People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Echahid Cheikh Larbi Tebessi University - Tébessa -
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of English Language and Literature

Resurrecting the Holy Land through Literature:

Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* and Radwa Ashour's *The Woman from Tantoura* as Case Studies

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Literature and Civilisation

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2024/2025

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our supervisor, Mrs. Amina Harrach, for her guidance, support, and her constructive feedback to complete this humble research.

We are deeply thankful for Dr. Ghazouane Arslane, Dr. Hiyem Cheurfa, Mrs. Kalthoum Ktir and Dr. Salima Ben Abida for their encouragement and help.

We extend our gratitude to Ms. Samira BOUHLEAIS as a jury member for dedicating her time and effort to review our work.

Dedication

I thank Allah, to whom all praise is due

I humbly dedicate this work to the sacred and unforgotten spirits of the *Gazan People* who were martyred under the machinery of war. To the unheard voices beneath the rubble, for the Palestinian hostages behind bars, to Dr. *Hussam Abu Safiya*, to the hungry whose cries of starvation yet are unheard by a complicit world.

To the memory of little soul *Hind Rajab*

Finally, I dedicate this work to my mother, my husband, my sister Sarah whom I thank for their support, I owe this success to you. To my little angels.

HELALI Hanane

Dedication

First and foremost, this work is dedicated to every Palestinian soul. To every woman who lost her family, to every girl whose dreams were stolen, to every bride who lost her beloved and never wore her white dress, to every baby girl who looked for a doll. Your voices are heard, your lives matter, your presence is eternal, and your souls are roaming within our heartbeats.

Palestine will be free, we will pray in Al-Aqsa Mosque, we will taste the pure olive oil, We will wear Al- Kufiyyah, and sing Fairuz's Zahret al-Mada'in.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my precious parents A. R, to my sisters and brothers, and my little nephews and nieces.

And to the one who held on through it all, ME.

BENDIB Romaissa

Abstract

This dissertation examines the representation of the Palestinian land in contemporary Palestinian-themed fiction, focusing on Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) and Radwa Ashour's *The Woman from Tantoura* (2010). In doing so, the research deconstructs the entrenched Zionist ideology that claimed the Holy Land was empty and addresses the broader historical context of Palestine. Through a close reading of the narratives, the research explores how the legacy of the land is portrayed in both works. Drawing on the perspectives of postcolonial theory, postcolonial ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and postcolonial feminism, the study investigates how the Palestinian land functions both as a witness to colonial violence and as a symbol of ancestral existence before and after Al-Nakba in 1948. Additionally, it considers how female agency emerges through reciprocal relationships with place and memory. It also highlights women's conditions during war, particularly experiences of sexual violence. By situating these novels within broader ecological and postcolonial feminist frameworks, the study sheds light on how the intersecting oppressions of colonial powers, war, and patriarchy are resisted through storytelling. Moreover, the research contributes to the growing recognition of contemporary women's fiction in shaping literary discussions around war. Ultimately, this dissertation reveals how these works give voice to both collective and personal loss by engaging with the land as a living archive of Palestinian history. It also addresses how literature defends Palestine through aesthetic acts of resurrection and narrative reclamation.

Keywords: Palestine, Land, Zionist, Al Nakba, Susan Abulhawa, Radwa Ashour, Postcolonial, Postcolonial ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Postcolonial feminism, resurrection.

Résumé

Cette recherche explore la représentation de la terre palestinienne dans deux œuvres de fiction contemporaine ayant pour thème Palestine, en mettant l'accent sur *Les Matins de Jènine* (2010) de Susan Abulhawa et *La Femme de Tantoura* (2010) de Radwa Ashour. Cette étude déconstruit l'idéologie sioniste ancrée, selon laquelle la Terre Sacrée était « inhabitée » et remet en cause cette affirmation en l'inscrivant dans le contexte historique élargi de la Palestine. Par une lecture approfondie des romans, la recherche explore comment l'héritage de la terre est représenté dans les deux récits. S'appuyant sur les perspectives de la théorie postcoloniale, l'écocritique postcoloniale, l'écoféminisme et le féminisme postcolonial, cette étude analyse comment la terre palestinienne se manifeste à la fois comme témoin de la violence coloniale et comme symbole de l'existence ancestrale avant et après Al-Nakba de 1948. De plus, elle examine la façon dont l'agence féminine se révèle à travers les relations réciproques entre lieu et mémoire. Par ailleurs, elle met en lumière les conditions des femmes en contexte de guerre, notamment en ce qui concerne la violence sexuelle. En situant ces romans dans une perspective écologique et féministe postcoloniale plus large, l'étude met en lumière la résistance aux oppressions croisée du pouvoir colonial, de la guerre et du patriarcat par le biais de la narration. Elle contribue aussi à la reconnaissance croissante de la littérature féminine contemporaine dans les débats académiques sur la guerre. Elle montre comment ces œuvres donnent voix à la fois à la perte collective et à la perte personnelle, en engageant la terre comme une archive vivante de l'histoire. Elle montre aussi comment la littérature défend la Palestine à travers des actes esthétiques de résurrection et de réappropriation narrative

Mots clés : Palestine, Terre, Sioniste, Nakba, Susan Abulhawa, Radwa Ashour, postcolonialisme, écocritique postcoloniale, écoféminisme, féminisme postcolonial.

الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث تجسيد الأرض الفلسطينية في الرواية المعاصرة التي تتمحور حول القضية الفلسطينية، من خلال دراسة الروايتين "بينما ينام العالم" (2010) لسوزان أبو الهوى"الطنطورية" (2010) لرضوى عاشور. يهدف هذا البحث الى تفكيك الأيديولوجية الصهيونية التي تدَعي ان الأرض المقدسة أرض بلا شعب من خلال تسليط الضوء على التاريخ الفلسطيني. يعتمد هذا البحث على قراءة تحليلية معمقة للعملين الادبيين، بهدف الكشف عن كيفية تمثيل إرث الأرض فيهما. وتستند الدراسة إلى إطار نظري يشمل النقد ما بعد الكولونيالي، النقد الايكولوجي ما بعد الكولونيالي، النسوية البيئية، والنسوية ما بعد الكولونيالية، لفحص كيفية تَجلِّي الأرض الفلسطينية كشاهد على العنف الاستعماري، ورمزاً لوجود الأجداد قبل وبعد النكبة عام 1948. كما يتطرق البحث لفعالية المرأة من خلال علاقتها المتبادلة بالأرض وذاكرتها، بالإضافة إلى إبراز وضعية النساء في ظلّ الحرب، لا سيما العنف الجنسي. ومن خلال توظيف النظريات السابقة، تكشف الدراسة ماهية تداخل أنظمة القمع المتمثلة في الاستعمار، والحرب، والهيمنة الذكورية، وكيف تتم مواجهتها عبر السرد الأدبي. تساهم هذه الدراسة في إثراء الاهتمام بأدب النساء، ودوره في بَلورةِ النقاشات الأدبية حول قضايا الحرب. وأخيرا توضح الدراسة كيف تُعبِّر هاتان الروايتان عن الفقدان الجماعي والفردي من خلال تمثيل الأرض كأرشيف حي للتاريخ الفلسطيني، ودور الأدب في مقاومة محاولات الطمس والنسيان مستعملا تقنيات جمالية تسترجع التاريخ وتحيي الذاكرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: فلسطين، الأرض، الصهيونية، النكبة، سوزان أبو الهوى، رضوى عاشور، ما بعد الكولونيالية، البيئية الاستعمارية، البيئية النسوية، النسوية ما بعد الاستعمارية، الإحياء.

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Introduction

For the past 75 years, up to the present day, Palestine has endured ongoing oppression, cruel genocide, and land confiscation, practices exercised by the Israeli occupation. Indeed, the Zionists, supported by the West, have deliberately obliterated Palestinian history and cultural memory, sought to take over their land using military force, and justified their actions not only through media and the politics of dispossession but also through art, particularly literature.

Ghassan Kanafany, Fadwa Tuqan, and other transnational postcolonial writers and activists who support the Palestinian cause such as Elias Khoury, Noam Chomsky, and Eduardo Galeano committed to challenging the Western master narratives, which among the most extensive versions, instrumentalize the mythology of the "Chosen people of God" as the inheritors of the Holy Land. This belief, shaped by the biblical perspective, was echoed in the words of Herzl, which are still repeated by Zionists, "We shall take what is given to us," disseminating the mythical slogan of an "empty land," as in Golda Meir's infamous discourse that the Zionists did not expel Palestinian people because they did not exist in the first place.

This narrative is rooted in the complex labyrinth of the Palestinian struggle to reclaim their land, which lies at the heart of their dilemma. The ongoing process of forced displacement began with the dispossession of the land during the British Mandate, and was followed by the decision of the United Nations to divide the Holy Land. These acts paved the way for Zionists to proceed with the theft of Palestinian territory.

For the indigenous people, the land is not merely a geographical location; it is a spiritual and physical interconnection reflected in deep-rooted reverence. The loss of land and forceful

removal might cause various psychological, sociocultural, and economic issues for those forcibly displaced, including a sense of loss and a feeling of alienation.

In this regard, the land stands as a symbol of continuity, heritage, and identity. Literature has served to convey this existential and emotional interconnection between land and people. Its role lies in exploring how the land shapes memory, culture, and resistance. In postcolonial literature, it becomes a tool to uncover colonization, dispossession, memory, and the longing for a lost land.

Accordingly, numerous postcolonial writers have explored the theme of land in their literary works, portraying its deep historical and cultural significance and using it as an immortal symbol to resist false narratives. These include Chinua Achebe, Samih al-Qasim, Radwa Ashour, Susan Abulhawa, and others.

Amidst this grim reality of displacement, cultural suppression, and the struggle for decolonization, a unique body of literature emerged, Adab al-Nakba, which not only documents the bloody history of 1948, but also serves as a means of resistance, memory, and the reclamation of self-determination. Within this tradition, both Palestinian and Arab writers have devoted their pens to advocating for the Palestinian cause.

In the same vein, the present dissertation examines two postcolonial novels, *Mornings in Jenin* and *The Woman from Tantoura* by Susan Abulhawa and Radwa Ashour, respectively.

Susan Abulhawa (1970-) is a Palestinian American writer and human rights activist. She was born in the refugee camp of At-Tur in Jerusalem during 1967. At the age of thirteen, she was sent to North Carolina, and received knowledge in United States. She majored in Biology and completed a Master's degree in Neuroscience. Later, she turned to journalism and fiction.

Mornings in Jenin (2010), was her debut novel, Bloomsbury republished the novel in United States, and it was originally published in 2006 as *The Scar of David*.

The novel tells the story of the protagonist Amal Abulheja who was born in the refugee camp of Jenin and experienced the war turmoil. Years passed and Amal finds solace in her education which later affected her life as she moved to United States to complete her studies. After years, Amal returned to Lebanon, where she suffers devastating losses during the 1982 Lebanon war, in Sabra and Shatila massacre, where she loses the rest of her family, her brother Yousef, his wife and her beloved husband Majid. After the massive loss, she returned to America where she had her newborn daughter Sara. The novel ended with Amal returning to Jenin in 2002 where she met a tragic end, and was killed while protecting Sara during an Zionist invasion. The author reflects the collective experience of war, loss, displacement, and death through the story of Amal. Additionally, throughout the story Abulhawa integrates realistic historical events and some of the Arab figures. Crucially, in the author's note at the end of the novel, she states that Edward Said influenced her in making the book, by saying that Palestinian narrative was lacking in literature.

Radwa Ashour (1946–2014) was a renowned Egyptian writer, academic, and literary critic. She studied English literature at Cairo University; then she earned her PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Massachusetts. She left behind a rich body of work that reflected her deep engagement with questions of identity, justice, and resistance. The *Woman from Tantoura* (2010) was Ashour's last novel. It is a historical narrative named after the Palestinian coastal village of Tantura, which was wiped out by Zionist gangs. It follows Ruqayya, a young Palestinian girl of thirteen years old, who survives a massacre and witnesses the killing of her father and siblings. The novel tells her story of forced displacement from 1947 to 2000, as

she is displaced along with her mother Umm Sadiq through places like Damascus, Sidon, and Shatila. She gets married at fifteen, and then loses her husband in the Sabra and Shatila massacres.

Through Ruqqaya's memories, the novelist sheds light on the suffering of Palestinians, the betrayal of Arab leaders, and the failure of the Palestinian Liberation Organization to protect the lives of Palestinian refugees. She mentions real historical Palestinian figures, such as Naji al-Ali, a Palestinian cartoon artist, who inspired the characters. Ruqayya holds a deep love for Tantoura, which she knows she shall never go back to. At the end, her son Hasan encourages her to write her memoirs to preserve the memory of their people.

The significance of the study lies in its attempt to contribute to the discourse of resistance, to better understand the influence of literature in recalling and preserving Palestine as a land inherently belongs to Palestinians. It underlines Palestinians, It underlines Palestinians' assertion of their cultural geographical, and historical belonging, as well as narrating their experiences and struggles from 1948 till today.

Documentaries, fiction, poems, storytelling, oral history, and a vast array of activities have been and are being written as responses to the forced depopulation of the Palestinian people. A great deal of historical and creative literature has been produced that "revive" the destroyed Palestinian territory to face the systematic distortions, ethnic cleansing, and eradication of the Palestinian presence in the land.

However, it lacks specific examples of literary works that illustrate how Nakba literature, history, and memory serve as powerful tools to preserve culture and resist colonial discourse. It is well-known that literature is mainly imaginary and fictional; however, it bears factual essence

when it comes to depicting reality, experiences, and struggles. In the context of the land and environment, literature creates a sensational spirit that makes the reader live in the described space, especially in crises and conflict as in Palestine.

While existing studies on Palestinian literature often focus on themes of exile, identity, and displacement and provide insightful analysis using psychoanalysis, feminism, and postcolonial perspectives, literary studies frequently neglect the symbolic importance of narrating the land and its depiction by both national diasporic Palestinian writers and non-Palestinian ones.

This raises the question of how the land itself functions as a central theme and motif, which contributes to presenting a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural significance of the land that needs to be studied.

Thus, this study aims to explore the representation of the land in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* and Radwa Ashour's *The Woman from Tantoura*. It seeks to show how literature serves as a tool for resisting colonial misrepresentations and contributes to reclaiming indigenous identity and the right to exist in their territories, with an emphasis on rootedness.

The land has been the centre of focus in every war and colonization context, notably in politics and the military. However, war literature, particularly under a postcolonial framework, directs attention to such contexts by highlighting resistance, identity, and the struggles of colonized people.

In the case of Palestinian narratives, land is not merely a matter of geography, trees, or stones; it is a repository of the Palestinian soul, culture, and history. Notable writers, originally Palestinians and from various nationalities, have beautifully and painfully depicted the Holy Land in their works of literature.

Correspondingly, this literature review presents the current understanding of the intersection between Palestinian land, its preservation, displacement, and identity in the key works *Mornings in Jenin* by Susan Abulhawa and *The Woman from Tantoura* by Radwa Ashour. It also situates it within broader postcolonial frameworks, to highlight the gap that this research seeks to address.

In “The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory", Nur Masalha points out the role of the Nakba literature in challenging Zionist narratives. Whether in exile or within Palestinian borders, Nakba literature has been engaged in confronting Zionist discourse.

Furthermore, in his article “History Buried Alive: Resisting Amnesia and Reclaiming Native Palestinian Ecology in the Works of Susan Abulhawa” (2023), Nasooha explores how Susan Abulhawa’s works resist historical erasure and retrieve the ecological and cultural heritage of native Palestinians. The article discusses the depiction of the land and its ecological importance, which is described in Abulhawa’s works as *Mornings In Jenin*, by focusing on the village of Jenin, olive trees, and the sense of rootedness towards the land in characters' souls as well as their behavior, as it is depicted in Yahya's decisions to return to his field under the hazard and brutality of the Zionist occupation. However, the analysis of Yahya seems narrow. It focuses only on his character without considering experiences of other characters such as Haj Salem, Basima, Darwish, and their interconnection with the land and displacement.

In her book *Contemporary Arab Women's Life Writing and the Politics of Resistance* (2023), Hiyem Cheurfa states that Radwa Ashour was an advocate for Palestinian history and resistance, and her commitment is influenced by her husband, the Palestinian writer Mourid Barghouti and their son, the Poet Tamim Barghouti. Her novel *The Woman from Tantoura*

reflects her concern with the Palestinian loss of the land. When Mourid was exiled from his motherland to Egypt, Ashour experienced and narrated the violent historical events such as the 1982 massacres of Sabra and Shatila in her autobiographical work Specters (79-80). Hence, the traces of displacement experience also prevails *The Woman from Tantoura* through the narrative of Ruqayya. This reveals that Ashour offers a personal and political reflection on Palestinian suffering and resilience.

In "The Impact of Traumatic Experiences on Identity formation in Radwa Ashour's *The Woman from Tantoura*", Ali Hussein Najm and MdSajidul Islam stress the events of 1948, and their influence on Palestinians, by focusing on themes such as: trauma and preservation of culture that Ashour addressed in her novel. Additionally, they explain how she portrays Ruqqaya, and how she transforms her personal experience to a collective one, in order to reflect the way memory becomes a source of resilience and how it shapes one's identity. The analysis focused mainly on traumatic experience, the role of cultural preservation and shared souvenirs, representation of cultural symbols such as the land, and exile could provide a better understanding of the dynamics of identity formation.

As Lenka Flipova contends in her book *Ecocriticism and the Sense of Place*, imaginative writing, such as the novel, offers spaces through which we can engage in and experience imagined realities. Literature possesses a distinctive ability to help us perceive and discover places in innovative ways by capturing what makes each space unique and meaningful. This perspective shows to what extent the land is necessary and preferred to be narrated by writers of war literature, such as Susan Abulhawa and Radwa Ashour.

These previous studies did not fully cover the theme of the land and how it is narrated, and by whom. For this reason this study attempts to address the depiction of the Holy Land in both novels under study showcasing a multiple dimensions of postcolonialism.

This research relies on close reading of the two novels focused on the Palestinian experience. It draws on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that blends postcolonial theory, ecocriticism, and ecofeminism. Initially, it examines themes of settler-colonial discourse, mass uprooting, and identity through a postcolonial perspective. Using postcolonial ecocritical theory, the research explores themes of interconnectedness, Palestinian indigeneity, and, most significantly, the representation of the land as both a witness to colonial violence and a repository of ancestral memory. Secondly, through an ecofeminist approach, the study investigates the symbolic and material bonds between women and the land. Then, through postcolonial feminist lens it studies the impact of war and sexual violence on female characters, and the function of storytelling as a way of resisting memoricide.

In this context, the current study aims to analyze how Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* mirrors aspects of the Holy Land's ecology and represents women as preservers of environment and cultural identity, while resisting colonialism. It also examines how Radwa Ashour's *The Woman from Tantoura* resurrects Palestinian land and patrimony by defying colonial erasure, and sheds the light on the layered struggle of Palestinian woman as she navigates: colonial objectifation and patriarchal barriers.

Accordingly, this dissertation is guided by following research questions:

1-In what ways does Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* reveals aspects of Palestine ecology through narration and symbolism, while resisting settler colonial annihilation?

2-How does Aboulhawa portray the dual struggle faced by Palestinian woman under colonial oppression and patriarchal structures?

3- How does Radwa Ashour's *The Woman from Tantoura* resurrect the Palestinian Land and patrimony, while subverting colonial erasure?

4- In what ways Ashour mirrors the female figure as a preserver of ecology and cultural identity?

This dissertation is divided into three main chapters. The first one provides a comprehensive historical and theoretical background. It will shed light on the 1948 Nakba, centering on the mass displacement, confiscation of land and erasure, drawing attention to the Zionist ideology of the "empty land". It traces the Palestinian history from the Ottoman rule to the British Mandate, bringing to the front its cultural richness and heritage. Finally, this chapter will address the ongoing struggle in Gaza. It will present essential perspectives about postcolonialism, Postcolonial ecocriticism, ecofeminism and postcolonial feminism as theoretical lenses for analyzing the two novels under study.

The first analytical chapter explores the theme of land in *Mornings in Jenin* by Susan Abulhawa and its representation as a site of identity. It discusses life during pre-Nakba in Ein Hod, the first setting portrayed in the novel, memory related to it, and rituals like olive harvest using postcolonial ecocriticism. It also analyzes the literary work through multiple dimensions: Ecofeminism by exploring the deep relationship between female characters and the elements of the land, then postcolonial feminism to expose the other side of being a woman, focusing on sexual and domestic violence.

Similarly, the second chapter explores *The Woman from Tantoura* through postcolonial and postcolonial ecocritical lenses, and it analyzes the relationship between women and the land. It delves into Ruqqaya's connection to nature, and how gardening and memory become means of survival in exile. It also brings in front the struggle of Palestinian women. Through ecofeminist reading, the chapter shows how the female body and land are both sites of violation and resilience.

Ultimately, this research is not without limitations. It is constricted by time, space, and lack of access to some sources, and relevant data that might affect the study. Also the sensitivity of Palestinian case, thus, may lead us to fall into subjectivity. Additionally, this theme of Palestinian cause is a complex theme that can be analyzed from multiple perspectives, and it intersects with politics, history, culture and identity.

Chapter One: Historical Context and Theoretical Framework

This chapter is divided into two sections, one providing a historical background and the other a theoretical framework. Firstly, it will introduce a brief historical overview on the Palestinian Nakba (catastrophe) of 1948. It explores the historical and ideological roots of such narratives in the context of Palestine the myth of the "empty land", and its role in shaping Zionist ideology and justifying forced displacement, dispossession, and memoricide, specifically on Tantura and Jenin, then it will extend to the ongoing war, focusing on Gaza (2023-2025). Additionally, it will explore the importance of nature and the land in shaping the history of Palestine, underlining the deep-rooted bond between Palestinian people and the Holy Land, besides the Palestinian identity and culture. Furthermore, it will delineate a comprehensive overview of postcolonial theory, Palestinian literature, and ecocriticism. Moreover, it will theoretically propose the ecofeminism and postcolonial feminism in the context of the Palestinian question, which are essential for our reading of the novels *Mornings in Jenin* by Susan Abulhawa (2010) and *The Woman from Tantoura* by Radwa Ashour (2010).

