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Identity and Memory in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*: A Saidian Reading

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Abstract

Using Edward Said's concepts of Orientalism, imaginative geography, and contrapuntal reading, this article examines how Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* connects identity and memory to the politics of representation. Although previous scholarship has analyzed trauma, exile, national identity, memory, metaphor, and Palestinian self-representation, the formal relation among focalization, spatial narration, naming, and mnemonic transmission requires further clarification. Through a qualitative close reading of the 2010 Bloomsbury edition, the study traces recurrent passages in which narrative perspective, place, names, bodily marks, and family testimony converge. It argues that memory becomes counter-Orientalist not merely because suppressed events are recalled, but because remembered experience reorganizes narrative authority: Palestinians become historically situated

subjects who perceive, interpret, and transmit the past. Ein Hod, Jenin, and the United States operate as unequally accessible geographies, while the Ismael/David plot exposes identity as institutionally produced but never reducible to one national designation. Family memories function as a selective counterarchive rather than a substitute for historiography. At the same time, Ari, Jolanta, Moshe, and David complicate collective binaries, allowing the novel to criticize acts, institutions, and structures of domination without essentializing Jewish identity. The novel's counter-Orientalist force therefore lies in the formal conversion of memory into narrative authority and in an ethically contrapuntal account of loss and relational identity.

Keywords: cultural memory; identity; imaginative geography; Orientalism; Palestinian literature

1. INTRODUCTION

Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* places a Palestinian family's domestic history within the political transformations that reshaped Palestine during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The narrative moves from village life in Ein Hod to forced displacement, the Jenin refugee camp, Jerusalem, Lebanon, the United States, and a return to Jenin. This geographical movement is also a movement through forms of memory. Places are not represented merely as settings for political events; they become repositories of family knowledge, loss, attachment, and contested historical meaning. The novel therefore makes identity inseparable from the ways in which the past is narrated, transmitted, forgotten, renamed, and recovered [1].

The historical background to the novel includes the end of the British Mandate, the 1947–1949 war, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the mass displacement of Palestinians. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency records that more than 700,000 Palestine refugees were displaced during the 1948 war [2]. Palestinians remember this rupture as the Nakba, a term that refers not only to a past event but also to continuing dispossession and fragmented belonging [3–5]. Later episodes in the novel refer to the 1967 war and occupation, conflict in Lebanon, the Sabra and Shatila massacre, and the 2002 Israeli military operation in Jenin. These historical references shape the narrative, but the novel should not be treated as a documentary archive or used as a replacement for historical scholarship. Its distinctive contribution is literary: it explores how large-scale events enter language, family relations, bodily memory, and individual self-understanding.

This distinction is important because representation is central to both the novel and Edward Said's critical work. In *Orientalism*, Said argues that the Orient was not simply encountered and neutrally described by Western institutions. It was repeatedly produced as an object of knowledge through discourses that divided a rational, authoritative West from an allegedly static, irrational, and inferior East [6]. Representation in this account is linked to power because the capacity to describe, classify, and speak for another people helps determine which experiences become credible and which remain marginal. Palestinian literature is therefore especially relevant to a Saidian reading when it does more than supply positive images of Palestinians. Its critical force lies in changing the position from which Palestine is perceived, remembered, and narrated.

Mornings in Jenin participates in this change by centering the Abulheja family's experiences across several generations. The novel does not introduce Palestine as an abstract territorial dispute. It first creates a social world structured by work, friendship, kinship, poetry, agriculture, food, and ordinary expectation. Political violence subsequently interrupts that world and transforms the characters' relation to place and to one another. Through this structure, the narrative contests depictions in which Palestinians appear only as refugees, militants, casualties, or demographic categories. They become subjects with memories extending beyond the moments in which dominant public discourse notices them. This recovery of narrative duration is one of the novel's principal forms of counterrepresentation.

A substantial body of scholarship has already examined the novel. Researchers have considered diasporic consciousness, trauma, national identity, metaphor, spatial return, decolonial narrative, and the unstable boundary between Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish identity [7–12]. Studies by Salam and Alqudah and Al Sous directly address memory as resistance and as a narrative means of constructing Palestinian identity, while Mami questions the emancipatory limits of the novel's postcolonial and individualizing strategies [13–15]. More recent work has also connected the novel with Said's advocacy of Palestinian self-representation [16]. The present article therefore does not claim that memory, resistance, or postcolonial representation has been neglected. Its narrower contribution is to explain how focalization, spatial sequencing, naming, and intergenerational transmission work together as a formal mechanism that converts memory into narrative authority. It also tests that mechanism against the novel's internal differences, including its representations of Palestinian disagreement and Israeli-Jewish characters, so that counterrepresentation is not treated as a simple reversal of collective stereotypes.

This article addresses these problems by asking three related questions. How does *Mornings in Jenin* redistribute narrative authority in order to challenge Orientalist modes of representation? How do spatial displacement, naming and renaming, and intergenerational memory shape the identities of Amal and other members of the Abulheja family? Finally, how does the novel place Palestinian and Jewish memories in relation without erasing historical differences or reducing either population to a monolithic category? The central argument is that Abulhawa's counter-Orientalist strategy operates through a formal redistribution of perception and memory. Palestinians become narrating subjects; dispossessed places acquire social and mnemonic density; renamed bodies expose the institutional production of identity; and family stories function as a counterarchive. At the same time, the novel's ethically significant moments resist the idea that counterrepresentation should merely exchange the positions of a virtuous self and an undifferentiated enemy.

The article contributes to scholarship on the novel by integrating three Saidian concepts—representational authority, imaginative geography, and contrapuntal reading—with theories of collective and cultural memory. This combined approach makes it possible to distinguish between memory as an object of representation and memory as a narrative procedure. It also clarifies why identity in the novel is neither a fixed essence nor an unrestricted personal choice. Identity emerges through historically unequal relations among places, names, institutions, family accounts, bodily experiences, and

competing public narratives.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. ORIENTALISM AND REPRESENTATIONAL AUTHORITY

Said defines Orientalism as a historically organized discourse through which European and later American institutions represented and governed societies designated as Oriental. The importance of the concept for literary study does not lie only in identifying hostile images or inaccurate stereotypes. Orientalism concerns the authority to produce an apparently coherent object called the Orient and to make that object available for description, explanation, and intervention [6]. A Saidian analysis must therefore examine who occupies the position of observer, whose categories organize the narrative, and whether the represented population is permitted historical complexity and interpretive agency.

