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The Contribution of Ghada Karmi's *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* to English Literature

Ghada Karmi'nin Return: A Palestinian Memoir Adlı Eserinin İngiliz Edebiyatına Katkısı

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore Ghada Karmi's Return: A Palestinian Memoir as an exemplar for the study of exile and diasporic identities in English literature and examines Dickens's portrayal of industrial society and how it expresses Western discourses of power, hierarchy, and cultural dominance, particularly focusing on the postcolonial theories of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Although Karmi writes in English, she is entirely in tune with the Palestinian heritage. As she recalls the Nakba, she expresses the multi-layered psychological and political impact of being dispossessed. Karmi's memoir aims to place the personal recollection of an event alongside the collective trauma of a people, as she examines the dislocation of an individual's sense of self and the unfulfilled desire to 'return.' What is more, the study articulates Karmi's quest to navigate the tension between British cultural integration and Palestinian belonging. More importantly, Karmi offers the Gaza Strip and other occupied Palestinian lands as the lived realities that she and her people inhabit, and not merely the ideological constructs the dominant Western Imperial discourses have made them. Karmi's autobiographical narrative rewrites the dominant Western narratives and repositions the Palestinian realities within the Anglophone literary canon. The memoir is a testament to the fact that the use of English in the colonial context can paradoxically enhance the articulation of a postcolonial Palestinian identity.

***Anahtar Kelimeler**: Palestinian diaspora, exile and memory, postcolonial identity, Anglophone Palestinian identity.*

Özet

Bu çalışma, Ghada Karmi'nin Return: A Palestinian Memoir adlı eserini İngiliz edebiyatında sürgün ve diasporik kimliklerin incelenmesi açısından örnek bir metin olarak ele almakta ve Dickens'ın sanayi toplumuna yönelik tasvirinin Batılı güç, hiyerarşi ve kültürel tahakküm söylemlerini nasıl yansıttığını, özellikle Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha ve Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak'ın postkolonyal teorileri çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Karmi İngilizce yazmasına rağmen tamamen Filistin mirasıyla uyum içerisindedir. Nakba'yı hatırlarken, yurtsuz bırakılmanın çok katmanlı psikolojik ve politik etkilerini ortaya koymaktadır. Karmi'nin anı kitabı, bir olayın kişisel hatırasını bir halkın kolektif travmasıyla birlikte ele almayı amaçlamakta; bireyin benlik algısındaki parçalanmayı ve "geri dönüş" arzusunun gerçekleşmemişliğini incelemektedir. Bunun yanı sıra çalışma, Karmi'nin İngiliz kültürel entegrasyonu ile Filistin aidiyeti arasındaki gerilimi nasıl yönlendirmeye çalıştığını ortaya koymaktadır. Daha da önemlisi, Karmi Gazze Şeridi'ni ve işgal altındaki diğer Filistin

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topraklarını, egemen Batılı emperyal söylemlerin ideolojik kurguları olarak değil, kendisinin ve halkının içinde yaşadığı gerçek yaşam alanları olarak sunmaktadır. Karmi'nin otobiyografik anlatısı, egemen Batılı anlatıları yeniden yazarak Filistin gerçekliğini Anglofon edebiyat kanonu içerisinde yeniden konumlandırmaktadır. Bu anı kitabı, sömürgecilik bağlamında İngilizce kullanımının paradoksal biçimde postkolonyal Filistin kimliğinin ifade edilmesini güçlendirebileceğinin bir göstergesidir.

***Keywords**: Filistin diasporası, sürgün ve hafıza, sömürge sonrası kimlik, İngilizce yazan Filistin kimliği.*

Introduction

The Palestinian Nakba of 1948 is a key event in Middle Eastern history, marking the mass displacement of Palestinian people and the splintering of a collective national identity. The Nakba is a formative event in dispossessing the Palestinian people, and this dispossession is embedded in the cultural memory of the Palestinian people (Masalha, 2012, pp. 7–9). In the Anglophone world, autobiographical writing is the dominant genre for expressing this sense of exile and constructing a diasporic identity (Fischer, 2019, pp. 31–34). One of the most important works in this genre is Ghada Karmi's Return: A Palestinian Memoir (2015), a deeply personal yet politically charged narrative of loss, memory, and the inextinguishable wish to return.

