

WRITING PALESTINE: PERSONAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY
CONSTRUCTION IN EXILE

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines representations of nationhood, exile, belonging and nostalgia in three Palestinian memoirs: Ghada Karmi's *In Search of Fatima* (2002), Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah* (1997) and Aziz Shihab's *Does the Land Remember Me?* (2007). For diasporic Palestinians (such as these three) who are denied access to Palestine as a geographical entity, Palestine exists most strongly in and through narrative. As such, I examine the extent to which these memoirs are acts of nation-building. I explore the impact that living in exile has on the authors' construction of personal and national identity, and the extent to which exile inhibits their ability to belong. Finally, I suggest that although these memoirs do not offer explicit solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, they are important as measured, reasonable and imaginative acts of nation-building that dramatize and make accessible the plight of the Palestinian nation.

List of Abbreviations Used

PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PNA	Palestinian National Authority

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Chapter One: Introduction

It is estimated that more than 750 000 Palestinians were exiled in the wake of the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Later, 300 000 were exiled after Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967.¹ At present more than five million exiled Palestinians live in the Diaspora.² For these individuals, as well as for Palestinians still living in Israel and the Occupied Territories, the relationship between nation, state, and geographical place is particularly complex. Edward Said argues that “[i]n a very literal way the Palestinian predicament since 1948 is that to be a Palestinian at all has been to live in a utopia, a *nonplace*, of some sort” (*Question* 124, emphasis in original). As such, Said’s suggestion—in which he draws on the work of Homi Bhaba—that “nations are narrations” (*Culture* xiii) has a unique resonance for Palestinians, who are, to a large extent, reliant on narrative to strengthen their nation-making project. With these things in mind, my thesis explores the meaning of nationhood, belonging, exile, return, loss, and nostalgia in three contemporary Palestinian memoirs:³ Ghada Karmi’s *In Search of Fatima* (2002), Mourid Barghouti’s *I Saw Ramallah* (1997) and Aziz Shihab’s *Does the Land Remember Me?* (2007). I have chosen to present the memoirs in this order because of the way in which they build upon one another. I begin with examining Karmi’s feeling

¹The appropriate name for the former Palestine is a contentious issue, which I address in my third chapter. Throughout my thesis, I will use “the West Bank and the Gaza Strip,” the “Occupied Territories” “Palestine-Israel” and “Palestine.”

²Throughout my thesis, when “Diaspora” refers specifically to the *Palestinian* Diaspora, I will capitalize it, to indicate that it is a proper noun.

³ Memoir as a genre offers access to history through an individual’s navigation between the personal and political facets of his or her identity, and a narration of a political backdrop that informs the personal events of his or her life. These memoirs narrate the experience of exile and return for three Diaspora Palestinians, and in doing so render more accessible and, consequently, more tragic the plight of the Palestinian Diaspora.

that she is permanently in exile, and thus not at home in either England or Palestine. She remains attached to strictly defined British and Palestinian identities, and ends her memoir with the feeling that she can never *return*. Barghouti's memoir complicates Karmi's statements on exile. He moves beyond her position, by seeking to connect with Palestinians currently living in the West Bank, and by investing in Palestine as a place of the future. He also foregrounds the materiality of Palestine, a consideration that is largely absent in Karmi's memoir. Shihab's position on exile is closer to Barghouti's. He endeavours to move beyond feeling permanently in exile by (re)connecting with family and friends. Furthermore, he demonstrates both a personal and collective rootedness in and love for the Palestinian land. Shihab's memoir gives an important historical and political context for both of the other two, and offers the most scope with respect to engaging with issues in contemporary Palestine-Israel.

In this thesis, I explore questions these authors raise concerning the link between politics, ethics and aesthetics. I look at the ways that both their memories of Palestine, as well as their relationship to it in the present, are informed by their position as exiles. I examine the impact that living in exile has on the authors' construction of personal and national identity, and the extent to which it inhibits their ability to belong. Furthermore, I investigate the extent to which these memoirs are acts of nation-building through personal narrative. In the conclusion, I suggest that, although these memoirs do not offer explicit solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, they are ultimately an important component of a constructive way forward, as measured, reasonable acts of nation-building that dramatize and make accessible the plight of the Palestinian people.

For all Palestinians, who do not have their own state, and especially for Diaspora

Palestinians who are denied access to Palestine as a geographical place, the nation of Palestine exists most strongly as an imagined community, and in and as narrative. That the Palestinian notion of nationhood is particularly reliant on the images of communion and sovereignty expressed in narrative politicizes the memoirs; as the authors narrate their own stories they are, in effect, narrating *Palestine*. Indeed, in memoir, Palestinians “assert not only their own identity as eyewitnesses to Palestinian life and experience, but the identity of their” country (Jayyusi as qtd. in Rooke, 233). Not surprisingly, then, these memoirs demonstrate the role of narrative in recognizing, defining, affirming and defending Palestinian national identity.

Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation sheds light on the authors’ construction of the Palestine. According to Anderson, the nation is an imagined community “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). In the context of Palestine, where there is no geopolitical Palestinian entity, part of these writers’ political project is to consciously contribute to the construction of a Palestinian nation and a shared Palestinian national identity.

The memoirs explore what it means to be denied access to a particular geographical place and to have no nation-state to which to belong. They articulate models of Palestinian nationhood that are different from the modern European model, which is based on an understanding of the nation as autonomous, sovereign and delineated along specific lines of race and ethnicity. For example, Karmi’s memoir references the Umma, a pre-nation-state model based on an Islamic community that is trans-geographical, multi-ethnic and not based on race or language (Euben 179). Barghouti presents us with nation

as a “multilocale diaspora” that is “not necessarily defined by a specific geopolitical boundary” (Clifford 246). And finally, Shihab’s memoir represents a model of nationhood based on strong family and community ties that span both distance and time. To varying degrees then, these memoirs gesture towards different models of nationhood available for stateless Palestinians. This gesture does not, however, deny the importance of arguments to be made for independent Palestinian statehood. Indeed, Said elucidates what is at stake for Palestinians as a stateless people. He argues that since World War II, “there has been a considerable increase in the feelings people attach to their nation-state” (*Question* 142). Palestinians do not have a unified, coherent force around which to coalesce, which leaves them detached, disconnected, and vulnerable. A state also enables political belonging; a Palestinian nation-state and would mean that Palestinian citizens would be able to come and go freely, and would have access to the rights and responsibilities that citizenship entails.

Because the Palestinian nation does not have its own state, and many Palestinians are denied access to Palestine as a physical place, land is a very important consideration in any discussion of Palestine. Persis M. Karim, who writes the Foreword to *Does the Land Remember Me?*, suggests as much when he argues that “[s]tories and memories are essential to the Palestinian national consciousness” because of the extent to which “[t]hey affirm and support the connection that remains between the people and the land of Palestine—even while the land has endured decades of occupation and war” (xiii). The land, and the Palestinian connection to it, are threads that weave their way through all three memoirs. For Karmi, it is the absence of land that informs her feelings of belonging nowhere; her experience of landlessness shapes her world-view. Alternately, Barghouti

seeks to emphasize the materiality of Palestine as a way to resist both the pull of a romanticized nostalgia as well as the reduction of Palestine to politics and news headlines. It is part of Shihab's narrative project to emphasize Palestinian presence on the land as a political statement in order to counter Zionist settler ideology that the region was "a land without a people for a people without a land," (Krämer 128), and to demonstrate the determination that many Palestinians feel to either remain on, or return to their land.

Edward Said, a Palestinian who spent most of his life in exile in the United States, is something of a touchstone for my project. Although his memoir, *Out of Place*, is a rich and moving account of the early years of his life, I have decided to foreground Said's more explicitly political writings on Palestine, rather than offering a reading of his memoir.⁴ In addition to his argument about the primacy of narrative to notions of nationhood, there are other facets of Said's writings on Palestine with which I engage in this project. Said's work is useful because of his engagement with narratives of belonging. For example, he argues that Palestinians' belonging to a broader Arab nation does not detract from their claim to a distinct nation of their own:

Palestine had been part of the Ottoman Empire until the end of World War I, and [it is] true also that in any accepted sense it had not been independent. Its inhabitants referred to themselves as Palestinians, however, and made important distinctions between themselves, the Syrians, the Lebanese and the Transjordanians. (*Question* 117)

As Said suggests, an understanding of Palestinian nationhood before 1948 is particularly

⁴ In *Out of Place*, Said narrates his experience of growing up in a more explicitly British colonial world than the three authors of my project. As such, the thematic concerns of his memoir are for the most part different from those that I explore.

important in the context of Zionist and Israeli settler ideology that view Palestinians as movable and resetttable.⁵

“Palestine” is a name that has been used, among others, to describe the geographic area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. It has been inhabited, at different points in history, by Jews, Christians and Muslims, and various combinations of the three. It was under Ottoman rule between 1516 and 1831 and again between 1841 and 1917, and then under British rule. Although European Jewish migration to the area began several decades earlier (Karmi 41), the Balfour declaration of 1917 was a formal statement of policy by the British government stating that “His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” (Abuelaish 26). In 1947, the United Nations voted to partition the area into two separate Jewish and Arab states. While the Jewish Agency accepted the plan, the Palestinian Arab leaders did not; violence broke out soon after, culminating in a civil war. At this point between 300 000 and 350 000 Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes. In May of 1948 the Jewish Agency declared the independence of the state of Israel. During this phase approximately 350 000 Palestinians were exiled. No Palestinian Arab state was founded; the Gaza Strip came under Egyptian rule, and Jordan annexed the West Bank and East Jerusalem. After the 1967 war Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed in 1964, and in 1974 over 100 states in the United Nations recognized it as the legitimate Palestinian representative (Said, *Question* 169). The “PLO has historically been concerned with return” and establishing Palestinian statehood (Said *Question* 135). 1993 was the year of the Oslo Accords, which Said describes as the “grotesquely misnamed

⁵ I address Zionist settler ideology in Chapter Four.

‘peace process’ between Yasser Arafat’s PLO and the state of Israel” (Preface, *I Saw Ramallah* ix). Believed to be a disappointing failure by many Palestinians “this US-brokered arrangement neither provided for real Palestinian sovereignty in Gaza and the West Bank nor allowed for peace and reconciliation between Jews and Arabs” (ix). It did, however, allow for the return of some Palestinians from the 1967 territories to their former homeland. Still, the vast majority of Palestinians (about 3.5 million) “are refugees from the 1948 territories and therefore cannot return under the present circumstances” (ix). The peace process also allowed for the creation of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), an administrative body with some sovereignty from the state of Israel. The responsibilities of the PNA (whose capital is in Ramallah) are limited to civil matters and internal security and do not include external security or foreign affairs. The PNA controls matters such as the postal and sewer systems; it can write school curriculae and issue parking tickets, but Israel still controls the borders, airspace, water rights and electricity (Abuelaish 25).

Palestinian memoir as a genre is one way in which a primarily Western readership has access to a nuanced portrait of the historical and contemporary socio-political landscape of Palestine and its Diaspora. Another facet of Said’s work with which I engage is his concern that contemporary news media tends to represent Israeli Jews as righteous victims and Palestinian Arabs as bloodthirsty, fanatical terrorists whose misogynist and anti-Semitic values inform their lifestyles and extreme actions. I draw heavily upon this specific aspect of Said’s thinking in my exploration of both Karmi’s and Shihab’s memoirs, and I also consider the ways that all three memoirs complicate this narrative by presenting Palestinians as complex individuals, revealing Palestinian losses,

and reinforcing the idea that only a small faction of the population engages in acts of terror and violence.

As a component of Palestinian nation-building, Palestinian memoir is key for the role it plays in the preservation of collective memory. Juliane Hammer argues that Palestinian memoirs

are perceived as part of the Palestinian collective memory and represent a conscious attempt to rescue the Palestinian past from oblivion. They realise that the Palestine they remember is a lost world, but one that shall not be forgotten. And it is this which connects the memoirs of the older generations of Palestinians to the present and future. (189)

Barghouti's memoir, perhaps more so than Karmi's and Shihab's, seems directed to a Palestinian audience. While Karmi and Shihab write their memoirs in English, Barghouti writes his in Arabic. His memoir explores the meaning of Palestine for younger generations of Palestinians, including his son Tamim. Hammer articulates that memoirs are important in passing a Palestinian "identity on to members of younger generations who were born and raised in exile" (178) in part because the lack of a Palestinian state means there is no official Palestinian historiography, no museums, and no national monuments.⁶ Although memoir is by definition a personal genre, all three authors navigate between narrating their own stories, and conveying a broader collective Palestinian history.

In order to address the relationship between memory and history, as well as the relationship between personal memory and the continuation of collective memory, I

⁶ Said also notes that in Israel, Arab Israelis attend schools and universities in which Hebrew is favoured over Arabic, and more attention is paid to Jewish history than to Arab (*Question* 127).

consider the genre of memoir as it applies to all three texts. Tom Sandborn writes that

Memoir is a tricky business, because it demands the writer find ways to make her unique experience resonate. It must chart a course between the details of an individual life and whatever more general meaning can be found in those details. [...] The task is harder than it looks, and only a few memoirs avoid the perils of solipsism, sentiment and sensationalism. (R5)

Drawing on Sandborn's ideas, I consider how the authors navigate between narrating their personal stories and telling a broader Palestinian history. I explore the extent to which they turn themselves into symbolic Palestinians who represent the entire Palestinian nation, or the extent to which they actively resist doing so.

Each memoir in my project adds a new and distinct dimension to the construction of a Palestinian nation. Each author has a different understanding of Palestine, and thus relates to and constructs Palestine differently. Karmi was born in West Jerusalem in 1939. She and her family left when the state of Israel was created in 1948. They spend a year in Syria, and end up in the United Kingdom, where she still resides. In Karmi's memoir, the meaning of Palestine resonates differently at different times in her life. It is the place of her childhood and her beloved nanny Fatima, and a place where Muslims, Jews and Christians co-exist relatively peacefully. It becomes turbulent, however, taking on a nightmarish quality in the years leading up to the creation of the state of Israel, and her family's frantic and hurried departure. During her years as a political activist in England and the Middle East, Palestine becomes a cause to fight for and defend, as she engages in a specific form of Palestinian nationalism. On her return, she finds it to be depressed, dilapidated, dusty, arid, impoverished and barely present (427; 437; 433). Barghouti was

born in Deir Ghassanah (on the West Bank) in 1944. He was in university in Cairo during the 1967 war, and the Occupying Israeli power did not issue him a reunion permit. He spent the next thirty years of his life living in and between Egypt, Hungary, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, and Iraq. Although for years Barghouti could only relate to Palestine through narrative and memory, during his return visit in 1996 he relates to Palestine through its materiality. It is a place of olive oil and fig trees, hills and pebbles; a place where the land shapes its people. Barghouti also encounters and depicts a Palestine that has undergone intense change. The Jordan has become “a river without water” and the hills are “[b]are and chalky (5; 28). Despite this, Barghouti remains optimistic about his connection with Palestine and also considers it to be a place of the future. He says, “[i]n Amman I will wait for Tamim’s permit. I will return here with him. He will see me in” Palestine “and we will ask all the questions after that” (182). Shihab spent the early years of his life in the village of Sinjil, on the West Bank, and in Jerusalem. As a young man, in 1950, he made the choice to move to the United States.⁷ In his memoir, he narrates a return visit that he makes in 1993. Shihab foregrounds Palestinian customs and traditions. For him, it is a place of family, feasting, conversations and celebrations. He emphasizes a long Palestinian presence on the land. He suggests that Palestine is a place where “if you own the land you must work the land, visit the land, and love the land” (94). Palestine is also a militarized zone, with checkpoints, borders, soldiers and settlers. Ultimately, Palestine is a place Shihab is invested in and connected to, so much so that he decides not to sell his piece of land ““to anybody at any price”” (139).

⁷ The “voluntary” character of Shihab’s exile is nuanced. I further address these nuances in Chapter Four.

As exiled Palestinians the authors of these memoirs explore what it means to live in the Diaspora, away from their homeland and the people in it. Each author experiences a longing for *home*, and must navigate between Palestine as it exists in the imagination and Palestine as a geographical, material, tangible, touchable place. In describing and constructing a Palestinian nation, the authors gesture towards popular images of Palestinians in the contemporary mainstream Western world, and in doing so disrupt dominant stereotypes and complicate simplistic narratives. These memoirs articulate the plight of the Palestinian Diaspora. They explore shared and distinct concerns between Diaspora Palestinians and those who live in Israel and the Occupied Territories, as well as narrating their own personal concerns. Navigating through these shared and distinct concerns is a challenging task, because, as Said articulates, “[t]he circumstances of dispersion in so many different countries prevented the Palestinians from becoming a socially homogeneous people” (*Question* 135). Although there is no such thing as an entirely homogeneous people anywhere, heterogeneity is particularly applicable to the Palestinian case. The Diaspora, as a group of Palestinians who have ended up in countries all over the world, are not a “socially homogeneous people.” Neither are Palestinians who continue to live in the region. Access to citizenship is uneven. Approximately 650 000 Palestinians live in “1948 Israel” and are Israeli citizens, while approximately one million live in the West Bank, and approximately one million in the Gaza Strip (Layoun 414). Some of the residents of the Occupied Territories have residence permits, while others (often those living in refugee camps) have no documentation whatsoever. Quality of life varies hugely amongst Palestinians living in Israel, the Occupied Territories, refugee camps in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and refugee camps in other Arab

states. The lifestyles of these three writers are quite different from the majority of Palestinians. They are materially better off than most Palestinians living in Israel and the Occupied Territories and certainly better off than those Palestinians in refugee camps. The writers of the memoirs constitute an intellectual Diaspora; they are highly educated, with access to intellectual and financial capital. Although to varying degrees they do seek to address the concerns of other Palestinians, they do not face the same material hardships. They have access to food, clean water, and education. They do not live under military rule or with the constant threat of violence. Although they cannot easily return, their mobility is not restricted in the same ways as it is for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories who must pass through checkpoints and endure curfews. Despite this, as Hammer suggests, these memoirs

do contribute to the production of collective memory in that they address different audiences, provide a different part of the larger picture, and legitimize the political claims of the Palestinian people. Thus, elite memoirs do matter, even if they do not represent the experiences of most Palestinians. (179)

Building upon Hammer's idea, I suggest that these memoirs are worthwhile for their exploration of diaspora, exile, nationhood, nostalgia, belonging, return, and loss.