Section one: Historical Context of the Palestinian Question

1. The History of the Nakba: Dispossession of the Land, and Forced Displacement

Throughout history, colonial powers have relied on powerful myths to legitimize dispossession and erasure. One of these infamous myths is the idea of "a land without a people for a people without a land" (Garfinkle), this narrative, was pointed out by Egyptian scholar Abdel Wahab El-Messiri in his interview on Al Jazeera's Without Borders with Ahmed Mansour, is not exclusive to the Zionist project in Palestine. It has been used to justify the extinction and

dehumanization of indigenous peoples by the Europeans. He compares this myth to colonial discourses in North America and South Africa, where colonizers claimed the land was “empty” or “virgin”. This way was used to ignore the presence of indigenous communities. He also notes that the Puritans used religion ,referring to the New World as “the Promised Land”, to justify and legitimize their settlement on a land that did not belong to them (Al Jazeera, Without Borders, (6:22–6:50)(20:36–20:45)).

Rachid Khalidi, in his seminal work *Palestinian Identity* (2010), explains that the early 1900s saw a powerful Palestinian opposition in response to the expansion of Zionist activity within their land. Notably between 1908 and 1914, a period that there was more political freedom and space for expression. The emergence of influential newspapers like *al-Karmil*, helped raise awareness. During this time, many Arabs began to grasp that Zionism was not just about a temporary migration project, but also as a movement seeking to build a Jewish state in place of Palestine. This realization became more obvious in rural areas, where land sales and the replacement of Arab laborers with Jewish workers especially among the *fellahin* (farmers), who were the first to suffer from displacement. Although the most visible reaction came from the urban educated classes through the press and politics, their fears were connected to what the *fellahin* were already experiencing on the ground (94).

This was the early wave of resistance, rooted in both urban political awareness and rural dispossession, and showed the deep historical interconnectedness of Palestinians to their land by the early 7th century, As Edward Said noted, in *Question of Palestine* (1992), that Palestine, known as *Filastin*, had emerged as an Islamic territory with a predominantly Arab population (51). For centuries, it was largely inhabited by Arabs, even as Jewish immigrants began arriving by the late 19th century. Palestine was a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, composed of

Muslims, Christians, and Druze, who had lived there for generations. These communities all spoke Arabic and were deeply rooted in the land (52). He adds that "The Palestinian Arabs were on the land", emphasizing that Arabs constituted the overwhelming majority, while Jews represented "only less than 10 percent" of the population (49).

The Holy Land, one of the most historically, religiously, and geopolitically contested territories in the world, continues to be at the heart of ongoing debates surrounding: Who are the rightful owners of the land .To better understand the roots of this complex case, it is essential to trace its historical trajectory. For epochs, Palestine witnessed successive waves of civilizations and fierce conflicts, such as the battles between Salah al-Din and the Crusaders in the 12th century, the Ottoman rule, and later, the British Mandate. Amid these events, the Zionist and western media has often falsified the Palestinian narrative. Therefore, this section presents a historical overview in order to contextualize the selected novels. This needs a look back into the period preceding the year of 1948.

Palestine was an integral part of the Ottoman Empire for almost four centuries; it was vibrant in various sectors. Renowned for its significant location in the Middle East and its historically rich cities: Hebron, Haifa, Jerusalem, Bethlehem (the birthplace of Christ), the region was celebrated for its natural beauty, a fertile land Stretching from the orange groves of Jaffa to Baysan's palm trees and the coast of Gaza. Beyond its fertile landscape, Palestine flourished as a heart of cultural activities. During Ottoman rule, authorities invested in education, establishing public and foreign schools. Literary salons attracted prominent Arab intellectuals like Tewfik Alhakim, while theatres echoed with the songs of Umm Kulthum and Mohamed Abdalwahab. The rise of journalism was marked by the publication of 32 newspapers and periodicals (Khalidi 25-26), and the voice of Ibrahim Tuqan resonated through national radio, symbolizing an era of

cultural and artistic vitality. However, during this period, a plan was being devised to gradually dispossess Palestinians of their land and pave the way for founding a Jewish state. This conspiracy, as revealed in the first episode of Al-Nakba, a documentary released by Al Jazeera on May 9, 2014, traces its origins to Napoleon Bonaparte, who first proposed creating a homeland for the Jews. Although Napoleon's plan was not realized, his colonial ambitions were revived through Theodor Herzl's project and the foundation of Zionism (Al Jazeera Documentary) (1:28-5:39). The Balfour Declaration of 1917 further supported this project, that initiated the purchase of Arab lands, such as "the fertile MarjIbn 'Amer and Huleh valleys" (Khalidi 34), and the forced displacement of indigenous Palestinians, then substituting them by bringing Jews from across the world particularly from Eastern Europe. All of this plotted and unfolded with the support of Britain.

Like other imperialist colonial powers, for 132 years, French colonialism committed genocide in Algeria, yet continues to deny its responsibility for war crimes against the Algerian people. To this day, France maintains control over the archival records and still hides important documents about its crimes in Algeria, which shed light on this dark chapter in Algeria's history. in his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2011), Ilan Pappé mentions, Just as the Zionists have done and continue to do, not only by suppressing documents that record the history of Palestine but also by manipulating historical facts and "distortion (278) of information. Hedenotes how Yitzhak Chizik, who served as a military governor in Jaffa during 1948, downplayed his reports especially those documenting the abuse of Palestinians, which were censored, hiding the full extent of the violence (239).

Zionist forces, backed by Western armies and artillery, sought to depopulate and cleanse the Holy Land of its native people, replacing them with Jews. This process involved genocide,

forced displacement, and the appropriation of Palestinian territory. According to the United Nations, The Nakba, which means "catastrophe" in Arabic, it refers to the forced expulsion and deprivation of Palestinians of their lands during Arab-Israeli War that took place in 1948 al Nakba. As Sanbar notes, it led to the,

> [Disappearance of Palestine and its people] from maps and dictionaries… 'The Palestinian people does not exist', said the new masters, and henceforth the Palestinians would be referred to by general, conveniently vague terms, as either 'refugees', or in the case of a small minority that had managed to escape the generalized expulsion, 'Israeli Arabs'. A long absence was beginning (4).

A nation and its citizens vanished from dictionaries and maps that year. The new masters declared that "the Palestinian people do not exist". From now on, the Palestinians would be referred to by broad, deliberately ambiguous terms as either "refugees" or, in the event of a tiny minority that had escaped the widespread expulsion, "Israeli Arabs". A protracted absence was starting (qtd. in Masalha 4).

As it is noted above, Zionist policies did not just expel Palestinians off their homeland, they also erased their identity. Palestinians were labeled as "refugees" or "Israeli Arabs." This was a political move to make it seem like Palestinians did not exist as a people.

The crimes and ethnic cleansing carried out by the Zionists began long before 1948; they took place during the British Mandate, with Britain facilitating armed groups like the Haganah, which committed unprecedented crimes. The declaration of Israeli entity as a state was not an overnight event but the result of a deliberate and systematic process. It began with the gradual influx of Jews and the purchase of lands from absentee the bourgeois landowners, followed by

waves of terror, mass killings, and forced displacement. Due to the scarcity of documentation, it is difficult to determine the number of massacres with precision. The overall aim was clear: The idea was to remove Palestinians step by step and replace them with Jewish settlers. This was a slow but organized operation of taking over the land.

The Zionists has achieved their objective in this unjust war through, "[t]he uprooting of the Palestinians and the dismemberment and de- Arabisation of historic Palestine. In the course of the 1948 war and immediate post-Nakba period the name Palestine was wiped off the map" (Masalha12).

Illan Pappé stated that by the end of the 1948 war, 800,000 Palestinians had been expelled, 531 villages destroyed, and eleven urban neighborhoods emptied. The Nakba not only involved the forced displacement of the native population, but also the annihilation of entire villages and the erasure of their cultural and social achievements. Despite international efforts, justice has remained elusive. As he observes, "The Zionist ideology of ethnic supremacy and the 'peace process' stem from Israel's continuing denial of the Nakba; in the latter, we see the lack of international will to bring justice to the region" (*Ethnic cleansing*16, 186, 269).Although Boling Gail in his book, *The 1948 Palestinian Refugees and the Individual Right of Return: An International Law Analysis*, states that the international law clearly guarantees the right of return to all people to their "homes of origin" regardless of the reasons behind their displacement, Israel has denied this right to Palestinians (1). This shows a double standard: laws are not applied when it comes to the oppressed.

The international community continues to turn a blind eye to the establishment of justice. The 1948 war is presented as a disaster that disrupted the continuity between the past and the

present for Palestinians. Since that catastrophe being Palestinian is described as living in a utopia, a non-place (Said, *The Question* 183,157)

The massacre of Tantura, a village wiped and bodies buried in a mass grave and buried beneath an area that is now a parking lot (McKernan), exemplifies this ongoing erasure. Israeli researcher Teddy Katz uncovered heinous crimes through his MA dissertation in 1990, interviewing former soldiers of the Alexandroni Brigade who confessed to atrocities. However, Teddy was punished, the university cancelled his thesis, and the veterans, who had participated in the interviews later, changed their testimonies and Brigade took him to court (Pappé 167). Despite attempts to silence the truth, it, like what the IDF have done with the Tantura martyrs, it comes again and once more to light like the sun. . Once again, that time their crimes have been brought back to the forefront in a documentary directed by the Israeli filmmaker Alon Schwarz, which exposed the crimes committed in Tantura. One soldier chillingly admitted, “I didn’t count I wouldn’t be able to know, (laughing) I had 250 bullets in my gun, (laughing) and I shot from it and killed everyone I can’t count.” Another confessed, shockingly that they were perpetrating rape: “We put Palestinians in cages and killed them. One of us raped a 16 year old girl; some of us ran after them with flamethrowers and burned them” (Tantura 00:00:00–00:50:00).

Tantura, one of the oldest coastal Palestinian villages, was home to over 1,500 inhabitants who relied on agriculture and fishing. When the villagers refused to surrender, Zionist forces attacked on May 11, 1948, surrounding the village, separating men from women and children, and expelling them to Furaydis. The men, aged 10 to 50, were murdered and buried in a mass grave (Pappé164).

1.1 Post-Nakba Palestine

The Nakba had profound and lasting consequences for Palestinians. The aftermath of this catastrophe resulted in the forced displacement of more than 720,000 Palestinians, who became refugees The newly established Israeli state occupied 78% of the formerly mandated territory of Palestine Consequently, Palestinians became a minority (Khalidi, *One hundreds* 67,68,93) in their own land. This gave rise to an even more complex problem, "it was forbidden to mention the word 'Palestine' " (Said, *The Question* 25). Moreover, the refugee crisis and the right of return for Palestinians who were forcibly expelled from their homeland became central issues, shaping the Palestinian diaspora in Arabic *Arab Shitat* (khalidi 90).

The Israeli Entity is a state born out of historical injustice. Since the very beginning of the statehood plan, Arabs have continuously resisted the occupation project, particularly after the establishment of the PLO, which was supported by even the Palestinians inside Israel. Their resistance, demonstrated by the Land Day, *Yom al-Ard*, protests on March 30, 1976, symbolizes a consistent struggle (Said 198).

This struggle continued and grew stronger over time. Four decades after the disaster of 1948 and the expulsion, a powerful popular uprising began in late 1987, known as the *Stone Intifada*. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, across Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza strip joined the revolt, call for their liberation. The cost was heavy, 120,000 Palestinians were killed, wounded, or jailed, yet the revolt reflected not only political resistance, but also a human need to reclaim existence and identity (Aljazeera documentary). As Said reminds us, being a Palestinian is to exist in a utopia, a "non-place". It is like, transforming their dilemma from merely a political fight into an existential one (*The Question*,157).

The initial phase of the Intifada was driven by ordinary civilians who took to the streets to express their anger and frustration through demonstrations, throwing stones and Molotov cocktails. They organized widespread strikes, while a hidden leadership operated behind the

scenes to coordinate and guide the movement (Grinberg, *The Intifada* 6). This grassroots resistance, which remained largely unarmed, saw participation from all classes of society: for example, they participate in disobedience, like boycotting Israeli products, refusing to work in Israeli settlements, and not paying taxes. Unfortunately, this "Polite" Resistance to Occupation was faced by repression and it was the case of a martyr–woman-, called Shaden Abu Hajla, who participated in non-violent resistance was sadly killed by an Israeli soldier as she sat peacefully with her family in a park (Allen, Palestinians Debate)

The second Intifada, or al-Aqsa Intifada, started on September 28, 2000, when Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East Jerusalem along with over 1,000 armed police and soldiers. That provoked Palestinians and led to waves of protests and resistance spreading across the Palestinian territories (Adam, *Palestinian Intifada*).

While the first Intifada laid the groundwork for local resistance and solidarity, the second Intifada added a new dimension to the Palestinian struggle. However, Israel's leadership is still driven by the greed for land, water resources, and power. In this view, the 1948 war was only the beginning of a larger, long-term plan "Sharon, at the time was Israel's prime minister, described the current war as "the second half of 1948" By this analogy, He meant that « that the work of ethnic cleansing was only half completed in 1948, leaving too much land to Palestinians (Reinhart, *Israel/Palestine*5–6)

The Intifada gradually came to represent more than just a rebellion; it established a blueprint for Palestinian political and social life, marked by nonviolence, creativity, bravery, and profound insight (Said, *The Question* 31). Additionally, Khalidi demonstrates, in his book *The Iron Cage* the way the Intifada helped in transforming the major part of the Muslim Brotherhood. It witnessed the birth of the Islamic movement Hamas, which itself has played a major role in the resistance to the Israeli entity (25).

The Intifada quickly became an inspiring movement for democratic protests worldwide. Despite Zionist violence and restrictions, Palestinians responded with creativity and resilience, finding ways to sustain daily life and community functions. (*The Question*32)

Israeli entity used the Intifada as an excuse to impose more restrictions on Palestinians by building the separation wall. That further takes over Palestinians' lands and block their access to their farms. Therefore, Palestinian displacement primarily took place during the 1948 and it was fuelled by series of military hostilities, and brutality.

Based on UNRWA's reports, Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, depend on the humanitarian aids. Therefore, the organization provides education, healthcare, relief, social services, camp infrastructure, and emergency assistance to Palestine refugees.

Correspondingly, Benny Morris highlights on his book, *The birth the Palestinian refugee*, that the United Nations recorded approximately four million refugees, and according to Palestinian authorities, the number reached five million. 1.5 million Refugees live in camps in cities inside Palestine like Nablus, Gaza, Ramallah, and in other countries such as Beirut, Damascus, Amman... He adds that the exodus occurred in several waves, each with different causes and characteristics (24, 621). this tragedy persisted and intensified with the displacement of over 400,000 Palestinians during the 1967 Naksa. (Ahmed) This displacement was a part of an ongoing process, as Israel continued its policies of forced expulsion and land appropriation, settlement expansion, and the separation wall have driven further displacement, and to create a refugee crisis.

The forced displacement of Palestinians has been exacerbated by the separation wall, which serves as a tool to control them. In addition to this, Zionist policies of land confiscation and settlement expansion have further restricted Palestinians, depriving them of independence in work, education, and even their food choices, ultimately forcing them to rely on humanitarian

aid. As a result, they have been placed in an “iron cage”. The Israeli entity, an ethnocratic (Yiftachel), state, has implemented a creeping apartheid (Yiftachel), system. Ironically, Western media label it as a democracy, yet it has rendered the Palestinian people refugees in their own homeland.

1.2. Ongoing Displacement: The Genocide in Gaza

Nowhere is this reality more evident than in Gaza, where Palestinians have been trapped in the world’s largest open-air prison since 2007. Under a joint Israeli-Egyptian blockade, they have endured severe restrictions on movement and resources. Since October 7th, they have been subjected to the largest genocide in recent history, as the ongoing policies of control, displacement, and erasure have intensified into a full-scale campaign of annihilation. While the world remains silent, Trump’s actions have further fuelled their suffering.

As of the moment of writing this dissertation, Gaza continues to endure a systematic genocide. According to Reuters, the reported death toll has surpassed 50,000. However, the exact number remains uncertain, as many bodies remain unidentified, and countless others still lie beneath the rubble (Reuters).

The escalation began on October 7th, when Hamas attacked occupied areas in an operation called “Toufan Al-Aqsa” and captured Zionist settlers as hostages. In response, Israel launched a brutal war on the Gaza Strip, utilizing all available weapons, including those prohibited under international law.

Gaza is now experiencing what many refer to as the second Nakba (Nashed and Humaid). However, unlike the first, this time, social media and technological advancements have allowed the world to witness it in real time. This ongoing tragedy, marked by the largest forced displacement and the genocide of a defenceless people, is being carried out by the Israeli entity with the support of the United States and its European allies. Meanwhile, the world watches in

silence including those who should stand by them. This is confirmed by a report from the United Nations, which states that,

> [At] least 1.9 million people – or about 90 per cent of the population – across the Gaza Strip were displaced during the war. Many have been displaced repeatedly, some 10 times or more. Since the start of the ceasefire, new population movements have been reported, with people trying to return to whatever is left of their homes. Most homes (92 per cent according to the Ministry of Public Works and Housing (MoPWH) have been either severely damaged or destroyed. Since the recent evacuation orders were issued, it is likely that more people will be forced to flee in search of safety.

1.3. Land, Identity Crisis and Cultural Alienation

More than 250,000 Palestinians were displaced during the 1948 war and sought refuge in Gaza that doubled the original population of 80,000. Today, refugees make up more than 70 percent of Gaza's population, with over half being children, making it one of the most densely populated areas in the world. 1.8 million People are confined to a narrow area, and one of the most overcrowded regions on earth. From 1967 until Sharon redeployed Zionist forces inside it in 2005, Israel imposed a policy of "de-development" on Gaza, depriving Palestinians of their essential economic resources. Forced displacement and losing their homes has caused them an identity crisis and a profound sense of cultural disconnection for Palestinians in Gaza, as they were brutally cut off from their ancestral lands. In addition, the Israeli blockade has made Gazans feel trapped in every way physically, mentally, and emotionally (Finkelstein, *Gaza3*).

Furthermore, Rashid Khalid exposed, in his book *Palestinian Identity*, the dilemma of the Palestinian people regarding the identity crisis in his book and delved deeply into it. The Palestinian can't move anywhere without passing through borders and checkpoints .Moreover six

million Palestinians are treated differently from others carrying travel documents rather than passports face humiliation as they are constantly reminded of their statelessness that creates deep anxiety (1, 2).

The identity crisis is not only faced by Palestinians living inside occupied Palestine but also by Palestinians in the diaspora to the Western countries. They face special interrogations and searches because of their Palestinian identity (4)

The Palestinian people have never achieved their independence, this lack of sovereignty has limited their control over state mechanisms which means they could not decide important things for themselves. They could not shape their identity through key institutions such as education, museums, archaeology, postage stamps, currency, or even the media.

Since numerous Palestinians are refugees, Al-Ju'beh states in the chapter entitled *Palestinian Identity and Cultural Heritage*, "The identity of the refugee was a movable one: kufiyyah, embroidery, traditional songs, dabka, house key, pictures, land registration document, Palestinian passport" (211).

The Palestine Question is not merely political, it is deeply personal. For Palestinians, the struggle is not just about reclaiming land but about reclaiming a sense of belonging, dignity, and the right to self-determination.

1.3.1 Land as a Witness: Resisting Memoricide

Drawing on historical evidence, the British-Palestinian historian NurMasalha asserts in *Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History* (2018) that the toponym(place name) "Palestine" appears in numerous historical materials such as inscriptions, ancient texts, maps, ecclesiastical histories, chronicles, letters, coins, and encyclopaedias, dating back to ancient eras and continuing through the medieval and modern periods. He adds that this toponym acquired official administrative status for over fifteen centuries, from the Byzantine period to the Islamic Middle

Ages (17). These historical facts expose the falsehood of Zionist narratives that seek to erase history, memory, and all traces of Palestine's past.

Historically, Palestine is the land where the Canaanite civilization was born and where the three Abrahamic religions flourished. However, it has long been a land of resistance and suffering for Palestinians. Their deep-rooted connection to the land stems from centuries of farming and cultivation, which created an intimate relationship and a profound sense of belonging and identity (Abdullah; Al-Qasim 2–3) However, Palestine has been always at the heart of conflict especially religious one.

Since 1948, the expansion of the Israeli entity has continued through a series of treaties and military actions that progressively reduced Palestinian territory. This proves that the founding of Israel was rooted in the erasure of the land and its people, a strategy central to the conflict.

The colonial Zionist settlement project, in fact, was planned long before 1948. Lorenzo Veracini, through his book *Israel and Settler Society*, clearly demonstrates the link between the Zionist movement and settler colonialism. He compares it to other settler colonies such as North America, Australia, and South Africa, emphasizing how all relied on the seizure of indigenous lands (6).

Veracini also draws parallels between Zionism and Afrikaner nationalism, particularly in their shared reliance on the myth of “a land without a people”. This myth is contradicted by historical evidence showing a steady increase in the indigenous population. Settler colonialism in both Israel and Australia employed the same strategies: demographic manipulation, land appropriation, and systematic erasure of indigenous narratives (19, 79).

In response to these acts of forced displacement, generations of Palestinians, dispossessed of their lands and homes, have preserved symbolic belongings such as land deeds, passports,

house keys, and olive trees. These items sustain their hope of return (Haq and Stockwell). Additionally, The Palestinian keffiyeh, a heritage and cultural symbol, carries connotations deeply connected to the land, symbolizes the Palestinian culture call for freedom

This is a way of resisting erasure and memoricide used by the Palestinian not merely to pass it on to future generations, but also to show it to the world as testament of his identity and, most importantly, his existence.

To erase Palestinian heritage, Zionists have engaged in toponymic erasure since what they claim to be their day of independence. Arabic place names with deep historical roots have been replaced, such as renaming the West Bank as "Judea and Samaria" (Khalidi14). This renaming campaign is part of a broader strategy to obscure the historical and cultural identity of the Holy Land. Yet, historians have acknowledged that the population of Palestine remained stable from the end of the Neolithic epoch, since the establishment of Mediterranean economy (qtd. in Masalha 2).

To achieve their goals, Israeli authorities have disregarded all limits and embarked on a process of cleansing the land of its native population. According to Al-Ju'beh, they use the desertification of the landscape as a means of control. Familiar Palestinian landscapes, such as orange groves, are destroyed, severing collective memory and a sense of belonging. He notes that after 1967, Palestinians began to actively preserve their tangible cultural heritage as a form of resistance and an affirmation of their identity and connection to the land.

Indeed, the Holy Land has always been a spiritual destination for people of all religions. To this day, it holds sacred sites like monuments (Church of the Holy Sepulchre) mountains (Mount of Olives JabalṬūr), and ancient trees that testify to its Arab identity.

According to Khader, ephemeral objects and documents have a lasting impact on cultural memory. In Palestine, roughly 80,000 to 100,000 families depend on the income from harvesting

olives and producing olive oil—highlighting the cultural and economic significance of the land (Haddad & Al-Tahhan, 2021; Khader).

