Displacement and Acculturation in Ghada Karmi's *In Search of Fatima*: The Case of Amina

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Abstract: This article draws on John Berry's acculturation theory to explore the acculturation process of the Karmi family into English culture as presented in the 2002 memoir *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story*. According to Berry, acculturation involves a dual process of cultural and psychological change, which occurs when individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into continuous contact. Based on the relation of individuals to their culture of origin and that of the host country, Berry classifies acculturation into four styles: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. This article argues that due to various social, economic, and political factore, the forcibly displaced Karmis faced substantial challenges in adapting to the culture of England. Although the story of each of the five family members deserves attention, we primarily focus on the acculturation of the memoirist's mother, Amina, because in many ways it is the most tragic, and because as the mother figure, her beliefs, actions, and degree of adaptation to the new culture greatly impact those of other family members.

Keywords: acculturation theory, England, Ghada Karmi, *In Search of Fatima*, Palestine

1. Introduction: Writing Palestine in memoirs

The Arab defeat in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war resulted in the expulsion of Palestinians not only from their homeland but also from the world map, histories, discourses, and, eventually, from international memory (Pappé 2006a; Masalha 2012). Since its inception, Israel has employed various measures to obstruct the emergence of any possible form of a Palestinian national narrative that would challenge the Israeli version (Said 1984; Almwajeh and Rababah 2024). These measures include the effacement of Palestinian geography through bulldozing entire Palestinian villages and towns and changing their Levantine Arabic names to Hebrew ones (Pappé 2006b); the deliberate targeting of cultural property and the destruction and looting of Palestinian libraries, archives, and cultural institutions (Amnesty International 2019; Kuntz 2021); the passing of the "*Nakba* Bill" which criminalizes the commemoration of the *Nakba*; the censoring of pro-Palestinian content on social media outlets (Ingram 2021); and the penalization of individuals and institutions supportive of the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions

movement. The purpose of these measures is to guarantee that "every subversive word that exposes and condemns the intention and meaning of Israel's actions in the Palestinian context is sterilized, taken out of political context, and stripped of its true meaning the moment it emerges" (Grinberg 2009: 106).

The way Palestinians are marginalized and muted is an important and recurrent theme in *In Search of Fatima* (henceforth *Search*). For example, reflecting on her feelings of alienation and marginalization in an atmosphere of warm pro-Israeli endorsement in England following the Six-Day War between Israel and three Arab countries, Karmi writes:

> I felt invisible as a Palestinian. Worse still, my side of the story was unacknowledged and illegitimate […] No one wanted to hear what I had to say or to give validity to my experience. […] No matter what my personal memories and experiences had been, or those of countless other Palestinians, only the Israeli version was valid (p. 386).

Palestinians, however, resisted this "paralyzing violence of silencing" (Grinberg 2009: 113) as they continue to narrate their version of the story, even if their words often fall on deaf ears. According to Karmi, *Search* was born out of "the right to grieve over [Palestine], or resent the fact it was seized by others" (p. 387). In this context, the proliferation of Palestinian memoirs in recent decades has been viewed as an opportunity for Palestinian writers and intellectuals to engage in the "historical (re)construction of marginalized Palestinian pasts" (Davis 2016: 2) and to defend the integrity of their society "against the forces that try to smash and disintegrate it" (Jayyusi 1990: vii).

Similar to other Anglophone Palestinian memoirs, *Search* directly reaches out to English-speaking audiences to dismantle the prejudiced stereotypes assigned to Palestinians by official Western discourse;[1] highlight the Palestinians' incessant struggle against endless cycles of colonial dispossession and oppression (Moore-Gilbert 2014); and undo decades of censoring and silencing (Ebileeni 2019). In addition to their important content, as Moore-Gilbert (2014) rightly argues, the literary and stylistic merit of the numerous works in this genre contributes to bringing the issue of Palestine to the attention of otherwise uninterested Western readers. Indeed, writing in English offers Palestinian writers not only the possibility of global circulation but also a sense of autonomy in narrating their stories, especially in the absence of an independent national state (Ebileeni 2019). Examples of Palestinian life narratives in English include Edward Said's *Out of Place* (2000), Raja Shehadeh's *Strangers in the House: Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine* (2010), Rami Baroud's *My Father was a Freedom Fighter* (2010), Issa Boullata's *The Bells of Memory: A Palestinian Boyhood in Jerusalem* (2014), Sari Nusseibeh's *Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life* (2015), as well as Karmi's later memoir *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (2015).