This understanding prevents a simplistic application of Said in which every unfavorable Western character is labeled Orientalist or every sympathetic Palestinian character is treated as proof of decolonization. Counter-Orientalist writing changes the terms of visibility. It can restore ordinary life where imperial discourse sees only disorder, recover historical causation where public narratives isolate acts from their contexts, and replace anonymous collectivities with persons who remember and interpret their own circumstances. Such writing may still contain tensions, exclusions, or rhetorical simplifications. The critic's task is consequently to analyze both its oppositional power and its internal limits.

Said's concept of imaginative geography is especially useful for examining the spatial organization of *Mornings in Jenin*. Imaginative geography describes the cultural production of boundaries between familiar and alien space. Such boundaries are not imaginary in the sense of being unreal; they influence political thought and material practices by assigning different values and forms of legitimacy to different places and populations [6]. In the novel, Ein Hod, Jenin, Jerusalem, Lebanon, and the United States are neither interchangeable nor self-contained. Their meanings arise from movement, exclusion, memory, and unequal access. A village remembered by refugees, a camp treated administratively as temporary, and an American city experienced through statelessness all reveal that geography is lived through power.

2.2. CONTRAPUNTAL READING AND RELATIONAL IDENTITY

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said develops contrapuntal reading as a way of attending simultaneously to metropolitan narratives and the histories of domination that make them possible [17]. The method does not collapse distinct experiences into equivalence. Rather, it reads apparently separate histories in relation and asks how one social world has been formed through contact with another. Applied to Abulhawa's novel, this perspective makes it possible to recognize the asymmetry of Palestinian dispossession while also examining Jewish histories of persecution, migration, and trauma that appear through Ari, Jolanta, Moshe, and David.

Contrapuntal reading is relevant because the novel's political critique is strongest when it refuses two symmetrical errors. The first is the erasure of Palestinian history through narratives that begin with Israeli security or state formation and omit the lives displaced by those processes. The second is reverse essentialism, in which Jewish identity is treated as a single political intention and individual characters are reduced to representatives of collective guilt. The novel sometimes uses stark political contrasts, yet its kinships, friendships, and divided identities repeatedly disturb the stability of those categories. Reading contrapuntally allows the analysis to criticize colonial relations and state violence while maintaining distinctions among an ethnoreligious people, a political ideology, state institutions, military practices, and individual characters.

Identity in this framework is relational and historical. Hall argues that cultural identity involves both shared positioning and continuing transformation; it is constituted within representation rather than existing outside history as an unchanged essence [18]. Bhabha similarly emphasizes the ambivalent and negotiated character of identities formed in colonial and postcolonial conditions [19]. These approaches illuminate Amal's movement between Palestine and the United States and David's formation across Palestinian birth and Israeli-Jewish upbringing. Neither character can be adequately described by a model in which identity is simply discovered as an original interior truth. Their identities are shaped through language, memory, recognition, institutions, and unequal histories.

2.3. COLLECTIVE MEMORY, CULTURAL MEMORY, AND POSTMEMORY

Memory in the novel operates at several levels. Halbwachs's account of collective memory establishes that remembering is socially framed: individuals remember through the languages, relations, and interpretive structures available within groups [20]. Assmann's concept of cultural memory further explains how communities transmit selected accounts of the past through texts, rituals, symbols, and durable forms of communication [21]. These theories help explain why Ein Hod remains consequential for Amal, who did not experience the family's pre-Nakba village life directly. The village reaches her through family narration, names, habits, objects, and repeated acts of recollection.

Hirsch's concept of postmemory describes the powerful relationship that later generations develop with traumatic events transmitted through stories, images, and behavior rather than direct recollection [22]. Because the concept was developed in relation to descendants of Holocaust survivors, its application to Palestinian literature requires care. The novel represents not only inherited memory but also continuing displacement and recurrent violence. Amal receives memories of a lost village from an earlier generation while accumulating direct memories of camp life, war, migration, and return. Postmemory is therefore useful only when joined to an account of ongoing historical conditions.

Rothberg's theory of multidirectional memory challenges the assumption that recognition of one group's suffering must diminish another's [23]. This idea is particularly relevant to the novel's contact between Holocaust memory and Nakba memory. Fischer describes this contact as a form of disruptive empathy that unsettles competitive victimhood without claiming that the two histories are identical [24]. In the present study, relational memory provides an ethical extension of Said's contrapuntal method: histories can be read together while their different causes, scales, and political consequences remain distinct.

Taken together, these concepts support an analysis of identity and memory as formal and political processes. Orientalism identifies the unequal authority governing representation; imaginative geography explains the production of valued and devalued spaces; contrapuntal reading reveals connected histories; and memory theory clarifies how family and cultural narratives sustain belonging across rupture. The combined framework also establishes a critical standard for the analysis: Palestinian self-representation should be restored without converting other identities into ahistorical abstractions.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative interpretive design based on close textual reading. The primary corpus was Susan Abulhawa's 2010 first U.S. Bloomsbury edition of *Mornings in Jenin* (ISBN 978-1-60819-046-1) [1]. The analysis considered the prelude, the novel's successive historical parts, and its concluding return to Jenin as a unified narrative structure. The purpose was not to test readers' responses, reconstruct authorial intention, or assess the historical accuracy of every represented event. It was to explain how the novel formally connects representation, memory, space, and identity.

