

**Displacement as a traumatic experience in  
Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) and Khaled  
Hosseini's *Sea Prayer* (2018)**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines how Susan Abulhawa and Khaled Hosseini narratively structure the displacement experience as traumatic one in *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) and *Sea Prayer* (2018). Both writers display this experience in light of its resulting catastrophic aftermath that Palestinians and Syrians have been enduring. To fully grasp the profound effects of this daily lived reality, this study adopts an interdisciplinary approach combining socio-psychological and literary examination. Both literary works are examined within the theoretical framework of Cathy Caruth's psychoanalytic notion of the 'repetitive seeing' of 'the story of the accident', and what Deborah Horvitz postulates the different symptoms that haunt the consciousness of a traumatized person. These symptoms of PTSD will be examined as a post-traumatic effect of displacement experience. Narrators in *Mornings in Jenin* and *Sea Prayer* are depicted as a nostalgic spectrum of traumatized refugees. The Palestinian nostalgic pattern represented in *Mornings in Jenin* serves as a positive psychological function, 'increasing self-esteem' and 'alleviating their existential threat'. The plight of Syrian refugees in *Sea Prayer* echoes another positive psychological function embedded in the positive emotion of persistence to preserve heritage. In this sense, the focal characters of the selected narratives of displacement are depicted as traumatized eyewitnesses of the Palestinian and Syrian plights. This paper chiefly answers the question: to what extent is nostalgia interwoven with the dialectics of displacement and memory? In other words, how far the past and the present are mingled in the displaced person's consciousness

as “a metaphoric designation” for “an absent presence” ? To answer this question, the first section of the paper is devoted to the theoretical framework. The second part presents the analysis and, a discussion of the selected texts. The last section offers answers to the research question and a conclusion.

**Keywords:** Traumatic experience –PTSD- Nostalgia- Narratives of Displacement

### مستخلص

النزوح كتجربة مؤلمة في صباحات جنين (٢٠١٠) لسوزان أبو الهوى وصلاة البحر (٢٠١٨) لخالد حسيني

إن الكوارث التاريخية للنكبة (١٩٤٨) والنكسة (١٩٦٧) والحرب السورية المستمرة من (٢٠١١) حتى الآن قد أنتجت ملايين الفلسطينيين والسوريين النازحين بشكل قسري والمشتتين كلاجئين في مختلف دول العالم. وهذه الأحداث التاريخية وحيات معسكرات التخيم تم توظيفهم كسياق أساسي للشخصيات والأحداث التي تم تجسيدها في النصوص المختارة موضع الدراسة. ويناقش هذا البحث كيف جسد سوزان أبو الهوى و خالد الحسيني تجربة النزوح كتجربة مؤلمة بشكل روائي في أعمالهم صباحات جنين و صلاة البحر. فكلا الكاتبين قاموا بتجسيد هذه التجربة في ضوء التبعات النفسية القاسية التي تحملها اللاجئيين الفلسطينيين والسوريين والتحديات التي واجهوها للحفاظ على تراثهم وتاريخهم. ولتحقيق فهم عميق للتأثيرات الممتدة لمثل هذا الواقع اليومي المؤلم المتعايش فإن هذه الدراسة تتبع منهج متعدد التخصصات يدمج بين إستقصاء اجتماعي نفسي وأدبي. فكلا العاملين الأدبيين سوف تتم دراستهم في الإطار النظري للرؤية التحليلية النفسية الخاصة بكاثي كاروث وديورا هورفيتز لوعي الإنسان المصدوم. ومتبينة هذا الإطار فإن هذه الدراسة استهدفت تصوير النمط الفلسطيني الحيني ومحنة اللاجئيين السوريين المتجسدين في سرديات النزوح المختارة من خلال شخصيات رئيسية كشهود عيان لهذه المأساة. وعلى الرغم من أن العاملين الأدبيين موضع الدراسة يعرضوا مظاهر مختلفة للنزوح فإن هذا البحث يجيب على سؤال أساسي: إلى أي مدى يندمج الماضي والحاضر في وعي الشخص النازح؟ فالشخصيات الفلسطينية في رواية أبو الهوى نزحوا داخليا لمعسكر جنين في الضفة الغربية بينما السوريين في صلاة البحر إبتعدوا عن أرضهم بحثا عن مكان امن لأسرهم بعيدا عن أحداث العنف والموت التي شهدوها في وطنهم. ومع ذلك فإن هذه الدلالات الصادمة لتجربة النزوح تتشارك في علاقة جدلية مع الذاكرة والحنين في الروايتين قيد الدراسة.

## Introduction

The historical catastrophes of *al-Nakba* (1948), *al-Naksa* (1967) and the ongoing Syrian war (2011- ) resulted in millions of Palestinians and Syrians being forcibly displaced and scattered as refugees in different countries of the world. In Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) and Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer* (2018), these political events and the life in refugee camps are employed as the main context and backdrop against which characters and events are depicted. Both literary works offer different manifestations of displacement. Palestinians in *Mornings in Jenin* are internally displaced to Jenin camp in the West bank. In *Sea Prayer*, Syrians had to flee the entire country. In both works, Abulhawa and Hosseini build their narratives around the displacement experience and its consequences the narrator or focal characters go through. Such experience is depicted as a cognitive one characterized by 'repetitive seeing of 'hallucinations', flashbacks, and remembrances suggesting trauma. These traumatic significations, the researcher argues, are mediated through the dialectics of memory and displacement in the two narratives under study.

