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Abstract

This paper examines the notions of diaspora, home, and return in Susan Abulhawa's novel Mornings in Jenin (2010), which chronicles the Palestinians' plight of exile and displacement. This paper argues that the novel set in different spaces and times displays how home is physically and imaginatively constructed. As the characters repeatedly recount and retell their stories to multi-generations, home becomes not just a mythical space or an omnipresent character in their narratives and memories, but also a physical location to return to. Thus, this study finds that although Amal experiences multiple displacements, she finally returns home to assert the right of return and survival against denial and annihilation. Abulhawa also seems to suggest that the act of return or coming home, though entails somehow ambivalent feelings of belonging and estrangement, home for the returnee is not just a physical place, but also it is possible to feel home in inter-personal relationships such as friendships, motherhood, and love.

***Keywords**: Diaspora- Home- Return- Palestinians' Plight- Mornings in Jenin.*

ملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في مفاهيم الشتات و الوطن و العودة في رواية "صباحات في جنين" (2010) للكاتبة سوزان أبو الهوى والتي تؤرخ معاناة الفلسطينيين المتمثلة في المنفى والنزوح. تجادل هذه الدراسة بأن أحداث الرواية تدور في أماكن و أزمنة مختلفة لتستعرض كيفية بناء الوطن ماديا وخياليا، و بينما تروي الشخصيات قصصهم وتعيد سردها مرارًا وتكرارًا لعدة أجيال، لا يصبح الوطن مجرد مكان أسطوري أو شخصية موجودة في رواياتهم وذكرياتهم، ولكن أيضا مكانا ماديا للعودة إليه. ولذلك توصلت هذه الدراسة إلى أنه على الرغم من تعرض أمل لنزوحات متعددة، إلا أنها عادت أخيرا إلى وطنها لتؤكد حق العودة و البقاء ضد الإنكار و الإبادة. كما أن أبو الهوى تشير أيضا إلى أن العودة إلى الوطن بالرغم من انطوائها إلى حد ما على مشاعر متناقضة بالانتماء والغربة، فإن الوطن للعائد ليس مجرد مكان مادي ولكن من الممكن أيضا الشعور بالوطن في العلاقات الشخصية مثل الصداقات والأمومة والحب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشتات، الوطن، العودة، معاناة الفلسطينيين، صباحات في جنين.

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Introduction

One of the significant historical events which have a resounding impact on people's lives, especially Palestinians, is the foundation of the state of Israel and the uprooting and the displacement of thousands from their homeland "rendering them a nation in Diaspora" (Salhi, 2004, p.2). Remarkably, the years 1948 and 1967, known as El Nakba and El Naksa, respectively add more salt to the Palestinians' injury. Moreover, by propagating the slogan "A land without people for a people without a land," Jewish settlers claim Palestine as their home meanwhile shattering feelings of belonging for the natives. Mainly, they work to destroy and deny all hope of return for the exiled and refugees. In doing so, they brought about complicated feelings related to issues of diaspora, exile, roots, home, and return.

The traumatic experiences of exile, homelessness, loss, and estrangement become not only day to day actual events, but also the subject matter for the writings of scholars, intellectuals, literary critics, and writers. For instance, Edward Said's autobiography *Out of Place* narrates perfectly the life of an exiled Palestinian whose literary and critical oeuvres inspire many writers to speak about different experiences and consequences of diaspora and exile. One of the texts which attempt to chronicle a nation's plight through a multi-generational family story is the novel *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) (first published under the title *The Scar of David*) by the Palestinian-American writer Susan Abulhawa. Based on the theories of diaspora and the notions of home and return, this paper demonstrates that the construction of home transforms from a mythical and an imaginative place to visit and to live in to a physical location to return to. Although Amal experiences multiple displacements, she finally returns home to assert the right of return and survival against denial and annihilation. More than that feeling at home can be felt in inter-personal relationships such as friendships, motherhood, and love, relics, recollected memories, and shared stories. Memory also plays a central role in the characters' lives by becoming both a source of agony and solace. Through the juxtaposition of past and present memories; this novel stresses that the past is never past and the characters' desire to belong and return shapes their present, their identities, and even their future. Even though the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is an ongoing clash with multifaceted effects, the novel carries some hope by revealing that humanity, coexistence, empathy, and love are possible even under trauma and war. To read

Mornings in Jenin within the framework of diaspora studies necessitates a general overview of theoretical concepts and elements.

1. Theorizing and Contextualizing Diaspora, Home, and Return:

Many societies and nations experienced exile and diaspora, whether forcibly or voluntarily. Under the umbrella of diaspora or what Professor of Political Science William Safran (1991) calls "diaspora community," he categories a variety of people with similar and different experiences, including "expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities" (p. 83) living exiled outside the homeland. The most defining characteristics of the concept of "expatriate minority communities" Safran adds:

> *1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not–and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return . . . 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such relationship. (pp. 83-84)*

Hence, diaspora is a historical displacement of people from their homeland or country of origin to a host country where memories of it are permanently recollected; meanwhile, feelings of estrangement and alienation are probably felt. Besides, Refugees and exiles maintain not just a mythical sense of belonging to their original homeland but also a genuine belief in returning home one day and through awareness and commonality, they sustain existence and survival. In terms of that definition, the Palestinian diaspora is an example where "Hundreds of thousands of Arab residents of what became the state of Israel were expelled, encouraged to flee, or impelled by conditions of hostility to leave. They have memories of their homeland; their descendants cultivate a collective myth about it; and their ethnic communal consciousness is increasingly defined by—and their political mobilization has centered around—

the desire to return to that homeland" (Safran, 1991, p.87). This model also comes into terms with Abualhawa's narrative, where thousands of Palestinians were forced out from their land and scattered throughout the world. However, memories of homeland and longing to return have been persistent. In particular, Safran's diasporic characteristics apply to Amal, the main character of this novel, who has been exiled many times; she retains a collective memory from her homeland; she feels being out of place in America, and for that, she longs to return for her homeland when conditions are suitable, in addition, a physical return happens in order to affirm belonging and the right to return.

In *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Avtar Brah (1996) believes that recent mass population movements or migrations are to be called "new displacements, new diasporas" (p.176) fashioned by political, social, cultural, and economic factors or circumstances. Among the migrants, she classifies "labour migrants (both 'documented' and 'undocumented'), highly-qualified specialists, entrepreneurs, students, refugees and asylum seekers, or the household members of previous migrants" (p.175). Similar to Safran's reasoning, Brah argues that diaspora as a theoretical concept can be understood as historical dislocation made of multiple and different journeys where each diaspora tells a different story about who travels, when, how, and under what circumstances? (p.179) Diasporas are not only personal exile experiences but also collective displacements which generate traumatic memories and images of uprooting and oppression. In the meantime, they are "sites of hope and new beginnings . . . where personal and collective memories" clash, intermingle, and assemble (pp.180-190).