The unit of analysis was a passage or episode in which at least two of the following elements converged: narrative perspective, historical memory, spatial displacement, naming or renaming, institutional classification, bodily memory, family testimony, or contact between Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish characters. This criterion directed attention to recurring narrative structures rather than isolated politically charged statements. The principal textual anchors were the Hasan-Ari friendship and the representation of pre-1948 Ein Hod [1, pp. 9–31]; the camp's morning ritual and Yehya's return [1, pp. 38–43]; Amal's memories of her father's poetry and educational instruction [1, pp. 52–53]; the family deliberations about her education and departure [1, pp. 108–113]; her assumption of the name "Amy" in the United States [1, pp. 134–142]; the confrontation between Amal and David [1, pp. 206–212]; and Sara's retrospective reconstruction of Amal and Jenin [1, pp. 241–243]. These passages were read in relation to the prelude and the novel's return to the same encounter near its conclusion.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, the chronology and changes in focalization were traced from the third-person family chronicle to Amal's first-person retrospection and, finally, to Sara's perspective. Second, each textual anchor was examined through five categories derived from the theoretical framework: representational authority, imaginative geography, naming and identity formation, intergenerational memory, and contrapuntal or relational memory. Third, interpretations were tested against complicating passages. Claims about national polarization were read alongside the Hasan-Ari friendship and David's divided identity; claims about memory as resistance were tested against Amal's silence and her attempt to become "Amy"; and claims about reconciliation were qualified by David's acknowledgment of violence against Yousef. This procedure treats recurrence, narrative form, and counterevidence—rather than political agreement with an isolated statement—as the basis of interpretation.

Said's *Orientalism* provided the principal framework for analyzing the relationship between representation and authority [6]. His discussion of imaginative geography guided the spatial reading, while the contrapuntal method developed in *Culture and Imperialism* informed the analysis of connected but unequal histories [17]. Cultural-memory scholarship was used to clarify the transmission of family and communal knowledge across generations [20–23]. Historical studies supplied context for the Nakba and displacement but were not used to claim that fictional representation is equivalent to documentary evidence [3, 4].

The interpretive validity of the reading rests on textual recurrence, theoretical consistency, and attention to complicating evidence. Page references identify the 2010 Bloomsbury text specified above; readers using another printing or an electronic edition should consult the corresponding chapter because pagination may differ. The article avoids attributing one meaning to every character from the same national or religious group and distinguishes among the narrator's perspective, a character's speech, the political structure implied by an episode, and the authors' interpretation. These distinctions are particularly important in a study of a conflict in which collective nouns can obscure different institutions, ideologies, and individual positions.

The study has three limitations. It examines one English-language novel and does not compare its wording with translations or with the earlier version published as *The Scar of David*. It offers a textual interpretation rather than empirical evidence about reader reception. Finally, it concentrates on Said and cultural-memory theory; other approaches, including gender studies, trauma theory, affect theory, and settler-colonial studies, could illuminate dimensions that receive less attention here. These limits define the scope of the argument rather than invalidate the close reading.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarship on *Mornings in Jenin* has developed around several overlapping concerns. One prominent line of inquiry examines exile and diasporic consciousness. Abu-Shomar argues that the novel links political dispossession, love, trauma, and the search for identity, while his later study interprets exilic consciousness as a basis for critical resistance rather than merely a condition of absence [7, 8]. Al-Ma'amari, Yusof, and Vengadasamy similarly emphasize the relationship among memory, homeland, and Amal's changing identity [25]. These studies establish that exile in the novel is psychologically and politically productive, but they tend to foreground thematic development more than the distribution of narrative authority.

A second group of studies focuses on national narration and decolonial representation. Ferhood and Janoory read the novel through the relationship between narration and attachment to the Palestinian nation [26]. Ahmad interprets Abulhawa's recovery of Palestinian experience as a decolonial narrative practice that responds to dispossession and dehumanizing public images [12]. Alqahtani explicitly connects the novel with Said's demand for Palestinian self-representation and shows how storytelling creates a platform from which Palestinians speak about their own history [16]. The present article builds on this insight but shifts the question from whether self-representation occurs to how narrative form redistributes the authority to perceive, remember, and interpret.

Spatial criticism provides another important approach. AlJahdali uses the chronotope to analyze Palestinian post-coloniality and the narrative significance of return, showing that space and time are inseparable in the reconstruction of Palestinian geography [9]. Cleary's broader comparative study of literature, partition, and nation-states helps locate Palestinian writing within literary responses to territorial division and political reorganization [27]. Such scholarship makes clear that the places in Abulhawa's novel cannot be reduced to background. The current study extends this argument through Said's imaginative geography, asking how the novel contests the power to define which population belongs naturally to a place and which appears as an intrusion.

Trauma and cultural memory have also received sustained attention. Raslan interprets the novel as a trauma narrative in which storytelling can transform traumatic memory and support resistance [10]. Salam more directly examines the poetics of memory and the politics of representation in *Mornings in Jenin*, arguing that individual and collective remembrance functions as nonviolent resistance and an affirmation of Palestinian identity [13]. Alqudah and Al Sous likewise connect nostalgia and collective memory to the construction of Palestinian identity and the disruption of dominant historical narratives [15]. Saloul's work on Palestinian catastrophe and exile offers a wider account of how narrative performance organizes memories of dispossession [28], while Sa'di and Abu-Lughod demonstrate that Nakba memory is produced through personal testimony, place, family history, and public contestation rather than preserved as a single unchanging record [4]. These studies mean that the present article cannot claim memory as an unexamined subject. Its contribution must instead lie in specifying the formal process by which remembered material acquires representational authority.

Other studies explore the novel's figurative and ethical complexity. Alkodimi analyzes metaphor as a means of expressing Palestinian suffering and resistance [29]. Ebileeni examines the Ismael/David narrative as a form of literary trespassing that destabilizes the border between Palestinian Arab and Israeli-Jewish identity [11]. His reading is especially valuable because it prevents the character from becoming a simple allegory of stolen land. David's identity is produced through an act of abduction, but his subsequent life cannot be erased by the recovery of his Palestinian origin. The resulting conflict reveals the violence of exclusive national classifications while preserving the historical asymmetry that produced his displacement.