Burdened with memories of irrevocable lives in the homeland, these memoirs chart the traumatizing effects of the events of 1948 on the authors, their families and the Palestinian people, and in effect, humanize the Palestinian problem (Rogers 2005). Indeed, Karmi explicitly states that an important objective of her life narrative is to present the Palestinian tragic story "in a human, accessible form, in

order to get away from the political treatises, research studies, economic analysis and dry histories which have become the norm for conveying the Palestinian experience" (2002: xv).

Search follows the five members of the Karmi family (Hasan and Amina, and their children Siham, Ghada, and Ziyad) as they struggle to cope with the difficult situation in Palestine in the context of the 1948 *Nakba* (Arabic for Catastrophe, here referring to the Israeli attack in which more than 750,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes), and then as they try to adapt to life in England. Although the story of each family member deserves attention, this article primarily focuses on that of the mother, Amina, because, as the matriarch, her beliefs, conduct, and acculturation style significantly impact those of her family members. In addition, Amina's story is in many ways the most tragic of all; in comparison to her husband, Hasan, who was well-educated, fluent in English, and familiar with English culture, Amina had limited education, did not speak English, and knew very little about the culture of the host country. Furthermore, while Hasan had a job and the children attended school, Amina had to stay home and take care of household duties in a foreign land that offered no immediate source of solace or support.

Drawing on cross-cultural discussions of acculturation and more specifically on Berry's model (1997, 2003), this article investigates the acculturation process of the Karmis, particularly that of the mother, in the context of forced exile from Palestine to a drastically different, and, at the time, not necessarily friendly, country (i.e. England). Using Berry's model allows for an in-depth understanding of the different factors that lie behind the way Amina, as a Palestinian, middle-class female who is involuntarily displaced from her land, acculturated to the English social and cultural environment of 1949 and after.

Three caveats need to be stated at this point. First, the story of the Karmis is not representative of the experiences of the approximately seven million displaced Palestinians–indeed, the fate of those who became refugees in their own land or in neighbouring Arab countries was as complex and varied. However, as Alrawashdeh (2018) postulates, despite its uniqueness, the narrative sheds light on the collective Palestinian experience of up-rootedness and longing for the homeland. Second, since life writing engages in acts of remembering and creating meaning out of the past, its "truth" is multi-layered and includes "different registers of truth beyond the factual: psychological, experiential, historical, cultural, communal, and potentially transformative" (Schaffer and Smith 2004:7–8). Indeed, the "truths" presented in *Search* primarily reflect the memoirist's views and ideas. Related to this point of truth is the fact that the Karmis' narrative of displacement and re-settlement is written from Ghada's perspective, first as a young girl and then as a highly politicised adult. Conceivably, other family members might have experienced matters differently, and, therefore, they might disagree with the way they and the family story are portrayed.

2. Acculturation and the Karmis

Berry's psychological and socio-cultural model of acculturation (1997), is considered the most influential work in the field (Kuo 2014). Over the past few decades, and largely due to the recent global flow of immigrants, research on acculturation, repeatedly described as the most challenging issue facing immigrants (Berry 1997; Nesdale 2002), has become a major force that drives scientific inquiry as well as political and public discourse (Kuo 2014; Mesoudi 2019). Given the intractable nature of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, almost two-thirds of the Palestinian population is still scattered around the world,[2] which reinforces the importance of exploring the issue of forced displacement and acculturation to the Palestinian question (Khalidi 1999; Bocco 2009).

According to Berry, acculturation involves a dual process of cultural and psychological change which occurs when individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into continuous contact. Based on the relation of the individual to his/her culture of origin (national culture) and that of the host country (host culture), Berry classifies acculturation into four styles: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Assimilation occurs when individuals shed the values of their national culture and adopt those of the host. Separation takes place when individuals maintain their national culture and reject that of the host. Alternatively, rejecting both the national and host cultures results in marginalization, whereas in integration, individuals maintain aspects of their national culture while simultaneously adapting to the culture of the host country.

