the building becomes the headquarters of the newly-established PA and its president, Arafat; by 2003 Shehadeh is contemplating its ruins, following the Israeli bombardment the previous year during 'Operation Defensive Shield'. Connecting past and present, Shehadeh is struck by how much has physically altered. This includes not just the building, now mostly rubble, but also his wider surroundings, transformed by the unchecked theft of Palestinian land:

It was once possible to roam these hills and enjoy their pristine beauty. They served as my refuge when I was active as a litigation lawyer – I would go to them and shed the dreaded military Occupation. It always worked. Once in the hills, I would experience a sense of freedom that I didn't feel anywhere else in Ramallah. All that was over. Now many of the hills were out of reach, used by settlers, closed off by checkpoints, criss-crossed by roads, and made dangerous by gunfire. Just like this Tegart, the land of Palestine was undergoing a process of transformation that might one day render it unrecognizable to the very people who had lived in it their entire lives. (90)

In the second diary entry, he describes entering the Muqataa in order to pay condolences for Arafat's recent death. Standing back from the ruined building, Shehadeh comments: 'From this angle, the skeletal wreck of the once-proud building looked like a carcass, not unlike the state of our nation' (91). What unnerves him most is the erasure of the past and, through this, the undoing of Shehadeh's legal work. Coming across the site of the old prison, inside which

countless Palestinians endured torture as well as incarceration, he notes that nothing remains, including no acknowledgement of this suffering. Struck by this, he writes: 'It should not have happened this way. There was no need for the return of Arafat to signify the suspension of the legal struggle to which I had been committed' (93). Shehadeh thus places this site-specific erasure within a broader context of PA complicity in Palestinian suffering. Writing elsewhere, he describes the Oslo Accords as 'a surrender document' that ultimately 'destroyed' the legal and human rights work to which Shehadeh was committed ('Vision' 5).

The third and final entry renders this situation even more extreme. The building has now been entirely remodelled, an undertaking described wryly as part of the PA's 'agenda of proving itself to the international community by building institutions' (94). Almost nothing of the original building now exists, although Shehadeh cannot help but notice the imposing walls and watchtowers, 'built by Palestinians, yet resembling those inspired by Sir Charles Tegart' (95). This grotesque mimicry is bolstered by the palm trees, bought from Israel. As he surveys the building, he notes:

The question I have so often asked myself returned: should I have left Palestine when I could well imagine what was in store for us? After the Oslo Accords were signed, I annoyed my friends with gloomy prophecies. Many have ended up as realities. Should I, then, have spared myself the pain and frustration? It's a moot question, perhaps. In fact, I both stayed and left; I became an internal exile. It was the sight of this refurbished Tegart that brought this home to me. (95)

Internal exile is thus partly shaped by the knowledge that what little exists of official Palestinian politics – pitifully ineffective as it is – is built on a site of great violence against Palestinians, a history of violence that is yet to be remediated or recognised. The hollowness of this for someone supposedly living in their homeland is made abundantly clear.



'When will this exile end?' he asks, before indicating that the answer lies in shedding narratives of exclusivism and divine rights (96). He continues:

It will end when the land and its people are rid of illusions, when my life in Palestine ceases to be conceived as that of a *samid* (Arabic for someone who is steadfast) and becomes that of a citizen. I would be free then to come and go as I choose, without attaching layers of meaning to the simple act of leaving. I would be free to live elsewhere, if I wished, without feeling I am betraying anyone. When Palestine/Israel come to mean nothing more to their people than home, only then will my state of exile come to an end. (96)

By raising this question of how to terminate exile, Shehadeh addresses the issues posed by Johnson in her introduction to *Seeking Palestine* – how to imagine a different Palestine and assert new ways of being Palestinian, while remaining acutely aware of what Palestine has been and currently is. Responding to the collection's titular statement, Shehadeh reveals why he is still searching for Palestine – for home – and how his vision for it could be realised. What makes the text effective as an example of short-form life writing is Shehadeh's use of the appalling legacy of one building to survey the Palestinian predicament more broadly. The destruction of the building comes to mirror the destruction of Palestine as contiguous territory. The carcass of the building is the carcass of the Palestinian state. Its remodelling as a revamped colonial fortress exposes not just the fact that structures of oppression still exist, but also that Palestinians as a polity have failed to dismantle any of these structures, either by preventing further suffering, or simply by honouring past suffering.

Therefore, as well as providing the structure for the text – each entry's narration revolving around it as Shehadeh physically moves around it – the

building functions as a metonym.<sup>90</sup> Each version of the building reveals something about Palestinian history and the settler-colonial nature of the conflict, while also giving the text an important coherence and maintaining a depth of analysis. Furthermore, the structure illuminates the autobiographical aspects of the text, drawing out and explaining Shehadeh's sense of exile. The diary form also contributes productively to the text. By their nature, diary entries are often relatively short, rendering them highly suitable for an anthologised text. Shehadeh's inclusion of several linked entries and the fact that these encompass a broad timeframe (as well a broad sweep of history) help delineate and chronicle his sense of exile. That these reflections are cultivated over time adds to their significance. In an essay for the special issue of *Wasafiri*, Shehadeh reveals:

From an early stage in my life I have felt the need to write and express myself. But writing for me is a way of life. It does not mean only writing for publication. For over forty years I have kept a daily journal and have found that putting down my thoughts and emotions helps me better understand myself and what is taking place around me. ('Vision' 4)

This disclosure bolsters what we learn from 'Diary of an Internal Exile'. It is made even clearer that internal exile is a process that Shehadeh has been thinking through and learning to articulate for a long time. While Shehadeh writes about wanting to leave Palestine – or, more accurately, having the freedom to make the decision to leave – these diary entries reveal his commitment to remaining in Palestine until the process of being exiled is brought to an end. Espousing what comes across as a form of reluctant nationalism (which arguably complements Said's defensive nationalism), Shehadeh asserts that for as long as Palestine remains exile, it must also remain home.

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<sup>90</sup> Shehadeh introduces a similar metonym to his memoir, *Strangers in the House*. The stranger represents his father but it also refers to the steady Israeli colonisation of Palestinian land. Again, a building takes on a figurative meaning in order to explore the impact of alienation more broadly.

## Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Sarah Ihmoud

We read, tell, and write Palestinian women's stories of home, including our own stories and those of our loved ones, as stories of *sumud* in the midst of the denial of the continuous Nakba.

Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Sarah Ihmoud, 'Exiled at Home' (382)

In order to explain the dynamics of internal exile as they experience it, Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud focus on the relationship between being othered and fiercely resisting this othering. This resistance – their *sumud* – is woven into everyday life and very consciously gendered. As they note, these are 'women's stories of home'. By evoking home – very much the central motif of the text – the authors demonstrate how exile consumes even the most intimate spaces. However this space is not just a physical, domestic sphere; it also signifies a space that encourages critical thinking as a means to counter exile. They explain at the outset:

We draw on our voices as two women seeing, living, feeling, and experiencing the matrix of military occupation in Palestine, and choosing Palestine as our intellectual and political home. We honor the voices of Palestinian women who have crossed before us, who have made their journey home, or created home in spite of colonial violence and dispossession of the homeland and home-spaces.  
(377)

There is an immediate similarity with Shehadeh's standpoint: resistance as a Palestinian is an important moral choice. While home is depicted as familial and intimate, it is also an intellectual and political site – 'a space for the creation and transmission of Palestinian memory and cultural and political identity' (381). The invocation of a female lineage for this transmission of memories and the experience of Palestinian home-making against the odds gives the text an entirely different focus to the exclusively public (and institutional) space evoked in Shehadeh's text.

Even on its own, 'Exiled at Home: Writing Return and the Palestinian Home', published in the special issue of *Biography*, is a compelling example of the 'collective testimony' that the editors of the special issue aim to produce overall (ix). By co-authoring the text, Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud accentuate the crucial generalities of their experience as Palestinian women. But these generalities are constantly in correspondence with the various differences between the authors, ensuring that the autobiographical aspects are also a fundamental part of the narration of internal exile. This balance is predominantly achieved by the structure of the text. Divided into short sections, it opens and closes with a collective voice, in between which are sections detailing each author's individual experiences. This does not mean that the discernibly autobiographical aspects are simply in service to broader theorisation of women's lives or the conflict, or that this theorisation is merely there to neatly bookend personal stories. Rather, there is a more fluid relationship between the different elements of the text, ultimately highlighting the impossibility for the authors to separate themselves from Palestine, either as women, academics, or moral agents. Palestine, as a cause, as a colonised space, as home, is always viewed from the inside. It is this that makes the motif of home – of private space – so potent. As the editors of *Biography* intimate, Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud 'draw on their personal histories navigating the violence of Israeli settler colonialism and militarization to theorize the Palestinian home as not only a physical, but also a psychological and epistemological space' (xxxix). It is texts such as these, with their political intentions, theoretical frameworks and personal stories, that make the wide-ranging term, life writing, so important. The fact that it is co-authored and that both authors are deeply committed to the lives and welfare of others, is another

reminder of Moore-Gilbert's observation that postcolonial life writing is attentive to relational models of selfhood.

Their identities as academics are crucial to how they articulate their experiences of exile; this relationship between academic and personal lives is established powerfully at the beginning of the text, when the authors narrate their return to Palestine from a conference in Jordan:

They detained us at the border. We waited there, two women of different generations, having grown up dispersed between the homeland and the *shatat* (diaspora), yet bound by our experiences of being Palestinians and our longing for home. [...] Palestine was in sight. We could see her across the border, yet we feared not being able to reach home, being separated or deported, not knowing whether we would lose each other. It is living in this spatio-temporal state of uncertainty, insecurity, and terror, navigating militarized spaces controlled by young men and women who do not count us but as unwanted security threats, as non-human Others, which binds us closer even as we sit together in silence, yearning to reach home. [...]

As we waited, a group of three white women professors passed through customs and security easily. We had all participated in a conference together in Amman on the state of Palestinian health, discussing the bodily and psycho-social effects of continued displacement, exile, and military occupation on Palestinian communities. These professors, who had just hours before professed their solidarity with our people, who had stood up with others to demand the world be attentive to Palestinian suffering, turned their backs on us at the border. As they passed through customs, on to Palestine, though we were seated in plain sight, they walked past us as if we were invisible entities. (378)

This episode establishes the key themes of the essay, in particular the authors' intention to theorise their predicament as a means to expose its injustice. Their sense of being in a spatio-temporal state that renders them 'non-human Others' indicates what internal exile feels like: an ongoing experience of vulnerability, anger and humiliation.

Furthermore, the incident demonstrates that in order for this theorisation to be meaningful, it must remain in conversation with one's values and life choices. This is underscored by the authors' assertions that they are made to feel alienated and exiled not just by the Israeli border control, who view them only as security threats, but by their fellow academics as well, whose racial privilege extricates them not only from the possibility of detainment but also, shamefully, of the obligation to assist or even acknowledge the authors. Through this (non)encounter, the authors make it clear that without concordance between personal lives and academic lives, solidarity – which must be performed as well as expressed – means nothing. This is academia as a committed, lived experience, with praxis as vital as theory. Ihmoud's description of a different border crossing, during which she is also detained and watches 'the white tourists who had flown with me from New York breeze through customs', reveals the *unavoidability* of this concordance for Palestinians (383). She writes: '[I]t was in this moment of racial interpolation – like that seminal moment described by Frantz Fanon ("Look, a negro!") – when, seeing myself in the eyes of the colonizer, I was finally driven to discover the meaning of Palestinian identity as a viscerally intimate, lived experience' (383). By inscribing Fanon onto her own experience, Ihmoud makes it impossible for her reader to dismiss his words as historical.<sup>91</sup> Their applicability to her situation establishes an important commonality between herself and other Palestinians, who similarly wait at borders because of their appearance, but also between Palestinians and others who continue to face racial discrimination. In doing so, Ihmoud locates the Palestinian predicament within the broader discourse of colonial history and the colonial present from which it is too often absent.