According to Brah, within the concept of diaspora, there is the subtext of '"home"' (1996, p.187). The latter embodies different connotations and implications related to how indigenous people are transformed into "the Native." This word becomes "a code of subordination," thus in the discourse of positionality, the Native becomes "the Other." Nevertheless, the inferior position of the Native gave him the potential to speak the unspeakable, to fight victimization, dispossession, marginalization, and different forms of oppression (pp.187-188). In Abulhawa's novel, the Palestinians are treated as "the Natives," and they experience different kinds of exploitation. However, they have resisted using different strategies in which reproducing a collective history from the viewpoint of the victimized and protecting it from reinvention, manipulation,

and erasure goes hand in hand with the armed struggle for freedom and independence. The second connotation is about the construction of a mythical image about home and the impossibility of return. In this context, Brah interrogates, "Where is home? On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense, it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory seen as the place of 'origin'" (1996, p. 188). Based on Brah's argument, home for diasporic people is an idealistic and abstract place and therefore return is impossible. On the other hand, she adds that "'home' is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust . . . In other words, the varying experience of the pains and pleasures, the terrors and contentments, or the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture" (pp. 188-189). Since the Palestinians have a homeland to return to, the myth of return becomes not just an abstract idea or illusion but also a valid right to be achieved. Safran supports the idea of return even if it is a short stay.

In the novel under discussion, Yehya's, Amal's, and Sara's returns subvert the ideology of the impossible return as claimed that "migration is one-way trip, there is no home to go back to" (Cited in Chambers, 1994, p.9). Those returns at the same time demonstrate that home becomes using Brah's words "the lived experience of a locality" (1996, p.188) or, as Sara Ahmed (1999) defines it "home is not simply about fantasies of belonging–where do I originate from–but that it is *sentimentalized* as a space of belonging ('home is where the heart is'). The question of home and being at home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being at home is here a matter of *how one feels or how one might fail to feel*" (1991, p.341). This definition leads us to consider the concept of return with the desire of coming home. Return often results in actual movement to the places of origin. Nevertheless, what makes return problematic is the mixed feelings experienced by the returnee, were coming home can be disappointing. This is what happens to Amal after returning to Jenin, where somehow she experiences moments of strangeness due to the unexpected changes.

2. Mornings in Jenin as a Counter-Narrative:

In Mornings in Jenin, Susan Abulhawa, the daughter of Palestinian refugees, a human rights and political activist, narrates the life stories of

Yehya's Abulheja family over four generations amidst dramatic historical events. Based on historical facts and fiction, the novel depicts stories of loss and love, despair and hope, violence and resistance experienced by Yehya Abulheja, his sons, their grandsons, family friends and relatives. The story of Abulheja family is not a single story of a family, but the story of a whole nation as millions of Palestinians were forced to leave their ancestors' homeland after the Israeli occupation. According to Nina Fischer (2020), "The Abulhaja family functions as a personalization of the Palestinian historical narrative. They experience all the key events of the interwoven history with Israel: The British Mandate period with the growth of the Zionist settlement, the Nakba, the 1967 war [. . .], the development of the Palestinian liberation movement [. . .] , the 1982 massacre at Sabra and Shatila, ending with the second Intifada" (p.5). Hence, this family saga encapsulates the history of the national struggle against the Israeli occupation of Palestine, whereby family and political struggles have intersected. In an interview with Ahmed Qabaha (2018), Abulhawa clarifies that her novel "[i]s a human story. A piece of a native people's narrative" and she "place[s] great emphasis on the human struggles of the characters as they move through a brutal colonial reality" (p.5). Abulhawa does not only capture the human tragedy and its traumas of dispossession, injustice, and estrangement. Also, the novel is a manifestation of endurance, a call for the right to return, and a humanitarian capture of love, friendship, and hope.

Interestingly, this novel tells the other side of the Palestinians' story by piecing together what have been missed and voicing out what has been silenced. Edward W. Said in his essay "Invention, Memory, and Place" urges the Palestinians to construct their collective history and legitimize the right of return using counter- narratives. He contends, "Perhaps the greatest battle Palestinians have waged as a people has been over the right to a remembered presence and, with that presence, the right to possess and reclaim a collective historical reality" (2000, p.184). Said insists on writing back to the falsified colonial discourse because reproducing a collective history is an integral part of their revolution, and freedom. For Said, it is necessary for Palestinians to rewrite and retell their own story free from the biases and misrepresentations because a lot have been unsaid and unheard about the injustices done to them. In the same line, Abulhawa belongs to a generation of Palestinian writers who committed their writings to the cause that Said called for and her novel is counter- narrative

par excellence. *Mornings in Jenin*, on the one hand, reflects on the Palestinians' history and culture, including traditional, social, religious, agricultural, and familial practices. On the other hand, it unveils how things fall apart after the Israeli occupation, as described meticulously in this passage:

As the people of Ein Hod were marched into dispossession, Moshe and his comrades guarded and looted the newly emptied village. While Dalia lay heartbroken, delirious with the loss of Ismael, Jolanta rocked David to sleep. While Hasan tended to his family's survival, Moshe sang in drunken revelry with his fellow soldiers. And while Yehya and the others moved in anguished steps away from their land, the usurpers sang "Hatikva" and shouted, "Long live Israel!"(Abulhawa, 2010, p.37)

Abulhawa here juxtaposes grotesque images of the dispersion of a majority from their land by a minority of Jewish immigrants, of Palestinians' agony and loss, and Israeli's triumph and ecstasy.

Understandably, Abulhawa makes the unspeakable speak by giving voice to those who have been constrained to silence and making the victim and the victimizer speak in the same space through juxtapositions of multiple narratives. In the collection of the Palestine Festival of Literature entitled *This is not a Border*, Abulhawa contributes to the festival a short autobiographical text entitled "Once Upon a Jerusalem." She points at the parallels between suppressing Palestinians' own stories and denying them the right to claim their stolen land. She maintains that "I left [my career in medical research] to become a storyteller, because someone stole my story and retold the truth of me as a lie . . . making me disappear, rootless and irrelevant" (2017, p.59). By voicing Palestinians' untold stories, she challenges the monologic discourse of power which distorts the Palestinian narrative. Similarly, commenting on her fiction whether it can be considered as writing back to Israeli colonial discourse which endeavours to cut ties between the Palestinians and their land, she firmly insists that "the impulse of belonging, to "own your place" manifests in struggle, of which narrative is an integral component. Owning one's story is as important as the ownership of physical space" (2018, p.7). Hence, literature becomes a site of empowerment and resistance for Palestinians because the physical struggle for regaining land goes hand in hand with telling ones' story about that struggle. In other words, writing about the Palestinian trauma is an integral part of the struggle for freedom.