In addition, Berry differentiates between two sets of variables that impact acculturation: The first works at the level of the group and includes the type of immigration (voluntary or forced), the length of the acculturation period, and the extent to which the social, economic, cultural and political aspects of the host country are compatible with those of the country of origin. The second set operates at the level of the individual and includes factors such as gender, age, level of education, language competency and personal traits. Accordingly, family members do not necessarily acculturate in the same manner or at the same pace, and this variation in the style and speed of acculturation often leads to conflict and stress within the family (Berry 2005).

Furthermore, Berry (2006) distinguishes between four categories of immigrants: voluntary immigrants who leave their homeland in pursuit of opportunities; sojourners or short-term visitors such as students; refugees, who are involuntarily displaced; and asylum seekers who seek the protection of other governments. Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga and Szapocznik (2010) show that voluntary immigrants are typically more successful in acculturating and that when they face difficulties coping with the new setting, they always have the chance to return to their homeland, an option that is not readily available to exiles and involuntary immigrants.

Both exile and involuntary immigration denote a forced (and sometimes, violent) physical removal from a particular space and both are fraught with enduring traumas. Thus, Edward Said's definition of exile as "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true

home" and his conclusion that "the essential sadness of exile can never be surmounted" (2000: 180) readily apply to involuntary immigration. The rift suspends the displaced person in an undecided state and space and makes return–in the sense of going back or moving forward to create a new future from the fragments of a past that has been lost (Majaj 2001: 116)–impossible.

This understanding of exile particularly applies to displaced individuals who are unable or unwilling to adapt to the conditions of their new place of residence, and therefore, profoundly reflects the condition of Amina, who is appropriately referred to as "some Palestinian Miss Havisham" (p. 174). In the forty years she spent in England, Amina was never able to overcome the emotional and psychological fracture caused by her displacement. Instead, she remained frozen in time, essentially sad, thoroughly lonely, and continuously preoccupied with the hope of returning "home". For the various reasons discussed below, Amina clung to her Palestinian culture and rejected that of England, or, to use Berry's terminology, Amina consciously chose to *separate* herself from the culture of the host country, while her husband and children made other choices.

There is ample evidence in *Search* of the variation in mode and speed of acculturation among members of the Karmi family as well as the resulting family conflicts. Amina and, to a lesser extent, Hasan largely clung to their national culture and separated themselves from that of England while Siham, who was eighteen when the family left Palestine, continued to see herself as Palestinian first but adopted numerous aspects of life in England. Ziyad and Ghada were respectively seven and nine when the family left Palestine. Therefore, it was not hard for Ziyad to almost entirely shed his Palestinian culture and assimilate to that of England, while Ghada went through various phases of separation, integration, and assimilation during her arduous pursuit of an identity and a sense of belonging. The disparity in the acculturation patterns adopted by various family members repeatedly caused tension among them to escalate.

The memoirist seems well aware of the distinction between "conventional [i.e. voluntary] immigrants who try to build bridges to the future" (pp. 220–221), and the involuntary ones like her parents who were only able to build bridges "which connected them to the past–to Palestine and the Arab world" (p. 221). Thus, she stresses the need to situate her parents' cultural isolation not simply within the context of migration, but more specifically within that of *forced* migration since they "did not choose to leave Palestine and they never willingly acquiesced in its loss" (p. 220). Instead, the Karmis intended for their stay in England to be very short, only lasting while the UN and the Arab governments sorted out the problem. Thus, England was perceived as "a staging post on a route where they could never go. And […] abandoning that view was tantamount to accepting the irrevocable loss of Palestine" (p. 220). However, as the Palestinian problem became intractable, the Karmis ended up spending most of their lives in the new country.

The toll that displacement exacted on the parents was undoubtedly immense and led to a significant change in their character and outlook on life. Karmi states that soon after they left Palestine, her parents behaved as if they had been attacked by "a temporary madness, an abnegation of responsibility that would have been

inconceivable before" (p. 158). In an attempt to psychologically interpret this transformation, Karmi contemplates the possibility that the trauma her parents had experienced went far deeper than anyone realised, especially as they had to leave everything behind and build their lives and those of their children anew. The overwhelming feeling of loss "led them somehow to lose control—to want to escape the bleak reality we all faced" (pp. 158–159).