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<sup>91</sup> For a sustained reading of Fanon vis-à-vis his relevance to the Palestinian context, see 'In the Company of Frantz Fanon: The Israeli Wars and the National Culture of Gaza' by Atef Alshaer.

The shared experience of detainment also establishes the closeness between the two authors (discernible even during moments of silence) and their solidarity against the injustice that exiles and others them. This is strongly reminiscent, too, of Hammami's resistance to internal exile. As discussed in Chapter Three, Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud's conception of 'present absentee' as a term applicable not just to internally displaced Palestinians but to all Palestinians denied a home space, captures the tension of internal exile and its paradoxical nature. The authors' adamant refusal to accept being exiled and othered is an essential component of what they nonetheless articulate as exile. The unclear boundary between 'internal' and 'external' exile is also emphasised in their reference to 'the "borders" of the still-expanding settler colonial state', which challenges clear-cut definitions of where and what Palestine is (393).

Central to the injustice that they suffer – and thus theorise – is the invasion of the home space. Drawing on the work of Lefebvre and Doreen Massey, who provide key tools for analysing the social and political dynamics of space, as well as referring to Shalhoub-Kevorkian's own theorisation of Palestinian homes as 'counter-spaces', the authors evaluate the far-reaching consequences of Israeli attempts to master intimate Palestinian spaces (381). This mastery is part of the overall disruption of everyday life, which aims not just to damage social relations and physically impact the home, but also to prevent the establishment and maintenance of 'cultural and political identities' (381). They contend that attempting to preserve the home space is an integral aspect of the Palestinian response to settler colonialism, rendering Palestinian homes 'radical spaces' and women's roles essential in resisting internal exile (382). The stories and photographs that accompany this theorisation affirm this battle over space

through their specificity and materiality. They also attest to Palestinian experience as a 'continuous Nakba', with each generation affected by displacement (382). The photographs – images of family and home – take on an added significance in this context because they speak to the importance of home-making as both an individual exercise (and right) and a collective endeavour that helps maintain Palestinian identity even as it is threatened. This threat is particularly evident in the image of the ruined foundations of the family home Ihmoud's father tried to build, against the backdrop of the Israeli settlement whose settlers were responsible for its destruction. While this is an explicitly violent example, if we acknowledge that *every* Palestinian home is also a site of (forbidden) memory making *and* transmission across generations, then each home space must be viewed as a political sphere.

This politicisation is evident in the protective defiance that Shalhoub-Kevorkian enacts in her narration of home-making against the odds. The pressures that she and her Armenian-Palestinian family face in the Old City of Jerusalem are described thus:

We live among a very supportive Armenian community in occupied East Jerusalem, where home is invaded *in every aspect of life*. We've confronted a series of challenges within this space, including the expansion of the Jewish Quarter, which keeps encroaching further into historically Armenian home spaces, as the transformation of architecture and urban space in the old city into Judaized areas changes geography to erase Palestinian history and insist on an exclusively Jewish history. (391, emphasis added)

Arabic street names are converted into Hebrew, the parking lot outside her home is now Jewish-only (highly reminiscent of the settler-only parking spaces established in Hammami's neighbourhood) and there are repeated violent attacks on the community. As such, Shalhoub-Kevorkian explains, '[w]e have endured an



ongoing battle simply to stay within our home' (391). Nonetheless, she explains: 'I confronted their efforts to uproot me by building a very close-knit family, an acutely aware academic and psycho-social home' (392). Again highlighting the overlap between the academic and the personal, she commits to creating a home where she can bring up her three daughters while simultaneously mentoring young Palestinian women – such as Ihmoud – who combine scholarship and activism as part of their refusal to accept exile (392). The home space is therefore a place of creativity and critical thinking as well as domestic life, reiterated by the Author's Note, which reads: 'Nadera and Sarah wrote this piece together in the old city, occupied East Jerusalem, overlooking the Mount of Olives' (396n). This focus on the potency of the home-space is a necessary reminder of where a sense of exile – and fierce resistance – extends to, while also acknowledging the vitally important roles that women play in the struggle against Israeli occupation.

Ihmoud also asserts home as a site of resistance. The settler violence that destroyed the home her father was building, and which she was to live in, is deeply painful but also engenders determination, which is immediately tied to her academic work. Reflecting on the 'ruins' that this violence caused – articulated as 'both physical and psychological' – Ihmoud writes: 'They inspire my desire to rebuild a home space in Palestine, to learn the stories of my people, to keep on returning, and as a politically engaged anthropologist, to tell my stories and to write against terror' (387). Home is narrated as both a symbolic and physical space: it houses her commitment to Palestine and her awareness of a life unlived in her father's village, as well as the memories she inherits from him.<sup>92</sup> It

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<sup>92</sup> The section heading for Ihmoud's individual narration is 'The Inheritance of Exile'. This echoes Karmi's narration of exile, hugely impacted by her parents' experiences and trauma, as well as Hammami's awareness of her father's loss of Jaffa. The notion of 'inheritance' also recalls Hirsch's concept of postmemory. I have used this title for the final section of this chapter.

encompasses the often unclear divide between internal and external exile (Ihmoud grew up in America and is primarily based there, as well as spending time in the Occupied Territories) and it also speaks to the challenge of return, explored in the next section. Both the symbolic and the literal are collectively reiterated when the authors state, 'we cannot afford to cease yearning for home in each other, to cease yearning for home in Palestine' (388).

Concluding their essay, they announce that '[h]ome is a space where we remember who we are and where we have been, from our multiple locations across the homeland and the shatat', before referring to 'our stories of exile in relation to righting home' (395). This narration of memories within a current context of settler colonialism mirrors the temporal register identifiable in Shehadeh's text, which also displays clear shifts back and forth across time. 'Righting home' incorporates a similar intention to maintaining *sumud* until such a point that home (and the homeland), through being 'righted', is no longer subject to invasion. Furthermore, their specific theorisation and personal narration of the concept of 'home space' provides 'Exiled at Home' with a structural cohesiveness that Shehadeh also achieves through his focus on the Muqataa. What is interesting, though, is that their definition of *sumud* differs from Shehadeh's in that it comes across not just as burdensome but also empowering in and of itself, especially in its sustenance of (female) community. Reflecting on postcolonial 'autocritique', Whitlock observes that '[f]or Fanon and Said, postcolonial theory and life writing speak to their location as subjects in history' (*Postcolonial* 174). This emphasis of the unavoidability, within a postcolonial context, of history and subject position in the production of both theory and life writing (and the fact that these forms can combine) is highly applicable to Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud's essay. By

narrating home as a site layered with meaning, they position themselves simultaneously as Palestinians, as women, as academics, as activists, and as exiled subjects committed to withstanding their ongoing displacement.

## Reaching for Palestine: The Denial of Return

Some of them hid in the ruins, others amongst the trees, and did not cross over into Jordan. They moved while it was dark and slept by day, returning whence they had come, only to be expelled again, to return, to be expelled, and then to return once more, right up to the present time.

Emile Habiby, *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist* (63)

The eponymous anti-hero of Habiby's 1974 novel observes early attempts by exiled Palestinians – labelled 'infiltrators' by the Israeli state – to unsuccessfully return to their lost homes and land following the Nakba. Contemporary iterations of this expulsion are to be found in the now well-known phenomenon of being denied entry by Israeli border control – the only way of accessing Palestine/Israel. Sa'di reflects on the impact of arriving at these borders:

In narrations of journeys of return, prior to arrival, there is a sense of overwhelming urgency and apprehension regarding whether they will be allowed in or not, and anxiety and fear that their mental images might be dissimilar to what they will find [...] Then, whether at Ben-Gurion airport or on the bridge on the Jordan River, there was the procedure of entrance. Most of the young Israeli men and women encountered in these journeys of return are jaded, with no interest in them beyond subjecting them to ordinary, often lengthy and humiliating bureaucratic procedures. This disparity goes much deeper than its appearance: it reflects the essence of the imbalance between the occupier and the dispossessed ('Exile' 237)

Similarly, Rashid Khalidi observes: 'The quintessential Palestinian experience, which illustrates some of the most basic issues raised by Palestinian identity, takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint: in short, at any of those many modern barriers where identities are checked and verified' (1). Complementing previous discussions of return in this thesis, this section examines the narration of being denied entry to Palestine/Israel, noting the anger and anxiety it generates, but also recognising its broader implications, to which both Sa'di and Khalidi draw

attention. These experiences speak to the extreme powerlessness of the Palestinians and the fact that through its control of all borders, Israel is able to forcefully remind returning Palestinians of their identity as exiles, denied the agency to even attempt the process of reversing this sense of displacement. In this section, I examine 'The Right to Wait: Exile, Home and Return' by Barakat and 'Imagining Myself in Palestine' by Jarrar.

### **Rana Barakat**

In its most simple and basic definition, an exile is someone who is prevented from returning to her/his home. Home and return, therefore, are embedded within the meaning of exile.

Rana Barakat, 'The Right to Wait' (142)

A historian at the University of Birzeit in the West Bank, Barakat found herself unable to return to her home and place of work when re-entering Palestine/Israel following a trip overseas. Deported and forced to live in limbo in America, where she grew up, Barakat experiences a major crisis while trying to come to terms with her exiling *and* attempting to find a way home again. Her essay, 'The Right to Wait: Exile, Home and Return' is primarily concerned with this process of trying to articulate exile in light of the ongoing conflict and her specific experience of being denied return to the place she calls home. The structure of Barakat's text ensures the delivery of her central message: return to Palestine is a necessity. By foregrounding her deep-rooted sense of dislocation as a result of growing up at a distance from Palestine, Barakat emphatically relays the huge significance of being unable to reach Palestine. What follows is a thoughtful exposition of Barakat's reliance on exilic writers in order to understand her own experience, which grants the reader greater insight into what it means to her individually, and highlights Barakat's attachment to a communal identity. It also chimes with other writers

examined in this thesis who draw together theory and personal narration. By balancing the two, she places herself in conversation with other Palestinian writers and in solidarity with her fellow Palestinians more generally. But she never relinquishes the loneliness that is central to her own experience. A postscript to the text allows a semblance of closure; we learn that eighteen months after her deportation, Barakat is able to finally return to Palestine. While this provides the text with a tentative 'happy ending', nonetheless the overriding message is of the precariousness of Barakat's situation (as for all Palestinians) and the permanence of exile, whether one returns or not.

Evoking the inherited and ongoing nature of Palestinian suffering, Barakat explains her exilic background and begins to illustrate why a physical return to Palestine is so important to her:

Born a world away, Chicago-to-Palestine is both a real and theoretical distance – my own experiences are as individual as any dislocated person's within a comfortable and privileged experience of displacement. Though 1948 and even 1967 occurred long before I was born, both years marked my life, as they have my entire generation. (137)

This establishes that her ties to Palestine have always been a part of her, made especially clear by her assertion that formative dates in Palestine's history also belong to her own timeline, even though she did not experience them first-hand. The desire to overcome physical and theoretical distance from Palestine indicates her need to reconfigure both her trajectory and her identity in order to strengthen these ties – and, one intuits, to disassociate from what is comfortable and privileged. As we have seen with other writers, Barakat's Palestinian identity is inseparable from an ethical imperative to honour that identity as it is threatened. Invoking Hirsch's concept of postmemory, Barakat writes: 'Abstract, solitary and haunted by memories that for the first generation were their own, my generation

had to make them our own' (136). This impulse to share ownership of past traumas reiterates her commitment to Palestine. It also suggests that the past is in fact a continuous present; the memories of previous generations become her postmemories, which she has to accommodate in her current identity – to actively 'make them [her] own'. This overlap between timeframes is further stressed by her observation about the Nakba that 'for subsequent generations this catastrophe kept repeating itself' (136).

