Routes to Palestine:

Home, Trauma, and the Nuances of Self-Construction in the Autobiographical Work of Ghada Karmi, Raja Shehadeh, and Edward Said

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Abstract

The genre of autobiography has gained currency in the Palestinian literary scene over the last few decades. This is a phenomenon that speaks to the relevance of this mode of expression to voice the nuances of the Palestinian experience both inside and outside Palestine. This research examines the dynamics of the relationship between the politics of identity construction in autobiography and the complex politics of being Palestinian by reading the memoirs of three Palestinian authors. Ghada Karmi, Raja Shehadeh, and Edward Said render a multiplicity of ways to be Palestinian in their life narratives. This study brings these memoirists together within a framework of postcolonial trauma by elucidating how they articulate their identities through the itinerary of a fragmented home, an impossible return, and an elusive sense of belonging. My reading reveals that the effort to highlight a nuanced Palestinian experience that attends to the specificities of individual experience finds a suitable space within the framework of autobiography. However, the Palestinian autobiographical act is still haunted by a collectivist shadow of nationalism. The conclusions this research draws demonstrate that the process of individuation is intertwined with the collective, engaging in a dialogue that both enriches and complicates the broader narrative of Palestinian identity. Although the effort to shape a Palestinian identity beyond nationalism is complex and ongoing, Palestinian memoirs serve as a testament to both personal and collective traumas, offering a deeper and more nuanced comprehension of Palestinian identity. Critics engaging with Palestinian autobiography should push further to construct ways to conceive of the Palestinian beyond the boundaries of nationalism. The growing body of autobiographical works that has been accumulating over the past few decades may well offer a substantial foundation to challenge and potentially replace the traditional frameworks that have so far monopolized the meaning of Palestinian identity along conventional narratives lines that may not fully capture the complexity and variety of Palestinian lives. This shift allows for a more nuanced and multifaceted portrayal of what it means to be Palestinian, reflecting the unique and varied journeys of its people and giving voice to what has long been silenced.

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Contents

Introduction

This thesis takes as its topic the nuances of self-construction in Palestinian autobiography by analysing the works of Ghada Karmi, Raja Shehadeh, and Edward Said. It argues that these authors render a self-perception that alternates between a desire for individuation away from collectivist, nationalist narratives and a sense of duty to maintain a level of commitment towards the Palestinian cause as a lifelong framework for meaning. Life writing, with its subcategories of diary, biography, autobiography, and memoir, has gained a noticeable level of popularity among Palestinian authors both inside and outside Palestine over the last three decades. The critical work accompanying this genre, however, has been limited to the thematic aspects of home, return, and identity that often assign to these literary works the position of historical documents serving a political function in the conflict. This being the case, this thesis will advocate for a reading of Palestinian life writing as a distinct variant of autobiography that highlights a dynamic interchange between the political and cultural circumstances informing the work of the author and the received generic conventions of biography, autobiography, or memoir. The present study addresses this complex relationship through the autobiographical works of these Palestinian authors, each of whom experienced exile and its political, cultural, and psychological repercussions, albeit in different ways and far-flung geographies. The autobiographies of Karmi, Shehadeh, and Said, this study argues, have not received enough critical attention in terms of their potential to inform ambivalent perspectives to look at not only Palestinian literature but also to offer more nuance to the generic boundaries of life writing, its underlying assumptions, its strengths, and its limitations. I will argue, throughout this introduction and the upcoming chapters, that by moving beyond traditional notions of home, return, and identity in reading Palestinian autobiography, it is possible to challenge hegemonic, homogenising perceptions of both the Israeli and Palestinian national projects, the traumatic memory of the Nakba, and life writing. In other words, the texts I examine provide a ground for writing, and speaking, back to Orientalism, colonialism, nationalism, trauma theory, and autobiography itself. This study does not claim to construct one incontrovertible notion of Palestinian identity. Rather, it suggests that Palestinian life writing reveals a dynamic, diverse, and multi-layered perception of the self that,

on the one hand, challenges official discourses of Palestinian identity and, on the other hand, problematises the function of the autobiographical act by introducing the politics of the Palestinian cause into the processes of memory and narrative. Thus, it contributes to a nuanced comprehension of autobiography as constructive of the author but also constructed by the author. While Karmi, Shehadeh, and Said emerge as distinct identities by the end of their respective life narratives, Palestinian autobiography emerges as a distinctive branch of autobiography where the politics of the genre intermingle with the inevitable politics of the Palestinian context, resulting in narrative ambivalence.

The significance of this topic is underscored by the international prominence of the Palestinian issue, which has persisted since 1948. This political and humanitarian crisis has attracted the attention of the international community over the last year more than it has ever done over the 75 years of Israeli occupation. The attacks carried out on October 7th, 2023 by Hamas and other armed groups on Israeli settlements, in which 'some 1,200 people were killed and around 250 abducted', triggered a still ongoing 'Israeli onslaught that has killed more than 41,500 people and forcibly displaced 1.9 million in the occupied Gaza Strip' (Amnesty International, 2024). The removal of Gazans in such huge numbers to Rafah in the South-West brought back echoes of a previous displacement that came to represent the single most foundational event of the modern Palestinian identity, namely the Nakba (Arabic for catastrophe). The Nakba resulted in the expulsion in 1948 of 750,000 Palestinians from Palestine (Franklin, 2023, p. 4), giving birth to a diasporic community whose members are scattered across the Arab World and beyond. This new mode of existence, produced by catastrophic political developments in the homeland, inspired a large body of literary production including poetry, drama, film, music, fiction, and life writing which rendered the Palestinian experience of occupation inside Palestine and exile in host countries. In a foreword to Rachel Gregory Fox and Ahmed Qabaha's collection *Post-Millennial Palestine: Literature, Memory, Resistance* (2024), Bashir Abu-Manneh observes that with 'several generations being born in exile after the *Nakba*, the sources of Palestinian writing have simply proliferated and multiplied' (2024, p. 4). This proliferation, Abu-Manneh continues, suggests that 'Palestinian voice can no longer be monopolized by one political party, official representative, or court sanctioned writer' and offers an opportunity for mirroring the

diversity of cultural 'self-representation' in upholding 'the right of Palestinian self-determination in politics' (2024, p. 7). The experience of occupation and the struggles of daily life under Israeli surveillance is rendered vividly in Shehadeh's work, as he writes from within Palestine. The challenges of leading a life away from one's homeland is extensively detailed in the texts by Karmi and Said, writing from the UK and the US respectively. When posited against the recent events in Palestine, the three authors seem to construct a textual nexus that locates the conflict in its larger historical context and, unfortunately, foreshadows the psychological pain and existential dilemma awaiting displaced people wherever they end up living.

I have been, and will be, using the terms 'life writing' and 'autobiography' interchangeably for a number of reasons. One of the first problems critics are forced to grapple with when engaging with the study of life writing is that of terminology. In order to make reasonable the nomenclatural differentiation between the term life writing, biography, autobiography, and memoir, it becomes necessary to delineate a typology that is based on distinctive criteria, thematic, structural, or stylistic. While 'life writing' seems to be the overarching term that potentially encompasses all writing which takes a human life as its subject matter, the boundaries of biography, autobiography, and memoir are so blurred, illusive, and mutually informing that they render efforts to distinguish them an instrumental necessity rather than a solid generic demarcation. In *Memoir Ethics: Good Lives and the Virtues* (2016), Mike W. Martin reports that some scholars understand autobiography as referring to 'full-life narratives, with a temporal span from birth to the time of writing.' Memoirs, by contrast, 'focus on periods or aspects of a life such as childhood, a marriage, a creative discovery, or a trip to Tibet' (Martin, 2016, p. 5). Distinguishing between autobiography and memoir based on the time frame they cover raises two questions. The first question regards the underlying assumptions and preferential viewpoints. Depending on the aspect under examination, these assumptions can push the critic towards one term or the other. In other words, if longer time spans are privileged in our typology, then memoir becomes a subgenre of autobiography, as this latter also covers events such as a marriage or an excursion. A succession of memoirs, in this sense, would make up a fragmented autobiography. The flip side of this occurs when depth, or sharpness of detail in the narrative is prioritised. In this case autobiography's ability to narrate life is questioned on the basis of its relative shallowness

as it only touches on significant events, undermining its own representational claims. From this angle, memoir seems to be more of a life writing than autobiography. In the context of Palestine, however, this relationship is made more complex because life narratives are repeatedly disrupted by traumatic events on a major scale, such as the 1948 Nakba, the 1967 *Naksa* (Arabic for 'setback'), the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and the many rounds of bombardment periodically visited on the Palestinians in the West bank, but especially in the Gaza Strip, tragedies that seem to have escaped the critical lens of trauma theory which has found fertile soil in cultural studies since the 1990s.

The second question is concerned with the extent of access provided to the reader of autobiography as compared to that of memoir. While autobiography purports to present a much bigger picture, usually putting events in more comprehensive historical contexts, it suffers from the lacuna in richness of detail that might prove vital to the truth value of life writing. Similarly, whereas memoir typically presents a much higher level of detail, its representational properties might be compromised by the narrowness of its contextual scope. The context of Palestine, again, presents a challenge to critical conceptualisations of autobiographical writing from this perspective. In Palestinian life writing, there often appears to be more to say that remains unsaid. The reading experience thus becomes caught up between the overwhelming number of details and events and the moral obligation of interpreting these against their historical backdrop. Neither subgenre seems adequate to the task. While it is extremely important to communicate the larger historical context in which events like October 7th take place, it is no less important to render in detail the nuances of these events and how they affect the individuals involved, victims and perpetrators. The aspect of historical contextuality recommends autobiography for the task. However, the speed, scale, and enormity of developments such as the Nakba beg a much more detailed account, hence memoir seems to be the structure of choice, if choice it could be called. Palestinian memoir is in this light an attempted autobiography. That is, a life narrative that repeatedly reintroduces the author and their background anew as an attempt to reconcile the need to bear witness, the obligation of historical contextuality, and the inherent belatedness of narrative as compared to experience. The Palestinian memoirs I read in this study are driven by an underlying commitment to tell and bear witness, as much as narratively possible, to the

trauma of human as well as territorial loss. In its recording of death and displacement, Palestinian memoir reemphasises historical existence and rootedness. Also, in the fragmentation of their texts, they render a Palestinian identity that is similarly fragmented by successive cycles of trauma. Shehadeh, for instance, tells and retells the story of his family's expulsion from Jaffa across his many memoirs. Similarly, Karmi reintroduces herself and her family's experience in the second memoir although she has already done that in the first. Said's account, which is different in its approach to the question of Palestinian identity vis-à-vis the relationship with the land, renders a fragmented life experience between multiple geographies and languages.

Interestingly, we could add to the above discussion the observation that both memoir and autobiography involve telling life stories of people other than the author, a characteristic which transfers them to the territory of biography. In *Memoir: an Introduction*, G. Thomas Couser pursues a lengthy discussion of the many intersections of memoir, autobiography, and biography. Rejecting the common assumption that memoir is restrictively used to name one's narrative about oneself, he declares that the term can also designate a 'narrative that is primarily about someone *other than* the author; used this way, the term refers to a subgenre of *biography*, as *distinct* from autobiography' (Couser, 2011, p. 18). But even narratives that call themselves autobiography involve telling stories of people other than the author. This suggests that it is not a simple task to draw the line between the two categories because, just like 'no person is an island, no autobiography is a one-person show' (Couser, 2011, p. 20). Put differently, the fact that the story is told by a person about themselves does not guarantee it is exclusively theirs. We are continuously implicated in others' stories the same way they are implicated in our stories. This leads us to the conclusion that 'there is no singular text of the self or no autobiography which is only one's own' (Anderson, 2011, p. 49). Karmi attempts to individuate herself in England by constructing an English identity as separate from that of her parents and immediate Palestinian surroundings. However, for that very attempt to carry any significance she needs to foreground it with her family's history in Palestine. Similarly, in his quest to construct a subjectivity away from his father's achievements, Shehadeh's narrative reclaiming of Palestinian land is predicated on employing collective memory. Said's account of his formative years in Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon is the richest of the three in terms of characters. That is, 'the narrative voice of the

individual not only exists within and responds to a collective, national discourse of resistance, but also continues to build upon its foundations' (Gregory Fox and Qabaha, 2024, p. 19). Therefore, the project of identity construction in memoir turns out to be inescapably attached, and representational, of life narratives of others. Having established that no autobiography is created in isolation, it is important to recognize another common aspect of these subcategories of life writing. The core issue in this classification problem stems from the inherent belatedness of retrospective representation and the unreliability of memory as its vehicle. These problematic classifications and cross-sectional categorizations arise from the impossibility of fully textualizing life. While memoirs offer relatively more focus, detail, and complexity, they provide narratives that appear detached from preceding or subsequent events, falling short of a comprehensive account of a multifaceted human life.

Another important point of commonality between the memoir and autobiography is linked to the inner workings of the narrative in each. In Couser's terms:

> One obvious indication that a text is a memoir or autobiography is that the author, the narrator, and the protagonist share the same name and vital statistics (such as date of birth). They are identical, in more than one sense: (1) they are all the same person, and (2) their congruence establishes the identity of the memoirist. This is in itself a sufficient signal that a narrative is a memoir. (2011, p. 37)

While the identity claim at the core of memoir and autobiography (Couser, 2011, p. 81) draws on a perceived identicality or sameness of the three 'I's (the author/memoirist, the narrator, and the protagonist), they turn out, upon closer inspection, to be distinguishable parties which fulfil different functions in the totality of the literary product. The protagonist 'I' is what populates the narrative predominantly. It is the one who did, said, or witnessed something in the past. In terms of temporality and the development of the self, it could be referred to as the 'I-then' (Couser, 2011, p. 69). The narrator gives voice to the process of moving across time and experience from the I-then to the 'I-now' (Couser, 2011, p. 69). Palestinian memoir, however, seems to fall outside this assumed continuity of movement from the past to the present. Rather, the narrative progress that connects the I-then to the I-now is caught up in successive rounds of disruption. Hence, a common feature, especially between Karmi and Shehadeh, is the need to reintroduce

the protagonist in each of their works. Narrative becomes an existential necessity for Palestinians in the multiple post-traumatic contexts they find themselves in. The I-now is what the author perceives of him/herself to be at the time of writing. How the narrator emplaces the protagonist in geographical locations and socio-political positions decides the nature of the link between the protagonist and the memoirist. In other words, how the author identifies at the juncture of writing is tantamount to how they read their movement across time by means of their shifts across social, cultural, political, geographical as well as ideological positions. The 'I' of the author, unarticulated yet always present in the background, is the (un)intended end product of the autobiographical act. Because the one who tells his or her story occupies, as the narrative proceeds, 'both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation' it might be most practical to approach life writing as 'a moving target, a set of shifting self-referential practices that, in engaging the past, reflect on identity in the present' (Smith and Watson, 2010, p. 1). So, far from an imagined recouping of the past, memoir engages the past as a hermeneutic lens of the present positionality. When reading memoir, the focus falls on 'how the text in some sense produces the subject, rather than the opposite' (Couser, 2011, p. 182). This burden of representability becomes even heavier on autobiography when we add the fragmentation of these authors' life experience that results from the problem of successive disruptions.

Life writing therefore posits a selective, justificatory representation which deploys memory to render the identitarian process of continuous becoming as a succession of moral, ethical choices. As Martin further explains this feature of life writing, he maintains that:

> Autobiographers also, however, assess and argue for general value perspectives, whether concerning specific social practices, morality, or good lives in all their dimensions. In doing so they transcend any narrow self-focus, though they marshal personal experience to support their perspective. (2016, p. 13)

Linking Martin's exposition of the underlying moral argument of autobiography to the above mentioned differentiation of author, narrator, and protagonist produces two main levels of analysis. The first one is concerned with the inner workings of self-representation in the text. It attempts to explicate how the three 'I's interact in the construction of the narrative and of

identity. The second focuses on the unarticulated arguments put forward by the memoir. In other words, it tries to discern what the memoir shows, rather than tells. Or, in Couser's terms, the two levels refer to 'how' the memoir works as opposed to 'what work' it does (Couser, 2011, p. 14), highlighting the contrast between the memoir as a literary composition and its impact on the extra-textual world. In the context of Palestine, it is especially important to keep the distinction between the autobiographical story and the story of autobiography. That is to say, the individual construction of a life narrative is always interlaced with collective narratives of history and culture. Indeed, as Anna Ball asserts, the 'very act of creative expression' carries political potential when approached as occurring 'against the backdrop of narrative silencing and erasure that has traditionally thwarted Palestinian self-representation, both political and creative' (Ball, 2012, p. 2). So, when the Palestinian author engages in narrating their life, they immediately, and inevitably, take a political stance. This leaves little to grapple with from an intentionalist point of view. That is to say, whether he/she intends to intervene politically or not is irrelevant. What is at stake, rather, is how these three authors tell the story of Palestinian autobiography while narrating their own life stories. In other words, drawing on Said's, Karmi's, and Shehadeh's notions of home, return, and self, this thesis intends to distinguish thematic, structural, and critical aspects that govern Palestinian autobiography as an act of both self-construction and self-representation. It highlights how all three emerge from their respective autobiographies as Palestinian individuals yet each of them constructs a unique subjectivity.

Nationalism, as Said eloquently defines, is 'an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs' (Said 2001, 182). The concept becomes particularly poignant in the context of Palestinian nationalism, which represents a multifaceted political and cultural movement grounded in the enduring aspiration for self-determination and sovereign control over the land historically known as Palestine. While its modern articulation began in the early 20th century, largely in reaction to the influx of Zionist settlers and the imposition of British colonial governance, its deeper origins lie in centuries of localized identity formation and resistance to foreign domination (Ghanem 2013). During the British Mandate era, Palestinian nationalism began to consolidate, especially in the wake of the 1936–1939 Arab Revolt—a pivotal uprising that underscored widespread

opposition to both British policies and Zionist expansion. This period marked a significant shift from fragmented local resistance to a more unified national consciousness. The establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 further institutionalized this movement, positioning the PLO as the principal representative of the Palestinian people and their quest for statehood. The organization not only articulated the political goals of liberation and independence but also became a symbol of Palestinian identity on the international stage. Palestinian nationalism is not monolithic; it has been shaped by a dynamic and often tense interplay of ideological currents, including pan-Arabism, Islamic traditions, and deeply rooted local affiliations. These elements have interacted in complex ways, reflecting the diverse social fabric of Palestinian society and the shifting geopolitical landscape. Over time, the movement has adapted to new realities, including mass displacement, the rise of competing political factions, and evolving strategies for resistance and diplomacy.

Palestinian nationalism, like many nationalist movements, has faced a range of internal and external challenges that have complicated its goals and hindered its effectiveness. One major issue is that the movement has been marked by deep political rifts, especially between Fatah (dominant in the West Bank) and Hamas (ruling Gaza), which has led to competing visions for Palestinian statehood. These divisions have weakened the ability to present a unified front in negotiations and international diplomacy. The ideological distance between the two major factions resulted in an ambiguous national vision. Palestinian nationalism has often struggled to articulate a clear and cohesive national project, oscillating between pan-Arabism, Islamic identity, and territorial nationalism. This ideological fluidity has made it difficult to build consistent institutions and long-term strategies. More significant to this study is the fact that a considerable portion of the Palestinian identity has been built around resistance and negation to Zionism. So, rather than a constructive vision of state-building, symbols and rhetoric surrounding the perception of a Palestinian largely emphasized struggle and victimhood. Another point that is relevant to my research and the texts I read in this thesis is the exclusivist orientation of nationalism that, similar to experiences such as the Uyghur Muslims in China, denies minority groups the right to exist narratively. The three authors I engage with in the upcoming chapters undermine the exclusivity of narrative voice that nationalism operates upon through their

representative voices as they recount their individual life stories. Memoir is key in this process of narrative liberation. This is mainly because is cuts through the suspension of disbelief and the open-endedness of possible interpretations through its tight relationship with the lived reality of the Palestinian people.

Palestinian autobiography has become a characteristic form of Palestinian literature over the last few decades. This is a feature noticeable in both creative production and literary criticism. The last 20 years registered the publishing of 'more than 110 Palestinian life narratives' (Iacovetti, 2024, p. 1). This literary corpus prepared a fertile ground for more autobiographies to be produced but also opened a fresh space for novel critical perspective pertaining to how best to read, analyse, interpret, and position these narratives in their literary, political, and historical contexts. In a recent article, Christopher Iacovetti makes the point that:

> Most scholars studying these texts have taken their critical-theoretical bearings from Edward Said, specifically from Said's conceptualization of Zionism as a hegemonic discourse that both enacts and depends on the erasure of its Palestinian victims. (Iacovetti, 2024, p. 1)

Reading Palestinian autobiography in the restrictive terms of a counternarrative to Zionism's historical and political claims gives rise, as Iacovetti demonstrates, to two main issues. First, it lends a central position to Zionism as a locus from which, or against which, the Palestinian identity emerges. The flip side of this observation is that centring Zionism forecloses the possibility of a Palestinian identity outside the framework of colonialism. Second, approaching Palestinian life writing merely as a counter discourse, while exhibiting a 'capacity to incorporate diverse Palestinian narratives into a unified interpretive framework', suffers from a related weakness of 'flatten[ing] complex multidimensional autobiographies into a single narrative mold' (Iacovetti, 2024, p. 2). As an alternative to this Saidian framework, Iacovetti proposes what he terms a 'Scottian' reading, inspired by the work of anthropologist David Scott who argues that there is a 'close correlation' between the political and temporal '"problem-spaces" in which people find themselves and the narrative "modes of emplotment" by which they interpret their lives and histories' (Iacovetti, 2024, p. 3). In order to elucidate his position, Iacovetti employs Scott's framework to read three memoirs by the Palestinian poet Fawaz Turki, which he wrote at

different points of his life over the span of 22 years. His conclusions upon reading Turki's *The Disinherited* (1972), *Soul in Exile* (1988), and *Exile's Return* (1994) can be summarized in three points. The first one is that Turki's writings do not constitute a counternarrative to Zionism. Second, he uses autobiography as 'a site for mediating and negotiating' the national, generational, and personal temporalities he inhabits (Iacovetti, 2024, p. 16). Finally, the Scottian framework used to read Turki can be deployed to read Palestinian autobiography in general (Iacovetti, 2024, p. 17).

My research is posited in conversation with ongoing critical work in the field of Palestinian studies. For instance, Norbert Bugeja's *Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East: Rethinking the Liminal in Mashriqi Writing* (2012) offers a critical reappraisal of how liminality functions within memoirs emerging from the Mashriq region. By foregrounding lived experience over abstract theorisation, Bugeja reconceptualises liminality as a material condition rooted in geopolitical rupture and historical trauma. Rather than treating memoirs as mere narrative retrospectives, he positions them as dynamic representational spaces where memory, identity, and national consciousness intersect. Through case studies of authors such as Mourid Barghouti, Amos Oz, Orhan Pamuk, Amin Maalouf, and Wadad Makdisi Cortas, Bugeja demonstrates how these texts reflect tensions between personal narrative and collective histories, often grappling with displacement, melancholy, and political thresholds (Bugeja, 2012). The book advances a materialist postcolonial framework by critiquing canonical theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, whose conceptualisations of liminality, Bugeja argues, remain overly symbolic and insufficiently anchored in the Middle Eastern historical context. Instead, the memoirs he examines reveal liminality as a fractured yet generative mode of identity formation, shaped by exilic memory, archival imagination, and gendered intellectual history. In Barghouti's I Saw Ramallah, for instance, liminal consciousness emerges through spatial alienation under occupation, while Cortas' A World I Loved underscores the role of Arab female voices in narrating national transformation. Ultimately, Bugeja's intervention lies in establishing memoir as a critical form that destabilises normative postcolonial paradigms while illuminating new epistemologies of place and remembrance in the Mashriq (Bugeja, 2012).

Lindsey Moore's study offers a compelling reconfiguration of postcolonial literary analysis by foregrounding Arab narratives that interrogate the nation-state and its colonial legacies. In the Egyptian context, Moore contrasts official revolutionary discourse with literary representations of revolt, particularly through the lens of gender and class. For instance, Latifa al-Zayyat's *The Open Door* is read as a feminist intervention that critiques patriarchal nationalism and foregrounds female agency within the Nasserist era (pp. 27–50). Moore argues that such texts 'recode revolutionary desire' by exposing the disjunction between state rhetoric and lived experience (p. 33). This approach allows her to situate Arab literature not merely as reflective of historical rupture, but as actively shaping alternative imaginaries of national belonging. In her chapter on Algeria, Moore explores the fraught legacy of anti-colonial violence and its literary reverberations, particularly through Francophone authors like Assia Djebar and Boualem Sansal. Djebar's work is positioned as a counter-narrative to masculinist historiography, offering a gendered archive of resistance and memory (pp. 77–123). Moore emphasizes how Djebar's polyphonic style 'disrupts the singularity of nationalist myth' and foregrounds the silenced voices of women in the liberation struggle (p. 89). Meanwhile, Sansal's novels interrogate post-independence authoritarianism and the ideological residues of colonialism, suggesting that decolonization remains an unfinished project (p. 102). Through these analyses, Moore demonstrates how Algerian literature functions as a site of ethical reckoning and historical re-visioning.

Ahmad Qabaha's *Exile and Expatriation in Modern American and Palestinian Writing* (2018) offers a nuanced contrapuntal reading of literary representations of displacement, contrasting the elective mobility of American expatriates with the involuntary exile of Palestinian writers. Through comparative analysis, Qabaha foregrounds the political and existential dimensions of exile, arguing that while American expatriation often reflects a pursuit of creative freedom and dissidence, Palestinian exile is a consequence of colonial dispossession and national trauma (Qabaha, 2018, pp. 1–40). In his reading of Malcolm Cowley and Fawaz Turki, Qabaha illustrates how Cowley's voluntary departure to Europe is framed as a liberating aesthetic choice, whereas Turki's forced exile from Palestine is marked by a persistent longing for return and rootedness (pp. 41–70). This distinction is further elaborated through the concepts of centrifugal

and centripetal movement: American characters, such as those in Hemingway's *Fiesta*, engage in outward mobility that affirms their autonomy, while Palestinian figures, like Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's protagonists, enact inward movement that reflects their desire to reclaim a lost homeland (pp. 71–116). Qabaha's analysis of Edward Said and Gertrude Stein deepens the exploration of identity and linguistic exile. Said's autobiographical reflections are interpreted as a 'voyage in' to the Palestinian national narrative, where his use of English becomes a site of tension between cultural alienation and political engagement (Qabaha, 2018, pp. 117–163). Stein, by contrast, performs a 'voyage out' from American cultural norms, using displacement as a means of self-fashioning and aesthetic experimentation. The final chapter juxtaposes Thomas Wolfe and Mourid Barghouti to examine the possibility—or impossibility—of return. Wolfe's protagonists navigate routes that lead back to accessible roots, emblematic of voluntary expatriation, while Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah* articulates a fragmented return haunted by occupation and erasure (pp. 165–210). Ultimately, Qabaha's work challenges postcolonial and diaspora studies to differentiate between the political conditions of exile and the aesthetic choices of expatriation, offering a framework that privileges historical specificity and ethical engagement (pp. 211–214).

Finally, I draw on Tahrir Hamdi's contribution in *Post-Millennial Palestine: Literature, Memory, Resistance* (2021). Hamdi's chapter "Late Style as Resistance in the Works of Edward Said, Mahmoud Darwish, and Mourid Barghouti" (2021) offers a compelling reconfiguration of Edward Said's concept of 'late style' as a form of oppositional critique rooted in the Palestinian experience of catastrophe and dispossession. Drawing on Said's notion of lateness as 'intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction' (Said, 2007, p.14), Hamdi argues that the late works of these intellectuals resist closure and harmony, instead foregrounding fragmentation, exile, and ethical dissent. Said's autobiographical writings, particularly *Out of Place*, exemplify a 'lateness of beginnings' that challenges dominant narratives of identity and belonging (Hamdi, 2021, pp. 36–40). Similarly, Darwish's post-Oslo poetry, marked by disillusionment and lyrical defiance, articulates a refusal to reconcile with colonial erasure, while Barghouti's memoirs, especially *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here*, invoke repetition as a mode of resistance, where the act of return is haunted by the impossibility of restoration (pp. 45–50). Hamdi's analysis situates late style within a broader framework of post-millennial Palestinian

resistance, emphasizing its capacity to critique divisionist agendas and reassert cultural memory amid ongoing catastrophe. The chapter contends that lateness is not merely a temporal condition but a political stance, one that enables Palestinian writers to confront mortality, exile, and the fragmentation of national identity with renewed creative urgency (Hamdi, 2022, pp. 51–57). By foregrounding the ethical dimensions of late style, Hamdi challenges aesthetic readings that divorce form from context, instead proposing that the unresolved contradictions in these texts mirror the lived realities of Palestinians under occupation. This approach not only deepens our understanding of Said's intellectual legacy but also affirms the role of literature as a site of resistance and historical reckoning. In doing so, Hamdi contributes to the growing body of scholarship that rethinks postcolonial aesthetics through the lens of Palestinian cultural production.

In my reading of Said, Karmi, and Shehadeh, I agree with the last two of Iacovetti's conclusions. That is, Palestinian autobiography should be read against the backdrop of the social, political, and temporal specificities of its production. Also, it is the case that each of the three authors finds in autobiography a space for both expressing and constructing a self-image that involves different layers of affiliation – personal, cultural, familial, national, transnational, intellectual, and political – which are in continuous reshaping and redefinition. However, I disagree with his first conclusion not least based on the last two. When the Palestinian uses the autobiographical 'I' they perform an inevitable counter-discursive act because of the very circumstances informing their literary production. Because of Israeli systematic attempts to erase the memory of the 1948 Nakba and therefore facilitate the consequent erasure of any Palestinian existence prior to the Zionist arrival, the Palestinian 'I' in autobiography is a political tool, which assumes, asserts, and perpetuates its own existence, whether intentionally or not. This autobiographical act undermines the totality of the Zionist project of what many Israeli and Palestinian historians call the 'memoricide of the Nakba' (Pappé, 2007, p. 225; Masalha, 2012, p. 88) and the obliteration of a socio-cultural collective that calls itself Palestinian, whether along lines of genealogy, territory, or the nation. I argue, in contradistinction with Iacovetti's either-or approach, that reading Palestinian autobiography as a counter discourse does not necessarily centre Zionism nor does it inescapably flatten the Palestinian experience under one narrative

mould. In this light, the aim of this study is to explain how a reading which preserves the individuality of the author, and the uniqueness of their life experience, can at the same time be approached both as a generic intervention and a political tool in the struggle for justice. The two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Rather, it is precisely because they are bi-directionally informing and closely interlaced that the autobiographical form has gained popularity in the Palestinian literary scene over the last few decades. Autobiography has become increasingly the tool of choice because it renders the Palestinian cause in individual terms and offers an opportunity of 'bridging individual memory and genealogical memory' (Gregory Fox and Qabaha, 2024, p. 24). This is not restricted to comparing the suffering of individuals to the overall history of Palestinian victimisation but, interestingly, how the loss of home, the inability to return, and a shattered sense of Palestinian-ness constitute a repertoire of loss, fragmentation and transience for the memoirist to construct their own identity. In other words, in parallel with the authors' assumption of a wholeness that exists prior to their autobiographical act, which they try to (re)construct, there is the assumption of a wholeness that characterises life prior to displacement and fragmentation.

The analytical chapters centre around the overarching notions of home and trauma. Trauma theory has thrived in the academy throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. The inauguration of trauma theory into cultural studies in the Western academy is indebted to the body of work produced mainly in the 1990s by critics such as Geoffrey Hartman, Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman, Dominick LaCapra, and especially Cathy Caruth. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996) Caruth maintains that:

> In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. (1996, p. 11)

Caruth proposes that in experiences such as 'rape, child abuse, auto and industrial accidents' there is a possibility to recognize 'a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential.' In other words, the notion of trauma prompts 'a rethinking of reference that is aimed not at eliminating history' but at 'permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not'

(Caruth, 1996, p. 11). Therefore, traumatic experience, as Caruth puts it, 'suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness' (Caruth, 1996, pp. 91-92) and an event 'is fully evident only in connection with another place and in another time' (Caruth, 1996, p. 17). Trauma, in Caruth's conceptualisation is therefore characterized by an aporetic relationship which ties together immediacy and belatedness, now and later, here and somewhere else, and perceives of the experience of knowing in the very unknowability of an event as it occurs. Trauma, in its classical conceptualization, spearheaded by the Caruthean framework, is 'a crisis of representation, of history and truth, and of narrative time' (Luckhurst, 2008, p. 5).

The emergence of the field of trauma studies in the early 1990s came about as 'an attempt to construct an ethical response to forms of human suffering and their cultural and artistic representation.' It was a product of 'the confluence between deconstructive and psychoanalytic criticism and the study of Holocaust literature,' and from the very beginning the theory's 'mission was to bear witness to traumatic histories in such a way as to attend to the suffering of the other' (Andermahr, 2016, p. 500). This objective is echoed in a frequently quoted statement by Caruth, often to be criticised as unfulfilled, when she declares that 'trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures' (Caruth, 1995, p. 11). However, for many postcolonial critics, trauma theory falls short of delivering the desired promise of cross-cultural sympathy based on attending to others' history of suffering in the contemporary cultural landscape characterised by multiculturalism and diasporic modes of experience (Bennett and Kennedy, 2003, p. 5). The criticism levelled at the theory in its classical model points at its limitations on several fronts. For instance, Stef Craps explicates in *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (2012) that the foundational texts of the field of trauma studies fall short on more than one count:

> they marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures, they tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity, they often favour or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and they

> generally disregard the connections between metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas. (2012, p. 2)

Craps, therefore, voices his fear that in its well-meaning quest to promote 'cross-cultural solidarity, trauma theory risks assisting in the perpetuation of the very beliefs, practices, and structures' it set out to counterbalance, and end up functioning as another theoretical framework deployed to 'maintain existing injustices and inequalities' (Craps, 2012, p. 2). Adding to Craps's apprehension, trauma theory can be criticised from a different angle, namely its constructed-ness and the politics of its standardisation and distribution.

The term 'trauma' was originally used to designate 'a physical injury requiring medical treatment. It derives from the ancient Greek word for "wound"' (Davis and Meretoja, 2020, p. 1). It was conceived in this sense 'on the model of a rupture of the skin or protective envelop of the body resulting in a catastrophic global reaction in the entire organism' (Leys, 2000, p. 19). However, from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards the term has undergone several stages of mutation until it became 'primarily used to describe emotional wounds, traces left on the mind by catastrophic, painful events' (Davis and Meretoja, 2020, p. 1). The genealogy of the term and its conceptual development in this timeframe was no mundane coincidence. As observed by Bond, many critics have often made the link between the 'origins of the trauma paradigm' and 'the onset of Western modernity' (Bond, 2019, p. 12). Roger Luckhurst, for one, suggests that 'trauma is a concept that can only emerge within modernity.' He 'trac[es] it as an effect of the rise, in the nineteenth century, of the technological and statistical society that can generate, multiply and quantify the "shocks" of modern life' (Luckhurst, 2008, p. 19). As Allan Young argues in *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (1996):

> [trauma] is not timeless, nor does it possess an intrinsic unity. Rather, it is glued together by the practices, technologies, and narratives with which it is diagnosed, studied, treated, and represented and by the various interests, institutions, and moral arguments that mobilized these efforts and resources (1996, p. 5)

This departure by Young, Luckhurst, and Craps from an intrinsically psychobiological understanding to a delimitation of trauma theory as a historical construct determined by the social, cultural, technological, and political specificities of the contexts in which it is experienced

and treated entails significant implications on the classical model. Craps, for instance, maintains that 'it can be argued that the uncritical cross-cultural application of psychological concepts developed in the West amounts to a form of cultural imperialism' (Craps, 2012, p. 22). In other words, the imposition of a trauma framework that is originally a construct of the West, in the West, based on the economic and socio-political conditions of the West, in a non-Western context might betray prejudice towards local cultural practices of endurance and healing outside the northern hemisphere.

Another concern in postcolonialism vis-à-vis the Western model is that it takes as a paradigmatic point of reference Holocaust survivors' testimony. The Holocaust, which is 'an atrocity committed in Europe, by Europeans, against Europeans' (Craps, 2012, p. 6) is widely regarded as a transhistorical event, that is an event that sits outside history. This proposition carries the risk of instrumentalizing trauma to deflect guilt and displace responsibility for other histories of violence such as colonialism and slavery. In other words, in its attempt to highlight the suffering of one people, trauma might well recruit the Holocaust to eclipse whatever other atrocity took place in human history. As Samantha Power sums up in "*A Problem from Hell*": *America and the Age of Genocide* (2003), America's understanding of, and (in)action on the contemporary cases of genocide is influenced by the notion of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Power concludes that 'America's public awareness of the Holocaust often seemed to set the bar for concern so high' that Americans found it possible to 'tell [themselves] that contemporary genocides were not measuring up' (2003, p. 503). This is especially important in the Palestinian case where, first, the Holocaust is used discursively to justify whatever befalls the Palestinian people and, second, the people are not allowed the status of victimhood as it is perceived as competing with the memory of the Jews who were exterminated by Nazi hands. Said phrased it best when he stated that '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' (2001, p. 184). The failure, or unwillingness, of both 'the Israeli state and the international community to acknowledge the ethnic cleansing of 1948' (Masalha, 2012, p. 18) can be explained by means of the centrality of the Holocaust to the foundation of the state of Israel. As Uri Davis asserts in *Apartheid Israel: The Possibilities for Struggle Within* (2003), 'the

Jewish Holocaust' constitutes the principal reason for obscuring 'the truth about the Nakba and the continuing horrific suffering of the Palestinian people' from the 'enlightened public opinion in the West' (2003, p. 18). The history of Palestinian suffering is deemed as competitive with the history of Jewish suffering in the West, the Holocaust in particular. That is, if trauma theory is to be hinged exclusively on traumatic events that took place in the West, then it is set by definition not only to exclude traumatic cases that fall outside the northern hemisphere but also, more seriously, to provide a theoretical framework which assists in the obscuring of that suffering.

Michael Rothberg argues in *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009) against the commonplace belief that 'the public sphere in which collective memories are articulated is a scarce resource' and that when different collective memories interact within that sphere a 'zero-sum struggle for preeminence' takes place. As a better substitute for this framework:

> that understands collective memory as competitive memory— as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources— I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative. (2009, p. 3)

Rather than conceiving of collective memories as existing in an exclusivist relationship in which one is promoted at the expense of the rest, the notion of multidirectionality advances an understanding of geographically distant histories of human suffering as mutually informing. For example, the perception of the Holocaust by the Jews as a collective memory which has resonances in colonialism, and vice versa, not only promises to create channels for cross-cultural empathy based on the common experience of collective victimization, but also provides perspective to challenge Western definitions of trauma which consider the Holocaust as an axiomatic paradigm for trauma theory. In contrast with the classical trauma framework, multidirectional memory facilitates a decentralisation of the memory of the Holocaust. This is not, by any means, aimed at underplaying the suffering of the Jews in Europe. Instead, such an approach proves more productive in establishing bonds of sympathy cross-culturally. In other words, when trauma deploys 'the presence of widespread Holocaust consciousness' in the west as an itinerary to articulate experiences such as slavery and colonialism, it circumvents the risk

of rendering the Holocaust a screen memory which might consign to oblivion our attention to the suffering of people in Africa, Asia and beyond. On the ethical front, moreover, multidirectional memory forecloses the possibility of instrumentalizing the Holocaust, or other histories of human suffering for that matter, in political propagandist discourses. That is, when histories of traumatic experiences are considered together, drawing on commonalities, preserving specificities, and exploring causalities, the strategy of utilizing one atrocity to push the rest to the background of public consciousness becomes untenable. Rather than an 'either mine or yours' approach to collective memories of traumatic experiences, Rothberg's framework calls for an alternative approach that examines 'the overlapping histories of antisemitism and colonialism, including an exploration of the colonial precedents for the genocidal practices associated with the Holocaust' (Andermahr, 2016, p. 500), as 'memories of seemingly distinct histories—such as those of slavery, the Holocaust, and colonialism—are not so easily separable' (Rothberg, 2011, p. 524). The criticism levelled at trauma theory by these critics and others is part of the ongoing body of work aimed at 'decolonizing trauma studies' (Rothberg, 2008, p. 226), a project whose purpose lies in the reconfiguration of trauma to create discursive spaces to voice non-western histories of violence and suffering which do not necessarily conform to the classical model but attempt to fulfil its 'simultaneously intellectual, ethical, and political task of standing against ongoing forms of racial and colonial violence' (Rothberg, 2008, p. 232).