The involuntary nature of the Karmis' displacement combined with their disillusionment with the belief in the impermanence of their residence in England, hindered the family's acculturation process. This is particularly true in the case of Amina, who was willing to tolerate life in England (which she referred to as "this cursed land" (p. 411) and "God-forsaken place" (p. 163), only because "it won't be for long" (p. 186). She, therefore, repeatedly warned her children against getting too used to the English ways of life as a return to Palestine was certain and imminent (p. 186). Consequently, Amina made the conscious decision to *separate* from English culture: "She refused to learn English, she had no English friends, she would reject any suggestion of decorating our shabby house, or even buying such a basic thing as a refrigerator" (pp. 186–187). Notwithstanding Amina's enduring hope to return to Palestine, her refusals and rejections could be interpreted as exerting some kind of agency in a situation over which she has almost no control.

The Karmis' acculturation process was further complicated by the economic, cultural and political situation in England, especially in relation to, and in comparison with, the conditions in Palestine before and after the *Nakba*. Economically, the host country was facing severe challenges. Despite the fact that England had emerged victorious from World War II, it was stripped of its financial resources, and the deterioration of the sterling as an international currency made it difficult to pay for imported basic commodities or food. In his description of the austere conditions in England soon after World War II, David Kynaston (2007) lists many basic services, goods and foods that were either absent or rationed. Numerous passages in *Search* echo and emphasize the conditions of dreariness and frugality described by Kynaston. For example, the memoirist states that "Everything was rationed milk, eggs, flour, and until a few months before our arrival, even clothes. Allowances were quite sparse; the weekly meat ration, for example, was down to half a pound per person" (p. 179). The food shortage reminded the Karmis of the situation in West Jerusalem, but only during the 1948 war. Prior to this time, Palestine was prosperous and was often perceived as a centre of enlightenment in the Middle East, attracting immigrants, professionals and labourers from other countries (Shiblak 2005).

The political environment in England also impeded the family's attempts to acculturate. The major role the British government played in the loss of Palestine stirred in the Karmis strong aversions to the country's political stances and practices. Hasan, for instance, placed the primary responsibility for the Palestinian catastrophe not on the Zionist movement but on the British government for its callous betrayal of Palestinians (p. 244). Amina, too, resented the British for their role in the loss of her homeland, and she considered Hasan's willingness to accept a British honours award from the BBC an act of treachery: "'After what they've

done to us,' she exclaimed to her husband, 'how could you want their honours or their awards?'" (p. 411). Later, the family was to have additional reasons for resenting the hostile political stances of England towards the Arab world which became particularly clear during the Suez War.[3] However, from the memoirist's perspective, the overwhelming support of the British government and people for Israel while overlooking the Palestinians' right to the land along with the legal and moral basis for this right was decisively the most frustrating and tormenting (pp. 384-5).

Conceivably, cultural differences between the national and the host countries are likely to impede the integration process of individuals or groups undergoing acculturation (Sam and Berry 2006). The Anglo-Saxon, Christian, liberal and individualistic England of the time substantially differed from the Arab, predominantly Muslim, conservative and patriarchal Palestine which valued the well-being of the collective over that of the individual. Due to these major differences, the Karmis, especially the parents, viewed life in England as a threat to their values and identity. Disparities between the two cultures were felt in relation to almost all aspects of life: the design of neighbourhoods, and houses, cuisine, language, dress code, schooling system, religion, entertainment, relation between sexes and marriage.

Overall, the unfavourable and significantly different economic, political and cultural conditions of mid-20th-century England further intensified the family's feelings of alienation and separation. The fact that two of the three adult Karmis (Amina and Siham) did not wish to apply for British nationality is reflective of their sense of alienation. According to Siham, they are "not English and never will be" (p. 216). However, there seems to be another reason for Palestinians' lack of interest in the British passport and for their desire to conceal the news when they obtained it. This is related to the then prevailing view that Palestinians who become British citizens were ignoring the history of British betrayal of Palestinians and were, therefore, unpatriotic and "almost a party to that betrayal" (p. 214). Therefore, when Hasan obtained the passport after a period of reluctance, he was careful to keep the news hidden, and urged other family members to do the same. Dealing with British naturalization as if it were a dirty secret added to what the author terms "the contradictions with which Palestinians lived" (p. 214); Palestinians hated what England had done to their homeland and people while simultaneously clinging to the security and advantages it provided them in exile (p. 214).