## 1. Theoretical Framework

### 1.1 Traumatic Experience and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Trauma studies as a field of research comprises different disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and cognitive sciences. On its official online website, the American Psychological Association (APA) defines trauma as the "emotional response" someone has to an extremely negative and "terrible event". Such a response could not be merely seen as a reference to a wounded psyche; the response implies a story of a wound that tells a real and true traumatic event. Psychoanalyst, Judith Herman identifies traumatic event as that causes "threat to life or bodily integrity" (24). It can also be "a close personal encounter with violence and as death" (Herman 24). In the same vein, Cathy Caruth argues that sometimes a traumatic event could be further seen as an embodiment of a human voice crying out from the wound: "a voice that witnesses a truth". (3) This traumatic event "is experienced [...] repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor", Caruth argues (4). Such an event remains at the heart of the cognitive process of "repetitive seeing" of "the story of the accident" (Caruth 92). In that manner, the traumatic event represents a "breach in the mind" instigating "conscious awareness of the threat to life" that consequently generates post traumatic symptoms (62). Seen through this psychoanalytic lens, the traumatic experience

embodies strong impressions of a previous past that the person cannot abandon. This traumatic experience could not be limitedly seen as referring to a past traumatic event but should be seen in light of its results and catastrophic aftermath. In other words, it is not an event that started and ended in past time; it is a daily lived reality. The traumatized person passes through a post-traumatic stage that often induces a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Such disorder is a manifestation of "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations." (Caruth 11)

Building on Caruth's psychoanalytic insight, Deborah Horvitz highlights in *Literary Trauma* the victim-survivor's "capacity and willingness to incorporate ... a traumatic event [which he/she experienced] *inside* oneself as an indispensable piece of personal history" (Horvitz 6). The greater one's ability to "make story" out of trauma, which is defined differently for each protagonist, the more likely s/he is to regain control of her or his life after that trauma (6). Providing the direct link between PTSD and an external violence, Deborah Horvitz sheds light on different symptoms that haunt the consciousness of a traumatized person. In Horvitz's view, PTSD generally includes the different diagnoses of "shell-shock," and "traumatic neurosis" as direct effects of external violence (Horvitz 12). Horvitz uses the term 'echoing' events in the victim's mind to make clear how the traumatic experience has intermingled with the characters' everyday thoughts: "the memories turn up in the form of symptoms, including anxiety, depression" (17). Placing these symptoms in dialogue with 'repetitive appearance of hallucinations' provides insight into what Caruth refers to as "the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event" (59).

On one level, war exposes one or more particular group(s) of people to traumatic violent events. On a collective level, wars negatively affect the whole social structure. For example, in a mental health survey on Kashmiris, Tambri Housen and his collaborators highlight the negative psychological impact of living in war and rampant conflict zone upon the collective psyche. Housen et al. view Kashmiris as survivors of violence who traumatically live with long-lasting "threats to life, [...] disappearance of friends or family, loss of property or belongings, [and] forced separation from family members [after] military attacks." (4) The authors state that these traumatic events generate Kashmiris' prevalent feelings of disappointment, anger, hopelessness as well as future

uncertainty (Housen et al. 2). The oppressed Kashmiris are specifically affected by what they witness of a doleful situation and potential break out of major conflict between India and Pakistan over their territory which justifies the pattern of suffering and the catastrophic after-effects of wars following colonization upon traumatized populations. One of these psychological consequences of war is living with long-lasting classic symptoms of PTSD such as panic attacks, flashbacks, and nightmares of a traumatic past. By the same token, Palestinians and Syrians experience societal post-war conditions that result(ed) in catastrophic aftermaths on both the psychological and the social levels. In brief, Palestinian, and Syrian refugees as represented in *Mornings in Jenin* and *Sea Prayer* go through a cognitive process of ‘repetitive seeing’ of past traumatic events which is reflected in nostalgia, as a post-traumatic consequence of displacement experience.

## 1.2 Displacement and its catastrophic aftermath: Nostalgia and In-betweenness

According to *Cambridge Online Dictionary*, displacement refers to "the situation in which people are forced to leave the place where they normally live." *The Oxford Online English Dictionary* also describes the term as “the enforced departure of people from their homes, typically because of war, persecution, or natural disaster.” In addition to studying displacement as a traumatic event of replacement, substitution or ‘enforced departure’, the researcher examines the psychological and social aftermath of it. Displacement, as Al Deek generalizes, is ‘ambivalent’ and ‘multiple’ experience that forces the displaced to "cling to history, to hang on to memory; for when one is nostalgic, one remembers.” (24) In his traumatic position, the displaced person is significantly haunted by a “metaphoric designation” for “an absent presence” in which he is caught in nostalgic ties to lost childhood and memories in homeland (Al Deek 31). In such a view, the displaced consciousness engages with a dialectical relationship between memory and forgetting where the past is indeed summoned and mingled with the present. Providing the direct link between nostalgia and memory, Svetlana Boym similarly argues that nostalgia embodies “a dual archeology of memory and of place” (20) in which “individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, [...] personal and collective memory” intermingle in a dialectic relationship (19)

