

ECHOES OF EXILE

Rememory and Resistance in *Salt Houses*

Sajjad Gheytsi

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Abstract: This article delves into the intricacies of memory, resistance, and identity within the context of Palestinian experiences, as portrayed in Hala Alyan's novel, *Salt Houses*. This study examines the profound impact of rememory on the collective consciousness of a Palestinian family haunted by forced expulsions, upheavals, and the enduring cycle of occupation and forced migrations. The essay underscores that residual elements of past are not a passive recollection but active agents that shape the present and future. It highlights how traumatic pasts, passed down through generations, become an enduring legacy, connecting history with contemporary realities. Drawing on the characters' experiences, it showcases how the struggle for identity and resistance against displacement is interwoven with the memory of ancestral trauma. Furthermore, the research explores the role of elder Palestinians, especially grandmothers, in preserving cultural heritage and transmitting stories that bridge generations. These narratives serve not only to understand history but also as a means of challenging occupation and advocating for the right of return. The article investigates the dissonance between imagined homelands and present-day realities, shedding light on the challenges faced by subsequent generations attempting to reclaim their heritage.

Keywords: Palestinian Experiences, Intergenerational Analysis, Identity, Residual Elements, Resistance

Here is Palestine, he would think. Here are the streets we'd walk in Nablus, the neighborhood we grew up in. Here is everything we loved. (Alyan, 2017: 244)

Sajjad Gheytsi is Assistant Professor of English literature at Payame Noor University (PNU), Tehran, Iran

Introduction

Hegemony theory offers a fresh perspective by emphasizing the diversity of struggles and the multifaceted power dynamics at play, departing from the conventional binary viewpoint. Moreover, within the intricate tapestry of hegemonic discourse, active rememory (Morrison, 1987: 135) has the potential to form alliances, working to challenge and disrupt the prevailing hegemonic discourse. Frequently, shifts in hegemonic power coincide with moments of crisis. Alain Badiou characterizes such moments as “events,” which represent a rupture in the established boundaries of what can be articulated within the dominant discourse, something that the existing knowledge system cannot comprehend, not even in hindsight (Badiou, 2005). These events do not become assimilated into the dominant discourse. Instead, they bring about radical transformations by repeatedly introducing disruptive voices into the prevailing hegemonic discourses, fundamentally altering them.

It is worth exploring the causal relationship between political events and discourse. In this sense, narrative construction and rememory play a pivotal role in shaping the political landscape, essentially laying the groundwork for transformative change. Moreover, we must acknowledge that the impact of these efforts can differ significantly between authoritarian and democratic societies. However, it is significant to consider instability within the prevailing political system that enforces specific memory narratives. If there is no structural crisis to expedite this change, these coalitions must evolve gradually to attain the necessary cohesion to supplant the dominant discourse. This process, reminiscent of Gramsci’s concept of “war of position,” (Gramsci, 2007: 139) requires time and persistence. Once the equilibrium of hegemonic discourse is disrupted, it does not automatically lead to the emergence of a unified counter-discourse. At the conclusion of the counter-hegemonic struggle, it is unlikely that a single, collective discourse will encompass all formerly subaltern memory groups. Instead, divisions among them are likely to persist, and the eventual formation of a new hegemonic memory culture won’t fully represent the entirety of those involved in the cultural memory revolution. Lachmann observes that “preserving cultural memory involves something like an apparatus for remembering by duplication, by the representation of the absent through the image, by the objectification of memory, and by the prevention of forgetting through the retrieval of images” (Lachmann, 2004: 166). When it comes to preserving and amassing cultural knowledge, literary texts play a crucial role by existing within the intricate web of cultural memory. Within this intricate tapestry, a fantastical text serves as a powerful pointer, directing our attention towards those suppressed and forgotten aspects of our collective memory, thus compelling culture to confront its own tendency to forget and ignore certain narratives.

The enduring instability inherent in mnemo-hegemonic shifts, combined with the inherent diversity within any community – as dramatically described by Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 108) when they assert the impossibility of a truly homogeneous society – inevitably leads to tensions among different groups, often characterized by conflicting collective memories. These conflicts act as instigators, prompting alterations in the distribution of power within society, ultimately reshaping the cultural terrain on a larger scale. Moments of upheaval within hegemonic structures often give rise to a renewed exploration of historical events and a bold questioning of prevailing narratives. These moments tend to occur when marginalized or silenced voices demand a reexamination of power dynamics and the historical roots that sustain them. In this sense, what may seem like enduring or temporarily fixed societal systems and shared identities are, in reality, the outcomes of social power dynamics that can be reconfigured by proactive individuals and collectives. In essence, these tensions become pivotal catalysts for change, fostering shifts in the social order and challenging established cultural norms. The resurgence of historical inquiry and the courageous critique of dominant narratives often emerge when the dominant order faces disruption, typically triggered by the insistence of marginalized voices seeking to reevaluate power structures and their historical foundations. The theory of mnemonic hegemony underscores what appears to be unchanging or momentarily stable social structures and collective identities, which are, in truth, the products of interwoven social power dynamics, susceptible to transformation through the agency of active rememory. In this regard, the notion of culture to formulate a fresh definition of “memory culture” is proposed. This new definition positions memory culture as the perpetually specific and contingent facet of all social domains where the interpretation of the past is subject to negotiation (Molden, 2010: 217). In essence, it emphasizes memory culture as a dynamic and ever-evolving dimension in the discourse of the past within society. Despite the fact that “the cultural plan will be mostly negative: a critique of the past aimed at destruction and erasure of memory” (Gramsci, 2007: 342).