None of the authors engage at any length with the fact that they have, in Said's words, "the most morally complex of all opponents, Jews, with a long history of victimization and terror behind them" or the reasons for the creation of the state of Israel (*Question* 119). One tragic component of the birth of the state of Israel is that the creation of a nation-state for one stateless and oppressed people effectively left another people

stateless and oppressed. The authors do not reference the history of anti-Semitism in Europe, which culminated in the Holocaust. Many Jews were left homeless after the Holocaust, and sought to establish a homeland away from Europe. With British and American support, they chose the Holy Land, which at that point was the British Mandate of Palestine. Given that these are the authors' personal stories, they are not responsible for offering an in-depth consideration of the historical or contemporary Israeli position. Perhaps they choose not to engage with Israeli or Jewish history in part because the Israeli Jewish version of the history and contemporary political reality continues to receive more media airplay and international support. Still, when considering the extent to which the memoirs offer a nuanced approach to and portrayal of Palestine-Israel, it is worth keeping in mind that they all make the same choice to leave out an extensive consideration of the Jewish history of statelessness and oppression. To an extent, this is a necessary omission in constructing a Palestinian national narrative; every national narrative is founded on such exclusions. The more explicitly political aims of these three authors are to explore their own experience as Palestinians living in exile, to consider Israel's responsibility for their dispossession, to describe Israel as an occupying power and to gesture towards possible future directions.

Said argues that Palestinians must struggle to maintain their identities "on at least two levels: first, as Palestinian with regard to the historical encounter with Zionism and the precipitous loss of a homeland; second, as Palestinian in the existential setting of day-to-day life, responding to the pressure in the state of residence" (*Question* 121). As such, all three authors encounter the challenge of constructing their identities both as exiles from Palestine and foreigners to their new places of residence. For all three authors, the

experience of living in exile means that they are always in a liminal position; unable to belong in either Palestine or anywhere else. Although all three writers explore the negative aspects of living in exile, each approaches exile differently. Despite Karmi's desperate attempts, at various points in her life, to belong to Palestine, the experience of living in exile leads her to feel as though she belongs nowhere. Barghouti experiences the same liminality but he uses it as a starting point from which to form connections with other Palestinians living in the West Bank. Shihab, who chooses to leave Palestine for the United States, engages with the guilt that accompanies his voluntary exile. At times he becomes defensive, and justifies his decision through distancing himself from and criticizing Palestinian customs and ways of life. More significantly, however, his feelings of guilt prompt him to make the commitment as a journalist to more accurately represent the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian nation.

In Chapter Two, on *In Search of Fatima*, I explore Karmi's articulation of the psychological dislocation of exile, and the impact of living in exile on identity construction. She ultimately describes her exile as a permanent condition; one from which there is "no return" (451). It results in a "split personality," which causes her "anguish." Her experience of living in exile causes her to feel as though she belongs nowhere; neither to Palestine nor to England. She feels "truly displaced, dislocated in both mind and body, straddled between two countries and unable to belong in either" (422). I use Karmi's text to argue for the importance of understanding how living in exile can stunt the development of both personal and national identity and can inhibit both personal and national belonging. I further argue that she constructs her personal experience of suffering as emblematic of the suffering of the Palestinian nation, and that

she intentionally narrates a version of Palestinian nationhood and national belonging as a counter to Israeli national narratives.

In Chapter Three, I analyze *I Saw Ramallah*, foregrounding the ways that Barghouti's identity as an outsider to Palestine impacts his relationship with the place and its people. Barghouti is a stranger to Palestine as a geographical, physical, and material place. When he realizes that the Palestine he encounters does not match the Palestine that exists in his imagination, he seeks to employ nostalgia strategically to demand recognition for the "crime" of Occupation.⁸ He also resists the reduction of Palestine to news headlines and politics, and instead during his return visit seeks to encounter it tangibly. In doing so, he foregrounds the materiality of place. He highlights olive oil and figs as key components of this materiality, yet he does so in a way that is at times symbolic with mythic dimensions. Additionally, his narration of the stories of others is an effort to establish a textual as well as a material connection with other Palestinians. His stories of the lives of other Palestinians are also an effort to resist the dangers of idealization, in so far as they necessitate that he emphasize the present rather than the past, and that he connect with living, breathing individuals rather than imagined, constructed, or symbolic representations of Palestinians.

Chapter Four examines *Does the Land Remember Me?* and interrogates Shihab's portrayal of the Palestinian nation in the past and the present. I argue that Shihab's representation of Palestinians as invested in Palestine as a geographical place constitutes a politically charged rhetorical strategy that disputes both historical and contemporary Zionist settler ideology, and legitimizes Palestinian land claims. Shihab also examines

⁸ In Barghouti's memoir, he capitalizes "Occupation" when referring to the Israeli occupation.

facets of daily life in order to provide a corrective to dominant stereotypes in journalistic accounts, and to offer a celebratory portrait of Palestinian nationhood.

None of the memoirs offer overt political solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Although they do gesture towards possible directions, each author is ultimately more invested in his or her return than in statehood.⁹ The authors hope to see their families and friends, to reconcile themselves with what they have lost, to re-connect, and to belong. For each of the authors, return is threefold: it is an attempt to reconcile Palestine as it exists in the imagination with Palestine as it is concretely experienced; it is a return in the present in order to bear witness to what has been lost and what has changed; and it is a broader statement of the necessity of the Right of Return, with its attendant political connotations. In these memoirs, one of the goals of the PLO (the Right of Return) is made accessible, acceptable and relatable through personal narrative.

A shared political statement between the three memoirs is that Palestine's existence as a symbolic nation and not a geopolitical state is a direct result of the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. The authors articulate the changes they have witnessed to Palestine as a place and Palestinians as a people as a result of living under occupation. They complicate the idea of ownership, and foreground both individual and collective loss. In differing ways, each memoir represents a negative construction of Palestinian identity in suggesting that loss is constitutive of a collective Palestinian identity. According to Glenn Bowman, the Palestinian Diaspora is "a group composed of individuals tenuously tied together by what is lost rather than by what is held in common" (152). Reflecting this notion, the three memoirs explore the implications of loss, and suggests ways to work through this loss.

⁹ I explore future directions in Chapter Five, the Conclusion.

According to Said, many Palestinians adopt a position of resignation with respect to their losses. He writes, “for most of us there will always remain the sense of deep, haunting loss that Jaffa, Haifa and the Galilee will not once again be as they were in 1948, that thousands of us have lost what we have lost forever” (*Question 175*).

All three writers use their memoirs as both personal and political narrative spaces. They wish to work through and document their own memories and the stories of their lives, but they also wish to make political statements. According to Hammer, many authors of Palestinian memoirs “explicitly or indirectly, feel the responsibility to preserve their memories for essentially political reasons” (189). Hammer’s statement holds true for each memoir in my project. During her return visit, Karmi highlights the inequalities between Israelis and Palestinians in Israel proper, and possible psychological impacts of living under occupation for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Barghouti’s memoir asks his readers to consider the impacts of the Occupation on the Palestinian landscape and economy. Shihab’s hope is that his memoir will help his readers to understand the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in a more balanced way, and he urges his American readers in particular to be aware of the influence of the United States in the region.

Palestinian memoir allows for a representation of Palestinian narratives in a more nuanced way than those offered in contemporary mainstream news media portrayals. These memoirs are necessary to counter the often simplistic journalistic account of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. They provide counter narratives to the creation of the state of Israel and explore the reasons for the resistance to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and consider the implications of these events on their own lives and those of other Palestinians. They represent Palestinians much more complexly than news

media portrayals, which generally reduce Palestinians to downtrodden refugees or fanatic terrorists. They explore the restrictions that prevent many Palestinians from returning, and the experience of being denied access to one's homeland. They navigate through the impact of living in exile on their relationships with family members and friends, and on their construction of personal and national identity. If there are five million Palestinians living in exile then there are also five million narratives of suffering and loss. My project offers an engagement with three of these in order to render certain aspects of the Palestinian plight more accessible.

Chapter Two: The Impact of Exile on Identity Construction and National Belonging

Ghada Karmi's memoir *In Search of Fatima* is an exploration of the impact of exile on the formation of personal and national identity. Karmi was born in Jerusalem in 1939, and left with her family soon after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. *In Search of Fatima* recounts her family's expulsion from Jerusalem when she was a young girl, her year living with her family and her grandparents in Syria, her adolescence and adulthood in England, her visits to the Middle East as a political activist and a physician, and her attempt to return *home*.

Karmi's experiences of exile and the accompanying feelings of estrangement and loss, as well as dislocation and nostalgia, cause her to feel alienated from both her identified homeland of Palestine and her other various places of residence. These feelings are not wholly negative, however. Karmi engages with them and they propel her to attempt to belong to both England and Palestine, to challenge Israeli power structures, and to defend the Palestinian nation. In this chapter, I examine how her position as a Palestinian exile informs her construction of personal, national and gender identity. I interrogate her portrayals of Palestinians and Israelis, her engagement with a broader Palestinian history and her understanding of nationhood and national belonging. I explore the symbolic and material reality of Karmi's understandings of such concepts as *nation*, *exile*, and, above all, *home*. For Karmi, Palestine is "an inspiration, an *identity*, [and] a reason for living" (399, emphasis added) because, as her *home*, it is extremely important to her. As such, I argue that she employs her personal experience of suffering, exile and loss as a rhetorical strategy to represent the suffering of the Palestinian nation and to

consciously create a narrative to stand against the Israeli version.

Karmi's construction of the Palestinian nation is largely a romanticized one. For her, it is the place of her childhood, her dog Rex, and her beloved nanny Fatima. Karmi is a member of a wealthy, educated family and a class to which most Palestinians do not belong. Furthermore, her understanding of gender identity and gender relations is largely informed by having grown up in England. As a result of these aspects of her upbringing, throughout her memoir she reveals that it is at times difficult for her to find common ground with other Palestinians. Furthermore, while the romanticized character of Karmi's Palestine is effective insofar as it draws her reader in and encourages a sympathetic and empathetic response, it also risks eliding the material reality and the concerns of the majority of Palestinians. She does, however, visit Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank, and works as a doctor in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and Libya. Moreover, she engages with Palestine as a geographical and political entity. Despite this, in the introduction to her memoir, she foregrounds Palestine as an emblem and an ideal when she says, "Palestine is not just a country or a name, it is an idea, an aspiration, and a symbol for everyone who has lost and longed for restitution and recompense" (xvii).¹⁰ As such, although she does engage with issues in contemporary Palestine, ultimately Karmi's rhetorical strategy is to create a Palestine that is palatable to her readers through using the relatable factors of longing for childhood and home, and appealing to a universal desire for the restoration of injustice.

As Karmi becomes an adult, she navigates through her identity as a Palestinian English woman living in exile, and struggles with her understandings of home. Upon

¹⁰ This statement directly contrasts those of the other two authors, especially Barghouti, who adamantly resists the reduction of Palestine to a symbol.

attempting to return to *home* and realizing that this is not possible, Karmi comes to view her exile as permanent, one from which there is “no return” (451). This realization leaves her in a liminal position, unable to identify as either English or Palestinian, and only as an exile. This identification is not problematic in and of itself. The problem is that the language that Karmi uses to describe her experience of exile suggests that hers is more painful than the experience of exile for those Palestinians currently living in Israel and the Occupied Territories. The most vivid example of this difference in language comes at the end of Karmi’s memoir. After finally coming to terms with the painful realization that she can never go *home*—the *home*, I would suggest that exists most strongly in her imagination, rather than exclusively as a piece of soil, a house with a backyard and a veranda, a nation of others who share the same ethno-cultural origins, or a state with recognized boundaries—Karmi finds herself back in her hotel room in Jerusalem, reflecting on her personal experience of homecoming as well as what she has witnessed more generally in Israel and the West Bank. Karmi hears the Muslim call to prayer, and opens her hotel window. She describes what she hears as the “unmistakable sound of another people and another presence, definable, enduring and continuous. Still there, not gone, not dead” (451). She goes on to say:

I closed my eyes in awe and relief. The story had not ended, after all – not for them, at least the people who lived there. [...] They would remain and multiply and maybe 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. (451)

There are multiple ways to read Karmi’s distancing herself from this “other people” (the

Palestinians currently living in Jerusalem). One way is with attention to Karmi's inability to fully identify as Palestinian. She feels estranged from the Palestinian place and its people. Another way to read this moment, however, is with the understanding that she remains attached to the idea of an "authentic" Palestinian that does not fit with those whom she has encountered during her visit to Israel and the West Bank.

Karmi experiences a nostalgic longing for *home*, as well as a longing for a pre-1948 Palestine. She longs for a "pure" Palestinian, a purity that can only exist nostalgically. The "literal meaning of *nostalgia* [...] is the suffering caused by the yearning to return to one's place of origin" (Arndt et al. 975). Linda Hutcheon elaborates upon this definition by arguing that "[n]ostalgia, in fact, may depend precisely on the *irrecoverable* nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal. It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power" (195, emphasis in original). She goes on to say "[t]his is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense, [...] nostalgia is less about the past than about the present" (195). Hutcheon's description of nostalgia helps to shed light on Karmi's approach to her past. Feeling restless in England (that is, feeling dissatisfied with her present, and feeling as though she does not belong there) she seeks out a past that she has constructed as perfect, "complete, stable, coherent, safe [...] very unlike the present" (Hutcheon 195). For Karmi, nostalgia is a painful experience. It "involves the wounding realization that some desirable aspect of one's past is irredeemably lost" (Arndt et al. 977). Indeed, at the end of her memoir Karmi understands her past as irrevocable. Upon finally locating her childhood home, she begins to accept that the house no longer belongs to her or her

family “and had not [...] for fifty years” (450). She goes on to say, “[o]ur house was dead, like Fatima, like poor Rex, like us” (450). Her use of death suggests the inaccessibility of her childhood, and her past of safety and comfort.

While Karmi’s realization that she can never *return* is certainly heartbreaking, her description of her experiences inadvertently creates a hierarchy of suffering in which her experience is more traumatic than the experience of Palestinians living in Israel and the Occupied Territories. I argue that this hierarchy does not hold up, however, and moments of her memoir itself complicate her assertion that the exile of those currently living in the region is in any way “temporary” (451). On the second day that Karmi searches for her childhood home in Jerusalem, she and her friends enlist the help of a Palestinian who used to live in the same neighbourhood. Karmi describes him as “a sad old man who had never set foot [in this neighbourhood] since his expulsion in 1948. Though he had lived for all those years on the other side of Jerusalem, barely a mile away, he had never once been back” (443). His return proves to be quite traumatic: “he was confused and could barely find where his old house had been. He walked along the streets in a daze, his eyes full of tears, touching the walls of the villas we passed and pausing every few minutes to stare silently into the distance” (444). This moment reveals that the experience of exile and return for those Palestinians living in close proximity to their original homes can be just as dislocating, distressing and traumatic as it is for those who live in the Diaspora. This man finds his former neighbourhood unfamiliar and is a stranger to it. The place is as distant to him as it would be if he lived on the other side of the world, instead of merely on the other side of Jerusalem.

There is a more sympathetic way, however, to read the end of Karmi’s memoir,

and her assertion that from where she was, “there would be no return” (451). Jean Thomson, for example, argues that although *In Search of Fatima* “gives some of the history of her country’s plight, its power lies in the fact that Ghada Karmi is able to show the psychological effect of such a loss upon one individual” (200). Karmi’s choice to end her memoir by reflecting on the differences between her own exile and those experienced by Palestinians in the region reveals the ways in which she *personally* feels traumatized.

For Karmi, exile is a state of being, and is as intimately connected with her identity as her gender or ethnicity. The state of exile is also a very personal experience for Karmi, as she ultimately does not identify with Palestinians currently living in Israel or the Occupied Territories, refugee camps, the Diaspora, or even her own family. Her sense of home is fraught, and her sense of belonging is insecure. One of the reasons that Karmi remains attached to her feelings of being an exile is that she never experienced any closure upon leaving Palestine. The departure was confusing for Karmi, and she was not able to fully process its significance. Her departure was frantic and hurried, and there was a sense that she and her family would soon return. Karmi also feels that theirs was a *forced* departure. She and her family did not have the *choice* to leave Jerusalem, and she feels that she does not have the choice to ever return.

Karmi’s portrayal of her mother demonstrates a longing for Palestine as *home*. Karmi describes her as a “Palestinian Miss Havisham [...] for whom the clock stopped in Jerusalem in April 1948” (174). Karmi’s mother’s recreation of the *home* has both personal and political resonances. At a personal level, she seeks to continue practising Palestinian cultural norms to help relieve feelings of homesickness. Her recreation of Palestine is also a political gesture, a way of “recreating the lost homeland” (186).

Karmi's mother poignantly seeks to bring about a grounded space after feeling uprooted in the wake of the creation of Israel. Karmi writes:

Many migrant groups are known to maintain their previous cultures and lifestyles in their countries of adoption. But this by way of adjusting gradually to the new society and creating a bridge between the past they had chosen to leave behind and the present they had opted for. None of this held true for us. My parents did not choose to leave Palestine, and they never willingly acquiesced in its loss. They did not see England as a place of the future, but only as a staging post on a route to where they could never go. And it could not have been otherwise, for abandoning that view was tantamount to accepting the irrevocable loss of Palestine. (220)

Karmi suggests that it is unfair to ask her mother to fully adapt to British norms because the stakes are too high. For Karmi's mother, giving up Palestinian cultural habits would in effect be giving up Palestine. Palestine exists for her in her memory and in the Palestinian space she has created in her home. She feels the need to desperately protect this Palestine as a way to alleviate the guilt and sorrow she feels at having left it. Karmi represents her mother as a symbolic Palestinian, whose loyalty to the nation results in a steadfast refusal to concede to its loss.

