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Yassir Al Soud

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Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*, Naomi Nye's *Habibi*, and Shaw Dallal's *Scattered Like Seeds*: A Critical Insight into the Dialectic of Past and Present in Contemporary Arab American Literature

By

Yassir Sabri Al Suod

Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*, Naomi Nye's *Habibi*, and Shaw Dallal's *Scattered Like Seeds*: A Critical Insight into the Dialectic of Past and Present in Contemporary Arab American Literature

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in English

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Acknowledgement

My deepest gratitude goes to my advisor Dr. Jadwiga Smith. My appreciation to her is beyond any language can express as she is the greatest and most knowledgeable professor I have ever known. She is now and always will be an inspiring role model whom I will always admire. Dr. Smith's clever insights, criticism, support, encouragement, and wit have shaped my thesis as well as part of my mentality and character. I am greatly indebted to her generosity, genuine efforts, kindness, consideration, and understanding, which have made this thesis both possible and enjoyable.

I'm also indebted to everybody at Bridgewater State University and in particular my thesis committee members: Dr. Kathleen Vejvoda and Dr. Benjamin Carson for their great help, constructive input, and reviews that significantly contributed to the successful accomplishment of my thesis. My thanks also go to all my professors and colleagues in the English department at Bridgewater State University, Mu'tah University, and Tafila Technical University.

I thank my family for their indescribable encouragement and support during the two years in the United States. My endless thanks go most especially to my parents for their emotional support, warmth, encouragement, and raising me to feel proud to be a Muslim Arab man.

Dedication

I dedicate my thesis to my father, mother, siblings, whose role in my life is beyond words, and to the loving memory of my grandmother who would have rejoiced greatly over my accomplishment.

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Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed a breathtakingly rapid development of Arab American literature: there is a burgeoning number of literary texts published in different genres, including nonfiction. As a result, Arab American fiction now holds a significant position in mainstream American culture. Numerous courses are nowadays being taught on Arab American fiction, history, and culture across the United States, and an increasing number of Arab American writers are publishing their writings in mainstream literary journals. On the other hand, library and internet websites are still short of critical essays and books on Arab American literature; there is a crucial need for more high-quality literary criticism. Arab American literature requires a broader theoretical and critical background despite the fact that Arabs and Arab Americans face an obstinate bias against them, which portrays them as a dangerous and unwelcome entity in the United States. The changing geopolitical landscapes in the Arab World arising out of different crises have resulted in a grossly negative conceptualization of Arab Americans in the United States.

In the thesis, I'm primarily concerned with critically discussing and tackling specific topics related to the larger fabric of Arab American literature. Contemporary Arab American writers are relentlessly trying to convey a new message to the West and the East that life is changing rapidly, and the radical thoughts about the relationship between the West and the East call for reexamination. This message of hope is not a case of easy optimism, though. Here I examine three recent Arab American novels: Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010), Naomi Nye's *Habibi** (1999), and Shaw Dallah's *Scattered Like Seeds* (1999). Despite the cultural and regional differences among these three authors, all of them explore the consequences of cultural, ideological, racial, economic, and political boundaries among the different generations. At the same time, the authors convey a sense of trust that the reader can grasp the cultural background with some degree of understanding and acceptance. The thesis, furthermore, attempts to explore the ways in which the three authors stand up for the message of building a sense of transnationalism and of crossing ideological, racial, psychological, economic,

* *Habibi* is an Arabic word of endearment that is equivalent to the English phrase "my darling".

and political boundaries among the different generations of Arab Americans: they call for a world in which heterogeneity and difference are welcome and endured, destabilizing the old perspectives on the construction of cultural identities.

There are almost three generations of Arab Americans in the United States, who have vastly different experiences of integration into American society. Accordingly, first-generation Arab Americans are those who compulsively immigrated to the USA from different Arab-speaking places and found home there as a result of the 1948 war. The largest wave of Palestinians to America began after the 1967 war and continues until today, setting up and running a politically-sensitive humanitarian campaign of conveying Palestinians' pitilessly veiled cries to the world. The reasons for immigration during this era could be lucidly attributed to the economic and political pressures exerted upon the Palestinians living through the political conflict with Israel. The first-generation Arab Americans have faced many challenges and obstacles, substantially growing out of their indispensable difficulties with the language, customs and traditions, as they advance toward identifying with and fitting in American society, which has subsequently caused an unbridgeable nonconformist gap among those people. Consequently, they have used their mother tongue, Arabic, in their homes and solely relied on English for business and outside communication purposes; and, moreover, they have tended to cook their own traditional foods in their homes. Despite all such impediments and barriers, a significant number of Palestinians joined American universities in order to achieve their dream of education, money, house, family, and stability. This generation was keener on retaining their original traditions and cultures, while other subsequent generations tended to be more Americanized.

These three authors all address issues of Arab American conceptions of home, family, nostalgia, identity, displacement, memory, and cultural prejudice. The thesis foregrounds such issues in order to showcase that the tense relationship between the West and the East carries many challenges preventing the crossing of cultural boundaries. As a result, different characters in two novels – *Abulhawa* and *Nye* – suffer from feelings of nostalgia, displacement, and various kinds of alienation

and distancing. In his essay “From Nostalgia to Critique: An Overview of Arab American Literature,” Tanyss Ludescher provides a brief survey of the history of Arab American literature based on the three phases of Arab American immigration, arguing that Arab Americans encountered numerous challenges and impediments on their road to assimilating into American culture. Ludescher mentions Chalala’s observation that the early phase of writing was nostalgic. However, this doesn’t entail that the other phases of writing are not nostalgic because writers of other generations, including the writers of the selected novels, write about their early years in their homelands with a sense of nostalgia reminiscent of various stories during those unforgettable years.

Arab American writers have distinct stories about their past. Thus, most Arab-American writers, especially those born in their homelands like Suzan Abulhawa, are completely caught up in the nostalgia of homeland memories and refuse to understand the essence of the multiethnic nature of the United States, preferring to remain homesick. Most, if not all, Arab American writers, including the selected authors, address similar issues. In their essay “Cultural Determinants in the Treatment of Arab Americans: A Primer for Mainstream Therapists,” Nobles and Sciarra discuss the differences between the traditions and values of Arab culture and those of the United States, and how such differences cause troubles and dichotomy. Moreover, Nobles and Sciarra throw light upon the effects of demeaning stereotyping and discrimination against Arab Americans.

In order for the reader to understand why Arab Americans experience cultural discomfort with life in America, a clearer distinction should be made between Arab culture and American culture so that the reader can properly trace the source of Arab Americans’ cultural discomfort. Arab Americans feel proud of their cultural heritage as well as its contribution to literature, medicine, and other fields. At the same time, they struggle to maintain their cultural roots, even though they try to become familiar with American culture. In his study *Arab and American Cultures*, George N. Atiyeh argues that understanding any culture requires the study of religion and language because they are “the two basic components of any culture” (126). Although not all Arabs are Muslim, the influence of Islam

cannot be underestimated because it regulates the everyday life and is the primary source on which many Arab cultures are based. Islam significantly influences Arab society because “the realms of God and Caesar are neither divided nor delineated in it as they are in Christianity” (129). The values and traditions of Arab culture are substantially different from those of American culture. Thus, Arab American children, for instance, are punished for certain behaviors that do not meet social expectations. However, Arab American children also grow up among many loving and nurturing caregivers, not only their parents but other family members. The strong religious influence on Arab culture establishes in the child’s mind a close association between sin and punishment, which would make the child think twice before doing anything wrong. Arab Americans are sensitive to their religious feelings when exposed to American culture. It is worth mentioning that Arab American Muslims are more deeply affected by cultural traditions and values, which are associated with Islamic teachings, than are Arab American Christians.

I’ve found that much of criticism related to contemporary Arab American literature is concerned with the writing in the shadow of Edward Said. Edward Said has studied the issue of Orientalism and how this discourse has been played out in the west in order to dehumanize the East. In his book *Orientalism*, published in 1978, Said argues that the notion of Orientalism helps and supports the Western imperialist powers. Said’s theory hinges upon the binary opposition between the East and the West. He asserts that the East is constituted by a set of political, economic, and ideological practices by the Western subject, and such a distinction marks the East as a knowledge object from which the Western subject formulates his identity. He concentrates on the Orientalism of major colonial powers: France, Britain, and later the United States of America. Said describes the relationship between the Occident and the Orient as a mere relationship of power and domination: Orientalism is a sort of a western style calculatedly created to dominate, restructure, and have authority over the East. The Orientalist always represents the West as superior to the East so the westerner comes up against the East as an American first and as an individual second. Moreover, he

argues that it is the rhetoric of hegemony that provides Orientalism with strength and stability, and brings about his calling “us” and “those” marking out the western subject from the non-western one. Said’s book reveals that Orientalism has helped the West to control the Orient and criticizes the imbalanced relationship between the West and the East.

I mention Edward Said and his views and ideas about the relationship between the East and the West because, as mentioned before, most critical discussions of Arab American literature follow in the footsteps of Said and his post-colonialist perspective in *Orientalism*. However, one may ask oneself about what kind of contribution this thesis would provide, or, more specifically, why the second section of the third chapter of the thesis is centered on defending and advocating Edward Said’s theoretical perspectives. The answer is that the direction of the third chapter is different as the three Arab American authors’ propositions largely run counter to Edward Said’s ideas and theories. In other words, it gives examples from these three novels, unraveling and uncovering the contradiction between these contemporary Arab American authors’ views and those of Edward Said and other critics as well. I, moreover, give credit to other American and Arab American critics, such as Jack Shaheen, Douglas Little, and Roland Stockton, who are involved in deciphering the nature of the relationship between the East and the West in order to lend more credence to the analysis.

Therefore, when trying to understand these Arab American authors’ lives, culture, identity, family, home, and other related issues, the reader has to examine how Abulhawa, Nye, and Dallal handle themes of postcolonialism, multiculturalism, and hybridity, which are variably used to describe groups of people of color or people of all cultures regardless of race. Thus, this thesis is primarily based on a combination of cultural and post-colonial analysis. Cultural analysis is very significant for it is based on the interconnection between a text and its society, whereas post-colonialism, along with hybridity and multiculturalism, helps us understand the background and voices of ethnic writers.

The term *postcolonial* has emerged as a label for the study of colonialism, postcolonialism, and, more broadly, political and cultural relationships between the powerful and powerless nations and

people (Parker 272). Moore-Gibbert, Stanton, and Maley argue that “Postcolonial critics often have a stake in postcolonialism as a political process in the context of specific national struggles. One may think here of Said and Palestine, Fanon and Algeria” (4). The analysis of postcolonial people and societies can be traced to the sense that colonialism is the only historical account of these societies (Loomba 20). Postcolonial theory invokes discussion about experience of different kinds: suppression, slavery, immigration, difference, resistance, gender, race, place and responses to the influential master discourse of imperial Europe (Ashcroft & Griffiths 2). Homi Bhabha posits that “there is always ambivalence at the site of colonial dominance. When two cultures commingle, the nature and the characteristics of the newly created culture change each of the cultures” (Guerin et al 205). Bhabha refers to this “dynamic, interactive, and tension-packed process” as “hybridity” (206). Bhabha says, “hybridization is a discursive, enunciatory, cultural, subjective process having to do with the struggle around authority, authorization, deauthorization, and the revision of authority. It’s a social process. It’s not about persons of diverse cultural tastes and fashions. As a result, a feeling of unhomeliness develops” (207). It’s worth mentioning that hybridity “denotes a wide register of multiple identity, cross-over, pick-’n’-mix, boundary-crossing experiences and styles, matching a world of growing migration and diaspora lives, intensive intercultural communication, everyday multiculturalism and erosion of boundaries” (Pieterse 221).

Oswald and Smolen in *Multicultural Literature and Response* state that America is a multicultural nation, including Native Americans, African Americans, Arab Americans, Asians, Europeans, and Latinos. An extended response to the needs of all people has resulted in broader realization that literature plays a crucial role in “the development of understanding across cultures” (1). Contemporary multicultural literature is concerned with exploring “the inclusion of any beliefs and values identified in traditional and nonfictional literature,” examining “contemporary characterization and conflicts,” and analyzing “the themes and look for threads that cross the literature” (4). American multicultural literature has become an independent genre. This literature has

emerged from the writer's real experience that reflects the nature of the life of an ethnic group that lives in the United States in general, with all its various ethnic origins. Loomba and other critics focus on the idea that multicultural literature develops the knowledge not only of the reader's culture, but also of other cultures. Therefore, these critics and others give authenticity to the fact that multicultural literature has substantially grown to be an important trend in American literature.

Within the past few decades, ethnic literature that is concerned with the Middle East has noticeably become a distinct part of minority literatures in the United States. Arab American writers, including the contemporary ones, have made significant contributions to ethnic literature in the Middle East. Their writings often represent a longtime clash between two dissonant cultures vehemently impacting their perception and take on literature and identity. Intuitively, Arab American writers are quite aware of the detriment of vehement negative stereotypes mushrooming all over America which portray Arabs as deadly terrorists, whilst rendering their women as alien to American culture and life. The attention that has been given to works by Arab American women echoes an increasing interest in women's desire to resist the deeply held misconception as well as the Orientalist discourse that Arab women are oppressed and deprived of any rights; thus, Arab American women's writings are in many cases directed specifically against such misconceptions.

Early and contemporary Arab American writers sometimes use their writings as a tool to resist the totalitarian and tyrannical regimes in the Arab world. In addition, they use their writings in order to express their hyphenated and transnational identities, doubleness, socio-cultural discomfort, and ambivalent conception of home. Arab American writers are totally concerned with their homelands and identities that are critically manifested in their writings. I would argue that since the 1967 war, most Arab American writers have focused on the preservation of their native cultures and identities while simultaneously adapting to the new cultural environment. They have also practiced different political and social activities as Arab citizens living in America not as purely Americans, which has helped them gain recognition of an Arab ethnic group and entity in America. Abulhawa, Nye, and

Dallal, as Arab American writers, have been affected by what is going on in Palestine, which is clearly exhibited in their writings about the Arab world in general and Palestine in particular. These writings, along with those by Arab American writers, unflaggingly attempt to build bridges between the various cultures, especially the Western and Arab cultures.

Following the intense aftermath of 9/11, Louise Cainkar in her book *Homeland Insecurity* (2009) observes that Arab Americans, even U.S.-born Arabs, were portrayed as alien to America. Moreover, she chronicles the consequential implications and effects of 9/11 on Arab Americans; she argues that while anti-Muslim suspicions did exist in America before the 9/11 attacks, 9/11 dramatically created a fertile environment in which hostility and misunderstanding toward Muslim Arab Americans could increase, and their political and social exclusion could be justified by the government and supported by Americans. She also maintains that post-9/11 polls found “a majority of Americans in favor of profiling Arabs, including American citizens, and subjecting them to special security checks before boarding planes” (70); as a result, Arabs and Muslims were de-Americanized in gendered ways: American state agencies stereotype men as deadly transitional terrorists and women as alien to American values and norm. In addition, she contends that the rhetoric of power shaped the behavior of daily life on every level, helping to dehumanizing individuals and groups and thereby depriving them of human rights.

In *American Ethnic Literatures: Native American, African American, Chicago/Latino, and Asian American Writers and their Background*, Peck fails to mention Arab American literature as one of the major multicultural literatures in America. Noticeably, he has overlooked one of the main streams of ethnic American literatures. By not mentioning Arab American as one of the many ethnic groups which emigrated from their war-torn homelands to America, he undoubtedly forgets a major component of the vast and diverse body of American literature. Through Michael Daher’s review of Kadi’s book *Food for our Grandmothers’ Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists*, he mentions that the book addresses the incongruous dimensions of what it means to be an “Arab

American” or “Arab Canadian” woman. All female authors in this book aspire to embrace their forgotten or ignored Arab heritage. Their essays are a form of fighting to establish their political and cultural ideas as well as to rectify all kinds of prejudice and racism that have affected their daily lives, for Arab or Arab American women are portrayed as unenlightened, subjugated, speechless, and stripped of agency.

Castle in his book *The Literary Theory Handbook* argues that transnationalism has emerged into the foreground as a new field that embraces “nearly every academic discipline in the humanities and social sciences and takes in as well business, economics, finance, political science, international relations, and diplomacy. The general premise of transnationalism is that the nation-state and the ideology of nationalism no longer adequately explain social, cultural, and geographic realities” (254). Thus, literature on transnationalism is directed by the premise that the lives of migrants and stateless people are no longer constructed within the nation-state, but rather beyond the national boundaries. The transnational subject conceives borders as invitations not as constraints in order to cross over to discover the new temporalities and spaces that such crossings open up. Based on the transnational perspective, postcolonial nations “enter into relations and form alliances across a vast, increasingly interconnected and technologically complex global environment, which tests the limits and resilience of the idea of the nation and of nationalism” (257). Theories of transnationalism foreground “a new transient internationalism of migrants, refugees, exiles, émigrés, and stateless people like the Palestinians and the Kurds” (258). Transnational people aim at both elaborating and erasing borders (259). Each migrant can be perceived as a subject of transnationalism who gets involved in different transnational practices and activities, but it doesn’t mean that the entire life of the migrant is chiefly characterized by transnationalism.

In his book *Contemporary Arab-American Literature*, Carol Fadda-Conrey argues that Arab Americans’ transnational connections to their homelands and past can play a crucial role in challenging any exclusionary types of US citizenship: “through Arab-American writers’ and artists’

strategic reconfigurations of the binary logics ... Arab-Americans' connections to the Arab world cease to be the ostracizing factor that prohibit them from asserting US belonging" (3). I agree with Fadda-Conrey in his argument, showing that the new generation of Arab Americans in the three novels assert themselves within a US framework while, at the same time, variably maintaining transnational connections to their original homelands.