This dialectic relationship is echoed in the overwhelming feelings of nostalgia which was considered by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century as “a

subconscious desire to return to an earlier life stage, [... that] was downgraded to a variant of depression, marked by loss and grief [...] equated with homesickness” (Wildschut & Sedikides et al.304). In the sense used here, nostalgia is not limited to its traditional definition as a medical disease or a psychiatric disorder including a syndrome of homesickness. By the late 20-th century, nostalgia is more frequently associated with old times and childhood as well as yearning than with homesickness (Wildschut & Sedikides et al. 304). Differentiating between homesickness and nostalgia, Wildschut & Sedikides et al. state that whereas homesickness “refers to one’s place of origin”, nostalgia “can refer to a variety of objects [...;] persons, events, places” (304-5). They add that “whereas homesickness research focused on the psychological problems (e.g., separation anxiety) that can arise when young people transition beyond the home environment, nostalgia transcends social groups and age [... and] is found cross-culturally and among well-functioning adults, children, and dementia patients” (304). It is in this light that Wildschut & Sedikides et al. variously define nostalgia as “a sentimental longing for one’s past” whether “a negative, ambivalent, or positive emotion” (305). While nostalgia is often triggered by negative moods and loneliness, in some cases, nostalgia could be considered as “a predominantly positive, self-relevant, and social emotion serving key psychological functions”, as Wildschut & Sedikides et. al. argue (304). Some of these functions are such as generating positive effect, increasing self-esteem, fostering social connectedness, and further alleviating existential threat. Examining the Palestinian displacement experience lends support to such an argument. Palestinian nostalgic narratives echo psychological effect, whether positive or negative, and are embedded in a social political context of the ‘right to return’.

An excellent example of such Palestinian narratives is that of Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish; their narratives expose an interplay between psychological and sociological aspects of nostalgia and engage with its dialectics of past and present. In his memoir *Out of Place*, Said depicts his “geograph[ical] displacement” after the Palestinian *Nakba* in 1948 and the consequent enforced departure and having to live “swept out of the place”, in “a place of exile”, in a continuous state of “removal, unwilling dislocation” (16, 14, 252). Said shares the same miseries with other displaced persons who are “cut off from their roots, their land, their past” (*Reflections* 205). However, he declares that he is involved in “the displaced form” of “nostalgia, homesickness, belonging”; so trapped “at the core of [his] memories” by places where he lived in Jerusalem that he

writes about for readers fifty years later (*Out of Place* 16). Mahmoud Darwish, by enmeshing memories in the narrative, *In the Presence of Absence*, similarly has nostalgic ties to his homeland. He continuously struggles with "an addiction to looking back, [...] an overwhelming urge to turn the present into [...] a shared past [...] that embodies prolonged] fears [of] tomorrow" (82). Darwish is perpetually haunted by 'a shared', 'panting', and 'nostalgic smell that guides [him], like a worn tourist map, to the smell of the original place' (63). Such a "smell is a memory", but a special kind of memory that is "rebuking the stranger" (63). Both Darwish's and Said's narratives represent here the dialectics of past and present. In his pioneering autobiographical prose-poem, Darwish skillfully makes use of memory as a tool to gather pieces from the past to provide the evidence that the present of the displaced *could be* narrated and written through a lost past and the vanishing homeland. In this sense, Darwish's 'form' of nostalgia is not merely a painful physical detachment from homeland, but rather it positively generates nostalgic ties to homeland that are neither dead nor overrated. Placing Darwish's form of nostalgia in dialogue with Said's substantiates the argument of considering nostalgia as transformative through the dialectics of memory and displacement.

In Bhabha's terms, displacement could be seen as a "social experience", that embodies the connectedness of the aforementioned dialectics of past and present (19). Not all displacement experiences are the same. However, different stereotypes of "immigrants, refugees, exiles... and the homeless" share "a personal experience" of living the "intensity of separation" (Kaplan 17). Such an experience may imply a moment of aesthetic distance which represents "a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality [...] bridging the home and the world" (Bhabha 19). In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha states that he experienced that moment of "scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others" (199). Seen through Bhabha's socio-cultural lens, the displaced could be considered as "the 'borderline' figure of a massive historical displacement— postcolonial migration – that is not only a 'transitional' reality, but also a 'translational' phenomenon (320). In such a transnational world, it makes significant "the border-problem of the diasporic, the migrant, the refugee", as Bhabha puts it (330). These different stereotypes share 'the border problem' of being in-between' (Bhabha 310). In this context, the displaced life is mainly characterized by temporariness; linked through "an 'in-between' temporality" that

"takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history" (Bhabha 19). Experience life in host countries, while dreaming about the homeland, the forcibly displaced person is threatened by a future life of in-betweenness where he/she would be caught between old and new surroundings.

