

**MANIFESTING SUMUD IN THE WAKE OF  
ON-GOING NAKBA: TRACING ELEMENTS  
OF CULTURAL TRAUMA IN SELECTED  
PALESTINIAN NOVELS**

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**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES**

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**Manifesting Sumud in the Wake of On-going Nakba: Tracing  
Elements of Cultural Trauma in Selected Palestinian Novels**

By

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## ABSTRACT

### **Title: Manifesting Sumud in the Wake of On-going Nakba: Tracing Elements of Cultural Trauma in the Selected Palestinian Novels**

This thesis is an effort to contribute to the vast pool of scholarship on the gathering of trauma, the birth of Sumud, the use of non-traditional narrative in disseminating the spirit of Nakba and writing that helps to pursue and further the cause of liberation in Palestinian literature. It analyzes the Palestinian novels *The Blue between Sky and Water* by Susan Abulhawa and *The Book of Disappearance* by Ibtisam Azem. While trauma theory has brought an understanding of the recondite subject of identity issues and coping mechanisms against the defenseless fragility of humans and societies, its study has been limited to the traumatic episodes in the West. To serve the need of documenting the traumatic incidents happening in the Middle East, this work has deployed the concept of Cultural Trauma by Jeffery C. Alexander and Chosen Trauma by Vamik D. Volkan to understand the trauma in the selected Palestinian novels. By exploring the wounded Palestinian community, with attention to the influence of the traumatic context and close textual analysis of the texts, the findings of the study reveal that the target community has been subjected to immense brutality, which is not just limited to their expulsion from their land but includes an appropriation of everything that speaks of the identity of native Palestinians. This thesis argues that both these texts serve as an alternate voice in serving the national narrative by exposing elements of Nakba as an ascribable event and reaffirming its codification as a Cultural trauma.

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## **DEDICATION**

*To Zee*

*My Rock-solid Support!*

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The history of the Palestine issue dates back to the fateful year of 1948, marking the exodus of more than 700,000 Palestinians who were tossed out of their homes and lands and were forced to become refugees in their own country and the world (Bocco 2010). The ethnic cleansing started when the newcomers came and initiated their wide-scale propaganda and expulsion plan that is deeply rooted in colonialist projects against the indigenous Palestinians. Palestinians have resisted military blockades and seven decades of violent dispossession in service of an apartheid state. They have been forced to live as second-class citizens and are witnessing the terrible quality of life in Gaza which has been turned into an open prison by the oppressive forces. Different historiographers have tried to go back to that time in history to evaluate and find the main causes that have resulted in this grave issue. While Palestinians claim themselves to be the true indigenous people of the land, Israelites have refuted these claims through the myth of a “land without people for people without land”<sup>1</sup> (Muir 1) that they carry around.

The modern era of a technologically equipped world precludes the chances of concealing mass extermination and massacre of people worldwide. Modern societies are connected through advanced media, which do not allow human-made catastrophes to remain hidden from the public eye. Even after the upsurge and advancement in the media field, the issue of the dispossession of Palestinians in 1948 has not only been hidden but denied altogether. A few decades ago, the victims gathering and reassembling the historical picture distorted by the Zionist narrative. Their experiences of becoming refugees and exiled community are enough to validate their side of the narrative about the incident of Nakba<sup>2</sup> in 1948. Arab sources and oral history shared by the victims are not only hauntingly

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<sup>1</sup> This is the most cited phrase in the literature of Zionism. This implies that Zionists believe that Palestine was an empty land with no people before Jews came there. Jews mass migrated from different parts of the world to Palestine to avoid persecution and pogrom. They also deny that Zionists thought it be to an empty land. The Arab people living there did not have any identity and did not own the place until Zionists came there. They developed their identity in resistance to Zionist’s immigration.

<sup>2</sup> Arabic word (al-Nakba), translated as “Catastrophe”; Expulsion of Palestinians from their land in 1948

vivid but also detail the enormity of crimes committed by Israeli soldiers that are missing from the documented history of the world. The need to present the victim's side of the story to complete the incomplete picture of Nakba is the only way to find about the undocumented traumatic incidents that have happened against the Palestinian community.

This moral imperative to continue the struggle against the denial of the crime proves to be the only way to find justice in the harbor of injustice in the world that is silent against the perpetual dispossession and apartheid at the hands of Zionist forces (Pappe 2006).

The endeavor, to lay bare the root causes of the issue and to understand this seemingly complex issue from a political and historical perspective, has been taken by many writers, historiographers, and critics belonging to both Palestine and other places. Diasporic Palestinian writers' community, too, is doing its part by writing fiction and non-fiction to present the trauma of their community. Their writings prove to be an almanac that sheds light on the systematic ethnic cleansing of indigenous Palestinians. Different methods have been employed and steps taken by the diasporic Palestinian community to keep their identity alive in the face of perpetual erasure at the hands of Zionist forces. After seventy-three years, Palestinians have no land and space left on the geography of earth and are constantly questioned about their true roots. In wake of such circumstances, diaspora writers have been successful in creating a little literary and academic arena of their own where they have pen down their side of the stories to share it with the world. Palestinian literature has been used as a tool to highlight their history, narrative, and identity that is on a constant verge of elimination.

Susan Abulhawa and Ibtisam Azem are two of the many writers who are using fiction to highlight the event of the Nakba and its consistent impact on Palestinians since 1948. Their writings are medium to express traumatizing episodes that they and their forefathers have been through. Commemorating it through their writings, Palestinian writers are sharing with the world that Nakba did not stop in 1948 and is ongoing. This thesis focuses on Abulhawa's *The Blue between Sky and Water* and Azem's *The Book of Disappearance* to explicate the trauma experienced by the Palestinian community. It also seeks to explore how fiction questions the approach to Nakba that frames the incident as traumatic. It also focuses on the coping mechanism utilized by the victim community and

resultant narrative that is built from it.

Writing is considered a tool by Palestinian writers to resist the physical as well as mental and emotional annihilation that has started against the Palestinian community. Since war erupted in 1948, most of the people left their homeland to seek protection for their lives with the hope of coming back to their country when the situation gets better<sup>3</sup>. This mass migration has resulted in displacing a lot of people internally as well as externally. Internally displaced people moved to other parts of their country and started living in refugee camps, and those who moved to other countries have tried to build their lives there. In both these novels, readers get to see families ripped and torn apart and forced to live away from each other for generations who wait for better days to come so they may reunite again.

The formation of the psyche of a community that is subjected to horrendous acts of extremism is the most concerning debate. This feeling of being alienated results in the formation of identity issues and is the root cause for the birth of trauma that seeps into the whole community. Alexander's theory (2004) conceives the concept of shattering of trust in people and community as a result of being subjected to any radical act. This, along with adding to the disbelief and mistrust in the surrounding community amplify tensions in relations with others. Everyone is viewed as a threat and those who feel connected with their fellow community due to the infliction of injury, form a close bond that becomes increasingly impenetrable.

The fiction explored here offers a more subtle and nuanced approach as writers (re)consider it from more subjective viewpoint, within the less restrictive parameters than previously constructed. The primary objective of this study is to draw attention towards the meaning-making influence of both the novels in reference to the event of Nakba as it foregrounds significant controversies and dilemmas that have intensified in the aftermath.

The work analyzes the incident of the Nakba that is a source of meaning-making

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<sup>3</sup> International law guarantees all individuals a right to return to their homes, also known as 'homes of origin' if ever they are displaced due to some circumstances beyond their control. United Nations has clearly called upon Israel to implement the international law of return for the safe return of Palestinian refugees to their rightful homes. Resolution 194 states clearly the right of Palestinians to right to their homes. This resolution is also embedded in the situation of Palestinian exodus in December 1948 (Boling 2001)

for the Palestinian community which forms the collective trauma that the characters endure and the consequential birth of narrative that arises from the persistent infliction of wounds on their psyche. This thesis examines both the literary texts in reference to Nakba as the product of carrier groups but also seeks to question the dominant perspective regarding the working of those particular carrier groups. Relying on the theory of Alexander and Volkan, the texts reaffirm the codification of Nakba as a cultural trauma but also underscores the dynamics of individual reaction within the community in response to any traumatic event.

This thesis will also evaluate the exhibition of resilience, SUMUD<sup>4</sup>, by the people of Palestine who are resisting and leaving their mark on the world by using writing as a space to counter the hegemonic colonialist project furthered by Zionist forces. To further the inquiry, the two aforementioned novels are explicated in understanding the coping mechanism that Palestinians use as a collective action to safeguard their families, community, identity, and determination to remain on the land even against the odds.

## 1.1 Delimitation

This thesis has been delimited to the theoretical lens of culture and collective trauma proposed by Jeffery C. Alexander in his seminal work *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. The work has also used Volkan's concept of 'Chosen Trauma' to highlight the way trauma becomes the identity of any particular community. The two novels under study and analysis, *The Blue between Sky and Water* by Susan Abulhawa and *The Book of Disappearance* by Ibtisam Azem are used as a primary source to answer the target research questions. The above-mentioned novels come under the category of Palestinian literature, which also holds a significant place as a literature of Resistance.

Since Holocaust is a prototypal incident that speaks about the worst kind of atrocities committed against the Jews solely propagated due to their religious beliefs which led to their exodus and eventual settling in Palestine, this work does not intend on comparing the two colossal incidents in history of world i-e Holocaust and Nakba, as both

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<sup>4</sup> Arabic word meaning Steadfastness. This concept is inherently unique in the discourse that is used to portray the struggle of Palestinians and plays a pivotal role in the formation of Palestinian identity and resistance and has become an integral part of National discourse (Rangitsh 2007)

the incidents carry an individual essence and importance in respect to the level of trauma and torture that has been inflicted and the mammoth loss of human lives they have had and also the value and meaning it carries in the culture of both the communities. This thesis is also not a comparative study of both the selected novels. Both texts are viewed under the above mentioned theoretical lens to track down the traumatic scenarios that are commonplace for the world to be registered as crime or violence against the selected community. This work does not aim to compare the two narratives, Palestinian and Zionist, and to conclude which one is right or legitimate. The thesis is guided by the sole aim of tracing the traumatic incidents that have and are shaping the destiny and identity of the Palestinians and the resistance and retaliation they are putting up against the systematic ethnic erasure. The use of writing as one of the mechanisms to document their side of the story is also being focused at.