Arab American characters in the three novels examined here plainly voice assorted issues of displacement, cultural prejudice, cultural discomfort, transitional connections, assimilation, and nostalgia, all of which are explained in depth in each chapter of the thesis. Each chapter focuses on a separate issue related to the larger context of Arab American literature.

Chapter One, "Old Home and New Home," examines the living difficulties the characters in the three novels face in their new country, America or Palestine, where culture, traditions, and values are totally different. It also narrates how Palestinians are compulsorily removed from their country and forced to immigrate to the United States. Furthermore, it sheds light on how it's difficult for Palestinian immigrants to assimilate totally to their new culture. This chapter, moreover, sets out to discuss the unstable concept of home, and how contemporary Arab Americans approach it; transnational entities and networks have their own taste and perception of home. In addition, this chapter discusses the outcomes as commensurate corollaries to the challenges that the characters face in their new homelands, America and Palestine, and how they cope with them in order to build a new future, bringing in the fact that it's evident that the ongoing interaction between conditions in the new home and the old home have shaped the new identity of the Arab American characters in the three novels.

Suleiman in his book *Arabs in America: Building a new future* argues that there were different manners in which Arab immigrants understood their new position in the United States; the first wave immigrants believed that they were living temporarily, with the intention of going back to their homelands, so they didn't belong to American society, while the second and third generation are more

open and acceptable to American society. It's natural for Arab Americans to fight and struggle in their new homes in order to comprehend and unify their hyphenated identities. Although some Arab Americans try to fully assimilate the American life and culture, but their homelands, specifically Palestine, remain the axial source of inspiration. This argument is true of Arab Americans who were born in their homelands and then immigrated to the United States, yet those born or raised in America don't have the same shared feeling toward their homes or their parents' native homes.

Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* and Shaw Dallah's *Scattered Like Seeds* present two Palestinian characters, namely Amal and Thafer respectively, who are trapped in the past of their life in Palestine, and work to make sure they have a life free of conflict in America by downplaying revolutionary attitudes and assimilating into American life. These characters experience the sense of twoness; the conflict sparks when they can't be pure American or pure Arab. In their new homeland, they are torn between two cultures and they feel how they can't fully assimilate into either any of these cultures. They experience the feeling of in-betweenness throughout their time in America. On the other hand, the characters that were born in America such as Liyana in Naomi Nye's *Habibi* and the Thafer's children in Dallah's novel, detect an attachment to Palestine, as they have a distinct picture of Palestine from their fathers' talk about their homeland, but this picture becomes more obvious when they pay Palestine a visit. The children and Liyana don't feel that they not purely American, even though they were born in America and have never visited Palestine before. When they visit Palestine, their new homeland, they start suffering from the loss of their identity, so they can never be sure to which culture, Arab or American, they do belong. All the characters in the new home, Palestine or America, are not very different from each other as they have the same feeling of multiculturalism.

Chapter Two, "New Family and Old Family," examines the difficulties involved in the characters' adjustment to the new life in the new family. Also, it highlights the differences in the customs, values, life style, and language in the new family compared to the old family. Despite the regional and cultural difference among Liyana in Nye's *Habibi* and Amal and Thafer in Abulhawa's

Mornings in Jenin and Dallah's *Scattered Like Seeds* respectively, all of them suffer from difficulties involved in their new adjustment to the Arab or American side of their identity, which means the assimilation of a new family and its language and customs. All the characters in these novels attempt to fit in the culture and mindset of the new family members, changing the new strange family atmosphere into one that they can accept or live in. Furthermore, this chapter sheds light on identifying family values that are prevalent in the Arab world and their development over time which provide an important context for a deeper understanding of Arab American patterns.

In the chapter "Family Values and Traditions" from the book *Biopsychosocial Perspectives on Arab Americans*, Nassar-McMillan, Ajrouch, and Hakim-Larson address many issues related to the values and traditions prevalent in the Arab family which significantly influence the Arab American family in America. They argue that parent-child relationships are exceptionally important to well-being across the course of the life. The identity of a child is very much affected by the parent-child relationship, and this influence continues up until adulthood. In addition, they argue that the values about marriage and love in the Arab world are totally different from the west; the approval of the extended family is more important than romantic love and is still the basis on which the marriage decision is made. Moreover, although Arab-Americans, including writers, are proud of their cultural and religious identities, some of their literary works address issues that are deemed taboo in Arab and Arab American culture, such as homosexuality.

This chapter highlights all these differences between the Arab family and Arab American family, and how the old family plays a vital role in partially shaping the new Arab American family. For instance, Poppy Abboud, Liyana's father in Nye's *Habibi*, firmly insists on drinking tea with mint and on using olive oil rather than butter: this reflects the strong influence of his old Arab family. Also, all Liyana's relatives in the new family in Palestine reject her friendship with Omer, a Jewish friend, as they regard it a forbidden relationship. Any intimate friendship or sexual relationship outside of marriage is strictly forbidden in the Arab world. The same case applies to Amal in Abulhawa's

Mornings in Jenin when she dates with men and drink beer and alcohol, all of which is taboo in the Arab Muslim families. In addition, the three novels deal with the different values, sometimes slight, between the old and new families.

Chapter Three, “War: Dialectics of Memory and Peace” initially presents how the life is before the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 over Palestine, and how happy and safe the Palestinians were in their houses and farms before the Israeli occupation. It also points out that these characters are forced, for different purposes and goals, to emigrate to the US during the war, and they come back when the war is temporarily over. The chapter is principally concerned with unpacking the concept of memory that is attached to the different Arab American characters, and putting on view the diverse kinds of memory the characters have undergone; moreover, the chapter displays the impossibility of bringing peace to Palestine and having Palestinians and Israelis live with each other. The chapter proves that although the war is now temporarily over, it is impossible for the Palestinians and Israelis to live peacefully with each other, especially after the latest brutal Israeli attacks on Gaza Strip in Palestine, despite Abulhawa, Nye, and Dall’s attempts to say that it’s possible for the Palestinians and Israelis to live in harmony with each other. This chapter also discusses how these three Arab American authors, along other Arab American writers, use their writings to resist the United States policy because it wages war against Palestine and other Arab homelands. They also address the issue of removal of Palestine that Israel has been working for since its victory over the Arab armies, and how the situation has worsened in Palestine since the 1967 war.

Chapter Four, “Negotiating Nostalgia and Identity,” attempts to pinpoint how nostalgia is tackled in the three novels, and how nostalgia helps in shaping and mapping the continuity of identity. Due to the continuous occupation of Palestine, two major characters in two novels out of three cannot rid themselves of their homesickness as nostalgia keeps inscribing and molding their identity. Immigrants always pass their nostalgia to their children and grandchildren. They live in their own dreams and try to transfer these dreams to them. Most Arab American writings are nostalgic because

they write about their early years in their homelands with a sense of nostalgic reminiscence of different stories during those memorable years. Arab American writers have distinct stories about their past, but this doesn't mean that they remain homesick and never accept America. On the contrary, many contemporary Arab Americans who are tinged with nostalgia strive to assimilate into the American culture, without, of course, losing or forgetting their original identity, in order to reflect the true picture of what is going on in Palestine, and to uncover the fake mask of the real brutal Israel.

Chapter Four points out that even though Arab Americans are attached to their original homelands, it doesn't necessarily mean that they all distance themselves from the fact that the United States is a home of strangers and wanderers. On the other hand, any attempt from them to go back to their homelands, because of a feeling of nostalgia, is chiefly considered as a sort of failure of assimilation. Orfalea in his book *The Arab Americans: A History* argues that Arab Americans should recognize that the problem of their ethnic identity is necessarily the problem of American identity. Abulhawa's and Nye's novels can be regarded as nostalgic because they narrate a strong attachment to the native homeland and past, whilst Dallal's *Scattered Like Seeds* can be considered as post-nostalgic.

Chapter One: Old Home and New Home

Contemporary Arab American literature is situated in a larger debate about the role and usefulness of addressing the issue of old home and new home, and how this issue should be critically studied in light of a broader theoretical and critical background. This issue of old home and new home should be focused on in relation to three major areas: (1) the difference in approaching the concept of old home and new home – based in the Middle East – for Arab Americans who were born in the Arab world and those born in America; (2) the varying degree of advocating the message of building a sense of transnationalism and of crossing ideological, racial, and political boundaries; (3) the degree of cultural acceptance of the new home, whether in America or in the Arab world. The political instability in the contemporary Middle East is responsible for the continuity of the migration for the people in the region, thus making the topic of the old home and the new home central to the Arab experience.

Al-Ali and Koser in *New Approaches to Migration* contest that traditional approaches have failed to characterize international immigrants as humans belonging to the established norm, whilst transnational approaches portray them not as outsiders, but, instead, as “representatives of a globalized world” (3). With the life developing scientifically and technologically, the majority of immigrants have become able to develop and map multiple identities and localities where they belong neither to the original home nor to the adopted one; their familial ties and connections have rapidly changed from being local into being global, which plainly puts forward that transnationalism destabilizes the rigid concept and meaning of home and place: immigrants are progressively developing trans-local conceptions of home (3). They have realized that the concept of home is not static but rather dynamic; and, thus, the concept and meaning of home is prone to political, social, cultural, and economic changes (6). Nikos Papastergiadis in his book *Dialogues in Diaspora* argues that home can be perceived as encompassing both a physical place and a metaphorical space: “The ideal home is not just

a house which offers shelter Apart from this physical protection and market value, a home is a place where personal and social meaning are grounded” (2).

Writing about Arab Americans as being caught in a double bind – they are living a life that is luxurious yet, to varying degrees, psychologically uncomfortable in their new home – has provoked a controversy over their right to write about the problems of homelessness and placelessness. The concern, for many, is that the old home plays a pivotal role in the formation and shape of the new life in the new home, yet they unanimously agree that this effect can be slightly undercut by building a strong sense of mental and psychological connectedness to the new home. The three novels addressing the stories of the old home are targeted at the Western audience who clearly holds a little positive knowledge of Palestine and the Eastern world, the old home. These stories of the old home teach that Palestinians are culturally rich rather than backward, peaceful rather than hostile, and hospitable rather than vengeful.

The characters in the three novels face various living difficulties in their new home because their language, culture, traditions, and values are entirely different. Suzan Abulhawa’s *Mornings in Jenin* presents the protagonist, Amal, who undergoes and faces different living difficulties in her new host home in America. Amal’s family in Palestine is forcibly removed from their village by the newly formed state of Israel in 1948, and obliged to live in canvas tents in the Jenin refugee camp. Amal receives a scholarship to do her BA at an American university, Temple University in Philadelphia, yet she encounters many living difficulties there. She finds problems with her skin color, language, Arabic name, and foreign accent, resulting in her being initially unadjusted to the new home: “Feelings of inadequacy marked my first months in America. I foundered in that open-ended world, trying to fit in. But my foreignness showed in my brown skin and accent. Statelessness clung to me like bad perfume and the airplane hijackings of the seventies trailed my Arabic surname” (169).

The English language poses a problem to Amal because of its rhetorical differences from Arabic: “Coming from such a culture, I have always found a mere ‘thank you’ an insufficient expression that

makes my voice sound miserly and ungrateful” (170). Amal finds great differences between the new home and the old home on her first night in the United States, which unconsciously reminds her of her old home:

What I recall most vividly of my first night in the United States ... I stretched my limbs in a large, soft sea of white linen and down soaking up the fatigue from my jet-lagged body ... As if to brace myself with context in that big bed, I reached to the past, moving my hand over the mangled skin of my belly ... I was starting a new life. But like the scar beneath my hand, the past was still with me. (171)

As a new comer to America, Amal tries to preserve the cultural and religious values of her old home during her first stages of life there, and the reader can see this pretty obviously in her panicked response to Elana Rivers’s question about her sexual life: “‘Have you ever had sex?’ she asked unctuously. I froze. I had never even kissed a boy” (172). She spends the first whole year studying diligently, gaining a very strong academic foundation at her university. Likewise, Amal refuses to wear a bikini, “It took me days to find a suitable swimming suit. A bikini was out of question” (178). Afterwards, the conflict between the two cultures promptly erupts into sight when Amal boldly endeavors to dampen all her senses to the world, getting herself artificially locked into the American lifestyle with neither her past nor a vision for the future. She commences recognizing herself as an Arab-Western hybrid, feeling herself all of the time as an abnormal person: “I metamorphosed into an unclassified Arab-Western hybrid, unrooted and unknown” (173). By distancing herself from the cultural and religious traditions and doctrine, Amal thinks that she pushes herself to gain social recognition in the United States, practicing everything forbidden and inaccessible in Palestine as well as enjoying a claimed copious possibility of choices that would foster her personality and identity.

However, as Amal’s travel narrative in *Mornings in Jenin* reveals, the experience of crossing borders between here (old home) and there (new home) creates a new sense of place. Expelled and forced to leave a homeland, people live on border zones where they neither belong to the new home

nor to the old one. Jill Bystydzienski contends that “those who cross cultures often do not see themselves as “belonging” to specific groups but rather as residing in “in-between” or “third spaces” from which they develop new hybrid identities and establish innovation sites of collaboration and contestation” (10). Amal’s “third space” leads her to attain new yet challenging avenues of knowledge and understanding of her new identity in America. Hence, Amal, rather than feeling rooted in one fixed space, Palestine, moves between the new and old homes, inhabiting a third place, one located in between both the old and new homes. Therefore, Amal forces herself to develop multiple allegiances to places in order for her not to be only confined to one fixed geographical place. Such competing allegiances unveil the fact that Amal aspires to change and mobilize her own perception of the meaning of home: she attempts to replace it with a more fluid, flexible and updated version of identification. She, thus, wants to challenge the essentialized norms of her identity and reconfigure her hybrid, transnational, and cross-cultural identity that would go through different changes and transformations: she wants to live in a space of her own construction and formulation. Amal’s relationship to home is synonymous with the relationship to her past, which is both tragic and nostalgic. However, her dual or multiple conception of home and identity results in Amal being ruptured and disoriented. As a result, later on, it becomes obvious that her native cultural and religious mechanisms continue to regulate and discipline her life in the United States, for her past is renewed and, thus, interprets her present and future, as her identity construction is largely influenced by her memories of the past.

In *New Approaches to Migration*, Koser and Nadje argue that “over a period of time, the taken-for-granted knowledge linked to a specific home – physical or cultural – might prove inadequate” (89). Unsurprisingly, the old home grows alien, unusual, and odd in Amal’s eyes. Amal recalls the poverty, Israeli oppressive policy against Palestinians, and lack of security, all of which strip her old home of any sort of warmth and comfort. Moreover, Amal’s case resonates with Bhabha’s notion of “unhomeliness” that exists once people cross different cultures. By crossing two conflicting cultures,

Amal encounters “newness” that creates a sense of displacement to her, making her feel that she belongs neither to the culture of the new home nor to the culture of her old home. On the other hand, Amal’s being driven into the culture and values of the new home and burial of the old home past is a temporal state of unconsciousness caused by her liking for getting assimilated into the American culture without recognition of the essence of this culture or even creating a balance between her two inconsistent cultures. This state accelerates her feelings of guilt because she does internally realize that what she is doing is a gross betrayal of the cultural and religious teachings of her old home, which would earn her repudiation in Palestine. Despite all her efforts to get entirely immersed in the new home and forget the old home, her attempts end in failure:

I felt a sweet nostalgia and longing for old friends ... Palestine would just rise up from my bones into the center of my new life, unannounced. In class, at a bar, strolling through the city. Without warning, the weeping willows of Rittenhouse Square would turn into Jenin’s fig trees reaching down to offer me their fruit. It was a persistent pull, living in the cells of my body, calling me to myself. Then it would slouch back into latency. (175)

Thus, Abulhawa realizes the vital role of the past of the old home in reshaping and remapping the identity of ethnic people in the United States. She maintains that ethnic people should not discard relations with the culture of their old home in order to make themselves markedly visible in the new culture they have adopted. Instead, they have to assess their relation with the new culture and make expectations against reality. Indeed, Amal feels stressed not only from the clash of cultures she confronts in the United States but also from the turbulent conditions of her old home in Palestine. It appears that Amal dearly loves her old home, yet she starts to feel strange and alien to her country and identity. However, she is physically rather than mentally exiled from herself, her old home, and her culture and religion. Through her memories of Palestine, its landscape, her friends, and her family, Amal can connect the past with the present and the future. Through these memories that emerge in full

force, Amal realizes that she has not actually forgot her past at all: that past with all its positive or negative effects has been all the time inside her.

Yousef's call to Amal recovers the minutest details that have shaped her identity, and that she has worked hard to forget and get rid of; she is again caught up with nostalgia for her family and her old home: "Amal. I cried at the sound of my Arabic name. The telephone was an inadequate connection to transmit the warm longing and surprise as we tried to speak through sobs and static" (180). Being unable to get over her strong feeling of nostalgia, Amal decides to go back to Beirut where her brother and his wife are living in a refugee camp after the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was expelled from Jordan. Amal fails to recognize her ethnicity and understand it. This issue of nostalgia is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four. Consequently, Amal lives on the nostalgic longing and dream for return to her native homeland and, thus, fails to break down rigid, essentialized concepts of home.

Noami Shehab Nye's *Habibi* presents two types of diasporic characters: Liyana, a second-generation Arab American, and Dr. Kamal Abboud, her father, whom his family calls Poppy, a first-generation Arab American. Nye considers her father as a symbol of her Arab legacy and roots. She talks about her father's homesickness for his old home, Palestine, through dreaming of the fig tree as manifested in her poem "My father and the Fig Tree" which painfully reminds him of his old home (Gomez-Vega 112). For Nye, it's utterly advantageous to have a multicultural background, and so it is for Liyana who is Nye's alter ego in the novel.

