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**The Search for Home in Contemporary Arab-American Women's
Literature: A Geocritical Study of Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky
and Water*, Alyan's *Salt Houses*, and Rum's *A Woman Is No Man***

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Dedication

To my mother; Djawhara, may Allah rest her soul and shower her with his endless mercy, who wanted me to be a doctor, this work is for you. To my beloved father Abdesalam, my safe haven and the source of my strength and to my affectionate mother Atika for her unshaken support throughout my life. To my honourable extended family including all aunts, uncles and cousins. To my dear siblings Mohamed Taher, Abdelmalek, Selsabil and Abdelhamid, thank you for being there for me in my happy and sad moments. To my lovely nephews Djawad, Iyad, and Ouais, for being adorably naughty and for leaving their scribbles all over my notebooks. To my best friend Imen for being there for me throughout my ups and downs, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Last but not least, to the resilient Palestinians and their descendants, this thesis is for you.

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Abstract

The aim of the present thesis is to analyse contemporary Arab-American women's literature in relation to the theory of spatiality. With the spatial turn in the humanities, geocriticism evolved as an interdisciplinary approach to analysing how geographical considerations of space, place, and location affect and shape the various literary productions of the era. In such approach, space is no longer a mere empty container but rather a realm of meaning that is never finished and always under some sort of modification. As such, this thesis employs close reading through a geocritical feminist approach. In this regard, textual analysis is used as the main method to read and analyse the three novels. With a focus on the notions of home, identity, and belonging, the three literary works present different viewpoints. Despite sharing the same heritage and background as Palestinian-American women, Susan Abulhawa, Hala Alyan, and Etan Rum do not share the same opinion when it comes to women, spatiality and the concepts of home, identity and belonging. For Abulhawa in *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015), Palestine is the point of departure and return for women who suffer the plights of colonialism and dispossession. Alyan's *Salt Houses* (2017) goes deeper into dissecting the roots of the psychological transgenerational trauma of Palestinians and their descendants alongside the issue of hybrid identity formation. Rum's *A Woman Is No Man* (2019) presents the dark side of the Palestinian story with the problems of domestic violence and the double oppression of voiceless Palestinian and Palestinian-American women.

Key words: contemporary Arab-American women's literature, geocriticism, home, identity, belonging.

ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل الأدب النسوي العربي الأمريكي المعاصر مركزاً على علاقته بنظرية المكانية. مع التحول المكاني في العلوم الإنسانية، تطورت الجيونقدية كمنهجية متعددة التخصصات لتحليل كيفية تأثير الاعتبارات الجغرافية للمكان والموقع على الإنتاجات الأدبية المختلفة في ذلك العصر وتشكيلها. في مثل هذا الأسلوب، لم يعد المكان مجرد حاوية فارغة بل أصبح عالمًا من المعاني اللانهائية التي تخضع لنوع من التعديل المتواصل. على هذا النحو، تستخدم هذه الأطروحة القراءة الدقيقة من خلال نهج نسوي جيونقدي. في هذا الصدد، تستخدم التحليل النصي كطريقة رئيسية لقراءة وتحليل الروايات الثلاث. مع التركيز على مفاهيم الوطن والهوية والانتماء، تقدم الأعمال الأدبية الثلاثة وجهات نظر مختلفة. على الرغم من مشاركة نفس التراث والخلفية باعتبارهن نساء فلسطينيات أمريكيات، إلا أن سوزان أبو الهوى وهالة عليان وعطاف رم لا يشتركن في نفس الرأي عندما يتعلق الأمر بالمرأة والمكانية ومفاهيم الوطن والهوية والانتماء. بالنسبة لأبو الهوى في روايتها "الأزرق بين السماء والماء" (2015)، فإن فلسطين هي نقطة الانطلاق والعودة للنساء اللاتي يعانين من محنة الاستعمار والتشريد. وتتنغمق رواية عليان "بيوت الملح" (2017) في تتبع جذور الصدمة النفسية التي تنتقل عبر الأجيال للفلسطينيين وذريتهم إلى جانب قضية تشكيل الهوية الهجينة. وتقدم رواية رم "المرأة ليست رجلاً" (2019) الجانب المظلم من القصة الفلسطينية مع مشاكل العنف المنزلي والقمع المزدوج للنساء الفلسطينيات والفلسطينيات الأمريكيات اللاتي تفتقدن صوتاً للتعبير عن حالتهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب النسوي العربي الأمريكي المعاصر، الجيونقد، الوطن، الهوية، الانتماء.

Résumé

L'objectif de cette thèse est d'analyser la littérature contemporaine des femmes arabo-américaines en relation avec la théorie de la spatialité. Avec le tournant spatial dans les sciences humaines, la géocritique a évolué en tant qu'approche interdisciplinaire pour analyser la manière dont les considérations géographiques de l'espace, du lieu et de la localisation affectent et façonnent les différentes productions littéraires de l'époque. Dans cette approche, l'espace n'est plus un simple contenant vide mais plutôt un domaine de signification qui n'est jamais terminé et toujours soumis à une sorte de modification. À ce titre, cette thèse utilise une lecture attentive à travers une approche féministe géocritique. À cet égard, elle utilise l'analyse textuelle comme méthode principale pour lire et analyser les trois romans. En mettant l'accent sur les notions de foyer, d'identité et d'appartenance, les trois œuvres littéraires présentent des points de vue différents. Bien qu'elles partagent le même héritage et le même contexte que les femmes palestino-américaines, Susan Abulhawa, Hala Alyan et Etan Rum ne partagent pas la même opinion en ce qui concerne les femmes, la spatialité et les concepts de foyer, d'identité et d'appartenance. Pour Abulhawa dans *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015), la Palestine est le point de départ et de retour des femmes qui souffrent du colonialisme et de la dépossession. *Salt Houses* (2017) d'Alyan approfondit la dissection des racines du traumatisme psychologique transgénérationnel des Palestiniens et de leurs descendants ainsi que la question de la formation d'une identité hybride. *A Woman Is No Man* (2019) de Rum présente le côté sombre de l'histoire palestinienne avec les problèmes de violence domestique et la double oppression des femmes palestiniennes et palestiniennes-américaines sans voix.

Mots-clés : littérature contemporaine des femmes arabo-américaines, géocritique, foyer, identité, appartenance.

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General Introduction

Space is not an empty container that solely holds a minor importance when compared to time and history. However, for a long time, space in literature was treated in a shallow manner as no more than a part of the setting of plots. This taken-for-granted belief led to the negligence of spatiality as a vital element in literary production and reception until recent times. With the heralding era of spatiality and because of the spatial turn in the humanities, things started to change as more research was conducted on space and place in different domains. This is where geocriticism as an evolving approach in literary analysis started gaining momentum with Westphal's ideas and more notably with Tally's interpretation and addition to this spatial-oriented theory.

While conducting research in this area, I made my first contact with the field of Arab-American literature and I was fascinated by the findings. Even from its name, one will feel puzzled as of how it is even possible to join such seemingly paradoxical terms in one word. As it is, the Eastern Arab world and the Western American world are believed to be completely different in terms of values and beliefs. Thus, the question of how is it possible for such a literature to exist. With the American culture at one end and the Arab culture at the other, the task of a myriad of Arab-American intellectuals and writers became more challenging as they were looking for the way best fitting to combine what is appealing from the two cultures, without risking falling into bias or prejudice.

As the ripe fruit of an immigrant community's endeavour to claim their stand and make their voice heard, contemporary Arab-American Literature has started to receive the due attention that it had hitherto lacked in the last twenty years or so. The field of Arab-American literary studies started to gain some popularity among literary circles

with new insights and various modes of analysis. It is surprising that many of the recent scholarship on Arab-American literature has not sufficiently tackled the concepts of home and belonging as they are represented in the various novels in relation to spatiality. With a keen observation, it is apparent that those very concepts are at the core of the story in many women's literary works.

This research explores and analyses the concepts of home, identity, and belonging as the main themes in three novels: *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015) by Susan Abulhawa, *Salt Houses* (2017) by Hala Alyan, and *A Woman Is No Man* (2019) by Etaf Rum. The three novels discuss the issues encountering both Palestinians and Palestinian Americans as they go through a series of spatial dislocations and relocations. The novels elaborate on the process of home-making as well as homelessness and the tiring sensation of non-belonging. These literary works also focus on the questions of identity, belonging, and the spiritual and moral gain and loss of those immigrants and their descendants.

For the purpose of the completion of the present project, the following research questions are addressed:

- 1/ How are women portrayed and viewed in contemporary Arab-American women's literature? Where do the notions of subversion, empowerment, and/or liberation fit in these literary works?
- 2/ Why are the concepts of home, identity, and belonging placed by the three Arab-American women's writers at the core of their literary works? How do space, place, and geography affect women's feelings, behaviours, and aspirations in the three novels?
- 3/ how is identity established amidst a spatial and diasporic hybridity?

The aim of this study is to analyse the three novels of *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015) by Susan Abulhawa, *Salt Houses* (2017) by Hala Alyan, and *A Woman Is No Man* (2019) by Etaf Rum using a geocritical approach to study the concepts of home, identity, and belonging and their significance in contemporary Arab-American women's literature. As such, the present study seeks to explore this arena of contemporary Arab-American literary fiction in new fashion. It also endeavours to limit its scope to women writers. That is why this research also uses an adjusted version of the feminist theory to suit Arab-American literature.

Lisa Suhair Majaj's *New Directions: Arab American Writing Today* (1999) is considered as a milestone work in the field of literary criticism. Majaj clearly states the development of Arab-American literature since the early days of the *Mahjer* (expatriate) writers up until the present. Her analysis uncovers the recent dilemma facing Arab-American writers regarding the choice of "one side of the hyphen or the other" (Majaj 124). At the core of her essay, Majaj calls for the need to move beyond a mere "examination of who Arab Americans are" to "an explanation" of what they "hope to become" (128).

Carol Fedda-Conrey further develops the concept of belonging with her ground breaking book *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging* (2014). The latter draws a clearer picture of the contemporary literary reality of the Arab-American writers who seek to maintain a balance between the two seemingly opposing worlds. Fedda explains how it is not essentially the ultimate goal of Arab-Americans to assimilate and fuse fully into the dominant culture of the US. The book also tackles the notion of diaspora and its influence on identity.

Gender, Identity, and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies (1999) by Linda McDowell addresses the question of “what has gender to do with geography?” Despite the fact that it does not directly address Arab-American literature, the book is central in developing my ideas regarding women and their spaces; particularly what she calls “gender divisions” and “spatial divisions” (12). Lindsey Moore’s piece *Space, Embodiment, Identity, and Resistance in the Novels of Fadia Faqir* (2013) is a major model of spatial analysis in relation to feminism. Although it is concerned with Anglophone Arabs, the study serves my thesis as an illuminating piece in the realm of space, feminism, and identity. Moreover, Rabab Abdulhadi’s *Where Is Home?* (2011) is remarkably central to the present study with its focus on “Fragmented Lives, Borders Crossings and the Politics of Exile” (315). It also provides an exquisite meaning for home and homeland for “exilic and diasporic communities” (315). The mentioned literature is vital in probing my ideas regarding the importance of considering space and geography in literary works.

As far as theory is concerned, Tally’s ground-breaking scholarships are deployed in the present study alongside Soja’s Thirdspace theory and Tuan’s elaboration on space and place to analyse matters related to spatiality and geocriticism. To give but one example, Tally’s *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies* (2011) explains Westphal’s geocritical theory and comments on the latter’s approach in dealing with spatiality. The book remarkably clears the ground for a better understanding of the geocritical theory with a keen focus on defining the different associated terms. Edward Soja’s *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (2014) explains the notion of thirdspace and the unique position of the in-between in fascinating ways. Most importantly, Yi Fu Tuan’s theory on space and place in his work titled *Topophilia: A Study on*

Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values (1974), introduced me to the notion of topophilia that is quite useful in my analysis of the three novels.

The significance of the present study lies in the fact that it attempts to explore the traditional concepts of home, identity, and belonging in a new light. By employing a geocritical analysis of three selected novels by contemporary Arab-American women writers, the concepts are examined in relation to spatiality, place, and feminist geography.

After extensive readings of *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015) by Susan Abulhawa, *Salt Houses* (2017) by Hala Alyan, and *A Woman Is No Man* (2019) by Etaf Rum, it turns out that the concepts of home, identity, and belonging seem to be at the gist of the stories. The depiction of belonging is coupled with a feminist representation of Arab-American women and their marginalization by both men and society. Here, the emphasis is on the question of Arab-American women's position in their homes and how they realise their sense of belonging and identity. Geocriticism, via the "drawing on interdisciplinary methods and a diverse range of sources," attempts to "understand the real and fictional spaces that we inhabit" (Westphal x), in a sense that makes the fine line between reality and fiction blurry.

The choice of the latter is the result of a constructed and systematic reading of the targeted literature. While most male writers focused on themes of war and politics, women writers were more inclined to write about home, identity and belonging. Being both women and hyphenated citizens drove most women writers to express their experiences through their pens.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it explores the traditional concepts of home, identity and belonging in a new fresh light. Through employing a geocritical approach to the analysis of the selected corpus, I seek to provide a new

analysis of what it means to live as an Arab-American woman, what is home, and how it is possible to maintain a diasporic hybridity.

This study may be an important resource to students, teachers, and academics working in the field of literary criticism, and particularly to those who are interested in contemporary Arab-American women's literature. It may also be helpful and beneficial to researchers working in the areas integrating Literature, Geography, and Feminism. With the contemporary shift towards spatiality and geography instead of temporality and history, the present thesis seeks to update the mode of analysis via adopting a geocritical approach to literature.

This thesis is based on a corpus of three novels by three Arab-American women writers. The three writers, Susan Abulhawa, Hala Alyan, and Etaf Rum share the same ancestral lineage. They are descendants of Palestinian immigrants in the United States. Through their respective and different experiences, the writers manage to authentically depict the lives of Palestinians and Palestinian-Americans with all their vicissitudes. As members of third wave Arab-American writers, they are more inclined towards exploring identity, home and belonging. That is why I intend to employ a geocritical approach for the core analysis of the three works. The study of the selected novels might reveal how Bertrand Westphal's concepts of real, fictional, and third space are invoked. The use of the geocritical approach to study a given literary text implies that the literary elements of the work are observed and studied in relation to geography and space. This interpretive approach calls for a comprehension of 'real' places "by understanding their fundamental fictionality, and vice-versa" ... since humans "understand 'fictional' spaces by grasping their own levels of reality as they become part of our world" (Westphal x).

As far as structure is concerned, the present research is composed of five chapters. The first chapter provides the theoretical background of the study. Geocriticism as an adopted approach for the study, together with feminism, shall also be exhaustively probed. This chapter seeks to link the dots between geocriticism, feminism and the Arab-American. After that, a general overview of Arab-Americans since their early days in the US is given. The chapter moves on to explore the development of Arab-American literature in general and Arab-American women's literature in particular. This part of the chapter also tackles the significance of Arab American literary fiction in shaping the American perception and reception of Arab-Americans.

The second chapter (practical part of the thesis) is about the analysis of the novel by Susan Abulhawa *The Blue Between Sky and Water*. The focus is on the Palestinian Baraka family who experience homelessness, exile and loss. This part particularly focuses on the spatial reality of the women of the family namely Nazmiyeh and the granddaughter of her brother, Nur. It specifically tracks the themes of identity, home and belonging as the family experience exile and migration.

The third chapter of this study is dedicated to *Salt Houses* by Hala Alyan. The novel records the story of four generations of the Palestinian Yacoub family through loss and destitution. This part of the study examines the gradual loss of identity experienced by the offspring of Alia and Atef after the loss of their homes and their dispersion to Beirut, Paris, and Boston. It further explores the heavy influences of space and the geographic movement on the Yacoub family's realization of their identities and home. I particularly focus in this chapter on the notion of transgenerational trauma for Palestinians and their descendants, and how this unhealed

wound leads them to experience problems in identity formation and the sense of belonging and homeliness.

Etaf Rum's novel *A Woman Is No Man* is exhaustively analysed in the fourth chapter of this research. Her novel presents the dark side of the Palestinian story of women. Rum, influenced by her own experience, depicts the harsh realities of women in two paralleled stories who are caught between two opposing societies. The women, namely Isra and her daughter Deya, experience patriarchal oppression in various forms. This part emphasises the troubles facing women in their homelands and new lands in terms of marginalization and voicelessness. Moreover, it focalises the importance of space in shaping identity, and how the latter stimulates the sense of belonging. In this chapter I also deploy Anthias concept of transnational positionality to explain the dynamics of hierarchy and power relations in the novel, particularly what relates to women positionalities.

The fifth and last chapter of this research is comparative in nature. In this chapter, I compare and contrast the representation of women in their gendered spatialities as they are depicted in the three novels and how each authoress holds a different view about the space of Palestine and women's place in the world. As such, this chapter perfectly combines geocriticism and feminism in analysing the spatial realities of Palestinian and Palestinian- American women. From Abulhawa's authentic depiction of women's lives in the crowded camps, to Alyan's world of rich women who seem to run their lives independently despite the struggle of dispossession and relocation, and reaching to Rum's melancholic story of Isra's voicelessness and weakness, this last chapter moves smoothly to wrap up the mesmerizing relationship of women and their spaces of longing and belonging.

Chapter 1

Linking the Dots: Geocriticism, Feminism, and the Arab-American

“To draw a map is to tell a story, in many ways, and vice versa”. (Robert T. Tally Jr, *Spatiality*.)

“It’s hard to belong anywhere, truly belong, if we don’t belong to ourselves first.” (Etaf Rum, *A Woman Is No Man*.)

Introduction

Recent scholarship has acknowledged the importance of spatial considerations in analysing literary texts. As such, the present chapter illustrates how geocriticism, as an evolving approach in literary circles, meets feminism in the writings of contemporary Arab-American women writers. The chapter seeks to link the dots between geocriticism, feminism, and the Arab-American condition.

Through focusing on spatiality, this chapter examines how contemporary Arab-American women writers perceive, and as a result represent in their novels, their place in their society as both women and Arab-American. Although Susan Abulhawa, Hala Alyan, and Etaf Rum are Palestinian-American women writers, their views diverge greatly on how women of Arab culture are treated and on how they react to this treatment. The chapter opens with an attempt definition of geocriticism as an approach to literary criticism. It mainly focuses on Tally’s theory of spatiality. Then, the chapter moves towards a discussion on space and place, and their relation to the concepts of home and belonging. In this respect, concepts from the field of geography such as mapping and transgression are deployed to highlight the meanings of space and place and to bring to surface the interdisciplinary nature of our research. Furthermore, Edward Soja’s notion of thirdspace is deployed to mark its vitality in the three selected

novels, namely, *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015), *Salt Houses* (2017), and *A Woman Is No Man* (2019).

This chapter also deals with feminism, postfeminism, and Arab-American feminism(s). The last part of the first chapter provides an account of Arab-Americans focusing on their history and life in the United States as well as the question of identity and as such their relation with the predicament of their people (Palestinians) in general, and the way contemporary Arab-American women writers seek to represent women in new ways. This part also highlights the issues facing Arab-American women in a patriarchal society.

1.1 Thinking about Geocriticism

The task of defining any concept in the academic realm is not an easy one. When it comes to literary studies, the task becomes even harder. Not only that the concepts are constantly emerging and evolving but also that their interpretation varies according to their interpreter. As such, geocriticism can mean different things to different people. Nevertheless, the most suitable definition of geocriticism that serves the present study is that of Robert T. Tally Jr. According to Tally, “Geocriticism is an approach whose purpose is to explore some of the interstices that until recent times were blank spaces for literary studies” (xiii). In this respect, geocriticism seeks to address those matters that were not regarded as important aspects of literary texts before. One of those aspects is that of space and place.

Geocriticism is an interdisciplinary approach that “explores, seeks, surveys, digs into, reads and writes a place; it looks at, listens to, touches, smells, and tastes spaces” (Tally 2). Tally’s definition brings forth some of the interesting traits of geocriticism. The sensory experiences of listening, touching, smelling, and tasting, are not commonly regarded as vital elements of analysis when the sense of sight exclusively

takes preference. However, literature is not only about the act of seeing things as they happen to be. The five senses are used at the heart of any experience. Even the dynamics of reality and imagination are at play within the world of fiction.

Geocriticism aims at exploring those real and imagined places and spaces.

In the three selected novels by Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum, the characters, mainly women, experience space differently despite their shared heritage and struggle. In this light, it is possible to utilize geocriticism to pose novel queries, read in novel ways, interact with disciplinary approaches, and analyze how we grasp our spatiality (Tally 8). Geocriticism helps in determining how the spatial experiences of different characters reflect and influence both their sense of belonging and the way they identify with their homes. In Rum's *A Woman Is No Man*, the women characters perceive their home as an uncomfortable abode of violence, oppression, and non-belonging, as it is controlled by patriarchs. However, in *The Blue Between Sky and Water* by Abulhawa, women feel at ease within their homes as they do not seem to receive ill treatments from their male relations, except for Nur who is constantly out of place.

Spatial theory, which is embedded in the geocritical approach, is the main focus of the present study. In his ground-breaking book *Spatiality*, Robert T. Tally Jr. explains thoroughly the spatial theory that has gained momentum in various literary and cultural circles (3). Unlike the nineteenth century that was dominated by the study of time and history, the post Second World War (WWII) era heralded a kindled interest in spatiality. Both the transforming consequences of postcolonialism and globalization, as well as a new aesthetic sensibility that became known as postmodernism, contributed to the so-called 'spatial turn' that assisted in placing space in the forefront (Tally 3).

Nevertheless, it is vital to note that the contemporary interest in spatiality is not a mere coincidence. Many factors contributed to its emergence and centrality in literary studies. According to Tally, the two world wars swayed the balance of time and space when humanity questioned the progressiveness of history and civilization with the horrors of the war and the vast mass destruction caused by the development in technology (13). In addition to the temporal scepticism as the aftermath of the two world wars, exiles, émigrés, refugees, and other large-scale population movements brought in an unprecedented degree of global mobility and a renewed belief that one's spatiality should not merely be overlooked or assumed as an absolute reality (Tally 13).

Furthermore, the technological advancement in all sectors of life rendered the world into a small town as it has aided in shrinking large distances and magnifying one's sense of mobility and space (Tally 14). This new spatial consciousness led to the development of new ways of expression and thus the rise of postmodernism (Tally 15). As it is with other literary concepts, having a unified definition of postmodernism is out of the question. Instead, Tally visualizes postmodernism as “an aesthetic movement in art, architecture, and literature that has also been characterized as a historical period, and a new way of thinking” (15). All those elements combined contributed to the acceleration of spatial theory and the remarkable interest in humans' space and place with new insights that divorced it from the traditional ways of the nineteenth century. One way this research adopts geocriticism is to explore real and imagined geographies and the way it shapes the concepts of home, identity, and belonging.

For contemporary Arab-American women writers, representing their homelands and new lands stands between a fine thread of reality and imagination. In the case of the three selected novels by the three Palestinian-American women writers, the homeland is Palestine and the new land is the US. Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum map the

same geographical space (Palestine and America) differently. It is true that they perceive Palestine and its land as their home where their identity and roots belong; however, they do not all agree that it is flawless when compared with their new land of freedom.

To illustrate, Rum, in particular, sees the Palestinian patriarchal culture as the source of the misfortunes of Palestinian and Palestinian-American women. Isra and her daughters receive the same ill treatment from the male figures after moving to the US just the way they did back home in Palestine. On the other hand, Abulhawa finds no fault in Palestine except for the Zionist colonization that caused the destruction of her land and suffering of her people. Abulhawa invokes the notion of in-betweenness right from the title of her novel. The reader cannot tell whether the blue is a real or an imagined place. As for Alyan, Palestine is that fragile home that was stolen from her people. The houses of her characters are compared to salt houses, denoting their fragility and temporality. Just like the salt that melts and disappears in humid condition, the houses of many Palestinians became salt houses threatened by instant vanishing.

A novel is able to draw maps in the mind of the reader. Tally believes that literature serves as a mapping tool as well, giving readers descriptions of locations, placing them in a sort of made-up world, and giving them references to help them get their bearings (2). The three selected novels in this study map Palestine (or parts of it thereof) through the use of the lives and the stories of various characters. This mapping technique makes the reader visualize Palestine even if they never happened to visit it. Whether the representation is authentic or fictitious, the image that is created in the mind of the reader is strong enough to take precedence over real pictures of the place or a Google Earth Map of the country.

To harp on the same string, Tally contends that literary works create a world tangible by giving it shape and by providing an allegorical framework for understanding that allows the reader to come up with their own interpretations (99). In other words, the Gaza that we conceive from Abulhawa's account may, as it may not, correspond with the "real" Gaza, Palestine. Nevertheless, the represented Gaza becomes the reader's reality as long as they do not travel all the way to examine the real city. Even then, the real city may confirm the fictional depictions of the author and evidently strengthen the previously generated image of Gaza as it is mapped by Abulhawa in her novel.

Geocriticism can be considered as the umbrella that shelters theories of spatiality with an interdisciplinary fashioning. Hence, geocriticism, also known as spatial critical theory, is generally considered to include both politics and aesthetics as components of an array of cross-disciplinary methods intended to obtain a thorough and sophisticated awareness of the constantly shifting spatial connections that shape the postmodern reality (Tally 113). Because of its unique and flexible nature, that encompasses many domains and theories, geocriticism is one of the most appropriate approaches to study spatiality and its influences in literary texts.

1.2 Moving Towards a Conceptualization of Space and Place

In the last thirty years or so, space gained a new prestige in literary studies where it has received much attention that was hitherto missing. Tally states that since the early 1990s, "questions of space and geography have become recognized as legitimate and important topics in many areas of literary and cultural studies" (29). This importance came out as the result of the spatial turn in the humanities. The postmodern reality of the world with all the technological advancement and the compression of time and space, further accelerated research on matters of spatiality.

What one means by space and place is no new discovery. From the dawn of history, people mapped their existence and drew borders in order to mark their space. Nonetheless, thorough research about space and its production gained momentum after the 1960's. In fact, Henry Lefebvre, the French Marxist philosopher and social critic, is highly credited for his theorization of the production of space, or what he terms 'social space'. In his book, *The Production of Space* (originally published in 1974), Lefebvre does a remarkable work in distinguishing between different spaces. When referring to the social space, Lefebvre rejects the traditional definition of space as a void entity and he rather defines it as a man-made product in a given society (Tally 117). Thus, social space for him is produced by the society under question; this clearly indicates that different societies would have different productions of social space.

In his work, Lefebvre discerns between three distinctive ways in thinking about space. As explained by Tally, the domains of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived are the three components of this triad: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. These three components correspond to three ways of being and understanding space, respectively (118). In simpler terms, the triad of perceived space, conceived space, and lived space is about the way humans experience space through the five senses, how they mentally think about their spaces, and how they actually live in those spaces, respectively.

Another outstanding element in the conceptualization of space is that of projected places in literary texts. As Piatti puts it, originally used in the project *A Literary Atlas of Europe*, the phrase 'projected places' refers to locations that are generated and brought up through the imaginative abilities of the primary characters. The latter dream of, yearn for, or reminisce certain places, both real and imagined, without the need to be physically involved (179). As such, 'the blue' in Abulhawa's

novel is a projected place in which the reader cannot tell whether it is an existing place or an imaginary one. Both Nur and Khaled, as two main characters in the novel, dream about the blue and long to visit it whenever they face trials and hardships. The blue provides a sort of comfort for the traumatized Palestinian children who went through the horrors of colonization and bloodshed. The blue, as a projected place, is their only way out of everyday fear and pain as it provides a sweet returning to Palestine before the coming of the Zionists.

Before delving deeper into the concepts of place and space, revisiting the concept of mapping in spatial theory becomes a necessity. The use of the term map often implies a matter of geographical considerations and a quest of finding a given place as it happens to exist in the real world. Yet, this conception is perhaps outdated in a world where mental and imaginary constructs are now regarded as maps, and the gap between the metaphorical connotations of mapping as a cognitive spatial exercise and its popular usage has significantly narrowed emphasising mapping as a means of depicting the world (Cosgrove 2). In fact, novels as a whole can be considered as gigantic maps that illustrate the spatial realities of the represented world. As Cosgrove confirms, geographical knowledge is not solely communicated through maps; written narrative and description are just as important as cartographic depiction, in that the graphic can be both verbal and pictorial (6).

One way of approaching the concepts of space and place is through dismantling the notion of social belonging. Humans are inevitably social creatures. They seek to belong somewhere and somehow to a given space that becomes their place of belonging. Since individuals live in groups, their place is marked by its relativity to others. A good example is given by Tim Cresswell, where in a company, each individual is well aware of their proper place in the hierarchy of the institution that

results from a set of behavioural expectations. The combination of one's sense of place with the social expectation is what leads to the emergence of 'social space' (3). One's social space is generally taken for granted unless there is some sort of rebellion, or better, transgression of expectations.

In the corpus of the three novels, transgression occurs in various forms. In the novel by Abulhawa, the blue, as a place, transgresses the line between reality and imagination. The characters of Khaled and Nur visit the blue several times in the novel, through their dreams and even with their souls, as it is the case of Khaled when he develops a locked-in syndrome. Nur transgresses the social norms of the Palestinian society when she becomes pregnant out of wedlock. In Rums novel, Isra feels suffocated with her in-laws and violent drunk husband that she resolves to transgress the norm of the obedient wife or the angel of the house when she attempts running away. Isra's sister-in-law Sarah, who turns off an arranged marriage and runs away from home, uses the same mode of transgression. Unlike Isra, Sarah succeeds in fulfilling her transgression. In Alyan's novel, though being Muslim, the Yacoub family transgress the expectations of both their Islamic faith and Palestinian society. Most of the female characters are not veiled and they neither fast nor pray. Most male characters drink alcohol and commit adultery. These instances of transgression of expectations (both transgression of the body and of the geographical space) is related to the social space of individuals.

Cresswell believes that place is created by actions that follow (ideological) convictions about what is right. However, the beliefs that generate it are reproduced by place in a way that makes them seem normal, obvious, and conventional (16). As it is, the above examples of transgression confirm that the social space of each of those individuals is questioned when the taken for granted beliefs are brought under the loop,

resulting in the reproduction of new norms and as such novel realisations of social space.

Following this thread, transgression of expectations acquires a distinct meaning than a mere resistance. According to Cresswell, the act of transgression involves a sort of crossing a line and going beyond the conventional and the norm (23). The mentioned illustrations of acts of transgression are all instances of crossing the line of formality in a social space, resulting in a breach in the firmly established social norms. It is no odd to find different societies having quite distinct social norms and a whole lot of expectations from its members. Yet, in most cases, the spatial arrangement in various societies adheres to a process of creating boundaries that in itself sets the stage for a possible transgression (Cresswell 149).

Cresswell believes that location, locale, and sense of place are the three components that make up place; a location is a point in space that has particular relationships to other points in space, whereas locale refers to a more general framework for social relations. In contrast, sense of place refers to the subjective emotions connected to a place (156). To illustrate, the location in the three selected novels is Palestine, the geographical land, whereas locale is the sum of social relations that unites Palestinians in which the sense of place is their shared love and appreciation for their homeland. As such, places “always exist in a state between objective fact and subjective feeling” (Cresswell 156). Even what defines one’s place, for instance a woman’s place, is always embedded in the ideology of power and who has the authority to execute those orders. Generally, in a typical patriarchal society, a woman’s place is her house and kitchen. As pointed out by Robert Sack, spatiality has been used as a means to exert power and authority over certain subjects and objects in a way that

ascribes for each one of them their appropriate place of belonging (qtd in Cresswell 163).

The notion of absolute space is explained by Lefebvre who seeks to draw a clearer picture of the sensibility of human space and place. For him absolute space “cannot exist because, at the moment it is colonised through social activity, it becomes relativised and historicised space” (Hubbard & Kitchin 5-6). It is in this sense that he considers social space as the product of each society. People experience space and place differently even if they happen to occupy the same territory. Humans develop attachments not just to other humans and living creatures but also to their inanimate surroundings, in this case, to their place.

Occupying different places and spaces at different stages of people’s existence brings forth the unique history of the place, or what is better called by Cresswell as “the hauntings of past inhabitation”. By providing the example of a university student room, he illustrates how this inconspicuous area has a past; it had significance for previous people. The new room occupant may begin considering adding her own belongings and possibly even moving the furniture around the room as she tries to establish it as her own, and adding her special touch to the new space turning it from an anonymous space to her own place (Cresswell 2).

The act of adding one’s own special touch to a given space turning it into one’s own place is related to humans’ constant search for meaning. Different places hold different meanings for people. Arab-Americans tend to do the same thing in their neighbourhoods. Not only that they establish businesses related to their Arab roots like restaurants and cafes serving Arab goods, but also that they make their identity visible through displaying Arabic calligraphy and Arab’s traditions and costumes. As such, Arab-Americans seek to define their place in the United States through maintaining

their identity and heritage. Cresswell argues that places are always in the making as they are constantly disputed and upheld (5). Of course, the creation of space, as well as its maintenance and contest are subject to matters of power and authority.

Keeping up with the same notion of meanings turning a space into a place, Cresswell believes that a space is turned into a place when people add meaning to it and become attached to it (7). For the sake of illustrating this point, in *TBBSAW* by Abulhawa, Nur turns her space in Gaza with the Baraka family into a place that she identifies with and eventually embraces as her own home. This is due to her sense of attachment to that space; and she then develops a solid meaning associated to it. One way of distinguishing space and place, then, is the matter of meaningfulness. As explained by Cresswell, for a long time people distinguished between space and place in relation to the meaning generated by these entities (10). The latter gives sense to why many places are highly valued and cherished by some individuals, while for others they do not represent more than a mere spatial reality.

The importance of the element of power in shaping and creating place is undeniable. In the corpus of the three novels by Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum, spaces turn into designated places because of some power and authority exercised by either imperialism or patriarchy and sometimes by both. In the novels, Palestinians are forced by the Israeli occupation and by the fierce war to leave their houses and give up on their natural rights to their land just because they are under the power and authority of the colonizer. Instead, they find themselves deported to the margins of unsuitable lands on which overly crowded camps are built to shelter them. Even in those inhumane living conditions, Palestinians establish their homes in the camps and attach themselves to their new space giving it meaning and turning it into their new place.

Women in the three novels experience double oppression from both imperialism and patriarchy. Not only that they suffer alongside men from homelessness and deportation, but also that they undergo violence and oppression inside their domestic sphere by their own patriarchs. Of course, this does not suggest that all Palestinian men are essentially brutal patriarchs who exercise violence and oppression over their Palestinian women. Nevertheless, it does not also deny the existence of such violent oppressive men in Palestine or elsewhere. The point here is to illuminate the fact that women, in most cases, are faced by power and authority from both stands. Suggesting that a woman's place is her domestic sphere, and more precisely her kitchen, has to do with the patriarchal meaning that is added to such places (house and kitchen).

Just the way a given space turns to a place when adding meaning and attachment to it, to name but two factors, a place can become a home just the same way. People are often faced with the dilemma of what makes them feel home and why they would call a certain place home. Certainly, the definitions of home vary according to each perspective. However, Cresswell perceives home as a model setting where people experience a sense of belonging and grounding, and he views home as a sphere of caring and a hub for meaning (24). From his definition, attachment, rootedness, meaning, and care are what turn a place into a home. One is home when one can be one's self without restraints and feels the warmth of belonging without the fear of abandonment. The concept of home is to be further explored in the coming chapters. The present chapter highlights the concepts of space and place as the precursor, or rather, as the grounding of the concept of home.

One enlightening argument concerning space and place is that presented by the famous ethnographer Setha Low, in her groundbreaking book *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*. According to Low, place can lose its cultural

familiarity and affective aspects as a result of urbanization, industrialization, and globalization processes, turning it into abstract space (12). This suggests that not only spaces are apt to turn into places but that even places can turn into abstract spaces. To put it differently, when places are stripped off their meaning, becoming meaningless, this may lead to them turning into abstract spaces with little to no significance to their inhabitants. While she views place as an enclosure that is occupied and claimed via the attribution of individual and collective meanings, sentiments, sensory impressions, and understandings, Low regards space as the more generic and abstract construct that retains its social construction and materialist beginnings (32).

In fact, space can be looked at not solely as a social product but also as a social construct. The social construction of space is associated with several factors including contestation and conflict as well as memory and history. With the factor of contestation and conflict, individuals are struggling to find their place in what is referred to as 'contested spaces'. Low defines the latter as "those sites where conflicts in the form of opposition, confrontation, subversion, and resistance engage actors- often with differential access to power and resources" (75). The best example to illustrate this point is found in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Both Palestinians and Israelis are engaged into a bloody conflict over the contested space of the land of Palestine. Unquestionably, their access to power and resources is not the same with the Israelis having an upper and aggressive hand in it.

Memory and history present another vital factor in the construction of space. Following the same instance of Palestinians and Israelis, it is clear enough that both people rely on memory and history in their justification of their claims to the land. For the Palestinians, Palestine, not merely holding their name, is their land for centuries with a rich history rooted in its ground. For Israelis, Palestine must turn into Israel,

their promised land as it is revealed in their religion, in which Palestinians are to be uprooted from its land and their long Palestinian history is to be wiped off. Abulhawa and Alyan, specifically, address this theme of the contested space of Palestine in their novels and further link it the new reality of Palestinian Americans who were unable to forget the land of their ancestors even after their solid establishment in America.

1.3 Exploring the Concept of Thirdspace

Perceiving space and place does not always indicate a vision that is exclusively black and white with no room for a possible grey option. With the spatial turn and the focus on spatial theory in various disciplines, thirdspace was introduced by Edward Soja that came as a result of the development in the study of various spatial realities. According to Cresswell, Soja is influenced by the ‘trialectics of spatiality’, which were developed by Henry Lefebvre, and that he introduces his notion of thirdspace as a result of his own frustration with the system of binaries that overwhelmed spatial studies.

As it is defined by Cresswell, “thirdspace is lived space and it interrupts a distinction between perceived space and spatial practises”, and whereas “Firstspace is the term he uses (Soja) to describe empirically measurable and mappable phenomena”, Secondspace “is conceived space – space which is subjective and imagined – the domain of representations and image” (38). In other words, thirdspace goes beyond the material and mental considerations of space to refer to the experienced space of everyday life. That is what justifies the saying that places are not fixed and that they are always in the making (Cresswell 35). Through the daily activities of their inhabitants, spaces acquire their meaning and turn into places of significance.

Thirdspace invokes the possibility of in-betweenness that things do not always conform to dichotomies and instead a middle position is expected to appear. In the case

of Arab-Americans, thirdspace is not something new to them. Living between the binaries of two opposing worlds, Arab-Americans find themselves obliged to retreat into a middle ground and live in a thirdspace of their own. Nevertheless, thirdspace is not merely affiliated with real aspects of spatiality as it can also represent imagined spaces. To illustrate, the blue in Abulhawa's novel can be considered as a thirdspace. The reader cannot tell precisely whether the blue is a real or an imagined place. Abulhawa explains that it exists between sky and water, putting forward the notion of in-betweenness. The blue is also a lived space especially for Khaled who visits it continuously. Abulhawa's portrayal of this thirdspace as an escape for the traumatized Palestinian children of war is a vital aspect of the struggle of Palestinians who suffer from homelessness.

As it is stated by Soja in his illuminating book *Thirdspace Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places*, thirdspace "can be described as a creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a Firstspace perspective that is focused on the "real" material world and a Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through "imagined" representations of spatiality" (6). As such, thirdspace takes from both firstspace and secondspace and further adds its own qualities that are not encompassed in the previous ones. Soja explains how he coined the term thirdspace by characterizing it as the result of a thirding of the spatial imagination, a different method of contemplating space is created that incorporates the classic dualism's material and mental spaces but goes far beyond them in terms of scope, nature, and significance (11).

Most theorists of spatiality, namely Lefebvre and Soja, experience space with a consciousness of being both part of the center and of the periphery that help them grasp better what it means to live 'in space'. Both Soja's thirdspace and Lefebvre's social

space share the same notion of spatial reality of the perceived, the conceived and the lived “with no one as inherently privileged *a priori*” (Soja 68). Nevertheless, they clearly consider lived space as the thirdspace in which the ‘Other’ finds its place. As Soja puts it “lived social space, more than any other, is Lefebvre limitless Aleph (the name of the place from the story of “The Aleph” by Jorge Luis Borges), the space of all inclusive simultaneities, perils as well as possibilities: the space of radical openness, the space of social struggle” (68).

The Aleph that Soja acknowledges as a thirdspace where both real and imagined spaces merge together in a unique fashioning is similar to Abulhawa’s notion of the blue. Similar to the Aleph of Borges, the blue of Abulhawa is a magical real place where both reality and fiction are contested. The blue combines the past, the present, and even the future of the Palestinian Baraka family. Khaled seems to be the character that dwells in it the most floating through time. Not only this, but also that the blue even trespasses the spatial reality of the mentioned territory. Abulhawa informs the reader that the blue is somewhere between the sky and water but she never links it to a specific land. The reader cannot situate the blue in Palestine or somewhere else. All that she cares about is that the blue is the safest place to be in, “a quiet place of refuge” (Abulhawa 135). She also describes the blue as “an endless space” (155) that both dead children and living ones inhabit it.

In Alyan’s *Salt Houses*, the character of Manar experiences thirdspace even more vividly during her visit to Jaffa. When she enters a restaurant to have lunch, she asks if they happen to serve “Muhammara”, which is a Lebanese dish, and the owner directly assumes that she is Lebanese and orders the waiter to “be good to her,... she is a Lebanese sister” (222). The incident made Manar think about correcting the

assumption of her being Lebanese, because as an Arab-American woman she had a rather complex lineage than merely identifying as a Lebanese.

Manar feels the need to know Palestine, the land of her ancestors, personally. For a long time, she managed to draw an image of what possibly be like living in Palestine and how it looked from all the shattering accounts that she collected from her family across the years, yet now she finally discovered by herself how real was Palestine as a spatiality (Alyan 226). Nevertheless, much to her own surprise, Manar is disappointed with her discovery. She has expected to form an attachment to the land of her forefathers, “to feel kinship” (Alyan 230), but she does not find the Palestine of her imagination. Manar only feels “like an interloper, trespassing on memories that had nothing to do with her” (Alyan 231). She has spent her life so far living ‘the American way’, and now that she finally witnesses for herself the life of Palestinians, she realizes that she will never have “the stability of a preordained life” (232).