## **1.2 Thesis Statement**

Cultural trauma occurs when a harrowing event strikes a community and leaves a dent in their consciousness and identity but is also dependent on the victim community's meaning-making process over time. Palestinian literature presents Nakba as a cultural trauma as they try to promote a victim narrative. The selected Palestinian texts serve as a site of contestation in examining fictional responses regarding narrative building, coping mechanisms formulated, and ways to instill the spirit of Nakba in future generations.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

1. How do the novels *The Blue between Sky and Water* and *The Book of Disappearance* recount the collective trauma endured by the Palestinian community?
2. How is Sumud used as a coping mechanism by Palestinian Community in the selected texts?

3. Taking into account the concept of Volkan's "Chosen Trauma," what ways and methods are used by the Palestinian community to protect themselves from ethnic erasure, and how is the tool of writing used to further this cause?

## **1.4 Chapters Breakdown**

This work comprises seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the study, where the questions, objectives, and thesis statement are discussed, which helps steer the direction and lay the foundation for this endeavor. The delimitation of the study, along with the significance and utility of the research, is mentioned in the same chapter. A brief history of the Palestine issue is also shared, and the root causes and elements that have led to the exodus of millions of people from their lands are also mentioned. A few terms in Arabic that are directly related to the struggle of Palestine and are identity markers that have taken place in the nationalist discourse of Palestine are elaborated.

The second chapter reviews existing literature surrounding the selected novels and theory. This section includes articles, books, and dissertations surrounding Palestinian literature that shed light on Nakba. Research gaps and lacunas are mapped to steer the direction of the study at a particular angle.

The third chapter briefly introduces trauma theory, its emergence, history, and the different approaches and shades it has taken in every new era in the literary domain. Then it gives a detailed discussion on the selected theory of J.C. Alexander and the different characteristics it has. It also explains Volkan's 'Chosen Trauma' and the concept of intergenerational trauma that is used for the current study.

The next chapter commences the textual analysis of the selected novels and analyzes them under the light of J. C. Alexander's theory and Volkan's concept to find traumatic episodes in the lives of the Palestinian community. Novels are strictly explicated under the abovementioned theory, and an effort is made to answer target research questions. The fifth chapter discusses Sumud, its emergence and propagation in the Palestinian community, and how it invigorates their spirits and has become a part of their political and literary discourse. The sixth chapter answers two-folded research question number three, which generates discussion about how the event of Nakba is vital in the

identity formation of Palestinians and how transgenerational transmission is made via the mode of writing.

The final chapter concludes the study by presenting the findings and conclusions of the study undertaken. Recommendations are made under the guided study of the previous chapters. A work cited list follows it.

## **1.5 Significance & Rationale**

This study carries its relevance in its approach of looking at the ongoing issue of Palestine. This work intends to give a detailed account of Palestinian history and ongoing land conflict presented in fictional work. This thesis tries to highlight the writers' efforts to develop a narrative through the art of storytelling. It also discusses how collectivity is subjected to trauma to the extent that they revolt against the hegemonic forces and formulate a unique identity against them. For readers, the research brings to light the coping mechanism and survival techniques against the cultural trauma developed by the Palestinian community. It is a concrete effort to look into the novels and record the problems experienced due to internal dislocation, exile, political instability and the perpetual risk of ethnic erasure. It can also help those readers who want to know more about trauma theory and are interested in Middle Eastern literature. Discussing stories of marginalized people and crafting them into a communicable form for academic audiences is both a public record and a means of generating theoretical insight that can help analyze the most pressing social problems. Since trauma theory has been dealing mostly with horrific incidents that happened in the history of the West, using their theoretical framework to deal with issues more serious in magnitude but neglected by them is the first step of decolonization. This thesis argues that suffering of this kind is an impetus for generating discussion, which further generates empathy, dialogue, and understanding across cultures and geographical limits.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review section discusses different works done by scholars in the form of articles, thesis, and dissertations on the novels, *The Blue between Sky and Water* and *The Book of Disappearance*. It includes reviewed articles that are explored and explicated under the theoretical lens of Jeffery C. Alexander. This unit explores the research methods utilized by writers and analyzes their findings to find existing research lacunas.

#### **2.1 *The Blue between Sky and Water***

Farisha V. M (2019) elucidates how Susan Abulhawa has retold the narratives turned into truths by Powerful countries through her novel *The Blue between Sky and Water*. Using Foucault's power discourse, the Researcher shows how power is the main and effective source of everything that is driven in the world. Through the characters of Uma Mazen and djinn Suleiman, Mamdouh, and Mariam, the struggle to fight and to survive stays side by side is shown. The state of Israel can control the whole of the West Bank and start ruling Palestine by depriving them of their basic rights. It is becoming a totalitarian state while trying to become a true democratic power by giving the people the right to vote in favor or against them. This article tries to show the resistance in the form of the power of humans, which the author has called 'Bio Power' (V. M 49) by saying that even if subjects do not have any tools to resist, they will resist with their spirits because wherever there is power, there is resistance (V. M). This article focuses solely on female characters neglecting other characters and socio-economic conditions influencing the situation.

Felicita Mary Praba (2019) uses Elaine Showalter's Cultural model of Gynocriticism to understand women's actions and motives in the Baraka family. The Palestine-Israel war has been kept as a background, and the women who have been subjugated to different traumas are discussed. These wars have harmed all the people of Palestine, but the trauma that has afflicted on women is unparalleled. Due to the immense torture that the women of the Baraka family have been through, they develop resilience and resistance against the patriarchy and societal norms. The trauma they go through in

their lives is due to the past they have been through—the snippets of the past mold and reform the lives in the present. Nazmiyeh, Nur, and Alwan are dealing with internal struggles as well as the Israeli siege. This research article centers on women's social and economic conditions and does not discuss the cultural aspect that plays a huge role in the lives of female characters.

Yousif Modaghesh (2019) explores how Palestinian history is embedded and interwoven in Abulhawa's novel *The Blue between Sky and Water*. The study aims to bring forth the displacement of the Palestinian diaspora and resistance against the atrocities committed against them. The study utilizes a feminist framework to analyze female characters of the novels due to numerous female characters. Abulhawa has also used magic realism that shows the hope the people of her country are holding on to and waiting for some divine intervention that may get them out of their misery. It also highlights their wait for the powerful nations to intervene and help them out of this situation. The resilience and perseverance of the characters in the novel show the resilience of Palestine's people in real life. Mamdouh, Nazmiyeh, Mariam, and Nur all go through hardships but never give up on each other.

Often called out for being anti-Semitic, Susan Abulhawa has been very vocal with her NGOs mission that works for Palestinian people. Her BDS, Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Campaign has worked for political initiatives that call for a boycott of goods from Palestinian occupied areas. It works as a form of protest and awareness about the eviction of Palestinian people from their lands. It also tries to highlight the usurpation of not only land but also of Palestine's culture, traditions, and history. In one of her interviews with Miriam Abdollahi (2017), she mentions how her social work and writing both try to work as resistance against ethnic erasure. She mentions that people who call the Palestine-Israel problem to be a conflict are wrong in their approach. Conflict is always between two equal powers. Colonialism, colonization is not a conflict; it is a form of oppression and what is happening with Palestine is settler colonialism and apartheid. Writers cannot be meditators in this process. She presented her aim of writing is sharing the Palestinian side of the story and using it as a form of resistance.

Palestinian art, writings, and literature advocate their presence, existence, history, and everything that has belonged to Palestine. She intends in bringing the real image and

resilience of Arab women in the forefront and to reject the metanarrative that religion has been the subjugator of women. She argues that the female characters in the novel, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, are resilient and strong women. They make a space for themselves even when the situation aggravates and the bad political atmosphere suffocates them, not the religion (Abulhawa 2017).

In like manner, in another interview of Abulhawa, she has extended Fanon's idea that asserting a narrative is like holding onto one's distinctive identity. She argues that she writes without giving it any political shades. Giving meaning and connecting it with real life scenarios is for the readers. She just tries to give snippets from the lives of people around her and of her memories from the old days when she lived in a refugee camp. She believes writing is one way of decolonizing if it is against the discourse of a politically stronger side. She has pointed towards the narcissist victimhood attitude of the perpetrators, which characterize their oppressors. They have elevated their suffering to such an extent that no other traumatic incident qualifies to that level and also the suffering they inflict under the garb of being victims is debarred from being documented. Her writing is an act of decolonization. It is a voice of the oppressed and a narrative of Palestinians during the hegemonic times when the voices are silenced. Another important element that she discusses about her writing in an interview is the mention of dispersed people all over the world (Qabaha 2018).

Maurice Ebileeni (2019) has tried to question the narration, discourse, and debate initiated by Palestinian writers like Susan Abulhawa and Susan Muaddi Darraj regarding the cross-generational implications of Palestinians' displacement in the US context. Taking *Mornings in Jenin* and *The Blue between Sky and Water* by Susan Abulhawa and *The Inheritance of Exile Stories* as a corpus, the article briefly mentions the writing style of both authors. While it maintains that Abulhawa tries to write in an anti-colonial style prevalent in third world countries, while Darraj's writing generates a cosmopolitan dimension in Palestinian works. Even though both writers try to bring forth a national voice, the discourse of former colonizers is not set straight. Different reasons have been mentioned that shows how the whole conflict between Israel and Palestine has been written in history. Though such historic reasons can be a valid argument to support nationalist discourse, they can negatively affect the diverse cultural and social settings developing

among the Palestinian community around the globe. Abulhawa's unvarying commitment to reinforce nationalist commitment in her works can be read oppositely to Darraj's works, which explore the liminal cosmopolitan space carved out on international borders. Fixation of roles as in Abulhawa's works shows the stress on the continuation of the idea of an immutable nationalist color and discourse spread even over several decades might hinder the development of narrations and fixes it to a specific geographical location. The fictional narrations of Abulhawa's *The Blue between Sky and Water* and *Mornings in Jenin* show US context to be either marginally or negatively framing the character's experiences. The writer shows a biased attitude, focusing on the national context and ignoring the idiosyncratic experiences in local settings. Sara Abulheja in *Mornings in Jenin* and Nur Valdez in *The Blue between Sky and Water* remain deeply affected by the tragic aspects of mainstream Palestinian narratives. Maurice questions the biased attitude of Abulhawa as she represents the Palestinian diaspora as a static outcome due to the grave historical injustice that needs to be reverted for future generations to live peacefully. Abulhawa does not look beyond "national frames" (6) as her works are unmistakably linked to the national script being propagated. She also ignores that diversity and widespread generations worldwide will resultantly help disseminate their nationalist discourse. Her writings only give an exclusive outlook that speaks loudly of the injustice done to them. Her characters' sole initiative is to go back to Palestine to find their roots and heritage which shows a dependency and lack of individual say and opinion in anything.