In this study, the following analytic part is specifically concerned with the displaced persons who are threatened by living in the state of 'in-betweenness' mentioned above. The experience of displacement is amply examined in this study as a postwar experience that is divided into three phases that Ane Isaksen & Thomas Vejling identify: the pre-displacement phase, the displacement phase and lastly is the post-displacement phase. The displacement phase, according to Isaksen & Vejling, mainly has two different experiences: "The first is the direct transit from native country to the host country. The second is the transit that involves countries of first asylum [... including] temporary settlements such as refugee camps" (Isaksen & Vejling 15). Of particular interest here is the second one. The selected focal characters in *Mornings in Jenin* and *Sea Prayer* represent a spectrum of traumatized refugees who share traumatic personal experiences of fleeing their homelands to avoid famine, genocide, or incarceration. In these works, Susan Abulhawa and Khaled Hosseini narratively structure the displacement experience as traumatic to make the narrator and/ or focal characters eyewitnesses to the consequences of displacement, even though, both writers continue to express a renewed hope in the future.

## 2. Analysis & Discussion

### 2.1 Traumatic experience of Displacement as presented in *Mornings in Jenin* & *Sea Prayer*

Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* begins with a prelude that takes place in Jenin in 2002. In this prelude, Abulhawa depicts her central protagonist Amal Abulhaja finds that "[t]he **petitions of memory** pulled her back, and still back, to a home she had never known" (*Mornings in Jenin* 9, emphasis added). Such a beginning prepares the reader to become acutely aware that all following events of Abulhawa's novel come out of Amal's 'petitions of memory' that delineate the plight of the first and second generations of Palestinian refugees. Abulhawa skillfully makes use of Amal's mother, Dalia's, personal traumatic experience to exemplify the traumatic events during *al-Nakba* and *al-Naksa* which

resulted in and extenuated Palestinian experience of displacement. **Similarly, inspired** by the painful image and heartfelt traumatic story of the Syrian child; Alan Kurdi, Khaled Hosseini brings the sufferings of refugees around the world to life in his *Sea Prayer*. Alan Kurdi then is a symbolic image of people fleeing conflict zones in the Middle East trying to find safe haven somewhere away from home. Hosseini depicts the long-lasting effect of the Syrian war in **form of a letter written on a moonlight beach** by a displaced Syrian father to his sleeping son Marwan during their painful waiting for dawn to break and a boat to arrive.

Palestinian and Syrian refugees are traumatized collectivities who significantly inhabit an ‘in-between’ position. Palestinians have been labeled as refugees (*Lajie'en*) since 1948, and after *al-Naksa* in 1967 a new wave of displaced Palestinians fleeing Zionist attacks, became known as displaced (*Naziheen*). In *Mornings in Jenin*, the Palestinian characters of the first and second generations are depicted as witnesses of 1948 *al-Nakba* and the 1967 *al-Naksa* both of which affected their collective psyche. To comprehend the magnitude of the long-lasting aftermath of *al-Nakba* and *al-Naksa*, Susan Abulhawa efficiently utilizes the voice of Amal Abulhaja as a testimonial tool to depict the Palestinians’ perennial sufferings of uprooting and enforced displacement that begun with Jewish encroachment in the Middle East before 1948 and onward. Through Amal’s voice, the reader recognizes Abulhaja family’s displaced life as a representative example of thousands of traumatized Palestinian families labeled as refugees. Abulhaja family is depicted as living in Ein Hod, a village located near Haifa. However, this family witnessed a violent dispossession by “a FOREIGN MINORITY” that “went about building a new state in 1948, [and] expelling Palestinians and looting their homes and banks” (*MJ* 38). In portraying Amal Abulhaja as one of the second generation in displacement, Abulhawa skillfully employs her characters’ personal traumatic experiences to exemplify the long-lasting effect of catastrophic aftermath of *al-Nakba* and *al-Naksa* upon the Palestinian collective psyche. For example, Amal, who was born in 1955, is deeply haunted by her traumatic memories of her mother Dalia who suffers from PTSD after losing her son in 1948, and then losing her husband in 1967.

Weaving history and personal trauma, Abulhawa makes use of Dalia’s psychic disorder as a tool to accentuate the everlasting psychological impact of *al-Naksa* upon the Palestinians’ psyche. Dalia Abulhaja is depicted as a traumatized Palestinian mother who witnessed

catastrophic loss of her six-month infant Ismael who was abducted in Ein Hod before she was displaced to Jenin camp with her family. Throughout Amal's traumatic restoration of memory, the reader is made to see how Dalia is deeply trapped by the pressure of the aftermath of a traumatic loss of a "vanished" son who "disappeared as an infant in the fateful mayhem of 1948" (MJ 67). Dalia's trauma is seen in what Caruth identifies as "the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (57). In every sudden flashback, Dalia "revisit[s] in her mind, over and over for many years [...] what [...] happened to her [lost] son", "search[ing] the fleeing crowd in her mind for Ismael", and "replaying that [traumatic] instant, over and over and over." (MJ 32-3) However, this is not the only personal traumatic event that causes Dalia's PTSD. Amal's mother traumatically experienced the disappearance of her second son Youssif in 1967, and the loss of her husband (MJ 71). Dalia, witnessing such calamities during *al-Nakba* and *al-Naksa*, is involved in different diagnoses of "shell-shock," and "traumatic neurosis" as clear indicators of PTSD, in Horvitz's terms. (12) Dwindled into a world of terror, Dalia traumatically builds around her a shell of lifeless harshness refusing forever to participate in life. The 1967 "war ... le[ft] her body a mere shell that [is] often filled with hallucination" (MJ 71).