Habibi's main character is an unenthusiastic girl, Liyana, who is at her wits end about leaving her life and friends in the United States and heading to Palestine, her new home; she is afraid she will not fit in the life in the Middle East because she is moving away to a land she knows little about: "She hadn't smiled back yet. Her eyes were fixed on the floral wreath hanging over the cash register and her mouth tried to shape the words, "May be it's a bad idea," but nothing came out. She felt the same way she did after the car accident on an icy road. *Leave the country?*" (2). Liyana, then, feels caught

between two incompatible cultures that emerge when her father decides to go back to his homeland, Palestine. She defines herself in terms of hybridity and feels confused about her identity:

Lately Poppy kept bringing up Arab women and it made Liyana mad. “I’m not a woman or a full Arab, either one! I am just a half-half, woman–girl, Arab-American; a mixed breed like those wild characters that ride up on ponies in the cowboy movies Rafik likes to watch. The half breeds are always villains or rescuers, never anybody normal in between. (20)

Therefore, Liyana suffers from hybridity when she goes to her new home as she oscillates between her native culture and the host culture. She lives in-between, between her American half and Arab half, which undoubtedly signals an unbridgeable gap between Eastern and Western cultures. This cultural in-betweenness creates a cultural discomfort for Liyana and her brother much more than her father, Poppy, causing her to be torn between her fondness for her old home and acceptance of the new home.

Moreover, the novel shows how Liyana undergoes cultural, often psychological, difficulties as she tries to adjust to the new home and its language, culture, customs, and values. The reader can notice such problems as Liyana attempts to express her feelings toward her new home, Palestine:

Liyana wished Uncle Zaki, Poppy’s older brother, had not asked “for her hand for his son. She felt awkward around her relatives, as if they had more in mind for her than she could ever have imagined... When she went to bed that night, she pressed her face into the puffy cotton pillow. It smelled very different from the pillow in their St. Louis house, which smelled more like fresh air, like a good loose breeze. This pillow smelled like long lonely years full of bleach. (60-62)

However, Liyana and her family are entirely accepted in their new home by the members of the community. Her feeling of being torn between these two identities is expressed when Liyana talks about her father after their return to Palestine: “Sometimes she heard her father say, ‘we are American’ to his relatives. Americans? Even Poppy, who was always an Arab before?” (124). When they move

from the United States to Palestine, Liyana feels the abruptness of the change, but she realizes that her father even after returning home still suffers from the feeling of in betweenness. Now she discovers that her father feels exactly as she does. Liyana feels culturally uncomfortable with her new home, because Palestinians have their own traditions, customs, and daily life. One of the things that poses a serious problem to Liyana is her friendship with Omer (a Jewish friend). Her mother tells her that this relationship is totally forbidden in Palestine:

It is a very conservative country. Haven't you noticed? Remember the shorts? Remember this story about someone getting in trouble because he talked to a woman in the street? People have supposedly even been killed! For little indiscretions! I realize you are not a villager and you don't have to live by their old fashioned codes. Just remember your father won't like it. (160)

Liyana's friendship with Omer reminds the reader of Liyana's being kissed by Jackson, showcasing how grossly different this culture is from that of America. As generally known, for Arab Muslims and Christians, based on religious and cultural constraints, sexual or any sort of intimate relationships are only confined to marriage between a husband and his wife. Sayed Jaffar in *Why Only Islam* remarks that the Western World, however, "believes in freeing and respecting sexual desires and involvements through lifting of traditional moral restraints" (385). Thus, her undesirable relationship with Omer is inconsistent with the moral fabric of Arab society. Yet, Liyana's forbidden relationship with Jackson or other American men can be understood because she has grown up in America not in the Arab world; being grown up in America means that one has more freedom without being restricted to a set of cultural or religious norms. Arabs tend to administer more physical punishment than do Westerners because children are taught to behave in a certain way in order to maintain an acceptable social and religious image. Thus, Liyana finds it pretty difficult to live in her new home. Thus, the reader can see her asking her father:

“Will we ever goes home (she means the United States)?” She asked poppy after an evening walk up to the small grocery to smell the air and buy new wooden clothespins and a box of loose tea. Poppy was whistling, so she figured it was a good moment to ask something like that. He paused.” I would hope,” he said” that you felt comfortable here”. “Oh I do” she said. “I feel more comfortable every day...sometimes I get incredibly homesick for...” (244)

Liyana is unable to conform to the conservative rules set by her new home as she wants to behave according to the values, beliefs and principles she claims to hold.

Transnationalism, which is a movement across two nations and the politics of identity and home rising out of such movements, becomes an essential manifestation of the diaspora in this novel. Nye presents a form of transnationalism that dwells in nostalgia as promulgated by other early Arab American writers; Nye’s *Habibi* retains a strong transnational viewpoint that paradoxically enhances homesickness, yet, in the same breath, it problematizes modes and forms of national belonging, whether by being nostalgically rooted in the native Palestinian identity or assimilated into the American culture and life. Poppy’s movement across multiple geographical places, including Palestine and New York, renders the borders between Palestine and the United States highly accessible, fluid, and permeable, making the notions of national citizenship and belonging flexible and unrestricted. Unlike some hyphenated characters in contemporary Arab American literature, whose double identity remains emotional and psychological rather than physical, Poppy moves between his Palestinian and American identities by frequently traveling between Palestine and the United States.

Although Poppy seems to be concerned with investing in cultural and social recognition in the United States by virtue of his long residence there, he puts his efforts into advancing his status in Palestine, which grows out of his potential project of permanent return to Palestine. A deeper level of unease takes place around the feeling of instability in Poppy’s life driven by his unceasing movements between the United States and Palestine, which, in addition to the positives, bear unpleasant outcomes.

His transnational links have deepened his attachment and strengthened his loyalty to Palestine. Moreover, such transnational networks and links don't mitigate his aggregated sense of rupture, negatively acting on any attempts to maintain a vigorous relationship between the old and new homes; Poppy's transnational experience doesn't give him stability and security.

Shaw Dallal's *Scattered Like Seeds* is about Thafer and his family who are reflective of the imperial and brutal acts done to the Palestinian people by Israel. The novel highlights the conflict and bitter experiences that Thafer undergoes in the new home in America, especially American support of Israel, resulting in his intense feeling of discontent with America. This novel is not chiefly concerned with Arab American ethnicity; rather, it's written to convey to the audience, particularly the American Audience, Arab thought, life, culture as well as what happened in Palestine in particular. However, the direction of this novel is almost non-Oriental and, thus, adds something noteworthy to the understanding of the United States from an ethnic perspective.

The novel narrates Thafer's life as an Arab emigrant in the United States. He has four children and is married to an American wife, Mary Pat, who dies later in the novel. Though Thafer appears to move within a circle of nostalgic growth, this development proves superficial as he has undergone substantial changes; Thafer doesn't remain the same person who left his old home for the United States. During his stay in America, Thafer goes through a mental and psychological rebirth. Such a mental and psychological rebirth does prove solid, because he has become adjusted and assimilated to the new culture and environment. However, he believes he is intermittently driven by the power of the past of his old home to go back there for a short period of time in order to help the Palestinian people. Thafer, returning to his new old home, is taken aback by the fact that he can't find a proper room for himself in his totally new old world to which he has come back, which results in having more issues distilled into his personal conflicts; he becomes a divided soul, cornered in the ambiguities of history. Despite this psychologically strife, he initially seems hesitant to go back to the United States and leave his native homeland behind. Later on in the novel, Palestine turns out be infused into the figure of Dr.

Suhaila, an Egyptian fellow working at OAPEC in Kuwait, thus equipping it with metaphorical presence in the novel.

Thafer is ill at ease with himself, if not contradictory to some extent, because he can't decide which home to choose to live in, finding himself torn between them; it's emblematic of how the diaspora has transfigured him. In the United States, he is able to situate himself within the ethnic American society, as he does understand the core spirit of multiethnicity in America; he prefers to remain less homesick, not looking eagerly for the day when he is back in Palestine. Therefore, once Thafer returns to his second old home, the Arab countries, he is faced with autocracy, the big gap between the sluggish, decadent rich and those who live in abject poverty, the refusal to admit errors, etc., ending up with more personal conflicts. In other words, he significantly succeeds to become Americanized as he does recognize the essence of American civilization which is very unique in the world. In addition, he is unable to take his American dress off and put his Palestinian dress on in order to become a real Palestinian like his father, since he is fully saturated with American values, order, thought, and lifestyle. It seems that Thafer has almost tried to forget his Arab roots and been brainwashed even though he was closely following the war's progress in Palestine, and this is clearly evident once he tells Dr. Suhaila that he is largely astonished by the civilized manner the Arab oil ministers have maintained during the conference:

I'm surprised by the civilized manner in which they conduct themselves ... I'm brainwashed. On television, in the movies, in the literature, in the newspapers, and even in their schools and colleges the people of the United States are taught to see Arabs as either camel herders and pearl fishermen or high-living billionaire sheikhs. To them, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and even Saudi Arabia are remote and backward lands. (147)

Thafer has willingly accepted to have America sway his own perception of the Arab world. Moreover, he has found himself incapable of accepting corruption, autocracy, and socioeconomic status; he

comes up with ideas with no real support and acceptance. Unexpectedly speaking, Thafer's old home, Palestine or Kuwait, has become his new home, and the United States has become his old home.

Thafer's character in this novel is unique in the sense that he has tended to be Americanized and forget all values and traditions associated with his old home although he is a first-generation Arab American. First-generation Arab Americans tend to be keener on retaining their original traditions and cultures than subsequent generations, which tend to be more Americanized. Thafer is an exception to this general view of first-generation Arab Americans. Thus, Thafer in Dallah's *Scattered Like Seeds* is completely different from Poppy in Nye's *Habibi* and Amal in Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*, as they are all first-generation Arab Americans.

Thafer's four children, Colleen (his stepdaughter), Kathleen, Sean, and Andrew, have markedly varying degrees of attachment to their old home and new home. These children have been brought up without any emphasis on their Arab background. They initially know little about their dead grandfather's status among the Palestinian people, or about their still living grandmother, Jihan, as well as the living conditions of Palestinians. In order for Thafer to assure a quiet and comfortable life for himself and his family, he downplays revolutionary attitudes and fully assimilates into American life and culture. However, the children detect a kind of attachment to the old home, Palestine, yet they don't have the appropriate channel through which they can articulate their feelings. This is particularly evident in the way the children recoil with discomfort as a social studies teacher makes a negative comment about Arabs; they sometimes personalize and internalize the Orientalist images they are subjected to:

"I told my social studies teacher about that," says Kathleen. She is Jewish and always tells us that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East. 'There's a reason why they didn't let your father in, Kathleen,'" Kathleen says, mimicking the way her teacher spoke. "There must be a reason. Israel is a democracy.' I got so mad, Dad, I almost told her off, but I didn't. (271)

No wonder that Thafer's children struggle in their new home in order to understand and unify their scattered identities. Their struggle in the old home is also symbolic of Palestinian Americans; their role signposts how the diaspora has also changed Arab Americans. Moreover, their role contextualizes key matters in current Arab America. It's not startling that Andrew and Colleen, both young and in university, ask their father to go back to the United States: "Dad," says Andrew, "Colleen and I have been wondering if the two of us can go home as soon as we return to Kuwait" (287). In contrast, Kathleen and Sean, still teenagers, seek to stay with their father in Kuwait or wherever he is: "Kathleen and Sean want to stay in Kuwait a little longer" (287). Thafer's children, including Thafer himself, have a wide range of commitment to the United States, which mirrors the heterogeneity of Arab Americans in America. Unlike Colleen and Andrew, Kathleen and Sean look to expand their residence in Palestine and stay more in tune with the life in Kuwait because they have not fully absorbed the life in the United States in order to consider it an indispensable space. Accordingly, Thafer can be classified into Colleen and Andrew's group of Arab Americans more than that of Sean and Kathleen.

Sean and Kathleen are more attached to their old home than Thafer himself, and they undergo experiences from feeling guilty at having avoided the poverty the Palestinian languish in under the Israeli occupation of their land to revolutionary impulses, because such abject poverty is present in their lives. The children's actions imply the cultural schism between Palestinian Americans and those who were born in America. While Thafer attempts mentally and psychologically to repatriate himself to his original homeland and root, his children only know New York as their home.

Thafer inversely revisits the rigid concept and meaning of home, challenging its standard characteristics of rootedness, comfort, warmth, and security. Because he doesn't maintain transnational networks and activities between Palestine or Kuwait and the United States, Thafer is not able to construct a cultural and social personhood that embraces boundaries and the ability to function within the two worlds. Thafer dramatically transcends the model of many Arab Americans who stick

to their native homelands and live on their nostalgic dreams to return to their origins. In order for Thafir to disengage himself from the meaning and concept of home as he moves to the United States, he brings this concept of home with him and becomes more involved in deciphering the code of its powerful grip on his life, especially after his marriage to Mary Patt. Unlike Poppy, Thafir is totally preoccupied with investing in and gaining social recognition in the United States, and, thus, he doesn't make any effort to enhance his status in Palestine, for he aims at living forever in America and doesn't plan to go back at all. Thafir's avoidance of building transnational links with his native home and of establishing a stable, coherent, and secure definition of home finally doesn't help him to better understand his multiple homes and identities; subsequently, he fails miserably in identifying with and feeling a connection to his native home and people.

Chapter Two: Old Family and New Family

Family lies at the core of society in the Arab world and is also deemed as the backbone of Islam. Islam speaks highly of the importance of family and considers all Muslims as brothers and sisters belonging to the same nation. Within this nation, families are given prominence as units. Men are given specific responsibilities toward their children and wives, wives are given duties regarding how to treat their children and husbands, and children are instructed to honor their parents. Both men and women are supposed to help each other in order to maintain and bolster the family unit in accordance with the conventional codes of family and honor and are held responsible for the raising of children. Family in the Arab world is perceived as patriarchal, for females are “taught to respect and defer to their fathers, brothers, grandparents, and, at times, male cousins” (Joseph 195). In spite of all cultural, economical, and social changes, the extended family still remains prevalent and crucial. Marriage in the Arab world is another story because it’s governed by Islamic regulations; although Islam is not the only religion practiced in the Arab world, it dominates it. The family is the keystone of Arab American culture as well, despite some differences from one country to another as far as the degree of its supremacy. Living in America drastically changes this emphasis on family structure and values.

In America, large families are viewed as an economic burden that it’s not easy to bear, and people tend toward nuclear families; however, Arab Americans exhibit a strong attachment to their extended families; they have a communal and collective nature. Apart from generalization, there are two different kinds of Arab American families: the militant Arab American family and the liberal Arab American family. All the Arab American families in the three Arab American novels belong to the second type – liberal Arab American families – which manifests the bitter conflict between the old family and the new family. Arab American men and women interact easily with customers, clients, workers and others who are not Arab, but at home, the relations between the family members reflects the noteworthy effects of the Middle East (Kayyali 68).

Therefore, this issue of old family and new family should be focused on in relation to three key areas: (1) identifying family values that are predominant in the Arab world and their development over time, which constitutes an essential context for a better understanding of Arab American patterns; (2) the kind of conflict in the adjustment to the new life in the new family; and (3) the difference in the customs, values, lifestyle, and language in the new family compared to the old family.

The discussion of cultural hybridity is considered apt to the different issues represented in the three novels, as the main characters are examples of individuals with backgrounds whose identities are formed and influenced by the multicultural American society in which they dwell. Cultural hybridity is not restricted to the physical features of human beings such as the shape and color of eyes, skin, hair, but rather goes beyond these attributes. Hybridity implies reconfiguration and redefinition of identity and culture. In this regard, Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* states that “hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination” (159). It’s worth noticing that the commingling of cultural practices within a multicultural society causes this reconfiguration, remapping, and redefinition of identity.

The characters in the three novels face numerous living difficulties involved in their adjustment to the new life in the old home because the customs, values, lifestyle, and language in the new family are totally different compared to the old family. Despite the cultural and regional differences among Amal in Abulhawa’s *Mornings in Jenin*, Liyana and Thafer in Nye’s *Habibi* and Dallal’s *Scattered Like Seeds*, all of them suffer from difficulties in their attempts to adjust to the Arab or American side of their identity. Unlike all other chapters, this chapter dedicates the largest part to and begins with Nye’s *Habibi* as it provides ample and plausible insights into the issue of old family and new family. Nye in *Habibi* presents a protagonist, Liyana, a second-generation Arab American, who is going through a conflict with two families with two different cultures marking her own identity. The conflict between the old family and the new family draws a portrait of the relationship between both the

Western and Eastern cultures and the big gap between them. Nye is fully aware of the ambivalent situation second-generation children face and is careful to make her characters, including Poppy, voice their confirmations and confusions.