Karmi's memoir retraces the history of her family's forced migration from Jerusalem to Britain after the Nakba, revealing how exile is not merely geographic but deeply affects the construction of one's identity. Karmi's life narrative, like many other Palestinian narratives, situates the self in relation to the trauma of the larger collective loss (Brown, 2017, pp. 112–115). Karmi's Return is an example of personal memory intertwined with collective memory and national history. Such use of memory allows the self to document community history. The use of personal narrative combined with the political also reflects a significant trend within postcolonial critique that subverts the dominant historiographies of empire (Moore, 2017, pp. 145–148).

A central tenet of diaspora studies is the idea of a 'teleology of return', that is, the diasporic consciousness is characterized by an overarching longing for and orientation toward the homeland (Naji, 2015, pp. 52–54). Karmi's narrative engages with and complicates this idea by illustrating her various attempts, both literal and figurative, to return to Palestine many years after her exile. In fact, many critics suggest that her return illustrates the inability to retrieve a homeland that has not been fundamentally transformed, a point that Karmi's critics see as a critique of simplistic nationalist frameworks (Qabaha, 2024, pp. 67–70). In this light, the memoir urges a more nuanced understanding of home and illustrates that return can be both a psychological imperative and a politically unattainable goal.

Furthermore, Karmi's standing as a Palestinian writer in English highlights the tension between cultural assimilation and national identity. The literature produced in English by Palestinians occupies a unique position in post-colonial studies; it engages with and addresses the Western readership while resisting Western imperial rhetoric (Ebileeni, 2017, pp. 214–216). Karmi, somewhat ironically, ascribes an anti-colonial function to the medium of a former imperial power of the Mandate, namely English, through her use of that language. As Gallien (2017, pp. 5–7) notes, most cross–cultural Anglo–Arab writers use English to incorporate silenced and marginalized narratives. Hence, in this regard, Return places the Palestinian lived experience within the Anglophone literary framework.

Karmi's portrayal of Gaza and other occupied territories of Palestine also contests the ideological abstraction of Western thought. She does not treat Palestine as an abstract, symbolic, or mythologized land; instead, she prioritizes the concrete and political realities that constitute the present existence of the Palestinian people. This tendency aligns with post-colonial, feminist, and nationalist critiques that focus on lived experience and embodied reality (Ball, 2012, pp. 98–101). By using autobiographical narrative, Karmi addresses negative and reductive stereotypes and reclaims Palestinian subjectivity from imperial invisibility. Return: A Palestinian Memoir intricately

illustrates the intersectionality of exile, memory, and identity in postcolonial Anglophone literature. Karmi's memoir situates her personal narrative within the collective memory of the Nakba, offering cultural reclamation. She illustrates how writing in English does not indicate assimilation but rather facilitates the expression of a Palestinian diasporic identity that challenges and reconstitutes the Western hegemonic frames of reference. Karmi's memoir represents an invaluable contribution to the scholarship of exile, diasporic consciousness, and the postcolonial configuration of the English language.

Exile, Diaspora, and Postcolonial Identity in Anglophone Literature

Exile, diaspora, and postcolonial identity are among the most productive and contested concepts in Anglophone literary studies. These terms not only represent definitional boundaries but also serve as a critical lens through which one analyzes the nuances of displacement, belonging, and cultural negotiation vis-à-vis imperialism and its legacies. In postcolonial studies, exile usually refers to a forced displacement of an individual from a sovereign territory, political rupture, and a permanent sense of loss. In contrast, diaspora describes a more complex, and in some cases voluntary, dispersal of a group and, in the long run, the maintenance of emotional, cultural, or symbolic connections to a homeland. The difference between exile and diaspora is pronounced in relation to Palestinians, particularly after the 1948 Nakba, which not only created mass displacement but also the formation of a global diasporic memory and framework of return.