Thirdspace is about inclusiveness as it is about providing a third, middle ground for those ‘others’ that are denied an existence in both firstspace and secondspace. As such, thirdspace in Soja’s theory provides the ideal medium for invoking and debating those contested notions that are lacking the proper acknowledgment in a world that prioritized historical and societal matters at the expense of spatial considerations.

One crucial aspect that marks Arab-Americans, in general, and Arab-American women, in particular, as a part of a periphery that occupies a thirdspace in the United States is the matter of identity and belonging. It is no oddity to view the Arab-American community as a marginalized group in the US’s cultural and social sphere. Soja provides an example of Hooks and West as African-American intellectuals who chose to embrace and develop their marginal stand as a context of extreme openness, a starting point for creating communities of resilience and rebirth that transcend and

subvert the binary distinctions of class, gender, race, and all other brutally Othering divisions (84). Similarly, Arab-Americans in the Writings of Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum seek to embrace their marginality and use it as a means of empowerment instead.

An illuminating instance of Arab-American women occupying a thirdspace is found in Rum's *A Woman Is No Man*. Isra and Deya, though living at different times, experience the same spatial reality and even risk having the same dreadful consequences of the violence and oppression of the place they occupied. Living in the same space, Deya's mother Isra suffered from domestic violence and abuse to the extent that she was beaten to death by her own husband. Deya, though living in a different time was living in the same house, which her mother once occupied, alongside her grandparents who wanted to force her into an arranged marriage when she wanted to go to college. This remarkable analogy of how both the mother and her daughter were going through the same spatial reality despite the temporal difference highlights the importance of space in shaping individuals lives and experiences.

Soja via introducing his notion of thirdspace seeks to restore the balance of the three vital factors of the historical, the sociological, and the spatial configurations to the human realization and livelihood. During an interview with Christian Borch, Soja asserts that his intention behind elaborating thirdspace is that our spatiality and geography would attain the same value and vitality in the cultural make up as the socio-historical elements of the human experience. He also states that the historical and sociological perspectives still dominated critical spatial thought, which was limited to two approaches to space analysis (Borch 113). As such, Soja with his concept of thirdspace aims at re-establishing an equilibrium through highlighting how important is spatiality to the understanding of the complexities of the human experience.

Via revisiting the example of Isra from Rum's novel, it is apparent how her spatial reality is as important as her historical and sociological one. Her parental house in Birzeit in Palestine is no different from her new house in Brooklyn where she lives with her in-laws in terms of social and cultural norms and mores. Isra expected a different reality just because she heard about this space that is called America, where people's ultimate freedom in managing their daily lives is quite visible. However, she ends up in a space much worse than her previous abode as she experiences oppression and marginalization from her own people on a daily basis. Rum is stressing the effect of lived space on Isra's life and on her eventual downfall. Through her novel, it is apparent that Rum considers Isra, and similarly a Myriad of Arab and Arab-American women, as the victims of their own social and spatial realities.

It is clear enough that the position of most Arab-Americans is oriented towards a thirdspace awareness and acceptance. The reason is quite obvious; it is embedded in the reality that they are not fully embracing one end of the hyphen. As for those who chose to deny one part of their identity, that is the Arab or the American, there is not much ado about their spatial reality since they have already made their choice. However, for those Arab-Americans who are not ready to compromise either part of their identity, occupying a thirdspace becomes inevitable. Soja asserts that thirdspace exists to address disturbing theoretical and epistemological criticism that centers on discontinuities and disorderings: of difference, of identities that are firmly centered, and of all types of binary classification (107).

In his elaboration of thirdspace, Soja points out to the overlapping nature of spatial feminism and postcolonial theory. Soja admires the work of Gloria Anzaldua as a postcolonial feminist theorist, particularly her writing about living in a thirdspace because of her ancestral lineage in her book *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New*

Mestiza. In fact, the situation of the Arab-American individual is similar, if not identical, to the experience of the Latino-American individual that Anzaldua mentions in her writings (qtd. in Soja 127). Both groups struggle in the margins of the dominant culture. Anzaldua explains that where two or more cultures abut one another, where individuals of various ethnic backgrounds share a common area, borderlands are physically prevalent. She sees herself as a border woman, having grown up betwixt two distinct cultures which invoked a thirdspace of contradictions and discomfort (qtd. in Soja 127).

Nonetheless, borderlands are not always matters of geographical divisions as they can be mental and cultural. To exemplify, Arab-American women as represented in the three selected novels by Abulhawa, Alyan and Rum, experience borderlands and enter their thirdspace in different ways. Starting with Abulhawa, Nur as an Arab-American woman experiences this thirdspace in relation to the different places that she dwells. Born and raised in America with a Palestinian influence, Nur cannot feel fully American and she cannot call herself Palestinian. After she moves to Palestine and lives in Gaza with the Braka family, she finds herself facing the label of a foreigner of being excessively Americanized, just the way the Americans considered her as an Arab. Yet, Nur cannot utterly associate with either. Both cultures represent who she is but she cannot find herself belonging to either. As such, Nur transcends into a thirdspace where she can be both American and Palestinian without being judged.

In *Salt Houses*, Manar, representing the third generation of Arab-Americans in her family, chooses a thirdspace reality after she realizes that neither the American nor the Arab cultures fully embrace her. Being half-Lebanese half Palestinian who is born in America, Manar feels the burden of being “a mutt” as her friend calls her. When she visits Palestine for the first time, Manar feels disappointed. She expects to feel the

natural bond to the land of her ancestors where her grandparents lived. However, the reality that she encounters is nothing like the imaginary picture that she drew regarding Palestine.

In *A Woman Is No Man* by Etan Rum, Isra and Deya transcend into a thirdspace to survive their harsh realities. Before her coming to America, Isra lived in a patriarchal household where she has witnessed the ongoing violence and abuse of her father towards both her mother and herself. Once she hears about her marrying from this Palestinian man who lives in America, Isra expects that she is finally going to feel the freedom and the affection that she did not find in her parental dwelling. For her own surprise, things get worse with her moving to an even more violent and oppressive atmosphere. Both her in-laws and her husband give her a hard time that she only feels solace when withdrawing to her basement room to read her books by the window. The latter is Isra's thirdspace where she can feel free of both realities; that of her parental dwelling and that of her abusive husband's house.

On the other hand, Deya, Isra's daughter, struggles to meet the expectations of her Palestinian grandmother and her own aspirations in an American society. Deya wants to go to college and finish her studies, yet her grandmother was urging her to get married and have kids. Many suitors come and go and their only reason for withdrawing the proposal is that she is not Arab enough. Rum highlights this matter of non-belonging when she mentions how Deya "had lived her entire life straddled between two cultures" that she "was neither Arab nor American" but something in between, and that "she belonged nowhere" (27). This confusion led Deya to choose instead a middle ground, a third stand, where she can be herself and not what others expect from her. After meeting Sarah, Deya realized that she needs to convince her grandmother not to interfere in her life and let the choice be in Deya's hands. At last,

Deya manages to go to college and not to marry. As for her choice of which culture to embrace, Deya chose her reality as it is; half-Arab and half American. Women, generally, are the victims of their oppressive patriarchal societies that renders their existence to the confinements of the domestic sphere. In this respect, feminism, postfeminism, and Arab American feminisms seek to defend women and their plights in a dominant patriarchal spatiality.

1.4 Feminism, Postfeminism and Arab-American Feminisms

Feminism has been one of the most debated (and even contested) concepts that meets a myriad of opposition as well as approval from society. In fact, it is quite difficult to clearly define feminism in a world where feminism(s) and postfeminism are introduced. Nevertheless, feminism suggests a movement that advocates women's rights and denounces patriarchal oppression of women in all its forms. Feminism can be looked at through its different waves that were taking place since the rise of feminist awareness since the 19th century. Even the matter of the waves of feminism is rather problematic since many scholars do not see the waves including women worldwide and representing their needs and differences. Similarly, Cochrane asserts that the "talk of waves can also simplify the depth and breadth of a movement in a single country, meaning some prefer to speak of multiple waves taking place at a single moment" (16).

Feminism originally started with the first wave in Britain aiming at granting women more political power through calling for the right to vote. The suffragettes campaigned peacefully and violently to claim their right in voting as equal citizens. However, not all women were interested in the political life as they were more oriented towards improving their living conditions and freeing themselves of the shackles of the domestic sphere. Many women called for the right for education, economic independence, and equal rights for inheritance such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane

Austen. With the coming of the industrial revolution and as many women were obliged to work for long hours under harsh conditions and suffering from sexual abuse and unequal pay, the aim of the movement shifted to cover those issues of women's abuse and exploitation.

It is estimated that second wave feminism took place in the 1960's and that it mainly concentrated on women's intellectual and social autonomy while addressing the ongoing legal disparities between the sexes (Real 13). The movement sought to give women more rights in terms of their roles in the workplace and at home. Similar to the first wave, second wave feminism is criticized for its failure to include other marginalized women of colour and that it has been centred on white middle class women. The movement is also criticized for promoting for a cult of men-hating lesbians who regarded men as inevitable enemies that needed to vanish in order for women to be free (more details in Real's book *Surviving Fourth Wave Feminism*).

In the 1990's, a third wave feminism emerged aiming to work on the drawbacks of the previous waves and expand the advocacy of women's rights. This wave was headed by so-called Generation Xers, who grew up in a media-rich, economically and socially varied environment after being born in the 1960s and 1970s in the industrialized world (Real 13). In a globalized atmosphere, the wave raised the challenge to represent women from all around the globe in an attempt to become a universal wave. The more the movement grew, the more it has diverted from the original goal of its creation to the extent that many people nowadays consider feminism as a growing evil that aims at destroying men. Many people started to joke that men are considering starting their own movement defending their rights and condemning women's movements.

While many scholars (Gills & Scharff, Genz & Barbon, and Rivers) suggest that we are living in a postfeminist era, others like Cochrane and Real assert the rise of a fourth wave feminism. According to Real, today's feminism "is undeniably anti-male, anti-West, anti-capitalist, and anti-white while being pro-victimhood-status, pro-Marxism (socialist), and pro-marginalization" (13). Real's words reveal the bitter dangerous turn that feminism took in its third and fourth waves that threw overboard its initial sacred slogan of 'equal but different' to a frightening questioning to whether the world needs men at all. This divergent path is the result of the exaggerated radicalism that tainted feminism along its progressiveness.

There is no doubt that feminism started as a movement that intended to end the suffering of women with the aim of creating an equilibrium that holds both men and women in the same balance. However, this innocent quest is far lost and forgotten with the coming of the later waves that has subsequently developed into a chaotic, emotionally charged tirade against men, mostly, if not completely, uttered by the woman who claims to be the victim (Real 17). To add fuel to fire, women in the fourth wave not only choose to bash men and deny their humanity but they even turn against other women who are not supporting their ideology such as Muslim veiled women, to give but one example. These women are viewed as oppressed victims who submit to the will of men and who are not entirely free in regards to the matter of exposing their bodies. Nonetheless, what those fourth wavers miss out is that, in most cases, it is the choice of the Muslim woman to cover up and put on the veil and that no one is in charge to dictate on her what she must and must not do. They fail to understand that it is part of their devotion to the teachings of their Islamic religion that they choose the veil.

As such, with each and every wave, feminism was heading towards its own downfall as an established movement that called for the equality between the sexes. Of course, many scholars still question the nature of this downfall; however, it is clear enough for everyone that feminism's ideology and agenda has changed greatly over the years. In addition, the matter of establishing and marking various waves of feminism further complicated matters. As Rivers puts it, "somewhat paradoxically then, promoting a collective and homogenised vision of feminist history and thought through the symbolically unifying analogy of waves has in fact fragmented feminism" (31).

One illustration of the divergence that tainted contemporary feminism is that of the attacks on feminists who do not choose to bash men and consider them as the enemy and those who do not support the LGBTQ community. The radical fourth wavers consider those feminists as a sexist homophobic lot that do not deserve to be labelled feminists, and as such, lose the right to be associated with feminism. Contemporary fourth wavers call for embracing diversity; however, they fail to appreciate different viewpoints and freedom of expression from fellow feminists. As it is with the risk of expanding what feminism means and what it can achieve as a liberating movement, the movement evolved in recent times to assert that "there is a 'right' or 'wrong' way to be a feminist rather than allowing for a multiplicity of feminism(s)" (Rivers 35).

Furthermore, contemporary feminism is associated more or less with consumerism branding and the new frenzy of celebrities adopting it and claiming to adhere to the ideals of the movement. Andi Zeisler's book, *We Were Feminists Once* (2016), contests the part celebrity feminism is having in influencing the contemporary feminist renaissance (Rivers 59). Many celebrities who once denounced feminism and refused to identify as feminists are now using feminism as a kind of branding to

increase their popularity. This dangerous turn in the perception of what feminism is further confirms the claim of those who believe that feminism as a liberating movement has reached its dead end in nowadays arena. Many celebrity feminists assure women from all around the world that nothing can stop a woman from achieving her aspirated goals. Nonetheless, what those celebrities fail to address is the economic and sociocultural hinders that stand in the way of those women. With the existence of such unrealistic calls of feminists, postfeminism rather takes the lead and claims its legitimacy in a postmodern world of contradictions.

Postfeminism is one of the most controversial concepts in recent scholarship. It is a concept “fraught with contradictions” that is “loathed by some and celebrated by others”. It has “emerged in the late twentieth century in a number of cultural, academic and political contexts” (Genz & Barbon 1). As it is, there is no clear consensus over its meaning and specificity. According to Gills and Scharff, the term can be analysed in four general ways (3). The first way is about “an epistemological break within feminism” that “marks the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including post-modernism, poststructuralism, and post-colonialism” (3). In this sense, postfeminism is viewed as a theoretical perspective and a sort of scholarly feminism's maturity (Gills & Scharff 3). The second way of understanding postfeminism is that of a change in the historical context following the peak of second wave feminism that concerns the pastness of feminist ideology, whether that perceived pastness is simply pointed out, condoled, or welcomed (Gills & Scharff 3). Gills and Scharff explain the third way of viewing postfeminism via considering it as “a backlash against feminism” where one considers that “all the battles have been won” and that “political correctness has become a new form of tyranny” against white men (3). The fourth way of defining postfeminism is to look at it as “a sensibility” in

which “a selectively defined feminism is both ‘taken into account’ and repudiated” (Gills & Scharff 3).

As such, postfeminism can mean different things to different people. Nevertheless, the unifying thread of all the previous definitions of postfeminism is that it is used in the contemporary context to replace; more as an alternative to, traditional western feminist thinking that was criticized for its negligence of representing other issues that are of concern to women of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The issue of giving a clear-cut meaning to the prefix ‘post’ is indeed of great importance for scholars in the field of academia. For some, ‘post’ can be “employed to point to a complete rupture”, to highlight some “kind of termination” (Genz & Brabon 3) of whatever comes next to this prefix. In this regard, postfeminism denotes a departure from feminism as it denotes a shift in the perspective of what dictates the regulations of the relationships between women and men.

Moreover, the prefix ‘post’ can infer a sort of continuity rather than complete breach as it is with one of the meanings of ‘post’ in postmodernism. As Genz and Brabon put it “the prefix (post) is understood as part of a process of ongoing transformation” (4). Postfeminism, in this sense, works on the shortcomings of feminism without totally discarding its importance in the theory and movement. Postfeminism, as such, does not exclude the existence of feminism within it. As it is the age of ‘thirthing’ and ‘in-between-ness’, the prefix ‘post’ can denote a delicate intermediate ground that is characterized by a conflicting reliance on and detachment from the concept that comes after it (Genz & Barbon 4).

What further complicates the matter of boxing what postfeminism is all about is related to the fact that even feminism is not clearly defined in the sense that it lacks general agreement upon its definition and scope. Consequently, the attempt to clearly

define what postfeminism is about and “fix” its meaning “looks futile and misguided”. Not only that it lacks a “secure and unified origin” to start with, but also that it has been criticized by many feminists for being no more than a “parasite charged with infiltration and appropriation” (Genz & Barbon 5). In this respect, it is not possible to view postfeminism as a substitute for feminism and its political and social goals, but rather as a fresh trend that has been shaped by feminist issues and women's suffrage, as well as being tarnished by modern media and the culture of consumption (Genz & Barbon 9).

Nonetheless, many critics, namely Rivers, believe that postfeminism is no different than feminism in terms of failing to liberate women in a realistic way and failing to cover women's issues from all over the world. To illustrate, this belief stems from postfeminists' unstated and rather under-the-table adherence to patriarchal objectifying of women's bodies through using nudity as a supposed weapon to liberate women. Rivers, in particular, provides the example of contemporary postfeminist activist Shevchenko and the Femen group that consider women's nudity as they were protesting topless as their weapon to liberate themselves and their sexuality. According to Rivers, “Femen's deeply problematic insistence on the powers provided by the baring of their breasts to ‘liberate’ their Muslim sisters”, suggests a set of imposed rules that dictate that certain feminists “know best”. Femen also “fails to take into account the important intersections of race, culture, and religion, preferring to focus only on gender and liberationism, and in doing so their actions demonstrate a lack of awareness of the nuances of difference” (87), and that not all women see nudity as a form of liberation.

It is in this particular regard of excluding Muslim women and women who do not support their extreme radical measures that postfeminism (even fourth wave

feminism) fails to achieve its claimed goals of liberating women regardless of their backgrounds. Rivers, also, points out to how dangerous is this association of Muslim women with terrorism that it may be used to fuel Islamophobic sentiment in which the veil is used as a symbol of oppression (88). What this movement fails to see is the urging necessity to give women a voice regardless of their choice in the form of liberation that they choose to identify with. According to Rivers, “Shevchenko is not so much seeking to give Muslim women *a* voice, but is rather attempting to give them *her* voice” (93).

Postfeminism, in recent usage, is also used to mark a new version of the American dream in which women who aim for a better future work hard enough to achieve such aspirations. As Genz and Barbon put it, unlike earlier waves' calls for a communal agenda of equal opportunity, being empowered now equates to maximizing one's own potential and satisfying oneself (37). This recent usage suggests a kind of individualism that is unique to each and every woman. This is of course perfect in theory, yet in practice, it is far from being a living reality for many disadvantaged women of colour or from an ethnic or religious minority.

It is because of this lack of representation and inclusiveness of women from all around the world in postfeminism or fourth wave feminism that Arab-American feminisms emerged, to give but one example. Arab-Americans, being Muslim, Christian or Jew, do not feel that contemporary Western fourth wave feminism or Postfeminism really include them or better represent them and their needs in the quest for equality between the sexes and women's rights for liberation in its various forms. When embracing their Arab identity and heritage, Arab-Americans are viewed as victims of a violent oppressive patriarchal culture that regards women as mere objects

to be placed inside homes to do the housework and raise kids behind firmly closed doors.

The well-established stereotype that considers all Arab men to be oppressive violent beasts and all Arab women to be victims of their own circumstances with no choice in life but to submit to the will of their patriarchs is commonly shared in the American society and much so within feminist circles. It is undeniable that such examples of abusive violent Arab men exist in both the Arab countries and in Arab-American households but this is not to generalize that being Arab means being an oppressor naturally and inevitably. It also does not conceal that many non-Arab men can be also violent oppressive patriarchs who abuse their women. The point here is not to fall in the trap of generalizing and stereotyping that all Arab men are oppressors and as such inherently evil.

US mainstream feminist agendas fail to address other ‘real’ issues of Arab-American women’s oppression and suffering and instead focus on stereotyped symbols such as ‘the veil’ and ‘the housewife’. If a Muslim Arab-American woman is veiled, she is automatically labelled as being oppressed even when she assures that veiling is her own free choice. Of course, this is not to say that all Muslim women choose Hijab willingly. Many Muslim women are forced by their societies and men to wear the veil, yet this does not deny the fact that a myriad of other women, who understand the aim behind hijab, freely choose to be Hijabis. In addition, Arab-American women who are satisfied with being housewives, taking care of the household and their kids, are deemed as backward oppressed females who surrendered to the will of their corrupt Arabness at the expense of the American call for realizing their dreams of becoming successful women in the public sphere.

After the dreadful incident of 9/11, Arabs and particularly Muslims were regarded as violent terrorists who represented a major threat on humanity in general and on the freedom and democracy of the United States in particular. Such feminists considered Arab and Muslim feminists as an impossible formula, as if being Arab or Muslim contradicted feminism, or as if Arabs were inherently or genetically unable to comprehend, support, or combat sexual and gender injustice (Abdulhadi et al xxxvi). Even when attempting to supposedly defending women's rights in the Arab world, particularly in Palestine, US mainstream feminism, rather than speaking of the cruelties of living under the harsh reality of colonization by the Israeli occupation, chooses to highlight such matters as the Palestinian suicide bomber women. Via positioning Palestinian women in this cultural background where they are perceived as victims of an oppressive, patriarchal Arab society that motivates them to harm both themselves and other people, US mainstream feminism invokes that their brutal political conduct is just one more illustration of how Arab society invariably murders its women (Abdulhadi et al xxxvi).

The position of Arab-American women in the American society is problematic because, in most cases, they fight oppression from two fronts. The latter is related to both the Arab community and the extreme patriarchal views regarding women, and the American community and its stereotyped prejudiced picture of Arab-American women as the victims of their own Arabness. Susan Muaddi Darraj argues that the well-known feminist catchphrases 'The political is personal' and 'The personal is political' do not apply to Arab American women in the same manner that they do to other American women (Abdulhadi et al xxxviii). She invokes the notion of fighting "two separate battles" in which Arab-American women fight one battle "at home against sexism that

is personal” and another battle “in society against racism that is political” (Abdulhadi et al xxxviii).

A good example that showcases both battles of the personal and the political is found in Rum’s novel *A Woman Is No Man*, particularly in the character of Isra.

After her marriage and moving to Brooklyn, Isra was, most of the time, confined to her basement room and its little window. Her husband spent his days working in the store. On one of the days in which he finished work a little early, he asked Isra to go out with him to show her Brooklyn Bridge and have a pleasant evening together. Isra, as a hijabi woman, was preparing herself to go out with her husband and arranging her veil on her head. However, her husband asked her to take her hijab off because no one will mind seeing her hair (Rum 47).

As she was astonished by his decision especially that, as a Muslim man, he is well aware why women veil, he explained that Americans will see them as outsiders and that the best way to try to fit in is to let go of the visible part of her religious identity (Rum 47). This is the political side of the fight, not to be visibly identified as a Muslim woman. The second sexist personal battle is with her husband who made her take off her hijab even though she did not want to do so and was surprised to find other women on the streets with their hijab who seemed to fit in easily (Rum 49).

In the case of Palestinian women, the battle is fought against both Palestinian patriarchy and the Israeli occupation. In this respect, in addition to examining women's experiences, a feminist or gender analysis critiques the mechanisms of privilege and power, including the dominance of men (or patriarchy) over women and the dominance of colonizers over colonized (Abdulhadi et al 187). Palestinian and Palestinian-American women do not expect, as such, that Western feminism will account for their needs and goals the same way it accounts for western women’s needs. After all, women

do not have the same needs and goals all the time. It is obvious that they are all united to fight against patriarchy and oppression. However, this does not infer that they have exactly the same vision of how a woman should be liberated and what forms of oppression are there to be fought. Since the present study is centred around Arab-American women and their search for home, identity and belonging, western feminism does not seem to offer the needed solutions to address the problems of this particular category of women. Instead, as stated above, Arab-American feminism is what suits best the analysis of the selected corpus of this research of the three Palestinian-American women writers, as it accounts for the other sensibilities surrounding women's lives and experiences in their hyphenated societies. Having that in mind, the following section is dedicated to Arab-Americans as a minority in the United States, in general, and the experience of Arab-American women in particular.

1.5 The Arab-Americans: Historical Analysis and Cultural Make-up

Arab-Americans, as an ethnic minority in the United States, are considered as a unique group within the dominant white culture of America. This is partially because, as the name signifies, having both labels of Arab and American seem to create an oxymoron. It is typical to think of Arabs as backward, violent people who despise everything modern, democratic, and American. It is not surprising to consider Americans as freedom advocates and liberal democrats who aim at making the world a better place to live in. Yet, to join Arabs and Americans in one word and one ethnic group seems fairly unattainable and somehow problematic in nature. Nevertheless, there are more than “three million” Arab-Americans living in the United States and making up “about 1 percent of the population” (Haddad 2).

The story of Arab-Americans starts with a small group of Muslim men from the Ottoman province of Syria who immigrated to the United States in the 1870s with the

intention of becoming wealthy and then going back to their families (Haddad 3). Their goal was never to settle in America. Instead, they wanted to benefit from the economic prosperity of America and rise up financially before setting back to their countries. However, immigrants that followed those early Syrians aimed at settling and starting a new chapter of their lives away from any political or religious persecution. According to Haddad, the number of immigrants was restricted after the First World War to allow no more than a hundred people annually from Arab countries (3). Arab-Americans lived in various regions in the United States but some places received more concentrations of Arab-Americans. One example is Little Syria, “the largest Arab-American colony in New York City on Manhattan’s lower west side along Washington Street” (Carlisle 7). This region celebrated the rich heritage of Arabs and slowly started to merge it with the westernized lifestyle of Americans.

What marked this first wave of Arab immigrants is their willingness to preserve their heritage and keep away from fully assimilating into the American lifestyle. As such, they attempted to pass on their firm belief in the value of marriage, family, and traditions to the following generation in order to preserve the Arab family's interdependence in American society (Carlisle 16). After WWII, millions of Arabs and Muslims migrated to America, entering different states of displacement, exile, and dispossession as a result of the US's direct and indirect involvement in significant Middle Eastern crises and the wars and conflicts that followed (Conrey 2). Those conflicts are mainly summarized in the Palestinian crisis of establishing the state of Israel in 1948 as well as the ensuing conflicts and wars in the Arab region (Arab-Israeli wars, Gulf War...). Because of the American foreign policy towards their lands of origins, many immigrants did not know how to react to the nationalist expectations of Americans that favoured a visible display of the immigrants’ utmost loyalty and

support to the United States even if it meant going against the policy of their homelands.

Gregory Orfalea refers to this period of second wave immigration as “The Palestinian Debacle” (151). It is commonly known among Palestinians as ‘Al-Nekba’, meaning the catastrophe, indicating the difficult situation that marked the lives of Palestinians at the time. Most immigrants, in that period, are Palestinians who were forced to leave their lands and seek refuge elsewhere. This wave is also marked by what is known as the brain drain; the mass emigration of intellectuals from newly independent Arab states (Orfalea 152). Diversity is an essential marker of this wave, as more Arab immigrants came from different Arab countries bringing with them their rich and distinct cultures and traditions.

The Second wave of Arab immigrants introduced a different cultural, social, and economic layer to the already established one by the first wave immigrants. Unlike the First wave immigrants who were mostly Christian, not well educated, and having financial problems, Second wave immigrants were mostly Muslim who were generally well educated and in a far better economic standing (Orfalea 153). Because of their distinct traits, the two waves remained separate, living in their own ways with little to no interaction, until “The devastating conflicts of 1967, 1973, and especially 1982 brought them together in a way that was unprecedented in political unity” (Orfalea 153). Both First and Second wavers realized that the best way to gain more rights and let their cause be heard in America is through uniting politically. Questions regarding Palestine, in particular, were raised and calls from countless Arab-American political activists were passed on to the American Congress at the end goal of defying the frightening rise of Zionism’s support in America.

The process of assimilation is no easy task for the Arab immigrants. Not only that they come from a totally different world culturally, politically, socially, and economically, but also that they are not quite yet ready to dismantle their Arabness at the expense of the suggested Americanisation. Nonetheless, time proved to be a helping factor. With the new generations of Arab-Americans, the question of assimilation did not pose the same amount of concern it did for the previous generations. American lifestyle was adapted to meet the traditional Arab ideals, which in turn were 'lightened' with more toleration of the prior strict Arab mores. Arab-Americans at this stage managed to create a middle ground, more like a third space, that would foster both Arab and American ideals.

Arab-Americans have resisted the stereotyped view of Arabs and Arabness as inherently barbaric ever since their establishment in the United States. However, their resistance did not exclude the uneasiness that tainted their quest to maintain their Arab identity and stick to Arab traditional ideals amidst a heavily Americanized environment. There is also the matter of seeking approval from their Arab community and the urging need to blend in the American society. As Martha Bosch-Vilarrubias explain, Arab-Americans are living in a context where identifications are subject to negotiation and always will be (58). She confirms that such situation is inevitable due to the perception that Arab and American identities are fundamentally incompatible, and that makes it difficult to reconcile them (Vilarrubias 58). As such, Arab-Americans find no option but to transcend to a thirdspace where both ends of the hyphen can co-exist peacefully.

Furthermore, the American foreign policy in the Middle East, and particularly in Palestine, directly influences Arab-American identity where questions of nationalism and patriotism are addressed. As a result, Arab-Americans develop a kind of split-

identity in which they find it difficult to choose which part to identify with, that is their homeland or their host land. This 'division of the mind' is another term for the heterotopic thirdspace that Arab-Americans occupy, which is split by the inconsistencies inherent in both an Arab and an American identity (Vilarrubias 60). Most Arab-Americans experience the ambivalent sense of belonging to the lands of their origins and the sense of belonging, or non-belonging, to their host land. For instance, Palestinian-Americans find it hard to fathom the US foreign policy and the Zionist's occupation of Palestine. It is due to their growing concern about the situation of their relatives and family in Palestine that they seek to find a means to influence US foreign policy in the Middle East.

Another vital factor that directly influences the identity and belonging of Arab-Americans is that of their family and the way they maintain their familial ties. Generally, as dwellers of a heterotopic space in America, Arab-Americans maintain their strong relations with their families and they aim at living in neighbouring regions to ensure the continuity of those relationships. The family, as an important agent in the social life of Arab-Americans, have helped in ensuring a sort of stability and order in times of loss and uncertainty. It represents the rock that keeps most Arab-Americans from falling into the confusion of non-belonging in a heterotopic space.

However, it is also plausible to denote that the family can become a burden for many Arab-Americans especially the young generation who are more westernized and perceive their traditional Arab norms as obsolete traditions in a modern American society. According to Vilarrubias, such belief leads to a clash between second-generation immigrants and their first-generation parents, who adhere to tradition and persuade their kids to follow in their footsteps by using the rhetoric of cultural authenticity (71). In this instance, family becomes a hinder in the way of the youths'

pursuit of blending and assimilating into the American culture. It also marks the opposite stand to their individualistic aspirations and the aim to build oneself autonomously at the expense of a more cooperative spirit of the family. This illustrates the reason why many Arab-American writers, especially women, portray their familial environment as a source of arising conflict. For example, Rum sees the family as a source of oppression and silencing of their offspring's aspirations, especially girls. She gives the example of Sarah who runs away from home and abandons her family to pursue her educational and social independence instead of surrendering to a traditional arranged marriage.

Since Arab immigrants are thought to carry their history with them, it is also reasonable to say that they also carry their cultural presumptions and their own perspectives on gender identity and gender relations (Vilarrubias 72). This is apparent in Rum's novel in the character of Adam, Isra's husband. Adam moved with his family to America when he was only 16. Instead of pursuing his own dream to become an 'Imam', he was forced, as the eldest son, to take care of the family financially and work in a grocery shop. Adam's views of women's place and role that he understood from his patriarchal society accompanied him to America. For him, his wife and daughters are expected to serve as housewives and mothers who give birth to males, since delivering a girl was considered as bringing shame to the family. When his expectations are not met with his wife's constant urging to allow his daughters to pursue their education and her failing to giving him the long-awaited male heir, he resolves to violence and physical oppression. This patriarchal view of women's role in society is what fuels US mainstream feminism to confirm the state of victimhood of Arab-American women and the state of violent patriarchs of Arab-American men.

Nevertheless, with the emergence of new generations of Arab-Americans, more freedom and cultural tolerance was developed from within the community. This was also followed by an active political awareness of issues in both America and the Arab world. The Palestinian cause took precedence and Arab-Americans sought to lobby American politics in their favour against Zionism. Of course, the quest is met with a refusal from the American side for even considering a roundtable talk regarding Palestinian matters, in countless occasions. The American say in justifying this stand is rooted in their history of supporting the Jews and helping them establish their own state, even if this meant dispossessing Palestinians of their lands.

The dreadful incident of 9/11 destroyed the shaking image that many Arab-Americans worked hard to draw in the past decades. Arabs and Muslims were considered as the enemy, the terrorist clan that came to unclothe America of its freedom and democracy. Neighbours turned against their Arab-American neighbours and public life for the latter became an unleashed hell. Arab-American Muslim women who were veiled became the first visible target for the angry Americans who harassed them verbally and even physically. The number of hate-crimes increased and Arab-Americans, especially Muslims, feared even the small act of stepping outside their houses. Discrimination against Arab-Americans reached its peak when calls from Americans were raised to have the Arabs go back to their countries.

Amidst such circumstances, Arab-Americans' awareness of the importance of changing their stereotyped image grew out of the fear that such views might be internalized and accepted by the coming generation as the authentic identity of Arab-Americans as an undesirable ethnic community in America. Since literature is the safe store of cultures, identities and traditions, Arab-American writers took it upon themselves to record and preserve their history and tradition in their writings. Those

books are the concrete insurance for the future generations that they have indeed a strong foundation upon which they can claim their rootedness on a shaking, unstable ground of multiculturalism.

The three novels, which are analysed in the present study, represent the very thing of preserving an identity and a 'life' in a book. Susan Abulhawa, Hala Alyan, and Etan Rum, as three Palestinian-American women writers, depict the lives, histories, and traditions of Palestinian-Americans in a world that claims the impossibility of the paradoxically ethnic minority in the US. Yet, they managed to display that it is quite possible to be half-Palestinian and half-American and identify with both identities equally. The Palestinian-American women writers succeed to portray how being Palestinian does not essentially mean being perfect and just all the time, the same way being American does not always infer being wrong and unjust.

For Arab-American women, the struggle is double-edged and even more ambiguous. In fact, in the corpus of the three novels, neither the Arab world nor the Western one is free from charges when mentioning women's oppression and exploitation. Each culture receives its fair share of blame and criticism. Arab-American women are considered as targets for both the Western sexism and prejudice and the Arab patriarchal oppression and exploitation. In both worlds, women's life business seems to be sorted out by their men. Even when they claim to give women more freedoms, patriarchal systems keep women under check and confine them to the boxes of a supposed femininity. Any attempt to break those conventions is labelled as a denouncing of femininity in which women are perceived negatively as ascending to a masculine realm in which they cannot belong. It is because of this supposition that many women fear to associate themselves with feminism or any movement that supports women's rights.

Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum revisit taken for granted themes of marriage, family ties, and the role of women in society, in their literature. While traditional arranged marriage is still valid as a welcomed option for many Arab and Arab-American women, modern views of marriage and dating for long periods of time before settling on marriage is also a reality for most women. The question of pursuing one's education and career before settling down is also present in the works of the three women writers. The unchanging image of the family as a sacred entity in the lives of individuals is inevitably existent however with varying degrees. It is possible to go against the family if the decision is proven as unjust and unjustified that many young women defy and bash their families all together. Most importantly, women are enjoying more freedom and control in managing their lives as opposed to the previous generations where total unquestionable submission is rather favoured at the expense of standing out. Women, in the three novels, are mothers, wives, and daughters as well as students, professors and businesswomen. Women's roles in society are changing with the rise of awareness and tolerance. This does not suggest that the fight to end patriarchal oppression is over since winning a battle does not infer winning the war.

Another fascinating theme that is celebrated in the three novels is that of the representation of the Arab-American woman in a new fashion that does not conform to the previous prejudiced depictions. The three Palestinian-American women writers draw a new picture of the Arab-American woman with all her strengths and weaknesses. As such, they tell the stories of women who grew up in both loving and harsh conditions. Stories of women who learned how to love freely and of women who learned to fear intimacy altogether. They tell the stories of deprived women who are violently abused behind closed doors as well as stories of women who are embraced and cherished by their families.

The stories also reveal that there is nothing wrong in a woman's choice to get married and favour domesticity, just the way it is totally fine if she wants to delay marriage to pursue her professional aspirations. Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum agree that the problem is not in what a woman does but in whether she has the freedom to choose what suits her without any pressure from either family or society. Motherhood is as important for a woman as it is her career. Traditional views of Arab women as the victims and the submissive creatures of their own circumstances are contested in the different stories of women who did not surrender to oppression and rather chose to break those shackles to set themselves free. The novels present the realities of the Arab-American woman as it happens to be without any utopian decoration. Of course, this is not to say that all Arab-American women share the same story or see life through the same lens. However, those stories work as representative instances that unite women's plight and give them a medium that they can use to relate.

What Arab-American literature aims for, among many other goals, is to attempt to create a world that combines both ends of the hyphen without much trouble. It aims at providing a thirdspace for those individuals who felt caught between the binaries of the East and the West. Those stories include Arab-American women (and men) who dwell in the in-between, "where the Middle East is a not-too-distant home, but America is still not a completely comfortable one" (Darraj 3). The depictions of women as strong and weak characters assure the authenticity of the representation. No culture is perfect just the way no woman is perfect and the Arab-American woman is no exception.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, recent studies highlight the importance of analysing space and its vital effects on the understanding of literary works. As such, Geocriticism as a spatial theory

is being used to study how human's perceptions and representations of space and place affect their lives. Geocriticism also addresses the issues related to real and imagined places in literature.

Throughout my study, Tally's theory of spatiality and geocriticism is used to analyse the notions of space and place and how they influence the concepts of home, identity, and belonging for Arab-American women in particular. This chapter also explains Soja's concept of thirdspace and how it is crucial in addressing the issue of in-between-ness that marks the experience of the Arab-Americans. Because of the contradictions of the two opposing worlds of Arabs and Americans, Arab-Americans are obliged to embrace a third space that tolerates their uniqueness and encourages it rather than denying and fighting it.

Feminism, postfeminism, and Arab-American feminisms are also deployed in this chapter to reflect on the experience of women in a patriarchal society. As it is revealed throughout the chapter, each movement has its strengths and shortcomings. Both feminism and postfeminism failed to deal with Arab-American women's issues, the thing that gave rise to Arab-American feminisms. Women do not share the same vision of what liberate them and better represent them and this is why having a unified feminist movement is not highly efficient. The last section of this chapter is dedicated to the exploration of Arab-Americans. The section illustrates the peculiarities of early immigrants as well as the other waves.

For Arab-Americans, the process of integrating into the larger culture of America was not an easy one. It was faced with hostility and resistance. However, Arab-Americans managed to claim their stand and position themselves in the American society. For Arab-American women, the struggle is double-edged since they are fighting both negative assumptions regarding Arab and American women. It is fair

enough to say that the postmodern environment has helped women to improve their living conditions and have more access to the domains, which were once exclusively claimed by men. Nevertheless, as displayed in the three novels by Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum, Arab-American women still suffer from oppression and exploitation from both ends of the hyphen. The following chapters will practically illustrate those raised issues regarding Arab-American women spaces and their realizations of home, identity and belonging as depicted in the stories of different characters in *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, *Salt Houses*, and *A Woman Is No Man*.

Chapter 2

“Because They Stole Our Country”: Mapping Home, Belonging, and Identity in Susan Abulhawa’s *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015)

Introduction

In *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, Susan Abulhawa discloses the reality of millions of Palestinians and Palestinian Americans who suffer from an ongoing ‘domicide’. The latter is a term coined by Porteous in 2001 to refer to the purposeful, intentional demolition of a person's house, resulting in their suffering (Porteous & Smith 3). Abulhawa highlights the struggle of Palestinians, particularly women and the double oppression exercised upon them under the Israeli settler colonialism. She also focuses on the drawbacks of such double issue on the matters of home, belonging and identity.

The novel focuses on women’s lives, especially the different characters of the Baraka family from Beit Daras, Palestine, before and after the coming of the colonizer. Abulhawa seeks to spotlight on the struggles of Palestinian and Palestinian American women facing homelessness, non-belonging and loss at different stages of their existence. This chapter deploys a spatial geocritical feminist lens in analysing the novel. The opening pages deal with the concept of “domicide”. The term refers to the planned destruction of homes by given agencies to meet a designated purpose. It is then sensible to project the term to Israeli colonialism which is deliberately destroying Palestinians’ homes and building new constructions upon them in a clear attempt to ethnically cleanse Palestinians and erase any trace of their existence in the land. The chapter moves to delineate the notion of In-betweenness that characterises the novel starting from the very title. This is aided by the use of Soja’s concept of “thirdspace”, particularly, in dealing with the unique position of Palestinian Americans as well as the real and imagined spaces and places in the story. The next section is dedicated to the

issue of non-belonging and being constantly out of place. The latter is the initial condition of the character of Nur, the Palestinian American woman who finds herself lost and unable to realize her identity. The chapter also highlights the complex process of hybrid identity formation for Palestinian American women, exemplified in the character of Nur. The following section is about what it means for women to live in exile and if homecoming is a valid option for them. The end of the chapter deals with women's portrayal in Abulhawa's narrative, and how the author empowers them as a means of liberation from both patriarchy and imperialism.

2.1 Domicide: The Killing of Home

Since the creation of Israel, it has always been quite hard for Palestinians to claim their land and pin it down on the large map of the world without much ado. The land of Palestine has been replaced by entity on the grounds that it is the Jew's right to return to their promised lost land, one that happened to be occupied by Palestinians for hundreds of years. In the Israeli-Palestinian equation with regard to homeland, the latter's fate is often overlooked and viewed as unimportant. As such, the settler colonialism of Israel has never hidden its clear intention of wiping the trace of everything Palestinian off the face of the Near East. In doing so, "domicide" prevails. According to Porteous and Smith, domicile is the "deliberate destruction of home against the will of the home dweller" (3). What the Israeli forces are doing in Palestine is a purposeful destruction of lands and homes that results in Palestinians' homelessness within their own homeland.