The second notion guiding the analysis of these memoirs is the pursuit of home. While current phenomena such as globalisation and cosmopolitanism have gained critical ascendency over the most recent decades, concepts like 'home, homeland, and homecoming have not entirely surrendered their starring role' (López, 2015, p. 4). Academic studies which deal with the notion of home differ in scope and context as they approach their subject from different perspectives in varying contexts attempting to fashion a comprehensive conceptualisation. What they seem to agree on, whether advertently or not, is that there is a dichotomous relationship between home and its loss, or the potential of its loss. That is, whether defined based on its geographical, social, psychological, national, or affective features, home always comes to focus only when threatened with the possibility of its disappearance or dismantling. This is why most books and articles that take up home as their object centre around notions of movement in its

physical and psychological meaning. One of the traditional delineations of home can be found in Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson's *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement* (1998). Rapport and Dawson define home as 'the stable physical centre of one's universe – a safe and still place to leave and return to, and a principal focus of one's concern and control' (Rapport and Dawson, 1998, p. 6). In their view, home is principally defined by means of the unchanging character of its geographical coordinates. The stability of these coordinates makes possible the routinisation of leaving and returning and keeping the human and material elements of this home under control and supervision. However, the forces of globalisation, already in full sway by the time of their publication, undermine this stability and control through the movement of financial, human, and ideological capital across borders. That is, the very potential of losing home brings about its definition. It is the 'threat' of globalisation that provides a ground to look for, delineate, conceptualise, and construct home.

The idea that home is a product of its own loss can be illustrated across a wide range of recent scholarship. One example is Anindya Raychaudhuri's *Homemaking: Radical Nostalgia and the Construction of a South Asian Diaspora* (2018). Raychaudhuri focuses in his book on the process by which 'little bits of south Asia' are created in the 'context of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Britain, America, and Australia' (Raychaudhuri, 2018, p. xii). Home is rendered in his work as the product of nostalgia. This latter is perceived as a 'collection of affects, strategies and processes' that culminate in the construction, preservation, and maintenance of 'a sense of home' in opposition to 'an ethnocentric hostility' (Raychaudhuri, 2018, p. xii). While in Rapport and Dawson home comes to the fore when its stability is threatened, Raychaudhuri's study suggests that when the physical stability of home is no longer a present reality diasporic subjects construct a nostalgic substitute that holds communities together and becomes an anchor for their identity as an antidote to their minority status in host countries. Another example is Jane Yeonjae Lee's *Transnational Return Migration of 1.5 Generation Korean New Zealanders: A Quest for Home* (2018). In this book, Lee reports on her 'empirical study of forty-nine Korean New Zealander return migrants' (2018, p. 8). She observes that a 'kind of "home instinct" feeling was shared by many of the participants' (2018, 153). I mention these two studies by way of illustration. Other works such as Sara Ahmed's *Uprootings / Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (2003),

Gabriel Sheffer's *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (2003), Bakirathi Mani's *Aspiring to Home: South Asians in America* (2012), Femke J. Stock's *Home and Migrant Identity in Dialogical Life Stories of Moroccan and Turkish Dutch* (2017), or more recently Alejandro Nieto, Aurora Massa, and Sara Bonfanti's *Ethnographies of Home and Mobility: Shifting Roofs* (2021) are part of an open list which demonstrates that home comes into existence, paradoxically, once lost. The point I am making is not confined to the subject matter of these studies or even their findings. It is rather the fact that the discussion of home is prompted by the perception of its loss or alienation. This notion takes a significant twist in the Palestinian case, as I discuss in my reading of Karmi's memoirs, against the backdrop of the traumatic loss of home in the event of the Nakba. On the other hand, the 'homing desire' that is characteristic of diaspora seems to become more geographically focused in the case of Shehadeh, who lives in Palestine still. Home, in Palestinian memoir is conditioned by the political condition. That is, it keeps shifting from its different facets depending on the context in which the author finds themselves.

While the Palestinian experience of exile shares the general principle of constructing home from its own loss, it carries with it some additional political implications and contextual specificities. As Helena Lindholm Schulz maintains, the geopolitical entity called Palestine 'has for many faded away into abstraction, while new relationships with new places have been moulded' (2003, p. 181). One of the manifestations of this de-territorialisation, or abstraction, of home can be seen as many Palestinians in exile consider home as 'something which you can carry with you [and take] wherever you are' (Schulz, 2003, p. 184). Another common perception of home among Palestinian immigrants is that home is wherever one's family is (Hammer, 2001). Some Palestinian authors have taken the abstraction of home to a point of reversal, namely making homelessness their home. One such author is Fawaz Turki who referred to the possibility of looking at 'exile itself as our homeland' (Turki, 1994, p. vi). Schulz comes to the conclusion that 'in people's strategies there is no absolute contradiction between fostering an image of Palestine as the "home" from which one originates and coming "home" to somewhere else' (2003, p. 187). Schulz' wording suggests that there is a possibility of contradiction between origination from one place and coming home to another. My reading suggests that there is not even the possibility of a contradiction because the home where these subjects originated from did not exist back then

qua home. It is a retrospective post traumatic (re)construction which is driven by the necessity to find a ground for identity and the urge to tell the story of the Nakba. This (re)construction is a mnemonic process which is not immune to the failings of memory and the excess of idealisation which accompanies the impulse to overcompensate for the severe losses that the Palestinians suffered from 1948 onwards. Another important point that characterizes home in the Palestinian context is that it is still bound up with a national, not necessarily nationalist, struggle for justice, return, and self-determination. This carries the implication that perceptions of home, its loss, and the potentiality of return takes shape within that framework and are expressed in line with its interests. Home in Palestinian diaspora is a framework that draws on the past to make sense of the present and fashion a vision for the future. That is, home is not only where the Palestinian exile comes from but also where they are heading to.

It is important here to highlight the link between home and identity in its individual and collective dimensions. Lee comments, citing De Botton, that being home means 'you can be true to yourself and practice your full sense of identity' (2018, p. 67). That is, home is where and when an individual can act spontaneously and without the fear of being judged by others. A person is home when they are fully themselves and vice versa, and this is especially pertinent in the lives of immigrants (Wiles in Lee, 2018, p. 109). For the Palestinian exile, there are many reasons not to feel home outside Palestine. One is the fact that home in the host lands becomes constituted of a nostalgic past that is used to aim for a utopian future. The state of homeliness cannot be reached because of its political implications. Being home elsewhere means accepting an end of sorts to the conflict, suffering, and loss. It also means giving up on the project of return which has come to signify a pivotal part of the Palestinian identity in exile. Home in the life of Palestinian exiles is an open-ended transitory phase that only ends with return. So, as long as the political crisis continues, home remains a distant place both left behind and shining ahead. The Palestinian identity in exile is built upon keeping the project of return a viability and a desire through the perpetuation of the idea of transience, which fundamentally negates the stability of home, even in its abstract renditions. As Karmi puts it in *Return*, 'nowhere else could take [Palestine's] place, and by definition could only be a temporary stop, standing in for the real thing' (*Return*, 2015, p. 18). I read *In Search of Fatima* and *Return* not as narratives of home and its loss in the Nakba, but

rather as narratives of the Nakba by means of a fragmented home and sense of being. That is, because the Nakba seems to be omnipresent in the background of the narrative, whatever the author tells us about her life is placed against this backdrop. The Nakba is in the prologue, the body of the text, and then in the epilogue. In a sense, it is a life story that does not belong entirely to the teller. It is a fragmented narrative that is collected from different times (past, present, future), lives (the author, her family, her friends, the Palestinian community), and constructed through the lens of the Nakba. This fragmentation, indecision, and intrusion suggest a framework of trauma theory to my analysis.

Chapter One argues that Ghada Karmi's *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (2002) and *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (2015) use home as a multidimensional construct to facilitate the integration of the trauma of forced displacement and its consequent repercussions into the life narrative of the author. The autobiographical accounts of the British-Palestinian memoirist provide a fresh perspective for understanding trauma. This is done not only by means of challenging its classical conceptualization in the works of Geoffrey Hartman, Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman, Cathy Caruth and others (i.e. the perception that trauma is a paralyzing, unrepresentable experience of West-based events such as the Holocaust and 9/11) but also by highlighting its ability to generate new social and cultural structures, combinations, and identities. By exploring how home transforms across its different geographical, social, cultural, mnemonic, and affective facets, *In Search of Fatima* and *Return* suggest that home in Palestinian diaspora is (re)constructed in a cyclical process initiated by the event of the Nakba then subsequently driven by the frequent resurfacing of its traumatic memory as triggered by personal as well as (inter)national political occurrences. In this analysis, home is not considered as necessarily predating, then lost in, the event of territorial dispossession. Rather, it proposes that home is, paradoxically, both constructed and *re*constructed in the context of post-Nakba. It is constructed as a discursive whole that preceded the shattering event and reconstructed through fragmented cultural and social recouping of materials, events, and stories that centre around Palestine and the past. In this sense, the Nakba and the perception of home interact in an achronological, non-linear, and mutually constitutive relationship. While the Nakba, in its suddenness, magnitude and individual and communal implications sets in motion a never-ending quest for home, the

existential and identitarian significance of this home away from home retrospectively brings the event of displacement into focus and lends meaning to its traumatic character. That is, not only does the Nakba produce home but it is through this very production that the Nakba can be narrated in Karmi's life stories.

This circular interplay is consistently reproduced in Karmi's autobiographical work. The narrative takes the Nakba as a point of departure then keeps returning to it as a lens for interpreting life events that would otherwise be construed in their own right as separate occurrences. The persistent questions of identity which permeate Karmi's texts as they alternate between searching for home and seeking to comprehend the aftermath of the Nakba in her personal and family life, highlight the inseparability of the two enterprises of finding home and constructing her Palestinian self. The chapter argues for moving beyond traditional trauma theory, which often centres on Eurocentric, individualistic perspectives rooted in psychoanalysis and deconstruction. Instead, it advocates for a postcolonial approach that acknowledges the specific social, cultural, and political contexts of non-Western experiences of suffering and healing. This shift challenges dominant narratives and opens up space for more nuanced understandings of trauma and resilience in Palestinian contexts. Finally, it draws attention to the pattern that binds autobiography to the Palestinian struggle as a whole. This link becomes more apparent as this study demonstrates that the act of life writing constitutes a return in itself. The return that Karmi aspires to achieve through her memoirs is from a present self which is fragmented to a pre-1948 self that is presumed whole and undivided. This desire of being whole (again) is expressed through the national cause or returning home to Palestine. Bringing memories back through the act of writing reflects a broader desire for restoration and healing, both personally and collectively. However, the concept of return functions more effectively as a symbolic trope than as a literal act of geographical relocation. Karmi's narratives reveal that her physical return trips to Palestine often resulted in disappointment when it came to the quest for a sense of home. These journeys, while failing to provide the anticipated emotional fulfilment, nonetheless serve as crucial material for her autobiographical work. This work becomes the textual locus of her identity, suggesting that her true sense of home resides in the ongoing pursuit of it. This quest is intrinsically linked to the broader political struggle of the Palestinian people.

Karmi finds herself no more at home in Palestine than she does in England, highlighting a persistent state of displacement. Despite this, she requires an anchor for her self-perception. The act of writing fulfils this need by keeping the idea of home alive. Through her writing, she defers the finality of its loss, externalizes the fragmentation of her identity, and preserves the hope for its eventual recapture. In this way, the act of writing transforms the elusive concept of home into a continuous possibility, rather than a definitive place.

I read Karmi's autobiographical narratives within this framework and in the spirit of expanding the boundaries of trauma as a critical tool with potential to bring to the international awareness the suffering which would otherwise remain unheeded. Reading Karmi's works as autobiographies of traumatic experience would allow for a conjoining expansion of our understanding of Palestinian autobiography and how it functions as a means of identification through locating individual life stories in collective political aspirations. While the aim of the Palestinian exilic community is to return to Palestine, the act of writing constitutes a return of the fragmented self to a sense of wholeness. When the experiences that make up Karmi's thread of life are put in one place (a book) as a narrative unity, they amount to an individual return to the self that is predicated on the assumption of its unity. This constructed self that presumably returns by the end of the narrative heralds the desired return to Palestine by keeping the end open to future alteration. Thus, while preserving the uniqueness of her experience Karmi still identifies as Palestinian in her own way.

Chapter Two reads three of Raja Shehadeh's autobiographical works as sites of memory. *Strangers in the House* (2002), *Palestinian Walks* (2007), and *A Rift in Time* (2010), this chapter argues, constitute a textual network that contributes to the preservation of the Palestinian ecology and cultural memory in the face of illegal Israeli settlement and memoricide. Shehadeh presents the Palestinian experience of colonisation and territorial dispossession by taking the reader on his walks in the hills outside the city of Ramallah, in the Jerusalem wilderness, and through the ravines by the Dead Sea. This posits his movement across the transforming landscape as a counternarrative to both the Israeli and the Palestinian national narratives. His discourse, as a lawyer and a writer, is predicated on a cyclic relationship to the land which is reciprocally, and

continually, driven by walking, remembering, and narrating. The identity that he constructs in these memoirs seems to be in a constant struggle between claiming autonomy on the one hand and being overtaken by collective narratives of the Palestinian memory, whether on a familial or (inter)national level. However, it is this interplay between the individual and collective dimensions of memory that produces spaces for Shehadeh's anticolonial discourse. While the individual act of walking provides him with an anchor to articulate his distress at the expansion of Israeli settlements and his fears of the dissipation of the Palestinian hope of self-determination, the land narrative that interlace with his autobiography calls attention to the ramifications of settler colonial policies on the ecology of the hills. What makes his memoirs inescapably political is the historical presence of Palestinians which he unearths from underneath the Israeli constructions. Shehadeh's immediate connection with the land prompts him to imagine, remember, and read Palestinian history onto the topographical background, thus re-placing the Palestinians on their territory, disrupting the Israeli discourse, and bridging gaps in the Palestinian national narrative. My reading of Shehadeh draws on Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoires* and Henry Lefebvre's theory of space. In Chapter Two, I make the case that Shehadeh's texts constitute Palestinian sites of memory which not only preserve the memory of the hills but also function as their prospective replacement. This is achieved through a triadic process which interactively involves the landscape, the collective memory of the Palestinian people, and Shehadeh himself as the walker/narrator. Walking and narrating against the backdrop of Memoricide, Shehadeh simultaneously finds a home and constructs one.

The field of memory studies has moved past the idea of memory as 'retrieval and recollection of faithfully stored stable information' to a perception of remembering as an 'imaginative process in which the memory is remade' (Kurtz, 2018, p. 140). Studies in various contexts highlight chiefly two characteristic aspects of memory. The first one suggests that memory is a product of the present rather than an accurate recouping of the past. That is, remembering does not entail a recalling of an object or an event that is statically preserved in the past. Instead, because it operates in 'a perpetual present,' memory imparts a 'reworked' version of the past in relation to the 'needs, fears, desires, and wishes' of the subject's actuality (Kurtz, 2018, p. 140). In other words, memory is a retroactive construct (Zizek, 1992) wherein

'the act of remembering is always in and of the present' (Huyssn, 2003, p. 3). The second is that memory is socio-culturally specific. In other words, what people remember and how they remember it is highly (pre)determined by the socio-cultural context in which they find themselves. In his influential book *On Collective Memory* Maurice Halbwachs asserts that 'memory depends on the social environment' where the act of remembering takes place (1992, p. 37). Halbwachs argues that our memories are rendered 'intelligible' through 'interpretative frames' which are 'socially acquired' (Webster, 2023, p. 6). This social aspect makes it impossible for memory to occur 'outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollection' (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 43). So, for instance, regardless of how a person enters a family, 'by birth, marriage, or some other way', they find themselves in 'a group where [their] position is determined not by personal feelings but by rules and customs independent of [them] that existed before [them]' (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 55).

While taking into account the above observations pertaining to memory, my reading of Shehadeh draws more closely on French historian Pierre Nora's intervention in the field of memory studies. Nora maintains that memory 'takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects' (Nora, 1989, p. 9). It is embodied in this manner as a response to the 'increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good [and] a general perception that anything and everything may disappear' (Nora, 1989, p. 7). To counterbalance this slippage, there arises the need for the preservation of memory in what he terms *lieux de mémoires* (sites of memory). A site of memory is a locus where a memory 'crystalizes and secretes itself' and where a certain 'sense of historical continuity persists' (Nora, 1989, p. 7). Nora suggests that there are '*lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory' (Nora, 1989, p. 7). That is if people were able to 'live within memory any longer, there would have been no such need to 'consecrate' sites in the name of that memory (Nora, 1989, p. 8). A locus becomes a site of memory 'at the same time an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears' (Nora, 1989, pp. 11-12). Sites of memory are 'simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration' (Nora, 1989, p. 18). Even when a site is 'apparently purely material' site, it becomes a site of memory 'only if the

imagination invests it with a symbolic aura' (Nora, 1989, p. 19). These sites' ability to function as an antidote to history's rapid mnemonic consumption draws on their 'capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications' (Nora, 1989, p. 19). It is through its openness to multiple layers of meaning and signification that the site of memory lives on as such. The memory is preserved in its own discursive transformation. As Nora put it, 'the lieu de memoire is double: a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations' (Nora, 1989, p. 24).

While sites of memory come in different categories including museums, cemeteries, sanctuaries, archives, treaties, monuments, and occasions such as festivals and anniversaries, in my reading of Shehadeh's memoirs I focus on specific sites. These are the 'topographical ones, which owe everything to the specificity of their location and to being rooted in the ground' (Nora, 1989, p. 22). In his walks around his city of residence, Ramallah, Shehadeh comes across many of these constructions that qualify as sites of memory in the sense that they host memories of the past generations of Palestinians who lived in the hills and whose lives depended on their knowledge of the ways of the hills in terms of cultivation and construction. The places he visits can be read as sites of memory because he invests them with stories and meanings supplied by the collective memory of the Palestinians (his family in this case). When Shehadeh visits these locations, he finds a home in the sense that they somehow validate these collective memories. Moreover, he constructs a home for himself and future generations in the fact that he adds his own layer of memories which comes into existence as a result of his interaction with the sites. For example, while a given construction used to be a reminder of his great uncle's life on the first visit, on the second occasion it became a reminder of his great uncle's life and of his first visit as well. There is a process of identity that takes place though this interlacing and chaining of memories and experiences. This process is made possible by the physical structure of the site and the will to remember on the part of the author/walker. In the Palestinian case, the autobiographical enterprise is a matter of individual subjective construction as much as a matter of claiming a space for the existence of a Palestinian nation. This means, in Shehadeh's memoirs, both telling the reader of his life, including his walks, and transmitting the history that populates

these places which he visits or stumbles upon. While 'the very act of walking "at liberty" in Palestine "not restricted by time or place" constitutes a challenge to the totality of the Israeli settler colonial project' (Batarseh, 2021, p. 244), the narrativization of these walks constitutes another stage in the metamorphoses that Nora refers to as characteristic of sites of memory. While the topography is under the imminent threat of disappearance under Israeli settlements, Shehadeh's memoirs amount to a supplement thereof in textual form. Shehadeh's narrative is a textual intersection where collective memory and personal experience of the Palestinian hills function as building blocks for the autobiography of the land that is motivated by its foreseeable vanishment.

To elaborate on how Shehadeh draws on collective memories to construct a home for himself and his fellow Palestinians, Chapter Two draws on Henri Lefebvre's theory of space. In his influential book *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre makes the point that:

> If indeed every society produces a space, its own space, [then any] "social existence" aspiring or claiming to be "real", but failing to produce its own space, would be a strange entity, a very peculiar kind of abstraction unable to escape from the ideological or even the "cultural" realm. It would fall to the level of folklore and sooner or later disappear altogether, thereby immediately losing its identity, its denomination and its feeble degree of reality. (1991, p. 53)

Drawing on Lefebvre, for Palestinian society to claim its historical existence, it needs to produce and maintain spaces where its identity can be manifested and expressed. As the Israeli construction continues across the hills, therefore creating a new social space for a foreign existence, it simultaneously erases the physical traces of a Palestinian social space that sustained cultural and economic life in the past. When Shehadeh walks and interacts with these sites which are threatened by memoricide, he finds a home that might soon disappear and immortalises it in his texts. As Lefebvre argues, '[i]tself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others' (1991, p. 73). That is, the memoirs find the Palestinian home in the hills and record its existence for future reference. In the same way that previous generations of Palestinians 'reclaimed the wild, possessed and domesticated it, making it their own' (*Walks*, 2007, p. 11), the upcoming generations can claim the place as their historical homeland, albeit in much more abstract terms. As the

autobiographical narrative constructs Shehadeh's identity, it necessarily challenges the Israeli project. At the same time, this identity that emerges towards the end of these memoirs tells the story of the books themselves. That is, his memoirs tell of life under occupation whether through events or through the structures of the books themselves.

Chapter Three reads Edward Said's memoir *Out of Place* (1999) against the backdrop of his critical work. This chapter argues that in his attempt to produce a personal, detached autobiography, the author is frequently overtaken by his political and intellectual involvement in the Palestinian cause. While Said's narrative seems intent on staying away from the politics of his life experience, his text tells a different story not only through its linguistic makeup and thematic structure but also its driving force; that is, what motivated Said to write his memoir in the first place. Relating the details of his coming of age, the text renders the complexity of his many networks of belonging. His case reflects a multidimensional construct of ethnic (Christian Arab), national (Palestinian-American), geographic (Palestine, Egypt, USA) and linguistic (Arabic, English and French) identities. *Out of Place* produces the exilic intellectual that Said praises and celebrates in his "Reflections on Exile" (2001) but in a specifically Palestinian fashion. Reading his memoir and critical work hand in hand, I argue that the two categories of writing are mutually informing and, therefore, the boundaries between Said the intellectual and the memoirist are blurred. In other words, Said's autobiography provides a case to challenge generic conventions that separate academic and creative writing. While *Out of Place* puts together Said's life story in one narrative, his academic work seems to guide the remembering process which supplies the narrative in the first place. That is, in his autobiographical enterprise, Said retrospectively constructs the exilic intellectual of his academic career. In this sense, not only is his critical work part and parcel of his life story but also a dictating factor in the writing process. It is the self-perception of the author at the time of writing that determines what he remembers and writes about. Identity's presence in the text is only partial. In *Out of Place*, it is what Said tries to avoid that tells of his identity, namely the Palestinian exilic intellectual.

The position of exile that Said writes from, both geographically and metaphorically, has its roots in a time as early as he can remember. As he imparts early in the narrative:

> There was always something wrong with how I was invented and meant to fit in with the world of my parents and four sisters […] the overriding sensation I had was of always being out of place. Thus 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. (*Out*, p. 3)

Said introduces himself as having 'always' been out of place starting from the day he was given his name. His full name combines Arabic and English on several levels. The articulation of his name requires morphological, phonological, ethnic, and nomenclatural transitions. The morphological and phonological part is concerned with the sound /ʕ/ of the consonant 'ع,' a letter in the Arabic alphabetical system which is articulated out of the middle of the throat. It has no equivalent in the written or spoken forms of the English language. Moreover, his name cannot be transferred from one language to the other without its perceived ethnic hybridity. This is because 'Edward' is an English name, chosen by his parents after Prince of Wales in 1935, and 'Said' is an 'unmistakably Arabic family name.' Therefore, Said's act of self-construction, as Doaa Embabi maintains, 'occurs within a context of constant translation influenced by the existence of Said between two cultures: the Arab and the Anglo-American' (Embabi, 2017, p. 150). In addition to this quandary, Said grew up with two languages simultaneously, not knowing which one was his original language. The fact that he grew up with both Arabic and English with no original point of reference destabilises the conventional process of translation in his case. That is, if we follow Heidegger's (1993) suggestion that individuals have their 'being' within language, then Said's predicament lies in having his 'being' in both Arabic and English.

Presenting his early years in such a split mode of existence foregrounds Said's text to build the resultant exilic intellectual that he describes towards the end of the memoir in these terms:

> 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. [...] With so many dissonances in my life I have learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place. (*Out*, p. 295)

As a Palestinian without a 'politically existent Palestine in which to belong,' Said expresses an 'unsettled state of the self' as 'divorced from a crucial part of its identity' (Al-Saleh, 2011, p. 88).

In the early years of his life, the multiplicity of displacements destabilises his sense of belonging, as the territory he identifies with is either temporary or absent altogether. The unsettling effect of this absence is later accommodated in his academic career. The loss of Palestine galvanizes the invention of the unbelonging exilic self, which is more practical in the political struggle than a nostalgic, mourning persona whose homeland is irrecoverably lost anyway. From this angle, the exilic position is assumed not only as an existential move, but a political one as well. In Said's case, therefore, the product produces the process that led to its production. Said's life, of course, extends in all directions beyond what he narrates in the memoir, but his rendition focuses intently on the displaced facets of his existence. It is the ambivalence of this focus that echoes his Palestinian-ness. That is, while Said was raised with no financial difficulties, attended the best schools in Egypt, and his experience of exile was less painful that many Palestinians, he adopts the exilic angle of his identity to locate his intellectual work but also his life narrative in the Palestinian story of suffering and dispossession.

Said's intellectual work had reached an international level of fame and influence before he decided to write his memoir. His *Orientalism* (1978), for instance, is one of the foundational texts of postcolonial criticism. Some of his other writings such as *Culture and Imperialism* and *The Question of Palestine* are also considered groundbreaking in the sense that they opened spaces for Third-World critics to challenge discourses of traditional binary oppositions such as the East/West dichotomy which underlies colonial practices. Yet, when in 1991 a blood test showed that he had chronic lymphocytic leukemia, he decided to write a narrative of his childhood leading up to his university years. In 1994, Said started work on *Out of Place* in the intermittent breaks between phases of chemotherapy. The book is described as 'a record of an essentially lost or forgotten world' (*Out*, p. xiii). The desire to leave this record after reaching worldwide renown draws on the representational aspects of autobiographical writing. That is, the underlying assumption is that, by contrast, his other writing was not representational enough of who he was. This posits a contradiction in Said's situation. While he tells the reader that he has always felt a sense of fragmentation and unbelonging, which are characteristics of the exilic intellectual, he attempts to construct a narrative whole by way of presenting himself. My argument is that, like Karmi and Shehadeh, Said is motivated by a desire towards wholeness that is akin to the

Romantic subjectivity. This motive emerges from a perceived state of fragmentation. The return journey that Said narrates in the book and the return that the book itself represents attest to a process of continued cyclicality. Said's text provides a more radical stance against trauma theory than Karmi and Shehadeh. While the first two expand the ethnic and geographical territory of trauma theory, Said challenges the very notion upon which the theory is traditionally built. That is, while trauma explains psychological reactions to extreme events by positing the thesis of a psyche scarred by overwhelming input, Said circumvents the idea of identity as a continuous whole. He rather assumes fragmentation as his route to self-perception. This does not, however, exclude his desire for wholeness. While the different circumstances, geographies, and languages that characterised his early life construct the exilic identity that he assumes at the point of writing, the writing itself puts the different fragments of his life in one place, which is the text. To complete the cycle, the text starts the explanation of the process of constructing the exilic intellectual anew. This bi-directional relationship highlights both the power and the limitation of autobiographical narrative. The power lies in the fact that the author can bring several facets of his life into one place by way of introducing himself and leaving a record of his existence and experience. The limitation, on the other hand, lies in the contrast between the textual and physical aspects of the book as a unity rendering a life experience that is fragmented.

Taken together, Karmi, Shehadeh, and Said substantiate through their autobiographical work, to different extents, that there are ways of being Palestinian which lie outside the framework of nationalism. The Palestinian experience of displacement has its own nuances in the middle of generalities. While Karmi's texts produce her identity as a survivor of the traumatic expulsion of 1948 and a custodian of that memory, Shehadeh's accounts construct his steadfast walker who combines walking in the hills and writing to immortalize the land which is being topographically redefined on a daily basis by the settlements. Said, on the other hand, fashions a record of his life that results in the exilic intellectual he celebrates and promotes in some of his critical work. Palestinian autobiography partakes in the generic characterisation of being personal and intimate to the author as a literary piece of identity. But, it parts ways with the conventional perception of life writing in the sense that it writes the self with an awareness of its political significance both at the time of writing and in the future. In the articulation of memory

there inheres a ‘political act’ that represents the infrastructure for ‘creative and cultural resistance’ and struggle for ‘prospective stability and visibility’ (Gregory Fox and Qabaha, 2024, p. 18). That is, what we read in Palestinian autobiography, despite efforts like Said’s to keep politics out of it, is that the author treads a fine line between the personal and the communal or collective stakes in the writing. The Palestinian memoir is therefore an individual project governed by the intersection of personal and collective narratives. While Karmi’s texts render the idea of a united subject by means of a desired return to Jerusalem and a strong sense of family, Shehadeh’s memoirs express his desire for return to a perceived former state of being by means of a hope for an undivided geography of Palestine. Although Said sounds keen to voice his exilic self-perception towards the end of his memoir, he partakes in the same general desire for a return. This becomes apparent in the description of his relationship with his mother. His longing tone and code-switched phrases that combine Arabic and English attest to a textual return that contradicts the celebrated exilic intellectual. Palestinian autobiography, as practiced by these authors is a site of return wherein the personal, individual past is written from a perspective of a collective future.

Chapter One: Trauma and the (Re)construction of Home in Ghada Karmi's *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (2002) and *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (2015)

This chapter argues that Ghada Karmi's *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (2002) and *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (2015) use home as a multidimensional construct to facilitate the integration of the trauma of forced displacement into the life narrative of the author. The autobiographical accounts of the British-Palestinian author provide a fresh perspective for understanding trauma not only by challenging its classical conceptualization as a paralyzing, unrepresentable experience, but also by highlighting its ability to generate new social and cultural structures, combinations, and identities. Deploying the different geographical, social, cultural, mnemonic, and affective facets of home, the two memoirs suggest that home in Palestinian diaspora is (re)constructed in a cyclical process initiated by the event of the Nakba (Arabic for catastrophe) then subsequently driven by the frequent resurfacing of its traumatic memory as triggered by personal as well as political occurrences. In this analysis, home is not considered as necessarily predating, then lost in, the event of territorial dispossession. Rather, it proposes that home is, paradoxically, both constructed and *re*constructed in the context of post-Nakba. The events of 1948 and the perception of home interact in an achronological, non-linear, and mutually constitutive relationship. While the Nakba, in its magnitude and sociopolitical implications sets in motion a never-ending quest for home, the existential and identitarian significance of home retrospectively exacerbates the losses suffered by Palestinians in 1948, rendering the event traumatic in the first place. This circular pattern is consistently reproduced in Karmi's identity dilemma which permeates her texts as they alternate between searching for home and seeking to comprehend the aftermath of the Nakba in her personal and family life, highlighting the inseparability of the two enterprises. This chapter argues that a comprehensive reading of the two memoirs highlights a move beyond the prevalent paradigm of trauma theory in cultural studies, mainly characterised by a Eurocentric, individualistic stance drawing on the legacy of psychoanalysis and deconstruction, towards a postcolonial framework which takes into

consideration non-Western contexts of suffering and healing and their social, cultural, and political specificities. Taking historical, political, sociocultural, and aesthetic considerations in postcolonial trauma as broad guidelines, this chapter reads Karmi's autobiographical accounts as trauma narratives in which the transformations that the notion of home undergoes suggest a paradigm shift in the experience of forced displacement initiated by the Palestinian exodus in 1948 known as the *Nakba*. It is not to be (mis)construed as a call for a categorical break with the classical framework of trauma theory. Rather, it invites a reading of these Palestinian autobiographical accounts as illustrative of a necessary shift in perception of one's traumatic experience as they become increasingly active both in the process of mnemonic (re)construction of home in new locations and in the political struggle central to the Palestinian national identity.

In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story (2002) is Karmi's first memoir. It recounts the life story of the author and her family in Palestine and then in England. The book is divided into three parts. Part One, 'Palestine', predominantly describes the particularities of life in Palestine before the *Nakba* of 1948. The largest section of Part Two, 'England', is devoted to narrating the transformations in the life of Karmi and her family members as they land in England as exiles fleeing their homeland. Part Three, 'In Search of Fatima', follows the author's return trip to Palestine as she attempts to find her house, the family's servant, and her identity. The main storyline is permeated by political events which overshadow the private sphere of individual and family life. Of these, the Nakba is omnipresent across the narrative. It is either explicitly pronounced or otherwise implicitly alluded to as a cause for other events, a consequence thereof, or a lens for interpretation. In my reading of Karmi, I take my cue from Rosemary Sayigh's article "On the Exclusion of the Palestinian Nakba from the 'Trauma Genre'". Sayigh questions the absence of the Nakba from the trauma canon in light of its significance in world politics, the 'many similarities' it has with 'other cases of social suffering,' as well as 'the unusual feature of its continuation and escalation more than sixty years after the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland' (Sayigh, 2013, p. 51). Karmi's autobiographical work makes the case that Palestinians in exile are victims of a traumatic experience that must be considered as such in its own right and on its own terms.

The first structural aspect that stands out about the text is Karmi's choice to divide it into three parts. The narrative is punctuated by significant events in the life of the author, her family, and the Palestinian people in general. The end of Part One is marked by the family's departure from their house in Jerusalem as the ultimate event of the 'Palestine' part of the narrative. Part Two starts with their landing in London and ends with the falling apart of her first marriage. Part Three begins with her new journey of political activism. This journey takes her back to Palestine where she does some work as a doctor besides her more personal quests about her family's past life. It concludes with the realization that her attempt to resolve her identity dilemma in Palestine was less satisfactory than expected. While the partition of the book in three parts with these titles provides a superstructure that organizes the events chronologically, it echoes Karmi's perception of herself and her life experience as fragmented by means of geographical displacement. The life of the author, one life, is narrated in three textual proportions in relation to geography and events, although these parts do not reflect proportionate temporal periods of her life. Part One, for instance, accounts for life in Palestine which represents only 9 years of Karmi's life. It also alludes to Karmi's sense of a discontinuous life narrative which not only draws on the family's experience of living in different geographical locations but, in addition, points towards gaps in the narrative and events which defy narration as much as they register their presence on the totality of the text, either in terms of structure, content, or both. Put differently, the transition from 'Palestine' to 'England' and then to 'In Search of Fatima' signposts drastic turning points in the identity of the author although they are not verbalized as such on the pages. The gaps, or transitions, are rather marked by the emptiness in the end of Part One and the title on the next page, and the same goes for Part Two and Part Three. In other words, Karmi communicates that there is a crossing through which the self goes when the family travels from Palestine to England and then when she decides to return to Palestine later in her life.

The prologue to *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* provides a narrative flashforward to the family's departure from their house in Jerusalem in the middle of bullets flying across the street and explosions heard in the distance. Karmi describes the situation at the time in these terms:

> The taxi stood waiting outside, its doors open, to take them away where she did not want to go. The little girl wanted to stay right here at home with Rex and Fatima, playing in the garden, jumping over the fence into the Muscovite's house next door, seeing her friends return, even restarting school, now closed since Christmas. Doing all the familiar things, which had shaped the fabric of her young life. Not this madness. Not this abandoning of everything she knew and loved. (*Fatima*, p. 1)

Karmi's presentation of the event of expulsion in the prologue can be approached from Couser's valid observation that memoir relies heavily on the faculty of human memory for its production (2012, p. 80). In this line of thought, the prologue is an achronological move which emulates the intrusive character of traumatic memories. The intrusiveness of the Nakba becomes evident as the narrative returns soon after the prologue to life in Palestine before 1948 including Karmi's birth and the names and details of her extended family members. When she mentions the catastrophe this early in the book, Karmi starts her text from a position of departure, loss, shock, and incomprehensibility. Other than a short subtitle that reads an italicised '*April 1948*', the two-page prologue gives no geographical or temporal context to the events relayed. It consists of names such as Fatima, Mohammed, Rex, and Ghada interacting hurriedly in the confusion of the moment. These are introduced later in the book as the maidservant, her brother, the family's dog, and the author-narrator, that is Ghada Karmi herself. The prologue sits narratively outside the memoir both through this decontextualization but also in terms of Karmi's choice of point of view. While the prologue is narrated from a third-person point of view signposted by 'she,' the rest of the memoir is narrated from a first-person point of view accordingly signalled by 'I'. The third person communicates a certain detachment from the memory of departure and its painful details. This choice by Karmi is enabling as it provides her with two layers of disengagement from the event. The first is a function of the third-person voice and the second is the distance between the author and the physical papers as the memory is externalised into words. More significantly, the shift from 'she' to 'I' signposts an identitarian transition that parallels the event of geographical displacement and the loss of home inherent in it. In other words, the sense of alienation that transforms 'she' to 'I' occurs because what constituted home was shattered in the Nakba.

The concept of home has been the subject of a wide range of academic studies which differ in scope and context. Home, as a notion, has been approached from different, at times intersecting, perspectives taking into account its multiple constitutive elements and dimensions. In *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement*, Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson provide one of the traditional definitions of home as 'the stable physical centre of one's universe— a safe and still place to leave and return to, and a principal focus of one's concern and control' (1998, p. 6). In their delineation, Rapport and Dawson assign home the function of a reference point which organizes the temporal and spatial frameworks of human activity. The geographical specificity of the house translates into reliability, as a routine of leaving and return can be developed around it. The homeliness of home in its traditional conceptualisation is tightly linked to the physical stability and unchanging character of its geographic coordinates. Home, in Karmi's prologue, is first rendered by means of this geographical element. The specificity of geographical location is emphasised as the 'little girl wanted to stay *right here* [emphasis added] at home' and not go away. The singularity of the house is further stressed by the mention of the neighbours next door and the fence that separates the two houses. Because of its significance, the loss of this geographical determinacy remains repeatedly circumvented, deferred, repressed, and denied. For example, when describing the family's house in Qatamon, she refers to it as the one 'we occupied until the end. And here at last my mother could build a family life for the first time since she had married in relative prosperity and free from disruption' (*Fatima*, p. 50). The house is described in terms of occupation rather than evacuation or loss.

