

## The Concepts of Home and Statelessness in Palestinian Diaspora Fiction: Reflections in Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* Jameel Alghaberi

### Abstract

The present paper examines the conceptualisation of home and statelessness in Palestinian diasporic narratives. Though the term 'Palestinian diaspora' is frequently debated and preference is given to terms such as 'exile' and 'refugee', the paper aims to reflect upon the correlation between 'historic Palestine' and the new conceptions of home that continue to evolve in contemporary Palestinian diaspora fiction. New generations of Palestinian exiles and diasporas find it difficult to imagine 'historic Palestine' as none have been physically there. Their sense of home/Palestine grows only as a collective narrative passed on from one generation to the next. Thus, the paper attempts to reveal what home means to such a category with reference to Randa Jarrar's novel *A Map of Home*. The paper also discusses the locations and dislocations of Palestinians and their journeys across borders.

**Keywords:** Home, Statelessness, Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, Exodus, Right to Return.

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### Introduction

The birth of Israel in 1948 signalled the end of the Jewish diaspora, but it simultaneously marked the beginning of the Palestinian dispersion. This dispersion rendered Palestinians displaced in their homeland and refugees in the other countries of the region. However, migration from Palestine is not new but older than the dispersion caused by the wars that led to the creation of the Israeli State. What is largely known about Palestinians is that they are exiles and refugees, but less is known about those Palestinians who voluntarily emigrated to Latin America during the Ottoman rule. Helena Schulz and Juliane Hammer observe that Palestinian migration began in the late eighteenth century, at that time primarily constituted by Christians and primarily oriented towards the 'new world'.<sup>1</sup> Today Palestinian diaspora is more complex, including voluntary and forced, and it is one among the widespread diasporas in the world. As a concept, it is indeed older than the exodus that resulted after the creation of Israel.

Today Palestinian nationalists intentionally attempt to dismiss the use of 'Palestinian diaspora' as they have certain fears regarding the existence and future of Palestine as an entity. It is an attempt to keep the rightful claim to statehood and the dream of an independent state alive. For them, 'diaspora' means accepting and celebrating a new diasporic home that may challenge the very existence of Palestinian national identity. Generally, the use of the term 'Palestinian diaspora' is thought to weaken the Palestinian national cause. Those writers who advocate such statements feel satisfied with the use of terms like 'exile' and 'refugee' and they think that such terms entail more elements of force and attachment to the homeland. Sari Hanfi, for example, argued that Palestinians abroad do not constitute a diaspora, proposing that they can be described

<sup>1</sup> Helena Schulz and Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* (London: Routledge, 2003) 2.

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as ‘partially diasporised people’ or ‘population in transit’.<sup>2</sup> The conscious use of the terms ‘exile’ and ‘refugee’ implies that the Palestinian’s journey was not voluntary but imposed and as such they would strive to maintain the fixity of the nation as a frame of reference and a national cause. In practical terms, the Palestinian diaspora has become a reality, and what is important for the Palestinian case today is to build bridges rather than walls. Having another citizenship does not necessarily mean betrayal to the homeland. It rather roots the dispersed and shelters the stateless Palestinians and provides them with state protection that they all lack.

Palestinian diasporic and exilic writing is vibrant and highly acclaimed. Writers like Naomi Shihab Nye, Susan Abulhawa, Randa Abdel-Fattah, Ramsey Nasr, Randa Jarrar and Diamela Eltit all write in different nationalities and employ certain varied forms of aesthetics. These writers and many others have been enriching the libraries of diaspora and world literatures for more than three decades. Their literary output occupies a sizable portion in the genre of victim diasporas, narrating the personal and the collective trauma of people who have been subjugated for decades. It is filled with anguish and despair, yet it communicates a voice of resilience. In the words of Nadia Sirhan, the very act of narrating gives credence and existence to the displaced and dispossessed Palestinians.<sup>3</sup> Memoirs, short stories, and novels that continue to emerge from different diaspora societies undoubtedly give the Palestinian political question a soul and spirit; substance that the political rhetoric lacks. Asmaa Naguib in this regard observes that the Palestinian novelists have assumed the task of remembering and narrating the entire collective experience to save the story of Palestine from oblivion.<sup>4</sup> This has been the crux of most Palestinian diaspora writing since the beginning of al-Nakba.<sup>5</sup>