Rather than consider the bulk of the sociocultural and expansive condition of the diaspora, Naji (2015) describes the exile as the immediate and coercive severing of one from their homeland, with politically induced personal trauma, while her use of diaspora speaks to the vaguer and broad sociocultural condition that also encompasses the second, and even later, generations and is characterized by the hybrid affiliation and multiple attachments and complex reconstructions of the social identity. That said, Awad (2011) has also noted the two. Exile, as she describes it, is a phenomenon characterized by a more pronounced, acute consciousness of loss and alienation among the marginalized. At the same time, the diaspora encompasses phenomena such as settlement, integration, and the circulation and production of culture within a given social system across several transnational axes. In this regard, while exile is characterized foremost by rupture and the \\"diaspora\\" by continuity, in the production of literature about the Palestinian people, both terms often overlap, with exile progressively becoming synonymous with a diasporic identity evolving.

A critical element of diaspora theory is the tendency of diasporic communities to orient themselves towards the `homeland' and focus on the return, or what Naji (2015) refers to as the `teleology of return`. This impulse is geographical, as it provides a basis for collective identity, but it is also symbolic, as it idealizes the `homeland' as an authentic place of origin (Naji, 2015). However, scholarship on the diaspora has pointed to the shortcomings of a return focus, and to whether it is desirable to begin with. The teleology of return could act as a myth to maintain social cohesion, but it can also distract from the more complicated realities of the `homeland' and the `hostland'. The concept of return, or the `teleology of return', is a dominant feature of Palestinian discourse, and it sharpens the tension between the lived experience and historical claims.

Palestinian exile and diaspora highlight the inextricable linkage between collective trauma and the Palestinian experience of exile and diasporic trauma. Masalha (2012) argues that the Nakba is much more than a historical event; it is an ongoing process of dispossession and structures of dispossession that become part of the Palestinian experience and identity. Palestinians experience the Nakba in their day-to-day lives, and it is integral to their cultural memory. This event is widely documented and represented in the oral histories, commemorations, and literature of the Palestinian community. What most trauma theorists refer to as a foundational cause of collective trauma, the Nakba is the cause of Palestinian trauma. The trauma is so profound that, although the Nakba is often associated with the date 1948, the memory, feeling, and experience of the Nakba are alive and present and continue to shape the diasporic experience.

Memory and trauma become both a site of resistance and an archive of the structures of oppression that exist in the Palestinian diaspora. In the diaspora, literature that recounts is a form of resistance to the erasure of the homeland from the diaspora's memory. Masalha (2012) argues that memory is also a form of decolonization, serving to address and contest dominant narratives that erase the Palestinian experience (pp. 22–25). The Palestinians utilize commemorative literature to assert their historical existence in the interstices of dominant narratives that conceal and erase their existence.

Theoretical interventions by Stuart Hall, Homi K Bhabha, and Edward Said offer valuable insights into the formation of postcolonial identities in these instances. Hall (1990) reconceptualizes cultural identity not as a fixed essence but as a process that is constantly and repeatedly produced through representation (pp. 222–225). For Hall, identity is articulated in relation to history, culture, and power. It is never finished, always in the process of becoming. In this sense, diasporic identities are defined not by purity or origination, but by hybridity and transformation. Such insights are essential for critiquing the oversimplified logic of nationalism and demonstrating the fluidity of belonging.

Bhabha (1994) further elaborates identity, especially through his ideas of hybridity and the 'third space' (pp. 36–39). In colonial and postcolonial contexts, cultural meaning is negotiated in the in-between places that challenge the binary distinctions of colonizer/colonized or home/abroad. Hybridity calls into question claims to cultural authenticity and identities, rendering identity performative and contingent. It is in this third space of the 'diaspora', where, for many diasporic subjects, a site of anxiety is transformed into a site of creativity where identities may be articulated that are not fully assimilated nor wholly descended, and this is particularly useful for many Anglophone Arab writers who navigate the complex terrain of the English language and culture while maintaining a connection to Arab histories and memories.

