

# The Diasporic Home of the Displaced Youth in Susan Abulhawa's 'Mornings in Jenin'

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This paper explores the question of a diasporic home as pertaining to the younger members of diaspora; why the displaced youth's perception of home diverges from that of the older generation, and what understandings of various home experiences in the diaspora lead the displaced youth to. To address these questions the experiences of different generations projected in Susan Abulhawa's 'Mornings in Jenin', with specific focus on Amal the protagonist's journey, will bring to light a new scope for post-colonial studies. The paper investigates the main dimensions that play vital roles in deciding the younger displaced subject's degree of attachment to or detachment from both people and places. It concludes that one's belonging depends solely on the circumstantial journey within the wider frame of diaspora, which leads the young diasporic family member to question the projected image of home and construct their own subjective one. A feminist dimension will be added, thus fixating the study particularly on dislocated women, and how their resilience becomes their urgency to create, from within their bodies, authentic perceptions that transcend the geographic allocation of a home.

**Key words:** *Diasporic home, mother/daughter home, Susan Abulhawa.*

## A Journey of Revelations for Different Generations

*Mornings in Jenin* represents the story of the Abulheja family, which is displaced by the newly formed state of Israel in 1948 from the town of Ein Hod and relocated in a camp in Jenin. The Abulheja family which includes different generations: Amal's grandfather Yehya, her parents Hasan and Dalia, and her brothers Yousef and Ismael/David, are all subjected to detachment from the land of Ein Hod at different levels. However, for the purpose of contrasting the notion of home between both generations, the prevalent diasporic pattern which is seen to be followed by older generation diasporic members will be projected in two



characters, Amal's grandfather Yehya and her mother Dalia. Both characters represent the older generation's experience of physical diaspora within the borders of Palestine.

### ***The Diasporic Home of the Older Generation***

The year 1948 is seen as a turning point in the history of Palestine because it brought with it the proclamation of the state of Israel, marking the great dispersion of Palestinians from their land (Said, 2001: p. 3). Like other Palestinian families, the three generations of Abualheja are forcefully dislocated into a refugee camp in Jenin with the hope to return one day when the war is over (Abulhawa, 2010). Although they are displaced within the borders of Palestine, they undergo a traumatic diasporic experience balanced only by their uncompromised hope of returning to their home.

Being relocated in Jenin Camp, the grandfather Yehya brings many memories of the peaceful life he enjoyed before the Israeli occupation. Yehya's experience of diaspora thoroughly follows the prevalent diasporic framework which forms the understanding of home around the frozen memories he has of his place of origin. He not only holds tightly to his memories of Ein Hod, but also materialises his longing through an actual return to it, through which he reaffirms that his understanding of home is fixed and unchangeable. Rather than accepting the new reality that he is forced into, Yehya relives his calm memories in a way that emphasises his eternal connection to the memories of enchantment to the life that was wiped out with the unexpected dispersion. For Yehya, the image of Ein Hod is not tainted by war or oppression, as he is still able to recount the good times there. As a diasporic member in Jenin who is unable to adapt to his new life in the camp, Yehya is expected to assert his devotion to the past lived in Ein Hod in different ways, one of which is his assertion of "know[ing] every tree and every bird there. The soldiers don't!" (p. 44), thus projecting his employment of memories and knowledge of Ein Hod in an attempt to reaffirm his connection with the land and to highlight his fixed notion of home.

However, the passionate references that he constantly makes of his possessions do not seem to satisfy his longing for life before war. Therefore, and instead of waiting for a distant collective return to take place, the emotional link between Yehya and everything about Ein Hod drives him to actualise a return visit that he hopes may yield him some fulfilment, as it becomes his "paradise of realized nostalgia" (p. 44). On his way back, Yehya verifies his ownership of the land by recreating the memories he previously had lived there. He also suffers from the heavy responsibility of passing on the details of the destruction of the village to the refugees in Jenin Camp. Yehya's overwhelming sadness is a clear indication of his loss of a sense of home, which leads to the crucial point where home for Yehya is more than the land of Ein Hod, onto the accumulation of shared life experiences and memories with the land, and most importantly, with family members and friends living there. This justifies his

decision to bring back the memories of forty generations in Ein Hod in the form of fruits that he picks from his homeland trees. Back at the camp, he proudly invites the neighbours to eat them, saying “Taste my land....! (p. 45)”.