### **Aim and Methodology**

The paper aims to discuss and critically reflect on the concepts of home and statelessness in Palestinian diaspora with reference to the novel *A Map of Home*. In connection with the right to return, the aim is also to examine the use of the terms ‘Palestinian diaspora’, ‘exile’ and ‘refugee’ in the Palestinian discourse. The methodology used in this study is a mix of various modes of readings. The study is based on a variety of resources, including Randa Jarrar’s novel *A Map of Home* as a primary resource and essays and memoirs by Palestinian scholars and critics as secondary resources. Extensive use has been made of exile and diaspora literature and critical articles relevant to the Palestinian diaspora. The work of Edward Said, Randa Jarrar, Ihab Saloul, as examples, embody the rich oeuvre of texts conceptualising the Palestinian issue. The psychology of particular characters in certain diasporic contexts is analysed in this paper, while postcolonial frameworks are invoked in addressing the Palestinian-Israeli territorial issue. Narratology as an interpretation model is also used in deciphering the core of the Palestinian narratives.

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<sup>2</sup> Sari Hanafi, ‘Rethinking the Palestinians Abroad as a Diaspora: The Relationships between the Diaspora and the Palestinian Territories,’ *International Social Science Review* 4.2 (2003) 174.

<sup>3</sup> Nadia Sirhan, *Folk Stories and Personal Narratives in Palestinian Spoken Arabic: A Cultural and Linguistic Study* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 70.

<sup>4</sup> Asmaa Naguib, *Representations of ‘Home’ from the Setting of ‘Exile’: Novels by Arab Migrant Writers*, Doctoral thesis (Exeter: The University of Exeter, 2011)56.

<sup>5</sup> ‘al-Nakba’ or ‘Nakba’ is an Arabic word which can be translated into English as ‘catastrophe’ or ‘disaster’. It is used in the Palestinian political discourse to designate the condition that followed the creation of Israel.

### **Borderlines in *A Map of Home***

Randa Jarrar is a Palestinian American writer whose debut novel *A Map of Home* won the Hopwood Award and the Arab-American Book Award. She herself won several prizes: the 2004 Million Writers Award for best short story online, the 2008 Chamberlain Prize, the 2010 Beirut 39 (Best 39 writers of Arab origin under 40), and the 2017 American Book Award. Her award-winning novel recounts the story of a Palestinian family, Waheed Ammar, his wife, Fairuza, and their two children, Nidali and Gamal, and follows their lives and experiences as exiles in Kuwait, Egypt, and finally as diaspora settling in the United States. It exhibits two different views of home –that of Waheed Ammar, and that of his daughter Nidali. Waheed’s view of home is romantic, idealist, nostalgic, while his daughter is pragmatic in perceiving and constructing the idea of home. As a father, Waheed’s primary goal is to inculcate the history of Palestine into the mind of his daughter. His attempt is to create memory and history in the hope that Palestinian roots will live on in the next generation. Nidali in this regard says,

I was a child; I had no memories about where I belonged. We were a family with a short history then; my parents were making my memories. It must be strange to be a parent, to be like a filmmaker who is always on, always rolling one memory or another for your child.<sup>6</sup>

*A Map of Home* is a bildungsroman story in which the protagonist, Nidali, is struggling towards attaining agency. In this respect, the novel can be read from a feminist perspective as Nidali symbolises resistance against the dogmatic beliefs and perceptions of women in the Middle East. Nidali’s father in the novel is also depicted as an oppressive patriarch, treating Nidali and her mother in an aggressive manner in most cases. Many may view Nidali’s reactions to her situation from a purely feminist perspective, but as an individual of Palestinian origin it is equally important to understand Waheed Ammar, Nidali’s father, from a psychological point of view. There is no doubt that Waheed, like many Palestinians of post-Nakba<sup>7</sup> and post-1967 war,<sup>8</sup> is traumatised. This trauma might be the reason for his behaviour towards his daughter in particular. In the novel, he is aggressive yet caring, badly-tempered yet loving. His relationship with his daughter is complicated not due to a sort of psychic complex but out of fear of losing his daughter like he has lost his home. From the beginning, he wants Nidali to be a boy and immediately after her birth he gives her a masculine name. This cannot completely indicate that he is against women; it rather reflects his anxiety about the very existence of his homeland. What can easily be inferred is that he wants a boy, a man to fight for the cause of Palestine. He himself failed to return to Palestine, and thus his ultimate hope is to raise a child who would accomplish what he could not. Waheed is unconsciously displacing his anguish and psychological trauma to his small family. Yet his daughter resists this and pursues her own

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<sup>6</sup> Randa Jarrar. *A Map of Home* (New York: Other Press, 2008) 287. All subsequent references to, and citations of, the novel will appear in parentheses within the body of this article.

<sup>7</sup> In the Palestinian historical, political and narrative discourses, post-Nakba refers to the period that followed the creation of Israel. It is mostly remembered in negative terms as it marks the dispersal of Palestinians.