Edward Said's analysis of exile is worth noting here. Said states that exile creates an 'unhealable rift' (Said, 2000, 173) because of the distance in the relationship between the person exiled and their homeland. Cross-cultural experience can foster awareness of different cultures (Said, 2000, 186-187). This dual consciousness can lead to alienation, yet can provide invaluable insight. Said understands that when someone is exiled, it can cause extreme psychological suffering. This is true; however, he recognizes the upside of exile: it can lead to significant creative and intellectual work. A consciousness of exile can create multiple narratives to counter the oversimplifications and singularity of national and imperial identities.

Hall, Bhabha, and Said illustrate the dynamic and negotiated status of exile and the diasporic experience. Hall focuses on cultural production and representation, Bhabha on liminality and hybridity, and Said on the ethical and political dimensions of displacement. All these different views debate the impact of multiple rival histories and the structures of power through which the post-colonized construct their identity. In what can be called "writing back" to the empire, Gallien (2017) situates Anglo-Arab literature within postcolonial literature, which seeks to dismantle the Eurocentric literary canon and rethink the dominant and the dominated in the geography of English literature. According to her, Anglophone Arab authors in post-imperial Europe create a literary geography that is not national and challenges the presupposition of language ownership (Gallien, 2017). English is, therefore, a colonial gift and a potent weapon for articulating global concerns.

Ebileeni (2017) also views writing in English as an act of writing back, and, in that sense, she classifies Palestinian Anglophone writing as a transnational and polyphonic formation. Writing in English is not an act of cultural submission; rather, it allows authors to take a position at the center of dominant discourses (Ebileeni, 2017). The dominant language becomes a medium for articulating subaltern voices. This aligns with postcolonial literary works that aim to reclaim the language of the empire for postcolonial and decolonial agendas.

The significance of the Nakba in Palestinian Anglophone writing emphasizes the way trauma and memory influence diasporic articulation. In many literary works, the act of return is evoked not only as a physical journey but as a form of narrative reconstruction. The homeland is recollected and reconfigured through memory, testimony, and the stories of different generations. Thus, literature

creates a space in which both the teleology of return is affirmed, and the possibility of critiquing it is offered. While some political frameworks may foreshadow the possibility of return as a definitive goal, literary narratives often highlight the intricate and paradoxical nature of return.

The relationship between exile and diaspora highlights tensions between first-generation displacement and subsequent generational identities. Exile evokes that particular moment of rupture and break, while diaspora implies a process of living and integration. Nevertheless, Palestinian literature shows that even distant generations carry the burden of exile through the memory that is passed down to them. Identity formation around collective trauma, which goes beyond experience, is a structuring part of consciousness. This correlates with trauma theory and postmemory, wherein the descendants of the original bearers of the trauma absorb the stories of the lost and the displaced.

As such, Anglophone Palestinian literature occupies a space that intertwines cultural memory, a critique of post-colonialism, and a negotiation of the diaspora. It challenges imperial historiography from the center by asserting the Palestinian position while engaging with world literature. It also opens a new space of contestation and articulation for the English language by enabling writers to address a Western audience without succumbing to the pressures of assimilation.

The structures of exile and diaspora extend beyond themes to encompass the particulars of 'postcolonial' identity formation. The combination of Hall, Bhabha, and Said, along with Masalha's historical grounding of the Nakba, demonstrates the many complexities of the Palestinian (Arab) Diasporic literature. There is a continuing phenomenon of loss vs. transformation. While the powerful phenomenon of return remains a motivating force, so, too, do the hybrid, transnational, and 'post' phenomena. The analysis and mobilization of Anglophone Arab literature reveal the potential of the displaced to transmute their colonial, linguistic, and cultural legacy into a means of subconscious resistance.

Exile is rupture, diaspora is dispersal and continuity, and 'postcolonial' identity is negotiation within asymmetric power structures. These definitions in the Palestinian context are the literature that memorializes the trauma and the imperial narrative of the subjugated. Against the empire's narrative, Anglophone Palestinian writers are inscribing their Trafalgar histories onto the empire's very own marginalizing linguistic structures. Identity, they show, is not singular, nor is it fixed, but a product of the relations of memory, displacement, and cultural translation.