“Calculating the number of generations who had lived and died in the village” (p. 34) is another way that he chooses to express his resentment towards the war that resulted in their removal from the village. He further develops a form of political right in the land of Ein Hod, as he thinks “Forty generations of living, now stolen [...] All carried away by the notion of entitlement of another people, who would settle in the vacancy and proclaim it all ....” (p. 35). It may be inferred here that the memories that Yehya emphasises surpass his personal experiences lived in the village of Ein Hod. Thus, the neighbourhood of Ein Hod is saved and revived through the personal and collective memories of its people, soothing their diasporic experience as it helps them maintain solidarity and consciousness. The discourse of memory repeatedly narrated by Yehya is further powerful in maintaining his right to the lost home of Ein Hod. His diasporic condition also leaves him with little but memories of a secure and happy life to be passed on to the younger generations.

In comparison to the secure life he experienced in his homeland, Yehya’s current insecurity is magnified the moment “he realised that his miserable tent in Jenin had turned into clay” (Abulhawa, 2010: p. 41). He is apparently unable to associate with lodging in Jenin and for him “the symbolic permanence of the shelter was too much to bear. He would rather have stayed in a cloth dwelling, with its leaky top and muddy floor confirming only a temporary exile” (p. 41). His strong faith in return is inescapable and both his eternal physical connection with Ein Hod as well as his refusal to identify with a new locality, confirm his fixed understanding of home. Furthermore, the reader may form a robust idea of Yehya’s attachment to the concept of home in Ein Hod in light of the risk he takes to make another visit to his homeland, only to embrace death there this time. In fact, Yehya’s peaceful memories in Ein Hod justify the camp’s inability to provide him with the security of a home, thus driving him to risk another journey to Ein Hod which asserts his complicated sense of physical dislocation within Palestine. Although currently bare and demolished, Yehya is aware that he “had gone to die where he was supposed to die” (p. 48). It does not come as a surprise then, that his passing is widely perceived by all refugees to be “from the malady of a broken heart” (p. 48), further highlighting the point that the land of Ein Hod combined with its glorified past are sufficient for Yehya to choose death at home.

### ***The Loss of Physical and Psychological Home for Dalia***

During their escape from Ein Hod to Jenin, the Abulheja family loses Ismael, its youngest son, who is snatched by an Israeli soldier. The physical relocation that the second generation of Abulheja family endures from Ein Hod to Jenin Refugee Camp is mingled with a

psychological aspect caused by the incident of kidnapping their son, Ismael. As a result, Dalia's setback where the image of a lost homeland is accompanied with a lost child, the fate of whom she knows nothing about, drives her to experience a physical and psychological detachment from life around her. This disconnection is reflected in her inability to resume her maternal role toward the rest of her children, as she "could not find the will to discipline [Amal] physically, as she had Yousef" (p. 52), illustrating her failure to function as a mother in the new state of psychological estrangement in which she finds herself.

Significantly, Sigmund Freud states as a "reaction to the loss of a loved one, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, and ideal, and so on" (Freud, 1957: p. 243), one would naturally experience a "profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, [and] inhibition of all activity" (p. 244). In other words, what Freud highlights is that a detachment from the real world is an expected symptom of the loss of a loved one, whether this loss is literal or symbolic.

In Dalia's case, the loss of both her son Ismael, and the security of homeland deems it impossible for her to reconnect with her family members, including her daughter Amal. Helen Cixous states that "there is always ...the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation; a force that will not be cut off but will knock the wind out of the codes" (Cixous, 1976: p. 882). The strong bond between mother and daughter that Cixous describes is however already broken between Dalia and Amal. This is because the occupation and the loss of her son, Ismael, disable her maternal connection that should ideally be the source of security for Amal. Moreover, the context of harsh insecurity and instability that result from her relocation to Jenin Camp, intensified by the loss of her son, contribute to Dalia's inability to react to life events. For instance, after the Israeli attack on Jenin Camp in 1967, Amal describes her mother's reaction to be "motionless... [and] her spacious empty eyes did not seem to see [Amal] standing before her. She seemed to see nothing..." (Abulhawa, 2010: p. 74). It is clear then that being psychologically alienated consumes almost all of Dalia's feelings so that she is unable to feel anything anymore.