Hania A.M. Nashef (2021) reviews the war situation leveled by Israeli soldiers who have used rape as a weapon of war. However, Israeli officials have long negated this allegation and have termed it propaganda. Most of the files at times of Nakba have remained sealed and are being classified as top secret. Palestinians have relied on their narration to describe their side of the story which has been taken as a poor alternative to Palestinian history. In addition, some of the ideologies favored the male voice to narrate the events, eventually silencing the female voices. Such kind of narration shows trauma or event descriptions by male members of the community, as a result, there is no female voice to be seen or heard. Oral histories and testimonies lacked female voices and their description of first-hand experiences of expulsion and traumatic events. This essay analyses two fictional historical novels that not only depict the real event but show how

weapon of rape is used. *The Blue between Sky and Water* details the account of a peasant family of Bait Daras who survive the ordeal of rape, exile, displacement, and loss of family. While the novel *The Women of Tantour* by Radwa Ashour tells the story of the aftermath of the massacre of 1948 events.

Palestinian literature emerged after the events of Nakba and Intifada in 1948 and 1967, respectively that has left a deep impact on the writing style of Palestinian American writers. The paper titled “A Corpus Stylistic Analysis of Abulhawa's *The Blue between Sky and Water*” (Zahoor, Khan and Ajmal 2020) uses stylistic analysis intending to analyze Abulhawa's *The Blue between Sky and Water* to trace out how the writer constructs reality using lexical categories. The thesis has employed mixed-method research and has also used Corpus Stylistics to analyze the novel. The study's findings suggest that the writer has used 6288 concrete nouns and 1634 abstract novels. The numerous concrete nouns used by the writer suggest that the writer's motive has not just been to produce art for the sake of art but art for the sake of life. Using concrete nouns suggests that her aim behind its excessive usage is to regain her homeland. In the same way, the Researcher has extracted 1400 adjectives from the novel which shows Abulhawa's effort at describing her community.

*The Blue between Sky and Water* gives an insight into the socio-political situation of Palestinians. Shehzadi, and Kanwal have employed the lens of the Postcolonial study of dislocation in a paper titled “A Post-Colonial Study of Dislocation in Susan Abulhawa's, ‘*The Blue between Sky and Water*’ (2021) to analyze the novel which brings forth the pain of the indigenous community of being dislocated from one's homeland. The indigenous community faces the restriction of coming to their land but many of them are put away in camps by Israeli forces. The approach utilized in the study shows that Israel is guilty of war crimes that have resulted in the dislocation of millions of Palestinians; however, the colonizers have the world's sympathy. Discussing it further, Shehzadi and Kanwal show Abulhawa uses this point to illuminate the fact that these displaced communities reside all over the world. Such territories ask the world to have a sympathetic look at their miseries and acknowledge their trauma.

Nina Fisher (2019) discusses the imagination and remembering of Palestine from a distance and explores the value and space of lost homeland in contemporary Palestinian diaspora literature. Fisher gives a brief overview of the tragic history and expulsion at the

hands of Zionist forces and later gives a detailed background of events like Nakba and Intifada and what they mean to the people of Palestine who define themselves against such events. She has used Sidra Ezrahi's thinking about the role of Zion in Zionist literature and cultural identity as a springboard to detail the role of the Palestinian homeland in carving and shaping out Palestinian nationalism, collective memory, identity, and political aspirations. Modern literature has explored similar questions of belonging and memory to the Palestinian homeland and what it means to "live, lost and still embattled" (32). She observes that all the authors who have somehow contemplated the issue of Palestine have "insistent memory" (32) which they keep at the center of the corpus yet they all differ in their point of view due to their different generational approaches to the concept of homeland. Abulhawa has been very vocal about the sight and feeling of home while away from it and the characters of her novels are the symbolic representation of the Palestinian diaspora community who yearns to go back to the land of Palestine to feel at home. Critics have often commended her efforts and have motivated her by saying that "we need such narratives" (35). Other than that, Abulhawa asks Palestinian authors to counter Israel's narrative that has dominated literature until recently. Many contemporary authors are part of an exilic generation born in the wake of catastrophic events leading ultimately to the cutoff of ties and connections with families, land, and traditions.

## ***2.2 The Book of Disappearance***

Ibtisam Azem (2020) discusses her second novel, *The Book of Disappearance*, in an interview to describe what she means by the word disappearance. She mentions that the main theme, the physical disappearance is not the only elimination that Palestinian people face or that the writers intend to write about. Ibtisam mentions that by disappearance, along with the physical disappearance, she is trying to highlight the disappearance of history, narrative, identity, and everything that comes with it. The absence and gap caused by constant and systematic erasure at the hands of Zionist forces is the pivotal factor of the novel. She aims to bring to life the narrative of the Palestinian people and as a result the identity that is nonexistent in the eyes of the world. The main purpose this fiction tries to fulfill is to retrieve the lost voice and question the identity issues, a voice that has been

subjugated and identity that has been erased. Brimming with elements of magic realism, the disappearance talks about the position and situation that the world would enter if Palestinians which are called Arabs cease to exist. Fictions like these are a raw source of information from war-torn and colonized lands like Palestine because mainstream media filter everything from the global south. Writing from people who have had roots and ancestors from that place gives it an air of credibility and attracts an audience of their own (I. Azem).

Grant Barber (2019) reviews the Azem's novel *The Book of Disappearance* by foregrounding its complex position due to the writer's technique of adding elements from different genres. The novel expands on the boundaries of science fiction with an equal touch of realism, adding information from the current political situation of Jaffa and Tel Aviv. The difficulty of coding the novel, *The Book of Disappearance* into one strict category articulates the situation of communities residing in Palestine. The second and third generations after the incident of Nakba cannot classify themselves as pro-Palestinians or pro-Israelites. They live together, but the effect of narrative from the older generations of both sides has added to the uncertainty about where they belong. This dilemma can be witnessed in the character of Ariel, who is a friend to Alaa but after Alaa's mysterious disappearance along with the Arabs, he would visit and use his friend's apartment. He also finds Alaa's diary and reads it. After some time, using his friend's apartment becomes a routine for him. Different critics have labeled it as a routine Zionist attitude of appropriating everything that is Palestine and making it their own.

### **2.3 Cultural Trauma**

Sonia Baelo-Allué (2016) discusses Amy Waldman's *The Submission* in the light of trauma theory as it has been linked with the struggle of individuals but has taken a political color to it.

The author has used Jeffery C. Alexander's theory of Trauma Culture to show the changing world after the 9/11 incident. In the light of Jefferson's Culture theory, a trauma that has wrapped whole communities, especially Muslims, has so many political colors to it too. *The Submission* talks about Mr. Khan who designs a garden for the memorial but his

Muslim identity makes him an object of hate. He goes through rigorous media scrutiny just for being a Muslim due to which he also undergoes an identity crisis. The work shows how different groups are against his right to make a memorial, resulting in the bifurcation of society. The trauma of the victim's family and Mr. Khan takes a political shape with the event commemorating the 9/11 victims (Baelo-Allué 177). This work highlights the trauma that victims have been through due to being directly affected by the incident. The Muslim community has not only suffered due to the incident but also due to the radical political situation and Islamophobia that gained momentum after 9/11 is also explored.

Kashmiri people have been resilient in their struggle against the occupation even when the world kept their quiet on this grave issue. Samia Hanif and Inayat Ullah (2018) discuss the Kashmiri literary text *The Collaborator* by Mirza Waheed under the theoretical lens of Jeffery C. Alexander and Kai Erikson. The article probes the issue of how trauma has been made into a Eurocentric concept and expands this conceptualization to add elements, and examples from places other than the global north. The study finds that the traumatic memories of the people of Kashmir are as gruesome as that of any other community. It also discloses the fact that people of the areas under siege have been going through immense physical and mental torture, resulting in a sort of complex environment of distrust on the world. This persistent injury generation after generation has caused a consistent unhealed abrasion not only to an individual's psyche but the whole community. In this article, the researcher has drawn a dividing line between perpetrators and victims and has shown through the protagonist Hussain who observes the unstoppable killings and death of his people and witnesses how the Indian army and Mujahidin from Pakistani borders cause havoc on their land. This article sheds light on the fictional narration that is being brought to the limelight to put in picture the untold stories of the trauma of the communities who hardly get any attention given by the Powerful units to know their agony.

Similarly, Willig takes a case study of the black community using Alexander's theory of Cultural Trauma. If the community is regularly being subjected to sub-standard treatment and is viewed by the public as commonplace and uplifted or approved by the law administration and officials, such reception also leads to feeling in the whole community of their being subjected to radical treatment. This systematic treatment gives birth to trauma in a community. The not-guilty verdict on the murder trial of Emmet Till, an African-



American at hands of two white men brought forth the response of the black community. The Emmet Till and many cases like this show methodical violence that has been institutionalized to a certain extent against the black community. This has ingrained in them a feeling of being a second-class citizen. All these scenarios give birth to routine harm, an unending injury inflicted on the target community, and the discourse that is built as a result of such existing pains, resulting in a narration around the commonplace culture of trauma (2016).

