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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the vital role of the journey motif in Ghada Karmi's Return: A Palestinian Memoir (2015). It specifically highlights how the journey taken by Karmi herself from Britain to Palestine leads her to question issues related to her sense of national belonging, identity, and whether return is a truly feasible project. Her return generates intertwined, paradoxical, and ambivalent feelings and attitudes. On the one hand, her expectations are quickly shattered on her visit there, where she feels the wide and the unbridgeable gap between her memory of a remote and distant past and the encountered reality. The Israeli's erasure of the Palestinian landscape and tribulations against Palestinians make it difficult for Karmi to identify with the current Palestine. On the other hand, the paper shows how investigating the crucial role of return as a subversive strategy challenges Israeli narratives which aim at denying the Palestinians' right of return.

Keywords: Ghada Karmi-Identity-Return-Memory-Palestine.

ملخص

الغرض من هذا البحث هو استكشاف الدور الحيوي لفكرة الرحلة في كتاب غادة كرمي العودة: مذكرات فلسطينية (2015). يسلط لبحث الضوء و بشكل خاص على كيف أن الرحلة التي قامت بها كرمي نفسها من بريطانيا إلى فلسطين قادتها إلى التساؤل عن قضايا تتعلق بإحساسها بالانتماء القومي والهوية وما إذا كانت العودة مشروعاً لا ممكناً حقاً. تولد عودتها مشاعر ومواقف متشابكة ومتناقضة. فمن ناحية، تحطمت توقعاتها بسرعة أثناء زيارتها هناك، حيث شعرت بالفجوة الواسعة التي لا يمكن ردمها بين ذكراها عن الماضي البعيد والواقع الذي صادفته. نحو إسرائيل لفلسطين التاريخية والجرا ثم المرتكبة بحق الفلسطينيين يجعل من الصعب على كرمي الانتماء إلى فلسطين الحاضر. من ناحية أخرى، يظهر البحث الحاسم للعودة كإستراتيجية تفكيكية بإمكانها تفنيد الروايات الإسرائيلية التي تهدف إلى إنكار حق الفلسطينيين في العودة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: غادة كرمي، هوية-عودة، ذاكرة، فلسطين

1. **Introduction**

In 1917, The British Mandate issued the Balfour Declaration which facilitated the creation of the state of Israel on Palestinian land. The establishment of the Jewish state in 1948 was at the expense of the expulsion of the indigenous people from their homes. The 1948 Nakba or the catastrophe marked the forced displacement of more than 700.000 Palestinians from their homeland, and more than 500 Palestinian villages had been depopulated. The Palestinian exodus did not end with the Nakba, in 1967, or what is referred to as Nakssa, more than 300.000 Palestinians were displaced when Israel conquered the West Bank and the Strip of Gaza. Since then none of these refugees were ever allowed to return to the homes from which they were displaced. Today, more than 7 million registered Palestinian refugees. The vast majority live in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. More than seventy years, Israel still refuses to grant the refugees their right of return. The "ethnic cleansing" of Palestinians during the Nakba and then Nakssa, and the issue of refugees constitute the very heart of the Palestinian experience and the continued Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel's denial of the right of return for Palestinians is a blatant violation of the international law and human rights. In December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 194 (paragraph 11) which recommends that the newly formed state of Israel to repatriate Palestinians, "wishing to live in peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do at the earliest practicable date", and to compensate them for the loss of property and land. However, the demands of the UN fell in deaf ears as Israel was reluctant and continuously postponed its implementation, even though the terms of its admission to UN membership required adherence to UN resolutions, including 194. Israel claims that there is no room for the refugees to return because there is no physical space, in which they would live. In addition, the traces of villages are lost and have been built over by housing for new immigrants. One more important claim was that the return of the refugees would threaten the Israeli state's Jewish character and demography (Abu Sitta, 2009, p. 3-4). Last, Israel denied its eviction of Palestinians, claiming that they expelled themselves following the orders of Arab and Palestinian official leaders who told them to; and consequently it suggested that the refugees should return only to the West

Bank and Gaza, regardless of whether that is they are from. It seems as if Israel is telling the Palestinians to forget their past, give up their homeland, and assimilate in the host setting. In fact, Israel has always insisted on deleting Palestinians' history of the Nakba to bar the return of the refugees. David Ben Gurion wrote in his diary, "We must do everything to ensure they [the Palestinians] never do return. The old will die and the young will forget". Ben Gurion's statement overshadows Israel's persistent attempts to negate and erase the Palestinian collective memory of Nakba. The Palestinians, however, have not forgotten the story of their dispossession and expulsion and still maintained their deep connections to their homeland.