Dalia Abulhaja's psychological disorder reflects the Palestinian traumatic experiences during and after *al-Nakba* and *al-Naksa*. To highlight the intergenerational trauma of displacement, Abulhawa utilizes the traumatic voice of Dalia's daughter to declare that the catastrophic "instant" in which the "six-month-old Ismael", who "was [...] in [Dalia's] motherly arms, [...] [then] was gone", doesn't only "crush [Dalia's] brain and change the course of [her and her family's] life, [but it further crush] the course of history" (MJ 32). Nonetheless, Ismael's kidnapping by an Israeli soldier is a metaphor for the 'kidnapping' of the land. This perspective is made clear through changing Ismael's Arabic name to a Jewish one; "David" as Moshe's wife; Jolanta decided "in memory of her father" to bring him up hating Palestinians. (MJ 37) Furthermore, the catastrophic aftermath of *al-Naksa* "made reality fade from [Dalia's] mind", and Abulhawa creates a link between this an "unending string of tragedies that befell Palestinians" and "an immeasurable love that could not find repose." (MJ 215) Such a link again emphasizes the fact that Dalia's case is not particular but representative of the collectivity of Palestinians.

Abulhawa shrewdly depicts the traumatic personal experience of Haj Salem who is a member of the first-generation trauma whose “family was killed in the Nakbe of 1948” and then “lived alone, [with] no wife, no children, no brothers or sisters” (MJ 67). Though the “Arab society revolves around the extended family, [and] no one had ‘no family’”, Amal narrates, Haj Salem is a representative for most traumatized Palestinians “who became scattered and dispossessed following the Nakbe, [and] proved so many exceptions to Arab society” (MJ 67). However, ‘the Nakbe’ is not the only catastrophe that deeply affected the Palestinian psyche. During *al-Naksa* or setback war in 1967, the Palestinian refugees had traumatic feelings that Abulhawa precisely depicts as follows: “The next morning [in Jenin], the refugees rose from their agitation to the realization that they were slowly being erased from the world, from its history and from its future” (MJ 44). Living the atrocities of the 1967 exterminating war, the Jenin camp dwellers stand for all the displaced who have lived in refugee camps. Seen as the historian of Jenin who “narrated exhumations of history”, Haj Salem states: “I’ve seen it all [...] the wars. They kicked us off the land and they took all the furniture I had made” (MJ 66-67). Amal asserts that Haj Salem’s story “single tale of dispossession, [...] left without rights, home, or nation” stands for every traumatic story of dumped refugee “like rubbish” into camps that are “unfit for rats” (MJ 66). In that manner, Abulhawa employs both Dalia’s and Haj Salem’s traumatic personal experiences as embodiments for traumatic experiences of the Palestinian collectivity triggered by “the usurpers proclaiming a new state[that]they called Israel” (MJ 66).

Abualhawa further educates the reader about the massacres that left their marks on the psyche of the Palestinians. Witnessing the catastrophic event of Jenin massacre in 2002, Abu Sameeh is depicted as “lying on the ground” in Jenin camp with “a gun in his hand and his dead son in the other arm” before “the soldiers had shot him [...] [and a] pool of blood widened beneath him.” (MJ 61) Not only that, but Palestinian refugees have also experienced many other massacres since 1948 and until the present. For instance, Abulhawa depicts the catastrophic aftermath of Sabra and Shatila massacre in 1982 committed against innocent Palestinian camp refugees with its horrific significations. Amal painfully describes the endless effect of “phosphorous Israeli shells” which resulted in “the babies [...] still burning [...] and] smouldered for hours” (MJ 172). These “tiny corpses” are depicted as “again burst[ing] into flames” when they were taken “out of the mortuary for burial” (MJ 172). These

traumatic memories of violence and death trigger the refugees' imagined horrors that could happen in the future as they fear "the imminence of a sad tomorrow on the barren, body-strewn soil of [...] days" (MJ 106). The massacres of the past and the uncertainties of a safe future take their toll on the psyche of Palestinians everywhere extenuating their loss of hope in return while living in a permanent state of displacement.

In the same vein, the Palestinian traumatic experiences of multiple enforced displacements as represented in *Mornings in Jenin* could be seen as guide to the Syrian refugee traumatic present as well as their imagined and prospective horrors of the future as depicted in *Sea Prayer*. Syrians share Palestinians' traumatic experience of living the "intensity of separation", in Kaplan's terms. (17) Both are tormented with the same painful feelings of refugeedom. Khaled Hosseini also maintains that "a powerful and tectonic event in [his] life, to be uprooted and to restart life in a foreign country. [America]" causes that "the theme of displacement has informed [his] writing to a great extent" (Interview). As a representative for asylum seekers' displacement experience, Hosseini utilizes his works to depict the plight of people who daily have to abandon home and flee for their lives, however live with memories in their host country. Currently, the brutality of the Syrian war is one of the world's biggest producers of refugees who had to face extreme violence and flee to neighboring countries in search for a safer life. Such a war obviously has a great impact upon Syrians' present and future as scarring their psyche and their abilities to cope with or assimilate in their host countries.