The conflicts in Nye's *Habibi* are harsh, personalized, and refreshingly sophisticated, which means that they are less Oriental and wider in scope. After creating a strong attachment to the past, Nye sets some circumstances that enable the characters, especially Liyana, to actively react to them with regards to the new and old families. After certain arguments, the characters showcase their actual identity. In making Liyana accompany her family to Palestine, Nye establishes a sense of physical reality for the past. Liyana feels the clash of the dissimilar American and Palestinian cultures before she sets foot in Palestine once she packs her shorts in preparation to travel to Palestine; her father, Poppy, promptly asks her not to pack them because Palestinians, including his family, don't wear them there, yet she agonizingly replies to him that this is not true as she has "seen pictures of Jerusalem and some people are definitely wearing shorts," but Poppy, for being defensive of the cultural principles set there, replies to her, "they are tourists. Maybe they're pilgrims. We are going to be spending time in older places where shorts won't be *appropriate*. Believe me, Arab women don't wear shorts" (19). Liyana already realizes that descent into the holy land is accompanied with clashes and differences. This is the first incident for Liyana to undergo hybridity experience even before she meets her new family. As a result, this issue of cultural belonging comes to the fore which drives Liyana to get mad and tells her father: "I'm not a woman or a full Arab, either one! I'm just a half-half, woman-girl, Arab-American" (20). Liyana starts early her struggle between belonging to a certain cultural identity and dissociating from it to fulfill the requirements of fitting in the new family. Hybridity is a concept devised by Homi Bhabha, who maintains that hybridity is the synthesis of two incompatible cultural identities that gives rise to the formation of a third, transcendent identity. Thus, Liyana's being torn by the conflict between the old family and the new family makes her feel most of the time like an abnormal person: she lives in a confused state of mind as she yearns to have an identity evenly situated

within her two cultures. The new family insists that Liyana adhere to their cultural values and traditions so that she can successfully live her new life in Palestine. Moreover, the cultural space is to be understood in terms of the hyphen connecting her identity as an American and an Arab. Liyana's words divulge abysmal conflict between the West and the East; it demonstrates that Liyana, a multicultural character, is unable to determine which culture or family she has to belong to. Most importantly, the ghost of the new family in the Middle East for the second generation is sometimes a source of curse, homelessness, and suppression. Liyana initially doesn't and is unwilling to conform to the conventions imposed by the new family and society.

The first difference, though not a conflict yet, Liyana observes once she arrives in Jerusalem is how her new family acts in a non-American way as they come to welcome her family: "a huge crowd of relatives burst into the room, bustling, hugging, pinching cheeks, and jabbering loudly" (40). For Liyana, her new relatives are not like those she has met before. Therefore, she keeps comparing the behaviors of the two families:

In the United States their family (except for Peachy Helen, who always acted cozy) held back from them politely as if they might have a cold. Uncle Leo had never hugged Liyana yet. He shook her hand like an insurance man. Aunt Margaret spoke formally to children, about general subjects. *Are you enjoying the summer? Do you have nice friends?* ...Liyana was being kissed by so many people whose exact identity was unknown to her. (40-42)

The level of affection and excitement Liyana observes in her new family dramatically different from that exhibited by her American relatives reflects how close-knit the Middle Eastern families ties are, and Arab families in particular. This moment reveals the density of interconnections among people within a family. This kind of "enthusiastic welcome" greatly pleases Liyana because she comes to know that they "landed in the proper hemisphere" (42). By the same token, Liyana keeps noticing the traditional dresses the Palestinian men and women wear and curiously wondering how they put them

on. Moreover, Liyana likes the women's curiosity when they touch her earlobes as she doesn't wear gold earrings. Liyana, Rafik and their mother stand very close to Poppy in order to translate Arabic and keep them posted on what the Palestinians relatives are saying. What astonishes Liyana much more is the coming of other people from outside the family: "The grocer showed up, and the postmaster, and the principal of the village school, and the neighbor, Abu Mahmoud, who grew famous green beans, and all of their wives and babies and teenagers and cats" (54). Consequently, the reader needs to rethink the concept of family in the Arab world, because, through this observation, the reader comes to realize that this concept of family is by far broader than that of the United States; rather, the family in the Arab world doesn't only comprise its members and relatives, but it also includes some people surrounding it, forming a new sort of family extended to the other members of the community.

The first conflict arises between Liyana and her new family when her uncle Zaki, Poppy's elder brother, asks for her hand for his son. Liyana feels furious and upset because jumping into marriage without knowing enough about uncle Zaki's son is a serious decision not made in the United States and, thus, goes against all her expectations; she cynically realizes that marriage in the Arab world is an unproblematic undertaking. This proposal sets up Poppy's first collision with his old family's outdated customs: "We don't embrace such archaic customs, and furthermore, does she look ready to be married? She is fourteen years old" (60). In the Arab world, some families, regardless of religion – Islam or Christianity – tend to marry their sons and daughters from within the same extended family and set a prohibition to marry outside it. But this tradition of marriage is in decline nowadays, with no one forced to marry only from within the same family. On a similar occasion, Poppy rejects one of the tradition that anyone returning from America should buy every female relative a bolt of cloth for making a new dress:

She thought I was going to park the car and come back and pick out a huge piece of red velvet for her. But instead I drove around the block and came straight home... The

old customs have to be changed somehow? Little by little. I told her I thought it was a stupid custom while we were sitting here – but she was relentless. So –as easily as she appeared in our house, I disappeared. She’ll get over it. (82)

Poppy can no longer abide by such old-fashioned traditions, and he is now confronting his old family, rebelling against all old habits, and deciding to bring things back to proper order. Eventually, Poppy’s strong feeling of being relieved upon his return to Palestine abates as he confronts the inevitable realities there

Liyana feels upset at the huge number of her relatives in the new family, because she is used to the nuclear families in the United States; and her new relatives keep staring at her as if she is “an exotic animal in a zoo,” resulting in an intense feeling of being awkward around her relatives, as she thinks that they have “more in mind for her than she could ever have dreamed” (60). Therefore, she is over-joyed when her uncles and aunts depart to another village to attend a wedding ceremony: “Liyana liked having fewer people around” (90). Liyana interprets the behavior of her new extended family as pressure to behave like them and comply with their culture

When an Arab boy gets mercilessly beaten up by a girl’s brothers after they catch them off guard kissing each other, Liyana’s personal conflicts with her new family soar. Such conflicts are as complex as the challenges of resolving them are problematic:

She wished she had not heard that an Arab boy who was found kissing a girl in the alley behind her house got beaten up by the girl’s brothers. What was wrong with kissing? Everybody else kissed *constantly* over here –but on both cheeks, not on the mouth. Had people reverted to the Stone Age just because everything in Jerusalem was *made* of Stone? (61)

Liyana can’t help understanding the new culture and customs she is being exposed to, as she measures America’s customs by Palestine’s. Public kissing, especially the romantic one – the one on the mouth – is forbidden and not allowed in Palestine; Arabs are very strict about such kissing. In this regard,

Randa Kayyali in her book *The Arab Americans* remarks that “parents threaten their children who engage in taboo behaviors with jeopardizing their reputations and so limiting their prospects of finding a spouse” (74). This quotation clearly interprets the reason why the girl’s brothers ruthlessly beat up the boy; rather, the brothers are blinded by the traditional conviction of their family’s honor and preoccupied by the fear of losing such honor.

When Liyana combs her long hair out on the front balcony of their house, her father, Poppy, instantly warns her not to be public about it and not to make a display lest one of his family members or relatives should see her; this confrontation fairly drives Liyana to hate her new family and the entire community. She longs for her life in America: “If I were at home on a beach I could run up and down the sand with just a bathing suit on and no one would even notice me. I could wear my short shorts that I didn’t bring and hold a boy’s hand in the street without causing an earthquake. I could comb my wet hair in public for a hundred dumb years” (125). Liyana draws a grim picture of her experience, one loaded with the reality of feeling lost from her old home and horribly dropped into a new family in a new different home. She paints a dim picture of the new family – a cold and conservative family rather than a glittering image of a family filled with reasonable freedom. Thus, Liyana in Palestine experiences frustration, dispersion, and a split vision which results in her being torn between the two homes and families. What raises attention is the behavior of Rafik, Liyana’s brother, who declares that he does want to live in Palestine forever: “‘Do you like it here?’ she asked Rafik. To her greatest surprise, he answered, ‘Yes.’ He hoped they would stay here forever” (99). Liyana is unable to find a place for herself in the new family and community, and she is a typical representation of American-born Arab Americans trapped in the same existential hell. What she later comes to realize is that by surrendering the rest of her days to a new strong friendship she can find stability and acceptance, which would help diminish her escalating homesickness.

Liyana’s new family, including her father, rejects her friendship with Omer, a Jewish friend, and looks upon it as a sort of unquestionably forbidden relationship. Her mother, moreover, out of fear

of dire consequences for non-compliance, gets pointedly shocked and dismayed, warning her of this terribly illicit relationship:

Liyana could see right then she had rounded the bend were conversations with her parents were no longer going to be as easy as they once were ... Liyana! This is his [Poppy's] country. It is a very conservative country. People have supposedly even been killed! For little indiscretions! I realize you are not a villager and don't have to live by their old-fashioned codes. Just remember your father won't like it if he knows about it. (160-161)

Once again, for Arabs in general, social and religious values determine when friendship is good and when it is bad. Nobles and Sciarra quotes Najjar's words about the cultural differences regarding women: "I know that the women's movement in this country (United States) has yet a long way to go, but compared to the restrictions on women my society has, this culture is liberating" (6). Here, the reader can find that this relationship is conceived as the turning point for Liyana to challenge the customs and traditions of the new family. Liyana's strong attachment to the United States and her past coupled with her vision of challenging and improving the conventional Palestinian-Israeli relationship, are motivations behind her choice to resort to keeping hold of her relationship with Omer. At first, Liyana agrees to put up with the family's rules, but it later on proves to be a tentative agreement before she ultimately finds light. Therefore, she starts firing arrows of criticism toward her father, Poppy, without hesitation, reminding him of his Jewish neighbors and friends: "Remember when you told us how you had Jewish neighbors and friends when you were going up here? Remember how we had plenty of Jewish friends back in the United States" (171). In order to justify to herself and to others this unwanted relationship, Liyana announces that she is American not Arab: "I am an American ... people should be able to get over their differences but this time, but they just stay mad" (165). Liyana finds the environment unhealthy for her to develop her personality, practice her life, and find a place for herself in the new home and family. Furthermore, her clinging to her American

identity and despising the Palestinian one adds to her cultural alienation and substantiates her otherness in the new home and family.

Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* forces the reader to take a fresh look of one of the defining political and psychological conflicts of our time. As far as the conflict between the old family and the new family is concerned, Amal goes through two stages in America with regard to the new family: (1) the challenge to keep up her old family's traditions and values; and (2) the impact of the traumatic past and conflict in Palestine on her relationship with her new family, namely her daughter Sarah. Compared to Nye's *Habibi*, this novel doesn't contain ample evidence on the conflict between the old family and the new family, because it's a politically loaded novel presenting the reality of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis.

This issue emerges when Amal travels to America to study at Temple University in Philadelphia after she is granted a scholarship. Her foreignness and accent become a barrier as she flounders in the United States, trying to fit in, but The first problem that Amal encounters in her new temporary family is her inability to culturally understand Lisa's father who lives with his girlfriend and comes to visit his family occasionally, feeling that it is "an odd arrangement" (170). The first observation that slips into Amal's mind is the comparison between the house of her new temporary family and that of her old family:

At the door, my eyes widened to take in the enormity of their home, the likes of which I had never imagined. Money flaked off the air of its oversized, immaculate rooms, and I could barely comprehend that Lisa and her mother lived alone, with part-time domestic help, in that expanse.... I stretched my limbs in a large, soft sea of white linen and down soaking up the fatigue from my jet-lagged body. (171)

As a poor Palestinian, she doesn't have the capacity to absorb this sudden change and cope with unexpected cultural surprises as she has endured very lamentable material circumstances back in Palestine. Therefore, she avails of the past in order to get a grip on herself and feel secure: "as if to

brace myself with context in that big bed, I reached to the past, moving my hand over the mangled skin of my belly. Snuggled in luxury on the threshold of a world that brimmed with as much promise as uncertainty, I was starting a new life. But like the scar beneath my hand, the past was still with me” (171). Entering into a spiral of the new world and family serves as a real war against the old world and the old family as everything is utterly different and requires new adjustments and considerations.

After Amal moves into the dorm with the help of Lisa, a new web of friends is made; Amal’s friends would somewhat serve as her new family in America. The closest friend to Amal is Kelly who helps her and makes conversation with her, too. The first conflict arises when Elana Rivers, a wisecracker with a massive bosom, frequently refers to her as “ay-rab” or as “the rag head” (172). Abulhawa introduces Elana Rivers as a portrayal of the ugly face of racist oppression against ethnic people in the United States. How Rivers conceives Amal’s hijab “veil” resonates with Trinh Minh-ha’s notion of racial discrimination. With regard to veiling, she says:

If the act of unveiling has a liberating potential, so does the act of veiling. It all depends on the context in which such an act is carried out or,...on how and where women see dominance. Difference should be defined neither by the dominant sex nor by the dominant culture. So when women decide to lift the veil, one can say that they do so in defiance of their men’s oppressive right to their bodies. But when they decide to keep or put on the veil they once took off, they might do so to reappropriate their space or claim a new difference in defiance of genderless, hegemonic, centered standardization. (196)

Minh-ha argues for respecting the difference that would be utilized as a tool of resistance and help promote a better understanding of identity, thus rejecting any monolithic or homogenous identity and body as well.

In order to add insult to injury, Amal’s amusement is drained away as Elana comes toward her and asks her, “Have you ever had sex?” (172). Taken by surprise, Amal feels dismayed and keeps her

lips sealed as she has never had sex before or even kissed a boy. Amal is fully aware that she has fallen into the trap of deeply rooted psychological and biased ideological stereotyping; such stereotypes are, as Bhabha maintains in *The Location of Culture*, “fixed and static constructions of the other as the subject of colonial discourse” (70). A year passes in America, with Amal running circles around all her colleagues at the university. Influenced by her friends and life in America, Amal starts to feel diminished, out of place, and impatient for change. In the absence of people from her old family to get ahold of, a feeling of inadequacy marks her life after the first year in California; she decides to belong to America at any expense and to step on the past and her family’s honor regardless of her psychological conflict:

But every house has its demons. I metamorphosed into unclassified Arab-Western hybrid, unrooted and unknown. I drank alcohol and dated several men – acts that would have earned me repudiation in Jenin. 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. I didn’t write to Huda, not to Muna or the Colombian Sisters. (174)

These words are illustrative of the hybridity that Amal is suffering from; she is torn between two cultures and she feels that she can’t assimilate any of them, living all the time in between. Bhabha asserts that “persons who have lived in more than one culture or who straddle two or more cultures are ‘hybrids’ who create ‘counter-narratives’ that both invoke and erase cultural boundaries (cited in Bystydzienski 50). Amal lives in an obvious state of hybridity, for she evokes social, religious, and cultural boundaries between her and her new home and family, yet at other times she purposely erases them. However, she starts to lose the very bases of her personality. To top it off, Amal suffers from distortion which is symptomatic of hybridity; she fails to connect herself with her cultural values and heritage as she has premeditatedly dislocated herself from her native roots. Thus, Amal doesn’t succeed in maintaining a sustainable and solid balance between the two cultures of the old family and

her new adopted one, making the gap between the two cultures more inevitable and unavoidable. Amal suffers from the coldness of uprootedness, disorientation, and estrangement in her new adopted home and family, an extreme state of instability provoked by her being cut off from her native home and family.

During the second phase of Amal's stay in America after she gives birth to her daughter Sarah, a new episode of conflict with her daughter and community unfolds. Tears slide down Amal's cheeks as she turns into a woman of walls, with no emotions, after the death of her husband, Majid, in Palestine. She nourishes her daughter's body for the sake of duty, and she holds her "emotions in a tight fist and hard jaw" (230). Her defense pricks anyone who dares to come near her, including her daughter Sarah, though she secretly relishes her scent while she is sleeping at night. It's obvious that the Palestinian cause plays a vital role in negatively influencing the behavior of the individual at the family level and at the community level. At the family level, this nuclear family has lost one of its members, Majid, who has been killed by the Israelis, which causes the mother, Amal, stunned by the death of her husband, to sink into a deep depression in which she lacks any sense of motherhood. The absence of the father from Amal's family, or any Arab family, is emblematic of the loss of protected, safe, and sheltered home. Amal's family, profoundly affected by the war that took her husband away, now houses hunger, emotionlessness, and insecurity rather than safety and warmth. The devastating impacts of war have considerably changed her approach to family and home in the United States.

At the community level, Amal scorns at the materialistic preoccupations of the people around her as utterly unimportant. She becomes desperate and helpless as she is dragged into a world and family devoid of her past and any viable source and motif:

I was a woman of few words and no friends. I was Amy. A name drained of meaning.

Amal, long or short vowel, emptied of hope. Only practical language could pass the

lump in my throat, formed there from love that meanders in the soot of a story that

almost was. My life savored of ash and I lived with the perpetual silence of a song that has no voice. In my bitterness and fear, I felt as alone as loneliness dares to be. (245)

Now, Amal doesn't confront or challenge her old family's customs and culture in America, yet she goes through a different curve, namely the impact of what happens to her old family on her behavior and approaches to life in the United States.

Unlike Nye's *Habibi* that presents Poppy with the goal of preserving the old heritage, Shaw Dallah in *Scattered Like Seeds*, through Thafer's character, has come into the fact that being American violates the very essence of rootedness and heritage imposed by the old family. The novel draws the reader to the conclusion that the United States is the promised land of diverse people from different ethnic groups, all with a broad spectrum of dreams, ambitions and conflicts. Dallah destabilizes the trope of ethnic people as being intrinsically, nostalgically attached to their ethnic past. He suggests that conflicts and problems should not be tackled by a nostalgic yearning for the past, which ultimately prevents the nostalgic from placing their ethnicity within a larger context and relating it to other ethnicities within American society. The style Dallah uses to deconstruct the ethnic past is fraught with gloominess, coming out with different fresh perspectives; however, it definitely makes up a very profound and sophisticated subject for ethnic representation. Thus, Thafer's assimilation of his wife's culture and lifestyle can be seen as a kind of 'destabilizing hybridity,' a notion devised by Pieterse F. Beyer, that "blurs the canon, reverses the current, subverts the centre" (277). Thafer shows no sign of hybridity, for he has erased the cultural and religious boundaries and barriers that separate him from his new family and home, thus distancing himself from the centre.