<sup>8</sup> War of 1967, or Third Arab Israeli War, was fought between Israel and three Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, and Syria) in which Arabs were defeated. It was another Nakba for Palestinians as large numbers were displaced.

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course of life. More importantly, he is concerned about grounding his children as he tirelessly narrates to his daughter the history of Palestine.

The title of the novel *A Map of Home* automatically opens the discussion about the map of Palestine which is continually reshaped and redrawn. For the sake of the establishment of a Jewish State, Zionism, since its emergence as a political movement in the region, has sought repeatedly to eradicate Palestine from the map of the world and to deny it as both a political entity and a basis of national identification. Consequently, the characterisation of Waheed in Jarrar's *A Map of Home* is a form of Palestinian counter-narrative. Jarrar here also attempts to show the tediousness of the search for home in multiple places of displacement. The novel as a whole is a depiction of the quest that a Palestinian growing up in diaspora undertakes to seek traces of home and frames of reference. It also manifests how the Palestinian narrative is passed from one generation to the next, problematising post-Nakba memory and the inheritance of its consequences.

The names of the characters in the novel have been carefully chosen. Nidali, the name of the protagonist, bears greater significance as it supports the title and creates a resonance in the Palestinian mentality. 'Nidali' means in Arabic 'my struggle'. Life under Israel's brutal force is one of a constant struggle for Palestinians. As an Egyptian, Waheed's wife does not like such a name. She is not preoccupied with the Palestinian historical struggle, and thus she protests, "I am not forecasting this girl's future and calling her 'my struggle'! She will be my treasure, my life, my tune" (8). Though Nidali goes through different experiences in Kuwait, Egypt and Texas, the name she carries does not signify only her individual suffering. It is towards the end of the novel we realise that it is her father's constant struggle as a Palestinian who attempts to represent the ideal Palestinian exile, anxious about raising his children with much attachment to their Palestinian culture and history. The name 'Gamal', which is given to Nidali's younger brother, has significance, too. It is the name of the deceased leader of Egypt, Gamal Abdunnasser, who waged war against Israel in 1967 and who is also considered as the father of the pan-Arab national movements. Moreover, Nasser is highly revered as he, after Nakba, welcomed Palestinians to Egypt and refused to designate them as refugees but as brothers. Palestinians owe him a great debt and gratitude as he ordered Egyptian authorities to treat Palestinians on par with Egyptians. By naming his son after such a great leader, Waheed Ammar attempts to revive the nationalist spirit that led to the independence of many pan-Arab countries.

The concept of home in Jarrar's novel is fluid and permeable. Nidali, born in the United States, raised in Kuwait, grew up in Egypt, and finally settled in Texas, holds a totally different view of home; it is a view that is contrary to the common articulations of home in Palestinian diaspora. To her, home is where one is safe and comfortable as she has never been anchored to a certain place. She moves back and forth without that particular sense of rootedness to a place. In Kuwait, she feels at home and makes friendships, yet the Gulf War of 1991 disrupts all ties, and the whole family is obliged to flee to Egypt. Also, in Egypt Nidali has friends as her mother is Egyptian, but this is cut short by her family's return to the United States. This kind of movement results in her uncrystallised concept of home which can be attributed to a sort of hybridity that characterises later generations of diaspora. Said explained that Palestinians are hybrid migrants in, but not of, any situation in which they find themselves, considering it the deepest continuity

of their lives as a nation in exile and constantly on the move.<sup>9</sup> It seems that going to multiple places means constructing new multiple homes to Nidali. Such a positive view reflects nothing but the willingness and the true desire of a Palestinian to have a home. 'Journey' is a metaphor in the Palestinian literature, and we obviously observe it through the locations and dislocations of Nidali's family. To be a Palestinian is to go through an ongoing struggle against the history of injustice and to try to assert roots and identity. In an attempt to redraw the map of home and in the midst of such constant movements, Waheed is anxious to teach his daughter the history, culture, and, more importantly, ways to draw the map of historic Palestine. Initially, Nidali responds positively to her father's lessons, but she eventually develops her own sense of home and constructs her own version of Palestine's map:

Baba told me to go get a blue book from the bookshelf, "Palestine is My Country" in big white letters on its side. Baba flipped to a page with the real map of Palestine on it and made me trace the map and draw it over and over again. He called it the map of home. (68)