Commemorating the Nakba then becomes a subversive tool to the colonial official narratives of denial and negation, and a reminder of Palestinians right of return. Nur Masalha (2005) elucidates the importance of oral history, memory, and oral testimonies of the Nakba victims to combat attempts of erasure, silence, and deletion. Ghada Karmi's Return: A Palestinian Memoir is a case in point. Though the memoir chronicles her journey of return to the modern Palestine, the memories of the Nakba pervade the narrative. The recall of past memories of the Nakba demonstrates Karmi's attempts to deconstruct and to subvert the Zionists' narratives to legitimize Palestinians' right of return to their homes. The Nakba is a testimony against Israel's destruction of historic Palestine and the forced displacement of its people from their homeland. Palestinian author, Salman Abu Sitta (1998) defines the Nakba in The Palestinian Nakba 1948:

The Palestinian Nakba is unsurpassed in history. For a country to be occupied by a foreign minority, emptied almost entirely of its people, its physical and cultural landmarks obliterated, its destruction hailed as miraculous act of God and a victory for freedom and civilized values, all according to a premeditated plan, meticulously executed, financially and politically supported from abroad, and still maintained today, is no doubt unique. (p. 5)

The memoir exposes the long lasting impact of the catastrophe and its continuity into the present, as Karmi (2015) herself points out "the past is still the present" (p.269). Karmi's return to Palestine was a part of her work as a consultant at the Ministry of Media and Communication. This paper examines how the journey motif plays an important role in Karmi's Return. The journey taken by

Karmi from Britain, which she calls her adoptive home, to Palestine leads her to question issues related to her sense of national belonging, identity, the role of both the Palestinians of the inside and those in exile, and whether return is a truly feasible project. By undertaking a physical return to her homeland, Karmi's memoir demythologizes and undermines the notion of fixed homeland an exile should eventually return to. Her return generates feelings of disappointment and alienation as the spaces, people, and beliefs have changed over time. She thinks that her journey to Palestine will solidify and reaffirm her belonging to her original homeland, yet she feels out of place. The paper demonstrates that the Israeli's erasure of the Palestinian landscape makes it difficult for Karmi to identify with the current Palestine. Karmi's outward journey is connected with an inner one that plays an important role in shaping and transforming her character and personality. In fact, Karmi goes through different experiences and encounters that help in widening her horizons, gaining new perspectives on the lives of Palestinians living in the occupied territories and in the camps, and instigating in her a deep awareness of the Palestinians' legitimate right of return to reclaim their homeland. Consequently, through the use of the trope of return as a subversive strategy, Karmi challenges and resists the colonial settler narratives that aim at denying the Palestinians' right of return.

2. Theorizing Return

The notion of return, whether imaginary or realized, is an integral part of diaspora studies. Though it is widely acknowledged the aspiration of return is not shared by all diaspora and teleology of diaspora is necessarily linear, recent diasporic narratives reverse this teleology where their writings depict characters leading back home journeys. Some theorists propose the possibility of permanent or short stay. Edward Gilssant maintains that "the first desire of transplanted population unable to maintain the former order of its values is return" (qtd in Anne M. François 2011, p. xvi). Similarly, Maria Oliver-Rotger (2006) points out that diasporic people look for the country of origin as an anchor to define themselves, emphasizing that "there is always nostalgia, the desire for someplace else, to be away from the host country....[to] fill in the void left by years of geographic and cultural separation" (p. 2). William Safran (1991) as well shares their very same views where in his seminal essay, "Diaspora in

Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” argues that the main common feature that is shared by diasporan communities is attachment toward the homeland with an expectation of return. He notes that the diasporic subjects maintain the hope of return to the nation of origins describing the ‘return’ of diasporas as “a largely eschatological concept” that is used “to make life more tolerable by holding out a utopia-or eutopia-that stands in contrast to the perceived dystopia in which actual life is lived” (p.194). He believes that diaspora people “maintain a collective memory or myth” about their original land and regard their “ancestral land as the true, ideal home” which signifies a sense of belonging and attachment toward the homeland (pp.83-84). Diasporic subjects often believe their original homeland as a source for their identification, belonging, and sometimes as a healing from the trauma of separation and this is why they tend to idealize and romanticize their original countries.

Return often results in actual movement to the places of origins, thus transforming ‘imaginary homelands’ (Salman Rushdie’s term) to physical homelands. The idea of returning home has been a recurrent trope in narratives across cultures. The expression of journey-home is a focal theme in Biblical stories, for instance, The Old Testament traces the Jewish exile to Babylonia and back to Jerusalem. Moreover, it becomes the source material of numerous literary works such as the epic poems of Homer’s Odyssey and Dante Alighieri’s Inferno both of which are narratives of homecoming that involve adventure into unknown and distant territory. In her book, Narratives of Place, Culture and Identity: Second- Generation Greek-Americans Return ‘Home’, Anastasia Christou (2006) defines return migration as “the process of migrants’ return to the country/ place of origin, parental/ ancestral extraction or to the ‘symbolic homeland’ ” (p.57). She maintains that return can be either forced or voluntary (in this case it is called ‘repatriation’). There are several terms used to refer to return migration such as, remigration, re-emigration, return law, return movement, reflex migration, retro-migration, back migration, counter migration, counter current ,counter flow, counter stream migration, second time migration ,U-turn migration, and others.