Echoing Karmi's desire to find her 'real self' in Palestine, Barakat further outlines her sense of dislocation:

Palestine was the symbol, the photographs, the posters, the long-distance telephone calls in a language that ought to be my own but was made even more foreign because it was not.

Language for me was an indication of distance. If I could penetrate the language, I could assume the identity; if I assumed the identity, I could embrace what was real in being Palestinian. Then I could finally be a part of our history, tragic though that might be. (137)

Barakat reveals that living with postmemories is not enough – truly being 'a part of our history' requires a more active role. Her initial ('theoretical') return is the study of history so that she can 'tell stories and [...] become a part of the story' (137). However, reflecting on Said's alternation in *After the Last Sky* between the subject pronouns 'we' and 'they' in his discussion of Palestinians (which I explore in Chapter One), Barakat reads this as a 'challenge', deciding that she has to become 'they' (137). In other words, she has to complement her theoretical return with a 'real' one: 'It was not enough to know the history, or even work to write it (in all of the complexities involved in telling stories), I had to be *on* the land – or at least the part I could reach – to finally be *of* the land' (137, emphasis in original).

This explication of the importance of return inaugurates the enormity of the fallout when she is consequently denied re-entry to Palestine.

Her deliberate move to distinguish herself from Said, who primarily articulates return in figurative terms, is also crucial because it signals the danger in generalising (or, worse, fetishising) his perspective on exile, which his status makes possible. Indeed, Barakat's text underscores just how varied the experience of Palestinian exile is. Her perspective still includes a deep admiration for and reliance on Said's work (which she refers to, along with Darwish's poetry, as 'scholarship for survival'), even while differing fundamentally on this issue of return and establishing home in Palestine (136). Reiterating both Said and Darwish, she states: 'In time I would learn that neither exile nor conditions of alienation and displacement would be cured, rather they would add new layers to what was a rich, albeit often tragic, presence' (137-8). She continues by acknowledging that Palestine, as a place, speaks to both the reality *and* the impossibility of home, as she admits that even while living there she still dreams of a homeland (139). This is exile as a permanent, unavoidable state. Nonetheless, even though it is 'a shared condition' (and one which she deliberately shares in her essay with Said and Darwish), it 'must also be experienced in an individual context', which underscores the plurality of responses to displacement (139). For Barakat, it means continuing to search for the 'reality' of home in Palestine even if the impossibility is never eradicated.

The denial of re-entry into Palestine is therefore narrated as a violent interruption of this search. She writes:

In the midst of this existential search, my precarious world came crashing down. Being told by Israeli border guards that one will be denied entry and deported is part of being Palestinian; standing in stubborn and somewhat unrealistic defiance



of that order is also part of our collective being. [...] My body was literally dragged out of the airport because the colonial power controls all ports of entry, and the space between my Palestine and my body was theirs to control. In a horrible moment that was both the culmination and the break of all real and existential journeys, I was thrust aside and forced to leave [...]. (139)

Barakat once again balances the collective and the personal, highlighting that even though deportation and exile are 'part of being Palestinian', as is resistance, nothing wards against the helplessness and devastating immediacy of what she goes through. A fate that affects many must still be experienced alone. She describes it as a 'moment of pure breakdown', the culmination of an arduous wait (143):

The ties that bind me to myself were all undone when an anonymous official announced in an all-too-ordinary tone that I would not be allowed to enter *here* and would subsequently be deported from *here*. Born in exile, living in exile, or returning to exile – I was not sure where to place myself. Though there are many Palestines, mine is a place, a tangible and material existence. We live a reality of Palestine that is neither myth nor dream. (144)

The impact on the model of selfhood that feels right to her (Palestinian, dedicated to the search for home in Palestine) is made very clear. While Palestinian life may well be defined by exile, this does not alter the fact that for her, Palestine is primarily a material reality to which she must return.

This unwavering intention is Barakat's clear response to her denial of entry. Her titular statement, repeated several times in the essay, indicates this – she has a *right to wait*. By articulating her situation as a form of waiting, she relates her own predicament to Palestinian experience more broadly – and there are strong similarities between Hammami and Barakat in terms of the psychic impact of Israeli control. Whether at checkpoints, borders or for an end to the occupation, waiting is an innate part of Palestinian life. By proclaiming her right to wait,

Barakat asserts her solidarity with and connection to that way of life. However, this desire to pursue return is not driven by any kind of nostalgia or romanticisation of homecoming; nor by nationalism or narrow ideas of what being Palestinian entails. Her model of selfhood remains fragile and she is clear-sighted about her decision; her essay opens with the statement, '[e]ven though I know better, I will wait' (135). After narrating her deportation, she announces: 'I will wait at the borders even if I know that I need to think beyond their barriers and my arguments with words. I will linger in exile until my feet hit the soil I should know better than to worship' (145).

Her admission is, I think, about the futility of her search – she should know better than trying to establish home somewhere so precarious. But this search is her right – perhaps the only right available to her – and to relinquish it is not an option. She writes: 'the search for a home is perhaps as much about the search as it is about the home. Palestine may not ever be home perhaps, but part of our struggle is to accept that, yet remain resolute in the act of searching' (138). This is remarkably similar to the irreconcilability inherent in Said's conception of exile: one will never overcome it, or be reconciled to it, but the goal is in attempting anyway – this is the exile's obligation, if one is to avoid forever nursing a wound. What fundamentally differentiates these two searches – which are ends in and of themselves – is that Barakat's is resolutely *located*. Internal exile is a fundamental aspect of the search, which her experience of being denied entry makes fully apparent. For the reader, Barakat's ordeal sheds light on why the right of return continues to be such a crucial issue for Palestinians in their quest for justice. By the time we reach her postscript, which reveals that she is finally able to re-enter Palestine, it is clear that for her, Palestine represents the *possibility* of home more

than anywhere else does, and it is to maintain that possibility that she keeps searching.

### **Randa Jarrar**

I was so afraid of facing the guards at the airport that I had a difficult time imagining the rest of my trip. I would picture myself walking around Ramallah with my sister, or attending a concert, or visiting my aunts, or seeing the Separation Wall, or staying at the American Colony Hotel for an evening, and I would draw a blank. There was a wall there, too, between my thoughts and Palestine.

Randa Jarrar, 'Imagining Myself in Palestine' (56)

Introducing her readers to the realities for Palestinians of dealing with Israeli border control, the novelist Randa Jarrar firmly foregrounds her sense of anxiety about her upcoming trip to Palestine.<sup>93</sup> Beginning her essay, 'Imagining Myself in Palestine', published in *Letters to Palestine*, she states:

Trouble began weeks before I boarded my flight to Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport. I had heard horror stories about a detention area there, dubbed the Arab Room, and in my anxious and neurotic style, I had emailed a dozen people – American academics and artists of Arab, Indian, Jewish, and European descent – and asked them what I was supposed to tell the immigration officers at Ben Gurion once I arrived. (55)

These opening sentences establish that 'trouble' will be an ongoing theme. By focussing on the minutiae of the experience of being denied entry, Jarrar exposes its cruelty and injustice. In doing so, she reveals that its primary function, beyond the unrestrained show of power, is to undermine and undo the links between Palestinians and Palestine, not just through the obvious act of denying them physical access to the land, but also by criminalising their historical and current connections to it, manipulating Palestinians' imaginative and emotional ties.

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<sup>93</sup> Jarrar is the author of a novel, *A Map of Home* (2008) and a short story collection, *Him, Me, Muhammad Ali* (2016). She is celebrated as a leading Arab-American writer. Both works are attentive to Arab characters who experience displacement and identity crises.

Jarrar's indication that her fear of the upcoming encounter with Israeli border control overrides any other thoughts, is symptomatic of this distancing.

Delineating the process of being denied entry and the distancing inherent to that process is Jarrar's objective. While we primarily follow the narrative of an intense experience as it unfolds, what adds depth to Jarrar's text is the way she narrates the interrogations she is subjected to. These confrontations bring back memories, even as she is being shown that such memories are deemed criminal. This structure, moving back and forth between the urgency of the present and memories of the past, allows the reader to sympathise more fully with Jarrar and comprehend the violence of the denial: not just the violence of denying her entry to Palestine, but also of denying her heritage and identity. Her approach, therefore, is very different to Barakat's structurally – she focuses precisely on the experience, which Barakat does not do. This focus allows Jarrar to adopt a darkly humorous tone – again, very different to Barakat – as she narrows in on those aspects of the encounter that seem particularly absurd. This is particularly reminiscent of Amiry's writing, which similarly possesses an agitative black humour, especially when narrating encounters with Israeli military or security personnel.<sup>94</sup>

We learn early on that Jarrar is flying to Palestine from America to visit her sister, who is working in the West Bank. This is Jarrar's first visit in over fifteen years, an absence explained by a rift between her and her family due to her becoming pregnant when unmarried. Her parents' horror at her 'shameful condition' convinces Jarrar that any subsequent return journeys must be undertaken independently (56). This introduction to Jarrar's family tensions adds a further layer of complexity. Before she proceeds with her account of being

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<sup>94</sup> Amiry describes her experiences of travelling as a Palestinian (and the inevitable interrogations) in 'An Obsession' (83-5), her contribution to *Seeking Palestine*, as well as in her memoir, *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law* (3-12).

interrogated at Ben-Gurion Airport, we are told about 'waiting in endless inspection lines' during childhood visits to Palestine via Jordan (56). Her Palestinian father would remain quiet and her Egyptian mother would remind the complaining Jarrar that giving up on returning to Palestine is exactly what the Israelis want them to do. This establishes return as an act of resistance, while reminding the reader that these journeys have never been straightforward.

In her description of her preparations for the trip, Jarrar brings into focus the policing of Palestinian identity:

I had deleted anything on my website critical of Israel, which amounted to about 160 posts. I had deleted the section on my Wikipedia entry that said I was a Palestinian writer. It had been unsettling, deleting my Palestinian-ness in order to go back to Palestine. I had been told that the Israeli officers might confiscate my phone and read my Facebook posts and Twitter feed, so I temporarily deactivated my Facebook account and locked my tweets. The entire endeavor left me feeling erased. (58)

Her narration of this act of self-censorship displays her attentiveness to the manipulation of the connections between Palestinians and Palestine. The fact that Jarrar feels impelled to take these measures, to actively 'delete my Palestinian-ness', underlines the potency of Israeli control. Her sense of erasure demonstrates its emotional impact but also its forcefulness; while these deletions are temporary and reversible, nonetheless they feel genuinely suppressive, especially if one considers the increasing importance of online lives in creating and maintaining models of selfhood.<sup>95</sup>

Upon arrival, Jarrar soon finds herself in 'the Arab Room', where it is abundantly clear that everyone has been racially profiled: her fellow occupants are all Arab and African (59). When she is taken for questioning, her family

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<sup>95</sup> Online lives is now a significant area of interest within auto/biography studies. See, for example, Paul Longley Arthur, Whitlock (*Soft*) and John Zuern.

connections and history are scrutinised. These questions are first about her father and his relatives; Jarrar tells the very young official as little as possible. Once it is discovered that her father was born in the West Bank, Jarrar is told to wait again while the official confers with a superior. This questioning is intersected with Jarrar's disclosure to the reader that she is estranged from her father, who cut off communication with her after her first novel, angered by the sexual content. This, he had claimed, was an affront to her Palestinian heritage. Jarrar is then interviewed by a different official, to whom she gives more information:

This time, I told her I was not in communication with my father, and that I was an American citizen, and a writer. She did not seem to care about this information one way or another, and spoke my grandmother's name. I hadn't heard my grandmother's name in years. She had died in the early '80s. I told the officer this, and she nodded, and gave me the names of many of my ancestors. I wanted to ask her for her grandmother's name, but gave her the name of my friend in Jerusalem, and my Israeli publisher in Or Yehuda, instead. (60)

The overlapping of the intimacies and challenges of family life with the exasperating process of trying to get through Israeli security is deliberately jarring. This trespassing into Jarrar's past and personal circumstances – in order to use them against her – is made obvious.