3. Life in Ein Hod before and after AL Nakba:

Much of the story is focalized and seen through Amal's eyes. The novel's plotline centers on interwoven stories that unfold backwards and forward in time. Notably, they move between the past and the present through flashbacks and memories. Journeying in time and space, between a past life recalled in memory and a lived one of great danger and challenge, Abulheja family saga is a combination of intertwined and intricate narratives that other tales participate in, as well as influence, the main story. The novel opens with a symbolic description of a harmonious mythical landscape in which the plot unfolds. Before the catastrophe or El Nakba, the villagers of Ein Hod, a small village east Haifa, lived in tranquility and peace and were surrounded by everything that reminded them of their traditions, origins, and roots. For example, when Yehya, Abu Hasan plays the nye, "its melodies gave [him] a sense of his ancestors, the countless harvests, the land, the sun, time, love, and all that was good . . . He played for his trees, to resurrect simplicity and peace" (Abulhawa, 2010, pp.13-21). The people in Ein Hod are olive farmers having solid ties both with the land and with one another. The sense of community and solidarity is very customary among family members and neighbours as reflected during the olive harvest. The latter symbolizes a way of life, a tradition, and above a mutual connectedness between people and their roots. The significance of the land is illustrated when Yahya denies his son Hasan "a descendent of the original founders of Ein Hod and heir to great stretches of cultivated land, orchards, and five impressive olive groves" (p.18) further schooling in Jerusalem because he is afraid that education and books would take him away from the land. Moreover, as Palestine has historically been a centre of different religions lived in harmony and tolerance, friendships between Hasan Abulheja and Ari Perlstein, and between Jack O'Malley, Yahya Abulheja, and Haj Salam become very remarkable and unique. All in all, Nina Fischer (2020) describes Ein Hod as "a bucolic space in an idealized period of coexistence and interfaith friendships" (p.4). This somehow idyllic and utopian life does not last long and the peace of Ein Hod is shattered when the Zionists occupied the land proclaiming it as a Jewish state.

Through massacres, aerial bombardment, and massive artillery, the Israelites launch their first campaign to get rid of Palestinians. Whole villages are wiped and massacred, and the fate of Ein Hod is not an exception.

Helpless and defenseless, the villagers seek peace and truce to ensure survival because they wished "only to live on their land as they always had. For they had endured many masters-Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders, Ottomans, British- and nationalism was inconsequential. Attachment to God, land, and family was the core of their being and that is what they defended and sought to keep" (p.28). Hoping to live side by side and to cling to their homes, Palestinians offered peace to their enemy; however, the Israelites' determined attacks dashed all these arrangements. What was colourful, fertile, and joyful turned into lifeless, arid, and miserable. All get traumatized and terrified, turning their lives into a nightmare, and this is the case with Dalia, Hasan's wife who suffered twice the loss of her son Ismael, who was kidnapped by a Jewish soldier and the loss of their home. Ismael's kidnapping is analogous to the takeover of Palestine. Enforced to leave their homes and belongings, the people of Ein Hod and other villages become refugees in their own land as they moved to Jenin's refugee camp where they "could stand on the hills and look back at the homes to which they could never return" (Abulhawa, 2010, p.33). Furthermore, being robbed of their homes, Yehya felt a bitter resentment towards the Jewish usurpers who had stolen a nation's history and proclaimed it as their own. In effect, the year 1948 becomes very painful and unforgettable, leaving moral and physical scars in Palestinian hearts as described in this passage:

In the sorrow of history buried alive, the year 1948 in Palestine fell from the calendar into exile, ceasing to reckon the marching count of days, months, and years, instead becoming an infinite mist of one moment in history. The twelve months of that year rearranged themselves and swirled aimlessly in the heart of Palestine. The old folks of Ein Hod would die refugees in the camp, bequeathing to their heirs the large iron keys to their ancestral homes, the crumbling land registers issued by the Ottomans, the deeds from the British mandate, their memories and love of the land, and the dauntless will not to live the spirit of forty generations trapped beneath the subversion of thieves. (p.34)

The Israeli occupation led to the annihilation of another nation. By uprooting the Palestinians from their homeland and confiscating their lands, this plight has befallen and traumatized generations, who though scattered and exiled fostered the myth to return.

4.1 Yehya's Return: between Lamenting a lost Land and Celebrating a Glorious Return

In his book *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence*, Muhsin Jassim Al-Musawi (2003) contends that among the themes postcolonial texts focus on is the land which is a site of occupation and contestation. He states, "The post-colonial novel takes the land as trope and subject because the whole scope of the struggle revolves around the human and the land" (pp.121-122). These novels then portray the suffering of the individual in his land, and ironically, the land which he struggles for becomes the source of his agony. If it gets violated and exploited, he/she gets affected and victimized as well. After dislocation from their native village to Jenin's refugee camp, Yehya neither forget nor give up the desire to return home. At the beginning of Israeli-Palestinian the conflict, the United Nations' recommendations to solve the conflict further raise hopes and aspirations among Yehya and his friends to go home where "gathering for the news became a morning ritual in the refugee camp. . . It was a time and place where the hope of returning home could be renewed. Even when those hopes were perpetually dashed. Even when the old began to die off. And even when hopes grew fainter, they continued to gather in this routine of the Right of Return" (p.38). Thus, the latter becomes a myth circulating amongst generations, and since they do not know when they have just to wait.

Over the years, the waiting in exile, which was seen as temporary, becomes permanent in the tents of Jenin. Because of the UN's broken promises and resolutions, Yehya could not wait idly and get defeated as time passing. One early November morning in 1953, He firmly decided to go to Ein Hod because it was the time of olive harvest and ripping grapes and figs. Despite his family's and friends' warnings of the danger, no one could stop him from going. He goes against the stream and crosses all the borders enforced on them; "he turned and walked as he once had, with purpose and pride . . . up the sloping alleyway to the edge of the camp, past its boundaries, outside the limit of that eternal 1948, beyond the border into what had become Israel—into a landscape he knew better than the lines on his hands—until he finally arrived at his destination" (Abulhawa, 2010, p.40). Thus what Yehya will not do is submissiveness, indifference, and waiting. Ein Hod remains engraved in his mind and heart as a central part of his very existence. He asserts this existence by going back to his

home, cherishing the warmth of land and even the vestiges; therefore, his return becomes a legacy remembered by future generations.

