UNIVERSITETET I AGDER

’Someone stole my story’

Home and Trauma in Two Palestinian Novels

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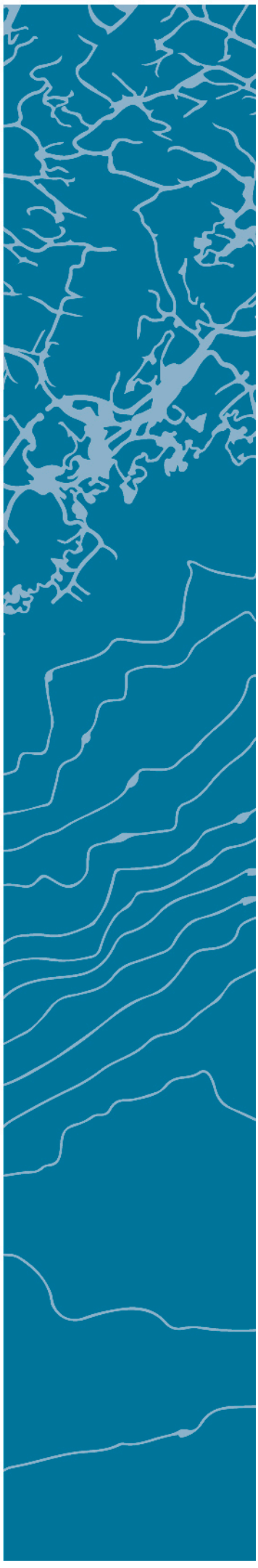

Abstract

This thesis will examine representations of home and trauma in the Palestinian novels *Mornings in Jenin* (2008) by Susan Abulhawa and *Salt Houses* (2017) by Hala Alyan. Written by Palestinian refugees now living in the United States, each of the two novels follows a Palestinian family through four generations, and depicts the struggle of creating a sense of belonging away from home. This thesis will focus on the individual experience of home, and examine the ways in which traumatic memories hinder the various characters' ability to create belonging in exile. Storytelling and the construction of narrative also serve an important function in the novels, and I will explore how narrative is both a means to overcome trauma and an important element in the creation of personal and collective identity. This thesis will also demonstrate that although *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses* are representative of the Palestinian experience of displacement, they could also be considered global narratives.

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Introduction and theory

No one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well
(Shire 1-4).

In 2015, when Europe faced a surge of refugees crossing its borders by any means necessary, Warsan Shire's poem 'Home' was frequently quoted across social media. In her poem, Shire attempts to explain the experience of being a refugee to a reader who would not know: 'you have to understand / that no one puts their children in a boat / unless the water is safer than the land' (23-25). The reason that Shire's poem gained such praise and attention is, I believe, because it uses the familiar concept of being at home to explain the, to many, unfamiliar experience of being a refugee away from home. The image of home becomes an access point into feelings and decisions that are impossible to understand for somebody who has never been forced to flee. Hence Shire's poem appears straightforward and its message clear: 'you only leave home / when home won't let you stay' (10-11). Home is also personified in the poem, making it as if it was a dear friend that is as sad to see you go as you are for leaving:

> no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
> saying -
> leave,
> run away from me know
> I don't know what I've become
> but I know that anywhere
> is safer than here (89-95)

This act of personification enables us to understand the personal connection between home and refugee, which further emphasises how painful it is to see one's home transform into something unrecognisable and fearful.

Mornings in Jenin (2008) by Susan Abulhawa and *Salt Houses* (2017) by Hala Alyan are two novels that attempt to capture a similar experience to that of Shire's 'Home'. Written by Palestinian refugees now living in the United States of America, *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses* portray a constant and – more often than not – fruitless search for belonging and for a home away from home. In the midst of the turbulent political landscape of the Middle East, each of the two novels depicts a Palestinian family who flee their homes as a consequence of the Arab-Israeli war in 1948, and again following the Six-Day war of 1967. In subsequent years, the characters of Abulhawa and Alyan's novels are again and again uprooted, either as a consequence of wars and political conflicts, or because they are on a quest for a sense of belonging, elsewhere.

Abulhawa is the author of two novels and a collection of poetry and Alyan wrote several collections of poetry before becoming a novelist. *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses* are their debut novels. Both novelists have already received critical praise for offering new insight into the situation for Palestinians, both in Palestine and especially in exile. Benay Blend, for example, has drawn on the works of both Alyan and Abulhawa in her article about the feminist perspective on the works of female Palestinian writers and Ayman Abu-Shomar is among several other critics who have examined the quest for identity and the search for a home in Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin.* Assmaa Mohamed Naguib, in his PhD thesis on *Representations of "Home" from the Setting of "Exile",* explores the notion of home in literature by Arab migrant novelists, among them Abulhawa, and he draws on theoretical concepts such as diaspora, nostalgia, the interspace between past and present, as well as the potential dichotomy between home and homeland.

What all these critics have in common is that they address these matters from the perspective of the diaspora. This thesis, on the other hand, will study *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses* within the framework of trauma theory, because the trauma of war and displacement affects the characters' ability to create a home in exile. As a way to address and eventually overcome the hold that the traumatic experiences have on the characters, there is an underlying emphasis in both novels, in both form and content, on the importance of narrative. Narrative, that is stories and the way in which stories are told, is a way to reclaim a sense of self when one is haunted by trauma, and narrative is also an important means in the preservation of identity, both personal and collective, when this identity is impeded, for example by displacement. Although I examine the dynamics between Palestinians and other cultures such as the United States of America, and look at various experiences of migration, both voluntary and forced, I have found that the following three theoretical fields best encapsulate the search for belonging in *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses*: the concepts of home and trauma, and the importance of narrative. After a theoretical introduction dealing with each of these frameworks, I will commence my analysis of the two novels. First of all, however, I will give a brief summary of the historical backdrop of the novels.

Historical context

The Middle East today is a complex political landscape, with many intertwining conflicts. Among them is the conflict between Israel and Palestine, which has its roots in the end of the 1800s, when Jews from across the globe started migrating to the area that was then known as Palestine. Established in the 1890s, the driving force behind this migration was Zionism, the ideology and political movement whose goal was the establishment of one national state for the Jewish people (Bunton 1). Palestine was the obvious place for the establishment of such a state, due to the Jews' geographical roots from the time before Christ. After the First World War, the Ottoman Empire, of which Palestine had been part, was dissolved and Palestine

became controlled by the British. In 1917, the Balfour declaration was signed, which promised British support for the Zionist cause (Bunton 18), and in spite of numerous protests from Palestinians, Jewish immigration increased throughout the following decades, especially after the escalation of persecution of Jews in Europe in the 1930s. The Zionist movement gained even more support for a Jewish state in Palestine following Holocaust. Violent actions and fighting increased as the Zionists fought to expel the British and eventually, the British pulled out from Palestine and gave its mandate to the United Nations (UN). In 1947, the UN suggested a partition plan in which the geographical area, then known as Palestine, would be divided into two sections; one of which constituted 55 percent of the land and would become Israel, the other of which constituted 44 percent and would remain Palestine (Khalidi 13). The remaining one percent was Jerusalem, which would remain under international control.

The Arab-Israeli War that both preceded and followed the declaration of the state of Israel on the 14th of May 1948 is referred to by Palestinians as *al-Nakba,* meaning 'the catastrophe' (Rogan and Shlaim 4). Although neighbouring countries intervened, they were motivated by their own interests rather than just support of the Palestinians, and by the end of the war, in January 1949, Israel had claimed 78 percent of original Palestine rather than the 55 percept suggested by the UN partition plan (Bunton 55). Jordan and Egypt controlled the remaining parts of Palestine (ibid.). Almost twenty years later, after military provocations from Jordan, Egypt and Syria, another war began on the 5th of June 1967. The Arab forces were inferior to the Israeli military power and after only six days Israel had taken control over the Gaza strip, the West Bank, as well as occupied the Egyptian Sinai (which remained under Israeli control until 1982) and the Syrian Golan Heights (which is still controlled by Israel). The 1967 war was named *el Naksa* by the Palestinians*,* meaning 'the setback' ('The *Naksa*').

Palestine has been under Israeli occupation since the war of 1967, but that is not to say that its population has not resisted. In 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was

founded as a means to resist Israeli settlements and occupation of Palestine, through armed struggle that has, to a large extent, been aimed at Israeli civilians (Bunton 177). The PLO eventually had to leave Palestine, and its members lived in exile in the south of Lebanon until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, after which they were forced to move to Tunisia (Bunton 83). A short while after, in September 1982, the massacre in Shabron and Shatila refugee camps resulted in the killing of several thousands, mostly civilians, and many family members of the PLO (ibid.). Although it was the right wing Lebanese party Phalange who carried out the massacre as an attempt to eradicate the PLO, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have later been held at least partially responsible because they allegedly knew that the PLO had already cleared out of the camps (ibid.). Israeli forces remained in Lebanon until 2000, during which time the organisation Hezbollah was founded and grew as a protest to the Israeli presence in the south of Lebanon. In 2006, Israel yet again invaded Lebanon, this time as a response to the Hezbollah imprisoning of two Israeli officers, which again was a response to Israeli imprisonment of Lebanese citizens (Hughes 220).

The diplomatic breakthrough for the PLO came in 1988, a year after the first Palestinian *intifada* or uprising against Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank (Bunton 86-87). The Palestinian people demanded an independent Palestinian state, consisting of Gaza, West Bank and East Jerusalem. Under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, who positioned himself and the PLO in opposition to terrorism and violence, the process of the Oslo Accords begun, and were signed in 1993 and 1995 (Bunton 118). Unfortunately, the peace process came to an abrupt end in 1995, when the Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin was killed by a Jewish extremist (ibid.). He was replaced by Benjamin Netanyahu, under whose leadership negotiations ended and the political fronts grew denser (ibid.). 2001 marked the beginning of the second Palestinian *intifada,* and throughout the first half of the 2000s, Palestinian suicide attacks on Israeli civilian targets increased (Bunton 98). In response, Israel strengthened its

fronts and restricted the mobility of Palestinians even more: in 2002, Israel started building the separation wall along the border of the West Bank. In Gaza, the Israelis have imposed a strict blockade of the entire area since the religiously radical party Hamas seized power in 2007. After repeated missile attacks originating from the Gaza strip, the Israeli bombed the highly populated area in 2008/2009. More than 1,400 Palestinians and thirteen Israelis were killed. Another 2,000 Palestinians were killed, almost 500 of which were children, in the 2014 Gaza war (Burke).

The situation in Israel/Palestine remains a complex issue to which there is no easy solution within sight. *Mornings in Jenin* begins in 1946 and ends in 2001, and the most central historical events in the novel include the Arab-Israeli war, the Six-Day war, the Lebanese war in 1982, and the first *intifada. Salt Houses,* on the other hand, presents a geographically broader perspective, as its characters live in Kuwait City, Amman, Beirut, Paris and Boston in addition to Palestine. *Salt Houses* concludes in 2015, and implicitly alludes to the present situation in the Middle East; the consequences of the Arab Spring, the war in Syria, and the refugee crisis. What the two novels have in common, however, is their concern with the effects of displacement within politically unstable landscapes.

More than 500 Palestinian villages were destroyed and more than 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee their homes as a result of the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 (Bunton 55). In 1967 another 300,000 were displaced from their homes (Krähenbühl). According to UNWRA, Palestinian refugees are defined as 'persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict' ('Palestine Refugee'). In 1950, UNWRA responded to the needs of 750,000 people. Today, the number of registered Palestinian refugees has exceeded five million, nearly a third of which live in refugee camps in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Gaza Strip and West Bank (ibid.). The UN and the international community have

made numerous attempts to reach an agreement between the involved parties, and especially to find a solution for the displaced Palestinians. By the end of the Arab-Israeli War in 1948, the UN General Assembly agreed upon resolution 194 that states that

> refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible' ('Resolution 194').

Still, seventy years later, this is yet to happen.

The context for displaced Palestinians today also reaches beyond the Middle East. Although I return to this context in the last chapter of my thesis, I must briefly explain a key term now that I will occasionally use throughout the thesis: diaspora. As Stephanie Anna Loddo has noted, '[d]efining Palestinians in exile as a diaspora can be seen as problematic' because it risks endangering the Palestinian right to return, and it may imply permanent settlement (276). Julianne Hammer likewise urges people to use 'diaspora' cautiously, because it tends 'to take the dispersal as a fact of life' rather than view it as a temporary settlement that still aspires to return to the national homeland (220). Still, Rogers Brubaker has identified three generally accepted elements attributed to diaspora: 'dispersion in place', 'orientation to a "homeland"', and 'boundary-maintenance' (quoted in Loddo 278). On this basis, Loddo argues that Palestinians outside of Palestine do qualify for the term 'diaspora'. Yet rather than a diasporic identity centred around the homeland, Loddo believes that the Palestinian diaspora is forged as much through mobility and hybridity, as it is by national rootedness (278). As opposed to other diasporic communities, Palestinians have typically been forced to migrate not just once, but several times throughout the years. The Palestinians who first fled to neighbouring countries were again uprooted when those countries faced

another war; for example, as the narrative of *Salt Houses* reveals, Palestinians who settled in Kuwait following the Six-Day War were again forced to leave their belongings and their homes behind when Hussein invaded in 1990. The most obvious example today, however, is the effect of the Syrian war. In the last couple of years, the Palestinians in Syria have been faced with yet again losing home and livelihood: out of the 560,000 Palestinians who lived in Syria before the war, 120,000 have fled and 440,000 are internally displaced (Krähenbühl). Thus to many Palestinians it is not a question of one-time flight, but generation upon generation of displacement.

The critical geography of 'home'

Pierre Krähenbühl, who is the Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNWRA), relates that for a while after 1948, the Palestinian refugee community resisted their new status as refugees (Krähenbühl). Believing in Resolution 194 and convinced that the evictions from their homes were only temporary, Palestinians did not really settle in their new places of residence. By 1955, however, UNWRA was replacing the tents with concrete shelters, imposing a sense of permanence onto the refugee community (ibid.). This was a tough transition for the Palestinians, because it indicated that the temporary camps put together in the rush following the Arab-Israeli War would be their place of residence for a good while longer than initially anticipated. Seventy years later, many Palestinians have lived their entire lives in those camps, yet in spite of this longevity, Palestinians still do not consider the camps their homes. Mohammed Kamel Dorai writes that it is 'always astonishing to hear children of the third exile generation name the village of their grandparents when asked where they come from. Their answers are all the more astonishing given that most of the villages were completely destroyed long ago, and exist nowhere but in the memories of the refugees' (93). But what, then, constitutes a home?

One possible answer could be located in the work of Gaston Bachelard. In *The Poetics of Space,* Bachelard explores the ways in which our perception of houses shape our memories, dreams and imagination. Throughout his book, he traces the imaginative functions of the various physical places in a house: the cellar and attic, the corners, the wardrobes and so on. For example, Bachelard believes that the house is typically 'imagined as a vertical being. It rises upward … ensured by the polarity of cellar and attic' (17). From a psychoanalytic perspective, then, the cellar symbolises the unconscious, and our fears that are located there are less definite than the ones located in, for example, the attic (ibid.). Bachelard considers the house a storage place for memories, and the structure of the houses of previous homes are often returned to in dreams and daydreaming: 'if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house I would say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace' (6). In other words, the house is a refuge and shelter, whose structure shapes the workings of our memories, and thereby our selves. 'The house,' Bachelard writes 'is the human being's first world' and thus life begins 'well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house' (7).

What Bachelard fails to address, however, are houses that are not necessarily homes. He writes that 'all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home' (5), and although he thereby recognises that the home does not have to be a house but could be any inhabited space, he does not consider hostile and unhomely homes such as, for example, a temporary tent in a refugee camp. Bachelard writes that although the interior being is realised through the house or home, we could also consider the symbolism of roads and movement. Although he does not elaborate much on this, he briefly states that the presence of movement and roads typically symbolise a 'going out' of ourselves, away from 'the intimate' (10-12). Applying these contrasts of house/road and intimate/'going out of ourselves' to the situation

of refugees, the absence of a physical house would imply an inherent dislocation from one's intimate self.

The discussion of home is also a discussion of the dichotomy between place and space. Ian Davidson explains that

> physical geography is the study of places within space, where a 'place' is a bounded area set within 'space' that is best described through a set of coordinates. Space is therefore *'a priori',* it was already there and places, such as towns, villages, homesteads, farms, cities, regions and so on, are located within it … Places provide spaces with content, and the populations of those places with identity and security; as well as being geographical locations they are also 'structures of feeling' (28).

What this paragraph from Davidson captures, is the interdependence of space and place, that place cannot exist without existing in space, and that space is best defined through places. The concepts of space and place have been given various degrees of importance in literary studies throughout the years. For example, some have argued for the interruption and disruption of place and belonging by modern technology, and Marc Augé went so far as to develop a concept of non-place, which refers to places that used to be constituted by human interaction, but that are now dominated by technology. To demonstrate this, Augé points to the living room, which used to be the centre of the house and the place in which family members interacted with each other. Now, the TV is often on, or everybody is preoccupied with their phones or tablets (quoted in Gebauer et al. 6).

In 'A Place Called Home', Doreen Massey critiques the argument that 'home' is a space that is increasingly being dominated by technology, media and a general lack of connection to place (12). Rather, Massey proposes that place is produced by social interactions that occur at that particular place. In connection to home, she argues that rather than being a restrictive place, home 'derived precisely from the fact that it had always in one

way or another been open' (12-13). In her monograph *For Space*, Massey develops these ideas further, beyond the place of home, and proposes the following: firstly, 'that we recognise space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny' (9). Secondly, 'that we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality' and thirdly, 'that we recognise space as always under construction … It is never finished; never closed' (ibid.). It follows from this that home can be both a place and a space, that is essentially constituted by the way in which people interact in this location, and home is made up of a plurality of different elements, from the material to the imaginative.

Davidson's definition of place as 'spaces with content' and as 'structures of feelings' and Massey's argument that home is partly constituted by social relations correspond well to the definition of home as it is laid out by Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling in their monograph *Home.* Whereas Bachelard focuses primarily on the symbolism of specific physical spaces within a house, Blunt and Dowling start off by asking the questions 'What does home mean to you?', 'Where, when and why do you feel at home?' and 'To what extent does your sense of home travel across different times, places and scales?' (1). Taking possible answers into account, they argue that home is a 'complex and multi-layered geographical concept' that constitutes more than just a place (2). More importantly, home is a set of 'feelings', for example of belonging, and Blunt and Dowling thus explain home as a 'spatial imaginary', meaning a 'set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and that construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places' (ibid.) In other words, home is both a place and a feeling, and, essentially, the relationship between the two. To better grasp this critical geography of home, Blunt and Dowling explain three of its components: 'home as simultaneously material and imaginative; the nexus between home, power and identity; and home as multi-scalar' (ibid.) The second of these components

recognises that the understanding of home is often closely connected to the identity of a person or a group and that a home can be differently experienced by different people or groups of people (24-25). For example, a home may mean something different to a woman than to a man, to a child than to an adult, and the same home may be experienced as homely to some and unhomely to others. The third of Blunt and Dowling's three components of the critical geography of home is that 'home' is not necessarily a house or a particular place, but can also be a neighbourhood, a nation, a 'park-bench', 'the world' or a home that stretches across transnational space (29).