Thafer encounters formidable challenges with his old family and relatives displaced across different Arab countries. When Thafer's plane lands in Beirut, Lebanon, he smells psychological warfare unrelentingly approaching him once some relatives of his old family drive him to a poverty-stricken camp in Beirut. He starts to feel a weird sensation sending a chill over his body, and his heart also starts to beat hard out of fear and discomfiture:

Thafer feels strange driving through the wide, clean streets of Beirut with the two Palestinian brothers... Suddenly, he is uneasy. There is an abrupt change as they enter a rubble-strewn street. Decaying, crumbling buildings appear. Some are charred... He is appalled as they enter the refugee camp. He looks at the shacks of the Palestinian refugees, at the people, the elderly men and women, the children, the cars, and the animals in the narrow, dirty streets. The smell is sickening... Now Thafer's unease is mixed with fear. He gazes at the young Palestinians and tries to assess them. (45-46)

Thafer holds a sort of discomfort with himself as he feels acutely that he seems insensitive, yet he is both terrified and captivated by the Palestinians living in the camp. Thafer recognizes that those Palestinians identify him as an American not as an Arab or even as a Palestinian, which suggests why they direct ruthless arrows of criticism toward him and toward American support of Israel. Moreover, what adds to this psychological warfare is his being deeply saddened by the view of the decaying houses and pitiful living conditions Palestinian families must endure, robustly reproaching himself as he has lived in a wealthy suburb in New York and never worked to help his family and people in Palestine.

Thafer feels down when Hani Amri, one of his relatives, tells him about his father, Ayoub Allam, a famed leader of the Palestinian 1936-1939 rebellion, and his brothers: "Your father, Thafer, was a great man. He devoted his life to defending the homeland. He was a military genius, one of the best of his generation... Your brothers, Kamal and Rassem, and I did our share in 1948, Thafer. Now you and Adnan must carry the torch" (51-52). Thafer feels uncomfortable and gets terrified by the idea of joining the armed struggle to free his homeland; and his relatives accuse him of becoming terrified at the idea because he has lived away from Palestine for a long time. However, Thafer doesn't only reject this idea because of fear, but because he doesn't "believe that armed struggle is the answer" (53). Thafer believes in a peaceful solution other than fighting and wars that breed more violence, but he is charged with proposing American solutions to the Palestinian cause.

The conflict reaches its climax when Adnan Amri, Thafer's relative, with a scornful smile, tells Thafer that he will never settle in the Middle East because he is attached to the United States much more than Palestine and the Middle East. Thafer, however, answers him, saying, "I'm attached to both, to the land of my birth and of my ancestors, and to the United States, the Land where my children were born" (55). What Thafer means by these words is that his adaption to the new home in the United States represents neither a refusal of the old home and family with their culture and customs nor an all-inclusive acceptance of all aspects of life in the new adopted home. Nevertheless, Adnan harshly replies with touching yet appalling words that reflect both his need for Thafer and his wrath against him: "If all Palestinian youth were to do what you did, then Palestine would lose its best-educated people at a time when it needs them most. There are thousands like you in the United States. It doesn't need you. We don't have anyone like you, and we need you" (55). Adnan's expressive words signify the fact that Palestine needs its youth more than the United States does, and that Thafer should serve Palestine and its people. They also signal the agonizing feelings that Adnan has as a war refugee. Thafer's family and relatives are unable or don't want to understand that Thafer has gone through substantial changes in the United States and he is no longer the same person who left his home twenty years ago. His wife, Mary Pat, lends him a hand to experience a new psychological and mental rebirth: "she tamed and refined me" (56). His family and relatives insist that he should take after his father, taking up arms and fighting Israel.

Thafer spends all of his time with his family and relatives answering their political questions about America's foreign policy, attitude, support, the role of the Zionist lobby in the USA, and his perspective on the future of the Palestinian cause. He tries his best to avoid saying "anything arrogant or cocky" (11) and not to appear condescending, since his family and relatives are a bitter people. Thafer's brother, Kamal, who is living in Jordan, gets mad at Thafer and is getting critical of his passion and attachment to the United States, because Thafer refuses to help him and the Palestinians to

launch a nuclear program in Palestine to introduce it into the conflict with Israel; Thaffer's brother considers it as an issue of survival because Israel has introduced it with the help of the United States:

The mere thoughts of taking part in something so potentially devastating gives me the shivers. I just can't do it. Please forgive me. And I promise on Ayoub Allam's grave that I'll always do my best to help our people return to the homeland. I'll always be a Palestinian, proud of my roots and of my heritage, but I don't want to be involved in violence, I want to think of alternatives to violence and destruction and war. (138)

It's natural to for Arab Americans to become the target of criticism by their old family and relatives once they pay the Middle East a visit. Neither Thaffer's self nor his native homeland remains static; they incessantly change and shift, and this change spells out the need for a solution utterly different from holding guns: the sitting at the dialogue table to come up with a solution satisfying all conflicting parties and putting an end to the escalating violence.

Thaffer's four children compare the way they are welcomed by the members of their new family in Palestine and by their old family relatives. They are warmly welcomed, with men kissing and embracing the male children as well as only shaking hands with the female children. Kathleen remembers that her grandmother, her mother's mother, has neither hugged nor kissed them, and how cold her maternal uncle was when he shakes her hand as if he had been a visitor. In Palestine, Thaffer's children are astonished by the kindness, generosity, and goodness of their new family members. They, however, feel nervous and uncomfortable because of the countless political questions raised by their new relatives, which creates a growing feeling of uneasiness and uncertainty about how to respond to them: "After dinner, the relatives are more relaxed, but Thaffer is uneasy. This is the time my relatives ask their political questions... I'm sure they won't embarrass me or my children. Without warning the question comes... Thaffer is horrified. He looks at his stepdaughter [Colleen] and can see the anxiety on her flushed, fair face" (273). In general, the children start to love their new family, feel for them,

and sow hatred toward their American government for its indifference to what is happening to the people in Palestine.

Chapter Three: War: Dialectics of Memory and Peace

As a result of the ills and heartrending ramifications brought by the Arab-Israeli wars, the Arab American characters in the three novels were stung by their fire which has variably affected their life and attitudes. So, in this chapter I'm critically and elaborately exploring two major war-related areas: (1) unpacking the concept of memory attached to the Arab American characters and showcasing the various kinds of memory they have processed and undergone; and (2) displaying chances of bringing peace to Palestine so that Palestinians and Israelis can live in harmony and foster respect for other people and cultures, and whether or not the three Arab American authors go hand in hand with Edward Said, Roland Stockton, Jack Shaheen, and Douglas Little.

The first full-scale war between Arabs and Israelis was in 1948, in which all the Arab countries adjacent to Israel participated; in addition, what was known as the Army of the Arab Rescue and thousands of other volunteers from Muslim countries participated in it. As for Israel, forces of different Jewish organizations participated in the war after they had been founded and supported during the British occupation of Palestine before the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948. The direct result of this war was the defeat of the Arabs preceded and followed by the displacement of Palestinian people from their homeland and their new status as refugees in other Arab countries. In 1948, more than half of the Palestinians were expelled from their towns and villages, largely by "a deliberate Israeli policy of 'transfer' and ethnic cleansing" (Masalha 73). The 1967 war is the war that broke out among Israel, Jordan, Egypt, and Syria on June 5, 1967; this war resulted in Israel's occupation of Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and Golan, and it's considered the third war within the Arab-Israeli conflict. Consequently, tens of thousands of civilians, living in the cities of the Suez Canal in Egypt and Quneitra governate in Syria, were displaced; and, similarly, tens of thousands of Palestinians residing in the West Bank were violently dislocated within and beyond the borders of Palestine, including wiping entire villages off the map and opening the door of settlement in East Jerusalem and the West Bank to Judaize the land.

The major characters in the three novels are sorely plagued with the memory of the dramatically bloody scenes that happened and are still happening in Palestine in the wake of the ominous Arab-Israeli War of 1948, recurrently drawing collective comparisons of Palestine before and after the war. The characters are forced, due to multifarious circumstances, to immigrate to the United States during the war, and they go back to Palestine when the war is temporarily over; they are caught up with the memory of the past with its easy and difficult times. The three authors do condemn the policy of the United States against Palestinians, as it is the one that supports Israel to launch war against Palestine and other Arab countries. In her novel *Mornings in Jenin*, Suzan Abulhawa describes how the Palestinians were happy and pleased in their houses and farms and how secure they were before the Israeli occupation of Palestine and its aftermath, setting forth the situation before the war and the fatal consequences brought about after that war. The first section of this chapter is devoted to interpreting and exploring the concept of memory and whether its impact as it's actually conceived continues to influence the Arab American characters despite their long stay in the United States.

Before the Arab-Israeli war begins, Amal's family and grandparents lives in "a small village east of Haifa" that lives "quietly on figs and olives, open frontiers and sunshine" (3). Every November, the harvest week brings renewed vigor to the people there to the extent that they feel it in their bones, lucidly bearing out the happiness and stability they enjoy at that time under their free will. Women help men during the harvest season by hoisting a basket of olives, urns, and belongings on their heads and proceeding down the hills. To maximize their harvest-related cheerfulness, some men "leaned into the breeze, blew softly into the mouthpiece of" their nyes, and "felt the music emerge from the tiny holes beneath" their fingertips (6). All things considered, Palestinians were safe and peaceful in their houses and farms, but their safety dissipates after the Israeli 1948 occupation of their land. Once the war erupts in 1948, anxiety knots in Palestinians' chests, in their hearts, and makes their "head spin" and "legs weaken," leading to their houses and lands being occupied and having the new Jewish immigrants housed in the buildings and houses vacated by Palestinians who were violently

driven from their country and homes (21). The author minutely touches on the historical account of the *Nakba* that is memorialized as the catastrophic uprooting of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their country, the supreme injustice that demands Palestinians' right of return to their homes and lands.

There are two different kinds of memory associated with the life of the Palestinian immigrant after the war: autobiographical memory and traumatic memory. Abulhawa's protagonist, Amal, falls under the power of traumatic memory that ceaselessly haunts all her life in the United States. Amal grapples with memories of trauma back in Palestine and is haunted by the ghosts of killing in cold blood, rotting corpses, and injustice. Most psychologists concur that traumatic memories are not stored in people's minds as exact copies or reproductions of the past; rather, they are an alterable reproduction of the past which is influenced by present-day elements and the prevailing details of the past. While this argument can't be applied to the case of Amal after the death of her husband, it could be typical of Thayer's case in *Scattered Like Seeds*. The theorist Daniel Schacter in his book *Searching for Memory* contends that traumatic memory is "frequently more accurate than memory for ordinary events," adding that vivid traumatic memory recollections are, "characterized by intense and absorbing visual imagery" (205-216). According to the current frustrating events and changes, Amal retrieves the most psychologically destructive, emotionally baleful aspects of her everlasting trauma.

Having arrived in the United States to pursue her BA and MA at Temple University in Philadelphia, everything Amal meets unswervingly forces her to retrieve the traumatic memory of her native past. All Amal's efforts to start a life in America devoid of her past with its devastating memory ends in failure, because the past is "still with me [her]" (174). Amal is readily susceptible to being incited into prodding herself to look into the abyss that separates her from the people surrounding her. One such moment is when she remembers an overflowing sewer in Jenin refugee camp:

During the sewage incident that gave our college house its nickname, the commotion provoked memories of Jenin, where the open sewers sometimes overflowed and we

would scramble, gathering old clothes and towels to plug the joints of our dwellings. Vile as the experience and subsequent cleanup were, Huda and I could not contain our excitement and anticipation at being allowed to sleep on the roof to escape the foul odor... We were naively full of dreams and hope then, blessedly unaware that we were the world's rubbish, left to tread in its own misery and excrement. (174)

Amal is left with memory flashes of her horrifically disturbing and disgusting experience in Jenin camp. After the 1967 war, the Israelis expel Amal and her family their home and force them to live in a canvas tent in the Jenin refugee camp, which stands as a continuing reminder of their displacement and ongoing refusal to forfeit the right of return to the former lands and homes. The recollection of such traumatic experiences affects people in striking ways. Kai Erikson interprets the effect of trauma on the status of memory:

Traumatized people often scan the surrounding world anxiously for signs of danger, breaking into explosive rages and reacting with a start to ordinary sights and sounds, but at the same time, all that nervous activity takes place against a numbed gray background of depression, feelings of helplessness ... Above all, trauma involves a continual reliving of some wounding experience in daydreams and nightmares, flashbacks and hallucinations, and in a compulsive seeking out of similar circumstances. (184)

Amal cannot control these harrowing flashes of memory, which spoil her new life in the United States even as they blur her native past and present.

During the second phase of Amal's stay in America, and especially after the death of her husband, Majid, who is killed by Israeli soldiers, she firmly abstains from most of life's pleasures and starts to lose contact with life itself. Amal narrates what Israel did to the PLO when it was striking back against it in Beirut on the pretext that its aim was self-defense:

Bombs and more bodies to receive them. I prayed and called the Red Cross... The results were 17,500 civilians killed, 40,000 wounded, 400,000 homeless, and 10,000 without shelter. Prostrate, Lebanon lay devastated and raped, with no infrastructure for food or water. Israel claimed it had been forced to invade for peace. "We are here for peace. This is a peacekeeping mission." (219)

This evocation of the war and its apocalyptic consequences is utterly conducive to fathoming the fact that Amal lives in a terrible fright, trying to relate what happened to her husband to the tragedy of thousands of Palestinians inside and outside Palestine. Amal has become so riveted on her war experiences that it's difficult for her to recollect any other times in her life; it's a natural yet negative reaction to the dilemma connected with traumatic memory. Her dreams and hopes get shrunk into scenes of blood, shelling, and everything that is unconnected to normal human existence. Amal's scars of war would not heal because they have lurked into and lodged in her subconscious mind. The negative impacts of the war haunting Amal are of long-term duration and so intense that Amal is no longer able to cope with her surroundings, making her both psychologically and behaviorally unstable: "I was a word drained of any meaning"; "My life savored of ash and I lived with the perpetual silence of a song that has no voice" (178,245). The problem lies in the fact that Amal doesn't look for any way possible to regain her sense of well-being, and she is justly held responsible for brewing some aspects of this trouble: she is not going the extra mile to heal at least partially from this traumatic memory in order to rear her daughter in a somewhat healthy atmosphere.

To top it off, the most traumatic experience for Amal emerges when she receives the news of the atrocious killing of her brother's wife, Fatima, and her children at the hands of Israeli soldiers: "They ripped my Fatima's belly with a knife! ... They killed my babies!?' His sobs shook the ground beneath my fear and I thought the force of his grief would tear the sun to pieces. He hurled objects within his reach ... He cried with no measure of control, gripped in a seizure of pain... I imagined myself screaming at Philadelphians, who went about their daily American lives" (228). This

unbearable incident seems to have subconsciously killed Amal because she has grown as emotionless and lifeless as a stone. Much to her close friend's chagrin, she doesn't show any passion or affection toward her daughter who unstintingly comes to her dripping with caring and loving need. Amal doesn't bring up any of the disturbing moments from her own past or even present to talk over with any of her friends; she has no drive to touch base with friends in the quest of finding a solution to her trauma.

Amal's traumatic memory has put her in a state of extreme insecurity and confusion, and, thus, she is unable to reconstruct a sound identity, for memory holds an overwhelming grip on reconfiguring one's self and identity. Amal's past situations shape the present, and so does the present for the future, since how she perceives the past affects and impacts both her present and future; she is powerless and helpless to take control of the self as she constructs it through the traumatic memory, thereby bringing about her being unable to recreate the cultural power within the place she is currently living in. Therefore, she is implicitly locked within the fence of the intelligibly excruciating past; her memory is only besieged by the traumatic past and it, subsequently, shapes Amal's troubled future. Fatima's face and Palestine come knocking at Amal's vision in order to search for "a decent grave, for an honest reckoning of what had happened to them" (230). Not only are Palestine and Fatima hovering over Amal, but "thoughts of Mama, Baba, and Yousef, and a deluge of longing for Majid's touch" are also building up an "oppressive weight" (230-31) crumbling over her heart like the concrete of her building that had once crushed her husband, Majid, in his sleep. Amal fully explains her totalizing state of internal strife:

The only way to stop the emotional storm from gathering was to splash cold water over me. Literally, I needed physical coldness to mute it all. Otherwise, I'd have gone mad, I'm sure of it. But the storm was always there, latent, lurking in the vast clench of my iron jaw. So I stopped reading or watching the news and I feared touching Sara,

lest I infect her with my destiny. Lest she warm my heart and unthaw the wrath and the ghosts and madness I feared lived inside me. (231)

Amal pricks anyone, including her daughter, who dares to come near her. However, she loves her daughter as much as she fears her own fury at the outside world. Amal holds her breath as she moves through a path of silence: she lives in a prison of her own making so as to keep the world away from her. Amal has given in to her destiny without finding a conduit to make sense of the past and survive in the present and future: she keeps her version of the past silenced and does not make use of it. Amal's self-recollection of her traumatic memories becomes an act of spiritual and mental suicide, not allowing any sort of linkage to the present or to the future. If Amal had linked the past to the present and integrated the agonizing past into a manageable and viable source of strength, she would have understood the past with clearer vision and with the urge for its maintenance in the present.