Countless newspapers covered the matter of houses demolition and the mass killings of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. According to a newspaper review in Palestine News & Info Agency website, in 27th July 2014, The Palestinian Arabic

daily' Sunday issue featured headlines about the massive destruction of entire Palestinian neighborhoods and the savage Israeli atrocities in Gaza that were discovered after a humanitarian truce on Saturday (<https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/81475>).

In her novel, Abulhawa stresses this aspect of the “murder of home” (Porteous & Smith 3), when she describes the state of the Baraka family after the destruction of their home and their displacement to the refugee camps in Gaza. In one of the scenes, the character of Mamdouh, the elder brother of Nazmiyeh, was staring at the “ration booklet” given to him by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency “which indicated that he was the head of the household. But there was no house and there was nothing to hold” (Abulhawa 46). The title of head of household meant nothing to Mamdouh, and other countless Palestinian men in the camps, when in reality there were only tents barely standing to shelter them and their large families.

In their more formal definition of domicide, Porteous and Smith add that in order to achieve specific objectives, human agency intentionally destroys homes, causing misery for the victims (12). As such, this human agency, embodied in the Israeli colonizer, causes physical and emotional suffering to the Palestinians who watch their homes falling to the ground without being able to prevent it or act upon it in courts. Finding themselves forced to the margins of the land to the overly crowded camps, Palestinians seek to rebuild their homes even in those harsh conditions. Elaborating on the notion of domicide, Nowicki explains how it is vital to understand this concept by extending its meaning and, consequently, its applicability to critical geographies of house literature, that it would account to the complex and interconnected components that make up the home as well as its destruction (788).

Palestinian women, in *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, and despite the ongoing domicide, were determined to make “a tender home together from shared wounds, loss, and the widow’s love of food” (Abulhawa 46). Even after the demolition of their homes, the women of the Baraka family refused to surrender to the new reality as they used whatever means available to re-make their homes. This can be attributed to the resilience of the Palestinian people as a group under occupation. According to Marie et al, resilience must be viewed as culturally embedded. It is a multifaceted, intricate relationship between a person's physical and social ecology and their capacity (25). Women in Abulhawa’s novel assume such cultural resilience as they reflect it on their physical and social realities. More specifically, resilience or ‘Sumud’ became a Palestinian strategy to protect identity, resist the Israeli uprooting policy, and restore dignity in the fight for national liberty (Marie et al. 29).

The actual act of destroying someone’s home, or what is defined as domicide, brings to mind the physical wrecking of a mansion or a house leaving only rubbles and debris. However, home is not exclusively the dwelling or the abode that one lives in. Another way to think about home is as a multidimensional and intricate geographical term that typically relates to a location, a collection of emotions or cultural meanings, and the relationships between the two (Blunt & Dowling 2). In this respect, Palestinians who witness this domicide are suffering emotionally more than physically. What the Israeli settler colonialism is aiming at in Palestine through domicide is not just to strip Palestinians off their houses and lands. The aim, first and foremost, is to uproot them and end their belonging to their homeland.

Via eliminating their physical claim to the land by the Israeli demolishers, Palestinians lose the solid proof of home to call for their right to remain. This also directly affects Palestinians’ identity and belonging. As explained by Blunt and

Dowling, people's perceptions of themselves are influenced by and created by their experienced and imagined impressions of home, which as a place and an imagination construct identity (24). As such, the Baraka family in Abulhawa's novel identify as Palestinian through living in and experiencing their grand home Palestine. When the latter is taken away from them because of colonization and domicide, the Palestinian identity faces questioning.

When referring to the Palestinian problem of identity, Braidotti and Gilroy explain how "Saïd sought to affirm the existence of a people whose right to exist was permanently in question, whose name was disallowed" (129). The domicide succeeded in not merely destroying Palestinian houses and lands but also in attempting to erase their name and existence off the world's map. People, today, speak of the state of Israel but only few ones still refer to Palestine. This displays the evil of domicide and colonization not just in the spatial considerations but also in cultural and social matters.

As it is discussed in chapter one, what turns a mere space into a place and a home is the attachment of meaning to that space by the people who come to occupy it. Porteous and Smith argue that, "this centeredness of home is felt most keenly when home is lost" (7). Palestinians lost their home and this is what makes it vital to them to claim it back. Yi Fu Tuan further elaborates that, "to be forcibly evicted from one's home...is to be stripped of a sheathing which in its familiarity protects the human being from the outside world" (99). The eviction leaves Palestinians the most vulnerable to outside threats as well as inside insecurities of non-belonging and identity crisis.

In Abulhawa's story, the women characters of the Baraka family are the active agents in preserving and creating a home for its members. Despite the calamities of war

and loss, Nazmiyeh and the rest of the women represent the string that kept the family together despite the harsh domicile. They became refugees in Gaza, the place that Abulhawa describes as “the largest open-air prison in the world” (9). The temporary tents that were planted in Gaza turned into permanent dwellings with cements and bricks. Palestinians in the camps were making a new home. As explained by Blunt and Dowling, “home does not simply exist, but is made” (23). Home is made from shared emotions of belonging and collective memory. For Nazmiyeh, leaving Palestine is out of the question even if that meant living in harsh conditions in the camps. As long as it was a Palestinian land of her ancestors, she did not mind the cruelty of settler colonialism.

Spivak draws an analogy between the suffering of Palestinians and that of South Africans during the Apartheid era. She illustrates that “for today Palestine is under the kind of sustained siege that is more comparable to South Africa under apartheid” (qtd.in Braidotti & Gilroy 51). However, unlike the world standing against the injustice of apartheid and the suffering of South Africans, the Palestinian cause received rather a dull response from most nations who twisted the narrative and proclaimed Israel as a self-defending state. Palestinians were perceived negatively, in this respect, as a bunch of anti-Semitic Arab terrorists who denied the Jews their right to the land. Nonetheless, “the great achievement” of Palestinians so far, “is that against all odds, all attempts to expel them physically, culturally, historically, personally” they “do belong to Palestine still- even if Palestine does not belong to them- not yet” (Braidotti & Gilroy 140). What the latter implies is that Palestinians will always belong to Palestine even if they live outside its borders and even when it is taken by the Israeli’s and renamed as the state of Israel.

Regardless of Nazmiyeh's attempts to keep the Baraka family together and maintain their home in Palestine, her brother and sons were searching for work abroad and even planning to settle there. This meant that "rather than returning and regrouping, family were leaving and dispersing" (Abulhawa 57). Nazmiyeh, in this instance, symbolizes Palestine (the homeland) whilst the family dispersal connotes diaspora and exile. Humanistic geography clashes in this respect with feminist geography in the analogy of women and the land. As Rose asserts, "place is represented as Woman, in order that humanists can define their own masculine rationality" (56). However, in Abulhawa's novel that is not truly the case.

To illustrate, Nazmiyeh, the mother, is in a way a projection of the notion of the motherland that is permanent and unshaken. Abulhawa suggests how important it is for Palestinian women to carry their home and identity within them and preserve it as such. Furthermore, the women characters of Abulhawa's story hold a strong position in the Palestinian society. They are treated with respect and affection and their social status is equal to men. This is exemplified in the character of Nazmiyeh who is treated with the highest esteem in Beit Daras, by both her husband and her entire family.

This does not deny that the Palestinian culture is patriarchal in the sense that they cherished having males over females. In their study, "Gender inequality and associated factors from the perspective of the Palestinian youth: a cross-sectional study", Nasr and Hammoudeh elaborate on this phenomenon of favouring having males over females and the socio-cultural factors that affect such decision. The reason behind such favouring of males over females has to do with traditional gender roles. Giving that the Palestinian society is under colonialism and suffering, having boys lessened the burden of dealing with the harsh lifestyle and meant having more potential fighters for Palestine's freedom.

The victims of domicide, also, struggle with maintaining their sense of identity and belonging. As Porteous and Smith put it, as the primary hub of our lives; the home fosters and maintains identity, offers refuge, solitude, and protection (31). However, when this centre that holds the component of the self together is lost and destroyed, identity faces a crisis and belonging loses the string that holds it firm. Palestinians cling onto their lands even if that meant taking some dirt and use it for gardening in the camps or solely holding their home's key as if the door is still there to be opened soon. Palestinians' undying hope is what keeps them going despite all the turmoil.

As highlighted by Porteous and Smith, "the strong sense of self created by a strong sense of home may also be the factor that preserves you when home is lost" (54). To illustrate, despite the loss of their home because of the domicide, the Baraka family persisted and they sought to establish a new home in the camps. For them, home is more than a physical dwelling. The strong sense of home that resided inside each one of them enabled them to move on even when they have lost everything. This unmatched resilience is indeed unique to the Palestinian people who do not mind starting their lives from scratch as long as it is still Palestine.

Palestinians' collective identity is rooted to the nation's soil. Nevertheless, the Israeli settler colonialism is anxiously trying to uproot the Palestinian identity. It seeks to ethnically clean the land from anything that is Palestinian and Arab. As Porteous and Smith put it, "Palestinian identity was obliterated from a 'Judaicized' landscape cleansed of Palestinian markers" (90). The attempt to erase, not merely, the physical propriety of Palestine but also the memory of its people at the end goal of altering history is the main reason behind the ongoing domicide.

After losing their home in Beit Daras, the Baraka family moved to the refugee camps in Gaza. Their place of attachment where they loved and lived so far is lost and forgotten. Only a vague memory lingers. A memory of freedom and prosperity. A memory of a close-knitted family and a secure community that is all gone now because of domicide. Mamdouh was obliged to move to Kuwait with his wife, when life in the camps became intolerable. However, Kuwait was not going to become his new home. Soon after, Mamdouh decided to move to America searching for a better life and hoping that one day he can go back to his homeland.

Nazmiyeh chose to remain in Gaza. Her husband, Atiyeh, was a fisherman and so were the rest of her boys. The grand sea with its endless blessings provided them with sufficient income, barely enough to keep them from starvation. However, they were always grateful to whatever god blessed them with. Nazmiyeh's small family is the example of the resilient Palestinian character that does not surrender to the grim reality. Despite the horrors of the war and poverty, they lived gracefully, resisting the brutal colonizer and fighting for Palestine's freedom. As for Mamdouh who moved to America, a new chapter of ambivalent feelings and in-between-ness was about to start, its culmination was with the coming of his granddaughter Nur.

2.2 The Notions of In-Betweenness and Thirdspace

Abulhawa's novel is loaded with the notion of in-betweenness and thirdspace. Starting with the very title, 'The Blue Between Sky and Water', signifies the existence of a middle ground in the novel that is unconventional; something evoking in-between-ness. Abulhawa illustrates that this blue exists between sky and water. However, the reader cannot tell the real nature of this place (if it is a place to start with) merely from the title. Moreover, this invoked in-betweenness suggests that whatever the novel is

trying to convey, it surely does not firmly adhere to the general rules of the physical world. To a certain extent, the reader is confused when first hearing about this place that is called the blue.

In addition to the title, the first time that the reader is introduced to the blue is when Khaled starts talking about it. Khaled is Nazmiyeh's grandson and the eldest son of her only daughter Alwan. Khaled calls this place "the quiet blue" and he describes it as the "place without time, where (he) could soak up all the juices of life and let them run through him like a river" (Abulhawa 11). As such, the blue appears to be a timeless realm, more like a land of dreams, where Khaled can feel alive and free without any constraints. However, what adds more confusion to both the notion of the blue and the character of Khaled is that Nazmiyeh's sister Mariam "created an imaginary friend named Khaled" (14) two generations before the birth of Alwan's son who holds the same name. It is as if Abulhawa is suggesting that this timeless space that is referred to as the blue is where the spirits of both the dead and the unborn resides.

In a scene where Mariam was meeting her imaginary friend Khaled to teach her how to read and write everyday "by the river of Beit Daras" (Abulhawa 14), the blue appears to be a real place by the riverbank. Abulhawa creates a place that is called the blue, which is both physical (the actual river) and metaphysical (the realm of souls). In this regard, the blue is a thirdspace in the novel, as both a real and an imagined place. It is a place where contradictions coexist. The insistence that it is a place without time further stresses the element of the spatial over the temporal. Time seems irrelevant in this instance. Space takes precedence, here, and is regarded as a comforting realm that abides by no rules.

Thirdspace also relates to the character of Khaled. The ‘real’ Khaled (Alwan’s son) who narrates many incidents in the novel seems to be the imaginary Khaled from Mariam’s play days. It is also revealed that Mariam, with her mismatched eye colour, has a special ability of seeing people’s feelings in the form of colours. Thus, she is able to see things that ordinary people do not perceive. Perhaps this explains why she could see Khaled who “would traverse time and death, before (he) was born, to wait for her by the river, where (he) taught her written language” (Abulhawa 25). As such, Abulhawa plays with notions of life, death, and time creating a place that goes beyond the normal; a thirdspace of the real-and-imagined.

The deliberate bewilderment that Abulhawa is installing in the reader is, in fact, expressed explicitly in the novel. When referring to Khaled and his condition in regards to the blue, it is stated that Khaled himself does not “fully understand it and don’t expect” the reader to fully understand too”, but perhaps the reader “can believe” that “there are truths that defy other truths, where time folds on itself” (Abulhawa 31). Here, the suggested ‘need to believe’ in the potential paradox that some truths defy other truths explains the condition of the sceptical postmodern world where truths instead of “truth” prevail. As such, Abulhawa is inviting the reader to have faith in her account even if they do not fully grasp the events that she is uncovering. She speaks of time as some entity that can be stopped and controlled in the space of the blue.

Another instance of a thirdspace is found in their family picnic in Beit Daras before the coming of the colonizer when they hired a photographer to take their pictures. The photograph displayed the family as they were enjoying their time by the river, featuring their mother Um Mamdouh, Nazmiyeh, Mamdouh, Mariam, and to their surprise, Khaled; the boy with a white streak of hair. Nazmiyeh asked Mariam before if Khaled was a djinni (demon) like Sulayman. Mariam assured her that he was

not a djinni but rather he was Nazmiyeh's grandson. Khaled was captured in the photograph and "the family could not recall seeing Khaled that day on the river" (Abulhawa 35). The only explanation that the reader receives is that in the space that is called the blue that is by the river of Beit Daras between sky and water, the spirit of the unborn Khaled communicated with his great aunt Mariam and taught her how to read and write.

Following this thread, both Khaled and the blue are said to occupy a thirdspace. As explained by Soja, thirdspace is the place of the real and the imagined where contradictions are embraced. At first glance, both Khaled and the blue seem to be a mere creation of the imagination yet they prove to have real presence in the novel of an actual boy and an actual place by the river. The added quality of not abiding by the law of time suggests that the blue, as a soothing realm for the wounded souls of Palestinians, will always remain intact by colonialism or mortality. Khaled, its main dweller, seems to enjoy being in the blue that gives him uncommon freedom and enables him to escape from the harsh reality of a colonized homeland.

This is similar to a study conducted by Sharma, in which the latter used Soja's notion of thirdspace to analyse Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. In her analysis, Sharma focused on the Forest of Arden as a classic example of a thirdspace, a transitional area where characters are free to explore and reassemble their identities while the strict social conventions and hierarchies of royal life are suspended (560). In the same vein, Abulhawa presents the realm of the blue as a thirdspace where characters are not governed by any laws.

In-betweenness marks the overall reality of being Palestinian-American. In the novel, Nur, Mamdouh's granddaughter represents the struggles of living between the

binaries of both worlds, the Arab and the American. The war drove her grandfather to move from Palestine to Kuwait and then to the United States searching for a better life for him and his family. Yet, his only son, Mhamed, did not show any enthusiasm towards his Arab identity and instead he preferred to identify as an American. Mhamed, Nur's father died in a car accident soon after and Nur was left in the care of her grandfather who taught her what it means to be Palestinian.

Nur is the embodiment of some of those "pieces" that "got lost on the other side of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans" when "destiny was inevitably dislocated" (Abulhawa 61). As a second-generation Palestinian American, Nur perfectly captures what it means to dwell in a thirdspace of in-betweenness. Just like the character of Nur, countless Palestinian Americans feel stuck amidst the contradictions of East and West. As Brocket contends, Palestinian Americans are, in most cases, "not Arab enough for the Arabs and not American enough for the Americans" (9). Nur lived with her grandfather Mamdouh in North Carolina until he passed away. He was the string that kept her connected to her Palestinian heritage.

Nur realized her Palestinian identity through what her grandfather provided her with in their small home. The countless stories that he kept telling her about their land and their people helped in keeping the memory of Palestine alive in Nur even when she never actually been there. However, after she lost her grandfather, Nur found herself all alone, lacking a family, a clan, a territory, and a nation because nothing in her immediate surroundings resembled anything Palestinian, not even the uprooted lives of exile (Abulhawa 82). As highlighted by Abulhawa, Nur in her in-between state of being, ironically, represented the most fundamental reality of what it is to be Palestinian—exiled, displaced, and disinherited. (82). The Americans saw her as a danger to their American values while the Arabs regarded her as too American to abide

by their cultural norms and traditions. As such, Nur embraced a thirdspace where she can be both Palestinian and American without much ado.

This thirdspace that Nur creates, as the representative of Palestinian Americans, is what Brocket calls “positioned belonging” that implies the way in which “members of the second-generation have reworked and unsettled dominant ideologies and categorizations about their place in the US and Palestine” (10). This process marks ending the ongoing ‘othering’ in both cultures via reconsidering the unique nature of the hybrid or the in-between and through eliminating all sources of comparisons and deficiencies. One aspect of these comparisons is tied to the issue of self-identification vs. society’s definition of identity. The majority of the members of the Palestinian American community had a clear definition of who they are as hybrids of two opposing cultures (see Brocket for more details). This situation led them to refute the boxing that both worlds (the Arab and the American) imposed on them and instead they opted for a middle position, a thirdspace that tolerates this in-betweenness.

The in-between position of Arab-Americans highlights the liminal state of their hybrid identity that is hard to decipher by both ends of the hyphen. As Abu Sitta puts it, life in thirdspace as Palestinian-Americans is similar to “a life of Schizophrenia”. One has an “outward life, with such good friends, interesting teaching... and outings on the weekends”, and another life of “the world left behind” and the constant worries of “who was still alive, who had died, who was exiled and where” (Abu Sitta 216). Perhaps it is this dual life and the liminal state of most Palestinian Americans that makes them more vulnerable and fragile. Living in America and witnessing its explicit support of Israel, aches countless Palestinian Americans who feel a sort of betrayal to their original homeland.

What adds to their suffering is the state of the ‘other’ that faces them in both worlds. In this respect, Najla Said, (Edward Said’s daughter) illustrates her own experience as someone living in-between the binaries of East and West. According to Najla Said, it was odd to travel to Palestine knowing that you are one of ‘them’, but still appearing, sounding, and behaving like one of ‘us’ (86). The ‘them’ vs. ‘us’ dichotomy is a clear indication of the liminal position in which Najla Said, as a Palestinian American, lived in. From her account, it is apparent that such position is not marked by comfort and ease but rather it is tainted by ambiguity. In fact, Nur in Abulhawa’s novel echoes the latter.

Another liminal thirdspace that is highly important in the novel is the camp. Palestinians who lost their homes because of the strategic domicide found themselves pushed to the periphery and the marginalized edges of their homeland to take refuge in overcrowded camps. With Israel confiscating more than 78% of the Palestinian lands in 1948 (Pappe xxiv), Palestinians who stayed were forcibly encamped in the remaining occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Naturally, life in the camps is not equal, or even close, to life in Palestinians natal villages and homes before the coming of the colonizer. However, most Palestinians managed to recreate their homes within the camps even when the harsh living conditions proved to be a real challenge.

The novel shows the Baraka family moving to the Nusseirat camp in Gaza after the domicide of Beit Daras. The spatial nature of the camp indicates its state of in-betweenness and liminality. The temporary “cloth tents” which were placed initially in the camp to shelter the Palestinians, were replaced by “mud bricks and corrugated metal” (Abulhawa 47). The liminality of the Nusseirat camp as a place of transition, a temporary station and a place of refuge to countless Palestinians, turned the camp into an ambivalent permanent home for its dwellers when Israel made it clear that there is

no such thing as “a right to return” for Palestinians. According to Pappe, Jewish Israelis' concern that Arabs will eventually outnumber them is the main reason they are refusing to grant Palestinians the right to return (253).

As such, the camps as designated “waiting zones” invite for a discussion of borders and borderlands (Agier 7). In the case of the Nusseirat camp, being at the heart of the Gaza Strip does not deny the fact that the camp is also situated in a border space when compared to the other territories. In fact, Palestine as a whole is all about borders that are set by the Israeli settler colonialism to settle what is ‘theirs’ and what is ‘ours’. The aim is to keep Palestinians in demarked spaces. To keep them under control and surveillance is one illustration for Israel’s obsession with borders and checkpoints. As Agier contends, “the camp, especially when it endures, represents a border situation; it is a space under control yet always liminal” (151). Palestinian refugee camps acquire the ability to endure the calamities of colonization and, as such, they turn into a unique kind of borderlands.

Following the same thread, Agier defines the refugee camp as an “out-place” “not only - a space of atomized and/or abandoned individuals” but also as “a space on the margin, at the outer limit, an inbetween-space” (151). Nevertheless, instead of letting the dark aura surrounding this space destroy everything that is human and emotional, refugees manage to turn it into a site of belonging and acceptance. At a given point of their existence, for refugees, refugee camps become (and/or continue to be) places of significance, belonging, and remembrance that transcend time and location. (Cox et.al 289). As such, camps acquire the characteristics of native homes as they restore the lost sense of homeliness and belonging. As Cox et al. put it, home is not “just a physical shelter against the weather: it is an affective shelter against the big

world that doesn't know us, doesn't care about us, has no inclination to cherish or protect us" (250).

Another definition of camps stresses the temporary nature of the latter. According to Ramadan, until a long-term solution to their predicament can be found, refugees may receive protection and humanitarian aid in the refugee camp (1). However, in the case of the Palestinian refugees, the temporary space turns into a permanent space in which the residents become accustomed to life in the camps. Abulhawa highlights this matter in her novel as the Baraka family celebrates the marriages of their sons and daughters in the overcrowded camp (48). She also describes the other sad side of life in the camps with the mass shooting of civilians and the martyrdom of children (Abulhawa 180).

One pivotal fact about the refugee camp is that it exists "on the margin of the world" (Agier 3). As they are first established to get rid of the unwanted population, refugee camps, in this sense, ultimately create a new way of existing in the world that is marked by roaming and persistent poverty, either temporarily or permanently (Agier 15). For countless Palestinians, refugee camps have evolved from being areas of transition, to permanent-temporary scapes of exile that provide insight into Palestine's past and future (Ramadan 2). The in-between liminal nature of the camp renders it simultaneously as the area of safety and the area of peril, the starting point, and most crucially, the point of return, as well as everything in between (Cox et al. 296). As such, Palestinian refugees in the camps are stuck in the middle of the defined binary of belonging and non-belonging.

The Palestinian refugee camp, as an initial liminal space, stops being a temporary location, a transit area used while anticipating an imagined homecoming

(Mbembe 12). Instead, the camp becomes the new home for those refugees. Mbembe argues that in a spatial structure, what was once considered an exception turns into the norm and the rule seems to become everlasting. (12). Children who are born in the refugee camps only know about their native homes and villages through the accounts of their family. For these children, the camp is home. For example, in the novel, Nazmiyeh's grandchildren, Khaled and Rhet Shel, are born and raised in the Nusseirat camp and they only know about Beit Daras from the family's accounts (Abulhawa 125). Nevertheless, what unites the generations of the natives of Beit Daras and their offspring is the fact that they are living out of place.

2.3 (Non)-Belonging and Out of Place

It is vital for individuals to establish a connection with their place of birth and residence. This unseen connection is generally known as the sense of belonging that one has towards one's birthplace or home. The sense of belonging is generated through a set of interconnected social ties that are, especially, developed in the early stages of the individual's life (Tally 33). As Parekh puts it, every human being ought to be a member of some sort of unique cultural group where they can feel anchored and know that they belong (92).

However, for Palestinians, belonging is a contested notion. Israel has attempted to erase anything that marked a Palestinian existence in the land. Palestine is a land of villages, *par excellence*. By August 1949, Israel had completely destroyed half of the towns using bulldozing machines (Pappé et al. 65). When the place of belonging is whipped off the map, it becomes both a demanding and tiring quest to prove that it once existed. As Abu Sitta puts it, the primary objective has been to gather the fragments of the wreckage and meticulously restore the devastated environment, in an

attempt to restore what turned into rubble (xi). In this respect, the national collective memory of Palestinians is vital. The Zionist's project recognized the importance of the sense of home for Palestinians and as such worked on ethnically cleansing the land of everything Palestinian (Porteous & Smith 90). The Israeli settler colonialism was trying to put into practice the claim that Palestine was a land devoid of inhabitants, and that it was accepted to take it for themselves (Abu Sitta 269). Most Palestinians who were forced out of their lands were faced by the new unpleasant reality of being out of place.

The systematic uprooting of Palestinians has affected their sense of home, which in turn have affected their sense of belonging. The stability of home and security is an essential component of establishing the roots that tie one to one's spatiality. However, the Palestinian character is indeed unique in that its national identity is inextricably linked to experiences of dispersal and exile (Ball 131). To put it differently, Palestinians' sense of home, identity and belonging is tied to the fact that they are constantly out of place. The stolen homeland is carved in their Palestinians' hearts as the symbol of resilience and resistance and the hope that keeps them going in their fight for liberation.

In Abulhawa's novel, the Baraka family are but one example of what it means to be out of place. As they were forced out of their native village of Beit Daras, the Baraka family found themselves seeking refuge in the overcrowded Nusseirat camp in the Gaza Strip (Abulhawa 46). Abulhawa especially highlights the initial situation, after the evacuation, of women who found themselves "burdened by shock, mud, and humiliation" as they were "waiting for someone to do something, waiting to go home to Beit Daras" (47). Nevertheless, the hope of returning to their homes started to slide out of the daily picture and a new acceptance of the refuge life took place. As such, as

their husbands constructed community kitchens and subterranean ovens for baking, women began to invest in their temporary quarters (Abulhawa 47).

The Palestinian refugees in the Nusseirat camp have developed a new home when the abnormal situation turned into a normal routine. Life for these refugees did not stop the moment they lost their homes. Instead, they collected their broken pieces and built with them their lives in the camps. However, when men found no jobs in the camp, they resolved to fetch for a source of living outside Palestine (Abulhawa 50). Elaborating on Agier's study on refugee camps, Picker and Pasquetti stress this aspect of normalizing social life in such spaces. They have also confirmed the need to view camps through various angles not simply as temporary sites for refugees.

Nonetheless, life in the camps is not an easy task. When it became hard for the Baraka family to live on the UN support that provided some basics of food and clothing, Mamdouh resolved to work in Egypt to suffice his family's needs. Abulhawa emphasises how Mamdouh continued to be carried farther and further from home by the tide of cheap labour (50). After Cairo, Mamdouh and his wife Yasmine moved to Kuwait in pursuit of a better life. He worked relentlessly and his efforts were paying off (Abulhawa 52). Abulhawa, also, sheds light on Palestinians' situation in the neighbouring Arab countries that was marked by both "pity and exploitation" (50). As Hanafi contends, Palestinians in the Gulf area are abused by a system of economics that discriminates against them and gives them little constitutional protection at work (163).

Mamdouh represents Palestinians who are constantly out of place, even against their will. Life in Kuwait provided him with a sense of settlement and ease, but that was also temporary when Mamdouh had to move again; to "Amreeka" (Abulhawa 76).

At this stage, Mamdouh started his diasporic wandering. In accordance with Kalra et al., diasporic individuals are bearers of a mindset that fosters a realization of difference, which is a fundamental component of self-identity (30). Mamdouh's difference in terms of being an Arab, more precisely a Palestinian, in a western country reinforced his sense of identity. However, this difference does not solely bring about positive outcomes. A person's sense of safety, identity, and physical and psychological wellbeing are all significantly impacted by their sense of belonging or estrangement (Linhard & Parsons 8).

The definition of belonging varies, as it is a highly contested notion, especially in contemporary times. Yuval-Davis sees belonging as an abstract mental realization regarding the attachment and feelings associated with one's home (197). In addition, he stresses the notion of belonging as an ongoing operation (199). Because of this dynamic nature of belonging, episodes of non-belonging may take place and result in a liminal situation. The latter can be a brief period of transition during which identity is rebuilt, or it can be viewed as a longer-term sense of ambiguity and in-betweenness in a situation that is changing (Beech 288).

It has been difficult for Mamdouh to face the new cultural reality of the Western world as he experienced an episode of non-belonging. Abulhawa insists that "exile made him a foreigner, permanently out of place, everywhere" (66). As immigrants in the US, many Palestinians feel that their "belonging", "security" and "rights" are "quickly and swiftly eradicated" (Abdulhadi et.al 61). It is especially true in the case of Nur who is unable to belong and is always out of place. Salaita contends that, "whether we like it or not, the adjective 'immigrant' connotes an Otherness, a not-quite-belonging, an in-between state of being" and "an alterity that is difficult to overcome" (122). In the case of Mamdouh, his sense of home and belonging is

distorted twice and affected by loss. First is the loss of his home in Beit Daras, and second is the loss of the whole motherland due to migration.

The loss of the sense of home and belonging, particularly when it is experienced more than once, results either in the immigrant's search for a new sense of belonging or the acceptance of non-belonging and life out of one's place. Abulhawa asserts how Mamdouh maintained his Palestinian belonging despite living in the US and how he wanted Nur "to know and never forget the place that burned in his heart" (63). In the diaspora, where integration and succession of generations born in the United States endanger the longevity of memory, Mamdouh's drive that the young Nur must be educated is a normal response (Lybarger 102). Basu confirms the latter and adds that maintaining a link to the pre-exile experience is crucial, but it may also be upsetting since it serves as a constant reminder of the past and who has been lost. (Basu 49). It is true that Mamdouh's connection to his pre-exilic life is what helped him nurture his sense of belonging to Palestine. However, this connection is also burdening as he kept thinking about those left behind, especially his sister Nazmiyeh and that is what motivated him to plan a return to Gaza (Abulhawa 68).

When the hyphen is added, and Palestinian becomes Palestinian-American, the matter of belonging and non-belonging is intensified. In Abulhawa's novel, Nur is the embodiment of what it means to live between the binaries of the Arab and the Western world. A life of "doubleness" where the feeling of being "torn" between two cultures is inevitable, became the reality for many hyphenated people (Salaita 127). This is what happened to Nur. Her grandfather Mamdouh was her only link to her Palestinian half that helped her make sense of her hybrid identity (Abulhawa 72). When he passed away, Nur lost her belonging to her Arab half and everything Palestinian (Abulhawa 94).

In his analysis of belonging, Yuval-Davis distinguishes between three main stages or levels. The first level, known as social locations, is governed by power dynamics in society and is where people believe they belong to one or more of its categories, such as gender, race, class, or nation (Yuval-Davis 199). This stage is generally taken for granted by most individuals since the belonging here is out of their control and rather influenced by external factors. The second level deals with people's identification and emotional ties, where they try to fit in and establish a stable state of being by identifying with a specific group (Yuval-Davis 202). This level is considered as the individuals personal attempt to form attachments with a given group. The third and final level deals with political and ethical principles that evaluate the first two levels and draw lines dividing the global populace into "us" and "them" (Yuval-Davis 204). This is the stage in which a sense of othering takes place, when the individual focuses more on the similarities and the differences between people, and draws boundaries to mark who is in and who is out of their circle of belonging.

The contemporary view of spaces and belonging(s) assumes that it became inevitable for individuals to feel a sense of non-belonging and placelessness (Jones 29). This view is reinforced by the belief that with the spatial turn, the world became a transnational borderless space where immigrants find it hard, and rather unneeded, to strictly define their territorial belonging. According to Quayson and Daswani, "Bourdieu uses the Greek term *atopos*, 'of no place' or 'out of place', to describe the state of the immigrant" (475).

However, Palestinian immigrants who are constantly out of place may develop a new sense of home and belonging in the diaspora. In this fashion, their perceptions of home are influenced by both their visions of future homes and their recollections of previous homes (Blunt & Dowling 198). These transnational houses, according to

Blunt and Dowling, are the culmination of the concepts and feelings of place and displacement, location and dislocation, where immigrants feel both at home and not at home in a variety of situations (198).

For those individuals who lack a rooted sense of belonging and who are mostly out of place, seeking to excel in the intellectual domain becomes the purpose of their existence. By discussing his own story of never feeling at home and being out of place in almost every aspect, Edward Said sheds light on the latter (266). As Said asserts, his special makeup as a Palestinian American who lived in different places yet was constantly out of place is what gave him the drive to find his own place in the world and that happened to be his intellectual belonging (266). Similar to Said's experience, Nur finds herself constantly out of place and the only means to feel a sense of belonging in America was through excelling in her studies and working hard. As Abulhawa puts it, if Nur put in the effort, she had discovered a means for displaying herself and a place where she might experience love and adoration. She thus put in as much labor and study as she could (75).

Nevertheless, Nur's excellence in her academic life did not mean that she finally found her place. As explained by Abulhawa, even when she sought an academic and professional excellence, Nur was still fragile with no real sense of belonging to any place (91). However, for Said, finding one place to belong to and call home became futile at some point in his life. Perhaps this is also the case for most hyphenated individuals who are fed up of seeking one defined sense of belonging. Approaching his final days, Said revealed that being 'right' and in place—for example, at home—does not seem vital or even appealing for him anymore, and that it is better to never feel too at home anyplace and just move around (333).

This view of the futility of belonging to one designated spatiality is based on the assumption that the sheer inability of belonging is the foundation of the yearning for it (Abdulhadi et al 301). For Palestinian Americans, occupying the edges of society and its margins may be a site of empowerment and opportunities, however, it also ushers a loss of homeliness, belonging, and sometimes a loss of cultural values and traditions (Abdulhadi et.al 301). This explains Nur's quest for a home that is rooted enough to embrace her fragmented identity and enable her to belong. Nur's arrival to Gaza and her life with the Baraka family is what helped her collect her lost broken halves and opt for a new sense of belonging.

2.4 Diaspora and Hybrid Identity Formation

Diaspora is one of the most ambiguous notions to define. Part of its equivocality colligates to the fact that it is hard to decidedly mark its boundaries. However, generally, diaspora is the condition of a group of dispersed people who reside outside their homeland and who share some common cultural and social traits. According to Baubock and Faist, the notion initially solely alluded to the historical experiences of some communities, namely Jews and Armenians (12). The older usages of diaspora marked "a forced dispersal" and is "rooted in the experience of Jews, but also – more recently – of Palestinians" (Baubock & Faist 12). It is because of this direct association with the experience of the Jews that many people refrain from using or associating with the term diaspora, particularly in the Palestinian case. Stuart Hall is one example of those scholars who initially rejected to label the reality of immigrants and refugees outside their homeland as a diaspora. Hall claimed that for quite some time, he would not use the term 'diaspora' since it was mostly used in reference to Israel, which used it to argue for its right to drive out everyone else and retake a territory that had previously been inhabited by several people (Hall & Morley 193).

The strong link between the notion of diaspora and the Jewish experience of exile and dispersal is what led many thinkers, mainly postcolonial ones, to abandon the word and use other synonyms of it. This belief stems from thinking that the Jews 'owned' the word as part of their history and identity. This matter was especially troubling to Palestinian thinkers, namely Edward Said, who outwardly refuted the notion of diaspora and did not want to consider it as his condition (438). Said's rejection of diaspora stems from the original association of the word with the Jewish experience as well as from his belief that the Palestinian experience is unique and cannot be generalized (438). The Palestinian situation is indeed problematic as it equates to the issue of forced displacement, which more accurately captures Palestinian reality than diaspora (Keown et.al 84).

It is evident that diasporas have arguably been around from the beginning of humanity's existence (Quayson & Daswani 6). With the clash of civilizations over land and resources, the dispossession and dispersal of people have become a common phenomenon. Different diasporas emerged in various parts of the world. However, the unifying thread of these diasporas is the fact that removal from and a desire to return to one's nation are central to the diaspora theory (Knott & McLoughlin 9). As such, living in diaspora brings about a discourse of double-consciousness, where the diasporic subjects are experiencing their new reality while remembering their lost past. As noted by Agnew, a diasporic individual lives in a constant state of conflict between recalling 'there' and existing 'here' as well as between the literal and symbolic home (4).

Nevertheless, the lack of thorough analysis and mention of the Palestinian diaspora in the literature of diasporic studies suggests that there must be a reason behind such obscurity. This reluctance and avoidance of dealing with the question of the Palestinian diaspora either means that the Palestinian situation is not considered

diasporic or that those academics do not acknowledge the existence of a Palestinian diaspora altogether. In one instance, Braziel and Mannur's *Theorizing Diaspora* offers a whole chapter on the Jewish diaspora but only a brief reference to Palestine while discussing the topic of diaspora (Keown et.al 85). The same pattern is repeated with Kalra et.al's *Diaspora and Hybridity* and Robert Cohen's *Global Diasporas*. This is evidence that the Palestinian diaspora does not receive its fair share of analysis in diaspora studies.

Paul Gilroy contends that because of its unexpected utility as a persistent aspect of the ongoing tremors caused by those political ambitions in Palestine and elsewhere, the ancient word 'diaspora' has taken on a contemporary tone (123). The political projects, mentioned by Gilroy, are crowned by the Jewish settlement in Palestine, as a solution and an end for the long-standing Jewish diaspora, which ironically have resulted in the rise of another diaspora; the Palestinian one. This particular instance highlights the fact that a "victim diaspora" (the Jewish diaspora) has engendered the creation of another victim diaspora (the Palestinian diaspora) (Cohen 513).

However, for Palestinians, the matter of the right to return to their lost homes in relation to the matter of diaspora is problematic. Through confiscating the land and claiming its ownership, Israel denies Palestinians the original ownership of the land and gives them no right to claim it back. This point is illustrated by Peteet who sees the diasporic experience of Palestinians as a special case in the broad discourse of diaspora when considering the issue of the right to return (635). More recently, another sort of ambiguity relating to the notion of diaspora have taken place, in particular, regarding the matter of who is considered a diaspora member (Christou & Mavroudi 4).

Quayson and Daswani argue that, addressing the changing relationships between homelands and host countries is central to the modern idea of diaspora, which emphasizes that not all dispersals result in diasporas (3). In other words, it takes immigrants more than merely leaving behind their homeland and migrate to establish a diaspora in the host nation. As stated by Hanafi, when a group of people who are spread out far from their home country have a recognized legitimate presence in the host nation, they can be regarded as a diaspora. It is crucial, that members of this group are connected to their actual or imagined homeland through a multitude of ties (166).

In the case of Palestinian immigrants in America, the two conditions mentioned by Hanafi are both present. Palestinian immigrants and their offspring have an accepted legal presence in the US, according to the Immigration Naturalization Act, and they are tied in various networks to their homeland Palestine. Nevertheless, the problem in the Palestinian example is linked to the matter of return. To put it differently, most Palestinian immigrants may think that acknowledging their diasporic state will mark the end of their efforts to attain their right of return to the homeland. This is crystalized in Hall's perception of diaspora and the problem of homecoming. Hall contends that people who are never going to be able to physically return to their original nations are said to be diasporic (206).

The absence of a chance to return to the homeland, as an integral part of the diasporic state, is not solely explored by Hall. Kalra et.al share Hall's insights regarding diaspora and the matter of return. They contend that the inability to "return"—that is, the difficulty, if not the complete impossibility, of going back to the location of migration—is what distinguishes diaspora (Kalra et.al 10). In Abulhawa's novel, the diasporic existence of Palestinians is illustrated by the characters of Mamdouh, his son Mhamed, and his granddaughter Nur. After losing both his wife and

son, Mamdouh realized that there was nothing in America worth living for and that it is better to seek a return to Palestine (Abulhawa 73). However, his wish never came into fruition as he passed away from pulmonary disease in the US. His son passes away in a car accident, leaving Nur as the only hope of a homecoming. The story of Mamdouh implies the impossibility of going back to the homeland after establishing a diasporic existence in the host country.

The case of the Palestinian diaspora in the US is indeed unique. The fact of labelling it a diaspora in the first place is highly contested. Hanafi contends that the Palestinian diaspora is “unachieved” or “partially diasporized” (158). The main reason behind such unachieved diasporization is summarized in the Palestinian identity's fairly recent consolidation and the diaspora's feeble core of gravity (Hanafi 174). From another perspective, Avtar Brah suggests that because not every diaspora uphold an ideology of return, the idea of diaspora gives a homing urge that is different from a longing for a homeland (16). However, for the Palestinians, the question of returning to the homeland is an integral part of their national identity. Abulhawa seems to share the same ideology of the urge of return as most Palestinians, and she presents that in the story of Nur and her journey back home to Gaza.

Nur's journeys echo her diasporic experience as a Palestinian American woman. As explained by Brah, the idea of a diasporic traveler seeking to establish roots and settle down is central to the concept of diaspora (179). As Nur was constantly out of place, she longed to settle and plant her roots somewhere (Abulhawa 191). Abulhawa reveals Nur's eventual decision to stay with the Baraka family that marks the end of her diasporic journey. After crossing the dark “tunnel” that separated Egypt from Palestine, Nur “was on the other side, back to Gaza” (Abulhawa 236). The image

of the unpleasant and freezing subterranean tunnel suggests Nur's own resolution as she has crossed from the realm of darkness and loss to the realm of light and home.

Clifford's definition of diaspora also addresses the issue of return to the homeland. He elaborates that diasporas typically assume greater distances and a separation more akin to exile: an inherent restriction on return or its deferral to a distant future (Clifford 246). Nevertheless, the Palestinian diaspora is not a constant reality. Hanafi contends that the Palestinian diaspora is an ongoing incomplete process and not a fixed established entity (169). The hope for return and independence is what makes Palestinian diasporic subjects cling firmly on their ancestral identity and their Palestinian heritage even when their spatial reality does not align with such aspirations.