Whatever feelings of loss and tragedy experienced by Yehya and the other refugees, they never cut the umbilical ties to their homes instead, they construct idealized images of them and longed for belonging. In this context, Zahia Smail Salhi (2006) maintains that "regardless of the reasons that make exiles live far from their homelands and regardless of whether they escaped prosecution or chose to live far from home, they all keep an idealized image of home as a paradise they were forced to flee, and never manage to entirely adopt their new dwellings. As such they share feelings of solitude, estrangement, loss, and longing" (p.3). Yehya; however, does not only keep an idealized image of his home but also dares to achieve a physical and real "brief" return. This return to his native village shows a kind of transition and movement from "imaginary homelands" (Rushdie, 1992, p.10) to physical homelands. Indeed, in the second attempt to cross Israeli boundaries, Yehya got shot and died, but his death becomes a celebration of bravery and a sacrifice for the love of the land. In the meantime, Yehya's death opens the refugees' eyes to ask a fundamental question "How was it that a man could not walk onto his own property, visit the grave of his wife, eat the fruits of forty generations of his ancestors' toil, without mortal consequence?" (p. 44) Accordingly, in order not to be erased from history and even the future, Youcef, after thirty years of this event, would tell his sister Amal about their grandfather's audacious return. Moreover, the importance of telling such stories is to insist on future generations to remember to return and reclaim what has been lost, as happened to Amal and her daughter Sara.

4. Amal's Childhood and Adulthood Ordeals:

4.1 Amal's life before and after AL Naksa

Although the central protagonist Amal was born in Jenin's refugee camp, trauma and feelings of displacement are not an exception for her. As Brah (1996) demonstrates that "'home' can simultaneously be a place of safety and of terror" (p.177); this almost pertains to what Amal felt and experienced in her childhood as she clarifies,"The world at home frightened me enough" (p.128). Born after seven years of the catastrophe precisely in 1955, Amal, whose name

signifies hope(s) is raised in Jenin as a third-generation refugee. Life in Jenin's refugee camp is wrapped by cheerfulness and sadness; the former is manifested in the way how family relationships and friendships are highly valued, the latter is reflected in the atrocities committed by the Israelites against disempowered Palestinians who become wretched refugees and exiles. Amal grows up in a traumatized family, especially with a mother overwhelmed by the disappearance of her son. Mother-daughter relationship then was not tender and warm as it is known to be instead, Dalia becomes a harsh and reticent mother who shows her love only during Amal's sleep. Thus, robust father-daughter relationship established between Hasan and his daughter, giving her not just care and love but also knowledge by teaching her classical Arab prose and poetry. Amal is taught that "The land and everything on it can be taken away, but no one can take away your knowledge or the degrees you earn [. . .] Palestine owns us and we belong to her" (Abulhawa, 2010, pp.53-54), Hasan maintains. Amal's unique and delightful mornings with her father are reflected in smelling the smoke of honey apple tobacco from his olive–wood pipe; listening to his mesmerizing voice while reading Arabic poetry, and above all laying in his lap, which turns to be the safest embrace she has never known before. These exceptional and emotional moments spent with her father will be decades later her "only thread of solace (p.53) in her "ghurba" life and "bleak early hours" (p.53) in Pennsylvania. Effectively, the novel's title evokes those sweet memories and moments that Amal enjoyed with her father before the disaster or "AL Naksa."

AL Naksa (The Six Days War of June 1967) was not the last straw that broke the Palestinians' hearts. It escalates their suffering and causes physical and psychological damage where Amal, for the first time, witnesses and experiences trauma and victimization. For instance, the harm caused to Dalia is very disastrous, especially after the disappearance of her husband and son, Youcef. Amal and her friend Huda also face death and feel the impact of the war while hiding in the kitchen hole under the sink. Hiding for days in the hole with the three-old-month cousin, Aisha, they-terrified and hungry- heard explosions, women's sobbing, and children's screams. "We heard destruction and blasts of fire. We heard chants. The odor of burning flesh, fermenting garbage, and scorched foliage mixed with the smell of our own excrement in the dust (p.59), Amal testifies. She compares these dreadful days with "Judgment Day." The most shocking moment is the death of the baby Aisha after an aggressive

explosion and the destruction of everything surrounding them. Dead bodies are everywhere; the survivors are shocked and frightened. After burying the baby, the two friends are saved by a Red Crescent nun called Marianne, where they receive medical treatment at a hospital established by international relief agencies. The effect of this war is very traumatic and distractive because when Amal moved to the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem, she found "Bethlehem looked just like Jenin, crumbled, torched and strewn with death" (p.63). Inside the church, hundreds of children are orphaned, motionless, and silent, "existing somewhere between life and death" (Abulhawa, 2010, p.63). Amal felt secure after taking a bath for water is a source of life and pureness. Beneath the world of water, she wishes to be a fish in order not to hear gunfire and screams and not to see and smell death. It is somewhat true when Iman El Sayed Raslan (2017) demonstrates that bathing becomes a means for cleansing earthly awfulness and dehumanization because for Amal, life becomes a hell where terror and chaos reside. Raslan adds that taking a bath after all the suffering she encounters is a kind of "rebirth" or resurrection towards new life journeys where she is going to learn how to survive and to face more hardships with courage (pp. 192-193).

***5.2 Amal in Jerusalem**:*

The most turning point in Amal's life is her departure to the orphanage school in Jerusalem called "Dar el Tifel el Araby" or "Home of the Arab Child" due to the death of her mother and the disappearance of her father and brother. Amal was orphaned at the age of fourteen years old and though she does not have a scholarly interest of her own, is sent to the orphanage in order to make her father's wish come true. She receives further schooling and obtains a scholarship to continue her studies in America. Hasan invests all his dreams in his daughter Amal to be raised not as a refugee but to get an education. What Amel experiences during AL Naksa is another painful chapter to be added to the Palestinians' plight in which thousands before her have undergone similar cruelty, and this is the case with Haj Salem. He is the sagacious orator and historian of Jenin; he personifies the link between the past and the present. He has "seen it all. All the wars" (Abulhawa, 2010, p.66) and his story is everyone's story "a single tale of dispossession, of being stripped to the bones of one's humanity, of being dumped like rubbish into refugee camps unfit for rats. Of being left without rights, home, or nation while the world turned its back to watch or cheer the jubilation of the usurpers proclaiming a new state they called

Israel" (p.66), Amal clarifies. Being part of this history, she identifies herself with her forefathers bound by the same torment, endurance, and waiting to return. However, waiting rules their lives, and what they long for becomes hard to achieve since all lands after 1967 become under Israeli control. In addition to this permanent exile, Amal's family disintegrates after her brother Youcef joined the PLO and her mother died. Consequently, she has been convinced to leave Jenin in order not to be condemned into the life of a refugee. She has been their hope and future, and the chance she has been offered would lead her to roam different spaces, experience multiple displacements, and forge different kinds of identities.