What makes Jarrar's narration so powerful is that her complicated family relations do not detract from her central message of fundamental injustice. She is able to express a certain ambivalence about her family ties while simultaneously exposing the cruelty of having these ties rendered criminal. In doing so, she establishes that the process of interrogation still violates something sacred, even if the Palestinian memories and images provoked by it are not straightforwardly positive. The complications of her private life should not be part of this process and the fact that they *do* become part of it speaks to the inherent brutality of the

experience, during which the Israeli officials demonstrate no sensitivity and deem nothing out of bounds in their pursuit of incriminating evidence of Palestinian-ness. This evidence eventually turns out to be a Palestinian ID attached to her name, which contains data of her entrance to the West Bank many years ago. Despite her vehement objections, this ID overrides Jarrar's American citizenship. Thus by proving her connection to the land, the Israeli officials are able to immediately distance her from it, demonstrating the unacceptability of this link between person and place. Her sister, previously described as 'only an hour away', is now unreachable (57).

After being told that she has been denied entry, Jarrar is made to wait again, leading her to reflect on how waiting 'is the principal state of the Palestinian' (64). Balancing emotion, frustration and humour, Jarrar realises that she will actually be leaving without seeing Palestine:

Eventually, two female guards came to tell me what time I would board the flight back to the US. When they did, I burst into tears. I had been holding out hope, right to the last. After they left, I was stuck with the male guard again, the one who had picked up the phone in the immigration booth.

I asked him if I could board a flight elsewhere – to Amman, or Cairo, even Paris. I wanted to go somewhere, at least, even if I couldn't see my sister. "No," he said. "You have to go back from where you came." I said that was unacceptable, and that I wanted the choice to go elsewhere. This time he shouted it. "No. You must go back from where you came."

"Are you from *The Lord of the Rings*?" I said. (64)

Her insolence earns her the punishment of being made to stand in a hallway, after which she is escorted to her flight. The guard's repeated statement that she must go back to where she came from is a final demonstration of the distance enforced between Jarrar and Palestine – the ultimate objective of her denied entry. Jarrar's place, she is being told, is most certainly not Palestine.

Instead of a final commentary on her experience, Jarrar concludes her text with a minor altercation with the man next to her on the flight back to America, who continually jabs her elbow when she attempts to use the armrest:

Finally, I turned to him, my arm firmly on the armrest, and said, "I get it."

He looked at me, embarrassed.

"I really get it. But I am keeping this armrest. I am not moving. I will keep my arm here for the rest of the flight," I said. And I did. (66)

This is Jarrar's understated way of claiming her place. By concluding her text this way, she asserts that whenever it is possible to fight back, she will. Indeed, her clear awareness of the motions she is supposed to go through when attempting entry – what information to delete online, what names to offer during interrogation – and her subsequent anger when these motions fail, demonstrate her will to succeed. This failure emphasises her lack of agency – and that of all Palestinians under such circumstances. Despite differing enormously in tone and outlook, both Barakat and Jarrar effectively use their personal stories of a fundamentally discriminatory process to comment on the wider injustice and indignity of the conflict, which continues to exile Palestinians from the land they seek to make home, or to simply visit. Furthermore, in both cases, short-form life writing comes across as the ideal format. Both authors narrate the impact of a very specific experience which, with its drama and its immediate, visceral impact, lends itself to a self-contained short text, able to swiftly engage its reader. Such texts, individually meaningful but also in conversation with wider concerns, are ideal components of anthologies and their collective intentions.



## Ties to Palestine: The Inheritance of Exile<sup>96</sup>

So the question is, what is it that ties us all back to Palestine?

Mischa Hiller, 'Onions and Diamonds' (179)

Being Palestinian is complicated.

Najla Said, 'A Heavy, Unwieldy Bag' (326)

This final section asks what it means to negotiate a Palestinian identity at a distance from Palestine, an identity both inherited from family but also with its own inevitable reality and shape. This inheritance can be burdensome: family memories are often traumatic (as is evident in Karmi's work) and negotiating between different cultures can add further complexities (as Jarrar demonstrates through her tensions with her parents). Furthermore, the ongoing nature of the conflict plays a pivotal role in how this complicated inheritance is articulated. One's Palestinian identity is inevitably connected to the current situation and is often reactive to this reality of continuing displacement and denial of Palestinian human rights. As well as thinking about inheritance in the obvious sense of family history, I am also interested in looking beyond these kinship ties. For example, what do subsequent generations of Palestinian writers 'inherit' from the narratives that precede them? Other than family, from whom do ideas of identity and how to negotiate exile derive? In order to explore this concept of inheritance, I look at 'Onions and Diamonds' by Hiller, followed by 'Diary of a Gaza War, 2014' and 'A Heavy, Unwieldy Bag' by Najla Said. Both writers present complex and contingent models of selfhood, at times relaying a sense of uncertainty and – for Said

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<sup>96</sup> This title is also used by the Palestinian-American writer Susan Muaddi Darraj in *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly* (2007), a collection of interlinked stories about four Palestinian-American women attempting to make sense of their identities as they navigate two cultures. Sarah Ihmoud also uses it as a section heading in her co-authored essay, as indicated earlier.

especially – fragility. Nonetheless, both are conscious of not undermining their ties to Palestine, recognising what these ties teach them and how they enable them to see the world.

### **Mischa Hiller**

The novelist Mischa Hiller begins his essay, 'Onions and Diamonds', published in *Seeking Palestine*, by recounting the story of a Syrian citizen, Hassan, whose parents were expelled from Palestine during the Nakba.<sup>97</sup> During a demonstration in 2011 to mark Nakba Day, Hassan crosses the Syrian-Israeli border with others, before travelling alone to Jaffa, where his father was from. Here, he asserts, is where he wants to stay. In response, Hiller writes:

I envy Hassan his certitude. He is, in one sense, better qualified than I to write about exile. To him it is straightforward, a matter that can be undone by physically returning to where you belong. Unlike him, I would not be so confident of wanting to settle somewhere I had never been, simply because one of my parents had been born there. (178)

Hiller's suggestion that there are both 'straightforward' and more complicated ways of approaching exile introduces the reader to his central message: the plurality of responses to dispossession. It is clear from this that Hiller's own response is not straightforward. His title – 'Onions and Diamonds' – indicates why these responses are so varied: 'Human beings are not identifiable through a single aspect. We are each a cross between an onion and a diamond, multilayered and multifaceted, both difficult to peel and brilliant to behold from different angles' (179). Hiller's decision to use this as his title demonstrates the importance to him

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<sup>97</sup> Hiller is the author of three novels: *Sabra Zoo* (2010), *Shake Off* (2011) and *Disengaged* (2015). *Sabra Zoo*, a moving account of the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982 and the massacre at Sabra and Shatila, deals most explicitly with Palestine. It represents an arresting counterpoint to Hiller's discussions in 'Onions and Diamonds' about identity and the intersection of the personal and political. His protagonist, Ivan, like Hiller himself, has one Palestinian parent and one European (Ivan is Danish-Palestinian).

of recognising the multiple aspects that make up an individual. The fact that the title is indecipherable until his explanation also underscores the importance of the message: we take extra note because it answers a question already in our minds.

Exploring this multiplicity in relation to Palestine, Hiller writes:

For various reasons, many, like myself, have never even been to what is left of Palestine. And now a third generation of people descended from Palestinians is growing up around the world, increasingly diluted (and indeed enriched) by time and place and, like myself and now my children, by parents of different ethnicity and nationality, making once obvious loyalties weaker and a universal outlook stronger. (178-9)

The key word here is 'enriched'. Hiller's mixed background has had a positive impact on him, producing a 'universal outlook' that does not seek to privilege one aspect of identity over another. Consequently, Hiller makes us aware early on of several salient details: he was not born in Palestine, he has never been to 'to what is left of Palestine' and he does not feel compelled to establish himself in Palestine, as Hassan seeks to do. These observations prompt Hiller to ask the question that even some readers might pose: does this 'dilution' make Palestinians born outside of Palestine, such as Hiller and now his children, 'less Palestinian' (179)? His response is resolutely in the negative. As far as Hiller is concerned, becoming enriched by the variety of one's experiences and mixed background does not mean becoming less Palestinian, or sacrificing ties to Palestine (or to anywhere else, of course). It does not mean that Hiller bears no connection to the experience of exile, as he goes on to discuss. Given this emphasis on enrichment, his assertion of envying Hassan's certitude becomes somewhat disingenuous as we read on: having such certitude is resolutely not who Hiller is *or who he wants to be*.

His relationship with exile is two-fold. Firstly, Hiller relates it to his role as a writer and secondly, he reflects on how the ongoing nature of the conflict, as well

as its historical injustices, have impacted him and contributed to his identity formation. These articulations of exile overlap but also raise distinct issues as Hiller navigates different aspects of his life, from being a novelist to being aware of a living conflict to which his heritage ties him. Beginning his discussion of exile and writing, Hiller asserts his dislike of being labelled, recognising it as an awkward condensation of what it is that enriches him:

Due to my mixed ethnicity, I have never felt that I fully belong in either camp, a feeling bolstered by being placed on either side of my ethnic heritage depending on the context. I'm described variously in book blurbs and reviews as Palestinian, British, Palestinian-British, British-Palestinian, Anglo-Palestinian, etc. – all clumsy labels that ghettoize more than they describe. Also, since my Arabic is not good enough to write with, I am uncomfortable with being labeled an Arab writer. (180)

He notes that if he has to, he describes himself as being of English and Palestinian descent. Hiller noticeably rejects any firm assertions of belonging, preferring instead to always be seen (and to see others) 'from different angles'. His earlier attempts to either belong or to actively distance himself from either 'camp' never worked and so, he notes, 'eventually I stopped worrying about what others thought and went with the comfortable if trite: just being me' (180).

This process of learning to embrace a model of selfhood that does not privilege belonging or fixed identity markers is very similar to Edward Said's notion of being out of place. Indeed, Said inspires a model of selfhood for Hiller as a writer, as he states when describing the benefits of his own position as an outsider:

What it does do, and this is invaluable for a writer, is give you a slightly displaced view of things, one that is not blinkered by whatever flag you happen to be born wearing. Being "Out of Place" – as Edward Said aptly named his memoir – is not a bad spot to inhabit. You can thrive in ways that you would not if you were a fully signed up and accepting member of the tribe. (180)

Briefly reiterating observations we find in Said's 'Reflections on Exile' about writers and artists flourishing in exile, Hiller celebrates the opportunities that can emerge from having a 'displaced view of things'. Similarly balancing the positive with an acknowledgement of the negative, Hiller states: "There is no doubt that it is liberating – being able to think against the grain – even if it is a struggle" (180). Therefore, part of Hiller's 'inheritance of exile' derives from Said and the particular framework he provides for exiled writers seeking to make use of their displacement. This framework allows Hiller to 'thrive' as an outsider instead of fixating on the difficulties of such a position, and while he does not say so explicitly, it is also doubtless significant to him on some level that it derives from someone who also has Palestinian heritage.