Gramsci’s interpretation of culture maintains its roots in the base, while culture unfolds within the superstructural domain encompassing the state and civil society, exhibiting a degree of autonomy. Consequently, culture takes on a broad and dynamic definition as an all-encompassing social process that encompasses both symbolic and material forms of thought, action, and negotiation within a specific larger group. When applied to the context of memory, culture encapsulates the entirety of communication processes related to the collective’s reflective engagement with knowledge and memory. This concept aligns with Jan Assmann’s characterization of memory as “knowledge with an identity-index, it is knowledge about oneself, one’s own diachronic identity” (Assmann, 2008: 114). In essence,

this perspective underscores that culture is intricately intertwined with the processes of memory and collective identity, encompassing the multifaceted ways in which groups perceive, preserve, and negotiate their shared knowledge and historical consciousness. Based on what Gramsci and Bakhtin have stated, Angenot believes that culture

legitimizes and publicizes certain views, tastes, opinions, and themes. It represses others into the chimerical, the extravagant. [...] In the social discourse you find in coexistence all the soft forms of social domination of classes, sexes, privileges, and statutory powers. (Angenot, 2004: 105)

These coexisting elements within societies are in a perpetual state of tension and sometimes even antagonism with one another, all the while being confined within the boundaries established by a “hegemony that mark[s] the boundaries of the ‘thinkable’[through] the normative imposition of the legitimate language” (Angenot, 2004: 102). In its post-structural evolution, hegemony theory adopts a more radical perspective regarding antagonism, departing from Gramsci’s pursuit of a new hegemony, often associated with the working class, and the resulting aspiration for complete emancipation. Instead, it embraces the idea of a perpetual division and tension as an ideal – because, as Laclau argues, “the full realization of freedom would be equivalent to the death of freedom, for all possibility of dissent would have been eliminated from it. Social division, antagonism and its necessary consequence – power – are the true conditions of a freedom” (Laclau, 2000: 208). Angenot also recognizes the significance of these antagonisms: “A culture [...] is thoroughly made out of regulated antagonisms between conflicting images, concepts, cognitive discrepancies, and incompatibilities that are still relatively stabilized without ever reaching a state of equilibrium” (Angenot, 2004: 102). This viewpoint underscores that culture is not a static entity but rather a dynamic product of ongoing conflicts and debates, reflecting the ever-evolving nature of human societies and their ideas.

The “historical boundaries of what can be thought and spoken,” as elucidated by Angenot (2010) in the context of societal discourse and culture, bear a resemblance to the limits of what can be socially remembered within memory cultures. When we conceive of memory cultures as a dynamic and operational structural concept, we understand that they do not represent a fixed state akin to classical structuralism. Rather, they offer a flexible framework for a realm of political agency. Much like Bourdieu’s (1984: 171) notion of *habitus* as “a structured and structuring structure”, memory cultures are susceptible to alteration by political actors. Simultaneously, these actors’ actions are fundamentally shaped by the prevailing memory cultures, resulting in a reciprocal relationship or an “interaction

between structures and agents” (Joseph, 2002: 38). In a manner reminiscent of the role of common sense in Gramscian notions of hegemony, habitus is formed through mimesis, which is “not an intentional act of imitation but a spontaneous form of identification” (Medina, 2006: 107). This highlights how individuals, within the context of their memory cultures and habitus, naturally internalize and identify with certain ideas and practices, thereby influencing their actions and contributing to the evolution of memory cultures themselves. In this regard, Bourdieu believes that:

the process of reproduction – a practical reactivation which is opposed to both memory and knowledge [...] The body believes what it plays at [...] It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it enacts the past, bringing it back to life. (Bourdieu, 1990: 73)

José Medina emphasizes two crucial aspects: firstly, “cultural memory incorporated in the habitus is not a conscious remembering” (Medina, 2006: 108). Secondly, he underscores the role of selective memory processes, such as amnesia and forgetting, in shaping cultural memory. In Bourdieu’s view, the social “unconscious” is an ongoing creation resulting from “the forgetting of history that history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of habitus” (Bourdieu, 1977: 78–79). It essentially comprises the accumulated layers of forgotten historical contingencies mentioned earlier. Moreover, Michael Burawoy has observed that Bourdieu’s concept of habitus serves as a perceptive description of how hegemony becomes embedded in individuals. However, it presents a more pessimistic perspective as compared to the (neo-) Gramscian optimism concerning the potential for agency and the capacity of individuals to transform the structures and modes of symbolic domination (Burawoy, 2012: 189). These dimensions collectively shed light on the structural circumstances in which specific power relations take shape.