3. *Return and Shattered Expectations*

*Though Karmi lived in England, acquiring an English citizenship, and established a life and career, she cannot ignore the importance of Palestine in the making of her identity. Unable to bear her nostalgic homesickness, yearning the long years of distance, Karmi makes the decision of coming back to Palestine. Her return is then motivated by her need to re-establish connections, connections that had been ruptured by the establishment of the Israeli state at the expense of the Palestinians' expulsion and displacement during what is called the catastrophe or the 1948 Nakba. Karmi asserts that she does not want to be "a kind of second-hand Palestinian, an armchair windbag" (Karmi, 2015, p.17), and a distant commentator; rather she wants to be to an eyewitness to the happenings and present conditions of Palestine. She felt an urge to go to Palestine, to see things by herself, to be a part of her community, and to be involved into the affairs of her homeland. To articulate her Palestinian-ness and relevance, she applies for working as a consultant to the PA's Ministry of Media and Communication. In returning to Palestine, Karmi is initially, and ironically enough aware that she is returning "to what is familiar, secure, stable, one's own" (Storti, 2001, 38). Karmi insists on returning to Palestine to reaffirm and consolidate her sense of belonging to her homeland despite of the Israeli's repeated negation of the Palestinians' claims to their homeland. She asserts "I was of that generation of Palestinians who still retained a memory of the homeland, however fragmented and shadowy, and still knew it as their real country" (Karmi, 2015, p.18). Commenting on exiles' aspiration to return, Ha Jin (2008), in *The Writer as Migrant*, points out that "many exiles, emigrants, expatriates, and even some immigrants are possessed with the desire to someday return to their native lands"; it is then nostalgia, he argues, which usually "deprives them from a sense of direction and prevents them from putting down roots anywhere" (p.63). Likewise, Karmi refuses to dismiss her past and her emotional ties to her homeland.*

Karmi's attachment to Palestine demonstrates that the original homeland cannot be excluded from the making of identity. Gabriel Sheffer (2003) defines "modern diasporas" as "ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin-their homelands" (p.3). Roben Cohen (2008) in his turn aligns with Sheffer's statement whereby he contends, in spite of the different

histories and experiences of the diasporic communities, all “acknowledge that the ‘old country’-a notion often buried deep in language, religion, customor folklore-always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions” (p.ix). Accordingly, living away from the original homeland, migrants attempt to keep bonds with the traditional values of the old country where Avtar Brah (1996) notes that the configurations of home in the diasporic imagination does not necessarily mean that “diasporian subjectivity is ‘rootless’” (p.191). Accordingly, Karmi’s life in exile away from her home country and her immersion in the English culture ironically bring her emotionally closer to Palestine and arouses in her feelings of patriotism and nationalism. Edward Said (2002) defines nationalism as “an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages” (p.177). Karmi shows a total devotion and commitment to the Palestinian cause and holds a strong belief in her national identity. She never doubted her identification as a Palestinian. She defined herself as a “full-time Palestinian” (p.13). Despite being displaced and forced against her will to leave her homeland, her ties to Palestine never vanish as she holds a very strong conviction that as a Palestinian she must return to what is her own. The memoir shows that home follows Karmi as she is unable to cut the ‘umbilical cord’ thatlinks her toher native homeland. She cannot be totally separated from her country, a connection which is apparent in her reaction to the physical separation from her homeland.

Karmi undertakes several temporary journeys of return prior to this current one in an attempt to establish her belongingness and Palestinian identity. Being an Arab Palestinian, living in England, she felt caught in a state of in-betweeness, unable to position herself due to the duality of her identity. In the memoir, Karmi describes her first years in London and how she found it difficult to adapt in the new setting. Living in the diaspora has considerable effects on people; they usually have been ghettoized and excluded from feeling of belongingness to the new country. Setting in a new land is in fact not an easy task whereby migrants find it difficult to adjust in the new environment as their customs, traditions and their whole way of life (Raymond Williams’ term) cannot be fully reconciled with the one of the host country. Such circumstances trigger their decision to journey back to their home countries and thus parody the metaphor of migration as a site of celebration and hybridity. In fact, displacement, longing, and nostalgia or

the root country evoke and encourage the physical act of returning and cause exiles to look back to their original homelands to seek questions pertaining to the nature of their complex and multifaceted identities. Return often results in actual movement to the places of origins, thus transforming 'imaginary homelands' (Salman Rushdie's term) to physical homelands. Karmi thinks that her trip to Syria and Jordan; she went there because she believed that their proximity to Palestine will at least reduce her sense of bewilderment, will solidify and reaffirm her belonging to her Arab roots, yet she felt out of place. Indeed, Karmi's life and stay in England and immersion into the English culture has a significant impact on her identity and results in her inability to identify with both cultures. Thus, she encounters the paradox of being a foreigner in England and a stranger in Syria and Jordan.