The endured trauma of diaspora caused by war is perhaps the most devastating to one's psyche, as in addition to losing land and security, losing a loved one complicates the diasporic experience as in the case of Dalia. With this realisation, Amal considers the changes that war and the disappearance of her brother leave on her mother, stating that:

"The war changed us. Mama most of all. It withered Mama. Her essential fibre unravelled her, leaving her body a mere shell that often filled with hallucination. Following the occupation and the disappearance of my brother and father, [...] Her lips hardened into a web of cracks and her body shrank" (p. 86).

Nevertheless, it does not come as a surprise to see Dalia facing her situation with hope, especially at the beginning. Surrounded by the remainder of her family members, and in her refusal to accept the definitive loss of her youngest child and later her husband, Dalia attempts to physically recreate an atmosphere of home in the camp that emulates that of her home in Ein Hod, as she “stubborn[ly] attempt[s] to duplicate the glory of her garden in Ein Hod” (p. 57). By recreating a similar garden to the one in her homeland, Dalia attempts to silence the constant feeling of alienation from her surroundings in the camp, yet whatever she attempts does not seem to yield her enough contentment.

In her essay “In Search of our Mother’s Gardens”, Alice Walker's description of a ravaged slave girl's soul is similar to that of Dalia, in that they both encompass the ability and need to recreate the past. Walker states “guided by my heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength – in search of my mother's garden, I found my own” (Walker, 1972: p. 409). Walker’s statement suggests that documenting and recreating the history of her ancestors is double-fold; on the one hand it plays a significant role in immortalising their past state of being in their homeland. It also, and more importantly, serves as a reminder for herself and her generation of their creative plentitude and silent resilience in the face of oppression. In other words, Walker’s art consists of a redemptive and a life-saving quality which connects her to the ancestors she depicts. Saving is mutual for her and the immortalised subject matter. It also includes using the wisdom of the past to save the subjects of the present from repeating the past’s mistakes. To be saved includes the achievement of individuality that is not forced.

In this sense, Dalia’s garden projects Walker’s redemptive art, as she takes her final attempt at recreating a splitting image of her memories before the war and the many losses she experiences over time. Recreating the garden helps her immortalise her memories of her better life when she had the security of land and family, so it serves the purpose of preserving her memories from loss by immortalising them through her recreation of her garden. Saving her memories also helps her preserve the healthy mental state that she once had, and creating a space where she may bring back and continue living her past sense of physical and psychological home. By doing so she also maintains her maternal connection with the remainder of her family, especially with her daughter Amal. But most importantly, bringing back the old memories of her life with her in the hope of reliving them, may perhaps give her a chance to reconnect with her lost husband and child, but because of the siege and constant troop-checks and bombardments, she is not given the space to recreate what was lost and so she gives up and in to death all together.

Subsequently, Dalia’s death is seen as a direct setback caused by the overwhelming sorrow that she cannot handle, in what Edward Said describes as the loss of “the Palestine of remote memory, unresolved sorrow and uncomprehending anger” (Said, 2000: p. 141). While Yehya

consciously chooses to die in his homeland where his wife is buried, Dalia's mental state continues to deteriorate until she passes, as Amal observes "Mama has plunged far into the abyss of her mind, defecting even from her own body, leaving it to the epidemic misfortune" (Abulhawa, 2010: p. 124). Ultimately then, Dalia and Yehya's sense of home is clearly projected in their physical and emotional connection to their homeland, only realised when uprooted and moved from it. Nevertheless, the perception of home differs for Amal because she knows no other home beyond the borders of the camp in Jenin, her birth place. Her deteriorating environment in addition to her alienation from her mother as she matures, have a profound negative effect on her life, which will undoubtedly form her sense of self-identification.

### **Amal's Search for Home**

In the novel, Abulhawa represents Amal, a younger generation diasporic member who is born as a refugee in Jenin Camp and grows up with her parents' image of a stolen homeland. Witnessing the physical and psychological devastations that the 1967 war leaves on the camp and her family members, she is unable to feel secure even while surrounded by her family members. Receiving a scholarship to further her education, Amal leaves for the United States where she undergoes an identity crisis that leads to her constant move between the United States, Lebanon and Palestine, eventually framing her understanding of home in none.