Palestinian Life Writing and the Politics of Return

The writing of life stories by Palestinians is significant as it helps shape the politics of the Right to Return. At the same time, it constitutes a form of testimony, a means of preserving cultural memory, and a form of political activism. The autobiographical accounts of Palestinian authors not only describe personal experiences but also situate individual journeys within the monumental and complex historical rupture of the Nakba and its continuing aftermath. This is what Masalha (2012) refers to when he cites the Nakba as an open wound and an ongoing structure of dispossession, which continues to form and shape the Palestinian psyche. In such a context, life writing is both a testament to a lived catastrophe and a means of claiming a historical presence in the face of total erasure.

Preservation and resistance are two important scholarly concerns in the analysis of Palestinian diasporic writings and the study of memory. In her analysis of the Palestinian diaspora, Blachnicka-Ciacek (2016) argues that intergenerational memories of Palestine are dominant in the diaspora through various means, such as narrative, commemoration, and memory, and that they create what can be defined as a "transportable homeland." In this sense, life narratives describe Return not just as a geographic destination but as a 'mnemonic practice' that articulates and preserves a sense of self amid displacement. This also resonates with the notion of postmemory in trauma theory, which describes the way in which a subsequent generation articulates and reconstitutes the primary trauma that the generation that lived through the events (Almarhabi, 2020).

The structuring principle of Palestinian discourse, as documented by Naji (2015), remains the ``teleology of return.`` Life writing often narrates return as both a desire and an impossibility. Although memoirs document physical returns to their ancestral towns and villages, these visits often reveal spaces that have changed and been politically altered, making complete restoration impossible. Instead of closing the wound of longing, such returns most often reveal the division of the homeland caused by occupation and by exile. Gallien (2017) observes that the return of the Anglophone Arab.

memoirs, unlike other works, prioritize the double and the hybrid rather than the same romantic-nationalist complexity. This means the politics of return in life writing is far from suggesting any closure; it emphasizes the difference between the memory of the place and the existing geopolitical order.

Stuart Hall (1990) and Homi Bhabha (1994) provide a basis for understanding how these autobiographical works negotiate identity construction. Hall describes cultural identity as an ongoing construction resulting from representation and the positioning of a group in history. Palestinian memoirists engage in this process as they self-locate in relation to Palestine and host societies, and construct identity as a process of becoming rather than as an essence. Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity and the 'third space' offers further insight into how return narratives function. These narratives are synthesized from interstitial, in-between positions, where people are neither fully incorporated nor fully returned to their ancestral homeland. The politics of return, therefore, takes place in this space and problematizes the dualism of home/away and colonizer/colonized.

Said (2000) refers to exile as an 'unhealable rift' and reflections like these are particularly powerful. Exile, for Said, produces a 'contrapuntal' consciousness, an ability to see and understand the existence of multiple histories simultaneously. This dual vision is characteristic of Palestinian life writing. It both critiques the imperial writing, which makes displacement a given and normalizes other displacements and writes of Palestinian continuity and presence. Many, by writing in English, transform the language of empire into a site of counter-narratives. Janeb (2017) states that the writing of the Palestinian Anglophone produces a transnational Maghrebi formation that recolonizes the center. Within this paradigm, life writing is an act of counter-narrative, of "writing back," that articulates Palestinian subjectivity in the global literary field.

It is important to note that the implementing politics of return in Palestinian life writing is not restricted to the territory alone. It has an ethical and an epistemic dimension. Almarhabi (2020) argues that national consciousness is formed through the reconstruction of Nakba memory, thereby reinforcing the legal and narrative imperative of the right of return. However, recent studies draw attention to the multiple imaginations of return. Sheets (2024) notes that, in the case of third-generation migrants, there is an accentuation, albeit in a more culturally sustained and just, perhaps more socially than physically, a repatriation, a shift of 'return' articulated as a cosmopolitical positioning of belonging.

So, Palestinian life writing serves two purposes: it remembers loss and imagines new ways to return. By writing autobiographical accounts, writers add Palestinian histories to the Anglophone canon, challenging dominant histories and showing that collective memory remains strong. The politics of return, as expressed in these texts, is not merely nostalgic or exclusively juridical; it constitutes a dynamic narrative practice that navigates trauma, hybridity, and the persistent quest for recognition. In this way, Palestinian life writing transforms exile from a state of silence into a space of critical expression and cultural strength.