Karmi's return is not devoid of challenges and obstacles. Upon her first visit to Palestine after she along with her family left Palestine in April 1948, was in 1991, Karmi lamented the fact that her country had been drastically changed under Israeli occupation. She says: "It had always been too painful to contemplate, too traumatic an acknowledgement of our loss and the triumph of those who had taken our place" (Karmi, 2015, p.7). The occupation had totally changed the landscape of the country as a way to erase the historic Palestine and claim its sovereignty over the land. The new Palestine that she encountered does not reverberate with the memories of her childhood. The mismatch between her memories and the reality brought senses of disappointment and disillusionment. Karmi thought that her visit to her country of birth will bring about a sense of belonging but instead it raises issues related to her sense of identity and national belonging. Moreover, Karmi's journey of return of 2005 was likewise as it generates feelings of despair and foreignness. She summed up her experience there as follows: "It was a momentous journey that had filled me with bitterness and grief. I remember looking down on a night-time Tel Aviv from the windows of the plane taking me back to London and thinking hopelessly, 'Flotsam and jetsam, that's what we've become, scattered and divided. There's no room for us or our memories here. And it won't ever be reversed'" (Karmi, 2015, p.7). Accordingly, the Israeli's erasure of the Palestinian landscape makes it difficult to Karmi to identify with the current Palestine.

Narratives of return then permit writers to portray the experiences of the diasporic subjects and to delve deep into their psyche (Oliver-Rotger, 2015, p.3). These narratives demythologize the original homeland where it is perceived as

alien and foreign to the returnee. In other words, return in some cases enables the diasporic subjects to discover and to confirm the elusiveness of home and thus negating and demythologizing the idealized vision they bury deep in their minds and imagination. For instance, when visiting Ramallah, Karmi is aware about what she is going to find: a changing homeland that does not match with her romanticized and idyllic past because it had been distorted and deteriorated by the Israeli occupation. By Visiting Jerusalem, Karmi was unable to recognize the city of her birth; it now becomes more modernized and highly westernized as a part of Israel's attempts to delete the Arab city and make it exclusively Jewish. Jerusalem does not reverberate with her childhood memories. The same feelings of disappointment are recorded in her visit to the Old City of Hebron. She felt outraged when seeing the Old Souk in the Shuhadda Street, once a hub of commercial life, became deserted and a ghost like place. Such transformations render the city unfamiliar, unrecognizable, and strange to identify with. Owing to the mismatch between the constructed and the imagined homeland, on the one hand, and the current and experienced return on the other hand, coming home can be more difficult and disappointing. For Karmi, then home is "a mythic place of desire" and therefore it is "a place of no return" (Brah, 2006, p.188). Due to her expectations to return to a homeland frozen in time, the coming home usually turns into impossible and illusion. Karmi recognizes that life has moved on and the hopes and dreams of those living in Palestine are not those of diaspora Palestinians. This makes Return a story of disappointment and bitter disillusionment. She expresses her despair as follows:

I had travelled to the land of my birth with a sense of return, but it was a return to the past, to the Palestine of distant memory, not to the place that it is now. The people who lived in this Palestine were nothing to do with the past I was seeking, nor were they a part of some historical tableau frozen in time that I could reconnect with. (Karmi, 2015,p.313)

Karmi's observations and her tours in Palestine give us insights into what life is like in Palestinian occupied territories emphasizing Palestinians' tribulations under Israel's occupation. It is the impact of the occupation and its attempts to erase the landscape that render the homeland different and strange. Palestinians are still subjected to continued dispossession, dislocation, and atrocities. Karmi asserts that "The Nakba was a seminal event in every Palestinian's life, the root of all the sufferings that followed" (Karmi, 2015, p. 212). In other words, for Palestinians the Nakba did not end in 1948 with the "ethnic cleansing of

Palestinians” and their expulsion from their homelands. Today more than 70 percent of Palestinians are refugees, either inside Palestine or scattered throughout the world. The Israeli occupation confiscated their lands, restricted their movements, constructed the separation wall, humiliated them at the checkpoints, besieged Gaza, and postponed the Palestinian refugees’ return to their homes. Accordingly, Israel evicted Palestinians, depopulated villages, and confiscated their lands to take it over to establish its settlements. The aim of these settlements is to besiege and confine towns and villages, restrict Palestinians movements, hinder their connection with the outer world, and protect the Israeli settlers against the Palestinian attacks. Karmi observes that these settlements were set up on West Bank’s agricultural and fertile land and envelop it. In Hebron, Karmi was agonized when hearing the story of Abu Ibrahim whose land has been constantly attacked by Israeli settlers, backed by the Israeli army and then most of it had been taken over to the settlers. Abu Ibrahim’s farm consists mainly of vineyards and because the Israeli army had cut off his water and filling his well with stones, his grapes started to yellow and wither.

In addition to land confiscation, Palestinians are also vulnerable to Israeli soldiers’ mal-treatment and harassment at the checkpoints. The checkpoints are scattered almost everywhere and even in places where the PA is normally the sovereign. Karmi showcases the restrictive impact of checkpoints on Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian territories. These checkpoints are established between one village and the other within the same region and between one town and another to encumber and impede Palestinians’ movements and make life intolerable to them. Even worse, the Israeli checkpoints isolated each and every Palestinian village unto itself. Consequently, fragmenting the West Bank into isolated and separate segments and parts enables Israel to control the Palestinian population. Importantly, curfews undermine the social interactions between Palestinians in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the West Bank, and sense of solidarity in the fight for the common national cause among Palestinians in the occupied territories. This clearly appears in people’s reactions to Israel’s attacks and tribulations against Palestinians. Karmi was distressed at the indifference and lack of concern of people in the West Bank to Israel’s strike of Gaza and the deterioration of the Old city of Hebron. She said: “To them, a village a few miles off far away, let alone Gaza, which could have been on another continent” (Karmi, 2015, p.66).