Section two: Theoretical Framework

1. An Overview of Postcolonial Theory

To begin with, the structure of the term "postcolonialism" requires clarification. As John McLeod denotes in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2010), the non-hyphenated form "Postcolonialism" implies the forms of representation, reading practices, attitudes, and values that encompass both the past and the present. This stands in contrast to the hyphenated form "Post-colonialism", which designates the historical period following colonization or the era of decolonization.

The term "Postcolonialism" garnered attention in academia and literary circles from the 1980s onwards. *Orientalism* (1978), by the Palestinian-American academic and literary critic Edward Said, established itself as a pivotal work that escalated postcolonial thought and propelled the term "Postcolonialism" into critical discourse. Said's work investigates past representations, stereotypes, and the ideological frameworks employed by Western colonial powers towards the Eastern colonized, thereby accentuating colonial discourse. Prominently, *Orientalism* deconstructs the worldview based on a binary opposition between the "Orient", portrayed as inferior, aberrant, weak, primitive, uncivilized, and ignorant—and the "Occident", as Said refers to it, seen as superior, rational, powerful, and civilized. Said devotes profound attention to literature, analysing how Western literary works reinforced this Orientalist discourse. He examines canonical texts by Rudyard Kipling, Gustave Flaubert, and E.M. Forster, thereby establishing a critical foundation for postcolonial theory and introducing key concepts for interpreting postcolonial literature.

Following Edward Said's intellectual path and his contributions to the postcolonial field, the Indian scholar and critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha, considered one of the leading voices in

postcolonial studies, focused on the interaction between colonizer and colonized, particularly their complex relationship and the identity of the colonized. In his influential essay “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” (1984), Bhabha introduces the concepts of “ambivalence” and “mimicry.” He describes ambivalence as the unstable and contradictory nature of colonial authority. The colonial discourse attempts to assert dominance through a so-called "civilizing mission," yet it simultaneously fears the potential empowerment of the colonized. The more the colonizer imposes their culture and values, the more fragile their authority becomes, as the colonized resist and subvert these impositions. Thus, ambivalence creates a paradox: it both enables control and opens a space for resistance. Mimicry, on the other hand, refers to the colonized adopting and imitating the colonizer’s behaviour, language, and customs. However, this imitation is, as Bhabha puts it, “almost the same, but not quite.” This imperfect imitation exposes the artificiality and contradictions of colonial authority and it can serve as a form of subversion. He calls this the “double vision.” Both ambivalence and mimicry offer a nuanced understanding of the dynamics between colonizers and colonized.

Prior to the contributions of Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, the French Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist, thinker, and philosopher, profoundly influenced postcolonial studies and anti-colonial movements. Fanon's book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) is a seminal text that addresses the psychological and cultural consequences of colonialism, especially concerning the identity of Black individuals in colonized societies. This situation, he argues, mirrors that of all oppressed people under occupation. Fanon deeply analyses the colonial relationship and how colonized individuals internalize the norms and ideologies of the colonizer, which leads to feelings of alienation and inferiority. The colonized often aspire to mimic the colonizer’s language, culture, and identity, believing this will grant them acceptance and equality. However, despite adopting the customs of the colonizer, the colonized remain in a submissive and

subordinate position. Fanon calls this imitation a "mask", which creates a fractured identity and alienates the oppressed from their true selves. Additionally, Fanon explores the psychological trauma of colonialism, highlighting the "double consciousness", the internal conflict between native identity and the imposed colonial one.

Fanon does not merely diagnose the problems of colonization; his anti-colonial spirit actively calls for liberation and resistance. *Black Skin, White Masks* lays the groundwork for his later work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1962), written during the Algerian War of Independence. This book functions as a manifesto for decolonization. Fanon addresses the dehumanizing violence of colonial powers and advocates for resistance, autonomy, and the reclamation of dignity. As he asserts: "[...] Decolonization is always a violent event" (1). According to Fanon, colonialism is built on systemic and physical violence, which sustains its power. Thus, he argues, decolonization inevitably involves violent confrontation to dismantle this oppressive system.

Similarly, in his book *The Colonizer and the Colonize*d (1957) (*Portrait du Colonisé précédé du Portrait du Colonisateur*), the Jewish French-Tunisian writer Albert Memmi offers a powerful exploration of colonial dynamics. He outlines the effects of colonialism on the social status of the colonized, economic life, cultural identity, and psychological well-being (4). Memmi emphasizes that the colonized may range from passively accepting colonization, resulting in deeper alienation, to actively resisting the oppressor and reclaiming their identity and culture. As he states: "One can be reconciled to every situation, and the colonized can wait a long time to live. But, regardless of how soon or how violently the colonized rejects his situation, he will one day begin to overthrow his unliveable existence with the whole force of his oppressed personality" (164). However, He also argues that even the struggle for self-determination is shaped by the colonial context: "[…] In the midst of revolt, the colonized continues to think, feel and live against and, therefore, in relation to the colonizer and colonization" (183). This suggests

that, even in resistance, the colonized remains bound to the structures and influence of colonial power.

Other influential thinkers and theorists from postcolonial countries, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Indian), Hamid Dabashi (Iranian-American), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Kenyan), and Salman Rushdie (Indian-British), also critique colonization and its enduring legacies. They advocate for the marginalized and silenced voices, calling for liberation and the right to self-determination. These figures champion the concept of "Writing back" in their works, reclaiming agency and voice for the Global South in response to the dominance of the Global North.

The concept of "Writing back" was crystallized in the seminal *book The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. The book theorizes postcolonial literatures and examines how writers from formerly colonized regions respond to and subvert imperial narratives. A particular focus is given to the language of colonial powers, especially English—and how postcolonial authors resist linguistically. The book introduces two key strategies: "abrogation," the rejection of standardized colonial English, and "appropriation", the reshaping of colonial language to reflect indigenous realities. Postcolonial writers often combine these strategies, refusing the colonial centre's authority while reworking the language to serve their own cultural contexts. A prime example is Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who embodied abrogation by shifting from writing in English to his native Kikuyu in works like *Devil on the Cross* (1980). Before this transition, he had already demonstrated appropriation in his English novels, such as *Petals of Blood* (1977), which reflect Kenyan social and economic realities using local idioms and proverbs.

In his influential work, *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), Ngũgĩ further critiques the cultural and psychological effects of colonial education systems that privileged English over native

languages. He argues for producing literature and art in indigenous languages as a means of reinforcing native identity and resisting cultural erasure.

Ultimately, postcolonial theory has paved the way for viewing the world through the lens of the oppressed, offering a reversed perspective that foregrounds the voices and experiences of marginalized peoples, from Africa to Asia to the Middle East. Colonialism and occupation have profoundly affected, and continue to affect, various regions across the globe. Palestine is one of them confronting Israeli oppression by every possible means. Among those means is literature, which remains a powerful tool of resistance, memory, and identity.

2. Palestine and The postcolonial challenge

Postcolonial studies have historically marginalized the Arab world and Arab literature. This exclusion is due to the Western narratives that more often regarded Arab world countries as instable and under the colonial authority, and terrorism, which has caused a delay in the intellectual engagement with its literary productions. In the introduction of her book *Narrating Postcolonial Nations: Egypt, Algeria, Lebanon, Palestine* (2018), Lindsey Moor states the complexities of including the Arab world in postcolonial studies, despite the fact of the pivotal contributions and engagements of thinkers like Edward Said in the field, Arab intellectuals do not identify with postcolonialism. Moor highlights that the obstacle was historical, especially for countries that associated with colonialism, neo-colonialism, and neo-imperialism, in addition to the geopolitical issues and political biases, as it is the case with Palestine. Criticizing Israel is often interwoven with anti-Semitism, challenging the wills of scholars who wish to engage in postcolonial critique of the Israeli occupation, some other faced professional risks as they addressed the former issue. Subsequently, the colonial partitioning of the Arab World through events like Sykes-Picot Agreement 1916 and the British Mandate 1920-1948 prevails to shape current struggles in Palestine and the Nakba 1948 with the Israeli policies are a direct extending

of colonial legacies. Therefore, the Palestinian case faced deterrent situations to be affiliated with postcolonial studies.

However, the shift happened gradually when Palestine started to gain recognition and explicit support within postcolonial studies due to the global endorsement of the Palestinian struggle. Palestinian literature marked a breakthrough in gaining attention in the West, Palestinian writers, and their attempts to narrate the tragic history of their land, and people transformed the paradigm.

2.1. Repositioning Palestine within Postcolonial Studies

Even though Palestine has a long and important history of colonialism and resistance, it has remained overshadowed in postcolonial studies. This exclusion stems from the complex, unresolved colonial and political condition that challenges standard postcolonial frameworks. Anna Ball and Patrick Williams describe Palestine's existential situation as being, "nowhere geographically, nowhere politically [and] nowhere postcolonially" (qtd. in Moore 164). The quote underscores that Palestine is not only deprived of political recognition and territorial identity, but also of a clear status in postcolonial studies. This positions Palestine in a state of unresolved in-betweenness, especially since it has not undergone a postcolonial transition to independence, nor does it possess recognized legal borders.

In fact, postcolonial studies have not always been approached from a neutral position. As Robert J.C. Young notes in his article "Postcolonial Remains" (2012), postcolonialism "tended to sideline not only the Israel-Palestine conflict, but also the question of Islam and the role of religion in anticolonial struggle more generally" (28). Academic institutions often disregard the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, but the settler-colonial reality on the ground has made it

necessary to approach Palestine through the lens of resistance. Unlike other Arab countries that gained independence, Palestine is still under occupation. Through literature, historical narratives, and activism, Palestinians use their voices to subvert colonial power and reclaim identity and visibility.

Over time, Palestinian cultural and textual productions have gained recognition and increased political urgency. Memoirs such as Edward Said's *Out of Place* (1999) cover his life from 1935 to 1967 in various places, from Jerusalem to Cairo and Lebanon, and later to the United States for academic purposes. He presents himself not as a fixed entity but as someone shaped by displacement and movement. The book explores refugee experiences, exile, and the tension of holding multiple identities: Arab but Christian, Palestinian but Western-educated. In its final pages, Said connects his personal and political journey, linking his individual experience with the collective experiences of the Palestinian people. The Arab-Israeli war of 1967, or al-Naksa, awakened his deep engagement with the political ramifications of exile. Its biased portrayal in the U.S. reshaped his understanding and drove him to reconnect intellectually and politically with Palestine (Moore 168–171)

This deep connection between memory, identity, and resistance affirms that Palestine cannot be analyzed solely through the lens of hybrid identities. According to Young, Palestine represents a different postcolonial narrative that insists on rootedness, land, and return. He argues that "the right of return to sacred or ancestral land… never fitted easily with the postmodern Caribbean celebration of delocalized hybrid identities" (Young 24). The aim of postcolonialism illuminates areas that gained recognition at the national level, but which in significant aspect were absent (23). However, Palestine remains invisible, marginalized by academic and political powers.

In lieu of analyzing Palestine through the conventional postcolonial perspective, a theoretical lens centered on resistance is required, focusing on how Palestinians are challenging and confronting Israeli colonialism, occupation, and displacement. This demarcates Palestine from other Arab contexts within postcolonial studies. By emphasizing resistance, scholars will be able to capture the ongoing struggle for self-determination and explore how Palestinian literature, historical narratives, and activism subvert the colonial powers.

Zionist lobbies work systematically to erase Palestinian history in order to enable the Israeli state to legitimize its existence and continue to assert itself through efforts to silence and erase that what Young reminds us of "the postcolonial is in many ways about… the continuing projection of past conflicts into the experience of the present" (*The Idea of Postcolonialism* 21). This erasure is not only about rewriting the past, it is also about controlling the present and reshaping the future of Palestinians. Their identity and collective memory are held captive by displacement and violence.

For this reason, Palestinian life narratives serve as a powerful response to strategic erasure. They offer personal accounts that resonate with collective experience. These narratives reveal that dislocation, exile, and violence are not isolated incidents, but rather part of a broader historical struggle against colonial brutality that spans years and borders. For exiled Palestinians, Palestine becomes an unstable home, a fractured concept, evoking a sense of the uncanny. Palestinian postcoloniality remains a contested discursive space, where identity, memory, and belonging are continuously challenged and reconfigured.

The growing academic interest in Edward Said's legacy, particularly his writings on the Palestine/Israel issue, has expanded the scope of postcolonial discourse on Palestine. More Palestinian literature is now available in English translation, and Palestinian cultural production

in English, by writers in the diaspora such as Said himself, Susan Abulhawa, Selma Dabbagh, Ghada Karmi, Naomi Shihab Nye, Samir El-Youssef, and Mischa Hiller, or within the occupied territories by figures like Hanan Ashrawi, Raja Shehadeh, and even from Gaza, Refaat Alareer's Gaza Writes Back (2014) have opened up Western academic spaces to deeper discussion about Palestine.

Because of the complexity of the Palestinian cause, Bart Moore-Gilbert argues in Palestine, "Postcolonialism and Pessoptimism" (2012) that the Palestinian struggle complicates traditional postcolonial frameworks due to the ongoing nature of settler-colonial violence. Since its founding, the state of Israel has portrayed itself as a postcolonial entity. Zionism has often been described as a liberation movement for the oppressed Jews against colonialism. Using the Holocaust for political justification, apologists succeeded in convincing much of the world that Israel belonged to the anti- or postcolonial world. However, in reality, it represents a settler-colonial project (2).

3. Palestinian Literature: Al-Nakba Literature

Literature as an art form is affected by external causes, aesthetically, socially, economically, and most importantly, politically, engaging, and converting in certain ideologies and commitments. It is encountered by many factors that lead to influential changes. Consequently, the Palestinian case led the literary productions to certain changes in contemporary Arab literature and marked itself as a distinctive in war literature.

According to the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* by Salma Khadra Jayyusi (1992), Palestinian literature is part of the modern Arabic literature; the latter is involved in the socio-political struggles of Arab people. As politics marked great stamp on the Arab writers

firstly, and the Palestinian writers secondly and most crucially. As the Israeli occupation starts 1948 and the war turned the region upside down, Palestinian writers' lives completely overturned. They spent their lives either in exile in other's countries, where belonging is nearly impossible or remained in their homeland, and if so, they are second class citizens in Israel, or lacking citizenship under Israeli military in the West Bank and Gaza.

Jayyusi denotes,

> There is no escape. For the writer to contemplate an orientation completely divorced from political life is to belie reality, to deny experience; for to engross oneself for too long in. "normal"everyday experiences is to betray one's own life and one's own people… [T]hey have become permanent exiles, the prototype of the strangers of all times, struggling against obstacles of every kind and magnitude. (1-2)

The quote emphasizes that Modern Palestinian Writers are repressed and committed to a life determined by events and circumstances of national loss and cannot disconnect themselves from political realities. Living solely in common life for them means betraying their identity and the Palestinian struggles, writers as exiles embody the eternal struggle of their people who are facing adversity and dislocation.

3.1. The development of Palestinian literature

Contemporary Palestinian literature could be divided into two categories based on the writers' lives: literature written by authors who are still living on the soil of historical Palestinian land, and literature written by authors in diaspora (exile). Writers who stayed in Palestine faced severe circumstances. Israel arrested them, their works were oppressed, and their creative works were forcibly translated from Arabic to Hebrew (Jayyusi 4–5). Literature and creativity inside

Palestine were under oppression. Since their works were translated, their hopeful aims of portraying their struggles were taken, putting them on a closed path regarding freedom of speech. On the other hand, writers in diaspora, and despite being far from their homeland, aesthetically built a strong connection with the radical literary experiments that shaped modern literature in the mid-20th century. The early 20th century marked the influence of Western literature on Palestinian fiction, and translation was the gateway that introduced a model for modern fiction. However, by the mid-20th century, Palestinian writers started to find their own Arabic literary heritage inspired by classical and folk narrative traditions, asserting their distinct cultural roots.

Key literary figures of Palestinian fiction include Khalil Beidas (1874–1949) and Ahmad Shakir. As they were living in exile, they were exposed to diverse literary movements, which later influenced them to engage with contemporary Arab artistic tendencies and discover their literary potentials. Thus, exiled writers addressed the Palestinian case with a rebellious spirit that increased after the Intifada, and themes of resistance, identity, and loss were expressed through traditional literary influences and innovative literary techniques.

Al-Nakba left many effective traces not merely socio-politically, but also artistically. Palestinian poetry was in its normal literary phase before 1948. Prior to Al-Nakba, writers were mainly poets. They were interested in comic or ironic writings. Ibrahim Tuqan (1905–1941) was among the influential poets of that period, with his distinctive style and his passionate and political poetry from 1920 to 1930 (during the British Mandate). Tuqan blended humor, comedy, and irony in his writings, which marked his poignant and engaging works with uniqueness. Another poet who distinguished himself as the only fully Romantic poet in Palestine, ‘Abd al-Khaliq Mutlaq (1910–1937), was influenced by the Arab émigré poets in North America. He was

different, with his deep, pessimistic, and philosophical introspective outlook. His poetry expressed themes of death and despair (Jayyusi 7–8).

Before 1948, fiction and its modern forms such as the short story and novel were still in the developing phase across the Arab world. The tendencies of modern fiction can be traced to Al-Karami (1894–1927) and Jameel Al-Bahri (1895–1930); they played crucial roles in enhancing fiction through literary reviews, translations, and didactical (theoretical) writings. This helped Palestinian readers to become familiar with Western fiction theory. Khalil Beidas is considered to be the father of Palestinian fiction, focusing on the moral and educational features of literature. He advocated fiction for the majority, which means for all common people regardless of elite readership. His novel *The Heir* (Al-Wãrith) (1920) is known to be the first Palestinian novel. He integrates traditional storytelling with modern narrative techniques and delves into social changes and problems.

In the middle of this period, Palestinian fiction was concerned with social issues rather than politics due to the influence of Western fiction, which was deficient in direct political engagement. Hence, it defended and reinforced the inherited cultural norms and roots in order to preserve Palestinian identity, especially with the increase in European Jewish immigrants' presence. Accordingly, this Palestinian fiction established itself as a vital literary force before 1948 (Jayyusi 11–15).

The Palestinian catastrophe of 1948 was the turning point of modern Arabic literature, a journey full of changes, loss, anxiety, hopelessness, and fear. After the Nakba, between the 1950s and 1960s, Arab countries witnessed underwent political upheaval and revolutions such as in Egypt (1952), Iraq (1958), Yemen (late 1960s), and the Algerian revolution (1962). The revolutionary changes were regarded as a step toward liberty, anti-colonialism, and resistance.

Profoundly, Al-Nakba of 1948 had an impact on Arabic literature, especially poetry. Following the path of the major revolutions, Arabic literary heritage rejected classical literary traditions. Free verse gained prominence during the 1950s, namely through the works of BadrShakir Al-Sayyab (1926–1964) and Nazik Al-Mala'ika (1922–2007). It is also worth noting that Al-Nakba and the psychological climate encouraged poets to bypass the former rigid classical structures, paving the way to a poetic uprising. From another angle, poetry transcends form by embracing new thematic dimensions, which reflect the social and political commotion. Poetry conveyed national struggles, resistance, and revolutionary ideas. Hence, poetry became a space for aesthetic and artistic innovations as well as a force for national activism.

During the exodus of 1948, Palestinian poets and writers in the diaspora witnessed a flourishing in their arts; by the fifties, some diaspora writers overcame the outcomes of the catastrophe and focused on the task of poetic creativity and fictional innovation (Jayyusi 16–18)

During the period from 1948 to 1967, Palestinian poetry was influenced by nostalgia, exile, and longing for the lost homeland. Poets often incorporated nationalist themes. Among them, Rashid Hussein, known as Abu-Salma (1936–1977) nostalgically dedicated his writings to Palestine and its landscape. Because he was exiled, his poems carried a deep longing for return.

Fadwa Tuqan (1917–2003), unlike her contemporaries, she focused on personal liberation as a woman more than political themes. Before 1967, her poetry was introspective, about self-discovery and raising the female voice.

However, the Arab-Israeli war in June 1967 caused a major transformation in Palestinian poetry. Themes of political activism, struggle, and resistance gained more prominence. "Resistance Poetry" was a defiant voice that rejected occupation and led poets to focus on themes

of resilience and the Palestinian malaise. The rise of resistance poetry encouraged poets like FadwaTuqan to join the ranks of the "poets of resistance." As she actively participated in public readings and political events, she shifted from her former personal themes and devoted her poems to portray the Palestinian melancholy under occupation (Jayyusi 18–21).

By the 1970s, Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008) became one of the prominent Arab poets who devoted his poetry to political commitment and evolved to philosophical reflections on identity, exile, resistance, and the sacred land with his teeming poetic talent. In the sixties, when his poetic career began, Darwish, in his poems, uniquely asserted his dignity as a Palestinian and depicted the tragedies and disasters of Palestinians, besides showing the evolved idea of the heroic figure that changed from the 1950s to the 1980s. From the traditional hero of resistance, fighting or leadership, to the distinctive hero who embodies identity, resilience, and the emotional depth of the collective Palestinian experiences, people who endure displacement and oppression while keeping identity and hope alive (Jayyusi 8, 21, 53).

In his poem "To Our Land", Darwish evocatively reflects the strong bond between Palestinians and their homeland and the centrality of Palestine in both identity and memory, with traces of the devastating effects of occupation and exile,

[…]

To our land,

and it is the one poor as a grouse's wings,

holy books ... and an identity wound

To our land,

and it is the one surrounded with tom hills,

the ambush of a new past

To our land, and it is a prize of war,

the freedom to die from longing and burning

[…]

(To our land, Translated by Fady Joudah).

Additionally, Palestinian poetry transcends the Arabic language. Some poets, such as Fawaz Turki (1940–), Naomi Shihab Nye (1952–), and others who lived in the diaspora and absorbed knowledge in Europe and the West, expressed the Palestinian malaise using English. Fawaz Turki is a poet and author of personal prose accounts. He chronicled the Palestinian experience of exile and struggle through works such as Soul in Exile (1988). Known for his activism and commitment to the Palestinian cause in the United States, he continues to be a vital voice, using his writings to reflect the trials of his people (Jayyusi 362).

In one of his poems, “Osama Jibril of Jerusalem”, Turki uses the symbolic figure of Osama Jibril to embody Palestinian identity and struggle. Through this figure, he portrays confrontation and resilience in the face of oppression. In his poem entitled Osama Jibril of Jerusalem,

[…]

the blood of our martyrs,

the vision of our patriots,

the memory of our homeland.