In a discussion of the effects of transnational mobility and migration on the sense of home, numerous questions arise: whether or not one can have more than one home; when, if ever, a new place can become home; and what it might mean to return to a previous home (197-98). These questions destabilise the perception of home as a static, fixed place or site, or a particular set of feelings. Rather, Blunt and Dowling suggest that 'ideas of home are relational across space and time, are often shaped by memories of past homes as well as dreams of future homes, and bring together both material and imaginative geographies of residence and belonging, departure and return' (198). Blunt and Dowling thus emphasise that the 'material and imaginative geographies of home are both multiple and ambiguous' to transnational migrants (202).

There are many reasons for transnational migration – from persecution and war, to economic reasons and education. However, in the last chapter of their book, Blunt and Dowling investigate particularly the personal and political motivation and effects of migration for exiles, asylum seekers and refugees. Involuntarily leaving their homes and homeland, refugees settle in a range of locations and circumstances: from homelessness to refugee camps, reception centres, detention centres and public housing, the common denominator is that they are characteristically unhomely places (221). Also, their actual home, in their

homeland, has often been taken away from them by force or they have been forced to leave them, and their possessions, behind. Such is, as we know, the situation for Palestinian migrants, most of whom have been forced away from their homes by Israeli warfare, occupation and settlement. Although some Palestinians return, as we will see in the discussion of *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses,* home is not necessarily as they imagined it would be. Similarly, Maja Povrzanovic Frykman writes about refugees from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina that their sense of home has often been transformed, from 'sites of personal control ... to sites of danger and destruction' and thus it is not only the physical home that may cease to exist, but also their idea of home, especially as somewhere safe (118). Laura Hammond is another researcher who has examined the perception of home for exiles. In her research on repatriation to Ethiopia, she challenges the conviction that 'refugees who return to their country of origin are necessarily "going home"' (3). Rather, she writes, home is 'the conceptual and affective space in which community, identity, and political and cultural membership intersect. In this sense, home is a variable term, one that can be transformed, newly invented, and developed in relation to circumstances in which people find themselves or choose to place themselves' (10). In other words, Hammond's study supports the claim that home is not just a place; rather, it is reproduced and 'recast through a range of home-making practices that bind the material and imaginative geographies of home' together (Blunt and Dowling 228). In this, it appears, Bachelard and Massey, both of whom uses space to connection place and feelings, or interactions, agree with the various theorists laid out by Blunt and Dowling. This echoes the arguments of both Bachelard and Massey, the latter of which insists that space is indeed constituted by interactions, and that it is always under construction. Thus Massey, Blunt and Dowling, and others, recognise that the space of a home can represent safety and belonging at one point in time, and traumatic memories and uncertainty at another, for example if one is forcibly evicted.

The representability of trauma

The word trauma derives from the Greek word for wound (Luckhurst 2). It was initially used to refer to a physical injury, but throughout the 20th century, particularly in the second half, the word has increasingly become associated with psychological trauma rather than physical. Especially after the world wars, the returning soldiers called for a diagnosis for the mental trauma that they carried with them after the war. After the First World War, the common diagnosis for traumatised soldiers was 'shell shock', which was 'typically marked by an obsessive return in waking thoughts and nightmares, to the pain and terror of traumatic battle scenes' (Luckhurst 9). It was not until the 1980s, following the war in Vietnam, that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) became the common diagnosis for people struggling with the after-effects of traumatic events. According to the American Psychiatric Association, people suffering from PTSD typically report that 'the traumatic event is persistently re-experienced', that they try to avoid 'stimuli associated with the trauma' and that they experience 'increased arousal', such as loss of temper (American Psychiatric Association 467-8). This diagnosis 'helped consolidate a trauma paradigm that has come to pervade the understanding of subjectivity and experience in the advanced industrial world' (Luckhurst 1).

Trauma became a framework for literary studies towards the end of the twentieth century, particularly from the 1990s onwards. Trauma theory has, for a long time, been particularly interested in the concept of belatedness, or *Nachträglichkeit.* First developed by Freud in 1895, 'belatedness' meant a temporary or permanent period of amnesia following a traumatic shock event. Whereas Freud held that the amnesia was a consequence of, to some extent, conscious repression, Cathy Caruth and others have since stated that the belatedness is an unconscious, necessary characteristic of trauma. In an elaboration on Freud's analysis of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, in which its hero Tancred accidently kills his disguised beloved and, at realising his mistake, slashes a wound in a tree that cries out in pain, Caruth

argues that what is truly striking about this romantic epic is 'not just the unconscious act of the infliction of the injury … but the moving and sorrowful *voice* that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released *through the wound*' (2). To Freud, the slashing upon the tree was a repetition of the initial killing. To Caruth, Tancred's story is also 'the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound,' meaning that trauma does not reside in the past, in the original infliction of the wound, but rather in its 'belated address' or delayed manifestation through something that resembles an 'other' rather than one's self (Caruth 2, 4). The frequently quoted statement follows, that 'the impact of the traumatic event lies exactly in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located' (ibid. 8). Bessel van der Kolk and Alexander McFarlane similarly argue from a psychological perspective that belatedness 'modifies the ways in which the brain processes the trauma-related information' (491). Either the traumatic event is stored in memory as just that, an 'unfortunate event', or the sensory and emotional responses to the event 'start leading a life of their own,' which often results in PTSD (ibid.). Van der Kolk and McFarlane argue that whereas the recollection of a non-traumatic event belongs to the past, remembering a traumatic event is 'as if the event was happening all over again' (ibid).

Although Caruth's concept of belatedness remained generally accepted throughout the 1990s, it has since been questioned by several critics. Among them is Alan Gibbs, who argues that the belatedness model does not suffice in the complex and inconsistent workings of traumatic memory (10, 13). One of the aspects that Caruth fails to account for, Gibbs believes, is that traumatic memory is not necessarily unique in its failure to be simply located. Richard McNally writes that 'failure to encode every aspect of a traumatic experience … must not be confused with an inability to recall an aspect that has been encoded' (9), and Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone similarly argue that 'the characteristic features of "traumatic memory" – its elisions, interruptions and reinventions – need bear no specific relation to an

event, but rather can be seen to characterise the workings of memory in general' (97). Trauma is, however, more dwelled upon, and has greater effects on everyday life than, for example, one's partial memory of going grocery shopping. Thus in trying, but repeatedly failing, to remember the details of a traumatic event, one is tricked into believing that the characteristics of trauma lies exactly in this failure to be easily located. This is not to suggest that trauma does not make a particular impact or have a lasting effect upon one's memory, but rather that the 'elisions, interruptions and reinventions' that have been seen as characteristic of traumatic memory are not exclusive to memories of trauma.

Another misconception about trauma is its apparently inherent shock impact. Laura Brown introduces the concept of 'insidious trauma' to include 'the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit' (107). According to Brown, trauma theory has exclusively addressed the suddenness of trauma, and argues that for example the psychological trauma of domestic violence, which may occur over the course of several years, is still trauma. Likewise, the continued oppression of the Palestinian people throughout generations may be considered 'insidious trauma', because the trauma lies not only in the shock impact of particular events, but also in the inevitability of the next blow. Trauma is also characteristically transmittable. In the aftermath of 9/11, for example, many people claimed that they were victims of 'secondary trauma'. Marianne Hirsch, among others, has argued that traumatic memory can even be transferred from one generation to another. Through studying the children of Holocaust survivors, Hirsch identifies a 'generation of postmemory', the definition of which I will return to in the final chapter of this thesis.

In literature, the ostensible characteristics of traumatic memory, such as fragmentation and gaps, have often been reflected in the narrative strategies employed by authors depicting traumatic events. James Berger writes in his review of literary trauma theory in the 1990s that

any study of trauma 'pays the closest attention to the representational means through which an event is remembered and yet retains the importance of the event itself' (572). He continues that representations of traumatic events in literature is challenging because trauma, like 'discourses of the sublime, the sacred, the apocalyptic and the Other in all its guises' is a discourse of the unrepresentable, that ultimately 'destabilises language' (573). W. J. T. Mitchell similarly argues that 'Trauma, like God, is supposed to be the unrepresentable in word and image' (60). However, in addition to alleged misconceptions about the workings of traumatic memory, also the literary conventions of representing trauma have been challenged in later years. Whereas Berger and others see the narrative restrictions of trauma, its unrepresentability and instability, Luckhurst and Gibbs, among others, recognise the possibilities of narrating trauma. Luckhurst writes that trauma is 'a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge' because trauma, in its shock impact, has been considered 'anti-narrative' (80). Since trauma ostensibly does not function well inside the boundaries of narrative, there has been a consensus that trauma narratives should be 'experimental, fragmented, refusing the consolations of beautiful form, and suspicious of familiar representational and narrative conventions' (Luckhurst 81). However, as Gibbs points out, such postmodernist narrative strategies have become the familiar framework of trauma narratives (41), and Luckhurst similarly states that '[p]aradoxically, the aesthetic means to convey the singularity of traumatic aporia has now become highly conventionalised, the narratives and tropes of traumatic fiction easily identified' (Luckhurst 89). Thus the 'typical' trauma narrative may no longer suffice in reflecting the inconsistency and individuality of traumatic memory.

The importance of narrative

Following a traumatic event, one's sense of self may be disrupted. The self is, as several contributors to the psychology anthology *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of*

Human Conduct point out, to a large extent constructed through stories. Ernest Keen writes that sharing stories with others is inevitable and necessary, and Stephen Crites insists that to understand the self, one constructs a story of what has been, and although this story may change over time, it is always constructed out of an interest in the future (Keen 182; Crites 155). When somebody has experienced trauma, however, the chronological putting together of events to create a coherent story can become difficult. As I discussed above, literature often attempts to reflect this lack of coherence and disruption to memory through various narrative strategies. Yet, even though traumatic events are hard to narrate, trauma often needs to be put into a narrative. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub have written that the '*necessity of testimony*' derives from the '*impossibility of testimony*' (224). Working with oral testimonies from Holocaust survivors, Felman and Laub argue that it is exactly because of the difficulty of narrating trauma, that trauma has to be narrated. Narrative, then, can be a means through which traumatic events can be put into a coherent system, which enables the traumatised victim to make sense of what has happene.

The kind of narrative most relevant to this thesis is, of course, the fictional one. In 1936, Walter Benjamin argued that the 'the art of storytelling is coming to an end' (83). Similar to the argument in the perhaps more famous essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', published in the same year, Benjamin argues in 'The Storyteller' that rapid technological development, the global distribution of 'information', and the form of the novel, all contribute to a move away from the authenticity of sharing experience and offering counsel to others, which, to Benjamin, are the main functions of the storyteller. The storyteller typically alludes to the 'lore of faraway places' or to 'the lore of the past', as he is typically either a traveller, or one who knows a lot about local history (85). To Benjamin, then, the storyteller serves an important function in the preservation of the past, and in the sharing of experience. It is safe to say that present-day society, more than eighty years after

Benjamin articulated his worry that 'the communicability of experience is decreasing', has the ability to both preserve the past and share experiences (85). However, Benjamin's essay emphasises the importance of placing experience or knowledge into a narrative, because the 'value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new' (90). Benjamin continues: 'A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time' (ibid.). On this note, imagine a newspaper article that relates that today, thirty Palestinians were killed by Israeli snipers. This information, if we are to believe Benjamin, does not stay new for long, but picture then that this information is incorporated into a story. Then, by placing a singular event into a larger context, the event is preserved and re-experienced each time the story is told.

The singular event, and the story as a whole, can be narrated in different ways. Since I will bring attention to various narrative strategies throughout this thesis, I will briefly clarify some key terminology of narrative within the field of narratology. Although both 'story' and 'narrative' can mean simply a tale, or a recounting of events, they have more specific definitions when applied in literary analysis and narratology. 'Story' is 'the sequence of imagined events that we reconstruct from the actual arrangement of a narrative plot', and 'narrative' is a

> telling of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events, recounted by a narrator to a narratee, [that] consist of a set of events (the story) recounted in a process of narration (or discourse), in which the events are selected and arranged in a particular order (the plot) (*Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 317, 219-220)

Narratologist Gérard Genette was the first to distinguish between what he characterised as the three aspects of narrative fiction; the '*story* (the totality of the narrated events), *narrative* (the discourse, oral or written, that narrates them), and *narrating* (the real or fictive act that process that discourse)' (*Narrative Discourse Revisited* 13). Building on Genette's distinction,

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan explains that the story is the 'narrated events' as they occurred in their chronological order, as well as the characters in the given story, 'abstracted from their disposition in the text' (3). What Genette called 'narrative', Rimmon-Kenan calls the 'text', that is the 'spoken or written discourse which undertakes their telling' (ibid.). The final aspect is the way in which a story is told, that is the aspect of 'narration' (ibid.).

Throughout this thesis, I will examine the ways in which the latter of these, narration, is used to emphasise certain aspects of the story. For example, as I have mentioned above, narratives of trauma typically use various narrative techniques that will make the narrative appear fragmented, as a reflection of the instability and inconsistency of traumatic memory. To accomplish this, the narrative could, for example, disrupt the chronology of the narrative, using strategies such as what Genette called 'ellipsis', which is the explicit or implicit omission in the narrative of particular events of the story (*Narrative Discourse* 106-8). Alternatively, the narrative could change from 'prior narration' to 'simultaneous narration' (ibid. 216), or change the focalisation of the narration. However, rather than elaborate on the terminology of all relevant narrative strategies now, I will explain them as I detect them throughout my analyses of *Morning in Jenin* and *Salt Houses*.

Chapter overview

Building on the theoretical frameworks as I have laid them out in this introduction, the proceeding chapters will uncover the relationship between trauma, home and narrative in Abulhawa and Alyan's novels.

Chapter 1 will focus on representations of home in Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin.* This chapter will first examine the importance of the homeland to the first generation of refugees. To Yehya Abulheja, home will never be another place than Ein Hod, the village that he is from. Yehya's granddaughter Amal, on the other hand, grows up in a refugee camp, and thus her sense of home is not connected to a particular place, but rather to relationships, and

the stories that she shares with the people that she loves. The third perspective on home that I will examine is related by Amal's brother Yousef, from whom home, in all its senses, is repeatedly taken away. Consequently, Yousef devotes his life to the resistance. Throughout this chapter, I will return to the importance of stories and of poems as means to preserve Palestinian identity, and as consolations in times of pain.

Chapter 2 will examine representations of home in *Salt Houses*, and it will particularly examine the ways in which traumatic memories interrupt the characters' ability to find belonging. The first part of this chapter will investigate the different houses inhabited by the Yacoub family, and discuss the ways in which these houses constitute homes. Then, I will focus especially on the characters of Alia and Atef to investigate how traumatic memory impedes the construction of a coherent narrative, which turns out to be a necessity for both overcoming the trauma, and create a sense of belonging.

In the final chapter, I will take a step back from the individual perspective, and – in a comparative analysis of the two novels – rather attempt to define what it means to be Palestinian, and whether the country of Palestine constitutes a home. I will particularly focus on the last generation of the Yacoub and Abulheja families, Manar and Sara, who grow up in the United States and return to Palestine when they are in their twenties. In this chapter, I will draw on Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, and examine the ways in which Palestinian identity is constructed and preserved in diaspora. Also, I will attempt to place Abulhawa and Alyan's novels in an international landscape of novels, and argue that they are products of an increasingly globalised world and they should therefore not be considered solely Palestinian novels.

In conclusion, I will continue the comparison between the two novels and examine to what extent Abulhawa and Alyan's novels can be considered nostalgic about the Palestinian

homeland. Finally, I will argue that both the similarities and the differences between the two novels make them well suited to be read and examined together.

Chapter 1: 'The home in sight, but always beyond reach': the story of home in *Mornings in Jenin*

In celebration of the ten-year anniversary of the Palestine Festival of Literature, a collection of the festival's contributions was published under the title *This is not a Border* (2017). With contributors ranging from Chinua Achebe to Michael Ondaatje and J.M. Coetzee, the festival and the publication aim to 'strengthen the artistic link' between Palestine under Israeli occupation and the rest of the literary world, and, with words borrowed from Edward Said, to reaffirm 'the power of culture over the culture of power' (quoted in Soueif and Hamilton). In the collection, Susan Abulhawa's short autobiographical text 'Once Upon a Jerusalem' is concerned with her family's history in Palestine, and her own conncetion to her homeland. For instance, she recalls the origin of her family' name which first appeared in the late 17th century when her ancestor Hasan was expelled from the village of Deir el-Hawa. Since he was expelled he had to hide his real identity, and he consequently became known as Abu el-Hawa which eventually became Abulhawa. Abulhawa's text also gives an account of her great-grandfather Mohammad Khalil, who became famous when he lived to be 136 years old. Had it not been for the framework in which Abulhawa places these personal facts, they might have seemed trivial in the context of the aims of the festival. However, Abulhawa insists on a crucial connection between the personal stories of Palestinians and the Palestinian claim to their land that is now under occupation. She writes: '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' (59). She argues that whereas she, one the one hand, possesses story after story that validates her connection to Palestine as her home, the current occupiers and occupants of her homeland, on the other hand, do not have stories of their own, and have simply adapted the heritage of the Arabs, pretending that 'the stories of those like Mohammad Khalil are their own' (64). Hence Abulhawa insists that identity,

heritage and belonging are affirmed through the divulgence of stories, and definitely not through the fluctuating claim that this is someone's country because 'God chose them' (ibid.).

Abulhawa explores this idea in her novel *Mornings in Jenin* (2010). In this generational novel, which unravels the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the course of six decades, Abulhawa examines the sense of belonging and of feeling at home through the stories of several Palestinian characters. Beginning in 1941, the novel first introduces Yehya Abulheja, a farmer in the Palestinian village Ein Hod, who is preparing for the olive harvest with his wife, Basima, and their two sons, Hasan and Darweesh. Following the *Nakba*, Yehya and his family are forced to leave their home and settle in a refugee camp in Jenin. The novel's protagonist Amal is born in Jenin in 1955 to Hasan and Dalia, and she grows up with stories of the Palestine her family had to leave behind, inheriting a wish to return. In 1967, however, the outlook of her future becomes even grimmer, as the Six-Day war leaves her orphaned and alone. Amal is sent to an orphanage in Jerusalem, then to the United States with a scholarship where she spends almost a decade, before she finds a temporary home in Beirut, Lebanon. There she is reunited with her brother, Yousef, who joins the PLO after the Six-Day war and is now living in exile with his wife Fatima and daughter Falasteen. In Beirut, Amal falls in love with and marries Yousef's friend Majid but soon, however, her sense of home is again taken away from her as Israel invades Lebanon in 1982, and Majid and Yousef's wife and daughters are killed. By then, Amal is back in the United States awaiting the birth of her daughter Sara, but following the death of Majid and the accusations that her brother is responsible for the 1983 bombings of the US embassy in Beirut, Amal's life consists only of bitterness and fear, and of feeling as 'alone as loneliness dares to be' (245). Numbness persists until her lost brother Ismael (now known as David) who was kidnapped during the *Nakba* fifty-three years earlier, tracks down his sister in her home

in Philadelphia in 2001. Their meeting sparks nostalgia for the homeland in Amal, which eventually leads to a return to Palestine together with her daughter Sara.