Similarly, another instance of deferral occurs in the middle of events when Abu Ahmed, a relative of the family, 'asserted with finality' that a Jewish takeover of Palestine would not happen because 'the English are in power, and second there is all of us living here. How are they going to get rid of us and of the English government? It's a nonsense.' With this statement, everyone 'agreed vigorously' (*Fatima*, p. 72). With the same attitude, when her father is reminded of the prospect of losing his large collection of books in the possible event of expulsion, he replies, 'No […] We're not going to be leaving and no one is going to harm my books' (*Fatima*, p. 92). The vigorous agreement that Abu Ahmed receives when he expresses the certainty of remaining in Palestine reflects the population's unpreparedness for the event to come. In

addition, it stresses the significance of the relationship between place and identity, as the fact of 'living here' forecloses the possibility of living anywhere else. The magnitude of the Nakba is therefore expressed by means of both its suddenness and people's inability to imagine life after such an event. The stability of home as the geographical centre of Palestinian day-to-day life is instrumentalized by Karmi as a backdrop to communicate the intensity of the event that resulted in severing the relationship of people and their homes and shattering the homely aspects which were housed in those physical structures. The repeated, reciprocal reassurances that the Nakba would not take place keep the thought at bay for some time but also point to the severity of the ultimate event. The shock builds on this denial of the political developments in the area. While Karmi initially partakes in this state of denial, as the violence begins, Karmi wakes up 'at some time in the night from a deep sleep and found [herself] in the middle of a nightmare […] For a few seconds, [she] could not distinguish dream from reality' (*Fatima*, p. 86). Karmi deploys the 'nightmare' trope to talk about reality. In so doing, she blurs the line between the inside and outside of the psyche but also between reality and imagination. She also expresses her inability to experience the event in real time as 'for a few seconds,' she did not know whether it was real or imaginary.

The loss of the geographical aspect of home is therefore experienced by Palestinians, in Caruth's terms, as 'one moment too late' (Caruth, 1996, p. 62). When the events began to escalate, they remained heedless until they were expelled. From a retrospective stance such as Karmi's, the event of the Nakba started before the actual expulsion but was only experienced as a reconstructed narrative later. However, unlike in the Caruthean framework, the state of denial that results in this latency does not seem to be a psychobiological problem. When the family leaves Palestine, the attitude of deferral becomes a state of repression. As Karmi relates, it was a 'curious thing' that soon after reaching Damascus, 'no one spoke of [their] home' or the people they left behind anymore. She describes how 'bewildered and lost' she felt when 'no one questioned this strange turn of events, least of all Siham and Ziyad.' As a result, she 'took [her] cue from them and kept [her] confusion to [her]self. [Her] allegiance to Fatima, to [their] house and to [her] childhood became a private affair, [her] secret to cherish and protect' (*Fatima*, pp. 138-139). Karmi's representation of her family's experience of forced displacement challenges

the tendency in trauma theory to focus predominantly on incidents that occurred in Europe or the United States, particularly the Holocaust and, more recently, the events of 9/11 (Craps, 2012, p. 9). The verbalization of loss is thus prevented by the lack of social discursive spaces in which the memory of home in Palestine can be articulated. Karmi highlights a different aspect of repression. It is not necessarily a pathological condition that makes the victim unable to express their traumatic memories of loss, but rather a social condition that occurs in the absence of attentive, sympathetic interlocutors. Moreover, it can be viewed as a political strategy to maintain the possibility of return to Palestine. In fact, Karmi addresses this socio-political reading of repression quite openly later in the narrative when she remembers how her parents 'never spoke about [their] material losses in Palestine – [their] house, [their] belongings, [her] grandfather's land – nor that [they] should ever demand restitution.' She explains that, 'like many other Palestinians, they feared that if they ever did so and succeeded they would in effect have been bought off, would have sold a patrimony no money could buy' (*Fatima*, p. 245). Rather than being possessed by a memory that is unspeakable, Palestinians in the wake of the Nakba, as Karmi suggests, chose not to dwell on their material and non-material losses to counter political and military attempts at erasing their historical rootedness in Palestine. Karmi's decision to keep her thoughts to herself illustrates how, after the traumatizing events, the political collective interest of the group superseded the individual need for expression. Trauma in the Palestinian case is repressed by the necessity to maintain national unity in exile under the common interest of return in the future, albeit an indeterminate future. The loss of home, in its physicality, is denied, deferred, then repressed for the sake of the future of the group.

Home, however, is not restricted to the geographically specific physical structure of the house. Another aspect of home that Karmi mentions in the prologue is reflected in the social relationships it makes immediately accessible. These are exemplified in Rex, the dog, Fatima, the maidservant, and her school friends. As Julian Hammer reports in *Palestinians Born in Exile: Diaspora and the Search for a Homeland* (2005), one of the most common responses he received in his interviews with Palestinians born in exile was that home was wherever the family was (2005, p. 208). In this sense, home becomes unhinged from its physical properties and is rather conceived of as a set of social relationships. Its homeliness is reflected in the mutual familiarity

but also the hierarchical position of individuals and their level of authority over the space they inhabit. Karmi relates the experience of traumatic displacement by means of the destruction of family relationships that formerly made the home space homely. In this, she deploys a comparative description of her relation to her parents and siblings before and after they left Palestine. Describing how close she was to her father, she remembers that:

> I was very attached to him and considered myself to be his favourite. Just as I believed that Fatima was there exclusively to look after me, so it was with my father who I thought loved me the best. He was certainly indulgent and patient and often put me on his knee and kissed me. (*Fatima*, p. 53)

However, as the family gets to England Karmi reads the trauma of territorial loss in her parents' changed behaviour, especially her father. She narrates that, neither of them 'seemed to take much interest in our lives, beyond our mother's commitment to cooking the daily meal and our father's concern about our achieving good marks at school' (*Fatima*, p. 224). Similarly, Karmi describes how the Nakba could be read in her brother Ziyad's altered behaviour. She could not 'turn for consolation to my brother, as had happened sometimes in Jerusalem.' This was because things 'had changed between us and I had grown increasingly resentful of him ever since coming to Damascus.' As a result, '[m]uch of the previous harmony when we played together in Jerusalem had been dispelled.' Back then, 'he was amiable and easygoing and I could often get the best of him. And we had Rex to share. But here it was different.' (*Fatima*, pp. 133-134). The disharmony between the author and her brother is relayed in terms of geographical reference. While she could turn to him in Jerusalem, she grew distant from him in Damascus. Displacement is therefore a process that not only changes the geographical coordinates of the family but also the whole dynamic of their relationships.

The physical aspects of home and the social relationships it provides facilitate a routinization of people into space. Karmi reflects this level of routinization in her prologue when she refers to 'playing in the garden, jumping over the fence into the Muscovite's house next door, [and] seeing her friends return' to school. Both aspects, physical and social, need a level of stability and familiarity in order to acquire a sense of homeliness. The feeling of homeliness develops as these different home elements begin receding into the background of subjects'

attention. As Greg Noble phrases it, 'the extent to which we feel a sense of being "at home", therefore, rests on the capacity of objects to withdraw, to become "invisible" elements of an embodied, practical knowledge of familiar space' (Noble, 2002, p. 58). Hyper visible objects are, by contrast, indicative of being unfamiliar and out of place. Michael Skey stresses in a similar vein that to be home, subjects must have the ability to 'rely on things – people, objects, places, meanings – remaining tomorrow, by and large, as they were today and the day before.' Skey sees the domestic home as a fundamental site for 'constancy, familiarity, safety, comfort and freedom' in a world of increasing complexity and occasional threat (Skey, 2011, p. 234). Similarly, Frost and Selwyn, citing Arien Mack, point out that 'home is supposed to be a place of comfort and refuge' (Frost and Selwyn, 2018, pp. 141-142). Karmi draws a comparison between the family's new house in London and the house they left in Jerusalem. In this contrast, she illustrates how architectural properties can be posited as a site of trauma. The London houses manifest none of the aspects of familiarity that hitherto made the fabric of her daily life. As she recalls:

> I try to remember now when I first saw our new home in London: did I look at that dreary suburban street with its, small, dark houses, all standing in monotonous rows, and its humble little strips of land pretending to be gardens and compare it to what I had known in Jerusalem? Did I feel the stark contrast between the two and grieve for what had been lost? I don't think I did, because I had by then already closed off the Palestine of my childhood into a private memory place where it would always remain magically frozen in time. (*Fatima*, p. 174)

The architectural disparities between Palestinian houses and their English counterparts signpost the loss of the former and the forced adoption of the latter. Interestingly, Karmi makes a comparison while telling the reader that she had not made a comparison back upon her first encounter with the new house. While the account of repressing memories of Jerusalem can be easily interpreted, based on the classical framework, as a symptom of trauma, it is equally significant to note Karmi's self-reflexivity in this passage. In other words, the passage attests to a move beyond repression. That is, the fact that she can articulately compare the two settings now speaks to the knowability of her traumatic experience. This passage is interesting for two main reasons: the first one is that it illustrates the possibility for expressing trauma in ways that are case-specific. That is, Karmi pushes the boundaries of the classical model of trauma theory in

favour of more inclusiveness of non-western histories of violence, in this case the Palestinian Nakba, that may have different itineraries of representability. The second reason is that the move from repression to articulation reflects a paradigmatic structure for Palestinian exile narratives. Put differently, the superstructure of the book as a trauma narrative starts from loss, then repression, denial, resurfacing, activism, and finally narration. What distinguishes Karmi's story is not necessarily a categorical break with the classical structure of traumatic experience and healing. Rather, it is the specifics of the Palestinian case that demand a stretching of the classical framework beyond its euro-centric, psychobiological boundaries. The text does suggest that the subject moves from latency to repression, to resurfacing to a process of healing, but it provides different reasons for these phases.

Another aspect of homeliness that is manifest throughout *In Search of Fatima* is the material culture of the house. That is the things with which people choose to surround themselves. In *Ethnic Identity of Palestinian Immigrants in the United States: The Role of Material Cultural Artifacts* (2010) Faida Abu-Ghazaleh presents a lengthy demonstration of this significant part of the physical dimension of home. Her study tackles the material artifacts inside immigrants' houses and their relationship to inhabitants. Abu-Ghazaleh argues that 'material culture of the home is part of self-identity, in which one recognizes, remembers, and identifies oneself in the personal and private space of one's home.' This is mainly because 'it reflects the occupation, the belief system and the aspirations of the owner.' She contends that 'material artifacts, tangible products, have meanings grafted by the individuals who have them, and they hold individual, social and cultural meanings' (Abu-Ghazaleh, 2010, p. 36). The way people interact with their homes and the material culture enclosed in them is an active factor in the process of meaning-making. Likewise, in *Making Homes Here and Away: Korean German Nurses and Practices of Diasporic Belonging* (2019), Helen Kim draws similar conclusions. She contends that material objects do not have an exclusively decorative function. Rather, they carry 'meaningful memories' and 'narratives of hopes, dreams, struggles, and possibilities' (2019, p. 266). Karmi's mother, we are told in the text, 'decided to recreate Palestine in London – as if we had never left, […] Like some Palestinian Miss Havisham, for her, the clock stopped in Jerusalem in April 1948' (*Fatima*, p. 174). To fulfil this task:

> She started first with the floors. […] my mother removed the carpets which covered the kitchen and the hall and had the floor laid with reddish-brown, shiny tiles to simulate our house in Jerusalem. She would fill a bucket with soap and water and slosh it all over the floor, exactly as Fatima used to do in Palestine, get down on her knees and mop it up vigorously with a cloth. (*Fatima*, p. 175)

To make the place homely, she modifies the material surroundings so as to create a replica of the family's home in Palestine. However, corresponding with this effort is her obligation to do 'exactly as Fatima used to do in Palestine.' The blurring of difference between housewife and maidservant echoes the loss of Palestine and its lifestyle. Karmi's mother illustrates a practical case in which denial functions as a tool to construct a sense of continuity to defy the rupture of the Nakba. She attempts to solidify the belief that 'the clock stopped in Jerusalem in April 1948' and therefore nothing happened after that. At the same time, this draws attention to a larger phenomenon, which is the fact that home in the Palestinian diaspora is not entirely a mnemonic reconstruction. It can be rather a production of the traumatic event which takes shape by mixing different old identities and moulding them into new, creative ones. Home in Palestinian exile is a product of trauma, rather than only an antidote to it.

The new identity of the mother is a mixture of her old one and some aspects of Fatima, the family's maidservant in Jerusalem. In addition to adopting some of her domestic duties, such as mopping the floor, her view of her clothes changed categorically in England. In Palestine:

> Fatima's caftan was a badge of her peasant identity and as much a part of her as the colour of her eyes. To wear Fatima's clothes have been as unthinkable as becoming Fatima herself. […] No one then could have known that after the loss of Palestine in 1948 this despised peasant costume would become a symbol of the homeland, worn with pride by the very same women who had previously spurned it. In exile, it became obligatory for each Palestinian woman to have her own caftan and to show it off at public functions. (*Fatima*, p. 23)

The fact that the caftan became part of the Palestinian home in exile signposts a reconfiguration in the identities of these women. What constitutes home in exile is not necessarily what constituted it before displacement. As the case of the caftan shows, the specificities of home at the individual level can be transformed under the pressure of collective political needs. In the Palestinian situation this dress is a useful cultural tool because it reflects a unifying symbol for all

Palestinians, which is the figure of the peasant. Introducing the peasant as a custodian of Palestinian tradition echoes Schulz's observation that '[r]epresentations of life before 1948 are, for one thing, almost entirely focused on peasant and village life' (Schulz, 2003, p. 108). This is because the economic sustainability of peasant life is entirely dependent on a strong relationship with the land. Thus, the 'Palestinian peasant has always had a strong affinity to the land, which has formed an essential part of his or her identity' (Nashef, 2019, p. 129). Palestinians' losses in the wake of the Nakba vary in terms of region and scale. This presents a challenge for keeping a sense of togetherness and nation in exile. It is the land that can function as a unifying narrative in expressing loss and reclaiming the right to return. The relationship of individuals such as the Karmis to exploitation was not direct, given their upper middle-class lifestyle. Instead, it is the cultural markers associated with the peasantry that most closely connect them to Palestine. Consequently, the Palestinian identity in exile emerges as a form of essentialism, which Lavie and Swedenburg (1996, p. 12) argue is a political necessity, especially when a group or culture faces the threat of radical erasure. This perspective, however, tends to overlook the significant economic and cultural disparities that existed prior to 1948. This essentialism, while politically expedient, simplifies the complex socio-economic landscape that characterized Palestinian society before the Nakba. The Karmis, representing the upper middle class, experienced a different set of socio-economic conditions compared to the peasantry. By focusing on cultural markers of the peasantry, the narrative of Palestinian identity in exile risks homogenizing diverse pre-1948 experiences and backgrounds. This homogenization can obscure the nuanced realities of class and cultural differences, which are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of Palestinian history and identity. Thus, the political interest of the group overtakes the detailed minutiae of individual experience.

Home in Palestine has a region-specific aspect to it. The link between Palestinians and their place of origin is stressed by means of this cultural and economic particularity. For instance, different Palestinian cities are famous for their unique customs, traditions, handicrafts, and ceremonies that distinguish them from the rest of Palestine. Karmi shares the fact that:

> traditions and customs that distinguish Palestine from its neighbours derive not from these people [her family and their social class] but from its peasant class. The

> famous Palestinian handicrafts like the glass-making of Hebron, the cloth weaving in Majdal, the pottery making of all Palestine's villages; or Palestinian music and Palestine's folk dance, the *dabka*, or its traditional embroidery were all carried out by rural people. (*Fatima*, p. 18)

When Karmi illustrates the cultural specificity of certain areas of Palestine, she effectively traces fine lines of difference between Palestinians in terms of cultural identity and production prior to 1948. For instance, the Palestinian culture of Hebron is mediated through making glass while that of Majdal is mediated through weaving. Although they come under the same national label of being Palestinian, they nevertheless differ in terms of regional identity which draws on a more direct relationship with the land in terms of cultural and nomenclatural uniqueness. As shall be discussed further in Chapter Two, Shehadeh explains in the prologue to *Palestinian Walks* (2007) that 'I like to think of my relationship to the land, where I have always lived, as immediate and not experienced through the veil of words written about it' (*Walks*, p. xiii). While Shehadeh maps out his changing self-perception on the changing landscape, Karmi reads the trauma of territorial dispossession on the cultural landscape of Palestinians in England. The territorial dispossession is another veil factor that interferes with the directness of this relationship as it erases traditional cultural boundaries and draws new ones. In the aftermath of displacement, the cultural markers of individual identity acquire a new position in the make-up of home. The geographical specificity of, for example, glass-making or cloth weaving is glossed over by the idea of loss. In other words, once the homeland is lost, cultural markers are transvalued from a regional, class-bound status to a national one. What is lost is not only Hebron or Majdal, but all of Palestine. The traumatic presence of the Nakba and the necessity to survive as a national entity push these differences to the background. This is why post-Nakba Palestinian narratives often focus on peasant life as a strategy to 'highlight the relationship of the Palestinian to the land and create one coherent identity in exile in spite of the variations within the country's social fabric prior to 1948' (Nashef, 2019, p. 129). In the process, 'urban life, class and economic tensions are erased and kept out of the stories' (Schulz, 2003, p. 108). The social, cultural, and economic differences between Fatima and Karmi's mother are kept out of the story in the latter's effort to reinforce her sense of Palestinian belonging through the materiality of the house and the newly found attractiveness of the caftan.

In pre-1948 Palestine, the caftan was region-specific. The different patterns of embroidery were indicative of which region of the country the caftan comes from. People back then 'could tell at a glance whether a gown was from the Jerusalem area or from Bethlehem or Gaza, since most embroidered caftans were made in these places' (*Fatima*, p. 21). In the post-Nakba context this cultural mapping recedes to the background in terms of significance. The emphasis falls rather on what symbolises unity and sameness, qualities which are indispensable in fashioning a Palestinian identity away from the homeland. Therefore, the caftan is somehow promoted from the regional to the national level of symbolism. In the process, there is a loss of cultural specificity but also an opening for creative positioning of cultural markers. Because in England the caftan is detached from its geographical entity, therefore deterritorialized, it can be adopted creatively. In the post-traumatic context of displacement, this resonates with Michelle Balaev's analysis that trauma encompasses an individual's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts their prior sense of self and the criteria by which they assess society (2008, p. 150). At the level of the self, the adoption of the caftan mirrors a shift from a class-defined self to a self-perception primarily defined by being Palestinian. The evaluation of the peasant class becomes predicated on their symbolic position in the historical and political conflict rather than their economic, cultural distinction. In this sense, the disruption in the immediate relationship between the people and the land is bridged symbolically through the image of the peasant emblematised by the adoption of the caftan. Continuity is then established by means of this fashionable item.

The adoption of the peasant cultural markers at the individual and family levels converges with the larger political context in which the family finds itself. From a political point of view, the symbolic use of the *fellah* as an emblem of the Palestinian past is 'a counterargument to Zionism and its presentation of Palestine as a "land without people for a people without a land"' (2003, p. 102). It is a statement that not only is Palestine a land with a specifically distinct sociocultural populace but also the people are defined by a fundamental link to the land in terms of their linguistic self-perception and economic sustenance. Other than the historical significance of the image of the peasant in the discursive battle over Palestine, they bear a symbolic significance which is at the heart of the post-Nakba Palestinian identity. This is because 'the fellahin, judged

uneducated and backward on the one hand, [are] also seen as symbols of tenacity, simplicity and steadfastness on the other. They [represent] continuity and tradition and the essence of what it [is] to be Palestinian' (*Fatima*, pp. 20-21). These traits of tenacity and steadfastness are crucial to the perpetuation of the struggle to reclaim the homeland. On the other hand, tradition and continuity emphasize Palestinians' entitlement to the land. In this fashion, by introducing the *fellah*, the narrative of Karmi is located in the middle of the political struggle by means of its reference to tradition. This positioning of the individual into the political and the (auto)biographical into a history of trauma takes place through the figure of Fatima. The reoccurrence of Fatima in Karmi's narrative and her mother's domestic activities signposts the repetition which is characteristic of traumatic memories. However, in distinction with a psychological reading of this repetition, the text provides a wider range of stimuli that trigger her memory. These triggers, mostly political events, emphasize further the inseparability of the individual and the political in the Palestinian memoir.

The repetitive emergence of Fatima in England and in Karmi's text draws attention to the fact that home in the Palestinian diaspora is not entirely a mnemonic reconstruction. It is rather a production of the traumatic event itself. The reconstructed home takes shape by mixing different old identities and moulding them into new, creative ones. For instance, while Karmi's mother was an upper middle-class lady who had little to do with the caftan in pre-1948 Palestine, it became part and parcel of her Palestinian identity in the post-1948 context as she adopted it alongside some of the domestic duties associated with its peasant background. The traumatic impact of the Nakba registers itself in these cultural, class-based transformations that took place as the peasant figure transvalued from its narrow scope of symbolism to a national level of cultural as well as political signification. The transformation in the mother's identity corresponding with this transvaluation marks a stark disparity between the home she tries to replicate and the one she does actually construct in London. The same goes for social circles which the Palestinian community tries to replicate in London. Karmi relates in great detail how weekly activities were structured around certain social events in Palestine. Before the Nakba:

> [each woman] had a certain day for her *Istiqbal*; I think ours took place on Tuesdays. There was a routine to these events. First, we were made to keep out

> of the way while our mother spent the morning making savouries and sweetmeats. (The best thing about that from our point of view was the wonderful food left over for us to feast on after everyone had gone.) Then, the front room, or salon, to the right of the *liwan* was dusted and swept to be ready for the occasion. There was an air of excitement as the women began to arrive, all dressed up and bejewelled. (*Fatima*, p. 30)

Istiqbal is the Arabic term for reception. The Karmi house 'was ideally suited for entertaining. The front door opened directly into [the] *liwan*, a spacious square room with two large windows on either side of the door' (*Fatima*, p. 51). The day for *istiqbal* solidifies social positionalities within the house and in relation to other families. In the context of the household, the position of the mother is acted out by hosting the event, cleaning the house, preparing the sitting, and cooking for the guests. In other words, taking care of different responsibilities in relation to the event is the mother's engagement of the day. On the other hand, for the children the event is an opportunity to feast on the leftovers after everyone is gone. In comparison to other families, *istiqbal* is an occasion when women show off their cooking skills and the organisation of their *liwan* and salon. This shows also in the way women are 'dressed up and bejewelled.' It is a routine of reaffirming social classes through fashion, gastronomy, and house design. Karmi observes the adequacy of having the *liwan* at the entrance to the house in relation to the social practice of *istiqbal*. The architecture of the house, therefore, has a socio-culturally determined functionality. The link is again made between home as a physical entity and social routines which provide a meaningful position for the self vis-à-vis others.

When the family moved from Damascus to London, Karmi's mother struggled to position herself in the new environment because of losing her social and cultural reference points such as *istiqbal*. As Karmi remembers:

> No one understood what had happened to her or why she had changed so. 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 that 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. (*Fatima*, p. 182)

The *Nakba*, as a catastrophic event, and the resultant displacement of the family has radical personal and social ramifications on the mother. The social circles which she used to be part of in Palestine are constitutive of her self-perception at the individual level. This is because she individuates herself through differences with other women which are manifested in social circles. These differences are conceived of along certain cultural lines. For example, in the event of *istiqbal*, the differences show in terms of cooking skills, housekeeping, and fashion. These elements are culturally defined in relation to the area from which they come. Moreover, the identities of the people she socialises with are very important in this process of identification. When she moves to London, the identities of the people around her are different, the house design is not the same, the cultural landscape is distinct, and the language is unintelligible to her. Defining herself in contrast with this new environment would amount to a break with Palestine and everything for which it stands. More importantly, it would affirm the loss of home, which loss 'she could not come to terms with.' Her approach has rather two facets; the first one is a denial of the present loss, and the second is, paradoxically, a reconstruction of what has been lost in the new environment.

A linear reading of the relationship between the social circles in Palestine and the ones Karmi's mother tries to find in London establishes a chronological link between the notion of home before the Nakba and its counterpart(s) after the Nakba. In other words, when the reader moves from Part One to Part Two, the social circles in Palestine are presented as a guideline for forming new ones in England. Home in this sense is a predetermined entity which did exist with well delineated dimensions in Palestine and was then lost in the event of departure. The circular reading of the relationship of trauma and home which this chapter proposes, however, problematises this interpretation. Not only is home constructed retrospectively in England but also the different strategies utilised to survive the trauma of territorial loss are what primarily determine the components of the Palestinian home in the first place, be it before or after the Nakba. In other words, home came into existence *because of* the Nakba. Therefore, as long as the Nakba remains an open event, an unintegrated memory, home remains an unreached destination. Rather than merely reiterating the observation that constructing home in new geographies is a symptom of trauma, this chapter highlights a different facet of the Palestinian

experience of exile, namely that home is not only a means of survival but also a product thereof. The retrospective process of memory involved in writing memoir subsequently projects the aspects of home as constructed in London on the history of the writer and her family in Palestine, providing the experience of traumatic loss with a narrative which draws on the fragmentation and transformation of home. Taking social circles as an example to illustrate this point, Karmi explains that her mother suffered at the beginning of their stay in England partly because of the lack of interaction with people:

> She made no secret of the fact that she resented being in London. She complained endlessly that there was no decent food to cook, none of the vegetables we were used to, and even garlic, the staple of all Arabic cooking, was a luxury. She hated the cold weather and the rain and complained she could scarcely keep the house warm. She was lonely and longed for company. (*Fatima*, p. 181)

For Karmi's mother, the unhomely character of London is rendered by means of its weather, the lack of the ingredients she needed for cooking, and the scarcity of opportunities to interact with people. These are aspects that highlight the difference between Palestine and England. In other words, her complaints are indirect references to the loss of Palestine.

However, as the family spends more time in London, she began making friends and the effects of displacement on her daily life seem noticeably mitigated. Karmi reports that:

> Within our first two or three years in London, our mother had made our home into a communication centre, not just for Palestinians, but for Arabs of every description. And this helped to lift her depression. Throughout the 1950s, her circle of friends widened as the number of Arabs in England, especially Palestinians, steadily grew. She went out or had visitors nearly every day. (*Fatima*, p. 221)

Palestinian social circles contributed to making life endurable in London despite the traumatic aftermath of the Nakba which unfolded in the destruction of her mother's former life. These visits and gatherings are part of importing old identities into new environments which facilitate the routinization of social and economic spaces. This process of routinization consequently makes possible her familiarisation with the geographical, cultural, and political context of diasporic life in England. The role played by social circles in facilitating the process of familiarising the self with new environments and the routinisation of socio-cultural activities is recognised by means of

their function in surviving the trauma of displacement. In other words, the weekly visits of *istiqbal* are retrospectively recognised as a constitutive element of home as it used to be in Palestine because of their role in constructing home in England as a surviving strategy. Karmi's narrative of home, as an existentially necessary anchor for identity in a post-traumatic experience, highlights not only the difference between before and after displacement but also the fundamental role of the Nakba in creating the need for home initially. So, the home which is presented as preceding the Nakba and lost in its aftermath is, paradoxically, foregrounded by the Nakba itself. That is, the need to establish a routine of frequent visits and social gatherings in England is a product of the Nakba, which severed the links the mother had to other Palestinians. As a sense of familiarity starts to build up, the new social landscape acquires an affect of homeliness. It is this newly sharpened sense of homeliness, in its existential significance, that retrospectively qualifies *istiqbal* in Palestine as an element of home. The social gathering, as such, presents a culturally specific space for the expression of trauma. It is a space in which memories of the previous life can be recalled and new identities can be constructed. The meetings are symptomatic of loss but at the same time therapeutic in the sense that they help Palestinians mitigate the psychological strain of exile or refugeehood.

Home in Karmi's first memoir is rendered by means of a range of memories which are judged in conjunction with the loss of their subject after displacement. The loss of Fatima, for example, is recognised as a loss only years later in the life of Karmi. As she admits:

> Of course I did not know at that stage what Fatima meant to us children or what she would come to signify for me personally, how the precious memory of her after 1948 would merge with the rest of my irrecoverable childhood. To my mother, she was merely a hard-working village woman who cleaned our house and helped her with the cooking. (*Fatima*, p. 15)

The Nakba left gaps in Karmi's life narrative as it separated her from Fatima who represented a reservoir of her childhood memories. The realisation of the significance of Fatima in Karmi's identity and her quest for home comes as a belated result of trauma. *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* equates this quest for Fatima with the search for Palestine and the search for belonging. When her husband, John, asks to meet her he reveals that he has found a new partner

and therefore their marriage was coming to an end. The following passage comes at the very end of Part Two, where Karmi relates in detail the last stage in the collapse of her first marriage. The next page marks the beginning of Part Three and has the title 'In Search of Fatima' (*Fatima*, p. 381):

> Where was the love affair for me? And looking at John's contented self-satisfied smile, I suddenly knew the answer. I suppose it had been shadowing me all my life. John may have found happiness with his anaesthetist, perhaps for now. But the 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. (*Fatima*, p. 380)

So, while John moved on from their problematic marriage to a new one with a different wife, Karmi seeks love in a relationship of a different dimension. It is in Palestine that she finds refuge from the devastation of divorce.

The search for Fatima is not only for the sake of her symbolic worth (a peasant woman and the servant of the family), but also for what she may help recover of Ghada's past. Karmi imparts that the first photograph she ever had in her possession dated back to 1948 when the family arrived in Syria in transit before flying to England later.

> And there, I suppose, they remained until the Jewish family which was moved by the Israeli authorities into our empty house found them and, for all I know, threw them away. So, I never got to see how my birth certificate looked or what my exact date of birth was, nor any of my childhood photographs either. For many years, the first photograph of myself I ever saw dated from when I was eight, taken after we had left Palestine for Syria. (*Fatima*, p. 8)

The loss of photographs and birth certificates from before the Nakba translates into a lack of evidence of her history prior to the event of moving to Syria. This is why when she 'looked at it as a child, [she] used to think that [her] real life only started with that photograph. What went before left no record and had no reality except in [her] dreams' (*Fatima*, pp. 8-9). The event in its literality destroyed the evidence of her exact date of birth and early childhood photographs. The resultant gaps in her life narrative bear this trace of the traumatic event of eviction. The break with the past in Karmi's case is not entirely symbolic but rather literal in the sense that the event caused the loss of any physical evidence of her existence before displacement took place. So, the

search for Fatima is a search for the self that Karmi narrates in the third person voice in the prologue. However, as Karmi tells of her move from Palestine to England and the implications of this move on her self-perception, she presents a traumatic narrative that is not exclusively hers. Her memoir manifests aspects of traumatic narratives such as repetition, indirection (Whitehead, 2004, p. 3), and the 'nonlinear movements that allow trauma to register in language and its hesitations, indirections, pauses, and silences' (LaCapra, 2001, pp. 121-122).

Part one of *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* is devoted predominantly to life in Palestine before the *Nakba*. However, it is interspersed with flashforwards which describe life in England after the family's departure in 1948. This structural pattern reflects trauma in the sense that it defies linear readings of the Palestinian history of displacement. Moreover, it emphasises the central role played by the *Nakba* in the construction of a post-traumatic Palestinian identity in diaspora. The centrality of the Palestinian catastrophe is rendered in the reading experience of *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* by means of its subtle yet omnipresent echoes across the narrative. For example, when Karmi describes how she used to go with her sister to school then come back home in Palestine, she follows it up with a flashforward to a similar routine in London:

> Unknown to us then, this process would repeat itself in London, both of us going to the same school, leaving our mother in bed in the morning and returning home together for lunch. (*Fatima*, p. 55)

Mentioning life in London in the middle of Part One alludes to a displacement that took place later in the life of the family. In many instances Karmi does use this narrative strategy to foreground events or aspects of life in Palestine prior to 1948. Another memory that is narrated in both its Palestine and England variations is her revising and reading to her sister:

> Some twenty years later in London, when I was studying for my specialist medical exams, I remember revising out loud to her as she sat sewing in the bedroom at home. I knew she could not understand my subject, but reading it to her was evocative of that time and somehow comforting and familiar. (*Fatima*, p. 56)

The memory of their school routine in London suggests a future displacement from Palestine to England. Part One consistently alludes to this crossing by emphasising Palestinians' denial of its

possibility. Part Two, on the other hand, refers back to it in times of crises as a possible interpretation for events. For instance, she supposes 'that the illusion of tranquillity we lived under during those final years abruptly came to an end in the summer of 1946' (*Fatima*, p. 58). The intensity of the eventual event of eviction is narrativized by means of the local population's total unpreparedness for it to take place. This for Karmi was a personal conviction but also a socially consolidated belief. As she imparts, 'I was merely intrigued and occasionally concerned. Not for a moment did I think it could touch me or Rex or our home' (*Fatima*, p. 69).

Life before the Nakba is therefore narrated with the present awareness of its future destruction. If *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* is a quest for home and an enterprise to construct a post-trauma identity, then the inescapability of referring back to the Nakba in remembering life before 1948 suggests that it is through the lens of the *Nakba* that home and the self are conceived. Also, it highlights the fact that the narrative of these events is not linear, which signals how trauma narratives are characterised with the collapse of temporality and chronology (Whitehead, 2004, p. 3). Likewise, Part Two reaffirms the centrality of 1948 and its lasting effects on Karmi and her community in exile. Karmi's family members take different approaches in narrating their trauma of displacement and territorial dispossession. The mother actively tries to 'recreate Palestine in London' (*Fatima*, p. 174). In this, she registers the *Nakba* as a traumatic event in a non-verbal, indirect narrative. The concept of an indirect narrative is vividly illustrated through the recreation of Palestinian material culture within the home and the frequent social gatherings that echo life before departure. These practices serve to deny the event in its literality. In other words, although the Nakba did occur, it did not fully register in the perception of the affected victims, the Palestinians. By reconstructing a semblance of Palestine in England or recreating a Jerusalem house in London, they bridge the temporal and spatial gap from before to after the Nakba. This act of cultural and social preservation allows them to maintain a connection to their past, making the displacement seem almost unreal or unbelievable. The indirect narrative thus becomes a means of coping with the trauma of displacement. The familiar sights, sounds, and traditions of Palestine are recreated in their new environment, providing a sense of continuity and stability. This recreation is not just about preserving memories but also about asserting their identity and resisting the erasure of their

history and culture. It occurs by way of expressing that, despite the physical displacement, their cultural and social identity remains intact. Moreover, these recreated spaces and gatherings serve a political function. They represent a form of silent protest against the forced displacement but also an act of resistance to cultural erasure. The event of the Nakba, while a historical reality, is thus rendered unbelievable in the sense that its impact is mitigated through these acts of cultural resilience. In essence, the indirect narrative allows Palestinians to live in a state of duality, where they are physically in exile but culturally and emotionally still connected to their homeland. It is a coping mechanism which makes survival an endurable possibility and helps maintain hope for a future return. The event of the Nakba, therefore, remains a part of their collective memory, but its harsh reality is mitigated by the ongoing recreation of their cultural and social life.

The latency in the perception of loss corresponds with a latency in the process of (re)constructing home in England. As the family stays in Syria, which is a neighbouring country of Palestine, the main approach is denial, as everyone around is reinforcing the belief of temporariness and 'everywhere the word went out that, until the problem was solved, leaving the danger zone was only a temporary measure' (*Fatima*, p. 112). However, as a sense of finality begins to make its way to the displaced family in London, the process of home (re)construction begins. The various strategies to build a home in exile can therefore be construed as an indirect way of experiencing the trauma of displacement. While Caruth suggests that experiencing trauma lies in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence, Karmi's texts suggest that homeliness in the aftermath of trauma lies in the very illusiveness of home and the continuous quest for it. Because the loss of the perceived home has not been fully nor directly experienced as it occurred, its reconstruction can never amount to the real thing perceived as the archetypal home, and therefore 'nowhere else could take its place, and by definition could only be a temporary stop, standing in for the real thing.' (*Return*, p. 18).

In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story shows that in the project of constructing an identity in a post-trauma context, the narrative bears the traces of a fragmented life experience not only in relation to events in different geographical areas but also in the very language employed to relate those events. Karmi's memoirs are written in English. However, when it

comes to some specifically Palestinian terms such as *falafel*, *hoummos* (*Fatima*, p. 39), *fatta*, *zeit*, *za'tar* (*Return*, p. 213), and most significantly *nakbah* (*Fatima*, p. 183), she mentions them in Arabic. These Arabic terms in the middle of an English text preserve the cultural specificity of Palestinian food as well as the historical uniqueness of the Palestinian experience of forced displacement. For Karmi personally, Arabic provides spaces for belonging to Palestine in her text. In this, her use of Arabic exacerbates her identity dilemma as an Anglo-Palestinian. Trauma in the text is registered in the non-linear structure as well as in the fact that memories of Palestine flash across at unlikely times and disrupt the narrative. In other cases, they defy repression and reoccur at times of crises as lenses to make sense of the situation. For example, the Suez Crisis triggers some of Karmi's dormant memories of her parting from Fatima which have been relatively absent from the narrative to this point. Karmi describes how she 'was back in the loneliness of that orphaned childhood which [she] suppose[s] had never left [her]' (*Fatima* 289). This comes as a result of her stance vis a vis the taking over by Egypt of the Suez Canal which eventually led to the crisis involving Britain, France, and Israel all against Egypt then led by President Nasser. Having taken the side of Egypt in this political situation, Karmi had to deal with controversy with her classmates:

> Increasingly, the issues which the events of 1956 had laid open began to haunt me. Was I Arab or English or a hybrid, and was there such a thing? I saw the Arab in me personified in my mother while, after so many years, my surroundings had also produced an English girl. Whereas until then, the English side of me had comfortably dominated, the experience of Suez brought back a compelling Middle Eastern dimension which I could not set aside. (*Fatima*, p. 294)

The general opinion inside the classroom, in favour of the coalition, was a microcosm of the public opinion throughout England. Consequently, Karmi's sister, Siham, decides to leave England for Jordan and Karmi's loneliness is further exacerbated as the two 'had been so close [and] had lived through so many traumas together' (*Fatima*, p. 310).

The political situation thus plays out at the family level and has an impact further down the personal as Karmi reads this parting from Siham through '[e]choes of [her] parting from Fatima [which] came back, painfully mingled with the fear of uncertainty' (*Fatima*, p. 311). So, the narrative in Part Two refers back to the *Nakba* to accommodate the Suez Crisis in the life

narrative of the author. Another incident which illustrates how the Nakba produces home in England without a previous counterpart in Palestine comes later in the text when Karmi relates the details of her marriage to John:

> what I felt for him in return was not love, but a need for him to love me and make me feel secure. I relished his indulgence of me, his devotion and the stability his presence had introduced into my life. For to me, he was inextricably entwined with his situation, as if he came as part of a package that included his mother and her dogs, the house, the Somerset countryside, those china cups. (*Fatima*, pp. 345-346)

John in Karmi's first marriage is described much more as an anchor in the English lifestyle rather than the most compatible of matches. The marriage was relentlessly opposed by the family on religious grounds (him being Christian, them being Muslim). However, Karmi's need to belong pushed her away from her family and closer to John and his mother. The marriage was held together for some time before it collapsed as a result of their opposing opinions regarding the 6-day War of 1967. The parting moments of the couple triggers traumatic repetition which, again, takes the narrative back to the Nakba.