The city of Jerusalem raises in Amal both feelings of animosity and adoration. On the one hand, she considers it the source of religious struggle between Muslims and Christians where each side claims his rightful possession of the land, thus the reason behind their dispersal. Similarly, Said clarifies that, "Palestinians feel that they have been turned into exiles by the proverbial people of exile, the Jews" (2013, p.184). On the other hand, the historical, ethnic, and racial symbolization of the city evokes to Palestinians a sense of endurance, rootedness and identity and this is what happens to Amal when she sees it in her way to the orphanage school. She says:

I have always found it difficult not to be moved by Jerusalem, even when I hated it—and God knows I have hated it for the sheer human cost of it. But the sight of it, from afar or inside the labyrinth of its walls, softens me . . . It sparks an inherent sense of familiarity in me—that doubtless, irrefutable Palestinian certainty that I belong to this land. It possesses me, no matter who conquers it, because its soil is the keeper of my roots, of the bones of my ancestors. . . Because I am the natural seed of its passionate tempestuous past. I am a daughter of the land, and Jerusalem reassures me of this inalienable title, far more than the yellowed property deeds, the Ottoman land registers, the iron keys to our stolen homes, or UN resolutions and decrees of superpowers could ever do. (pp.115-116)

Amal's four years' stay in Jerusalem as a knowledge-seeker refugee becomes a crossroads in her life. Even though she meets different girls from different social backgrounds, their stories of the diaspora have much in common with hers.

They share somehow the same experiences of trauma, displacement, and oppression. Meanwhile, through their friendships, they build mutual affiliations and alternative families; find consolation, and use their friendships as a shield against loneliness and hard times. The ties they forge are shaped by individual and collective tragedies, the need for survival, and most importantly, it is Palestine that unifies them. In her adolescent years in the orphanage, Amal tries to create a peaceful present by closing the window of the past since everything related to it has been lost and stolen, including family and home.

5. Amal's Journey from Jerusalem to the United States:

5.1 The Clash between Amal and Amy:

The scholarship that Amal gains at Temple University in Philadelphia opens to her divergent paths full of challenges and identity crisis. In other words, she faces many hardships which hinder her from fitting in. These difficulties have to do with her skin colour, language, and Arabic name, resulting in feelings of alienation and foreignness: "FEELINGS OF INADEQUACY MARKED my first months in America. I floundered in that open-ended world, trying to fit in. But my foreignness showed in my brown skin and accent. Statelessness clung to me like bad perfume and the airplane hijackings of the seventies trailed my Arabic surname" (p. 135). Indeed, in her journey to America to remake herself, she crosses not only physical places but also undergoes psychological transformations which have to do with her origins. In his book, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, Ian Chambers (1994) argues that the most defining characteristic of the theme of diaspora is "The migrant's sense of being rootless, of living between two worlds, between a lost past and a nonintegrated present" (p. 27). This state of in-betweenness and being out of place reflects Amal's early months in America, where she felt being an outcast unable to fit in the American way of life. Although her host family is kind to her, she cannot feel relaxed with them. Added to this, when wandering in the streets of Philadelphia, she felt aimless, dispossessed and "diminished, out of place, and eager to return" (Abulhawa, 2010, p.137), unlike the self-confident Americans who "walked with purpose and self-possession" (p.137). Caught between East and West, past and present, old and new, she starts looking for ways of adaptation and belonging through leaving behind her past, changing her name into Amy, and submerging into the western lifestyle. She describes her

transformation as follow:

the Palestinian girl of pitiable beginnings was trampled in my rush to belong and find relevance in the West. I dampened my senses to the world, tucking myself into an American niche with no past. . . I lived free of soldiers, free of inherited dreams and martyrs tugging at my hands. . . I metamorphosed into unclassified Arab-western hybrid, unrooted and unknown. I drank alcohol and dated several men . . . I spun in cultural vicissitude, wandering in and out of the American ethos until I lost my way. . . I lived in the present, keeping the past hidden away. (p.138)

In doing so, Amal moves from a hostile and confining environment to a safe and fluid American lifestyle. She changes from a wretched Palestinian girl to an Arab-Western independent girl internalizing western standards and values.

Her relocation to America indicates her willingness to adapt to change and start a new life. What she finds in America is peace, freedom, and comfort, much in contrast to what life looks like in Jenin. Leaving the past behind becomes Amal's surviving strategy and the mean through which she re-positions herself in this new environment. She cuts links with her past which she considers disturbing not participating in political discussions, not contacting her uncle and friends, and by becoming Amy. This passage perfectly tells the shift in Amal's identity:

I deliberately . . . let myself be known as ""Amy""– Amal without the hope. I was a word drained of its meaning. A woman emptied of her past. The truth isthat I wanted to be someone else . . . no soldiers here. No barbed wire or zones off-limits to Palestinians. No one to judge me. No resistance or cries or chants . . . on year into graduate studies in South Carolina, I received my green card and adopted the United States as my new country. . . Amal of the steadfast refugees and tragic beginnings was now Amy in the land of privilege and plenitude. (Abulhawa, 2010, p.142)

In becoming Amy, she suppresses past memories and buries her old self. She devotes her time to studies and works to not awaken the abyss inside her. Furthermore, when she becomes accepted and welcomed by the host society, she

feels secure, and no person and no gun can frighten her compared to the soldiers and M-16 assault rifles she has known in her past life in Jenin. Amal's transformation, therefore, goes with Said's argument that "Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past…Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people" (2013, p.183). Though submerged in the American way of life, memories of her family and past constantly haunt and provoke her as a reminder of her roots and home.

Abulhawa does not seem total to celebrate assimilation as a positive experience and a second chance that underlines the human impulse to migrate. The novel shows how the fruitless search for a sense of identity and belonging takes the protagonist back to her family roots which she had left behind as a young girl. So, the question which arises here is Amal going to reconcile with her past and return home? Is home for the exile fixed, and is it a physical space to return to or an abstract imaginary place? For Abulhawa, the past is never past as Amal is trapped in the past memories in Jenin. Some people, incidents, and objects resurface and come across in her life, making her nostalgic and at the same time shameful for betraying her family and even herself. For instance, the scar in her body is a constant reminder of her childhood trauma; thus the past is always part of her life. Overwhelmed by the memories of the past, her father and mother remain absent present as well. Besides, the call of Palestine and her old friends now and then shakes her new life even though she tries to forget and bequeath them. Nevertheless, the call is irresistible, and the past is undeniable, including home, family and roots. She is physically rather than mentally alienated and exiled from her home and people because memories and feelings of belonging always haunt her. Amal asserts that "no matter what façade I bought, I forever belonged to that Palestinian nation of the banished to no place, no man, no honor. My Arabness and Palestine's primal cries were my anchors to the world. And I found myself searching books of history for accounts that matched the stories Haj Salem had told" (p.143). Amal's suffering from nostalgia and homesickness leads her to recognize that personal history and identity are part of the collective history of her nation, and her affiliation to Palestine cannot be discarded. Hence, the country of origin is the anchor which defines her.