Fischer develops this ethical complexity by examining the novel's relation between Holocaust and Nakba memory [24]. Rather than presenting remembrance as a competition in which recognition of one trauma cancels another, the novel creates points of contact that can disrupt hardened national narratives. This approach is compatible with Rothberg's account of multidirectional memory and with Said's contrapuntal reading, provided that relationality is not mistaken for equivalence [17, 23]. The Holocaust and the Nakba have distinct histories, agents, and consequences; reading them together means examining how their memories enter the same political and literary field, not declaring them interchangeable.

Mami provides an important counterposition by questioning whether the novel's emphasis on individual identity and textual reconciliation limits its emancipatory politics [14]. This criticism prevents the present reading from treating interior complexity as politically sufficient. The analysis below therefore asks not only how the novel humanizes divided subjects, but also where interpersonal recognition leaves structures of territorial control, displacement, and unequal power unresolved.

The existing literature therefore provides strong accounts of diaspora, trauma, spatial return, national narration,

metaphor, self-representation, mnemonic resistance, and the limits of postcolonial individualism. The remaining problem is not the absence of memory studies but the lack of a sufficiently integrated explanation of how narrative form converts memory into authority. The present study identifies a four-part mechanism: retrospective focalization restores historical duration; spatial sequencing turns inaccessible places into socially remembered geographies; naming and bodily marks expose institutionally manufactured identities; and intergenerational narration transfers interpretive agency without making family memory equivalent to documentary history. The analysis then tests this mechanism against silence, coercion, political asymmetry, and characters who do not fit a single collective identity.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. NARRATIVE AUTHORITY AND THE COUNTER-ORIENTALIST GAZE

The novel's first counter-Orientalist intervention is its reorganization of narrative authority. Its prelude presents Amal in Jenin in 2002 at a moment of lethal vulnerability, but the scene is focalized through her attention rather than through the soldier's institutional viewpoint. The chronology then breaks backward to the family's life before 1948, postponing the outcome of the armed encounter while supplying the threatened woman with a genealogy, an education, relationships, migrations, and memories. When the narrative returns to Jenin near the conclusion, the visual relation of soldier and civilian remains unequal, but the reader no longer encounters an anonymous body. Retrospection has made Amal the interpretive center of the scene and restored historical duration to an image that military vision could compress into a target [1, Prelude; pp. 239–243].

Orientalist representation often produces its object by separating it from a complex history and placing it within a ready-made explanatory category. Abulhawa counters this compression through narrative accumulation. Before the family becomes a refugee family, the novel dwells on agriculture, household disagreements, marriage, poetry, humor, and the childhood friendship between Hasan and Ari. The friendship is described through books and shared morning routines before later political divisions reorganize the characters' possibilities [1, pp. 9–18]. The density of ordinary activity is formally important: displacement interrupts a differentiated social world rather than moving an abstract population from one location to another. Because the village is represented before its loss, later recollection carries concrete social content rather than generalized nostalgia.

The distribution of focalization reinforces this intervention. The early third-person family chronicle gives access to events that precede Amal's birth, while the later first-person voice repeatedly marks memory as retrospective and embodied. Her recollection of childhood, for example, joins her father's reading voice, tobacco, touch, and dawn, so that cultural transmission occurs through sensory form rather than through historical exposition alone [1, pp. 52–53]. The transition does not sever the individual from the collective: Amal inherits accounts that precede her, but she also revises them through fear, silence, migration, and belated understanding. The final movement toward Sara's perspective further prevents one narrator from owning the entire family past [1, pp. 241–243]. Narrative authority is redistributed across generations rather than concentrated in an omniscient communal voice.

This distinction clarifies the novel's relationship to self-representation. Alqahtani correctly identifies storytelling as a Saidian strategy through which Palestinians answer external descriptions [16]. Yet self-representation in the novel is not the expression of a fully unified communal voice. Family members remember differently, conceal information, misunderstand one another, and respond to violence through divergent choices. Yousef's path, Amal's educational migration, David's divided affiliation, and Hasan's friendship with Ari cannot be absorbed into one representative Palestinian consciousness. The novel gains authority not by claiming internal sameness but by permitting conflict within the represented community.

The historical part titles further redistribute interpretive authority. Terms such as *El Nakba*, *El Naksa*, and *El Ghurba* organize chronology through Arabic concepts of catastrophe, setback, and estrangement. Their placement at structural divisions makes Palestinian historical vocabulary a principle of narrative order rather than a translated supplement to another national chronology [1, Parts II–IV]. The titles therefore perform the representational change that the article identifies: memory supplies not only remembered content but also the categories through which the story becomes temporally intelligible.

At the same time, the counter-Orientalist perspective should not be confused with factual omniscience. The novel is a work of historical fiction, and its emotional authority does not eliminate the selectivity of narrative. Its family-centered structure foregrounds particular experiences and cannot represent every Palestinian, Israeli, or Jewish position. Recognizing this limit strengthens rather than weakens the argument. Said's critique of representational authority does not require the replacement of one total account by another. It asks readers to identify the worldly conditions and exclusions through which accounts become authoritative [6]. Abulhawa's narrative is therefore most persuasive as an intervention into an unequal field of representation, not as a final or exhaustive history.

The novel also humanizes Palestinian life without making humanity dependent on political innocence. Characters experience anger, desire, fear, rivalry, self-protection, and contradictory loyalties. Such complexity resists a humanitarian

convention in which oppressed people receive recognition only when they appear as passive and morally uncomplicated victims. Ahmad's description of the novel as decolonial narrative practice is useful here because the text does not merely request sympathy; it contests the conditions under which Palestinians are considered narratable and intelligible [12]. Narrative authority becomes a form of political agency precisely because the characters are allowed full, imperfect personhood.

5.2. IMAGINATIVE GEOGRAPHY: EIN HOD, JENIN, AND AMERICA

The novel's geographical sequence demonstrates that identity is produced through unequal relations of access, mobility, and naming. Ein Hod first appears as a lived environment whose meaning arises from labor, family continuity, and social memory. After the Abulhejas are displaced, the village acquires a second existence in stories and longing. It remains materially located yet becomes inaccessible to those who understand it as home. This division between physical proximity and prohibited belonging illustrates Said's imaginative geography: political power reorganizes not only territory but also the categories through which presence appears legitimate or illegitimate [6].