> I was momentarily struck dumb. A yawning sense of loss too terrible to describe gripped me. Why did I feel so bad? Did I love John after all or was this a replay yet again in my life of leaving, of abandonment, of neglect?' […] Parting from him brought back echoes of a previous parting, long ago in childhood, when the world I knew slipped away from me, irrevocably out of reach. (*Fatima*, p. 380)

Paradoxically, it is the realisation that the world of Palestine had slipped away irrevocably that sets in motion a new journey to find home. The reoccurring memories of displacement keep present the fact that England is not home and keep the quest for home a continuous enterprise. This is significant in the Palestinian political struggle in so far as it creates discursive spaces for the right of return. In other words, return is a demand as long as home has not been found. This works against the reconstruction of home in new territories. The paradoxical relationship between fashioning spaces for belonging and the denial of loss is therefore a political necessity which maintains the feasibility of return. As Karmi suggests, although her mother 'was enviably successful and cultivated around her a circle of devoted and loving Palestinians' in London (*Fatima*, p. 228), the 'fantasy of return she had harboured since 1948 was still alive within her'

(*Fatima*, p. 344). Therefore, in its move from an advertent (re)construction of home in new locations to the perpetuation of return as a national project, *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* reflects how the Palestinian struggle for existence as a nation 'necessitates inventing cultural symbols in order to preserve their collective past and reiterate the idea of return' in the absence of 'supportive structures of statehood' (Turan, 2015, pp. 45-46).

Karmi writes about her divorce as an event that triggered her activism, which still defines her life to this day. The loss of the marital relationship is interpreted as a new episode in a series of losses but at the same time as a new beginning. Because autobiographical accounts present their subjects as admirable individuals whose life-stories are worth telling, the loss is quickly transformed into a worthwhile journey, a real love story that has always been lurking under the surface. Divorce is not allowed to interrupt the narrative for long; it is not *the* disruptive event. This shows how the intersection between the individual dimensions of the narrative and the collective interests of the author's community can serve the autobiographical project. That is, Karmi leans on the collective trauma of the Nakba to, first, interpret the individual trauma of her divorce and, by the same token, to transition from a life characterised by detachment to a politically engaged one. The Nakba is in this instance a lens for interpretation but also a bridge between the individual and the community. To be Palestinian in exile is to see the world through this lens of displacement and dispossession. The return that the text undergoes when it refers back to the divorce incident is tantamount to Karmi's return to her Palestinianness. The same way home is, as I argue, a product of its own loss, belonging seems to be a construct of a series of losses. Karmi's loss of Palestine launches her search for belonging in England, then the loss of her English anchor marks the start of another journey. This latter is presented as a return when Karmi remembers thinking that the love story she has been seeking 'had been shadowing me all my life [...] and for good or ill, it would last a lifetime' (*Fatima*, p. 380). With this statement, Karmi foregrounds the third part of the text, which is mainly about searching for belonging in the physical return journey.

While her mother's initial reaction to life in England was to recreate Palestine, Karmi's approach was based on an intent forgetting of Palestine and a calculated reinvention of herself

as an English subject. As she relates, 'unnoticed by [her] parents' and 'while [her] mother carefully guarded [their] home from outside influences, [she] was relentlessly being absorbed into the English way of life' (*Fatima*, p. 215). In her 'overt exposure to [English] cultural experiences' as well as her extensive consumption in English literature, Karmi's 'inner sense of [herself] was irrevocably affected.' When she started writing her own stories, they 'were all rooted in England and the English way of life which seemed to [her] far closer and more familiar than anything Arab or Islamic' (*Fatima*, p. 218-219). Because of her readings and cultural experiences that were all in England, and due to her suppression of the memory of Palestine, Karmi invented for herself an anglicised identity that ignored her Palestinian background. However, as the narrative approaches Part Three, Karmi faces the realisation of her Englishness being no more than a constructed façade in the face of a traumatic reality:

> I was crushed by the thought that my life had been nothing but a sham. The sense of belonging I had nurtured was only a pretence that I could no longer support. I may have become English in culture and affinity, but in all the ways in which it mattered I was not. (*Fatima*, p. 377)

The realisation that she was not English in 'all the ways in which it mattered' can be equated with a realisation that a shift in her approach to the experience of displacement became necessary. The narrative in Part Three adopts a tone which is more mnemonically active and politically direct. Portraying her belonging to England as nothing more than a pretence suggests that her journey towards Palestinian identity is a return journey to a previous self rather than a new destination. The inseparability of Palestinian identity from politics becomes evident in this narrative move, as she equates being Palestinian with being politically active in the struggle for the general return of the Palestinian people to their homeland.

In fact, in the very first page of Part Three Karmi quotes one of the Israeli political figures involved in the conflict:

> In 1969, the Israeli prime minister, Golda Meir, made an astonishing pronouncement. "It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them," she said. "They did not exist." Had it not been

> for statements like this, the changes which the defeat of 1967 had stirred in me might never have progressed further. (*Fatima*, p. 383)

Rather than denial, repression, or a passive claim to victimhood, Karmi decides to face the memories which haunted her life after the events of 1948. She decides to take the return trip to Palestine, now Israel. Schulz proposes that to be a returnee in the Palestinian context 'represented action, to go back to where one came from, as opposed to the term "refugee", which implied being a passive victim of things that happened.' It also implicitly entailed that 'residence in host societies was only temporary' (Schulz, 2003, p. 130). However, in Karmi's case, return is a redemptive step towards self-discovery. It is narrated as an attempt to correct a self-perception that had been repressed by the hope of integration and the lack of discursive spaces to express victimisation in the form of forced displacement. As she describes the general public atmosphere in England after the Six-Day War in 1967:

> Due to all these factors, by the beginning of the 1970s I felt invisible as a Palestinian. Worse still, my side of the story was unacknowledged and illegitimate. What had previously most angered me amongst my Jewish fellow pupils at school now resurfaced with virtually everyone I met. (*Fatima*, p. 386)

While her return to Palestine is pronounced as an attempt to participate more actively in the political struggle, it is also a search for these spaces to voice loss and victimhood denied her in England. Karmi's statement presents a nuanced experience of trauma which breaks away from the event-based framework. Of course, the Nakba remains the most definitive of events in her life story but everyday life in England also brings about other encounters that turn out to be traumatic. For instance, in the above passage the absence of expressive spaces for her political position regarding the Six-Day War makes her recall a similar condition from her days in school. Trauma in the Palestinian diaspora is therefore not restricted to the memory of the Nakba but can occur in daily encounters that might be casual in other contexts.

Karmi's books therefore function as a narrative of seeking these discursive spaces but also as spaces to voice the author's, her family's, and the Palestinians' traumatic experience of displacement and colonialism. This shows in her ultimate decision to engage in political activism, in contrast to the Palestinian stance in England. Discouraged by the Israeli victory and its

ramifications on the public opinion, her parents resorted to attempts of acclimatization to life in England and Palestine was reserved as a subject of passive nostalgia:

> 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. (*Fatima*, p. 393)

Her parents deploy a nostalgic attitude towards Palestine to preserve its memory from the changes that took place after their departure but also as a way of expressing their resentment of the occupation without directly acknowledging it. In *Homemaking: Radical Nostalgia and the Construction of a South Asian Diaspora* Anindya Raychaudhuri defines home as a 'culmination of a number of contradictory narratives and as a result, a space of belonging and identity, memories and experiences that cannot be simplified under any kind of a simplistic symbol for nationhood' (Raychaudhuri, 2018, p. 14). His study of South Asian populations proposes that home can be the product of nostalgic thinking, 'conceived as the varied collection of affects, strategies and processes through which a sense of home is first constructed, and then preserved and maintained' (Raychaudhuri, 2018, p. xii). Raychaudhuri refers to his use of nostalgia as 'the various social, creative and discursive processes that can be deployed in order to attempt to remake the home, in the here and now' (Raychaudhuri, 2018, p. 11). Nostalgia, for him, is a mnemonic act with deeply critical potential of the present. That is, in the process of remembering the past in a positive light, there exists an underlying comparison which casts the present as flawed. In other words, nostalgia itself is inseparable from the subject's dissatisfaction with their contemporary situation at the time remembering takes place. To engage in nostalgic reminiscing is therefore to criticise the present as much as it is about praising the past. Nostalgia can therefore generate not only a recourse to a preceding situation but also a criticism of the status quo. The aim is not only to revisit the past, but to compare it to a defective present in the hope of a better future (Raychaudhuri, 2018, p. 12). Home as a construction of nostalgia carries the critical potential for political change as it deploys a notion of the past as better to envision a future that is different from the present. The present location and the experience associated with it is therefore held

between two imagined utopias. The first one is in the past; the second in the future. Life in such contexts is therefore perceived as defective and at the same time transitory regardless of how long it lasts. It is this future-oriented function that Karmi adopts towards the end of her first memoir.

This decision proves highly liberating from the burden of repressed traumatic memories expressed earlier in the narrative. As she declares a few pages later:

> [By] the mid-1970s I had latched passionately onto the cause of Palestine as an inspiration, an identity, a reason for living. I felt part of a lofty enterprise – to put right a huge injustice of which I was also victim. Grandly fired by this sense of destiny I embarked on adventures that would have been unthinkable in my previously staid and conventional English life. (*Fatima*, p. 399)

This passage could be considered as a turning point in the first memoir. It provides a noticeable reversal of her self-perception vis-à-vis life choices against the backdrop of a traumatic history of displacement. To drive this point home, it is useful to deploy another passage from earlier in the narrative. Comparing herself to her parents, Karmi remarks that 'unlike the case of the conventional migrants who try to build bridges to the future, the only bridges my parents built were ones which connected them to the past – to Palestine and to the Arab world' (*Fatima*, p. 221). So, in her effort to distinguish herself from this past-oriented outlook, she 'would embrace wholeheartedly my English husband and his English life. If Palestine still lingered somewhere in my memory, it cast no shadow and meant nothing' (*Fatima*, p. 349). This passage signposts the transformation of Palestine from an entity frozen in the past to an 'enterprise' shaping the future; from an entity which 'meant nothing' to 'an identity' and a *raison d'être*. The circular structure of the text is completed at this point of the narrative. It is here that Karmi rediscovers her identity as a Palestinian. It is this discovery that allows a reunion of the 'she' in the Prologue and the 'I' throughout the rest of the narrative. In other words, while the little girl in the prologue experiences Palestine as home in its multiple dimensions as a default state of being, Karmi the author/narrator has to go through the trauma of homelessness for decades before finding home in her newly constructed identity of political activist.

However, the return trip Karmi takes as part of her new career proves futile at the personal level of self-discovery. She laments that '[two] years in the Arab world had not helped [her] find [her] roots. Rather [she] began to fear that she had none to find' (*Fatima*, p. 420). So, she 'concluded desperately' that she had to 'go to the source, the origin, the very place, […] where it all began in order to find [home]' (*Fatima*, p. 422). Return has been one of the central components of Palestinian identity in exile ever since the Nakba. However, when the opportunity to return presents itself, the process is not straightforward. As Katharyne Mitchell *et al* observe, '[n]ostalgia and reality clash and often lead to disappointment.' While these return visits are 'journeys to re-capture the past,' they are at the same time undertakings which 'shatter memories' (Mitchell et al, 2019, p. 275). Accordingly, Roger. J. Porter explains that '[r]eality, with all its incongruities and disappointments, cannot match the place held in the imagination; the literal return is always a disappointment' (2001, p. 307). Hammer points out that this disparity between 'image and reality is not entirely unexpected, yet often comes as a surprise and challenge to returnees.' This is mainly because 'the myth of a shared homeland, a place of ancestry as well as a place of symbolic or real belonging, is one of the founding pillars' of Palestinian communities in diaspora. It maintains their 'relative stability as a community and […] a nation' (Hammer, 2005, p. 74). So, rather than being the supposed 'miracle solution to all problems' (Schulz, 2003, pp. 182-183), in Karmi's case, return 'brings to mind the phrase "you can't go home again"'. As proposed by David Bartram et al, 'return is not the reverse of outward migration; instead, it shares some essential features with outward migration' (Bartram et al, 2014, p. 124). Shehadeh refers to a similar experience of disillusionment that happened to his father when he returned to Jaffa after years of internal exile. Rather than undoing the fracturing effects of displacement, return drives home the finality of loss. It dismembers nostalgia and confirms the discontinuity of past life.

The very last paragraph of *In Search of Fatima* echoes this suggestion of the impossibility of return when she compares her situation of exile to that of refugees in camps around Palestine:

> They would remain and multiply and one day return and maybe overtake. Their exile was material and temporary. But mine was a different exile, undefined by space or time, and from where I was, there would be no return. (*Fatima*, p. 451)

Interestingly, the second memoir stands in literal opposition to this final statement. Karmi's return trip to Palestine brings her to the realisation that return in the geographical sense does not necessarily serve the role of self-realisation nor the much-desired resolution to her traumatic loss of home. It is the return captured in her second memoir that is her new home. While for her parents, 'simply wishing to return may be their "home"' (Wise, 2006, p. 184), Karmi's home seems to manifest itself in the recurring attempt to return regardless of how disenchanting it might turn out to be. As John. R. Kurtz suggests in a relevant vein:

> narrative itself embodies the traumatic problem, in that it represents through its narration of past events a ceaseless and obsessive return to the site of trauma at the same time that it offers an expressive mechanism that might potentially offer a solution to the problem. (2018, p. 4)

So, Karmi's approach consists of taking action both literally and literarily. That is, the repeated attempts to find home in returning to the Arab world, especially Palestine, becomes a homely space in which she can voice her political views and aspiration and find sympathetic listeners. Also, her memoirs which narrate the particularities of these enterprises provide a renewable space for the voicing of the traumatic experience of Palestinians in Palestine and elsewhere in the world. Moreover, *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* attests to the continuation of the return project both as individual and collective pillar of Palestinian identity, despite its unfeasibility or else its defectiveness as a remedy to the trauma of displacement. It is in an unconditional upholding of return that the Palestinian identity in exile is reserved.

Return: A Palestinian Memoir (2015) presents a similar structure in its circularity and centredness on loss, recovery, and hope. However, its tone is much more direct and politically involved than that of *In Search of Fatima*. The book is divided in chapters, unlike the tripartite structure of the first memoir. Karmi launches the narrative with a prologue in the first-person telling of her father's final days then opens the first chapter, 'Journey to Ramallah':

> I had sworn never to return to this torn-up, unhappy land after that first trip in 1991 when I broke a long-standing family 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 acknowledgment of our loss and the triumph of those who had taken our place […] As it transpired, I broke my resolve and

> returned to the same land several times after 1991, and here I was again. (*Return*, p. 7)

Instead of a repetition compulsion in which the victim remains on the receiving end of traumatic history, Karmi's compulsion to return is a political obligation in which she has an active role. This time, she returns as a UN employee to work as a consultant to the PA's Ministry of Media and Communications. Presented with the opportunity to visit different cities in Palestine, Karmi stretches her narrative to include the suffering of other Palestinians and highlight their traumatic everyday under the occupation.

One of the most 'outstanding' of the colonial practices affecting the Palestinians is the Separation Wall. The Wall, also referred to as the West Bank barrier, extends over 700 km separating families, farmers and lands, as well as workers from their places of work. One of the stories Karmi vocalises in her memoir is that of a Palestinian woman, Naila. As Karmi 'stood close up against the wall' Naila stood beside her and told her that her husband was behind the wall and that they were not allowed to live together anymore. This is because they had owned a house in Abu Dis until the wall was built, 'putting the house on the Israeli side of the village. They were instantly separated, for she was a "resident" of East Jerusalem' and held a blue Israeli ID and he was a "West Bank resident" and held an orange ID. When Karmi asks Naila why she would not join her husband on the other side, she responds that she would lose her Israeli ID and consequently forfeit her right 'to use Israel's airport, or take her children to Jerusalem's schools, or use its hospitals (*Return*, p. 47). In her relating of this story and similar ones of Palestinians whose lives have been destroyed by the occupation and its discriminatory policies, she draws attention to traumatic experiences that went unnoticed, or have been overlooked, by the 1990s' framework. The trauma of people like Naila is not event-based. It is an accumulative traumatic experience that renews itself and adds up every day. It is clearly knowable. In fact, the victim herself tells Karmi the story in detail without breaking down or exhibiting any pathological symptoms. Also, the narration of her story of suffering does not necessarily adhere to the narrative impossibility and cognitive indecision as prescribed by the classical framework (Whitehead, 2004; Luckhurst, 2008; Craps, 2012; Kurtz, 2018). More importantly, it necessitates political action, like Karmi's witnessing and reporting, to give voice to these instances of violence

and pave the way for their potential resolution and healing. In Naila's story, there is an illustration of traumatic experiences that fall outside the classical framework of trauma theory. Naila's story destabilises the paradigmatic relationship between trauma and major events. That is, the Separation Wall was not built overnight, nor did it break out as an unexpected event by the residents of the neighbouring cities. Karmi, therefore reports on cases of suffering that are ongoing because they might not be dramatic enough to call the world's attention or because of being located in the periphery. Such traumas of everyday emotional strain that come as an outcome of colonial practices need to be addressed alongside cases such as the Holocaust and 9/11 if trauma is to fulfil its potential as a bridge for cross-cultural sympathy.

The prologue to *Return* interlaces the personal and the political in the sense of loss that Karmi expresses. While nursing her father in Amman, Jordan, she reflects on his life alongside the history of Palestine:

> 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. (*Return*, p. 2)

As she prepares herself for the loss of her father, Karmi has to reexperience the loss of Palestine and the state of exile that the Palestinians found themselves in as a result of the Nakba. The life of her father is thus seen through the lens of Palestinian history and the political developments that led to contemporary situation. Unlike the indirection that Karmi uses especially in the first part of *In Search of Fatima*, in *Return* she addresses the traumatic loss of Palestine and the ramifications of that loss on her personal and family life more openly and directly. An interesting instance of this directness occurs when her father asks to go home, meaning in England:

> This memory returns to me even now, because I know that passionate longing for normality, for life to resume as it has always been, and yet be powerless to make it happen. It took me back to an April morning and to the child I was then, standing

> helplessly at the closed garden gates of our house in Jerusalem that my heart feared I would never see again. (*Return*, p. 4)

While her father refers to London as home, Karmi refers to the family's house in Jerusalem, recalling the expulsion of the family back in 1948. So, instead of repressing the memory of exile as was the case in the first memoir, she is prompt to address the trauma explicitly, although 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' (*Return*, p. 7). Similarly, she does not hesitate in sharing her feelings about the situation of Palestinians who, as she sees it, have become '[f]lotsam and jetsam, that's what we've become, scattered and divided. There's no room for us or our memories here. And it won't ever be reversed' (*Return*, p. 7).

Despite acknowledging the severity of the losses that the Palestinians suffered, Karmi still found home in political activism. The journey that began with the falling apart of her first marriage, as related in the last part of her first book, continues into the second memoir. Karmi observes that:

> [l]ike 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. I lived and breathed it, worried about its adversities which felt as urgent and immediate as if they were happening beside me […] to such an extent that when anyone asked what I did for a living, I would answer, "I'm a full-time Palestinian!" It was not really true, of course, since I had worked as a doctor of medicine, been a medical historian and later become an academic. But being a Palestinian was the only thing that felt real. (*Return*, p. 13)

The feeling of being Palestinian seems to ebb and flow with political involvement. When the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993 and the leadership of the PLO were allowed back to Palestinian soil, diasporic political activists like Karmi felt left behind as the centre of events moved back to Palestine. This created in Karmi 'a sense of distance and irrelevance that became intolerable, until [she] realised there was only one way to end it.' To do so, she decided 'to go there [her]self and re-establish [her] connection with the people who lived there, [her] people, whose lives [she] would share, even if only for a while' (*Return*, p. 17).

The political and the personal converge once more as Karmi declares that her trip to Palestine was not only for political purposes but also for a deeply personal quest that she wished to fulfil:

> 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. (*Return*, p. 18)

Karmi returns to Palestine attempting to resolve her identity dilemma that started with the family's departure from Jerusalem in 1948 and continued resurfacing throughout her life in England. So, although she finds a home in political activism, her journey prompts her to look further for another home, that is the original site of her memories. When presented with the chance to find home in its physicality, the previous variations that were constructed after 1948 seem to become unsatisfactory. Referring to the original home, Karmi says that '[n]owhere else could take its place, and by definition could only be a temporary stop, standing in for the real thing' (*Return*, p. 18). The political pursuit that Karmi engages in is in fact a home as far as it provides a potential route to the original home in Jerusalem. The passage speaks to the underlying assumption that her political and personal endeavors are essentially separate. However, in the context of Palestine, the two dimensions inevitably inform each other. Even the title of the book, *Return*, carries political implications that are radically opposed to the Zionist narrative. In other words, the political and the personal are not as separate as they seem. While the political involvement seeks to secure the Palestinians' right to return to their homes, it does not become home as much as a step towards it. In this sense, home is kept unreached, and *the* return unfulfilled, until the Palestinian cause has been justly resolved.

Like *In Search of Fatima*, Karmi devotes a proportion of *Return* to talk about her relationship with her siblings and parents. She relates in a grieving tone how she drifted apart from her brother because of their different lifestyles. Her sister, Sihem left England for Syria where she lived with her uncle. And the father Hassan grew resentful and angry after his wife passed away:

> It grieved me that the three of us were not more close, but I knew it was our parents' unhappy legacy to us. They never taught us how to love or support one another because no one had taught them either […] At such times the compassion I should have felt for them, every bit as traumatised as we were by the rupture in their lives and yet trying to give us shelter and care as best they could, deserted me. (*Return*, p. 162)

After explaining the practical reasons for the falling apart of the family in such a sad fashion, Karmi links it to the Palestinian history. Positing the Nakba as the source of all Palestinian problems reemphasises its position as a gravitational centre of the narrative:

> Just as the ripples of a stone thrown into a pond will spread further and further away from the source, so the ripples of the disaster in 1948 hit my parents first and spread to us and to our children long afterwards. Seeing only the ripples, it was easy to confuse the original cause with its effects. (*Return*, p. 165)

Karmi addresses the Nakba openly while at the same time referring to its traumatic effect on her parents and consequently on her relationship to her siblings. This statement has the double function of both voicing the traumatic experience of Palestinians inside and outside Palestine and demanding to enlarge the classical framework of trauma theory to include such cases as her family's. As her example shows, the destruction of families can be a gradual process that builds on slowly rather than a sudden event. It is also clear from the way she discusses her family that their problems can be expressed, explained, and understood in simple terms. By tracing the lack of homeliness in her relationships to her family back to the Nakba, Karmi once more locates the intimate, personal, space into the larger political context of Palestinian exile. By the same token, she locates her memoir in the history of Palestine. Her Palestinian identity is constructed through a narrative discussing her struggle to establish that very identity.

Return is drawn to a similar conclusion to that of *In Search of Fatima*. Karmi's initial hopes of helping the cause from the center of action end up in a disappointing realization that there was no cause anymore. Karmi concludes that she 'had travelled to the land of [her] 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' (*Return*, p. 313). Summing up her experience with the PA, she further observes that her stay in Palestine 'had really shown [her…] that the two fundamentals [she] had

always lived by were transformed out of all recognition.' First, the national cause was no more, and second, there was 'no unified struggle for return' (*Return*, p. 316). The next page, the epilogue, takes the narrative full circle back to the prologue recounting the final hours of her father's life. While Karmi thus closes off her book with a distressing rendition of the Palestinian people, she is keen to reiterate, as in the first memoir, that hope remains the first option. So, the last sentence goes, '[was] that to be my fate too, and my daughter's and all of us? Despite my gut-wrenching despair, I was determined that it would not' (*Return*, p. 319). Taken together, Karmi's memoirs provide a narrative of trauma that takes off from a position of loss and seeks home throughout the length of the story then concludes with partial irresolution leaving spaces for future hope and recovery. While it aligns with certain elements of narrative aesthetics such as indecision and fragmentation, it parts ways with the assumed universality of the Western trauma framework which is paradigmatically based on the Holocaust, thus underscoring its representational limitations. This is particularly evident as Karmi narrates Naila's story. In the quest to find home in new geographical locations, the traumatic experience of displacement manifests itself in multiple ways. Whereas Karmi's mother engages in an active (re)construction of Palestine in England, a process in which her identity is transformed as she adopts Fatima's clothes and some of her duties, Karmi's own trauma is expressed differently. While initially she represses the memories of home in Palestine, as belonging becomes more clearly impossible in England, she realizes that it is in political activism that the memories of home loss can be integrated into a meaningful life narrative. Trauma, in Karmi's quest for belonging is expressed, and coped with actively but also with the realization that the open-ended nature of the Nakba requires a likewise life-long process of recovery. This is reflected in the last passage as Karmi expresses her determination that the suffering which her generation endured must not continue into that of her daughter.

This chapter demonstrated that Ghada Karmi's *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (2002) and *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (2015) deploy a perception of home as a multidimensional construct to facilitate the integration of the trauma of forced displacement into the life narrative of the author. The two memoirs introduce an opportunity to approach trauma theory from a more nuanced angle. This is done not only by challenging the theory's classical

conceptualization, in which trauma is rendered as a paralyzing, unrepresentable experience, but also by highlighting its ability to generate new social and cultural structures, combinations, and identities such as the newly Palestinian-activist Karmi or her mother who emerges from the experience of exile as a mixture of herself and peasant Fatima. Tackling the notion of home from its different geographical, social, cultural, mnemonic, and affective facets, I have shown that home in Palestinian diaspora is (re)constructed in a cyclical process initiated by its loss then subsequently driven by the frequent resurfacing of its memory as triggered by personal as well as political incidents. Home, that is, becomes both a symptom of displacement and a process of recovery in the new location. In terms of temporality, home is not considered as necessarily predating, then lost in, territorial dispossession. Rather, home is, paradoxically, both constructed and *re*constructed in the context of post-Nakba. The perception of home and its own loss interact in an achronological, non-linear, and mutually constitutive relationship. Home, in this sense, is a traumatic construct that is discovered only when lost. While the Nakba, in its magnitude and sociopolitical implications sets in motion this life-long search for home, the existential and identitarian significance of home retrospectively idealizes the past life and exacerbates the losses suffered by Palestinians in 1948, rendering the event traumatic in the first place. The transformation that the concept of home undergoes as Karmi moves from Palestine to England and then back to Palestine provide the background that facilitates locating her autobiography onto the larger Palestinian history of exile and territorial dispossession. Karmi's narrative seems to partially fulfil trauma's potential in bringing people together based on their share of suffering throughout history. It is through expressing the trauma of her family that she identifies with the collective Palestinian experience of displacement and the ongoing struggle for return. *In Search of Fatima* and *Return* highlight the specificities of the traumatic experience of exile which results from colonial practices in the homeland. By implication, these texts call for broadening our perception of trauma and the inclusion of non-Western cases which have their own historical background and culturally specific frames of expression and recovery within the paradigm of the theory. While this chapter illustrated how Karmi reads her trauma on home and family, the following chapter will demonstrate how Raja Shehadeh reads his own trauma of internal displacement and loss on the landscape of Palestine.

Chapter Two: Sites of Postmemory in Raja Shehadeh's *Strangers in the House: Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine* (2002), *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (2007), and *A Rift in Time: Travels with my Ottoman Uncle* (2010)

This chapter examines the memoirs of the Palestinian lawyer and author Raja Shehadeh as contributing to the preservation of Palestinian ecology and cultural memory in the face of illegal Israeli settlement. *Strangers in the House* (2002), *Palestinian Walks* (2007), and *A Rift in Time* (2010) constitute a textual nexus in which the interplay between the individual and collective dimensions of memory produces spaces for Shehadeh's anticolonial discourse. Shehadeh's rendering of the Palestinian experience of colonisation and territorial dispossession through his walks in the hills outside the city of Ramallah, in the Jerusalem wilderness, and through the ravines by the Dead Sea posits his movement across the transforming landscape as a counternarrative which is predicated on a cyclic relationship to the land reciprocally driven by walking, remembering, and narrating. The cyclicality which characterises Karmi's reconstruction of home in new lands is rendered in Shehadeh's experience through the act of walking. Walking provides him with an anchor to articulate his distress at the continuous construction of Israeli settlements and apprehension of the future of the Palestinian cause. The land narrative that permeates his autobiographical account provides a route to examine the ramifications of settler colonial policies on the ecological properties of the hills. The toponymic transformation that the hills undergo dislocate their discursive significance in affirming the Palestinian historical presence which constitutes an indispensable element of the indigenous population's identitarian construct. Shehadeh's immediate connection with the land prompts him to imagine, remember, and inscribe Palestinian history onto the topographical background, thus re-placing the Palestinians on their territory, disrupting the Israeli discourse, and bridging gaps in the Palestinian national narrative. Drawing on Henry Lefebvre's theory of space and Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoires*, it is this chapter's argument that Shehadeh's texts creatively represent Palestinian

sites of memory which preserve the memory of the hills and function as their prospective replacement. This is achieved through a triadic process which interactively involves the landscape, the collective memory of the Palestinian people, and Shehadeh himself as the walker/narrator. The memoirs are posited in dialogue with an orientalist discourse which foregrounds the memoricide policy perpetrated by the Israeli state. Through the walks and their narrativization, Shehadeh simultaneously finds a home and constructs its continuation.

Raja Shehadeh is a prominent Palestinian writer, human rights lawyer, and activist who resides in Ramallah, West Bank. He is widely recognized for his extensive work in the field of human rights and his profound literary contributions that shed light on the Palestinian experience. Shehadeh co-founded Al-Haq, a leading human rights organization based in Ramallah, which is affiliated with the International Commission of Jurists. This organization plays a crucial role in documenting human rights violations and advocating for justice in the region. Shehadeh is the author of numerous books that explore themes of human rights, international law, and the complexities of life in the Middle East. His literary works are not only informative but also deeply personal, as he often draws upon his own experiences, family history, and the broader struggles of the Palestinian people to illustrate the impact of Israeli policies on Palestinian land and lives. His memoirs are particularly notable for their introspective and reflective nature, offering readers a poignant glimpse into the realities of living under occupation.

Among his acclaimed memoirs are *Strangers in the House: Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine* (2002), which delves into his personal journey and the challenges of growing up in a conflict-ridden environment; *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (2007), a powerful narrative that intertwines his love for the Palestinian landscape with the harsh realities of its gradual disappearance; *A Rift in Time: Travels with My Ottoman Uncle* (2010), which explores historical and familial connections across generations; *Where the Line is Drawn: Crossing Boundaries in Occupied Palestine* (2017), a reflection on the physical and metaphorical boundaries imposed by the occupation; and *We Could Have Been Friends, My Father and I: A Palestinian Memoir* (2022), a touching exploration of his relationship with his father and their shared experiences. *Palestinian Walks* is particularly significant as it won Shehadeh the 2008

Orwell Prize for Political Writing, highlighting his ability to convey complex political and social issues through compelling storytelling. In this book, as well as in *Strangers in the House* and *A Rift in Time*, Shehadeh's narrative style is characterized by a deep connection to the land and a profound sense of memory. His writing demonstrates how, as the Palestinian landscape continues to shrink due to the ongoing building of settlements, his narrative expands to encompass broader temporal and spatial dimensions. This expansion of Palestinian space through individual and collective memory creates new avenues for understanding and resistance. Shehadeh's work embodies the concept of *sumud* (Arabic for steadfastness), a form of resilience that is rooted in the enduring connection to the land, the uncompromising will to stay, and the persistent struggle for justice. Through his writings, Shehadeh not only documents the Palestinian experience but also offers a powerful strategy for resistance, emphasizing the importance of memory and landscape in sustaining the Palestinian identity and cause. My reading of Shehadeh highlights how he finds new spaces to articulate collective memory while constructing an individual identity. Incorporating land narratives withing his walks signposts a broader phenomenon in Palestinian life writing, which is the author's ambivalent engagement with the collective narrative of identity. That is, the collective memory is the bridge towards individuation.

Strangers in the House (2002) recounts the aftermath of the 1948 *Nakba* and the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, also known as the Six-Day War. The book captures the financial, social, psychological, and territorial ramifications of these major events on Shehadeh growing up as a Palestinian individual as well as on his family, one of many who were displaced in 1948, and further dispossessed in 1967. A central theme of the narrative is a rewriting of his self-perception and worldview as he attempts to dissociate his perspective gradually from that of his father's political standpoint but also from his family's reminiscences of Jaffa, the city they were forced to leave in the year of the *Nakba*. Shehadeh launches the narrative of *Strangers in the House* by questioning the source of his memories:

> For a long time I was hostage to the memories, perceptions, and attitudes of others that I could not abandon. My sense of place was not mine. But I never

> thought I had the right to claim it. My elders knew better. I felt it was natural to defer to them on such matters. (*Strangers*, p. 2)

Describing himself as a 'hostage' in the beginning of the memoir not only invokes an affect of sympathy on the part of the reader, but also emphasises the inescapability of the environment in which the author was raised. Shehadeh remembers how he grew up surrounded by memories and social frameworks that he could neither relinquish nor move beyond. Importantly, considering the subtitle of the memoir, *Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine*, the use of the 'hostage' metaphor calls attention to a wider political reality. That is, the whole Palestinian population is *literally* held hostage by the Israeli occupation. However, in the middle of this pessimistic register which interlaces individual confinement with the historical actuality of occupation, Shehadeh passes a hint that things are prone to change as the narrative proceeds, a hint heralded by temporal movement. When Shehadeh expresses his passiveness while being shaped by others' memories and perceptions, he renders it in the past simple tense, alluding to the possibility that this is a thing of the past, something which has already been revoked. The above passage, therefore, foregrounds *Strangers in the House* as a narrative produced by Shehadeh's memories and reflections in which the progress of the story retroactively produces the contemporary author. As Thomas G. Couser suggests, when reading memoir the focus falls on 'how the text in some sense produces the subject, rather than the opposite' (*Memoir,* 2011, p. 182). If we are to follow Couser's suggestion, then what *Strangers '*produces', in addition to demonstrating how Shehadeh's formative years were dominated by his social surrounding's mnemonic and perceptual capital, is the process by which, or through which, this domination became something of the past, if it actually did. Put differently, it highlights how he came to formulate his own 'memories, perceptions, and attitudes' as well as reclaim his own 'sense of place.'

Shehadeh was 'always reminded' that his family was supposed to be leading a 'better life' and that this life 'had been left behind in Jaffa', which they had to evacuate in 1948. Jaffa was described to him as 'the bride of the sea', 'a pearl', 'a diamond-studded lantern from the water'. Ramallah, their city of residence, on the other hand, was depicted as a 'drab, cold, backward village' that 'did not even have a sea' and in which 'nothing ever happened' (*Strangers,* p. 1). This

is one of the many narrative instances in which *Strangers* illustrates how Shehadeh's memories were shaped by those of his family members. The deliberate comparison of the two cities goes beyond their respective ecological properties. The point of the contrast is to stress that life before 1948 was a better life. This recalls Said's notion of the contrapuntal thinking characteristic of displaced subjects. In *Reflections on Exile* Said maintains that while the majority of people are 'principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home', people who undergo the experience of exile become 'aware of at least two' (2001, p. 186). For these subjects, Said explains, 'habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment' (2001, p. 191). The result is a 'plurality of vision [that] gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions' (Said 2001, p. 186) in which 'both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally' (Said 2001, p. 191). Although Said formulated this notion as part of his reflections on the status of exiles crossing national borders, for instance Palestinians in the West or other Arab countries, it proves pertinent in the case of Shehadeh's internally displaced family. Life in Ramallah seems to occur in conjunction with life in Jaffa. The latter is praised and appreciated not least in order to voice dissatisfaction with the former. It is the circumstances under which life in Ramallah became a necessity that determine how Jaffa is to be remembered. However, when the contrapuntal state of mind underlying this simultaneity of perception is extended into the context of the second generation, Shehadeh's, it raises problematic questions concerning the power structures involved in the process of constructing a memory, be it individual or collective, and the different agents partaking in the politics of recalling the past.

Contrapuntal thinking in the second generation is problematic, and worth examining for that matter, precisely because its informing sources are doubly removed. In other words, Shehadeh's family exert this double consciousness, of here and now as opposed to then and there, because they experienced life not only in two different geographical locations but also in two disparate, although consequentially related, political realities. The geographical distance between Ramallah and Jaffa mirrors the mental distance between life in Mandate Palestine and the current life under the Israeli occupation. The memory of Jaffa, therefore, sits at the borderline of these two political realities. This is why his father, Aziz, a politically active lawyer, 'always spoke

of this time with nostalgia' as a time when the Palestinians 'had a strong sense of togetherness' and 'plenty of time, to discuss the future' (*Strangers,* p. 26). His grandmother, on her part, would often look toward Jaffa while standing 'in reverent silence'. On these occasions, Shehadeh would stand next to her, 'holding her soft warm hands,' holding his breath, and concentrating 'all [his] attention on the lit horizon, imagining what sort of place these lights illuminated' (*Strangers*, p. 2). Schulz maintains that the 'creation of a collective memory' is for Palestinians 'very much a family business' wherein the younger generation 'became part of the narrative produced by their parents' (2003, p. 172). In line with Schulz's observation, the nostalgic tone underlying the comparison of Jaffa and Ramallah, its vocalization by Aziz, and its embodiment in the behavior of the grandmother are mnemonic practices through which a social framework for the construction and transmission of the collective memory of the *Nakba* is founded. This framework entails consequential bearings on Shehadeh's individual memories. Although he had no direct experience of life in Jaffa or any geographical area other than Ramallah, he renders a nostalgic tone akin to that of his family when speaking about Jaffa. Accentuating his alienation, he describes Jaffa as 'the place [that] was over there' in a 'world of imagination' that was 'unreachable', because it was only 'evoked by the words of [his] elders as they yearned and described, reminisced, dreamed, and remembered' (*Strangers*, p. 30).

Shehadeh's adoption of the memory of Jaffa calls for a scrutiny of the dialectic relationship between individual and collective dimensions of memory. Academic research on the concept of memory over the last few decades has repeatedly stressed its constructedness. Studies in various contexts highlight chiefly two characteristic aspects of memory. The first one suggests that memory is a product of the present rather than an accurate recouping of the past. That is, remembering does not entail a recalling of an object or an event that is statically preserved in the past. Instead, because it operates in 'a perpetual present,' memory imparts a 'reworked' version of the past in relation to the 'needs, fears, desires, and wishes' of the subject's actuality (Kurtz, 2018, p. 140). In other words, memory is a retroactive construct (Zizek, 1992) wherein 'the act of remembering is always in and of the present' (Huyssn, 2003, p. 3). The second is that memory is socio-culturally specific. In other words, what people remember and how they remember it is highly (pre)determined by the socio-cultural context in which they find themselves.

In his influential book *On Collective Memory* Maurice Halbwachs asserts that 'memory depends on the social environment' where the act of remembering takes place (1992, p. 37). Halbwachs argues that our memories are rendered 'intelligible' through 'interpretative frames' which are 'socially acquired' (Webster, 2023, p. 6). This social aspect makes it impossible for memory to occur 'outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollection' (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 43). So, for instance, regardless of how a person enters a family, 'by birth, marriage, or some other way', they find themselves in 'a group where [their] position is determined not by personal feelings but by rules and customs independent of [them] that existed before [them]' (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 55). Similarly, Shehadeh's upbringing in a family affected by the traumatic events of the *Nakba* resulted in his belated feelings of nostalgia for a city in which he never lived. His 'memory' of Jaffa takes shape as he '[places] himself in the perspective of the group,' but at the same time 'the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in [his] individual memories' (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 40), which are subsequentially relayed in his memoirs. Thus, the memory of the *Nakba* is perpetuated by Shehadeh in the very narrative act of enquiring how it came to be one of *his* memories in the first place.