A memory culture is characterized by the frameworks of historical reference shared by particular communities of experience and tradition. These communities possess a critical mass of shared content, patterns of interpretation, and collective memory rituals. In essence, memory cultures define the historical and cultural backdrop against which the memories and identities of these communities are constructed and perpetuated.

Threads of Resilience and Inheritance of Hope

Salt Houses effectively portrays the lasting resonance of the characters’ haunting recollections of their forced expulsions and unsettling upheavals, highlighting the profound impact of these memories on the successive Palestinian cohorts.

The weight of a distressing heritage is bequeathed to these individuals, an inheritance that proves arduous to shake off, ensnaring them in a continuous cycle of occupation and forced migrations. As the narrative progressively unravels, the younger generation of Palestinians find themselves not only entrusted with the narratives of strife and dislocation recounted by their forebearers but also thrust into the harrowing actuality of life under occupation. The pervasive exposure to violence within Palestine and its ubiquitous portrayal through various media outlets becomes a daily ordeal, etching a distressing tapestry of experiences into their collective consciousness.

The novel's intricate tapestry weaves together the threads of these intergenerational traumas, illustrating how the past's scars are handed down with unwavering persistence. The relentless transfer of these memories from one generation to the next creates an unbreakable chain, a testament to the inextricable link between history and contemporary realities. The characters' struggles, both internal and external, mirror the broader struggles faced by an entire community entangled in a complex web of displacement and loss.

The author adeptly demonstrates the interplay of Antonio Gramsci's notion of agency and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus in the intricate landscape of memory. The narratives of the past emerge not merely as passive recollections but as active agents that influence the present and future. Through the characters' perspectives, readers bear witness to how historical injustices continue to resonate, driven by the agency to resist and adapt despite prevailing adversity. *Salt Houses* serves as a poignant reminder that, as shaped by their habitus, individuals forge their identities in the midst of displacement and conflict, with the imprints of these experiences embedded in personal stories and collective consciousness.

According to Jabr, the concept of "post-traumatic stress disorder" is not applicable to the Palestinian context due to the continuous and unceasing nature of their traumatic ordeal (Jabr, 2019: 6). This observation underscores the fact that trauma remains an ongoing reality, ingrained in the fabric of Palestinian lives. Elaborating on this notion, Sa'di and Abu-Lughod (2007) expound on the intricate interplay of generational time within the Palestinian collective memory. They illuminate how this temporal dimension constitutes a pivotal aspect of recollection, shaping the ways stories, memories, emotions, and even culinary traditions are transferred from one generation to the next. The very essence of identity is passed down, carrying with it the weight of an unrelenting historical burden (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007: 19). Jabr's assertion resonates profoundly, highlighting the inherently unique and ongoing nature of the Palestinian experience. Unlike the conventional understanding of trauma as a discrete event that results in a discernible "post" phase, the Palestinian context defies such compartmentalization. The perpetuity of

their traumatic narrative infuses every aspect of life with an enduring sense of unrest and displacement.

The insights of Sa'di and Abu-Lughod further underscore the intricate layers of generational memory. Their observation that stories, memories, and emotions are transmitted not solely as passive accounts but as vital inheritances speaks to the visceral connection Palestinians have with their history. This perpetuation of memory is not limited to abstract recollections; it extends to tangible markers of cultural identity, such as food, which become carriers of heritage and resilience. In the broader context of cultural transmission, herein, the portrayal of generational time as a “key dimension of memory” serves as a poignant reminder of the resilience and continuity that persist within Palestinian society despite the endured adversities. The interplay between inheritance and identity intricately weaves together the threads of the past, present, and future, creating a complex narrative tapestry that bears witness to the endurance of the Palestinian people.

The continuous reenactment of trauma across generations is indeed the very essence that transforms the Palestinian predicament into a vivid illustration of resistance against the backdrop of settler colonialism. In the novel *Salt Houses*, the weight of history is handed down to Linah, burdening her with a heritage saturated with recollections of “Israel and Palestine, wars and land and people dying” (Alyan, 2017: 228). Beyond this profound legacy, Linah finds herself ensnared in the harrowing aftermath of her parents’ haunting experiences, which have left an indelible mark on her identity (Schwab, 2010). Yet, Linah’s connection to this intergenerational legacy extends beyond the pages of history. The horrors of the 2006 Lebanon War, etched into her memory during a seemingly innocuous family vacation, become another layer of traumatic experience that she carries with her. These visceral encounters with conflict and displacement serve as stark reminders that the Palestinian struggle is not a distant memory but a vivid reality, persisting through the tumultuous present.

While the framework of trauma theory often focuses on the delayed and lingering effects of distressing events, the Palestinian narrative diverges significantly. Unlike the concept of “postmemory” or the notion of memories that emerge after the traumatic event, Palestinians remain unceasingly entrenched within their traumatic history. The lingering occupation ensures that their memories are not reflections from a distant past but palpable experiences of a still-ongoing crisis. As articulated by Manar in the novel, the wounds inflicted upon Palestine are not scars that have healed but raw, ever-present injuries that refuse to fully mend: “Palestine was something raw in the family, a wound never completely scabbed over. Her grandparents rarely mentioned it” (Alyan, 2017: 281).