3. The Palestinian Miss Havisham

Despite the grave consequences members of the Karmi family had to suffer for being violently uprooted from Palestine and relocated in a foreign land, they all, except for the mother, had meaningful things to do, and people outside the family circle to interact with. Amina, on the other hand, was left with almost nothing to fill the void created by her departure from Palestine. She therefore found the new life and place meaningless and continuously longed "to see living people [i.e. Arabs]" (p. 202). In pre-1948 Palestine, Amina, the "enthusiastic home maker" (p. 222), had been quite comfortable and content. True, unlike the well-established

Jerusalemite families, the Karmis were not originally from Jerusalem nor did they possess enough wealth to feature among the elite–they originally hailed from Tulkarm in what is now called the northern West Bank and moved to Jerusalem in 1938–but they still were able to attain their middle-class social status after years of struggle and hardship (p. 29). With a close-knit family, a decent house in an attractive residential area, domestic helpers, friends, and relatives, Amina had been quite happy. Socializing and mixing with people, we are told, were not only her principal pastime, but her main activity in life: "My mother had been a gregarious, sociable woman who depended on the company of other people almost for her very survival" (p. 181). However, when the Karmis moved to England, Amina was no longer able to pursue her social activities because she had no interest in socializing with the English while the number of Arabs then was small. Consequently, Amina's psychological state began to deteriorate, and she lost interest in life, neglected her appearance, and would often lie alone on the floor of the family's dark kitchen. Her profound sadness and helplessness were obvious in her hunched back, bowed head, and drawn face "as if she bore a huge burden of care on her shoulders" (p. 222). In retrospect, Karmi realizes that her mother was suffering from depression while the family helplessly watched her.

Numerous studies focusing on the acculturation of Arab immigrants suggest that there is a positive correlation between the length of residence in the west and successful acculturation (Al Wekhian 2016). In her discussion of the concept of acculturation in *Search*, Azim (2015: 96) calls both Ghada and Amina "defeated nostalgists" because they failed to assimilate to English culture. However, grouping both women under the same category is problematic as it blurs the major difference between their approach to England. Ghada, as Azim explains, earnestly tried to integrate and fit into English society and culture only to realize that a total integration is impossible. Amina, on the other hand, consciously chose to reject everything English and to separate from the new culture. Her resentment toward everything English despite the fact that she spent forty years in England stemmed from reasons related to both England and Palestine. Amina perceived every aspect of life in the new country either as meaningless or essentially deficient in comparison to what she had known. For example, she disliked the family's "cramped house with its wooden floorboards and small rooms" (p. 174) because it was inferior to her stone villa in Jerusalem (p. 174); she disdained the neatly arranged rows of fruits and vegetables in England "as if they were pieces of jewellery" (p. 180) because she was accustomed to their abundance in Palestine; and she grumbled that the fruits and vegetables were tasteless compared to those in Palestine. In other words, Palestine continued to function as a reference point to which everything in England was negatively compared. This is reminiscent of what Said calls the exile's "double perspective" which makes the exile see "things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now […] never seeing things in isolation. Every scene or situation in the new country necessarily draws on its counterpart in the old country" (1996: 60).

Therefore, to assume that the exile is totally cut off and separated from his/her place of origin is to underestimate the gravity of his/her condition because if what

Said terms a "surgically clean separation" (p. 48) had been possible, the exile would at least have the blessings of knowing that what is left behind is "unthinkable and completely irrecoverable" (p. 48). Instead, as in the case of the Karmis, the difficulty of being forced to live away from home is compounded by the continual presence of haunting memories and unattainable dreams of return.

Amina's conscious and unconscious drawing on counterparts from her life and experience in Palestine, as well as her firm belief that the family's exile was temporary, did not only impede her integration into the new environment, but also that of the entire family. Reflecting on the challenges the Karmi children encountered while trying to adapt to their new life, the memoirist explains that since her mother rejected "every aspect of life in England, she was in no position to help us integrate. If anything, she would try to pull us back every time she thought we were straying from our customs or our culture" (p. 208). Naturally, Amina's attempts to make her children adhere to Palestinian culture were not always successful as they (especially Ghada and Ziyad) started to gradually and steadily adapt to the new setting. Inevitably, the gap between the children and their mother grew wider, and, consequently, she became even more isolated.