Extending his discussion of exile and writing to include Palestine, Hiller reflects on what it means to write about Palestine, both in terms of the opportunities provided by the subject matter and the imperative to write about it:

As writers and artists we can also tap into the incredible wealth of material Palestine presents us with: conflict, injustice, thwarted dreams, forbidden love, misplaced loyalty, clash of cultures – it is all there in abundance. They say the subject matter chooses the artist, not the other way around, and it is true that there is a particular need for Palestinian stories to be told. I found this with my first book, *Sabra Zoo*. It followed me around for years, bullying me until I got rid of it by writing it down. (181)

Approaching Palestine from a very different angle to Jayyusi, Hiller focuses not on the existential value of Palestinian literature for its reader, but instead considers what Palestine offers the writer creatively when they deal with such provocative themes. This, I think, reaffirms his decision to view exile as primarily an intellectual inheritance. His articulation of Palestine as an 'abundance' of issues that a writer can 'tap into' is highly suggestive of this – it is hard to believe that he

would deploy such language if his identity were more directly threatened. This is not to criticise Hiller for his personal response to the conflict, but to observe his choice of words – as a novelist – when describing it, which a writer more attached to (or, indeed, psychologically supported by) the notion of belonging would surely not adopt. As discussed in Chapter One, being out of place is not a model of selfhood to which many can ascribe.

There is also something striking about his description of the process of writing *Sabra Zoo*. By depicting the novel as something that ‘followed’ and ‘bullied’ him until he could ‘get rid of it’ by committing it to paper, Hiller reveals the weight of this subject matter, even for someone who chooses to be an outsider. There is also an unmistakable suggestion of a burden, which speaks to the other aspect of his inheritance: the familial ties to a place from which one of his parents was forcibly exiled. This suggestion wrestles with Hiller’s writerly instincts, which dismiss any sense of obligation:

I reject completely the idea that writers who are Palestinian, or descendant from Palestinians, are duty-bound to write about Palestine or the Palestinian experience [...]. Nobody is duty-bound to write about any subject and, indeed, many a well-meaning writer has floundered by trying to be true to some political point before being true to his or her art. (181)

There is an intriguing tension here between being compelled to write about Palestine, benefiting as a writer from that subject matter, and a fervent belief that politics are secondary to a writer’s ‘art’, by which I assume Hiller is referring to a belief in creative choices that are instinctive. That these two areas – politics and art – are rendered distinct here (and seen as potentially unproductive for a writer when combined too self-consciously) and yet inevitably merge elsewhere, suggests to me that as a writer, Hiller continues to grapple with the different elements of his inheritance. His earlier observation that he likes ‘to move between’ his English and

Palestinian identities, or to sometimes 'ignore them both', indicate the fluctuations that exile has imparted to him (180).

Given Hiller's disavowal of belonging and his disinclination to a physical return to Palestine (unlike Hassan), Hiller's use of the term exile as a description of his own experience might seem strange. This is something that Hiller addresses explicitly and its discussion forms the second half of his essay, which examines a different facet of the diamond, as it were. The focus in this case foregrounds Hiller-as-Palestinian, instead of Hiller-as-writer. To begin with, he remarks that if one were 'literal-minded' about this question of exile, he 'and millions of others born in diaspora' could not be considered exiles (181). What is at stake for Hiller, though, is the fact that there is a shared experience for all Palestinians, which includes himself: 'the gradual dismantling of their abandoned homeland' (182). It is the continual reconstruction of this homeland into a different place that exiles him, as it does *all* Palestinians, regardless of where they were born and where they currently reside. Hiller changes tack here slightly and announces that this situation effectively means dispossession: 'We have been dispossessed, not exiled. Something has been stolen and disguised so that it is no longer recognizable. We have become rootless, citizens of the world' (182). This reality, for Hiller, means that 'the struggle is taking place everywhere', albeit in different ways (the reality of occupation is, of course, very different to Hiller's life in Britain, as he is quick to acknowledge) and that everyone is entitled (Hiller does not go as far as to say *obligated*) to speak out (183).

It is telling that this discussion of speaking out references the PA, especially its failure to protect the right of return for Palestinians in the diaspora (echoing Karmi's criticisms, as discussed in Chapter Two). This subtly confirms Hiller's

(inherited) position as one of these Palestinians and reveals a commitment to the Palestinian cause as part of the collective dispossessed. This is not, therefore, done on an individual level – we know that Hiller does not want to return himself – and so instead it indicates that regardless of his own relationship to Palestine, the fundamental injustice of the conflict means that he is committed to a just resolution that ensures the right of return for those in his position who wish to exercise this right. This solidarity with the dispossessed is both distinct from and in conversation with his identity as an exiled writer. Paradoxically, perhaps, Hiller becomes less of an outsider in his assertion of rootlessness – this time, it is a collective experience and by adopting the collective pronoun, he admits to a form of belonging. As we have seen with so many other Palestinian writers, there is a moral impulse behind this declaration of shared identity: Hiller might not be personally committed to nation-building or return, but he *is* committed to reversing a longstanding military occupation that deprived his own family of their homeland. His ‘inheritance’ in this sense is an active rejection of what happened in 1948 and what continues to happen.

Hiller concludes his essay by expressing a hope for a future Palestine that allows those who wish to return to do so, but which does not become a place ‘trapped in history’ – it is in this sense that he addresses the question posed by the editors of *Seeking Palestine* about how to imagine the future of Palestine (185). Coming back to Hiller-as-writer in order to ‘imagine’ this future, he nonetheless reaffirms his preference for being an outsider, stating that when Hassan does make it back to Jaffa permanently, when it comes to himself, ‘I reserve the right to graduate from being dispossessed to becoming an exile’ (185). In its final articulation, then, exile is an aspiration. To graduate from dispossession means



being able to freely choose exile. What is so intriguing about Hiller's essay is its distinct articulation of exile as a desired state. To inherit, for Hiller, is to be enriched, and in a similar vein to Said's intention of developing strategies to make the most of exile, Hiller privileges it, celebrating it as a model of selfhood. By distinguishing it from the realities of dispossession, he reaffirms exile as predominantly an intellectual inheritance – inflected with Palestine but not weighed down by the political situation. It is here that he diverges from Said: for Said, exile and dispossession are two sides of the same coin. For Hiller, they are kept separate even while they continue to inform each other. While Said asserts that exile will never end, Hiller seems to say: let dispossession end so that exile can truly begin. This suggests ways of articulating a Palestinian identity (along with other facets of identity) that is broadly positive: the conflict is by no means ignored, but it is kept separate in order to safeguard what is to be gained from inheriting Palestinian exile.

### **Najla Said<sup>98</sup>**

Inheritance for Najla Said is multi-layered. Her writing reveals it to be familial, intellectual, creative, burdensome, undermining and overwhelming. As she states: 'Being Palestinian is complicated' ('Heavy' 326). While it is hard to avoid discussing her father when considering her inheritance – not least because Said herself invokes him and his work – it would be a mistake to view her writing only through the prism of his thinking and influence. This analysis, therefore, aims to simultaneously address Edward Said's presence as a form of inheritance for Said, as well as to recognise other crucial forms. Taken together, they produce an

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<sup>98</sup> For the sake of absolute clarity, it should be noted that in this section, when I refer to 'Said' I am referring to Najla Said. Any reference to Edward Said will be done using his full name or by referring to him as 'her father' (in this section only). Elsewhere in this thesis, references to 'Said' mean 'Edward Said'.

articulation of exile that is very much her own experience. My main focus is 'Diary of a Gaza War, 2014', although I will also draw on her much shorter text, 'A Heavy, Unwieldy Bag'.<sup>99</sup>

'Diary of a Gaza War, 2014' is comprised of diary entries covering the first month of 'Operation Protective Edge'. It includes much intertextual material, ranging from news headlines and statistics about Gaza, to quotations from commentators on Palestine/Israel, including her father (who died in 2003). She responds to events as they happen, often with heightened emotion – one entry towards the end simply reads: 'Daddy, come back – help!' – but also intersperses these raw responses with recollections of her past (124). This creates a rich, albeit at times uneven, text that reveals Said's deep attachment to Palestine. Addressing her background and placing it within the context of the current invasion of Gaza, she writes:

My father and all his ancestors were born in West Jerusalem. I can't live there because I am not Jewish. Even though we never sold the home. It was taken. My mom is from Beirut, Lebanon, and all her ancestors are from there too. I can't be a citizen there either because my dad is not Lebanese. I was born with a US passport because my Palestinian grandfather immigrated here and lived here and served in the US Army before ultimately moving back to Palestine. I have only lived in NYC. I don't belong in any of the places I come from. And this is what my home country, city, elected officials expect me to do and want me to feel about the place I come from: that I should further give money to help blow them to smithereens and be outraged that we are not working harder to do so. (114)

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<sup>99</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, Said is also the author of a memoir, *Looking for Palestine: Growing up Confused in an Arab-American Family* (2013), which evolved from her solo Off Broadway show, *Palestine*. Her memoir deals in detail with the psychological toll of the identity crises she experienced in early life, trying to negotiate between being Arab and being American, while simultaneously affected by the conflict and America's attitude towards Palestine. Her relationship with her father is affectionate as well as complicated.

The first thing to note in terms of inheritance is the disavowal of belonging: Said's admission that 'I don't belong in any of the places I come from' is an echo of Edward Said's sense of being out of place and unable to call anywhere home.

The model of selfhood that Said begins to articulate is personally impacted by instability and rejection derived from deeply entrenched political issues. Her Lebanese and Palestinian heritage comes with complications, and through its financial and political support, the country she has always lived in significantly contributes to those complications. The current war that she narrates throws this into sharp relief, escalating her sense of alienation and desperation. Another entry reads: 'Gaza is exploding again. Being exploded upon. Being expelled, expulsed, whatever the word. And the divide gets bigger, deeper, faster than ever. (Just wanted to tell you)' (110). The unravelling of information here, driven by Said's repetition and use of assonance and alliteration, underscores how fraught she feels as she follows the news coverage.<sup>100</sup> Further on, two separate entries – one about the killing of Palestinian children as they play at the beach in Gaza and the other about Said's memories of childhood visits to the beach in Beirut while bombs go off in the distance – create an affective concordance between past and present that reinforces the fragility of life (116). She recalls laughing and eating watermelon, before stepping back and asserting: 'It's not about me; it's about the reality of humanity. Children. Playing. Should not be killed' (116). A week later, one entry simply reads: 'Tears for everything today' (121). Her use of punctuation and short sentences escalates her enraged narration of the war and expresses her stake in what is happening.

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<sup>100</sup> Said's narration of Gaza is reminiscent of the character Iman in Selma Dabbagh's novel, *Out of Sight*. Iman, who is from Gaza, finds herself in London when Gaza is being bombed and follows the coverage through the media, as Said does (185-93). There is a striking similarity to their helpless rage and distress.

The trauma of following the onslaught on Gaza is evidently burdensome for Said (who, it must be said, always acknowledges that her grief is dwarfed by that of Gazans themselves). While the unrestrained and violent nature of the war makes this burden particularly obvious, it is nonetheless a constant facet of her identity as articulated in writing. It is this sense of burden, along with her assertion that she belongs nowhere, that characterises Said's writing as exilic – although she does not herself use the term. In 'A Heavy, Unwieldy Bag', the title's metaphor is used to explain this burden: 'If I try to come up with a metaphor for what it is really like to be Palestinian, or perhaps I should say "what it is like to be Palestinian in New York City", all I can think of is carrying a really heavy, entirely unwieldy bag. Of groceries, perhaps. Or rocks, maybe' (326). Said continues with this metaphor, adopting the second-person pronoun, perhaps to impel her reader to empathise: 'You have to carry these bags, and you have no help' (327). This reference to location underscores her keen and unavoidable sense of displacement: the place where she has always lived exacerbates her struggle, leaving her bereft of a true sense of belonging.

