

## Beyond Exile: Confronting Adversity and Reclaiming Identity in The Struggle for Home

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### Abstract

*Acceptance of alternative psychological healing methods has made healing trauma a topic of modern cultural discourse. Particular past trauma from violent political upheaval cannot leave the body unless confronted and worked through. The novel Mornings in Jenin by novelist Susan Abulhawa explores the painful process of being forced to leave their homeland, Palestine, following the Nakba of 1948. The article highlights the complex efforts of displaced Palestinians to overcome their trauma. It explores the position that a multidimensional perspective on conflicts provides a genuine understanding of the harmful psychological effects of war. Trauma theory provides insight into the Palestinians' insistence on remembering their terrible past, such as the Nakba, but fails to explain the importance of these traumatic narratives in preserving collective memories and affecting political change*

**Keywords:** Trauma, Memory, Healing, Politics, Culture.

### Introduction

The Palestinian resistance, as attributed to the novel by Susan Abulhawa, *Mornings in Jenin*, aims for the memory of the 1948 war and Palestinians' right to self-determination. It tells the story of a Palestinian Abulheja family, their traumatic experiences, and their struggle to prove otherwise than history might depict them to be. The characters experience stages of trauma, including regression, fragmentation, and reunification, which help them strategize and counter-assert settler colonial efforts. The novel emphasizes the power of cultural memory and the potential of the Palestinian resistance, evoking optimism about homecoming in the minds of the Palestinians. The novel's deeply embedded idea of the right of return, a key principle in the Palestinian struggle, mirrors the Palestinian resistance, evoking hopes of reclaiming and returning their lost land. The right of return refers to the Palestinians' right to return to their homes and lands from which they were displaced in 1948. The novel successfully kindles a spirit of nationalism and transnational bonding among the Palestinian diaspora towards their land. It also includes personal experiences after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war related to blood and torture that compels characters to move to the US, after which they return to Palestine.

### Amal's Journey: Navigating Identity, Hope and The Palestinian Struggle For Return

The novel explores the complex emotions of Amal, a character who experiences distressing experiences and fear of obliteration from the world. Amal's family has witnessed three generations of distressing experiences and a lack of understanding about their future. During her childhood, Amal "remained stubborn and capricious except with her father [Hasan] [who] seemed to her like a god. When she approached him, she did so with worshipful eyes that reached to her father's depth" (Abulhawa59). Many years later, Amal recalls her father's advice: "Habibti [my beloved], we have nothing but education now" (Abulhawa19). Elsewhere, she remarks: "Baba said, the land and everything on it can be taken away, but no one can take away your knowledge or the degrees you earn" (Abulhawa67). The novel highlights the struggle for rights and humanizing the 'enemy other', meeting the demands of justice, appraisal, veracity, and ethics. The novel also highlights the presence of Haj Salem, a wise and knowledgeable figure who represents the soul of a common Palestinian psyche. Salem can spin tales from the rich history of the past and trace the lineage and background of every Palestinian residing in the refugee camp. His role in nurturing Amal's desire to

return to EinHod, her ancestral village, is the most prominent of all his noble deeds. He instills in Amal and her friends a love for their homeland through Palestinian folklore, proverbs, and names from war victims, which would later be included in her later history texts.

### **Nurturing Hope Amidst Tumult: Amal's Vision for Return and Identity**

In the novel, Amal clings to a hopeful vision of a potential return to her village of EinHod, a vision that is buoyed by the 1967 war. She even promises her friend Huda a room in her grandfather's grand house, painting a picture of the life she has never known. Amal says:

I conjured all the places of the home that had been built up in my young mind, one tree, one rosebush, one story at a time. I thought of the water and sandy beaches of the Mediterranean- "The Bride of Palestine," Baba called it- which I had visited only in my dreams. A delicious anticipation bore visions of the old life, the one I had never known. My rightful life, disinherited but finally to be regained, in the back terrace of Jiddo Yehya's and TetaBasima's mansion, with its succulent grapes dangling from their vines, Mama's rose garden, the Arabian horses Ammo Darweesh raised, Baba's library, and our family's farm, which had sustained half the village. I comforted Huda, who seemed frightened, with a reminder that we would have our own room once we returned, and enough money for dolls. (Abulhawa65).

The events of March 1968, or the 'Battle of Karamah,' further fueled her hope for return. A year after the 1967 events, the Palestinian armed resistance, including Amal's brother, engages in a new conflict with the Israelis. The short-lived battle reignites hope for a possible return. Amal and her friends meticulously plan the practicalities of returning to their original villages, comparing their dreams to their desires. Abulhawa's narrative, with its frequent flashbacks, mirrors the fragmented nature of Amal's life as she grapples with identity construction amidst shifting geographies, temporalities, and politics.

### **Finding Closure in Homecoming**

Abulhawa's flashback narrative, her navigation between various episodes of Amal's life, loosens any possible attempt to create wholeness for someone who would

endure the demands of identity construction in the interims of geography, temporality and politics. In her night in America, Amal remarks that "what I recall most vividly of my first night in the United States was sleeping for the first time in a real bed" (Abulhawa 172). Before this, her life was a sort of episodic fragmentation of dislocations which brought about a closed consciousness for someone who suffers the closure of a refugee camp and orphanage. Abulhawa describes nostalgically how Amal experienced "the air filled with arousing sounds and people drunk on the fruit of trees that had continued in time and penetrated the cloud of exile" (Abulhawa54). In this Abulhawa diligently and, with considerable irony, creates tension among the three phases of Amal's life; the simple life of the Palestinians before the 1948 catastrophe (Nakba); the shattering conditions of the dispersed life in the West Bank and the neighboring Arab countries; then asylum and the promise of an auspicious life in America.

### **Summing Up**

Susan Abulhawa's novel *Mornings in Jenin* is a powerful exploration of Palestinian national identity and the struggle for return. It spans five countries and generations and explores themes of love, loss, war, oppression, heartbreak, and hope. The novel questions whether the continuity of Palestinian national identity is linked to resistance to Israelis or the hope generated by it. It highlights the importance of armed struggle and the hope for return, highlighting the traumatic experience of exile and dislocation.

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