Unlike Amal in *Mornings in Jenin*, Liyana, a protagonist in Nye's *Habibi*, has never suffered from any traumatic experience in her life because she is an American born of a Palestinian father and American mother. The Palestinian trauma is transferred to her by her father, who has experienced and witnessed it directly in Palestine; and Liyana displays some sympathy with the Palestinian cause, yet she is not affected directly or indirectly by her father's slight post-traumatic symptoms: She does not experience any kind of historical or cultural symptoms of trauma that are cross-generationally transmitted from historical and cultural losses. Thus, Liyana shares the collective memory with her father and other Palestinians, but she does lack the national identity, the sense of belonging to the Palestinian and Arab nation.

Liyana's experience falls within the category of autobiographical memory that incontestably manifests after she goes to Palestine with her family. Bluck, Alea, Habermas, and Rubin argue in their article "A Tale of Three Functions: The Self-Reported Uses of Autobiographical Memory" that autobiographical memory serves three functions: directive, self, and social functions, each relatively clear cut in the case of Liyana in Nye's *Habibi*. The directive function is used to have the past direct

the present and future behaviors and thoughts, solve problems, and reinterpret “previous events in light of new information” so as to “understand what causes them” in the hope of positively directing “their present and future” (108-109). The self function is of value and importance since it serves the development and “continuity of the self” (93) over the time by experiencing the past. The social function is essential in “developing, maintaining, and nurturing social bonds” which facilitate social interaction and provide “material for conversation” (94). Moreover, the social function of autobiographical memory has two main undertakings: “learning about another’s life in order to form a new relationship and maintaining warmth (e.g. empathy) and social bonding in existing relationships” (110).

It is not my intention here to explore and apply all of these functions to Nye’s *Habibi*; rather, I examine the most indispensable narrative events related to Liyana’s autobiographical memory both before and after arriving in Jerusalem, Palestine. The recollection of personal life experiences plays a pivotal role in reconsidering the overall underlying sense of identity and culture linked to shaping the selfhood of any person traveling outside his/her country. Liyana intermittently resorts to her past memory in order to account for the totally different condition of the new country, family, and environment she is currently dwelling in, occasionally remembering “Lonnie and Kelly and Barbara, her friends,” her family’s home in New York, her grandparents and uncles, and her life in general (21).

Liyana starts remembering her teachers back home who had been nice to her when they knew that she was heading to Jerusalem: “Why don’t you tell us about where you are going?” and they also told her that they all “know about Jerusalem –it’s a big part of religious history and constantly in the news” (27). Liyana intuitively retrieves this event first from her autobiographical memory in order to feel more secure that she is leaving the US for a historical place located in the Middle East; Liyana loves her teachers and, thus, trusts their points of view, creating a sort of mental comfort for herself. She recalls some events of her past, such as a letter she wrote for one of her teachers telling him about her father and Palestine and holding off her father’s decision to go back to Palestine with his family.

She remembers that her father wants Liyana, Rafik, and her mother to know his relatives in addition to his unruly desire to be in his old home as he thinks that it is turning into a better country after the Arabs and Israelis shook hands again: “Only recently he [Poppy] grew hopeful about Jerusalem and his country again. Things started changing for the better. Palestinians had public voices again. Of course they never stopped having private voices” (31). Liyana in these words endeavors, by means of her autobiographical memory, to find a role for herself in Palestine, a role that is well elaborated and elucidated in the second section of this chapter – the chances of achieving peace – for she has not arrived in Jerusalem yet.

As mentioned before in the previous chapters, the huge difference between Liyana’s old and new homes and families drives her to make a critical comparison between them, so Liyana draws upon her autobiographical memory to remember the past behaviors and thoughts in the pursuit of culturally accommodating the real-time situation in which she finds herself, and this is crystal clear when Liyana remembers how her uncle Leo “shook her hand like an insurance man” and how “Aunt Margaret spoke formally to children about general topics” compared to the current situation she is startlingly being exposed to when a bustling group of uncles and aunts hug and squeeze her “so tightly that Liyana lost her breath” (40-41).

Liyana keeps on wondering how she is a mere blur going by in Jerusalem’s streets, intuitively having recourse to her past memory to realize that she is in a place where no one but her family knows her; the narrator relates that Liyana recalls her home in St. Louis where the man at the grocery store remembers the day when a very young Liyana pokes “a ripe peach too hard” with her finger going inside it, and how “the neighborhood ladies buying vegetables” laugh after she loudly screams. Since then, the grocer would say to Liyana when she comes into the store, “Be careful with my plums! Don’t get too close to my melons!” (84). Remembering is not always invoked to help in healing and providing comfort, but Liyana wants to express her discomfort by relating one of her past experiences. In his chapter in David Rubin’s *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory*, Martin

A. Conway argues that “the adequacy of autobiographical knowledge presumably depends on its ability to support and promote continuity and development of the self” (88). Thus, Liyana, forlornly recalling this autobiographical memory of the past, internally holds an impulse to cognize the new life with its corollary yet required adjustments and the urge for crafting an identity harmonious with the life in Palestine; she needs such an experience to compare and also to incorporate it into her sense of self.

Recalling autobiographical memory sometimes helps develop more positive notions of the future. In this regard, Liyana remembers her father’s Jewish friend who likes “Arabic hareesa, a delicious cream-of-wheat cake with an almond balanced in the center, outside on a plate” and brings “slices of date rolls” to her father, adding that both of them, “liked everyone’s else dessert better than their own” (28). Liyana is well acquainted with relating her autobiographical memories, arranging them, and providing an evaluation for her retrieving them as being important socially and personally. When talking to her Jewish friend Omer, Liyana also remembers one day back in America when some ladies come knocking at their door to tell them about Jesus Christ, and how her father hastily marches into “his bedroom, tied on along gray cloak that had belonged to his father, and a checkered *Kaffiyeh*, the head-dress that he never really wore, and leapt out of the bedroom into their startled gaze” and tells them, “but *first*, may I tell you about Muhammad?” (178). This simultaneous remembrance demonstrates how parental behaviors and attitudes affect their children’s, such as Liyana’s, autobiographical memories, providing them with a great deal of information about certain events and situations. Liyana’s standpoint on the future of relations between Palestinians and Israelis is thoroughly explicated in the next section of the chapter.

Dallal Shaw’s protagonist, Thafer, in *Scattered Like Seeds* adds up to another example of an immigrant stung by traumatic memory after the terribly destructive war between Arabs and Jews. A little bit like Amal in *Mornings in Jenin*, Thafer has undergone a difficult, complex, and hair-raising time as a child during the Israeli occupation of his land, which has somewhat affected his life later in

the United States. However, Thafar is totally different from Amal in his own process of getting healed from the trauma: Thafar has partially recovered from his painful memory with the help of his American wife, whereas Amal has locked herself behind her traumatic memory. One could offer many examples demonstrating the difficulties Thafar experiences in Palestine, but my goal is to focus on the way he heals from the trauma while in the United States.

At the beginning of the novel, Thafar is mentally shattered as a result of the Arab-Israeli War of 1967; although Thafar has fully assimilated into American culture, he is drawn back into the world of his family and people when a war between Arabs and Israelis erupts again. Worried about the way the war is progressing in Palestine, Thafar's tension and trepidation are alleviated mainly by his American wife, Mary Pat, and by his children too. Mary Pat tells her children one of the stories that Thafar told her before about how the Israeli soldiers viciously pounded at the outer door of his family's Jerusalem house to arrest his father: "His mother went to the outer door while he [Thafar] tugged at her skirt and left his younger sister crying. Her hands began to shake as she unlocked the outer door and faced four British troopers. Your name? Jihan Allam, his mother said, not looking at the trooper and pressing Thafar to her side. Is Ayoub Allam in? No, he is not ..." (3). Mary Pat tempers Thafar's outrage at the U.S. support of Israel and is the source of healing from his traumatic memory; as soon as Thafar gets worried and troubled, he is used to throwing "himself into her arms" (9) to feel more comfortable and secure. Thafar has healed quickly from his traumatic memory for two major reasons: (1) he narrates his traumatic life events to his wife, Mary Pat; and (2) his distinct memories of the past demonstrate that he has experienced that past differently.

Narrating one's traumatic memory to other people, especially those close to one's heart, boils down a long way toward healing from such a racking memory staying afloat over the affected person. In *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction*, Deborah M. Horvitz maintains that "since narrative is inextricably entwined with memory and the process of remembering, the greater one's ability to 'make story' out of trauma, the more likely s/he is to regain

control of her or his life after that trauma” (6). By elucidation not limitation, the following conversation puzzles out the narrativizing method Thafer makes use of to recover from the trauma:

“Is something else bothering you, Thafer?” “When I went to visit my dying father in 1959, Mary Pat, he begged me to return. I had no desire to go back, and I stayed only ten days after his death. I didn’t belong anymore. My mother pleaded, my brothers pleaded, our relatives and friends pleaded, but I just couldn’t. That was eight years ago. I don’t know what it is, Mary Pat. Maybe it’s the war... My family left Jerusalem in 1948. My mother was the one who wanted the family to leave ... My mother blames herself and is determined never to leave Palestine, even if it means her life.”
(11-12)

By recounting the story of his distressing life events to Mary Pat, Thafer extinguishes the fire of the trauma kindled by the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, including such horrors as the Palestinians being shot in cold blood, tortured, raped, and driven Palestinians out of their lands. Narrating this past traumatic memory to Mary Pat noticeably helps Thafer to construct his identity, for narrative contributes to the construction of identity. Thafer, thus, finds the totalizing healing power of relating his already silenced memory to Mary Pat a curative treatment for his troubled psyche, lending him a hand to flip a new chapter of life in the United States and resisting the overwhelming impact of his past upon him.

Though it’s not ideal that Thafer actually dismisses from his mind the traumatic past, he has come to realize that narrating his traumatic experience is the only way available to heal so that he can integrate with American culture and life. In their chapter in *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray-Rosendale assert that “survivors who often have been silent because they feared retaliation or increased humiliation, and who have been carrying around the burden of a hidden agony for months, years, and even decades, report the experience of speaking out as transformative as well as a sheer relief” (200). Unlike Amal in *Mornings In Jenin* who is helpless, hopeless, and unable to take any action against her traumatic memory making her experience more

painful and petrifying, Thafer's voicing his trauma aids him in better understanding himself and reconstructing a new sense of self aligned with the developments and changes of his new environment; he no longer looks upon himself as a trauma-struck and affected person, but rather he has turned into a mentally sound person with slight and transient trauma haunting him from time to time based on what happens in Palestine.

Unlike Amal who has spent most of her life in Palestine and experienced all kinds of grossly traumatic events, Thafer undergoes such harrowing events when he is only a child before he is sent to Kuwait in order not to get enlisted in the Jordanian army to fight Israel:

It was all his mother's idea to go to Kuwait. He had been sitting in his room in their Tulkarm and had overheard his parents' conversation. My dear, his distraught mother said to his elderly father, we have to get Thafer out before there is more fighting. Where would we send him? To Kuwait. My nephew Khalid works in Kuwait. Let's do it before any more fighting breaks out and before the Jordanians take him into their army. Dear, we lost a son. Kamal is still in the Syrian army in the north. Rassem is in the Iraqi army a few miles from here. We certainly don't want Thafer to be taken by the Jordanians. (57)

Thafer has not seen hundreds of corpses lying together after they had been machine-gunned or knifed to death; he has not experienced how Israelis set up checkpoints preventing the exit of Palestinian refugees. Thafer's memories of the past are not so traumatic that they impose any limitations to his thinking or personal behaviors and rebirth; his dreams have not passed out of sight like those of Amal, her brother, his wife, and his children. Thafer has not fully experienced the Palestinian cause with all its tragic aspects because of his short direct contact with it; all he knows about it is via TV, radio, and newspaper, yet, in the same breath, his fleeting suffering from his harsh childhood, albeit rather short, remain stuck with him, especially after the death of his wife, Mary Pat. He finds in his late wife his need for tenderness, warmth, and life itself, so the reader can see that, after her death, Thafer abruptly

opts for going back to Palestine because he has lost the person who stood by him all the time helping him to forget his painful past and hit the ground running for a better future in the United States.

Arab American literature is more or less influenced by the writings of Edward Said. Neo-Orientalism of modern Arab Americans, influenced by Said's *Orientalism*, holds that "otherizing" the East deprives it of its independent voice and identity. Neo-Orientalism, however, is different from Orientalism in terms of stressing the power of economic conditions and the possibility of the introduction of democracy into the Middle East. Therefore, Neo-Orientalism depicts Arabs as transnational deadly terrorists as well as underdeveloped nations. Despite such a writing environment, a number of Arab American writers have grappled with Neo-Orientalism and tried to present the true face of Arabs and Arab Americans through their writings that pinpoint the very reason behind the wars and turmoil in the Middle East in a non-prejudiced way, thereby building bridges between the East culture and the West culture. The writings of Suzan Abulhawa, Naomi Nye, and Shaw Dallah are examples of engagement with Neo-Orientalism and Orientalism in a discursive way; their novels reexamine the basic prejudices of these discourses.

The relationship between the East and the West is studied as a mere relationship of power and dominance; the East has been Orientalized by the West. In this context, Edward Said confirms that the West has separated and dichotomized two entities into the West and the East. There is a dilemma of representation vis-à-vis the discourse of West-East difference. In the editorial of his book, Edward Said quotes Karl Marx's argument in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, "They can't represent themselves; they must be represented" (293). This quotation represents a general premise that runs through Said's study, which examines many Orientalist writings from the eighteenth century forward, including works by Lord Cromer, Balfour, Flaubert, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, etc. Said decodes the association of Western imperial power and domination with the discourse of Orientalism since the eighteenth century. He asserts that orientalism is the representation of the East through the imperial lenses of the West serving the goals and territorial ambitions of Western colonial powers; it's the imperialistic

misrepresentation of the conquered East by the West, as seen through the Western eyes not as the people of the East see themselves: “Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point, Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient –dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” (3)

In this section of the chapter dedicated to briefly discussing the attitude of the Arab American characters toward the relationship between the East and the West as well as the chance of achieving peace between Israelis and Palestinians, I am primarily presenting the way each character in each novel approaches this sensitive relationship accompanied with some comments and criticism. Susan Abulhawa’s *Mornings in Jenin* unravels a message hidden in the folds of this novel that the relationship between religions and cultures is possible regardless of religion, culture, and race boundaries. The reader perceives this message through the close friendship between Hasan and his childhood Jewish friend, Ari Perlstein, the son of a German professor who escaped from the Nazis. Their friendship begins when Ari, holding a large red tomato, moves towards Hasan, who sits reading a book of Arabic poems; Ari pulls out a pocketknife and cuts it, “keeping half and offering the rest to Hasan”. Abulhawa asserts that the friendship between Hasan and Ari is born “in the shadow of Nazism in Europe and in the growing divide between Arab and Jew at home.” Even after decades that divide them after the war, Hasan recounts to Amal, his youngest child, the story of his friendship with Ari, plaintively telling her that “he was like a brother” (9).

In spite of the conflict between Arabs and Jews, the representation of the strong friendship between Hasan and Ari is intended to convey a message that Palestine was the home of tolerance and coexistence of religions, and that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and hostility is not based on religion. Hasan and Ari spend hours together “teaching each other the words in Arabic, German and English.” Ari begins to wear “traditional Arab garb on weekends,” and their friendship extends to comprise their families:

Mrs. Perlstein loved Hasan and was grateful for his friendship with her son, and Basima received Ari with similar motherly enthusiasm. Although they never met face-to-face, the two women came to know one another through their sons and each would send the other's boy loaded with food and special treats, a ritual that Hasan and Ari grudgingly endured. (10)

Abulhawa purposefully inserts Hasan's and Ari's mothers into the context of their friendship because she wants to pinpoint that it's not only the innocence of the two boys, their poetic solitude among books, and their disinterest in politics that keep their friendship fortified and sustained, but also the supreme human relationship is intrinsic to shaking off any discrimination predicated upon religion, race, or culture. Emile Bustani in *Doubts and Dynamite: the Middle East* affirms, "Palestine—in which, be it said, Arabs and Jews were living side by side in absolute amity—had unquestionably been an Arab country for ages past" (13). This human relationship is exquisitely manifested when Hasan receives "superior tutoring from Mrs. Perlstein, who sent her eager young student home every week loaded with books, lessons, and homework" (11). Hasan continues his mentorship with Mrs. Perlstein until he graduates with Ari in 1943; Mrs. Perlstein's tutoring Hassan proves the fact that she loves him as if he were her son, which indicates that Jews and Palestinians, in many cases, were living together lovingly and peacefully.

However, such exemplary love and compassion do not actually give the Jews the right to occupy Palestinian territories, drive them from their land, kill them, and deprive them of their right of return to Palestine: this is typically Abulhawa's repeated argument about the Arab-Jewish conflict over Palestine. Abulhawa, through the character of Amal, articulates that Palestine, or the Middle East in general, has become an area of exploitation and colonialization. The Israelis are the West here, and they Orientalize the Palestinians as the Other. Israel's ruthless treatment of Palestinians is Orientalist in nature, and, as a result, Amal partakes in the resistance movements as a human rights defender in the pursuit of hopefully casting off the chains of colonial oppression, which later costs Amal her life.

It might be argued that Amal immerses herself in the past and in what is happening in Palestine in an attempt not to be brainwashed by the Orientalist discourses that have molded the attitudes toward Arabs and Arab Americans in the United States. Abulhawa's recounting of the history of the Palestinian conflict reflects an unbridled desire, as an Arab American novelist and intellectual, to imbue the nation with a common meaning and a more accurate, realistic, and representative reckoning of its collective history. Abulhawa's counter-Orientalist narrative unmask the ways in which Israeli's political discourses and history draw upon Orientalist-saturated historical writings, thereby categorically rejecting all such Orientalist discourses and structures. Amal's travel narrative refutes fixed Western Neo-Orientalist and Orientalist discourses that stereotype and naturalize Eastern women as passive, speechless, submissive, sexual objects, backward, and deprived of agency.