This chapter on Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* will examine the concept of home from the approach of Yehya, Amal and Yousef. First, I will look at the first featured generation of the Abulheja family and argue that to Yehya, home is a particular place, which is constituted by history, tradition and community. Through Yehya, the novel relates a binary perspective on the Palestinian displacement. Whereas the narratives of his sons, grandchildren and Sara are to a greater extent conditioned by politics, ideology, education and relationships, Yehya's concern is, in contrast, only to return to that one, specific place which he calls home. Secondly, I will investigate the ways in which Amal feels at home in interpersonal relationships. Uprooted, displaced, orphaned and exiled, Amal does not have a place to call home. Rather, her sense of home resides in the stories that she shares with the people she cares about: from her father Hasan, to her husband Majid and daughter Sara. Thirdly, I will turn to the character of Yousef, to whom the forced removal from his home, both spatial and imaginative, is the force which drives his resistance, first with his father in 1967, then with the PLO, and finally, by himself, ostensibly responsible for a terrorist attack on the United States' embassy in Beirut in 1983. I will also address the distinctive narrative strategies that are used in Yousef's narrative. Finally, this chapter will turn to the extent to which the sense of home is constructed through stories, and in what ways these stories are related through the various media employed in the novel, from storytelling to blogging.

1.1 First-generation refugee and the Palestinian home

The opening of Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* immediately constructs a strong contrast between the state of Palestine before and after 1948: 'In a distant time, before history marched over the hills and shattered present and future, before wind grabbed the land at one corner and shook it of its name and character … a small village east of Haifa lived quietly on figs and

olives, open frontiers and sunshine' (3). The pastoral literary tradition, which typically idealises rural settings, is employed here together with an almost fairy tale-like opening to render the memory of a peaceful Palestine, with 'open frontiers' as if it was an unreachable, happy dream. The opening phrase, 'In a distant time', echoes the quintessential fairy tale opening 'Once upon a time', emphasising both a temporal and spatial distance between the present reality and the story of this village east of Haifa. Abulhawa, who is actually set on relating a realistic perspective on the Palestinian situation, curiously begins her novel with such fantastic formal choices: 'history' adapts the power of 'shattering' time, and the 'wind' holds the ability of shaking a land of 'its name and character'. Abulhawa argues in 'Once Upon a Jerusalem' – the title of which suggests the same predicament – that the Jews stole the story of Palestine and 'retold [it] as a lie' and thus the story of a Palestinian people with a claim to 'a small village east of Haifa', according to the Israel, cannot ever have existed. Needless to say, a Palestine not under occupation is a historical fact, not a fairy tale, but by opening her novel in such a stylistic manner, Abulhawa ironically emphasises that history has become fiction as an effect of Israel's erasure of Palestinian legitimacy, hence the formal insistence upon the unreal setting of a peaceful Palestine.

Assmaa Mohamed Naguib likewise argues that the narrative of *Mornings in Jenin* that precedes 1948 exists to emphasise the horror of the proceeding story, although in a more explicit manner than my suggestion above. He writes that whereas the narrative prior to the *Nakba* is 'full of references to the mundane details of daily lives, adolescent love, plans for arranged marriages,' and other daily experiences, this setting is strongly contrasted with the narrative that follows, which is dominated by uncertainty, rootlessness and unpredictability (Naguib 83). Indeed, the story of the Abulheja's peaceful lives in Ein Hod is recalled in great detail: in 1941's Ein Hod, the villagers peacefully prepare for the morning *salat*, praying with 'particular reverence because it was the start of the olive harvest' (3). Yehya 'could feel it in

his bones' that it was time for the harvest, and this year, like every other year, he is eager to get a head start over his friend and neighbour Haj Salem (3-4). As they work, the women sing 'the ballads of centuries past', and Yehya surveys the splendorous landscape around him and recalls working on the *sanasil* barriers that go up the hill with his grandfather (4). By evening, Yehya 'would be smoking hookahs' with Haj Salem, 'arguing over who worked hardest and whose sons were strongest … Games of backgammon over bubbling hookahs would settle this annual argument and they would stubbornly play until their wives had sent for them several times' (5). Here, even the verbal form underscores the theme of tradition; the repetitive use of the conditional mood 'would' indicates that this is a predictable, unalterable, annual routine. Genette called this form of narration an iterative narrative, that is, relating once what happened several times (*Narrative Discourse* 116). This narration stands in strong contrast to the singulative narration, that is narrating once what happened once, that characterises the narrative after the *Nakba* (*Narrative Discourse* 116). The effect the iterative narration is a reflection of the content: by commencing the story of the Palestinian diaspora through such narrative means, Abulhawa emphasises the trauma of having known predictability, routine and stability, and then having it forcibly taken away. In a sense, then, the iterative narrative is reflective of home itself, as home is traditionally filled with routine and stability.

This form of narration is characteristic only of the first part of the novel. As tensions between the Arabs and the Jews increase throughout 1947, the narrative form changes to reflect the changing reality of the Abulhejas. From being repetitive, predictable and habitualised, the lives of Yehya and his family gradually become more uncertain, and consequently, the narrative form is increasingly dominated by singulative narration. This transition, both formally and in content, is well marked by the following passage that

describes Darweesh, Yehya's son, being shot by an Israeli soldier during the eviction from Ein Hod:

> Panic rose from the shots and the birds of terror were supplanted by clouds that made Yehya hope for rain. It wasn't season yet, but his trees needed water. At times rain had been everything in Ein Hod, other times it was merely precious. Then he saw his son Darweesh and nothing had meaning. Rain be damned. Yehya dropped the basket from his back and began to cry for that strong boy of his, that impressive rider and beloved son. (32)

The above passage effectively marks a change in Yehya's priorities. Seeing a cloud drift by, Yehya instinctively thinks of his olive trees, and the good that the rain will do them. His land is his legacy, his embodied priority, but seeing his son drop to the ground, this suddenly no longer makes sense. Although his concern for his land returns to him shortly, this moment marks the introduction of much greater worries than the weather and the state of his olive trees into the life of Yehya and his family. The narrative decision of inserting a phrase of free indirect discourse here, that is 'Rain be damned', is yet another a break from the anticipated form, which again reflects the break from the predictable life of the Abulhejas. This disruption, both in form and content, is also reflective of the state of Palestine itself. Darweesh, who used to be a 'strong boy' and 'impressive rider', is now doomed to 'motionlessness', living only in the 'memories of horses and wind' (32). The allegory becomes apparent as the narrative proceeds and unveils a tendency to cling to the memory of what used to be, rather than finding alternate solutions for the future. Palestine, which used to be the country of 'figs and olives, open frontiers and sunshine' (3), has since become known primarily as an occupied place with a victimised population.

Recalling Blunt and Dowling's argument that 'home is *both* a place/physical location *and* a set of feelings' (22 emphasis in original), the following extract demonstrates the extent

to which Yehya's family is connected to Ein Hod. Driven away from his home towards a temporary residence in Jenin,

> Yehya tallied forty generations of living, now stolen. Forty generations of childbirth and funerals, wedding and dance, prayer and scraped knees. Forty generations of sin and charity, of cooking, toiling, and idling, of friendships and animosities and pacts, of rain and lovemaking. Forty generations with their imprinted memories, secrets and scandals. All carried away by the notion of entitlement of another people, who would settle in the vacancy and proclaim it all – all that was left in the way of architecture, orchards, wells, flowers, and charm – as the heritage of Jewish foreigners arriving from Europe, Russia, the United States, and other corners of the globe' (34-35)

This extract demonstrates a strong connection to one particular place, yet it also recognises that this connection is constituted by stories of personal and social experiences, such as falling in love, praying, giving birth and keeping secrets. Massey insists that the space of home is constitutes by interactions, and Nikos Papastergiadis likewise argues that 'a home is a place where personal and social meanings are grounded' (2). This means that it is not the architecture or the gardens alone that constitute the home of Ein Hod, but the experiences and stories which happened there. This may suggest that the physical place is irrelevant to the sense of home, and that as long as Yehya and the other villagers make friends, scrape knees, bury their dead and get married in their new surrondings in Jenin, Jenin will soon constitute a home. However, the refugee camp in Jenin cannot offer what Iris Marion Young identifies as the four '"normative values of home that should be thought of as minimally accessible"; safety, individuation, whereby each individual has place for the basic activities of life; privacy; and preservation' (quoted in Blunt and Dowling 5). Thus to the more than 750,000 Palestinians who were forced to flee during the *Nakba,* home is a place not easily reconstructed in an unhomely refugee camp.

The above extract from *Mornings in Jenin* also addresses the Jews' unjust claim to Palestine. Whereas Yehya's family can be traced back through 'forty generations of living', the Jews declare Palestine their land because of the Zionist belief that they are the chosen people, calling Palestine a land without a people for a people without a land. Yehya's recollection of his heritage, 'now stolen', implicitly questions this claim as the Jews obviously lack a personal story tying them to Ein Hod and the other, now vacant, Palestinian villages. Rather, their history and set of feelings connected to the sense of home lie elsewhere – all over the globe. However, as Blunt and Dowling emphasise throughout their book, home remains a dynamic concept which is 'produced and recast through a range of home-making practices that … exist over a range of scales' (228), and, following the Second World War and the Holocaust, Ein Hod and the other Palestinian villages provided the first places in a long time that the Jewish foreigners could feel safe. Settling in Palestine was an attempt to diverge from the narrative of Holocaust that was imposed on them in Europe, with the hope that a new place should give space to a rewriting of the Jewish narrative as victim. Unfortunately, as the narrative of *Mornings in Jenin* reveals, the newly founded Jewish state soon transcends into the realm of victimiser, repeating the atrocities imposed on them onto the Palestinians.

Yehya's story is one of tradition and belonging, then of displacement and uncertainty, and finally one of return and temporary contentment. After five years in the refugee camp in Jenin, Yehya realises that 'his miserable tent in Jenin has turned into clay' and this 'symbolic permanence of the shelter was too much to bear' (41). This echoes the resistance that UNWRA met when they replaced tents with permanent shelter (Krähenbühl). To Yehya, it is too much to bear, and he decides to return home:

The olives are ready.

He shaved …

> *The grapes and figs have surely fallen by now and are rotting on the land.*
>
> One garment at a time, he dressed himself in vintage dignity, putting on his best dishdashe …
>
> *October's rains have surely loosened the ground.*
>
> And he walked out of his tent a proud man … beyond the border of what had become Israel – into a landscape he knew better than the lines on his hands (42-43 emphasis in original)

In these final stages of Yehya's story, the free indirect discourse, or interior dialogue, here emphasised by italics, penetrates the third person narration to create an even stronger understanding of, and connection with, Yehya's thoughts and motivation. His story, which ends with his death by the hands of the Israelis, is shaped by his connection to the land, to such an extent that, ultimately, it is the time for harvest that calls for his return to Ein Hod. The character of Yehya thus epitomises the spirit of countless Palestinians who were born and bred to care for their land, but who were subjected to loss of identity and dignity as this right was forcibly taken away from them. Only when Yehya returns home, in his most respectable guise, does he regain some of this dignity. Yehya is killed on his second return to Ein Hod, and his friends and family consequently ponder the 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?' (48). In addition to marking the transition from Palestine before to after the *Nakba,* the story of Yehya in the novel also functions as a call for attention to the suppression of the Palestinian right to return, and to the gradual abolishment of Palestinians' right to live on, let alone visit, their ancestors' land. Finally, Yehya's narrative insists that the story of forty generations worth of weddings, funerals, scraped knees, cooking and toiling, is consistently being eradicated by the Israelis, to validate their claim that Palestine is 'a land without a people for a people without a land'.

1.2 Home as constituted by relationships

'He is himself only in relation to others' writes Stephen Crites in 'Storytime: Recollecting the Past and Projecting the Future' (155). Although his essay focuses on the understanding of self through constructing a narrative of what has been, out of an interest in the future, the basis of his argument is an understanding of the 'self' as 'distributed through a network of relationships over time' (ibid.). From this, Crites argues that the narrative is what constitutes the self through tying together 'instances of memory' that create a sense of personal continuity (159). By applying these thoughts onto the character of Amal, it becomes obvious that her sense of self is to a large extent created through, and uprooted by, her relationships with others. The narrative of her childhood is framed by the mornings that she spends with her father, and she is very concerned with how he perceives her – as a good student, for instance. Likewise, when she is orphaned and abandoned at the age of twelve, and is sent to an orphanage in Jerusalem, any sense of belonging is constituted by the friendships that she forms, and definitely not by the place itself, which offers neither the individuation, permanence nor security that Young argues are essential characteristics of the sense of home. Still, Amal later recalls these years with nostalgia: 'It is true we had no heat to warm our nights … but we had much of the stuff that warmed our souls. We were friends who doubled as mothers, sisters, teachers, providers, and sometimes as blankets' (164). Similarly, when Amal visits her brother in Lebanon, she is able to find a home there exactly because of the relationship that develops between her and Majid. The ultimate sense of belonging and peace of mind, however, is not found until she brings her daughter back with her to Jenin, where the narrative suggests that home, to Amal, is finally found in Sara.

The first person to make Amal feel truly at home, however, is her father, whom she knows as *Baba*. When Amal is five years old, she stumbles across her father an early morning, reading to himself on the porch. *Baba* places his daughter on his lap and says:

'Listen to the words I read. They're magical' (58). Although it is hard for the five-year-old to understand the classic Arabic prose, she appreciates that 'the cadence was mesmerizing, and Baba's voice was a lullaby' (ibid.). The next morning, just before dawn, Amal is excited to 'once again have a special place in Baba's morning,' again he reads to her, and soon it becomes a part of Amal's daily routine to share the mornings in Jenin with her father (ibid.) As the title of the novel suggests, these mornings in Jenin spent with her father reading poetry are essential to the understanding of Amal as a character. To state the obvious, it is neither the time of day, nor the physical place that she considers 'magical, enchanted' (60); rather, it is the safety of her father's embrace and his unwavering love that gives Amal a sense of belonging in an otherwise uncertain everyday in the refugee camp. Thus, in concordance with Blunt and Dowling's argument that home is both a place and a set of feelings – and the connection between the two – Amal's sense of home and belonging in Jenin is, essentially, fashioned by feelings of love towards Baba, among others.

This reliance on relationships to constitute a sense of belonging persists throughout Amal's narrative. Following the death of Yehya, the story of the Abulheja family transitions into one that is less concerned with returning to that one, particular place and more concerned with finding a sense of belonging anywhere. Although Amal's story, like that of her grandfather and her brother, remains concerned with questions such as the right to return, the political increasingly merges with the personal. In his thesis, Naguib writes that although they are often considered two separate levels of home, the personal and the collective/political operate at the same time in *Mornings in Jenin* (79), the effect of which is that the story of the characters reflects and interacts with the story of Palestine. For example, all the major events of the characters' lives, such as education, housing, falling in love, becoming parents and losing loved ones, are conditioned by the occupation. For Amal, the Israeli claim on Palestine

and the atrocities that the Israelis impose on Palestinians, are what hinders her quest to find belonging somewhere, with somebody.

Crites writes that it is in the present that the story of one's past is created, and thus the personal narrative is dynamic, recollected differently depending on one's current present (162). He also emphasises that consequently, the narrative of the self is a selective narrative, which does not include every perception and experience of one's life (159). On the verge of moving across the world to the United States on a scholarship, Amal recalls this moment, unsurprisingly, as affected by the conviction that 'a usurped life was [her] inheritance' (156). This is not to say that Amal's life is not 'usurped', but rather that she perceives it as such because of her present situation:

> Growing up in a landscape of improvised dreams and abstract national longings, everything felt temporary to me. Nothing could be counted on to endure, neither parents nor siblings nor home. Not even one's body, vulnerable as it was to bullets. I had long since accepted that one day I would lose everything and everyone … (156)

Her story, thus far, has indeed been dominated by uncertainty and loss, and Crites emphasises the 'acute unease a human being can feel without a coherent story of a personal past' (162). He also writes, drawing on Søren Kierkegaard's 'The Unhappiest', that 'that person is unhappy … who cannot re-collect himself out of the past' (183).

Of course, Amal's story is filled with an unimaginable amount of loss and trauma, and thus it is not surprising that it is these experiences which dominate her story. However, what is characteristic of Amal's narrative – and the whole narrative of *Mornings in Jenin* – is the repetitiveness of the suffering. It is impossible for Amal to 're-collect [her]self out of the past' because the thing that dominates her life – the Israeli occupation – is a part of her past, present and future. The occupation of Palestine is the longest lasting occupation in modern times, and unlike conflicts such as the World Wars, the Bosnia War, the Arab Spring, or even

Apartheid in South Africa, the latter of which lasted for "only" forty-six years, the occupation of Palestine is still ongoing after seventy years. Thus the atrocities and trauma are not just a past experience that is related to the next generation but, rather, the trauma is repeatedly imposed on generation after generation. According to Crites, who again draws upon the work of Kierkegaard, dwelling in the future without hope makes you as unhappy as not leaving the past in the past, and the ultimate unhappiness is achieved by the combination of both (153). As the above extract from *Mornings in Jenin* demonstrates, both her past and the poor predictions for her future leave Amal in an unhappy and rootless state of mind, as she is subjected to, and witness of, Israeli violations of human rights and international law her entire life.

Unhappiness and rootlessness persist throughout Amal's years in the United States, and Amal's failure to find a home there is reflected in the narrative form. The part of the narrative set in the United States is dominated by summaries, and there is not a lot of space in the novel that is dedicated to the time that Amal spends there. This indicates that the time spent in the United States does not carry a lot of significance in Amal's search for belonging. Although she changes her name to Amy, and 'metamorphosed into an unclassified Arab-Western hybrid … keeping the past hidden away', making herself more American does not make her happy (179). Not until a phone call from her brother, reminding her that 'Arabness and Palestine's primal cries were [her] anchors to the world', does she regain some sense of herself as someone who belongs somewhere (ibid.). Amal soon travels to Lebanon and stays with her brother in Shatila, the refugee camp that 'Israel would label a "breeding ground of terrorists" and a "festering den of terror"' (190). For the first time since before the war in 1967, Amal has found a place to call home: 'At last, fate had surprised her with a dream of her own. A dream of love, family, children. Not of country, justice or education. [Majid] became her roots, her country' (209). Amal is no longer dreaming the dream of her

grandfather, to return to Ein Hod, nor the dream of her father, to get an outstanding education, and neither does she dream the dream of her brother, which is to impose justice upon the Israeli. Her dream is her own – to have love in her life, and the mutual love between her and Majid is strong enough to act as a substitute for the 'roots' and 'country' that she does not have. Her dream, however, comes to an abrupt end with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the massacre in the Shatila and Sabra refugee camps in 1982. Majid, Fatima and Falasteen are killed, alongside thousands of other innocent civilians, during what Israel still claims to have been a 'peacekeeping mission' (219).