Yehya's return to Ein Hod is crucial because it refuses the idea that displacement instantaneously dissolves attachment. In the camp, the replacement of cloth tents by clay shelters makes material durability feel like an admission that exile is no longer temporary. Against that unwanted permanence, Yehya prepares his clothes and body for return through deliberate ritual. The narrative then contrasts the practical knowledge carried in his farmer's hands with the new designation of him as a trespasser; after his death, the olives and figs found on his body turn remembered agriculture into bodily evidence of prohibited belonging [1, pp. 38–43]. The episode therefore joins sensory memory, ritual, and political classification. Memory sustains attachment, but the label "trespassing" shows that attachment cannot by itself produce legally recognized access.

Jenin initially appears as a place of imposed temporariness. The morning gathering is described as a recurring time in which the hope of return can be renewed even as that hope repeatedly fails [1, p. 38]. Repetition makes the camp's temporality double: each morning reopens Ein Hod as remembered possibility, while the routine's persistence records the duration of displacement. Residents nevertheless build friendships, educational aspirations, humor, and mutual care. Jenin is therefore neither a substitute homeland nor an empty waiting room; it is a socially produced place whose vitality coexists with the political conditions that created it.

The relation between Ein Hod and Jenin also complicates a simple opposition between authentic origin and degraded exile. Ein Hod is central to family memory, but Amal's own childhood knowledge is rooted in Jenin. She inherits the village as a powerful narrative rather than a personal recollection. Her identity consequently joins an ancestral geography to a camp geography. This relation is compatible with Halbwachs's argument that memory is framed by social groups: Amal remembers Ein Hod through the family's language, while she remembers Jenin through direct experience and later retrospective narration [20]. The two places are not equal, but neither can be removed from her sense of self.

Jerusalem and Lebanon extend this spatial structure. They provide education, political contact, family reunion, intimacy, and additional forms of vulnerability. Each location alters the characters' possibilities without allowing them to leave Palestinian history behind. The novel's movement across borders demonstrates that exile is not a single departure followed by stable resettlement. It is a repeated negotiation with documents, institutions, wars, social expectations, and memories that can return without warning. Abu-Shomar's concept of exilic consciousness captures this mobility, but the novel also shows that consciousness is anchored in specific routes and restrictions rather than in generalized homelessness [8].

The United States appears as a space of safety and educational opportunity, yet it also confronts Amal with the pressure of legibility. The observation that "Statelessness clung to me like bad perfume" converts a legal and political condition into an unwanted sensory trace [1, p. 134]. The verb "clung" denies the fantasy that migration permits a clean separation from history. Later, Amal explains that she allowed herself to be known as "Amy," glossing the change as "Amal without the hope" [1, p. 141]. The narration thus interprets the abbreviation rather than leaving it as neutral assimilation: the shortened name is a strategy of social passage that simultaneously removes the semantic inheritance attached to "Amal." Her American identity is neither simply false nor complete; it is a protective performance whose cost the retrospective narrator can finally name.

Hall's account of cultural identity as both continuity and becoming illuminates this tension [18]. Amal does not carry an untouched Palestinian essence from one territory to another. Her identity changes through education, friendship, motherhood, loss, and return. Nevertheless, transformation does not mean that historical attachment is freely chosen or easily discarded. Palestine remains present through family knowledge, bodily reaction, language, and interrupted mourning. The novel thus avoids two inadequate models: identity as permanent essence and identity as unlimited reinvention.

The concluding return to Jenin brings the geographical pattern into a circular form without resolving it. The location encountered in 2002 is not the place of Amal's childhood preserved unchanged. In Sara's perspective, ancestral faces, Ein Hod, a violin recital, the destroyed camp, and Amal's final bodily act enter the same unstable sequence [1, pp. 241–243].

This montage makes return temporal as well as spatial: Sara inherits Jenin through direct catastrophe and through memories transmitted by her mother. AlJahdali's chronotope of return is therefore extended across generations [9]. Home is neither recovered intact nor dismissed as an illusion; it becomes a relation among loss, recognition, and responsibility for what the next narrator will preserve.

5.3. NAMING, ABDUCTION, AND THE ISMAEL/DAVID DOUBLE IDENTITY

The Ismael/David plot makes naming one of the novel's clearest representations of institutional power. Ismael is taken from his Palestinian family during the displacement of 1948 and raised by Moshe and Jolanta as David. The change of name is not a superficial disguise placed over an otherwise untouched self. It reorganizes kinship, language, religion, national belonging, memory, and the social recognition through which a child becomes a person. The episode demonstrates that identity is produced through relations and institutions, even when the conditions of that production originate in coercion [1, Parts I and III].

A reductive allegorical reading would treat Ismael as purely Palestinian truth and David as purely Israeli falsification. Such a reading rightly identifies the violence of abduction but fails to account for the life that develops afterward. David's attachment to the family that raises him, his participation in Israeli society, and his lack of access to his Palestinian origin are real components of his subjectivity. The recovery of his birth history cannot simply erase them. Ebileeni describes this divided position as literary trespassing because the character crosses and destabilizes the boundary separating Palestinian Arab and Israeli-Jewish identity [11]. His existence reveals that national categories can be politically enforced while remaining personally and genealogically entangled.

The scar associated with David gives the body a mnemonic function. When Amal meets him, the narrative moves from the family photograph to the scar near his eye and then to resemblances with Dalia, Hasan, and Yousef [1, pp. 206–207]. This sequence does not allow the mark to disclose a complete identity by itself. The scar becomes meaningful only within a network of photographs, remembered faces, testimony, and recognition. The body therefore acts as a counterarchive not because physical signs transparently reveal truth, but because the mark interrupts David's established biography and requires another account of how he became legible to himself and to the family.

The episode also transforms the meaning of the "Other." In a conventional nationalist structure, each community secures itself by imagining the other as separate and internally uniform. David makes that separation difficult to sustain. His Palestinian birth and Israeli-Jewish upbringing do not produce a harmonious synthesis, but they make exclusionary definitions unstable. He is not a neutral bridge who resolves political conflict; he is a person injured by the demand that identity fit one exclusive narrative. Bhabha's account of colonial ambivalence helps explain why his divided position is politically disturbing: it reveals that supposedly pure categories depend on repeated acts of classification and disavowal [19].