It is, therefore, interesting to look back at the father's map of home and the daughter's modified map of home. Waheed's map is that of 'historic Palestine', which has now been overtaken by Israeli settlements. As a dispersed Palestinian, Waheed still recalls every single aspect of his native place: the olive trees, memories of the villages and neighbourhoods where he spent his childhood. Consequently, he thinks that it is his duty to transmit such a collection of memories to his daughter, attempting to keep the flame of Palestine alive in the new generations. However, the father's map which might be the map of Palestine before 1948 or 1967 is no longer applicable. It has been dissolved, appearing today fragmented and bubbled with the Israeli settlements. Under the forcible Israeli schemes to incorporate more land to their emerging state, Palestine based on the UN resolution of 1948 practically does not exist today. With the western world turning a blind eye to the Palestinian-Israeli issue, Israel continually deducts land from the 1946 Palestinian territory, extreme extraction which leads to more suffering for the Palestinians on their own land.

After some years, Nidali is challenged with testing her acquired memory of Palestine and its map. She tries to draw the map of Palestine and shows it to her father. He likes it but when she asks him whether the map is right, he replies with a pragmatic response reflecting the continuous erosion of the Palestinian territory. She asks him, "Is it right?" He replies, "Who knows?" (193). Nidali remains unconvinced with his response and demands more explanation. Waheed responds with frustration and anguish, voicing confusion about his identity and a deep despair for his lost homeland: "That map is from a certain year. The maps that came earlier looked different. And the ones that came after, even more different. I mean ... there is no telling. There is no telling where home starts and where home ends" (193).

Nidali's map of home, once imposed by her father, is not actual. She has no memories of Palestine and only receives the narrative of Palestine through her father. Her map is thus an imaginary one. However, this does not mean that Jarrar has no intentions of advocating the

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) 164.

Palestinian national cause. It is really difficult here to draw a demarcation between the personal and the political. And in this case, it is essential to mention that many writers have never lived in Palestine but they do demonstrate their Palestinian identity more powerfully in their literary and non-literary writings. Unlike other Palestinians of diaspora, Jarrar has no personal memories of Palestine. Like her protagonist, she experiences Palestine only through collective narrative that is passed from one generation to the next. Nonetheless, by presenting the difficulty of locating home, she protests against the continual erasure of the Palestinian territory.

To Nidali, home does not hold much geographical space as it is specifically psychic and imaginary. Examining her stance further, Nidali's constant crossing of borders, and her family's ethnic and historical background, has affected and shaped her perception of home. One can have home in multiple places, and this endows the person with the plurality of vision and ability to exist and nourish between cultural borderlines. This is the principle that Nidali follows, whether she lives in Kuwait, Egypt or the United States.

Helena Schulz and Juliane Hammer note that the connections between land and the people are described using metaphors relating to what grows and to what the land gives.<sup>10</sup> Dispersed after the war of 1967, Waheed Ammar carries his Palestinian homeland in his soul. Nidali recounts his dictations in these lines:

Baba said that moving was part of being Palestinian. "Our people carry the homeland in their souls", he would tell me [...] This was my bed-time story when I was three, four [...] You can go wherever you want, but you will always have it in your heart (9).

It is thus apparent that Waheed idealises Palestine. This is reflected in his concern and attitude towards his daughter and the fear of losing Palestine as an idea. By literally dictating history to her, he urges Nidali to comprehend the historical background of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Nonetheless, Nidali's conception of home does not correlate with her father's idea of historic Palestine. Even his dictated history and the map that he attempted tirelessly to instil in her mind did not curtail her from constructing her own vision of home. In later stages, we identify that Palestine is not a home for her, yet she advocates the Palestinian national cause. Moving across places and cultures cultivated in her a sense of cosmopolitanism. She pronounces, 'Mama is an Egyptian, her mother was Greek, my father is Palestinian. I was Egyptian and Palestinian. I was Greek and American' (8). In brief, Nidali's actual home is where she feels comfortable, and Palestine is merely a cause that follows her as a Palestinian by origin.

To trace the evolution of Nidali is to closely examine her life and interactions at the different destinations she happened to be in for defined periods of time. The evolution she underwent is both psychological and perceptual. Once war erupts in Kuwait in 1990, the whole family leaves Kuwait for Iraq, and then to Egypt, fleeing war. Even after the end of war, Palestinians were not welcomed any more as their leader in Palestine supported Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Because of this they could not return to Kuwait. They were no longer wanted there. Nidali bitterly laments it by saying, 'Kuwaitis decided collectively to punish all Palestinians. My father's work permit had been revoked indefinitely' (192). In Egypt,

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<sup>10</sup> Schulz and Hammer 99.