Amal's sense of belonging to places and with people, is repeatedly shattered throughout *Mornings in Jenin,* but whereas places and people appear temporary to Amal, the consolation that she finds in poetry remains one of the few constants in her life. Short extracts from poems by Khalil Gibran, Rumi and Mahmoud Darwish, to mention a few, are recalled several times throughout the novel. Either the characters explicitly read or recall the poetry, or it only implicitly interacts with the narrative. For example, both Darwish' 'The Earth Is Closing on Us' and Gibran's 'The Farewell' appear at the beginning of chapters, but without being mentioned by the narrators. The poems apparently have three, overlapping functions in the novel. First of all, they appear as part of the cultural heritage of Palestine and the Arab world, serving to rekindle and preserve Amal's Palestinian identity. Secondly, they function as a source of consolation in times of difficulty and thirdly, they are a substitute for recollecting traumatic events of which it is difficult to speak. The second of these functions is reflected by the way in which poetry is a means through which Amal accesses memories of her father, and of Majid. The poetry is a way to connect to her father, to his 'passions, his losses, his heartaches, and his loves,' and the memory of the mornings that they shared in Jenin are, in the 'bleak early hours of a Pennsylvania February, [her] only thread of solace' (61). Amal also shares her love of literature with Majid. Although they argue about the

authenticity of Robert Frost's description of the rose, they also read Gibran's *The Prophet* together: 'Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself…' (248). Rereading these words to her daughter evokes the memory of her late husband:

> I heard her father's voice in mine and felt his fingers run through my hair the night we read Gibran together. He leaned and kissed my lips, the apparitions of an expired love story … Majid is the dream that never left me. The country they took away. The home in sight, but always beyond reach. (249)

Although a painful reminder of that which she has lost, the poetry also function as a sort of layer through which she can address the memories of that which she has lost – her dream, country and home – through leaving the painful narrative of her life be, and evoking the melancholic, and simultaneously beautiful, figurative language of poetry.

This overlaps with the third purpose of poetry in *Mornings in Jenin,* which is as a substitute for the recollection of traumatic events of which it is too difficult to speak:

> I can explain this, but it would break
> the glass cover on your heart,
> and there's no fixing that. (104)

These words of Rumi are repeated three times in the novel: first, when Yousef returns to Jenin after forty days' imprisonment in 1967 and he is forced to 'conceive the inconceivable'; that his father is dead (104). The second time is in the aftermath of the Six-Day war, when 'Toughness found fertile soil in the hearts of the Palestinians' and even Amal aspires to martyrdom (108-109). The last time the extract appears is twenty years later, when Amal realises that she has already 'been dismantled by the loss of everyone my heart had ever embraced' and she would not allow the 'vulgar breath of [her] fate' to spoil the life of her daughter (249). The meaning of Rumi's words is perhaps most apparent in the last instance,

as it suggests that Amal consciously refrains from telling her daughter about her traumatic past, because she wants to shield her from her own fate, that is to know and to have experienced such trauma that her heart can never truly be whole again.

Before the end of Amal's narrative, she does, however, share her story with Sara, but she is able to do so only when she is back in Palestine, and back 'home' in Jenin. So far, my analysis of Amal's conception of home ostensibly suggests that the physical place scarcely matters, and it is only through relationships that Amal feels at home. However, through two aspects of her story, it becomes evident that Palestine – or perhaps, by extension, the Arab world – is the only place where she can truly feel at home. First of all is her cultural appreciation of Palestine, and her continued alienation in American society, and secondly, it is the fact that all the relationships through which Amal experiences belonging are formed and evolve in Palestine and Lebanon. Amal struggles to adapt to the American way of life. For instance, she finds the English 'thank you' insufficient in comparison to the Arabic 'may Allah bless the hands that give me this gift' (169), and although she tries to fit in, she repeatedly fails to create any lasting relationships with Americans. When she arrives in Lebanon, until then unaware of how much she had missed the sound of the *adhan* (the Muslim call to prayer), she expresses: 'It's good to be on Arab soil again' (186). Another reliable indicator of the actual relevance of Palestine as a home country, is that it functions as an indispensable requisite for Amal to finally open up to her daughter. The same relationship – mother and daughter – existed in the United States, but it is only when they are back in Palestine that they truly get to know each other. It is only then that Sara finally gets to hear the stories of her family and see her mother open up. Also, together they are caught in Jenin during the massacre, and thus Sara does not just hear stories about Israel's violence and injustice, but rather she experiences it first hand, together with her mother. Amal is killed

during the massacre, but before she does, she realises she has 'finally found home', in Sara (297).

1.3 The traumatic prerequisite of resistance

There are many detailed descriptions of traumatic events in *Mornings in Jenin.* For example, during the Six-Day war, Amal and her friend Huda hide underneath the kitchen floor together with the neighbour's baby when a grenade lands in their hiding place:

> I did not understand. My tears landed on her face, streaking the filth on her cheek. Her abdomen was a gaping hole cradling a small piece of shrapnel. The whole world squeezed itself into my heartbeat as I took the bloodied metal in my hand. So small and light, how could it have cut her open like that? How could it have taken a life with such ease? (70).

As this extract demonstrates, Amal is, at twelve years old, incapable of understanding the scene that unfolds in front of her: Aisha, the neighbour's toddler, has been killed by a grenade. The narrative from the Six-Day war is fragmented, describing only glimpses of what Amal and Huda can gather from their hiding place in the hole underneath the kitchen floor. In many ways, the Six-Day war marks Amal's loss of innocence, and from that point in the narrative and onwards, Amal is rapidly forced to grow up and quickly understand the bleak future of Palestinians. Throughout her narrative, she represses, addresses, and tries to cope in various ways with the trauma that is repeatedly imposed on her.

Amal's brother Yousef also struggles to overcome the number of traumatic events that happens to him, and he does so through resistance. In the first of the chapters narrated from the perspective of Yousef, he relates that in 1948, 'war and I were formally introduced' (95). This chapter, however, begins in 1967 when he is at the University in Bethlehem and hears that Israel is attacking Egypt. He immediately rushes home to fight with the rest of the men in Jenin but, finding himself incapable of actually taking somebody's life, he is soon captured

and imprisoned. He is released after forty days, but refusing to live according to Israeli rules, he soon leaves Jenin to join the PLO, leaving a letter for Amal explaining his reasons for leaving:

> *They've taken everything, Amal. … Please, little sis, forgive me for leaving. I'm going to fight. It's my only choice. They have scripted lives for us that are but extended death sentences, a living death. I won't live their script … If I am martyred, so be it … I'm like a caged bird here. I know you are too … You were born a refugee, but I promise I will die, if I must, so you do not die a refugee* (120 emphasis in original).

Although he promised his father to take care of Amal, Yousef is compelled to leave, driven by his need for justice and convinced that his death is an inevitability if he stays in Jenin. By now, Israeli soldiers have taken home, in all its senses, from Yousef, and they do so again and again throughout his narrative. First, they evict him from his home in Ein Hod in 1948, during which time Yousef's brother Ismael disappears. Then, in 1967, Israel again endangers his family: his father disappears, and Yousef himself is imprisoned for forty days. After the war, the Israeli presence increases in Jenin and Yousef is repeatedly beaten and interrogated. To speak of 'home' in Jenin is, to Yousef, like calling a cage the home of the bird. Another phrase from the above extract worth noting, is that Yousef refuses to 'live their script'. Rather, he wants to live his own, Palestinian story, and he sees that as an impossibility in Jenin. In the essay 'Paranoia and Cataclysmic Narratives', published alongside Crites in the collection *Narrative and Psychology,* Ernest Keen focuses on the inevitability and necessity of sharing stories and writes: 'even in the bitterest of wars, combatants share the story of the war; they may kill one another, and even hope to kill one another's stories (which is much harder) but even the single theme of your life or mine becomes a shared story …' (182). What is curious here, is the small digression to point out that to kill another's story is 'much harder' than to kill another human being, and although Keen does not elaborate on this point, it

applies in Abulhawa's novel to Israel's attempt to erase the story of the Palestinians and impose 'scripted lives' on them instead. Israelis and Palestinians inevitably share a story, and uncountable killings have been executed by both parties. The ultimate goal, however, which Yousef fights to resist, is this erasure of the other's story.

Thus Yousef decides to fight; to join the PLO and, if he must, he will die if it ensures the freedom of his sister. Yousef is deemed a hero after the battle in Karameh in 1968, and he stays with the PLO until their exile from Lebanon in 1982. Then, Yousef loses yet another home when the PLO are forced by the Israelis to leave Lebanon, and to leave their families behind, unprotected. Following the massacre in Shatila, Yousef decides, like he did in 1967, to resist, but this time he goes to extreme lengths to impose revenge on those responsible, planning an attack on the US embassy in Beirut. Abulhawa does not, however, paint a picture of a typical terrorist or villain; rather, the portrayal of Yousef and the insight into his thoughts are there to explain – although not entirely justify – what it is that might drive anyone to such extremism. The fact that Yousef changes his mind at the last second arguably leaves the reader comfortable with feeling sympathy with this man from whom Israel has taken grandparents, parents, brother, wife and daughter, as well as safety, dignity, humanity and homes. If, on the other hand, Abulhawa's novel had sympathised with a terrorist who actually executed an attack, it would perhaps not have been received as well by the Western reader.

As I have stated before, the story of Palestinian displacement is related from a commendable number of perspectives in *Mornings in Jenin,* and to accomplish this nuance in the narrative, Abulhawa employs various narrative strategies to different effects. She switches repeatedly between what Genette calls heterodiegetic and homodiegetic types of narrative voice, or third- and first person narration, and between zero focalisation – the omniscient narrator – and internal focalisation, in which the narrator knows only as much as the focal character (*Narrative Discourse* 189). Abulhawa also disrupts the chronology of the story,

using means such as 'ellipsis', which is the explicit or implicit omission in the narrative of particular events of the story (ibid. 106-8). For example, *Mornings in Jenin* does not at all mention the peace process of the 1990s. It is very unlikely that this is just an unfortunate act of forgetting; rather, the omission of the Oslo Accords presumably attests to its failure, and its lack of lasting effects.

Perhaps the most distinctive narrative strategies that Abulhawa employs, are the ones she uses to relate Yousef's perspective. Characterised by what Genette called simultaneous narration, that is narrating what is happening as it is happening (*Narrative Discourse* 216), Yousef's rapid succession of thoughts create an intense effect in his narrative. This intensity emphasises his perspective on events that are often already related elsewhere in the narrative. For example, Yousef's narration in 'Yousef, the Avenger' comes after a phone call from Yousef to Amal, which is narrated from the perspective of Amal, in which Yousef yells: 'THEY SLAUGHTER MY WIFE AND CHILDREN LIKE LAMBS' (227). Yousef's narration of the events also happens after Amal's narrative reveals that Yousef is suspected of being responsible for the terror attack on the embassy. This disruption of the chronological order serves to emphasise Yousef's narration, when it occurs:

> I am an Arab son. Born of Dalia and Hasan. My grandfather is Yehya Abulheja and my grandmother is Basima. I am the husband of Fatima, father of two. I am a haunted man, possessed now by their corpses. A storm brews inside of me. I do not sleep and I cannot see the sun. Demonic wrath bubbles in my veins. May it lurk after I am gone. May you taste its vinegar. I seek vengeance, nothing more. Nothing less. And I shall have it. And you shall see no mercy. (241)

Abulhawa employs a rich language to impart Yousef's thoughts, and the anger that he feels is very explicit. Yousef does not state who he addresses, but it is safe to assume that it is either the Israelis, whom he considers responsible for the massacre in Shatila, or the Americans,

who, under president Ronald Reagan, encouraged the PLO to leave for Tunisia and guaranteed the safety of the remaining women and children. Or, perhaps, it is both. The blame meted out by Yousef's narrative is strongly contrasted, and simultaneously supported, by the reports of the historical facts of the conflict which are related either by the characters themselves, or by an ostensibly objective third person narrator. For instance, Amal relates some of the news reports of the massacre: '"Israel is striking back against the PLO, a terrorist organization whose aim is to slaughter Jews like they did the Munich athletes." Israel's stated aim was self defence. To dislodge the PLO, a six-thousand-member resistance' (218). Here, an actual news report is presented alongside Amal's ironic statement that the military power Israel is in need of 'self defence' against such a small resistance. Hence the blame that Yousef puts on the Israelis, the Americans, or both, is legitimised through the novel's insistence on being grounded in historical facts and actual events.

The final chapter that is narrated from the perspective of Yousef summarises much of what his narrative aims to communicate. In 'Yousef, the Cost of Palestine', which he addresses to his sister, it becomes clear that although he was filled with rage and the lust for revenge, he was incapable of actually executing the attack on the United States' embassy. He is haunted by '*sighs of memory*' which reminds him of what he has lost, and the dreams he used to have, but now, the only thing left to do is wait for '*the honourable thing to come of its own accord*' (322 emphasis in original). The title of the chapter suggests that this is the cost of being Palestinian: to be left with nothing but the memories of what used to be. However, the final line of his address to Amal strikingly summarises Yousef's story: '*For I'll keep my humanity, though I did not keep my promises. … And Love shall not be wrestled from my veins*' (ibid. emphasis in original). In spite of the numerous attempts made by the Israelis, both directly and indirectly, to minimise his being and take away his homes – in all of the

word's senses – Yousef still has his humanity, he still has love, and he still has his story to tell.

1.4 The importance of story in the creation of home

Abulhawa writes in her online blog that she has 'always admired writers who chose storytelling as a way to tear down the barriers between peoples' and *Mornings in Jenin* achieves this effect in various ways (quoted in Naguib 78). First of all, and most obviously, storytelling occurs on the level of the author and the reader. As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, Abulhawa became a storyteller exactly because the story of her heritage and personal history was slowly being erased by the Israelis. Thus *Mornings in Jenin* is a way to reclaim this story, and to immortalise it through the written word. Then, within the novel, the characters each relate their stories through their respective narratives. Also, storytelling is emphasised as an important means through which the stories of Palestine are related to the next generation – both as entertainment and as education. Haj Salem, for example, 'had seen it all [and] passed history on to the camp's children' and Amal learnt her 'treasure of Palestinian folklore and proverbs' from him (78). Haj Salem is one of only two characters who are alive throughout the entire course of the novel – from the annual olive-picking competition with Yehya, to Amal and Sara's return to Palestine in 2002. The fact that the storyteller survives several wars and more than fifty years in a refugee camp indicates that although Israel can take uncountable lives, they cannot kill the Palestinian story.

Another important storyteller in the novel is Ari Perlstein, Hasan's old Jewish friend, whom Amal and Sara seek out immediately after their arrival in Palestine:

> In Ari's office, we were three generations hauled together by the wilful drag of a foreclosed story swindled by fate but gathered in that moment to demand to be told. The story of one family in an obscure village, visited one day by a history that was not its own, and forever trapped by longing between roots and soil. It was a tale of war, its

> chilling, burning, and chilling-again fire. Of furious love and a suicide bomber. Of a girl who escaped her destiny to become a word, drained of its meaning. Of grown children sifting through the madness to find their relevance. Of a truth that pushed its way through lies, emerging from a crack, a scar, in a man's face. (285)

There is an emphasis here on the attempted foreclosure of the story of the three generations, but, indeed, the story demands to be told. Recalling how the Abulhejas in Ein Hod were visited by 'a history that was not their own', this extract thus emphasises the attempted exchange of a Palestinian story with a history that where not Palestinian, and the consequent entrapment of the Abulhejas in a story of rootlessness that would last for half a century. However, it also highlights that in spite of resistance, the Palestinian story is still being told, and the truth is an inevitability that will always push its way through the layers of lies. According to Benjamin, the 'value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new,' whereas a story, on the other hand, 'is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time' (90). In other words, a story eternalises the event that happened at a specific moment in time, and thus a story, as long as it is told, preserves this information.

The final perspective from which the story of displacement is related in *Mornings in Jenin*, is that of Sara. Sara's childhood and youth are not recorded in great detail, and her story is primarily narrated by Amal, whose feelings towards her daughter are apparently filled with pain, as much as with love. However, in 2002, Sara decides to go to Palestine – not 'because of these filthy politics and injustice', but because she wants to know who she is (281). Amal and Sara return to Palestine, but are trapped in Jenin during the massacre. Amal is killed catching a bullet intented for her daughter. After the death of her mother at the hands of Israel, Sara starts posting her thoughts and sharing her stories on an online blog. There, she

emphasises the huge gap between her own story, and the story that the international media chooses to convey:

> The official report of the United Nations, prepared by men who never visited Jenin and spoke to neither victim nor victimizer, concluded that no massacre had taken place. The conclusion was echoed in U.S. headlines: "No massacre in Jenin" "Only militants killed in Jenin, says Israel".
>
> *They murdered you and buried you in the headlines, Mother. How do I forgive, Mother? How does Jenin forget? How does one carry this burden? How does one live in a world that turns away from such injustice for so long? Is this what it means to be Palestinian?* (317 emphasis in original)

Again, Abulhawa combines the thoughts and personal experiences of her characters with a detached voice reporting the official stories of the events, and again, the international media and official reports refuse to acknowledge Israel's violations of human rights and international law. Thus Sara's blog, and the other stories mediated in, and through, *Mornings in Jenin,* emphasise the importance of voicing the different versions of these events, and to pose questions; how does one forgive, forget, and carry this burden, and is this, really, '*what it means to be Palestinian?*'.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the characters of *Mornings in Jenin* find home in various places and emotions, and again and again this sense of belonging is taken away from them by the effects of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. As Yehya, Amal, Yousef and, finally, Sara, come to realise, home is temporary and fragile, and physical places as well as relationships are breakable. However, their stories of overcoming trauma and searching for home transcend Israel's attempt to eradicate any story that supports a Palestinian claim on Palestinian land.

Chapter 2: 'I saw the houses, I saw how they were lost': houses, homes and traumatic memory in *Salt Houses*

At a TEDx event in Brooklyn in December 2012, Hala Alyan talked about her love of narrative and storytelling, and how this life-long interest has affected her career choices as a clinical psychologist, a poet, and – although more than four years passes between the TEDx event and the release of *Salt Houses* – a novelist. After a recital of her poem 'Push', Alyan declares herself 'a member of the Palestinian diaspora' and continues: 'as a child, it was difficult to constantly be uprooted [and] to navigate new cultures … one of the things that I did – or two actually – was reading a lot and writing a lot'. She describes reading as a sort of escapism from the constant uprooting of her childhood. Interestingly, she also considers how reading, 'in and of itself [was] a sort of homecoming'. Neither writing nor reading are location-specific, she reflects, but rather they can happen – and remain the same – distinct from temporal or spatial conditions. Hence these activities apparently created a sense of belonging for Alyan, a sort of place where she felt like everything was not constantly changing. When she became older, she pursued 'this love of narrative', as she phrases it, and her debut novel *Salt Houses* was consequently published in 2017.

It is not germane to this thesis to enter into a discussion about the role of the author in literary analysis. I am aware of the arguments of theorists such as Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, both of whom insisted that assigning an author to a text was an impediment to the understanding of that text[1], yet Alyan's statements about storytelling are a good indication of what her debut novel attempts to convey. *Salt Houses* is about attempting to belong, everywhere and nowhere. Like *Mornings in Jenin,* it is a generational novel that follows a displaced Palestinian family through more than half a century's worth of estrangement and searching for belonging. It is about the implicit effects of constant war,

[1] Foucalt 'What is an Author' and Barthes 'Death of the Author'

migration and uprooting on an otherwise privileged family, to whom, as the title implies, homes are as easily dissolved as if they were built out of salt. Consisting of twelve chapters and an epilogue, the novel's heterodiegetic narrator (meaning that the narrator is absent from the story [Genette *Narrative Discourse* 245]), follows four generations of the Yacoub family from 1963, through several wars and numerous flights, to the end of 2015. By consistently changing its focal character with each new chapter, the novel insists on reflecting a diverse number of perspectives: from Salma Yacoub, who was forced to flee her home in Jaffa and settle in Nablus after 1948, prior to the commencement of the plot of the novel, to her children, Mustafa and Alia, whose lives change drastically after the Six-Day war. Alia and her husband settle in Kuwait, but their children spread across the Middle East, to Beirut and Amman, and to Paris and the United States. With the exception of the epilogue, all the chapters initially state the city and the month and year in which the events of the chapter take place, and each chapter focuses on a specific focal character. Through internal focalisation, the narrator accounts for one specific day in the life of the focalised character, in present tense, as well as the appropriate summary, in past tense, of the thoughts and memories which the present day incurs. In this manner, the narrative implicitly emphasises the importance of time, place and personal experience, and the connection between the three.