Jolanta's role requires equally careful interpretation. Her desire for the child is connected in the novel to her own history of loss and persecution in Europe. That history does not justify Ismael's abduction, nor does recognition of it diminish the Palestinian family's loss. It does, however, prevent her from functioning only as an ethnic symbol. Contrapuntal reading holds the histories together while preserving their moral and political differences. A victim of European antisemitic persecution can participate in the dispossession of another family; acknowledging the first fact does not excuse the second, and condemning the second does not require denial of the first.

This distinction corrects the ethically unacceptable tendency to turn David's story into a judgment on "the Jewish people." The relevant critical objects are the specific act of abduction, the institutions and narratives that make the new identity sustainable, and the broader political context of Palestinian displacement. Jewish identity is not equivalent to Zionism, the Israeli state, military policy, or the actions of individual characters. By maintaining these distinctions, the analysis can identify colonial violence precisely rather than transferring collective blame to an ethnoreligious population.

David's encounter with the Abulheja family therefore produces neither complete restoration nor simple reconciliation. At the checkpoint, David had exercised military power against Yousef; in conversation with Amal, he acknowledges both the act and the fear that he might be Arab [1, pp. 207–210]. The disclosure joins institutional power to disavowed identity rather than allowing recovered kinship to erase responsibility. Amal's description of the siblings as heirs to "stolen identities" is followed not by an embrace but by her spoken uncertainty [1, p. 210]. The difference between inward recognition and outward hesitation formally limits reconciliation. The family recovers Ismael, but the person who returns is also David, and memory can reveal the loss more completely without reversing it.

5.4. AMAL'S EXILIC IDENTITY AND EMBODIED MEMORY

Amal's identity develops at the intersection of inherited history and direct experience. Her father explains the long vowel in her name as a plurality of hopes and dreams, making the name a compact form of family expectation [1, p. 61]. The first-person narrator then places that inherited meaning beside later fear, withdrawal, education, migration, love, and

return. Because “Amal” is interpreted both by the father who names her and by the adult who remembers that naming, identity emerges through competing temporal perspectives rather than through the fulfillment of a fixed national emblem.

Her relationship with her father, Hasan, is central to this development. Their morning encounters join poetry, language, intellectual discipline, touch, smell, and paternal affection [1, pp. 52–53]. Education is consequently remembered as an intimate inheritance before it becomes a route beyond the camp’s restrictions. Later, Darweesh’s warning that “The future can’t breathe in a refugee camp” personifies futurity as a body deprived of air [1, p. 111]. The metaphor holds together two meanings of Jenin: it is the community Amal does not wish to leave and a political space that constrains the life her family imagines for her. Educational migration thus realizes an inherited aspiration while producing another separation.

Trauma affects Amal not only as remembered content but also as a pattern of perception and self-protection. During her departure, grief gives way to the image of emotional “jail bars,” while Dalia’s instruction to keep feeling inside returns as an inherited refrain [1, pp. 112–113]. The metaphor shows restraint as both protection and confinement. Raslan’s trauma reading clarifies the relation between narrative memory and psychic survival [10]; the present analysis adds that retrospection makes the defensive pattern formally visible. By narrating the language through which silence was learned, Amal converts private self-protection into testimony without treating narration as complete therapeutic recovery.

The move to the United States makes this tension more visible. Amal acquires new intellectual and social possibilities, but she also encounters an environment in which her history is not immediately legible. The name “Amy” reduces linguistic difference and allows a limited form of social passage. At the same time, it marks the pressure to become intelligible through a name detached from the history carried by “Amal.” The two names do not correspond neatly to authentic and inauthentic selves. Each belongs to a context in which she acts, protects herself, and forms relationships. Their coexistence demonstrates that diasporic identity is layered rather than divided into mutually exclusive national halves.

Al-Ma’amari, Yusof, and Vengadasamy emphasize the role of memory in Amal’s quest for identity, while Abu-Shomar relates her development to diaspora, trauma, and belonging [7, 25]. These readings can be extended by focusing on how the novel distributes memory across body and narrative. Amal does not remember only through deliberate recollection. Places, language, family resemblance, news, and political events activate memories that interrupt the apparent stability of American life. Palestine is not simply an idea she chooses to preserve; it persists as an embodied orientation that shapes attention and emotion.

Motherhood creates another transformation. Amal’s responsibility to Sara changes memory from a relation to predecessors into a question of transmission. She must decide what can be communicated to a child and how inherited pain can be conveyed without making trauma the child’s only identity. This problem gives the novel’s intergenerational structure an ethical dimension. Memory preserves cultural and familial continuity, but it can also burden later generations when suffering becomes the sole authorized account of who they are.

Amal’s return to Jenin is consequently not a recovery of an unchanged origin. The returning subject has been formed by Palestine, the United States, family loss, marriage, and motherhood. The return confronts her with the continuity of violence and with the limits of geographical restoration. Yet it also places her testimony within a relationship to Sara and to the reader. Her identity becomes narratively coherent not because contradiction disappears but because she can position its different elements within a story. Hall’s formulation of identity as production rather than completed essence is especially apt here [18].

The novel’s treatment of Amal therefore challenges Orientalist representation in two related ways. It gives a Palestinian woman authority over the interpretation of history, and it refuses to make her a transparent emblem of nation. She is situated within collective history but not dissolved into it. This complexity is politically important because stereotypical representation can operate through idealization as well as denigration. A subject reduced to heroic resilience is still reduced. Abulhawa’s portrayal is most effective when Amal’s fear, ambivalence, intellectual life, desire, and protective silence remain visible alongside her role in transmitting Palestinian memory.