A growing fascination with the notion of diaspora in relation to the ideology of hybridity have masked the 'other' dark side of the diasporic experience. As explained by Timothy Brennan, the allure of diasporic groups' hybrid cultures often obscures the reality that these individuals frequently do not wish to be diasporic (674). There is such an example in the Palestinian experience of diaspora. Palestinians were forced out of their homeland that resulted in their scattering and dispersal. Naturally, most Palestinians would choose their homeland over a life of exile and foreignness. It is especially valid to desire a return to the homeland when life in the diaspora is characterized by all sorts of difficulties such as physical assaults, agonies, prejudices and stigmas (Ember et.al 243).

The diasporic experience often sets up the ground for hybrid identity formation. Cultural hybridity has been the focal point of analysis by various scholars across disciplines, especially those interested in matters of cultural identity and diaspora. According to Knott and McLoughlin, more recently, in the context of migration,

hybridity emerges as a useful term at 'the edge' or junction point in diaspora, characterizing cultural mingling where the diasporized and the host intersect (59). Thus, cultural hybridity is about the interlock of, at least, two cultures in which the resulted hybrid culture implements elements from both cultures. Kalra et.al explain how the diasporic immigrants generate new hybrid cultures or hybrid identities by modifying, restructuring, and rearranging elements of the host culture (71).

Nevertheless, a hybrid is not always viewed positively. In essence, the concept of hybrid has its roots in the strong botanical or biological image of "mestizaje," which was employed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to produce analogues like "cross-fertilization" and to indicate terms of scorn like "mongrel" or "bastard" (Burke 49). As such, a hybrid is considered as an inferior breed of two or more 'pure cultures'. This is what explains hybrid people's uneasiness regarding the matter of hybridity and purity. Kalra et.al contend that the notion of purity associated with essentialist nationalisms and chauvinisms that are used against migrants, the diaspora, and hybrid people is undermined by hybridity. (72).

Gilroy was overwhelmed by the frenzy of 'pure' cultures to the extent that he rejected them altogether. He even rejected the use of the term hybrid. Gilroy attempts to avoid using the word hybrid in any way because he claims that the concept of hybridity, or intermixture, assumes two prior purities that he believes are unattainable (54). However, it is not veracious to deny the existence of hybridity simply because of the rejection of the myth of purity.

Through rejecting the dichotomy of hybridity and purity and with evolving indicators of alterity that define and rule postmodern truth, Gilroy dismisses the prevalent indications of cultural similarity (Werbner & Modood ix). As Tsolidis puts it,

a more nuanced comprehension of cultural linkages that separated them from the nation state and instead emphasized mixed identities had been offered by postmodern conceptions of diaspora (6). In the postmodern globalized world, hybrid cultures and people are the new norm. As a legacy of the colonial and postcolonial eras, hybridity is an inevitable phenomenon that tinges almost all the world's cultures.

Rather than establishing fixed identities that operate within the boundaries of the nation-state, the world is moving towards the acceptance and celebration of hybrid identities that are diasporic and transnational in their gist. According to Hall and Mercer, the majority of our contemporary nation-states are culturally hybrid, permanently deformed and dispersed (143). The latter denotes how it is impossible for these nations to retain a pure culture after going through the experience of diaspora. As Edward Said contends, since we live in an array of interrelated, multicultural societies, anything we discuss is a blend implying how these cultures are impure and hybrids (391). The condition that engenders the creation of a hybrid culture is governed by the politics of power and authority. However, instead of focusing on who is right and who is wrong with the principle that what is different is inherently evil, it is more suitable to call for middle ground of negotiations (Hall & Mercer 166).

Bhabha addresses the matter of negotiation of cultural hybridity by hyphenated individuals. He contends that those hyphenated individuals form the solid morsels in the theory of the melting pot that resist the metaphor of melting in and resulting in one unified, homogenous composition (Bhabha 219). Instead, those apparent bits float on the surface of the pot and claim their uniqueness. Generally, these hyphenated subjects will attain their pride in both cultures and display both sides of the hyphen visibly in various occasions. The result of acknowledging both cultures and accepting the new

hybrid form leads hyphenated people to develop a dual mixed identity (Smith & Leavy 107).

To illustrate, the situation of hyphenated Americans is rooted in the subject of hybridity. Their cultural hybridity affects the way they see themselves and others. According to Smith and Leavy, these individuals are unable to favour one culture over the other since they have experienced them both for a certain time (104). Nevertheless, one may question the validity of Smith and Leavy's point, especially when it is linked to the issue of spatiality and its role in identity formation and realization. The generations born and raised in America who have never been to their ancestors' homeland would not acquire equal patterns from both cultures.

These hyphenated people spatially live in and experience the culture of America. It is taken for granted that their identity is forged in the American cultural emblem and that they must naturally feel fully American. However, for most hyphenated Americans, the second world of the faraway homeland is also present inside their homes. Through their parents and grandparents who carry their culture and transmit it to the next generation, hyphenated Americans experience both worlds in one spatial reality. The issue is grounded on which culture is going to be mostly visible and under which circumstances the realization of such hybrid identity is achieved.

The formation of hyphenated identities is a natural phenomenon especially in the postcolonial postmodern world. Because of the cultural exchange and mixing and the movement of people through migration, hyphenated identities are formed and well established in various parts of the world. The matter of spatial belonging and loyalty to a single nation-state is addressed especially when both homeland and host land seem to show some hostility to one another. Where would you belong, and who would you

defend in times of war, are two common questions for most hyphenated people. The answer may not be an easy one. Kalra et.al suggest that the emergence of hyphenated identities can strengthen the perception of belonging to the nation-states on both ends of the split as it can result in the establishment of new identities that are unrelated to the nation-state altogether (33).

The idea of a possible middle ground instead of clearly defined binaries is well established and rather welcomed in the contemporary world. Many scholars advocate this ideology of liminality that prevailed in the post war era. The hyphen that joins the two ends of the hybrid identity has received its fair share of criticism. While many scholars thought of it as the separating line that demarks the boundaries of the two identities or cultures, Steiner, as a hyphenated American himself, disagrees with this stand of separation. Instead, he tracks the origins of the word to its Greek usage and argues that “the hyphen itself, means, in that classic language, ‘under one, into one, or together’ and thus the hyphen indicates “that they belong together, although they have a distinct origin” (Steiner 6).

Bhabha pays a peculiar attention to the notion of hybridity. In fact, he is credited for his elaboration on the concept of in-between-ness with his third space theory. He contends that our epoch is characterized by a philosophy of “transit” where “space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (Bhabha 1). Bhabha focuses on the ambivalent relationship in a postcolonial reality between the colonizer and the colonized. The hybrid identity that results from the contact of the two cultures is situated in a third space of in-betweenness. He believes that the matter of the cultural difference that faces hyphenated subjects must be negotiated instead of it being resisted and criticised (Bhabha 2).

Cultural hybridity resists the impulse of unquestioned assimilation in the host nation. Instead, most hyphenated subjects reject the ideology that calls for melting in the dominant culture and cutting all ties with the minority, ethnic community. The hyphen that separates the two cultures may signal the tension and difference that dwells within cultural hybridity. Powell believes that the situation of hyphenated subjects who try to live on both ends of their hybrid identity is a hard reality (3). However, the hyphen may also be considered as the bridge that links both ends of the spectrum and results in the birth of a new hybrid cultural reality. In this respect, the hyphen is not regarded as a negative aspect but as an empowering tool. Moghissi contends that it is not essentially a weakness to possess multiple identities as this may provide individuals the chance to choose to identify using the right identity for the right situation (176).

In Abulhawa's novel, cultural hybridity and hyphenated identities are exemplified in the character of Nur. At the onset of her journey of self-realization, Nur struggles with both sides of the hyphen, as she is unable to identify with the American nor with the Arab identities. Her spatial dislocations and constant mobility from foster home to another further complicated her sense of belonging and attachment in America (Abulhawa 90). Nur could not fit in as she kept moving from place to place. Part of the reason behind her uneasiness is related to her Arab Muslim half that she carried deep inside her. Nur felt that her hybrid identity with its shattered pieces did not provide her with a sense of wholeness and belonging (Abulhawa 93). It was only after Nur graduated and started her job as a psychotherapist that she started to search actively for her Palestinian half. As she was appointed the case of the boy from Nusseirat camp in Gaza who suffered from a condition of a Locked-in syndrome, Nur finally thought about reconnecting with her Palestinian heritage (Abulhawa 148).

The issue of identity formation is a vital area of research especially when it is joined with cultural hybridity. When addressing the matter of identity, Vignoles asserts that the latter is about individuals responding to the basic question of who are they (1). However, people deal with their identity with indifference as they take it for granted as something innate until a crisis arises. As such, they are obliged to seek an answer to that simple yet complicated question. As Jenkins elaborates, when it comes to identity, people apply their linguistic ability to make sense of themselves, of other individuals and of how they each perceive each other (5). What Jenkins' definition adds is the social dimension of identity; the part of knowing others and the way they think and see us.

In this respect, identity turns into a multi-faceted ongoing process of situating the individual's place among other people as a member of a community (Jenkins 5). Identity is not static and permanent. Instead, it undergoes stages of formation, change, and development. It is both personal and social. Stuart Hall is one of the prominent figures in identity studies who advocated the importance of seeing identity as dynamic and evolving rather than fixed and perquisite. He insists that it is crucial to reject any view of identity as a fixed complete entity and to cherish the inevitable, paradoxical, fragmented, hybrid cultures (Hall & Morley 58).

Hybrid identity formation is conditioned by both personal and social identities of hybrid individuals. Living in or coming from two worlds adds another layer of complexity to the already existing flux between the personal and the social parts of identity. Najla Said explains the condition of being Palestinian American without truly identifying with either culture as a scary experience. She contends that she was unable to develop a full American sense of identity just the way she could not feel fully Arab (Said N. 116). The problem of Najla, and a myriad of Arab Americans, rests on the fact

that their identity is caught in between two ends of a spectrum. For those who still live in America, the spatial reality dictates on them a given set of obligations that should normally lead them to fully embrace their American identity. Yet, that is not easily attained in most scenarios. There is also the Arab identity that is preserved in the cultural dimension of their homes even when, geographically speaking, the Arab world is faraway.

Layder highlights the difference between personal and social identities as he explains the clash that arises from the individualistic drive of autonomy and the societal call for collectivity that creates a sense of uneasiness regarding the social urge to fit in and the individual's unique choices (3). Not only that a hybrid subject is caught in between the push and pull of a single personal and social identity, but also that he or she has to deal with a hybrid identity that is a mixture of two or more identities. To illustrate, for a Palestinian American woman, the problem of identity does not solely reside on the tension between the personal and the social determiners of identity. In fact, the issue goes deeper to include the question of the hyphenated identity, gender identity, and what it means to be both an Arab and an American woman.

Personal and social identities constitute the basis for developing a hybrid identity in diaspora. Since the condition of diaspora is marked by a strong connection to the original homeland from where the dispersal started, so is the case of identity formation. It has to be linked to a rooted point of departure. As illustrated by Sabaté, “in all cases, the essential personal and social identity requires more or less secure fixing points, but always as references to the past” (10). These secure fixing points will aid in the building of a “historical memory” that will help individuals know their place in the world and who they are in order to be able “to grasp reality and to co-exist” (Sabaté 10). This is especially true in the case of Palestinians who are struggling to

keep their historical memory alive, in a world that seeks to deny its existence in the first place.

When addressing the matter of hybrid identities, it is assumed that one side of the hyphen must essentially vanish to give way to the other side to prevail. This view suggests the impossibility for both identities to co-exist simultaneously. This assumption is regarded as one of the vital existential questions that face hybrid subjects, especially for those who have never been to the ancestral homeland before. The matter of choosing one single identity is tormenting and confusing for countless hyphenated individuals. As illustrated by Najla Said, “letting go of the idea that (she) had to have one identity, one way to describe (herself), one ‘real (her)’ hasn’t left (her) any less confused about who (she was)” (7). However, her new awareness of her hybrid identity allowed her to be “inspired, engaged, interested, complicated and aware” (Said N. 7).

There is also the fear of losing the individual’s identity altogether when the latter is overwhelmed by the contradictions of the hybrid identity. However, as Firmat explains this fear is unfounded and rather amplified since it can never be a de-culturation without re-culturation (169). He further elaborates that this identity “process” is not about “dying” but about “dyeing, not death but change” (Firmat 169). This is what confirms that identities are not static but are in constant change as they develop and evolve because of a number of circumstances. The latter can be related to social, cultural, economic, political, or even psychological drives.

Humans live in groups and develop their sense of identities in various ways. Historically, it has been argued that human identity is generated by both a self-realization and a communal-realization (Côté & Levine 2). Côté and Levine’s view

joins both the personal and the social sides of identity. This suggests that it is inevitable in identity formation to start at the personal level of identity. It is vital to know the self and what makes it special and unique. After the personal level comes the social level of situating the self within the community or the society. It is natural for individuals to live in groups of social interaction and cultural exchange. Those terrains of society are the stages of identity manifestations where the personal meets the social and unite to form a complete whole.

Under the axis of personal and social identity, it is possible to decipher a third identity that is linked to spatial considerations. Proshansky labels it “place identity” and he defines it as:

those dimensions of self that define the individual’s personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to this environment. (155)

In other words, place identity is linked to the individual’s attachment and sense of belonging to a given spatial location that reflects and comprises a set of cultural-specific elements unique to that particular environment. For instance, Palestine, as a spatial entity, inspires in Palestinians, and their hybrid offspring, a sense of attachment to the land; a form of place identity, even if they are living in other places outside its borders.

Proshansky attempts to highlight with his concept of place identity the gap that scholars and researchers in the realm of identity and its formation did not consider. He argues that they have neglected the vital aspect of the spatial considerations alongside the social and cultural factors that affect identity formation (Proshansky 155). In other

words, place identity is what shapes social identity that in turn affects the personal identity of individuals. It all starts in space. Identity formation, in this regard is rooted to spatiality.

When it comes to the nature of identity, Jenkins insists that writers must not take for granted the dynamic attribute of identity. He elaborates on the idea that most of the literature on identity considers the latter as a finished fixed product instead of viewing it as an active operation that is unfinished and incomplete (Jenkins 17). Other writers were more concerned about the dichotomy of similarity and difference when studying identities. Thinkers, namely Hall and Gilroy, argue that identities are marked by their difference and this is what enables people to recognize themselves from others. On the one hand, Hall asserts that identities “are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity” (4). On the other hand, Gilroy contends that “identity is always particular, as much about difference as about shared belonging” but in most cases “identities depend on the marking of difference” (301).

Identity formation is conditioned by interweaved social, cultural and personal factors. As such, hybrid identity formation is linked to the cultural and social hybridity of hyphenated subjects. In the case of Palestinian Americans, the cultural and social norms of both sides of the hyphen, that is of the Arab and the American identity, merge and deliver a new form of identity that is a hybrid of the two original ones. This new form of identity is the product of the coalescing of Palestinian “ancestral loyalties (religious, linguistic, and cultural) with American circumstances, political ideals, and participation in American political institutions” (Smith & Leavy 106). In Abulhawa’s novel, this hybrid identity is personified throughout the story in the character of Nur. The latter lives for almost thirty years in America exclusively exposed to her American

side, before she gets the chance to travel to Palestine and discover her Arab Palestinian identity.

2.5 Life in Exile and the Longing for Homecoming

Exile means different things for different people. For those who experience it first-hand, the matter is mostly complicated when different perceptions and feelings conflate and form a complex whole. According to Weaver, “life in exile is liminal existence” in which the individuals are “perpetually ‘out of place’ and de-centered” (15). Exile is painful as it keeps reminding the ones who are experiencing it that they are not home anymore. It constantly reminds them that they do not belong to this new spatiality. Exile stresses the point that home is left behind. However, for Palestinians, in particular, the reality of having no acknowledged state led them to develop a peculiar sense of statehood. Turki reveals his own experience as an exiled Palestinian as he records a moment in history when he met other Palestinians in Algiers for a political event. Turki acknowledges his strange feeling of attachment to those Palestinians he met there who came from all around the world, and who managed to withstand exile and hold onto their common national belonging across time and space (7).

The exilic state of Palestinians helped them to create what Turki calls a “nation-in-exile” (8). The sense of their identity and belonging to Palestine enabled them to understand their shared plight and struggle even in different social and cultural settings. When addressing the concept of exile in Palestinian American studies, the first figure that comes to mind is Edward Said with his groundbreaking essay *Reflections on Exile*. Said argues that Palestine has been considered as a spatiality doomed by dispossession and exile for its people and more so as a barren land for the final return of Jews (27).

From the spatial dimension that Said stresses, Palestine is viewed as a geographical land, even when its borders have shrunk dramatically because of the Israeli colonization and confiscation of land. The fate of its people as permanent exiles was solidified with the blockage of return for Palestinians and their descendants.

The matter of mourning the lost land is an important part in the identification of Palestine spatially, not solely for the Palestinians but also for their offspring. In addition, the Palestinian exilic experience stresses the suffering of the uprooted people who are faced with the impossibility of return. Furthermore, the reinforcement of the myth of an empty land for a people with no land makes Palestine, as a geographical territory, the resolution for the Jewish diaspora and the home for their final return. The irony that results from this resolution is that the Palestinians are forced out of their land into exile and diaspora so that a diasporic exiled group (the Jews) can settle and establish a home.

When referring to the state of exile and its effects on people, Said highlights the bittersweet reality that he and countless exiles face constantly. He argues that exile has both a bad side of that which was lost and left behind and a good side of developing various perspectives about the world (Said 29). In this respect, Said is acknowledging both the positive and the negative aspects of life in exile and it is up to the exile to decide which aspect to embrace. Remembering the lost home and past may cause pain and uneasiness. However, this memory can also be redirected to work on building the future.

Life in exile is a life of struggle. As Said puts it, the Palestinian who finds himself in a state of exile and displacement has no choice but to create a livelihood against all the hurdles of the new spatiality (74). Exiles are not prepared for the living

conditions that may face them in the host land. This is what justifies how exile can be a thrilling notion theoretically but a hard challenging matter in practice (Said 184). Because of the uprooting of Palestinians by the Israeli forces, the situation of the former is bound up to an infinite condition of exile. As such, Palestinians find themselves “continually ripped out of their context” more like “travellers in a strange world” (Weaver 44).

The series of spatial dislocations and relocations also affects the identity of Palestinians. According to Weaver, “without continuity of place, Palestinians experience no continuity of identity” as their “de-centered” and “out of place” existence dictates on them a life of “travel without fixed destination” (44). This is perfectly the initial state of Nur in Abulhawa’s *The Blue Between Sky and Water*. Nur is constantly out of place, especially when she lives in America. However, unlike Weaver’s pessimistic and indisputable belief in the impossibility of finding a fixed place to call home for Palestinians, Abulhawa presents to the reader a woman who was able to return home and find her true self. Abulhawa, in this respect, is paving the way for a discourse of homecoming and redemption for the Palestinian exiles.

The irony with the Palestinian exile is that it is credited for preserving and maintaining the sense of nationalism for Palestinians. Normally, the two concepts of exile and nationalism present an oxymoron since the one negates the other. As Said puts it, the discourse of nationalism essentially calls for a deep attachment to certain spatialities and people and also scraps and opposes exile in almost every way (186). However, in the case of the Palestinian exilic state, the opposite is true. Exile works as the ongoing daily reminder of the nation left behind. This sets forth the perfect ground to build a strong sense of nationalism for Palestinian exiles.

At the other end of the spectrum, homecoming seems to be the resolution of exile. Homecoming entails the experience of finding a place that one can call home as it implies a return to a former home. “Genuine return”, as explained by Weaver, is not “ultimately a departure from diaspora” to a more “pure origin” as it is “a homecoming in which exile shapes the meaning of home” (18). To put it differently, even with the homecoming of exiles, a complete return to the original state that prevailed before exile is inevitably impossible. Exile has shaped the identity and perception of those who experience it. There is no absolute escape or total detachment from the state of exile, even after fulfilling the dream of a homecoming.

The state of exile denotes a form of punishment, pain, and estrangement. Said contends that the term exile “originated in the age-old practice of banishment” that entails the condition of living “an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider” (190). In Abulhawa’s novel, the latter stand is particularly true in the case of Mamdouh. Despite all the economic privileges that America provided for Mamdouh and his family, exile turned him into a wanderer who was conditioned by non-belonging (Abulhawa 66). He could not feel the sense of belonging to his new spatiality, as his heart was always connected to Palestine.

Grounded in the experience of diaspora, the state of exile is both liberating and painful. As explained by Hall, there is essentially a sort of loss in diaspora, not in the permanent sense, but it is about having those moments of sorrow that create an emptiness, denoting that something will always be missing (275). In terms of his own experience as an exilic diasporic subject, Hall reveals how two books by famous writers have influenced him and his ideology. The two works are Lamming’s *The Pleasures of Exile* and Edward Said’s *Out of Place* (Hall 276). Lamming’s work highlights the freedom that comes along the experience of living in exile while

enduring the permanent loss of the homeland. Said's work emphasises the sense of being out of place that he believes is unavoidably a precondition of diaspora (277).

The exilic experience of Mamdouh is mostly about suffering and loss. In the novel, Mamdouh starts his journey by losing his homeland and the warmth of family in Palestine. Afterwards, he undergoes a series of dislocations and relocations to Cairo, Kuwait, and North Carolina. Even in America, Mamdouh finds it hard to feel home. This is especially true giving how his "long exile" has "stole everything" from him; starting from his son's "heritage and language" to his own wife "Yasmine" and his youth, as he became "an old man in a place that had never become familiar" (Abulhawa 107).

Unlike Mamdouh, Nur is able to have her homecoming at last. Abulhawa highlights the fact that Nur's return from Cairo to Gaza to stay with the Baraka family is the only time she experienced homecoming (237). Nur spent most of her life on the move. Her mobility is not a voluntary one but rather a necessity that resulted from her harsh circumstances as a Palestinian American who grew up alone in the US. However, after moving to Gaza and meeting her Palestinian family, Nur decides to stay with them as she comes to feel finally at home.

The theme of the homecoming of an exile is often thought of as a dramatic scene that is especially loaded with mixed emotions of happiness and anguish. Hammer argues that this scene takes place in "a homecoming story". He perfectly illustrates the latter when he analyses a Palestinian literary text in the following passage:

To kiss the ground of the homeland upon return is a common image from many parts of the world when exiles reach the soil of their native country. The tears, the inability to speak for a day, and the overwhelming beauty of the homeland

tie in with the emotional connection to Palestine and the unearthly beauty of the homeland in the exile's imagination. (Hammer 127)

What Hammer describes in his analysis is similar to Abulhawa's account of Nur's homecoming. Abulhawa highlights how the Baraka family welcomed Nur with smiles and warm greetings as well as with all sorts of refreshments and sweets (237). This is the first time that Nur had made it to a place where she could feel belonging, after spending most of her life wandering aimlessly (Abulhawa 237).

Conclusion

Women in Abulhawa's story are empowered and celebrated. It is true that the Palestinian society is a patriarchal society in essence that favours having males over having females for various reasons. However, in Abulhawa's account, women are respected and cherished for their existence and their roles as mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives. The matter of women's domestic sphere does not seem to vex Palestinian women in Abulhawa's novel. Both men and women joined forces and worked in collaboration to deal with their troubles and loss amidst the Israeli colonization and the destruction of Palestine and its villages. Gender roles are taken for granted by both men and women in the novel. This is not to generalize the acceptance of gender roles in the Palestinian community. After all, Abulhawa is presenting one story among countless other accounts of the Palestinian people.

Chapter 3

Doomed in a State of Betwixt and Between: Alyan's *Salt Houses* and the Problem of Home, Identity, and Belonging.

Introduction

Dwelling in the liminal in-between-ness of the East and the West is not a comfortable state; especially for those who are unable to establish a balance. Questions of home, identity and belonging prevail amidst waves of confusion and uncertainty. In *Salt Houses*, Alyan maps the course of four generations of the Yacoub family as they go through a series of dislocations and relocations. What is interesting about this novel is that it focuses on the ongoing Palestinian transgenerational trauma and how the latter is rooted in the spatial experience of the Yacoub family.

In her work, Alyan depicts places and spaces that play a vital role in the sense that they constantly shape and reshape the Yacoub's realization of home, identity and belonging. The Yacoub's find themselves carried away farther from Palestine to Amman, Kuwait, Paris, Boston, and Beirut. As such, transnationalism becomes their new reality. In this respect, this chapter opens with a section on the concept of home in which it maps "the salt houses" of the Yacoub's throughout their journey. Then, the chapter moves on to deal with the issue of the unhealed wound of the Palestinian transgenerational trauma. The next section is dedicated to transnational identity formation. I seek to invoke Alyan's work to highlight the process of establishing a transnational identity, particularly, for Palestinian American descendants. This chapter also deals with the issue of non-belonging and being out-of-place.

3.1 Mapping “the Salt Houses”: A Spatial analysis of The Yacoub’s dwellings

Titles can reveal a great deal about the content of the literary work, and Alyan’s title is no exception. Salt houses are not real dwellings that one can see standing. However, choosing to label the houses of the work as made of salt is no random or unintentional decision. The symbolism of salt is essential in understanding the nature of home for various characters in the novel. Salt can convey different meanings. Mulu (symbolsage.com) suggests that salt is a symbol of purity, contamination, and even death. The latter is a recurrent theme in the Alyan's novel.

Thinking about salt brings forth the image of fragility and weakness, especially if it is considered as a material used to construct houses. As such, labeling the dwellings of the Yacoub family as salt houses indicates how frail they are and how they are threatened by vaporization both literally and figuratively. Because of the Israeli colonization, the Yacoub's native house is destroyed and erased from the face of earth; leaving no trace behind, as if it was made of salt. Even after moving to different locations, the houses of the Yacoub's were more like salt houses, standing for some time and vanishing soon after. This is illustrated by Alyan reaching the end of her story. Atef was contemplating on the different houses that they came to occupy and how they were temporary and vulnerable more “like structures made of salt, before a tidal wave comes and sweeps them away” (Alyan 220).

The “salt houses” that Alyan fills her story with are scattered all around the world. This salient feature indicates the transnational spatial dimension of her story. The task of mapping the salt houses is highly important in unveiling the complex notion of establishing and maintaining a home amidst the flux and turmoil of colonization and displacement. It is true that in terms of the economic state, the Yacoub's of Alyan are way better than the Barakas of Abulhawa. However, both

experience loss and devastation on different levels. The Yacoub's lived in villas and had maids and chauffeurs while the Barakas lived in overcrowded camps and hardly made ends meet. But eventually, they were both affected by the loss of Palestine and identity. The mapping of the salt houses starts in Palestine in 1948.

In Alyan's *Salt Houses*, the Yacoub's are said to be originally from Jaffa before the destruction of their home in 1948. Before its destruction by the Israeli forces, "Salma and Hussam's villa sat atop a small hill that overlooked the sea, with orange groves banded beneath it in strips" (Alyan 10). Their first 'salt house' burned alongside their land in Jaffa and they had to move to their relatives in Nablus. Alyan does not provide a thorough description of this first house. It is only mentioned in a vague flashback that came across Salma's memories when she was preparing for her daughter's (Alia) marriage.

In his study on Alyan's novel, Awad claims that the two most salient elements in the Yacoub's story are houses and the sea (25). He analyzes the sea imagery and highlights how the notions of stability and mobility are reversed when referring to the houses and the sea (Awad 25). Traditionally, the house symbolizes safety and permanence, whereas the sea symbolizes danger and movement. However, in *Salt Houses* the opposite is true. As Awad contends, "The sea, that traditionally symbolises mobility and motion, wins over houses, which are symbols of fixity and stability" (25).

The second "salt house" of the Yacoub's is in Nablus. This house functions as a site of lament for the lost home. Alyan describes the state of the Yacoub's' longing for their house in Jaffa. She speaks of Salma who "missed her home with a tenacity that never quite abated" to the extent that "she spent the first five years in Nablus daydreaming of returning" (Alyan 11). The hope of returning to their villa that was turned into rubble was still alive at that time. However, things started to change after

the incident of reading the cup. As a Palestinian tradition, women would read what is revealed in the coffee cup after they finish it and flip it upside down for some minutes (Banat et.al 348).

Salma reads Alia's cup before her wedding and she notices that "the surface of the teacup is white as salt". She also sees a form with a roof suggesting "houses that will be lost" (Alyan 13). This is an explicit indication of the salt houses that would shelter Alia and her offspring and vanish afterwards. It also suggests the foreseen uneasiness and the lack of a sense of rootedness for this family. In other words, the teacup reading foresaw the Yacoub's fate as that of scattering and unsettlement, the thing that frightened Salma.

The Nablus house, despite its large rooms and beautiful furniture, did not help the Yacoub family to develop a strong sense of belonging to it, initially. Alyan highlights how houses encompass the lives of their former inhabitants to the extent that the Nablus house seemed "ghosted with its former life" (14). It was only possible for Salma and her children to feel connected to their new house after they have removed the possessions and belongings of the former dwellers of the Nablus house and replaced them with their own things. Giuliani illustrates this dwellers-dwelling nexus when she argues that what helps rendering a normal space into a home is what the dwellers change and alter in it (8).

The difference in location is not deeply felt yet for the Yacoub family, since it is still Palestine. Things start to change after they move to Kuwait and Amman. They flew there after Israel took over Nablus. In Alyan's account, the abrupt displacement essentially calls for some memories. There is always something from the previous salt house to remember and lament in the new salt house. A good example is when Alia complains about the quality of the soap in Kuwait that irritates her skin unlike the

smooth soap of Nablus (Alyan 44). The simple act of comparing the soaps of Kuwait and Nablus stresses the importance of remembering life in Palestine before moving to Kuwait. Alyan contends that in this scene, Alia is recalling bits of her former dwelling and home.

Even within one household, the different rooms are associated with different meanings and representations. For instance, the living room constitutes the shared open space in the domestic sphere of the house. Normally, all, or most of, the family members would sit together in the living room as an act of socializing and strengthening familial bounds. The bedroom and the bathroom are private closed spaces where individual family members feel both the freedom and the safety to express their real identity. Behind closed doors and the limited access to these two spaces, all the masks drop, revealing the true self that is hidden behind social norms and decorum. There is also the space of the kitchen. Unlike the taken for granted association of the kitchen with women's oppression, this space is far more intriguing than a mere scene of patriarchal dominance.

In Alyan's novel, the abovementioned spaces shape, alter, and expose the inner realizations of many characters in a multiplicity of ways. Many studies focused on the analysis of particular rooms in the house namely Cromley's study of bedrooms, Kira's investigation of bathrooms, and Emmel et al. study of the kitchen. Wood and Beck focused on the space of the living room and its associated meanings. The living room represents a different space for the Yacoubis throughout their journey. In the early days in Kuwait, which coincided with the Naksa of 1967, the living room, as a private space, is a place for mourning and lament. Alyan argues that the television, mainly the news, in the living room is the object that unifies the family via keeping them connected to those who passed away and the land lost behind (Alyan 51). The living room, as such,

nects the shared trauma of a lost home and an unknown future for the Yacoub, particularly for Alia and her husband Atef.

Time freezes for Alia in the space of the living room when she spends almost a week following the newscasters and the horrifying deaths of her people without noticing the passing of time (Alyan 55). However, even amidst the dreadful circumstances of war and loss, the living room, as a public space, was also the place to join the family and friends in a joyous occasion. Alia throws a party and invites her sister Widad and her husband Ghazi alongside a bunch of friends in Kuwait. When the living room was turned into a dance floor after the songs and the dancing started, Alia felt that her living room “looks like a home” (Alyan 56).

At times, the living room stages episodes of an ordinary life of a regular family, allowing the Yacoub to forget even temporarily their loss and trauma. The space of her living room witnessed the everyday routine of having the morning quarrels with the little ones when they protested on dressing in a certain way, requesting to have a given thing, or planning an outing to a particular place (Alyan 78, 129). Even after they got married, the children carried the sacred rituals of their parent’s living room and implemented them in theirs. To illustrate, the living room of Riham is a comforting space for undertaking the matriarchal practices of knitting and remembering grandmothers (Alyan 150). The sacred rituals comprised sitting around the television, watching the news, a soap opera, or a singing show, while sharing some meal or discussing a given topic.

However, even when considering the living room as a private space, there are certain degrees of privacy that do not unfold in this space, unlike the bedroom or the bathroom as examples. To illustrate, Rechavi asserts that the living room, even as a private space, cannot be the site to manifest “more secretive or personal aspects of the

dwellers” (134). Her analysis also stresses the reasons behind the dual function of the living room as a public space at times and a private space at others (Rechavi 140). For the Yacoub, this duality is blurry especially when Alia uses the space of the living room in her state of solitude and grief.

The bedroom and the bathroom appear in the novel as the arena of private space for various members of the Yacoub family. The bedroom may be shared with other people like a spouse or a sibling. However, the bathroom is exclusively for the use of one person, which makes it the perfect private space in the house. When discussing the matter of privacy, Newell argues that the latter is a condition of place highlighted and shaped by the personal consideration of space and its arrangement (90). Since spaces and places are under ongoing alteration and never finished, private spaces change too. As explained by Newell, people develop various definitions of privacy that change over time and space and that align with their distinct experiences (91).

In the case of Mustafa, Alia’s brother, the entire house becomes his own private space; with his sister, marrying Atef and moving to her own house, and with his mother moving to her house in Amman. Some spaces are said to be privacy-centered such as the bedroom and the bathroom (Newell 98). Alyan shows us snippets of Mustafa in his own place, moving from the kitchen to the living room and to his bedroom (30). When no one is around, Mustafa reveals his true identity without fearing criticism. This happens when he faces a mirror in his bedroom while undressing and rehearsing his speech aloud, all alone in the space of his bedroom. Staring at his reflection in the mirror, Mustafa contemplates on how good-looking he is despite never having the courage to show this belief to others (Alyan 31).

In a similar scene, Alyan gives us the female version of facing the mirror in one’s bedroom. Alia is styling her hair at her vanity after taking a shower. After

finishing, Alia removes her towel and impels a hesitant stare at her naked body (Alyan 44). The act of gazing at the naked body may indicate different things. In Alia's case, the forcing of the gaze is not out of shame or intimidation. The forcing of the gaze relates to her fragile mental state as a pregnant woman. Alia glances over her body until she reaches "to the unavoidable: her rounding belly" (Alyan 45). The latter indicates how Alia is finding it hard to fathom the undeniable truth of her pregnancy; that she shall become a mother. The private space of her bedroom helped her release her anxiety regarding motherhood. In her bedroom, facing the mirror, Alia feels comfortable enough to deal with what is troubling her before she goes back to the public space of her family.

Alyan draws an interesting analogy that relates to the bedroom. She postulates that Alia had an abnormal conception of her body. Alia objectifies her body as "she likes her body in the same way she likes her bedroom, or her car...as a commodity...a working machinery" (Alyan 122). However, the objectification is not random. Alia owns her bedroom (her private space) the way she owns her body. She knows every tiny detail of it better than anyone else. Alia feels safe and comfortable in her bedroom, which alludes to her relationship with her body, especially at this stage. To illustrate, Lincoln argues that for most people bedrooms function as a space of refuge and a realm of control (2). In such space, individuals express their 'true-selves' and feel a certain degree of control over their spatial reality. In other words, the bedroom becomes one's possession.

The bedroom is also a transformative private space for Riham, Alia's eldest daughter. After moving to Amman, Riham marries Doctor Latif and embarks on a voluntary life of domesticity. Alyan reveals a scene in Riham's bedroom when she is all by herself. Riham loved exercising in her bedroom when the men are "out of the

house”, pretending to be “a Russian soloist prepping for the stage” (Alyan 143).

Riham’s bedroom is the outlet of her unfulfilled dreams and desires. For those brief minutes of her morning routine, Riham envisions being a ballerina. Moving her body freely makes her feel free and empowered. In reality, Riham is the most introverted member of the Yacoub. Since childhood, she barely expresses what she really wants. Even as an adult, whenever her husband teases her, she “just smiles” (Alyan 143). Nonetheless, when she is alone in her bedroom, she is a changed person.

Another peculiar space in the house is the bathroom. According to Giuliani, “the bathroom, as a room, is associated with a series of taboos” (143). The enclosed space of the bathroom, especially with a firmly closed door, is the perfect outlet for psychological repressed emotions and actions. Many would cry, scream, or simply contemplate in silence those emotions that they hide from the public space. In the case of Alia, the bathroom is the contemplation room where she tries to resolve the tension of her overwhelming life. Alia turns the simple act of having a shower to a session of retention where she remembers her house in Nablus. She is not satisfied with her life in Kuwait; especially that she hates the hot weather (Alyan 44).

The bathroom became her refuge. There, she is not interrupted by anyone, not even her husband. When she is not satisfied with something that her family does, “Alia would go to the bathroom and roll her eyes at herself in the mirror” (Alyan 47). The social comment that she is unable to deliver in the public space leads her to the bathroom, facing the mirror, to express her emotions even through a mere facial expression; rolling her eyes. The bathroom, with its small size, provides the perfect medium for such expression. As Giuliani contends, because of its nature, the bathroom gives the impression that whatever happens in it must not be shared and revealed with

the public sphere (143). In this respect, Alia is aware that whatever happens behind the closed door of the bathroom remains there, away from the public gaze and scrutiny.

Following the same thread of the bathroom as a space of refuge, instances of Alia's retreat to this space are indeed numerous. Alyan discloses how Alia could not deal with the fake happiness that she showed to her guests in the party when she "fled to the bathroom, where she stuffed a towel against her mouth to muffle sobs" (50). Alia runs to her bathroom and withdraws from the crowded scene, dropping the mask that she kept so far. In the bathroom, Alia is able to "mourn" over this "awful country" that she hates and the pretentious happiness that she was wearing as a garment to hide "the emptiness" of her life in Kuwait (Alyan 50). As explored by Blackwell in her analysis of the bathroom, in literary works, authors use bathrooms as spaces of discussing matters of identity, the dichotomy of public and private space and the issue of being and belonging (6).

Alia is traumatized by her spatial reality. She is unable to accept life in this new space. Despite the fact that she is surrounded by her family and friends, Alia's longing for her previous home torments her in the new abode. It haunts her like a ghost, leaving her no space for relief, especially during the first months of their displacement. As such, Alia finds herself obliged to withdraw to the private space of the bathroom to manage her anxiety and psychological uneasiness. As explained by Giuliani, individuals tend to retreat from others to sort out complex feelings especially in intensified moments of nostalgia and trauma (138). The bathroom, in this sense, is important solely for Alia who uses it in an attempt to deal with her emotions.

Atef experiences the bathroom in a similar way to his wife Alia. After enduring torture under the Israeli soldiers, Atef manages to escape and join his wife in Kuwait. However, he is a changed man, no longer the same Atef. He lost his best friend and

brother-in-law, Mustafa, and he kept blaming himself for this loss. Alia transgresses the private space of the bathroom when she opens its door to find her husband in a shocking situation. She finds him in all covered in his own blood (Alyan 63). As explained by Blackwell, the bathroom operates as the ideal space where boundaries set by social and cultural norms blur and as such the individual finds more freedom to express their inner problems (37).

Apparently, his wounds from the torture are not healed because he keeps scrubbing them. He does this in the secret space of the bathroom, until Alia discovers him. However, instead of turning away and concealing what she witnessed Alia moves in and she joins her husband closing the door of the bathroom (Alyan 63). Alia and Atef share this private space with its hidden trauma and they merge as one entity. The “secure and solitary” space of the bathroom unites them in one whole where they “negotiate their own positioning in the world to deal with the absence of someone important in their life” (Giuliani 139). This important someone is none other than Mustafa who was killed by the Israeli soldiers in Nablus.

Even when Alia ages and catches Alzheimer, the bathroom remains an important space in her life. Reaching the final stages of her disease, Alia is unable to recognize her husband Atef. Believing him to be a stranger, she runs to the bathroom, locking it firmly (Alyan 244). Alyan illustrates how Alia was looking at her self in the mirror without recognizing who she was, as she could not remember her face, and this made her weep (244). According to Blackwell, the bathroom as a private space, and its mirror, witnesses the physiological alteration of its occupants with time. She contends that this space becomes loaded with different physical and psychological elements that shape and modify the individual’s perception of who they are (Blackwell 35).

At this stage, Alia retreats to her secure space of the bathroom seeking comfort but she is unable to reach it, since the memory of who she was is all gone due to her condition. Thus, for Alia, the bathroom transforms from a space of remembering to a space of forgetting. As Alia lost the ability of self-realization, the bathroom ceases to be the same space that she once occupied. Instead, the bathroom evolves into a space of oblivion.

Another vital space in the 'salt houses' is the kitchen. The latter is almost universally acknowledged as "a specifically gendered space" (Garcia 34). The sole business for men in the kitchen, according to this belief, is to deliver the groceries or ask for a meal before heading out to another part of the house. In the different kitchens that Alyan pictures for the reader, women conquer this space. Those depictions adhere to the kitchen's essence as a female arena par excellence (Garcia 98). Alyan highlights this ideology when speaking about the character of Mustafa. Living alone obliged Mustafa to transgress to this naturally female space. However, he is at a loss in managing the various kitchen affairs, ranging from his "haphazard grocery shopping" to his eating habits and prepping meals (Alyan 27).

However, the space of the kitchen shifts from being a feminine private space to a neutral public space when it unites the family members over meals and discussions. As Tally points out in his work on Topophrenia, "the same basic space means different things, even though the dimensions may be identical, depending on the meanings attached to it" (125). In the novel, Alia, Mustafa and Atef unite in Mustafa's kitchen occasionally to share a meal and discuss their lives (Alyan 28). Moreover, the kitchen constitutes the ideal space of socialization and strengthening of the familial bounds, for Alia and her brother Mustafa, when Atef is not around. After Mustafa ruins his dinner, Alia enters his kitchen and they start their routine disclosing of affairs. In the space of

the kitchen, Alia and Mustafa share everything with one another. Alyan argues that “they talk of the weather, Atef’s new job at the university” and “swap stories” of their mother’s “phone calls” and her “perpetual worry for their future” (Alyan 30).