The place where the story of the Yacoub family begins, is Nablus in Palestine. On the evening before Alia and Atef's wedding, Salma reads the future in the dregs of her daughter Alia's coffee cup and sees 'lines curve wildly, clusters streaking the sides' and forsees 'Arguments coming … Houses that will be lost' (9). At the centre of her predictions is the certainty that her daughter's life will be dominated by flight; 'an exterior life, an unsettled life' (9-10). Unwilling to spoil Alia's hopes and happiness so close to her wedding, Salma keeps this prediction to herself and it is not until twenty-five years later that she finally, hastily and regretfully on her deathbed, tells her daughter: 'I saw the houses, I saw how they

were lost' (141). Salma's prediction at the onset of the novel encapsulates many of the proceeding events in the lives of Alia and her family. The majority of the moves in *Salt Houses* are ostensibly voluntary, yet they are still a sort of flight; away from rootlessness and unsettlement, towards potential belonging elsewhere. The house in Nablus – and their life in Palestine – is altogether lost during the Six-Day war. Then, after a little more than two decades spent living in Kuwait City, Alia and Atef are again forced to flee following Saddam Hussein's invasion, and they settle in Amman. Their daughter Souad moves from Kuwait to Paris to Boston to Beirut. Her sister Riham moves to Amman to become a devoted wife and stepmother. Their brother Karam moves to Boston to study, but spends his summers in Beirut, and the grandchildren of Atef and Alia also scatter across the globe. Altogether, the uprooting of the Yacoub family is representative of the constant search for belonging, for a home away from home, that dominates the lives of millions of Palestinians.

This chapter will, first, examine the various representations of home in *Salt Houses.* Although the characters inhabit numerous houses across the Middle East, in Paris and in America, these houses are only temporary and fragile homes. Then, in the second part, I will examine the ways in which the characters of *Salt Houses* cope with traumatic experiences, and how *Salt Houses* as a novel can be seen as both conforming to, and challenging, the traditional means of representing trauma in literature. With particular reference to Atef's experience of imprisonment in 1967, and his subsequent struggle to overcome the traumatic memories, the third part of this chapter will argue that in order to overcome trauma, one has to incorporate it into a narrative. In the fourth and final part of this chapter, I will continue investigating the importance of narrative in the construction and preservation of the identity of the self, as I examine the epilogue of the novel, which is narrated from the perspective of Alia, now diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease. There are eight different focal characters in *Salt Houses,* and even more central characters; consequently, there are very many

perspectives on home and belonging. This chapter will concentrate primarily of Atef and Alia's narratives, as their complex and dynamic characters encapsulate many of the feelings and perspectives also shared by the other characters.

2.1 The making and unmaking of a place to call home

The first 'home' that is depicted in *Salt Houses* is the house in Nablus. Gathered in the garden on the night before Alia's wedding, when Salma makes the predictions about her daughter's future, Salma reflects on the home in Jaffa that she was evicted from, and how she made a home in Nablus. Salma remembers her house in Jaffa, the villa atop a small hill, overlooking the sea and their orange groves. Now in Nablus, she still dreams about returning, to 'everything as she'd left it', yet she knows that the villa is ruined and the groves replanted (6). The house in Nablus remains 'the *new* house … ghosted with its former life, the dinners and celebrations and quarrels it had witnessed' (10). However, Salma has made sure that the garden is completely hers. 'I need to see the soil' she told her husband when they moved in, removing the tiles in the garden (ibid.). When, after months of applying fertilizer, tilling and pruning, a weed finally sprouted, Salma 'remained still, touching the sprout, recognizing in that moment that there were some things we are meant to keep for ourselves, too precious to share with others. She shut her eyes and recited the Fatiha [a prayer]' (ibid.). Blunt and Dowling point to a number of theorists that have tried to encapsulate the 'domestic entanglement of nature and culture,' some of which focus especially on the gardens; their aesthetic value, their function as both a private and public space, among other approaches (77). Gardening can also be an important home-making practice and to Salma, when she was forced away from her home and into a new house, the restauration of the garden became an important way for her to make a home in a space that was not initially hers. Although the setting is less explicitly pastoral, this opening of *Salt Houses* echoes the opening of *Mornings in Jenin.* There is, of course, an important socioeconomic difference between Salma and

Yehya, but the 'natural', whether it is farming or gardening, constitutes an essential part of their sense of belonging. Thus, when Yehya is evicted from his land and can no longer tend to his olive trees, or when Salma moves to a new house with a tiled garden, both struggle to feel at home.

The second chapter of *Salt Houses* is narrated from the perspective of Mustafa. Interacting with the narration of his involvement with the mosque is a description of the deterioration of the home that he inherited from Salma. When Salma moves to Amman, Mustafa inherits the family home, but with him in charge, the house changes drastically: 'From a distance, the house appears unaltered, the doorway framed by trees. Only upon closed inspection do signs of neglect become apparent – the untrimmed hedges, the windows streaky with dust, a slackness to the doorknob …' (26). To Mustafa, the house is like 'a beautiful trinket that he cannot touch without its breaking': the kitchen is a mess, with newspapers scattered across the counters and there is 'a grayish plant he never remembers to water on the windowsill above the sink' (ibid.). There is, in other words, a strong contrast between the house when Salma lived there, and the house after Mustafa inherited it. This contrast reminds us that a home 'does not simply exist, but is made. Home is a process of creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging,' a process that is both material and imaginative (Blunt and Dowling 23). Thus a home is created differently, depending on priorities and needs. Mustafa, who spends the majority of his time in the mosque, does not prioritise taking care of his house. His involvement in the mosque is not religious; rather, when he is listening to the imam, 'Mustafa's spine tingles at only one word: *Palestine*' (31, emphasis in original). The significance of the space of the mosque becomes apparent if we recall Massey's argument that space is the 'product of interrelations' (9). Mustafa feels most content when he is in the mosque because it is a gathering place for men like himself, who are willing to fight for a free Palestine. Although there is no detailed description of the mosque, it

appears, in contrast to the messiness of the house, as more of a home than Salma's old house. To Mustafa, a sense of belonging does not depend on a physical place. Rather, it is constituted by comradeship and shared political convictions, and by a willingness to fight for the 'home' that they have lost: Palestine.

Daniel Miller argues that homes are also constituted by material objects and their cultural significance, and he investigates how objects are 'employed to become the fabric of cultural worlds' (6). For example, when Alia thinks of her home in Nablus, she remembers the 'seashells she filled bobby pins. The tangerine dress she'd bought right before her trip to Kuwait and never worn. Photographs, necklaces, the glasses and silver *ibrik* [a sort of coffee pot] her mother had given her' (75). Likewise, when Souad is in Paris during the war in Kuwait, she finally

> understood the gravity of it. There would be no return. Her clothing … the large evil eye dangling from her window. The map she'd hung after an argument with her mother, enormous, spanning an entire wall with blues and greens. Her old school, the chalk on her classroom floor, the market her father likes to buy melons from. She suddenly recognises it all as lost. (169)

It is not the objects themselves that Souad or Alia will miss, but rather their symbolic value as representative of the homes that they have lost. Home is thus both material and imaginative; it is a process, but home is also constituted by a number of material objects and things. From seashells to a map on the wall, home is a place where you keep your belongings.

The value of material objects does not, however, diminish the imaginative dimension of home as a structure of feelings. There is, for example, a contrast between the two chapters narrated with Souad as its focal character. In the first of them, Souad is eighteen years old, watching scenes from the war in Kuwait on a television in a bar in Paris, and in the second,

Souad has been married, moved to the United States, had two children, been divorced and is now moving back to the Middle East:

> Beirut called to her. She wanted somewhere new. She wanted to go home … *Home as in somewhere familiar, somewhere people look like us, talk like us, where you guys can learn Arabic and be near your grandparents and never come home asking what* raghead *means* (207, emphasis in original).

Here, home is not a collection of material belongings like, but rather a place constituted by feelings of belonging, of shared identity and closeness to family. When Souad remembers her home in Kuwait, she remembers clothing, decorations, her school and the market 'her father likes to buy melons from'. When she is returning to Beirut after spending years in Paris and the United States, Souad thinks of 'home' as a feeling, somewhere 'familiar', where people look like her and where she can really belong. However, the 'scene' of this chapter, dated 'Beirut, *June 2004*', is the day that Souad goes to a home-decoration store with her children, to buy the things that will make their apartment feel like home. This chapter, then, suggests that home is indeed a feeling, somewhere familiar, but material things, such as curtains or a rug, are important elements in the creation of a house to call home.

The narrative of Atef also reflects on the meaning of home and houses. Sitting in his garden in Amman at the end of the day that Alia gets her Alzheimer's diagnosis, Atef realises that it is the Yacoub family that will always constitute home to him: 'Nablus, filled with flowers. How in love he was, with Mustafa, with his defiant sister, their house, their wealth. *I wanted all of it,* he wrote once. It was true' (274, emphasis in original). Two elements initiate this realisation: first, is Alia's recent diagnosis and the realisation that now, he has to remember for the both of them and second, is Atef being surrounded by grandchildren who wish to know about their family's history. To Atef, what immediately comes to mind, is the houses. In his response to his grandchildren he describes Salma's house in Palestine: 'A good

house. There was a table under the trees. In the summer, we'd sit there for hours' (273). The table, although it is just an object, here signifies the time spent in good company. Yet this house, and all the other houses in which Atef has lived, are inherently temporary:

> All the houses they have lived in, the *ibriks* and rugs and curtains they have bought; how many windows should any person own? The houses float up to his mind's eye like jinn, past lovers. The sloping roof of his mother's hut, the marbled tiles in Salma's kitchen, the small house he shared with Alia in Nablus. The Kuwait home. The Beirut apartments. This house, here in Amman. For Alia, some old, vanished house in Jaffa. They glitter whitely in his mind, like structures made of salt, before a tidal wave comes and sweeps them away. (273)

To Atef, the images of the houses that he has lived in facilitate the memories of events and experiences that have occurred in those places, like for example 'how in love he was' with Mustafa and Alia. As Bachelard argues in *The Poetics of Space,* previous homes function as storage places for memories, and the structure of these houses are often returned to in dreams and daydreaming (6). To Atef, then, the memories of the houses are like 'past lovers,' and ultimately an access point into memories of events rather than just a concern with particular places.

The last sentence of the extract obviously alludes to the title of the novel, *Salt Houses.* To Atef, the houses come and go, the physical objects such as *ibriks,* rugs and windows, are lost, and houses are, ultimately as fragile as structures made out of salt. Atef perceives life as 'continuing to move, enduring, not stopping even when there is pain. *That's all life is,* he wants to tell [Manar]. *It's continuing*' (273). The image of life as moving, enduring and continuing echoes the movement of the tidal wave that sweeps the salt houses away, emphasising the fragility and temporariness of home. The image of the wave is again repeated in the chapter set in Jaffa in 2014, in which its focal character Manar draws a family tree in

the sand on the beach: 'A large wave washes over the sand, the water eating her words, her family come and gone in this sea that belongs to none of them' (296). And finally, in the epilogue, Alia reflects: 'life has swept her along like a tiny sheashell onto sand, has washed over her and now, suddenly, she is old' (308). In all of these extracts, the wave implies a current; an inevitability and a repetition. The fact that the image of the wave, which implies movement, is connected to houses in *Salt Houses* indicates an opposition to the perception of homes as something static. Rather, as Massey argues, the space of home is always 'open', and always under construction.

2.2 Trauma as anti-narrative

Salt Houses is narrated from the perspective of various focal characters, and thus the reader is given access to numerous perspectives on home, and to several experiences of the trauma of war and displacement. On the one hand, however, the narrative form of *Salt Houses* may be seen as embodying a form of restraint. In each chapter, the reader is given access to only one specific day in the life of the focalised character, and the time that passes between chapters spans from two years to a decade. We are given access to summaries of what has happened in between, yet these summaries are conditioned by the thoughts of one specific character during a limited slot of one specific day. In other words, the narrative form reflects the way in which memory works – it is conditioned by the present situation of the character. Considering that the narrative does not aim to relate fully what is fictionally true or what actually happened, but rather focus on the individual experience of particular events, it is not really relevant to question the reliability of the narrators. However, it is worth keeping the partiality of the focaliser in mind, as we assign credence to a particular version of events. Also, the focaliser give access to historical events only through one set of eyes at a time. For example, the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 is experienced only from the perspective of eighteen-year-old Souad, who is not even in Kuwait at the time. Likewise, the 2006 Lebanon war is narrated

from the perspective of nine-year old Linah, whose primary concern at the time is to sneak out and buy cigarettes. This one-sidedness ostensibly limits our understanding of, and access to, the historical facts and the traumatic impact of these wars. This stands in strong contrast to Abulhawa's novel, which includes news reports, historical facts and witness accounts to validate its historical backdrop.

On the other hand, these narrative specificities are what guide our understanding of the content. It might help to start by defining that which *Salt Houses* is apparently not: a trauma narrative. As I explained in the introduction, trauma is 'a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge' because trauma, in its shock impact, 'is anti-narrative' (Luckhurst 80). Luckhurst writes that '[t]he relationship between trauma as a devastating disruption and the subsequent attempts to translate or assimilate this disturbance is a fundamental tension between interruption and flow, blockage and movement' (ibid.). Due to the inherent qualities of trauma – that it is sudden, a shock, and 'outside the range of normal human experience' (Luckhurst 80) – it does not function well inside the boundaries of narrative. According to Arthur Frank, narrated trauma is an aporia that, if at all, can be recollected only in 'an anti-narrative of time without sequence, telling without mediation' (98). Typically, then, narratives of trauma are unconventional in their form, or, as Luckhurst puts it: 'Ultimately, fractured Modernist form mimics narrative possibility disarmed by trauma' (81). It may follow that *Salt Houses* is not a trauma narrative because of its consistency in narrative form. Although its overarching narrative is temporarily fragmented, with up to a decade passing between chapters, the otherwise consistent form of the narrative is not typical of a trauma narrative.

Indeed, *Salt Houses* is not explicitly about traumatic events, neither in form nor in content. Alyan achieves this impression by exploiting the narrative strategies that Genette has termed narrative speed or 'narrative movements'; that is, 'pause', 'scene', 'summary' and 'ellipsis' (*Narrative Discourse* 94). 'Pause' takes the form of static descriptions, in which

there is no indication of fictional time passing in the narrative (99). 'Summary', in contrast, also characterises descriptions, but specifically of events that have already happened, whereas in the 'scene', the time of the narrative corresponds to the time of the story – dialogue is a good example of this (95). The last narrative movement is 'ellipsis', which encompasses the explicit or implicit omission in the narrative of particular events of the story (106-8). In *Salt Houses,* Alyan employs all these narrative movements to various degrees, and all contribute to the repression of traumatic events. Neither the actual wars nor the forced removal of the Yacoub family from their homes in 1948, 1967 and 1990, are recalled in the scenes, and these traumatic events are also avoided in the summaries. This is an example of how Alyan uses ellipsis to show that traumatic events have occurred, even though they are rarely mentioned by the narrator. Whenever it is mentioned in the novel, trauma is recalled retrospectively or from a physical distance, or, as with the war in 2006, from a developmental distance, that is from the perspective of the child who does not have the capacity to truly understand the complexity of that which is going on. Through exploiting the capacities of narrative, and by placing the trauma outside of the narrated instance, Alyan appears to recognise that trauma is in and of itself anti-narrative. It follows that from this perspective, *Salt Houses* might be said to not be a trauma narrative, but rather about the implicit effects of war on everyday life and the aftermath of traumatic events.

In spite of this, I believe that *Salt Houses* should be considered a trauma narrative *exactly because* of its formal consistency and temporal distance from the trauma. The use of a detached narrator, who enforces a disciplined and consistent form, reflects how trauma victims typically have a need for exterior order in their lives, when their interior selves are disrupted and their memories fragmented by the trauma. Thus the distance between the narrator and the narrative may be reflective of the distance between a trauma victim and his or

her trauma. *Salt Houses* then becomes a trauma narrative because of the narrator's refusal to address the character's repression of trauma.

I stated above that the trauma in *Salt Houses* is primarily recalled retrospectively, in past tense, yet there are exceptions to this rule: at one point, Atef dreams about his and Mustafa's imprisonment. As if it were happening anew, it is recalled in present tense:

> "You talk or I take this." Gruff, broken Arabic. His fingernail held between metal pliers. A faceless man tugs. The snake is coming. "You want to stay silent? Fine." Somewhere, someone has spilled ethanol, the smell piercing Atef's nostrils. Metal is wound around his head and his wrists; he wants to scream but he cannot. "*Ya Rab,*" he mutters, and spears of fire shoot up the length of his arm. "*La Ilaha Illa Allah*," and electricity snakes into his jaw, binding his teeth shut. (78)

This extract is from the beginning of the first chapter narrated with Atef as its focal character. Atef's narrative opens with an intense recollection – although through a dream – of glimpses of what happened to him ten years earlier, in 1967. By commencing the chapter in this particular way, the narrator ensures that the ensuing chapter is seen from the perspective of a once tortured, still traumatised man who struggles to keep his family happy amidst his own rehabilitation. The narration of the dream is – in accordance with the inherent anti-narrative qualities of trauma – fragmented, and appears to relate only short instances of the imprisonment: from being rounded up by the Israelis, together with Mustafa and 'dozens of their neighbours, men from the mosque', to suddenly being in prison, questioned and tortured (78-79). The fragmentation – both in forms of the chronology of the story, but also formally with rapid punctuation and vague statements such as 'the snake is coming' – stands in strong contrast to the otherwise consistent form of *Salt House.* Such a formal contrast emphasises the importance of the dream in relation to the rest of the narrative, as it suggests that Atef's traumatic memories do not belong to the past, but are rather an essential part of his present.

The fact that the dream is related in present tense, and that Atef perceives his trauma as not belonging to the past, may also give credence to Caruth's model of belatedness, in which she argues that trauma typically manifests itself as if it was happening anew long after the initial traumatic impact. Recall from the introduction that Caruth writes that trauma is something 'other', apart from one's self, which typically refuses 'to be simply located' (4, 8). Van der Kolk and McFarlane similarly argue that traumatic memory starts leading a life of its own, and when it reappears, it is as if it was happening all over again (491). These observations of traumatic memory correspond well to what Atef once told his physician: 'It's like a shadow life … Like there's another me, and that me is still stuck, like a skipping record' (79). The fact that the trauma is like 'a shadow' indicates that it is not easily located, and Atef's statement that 'there's another me,' could imply that the trauma itself is perceived, like Caruth suggests, as something apart from one's self.