Respectively Amal deviates from the perception of home that all other members of her family follow, including her two brothers who ironically are members of the younger generation. One fighting to reclaim his homeland and the other assuming he is Israeli and attempting to reclaim his. She is then, the only one who feels lost, homeless and lacking a sense of security with her mother. Amal is soon moved from Jenin Camp to Jerusalem to settle in an orphanage after the death of her mother Dalia and the loss of her father Hasan, where she is to excel in her studies and receive a scholarship to further her education in the United States.

### ***The Fluctuating Identity of Amal/Amy***

Living in the United States, Amal reaches the realisation that her actual home is yet to be explored. She understands that the intimacy of home she is seeking throughout her life cannot be found in places where all her memories are of abstractions and instability. This justifies her persistent attitude towards finding a home with which she may associate love and belonging. Upon departure to the United States, Amal points out that "There was nothing left for me in Jenin but scraps of my childhood and the debris of the family lost forever, all of it packed beneath the boots and tank treads of patrolling Israeli soldiers" (Abulhawa, 2010: p. 158). She is aware of the negative impact that these dreadful memories have left on her and

she understands that her memories in Jenin do not provide her with a sense of home. Thus, she wholeheartedly embarks on the journey of allocating a sense of belonging elsewhere.

However in the United States, Amal is torn between the past and the present, as she lives in the diaspora traumatised by the suppressed memory of war and its insecurities that had left a bullet on her body to serve as a reminder. The memory of this scar, beside all the memories of her past, accompanies her to the extent that whenever she thinks she is “starting a new life... [...] like the scar beneath [her] hand, the past was still with [her]” (p. 171). Thus, Amal assumes that her attempt to escape these memories may set her free from her parents’ burden of the lost homeland, so she may construct her own image of home. Ironically, what she truly ends up doing is relocating from one place to the next, further detaching herself from everyone and everything she knows. Amal’s identity may be construed as a flexible construct that she builds according to the distinctive diasporic journey that she undergoes. The significance of her constant mobility is investigated in the fluidity of her identity, as it evolves in each phase of her life according to the given context. In this context, Stuart Hall observes that: The recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities [...]produc[e] and reproduc[e] themselves anew, through transformation and difference (Hall, 2014: p. 235).

Hall’s argument is echoed in Amal’s identity, since her constant move from one place to another, one country to another, is no more than a result of the continuous psychological and physical detachments that she undergoes. Throughout the novel, and in each phase, Amal’s identity keeps transforming and evolving according to the underlying need for stability and her inability to reach this state alone.

Clearly then, Amal’s image of Ein Hod as the idealised home is grounded on her parents’ account of it, and not on an actual life experienced there since she is born a refugee in Jenin Camp. Moreover, both Jenin Camp and the orphanage in Jerusalem are places where she spends most of her childhood. Yet, she never associates home with these places; she is more familiar with them than at home in them because they do not provide her with the security she is looking for. The life she spends in these places is based on habitual routine; as she is adapted to them but not fully satisfied with calling either of them home. She further explains “Growing up in a landscape of improvised dreams and abstract national longings, everything felt temporary to me. Nothing could be counted on to endure, neither parents nor siblings nor home” (p. 156).

As it follows, Amal’s inclination to start anew and find a self-centred wholeness in the United States is evident through various indicators; one of which is the change that her name receives while living there “Amal of the steadfast refugees and tragic beginnings was now



Amy in the land of privilege and plenitude” (p. 179). As long as she maintains her original name, Amal remains connected to the memory of the past that she is escaping. She interestingly recalls her father’s words when he says “We named you Amal with a long vowel because the short vowel means just one hope, one wish...you’re so much more than that.” (p. 72). However, to accept being ‘Amy’ while living in the United States indicates that she not only accepts a rendition of her name, but also a rendition of its implication, since she states: “I let myself be unknown as ‘Amy’-Amal without hope... a word drained of its meaning ...a woman emptied of her past” (p. 178). Majaj points out that in such a case “what is lost in forced assimilation is more than a name: it is an identity, a history, a self” (Majaj, 1999: 7). This means that her acceptance to change her name from Amal to Amy proves her insistence to liberate herself from the burden of the memory attached to that name. She is even inclined to believe that a mere change of name may help her blend in with the American culture in an attempt to possibly allocate a home. Clearly then, her inclination towards having a stable identity is seen in her attitude of stepping into the new reality of the American context. She describes herself in that phase by stating

“I spun in cultural vicissitude, wandering in and out of the American ethos until I lost my way. I fell in love with Americans and even felt that love reciprocated. I lived in the present, keeping the past hidden away” (Abulhawa, 2010: p. 174).