In essence, the Palestinian experience embodied by Linah and others in *Salt Houses* is a living testament to the resilience and resistance that emerges from the

persistence of trauma across generations. It serves as a poignant reminder that the legacy of displacement, conflict, and occupation reverberates not as a faded history but as an unyielding call for justice and recognition. The rawness of their collective memory underscores the urgent need to acknowledge and address the ongoing struggle for liberation and self-determination. Furthermore, Alyan utilizes the figure of the grandmother as a stylistic motif to elucidate the dynamic between successive Palestinian age groups. Within this framework, grandmothers play an indispensable role in upholding the tapestry of Palestinian heritage and legacy. They emerge as symbolic vessels, embodying the essence of the homeland as a sanctuary of deep-seated connections and beginnings. Their significance transcends the familial, embodying a broader connection to the land itself. Central to this role is their responsibility in transmitting the stories of the past to their descendants (rememory), infusing the younger generations with a profound sense of identity and continuity. Scholars like Kadi (1994) and Aboubakr (2019) have emphasized the pivotal function of grandmothers in this cultural preservation, underlining how they become the torchbearers of tradition and bring residual elements from the past back to life, guiding their offspring through the nuances of cultural practices and customs that bind the Palestinian community together. It is worth mentioning that Williams' framework would also invite critical analysis of texts, considering their relationship to the dominant ideology, their engagement with residual elements, and their potential to contribute to emergent cultural and social change (Williams, 1976). This intergenerational exchange encapsulates not only the wisdom of the past but also serves as a bridge to the future (emergent elements), fostering a sense of unity and resilience that transcends the challenges posed by displacement and adversity. Alyan's artistic choice to elevate the grandmother archetype in this narrative context resounds as a celebration of the enduring spirit of Palestinian culture and the tenacious legacy passed on through the nurturing hands of these matriarchs.

Within the pages of *Salt Houses*, Riham's world is enriched by the narratives spun by her grandmother, painting vivid scenes of a Palestine that existed before the upheaval. The intimacy of these rememories, shared between them, unveils fragments of her grandmother's past and evokes a deep sense of connection within Riham. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that these stories are not mere passive recollections; they are active agents that shape Riham's perception of herself and her place in the world. The allure of these whispered narrations, imbued with her grandmother's habitus – the deeply ingrained dispositions and experiences of a coastal-dwelling peasant girl in Jaffa – proves irresistible to Riham. Herein, the reader can understand how the grandmother's upbringing and social context have influenced her storytelling, making these narratives/rememories a reflection of not just personal history but also a collective memory of a

world unmarred by the ravages of war. This glimpse into history, as the concept of “rememory” would suggest, fosters a unique bond between generations. It allows Riham to not only envision but also emotionally experience a reality that contrasts starkly with the prevailing turbulence of her time. In this way, rememory, habitus, and agency converge in Riham’s journey, shaping her understanding of her family’s past and her role in preserving and passing on these cherished stories (Alyan, 2017: 117).

When the tumultuous echoes of the 2006 Lebanon War reverberate, it is Linah who seeks solace in the presence of her grandmother, Alia. The symphony of bullets and bombs serve as a haunting reminder of the fragility of life. Yet, in the midst of the chaos, Linah’s trust in her grandmother shines like a guiding light. Alia’s wisdom and empathy emanate as pillars of strength. Within her embrace, Linah finds comfort, a refuge from the cacophony of fear and uncertainty. This connection transcends mere familial ties; it is a profound understanding that words alone cannot encapsulate. Linah’s conviction in her grandmother’s wisdom is unwavering, viewing her as a beacon of intellect and virtue (Alyan, 2017: 174). In both instances, Alyan weaves a tapestry of intergenerational relationships that reflect the power of shared stories and the solace that familial bonds can provide during times of adversity. Through Riham’s yearning to understand her grandmother’s past and Linah’s reliance on her grandmother’s guidance, the novel highlights the enduring role of grandmothers as bearers of history and sources of unwavering support.

Alyan skillfully employs ancestral rememory as a potent tool of defiance and a subversion against Israel’s calculated manipulation of Palestinian historical truths. The act of summoning forth the memories that resonate throughout Palestinian society stands as a tangible manifestation of the characters’ form of nonviolent opposition. In her final moments, the matriarch Salma imparts a poignant directive to her daughter Alia: “You must remember” (Alyan, 2017: 141). This injunction, though seemingly cryptic, echoes with profound significance. While Alia herself may not fully comprehend the exact depths of remembrance her mother implores, the reader discerns a subtle allusion to the cataclysmic events of the 1948 Palestinian exodus, the ramifications of the 1967 crisis, and the overarching tragedies that have led to the forfeiture of homeland and heritage. Salma further elucidates her plea: “When it happens, you must find a way to remember” (141). Alia’s curiosity is palpable as she seeks clarification: “When what happens, Mama?” (141). Amidst this interplay of uncertainty and instruction, Salma’s unwavering insistence on remembrance becomes a torch passed down to Alia. It is a torch that Alia is now entrusted with, a legacy she must continue. The collective consciousness of the Palestinian people becomes an archive of these memories, preserving history’s irrefutable truths in the face of distortion and erasure. Thus, those who

cling to these recollections shoulder the responsibility of retrieval and resurfacing.