6.2 Beirut *as a Bridge between Amal's Present, Past and Future*

Youcef's telephone call to Amal is the catalyst that drives her to overcome nostalgia and reunite with her brother in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon. This call does not just reconcile Amal with her past but also influences and shapes her future. When hearing her name, she "cried at the sound of her Arabic name" and "The telephone was an inadequate connection to transmit the warm longing and surprise as they tried to speak through sobs and static" (Abulhawa, 2010, p.143). By calling her Arabic name, which means hope(s), she regains part of her Arabic identity, which she changes to Amy, a name devoid of meaning and hope. Unable to endure feelings of longing and waiting, especially after knowing she is will an aunt, Amal decides to go to Lebanon where her brother and his wife Fatima live after the PLO forced out from Jordan. Nevertheless, she starts considering America as her home; she decides to return to her old self and to revisit her past.

In Lebanon, every minute detail which takes her back to her childhood memories and origins matter to Amal now. For example, when she heard the calls and the responses in the Arabic language in Beirut International Airport, they sounded to her musical and appealing. Moreover, being in an Arab country gives her a sense of warmth and identification with her native home in which the view of newspaper peddlers, flowers, the fragrance of baked bread, and street-side displays of "kaak" directly and powerfully restore memories of Palestine (p.146). As Salhi points out, "the motherland [can be] restored [to the exiles] through various signifiers, including colours: "the colour of face", sensations: "the warmth of the body", and flavours: "the taste of earth", for all that is left with the exiled of their homeland are landmarks in their memory" (2006, p.1). This is precisely what happens to Amal when her senses are awakened; she can identify with her homeland.

The resemblances between Sabra's and Shatela's refugee camps and Jenin's are another factor that intensives Amal's longing for Palestine, thus reconciliation with her past and affirmation of roots. The way and the games children played; their gathering around the arriving cars reminds her of herself as a child and other children doing the same thing when visitors came to their camp. The most sensitive moment in the camp is Amal's reunification with her brother after thirteen years of separation. For her, his embrace symbolizes safety

and remedy to her aches and loneliness. She receives a warm welcome from Fatima and the other women in the camp. Feeling at home for Amal then is not just linked to a physical place, but rather to relationships, people, objects, stories, sensations, and the like. Her father's smoking pipe -which she carries with her since she has been in the orphanage-, is not only an object or a souvenir, but it is among the memories she has cultivated about life in Jenin. The fact that she takes it with her wherever she travels indicates her clinging to her origins and roots. In addition, in that refugee camp, Amal understands how the love story between her brother and Fatima persists in the face of terror and trauma. Despite the displacement, their house of love in Lebanon alleviates feelings of estrangement and loneliness. Under the influence of this love story and the charisma of doctor Majid, her brother's friend, Amel finds her other half and reclaims her past memories.

To help the refugees, Amal volunteers to teach at the UN's girl school. This voluntary work enables her to come close to her future husband Majid, who assists in childbirth in the camp. Through these childbirths, she rejuvenates memories with her mother as they delivered many babies together. Though it was difficult in helping one of the women delivering her baby, she felt "sweetly, satisfying, to be Amal again—not anonymous Amy. . . Dalia had helped [her] find another piece of [herself]" (Abulhawa, 2010, pp.153-154). Amal's renewal of her old self occurs through stages primarily through moments and memories which are stimulated during her visit to Beirut, and her relationship with Majid makes life for her worth living, and most importantly, he "became her roots, her country" (p.164). During the wedding, "Amal wondered nostalgically in and out her memories" (p.163) because this celebration reminds her of playing "aroosa" with her friends in Jenin meanwhile, she wishes all the people whom she loved being with her on that joyful occasion. Amal's marriage and reunification with her brother, however, are short- lived when Israel attacked Lebanon in 1981 for harbouring the PLO fighters. Amal is obliged to live another exile, and experience a more painful tragedy. For her, this departure is temporary, and she promises to return again.

6. (Im)possibility of Return: Is Home a Myth or Reality and Is Co-existence Possible?

The year 1982 marks another trauma in Palestinian history. Before Amal could arrange the asylum papers for her husband and her brother's family in Philadelphia, everything collapsed on June 6, 1982, when Israel attacked Lebanon. Despite her prayers as her mother Dalia did before to save her family, they prove fruitless because another trauma befalls her. The murder of Majid turns Amal's dreams into ashes and dust. Added to this heartbreak, during the massacre of Sabra and Shatila, she lost her sister-in-law, her niece Falasteen, and many women and children she has known during her stay in Lebanon. In retaliation, Youcef blows a truck bomb into the U.S. embassy in Beirut. After this massacre, Amal gave birth to a baby girl called Sara. Although she wishes to die the day her daughter is born, life has given her another life personified in her newborn baby. She describes this controversial moment as follows: "At last, my baby's instinct for life conquered me and I let go . . . she spooned life over my hardened heart, like moss cushioning a stone. But I kept my distance, going only through the mechanics of caring for a newborn. This fragile infant had forced upon me the will to live, and I resented her for that, for all I really wanted then was to die" (p.180). Amal has mixed feelings towards her daughter in which motherhood for her is a duty, not a reciprocal love relationship. Nevertheless, she conceals her emotions, "Sara's scent was irresistible, an intoxicating, wordless promise that weakened [her]" (p.181). Amal hides her emotions using a social veneer because she suspects infecting her daughter with her lousy destiny, and she fears love more than death because she cannot bear loss again. Furthermore, Amal's solitude, reticence, and toughness accumulate when she plunges herself again into the American way of life and hard work. Her life becomes devoid of meaning and purpose. She describes what her life looks like and how she treats her daughter as follows:

I was a woman of few words and no friends. I was Amy. A name drained of meaning. Amal, long or short vowel, emptied of hope . . . My life savored of ash and I lived with the perpetual silence of a song that has no voice. In my bitterness and fear, I felt as alone as loneliness dares to be . . . Only Sara was a threat to my hardness. . . She was the brilliant color in the middle of the gray desolation of my world, the point where all my love, my history, and my pain met in a perfect blossom. . . I was afraid to transmit my jaded frost to her. . . So, I tended to the demands of motherhood, containing that burning love behind the cold walls of fear and long work hours. . ., and eventually she stopped

coming to me, constructing walls of her own to keep me out as well. Thus we lived behind our solid barriers, each craving the other's love.

(Abulhawa, 2010, pp.192-193)

This ambivalence and coldness will melt when Amel meets her lost brother Ismael, the Jewish David who is in a quest for identity and roots.