5.5. INTERGENERATIONAL MEMORY AND THE FAMILY AS COUNTERARCHIVE

The Abulheja family functions as a counterarchive because it preserves connections that official territorial and institutional arrangements attempt to sever. The term “archive” is used here metaphorically rather than to equate oral family memory with a state or documentary repository. The family’s stories retain names, kinship relations, places, habits, and causal sequences that would otherwise be fragmented. Their authority comes from lived continuity, but their accounts are also selective, emotional, and vulnerable to silence. The novel makes both qualities visible.

Collective memory, as Halbwachs argues, depends on social frameworks through which experiences become recallable and meaningful [20]. The novel makes these frameworks materially specific. Darweesh’s photograph releases stories of family life before Amal’s birth [1, pp. 110–111]; the letters saved in a tin box become chronicles of orphanage friendship and survival [1, pp. 131–133]; and the photograph beside David converts family resemblance into a prompt for belated recognition [1, pp. 206–207]. These objects do not preserve autonomous facts. They become mnemonic only through narration, interpretation, and affect, providing the relational structures through which Amal understands loss and belonging.

The novel's multigenerational chronology gives this transmission formal structure. Public events enter the narrative through their effects on family relations: a war becomes disappearance, a border becomes separation, a massacre becomes bereavement, and exile becomes a change in language and daily practice. Conversely, family memory interprets public history from below. The Nakba is not presented only as a date or numerical displacement; it becomes the transformation of an inhabited village into an inaccessible remembered home and of a family into refugees. This movement between historical scale and domestic consequence is one reason the novel can contest abstract political representation.

Assmann's concept of cultural memory helps explain the extension from family recollection to communal meaning [21]. The part titles, Arabic expressions, recurring place names, and narrated rituals place the Abulhejas within a broader Palestinian memory culture. Yet the novel does not suggest that all Palestinians remember identically. The family counterarchive is one situated account whose literary significance lies in making suppressed experience communicable. Sa'di and Abu-Lughod similarly emphasize the plurality of forms through which Nakba memory is claimed and contested [4]. The novel participates in this field without exhausting it.

Hirsch's postmemory is relevant to Amal's inheritance of Ein Hod, but the novel complicates a model based solely on generational distance [22]. Amal receives the village through other people's stories and objects, yet she also acquires direct memories of camp life, war, migration, and return. The final focal shift intensifies this layering: Sara's memories of her mother merge with ancestral faces and places she knows through narration, and she records the result in letters addressed to the dead [1, pp. 241–242]. Transmission therefore occurs while the conditions associated with the earlier rupture remain active. The past is neither closed enough to become only postmemory nor fully present as unmediated experience.

Silence is also part of the counterarchive. Characters withhold information to protect themselves or others, and traumatic experiences do not always become immediately narratable. Such gaps do not simply represent failure. They reveal that memory is shaped by emotional capacity, social danger, and the anticipated consequences of disclosure. The belated recovery of Ismael's history, for example, depends on information that has been separated across families and institutions. The counterarchive emerges through incomplete convergence rather than through uninterrupted preservation.

The family form can itself create exclusions. Emphasizing genealogy and inherited land may appear to secure identity through biological descent. The novel partly resists this restriction by representing chosen relationships, friendship, adoption, marriage, and diasporic community. David's story is especially disruptive because birth family and raising family cannot be arranged into an ethically simple opposition. The family counterarchive identifies the violence that separated him from his Palestinian relatives, but it cannot deny the formative reality of the life he lived as David. Memory thus restores relation without eliminating relational conflict.

Narration becomes a form of resistance because it preserves causation and personhood against erasure. Harlow's account of resistance literature emphasizes the connection between literary form and political struggle [30]. In Abulhawa's novel, resistance is not limited to armed action or explicit political speech. Teaching, remembering names, recounting village life, sustaining family connection, and transmitting a child's history all oppose the reduction of Palestinians to a people without a narratable past. The counterarchive is therefore political not because every memory is accurate or unified, but because it keeps open the question of whose past can organize public understanding.

5.6. CONTRAPUNTAL MEMORY AND ETHICAL COMPLEXITY

The novel's relation between Palestinian and Jewish memory is one of its most ethically consequential features. Hasan's friendship with Ari is initially organized through their shared reading and their disinterest in adult politics [1, p. 9]. The narrative later places Ari's European history of antisemitic persecution beside the Abulhejas' displacement without converting either history into the cause or moral equivalent of the other. The early intimacy does not cancel the subsequent political rupture; instead, its position before 1948 makes timeless ethnic hostility an inadequate explanation for relations that institutions and historical events later transform.

Said's contrapuntal method requires attention to these connected histories without disguising asymmetry [17]. European persecution of Jews is part of the historical field in which Zionist migration and state formation developed, but Palestinians did not cause the Holocaust and should not be made to bear its political cost. Conversely, recognizing Palestinian dispossession does not require minimizing Jewish histories of persecution. The novel creates its most demanding ethical space when it asks readers to hold both propositions while examining the unequal power relations through which one displaced history becomes connected to another.

Jolanta embodies this difficulty. Her trauma and desire for family make her emotionally intelligible, yet her acceptance of Ismael as David depends on the erasure of his Palestinian kinship. Much later, David's affectionate description of Jolanta as a warm and attentive mother forces Amal to encounter a domestic identity that does not nullify the original abduction [1, pp. 211–212]. The narrative does not require a choice between recognizing Jolanta's suffering and condemning the taking of the child. Their coexistence demonstrates that past victimization does not prevent participation in another family's dispossession.

David's divided identity continues the contrapuntal structure. He is connected to Palestinian loss as the abducted Ismael

and to Israeli-Jewish life through language, family, education, and social belonging. His character does not provide an easy model of reconciliation. Instead, it reveals the personal damage caused by national narratives that demand exclusive and continuous origin. Ebileeni's concept of literary trespassing aptly describes how David's existence unsettles the border between identities that public discourse often treats as mutually impermeable [11].

Fischer argues that the novel brings Holocaust and Nakba memory into a relation of disruptive empathy [24]. The value of this formulation lies in the word "disruptive." Empathy is not presented as sentimental agreement or as a substitute for political analysis. It interrupts narratives of competitive victimhood in which acknowledging another group's trauma is experienced as weakening one's own claim. Rothberg's multidirectional memory supports the same point: memories can interact, borrow forms, and create new ethical recognition without becoming identical [23].