The transgenerational transmission of collective memory, and therefore its perpetuation, is a matter of existential urgency for Palestinians. On a general note, one of the main functions of a collective notion of the past in any national context is 'the self-image of a specific group in the present' which in itself is 'not so much about memory.' Rather, it is centred around a 'story of shared social suffering agreed on by a specific social group and accepted by an audience' (Kurtz, 2018, p. 116). Julian Hammer highlights the existential function of collective memory when he states that a 'shared history or historical memory is one of the factors determining whether a group can be called a nation' (2005, p. 40). The feelings of nostalgia which Shehadeh expresses towards the city of Jaffa seem to be mere emotional reactions to his household's memories and attitudes, but upon closer inspection they turn out to be politically loaded. Shehadeh observes that although 'some two decades had passed since the *Nakba*,' he did not notice even 'the slightest indication that anyone was abandoning the dream [of return]. There was no waning in the certainty that return was inevitable' (*Strangers*, p. 30). In the very next sentence, he says that although '[life] in Ramallah was the only life [he] knew, but even for [him], there was a sense of

it being temporary. [He] viewed it as a pale reflection of the other life' (*Strangers*, p. 30). The nostalgic attitude imparted to Shehadeh by his family serves a significant political role in the continued upholding of the prospect of return. Not only did Jaffa become 'a fantasy, for which reality is a poor substitute' (Schulz, 2003, p. 215), but also the nostalgic reminiscing it evokes represents a powerful itinerary through which the present can be criticised in contrast to a better past. So, the discourse of the Right of Return, so axiomatic to the Palestinian cause and identity, is maintained by removing the problems and deficiencies of the present from the portrayal of an imagined past life. The past, the present, and the future thus coalesce under the pressing need for a national discourse.

In the process of constructing such a discourse, the memories of the second generation are glossed over by those of their ancestors. In this regard, while Shehadeh's memoir sets out as a deeply personal account of the author's upbringing, it touches upon a transgenerational phenomenon which is not exclusive to his family or to the Palestinian context. In the field of Holocaust Studies, this structure of mnemonic mediation has been conceptualised by Marianne Hirsch as postmemory, a term which:

> describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. (Hirsch, 2012, p. 5)

So, while initially received as memories of others, family memories eventually become part of children's own life narratives. In *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (2012), Hirsch makes the distinction between her notion of postmemory and memory and history respectively. In her reading, she differentiates her notion from memory by means of 'generational distance,' which refers to the fact that there exists a generational gap between the children and the memories of their parents. On the other hand, postmemory is different from history because the former involves 'deep personal connection' which the latter does not necessarily presuppose. So, in contradistinction with memory, postmemory renders a

'connection to its object or source [that] is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation' (Hirsch, 2012, p. 22). It is characteristic of 'the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation' (Hirsch, 2012, p. 22). So, while Halbwachs examines how individuals' acts of remembering are influenced and shaped by the social collectivity, Hirsch's postmemory refers to the memories that children inherit from their parents but eventually come to represent a crucial part of their identity as if they were memories of their own first-hand experience. *Strangers in the House* individuates the author by sketching his awareness of the appropriating power of both collective memory and postmemory.

In an interview with Persis M. Karim, Shehadeh explains how the book was important on many fronts as it helped him put the similarities and differences between him and his father into perspective and better appreciate his father's effort and what he had to deal with as a result of his own traumas:

> It was both about my experience of becoming aware of the losses endured by my father, both physical—as in the land of Palestine—and psychological—as in his sense of lost hope for Palestine's future. We were at odds sometimes, but writing that book helped me come to terms with how I was shaped by my father's history as well as the relationship between us. (2012, p. 44)

Shehadeh's story parallels that of his father Aziz in many respects. Not only are they both politically involved lawyers, but both father and son had to go through an experience of disillusionment to arrive at their respective political positions vis-à-vis the past and the future of the Palestinian people. Aziz is mentioned in the beginning of the narrative as nostalgic for the past life of Jaffa. His longing for the place manifests itself when a UN representative offers his services upon taking leave from the family in Ramallah. Aziz 'only had one request: "Take me to Jaffa," he said.' Shehadeh describes his father's trip as 'more like traversing abandoned space and regaining lost time, going back through the darkness to where the lights shone every evening' (*Strangers*, p. 55). Aziz's journey reveals the perils of nostalgic memory but also the traumatic effects of forced displacement. Nostalgia can obscure by idealizing an imagined past, potentially leading to perceptual stagnation and political paralysis. But this idealization of the past comes as

a result of a reaction to the traumatic experience of displacement. The refusal to accept the finality of loss is what keeps the memory stuck in Jaffa and keeps the city unchanged in the individual's perception. Upon visiting Jaffa, Aziz encounters a city starkly different from his memories, now relegated to underdevelopment in comparison to the newly built neighbouring city of Tel Aviv. In fact, the evening lights that captivated his eyes on every evening were those of Tel Aviv. This shift in perception, from a collective memory frozen in 1984 to the present reality replaces his nostalgic idealization with a profound sense of regret. Aziz realises that leaving Jaffa meant abandoning not just his property but the entire fabric of his former life, now managed by new inhabitants (*Strangers*, p. 62). As Aziz accepts that Jaffa is no longer a fantasy but a real place inhabited by others, his perspective on the Palestinian situation transforms. Shehadeh notes that Aziz resolved never to listen to another song about the lost country (*Strangers*, p. 63). He observes that his father's life could no longer remain the same, as one of its fundamental coordinates had shifted (*Strangers*, p. 64). Previously, his father's gaze had been fixed on the horizon of his yearning, but now, looking towards Jaffa, he could no longer see only what he wished to see. The 1967 war shattered this illusion, breaking the spell and dispelling multiple illusions (*Strangers*, p. 64). Aziz's confrontation with reality disrupted his nostalgic idealizations and forced a reevaluation of his past, present, and future.

Shehadeh, in dealing with his own trauma, finds himself obliged to dissociate from several collective frameworks to perceive his sense of individuality as a Palestinian. He begins this introspective journey by asking the fundamental question, 'Who was I, then?' This question marks the start of his quest to construct a narrative of his identity, distinct from the collective identity imposed by his surroundings. He subsequently determines that he 'was going to grow into a different kind of man,' one with 'distinguished rational' capabilities and a 'more developed self-consciousness and sensibility' compared to what he saw 'displayed by those around [him]' (*Strangers*, p. 74). In his pursuit of stepping out of his father's shadow, Shehadeh announces that his challenge was of 'another sort.' Unlike his father, whose life was deeply intertwined with the collective Palestinian struggle, Shehadeh's challenge was to 'combine writing and the life of a professional lawyer.' This combination was not merely a career choice but a deliberate strategy to carve out his own path and identity. The pronounced objective of this combination was to 'find

[himself] in [his] father's country' (*Strangers*, p. 91). This indicates his desire to reconcile his personal ambitions with his heritage and the collective history of his people. As Shehadeh takes time to analyse the events that led to the Israeli occupation, starting from 1948, and their 'effect on [him] and [his] relationship with [his] father,' he comes to a profound realization. He understands that his 'true feelings for the Israelis' were 'suppressed' because of his father Aziz's perception of the conflict and his view of the most practical route forward. Aziz's pragmatic approach to the conflict had a significant influence on Shehadeh, shaping his initial responses and attitudes. However, as Shehadeh decides to distinguish himself, he begins to see that he did not necessarily have to adopt his father's views as his own. This realization marks a critical point in his journey towards individuality. He recognizes that while his father's experience and perspective are invaluable, his own path might require a different approach and understanding. This process of differentiation allows Shehadeh to develop his own voice and perspective, both as a writer and as a lawyer. Through this journey, Shehadeh not only seeks to understand his own identity but also to contribute to the broader Palestinian narrative in his unique way. His writings reflect this duality—honouring his father's legacy while also asserting his own individuality. This balance between personal and collective identity is a recurring theme in Shehadeh's work, illustrating the complex interplay between individual experiences and collective history in the context of the Palestinian struggle.

By the same token, he did not have to subscribe to a self-pitying perception of himself and his fellow Palestinians in which fine lines between the status of victimhood and heroism were often blurred and the important differentiation between Palestinian self-determination and unconditional hatred of Israelis was occasionally overlooked. After a dinner with a group of Palestinian immigrants in Texas, USA, Shehadeh is asked about 'the situation in the homeland.' Describing the context, he says that he knew what was expected of him, which was 'an inflamed passionate denunciation of the Zionist enemy as the source of all [Palestinians'] troubles. Yet somehow [he] could not oblige':

> Only later did I realize that to do so would have been a betrayal of my own existence. To simplify my life and paint it in black-and-white terms was to deny my own reality, which I mainly experienced in tones of grey. If my countrymen really

> cared about me they had to see me as a human being, one who did not exist only in those heroic moments of struggle against the occupation as they liked to imagine. They had to realize that I was like them; my society had an integrity of its own that was not derived from the negation of the existence of the Zionist enemy. (*Strangers*, p. 140)

Shehadeh challenges the premise of a Palestinian identity which exists exclusively within the framework of colonisation. Therefore, in continuation of his self-individuating journey, he refuses to aestheticize the situation as a 'heroic' opposition that obscures the changing reality on the land and the sociopolitical particularities of his daily life, which he describes as belonging to the 'grey' part of the spectrum. *Strangers in the House* demonstrates that the depiction of the Palestinian cause from a nuanced, individuated perspective based on personal experience is no less important than the collective struggle for self-determination in the realm of politics. By breaking away from his family's memories, his father's political stance, and the aestheticized image of the Palestinian identity as a heroic opposition to Israel, Shehadeh protects his autobiography from being subsumed by ancestral narratives, political hegemony, or international opinion. The book paves the way to the emergence of the individual that Shehadeh seeks to construct by outlining social and political spaces in which such a nonconformist subjectivity can arise. This recalls Henry Lefebvre's remarks in his influential work *The Production of Space* (1992). Lefebvre maintains that such precepts as 'Change life!' and 'Change society!' remain meaningless 'without the production of an appropriate space.' This is because, as he further explicates, 'new social relationships call for a new space, and vice versa' (1991, p. 59).

The text serves as an alternative space wherein the narrative progression facilitates the construction of Shehadeh's personal memories and political standpoint. In this regard, the text not only recounts the journey of how Shehadeh came to distinguish himself from his father by the time of writing, but it also stands as a testament to this differentiation. The act of producing a book that reflects his awareness of the formative influences on his upbringing, memories, political stance, and attitudes towards Israelis is, in itself, evidence of his partial emancipation from those influential powers. This process mirrors the way in which Aziz, his father, broke 'the spell' of nostalgia. The text exemplifies the concept of narrative as a space of resistance. By documenting his personal journey and political awakening, Shehadeh challenges the dominant

narratives that seek to homogenize Palestinian experiences and identities. His writing becomes a site of contestation, where he can critique and reframe the historical and political discourses that have shaped his life and the lives of his compatriots. The production of the book is also a testament to Shehadeh's intellectual and emotional growth. It reflects his ability to critically engage with his past and present, and to articulate a nuanced understanding of his position within the broader socio-political landscape. This process of self-reflection and articulation is crucial for the development of a more complex and multifaceted identity, one that acknowledges the influence of his father's experiences while also asserting his own unique perspective. In essence, *Strangers in the House* functions as both a narrative and a meta-narrative. That is, it tells the story of Shehadeh's personal and political development, while also serving as a commentary on the act of storytelling itself. Through this dual function, the book underscores the power of narrative to shape and reshape individual and collective identities. It highlights the dynamic interplay between memory, history, and identity, and the ways in which these elements are continually constructed and reconstructed through the act of autobiographical writing. Thus, Shehadeh's task in his bildungsroman is not merely to reflect on his personal journey but also to render a broader commentary on the nature of identity formation and the role of narrative in this process. It is a testament to the transformative power of autobiography and the ways in which Palestinians can use narrative to assert their agency and resist the forces that seek to define, silence, or constrain them.

Thus, towards the end of *Strangers in the House*, Shehadeh relates the details of Aziz's assassination in a dichotomous fashion conjoining life and death, continuity and rupture. Aziz was stabbed to death outside his office in Ramallah. The man who did it remains unknown. The incident is described graphically by the author. He regrets how 'they left [his father] there for the whole town to see. They abandoned him in his death as in his life. They let him bleed [as] [t]he rain fell over his body' (*Strangers,* p. 196). When Shehadeh receives the devastating news that his father has been assassinated, he flies from the US to Palestine immediately. Rather than passive victimhood, Shehadeh describes his arrival in Palestine as an act of return which is characterized by a reemphasis of agency and responsibility towards the future of Palestine:

> Even when I walked across the shaky bridge, I felt my feet touch the ground of home, home for the first time without a father. And in a first moment of clarity, I made my wish, the first of my new reality: I wished that he would pass his energy to me […] But I also felt as though I was seeing for the first time, hearing for the first time, being born again. (*Strangers*, pp. 199-200)

Reading the end of his father's life as a beginning echoes the continuation of the Palestinian struggle for independence as one generation passes the burden of *sumud* and representation to the next. Shehadeh renders this displacement of responsibility from the dead to the living as 'seeing for the first time, hearing for the first time, [and] being born again.' The transformation which results from the death of his father is mainly of his moving from the second generation to the first generation, a move which entails an ethical burden of telling the history of the Palestinian suffering anew and straight from the beginning. The new beginning that corresponds with Aziz's death is a regeneration of the mnemonic cycle with the addition of a new episode, which is Shehadeh's life narrative. So, even the textual construction of an individuality drawing on idiosyncratic dimensions of memory and perception ends up reproducing a collective narrative of the past which is pressured by the political demands of the present. Here, this analysis goes a step further by suggesting that Shehadeh's text(s) present an example of a narrative trend characteristic of Palestinian literature and, in particular, autobiography. I would like to call it *prospective memory*.

Prospective memory is what we construct in the present with an awareness of its future indispensability. It is, in a sense, the memory of the present as (would be) remembered from the future. Unlike memory or postmemory, which attempt to establish a past-oriented continuity as a ground for identity, prospective memory is prompted by the potentiality of an imminent obliteration of the objects of reminiscence, whether of the first generation or their descendants. In other words, if memory and postmemory fashion spaces in which identitarian constructions drawing on a narrative of the past, individual or collective, can be meaningfully established in the present, prospective memory foregrounds spaces in which the continuation of these identities can be extended into the future. This is why this mnemonic strategy is manifest most particularly in communities whose sociocultural existence as a historical fact is under the threat of memoricide, a characterization of which the Palestinian history, culture, landscape, archaeology,

and people are increasingly becoming a paradigmatic case. Prospective memory is often a counter strategy to memoricide. The latter notion was coined by Mirko Grmek to describe the destruction of historical sites, churches, monasteries, and art by invading Serbian forces entering Croatia in the 1990s' (Fuller and Owen, 2022, p. 535). Memoricide, as suggested by the etymology, is 'the cultural equivalent of genocide' (Grmek et al, 2018, p. 22). It stands for the 'purposeful eradication of cultural memory' (Grmek et al, 2018, p. 18). In the pursuit of this destructive end, memoricide 'encompasses not only the destruction of written documents or cultural artifacts' evidencing the existence of a distinguishable socio-cultural entity, but also 'the systematic demolition of historical monuments and, indeed, of all traces of the past in the present' (Grmek et al, 2018, p. 22). Drawing on Halbwachs, Scott Webster adds that memoricide 'intervenes on the repetitions that sustain collective memory. That is our interactions – with people, places, objects – that function as cues for memories' (Webster, 2023, p. 6). The destruction inherent in the practices of memoricide creates a rupture which forecloses the emergence of memory by means of excluding the entities that invoke it. This rupture is not merely physical but also psychological, as it disrupts the continuity of cultural and historical narratives that communities rely on to maintain their identity and cohesion. In this context, prospective memory becomes a vital tool for communities under threat. It involves the active preservation and transmission of cultural and historical knowledge to future generations, ensuring that the identity and heritage of the community are not lost. This can take many forms, such as oral histories, cultural practices, and the creation of new cultural artifacts that embody the community's values and experiences. By doing so, communities can resist the erasure of their history and maintain a sense of continuity and identity despite the forces of memoricide. Moreover, prospective memory is not just about preserving the past but also about envisioning and shaping the future. It involves a forward-looking perspective that seeks to create a future in which the community's identity and heritage are recognized and valued. This can involve advocacy, education, and the creation of institutions and structures that support the community's cultural and historical continuity.

In order to understand the mechanisms of memoricide it is of consequential import to highlight the link between memory and the physical as well as the interpersonal environments that give rise to it, a link which is at the centre of the French historian Pierre Nora's notion of

lieux de mémoire. *Lieux de mémoire* outlines the idea that particular sites become the locus of collective memory. Nora contends that memory 'takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects' (Nora, 1989, p. 9). In response to the 'acceleration of history' and due to the 'general perception that anything and everything may disappear' as a result of an 'increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good', there arises a need for the 'embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists' (Nora, 1989, p. 7). The sites of memory in which it 'crystallizes and secretes itself' (Nora, 1989, p. 7) can be places such as museums, cemeteries, and sanctuaries; they can be objects such as archives, treaties, and monuments; they can also be social and national occasions such as festivals and anniversaries. These, for Nora, are 'the boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity' (Nora, 1989, p. 12). It is the sense of a continuous socio-cultural existence punctuated physically, as in museums and monuments, and temporally, as in festivals and anniversaries, that policies and practices of memoricide attempt to dissipate. The destruction of physical traces of the past and the prevention of annual commemoration of its significant events together create gaps in national narratives of history by undermining the spatiotemporal infrastructure sustaining collective memory. Thus, the decrease in the frequency of people's interaction with sites of memory foregrounds its abstraction and facilitates its eventual descent into oblivion. It is this existentially detrimental outcome that Shehadeh's memoirs endeavour to overturn.

In *Strangers*, Shehadeh remembers the primary material he used to write his memoir of coming of age:

> Meanwhile I would write about the actual stuff of life as it happened to me and to others, recording daily experiences spontaneously in a diary style. It would be a kind of documentary that didn't demand much time, for I didn't have time. What it lacked in literary merit would be compensated for by its value as documentation for future generations or anyone else who cared to know what life was like under occupation. (*Strangers*, p. 145)

The book is a site of memory in two different ways. In one sense, it provides insight into the particularities of life while growing up under occupation as well as how the mediation of the memory of the *Nakba* constituted a significant part of his formative years. It is a portal into the memories of Shehadeh, his family members, and his immediate social surroundings. Reading the

book gives voice to these memories and perpetuates them in the present. From a different angle, the book's production itself is a process which bears witness to the reality of colonization. The final text of *Strangers in the House* is a rewriting of the author's diaries. As suggested by the above passage, resorting to the diary style was prompted by a tight schedule but also by the rapid succession of events and the overwhelming number of events which needed documentation. As Shehadeh affirms in his interview with Karim, it is a 'ridiculous' proposition that a writer of nonfiction would run out of material to write about in Palestine that they would turn to fiction. There are 'so many stories to tell' and '[l]iving here, in the Occupied Territories, living under Israeli occupation, there's so much that is unbelievable, that is *stranger than fiction*' (Shehadeh, 2012, p. 44-45). The book is a *lieu de mémoire* in a double sense: 'a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations' (Nora, 1989, p. 24). The book *tells* a story of the politics overshadowing the relationship of an individual to his family, but also *has* a story of its own generic transformation from the intimate sphere of diary to the more open representational space of memoir under an urgent need to document human suffering. Shehadeh's open declaration that his objective was to leave a record for future generations of the specificities of life under Israeli occupation renders *Strangers in the House* a case in point where the production of a personal account undergirded by prospective memory transvalues in both significance and reach into a site of memory which can be relatable on a national level. It goes hand in hand with Shehadeh's belief that literary books have a unique power to engage readers and make them 'identify with the subject matter, making the experiences their own. This cannot be done in academic writing' (Shehadeh, 2014, p. 520-521).

In the Palestinian context, the Israeli policies of memoricide have been extensively investigated and illustrated by Ilan Pappé in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2007) and Nur Masalha in *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (2012). These works provide a comprehensive analysis of the systematic efforts to erase Palestinian presence and history from the land. As will be demonstrated, in the wake of the Nakba, Israel formulated its policies towards the accomplishment of two main objectives. These are the discursive denial of the existence of Palestinians in the land, past or present, and the destruction of any intelligible traces that could point to such existence. The first objective is

manifested in the Zionist project to reconstruct the history of the land, linking it to biblical times. This involves a narrative that emphasizes Jewish historical claims to the land while minimizing or outright denying the historical and contemporary presence of Palestinians. This discursive strategy is evident in various forms of media, educational materials, and political rhetoric that seek to establish a singular historical narrative that excludes Palestinian experiences and contributions. The second objective is less subtle, as it involves the transformation of the Palestinian landscape by Israeli settlements under the veil of improvement. This includes the demolition of Palestinian homes, the uprooting of olive trees, and the construction of new settlements that alter the physical and cultural landscape. These actions are often justified under the guise of development and security, but they serve to erase the physical traces of Palestinian life and heritage. It is the undermining of these discourses that is the work of Shehadeh's *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape*.

Palestinian Walks is by far Shehadeh's most famous book, not least for winning the Orwell Prize for Political Writing in 2008. The narrative records in detail seven of Shehadeh's walks in the hills of Palestine as he performs the Palestinian tradition of '*sarha*' (The term refers to an aimless, boundless stroll that is unrestricted by time or place). The book chapters are organised by place rather than chronological order. They are subtitled 'Ramallah to Harrasha', 'Ramallah to A'yn Qenya', 'Qomran', 'the Dead Sea and Wadi El Daraj', 'Wadi Qelt to Jericho', 'Janiya, Ras Karkar and Deir Ammar', 'Wadi Dalb', and finally 'Ramallah to a'yn El Lwza'. The seven walks cover a period of twenty-seven years corresponding with different stages in Palestinian history and Shehadeh's life. Outlining the text in such an achronological fashion with temporal leaps both within the same chapter and between different chapters works against attempts at linear one-dimensional readings of the landscape. In so doing, the narrative shifts the interest of the reader from the subject that is doing the walking to the landscape that is being trodden. As Shehadeh himself attests in the introduction, his intended objective is to record 'how the land felt and looked before [the] calamity' in order to 'preserve, at least in words, what has been lost for ever' (*Walks*, p. xviii). The history of his initiation into this tradition goes back to the late 1970s, a time he describes as 'before many of the irreversible changes that blighted the land began to take place.' The hills at the time were like one big stretch of natural space with the 'unspoiled beauty

and freedom unique to such areas' (*Walks*, p. xii). Based on his long-standing relationship with, and first-hand experience of, the hills, Shehadeh is well positioned to narrate their 'biography' which he identifies as 'in many ways [his] own, the victories and failures of the struggle to save this land also [his]' (*Walks*, p. 1). However, as the narrative proceeds, it becomes noticeable that although the core of the *sarhas* is based on Shehadeh's first-hand experience of the hills, he nevertheless draws on collective memory to establish the continuity of Palestinian presence on the land. In this the text becomes the product of individual as well as collective memory, a narrative construction which interweaves memory and postmemory to secure a space for the future existence of the Palestinian cause.

The prospective, future-oriented, aspect of the narrative is made clear from the very beginning. Shehadeh writes, '[to] my nephew and niece, Aziz and Tala, with the hope that they will be able to walk in the hills of Palestine' (*Walks*, Dedication page). The dedication page signposts the transmission of the Palestinian tradition of *sarha* from one generation to the next, but also insinuates the necessity of a present deferral of the freedom to roam under the current circumstances. The mediation of this cultural practice can only be realised in the time to come. So, the author's task is to excavate a Palestinian layer of the landscape in the present and preserve it for the future. To carry out this responsibility, Shehadeh fashions narrative as well as topographic spaces for the emergence of Palestinian memory and identity. In this he is faced with both discursive and toponymic memoricide. The first *sarha* in *Palestinian Walks* provides a prime example of how biographical accounts of people other than the memoirist can be mediated through collective memory and mobilized in the narrative to provide a creative route to criticize underlying expansionist ideologies and oppressive colonial practices perpetrated by the state of Israel. In Shehadeh's family, the practice of *sarha* was:

> associated with my grandfather's cousin, Abu Ameen, who was already elderly when I was growing up. He had suffered a stroke and could only walk with the aid of a cane. I don't remember him ever speaking of the sarha; the stroke had made his tongue too heavy. My memory of him is of a short, silent old man shuffling around his dark, cavernous, musty-smelling home in the old part of town. It was from others that I heard about the sarha and Harrasha ("small forest"), where in the old days he used to spend the summer months cultivating his land and living out in the open fields[.] (*Walks*, pp. 4-5)

Throughout the texts examined here, Shehadeh is careful not to concede too uncritically to collective narratives of Palestinian history, nor does he encourage the reader to do so. For instance, although the implicating of Abu Ameen's biography is central to the political underpinnings of his first walk, he is prompt to make it known that it is only 'from others that [he] heard about [it]' as he does not 'remember him ever speaking of the sarha.' In her reading of the memoir, Lindsey Moore notes that it is 'predicated on the diminishing possibility of its object—walks in the Palestinian hills—and thus the increasing value of memory' (Moore, 2013, p. 37). That is, as she explains, while Shehadeh presents the book as a 'series of walks, it is a retrospective construction; memory and writing partly produce the walks' (Moore, 2013, p. 37).

So, the reader is set to experience the hills as the author remembers them. As the narrator describes the physical features of his *sarha* from Ramallah to Harrasha, it is his individual reminiscences that materialize on the page. When it comes to the specificities of Abu Ameen's life story, they are primarily the product of collective memory in the form of family storytelling. This distinction is important for it raises interesting questions in relation to Shehadeh's authority/voice in the text as well as his self-perception as an extra-textual Palestinian subject. One substantially telling aspect that stands out in the first chapter is the bigger narrative portion allocated to the story of his grandfather's cousin, Abu Ameen, in comparison to the description of the ecological properties of the route he takes. Couser explains that 'we are always characters in others' narratives, and our own narratives always involve other people. Just as no person is an island, no autobiography is a one-person show' (Couser, 2011, p. 20). While agreeing with Couser's principle, in Shehadeh's first *sarha*, it is pertinent to read the narrative through this lens of proportionality. In other words, if the narrativization of the walk is devoted predominantly to the mnemonic production of someone other than the author, that is his family members, then this calls for a reconsideration of the very authorship of the memoirist. This is not to suggest a questioning of the truth value of Shehadeh's memoir. Rather, it is to suggest that because much of the narrative can be traced back to a memory that is maintained collectively, this tells something about the memoirist's self-perception by virtue of the underlying identity claim which the memoir makes when it voices the first-person singular pronoun. In simpler terms, when the narrator says 'I,' what populates his narrative is what he wants the reader to know about *him*, *his*

worldview, and *his* experience. When Shehadeh allocates the larger part of his walk to the narrative of his grandfather's cousin's condensed biography, it highlights both the nature of his experience of the Palestinian hills as well as the position of Abu Ameen in his self-perception as the human rights activist and socio-political critic when writing *Palestinian Walks*. The identity-constructing move from the subject making the walks to the memoirist at the juncture of writing goes through the memory of Abu Ameen's life. His stance as a Palestinian in the face of memoricide draws on the continued presence that the relationship with his grandfather's cousin represents.

Shehadeh relates how he 'stumbled, quite by accident, upon the legendary Harrasha of Abu Ameen, deep in the hills of Palestine' (*Walks*, p. 7). Abu Ameen and Shehadeh's grandfather, Saleem, went to the same school. Saleem followed through with his education plans, went to the United States, studied law, then came back to Palestine to serve as a judge in the courts of the British Mandate in the coastal city of Jaffa. Abu Ameen on the other hand followed through with his own plans of buying a plot in the hills outside Ramallah, using his masonry skills to build a stone house, getting married, and having children (*Walks*: 18-19). While Saleem was held in great esteem by Shehadeh's family, asked to repeatedly tell the same stories of his travels as his household sat around him (*Walks*, p. 31), Abu Ameen was judged differently. Shehadeh recounts that his family, being 'judgemental, arrogant and proud of their education and status […] looked down on Abu Ameen and his family' (*Walks*, p. 24). Shehadeh's inclusion of Abu Ameen's biography as part of his land narrative resonates with a redefinition of the Palestinian cultural landscape incited by the *Nakba* in 1948, which resulted in the displacement of about 750,000 people from their homes in today's Israel (Kläger and Stierstorfer, 2015, p. 229). As a reaction to the traumatic experience of colonisation, defined most fundamentally by territorial dispossession, the Palestinian act of resistance was manifested through reconfiguring the iconological makeup of the Palestinian identity, allocating the peasant a privileged position, akin to the position explained by Karmi in the context of England. As Schulz contends, the symbolism embedded in the figure of the *fellah* (Arabic for peasant), as an 'icon of the Palestinian past is a counterargument to Zionism and its presentation of Palestine as a "land without people for a people without a land"' (Schulz 2003, 102). The most immediate symbolic link to the lost land

became the peasant and his produce, especially olives (Schulz, 2003, p. 102; Hammer, 2005, p. 65; Swedenburg, 1990; Frost and Selwyn, 2018, p. 119), almonds (Hammer, 2005, p. 65), and oranges (Hammer, 2005, p. 65; Swedenburg, 1990).

To understand how a narrative which sets out to preserve the landscape textually diverts from ecological specifics to become highly absorbed by Abu Ameen's biography it is useful to locate his life story in the middle of the implicit debate which *Palestinian Walks* engages in by virtue of its subject matter. Shehadeh's observations in the introduction belie his awareness of the political implications as well as the ideological position of his text. Although mentioned later in the narrative, the description of Palestine by prominent orientalist travel writers is foregrounded in the introduction when Shehadeh remarks that:

> [T]he Western world's confrontation with Palestine is perhaps the longest-running drama in history. This was not my drama, although I suppose I am a bit player in it. I like to think of my relationship to the land, where I have always lived, as immediate and not experienced through the veil of words written about it, often replete with distortions. (*Walks*, p. xiii)

Shehadeh quotes a number of orientalist authors who rendered an image of his homeland in their texts for a Western readership. For instance, he wonders:

> How could Mark Twain, when he visited this area in the nineteenth century, not have noticed its outstanding beauty?
>
> "of all the lands there are for dismal scenery, I think Palestine must be the prince. The hills are barren, they are dull of color, they are unpicturesque in shape. The valleys are unsightly deserts fringed with a feeble vegetation that has an expression about it of being sorrowful and despondent. The dead sea and the sea of galilee sleep in the midst of a vast stretch of hill and plain wherein the eye rests upon no pleasant tint, no striking object, no soft picture dreaming in a purple haze or mottled in the shadows of the clouds. Every outline is harsh, every feature is distinct, there is no perspective – distance works no enchantment here. It is a hopeless, dreary, heart-broken land." (*Walks*, p. 120)

Indeed, in its depiction of Palestine, the Western tradition of Orientalism during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and into the twentieth century was not free from distortion as it was mainly fixated on the rendition of an image which is characterized by ignoring indigenous presence. This took

place through emphasising historical links to the birthplace of Christ. Palestine was introduced to the Western public as a forsaken biblical land which is barren and in need of cultivating and improvement. In his seminal book *Orientalism* (1978), Said presents an extensive, although by no means exhaustive, list of Western artists, authors, intellectuals, pilgrims, clergymen, and politicians who, according to his analysis, shaped the Euro-American perception of the Orient, with a particular depiction of Palestine.

Said asserts that '[a]t most, the "real" Orient provoked a writer to his vision; it very rarely guided it' (1978, p. 23). For instance, François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), a French writer, politician, diplomat, and historian, describes the inhabitants of Palestine at the time of his visit in these terms, as quoted in Said:

> The Crusades were not only about the deliverance of the Holy Sepulchre, but more about knowing which would win on the earth, a cult that was civilization's enemy, systematically favourable to ignorance [this was Islam, of course], to despotism, to slavery, or a cult that had caused to reawaken in modern people the genius of a sage antiquity, and had abolished base servitude? […] Of liberty, they know nothing; of propriety, they have none: force is their God. When they go for long periods without seeing conquerors who do heavenly justice, they have the air of soldiers without a leader, citizens without legislators, and a family without a father. (1978, p. 172)

By thus expanding the scope of the crusades from a religious war to a universal civilisational endeavour, de Chateaubriand provides a moral ground for a second overtaking of the land by Christian Europe based on a moral obligation which draws on the battle of good against evil. This framing transforms the historical narrative of the Crusades into a timeless struggle, positioning Christian Europe as the bearer of a civilising mission. A second crusade, for de Chateaubriand, would not only serve European imperialism economically but also fulfil the *mission civilisatrice* of bringing 'heavenly justice' to a people who are given to ignorance and savagery by temperament. In this view, the Crusades are not merely historical events but are reimagined as part of an ongoing moral and civilisational duty. This perspective allows de Chateaubriand to justify contemporary colonial ambitions by linking them to a noble cause. The idea of bringing 'heavenly justice' implies a divine mandate, suggesting that European intervention is not only justified but necessary for the moral and spiritual upliftment of the colonised peoples. This narrative

conveniently ignores the complex histories and cultures of the people being colonised, reducing them to mere objects in need of European salvation. Thus, in a matter of few sentences, the swift move from the Crusades to 'conquerors who do heavenly justice' obliterates centuries of Muslim presence in the land. This rhetorical strategy serves to erase the rich and diverse history of the region, presenting it instead as a blank slate upon which European powers can inscribe their own values and systems. Palestine, or Judea as de Chateaubriand insists upon calling it, exists as far as it supplies a 'decrepit canvas awaiting his restorative efforts' (Said, 1978, p. 171). In orientalist discourse, Palestine is a land in a state of decay and neglect, awaiting the civilising touch of European intervention.

Another example Said adds is Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869), French author, poet, and statesman who described the Arabs as 'a primitive people' and the Orient as 'nations without territory, patrie, rights, laws or security . . . waiting anxiously for the shelter' of European occupation (Said, 1978, p. 179). Travelling from the other side of the Atlantic, Twain imparts to his readers that 'time had stood still in Palestine.' It is a place where:

> you feel all the time just as if you were living about the year 1200 before Christ— or back to the patriarchs— or forward to the New Era. The scenery of the Bible is about you— the customs of the patriarchs are around you— the same people, in the same flowing robes, and in sandals, cross your path— the same long trains of stately camels go and come— the same impressive religious solemnity and silence rest upon the desert and the mountains that were upon them in the remote ages of antiquity (Rogers, 2011, p. 67).

This discourse of sameness continued into British Mandate Palestine. In the context of photography, Sary Zananiri defines the process of biblification as the reading of Palestinian landscape and population through a 'Biblical narrative, effectively projecting the land and its people backwards into an ancient past, while also excising the modern from the photographic frame' (Zananiri, 2021, p. 7). The city of Jerusalem, for example, during the Late Ottoman Empire and British Mandate was a city undergoing noticeable transformations 'connected with both the politics of the period in question and to the transformations on a larger scale associated with modernization and modernity' (Nassar, 2015, p. 320). But, although the photographic process was 'one of the technological fruits of modernity,' it did not 'bestow' that modernity on Palestine

(Zananiri, 2021, p. 6). As Issam Nassar demonstrates in an article on the instrumentalization of biblification to serve colonial ends, although these were times of significant socio-political change, 'modernisation and rising interconnectedness with the rest of the world', Jerusalem seemed to be trapped in its image as embodying a 'world of the past. Unimpressed by its social and economic growth, European visitors often lamented the fact that it could be reached by train' (Nassar, 2006, p. 317).

Equally important was the depiction of people in early European photography of Palestine. Nassar reports that inhabitants of the region 'were either absent, shown as unclean and primitive people, or used to re-enact a biblical scene' (Nassar, 2015, p. 323). Illustrating this point, he mentions how photos taken by such figures as Dumas, Bonfils and others represent the 'types of people living in the Holy Land (a number of pictures entitled "a woman from Bethlehem" illustrate this point)' (Nassar, 2015, p. 327). The final stage before 1948 was perhaps the shift in the presentation of the indigenous, or more precisely indigeneity itself. In the inter-war period, filmic production:

> carefully conflat[ed] the indigenous within the Biblical. The consequence of this shift proffers a rejection of Palestinian indigeneity and the politicised re-ascription of indigeneity to Jewish bodies, constructing Arabness as an infiltration of the 'natural'–and perhaps divine–order of the Biblical landscape (Zananiri, 2021, p. 726)

Interestingly, the orientalist representation of Palestine and its population before 1948 became a ready-made narrative which was pragmatically adopted by Zionist associations and its echoes can be heard in Israeli political discourse as well as implemented policies. While Orientalism, in Said terms, made available a 'collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies' to westerners who wanted to talk about 'what lies east of the dividing line' (Said, 1978, p. 73), its perpetuation into the first half of the twentieth century provided an exploitable niche for Zionism to cover their militarised advancement in the land in the political domain with claims based on biblical ties and the inevitability of progress. For the first Israeli Prime Minister and one of the founding fathers of Zionism, David Ben-Gurion, what mattered was not the validity of the biblical story, but

importance fell rather on the fact that it constituted 'what the Jews believed as far back as the period of the First Temple' (quoted in Masalha, 2012, p. 29).

While Ben-Gurion's vision illustrates the importance of biblification for the sake of biblification regardless of its historical accurateness, as already stated in Chapter One, in 1969, Golda Meir, the then Prime Minister of Israel, asserted that the concept of a Palestinian people did not exist. She argued that there was no self-identified Palestinian population that was displaced or had its land taken by the Israelis (Masalha, 2012, pp. 4-5). What Meir's statement does effectively is transform the land of Palestine into a void that can accommodate an Israeli narrative, and nation, without having to account for the absence of the Palestinian side. On a general note, Lefebvre observes that 'speak[ing] of "producing space" sounds bizarre [because] so great is the sway still held by the idea that empty space is prior to whatever ends up filling it' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 15). With stories such as that of Abu Ameen, the idea of an empty space prior to the arrival of European Jews is undermined and challenged. The presence of Abu Ameen in the hills outside Ramallah refutes such claims as the one made by Meir. At the same time, connecting with his grandfather's cousin's construction ensures the continuation of the Palestinian relationship with the land as Shehadeh becomes the link between the past generation and the future one. The first walk then discovers a space where the Palestinian collective memory gets articulated. Moreover, the very articulation of this memory, in turn, fashions a narrative space in which the topographic site can be preserved and the memory of Abu Ameen re-articulated in the future. While family stories constitute the bridge between Abu Ameen and Shehadeh, enabling the latter to transform the former's construction to a site of Palestinian memory, the narrative of his walk there makes his autobiography the bridge between Palestinian history and the future generations. Visiting the site prompts memories; memories are what populates narrative; and narrative produces the identity of the author. In context, the Palestinian human rights lawyer who loves taking long walks in the hills of Palestine conceives of Abu Ameen *qasr* (Arabic for castle) as a site of memory from which the Palestinian side of the story can be told.