In support of Salhi's argument that the exiles can conquer feelings of loneliness, loss, and displacement in their new dwellings by bringing objects with them and maintaining their culture and traditions (2006, p.3), Amal does so by preparing traditional Palestinian dishes like "makloobeh," and making "kahwe." Most importantly, she consolidates ties with her home through remembering, going back to past recollections, and piecing together old oral stories about Palestine and her ancestors. For instance, when reading passages from Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* to her little girl, Amal felt the presence of Majid with whom she read the same passages before. Majid, is stolen like Palestine; he is "The country they took away. The home in sight but always beyond reach" (p.194). He is beyond reach like Palestine and only after David's and Amal's meeting regenerates nostalgia for the homeland in Amal, which eventually leads to a physical return to Palestine together with her daughter Sara. Although the desire and the possibility of return to the place of origin are not supported by all diaspora studies and migrancy was seen as one way linear movement without homecoming (Brah, 1994, p. 188-194; cited in Chambers 1991, p.9), some diasporic narrative such as the novel under discussion contradicts these assumptions. Abulhawa shows through her characters that return and homecoming are possible, thus subverting the in one direction. Said (2013) too argues, for the impossibility of return when he demonstrates that "The pathos of exile is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth: homecoming is out of the question" (p.185). In contrast, other theorists suggest the possibility of return, whether permanent or for a short period, in which feelings of nostalgia aggravate the sense of homecoming.

Moreover, memory plays a vital role in regenerating and preserving Amal's recollections in Jenin from forgetfulness. Memories are not a mere reflection of psychological anguish and painful memories, but they contribute to Amal's recognition of the human suffering of her people who have been

dispossessed and scattered worldwide. By remembering the past, she builds bridges and shows commitment to the collective memory of Palestinians. Wael Salam (2021) demonstrates that "memory is a cultural celebration of one's own identity and a subscription to the collective memory of a people. At the same time, it is a peaceful resistance by which Amal reclaims the right of resistance and existence" (p.11). Following Salam's reasoning, Amal's recollections of the past, sometimes painful, have a double function; her personal trauma is an epitome of a collective one. It is through the past that she still maintains links with her Palestinian identity and roots. These memories of the past would also help her brother Ismael/David reclaim his origins and Arabic name. In the meantime, the appearance of David in Amal's life affects her on different levels. First, the mother-daughter rigid relationship becomes more affectionate since Amal discloses her heavy burden and demystifies the untold story of David. Sara sympathizes with her mother at the same time becomes more curious to know about her family "To be invited, in a way, into the mysteries of her mother. She felt, above all, a rare closeness with her mother, the iron-willed woman who suddenly appeared vulnerable, almost fragile, to her"(Abulhawa, 2010, p.203). When Amal unleashes the flow of emotions and the motherly instincts towards Sara, they start to build mutual and strong bonds, which they have avoided before. Because the past has more authority over Amal's attempts to conceal it, David's call after two decades of absence leads Amal to revisit her past. Therefore, this symbolic return helps her revise and reshape her and her daughter's present and future. Interestingly, the meeting between Amal and David can be interpreted as a symbolic confrontation between the past and the present, dispossession and repossession, anguish and healing, and above all, a clash between roots and routes (Paul Gilroy's term).

Amal tries to fill in the missing gaps which David has about his roots and family through artifacts, photographs, letters, and objects such as Dalia's silk scarf and her embroidered breast portion of her favourite thobe. She stored them in a box since she left Jenin, and through oral stories, she inherited from Haj Salam and others. These remnants stand as historical evidence for the strong ties she has with her family and origins. For instance, the drawing of the founders of Ein Hod, which Amal keeps with her in her house in Philadelphia, shakes David's sense of belonging and mistaken identity. This drawing disclaims the Zionists' slogan, which denies Palestinians historical presence and non-

existence as land and people. She describes David's reaction as follow:

He looked on in silence at the proof of what Israelis already know, that their history is contrived from the bones and traditions of Palestinians. The Europeans who came knew neither hummus nor falafel but later proclaim them "authentic Jewish cuisine."

They claimed the villas of Qatamon as "old Jewish homes." They had no old photographs or ancient drawings of their ancestry living on the land, loving it, and planting it. They arrived from foreign nations and uncovered coins in Palestine's earth from the Canaanites, the Romans, the Ottomans, then sold them as their own "ancient Jewish artifacts." They came to Jaffa and found oranges the size of watermelons and said, "Behold! The Jews are known for their oranges." But those oranges were the culmination of centuries of Palestinian farmers perfecting the art of citrus growing. (p.206)

In the above passage, Abulhawa shows how Palestine's rich history has been distorted, falsified, and stolen and this applies to David, who has been kidnapped and brought up as an Israeli. Though David takes Amal back to painful and traumatizing past, which she considers he is responsible for part of it, his loneliness, melancholy and his life story push Amal to recognize him not as an abstraction but as her long-lost brother. They are "the remains of an unfulfilled legacy, heirs to a kingdom of stolen identities and ragged confusion. In the complicity of siblinghood, of aloneness and unrootedness, Amal loved David instinctively, despite herself and despite what he had done or who he had become" (p.212). Accordingly, after this encounter, both of them clarify things to each other, and they become able to understand that there are two sides to every story. On the other hand, the appearance of David intrigues Sara, a Palestinian born in exile, to know her family's history and native home.

Sara, rather than just getting an abstract image about Palestine from her mother, decides to go to Palestine in order to gain and experience concrete belonging and to know its roots. ""It isn't just because of these filthy politics and injustice, Mom . . . I want to know who I am,"" (Abulhawa, 2010, p.220) Sara said. So, an actual physical return to Palestine takes place after three decades of exile. Wael Salam (2021), in his study "The Burden of the Past: Memories, Resistance and Existence in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* and Hala Alyan's *Salt House*s" argues that "Returning to one's homeland,

though temporarily, is an act of resistance and an affirmation of the Palestinian will to return" (p.10). It means that it is an act of resistance against forgetfulness, misrepresentation, and erasure simultaneously return is an act of identification with roots and confirmation of the right to return. After Sara's and Amal's arrival, they are welcomed by David and his son Jacob, but Amal wants to visit Jerusalem, the orphanage, and find Ari Perlstein's office first. Tree generations gather in Ari's office, and they aim is to affirm who are they and from where they come from; to piece together what has been untold and reveal what has been veiled. Every single story told in Ari's office represents one of three generations where each of whom tells his or her personal story forming a chain of interrelated stories. Ari Perlstein, Hasan's old friend, tells them stories about his friendship with Hasan, Ein Hod's trees and legacies, and the war's atrocities. Like Haj Salam, he becomes a historical figure bearing witness to Ein Hod's past and present. The friendship between Ari and Hasan regardless of their origins, is unique, as well. Hasan's sacrifices for the sake of helping the Perlsteins' to cross over make Jacob recognize his uncle's human deeds towards Jews. Amal continues the stream of narration when Ari's memory trails off. The meeting with Ari then restores Amal's sense of belonging and alleviates her feelings of strangeness and homesickness. Moreover, the impact of the "adan" on Amal is very compelling. Unheard for too long, its melody runs into her like a river. By surrendering herself to this soft call, Amal "open[s] the gates to a wounding nostalgia and longing for [her] lost family, for [her] lost self" (p.223). The "adan" gives Amal power to answer questions and cry for the ones she loved and lost, consequently giving them tribute though painful, it is unforgettable as well.