In contrast to herself, Karmi constructs her sister Siham as an "authentic" Palestinian, with a strong desire to return *home*. Karmi recounts that when her sister decided to move back to the Middle East, she felt envious of Siham's "certainty about herself, her comfortable sense of her own identity" (332). She goes on to say,

It seemed to me that while my parents played absurdly at being Arabs in

an English land and I floundered desperately trying to fit myself somewhere *in between*, she had truly found herself. [...] By returning to the East and sharing in its life, it was she who was the *authentic* one. (333, emphases added)

At this point, Karmi does not feel as strong a connection to the Middle East as her sister does. Throughout her adolescence and young adulthood in England, Karmi struggles to firmly identify as either firmly Palestinian or firmly English, and in the end is left feeling that she is neither. The “in between” (333) space that Karmi occupies is not the creative third space that Trinh T. Minh-ha articulates. Rather, for Karmi, it is an uneasy, uncomfortable space. Minh-ha’s articulation of what emerges in the negotiation between attempting to replicate the home (Karmi’s mother’s approach) and adopting the new culture (Karmi’s approach) is a third space—one that Karmi and her family are unable to create. Karmi describes her sister’s approach—that of returning to the homeland—as the most authentic of the three. Her use of the word “authentic” reveals that she has a specific understanding of Palestinian identity. For Karmi, living in an Arab state, rather than in the Diaspora, is more “authentic.” Perhaps she understands identity as constructed in relation to others, and if those others are Arabs then this will foster a stronger Arab identity. In this moment, Karmi turns her sister from a real person into a symbolic figure who understands and affirms the importance of going *home*. Karmi’s construction of Shiham as an *authentic* Arab risks glossing over the heterogeneity that exists in both the category of both “Arab,” and “English.” I argue that this is the potential danger of simplification that occurs in Karmi’s consistent rhetorical strategy of using real individuals to create a Palestinian mythology.

Karmi's representation of her father is more nuanced, and also allows her to describe other possible models of Palestinian nationhood. Furthermore, his understanding of history complicates existing Palestinian and Israeli national narratives. Karmi offers another representation of the origins of the state of Israel through her father's discussion of the British role in its creation. Although Karmi's father "and many other Palestinians appreciated full well the Zionist plan for Palestine to which [Palestinians] had fallen victim, in a curious way he did not blame the Jews. He placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the British who had betrayed us" (244). Like Shihab's father, Karmi's father reminds readers of the multiple ways of interpreting history. He suggests an alternative narration, with a different perpetrator. In Karmi's visit to Israel at the end of her memoir, however, any consideration of Britain's role is absent. It is the Israelis who are the "uninvited" aliens that "bombed and plotted" to "steal" Palestine "from its rightful owners" (442). Karmi's comments reveal an unwillingness to accept the validity of the reasons for the creation of the state of Israel or to acknowledge the Jewish history of statelessness and oppression. Given that it is her narrative project to write a personal memoir that speaks for the need that all Palestinians have for a nation and a homeland, however, she cannot simultaneously legitimize the Israeli point of view.

Karmi and her father have different understandings of nationhood and national belonging, which in some ways inform their respective understandings of identity. As a result of Karmi's father's historical moment—that he grew up in Palestine when it was under Ottoman rule— and his understanding of a collective Muslim identity, he conceives of a model of nationhood with fluid boundaries. He says, "[w]e are all one

Arab nation” (269).¹¹ He goes on to say, “we have the same language and history and customs. And most of us are Muslims as well” (269). Roxanne Euben offers a way in which to understand Karmi’s father’s descriptions of nationhood and national identity. Euben describes the “*umma* as a cosmopolitan social imaginary captured [...] by the image of crisscrossing networks of mobile Muslims with multiple nodes serving plural purposes” (179). Euben’s description of the Umma reminds us that there are various models of the nation beyond the modern Western concept, to which Karmi (willingly or not) remains attached. The Islamic nation is not based on race, blood or language. It is trans-geographical, and in this sense is also cosmopolitan. Euben describes a model of identity that is fluid, an identity in which allegiances are not necessarily to a strictly defined nation state, but to a more “cosmopolitan” construct of the nation. Karmi recognizes one limitation of the model of nationhood that the Umma describes. It only includes Muslim Arabs. Karmi’s father does irritably reply that Arab Christians are “part of it too” but then goes on to say, “[t]hat’s not the point. We’ve all been split up into states with artificial boundaries. Do you know, when I was your age, we could go from one town to another, say from Jerusalem to Damascus or Cairo, without passports or permits? [...] We were under Ottoman rule of course. But then, the Ottoman Empire fell, the West took over and look at the Arabs now!” (269). Karmi’s father’s understanding of nation is one that is less invested in state boundaries than Karmi’s own.¹² In examining the models of nationhood that Karmi and her father are invested in, it is important to

¹¹ Arab is a broad identity category that refers to peoples originating from West Asia and North Africa who speak Arabic and share common customs. They can be Muslim, Christian or Jewish.

¹² Drawing upon Said’s argument from Chapter One, Karmi’s father’s description of Palestinians as belonging to a broader Arab nation does not preclude the validity of Palestinian claims to the land that was once *Palestine*.

consider their respective historical moments. Karmi's father's description is based on his experience of the past, and he does not acknowledge that state boundaries in the Arab world are now fairly solidified. Karmi's own understanding is based on the European model of the nation as autonomous, sovereign, and delineated along lines of race and ethnicity; the cultural context in which she spent most of her life is invested in a similar model of nationhood. It is useful, however, to be attentive to the ways in which this understanding proves to be limiting, as it does not allow Karmi to attend to either a Palestinian or a British diversity or imagine other possibilities of national affiliation.

Karmi's construction of identity is fraught with anxiety. Her experience of her world accords with theory that Franz Fanon elucidates. Fanon employs psychoanalytic theory to explain feelings of inadequacy and dependency that colonized subjects experience in the colonizer's world. He analyzes the divided self-perception—a type of “schizophrenia”—of the individual who rejects her cultural origins and embraces the host culture. Fanon argues that the colonized subject is forced to adopt a white mask in order to be perceived as a real human being in the eyes of the dominant culture. The colonized subject will try to imitate the cultural code of the colonizer in response to the inferiority complex from which she suffers. Karmi's solidification of her English identity during her experience at university resembles Fanon's articulation of the colonized individual who identifies “with the victor” (Fanon 146). During one of her visits home to London, when she must decide whether to accept her boyfriend John's offer of marriage, Karmi relates:

With trepidation but also with a sense of inevitability, I made my decision. I would leave my parents and embrace wholeheartedly my English husband and his English life. If Palestine still lingered somewhere in my

memory, it cast no shadow and meant nothing. To all intents and purposes, the transition from the Arab child who arrived in 1949, knowing nothing about England, to the miniskirted young woman at home only in England, was now complete. (349)

One way to read Karmi's rejection of her parents is that she wishes to cultivate an identity that will enable her to feel a sense of belonging in England. An unintended and potentially harmful consequence of Karmi's description of her parents is that it reveals an internalized racism that resurfaces at other points, and that she arguably has not given up by the end of her memoir. In her desire to identify with the dominant culture—the English—she has also come to view her parents as inferior. For Fanon, her decision to marry John may represent a desire to “climb [...] up into society—white and civilized” and to reject her family as “savage” (149). According to Fanon's articulation, at this point in Karmi's life her goal is to become the Other (that is, an English person) because the “[o]ther alone can give [her her] worth” (Fanon 154). Karmi's relationship with and eventual marriage to John is in many ways an attempt to solidify an English identity. She recounts that during her visit with John's family she “had fallen in love with [John's mother], her son, the house, the roast lamb and the Englishness of everything [she] had seen that day” (338). Karmi's articulation of “Englishness” conveys a specific, and also *imaginary*, understanding of English cultural identity. Influenced by her privileged class status in England, Karmi considers that to be English is to be white, wealthy, to drink tea, eat roast lamb on Sundays, and have a large house in the country.

Karmi's association of John with his *land* and his *country* reveals a particular understanding of nationhood and national belonging. Karmi tells John that the area

around his house is beautiful in part because it is *his*. When John corrects her, she persists, saying, “you can walk out into your garden and your fields and know that it’s yours, your land, your country [...] there’s nowhere I can do that. Nowhere on earth” (337). Karmi makes a link between identity and land that conveys and constructs a very specific idea of English national belonging. For her, to be *authentically* English is to feel a connection to and ownership of English land. This moment reveals that there is a difference between the way Karmi articulates her identity and the way she experiences it. Throughout her memoir she states that her English and Palestinian identities are completely separate, but this moment suggests that her worldview is very much shaped by her experience of landlessness. Her way of thinking about English identity is born of her Palestinian experience, which suggests that these identities are more imbricated than she presents them to be. To an extent, Karmi begrudges what she considers to be John’s unconditional *belonging* in England. Her life does not have the continuity that his does. She lives somewhere other than where she was born and does not feel a sense of certainty that she will be there forever.

Karmi’s description of an identity crisis that she experiences following a confrontation with some of her English colleagues after the onset of the Six Day War recalls Fanon’s articulation of the schizophrenic colonized subject. She recounts:

my sense of isolation amongst my colleagues forced me to face a[...] melancholy realisation. Even had I wanted their acceptance they would never have given it. Their opposition to my stand on the conflict between Israel and the Arabs meant I could never be one of them. (377)

She goes on to ask: “whom was I one of? [...] could I go back to being the split

personality that had caused me such anguish?” (377). Karmi narrates an experience of suffering and “anguish”; she is not able to construct a hybrid identity that is in any way liberating or freeing. Indeed, exclusionary narratives of authentic identity, such as those to which Karmi seems to be attached, preclude all experiences or constructions of hybrid or pluralistic identities.

Part of the potentially irreconcilable nature of Karmi’s identity results from her experience as a Palestinian woman living in the Diaspora who must negotiate between two very different sets of gender expectations. In a hopeful attempt to achieve a feeling of belonging, Karmi moves back to the Arab world for a period of time. She chooses Jordan as the closest to Palestine because of the large Palestinian population there, but finds it difficult to integrate into Jordanian society, in large part because of the understanding of gender roles that she has come to develop while living in England. Karmi learns of a bigamous relationship and is appalled, saying, ““it’s all to do with women’s unequal status here. In Europe, for example, such a situation could never arise”” (419). Karmi suggests that it is markedly better to be a woman in Europe than in the Middle East. A Jordanian woman responds with, “[w]hat’s so good about the way they do it in Europe? [...] They certainly don’t respect women there. All the men have mistresses, but the difference is the wife doesn’t know and the mistress has to be kept hidden”” (419). As a result of this dialogue, Karmi experiences feelings of both personal and cultural confusion. She further reveals that the binary that constructs the West as a place of progressive, advanced, empowered, *equal* women and the East as a place of repressed and backward women does not hold up. Even while engaging with the nuances of gender roles in the Arab world, part of the reason she feels that she cannot belong there is

because of gender roles and expectations.

Karmi's memoir serves both as a corrective as well as a re-inscription of certain dominant news media representations of Palestinians. In her introduction, Karmi states that

if people could understand Palastinians [sic] as human beings with names and life histories, rather than in terms of collectives such as 'Arab refugees', 'extremists' or Islamic 'terrorists', they would begin to empathise with individuals caught within this most tragic of stories. (xv)

In describing her family, Karmi offers a representation of the Palestinian nation that does not fit into the predominant news media portrayal of Palestinians as refugees or suicide bombers. Her father is a distinguished Arab scholar and reporter, her brother Ziyad is an engineer and Karmi herself is a successful doctor. She foregrounds the importance of education to her family, and in doing so she gestures towards the importance of education for the Palestinian nation. When she was growing up, Karmi's father used to say to her and her siblings, "[y]ou must never become anyone's employee, anyone's slave as I have been (202)." Karmi goes on to say that "occasionally he would add in the closest allusion to the loss of our country he ever permitted himself, "I want you all to have a skill in your pocket to take with you wherever you go. That way you will always survive, no matter where you are forced to live'" (202). For Karmi's father, as for many other Palestinians, to be educated is a way to empower oneself in the face of feelings of powerlessness that can accompany statelessness.¹³ He therefore hopes that his children will be educated so that they will always be able to protect themselves and be independent. Indeed, as Helena Lindholm Schulz argues, "[e]ducation has been of mighty

¹³ This applies to immigrants everywhere.

importance in Palestinian self-perception as well as in real-life strategies. Education has been seen as both a form of and a preparation for the struggle” (132). Further, she notes that education “has been the sole source of social mobility” and that it has been important for *all* Palestinians, and is not only a concern for those who come from wealthy backgrounds (Lindholm Schulz 132).

A limitation of Karmi’s work is that, beyond her description of her own family, she does not represent a diversity of Palestinian experiences. According to Edward Said, contemporary news media represents Palestinians in two distinct ways: either as downtrodden refugees or fanatic suicide bombers. He argues that before Palestinians made a dramatic re-appearance in the 1960s, the policy was “to ignore them” (*Covering* 20). Karmi notes that

[t]he Western world found little to sympathise with in the Palestinian reappearance on the international stage. There was scant regard for the patient, passive twenty years in which Palestinian refugees had quietly endured their awful lives, awaiting a solution and little understanding for the frustration of Palestinians forced to resort to acts of terrorism in order to have their case heard. But if they had hoped thereby to persuade Western powers of their position they were sadly mistaken. On the contrary, they gave Israelis and their sympathisers a perfect weapon to level at the Palestinians, who were now dubbed “terrorists” and marginalized even more. (388)

Karmi narrates the emergence of Palestinian terrorism, and explores the reasons for this emergence. According to Karmi, the goal of Palestinian terrorism is not to destroy the

state of Israel, but rather to solicit international attention and to make a statement about the harmful effects of Israeli occupation. She suggests that this strategy was, and continues to be, unsuccessful. It enabled Israel to present Palestinians as a threat, which resulted in further international support for Israel.

In her visit to a guerrilla training camp outside Tripoli, Libya Karmi reveals that she is invested in a particular model of Palestinian identity. She recounts:

I suddenly saw that my life [in England] was nothing but an act. I was playing at being Palestinian, unwilling to soil myself with its reality. It was these poor boys, these “terrorists,” with their wretched lives and the certainty of their violent ends, who were the reality. All else was hollow, self-indulgent pretence. (404)

Lindholm Schulz suggests that, to an extent, class divides the Palestinian struggle. There are “tensions between ‘those who fight’ and ‘those who work in offices’” (125). Karmi, as someone who does *not* fight, almost romanticizes the violent commitment that these boys have to defending the Palestinian *nation*. Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation helps to illuminate Karmi’s own understanding of nationhood. As quoted in Chapter One, for Anderson, the nation is an imagined community “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). In order to go to such lengths to defend the Palestinian nation, these boys have to feel strongly that they belong to a Palestinian community that is worth dying for. For Anderson, “[d]ying for one’s country, which usually one does not choose, assumes a moral grandeur, which dying for the Labour Party, the American Medical Association, or

perhaps even Amnesty International can not rival, for these are all bodies one can join or leave at easy will” (144). Thus, the decision of these young boys to end “their wretched lives” (404) is their contribution to supporting and defending the Palestinian nation. Furthermore, that they understand Palestine as something worth fighting, and quite likely dying for, reveals the strength and power of certain versions of Palestinian nationalism.

Karmi understands the *nation* as, in the words of David Theo Goldberg, “the significance of cultural markers as” assigned “indicators of common originary belonging, where race (or ethnicity[...]) might be one of those markers assigned significance or dominance in picking out members” (118). For Karmi, being a member of the Palestinian ethnic group, as opposed to a broader Arab “race,” would be the defining criteria for belonging to a Palestinian nation. Karmi feels attached to a Palestinian nation as an entity to which to belong. Anderson offers insight in terms of understanding Karmi’s attachment to the nation. He argues that “the ‘end of the era of nationalism,’ so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time” (3). The concept of the nation carries a strong political currency, which helps to explain why Karmi is so invested in it.

On her return trip to Israel and the West Bank, Karmi’s choice to represent Palestinian victimization and suffering risks reducing Palestinians to a powerless people lacking agency. She also risks re-inscribing the stereotype of Palestinians as downtrodden refugees. I argue, however, that her choice to foreground Palestinian misery is a deliberate rhetorical strategy in order to foreground the oppression and inequalities to which Palestinians are subject. During this return trip, Karmi is shocked and dismayed by what she witnesses. She sees Palestinians as second class citizens, inferior with respect to

their Israeli counterparts. For example, when she is at a restaurant between Tel-Aviv and Jaffa she notes, “[i]t gave me a sense of unutterable shame to see them, colonised and colonisers alike” (429). Karmi represents the Israelis as colonizers, and the Palestinians as colonized, and therefore weak, subservient and powerless. She does not present an educated or professional class of Palestinians, or any sense of Palestinians as a vibrant people. When she visits her extended family in Tulkarm, in the West Bank, she describes it as “under military occupation and subject to frequent curfews, its people cowed and nervous” (437). Here again, Karmi seeks to expose an unjust power relationship between Israelis and Palestinians, and to explore the psychological impact of living under military occupation. She suggests that Palestinians in the Occupied Territories live in fear and are intimidated by the Israeli authorities.

In her visit with an Israeli couple on the same trip, Karmi foregrounds inequality between Palestinians and Israelis, rather than the possibility of constructively moving forward through coalitions and alliances. The couple that she interacts with “have no time for right-wing Israelis, disapprove [...] of all religious groups and individuals, deprecate [...] the military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank and [have] several Palestinian friends” (441). When they ask Karmi for her impressions of Israel she says that, “there are two peoples here, unequal in every respect because the one considers itself superior to the other” (442). The couple do not agree with Karmi because “there are people like them in Israel who [are] making links with the Palestinians, developing a movement of solidarity and cooperation [...] trying to understand, trying to build bridges” (442). Karmi does not credit the couple with providing real possibilities for moving forward. She suggests that these are tokenistic responses; after all, it is easier to be generous when you

are the one in power. Said notes that “[t]he recent emergence of a group of Israeli ‘doves,’ [also 441 in Karmi] willing to risk something for peace and understanding, is encouraging, but it is still disheartening that the old arguments about Israeli security and Arab threats regularly sweep all alternatives before them” (*Question 173*). Said’s comments affirm Karmi’s scepticism. In her interaction with the couple we do not witness a sustained dialogue, and instead are only left with the ways in which the two positions are irreconcilable.