Nidali and her mother all feel at home since they have roots there. However, the matter is different for the father, Waheed. He is unsettled, uncomfortable, and thus he begins thinking about moving to the United States. He succeeds in getting a job there, and after a few months the whole family follows him. Amid all this constant journeying, Nidali seems to be weary. She ponders, 'I cannot move to America [...] I did not want to move again, to work at feeling at home again, to lose that home again, then have to start all over again' (207).

In the United States, there begins a new chapter in the life of Ammar's family. They again start by searching for a home, and Waheed Ammar would usually reply, "'how can I when I have never had one?'" (200). Nevertheless, Nidali and her mother are more serious in approaching their life there. Though at the beginning, she seems scared and unsure if she could transition fluidly again in the land of her birth, Nidali is more likely to rapidly assimilate and openly embrace the culture of the new host society. More importantly, she is confused again: 'I was missing a hundred different things from home, and the sad part was I was starting to forget what they were and where home really was' (221). The first thing she encounters in the American society is the 'half of one thing' and 'half another'. By being Palestinian of Egyptian background, she thinks that she is special and unique, not realising the fact that the 'half one thing and half another' is the defining feature of the American society. Nidali notes this discovery when she recounts her introductory conversation with her neighbours:

When our white neighbours came to visit, I told their daughters [...] I was half-Egyptian, half-Palestinian. "We are half-German, half-Irish" they said, not batting an eye. It turned out everyone here was half one thing, half another. I thought this would make me feel at home but instead I was sad that I was no longer special. (218-19)

The sort of in-betweenness that Nidali sticks to is very much reflected in her responses to the question, "'where is home?'" In her first days at school in the United States, Nidali is asked by one of the girls, "'where is home?'" Her reply is simply "'Far away. You wouldn't understand'" (224), and on the girl's insistence, she says, "'Egypt and Kuwait'" (224). She here acknowledges her hybridity and she also indicates the lack of home. Nidali later develops her own concept of home and, along with her mother, starts seeking a better life apart from the conflicting dichotomies of 'home' and 'abroad', 'here' and 'there'.

Once they are in the United States, Nidali and her mother differ markedly from the way Waheed sees the new world around them. He is less concerned about socialising with others, nor does he allow Nidali to build relationships in such a new land. His slogan has usually been only 'to take the best of America', money and education, as it is not their country. He repeatedly tries to confine his daughter, thwarting her attempts to direct her own course of life. However, Nidali and her mother are more realistic and feel interested in rooting themselves again and not merely to gain money and education. Their plan is to put an end to the endless journey that a Palestinian is destined to take and to settle down and build their real home, not Waheed's imagined one.

Waheed again tries in the United States to control his daughter, but she turns more rebellious and chooses her own path. Upset by family arguments and her father's restriction on her freedom, she decides to run away from his house. Her father usually pronounces angrily, 'We are here to be educated and make money, not friends' (229). Nidali wants to make friends and lead a normal life, a life that is not based on her father's mantra: study and get the best of

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America. She and her mother are in the United States for life, not for struggle and alienation. This is the path they both chose despite the opposition from the father's side. Making their objective clear, Nidali states, 'Mama was here for friends, for life. I sat and watched her, jealous of how easily she seemed to root herself here. Me, I felt splintered, like the end of a snapped off tree branch' (231).

Nidali defines her own approach more clearly. She does not want to be different, singled out and profiled. Her aim is to live in the present and leave the past behind. She runs away twice, first to escape her oppressive father's norms and regulations, and second to study in New York, far away from home, despite her father's opposition. He wants her to study in the university nearby, but she rejects this and thus runs away. Once she hears about her mother's longing for her and the sickness inflicted upon her, she returns and she again defends her choice in front of her father: "'Baba, I don't want to be different. I know I am different, I know it, but I don't want to feel like an outsider'" (288).

It is at this stage that the whole family begins to accept Nidali and respect her choice. She is finally enrolled in the college she likes, and her father lets her go. Her evolution is not only at the personality level, but it is also part of defining her own identity. The endless search for home has come to an end and has become to her futile and tiring. She is proud of being partially Palestinian, partially Egyptian, and partially American. Kuwait is part of her memory even though she does not have blood relationships there. By crossing multiple borders, Nidali nurtures a hybrid sense of home. The inter-generational post-Nakba memory defines part of who she is, but it cannot help in relating to the 'historic Palestine' that her father covets.