In Naomi Nye's *Habibi*, the author attempts to cross boundaries between divergent cultures, believing that Palestinians and Israelis can live in harmony with each other if they sit seriously at the dialogue table to come up with a solution satisfying both parties. As Liyana's airplane flies over the Mediterranean, she mocks at the name of the country she is heading to – that of Palestine or Israel – whispering to Rafik, “Too bad the country namers couldn't have made some awful combo word from the beginning, like *Is-Pal* or *Pal-Is*, to make everybody happy” (37). Another clear example emerges when Liyana tells an Armenian priest that she is willing to learn about Armenian literature; the Priest accepts and tells her that she would be the only (outsider), a word that makes Poppy recoil, saying, “Let's believe together in a world where no one is inside or outside” (78). It's evident that Nye is sure that all people can live peacefully with each other, and she does take umbrage at the fact that the Palestinians and Israelis hate each other. Accordingly, Michael Suleiman in *Arabs in America: Building a new future* argues that Nye seeks to make us think about the various ethnicities who suffer from discrimination due to their religion, culture, race or color.

Liyana seizes the opportunity of being in Palestine to dismiss the discourses of West-East difference; she derisively brushes off the induction of purported West-East difference as being

dichotomous, feigned, and symptomatic of a fabricated dichotomy. Nye in her novel shoots for deconstructing the geographical, racial, political, cultural, and religious divides that were created in order to designate the West as being superior to the East; Nye calls for a shared ideology of compassion, understanding, and justice, rejecting any kind of inequity and defamation (Yousef 970). Liyana's discontent at the strained relationship between Palestinians and Israelis is aggravated when she befriends a Jewish man, Omer. Being taken aback by the objection of her new family, including her father, to her relationship with Omer on the basis of his being Jewish and Israeli, Liyana commences waging a ruthless war against her family and society; one of her fiery reactions, as mentioned in chapter two, is when Liyana reminds her father of his Jewish neighbors: "Remember when you told us how you had Jewish neighbors and friends when you were going up here? Remember how we had plenty of Jewish friends back in the United States" (171). Liyana denounces all dissonant voices calling for segregation, unflaggingly sparing no effort to bring people together under one peace-bound banner.

Though Nye in this novel diligently attempts to improve the fateful status in the Middle East, the Arab world, and ameliorate its tense relationship with the Western World, the East and the West behave in the same way as articulated by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, confirming the Orientalist discourses and serving the goals of colonial powers:

This fighting is senseless, don't you think? People should be able to get over their differences by this time, but they just stay mad. They have their old reasons or they find new ones. I mean, I understand it mostly from the Arab side because my father's family lost their house and their money in the bank and lots of their community when my father was a boy and the Palestinians were suffering so much, just kicked around until recently as if they were second-class human beings you know they couldn't even show their own flag or have hardly any normal human rights like the Jews did till

recently... I know the Jewish people suffered so much themselves, but don't you think it should have made them more sensitive to the sufferings of others too? (165-166)

Liyana vocalizes the above heartfelt words to disclose what she is afraid of: she is afraid of the bitter truth that such an indiscriminate conflict over the land would give rise to breeding more blood as well as constant and gratuitous acts of violence and counter violence. So, she looks for bringing peace to Palestine, an imagined country that embraces both conflicting parties regardless of their race, religion, and culture. Correspondingly, Omer shares the same hope for a bright future of peace and harmony within the same land: "It's a bad history without a doubt. Nothing to be proud of" (166). Both of them call for peace and solidarity with genuine efforts aiming at achieving this desired peace; they seem to believe in the unjustifiability of violence under any circumstances and in the potential of having the dispute settled and reconciled between Palestinians and Israelis, between Arabs and Jews.

Even though Liyana believes in the possibility of peace, she suspects the readiness and truthfulness of both parties to successfully achieve this uneasy equation. Thus, she is afraid that she is the only one who believes in and strives for peace, and that the fate of peace is doomed to failure:

That night Liyana dreamed of a cake that fell off its plate into the sea and floated away from her. She reached wildly with both her arms, standing knee-deep in the pull of powerful waves. And it was Omer she was calling to. 'Save it! Can you reach it?' but he was swimming too far out. Then she was shouting and waving, 'I'm sorry! I wanted to share it with you!' but he could not hear her. He was swimming the other direction. And the cake was drowning (189).

After strenuous efforts made toward convincing Liyana's family of her friendship with Omer, she finally succeeds in persuading them to invite Omer for dinner one day. Liyana's grandmother, "*Sitti*", receives Omer warmly, and Omer, in turn, takes her hands in his and thanks her; *Sitti* finally welcomes Omer's friendship with Liyana and warns him of the difficulties and obstacles that would impede their

relationship: “You will need to be brave. There are hard words waiting in people’s mouths to be spoken. There are walls. You can’t break them. Just find doors in them” (270).

Edward Said adopts a view that is utterly opposed to that of Nye and Abulhawa. Said believes that Arab people, or the East in general, are depicted as subjects that are unable to manage themselves and choose the best for themselves, so the colonial powers speak on their behalf. He asserts that the Western system of knowledge and representation functions in order to construct the Eastern World. In line with this hegemonic operation, Orientalism, which works for the benefit of the West, constructs the East as being inferior to the West and the West as being superior to all others outside the Western subject. According to the Orientalist discourse, the Occident, the West, is capable of having a relationship with the East that is based on the superiority of the West. In so doing, the Eastern world is destructively depicted as sensual, irrational, exotic, and static; subsequently by this predominant operation the West constructs itself as rational, known, and ethical. Moreover, Said maintains that colonialism and Orientalism hold on, significantly unchanged, and create the uneasy relationship between the Eastern and the Western worlds. Said emphasizes that the Orientalist knowledge of the East significantly falls short because it doesn’t result from compassion, understanding, vigilant study and analysis for their own interests. Rather, “it is a campaign of self-affirmation” (2). Nevertheless, it’s likely that Liyana’s and Omer’s love relationship would succeed, because they would be able to understand each other. Omer in this relationship can’t apply the norms of the Orientalist discourse in the sense that the Oriental is an object that can be evaluated, conceptualized, and unable to manage and think freely, for Liyana belongs to the Western world much more than the Eastern one. Nye’s *Habibi* tries to present a different picture of the dialectical relationship between the East and the West, a relationship in which the borders, regardless of the source of conflict, can be feasibly crossed.

In spite of Nye’s genuine efforts, through Liyana, to break into the norms of the peace process available in the Middle East and, thus, hold corporations to this process and justice, Said’s theoretical views of the impossibility of peace in Palestine are still prevailing and reflective of the true reality of

the relationship between the East and the West. Liyana's, Poppy's, and even her Sitti's visions of the possibility of peace in Palestine could be understood to some extent due to several reasons and factors. Firstly, Liyana, Poppy, and his family have not been exposed to displacement, violence, and loss caused by this conflict, and, therefore, they have not suffered from the variety of stressful and harmful situations other Palestinians are daily experiencing, including "imprisonment, beatings, collective punishment, house demolitions, land confiscation and clearing for military purposes, targeted assassinations, and constant social and economic pressure" (Chatty 219). Hence, it's clear that Poppy changes his attitude toward peace when he decidedly holds a gun to fight Israeli soldiers after they shoot Khalid, a little boy, which undoubtedly means that the sought-after peace between Palestinians and Israelis is almost impossible. Secondly, Poppy and his family are Christians not Muslims, and their initial objection to Liyana's friendship with Omer stems from cultural constraints not from religious ones; it's religiously prohibited for Muslims to have such a friendship. The escalating development of the relationship between the Liyana and Omer and their being positioned as an exemplary model for crossing borders and building a future for Palestine where peace, justice, security, and amity prevail in the land, could actually reason for optimism; but Liyana, Poppy, and his mother don't represent the overwhelming majority of Palestinians, and, likewise, Omer doesn't stand in for the Jewish or Israelis. It's truly a noble call for peace, but it's impossible now to be applied on the ground. Thirdly, Israel violently treats Palestinians on the basis of power, and it's far stronger now than yesterday because of the weakness of all Arab armies; the Israeli discourse of power is allegedly perceived as a dynamic necessity for them, not to mention that this rhetoric of power neglects all the calls for establishing peace with Palestinians. This way of approach to rule is consistent with Edward Said's views in *Orientalism* and his other works.

Thafer in Dallal's *Scattered Like Seeds* believes in peace as the only way to resolve the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, as a coexistence between them, sanguinely calling for the establishment of a one-state or two-state solution that makes it possible for both parties to live with

each other or next to each other in peace, amity, and security. Yet, his small hope for peace is confronted by Adnan Amri, a Palestinian living in a Beirut refugee camp, who tells him that the way Israel poisons the atmosphere vis-à-vis peace with Palestinians hinders the possibility of achieving or even negotiating peace: “Israel is not scared of the PLO as a military force. It is scared of a PLO that wants peace and that advocates the political and civil rights of our people. Israel wants all Palestinians, including you, Thafer, to disappear from the face of the earth. We have no other alternative. We need to defend our existence” (48). This is the first face-to-face confrontation between Thafer, who believes in peaceful solutions to the Palestinian cause, with a Palestinian refugee, Adnan, who insists on the military solution and accuses Thafer of being petrified at the idea of joining the armed struggle against Israel: “I suppose that after one lives away from the homeland as long as you have, one becomes terrified at the idea” and Thafer replies, “It isn’t living away from the homeland, Adnan; it’s that I personally don’t believe that armed struggle is the answer” (53). Thafer is in favor of a peaceful solution in Palestine involving the parties concerned, but the majority of Palestinians and Israelis don’t support such a solution, since they don’t trust each other.

When the Jewish teacher of social studies repeatedly tells her students that Israel is “the only democracy in the Middle East” (271) and justifies the brutal act Israeli soldiers commit against Kathleen’s father, she undeniably draws on Orientalist discourses because it is the most deceptive and powerful tool for asserting that the victimizer and imperialist has a heroic and moral cause to defend. Their claimed cause centers on their colonial project to civilize the savage and the barbaric. Inopportunately, the victim seems to be silenced forever. In this regard, in his book *American Orientalism: The United States and Middle East since 1945*, Douglas Little reaffirms that the established degrading stereotypes of Arabs are defined and constructed by colonial powers to justify their imperial acts as they claim that their mission is to establish the Western civilization in order to rescue uneducated and backward Arabs (17). Furthermore, Thafer’s shocking comment on the civilized manner the Arab oil ministers have maintained during a conference is another justifying

example: “I’m brainwashed. On television, in the movies, in the literature, in the newspapers, and even in their schools and colleges the people of the United States are taught to see Arabs as either camel herders and pearl fishermen” (147). The East and the West are erroneously portrayed as alien to each other by many fanatics, as if the East were residing in the barren seclusion of the desert’s hellish sand dunes. The Western media continues to reproduce the Orientalist stereotypes that Said exposes; its role vindicates Said’s views of the relationship between the East and the West because it portrays the massive and complex Middle East in this negatively narrow way that misrepresents the humanity and diversity of hundreds of millions of people who live like others living in the Western World, thereby adding insult to injury and making the relationship between the East and the West worse. In this respect, in his chapter, “Ethnic Archetypes and the Arab Image,” in Ernest McCarus’s book *The Development of Arab-American Identity*, Roland Stockton displays the negative impacts of stereotyping that “take people out of history and deny them the right to change across time.” He brings to light a great deal of negative representations and misconceptions about Arabs in the media, saying that “images of Arab cannot be in isolation but are primarily derivative, rooted in a core hostile archetypes that our culture applies to those with whom it clashes” (20).

In the same way, in his article “Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People,” Jack Shaheen surveys the different demeaning stereotypes glued to Arabs that remain predominant throughout the history of American cinema, inferring that he finds these stereotypes in “more than 900 films, the vast majority of which portray Arabs by distorting at every turn what most Arab men, women, and children are really like.” He finds that moviemakers have overstuffed the marketplace with a wide range of Arab villains, collectively degrading Arabs in every movie a person can watch. Furthermore, he confirms that Hollywood naturalizes, legitimizes, and frames stereotypes in viewers’ mind that Arabs are “brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits, and abusers of women,” thus demeaning Arabs as an ethnic and racial group (172). Such debasing and reinforced stereotypes destructively affect the domestic and foreign policy of the United States and other

powerful countries, making the chances of bridging the gaps between the East and West out of the question. Such offensive stereotypes and representations reveal the continuing prominence of the Orientalist discourse, which is built on conceiving of Arabs as sources of terror and hostility.

Thafer receives degrading treatment from Israeli soldiers as he crosses the Jordanian borders to see his mother in Jerusalem; he is delayed for hours in line while other Europeans and Americans in the other line enter within minutes, and then an Israeli soldier asks Thafer to take his jacket and shoes off. It doesn't stop at this point, the soldier orders him to take off all of his clothes: "Go in the next room, *and take off all your clothes*. Clear? ... At long last, the Israeli returns with a flashlight. "Turn around," says the angry voice. Thafer turns around nervously. The Israeli points the light at Thafer's private parts for what seems an eternity" (132-133). After being denied entry into the West Bank and treated insultingly, Thafer seems to initially insist on his opinion that the peaceful solution is the only and best one: "today's events haven't changed my mind" (138). Later in the novel, the reader can notice that Thafer, as a result of this very humiliating occasion, gradually starts to repatriate himself to his old family and people, with his father frequently coming to him in his dreams asking him to hold his gun and join the armed struggle:

He dreams that he sees an Israeli Jew laying wreaths on the graves of his father, his brother, his brother's wife, and their two children. He walks to the Israeli and tells him that these are Palestinian graves, that he knows for sure they are the graves of his father, his brother, and his brother's family. Yes, I know, the Israeli replies, but we stole their home and farm... Your brother and his family were murdered by us, but Ayoub Allam isn't dead. Where is he? He's right here in your house. Thafer walks to the living room, and there is his father wearing his military uniform and holding a white robe and a white headcloth. Thafer, my son, he says, I'm going to retire and take off this uniform. I'm going to give you the uniform to wear. Wear it, Thafer, he

says, wear it. Do it now! Right now. At first Thafer hesitates, then he puts his father's uniform on while his father watches him. (250-251)

Thafer's heart is now full of agony and there is no longer space for peace and tranquility even though he doesn't hold a gun or even a knife as he absolutely rejects getting involved in any armed struggle; however, this dream might be argued to be predictive of Thafer's yet-to-emerge transformation into a cynic rather than a believer in peace treading on all previous beliefs about the possibility of the existence of peaceful solutions. This change reflects the bitter reality in Palestine and the impossibility of coexistence between Palestinians and Israelis.

Chapter Four: Negotiating Nostalgia and Identity

Many Arab-American writers, including the contemporary ones, are preoccupied with either the loss of their homelands and/or the different turbulent upheavals ensuing from critical crises their native worlds have faced. Early Arab-American generations put efforts into negotiating the schism between the Arab and American sides of self and identity, decidedly revealing that they are disinclined to fully assimilate into American culture; such collective orientation for not belonging is ignited by nostalgia, as they feel nostalgic for their original cultural identity, the past that still proceeds to colonize their present, the times they lived through, and for home as well. Therefore, nostalgia plays a pivotal role in shaping their literary narratives and, hence, they are almost embroiled in their clear desires and their own senses of what should construct and constitute the present and future concept of self and identity. Other subsequent generations start to speak into a new space that is formulated with a new outlook that sets aside any nostalgic longing for the past, challenging the essentialized codes and norms of nationalism and racialization. Nevertheless, some literary works written by contemporary Arab Americans still dwell in the past and are garnished by nostalgic aspects of the gone past; two novels out of three selected for this thesis illuminate the argument that some Arab American writers of the new generation are still indulging in nourishing the nostalgic past and attempting to incorporate it into their lives.

There are some common features plainly shared by nostalgia and identity; both are involved in deciphering the code of the past and its overwhelming grip on directing the present and future. In addition, both are subject to change at any time and anywhere according to individual, group, or driving stimuli. Thus, Turner observes that there is a “continuous reciprocal interaction and functional interdependence between the psychological processes of individuals and their activity, relations and products” and such interdependence is devised by nostalgic recollections of the past (qtd. in Brown and Humphreys 154). In this context, this chapter sheds light on how nostalgia is tackled in each novel as well as how nostalgia can help in facilitating the coherence and stability of identity.

The three Arab American novels tackle the issue of nostalgia within varying criteria and standards; Suzan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* presents a character with a resurging underlying sense of homesickness; Naomi Nye's *Habibi* raises and underscores this issue, and Shaw Dallah's *Scattered Like Seeds* lays the ground work for what is termed "post-nostalgia." In order for me to avoid falling into the trap of repetition, I tackle the issue of identity, by and large, from a nostalgia-specific angle and perspective, let alone some extracts are cited again to lend credence to following interpretation and analysis, presumably setting in motion a different trend of rendering the politics of identity into a somehow new negotiating avenue in Arab American literature in general and the three novels in particular.

Susan Abulhawa in *Mornings in Jenin* decidedly addresses the issue of nostalgia and identity in a way slightly different from the two other novels, especially Dallah's *Scattered Like Seeds*. Abulhawa's protagonist, Amal, undergoes a resurging feeling of nostalgia during her first residence in the United States; those four years of habitation are described from the cultural and spiritual standpoint as disorientation-years, and from the standpoint of literary academics as years of knowledge and broadening understanding. Explication and interpretation are merely glued to Amal's first residence in America for it provides in some way ample evidence and is thus compatible with the ideas infused in the novel to be posited within the context of the wider intercultural matrix of the novel that intensively impacts the politics of nostalgia and identity in this novel.