We will resume our journey

muttering cruel prayers

and drinking rain […]

From the 1960s onwards, fiction gained significance with the rise of Palestinian novelists who used novels and short stories to explore themes of exile, identity, survival, and love for the land. Writers such as Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1919–1994), Mahmoud Saif al-Din al-Irani (1914–1974), Samira ʻAzzam (1927–1967), and Ghassan Kanafani (1936–1972) played a crucial role in shaping Palestinian narrative fiction. These authors captured the Palestinian experience while experimenting with narrative techniques, merging realism with symbolism. The novel, in particular, grants authors the space to deeply narrate the malaise, experiences, and struggles of their people.

Ghassan Kanafani stands as one of the most influential writers in Palestinian literature, especially in fiction. His works *Men in the Sun* (1963), *All That's Left to You* (1966), and *Return to Haifa* (1969) narrate the turmoil of exiled Palestinians. His fiction often portrays displaced characters who struggle for survival, grappling with betrayal and the question of identity. With his modernist storytelling techniques, such as fragmented narratives and shifting perspectives, Kanafani established himself as an innovative figure in Arabic literature.

After the June War (the 1967 Arab-Israeli War) and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, literature, particularly novels, began to document life under occupation, the impact of resistance movements, and the pain of exile, identity crises, and the loss of belonging. For Palestinian writers in the diaspora, whether forcibly exiled, displaced, or raised in refugee camps,

their unique experiences profoundly shaped their writings. These writers remain committed to Palestine, sustaining their nationalist spirit by advocating for the Palestinian cause through innovative and artistic expression.

To the present day, the Palestinian novel remains a powerful tool for cultural resistance and historical documentation. Writers like Susan Abulhawa (1970–), Adania Shibli (1974–), Hala Alyan (1986–), and Isabella Hammad (1992–) continue to explore themes of memory, diaspora, and identity—often from an international or globalized perspective. The Palestinian novel transcends the Arabic language and demonstrates its power to amplify local narratives globally through English. This linguistic shift serves as a testament to Palestinian resilience: by using a lingua franca, Palestinian voices are heard worldwide, linking new generations to their history and fostering solidarity with their rights.

Preserving history and narrating Palestine have always been central goals of Palestinian literature. Writers have increasingly engaged in "Palestinian personal account literature,"(Jayyusi 66-69) a genre that includes memoirs, diaries, and autobiographies. These personal narratives serve not only as historical records that testify to the unbearable experiences of war, but also as assertions of identity in the face of political upheaval. They intertwine personal and collective memory, reflecting communal experiences and national identity. Characterized by themes of nostalgia, memory, and rootedness, this genre reinforces deep ties to the homeland—even among generations born in exile.

Personal narratives function as historical witnesses, reflecting political events and social struggles. For instance, in his autobiography Children of Dew (1990), Muhammad al-As'ad (1944–2021) recounts the memory of his brother's death within the harsh realities of refugee camp life. He presents a somber portrait of Palestinian children during the 1948 exodus,

describing their desperation and survival, “When the children got thirsty, we used to collect dew with our hands from the leaves of trees and rub it on their lips” (Jayyusi 622).

On the themes of memory and nostalgia, Mahmoud Darwish’s poetic prose in Journal of an Ordinary Grief (1973) reflects his struggles in exile in Lebanon. He explores the agony of unbelonging and the pain of remembering Palestine. In Darwish’s words, as he contemplates homesickness:“[…] you remember that Palestine is your country… The name returns”. And on the confusion brought by loss, “You are not on earth but lost, lost and fascinated by ambiguity […]”.(IV)

Overall, Palestinian literature documents the suffering and tragic history of Palestinian life. These writings confront negative portrayals of Palestinians and challenge global misrepresentations and distortions of the reality behind Israeli occupation. They express the urgent need to preserve native identity and protect it from memoricide, the erasure of collective memory.

As Edward Said emphasizes in his essay “Permission to Narrate” (1984), narratives are often controlled by Zionist discourse, while Palestinians have been denied the right to tell their own stories. Their history and identity are frequently erased or misrepresented by Zionist narratives. Therefore, Said advocates the essential role of storytelling in resistance movements and in challenging dominant discourse.

4. Ecocriticism: A synoptic view

Nature has always been a source of spiritual inspiration in literature, and poets have woven its splendor into their verses. Yet, literary theorists and thinkers have found in it a realm for study and analysis, delving into the depths of its relationship with literature. This thought

emerges within the field of Ecocriticism. Etymologically, the word "Ecocriticism" was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism", and later it appeared as a critical approach in the late 1980s. Rueckert defines ecocriticism as "[...] the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature […] applying ecological concepts to the reading, teaching, and writing about literature" (107). In other words, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the external tangible world, as it notes in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, "ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (xvii).

Ecocritics inquire about the role of the physical world in literature with all genres (novel, poetry, play) and how nature is portrayed, how the use of metaphors of the land influences its treatment, how literature itself affected the relationship between humans and the natural world, and how science fuses with literary analysis. Prominently, ecological criticism premises that there is a mutual influence between the human culture and the physical world and an interconnection between the cultural artifacts of language and literature with nature. From this perspective, literature itself exists and plays a part in the complex global system; ideas coexist and interact with matter and energy of ecology. Critically, ecocriticism bridges literature (imaginative and narrative aspects) with the land (physical and ecological realities), and theoretically, it connects the human with nonhuman (xix).

In the context of the land and environment, literature creates a sensational spirit that makes the reader live in the described space. As Lenka Flipova states in her book *Ecocriticism and the Sense of Place* (2021), "[…] Imaginative discourses such as fictional writing can provide

both experimental and experiential spaces in which we can imagine. Literature can help to invent new ways of thinking about and conceiving of place by recreating its singularity […]" (27).

One of the key goals of ecocriticism is challenging anthropocentrism, which assumes that humans are the centre of the universe and nature is merely a source available for exploitation. From an anthropocentric view, society is complex, whereas nature is simple. Ecocritics criticized the former thought, arguing that nature has a more complex adaptive strategy that cannot be devised by the human mind. Therefore, since literature is a human production, the task of examining nature's complexities, which in itself incorporates humans, is a challenge (*Ecocriticism Reader*230–31).

4.1. The Interdisciplinarity of Ecocriticism

The field of ecocriticism, while inherently focused on the relationship between literature and ecology, it acquires remarkable depth when entwined with other literary theories, as the critical lenses of postcolonialism and feminism. This interdisciplinarities reveals the interactive relationship between woman and nature, besides the reciprocal connection between the environment and females under occupation.

4.1.1. Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Initially, it is essential to note that the intersection of postcolonial and environmental/ecocritical studies faces significant adversities because of the complexity and the lack of conceptual clarity. This ambiguity surfaces due to the methodological divergences, which challenge the establishment of a unified approach between ecocriticism and postcolonialism. However, both perspectives converge in certain aspects.

In *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology* (2016), edited by Hubert Zapf, Mita Banerjee highlights that postcolonial ecocriticism bridges the postcolonial critical view of colonialism and capitalism with the emphasis on land in ecocriticism, in which the latter faces exploitation. In addition, the emergence of both fields comes after intersecting humanities' concerns and political activism, as both of them focus on human struggles under material and social realities. Both fields are considered to be corrective: postcolonial studies criticize and reverse the falsified reality of Western superiority; similarly, ecocriticism corrects the anthropocentric view of the superiority of man. Instead, it reinforces the relationship between human beings and ecology with its "animate (living things: plants, animals, microorganisms) and inanimate (non-living things: water, air, rocks, soil) form". Accordingly, both perspectives have a didactic aim, which is urging people to change their ways of thinking toward the notion of political ideologies in postcolonialism and embracing the relationship between human and non-human.

Simultaneously, ecocriticism and postcolonialism may differ in the temporal context. Postcolonialism is accused of being more encircled by the past because of the "writing back" concept. On the other hand, ecocriticism is concerned with the future.

In literary criticism, postcolonial theory framed metaphors of land and rootedness in colonial subjects, the reading, and the analyzing tasks practiced by postcolonial critics. This caused the obscurity of the ecocritical dimensions of these metaphors (Banerjee 194–95).

According to *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010), by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, postcolonial ecocriticism advocates the relation between the real world and the imaginative spaces in literature, which enhances the transformative view of the world (13). As Huggan and Tiffin contend, "[...] postcolonial ecocriticism preserves the aesthetic

function of the literary text while drawing attention to its social and political usefulness, its capacity to set out symbolic guidelines for the material transformation of the world" (qtd. in Huggan and Tiffin 14). The quote highlights that postcolonial ecocriticism, as a literary approach, aims to retain the aesthetic and artistic value of the literary text while emphasizing its relevance to socio-political issues. It emphasizes that literature, with its symbolism and narratives, can inspire actions that lead to changes in the real world. In other words, postcolonial ecocriticism sees literature as an effective tool of progression and reflection.

Crucially, the concept of witnessing gains different prominence. For postcolonialism, the historical witness is the center of focus: the colonized, oppressed peoples' narratives who experienced the colonial atrocity. It can be historical records or literature. For ecocriticism, witnessing extends beyond human perspectives and inserts the land and environment; it reimagines the land as an active participant that bears testimonies of the past, as Banerjee denotes "[…] the land remains as the sole spectator of the past […]" (196), in addition to exploitation and environmental destruction. Consequently, witnessing transcends anthropocentrism and embraces both human and non-human histories, giving a sense of agency and importance to the natural world (Banerjee 196).

In *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011), edited by Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, the editors commence the book with Edward Said's Culture and Imperialism and his belief in the powerful role of literary imagination of the land in freeing it from the control of colonialism and globalization. Said asserts, "[…] the land is recov-erable at first only through imagination" (qtd. in Said 7). For him, postcolonial writing is a way to reconnect with the land and retell and interpret its history by giving it new meaning. The land is a central symbol of identification. Nonetheless, reclaiming the land is not an easy task because it is

already scarred by historical violence. This raises questions on how to integrate nature with history without decreasing its primal essence and how to restore the sense of place under the environmental/ecological issues. Said's work helps in postcolonial ecology, highlighting the importance of place and its meanings. Place holds different understandings: geographically in the expansion; environmentally in cities and rural areas; genealogically, by associating communities with the ancestral land; and phenomenologically, connecting the environment with people physically and emotionally. Therefore, the concept of place is central in postcolonial studies to subvert the colonial powers, particularly in shaping the history of the Global South. Notably, the idea of place, land and sea, carries the memory of time, helps in understanding the colonial harm that faced colonized people and the ways they resisted it. The embedded history is an effective tool for uncovering and responding to the colonial narratives (DeLoughrey and Handley 3–4).

4.1.2. Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the Palestinian Context

Building upon the historical background presented in the first section of this chapter, it is evident that the Palestinian experience is linked to the land and its enduring struggles. Beyond its historical and political dimension, the Palestinian landscape has its religious dimension in Islam, as it is imbued with deep religious meaning for Muslims, especially with the presence of the holy sites, Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa Mosque, and The Dome of the Rock.

In literature, Palestinian as well as Arab writers more often choose Palestine's cities names as titles and particular places to center the plot. Major writers include Mahmoud Darwish's poem "In Jerusalem", Murid Barghouti's *novel I Saw Ramallah,* Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin,* and the Egyptian writer RadwaAshour's *The Woman from Tantoura*. They chose to title their works after the names of Palestinian cities and places, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Jenin, and Tantura.

In his article “Ecocriticism in the Colonial Present: The Politics of Dwelling in Raja Shehadeh's Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape” (2010), Robert Spencer argues for the need to look at ecocriticism from a postcolonial lens, especially in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He criticizes the ecocriticism approach, which is based on Martin Heidegger's philosophy that emphasizes dwelling and rootedness, which promotes exclusionary attachment to territories while overlooking the causes behind the ecological crisis. Instead, Spencer proposes an ecocritical approach informed by Marxist thought and postcolonial theory. The approach uncovers the global dimensions of ecological crisis and how colonialism and capitalism contributed to environmental destruction. As a case study for this ecocritical approach, the author uses Raja Shehadeh's “Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape”, where he documents the ecological damage in Palestinian land caused by Israeli occupation in the West Bank and offers more sense of post-national belonging with nature. Spencer provides an example of environmental consciousness that links colonialism and ecological crisis with the need for a response.

In the article “A Postcolonial Ecocritical Reading of Mahmoud Darwish's The Red Indian's Penultimate Speech to the White Man” (2023), Ahmad Qabaha and Abdel Karim Daraghmeh explore the dimensions of the Palestinian struggle against colonialism by analyzing Darwish's poem. Inspired by Native American oral traditions, the poet establishes a connection between the loss of homeland and the loss of nature. Through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism, Qabaha and Daraghmeh interpret Darwish’s work as an advocate for the integration of ecological and national malaise against settler colonialism that reinforces the vision of Palestinian struggle against Israel. The authors argue that the poem highlights the necessity of protecting and preserving the land for the sustainability of native, indigenous communities.

Ultimately, the Palestinian landscape is a worshipped entity for Palestinians, and seeing it vanish and replaced gradually by Israeli occupation causes the catalyst in Palestinians' nationalist sentiments

4.2. Defining Ecofeminism

In 1974, the term "écoféminisme" was forged by the French feminist writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in the final pages of her essay "Feminism or Death" (1974). she examined the subjugation of women and reflected it on the environmental degradation, aiming for freeing nature and women from systems exploitation. While her ecofeminist theory links and juxtaposes feminism and ecology, it critiques the world system by emphasizing the marginalized and the exploited. She argues that ecological destruction is essentially linked to patriarchal dominance, which originates in male-driven and pre-capitalist farming methods. These techniques controlled women's reproductive capacities, leading to overpopulation and depletion of natural sources. In this matter for d'Eaubonne ecological and feminist struggles are inseparable, and the environmental threats cannot be resolved without challenging patriarchal systems.

According *to Ecofeminism Women, Culture, Nature* (1997) edited by Karen J. Warren, ecofeminist philosophy is rooted in various feminist (liberal, Marxist, Black, Third World feminism etc…) however, what distinguishes ecofeminism is its argument that the domination of nature (naturism) and the exploitation of the natural world are feminist concerns. Additionally, ecofeminist philosophy links social injustices like sexism, racism, and classism to environmental harm. This stresses how social and ecological struggles are connected by using ideas from multiple fields as feminism, science, technology, and local knowledge to confront oppression in its forms (J. Werren 4).

In literature, Ecofeminist literary criticism blends ecological and feminist perspectives; it provides a framework for analysing how nature is portrayed in literature and its relations to gender, race, class, and sexuality. The central focus is on the cultural creation of nature, the use of language, the examination of desire, knowledge, and power. As a consequence of the environmental crisis, ecocritics insist on the necessity of shifting literary studies to explore how literature conditions human attitudes toward nature. Ecofeminists argue that the environmental crisis as waste management and water system design derive from patriarchal attitudes that equate land with women, which reinforces domineering hierarchies. They critique the representation of nature as female as a mother or virgin. For them, such imagery sustains oppressive and injustice frameworks that position marginalized groups as "closer to nature". Crucially, ecofeminist literary criticism plays an important role in re-evaluating traditional nature writing by presenting a perspective that opposes dominant narratives. Nonetheless, many canonical works still frame nature as an external other, insisting on the hierarchical divisions between nature and culture, self and other. This oppressive perspective reinforces the exclusion of nature in human's identity in literature, where they separate nature from themselves. Writers often describe nature as an outsider of human experience. Thus, ecofeminists advocate the re-imagination of human-nature relationships to dismantle the institutional oppression and foster prospective environmental practices (T. Legler 227-229).

Prominently, ecofeminism and postcolonialism converge to dismantle forms of oppression against women and colonized communities. As stated in Literature and *Ecofeminism Intersectional and International Voices* (2018), edited by Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey, both ecofeminism and anti-colonialism, resist various forms of domination and underscore how nature, natural resources, and land often become arenas for intense conflicts over ownership and

control. Consistently, ecofeminism highlights the connection between land and the treatment of nature, showing the way feminization of land enables its colonial and patriarchal exploitation. Moreover, similar to postcolonial authors, ecofeminists use "writing wrongs" or "writing back" as a literary strategy introducing its significance in engaging with oppression. And beyond documenting and confronting colonial, patriarchal, and ecological injustices, both perspectives utilize hybridity as a tool for resistance. As articulated by Homi Bhabha in postcolonial studies, hybridity focuses on the complexities of identity, which resists the colonial narratives of cultural purity. Like the former, ecofeminism distinctively uses hybridity to deconstruct the essentialist binaries (human, animal, and man, nature) and reveal interconnectedness between creations rather than opposition (A. Bedford 202-205).

5. Understanding Postcolonial Feminism

Feminism in literature interacts with and relates to other theories and establishes new perspectives that valorize women and oppose patriarchal society. Literary theories such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, critical race theory, and most importantly, postcolonialism.

In his sixth chapter, "Postcolonialism and Feminism" *in Beginning Postcolonialism* (2010), John McLeod defines postcolonial feminist criticism as "extensive and variable." It examines the representation of women in both former colonies and in Western contexts. Scholars' concerns are diverse; some focus on the way gender differences were shaped during colonialism in colonial and anti-colonial narratives. Others analyze the way women are portrayed in postcolonial writings, particularly by female authors. Theoretically, postcolonial feminist theorists highlight various conceptual, methodological, and political problems in the representation of gender. Thus, debates on gender representation within postcolonial contexts led to innovative and influential contributions in the field (118).

As presented in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (2003), edited by Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, they contend that feminist postcolonial theory engages in two-fold projects: to challenge and address racial biases in the field of feminism while integrating feminist perspectives in the concepts of colonial and postcolonial dynamics (3). However, this perspective faced difficulties in joining the political dimension with the developments of the world. Crucially, Western feminists stereotyped Third World women and obscured them from the settings of the political agenda. Western feminists positioned themselves differently from other women. Black and Third World feminists criticized Western feminist focus on the writings of white colonial women because it framed the white perspectives as the absolute narrative of the colonial experience. As a result, the voices of colonized women, who are more marginalized, are disregarded and neglected; this reinforces the colonial hierarchy and dynamism in lieu of opposing them. Diverse and inclusive narratives that account for other women within colonial contexts are needed (9).

Third World scholars raised their voices and stood for advocating marginalized women. The Indian scholar, literary theorist, and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942–) with her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) contributed to the development of postcolonial studies as well as feminism. Gayatri uses a Marxist lens to analyze the international economic system, especially the phenomenon of exploiting countries and people in the postcolonial period. Importantly, she chooses deconstruction to criticize the way Western intellectuals talked and represented the “subaltern”, people who are marginalized and oppressed by colonialism and global powers. She argues that Western intellectuals, while trying to give voice to the subaltern, sustain an epistemic violence toward them. Spivak showcases that the subaltern woman is “doubly in shadow”, marginalized by their international subaltern status and

their social constructionist status (their gender). She challenges the view that subalterns can be simply understood and represented, insisting on the complexity and heterogeneity of their experiences. This uncovers the limitations of Western theoretical frameworks in perceiving the subaltern, especially in the context of gender and postcolonialism.

In her influential book *Feminism without Borders*: *Decolonizing Theory*, Practicing *Solidarity* (2003), the Indian postcolonial and feminist transnational theorist Chandra Talpa de Mohanty challenges the Westerner's gaze toward Third World females, criticizing their hegemonic, superior agency. In the first chapter, "Decolonizing Feminism: Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", Mohanty argues that Westerns' portrayal of other women is discursive colonization,"[…] Western feminisms appropriate and colonize the constitutive complexities that characterize the lives of women in these countries. It is in this process of discursive homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the Third World […]" (19–20). They categorize and acknowledge the Third World based on their own interests. She denotes that this view overlooks the diversity and realities of these women and imprisons them in a singular, monolithic subject, which affects the image of non-Western women and reinforces Western feminist hegemony.

Significantly, In April 2024, a report presented by Pramila Patten, the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, includes information on sexual violence in various global conflict zones. For the first time the annual report dedicates a section to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. Following the 7th October attacks, Patten and her team conducted a visit where they determined that there are reasonable grounds to believe that conflict has a relation with sexual violence that took place in at least three locations, with indications that such acts were committed and may still occur against hostages.

During their visit to the occupied West Bank, they reviewed UN reports indicating that Palestinian women and men arrested and detained by Israeli forces have endured mistreatment, including instances of sexual violence, and comparable allegations have also surfaced from Gaza. The report also states how sexual violence has severely restricted ability to sustain their livelihoods and has prevented girls' access to education, particularly in amid of displacement.

5.1. Postcolonial Feminism and the Palestinian Woman

The Palestinian women from 1948 until this moment are facing tough circumstances under the Israeli occupation. Palestinian female writers in literature expressed the aching experiences of the Palestinian women, giving realistic imagery of the horrific situations where those women lived and are still living under. However, even under war, Palestinian women activists attempted to provide help, confronting both war and exclusion from political activism.

According to Women *and War in the Middle East: Transnational Perspectives (2009),* edited by Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, Isis Nusair in his chapter “Gender Mainstreaming and Feminist Organizing in the Middle East and North Africa,” states that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of women's activism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) increased during the 1990s, due to state programs, urbanization, and women's education. Women's groups in MENA diversified, and activists worked on raising consciousness about women’s realities: the physical, mental, and psychological violence, and contributed to research and academia asserting their intellectual abilities. Yet, they faced issues in certain countries due to family laws, personal status codes, and most crucially issues related to women's patriarchal society (136–38).

In recent years, the debate on the impact of war conflict on women increased; women built a strong nationalist spirit and participated directly or indirectly in peace processes as men. Nevertheless, their participation does not guarantee that their feminist concerns will be addressed in agreements, and this gender balance was not paired with gender mainstreaming, due to the sustainability of violence and discrimination against women in their societies (qtd. Onubogu and Etchart 36).

The Palestinian case was the catalyst for raising questions about gender mainstreaming in conflict situations. The First Intifada in 1987 caused the creation of new organizations that embraced Palestinian youth, workers, women, and students. It established independent feminist centers and reinforced international attention toward Palestinian women. However, the achievements of women and the women's movement failed in promoting the change of gender roles within Palestinian society (*Women and War*145–46).

Despite the Second Intifada in 2000, the question of achieving gender equality remained, and the prioritization of national security, as well as the patriarchal structures in Palestinian society entrenched in times of instability, paralyzed gender equality. The issues of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) since 2006 and the lack of legislative progress to reform critical areas such as penal and personal status codes resulted in the impossibility of achieving gender balance (149).