### **Between 'Diaspora' and 'Refugee' Status**

Many Palestinian critical thinkers use the concept of 'diaspora' with caution for the simple reason that it promises no return to the historic homeland, Palestine. Since the 1948 'al-Nakba', or catastrophe, which marks the beginning of Palestinian exodus, many Palestinians are still refugees in a number of countries all over the world. The lack of state protection is the defining characteristic of such Palestinian refugees today. The exile and refugee status literally means that one is stateless, and hence statelessness is a major factor in exposing Palestinians to extreme poverty and marginalisation. It also renders them invisible not only to the governments of the host countries but also to the international community. Despite all this, some scholars, for example, Kodmani-Darwish and Julie Peteet prefer a 'refugee status' rather than a 'diasporic' one, thinking that such a position would push Palestinians to fight for return. Julie Peteet in this regard notes that assigning Palestinians diasporic status could risk diluting concerns with policy and long-term, equitable solutions, and the political dimension, as she suggests, needs a careful reading of the concept, in particular its flexibility and thus widespread currency.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the systematic attempts to erase Palestine from the map of the world, it still exists in the hearts of its people wherever they might be. Ihab Saloul demonstrates how 'al-Nakba' emerged in Palestinian culture as a concept that signifies an unbridgeable break between the past and the present, and that romanticises the Palestinians' loss of the homeland as a loss of

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<sup>11</sup> Bassma Kodmani-Darwish, *La Diaspora Palestinienne* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997); Julie Peteet, 'Problematizing A Palestinian Diaspora,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39.4 (2007) 636.

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paradise.<sup>12</sup> Palestinian diaspora literature abounds with vivid images and romantic descriptions of home, sometimes as a betrayed and abandoned mother, and some other times as an unreachable mistress. More importantly, it is resistive and counter-narrative in nature. The Zionist dominant narrative – ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’ – has been promoted in claims of a Jewish historical presence in Palestine, ignoring the long history of Arab Palestinians that stretches for thousands of years. What is worrying even today is the rejection of the Palestinian historical roots with brutal military force. This attitude of negating the other has led to counterclaims and counter-narratives from the Palestinian side.

If we examine the nature of ‘diaspora’ it will be easy for us to realise that the fear of Palestinian nationalists towards the use of this concept is justified. Home for diaspora is not realised but imagined, and this would inevitably worsen the Palestinian national cause. To other members of the Palestinian diaspora, the homeland in concrete terms long ago lost its ultimate significance and remains but a symbol to gather around in the land of exile.<sup>13</sup> Because of the prolonged conflict, many Palestinian diasporas are today well integrated into the host societies to the point that even a return seems of less importance. Moreover, ‘territory’ and ‘land’ may for diasporas be more metaphorical and symbolic than ‘real’.<sup>14</sup> Members of Palestinian diasporas might repeatedly undergo a feeling of homesickness, but they will continue to form life experiences in a homeless condition or create new multiple homes in new settings. This signifies the possibility of creating unbounded identities that are plural and hybrid. And today, with the help of technology, diasporas create new and other forms of social connections and interactions that are not anchored to a particular territory. In her analysis, Anat Ben-David concludes that the Palestinian diaspora network is no longer defined around ‘Palestine as a place of origin, but is instead constructed around Palestine as a point of reference; its organisation is less around a network of familial, social and transactional ties ... and more around global advocacy networks that transcend their immediate social networks’.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, Palestinian diasporas have the capability of creating their new forms of identifications and in this they demonstrate that the homeland is not really necessary in order to maintain a sense of belonging.

In the Palestinian case, creating stories of transgenerational memory and of familial connection is a technique to maintain and preserve roots. Post-Nakba memory is restructured again and again as a means to understand and accommodate the realities and complexities of Palestine and its history. It, however, depends on generational distance and deep familial connections. As it has been demonstrated, the existence of Palestinian memory under the constant threat of a dominant Zionist narrative with political and military force to silence it led to the burgeoning of Palestinian counter-narratives. Since the early days of the conflict, the Zionists have relied on two main things: (1) that the older generations of Palestine will perish and their memories fade away ;(2) that the new youth will forget their historical links and ancestral roots.

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<sup>12</sup> Ihab Saloul, *Catastrophe and Exile in the Modern Palestinian Imagination: Telling Memories*. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) 15.

<sup>13</sup> Saloul 3.

<sup>14</sup> Schulz and Hammer 10.

<sup>15</sup> Anat Ben-David, ‘The Palestinian Diaspora on the Web: Between De-Territorialization and Re-Territorialization’ *Social Science Information*, 51.4(2012) 34.

This proved unsuccessful as the post-Nakba generations of Palestine continue to today to inherit the past effects of memory of the catastrophe through narratives passed from one generation to the other. Randa Jarrar in her novel, for instance, addresses the issues of memory and the inheritance of exile. Though she does not stress it, Jarrar demonstrates how post-Nakba memory functions within families via parent-child relationships.