In the memoir, At Abu Holy, Qalandia, Nablus, and Erez checkpoints, Palestinians are supposed to wait long hours, enduring the Israeli soldiers' harassment and intimidation. In spite of this brutality, Palestinians obey the soldiers' instructions, bear their shouting cries, and the hot and the sweat in the summer or the mud and rain in the winter, and endure the long hours of waiting to reach their destination. Karmi herself was subjected to humiliation from a Druze Israeli soldier at Qalandia checkpoint on her way to Jerusalem.

Karmi harshly criticized the construction of the Separation Wall in the West Bank and exposes its dehumanizing effects. She described it as a cage wherein "wild beasts and ravening wolves roamed the other side and had to be kept out at all costs?" (Karmi, 2015, p.48). The wall stretches for more than 700 kilometers, annexing Palestinian lands inside the West Bank. The Wall is established on the very rich agricultural and fertile lands being confiscated from the Palestinians. The apartheid wall, with its electric fence and height of eight meters, has been constructed, according to Israeli's claims, to protect its security and the security of its settlers from suicide bombers; but in fact it aims at confining Palestinians in prison like towns, communities and families; annexing more Palestinian territory as it is built within the West Bank and along 1967 boundary, known as the Green line, and more importantly, undermining the sense of solidarity among Palestinians to extinguish the flames of resistance against the occupation. To Karmi, the Wall demonstrates Israeli's sovereignty over Palestine. In other words, it designated Israel hegemony over the land and that Palestine is "Israel's alone, to settle, loot, divide, carve up, refashion, rename, and do with whatever it pleased"(Karmi, 2015,p.49). In the memoir, Karmi was distressed when seeing the villages of Abu Diss and Qalqilia, the walled town. Karmi describes her experience in Qalqilia saying that "As if I were inside a prison without hope of escape" (Karmi, 2015, p.240). These two villages were victims of the construction of the Wall. In Qalqilya, farmers' lands had been seized and taken over to Jewish settlers and what remained was totally encircled by the Wall. Indeed, the wall cut off Palestinians farmers from their land. Such a brutality impoverished the town and forced many Palestinian peasants, who lost their lands, to work in construction in the Israeli settlements. The occupation did not stop with seizing Palestinians' lands, constructing settlements, and restricting people's movements, but also confiscated religious and sacred sites, giving them Hebrew names to assert the credibility and the legitimacy to their state. According to Nur Masalha (2008) "The Hebraicisation

and Judaisation of Palestinian geography and toponymy” was designed to “consolidate the myth of the ‘unbroken link’ between the days of the biblical Israelites and the modern Israeli state” (p.131). By Visiting Jerusalem, Karmi exposes Israeli’s encroachments on the city’s archeology and architecture and its project to turn it into a Jewish city, and the Aqsa mosque into a synagogue. The Ibrahimi Mosque, a wonderful Islamic monument in Hebron had been abused as well. Jews believed that the biblical patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives were allegedly buried here and the Cave of Machpelah should belong exclusively to them. Israel partitioned the building into Jewish and Muslim sections, neither of which was accessible to the other. The mosque’s central quadrangle had been transformed into a Jewish religious space. Karmi exclaimed how the Jews could fool themselves into believing that this place is theirs though they can see that they were Islamic shrines and tombs were draped according to Muslim tradition in coverings inscribed with Quranic verses. In addition to the Judaization of the Ibrahimi Mosque, Israel believed that Silwan (City of David according to Hebrew legend) consisted of their biblical past, City of David. According to Karmi, the aim of these archeological investigations is to give “their presence in Palestine a legitimacy they still felt they lacked” (Karmi, 2015, p.245). The search for a Jewish past was at the expense of expelling Palestinians from their homes, and threatening others to withdraw from the area designated to the National Biblical Park. Israeli’s actions then can be interpreted as attempts to erase the historic Palestine to consolidate its existence and justify its sovereignty over the land.

One of the horrifying outcomes of Israeli’s expulsion of Palestinians from their homes during the Nakba and the Nakssa is refugee camps. In the memoir, Karmi gives us an account of her visit to Palestinian refugee camps and describes how life is in these places. Her visit chronicles distress and despair. Karmi was so agonized at life in the camps: poverty, overcrowding, high unemployment rate, piles of uncollected refuse, inadequate drinking water supply, and others. Karmi considers camps as storehouses and sites of traumatic memories; memories of forced displacement and dispossession. Baq’a, Bureij, and Jabaliya refugee camps are, to borrow Karmi words, “corner of Palestine that still lived on” and “islands of memory in an erased landscape, faithful repositories of a Palestinian history” (Karmi; 2015, p.169). Because the camps are reminders of Israeli’s cruelty and testimonies of Palestinian collective memory of dispossession, Karmi points out, were often targets to Israeli’s attacks. Israel attempts to delete

the camps and turn Palestinians into immigrants' rather than refugees to deny them the right of return. In spite of marginalization and impoverishments, Karmi noticed that the refugees still retained "a spirit of determination" and "a solid belief" in a future return to their homeland (Karmi, 2015, p.169).