Profoundly, women during wartime faced gender-specific violence, including sexual humiliation, forced prostitution, rape and forced pregnancy. Through history rape has been one of the most pervasive forms of violence against women. While it may occur as a result of lawlessness, disorder, and aggression, it has also been deliberately used as a systematic weapon of war and torture to escalate suffering. This form of violence serves as a broader tactic to

humiliate and undermine women and their communities. Since women often regarded as bearers of nation's honour and pride or as ethnic symbols within local ideologies, rape inflicts profound psychological and physical damage on its victims and destabilizes the social fabric of an entire group (Al-Ali and Pratt 11). Palestine and Iraq illustrate this escalation of violence across several dimensions; the war conditions have intensified instability, affected social structures, and perpetuated cycles of conflict (Women *and War*17).

Additionally, during time of conflict women faced continued violence. This discussed as the "*continuum of violence"* which is uttered by feminist scholars and activists (Al-Ali and Pratt 7). Which refers to the relationship between different forms of violence, especially those appear within home, street, society at large, and the violence that takes place during conflict situations. This suggests that even during post- war period women suffered from violence.

5.2. Palestinian Literature and Postcolonial Feminism

According to Anna Ball's *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective* (2012), postcolonialism and feminism and Palestine seem not to integrate in literary criticism, but they can align productively because postcolonial feminism combines the ideal concepts of both theories, especially in producing creative alternatives to the power structures in colonial and patriarchal oppression. From this perspective, Palestinian literature and film navigate the dual struggle of colonial powers and oppressive gender norms, inserting deep willingness for liberation and reimagined realities. Therefore, creativity in artistic works is an influential tool that embodies postcolonial feminist perspectives while actively engaging with the ideologies and challenging their structures by forming alternatives to the injustices faced by Palestine and recovering historical narratives (2).

Palestinian creative expressions resist colonial domination as well as patriarchal domination, and Palestinian women writers such as Fadwa Tuqan and Liana Badre navigate colonialism and patriarchy while attaching their roles in nationalist and private spheres. Both writers incarnate the compound tension between feminist and nationalist commitment. They presented public, private, political, and personal domains' struggles. Their narratives, while challenging the traditional ideas of power and resistance, encourage readers to picture freedom for Palestinians in imaginative ways. Crucially, it is important to note that theorizing Palestinian postcolonial feminism needs careful attention to the complexities of relationships, alliances, and the difference between nationalism and gender consciousness (47, 49).

Ball integrates and acknowledges Fadwa Tuqan's autobiography "I, Myself, Am a Poem": Interior Struggle in Fadwa Tuqan's A Mountainous Journey". She explores the interior complexities in Tuqan's autobiography. She did not identify herself as a feminist, but her concerns can be seen as "invisible" feminist consciousness. This concept appears in Tuqan's insistence on the political importance of her personal life. This demolishes the nationalist view that the personal is secondary to the political. This means that the focus on her personal life juxtaposes the common idea that individual experiences are less important than the political aims of the nation (52–61).

Ultimately, works such as those by Fadwa Tuqan (autobiographies), besides novels, serve as powerful testaments that ensure Palestinian women's experiences are integral to feminist and postcolonial discourse.

In conclusion, this chapter tried to formulate a detailed historical and theoretical foundation to properly contextualize the discussions and analyses in the following chapters. By exploring the central principles and frameworks, we have aimed to build a strong contextual and

conceptual basis that will, presumably, enrich the comprehension and integration of the former reflections in the context of both novels.

Chapter Two: Where the Soil Remembers: Land as a Living Presence in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin.*

The second chapter of this study will look at how Susan *Abulhawa's Mornings in Jenin* portrays the Palestinian Land, specifically, Ein Houd and Jenin. It attempts to reveal the changed situation of ecology and its relationship with Palestinians, due to displacement, showing the wounded souls far from their homeland. It also highlights the effective use of literature as a mean to transmit and preserves the cultural and historical narratives drawing on the postcolonial concept of Writing Back. It will also explore the intricate bond between women and land as represented through metaphor and symbolism. Additionally, it will address the domestic and sexual abuse, pointing out the double tragic reality of women's sufferance in war conflict**.**

1. Pre-1948 Palestine: Whispers of Homeland and Heritage

Before the catastrophe of 1948, Palestine and its landscapes woven from the threads of heritage and its people deeply rooted in tradition. Palestinians lived freely, nourished by the riches of their lands from olives to fruits. The motherland bore witness to generations who called it home. It carries sacred traditions, dreams, and unspeakable bond with the soil beneath their feet. Despite the fact of the barriers of war, the ancestral whispers remain embraced by those who refuse to forget and choose to narrate what the Zionist genocide and mass bloodshed try to obscure. Abulhawa's demonstrates that throughout the novel, representing the local culture as wells as history. This section will look at how the pre-1948 status in Palestine is portrayed, to show how the writer preserves the vivid locality by illustrating scenes from ordinary Palestinian life.

1.1. Agrarian life in Ein Hod

Ein Hod is the first setting mentioned in *Mornings in Jenin*, the ancestral land of the protagonist, Amal's parents. The village, in Arabic *Ayn Hawd*, was a historical village whose origins trace back to the medieval era, with ties to Salah al-Din. It lay at the foot of Mount Carmel. It is an agricultural village, known for its trees and stone quarries. Olive as Abulhhawa refers to it "noble fruit" (11), and carob trees covered large parts of the land and the olive crop was sold in Haifa and Acre. It maintained a mosque, a school, and a strong communal life cantered on its *diwan*. In July 1948, the place was captured by Zionist forces. Peasants resisted expulsion to the last breath. In her novel Abulhawa gives a hint about Palestinian indignity, people who settled there for generations, claims that Saladin al-Ayyubi himself had granted the land to Amal's grandfather, traced back to the Byzantine Empire (206).

Abulhawa opens the novel with a sensorial rich and poetic depiction of a pre-Nakba village, "In a distant time, before history marched over the hills […] a small village east of Haifa lived quietly on figs and olives, open frontiers and sunshine." (11). This imagery metaphorically resurrects the land as a space of harmony, belonging, and peace, brutally disrupted by colonial violence. Yehya's response to fear is to play his "*nye*" (flute) for his trees, "In disgust of his fears, Yehya exhaled through his precious nye […] He played for his trees, to resurrect simplicity and peace" (21). Such moments emphasize the therapeutic and symbiotic relationship between Palestinians and their land.

Whereas the natives prepared a "feast meal" to welcome the soldiers, the newly arrived Jews, as a sign of friendship and intentions to live peacefully alongside them, shortly afterward, the same soldiers invaded the village, forced the indigenous to dig a mass grave for thirty bodies, and then expelled them. The natives became refugees, living in dehumanizing conditions in camps. Meanwhile, French Jewish artists settled in the village, romanticized it as a utopian space,

while ignoring its past and the people who once lived there. From postcolonial Ecocritic lens, this scene reflects the colonial ideology stems from Eurocentrism and Anthropocentrism, which regards the indigenous as "primitive". However, the novel grounded in displacement and dispossession, which aligns with the idea of colonial settlement, was imposed rather than welcomed by Palestinians.

The novel reclaims the indigeneity of Palestinians in the first chapter "*The Harvest*", presenting a vivid depiction of mundane life and rural traditions in Ein Hod pre-Nakba, at the beginning of the olive harvest season. At dawn, the villagers after *wudu* and *salat*, in a religious communal ritual that reflects spirituality and reinforces the bond between land and faith. The harvest is an annual event that unites families and neighbors; it includes folk songs, labor, conversations, and jokes. Women sing and prepare food, while the men focus on gathering the olives, all dressed in traditional clothing such as the "*thobe*", "*dishdashe*", and "*kaffiyeh*". At the end of the day, they all share "*makloobeh*", the novel restores a thorough understanding of Palestinian traditions that had been deliberately marginalized via highlighting the sense of belonging and solidarity at the heart.

However, this relation can echo the resistance dimension as Edward Said affirms in his critique of colonial discourse, which erases native presence and history. Said states that long before the land was violated by the Zionist settlers, "[t]he Palestinian Arabs were on the land" (Said 42).

Furthermore, the writer demonstrates a culture of tolerance and the coexistence through the friendship between Hassan and Ari, despite their contrasting backgrounds, the novel reflects a deep bond that transcends religious and cultural differences. That once existed between Palestinians and Jews before 1948. In this sense, the portrayal of such coexistence becomes a subtle form of

resistance against colonial narratives that depict Palestinians as ‘terrorists’. By doing so, she contributes to dismantling the prevailing stereotypes about Palestinians.

Through Amal’s recollections, Abulhawa reappropriates Jerusalem from the “Judaizing” plans and memorial obliteration imposed on it. The city bears witness to “the confidence of ancient civilizations” and stands as a living symbol coexistence. Abulhawa portrays this multiculturalism through Amal, a Muslim girl; Sister Clairie, a Christian; and Ari Perlstein, a Jewish boy whose father was a Holocaust survivor and a friend of Amal’s father, Hasan.

Before the Nakba, Ein Hod is portrayed as a “lost paradise.” Abulhawa describes it with vivid sensory details as hills, olive, fig, and citrus trees, along with “*sanasi”* (stone terraces). It is a peaceful village cultivated by generations of Palestinian hands. The sounds of the nye flute, played by Yehya and his son Hassan, and the rhythmic singing of birds and women reflect a life in harmony with the land, reinforcing that the land is an extension of identity.

1.2. Ancestral Memory and Environmental Belonging

Mornings in Jenin serves as a site of memory that does not resist enforced forgetting and erasure, but also it revives the Palestinian cause from the ashes of devastation and global indifference. In addition, Abulhawa’s narrative deployed intimate moments in order to humanize Palestinians.

Huggan and Tiffin highlight that this “ontological” bond explains why land claims transcend the legal foundation of “entitlement,” as they are embedded in a collective narrative (27). Abulhawa anchors her narrative not only in the struggle of Palestinians but also in a deep, existential connection to the land, embodied through the characters of Yehya and Bassima. Huggan and Tiffin further explain that this form of belonging is marked by a feeling of “at-

homeness," shaped and sustained through historical and cultural continuity. This is what makes belonging a major theme in Palestinian literature. *In Mornings in Jenin*, it is portrayed as intergenerational, forged not only through centuries of existence on the land, but also through culture, rituals, and connection with elements of nature.

Collective identity is embodied in the Abulheja family; the family represents a communal tragedy that reflects Palestinian fate. First and foremost, Abulhawa weaved her narratives on multiple generations, expresses the profound sense of longing and belonging to the dispossessed land through addressing the experiences of its people. Yehya can be seen as a prototype of the Palestinian elderly who continued to live. in the refugee camp with hope of return, who yearned for his trees and "[…] aged tremendously in those confused months that stretched into years[…]" (39). The grandfather defies the occupation and returns to Ein Hod after years in exile. "[…]Yahya had made his way back to Ein Hod, undetected by soldiers […] 'That terrain is in [his] blood!' he proclaimed. 'I know every tree and every bird. The soldiers do not' " (40). Yehya returns once more, but this time, to die in his land where he believes he was meant to die. His actions represent the resilience and attachment to the land. His generation preserves the spatial memory of Ein Hod via stories of the village's mosque, orchards, and customs, forming a collective memory that transcends the physical destruction of the space. Symbolic objects such as "large iron keys" and "Ottoman land records" serve as tangible anchors of this remembrance.

Extensively, the third generation embodied in Amal, who never saw Ein Hod, yet she feels connected to it by what she calls a "petition of memory." Similarly, she reflects on Jerusalem, carrying for her complex emotional layers. She stated that she has always found it difficult not to be moved by Jerusalem, even when she hated it. As she confesses, " […] God

knows I have hated it for the sheer human cost of it […] ” (115). Despite the wound, she declares, “[…]I belong to this land. It possesses me, no matter who conquers it […]” (116).

Another aspect that aligns with the postcolonial ecocritic theory as exemplified by Darweesh’s “beloved [horses] Ganoosh and Fatooma,” that were killed by the Zionists. In doing so Abulhawa denounces the injustice of the colonial settlers not only toward humans but also toward non-humans. Conversely, she portrays the relationship between the “*fellaheen*” (farmers) who compose the population majority, and nature, for instance through the character of Yehya and his care for the olive trees. At its core, this sense of belonging is ontological, rooted in Palestinian identity, which distinguishes who they are and where they come from, surpassing the boundaries of legal ownership (89).

Abulhawa detailed the olive harvesting rituals that the region has relied on for “forty generations.” The olive tree represents a sense of belonging and national identity, and through depictions of the harvest, the narratives evokes endurance, collective memory, and a deep connection to the land. She employed vivid detail, from collective labor and traditional songs to the meticulous care given to the trees (108–09). “The peasant prayed outside, under the open sky, and with particular reverence welcoming the harvest. It always began around five a.m.” followed by the sound of sticks tapping the olive branches, “the shuddering of the leaves, the plop of fruit falling onto the old tarps and blankets […] beneath the trees” (11). This passage reveals that Abulhawa provides a counter narrative in order to defy the Zionist plan that eroded indigenous culture and deteriorate their landscape through re-centering Palestinian perspective. Pointing notably on Ein Hod, before the catastrophe, she represents their rituals relied to harvesting olives. The olive trees are not merely a sustainable source for their livelihood but as symbol that unify the Palestinian community and bond them. “These “green lungs” are religious and cultural

emblem of Palestine that stand there in the holy land for generations to prove that the land was not barren prior to the Zionists colonial settlement.

Moreover, the character of Yahiya mirrors the rootedness of the Palestinian to his motherland. He plays his "*nye*" for his spoiled olive trees. Through this depiction, Abulhawa sought to resurrect simplicity and tranquility amidst his groves, and illustrate the organic connection that is traced in, she denotes, "[…] his farmer's hands [that] were infused with the melanin truths of those hills [...] caressed those majestic, beloved trees" (42). That reflects his interconnection with the land and his knowledge of it and its needs. In a different scene, the author metaphorically personifies the olive tree as an "*Old Lady*" (54), a fifteen-hundred-year-old, which, in turn, symbolizes Palestine in a conversation between the protagonist and her father, contends, "[n]o one can own a tree […] It can belong to you, as you can belong to it. We come from the land, give our love and labor to her, and she nurtures us in return. When we die, we return to the land. In a way, she owns us. Palestine owns us and we belong to her" (54). His expression explicitly reflects the interconnectedness between the land and its people, the emphasis on being created from land, devote love and care to it, and buried inside its soil, points out how the human carries nature inside throughout his life. The cycle of creation, growth, and death is an eternal rhythm echoed in nature itself.

In his article, "A History Buried Alive": Resisting Amnesia and Reclaiming Native Palestinian Ecology in the Works of Susan Abulhawa, Nassouha" (2024) he explains that in addition to land seizure, the Zionist entity appropriates the Jaffa orange as a cultural emblem and the olive tree as the national tree and as a strategy of cultural erasure and settler colonialism. This oppression transcends practices like apartheid, such as restrictions on Palestinian access to agricultural lands, control over the Palestinian environment, and the imposition of enforced

amnesia through the eradication and destruction of villages. While these practices may not rise to the level of genocide, they represent continuous crimes that intensify slow displacement. He emphasizes that Palestinian literature serves as a "lieux de mémoire", preserving erased villages and the history of forced displacement (107).

2. The Pen Fights Back: Resistance through Language and Postcolonial Discourse

Drawing on the postcolonial concept of Writing Back, language plays a crucial role in postcolonial literatures, especially the distinctive use of it. Utilising language as an "appropriation" is the mainstream of writing wrongs, which is the integration of dialects and native language in the process of writing, in order to emphasize the nativism of colonized people. This what Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin state in their book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (2002), "... appropriation is clearly the most significant feature in the emergence of modern post-colonial literatures "[...] [A]ppropriation which brings it under the influence of vernacular tongue, the complex of speech habits which characterize the local language..." (06, 38).

Crucially, in narrating the local culture of the oppressed, English often fails to reflect the linguistic and lexical specificities of these cultures. Therefore, postcolonial writers purposefully, preserve the locality of terms, positioning them as untranslatable, "[...] the untranslated words, the sounds and the texture of language can be held to have the power and the presence of the culture they signify- to be metaphoric in their 'inference of identity[...]" (51).
This act resists the imposed narratives, while asserts the cultural distinction, affirming that language retains significance, since it is a mean of depicting reality, "[...] language constitutes reality in an obvious way [...]" (43).

In the novel, Abulhawa adopts appropriation by using local terms as strategy as a strategy to introduce and reclaim the Palestinian cultural identity. She uses English as a bridge between different cultures, allowing her to represent Palestinian culture and underscores their struggle for identity, particularly in relation to the Palestinian cause. The novel, therefore, makes extensive use of the Palestinian dialect to highlight cultural elements of Palestinian life, reinforcing a sense of rootedness**.** Conversely**,** the language used to convey not only the struggle of Palestinians but also to preserve the meaning that correctly reflects their ability to find moments of beauty amidst chaos and war, avoiding any misinterpretation of her expression. The aspect of ecological harmony is illustrated in the characters' capacity to maintain connection to homeland, identity, and memory despite their sufferance. Moreover, the use of linguistic hybridity signifies an organic connection to the land, particularly through the use of non-translated local expressions and terms such as: "*Zaatar*" (thyme), "*Manakeesh*" (bread), "*Aroosa*" (bride), or religious expressions like "*La ellahaella Allah*," which means "There is but one God". The Writer associates these forms of harmony to familial relations such as "*Sitti*", "*Jido*", "*Baba*", "*habibiti*", and to kindness, as illustrated in a moment when Amal's brother Yahya greeted her by saying, "Salamatyakhti*"*.

By means of language, Abulhawa connects the local expressions to sensory memories tied to the land and loved ones, as shown in Amal's description of her journey to Bartaa, "[The] route to Bartaa was a tree-lined footpath of untamed *sabar* (cactus) plants, intoxicating jasmine, and wild *areej* (fragrance) wafting along the path"(209). In this way, the author reinforces the connection between language, memory, aiming to value the Palestinian nature and to reorient the audience toward the specificity of ecology in Palestine. Furthermore, Memory and the protagonist's intimate moments in relation to space stress the significant role of place and memory for subjugated people in resisting erasure.

One of the strategies used by Zionist settlers is appropriating the land under "developmental mission" by Palestinian Arabs (qtd. in Nassouha 101). Abulhawa counters this claim by describing the land as a "glorious land, which had glistened green beside the blue Mediterranean waters since before Moses" (Abulhawa 97).Sharif adds that literature is essential for uncovering eco-occupation, giving voice to marginalized Palestinians, and challenging the policies of environmental marginalization and racism. Literature, then, offers a space for resistance against erasure (Sharif 107). He illustrates this by analyzing *Mornings in Jenin* in which Abulhawa dedicates her literary work to subverting the settler-colonial narrative, by centering it on the lives of Palestinian peasants who were forcibly removed from their land in the wake of Israel's establishment. Her novel consistently asserts narrative agency and emphasizes the intergenerational ties between Palestinians and their land.

Crucially, Abulhawa documents historical events that have been deliberately buried or distorted by Western and Zionist narratives. To challenge Zionist discourse, she incorporates these events into her novel. She depicts the peaceful and secure lives of Palestinians before the Israeli invasion, followed by the wiping of entire villages from the map, dismantling the myth of "a land without people for a people without a land."(Garfinkle 539) However, Abulhawa gives voice even to Jewish and Zionist characters, such as Ari Perlstein, whose friendship with Hasan "had been born in the shadow of Nazism in Europ" (15). She portrays the coexistence and tolerance that existed prior to the occupation (Al Soud 34). The character of Moshe, the soldier who kidnapped Ismael, his dehumanizing gaze toward Dalia, look at her as an Arab woman could bear children while his beloved wife, who had suffered the horrors of the Holocaust, was unable to conceive.

2.1. Narrating Post- Nakba 1948: Amal's Memories

In the aftermath of the Nakba and the forced displacement, Yehya becomes aware that his trees still stand but require care, depicting the Palestinians' loss of their land and their enduring bond with it. Abulhawa eloquently uses the olive tree to represent rootedness and continuity in the face of occupation and attempts to erase Palestinian history (109). Amidst the chaos and the assault of the Zionist soldiers, he remained attached to his olive trees, seeing these trees as an extension of his being. The horrors could not distract him from watering his trees, even as the fear intensified with the sound of gunfire.

Furthermore, throughout the novel, the reader is taken on a journey across multiple places in historic Palestine. Abulhawa deliberately mentions locals and monuments such as the “Damascus Gate in the Old City”, “Jerusalem”, “Bab el Amoud ” “el Qiyameh”, “Khan el Zeit”, and “Jenin”, aiming to inscribe them in the mind of the audience. In turn these places act as a “bear witness” of a history of resilience.

Both Palestinian history and land shape Amal’s identity. The narrative runs through her voice as a third-generation member of the Abulheja family, who were dispossessed of their land and subjected to violence and terror in 1948. Amal, Youssef, Majid, Yehya, and other characters each reflects Kanafani’s famous quote: "al-insan qadiyyah," or "a human being is a cause." Throughout the novel, Amal resists and navigates a world that persistently denies her existence

Abulhawa weaved a non-linear narrative centering the story on the Abulheja family, who experience sixty years of terror. Their life story is divided into two contrasting phases: before and after Amal’s birth. They once lived peacefully in Ein Hod, farming and tending to their trees, but their lives were shattered by the occupation. The colonial settler not only stripped them of property and land but also sought to erase their identity.

Amal never visits her ancestral home. As a young girl, she listens to nostalgic stories told by Haj Salem, her father Hassan, and her grandfather Yehya. These elders storytelling serve as a bridge that enable her to envision Palestine, Ein Hod specifically, during pre Nakba .These inherited memories rooted in her identity, and shape her image of a land she has never seen. Amal born in a refugee camp, she becomes the carrier of a fragmented history and collective misery. Amal describes her memorial status by saying, "built up in [her] young mind, one tree, one rosebush, one story at a time" (56). She imagines, "the back terrace of [her] Jiddo Yehya's and Teta Basima's mansion, with its succulent grapes dangling from their vines, [her] Mama's rose garden, the Arabian horses [her] Ammo Darweesh raised, [her] Baba's library" (56). She visited the Mediterranean—what Hassan called "the Bride of Palestine", only in her dreams, shaped by his stories. She also recalls herself searching books looking for historical narratives that parallel the stories told by Haj Salem. As a sign of mistrust of official narratives that continuing distorting the truth about the Palestinian issue.

These multifaceted memories, especially those of Haj Salem, were narrated like a puzzle. His story can only be understood by reading many chapters due to the temporal dimension, as Abulhawa denotes, "[he] was over one hundred years old […] To have lived so long, [carried memories of a land before occupation], only to be crushed to death by a bulldozer" (243). Likewise, her uncle Darweesh also passed down stories and memories, telling Amal's daughter about his Arabian horses.