The attempted discursive memoricide was corroborated with policies aiming to erase the physical traces of Palestinian presence prior to 1948. To demonstrate cultural memoricide, a systematic effort galvanizing scholarly, political, and military forces to de-Arabize the Palestinian terrain both culturally and ecologically (Masalha, 2012, p. 89), Pappé cites a number of examples in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2007). For example, he explains how the physical erasure of the *Nakba* is accompanied by denying the existence of the Palestinian villages which were depopulated in 1948 in the case of a forest funded and supervised by the JNF (Jewish National Fund):

> The Birya Forest is located in the Safad region and covers a total of 20000 dunam. It is the largest man-made forest in Israel and a very popular site. It conceals the houses of at least six Palestinian villages. Reading through the text on the website [of JNF (Jewish National Fund)] and simply highlighting what it includes and excludes, none of the villages of Dishon, Alma, Qaddita, Amqa, Ayn al-Zaytun or Biriyya are ever mentioned (Pappé, 2007, p. 230)

So, when Shehadeh writes about the Palestinian landscape as a lawyer and human rights activist, he inevitably positions his text in direct opposition not only to the travel accounts of orientalist figures he quotes such as Melville, Twain, Thackeray, and Lawrence (the latter of whom he mentions in *A Rift in Time*), but also in the arena of the highly politicised battle over memory. In the hope that his book does not 'fall' within a tradition that prioritised 'the viewer's or reader's religious or political beliefs' over 'the land and its inhabitants' (*Walks*, p. xii), Shehadeh treads carefully, giving the land a voice rather than speaking for it. In orientalist discourse, as Hania A. M. Nashef explains, the actual landscape was subjected to beliefs even though scientific evidence was not always present to confirm those beliefs. In other words, 'the Bible was used to provide proof rather than using evidence to substantiate the Biblical story' (Nashef 2020, p. 311). In *Palestinian Walks*, however, there is a reversal of this approach. The landscape and its ecological components provide evidence for the subject matter of collective memory. It is the land that tells Shehadeh what to remember, not the other way around. This is clearly illustrated in the first *sarha*. The details of Abu Ameen's enterprise in the hills are presented as inspired by the site of his construction. Abu Ameen's story speaks to the fact that the 'barren' landscape is not barren after all.

In fact, the way Shehadeh traces the building stages of Abu Ameen's stone house shows how this very impression of barrenness might be deployed against Israeli settlements. One of the features stressed in the narrative of Abu Ameen's stay in the hills is the seamlessness of his construction and how it barely disturbs the landscape. Shehadeh's encounter with this 'architectural wonder' (*Walks*, p. 15) was totally accidental, which echoes its congruent insertion into the scenery. Being a stone mason, Abu Ameen 'only had to touch a stone to know what kind it was and whether or not it could take the weight' (*Walks*, p. 21). Scrutinising the way the house was designed, Shehadeh comes to the conclusion that while Abu Ameen and his wife, Zariefeh, were in the hills building their *qasr*, they 'must have been very careful to follow the natural contours, memorizing the whole slope before deciding how to subdivide it.' When they found large rocks which could not be removed, they kept them 'standing where they found them' (*Walks*, p. 11). The question of survival in the depth of Palestinian hills was Zariefeh's responsibility. As they worked on the *qasr* for long days on end, 'it was only because Zariefeh knew what was edible in the wild that they were able to survive in the hills on the provisions they had brought with them' (*Walks*, p. 22). On the other hand, the settlement blocs cannot be missed from a distance. Shehadeh regrets how a land on the old Ramallah-Jaffa Road 'had already been taken over by the settlers, who had placed ugly red-coloured caravan-style houses on it' (*Walks*, p. 75). The hypervisibility indicates the extraneousness of these buildings, their out-of-placeness. The conspicuous nature of these 'ugly structures do[es] not only stress their creators' foreignness to the land but will also testify to the ugly history of occupation' (Nashef, 2020, p. 322). They are *in* the hills but not *of* the hills.

The interaction between the landscape and the Palestinian collective memory creates a disruption to biblical claims such as the ones foregrounded by de Chateaubriand and Twain and pushed by Ben-Gurion and Meir. While Israeli political discourse glosses over centuries of Palestinian/Arab/Muslim presence before 1948 by establishing a narrative history which stretches uninterrupted to biblical times, Shehadeh's text does the same in the opposite direction. That is to say, he bridges the traumatic rift initiated in 1948 between the Palestinian body and land. Shehadeh's overarching purpose is, in Nashef's terms, 'to connect the dots between home and homeland. He does that by preserving and resurrecting some of the original names' (Nashef,

2020, p. 317). Aware of the imminent disappearance of the places under settlement blocs along with their names, Shehadeh is keen to point out the Arab names in his effort of textual preservation. One of these instances is mentioned in the second chapter, 'The Albina Case: Ramallah to A'yn Qenya'. Shehadeh writes that the settlers:

> cared little about the Palestinians in Beit 'Ur, who had been in the village for centuries and were now going to be edged out by the new settlement […] The settlement to be established on the land was given the name Bet Horon, Horon being the Canaanite deity mentioned in Ugaritic literature […] With the exception of this ancient biblical link, the settlement being planned on my client's land had nothing to do with religious Zionism.' (*Walks*, p. 77)

Bearing in mind Nashef's statement that the Palestinian identity 'has for centuries depended on land to partly define itself' (2020, p. 315), renaming places and redrawing borders by disfiguring the landscape has a direct redefining impact on that identity. It is equally noteworthy that settler colonial practices such as these result in cultural change. A good example would be the very idea of a *sarha*, that is roaming unbound by time or place. The construction of settlements transforms not only the topography but also the cultural landscape. For example, it results in a direct redefinition of the practice of *sarha* as it becomes restricted and less spontaneous. His previously 'unimpeded and aimless meandering of the *sarha* is at least partially forced to a target-oriented path' (Batarseh, 2021, p. 250). In other words, his walks are much more dictated by the Israeli authorities than by his own choice. His imagined *sarha* in the seventh chapter might be a counterstrategy to these restrictions. In order to circumvent this impact throughout the book, the author resorts to the cultural reserve of collective memories, a move which allows him to overwrite the current landscape with a textual layer informed by the collective mnemonic map. When Shehadeh interweaves his walks with collective memory, he constructs a map of resistance. In other words, when describing how a place used to be, the 'I' in the text alternates between a character who is the central object of the memoir and the narrator who is carrying out the autobiographical act of self-construction. While the protagonist interacts with the immediate physical environment the narrator positions his movement on the topographic plain in a temporal interplay between the past and the present. The details of how the place used to be in the past allow him to 'walk' the map of resistance in the present.

While this strategy works in the text, it has little success outside of it. Expressing his frustration, Shehadeh describes how his long-fancied walk from Ramallah hills to the coastal plain and the sea has become impossible as the settlements 'built in the wadis and over the hills along with the other settlements that straddle the green line would block [his] way. This is one walk [he] will never be able to take' (*Walks*, p. 87). Similarly, in the last *sarha*, he admits that he cannot reach his destination as the terrain has been radically transformed. So he finds himself obliged to consult a map of the hills, a practice which he considers as a defeat (Batarseh, 2021, p. 249):

> So I decided to consult a map of the hills. I had to. It was not a practice I would have chosen, for it implied submission to others, the makers of the maps, with their ideological biases. I would much rather have exercised the freedom of going by the map inside my head, signposted by historical memories and references: this area where Abu Ameen has his qasr, that rock where Jonathan and I stopped and had a long talk. That hill over which Penny and I had a memorable walk. But I had no choice. To find a track I could take that was without settlers or practice shooters or army posts or settler bypass roads had become a real challenge' (*Walks*, p. 189).

The landscape thus becomes not only a reserve for collective memory, but also a canvas of personal memories. When Shehadeh regrets his inability to perform a walk that is guided by signposts of intimate relationships, such as that with his colleague Jonathan or his wife Penny, his walks become a site where individual and collective dimensions of memory converge. In the act of walking, he unearths the history of monuments such as Abu Ameen's *qasr* which are prone to be erased by settlement schemes. At the same time, he creates another mnemonic narrative by virtue of the memories which emerge from his immediate interaction with the land. The superstructure of *Palestinian Walks* can be regarded as a cycle of walking, remembering, writing, then reading. The latter stage results in a reproduction of the walks and the whole cycle rematerializes subsequently. The book, therefore, represents not only a narrative rendition of the walks but also a constant opportunity to re-experience them even though the land is disappearing.

Along these lines, Shehadeh produces a framework to relive his walking experiences repeatedly in the future, even when the landscape is under the imminent threat of disappearance. His text manifests the interconnectedness of his life experience and the transformations inflicted

on the landscape both literally and structurally. He reads Palestinian failures on the land and the land's gradual alienation as reflections on his personal and family life. In the introduction, Shehadeh states that ever since he read about the plans to transform the Palestinian hills being prepared as a long-term strategy by successive Israeli governments who were in favour of the policy of settlement building in the Occupied Territories, he has 'felt like one who is told that he has contracted a terminal disease' (*Walks*, p. xvi). This poignant metaphor underscores the deep sense of loss and inevitability he feels regarding the changes to the landscape he cherishes. Reading these lines, it is hard not to remember Edward Said's observations towards the end of his own memoir *Out of Place* (1999). In Said's case, the writing of his memoir was literally galvanized by the knowledge that he had contracted a terminal disease, communicated to him by his doctor. Said explains that his memoir is in some way an autobiography of the disease itself, as the fluctuating health state dictated by periods of chemotherapy and its subsequent periods of recovery structured the writing process and its frequency (*Out*, p. 216). While Said's foreseeable departure gave birth to his life narrative, Shehadeh's knowledge of the imminent disappearance of the hills 'heightened his experience of walking in them and discouraged him from ever taking them for granted' (*Walks*, p. xvi). However, unlike *Out of Place*, wherein the structuring force, the disease, initiates the project then disappears into the background of life events, in *Palestinian Walks* the hills are multifunctional. They provide a driving force, a central matter in the narrative, and a backdrop for self-construction. The hills are not just a setting but an active participant in Shehadeh's story, shaping his identity and experiences. Shehadeh's narrative intertwines his personal history with the broader political and social changes affecting the Palestinian landscape. His walks become a form of resistance, a way to assert his presence and connection to the land in the face of its transformation. Each walk is an act of remembrance and defiance, a way to document and preserve the landscape that is being systematically altered. Moreover, Shehadeh's reflections on the landscape serve as a metaphor for the Palestinian struggle. The hills, with their enduring presence and gradual transformation, mirror the resilience and challenges faced by the Palestinian people. His detailed descriptions of the landscape and its changes highlight the impact of Israeli policies on the environment and the lives of those who inhabit it.

Shehadeh's life story is written in analogous terms with the gradual altering of the landscape. For instance, the second chapter demonstrates how his unsuccessful effort as a lawyer to clinch his client's property from the settlement scheme results in a direct redefinition of the landscape. Another part of this two-way constructive process is the interplay between Shehadeh as a protagonist and as a narrator. While the protagonist walks and extracts memory stimuli from the ecological properties around him, the narrator contextualises him and his walks in the political and historical realms. For example, as the protagonist passes through a field that is full of *natch* (Poterium Thorn), the narrator provides an explanation of the Arabic roots of the word and its variations. Then, he illustrates how it has been utilized in Israeli military courts to expropriate land from its Palestinian owners:

> In Israeli military courts this weed has gained great popularity. Never has a weed been more exploited and politicized, not least by Dani Kramer […] How often I have heard him stand up before the judge in the military land court and declare: 'But, Your Honour, the land is full of natch. I saw it with my own eyes.' Meaning: what more proof could anyone want that the land was uncultivated and therefore public land that the Israeli settlers could use as their own? (*Walks*, p. 53)

With such a pinch of irony at the end of this passage, Shehadeh undermines the legal significance of this plant, pointing at the same time to the systematized partiality that allows such arguments to take place successfully. Mohammed Sakhnini interprets this demonstration by Shehadeh as employing local knowledge of the terrain to 'deconstruct words and strip them of their hegemonic references' in opposition to 'the spirit of improvement in the original story of settler colonialism' (2014, p. 212). Equally important to the analysis of this chapter is the narrative moves from the land to the personal, professional, or family life of the author and back to the landscape. Although, admittedly, his experience of the hills has been heightened by the knowledge of its potential temporariness, Shehadeh seems unable to enjoy his walks fully. One significant reason for this is that certain parts of the landscape intrusively invoke highly political/politicized memories. Having talked of Kramer and his 'legal fetish for natch', he mentions that it was time to forget about it and enjoy his walk (*Walks*, p. 54). In the next page, he gets to the part of the wadi which 'always inspired talk when he walked with Jonathan Kuttab,

his colleague in human rights at Al Haq in 1981' (*Walks*, p. 55). The text then, following their conversation, goes back to the settlements planned on the hills.

Shehadeh produces in his text a mirroring of the walking experience on many levels. A key strategy here is the frequent alternating between mimesis and diegesis, that is scene and summary (Couser, 2011, p. 68). So, having declared his intention to forget about Kramer and try to enjoy his walk, Shehadeh encourages the reader to expect a scene with a longish description of the hills to follow. But, after one short paragraph, he cuts the scene short with the memory of his conversations with his colleague, again, about the settlements. The reader is thus put in a position to feel what Shehadeh expresses elsewhere in his book when he wonders:

> How unaware many trekkers around the world are of what a luxury it is to be able to walk in the land they love without anger, fear or insecurity, just to be able to walk without political arguments running obsessively through their heads, without fear of losing what they've come to love, without the anxiety that they will be deprived of the right to enjoy it. (*Walks*, p. 33)

It turns out that while Shehadeh initially invites his readers to appreciate the Palestinian hills in this textual walk, he in fact ends up producing a mimicry of his first-hand experience. In other words, while he was deprived of the right to walk unhindered by checkpoints and settlement blocs, the reader is deprived of the opportunity to enjoy the 'walk' by means of Shehadeh's intrusive reflections on the political and identitarian implications of the remapping of Palestine. The political underpinnings of the narrative work directly against its authorial intention. This observation dictates a retrospective move from this narrative juncture to the title of the book, begging the question of what makes these walks 'Palestinian'. Because of his work indoors and the heavy rain outside, 'which made the path too muddy, Shehadeh hadn't been able to walk for one full week. He thinks 'this was what accounted for [his] tense state. Walking helped [him] put things in perspective.' (*Walks*, pp. 49-50). In turn, the landscape is a topographical text on which the reality of living under occupation can be traced retrospectively. In this sense, the title of the book, 'Palestinian Walks', is deeply significant as it encapsulates the dual nature of Shehadeh's journey: a physical traversal of the land and a metaphorical exploration of identity and belonging. The walks are Palestinian not only because they occur in Palestine but also because they embody

the Palestinian experience of navigating a physical, cultural, and political landscape fraught with historical and contemporary challenges. Through his narrative, Shehadeh invites readers to see the land through his eyes, to understand the deep connections between place, history, and identity, and to appreciate the resilience and perseverance of the Palestinian people.

When the text moves from the first *sarha* to the second, Shehadeh moves from one geographical area to another, and he locates all these elements in the larger historical context through a not very subtle comparison between his position and Abu Ameen's vis-à-vis the possibility of *sarha*. When relating Abu Ameen's story, he suggests that '[p]erhaps his entire time in the hills with Saleem was one long *sarha* such as I might never be able to achieve' (*Walks*, p. 10). While his relative's life in the hills was by choice, Shehadeh's walks became an existential obligation prompted by the 'terminal disease' which inflicted the landscape. The occupation is rendered by means of these moves from choice to obligation, and from freedom to restriction. In Moore's reading:

> [w]hereas Abu Ameen had the 'security' of an unchanging panorama, his descendant charts, over the course of the narrated walks, the transformation of the hills into 'confining, endangered areas and a source of constant anxiety'. In a return visit to the qasr in 2003, the author finds the a'rsh [throne] 'desecrated and displaced' and the walk almost ends in tragedy when his nephew picks up an unexploded missile. (2013, p. 36)

Third, what makes the walks 'Palestinian' is inseparable from the act of resistance they perform, both in the physical and textual forms. In the physical form, the movement across space reaffirms Palestinian entitlement to the land. When Shehadeh walks until stopped by a checkpoint or a settlement he effectively delineates the reach of colonization so far. In the textual form, Shehadeh bridges a gap in the Palestinian national narrative when he reconnects with the site of Abu Ameen's construction. While Abu Ameen's biography foregrounded the possibility of *Palestinian Walks*, Shehadeh himself constructs new memories by walking the land. When he dedicates the book to his 'nephew and niece, Aziz and Tala, with the hope that they will be able to walk in the hills of Palestine,' he voices his hope for a perpetual presence in the hills which he loves. As the text intersperses the two life narratives of Abu Ameen and Shehadeh, not only does it emphasize that they constitute a continuous thread but also places Shehadeh's walks as a new

historical signpost which can be traced by future generations. Continuity is thus fashioned through such instances of 'continued visitation' which permit 'the layering of spatial narratives' where 'the personal accounts of Shehadeh's walks through Palestine [are posited] on top of the communal narratives saturating the places he visits' (Batarseh, 2021, p. 243). As Shehadeh's paths are 'increasingly obstructed by walls, military forces (both Israeli and Palestinian), security zones, and settlements', his very ability to perform an 'act of walking' becomes an act of defiance to 'the totality of the Israeli settler colonial project' (Batarseh, 2021, p. 244).

A Rift in Time (2010) is another text where Shehadeh deploys memories of the past in order to inspire a vision of a better future. This time, he records the journey he took along the Rift Valley east of the Mediterranean as he tries to trace the route that his great- great-uncle Najib Nassar took when he escaped the Ottoman authorities of his day. Najib was politically vocal and expressed his opposition to the Ottoman Empire's participation in the Second World War on the German side. This led to being charged with treason and the threat of imminent arrest and possible execution. So, he decided to escape and take refuge in the wilderness and amongst the tribes populating the region at the time. Najib's story thus foregrounds Shehadeh's walks and narrative as he attempts to reimagine the place before the many changes that took place since his uncle's escape. In the epigraph, he cites Brian Eno's observation that:

> Human beings are capable of the unique trick, creating realities by first imagining them by experiencing them, in their minds. The active imagining somehow makes it real. And what is possible in the art becomes thinkable in life. (Shehadeh, 2010)

When Shehadeh follows the footsteps of Najib he presents the possibility of a world without the artificial borders of the nation state which resulted from the demise of the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, he renders an image of how difficult a (re)production of such a world would be in light of the present circumstances. As he was planning his route, Najib did not have to worry about 'the political borders that many Palestinians are not allowed to cross today' because they did not exist. He went by horse and 'in no time found himself on the eastern bank in what today is the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan' (*Rift*, p. 4). In Shehadeh's case, this is not possible because:

> [s]o distorted has the geography become that for us West Bank Palestinians to travel north to Damascus we would have to travel east, then north, crossing four different countries; and even that is possible only if we are fortunate enough to secure the necessary visas and exit permits from often uncooperative authorities, both Israeli and Arab (*Rift*, p. 4)

Like *Palestinian Walks*, *A Rift in Time* can be read as a site of memory which serves a prospective function. It is a site of memory in the sense that not only does it tell the memory of Najib's escape and Shehadeh's walks, but also the production of the book involved challenges that extended beyond the writing process. As Shehadeh imparts, his 'quest for Najib [...] that consumed [him] for the next thirteen years was not an easy one.' One of the main reasons for this is the fact that '[m]ost of Palestine's history, together with that of its people, is buried deep in the ground' (*Rift*, p. 4).

Many of the villages that Najib used as a hiding place 'had been reduced to rubble' (*Rift*, p. 5). Shehadeh expresses his appreciation of his great-great-uncle with whom he 'developed a deep empathy' (*Rift*, p. 10) not least for being a man able to 'speak truth to power' notwithstanding the personal cost (*Rift*, p. 11). To reproduce his route of escape is for Shehadeh to reinforce their relationship by means of their connection to the land and finding refuge in it. While *Palestinian Walks* is a site of memory which exposes the ills of colonisation, *A Rift in Time* points out the complicity of nationalism in the suffering of Palestinians. Shehadeh invites readers to imagine the Levantine region as a borderless geographical entity offering the possibility of unrestricted movement. In this endeavour, he resonates with Michel De Certeau's remark that '[t]he desire to see the city preceded the means of satisfying it' (De Certeau, 1988, p. 92). *A Rift in Time* is the product of Shehadeh's desire to see the Levant as a geographical unity although the means to satisfy this desire are not presently available. What he can do as a writer is present the fact that these borders which render the prospect of one open stretch of land impossible now have not always been there. These borders, in fact, can exist only when people allow them to exist in their perception. In Shehadeh's experience:

> [b]y trying to re-create my uncle's journey, I was able to learn much about the geography and importance of the Rift Valley—to see it as a kind of last battle for the heart and soul of Palestine and the borderless world that it once was. I have

> no doubt that in the not-so-distant future the present borders between the various countries […] will vanish and the Rift Valley will once again become one long, open stretch without borders.' (Shehadeh, 2012, p. 47)

For Shehadeh, the principle of freedom lies in denying the Israelis the 'possibility of trapping [Palestinians]' not only in the physical sense of the term as evident in obstacles like checkpoints, but more importantly in not 'accepting to live in that confined space and confining the mind to that small space' (Shehadeh, 2023, p. 96). The openness and unity of the land represents for Shehadeh the essence of 'what is real, not the confinement we have been placed in'. The message he wanted to convey to readers is to stop limiting themselves to specific locations, to broaden their perspective and experience the liberation that comes with embracing a wider expanse. In his view, this serves as a countermeasure to the restrictions imposed on the Palestinians (Shehadeh, 2023, p. 96).

While Shehadeh's curtailed attempt to recreate the journey attests to the reality of the present and the distorted geography of the Palestinian land, Najib's route inspires the possibility of a better future and presents an alternative for which to strive. In the same way as *Strangers in the House* and *Palestinian Walks*, *A Rift in Time* positions its author as a bridge between the past, present, and the future. While the walks around Ramallah defer the possibility of *sarha*, tracing Najib's route defers the unity of the region. To walk in Shehadeh's case is to document, experience confinement, and imagine freedom. These books are integral pieces of Shehadeh's identity, reflecting not only how he views and experiences the land but also as projects that have consumed significant portions of his lifetime. In other words, the memoirs recount his life's actions and how he remembers and contemplates them. Writing the landscape serves to refamiliarize it, immortalize it, and provide the opportunity to 'walk' it repeatedly despite its imminent disappearance. The life experience is thus prolonged through the possibility of rereading the text. This highlights that among the diverse life experiences Shehadeh had, walking the hills is particularly worth remembering, writing about, and sharing with the world. Consequently, these texts testify to the centrality of the homeland in his self-perception. The act of walking, as depicted in his narratives, transcends mere physical movement; it becomes a profound engagement with the land, a means of asserting presence and identity in a space

fraught with political and social tensions. In tracing Najib's route, Shehadeh offers a vision of unity and continuity that contrasts with the fragmented reality of the present. This act of historical and geographical tracing serves as a metaphor for the broader Palestinian struggle for coherence and self-determination. The juxtaposition of Shehadeh's constrained walks with Najib's more expansive route highlights the ongoing tension between the present conditions and the aspirational future. They capture the essence of a landscape that is both a physical space and a repository of memory and identity. Through his detailed and evocative descriptions, Shehadeh invites readers to engage with the Palestinian hills as symbols of a rich and contested history. Ultimately, his works undermine the ideological infrastructure of colonialism, present a vivid rendition of Palestinian life, and, nonetheless, offer a powerful narrative of resilience and hope.

This chapter read *Strangers in the House* (2002), *Palestinian Walks* (2007), and *A Rift in Time* (2010) as contributing to the preservation of the Palestinian ecology and cultural memory in the face of illegal Israeli settlement and memoricide. It argued that the memoirs constitute a textual nexus in which the interplay between the individual and collective dimensions of memory produces spaces for Shehadeh's anticolonial discourse. Through walking, remembering, and narrating, Shehadeh anchors the land narrative that permeates his autobiographical account. This provides a route to examine the devastating consequences of settler colonial policies on the Palestinian land and the lives of its inhabitants. His response to the toponymic transformation that the hills undergo is to relocate their discursive signification in affirming the Palestinian historical presence which constitutes an indispensable element of the indigenous population's identity. Shehadeh's immediate connection with the land prompts him to imagine, remember, and inscribe Palestinian history onto the topographical background, thus disrupting the orientalist discourse on which the settler colonial project is constructed. Drawing on Henry Lefebvre's theory of space and Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoires*, this chapter demonstrated that Shehadeh's texts make up a set of Palestinian sites of memory which preserve the memory of the land and serve the function of its prospective textual substitute. This is achieved through a triadic process which interactively involves the landscape, the collective memory of the Palestinian people, and Shehadeh himself as the walker-narrator. In his ancestors' memories, Shehadeh finds a home, and in his own walks he constructs its continuation. The next

chapter presents yet another facet of home in Palestinian autobiographical writing by analysing how Said's upbringing in different geographical and linguistic territories shaped his identity and his own notion of identity in his memoir *Out of Place* (1999). This exploration will further illuminate the complex interplay between place, memory, and identity in Palestinian memoir, offering deeper insights into the ways in which personal and collective histories are intertwined in the quest for home.

Chapter Three: The Reconstruction of the Exilic Intellectual in Edward Said's *Out of Place* (1999)

This chapter reads Edward Said's memoir *Out of Place* (1999) within the broader context of his critical work, positing that while Said maintains a relatively detached tone throughout the narrative, he foregrounds the emergence of the Palestinian exilic intellectual. The memoir intricately details his coming of age and the multifaceted complexity of his diverse identities—ethnic (Christian Arab), national (Palestinian, American), geographic (Palestine, Egypt, USA), and linguistic (Arabic, English, French). *Out of Place* embodies, both thematically and critically, the exilic intellectual that Said celebrates in his essay "Reflections on Exile" (2001), but with a distinctively Palestinian perspective. By juxtaposing his memoir with his critical work, the chapter suggests that these writings inform and enrich each other, blurring the conventional boundaries between academic and creative writing. This interplay highlights a cyclical pattern in which the intellectual shapes the memoirist, who, in turn, narrates the story of the intellectual. This dynamic challenges the traditional rigidity that separates academic and creative writing in terms of their respective autobiographical functions. Said's narrative approach in *Out of Place* diverges from those of other Palestinian writers like Ghada Karmi and Raja Shehadeh. Unlike Karmi and Shehadeh, who often explore themes of return and the quest for a pre-dislocation wholeness, Said emphasizes a perpetual state of displacement and fragmentation. He does not seek to return to an idealized past but rather underscores the continuous and inherent nature of his dislocation. This perspective offers a nuanced understanding of exile, not as a temporary condition to be resolved, but as a fundamental aspect of his identity and intellectual stance. The memoir is not just a personal recounting of Said's life but also a critical reflection on the broader implications of exile and identity. Said's experiences of displacement and his navigation through various cultural and linguistic landscapes are emblematic of the broader Palestinian experience. His narrative is imbued with a sense of loss and longing, yet it also reflects resilience and adaptability akin to Shehadeh's *sumud*. While Shehadeh's *sumud* is closely related to the land, Said's seems to be on the other extreme of the spectrum. Said's notion of home is predicated on the negation of unilateral attachments to geographical entities. In his memoir, Said makes it clear that his

home is ephemeral, multi-territorial, and his relationship to it is rather primarily psychological. If Said's *sumud* has a ground, it is in the academic context. The memoir's detailed exploration of Said's educational journey, his family dynamics, and his professional achievements provides a comprehensive view of how his personal history is intertwined with his intellectual development. The memoir provides the link between Said's public image and his own self-perception by juxtaposing the linguistic, geographic, and political nuances of his upbringing. What Karmi sees in her family, and Shehadeh in the hills of Palestine, Said explores in the inner workings of his education and identity development.

Said's memoir, *Out of Place* (1999), presents a formidable challenge for scholarly engagement due to its intricate blend of personal narrative and intellectual introspection. Said's critical acumen—so often directed outward in his theoretical works—is redirected inward in this autobiography, producing a self-reflective mode that resists conventional biographical analysis. The text does not indulge in overt political polemic; rather, it crafts a nuanced landscape of identity, exile, and memory through understated literary techniques and confessional sincerity. This lack of overt political discourse paradoxically reinforces Said's political position, as his autobiographical silence on certain matters can be interpreted as a deliberate form of resistance to reductive identity politics and essentialist readings (*Out*, 1999, pp. 295–301). The memoir's introspective tenor, grounded in contradiction and displacement, complicates the task of critical response precisely because Said anticipates and diffuses many of the analytical approaches available to scholars. Moreover, Said's self-analysis in Out of Place leaves little interpretive leeway for critics, as his own commentary on identity, upbringing, and estrangement often pre-empts external theorization. Said constructs himself as both subject and critic, engaging with psychoanalytic and cultural frameworks to interrogate his own positionality as a Palestinian Christian educated in colonial institutions (*Out*, 1999, pp. 19–23). This dual role makes the memoir a self-contained intellectual project that discourages reductive critique or mere contextual elaboration. As Hamdi notes, the memoir's complexity lies not in what it reveals but in the meticulous way Said controls its modes of disclosure, crafting a narrative of exile that is at once emotionally resonant and intellectually rigorous (Hamdi, 2022, pp. 57–62). Consequently, the scholarly difficulty of writing about Out of Place stems not from a lack of content but from

Said's anticipatory engagement with critical discourse—a challenge that compels readers to reassess the boundaries of autobiographical form and postcolonial narrative.

In this chapter, I engage with Tahrir Hamdi's nuanced rethinking of Said's concept of 'late style' as articulated in *Post-Millennial Palestine: Literature, Memory, Resistance* (2021). Hamdi's intervention, particularly in the chapter "Late Style as Resistance in the Works of Edward Said, Mahmoud Darwish, and Mourid Barghouti," reorients Said's late stylistic framework—defined by "intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction" (Said, 2007, p. 14)—toward a mode of political and aesthetic resistance grounded in the ongoing Palestinian experience of catastrophe, exile, and dispossession. Through close readings of these intellectuals' final works, she demonstrates how late style functions not merely as a biographical or chronological marker, but as a defiant stance against narrative closure and conciliatory harmonies. These texts become sites of ethical dissent, foregrounding fragmentation and estrangement as politically charged formal choices. Central to Hamdi's analysis is Said's autobiographical memoir *Out of Place*, which she reads as an exemplary instance of what she terms a 'lateness of beginnings' (Hamdi, 2021, pp. 32). Rather than seeking to summarize or reconcile a coherent life narrative, Said's late autobiographical writing unsettles dominant configurations of identity and belonging, enacting a recursive structure that reflects his perpetual state of displacement. In resisting both teleological resolution and the comforts of integration, Said affirms a secular humanism rooted in contradiction and critical reflection—traits that, in Hamdi's view, reconfigure late style as a sustained act of resistance. The following chapter builds on this insight to examine how lateness, in the Palestinian literary imagination, unsettles notions of finality and opens space for rethinking exile, memory, and the aesthetics of dissent. Late style produces the exilic intellectual by transforming the condition of exile into a critical aesthetic and ethical stance—one that resists reconciliation, embraces contradiction, and foregrounds displacement as a generative force.

Regardless of the motivation that prompts memoirists to writing their memoirs, they all 'typically imply, express, and even defend a value perspective, offering their experience as evidence' (Martin, 2016, p. 2). The moral argument that is implied in autobiographical writing, therefore, presents the life of the author as a series of choices determined by a moral stance and

leading ultimately to a meaningful outcome. The life of the author emerges from the narrative as a life worth-living which provides the primary material for a life story that is worth-telling. In addition to the moral underpinnings of autobiographical writing, it constitutes a verbalisation of an identity argument. That is, when the author tells their life story, they preserve the authority over their narrative and therefore, reaffirm both their unity and uniqueness. However, as Smith and Watson suggest, even being the author of a life narrative does not necessarily mean that the person becomes the sole authority on it. This is because, as they carry on, 'life writing requires an audience to both confirm the writer's existence in time and mark his or her lived specificity, distinctiveness, and location' (2010, p. 16). Thus, the truth value of autobiographical writing inheres in the 'intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of a life' (Smith and Watson, 2010, p. 16). Involving the readership in the overall meaning construction of the memoirist's life brings us close to a reversal of the common notion that people live their lives first then document them later, whether in writing or other media. From this angle, that is, 'life writing does not register preexisting selfhood, but rather somehow creates it' (Couser, 2011, p. 14). So, instead of telling of a past experience, by writing about one's life, a new identity can emerge. If this holds true, then reading life stories allows us to observe the invention of a new self (Couser, 2011, p. 14). This is mainly because life experiences themselves cannot be fully replicated in textual form, not least for the fallibility of the human faculty driving the narrative, namely memory (Couser, 2011, p. 80). That is, autobiographical accounts position their authors as 'readers of their experiential histories, bringing discursive schema that are culturally available to them to bear on what has happened' (Smith and Watson, 2010, p. 33). In other words, what we read in memoir are 'records of acts of interpretation by subjects inescapably in historical time, and in relation to their own ever-moving pasts' (Smith and Watson, 2010, p. 30).

In memoirs, we are captivated by the way character is shaped through real-life events—or at least how the narrator interprets this process. This genre allows us to witness the transformation of the 'I' from the protagonist, who experiences the events, to the narrator, who reflects upon them. This shift is crucial, as it highlights the evolution of identity over time. The essence of memoir lies in its ability to make identity claims, prompting us to examine the nature

of the identities being presented. We become deeply engaged in understanding how the narrator's sense of self has been influenced and altered by their experiences. This introspective journey not only reveals the complexities of personal growth but also invites readers to reflect on their own identities and the events that have shaped them (Couser, 2011, pp. 13-14). Therefore, as a whole, a memoir asserts that the author's life is not only worth living but also worth sharing with readers and the world. By narrating their experiences, the author introduces themselves in a deeply personal and meaningful way. The transition within the text from the protagonist, who lives through the events, to the narrator, who reflects on them, represents a journey of self-discovery and transformation. This progression is a series of events that culminate in the development of a desirable character or perspective—the author's own. In what follows, I will argue that in *Out of Place* Said employs memoir to reconstruct the exilic intellectual he celebrates in his critical work on the state of the exile. At the same time, the narrative space offers him an opportunity to reinterpret his relationship with his father, mother, and Palestine. In Said's case, the desired perspective is the exilic intellectual one, which can examine and analyse both the Western World and the Middle East as an insider and outsider simultaneously.

Said opens his article "Reflections on Exile" (2001) by emphasising the pain and suffering inherent in the experience of exile:

> Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. (2001, p. 180)

Said speaks to the deep and often paradoxical nature of exile as a condition of being in the world which is intellectually fascinating yet deeply painful to endure. The juxtaposition of its intellectual allure and the harsh reality of living through it underscores his firsthand experience. Indeed, he acknowledges that literature and history often depict exile in a heroic, romantic, or even triumphant light. However, he posits the argument that these portrayals are efforts to mask or

overcome the deep sorrow and alienation inherent in exile. While such narratives can be inspiring, they may also gloss over the harsh realities faced by displaced people. The root cause of this suffering is the permanent separation between an individual and their native place, or their 'true home.' This rift is not just physical but also psychological, creating a deep sense of loss and dislocation that cannot be fully mended. Even if the subject in question is exceptionally accomplished, Said suggests that their achievements are 'permanently undermined' by the loss of something that can never be returned to nor recaptured. This means, in Said's case, that his academic success in the US and beyond did not fend off the haunting presence of somewhere/something left behind. Academic renown and the publishing potential of his critical work is no replacement for the homeland. The loss of this latter, Said tells us, remains an indelible part of the exiled individual's life. An angle of the exilic experience which the heroic narratives of exile in literature and history often fail to capture. However, Said tackles the experience from a politically empowering perspective towards the end of his article. Other than mitigating the pain and suffering inherent in the experience of exile, Said sees in exile the only opportunity, and position, to conceive of an identity outside the framework of nationalism. Nationalism, as explained by Said, represents a claim of connection to a specific place, community, and heritage. It validates the sense of home established by shared language, culture, and traditions, thereby countering the impact of exile and striving to prevent its detrimental effects. The relationship between nationalism and exile resembles Hegel's master-servant dialectic, where these opposing forces shape and define one another (2001, p. 182). That is, he does not consider exile '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' (*Reflections*, 2001, p. 189). But, in order for exile to serve the function of an alternative to nationalism in the process of identity construction, the exilic subject should refuse to be on the margins lamenting a loss. He or she is under an existential obligation to 'cultivate a scrupulous (not indulgent or sulky) subjectivity' (*Reflections* 2001, 189). This chapter will argue that Said writes his memoir in the spirit of cultivating such a subjectivity.

The exilic intellectual occupies a unique epistemological and ethical position shaped by displacement, liminality, and critical detachment. Exile, as Said observes, is a state of 'terminal

loss' that paradoxically generates heightened insight and resistance (Said, 2000). Intellectuals in exile often adopt a contrapuntal approach to critique, juxtaposing narratives from both their homeland and host culture to expose ideological contradictions and colonial legacies (Said, 1993). This dual perspective fosters a form of dissent rooted in non-assimilation and historical awareness. Figures such as Mahmoud Darwish and Mourid Barghouti exemplify the refusal to normalize exile, embedding memory and dispossession within their literary and political expressions (Hamdi, 2021). Their work resists both hegemonic nationalism and the erasures of diasporic displacement, embodying a conscious engagement with justice and ethical responsibility. Furthermore, the identity of the exilic intellectual is marked by liminality, navigating between cultural frameworks without full incorporation into any. This marginality cultivates a discursive space for creativity, critique, and the interrogation of dominant paradigms. Said's notion of intellectual responsibility emphasizes the need for sustained critical engagement from outside established systems of power, a stance intensified by exile's estranging force (Said, 1994). Hamid Dabashi expands on this by arguing that the post-Orientalist intellectual must repurpose exile as a site of epistemic rebellion rather than victimhood (Dabashi, 2012). In postcolonial contexts, particularly the Palestinian experience, exile functions not merely as a geopolitical condition but as an ontological stance—a means of resisting reductionist identity categories and asserting the complexity of memory, place, and belonging.

Out of Place is a profoundly personal account by Said. In this autobiography, Said reflects on his life and that of his family from the early years of the twentieth century to the late 1990s. The book was written during the intermittent periods of recovery from chemotherapy for leukaemia, a treatment which the author began in 1994. Born on November 1, 1935, in Jerusalem, Said's parents, Wadie (William) Ibrahim and Hilda Musa, were living in Cairo but chose to travel to Jerusalem for his birth to avoid the fate of his brother, who had died from an infection shortly after his birth in a Cairo hospital. Due to the obscurity and reticence of his parents regarding their lineage, Said could only 'assume a longish family history in Jerusalem' (*Out*, p. 7). From his birth until 1947, the family had 'off-and-on sojourns in Palestine,' (*Out*, p. 20) where they would visit extended family in Talbiyah, West Jerusalem. These frequent trips to Jerusalem offered a relative freedom from the 'organized space and time that made up [his] life in Egypt' (*Out*, p. 21).

However, Said also felt that these visits were 'temporary, even transitory, as indeed they later were,' (*Out*, p. 22) preventing him from fully enjoying them. The text, therefore, captures the tension between the organized, predictable life in Egypt and the fleeting, yet liberating, moments in Palestine. However, Said does not invest enough in the organized space of Egypt for it to be considered a homely location. This duality reflects the broader Palestinian experience of displacement and the struggle to find a sense of home and continuity. The narrative is rich with descriptions of his educational journey, his family dynamics, his acquaintances, and the cultural landscapes he navigates. His experiences in various schools, his interactions with different languages, and his exposure to diverse cultural influences all contribute to the complex tapestry of his identity.