Although settlements, stone buildings and hotels spread around Jerusalem and in the West Bank, Amal does inhale the land's welcome and feels meaning restored to her name, which has been devoid of hope before. Now, she is Amal, not Amy and Sara becomes happy when people call her mother Amal. For Sara, the sight of Jerusalem is fantastic, but for Amal, it is just stone, and in Jenin, there is an olive tree with more history than the Old city Walls. When returning to Jenin, the familiar becomes unfamiliar, and Jenin is not the same place that she had left years ago. According to Sara Ahmed (1999), the association of home with familiarity and migration with strangeness is not a safe definition because:

there is always an encounter with strangeness at stake, even within the home . . . There is already strangeness and movement within the home itself. It is not simply a question then of those who stay at home, and those who leave . . . Rather, 'homes' always involve encounters between those who stay, those who arrive and those who leave . . . Given the inevitability of such encounters, homes do not stay the same as the space which is simply the familiar. There is movement and dislocation within the very forming of homes as complex and contingent spaces of inhabitance. (p.340)

In support of Ahmed's argument, this is what happens to Amal, who returns to a home that does not live up to her expectations. Jenin became bigger and crowed than before with different generations of refugees. It changes into "The busy, resolute, angry Jenin. Not the passive, waiting, putting-it-in-the-hands-of-Allah Jenin of my youth" (Abulhawa, 2010, p.229), Amal demonstrates. As a result, she looks for a sense of home in family relationships and friendships. Her uncle Darweesh, Haj Salam, and Huda are the only survivors of her past memories. Huda's house, for example, becomes a niche for Huda's and Amal's stories which they told to their children. Nevertheless, the shadow of death is nearby, and the Israeli troops had circled towns around Jenin; Amal lets herself wrapped by Sara's arms. This embrace stimulates the love she has feared and denied to herself and her daughter lying now in her arms. Indeed, for Amal, this poignant hug leads her to think that she "had found home. She had always been there" (p. 232). The nine days stay in Jenin despite being fraught with terror and near death, both Amal and Sara get close to each, clearing all the misunderstandings and barriers between them. Through regret and forgiveness, both become able to redeem and heal their pains and dislodge the burden of fear they carried for a long time. The most crucial act through which Amal expresses her love towards Sara is sacrificing herself in the face of an Israeli shotgun meant to hit Sara. Instead of experiencing fear in the face of the Israeli soldier, Amal felt life in death "a newness, the coming of rebirth" (p.238) since she realizes asking forgiveness from David and feeling sorry for her killer. For the sake of protecting Sara from the snipers, she felt happy to get shot instead of her. She says, "I look into my daughter's frightened eyes beneath me and am overcome with warmth. I am delirious with love for my daughter. My precious little girl. . . My life's loveliest song. My home" (p.239). As a result, her death becomes a

celebration of life; she died with the joy and the love of having saved her daughter's life.

Although Sara loses her mother in Jenin, she reclaims her unconditional love and her family history. She keeps her alive by writing letters to her on a website accessed by different people around the world, and there she "records her memories of that month, the month from which all things come and to which all return. The month from which Sara loves and hates" (p.243). She tells the world how much she loves her mother; the massacre committed in Jenin, her mother's bravery while facing death, and the legacy of four generations of Abulheja's family in which stories passed from generation to generation. On the one hand, the act of storytelling becomes important for Palestinians in order not just to show to the world what is happening now but also what happened in the past. On the other hand, these stories help the characters foster strong ties with the land and with Palestine's collective memory. To consolidate Sara's sense of belonging, Ari takes her and David to Ein Hod, her family's ancestral home. The village turns into a Jewish settlement, and Abulheja's house too becomes a Jewish property. However, Sara takes photographs for the remaining vestiges, such as the stone building of her great uncle Darweesh's horses. David finds the grave of his grandmother Basima due to the roses planned by his mother around the grave, and Amal told Sara before about the grave and the roses. In Jenin, Sara reunites with her large family (including her great uncle Darweesh and his cousins, her uncle David and his son Jacob), establishes motherly ties with Huda, and volunteers in raising funds for reconstruction. "All very different people, they found one another in the memory of loss and the hope of rest, becoming something of a family" (Abulhawa, 2010, p.247). David, on the other hand, stops drinking and thanks to Amal's acceptance, he is happy to see himself as human, no matter whether he is Jewish or Muslim. Furthermore, because Sara's website becomes a threat to the Israelites, she returns to America meanwhile, the umbilical cord which binds her to Jenin remains unbroken. Abulhawa seems to go with Ahmed's (1999) claim that "home is not simply about fantasies of belonging – where do I originate from – but that it is *sentimentalized* as a space of belonging ('home is where the heart is'). The question of home and being at home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being at home is here a matter of *how one feels or how one might fail to feel"* (p.341). In America, Sara, Jacob and Mansour live together

regardless of their ethnic differences. They try to assert themselves within a US framework while, at the same time, maintaining transnational connections to their original homelands.

7. Conclusion:

Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* can be classified as a historical novel, a semi-autobiography and a trauma novel that intertwines intricate narratives related to issues of dispossession, trauma, homesickness, and the hope to return. The Israeli-Palestinian everlasting conflict is the background against which Abulhawa's narrative captures the history of Palestinians' struggle against the Israeli occupation over six decades. Though the novel's characters are forced to leave their homes, rendering them into refugees and exiles and this is the case of Amal, her father, and grandfather; they still maintain a sense of belonging and believe in the right of return. Moreover, the main protagonist Amal, experiences multiple exiles, traumas and losses, but memories of the past constantly haunt her as a reminder of a past that cannot be erased. Indeed, Amal's journey across time and space, past and present, leads her to construct not only an imaginary mythologized homeland, but also to turn it into a real space through a concrete return to the home of origin. Nevertheless, return becomes somehow disappointing for the returnee because home (Jenin) is not the same when Amal has left, she realizes that home is more than the physical space that one returns to, instead it can be manifested in relationships, found in people whom she loves, and more than that she feels at home in the stories that she shares with: her father Hasan, Haj Salem, her friend Huda, her husband Majid and her daughter Sara.

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