She observes: 'In real life, these bags manifest as circumstances you have lived through a few too many times' (327). These circumstances include a fear of being turned away from the Bar Mitzvahs she is invited to during high school; having to always tell Jewish people that she does not hate them ('[b]ecause no matter what, they will ask if you do'), and the inevitable political arguments about terrorism (327). This snapshot into Said's life in New York hints at the anguish she has faced as a result of her Palestinian identity. In a different place and time to Karmi, she reveals a similar sense of alienation through trying to come to terms with her Palestinian and Arab background in an environment often hostile to it.

Like Karmi, feelings of frustration are made manifest and in both cases, this frustration is partly to do with the fact that it is inescapable. Said makes the permanence of her situation obvious: '[Y]ou realise you didn't do anything wrong. You did nothing to deserve it. You're just in an uncomfortable circumstance, and you can't do anything about it' (327).

Witnessing what is happening in Gaza while living in an environment hostile to Palestinians is also part of this burden. Throughout the diary entries, as she responds to the intertextual material on the conflict, she directly addresses the reader, in particular pre-empting criticisms and objections to her outrage at the military operation launched by Israel. This combative mode of writing reveals that she has encountered these criticisms many times previously and complements her use of the second-person pronoun in 'A Heavy, Unwieldy Bag', which in a different way aims to engage her reader. In her first entry, she writes:

I always try to be diplomatic about this stuff but sometimes I just can't. If you think that Palestinians all hate Jews and are rejoicing in the death of those three young men (Naftali Fraenkel, Gilad Shaer, Eyal Yifrah), then you are racist. That's all I have to say. As my dad used to say, "No one has a monopoly on suffering." ANY loss of life is tragic but please, please, please STOP: Stop asking me why I have so little self-esteem when the media and the world and every one around me sits by and says that the life of a Palestinian isn't worth shit compared to the life of an Israeli. Fuck you for condoning that by letting the media misinform the world. (107-8)<sup>101</sup>

Said writes directly and provocatively, evidently addressing those unsympathetic to the plight of Palestinians. Said's background as an actress (and as the author and performer of a one-woman show about her Palestinian identity) comes across here in the way she invokes an audience. She is clearly speaking *to* someone, reacting to

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<sup>101</sup> The deaths Said is referring to are the kidnap and murder in June 2014 of three young Israelis in the West Bank (they all lived in settlements). Their deaths sparked a massive military operation and are widely seen as one of the main triggers for Israel's launch of 'Operation Protective Edge'.

a sense of hostility. This once again attests to her professed feelings of unease living in America, confirmed by her reference to low self-esteem.

Said is writing her own form of resistance literature. Her need to do so is no doubt partly inspired by Edward Said's work on Palestine (despite her complicated relationship with her father, her writing demonstrates a clear dedication to honouring his legacy). In one entry she refers to her father's ability to predict what was going to happen in the Middle East and declares that all of the current discussions about how to solve the conflict justly, 'are the values I was raised with and the ideas I was brought up to believe in' (109). Staying true to these values and upholding them publically is an integral part of her model of selfhood, derived directly from her father. In another entry, before quoting Darwish's poetry, she writes: 'If you don't know who Mahmoud Darwish was, you probably don't know that for years before people like me, there have been brave and beautiful artists of resistance from Palestine. I am simply trying to follow their lead. It is no easy feat' (117). Said modestly establishes herself as part of a lineage of Palestinian writers committed to producing counternarratives. This lineage is her creative inheritance, enabling her to find her own voice.

This voice is very much her own, despite the inheritance that helps makes it possible and which provides her with a moral and political blueprint. In an article, she remarks: 'I'm surprised when people like my writing; I am not surprised when some people are disappointed that it doesn't sound like something my father wrote. That happens all the time, and it doesn't even faze me anymore' ('Upper'). Said never seeks to emulate her father's style; his ideas loom large in her own writing but her work is entirely distinct from the academic and intellectual contexts within which Edward Said operated. Instead, it is humorous, irreverent,

antagonistic, often informal and never afraid to display emotion. In this sense, she is part of a new generation of Palestinian writers working in English – her humour is similar to Jarrar’s and her combination of irreverence and outrage reminiscent of Remi Kanazi’s spoken-word poetry. Said’s use of swearing is evocative of Salaita’s comments in *Uncivil Rites: Palestine and the Limits of Academic Freedom*, in which he writes: ‘I cuss sometimes because why the fuck not? [...] All languages have cuss words. They’re necessary to human communication’ (6).<sup>102</sup> In terms of her predecessors, her work is closest to Amiry’s, whose own diary entries in *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law* are often angry, informal and extremely tongue-in-cheek. These writers are united in the accessibility of their work, which suggests a desire to communicate Palestinian life stories and the realities of the conflict as clearly as possible.

At the end of ‘A Heavy, Unwieldy Bag’, Said declares that a central benefit of being Palestinian is realising ‘that you know exactly what it is like to be marginalised, left out, disregarded and forgotten, and that you can empathise with pretty much anyone’s struggle’ (328). This empathy is also part of Said’s inheritance, often manifesting itself as an obligation to speak out and a strong sense of solidarity. That she is not entirely comfortable doing so – ‘I don’t talk about politics a lot because it hurts my heart’ – returns us to the notion of burden (‘Diary’ 108). Like her father, she wrestles between the positive and negative aspects of exile, recognising what she gains while never losing sight of her sense of permanent displacement. Demonstrating this tension between loss and gain and

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<sup>102</sup> As mentioned briefly in my introduction, Salaita had his tenured professorship revoked by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for tweets posted during the same bombardment of Gaza that Said is angrily narrating in her diary entries. *Uncivil Rites*, which combines political analysis and personal reflection, is Salaita’s account of what happened, events he places within the broader context of the silencing of Palestinian voices in America and the difficulties of expressing criticism of Israel’s actions.

echoing the endless cycle that her father invokes to characterise his experience of exile, she concludes her text as follows:

There really is nothing more powerful than the true goose bump-ly feeling of solidarity, of humanity, of love, of empathy, of pure connection.

And so, in the end, I guess being Palestinian might actually be worth its cumbersome, unwieldy, often torturous, weight.

Sometimes. (328)



## Conclusion

In reading anthologised Palestinian life writing, connections between writers and texts rise to the surface quickly; moving from one short text to another, resemblances – and differences – are often obvious to the reader. We recognise that writers are in conversation with each other, each attempting to represent their own personal experience of exile and displacement but also responding to wider issues, as articulated by the respective editors of the anthologies. Unlike book-length works, anthologised texts often provide a concentrated focus on a single issue, or a memorable snapshot of a pivotal moment. Anthologies also provide opportunities for more writers: not all writers (especially younger, emerging ones) are able to produce or publish a book-length work. Short-form life writing allows them to explore a particular topic that they *are* able to write about and which potentially contributes meaningfully to an understanding of Palestinian exile. In this sense, there is a democratisation to anthologies that speaks to the issue of solidarity that this chapter has explored. What emerges from reading them is both the commonality and complexity of exile and displacement within the Palestinian context.

The sense of a collective aim – across all anthologies – is evident: this is writing as literary testimony. As Whitlock argues, such testimonies are a direct appeal to a reader in the hope that their suffering is recognised (*Postcolonial* 8). Whitlock is right to draw attention to the affective nature of this ‘transfer’ between writer and reader, through which the writer seeks acknowledgement of the injustice of their situation. In particular, the narratives of Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud, Barakat and Najla Said speak strongly to this notion of affect; their texts aim to communicate the emotional weight of their experiences. Whitlock also

observes that 'testimonial transactions connect directly to the most fundamental questions of who counts as human' (169). This echoes the message relayed by many of the editors of the anthologies that Palestinian writing goes beyond narrating the specifics of the conflict, but digs deeper to reflect on central questions of dignity, justice and what it means to be human. In this sense, it aims to reach its reader on a fundamental level, at which they understand that the writer is their equal and that their suffering is real. These central questions, with their broad applicability, coupled with the issues of form raised by collected life writing, mean that anthologised Palestinian life writing deserves greater attention within auto/biography studies.

Finally, there needs to be an acknowledgement that anthologies of Palestinian writing, whether life writing or otherwise, are important for postcolonial studies. Produced within a context of displacement and ongoing occupation, these testimonies provide compelling examples of 'speaking truth to power' and of 'the empire writing back'.<sup>103</sup> In this sense they complement the tradition within postcolonial studies of providing counternarratives. They are also, I would argue, part of the same tradition of anthologising postcolonial writing, in particular new writing (at least 'new' to Western readers) from former colonies, or by minority writers.<sup>104</sup> However, as Mohammed Abdullah Hussein Muharram points out in his overview of relevant anthologies, Arab writers continue to be excluded from postcolonial and world literature anthologies (and curricula), which

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<sup>103</sup> 'Speaking truth to power' is a reference to Edward Said (it is the name and topic of a chapter in *Representations of the Intellectual*). *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) is an early influential postcolonial studies publication by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, challenging traditional canon formation and aiming to establish further theorisation of postcolonial literature through an attentiveness to wider cultural and political contexts.

<sup>104</sup> *Wasafiri* and *Banipal* are good examples of this. There are far too many others to provide a comprehensive list, but these publications give an indication: *Indigenous Australian Voices: A Reader* (Sabbioni et al); *Opening Spaces: An Anthology of Contemporary African Women's Writing* (Vera); *The Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (Mehrotra).

he believes are too narrowly defined (130). Obviously this also includes Palestine, and Muharram rightly draws attention to the fact that even the revised 2002 edition of *The Empire Writes Back* maintains a silence on the Arab world, despite its extensive reader's guide and bibliography (134).

Thus, given this neglect, further attentiveness to anthologies of Palestinian writing and the questions they raise is both necessary and timely. In an era of rising Islamophobia, modern politics' obsession with national borders and the concomitant scapegoating of migrants and other vulnerable peoples, as well as the ongoing Israeli occupation, establishing productive links between Palestinian writing and postcolonial studies is more urgently needed than ever. The seven writers I have examined here each deliver testimonial narratives that address concerns deeply important to postcolonial studies: settler colonialism, national liberation, gender, neocolonialism, and of course exile and diaspora. Reflecting on the impact of testimony, Whitlock writes:

Testimony takes us to worlds where the boundaries of the civilized and the strange are perpetually a work in progress, returning repeatedly to that 'global heritage' of postcolonialism: the struggle to imagine new humanisms and the possibilities for activism and social change that follow. (10)

In order to properly honour this 'heritage', postcolonial studies must ensure that Palestine is not overlooked and that its struggle for justice becomes part of the ongoing critique of colonial practices to which postcolonial studies is so committed.

## CONCLUSION

So though the dominant surrounds us, we need not be lamed by it. Though counter-discourses are not sovereign and do not exhaust reality, reality can neither exist nor change without them.

Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse* (19)

As I write in 2017, the centenary of the Balfour Declaration, the situation for Palestinians remains dire. Israel's widespread denial of the settler-colonial dimensions of the conflict and refusal to acknowledge the injustice of the Nakba continue to have profound consequences, as Pappé captures well:

[T]he currently prevailing consensus in Israel justifying whatever happened during the 1948 war has far-reaching political implications. It reveals an Israel unwilling to reconcile with the past and with the Palestinians, an Israel overconfident that its policies of ethnic cleansing and dispossession can be morally justified and politically maintained as long as there are Western academics and politicians who are reluctant to apply the same set of values and judgments to the Jewish state that they have applied, quite brutally, to countries in the Arab and Muslim world. ('Historiography' 20)

The counternarrative to this (political *and* academic) status quo is, unsurprisingly, vulnerable. But as Terdiman reminds us, reality neither exists nor changes without counter-discourses. Reflecting on resistance literature, Barbara Harlow underscores its insistence on its reader understanding – and thus critiquing – the specific context from which it emerges. 'Essential then to the narratives of resistance', Harlow writes, 'is the demand they make on the reader in their historical referencing and the burden of historical knowledge such referencing enjoins' (*Resistance* 80). Palestinian life writing on exile makes this demand, seeking recognition of the historical circumstances that construct the frame of reference within which these narratives are composed. This composition – the formal distinctions between the narratives and the varied articulations of exile

they express – has been the focus of this thesis. These distinctions and variations are important (especially within a literary context), but I want to begin by asserting that such is the reality of Palestinian life today that these differences are exceeded by a shared awareness of the ongoing denial of their narrative. As Rashid Khalidi observes, Palestinian identity ‘is in many contexts suspect almost by definition’ (2). It is against such suspicions that Palestinian life writers must articulate their identity, expose crimes of the past and present, and assert hopes for a changed future. Quite simply, to write Palestinian lives is to counternarrate.