This intentional act of memory preservation stands as a counter-narrative to Israel's efforts to rewrite history. It becomes a narrative act of resistance, affirming the existence of a past that continues to echo within the hearts and minds of Palestinians. Through this exchange between Salma and Alia, Alyan underscores the idea that these memories, imbued with cultural heritage and shared experience, hold a vital role in shaping the identity of the Palestinian people. These memories, lovingly safeguarded across generations, serve as a testament to the resilience, endurance, and unwavering spirit of a community that refuses to be silenced. Elderly Palestinians play a crucial role in the diasporic cultural resistance movement, acting as a resilient bulwark against both occupation and attempts to erase collective memory. Their narratives serve as connective threads, weaving together the intricate tapestry of the past and the contemporary moment (Kadi, 1994). As Palestinian youths immerse themselves in their heritage and origins, they find not only a means to understand their history but also a path to actively challenge the ongoing occupation. This engagement empowers them to amplify the voices of the displaced Palestinians, resoundingly advocating for their rightful return to the lands from which they were expelled (Aboubakr, 2019). Consequently, the past becomes not an abstract relic but a living, breathing realm in which all Palestinians coexist.

For those who have experienced displacement, the past is not a distant memory detached from the present. Instead, it functions as the crucible of Antonio Gramsci's concept of agency (Burawoy, 2012: 189), where individuals and communities actively engage with their histories to navigate the complexities of the present. The narratives of displacement, shaped by individuals' habitus, become integral to their identities, guiding their actions and forming the lens through which they perceive the world. This relationship between past, present, and future is profoundly dialectical, embodying a symbiotic interplay of forces. As the concept of agency suggests, the past is not a passive backdrop; rather, it is a dynamic force that propels the present forward. The collective memory of displacement, rooted in habitus, influences how communities respond to contemporary challenges and opportunities. The struggles and resilience of the past become a reservoir of strength, shaping the contours of their aspirations for the future. Conversely, the present invests the past with renewed significance, reshaping how it is understood and interpreted. In the ongoing dialectic between past and present, communities reinterpret their histories, adapting narratives to reflect contemporary circumstances and aspirations. This dynamic interaction ensures that the past remains a living, evolving force, not a stagnant relic, and demonstrates the enduring relevance of how individuals and communities engage with their own histories.

This intricate interplay underscores the crucial role of active rememory in shaping Palestinian trajectories. To comprehend the current context and strategies for what lies ahead, a conscious and deliberate embrace of historical narratives is paramount. In this light, rememory becomes a potent form of resistance – a conscious choice to resist forgetting, to reject erasure, and to harness the strength of a collective past as a formidable force for change.

Alyan employs the art of epistolary composition to intricately weave the complex tapestry of her characters' innermost emotions and experiences. One compelling instance of this technique is found in Atef's recourse to "scriptotherapy," an ingenious method he employs to grapple with the weight of his traumatic past, offering an avenue to unburden himself through the written word (Henke, 1998). Urged by his physician, he turns to the therapeutic act of transcribing his ordeal onto paper as a means to find solace. The doctor's recommendation serves as a lifeline: "They say it can help. It's a way to organize your thoughts, explain what you've been through. Write them to your wife, your family back in Palestine" (Alyan, 2017: 82).

These written missives emerge as a conduit for Atef to chronicle his recollections of the Nablus war. Within the lines he pens, his fervent desire to rewrite history, to reshape the narrative of his past experiences, becomes palpable. It is a poignant reflection of his deep yearning to reconfigure the agonizing memories he carries. The act itself becomes a way to re-envision a reality where Palestine remains whole and unbroken (Alyan, 2017: 271). As the story unfolds, these letters take on an even broader significance. They morph from personal confessions into invaluable fragments of the family's history, encapsulating a multi-generational saga. Atef's ability to encapsulate his haunting legacy within these letters isn't just a personal catharsis – it is an assertion of resistance. This legacy, preserved through his writing, becomes a torch that he passes on to his grandchildren, paving the way for the narrative of resilience to continue into the future. This transition from personal therapy to family history underscores the political dimension of such an endeavor.

Indeed, Atef's capacity to inscribe his own trauma and pass it down through the generations embeds a profound political statement within the fabric of personal experiences. This legacy of resistance, initiated by Atef and sustained by successive generations, casts trauma not solely as an individual plight but as a shared memory that intertwines with the broader struggle for Palestinian identity and autonomy. The act of rememory becomes an act of defiance, a way of reasserting presence and reclaiming narrative control in the face of adversity. The individual and collective encounters of cultural memory with displacement and dispossession effectively counter the distorted historical narrative that has clouded the Palestinian experience. Within the pages of *Salt Houses*, Atef's poignant letters

assume a dual role: they act as both a navigational guide for his grandchildren and a deeply personal chronicle of the family's past, meticulously chronicling what numerous Palestinians have endured over the span of 72 years.