Any natural or human-made incident, event, and disaster against any other community make that particular incident a central axis that later on becomes their defining point. The article “Calling the Phoenix: Integrating the Trauma of the Nakba into Palestinian Identity” (Mustafa 2018) probes into the structure surrounding the event of Nakba and seeks to find out how it has turned into a comparison against the lands and people to the eventual loss of land and people. This integration and commemoration of incidents help pass the traumatic memories down to generations, aligning the thinking of successive generations to one common discourse. This discourse is then used to define the ethnic erasure and constant alienation the Palestinian community is subjected to. Explicating Palestinian novel, *The Woman from Tantour* by using the theoretical lens of Gayatri Spivak’s strategic essentialism and combining Stuart Hall’s two axes of Cultural Identity and Alexander’s theory of Cultural Trauma shows that Ruqayya, a female character from the novel, works around memory building based on the traumatic episodes of her life. She feels that her life has stopped the day she is evicted from her land which resulted in a deep psychological impact on her. She feels that the only prominent elements in her life are absences, absences of family, loved ones, absence of familiar home, land, and people, absence of good memories. These absences have defined the critical and crucial element in her life. Through the life of Ruqayya, her memories and understanding can be stretched to all the people who witnessed the event of Nakba. The author of the book, Radwa Ashour tries to build on different experiences to help make a narration that comes to work as a collective identity. She has tried to include different versions of traumatic memory to help give it more space without delimiting the whole event to any particular narration.

Amal Amireh (2003) in her essay titled “Between Complicity and Subversion:

Body Politics in Palestinian National Narrative,” describes two incidents in history that exemplify the inextricable interconnection between gender and nationalism in the Palestinian context. The first incident has been derived from the times of Intifada when a group of young men were seen throwing stones at Israeli soldiers and they chased them up, resultantly catching one of the young men. Israeli soldiers catch him and start to drag him to the jeep, where a young woman with a baby in her arms went up to the caught Palestinian young man and threw the child in his arms and said that she was fed up with his irresponsible attitude and he should care for his child from onwards. This dramatic scene between the young woman and man causes his release. The second story is a local newspaper report mentioning the alleged bubblegum marketing that causes sexual activity and frustration in young Palestinian girls. The report at the end also mentioned that the authorities are doing their best to crack all local intermediaries to prohibit selling such chewing gums. These two incidents show women to be at the center of political propaganda and have shown how they are the venerable aspect of any society. It would not be wrong to suggest that women are being used as ideological signs and constructs, becoming the narrative that is part of a larger discourse about gender sexuality and nationalism that permeates not only popular media and overtly political propaganda but also literature (Amireh 748). Nationalism gives an immense value to culture and literature and by utilizing Benedict Anderson’s theory of ‘Imagined Communities’ in this essay, the author is keeping women at the center of the notions of designed ideologies in the stride to freedom.. The Palestinian feminists have urged to explore the moral symbolism of motherhood to make it more effective against occupation. These steps have resulted in the adoption of a new mode to bring a fresh look at the prevalent discourse but they have done so at the cost of leaving an unquestioned conceptual framework that is patriarchal as it plays a fundamental role in shaping both nation and gendered relations.

As mentioned earlier, the reviews show that different scholars and critics have explored identity and individual crises about the Palestine issue. A quantitative study about individual trauma has also been documented. In the same way, exiled populations and diasporic communities of refugees and their poor living conditions have also been worked on. In addition, research has been conducted on Palestinians as a marginalized group, Sumud in women, and the historic Nakba event. The space that is created as a result of the

above study demands a need to talk about the trauma of the whole community on a collective scale and how the event of Nakba has become chosen trauma. The need to make Nakba a chosen trauma further poses a question of its intergenerational transmission and hence, this thesis answers the questions posed above.

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter gives a detail account of the theoretical and critical perspectives being used for this study. After theoretical framework, this chapter explains the methodology used for this research.

### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

The primary theoretical framework used for this study is Cultural Trauma by J. C. Alexander and other theorists that are being used revolve around the concept of Cultural trauma. Moreover, Vamik Volkan's concept of 'Chosen Trauma' has also been utilized for theoretical underpinnings to explicate Palestinian novels under study. The theoretical framework of this chapter deals with only predominant and principle theoretical sources that are introduced and explained. The following are the key concepts that serves as theoretical guidelines for this project.

#### **3.1.1 Introduction**

Discussion surrounding trauma took a new shift when critics started to take this rubric not only as a neurotic disorder but also started looking for elements and conditions that may result in giving birth to trauma. It gained significant attention in the field of literary criticism with the groundbreaking work of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* in 1996. The previous scholarship on trauma suggests it as a kind of absence in a psyche due to some painful experience. Such recurring absence splits the knowledge and ability of a human to channel their feelings. This condition, resultantly, hinders the person to put his experience into words. Caruth builds on this scholarship, proposes a deconstructive model surrounding this field of knowledge, and converses about the "language indeterminacy, ambiguous referentiality, and aporia" (Balaev 2014). This failure of representation became the central thesis of discussion, where the main emphasis went to look for the external factors that become the reason for building

the trauma. Trauma theorists started to look for alternate ways and methodologies that could be the best coping mechanism. With the emergence of coping mechanisms, attention was attracted to not just the words (un)said but their behavior patterns, actions that expressed their extreme experience in some ways. Amongst many reasons that surfaced, one of the most important has been the social environment, culture, and society's impact on the coping pattern of a person. It has been considered an important tool in providing and refusing the required support to the victim. Such conditions are not limited to individuals only. Societies may follow the same patterns of going through any severe incident and may need coping mechanisms to come out of it. As a society, too, needs to shield itself from defenselessness and fragility, it takes certain measures to guard itself (Vickroy, Laurie 2014).

### **3.1.2 Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity**

Pursuing the same field of scholarship, Jeffery Alexander initiated working on social norms, values, and culture of polarization. Upon further inquiry, he realizes it to be the trauma that he is talking about. Every further inquiry added more to the rubric. Alexander created a discourse about cultural trauma and collective identity, which moved the shift from individual trauma. Describing Cultural Trauma, Jeffery Alexander states that cultural trauma occurs when a group or community feels that they have been subjected to extreme circumstances that leave an inerasable mark on their psyche (1). Since it deals with society and affects the group collectively, it has political and cultural implications. Communities that suffer from collective trauma transform as they start to look at things from a completely new perspective. This collective trauma joins the subjected community with the new awareness of a looming danger that may strike them at any moment. This identification of threats or trauma helps the community redefine their collective solidarity and results in the new array of questions that come before them. The questions are about the community's sovereignty and possible attempts by enemies to dismantle it. Questions can be whether the target community is the only group that has been subjected to such dangers or are there others too? This thinking expands the circle of the victim community

due to which people connect. By the same social tokens, groups can refuse to accept the trauma of others or blame others for their sufferings can result in restriction and shrinking of their social group. By denying the reality of others' suffering, people not only project their responsibility for suffering on others but also blame others for any mishap that happens to them.

“Trauma is not something naturally existing; it is something constructed by society” (Alexander 13). Explicating how trauma gets embedded and shakes the roots and core of society is when a social event destroys the fabric of society and then that event arises to the collectivity; hence the social crisis becomes a cultural crisis. Two things play side by side. Real events and representations of that very event, both of which can be different. This results in the group experiencing pain as a result, they suffer from acute discomfort regarding their collective sense of self and identity that they hold in the world.

Traumatic events or incidents have the capacity to transform the psyche of people. Any bad experience, event, an act of violence, harassment, or abrupt change not particularly malevolent, the experience of social transformation can traumatize people. They use the language of trauma to describe what happens to them and to the collectives to which they belong (Alexander 2). Common language describing the trauma of any particular community shows it to be recurrent, commonly experienced, and intuitive. It allows the community to gain reflectivity to look at it from a sociological perspective. This shows that trauma does not naturally exist but is manufactured by society.

### **3.1.3 The Social Process of Cultural Trauma:**

For trauma to emerge at the social level, a social crisis must become a cultural crisis. Events are one thing, and their representation is quite another (Alexander10). Acute discomfort enters into the core identity of collectivity. Collective actors share this pain and decide to call it a fundamental threat to their existence and identity. The cultural construction of trauma begins with the claim to some fundamental injury, an exclamation regarding any injury to some sacred value, a narrative about the destructive social process, and a demand for some social, institutional, and emotional reparation.

Carrier groups are the medium and agent of the trauma process. They may have ideal and material interests. They are part of particular social status and articulate claims that can be a way of meaning-making in public spheres. Carrier groups can be a part of the elite or marginalized class. It can be generational, representing the viewpoints of the younger generation against the old, and vice versa, or it can be national, where one nation is seen pitying the other.

Creating a compelling narrative demands a compelling framework to be devised. It is a simple storytelling process but at the same time, quite complex and multivalent that can be contingent, highly contested, and sometimes polarizing (12). Four critical representations are essential in creating a master narrative and should answer the questions like what happened to a group or collectivity in the past? Who are the affected groups, and how many groups are affected or whether a single group or audience is affected? What is the relation of a trauma victim to the larger audience? The debate regarding whether the identity of the perpetrator is established? Different institutional arenas come into play to create a new master narrative.

The institutional arenas and stratification of hierarchies mediate the linguistics lexicon. Whatever medium trauma unfolds, it is described in that target language. Different institutions may include religion, aesthetics, legal, scientific, mass media, and state bureaucracy.

The constraints that are born as a result of these institutions are further mediated by stratificational hierarchies. Once the collectivity of trauma has been generated, a period of calming down starts. The routinization process is invigorated by commemorating the incidents that help future generations remember those events and broadens the realm of social understanding, providing powerful avenues for social incorporation (Alexander 24).

### **3.1.4 Chosen Trauma**

Volkan defines large group identity as the “subjective experience of thousands or millions of people who are linked with a persistent sense of sameness while also sharing numerous characteristics in the foreign group” (79). He describes the situation in Germany during the conflict of the Berlin Wall. He puts his observation into a paper where he

describes, keeping in light the issue of the wall of Berlin, how physical borders act as psychological borders and affect the psyche of the community. He has given the concept of Chosen Trauma through which he has described the mental representation of historical events and figures associated with any society. These societies use any particular historical event that has been a defining moment for them. The celebration and commemoration of these events every year instill in the society the connection they have with that particular incident. Young generations look up to the older ones and sometimes form connecting links according to their understanding and the narrative that they have heard from their elders. Such narrative and commemoration of events work on the psyche of the people and images are deposited on the minds, acting as an identity marker for that particular community. Using the real conflicts among different nations, Volkan describes how the traumatized community disseminates and transfers those traces of memories surrounding that event to their offspring to rear them up in the same shades and colors as theirs. Volkan has called it “transgenerational transmission” (Volkan 85). He states that psychic borders are permeable in the relationship between grownup children and parents or between two adult individuals who relate or connect to one another under drastically or partly regressed states.