Atef's state of mind can also be characterised by the terms 'repression' and 'dissociation'. Freud writes that *'The essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious*' (*Standard Edition* 143, emphasis in original). As opposed to suppression, which is a conscious and deliberate act, repression is primarily involuntary and unconscious. W. H. R. Rivers, who worked with soldiers suffering from shell shock during and after the First World War, writes in 'The Repression of War Experience' (1917) that the ambiguous term 'repression' ultimately has two senses. First of all is 'the *process* whereby a person endeavours to thrust out of his memory some part of his mental content', and secondly is the '*state* which ensues when … part of the mental content has become inaccessible to manifest consciousness' (1). This second sense, Rivers continues, closely corresponds to 'dissociation', which is both the process of separation and the state of being separated from certain mental content (ibid.). The term 'dissociation', which was first used in the 1890s by Pierre Janet and elaborated on by Freud's theories of psychoanalysis, is

according to the *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* (2015) a 'partial or total disconnection between memories of the past, awareness of identity and of immediate sensations … often resulting from traumatic experiences …' (214). If we return to Atef's statement to his physician, both Rivers' and Freud's terminology applies. Atef explains that there is a part of his life that is like 'a shadow life', as if there is another him that is still stuck, 'like a skipping record'. The perception of his trauma as a 'shadow life … like there's another me' echoes the definition of dissociation, that there is, first of all, a disconnection between his present and his memories, but also that 'the other him' is not an object of the past; rather, it co-exists with his current self.

In a letter to Mustafa, Atef writes:

> *I wake up and it feels like my lungs are dropped in ice and I have to count, one two three four, listen to myself taking in air. Sometimes I wonder if this is really the waking world: coffee in a red mug, three children sleeping in three rooms, the television blaring in the background.* (82)

Atef reflects on how, at times, the trauma that he relives in his dream appears more real to him then his waking world. As becomes apparent later in the novel, Atef is dealing with a lot of guilt in connection with Mustafa's fate, and this extract manifests Atef's difficulty with accepting his current state of normalcy and safety – of having coffee, children and a blaring television. Indeed, there is a disconnection between Atef's present and repressed selves, but as Freud recognises in his theories of the subconscious, the repressed memories are still there, as if they were a shadow, which may resurface at any time – or particularly in moments when the mind is resting, for example when sleeping.

The claim that trauma is anti-narrative is supported by the characters' active refusal to address their trauma, both through and within the narrative, in interactions with each other. In the chapter dated 'Kuwait City *April 1988*', narrated with Alia as its focalised character, Alia

relates an unspoken rule of her and Atef's marriage: '*If it hurts, leave it*' (145, emphasis in original). Their marriage has 'a glove compartment, a hollow, cluttered space where emotional debris went – Mustafa, those first months in Kuwait, Nablus. Palestine tossed in there like an illegible receipt, keys that no longer opened any door' (ibid.). Examples of suppression like that of Alia and Atef occur numerous times throughout the entire narrative of *Salt Houses* – irrespective of who is the focalised character. Following Atef's arrival in Kuwait, Alia is afraid to say anything that will upset him, and in their refusal to address the trauma in the couple of months immediately following the Six-Day war, they consequently forget to re-open that 'drawer' at a later, more emotionally stable, stage. The tendency to suppress pain is passed down through generations. For example, Atef and Alia's granddaughter, Manar, who is the only one who returns to Palestine, knows that their home country remains something 'raw in the family, a wound never completely scabbed over' – something that her grandparents never spoke about (281). There is, in other words, an inherent reluctance to talk about that which is difficult – be it Palestine, traumatic events, or both.

2.3 Constructing narrative, achieving catharsis

As Luckhurst notes, there appears to be a contradiction between 'cultural theory that regards narrative as betraying traumatic singularity' and the discourses that consider narrative to essentially be a working-through of trauma, to borrow Freud's terminology (82). Although trauma narratives are formally reflective of the disruptive nature of trauma, both in its immediate experience and in its ostensibly quintessential belatedness, trauma narratives also demand being told. Hence Luckhurst argues that while theorists such as Jaques Derrida, Caruth and Paul de Man read 'trauma as an aporia of representation', others see the 'crisis in representation' as narrative '*possibility* just as much as *impossibility*' (83). Among the latter is Paul Ricoeur, who argues that narrative is 'the privileged means by which we re-configure

our confused, unformed and at the limit mute temporal experience' (1984: xi). In this sense, trauma may be initially anti-narrative, but narrative is more importantly the means through which trauma takes form, is remembered and eventually overcome.

In *Salt Houses,* the content and the narrative strategies that reflect repression and suppression are contrasted by the means through which the novel finally addresses the trauma and reaches a sense of catharsis. The perhaps most obvious change is Atef's narrative, which moves from only vaguely mentioning the events of the Six-Day War, to giving a full account in the chapter dated 'Amman *June* 2011'. As I have discussed in relation to the anti-narrative qualities of trauma, what Atef endured in 1967 is repressed, stored away in the subconscious, and is, for a long time, 'stuck' there. Atef has never told the truth to any of the other characters. Here, the narrative form is indeed repression's best friend: the holding back of information is aided by what Genette calls internal focalisation, that is the fact that the narrator knows only as much as its focal character. Hence when Atef represses his past, so does the narrative. Atef's narrative does, however, eventually relate the truth of what happened: that actually, Mustafa packed his suitcase and wanted to flee rather than stay and fight. Had it not been for Atef calling him a coward and thereby convincing him to stay, they would, Atef believes, have survived. Instead, they are soon arrested and, as the reader is already well aware, only Atef survives.

Interestingly, the narration of the actual events is accompanied by an alternative truth to which Atef has escaped for years:

> Atef shakes with the desire to rewrite everything that happened. For years, that was his fiction. *Here is Palestine,* he would think. *Here are the streets we'd walk in Nablus, the neighbourhood we grew up in. Here is everything we loved.* … With a mental brushstroke he re-creates it, everything … *Punch me,* he wants to yell at Mustafa. *Tell me to fuck off, hit me in the face. Pick up that goddamn suitcase, walk down the*

> *driveway. I would've followed you … You can save yourself. We can both live* (271, emphasis in original).

In this interior dialogue, it becomes clear that Atef has, desperately, re-written the story of what happened to Mustafa. Although this is, on the one hand, another level of dissociation and escape from trauma, it is, on the other, demonstrative of the relieving effect of fiction. Paul Ricoeur writes that 'Fiction gives eyes to the horrified narrator … [and] permits historiography to live up to the task of memory' (1988: 88-89). Fiction, he continues, speaks for 'victims whose suffering cries less for vengeance than for narration' (ibid.). Creating a fictional truth, one in which Mustafa and Atef escapes Nablus and survived, is a means through which Atef is able to escape from the pain of remembering what actually happened. Yet, in the same chapter as Atef admits to this alternative narrative, he also relates what actually occurred, and this suggests that Atef is finally admitting to himself that he has to let go of the fictional escape, and accept that which happened. This acceptance is brought on by the realisation that Alia has Alzheimer's Disease: 'It began with her forgetting the word *pomegranate*' (250). Now, Atef '*has to remember for the both of them*' (273). He tries to tell Alia that she will increasingly forget, but she is already too far gone to comprehend this. Suddenly, forgetting is no longer voluntary – memories are not suppressed or repressed, nor are they stored away for later recall, and thus Alia's condition epitomises the importance of remembering.

In addition to Alia's diagnosis, the recalling of 1967 is also initiated by the realisation that Atef's grandchildren have read his letters. Initially, the letters were a means through which Atef could express himself when he arrived in Kuwait after the Six-Day war, and was clearly suffering from PTSD. The letters are first mentioned in the chapter dated 'Kuwait City, *May 1977'.* In this chapter, which I have discussed previously in relation to Atef's dream, the 'scene' of Atef's narrative is the celebration of his daughter Riham's birthday, but

throughout the day, Atef's thoughts return to letters that he has written throughout the years, addressed to Mustafa, which he started on his doctor's recommendation: 'It's a way to organize your thoughts, explain what you've been through' (82). Atef is asked to construct a narrative, or simply record his feelings, not necessarily of what is true, but of whatever he feels the need to write. When nothing else helps decrease his nightmares and melancholia, the letters, on the other hand, help him work through and overcome his disruptive memories and behaviour. The fact that Atef writes letters rather than, for example, a diary, implies that he is sending his thoughts away, and thereby metaphorically distancing himself from what he has written. Atef writes about everything in his letters, from his difficulties with Alia and his worries for his children, to his memories of the war. Decades later, these letters end up in the hands of Zain and Linah, Atef's grandchildren, who are rummaging around a storage room during the war in Lebanon in 2006, and the two children share the letters with their cousins. In 2011, Atef overhears his grandchildren discussing the letters:

> "He loves her," …
>
> "She's right." Zain pauses. "It's what he always wrote about."
>
> Atef shoots upright, his ears burning. He cranes forward to hear his grandson's sentence.
>
> "… He has to remember for the both of them now." (268)

Concerned for their grandfather, the conversation between Zain, Linah, Manar and Abdullah concretises much of what is running through Atef's mind: how will he cope with losing Alia, on whom he has depended all these years, and how he now must remember for the both of them. Surprisingly, Atef realises that 'he didn't mind' that his grandchildren have read his letters (269). In fact, he is glad that now, 'they know him', and it feels like 'dropping the weight of a planet. Like finally stepping back' (ibid.). This suggests that it was important for

somebody else to read the letters, for Atef to finally stop repressing the traumatic memories, which he reveals and addresses in the same chapter.

2.4 Alzheimer's Disease as metaphor

The 'Epilogue' of *Salt Houses* is narrated from the perspective of Alia, now diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease. An epilogue typically serves as a comment on, a summary of, or a conclusion to what has happened in a book, and in *Salt Houses,* Alzheimer's functions as a means to summarise the theme of memory that reoccurs throughout the novel, and comment on the repression and suppression of painful memories that occur throughout *Salt Houses.* In her essay on Alzheimer's Disease as metaphor, Linda Simon examines the disease's function in literary plot and character development, what themes it is used to convey and how it metaphorically reflects our culture and society (6). The disease, which was first discovered in Germany in 1906, is characterised by the loss of memory – and thereby self – often at a younger age than those suffering from age-related dementia, which is a more common diagnosis. The loss of memory, Simon writes, 'has become synonymous with loss of self', and those close to the one suffering from Alzheimer's 'testify to the "loss" of the AD [Alzheimer's Disease] sufferer long before they die' (7). As Simon notes, stories about the effects of Alzheimer's are typically told from the perspective of care-takers and family members, because Alzheimer's is a serious disruption of memory, and therefore it is difficult for the sufferer to form a coherent narrative themselves. However, *Salt Houses* stands out because in addition to the family's perspective on the deterioration of Alia's mental health, the effects of the disease are also related from the perspective of the person suffering from Alzheimer's.

Christopher Nash writes that 'It's in our thinking in story form – giving accounts of ourselves as actors in events "spelled out" in time, in a compact drama of causes and effects – that we've routinely constructed and organized our lives and our import' (quoted in Simon 8).

Simon elaborates, and writes that narratives 'chronicle and therefore affirm the continuing identity of the self in time' and if this ability is disrupted, confusion and anxiety follow (Simon 8). The epilogue of *Salt Houses* is indeed fragmented in form and repetitive in content, echoing the typical traits of Alzheimer's. For example, the fact that 'the television is always on' is repeated several times (297, 299). Characteristics of Alia's family and care-takers, such as the kindness of Linah, are also related several times. That which is perhaps most striking, however, and which would have presumably been impossible to narrate from a care-taker's perspective, is the self-awareness of the narrative. Alia is, at times, aware of what is happening to her, and she is frustrated by her inability to remember: 'They are wrong. She knows something is different. Amiss. When she remembers what it is, there is a sorrow that scalds her throat …' (298). The narrative also relates that at other times, Alia does not realise that she cannot remember, but still knows that there is something wrong. This, however, 'is more difficult to put into words, those moments of inundation when she scrambles to piece herself together' (299). In this intertwining of remembering, forgetting and remembering that one is forgetting, the narrative appears to comment on its own proceedings: how can memories be formed into narratives, and 'how to put to words that silken rope of remembering, of weaving through days, then losing what is lost again' (298). Placing this into the context of the epilogue, and its preceding chapters, these metafictional elements emphasise the theme of the narration of memory – whether traumatic or not – that is consistent throughout *Salt Houses*.

In the chapter dated 'Kuwait City *April 1988*', Alia is recalling the conversation that she had with Salma on her deathbed:

> "When it happens, you must find a way to remember."
>
> "When what happens, Mama?" An icy fear seized her. She had never heard her mother speak this way before.

> "I was wrong. I thought I could make myself see something that wasn't there. But it was a lie. I saw the houses, I saw how they were lost. *You cannot let yourself forget*" (141, emphasis in original).

This conversation obviously alludes to the predictions that Salma made on the eve of her daughter's wedding, that she never honestly communicated to her daughter. Although it was not as clear in the opening chapter, the ambiguity of the prediction that houses will be lost could also allude to how Alia will lose the memory of the houses. Salma's pessimistic forecast at the onset of the novel, and Salma's warning on her deathbed, suggest that the unsettledness of Alia is as much a result of the loss of memory, as it is of houses. This indicates that the sense of home is as much constituted by memories of belonging, and memories of one's past, as it is by physical houses.

Salma's last wish for her daughter to remember, and the epilogue's portrayal of the pain of forgetting, is contrasted by Alia's insistence on the suppression of painful memories and willingness to forget before her Alzheimer's diagnosis. In the two chapters narrated with Alia as their focal character, Alia appears to want to forget all painful elements of her past. For example, she feels sorry for those who knew a Palestine at peace, thinking that it seems easier 'to remember nothing, to enter a world already changed, than have it transform before your eyes' (74). She continues:

> Nostalgia is an affliction … Like a fever or a cancer, the longing for what had vanished wasting a person away. Not just the unbearable losses, but the small things as well. Alia thinks of her bedroom in Nablus. The seashells she filled bobby pins. The tangerine dress she'd bought right before her trip to Kuwait and never worn. Photographs, necklaces, the glasses and silver *ibrik* her mother had given her (74-75).

This extract is from the narrative dated '*December 1967*', and the narrator here compares longing for what has been with an illness, like fever 'or a cancer'. In her article, Simon

challenges the significance of memory in the Western culture, as she questions whether memory is a 'good thing, enriching people's lives individually and collectively', or if it is a 'constriction, binding individuals to the past' (9). In this context, Alzheimer's could be argued to be a gift to Alia, the ultimate repression after a lifetime of wishing to forget.

Alzheimer's Disease is, however, obviously more a curse then a blessing to Alia as a character. In addition to emphasising the effects of the disease on the sense of self, however, Alzheimer's also functions in the narrative as a means of cultural commentary. The epilogue, like the preceding chapters, states the place at its beginning – Beirut – but it does not state the date. It is clear from the narrative that it is Alia's birthday, and in her narrative from 1967 it is revealed that her birthday is sometime in November or December. Also, the narrative reveals that 'there is a baby' that is sometimes placed in Alia's lap (298) and we know that Manar first knew she was pregnant in the summer of 2014. Thus it is safe to assume that it is set in Beirut, at the end of 2015. Like I have discussed previously, *Salt Houses* does not explicitly engage with the traumas of war, but rather focuses on the implicit effects of war on everyday life. Hence war is typically not related in the present. There are, however, exceptions to this rule: first of all is the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, narrated from the perspective of Souad, yet this is experienced from a geographical distance; from Paris. Secondly, there is the 2006 war, which is narrated from Linah's perspective, yet she is a child, and does not understand the magnitude of war; hence she is rather bored by the whole thing. The third exception is Atef's dream, and the final exception is the epilogue:

> There is a war. She understands this intuitively; in fact, it seems to her the only truth she holds immutable. […] A young girl wears nothing but dirt. An explosion has dismantled a city. People gather the entrails of their families. A man sets himself on fire. A man burns a flag. A man holds a woman underwater. A man hangs from a tree. A man is eaten by flies. (300)

These observations presumably allude to images of war. Men burning flags and explosions that dismantle cities are common phenomena in the Middle East, but some of the images are more specific: the fourth one probably alludes to Mohamed Bouazizi, whose act of putting himself on fire became the catalyst for the Arab Spring. Didier Fassin calls this act the 'most violent response to violence that can be imagined' (28). The last statement, I believe, may allude to the fact that due to the great number of dead as a consequence of the war in Syria, there is no capacity to give them all a proper burial. Many are therefore left to the mercy of insects. These explicit references to images of war in the epilogue are contrasted by the preceding narrative, which is set on repressing memories of wars. It has an interesting effect, then, to conclude *Salt Houses* with the perspective of a character who has forgotten who she is, who her family is, and when she is; yet she remembers these images and knows, instinctively, that there is, indeed and as always, a war going on.

Alzheimer's permanent loss of memory, as Simon notes, is both 'a threat to the survival of the self' and to 'cultural integrity' (10). Simon writes that when a culture loses its history, it is at risk of losing its identity, just as a person suffering from Alzheimer's:

> Even more dire than George Santayana's warning that those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it, some fiction writers concerned with [Alzheimer's Disease] warn that those who do not know history will not have the power to do anything at all. The culture itself will be obliterated. (10)

The epilogue could be read as a sort of elegy of the Palestinian culture. Arguably, through extended exile, Palestinian culture is slowly being obliterated, and Alzheimer's Disease, as Simon points out, functions in *Salt Houses* as a warning of this potential outcome. On the other hand, Alzheimer's, which is supposed to remove memory and confuse its sufferer, is, in *Salt Houses,* actually one of the few means through which the narrative relates what is happening, politically. Thus the epilogue summarises the novel, but also brings it a sense of

catharsis in the complex sense that it allows for the narrative of *Salt Houses* to finally admit that there is a war, and it is affecting its characters.

To conclude this chapter, I have thus examined the ways in which *Salt Houses* is an exploration of home, trauma and the compiling of memories into narratives. In *Salt Houses,* houses and homes are fragile and temporary, and easily dissolvable, and the characters' sense of belonging is largely affected by the traumatic memories that they carry with them. Through employing various narrative techniques, and contrasting the consistency of the narrative with the fragmented and inconsistent epilogue, the novel emphasises that in order to transcend and overcome their uprooted state of being, and their traumatic memories, the characters must address the trauma and preserve memories of the past.

Chapter 3: '*Is this what it means to be Palestinian?*': the creation and preservation of Palestinian identity in a globalised world

'There are two striking features of Palestinian life,' Juliane Hammer observes, 'one being the diversity of stories and experiences of Palestinians and the other an overwhelming sense of belonging to one another as a people' (3). In her study of Palestinian repatriation as a direct or indirect consequence of the peace process in the 1990s, Hammer describes the 'search for a homeland' for Palestinians born in diaspora (1). Through a number of interviews, Hammer explores the dichotomy between diaspora and homeland, asking what 'home' means to the returnees, and essentially finding that their lives thus far have been characterised by a 'sense of movement, the lack of stability and the quest for it' (2). Although her study was conducted and published more than a decade ago, Hammer addresses matters that remain typical to Palestinians today: the inherent wish to return, potential resettlement in the country of exile and adaption of its respective culture, the preservation of Palestinian heritage, and defining the meaning of home and of homeland.