In this sense, the characters of Linah, Zain, Manar, and Abdullah transform Atef's letters into a shared artifact, akin to a cherished book. Through these letters, Atef's stories of the Nablus war and his years in Kuwait come to life, evoking the presence of distant relatives, old companions, and their very own parents in a manner that feels as exotic and captivating as characters from a cinematic tale (Alyan, 2017: 279). Alyan's adept use of the letters as a conduit stitches a profound connection between the grandchildren and the roots of their lineage.

These letters, much like a finely woven thread, unravel across the generations, creating a seamless link between the past and the present. Alyan's literary technique mirrors the interconnectedness of the characters, affording the grandchildren a glimpse into their ancestral history while embedding within them a deep-seated understanding of their heritage. Through Atef's letters, Alyan deftly engineers a conduit that spans time, ensuring the endurance of a history that might otherwise be suppressed or distorted. This conscious act of passing down stories from the past underscores the intrinsic power of personal narratives as a counter to historical misrepresentation. By intertwining individual experiences with the collective memory, these letters paint a vivid picture of the Palestinian narrative, uniting generations in a shared story of struggle, triumph, and the unwavering quest for justice.

His children are staring at him, Atef understanding that he is changing their lives, these children who will take this moment and make something of it, turn it into their own lives, remember on their deathbeds the cool air, the stars, their grandfather weeping under a fig tree. (Alyan, 2017: 274)

The above quotation implicitly underscores the significance of transferring memories across successive generations. The act of safeguarding rememory of one's homeland remains intricately tied to the dispersal of an entire populace into diaspora. While these grandchildren might not have lived through the direct upheavals of earlier conflicts in Palestine, the responsibility to uphold these memories has been entrusted to them, a solemn duty to seize the present moment and articulate the floating signifiers in the field of discursivity (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 125). Atef vividly captures his grandchildren's spirited engagement, likening their enthusiasm and rapt attention to an unwavering army assembled before him (Alyan, 2017: 274). This portrayal distinctly underscores their pivotal role in resisting occupation and in maintaining a firm grip on their ancestral heritage. The memory-preservation mission of these grandchildren has a transformative power.

By committing to rememory their grandfather's narratives encompassing Palestine's history, including the exodus, the setbacks, and the emblematic fig tree – a poignant symbol of Palestine itself – the grandchildren essentially fortify their connection to the land that was unjustly taken from their forebearers. These narratives breathe life into a homeland that endures in their hearts, an assertion of their unassailable right to reclaim their place of origin.

This intergenerational transfer of memories becomes an act of profound resistance and an assertion of identity. By remembering the accounts of Palestine's tumultuous history, the grandchildren carry the torch of their forebearers' struggles, translating their ancestors' experiences into a catalyst for their own determination. They inherit not just a narrative but a legacy, a call to action to honor their roots, lay claim to their heritage, and advocate for the restoration of a rightful homeland. Alyan's narrative choice illuminates the indomitable power of rememory in shaping the future trajectory of a displaced people. Manar and her cousins perceive Palestine as something beyond a mere attachment to a specific geographical location or a material connection. To them, Palestine embodies a profound cause that demands their unwavering commitment and active engagement. When Manar shares her plans to visit Palestine with her boyfriend Gabriel, he questions the urgency of her trip (Alyan, 2017: 277). In her response, Manar articulates her ethical duty as a Palestinian.

Manar's visit to Palestine is not merely a casual journey; it is a pilgrimage driven by a deep sense of responsibility. She sees herself as a guardian of her Palestinian identity and heritage, and her journey is an embodiment of her commitment to this cause. In her eyes, the urgency lies not in a personal whim but in the obligation to continue the struggle for justice and the right of return. It is a testament to the enduring spirit of the Palestinian people and their unwavering dedication to a homeland that has been unjustly taken from them. Manar's perspective highlights the ethical dimension of the Palestinian struggle, where the fight for justice is not a choice but a moral imperative, passed down through generations and carried forward with unwavering determination.