The extent to which Amal reaches in assimilating with the new environment, points out a new identity facet that she acquires. She is distanced from her Arab identity in an attempt to find a sense of belonging in the American context. Nevertheless, she ironically depicts herself as “anonymous” and “unloved” in the United States because she is unable to give up on her memories in Palestine as she contends “sometimes the blink of my eye was a twitch of contrition that brought me face-to-face with the past” (p. 174).

Such experienced duality hinders her from integrating with the American society, as she feels that she has “metamorphosed into an unclassified Arab-Western hybrid” (p. 173). This hybridity is seen when her “rush to belong and find relevance in the West” (p. 173) immediately matches her realisation that “Palestine would just rise up from [her] bones into the centre of [her] new life” (p. 175). Thus, it is clear that Amal identifies with the present by situating it against her past in an attempt to merge her own experiences with the new culture she is placed in. This does not however help her reach the sense of security and safety she needs to allocate in a home. At one point, she condemns her new life in the United States as she feels that it carries a “sense of shame that [she] had betrayed her family – or worse, [herself]” (p. 174). Her feelings in this instance show a contradiction to the lifestyle she used to have in Palestine, and it is this contradiction that intensifies the identity crisis that she goes through by creating cognitive dissonance within her psyche, thus leading to her next move, this time to Lebanon.



After spending ten years in the United States, Amal realises that her stay serves the purpose of fulfilling her father's wish of furthering her studies, yet she remains lost as to feeling a sense of home. Ultimately, she decides to reconnect with the remainder of her family members and childhood friends, now relocated in Beirut, as she believes that she may find an answer to her identity crisis as she states "I had thought of little else but to return to my family, to myself" (p. 181). Called by her original name again in Lebanon, after a decade of being Amy in the United States, Amal shows mixed feelings towards it "How it hurt, satisfyingly to be Amal again, not anonymous Amy" (p. 195). The fluctuations observed in her attitude toward constant name and country change illustrates her inability to find a sense of self-identification. It is true that once there, she explains that "For a moment, [her once assumed dead] brother's arms dulled the aloneness of [her] life" (p. 189), but this neither lasts long, nor does it provide her with the stability she seeks, as her brother cannot offer her anything beyond simply being her sibling, and this does nothing to ease the instability within her that is intensified by the political state of Lebanon. Her visit to Lebanon is also aligned with the invasion and the massacre that the Israeli occupation enforces on Sabra and Shatila Camps in 1982. Thus, even by meeting her brother, Amal does not seem to identify with a sense of family or warmth in that context. So, she decides to embark on marriage instead, in the hope of creating her own home with her brother's friend Majid in Lebanon. However and even in her marriage, Amal does not show that she gains her true self. It is true that she feels happy, as other young girls would be on such a day, but "she smiled throughout her wedding without once tightening her jaws, watching the celebration, Amal wandered nostalgically in and out of her memories" (p. 208).

Amal's sense of identity and home is therefore still evolving and transforming; aligning with Gayatri Spivak's statement where she explains "there are many subject positions that one must inhabit; one is not just one thing" (Spivak, 1990: p. 60). In other words, the different positions that Amal takes in her journey as a daughter, a sister and a wife, alongside her distinctive diasporic experiences allow her to construct a unique identity, and this aligns with Hall's notion of identity when he observes, Identities are never unified and in the late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions (Hall, 1996: p. 4).

Hall's point illustrates that identity evolves with the different contexts and positions occupied by a person, and this is unsurprisingly shown in Amal's identity development, as she takes up different social and academic positions, each of which influences her process of identity construction, but do not provide her with the sense of security or a home that she seeks.



### **Amal's Home in Motherhood**

Just when Amal assumes that she may finally find her home in her new family, with her husband and the child they are expecting, she is forced to move back to the United States, due to the political emergency that takes place in Lebanon, where she experiences a doubled sense of loss, as she states “I was in Philadelphia with the cheerless void of not wanting to be there. It seemed a lifetime had passed since I had first come to that city, unsure of my step...” (Abulhawa, 2010: p. 214). The state of foreignness accompanies her as a result of physical relocation, deepened by leaving behind the remaining members of her family in an unsafe warzone. Although she is physically distanced from the massacre that Israeli soldiers perform in Lebanon, the news of the death of her husband Majid, in an airstrike carried on the hospital where he works is what causes her emotional breakdown. In fact, Amal at this particular point experiences the highest level of psychological detachment, and reflects her resentment in the pain she experiences as she gives birth to her daughter Sara, stating that she “wanted the pain to last longer, to become more intense, to kill [her], too” (p. 228).