The kitchen also works as a nostalgic site of remembering the past, especially for Alia. After moving to Kuwait, Alia sits with her sister Widad in the kitchen and they spend some time talking and preparing food for the party with the help of the maids. Instead of disclosing what was vexing her for such a long time, Alia prefers not to share anything with her sister. In the kitchen, Alia remembers Amman and she yearns to move to it to join her family (Alyan 53). Amman for Alia is a reminder of home; a reminder of a Palestine that have “vanished for them” but they “can find the ashes in Amman, collect them to build another life” (Alyan 53). Thus, the space of the kitchen provokes Alia’s memories and hidden wishes that she keeps as a secret.

However, the same space of the kitchen may be interpreted differently since “meanings of given spaces vary dramatically across literature, as a room could signify comfort to some, confinement to others” (Tally 125). To illustrate, in one incident, the space of the kitchen kindles Alia’s sense of jealousy. The Yacoubis are a wealthy family who used maids and chauffeurs. Alia and her siblings were brought up “in the manner of wealthy Nabulsi children” (Alyan 28). As such, the kitchen for Alia, as a woman, is not a common space where she can undertake the different tasks of cooking and cleaning. There is always a maid or two to handle this business. This has created some sort of envy on the part of Alia, as she felt excluded from such vital feminine space. As illustrated by Alyan, “Alia envies Priya her daily tasks, the constant motion of dusting and folding laundry” (123). Instead, Alia grabs a carrot from the kitchen, “feeling once more like a child” (Alyan 123) and this takes her back to her mother’s kitchen in Nablus.

The kitchen is also the secret meeting room of the grandchildren of Atef and Alia where they discuss important things amongst them, without interruption from the elders. According to Giuliani, “the kitchen is often a space for sharing, from food to thoughts and arguments” (141). In the threshold of the kitchen as a private/public space, the grandchildren sit around some food while they talk about their grandmother’s Alzheimer and their grandfather’s reactions. They believed that no one is hearing what they are discussing (private space), when Atef was behind the door listening to their talk (public space) (Alyan 215). Amidst their discussion, Atef realized that his grandchildren have discovered his hidden letters and they have read them all (Alyan 216). As such, the supposedly private space of the kitchen becomes an open public space when Atef accidentally discovers their secret.

It is insightful how the Yacoub family remained together throughout the series of their dislocations and relocations until they reached Kuwait. The latter represents the turning point in the lives of each member of the family. After their ‘salt house’ in Kuwait, the Yacoub family scattered around the world to Paris, Boston, and Amman and their transnational journey intensified. Souad, Alia’s youngest daughter, moved to Paris, before the invasion of Kuwait, to study and she remained there. After Alia, Riham, and Atef’s move to Amman, Alia pleaded Souad to join the family and not live in a foreign country. However, Souad decided to live in Paris and she married the half-Lebanese Elie (Alyan 129).

Karam moved to Boston after marrying Budur, the Iraqi friend who used to hang out with Souad in Kuwait. The arrangements made by Alyan showcases the transcultural and transnational nature of the Yacoub family after their movement from Palestine. Souad’s ‘salt house’ in Paris was the most fragile of all the other houses. Soon after, she moved to Boston to be around her brother (Alyan 146). There is no

clear picture of Souad's and Karam's houses in Paris or Boston, as Alyan moves through these details without a thorough description. All that can be inferred from the description of their lifestyle and dwelling, at this stage, is that they were more influenced by the Western world than their Eastern heritage (Alyan 148).

Even in America, the Yacoub could not develop a sense of rootedness. After her divorce, Souad decided to settle in Beirut, ushering the beginning of a new 'salt house'. In fact, the house belongs to Riham. The Beirut apartment is not even Souad's own space. However, Souad was trying her best to cope with the rapid uncomfortable changes in her life, as she was raising her two children, Manar and Zain, by herself. She wanted her kids to be around their people, to feel connected to the land of their father and feel home (Alyan 168). Nevertheless, her decision was also influenced by her own desire to be free and make a fresh start (Alyan 169). As Alyan puts it, in Beirut Souad felt her Palestinian identity rising again after being suppressed for a long time (169).

In the final stations of their nomadic wandering, Atef remembered all the houses that they occupied in the course of their existence. He remembered them "like structures made of salt, before a tidal wave comes and sweeps them away" (Alyan 220). In each dwelling, they tried to maintain roots and settle only to find themselves move again to a different spatiality. The Yacoub's mobility was also bound to the trauma of a lost home that they carried inside them and passed it down to the next generation.

3.2 An Unhealed Wound? The Yacoub and Transgenerational Trauma

One of the salient notions in Alyan's *Salt Houses* is that of transgenerational trauma. As a Palestinian American, and from her life experiences in diaspora, Alyan weaves the story of the Yacoub who cannot overcome the loss of Palestine. After their

dispossession in 1948, the Yacoub found themselves unable to find a place to call home. Even their elevated economic status and wealth did not shield them from the drawbacks of trauma and loss. In an interview with John Stintzi, Alyan discloses how her own background as a clinical psychologist influenced the threading of the story of the Yacoub.

Before addressing the matter of transgenerational trauma, it is vital to conceptualize trauma. According to Bako and Zana, “the word trauma is Greek in origin, and refers to a sudden, very powerful shock, causing physical or emotional injury or confusion” (6). The latter definition brings forth the issue of the physical vs. the psychological wounds. Trauma can be physical, psychological, and it can be both. In most cases, the physical injury, such as a deep scar or an amputated organ, may cause a permanent psychological distress.

As such, even the physical injury may cause psychological trauma. Woods perceives that primarily and most importantly “trauma is psychoanalytical because the injury or wound entails an interpretation of the mental injury” (7). This mental injury, despite happening in the past, still affects the individual as it is not yet fully mended (Woods 13). The trauma comes back when it is not properly handled. This is especially true if the victim of trauma resolves to the defence mechanism of repression. As such the trauma cannot be resolved and treated since “nothing can be completely forgotten until it is remembered” (Woods 17).

What is daunting about trauma is the fact that, if not dealt with properly, it may become a lifelong struggle for its carrier. Balsco and Calvo elaborate that trauma is commonly defined as an ongoing reoccurrence of past wounds, which appear in present events (100). The latter stand suggests that a myriad of theorists in the field insist that trauma is incurable. Once a person is struck by a calamity that leads him or her to be

traumatized, the effect is everlasting and may even be transmitted to the next generation. Mohsin et.al, trace the etymology of trauma analysis to the times of Freud that is rooted in his psychoanalytical theories (718). This reveals how trauma is indeed an important concept for theorists even in the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, the theory of trauma in literary theory and criticism, as it is understood today, is very recent. According to Balsco and Calvo, “trauma theory developed in the 1990’s in connection with the ethical turn that emerged in the previous decade and which affected literary theory and philosophy” (1). Trauma studies extended and developed paving the way for a new understanding of the notion of trauma. This is especially true in the emergence of the concept of transgenerational trauma and the whole controversy ushered by such notion.

To put it simply, when trauma is not dealt with properly and the process of healing and mourning is disrupted, the risk of passing the trauma to the next generation is high. When it comes to the Palestinian transgenerational trauma, there is a serious lack of literature covering the subject of transmission. In fact, the field of transgenerational trauma since the 1990’s is particularly concerned with the matter of the Holocaust. Schwab’s and Hirsch’s modes of analysis are applied to analyse Alyan’s novel highlighting how the Palestinian transgenerational trauma is a living reality of most Palestinians, especially second and third generations. The analysis seeks to fill the gap in the literature and address the obvious lack of representation and acknowledgment of the existence and persistence of Palestinian transgenerational trauma.

Note that Alyan’s novel have received little attention from critics especially what relates to transgenerational trauma. So far, only four works have analysed *Salt Houses* with a focus on the aspect of transmitted trauma. Notably, Aladylah’s

“Polyphonic Narrative Spaces in Hala Alyan’s *Salt Houses*” (2019), Salam and Mahfouz’s “Claims of Memory: Transgenerational Trauma, Fluid Identities and Resistance in Hala Alyan’s *Salt Houses*” (2020), and Salam’s “The Burden of the Past: Memories, Resistance, and Existence in Susan Abulhawa’s *Mornings in Jenin* and Hala Alyan’s *Salt Houses*” (2022). The present study elaborates on these works as it supports some of their claims while counter arguing others, particularly the last two works.

Schwab’s study focuses on how trauma is transmitted to the next generation in the case of Holocaust survivors. He elaborates that, “The legacies of violence not only haunt the actual victims but also are passed on through the generations” (Schwab 1). This can be compared to the case of Atef and Alia in *Salt Houses*. The couple are considered victims of trauma in different ways, with Atef suffering from both physical and psychological wounds. In addition to the collective trauma of losing Palestine, Atef is also suffering from physical wounds because of the torture he went through when the Israeli caught him and Mustafa. They tortured him with all means, even with electricity (Alyan 68). This severe physical injury led Atef to develop a psychological wound. The dreams of what happened during his torture never stopped even after a long time of psychotherapy (Alyan 68).

After being released from prison, Atef could not restore his old life and his true self. Alyan ponders upon Atef’s traumatic experience when he told the doctor that he was living “a shadow life” where there is “another” version of himself that “is still stuck” in the past, “like a skipping record” (68). Atef is haunted with what happened to him 10 years ago. These dreams are the expression of his “traumatic memories” that “come in flashbacks and nightmares” (Schwab 2). The main reason for Atef’s unresolved trauma is the fact that he buried his trauma in his unconscious psyche

harbouring a sort of ghost that kept coming back to him (Schwab, 1-2). He could not forget the pain he went through but most importantly; he could not forget Mustafa. He kept blaming himself for the loss of Mustafa, as he believed that he betrayed him (Alyan 71).

What complicates things even more is the fact that Atef is unable to share and communicate verbally his trauma. During his first days after being released from prison, Atef was grieving Mustafa's loss through weeping whenever he heard his name (Alyan 45). He could not utter a word about what happened or what was vexing him. However, he was expressing his pain and loss through non-verbal means unconsciously. Bako and Zana illustrate the issue of being unable to talk about the traumatic event since

The trauma victim is characterized by regressive operation, and symbolization – the ability to express important events verbally – is reduced... Thus, the individual loses the opportunity to narrate the traumatic event, and for its identification ability to aid the working-through process and self-healing. (6)

Since Atef was unable to use language to communicate and share his trauma even within his safe space, he developed a pathological processing of trauma that relates to the act of splitting.

During the first months after his trauma, Atef resolved to a silent mode of existence where he barely associated with his family or friends. He would sit “limply in front of the television” and “move through the rooms of their new house as a sleepwalker” (Alyan 45). Alia would not recognize the man she has married, as if he is completely a changed person. Mate explains such behaviour since the traumatized person would try escaping the uncomfortable overwhelming pain via numbing his emotions and normal everyday interactions (qtd in Valgiusti 15). In addition, someone

who suffers from trauma attempts to manage the pain via detaching from reality and the outer world resolving instead to shut on oneself (Bako & Zana 8).

If Atef was surrounded with the right support and the safe space, his mourning process would have not been interrupted; leading his trauma to persist within him like a phantom. However, who can blame Alia for such negligence? In fact, Alia herself is suffering from the trauma of losing her home and her only brother. As Atef was traumatized too, they both lived in an atmosphere that lacked the needed means to handle and solve their traumas. According to Bako and Zana, “without a secure enough milieu, the individual’s inner image of himself may become seriously fragmented and chaotic” (4). Not having this space of security and safety complicates the trauma and delays the healing. Vickroy asserts that a combination of spatial, social and personal factors decides how the traumatized individual deal and live with it (14). In the case of Alia and Atef, the lack of the right milieu to resolve their trauma resulted in them not knowing how to handle their social roles as parents in which their distorted personalities were reflected in their offspring.

It is because of such issue that trauma slides by to the next generation, even though the latter did not experience it first-hand. It is evident that when the process of mourning fails, the trauma is likely to develop into a transgenerational trauma, affecting not just the individuals but also society as a whole for several generations to come (Bako & Zana 10). Trauma can be inherited. The psychological wound can be transmitted to the next generation if the trauma is not turned into a bearable memory. As such, Atef and Alia’s children; Riham, Karam, and Souad, inherit the psychological wound of a lost Palestine and a troubled erased past.

Sabawi Samah, a second- generation Palestinian-Australian, reveals her inheritance of her father’s trauma. She states her confusion when thinking about the

loss of a space that she has never experienced personally and yet felt a strong attachment to it and the trauma resulting from such loss (Sabawi 248). Samah is but one example of countless Palestinians who still suffer from the ancestral trauma of losing the homeland. Unlike the Holocaust, the Palestinian trauma is ongoing as Palestine is still colonized by the Israeli settler colonialism. According to Woods, “history is associated with memory and trauma in a cultural politics of national identity” in which memory and trauma are considered “twin matrices” (1).

In this respect, it is vital to seek to turn the trauma into a memory in order to ensure the continuity of history without the persistence of a psychological unhealed wound. Schwab uses Hirsch’s concept of the Postmemory in his analysis of the Holocaust survivors’ transgenerational trauma. He asserts that “while victims of trauma live with the scars of memory...the recipients of transgenerational trauma live with a ‘postmemory’ that comes to them secondhand” (Schwab 14). In fact, postmemory is the way Hirsch defines transgenerational trauma. As Hirsch puts it, “postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them” (103).

The second-generation children unconsciously take in the trauma but deal with it in different ways (Schwab 14). Taking the example of the Yacoub, the second generation exemplified in Riham, Karam, and Souad, did not fully understand the traumatic atmosphere that they lived in which have affected their own personalities. They grew up in Kuwait while visiting Amman in summers with their mother Alia. They have never been to Palestine, but they grew up with Palestinian stories and culture. As such, the transgenerational trauma resided in them unconsciously and this is reflected in the way they raised their children, the third generation, and their constant

search for home and belonging. Schwab calls this search an attempt to make sense of a past that is fragmentary via using narrative and pictures (14).

Karam and Souad felt it the most as they were carried farther to Paris and Boston in search for a better life. They were attempting to fill the void that dwelt deep inside their hearts. There was always something missing. However, they could not understand what it was exactly. In this sense, the Yacoubes developed what Hirsch calls a family language where non-verbal communication plays a vital role in the transmission of trauma (112). Silence and not talking about what they have lost nourished the trauma and kept it repressed in their unconsciousness. The transmitted trauma is hidden and untreated since it is forgotten (Vickroy 12). Similarly, Schwab contends that these “traumatic experiences are often sealed off from communal communication and exchange... thus remain hidden and unresolved” (32).

Atef maintained his silence for more than three decades. However, he was writing about all that he had experienced as recommended by his psychotherapist Dr Salawiya (Alyan 71). He would write about what happened to him in details. Atef wrote about his dreams, about his kids’ daily routines, and about the lost Palestine and he addressed his letters to Mustafa as if he was still alive (Alyan 71). As such, Atef used a form of psychotherapy that includes writing down and narrating the traumatic past. Vickroy highlights the importance of this practice of writing about the trauma as a means of healing (20).

In the novel, Mustafa had no grave since his body was not found (Alyan 71). As such both his body and the memory associated with him are not appropriately buried. According to Schwab, not having a designated place to mourn the loss of the loved one prevents the process of healing and obstructs reality (3). This is the case of Atef and Alia. They have both buried the loss of Mustafa in their psyche. Whereas Atef resolved

to write his letters, which partially helped him to deal with his trauma, Alia repressed it all in her unconscious until she developed a condition of Alzheimer.

If Atef disclosed what happened to him and Mustafa in Nablus to Alia by showing her his letters, it is possible for her to heal from her trauma too. Nevertheless, Atef felt a sense of shame that prevented him from sharing the truth with Alia. Kompan Erzar elaborates on the idea of how the sense of shame prevents the traumatized subject from opening up about what really happened (234). Atef's letters never reached Alia, and she died without knowing what really happened to both her brother and husband. In this respect, Alia's trauma was never resolved.

However, for Atef, his letters eventually reach his grandchildren Linah and Zain after more than thirty years of writing them. He never intended that. When Atef was in the process of composing his letters and narrative, he made sure no one would ever find them. That is why he wrote them when no one was around and he kept them in a book that no one was likely to pick titled (Alyan 71). However, because of the Yacoub's mobility and their continuous dislocations and relocations, the letters in that book were carried with them to the new space.

The letters represent the memory that Atef kept hidden from his family throughout the years. Unexpectedly, they have reached the third generation of the Yacoub's. Zain, Linah and the others sat together to talk about the family's history; to discuss what happened to their grandfather Atef, and to learn about his traumatic past. According to Bako and Zana, the "traumatic experience is thus the history of the family. It is a memory of the people, of the world that disappeared – disappeared but not without a trace" (34). The letters work as a map. The grandchildren of Atef used them to redraw a space that vanished long before their coming to the world. The letters are also proof of their ancestral lineage and heritage.

When transgenerational trauma is processed via rendering the painful psychological wound into a bearable memory, healing becomes possible. Bako and Zana illustrate that transgenerational trauma for second and third generation is not a haunting ghost but rather a historic afflictive retention (87). In this light, the grandchildren of Atef do not merely manage to turn their grandfather's trauma into a personal memory (more like a history), but they also help him heal from his own trauma since now the incident is no longer a silent repressed matter. As his grandchildren came to know what happened through the letters, the non-verbal aspect of his trauma is verbalized and the narrative is shared with those in the traumatic atmosphere.

This is what confirms that healing from trauma is possible when it is properly dealt with. This also applies to transgenerational trauma and its recipients. The victims of transgenerational trauma would "slowly regain the space to live on their own terms, and to build their own identity" (Bako & Zana 87). Alyan contends that after the incident of the letters, the grandchildren of Atef and Alia resumed their lives in America, holding the memory of Palestine within them, and only discussing it in their trips to Beirut (Alyan 226). As such, Alyan's *Salt Houses*, like Abulhawa's and Rum's novels, is a "postmemorial work" that "strives to *reactivate* and *reembody* more distant social/national and archival/ cultural memorial structures" (Hirsch 111). Because of their spatiality and constant mobility, the Yacoubes gained a transnational aspect to their identity. Instead of being rooted to one spatial homeland, they came to develop a link to various spaces in their journey. The next section thoroughly deals with transnationalism in relation to the Yacoubes in *Salt Houses*.

3.3 The Yacoub and the Issue of Transnational Identity Formation

Mapping the ‘salt houses’ of the Yacoub in Alyan’s novel reveals how they came to develop a transnational sense of belonging. The yearning for the lost homeland is inscribed in their hearts and memories. However, throughout their journey, the Yacoub managed to transcend the traditional rigidly marked lines of nationality. Instead, they have attained a transnational identity that goes beyond the traditional definitions of home and belonging. This is especially true with the descendants of Alia and Atef; the third and fourth generations.

Transnationalism is a loaded concept with various definitions and characteristics. It is often used interchangeably with diaspora. However, Baubock and Faist argue that there is a blurry distinction between the two (9). They insist that the two concepts are “two awkward dance partners” with “fuzzy boundaries” that “often overlap” (Baubock & Faist 11). More explicitly, “transnationalism’ refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders or nation-states” (Vertovec i).

Unlike Baubock and Faist’s view that diaspora and transnationalism are awkward dance partners, other scholars argued that transnationalism encompasses diaspora. Among such researchers, Quayson and Daswani assert that “While diasporas are often understood to be a subset of transnational communities, the latter are taken to be an expansion of the overall conceptual scale of the former” (4). To put it simply, according to their definition transnationalism is the broader notion that shelters the concept of diaspora. In spotting the difference between the two concepts, Quayson and Daswani believe that:

While diasporas evoke a future time that foregrounds ritual practice and performance which is in tension with, yet also participates in, the creation of a

distant homeland in the present, transnationalism points to an irony and tension between the personal and group ambitions to transcend geographical, social, and economic boundaries and the political and cultural barriers and boundary-making processes that accompany such movement and mobility. (18)

This highlights how transnationalism fuels the ambiguous ironic relationship between the individual's interest and the expectations of the community as a whole. They assert that transnationalism helps in moving beyond the demarked spatial and abstract borders of nation-states to reach out for an understanding of cross-border relationships.

The above definitions of transnationalism, regardless of their difference, agree that the “trans” part of the concept has to do with the act of going beyond something, and in this case, going beyond nationalism. This is not to suggest that we live in a post-national world par excellence. Surely, nationalism is still in the frame. However, it is not in vogue as it used to be. The reason is rooted in the world's shift towards globalization and cosmopolitanism. It happened naturally giving the huge technological development of the contemporary world. The latter moved towards the creation of a seemingly borderless world where people, ideas, capital, and cultures circle freely. This is significantly apparent in Tsolidis definition of transnationalism who believes that the latter notion is rooted in globalization and the idea of a global demarked space that gives little importance to national borders (126). Following this thread, transnationalism can be “employed as a term that describes the increased levels of interconnectedness across national boundaries” (Tsolidis 126).

Transnationalism has received a great deal of attention from various scholars across disciplines. Notwithstanding, Vertovec manages to enumerate the basic six usages of the concept. In this scope, he argues that transnationalism is used “as social morphology, as type of consciousness, as mode of cultural reproduction, as avenue of

capital, as site of political engagement, and as (re)construction of ‘place’ or locality” (Vertovec 4). Of these selected meanings, the present research excludes the fourth and the fifth ones as not quite aligning with its analysis. The other usages are blended together and regarded as the essence of what it means to be transnational.

To illustrate the existence and formation of a transnational identity, it is crucial to analyse the example provided by Alyan in *Salt Houses*. The Yacoub family moved after living in Nablus to Kuwait and Amman. This mobility marks the beginning of an episode of relocations and transnational identity formation. The first move to Amman is a voluntary relocation by Salma to be next to her sister and to push her son to marry (Alyan 26). So is the case of Widad; Selma’s eldest, who marries Ghazi and moves permanently to Kuwait. These two spaces harbour the official transnational identity for the Yacoub family. However, it is still an Arab country in the Middle East; a neighbouring land to the original homeland. The real change appears after moving to the West; to Paris and Boston.

Nonetheless, even the apparently voluntary relocation is problematic. According to Kim, “free mobility is itself a deception, since the seemingly voluntary movement...is a forced process mediated by larger forces” (6). In the case of the Yacoub family, the pushing force for their mobility is the Israeli settler colonialism. Selma and Widad would not have had to leave their home in Jaffa and move to Amman and Kuwait if the circumstances were different. The spatial loss of their home in Palestine is a driving force for their wandering lifestyle and the formation of their transnational identity.

After staying in Kuwait for some time, Alia’s daughter Souad decided to travel to Paris to pursue her studies. Despite her own shortcomings and liberal outlook, Alia strangely protested against her daughter’s decision, stating that they would not allow

her to live alone in Paris “like some street girl” (Alyan 129). Alia’s statement highlights her use of the card of Arab propriety and norms to prevent her daughter from moving away from home and settling in the West. Alyan brings to light Alia’s ironic and paradoxical statement when the latter does not abide by the proper ‘Arab behaviour and conduct’. Throughout the novel, Alyan draws the picture of Alia who is reckless, liberal in her way of dressing and carrying herself; she wore tight revealing cloths and smoked publicly, and she did not follow the norm of the domestic wife and mother.

Nonetheless, Souad eventually succeeded in convincing her family to move to Paris with a relative; Khalto Mimi and her family who resided there (Alyan 128). Paris represents another vital spatiality in the transnational identity formation of Souad as a member of the Yacoub. Amidst this new phase, the streets of Paris fascinated Souad who found herself in a different culture (Alyan 129). The French culture with the freedom allowed for women heightens Souad’s sense of awe that makes her question her lifestyle in Kuwait. Paris is also the place where Souad finds love and marries Elie; the French Lebanese author (Alyan 141).

In America, Karam and Souad raised their children in accordance with their Western milieu; the thing that angered Alia who was constantly complaining of their “Americanness” (Alyan 164). At this point of their journey, the Yacoub acquired a transnational identity that started with their move to Kuwait reaching for their stay in America and ending with the annual summers in Beirut.

Nonetheless, Alyan asserts how it was uncomfortable for Alia to move to those spatialities. She hated moving to Kuwait and regarded it as “something to mourn over” (Alyan 50). However, she loved her summers in Amman, the city that reminded her of Palestine (Alyan 64). Even when Alia grew older and witnessed the birth of her grandchildren, she did not change her mind regarding all the spaces that the Yacoub

occupied. She believed that Kuwait, Paris, America, and especially Beirut are awful places, not fitting to live in, as she only perceived Amman as home (resembling Palestine) (Alyan 147). As such, Alia is resisting the transnational identity that her family developed throughout the years. She is clinging to their original homeland via accepting the closest alternative of living and settling in Amman.

This was not the case of her offspring. In fact, the opposite is true. Riham, Karam, and Souad welcomed the idea of moving to a new place as long as they found comfort and tranquillity. For Riham as an adolescent, Kuwait is home and Amman is the foreign land (Alyan 93). Alyan does not reveal much about Karam's feelings of belonging and homeliness. She mainly focuses on the women of the Yacoub family. Yet, she tells us that Karam's moving to Boston to study architecture was what he wanted (Alyan 132). Souad, too, was determined to move to Paris that and afterwards to Boston to join her brother Karam (Alyan 129).

The matter of developing a transnational identity does not seem to be a vexing thing for Alia's children (Souad and Karam) and grandchildren (Manar, Zain, and Linah). The resistance to the formation of such an identity is only found with those originally born in the native homeland. In Alyan's novel, this is especially true for Alia. Regardless of her free-spirited and liberal beliefs and lifestyle, Alia is intolerant when it comes to the issue of identity, particularly, her 'Arabness'. She insisted that her family follow her example and settle in Amman rather than meeting in Beirut that she labels the "city of whores" (Alyan 166).

In a similar vein, in a study on the transnational identity formation for Korean Americans, Mohácsi analyses the different patterns shown by the second-generation and their parents regarding belonging and identity (2). The transnational identity that is forged in a given spatiality is generally welcomed and accepted by most second-

generation individuals (Mohácsi 4). The analysis focuses on the novel by Catherine Chung *Forgotten Country* and the struggle of belonging and identity formation. The unifying pattern between Mohácsi's analysis and the present study is that transnational identities are welcomed by some and resisted by others. Mohácsi concludes her analysis by stating that transnational identity provides Korean Americans with the chance to take what suits them from every culture creating their own unique version of identity (16). In Alyan's novel, this is also the case of Palestinian Americans.

Throughout their story, it was not possible for the Yacoub to end their wandering mobile nature and establish roots in one particular spatiality. This does not infer that they did not try to find home. There are several instances of such attempts in the novel. In the case of Souad, after her divorce with Elie, she wanted to live with her children around their grandparents and to find homeliness in a place where people resembled them in appearance and culture (Alyan 168). Souad finds her solace in Beirut (possibly, because her husband is half-Lebanese and so are her children). Alyan highlights how Souad felt more Palestinian in Beirut (169). A discovery that was sparked by the geographical relocation and the move from the West to the East. Yet, Alyan tells us that despite living in Kuwait, Souad "wasn't Kuwaiti" and despite never being in Palestine "she was Palestinian" (170). This suggests that the attachment to a giving geographical space and the added meaning to that place is what defines the sense of belonging and rootedness rather than the mere occupation of the spatiality.

Unlike the generation of Alia and Atef who aspired to shield their national identity alongside their journey, their descendants developed a transnational identity that combined aspects from the homeland and other host lands. One can argue that such a realization is quite normal in a world that moved towards cosmopolitanism. As Vertovec contends, "Growing multidimensional diversity, increasing social complexity

and migrant transnationalism are being broadly acknowledged as ordinary, or at least unavoidable, facets of contemporary, globalized society” (158). As such, transnationalism becomes the norm and the prevailing *mode de vie* for most migrants and their offspring.

For the sake of illustration, the third and fourth generations of the Yacoub family manage to maintain their transnational identity alongside treasuring their ancestral homeland and Palestinian heritage. This can be detected in *Salt Houses* when Alia was in her last stages of Alzheimer. As soon as they heard about the deteriorated state of their grandmother, the grandchildren left everything behind and booked flights to be in Amman next to their family (Alyan 204). It did not matter where they settled. Whether it be a remote city in the West or a neighboring adjacent country in the East, the descendants of the Yacoub family understood their heritage and the responsibility of carrying the memory of Palestine within them wherever they moved. Somewhere in between the two juxtaposed worlds, the Yacoub family lived in a state of liminality.

3.4 A Threshold: The Liminal state of the Yacoub family and the Matter of Belonging

Space plays a vital role in shaping and deciding people’s identities and sense of belonging and attachment. It is quite important to the extent that its loss may cause dreadful consequences not only to the active agents who occupy it but also to their descendants who never set foot in it. This is what we find in Alyan’s account of the Yacoub family in *Salt Houses*. The loss of Palestine; the original homeland, led the Yacoub family to lose their sense of belonging and they found themselves carried in waves of migration and dispersal. No place after their forced removal would create enough meaning and attachment for them to ground roots and settle.

In fact, they developed a transnational identity because of their constant mobility and relocation. Not only did they live in neighboring Arab countries, but also,

they have moved to live far in the West. With the crossing of each border, the Yacoubes were also crossing the borders of their culture and identity. With each new spatiality, a new cultural layer was added to the existing ones, resulting in a hybrid multicultural mix. For the Yacoubes, this meant carrying their Palestinian heritage when they moved to Kuwait, Amman, Paris, Boston, and Beirut. All of these spaces, as a place of temporary residence for some members of the Yacoubes, also carry their own cultural and social norms and mores. In some cases, the native culture clashed with the hosting culture resulting in an uncomfortable position for the Yacoubes.

Consequently, the Yacoubes find themselves in a state of liminality. Caught in between two opposing worlds, they lived in a condition that is governed by politics of pushing and pulling and negotiation. When addressing the emerging genre of Anglophone Arabic Literature, Aladylah elaborates on how women writers in particular used English and their Arab heritage to weave stories that are caught between two spatialities, cultures, and identities (3). Alyan is one of those women writers who represent the latter in her novel. In *Salt Houses*, the in-between is a contested space that evokes both admiration and woe.

Note that the in-betweenness becomes mostly visible when characters are confronted with the claim of ‘pure cultures’ who point out their otherness and superficial belongingness. This what happens with Linah when she was talking with her Lebanese friends about Jbail and one of the girls protested that she had no right to do so since Linah “is not even Lebanese” (Alyan 186). Linah realized her confusion regarding her identity when the girl kept accusing her people of killing her uncle when Linah never knew what it means to be Palestinian of Iraqi descent (Alyan 186).

Originally, liminality as a concept was first introduced by Arnold Van Gennep and revived later on by Victor Turner. As illustrated by Meethan, a concept’s initial

meaning may change to mean something quite different as it happened with the notion of liminality (69). Thomassen elaborates on the definition of liminality as he explains its natural tendency to go beyond the lime which is a Latin word denoting a threshold. This boundary or lime exists to be crossed (21). Tally shares Thomassen's view regarding the concept of liminality. He elaborates that "liminality signifies a threshold between two zones, an anteroom distinct from that which could be said to be definitely inside or outside, here and there" (Tally xii).

From the above definitions, it is confirmed that liminality is a state of being and existing amidst two entities. In this case, the two scholars are referring to the spatial liminality and border politics. This can include the transnational identities that cross borders and confront the differences that living in the in-between intensifies. It is possible to reflect this on the case of the Yacoub in *Salt Houses*. The spatial liminality of the Yacoub has affected their identities resulting in the creation of liminal identities.

In this instance, liminality represents an in-between waiting spot or temporary station that people occupy before moving to a more permanent social position (Decker & Winchock 4). In the case of the Yacoub, this has to do with the choice of fully integrating into the Arab or the American identity. However, it is not that easy to choose a stand. Decker and Winchock point out that such process of liminality may not help the individual claim their prior identity as it may create difficulties in adopting the new one (4). The new formed liminal identity does not fully adhere to these identities but it takes aspects from both.

It is vital to understand that despite the flexible nature of liminality, living in it for a long time is both exhausting and dangerous. The state of liminality is meant to be temporary. Thomassen asserts that "liminality cannot and should not be considered an

end-point or a desirable state of being” because this results in the loss of “the existential basis” of “creativity and freedom” that turns into “boredom and a sense of imprisonment” (31). He also argues that unlike the common belief, “it is impossible simply to feel at home everywhere if one does not feel at home somewhere” (Thomassen 31). The contemporary cosmopolitan belief of belonging to the world and the cosmos conceals the importance of the micro belonging to a specific local spatiality.

Agier holds a different opinion when it comes to the notion of cosmopolitanism. He believes that “cosmopolitanism is not the monopoly of a globalized elite” but rather as “the experience of the roughness of the world by all those who, by taste, necessity or compulsion” are directed “to live in several places almost simultaneously in an increasing mobility” (Agier ix). The latter definition fits perfectly with the journey of the Yacoub. While their initial mobility is out of necessity and because of their compulsion, some later movements are characterized by free desire and taste. However, for such individuals the sum of their local and global relationships constitutes the ground on which in-betweenness emerge due to their raising cosmopolitanism (Agier 125).

In this respect, liminality affects identity. It reshapes and alters it. As Beech contends, liminality is a “reconstruction of identity (in which the sense of self is significantly disrupted) in such a way that the new identity is meaningful for the individual and their community” (296). Thus, for the Yacoub and their community, the new liminal identity is a normal outcome of their existential reality. Othering begins when they move to a spatiality that is marked by unifying identity; such as the example of Linah and Jbail that was discussed earlier. In those spaces, the Yacoub are

confronted by the rigid distinction of seemingly ‘pure cultures’ that do not tolerate a hybrid liminal identity.

Agier calls these formed identities “uncertain identities that are ambiguous, incomplete”, in which space and “border landscapes...bring into relation a here and an elsewhere, a same and an other” (8). The mobility of the Yacoubis reveal their uncertain identities and their problematic belonging. To illustrate, Alia faces a problem of belonging with their movement to Kuwait. Crossing the borders and moving to the latter traumatized Alia and resulted in her permanent uneasiness with her spatiality (Alyan 93). Her daughter Riham holds a similar position about another spatiality; her mother’s favorite place, Amman. Unlike Alia, Riham, in her teenage years, feels a deep sense of non-belonging in Amman. In fact, Riham considers Kuwait as her home (Alyan 88). As such, the same space means different things for different members of the Yacoubis.

Alyan stresses this notion of various modes of belonging that are experienced by one single family. Each generation of the Yacoubis hold a different understanding of what constitutes home and of the meaning of belonging. For the older generation, home and belonging are in Amman; a duplicate of Palestine. However, for the later generations, especially those born and raised in the West, their belonging is shaken and often unresolved. In other words, their liminality and in-betweenness creates a sense of belonging to various spaces all at once. This view is thoroughly illustrated in the previous chapter in Edward Said’s notion of being ‘out of place’.

His daughter Najla Said also confirms her stand as someone who is caught in-between the “the line between ‘East’ and ‘West’” (85). Najla Said contends that she resided in the in-between for such a long time, before realizing that it is alright to let go of the compulsion to choose one defined identity (7). Similar to her beliefs, Chawla

highlights how “belonging was not as important as traveling the in-between spaces” and that “to not belong” became her means “to liberation” (Chawla & Rodriguez 3). Belonging here is disregarded when one of the halves of identity is to be compromised. When the Palestinian American is obliged to choose a side to belong to, the resulting uncomfortable state renders the whole philosophy of belonging into a futile matter.

Nonetheless, having at least one identity and a sense of belonging to a given space is inevitable. Taking the example of the Palestinian Americans, the fact that they cannot return to Palestine has strengthened their inclination towards seeking to belong in America. This does not suggest that they are no longer proud of their Palestinian half. It is just the fact that it is hard to deny the strong, ceaseless influence of space over identity and the sense of belonging. In this respect, the American everyday life becomes the norm that describes this community’s identification. However, even inside such Western environment, the Eastern Palestinian Arab heritage is preserved in the food, language and overall culture of these individuals.

In *Salt Houses*, Alyan addresses the daunting matter of feeling a strong attachment to the ancestral homeland, especially when visiting it for the first time. The grandchildren of Atef are comfortable with their lives in the West. However, when Manar finds out that she is pregnant, a strong desire is kindled inside her to see Palestine. This signals the importance of keeping the memory of the homeland alive in the coming generations. It also suggests that the hope of returning to Palestine is with the future generations who are yet to be born. Nevertheless, through sending Manar to Palestine, Alyan is challenging Fadda-Conrey’s notion of “rearrival”. The latter is about “second-and third-generation Arab-Americans undertaking temporary return journeys to ancestral homelands” (Fadda-Conrey 26) to feel connected to their Arab heritage and decide their belonging in America.

Instead of helping her to reconnect with her Arab heritage through her journey to the homeland, Alyan elucidates how Manar was ‘lost in Palestine’. In the plane to Palestine, Manar “felt a sharp homesickness for Manhattan, though she had been gone for only half a day” (Alyan 222). This is the first proof of Manar’s changed willingness, and perhaps even regret, for starting this journey. Note how Alyan spots light on Manar’s extreme sense of attachment and belonging to Manhattan to the point that she feels sharply homesick only after few hours from leaving it. Once she landed, Manar visited all those “places she has read about, circles on a map” that “suddenly emerge” as proof that “Palestine is real” and that while she was busy living her American life, “there were people over here being Palestinian” (Alyan 226).

Manar’s disappointment with Palestine was grandiose especially that she has experienced nothing of what she has imagined she will. She expected that she would “feel unflinching attachment” to the land that would “shaken” her “to the core” (Alyan 227). However, Manar does not feel anything special about the real Palestine and she finds herself unable to think or feel anything (Alyan 227). This numbness was nothing like the fierce enthusiasm that she felt when reading about these places. However, now when she finally came to experience them first-hand, she “felt uninspired” unable to find the thing that “would link her, in some ancestral way, to the world” (Alyan 230).

Manar’s experience matches Najla Said’s description of her first ‘rearrival’ to Palestine. Similar to the character of Manar, Najla remarks how she “stared out the window at the landscape and waited to feel something amazing, but in truth” she “was in no state of mind” and “the promised land” appeared to her as “a horrifically frightening place” (86). It is outstanding how this Utopian rosy view of Palestine that these women grew up hearing about turned to a huge disappointment when visiting the real landscape. As if the picture that they had threaded throughout their lives was too

perfect to be true. Alyan, neatly, highlights this matter of the sense of belonging that many people choose to deny or romanticize.

Alyan brings Manar to visit Nablus, the home of her grandparents after al-Nakba, “to feel kinship” (230), but Manar felt thwarted. She used the letters of Atef that Zain gave her as a map to look for her grandparents’ house and the places that were visible in the family’s photographs. However, once she found the house, Manar did not feel “some internal tectonic shift” but she simply felt “like an interloper, trespassing on memories that had nothing to do with her” (Alyan 231). She could not feel a sense of attachment to her ancestral homeland no matter how hard she tried to. Reaching the end of her temporary journey in Palestine, Manar realized that she has “come here for no reason” (Alyan 236) stressing the futility of her search of belonging in her ancestral homeland. Alyan concludes her story of the Yacoub with Manar drawing their family tree on the sand. The thought of having her family all united in Palestine is pleasant but soon after “a large wave washes over the sand, the water eating her words” and her “family come and gone in this sea that belongs to none of them” (Alyan 237).

The concluding section of *Salt Houses* sums up the Yacoub’s struggle with finding home and belonging amidst a transnational existence. There is no return for them. Even the short ‘rearrival’ of Manar is not fulfilling. It serves no purpose except to comment on the possibility that some people will not feel the attachment to their ancestral homeland and that it is okay to feel so. Palestinian American women writers, such as Alyan, reveal how their communities are more inclined towards an Americanized lifestyle. This in no means imply that their sense of liminality and in-betweenness is resolved. However, I argue that the sense of being caught between two juxtaposing worlds softens with their conscious and unconscious choice to lean more

towards their American half in their hybrid make up. This has to do with spatiality. Space affects identity and belonging deeply. Naturally, their spatial existential reality and experience creeps into their lives whether they choose to shun it or fully adopt it. Women are the moving engine of the Yacoub's story. It is vital to consider the way they perceive their spaces and relationships along their journey.

Conclusion

Alyan's *Salt Houses* sums up the struggle of four generations of the Yacoub family who undergo the Palestinian Nakba and scatter all over the world. This chapter begins by mapping the various salt houses that the Yacoub family occupied in the course of their journey of dislocation and relocation. This section highlights how it was impossible for this family to find rootedness and develop a strong sense of home in these spaces. The chapter also analyses the matter of the Palestinian transgenerational trauma in relation to the Yacoub family. This unhealed wound persisted and was transmitted across generations. The next section sheds light on the peculiarities of transnational identity formation and the matter of liminality and in-betweenness. Because of their constant mobility, the Yacoub family attained a transnational dimension to their identity that was hard to define and dissect. This is especially true with the first and second generations. However, third and fourth generations are more apt to accept their out-of-place-ness and fluid identities.

Chapter 4

Home and Homelessness: Women's Spatiality and Belonging and Arab and Arab-American Family Dynamics in Rum's *A Woman is No Man*

“But there were some things you couldn't explain. Words could do extraordinary things, but sometimes they were not enough”.
“You have to have a home first to be uprooted from it. You have to know what love is to feel alone”.

-Rum, *A Woman Is No Man*.

Introduction

The third novel of the present study paints a different tableau of the Palestinian story. Whereas Abulhawa and Alyan focus on the Palestinian Nakba and the Palestinian quest to find meaning again in a shattered world of confusion and loss, Etaf Rum starts her story in 1990 and presents the horrifying truths of living as a woman in an oppressive patriarchal household. Another difference is in the setting of the novel.

Most events take place in the space of America, more precisely Brooklyn, with Palestine operating mostly in the background as the lost homeland. The women of Rum's world are voiceless and helpless creatures utterly at the mercy of their patriarchs who deny them their rights. In this respect, this chapter foregrounds three main aspects that Rum centers her story around. The first section deals with the issue of women's spatiality and the question of home and belonging, which in terms affect women's self-realization and identification. Through choosing the small space of the Ra'ad's house in Brooklyn to narrate most of the events, Rum expresses a pessimistic view of women's confinement into the marked domestic sphere, especially for Isra and her daughters. The latter spent most of their time in their basement rooms that are dark and windowless. This spatial arrangement sets the tone for the entirety of the story as Isra and her daughters are hidden underground with no access to the outside world even through the threshold of a window.