An Analysis of Ghada Karmi's Return: A Palestinian Memoir

Ghada Karmi's Return: A Palestinian Memoir (2015) is a complex narrative that weaves together personal memory, national history, and political critique to question what it means to return for a Palestinian in exile. The memoir oscillates between the author's present experience in Ramallah in 2005 and her childhood displacement from Jerusalem in 1948. Through this technique, Karmi

transforms autobiography into a space where personal trauma and public grief intersect with the collective. The text shows that 'return' is not a simple geographical movement or a psychological state resolved once and for all; it is an ongoing engagement with psychosocial and geographical loss and with a complex, fragmented identity.

The memoir intertwines the personal dimensions of the story with history almost immediately. Karmi's father is dying. As Karmi's father died, Karmi's family history was intertwined with the history of the Ottoman Empire, British Empire, the British Mandate, the establishment of Israel, and the Palestinian exodus. Karmi notes that "an era, not just for his family, but for Palestinian history, was drawing to a close" (Karmi, 2015, p. 11). The father's biography punctuates Palestine's modern history. "What do you say to Omar, you and me going home now?" (Karmi, 2015, p. 12) was a question he posed, and it represented the most direct of the aspirations of the memoir. "Home" was where he wanted to return, both literally and symbolically, to his apartment in Amman and to the Jerusalem he could not get back to, which he had constructed in his mind. This is an example of what Edward Said (2000) described as the "unhealable rift" of exile, where the desire to restore things to their former state or the way they ought to be is juxtaposed against an absence of a history to make it so.

Karmi's memory of standing "helplessly at the closed garden gates of our house in Jerusalem" (Karmi, 2015, p. 12) anchors the text's most profound emotion. The closed gates serve as a metaphor for dispossession—a barrier that is both physical and existential. The Nakba is not captured through grandiose political discourse but through the simple, domestic, and everyday imagery of the house, the garden, and the family. In Reclaiming the Nakba, Karmi writes herself into the tradition of Palestinian life writing that reclaims history through the lived experience. As Masalha (2012) states, the Nakba endures as a "continuing event" in the Palestinian collective memory. Karmi's memoir exemplifies this, demonstrating the echoes of 1948 across decades.

Karmi's first chapter, "Journey to Ramallah," recounts her return to Palestine after years of activism in London. Her internal struggle with this choice is evident. "What the hell was I thinking of?" (Karmi, 2015, p. 15), she recalls. This is a clear case of non-romanticized return. A previous return in 1991 was less than enjoyable. "Flotsam and jetsam, that is what we have become, scattered and divided. There is no room for us or our memories here" (Karmi, 2015, p. 15). This depicts her experience with fragmentation and displacement. This further illustrates Stuart Hall's (1990) conception of diasporic identity as formed through breaks and ruptures rather than continuity.

Karmi's run-in with the Israeli consul and the Allenby Bridge illustrates the layers of bureaucratic control of the occupation. The immigration officer says to Karmi, "It says here you were born in Israel," and Karmi responds, "Not Israel… Palestine" (Karmi, 2015, p. 18). This short interaction describes the fight of competing narratives and the politics of naming. The absence of "Palestine" from official texts is what Said (1978) describes: the control of representation and its politics. Karmi is engaging in narrative resistance through her insistence on "Palestine."

Coming from the literary confines of the Palestinian Authority, the author's experience is nuanced. Her disappointment with the Ministry of Media and Communications reveals how brittle the quantum leap from the Oslo Accords is. The ministry's dilapidated headquarters, the bureaucratic stalemate, and the rivalries between the ministries can detract from the spell of statehood. Karmi contemplates the peculiarity of a "government-within-a-government… operating as if it were sovereign… while in reality, …subservient to someone else in every sense" (Karmi, 2015, p. 24). This contradiction exemplifies the inadequacies of the PA's autonomy and the Oslo Accords.