Amal's psychological detachment forces her to desperately seek any means by which to escape her reality; by embracing physical pain in the hope to die while giving birth. However, the moment she holds her child she realises that her sorrow is juxtaposed by a new position, motherhood, offering her a new opportunity to hold on to life, as she contends “At last, my child lay wrapped in my arms, like a flower bud. I settled my being in the rhythm of her jaw suckling at my breast, while she spooned life over my hardened heart” (p. 229). Unlike her distorted relationship with her mother, Amal chooses to build a strong tie with the only remaining member in her family, her daughter Sara. Despite the long and cruel journey and the many realisations that she reaches, Sara becomes the one thing that clearly defines Amal's existence. Amal's daughter represents the only stability and consistency in her life, whether she chooses to be Amy or Amal, in the United States, Lebanon or Palestine, she finally finds her purpose for life. In that particular moment when her insecure memories gradually attempt to eat away her soul, she is revived by Sara's constant presence in her life, whose growing love shelters and nurtures her being. Although Amal initially seems unaware that her love for her daughter is sufficient to shape her sense of home, she still feeds her Self with affection for Sara. This is described in her routine of “Only at nights, when Sara is sleeping did she mercifully permit herself a whiff of love. Under the cover of night, she folded her arms over Sara, inhaling the soft fragrance of maternal love until the world seemed bearable again (p. 255).

Amal seems aware that she seeks refuge in her daughter's existence. This is evidenced in the way she interacts and behaves with her daughter in each moment of every passing day. The warmth of a daily ritual is one of the things that Amal depends on in her diasporic reality to survive. It is true that Amal “disliked herself, emptied her world as much as possible and



encrusted that emptiness with fear, on the lookout for pain, anger, or love that might break her fortress and fill the emptiness” (p. 254).

However, indulging in her role as a mother, Amal does not show any interest in turning back to the memories of her displaced family or her roots for inner safety, as her quest is rather met by the unbreakable maternal connection she has with her daughter, Sara. This unique relationship is echoed in Adrienne Rich’s statement that “Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has laboured to give birth to the other” (Rich, 1995: p. 225).

What Rich emphasises in this sense is that unlike women’s relationship with each other, the connection that ties a woman with her daughter is uniquely supported by the role of reproduction. Amal’s attachment to Sara is then doubly bounded, due to her production of her daughter from her own body, and in doing so her own production brings life back to Amal. This is not to say that she does not remember the love of friends and family members, yet, the peace she feels in the company of Sara seems to her incomparable, as she states “[t]hrough it all, I held my daughter close in private dream, falling in love with her as if I had just given birth to her once more. We talked for nine days, dismantling the uttered words of a lifetime” (Abulhawa, 2010: p. 299). The fact that she feels that she continuously gives birth to her daughter each time she lays eyes on her does not merely strengthen the bond between herself and Sara, but more so gets her closer to the sense of self-definition, security and safety she never experienced.

On this point, Cixous explains the significance of the process of giving birth in defining a woman’s sense of selfhood, stating that “It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself be given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in the love the body that was ‘born’ to her. Touch me, caress me, you the living no name, give me my self as myself” (Cixous, 1976: p. 881).

In other words, a woman may retain her love for herself, and therefore a sense of security through her Self, by being a mother and giving birth to another that is a product of her own womb. Another important point that strengthens the maternal bond between Amal and her daughter Sara is the stories that she narrates to her daughter “[But] that sweet voice calling her ‘Mommy, will you read to me like you did when I was baby?’ ... she took all that in, unable to resist sweet indulgence” (Abulhawa, 2010: p. 254). Additionally, the communication that Amal establishes by means of narration to her daughter is powerful in bonding the tie that she has with her. Thus, speech allows her to channel her Self, and addressing speech to a product of her own body further confirms her being and self-projection, since by speaking “she doesn’t [merely] ‘speak’, [... but rather] lets go of herself,



she flies; all of her passes into her voice” (Cixous, 1976: p. 881). Consequently, the influence of her speech on her daughter is eternal, and in turn, her daughter absorbs it and employs it in her life. Walker points out a similar notion when she explains “So many of the stories that I write, we all write are my mother’s stories...I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories – like her life – must be recorded (Walker, 1972: p. 52).