Edward Said has been one of the first Palestinians to advocate for the cause of Palestine. His work constituted a large corpus about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but it does not receive adequate attention in the western canon. Said compellingly argued for a reassessment of the injustices on both sides of the divide between Israelis and Palestinians.<sup>16</sup> He initiated a 'writing back' to dismantle the western master-narratives that shape the commonly held perceptions about Arab Palestinians. He had used all possible opportunities and places to put the aspirations of the Palestinian people to the international community.<sup>17</sup> He was clearly the voice of Palestine in the West, campaigning against the politics of dispossession.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a territorial one as both sides have been part of what is called 'historic Palestine'. Yet there have been devious schemes from the Israeli side to grab more land, and worse than all this, to delegitimise the rights of the other side – Palestinians. The land and the landscape have consequently been changed completely due to the devastating blow and unlawful destruction of villages in the Palestinian territories. All this is done with the intention to erase any memory of actual Palestinian homeland and also to bar any attempt for refugees to return. Special Israeli laws have also been designed to confiscate the land of Palestinians since 1948, and today settlements remain one of the thorniest issues in the continuous displacement of Palestinians in the West bank and Gaza.<sup>18</sup> The international diplomatic efforts that have been exerted so far about the right to return deal merely with resettling Palestinian refugees somewhere else, not Palestine. Return of Palestinians is seen as an existential threat to Israel due to the fears of any demographic changes, and hence return deals are mostly aborted. Edward Said repeatedly exposed the Israeli intentions. He thought that the inadmissible existence of the Palestinian people whose history, actuality and aspirations, as possessed of a coherent narrative direction pointed towards self-determination, were the object of this violence and that Israel's war was designed to reduce Palestinian existence as much as possible.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, barring the Palestinians from returning to their homes displays merely one aspect of the Israeli policy.

Palestinian diaspora literature deals mostly with the issue of Palestine as an identity. There is also abounding narrative of border-crossings and the quest for home. *A Map of Home* is a text in which characters and geography are intertwined. Because of Jarrar's personal history, her characters move across time and space. This is also the case with most Palestinian narratives that abound, according to Schulz and Hammer, with descriptions of an identity that is out of place, without centre and on a constant journey.<sup>20</sup> To be a Palestinian is not only to fight against the injustices of history but also to be on the move. Like many other Palestinian narratives, Jarrar's novel is full of stories that recount what actually happens at different kinds of borders,

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<sup>16</sup> Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said* (London: Routledge, 2001) 118.

<sup>17</sup> Li Yi, 'Edward Said's Thoughts and Nationalism,' *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 5.3 (2011) 111.

<sup>18</sup> Schulz and Hammer 72.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Said, 'Permission to Narrate,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13.3 (1984) 29.

<sup>20</sup> Schulz and Hammer 85.

crossings and checkpoints. The journey is portrayed as endless.<sup>21</sup> The stateless status of Palestinian refugees leaves them to struggle with the trauma of lacking a valid passport. Waheed, Nidali's father could not get a Palestinian passport, nor did anyone recognise Palestine as a state. He was given a Jordanian passport only as a travel document and not as a proof of identity. Amid all of this, the Palestinians still persist steadfastly, waiting and hoping for the future to arrive, for return to be achieved.

It is through the depiction of Waheed Ammar that Randa Jarrar in her novel gives us glimpses of the Palestinians of post 1967. The ideal image of the Palestinian was the peasant who stayed put on his land and refused to leave.<sup>22</sup> Parameters, however, changed, and the focus shifted to those diasporised Palestinians who preserve their culture and nourish a sense of home in the upcoming generations. Jarrar in her novel depicts Waheed not as an ideal type of Palestinian diaspora veteran but of a victimised one who is anxious and troubled by the uprootedness he underwent. For Waheed's generation of Palestinians, Palestine is very much glorified and highly romanticised. It is remembered and represented in many cases as a place of bloom and celestial beauty, and the Palestinian landscape is described with a sense of passion and affection. It is the same for those dispersed as stateless refugees in neighbouring countries. The refugee camp, whatever condition it may have, is for Palestinians a site for confinement, marginality and exclusion. Therefore, they imagine home as a heavenly place where torments and agonies never exist.