Through Amal's voice, Abulhawa expresses that Jerusalem continues to hold power over every Palestinian, regardless of who controls it, because its soil preserves their origins and the remains of their ancestors. The protagonist sees herself as the extension of this past. She considers herself a daughter of the land and believes that Jerusalem's walls and soil are the

safeguard of her roots and the bones of her ancestors. More than any deeds or UN resolution, it reassures her of "this inalienable title", as a true "daughter of the earth."

2.2. Fragmented Lives: Alienation, Displacement, Refugee

Through both characters Amal and Yehya, Abulhawa express a deep yearning for a lost homeland and reflect the multifaceted nature of Palestinian identity. Additionally, despite the enduring struggle of forced displacement, she reclaims the Holy land and it monuments that still stands as an immortal repository of the collective memory and Palestinian identity and history.

In her essay, "Trauma and Resistance in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* ", Iman El Sayed Raslan regarded *Mornings in Jenin* as a trauma novel, Abulhawa does not merely employ trauma in her narrative as a manifestation of oppression, but also as a means to reveal shared suffering and its function in shaping identity and creativity (qtd. in Raslan 187).

The Abulheja family is the vehicle through which the novelist depicts the trauma experienced by displaced Palestinians. In the Palestinian context, Raslan suggests that trauma arise from various causes, manifests in multiple forms, and can be inherited. It arises from violence, the struggle for identity, resilience, and pain. The lives of the Abulheja family reflect the experiences of those exposed to atrocities and mass killings, such as the Sabra and Shatila massacres, which affected Amal and her brother Youssef. The later was exposed to torture and arbitrary violence that left lasting wounds on both his psychological and intimate life, echoing Fanon's theory of the tormented soul of the colonized. The Nakba and the 1967 war had profound effect for all the Palestinian people, Abulhawa depicts it in the characters of Abulheja family, who "are anesthetized to the guns constantly pointed at [them]" (151).

Moreover, according to her essay “The Representation of War Trauma on Palestinian Families in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*”, Samet Güven uncovers the topic of intergenerational trauma. She added that this passed down trauma underscores the persistent nature of the struggle and its force in shaping identities and relationships. That is reflected in the younger generation, including Amal’s children, inherits the suffering of her predecessors. As Abulhawa writes, "[…] Forty generations of living, now stolen […]" (35), emphasizing the plight of Palestinians who were "being slowly erased from the world" (qtd. in Güven 140).

Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity assumes “negotiating” space between different identities, yet in Palestinian case Abulhawa like other Palestinian authors affirms a strong attachment to the Palestinian identity rather than hybridization. Furthermore, Israel itself is an apartheid state, its aim is to ethnic cleanse the natives, and to erase their existence from history and geography, it is not an ordinary form of colonialism it is a settler –colonial that aims to erasure and replacement. However, Palestinians live in liminal space after being displaced multiple times. This in-betweeness manifests in Amal, who lives between Palestine and the USA, She was torn between her Palestinian and American identity that is illustrated in when she is addressed as “Amy” instead of Amal.

Crucially *Mornings in Jenin*, is titled after the refugee camp of Jenin that situated in the West Bank, was founded in 1953 by the UNRWA. The camp stands as prominent symbol of Palestinian resistance after the massacres of Ariel Sharon and the invasion of Israeli forces in 2002. Abulhawa portrayed in meticulous details, depicts it as microcosm of the Palestinian struggle.

The novel portrays the land as “demolished”, “confiscated”, destroyed through what Haj Salem calls “Imperialism by the inch”. It became “barren wastelands, littered with the rubble of

old homes, burned tires, spent bullet casings, and struggling olive saplings" (94). The expression reflects the erasure of Palestinians and their identity through destroying their landscape. Abulhawa conveys the grave environmental degradation of camps, though using powerful and sensory language to describe it as "a city of cold tents and muddy paths", and when Amal recollects her "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" (183).

Following Edward Said, Abulhawa counters the colonial discourse through her pen, as Nasooha stated that she subverts the Zionist narratives that claim that Israel was essential for developing the region. The author uses her writing as a tool to preserve Palestinian memory, recounting their deep connection to the land and cultural heritage. He adds that she also exposes the environmental oppression faced by Palestinians under colonization, as well as their fragmented but persistent resistance (*History Buried* 117)

3. Womanhood between Bloom and Bruise: Land, Body, and Violence

> We are women. We rise from the wave. We are gazelle and doe […] lilies and roses and peach, we are air, we are flame […] we are girls. We are woman and nature. And he says he cannot hear us speak. But we hear.
>
> Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring inside Her.*

This section will point out two sides of women's life that occur in M*ornings in Jenin*. The first focuses on the interactive relationship between certain female characters- Basima and Dalia with the land, emphasizing their engagement with ecology and the way in which their connection to nature reinforces the theme of belonging. The second side explores the portrayal of wounded femininity, by exposing the reality of sexual violence in the story of Amal's friend, Huda.

3.1. The Affinity between Land and Women

Within the ecofeminist framework, women and ecology share a deep interconnectedness. While ecofeminists critically challenge the parallelism of femininity and nature, they also recognize an innate connection that transcends oppressive constructs and reflects an organic bond. In her book *Ecological Politics Ecofeminists and the Greens* (1998), Greta Gaard shifts the view from the exploitative and dominating relationship with nature towards a more respectful and harmonious one. She reinforces her argument by emphasizing the personal nature of the ecofeminist experience by illustrating it through the ecofeminists interaction with earth. One such example is Karen Warren, whose engagement with rock climbing supported her to be an ecofeminist, "It was actually personally for me a rock-climbing experience that made me an ecofeminist, where I realized that within the span of a few days not only had my beliefs and values changed, but my behaviour toward a rock had changed" (qtd, in Gaard 30).

Thus, the bond between nature and woman can take empowered imagery, females can reunite with nature to recognize themselves and sense the external as well as the internal. From this perspective, Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* pictures this sensational bond throughout the novels.

In the novel, the profound attachment to nature is portrayed in Basima, the grandmother of the protagonist Amal. Throughout the novel, Basima possesses an extensive knowledge of plants and herbs and has a pride in informing her daughter-in-law Dalia about them, "Basima led Dalia through her herb garden, revealing the uses of various plants. She was giddy, excited to have a female heir to her empire of enchanted herbs. She had already taught Dalia how to prepare Hasan's chest medicine. "[...] 'However, for beauty, olive oil is the main ingredient', she

whispered. ‘Crush mint and basil in the oil and rub it over your body to keep the skin firm, and on your scalp to put a shine in your hair’ ” (23).

“Her empire of enchanted herbs”, Basima as a female, builds and possesses a world where she can find herself in, and her will to extend the empire to Dalia is a yearning for continuity and protection from loss. It pictures women as keepers of the traditional knowledge connected to nature. She is a woman with an intimate knowledge about nature. This aligns with the ecofeminist perspective that women are more often situated to the domestic sphere and land-based labour, where they developed and crucial knowledge about the natural world. In the case of Basima, living in an urban area as Jenin and practising agriculture reinforced the rootedness to her environment.

On the other hand, she shares the secrets of nature and reveals the way the olive oil unite with women's body to brighten their femininity,

> She instructed her in the secrets to regain the body’s firmness and in tricks to keep the interest of her husband after childbirth. ‘It all goes eventually—the breasts, thighs, they just fall,’ Basima said. ‘But olive oil is the trick.’ Basima’s narrowing eyes glimmered with conspiracy as she moved closer and began describing the beauty concoctions she had discovered herself. ‘These are a woman’s secrets that I’ll only pass to you and, inshalla, Darweesh’s wife’ […](23).

“The beauty concoctions” the expression addresses the physical body besides the concerns of aging and changes after childbirth, both are inevitable paths that exist in women's life and may occur as a physical problem for them. Here, when nature acts as the solution, “the olive oil, mint, and basil” are raw products from earth that interact with the female body. This

highlights the connection between body and land, where natural resources serve women's well-being and self-care, and emphasizes the reliance on local nature. Especially olive oil, since olive is a deeply symbolic plant that represents Palestinians and their connection to land, and using this source for personal care intertwines the individual, the body, and land.

Moreover, the passage highlights the distinctiveness of female, as Basima said, “a woman's secrets”, she intends to explicitly frame her knowledge as secrets belong to females that will be inherited through the maternal line. And within the patriarchal society -which is implied by the context of sustaining a husband's interest - the sphere of women's secrets represents a form of female agency, and an autonomous knowledge built around special practices related to body and nature.

Beyond the cultivation of herbs, the bond with nature is exemplified through the symbolism of roses. Before Basima’s death, this connection is particularly pronounced. When Dalia faces an insult, Basima stands by her side, offering reassurance with the words, “[...] No more mourning, my Dalia. Let’s breed new roses for a new beginning [...]” (23). Traditionally associated with femininity and purity, roses here signify renewal. The new blossoms become a metaphor for restarting. This affirms nature's role as a source of healing and transformation. Thus, as olive trees and roses stood as silent witnesses to Basima’s triumph in raising her natural sanctuary, they also bore witness to her tragic end, claimed by an Israel bomb explosion, “[...] Basima’s anxiety knotted in her chest, in her heart, and made her head spin, legs weaken, until she fell amid her rosebushes, clutching her right shoulder [...]” (23). In this sorrowful scene, her death unfolds within the embrace of nature, her rosebushes cradling her as if in mourning, holding the echoes her memories in their silent condolence. In addition, Abulhawa's portrayal of Basima's death following her hope for renewal is an evocative commentary on the fragility of life

under violent occupation. While she nurtures the land as a source of healing, believing it new beginnings, her death caused by an effect of Zionist explosion interrupts this promising vision, stressing the brutal reality of war and occupation. The sequence is ironically depicting the tension between renewal and destruction, the inevitable faith of Palestinians under war.

After Basima passed away, Dalia assumes the role of caretaker she is described as "custodian of her (Basima) beloved roses" (23), she crosses roses' fragrance and colour, and ensures the survival and transformation of the cherished roses. She honours Basima's knowledge, actively persevering and expanding the garden. Even the gravesite covered by white-streaked red roses the most treasured blooms of her, they were planted at her burial site. Dalia, despite the fact of the poignant reality she transforms the act of mourning into one of regeneration. The weekly ritual of tending the space with her son Yousef suggests a generational transmission of memory and reverence. The garden as a natural source solidifies with living a testimony of a woman existence.

Dalia's act of care is an act of resilience against forgetfulness, after two generations Basima is not forgotten the white-streaked red roses distinguished her, in 2002 when her grandchildren visited her grave the roses are still colourful symbolizing immortality, "[...] Amal had told her daughter about the grave and the roses. The story is still fresh in her mind. She knew right away what the men were looking at, "Should we say the Fatiha for my great-teta Basima? [...]" (246). Nature is not simply a passive recipient of grief but an active participant in holding a memory, finding comfort in the midst of loss, and embodying continuity of another bond between the same nature and different woman. Amal knew about her grandmother through Dalia. Therefore, she narrated it to her daughter Sara. Abulhawa insists on the ancestral tales. They continue recurring until they reach an intergenerational memory.

3.2. Violence behind Closed Doors

It is challenging to determine that women in their homes among their families faced domestic violence. According to the 2001 report "Women Facing War", the international Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) , domestic violence tends to rise in conflict settings due to a combination of factors, including displacement, shifting gender roles, and high unemployment rates. War conditions can foster a culture of violence, where aggressive behaviour is normalized and accepted (45). From this concern, a trace of domestic violence in Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* exists.

While Abulhawa's novel diverges by not depicting rape cases perpetrated by Zionists, it nonetheless presents an instance of domestic violence involving sexual assault. The situation centres on the account of the devastating domestic violence that Huda, Amal's (protagonist) friend, suffered from at the hands of her father, which tragically escalated from beating to sexual assault when she turns eight years. Amal describes the case, "He was a dreadful man who beat her and when she was eight, *It* happened. He did *It* to her. It would be an unforgivable betrayal to utter the word" (70). It is noticeable how the avoidance of direct references to "rape" or "sexual assault" is substituted by *it*, this reveals the broader societal discomfort in the Arab communities when confronting such sensitive topics.

Furthermore, as a young girl, Huda was not prepared to openly discuss the incident. Nevertheless, she confessed to her closest friend, allowing Amal to convey the truth to her father.

Amal states,

> [...] [a]fter *It* happened the first and only time, she confessed to me as if It were her disgrace, and she allowed me to tell Baba. Alarm had concentrated in Baba's eyes when I

> relayed the heavy secret, which I did not fully understand. With firm caution, Baba ordered me to honour Huda's confidence with discretion. If people knew, it would have been a fadeeha. Such a scandal involving a girl's virginity was of serious consequence in our culture. Not wanting to scandalize Huda's pain, my father convened with Ammo Darweesh and Haj Salem in a sober conspiracy to dislodge Huda's father. Baba did not disclose his cause to either my uncle or the haj, nor did they demand explanation (70).

What stands out is, first, Huda's perception of the event and her emotional response afterwards, and second, Amal's father reaction. Abulhawa parallels Huda's confession with the feeling of shame "disgrace". This reflects a common reality where the survivors of sexual assault develop feelings of shame, fearing society's judgement. Then Amal's father who chose to hide Huda's situation, arguing that people would know and becomes a scandal "fadeeha" and for the honour of Huda he decided to do not tell other family's men preserving the girl secret, and he decided to keep Huda among his family. It might be seen as understandable, especially in a conservative society where women's honour of sexual purity is prioritized rather than her safety. This aligns with what is stated in the ICRC study (2001), "[...] in many cultures, the "shame" associated with rape is in a social sense perceived as even worse than the physical act itself" (52).

3.3. Bearing the Struggle of Woman during War

One of the ultimate goals of postcolonial feminism is re-centring the dominant feminist perspective while asserting the female voice in narrating war experiences (*feminist postcolonial theory* 03). Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* is centred on female protagonist and narrators; despite the fact of the existence of male narrators, the female protagonist dominate the narrations.

Abulhawa's narrative is profoundly shaped by the theme of suffering, offering a detailed and emotionally charged depiction of Palestinian anguish. She traces this pain from the Nakba to the devastation events of 2002 in Jenin, crafting a sorrowfulness tone that permeates the novel's thematic structure. The protagonist, Amal, endures hardship from childhood to death, her life serving as a testament to the reaching consequences of war. One of Amal's most painful childhood experiences was the moment she was shot, which recounts it intensively,

> [...] Then my abdomen cramped […] I simultaneously looked and felt where my right leg was oddly wet and warm. In the inchoate realization that my own blood flowed, I entertained the notion of a colossal menstruation. My hand moved to the cramp in my side and as my fingers sank into a horrid slush, my knees buckled, my eyes bulged and rolled, and my last string of consciousness that day roiled from the depths of the earth, through my lungs, fleeing my breath as a wild scream. I'd been shot (97).

Her narration captures the shock, fear, and searing pain of the experience, blending the physical sensation with fragmented cognition. Her initial misinterpretation of the injury reflects her innocence as she thought it is menstruation.

Tragically, *Mornings in Jenin* ends with the death of Amal, who is fatally shot by an Israeli soldier during the exodus events of 2002 in Jenin. In the place where she was born, her life comes to an honourable end, and passes away as a martyr. Amal narrates the moments in her death throes,

> […] I close my eyes, the wholeness of my life flickering, flashing, and taking form. I have made so many mistakes. I have not loved enough. I have not loved enough […] I am

> unbelievably happy. Euphoric because the snipers did not see her and we are safe on the ground. Low beneath the clouds of dust […] (239).

Then her death confirmed, "AMAL WAS SHOT" (241).

As shown in this chapter, Susan Abulhawa in *Mornings in Jenin* revives the heritage of the Palestinian land, showing the deep connection with its people. Despite the fact of the Israeli attempts to erase the Palestinian land, the novel serves as a mean of defense against memoricide, by narrating events between the period of pre and post-Nakba 1948. Moreover, the chapter demonstrates an individual dimension by showing the interactive relationship between women and land; on the other hand it states the female's struggle of facing domestic violence during war.

Chapter Three: The Land in *The Woman from Tantoura* by Radwa Ashour

This chapter provides a close reading of *The Woman from Tantoura*, drawing on postcolonial and postcolonial ecocritical frameworks to explore how Radwa Ashour represents the intimate bond between Palestinians and their land, particularly through depictions of life in Tantoura before 1948. It also explores the lasting impact of the Nakba on both the Palestinian people and their confiscated landscape. Furthermore, the chapter investigates how the novel resists memoricide and helps preserve the Palestinian heritage and history. Finally, it applies a postcolonial ecofeminist lens to connect land with womanhood, showing how both are subjected to violence yet remain sites of resistance through Ruqayya's narrative and recollections.

1. Palestine before erasure: Ecological Memory

Echoing the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish in his employment of ecological memory, especially in "*Memory for Forgetfulness"*, Ashour uses the physical environment in her novel to underscore a strong connection between Palestinians and their lost land. In doing so she does not merely challenge the erasure but to preserve the dispossessed land from forgetfulness.

1.1. The Rural Life in Tantura

Tantura is an ancient village whose history dates back to ancient times. Its fertile soil and flourishing agriculture reflect the richness of the land. Tantura thrived not only on land but also at sea. Dr. Adnan Yaqoub Yahya, who was born in Tantura in 1930, was detained during the Nakba for over a year, and later became a doctor in Germany. Despite his life abroad, he still cherishes memories of his home. In an interview with *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, he said, "The people of Tantura

cultivated vast areas of watermelons […] being shipped to Beirut" (Awawdeh). His recollection asserted the village's prosperity and the deep agricultural traditions before 1948.

Once, it was a picturesque coastal village, its image adorning the cover of Radwa Ashour's posthumous novel. Khitam Alkhouli, in her essay *"*The Setting in the Novel of Al-Tanturiya," highlights that the choice of the title reflects that place occupies a central role in Ashour's life, a fact embodied in her selection of the title **"***al-Tantūrīyah***"**. The title serves as a gateway to the narratives, pulling the reader into exploring its deeper meanings. It acts as a key that unlocks the mysteries of the story, understand its dramatic movement and narrative suspense. Moreover, it becomes a tool that reveals the text's semantic structure, defines the features of its narrative discourse, and foregrounds its distinctive characteristics (335).

The village was erased by Zionist forces, depopulated either through genocidal acts or the forced exodus of its native population. Holding both hope and despair for return, Mourid Barghouti, in his autobiography *I Saw Ramallah*, recalls the rural relationships that tied Palestinian families together and the vast fields of olive groves, and reflects how the destruction of Palestinian villages meant the eradication of the collective Palestinian identity, wondering, "Had I been describing Deir Ghassanah with its surrounding olive groves, and convincing myself I was describing the whole country?" (Barghouti 37).

Tantoura is full of villagers whose lives revolved around agriculture and who had rich traditions such as arranged marriage and strong family ties. The rural life in the village centred on fishing and working the land,

> They can work the land, or supervise the fishing boats, we have not one but five boats, and they can keep track of them with the captains of the boats." He scolded me, "Did I

send them to school to till the earth or sell fish?" And what's wrong with tilling the earth? What's wrong with selling fish? (Ashour25).

Huggan and Tiffin posit that a primary aim of postcolonial ecocriticism is to challenge dominant "western ideologies of development", which are often complicit in ongoing environmental abuses (26, 84). This perspective resonates with the Palestinian context, where activities such as farming and fishing are not merely means of survival and livelihood but acts of resistance against the devaluation imposed by colonial capitalist ideologies. Moreover, the authors associate the colonial discourse of development with economic systems, "[T]ourism and capitalism", which have transformed the resources for indigenous survival into commodities for recreation (77).

After the attack on Tantoura and the expulsion of its people during the Nakba, the village has become a resort" (Ashour330), settlers turned the village into a place for tourism, destroyed old homes, and erased what once stood there .The place witness a radical transformation. The colonial settlers transform the school into an agricultural research centre, at the entrance was placed a sign with the names of the Zionist soldiers who were killed in doing so they obscure historical truths, effectively falsifying the indigenous narrative of what really occurred.

1.2. Ecological Harmony, Identity, and Collective Memory

From the very beginning of the novel, the writer affirms the deep-rooted existence of Palestinians, and she resists the colonial misrepresentation of the Holy Land as an "empty land". Through the nostalgic recollection of Ruqqaya, Ashour integrates cultural aspects that reflect the mundane life of indigenous villagers. This echoes Edward Said's critique of colonial discourse,

which erases native presence and history. Said states that long before the land was violated by the Zionist settlers, "[t]he Palestinian Arabs were on the land" (*The Question* 42).

Accordingly, Ruqqaya remembers the scene where the inhabitants celebrate a wedding by the seashore, depicting the cultural and ritual life of the villagers. Women joyfully sing while they prepare food, chanting traditional lyrics, "Say to his mother, rejoice and be glad, / Place myrtle on the pillows and henna on our hands" (Ashour4). These songs embody living traditions that link the villagers to their land, culture, and history.

Men dance *Dabka*, which is a Levantine folk dance. In this context, it is not merely a dance; it expresses Palestinian's cultural root and has become a symbol of artistic resistance. Through this depiction, Ashour humanizes their lives, often reduced to mere numbers. She brings them to life through detailed sensory descriptions such as the scent of grilled lamb, "the torches", the picturesque view of horses near the sea, and "the ataba and ooof melodies." These songs pass down through generations; embody living traditions that tied the villagers to their identity, culture, and history. In addition, she brings to life the richness of communal experience. The landscape is integral part in the villagers' social life.

The question of memory and identity gain centrality in *The Woman from Tantoura*. Ashour grounds Palestinian identity in everyday experiences. Thus, she utilizes sensual imagery such as "among the stalks of wheat" "Indian fig bushes" and "flat stone-baked bread loaves" in order to make readers feel the smells and textures of village life proof that this land was both lived in and beloved. Other forms of cultural aspects such as arranged marriage, which is part and parcel of the community. In addition to Madafa (guesthouse) where men gathered in, spending

their evenings solving their problems and listening to the radio. Their community was governed by strong social and familial customs.

The relationship between Palestinians and their land is vividly apparent in their culture and daily practices before the Nakba. Palestinians were deeply rooted in their environment, as they were predominantly a rural society. This connection is reflected in the works of Ghassan Kanafani, Susan Abulhawa, and Mourid Barghouti.

Correspondingly, Ashour, through her protagonist Ruqqaya, reflects this harmonious relationship with land. That manifested in the moment when Ruqayya "was carrying the little goat kid whose mother had died,… [she] said, 'I'll take her with me" (Ashour 45). Even when they forcibly displaced and terrorized along with her family and the villagers, she did not leave behind her goat, that reflects an act of conserving a piece of her homeland.