The study of psychoanalysis and history can result in pieces of evidence related to the transgenerational transmission of trauma at the larger group level or its impact on the large group level. Within almost every group, there exist mental traces of traumatic events in the past in which the larger group suffered and resultantly experienced helplessness, a humiliation in conflict with another group. The transgenerational transmission of the past traumatic event with the past generation’s inability to mourn the losses of land, wealth, identity, and prestige and their failure to revert the causes or avenge the wrong done to them is transferred to the young generation. This injury is usually inflicted by another group, mostly a neighbor but in some cases, it can be ethnic or religious groups within the country (Volkan 87).

Each member of the traumatized community has his own identity and personal reaction to the traumatic incident. Together they share the mental representation of tragedies that have befallen them. Their injured self-representations of the traumatic incidents are then deposited on the minds and personalities of children in the next generations, hoping to reverse the humiliation and mourn the loss. They in turn pass the



mental representation of events to the next generation. Volkan calls this historical event transferred over generations as “Chosen Trauma” (88). Chosen trauma changes function over time. With the passage of time, the historical importance of the event does not hold importance to that limit; what remains important is that through this chosen trauma, the community remains linked together. The chosen trauma becomes woven in ethnic and larger group tents. The component of ethnic, religious, or national identity may not be evident at all times.

When the chosen trauma is fully reactivated within the larger group by a looming danger or elements of anxiety surrounding them, a time collapse occurs which Alexanders calls a “period of calming down” (22). This refers to fears, expectations, and hopes that are reactivated when conscious and unconscious connections are made. Volkan opines that such situations may lead to irrational and worst decisions that can lead to perpetuating unthinkable cruelty (89).

As a final point, the researcher will use the theoretical lens from Alexander’s concept of cultural trauma to explicate traumatic incidents in the selected text. This will help in building towards the next point of discussion about coping mechanisms formulated by the Palestinian community. Lastly, utilizing Chosen trauma by Volkan, the researcher will seek how the incident of Nakba is used as a link with the lost homeland and a psychological connection with the future generation.

### **3.2 Research Methodology**

This thesis utilizes a close textual analysis method. The study is qualitative in nature as the researcher analyses the primary text subjectively and descriptively. Each text analysis within this thesis has been selected after months of extensive readings surrounding the Nakba, Palestine issue, political implications, and regional politics through different websites. Each of the texts has not been selected solely for the particularity of voice it carries but because these texts do not conform to the literary absolutes prescribed generally by trauma theory. Both texts, though, written by different Palestinian writers, bridge a temporal gap in the representation of Palestinians over the years. Abulhawa’s novel gives

a detailed account of the Nakba and expulsion that took place in 1947; Ibtisam Azem's novel narrates the scenarios of the current generations of a Palestinian living under Israeli apartheid linking with history through memories of older generations. These texts raise important questions about the intersection of literary trauma theory with voice, agency, and identity and suggest that thinking outside the boundaries is important in making broader, inclusive teaching of trauma theory as represented in writings. This modulation, this thesis contends, is necessary for discussing trauma theory in a global context as is reflected in the close reading methodology it employs. This thesis focuses on cultural, gendered, and referential implications writing brings with itself hence, this is further accentuated by the chapter structure of this thesis, where each text is analyzed in its section in the context of questions posed in chapter one.

This study is a qualitative work where I have used line by line textual analysis method for the reading of Susan Abulhawa's fiction, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, and Ibtisam Azem's *The Book of Disappearance*. An adequate literature review surrounding Trauma theory, Palestinian Literature, and the two novels mentioned above will be studied and analyzed. Then the above mentioned texts are read against the theoretical framework of J.C. Alexander and V.D. Volkan's. Different instances from the novel have been taken to support the study's argument. Quotes from the novel are used and paraphrased to prove the validity of the argument that this study makes. Textual analysis is all about the text itself and it is the most commonly used research method to analyze literary works. Catherine Belse effectively explains this method in her essay "Textual Analysis as a Research Method" (2005). Conclusions and recommendations are made according to the discussion generated in the Data Analysis section. The main theoretical paradigm used for this study is Cultural Trauma and all other theories and ideas are grounded within this paradigm in order to analyze the text.

In conclusion, the theoretical underpinnings discussed above is likely to support my analysis of the primary text. However, the theoretical framework of this study is inclusive in nature. The researcher is not entirely dependent on her theoretical framework. These theoretical positions are used only as reading props. These theoretical lenses may support the argument the researcher is trying to make in her thesis.

## CHAPTER 4

### **TRACES OF COLLECTIVE TRAUMA IN *THE BLUE BETWEEN SKY AND WATER* AND *THE BOOK OF DISAPPEARANCE***

Palestine has become a political issue that carries a colossal history that is often described by many scholars, writers, critics, and political analysts with words like expulsion, annexation, mass imprisonment, settler colonialism, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, censoring and silencing dissent, and counter words like liberation, freedom, ownership, sovereignty, legitimacy, and recognition. Liberation is political terminology. It encapsulates the politics of freedom from systematic repression. This vocabulary has tried to introduce the issue of Palestine to the debate and has shaped it into a testament of tragedy but of overcoming. Palestinians living under the settler's regime and those living in other parts of the world have used numerous forms and mediums of expression to propagate the cause of Palestinian liberation. Art, music, protest, writing, and political offices are used to give voice to the tragedies happening in their home, Palestine. Many writers have used their writing space to give a vivid picture of the ground situation. Rape, killings, mass murders, extortion, and appropriation of land, culture, and identity are numerous books' main plots and themes. These traumatic scenarios are mentioned to make Palestine an object of study and to teach and impart the need for political affirmation and commitment to the cause. The impetus behind disseminating knowledge is the commitment to the cause of letting others know of the injustice and barbarity happening back home. For trauma to be dealt with, it first needs to be recognized. Therefore, the process of trauma creation must be understood first as a process and an ongoing struggle to find meaning and ways to assess and reassess the long-lasting implications of that particular incident.

Jeffery C. Alexander (2004) states in the preface to his book about the joint investigation he intends to put into finding out about the common values and polarization at the hands of social elements. Later he realizes that it is trauma that they are talking about. Alexander, in his seminal book *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004), explains cultural trauma as a phenomenon that occurs when a group or collectivity feels that they have been subjected to extreme terror that leaves an inerasable mark on the psyche of the

community. Not only does such a harrowing event affect that particular community's psyche, but it also haunts them regarding their future and changes their collective consciousness and identity in an unalterable way (Alexander 1). The issue of Palestine is not new and has been termed a perplexing issue and conundrum for the world elites.

The Zionist forces have constantly commandeered Palestinians. Since they are up against powerful enemies not only in number but in financial resources, their side of stories is unknown. Their side of stories remains the raw material for formulating Palestinian history. The fictional portrayal brings forth the traumas they have endured at the hands of Zionist forces. The texts examined here describe different instances where characters have been through extremely traumatic incidents that framed their future outlooks on life and their country. Susan Abulhawa has an intertwined relationship with the home, which she has showcased through her characters. Her novel *The Blue between Sky and Water* (2015) expands on the background situation of a sieged homeland, and her characters struggle with the reconstruction of reimagining and reconstructing home elsewhere while trying to cope with the trauma of expulsion. The novel sketches the creation of the state of Israel by inflicting Holocaust on Palestinians (Shehzadi, Bacha and Bibi 2). The story is narrated by two characters, Khaled and Nur. Khaled describes the inner battles of thoughts and self and outer-worldly battles fought by his near and dear ones and the Bait Daras community members. His narration is the raw source of the erased and unrecorded history of Palestinians and the difficult times they have endured. The book starts with Khaled describing the times without mentioning any year or date and reflecting on the uncertain times, marked by the commencement of traumatic episodes in their lives and not by calendar year. He recollects his being alive physically when he could move and process freely before meeting his tragic fate. He reminisces the days as the times of the tunnel and underground dug system, which acts as passageways to transfer the basic amenities to the people of Bait Daras. They would use these underground systems twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week unless the Israeli military force blew them up. "I lived in these times of the tunnels, a network of underground arteries and veins with systems of ropes and pulleys that pumped food, music tapes, Mama's menstrual napkins, Rhet Shel's crayons" (Abulhawa 10).

Alexander mentions in his book that when trauma is inflicted on any community,

though it is sudden but the agents that perpetuate that event are recognizable and can be seen by the victims. Such a clear perception of agents or reasons instigates the responses from the victim community, even if it is on a small scale. The reaction and strategy to such an act are lucid (3). Khaled narrates that building an underground tunnel was a problem-solving strategy and coping mechanism in response to the military siege that Israeli forces implemented on them. They deliberately blocked all basic amenities to curb the growth and lives of Palestinians. The victim community of Palestine evaluates these reasons, and they try to find ways out of those obstacles. Since they could not fight them back with force, as Bait Daras lacked military power, they tried to outclass this strategy by digging tunnels.

These tunnels result in the leakage of goods from all the adjoining borders and a way to their living. Khaled claims it as a strategic response to all the manufactured drought and mission of ethnic cleansing. He calls it their win, Palestinian's win this time over all the antagonist forces.

We were used to being the losers. But this time we won. We outsmarted Israel, Egypt, and the great United States of America. Gaza was one giant party for a while.... we had made from that excellent steel: car parts, playground equipment, building beams, and rockets. (Abulhawa 11)

Trauma provides a sudden reawakening and a collective consciousness toward the minuscule description of their lives (Alexander 3). They start looking at those aspects of their lives that they took for granted. The community of Bait Daras suffered huge personal and collective, physical and emotional losses when expelled from their homeland. Khaled describes that his Tete Nazmiyeh, his mother, Alwan, Rhet Shel, and in the same way, other women suffered terrible losses. He commended their strengths even in the face of adversity. "These were the women of my life, the songs of my soul. The men they loved were lost in one way or another, except me. I stayed as long as I could" (11). The personal loss that manifests the trauma of losing loved ones reinforces the collective loss of the community.