Tally's concept of topophrenia is deployed to discuss these spatialities more accurately. After that, the chapter moves to deal with the matter of Arab and Arab-American family dynamics, to analyze home from within that make up a poignant point in the development of events. Rum is critical of the ideals of Arab families that they try to insert in their offspring's lives in the West, particularly for girls. In this section, the focus is on how the upbringing of both boys and girls result in their designated social roles and power relations.

Anthias' concept of translocation positionality is suitable to delineate the matter of patriarchal oppression and hierarchies in relation to social power and authority. This section of family dynamics paves the way for the last section that is dedicated to analyzing the notion of females' education and its role in the empowerment and liberation of women. Rum is sending a message through her female characters that education is what a woman needs to break her shackles in an oppressive men-dominating milieu. The contrast is heightened between Isra and Sarah with the first lacking a proper education and with the second striving to finish her studies. Deya, Isra's daughter does not want to repeat her mother's fate and life but she also does not want to forsake her family and Arab tradition like her aunt Sarah. Eventually, Deya manages to do what her mother and aunt failed to accomplish as she convinces her grandmother of her desire to pursue higher education and not marry without the need to violate their culture and tradition.

4.1 Women's Spatiality and Belonging: Between Topophobia and Topophrenia

The spatial fashioning of *A Woman Is No Man* varies greatly if we compare it to that of *The Blue Between Sky and Water* and *Salt Houses*. Unlike the spatial mobility (both voluntary and compulsory) that characterizes Abulhawa's and Alyan's novels, Rum's spatial representation is fixed in two main locals: the first one is found in the brief

spatial positioning of Isra in her parents' house in Palestine before her wedding, and the second one is after she moves to Brooklyn with her in-laws. Represented as an object that was moved from Palestine and brought to America, Isra's spatial positioning revealed her lack of agency and her absolute dependency and subordination.

Massey contends that when it comes to the dichotomy of time and space, matters flipped with space taking the upper hand over time (Massey 89). As such, the present analysis of the three novels focuses on the spaces that establish and reinforce the sense of home, identity and belonging for Palestinian and Palestinian American women. The focus is rooted to those spaces that lead the represented women to lose their sense of belonging and identity. The study highlights what McDowell refers to as the politics of space that delineate the means to shaping and altering place and identities in a complex web of connections that decide who is in and who is out (214).

Rum opens her novel in the Hadid's house in Birzeit, Palestine, precisely from their kitchen. Isra and her mother were busy preparing food for their coming guests that they even missed their *Maghrib* prayer deliberately (Rum 10). Apparently, the Ra'ads were coming from America to propose to Isra and that was the reason behind all the careful preparations. Aside from Isra's exaggerated fear and anxiety to please everyone in the room, it is noteworthy to explain why Rum decided to open her novel with women in the kitchen. The most obvious explanation lies in the universal shared belief by patriarchal systems that a woman's place is her kitchen.

As it is illustrated in the previous chapters, the space of the kitchen in the two other novels is a warm space of sharing and of female and familial bonding. However, the space of the kitchen in Rum's novel is rather different. Isra and her mother did not talk while working. There is a clear lack of a mother-daughter bonding in this space that is supposed to unite them. To illustrate, Isra's mother was scolding her harshly for not

abiding by their cultural norms while serving the guests despite Isra's insistence that it was a mistake since she was nervous (Rum 14). Even when Isra was looking for motherly comforting and assurance that everything will be okay once she moves to America, her mother was stone-like and kept on tending to her automatic dinner-making rituals without even looking at her daughter's face (Rum 14).

The abovementioned stand can be illustrated with Anthias concept of translocational positionality. Anthias contends that this concept "addresses issues of identity in terms of locations which are not fixed but are context, meaning and time related and which therefore involve shifts and contradictions" (5). Hence, the translocational part of the concept acknowledges the multiplicity of peoples' locales and belongings that they develop depending on the situation and the context (Anthias 6). Anthias' concept relates to the theory of intersectionality that was originally established as a feminist approach to study the oppression of women of color. As explained by Dhamoon, intersectionality aims at opposing all calls to box people in one category, giving them one label, and ignoring the interplay of power and social relations in shaping different positionalities (230). She contends that this paradigm is all about going against the "idea that subject formation and identities are unified and autonomous" (Dhamoon 231).

More specifically, Anthias asserts that positionality is about the sum of social positions and positioning that determines social roles and hierarchies (634). For example, Isra's mother dwells within different positionalities that are contradicted in nature. On the one hand, she is the victim of the patriarchal oppression of her husband and overall society. On the other hand, she acts as the oppressor of her own daughter through punishing her for things that she herself suffers from. In a similar study on intersectionality, Mastoureh Fathi analyses the different positionalities of Iranian

women in UK as immigrants, from a social perspective. Moreover, Melanie Hoewer's book *Crossing Boundaries during Peace and Conflict Transforming identity in Chiapas and in Northern Ireland* focuses on women and their identities as they cross borders and positionalities at times of turmoil.

Translocations are defined as those social spaces that are governed by power relations and a marking of boundaries (Anthias 15). Anthias insists that "positionalities themselves are socially produced through the interplay of processes and outcomes of social relations" (17). In the case of Isra and her mother, their social positioning is determined by hierarchies and power relations. For instance, Yacob's positionality in relation to his family and women is that of a privileged position of power and prestige. His word is the first and the last, and no one dares to go against his decisions even if they are wrong. As such, he appears as the patriarch who abuses his family and manages it according to his laws.

However, Yacoub's translocational positionality moves beyond the level of the tight circle of his small family to account for his positioning among other Palestinian men and even in relation to the Israeli colonizer. In this sense, Yacob is no longer in an advantageous position. Instead, Yacob becomes the poor weak man who is not highly appreciated by his society and who is clearly unimportant to the Israelis. This results in a contradictory translocational positioning for Yacob. Rum highlights this contradiction in his position and views when she speaks of his opinion about his house and its location. The location of their house was on "a steep hill" on the "outskirts of Birzeit" that Yacob took much pride in purchasing it that he felt "powerful, like a king" (Rum 11). When in reality, the house was on an abandoned space with a low price to go with their tight budget (Rum 11).

Going back to Isra's mother and her relationship to her daughter and the space of the kitchen calls for regarding her translocational positioning as well. According to Wang and Liang, "If women's aphasia in the kitchen space is caused by patriarchy, traditional women, as participants in this culture, act as accomplices to maintain the deformed gender order" (181). In Rum's novel, the accomplice of patriarchy that maintains the oppression of Isra is her own mother. The latter was raising her daughter in accordance with the expected patriarchal norms even when it was her own plight to suffer under the control of Yacob. Isra could not resist her family and tradition despite her unwillingness to get married and move to America.

One striking incident that relates to the space of the kitchen is when Isra, as a five year old, witnesses for the first time the battering of her mother by her father. Apparently, Yacob was "displeased" because of "an undercooked piece of lamb" that he let his rage out on his wife who was "begging him to stop" as he "struck her" (Rum 16). Isra learns about the different power relations at play in such gendered space from such a young age. Yacob as a man, a husband and the head of the household is the one that should never be crossed and must be pleased to avoid such violence. Her mother's position as a woman and a wife is to obey Yacob at all costs and seek to never anger him to live at peace. This image distorts the ideal relationship between husband and wife for Isra and teaches her that to avoid pain and uneasiness, silence and obedience are the only means to follow as a woman.

Moving from the kitchen of her parents, Isra found herself serving in the kitchen of her in-laws in America. Isra is expected to take care of the house chores, especially the kitchen. Not surprisingly, the first thing that Isra did after she was shown her windowless bedroom in the dark basement was to enter the kitchen and help her mother-in-law set dinner for the whole family (Rum 45). From that day onward, Isra's

life would revolve around helping Fareeda in the kitchen, cooking and cleaning, or sitting with her in the same space to listen to her stories about America (Rum 61).

The same kitchen that Isra enters for the first time when she arrives to Brooklyn is never altered spatially. However, what changes is the lived space as experienced by Isra and her new family. It is in Isra's nature that she is eager to please everyone even at her own expense. The space of the kitchen is a witness of her countless attempts to prove herself as a good daughter-in-law and a good wife. Nevertheless, with her second pregnancy, Isra develops a negative attachment to the kitchen (Rum 100). Her dull daily routine of cooking and housekeeping while switching from the kitchen to her rooms in the basement depresses Isra and makes her question if she is fit to be a mother.

Isra's various positioning amidst her limited spatiality reflect how she is weak and voiceless. The sum of her intersecting traits and experiences results in such vulnerability. When it comes to identity and intersectionality, Hankivsky et al. illustrate how individuals as members of various social settings are "either intersectionally privileged or intersectionally oppressed" (9). In another study, Bedolla asserts the latter by explaining how people are intersectionally prone to "experiences of marginalization and privilege simultaneously" (235). However, Isra is in a constant state of oppression throughout her different positioning and intersectionalities. She is an oppressed daughter, wife, and daughter-in-law. Isra is never in a state of privilege.

The kitchen turns into a site of violence and discomfort for Isra after a year of her marriage. Her husband, Adam, started drinking and he divulged his anger and frustration on her in the kitchen while eating his dinner (Rum 102). After Isra's third daughter and her failure to give them the long-awaited son, and especially after Nadine, Omar's wife, gave birth to a boy, Adam became accustomed to battering Isra. In one

incident, the kitchen turned into the site of concealing this domestic violence by Fareeda who covered Isra's face with makeup, teaching her how to conceal her shame instead of protesting the injustice (Rum 141).

Sarah's relationship with Isra deepens in the kitchen. First, it was merely some words of support whenever Fareeda scolded one of them. However later on, their relationship develops and a sisterly bond grows out of their daily interaction as they prepare meals and wash dishes together. Isra sees herself in Sarah's shoes as she struggles as a young girl controlled by her mother. Sarah does not accept the oppressive situation of Isra and the rest of the women and she shows signs of resistance and rebellion whenever possible. The bulk of their kitchen interaction is when Sarah confronted Isra about the issue of domestic violence that Adam is alcoholic, and she should not consent to his battering. Isra's reply astonished Sarah who did not know that she was enduring in silence.

The kitchen, in Rum's novel, is a space dominated by patriarchal oppression and control. The kitchen appears as a space that keeps women in a state of subordination and servitude. Isra realizes this after her talk with Sarah. She finally understood why she was voiceless and helpless. Isra have been "stuck in the kitchen" her "entire life, first in Palestine and now here" (in America) (Rum 148). McCall highlights the complexity of intersectionality as a feminist approach to studying women's subjugation in various locations. She asserts that previous methodologies went wrong in focusing on individual social positions rather than analyzing the intersecting categories that form a complex whole (McCall 1780).

Rum's choice of positioning Isra and her daughters in the space of the basement is not to be overlooked. Even before Isra's arrival to Brooklyn, when she first meets Adam, the space of their meeting has an odd scenery that foreshadows what is coming

in Isra's fate. They sat facing a graveyard and Isra thought that this may be "a bad omen" (Rum 18). In America, the women in Rum's novel are positioned differently. Isra is the Palestinian, lower-class uneducated woman who came to the US looking for better opportunities. Her daughters are in a different positioning as Arab-American middle-class educated women. However, the unifying thread of all of these women is that they only present one layer of their complex identities at a time. McCall gives a similar example about Arab-American women in her analysis of intersecting categories (1781).

As it is a hidden space underground, cut away from the rest of the house, the basement enables Isra to hide her sorrow and pain from her in-laws for some time. Instead of being vocal about her oppression, Isra chooses to suffer in silence in her confined gloomy basement that is tainted by loneliness and domestic violence. Isra is unable to belong to her new spatiality. According to Anthias, although boundaries delineate areas of distinction and inclusion, they exhibit various levels of vulnerability due to their spatiotemporal manifestations, both in regards to one another and as part of broader social relationships of hierarchy (30). Because Isra lacked the needed support from her husband and in-laws to feel at home, instead of developing a topophilia she develops a topophobia.

These two concepts belong to the discipline of geography and are quite useful in the present geocritical analysis of the notions of home, identity, and belonging. Topophilia is first coined by the famous geographer Yi-Fu Tuan to denote "the affective bond between people and place or setting" (4). If you literally break the concept, topophilia would mean the love of place. It is about those strong emotions that one develops in a certain spatiality. Topophobia is its antithesis. If the former notion highlights the love of place, the latter concept foregrounds the fear and anxiety attached

to a given place or space. The notion of topophobia is explained by Trigg who contrasts it to the notion of topophilia when analyzing the concept of home.

To better understand how this contrast works, it is beneficial to think about topophilia as a positive experience of space whereas topophobia is a negative one. Both concepts may be applied in analyzing the notion of home. When one's home is a comfortable niche, where one finds peace and tranquility, topophilia is most likely to be developed. However, if the subject experiences confinement, discomfort, violence, and an overall threat to their wellbeing in their home, a topophobic condition will take place. To illustrate from Rum's novel, Isra's negative experience in the spaces that she occupied resulted in her developing a topophobia. In fact, Isra never succeeds in creating a love of place as she is constantly struggling with her non-belonging.

The space that humans occupy is never a unified fixed entity. As explained by Massey, since space is the realm of diversity and the result of social interactions, which are actual material activities that are constantly occurring, space cannot be closed; there will always be loose ends and possible components of chance (132). Two main things may be extracted from Massey's stand. The first is that space is produced through processes of social powers and relations that create hierarchies and differences among the occupants of such space. In the case of Isra and the other female subjects in Rum's story, those social relations are dominated by a cultural patriarchal doctrine that keeps women utterly dependent on men as they lack any means to attain autonomy or self-governance. Via lacking a proper education and the economic means to ensure their livelihood without the support of men, women find themselves helpless and they resolve to take those social powers for granted.

The second point tackled by Massey regarding space is that because the latter is open and ongoing, it is inevitably prone to change and modifications. However, that

cannot be attained without resistance and transgression of the conventional boundaries. In Rum's account, Isra lacks the very thing; she does not resist her spatial oppression and she does not attempt altering her space. For Isra, her space is always controlled by other agents but herself. When she lived with her parents in Palestine before her marriage, Yacoub and her mother were the active agents in maintaining such control. When she moved to America with her in-laws, Adam, Fareeda and the rest of the family assumed that role of supervision and monitoring. Since the sum of these social relations and powers inflicted pain and suffering upon Isra's being, it is no wonder that she developed a topophobia for both places (her parents' house in Palestine and her new house in America with her husband's family).

Isra's topophobic experience worsens because of her voicelessness. In order for change to take place, the subject needs to voice out their thoughts and beliefs. The same applies to spatial realities. As Massey puts it, "spaces and places are altered in their physicality and in their meaning through their embeddedness in networks of communication" (134). When there is no resistance to the designated limits of the marked closed space, a possibility for change slowly fades away. This proves to be the example of Isra who accepts her spatial relations without seeking to free herself from its dominance and oppression that leads her to face her dead end, literally. In a similar study, Gonzáles applies the notions of topophobia and topophilia on Spanish women and how they perceive their homes as prisons or places of comfort and security (203). Bowring highlights the interplay of topophobia and topophilia after the Christchurch earthquake in New Zealand and how citizen's perceptions altered regarding the same spaces (112).

Massey also elaborates on the relationship between space and identity in terms of women's spaces and their self-realization and identification. Rum's focus on the

Arab patriarchal culture brings forth the issue of “the limitation of women’s mobility, in terms of both identity and space” as “a crucial means of subordination” (Massey 179). Women in Isra’s world are confined to “the domestic sphere” by their patriarchs who exercise “a specifically spatial control” on them that results in “a social control on identity” (Massey 179). As such, in this antagonistic psychological and social setting, women lack a clear identity that bolsters the members' sense of value (Wagner et.al 524). Topophrenia engenders such ambiguous identity.

Tally remarkably coins a new term that joins both topophilia and topophobia that he labels topophrenia. Through conjoining the love of place with the fear of place, Tally adds another layer of the awareness of place. He believes that space and place inflict in humans more than just love or fear. Instead, he regards topophrenia as “a sort of visceral and persistent place-mindedness” (Tally 47). Topophrenia, in this regard, is concerned with how humans perceive space and place and how they relate to them in everyday life experiences. Moreover, Tally contends that “topophrenia characterizes the subjective engagement with a given place, with one’s sense of place, and with the possible projection of alternative spaces” (38).

In a study on Stig Sæterbakken’s novel *Gjennom Natten*, Stahr uses the dichotomy of topophobia and topophilia to analyze the different spaces in the story and the characters’ perception towards them. Stahr adds another two concepts that she believes fill the missing gap between topophobia and topophilia that of ‘topoaversion’ and ‘topoanimosity’ (65). Sofia Martinicorena deploys the notion of topophilia in her literary analysis of Joan Didion’s *Run River*. She highlights the crucial aspect of developing a love of place and how this shapes the sense of home and belonging (Martinicorena 111).

Nonetheless, despite Tally's insistence that his concept of topophrenia "could include aspects of both topophilia and topophobia" (39), his conceptualization is more prone towards the latter with little room for the former. The reason behind this argument is found in his elaboration on topophrenia, in which he explains that the term entails a sort of anxiety of being lost and the potential bewilderment and discontent that humans form and attach to given spaces and places. It is true that his conceptualization implies a departure from a mere love or fear of a given spatiality; however, his concept is more like topophobia with its negative connotation. To illustrate, Tally states that "even familiar places might engender in the subject feelings of fear and loathing" (37). According to Ruan and Hogben, whether it be topophobia or topophilia, the experience of both entails a set of human's emotions attached to given topos both physically and mentally (3).

Coming back to Rum's novel, Isra is in a state of place-mindedness throughout the story. Starting in Palestine and moving to America, Isra's spatiality is characterized by a dis-ease and a perpetual state of loss and anxiety. With the endless vicious cycle of patriarchal oppression that was transmitted across generations, Isra is taught that a woman's presence must always be barely noticeable; that she must be invisible to survive in the harsh world of men. Women in Rum's world are unable to belong to their spaces and places and their identities are affected negatively because of that.

The previous chapters have touched upon this matter of belonging. However, it is vital to re-address this notion in relation to this novel too. Anthias gives a deluxe definition of belonging that is quite suitable to Isra's state. She contends that:

Belonging is not just about membership, rights and duties, as in the case of citizenship, or just about forms of identification with groups or others, but it is also about the social places constructed by such identifications and

memberships and the ways in which social place has resonances on stability of the self, on feelings of being part of a longer whole and the emotional and social bonds that are related to such places. (Anthias 8)

Anthias explains how belonging is different from citizenship and group membership. She affirms that belonging is more about the social relations that form those emotions and feelings that people attach to different places. The established hierarchies are the ones that decide how people form these emotions.

Rum depicts in her novel the lives of women who are controlled by a patriarchal culture that denies them equal rights to men. When Sarah protested against Fareeda's unjust treatment of her, when the latter kept reminding her that she must prepare for marriage and forget about school, Sarah compared her situation to her brothers' free lifestyle. Fareeda, then, gave her the daily dose of the bitter pill of "what's important for girls" and the constant reminder that "a woman is not a man" (Rum 75). However, because of her half American identity, Sarah is not able to tolerate this reality like Isra and she decides to run away. As such, although Rum's novel is "filled with anguish and despair" especially when addressing women's subjugation and oppression, "yet it communicates a voice of resilience" (Alghaberi 2). This voice is found in the character of Sarah and later on in the character of Deya.

A Woman Is No Man also addresses the hardships facing hyphenated American women, particularly the issue of belonging and identity. Sarah and Deya are caught in a disorienting experience of living amidst two juxtaposed worlds of the East and the West. For them, Palestine is that homeland that they only know about from their family's "collective narrative" that is "passed on from one generation to the next" (Alghaberi 1). They have never been physically to 'historic Palestine' and all they know about that half of their identity is transmitted to them from their parents and

grandparents. Sarah is caught between two opposed cultures that leads her to assume two different identities of the obedient yet rebellious daughter (Rum 146). Deya, too, was not “Arab enough” as she “straddled between two cultures”, “neither Arab nor American. She belonged nowhere” (Rum 27).

These problems of belonging especially emerge at times of crisis. Sarah only feels the burden of her hybrid identity and her struggle with belonging when her mother reminds her of the matter of marriage and a woman’s role in their Arab culture. Similarly, Deya faces the hardship of fitting in in both worlds when she dreams of pursuing her studies and her grandmother urges her to get married. As Anthias puts it, due to the idea that there are a variety of spaces, locations, regions, and identities that humans do not and cannot be a part of, belonging concerns frequently arise (8). Because of their cultural control, both Sarah and Deya are unable to belong to both spaces (that of the homeland and the host land).

The Arab Palestinian culture, as represented by Rum, maintains such techniques as “female space denial” and “space segregation” in order to insure males’ dominance over females (Benneghrouzi & Zitouni 205). In the novel, Isra, Sarah, Deya, and her sisters are denied access to the public space of Brooklyn. The only exception is when Sarah, Deya and her sisters go to school and that too is under strict supervision by Fareeda who assumes the role of the patriarchal monitor. However, Isra is different in the sense that she does not voice out her struggles in the designated space that the patriarchal culture set for women like her. As Benneghrouzi and Zitouni contend, the disparity appears to be expected by both the male disparager and the female disparaged because, astonishingly, many women are indifferent to space separation, which is so implicitly accepted (206).

When patriarchal oppression is faced by a dead silence from the subjugated women, the practice prevails and finds its fuel in such voicelessness. The women in Rum's novel are denied a voice of resistance to such system. They are taught that a woman is no man and that the best way to survive in their world is via keeping their thoughts to themselves and to hide their agonies. Note that the cultural composition of men and women through their socialization procedure creates and maintains this patriarchal system by instilling in them the expectations and enforcing behaviors that must all align with the reinforcement of masculinity (Benneghrouzi & Zitouni 207).

Unfortunately, even women, particularly mothers, help in boosting this phenomenon of masculinity promotion and the oppression of their own daughters. Fareeda and Isra's mother are the best illustration for the latter. This does not infer that these two women are positioned to serve only this role of supporting the patriarchal system. As stated previously, subjects may develop contradictory positionalities depending on their circumstances. Fareeda and Isra's mother are positioned culturally to watch over their girls' behavior and ensure that they fathom their dependency upon men, that they are not equal to men, and that their sole purpose is to fulfill their duties in their domestic sphere. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight the undeniable truth that Fareeda and Isra's mother are occupying peripheral or inferior roles in various contexts particularly, when men are added to the formula (See Anthias 76).

The combination of these vital elements is rooted in Anthias idea of translocational belongings. She explains how the different positionalities that subjects acquire determine their sense of belonging (or lack thereof) to their spatial realities. As Anthias contends, for the objectives of governance, abuse, and discriminatory marginalization, social groupings use shifting conditions to decide how certain individuals are to occupy spaces (78). It is through this means that the binary of a

man's place or a woman's place is installed and passably fixed in most cultures. Rum is critical of women's positionalities in her Palestinian culture as it is represented in her novel. Those fixed and rigidly marked social categories are governed and shaped by a politics of power and hierarchy (Anthias 79).

In Rum's novel, Isra, representing the submissive Arab girl, takes in her social positioning without any resistance. Despite facing cruel treatment, especially from her husband who batters her daily, she is unable to utter any words to defend herself. The one time she decides to break free from her chains for the sake of her daughters and run away from such violent environment, she is caught by her husband who beats her most violently until he kills her on the floor of their basement. As such, Isra is doomed to remain confined and locked in that basement until her death.

Unlike Isra, Sarah seeks to free herself via following the American way. After refusing the idea of an arranged marriage and the fact that Fareeda will never allow her to go to college, Sarah decides to leave her family, find a job, and finish her studies (Rum 223). After this incident, Sarah assimilates into the American culture and she dismantles her Arab upbringing. Nevertheless, this turns out to be a very heavy price that she has to endure because of her choice of running away. When she met Deya and wanted to convince her to voice out her struggle and refuse to submit to Fareeda and her orders, Sarah disclosed to Deya that her decision of fleeing home "came at a cost" (Rum 138). The latter turns out to be Sarah's sense of belonging.

Despite the shining outer look of her independent life, Sarah could not truly "connect with anyone", regretting that she "wasted a lot of years pretending to be someone that (she) wasn't" (Rum 138). Rum asserts how Sarah's running away from her oppression was never the right thing to do because it led her to lose a vital part of herself. Although she had a successful life as an American woman, Sarah felt the void

of not having her Arab half around. As such, Sarah urged Deya not to follow in her footsteps and leave her family. Instead, she pleaded her to find courage and strength to speak up for herself and take charge of her life without the need to lose her family.

In the novel, fleeing is never the means to empower a woman. Isra tried it and she was caught and lost her life because of it. Sarah succeeded in running away but she paid a high cost of non-belonging and a bitter feeling of emptiness. Deya represents the third category that is caught in-between the Arab and the American cultures. She is burdened by the unjust patriarchal shackles that kept her mother confined to their basement. However, she is also unable to see herself fully embracing the individualistic independence of the American culture. That is why Deya decides to embrace her thirdspace of liminality and she manages to convince her grandmother of her choice to pursue her studies as marriage can wait for a later date.

The analysis of women's spaces of belonging in *A Woman Is No Man* calls for an urge to focus on those social relations and powers that both influence and are influenced by the represented spatiality. That is how the following section is concerned with Arab and Arab American family dynamics, more precisely in the Palestinian context, to decipher those patterns that decide and govern women's lives in their spatial realities.

4.2 Arab and Arab-American Family Dynamics: Patriarchal Families *Par Excellence*?

The family is one of the most essential units in the makeup of any society. Individuals innately need the affection and support of those surrounding them in order to live peacefully. Pierre Bourdieu gives one of the most outstanding views of the meaning and importance of family for the Arabs in his book *The Algerians*, in which he states that:

The family is the alpha and omega of the whole system: the primary group and structural model for any possible grouping, it is the indissoluble atom of society which assigns and assures to each of its members his place, his function, his very reason for existence and, to a certain degree, his existence itself; the center of a way of life and a tradition which provide it with a firm foundation and which it is therefore resolutely determined to maintain; last but by no means least, it is a coherent and stable unit situated in a network of common interests whose permanence and security must be assured above all else, even if necessary, to the detriment of individual aspirations and interests. (97)

As such, in the Arab culture, the family is regarded as the ideal sanctuary that shelters people's lives and insures its stability and continuity. In the Arab family, the individual's rights and aspirations are second place when compared to the collectivity of the whole. The Arab family is governed by a complex system that determines how each member is expected to behave. Ajami et al. explain family systems for the Arab family and they focus also on Arab-American families. According to their analysis, the Arab family operates on various levels such as gender and age and assigns roles accordingly (Ajami et al. 104). Bourdieu evidently describes a healthy Arab family that assigns to each member their share of rules, rights and duties, and decide and outline the interrelationships of every member.

However, not all families are like that, whether it be an Arab or a Western family. In many cases, the family may turn into the emblem of discomfort and dis-ease. As Ajami et al. contend, the Arab family's expectations regarding children adherence often results in an ambivalent state in which children seek a way out (105). In such cases, the attachment that interrelated relationships imply lead parents to assume more

power and authority over their children even when they become adults (Ajami et al. 106). That is precisely what Rum's *A Woman Is No Man* shows.

Rum's novel contains such examples of dysfunctional families that render the lives of its members unbearable. The two main families presented in the story are those of the Hadids and the Ra'ads. Isra comes from the Hadid family from Birzeit and she marries into the family of Ra'ad; a Palestinian family that settled in Brooklyn. The Hadids are a poor family; that is why they were so happy to send their daughter to the Ra'ads who lived in America.

Nonetheless, both families fail to care for the emotional needs of each member of the household, particularly women. Isra grows up in a violent atmosphere where her father does not solely beat her and her siblings but also their mother for very silly things. On the other side of the Atlantic, the Ra'ad family treats their only daughter Sarah poorly and unfairly and prioritizes her male siblings over her in all matters. As such, space does not affect the way these families carry out their demeanor regarding women, when the patriarchal culture that they share dominate every other aspect of their livelihood.

Perhaps more so is the anxiety that the Ra'ads felt in dealing with their offspring. Living in a Western country that opposes every cultural norm of being Arab drove Fareeda and her husband to take extra measures in dealing with their children. According to Haddad et.al, "among the many challenges faced by Muslim women and their families in the American context is that of raising children in Western society" (14). Although the Hadids are not a practicing Muslim family, yet they use the religion as a means to control their Americanized children. Rum highlights this aspect of control throughout the story illustrated in Fareeda's ceaseless attempts to remind her sons and daughter that they are Arabs not Americans and must act accordingly (106).

Fareeda constantly reminds Sarah that they did not come to America so that they discard their Arab heritage altogether and become fully American (Rum 126).

In this respect, both families' dynamics were unhealthy and resulted in the apparition of identity and belonging problems. It is vital to point out that the use of the concept of family dynamics centers around those patterns of interaction within the family; how roles, responsibilities, and rights are distributed among the members and how members develop their relationships with other members of the family as well as the outside world. Since both families regard women as second-class in regards to men, it is common to witness their oppression and subjugation throughout Rum's story. Not only that the superiority of men in this context is voiced out and stands quite visibly in comparison to women's subordination and inferiority, but also that this very matter is celebrated and cherished by this system that ensures its continuity even in a different spatiality.

The responsibility of raising children and caring about their upbringing is assigned to women who general dwell in the domestic sphere. Fareeda, Isra's mother, and their daughters has to deal with the hardships of living at the mercy of a patriarchal system that overtly burdens these women with the entire obligation of educating children; a system that blames them, and punishes them when things go wrong. In an interesting study on women's assumed role of raising children, McDowell asserts that it was believed that the home was the center of affection feelings, and empathy, and that women, who were envisioned to be angels rather than laborers, ought to assume the responsibility of raising and caring for offspring (75). In Isra's story, this heavy burden of raising four daughters on her own while Adam is at work all day long is what leads Isra to break down both physically and psychologically.

On the one hand, Isra and her family in Birzeit exemplify Arab Palestinian family dynamics, as perceived by Rum. It is important not to generalize Rum's view and not to consider it the norm in the Palestinian family. As it is discussed in the previous chapters, Abulhawa and Alyan represent different views regarding Palestinians and their family dynamics. Rum's account is darker in tone as it showcases the other side of the story that is not popularly told. The novel condemns the cultural patriarchal oppression that sought to silence women and conceal their existence and pain. In such case, it can be said that the Palestinian woman's lack of social support from her family makes her more likely to end up a victim who loses her sexual, bodily, and psychological safety amidst a lack of societal control mechanisms (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 4).

On the other hand, the Ra'ad's family in America represent what it means to be an Arab-American family. The novel shows the characters of Fareeda and Khaled as constantly burdened by the crawling of the American culture into their children's lives. When things start to go wrong, they express regret at coming to America in the first place and they wish they have stayed in Palestine even when life was hard to navigate (Rum 228). For the Ra'ads, the Arab and the American halves that constitute their identity are extreme ends that result in an unsolved puzzle. The elders keep urging the youth to isolate themselves from the Western influence and to cling to their ancestral heritage and identity. However, that is not an easy option for the youth who lived amidst a state of in-between-ness and are directly influenced by the American culture.

In the novel, it is apparent that there is a critical perception of the matter of being Arab. As if to denote, that it is the fact of being Arab that makes life intolerable, particularly for women. There is also an open encouragement suggesting that the American culture is the best solution for women's patriarchal oppression. As such,

unlike the two other authors in this study, Rum's story appears to be excessively prejudiced against Arab cultural beliefs. Indeed, the novel presents surreal cases of ultimate cruelty and violence attached to women. The views of the Palestinian woman are formed under an Orientalist philosophy. In that sense, Rum, in her novel, joins a segment of Western feminist' "construction of Arab and/ or Muslim women as the 'different other', as objects of passivity, silence, submission, veil, and seclusion" (Abdo 141).

Moreover, Rum seems to exaggerate in her portrayal of Isra as having no way out of her miserable state, as being doomed to receive pain and suffering, and as an ultimate weak victim of patriarchy. She confirms the prevailing description and representation of Arab women "as a homogenous group that is oppressed, passively submissive and victimized" by men, as it is "embedded in classical Western Orientalist literature" (Hasan 89).

Via close reading of Isra's story, it turns out that since Palestinians are now living in America, it is better to live like Americans and detach from the norms of the Arab culture. Regardless of the novel's open ending, there is an unmistakable call for assimilating Arab-Americans into the general dominant culture that appears as an alluring, trouble-free culture. This is not to suggest that the Arab culture is utopian in regards to men's and women's roles and duties in their society or that women's subjugation is non-existent. Nonetheless, as explained by Haddad et.al, "the issue is not whether repression of women has been present in Muslim cultures or whether it is unique to these societies. It has existed and continues to exist in some Islamic countries, as is true of other cultures" (4).

Isra's voicelessness becomes the archetype that sticks to the minds of the non-Arab reader and models Arab and Palestinian women as vulnerable and oppressed lot.

As Tally contends, any novel “is also a distinctively epistemological narrative form, which like the map presents a seemingly realistic but utterly figurative image of the world it depicts... that can be used to make sense of, or give form to, the ‘real’ world” (26). As such, Rum’s narrative map that depicts the Palestinians as patriarchal merciless beings and their women as weak and desperate creatures breathes life into the imagined picture of these people by the non-Arab reader who, then, confirms it as the ‘real’ image.

This is why writing about the Palestinian people for a Western audience is one of the most challenging tasks. The author is pressured by the sensitivities of the target audience as they are attempting to depict their stories accurately and honestly. Unlike other literatures, without a nation-state, national associations, or a restricted geographical space to shelter, sustain, or foster its growth, Palestinian literature developed amidst a predominantly refugee community (Abu-Remaileh 71). Most writers who engage in Palestinian literature are descendants of immigrants who are born and raised in America or the West and who rarely set back to the homeland. As Alghaberi puts it, “new generations of Palestinian exiles and diasporas find it difficult to imagine ‘historic Palestine’ as none have been physically there” (1).

This could be one of the reasons why Rum runs her story in the space of America with empty references to Palestine - as if it were an empty container. It is quite natural to attempt to resolve the tension between the two ends of being Arab and American. Despite all the obstacles, the yearning for a place of belonging persists, particularly for the hyphenated individuals who constantly speak from in-between cultures, nationalities, and languages. (Jones 52).

To illustrate the previous point, Sarah and Deya, in particular, attempt to find their sense of belonging amidst the chaos of the politics of being Arab and American.

They both loath Isra's fate and life and aspire to have a different path than hers. Sarah directly reveals to Isra that she does not want to have a life like hers where she cooks and obeys without complaining (Rum 220). Years after Isra's death, Deya realizes that she does not want to "repeat" her "mother's life" (Rum 182). Both women refuse to be under the control of the patriarchal system that rendered Isra's life into a living hell until her death. While Sarah chooses to run away and assimilate into the American culture, Deya picks up a third option of settling on a middle ground that allows both cultures to coexist. Deya does not run away but she stands against her grandparents' decision to marry her off and stop her from going to college.

When looking back at Isra's life before her marriage, the patriarchal oppression is depicted as a daily normal routine in the Palestinian culture. In this sense, Rum adheres to Bourdieu's ideas regarding marriage and women in the Arab world. Speaking about the Algerian women as an example and generalizing it to include all Arab women, Bourdieu argues that "marriage liberates a woman from the absolute authority of her father only to hand her over to the complete domination of her husband" and of "her mother-in-law" in which "she must be both an obedient and faithful wife" (6). This is precisely what is found in Rum's description of Isra and her marriage. Yacob, her violent father, marries her off to Adam who abuses her and batters her especially when she keeps giving birth to girls. Fareeda, too, functions here as the evil mother-in-law who controls Isra via teaching her what it means to be an obedient woman.

Rum focuses on the aspect of domestic violence in the Palestinian culture as the norm that governs women's lives. When Isra received battering from her alcoholic depressed husband, she felt shame but then she remembered "back home, where a husband beating his wife was as ordinary as a father beating his child" (Rum 142). This

private form of domestic violence is usually unreported unless the victim faces her dead end. As explained by Wallace, in the Palestinian culture domestic violence is regarded as a private matter that no one dares to report it to authorities (140). In her chapter on domestic violence in Victorian and Edwardian fiction, Moon elaborates on the notion of domestic violence as a universal crime that is kept discreet particularly by women who are raised to care for their families above any other consideration, even at their own expense in the case of violent battering (3).

Presenting loveless marriages, which are tainted by domestic violence, gives the wrong picture of the Arab family and the institution of marriage. Domestic abuse occurs in every nation, but non-Arabs have been led to believe that women are not dealt with fairly and are not recognized as equals in their own culture (Hamed 7). As explained by Naber, “articulations of Arabness in America have been haunted by culture or, more precisely, by Orientalist definitions of culture” (80). The family dynamics of the Arab and Arab-American family as it is depicted by Rum in her novel is that of patriarchal control and female subjugation. In such a system, both men and women contribute to the maintenance and strengthening of such system through socializing boys and girls to adhere to their designated roles and cultural expectations. In Palestine, Isra’s mother constantly reminds her that she is a woman, that meant serving men, and taking in all the treatment they receive from them even if it is unjust (Rum 16). In America, Fareeda reminds her daughter Sarah and her granddaughters that a woman’s place is her husband’s house and that marriage is all they should think of (Rum 75).

However, Rum’s narrative emphasizes the point that it is all because of their Arab heritage that such oppression persists even in the land of freedom. According to Khan et al., Rum’s novel is inspired by her own life experiences as a Palestinian

woman who suffered from patriarchal oppression despite living in America (275). This explains Rum's call to Americanization and a more liberal lifestyle as it is manifested in her work. This is indeed a dangerous move. Denying the Arab half of those Arab-Americans in the US "except as bloodthirsty and suspect male villains, helpless female victims, and exoticized alien other" (Abdulhadi et.al 327) confirms the Western Orientalist stereotypes and encourages them. There is a clear postulation in this novel for women to forget about their patriarchal cultures and to mold their lives "to fit neatly in the folds of Americanness" (Abdulhadi et.al 327).

Nonetheless, it is because of the sensitivity of such task of representing a nation or a culture to another one through literature that the author is facing a grave moral responsibility. Rum has never lived in Palestine to truly describe the minute details of their lives. Like many Arab-Americans, her stories are received from her parents and grandparents' accounts and memory. In *A Woman Is No Man*, Rum invents "a story with the ability to convince women in Western societies that whatever patriarchal indignities they experience are far preferable to the savagery of the Arab male" (Salaita 98). An American or non-Arab who reads Rum's novel may think of his Arab neighbor or colleague as Yacoub the cruel father who terrorizes his wife and children or Adam the drunkard who gives his wife a good beating every night. This is no exaggeration. Salaita confirms that "most American readers" will "prefer a simulated version of Middle Eastern reality in which irrational men engage in domestic abuse and subservient women silently mourn their hellish fate" (101).

There is a huge difference between an author's intent and the work's effect. Rum may be seeking to represent the unspoken stories of women who are suffering from domestic abuse. However, it is vital to "focus not so much on a novel's intent, but on its effect" (Salaita 106). Rum's novel received an ardent welcoming from Western

feminists in particular and the American society in general for confirming their calls to liberate Arab women from their culture. Moreover, despite having Palestine as an important part of the existence of such a community in the first place, very little is mentioned about this space and its people. As Salaita contends, “the Arab thus exists both consciously and unconsciously in the philosophical contradictions evident in notions of American exceptionalism and its exclusionary reality” (110).

The last section of this chapter addresses the question of education for women, and how it is considered a vital means in liberating Arab and Arab-American women.

4.3 The Question of Female’s Education for Arab and Arab-American Women: An Unattained Dream or a Living Reality?

Unlike Abulhawa and Alyan, Rum highlights the matter of female’s education and grounds it in her plot. Education, in *A Woman Is No Man*, is regarded as one of the vital themes, and surely, this is not random. In fact, Rum, as it is the tradition of countless female writers in different literatures, links a woman’s empowerment and liberation with her attainment of a proper education. Note that I used the word proper here to separate between the traditional gendered education that prepares women to handle their social designated roles as wives and mothers, and the neutral academic pursuit of education that enables women to access the professional economic arena. The latter form of education is what helps women achieve a certain degree of autonomy with the provided economic independence. Moreover, Rum focuses on higher education and the desire to go to university instead of accepting an arranged marriage by the girl’s family. As such, this section highlights the theme of tertiary education in relation to Arab (Palestinian) women and Arab-American women as it is manifested in Rum’s story. This section follows the educational path of three main

female characters in the novel: Isra, Sarah, and Deya, to compare between their cases and synthesize whether education truly empowered them or not.

Starting with Isra, as most of the story is about her life, higher education is never part of her life plans set by her parents, just like her marriage and a myriad of other important things. In the novel, all her life decisions are not hers to make. Her parents are the ones who decide everything for her. As it is part of their social customs and traditions in Palestine, Isra is unable to interfere and oppose her parents by telling them what she really wants. As Rum puts it, “Isra had learned from a very young age that obedience was the single path to love. So, she only defied in secret, mostly with her books” (12). However, it is also revealed that Isra was forbidden from reading books by her own mother (Rum 13). When Isra read in secret and she was caught, she received a harsh beating from her father until she fainted (Rum 13).

The matter of reading in secret and the beating that followed such transgression of social expectations does not solely suggest that Isra lived in a violent atmosphere that controlled every move she took, but it also highlights Isra’s aspirations to learn and read books even against her parents will. Her act of reading in secret made her dream of a better life in which she is free to choose and to love (Rum 15). Reading books in this sense equips Isra with a different kind of education than that one that she receives from her mother and culture.

However, at this level, there is a sort of contradiction in the belief that having the right education serves as a tool of empowerment. If Isra had books to educate her about women’s rights and the world out there and this made her dare to dream big then why couldn’t she stand up for herself in times of hardship? If the proper education is all she needed to set herself free from her dreadful circumstances, why couldn’t she use it to empower and liberate herself?