On a different note, it is important to consider that *The Woman from Tantoura*, is originally written in Arabic *Al-Tantouriyya*, approaches Palestinian culture by incorporating specific Palestinian terms and expressions, influenced by Ashour's husband, Mourid Barghouti, and as a means to preserve Palestinian heritage. In both the source and target texts, the Palestinian dialect is preserved, for instance, in the Arabic version: "Shbat maʿalih ribāṭ" translated to "Fickle February". The translator, Kay Heikkinen, employs the strategy of foreignization. This is illustrated in cultural items such as "qumbaz" (dress), "mujaddara" (a levantine dish), and "thawb" (caftan). It is also embodied in Um Sadiq's wailing, "Yaammaa, apples of my eye, they're shooting at you so far away and nobody even knows, yaammaa" (Ashour 18), to retain the cultural resonance of the source text.

Ruqqaya also maintains a connection with nature, particularly through the almond tree, which is personified as a queen symbolizing pride, dominance, and natural sovereignty over the

village: “All alone the almond tree ruled over spring in the village, the undisputed queen. None of the surrounding trees dared to contest it. Even the sea was jealous of the almond tree in the spring” (15).

The chronological order of her memories is intertwined with the almond tree, “Then the almond flowers,” and “When the almond trees flowered the whole village knew that war was breaking out” (26). “Returning from Lebanon with two truckloads of weapons, and two weeks later Haifa fell. None of us (…) noticed that the almonds had turned green on the trees” (26). It is as if Ashour links resistance with the almond tree once again when Ruqqaya’s uncle recalls his memories of resisting the Zionist occupation and refers to those who fought and were martyred alongside Palestinians from many countries, stating, “We buried him when the almonds were just starting, the blossoms just opening on the branches” (69). The poetic language and sensory detail captures a deep understanding of place: “the figs were the green kind, their sweetness would entice the birds, and they would perch on it and peck the fruit before dawn.”(119). Here the author associated the fig tree to Umm Sabah, who lives in a refugee camp, who remembers bitterly details about her figs their colours, taste despite the exile that aligns with the ecological memory, and evokes a collective, gendered map of the land, deeply stemmed from intimacy and resistance.

Ultimately, in *The Woman from Tantoura,* resilience is depicted through the description of Ruqqaya’s skill in peeling Indian figs, despite their thorns. Her brothers admire this ability. By focusing on Ruqqaya’s senses and her interaction with the fruit, Ashour depicts her natural bond with the land, her harmony with it, and her instinctive connection to nature.

The Indian fig, olive trees, and the sage are extensions of Palestinian culture and ecology that tie Ruqqaya to her confiscated land.

1.3. Mapping Memory: The Land as Resistance

In one of her final interviews, Radwa Ashour emphasized that the novel cannot be amputated, explicitly or implicitly, from its geographical and historical contexts. In *The Woman from Tantoura*, the land becomes a repository of memory, history, and culture. In this spirit, Ruqayya's attachment to Tantoura conveys a universal indigenous ancestral bond to the motherland. Ashour represents it as an echo of the past, souvenirs, rooted in family or emotional relationships. Besides, by means of fiction, she resurrects what has been lost, violated, and deliberately forgotten. In the same vein, Chaima Mohamed Hassanin observes,

> The novel recreates its geography from memory, where all the villages of the Sahel and the towns of Galilee, with orange walls, olive trees, and figs, with all its wildflowers and crops, are described. From Tantoura to Ain Ghazal, Izm, Qaisaria, Freddys and Tarbeja, Ain Tahrabiya, Ain Basin, Safouria and Al-Mutla, Um al-Shuf and Tira, Wadi Ara, Al-Khalisa and dozens more are well-described. The novelist does not forget to create the geography of Palestine.(1188).

Furthermore, the novel's opening, which includes a map of Palestine and a plan of Tantoura, underscores the centrality of place. Cartography reappears as a declaration of existence throughout the novel in symbolic moments such as, "grasped a stick from a tree, and drew a map of Palestine on the sand."(Ashour38), and "Abu Amin would scrutinize the details more closely,[...], and sit on the map, reaching out and taking the pencil from Hasan and adding towns

and villages neither I nor Amin had ever heard of"(96) these moments transform mapping into a narrative act of *Sumud*[1] –steadfastness-.

In addition, the novel is rich with symbols that serve as anchors of identity. The olive tree is an emblem of Palestine. It echoes the Holy Land and the text grounds the reader within the physical and historical landscape of the Palestinian cause. These archetypal symbols, olive trees, the sea, palms, and Indian fig bushes, convey the cultural specificity of the land and elevate it beyond a mere setting. Ruqayya's memory revives Tantoura, a place that has been wiped from the map. This deep connection between memory and land makes it impossible to separate the narrative from the geography that gives it shape.

From a postcolonial ecocritical perspective, the landscape in *The Woman from Tantoura* is a participant in the story. It bears the scars of massacres, atrocities, and the collective trauma of displacement. The sea in the opening scene functions as a metaphor for "paradise lost," representing what once was and what has since been erased. Such imagery elevates the environment into an active narrative agent. As Graham Huggan explains, postcolonial ecocriticism involves "(1) the continuing centrality of the imagination and, more specifically, imaginative literature to the task of postcolonial ecocriticism and (2) The mediating function of social and environmental advocacy, which might turn imaginative literature into a catalyst for social action and exploratory literary analysis into a full-fledged form of engaged cultural critique" (*Postcolonial Ecologies* 12). Ashour's imagination of Palestine draws attention to the human and ecological cost of settler colonialism.

[1] Johannessen, Runa. "Sumud." *PalQuest*, The Palestinian Museum, https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/33633/sumud. Accessed 17 May 2025.https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/33633/sumud

Furthermore, Ashour revisits Tantoura in order to revive it like a martyr rising from the grave, mirroring this in the scene where, “Hasan would have distinguished Tantoura by writing its name in larger letters than he used for the names of Haifa or Jaffa or Jerusalem, marking its place with a large circle that he colored in red, as if Tantoura were the district capital and not Haifa.” (96). Through vivid recollections, Ruqayya transforms memory into an act of defiance. Her intimate and detailed narrative reimagines the village through rich, sensory descriptions. Memory becomes the core of the novel, resurrecting a place that now exists only in the collective consciousness of the displaced. In one scene, a Palestinian “grasped a stick from a tree, and drew a map of Palestine on the sand” (38), by centring the focus on geography as a form of resistance, Ashour confirms that its map is imprinted in their hearts and memories. Similarly, Ghassan Kanafani responds to the erasure of the Palestinian geographical map by creating a literary one just before the 1948 war, where he highlights the coexistence of Arab Palestinians, Eastern Jews, and other minorities before the arrival of European Zionists (Alhosani 37). Through this imaginative narrative, he shows how fiction can challenge colonial stories and help reclaim both historical and geographical truth (Alhosani, *Palestine in Geography and Fiction*).Ultimately, Ashour also reinforces the land as a site of sacrifice and honor. Abu Amin’s account of visiting,

> A three-sided monument of white marble that was erected near Rachel's Tomb, at the fork of the road to Jerusalem and Bethlehem and Hebron. On the monument were carved the names of the martyrs who participated in the battles that occurred south of Jerusalem. Palestinians, Egyptians, Syrians, Libyans, Sudanese, and Yemenis, who are buried there. I visited them, and recited the Fatiha for their souls (Ashour 69).

That testifies to a shared human history of resistance rooted in the Holy Land and provides evidence of the profound bond between geography, memory, and resistance.

2. The Land under Siege: Palestine's unending Nakba

Radwa Ashour addressed the post-Nakba period, one that has never-ended, and its lasting effect on both the landscape and the people. She highlights the struggle of Palestinian people, who experience various forms of oppression and layered struggle that resulted from mass exodus, and exile. She draw particular attention to refugee camps.

2.1. Ruqqaya's recollections: The Olive and the Key

We follow Ruqqaya's account evoluted as she comes of age from childhood, womanhood to grandmotherhood.

Ashour carefully reveals the intimate details of village life, during her childhood, in al-Tantoura, which lies at the heart of Ruqayya's memory. She portrays the village as a source of belonging and rootedness, brought to life through the protagonist's recollection,

> Me, me, me . . . ." I would go down into the deep pit and they would spread sand over me until my body disappeared, leaving only the head rising excitedly from its warm, sandy burial place. A grave surrounded by the laughter and devilment of the young. At other times I would shout at the top of my lungs like someone struck by madness, "Hun-ter! Hun-ter!" I would crawl on the ground and jump and crawl again, in my hand the copper vessel that I had secured between the rocks as a trap for fish, in which the poor thing had been caught. I would lift the silver fish by its tail and say teasingly, "My fish is always the biggest and the best(3).

From the beginning of the story, Ruqayya tells her story step by step as she moves from one place of exile to another. In her narrative, the land is a living memory, carved deep into her soul, constantly resurfacing at every stage of her narrations.

Accordingly, Ashour deliberately challenges the narrative of settler-colonialism, which often imposes itself upon historical documentation. Through the character of Ruqayya, she reimagines the historian as a storyteller, reclaiming history from the margins (Barakat 32). The poscolonial novelist decentres the narrative, gives a voice to a subaltern female through the power of memory and storytelling.

Ruqayya the mother and wife is mirrored as a Palestinian woman, who carries within her heart the map of lost Palestine. Ruqayya is haunted by her birthplace memory. She remembering al-Tantoura when sitting by the sea in Sidon, alien facing the sea in Alexandria. The sense of estrangement becomes palpable as she carries her "strangers' gear, an umbrella, a chair, perhaps a towel and swimsuit. It's a limited visit; you come as a [stranger]."(3), bitterly remembers that the sea once bordered her home. She cannot recall when she learned to swim because water, like the land, was simply part of her being.

Her memory becomes an act of resistance. Ruqayya does not merely seek the names of fellow villagers in refugee camps; she actively revives the forgotten details of her village with Uncle Amin, giving al-Tantoura new life through storytelling. The village appears again and again, in her nostalgic recollections, in the way she describes familiar places, and in the key to their home, which her mother wore until the day she died. This key becomes a lasting symbol of the right to return for all the Palestinian people.

Grandmother Ruqqaya, fulfilling her innate role as a storyteller to her grandsons, but this time she decides not to tell myths and ghoul stories, instead she narrates her land as a deep wound.

Throughout the novel, al-Tantoura, the refugee camp, the olive, and the key emerge repeatedly. These elements demonstrate that place, in Ruqayya's memory is emotional, symbolic, and inseparable from her identity. Even when stolen, the land lives on in the Palestinian consciousness, retold as story, reclaimed as truth, and used to confront forgetting and global complicity. By the end of the novel, the land appears as immortal, an eternal memory that is living with her.

Ashour ended the narrative with a little boy called Naji, which means "the survivor." As if Ruqayya, the woman who survived the Nakba passes the flame to young Naji child from a new generation for her, he holds on to the dream of freedom.

Throughout the novel, Radwa Ashour gives voice to the different faces of Palestinians who live through the continued tragedy, like Abu Sadiq, who refused to leave his land and was martyred along his sons for his land. Unlike Abu Amin, who chose to survive and protect his family, never stopped dreaming of his village, and stayed tied to it, whispering its name so he kept Tantoura alive. Ruqayya herself fought with memory and words, determined not to forget and not to let the world forget.

She wants that the future generations and all of humanity to remember that once, on the shore of the Mediterranean, there was"[a] lady of the land"[2] called al-Tantoura, was wiped off the map, but it remains alive in the hearts and memories of its wounded people.

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[2]Nahid, Pádraig Ó Tuama. "*Love in a Time of Refugees*." On Being, 13 July 2016, https://onbeing.org/blog/love-in-a-time-of-refugees/.

The struggle is centred on the land, a land that remains the object of invaders' greed to this day. This ongoing greed is particularly evident in Gaza**,** where the same painful scene repeats itself, albeit today much more brutally. There is a world of difference between holding a piece of paper that says you own the land and truly belonging to it by spirit and identity. Fanon powerfully addressed this in *The Wretched of the Earth*: "For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity. But this dignity..." (44).

Following 1948, it became impossible for the original inhabitants to return; however, the connection between Palestinians and their land persisted. In *The Woman from Tantoura*, the author reflects this bond in the memories of Abu Amin, who, despite the dangers, revisited his village again and again,

> My uncle Abu Amin was not there when they occupied the village, but he was the first of the family to go back to it. He would say, 'I went back to Tantoura.' [...] My uncle didn't tell us anything about what he saw in our village when he sneaked back two months later (69).

For Uncle Abu Amin, this secret pilgrimage becomes a form of resistance. Radwa Ashour constructs a profound sense of ecological connection that transcends the Nakba. Abu Amin, who secretly returns to his village of Tantoura, embodies a form of belonging that is akin to an umbilical cord connecting a baby to its mother. This feeling of attachment to the land does not arise solely from history or politics; rather, it stems from a symbiotic, innate, and deeply rooted consciousness. This reflects what Tom Griffiths refers to as "deep ecological time" a conception of time not seen as a sequence of events marking beginnings and endings, but as a continuous,

organic interplay between humans and their land. Thus, the relationship stretches beyond temporal frameworks (Huggan &Tiffin 96).

The people who had once lived in harmony with the land depended on its resources: they grew wheat, planted fig and olive trees, fished, and stored olive oil, thyme, and crops. Ashour highlights the impact of this transformation on the environment through the lens of human loss. When Ruqayya saw pictures of her village, she was mesmerized: "Oh my God, hold on, Ruqayya! A refugee, in a tent, in Tantoura? Where will I go then, to one of the tourist chalets on the seashore?" (Ashour 333).

This narrative echoes what Mourid Barghouti described during his visit to Ramallah, painfully recalling how his family and the fellahin in the area used to store olive oil. In his autobiography, he writes,

> After '67 my discovery that I had to buy olive oil was truly painful. From the day we knew anything, we knew that olives and oil were there in our houses. Nobody from the village ever bought oil or olives. The village sells oil and olives to Ramallah, to Amman, to the Gulf. But for their own tables its people bring the olives in from the fields and the oil in from the press to the storeroom and the barrels that are never empty from season to season (Barghouti 63).

In a powerful act of solidarity, a determined woman, Fatma bint Abu Seif, restored the oil press that had not worked for years so that people could again press their own olive oil (63).

Ashour exposes Zionist practices that destroyed nature by implementing systematic strategies. Through Ruqqaya's voice and the shared oral histories of women in the Shatila camp,

she reveals how trauma is preserved not only in Ruqqaya, but also within the entire Palestinian community that has been exposed to repeated massacres. She depicts the land as more than a geographical space, it is a space of belonging, a silent witness to violence, and a repository of collective memory.

In the account of Um Ilyas, a refugee woman, Israeli soldiers dug military trenches four months after the people forced displacement. They destroyed her farm and severed it from the village, symbolizing the rupture of both ecology and "indigeneity". Women, as living witnesses in the camps, share their bitter experiences and relive memories of ethnic cleansing and massacres committed by Zionist forces against a vulnerable and defenceless population.

Later, the Zionist forces built kibbutzim (settlements) on the seized land under the guise of a colonial "developmental" project. Through metaphors and the testimonies of her characters, Ashour personifies the land as a victim of military violence.

Ashour's storytelling challenges colonial narratives by presenting the land not as empty. These capitalist settler-colonial practices, which destroyed the indigenous lifestyle, align with postcolonial ecocriticism, a theoretical framework that exposes how so-called "development" often masks violent imperialist ambitions. In this light, Israel emerges not as a developmental state, but as an expansionist, imperial entity.

2.2. The Palestinian Experience of Land Displacement and Trauma: Memory, Identity, and Resistance

Ruqayya experienced both the pre Nakba period and post Nakba era. She personifies the Palestinian identity through multiple dimensions. On one hand, she represents the displaced

individual living in exile, whose land has been taken; on the other hand, she embodies the wounded person who suffers from deep loss and trauma. Contrary to the Holocaust, the Nakba remains a living reality for Palestinians, it has not become a closed chapter in history. This ongoing struggle creates significant challenges that hinder the advancement of trauma studies in the Palestinian context. Furthermore, the Nakba has not been properly documented or commemorated, due to the absence of accountability for those responsible for the dispossession and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. In this context, Nur Masalha showcases the repercussions of the 1948 catastrophe on Palestinian refugees and emphasizes the importance of oral history, memory, and the testimonies of Nakba survivors in documenting and preserving the victims' version of history in contrast to the dominant Israeli narrative. As Aouadi notes, trauma experiences of loss and dispossession are deeply intertwined with the struggle over power, particularly in terms of who has the authority to narrate and record their own stories and truths (204).

Ruqayya thus represents the Palestinian woman who tells the story of her homeland so that it is not silenced by forgetfulness. Like the resistant figure envisioned by Ghassan Kanafani, who advocated for the use of "the weapon of literature" as a means of self-representation and refusal of silence. Ruqayya's son "Hassan" insists that she narrate what really happened of their homeland herself. This aligns with Edward Said's call for self-representation, where the subaltern voice resists suppression by reclaiming "the permission to narrate".

Ruqqaya conveys the history of several generations: those who once believed in the rise of Arabs and the emancipation; the generation of 1948, which endured exile and ethnic cleansing; and those who believed the return to their land was inevitable, reflecting Darwish :"We

Palestinians suffer from an incurable disease called “hope”.. Ruqayya preserves the memory of a village erased from the map, using narrative as a means of cultural resistance.

Ashour's rich language functions as a vessel for Palestinian identity. Her writing gives voice not only to the land and the olive tree but also to traditional elements such as the qumbaz, the *maqluba* dish, and the nameless martyrs buried in mass graves. She amplifies the silenced stories of women in refugee camps, grieving mothers, elderly survivors, and children like little Said. Through a blend of expressive and narrative techniques, Ashour infuses her prose with cultural and historical meanings, enabling readers to engage with the text on intellectual, emotional, and political levels.

In *The Woman from Tantoura*, Ashour portrays the lasting effects of colonization on individuals and communities, with a focus on displacement. The themes of exile, alienation, and return are explored within a postcolonial framework. Displacement is shown not only as a physical removal but also as a deep emotional rupture that affects the individual’s sense of belonging and identity. Ruqayya’s multigenerational journey reflects the continuous trauma of Palestinians who have been expelled from one refugee camp to another, and between different countries, all while nurturing the hope of return.

Her displacement begins at the age of thirteen, when she and her community are forcibly removed from their native land. Taken by truck to the nearby village of Al-Furaydis, this marks the beginning of a long and painful journey. Ruqayya’s path leads her from Tantoura to Al-Furaydis, then to the Triangle area, Tulkarm, Hebron, Sidon, Beirut, Abu Dhabi, and finally Alexandria. This endless cycle of dislocation emphasizes the broader Palestinian exile and deepens her internal fragmentation; with each displacement, a piece of her identity was eroded.

Ashour illustrates not only Ruqayya's personal loss but also the widespread dispersion of Palestinians across and beyond their homeland. This fragmentation mirrors the collective struggle of a people who live in a state of statelessness, under occupation or in diaspora. In the Shatila refugee camp, Ruqayya listens to women recount stories of stolen olive groves, lost siblings, ancestral lands, and violent wars, reinforcing the shared memory of dispossession.

The novel depicts both the psychological and physical effects of displacement. Ashour aligns with Shaima Muzher Abid Alreda Alsaedi's definition of displacement as the forced removal of people due to war or political unrest, resulting in isolation, emotional detachment, and alienation. Displaced individuals often experience disrupted routines and weakened community bonds, altering their behaviors and identities (67–68).

Ruqayya's character, who is torn between adapting to foreignness and preserving her culture and identity. Her internal conflict resonates throughout the narrative, transforming her own individual suffering into a testimony of resilience.

The Woman from Tantoura, at its core, portrays the trauma inflicted by war, with Ruqayya as a survivor of genocide. At just thirteen, she loses her father, brothers, and many villagers during the massacre of Tantoura. In this context, Frantz Fanon explains trauma as a direct consequence of colonial violence, which aims to dehumanize the colonized (16). Ashour adopts a fragmented narrative structure to reflect Ruqayya's experience of trauma, oscillating between past and present, memory and survival.

Similarly, Edward Said connects the Nakba with lasting trauma. He writes,

> Many families and individuals had their lives broken, their spirits drained, their composure destroyed forever in the context of seemingly unending, serial dislocation: this was and still is for me of the greatest poignancy. One of my uncles went from Palestine to Alexandria to Cairo to Baghdad to Beirut and now in his 80s lives, a sad, silent man, in Seattle. Neither he nor his immediate family ever fully recovered. This is emblematic of the larger story of loss and dispossession, which continues today. (qtd. in Hassanin 1186)

Ashour captures the overwhelming effect of trauma and the burden of remembrance of the dark past of wartime. Ruqqaya found that,

> it's hard to tell, it's not something to tell. It branches out, and it's heavy. How many wars can a single story bear? How many massacres? Anyway, how can I tie the small things, important as they are, to the terrors that we've all lived through?(Ashour 163).

She connects element from nature to war and terror.

2.3. Refugee Camps as Sites of Exile

Centring camps in postcolonial literature has become essential in order to decentre dominant narratives by giving voice to the marginalized, those who live in tents. Refugee camps have become a symbol of dismembered Palestine and the plight of displaced Palestinians. The year 1948 marked a critical juncture in Palestinian history, as they were subjected to atrocities and mass displacement from their homeland, leading to an ongoing refugee crisis. Since the 20th century, *Nakba* literature has embraced stories centred on themes of exile and refugee camps, reflecting what Edward Said refers to as “the age of the refugee” (180). Ashour revisits the Nakba in her novel through the fragmented narration of Ruqayya, using a first-person narrative.

According to Khitam Alkhouli “The novelist realizes that narrating in the first person pronoun enables the writer to reach the inner thoughts and feelings of the protagonist without affectation or mincing.”(10). that clearly conveys the refugees’ status and their exilic conditions.

Accordingly, Rana Barakat, in her article How to Read a Massacre in Palestine: Indigenous History as a Methodology of Liberation, states that Ashour liberated her writings from the linearity of history , that challenges the dominant settler temporality, as earlier Palestinian writers have done. Yet she goes further by positioning the audience into a listener to the protagonist’s stories, she shifts focus from chronological progression to spatial narration creating a map of living memory (33).

Since the attack on their village of Tantoura the characters remain stateless.

Ruqqaya narrates her experience alongside others, exposing the suffering of refugees who are constantly subjected to fear. She describes the severe restrictions, in Shatila for instance most of their houses were roofed with sheets of zinc held down with stones, because it was forbidden for the refugees to build a roof (189), and unhuman conditions, echoing what Mahmoud Darwish wrote in his poem: *Love in a Time of Refugees*

In the midst of a sea of humanity,
refugees in tents
Sleeping on bags and blankets:
a tent. (Darwish qtd. in Nahid).