But that was precisely it – the urgency was there was no urgency. There never would be. For years she watched news reports of the settlements, the phosphorus dropped over Gaza, camps swelling with eyeless children. Anger held her up with burning little hands, assembled itself into chants of *Free Palestine, free, free Palestine* with the rest of the Justice for Palestine group during Apartheid Week at Columbia. (Alyan, 2017: 277–278 original emphasis)

Much like countless Palestinians, Manar finds herself compelled to bear the weight of anger as a reflection of her discontent with the prevailing circumstances endured

by her people. Consequently, her impending visit isn't a simple tourist excursion; it is a profoundly motivated endeavor, spurred by her intimate ties to her homeland and the ancestral heritage she holds dear. As she steps foot in Ben Gurion Airport, Manar's determination is vividly showcased when she resolutely refuses to surrender her grandfather's letters to an Israeli officer. In her perspective, these letters are more than ink on paper; they encapsulate the entirety of her family's history, a precious repository of their shared narrative (Alyan, 2017: 286). Unexpectedly, her pregnancy overtakes her, leading to a momentary loss of consciousness. The Israeli officer misconstrues this event as a ploy, a deliberate scheme by Manar to avoid inspection of the letters. Yet, for Manar, this fleeting loss of consciousness becomes a moment of triumph. The stakes are high; the letters are not just documents but a testament to her grandfather Atef's years of effort. Losing these letters would be tantamount to betraying Atef's legacy – his dedicated labor to preserve their history and resistance.

In this pivotal instance, Alyan crafts a powerful narrative of defiance and resilience. Manar's refusal to surrender the letters becomes a metaphorical stand against attempts to erase Palestinian history and narrative. The officer's misinterpretation serves to underline the magnitude of the struggle faced by Palestinians, where even their actions of protection and preservation can be misconstrued to belittle their cause. Manar's determination, fueled by her connection to her roots, underscores the ongoing battle to safeguard Palestinian heritage in the face of adversity. The narrative magnifies the significance of such actions as vital components of the collective struggle, a means to resist erasure, and an assertion of identity that refuses to be silenced.

Manar's recollections of Palestine are primarily shaped by a combination of her imagination and the tangible artifacts she has inherited from her grandparents, such as letters and photographs. These family photographs, as elucidated by Hirsch (1997), serve a profound purpose beyond just capturing moments in time. They become the custodians of ancestral memories, wielding the power to influence the narrative that families construct around their past, their histories, and, most significantly, their worldviews.

In *Salt Houses*, the concept of return, as suggested by Bayeh (2015), is far from a simplistic, nostalgic journey. Instead, it is a multifaceted endeavor fraught with complexities, giving rise to a myriad of contradictions, ambivalences, and associations (Bayeh, 2015; 7). Manar's role as an archaeologist lends an intriguing dimension to her quest for roots. She embarks on a profound exploration of her great-grandparents' city, Jaffa, and her grandparents' wedding city, Nablus. In Nablus, she is driven by an ardent desire to locate the family's ancestral home, piecing together the descriptions penned in her grandfather's letters and comparing them with the visual evidence provided by family photographs.

Intricately, this narrative thread delves into the nuanced relationship between memory, identity, and the physical landscape. Manar's archaeological pursuit represents not just a personal journey but a microcosm of the broader Palestinian experience – a struggle to reconnect with a fragmented past and a land left behind. Her attempt to reconcile the descriptions from letters and photographs with the present-day reality of Nablus symbolizes the ongoing Palestinian quest for a homeland and the right of return. The family photographs, as conduits of memory, illustrate how the past continues to resonate in the present, how it influences the construction of narratives, and how it serves as a powerful force in the ongoing Palestinian struggle for recognition and reconnection with their roots. However, her experience in Nablus turns out to be a profound disillusionment, far removed from her anticipations. The sense of kinship she had yearned for, nourished by sporadic tales from her grandparents, becomes a poignant letdown. Despite the infrequent stories, she had woven a mental tapestry of her grandparents' upbringing, especially within the city of Nablus (Alyan, 2017: 287).

Yet, Manar stands as a stranger rather than a returnee. She is an outsider trying to retrace a history handed down through the letters and stories of her grandparents. The dissonance between her imagined Nablus and the reality she encounters in the present creates a palpable sense of alienation from her grandparents' city. As Fadda-Conrey elucidates, the act of subsequent generations returning to their homelands entails a nuanced and intricate exploration of their Arab heritage, enriching their comprehension of their roots (Fadda-Conrey, 2014: 66).

In the *Salt Houses*, the Nablus that existed in 1967 diverges starkly from the Nablus of 2014. This physical shift resonates with Manar's own internal transformation. The divergence between the idealized images she had nurtured within her mind for years and the actual reality of Nablus now casts shadows of uncertainty on her perception. The juxtaposition of past and present exposes the chasm between the familial tales she inherited and the contemporary reality. While her experience in Nablus may have unraveled idealized visions, her unrelenting dedication to tracking down her roots reflects her determination to reclaim an essential part of her identity. In this tapestry of identity, Alyan unveils the intricate interplay between memory and actuality, between the imagined and the encountered. Manar's journey, while unveiling the challenges of reconciling history with present circumstances, also underscores the resilience of those striving to maintain their connections with their ancestral homeland. The act of tracing and returning is not just a physical movement but a profound declaration of the unbroken ties that link generations to their roots.