Randa Jarrar in her novel not only unravels the mounting concerns and fears surrounding Palestinians either as diasporas or refugees, she also highlights the maxims and principles that all Palestinians try to impart to their children who grow up in diaspora. Apart from identity issues, education for Palestinian diasporas and refugees is considered as a way to recover their lost homeland. They believe that Palestine has been lost because Palestinian peasants were ignorant and uneducated, and it was therefore knowledge that would ultimately defeat Israel.<sup>23</sup> This is very much reflected in the novel where Waheed pressures his daughter into getting a better education: 'To be free, you must be educated. So you must do excellent work, always' (24). This is what he attempts to pass to her. He also finds it as a sort of compensation for the loss of home: "I lost my home [...] and gained an education [...] which later became my home" (106). Waheed and his family resort to education as a means of survival. Education for them is not merely an avenue to improve their living conditions, but it also serves as a tactic to counter the Israeli claims. It is seen as a form of resistance against the attempts to erase their identity. Waheed communicates this to Nidali by encouraging her to be a professor: "A big professor of literature! Write poetry like I used to do. Write poetry and teach in English. Show those bastards the greatness of our literature" (65). Another significant element that is used by Palestinian diaspora writers to represent the connection between people and the land is trees. Palestinians, according to Laleh Khalili, commemorate a broad range of events, objects and persons, including olive trees, stone houses built in old villages, oranges, keys and embroidered dresses as they are overwhelmingly associated with prelapsarian village life in Palestine, and were invoked as signifiers of Palestinianness once the nationalist movement re-emerged in the mid-

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<sup>21</sup> Schulz and Hammer 88

<sup>22</sup> Schulz and Hammer 103.

<sup>23</sup> Schulz and Hammer 131.

1960s.<sup>24</sup>The use of trees as metaphors to show the connections between the land and its people is prominent in the Palestinian nationalist discourse. The olive tree in particular is of great significance, symbolising both ‘roots’ and Palestinian identity beside its function as a form of production. It is used as a basic ingredient of subsistence since it is grown there in large quantities. By its ability to withstand harsh climates, the olive tree has become a defining feature of Palestine and its people. In addition, olive trees may become very old and they need very little to grow, and thus give meaning to the Palestinian discourse and the ancient unflinching connection to the land. In *A Map of Home*, Waheed idealises the olive tree and its oil. He keeps it beside him to always remind him of his homeland. Jarrar also chooses to depict him this way since the tree is often used as a symbol of rootedness, of historic Palestine; a representation of belonging to the land.

In summary, the argument about whether to use ‘diaspora’ or ‘exile’ leads only to further disagreements. Both concepts involve a sort of movement and migrancy, and hence ‘home’ is pursued with varied degrees of difficulty. However, with the rise of nationalism in nation-states, the Palestinian individual is left stateless and therefore an ‘exile’ or ‘refugee’. Randa Jarrar in her novel does not chronicle the history of Palestine but highlights the suffering of a Palestinian family due to dislocations and multiple border-crossings. After endless journeying, her main character, Nidali, makes her decision to settle down and create a diasporic home. The right to return is fundamental to the core of the Palestinian issue, and it can be achieved through diplomatic channels, not alienation and the multiple dislocations of Palestinians.

### Conclusion

The paper reviews the concepts of ‘home’ and ‘statelessness’ in the Palestinian discourse, and it also presents a critical view of the dialectic between ‘diasporic’ and ‘exile’. In addressing the concepts of home and statelessness in Palestinian diaspora, Randa Jarrar in her novel *A Map of Home* is more pragmatic. Home for her is in multiple places, yet she recognises the Palestinian national cause and the rightful claim to establish their own state. Unlike previous Palestinian American writers, Jarrar rejects polarisation and questions the romanticisation of homeland. She also calls for plural, hybrid and fluid conceptions of home. Jarrar’s characterisation of Nidali as a protagonist reflects much about herself and her views about the continuous journeying and endless quest for home. By moulding her novel in a bildungsroman form, Jarrar invites us to trace the evolution of the protagonist and her journey through a series of identifications and realisations of what home is. The novel portrays the life of the Palestinian individual, dispersed from home, obliged to cross borders with different travel documents, and destined to carry the weight of homeland in their heart wherever their residence may be. It also shows the way Palestinian diasporas strive to cultivate memories of home and create historical roots. The novel is written for a western readership to convey the Palestinian diaspora’s continuous search for home. As a transnational text, there is an inherent message for re-rooting and regrowth of Palestinians wherever they might be even if such a process of sprouting is challenged. In the face of the grand narrative that is skewed in favour of Israel, it is observed that the Palestinian narrative definitely lacks centrality. The connection between Palestinian refugees and diasporas

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<sup>24</sup> Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 7.

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and the Palestinian territories has to be natural and primordial. Rather than functioning as translators of Arabic culture to the American audience, Palestinian diaspora writers are also supposed to furnish the whole world with narrative evidence since the one who writes his story inherits the land of that particular story.

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