They feel connected through these common sufferings that they have been through. Even Khaled's maternal uncle, Mamdouh, who went to the US stays connected with his

sister and extended family in Beit Daras. Khaled imagines and believes that people are not just made of flesh; they are portions of love as well. “But if you believe as I do that people are part love, part flesh, and blood, and part everything else, then mentioning her name now makes sense, at the source of her love part” (20). This bonding of love is strengthened more by the expulsion, extreme trauma, and terror enforced on them from the outside.

According to Alexander’s conceptuality of trauma theory, any event that shatters the barricades of security and safety of any particular community and leaves the shock of such an event so profound that marks their identity and psyche forever (3). Palestinians have faced the worst atrocities committed against them. Israel, which is mightier in terms of economic and military power, closes all borders on Palestinians to curb any aid coming their way. The elitist argument about this inhumane act against Palestinians is to “put them on a diet” (Abulhawa 10). Refusing to eat in any manner is a personal choice but in this context is forced on Palestinians to starve them to death. This coercive banning of food and other necessities of life is an open incentive to ethnically cleansing them. “When the sky, land, and sea were barricaded, we burrowed our bodies into the earth, like rodents, so we didn’t die. The tunnels spread under our feet, like storylines that history wrote, erased and rewrote” (Abulhawa 140).

In addition, the massacre of the people of Beit Daras on a large scale, without any accountability of the hostile forces, makes it clear that Palestinian killings are not accounted for. Their killing is just another number in the count of dead. The lack of distinction between being human and an animal is erased by the mass slaughter and merciless killings while the whole world has become mere spectators. Such unaccountable killings force them to leave their homes, hoping to return when the situation gets better, and their merciless killings stop. Abulhawa shares the same description of events in her novel *The Blue between Sky and Water* when every deadly attack would yield at least fifty or more dead. The men of Beit Daras order their family to leave their abodes and move to Gaza with the instruction of taking only a few things with themselves ““Just until the hostilities subside,” they said. “Take enough things for a week or two”” (Abulhawa 34) while they decide to stay and put up a fight.

Death has become such a commonplace idea for them as they witness it on a daily

basis. The imagery described by Abulhawa in her novel shows how the world for Palestinians has turned dark and upside down. Smoke, fire, and blackness paint the world for them and depict the situation of their lives. While they moved out of their houses to seek refuge, they could see the terrible smoke and darkness hovering around them, foreseeing their future- the trauma of displacement and darkness. Little did they know that those they have lost now are not the end of this inhumane and mass extermination that will follow. They carry the weight of losing their loved ones and defeat at the hands of invaders. These memories will haunt the survivors for times to come. They lost a few in an ambush and left their homes, which carry the happiness and comfort of abode, while leaving others to fight, not knowing the future they will hold. “The villagers who had stayed behind either had been killed or were already fleeing toward Gaza, and the rest were taken prisoner, never to be seen again” (37).

Trauma occurring on such a colossal level is multifold as it affects and influences numerous social and psychological arenas of the community, giving birth to responses on multiple levels. One such response, Alexander mentions in his theory, is the effort to alter the already happened and repenting on the lack of swift response. Such efforts are in vain, so the next step is to change and remove the circumstances that caused the trauma and incident in the first place. This way, future strategies are devised based on past events and experiences. “The responses to such traumas will be efforts to alter the circumstances that caused them. Memories about the past guide this thinking about the future” (Alexander 3). Abulhawa employed supernatural elements in her novel to add magical realism. Um Mamdouh can speak with the djinn, which is also the reason for her aloofness from society. People of Bait Daras term her mad and insane and label her with many inappropriate names due to her eccentric behavior; however, certain events confirmed her supernatural power of possession of a djinn. When the situation outside Bait Daras started deteriorating, the community elders visited Um Mamdouh to foresee the future. She mentions the chances of an upcoming attack from the enemies, but she could not put it in plain words. All she said is that human beings cannot know the unknown as they do not hold the capacity on learning the future “but if Beit Daras does not surrender, this land will rise again, even if the war is lost.” (30). The elders of the community left her place with the hope and final words of salvation and the rising of the land, yet, they could not grasp the urgent message of attack

that followed eventually. This lack of insight into the message of Um Mamdouh results in poor retaliation towards the attack leading to the loss of land and lives and “wreckage of nostalgia that paved refugee camps” (30). This uninterrupted attack results in casualties and losses, which Mamdouh could see and smell by witnessing the earth turned to ash and perished lives. Anger filled him in; the land that once belonged to them turned someone else that day, making him cough (38). He feels the shocks while walking on their occupied motherland, of an irreparable loss of life and land that he knows will stay with them till times unknown. This tragic episode in the life of the Bait Daras community resulted in displacing many, including Mamdouh, who later traveled from one continent to another. Yasmin and Mamdouh carried the love of bees in their hearts and planted it on another continent. Their love of bees connected them to their roots and home emotionally. If the people of Bait Daras had been told about their displaced future a thousand miles away from their land, no one would have believed it then.

Alexander states that events themselves are not truly traumatic; it is the meaning associated by the victim community that codify a particular event as a cultural trauma (11). He draws attention towards the meaning-making process and not the intrinsic traumatic quality of the event. He calls it “a progressive effort” (11). While he stresses on the cultural trauma as a constructed process, the novels under study brings forth the lived reality of the Palestinian community through the characters. Characters showcase the traumatic memories of loss, displacement and disposition. It has been more than narrative building. Palestinian’s stories are about living through those incidents and coming out of it. The community of Bait Daras carried fewer things as they hoped of coming back home sooner as the hostility subsides. Little did they know that they are going to be displaced for decades and maybe for centuries, and it would take generations to experience the ecstasy of coming home that they have dreamt of while leaving their houses. Mamdouh carried a family photo and a few other necessary items required for survival, but the situation worsened on the way to a refugee camp. He touches the photo trying to hold onto the fleeting moment and bringing back the sweet memories of the past. He wishes to force the clock to reverse so that he and others may change the course and the results but all in vain. They stood on a different side of history that day, walking away from everything that had once been theirs, without uttering any words, looking at the conquering soldiers in the timid way who were



intoxicated with “greed and power of God” (38). The people of Bait Daras faced extreme conditions, expulsion and, experienced the worst treatment that could be meted out to any community in the world. The experience of an event firsthand is the initial step. After the passage of some time, the community may revisit those events and formulate a subjective approach regarding the calamity that has struck them.

The villagers and the Baraka family continue walking away from their homes and live thirty-five kilometers to Gaza. Bullets and snipers shot accompanied them in their journey towards the new abode. They move in groups and slowly become a large procession of human despair. If anyone dropped due to a sniper shot, they would collect the dead, and injured and continue with their journey as they could not do anything else (Abulhawa 38).

Displacement is not the only agony that the community of Bait Daras faces. This complex multifold trauma does not include trespassing of land but of honor and bodies as well. Rape is one such tool used to crush and weaken Palestinians. Zionist soldiers try to break the spirit and bond of togetherness and the protective wall they have created. Nazmiyeh leaves the shore where refugees have settled as she cannot find her beloved sister, Mariam. She finds Mariam crooked at one corner of the room when she reaches her home. Bad luck crosses their fate as they stumble upon Zionist soldiers who would not let them go. Intoxicated with power and hunger in their eyes, they trespassed the body of Nazmiyeh as they did her land. “Nazmiyeh did not understand what the soldier yelled before forcing himself into her. She clenched her teeth, lest it escapes from her voice and reaches Mariam’s ears” (Abulhawa 42). This trauma alone was hard enough to endure when one of the soldiers shot a bullet in Mariam’s head. Nazmiyeh screams excruciating pain as she sees her sister fall to the ground, the content of her wooden dream box spilling. Her eyes gradually closed down, hinting to the sun in the life of Nazmiyeh that would never rise again (Abulhawa 43).

Trauma is not felt by just one person but by many and in different ways. When Um Mamdouh and others faced their expulsion from their homes and witnessed settlers taking over their lands, Mamdouh and many like him faced displacement and moved to other continents. The novel suggests that individual responses may differ within the collectivity.

Attachments may produce an injured collective; the injuries within the collectivity may not look the same. Nazmiyeh is not only a rape survivor, and a displaced person but is the eyewitness of her sister's gruesome killing. Not only that, the people of Bait Daras, after expulsion faced a lack of jobs; hence, poverty ruled amongst them, and the people who settled on the shores of Gaza faced famine. This affected the dignity of many as they struggled to provide food for their families. United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) started relief funds program and ration booklets were distributed amongst the displaced people. Mamdouh was mentioned as the head of household in the ration booklet, but the irony of their lives is that there is no house and hence nothing to hold. This despair continues from generation to generation, and the agony of being unable to provide for family transferred from generation to generation. As the settlers continued shrinking livable conditions and space on them, Palestinians' chances of survival and providing for their family continued shrinking. This despondency that started with the initial expulsion of the community of Bait Daras continued to the third generation. The agony with which Mamdouh holds the ration booklet to get aid for his family seeped into the future generation that followed afterward. After many years when Mamdouh died, Atiyeh, the son-in-law of Nazmiyeh and husband of Nazmiyeh's only daughter, Alwan, continues standing in the ration line. This shows that those who witnessed the expulsion and those who only saw themselves growing up under an open sky are connected by transgenerational trauma, agony, and shame. The conditions further deteriorated and their crushing at the hands of Zionist forces continues even after decades. Rape, mass-scale killing, extermination, human-made famine, stripping Palestinians of their dignity, and putting them in jails without any trials are a few of the many ways of ethnically cleansing Palestinians.