In a particularly powerful image, Amina is described as "some Palestinian Miss Havisham" for whom "the clock stopped in Jerusalem in April 1948" (p. 174). This comparison invokes the image of the elderly unmarried woman in Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861, 2003) who lived in a dismal house barricaded against the outside world. Jilted by her lover at the altar, Miss Havisham stopped the clocks at the exact time she received this painful news and never took off her bridal gown. She remained frozen at the tragic moment of her abandonment, chose to live in the past and refused to move forward with her life. Amina, of course, was not jilted at the altar, but when she was forcibly uprooted, she felt that "her whole life had collapsed around her" (p. 182), and she "tried to make time stand still in the Palestine of her young womanhood" (p. 210). Having "lost everything that to her made life normal and worthwhile" (p. 182), she felt lost and abandoned.

The list of losses Amina suffered is long and includes not only her home, land, family and friends, but more importantly her very identity which is "defined by one's role and place in society; to lose that was to lose a large portion of one's self" (Hoffman 1999: 40). As Terri DeYoung (2017: 7) points out, for Palestinians, the situation is further complicated since their identity "is eternally called into question when the temporal (the past is 'not-now') and the spatial ('your place no longer exists') are invoked". Indeed, since the 1948 war, what constitutes 'Palestine' and 'Palestinians' has been increasingly difficult to define and *Search* is infused with references to this problem of identity. For example, towards the end of the memoir Karmi expresses her deep sense of frustrated hopelessness as she reflects on the fate of her family, a fate that is characterised by absence and loss: "I thought that's how we ended up, not a stick, or stone to mark our existence. No homeland, no reference point" (p. 445).

Like most Palestinians, Amina was disillusioned about the bleak reality concerning the finality of her exile. Therefore, she refused to do anything that would indicate the possibility of a long stay in England. To her, real and meaningful life

could only exist in Palestine. Azim (2015: 96) rightly points out that Amina's insistence to preserve her Arabness reflects "the psychological barriers she could build to prevent her integrity [sic.] with the new place". To preserve her Palestinian identity, Amina set to "recreate Palestine in London" (p. 174). The constructed diasporic territory has been described by Dorai as "a symbolic substitute for the lost homeland" (2002: 88) and as a displacement of the dream of repatriation primarily done by women (Majaj 2001). However, and far from being sentimental, Amina's faithfulness to Palestinian culture should be read as an expression of defiance because, as Hasabelnaby and Nasr (2022: 239) maintain, Palestinian women sometimes resist memoricide "by preserving their traditions and transmitting them through food, clothes, and the oral testimonies […] through simple female tasks of gardening, cooking, storytelling, and ritual keeping".

Therefore, as soon as the family arrived at their new house, Amina began the process of cloning it in the image of the one she had in Jerusalem. She objected to buying even the most basic of house commodities simply because the family never had them in Palestine (p. 186) and insisted on preparing only Arab food despite difficulties in finding the needed ingredients (p. 184). Indeed, as Bascuñan-Wiley **(**2019: 101) postulates, Palestinian food culture "constitutes a form of diasporic *sumud* (steadfastness in Arabic)". Amina's insistence on preparing and consuming only Palestinian food may, therefore, be read an expression of loyalty to her homeland.

There was, however, more to recreating Palestine in England than duplicating the way people furnish and maintain their houses, prepare their food, dress and manage their households; it also meant making the family's daily routine in England as Arab as possible and socializing exclusively with "real people, that is other Arabs" (p. 222). Therefore, a few years after their arrival in England, Amina turned the family's home into a communication centre for the Arabs whose numbers were increasing in the 1950s (p. 221). During this period, she visited Arab friends or had Arab visitors almost every day, and she entertained her visitors in a manner similar to the way it had been done in Palestine. For Said, this "exaggerated sense of group solidarity, and a passionate hostility to outsiders" is the least attractive aspect of exile (2000: 184) probably because, as in the case of Amina, this state of exclusive identification with and acceptance of those who are similar intensifies feelings of separation and alienation from the unfamiliar culture of the host country.