The occupation's brutality and violation of Palestinians freedoms and rights is also apparent in Gaza Strip. Karmi's journey to Gaza filled her with angst and bitterness as well. Her visit there coincides with Israel Disengagement from Gaza in 2005; the unilateral withdrew of its settlers and troops from Gaza. Karmi was so shocked at the miserable and dire conditions Gazans are living in. Gaza was an "open-air prison", and the largest jail on Earth, consisting of approximately of two million residents who had been under a land, sea, and air blockade imposed by Israel. People in Gaza were barred from travelling out of it, and their movement between Gaza, the West Bank, is restricted to exceptional cases and subjected to Israeli permits. The economic and the humanitarian conditions were even worse as the majority of population depend on humanitarian assistance to survive. This resulted in high unemployment rate and other social problems. These circumstances shatter hopes for a better future among the people of Gaza. For many, emigration has become the only escape out of this large prison. The story of Tariq exemplifies the state of despair and hopelessness the youth in Gaza live in. In addition to the story of Tarik, Karmi's encounters with people in Gaza like Mahmoud al- Zahar, a senior Hamas leader, and Maliha's family made her realize the huge impact Israel had on Gaza. She said: "Gaza was a place of Israel's making, created out of deliberate impoverishment and violence" (Karmi, 2015, p.207).

In the memoir, Karmi's criticism encompasses the Palestinian political stance. Her work at the ministry of Media and communication allowed her to have a deep understanding of the internal state of affairs not only of the ministry but also of the Palestinian Authority. Working there, Karmi was unwelcomed. She faced extreme resistance and downright hostility from her colleagues. She applied to this job in the hope to help in constructing her country, but she finds only humiliation, indifference, and rejection. Tania Ghanem (2003) states that "Many return with the anticipation that the skills they have acquired abroad will give them the opportunity to contribute to the development or reconstruction of their country. Instead, the returnee's enthusiasm is received by the home population with cold indifference or rejection" (p.45). Those in the ministry view her as an outsider and a threat. Unfortunately, Karmi's aspirations, ambitions,

and attempts to come to terms with her country go in vain. Her experience with the ministry and the PA made her realize that the Palestinian leaders seem to live in a bubble, organizing conferences, spending time, money, and skills just to give some meaning to the situation. The PA, the pretend government, with its ministries, the pretend ministries, according to Karmi, behaved as if it were a government of a state; but in reality, it was checked by Israel. The PA was subservient to the Israel in every sense. Since the PA has no income of its own, it is heavily dependent on foreign aids and taxes collected by Israel. Such dependency made the PA subservient and ineffective against the enforcement of increasingly encroaching borders and checkpoints by Israel. She contrasted the current policy of cooperation with Israel with that of the PLO when the organization emphasized armed resistance and liberation. The PA under the leadership Mahmoud Abbas abandons all forms of armed struggle against the occupier and subscribes to submission and even defeatism. She criticized the current discourse of the PA and how it has instructed Palestinians that they have no power to resist the atrocities of the Israeli army, and that it would be less harmful if they submit to its military power. She comments: "I remembered the vigorous, creative young revolutionary he had been and could scarcely believe that this defeated, submissive creature was the same man" (Karmi, 2015, p.311).

4. Memory as a Site of Belonging and Resistance

Israel's tribulations and violations against the Palestinians, and Palestinian Authority's impotency and defeatism make Karmi realize the futility of both of her tasks, the professional and the personal. Karmi comes to Palestine with the aspiration to regain her sense of belonging and identification with her root country and to help in building it, yet she ends up disappointed and distressed. Similarly, Said points out that "no return to the past is without irony, or without a sense that a full return, or repatriation is impossible" (2001 [2000], p. xxxv). Karmi aware of the failure of the actual return attempts to return metaphorically, relying on the power of memory. Returning to the past through the vehicle of memory allows her to lessen the disappointment and disillusionment of the physical return and to reestablish her belonging to her homeland. Through the act of remembering, Karmi tries to recreate, to voice her past, and to reaffirm her national identity. Her recurrent references to her

childhood memories of the pre Nakba in Qatamoon allow her to reconstruct her childhood homeland and thus enable her to return metaphorically.