This fear and uncertainty are deftly represented in *Sea Prayer* which paints a detailed picture of a displaced Syrian father watching his son sleep during their risky voyage to Europe in search for a safe land. Similar to the traumatic scenes in *Mornings in Jenin* of Abo Sameeh holding his 'dead son' in his arms, in the final scene of Hosseini's illustrated work, the traumatized father expresses his deep love to his "precious cargo, Marwan, the most precious there ever was" and "pray[s] the sea knows this." (SP42) In this context, Marwan's father is haunted by fears of losing his son. Such fears of the possible painful future have already happened in the case of Abu Sameeh. However, in the Syrian case, the traumatized father is crippled and unable to protect his son having no final resort but praying. All that he can do is to "Pray God steers the vessel true, when the shores slip out of eyesight." (42). Hosseini depicts his central narrator as unnamed to show how the displaced Syrian

father is a representative of the whole Syrian refugees who are trapped in a loop of psychological impact created by traumatic conditions of enforced displacement. In this risky voyage, Marwan's father embodies the Syrian refugees' totality who have to flee their homes and take to the sea in hope of finding some place that accommodates them.

*Sea Prayer* delineates another collective experience: being unwanted and unwelcomed in one's countries of destination. Hosseini efficiently explores how his displaced Syrian narrator shares with other displaced "Afghans and Somalis and Iraqis and Eritreans and Syrians" fearful feelings of being "uninvited" and "unwelcome" and having to "take [their] misfortune elsewhere" (SP 33). Dumped as refugees in different yet similar risky voyage, all these traumatized people are trapped in a perpetual "search of home" in a dark night "on cold and moonlit beach" where "crying babies" and worrying women's "tongues we don't speak" (SP 33). Linking again the Syrian traumatic experience of displacement to the Palestinian one, this traumatic scene of 'crying babies' recalls the scene of "the babies... still burning" in Sabra and Shatilah Palestinian refugee camp (MJ 172). In this context, both Palestinian and Syrian traumatic experience of displacement reflect one another in their illustration that all forcibly displaced populations (will) share traumatic conditions in different countries of the world. Both had experienced political conflicts and wars leading to their displacement and their temporary settling.

In a skillfully written scene mingling picture and text in *Sea Prayer*, Hosseini efficiently adopts the testimonial trait of the picture of a lot of displaced people with the aim of drawing the attention of the global audience to the crisis of refugees who often have move with no passports or with fake papers, crossing the Mediterranean in search for safe temporary places. The picture of a small boat filled with many refugees is akin to that of camp life that displaced Palestinians experience in *Mornings in Jenin*. The boat journey, a traumatic event in itself, metaphorically lends the refugees future living in 'in-betweenness' in the host country. Refugees on the boat inhabit nowhere, unable to return to their past homeland and unsure of whether they will arrive to their destination before drowning or being deported in the best scenario.

Though being surrounded by such dangers, the refugees in the small, overcrowded sailing boat are depicted as being "in dread of" and "impatient for sunrise" that the narrator tells his sleeping son he

witnessed before during his innocent childhood in pre-war Syria (*SP* 33). However, the ‘sunrise’ in this scene symbolizes the hope of arriving safely. Such metaphor of ‘sunrise’ in pre-war and post-war Syria weaves the past with the present and the future. It displays how the displaced Syrian refugees share the same miseries of Palestinians whom Said describes as “feel[ing]an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives” (*Reflections*205). In *Sea Prayer*, Hosseini utilizes Syrians’ experience of displacement as representative for all other displaced populations who have to nostalgically live with their memories in the host country, which is what the following section discusses.

## 2.2 Nostalgia and the Right to Return in *Mornings in Jenin* and *Sea Prayer*

Engagement with narratives that foreground war trauma and displacement in relation to nostalgia invites readers to develop deeper awareness of the displaced self, its repetitive dreams, and its memories. The dynamics of nostalgia and memory is a common trope in the narratives produced by and about the displaced people who experience a war trauma leading to forced relocations. In these stories now written, readers find “the raw materials for building a house; [and these] [...] [w]ords are a country” as Darwish exquisitely expresses (64). Such narratives which are predominantly nostalgic narratives could be further identified by the recurrent rhetorical strategies including “a particular sense of home, belonging, citizenry, and the right of return” (Powell 302). In Powell’s view, ‘rhetorics of displacement’ are mainly embedded in the resistances to “the subjectivities inscribed for the displaced by those who have power over them, such as tyrannical governments” (302). Exemplifying such ‘rhetorics’, Powell discusses the complexities of the displaced figures’ “active writing of letters, through their refusal to move from their homes, and through their requests for documents or photographs” (316). Embodying the nostalgic relations to homeland, letters and photographs, in this sense, are coping tools to overcome the traumatic condition of forced displacement and to negotiate the refugees’ rights to return. Abulhawa and Hosseini use trauma-related lexis in their narratives of displacement as a poignant reminder of Palestinian and Syrian refugees’ rights for protection and respect. Asserting empathy with these traumatized victims, both writers employ the Palestinian and the Syrian experience to underscore the prolonged effects and after-effects of war.