Said's early educational trajectory reveals how colonial institutions shaped his evolving intellectual resistance, challenging imperial authority through language, perception, and cultural positioning. Said first went to the Gezira Preparatory School (GPS). He attended from 1941 to 1942 (when they moved to live in Ramallah), then from 1943 to 1946. The GPS was an institution managed and instructed by mostly English staff and attended by a microcosmic sample of the Cairo cosmopolitan population of the time. Said studied alongside Armenians, Greeks, Egyptian Jews, Copts, and English children. One of the experiences in the GPS years Said stresses in his account is when a certain Mr. Bullen, a school principal, 'wacked [him] three times on the behind' with a bamboo stick (*Out*, p. 42). He describes the encounter as his 'first extended contact with colonial authority in the sheer Englishness of its [GPS] teachers and many of its students' (*Out*, p. 42). In the fall of 1946, he entered the Cairo School for American Children (CSAC). While, as a child of an American, he 'was supposed to be among [his] own kind at CSAC, [he] found it [his] lot to be more the stranger' than at GPS (*Out*, p. 87). Part of his alienation was when one of the teachers described him as 'undoubtedly the worst student' in class (*Out*, p. 86). Because the family spent most of 1947 in Palestine, Said missed the CSAC and was enrolled in St George's School in Jerusalem before they left for 'the very last time in December of that year' (*Out*, p. 107). Having completed his years at the CSAC, he entered Victoria College (VC) in the autumn of 1949. The VC years are presented as more interesting and complex in terms of his own development as a later thinker and critic, and in relation to the English teachers he had and challenging their

authority in creative ways. For example, students started using Arabic, which was a direct violation of rule one of *The School Handbook*. The rule stated that English was the school's language, and the use of any other language(s) would be punishable. So Said and his peers started insulting English teachers in dialectal Arabic. They would then deliberately mistranslate these insults into innocuous English phrases (*Out*, p. 184). Said summarises his VC experience as irreversibly changing his life, his self-perception vis-à-vis the English (*Out*, p. 186), and his view of family links and their concordant attachments (*Out*, p. 201). In 1951, Said travelled to the US to carry on his university studies at Princeton University, then as a Graduate in Harvard to settle finally to teaching at Columbia University.

Said presents himself as the product of a troubled upbringing that made him feel uncomfortable in the social and educational environments he finds himself occupying subsequently. The root causes of his feelings of unbelonging, he tells the reader, can be traced back to his name, Edward Said. In *Language and Identity: An Introduction* (2009), John Edwards makes the point that the significance of names by which communities identify themselves, and are identified, is predicated on a commonly perceived notion of 'voice appropriation' (Edwards, 2009, p. 39). Such a self-appointed spokesmanship manifests the political and cultural hegemony of powerful groups and their monopoly over linguistic construction and knowledge production. This collectively shared awareness of linguistic passivity, Edwards argues, arises from a feeling of resentment at having no choice in these people's own naming and 'relatedly, that their important myths and legends have largely been told by outsiders.' Being thus named, defined, and somehow epistemologically produced by 'outsiders' is a 'cultural theft […] generally seen as a continuation of colonialism' (Edwards, 2009, p. 39). Edwards' psycho-political bifurcation of the issue of naming finds an echo in the opening lines of Said's memoir:

> All families invent their parents and children, give each of them a story, character, fate, and even a language. There was always something wrong with how I was invented and meant to fit in with the world of my parents and four sisters […] the overriding sensation I had was of always being out of place. Thus 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. (*Out*, p. 3)

As if by some fatalistic conspiracy, his first and family names exemplify discrepancies on morphological, phonological, and ethnic grounds. The morphological and phonological aspect involves the sound /ʕ/ of the consonant ‘,’ع a letter in the Arabic alphabet articulated from the middle of the throat, which has no equivalent in English. Thus, pronouncing his full name requires combining two phonological systems, necessitating a shift from one to the other. Moreover, his name cannot be faithfully transferred between languages due to its perceived ethnic hybridity. The ethnic aspect relates to ‘Edward’ being an English name, chosen by his parents after the Prince of Wales in 1935, while ‘Said’ is an unmistakably Arabic family name. The issue with Said’s English first name is that it was given by Arab parents in an Arab country where Arabic was predominantly spoken. Therefore, the articulation of his full name symbolically verbalizes the historical and political issues of Palestine and Egypt in the 1930s and 1940s.

In this context, the two parts of Said’s name evoke a range of linguistic, cultural, political, and discursive dualities that he inhabits, or is thrust into, without fully belonging to either. ‘Edward’ echoes British colonial history and the continued presence in newly independent Egypt and Mandate Palestine, while ‘Said’ reminds us of the long-standing Arab presence predating British influence. This duality in his name encapsulates the complex interplay of identities and histories that define his existence. ‘Edward’ aligns with the cultural and political hegemony of the time, representing the Western, colonial influence that dominated much of the world during Said’s formative years. It signifies the power structures and cultural norms imposed by British colonialism, which shaped the socio-political landscape of Egypt and Palestine. On the other hand, ‘Said’ suggests subordination rooted in cultural ambivalence and political resistance. It embodies the rich, indigenous Arab heritage that stands in contrast to the imposed colonial identity. This juxtaposition highlights the tension between dominance and resistance, between the colonizer and the colonized. Thus, self-identification for Said is haunted by the act of translating the self. As Doaa Embabi states, “The act of constructing the self occurs within a context of constant translation influenced by Said’s existence between two cultures: the Arab and the Anglo-American” (Embabi, 2017, p. 150). This constant translation is not merely linguistic but also cultural and existential. It involves navigating the complexities of belonging to two worlds that are often in conflict with each other. The shift from ‘Edward’ to ‘Said’ involves moving from the

present to the past, from English to Arabic, from American to Palestinian, from metropolitan to peripheral, and from a passive colonial mimic to a subject resisting assimilation. This transition is emblematic of Said's broader intellectual journey, where he moves from accepting imposed identities to actively resisting and redefining them. It reflects his struggle to reconcile his Western education and upbringing with his deep-rooted Arab identity. In this translational interplay between the individual and the historical, Said's problematic name becomes a verbalization of the history of imperialism and its dynamics in the region, rather than a mere product of the postcolonial situation. His name encapsulates the historical and ongoing struggles of the Palestinian people, as well as the broader Arab world, against colonial and imperial forces. It symbolizes the enduring impact of these forces on personal and collective identities.

Said's bilingual upbringing and fluid linguistic identity challenge the fixed binaries of cultural and linguistic translation, revealing how identity itself is negotiated through strategic acts of suppression, adaptation, and self-reinvention. Because Said grew up with both Arabic and English spoken around him, the challenges of 'bearing such a name were compounded by an equally unsettling quandary when it came to language' as he has 'never known what language [he] spoke first, Arabic or English, or which one was really [his] beyond any doubt' (*Out*, p. 4). This being the case with Said, the simultaneity of language acquisition results in a destabilization of the perceived dynamics of translation. Put differently, it affects an overlap of the source and target languages. As a consequence, the linguistic, and cultural translation becomes a bidirectional process. If, in Heidegger's terms, individuals have their 'being' within language (1993), then Said's predicament lies in having his 'being' in both Arabic and English with no original point of reference. However, Said soon gets past complaints to demonstrate how he used this bilingualism strategically to navigate the world(s) of his early life. Because his education was carried out in English schools, his early years were marked by an intent suppression of the Arabic part of his name, and identity. For instance, when he entered the Cairo School for American Children, he introduced himself as 'Edward Sigheed,' which 'did pass muster' and soon made him 'able in some way to belong.' (*Out*, p. 81) The cultural translation which allows him to 'belong' is subsequent to the distortion of his Arabic name, signaling an overlap of language, culture, and identity. The convergence of these three concepts is not without complications, as Muñoz-Calvo

and Gómez stress that '[i]dentities and their linguistic reflexes are the result of a multiplicity of choices, many of which do not "travel well" across language borders' (2010, p. 76). In the context of CSAC, Said's family name seems to initially 'travel well' from its Arabic to newly American pronunciation. However, the cultural part is what gets trapped in the rift between Said and the rest of the children as every morning when he stepped on the bus he would be faced with 'the colored T-shirts, striped socks, and loafers they all wore,' which caused him a feeling of 'seething panic' as he was in a 'primly correct grey shorts, dress white shirt, and conventionally European lace-ups.' Once in class, having noticed his otherness by means of his attire, he would settle his 'inner consternation into an efficient, albeit provisional, identity, that of bright, yet often wayward, pupil' (*Out*, p. 81).

Said's struggle to assert his identity through academic success was paradoxically undermined by the very linguistic and cultural erasure demanded by the American educational system—where excellence required suppressing the Arabic language and name that anchored his sense of self:

> having pretended that "Sigheed" was an American name, I had some of my worst moments in Arabic class. Somehow I had to conceal my perfect command of what was my mother tongue in order to fit in better with the inane formulas given out to American youngsters for what passed for spoken (but was really kitchen) Arabic. (*Out*, p. 82)

This effort to cling to an American identity and belong in the group was countered openly by one of the teachers when she described to the class an amusement ride she had experienced called 'saida,' emphasizing and repeating the word while addressing him particularly (*Out*, p. 83). This incident highlights the tension between Said's desire to assimilate and the external forces that continually reminded him of his difference. The teacher's deliberate emphasis on 'saida' served as a stark reminder of his Arab identity, which he was trying to suppress in favour of an American one. In the context of the Cairo School for American Children (CSAC), the English language assumes a primary role in accommodating and expressing the self. This is mainly due to its relatability and relative seamlessness within the linguistic environment. English, being the dominant language at the school, provided a means for Said to fit in and communicate effectively

with his peers and teachers. It represented a bridge to the American culture he was trying to adopt. Arabic, by contrast, functioned as an impeding mode of self-expression. The use of Arabic was limited and often associated with his home life and cultural heritage, which he felt compelled to distance himself from in the school environment. This linguistic dichotomy created a significant barrier for Said, as his mastery of Arabic was purposely suppressed, denying him the full expression of his identity. The downside of this assumed Americanness is that it necessarily affected Said's performance in school, especially in the Arabic class. His struggle with the language was not just academic but also deeply personal, as it symbolized the suppression of a crucial part of his identity. The teacher's emphasis that 'saida' is pronounced with an Arabic phonological articulation further alienates him, reinforcing his sense of being an outsider. It underscores the persistent reminders of his otherness, despite his efforts to assimilate. His out-of-placeness in CSAC was thus sealed, as he was caught between two worlds, fully belonging to neither. He later declares that he 'came to detest this identity,' an identity he had to stick with for that time as he 'had no alternative for it' (*Out*, p. 87). It was an identity that he adopted out of necessity, to navigate the social and cultural landscape of the school, but one that never truly resonated with him. The lack of alternatives left him feeling trapped in a role that was both uncomfortable and inauthentic.

At Victoria College, Said's deliberate manipulation of language marked a shift from passive assimilation to active resistance, exposing how institutional monolingualism reinforced colonial hierarchies while ironically relying on the linguistic adaptability of its 'native' students. The strategic employment of language in Said's narrative takes a more confrontational approach in the next phase of his studies. Aged fourteen, he 'became "Said" exclusively, [his] first name either unknown or shortened to "E"' (*Out*, p. 179). The VC was entirely English, except for the teachers of Arabic and French, although 'not a single English student was enrolled' (*Out*, p. 180). Said remembers how the pamphlet entitled The School Handbook disallowed the use of any languages other than English (*Out*, p. 184). This galvanized a sense of collective defiance in the attending students:

> So Arabic became our haven, a criminalized discourse where we took refuge from the world of masters and complicit prefects and anglicized older boys who lorded

> it over us as enforcers of the hierarchy and its rules. Because of rule 1 we spoke more, rather than less, Arabic, as an act of defiance against what seemed then, and seems even more so now, an arbitrary, ludicrously gratuitous symbol of their power. What I had formerly hidden at CSAC became a proud insurrectionary gesture, the power to speak Arabic and not be caught. (*Out*, p. 184)

The imposition of English, although previously adopted by choice in the Cairo School for American Children (CSAC), results in an act of resistance reflected in the use of Arabic in the middle of an exclusively English institution. This imposition is not merely about language but also about the cultural and political dominance that English represents. Because the rules are perceived as an extension of colonial power and authority, Arabic becomes a haven for a sense of belonging to the same group, unified by an act of defiance. The use of Arabic in this context is a powerful statement against the colonial structures that seek to suppress indigenous identities and languages. Crossing from English to Arabic entails a shift from an anglicized, mimicking self, to a primarily Arab, resisting one. The linguistic shift is symbolic of a deeper cultural and political resistance. Knowledge of Arabic in the resisting group of students becomes an empowering tool for self-expression in the face of colonial dominance. It allows them to assert their identity and resist the cultural erasure imposed by the colonial education system. Arabic, in this sense, is not just a mode of expression but a means of resistance and a token of resilience. Belonging to, and in, Arabic, is for Said accompanied with an awareness of its discursive association with the colonized, victim, dominated social and political position. This awareness adds a layer of complexity to the act of using Arabic, as it is both a source of empowerment and a reminder of the historical and ongoing oppression faced by the Arab people. More interestingly, bilingualism allows Said and his fellow students at VC to challenge the colonial power from within its institutions. They have access to the institution by means of English and they can disturb its functionality by means of Arabic. This dual linguistic capability enables them to navigate and subvert the colonial system from within. They can engage with the colonial authorities in English while maintaining their cultural identity and resistance through Arabic. This strategic use of language highlights the power of bilingualism as a tool for resistance and empowerment. In this sense, it is far more empowering to be linguistically out of place.

In postcolonial contexts and texts, as Qabaha and Hamamra contend, paying close attention to language equips the reader with the ability to 'understand the ways in which postcolonial authors represent cultural loss and hybridity' (2022, p. 399). The examination of language encompasses not only what language is in use but also how it is used. This involves a detailed analysis of the linguistic choices made by the authors and the socio-political implications of these choices. Moreover, readers must be vigilant not to overlook textual attitudes and narrative reactions to language use itself. In other words, to fully grasp the functionality of language in the life of the author and their sociocultural environment, it is essential to identify narrative instances where language becomes the subject matter rather than merely a means of communicating ideas or representing events. In various instances in *Out of Place* Said interrupts the flow of the narrative to focus on the language being used, whether Arabic or English, and the implications of word choice. For example, the fact that the School Handbook turns the students into "natives"' (*Out*, p. 184) gestures towards the ways in which language can be used as a tool of colonial power, transforming the identity of the students through the imposition of a colonial narrative. Said later describes on the same page how Arabic became a 'haven' and a means of resisting and mocking what was perceived as an extension of colonial rule. This dual role of language—as both a tool of oppression and a means of resistance—illustrates the complex dynamics at play in the postcolonial context of Cairo. On a related note, towards the end of the 1940s, Said and his family, along with others of similar lifestyle and background, were reclassified in the Cairo consciousness and common parlance from the category of 'Shawam,' designating Levantine people, to 'khawagat,' a term reserved as a 'respectful title for foreigners which, as used by Muslim Egyptians, has always carried a tinge of hostility' (*Out*, p. 195). This shift in terminology reflects broader social and political changes. By thus shifting the focus of the narrative to the use of language, Arabic and English are 'translated to the reader as an indication of a statement or a position rather than a practice taken for granted' (Embabi, 2017, p. 161). This approach allows readers to see language not just as a neutral medium but as a site of struggle and negotiation, where meanings are contested and identities are constructed and deconstructed.

Code-switching is another feature that stands out in the makeup of the text in *Out of Place*. Said inserts words in the Palestinian dialect to report his mother's speech as he remembers it from the early years of childhood. Words such as '*tislamli*' and '*mish 'arfshubiddi 'amal?*' are left untranslated. As a textual bridging of time and space, these terms, in Palestinian dialect, allow a return to the intimacy of the moments he spent with his mother. Guarding the words in their original language aims to preserve this intimacy from the semantic as well as cultural loss inherent in the process of translation. Moreover, this move can be explained as an endeavour to recuperate the memory in its literality, rather than the meaning of the words. It also imparts a sense of personal as well as ethnic belonging, as he does not give access to non-Arabic speakers to these expressions, unlike words such as '*Shawam*' or '*Khawagat*.' Qabaha and Hamamra assert that 'Indeed, Said feels nostalgic for these expressions and for his intimate connection with his mother who links him to his mother tongue, Arabic, which is suppressed by the dominant language, English' (2022, p. 401). English, being the language of the educational institutions Said attended, becomes reflexive of the 'Edward' self meticulously constructed by his parents and supervised by his English teachers. Arabic, on the other hand, is the language of the suppressed self, 'Said' (Qabaha and Hamamra, 2022). While there might be longing for moments of harmony in the author's relationship with his mother, it is not clear that the text strives to render an emotionally charged, nostalgically idealised reconstruction of Said's experience in the Middle East. Rather, reading the text, one is surprised at the noticeable repression of emotional reactions over the Palestinian cause given what the author came to represent in his later career. In addition to the personal aspect of code-switching, it entails an identitarian statement that goes in two directions. On the one hand, Said establishes his identity with an Arab readership by granting them exclusive access to his mother's speech. In the process, he asserts his Palestinian identity and reserves authority on his text, written in the language of the other. On the other hand, he reaffirms his out-of-placeness by these frequent crossings from one language, and culture, to its counterpart. Qabaha & Hamamra read this as Said's desire 'to show that his competency with linguistic variations can prove his sense of being both an insider and outsider in the Levant' and realisation that 'linguistic multiplicity could mark a rift in one's identity that mirrors physical displacement.' (2020, p. 404) Given that Said's life experience, and his family's, has been largely

marked by displacements, linguistic and otherwise, code-switching in his memoir is a symptom of the deficiency of monolingualism to effectively represent human experience, especially in bilingual contexts. In such cases, the author resorts to more than one language to render an adequate reconstruction of his experience (Appel and Muysken, 1987).

In the preface, Said declares that '*Out of Place* is a record of an essentially lost or forgotten world' (*Out*, p. xiii). As he tries to reconstruct in words what has been lost forever, the insertion of Arabic words creates disruptive spaces throughout the fabric of the narrative. The 'Said' self and memories are therefore accommodated in these code-switched snippets in the middle of a life-narrative written in the language of 'Edward,' the other. In other words, Said fashions spaces to belong in the world of his own text marked by the way he associates Arabic with his belonging to the intimate world of his mother in Palestine, and later Cairo, as he imparts, 'there was always the feeling that what I missed with my American contemporaries was other languages, Arabic mainly' (*Out*, p. 233). Interestingly, *Out of Place* demonstrates a sense of belonging that is not fundamentally nostalgic but rather consistently ambivalent. In other terms, while Said expresses his longing for his mother and homeland through Arabic, he is aware of the pitfalls of these attachments. For instance, he articulates his ambivalence to be 'secure' in his mother's praise of his brilliance and musicality (*Out*, p. 45). Similarly, being in mastery of both Arabic and English without chauvinistic attachments is what empowers Said's narrative as well as his earlier intellectual career. For example, Arabic is his language of choice as long as it provides a means to challenge authoritarian power in VC. English, on the other hand, is empowering in its access to better educational institutions in early 20th century Cairo, American universities, and as a language of worldwide publishing potential. This dual linguistic capability allows Said to navigate different cultural and intellectual landscapes, enriching his narrative with a contrapuntal perspective. Said's nuanced linguistic identity, thus, 'turns out to be a marker of self-conscious desire to confront his complex and diasporic selfhood' (Qabaha and Hamamra, 2022, p. 404) rather than a means for passive nostalgic reminiscing. This self-conscious desire is evident in the way Said uses language to explore and articulate his experiences of displacement and ephemeral instances of belonging. By weaving Arabic and English into his narrative, he creates a textual space that mirrors his own hybrid identity, challenging the reader to engage with the complexities

of his cultural and linguistic heritage. Moreover, by inserting Arabic words and phrases into an English-language narrative, he disrupts the colonial linguistic hierarchy and asserts the validity and richness of his native language.

The text reflects Said's perception of his family as being out of place in various locations such as Palestine, Cairo, Lebanon, and the United States, essentially wherever they reside. This sense of displacement is not just geographical but also deeply personal and familial. Said experiences a dual-layered sense of (un)placement: he is geographically out of place, and he also feels a profound sense of not belonging within his own family. This internal conflict is characterized by his struggle to 'fit in' amidst the authoritarian control exerted by his parents and teachers, contrasted with his own rebellious nature that lies just beneath the surface. The narrative technique of code-switching, where the text flows in English for extended passages and is then abruptly interrupted by Arabic words, serves multiple purposes. It not only showcases Said's linguistic proficiency and his ability to navigate different languages, which grants him a dual status of both 'insider and outsider in the Levant,' but it also highlights the potential for 'linguistic multiplicity to signify a fracture in one's identity.' This fracture narrates the story of physical displacement (Qabaha and Hamamra, 2022, p. 404). From the perspective of the reading process, these code-switched interruptions do more than just mirror the existence of multiple geographical territories in the author's life. They create a textual simulation of the experience of successive displacements. In simpler terms, just as the reader becomes 'comfortable' with the English text, the sudden appearance of Arabic words disrupts this comfort. This disruption allows the reader to share in the exilic experience through the mechanism of code-switching. Thus, *Out of Place* offers an account that is interspersed with multiple locations and a reading experience that reflects their socio-cultural distinctness. In this way, Said successfully integrates his lived experiences with his critical work. The outcome is an exilic life narrative that is emblematic of a 'life led outside habitual order.' The language used is 'nomadic, decentred, [and] contrapuntal,' such that just as the reader becomes accustomed to it, its unsettling force re-emerges (*Reflections*, 2001, p. 192).

In his memoir, Said reveals the significant role cultural translation plays in establishing affiliation as a means of constructing and representing identity, despite the absence of a sense of 'rootedness to a particular location or place' (Embabi, 2017, p. 154). Said's lack of an immediate relationship with England or the United States is supplemented by his educational years at GPS, CSAC, VC, and American universities. In most of these early institutions, the Arab components of his life narrative had to be suppressed to attain a functional level of belonging. On a personal level, his immersion in English literature and European classical music provided him with a range of exemplary figures and role models, all from the West. This range extended to include intellectual figures in US universities, resulting in a cultural and intellectual 'bibliography' dominated by Western names and titles. Beyond the educational and academic world, cultural translation serves a perceptive function in Said's life. For instance, translating the term 'Nakba' to 'Exodus,' 'expulsion,' or 'mass migration' strips the word of its cultural specificity and historical significance to the Palestinian populace. While 'Exodus' or 'mass migration' are experiences that could happen to any people (such as the Jews or the Armenians), 'Nakba' is a term reserved exclusively for the Palestinian 1948 expulsion. Thus, cultural translation can be used as an interpretative tool to understand Said's relatively detached attitude when approaching emotionally charged matters in the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and return to the homeland. This detachment is not indicative of a lack of empathy but rather a strategic use of his bilingual and bicultural identity to navigate the complex political and cultural landscapes of his upbringing. Said's ability to move between languages and cultures allowed him to construct a multifaceted identity that could engage with both Western and Arab intellectual traditions. This duality enabled him to critique Western imperialism while also addressing issues within Arab societies. His strategic use of cultural translation highlights the fluidity of identity and the potential for cross-cultural understanding and dialogue, matters which characterised his intellectual career.

One aspect in *Out of Place* that cannot be missed by readers is the overwhelming multiplicity of departures and arrivals which punctuate Said's life and that of his family. Said is acutely conscious of this defining characteristic of his memoir, as he explicitly states that in addition to the identitarian implications of his bilingualism, the 'geography – especially in the

displaced form of departures, arrivals, farewells, exile, nostalgia, homesickness, belonging, and travel itself' dominates his reminiscences of the early years of his life (*Out*, p. xvi). This geographical displacement is not merely a backdrop but a central theme that shapes his narrative and identity. Asmaa Elshikh astutely observes how Said is 'conscious about the authority of "place" in shaping his character.' This consciousness is evident in the choices he makes when asked about his name, nationality, or religion. Said is aware that the 'alternatives' of the answers he provides might be context-dependent, such that one response 'might work, say in school, but not in church or on the street with [his] friends' (Elshikh, 2018, p. 6). This situational adaptability underscores the fluidity and complexity of his identity, which is constantly negotiated in different social contexts. Institutions such as GPS, CSAC, and VC become, therefore, sites of identity politics where the adoption of names (Said or Sigheed, Edward or Ed) and the prioritization of languages (Arabic or English) serve as markers of power, authority, and resistance. These educational settings are not just places of learning but arenas where Said's identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed. The choices he makes in these contexts reflect broader socio-political dynamics and the pressures to conform to dominant cultural norms. On the other hand, Said's reflection on his early years in the Arab world as a narrative of successive dislocations and relocations provides a route to reading his memoir as a chronicle of fragmented experiences. These experiences display traces of only partial and temporary belonging to any specific geography. This sense of impermanence and transience is a recurring motif in his memoir, highlighting the instability and fluidity of his identity. To further elucidate this point, I will first discuss Said's reminiscences of four geographical locations: Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon, and the United States. Each of these locations represents a distinct phase in his life, characterized by unique challenges and experiences that contribute to the mosaic of his identity.

Said's describes his 'early memories of Palestine itself' as 'casual.' He remembers taking it 'for granted' as the country he was from, 'where family and friends existed (it seems so retrospectively) with unreflective ease' (*Out*, pp. 20-21). Said acknowledges his obliviousness, in his early years, to the complexities of the position of Palestine in the middle of contestant religious, historical, and political narratives, and its centrality to different populations as the imagined homeland. He notices how 'curiously unremarkable' his memories of the place are

'considering [his] profound later immersion in Palestinian affairs' (*Out*, p. 20). Said cannot seem to remember Palestine without referring to a critical distance which he acquired throughout his political activist career. Even the memories of Palestine themselves are put into perspective in contrast to his later involvement in the politics of the region. A direct emotional attachment to the land as a homeland, or an anchor for identity, is disrupted by the insertion of family and friends in the mediation of his memories of Palestine. This place, therefore, is more significant for Said 'the author' (aware of the political and historical tension surrounding it) than it is to Said 'the narrator' of childhood memories. This passage shifts the narrative from a passive recalling of events and feelings to a critical observation of the almost marginality of place in the pre-Nakba context of Palestinian history. The idea of belonging to a land which essentially defines one's identity and perception of oneself and the world is thus not only challenged by Said but also positioned under historical scrutiny. This move, on the one hand, can be considered as an intent, retrospective solidification of his later views on identity and his celebration of exile. On the other hand, it communicates to the reader Said's sense of unbelonging to Palestine, which is at variance with narratives, political or personal, homogenizing the Palestinian experience of alienation. The absence of a feeling of belonging to Palestine is, in this sense, critically empowering and intellectually important. The nostalgically idealizing descriptions of Palestine and its early years is circumvented by social relationships, such as 'family and friends' but especially Said's relationship with his mother. He makes the association of warmth and belonging through the figure of his mother and her Arabic words. Palestine is a place of belonging as long as it linked to his mother and the Arabic language. Paradoxically, in the very attempt to dissociate emotionally from the land an affect of belonging is invoked. That is, the figure of the mother not only mediates the memory of Palestine but the two actually converge resulting in an emotive bond, albeit indirect.

Said's ambivalent relationship to Cairo illustrates how spatial stability can mask deeper cultural alienation, as the city's functional role in his family's life ultimately reinforced their persistent sense of displacement and the erosion of Palestinian identitarian ties. As the family spent more time in Cairo, 'Palestine acquired a languid, almost dreamlike, aspect' for Said (*Out*, p. 21). The spatiotemporal distance from the lived experience of Palestine, undermined the

identitarian links by means of the border crossing disruption. Compared to other locations, 'it was always Cairo to which [Said] accorded stability' (*Out*, p. 235). Although Wadie was originally from Palestine and Hilda from Lebanon, Cairo provided the family with a sense of belonging hinged on their economic stability and their children's educational pursuits. For Said, it was the routinization of the Cairo space that accorded it this sense, an aspect he describes as lacking in Palestine. As he spent time in Palestine, 'although I sensed the absence of closely organized space and time that made up my life in Cairo,' he says, 'I could not completely enjoy the relative freedom from it that I had in Jerusalem.' What prevents Said from belonging in Jerusalem is not only its unrelatability, but rather a fear of emotional commitment to an experience that he knew was 'transient' (*Out*, pp. 21-22). This further juxtaposes the figure of his mother and the land of Palestine in the uncertainties they instilled in him. In his personal experience of belonging to his mother, Said shares his ambivalence in regard to feeling 'secure' in her good opinion of him because of how unpredictable her feelings were (*Out*, p. 45). Cairo did fashion a stable life for the family in the 1940s, but it was one disrupted by political developments across Egypt and also contradicted by the general social and cultural makeup of the Egyptian population. Said's family was a Christian, American, Arab, Palestinian in the middle of a country (and region), defined mainly by Islam, Arabism, and sometimes anti-Levantine sentiment. In other words, a place that did not host social and political characteristics that would facilitate his belonging. This gave Cairo a primarily functional place in the family's life. This functional role of Cairo is underscored by the fact that, despite having spent many years in the city, Said's parents had not fully integrated into Cairo society by the time he left for the United States in 1951 (*Out*, p. 95). This lack of integration speaks to the persistent sense of being 'out of place' that characterized their existence in Cairo. The city, while providing a semblance of stability, remained a transient and somewhat alien environment for the family, reflecting the broader theme of displacement and uprootedness that permeates the memoir.

After 1943, the Said family started to spend every summer in [the] 'dreary Lebanese mountain village [Dhour el Shweir], a place which his father 'seemed more attached to than any other place on earth' (*Out*, p. 28). In the context of Dhour, there is a noticeable contrast between the way Said describes his father's attitude and the way he relates to the place himself. Said

imparts his father's attachment to the place itself, although he later explains that the reason for this attachment is that Dhour symbolised being far away from his business and its pressure back in Cairo. When it comes to his perspective, he first describes the place as 'dreary.' Second, when later in the narrative, he expresses his longing for Dhour, it is only due to his affections for Eva, a woman he meets there. Said is keen in his narrative to avoid such essentialising phrases as 'being attached to the land.' This might reflect another slipping into his intellectual perspective in a critical retrospect which overtakes his autobiographical account every now and then. Interestingly, it might be explained through the process of translation prevalent across his text. Translating experiences that he had in the past, the Middle East, and potentially in Arabic onto the pages of the book in the language of his education and critical work may well be an influential interpretative lens, rather than a mere replication of those linguistically and spatiotemporally distant experiences. Said himself is admittedly aware of this possible pitfall as he observes in the preface that 'more interesting for [him] as an author was the sense [he] had of trying always to translate experiences that [he] had not only in a remote environment but also in a different language' (*Out*, p. xv). That is, while trying to produce a narrative of a life he experienced firsthand in Arabic, the language of Palestine, Egypt, and Lebanon he reexperiences his childhood in the English language of his intellectual career up to the point of writing.

Said's early experiences of exile and estrangement in the United States underscore how displacement and maternal connection became central to his identity formation, revealing that belonging for Said was not grounded in geography but in emotionally contingent relationships shaped by constant movement. Said describes his first years in the United States as 'unhappy,' especially in Mount Hermon, which he defines as 'a repressive New England boarding school.' This being the state of affairs, his first holiday back from the US in the 'summer of 1952 was critically important, mainly because [he] could spend time with [his mother]' (*Out*, p. 56). Because Said is out of place, and keen to make it known that he is, he cannot replace the unhappiness of Mount Hermon with a better state in Cairo or Lebanon. He rather circumscribes the geographical context by referring to the relationship with his mother. Said's mother herself is out of place as her life is characterized by a series of displacements. This way, belonging to his mother does not imply belonging to a particular geographical area. Arrivals in different places are frequently

marked by the beginning of a new phase in the life of Said and, sometimes, his family. For instance, arriving in Cairo after spending time in Ramallah marks the beginning of 'a process of change' in his life in which he was encouraged by his 'mother in particular to believe that a happier, less problematic period had ended' (*Out*, p. 27). Said again links his self-construction directly with the experience of displacement when he declares that upon arriving in America, he decided to assume an attitude of simplicity, transparency, and reservedness. He resolved to speak 'only sparingly' of his 'family or origins.' Being able to shift consciously from one personality to the other is considered by Said as a marker of the 'split between 'Edward, […the] 'public, outer self, and the loose, irresponsible fantasy-ridden churning metamorphoses of [his] private, inner life' (*Out*, p. 137). The episodes of the relationship between the two facets of his identity are thus signposted by movement from one place to another.

This centrality of place in the development of Said resonates with Shehadeh's perception of his identity in a state of constant dialogue with the Palestinian landscape. However, Said's emphasis of this role comes in the form of its own negation. The paradox of *Out of Place* is that it underplays the significance of place in the construction of identity by showing how a lack of a geographical point of reference fashions a certain type of identity. Said's narrative emphasizes the authority of place in the very attempt to undermine it. By highlighting the fluidity and transience of his experiences, Said demonstrates that identity is not fixed or tied to a specific location. Instead, it is shaped by the continuous process of movement, adaptation, and negotiation. This dynamic and multifaceted approach to identity challenges traditional notions of belonging and rootedness, offering a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which individuals construct their sense of self in a context of constant movement across geopolitical boundaries. At the same time, his perception of identity as fragmented implies detachment from *one* place but dependence on multiple places, or locations. That is, to adopt a de-territorialized notion of identity the text falls into a multiply territorialized one. While Shehadeh employs his narratives to unite the levant as it once used to be, Said seems to use his to assert its fragmentation. In other words, the sense of fragmentation that Said feels when addressing his identity attests to the fragmentation of the landscape of his upbringing. Shehadeh' *Palestinian Walks* and Said's *Out of Place* can be read as mirroring each other based on how the author

externalizes his identity on the motive of his writing. As mentioned earlier, Shehadeh was initially prompted to textualize his walks when he learned of the settlement plans and their potentially radical alterations of the landscape. The possibility of taking walks dictates the possibility of their subsequent narrativization, and therefore the space to articulate his life experiences. In this sense, Shehadeh's autobiography is also a biography of the landscape (*Walks*, p. 1). Similarly, Said's memoir, as a process of gathering the fragments of his early life experiences, was punctuated by the highs and lows of his health while undergoing chemotherapy. That is, the disease is an acting agent in the construction of his identity. Said's memoir is bound with the potentiality of departure in every pause he took from the writing process. *Out of Place*, therefore, presents Said's life as a continuity of successive departures even as it came to be. In other words, while the *story in the book* explains how the exilic intellectual was formed, the *story of the book* asserts that his situation is not prone to change, as his very articulation of identity is haunted by his final departure.

Said describes in "Reflections on Exile" that 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' (2001, p. 192). In the US, Said experienced something similar to the 'Saida' incident, which solidified his outsider's status in the Cairo School for American Children by means of his Arab family name. On graduation day in Mount Hermon, the American boarding school, he was not appointed salutatorian despite alternating between first and second in class all term time. The person appointed instead never ranked higher than sixth. Said regrets that in contrast to Fisher, who was given the position, 'I was not a leader, nor a good citizen, nor pious, nor just all-round acceptable. I realized I was to remain the outsider, no matter what I did' (*Out*, pp. 247-248). Thus, whenever Said feels a sense of settling in somewhere, the forces of exile 'erupt anew' to remind him of his outsider's status. By the end of the graduation ceremony, he expresses his anxiety to 'get back to Cairo and home.' As he had his 'fill of motels and dormitories […] the desire to return to the Cairo [he] had left two years ago was overwhelmingly powerful' (*Out*, p. 249). So, when Said feels as an outcast in the United States, he sees Cairo as the refuge. This does not mean he considers Cairo as his 'home' in the sense of defining his being. What takes place when Said is confronted with his out-of-placeness is a move from one alienating location

to another. His true abode is exile itself, the act of movement which allows him to long for the place he leaves behind and dissociate from the one he arrives in. Because the memoir is a record of a lost world that cannot be recuperated in its literal sense, nor can it be relived to correct its ills, Said attempts a positive reading of his upbringing by means of his successful academic career. In this, not only does he redeem his childhood as a worthwhile set of experiences but also fashions a redemptive interpretation of his parents' efforts to pave his way to a successful future. This reinterpretation allows him to find value and meaning in the dislocations and challenges he faced, framing them as integral parts of his journey towards intellectual and personal growth.

Said acknowledges the significance of 1948 in Palestinian history, yet his memoir does not emphasize the Nakba as a primary factor in his displacement. One suggested reason for this is his effort to maintain a personal, rather than political, narrative. Nonetheless, the intertwining of personal, historical, and political elements seems unavoidable in his story. Hosam Aboul-Ela argues that *Out of Place* distinguishes itself from the American confessional memoirs of the 1990s by linking personal experiences with geopolitics and a critical stance on American foreign policy (2006, p. 24). As a US citizen and a notable academic figure, particularly after his 1978 work *Orientalism*, Said diverges from mainstream politics to advocate for Middle Eastern issues against US intervention. This blend of personal and political is evident in a conversation with his mother, who advises him to focus on his literary career and avoid politics, underscoring the tension between his personal aspirations and the broader political context in which he is situated. The illness and subsequent death of Said's father, Wadie, are interpreted against the backdrop of political changes in the Middle East. Wadie's illness served as an early indication of both men's mortality and symbolized the fragility of the Middle Eastern home they had established, with connections to Cairo, Dhour, and Palestine (*Out*, p. 261), thus intertwining this personal loss with the political instability of the region. Aboul-Ela interprets Said's transition from a British school in Cairo (GSC) to an American one (CSAC) after World War II as a sign of the declining British influence and the rising dominance of the United States in global politics (Aboul-Ela 2006, pp. 25-26). From this perspective, his life story and the story of Middle East politics are interwoven to a point that the narrative of the personal becomes a story of the transition of authority from one superpower to another, from Britain to the US. However, the same relationship between the

personal and the political in Said's case could be the result of the nature of autobiography. That is, the retrospective process that produces the past from the perspective of the present constructs the life of Said along lines of major political changes in the region, therefore shedding light on how he remembers his childhood through the critical lens of the exilic intellectual behind the book. Said's memoir, therefore, seems to be posited in dialogue with his critical work. His experiences of displacement, loss, and identity formation are deeply embedded within the geopolitical context of the Middle East. This intertwining of personal and political narratives allows Said to critique Western imperialism and advocate for Middle Eastern issues, while also providing a deeply personal account of his own life.

Another possible reason for the scarce mention of the Nakba in the core of *Out of Place* is the financial status of Said's family during the 1940s. Because the family remained within the circles of the Palestinian elite, they were able to maintain a level of financial stability both inside and outside Palestine. This stability shielded them from the severe economic hardships that many other Palestinians faced. Consequently, Said could pursue a better educational path than those who ended up in refugee camps. He joined prestigious Western circles at Ivy League schools and later moved into significant political roles, including working for the PLO and the UN. According to Asaad Al-Saleh, this context explains why 'Said's autobiography might not show displacement in its full, painful weight and psychological effect' (Al-Saleh, 2011, p. 81). In his reading of the memoir, Al-Saleh argues that the text 'suggests that Said grew up to be the man his father wanted him to be, doing well with what was available instead of lamenting the lost, unavailable homeland' (2011, p. 83). Building on this insightful remark, one can link the prototypical exilic intellectual celebrated by Said to his life narrative encapsulated in the memoir. Despite his anti-authoritarian character, which manifested early as a critical questioning of his father's rules and dictates, his career serves as an unspoken testament to his father's wisdom. His forward-looking stance is indeed manifest in the very production of the memoir while fighting a terminal disease. However, discarding the past is not always the mantra of a profound philosophy. Repressing the past, as Wadie does when asked about the origin of his name or his past experience, can be interpreted as symptomatic of trauma. Wadie's silence on his past resonates with Karmi's attempt to construct an English identity by means of cultural affiliation and a deliberate discarding of her

Palestinian background. She declares that by the time she saw the family house in London she had 'already closed off the Palestine of my childhood into a private memory place where it would always remain magically frozen in time' (*Fatima*, p. 174). Karmi, that is, 'enfolds memories [...] in an attempt to re-mould her identity, so as to fit in' (Gregory Fox, 2024, p. 142). While her repression of Palestine dissolves towards the beginning of Part Three of *In Search of Fatima*, Wadie seems to have carried his past with him to the grave. It is Said himself who faces the consequences of this silence as he struggles throughout his educational career to fit in the successive environments he inhabits.