In addition, the mental agony of living in the situation of war has debilitating effects on the psyche of the community. Palestinians have been living in an environment of war and there is no end to it. The settlers displayed a bellicose spirit that greatly impacted the psyche of Palestinian community. The war that has been initiated in 1947 has not stopped as yet. The novel *The Blue between Sky and Water* shows the expulsion of the community of Bait Daras, which refers to the expulsion of the first generation from their homes. This multi-generational saga shows that even after decades of expulsion and displacement, no referendum, law, or United Nations committees' suggestion could take them back to their

rightful homes. This tyranny and settler's colonialism continue still today. Ibtisam Azem's *The Book of Disappearance* shows that the Palestinian's land has been divided and the native people's homes have been demolished, their lands usurped. The history, lands, and areas that signify and point towards the inhibition of Palestinians have been erased and new names are given to the places. The erasure is carried out on such a scale that the newer generations cannot differentiate between the older and newer places. The only proofs left about the history of Palestine are in the minds of the older generation who are trying to leave imprints about their times through stories and narrations. Alaa who is an Arab journalist, lives in Tel Aviv. He and many other Arabs coexist with the Jews of Israel, showing an apparent harmony amongst the community members. However, the difference in the living style of both community members is visible in everyday chores. The mental incarceration and separate sets of rules show the liberty granted to them. Alaa tries to keep alive the memories of his grandmother and that of old Jaffa that the newer generation cannot see. Not only does he try to preserve this part of history, but he also tries to disseminate the traces of trauma that his grandmother's generation has been through. His grandmother has shared how they lived during the days of Nakba. Jotting it down in his red notebook as his memoir, he ponders on the value of life Palestinians have now in his times and back then. This reflection hurts his sentiment that the standard of life and its worth in the eyes of the world has remained poor ever since. Once while narrating the events that his grandmother and others have endured, Alaa reminisces how they are still treated as sub-humans. "The bullets were everywhere. They used to shoot at us whenever we went outside our houses. We were like mice. Our lives had no value" (Azem 16).

The trauma is a household subject in the lives of Palestinians as they cannot silence or ignore it even for a moment. It finds its relevance and connection to everything concerning their lives. One of grandmother's necklaces made of pearls went loose. Alaa knows that the necklace carries significance for her because it brings back nostalgia and linkage to the old days. Upon Alaa's inquiry about the necklace, she opines that her whole world went loose. The spirits that make Palestine one of its kind have come loose. Its people have abandoned it. Those living in it do not know about the history these places carry. She complains that fate has brought the older and newer generation at a crossroads where the older generation's memory brims with the traumatic images and memories of apartheid

while younger generations know nothing about it. “People went away, a country stayed, our souls came loose, and you keep asking about the pearl necklace” (17).

Jaffa is a mythical city for Alaa in the novel *The Book of Disappearance* as Beit Daras and Gaza is for Nur in *The Blue between Sky and Water*. Sharon Rotbart, in his book *White City, Black City: Architecture and War in Tel Aviv and Jaffa* (2015), offers an intertwining narrative about Tel Aviv and Jaffa. He dissects Tel Aviv as the city of architectural exemplars by positing that its modernism and cultural advancement have stemmed from the obliteration of Jaffa. Alexander states that trauma on a community level is multifaceted, as it has a deep social and psychological impact on the community (3). Both the target texts show that the younger generations feel emotionally displaced and their memories hijacked. Hence, Alaa and Nur know about the cities of their respective Grandparents before even setting foot in it. They look at it through their grandparents' eyes, creating an emotional link to the city. The stories and narrations about the particular places and streets in creating an image that cannot be found on the ground but is crafted in the minds of younger generations are fundamental to their knowledge about these cities. The demolition of the old sites that have once been the trademark of the old Jaffa and the apparent revamping and advancement of the city at the hands of settlers have changed the city's shape. The change has been so immense that Alaa once asked his grandmother why she could not recognize it during the walk in the morning in the city. To which she responds with grief that expulsion has taken place on such a massive scale that it gives the image of the expulsion of not only the natives of Jaffa but the vibe and aura that the city carried as well. The old Jaffa has been driven out too. She complains that Jaffa has changed, the people of Jaffa driven away, and its history erased. Alaa transcribes in his red notebook that he tries to imagine the scenes of the expulsion of the people who were forced to leave at that time. The imagery of darkness would occupy his imagination which swallowed everything- the city and its people. The sea engulfed the remaining people. Alaa asks his grandmother that even though the expulsion took place and many of them were forced to leave, the city's population never went down. It is still throbbing with people. This non-reduction of the number game in the population of the city signifies the Zionist's plan of inhabiting the place with displaced Jews. The city still has the same number of inhabitants, yet, the people occupying it are different. The natives are driven out and their homes are

given to settlers. Alaa finds this a tragedy, “What bereavement! My mind cannot process these figures. I, who was born and raised in Jaffa after Jaffa had left itself” (Azem 66)

In addition to Alaa jotting down the traces of history narrated to him by his grandmother, he also goes through his own experience of an Arab living under the settlers’ regime. He shares the discrimination that he faces at the hands of Zionist forces while moving about in his own country and the country of his grandparents. The double security check which he witnesses is the gravest method of humiliating and degrading Palestinians. The poor living conditions of Arabs in Israel exacerbate the transgenerational trauma of expulsion and occupation. The airport security turns him naked; all Alaa can feel is humiliation and degradation. He shares how he felt his skin just to be snow out of shame at that moment. He sees his skin through the eyes of security personnel. “There was frost coming out of the security personnel’s bodies while I was sweating. Gloves touching my body as if I were nothing. A mere sheep being offered” (Azem 66). The same condition is also felt by Nazmiyeh and other women in *The Blue between Sky and Water*, who describes the torment of passing through the barricades of Israeli forces’ check post. Nazmiyeh, who would go through extreme checking to meet his son, Mazen, anguishing in jail, would go through the torment of striping naked in the name of security checking. These disrespectful measures not only suggest the methodology of humiliation deployed for them but also insinuate the power that Zionists possess over them.

The plot of the novel *The Book of Disappearance* poses a hypothetical question regarding the scenario about the situation or change that might occur if one day all the Palestinians disappear from the earth. Ibtisam Azem uses this question to draw attention towards the minute but stern efforts underway to eliminate Palestinians from the world. The characters in the novel, especially Alaa, need to document every moment in his life as it refers to the general living conditions of the people of Jaffa. The story’s narration points towards the mentality of occupying everything that is Arab, which is supported by the incident in the novel the day news spread across the country of the disappearance of Arabs. Ariel, a liberal Jew, checks on his journalist fellow, Alaa after hearing the news. “He rang the doorbell, then banged on the door. Took Alaa’s key out, and turned it. He hesitated a bit in his first few steps inside the apartment. What if Alaa was inside?” (58). This scene hints towards the psyche and mental schemas developed over the years due to occupation.

The Jews feel they have an inherent right over everything that is Arab and can trespass the boundaries without being held accountable. The same attitude has been displayed by Ariel who opens the door without caring for any consequences and respect of boundaries. It also refers to lives being led under the constant threat of boundaries being trespassed.

The issue of Palestine is not just limited to the occupation of land only. Neither is it abridged to the inhibiting the land with Jews. This occupation extends beyond the material gains and control and involves the usurpation of culture, language, and traditions. This deletion process stems from the initial plan of expulsion and gradually capitalizing it and eliminating everything that may ever hint towards the traces of Palestine. Learning Arabic for Zionist Jews is a strategy to understand the motives of Arab and fight them accordingly.

Ariel's father suggests learning Arabic as it would help him in the army. "His father insisted that he learns Arabic because it would serve him well once he joined the army" (Azem 66). On one side, Palestinian youth are forced to read, write and communicate in Hebrew to distance them from their roots while on the other hand, they encourage Jewish youth to learn Arabic as a strategic transcendence. "The plan was for him to learn Arabic in order to understand the cultural milieu and "know thy enemy" but no more" (Azem 61).

These instances above provide testimony to corroborate and attest to the human rights violations happening on such a large scale for a long time against Palestinians. For any trauma that needs to be healed, it needs to be acknowledged first. These instances provide raw material and proof for the world to shun their apathetic attitude towards Palestinians and take concrete steps to stop this ethnic cleansing. It also hints at the systematic erasure and strategic silencing planning paved against Palestinians, pointing to the gravest crimes committed. These instances provide a poof for undocumented history but also of the unacknowledged trauma and hence it answers research question one of this thesis.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMUD MANIFESTED BY PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY IN SELECTED PALESTINIAN NOVELS**

Decades of persecution, displacement, famine, endless atrocities, merciless killings, rape, and dispossession have tried to break the spirit of Palestinians, yet it fails to defeat their spirit as they refuse to leave their lands- a place of their forefathers and stay there with unshakable faith and loyalty to their homeland. This unflinching faith has become a national concept in Palestinian history called Sumud which is translated into English as “steadfastness and resilience” (Rijke and Teeffelen 86) (Cotter II 1). It is considered a part of the Palestinian community's collective consciousness, which carries the element of strong determination in the face of adversity and to stay in the country and on land.

According to Alexander, the process of ‘meaning-making and storytelling’ (12) transforms catastrophic events into cultural trauma. Any event or incident that has happened in the lives of collectivity is not necessarily traumatic; the description, narrative formulation and dissemination affirm its codification as cultural trauma. The previous chapter narrates instances that support the claims described through incidences in the selected texts. Both the writers have held a firm position regarding the incident of Nakba as a cultural trauma and delineated the long-lasting impact on the lives of generations that followed afterward. While the focus of the texts has been the impact of trauma, the lives of communities affected due to Nakba are evaluated to understand the coping mechanism in the face of adversity. This chapter focuses particularly on the formulation of Sumud and its integration in the national cause present in the selected texts. The chapter also evaluates Sumud as a strategic coping mechanism and how it impacts the bigger picture of public consciousness and national narrative formulation.

Jeyda Hammad and Rachel Tribe (2020) state that Sumud is a culturally woven terminology that underpins resilience for the Palestinian community. During the early years of dispossession, Sumud became a part of their narrative, which demands steadfastness and

perseverance when their refugee camps have to be defended. Similarly, the same spirit also countered other attacks at that time. Those who would die defending their newly formed abode were considered martyrs. Over time, the concept of Sumud started signifying more meanings. It still carries the meaning of protecting and defending their abodes and lands and staying committed to the national cause but it has also added more shades to it. It has become a part of intellectual debate about strategic development under colonial conditions. While Palestinians display Sumud in different walks of life, all of them present it in their own way, showing their allegiance to their land and national cause.