The unintended consequence of Karmi’s portrayal of the Israeli couple and the young suicide bombers is that it suggests that compromise between Israelis and Palestinians would be next to impossible to achieve. In an article exploring possible solutions to the conflict, however, she suggests that co-existence is ultimately the most constructive way forward. She argues that “it is by no means certain that the two state solution for this intractable conflict is either feasible or desirable” (215). She cites the continued expansion of Israeli settlements on the Occupied Territories, the lack of natural resources in what would be the Palestinian state, and issues of infrastructure and security. Karmi also provides evidence that a one state solution has been under consideration by the Palestinian left and anti-Zionist left wing Israeli organizations since 1969. The state that Karmi envisages as the most viable way forward is a secular democratic state. She does not support a two-state solution or even a bi-national state that would recognize two distinct nations in Palestine-Israel, each with separate national identities. On the website “Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Pro-Con.Org,” in which academics, politicians, and policy makers present their opinions on possible solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, she writes:

No one denies that there will be massive obstacles in the way of implementing a one-state solution in Israel/Palestine. And it may well be that there will have to be a series of intermediary steps towards its realisation: a temporary separation of the two peoples, followed by a stage of bi-nationalism, and ultimately leading to what this author believes to be the most appropriate outcome, namely that of a secular democratic state which we may name “Eretz-Palestine”. (Karmi, ProCon.Org).

Karmi’s choice to represent Palestinians and Israelis as having irreconcilable goals in her memoir seems strange given that in her nonfiction she argues that the most constructive way forward is compromise and coexistence. Perhaps in her memoir she leaves herself more room to express personal feelings of resentment at her loss, whereas in her nonfiction she seeks to be more pragmatic. She dispassionately suggests a possible solution: political equality between Palestinians and Israelis, democratic representation (one person one vote), and a secular state rather than a religious or an ethnic based state.

Upon returning to Palestine, Karmi seeks to return *home*. She has been struggling with her English identity, and does not feel as though she fully belongs in England. She “desperately” concludes: “I would have to go to the source, the origin, the very place, shunned fearfully for years, where it all began in order to find it” (422). She decides to search for her *home*; both her actual childhood house—which she has not seen since she was nine years old—and a place to which to belong. She ultimately discovers, however, that she does not feel a strong connection to Palestine either, and does not feel as though she belongs there. She remains “truly displaced, dislocated in both mind and body, straddling two cultures and unable to belong in either” (422). Karmi’s desire to return

home accords with Victoria Mason's articulation of the complicated connection that many Palestinians living in the Diaspora feel with Palestine upon encountering it as a tangible place. Mason argues that

many Diaspora Palestinians grow up with strong attachments to the homeland, which they imagine is a place in which they will finally feel at home and to which they belong. Unfortunately many discover that a return to Palestine brings a heart-breaking realisation that they feel out of place there too, that feelings of belonging and home are not automatically forthcoming. (275)

Given that Karmi's experience resonates with that of many other Diaspora Palestinians, on her return she both narrates her own feelings of disappointment and sadness, and also speaks to a general anguish that the Palestinian nation experiences in its inability to go *home*. Lindholm Schulz argues that in the realization that belonging is impossible, the "basis of identity is not only lost, but never existed, and the *dream* of 'returning' represents a search for identity as much as for a place" (111). It is worthwhile to note Lindholm Schulz's use of the verb "dream," which suggests that this return home is just that; a fantasy that can never be fulfilled. Bonnie Honig begins the introduction to her book by grappling with understandings of *home*. She quotes Dorothy Gale from *The Wizard of Oz*, and her famous, magical phrase "there's *no* place like home." According to Honig, "the phrase suggests that home is so unique, wonderful, and irreplaceable [...] (a 'place where people know me, where I can just be,' [...]) that no other place ever lives up to it" (xiii). According to Lindholm Schulz, "[h]ome provides security, identity, a place where one is comfortable, needs no roles, where stability, warmth, comfort, relaxation

and meaning prevail” (19). To an extent, Honig and Lindholm Schulz articulate *home* as Karmi has constructed it for herself. Although she explicitly states that she is interested in seeing the house in which she grew up, the rest of her narrative suggests that she also searches for something more. Indeed, the title of her memoir, *In Search of Fatima*, references her beloved childhood nanny, whom she had to leave when she was nine years old and never saw again. I would suggest, therefore, that Karmi’s narrative project is to foreground her own feelings of exile, trauma, loss and liminality as a way to narrate the story of the Palestinian nation’s experience of displacement, dispossession, occupation and oppression. To read Karmi’s memoir as a narrative of *personal* loss lends sympathy to her desire to return *home* and her intense feelings of nostalgia. Her romanticization reveals the strength of her attachment to Palestine, and is a way to work through her personal feelings of loss. This strategy also makes *Palestine* palatable to readers, and encourages a sympathetic response to the plight of the Palestinian Diaspora.

Karmi remains invested in authentic English and Palestinian identities that risks glossing over the diversity within each respective identity, and sets impossible standards of personal belonging. That she is never able to occupy these identities leaves Karmi experiencing constant feelings of loss and dislocation, and at the end of her memoir she does not have access to a coherent Palestine. Furthermore, she has the tendency to present her own experiences of homesickness and loss as more intense than that experienced by contemporary Palestinians. In other ways, however, her romanticized Palestinian nation is an effective rhetorical strategy. The reason Karmi seeks so desperately to support, defend, and return to Palestine is because, as her *home*, it carries tremendous importance for her.

She elicits the empathy from readers who can relate to the desire for a place of emotional, cultural and political belonging.

Chapter Three: Materiality as a Response to Romanticized Nostalgia

Mourid Barghouti, one of the most well-known contemporary Palestinian poets, was born in 1944, “four years before the birth of the State of Israel” (56) in Deir Ghassanah, a village close to Ramallah, where he completed secondary school. He was attending university in Cairo when the 1967 war broke out. The occupying Israeli power did not issue him a reunion permit, and he spent the next thirty years (during which he also married and had a son) living in and between Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Hungary, the United States and the United Arab Emirates. In 1996, he was finally successful in obtaining a reunion permit. His memoir, *I Saw Ramallah*, begins with the trepidation and excitement of his first visit to Palestine in thirty years.¹⁴

In his memoir, Barghouti reveals that for many years his Palestine existed primarily in narrative, memory, imagination, and on the news, but upon returning, he interacts with the materiality of Palestine. It is a place of olive oil and fig trees, hills and pebbles; a place where the land itself exerts a certain agency in shaping its people. In response to his fear that Israel has severed the connection between the Palestinian people and the land, Barghouti rejects a symbolic approach to Palestine in both his interactions with it and his writing about it. He juxtaposes Palestine as a visible, tangible place with the Palestine that exists both in his own and a collective memory. This emphasis on the

¹⁴ Barghouti first published his memoir in Arabic in 1997, one year after this return visit; it was translated into English in 2000. Anna Bernard, a scholar who works on Barghouti, notes that his “name now appears on a considerable number of reading lists designed to introduce European and American readers to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” (665). She goes on to say that *I Saw Ramallah* “was immediately and enthusiastically recognized by the Arabic literary establishment, winning Barghouti the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in 1997 and the Palestine Prize for Poetry in 2000” (665).

materiality of Palestine constitutes Barghouti's political, ethical and aesthetic project. He interrogates the accuracy of his own memories about Palestine, seeks to resist the desire to idealize the past, and explores the impact of Israeli occupation on the landscape. Furthermore, his attempt to connect with some of the villagers of Deir Ghassanah, and to narrate their stories, goes some way toward mitigating the dangers of idealization, in so far as it requires that he foreground the present over any remembered version of the Palestinian past. Forming these connections constitutes another of the most important aspects of his political and aesthetic project; that is, contributing to the construction of the Palestinian nation.

In his engagement with his own memories, Barghouti self-consciously resists nostalgia because he feels that it is a counter-productive, indulgent feeling. In an interview with Stuart Reigeluth, Barghouti says:

I see nostalgia as a negative feeling, a passive one, futile and lazy – another form of luxury suited to persons of a romantic disposition. When you are pushed around, forced into exile and displacement, you don't look back on the place you lost with nostalgia, but with anger. You are in exile because your will has been broken. In my case I was exiled and displaced because the will of my enemy overpowered my own. The unfulfilled desire to restore my will generates anger not nostalgia. (175)

Barghouti's comments suggest that he does not have *access* to this romantic form of nostalgia. He never had the *choice* to leave people and places behind and thus cannot look back on them with a romanticized or idealized yearning. Despite his criticisms of nostalgia, and while he himself seeks to resist engaging in a longing for the past, he often

invokes nostalgia in his reader. He does so in order to reveal some of the ways that Palestine was materially better off before the Israeli occupation. Barghouti also highlights the dangers of collective nostalgia for the Palestinian past. He suggests that such nostalgia ultimately serves the interests of the Israeli Occupation; longing for the past prevents the healthful development of Palestinian towns and cities. He reveals his suspicion of nostalgia, suggesting that it can create a past that is more perfect than the present, and that never actually existed.

The tone of Barghouti's interview and his comments on nostalgia suggests a measured anger, yet Barghouti's memoir is not antagonistic. His well thought-out and strategic use of poetic language and devices allow him to express a restrained and considered resentment. He makes critical statements without ever appearing to be irrational or overly emotional, and his political commentary is always layered and nuanced. Barghouti's memoir is a hybrid piece. Anna Bernard describes *I Saw Ramallah* as "[p]art memoir, part essay and part prose poem" (665). Barghouti's engagement with each of these different modes allows him to achieve different ends. His rhetorical strategy of posing challenging and complex questions invites the reader to ask the same questions and wrestle with possible answers. His use of poetic language encourages an active reading and leaves more room for interpretive space than either of the other two memoirs. Furthermore, Barghouti's engagement with politics is complex. As he says in his memoir "[s]taying away from politics is also politics. Politics is nothing and it is everything" (44). Given Barghouti's statement on politics, it makes sense that his work would be both political and a-political. Although he refrains from making explicitly political statements, I argue that he employs various literary strategies in order to engage with and explore the

politics of Palestine.

Barghouti's ethics inform his aesthetics. He is committed to creating art that engages with Palestine's materiality and he resists a straightforward use of poetic devices. According to Richard van Leeuwen, Barghouti uses both the poems within his memoir and his memoir itself to examine, evoke, record and memorize the homeland, as he understands it (207). van Leeuwen argues that as part of Barghouti's overall narrative project, "[w]riting poetry is [...] an effort to preserve the reality of a place. The effort is situated in the context of Israeli power, which has forced the Palestinians to turn their homeland into an idea or a symbol" (207). van Leeuwen's argument speaks to the importance of materiality for Barghouti's work.¹⁵ Barghouti uses narrative to access and construct Palestine; to remember it as it was in the past, to connect with it in the present, and to envision it as a place of the future. Throughout his memoir, the figure of speech he most frequently employs is metaphor. For example, he compares Palestine and a scorpion, and the Jordan River and a parked car in order to subtly make political statements about the damaging effects of Israeli occupation. He often juxtaposes dissimilar images, or makes uncanny comparisons to encourage his readers to think deeply about the effects of Israeli occupation, and the ways that the West Bank has changed since 1967. An engagement with the tangible reality of a place is a crucial part of Barghouti's aesthetic, ethical, and political project. He says, "I only started to believe in myself as a poet when I discovered how faded all abstracts and absolutes were. When I discovered the accuracy of the concrete detail and the truthfulness of the five senses, and the great gift, in particular, of sight" (62-63). Through his focus on materiality, Barghouti

¹⁵ Later in the chapter, I will examine figs and olive oil as important aspects of this materiality.

commits to presenting—as accurately as possible given that language always has a mediating effect—a picture of life in contemporary Palestine. Bernard argues that “the commitment to the ‘truthfulness of the five senses’” is Barghouti’s “political strategy intended to benefit the collective” (669).

As an approach to resisting nostalgia Barghouti foregrounds the importance of depicting Palestine as he encounters it rather than a remembered, imagined or idealized Palestine. As a political statement, this gesture is intended to resist the Israeli effort to sever the connection between the Palestinian nation and the land of Palestine. Barghouti’s memoir also suggests the role that narrative plays in forging bonds within a group. This connection is possible because his poetry has been inspired by and will be accessible to Palestinians. Through writing poetry he is able to relate to Palestine on his own terms, something that the Israeli government has denied him for the past thirty years. Because he writes in Arabic, he is ultimately successful in establishing a connection with Palestine and its people through his poetry. When the Ministry of Culture in cooperation with a publishing house in Nablus agrees to publish some of his poetry he says, “[a]t last my voice, or part of it, returned to its place and its people” (155). In this moment, Barghouti experiences not only a reconnection with Palestine and its people, but also a restoration of his agency.

For Barghouti, return is a process of reconciling Palestine as it exists in his imagination with Palestine as he concretely experiences it; he wishes to bear witness to what he has lost and examine what has changed. Thus, when Barghouti first glimpses Palestine he sets up the schism between it as an imagined and a touchable place when he says:

Now here I am looking at it: at the west bank of the Jordan River. This then is the “Occupied Territory”? No one was with me to whom I could repeat what I had said years ago [...] that it was not just a phrase on the news bulletins. When the eye sees it, it has all the clarity of earth and pebbles and hills and rocks. It has its colors and temperatures and its wild plants too. [...] Who would dare make it into an abstraction now that it has declared its physical self to the senses? [...] It is no longer “the beloved” in the poetry of resistance, or an item on a political party program, it is not an argument or a metaphor. It stretches before me, as touchable as a scorpion, a bird, a well; as visible as a field of chalk, as the print of shoes. (6)

Despite his stated resistance to describing Palestine in figurative language, Barghouti nonetheless returns to it frequently. In this moment, he employs images that are rooted in the land in suggesting that Palestine is “as touchable as a scorpion, a bird, a well; as visible as a field of chalk, as the print of shoes”(6). Barghouti’s list of dissimilar images has a confusing effect on the reader, which parallels his own disorienting return to Palestine. Although he seeks to assert that Palestine is first and foremost a touchable entity, he is aware that to an extent it is also a political entity, a news bite, the subject of resistance writing, and a metaphor. In the list of images, the scorpion is the most threatening figure, and suggests the harmful, hurtful effects of the Occupation. That a scorpion is not touchable at all suggests that Palestine is still inaccessible to Barghouti individually, and to all Palestinians—those living among the Diaspora and in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Indeed, as Edward Said notes, “the overwhelming majority of most Palestinians (about 3.5 million) are refugees from the 1948 territories and therefore

cannot return under the present circumstances” (Foreword, *Ramallah* ix). The scorpion might also be a statement about the tenuousness of Palestinian land claims and the precarious political situation. The symbolic dimensions of the other metaphors are ultimately more positive. A bird suggests freedom and independence, and a well is life-giving. While it is worth engaging with the substantive content of the images, Barghouti’s choice to use metaphor at all is particularly noteworthy. In returning to metaphor, he makes a statement that in the case of Palestine it is impossible to escape figurative language because of the Israeli Occupation. There is no precise geopolitical entity of Palestine, so something has to be substituted, and in Barghouti’s case this is metaphor. The danger of Palestine existing solely as metaphor is that it detaches the Palestinian people from a particular place and leaves them landless, stateless and vulnerable. In this moment, however, Barghouti’s use of metaphor is not reductive. Rather, it encourages the reader to be an active participant in more deeply understanding what is at stake in a return to Palestine and to ask how touchable Palestine actually is.

Barghouti resists nostalgia through revealing the dangers of longing for the past. He suggests that constructing the past as idealized is particularly risky in the Palestinian context because one of the effects of the Israeli occupation has been to stunt the organic growth of Palestinian villages and towns, in effect leaving them as they would have been in the past. He further suggests that nostalgia precludes the promises of the future, saying:

The Occupation forced us to remain with the old. That is its crime. It did not deprive us of the clay ovens of yesterday, but of the mystery of what we would invent tomorrow. [...] I used to long for the past in Deir Ghassanah as a child longs for precious, lost things. But when I saw that

the past was still there, squatting in the sunshine in the village square, like a dog forgotten by its owners—or like a toy dog—I wanted to take hold of it, to kick it forward to its coming days, to a better future, to tell it: “Run.”
(69-70)

In this moment, Barghouti again uses figurative comparison to suggest that his village—which he compares to an abandoned dog—is helpless and has been beaten down. His use of the toy dog suggests ultimate passivity. He implies that a collective nostalgia for days gone by ultimately keeps the Palestinian nation in the past, and prevents them from constructively moving forward in the present.

Barghouti further suggests that one of the goals of an occupying power is to sever the connection of the occupied people to the land, and in order to achieve this “it is in the interests of an occupation, any occupation, that the homeland should be transformed into a bouquet of symbols. Merely symbols” (69). For Barghouti, understanding Palestine symbolically is a risk because it elides the materiality of place. Thus, the focus on materiality in his work is in part a response to what he understands as Israel’s strategy of converting Palestine into a symbol.

Barghouti’s return involves navigating between the Palestine that exists in his memory and the Palestine that he encounters. Return is a symbolic action, but more importantly for him, it is a concrete action. In the context of Palestine, an action such as return, which is not in and of itself a political statement, becomes political. According to Said, Barghouti’s desire for return is reflective of that of many Palestinians who, he argues, “have not given up on their desire for return; nor have they for any significant length of time considered the alternative of fading indiscriminately into the surrounding

Arab ocean” (*Question 177*). Although at other points in his narrative Barghouti emphasizes that he is not interested in an affiliation with the Palestine Liberation Organization (42), in returning, he enacts one of the PLO’s main goals. In his initial moment of return he creates space to navigate through his feelings of belonging and not belonging, to explore the extent to which he is both an insider and an outsider, and to begin cultivate a connection to the place of Palestine and its people.

Barghouti, more strongly than Karmi and Shihab, is invested in being an insider in Palestine. This may be partly because he was never granted citizenship of another nation-state, and he never spent significant periods of time in any one place. Given this, his return also represents the possibility that he might permanently resettle in Palestine. As a result, more is at stake for him in forming connections with other Palestinians currently living in the West Bank, and in Deir Ghassanah in particular. In his memoir, Barghouti narrates his own life, as well as the stories of others—family and friends, both dead and alive. He uses the tool of story-telling to document the lives of other Palestinians, and to situate himself in relation to a community of contemporary Palestinians, with a deliberate intention not to construct them in a nostalgic way.

