



شبكة المعلومات الجامعية
التوثيق الإلكتروني والميكرو فيلم

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم



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شبكة المعلومات الجامعية التوثيق الإلكتروني والميكروفيلم



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جامعة عين شمس

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PHD Thesis
Palestine Remembered:
Narrating the Diaspora in Selected Palestinian
Autobiographical Works

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2021

Abstract

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Palestinian autobiographies and/or memoirs form a type of writing that is historically specific: in general they are a response to a specific historical and political event, namely, the Nakba. Because of the Nakba there was a proliferation of writing autobiographies and/or memoirs about Palestine in the second half of the twentieth century. Several Palestinian authors attempted to represent Jerusalem to the reading public, they all had the desire to preserve Palestine's Arab identity in writing, to rescue it from obscurity and neglect, and to make it visible through their work. The desire to write Palestine conveys a desire to re-live the past, to construct a reality reminiscent of a previous one. Speaking of the Nakba takes us to the realization of the peculiarity that differentiates Palestinian autobiographies and/or memoirs from other literary memoirs and/or autobiographies. Palestinian autobiographies and/or memoirs are unique in that they are not only products of individuals, but they represent the notion of collective recollection, or collective memory, of a whole nation.

This thesis examines four texts that represent the Palestinian diaspora and search for identity from the fifties of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty first century. These texts are *In the presence of absence* (2011) by Mahmoud Darwish, *I saw Ramallah* (2008) by Mourid Barghouti, *Out of Place* (2000) by Edward Said and *In Search of Fatima* (2002) by Ghada Karmi. Although the events are bound by time (the four texts were written between 1997 and 2007) the aim of the thesis is to highlight the differing sensibilities of the four writers: Darwish, Said, Karmi, and Barghouti, despite the seemingly similar exilic experience.

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Abbreviations

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References to the main works under consideration will be made using the following abbreviations:

In Search of Fatima . ISF

In the Presence of Absence. IPA

I Saw Ramallah. ISR

Out of Place. OP

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements

This thesis was the dream of my late mother and I made it come true. Thus, I dedicate this work to my mother who believed in me and encouraged me to be a better person. I would like to express my utmost gratitude to Professor Faten Morsy for her academic guidance and constructive comments, critical reading, and her unforgettable advice.

I want to express my appreciation to Dr. Mona kattaya for providing feedback and for her inspiring comments. I am really indebted to my supervisors, and I consider myself a lucky person to work under their supervision.

Finally, I want to thank my husband Mohamed Lokman for helping and encouraging me to complete this thesis.

Preface

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بساعة نحس واحدة دخل التاريخ كحصن جسر من باب، و خرج الحاضر من شباك.

و بمذبحة أو اثنتين انتقل اسم البلاد، بلادنا ، إلى اسم آخر.

و صار الواقع فكرة و انتقل التاريخ إلى ذاكرة.

الأسطورة تغزو، و الغزو يغزو كل شيء إلى مشيئة الرب الذي وعد ولم يخلف الميعاد. كتبوا روايتهم: عدنا.

و كتبوا روايتنا: عادوا إلى الصحراء. و حاكمونا: لماذا ولدتم هنا؟

فقلنا: لماذا ولد آدم في الجنة؟

تذكر، لتكبر، نفسك قبل الهباء

تذكر تذكر

(في حضرة الغياب 47-48)

In one ill-fated hour, history entered like a bold thief through a door as the present flew out through a window. With a massacre or two, the country's name, our country, became another. Reality became an idea and history became memory. The myth invades and the invasion attributes everything to the will of the Lord who promised and did not renege on his promise. They wrote their narrative: We have returned. They wrote our narrative: They have returned to the desert. They put us on trial: Why were you born here? We said: Why was Adam born in paradise?

Remember yourself before all turns to dust

so that you may grow up

Remember, remember. (In the Presence of Absence 38)

In this quotation Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) summarizes the tragedy of the Palestinian diaspora. History, the “bold thief”, robbed the “present” of the Palestinian people by force. The victorious, with his “massacre”, rewrote his own version of history, invented his own myths and narratives, emptied the land from its people, renamed it and changed the reality into an abstract idea. Like Adam’s right in paradise, the Palestinian holds the right to Palestine. For the Palestinians to remember what was lost, erased, and usurped is no more a choice; for Darwish, it is imperative to “Remember”. Memory and the act of remembering become for Darwish the only way to save the history and the national identity of his people.

The above-mentioned quotation is but one example of Palestinian memoirs and/or autobiographies which is the topic of my thesis. In this thesis, I shed light on memory studies and the importance of representing memory in various forms to preserve the cultural, national, and social identity of people. Representing memory comes in different forms such as literary writings, photography, painting, architecture, music among others. My thesis focuses on autobiography and/or memoir as a means of preserving memory from loss. Hence, autobiography and/or memoir is one form in which people can represent their memories. Autobiography and/or memoir can be considered an alternative source for history; it also plays a complementary role to history because it represents what is missing in history books such as the reactions of people toward historical events and the effects of historical events on the lives of ordinary people. In autobiography and/or memoir the reader can imagine events as they were lived and experienced. In addition, the autobiographer and/or memoirist uncovers the emotions and feelings of people during specific historical event. Therefore,

autobiography and/or memoir represents two sides of the historical event: the first is the objective side and the second is the subjective side. The former appears in the dates, numbers, and narration of the historical fact and the latter appears in the autobiographer's and/or memoirist's comments and reflections on this event.

My thesis shows attempts to show that any discussion of the literary history of the memoir and/or autobiography form in general would be never complete without recognizing and incorporating the Palestinian contribution to this literary genre. Palestinians realized that their national and cultural history is about to disappear. Moreover, their history is written by others who represent a different version of history that neglects the existence of Palestinians. Therefore, from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, Palestinian autobiography and/or memoir flourished and spread to resist the prevailed version of history that is written by their colonizer. Numerous contributions by Palestinians in the field of autobiography and/or memoir and memory writings have been published recently. It is imperative to shed light on such works by way of documentation and by way of debunking myths and false claims about the absence of autobiography and/or memoir as a genre in Arab literary tradition in general. Such claims take Georges Gusdorf's assertion in *Autobiography Essays: Teoretical and Critical* (1980), that "autobiography is not possible in a cultural landscape where consciousness of self does not, properly speaking, exist" (30) to apply to Arabic letters that traditionally lacks the uniquely personal aspect of life that is necessary in autobiography. The last two decades have witnessed a plethora of Palestinian autobiographical writings. Of these one may mention such works as *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017* (2020) by Rashid Khalidi, *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law* (2003) by Suad Amiry, *The First Well: A Bethlehem*