In the tapestry of Palestinian experiences, there are those who opt for a more tangible connection to their homeland. This sentiment is epitomized by Manar's poignant return to her ancestral city. In this context, Bayeh's distinction between

“roots” and “routes” takes on significance. The former signifies the actual physical return to the homeland – a feat unattainable for all members of the diaspora. Conversely, “routes” imply the very act of movement and journeying, often intertwining with the concept of “roots” by embodying the essence of returning to one’s original country (Bayeh, 2015: 6). In this regard, Alyan masterfully illuminates how Palestine is not confined to being a mere lost homeland; it is a realm that straddles both the realms of imagination and reality, forming a cornerstone of Palestinian nationalism and identity.

Within the intricate mosaic of displaced Palestinians existing within the diaspora, there exists a fervent yearning to return to the land that was their birthright before the catastrophic events of 1948. This aspiration is nurtured by visions that are painted in idealized hues, suffused with nostalgia. However, as Feldman observes, these longings, borne from the weight of catastrophe, cannot be placated by a mere homecoming – there is a deeper wound that cannot be simply healed by revisiting the physical location (Feldman, 2006: 19).

This brings us to Manar’s journey. Her perception of Nablus and Palestine is marinated in a blend of idealized memory and genuine nostalgia. Yet, as she sets foot on her ancestral soil, the disjunction between her imaginings and reality is laid bare. Her romanticized vision encounters the complexity of contemporary circumstances, bridging the gap between the longed-for past and the lived present. Still, Manar’s journey is not a mere physical return; it’s a profound act of self-awareness, an assertion of affiliation with Palestine that’s nuanced, multilayered, and deeply rooted.

Through Manar’s narrative arc, Alyan masterfully constructs a powerful allegory that embodies the rich tapestry of memory, identity, and physicality. This act of returning transcends the mere physical journey; it becomes a multidimensional exploration of roots, routes, and the intricate facets that constitute Palestinian identity. Manar’s journey embodies the agency of individuals and communities to actively engage with their past, shaping their understanding of the present and aspirations for the future. As narratives interweave the past and present, the habitus, deeply ingrained through generations of Palestinian experiences, influences the characters’ dispositions and perceptions, guiding their actions as they navigate the complexities of displacement and return. Manar’s own habitus, formed by her family’s history and personal experiences, shapes her perspective as she rediscovers her homeland. Moreover, the represented memories, as Manar and other characters grapple with the haunting – yet transformative – power of memories, are not static recollections; they are living entities that bridge the past and present. Significantly, they serve as a testament to the enduring spirit of a people who carry their homeland within their hearts, even as they navigate the diaspora’s complexities. In this sense, Manar’s journey is a vivid illustration of the ways in which

rememory allows individuals and communities to recontextualize their histories, transforming them into a source of strength, resilience, and a foundation for future agency. In essence, Alyan's narrative invites readers to witness the intricate dance between past, present, and future, amplifying the resilience and adaptability of a people whose identity is deeply rooted in their collective memory and shaped by their agency to engage with their history.

Conclusion

This article has unveiled the profound consequences stemming from the wrenching loss of home and homeland, which give rise to deeply ingrained and persistent intrusive traumas. Palestinian diasporic writers, among them Alyan, embark on a quest for a sense of rootedness and territorial identity. Their endeavor aims to fashion diverse forms of triumphant ideology, meticulously weaving together narratives that encapsulate the ancestral Palestinian past. They ingeniously employ an array of mediums – personal memories, anecdotes, letters, memoirs, and literary works – to give voice to their political and cultural marginalization. The exploration transcends the notion of reducing traumatic memories to individualized experiences of amnesia and melancholia. Instead, Palestinian traumatic memory emerges as a collective phenomenon, serving as a foundational pillar for the Palestinian cry for the right of return.

The scrutiny of traumatic narratives within *Salt Houses* stands as a testament to the efficacy of Palestinian literature in extending the frontiers of trauma studies beyond the confines of Euro-American contexts. Alyan's narrative craft underscores the transformative power of literature as a means to illuminate the intricate interplay between individual anguish and collective suffering, traversing the realms of memory, history, and identity. This endeavor underscores that Palestinian literature is not confined to a solitary pursuit; it's a profoundly political act, a form of cultural resistance that challenges the orchestrated efforts by Israel to erase the annals of Palestinian history (Said, 2000: 183).

For Palestinians, remembrance assumes an overarching role that extends beyond a passive act of recalling. It becomes a dynamic tool of resistance – a means to counteract “the assassins of memory,” referring to Israel's systematic endeavor to efface and manipulate Palestinian historical narratives. Within this context, the act of remembering morphs into a form of dissident memory, a potent force that disassembles historical distortions and misrepresentations. The act of recalling is no longer a passive endeavor but a powerful instrument of defiance. It becomes a method of reclaiming lost heritage, amplifying the voices of the marginalized, and piecing together the fragments of a collective past that has been subjected to deliberate erasure.

In this intricate tapestry, Alyan introduces yet another layer to the notion of remembrance – resistance. By preserving and recounting the collective past, Palestinians fortify their resilience against a history under siege. Through narratives, they assert their agency, crafting a dynamic counter-narrative to challenge the status quo. The act of remembering is thus elevated beyond a mere act of preserving the past; it becomes an active means of shaping the present and forging a path toward a future rooted in justice and reclamation.

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