The answer is that theory is nothing like practice. Reading about empowerment will not empower a woman unless other measures are applied in the real context. It must be noted that the spatiality of Isra is a hindering factor in her educational path and in her overall empowerment. Isra occupies the space of colonized Palestine before her marriage where normal life is already abnormal because of the Israeli colonizer. In addition, the Hadids are an extremely poor family who can hardly make ends meet. Rum highlights that one of the reasons why they wanted to marry off Isra is because of their financial difficulties (12). It is not surprising that thinking about sending their children to university is out of the question. Their financial burdens will not make it possible for Isra to pursue her education regardless of the patriarchal social norms that do not support girls' pursuit of higher education.

Furthermore, being under the Israeli settler colonialism that renders life more difficult for Palestinians, particularly women, the idea of crossing the difficult checkpoints and routes to school and university discourages many families from supporting their girls' education. This is illustrated in a study by Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian entitled "The Gendered Nature of Education Under Siege: A Palestinian Feminist Perspective". In her analysis of the relationship between gender and education in occupied Palestine, Shalhoub-Kevorkian argues that it is not possible to think about gender and education "in time of war and political conflict" as "a neutral site, but rather (as) a contested one" (179). In the Palestinian context, the gendered aspect of education is shaped by the psychological anguish, internal relocation, and economic downturn brought on by unchecked aggression in conflict areas (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 179). However, in the novel, Rum does not acknowledge this reality. She keeps blaming the patriarchal culture alone forgetting about the other more important factors that hinder women's education in Palestine namely war and poverty.

Since the Nakba, most Palestinians realized the importance of education in changing their lives under colonialism for both men and women. More recently, Palestinian families encourage their girls to excel in their studies and support them despite their arduous economic situations. As it is explained by Kjølseth, “Palestinian women now not only can have an education – they are generally expected to have one” (13). In fact, through her analysis of women’s education in occupied Palestine, it turns out that several households put a lot of burden on their financial situation specifically to enable their daughters to attend college, even if the current state of the economy renders it impossible for all of their daughters to do so (Kjølseth 13).

Another important factor that affects Palestinian women’s access to education, in general, and higher education, in particular, is their lack of safety and the potential threats and risks they face on their way to schools and universities. The Israeli colonizer is well aware that education empowers the Palestinians. As explained by Shalhoub-Kevorkian, “in order to culturally repress, control, subjugate, and promote intolerance, it is essential for Israel to deny Palestinians’ access to education” (184). This strategy pushes many families to give up on the idea of education for both men and women. More poignantly, the Israeli colonizer uses the Arab culture and its overprotective nature towards its women as a means to hinder females’ education. Through targeting and harassing young women on their way to school and university, the Israeli colonizer pressures the families of these girls to stop them from pursuing their education in order to preserve and protect their dignity and honor.

Even if their families do not hear about these difficulties, these young women are psychologically affected and may even think about dropping out in order to end their suffering. Via interviewing many girls who suffered from these obstacles while carrying their education, Shalhoub-Kevorkian reveals how the political and military

occupation, ongoing instability, and aggression against their education, had an impact on their schooling, gender roles, freedom of mobility, and private ties with relatives and siblings (188). This situation “convinced” these young girls’ “parents and other family members that acquiring education within such militarized space and places was an unsafe undertaking for their younger kin” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 188).

As it is displayed in the novel, Isra lived in such circumstances. One cannot, thus, assume that marriage and moving to America is a bad decision that Isra’s parents take randomly. As a Palestinian young woman, Isra must have faced these difficulties when she went to her all-girls school in Birzeit. However, we have no account of that in the novel. Rum does not talk about her struggle to go to school. She solely centers her attention on the fact that her parents and the Palestinian culture do not want her to have an education and that they do not prepare her to face the outside world. Rum, then, uses Isra’s lack of education as a justification of her weak and submissive nature.

Rum creates a story where the mother and her daughter face similar situations in different periods of time and different spaces. These situations mainly revolve around the matter of marriage and the question of higher education. Just like her mother, when she almost reached 18 years old and was about to graduate high school, Deya was compelled to accept one of the suitors presented by her grandmother Fareeda. However, what is more striking than this resemblance is how Rum describes Isra as “a Palestinian immigrant, with no job or education” and Deya as “a bright, educated Arab American girl” (140). Isra did not finish high school, just like Deya, when the matter of her marriage was brought forth (see pages 12 & 25 for illustration). Nonetheless, for Rum, as an Arab Palestinian woman, Isra’s education is nothing to be compared with Deya’s, the Arab American girl who went to American schools.

Even Sarah, Deya's aunt and Fareeda's only daughter is portrayed as an empowered woman who dared to defy her family and tradition via declining an arranged marriage, running away, finishing her education, and starting her own business. Sarah was also 18 when she run away from home (Rum 114). While Isra could not even use her words to show her dissatisfaction with her marriage to her parents, Sarah took the action of deserting her family and diving into the unknown. This naturally makes Sarah look appealing to the reader. It makes her look strong and empowered because of her decision to control her life and decide for herself. Her insistence upon pursuing higher education is part of her alluring traits.

Sarah is used in this part of the story by Rum to highlight the importance of higher education as an empowering tool for women but not at the expense of losing family and belonging. It is true that she did not realize this at the age of 18, but Sarah was sure, after all those years in which she was cut off from her family, that running away was a dreadful mistake that cost her a heavy price for a lifetime (Rum 115). Sarah is different from Isra in that she did not remain silent regarding her life's decisions. In the novel, this is explained as a natural outcome of Sarah being American with a voice and a strength to take hold of her life unlike Isra, the victim of her "unfair" culture (Rum 77).

Isra's plight as a Palestinian woman who lived under the Israeli colonization positions her in a place where any comparison with other women in other parts of the world, such as Sarah and Deya, is rather futile. Isra does not find the means to end her suffering and her domestic violence not simply because she lacks the American voice of empowerment. Countless women in war zones, and particularly Palestinian women, are unable to pursue tertiary education and have a job that enables them to manage their lives independently. Makkawi explains how it is quite difficult for Palestinians to

carry on their education since as a key element of its colonial strategy in the West Bank and Gaza, Israeli military rule has attacked Palestinian education since 1967 (49).

In the case of Palestinian women, this matter of the colonial targeting of education further complicated their quest for empowerment and liberation particularly for women in highly violent spatialities. As Shalhoub-Kevorkian contends, lack of education and variables influencing women's educational choices restricted women to economically dependent roles, making it difficult for many of them to report or flee abusive conditions that would otherwise be intolerable. (198). This is exactly what happened to Isra who could not find a place to go to with her daughters to escape her abusive space.

No one denies that most Arab countries are patriarchal in nature. However, this does not mean that all Arabs are inherently evil and oppressive towards women. In her article “Women and Empowerment in the Arab World”, Sherifa Zuhur discusses the composition of Arab society that is centered on the family and collectivity rather than individuality and autonomy. She contends that different patriarchal frameworks are embodied by Arab states, and Arab culture adheres to a system of male dominance where women's roles inside the home and obligations to the family come before their individual rights (Zuhur 2). This does not mean that oppression of women is allowed if it is for the sake of preserving the family.

Nonetheless, the Arab patriarchal society is primarily family oriented in all aspects of life. This means that for women, the roles of wives and mothers are highly valued and sought after. Women are more fit to hold responsibilities indoors, but it is not appropriate to interpret this as a directive to completely limit women to the home and to domesticate them (Buang & Swyandari 60). Many families encourage their women to finish their education and have good jobs besides engaging in marital life

and motherhood. This matter is unique to each family. As Kjøstvedt highlights, the family is portrayed as both an organization where women have power and influence and as the primary institution limiting their access to rights (4). She is focusing on the Palestinian case in her analysis asserting each family is unique in terms of women's treatment.

There is no doubt that education empowers women in various aspects. To be more precise, education is "the milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, confront their traditional role, and change their life" (Prasad et.al 6). To harp on the same string, Jaysawal and Saha believe that education "provides women an understanding about their rights and power to fight the economic and social discrimination", emphasizing that "an educated woman provides an infrastructure for a family to grow up in a competitive world" (9). As such, education helps women realize their rights and stand against the oppressive treatment that they may receive in their families.

Nonetheless, education alone cannot empower the Palestinian woman, particularly those residing in occupied Palestine. That is why it is more helpful to acknowledge that it is necessary to contextualize the phenomena of women's empowerment within the broader culture and treat it in accordance to the prevailing socio-cultural factors of spatiality (Ashraf & Farah 17). It is illogical to argue that all what Palestinian women need to be empowered is higher education. That is simply because "the Palestinian population's access to education is shaped everyday by Israeli occupation policies and violence" (Arestizábal 8) and this makes it a changing variable not always available and easy to have.

Even amidst such uncomfortable circumstances, according to several studies, the higher percentage of Palestinian women enrolled in higher education may result

from the higher social significance that Palestinian society places on women's education (Arestizábal 9). This contradicts with what is represented in Rum's story that marks Palestinian Arab men and families as active agents that prevent women and girls from having an education. The novel highlights Isra's lack of the needed education to support her and grant her the means to end her suffering. However, it fails to account for the real reasons and factors that caused her vulnerability and helplessness in the first place.

Sarah is used by Rum to show how women with an education are able to live independently and support themselves economically. However, she also stresses the aspect of Sarah's loss of the sense of belonging and familial support that characterizes the Arab family when she runs away. This is why Sarah kept urging Deya not to commit the same mistake of deserting her family in order to fulfill her academic aspirations. In this respect, Rum gives Deya what both her mother and aunt could not attain. Via positioning Deya in a middle ground, Rum enables Deya to take hold of her life when the latter decides to pursue her studies and not consent for marriage for the time being.

It is vital to note that women's education and their role in society is a hypersensitive issue worldwide; that it is not exclusively a phenomenon characterizing women in the Arab world. Rum's portrait of the Arab woman as inherently weak and silenced is problematic. Such representation helps in engraving the Western stereotyping of Arab women with an Orientalist perspective in the minds of readers. Instead of attempting to correct the Orientalist prejudiced view of Arab women, she is, perhaps unknowingly, reinforcing such image through her women characters, namely Isra.

Nevertheless, Rum's description of the mother-daughter relationship and the family's role in shaping women's perception of their rights and duties is extremely crucial. In her groundbreaking book *Mothers and Daughters in Arab Women's Literature the Family Frontier*, Abudi explains in details this relationship between women, and how it affects various aspects of their lives. She elaborates that "through the lens of the mother-daughter relationship it is possible to examine larger issues concerning Arab women, such as their role in social reproduction and in the preservation of the status quo" (Abudi 6). In other words, it is essential to focus on the mother-daughter bond in order to understand the dynamics of Arab women's aspirations and convictions in their different spatialities.

Isra's mother is unable to establish a healthy strong bond with her daughter. This in turn affects Isra's understanding of her role as a woman, as a daughter, and later on as a wife and mother. Rum highlights this matter throughout her story. Fareeda, Sarah's mother and Isra's mother-in-law, is also lacking a proper relationship with her only daughter and later on with her daughters-in-law. The only fault in such view is Rum's generalization that all Arab mothers must have such fragile relationship with their daughters because of their culture (Rum 77). Abudi highlights how such relationship is "largely depicted as oscillating between a variety of opposite poles: love and hate, blame and guilt, tenderness and anger, intimacy and estrangement, solidarity and animosity, harmony and conflict... oppression and empowerment" to name but few instances (7).

All these binaries are indeed characteristics of the relationship between mothers and daughters in Rum's novel. In the novel, daughters believe that their mothers hate them because of their continuous anger, conflict and oppression. However, the mothers believe that this is how they show love, solidarity and empowerment to their daughters.

Isra keeps questioning whether her mother ever loved her, as she never showed her any signs of affection, and she only realizes her mother's love when she becomes a mother (Rum 143). Deya is also skeptical of her mother's affection when she reveals to Sarah that Isra never seemed to love anyone (Rum 117). This vicious cycle of questioning a mother's affection is passed on from one generation to the next, as highlighted by Rum.

Even when it comes to the matter of education, the mother-daughter relationship decides and controls whether women are expected to pursue their studies or engage in wifedom and motherhood when reaching a certain age. Isra's mother and Fareeda, as representatives of the Arab mother, are eager to teach their daughters the right set of norms that would ensure the continuity of their traditional roles as caring wives and sacrificing mothers. Both mothers do not see going to college as an important part of their daughters' lives and prosperity. Instead, they keep preparing Isra and Sarah to become obedient wives and good mothers. As Abudi puts it, "the interdependence and reciprocity that characterize this relationship imply that the mother can be the key to the daughter's liberation and vice versa" (8). This is why Isra decides to give her daughters the life that she did not have when she tried to run away with them after her husband ensured that they will not finish their studies (Rum 246).

Conclusion

In a nutshell, Rum's novel highlights the dark side of the untold stories of Palestinian women and their offspring in different spatialities. Throughout her novel, Rum highlights the importance of education in empowering and liberating women. She sees education as a vital means to end women's oppression and subjugation. On the one hand, through the character of Isra, Rum asserts that because of her overt dependence on her male relatives and her lack of proper education, Isra could not set herself free from her abusive husband and ended up losing her life. On the other hand,

Sarah represents the other end of the spectrum; she is the Arab-American woman who defies her family, rejects an arranged marriage, and runs away from home to pursue her studies and start her business. Deya occupies a thirdspace. She does not want to lose her family but she also does not want to forsake her dreams and academic aspirations just to consent for arranged marriage. Rum uses Deya to invoke that what both Isra and Sarah failed to accomplish in terms of having a voice and a choice is now an option for Deya. The latter faces her family and she convinces them to allow her finish her higher education while marriage can wait.

Chapter 5

At the Crossroad: Representation of Women in Their Gendered Spaces in *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, *Salt Houses*, and *A Woman Is No Man*

“They have no idea what it means to be a woman in this world.”

-**Rum**, *A Woman Is No Man*.

Introduction

It is lucid, at this level of this study, to see women as the core and moving engine of the stories of the selected novels. This concluding chapter is preoccupied with the feminist geocritic notions that are mapped in the three novels. From the very title of this chapter, it is highlighted that this study attempts to convey a new endeavour to analysing these particular literary texts. Being at the crossroad implies a junction of ideas that clash and meet in various fashions. This is perfectly the state of the three women writers and their perception of Palestine and the three concepts of home, identity and belonging.

Whereas Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum adjoin their identity as Arab women to the space of Palestine, their depiction of women and their gendered spaces vary significantly. As is illustrated in the previous chapters, this thesis employs the term ‘feminism’ to fit the context of the Palestinian-American woman. As such, the main arguments provided in this thesis do not fully adhere to any of the recognized waves or theories of feminism. Rather, the feminist reading of the three novels focuses on the representation of women, their stories and how they are empowered, liberated, or subverted in their different spatialities. The present study rejects the growing universal cry for a unified feminist movement that goes beyond the spatial context of the perceived culture. This only leads to the fall into the trap of overgeneralization, thus

creating some sort of anxiety for women who do not fully follow the Western hegemonic feminism. The latter views Muslim women who are hijabis as victims of their own circumstances who need to take the veil off and burn it to be liberated and officially join the feminist movement.

This is what this chapter attempts to illustrate in the three novels. Note that the aim is not to condemn or correct the picture that is drawn by Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum regarding women and their roles in their spaces. However, the study seeks to spotlight on the representation of these women in their gendered spaces. Through close reading of the three novels, it turns out that the politics of spatiality highly affect women's realizations of who they are and where they belong. In this respect, this chapter combines both a feminist and a geocritic lens to analysing women in their gendered spaces as portrayed by the three women writers.

The first section of the chapter deals with Abulhawa's view of Palestinian and Palestinian-American women in Palestine and the US. The analysis follows the way women shape the story and alter it at different points of the development. The second section is dedicated to Alyan's novel *Salt Houses*. Women in this story seem to be the bosses who run the matters of the Yacoub family. However, Alyan does not provide us with a unifying picture of women but rather a diversified tapestry of females. The chapter moves to Rum's dark side of the woman's story in Arab culture. Unlike women in Abulhawa's and Alyan's novels, Rum's women are all disempowered and weak except for one female character. The last section is about a closer reading of the spaces represented in the three novels, particularly how Palestine and America mean different things for different characters and especially for the three Palestinian-American women writers.

5.1 Women's Portrayal in *The Blue Between Sky and Water*

One of the main concerns of the present study is related to the portrayal of women in Palestinian American women's writing. While some women writers are careful about what to discuss in their literatures, others choose to dig deeper extracting those hidden untold realities of the genre. As Abudi contends, Arab women writers breach the taboo around the intimate sphere of family life by exposing the frailty of this holy institution and shattering the ideology that exalts the family (284). The question of how women are represented in the various stories of Palestinian American writers in general did not receive the required attention and the fair share of literary criticism.

In fact, this field of study foregrounded the struggle of Palestinian men in terms of clashing with the colonizer and the anguish of losing home and living in diaspora and exile. As illustrated by Farag, in Palestinian literature, exile was predominantly framed as a male predicament in which male protagonists battled to fulfill their masculine responsibilities and cope with the shame of losing their nation (184). In contrast, female characters, generally as a symbol of the land of Palestine, are depicted as passive agents who receive the action and remain in the homeland until their death.

Nevertheless, that is not what readers find in Abulhawa's novel. In fact, the latter depicts and describes the equilibrium in the representation of males and females in terms of their social and cultural roles and authority. Abulhawa does not openly discuss or focus on patriarchal designated gender roles in the Palestinian society in her novel. As it is depicted in her literary work, the bulk of the Palestinian narrative is found in the cooperation between men and women under the plight of the Israeli settler colonialism that is denying their existence.

Abulhawa does not sugarcoat the existential everyday life of Palestinian women in their society. Rather, she presents the story with its fluctuations, the way she

perceives it most appropriate. Women in her novel spatially reside in the domestic sphere par excellence. This does not bother or frustrate these women. There is no place in the novel that shows Nazmiyeh, her daughter Alwan, or even other minor female characters protesting against their lives indoors. This is informative enough to denote that these women work in harmony with their men behind closed doors under unusual circumstances to ensure their livelihood and continuity.

Since the idea of cooperation and partnership is brought forth, it is inevitable to discuss the concept of marriage. It is almost a universally acknowledged truth for feminist critics, particularly after the 1960's, that marriage is a major factor that contributes to women's oppression and subordination. Most radical feminists (e.g., Atkinson, 1974; Firestone, 1979; Pateman, 1988; Rich, 1983) go to the extreme of considering marriage as the other face of the same coin of colonialism. Other Western feminists even consider the marital contract as the woman's slavery document, in which she is no more different from any other property in the household. According to Gayle Rubin, "women are given in marriage, taken in battle, exchanged for favors, sent as tribute, traded, bought, and sold" (175). The last three verbs of Rubin's statement juxtapose the marriage market to the slave trade.

Undoubtedly, for many women, marriage is like a trading deal. They do not initially fully consent to it, and most often, they find themselves enslaved by their husbands, in the literal meaning of the word. However, most feminists fall short in the blind spot of overt generalization as they view every marriage everywhere in the world as the active agent in women's subjugation. Abulhawa does not adhere to the feminists' agenda that condemns marriage, but instead she diversifies her representation of this notion in her novel. Abulhawa presents the institution of marriage through various

angles. One main depiction is that of an equal union between Palestinian men and women.

In the novel, the marriage of Atiyeh and Nazmiyeh is a union of two lovers who worked in harmony; with the former in the sea fishing and providing for the family and with the latter inside the house managing the affairs of the household (Abulhawa 52). Atiyeh does not take advantage of his position as the sole responsible of the economic wellbeing of the family and as the ‘master of the house’ to subvert his wife. In the same vein, Nazmiyeh does not perceive her housekeeping as a form of enslavement or oppression. Instead, she anxiously anticipates the arrival of her husband and sons every time they go fishing, and welcomes them with homely warmth and affection (Abulhawa 52). As such, both Atiyeh and Nazmiyeh are sharing in a true partnership the burdens of taking care of their family. Nazmiyeh, in particular, takes in her assigned role in her gendered space without much ado or detest.

Another example of equality between the spouses is found in the relationship of Yasmine and Mamdouh. Their marriage is out of love too and free choice (no one forced them to wed). Furthermore, while working abroad, Mamdouh entrusted his financial gains to his wife as he worked hard and placed “his earnings to Yasmine for safekeeping” (Abulhawa 50). Their marriage is an example of marital trust and cooperation with Mamdouh doing the hard labour outdoors and with Yasmine housekeeping and safekeeping the wealth of the family. Their mutual love and respect are what kept their bond unshaken despite the harsh conditions. Nazmiyeh and Yasmine as women who operate solely in the marked domestic sphere are not considered as subverted oppressed women. Instead, their gendered spaces are wilfully accepted alongside their assigned roles as Palestinian women (mother, wives,

daughters...) to manage the domestic affairs of home while men manage the hard part of labour in harsh conditions.

Nonetheless, Abulhawa does not provide a single outlook of marriage. From a deep reading of the way she presents married couples in the novel, it is clear that she presents different layers of the marital institution. On the one hand, there is the stable harmonious fits of Nazmiyeh and Atiyeh, Yasmine and Mamdouh, and Alwan and Abdel Qader. On the other hand, there is the unstable weak marriages of Dr Musmar, and Nur's parents. The highlight of Abulhawa's perception of what makes a lasting marriage is that which does not rely on material aspects as its unifying thread. In the instances of the stable marriages, the couple could hardly afford the necessities of living. However, they regarded marriage as a sacred union and a lifelong partnership. The weak fits of Dr Musmar who was having a fling for Nur and the latter's own parents prove that marriage is not about having the riches of the world but about accepting the other part with all its flows.

Abulhawa also portrays the strength of the respected matriarchs in the Palestinian culture. Um Mamdouh, despite the rumours of her insanity, is highly respected by both men and women in the village. When the news of war in 1948 started to reach the villagers, the elders set to go to Um Mamdouh seeking help and council (Abulhawa 28). Nazmiyeh is another example of female empowerment in the story. Despite facing gang rape and torture by Israeli soldiers, Nazmiyeh never loses her inner flame that pushes her to stand for her rights and defend those beloved to her. This is what earned her much respect and admiration by both men in women in Beit Daras and even after moving to the Nusseirat Camp (Abulhawa 54).

From a western feminist perspective, the representation of women in Abulhawa's novel merely confirms the stand of Palestinian women's oppression as

submissive victims by patriarchal dogma. Nevertheless, the cultural understanding and acceptance of the domestic sphere as the ideal place for Palestinian women is not given the fair share of consideration. Feminism, in this respect, cannot be global. That is to say, it cannot have a homogenous agenda and definition amidst cultural and social differences. Castells addresses this matter in his work on *The Power of Identity*. He contends that in regards to the question of whether feminism is global, “a tentative answer to such a fundamental question, must distinguish various areas of the world” (Castells 243). What western feminism failed to acknowledge is that geography affects identity in various aspects. One of these aspects relates to women’s place in society as “gender relations vary over space” (Massey 178).

The women represented in Abulhawa’s novel are the mothers, the wives, and the daughters who navigate life alongside men, but in most cases, without men. Men, in the novel, are either dead or struggling somewhere in the world to care for their families in an atmosphere that is tainted by flux and turmoil. From the very beginning, the reader meets Um Mamdouh, the mighty matriarch, who is a widow who raised her three children on her own. Her eldest daughter Nazmiyeh is another example of a powerful daughter, wife, mother, and sister. Abulhawa, highlights her ‘motherly’ role to her siblings from a young age, as Nazmiyeh was the one to care for her sister Mariam the most (26). Even when Mariam is killed by the Israeli soldiers who raped Nazmiyeh, the latter never stopped thinking about her sister Mariam and she carried her memory throughout her life.

Abulhawa also pictures mothers who are willing to do anything for their children. Nazmiyeh creates a commotion in the camp when her son Mazen comes back home in tears after hearing a boy saying that he is the fruit of rape. Driven by her motherly instinct, Nazmiyeh “swept through the Nusseirat refugee camp like a tornado,

kicking up dust and fury that reminded everyone why she should not be crossed” (Abulhawa 53). Alwan, Nazmiyeh’s daughter is another instance of strong mothers who sacrifice themselves for their kids. When her son Khaled was in danger of being shot by the Israeli soldiers, Alwan did not think twice and she rushed to save Khaled, risking her own safety (Abulhawa 180).

It is vital to consider how Abulhawa pays a close attention to the notion of motherhood. Being a mother in a patriarchal society brings about a myriad of challenges. However, Abulhawa seems to defy them all through her story. Obviously, the Palestinian culture, in particular, and Arab culture, in general, desires having males over having females. The reasons are numerous but mainly this ideology is rooted in the belief that a son will carry the family’s name and honour when the girl is to be taken by another family for marriage. Abudi contends that “Arab culture valorizes the son as the prime offspring of his parents” and “to acquire status in her family, a woman must give birth to a son” (181).

It is what happens to Alwan when she kept having miscarriages and was only lucky to have a boy and a girl. Initially her husband is supportive and he does not blame her for her failure. However, when his economic state deteriorates as he lost access to the ocean because of the colonization, his “shame shape-shifted to anger” and Alwan “was the easiest target” (Abulhawa 122). Although Abdel Qader is a loving, caring husband for Alwan, the “patriarchal ideology that plays a critical role in defining and controlling the mothering practices of women in Arab societies” (Abudi 181) affected him to the extent that he questioned his choice of a wife. However, he soon realized his fault and he assured his wife that it is not her fault (Abulhawa 124).

It is with Nazmiyeh that Abulhawa reverses the traditional patriarchal norms of favouring having males over females. Unlike other women who desperately aspired to

conceive boys instead of girls, Nazmiyeh kept getting pregnant each time to have her long-awaited daughter. Despite having many boys (eventually eleven), Nazmiyeh felt the disappointment of not giving birth to a girl (Abulhawa 45). This is indeed odd in a society that considers having boys as the proof of a woman's perfect womanhood. As Abudi argues, "the prestige and social recognition that come from having sons are such that in traditional milieus a woman who has only daughters is not much better off than a childless wife" (65). However, Abulhawa insists that Nazmiyeh does not fit into this rule, as she desired having a daughter above anything else. The main reason behind the latter is in her memory of her sister Mariam.

After her sister Mariam was shot dead in front of her, Nazmiyeh heard her dead sister talk to her. Here, the fine line between reality and imagination blurs and the reader is unable to tell whether Nazmiyeh is hallucinating because of the trauma that she encountered at the time or whether it is really Mariam's soul communicating with her. Abulhawa is using magical realism in her novel. Nevertheless, what matters the most from this scene is that Nazmiyeh heard Mariam pleading her to "go now. Have a daughter, and name her Alwan" (Abulhawa 41). This is the motivation that kept Nazmiyeh enduring the pains of labour throughout the years, just to fulfil the wish of her sister.

Abulhawa twins between motherhood and sisterhood in an attempt to show female empowerment and liberation. Nazmiyeh's strong bond with her sister Mariam is even stronger after her death. She lives with her words and memory and even believes that Mariam never truly left her side (Abulhawa 43). It is an honouring of a sister's words that drives Nazmiyeh to defy the patriarchal traditions of treasuring sons, when she "held her precious jewel to her breast, Alwan, the promised child" (Abulhawa 57).

Moreover, mothering is not solely the job of the biological mother of the child. In Abulhawa's novel, other females join forces to assist in the process; ranging from close relatives to distant acquaintances and neighbours. The female relationships in Palestinian lifestyle and culture, which are defined by communal life, the village, and the larger family, have involved young, old, unmarried, and infertile women in the mothering mechanism (Rich 12). To illustrate from the novel, Nazmiyeh is mothering her own sister Mariam even when she was very young and unmarried. The old beekeeper widow, in turn, assists Nazmiyeh with her role as a mother and keeps her company in old age. This network of females is represented by Abulhawa as the support system who governs the Palestinian household in the absence of men and the emphasis on the matriarchal protective powers of these women.

Another crucial trait about Abulhawa's depiction of women is her view of the veil. Unlike the two other women writers in this study, Abulhawa presents hijab as a normal unproblematic aspect of being a Muslim woman. Abulhawa does not correlate hijab with oppression or with female subordination and subjugation. In fact, the strongest female character in her novel, Nazmiyeh, wears the hijab. In doing so, Abulhawa breaks down the stereotypical image of "the dominant discourse in Western society" that perceives "the veil as a symbol of women's oppression by a patriarchal culture or a fundamentalist religion" (Baerveldt 534). In the same vein, Abulhawa stresses the matter of agency in choosing the hijab by these Palestinian women who are not forced to wear it. To illustrate, the Baraka family does not force Nur to wear the hijab since they believed veiling for a Muslim woman to be a free choice.

Abulhawa is relentlessly attempting to empower the women of her story. Even when presents the character of Nur, who is the most devastated of all the characters, she does not leave her static and weak. Nur is empowered by the sisterly bond that she

forms with the women of the Baraka family. Abulhawa provides Nur with a home whose dwellers are linked by a motherly bond “that spanned lifetimes of gossip, marriage, childbirth, war, scandal, friendship, prayer, and all the beautiful hard living” (162). Abulhawa emphasises the vitality of this female arena in shaping the new identity of Nur who is initially lost and broken.

The women of the family embrace Nur when she was in need of acceptance and affection. They teach her their ways of living as Palestinian women struggling at times of hardship. Nur learns how to become a mother from Nazmiyeh and her daughter Alwan. This is what helps her realize that becoming a mother is what she needs and what she is made for. Via admiring the mother- daughter relationship of Nazmiyeh and Alwan, Nur discovers what it means to be a mother. Abulhawa gives Nur a safe haven of motherhood unlike what the latter lived in with her biological mother.

Women in Abulhawa’s story are empowered and celebrated. It is true that the Palestinian society is a patriarchal society in essence that favours having males over having females for various reasons. However, in Abulhawa’s account, this favouring is reversed as women are respected and cherished for their existence and their roles as mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives. The matter of women’s domestic sphere does not seem to vex Palestinian women in Abulhawa’s novel. Both men and women join forces and work in collaboration to deal with their troubles and loss amidst the Israeli colonization and the destruction of Palestine and its villages. Gender roles are taken for granted by both men and women in the novel. This is not to generalize the acceptance of gender roles in the Palestinian community. After all, Abulhawa is presenting one story among countless other accounts of the Palestinian people.

5.2 Womanhood in *Salt Houses*: Mothers, Daughters, Sisters and Wives

In her novel, Alyan depicts the lives of Palestinian and Palestinian American women in the different spaces that they occupy. She portrays and represents women in a more realistic way that challenges some of the established stereotypes of typical Arab women. However, she also adheres to other assumptions regarding women's position in society. Feminism is clearly present in *Salt Houses*. However, it is a special type of feminism that does not fully fit into one of the defined four waves. The present analysis particularly agrees with McDowell's assertion that "feminism does not imply a united field of theory, political position, or perspective" (8). Nowadays, Western feminism is dominating the scene and even the attempt to establish a universal movement of women is doomed to fail.

The reason is quite banal. Women are not the same even within one culture. They do not think the same way and as such have different perceptions towards what is liberating and what is subverting for them. As Darraj contends, the diversity of styles among the community of women writers of Arab heritage attests to the diversity of thoughts, viewpoints, and experiences, which is sufficient evidence that women do not share an identical narrative (3). As such, claiming to empower women through boxing them under one label is a helpless move to change women and make them fit into a given designated standard. That is why it is evident that Alyan while attempting to empower her female characters and refute the long-established stereotypes attached to Palestinian women, particularly Muslim ones, falls into the trap of creating other assumptions particularly about the matter of hijab and practicing Muslim women.

As such, reading and analyzing her work, as well as the other two novels of Abulhawa and Rum, calls for a use of an adapted version of feminism that represents a dedication to understanding what women write, express, and represent in cultural forms

(McDowell 8). A kind of feminism that does not see the hijab, for the women who choose to wear it, as a cover for distorted body images and insecurities. A kind of feminism that does not see a woman's choice to resolve into a committed life of domesticity and motherhood as an irrelevant cowardice move. This belief stems from a conviction that such kind of feminism is about women's choice, whatever that is, and that they are not to be ridiculed or reproached for choosing the life they want to lead.

Alyan fills her story with women who are mostly mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives. She does not focus on the public sphere in the sense that we do not have a single woman in her story who holds a professional job or earns money. Instead, her novel follows the life course of housewives and even single young girls who are mostly indoors. The Yacoub family is a rich Palestinian family in which women are not economically independent but they are not typical housekeepers too. Starting with Salma, the matriarch of the Yacoub, Alyan pictures an Arab mother and wife who is not typically strict in her raising of her children like her peers.

The reason behind Salma's tolerating nature with her children is partially due to how she treasures them more than anything else in the world, especially that it was not easy for her to have them. Alyan explains this part of Salma's frustration with the "betrayal of her body" that "stretched only to flatten again" as she endured miscarriage "six times" (10). What is worse is having her first newborn a girl instead of a boy. This reality made Salma feel ashamed since she felt that she failed in her role as a wife. Note that her husband, Hussam, do not openly complain about this issue. However, Salma was smart enough to notice "his disappointment" (Alyan 10). Alyan is critical about this patriarchal idea that compels women to give birth to healthy male children otherwise they will be shamed and regarded as malfunctioned machines.

Furthermore, Salma loses her husband and she is left alone to raise Alia and Mustafa. Perhaps this is what led Salma to raise her children in a way that turned them into “careless children”; “both spoiled, given to mercurial moods” (Alyan 16). Her excessive tolerance and easy-going nature spoiled both Alia and Mustafa and affected their lives later on. Salma even thinks that she has betrayed her husband’s ideals in raising Alia, in particular. Hussam was a practicing Muslim who would never approve on the liberal way that Salma raised their children after him (Alyan 18). Salma’s only solace in brushing off these thoughts about Hussam’s disappointment in her duty as a mother was to consider how “all girls are doing it” and not only her Alia who “made it clear she would never veil” (Alyan 19).

One of the central women characters in *Salt Houses* is Alia. Alyan manages to join all sorts of paradoxes in Alia’s character and personality. Even before the start of their endless journey to different spaces, particularly America, Alia is not the typical ‘good Arab girl’. Alyan challenges this stereotype of the good Arab girl vs. the bad American girl through the character of Alia and other females in the story. In various parts of the novel, Alia explicitly violates the salient Arab norms of the Muslim Palestinian society. Unlike her peers and her sister Widad, Alia decided never to wear the hijab (Abulhawa 19). Instead, Alia grows up with “short skirts and feathered hair” alongside “tight sweaters, eyeliner” and “frosty lipstick” (Abulhawa 110).

However, Alia could not fathom or tolerate her daughter’s Souad “too-tight jeans and leather” (Abulhawa 110). Alia smoked in front of her family and used sharp language. Nonetheless, she complained of her daughter’s behavior and considered her desire to pursue her studies alone in Paris as an insult only done by “some street girl” (Abulhawa 129). The contradiction in Alia’s personality and perception of right and

wrong is highlighted by Alyan. Sometimes mothers tend to hold their daughters accountable for things that they themselves were indulged in in the past.

As such, the paradox in Alia's character as a woman, a mother, and a wife is appealing to the reader. The way she is critical of the "bad American girls", "the street girls", or of Beirut as a "city of whores" only enliven Alia's own faults and non-conformity to the Arab ideals of proper behavior. In fact, the way Alia uses the norms of the Arab culture to deal with her naughty children, namely Souad, confirms Naber's elaboration on using Arab culture as a means to rule over the kids while invoking that it is there to root them to their culture (8).

Nonetheless, Alia is also critical of Riham's 'visible faith' that made her uncomfortable. As Alyan contends, Alia could not understand how her daughters were so different despite being brought up in one household. Souad was "godless and unruly" while Riham was "veiled and earnest and *married*" (Alyan 110). It seems that Riham's devotion to her religion "perplexed" her parents who "saw themselves as lacking" (Alyan 111). However, they do not try to meddle in her religious commitment despite their uneasiness.

This particular scene of Riham's faith is vital in highlighting one of the stereotypes that Alyan, consciously or unconsciously, represents in her story. The Yacoubis are a Muslim family but it is clear, from Alyan's account, that they are not practicing the faith except for some few members. In regards to women, only Salma and Riham are committed to their religious practices. In fact, Riham is influenced by the example of her grandmother Salma in adhering to the Islamic teachings. As a teenager, Riham was "mousy and shy" and uncomfortable about her body image (Alyan 91). Her mother could not understand this fact. Only her grandmother did. Salma became her role model.

It is no surprise to find Riham attached to her grandmother to the extent of following in her footsteps; as she decided to veil and be religious unlike her mother and sister. Abudi best explains the relationship between females within the family circle when she highlights the matter of searching for maternal love and support. Riham's mother, Alia, fails in acknowledging the emotional needs of her daughter. As such, Riham is in search "to satisfy her needs for maternal love and warmth" that she finds in the "surrogate mother figure" of her grandmother (Abudi 185). Her grandmother supports her emotionally and she introduces her to the Islamic faith during her visits to Amman; taking her to the mosque and reminding her to read the Quran (Alyan 99).

Consequently, Riham views her grandmother's religiosity as an alluring matter and she finds herself following her grandmother in adhering to Islam's teachings and obligations. As Salma becomes the surrogate mother figure for Riham, their new mother- daughter relationship is strengthened by Islam's rituals such as praying, fasting, and reading the Quran. When Riham nearly drowns, the "only name" that she could think of was "Allah" and the memory of "the mosque" and "her grandmother" putting "the veil around her head" (Alyan 105). In that moment that blurred life and death, Riham realizes that only god can save her from drowning.

Even when Salma passes away, Riham keeps a strong attachment to her. It was Salma who taught Riham how to perform Wudu (washing ritual) before praying. As Riham performs this ritual to pray her five daily prayers, "she remembers her grandmother, briefly, each time" (Alyan 150). Thus, Riham, in turn, becomes 'the ambassador of Islam' in her own large non-practicing Muslim family. As Alyan puts it, Riham was the only one who paid attention to the kids as she invited Linah and Zain "to sit with her and recite Qur'an" (185). Riham is, thus, assuming the role of her grandmother in preserving the faith of the Yacoub's future generation.

Nevertheless, the problem with the depiction of Riham does not lie in the fact of her devotion to Islam. Unlike the rest of the female characters who are depicted as free, independent, and strong women in *Salt Houses*, only Riham is represented as the fragile prudent woman who cannot express her thoughts loudly. Alyan makes her commitment to her religion a part of the reason why she is not empowered as the rest of the Yacoub women. This is not obvious from the start. However, a close reading of the character development of Riham reveals how her insecure weak nature uses religion and the veil as a mask to hide behind.

Alyan first introduces the character of Riham as a quiet book-worm who is not a big fan of socializing even with her small family (88). Riham is uncomfortable with their summer visits to Amman except for being with her grandmother. She is vulnerable and body-conscious around her, seemingly, flawless cousins that she prefers reading her books to going to the beach with the rest of the family (Alyan 93). Riham is depicted as the typical introvert who prefers a state of solitude over a state of socialization. Only her grandmother understands her and this leads Riham to seek to be like her.

Of course, having characters such as Riham is a common thing in novels. However, it is peculiar that Alyan only chose her as the hijabi devoted Muslim woman in her story. Why wouldn't it be Souad with her free-spirited strong personality that chooses to veil? Why must it be a weak body-conscious and shy girl who chooses hijab and conformity to Islam? As if hijab is the perfect mask to hide the not-so-attractive features of Riham's body. It is also intriguing to associate practicing the religion with being socially awkward and unable to fit in with the rest of the family.

The stereotype of the veiled woman does not end here. Even Riham's choice of a husband and the way she carries herself as a wife is prejudiced. Of all the possible

suitors that she could get, Alyan marries Riham off to a widower who has a son; a man “old enough to be her father” (Alyan 111). Moreover, from all the Yacoub’s women, only Riham turns into the typical housewife who cooks and takes care of the daily chores even in the presence of a maid (Alyan 143). Alyan’s characterization of Riham suggests that veiled practicing Muslim women are boring, dull females who are not empowered or liberated and who prefer staying hidden behind closed doors. Riham does not even get a chance to be a biological mother to a child; she only raises Abdulllah the son of her husband from his late marriage. As if to suggest that she is not fertile or that her marriage is more of a Platonic partnership than that of a romantic relationship.

However, when it comes to representing women who are empowered and liberated, Alyan presents females who go against the Muslim Arab culture. Souad seems to be Alia’s duplicate, though with an extreme level and an added layer of transgression. Unlike Riham, Souad is displayed as daring and outspoken. She is rebellious and unable to conform to any of the designated rules that her sister follows willfully. She is extremely beautiful and she displays her beauty provocatively. Alyan describes her as “cavernous, chaotic” and “beautiful” (148). Even as a child, Souad stood out among her siblings as the one who brings much trouble (Alyan 89).

Alyan attributes Souad’s empowered character to her unconventional personality. She used to stay late at night hanging out with friends even when her parents, especially Alia, made it clear that this is against their rules (Alyan 117). Her dress-code is also provocative even for her easy-going mother. What crowned it all is her decision to move to Paris to finish her studies (Alyan 128). Eventually, Souad gets what she wanted, as always. She even marries a half-Lebanese half-French man, Elie,

and moves later on to America. The allure of the Western life does not last long with Souad, and she soon finds herself heading back to Beirut, divorced and with two kids.

Despite Alyan's efforts to show the glamour of Souad's life of adventure and breaking all norms, still no one can deny the vulnerable side of her character that resides beneath the mask of luxury. Alyan tried to keep the character as real as possible, unlike what she did with Riham.

Souad is one of the women of the Yacoub family who suffered from non-belonging. She contemplates the meaning of home throughout her journeys until she reaches Beirut and reveals to her kids her discovery that home is "as in somewhere familiar, somewhere people look like us" and "talk like us" (Alyan 168). As such, Souad the mother and wife is nothing like Souad the daughter or Souad the sister. With her shifting roles, her personality shifts too and she realizes where she has gone wrong.

Of the other female characters that the novel highlights, Manar is the most distinguished both in her character and actions and reactions. She is Souad's eldest daughter; a "smart", "incisive and sly" girl (Alyan 165). Alyan initiates her image as an angry teenager who is uncomfortable about her body because of her weight (175). Again, it is clear enough that Alyan focuses a lot on the matter of outer beauty and body image in the building of the personality of her female characters, in particular. This trait of body-consciousness 'runs in the family' of the Yacoub; from few accounts of Widad to Riham's body insecurities to Manar and her difficult character.