Meeting Dr. Sabah, in Chapter 2, is a further blow to Karmi's expectations. Some of the heaviest sarcasm from the text is in his question, "What has this to do with you? I simply do not understand" (Karmi, 2015, p. 33). This expresses a form of suspicion toward diaspora returnees and exposes some fractures in the Palestinian social body. The humiliation that Karmi experiences in this instance highlights the tension between external advocacy and the internal political reality. The fact that she feels she has "mishandled the situation badly" (Karmi, 2015, p. 34) illustrates the paradox of

belonging, the most painful part being that returning home does not guarantee acceptance and may even highlight the differences more.

The visual representation of settlements around Ramallah reflects the realities of the occupation. Karmi paints the picture of settlements "cascading down towards the town's outskirts and almost merging with them" (Karmi, 2015, p. 28). The metaphor of homes "stuck virtually on top of each other, one Palestinian, the other Israeli" (Karmi, 2015, p. 28) signifies enforced proximity. The imposed distance of these settlements is exemplified in the commentary of "Do they become friends?" The response is a stern "No, not friends... but they are sort of neighbors" (Karmi, 2015, p. 28). The understatements in such examples are clear signs of prejudice towards the other.

The journey of Karmi's memoir illustrates a self-disclosure of how she has confronted the numerous aspects of her self-identity. As she recalls her time in England, she felt "too 'Arab'… despite being thoroughly anglicized," and of her time in Arab countries, she was "not 'Arab' enough" (Karmi, 2015, p. 19). This self-identity transformation and psychological transition align with Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity and the "third space." In her memoir, Karmi's return to Ramallah illustrates her attempt to resolve these conflicting factors of her life. However, the memoir suggests that "resolution" is nowhere to be found, and that geographic "identity" is a myth.

The father figure's appearance reiterates the theme of generational transmission. The father's story is intergenerational, and his homeward journey is the legacy he passes on to his daughter. This memoir spans the years 1948 to 2005. It addresses the issue of generational exiles. This is where Karmi's story engages with Hirsch's concept of postmemory, where the children of traumatized people remember the trauma and restate the trauma.

In Return, the use of language becomes a tool of politics. By choosing to write in English, Karmi is directly addressing the dominant narratives of the West. She crafts her narrative with a mix of irony, self-irony, and straightforwardness. By capturing the everyday humiliations people endure at borders and ministries, and in supermarkets with Hebrew signage, she deconstructs abstract geopolitical frameworks and centers her narrative on people's lived experiences. Karmi's memoir contributes to what Gallien (2017) identifies as Anglo-Arab "writing back", reshaping the Palestinian experience in the Anglophone world.

Return indeed resists closure. Karmi's journey to Ramallah is not about ending with reconciliation or a victorious homecoming. It bears the disintegration of present-day Palestine, portraying the constraints of personal constructive agency vis-à-vis structural occupation. Nonetheless, the mere act of narration is a kind of return. Karmi's reclamation of a particular memory and the embedding of the Palestinian experience in English prose convert exile into testimony. Return, thereby, becomes a commitment that is ethical, rather than a destination that is 'completed.'

Ghada Karmi's Return: A Palestinian Memoir is not simply an account of personal loss and displacement. Karmi's singular experience intertwines personal memories with collective ones, illustrating the deep-rooted, multifaceted impact of the Nakba on the contemporary Palestinian psyche. This memoir engages with the question of what it means to "go home" when home has been lost forever by juxtaposing scenes of bureaucracy and institutional failure with personal memories. The author argues that the Palestinian diaspora's right to return is not merely the end of exile but rather a complex and contentious interplay among memory, identity, and the geopolitical order. Karmi's story has been silenced, and the power of her words restores that lost presence.

Conclusion

Ghada Karmi's Return: A Palestinian Memoir shows that the processes of exile, diaspora, and return are constructed and transformed through memory, historiography, and politics, rather than being permanent states. With the combination of a personal account and a broader societal record, Karmi's memoir shows that Palestinian identity is neither completely erased by displacement nor

entirely reclaimed through physical return. Instead, it is a state of continuous restructuring. In Hall's (1990) words, while dispersed identities are transformed through reconfiguration, the focus should be on "becoming" rather than "being." In this case, identity is not rooted in a fixed homeland but is the result of a multitude of relations mediated by representation, memory, and the politics of struggle. Karmi's account is a clear representation of this process, as she places herself at the convergence of British cultural integration and Palestinian historical affiliation.