Reflecting on Elias Canetti’s comments on reading Kafka’s letters – which, he claims, affect him just as an encounter with an actual person would – Shoshana Felman writes: ‘A “life-testimony” is not simply a testimony to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can *penetrate us like an actual life*. As such, Kafka’s correspondence is testimony not merely to the life of Kafka, but to something larger than the life of Kafka’ (14, emphasis in original). Similarly, I view Palestinian life writing as the intersection of text and life, a form of literary testimony that lies at a particularly pertinent interface between auto/biography studies and postcolonial studies. Central to Felman’s observation is the wider context of testimony, the fact that it seeps out from the private into a larger, more complicated sphere. As she claims, Kafka’s words have an impact because there is ‘something larger’ at stake. Thus, testimony derives its power from the complexity (and potential) of its relationships, the fact that the individual providing the testimony is implicated in so many other lives: the lives of those who are part of the telling and the lives of those to whom they deliver that telling.

Felman captures this constant and unavoidable slippage from individual, to relational and collective:

Since the testimony cannot be simply relayed, repeated or reported by another without thereby losing its function as a testimony, the burden of the witness – in spite of his or her alignment with other witnesses – is a radically unique, noninterchangeable, and solitary burden. [...] And yet, the *appointment* to bear witness is, paradoxically enough, an appointment to transgress the confines of that isolated stance, to speak *for* others and *to* others. (15, emphasis in original)

This is certainly relevant in the Palestinian context, as this thesis has hopefully demonstrated. In their different ways, and to varying degrees, all the writers I have examined grapple with the need (and expectation) to synthesise the personal and the collective, a task that is necessary to the urgent counternarrative, but impossible when trying to testify fully to one's own experience. This is not to suggest a failure on the part of the writers, but to draw attention to the challenges inherent to the production of testimony. While the uniqueness of personal experience is an integral aspect of a writer's task, so it is with the collective.

Gilmore states that one cannot avoid 'the paradox that the autobiographer be both unique and representative' (8). This dilemma – how can one be both? – is at the crux, then, of both testimony and life writing more broadly. With this in mind, I have sought to observe the complexities *and* commonalities of exilic Palestinian life writing. As the writers in this thesis have demonstrated, negotiating between what feels unique (and perhaps even isolating) and what feels like a shared aspect of experience is not straightforward; nor can such a negotiation be fixed or finalised. Therefore, many of them would surely acknowledge what Gilmore describes as 'the limit of representativeness, with its compulsory inflation of the self to stand for others, the peculiar way it operates both to expand and constrict testimonial speech, and the way it makes it hard to

clarify without falsifying what is strictly and unambiguously “my” experience when “our” experience is also at stake’ (5). Naturally, this intersection of personal and collective is not peculiar to Palestinian life writing; Felman’s context is Jewish lives and, in particular, the Holocaust; Gilmore’s comments derive from research on contemporary (predominantly American) life writing in which trauma plays a major role. Within such a politicised and contested arena as Palestine/Israel, this intersection is also extremely prominent. The convergence of identities – evident through the assertion of relational and collective models of selfhood – becomes particularly apparent when a painful history is being narrated. As Gilmore observes, ‘[t]rauma is never exclusively personal’ (31). Similarly, in her study of Palestinian peoplehood, Matar refers to ‘the experience of trauma by proxy’, while Hirsch’s concept of postmemory signifies the inevitably shared nature of traumatic experiences (*Stories* 132).

These interrelated issues – personal and collective identities, testimony, trauma – raise a common theme that emerges from exilic Palestinian life writing: its affective nature. Studying autobiographical narratives within the discourse of human rights, Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith state:

Affective dimensions always attend the telling and reception of stories. Stories may generate strong sensations, feelings, and embodied responses for tellers and their audiences, at times of first and subsequent witnessing. As a sensation, capacity, or force felt in the body, affect lends intensity and amplification to responses, suffusing the conditions of reception. (6)

Whitlock reiterates this, noting that ‘testimonial life narrative travels on shifting sentiments of witness and spectatorship, and it is vitally dependent on its capacity to engage in affective transactions’ (*Postcolonial* 68). The ongoing conflict and its misrepresentation produce a deep sense of injustice from which Palestinian life writing springs. The strong emotional pull of Palestine does not always manifest

itself emphatically in the writing, but nevertheless it drives the counternarrative, and whether implicit or explicit, it is part of the affective nature of this body of literature. To return to Stuart Hall's assertion about why he researches the diaspora: *the heart has its reasons*.

To state that Palestinian life writing is affective, then, is to draw attention to the *impetus* for writing as much as to the harrowing aspects of testimony. It is most certainly not to diminish the ability of this testimony to provide reasoned, sustained narratives of the impact of settler colonialism. While there is a broad spectrum of emotional disclosure within this life writing, my intention is not to overstate the confessional aspects of it. Rather, I want to make it very clear that this writing is produced from a place of suffering, whether that suffering is directly experienced or inherited, and regardless of the extent to which (and the *ways* in which) that suffering is enunciated. This goes back to Khalidi's assertion: if Palestinian identity is *suspect almost by definition*, then similarly built into the definition of Palestinian life writing is the need to challenge the wrongs of the past and to counter the discourse that criminalises Palestinian identity, and by extension their very *humanity*. Wail Hassan, with a broader emphasis, also recognises this, observing that autobiographies by Palestinian exiles

play a role similar to that of slave narratives, prison memoirs, and testimonies of survivors of genocide and war crimes, in that they concretize a historical trauma that may seem abstract to those unfamiliar with it, anchoring collective tragedy in individual experiences, and adding the human dimension often missing from historical accounts and ideological claims and counter-claims. (114)

This underscores more explicitly the affective nature of Palestinian life writing, derived from the human dimension missing from other accounts – such as from the human rights reports that Shehadeh asserts cannot achieve what literary writing can. Hassan also reiterates Gilmore and Matar's point that trauma is



shared: individual experiences are part of a *collective* tragedy, and as many of the writers in this thesis show, navigating between these individual and shared forms of trauma is part of the challenge of narrating life.

Thus, it would be wrong to overlook or dismiss the affective nature of Palestinian life writing. I do not believe that scholarship is improved, or more 'balanced', if this is placed outside the terms of analysis. The ability, or at least the potential, of life writing to forge connections is the source of its strength; the 'greater power' of literary writing, to return to Shehadeh, is predicated on involving readers in 'a deeper and more lasting manner'. Echoing Harlow's assertion of the *demand* made on the reader by resistance literature, Whitlock persuasively articulates the role of the reader as witness to testimony. Therefore, the relationship between the writer and reader of postcolonial testimony is expressed in terms of a meaningful transaction: 'We speak of *bearing* witness to indicate the weight of responsibility and affect that follows this transfer' (*Postcolonial* 8, emphasis in original). This weight is there in Canetti's response to Kafka's writing, affecting him *like an actual life*. It is there when I read about Karmi's mother, profoundly unable to adjust to life in England, or when I read of Barakat being denied entry to Palestine, or Hammami and her aunt's return to the family home in Jaffa, or Said's difficulty in fully accepting his distance from what the photographs in *After the Last Sky* depict.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that there are serious challenges when it comes to the circulation and recognition of testimony – to the acceptance of the 'weight' being transferred. Discussing the transnational dimensions of testimony, Rooney persuasively suggests that '[b]earing witness should be understood as a matter of keeping faith with humanity', a faith that is

ruptured when those asked to bear witness fail to recognise any sense of responsibility on a human level for those testifying ('Humanity' 106). There is, therefore, a certain fragility in entrusting someone with your testimony because it can either lead to a moment of connection, or abandonment (116). The 'shifting sentiments of witness and spectatorship' that Whitlock refers to are also indicative of this. To compel someone to bear witness to your story is not the same as succeeding at it. In *Soft Weapons*, Whitlock observes: 'Tragically, the emotional valency of testimony has little to do with the intensity of the suffering or pain that it carries, and it has everything to do with the cultural and political milieu it encounters and its capacity there to command witness' (79). The fact that the texts under examination are written in English, and the ways in which they appeal to the reader, demonstrate both the potential *and* challenge of commanding witness. The narratives are opened up to the broadest possible audience, but they also consciously address a reader that might well dismiss them. As should be obvious, this testimony is not just addressed to fellow Palestinians, but also on behalf of them. Fundamental to this is its appeal to the reader on a *human* level, and its desire to be accepted (borne witness to) on this level. Such an appeal to universal humanism should not be derided (as broader notions of humanism so often are), but instead seen as an important *strategy* of this form of testimony, given the Anglophone context within which it circulates. The cultural and political environments at which these texts are surely aimed, namely the UK and the US, are generally unreceptive and even hostile to Palestine, and the writers in this thesis are fully cognisant of this reality. Franklin's description in her analysis of *Out of Place* of 'a more supple humanism' that admits the humanity of those othered by its Western analogues, extends beyond Said's work and resonates as a

fundamental aspect of the works studied here (*Academic* 124). As Said himself writes in *After the Last Sky*, words that still have relevance: 'Stateless, dispossessed, de-centred, we are frequently unable either to speak the "truth" of our experience or to make it heard. We do not usually control the images that represent us; we have been confined to spaces designed to reduce or stunt us; and we have often been distorted by pressures and powers that have been too much for us' (6). Trying to combat these pressures, alongside the trickiness of narrating personal and collective lives, is a central feature of the writing under examination. Part of the Palestinian counternarrative is to always be mindful of these pressures – to recognise the importance of continually justifying one's history but also one's humanity, while knowing that these utterances might not be heard or accepted. It refuses to be a futile gesture, even though obstacles and frustrations are very much part of the telling. This adds a combative aspect to the life writing evident in, for example, Hammami, Jarrar and Najla Said.

However, we must also recognise that narration often stems from private moments of crisis, which means that testimony is not *only* about reaching an audience. Suzette Henke argues:

Testimonial life-writing allows the author to share an unutterable tale of pain and suffering, of transgression or victimization, in a discursive medium that can be addressed to everyone or no-one – to a world that will judge personal testimony as accurate historical witnessing or as thinly disguised fiction. No matter. It is through the very process of rehearsing and reenacting a drama of mental survival that the trauma narrative effects psychological catharsis. (xix)

Henke's focus on the *act* of life writing, which we can link very closely to the *impetus* to narrate Palestinian exile, is important, because it is easy to fixate on the public nature of testimony and its need for someone to bear witness. I would argue that both act and impetus, with their intrinsic interiority and emotional weight,

contribute to the affective nature of the literature. The profound importance of the *process* of narrating exile, alongside what provokes it, comes up repeatedly. For example, Shehadeh asserts the necessity of keeping a diary to make sense of his internal exile; Hammami avoids a mental breakdown by transferring her energies to narrating the occupation; Said's response to his diagnosis is to throw himself into the narration of his lost past; Shalhoub-Kevorkian explicitly articulates her threatened home as a space of creative resistance, where she narrates the occupation alongside young scholars, such as Ihmoud. In all instances, writing is a form of therapy, or as Henke (and others) put it, 'scriptotherapy'. This is not to downplay the role of the reader, but to underscore the fact that it is not the sole factor in the production of (Palestinian) testimony. It is important to acknowledge what precedes the completed and published narrative.