The novel nevertheless requires critical vigilance because relational memory can be misread as symmetry. The Nakba and the Holocaust differ in historical context, agents, ideological structures, scale, and aftermath. The fact that both appear within the novel does not authorize comparison without limits. A responsible reading identifies the narrative relations among them while preserving these differences. It also avoids using one trauma as explanatory property for the other. Jolanta's suffering helps explain her emotional condition, but it does not morally explain away the Palestinian child's abduction.

This contrapuntal dimension strengthens the novel's counter-Orientalist force. A reversed Orientalism would restore Palestinian humanity by denying complexity to Jewish characters. Abulhawa's more significant achievement is to center Palestinian history while permitting Ari, Jolanta, Moshe, and David different degrees of interiority and contradiction. The portrayals are not equally sympathetic, and the narrative's political commitments are clear. Nevertheless, Jewishness is not consistently treated as a single moral or political identity. This distinction allows criticism to remain directed toward acts, institutions, ideologies, and structures of domination.

The ethical complexity also changes the meaning of coexistence. The novel does not present interpersonal recognition as sufficient to solve a conflict grounded in territory, displacement, military power, and unequal rights. Hasan and Ari's friendship cannot prevent historical rupture, and David's divided identity does not reconcile the families affected by his abduction. Personal relation reveals possibilities obscured by collective categories, but it does not abolish the need for political justice. Contrapuntal memory is therefore a mode of understanding rather than a substitute for material redress.

5.7. MEMORY, RESISTANCE, AND THE LIMITS OF HEROIC SIMPLIFICATION

The novel represents several forms of resistance, including armed struggle, education, narration, care, return, and the preservation of cultural knowledge. These forms should not be collapsed into a single heroic category. After the embassy bombing, public media reduce Yousef to a representative image of evil, while Amal's countersequence recalls childhood play, sibling intimacy, courtship, teaching, and fatherhood [1, pp. 188–189]. The juxtaposition does not prove his innocence merely by humanizing him; rather, it exposes the difference between a public image that fixes identity and a family memory that restores contradictory duration. The novel thus makes Yousef historically intelligible without turning him into either a terrorist type or an uncomplicated national hero.

A Saidian reading must attend to the asymmetry of representation surrounding such a character. Political violence by a colonized or occupied subject is often detached from history and made to define an entire population, whereas institutional violence can appear as neutral security. Abulhawa restores causal history and emotional life to Yousef. Yet historical explanation is not the same as moral exemption. The character's value lies in exposing the pressures and contradictions through which political subjectivity is formed, not in providing a universal model of Palestinian youth.

Amal's narration offers a different resistance. Her testimony preserves experiences that public discourse can exclude, but it also questions a masculine hierarchy in which armed action appears as the only politically meaningful response. Education, emotional survival, motherhood, friendship, and storytelling sustain continuity across forms of destruction. The novel's women do not merely symbolize a homeland that men defend; they interpret history and carry its transmission. This aspect could be developed further through feminist analysis, but it already indicates that counterrepresentation changes the recognized forms of agency.

Memory itself is ambivalent. It can sustain identity, recover suppressed causation, and connect generations. It can also intensify grief, restrict the future to inherited injury, or become a demand for political purity. The novel acknowledges these risks through characters who protect themselves by silence, distance, or altered names. Cultural memory becomes resistant when it permits critical relation to the past rather than requiring mechanical repetition. Saloul's emphasis on telling catastrophe is useful precisely because narrative is a performance that reorganizes memory, not a container that preserves it unchanged [28].

The strongest projects of counterrepresentation therefore avoid heroic simplification. Palestinian characters need not be morally flawless in order to possess historical and political intelligibility. Jewish characters need not be denied histories of suffering in order for Palestinian dispossession to be named. The novel's political argument is most persuasive when it differentiates responsibility, restores context, and allows identities to remain relational without pretending that power is

equal. This is the point at which memory and Said's critique of representation converge: both concern the struggle over which relations, histories, and forms of personhood can become visible.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has argued that memory becomes counter-Orientalist in *Mornings in Jenin* through a formal redistribution of narrative authority. The backward movement from the armed encounter in the prelude to the Abulheja family chronicle restores historical duration to Amal, while the later movement from family chronicle to first-person retrospection and finally to Sara distributes remembrance across generations. Spatial sequencing gives Ein Hod, Jenin, and the United States different meanings through access, ritual, sensory recollection, and institutional classification. Memory is therefore not only represented as a theme; it supplies the temporal, spatial, and perspectival forms through which Palestinian lives become historically intelligible.

Naming and bodily evidence reveal the limits of both essentialist identity and easy reconciliation. "Amal" and "Amy" register the interaction of inherited meaning, social legibility, and self-protection. Ismael/David's two names and scar expose the coercive origin of his separation while acknowledging that his later Israeli-Jewish life cannot simply be erased. His admission of violence against Yousef and Amal's inability to translate inward recognition into immediate reconciliation show why relational identity does not dissolve responsibility. In the same way, attention to Ari and Jolanta permits recognition of Jewish histories and individual difference without treating those histories as equivalent to, or exculpatory of, Palestinian dispossession.

The analysis consequently refines existing studies of memory and resistance by locating their political force in the interaction of focalization, spatial narration, naming, material traces, and transmission. The family counterarchive remains selective and vulnerable to silence; it contests erasure without becoming documentary history. The study is limited to one English-language edition and does not establish how translations or different readerships alter these effects. Comparative work on *Mornings in Jenin*, its translations, and other Palestinian and Israeli narratives could test whether the formal mechanism identified here travels across languages and narrative traditions.

ETHICS APPROVAL

Not applicable. This study analyzes published literary and scholarly texts and did not involve human participants or animals.

DATA AVAILABILITY

No datasets were generated or analyzed. The primary material is the published novel identified in the references.

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Generative AI was used for language editing, structural revision, and reference-checking assistance. The authors remain responsible for verifying all textual interpretations, quotations, page references, and bibliographic information.

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