The Nakba experience is noted by Masalha (2012) as the event of 1948 not being a 'closed historical episode', but rather an example of the dispossession that is an enduring structure embedded in the consciousness of the Palestinians. In Return, the remembrance of Jerusalem, the 'closed garden gates', and the 'father's longing for home' are all acts of nostalgic resistance, not sentimental embellishments. In this case, Karmi is not only preserving a personal account by writing in English but also situating Palestinian memory within world literature. In this case, she is defying the truth, erasing.

folds of imperial history. This is in line with what Moore (2017) describes as postcolonial life writing, in which the dominant narrative is subverted, and a new one is constructed through the autobiographical retelling of events.

Regarding Karmi's complicating of the "teleology of return," which is often pivotal to diaspora theory, Naji (2015) notes that diasporic consciousness is commonly organized around a homeland perceived as an authentic site of salvation. Karmi's experience in Ramallah demonstrates that the return is, in fact, an ambivalent one. The homeland is encountered, fragmented by occupation, bureaucracy, and politics. Thus, the return is neither a simple act of reclaiming one is belonging nor a closure to one's nationalist desire. Rather, it demonstrates, in full contour, the stark contrast between an idealized Palestine and the actual, contemporary, dysfunctional geo-political order. This is also the position taken by Qabaha (2024), who argues that Palestinian memoirs of return dismantle unqualified nationalist frameworks and articulate the contradictions between desire and the absence of a geopolitical order.

The memoir's negotiation of language underscores its postcolonial value. Karmi uses English, the language of the colonizing British Mandate power. However, she uses it to reappropriate an instrument of imperial power and convert it into a means of counter-discourse. As Ebileeni (2017) posits, Anglophone Palestinian literature, as a consequence of its position, offers the possibility of the subaltern speaking within the cultures of power. This position is also shared by Gallien (2017), who argues that Anglo-Arab literature subverts English's control by recasting literary geography. Karmi's memoir exemplifies this strategy of "writing back." Through English, Karmi does not signal assimilation but rather a purposeful challenge to Western-dominant frameworks that have disallowed, restricted, or completely erased Palestinian discourse.

Return further illustrates Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space" and hybrid identity. Karmi occupies an 'in-between' position; she can never feel at home in Britain, but also is not fully reintegrated into Palestine. This 'liminal' space can be both an anxiety and a locus of creative truth. Karmi conveys that a diasporic identity is not a dilution of one's origin or a betrayal of one's homeland; rather, it is a complex process of negotiating a multiplicity of connections. The memoir also reframes hybridity not simply as fragmentation but as a positive condition that enables the articulation of deep critical and creative insight and 'contrapuntal' awareness. This is in line with Said's (2000) concept of hybridization in exile as both a painful rupture from one's homeland and an opportunity to explore new ideas.

The memoir also illustrates that the politics of 'return' are more than just a matter of land reclamation. Almarhabi (2020) states that rebuilding the memory of the Nakba is a definitive act of the 'right of return' and serves to develop one's national consciousness. Karmi's text shows that the act of return can be symbolic or ethical, rather than just physical. Writing becomes a form of return; it reclaims one's narrative and historical presence. The memoir, in this sense, aligns with Blachnicka-

Ciacek's (2016) notion of a "portable homeland," achieved through storytelling and intergenerational transmission.

To sum up, Ghada Karmi's Return: A Palestinian Memoir is an important work not only for Anglophone Palestinian literature but also for postcolonial studies. It shows that exile is not just a spatial phenomenon but a lived experience of memory and identity, and that returning is not the destination but an ever-evolving process of negotiating the past and the present. By fusing the personal and the collective, Karmi reinvents autobiography as a politically engaged genre and redeems the English language as a means of decolonial expression. Karmi's memoir demonstrates that the Palestinian diasporic identity, albeit one marked by fragmentation and loss, persists through the power of storytelling. In so doing, she reclaims the Palestinian experience and literature. She shows how important it is to be the site where the loss of history is challenged, and the possibilities of justice are explored.

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