As the preceding chapters of this thesis have demonstrated, similar matters to those of Hammer's study are addressed by Abulhawa and Alyan's respective novels. Reflective of Hammer's claim that Palestinian life is distinctive in its diversity of stories, I have thus far demonstrated how the novels emphasise a diversity of personal stories and experiences of trauma and belonging that derive from the Palestinian displacement. Now, in an attempt to discover what it is that creates such an 'overwhelming sense of belonging to one another as a people,' to borrow Hammer's phrase, I will move away from the characters born in, and exiled from, Palestine, and rather examine more closely the last generation of the Abulhejas and the Yacoubs; Sara and Manar.

This comparative chapter will essentially address two different, yet simultaneously intertwined, questions: how is Palestinian identity preserved and created throughout generations, and to what extent should *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses* be considered

Palestinian novels? First, I will draw on Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory' to examine to what extent Sara and Manar's connection to Palestine is a result of transgenerational transmission of memories from, and experiences of belonging in, Palestine. Then, I will investigate what, to the generation born in diaspora, it means to be Palestinian. In the third and fourth parts, although my thesis thus far has treated Abulhawa and Alyan's novels as representative of the Palestinian experience of displacement, I will argue that they cannot be characterised solely as 'Palestinian'. Although they have the Israeli/Palestinian conflict at their cores, the novels are written by Palestinian *American* authors, and are set in various geographical locations beyond Palestine, and it should not be taken for granted that the characters of *Mornings in Jenin* actually consider Palestine their home. As such, the novels are also representative of the turn in the twenty-first century towards the 'global novel' and the transnational narrative.

3.1 The generation of postmemory

Although they belong to two different novels, Sara and Manar are in many respects remarkably similar. Born in diaspora, their perceptions of home, and of homeland, are to a large extent shaped by their diasporic upbringing, and by experiences and memories of events that are not initially their own. When they are young adults they decide to return to Palestine, in order to 'find themselves': '"Mom, I'm going to Palestine. I want you to come too … It isn't because of these filthy politics and injustice, Mom," Sara said, the rims of her eyes darkening into red and tears pooling over them. "I want to known who I am"' (*Mornings in Jenin* 281). There is no obvious reason that a trip to Palestine will help Sara realise who she is: she is motivated by neither politics nor injustice, but rather by a personal need to 'return' to the place from which her mother departed. Sara's need – in lack of a better word – is her own, but it is conditioned by the memories and experiences of her mother. Likewise, in *Salt Houses*, Manar has never been to Palestine, nor have her parents, and, like Sara, she has

grown up with a family that barely mentions their Palestinian history: 'it was something raw in the family, a wound never completely scabbed over' (281). In spite of this, Manar has been nursing an image 'of herself, dusty, solemn, walking onto Palestinian soil, squinting in the sun,' and when she discovers that she is unexpectedly pregnant, she decides that it is time for her to return to Palestine. 'Return' implies a prior experience of departure and Manar and Sara have never been to, and can therefore not have left, Palestine. Yet both Manar and Sara's travels to Palestine are a way to retrace their connection to the place from which their family departed, hence in an extended sense, the term 'return' applies.

In 'The Generation of Postmemory', Marianne Hirsch discusses the ways in which memories of traumatic events are transferred from one person or generation to another. Postmemory, she explains, is 'a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience [and] a *consequence* of traumatic recall … at a generational remove' (106). To exemplify this, Hirsch examines 'the second generation' of the Holocaust – that is, the children of the survivors – whose parents' traumatic memories are apparently being transmitted onto the next generation. In other words, although the Holocaust preceded their births, traumatic memories dominate their parents' narratives to such an extent that it dynamically affects, and eventually transfers onto, the memory of the second generation themselves. However, 'postmemory's connection to the past is … not actually mediated by recall, but by imaginative investment, projection and creation' (107). Thus postmemory is not an 'indexical trajectory' from event to memory; rather, it emanates from the memory of another person and generation (109).

Hirsch draws on Jan and Aleide Assmann's distinction between 'communicative memory' and 'cultural memory' to explain how memories are shared with others. 'Communicative memory' constitutes the 'factual' or 'biographical' memory, which is experienced on a personal or individual level and a recollection of which is passed on to the

next generation, typically family members (Hirsch 110). 'Cultural memory', on the other hand, is the institutionalisation of such memories, whether through text, performance or rituals (ibid.). Hirsch argues that through sharing a memory with others, the memory is formed by the collective group into 'narratives and scenarios,' and thereby gradually ceases to be a personal memory (ibid.). Gradually, the memory transfers from the communicative to the cultural. However, whenever this memory is a traumatic one, the transition from, and distinction between, personal embodiment of memory to institutionalised archives of memory becomes blurred. In the case of traumatic experience, postmemorial work enables a reactivation and re-embodiment of distant 'social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures' through 'familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression,' like the photograph (111). Thus the 'second generation' can engage with memories that preceded them through a sense of 'an embodied "living connection"' both on a personal level, but, perhaps more importantly, on a cultural level which includes them in a 'collective membrane' with a shared traumatic past (ibid.).

At first glance, Hirsch's theory fits well with the narratives of Manar and Sara. Growing up with parents and grandparents to whom Palestine is like a raw wound, memories of events and experiences of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict have undoubtedly affected Manar and Sara's upbringing, much like the second generation of Holocaust victims. Although both Manar and Sara have families that are reluctant to talk about Palestine, they have presumably gained an idea about what happened to people like them through publicly available photographs, news reports and stories, which very well may have been similar to the experiences of their parents and grandparents. Thus, as Hirsch's theory of postmemory suggests, Sara and Manar have inherited memories of Palestine and made them their own. Still, there are three ways in which the theory of 'postmemory' does not fully suffice in an analysis of *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses*: first, because the traumatic situation in Israel/

Palestine is still ongoing; second, because it does not sufficiently account for intergenerational transmissions of trauma and third, because Hirsch focus is on the photograph as the ideal media for transmitting memories, rather than, for example, letters or a blog.

My first concern, then, is that Hirsch does not account for traumas that are still ongoing, such as the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Although events like the *Nakba* or the Six-Day War can be studied as the origin of specific traumatic memories, one would be wrong in isolating them from the rest of the conflict, which is still ongoing. Mahmoud Darwish writes that 'the Nakba is not a memory; it is an ongoing uprooting, filling Palestinians with the dread for their very existence' (7). Identifying a Palestinian 'postgeneration', or applying the term postmemory, would thus call for a temporal definition of the 'post' beyond that of strictly 'after'. Whereas Hirsch studies the second generation of Holocaust, an event that is, at least historically, located in the past, enough time – however long that may be – is yet to pass before all the traumatic events of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict can be considered as completely belonging to the past.

The second concern that I have with applying Hirsch's theory of postmemory to Alyan and Abulhawa's novels is that Hirsch does not fully account for intergenerational transmissions of memory. Although she recognises postmemory as a structure of both trans- and intergenerational transmission, she puts an emphasis on the 'post' or 'after-ness' of memory. Others, like Alison Landsberg, have recognised the simultaneous transmitting potential of memories through mass culture, for example through television or cinema, thereby creating a personal experience of an historical event that was not witnessed first-hand (Landsberg 23-24). Whereas the name 'postmemory' emphasises a temporal dimension, Landsberg's 'prosthetic memory', on the other hand, indicates that the memory is an artificial construction that does not, by way of nature, belong to you, but the term does not have any

temporal implications. For example, consider the way in which news is mediated through the television. It can be a direct broadcast of, for example, a flood, and thus exactly as it is happening it is experienced by many more than just those directly affected. Imagine then, that the news report is from somewhere that the person watching or reading is familiar with, concerning somebody with whom they have a connection – for example, news reports from a conflict zone from which their family fled:

> For years [Manar] watched news reports of the settlements, the phosphorus dropped over Gaza, camps swelling with eyeless children. Anger held her up with burning little hands, assembled itself into chants of *Free Palestine, free, free Palestine* with the rest of the Justice for Palestine group during Apartheid Week at Columbia. For years she kept a poster taped above her desk of a young man mid-hurl, a stone flying in the air. Along the border were sentences calligraphed in Arabic. His arm arched like an arrow, his face hidden beneath a scarf. The stone had just left his fingertips. A part of her knew such posters were romanticism, envy at best. Still, she hoped he hit what he was aiming for (278).

In this iterative narration (indicated by the temporal marker ‘for years), it becomes evident that Manar has kept track on the situation in Palestine. Manar has seen numerous news reports of the illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian land, and of the violations of international law conducted by the Israelis as they extensively used phosphorus during the 2009 war in Gaza. As a natural result, she feels anger, demonstrating with other students for a free Palestine. Yet, the experience of displacement as a consequence of Israeli settlements, or of watching friends and family suffer and die at the hands of the Israeli military, are not Manar’s experiences, and not her memories. Where postmemory would explain Manar’s reaction to the news reports by suggesting that Manar is imagining, through these public images, that which may have happened to her grandparents, Landsberg’s prosthetic memory, on the other

hand, account for the transmission of such memories, regardless of interpersonal relations, through mass media (Landsberg 25-26).

Still, Manar feels like she is not truly Palestinian: 'while she was busy sleeping with American boys and writing essays about the diaspora, there were people over here [in Palestine] *being Palestinian*' (282). One of the people who are presumably *being Palestinian* is the young man on the poster with the Palestine scarf who is hurling stones at the Israelis. Hirsch asserts that the trauma of the postmemory generation does not just originate in the stories or experiences of a parent, but also through ostensibly 'intimate familial knowledge' mediated by 'broadly available public images and narratives' (112). Hirsch argues that finding its counterpart in the public display of private photographs, the public image of the anonymous victim is adapted into the private sphere by the second generation to better imagine their parent in the unimaginable setting (ibid.). A similar argument applies to Manar's poster: it is a public image of an anonymous Palestinian, but whereas Hirsch imagines this as way to imagine the experiences of the parents of the postgeneneration, it appears to rather be a way to imagine who Manar would have been, if her grandparents had not left Palestine. To Hirsch, 'the phenomenology of photography is a crucial element' in her understanding of postmemory (107). Photographs are windows through which unimaginable events can be imagined and mediated beyond the contemporary generation. In Hirsch' words, photographs are 'ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world' which enable us to 'touch that past' (115). Photographs do not, however, just capture events in the past. Rather, although the nature of photography indicates a temporal space between its production and its reception, photographs can also provide a representative image of a parallel present. The poster on Manar's wall, then, is not a photograph that mediates the unimaginable experiences of the preceding generation. Neither is it necessarily a memory, but rather a representation of an event, which Manar can imagine herself in, and that invokes a certain identity.

My third concern with Hirsch's concept is that it does not account for the role of written media in the transmission of traumatic memories. In the article 'The Generation of Postmemory', to which I have referred so far, it appears that Hirsch prioritises the photographic media as the ideal means for the postgeneration to access the past. In her monograph *The Generation of Postmemory,* however, published four years after her article of the same name, Hirsch gives two examples of written accounts that may serve the same function as a photograph: written by residents of concentration camps, a recipe book and a graphic novel have since become 'a testament to the power of memory and continuity in the face of brutality and dehumanization' (178). Hirsch writes that the two texts are like souvenirs that 'authenticate the past,' and are means through which later generations can get a glimpse of the atrocities that were imposed on their parents – and parents' parents (186). These two books, however, are not purely written accounts, and although the graphic novel presents a narrative, its representation is primarily visual.

In *Salt Houses,* on the other hand, it is Atef's letters that are the means through which much of the trauma and history of Palestine is passed on to Atef and Alia's grandchildren. In the grandchildren's discovery of the letters, the letters transcend the therapeutic function that they held for Atef, and become the means through which family history is passed on to the next generations. Zain gives the letters to Manar when she is leaving for Palestine, and throughout her trip, Manar returns to the letters, reading passages out loud and trying to find hints as to where, and how, her grandparents grew up. When the grandchildren discuss the letters during their summers together in Beirut, they talk about the letters 'like a book' and the 'people he refers to – a dead great-uncle, old friends, their own parents – seem as exotic as characters in a movie, and as unlikely' (ibid.). Yet when Manar reads the letters in Palestine, she perceives them as more than just a 'ghostly revenant' from an 'irretrievable' past, as Hirsch characterises the photograph, nor are they simply a 'souvenir that authenticates the

past'. Rather, the letters function as a sort of talisman, or even guidebook, that connects her to Palestine and her family's history. When Manar is in Jaffa, she rereads her favourite passage: "*But Mustafa, we still thirst for it. Our mutiny is our remembering … Our remembering the hundred names of that land … This is what it means to be alive*" (294-95). Although it is an ambiguous statement, Atef's letter appears to suggest that remembering is a form of resistance and of mutiny. This extract from the letters, read by Manar now back in Palestine, is thus a way of transmitting not just the memory of the past, but also Atef's resistance to the occupation. Thus by returning to Palestine, and retracing her family's history, Manar is preserving the memory of 'the hundred names of that land' that is transmitted to her through the letters.

3.2 Palestinian identity

Whereas Manar's return to Palestine is narrated with herself as the focal character, the narrative of return in *Mornings in Jenin* prioritises Amal's perspective over that of Sara. We know little of Sara's life in America prior to her trip to Palestine beyond that she volunteers for the local Amnesty International chapter, and is, like Manar, a member of a 'Students for Justice in Palestine' group (258). Amal's narration reveals that even though she has been an emotionally distant mother, she has still passed on some of her Palestinian heritage to Sara, such as her favourite dish, *makloobeh* (ibid.). When they return to Palestine, however, to a place where Amal feels at home, Amal finally shares her story with her daughter: from Yousef's alleged involvement with the attack on the United States' embassy in 1983, to stories from her own childhood in Jenin. As Hirsch notes in relation to second generation Holocaust victims who returned to their parents' place of origin, or to the camps in which they were detained, '[r]eturn to place literally loosens the defensive walls against the sorrow of loss that refugees build up over decades and that they pass down to their children' (*The Generation of Postmemory* 207).

Whereas Manar's return is guided by a written account of her grandfather's story, Sara has the privilege of traveling with her mother. The latter is, however, both a blessing and a restriction. Similar to the concept of 'postmemory', Hammer observes a pattern of cultural transmission from parents to the Palestinians born in diaspora. To the majority, parents and family members played an essential part in forming their Palestinian identity, and Hammer observes that the attachment to Palestine for Palestinians born in diaspora is 'based on learning, on the transmission and re-creation of memories, images, and history' (5). She writes that 'collective memory, literature, and the visual arts were important sources for learning what it means to be a Palestinian' (220). Although this is essential to the young Palestinians' understanding of their Palestinian identity, some of the interviewees explained that they had to return to Palestine to figure out for themselves what 'being Palestinian' meant to them. By traveling to Palestine, and spending some time there, Hammer's interviewees explained that finally, their connection to Palestine was a choice rather than something decided by their parents. After Amal is killed in *Mornings in Jenin,* the change from Amal to Sara as the focal character indicates that Sara eventually gets to create her own narrative of what it means to be Palestinian, and whether she wants to be defined as such.

Both Manar and Sara eventually claim, in their own terms, their Palestinian identity. They both leave for Palestine on a quest of self-discovery, and out of an inherent need to see the place from which their family stems, yet their experiences in Palestine are very different. Whereas Sara spends most of her time in Jenin, listening to stories about her mother's childhood and visiting Amal's old friends and family members, Manar, on the other hand, has more of a touristic experience in Palestine, visiting the Al-Aqsa and the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and smoking pot at a beach party in Jaffa. Because she travels with her mother, Sara presumably experiences a sense of coming home in Palestine. Manar, on the other hand, has a feeling of 'things being *off*' as she travels through Palestine: 'Al-Aqsa had been a

disappointment, the Holy Sepulcher as well' and 'Nablus was the biggest disappointment of all. She'd expected to feel kinship [instead she feels] like an interloper, trespassing on memories that had nothing to do with her' (286-288). It is not until she is in Jaffa that Manar finally experiences a sense of connection to her Palestinian heritage.

On the beach, Manar says out loud to herself: 'I've come here for no reason' (295). She laughs at this realisation, but as she sits down in the sand she is compelled to write a 'testimony, she decides. On the wet sand, she writes letters with her finger' (295). Manar draws a family tree in the sand, pondering over her connection to her family, and the family that she is about to create for herself. There is an old man eying her suspiciously and Manar understands that all he sees is an 'unnecessary foreigner':

> A large wave washes over the sand, the water eating her words, her family come and gone in this sea that belongs to none of them.
>
> "I'm leaving," she says to the man in Arabic.
>
> As she walks past them, she glances up only once. The man is still watching her, but his expression has changed. She nods, and the man nods back. (296)

This rather ambiguous ending to the chapter suggests both a connection between Manar and Palestine, and a severing of the same connection. The sand and the wave refer back to the image of salt houses, indicating the fragility of connection to a particular place, whether it is a house or a country. The movement of the wave also indicates the inevitability of change, and indeed, the Mediterranean, which 'belongs to none of them', washes away any trace of her family tree. All of this indicates a very fragile connection between Manar and Palestine, and apparently for this reason, Manar decides that she is leaving. However, before she leaves, she is acknowledged by the Arab man, now with an expression changed from the one he held when he believed her to be a foreigner. This suggests that because Manar speaks in Arabic, the man recognises a sort of connection between them, acknowledging Manar as a kinsman –

yet this comes after Manar has arguably severed her tie to Palestine. This ambiguity, I believe, suggests that although the return to Palestine forces a decision to either belong, or move on, Manar chooses to dodo both; to leave Palestine behind, and yet still appreciate her ties to Palestine. National identity and the notion of a particular homeland are thus as fleeting as a wave, and Manar's Palestinian heritage is just one part of the melting pot of identities that constitutes Manar.

Also Sara transcends the connection to Palestine conditioned by her parent. When Amal is killed by an Israeli sniper, catching a bullet intended for Sara, the narrator switches perspective and the last part of the novel is narrated from the perspective of Sara. Sara stays in Palestine for a good while following her mother's death, working for an NGO in Jenin and visiting Ein Hod together with Ari Perlstein, Sara's grandfather's Jewish friend. Eventually, however, Sara is deported from Palestine, partly due to the blog in which she writes letters to her mother:

> *Do you know, Mother, that Haj Salem was buried alive in his home? Does he tell you stories in heaven now? I wish I had had a chance to meet him. To see his toothless grin and touch his leathery skin. To beg him, as you did in your youth, for a story from our Palestine. He was over one hundred years old, Mother. To have lived so long, only to be crushed to death by a bulldozer. Is this what it means to be Palestinian?*
>
> […]
>
> *They murdered you and buried you in their headlines, Mother. How do I forgive, Mother? How does Jenin forget? How does one carry this burden? How does one live in a world that turns away from such injustice for so long? Is this what it means to be Palestinian, Mother?* (314, 317)

Both of these extracts demonstrate Sara's newfound understanding of what it means to be Palestinian. Indicated by the wish for a story from '*our Palestine*', it is evident that Sara now

identifies as Palestinian. Kai Erikson, among others, have noted that although traumatic events impair social structures of support, traumatised people are often drawn to others who have similar experiences, forming a traumatised community with trauma as the 'basis for communality' (198). Thus Sara has transcended her initial place in a potential 'postgeneration', inheriting her mother's trauma, and become herself the first generation of a traumatic experience. Similar to Atef's letters, the blog functions primarily as a means to address and cope with Sara's own trauma, as she addresses her mother much like Atef addresses Mustafa. However, as Hammer points out, written accounts of the Palestinian story are a means through which other Palestinians, in diaspora, can connect with each other and thereby share a sense of communality through shared experiences. Thus Sara's blog mediates a story about Palestine with which Palestinians and others across the world can sympathise, and which may initiate the creation of prosthetic memories.