In *Mornings in Jenin*, Abulhawa significantly embodies the Palestinian traumatic condition of “exilic displacement” that Al-Deek defines as a ‘melancholic condition’ of a soul preoccupied with nostalgic ties to an absent or lost homeland (36). The complex relationship between nostalgia and memory is delineated in Abulhawa’s narrative in a similar manner to Darwish’s and Said’s juxtaposition of past and present times and memories mentioned earlier. Darwish’s romanticizing notion of “longing for [...] lost time protesting the sadism of the present” (83) is evident in Abulhawa’s portrayal of “a distant time, before history marched over the hills and shattered present and future” when “a small village east of Haifa lived quietly on figs and olives, open frontiers and sunshine” (MJ 11). Abulhawa nostalgically contrasts the past Palestine’s natural abundance of ‘figs and olives’ to the present “wind [which] grabbed the land at one corner and shook it of its name and character” and actively destroyed the paradise of the past (MJ 11). In her narrative, Abulhawa powerfully combines romanticized memories of the past with the brutal realities of the present through a displaced voice.

Abulhawa’s pattern of nostalgia in *Mornings in Jenin* profoundly echoes Boym’s notion of nostalgia as an embodiment of the relationship “between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory” (19). Amal Abulhaja is an epitome of the complex relationship that haunts the traumatized Palestinian collective psyche. Through Amal, Abulhawa provides a pattern of nostalgia that entails an ‘inherited memory’ in which she compares the earlier peaceful life in Palestine before 1947 and a perpetual traumatic one after the war in 1967. Thus, Abulhawa’s family stands as a symbol for all traumatized displaced Palestinian families, whom Abulhawa depicts as experiencing a “sorrow of a history buried alive” along with “their memories and love of the land” during the twelve months of the 1948 when “[they] rearranged themselves and swirled aimlessly in the heart of Palestine” (MJ 34).

Abulhawa utilizes the nostalgic pattern of first and second generations of Abulhaja family to underpin the continuous attempts of Palestinian refugees to preserve their heritage and history. Yehya Abulhaja exemplifies the first generation of traumatized Palestinian refugees’ who “dauntless[ly] will not leave the spirit of [older and later] generations trapped beneath the subversion of thieves” (MJ 34). This grandfather is depicted as “a withering refugee in the unfamiliar dilapidation of exile” in Jenin (MJ 16). However, Yehya Abulhaja is

depicted as the preserver of history “tall[ying] forty generations of [...] childbirth and funerals [...] with their imprinted memories, secrets, and scandals” (MJ 33). Yehya’s insistence on keeping his ancestors’ heritage further embodies his historic responsibility towards the “old folks of Ein Hod” that “would die refugees in the camp, bequeathing to their heirs the large iron keys to their ancestral homes, [and] the [real] deeds from the British mandate” (MJ 34).

A significant result to Yehya’s persistence is his son Hasan who is depicted in many sections of the novel as perpetually trying to bring up his daughter with a belief that “Palestine owns [them] and [they] belong to her” (MJ 54). Abulhawa skillfully portrays the generational transmission of such a belief throughout the metaphor of the fifteen-hundred-year-old olive tree. The “Old Lady” symbolizes land belonging to them as they belong to it; they give it love and labor, and she nurtures them in return. Hasan tells his daughter Amal: “When we die, we return to the land. In a way, she owns us.” (MJ54) In this sense, Abulhawa’s *Mornings in Jenin* exemplifies the connectedness between nostalgia and the right to return, that is between the past and the future. She utilizes their daily “routine of the Right of Return” as their coping strategy to keep their hope alive to return their homeland (MJ 39). Throughout the ‘petitions of Amal’s memory’, Abulhawa exposes the reader to the Palestinian Jenin camp refugees’ “gathering for the news [that] became a morning ritual in the refugee camp” (MJ 38). Each morning, a group of men gather near Yehya’s tent for the latest news that his son, Hasan, read in newspaper such as “the five major powers—the Soviet Union, France, Great Britain, China, and the United States— appointed a UN mediator to recommend a solution to the conflict” (MJ 38). Gathering “in this routine of the Right of Return”, Jenin camp refugees of various ages are depicted as communally looking forward to re-possess their home (MJ 39). On another occasion, in one of these morning rituals, an attendee wishes that “the Jews didn’t mess up [his] house too bad” (MJ 38). Yet he declares that he “[does]n’t care. [He]’ll fix [his] house. [He] just want[s] to go home” (MJ 38). This intergenerational transmission of nostalgia, memory and hope stand as the main features of Abulhawa’s narrative of displacement.

In *Mornings in Jenin*, the final death scene of Amal, the main narrator, is a metaphor for Palestinians’ brave challenge to rebuild hopes of reintegration into their homeland. Although Amal was torn, oppressed, and rootless for years, she finally decided to come back from ‘the States’

to Jenin to join her family and later dies there on the land of her birth. Such a scene of death embodies the physical and ancestral link between the Palestinians and their homeland. Justifying the Palestinians' right to the land, Abulhawa furthermore dexterously utilizes the repetitive usage of affective words of "roots", "seeds" and "bones" to combine history and the innate feeling of belonging. Furthermore, the name of Abulhawa's main protagonist, Amal, meaning hopes, functions as an embodiment of the Palestinian aspirations of the 'right' and hope to return. Through her 'petitions of memory', Abulhawa's central narrator remembers that her father once said when she was six: "We named you Amal with a long vowel because the short vowel means just one hope, one wish [...but] We put all of our hopes into you. Amal, with the long vowel, means hopes, dreams, lots of them" (MJ 61-2). In this context, Abulhawa's narrative echoes the positive psychological effect of nostalgia embedded in the social political context of keeping 'right' to the land and the hope to return. The Palestinian nostalgic pattern represented by Yehya, Hasan, and even Amal serves as a positive psychological function, 'increasing self-esteem' and 'alleviating their existential threat'.