Just as he resists describing Palestine and its people in a romanticized way, Barghouti also refuses to indulge in a romantic construction of his own identity as an exiled “stranger.” Instead, he foregrounds the politically vulnerable position of exile and the enduring quality of estrangement. For Barghouti, “the stranger” is a corporeal, political being. He is stateless, and does not receive political acknowledgement of his existence. He “is the person who renews his Residence Permit. He has to constantly come up with evidence and proofs” (3) of his identity. Barghouti presents the experience of

being a stranger as tedious and frustrating. Because he does not have membership to a particular nation-state, his entire existence is somehow invalidated. He also suggests that his identity as a stranger is an enduring one when he says that “the stranger can never go back to what he was. Even if he returns. [...] A person gets ‘displacement’ as he gets asthma, and there is no cure for either” (4). In this moment, Barghouti again employs metaphor; asthma represents displacement, and he feels that both are incurable. As such, Barghouti considers himself to be forever displaced from Palestine, to the extent that even a return there will not fully reconnect him to that place. His use of asthma is another example of his strategy of employing figurative language to make a political statement: the Israeli state’s refusal to grant him re-entry caused him to be permanently sick. He suggests that the condition of exile is inextricably linked with his identity when he says,

It is enough for a person to go through the first experience of uprooting, to become uprooted forever. It is like slipping on the first step of a staircase. You tumble down to the end. It is also like the driving wheel breaking off in the hands of the driver. All the movement of the car will be haphazard and directionless. (131)

Both of the images that Barghouti uses are ominous; he presents exile as an endless, dangerous state of being. Being in exile prevents him from establishing roots or making concrete long-term plans. It is out of his control. Upon returning, he is able to connect with the people of Palestine through stories, poetry and narrative, and the place of Palestine through appreciating and relating with its physicality, but he never feels as though he is fully an insider. His position as an insider is never absolute; he is always in a liminal space in between belonging and not belonging.

According to Bernard, however, it would be a misunderstanding of Barghouti's narrative project to emphasize "his life in exile over his attempt to narrate the lives of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation" (674). For Bernard, Barghouti's exile and his narration of the lives of Palestinians under occupation are mutually exclusive. I argue, however, that this is not the case and that one in fact gives rise to the other: *because* Barghouti understands himself to be permanently in exile, a condition which he has not chosen for himself and does not romanticize, he feels an especially strong desire to resist his exile *through* his connections with other Palestinians, and with Palestine as a material place.

Like Juliane Hammer, I believe that for Barghouti, "[d]isplacement is about letting go of the idea of permanence, both in space and time" (187). One of Barghouti's anxieties comes from a fear of being locked into a moment that is lost. This is ultimately why he feels "comfort in hotels"; they teach him "not to hold on to a place, to accept the idea of leaving" (92). Hammer argues that despite his knowledge of the temporary nature of his stay in any one place, Barghouti always seeks "to live and feel somewhat at home" wherever he is (186). She cites his habit of keeping plants in his various places of residence "as part of an effort to retain a sense of being at home, even in exile" (Hammer 186). I argue that given the emotional energy it would require to maintain such a lifestyle, Barghouti's insistence on doing so demonstrates his strength and optimism. In managing to engage with the various places in which he lives, and also maintain a connection with Palestine, he refuses to be permanently defeated.

Still, Barghouti's experience of exile produces feelings of longing for connection and belonging. He wishes to be a member of a community, despite his acknowledgement

of the difficulty, and perhaps impossibility of achieving this. In the first moments of his return to Deir Ghassanah, Barghouti recounts: “I wanted someone to know me. Even that old man walking slowly and thoughtfully along the street did not know me. And I did not know him, and I did not ask. How stupid in your own birthplace to ask a tourist’s questions: who’s this and what’s that?” (66). Barghouti does not want to admit his ignorance for fear that this will confirm that he does not and cannot belong. Although a desire for belonging to a certain extent resonates as a universal experience, Barghouti’s desire for belonging is heightened as a result of his exile. If this were truly Barghouti’s home, then he would not be a stranger. Helena Lindholm Schulz argues that upon return to Palestine, many Palestinians fear that their own feelings of estrangement reveal that they are not, and perhaps never can be, at home (211).

Barghouti’s narration of the stories of other Palestinians enables him to establish both a textual and a material connection with them. One of the ways that he begins to reconnect with the villagers of Deir Ghassanah is by conducting a poetry reading. At the end of it he recounts:

The reading was over and the discussion with the people of the village began. Questions about displacement, estrangement, returning, and the political situation. But the question I still remember came from a lady in the back row. She said, “what is the most beautiful thing you saw since you returned to the homeland?” I replied quickly and truthfully: “Your faces.” (84)

In this moment, however fleeting, Barghouti finds profound beauty in this particular community of Palestinians. He represents the adults as intelligent and engaging, and the

children as having “eyes full of that enchanting childish mixture of shyness and mischief” (84). Barghouti’s choice to foreground the question about beauty over any of the more politically charged questions about “displacement, estrangement, returning, and the political situation” (84) (which, notably, are quite similar to my own focal points in this project) suggests that it is more important for him to connect with the people of Palestine, rather than to engage with any particular political cause. Still, despite this moment, Barghouti finds himself detached from the people of Deir Ghassanah. At the end of the reading, he says that it

might have been a moment of pure happiness, apart from the voice that scolded me, that said: “Wait a minute!” A cruel and hurtful thought: What does Deir Ghassanah know of you, Mourid? What do your people know of you now? What do they know of the things that you have been through, the things that have shaped you, your acquaintances, your choices, the good and the bad in you throughout the thirty years that you have lived far from them? (84-85)

It is possible that he understands that moments of “pure happiness” can only exist as an ideal. I would also suggest that he is aware of and wary of the possible “purity” of nostalgia, which he deliberately resists. It is also possible that he wishes to protect himself. He prevents himself from experiencing “pure happiness” in connecting with the people of Deir Ghassanah because he fears that any connection with this place or its people poses a risk because of the uncertainty of his gaining permission to return again. He is further attentive to the ways that his experiences during his years living in exile have shaped his identity. His return visit cannot undo the thirty years he spent living in

exile. He questions the extent to which the attendees at his poetry reading understand his exilic identity, and suggests that it would be disingenuous to ignore the impact of living in exile on his construction of selfhood.

Barghouti recognizes both the allure of nostalgia and the potential for irresponsibility that accompanies it. He is attentive to his inability to know the other villagers of Deir Ghassanah, and aware that he does “not know the times they have been through” (85). He notes that “[t]hey lived their time here and I lived my time there” and asks, “[c]an the two times be patched together?” (85). Barghouti resists the pull of nostalgia through forcing himself to come to terms with the time that has elapsed since he was last in Palestine and the changes that have occurred there. van Leeuwen argues that at this moment, the attendees at the poetry reading understand Barghouti as “an idea, a symbol, which has only limited significance for their reality. His recitation of poetry in the village cannot take away this feeling, since the audience cannot ‘know’ him and cannot link their experience to his” (205). Barghouti is also unable to link his experiences to theirs. He does not remain in this moment, however, and instead attempts to move beyond it. He continues to foster connections with other Palestinians, and to share their stories. It is possible that Barghouti’s very status as an outsider—and the distance this affords him—is what enables him to bear witness in this way.

The community that Barghouti constructs is not only a community of the listeners at the poetry reading, or the inhabitants of Deir Ghassanah, Ramallah or the West Bank. In effect, through his attempts at relating and through his sharing of stories, Barghouti connects with and constructs a Palestinian *nation*. For example, he describes ‘Bismarck, who “fixes the affairs of the village in a mysterious way” and Abu Seif, “awesome and

huge, the biggest landowner in the village and its surroundings” (94). Abu Jawdat is “old, generous, always sleepy” and Abu Talab lends “money with interest” (94). Although the anecdotes are not necessarily long or detailed, their presence contextualizes his experience, and offers a broad, rich perspective. According to Hammer, for the authors of many Palestinian memoirs, the people they remember are extremely important because “[t]hey constitute the social space of Palestine and the particular space the authors grew up in. It is the people who influence and shape the place and the sense of belonging there” (183). This is true of *I Saw Ramallah*, which is populated by particular, colourful, unique individuals who, Barghouti insists, are not symbols. The Palestinian *nation*, as he understands it, is made up of these individuals.

Barghouti’s act of nation-building in *I Saw Ramallah* is one of the most important facets of his aesthetic and political project. As Bernard argues, “the form of the narrative [...] binds members of the collective together through its thematic coherence [and] through its aesthetic” (681). Barghouti seeks to “attach one moment to another [...] to attach exiles to the homeland and to attach what I have imagined to what I see now. We have not lived together on our land and we have not died together” (163). Barghouti recognizes the work he must do –intellectually, emotionally, artistically and socially to stitch together some form of a coherent Palestine, and grapples with the forces that make such a construction fraught with difficulty. Because the Palestinian population has been so fractured—between those who were exiled in 1948, those who were exiled in 1967, those who live in Israel or the Occupied Territories, those who live in the Diaspora and those who live in refugee camps—the process of nation-building has been fractured and stunted. The fabric of collective Palestinian nationhood that Barghouti identifies the most

readily is the experience of suffering under the same hostility. He says: “[s]ince 1967 the last move in the Arab chess game has been a losing move. [...] We are always adapting to the conditions of the enemy. [...] Since June 5, 1967 we have been left to sort out our lives in the lengthening shadow of the defeat, the defeat that has not yet ended” (174).

According to Bernard

Here “we” refers to a people who are joined not by their material circumstances, but by the fact that each of them has to “adapt” to circumstances which have been imposed upon them by the Israeli government. Thus, it is their total subjection to Israeli policy, not a particular way of looking at the world, that connects members of Barghouti’s Palestinian nation. This conceptualization of Palestinian identity puts forward a Palestinian nationalism based on a coalitional, rather than identitarian, politics. (681)

As Bernard suggests, Barghouti understands Palestinians as part of a collective whole, the formative aspect of which is their shared suffering at the hands of the state of Israel. To an extent, then, he offers a negative definition of Palestinian identity. Still, despite his suggestion that crisis, death and defeat are a part of a Palestinian national narrative, he also returns to the theme of “Palestinians’ shared imperative of ending the occupation” which is an important theme in his memoir (Bernard 681). For Barghouti, one of the most important facet of these shared circumstances is, in fact, changing them.

As Bernard argues, Barghouti’s emphasis on the physical reality of Palestine is crucial to his nation-building project:

Barghouti’s approach distances him from Benedict Anderson’s

understanding of the nation as a “cultural artifact” which is first discursively “imagined” and then passed down to subsequent generations. Instead, BarghoutI argues that the nation is continually produced through [...] “the real processes” – all of them *physical and material*. (672, emphasis added)

In *I Saw Ramallah* Palestine is much more than the sum of the abstract nationalist discourses that seek to unify its people: though certainly an ideal, it is also a very real place. In his characteristic style of posing difficult and provocative questions that encourage an active reading, Barghouti asks, “how to distinguish between ideologies and conflicting opinions and political theories on the one hand and this green fig that covers a third of the hill next to Abu Hazim’s house on the other?” (37). In this moment, he could be suggesting that in a place that is as politically charged as Palestine, ideology and fig trees are inseparable. He could, however, be gesturing toward the necessity of anchoring the fig tree in its materiality, and refusing to reduce it to a symbol of Palestinian resistance, liberation or even rootedness to the land. And yet, as I quoted earlier, he is adamant that “[s]taying away from politics is also politics. Politics is nothing and it is everything” (44). As such, Barghouti’s stirring description of “[t]he swinging slopes of the hills, the green that speaks in twenty languages of beauty” (37), is also a kind of literary land claim, a testimony to his ability to be at home in the “swinging slopes” and to understand their “twenty languages of beauty.”

In Barghouti’s text, the relationship between nation and narration plays out in the stories he tells his son about Palestine, the way he himself remembers it, and the way that all Diaspora Palestinians, who are denied the right of return, are forced to relate to

Palestine only as an imagined construct and not as a physical entity. Barghouti realizes how much he has forgotten about the place in which he grew up, and he struggles to articulate the loss he has experienced. After wondering how it is that he can relate to Palestine when he has spent so long away from it he says,

The long Occupation [...] created [...] generations of Palestinians strange to Palestine; born in exile and knowing nothing of the homeland except stories and news. [...] Generations that never saw our grandmothers squatting in front of the ovens to present us with a loaf of bread to dip in olive oil [...] The Occupation has created generations without a place whose colors, smells, and sounds they can remember; a first place that belongs to them [...]

Barghouti describes the construction of national identity for Diaspora Palestinians, and laments that they are unable to connect with its materiality. Initially, it appears that Barghouti does not count himself among the Palestinians who are “strange to Palestine,” given that he was not “born in exile” (61). This pronoun use suggests that in this moment he imagines the generation that comes after him, which includes his son Tamim. He then uses the pronoun “us,” however, revealing that he does in fact consider himself to be among those for whom Palestine is unreachable and inaccessible. Barghouti poetically makes the political statement that the main reason Diaspora Palestinians have access to Palestine only through narrative, and cannot connect with its materiality is because of the Israeli Occupation, when he says:

The Occupation has created generations of us that have to adore an unknown beloved: distant, difficult, surrounded by guards, by walls, by

nuclear missiles, by sheer terror. [...] The long Occupation has succeeded in changing us from children of Palestine to children of the idea of Palestine. (61-62)

The Occupation has denied Palestinians a place to which they can return, and a place to which they can belong. The place itself, as he describes it in this moment, is a militarized zone; uninviting, unsafe, and inaccessible. Barghouti resists engaging in a romantic form of nostalgia for Palestine and at another point states that it is a “crime of the Occupation” to have succeeded in turning Palestine into a memory, a symbol, or an “Idea.” As such, he responds by employing symbols such as the fig tree and olives that are rooted in the ground, and are suggestive of growth and sustainability. The value of these material objects gestures towards the importance of the land of Palestine in shaping its people.

One aspect of the materiality of Palestine that Barghouti highlights is olive oil. His treatment of olive oil is nuanced; he foregrounds it is a material product, and yet it also represents his community’s ability to cultivate their land, his belonging to Deir Ghassanah, and his *home*. He says:

After ’67 my discovery that I had to buy olive oil was truly painful. From the day we knew anything we knew that olives and oil were there in our houses. Nobody in the village ever bought oil or olives. The village sells oil and olives to Ramallah, to Amman, to the Gulf. But for their own tables its people bring the olives in from the fields and the oil in from the press to the storeroom and barrels that are never empty from season to season. (58)

Barghouti associates olive oil with the communal process of growing olives and working

the land. I argue that even as he foregrounds the materiality of olive oil, he cannot fully resist the pull of nostalgia associated with it. Although in this moment and others he employs nostalgia strategically, at other times his nostalgic response to his past is most likely unintended. To a certain extent, his memory is nostalgic as it aligns with Linda Hutcheon's definition.¹⁶ He contrasts his past, which is "simple, pure" and "ordered" (Hutcheon 195) with his present in Egypt, which is "contaminated" and "ugly" (Hutcheon 195). For Barghouti, olive oil invokes nostalgia for being at home in a particular place. He associates it with living in a specific spot, and with having his own home. For him, having olive oil at home is a vital part of life, not in Palestine in general but in Deir Ghassanah in particular. Olive oil is also an integral part of the social fabric. Barghouti goes on to say that "[f]or the Palestinian, olive oil is the gift of the traveler, the comfort of the bride, the reward of autumn, the boast of the storeroom, the wealth of the family across centuries" (58). His reference to "wealth [...] across centuries" (58) moves his focus beyond the present moment to a centuries old relationship to the land, and his use of the word "reward" gestures toward its value as a commodity. In Barghouti's description, olive oil *is* wealth, and it is also a *symbol* of wealth. Thus, to a certain extent, Barghouti's invocation of olive oil is nostalgic because he associates with a past that is coherent, safe, and more healthful than his present circumstances in Egypt, where he cannot enjoy the homemade Deir Ghassanah olive oil. When Barghouti is living in Egypt during the early years of his exile he refuses to buy olive oil, suggesting that to do so would be to concede to the loss of his home. He says that "when absence grew long and going back to Deir Ghassanah became impossible, I exercised the first simple and serious humiliation when I put my hand in my pocket in a grocer's shop and bought my first

¹⁶ See also p. 19.

kilogram of olive oil. It was as though I confronted myself, then, with the fact that Deir Ghassanah had become distant” (58). The “humiliation” he experiences has resonances of ultimate defeat, suggesting that more is at stake in this moment than merely paying for olive oil. That he has to buy olive oil at all means he may never be able to be at home again; that he may never *return*. In this moment, I argue that Barghouti employs nostalgia strategically in order to reveal the painful effects of living in exile. He is separated from his family, his community and his land; he is also denied access to a material product that he understands as crucial in shaping his very identity. To further engage with the complexities of this moment, I return to Barghouti’s comments on anger in his interview with Reigeluth. He is in exile in Egypt because his “will has been broken” (Reigeluth 175). He “was exiled and displaced because the will of [his] enemy overpowered [his] own” (175). It was not his *choice* to be in Egypt, or to have to buy olive oil there. As such, according to Barghouti’s own definition, the memory of olive oil invokes anger, not nostalgia. Ultimately, however, Barghouti suggests that before anything else, olive oil (and also figs) are material products that insist—in their physicality and rootedness—on the vitality, health and potential of the Palestinian nation.

At the moment of his initial return, Barghouti engages with a memory that does not have a romanticized or yearning quality to suggest that Palestine was materially better off before the Israeli occupation. In encountering the Jordan River he says,

I was not surprised by its narrowness: the Jordan was always a very thin river. This is how we knew it in childhood. The surprise was that after these long years it had become a river without water. Almost without water. Nature had colluded with Israel in stealing its water. It used to have

a voice, now it was a silent river, a river like a parked car. (5)

In this moment, Barghouti does not think longingly back to the days when the Jordan River flowed mightily. Instead, he narrates a realistic memory that emphasizes that this aspect of Palestine's past was materially better off than its present. Furthermore, Barghouti's use of language strategically encourages his readers to ask difficult and uncomfortable questions about Palestine's past and present, and to attempt to answer these questions. According to Bernard, "Barghouti demands that the reader recognize the image [a parked car] as an artificial one, a realization which should then lead his or her attention back to the material consequences of the evaporation of the river for the inhabitants of the West Bank" (671). In using metaphor, Barghouti is able to poetically make a political statement about one of the effects of Israeli occupation, without appearing to be exclusively political.