Amal's first days in Philadelphia are marked by her attempts to discover the new world and embark on the new experience of building a new integrated identity, triggering all possible senses of nostalgia for the old home and family:

The scent of the city seeped into the car. Street vendor cheese-steak hoagies, greasy fries, diesel truck fumes, and car exhaust gave my nostrils a full-bodied welcome. It smelled like the irretrievable loss of white Madonna lilies growing in the limesinks of

Palestine, the bereavement of my country's camphires, which would burst forth each spring into fragrant flames of white and yellow clusters, delicate and fiery. (170)

Amal is thrown into her taken-for-granted feeling that she is authentically unable to adapt to the new host country without retaining her own traditions and culture within the this multifaceted society. Therefore, the first whole year is merely characterized by Amal's nostalgic allegiance to the culture and religion of her old home; it's a kind of pride in and love for a culture that she feels without necessarily having it incorporated into her daily behavior. Amal is burdened by the loss of her native homeland; she is no longer living in Palestine, which means that the place and time is not current now, giving an insight into the often common dilemma that its reality is unable to alleviate its stingingly nostalgic reminiscence; her nostalgia is evocated by those immediate stimuli that unescapably yield in recollecting the memory of her old home. Amal's nostalgic behavior in the first year demonstrates that she has not completely assimilated the American culture; rather, the American culture looks exotic and unaccommodating for her despite her bold desire to belong: "I found no commonality with the men and women ... I felt diminished, out of place, and eager to belong" (172).

The reader is forced to observe that Amal's submissiveness to the dominant or hegemonic American culture leads to imposing a new identity on her as she belongs to a subordinate and subservient ethnic group, which due to the sought-after social status she is not capable of contesting such an ascription and is driven to consciously or unconsciously disclose the characteristics that visibly underpin the new identity assigned to her; and, thus, this indubitably accounts for why she stamps down her nostalgia, tuning her old world out: "I deliberately avoided political discussions, didn't write to the people who loved me, and let myself be known as "Amy"" (178). Amal complies with such prescribed instructions in order to remap and reconstruct an identity which can give her status within American society.

Nostalgia is different from memory: memory is perceived as the means by which the nostalgic reminiscences are derived. Amal's memory keeps inscribing a very nostalgic sense of her gone past:

“But like the scar beneath my hand, the past was still with me” (171). Speaking of the past, nostalgia should not be tackled as lodging in the past; rather that positive recalls vis-à-vis negative ones, enhance and map current and future experiences. After the first year, Amal becomes an active member of the American culture and grows an interest in learning about and practicing the different aspects of it:

I drank alcohol and dated several men – acts that would have earned me repudiation in Jenin. 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. I didn’t write to Huda, nor to Muna or the Colombian Sisters. Nor to Ammo Darweesh, Lamyia, Khalto Bahiya, or Haj Salem. But sometimes the blink of my eye was a twitch of contrition that brought me face-to-face with the past. (173-174)

Under such behavioral circumstances, Amal’s deviation from the natural route, steered by her culture and religion, turns out to have been engrossed by the super-oppressed nostalgic longing for her past which encompasses her family and friends. It might be said that Amal’s eye-blinking or rather recollection of the past is created unconsciously or consciously in order for her to repatriate herself into a typical Palestinian much attached to the cause and heritage, or to defend against her present-day experience, all of which is caused by her overwhelming feelings of uneasiness and disloyalty. In consequence, Amal has a strong nostalgic drive to take stock of herself as the first step for deep self-searching in order to get rid of deformity that has imbued her sense of self and identity, thus blurring boundaries related to both of them. In this regard, Amal is characterized by her identity ambivalence: she has an unruly desire to belong to the American culture and atmosphere, but, in the same breath, she renders herself as a traitor to her homeland and family as she feels “a sense of shame that I [Amal] betrayed my family – or worse, myself” (174); Amal has discursively opened up an identity space in

the United States in order to have it completely inhabited, but her intention is not fulfilled, thus creating an identity problem as it revolves around a circle of emptiness and disorientation.

Amal's endeavors to take arms against her harsh nostalgia through artificial remapping, reshaping, and reconfiguring identity, end in failure. One of the clear-cut instances throwing light upon the role of family in igniting the fire of nostalgia in an immigrant is when Amal remembers her family: "Walking downtown once, I thought I saw my mother ... I paused, starring at my mother's daughter. Dalia, Um Yousef, had bequeathed to me the constitution that could not breathe while holding hands with the past. She could isolate each present moment while existing in an eternal past. I thought at that moment that no other soul could understand me as she might" (174). Moreover, during Amal's living with her housemates in Philadelphia who are used to calling their parents, she remains "unperturbed" accompanied by "a sweet nostalgia and longing for old friends." She is so homesick for her homeland that "Palestine would rise up from my bones into the center of my new life, unannounced" (175).

Amal fails to become an ethnic Arab American in the United States because she doesn't fathom the essence of getting her two conflicting cultures properly balanced. She can be acutely selective and discriminate between what is important and what is not; and a wise and sharp person never comes close to absorbing all of the aspects of the new culture that could be utterly antithetic to the original one. Thus, this kind of imbalance has implications for how we conceive of nostalgia at all levels. Despite her long years of stay in the United States, Amal describes herself as "Amal without the hope" (178). In this regard, the neurologist Philippe Pinel describes the extremely nostalgic person as "a sad, melancholy appearance, a bemused, ... an indifference toward anything; ... an obstinate silence ..." (qtd. in Lowenthal 10). Accordingly, Amal represents a failure of assimilation in America without any tangible success in her homeland, Palestine. Amal is neither positive nor negative about the new life in the United States; however, she consciously and unconsciously tilts more toward hidden nostalgia for the past although she tries to empty herself of the past, sabotaging her process of

integration into American society and life. Receiving a call from her brother, Yousef, Amal's oppressed nostalgia bursts out restlessly compelling her to go back to her old family and world:

Another year passed. *Whatever you feel* ... I kept it all in. Until one day when the telephone rang at five A.M. Half-sleeping I picked the receiver. "Hello." "Aloo," answered an accented voice. "Amal?" "Away," I said, suspecting his identity and fully awake now. He chuckled, a sound I could recognize anywhere, it was the muffled laughter that first escaped from the right side of Yousef's mouth, then stretched a smile across his handsome face... "Finally, little sister! We've been trying for months to find you." Someone took the phone. "Amal! Habibti, darling! We found you." It was Fatima. Amal. I cried at the sound of my Arabic name. (179-180)

Her hidden and oppressed nostalgia awakens in spite of her deliberate efforts to bury it in America so that she would be transformed into a woman of one-sided identity, the identity of the dominant society that would embrace and grant her some privileges that are denied to Palestinian people; however, developing a one-sided identity on the rubble of the original and deeply rooted one makes life destructive for her, just as it would be for someone who exaggerates his/her national, religious, and cultural identity to such an extent that it's detrimental to himself/herself and others as well.

Naomi Nye in *Habibi* presents Poppy as an example of a Palestinian immigrant plagued with nostalgia for his homeland in spite of his continuous movements between the US and Palestine; Liyana, Poppy's daughter, narrates how her father stays homesick for Palestine and his family over there. Poppy's nostalgia also represents the failure of ethnic assimilation in the United States, for he remains attached to his native land with unrelenting loyalty: "'You know,'" Poppy said, "I never planned to be an immigrant forever. I never thought I'd become a citizen. I planned to return home after medical school. I didn't know"' (3). This is the typical case of most first-generation Arab Americans who sentimentally and strongly cling to their homelands, and their unwavering fidelity to native customs and culture renders a portion of the large-scale failure of rationally perceiving and

judging the American experience among many first-generation Arab immigrants. The narrator explains that Poppy used to tell his family from time to time that they would go to Palestine one day: “*Leave the country?* Of course it was a rumor Liyana had been hearing all her life. Someday her family would leave the United States, the country where her mother and brother had been born in, and moved overseas to the mixed-up country her father had been born in. It was only fair. He wanted to show it to them” (3). Poppy’s surface intention conveyed to his family is that he wants them to know both sides of their history and become fully rounded human beings; however, the truth is that he is no longer able to grapple with his nostalgia, since it’s the due time for finally going back to his native homeland after a series of delays. Liyana mentions that her father insists on drinking tea with mint and Arabic coffee as well as using olive oil rather than butter, all of which triggers insights into the role of food both in stirring up Poppy’s nostalgic feelings and keeping him in constant touch with his homeland. Food can be seen as a means of resisting American culture, and thereby rejecting mainstream monolithic American identity. In this regard, Priscilla S. Wathington candidly comments on the role of food as a tool of resistance for some Arab Americans: “Food surfaces once more in the narratives, not making existential proclamations but resisting—slowly, pragmatically, even at times invisibly—a dominant monolithic white North American culture” (62).

The critical question is how Poppy feels nostalgic for Palestine and wants to go back even though Palestine is not a peaceful place and war torn. Someone would reply and say that the answer is pretty simple, because Poppy is longing for his family, the place where he was born ...etc. I would say that what has been posited is right, but we need to further understand how Poppy as an immigrant perceives and remembers Palestine: is the real picture of Palestine in Poppy’s mind complete and authentic or fragmented? Unlike Amal in *Mornings in Jenin*, I posit that the picture and reality of Palestine is fragmented and distorted in Poppy’s mind. Greenberg and Koole in *Handbook of Experimental Psychology* mention that Fred Davies in his book *Yearning for Yesterday* terms nostalgia as “a positively toned evocation of a lived past” and adds that “the nostalgic ... experience ... is

infused with imputations of past beauty, pleasure, joy, satisfaction, goodness, happiness, love ... Nostalgic feeling is almost never infused with those sentiments we commonly think as negative – for example, unhappiness, frustration, despair, hate, shame, abuse” (204). Hence, the fragmented reality of Palestine is consciously created in Poppy’s mind so that he can identify with his past in order to fight against the current experience – that is the dominant American culture and identity. Since Poppy’s identity is vulnerable to threats and is at risk, he seeks refuge in nostalgia for an unreal imagined homeland. As mentioned above, Poppy tells his family that he has never thought to become an US citizen, which justifies why he takes refuge in nostalgia to stand against any dangers or forces threatening his native identity.

As Poppy solely retrieves the positive recollections of his past, such positive recalls are directly posted to his current consciousness; and his indulging in recalling the unreal imagined aspects without the presence of negative recollections brings about the positive aspects overshadowing the negative ones and, thus, resulting in an inauthentic past. In other words, it could be seen that Poppy operates on the selectiveness of nostalgia that leads him to be living in a world of make-believe called self-deception. The origin of this self-deception lies in his psyche as he thinks that by doing so he can protect and bolster his native identity, but such a thought proves destructive for his life when he goes back to Palestine. Therefore, when Poppy arrives in Palestine, he unnervingly starts to recognize that the absented negative aspects of his nostalgia are being reflected and materialized in front of him, pushing him to retreat and reconsider his custom-fitted recollections: “Sometimes she [Liyana] heard her father say, ‘we are American’ to his relatives. Americans? Even Poppy, who was always an Arab before?” (124); hence, his pronouncing that he is American not Arab is conclusive evidence for what I have already posited.

Before Liyana befriends Omer, the Jewish friend, she reaches a somehow dead end in her attempt to get involved in the new culture and environment as a result of her different perception of life, obligations, and duties. Liyana’s nostalgia is patently aroused by her monologue as her father

warns her not to be public while she is combing her hair out on the balcony: “If I were at home on a beach I could run up and down the sand with just a bathing suit on and no one would even notice me. I could wear my short shorts that I didn’t bring and hold a boy’s hand in the street without causing an earthquake. I could comb my wet hair in public for a hundred dumb years” (125). Liyana’s recourse to nostalgia emanates from her pressing quest and clamoring for the American social and cultural values and the traditional codes of life as she denounces those of Arab life which are not easily obtainable and accessible. Her nostalgia being a means by which she can cast her memory back to the pleasant past in America is also a vehicle to start setting expectations and standards for the new life, something that may be necessary to propel mental and psychological growth. Liyana is not worried about her identity at all, for she looks for identifying with the new home and family and is well acquainted with the importance of multi-identification; she is fully aware that identity is not static but rather dynamic, and that it is recreated and reshaped by immediate social and cultural forces and factors; therefore, she resorts to nostalgia once she feels that her deeply rooted identity is unacceptable and unwelcome, but she doesn’t do this in order to reject the new identity looming on the horizon; rather she is lucidly unable to counterbalance between the two as she is both eager to maintain her original identity and to fit in the new one but within the boundaries pertaining and relevant to her American identity: how to harmonize the American values of open freedom, independence, and others with the restrictive rules set in Palestine; it’s a perplexing equation.

Shaw Dallal in *Scattered Like Seeds* presents Thafer’s character who is totally different from Amal, Poppy, and Liyana in the other two novels in terms of his handling of the issue of nostalgia: he enters into the “post-nostalgia stage.” Unlike Poppy, Thafer recognizes and confesses that the past is not splendid and superb as Poppy and other Arab Americans attempt to convince themselves. Thafer takes life and the integration process in the United State seriously to such an extent that he no longer gets hold of his family; he has determined to move beyond nostalgia in order to embrace his ethnicity in America. In other words, Thafer challenges any kind of nostalgia so that he can move on with

ethnicity. In *The Arab Americans*, Randa Kayyali argues that “Arab Americans have adapted to life in the United States by integrating Arab cultures and customs with the prevailing U.S. norms and trends” (68). Thafar has adopted the American life without retaining any of his past traditions, smashing and treading on anything related to his native past; Thafar is aware that he must assimilate in order to get rid of any sense of distancing and strangeness. Through this representation of Thafar, Shaw Dallal follows in the footsteps of other contemporary Arab American writers who “increasingly seek to challenge established cultural and racial boundaries in their articulation of Arab-American identity, and to assert their identity on their own terms” (Majaj 330).

Thafar looks at and approaches the different aspects of Palestinians’ life from the western angle and perspective, which apparently articulates the fact that he has turned into a person emptied of any sense and feeling shared with his native land and people:

The clear sky and the blue Mediterranean remind him of an earlier time, long forgotten. It’s an odd sensation that sends a chill over his body ... Thafar feels strange driving through the wide, clean streets of Beirut with the two Palestinian brothers. Tourists and visitors with their camera fill the streets, but Thafar feels far removed from the scene. Suddenly, he is uneasy. ... Now Thafar’s unease is mixed with fear. He gazes at the young Palestinian and tries to assess him. His youthful face seems agreeable and harmless. He is uncomfortable with himself. He feels badly about seeming insensitive, yet he is frightened and fascinated by that young Palestinian, Adnan. (44-47)

This quotation elucidates how far Thafar has gone away in his ignoring and bypassing his past and people to the point that he feels appalled when he gets closer and closer to meeting them face to face. In essence, this dreadful feeling reflects the reality that he has extinguished nostalgia and any feeling reminding him of his past, because nostalgia keeps people attached to and connected with their past. This way of dealing with the past proves to be destructive rather than constructive, for Thafar has

erased all memories of his past and reprogrammed himself into an American man with no past. Even though Thafar's dealing with nostalgia could be considered as a step towards ethnic identification, this step is encircled by exaggeration and denial of native identity and seeking after American monolithic identity, instead. Unlike Poppy who holds a sort of a temporarily cohesive shared identity, Thafar doesn't exhibit such shared identity at all, since the native identity characteristics have been replaced by the new American ones.

Thafar assumes the role of a western foreigner who has never undergone the Palestinians' pain or heard about their plight, and he is thus unable to understand them and, in turn, to convince them of his perspective: "These people are very angry, he finally tells himself as he tries to get some rest. They're bitter and suspicious; they have lost everything, and I mustn't go around trying to teach them how to be rational and good" (50). This comment alone expounds that he has never felt any kind of nostalgia for his home and family, but the contradiction in the novel, I suppose, is that Thafar keeps up to date with the latest news about the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 over Palestine, and, at the same time, he knows nothing about Palestine and how people live there. In addition, he decides to go back to Palestine after the death of his wife, Mary Pat, artificially pretending that he is nostalgic for his native land and people, but his actions and behaviors prove the opposite. Moreover, Thafar doesn't know anything about his family as he has not been updated and posted about the news of his family members: "May be your brother Kamal has told you, Thafar," says Adnan as he drives Thafar back to Beirut airport, "that I'm officer in the military section of the PLO" "No, he has not." "Is my bother Kamal connected with the PLO?" (53); and Thafar is also surprised when Adnan tells him that his brother, Hani, is "a schoolteacher" (55).

For further proving what has been posited above concerning Thafar's embodiment of the role assumed and anticipated from a westerner, nostalgia in this Arab American novel is shifted into a new space that I term as "nostalgia role-shifting." Even though Thafar starts to feel sympathetic, like anyone else in his place, to the Palestinian people, he expresses his discomfort and indignation over

the corruption, idiots, autocracy, feudalism, and poverty; thus, as things rapidly go downhill, he is willy-nilly forced into feeling nostalgic for the United States, publicly declaring that he is American and can't "pledge allegiance to a flag other than the U.S. flag" (284). He starts drawing internal collective comparisons between life in the United States and life in the Arab world, finding out that he is entirely attached to the United States. He starts to long for peace of mind in America, since he is frightened by the ideas other have suggested to him: he doesn't want to get "involved in the nuclear madness of the Middle East" and is unwilling and afraid to join the armed struggle against Israel (191). Despite the obsessive love he holds for Suhaila, he prefers America over her as he is unable to live in a country other than the United States: "Do I dare tell her, he asks himself, that I want to go back to the United States?" (190).

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