3.3 The Palestinian narrative and the global novel

Johan Ramazani writes that 'poetic transnationalism' is a necessary and important means to imagine and understand ourselves as 'imaginative citizens of worlds that ceaselessly overlap, intersect and converge' (49). Manar and Sara's stories are not stories about being just Palestinian: Sara is born and grows up in the United States, to a mother who spends the majority of her life in exile, and Manar is born in Paris, to a Lebanese father and a Palestinian mother who grew up in Kuwait, and she grows up in Boston, before moving to Beirut and then back to the United States. Manar's friend Seham likes to tell her: 'No wonder you're messed up. You've been emotionally code-switching all your life,' and Manar likes 'reveling in the notion that her problems, the disarray of her life, all spring from her heritage' (276). As the first two chapters of this thesis have demonstrated, feeling uprooted and a sense of estrangement, and not belonging anywhere in particular, are characteristics of all the characters that I have examined in *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses.* Yet this is not

exclusive to Palestinian narratives; rather, it is a reflection of literary developments in the twenty-first century form of the novel. According to Paul Jay,

> [s]ince the rise of critical theory in the 1970s, nothing has reshaped literary and cultural studies more than its embrace of transnationalism. It has productively complicated the nationalist paradigm long dominant in these fields, transformed the nature of the locations we study, and focused our attention on forms of cultural production that take place in the liminal spaces between real and imagined borders (1).

Although *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses* epitomise the state of many Palestinians today, the novels are also reflective of patterns of movement regardless of country of origin or reason for migration. As Hammer notes, it is important to consider that Palestinians have typically migrated more than once, from the first country of refuge to other countries of exile. (13). As a consequence, 'perceptions of home, diaspora, and national identity are redefined by people living in a "world of movement"' (Hammer 218). Thus, as Jay argues, the novel is increasingly adapting to account for such globalisation.

Like Jay, Carren Irr notes that since the 1980s, there has been an increasing concern with writing global, transnational novels (660). Concerned primarily with the American novel, Irr writes that some see the turn towards a global novel as a total replacement of the twentieth century's 'great American novel' of self-discovery, yet Irr argues that the transition is rather fluid, bringing with it characteristics of its predecessor, such as 'multistranded narration, broad geographical reach, cosmopolitan ethics, multilingual sensitivity and a renewed commitment to realism' (661). She divides the expatriate American writings of the twenty-first century into three categories: the twenty-first century American abroad, expatriates in America and 'the new nomads', the characteristics of which all apply to *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses.*

First of all is the American abroad: Sara and Manar are legally American and the narratives of both are concerned with the time that they spend in Palestine. However, this first group of expatriate novels, according to Irr, typically excludes from its narratives state politics (668). At first glance, this characteristic does not apply to *Mornings in Jenin* because Sara explicitly criticises the regime that killed her mother. However, Sara's critique in her blog is to a large extent directed at an international, rather than national audience – '*How does one live in a world that turns away from such injustice for so long?*' – and the headlines that she condemns, claiming 'no massacre in Jenin' and 'only militants killed in Jenin' come from international and American media (317). Whereas *Mornings in Jenin* does present some political commentary, *Salt Houses* stays, for the most part, away from any such criticism.

The second group of American expatriate novels, according to Irr, contains those concerned with the expatriates in the United States. This category is 'sharpening our sense of the different lenses expatriates from various backgrounds employ' through presenting a narrative of interacting cultures (663). Whereas the first group was hesitant in its political critique, the 'concerns of these novels are at least collective and sometimes openly political at the outset' (668). Here, *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses* are more obviously applicable. From Amal's denunciation of her 'Arabness' and adaption to the Americanised version of her name (Amy) to Souad's inability to feel at home in a place where people does not look like her, both Alyan and Abulhawa's novels undoubtedly question and challenge the dynamics of being Arab in America. Manar, for example, recalls that 'her professor once said *Arabs* instead of *terrorists* when discussing 9/11' (280). The novels in this second of Irr's groups typically have more than one protagonist, presumably to reflect a collective rather than individual perspective on the collision of cultures, a characteristic with which Alyan and Abulahawa's novels comply.

The final of Irr's three expatriate novels is the 'new nomads', which concerns those that are permanently expatriates, or simply stateless (672). Rather than focus on personal belonging and heritage, there is instead an interest in the ways in which these expatriates belong in a transnational space, and rather than constructing characters that are reflective of a particular culture, they are rather results of cultural hybridity (677). This is perhaps the group of novels with which *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses* fit the least obviously. Alyan and Abulhawa have written Palestinian narratives, concerned with Palestinian heritage and nationality, and the challenges of preserving Palestinian identity in exile. Yet they both present narratives of creating a sense of belonging in the space in between places. In the concluding chapter to her book, Hammer questions whether, to the Palestinians born in diaspora, 'being without a home and homeland [has] become the home of the Palestinian diaspora' (200). She quotes one of her interviewees:

> I have never felt any loyalty to any place. It is as if being homeless has been my homeland, a kind of transnational place where I, along with other Palestinians of my generation, have felt the same sense of at-homeness [sic] that other folk, with a state of their own have had (200)

In *Salt Houses,* the change from being Palestinian to feeling at home in a transnational space, has been a gradual, generational process. The first featured displaced generation, Alia and Atef, remained Palestinian in spite of their dislocation: Alia persisted in missing her home in Palestine, and especially her friends and family from Palestine, and Atef had the ghost of his political involvement in Palestine hanging over his head for the majority of his life. The next generation – Souad, Riham and Karam – appears to be 'less' Palestinian, yet all three, to varying degrees, remain connected to the Arab world, creating homes in Beirut and Amman. To the third generation of exiles – Manar, Zain and their cousin Linah – on the other hand, Palestine is, as Manar's narrative demonstrates, a part of their history, but not the definite

place to which they would attribute their sense of home. Rather, as the final scene of Manar's chapter indicates, 'her family come and gone in this sea that belongs to none of them' (296), Manar has realised that her national belonging is fleeting.

In *Mornings in Jenin* the sense of home and belonging is more connected to a particular place: Palestine. As I demonstrated in the first chapter of this thesis, all featured generations of the Abulheja family ultimately consider themselves Palestinian, and Palestine their home. As Sara's blog demonstrates, the return to Palestine and the trauma that she experiences, strengthens her bond to Palestine, and increases her sense of Palestinian identity. If we return to Irr's 'new nomads', Sara may be a perpetual expatriate, but her connection to Palestine and her forced exile in America both suggest that she is tied to particular places rather than belonging to nowhere in particular.

3.4 Terrorism and the novel

Another reason why it is wrong to assume that *Salt Houses* and *Mornings in Jenin* should be given a Palestinian attribution only, is that both demonstrate diplomacy in their portrayal of the aggressor, a diplomacy that very well may be attributed to a 'westernised' perspective. For example, *Mornings in Jenin* includes the story of an Arab brought up as a Jew, and the reader is invited so sympathise with those who kidnapped him. Abulhawa's novel also portrays a very strong friendship between an Arab and a Jew, Amal's father Hasan and Ari Perlstein, and although the novel is very critical of the United States' role in the political landscape in the Middle East, the critique is primarily political, rather than attacking particular individuals. Even when Sara returns to Ein Hod, five decades after the *Nakba* which forced her family into exile, the novel shows understanding for the Israeli woman who refuses Sara entrance to her family's house.

The most aggressive response to the Israeli occupation in *Mornings in Jenin* is the narrative of Yousef, the alleged terrorist. The political convictions and anger laid out by

Yousef's narrative would presumably have been enough to execute attacks such as the one of which he was suspected. Yet as the final pages of *Mornings in Jenin* reveal, Yousef did not, after all, execute the attack, in honour of his late wife's memory and, essentially, out of love: '*For I'll keep my humanity though I did not keep my promises. … and love shall not be wrestled from my veins'* (322). In *Salt Houses*, both Atef and Mustafa flirt with the idea of violent resistance, but their plans come to an abrupt end with the Six-Day war, during which they are both imprisoned. Years later, Atef draws on this experience when he tries to convince Riham's stepson Abdullah to be careful in his political involvement with a radicalised group of young Muslims who advocate the following convictions:

> We lose our culture. We sell our souls. Instead of getting fat off of their land, we should be fighting them, arming to the teeth. We should be returning to Allah. The people who are going to save us, they aren't those spineless politicians. It's the men inside the mosques (189).

Yet Abdullah's arguments lack persuasiveness, and are immediately dismissed by his surrounding family. Whereas Yousef at least was a focalised character, if not the main protagonist, Abdullah's voice is barely given any space in the novel, and his radical convictions are only mentioned one more time, when the narrative briefly states that when 'the towers fell in America, and the war started in Iraq … something within Abdullah eased, seemed to snap awake' (254).

This is not to suggest that the absence of actual terrorists in the narratives of *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses* deems the novels 'not Palestinian'. Rather, I believe that the perspective of the radical is included in the novels in order to highlight, yet not risk the novels being perceived as a support of, the motivations of the extreme political periphery. In addition to this, the representation of the radical Arab complements the characters' experience of 9/11. Peter Boxall, who like Irr and Jay sees a turn towards the global novel, argues that the

beginning of the twenty-first century is also characterised by fictional representations of terrorism, specifically the 9/11 novel, which attempt to imagine, and overcome, the 'oppositions that 9/11 and its aftermath set in train' (141). Boxall draws on the works of Jonathan Safran Foer, Ian McEwan and Don DeLillo, to mention a few, to demonstrate how fictional works and artistic representations were a way to address and cope with the traumatic event that DeLillo, among others, claimed 'marks the actual beginning to the twenty-first century' (quoted in Boxall 123).

In *Mornings in Jenin,* Amal tells Sara that 9/11 was so difficult for her, because Majid was killed the same way: 'On September eleventh, I faced the last moments of your father's life. I saw him in every person who tried to jump and every person they pulled from the rubble. And I saw myself as I was never allowed to be, consoled, understood and loved' (301). Amal has an ability to empathise with the American people because although 9/11 has been named an until then unimaginable event in the Western world, to many others it is unfortunately very imaginable. After 9/11, the United States had the whole world's sympathies. In contrast, when Amal's family was killed by the hands of the Israeli military, Amal was alone in America, and only 'a week after the massacre at Sabra and Shatila, *Newsweek* magazine determined that the most important story of the previous seven days had been the death of Princess Grace' (230). Jean Baudrillard suggests that in order to understand what happened on 9/11, 'we have to slough off our Western perspective to see what goes on in the terrorists' organization, and in their heads' (21), and even though *Mornings in Jenin* withdraws from narrating a terrorist's perspective, it aids in sloughing off the limited Western perspective on the reasoning behind, and effects of, 9/11.

Whereas Amal sees the death of Majid and the fate of her brother in the attacks, *Salt Houses'* narration of the attacks does not attempt to transcend a Westernised perspective on the events: Souad 'watched the towers fall for days … each time felt like the first time, the

destruction so immense it bordered on the majestic' (208). Souad sees posters of martyrs hanging on buildings in Beirut, and of 'all the things in this new country … this is what frightens her the most. The men on the posters – the dead, or the ones hungry for death. Their frenetic, glassy eyes are identical to the hijackers' (ibid.). Whereas some would feel at least tolerance, if not kinship, the fact that Souad describes a feeling of 'fear' when seeing the posters attests to her complete lack of sympathy with, and understanding of, the convictions of the men that are portrayed. Thus in contrast to *Mornings in Jenin,* which transcends the western experience of 9/11 and balances it out with sympathy for both victim and victimiser, *Salt Houses* has little nuance in its narration of 9/11.

To summarise, it is evident that both *Salt Houses* and *Mornings in Jenin* account for more national perspectives than just the Palestinian. Although I have not contrasted this with a traditional Palestinian novel, I believe that it is safe to say that the transnational perspective that both novels convey, suggests that they fit well into the characterisation of the twenty-first century global novel. As Manar and Sara's narratives epitomise, Palestinian identity, as it is both passed down through generations and re-experienced, can co-exist with a sense of belonging in a transnational, or international space. Yet this is not to say that nationality does not matter. Although globalisation has indeed gone far, 'contemporary globalisation is characterized, not by the withering away of the nation-state in the face of homogenizing, westernizing, or cosmopolitan tendencies, but by the *simultaneous* acceleration of globalization and nationalism' (Jay 118). Thus *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses,* to varying degrees and in different ways, reflect international and transnational identities, while at the same time preserving the Palestinian and Arab identities of their narratives.

Conclusion

After having explored *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses* through the theoretical frameworks of the concepts of home, trauma and narrative, I will now, in conclusion, build on the comparison of the previous chapter, and present some final reflections stemming from my analysis. First of all, it is evident that it is a traumatic experience to be displaced from one's home. To the characters of *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses,* homes are fragile and temporary and throughout generations, the families of the two novels are repeatedly forced to flee from their homes. In this uprooted and uncertain way of life, it is difficult to create a sense of belonging, anywhere. Although the characters create substitutes for home in relationships, and temporary consolation is achieved through reading poetry or writing letters, traumatic memories of war, occupation and displacement impede the characters' ability to find a home away from home.

In many aspects, *Mornings in Jenin* is an homage to the Palestinian history, and the Palestinian cause. Although Amal, when she first arrives in the United States, represses her Palestinian background, taking on the Americanised name of 'Amy', she never forges any real ties to people or places outside of the Middle East. Through recollecting Arab poetry, keeping track of the political movements in the Middle East, and eventually sharing her story with her daughter, Amal demonstrates, in various ways, the importance of preserving the Palestinian narrative, even – or especially – in exile. This preservation is necessary partly because Israel has claimed not only the land of historical Palestine, but also Palestinian history and traditions. Recall that in 'Once Upon a Jerusalem', Abulhawa writes that she became a storyteller because 'someone stole my story and retold the truth of me as a lie' (59). In *Mornings in Jenin,* Abulhawa points to numerous examples of Israelis 'stealing' the Palestinian story: 'They came to Jaffa and found oranges the size of watermelons and said, "Behold! The Jews are known for their oranges,"' erasing the legacy of Palestinian farmers

who perfected 'the art of citrus growing' (263). The Israelis claimed hummus and falafel, and called it 'authentic Jewish cuisine', designing their history 'from the bones and traditions of Palestinians' (ibid.). In Yousef's letter to Amal, he writes that he refuses 'to live their script', meaning that he refuses to live a life defined and controlled by the Israelis (120). As many others have pointed out, it is ironic (in lack of a more appropriate word) that prior to the Israelis' eradication of Palestinian identity, the Jews were the ones who were almost eradicated. One could argue that Yousef's resistance is, in some aspects, a continuation of this trend – that the victim becomes the victimiser. However, placing such a story of resistance within a narrative that attempts to preserve Palestinian identity, justifies its cause, and emphasises the importance of resisting the disruption of the Palestinian narrative.

Salt Houses, in contrast, challenges the notion of nostalgia for the homeland. Throughout the narrative, its various characters repress not just the traumatic memories of the wars and the displacement from Palestine, but also any connection to Palestine. Alia believes that '[n]ostalgia is an affliction' and 'longing for what had vanished' merely serves to 'wast[e] a person away' (74-75). This is, as I have argued, contrasted by the epilogue of *Salt Houses*, in which Alia tries to remember, cannot, and therefore wastes away. Alia's narrative, and Atef's, clearly emphasise the importance of remembering and not repressing the past – yet this is not to suggest that one ought to be nostalgic, or sentimental about this past. When Atef realises that his grandchildren have found his letters, he appears content with finally letting those letters – and the past that they represent – go. Likewise, when Manar is back in Palestine and decides to leave, she is accepting the part of her that is connected to Palestine, but she is not set on retrieving a Palestine that used to be. In this context, Alzheimer's ambiguous function in the epilogue may serve not only as an allegory for the importance of remembering, but also for the inevitability of forgetting, and the uselessness of clinging to the past. Without diminishing the Palestinian right to return, this dialogue between remembering

and letting go which *Salt Houses* depicts, may encourage a nudge towards the future to find possible solutions, rather than dwelling in the past.

In spite of the different approaches to the importance of the homeland in the creation of belonging, Abulhawa and Alyan's novels are similar in many aspects. Both are transgenerational, both address displacements following the *Nakba* and the Six-Day war, and both are set across the Middle East as well as in the United States. Both Alia and Amal lose a brother during the Six-Day war, and both Manar and Sara are members of 'Justice for Palestine' groups at their universities. In an interview by Carrie Mullins for the online site *Electricliterature.com,* Alyan admits to having read – and enjoyed – Abulhawa's work and, indeed, *Salt Houses* can in many ways be seen as a response to, or building upon, Abulhawa's novel. Whereas Abulhawa's main character grows up in a refugee camp and experiences the brutality of the Israeli occupation first-hand, Alyan's novel depicts an economically privileged Palestinian family, whose moves are often voluntary and whose traumatic experiences are understated and implicit. By depicting an economically privileged family rather than a refugee restricted by lack of economical means, Alyan expands the fictional representation of Palestinians to include also those who move voluntarily. Another noteworthy difference between the novels is the use of narrative strategies. By not conforming to the strategies of the stereotypical trauma narrative, Alyan's third-person, and somewhat detached, narration echoes the characteristics of the realist novel, and challenges the future form of the trauma novel. Abulhawa, in contrast, uses a more typically postmodern approach and her novel jumps back and forth between different narrative voices, times and perspectives. The latter features are, as I have discussed, typical of the trauma narrative, and by using these narrative strategies, Abulhawa makes sure that the trauma moves to the forefront of her novel.

This leads me to a key, and complementary, difference between the novels: the fact that *Mornings in Jenin* is explicit in its depiction of traumatic events, and their effect, whereas *Salt Houses* refuses to describe traumatic events in detail, and is always set at a temporal or spatial distance from the numerous wars that still have a profound effect upon the characters' lives. Another difference is apparent in how *Salt Houses* give detailed accounts of the numerous houses that its characters inhabit, whereas *Mornings in Jenin* presents few houses and places of belonging. Taking these differences and similarities into consideration, *Mornings in Jenin* and *Salt Houses,* read and examined together, paint a complex and diverse picture of the situation in Palestine, and for Palestinians across the world.

Abulhawa and Alyan thus offer important perspectives on what it means to be a Palestinian refugee. Although this thesis has focused more on the individual and personal experience of displacement, it would also be interesting to further examine the Palestinians' collective identity, and explore the meaning of homeland to the Palestinians in exile. Additionally, Abulhawa and Alyan's novels encapsulate an experience of displacement that is shared today by an increasing number of people, not just Palestinians: as a consequence of the war in Syria, among other conflicts, the number of refugees and internally displaced persons is steadily increasing. This creates additional conflicts in the countries in which the refugees arrive, and the last couple of years have seen the rise of politicians who encourage a fear for 'the other'. Ultimately, I believe that fictional representations of the struggles of refugees help create understanding for their situation. Fiction can, to borrow a phrase from Caruth, help give the wounds of displacement and of being a refugee away from home a voice that desperately needs to be heard.

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