When, after thirty years of exile, Barghouti is poised to cross the bridge that will bring him to Palestine, he pauses and recalls the forces that initially expelled him from his home. He describes the bridge over the River Jordan as "no longer than a few metres of wood and thirty years of exile" (9). The bridge, as that which separates and divides, is a potent political entity. He asks, "[h]ow was this piece of dark wood able to distance a whole nation from its dreams? To prevent entire generations from taking their coffee in homes that were theirs? How did it deliver to us all this patience and all that death?" (9). Struck by its fragility, he comments that the bridge is "not a sea or an ocean"; it is "not a mountain range inhabited by wild beasts and fantastical monsters" (9-10). Barghouti navigates between the symbolic importance of his return and its emotional fabric; the physical action and its political significance when he asks if he is a visitor, a refugee, a

citizen, or a guest (11). He lists several of the names of the bridge, revealing its different meanings for Palestinians, Jordanians, Israelis and his family (10). In his return, Barghouti juxtaposes the Palestine that exists in his memory with the Palestine he encounters in order to explore possible political reasons for why it has changed so drastically.

Barghouti uses the feelings of disappointment that accompany his return to engage with the dangers of a romanticized nostalgia. As is the case for many Palestinians, his actual return is “replete with disappointments and frustrations in realising that the dreamt homeland [is] not there anymore” (Lindholm Schulz 214). He says:

I used to tell my Egyptian friends at university that Palestine was green and covered with trees and shrubs and wild flowers. What are these hills? Bare and chalky. Had I been lying to people, then? Or has Israel changed the route to the bridge and exchanged it for this dull road that I do not remember ever seeing in my childhood? [...] Did I paint for strangers an ideal picture of Palestine because I had lost it? I said to myself, when Tamim comes here he will think I have been describing another country [...] I wanted to ask the driver if the road had been like this for many years, but I did not. I had a lump in my throat and a feeling of being let down.
(28)

As Barghouti wonders whether he has idealized Palestine or if it has actually changed, he acknowledges the difficulty of accurately accessing a place that exists only in memory. In this moment, Barghouti self-consciously engages with his own nostalgia. One of the dangers of nostalgia is in creating a glorified past that never existed, and that the present

circumstances could not possibly match. Without as realistic and accurate a picture of pre-1948 and pre-1967 Palestine as possible, Palestinians individually and collectively, personally and politically will be unable to constructively move forward in the present. In this moment, Barghouti also gestures towards his own ethical imperative to bear witness. He feels a responsibility to remember Palestine as it was in the past in order to engage with the damaging effects of Israeli occupation. He also encourages his readers to take an active role, and to consider Israel's role in creating a Palestine that is unrecognizable to Palestinians. Barghouti's experience of encountering a changed and unrecognizable Palestine resonates with that of many other Palestinians. Glenn Bowman argues that Palestinians in both the Diaspora and in Israel and the Occupied Territories "perceive the territory which is the locus of their identity as mutilated and stolen" (139). Bowman's comments suggest that upon their return, Palestinians understand that the change in the landscape is a direct result of Israeli occupation.

Barghouti deliberately resists indulging in personal nostalgia for the fig tree at the house of his aunt, Umm Talal, and employs nostalgia strategically to illuminate the economic situation in the West Bank. Umm Talal relates her reason for cutting down the fig tree, saying: "I've grown old and weak. People have emigrated and people have died. To whom should I feed the figs, my son? No one to pick the fruit and no one to eat. [...] It wearied me and I cut it down" (56). Although neither Barghouti nor his aunt are nostalgic for the fig tree, the poignancy of this moment relies on the reader feeling nostalgic for a time when the fig tree would have flourished. Furthermore, according to Bernard, "the loss of the fig tree and its fruit signifies not only the loss of Palestinian sovereignty over the land, but also, and more crucially, the dispersal of the Palestinian

population and the narrowing of local industry to a single cash crop” (679). As with the olive oil example, Barghouti’s treatment of fig trees is most powerful when understood *both* symbolically and materially. To understand the West Bank’s economic transformation after 1967, it is necessary to consider

a confluence of factors including the confiscation of land for Israeli settlements, which led to land hunger among Palestinian residents; the introduction of modern agricultural methods, which increased production capabilities for some small landowners, but reduced the overall number of agricultural jobs; and the “mass emigration” of West Bankers to the Gulf States in the 1970s. (Pappé as cited in Bernard 679)

Barghouti contrasts the past and the present not to mourn the loss of the fig tree or to condemn his aunt for cutting it down, but rather, to reveal the circumstances that forced her to do so. There are other factors that inhibit the growth of the Palestinian economy. Curfews, checkpoints and blockades make it difficult to move goods in or out of Palestine. Constant university and school closures hinder the development of a knowledge infrastructure. Barghouti notes that “Israel closes down any area it chooses whenever it wants. It prevents people from entering or leaving until the reason for the closure is over. There are always ‘reasons.’ Barricades are set up on the roads between cities” (48). Examining the economic situation in the West Bank is one way in which Barghouti seeks to be attentive to the material reality of Palestine. Still, despite the grim economic prospects, all of the Palestinians who have died, been deported or forced to leave, the ways in which the landscape has been irrevocably changed, and the fragile

nature of his own belonging there, Barghouti nonetheless remains linked to and optimistic about Palestine.

Barghouti is invested in connecting to Palestine not only as a place for himself, but also as a place for his son Tamim. He hopes that Tamim will come to Palestine, and perhaps even “live [t]here one day” (155). Barghouti’s feelings resonate with many other Palestinians, for whom “it is very important to bring their children to visit [...] Palestine, if possible [...] to provide them with knowledge about that aspect of their identity” (Lindholm Schulz 174). Barghouti describes Tamim’s connection with Palestine thus:

He knows all the stories of Deir Ghassanah, the stories of the guesthouse, and the news of the old men and women. He tells them in their peasant dialect exactly as though he had been born in Dar Ra’d. His sorrowful anger at the cutting down of the fig tree was more than the anger of the whole family. He will not forgive my uncle’s poor wife what she did to a tree that he had never seen with his own eyes nor eaten the fruit of, but he cannot imagine Dar Ra’d without it. (136)

Although Barghouti considers it an injustice that Tamim has never seen or set foot in Palestine, in this moment he does not foreground that fact. Rather, he emphasizes the ways in which Tamim is invested in and connected to Palestine as a place, *his* place. His reference to the fig tree is particularly telling. Tamim’s reaction to the cutting down of the tree is stronger than either Barghouti’s or his aunt’s. Thus, even from afar, Barghouti has successfully instilled in Tamim a relationship to the Palestinian landscape. Tamim feels passionately about the Palestine that his father has constructed, despite having never been there. According to Lindholm Schulz, among Diaspora Palestinians, “children assist[...]

in story telling” and make “an effort to learn stories of their parents’ house and village in detail” (103). She further argues that “the family has been a weighty institution in creating a Palestinian identity in exile and restoring a Palestinian community” (172). In sharing stories of Palestine, then, Barghouti and his son are not only remembering it, but also creating and experiencing it.

Unlike Karmi’s text, which ends with her feeling as though she can never return to Palestine, Barghouti ends with the fairly concrete suggestion that he *will* return, and that he will bring Tamim with him. Barghouti’s text is optimistic, in that despite the personal and political barriers that prevent him from fully belonging to Palestine, he nonetheless demonstrates that he does not see belonging as entirely impossible. For him, as for many other Palestinians, hope “is another strategy to counter processes of victimisation and ‘feelings of powerlessness’” (Said as qtd. in Lindholm Schulz 207). Instead of feeling discouraged and defeated by the Israeli bureaucracy and frustrated by the difficulties that his lack of citizenship poses, Barghouti works within the system to foster a connection.

In his memoir, Barghouti constructs his position as an exile as a starting point from which to form connections with Palestinians currently living in Ramallah and Deir Ghassanah. Although he engages with the idea that his identity as a stranger is a crucial part of his composite selfhood, he nonetheless seeks to move out of this condition of estrangement. In forming what is for him an authentic connection to Palestine, he foregrounds the materiality of place and resists nostalgia as vital facets of this connection.

Chapter Four: Strategic Re-Presentation of Conflict and Identity in Palestine

Aziz Shihab's 2007 memoir, *Does the Land Remember Me?* narrates his month-long visit to the village of Sinjil, Palestine in 1993. Shihab left Palestine in 1950 to move to the United States, where he married and started a family. During this return visit, his purpose is to visit his dying mother, to decide what to do with a small piece of land that he owns and to record the reactions of Palestinians to the Oslo Accords and peace process.

Shihab's position—as both a journalist and a voluntary exile—informs his opinions on Palestine-Israel and influences his writings about it. I use Shihab's memoir to explore representations of the Palestinian nation in the past and the present. He narrates a strong image of his individual attachment to and love for the land in order to represent an overall connection that the Palestinian nation has to Palestine as a material, geographical, and physical place. He does so to dispute historical and contemporary Zionist settler ideology and, I argue, to legitimize the land claims of the Palestinian nation. Shihab's memoir reveals that there is important historical information about the Palestinian nation that his readers should understand—specifically the birth of the state of Israel and Britain's and Jordan's roles in that. For Shihab, it is equally important that his readers understand the harsh conditions under which Palestinians struggle in the present. Shihab engages with both media representations of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as well as stereotypes about Palestinians. He explores the negative ramifications of exclusive versions of Israeli and Palestinian nationalisms, and the impacts these exclusive nationalisms have on Palestinians and Israelis. Finally, despite his awareness of the challenges and resultant

limitations that the Palestinian nation faces, Shihab ultimately portrays its strengths, and affirms and celebrates it.

Shihab's exile is different from Karmi's and Barghouti's, in that he was not driven out (as Karmi was) or refused re-entry (as Barghouti was). In that way, Shihab's exile is voluntary.¹⁷ The voluntary character of Shihab's exile prompts him to wonder if he "should be living in America, the country that helped bring so much misery" to the Palestinian people (64). Simultaneously, however, he feels "happy not to be living in this village, suffering the same humiliations" that his family endures (64). His feelings of guilt are heightened by the complicated and often volatile reality of day-to-day life in Palestine-Israel. As such, he struggles to justify his decision to members of his family, to himself, and to other Palestinians. I argue that in order to do so, and also to alleviate his sense of guilt, he criticizes traditional Palestinian customs that continue to be upheld in contemporary life. He also experiences difficulty re-connecting with other Palestinians, and at one point says, "my Palestinian people have their own way of doing things. I just felt glad their ways were not mine" (124). More constructively, however, these feelings of guilt also prompt him to explore both journalistic representations of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as well as stereotypes about the Palestinians. He seeks to provide a more nuanced and balanced representation, which I suggest is crucial for a North American readership.

Shihab's profession as a journalist informs both his ethical and aesthetic project.

His use of journalistic language gives his memoir a less romantic feel than either Karmi's

¹⁷ To refer to Shihab's exile as entirely voluntary may be too reductive. He describes himself as both an exile and a refugee, and when a young Israeli asks him if he feels "disloyal to Palestine by living in America?" he responds with, "I feel very uncomfortable living in America, but I don't really have a choice. Your people have taken my home" (104).

or Barghouti's. Furthermore, the text's apparatus grants it an authority that is more academic than the other two. It is the only memoir of the three that is published by an academic publishing house—Syracuse University Press. The first title page of the book has only the title *Does the Land Remember Me?* with the sub-category “Arab American Writing” indicating the work belongs to a series collected by the press. There is no mention of Shihab's name, or that this is a memoir and therefore a personal account. It is only the second title page that has the sub-heading “A Memoir of Palestine” as well as Shihab's name and the author of the Foreword. The structure of the title pages foregrounds the academic authority of the text rather than Shihab himself as the author. The dust jacket description also removes Shihab as author and suggests that “[t]he central character of the memoir is *Palestine*” (emphasis added) rather than Shihab himself. Shihab's piece—as a hybrid memoir/scholarly study/ journalistic account—does things the other memoirs cannot. It allows Shihab to offer candid criticisms of Israelis and Palestinians, and provides him with the necessary distance to present them in a negative light when necessary. It means that he does not have to shy away from addressing aspects of Palestinian culture that he deems reprehensible—specifically patriarchy and nepotism. The potential risk of Shihab's memoir, however, is that it at times re-inscribes certain negative stereotypes of Palestinians, and does so with the authority of someone who is both a Palestinian and a journalist. Additionally, and more constructively, the text's apparatus goes some way toward advancing Shihab's political agenda. Echoing my use of Juliane Hammer in Chapter One, I argue that Shihab seeks “to preserve [his] memories for essentially political reasons” (189). He hopes that in reading his memoir, his readers will better understand the nuances of Palestine-Israel.

As part of his engagement with representation and narrative, Shihab uses re-constructed memory to narrate the rule of the British before 1948, the years surrounding the creation of the state of Israel, and the role of the British and Jordanian administrations in this creation. Shihab relates that “[t]he British had ruled Palestine with a whip, using our land as part of their empire” (5). He goes on to narrate an incident in his life of abuse at the hands of British soldiers:

I had a small red tarboosh (fez) on my head, and I walked under it straight and happy. Two British soldiers were coming down the road. They stopped me and said, “Why do you look so proud in your tarboosh? You are nothing but an Arab.” They knocked the fez off my head and stepped on it with their boots. I left it in the street and walked away without daring to utter a word. (6)

This episode reminds readers of the long history of occupation and external rule to which the Palestinian people have been subjected, and the negative impacts this has had on their constructions of personal and national identity. In this moment, Shihab represents himself as an archetypal Palestinian who must outwardly concede to his inferiority. He constructs himself as a symbol for the damaging effects of the British colonial rule on the construction of personal and national identity for Palestinians. Furthermore, in a similar way to Karmi, Shihab’s inclusion of this episode reminds his readers of the British presence in Palestine, complicates the notion of Israel as the sole aggressor, and gestures towards Britain’s role in the creation of the state of Israel. Ted Swedenburg argues that the logic of Israel’s autobiography[...] denies the essential role the British performed in facilitating Zionist colonization prior to 1947-1948 [...] By

shining the spotlight on Palestinian self-destruction, Israeli histories cast the British military's superior firepower and its brutal methods into the shadows. (162)

In a way that is similar to Karmi's memoir, Shihab's memoir suggests that in order to understand the intricacies of contemporary Palestine-Israel, it is also necessary to understand the birth of the state of Israel and the involvement of various other powers. He also gestures towards Jordan's role, noting that, "Jordan used Palestine and its people as a bargaining chip with Israel, telling the leaders of the gathering Jews in effect, leave us alone, don't attack us or take away any of the land east of the Jordan River, and we will work with you" (8). The Palestinians were never equal partners in the "division" of Palestine between Jordan, Egypt and the new Israeli state. Shihab's inclusion of Britain's and Jordan's role serves to complicate an overly simplified representation of the birth of the state of Israel, where Israel is the sole aggressor.

Shihab engages with the notion of naming as representation, and explores what is at stake in using certain names to describe Palestine. In the Askar Refugee Camp, he meets some young men who say that they "really hate when people call this place Israel or the West Bank. It was, and still is, Palestine" (42). The young men, I argue, feel that not using the name *Palestine* effectively denies the existence, both historically and presently, of the place of Palestine. The area that was historically the British Mandate of Palestine is known variously as Israel (indeed, on North American world maps the only label for the area is "Israel"), Palestine, Palestine-Israel, Israel-Palestine, the West Bank and Gaza, the Occupied Territories, Judea and Samaria (the Israeli term for the area that falls outside of Israel proper) and the Palestinian National Authority. According to

Richard van Leeuwen,

[t]hese names are not only the expression of different experiences and different ideologies or views of the world. They are also the outcome of wilful manipulation and efforts to fragment an idea into many different components or appearances, which, in the end cannot be put together again. It is an effort to break up the relationship between an idea and a reality, between a place and its meaning. (205)

van Leeuwen's comments address the complex relationship between language, identity, nationhood and power. According to van Leeuwen, the lack of a singular, coherent name for Palestine makes it more difficult for Palestinians to coalesce around a unifying entity. He suggests that it is advantageous to the Israeli state to prevent Palestinians from identifying with a specific geopolitical body. Similarly, Shihab points out that the name "the West Bank," for example, was first used "by Jordan when the Hashemite family annexed the part not occupied by Israel" (13). To build upon van Leeuwen's idea, I argue that the absence of a name is useful for Zionist settler ideology and its settlement building project. A name that is clearly associated with a specific geographical body suggests a link between ideology and land. Without having to acknowledge such a connection, the Israeli state can more easily justify both historical Zionism and contemporary Israeli expansion. Settlers can deny that Palestinians live on this particular land and have a relationship with it.

Shihab includes a representation of Palestinian refugees to suggest that in order to justify building settlements on Palestinian territory and pushing Palestinians to relocate, Israeli settlers must feel a strong sense of entitlement to that land. He presents one facet

of the aggression to which Palestinians are currently subjected, and further demonstrates Palestinian investment in remaining on and belonging to the land. Jamal, a young man whom Shihab meets in the taxi ride from the airport, is going to visit his parents in the Jalazoon Refugee Camp to begin preparations for his wedding. He describes to Shihab, “in exacting detail how Israeli soldiers came to the camp every night and terrorized the refugees, urging them to move to Jordan or some other Arab country” (33). The refugees refuse to be driven out, and say that they want “to live and die in Palestine” (33). The settlers who taunt Palestinians assert a version of Israeli nationalism that actively excludes Palestinians. These settlers wish to belong to an Israel that is only for Jews and seek to drive Palestinians out.¹⁸ The refugees’ refusal to leave reveals a strong investment in Palestine as a place of the past, present and future. It suggests a desire to remain—despite trying, frustrating, and often times oppressive circumstances.

Shihab’s representation of Palestinian refugees emphasizes the refusal of Palestinians to re-locate elsewhere and is a political statement asserting that refugees are part of the Palestinian nation, and must be considered as such in any viable plan for the future. Palestinian rootedness in the land that was formerly the British Mandate of Palestine is particularly meaningful in the context of historical and contemporary encounters with the Israeli Zionist project. Golda Meir, the Prime Minister of Israel in the 1960s stated that ““there are no such things as Palestinians”” and ““it was not as though there was a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. [...] [They] did not exist”” (Quigley as qtd. in Abufarha 356). Quigley notes that “what Meir meant is that Palestinians are not any different from the

¹⁸ Shihab does not explicitly engage with or dispute the grounds for the Israeli settlers’ land claims.

neighbouring Arabs” (Quigley as qtd. in Abufarha 356). Although, as I discussed in the chapter on Karmi’s memoir, many Palestinians do understand themselves as part of a broader Arab nation, it is a perverted logic to use this sense of belonging to suggest that, since Palestinians are also Arabs, they can simply and easily relocate to other Arab states. Many Palestinians identify their former land with their homes and families; they feel as though they belong to their land politically, socially and culturally. Given this, for Edward Said, one of “the principle tenets of Palestinian identity” is “built upon the need for the repossession of land and for the realization of Palestinian statehood. Zionism has always denied not only the legitimacy of these needs but also their reality” (*Question* 149).