Ultimately then, mothers’ stories are one of the ways by which women are seen to represent themselves. For Amal, these stories eternally connect her with Sara in her own way. In other words, the stories she narrates to Sara not only give her space to represent herself, but also support her relationship with Sara to the extent that makes her feel that the harmony which she finds with the presence of Sara is her first experience of pure and satisfying love. This accordingly leads her to locate a home in her daughter, and all that she had experienced before were fragments of bitter moments that were unable to fulfil her desire of feeling at home.

In the light of the developing identity that Amal forms due to the multi-dimensional aspects of her journey, it stands to reason that she would seek an understanding of home that aligns with her identity as she perceives herself. Like all diasporic subjects, Amal articulates a strong desire to belong to a home. However, her understanding of home, as a diasporic member of the younger generation, is completely different from that of the older generation, projected in her mother Dalia and her grandfather Yehya. In Amal’s case, the absence of a true connection to a specific land drives her to consider an alternative substitute; a connection with people as a home rather than a stationary location. Amal’s case is best described by Majaj as she states “there has never been a singular home-space, one definition that will work for everyone” (Majaj, 1999: p. 10). Majaj explains the multiplicity of definitions that may constitute a home, according to each individual’s subjective experience in the diaspora.

The final visit that Amal makes to Jenin after three decades in the diaspora, with her daughter, her long lost brother Ismael (David), and Ari, her father’s old friend, proves to her that her understanding of home goes beyond her physical connection to Jenin Camp with all its shared moments. The assumption that she once had of finding a home in her best friend is ultimately revoked by the drastic change that Amal’s evolving identity receives due to her distinctive experiences with her daughter in the diaspora. This juncture leads her to realise that she still feels out of place even in her place of birth, Jenin Camp. This realisation posits her as a post-modern diasporic subject, not influenced by the fixation of the older generation’s physical perception of home and locality, and she transcends her search for home to include, not any person, but her daughter. Thus, only in her final visit with her daughter does Amal stop her long search for home, as she embraces the assurance that Sara is the only one that fulfils the promise of stability, warmth, affiliation and belonging that she



spends her entire life looking for. The extraordinary association that Amal makes in finding peace and settlement embodied in a creation of her own body rather than a land seems to echo Cohen's suggestion that a "homeland had become a homing desire and soon home itself became transmuted into an essentially placeless, though admittedly lyrical space" (Cohen, 1997: p. 3). Amal's case perfectly aligns with this notion, since her understanding of home goes beyond the locality of Palestine or the United States, her estranged family members or friends, leading her to a home in her maternal relationship with her daughter, her only source of stability and hope.

In her autobiographical essays "A Sketch of the Past", Virginia Woolf explains a similar attitude where one may find peace and settlement embodied in people. In her essays, she illustrates the magnitude of her obsession with the image of her mother, perceiving her as more than an ordinary person "The presence of my mother obsessed me. I could hear her voice, see her, imagine what she would do or say as I went about my day's doings. She was one of the invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life...of course she was central. I suspect the word 'central' gets closest to the general feeling I had of living so completely in her atmosphere that one never got far enough away from her to see her as a person (Woolf, 1976: p. 83).

Although Woolf projects her perspective as a daughter not a mother, the sense of security and belonging that the image of her mother offers her aligns perfectly with the sense of home that Amal finds in the consistency of her relationship with her daughter. Essentially, this indicates that the homing desire for any diasporic subject is - genuinely and before being assigned to lands - attached to the mother, aligning with what Anton Shammas suggests, that "birth is your first experience of exile, the Greeks maintained. That's why a child bellows when it is born" (Shammas, 1990: p. 62). This suggests that the mother's womb is viewed as human's first premise of home where one unconditionally feels secure and safe. And by giving birth, the infant is left to his first experience of displacement. Accordingly, as the infant gets older and exposed to wider horizons of life, he/she gradually experiences diaspora in terms of the distance created between him/her and the mother. Similarly observed by Luce Irigaray, being distanced from the mother, one is subjected to the dilemma of "being unable to [...] return to their original home of their mother's bodies" (Irigaray, 1981: p. 67-69).