The refugees' melancholic nostalgic ties to their homeland are also evident in Hosseini's *Sea Prayer*. These ties are written in the form of a letter in which Hussein uses pictures next to text to explain the Syrian refugees' 'melancholic' condition of 'exilic displacement'. Visualizing the nostalgic model of the traumatized and forcibly displaced Syrians, the narrative moves chronologically starting with the past moving to present and showing hopes for future. This structure serves to paint the narrator's past and innocent childhood memories of the in pre-war Syria, his fear of the present and his hopes for a safer future. Nostalgic about his past, the father recounts his memories with his brother, Marwan's uncle, where they used to "spread [their] mattress on the roof of [their] grandfathers' farmhouse outside of Homs" (SP 5). However, this nostalgic pattern of the first generation of Syrian refugees echoes positive psychological function embedded in the positive emotion of persistence to preserve heritage. Yehya Abulhaja's insistence on keeping his ancestors' heritage mentioned earlier in *Mornings in Jenin* is significant in *Sea Prayer* through the displaced Syrian father's "wish" that his son "wouldn't" have forgotten the farmhouse, the soot of its stone walls, the creek where [his] uncles and [his father] built a thousand boyhood dams" (SP 12). In this context, the displaced Syrian father's wish could be seen as an embodiment of Darwish's notion of the displaced involvement of "an

addiction to looking back” of “a shared past” of an “inherited memory” (82). Such ‘inherited memory’ is common among displaced people.

The pattern of nostalgia in *Sea Prayer* significantly combines romanticized Syrians’ memories of the past with the brutal realities of the present. Darwish’s romanticizing notion of “longing for [...] lost time protesting the sadism of the present” is evident in Hosseini’s portrayal of the contrast between pre-war Syria and current Syria (83). This is further consolidated by the illustrations in the book. The first ones illustrating pre-war Syria are dominated by bright colors, families walking in squares and stars in the sky, while the illustrations about the present are significantly darker with clack, and grey and absence of gatherings as the dominant features. In the second half of *Sea Prayer*, the father laments that Marwan, his son, have no memories of Syria but scary ones: “bombs”, “starvation and burials” bloodshed. (22) Hosseini utilizes his narrator’s sorrow for his son’s traumatic familiarity with the brutal scenes in present-day Syria to develop deeper awareness of the catastrophic aftermath of wars.

### 3. Conclusion

This study foregrounds the interactions between the traumatic Palestinian experience of displacement and the Syrian one. It specifically displays how traumatized Palestinian characters of the first and second generations in *Mornings in Jenin* share the same miseries of those of the first one of Syrian refugees in *Sea Prayer*, witnessing brutal scenes of ‘pool of blood’ in Jenin camp, and ‘swimming hole learned dark blood’ in Syria. Placing *Mornings in Jenin* in dialogue with *Sea Prayer* contributes much to the illustration of the individual’s capacities to integrate his/her personal trauma in that of the collective traumatic experiences. Abulhawa and Hosseini utilize their narratives to turn the focus of the international community towards the painful issue of present-day refugees triggered by traumatic episodes; *al-Nakba*, *al-Naksa*, and the ongoing Syrian War. Both authors depict each of their main narrators as an eyewitness to these traumatized collectivities’ plights, dumped as refugees and scattered in different countries of the world. As such, both displaced populations share similar traumatic memories of loss and death that deeply affect their collective psyche as exemplified in the selected texts. The focal characters of these works are employed as symbols of a shared trauma to emphasize the precarious situations of living in ‘in-betweenness’ that Palestinians and Syrians have to endure. In *Mornings in Jenin*, the Palestinian traumatic experiences in the past; during and after *al-Nakba*

and *al-Naksa* foreshadow the alarming tendencies of the traumatic present and the imagined horrors of the future shared by traumatized Syrians as presented in *Sea Prayer*.

To recapitulate, both writers bring to attention a human account of the psychic aftermath of the catastrophic episodes as well as the refugees' challenge of maintaining their heritage and history. Highlighting the lasting effect of traumatic experience of displacement that extends to the second generation refugees occupies the concern of both selected texts. In *Mornings in Jenin*, Abulhawa skillfully depicts Dalia's 'repetitive seeing hallucinations' of the loss of her son as an embodiment of the catastrophic aftermath of the kidnapping their land. Haunted by a perpetual hope for finding her infant who was lost during *al-Nakba*, Dalia could be further viewed as a representative of Palestinians' insistence on hoping to retrieve their land. In a different social context of a risky voyage, Hosseini employs his central narrator's 'repetitive seeing' remembrances of peaceful vs. brutal, pre vs. post war Syria to expose the reader to the fear of living in a permanent state of 'in-betweenness': past and present. In a form of letter, Hosseini's narrative of displacement is efficiently entwined the dialectics of 'inherited memory' and nostalgia to depict the psychic aftermath of Syrian war. Based on this analysis, the nostalgic narrative presented in *Mornings in Jenin* and *Sea Prayer* successfully delineates the dialectics of past and present.

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