As this thesis has demonstrated, the most obvious aspect of these counternarratives is the catastrophic impact of settler colonialism, from the Nakba to the current occupation and the ongoing denial of the right of return. Related to this is the broader question – raised in my introduction – of what Sa'di describes as 'a moral and just human order'. This is achieved, I would argue, not through generalised judgments on justice and moral behaviour, but through a close attentiveness (as befitting *life* writing) to the experience of uncertainty and its psychic impact. This further contributes to the idea of affect. For a reader, it also prompts questions of *why* this uncertainty exists, which brings one back to the root cause of settler colonialism. Thus crises of identity, with their familiar vocabulary, are ultimately inseparable from the wider question of Palestinian dispossession. We see this in Said's determination to live with irreconcilability; in Karmi's deconstruction of identity politics, moving constantly between searching for a 'true

self' and admitting that this is not possible; it is also found in Hiller's more assertive approach to the uncertainty of Palestinian identity and his resistance to being labelled too precisely. The differences between just these three writers indicate the formal distinctions with which this thesis has been concerned. Exile – as a personal experience of loss – takes many forms, while also being united by the experience of uncertainty as a fundamental aspect of identity to be negotiated.

In Chapter One, I explored Said's life writing, paying attention to the formal differences between *After the Last Sky* and *Out of Place*. Through critical works such as *The Question of Palestine* and *The Politics of Dispossession*, Said is well known for his counternarrative emphasising Palestinians as a presence, constantly refuting their exiling and erasure. This is evident, too, in his responses to Jean Mohr's photography in *After the Last Sky*, and in his recovery of the lost past in *Out of Place*. We existed, Said shows, and we exist now. His life writing is faithful to this important counternarrative, yet the complexity of Said as an individual means that he also conceptualises exile in ways that are particular to him alone. He grapples with it as a deeply private experience, at times enabling and at others disabling. He writes with an awareness of his stature and a sense of obligation to the cause he has long championed, while rejecting collective forms of identity and instead articulating a fluid model of selfhood that represents not just the survival of exile but the ability to make a success of it, rendering it intellectual and metaphorical. I have thus read his life writing as indicative of the need to *sublimate* exile, and indeed this sublimation is essential to Said's production of counternarratives as a Palestinian intellectual. Said's complexity and paradoxes mean that he commits to the counternarrative critiquing the conflict and its inequities, while also appreciating the lessons learned from exile. The central theme here is

irreconcilability, yet for Said this does not imply surrender or defeatism. The conflict may be intractable, but that does not preclude striving for a solution. His model of selfhood will always remain uncertain, but it is navigated in ways that allow Said to harness this uncertainty. And while his life writing may not provide a blueprint for others to enjoy exile, it does demonstrate that there are ways of living with unresolvable tensions.

In Chapter Two, I examined Ghada Karmi's life writing and her attentiveness to place. Karmi, with her direct experience of the Nakba, narrates exile very differently to Said. The counternarrative of *In Search of Fatima* revolves tightly around the personal impact of the Nakba, demonstrating how it devastated (and continues to devastate) not just Palestinian society but also family life at an atomic level, paralysing trust and communication. Karmi's struggles to come to terms with her exilic identity, and her distance from Palestine, indicate the emotional impact of displacement, not just in terms of establishing home but in terms of defining oneself. These struggles continue in *Return*, suggesting that the search for a settled identity has, paradoxically, become a central aspect of Karmi's identity. In other words, identity is somehow constantly deferred. *Return*, through its narration of living in Palestine, is also a testimony of life under occupation, the failures of the PA, and the settler colonialism that continues to underpin it all. It is striking that both Said and Karmi narrate striving for the impossible as a consequence of exile – for Said, striving to arrive at an end to exile; for Karmi, striving to return home. The different directions they move in indicate their different perspectives. Said does not seek to recuperate the past for his own sake; rather, he seeks to keep moving towards, through the continued sublimation of exile, a termination of it, knowing that this is not possible; hence the

transmutations and paradoxes that his life writing often displays. Karmi wants to undo the effects of exile by recovering what she has lost, equally aware that this is not possible. Taken together, both writers underscore the permanence of exile; what is unreachable remains unreachable, what has been done cannot be undone. Yet as I have shown, this permanence does not dilute their commitment to the urgent counternarrative to Israeli hegemony, but in fact strengthens it.

Chapter Three analysed the varied work of Rema Hammami, examining in particular the experience of internal exile and its intersection with external exile, demonstrating the qualitative differences between the two. A defining aspect of this difference is the *resistance* built into the definition of internal exile – a refusal to accept one’s exiling. Hammami’s counternarrative is clearly an opposition to the Israeli occupation that continues to carve up the Palestinian landscape, control Palestinian mobility, dispossess Palestinians, and remind them of their inequality on a daily basis. Crucial to this narration is a focus on collective suffering and resistance, whether in her East Jerusalem neighbourhood or at checkpoints. Unsurprisingly, this narration of the collective is more robust than in either Said or Karmi, yet she nonetheless indicates how fragile this collective is – a direct consequence of ongoing settler colonialism. Part of a fractured and fracturing polity, she is often made to feel entirely separate from her fellow Palestinians, not just in inaccessible Gaza, but also in the West Bank. The trauma and violence that reigns in Sheikh Jarrah enhances this sense of fragility. Her articulation of external exile emerges from her writing on Jaffa, from where her father and his family were exiled during the Nakba. There are similarities between Karmi and Hammami in terms of the inheritance of loss from an older generation, and the difficulty of returning to the family home. Thus, within her work we find different forms of

exile, suggesting the increasing complexity of Palestinian exilic experience. Hammami's work also allowed an exploration of form in relation to life writing, thinking in particular about the personal essay, the intersection of the autobiographical and the academic, and the benefits of co-authorship.

Continuing my focus on formal differences – both in terms of exile and life writing – my final chapter examined the anthologising of Palestinian life writing, arguing that such anthologies represent a collective counternarrative designed to demonstrate solidarity. Often concentrating effectively on a single issue, the six texts under scrutiny contribute meaningfully to a discussion of exile, and show the value of looking beyond single-author, book-length works. Shehadeh convincingly narrates the challenges of internal exile by examining the history of one building in Ramallah, with its legacy of suffering and colonial oppression. In contrast to Hammami's focus on the daily lived experience of internal exile, Shehadeh provides a valuable long lens to the conflict, offering historical context that searingly critiques the Oslo Accords and the progress they purported to represent. This overlaps with Karmi's observations on the hollowness of state-building, which she witnesses on her return to Palestine to work for the PA. Writing from East Jerusalem, Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud echo Hammami's combativeness, persuasively combining theory, gender and life writing. Their decision to co-author enunciates the importance of community and resistance, and the strength derived from shared experience. Home, the central motif of the text, is used to demonstrate how exile consumes even the most intimate spaces. By examining two narratives of returning to Palestine and being denied entry, by Barakat and Jarrar, I animate a central issue of the conflict: the right of return. These pieces succinctly and in different ways (mournfully in Barakat's case and with black humour in Jarrar's)



demonstrate the injustice and routine helplessness of Palestinian experience. There is a crossover with Hammami's observations on the inequality of negotiating the checkpoint, while in both cases the Palestinian tendency towards solidarity is easily dissolved by the mechanisms of Israeli control. Barakat, like Hiller, admits to being indebted to Said's ideas on exile, yet nonetheless articulates her own exile very differently. Like Karmi she is determined to 'return', even while admitting that true return is an impossibility; unlike Karmi, she feels able to remain in spite of this. By concluding the chapter, and the thesis, with an analysis of the inheritance of exile, I wanted to interrogate a theme that arguably applies to all of the writers, in their varying ways impacted by the sorrow of older generations. Both Hiller and Najla Said are influenced by the ties of kinship from which they derive their Palestinian identity, but it is an identity that also stems from the body of narrative work that precedes them. Their essays raise compelling questions about how their respective relationships to Palestine are cultivated at a distance. Najla Said is more sensitive to the burden and pain of her Palestinian identity; Hiller is more open to its metaphorical possibilities and the way it enriches his work. But both remain tied to Palestine, even if each inheritance is ultimately shaped by the sensibilities and circumstances of the individual.

As I reflect on the various works I have examined, some striking points of coherence emerge. In the first instance, the need to narrate exile and respond to the Palestinian predicament is not governed by gender, age or whether one is inside or outside Palestine. The past is referenced and studied, but not fetishised; instead, it is used as a way of understanding the present and shaping the future. This recalls my reference in the introduction to literary merit. There are certainly examples of Palestinian life writing that do fetishise the past, but I would argue

that the writers in this study adopt a more nuanced approach to temporality, which elevates their work as literary testimony. As the exiled writer Shahid observes in *Jerusalem Memories*: 'Keeping the memory of those long-ago days alive is important, I think, and the hope of better days to come for all of us can only be based on the true knowledge of the past' (i). This need to better understand the past, applicable to the writers I have chosen, suggests a tentative collective consciousness; one that bears a resemblance to what Matar refers to in the subtitle of her book *What it Means to be Palestinian* as 'Palestinian peoplehood'. Such a concept is not rooted in territory or formal politics, but instead animates the question of what binds Palestinians as a people across national borders. The writers I examine are attentive to this idea of peoplehood; certainly much of the work I look at rejects party politics, the supposed state-building of the PA and familiar tropes of Palestinian nationalism (often regarded as limiting and patriarchal). Hammami, Shehadeh and Karmi are all scathing about Palestinian 'state' politics, as is Said in much of his critical work. Karmi's critique of the PA is acerbically satirical, and indeed it is striking how many of the female writers in this study – Hammami, Jarrar, Najla Said – deploy satire or black humour in their work. This seems to indicate both a coping method, and the ability to use engaging narrative strategies. I do not see the multiplicity of exilic or life writing forms as detrimental to a broader cohesiveness, or to notions of a future Palestine. Indeed, such diversity can only further the development of a more stable (post)national identity. I hope that my thesis captures what Hammer observes: 'There are two striking features of Palestinian life, one being the diversity of stories and experiences of Palestinians and the other an overwhelming sense of belonging to one another as a people' (*Exile* 3).

The absence of Palestine is still felt on many levels. In my introduction, I drew attention to Williams and Ball's question: Where is Palestine? To which the answer they offered was: Nowhere. In an eloquent essay on Palestinian exilic writing, Ibrahim Muhawi recalls being asked the same 'seemingly unanswerable' question by a colleague:

'Where is Palestine, then?' she wanted to know. The more thought I gave it, the more I realised Palestine has remained a question whose answer was like the Hindu meditational practice called '*neti, neti*'. Whenever a thought comes into the mind, you negate it by saying to yourself '*neti, neti*', meaning 'not this, not this'. Thus Palestine is not the West Bank, and it is not Gaza; and it is not the West Bank and Gaza combined. It is not the Palestinian Authority; and it is not Israel. It is not even historic Palestine except as a dream. Palestine exists in exile as a signifier whose signified does not match its shape or magnitude. (31)

The writers I study also conceptualise Palestine as something still transitory. It is never a fixed entity, and no two articulations of it will ever perfectly align. This is not just because places are always subjectively perceived, but because of the extreme precariousness of Palestine: not simply a disputed territory, but also a diverse and unstable concept. In the face of this irreconcilability, to borrow from Said, these writers strive to give Palestine shape, form, meaning, dignity, prominence, a voice; sometimes even just a name. But they also demonstrate that whatever Palestine is now, it is not enough.

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