If the recreate-homeland-in-exile-strategy helped lift Amina's depression, at least partially and temporarily, it also impeded her integration into English society and negatively affected her relationship with her children and her husband. Despite her growing circle of Arab friends, she continued to experience depressive episodes and to look forward to the time when she would return to Palestine. Meanwhile, her "unrelenting Arabness" (p. 272) and her continuous insistence on enforcing Palestinian culture and code of conduct on her children, on the one hand, and the children's progressive integration into English culture on the other, widened the gap and increased the tension between them. Furthermore, as time progressed, life in the new country began to put the husband–wife relationship to the test since Amina never forgave her husband for forcing her to live in a foreign land, while his

feeling of guilt for her unhappiness mixed with resentment towards the way she shut herself off from life, neglected her duties, and disparaged him, increased his frustration with her (pp. 224–225).

Intriguingly, despite Amina's strong sentiments towards the Arab world and her dislike for life in England, she never travelled back to that region. The memoirist attributes Amina's reluctance to return to the Arab region to a set of complex issues. First, the family's return to their home in Jerusalem was out of question as West Jerusalem came under Israeli control after the 1948 war. Therefore, "return" would have meant going to other parts of Palestine ruled by Jordan until 1967 or to Syria, choices that Amina was not particularly enthusiastic about. Second, staying away enabled Amina to bury the tormenting feelings of disgrace and guilt caused by her flight to England while leaving her country and people behind. Return could have possibly resurrected these negative feelings for being self-indulgent (pp. 332; 344). Third, England allowed Amina some freedom and independence, for while in Palestine she was only known as the wife of Mr. Karmi, in England she became "a person in her own right" which "gave her a sense of fulfilment and importance" (p. 332). For these reasons, Siham knew that despite her claims that she wished to go back, Amina "no more wanted to give up her life in London than fly to the moon" (p. 343). These clashing feelings tormented Amina for even "when she had managed to find some release from the melancholy of her disrupted life, she could not feel free to enjoy it without shame and guilt" (p. 332).

Conclusion: Incessant wretchedness

Like many other memoirs by displaced writers, *Search* raises important questions about the fate of those who are forced to flee their country, even after many years of exile. The fact that Karmi wrote her memoir some 73 years after she had left Palestine and settled in England indicates that the traumatic experiences of war, displacement and alienation are difficult to resolve. In an intense paragraph towards the end of the memoir, Karmi provides a painful description of the toll that displacement took on her family many decades after they were forced to leave Palestine:

> I thought that's how we ended up, not a stick or stone to mark our existence. No homeland, no reference point, only a fragile, displaced and misfit Arab family in Britain to take on those crucial roles. And even that family, now dispersed and fragmented: Ziyad neither inside nor outside society in Denmark; Siham, struggling with her four children in the country she so firmly rejected; and our parents, who in old age had felt the urge to go home, and, being unable to, had settled in Jordan, the nearest thing to Palestine there was. My mother, already gravely ill, would die there a year later and be buried in a large cemetery outside Amman, neither her original home nor my father's (p. 445).

Through memoir writing, Karmi hoped to make the world recognize the toll of forced displacement on Palestinians and to act on such recognition. To expect that the life narrative of a single individual, no matter how powerful, could accomplish these objectives is, perhaps, unrealistic, especially when the counter-narrative is

forceful and relentless. However, when stories accumulate and find an attentive audience who is willing to listen, understand and act, they manage to forge communities of interest and initiate change.

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Endnotes

[1] Palestinians are often characterized in western media outlets as the radical, belligerent, and unruly other who threatens the western 'Us'. See Ezzina (2021).

[2] According to The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the population of Palestinians in 2019 is estimated at 13.8 million (https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=3503). Of these, over half are refugees from 1948 or their descendants, while the number of those displaced in 1967 and their descendants is estimated to be around one million. See Albanese and Takkenberg (2021).

[3] In 1956, the Egyptian President Abdel-Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. Consequently, Britain, France and Israel invaded Egypt to regain control over the Canal. The crisis seriously damaged the relationship between Egypt and Britain.

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