Nonetheless, what is vital in the portrayal of Manar as a female is how she receives the meaning of being a woman from her mother Souad, who received it from her mother Alia, and internalize it in an unconscious attempt to discover herself. In chapter three, transgenerational trauma was thoroughly analyzed in relation to the matter of the hereditary Palestinian wound of losing home, identity, and belonging. In a

similar vein, the troubles facing women in the Yacoub family are transformed from generation to the next, even without precise deliberation. For instance, similar to Alia who finds in Souad her shameful duplicate; a mirroring of Alia's own faults and weaknesses, Manar is assuming Souad's role of a rebellious daring daughter who loves taking risks.

Manar even starts a relationship with an American married man; Gabriel, and she becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Manar is more liberal than her mother Souad but her pregnancy "shamed her"; signaling the effect of her Palestinian culture on her character even if it is buried under the countless layers of her American-ness (Alyan 225). She even wanted to visit Palestine and reconnect with her ancestral homeland. However, that does not happen and she finds her whole journey to Palestine a huge disappointment (Alyan 231). Alyan threads the lives of these female characters who live amidst the in-between of the East and the West. It is true that they all carry Palestine and the Arab culture within them. Nevertheless, from the way they lead their lives and make their choices it is obvious that the Western half with its influence is stronger than the other Arab Palestinian half.

Comparing Alyan's portrayal of women as mothers, daughters, sisters and wives in *Salt Houses* to that of Abulhawa's in *The Blue Between Sky and Water* uncovers how diversified are Palestinian American women writers in regards to the way they perceive and shape the image of women and their roles in society. One cannot ever expect to find a single version or representation of what is a woman's role in her community and how she should act in her society. The two novels are but two examples of the differences that women from similar backgrounds hold concerning the depiction of women while speaking about home, identity and belonging. Whereas Abulhawa gives Nur her homecoming and unites her with her Palestinian half, Alyan,

through the character of Manar, challenges the notion of re-arrival and the ecstatic feeling of re-uniting with the homeland. The following section provides a third viewpoint and a darker version of the story of Palestinian and Palestinian-American women through the analysis of Rum's sketching of women in her novel *A Woman Is No Man*.

5.3 Motherhood in Crisis and "A Woman Is No Man": How True Can That Be?

The third story in this study that is presented by Rum in her novel is darker in tone as it stresses an untold version of the Arab woman's experience and suffering in her society. Rum threads the lives of four main female characters in her novel: Fareeda, the helpless matriarch, Isra, the victim of domestic violence and voicelessness, Sarah, the transgressor and a runaway, and Deya, Isra's eldest daughter, who risks repeating her mother's life with all her plights. In fact, all of the women in the story are oppressed by a patriarchal system that is inherited across generations. Women in *A Woman Is No Man* are subverted and subjugated to a level worse than slaves. This is what Rum is trying to convey to the world. Life, for Arab women, is not always seen through a pink rosy lens. Instead, Rum sends a message that states that Arab women, and even Arab American women, are suffering because of a rooted belief in the subordination of women to men and that their sole duty and the reason for their existence is to please and serve men in their society.

The example presented by Rum is set initially in an Arab Muslim Middle Eastern society. Isra Hadid is from Birzeit, Palestine and Rum reveals how Isra lived there before receiving a marriage proposal from Adam, the eldest son of a Palestinian family living in Brooklyn, and moved to America. This is how the story moves from Palestine across the Atlantic to settle in the space of America, more precisely Brooklyn. The story is uncovered through the use of multiple voices, mainly Fareeda's,

Isra's, and Deya's and the technique of flashbacks and flash-forwards. With her polyphonic text, Rum gives a fair share of talk and presence to the mentioned female characters as the active agents in the story.

It is interesting how Rum highlights the fact that women are not solely oppressed by men in a patriarchal milieu, but also by some women who support such corrupt system. This is impersonated in the character of Fareeda, Isra's mother-in-law. In fact, it can be argued that Fareeda is one of the main reasons behind Isra's downfall. Moreover, Isra's own mother, Sawsan, is another example of a woman who unconsciously endorses the unjust patriarchal norms that keep women in a vulnerable position via storing these ideas in her daughter's psyche since infancy. To illustrate, Isra often recalls her mother's "voice in her ear, reminding her: A woman belongs at home" where she is expected to "serve and entertain" (Rum 11) without a complaint.

Even the mother-daughter relationship of Isra and Sawsan is troubled. Rum reveals how Sawsan appears as an indifferent mother to Isra, her only daughter among several sons (14). This indifference and lack of displayed affection leads Isra to question her mother's love and why she is not worthy enough to have it. In this respect, Sawsan fails in her role as a mother to Isra. According to O'Reilly, mothering entails providing for children's necessities and fostering their self-esteem so they believe they are unique and worthy (169). Since Isra is unable to receive such kind of mothering from Sawsan, she is unable to develop a strong sense of self-esteem and never thinks that she is special in any way. Unfortunately, the consequences of this failure do not end with Isra, but are rather transmitted to her daughter Deya.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that Sawsan is not to fully be blamed for not tending to her daughter's needs. In reality, Sawsan is also a victim of the prevailing patriarchal system of the Palestinian culture. Sawsan's own mother and her

grandmother and all the mothers before them kept teaching their daughters the same ideology of women's place in the world and the proper way of acting and behaving in order not to bring shame to the family. Her husband Yacob beats her violently and constantly for futile reasons such as "an undercooked piece of lamb" (Rum 16). For Sawsan, and later on for Isra, domestic violence of this sort became a routine of their family's interaction.

As explained by Rum, women are expected to be beaten by their husbands if they do something wrong or fail to do what is right. It is similar to an endless vicious cycle of victimhood and battering. O'Reilly contends that, "A mother's victimization does not merely humiliate her, it mutilates the daughter who watches for clues as to what it means to be a woman" (162). This is precisely the case of Isra who understands her role as a woman through the example of her mother and accepts violence as part of being female.

Mothers are vital in shaping and molding the life of the child, especially in their early years of character development. Abudi argues that mothers are essential in raising children and preparing them to be contributing parts of society (4). As such, Isra does not learn much from her mother in terms of her role in society and what she is expected to do as a woman. Especially concerning the matter of marriage, all that Isra has learnt from her mother is that "there's no room for love in a woman's life" (Rum 15). Sawsan teaches Isra from a very young age that marriage is not built upon love. She engraves in her mind that the woman is the one who takes most of the burden of marital life. Isra grows up hearing that children are her sole responsibility in which she is expected to raise them alone while the man is outside fetching for provision.

However, deep down, Isra does not want to have this life; to be miserable like her mother. Since she is moving to America, Isra believes that things will be different

from Palestine; that she will be freer. Sawsan soon corrects her daughter, insisting that “no matter how far away from Palestine you go, a woman will always be a woman...there is nothing out there for a woman but her house and home” (Rum 16). The type of motherhood that Sawsan absorbs and passes on to her daughter Isra is that of motherhood as an institution in the patriarchal system. In her groundbreaking book *Of Woman Born*, Rich manages to

distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that that potential – and all women – shall remain under male control. (13)

In the case of Sawsan, the conceptualization of motherhood adheres to the second definition given by Rich. A woman’s only worth, according to the followers of this second belief, is pleasing the husband and rearing children with no protest.

This belief becomes the norm to be followed blindly without questioning. O’Reilly asserts that the beliefs and expectations of the prevailing patriarchal culture are upheld by mothers as they raise their children (161). In a Palestinian patriarchal household like Yacob’s, Sawsan and Isra have no choice but to submit to the dictated set of morals and norms of their culture. Any defiance would be considered a major transgression that brings shame and as such calls for disciplinary actions to prevent it. This includes all sorts of violence that can lead, in the worst-case scenarios, to death.

The patriarchal code of conduct does not merely address females’ behavior and role in society, but it also inscribes for males the proper mode of exerting their control and power. This is also unconsciously accomplished by mothers who instruct and raise their sons to be patriarchal subjects. To illustrate, in Rum’s story, both Sawsan and Fareeda only have one daughter among several sons. They both treat the girls poorly,

barely paying them any sort of special attention or affection while caring and spoiling their boys openly. As such, the institution of motherhood encourages male dominance and sexism in sons (O'Reilly 165) while teaching daughters to accept their inevitable inferiority in the world of men.

Rum highlights this reality throughout her story, starting from the title of the novel. A woman is not a man; she cannot have what he has, cannot be free or independent intellectually and economically. Among the female characters in the novel, Sawsan and Fareeda are the ones supporting this claim and reminding Isra, Sarah, and Deya that a woman is no man. According to Abudi, a number of Middle Eastern academics, in the Arab world, asserts that the mother shapes the child's mind and character since the infant is fully given to her during those formative early years (5). No wonder, then, to find Isra mimicking Sawsan in her mothering of Deya and her three other daughters. Even against her better judgment, Isra finds herself turning into another version of her mother.

Rum is critical of this sort of mothering that boosts the tyranny of the patriarchal system and keeps it functioning from one generation to the next. She especially focuses on how Arab immigrants seek to pass along their Arab tradition and culture to their American born children and the issues associated with raising girls in particular. As Naber points out, "our immigrant parent's generation disproportionately pressured girls to uphold their idealized demands of Arab culture" (2) while they tolerated the behavior of men and their indulgence in the American lifestyle. However, for females the story is reversed since "girl's behavior seemed to symbolize the respectability of our fathers and our families" (Naber 2).

A woman's honor is not solely hers alone to keep; it is the family's honor before any other considerations. Because of the potential risk of losing such honor in

the public sphere, these patriarchs believe that women must be confined inside the walls of their home to keep them (their honor) safe. McDowell explains how the social construction of space is also closely linked to this binary split, as both men and women are supposed to understand which spaces should be occupied and which are unacceptable to inhabit (11). Sawsan keeps reminding Isra that a woman “belongs at home” (Rum 11). This is how Isra learns that her natural space is the domestic sphere and she is ready to pass this ideology on to her Arab-American daughters.

Arab women's literature frequently deals with the sorrow of a girl who is compelled to wed a guy she does not love (Abudi 282). This is what the reader finds in Rum's novel. Isra wants to marry for love, unlike her parents. She wants to stand for herself and decline this marriage that she does not want but she is unable to find the words to do so. As Rum puts it, “Isra had learned from a very young age that obedience was the single path to love” (12). All sorts of love that she has known in her life were conditional and required something in return. Isra believed that even her mother only loved her when she finished her daily chores in a good way (Rum 61). In such kind of Arab novels, a mother is a cruel, uncaring, unloving, and unempathetic person toward her daughter (Abudi 274). The latter is especially true in describing the relationship between Sawsan and Isra. The result is a distorted perception of affection that drives Isra to accept that the only means to earning the love of those surrounding her is through pleasing them and giving something from her part.

Married and deported to America at the age of seventeen, Isra finds herself unable to cope with the life she is having. Similar to Cleofilas, the protagonist of Sandra Cisneros' short story *Woman Hollering Creek*, who encounters patriarchal oppression since infancy, Isra “comes to terms with womanhood, as the new wife of” Adam Ra'ad (Baxley & Boston 72). Before marrying Adam, Isra is still in the stage of

girlhood not knowing much of a woman's place in the world. Such a woman surpasses the threshold that necessitates her moving from her father's home, where she cared for her father and brothers, to her new place of residence with a man who abuses her (Baxley & Boston 72).

Since Isra is conditioned, from a young age, to think that affection must be earned with hard labor and mastering silence, she submits to the whims of her abusive husband, who finds in her the outlet of his own weaknesses and social pressures, without defending herself. She resorts to silence despite having many things to say (Rum 131). Traditional Arab culture can be compared, in this respect, to traditional Latino culture in terms of a woman's proper place and role in society. As Baxley and Boston contend, "a woman's status in the (traditional Latino) community is defined by her status as wife and mother" where the mother's "importance lies in her role as a sacrificial, supporting figure of her husband and children" (72). As such, the woman, according to this view, does not have an autonomous existence for her own sake, but that she must sacrifice herself to tend for her husband and children's needs. Isra unquestionably adheres to this principle.

What is vital in *A Woman Is No Man* is that Rum is one of the women writers "who have introduced protagonists facing the painful dilemma of silence brought on by a host of factors, namely societal norms that dictate who and what is valued" (Baxley & Boston 13). Isra's 'failure' to grant Adam the desired son added to her misery and intensified her physical battering by her livid husband. However, her psychological wound is even worse than her physical pain with Fareeda's constant reminders of her inability to bear a son. As such, Isra as a woman, a wife, and a mother lives in uncomfortable environment that links her worth to how many male heirs she is able to produce. As illustrated by Abudi, "the prestige and social recognition that come from

having sons are such that in traditional milieus a woman who has only daughters is not much better off than a childless wife” (65).

Rum stresses the notion of submission and pleasing that characterized Isra’s relationship with her husband and her in-laws. In vain, Isra has tried to be “the angel in the house”, doing all the house chores without complaining, serving her husband like her master, and not uttering a word of complaint. She thought resolving to silence was the best means not to cause any inconvenience in the house. Yet, Isra “had failed to earn” her husband’s “love despite her many efforts” (Rum 101). Her husband’s battering started after she gave birth to her third daughter and after his younger brother had a son (Rum 132).

After that day, Isra’s battering becomes a constant routine of her alcoholic frustrated husband who would give her a good beating every night he returns home. Surprisingly, Isra accepts his violence as a form of apologizing for failing him in the matter of giving birth to a son (Rum 141). She is unable to find the support she needed from women around her. What is worse is that Fareeda, her mother-in-law and the first witness of her face bruises, teaches Isra how to use makeup to cover up the purple and blue bruises insisting that “what happens between a husband and wife must stay between them. Always. No matter what” (Rum 142). Instead of helping her out via scolding her own son and teaching her to stand up for her rights, Fareeda is covering up for Adams’ violence against Isra. In other words, Fareeda is an active agent in the patriarchal oppression of Isra.

Rum highlights Isra’s deteriorated state of mind and body after all her suffering. Isra’s plight is that she spent her life seeking to please everyone around her. When she moves to America, she fancies life to be different but patriarchal oppression and domestic violence were the same despite the difference in spaces. When Isra could

no longer be “the angel in the house”, Fareeda decided that she has become “the madwoman in the attic” (Gilbert & Gubar 232) except that Isra was confined to the basement and as such must be labeled the madwoman in the basement.

When Gilbert and Gubar discussed this notion of a madwoman they illustrated that it is not merely about actual lunatic women. The madwoman is that female who is entrapped in a closed space with no windows or light; and no hope for escape (232). This is literally the case of Isra who lives in the windowless dark basement of her in-laws. Isra spends her days staring out the little window of her daughter’s room. Signaling her imprisonment, the window represents the threshold and the only means through which Isra can see the outside world and wander with her thoughts.

Another vital representation of women in the novel is found in the daring character of Sarah, Fareeda’s only daughter. Just like Isra, Sarah is Fareeda’s “temporary possession” who is “noticed only when there was cooking or cleaning to be done” (Rum 60). However, unlike Isra who was anxious to oblige Fareeda and the rest of the family without protesting, Sarah’s behavior is marked by mild rebellious disobedience when Fareeda orders her around (Rum 45). The reason behind Sarah’s outstanding personality, as Isra conjures, is her being American with a strong voice (Rum 77). This is precisely why Fareeda is especially harsh on her daughter; because of her growing visible American-ness.

Fareeda and Sarah’s relationship is not tainted by affection and maternal support. Blindly adhering to the patriarchal norms of traditional Arab society, Fareeda regards her daughter as a walking bomb that may explode at any moment, finishing off the whole family. Since the concerns of the whole family, in traditional Arab society are beyond personal matters and more effective than national concerns, any sort of transgression or defiance is to be severely punished (Abudi 34). As such, Fareeda

dedicates her life to monitor Sarah and make sure she is kept under control. Even when Sarah protests against her mother's unfair treatment of her unlike how she tolerates her brothers, Fareeda reminds Sarah that "marriage is what's important for girls, not college" and that "A woman is not a man" (Rum 75).

Rum emphasizes Sarah's free-spirited nature that helps her carry herself despite the struggles of living in a patriarchal oppressive family. The problem is not that only male relatives are the ones who exercise their authority and control over females. According to Coulter, in addition to being watched over by the males in their lives, proactively engaged women in their communities also police women to ensure that they don't deviate from accepted standards of female conduct (35). In Sarah's case, such a woman is her own mother who is following what culture dictates on females no matter how unfair that is. In fact, both Fareeda and Sawsan are trapped in "disillusioned motherhood" where they "induce their female offspring to accept a social order that has already betrayed them and requires them to betray their daughters for its continuance" (Coulter 39).

Fareeda and Sawsan must have had their fair share of oppression from their patriarchal society. However, when it comes to their own daughters, Sarah and Isra, they find themselves unable to change the narrative and free their daughters from the chains of patriarchy. As Woolf contends in her groundbreaking work *A Room of One's Own*, "women are hard on women" (93). Of the two daughters, Sarah is the transgressor who is unable to accept to live under such circumstances. Isra endures in silence until she passes away. Yet, Sarah's transgression is worth a hefty price. Sarah becomes the outcast of the family, exiled from her home, when she runs away because she refused to enter an arranged marriage.

For most feminists, Sarah's rebellion against the unjust patriarchal demands translates into her new empowered self who dared to go against such rooted norms. However, for the Arab and Palestinian society, Sarah's actions are ruthless, bringing shame to her entire family. Such belief regarding women is often linked to conventional patriarchal ideals, such as honoring family members, talking only if instructed to do so, and deferring to elders at all costs (Baxley & Boston 129). However, despite her new freedom and autonomy, Sarah regrets her decision to run away and leave her family. This is why she reaches out for Deya advising her not to follow in her footsteps and that she can convince her family with her decision to go to college and not marry (Rum 104).

Deya is the culmination of what it means to live between and betwixt the opposing worlds of the East and the West. She represents the struggles encountered by Palestinian American women living in the West in a strict household. Deya is the eldest daughter of Isra. Rum foregrounds the spatial reality of Daya who is risking repeating her mother's life and fate. There is a striking resemblance between her mother's life under her patriarchal oppressive family and her own. At approximately the same age when her mother married and moved to America, Deya was under pressure from her grandparents, namely Fareeda, to get married and forget about going to college (Rum 25).

Nonetheless, Deya resists this idea and she keeps urging her grandmother to reconsider her decision and allow her to pursue her studies instead of starting a family. Fareeda is not the kind of person to reason with as she regards Deya's insistence on education a breach of their long-established tradition of marriage. As explored by Baxley and Boston, the "breaking of tradition is often a source of conflict between... daughters and their mothers (grandmothers), who expect their daughter to maintain the

old ways” (131). In this respect, Fareeda and Deya’s relationship is a fragile one characterized by tension and intolerance.

Deya, as a woman, is empowered by the story of Sarah and the dreadful end of Isra. As illustrated by Woolf, “we think back through our mothers if we are women” (64), and Deya does not want to have the end of her mother. As Rum puts it, Deya realizes that she “will not repeat” her “mother’s life” (182), who was “beaten to death in their home, in the very rooms where she and her sisters spent their days” (181). What helps Deya reach this conclusion is the support she receives from her aunt Sarah. In this sense, Sarah assumes a motherly figure for Deya and seeks to liberate her from her oppressive entourage. Via trusting Sarah and allowing her into her life, Deya enters a “female world” where “women rely heavily on other women to reduce their isolation and develop a support system” (Abudi 11).

It is essential to note that Rum’s empowerment of her female characters, namely Sarah and Deya, is linked directly to the matter of education. This is thoroughly discussed in chapter four in the section of women’s education. As such, Rum manages to depict the lives of some Palestinian and Palestinian American women who suffer both physically and psychologically in a patriarchal oppressive environment. Despite its fictitious nature, this novel mirrors the real lives of countless women who are victims of their own circumstances regardless of their spatial existential reality. In this respect, the following section focuses on the spatial representation of Palestine and America and their meaning for Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum through the accounts of the different female characters in their novels.

5.4 Mapping Palestine and America and the Spaces In-Between: A Geocritical Feminist Analysis

As it is grounded in this study so far, space and place play a pivotal role in shaping and altering human relations and senses of home, belonging, and identity. The spatial dimension of the existential state of humans is not random. The geographical location is crucial in creating that sense of place that all humans need in order to root themselves somewhere in the world. Intrinsically, the Palestinian Nakba of 1948 does not solely represent a poignant temporal event for the Palestinians in terms of losing historic Palestine to the Zionists. However, the Nakba also features the altering of the world's geography via wiping Palestine off the international world map.

Spatially, Palestine ceased to exist soon after the Nakba. Instead, the world, led by Western nations, acknowledged the birth of a new democratic nation-state; Israel. As illustrated by the historian Nur Masalha in her groundbreaking book *The Palestine Nakba*, the Nakba marks a watershed in Palestine's contemporary history; in that year, more than 500 villages and towns, as well as the entire nation and its inhabitants, vanished from global dictionaries and maps (3). It was not merely an ethnic cleansing led by a settler-colonizing regime, but also, as thoroughly explained in chapter Two, a domicide of geographic Palestine and a mass destruction of its landscape.

It is as if the Zionists turned the land of Palestine upside down, leaving no trace of Palestinian existence, and replacing it immediately with the Israel's made-up history and geography. As Alhosani contends, "cartography was manipulated to silence the Palestinian subaltern or consider him as invisible, or conflate him with a status of cultural decadence and backwardness" (29). This Zionist policy aimed at ensuring that the rise of a democratic state of Israel is inevitable and rather welcomed as a means to civilize the barbaric, inferior stock of the Arabs who occupied the land. Since most

European nations were involved, in a way or another, in the imperial history of the world, such a move was accepted and supported. Alhosani elaborates, “the colonizer immediately used geography to blur facts and distort history by producing a new map of Palestine/Israel” (30).

It is due to such policy that Palestinians realized the importance of cartography and mapping in ensuring their rights and history. Tally highlights the vitality of mapping in his book *Topophrenia*, insisting that “one might suggest that mapping is almost essential to our being. I map, therefore I am” (14). Using Descartes’ principle, cogito, ergo sum, to construct his idea, Tally coins the existential reality of a people with their spatiality, more particularly with mapping. According to Tally, “mapping makes visible places and what might seem to be a circular logic, being mapped is what in many respects establishes a place as a place” (31).

When the Palestinian people lost their map that was replaced by the Israeli one, with Hebrew names instead of the Arabic ones for its towns and streets, they have lost their Arab identity and spatial proof of their existence in the land. Note that the Nakba of 1948 is not yet over to this day. Palestinians are constantly being denied their right to their land and even their right to map their territory that is shrinking day after day because of the Israeli settler colonialism. Moreover, the insistence on the “Nakba denial” (Masalha 5) by the Israeli’s and their sponsors risk the total erasure of the Palestinian existence in the region.

That is why a counter attack is inevitable. Writers of Palestinian decent use their pens to do the very thing. They counter argue this Nakba denial by insisting on preserving the events of 1948 and what comes after that, in their literatures. The three selected novels in the present research are a good example of, what I call, Nakba revival, in which the three women writers center their stories around the Nakba. This is

especially true for Abulhawa's novel *The Blue Between Sky and Water* that starts soon before the Nakba and continues on after it, highlighting the struggles facing the Palestinians during those hard times.

The main aim behind the analysis of the three novels is to map the different spaces that women occupy, and how these spaces affect their identity and belonging. Spaces are not empty containers. Rather, spaces are embedded with ideology. Consequently, space itself may serve as a source of control and a restriction on women's freedom of movement, but it can also be a place where women can actualize themselves, transcend gender norms, and gain power (Wrede 10). Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum vary in their representation of women in their gendered spaces. Each writer has a distinguished perception of Palestinian and Palestinian-American women as well as the spaces of Palestine and America and those spaces in-between.

Starting with Abulhawa's novel, Palestine, as a space, represents the focal point of departure and arrival for Palestinians and Palestinian-Americans. After losing their home because of the colonization, Nazmiyeh and the rest of the Baraka family embark on a journey of displacement and mobility. Their original village of Beit Daras is completely destroyed and they find themselves in Gaza's refugee camp. Across the Atlantic, Nur, the Palestinian-American grandniece of Nazmiyeh, grows up in various foster homes with a distorted sense of identity and belonging. Abulhawa fleshes out her story mainly in these two places (Palestine and America).

Via deploying a close reading of her novel, it is apparent that, for Abulhawa, Palestine is considered as the ultimate home for both Palestinians and Palestinian-Americans regardless of their geographical positioning. Despite the disadvantaged living circumstances and arrangements in Palestine, which are markedly distinct from all the privileges that come with living in America, Abulhawa insists that there is no

place like Palestine to find the existential meaning of homeliness and belongingness for Palestinians and their descendants. This is exemplified in the instance of Nazmiyeh and her daughter Alwan's family, who never leave Palestine despite all the hardships, and Nur who returns from America to find her family in Gaza.

It is also intriguing to consider how Abulhawa manages to depict Palestine as a feminine space. Starting from the very beginning of the novel, the reader exclusively follows the lives of women and their daily routines. Later on, men are either depicted as working outside Palestine to support their families, such as Mamdouh, or are in the background as dead and long gone like the father of Nazmiyeh. The household is run by women, as men are absent. In doing so, Abulhawa, through her spatial arrangements, "offer resistance to gender hierarchies" and attempts to "subvert the oppressor-oppressed paradigm" (Wrede 10).

Palestine is also likened, by Abulhawa, to a major female character in her story. In 1948, the domicile of Palestine officially started. In the novel, the same date corresponds with Nazmiyeh's gang-rape incident. This explains how the colonizer conquered both the land and the female's body. Abulhawa as such highlights the analogy of Palestine as a woman. In literature, it is common to read about women "as metaphor for nature" especially in relation to space in which "that place called home is frequently personified by and partakes of the same characteristics as those assigned to, woman/ mother/ lover" (Massey 10). However, Nazmiyeh does not surrender to her anguish but rather gathers her broken pieces and patches a new life in the camps. Similarly, Abulhawa suggests that just like Nazmiyeh who moves on despite her hardships, Palestine too would prevail despite the colonization.

America for Abulhawa and her characters is a space of duality and contradictions. It is the space where better living conditions are a daily reality, where

countless opportunities are present. However, it is also a cruel cold space for those immigrants and refugees who left family and home behind. The first contact with America for the Baraka family is accomplished by Mamdouh and his wife Yasmine. Abulhawa does not focus on their life and struggles there as immigrants. However, she stresses how Mamdouh misses Palestine and wants to return home, especially after he loses both his wife and only son (Abulhawa 73). It is Mamdouh's granddaughter Nur that grows up in America, alone, after Mamdouh passes away.

America for Nur is a place of fulfillment as well as a place of loss. Spending her childhood and teenage years in various foster houses in North Carolina leads Nur to develop a topophobic tie with the land. America for her is the haven of her loneliness where no family are around. Nonetheless, the same space that creates the fragmented nature of her being helps her achieve success professionally and allows her the chance to go back to her ancestral land of Palestine. This dual understanding of space is what Massey acknowledges in her analysis of spatiality. As Massey argues, "we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity... as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity" (22). As such, America as a space has different meanings for Nur as it is for other Palestinians and their descendants.

As for *Salt Houses*, Palestine as a space is placed mostly in the background as the homeland that is lost. Alyan mentions the Nakba briefly and how the Yacoub had to leave Jaffa and move to Nablus. However, she focuses more on the Naksa of 1967 that led the Yacoub family to scatter all around the world, ushering the start of their transnational wandering. Unlike Abulhawa who makes Palestine the land of longing and belonging, Alyan focuses on the transnational identities of her characters who never truly fulfill an authentic homecoming. The spaces in *Salt Houses* are those in-

between places, such as Kuwait, Amman, Beirut, and Paris that the Yacoub family move to at different periods of their journey.

Another striking difference between the Baraka family and the Yacoub family is their clinging to the space of Palestine regardless of the circumstances. Whereas the former chose to stay in Palestine no matter what, the latter fled as soon as the war started. Perhaps this has to do with their financial states. To illustrate, the Baraka family are extremely poor even before the Nakba that they could not even think about migrating to another country. However, the Yacoub family are a wealthy family that used the money to start over in different places; starting in Kuwait and reaching to America.

In this respect, as Alyan highlights, Palestine as a space to live in is no longer an option for the Yacoub family. It is true that they carried its memory within them and passed it to the next generation alongside the trauma of losing it in the first place. Nonetheless, geographically speaking, Palestine is lost and the story of the Yacoub family takes over in other spatialities. This does not suggest that the Yacoub family were less Palestinian or that they betrayed their land when they left it. It is simply that Palestine meant different things for different Palestinians and that there is more than one story to it. Its relevance, however, resides in the fact that for the Yacoub family, Palestine, as a space, “was something raw in the family, a wound never completely scabbed over” (Alyan 225). Even when they moved to different places, there was always something missing, something left behind.

Alyan, also, challenges the common belief that states that women always remain in their homelands and never leave. All of the women in the Yacoub family embark on a journey to different spaces. Some goes to Kuwait (Widad and Riham), some goes to Amman (Salma, Alia), and some goes to Paris and America (Souad, Linah, Manar). As such, even within the same space and time, what defines and assigns

women's duties and rights and the issue of public vs. private spheres and where it is best fitting for a woman to be are obviously influenced by cultural and ethnic differences (Haddad et.al 16). There is also a challenge and rebuke of the "patriarchal understanding of family structures insofar as women are depicted as secondary vis-a-vis men" (Haddad et.al 36).

Alyan rejects even the romanticized vision of a homecoming when Manar is unable to identify with Palestine as the homeland and the origin of her family. As Massey puts it, "places change; they go on without you... for the truth is that you can never simply 'go back', to home or to anywhere else. When you get 'there' the place will have moved on just as you yourself will have changed" (169). As such, the concept of a homecoming that many scholars advocate is problematic as spaces and places are always in the making; changing and evolving. It is in the human nature to look for an anchor to root oneself somewhere in the world. This is what is referred to as "a sense of place, of rootedness" that helps establishing "stability" and an "unproblematic identity" (Massey 151).

The other brief accounts of some members of the Yacoub family are grounded in the spaces in-between Palestine and America. Kuwait appears as a barren desert and the literal opposite of Palestine, especially for Alia. Unable to cope with both its weather and traditions, Alia feels suffocated and only find solace in the sea at night where she contemplates that when "emptied, the city is feminine" (Alyan 64). Riham, on the other hand, hates Amman and prefers Kuwait with its comfort of home (Alyan 93). Souad moves to Paris and she is fascinated with the city at first but she encounters a change of heart soon after. She then moves to Boston to join her brother Karam. However, America too does not help Souad find her home. She moves again to Beirut

after her divorce in an attempt to collect her broken pieces and start a new life with her kids there.

The spaces and places in *Salt Houses* are literally, as the title suggests; fragile in nature and at risk of decay. Moving from Palestine usher an endless journey of mobility for the Yacoubis who are never satisfied with the places that they occupy. In her novel, Alyan foregrounds the moment of losing the space of Palestine as the moment of losing the sense of home and stability. No other space is compared to Palestine, regardless of the advantages and benefits of such a space, in terms of bringing meaning and maintaining rootedness. However, humans “are always, inevitably, making spaces and places” (Massey 229) and this is how life goes on. As such, Alyan suggests that transnationalism becomes the fate of many people, namely Palestinians and their descendants.

A third, yet very brief, representation of Palestine as a space is found in Rum’s novel *A Woman Is No Man*. Note that the Nakba is only present in the background of the story as the novel starts in 1990 in Birzeit, Palestine. The protagonist Isra and her family lived on “one of the steepest hills in Palestine...on the outskirts of Birzeit” (Rum 11) facing two graveyards; in other words, they lived in a wasteland that no one wanted, not even the Israelis. This spatial description of Isra’s home in Palestine highlights how her family does not truly belong to Palestine, as they merely existed on its margins. In such instance, Isra’s family represents the case of countless Palestinians suffering from the outcomes of the Nakba.

After the marriage of Isra, Palestine is no longer present in the development of events as the story moves on across the Atlantic and settles in Brooklyn, America. The only exception is when Fareeda is after finding a wife to her son Omar ‘from back home’ and even with that incident Rum does not describe anything special or spatial

about Palestine (Rum 107). Rum uses Palestine more as an abstract place than an actual lived space.

Unlike Abulhawa and Alyan, Rum's story is mapped in America in the closed space of Brooklyn. Her novel spots light on the issue of women's confinement to the domestic sphere and all the brutalities of living under a strict patriarchal control. Isra never leaves her basement except to do her daily chores in the first floor. Leaving the house alone is out of the question and even her small space of the basement is windowless and dark.

As it is explained throughout this research, space and place are endowed with different ideologies that are linked, not merely to time and history, but also to gender as well as other factors. As it is described as the age of spatiality, the contemporary era has witnessed massive changes especially relating to time-space compression. This led to the altering of the perceptions of spaces and places. According to McDowell, "geographers now argue that places are contested, fluid and uncertain" and that, above all, they are "made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries" (4). These boundaries decide who is allowed 'in' and who must remain 'out'.

Through the analysis of the three novels, the above statement is confirmed since the same spaces of Palestine and America mean different things for different characters and even for the writers themselves. As McDowell contends, distinct groups have particular meanings for different areas, and various social groups may occupy a space throughout the course of a day, a week, or more (168). Even the meaning attached to the private sphere of the home is different for Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum. Whereas Abulhawa sees no problem in women's domestication, Alyan rebukes Riham's

embracing of domesticity and considers it a weakness. Rum considers Isra's life and daily chores as a bitter routine of a prisoner.

The three women writers present different accounts of the same spatialities which emphasizes the stand that there is never a single story to be told, particularly when it comes to the Palestinian story. Furthermore, space and place are not easily defined and contained. They are constantly changing and evolving. Space and place are never finished just the same way time cannot be finished or cut to pieces. Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum map the lives of Palestinian and Palestinian-American women who suffer from an identity crisis and a loss of orientation in terms of belonging and rootedness. They are empowered at times and subverted at others. These women are living amidst exceptional circumstances with colonization and the pain of exile. However, they do not surrender to that reality.

Conclusion

Using their pen, the three Palestinian-American women writers seek to keep Palestine alive despite the countless attempts by the Israelis and their allies to erase it once and for all. They seek to represent a group that is visibly invisible and demand acknowledgement and appreciation for their culture and identity. Since Palestine is still, to this day, under the mercy of the Israeli settler colonialism, "the traumatic rupture of the Nakba remains rooted in Palestinian collective consciousness" and "the shock, devastation, humiliation and suffering" (Masalha 13) are present in the three novels with various degrees. As resistance comes in different shapes and sizes, the literatures of Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum are another form of resisting colonialism and patriarchy. Via insisting that even if the space is altered and Palestine as it used to be is no longer there, the memory and identity of Palestinians will thrive and prevail, these

women writers keep the hope alive and seek to remind the future generations of what has been lost; to never forget where it has all started.

General Conclusion

Throughout my analysis of the three selected novels, I have come to realize the vitality of spatiality in the study of literature in novel ways that confirm the prevailing ideologies of the spatial turn that characterizes our contemporary times. This does not mean that time has no importance in this new approach of analysis. Instead, spatial considerations, which were once viewed as no more than a part of the setting of plots, are now being acknowledged as a vital aspect in both the production and representation of literary texts, alongside temporality. As such, I found geocriticism, with its flexible interdisciplinary nature, the most suitable theory to study the selected novels in my thesis.

I have used geocriticism to analyse the three novels of *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, *Salt Houses*, and *A Woman Is No Man*, highlighting how spatiality plays a pivotal role in shaping the notions of home, identity and belonging for Palestinian and Palestinian-American women writers. In fact, my selection of the corpus of analysis was used to test the extent of which the shared background of the women writers is going to manifest itself in threading a similar narrative regarding the Palestinian story. Despite their common heritage and similar experiences, Susan Abulhawa, Hala Alyan, and Etan Rumi hold quite distinct views to the space of Palestine and America as it appears in their novels.

The Palestinian story of home, identity and belonging is never meant to be reduced or boxed into one unified story. My research showcases such examples of the diversified perspectives on what is home and what is identity for Palestinians and their descendants. My study seeks to shed light on how this group manage the ambivalent sensation of belonging amidst in-between-ness and displacement. Note that I have purposefully specified women's views and experiences of home, identity and

belonging amid their respective spatialities. This is not to exclude men's definition of home or to regard it as less important. However, for the purpose of my study, I have focused exclusively on women's voices using as such feminism to address the matter of women's oppression, subjugation, and/or liberation.

In my chapters, I have sought to highlight those themes which are mostly associated with women and patriarchy. As far as geocriticism is concerned, I am deploying a geocentric approach in studying the depicted places and spaces in the three novels and how it affects and alters the senses of home, identity and belonging of the female characters under study. However, my geocritical analysis does not end there with the fictional (imagined/ real-and-imagined) spaces and places of the three novels. Instead, I go a step further to challenge Barthes theory of the death of the author and the common tradition of focusing on the text and not the author, via focusing on the three women writers and their own spatial realities.

In this sense, I use a geocritic egocentric approach in studying the influence of the existential spatial realities of the three women writers on their literary works. Geocriticism is used to ask geographical questions about literary texts and to ask literary questions of geographical realities, bringing together social sciences and the humanities in a fascinating way. Because of its pliable quality, geocriticism draws upon multiple theories and approaches, namely, postcolonial theory, cultural studies, globalization, and cosmopolitan theory. For example, geocriticism deals with issues related to power relations, and minorities' struggle to challenge the dominant ideologies and discourses of othering and marginalization all in relation to spatiality.

In the present study the three novels are analyzed with a feminist lens. Abulhawa highlights the strength and undying resilience of the Palestinian woman

under the plight of the Israeli settler colonialism. On the other hand, Rum sheds light on women's oppression and vulnerability amidst a patriarchal Palestinian culture. Alyan occupies a middle ground in this respect. At times, she celebrates the Palestinian female empowerment and victories despite all odds. At other times, she falls in the trap of confirming the common stereotypes regarding the Muslim veiled woman as a weak, oppressed victim of a patriarchal ideology.

The difference in representation of women is vastly felt while moving from one novel to the next. Reading Abulhawa's portrayal of women made me realize that among the three women writers, she is the only one who fairly managed to depict an authentic image of Palestinian women and Palestinian culture without bias. In *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, we have women who suffer from colonization and its brutalities, but who, nevertheless, remain strong and resilient. Women in her story are well aware of their place in society. They fully understand their responsibilities and they take care of them.

The relationship between men and women, for Abulhawa, is built upon love and cooperation despite the harsh conditions within Palestine. Moreover, women in her novel are the ones who suffer the most. However, they are not solely the bearers of pain and anguish. They are the ones who carry the culture, who keep their homes safe and warm, and who help men lessen their burden under the plight of settler colonialism. This is how Abulhawa empowers Palestinian women without risking defaming or degrading their culture.

Alyan attempted to do the same thing in her *Salt Houses*. She tried to picture a world of women who, despite their wealthy economic state and fortune, suffered from great loss and trauma because of the Israeli settler colonialism. We see in her story

liberated women who appear strong and independent. Alyan also portrays the relationship between men and women as that of equals. The only fault about her representation and empowerment of women is in her depiction of the veiled Muslim woman as weak and helpless. Following the prejudiced Orientalist perspective, Alyan chooses one of the weakest characters to be a veiled, pious practicing Muslim woman. This message suggests that women empowerment and liberation reside in adhering to the Western ideals of what is true liberation and that Arab Muslim traditions of modesty and hijab do not help in achieving such empowerment.

However, the one who truly went wrong in her story of liberating the Palestinian woman is Rum in her *A Woman Is No Man*. Although she has opted for a fair representation of Palestinian women's conditions under a patriarchal regime, Rum became the victim of heavy exaggeration and confirmed prejudice because she followed an Orientalist bitter ideology in telling the dark side of the Palestinian story. Again, it is unquestionable that patriarchy is a rooted phenomenon in the Arab world in general, and in Palestine in particular. Nevertheless, this does not mean that it is the norm. Reading Rum's novel gives the impression that the situation of women in Palestine is far beyond any hope of repair; those women there are doomed to suffer and die in silence because of their culture. Such representation by Rum does not empower women but instead it foregrounds and deeply confirms the Western stereotypes of the weak-in-need-of-rescue Arab woman and the patriarchal-brutal- monstrous Arab men.

In my research, I insist that spatiality does not merely affect the realisation of home, identity, and belonging, but it constantly and actively shapes and reshapes such realization. This is proven via analysing the three novels of Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum. Each woman writer had a unique experience of spatiality. As I have stated previously, their spatial actualization is not solely present in their fiction. In fact, it all

stems from their personal existential spatial realities and finds its way into their literary works. However, despite sharing the current space of America, Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum experience space differently as it is apparent in their novels. While the three women writers use their pen to affirm Palestinian existence, they do not essentially share the same realization of Palestine as a space.

I argue throughout my research that the urge of placing home at the core of their stories is the result of losing Palestine (a space) in the first place and the problems that arise from having a lack of rootedness and belonging. Since the space of Palestine is altered and reshaped almost daily by the ongoing domicile that targets its landscape and geography, the homeland of Abulhawa, Alyan, and Rum that they depict in their stories is at a great risk of loss and decay. The greatest loss for Palestinians and their descendants in diaspora remains the denial of their right to return to their ancestral land and claim their roots.

The three women writers and their literary works represent women's belonging, identities and homes in distinct fashions despite their common lineage. The spaces of Palestine, America, and other places of the Palestinian diaspora are explored by the women writers differently. I have compared and contrasted such representations in my thesis reaching to the conclusion that there could never be a single story to Palestine and its people unlike what the Western world is attempting to prove in their narratives.

For future research, it is helpful to study the three selected novels using authorial intentionalism theory (I have slightly discussed this in relation to Rum and her novel). Also, it would be fruitful to re-address and elaborate on the matter of feminism to dismantle Western Orientalist feminist views and their influence on contemporary Arab-American women's writing. Moreover, deploying a

psychoanalytical lens to reading the novels will provide interesting findings particularly what relates to transgenerational trauma and depression.

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