Shihab’s representation of his mother’s attachment to her home is in part an exploration of his mother’s strength of character. It is also a statement about the tangible losses that many Palestinians experienced, their refusal to re-settle elsewhere, and their steadfast desire to return. Shihab relates: “Mother kept the keys to our Jerusalem house until her death, and now I have the large solid iron knocker of our front gate” (52). This description resonates with ethnographic accounts of exiled Palestinians. For these Palestinians, many of whom have lived away for decades, the chances of returning to Palestine are slim, and the possibility of re-claiming their homes nearly impossible. Their insistence on keeping the keys demonstrates an attachment to a tangible proof of ownership. This gesture constitutes a refusal to surrender or accept the claim of anyone else to the same house, same land, or same nation. Simultaneously, the futility of this gesture is heartbreaking. To a certain extent, Palestinians who keep the keys to their houses demonstrate an unwillingness to accept an irrevocable loss, and their refusal to do

so may inhibit the development of a realistic assessment of what might actually be possible in the present or the future.

Shihab's representation of Palestinian determination to remain on their land is particularly pertinent given that Israel continues to aggressively expand in the form of settlement building on Palestinian land in the Occupied Territories. One of Shihab's relatives comments: "[l]ook at those boxes out there, [...] Jewish settlers put these houses up overnight. They show up, put barbed wire around our land saying it is for state security, and the next morning you see the boxes scattered all around" (57). These comments suggest the deceptive character of settlement building, and the support of the Israeli state apparatus for such a project. Mary Layoun notes that, as of the early 1990s, "over 52% of the West Bank and 34% of the Gaza Strip ha[d] been confiscated by Israel for military use or settlement by Jewish citizens" (414). According to Helena Lindholm Schulz, "[s]ettlement activities continued throughout the peace process, by all Israeli governments. In 2000 there were 200 000 settlers in the West Bank and Gaza, compared to 120 000 prior to the signing of the Oslo Agreement" (150). The settlements affect the geography of the Palestinian nation and also have a strong psychological impact. There is a significant inequality between Israeli Jewish settlers and Palestinian Arabs who live in the Occupied Territories. For example, the laws governing the lives of the Israelis and Palestinians are vastly different. While Israeli law is similar to that of North American countries, Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are subject to a series of harsh military orders; "[t]here are more than 1,500 military regulations governing the daily lives of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories" (Layoun 415).

As a metonym for Palestine itself, the land stands in for the autonomy,

sovereignty, and self-determination that Palestinians so desperately seek. Shihab represents his relationship to his land as an affirmation of the rootedness of the Palestinian nation in Palestine as a geographical place, as well as linking him to the Palestinian nation. The land connects Shihab to both a past and a present in Palestine. It connects him to the people, who want to know if he still shares their fears and their pain (90). The stakes are so high in Shihab keeping his piece of land because, ultimately, the land is the basis of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Shihab's eighty-five year old relative tells him, "if you own the land you must work the land, visit the land, and love the land. Do you? All our struggle and bloodshed in this country, between us and the Jews, is about land. They came from everywhere and claimed our land [...] Allah does not like greed" (94). His uncle thinks that Shihab must sustain an energetic connection to the land as a resistance to Israeli settlers who have driven and continue to drive Palestinians off of their land. Shihab includes this moment to clarify for his readers that land is the main source of hostility between Palestinians and Israelis, rather than ethnicity, culture, or ideology. He foregrounds the feelings that many Palestinians have that the Israelis unjustly took their land with force.

Shihab creates a picture of his individual attachment to his piece of land in order to affirm the love that the Palestinian nation feels for the land of Palestine. He says,

I walked to my small piece of land, sat on some large rocks, and picked some of its wildflowers. Tears filled my eyes. I made sure the tears fell in various places so that the tear trees would have large areas in which to grow. I told myself they would grow large and their fruits would hang on their branches down to the ground. Then I spoke to the land and said,

‘Please remember me and take care of my tear trees and remember that others may covet you and try to own you but you will always be mine.’ I threw kisses toward the earth. (46)

Shihab personifies the land, and suggests its beauty and lushness. As in other moments, I argue that here Shihab constructs himself as an archetypical Palestinian who has a deep love for, appreciation of and connection to the land of Palestine. In doing so, he suggests that other Palestinians also experience this relationship to the land. To build upon this moment, I contend that he also implies that Israel’s nation-building project has wounded Palestinians by severing their connection to the land.

Shihab represents the ownership of his piece of land as a metonym for the land claims of the Palestinian nation. Part of what is at stake, then, in Shihab’s holding on to the land is refuting the myth that Palestinians had no historical belonging to the land, and that they thus lack such a belonging in the present. The logic that Shihab’s nephew Nayef uses in an attempt to justify his present use of Shihab’s land is strikingly similar to that which the early Zionist settlers used. According to Nayef, Shihab neglected his land and did not properly care for it. Nayef feels that “Jews [...] took our land because it was uncared for, and turned it into gardens” (98), referring to the rationale that early Zionists used when they settled in Palestine. According to Nasser Abufarha, “Palestinians were seen by the colonialists’ eyes as Arab shepherds, part of the landscape frame but not necessarily having any conscious relationship to it (356). It was part of the settler mythology that Palestinians were not interested in cultivating their land, and Palestine

was an unplanted desert until the Zionist settlers developed it.¹⁹

Shihab engages with American ignorance about, and lack of sympathy for, Palestinian land claims. I argue that he does so to suggest that potential peace plans will only succeed if they offer return and compensation for exiled Palestinians. Successful peace plans must also acknowledge the investment that the Palestinian nation has in Palestine as a geographical, physical, material place. Shihab finds that he must constantly remind other Americans of Palestinian existence in the region before the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. At the beginning of the memoir he says: “[f]or some thirty years in the United States, I have always been told I was from Israel” (1). Shihab partially attributes the general American failure to acknowledge that there was once a place called Palestine in which Palestinians lived to “ignorance about the Middle East” (1). He also suggests that in the American imagination the Israeli claim to the land is typically seen as more legitimate than Palestinian claim to the same land, for religious, political and cultural reasons. Like Shihab, Said insists that understanding Palestinian desire to remain on the land must be a starting point for any consideration of future possibilities. He argues that “only if those values and history are taken account of, can we begin to see the bases for compromise, settlement, and finally, peace” (*Question* 118). For those who seek to represent or understand a more nuanced and balanced portrayal of the past and present socio-political landscape of Palestine-Israel, it is necessary to reconcile the fact that there are two peoples who both have valid claims to the land and who do not accept abandoning this claim as a reasonable option.

¹⁹ It is important to distinguish between Zionism and other colonial movements. Zionism was not concerned with acquisition of territory or expansion of empire, but rather, sought a restitution (and creation) of homeland. It was a Jewish movement—primarily a European Jewish movement—designed to establish a homeland away from Europe, where the Jewish people were consistently persecuted.

Shihab explores narratives of religious originary belonging because, as he understands it, the Israeli Jewish narrative is the one that resonates most strongly in the collective North American imagination. Shihab suggests that, as far as the Americans are concerned, Palestinians do not have a legitimate spiritual connection to the Holy Land. This is in part because of the strength of the Israeli national narrative, which represents Palestinians as violently disrupting the long-standing spiritual connection between the Jewish nation and the land of Israel. One of the reasons that Palestinians cannot be “placed meaningfully within” an Israeli national narrative (Swedenburg 154) is that the Israeli version needs to forge a commonality based on religion; a Palestinian national narrative that includes Muslims and Christians would disrupt this cohesion. For those who have grown up in a Judeo-Christian culture, even if secular, the idea that the Jewish nation has an ancient, beautiful connection to the land of Israel is constantly re-enforced. Put differently, for a significant majority of North Americans, even those who are not explicitly religious, the connection between the land Israel and the Jewish nation is one that has become naturalized. This is especially true in a post-Holocaust landscape, where North American and European nations feel a certain amount of guilt, because they themselves turned away persecuted Jews from their borders. Shihab describes one particular Christian minister who spoke in support of Israel as a Jewish state, and described Israel as the land that “the Lord promised to the Jews” (81). In this context, where Jewish repatriation of the Holy Land is seen as a necessary restitution of the loss that the Jewish people experienced 2000 years ago, the Palestinian nation must work even harder to assert its right to belong to the same part of the world.

I read Shihab’s engagement with journalistic representations of Palestinians and

the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as stemming from a personal and professional commitment to offer a more accurate portrayal. The basis of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is most often misrepresented in mainstream journalistic accounts. It is represented as an ancient religious, ethnic or ideological conflict, rather than a dispute over territory or a resistance to occupation. Even when the media represents the Palestinian-Israeli conflict more accurately, there remains a troubling and consistent stereotypical way in which Palestinians are represented. As I discussed in the Karmi chapter, according to Said, Palestinians are represented as either fanatical terrorists and suicide bombers, or downtrodden nondescript Arab refugees. Shihab relates the unending, frustrating task of correcting the unbalanced, pro-Israeli narrative that exists in American journalistic accounts when he says:

I was boiling inside to find out that convincing even one American of the truth of what happened to my people and my homeland was quickly and continuously negated by press coverage portraying my victimized brothers as terrorists. At the same time, the U.S. Press described the killers of my brothers and sisters as heroic people fighting for “security” with American weapons paid for by tax dollars to which I contributed. (2)

In this moment, Shihab addresses multiple facets of the representation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He notes that in the popular American imagination, Palestinians are terrorists while Israelis are heroes. The sensational nature of suicide bombings is one of the reasons why this aspect of the conflict is over-reported in the news. According to Said, “[i]n the West, Palestinians are immediately associated with terrorism, as Israel has seen to it that they are. Stripped of its context, an act of Palestinian desperation looks like

a wanton murder” (*Question 171*). For Said and Shihab, part of the problem is that there is not enough media attention devoted to *why* it is that Palestinians might resort to such acts. Shihab also gestures towards American support for Israel. The United States donates aid money to Israel, sells it weapons, and regularly supports Israel at United Nations meetings. At present, however, with the U.S. administration under President Obama, American support for Israel may be shifting.

Understanding the details of daily life for Palestinians is especially important for Western audiences. The day-to-day reality for Palestinians is not as sensational as suicide bombings and popular uprisings, and thus, regrettably, is rarely part of news media narratives about Palestine-Israel. Shihab offers a representation of the Palestinian nation as suffering, which I contend is a deliberate rhetorical strategy to elicit the readers’ sympathy and establish a full picture of the Palestinian reality. Shihab’s ethical and political project is in part to represent the contemporary plight of the Palestinian nation. He reveals the fears, frustrations, and feelings of impotency and powerlessness that many Palestinians experience. Shihab describes life under Israeli occupation for members of his family, and depicts Israeli exertion of domination and control. He relates that one morning when he was “sitting in [his] mother’s courtyard talking to her philosophically about death and telling her not to be afraid, two Israeli soldiers burst through the front gate with grenades in their hands” (38). He describes a moment that is terrifying, invasive, and humiliating. Under the governing legislation of the Occupied Territories, Israeli soldiers can enter Palestinians’ homes and search them without a permit, and

Palestinians are unable to resist.²⁰ This moment represents some of the most oppressive aspects of daily life for Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. Said further outlines the conditions of the Israeli occupation as of 1967, many of which still apply today. He notes that any Palestinian in the Occupied Territories

could be deported, and many were; thousands of families had their houses destroyed for any number of “suspected” offenses [...]; thousands of people were “transferred” from one place to another [...]; above all, Palestinian residents of the occupied territories were denied any of the privileges of citizenship in their own land. (*Question 137*)

Both Said and Shihab explore the oppressive conditions of the Israeli occupation, and suggest that in the context of Western news media accounts that more readily emphasize Israeli suffering, it becomes especially important that Western audiences are aware of these details.

I interpret Shihab’s text as an intentional representation of a suffering Palestinian nation in response to the overwhelming emphasis on Israel as the constant victim of Palestinian attacks. For Shihab, as well as for Said, another aspect of the problem of representation is that Israeli acts of aggression are under-reported. Said writes, “[w]hat is too often scandalously ignored and unreported in the United States” are events like the “weeks of sustained Israeli napalm bombing of Palestinian refugee camps in southern Lebanon” (*Question 172*). Said argues that Palestinian acts of violence often result in disproportionately severe attacks from Israelis. In Western news media accounts, Israel as

²⁰ Many Palestinians live in the same fear as Shihab’s mother. He recounts that “[d]arkness brings with it lots of fear to villagers, fear of Israeli soldiers, who show [...] up unexpectedly on the [...] roofs of their houses to startle and humiliate them” (39-40).

a nation-state and Israeli individuals are often presented as righteous victims, under threat of a second attempt at extermination, this time by aggressive, anti-Semitic Arabs.

Although there is certainly misery on the Israeli side (which Shihab address, and with which I will engage later in the chapter), there is insufficient attention paid to Israeli acts of hostility.

Shihab explores the barriers that prevent alliances between Palestinians and Israelis in order to suggest that such coalitions do not fit in the context of exclusive versions of nationalism. Coalitions between Palestinians and Israelis would disrupt homogeneous Israeli or Palestinian nation-building projects, and as such are difficult to cultivate. Shihab notes that there is “no rule against Israelis spending the night in Arab neighbourhoods[...] In Israel, on the other hand, a Palestinian from the West Bank would be forbidden to spend the night with any friend” (109). Systemic discrimination, power imbalances, check points, and barbed wire fences further serve to keep Palestinians and Israelis separate.

Shihab’s representation of the Israeli occupation reveals its impact on the occupier as well as the occupied. In doing so, he breaks down one image of Israeli soldiers as triumphant, victorious and ruthless, and gestures towards the harmful outcomes of Israel’s violent defence of itself as a nation-state. His representation of Israeli soldiers serves to humanize them, as well as complicate the victim/perpetrator binary that entrenches the roles of Palestinians as victims and Israelis as perpetrators.²¹ Shihab initially represents Rafi, the young soldier whom he first encounters at the border and who made Shihab strip naked as “covering his cowardice with an aggressive façade” (26). Later, however, when they spend more time together, Shihab reveals that Rafi is an

²¹ This binary emerges most strongly in Karmi’s memoir.

intelligent, gentle young man, with a nuanced view of his circumstances. Shihab describes him as “calm, sensitive, unhappy with his job and unhappy with what he called, ‘this awful mess in this lovely place’” (103). Rafi also apologizes to Shihab, saying, “‘I am sorry about making you strip naked [...] [b]ut orders are orders and army orders are not flexible’” (103). Rafi takes no pleasure in asserting himself over Palestinians, but also does not want to put himself in jeopardy by refusing to obey orders. Shihab also represents a light-hearted picture of Israeli and Jordanian soldiers. As he passes through Israeli and Jordanian checkpoints, Shihab recounts:

I wondered if the boy soldiers of Israel and the Bedouin soldiers of Jordan were on the telephone lines from one checkpoint to the other telling each other dirty jokes. Did they talk about the people who had passed through? I once told a joke to an Israeli soldier near Jericho, and a Jordanian soldier repeated it to me at the Jordan River. (139-40)

The jokes humanize the Israeli and Jordanian soldiers, and suggest that there is a gentler side to what is most often a grave situation. In this moment, both Shihab’s description of the soldiers’ behaviour, as well as his use of the word “boy” remind his readers that the majority of Israeli soldiers are quite young. The mandatory military service for all Israeli youth means that they are put in a position that is almost as unfair to them as it is to the Palestinians who must cross through their checkpoints daily.²² Shihab’s desire and ability to converse with Israelis suggests that although he has a sense of Israeli injustices, he also understands the importance of dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis.

I argue that Shihab’s dialogue with Rafi’s family is noteworthy because it puts forth an image of nation-building in the region that is not necessarily an exclusive

²² Some Israelis are exempted from military service.

Palestinian version. Although his memoir works reveal the suffering of the Palestinian nation, he does not suggest that Palestinians are entirely blameless victims and Israelis solely their tyrants. He recounts that Yasi, Rafi's sister, is a widow whose husband was "killed [by a sniper] when he was returning from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv five years before" (115). She also had a child who "was killed when a suicide bomber attacked a supermarket" (115). Shihab includes these details as examples of Israeli suffering in order to construct a more balanced representation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Furthermore, his representation of Israeli suffering also makes broader statements about the devastating impacts of violent nationalisms. Shihab's interaction with Rafi's family also moves his connection with Israelis beyond a personal connection with one individual to a broader connection with an entire community.

Shihab represents the suffering of the Palestinian nation, and the instances which impede its healthful development. He represents the aftermath of the Oslo Accords and peace process of the 1990s as a setback for the Palestinian nation. He engages with the misrepresentation of the peace process, which suggested and still suggests that Israel offered the Palestinians an independent state that they rejected.²³ Shihab recounts the initial sense of optimism that he and many other Palestinians experienced: "When Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat finally signed the Oslo Accords agreement in 1993, there was talk of a new Palestine. I wanted to witness the re-birth of my homeland" (3). Believed to be a disappointing failure by many Palestinians—something with which each of my three authors engage—"the Oslo Accords neither provided for real Palestinian sovereignty in Gaza and the West Bank nor allowed for

²³ All of my three authors wrote their memoirs after the Oslo Accords; each author was disheartened by the process, and discouraged about the possibility of it bringing lasting peace.

peace and reconciliation between Jews and Arabs” (Said, Foreword, *Ramallah* ix). Said’s comment suggests that that in all the negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, the Palestinians were never treated as equals. According to Lindholm Schulz, “[t]he Oslo Agreement was based on an understanding between the PLO and the Israeli Labour Party that a Palestinian state of some sort was the only realistic outcome of the process, although this would be dependent on the performance of the Palestinian Authority in safeguarding Israeli security” (143). The Oslo Accords did not create a Palestinian state or even a proto-Palestinian state, but instead allocated reservations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on which Palestinians had some autonomy (Lindholm Schulz 143). Shihab relates that many Palestinians were aware of the unfair outcome of the peace process. A man Shihab converses with says to him, “[I]isten to me. We are not getting a country. We are getting Riha (Jericho) and do you know what the word *Riha* means? It means a smell. We are getting a smell of Palestine” (80). The Oslo Accords did not offer the Palestinians a separate state, but instead a different form of occupation²⁴ According to Hammer, “the proliferation of memoirs and autobiographies during the 1990s is linked to the perception of the Oslo process as the latest in a chain of crises for the Palestinian people, in particular the Palestinian diaspora communities” (180).