Then, more than not, Irigaray links the very first feeling of home and security with the mother. This in turn indicates that unless one finds an alternative external sense of belonging, one would still seek the mother's womb, with all the implications of peace and inner homing. Since Amal's relationship with her own mother is troubled early on due to the political instability in Jenin, as well as the deep psychological dislocation that detaches Dalia from the world around her, the security of her womb in Amal's eyes is broken. This forces her to search for an alternative home she only finds in the private creation of her own womb as a

mother, by giving birth to her own sense of home. In other words, Amal unconsciously turns onto herself for a home through the product of her own body, her daughter Sara. Irigaray highlights the importance of the mother/daughter relationship, stating that “if I leave... you no longer find yourself. Was I not the bail that keeps you from disappearing ... and what I want from you mother is this: that in giving me life, you still remained alive” (p. 67). Irigaray gives power to the role that the mother plays in giving birth to a daughter. The role that Amal plays as a mother does not merely give her a stable sense of self-definition, but more so allows her own rebirth by giving birth to her daughter. In other words, by giving birth to her daughter, Amal gives birth to her identity. She is able to find home in her daughter because Sara is a product of her own Self. By giving birth, she creates a sense of home that remains hers and hers only. Reaching her self-definition as a mother then, goes side by side with her allocation of the safety of a home. Her daughter respectively becomes the very representation of herself that will never leave her once created.

Simultaneously, the timing of Amal’s home recognition is a significant matter. In Jenin, back to the context of war and fear, surrounded by her friend, Huda, and her long lost brother, Ismael/David, she verbalises her realisation that Sara is her actual home. In this particular moment, when she sacrifices herself to save her daughter from the bullet of death, she loudly articulates her recognition that the source of peace and love in her life is Sara. She clearly states it by saying “I looked into my daughter’s frightened eyes beneath me and am overcome with warmth. I am delirious with love for my daughter. My precious little girl. Sara. My life’s loveliest song. My home... I’m too exhausted to move. I whisper to her ‘I love you’” (Abulhawa, 2010: p. 307).

The last scene in the novel is of crucial significance for Amal, as it marks her association of inner peace, love and home with her daughter, thereby challenging the fixity of the older generation’s perception of it exemplified in Yehya and Dalia, which is their place of origin within the context of an idealised past. Ultimately then, Amal’s unique diasporic experience and lengthy journey of home allocation, which includes various positionings and places of temporary settlements leads her to individually create her own standards of what makes a home. Evidently, her detachment from her mother, her experience in the diaspora, coupled with her constant country change undoubtedly cannot be compared to any other diasporic perception of home, including those of her family members and acquaintances. This justifies why Amal’s perception of home uniquely goes beyond physical territory or connection to any other than her daughter Sara.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis undertaken in this paper illustrated that younger generation diasporic members are found to exhibit more psychological than physical dislocation, which allows them to



deviate from the diasporic pattern as pertaining to the allocation of Home. This is projected in Amal's character whereby she allocates a space for flexibility of representation and home association according to her own circumstances. The flexible perception of home for displaced youth is seen as a direct result to their distinctive experiences in the diaspora that combine physical and psychological detachments from a specific homeland. Thus, as long as the experiences of diaspora are different, the young subjects are expected to reach different conclusions as pertaining to their sense of home, away from a specific association with the land of origin. The various places that Amal comes across in her tumultuous journey of self-identification as well as the traumatising reality of war and loss that she is subjected to, urge her to go beyond geographic allocation for a true sense of home. Amal's journey is thus exceptionally developed because she turns to her own Self, through the creation of her own body, as she materializes her sense of home in her daughter Sara.

Although the mother has historically been associated with the first sense of safety, security and home, the association does not fall short from detachment. Amal's detachment from her own mother further drives her to look onto her own body as a mother for what she does not find in Dalia. In conclusion, and in the vein of the many theorists employed in the paper, the generational discussion of different characters in the novel offers huge grounds yet to be explored of the influence of diasporic variables on the understanding of home. The reader is thus offered a new scope for further research within the study of diaspora that includes the understudied younger generations who deviate from the prevalent pattern. Ultimately, such a positioning allows one the consideration of a more flexible understanding of a home through relative given truths.



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