The narrative offers a redemptive portrayal of Said's father through his pivotal role in shaping his son's intellectual trajectory. This redemptive aspect is crucial as it recontextualizes Said's upbringing, highlighting the positive influence of his father and the stability afforded by their financial status. Contrary to Al-Saleh's interpretation of the Nakba's absence from the central themes of Said's life narrative, I propose that the memoir's deviation from the events of 1948 is primarily driven by a deliberate intention to present Said in a different light from his critical engagements. In essence, *Out of Place* competes with Said's renowned works such as *Orientalism* and *The Question of Palestine*, which are predominantly centred on political critique and the historical context of the Middle East, particularly Western imperialism and the Palestinian plight. The memoir, however, aims to reintroduce Said to the public as a more nuanced individual. By concentrating on his personal experiences and the intricacies of his identity formation, Said provides a more intimate and multifaceted self-portrait. This approach enables readers to perceive beyond his public persona as a distinguished intellectual and political advocate, uncovering the personal struggles and experiences that shaped his worldview. But, like Karmi and Shehadeh, Said narrates from a predetermined postcolonial position. The fact that so intimate a narrative makes a political intervention by default demonstrates that the political aspect of autobiography is highly intensified in the Palestinian context. While Karmi's return to Palestine in search of political relevance and personal fulfilment espouses the political with the personal, Said's return to his memories deploys the political lens he developed in academia to re-read the specifics of the personal sphere of his upbringing.

Said's *Out of Place* embodies the intrinsically political nature of Palestinian autobiography, driven not by personal recollection alone but by an ethical imperative to narrate exile, memorialize identity, and resist erasure through literary testimony shaped by both illness and impending mortality. Like Karmi and Shehadeh, Said seems to be driven to write his own memoir out of an underlying commitment to leave a trace of his existence as a Palestinian exile. Palestinian autobiography is primarily driven by a perceived obligation to narrate, rather than a mere desire to do so. This makes the genre in the Palestinian case inevitably political. By political I do not refer only to the politics of identity as a construct in continuous negotiation between the individual and the collective sociocultural body they partake in. I refer, in addition, to the implication of the literary production that calls itself memoir, autobiography, or life-writing in general on the bigger political discourse surrounding the Palestinian cause. Said started his leukaemia treatment in March 1994 and began work on *Out of Place* in May of the same year. The book was written during intermittent phases of the illness. Said relates that as he 'grew weaker,' he was aware that the 'book was [his] way of constructing something in prose while in [his] physical and emotional life [he] grappled with anxieties and pains of degeneration' (*Out*, p. 216). The writing process became a welcome distraction and escape from the ordeals of daily life as well as a healing mechanism in itself. The healing potential in Said's case lies in fulfilling 'his mission to narrate' his early life and in the 'sense of commemorating and being able to leave an account of those remote times and places, facing loss and forgetting' (Luca, 2006, p. 140). Interestingly, the narrative in *Out of Place* presents a life, of an individual and a family, marked chiefly by successive departures and arrivals in different lands and cultural environments. As if to solidify the exilic status of Said, even the writing of his memoir was galvanized by an imminent final departure, death. This awareness of mortality adds a poignant layer to his reflections, imbuing his narrative with a sense of urgency and introspection. Unlike other Palestinian writers such as Karmi, who reads her life through the lens of the Nakba, or Shehadeh, who views his experiences through the Palestinian landscape, Said's memoir follows an inverse relationship with his political writing.

While his politically and culturally engaged works like *Orientalism* and *The Question of Palestine* are deeply intertwined with historical and geopolitical analysis, his memoir *Out of Place*

attempts to delineate a clear boundary between the personal/domestic and the intellectual/political. This distinction is not merely a structural choice but a deliberate effort to present a more nuanced and multifaceted portrayal of his identity. Said's memoir is an exploration of his personal experiences, family dynamics, and the intimate aspects of his life that are often overshadowed by his public persona as a prominent intellectual and political advocate. By focusing on the personal, Said provides readers with a deeper understanding of the formative experiences that shaped his worldview. This approach allows him to humanize his narrative, offering insights into the emotional and psychological dimensions of his identity. The act of writing his memoir in the face of his impending death underscores the theme of exile and displacement that permeates his life. It is as if the finality of death serves as the ultimate departure, reinforcing the transient and unsettled nature of his existence. This existential reflection is a stark contrast to the more analytical and critical tone of his political writings, highlighting the duality of his identity as both a private individual and a public intellectual. By distinguishing between the personal and the political, Said challenges the conventional boundaries of autobiography and political discourse. *Out of Place* demonstrates that the personal is inherently political, and that the intimate details of one's life are deeply connected to broader historical and geopolitical contexts.

For Said, celebrating detachment does not entail heedlessness to the suffering of homeless people or 'forgetfulness of the place of origin' (Qabaha, 2022, p. 9). Rather, detachment is a strategic stance that allows him to assess and judge the plight of the Palestinians from the vantage point of an outsider whose perceptual lens remains unblurred by the effects of nationalism. This nuanced understanding of detachment is crucial in comprehending Said's approach to his identity and his advocacy for Palestinian issues. Said's detachment is not a form of indifference but a deliberate effort to maintain a critical perspective. By positioning himself as an outsider, he can engage with the Palestinian cause without being overwhelmed by the emotional and ideological pressures that often accompany nationalist sentiments. This detachment enables him to offer a more objective and balanced critique of both Western imperialism and the internal dynamics within Palestinian society. This approach is evident in the fact that Said does not deflect the topic of Palestine. On the contrary, he is deeply engaged with

it, expressing his disappointment at the forced silence his parents maintained on the topic in an 'attempt to detach him from Palestine.' This silence was an effort to protect him from the political turmoil and to integrate him into a more stable and secure environment. However, this attempt at detachment could only be countered by Said estranging himself from 'Edward,' the self that had been imposed on him by his family (Qabaha, 2022, p. 11). For instance, he reflects:

> 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. As a boy of twelve and a half in Cairo, I often saw the sadness and destitution in the faces and lives of people I had formerly known as ordinary middle-class people in Palestine, but I couldn't really comprehend the tragedy that had befallen them nor could I piece together all the different narrative fragments to understand what had really happened in Palestine. (*Out*, p. 114)

Said articulates the delayed experience of the Palestinian Nakba. Although he references it in his text, he does not elaborate on its personal dislocating impact. Nevertheless, he alludes to the catastrophic consequences of the Israeli intervention in the region, projecting 'sadness and destitution' onto those he knew were compelled to abandon their homeland. One reason for his apparent detachment from the topic of Palestine is the deliberate suppression of the tragedy by the Palestinian community in Cairo. Said openly laments that they 'seemed to have given up on Palestine as a place, never to be returned to, barely mentioned, missed silently and pathetically' (*Out*, p. 115). Against this backdrop of loss, Wadie articulates a mantra that would become a prominent aspect of Said's career: '"what is past is past and irrevocable; the wise man has enough to do with what is present and to come"' (*Out*, p. 115). The mention of the Nakba in the text serves as an opportunity to underscore his perspective on the history of Palestine, which he addresses extensively in his academic work.

Writing in English about experiences that he had in Arabic is another aspect that suggests the blurring of boundaries between the intellectual and the domestic/private spheres that Said occupies and writes about in his memoir. Most of the experiences that Said talks about in his childhood, whether in Palestine or Cairo, took place in Arabic. English, on the other hand, is the language of his education and later career. To narrate the experiences of his childhood in English means that the act of narration is compounded with a process of translation. If autobiography is

a piece of identity in which the author tells the readers who he is in contrast with who he is perceived to be, then Said's memoir not only constitutes a process of translation but also renders the author's identity as a continuous shift between linguistic as well as cultural subject positions. Languages, in Edwards' terms, can be understood as distinct systems that mirror various aspects of the human experience. While they may differ in complexity at certain times, this does not mean that some languages possess a superior ability to express ideas. In other words, not all language varieties have identical capabilities; instead, social, geographical, and other factors influence which elements are necessary and thus developed (Edwards, 2009, p. 60). Said uses English because of his mastery and superior expressive ability, as well as its international publishing prevalence. Arabic, on the other hand, seems to be preserved for culturally specific notions in his text, which would otherwise lose their specificity if translated. The narrative is therefore a product of the intellectual in the language of his academic work that only spares few Arabic words the distortions of translation. The linguistic choices by Said mirror both the geographical dislocation and the identitarian statement underlying his memoir. For example, when addressing their life in Cairo, he remembers how they were referred to as '*Shawam*' then '*Khawaga*' following the political changes that the whole country was undergoing. The preservation of these terms in their untranslated Arabic form brings the memory closer to the author as it removes the distance affected by the translation process. Additionally, it preserves their affect of belonging to the Levant, in the case of '*Shawam*', and the sense of animosity, in the case of '*Khawaga*.' When he refers to Palestine, on the other hand, he preserves a different set of terms in their original language. To maintain a double sense of intimacy with both his mother and Palestine, Said fashions a space for belonging in the Arabic of his mother in such expressions as '*tislamli*' and '*mish 'arfshubiddi 'amal?*'.

In their reading of *Out of Place*, Qabaha and Hamamra argue that Palestinian writers often blend Arabic words into their English-language stories. This practice, known as code-switching, serves as a powerful tool to preserve their cultural identity and resist the cultural dominance and transformation of their homeland. By integrating Arabic into their English narratives, these authors actively work against the erasure of their heritage and the imposition of a different cultural narrative (2022, p. 397). This linguistic blending is more than just a stylistic choice; it

becomes a deliberate strategy to express and affirm their national identity and sense of belonging. Through code-switching, Palestinian authors can maintain a connection to their roots and assert their cultural presence within a predominantly English-speaking literary world. This approach not only enriches their narratives but also serves as a form of cultural resistance and a declaration of their enduring connection to their land and culture. Said's diverse personal experiences with multiple identities allowed him to challenge rigid and dominant notions of national identity. By drawing on the connection between nation and narrative, Said's writings reflect not only his journey back to his homeland but also his willingness to engage with English culture. This openness to another culture enabled him to convey the Palestinian experience of displacement and exile to a Western audience (2022, p. 398). Classifying Said as belonging to 'what might be called the first wave of Palestinian memoirists writing about displacement and code-switching', Qabaha and Hamamra go on to say that while the memoir, as a genre, offered a platform for sharing personal histories and 'linking the individual experience with collective experience, code-switching allowed the memoirist to express linguistic and cultural filiations' (2022, p. 398). However, they interpret this move by Said as an attempt to romanticise 'the former existence of Palestine before 1948' (2022, p. 399). In response, I argue that, rather than an attempted romanticisation of the pre-Nakba era, what Said does by means of code-switching is predicated on the personal and geopolitical specificities of the context in which these code-switched words are used. He uses it in Cairo to emphasise the political change sweeping the country and redefining his family's status within the Egyptian society, and in Palestine to reaffirm his origins and commitment which his political career demonstrates.

Out of Place attempts to resist home as an anchor for identity. Said is primarily seeking to 'account for the complexity of his identity and its changes' in a language that allows 'political understanding and introspection [to] ultimately replace mere nostalgia' (Porter, 2001, p. 310). The book is therefore a fulfilment of his father's mantra that encourages engaging with the present and planning for the future, rather than lamenting the past. Linking this to his choice of language, it appears that home and belonging are gendered notions for Said. While Arabic remains the language of his mother and the medium through which he remembers her, English is the language of his career through which he produced his academic as well as literary work.

The book, in its linguistic choices, presents Said as a product of his father's close supervision and planning, offering the latter a redemptive narrative. At the same time, with the few Arabic expressions allowed to emerge in the middle of the text, Hilda's subservient role in his American career is underscored. Her role, however, as linked to Arabic, is to maintain Said's bonds with the world of his childhood. In his own style, Said resounds his father's statement that 'the wise man has enough to do with what is present and to come' (*Out*, p. 115). Instead of a defeatist, passive attitude, he states that '[e]xiles, émigrés, refugees, and expatriates uprooted from their lands must make do in new surroundings' (*Reflections,* 2001, p. 9). Exilic life is a 'way of dwelling in space with a constant awareness that one is not at home' (Barbour, 2007, p. 293). The exile lives where he does not belong and belongs where he does not live. Said demonstrates in his memoir, as a farewell gesture, that a narrative of the self out of place is not only possible but, first, necessary for survival, and second, recommended to tackle cultural and political discrepancies between the East and the West. However, his 'allegiance to intellectual ideals and principles that have little to do with geography' does not prevent him from expressing 'the fundamental human need for attachment to a particular place' (Barbour, 2007, p. 297).

What Said provides through his life experience and memoir is a profound image of a displaced Palestinian 'whose autobiography demonstrates the meaning of the self separate from the place, rather than the place as expressive of a presupposed, immediate meaning to him' (Al-Saleh, 2011, p. 85). To devoid place from its symbolic signification is concordant to a flattening of cultural and political specificities. This creates for Said space for creative approaches to the construction of the self. Because he is able to see where 'Edward' came from as opposed to 'Said,' his self-perception is far from a passive positing into one of the subject positions made available a priori by the political or the socio-cultural atmosphere in his place of residence. To transcend place in self-construction is to acquire the ability to examine one's own positions and stances from an opposing outsider's perspective with unsparing criticism. Said's existence between the Arab and Anglo-American cultures influences the process of constant translation within which his self-construction occurs (Embabi, 2017, p. 150). Said's formative years in the Arab world, particularly in Jerusalem and Cairo, were marked by the interplay of different cultural systems. His mother's use of Arabic and his father's insistence on English, reflecting his pride in American

citizenship, created a dynamic environment for Said's identity formation. The family's roots in Jerusalem and their residence in Cairo, combined with Said's Arab heritage and American career prospects, facilitated a bidirectional act of meaning transfer between Edward, the Anglo-American construct shaped by his parents and colonial educational institutions, and Said, the Arab anti-authoritarian subject. This dialectic is evident in cultural elements such as his name and language, which are continually examined within this framework. Said's memoir reflects his father's influence, emphasizing the importance of engaging with the present and future rather than lamenting the past.

Because Said's life has been largely dominated by successive departures and arrivals, geographical as well as cultural, his notion of place is not necessarily one of homogeneity, stability, or reliability. Place, and even culture, are always provisional and temporary for him. He could not enjoy his stays in Jerusalem because he knew they were 'temporary, even transitory' (Out, p. 22) nor could he feel at home in Cairo being labelled as, first, 'Shawam' (Levantine) then 'khawagat' (foreigners). Instead, his perception of normality might be hinging on the very idea of constant movement across boundaries, physical and symbolic. Therefore, it can be argued that the succession of geographical displacements in the formative years of his life preconditioned him with an exilic sense of existence which enabled him, being outside, to return at will to such concepts as 'place, exile, and dispossession' and to analyse 'the historical, cultural and even personal contexts within which these concepts operate' (Al-Saleh, 2011, p. 86). Being out of place does not entail a detachment that is exclusively physical. More importantly, it refers to the state of (un)placement, that is to unshackle himself from the historical, cultural, and political lenses which define a particular geographical territory. Thus, Said, the exilic intellectual, can critique these layers of meaning attached to place by means of the two personalities he assumes alternately. To be an exile, for Said, is to flip the historical pattern of an identity predetermined by place. What his life narrative represents, and calls for, is a self- perception conceived of outside the ideological frames of place. Such a self is best positioned to read the political and historical workings of place. Said takes the personal route to arrive at this conclusion. The dialectic of 'Edward,' a 'false, even ideological, identity,' (*Out*, p. 90) and an 'inner self' (*Out*, p. 137), a 'non-Edward' (*Out*, p. 165) that is capable of resistance, rebellion, and criticality exemplifies how the

(un)placed self can break free from the dictates of a world view influenced by the historical and cultural traces of colonialism in Mandate Palestine and Cairo.

Out of Place presents, through the autobiographical details of the life of the author, how the narrative imparts routes of identification with different spheres and (sometimes) opposing worlds at the same time. As a personal account written by Said, the intellectual, this memoir succeeds in making 'a statement' about his identity as 'belonging both to the Arab world through filiative ties and the Anglo-American tradition through professional and socio-cultural affiliation' (Embabi, 2017, p. 150). Al-Saleh asserts that Said affiliates himself more with the Arab cultural milieu of his birth than he does with the West. His displacement from the middle East to the US is rendered 'vastly' complicated by the joint discrepancy in the cultural scene between the two locations (Al-Saleh, 2011, p. 84) and also by the Western political involvement in the Arab loss of Palestine. However, his identification with the Arab culture might have been influenced by his stay in the US. Said describes how 'when [he] arrived in Cairo after graduation, [he] soon saw that [his] memory of it during [his] exile in the United States as a place of stability was no longer accurate' (*Out*, p. 272). Said, therefore, moves from the United States, where he spent almost all his mature life, still calling it 'exile' to Cairo, supposedly a non-exilic site, a city he 'always liked yet in which [he] never felt [he] belonged' (*Out*, p. 43). Places for Said are only indicative of exile, and 'a sense of affiliation to any place never bothers him' (Elshikh, 2018, p. 8). The book reflects his awareness of unbelonging on all levels, not only as a displaced Palestinian, a Shami in Egypt, a Christian in a Muslim community, and an Arab in America (Elshikh, 2018, p. 7), but also as the 'delinquent Arab to the fading colonial authoritarianism of an English college, and a Palestinian presenting his U.S. passport at checkpoints for ease of passage' (Jilani, 2015, p. 60). What Said did with his memoir is analogous to his views on the critical power of exile. Giving his two selves, 'Edward' and 'non-Edward' narrative space to exist and inform each other mirrors his ability to examine and assess one cultural component of his identity by means of the other. As he states in "Reflections on Exile", when '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'

(*Reflections*, 2001, p. 186). Exile is the process in which Said '*learned* [emphasis added] actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place' (*Out*, p. 295).

The self that Said constructs in *Out of Place* draws heavily on his intellectual work, particularly in its opposition to the dictates of nationalism. Said's identity is not confined by the traditional boundaries of national allegiance. Instead, it is shaped by a broader, more inclusive understanding of culture and belonging. Said's opposition to nationalism is rooted in his belief that rigid national identities can be limiting and exclusionary. He argues that nationalism often imposes a singular narrative on a diverse population, erasing the complexities and multiplicities of individual identities and life experiences. In his memoir, Said resists this homogenizing force by embracing a more fluid and dynamic conception of identity. As he explains:

> Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages. Indeed, the interplay between nationalism and exile is like Hegel's dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and constituting each other. (*Reflections*, 2001, p. 182)

In Said's stance against nationalism, he only finds exile as an alternative. Because he has the tools to construct a self that has always been displaced, or unplaced, he employs the personal history of his upbringing to challenge the necessity of nationalism as a prerequisite sentiment to a Palestinian identity. The multiple geographical locations of his childhood added to his bilingualism make up a Palestinian subject who is unhinged from place and language. That is, Said's account suggests that the continuous crossing of borders does not result in identifying with multiple locations. Rather, it amounts to a loss of the geographical aspect of identity as a whole. By the same token, the continuous self-translation that occurs through linguistic and cultural border crossing does not fashion an identity characterized by the sum of these components. Rather, it constitutes the loss of their identitarian functionality. Being out of place, therefore, refers to being *outside* the places of origin. Additionally, it alludes to *running out of place* which means existing as a subject out of the common framework of geographical and national affiliation. A conscious resisting of the notion of home and its limiting ramifications on Said's critical lens posits his text out of the boundaries of homeliness. While this makes *Out of Place* a memoir *about*

homesickness, it spares it the fate of identitarian texts, which are chiefly characterised as being *within* a condition of homesickness (Porter, 2001, p. 304). Said's state of exile is made no less complex by his own resistance to the idea of belonging to a particular piece of land and considering it a source of defining oneself.

The intellectual author and his autobiography are thus pitted in a cyclical conversation which supports a constructive process that goes in both directions. That is, while the intellectual view opposed to essentialist identities prompt him to remember the many dislocations, geographical and otherwise, that defined his early life experiences, those very experiences reaffirm his exilic status towards the end of the narrative. In his dual pursuit to articulate the forces shaping his identity and simultaneously challenge the cultural and political dominance of nationalism, Said discovers the potential to integrate the diverse aspects of his experience within the realm of academia. The exilic intellectual embodies the duality of being an exile, enduring the inherent pain of displacement, and an intellectual, who can be seen as a cohesive entity. For the exile, home is found in the intellectual capacity to weave the myriad fragments of his experiences into a coherent narrative. Conversely, the intellectual leverages the detached viewpoint of the exile to enrich his analytical perspective. Presenting himself as an example of a fragmented sense of being, Said 'enlarges the possibility of solidarity by affirming hybridity and multiplicity as the "essence" of the category "Palestinian"' (Moore-Gilbert, 2009, p. 120).

In his 1999 article 'Defamation, Zionist-Style,' published in the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Said argues that 'it is part of the Palestinian fate always to be required to prove one's existence and history.' This theme resonates throughout his memoir, *Out of Place*, which highlights the persistent struggle of Palestinians to affirm their existence. Despite his extensive academic and political writings on the Middle East, particularly Palestine, and the challenges faced by Palestinians in host countries, Said felt the urgency to write his memoir after being diagnosed with a terminal illness. The memoir aligns with Said's intellectual perspective, depicting a Palestinian identity uprooted not only from Palestine but also from the very concept of place as a core element of identity. Through his memoir, Said achieves two main objectives. Firstly, he constructs a prototypical subjectivity for exiles, encouraging them to 'make do' with

what they have in host countries rather than remain entrapped by the paralyzing effects of nostalgia. Secondly, he crafts a redemptive narrative for his father, redefining their relationship and allotting him a share in his intellectual achievements. In contrast, his mother occupies a position characterized by ambivalence. While reminiscences about moments shared with her evoke a nostalgic tone that conveys a sense of homeliness, these moments are soon overshadowed by the detached attitude Said assumes in his memoir. Hilda and Palestine are intertwined in *Out of Place*, reflecting his complex relationship with both. He neither felt entirely secure in his mother's regard nor could he fully detach from her; similarly, he could neither belong wholly to the land of Palestine nor forsake his attachment to it, as his academic career demonstrates. Wadie, on the other hand, represents the United States, the English language, and Said's international success—elements that ultimately fell short of providing him a true sense of home. Said emerges from his narrative as the exilic intellectual shaped by both his nuclear family and the broader historical and political forces sweeping the Middle East during his formative years. Just as his education was primarily supervised by his father, a proud American citizen, the text is dominated by English, the language of Said's education. Conversely, his mother's auxiliary, almost passive, role in his upbringing associates her presence in the text with Arabic, the language of Palestine, Egypt, and Lebanon. Arabic erupts in the text intermittently, signalling a persistent presence and a route back to his mother and Palestine. Said's refusal to define his identity based on geopolitical dictates introduces a unique perspective on Palestinian identity. Through the painful experience of exile, he discovers an intellectual home from which he negotiates and reconstructs his life experiences in the Levant and the United States. This journey leaves behind a record of an influential career that began with a repressive, out-of-place upbringing, both literally and figuratively.

Edward Said's *Out of Place* (1999) can be compellingly interpreted through the critical framework of 'late style,' a concept he elaborated toward the end of his life, rooted in Adorno's reflections on artistic and intellectual lateness. Said's memoir evinces many hallmarks of this mode: fragmentation, estrangement, and unresolved dissonance. The text resists the conventional arc of self-narration and instead enacts displacement as a structuring principle. Said moves across geographic and cultural coordinates—Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon, and the United

States—not to reconcile these fragments into a coherent whole, but to foreground his perpetual sense of exile and ambiguity. This polyphonic movement between spaces corresponds to his experience as a Christian Palestinian intellectual educated in the West, always "out of place" and acutely aware of his fractured identity. Rather than offering clarity or catharsis, the memoir dwells on contradiction and introspection, exposing the dissonance at the heart of belonging. In this light, *Out of Place* embodies an aesthetic of lateness that resists closure and affirms the ethical power of unresolved subjectivity. Moreover, the memoir's temporal and tonal conditions reflect the existential urgency and secular reckoning that mark Said's later works. Written in the shadow of his leukemia diagnosis, *Out of Place* does not indulge in spiritual redemption or nostalgic narrative arcs. Instead, it enacts a critical self-interrogation—one that refuses reconciliation with any totalizing historical or autobiographical project. As Hamdi and others have noted, this reflects a 'lateness of beginnings' (Hamdi 2024, p. 41): a preference for initiating thought over arriving at finality. Said's portrayal of memory, identity, and place is recursive rather than conclusive, echoing the intellectual stance he theorized in *Beginnings* (1975) and revisited in his final essays. This commitment to opening inquiries—rather than sealing them—establishes *Out of Place* as a paradigmatic text of late style, where resistance is located not in resolution but in an enduring refusal to domesticate experience. The memoir thus becomes a poignant vehicle for ethical dissent and a meditation on the enduring complexities of exile.

Conclusion

This thesis examines the nuances of identity construction in Palestinian autobiographical writing through the work of three memoirists, Ghada Karmi, Raja Shehadeh, and Edward Said. It argues that the three authors render a self-perception that alternates between a desire for individuation, on the one hand, and a sense of commitment to the Palestinian plight that pushes their narratives back to collectivist discourse. Memoir provides the route for individuation by means of its underlying identitarian claim. However, the individual dimension of these texts is only perceived in relation to collective constructions. This is evident in the way Karmi finds a narrative framework for her life story in the experience of the Nakba, the 1948 Palestinian exodus, which serves as a pivotal element in her narrative. The Nakba not only shapes her personal history but also intertwines her identity with the collective memory of displacement and loss experienced by the Palestinian people. Likewise, Shehadeh inscribes his trauma of territorial dispossession on the Palestinian landscape, using the physical environment as a canvas to express the personal as well as the collective layers of grief. His writings reflect a deep connection to the land, portraying it as a silent witness to the ongoing struggles and injustices faced by Palestinians. Through his detailed descriptions of the changing landscapes, Shehadeh conveys a sense of loss and longing that transcends his individual experience, resonating with the broader Palestinian narrative. Although Said tries to steer away from the intricacies of the Nakba in his memoir, his distressing upbringing reflects the social and political context in which he spent the formative years of his life. Said's narrative is imbued with a sense of exile and displacement, themes that are central to the Palestinian experience. His attempts to forge an individual identity are constantly influenced by the collective history and the political turmoil surrounding him. Said's memoir becomes a testament to the complex interplay between personal and collective identities, highlighting the challenges of maintaining a sense of self amidst the pressures of nationalist discourse. These autobiographical narratives position the individual in their historical context while trying to maintain a level of detachment from nationalist discursive formulations. The tension between personal and collective identities in these works underscores the intricate dynamics of identity construction in Palestinian autobiographical writing. Through their memoirs, Karmi, Shehadeh,

and Said offer profound insights into the ways in which personal histories are inextricably linked to collective experiences, revealing the multifaceted nature of identity in the context of Palestinian displacement and resistance and offering ways of being Palestinian.

In Chapter One, I read Karmi's two memoirs *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (2002) and *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (2015). These works are examined through the lens of postcolonial trauma theory, offering a nuanced exploration of the Palestinian experience of displacement and identity reconstruction. By drawing on the insightful contributions of postcolonial critics such as Stef Craps and Michael Rothberg, I situate my analysis within the broader discourse of decolonizing trauma theory. This approach not only highlights the importance of such narratives as the ones written by Karmi but also contributes to the ongoing scholarly effort to challenge and expand the boundaries of trauma theory beyond Eurocentric frameworks delineated in the 1990s and 2000s. By engaging with Karmi's memoirs, my analysis in Chapter One aims to advance the decolonization of trauma theory, advocating for a more inclusive and representative understanding of global experiences of trauma and recovery. I employ a multidimensional understanding of home to illustrate how Karmi's traumatic experiences resonate not only with her immediate family but also with the broader Palestinian diasporic community in England, and sometimes in Palestine as well. My analysis highlights that the Nakba and the concept of home are deeply intertwined and mutually constitutive for Palestinians. On the one hand, the trauma of displacement engenders a lifelong quest for a sense of home. This quest is fueled by the profound need to reclaim a space of belonging and identity that has been disrupted. On the other hand, the very significance attributed to the notion of home intensifies the sense of loss, rendering the displacement even more traumatic. By examining Karmi's narrative through this lens, I show that her personal anguish is not an isolated phenomenon but is inextricably linked to the collective experiences of her family and the wider Palestinian community. The persistent search for home amidst the backdrop of displacement becomes a shared struggle, reflecting the collective memory and identity of a people uprooted from their homeland. Furthermore, I argue that this interplay between trauma and home is crucial in understanding the complexities of diasporic identities. The longing for home, while a source of pain, also serves as a driving force for resilience and continuity within the Palestinian

diasporic community. The notion of return to the homeland is a collectively perpetuated discourse that keeps home present and alive. This duality underscores the enduring significance of home as both a physical and emotional anchor for Palestinians but also the intertwined relationship between home, the politics of return, and Palestinian autobiographical writing. Ultimately, my analysis reveals that the relationship between trauma and home is cyclical: the trauma of losing one's home intensifies the longing for it, while the deep-rooted desire for home amplifies the pain of displacement. By thus locating her life narrative within the larger Palestinian discourse of home and return, Karmi experiences home as an ongoing project and expresses her Palestinian identity through partaking in that project both in literature and political activism.

In Chapter Two I analyze Shehadeh's memoirs *Strangers in the House: Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine* (2002), *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (2007), and *A Rift in Time: Travels with my Ottoman Uncle* (2010). I argue that these memoirs collectively form a textual nexus through which Shehadeh challenges the ideological underpinnings of the Zionist project, which justifies land expropriation under the pretense of improvement and protection. Shehadeh's narratives serve as a powerful counter-discourse, reclaiming the Palestinian perspective and asserting the historical presence and significance of the Palestinian people on the land. By weaving the collective memory of his family into his writings, Shehadeh underscores the continuity and resilience of the Palestinian identity amidst the ongoing displacement and expropriation. In *Strangers in the House*, Shehadeh reflects on his formative years and the profound impact of living under occupation. His personal experiences are intertwined with broader political and social realities, providing a poignant account of growing up in a landscape marked by conflict and displacement. This memoir sets the stage for understanding the deep-rooted connection between his personal memory, his family history and the tension characteristic of the Palestinian national identity. In *Palestinian Walks* Shehadeh takes the reader on a journey through the changing landscape of Palestine, highlighting the physical and symbolic erasure of Palestinian presence. Through his detailed observations, descriptions and reflections, Shehadeh documents the transformations imposed by settlement expansion and military occupation. His walks become acts of resistance, asserting the enduring bond between the Palestinian people and their land but also inscribing his trauma and distress on the scarred

landscape. In *A Rift in Time*, Shehadeh expands the territory of his narrative by expanding the territory of his walks. He delves into his family's Ottoman heritage, tracing the historical and political trajectories that have shaped the present-day Palestinian experience, especially nationalism. By connecting past and present, Shehadeh emphasizes the long-standing historical ties of Palestinians to the land, challenging narratives that seek to essentialize the imaginary borders dividing the people of the Levant. That is, Shehadeh employs autobiographical narrative as a strategy to expand his horizons as the physical territory he can walk keeps shrinking. Through his memoirs, Shehadeh constructs a discourse of resilience and steadfastness, drawing on the collective memory of his family to inscribe Palestinian history onto the very landscape he traverses. He emphasizes that the land was never empty or barren before the arrival of European Jews, but rather, it was a vibrant, inhabited space with deep historical and cultural roots.

By drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theory of space and Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire*, I demonstrate how Shehadeh utilizes the collective memory of the Palestinian people to infuse the landscape with his personal experiences. He interprets the land narratives embedded in the hills to reclaim them as intrinsically Palestinian. This reclamation process involves walking through the landscape and subsequently narrating these walks, thus adding another layer of Palestinian narrative to these sites. While his visits constitute a Palestinian return to the sites, his texts immortalize a cyclical reworking of this experience. As Gregory Fox argues, '[r]eturning, remembering, and unfolding memories provides opportunities to rearticulate both individual and collective (national) narratives' (2024, p. 147). Shehadeh's method of embedding his individual experiences within the broader collective memories of Palestinians enables him to articulate his identity through his interaction with the land. Walking becomes an act of resistance and reclamation, a way to inscribe his presence and the presence of his people onto the landscape. This practice of situating personal interactions with the landscape within larger collective narratives allows Shehadeh to voice his Palestinian identity in a triadic pattern that starts with walking, remembering, then narrating. The reading experience enables the articulation of his identity to start anew. Furthermore, through these acts, he creates a textualized landscape that serves as a repository of memory and identity for future generations. By walking and narrating his experiences, Shehadeh not only documents the Palestinian presence

but also ensures that these narratives continue to resonate and inspire subsequent generations. The landscapes he traverses become living texts, enriched with the stories and struggles of the Palestinian people, and serve as a testament to their *sumud* and enduring connection to the land. This approach qualifies his memoirs as sites of memory which assume a prospective orientation in the struggle for identity and recognition. Shehadeh's work exemplifies how personal and collective memories can be harnessed to challenge dominant narratives and reclaim spaces that have been symbolically and physically contested. In doing so, he finds a home for his self-expression and constructs one for Palestinian voices in the ongoing discourse about land, identity, and belonging.

In Chapter Three, I analyze Said's memoir *Out of Place* (1999), contextualizing it within the broader scope of his critical work and academic career. My analysis aims to uncover how Said's personal narrative, as presented in his memoir, offers a unique perspective on his identity by subtly downplaying the political dimensions of his upbringing in the Middle East. Despite this narrative suppression, the political upheavals that marked his childhood and adolescence invariably influenced his formative years. Said's memoir provides an intimate glimpse into his early life, portraying the complexities of growing up as a Palestinian in a region marked by significant political and social transformations. By juxtaposing his personal experiences with his critical work, namely his article “Reflections on Exile” (2001), I argue that *Out of Place* reveals a different facet of Said's multifaceted personality. This narrative allows readers to see a more vulnerable and introspective side of Said, contrasting with the more public and politically charged image often associated with his academic and activist endeavors. One of the central themes in *Out of Place* is the notion of identity and belonging. Said's memoir reflects his constant struggle to reconcile his multifarious identities—Palestinian, American, Arab, and Christian—within a context of continuous displacement and exile. This internal conflict with names and languages is compounded by the broader geopolitical shifts occurring in the Middle East (especially Palestine, Cairo, and Lebanon) during his youth, such as the establishment of the State of Israel and the resulting Palestinian diaspora. These events, though not always explicitly addressed in the memoir, cast long shadows over Said's personal and intellectual development. By narratively downplaying the overt politics of his upbringing, Said's memoir focuses more on his personal

journey of self-discovery and intellectual growth. However, the reader can discern the underlying political tensions that shaped his worldview. The memoir subtly hints at the ways in which these external forces influenced his sense of self and his subsequent work as a scholar and advocate for Palestinian rights. In examining *Out of Place* alongside Said's critical oeuvre, I illustrate how his personal history and the political context of his youth are inextricably linked. The memoir serves as a testament to the enduring impact of Said's early experiences on his later intellectual pursuits. It reveals how his encounters with displacement, identity crises, and cultural dislocation informed his critical views. Chapter Three highlights the interplay between Said's personal narrative and the broader political landscape of the Middle East. By situating his memoir within the context of his academic career, I emphasize how Said's life story not only adds depth to our understanding of his work but also underscores the profound influence of political and social upheaval on individual identity formation. What we are left with towards the end of the narrative is the exilic intellectual celebrated in “Reflections of Exile” who perceives his identity as a set of flowing torrents rather than a notion set in stone or attached to a particular place. While the intellectual persona dictates what Said remembers and narrates, the narrative of *Out of Place* reconstructs the intellectual persona.

This thesis has put forth an argument for a nuanced and attentive understanding of Palestinian autobiography, not only as a medium for individuation and identity formation but also as a contested space where individual experiences intersect with broader historical and political contexts. Palestinian autobiography holds significant power due to the immediacy and urgency with which it narrates personal stories—bearing witness to trauma, land expropriation, or facing imminent death. However, whether Palestinian autobiography can construct a Palestinian identity independent of the framework of nationalism remains an open question. The authors examined in this thesis each attempt, to varying degrees, to disentangle their life narratives from collective cultural, mnemonic, or political formulations. Nevertheless, they often find themselves repositioning their autobiographies within the very frameworks from which they seek to disassociate. This tension reflects the intricate relationship between individual identity and the collective memory and historical experiences of the Palestinian people. The immediacy of Palestinian autobiography stems from its role in documenting personal and collective trauma.

These narratives serve as testimonies to the lived experiences of displacement, loss, and resilience. By narrating their stories, Palestinian autobiographers bear witness to the ongoing struggles faced by their community, ensuring that these experiences are not forgotten. The act of writing memoir becomes a form of resistance, a way to assert their existence and identity in the face of oppression, marginalization, and memoricide. Despite this powerful role, the challenge lies in whether Palestinian autobiography can transcend the framework of nationalism. Nationalism often provides a unifying narrative that shapes collective identity, but it can also constrain individual expressions of identity. The three authors discussed in this thesis—each with their unique approaches and perspectives—navigate this complex terrain. Their attempts to articulate their personal experiences sometimes lead them back to the broader nationalistic narratives they seek to move beyond. For instance, Karmi begins by focusing on personal memories and individual struggles to integrate in England, only to find that these experiences are inextricably linked to the collective history of Palestinian dispossession and resistance. In fact, she interprets them through this very lens. Shehadeh, in turn, attempts to distance himself from his father's views, only to admit the many similarities between them in the end of his narrative. In this way, Palestinian autobiography becomes a space where individual and collective identities continually intersect and interact. Moreover, this thesis highlighted how Palestinian autobiographers use their narratives to carve out spaces for individuation and belonging within the broader collective identity characterized by displacement and uprootedness. By recounting their unique experiences, they contribute to a more diverse and multifaceted understanding of what it means to be Palestinian. This process of individuation is not separate from the collective but rather exists in dialogue with it, enriching and complicating the overarching narrative of Palestinian identity. While the quest to construct a Palestinian identity outside the framework of nationalism remains a complex and ongoing endeavor, Palestinian memoir remains a means to bearing witness to both personal and collective traumas, contributing to a richer and more nuanced understanding of Palestinian identity.

In light of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, speaking and writing about Palestine has become not merely an intellectual endeavor but an ethical imperative—one that demands sustained engagement with the lived realities of a population subjected to decades of dispossession, occupation, and violence. This research draws on the autobiographical writings of

three Palestinian authors, whose narratives illuminate the complex interplay between mobility, trauma, and identity among upper-middle-class individuals able to seek refuge abroad. While these works articulate the psychological and emotional toll of displacement, they also underscore a privilege of movement not afforded to the vast majority of Palestinians. The current catastrophe amplifies the urgency of this contrast, as those unable to flee face intensified conditions of precarity and loss. Thus, my research is situated within a broader intellectual and moral framework that seeks not only to analyze the aesthetics of Palestinian autobiography but also to preserve and amplify the voices of Gazans and other victims who remain unheard amid the noise of geopolitical discourse. In foregrounding life-writing as a site of resistance and historical testimony, I aim to contribute to the ongoing effort to combat erasure and ensure that Palestinian narratives remain present, resonant, and politically charged in both scholarly and public arenas.

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