*In his seminal essay "Imaginary Homelands," Salman Rushdie (1982) states that what drives him to write his novel *Midnight's Children* was an attempt to restore his childhood home, distant both in time and space, to the present. He argues that "the writer who is out of country and even out of language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity of his present being in a different place from his past, of his elsewhere" (1982, p.12). Therefore through the act of imagination and remembrance, Rushdie brings home to London. Speaking of Indian immigrants, he writes that "our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities and villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (1982, p.10). Home then for immigrants is a construct of memory of the past that exists in often fractured and contradictory relationship with the present. Rushdie asserts that his memories of childhood in Bombay are partial and fragmentary and that his reflections were made "in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been inevitably lost" (1982, p.11). Memory, though fragmented can compensate for the loss of the childhood home and bring it to life in the changed present. Consequently, Karmi's articulation of home is the product of memory wherein the notion of home is not a mere physical dwelling or simply a geographical location but it transcends the physicality of place and becomes a product of memory. In fact, Karmi clings to the memories of the past as a site of belonging where she can find her true sense of self. Visiting Salah-Din Street, Karmi experiences a kind of restorative nostalgia. Indeed, visiting such a place allows her to recall her childhood past memories, to reconnect with her past, to lament and to yearn to those old happy days, and more importantly to reconstruct her selfhood as a Palestinian who has claims on the land. She says:*

As I walked through it I felt a surge of nostalgia pass through me, faint echoes of childhood perhaps, since al-Ma'mouniyya, the primary school I attended all those years ago, was in the vicinity. The crowded pavements, the noise, the village women in their colourful embroidered caftans sitting on the pavement with baskets of fresh fruit and vegetables around them, all brought back indefinable, half-conscious memories and with the man ineffable sadness. (Karmi, 2015, p.111)

It is important to note that remembering the Past (the preNakba and the Nakba) does not only help Karmi to cope with her changing homeland but also shows her attempts to falsify the Israeli occupation's denial and negation of a historic Palestine.

Remembering the past is one of the non violent strategies Palestinians adopt to subvert, deconstruct, and resist Israel efforts to deny Palestinians the right of return. Memory then becomes a counter narrative tool. It is a site of resistance and defiance against the official Israeli narratives that attempt to erase the historic Palestine not only from the geographical map but also negating its history and its people's claims to the land to justify its existence in Palestine through the expulsion of Palestinians from their home in the Nakba and Naksa. Ahmad Sa'di (2008) explains after "Al-Nakba the Palestinians have remained in a non-communicative mood," and the traumatic story of their expulsion was buried beneath the dust, or simply silenced and occluded by the narratives of the powerful. He adds that it was until the fifteen anniversary of the Nakba that Palestinian writers recognized the importance of narrating the history of the Nakba in the articulation of Palestinians collective memory (p, 383-384). It becomes urgent for the Palestinians, according to Said, to reconstruct a Palestinian narrative and history to legitimize Palestinians right of return. He contends, "Perhaps the greatest battle Palestinians have waged as a people has been, over the right to a remembered presence and, with that presence, the right to possess and reclaim a collective historical reality" (2000, p.175). Similarly, Ahmad Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod (2007) argue that the Nakba is not only a site of expulsion and dispossession, but also a reservoir or a repertoire of memories that demonstrates Palestinians' right of the land. They maintain that there is "strong evidence that making memories public affirms identity, tames trauma, and asserts Palestinian political and moral claims to justice, redress, and the right to return" (2007, p.3). In addition to Karmi, there are many attempts made by Palestinian writers to retell the Palestinian tragic history and prevent it from forgetfulness, oblivion, and erasure. Masalha (2005) states Palestinians can challenge and defy Israeli denial of the Nakba through commemorating their collective memory to "consolidate national bonds, mutual solidarity and shared history, memories and struggle" (p.243). Commemorating the past memories of expulsion, points to the Palestinians resistance against the occupier injustices and their insistence on the legitimacy of their cause.

Bearing witness to these traumatic events and providing testimonies of their memories, Palestinian writers aim at countering Israel's attempts to erase Palestine not only geographically but culturally as well. In addition to grappling with memory and its discourse of resistance and writing back, contemporary Palestinian writers are preoccupied with the current upheavals and catastrophes that continue to impact and to plague Palestinian lives. Such a preoccupation with the current circumstances demonstrates their attempts to resist, challenge, and write back to the official totalizing versions of history (Fox and Qabaha, 2021, p.18). It is through commitment to their cause and writing about Palestinian collective memory of the Nakba and the continued atrocities of the Israeli colonialism towards the Palestinians, Palestinians writers attempt to reach global audiences, make their voices heard, and show the Palestinians' resilience and steadfastness in the face of the settler narratives. As such, recalling past memories has political and ideological dimensions wherein writers become active agents rather than amnesia-tic creatures who defy rather than succumb to colonialism, and who remember than forget their collective past (Fox and Qabaha, 2021, p.17).

In the memoir, Karmi blends history with her childhood memories, the political and the personal, in her narrative to demonstrate the importance of memory and mainly that of the Nakba and its key role in shaping Palestinian national identity. Karmi defines herself as "1948 Palestinian", and that the generation of the Nakba is "the proper custodian of our national history, the vital witnesses to the dispossession and loss of the homeland which lay at the root of the bitter conflict that had blighted all our lives" (Karmi, 2015, p.144). It is the generation of the Nakba that gives the Palestinian cause its legitimacy and justify Palestinians' right of return to their homelands. Karmi believes that unless the survivors of the Nakba narrate their story, the Palestinian existence and their struggle in the present will be incomprehensible. Indeed, her recurrent references to her childhood memories, to life in Qatamoon, a prestigious neighborhood in West Jerusalem, to their maid Fatima, and to their expulsion from their homeland are significant in preserving not only individual memories but also the Palestinian collective memory from amnesia and erasure. Her childhood memories are vividly remembered and painstakingly documented. Karmi remembers how tranquil and peaceful life is in Qatamoon before the Nakba. Qatamoon was like a melting pot place wherein people from different religions; Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived in peace and harmony. The beginning of

Jewish militias' attacks, however, destroyed its peace and planned to turn it along with other parts of West Jerusalem into a Jewish state. Deir Yassin massacre, in which Jewish paramilitaries killed some 120 inhabitants of the village, had a devastating impact on the Palestinians, especially those in nearby Jerusalem, who were terrified they might be the next victims as the Jews had threatened, began to flee their homes. The massacre pushed Karmi's family as well to flee their hometown.