Shihab represents negative aspects of the Palestinian nation in order to move past a two-dimensional representation. Although Shihab is in many ways successful in disrupting dominant stereotypes and accepted narratives, he is also guilty of re-inscribing certain negative portrayals. He describes a Palestinian mentality that is traditional and

²⁴ The autonomy of the Palestinian National Authority has always been limited and restricted. Israel controls external security and borders. Economic relations are “subject to Israeli regulations [...] and legislation must be presented to Israel in order to be regarded as valid” (Lindholm Schulz 143).

patriarchal (100). He further suggests that it is a society based on nepotism and connection, rather than on merit, when he says that “[t]o get rich here, [...] you have to be a thief and a liar. And to get anything done you have to know the right people” (126). In this moment his portrayal is not adequately nuanced. He neglects to consider that to a certain extent it is true of *anywhere* that it is helpful to have connections. He also deplores that “‘honor killing’ is still going on in many parts of the Arab world” (79). He says that this “sickens” him and he always repeats the words “[t]hey are living in ancient times.” (79). Shihab acknowledges and condemns one of the horrendous practices that still is still carried out in parts of the world. In doing so, he makes the statement that intelligent Palestinian men do not need to condone this practice. I argue that his inclusion of these aspects of Palestinian nationhood is an attempt to represent a complex, balanced portrait of Palestinians, even if this is at times negative. To examine Shihab’s rhetorical strategies, these descriptions may be an effort to grant himself authority as an insider, a Palestinian Arab who has a thorough knowledge of the customs, yet also someone whose values are palatable for a North American readership. In the same vein, it may be an intentional gesture to distance himself from patriarchy and nepotism, which he deems reprehensible. Furthermore, he does not want the clichés that are associated with Arabs, Arab men in particular, to be applied to him.

In addition to conveying both the suffering and setbacks of the Palestinian nation, as well as its more negative aspects, Shihab also seeks to represent its strengths. His memoir represents the Intifada as an example of the strength of the Palestinian nation,

rather than its militancy.²⁵ During the Intifada, Palestinians refused to pay taxes, boycotted Israeli products, engaged in nonviolent civil disobedience, and conducted general strikes. Shihab expresses acceptance of and sympathy for the Intifada, and suggests that it was both an unavoidable response to Israeli rule, as well as an important moment in Palestinian nation-building. Shihab says that the Intifada “seemed almost an inevitable shaking-out of anger and frustration after years of occupation and oppression” (38). Shihab’s use of the word “inevitable” suggests that the Intifada does not need to be justified; the oppressive conditions under which Palestinians in the Occupied Territories live are unsustainable, and thus, resistance is understandable. Given this opinion, images on the news of Palestinians throwing stones at Israeli soldiers (which became an almost iconic example of Palestinian militancy) or refusing to work, and instead “going home to take a nap” (35) become easier to understand. Shihab’s memoir also gestures towards the importance of the Intifada for the Palestinian nation. According to Lindholm Schulz, the First Intifada “had far reaching consequences in raising Palestinian self-esteem and dignity. Psychologically and emotionally, the *intifada* meant a new pride among Palestinians in being Palestinians” (134). In his engagement with the Intifada—a part of Palestinian history that resonates in popular North American imaginary as evidence of the Palestinian nation’s fanaticism and violence—Shihab successfully offers a re-presentation that foregrounds Palestinian strength and agency.

Shihab includes examples of Palestinian autonomy to represent some of the achievements of the Palestinian nation. Despite paying attention to the challenges that the

²⁵ “Intifada” is an Arabic word which literally means “a feverish shudder, [...] trembling, like shaking the dust off something” but is usually translated as “uprising,” and often refers to a popular resistance to oppression. In Palestine-Israel, the First Intifada, which occurred between 1987 and 1993, took place in the Occupied Territories (Lindholm Schulz 128).

Palestinian nation must overcome, Shihab is careful not to represent Palestinians as eternal victims. He describes Palestinian attempts at resistance and their struggle for self-determination. When Shihab is in Ramallah in order to sort out the bureaucratic details of his piece of land, a man who works in the courthouse says to him, “[d]id you know we just got our own Palestinian postage stamps? We don’t have to use Israeli stamps anymore, thanks be to Allah.’ He held high a sheet of the stamps with Yasser Arafat’s picture” (88). This moment represents Palestinian achievement of a modicum of sovereignty and statehood. Although it is important for any nation to have a positive self-image, this is particularly important in the Palestinian case, where the negative image of Palestinians represents a real barrier to Palestinian sovereignty and autonomy. Said argues that despite the attention the media pays them,

Palestinians are still perceived—even at times by themselves—as a collection of basically negative attributes. This being the case, the process toward full Palestinian self-determination is an extraordinarily difficult one (*Question 118*).

Both at an individual and a collective level, the experience of dispossession and occupation inhibits the development of a healthy Palestinian nation. When Palestinians can conceive of themselves in a more positive way, they will also be able to take confidence in their ability to govern themselves.

One way in which Shihab celebrates the strength of the Palestinian nation is by portraying the importance of family for Palestinians. Indeed, the strength of the Palestinian family and its communal mindset have been crucial to the survival of the Palestinian nation. Shihab’s memoir suggests a strong model of Palestinian nationhood

based on loyal family and community ties that span both distance and time. His relatives affirm a communal mentality and emphasize the importance of forming connections with one another; of conversing, eating, and celebrating together. When one of his young relatives is getting married, and Shihab learns that his family has elected him to perform wedding related duties, he says, “[I]isten to me. I came here to visit my mother and to sell a piece of land and to witness the rebirth of Palestine. And that is what I am going to do. Period” (37). One of his uncles, however, informs him that this will not be the case, saying, “[w]hen you are here, you are a member of this family, and you do what is good for the family, and not just what is good for you. Hear me?” (37). Despite Shihab’s decades long absence from Palestine as his family, his family members still consider Shihab to be a member of the family and treat him as such. Shihab’s memoir reminds his readers that despite the challenging and often harsh and oppressive circumstances in which Palestinians live, they are also a nation of great strength and determination

Shihab’s ultimate decision to retain ownership of his piece of land is a demonstration of personal growth and change in his sense of self-identity and identification with Palestine. It is also yet another affirmation of a more general Palestinian rootedness in the land. Shihab recounts the moment of telling his family his decision: “I’m not selling it [...] I’m not selling it to anybody at any price. I’m hanging on to it.’ [...] They clapped as if I had just delivered a moving lecture, and some got up and patted me on the back and shoulders.[...] One said, ‘Now we know you will come back and live among us’” (139). Keeping his piece of land gives Shihab a reason to keep returning, to remain engaged with his relatives and invested in Palestine as a social, cultural, geographical, physical, and political place.

Shihab's memoir is useful, provocative and engaging in offering a *re*-presentation of the Palestinian nation. Shihab's position as an exile—who is both an insider and an outsider—creates the necessary distance for him to offer both commentary and criticisms. He emphasizes aspects of the history of the Palestinian nation that are important to understand in order to constructively move forward in the present. Through narrating the experiences of his family and friends, he highlights the often bleak reality in contemporary Palestine-Israel. To counter Israeli Zionist settler ideology, he narrates his own meaningful and significant relationship with his piece of land, reveals the resolve of Palestinians to hold onto or return to their homes and their land, and gestures towards a long history of Palestinian presence in the region. Although he is at times guilty of reinscribing stereotypes of Palestinians, his work goes a long way toward correcting these stereotypes and offering a more balanced portrayal of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He represents the Palestinian nation as strong, tenacious, and determined. He reconnects with his family and friends; he eats, talks, and attends gatherings with them, and in doing so offers a celebratory representation of Palestinian nationhood.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

I am impressed by some of the methods used to restore Palestine. [...] The steady trickle of memoirs: the daybooks, journals, albums, diaries, and recollections of various Palestinians. All of them rely on the notion of statement – enunciations grounded in personal authority – and strive for the clarity of unquestioned evidence. (Said, *After 75*)

As Edward Said affirms, in the absence of a Palestinian state, the writing of memoir is an important act of nation-building. In an effort to move past a romanticized nostalgia, the three authors I have considered in this thesis use their personal stories “to restore” Palestine, each in their own unique way.

All three memoirs present an image of Palestinian nationhood that stands against the Israeli national narrative. In tracing their genealogies and exploring their personal and family histories, the authors emphasize their origins in Palestine. Through the process of sharing the stories of those who have held on to the keys to their homes and the deeds to their land, they affirm the determination of Palestinians to remain connected to Palestine as a geographical place, and in doing so validate Palestinian land claims. Although the authors see Palestine as a place worth defending, they also present criticism of it. Karmi, for example, finds the patriarchy within Arab society to be oppressive, and suggests that this is one reason why she is unable to re-integrate permanently. Shihab feels distant from “the dowry business,” which always makes him glad he “got married in America” (120).

As exiles, the authors work through and narrate the trauma of the loss of Palestine as home. They explore the resonances of Izzeldin Abuellaish’s statement that “[y]our home, whatever it is, is where you feel safe, or at least grounded. To be pushed out of it is

to be marked with the scar of expulsion for the rest of your life” (30). In all three memoirs, the loss of home becomes a permanent feeling, which, to varying degrees, prevents the sense of belonging anywhere; either to the host country or to Palestine. As such, foregrounding homelessness is a political statement that seeks to address the reality of stateless Palestinians.

The authors explore the personal and the political implications of their return. As Said notes, “[a]ll of us speak of [...] ‘return,’ but do we mean that literally or do we mean, ‘we must restore ourselves to ourselves?’” (*After* 33). He later emphasizes the political resonances of the word “return,” saying that it “is crucial and stands at the very heart of our political quest for self-determination” (*After* 52). In the discourse of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the right of return for exiled Palestinians figures prominently, as a necessary consideration for any viable way forward. Indeed, as Helena Lindholm Schulz argues, “the right of return [...] is one reason why the 2000 Camp David negotiations broke down” (Lindholm Schulz 152-3).²⁶

As well as foregrounding the precarious nature of their ability to return, all three authors emphasize Palestinian suffering at the hands of the state of Israel. While their choice to do so is in part an attempt to work through their own feelings of trauma and loss, it is also a politicized statement. Knowledge of key historical events is crucial for understanding the setbacks from which the Palestinian nation has suffered, which in turn is a necessary starting point from which to constructively move forward in Palestine-

²⁶The Camp David negotiations, which took place between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barack and Palestinian National Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, were an attempt to negotiate a settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. They broke down, largely because of Arafat’s dissatisfaction with the Israeli position on the refugee issue and the Right of Return, as well as the Dome of the Rock. Like the Oslo Accords, the Camp David Negotiations have been misrepresented as another instance in which Palestinians rejected an offer of autonomous statehood.

Israel, and to navigate through workable solutions to the conflict. The memoirs address the impact of the 1948 creation of the state of Israel and the ensuing catastrophe, and the 1967 war and the Israeli occupation. In doing so, each author explores the ways in which Palestine has changed in the last few decades. They gesture towards the disappointing failure of the Oslo Accords and peace process, and the broken promises of Palestinian autonomy. I argue that these memoirs themselves are part of the way forward, as a non-violent approach to nation-building that dramatizes and makes accessible the plight of the Palestinian people.

According to Said, “most Palestinians fully realize that their Other, the Israeli-Jewish people, is a concrete political reality with which they must live in the future” (*Question* 174). Shihab’s memoir in particular speaks to this understanding. In their dialogues with Israelis, both he and Karmi also foreground the importance of Israeli understanding of the Palestinian perspective. Karmi, in her conversation with an Israeli couple, says that “[i]t’s clear for anyone to see that Arabs in this country live separate, excluded lives. In the rest of the world, we call it racism” (442). She draws attention to the unequal status of Palestinians in Israel, and to the damaging psychological effects of living under Israeli occupation. Shihab, in conversation with a young Israeli soldier, says, “I feel very uncomfortable living in America, but I don’t really have a choice. Your people have taken my home” (104). In making such a statement, he emphasizes Israel’s role in Palestinian dispossession. Shihab gestures towards an argument that many scholars have made, asking Israelis to engage with their responsibility for Palestinian losses. Said, for example, stresses the importance of an engaged understanding when he argues that “[b]oth inside Israel and in the Diaspora, Jews lose a great deal when they

shut themselves off from the Palestinian problems they have largely caused” (*Question* 175). The memoirs suggest some optimism in presenting Israelis who are willing to open themselves to “Palestinian problems.”

Still, the authors—Shihab and Barghouti in particular—do not represent Palestinians as sanctified and entirely blameless. Shihab, for example, says, “I truly dislike [...] the lack of self-examination and taking responsibility. People here always seem to blame someone else for their misery and their troubles” (100) and Barghouti argues that

it is not enough to register the faults of others, the Occupier, the Colonialist, the Imperialist, and so on. Disasters do not fall on people’s heads like comets from the sky on a beautiful natural scene. We too have our faults; our share of shortsightedness. I am certain that we were not always a beautiful natural scene. (41)

I argue that, in addition to providing a nuanced representation of Palestinian nationhood that does not always hold it up in high esteem, the authors also seek to represent themselves as distanced and detached enough from Palestine to be able to offer a Palestinian portrait that should be considered as valid.

Given that the authors are Diaspora Palestinians, they affirm Said’s assertion that “the question of Palestinian self-determination includes *all* Palestinians, not just those on the West Bank and Gaza” (*Question* 174, emphasis in original). They reveal their investment in and connection to Palestine as a place of the past, present and future. Said suggests the difficult work that must be done in order to achieve a stable future when he argues that “[i]f we think of Palestine as having the function of both a place to be

returned to and of an *entirely new* place, a vision partially of a restored past and of a novel future, perhaps even a historical disaster transformed into a hope for a different future, we will understand the word's meaning better" (Said, *Question* 125, emphasis in original). He suggests that although the goals of Diaspora Palestinians—who seek to return—and those living in Israel and the Occupied Territories—who are working towards independence and equality where they are—are certainly different, any viable plan for the future must address the needs of both groups.²⁷ In addition to this, his comments also reveal a sense of optimism, and a belief that “transformation” is possible.

Defining, celebrating, affirming and defending the Palestinian nation is not synonymous with insisting that all Palestinians are in favour of a distinct, independent, autonomous Palestinian nation-state. A telling example of this is the opposition many Arab-Israelis express to becoming part of a Palestinian state.²⁸ Despite the decades long presence of this group in Israel, Gregg Carlstrom notes that in 2008, Tzipi Livni, Israel's former foreign minister proposed annexing Arab-Israeli villages to a future Palestinian state, which would force “tens of thousands of Israeli Arabs to choose between their citizenship and their land” (par. 9). This move would require that Arab-Israelis affirm one aspect of their national belonging over another. Although Arab-Israelis often experience discrimination when applying for jobs, and Arab towns and villages by and large receive a lower level of government funding than Jewish communities, Carlstrom highlights what may be a surprising fact: “[p]olls of Israeli Arabs over the last decade have consistently reached a similar finding: most would rather remain in Israel than live under Palestinian

²⁷It must also address the needs of Palestinian refugees, which include adequate compensation.

²⁸According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, the Arab population of Israel (those Palestinians who remained within the 1948 borders and opted for Israeli citizenship) in 2011 is 1,587,000, or 20.5 percent of the population (Jewish Virtual Library par. 1).

jurisdiction” (par. 26). Mustafa Fayoum, a resident of the Arab village of Jaljulia goes as far as to say, “Netanyahu cannot take me and tell me, ‘you are living here [...] I am Israeli, only Israeli’” (qtd in Carlstrom par. 29). Fayoum’s comments highlight the nuances of national and political belonging for many Palestinians. Although the vast majority of Palestinians feel connected to the region, it is by no means the case that all Palestinians are invested in either the creation of or belonging to a Palestinian nation-state. Perhaps surprisingly, many feel connected to Israel, and feel as though they belong there. At the level of policy-making, however, Israel still foregrounds itself as a Jewish nation. Said’s argument about Israeli nationalism addresses its often exclusive character: “Palestine has been replaced by an Israel whose aggressive sense of itself as the state of the Jewish people fuels the exclusivity of a national identity won and maintained to a great extent at our expense” (*After* 34). According to Said, Israel exerts a certain version of nationalism that is not particularly cosmopolitan or inclusive.²⁹

In addition to exploring the plight of the Palestinian Diaspora and the attendant reality of exile, dispossession, loss, and homelessness, as well as documenting the often grim reality of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation, Karmi, Barghouti and Shihab all offer an affirmative and celebratory portrait of the Palestinian nation. They reveal its strength and tenacity, and its determination to carry on into the future. Said suggests as much when he says, “I have never met a Palestinian who is tired enough of being

²⁹ At present, although the majority of both Palestinians and Israelis support a two-state solution, support for a one-state solution is increasing. Many in the region, both Palestinian and Israeli, feel that a one-state solution would encourage alliances and solidarity, rather than dividing the two peoples even further. Still, at the level of policy this option generally met with resistance by Israeli negotiators, who fear that the likelihood “that Palestinians might one day constitute an electoral majority in a bi-national state—which is seen as inevitable”—would constitute “a threat to the ‘Jewish character’ of the country” (Poort par. 4).

Palestinian to give up entirely” (*After* 158). Furthermore, although they gesture towards the limitations of nationalism, they also affirm Benedict Anderson’s assertion that “[i]n an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals [...] to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love” (141). Indeed, especially in the context of journalistic accounts of Palestine-Israel, where Palestinians are often represented as embodying a “near pathological” nationalism, the authors of these memoirs demonstrate a love for Palestine that is rooted in the history, the customs, the land, the material products, and the people.

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