Despite these hardships mentioned by Darwish, the camps served as a centre for Palestinian resistance. However, the refugees also became targets of violence, sieges, and

massacres, such as Sabra and Shatila massacres, which Ashour portrays with haunting imagery, a nurse from Shatila retell Ruqqaya what happened in the hospital of the camp. She portrays the chaotic state of the hospital: “the glass was broken and the curtains were burned and the cafeteria was demolished, […] and the picture of Abu Ammar was torn, [...] The children’s section was empty, and the nurseries also.”(199). then she added that,

> [she] found a child killed and thrown into the hospital garden. She added that when she went back to Sabra she found there children who had been in the hospital and whom she knew, aged a year or two years or three, killed, including a paralyzed child who had been killed with an axe. She thinks that they threw them there so it would not be said that they killed children in the hospital. A number of people testified that […], they found bodies piled on top of each other, and among them were the bodies of nursing infants and children not fully formed (I think that they were the newborns that they took from the nursery (199).

2.4. Land and Memory: Resisting Palestinian Memoricide

Despite the occupation, oppression and the ongoing genocide, the testimony of the Holy Land has always been present in its trees and sacred monuments. Harlow and Riley point out, in their introduction to *Palestine’s Children: Returning to Haifa and Other Stories*, that Kanafani’s works serve not only as fictional accounts but also as records of Palestinian geography and history. Kanafani attempts to resist the memoricide of Palestinian places that were destroyed and renamed by Zionist forces. Inspired by James Joyce’s literary depiction of Dublin, Kanafani utilizes literature as a means to resist the erasure of memory. His works underscore how deeply homeland and identity are interwoven in the Palestinian collective imagination. Through

Mansur's journey across Galilee, Kanafani reclaims the lost landscape, offering a topographical record (Harlow and Riley 19). In this context, " in his literary work *Returning to Haifa* , a narrative of loss he depicted through a character called "Said" power of memory to preserve place: Said "used to know Haifa stone by stone, intersection by intersection […] he knew Haifa well, and now he felt as though he hadn't been away for twenty years" Though "the names began to rain down inside his head as though a great layer of dust had been shaken off them, Wadi Nisnas, King Faisal Street, Hanatir Square, Halisa, Hadar"(Kanafani152).

Similarly, in *The Woman from Tantoura*, Radwa Ashour instrumentalizes memory to defy erasure through nature and symbols such as trees, the sea, sand, and place names. Even when return is impossible, displaced characters preserve the memory of places through language and ritual. Every Palestinian mother, including Um Ruqayya, kept the key to her lost house, a symbolic act of remembrance and resistance. After Umm Ruqayya's death, her daughter inherits the key and wears it around her neck, signifying the transmission of memory and the enduring hope of return. At the literacy centre, in the refugee camp, where Ruqayya teaches, she observes that all the women similarly hold onto their keys. These keys and other belongings become vessels of identity, and collective heritage.

This notion echoes Astrid Erll's concept of "traveling memory," where individuals participate in collective remembrance through shared narratives, inherited rituals and traditions. As she explains: "The individual who shares the collective images and narrative of the past, who practice mnemonic rituals, display an inherited habit and can draw on repertoires of explicit and implicit knowledge... All forms of diaspora lead to diffusion of mnemonic media, contents, forms, and practice across the globe." (Erll, qtd. in Hassanin1196).

Thus, memory resists forgetfulness and colonial suppression. It is not merely a recollection of the past but a living force that sustains identity, reclaims space, and challenges the settler-colonial narrative.

Writing about the past of one's life "does not act as a single account" but "belongs to a whole story" that is still taking shape. Joyce Carol Oates sees memoirs as the most seductive and dangerous of literary genres: "The memoir is a repository of truths, as each discrete truth is uttered, but the memoir cannot be the repository of Truth which is the very breadth of the sky, too vast to be perceived in a single gaze" (300). Oates capitalises the Truth to show that it cannot be contained in one memoir and that it is still part of the process of adding accounts to a story in the making (Aouadi 219).

The individual memoir represents one piece of the puzzle; therefore, storytelling must be valued as an important tool for shaping *al-dhakira* -collective memory-.

The postcolonial authors provides powerful literary representations of the enduring bond between Palestinians and their land. Moreover, through postcolonial and ecocritical reading, this analysis has revealed how the author portrayed life in Palestinian village before Nakba as spaces of rootedness, harmony, and belonging. The Nakba, as depicted in this narrative, impacted not only human beings but also the landscape. Yet, this text contributes to resist the erasure of memory. By preserving the voices of a displaced people through storytelling and remembrance. The novel stands as an act of cultural survival and resilience, reviving Tantoura, a village that once existed on the shores of the Holy Land.

2.5 Postcolonial Voice and colonial violence

Radwa Ashour was deeply engaged with postcolonial themes that were clearly reflected in her work. She addresses concerns that are linked to this scope. Ashour rewrites history by focusing on personal and collective narratives, giving voice to the marginalized and shedding light on obscured episodes of atrocities and brutalities stemming from the events of 1948 that began 75 years ago. She bears witness to the history of extermination. Echoing Memmi's theory of colonization which contends that the colonizer draws upon destruction and erasure, she reveals several massacres like Sabra and Shatila, and Tantoura as part of continuous acts of violence and massacres. In details she records practices of the settler occupation of "plundering," "destruction of property", pointing out that the Zionist goal was not just to expel Palestinians, but to wipe their existence from the land, "They weren't satisfied with plundering, they also destroyed the furniture and the equipment they hadn't taken, and wrote obscenities on the walls" (209).

In the same vein, the writer also chronicles the events and mentions the role played by the Phalange and Saad Haddad's army, who shockingly executed Palestinians in camps. "There was kidnapping and killing and making examples of corpses and imprisonment and torture, during the fall of 1982 and throughout the following year" (190). The author resurrects the serial killing and violence committed by the Israelis that aligns with Memmi's analysis of the colonizer as the dehumanizing of the occupied subject. In doing so, she provides the testimony of Umm Brahim and others in order to assert that the committed massacres were not isolated acts but a part of lasting practices and slaughter that shape the identity of a people under ongoing oppression. Moreover, she details events in a way to reconstruct the past again via recording, scenes, dates, names, and locals. She illuminates an obscured narratives of a subjugated people through exposing the colonial logic of ruination.

3.Land and Womanhood: An Ecofeminist Perspective

Rape doesn't exist.

'They say that it's nature.'

'We say that it's the law.'

Rape exists in reality

Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Feminism or Death*

The Woman from Tantoura echoes ecofeminist theme of the strong relationship between female characters and nature using metaphors and symbolism. Through metaphor, the protagonist Ruqayya narrates the arrival of spring in Tantoura in her childhood, where verdant landscape blankets the hills and valleys, and almond trees stand in distinctive presence. The almond tree, a well-known symbol in Palestinian culture, serves as a maker of both rootedness and continuity. The personification of the almond tree as "queen" ruling over spring reinforces its symbolic connection to women as central, vital, and enduring. "All alone the almond tree ruled over spring in the village, the undisputed queen. None of the surrounding trees dared to con-test it…" (Ashour 15), the metaphor of the almond tree's queendom aligns with the depiction of women as vital, central, and enduring figures, tracing its uniqueness and beauty through personification. The imagery frames the tree's singular beauty and authority, linking it with the strength and distinction of women.

After decades, in Alexandria, Ruqayya senses the longing and homesickness to her local nature in Tantoura where she lived the childhood spring, Ruqayya explicitly states, "...I missed the almond tree, and in the spring I missed it more..." (316), implying that nature serves as a vessel for memory, where its elements evoke a sense of nostalgia upon sight. The almond tree reconnects Ruqayya with past experience and emotions. Just as the almond trees in Tantoura held

echoes of home, Ruqayya carries her bond with nature beyond Palestine, planting roses in her house garden in Egypt. She passes geographical displacement while reconciling with nature.

In the chapter entitled Households Gardens, Ruqayya recounts her journey of cultivating a garden within her home, weaving personal memory in the act of planting. She refers to her jeneina (garden), noting that the word is the diminutive form of janna (Paradise), reflecting the reverent connection to the space and capturing the perfection of nature.

As she thinks about her garden, she recalls her mother's words about Umm Jamil, "... I remember that my mother used to say that my Uncle Abu Jamil's wife had a green thumb..." (315). In Arabic, this expression's origin is Yadãn Khadrã' (green hand), which conveys the idea that when a woman plants something, it flourishes, signifying nature's responsiveness to feminine care. This strengthens the ecofeminist link between women and the land. The act of gardening is an extension of a female's creativity.

Moreover, as Ruqayya initiates planting roses, she contemplates the Jasmine, Ashour uses simile and personification to describe it, "... I planted two kinds of jasmine. Jasmine is like a girl. It grows quickly and then fills out…" (315). the simile of jasmine and a girl evokes themes of vitality and transformation. It portrays the organic process of maturation and beauty. The comparison also underscores Jasmine's responsiveness to care and environment. Just as a girl thrives when nurtured, encouraged, and given space to grow, jasmine flourishes under attentive care. Its fragrance, soft yet persistent, mirrors the strength and influence of femininity. It is subtle but deeply felt.

As Ruqayya immersed herself in planting, she developed a deep, intimate connection with the plants.

Ruqayya's relationship with nature deepens as she cultivates the garden, and her desire to plant roses becomes more than simple act, it evolves into a necessary, a craving and need she describes as being "gripped by flower fever". This suggests the instinctive urge to nurture life through planting, which elaborates the ecofeminist idea that nature and feminity are linked. Additionally, she reflects on the plants profound effect on her, saying, "I wanted to occupy myself with the plants; they enticed me, and I gave in to temptation..." (316), insisting the irresistible connection between them.

Therefore, her attentiveness towards plants "...water them, turn over the dirt, feed them with fertilizer, clean their leaves, and think about them..." (316), reveals how nature responds to the physical acts of care as an entity that interacts, flourishes, and offers something in return under the female treatment. In this context, tending to plants is not merely a task but a conversation, an exchange that empowers a woman's relationship with the natural world. The presence of the planted roses intertwines with the loneliness of Ruqayya in exile.

Profoundly, the deep identification between women and trees manifested in emphasizing their rootedness in the homeland. Ruqayya denotes, "... every woman is a tree. I mean, every woman has a tree …" (119). This follows a description of Umm Nabil talking about the pomegranate appearance in her village, Ruqayya says "there" referring to their villages in Palestine, the homes they were forced to leave, the statement made in the context of the protagonist's experiences in the Shatila refugee camp where she visited the women there. The metaphor "woman is a tree" indicates a personal and specific connection between both. Each one of them exists within the other, and every woman possesses a specific tree that rooted in Palestine in her village, knowing by her name, "...[t]he lemon tree of Umm Samir; the orange tree of Umm

Ilyas; the carob of Umm Haniya; the almond of Umm Abed; the palm of Umm al-Nahid; the blackberry of Umm Muhammad; the fig of Umm Sabah…" (119).

Notably, the sea stands as a fundamental feature of Tantoura, shaping both the village's identity and Ruqayya's profound connection to it. From the beginning of the novel, she narrates the sea voices, colors, and scents. Besides reflecting on her relation, later, she states, "... I don't remember when I learned how to swim just as I don't remember when I learned how to walk or talk..."(2). Through this confession, she suggests that swimming is not merely a learned skill but an innate side of her being and existence, it is absorbed effortlessly like language and movement, took it from the rhythms of her native environment. In this sense, the sea becomes a part of her, embodying familiarity and instinct, and continues its role as constant force in her life.

As the years passed, Ruqayya persevered with her innate connection to the sea. She carries it with her through exile in Alexandria. Throughout the narrative, she sought solace and tranquillity along the shoreline, she found in the rhythmic waves a quiet spiritual refuge, a space where the burden of dislocation momentarily softened, easing the weight of her days and reminding her of home. The scene is beautifully narrated and pictures the sensational moment with the sea, she says,

> Sometimes I go down to the beach; I take off my sandals and plunge into the sand with my bare feet, crossing it in a straight line toward the water. Then I stop, and give myself to the scent of the sea, to the splashing of the waves, to the salt and spray they scatter over my face and body, which somehow steal onto the tip of my tongue. I stay standing like that, watching (314)

The sea in the novel functions as more than a natural element. It becomes a living repository of memory it woven into the village's identity through Ruqayya's personal history. It presents itself in remembrance, holding both loss and longing. In her dream, Ruqayya revisited Tantoura's shore alongside Wisal, her childhood friend, recalling the profound act of walking barefoot on the sand, "... Once we were in Tantoura, walking on the seashore, just two girls walking barefoot on the wet, sandy shore, walking along the edge of the sea..." (258). this imagery reinforces the sea's role as a channel for memory, an eternal witness of souvenirs.

3.1. Palestinian Women's Double Struggle: Between Patriarchy and Occupation

Ashour recounts the horrific experiences of women, including instances of rape committed by Israeli soldiers during the Zionist attacks on Lebanon. The first involves Ruqayya's assistance to writer Bayan Nuwayhid, who aimed to collect testimonies from survivors of the Sabra and Shatila massacres. Among the cases that deeply affected Ruqayya was the tragic story of the Lebanese woman Intisar, a worker at Acre Hospital, who was raped until she died. She also remembered the ordeal of another nurse who was repeatedly raped until her death. Ruqayya vividly recalls these stories,

> She must have mentioned Intisar, whom I found charming, and whom they raped until she died. She must have mentioned her other coworker, whose name doesn't come to me but whose face and tone of voice I remember, I mean the other nurse they took turns raping until they killed her. (Ashour 184).

This same account was narrated by Abed, Ruqayya's son, in a letter to his brothers Sadiq and Hasan:

> [T]hey took two nurses, one of them Palestinian and the other Lebanese. They pulled Intisar the Lebanese by her hair and took her down to the shelter of the hospital and took turns raping her, then they shot her. Then they returned for her coworker and raped her until she died (Ashour 198).

According to Nicola Henry's article "Theorizing Wartime Rape: Deconstructing Gender, Sexuality, and Violence" (2016), sexual violence, including rape, has been a widespread phenomenon in warfare throughout history, affecting women, children, and men. Despite legal and political silence, rape remains deeply rooted in the aftermath of conflict**.** These literary depictions powerfully illustrate how Ashour's narrative aligns with Henry's observation that rape in wartime is not an isolated incident, but a systematic and symbolic weapon targeting both individuals and communities.

At the request of her son Hasan, Ruqayya documented her experiences and those of other Palestinians. Among the testimonies she recorded was that of Abu Muhammad, a Palestinian man imprisoned in Zikhron Yaakov. He recounted witnessing a brutal assault on a girl by Israeli soldiers in front of her father. When the father tried to intervene, he was shot dead. Abu Muhammad observed a shift in Arab societal discourse, as these acts, once hidden, came to light due to such testimonies: "One person among us saw the Israeli soldiers assaulting a girl before his eyes, and when her father tried to protect her, they killed him" (Ashour 241).

Although rape and other forms of sexual violence are recognized as severe violations of humanitarian law, their existence remains unchanged. Gender-based violence continues to persist. Furthermore, in the aftermath of political conflicts, survivors often endure societal stigma and shame, while perpetrators escape prosecution and accountability (Henry 44–45). This is echoed

in Ashour's narrative, where silence surrounds the victims and acknowledgment only surfaces within the confined space of testimony.

Based on a 2001 ICRC study, sexual violence in armed conflicts is used as a weapon of destruction, targeting communities as a form of warfare. It is also regarded as a "by-product of war," where women's bodies become sites of assault, sometimes even granted as rewards to soldiers or civilians (Henry 51–52). Ashour's depiction of Intisar and the anonymous nurse underscores this dynamic, as both women are objectified and brutalized within a context that dehumanizes their very existence.

Ashour also subtly illustrates how the trauma of war infiltrates personal and domestic spaces. Following the Zionist raid that led to the looting and closure of the Centre, Abed, Ruqqaya's son, becomes deeply affected. Unable to process the collective trauma, his pain spills into his household in the form of domestic violence. In a tense conversation with his mother, Abed admits to hitting his wife, mistakenly assuming that she came to complain: "He said, 'She came to complain to you about me, didn't she, to tell you that I hit her?" (Ashour 208). His mother responds with silence, reflecting how abuse is often concealed in Arab society: "She didn't say that" (208).

This concealment mirrors Henry's argument that survivors of wartime sexual violence are silenced by societal norms and pressures, where the preservation of family honour often takes precedence over justice or healing (51-52).

Although Ashour withholds the wife's voice, the novel provides insight into Abed's mental state. Crushed by external pressures, he admits to a sense of disconnection from life itself,

> I can't stand myself. I can't even stand our little boy... I want to sleep but I can't sleep, I'm hungry but I'm not interested in eating... I turn to my wife suddenly as if in desire and then I discover that I'm incapable of intimacy with her... my ability to concentrate is zero (208).

Ruqqaya's subsequent question: "Did you go to the Center?" reveals her understanding that his violent outburst is a product of psychological disintegration brought on by systemic and personal trauma.

3.2. Narrating Survival and Suffering

Ashour's The Woman from Tantoura is distinguished by its significant narration of survivability, as the protagonist, Ruqayya, recounts her lived experiences across Lebanon and Egypt. Even aesthetically Ashour structures the novel with deliberate linguistic symbolism, opening with Yahya (1), an Arabic verb meaning to revive, and concluding with Naji (362), a noun signifying survivor. This linguistic progression reinforces the novels thematic notion of revival and survival as central motifs in Ruqayya's journey.

The novel develops, mostly through her perspective, documenting not only the personal dimension but also the broader struggles of displacement and the political upheaval. Her journey of survival begins in the refugee camps of Lebanon, where she lives the hardships of displacement. Her story improves through key stages of her life, including marriage and raising children, and the narratives in Lebanon vividly depict the devastating impact of the Palestinian conflict, presenting in the fear she lived there and the tragic loss of her husband, who disappeared after the Zionist attack on the hospital where he worked. Years later, Ruqayya moves to Abu

Dhabi, before eventually settling in Alexandria, marking a continued search for stability while lingering echoes of her mother land Palestine.

In the novel, Ruqayya embarks on the challenging task of writing testimonies at the request of her son, Hasan. Despite finding unease in the process, she remains committed, continuing through her discomfort to fulfil the responsibility as Hasan her son insisted on her. Ruqayya denotes, “One morning I picked up the pen and here I was writing… Then I advanced farther along the rough trails of memory and of words… Here I am after writing two notebooks and dozens of pages incapable of continuing…” (Ashour 163).

Conclusion

The main aim of this research was to provide a close reading of Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* and Radwa Ashour's *The Woman from Tantoura* in order to examine how each novel depicts the Holy Land as a living archive. Despite the distinct cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the authors, both succeed in picturing a vivid and historically grounded portrayal of the Palestinian landscape and the transformation it has undergone following the Zionist occupation. Through the narratives of the protagonists lived experience, the land functions as a site of collective memory and symbol of belonging and loss afterwards, rendering Palestinians as orphaned souls deprived of their motherland. Its echoes are recurring across generations, even in a period of displacement and refuge.

By exploring the theme of land as a central motif, this study underscores literature's pivotal role in resisting erasure, reclaiming and resurrecting occupied spaces, and ensuring the historical continuity against the genocide, while affirming the originality as an inheritance of Palestinian ancestors and future generations.

Additionally, both novels differ in narrating the land, *Mornings in Jenin* focuses on the Palestinian lived experience in the agrarian land of Ein Hod, while *The Woman from Tantoura* locates the story in the coast and sea-bond in Tantura. This juxtaposition broadened the ecological scope of the works, showing the diverse vital life of Palestine before the disaster and demonstrating the deep relationship of Palestinians with their land, from soil to sea.

Moreover, this dissertation tackled another angle from the novels, by focusing on some of female characters and reflects on their intimate bond with their land and its natural elements, showing the beautifulness of femininity when it reunites with nonhuman elements. Yet, the

authors also expose the harrowing realities faced by women, who endure gender-based violence perpetrated by Israelis and patriarchy. This reveals the oppressive realities of domestic violence and sexual assault, highlighting the double jeopardy of Palestinian women as being a female and a colonized.

The core of each novel is a female protagonist and narrator. Amal in *Mornings in Jenin*, who traverses the horrors of war and loss, first as a refugee, then as an orphan, later as a widow, and ultimately as a martyr; and Ruqayya in *The Woman from Tantoura*, who narrates a life shaped by survival and exile, dwelling in the shadow of homesickness and longing. By delving into these distinct narratives, the Palestinian condition is addressed in two trajectories, returning to the homeland where the death at the hands of the Israelis is lurking, or remaining in exile and sustained by the dream of freedom. Both have paths torn Palestinian dream of nationhood, they see the vision of liberation ever distant and caught between despair and the glimmer of hope. Besides, the existence of female protagonists underscores the way both of them transcend the usual victimized portrayal of women in the Arab patriarchal community, and features them as a resilient and survivor who confront colonial oppression and learn to navigate life without the presence of patriarch support.

Based on our humble study, we conclude that literature serves as a powerful medium for writing the historiography of silenced voices and documenting the dark chapters of history. Both novelists, each in her unique way, illuminate obscure aspects of Palestinian history, especially the human experiences of the first generation of 1948. Characters like Abu al-Sadeq and Abu Amin, who waited in vain for Arab military intervention, are vividly portrayed in Radwa Ashour's fluid prose. Additionally, the theme of Palestinian disarmament is explored by Susan Abulhawa, reflecting the betrayal of the Palestinian cause by the Arab states.

This dissertation has tried to demonstrate the vital role of literature in bearing witness to injustice and addressing the realities of colonized and oppressed Palestinians, who persist in the ongoing violence. *Mornings in Jenin* and *The Woman from Tantoura* act as literary testaments to the Palestinian experience; they remind us the presence of the land and its scent of olive trees, while capturing the brutality of those responsible for systematic genocide from 1948 to the present. Through this close reading, we hope this has contributed to the broader discourse of the Palestinian case, offering a nuanced lens that enriches the understanding of its historical and literary dimensions. Believing in the pen as sword, literature reinforces the power of storytelling in persevering identity, refuting the claimed narratives, and most importantly, assuring the voices of those who are powerless on their own land Palestine.

Ultimately, this research has focused on the theme of land in literature. Future research could explore experiences, resilience and sufferance of children in both novels. Researchers could delves deeper in terms of their loss, trauma and psychology. This area remains unexplored and would provide valuable insights into the lasting effect of war on the most silenced and vulnerable characters in fiction.

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