Karmi's visit to her old house triggers memories of the past. These memories are vital in the construction of her mythic Qatamon and thus they keep her in a constant attachment to her homeland. In other words, the recalling of these memories allows and helps Karmi to deal with the alienation of the present, and to minimize the trauma of being forcibly displaced against her will. She gives us a full account of her life in this place and how now it is inhabited by other people from different places. Karmi draws a picture of the historic Palestine, the idyllic and peaceful land. Speaking of Jerusalem, she says, "But for me Jerusalem was an undivided city where our old house still stood as testimony to Jerusalem's Arab past – no matter what artifice Israel had later imposed on" (Karmi, 2015, p.11). The reclamation of past memories goes against Zionists' claims that Palestine was "a land without a people for a people without a land." Recalling past memories then categorizes Karmi's memoir as a narrative of return which, according to Samar Aljahadi (2014), displays a chronotope that inverts settler official narratives and reconstructs Palestinian collective memory. Accordingly, the cover of the book contains open palms and across them a long fashioned key. This key is a Palestinian icon that stands for the keys to the houses of Palestinians who were forced out of their homes in 1948. The Palestinians kept their keys in the belief that they would not be away for long and would be back to their homes, but they never go. Retaining the keys is a symbol of loss, but also of hope.

The key then represents Palestinians' belief in their right of return, though it seems impossible in the current time. In the memoir, Karmi refers to the story of Mr. Tibi and the mulberry tree. The story elucidates Palestinians' strong attachments to their homeland though they lived abroad for so many years. There is always a longing and nostalgia to the homeland. Despite being granted a stay of three months, he insisted on going there and built a house to satisfy his urge to sit under his tree. The mulberry tree with its height and extensive spread of its branches denotes his attachment to the land and that the land is the

propriety of the Palestinians. The tree persists as a form of resistance to the Israeli occupation that aims to erase the historic Palestine and thus negating the Palestinians right of the land.

5. Conclusion

*As the above discussion shows, investigating the importance of the journey motif in *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* helps to shed light on the different aspects of return. Karmi's outward journey is connected with an inner one that plays an important role in shaping and transforming her character and personality. As she makes her journey to her hometowns in Palestine, she embarks into a journey inward, into "a voyage in" towards self-discovery. Her journey makes her realize that returning home embodies a failure of memory because the familiar becomes unfamiliar and the fixed home has changed and does not live up to the returnee's aspirations. In other words, return arouses memories of the idyllic past but also inevitably generates feelings of estrangement as the places that are revisited are not the same. Like many of exiles, Karmi held her homeland in a kind of fixed and stable entity with the hope that she could one day return to a native country that was in a similar condition to the country she had left years ago. In an interview published in 2001 with Mahmud Darwish, he describes what home means to him: "[H]ome is a place where you have a memory; without memories you have no real relationship to a place. Also, it is impossible to return. Nobody crosses the same river twice. If I return, I will not find my childhood. There is no return, because history goes on. Return is just a visit to a place of memory, or to the memory of the place" (Darwish 2002, p.77). Likewise, upon her return, Karmi realizes the wide and the unbridgeable gap between her memory of a remote and distant past and the current encountered reality. The Israeli occupation and its claims of sovereignty over Palestine create a different Palestine. Though Karmi realizes the futility of her return, deep down she holds a strong belief that the Palestinians' right of return would be realized through those Palestinians who are living under the occupation calamities; enduring its brutality, intimidation, humiliation, and cruelty. Their very existence demonstrates resilience, resistance, and steadfastness.*

Return stands as a pioneering memoir against erasure, suppression, and negation. The issue of return as the paper show lies at the very heart of Karmi's memoir. According to Karmi, there will be no end to the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict without the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes. Karmi's return, though futile, allows her to realize her active role as a Palestinian writer, activist, and intellectual to preserve the story and the history of her homeland from forgetfulness and oblivion. Her narrative is a demonstration that Palestine's present and future are all interlinked to its past, to the Nakba. Palestinians' story of dispossession and displacement did not end in 1948, but they are still subjected to continued catastrophes and upheavals. Unraveling the occupation's violations and atrocities is evidence of Israel's continued attempts to delete the historic Palestine, to negate its collective memory, and to bar the Palestinians refugees from returning to their homelands. The memoir then shows that returning to one's homeland, though temporarily, is an act of resistance to the dominant Zionist narratives and affirmation of Palestinian identity.

6. References

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