The fictional community of Bait Daras in *The Blue between Sky and Water* faces extreme terror and persecution at the hands of Zionist forces. Yet, they do not surrender to their inhumane ways. They have turned their trauma into undying spirits that help them lead their lives with the same vigor and passion. They have not forgotten the bad episodes that have become a part of their lives, yet they refuse to ignore or become silent. The Sumud helps them endure all the hardships of refugee camps and survive drought and famine. The same spirit supports them in finding happiness in the dark phases of their lives and continues living even while many of their fellow members are languishing in jails and facing exiles. It is one way to cope with trauma and help rehabilitate from the bad past. Alexander states that when a community faces any traumatic episode, they are first taken aback but later develop coping strategies for it (3). Many of the coping strategies might not be extremely advanced or well developed to deal with an extreme situation, yet there are ways to initiate their lives after setbacks. Alexander believes that sudden reawakening towards any extremity inflicted on them develops into either of two attitudes (12). It gives birth to either a confused mindset, a hindered approach, or an advanced strategic and improvised attitude towards moving forward (3). Sumud is a devised strategic approach that has become a cultural element for the Palestinian community. The novel *the Blue between Sky and Water* shows the tragic fate that wraps around the community of Bait Daras; however, they stay there and did not leave when the people of their community are getting jailed and killed.

Nazmiyeh underwent the distressing episode of rape and killing of her sister, Mariam. She faces the merciless killing of Mariam but had to leave her body. She moves away from her body with heavy steps as if her world has turned upset down; nevertheless,



she does not stay there and continue her journey towards the remaining family on the shore. Her brother has been shot in the leg, leaving him limping throughout life. The limping leg reminds him about the tragic episode of displacement in their lives and narrates to his granddaughter about the forceful expulsion. Nazmiyeh's family is shown to witness this ordeal yet their steadfastness kept them going. Sumud plays a "psychological defense mechanism between external shattering events" (Alexander 5) and individual internal response.

Nazmiyeh grips all the resolve and determination that has carried her this far amid all the distress, kept pushing her forward. Her promise of moving forward to reach her family shows her commitment of not quitting and moving ahead. After some time, she feels that she has regained her voice that has locked in due to the episode of rape and Mariam's murder but what emerges from her throat is not any despair and crying but "a promise from another time and another place" (Abulhawa 45).

Nothing can be more traumatizing than forceful eviction from one's rightful house, land, and country, and committing such a heinous crime is the most inhumane act one can do against the other. The eviction of people of Bait Daras from their homes, killing them, and dispossessing them of their rightful share is their collective grief and loss. Owners of the homes and lands one day turned refugees the next. This dispossession has distorted the basic tissue of society. The need for social security, love, and commonality is deeply undermined when some event and agent destroys them. (Alexander 3). The surrounding villages of Bait Daras were longtime friends. Even Um Mamdouh prophesied about their sinister plans could not shake a firm belief in their neighboring villages. This unimaginable tragic episode traumatized the people who become refugees and started moving to an unknown destination with the frail hope of saving their lives. The people of Bait Daras, now refugees, have been tormented by confusion for days. Their uncertain future haunts them. The poor living conditions welcome them. Lack of tents and food items, diseases and insects and animals become their new living condition. War has become the biggest equalizer as it erased the distinction of rich and poor and everyone started sleeping on the earth. All these conditions could not dampen their spirits and they become accustomed to such living conditions. They left their furnished and comfortable house and settled on the banks and shores of Gaza but they decide to remain loyal to their land and live on it no

matter the conditions (Abulhawa 48).

The traumatic event requires “cultural references” (Alexander 10) and a structure of meanings that are attributed to that incident. While cultural trauma involves a whole community, individual responses toward the event within the same victim community may differ. Attention must be drawn to the complexities and dilemmas that intensify in the aftermath. Both the texts show the responses of grandparents and grandchildren generations and even individual responses within community during each time of respective generation differ. The intensity of their opinions might not be extremely polarizing however, the approach and viewpoint differ. After expulsion from their homeland, the people of Bait Daras experienced a scarcity of resources. They wait in ration lines with small booklets stamped every time as they receive food from United Nations aid. These ration booklets are not just a symbol of misery, destitution, and poor conditions in which they are living; in addition, they also become symbols that would showcase their presence in history one day. They decide to make it a part of their identity and inheritance so that the world may not forget the community that is there today and may get wiped out someday. These tiny booklets will someday fight for their erased presence (Abulhawa 48). They utilized their coping strategies to live with the same vigor and passion. It can be witnessed by the attitude of the Beekeeper’s widow whose love for cooking did not change even after dramatic change in the dynamics of her life. Food plays a fundamental role in the construction of identity and it also acts as political resistance. Since recipes of particular dishes are central to specific areas, they are located in spatiotemporal and historical moments (Wiley 2019).

Since the issue of Palestine is inherently unique in its way as there has not been any closure or compensation for their loss of land and lives; the national calamity and collective sorrow have seeped deeper into generations (Alexander 10). They displayed Sumud by staying on the banks of Palestine under adverse conditions but did not leave or abandon the place of their forefathers. They continue their lives with the same vigor and passion, went back to cracking jokes and sensing scandals, and between all this, babies are born and the weddings take place and life continues to happen. Life banalities pulled them from their tents and they went back to commonalities. “The tug of life’s sustaining banalities pulled them from their cots into communal spaces, where they prayed together, drank the

morning's coffee and afternoon's tea together" (Abulhawa 52). Considering the fact that trauma on a national scale blows the basic tissue that breaks the bonds that hold people together, and disfigures the sense of commonality (Alexander 4), coping from its effects would be binding back with one's own people. The community of Bait Daras reinstated their ties in the same manner when they were living at their homes. The sense of togetherness and community become the same even if the place of living has changed.

The Sumud for the Palestinian community is not just staying in their areas and not leaving their land and homes. They have adapted it in many forms and for different situations. They do not face displacement, killing, and atrocities once but this military subjugation has continued intermittently. After each brief hiatus would appear another act of brutality at the hands of Israeli soldiers, people would be killed and they would fight back too. Episodic sheer brutality ultimately normalized everything that is abnormal for the rest of the world. The cries and tears would always dry up and they would return to their routines. The loss of lives and belongings becomes a part and cost of their living but "People persevered and they fought back, too" (Abulhawa 62). Palestinian community tries hard to return to normal after every episode of atrocity. They go on to reconstruct their individual and collective environment (Alexander 3) by trying to subside the trauma by clinging to the minuscule life's happiness and events.

As Palestinians are subjected to shared losses and exile, they are haunted by fears of the effacement of lives, properties, rights, and even their identities. These fears clear their position and placement in societies and the world. These crippling situations give rise to the undermined value of oneself or a community. This situation can potentially lead to the idealization of one's place in the world, giving birth to claims like existence is equal to resistance. Palestinians have inculcated this equation as an inherent attribute in their discourse, reinforcing their significance in face of effacement that they face regularly (Schiochet 2011). This notion of existence to resist annihilation is one of the many forms of Sumud that Palestinians display. These qualities attract attention from all the groups of the population, inviting public attention or response since it is the only logical way to react (Alexander 3).

Sumud has been the impetus to rejuvenate the spirit after every loss they face. It

has been the vital force that has helped them stay strong in front of their colonizers for decades now. They cannot fight their enemies as the antagonist forces are superior in terms of financial and military strength. However, they still put a resistance by staying there and showing manpower. They use themselves as a barricade to be wiped out before the settlers take over their land. Susan Abulhawa in her novel shows that people's lives are the epitome of resistance. Their living means nothing else but a pledge to stand by their land. "Mazen, now twenty, still had not chosen a wife and his brothers joked that he was like Yasser Arafat, "married to the resistance" (Abulhawa 64).

Nazmiyeh is one of the many people who decide to stay on her land despite poor economic and social conditions. She not only defers the option of going away from Palestine with her brother but also talks others out of this. She implores about life and its harshness away from home. She believes life is as hard away from one's homeland as it is now away from home. "Nazmiyeh had pleaded. "There is no dignity in life or death away from your home and family" (Abulhawa 116). The Sumud she displays on multiple fronts is exhibited by others living in the refugee camps. Unlike their initial thinking of returning to their homes when conditions improve, the situation worsens. The encroachments keep on increasing and so do the patrolling and guarding towers. Despite all this, the refugees of Bait Daras, who have settled by the sea, continue living their days on the gifts of the sea. Daily chores, rumors, gossip, politics, defiance, and their love and loyalty to Palestine accompanied them.

Fictional portrayal accounts for images and situations that have somehow failed to become a part of documented history. Regions that carry disputed status often face the dilemma of their tragedy needing to be accounted for or documented. Neither their determination nor the agony is written down. This failure of being documented is one face of injustice and discrimination that the community faces. Even with all the odds, Palestinians have displayed sheer courage and perseverance in face of brutality. In addition, examining mass-scale events requires attention to the claim-making efforts of the dominant and not-so-dominant groups. It calls attention to the claim-making efforts and the accumulation of meanings (Schaap 87).

The fictional accounts of Abulhawa and Ibtisam Azem's novel record

displacement, brutality, and trauma inflicted on Palestinians. While the grandparent's narrations provide an overview of the firsthand experience that they faced during the times of Nakba, their commitment to continue using their memories to educate their coming generation and masses about the injustice and teaching them the loyalty to stay on the land no matter the condition is evident through these selected texts. Their memories try filling up the little spaces and curating their history. The resilience and perseverance can be witnessed by the characters' decision to stay in their land in the face of adversity, synonymous with displaying Sumud that is inherently embedded and true to the Palestinian cause. Alaa's grandmother narrates the tragic events during the dark period of Nakba when everything turned dark and whole villages were wiped out.

Alaa's grandmother's father advised her to leave the place and go with them to Beirut as he had arranged everything over there but she stayed determined and decided otherwise. "He told me that we must leave. I've arranged everything and we must go before they kill us. We'll come back when things calm down. I told him that am not leaving" (Azem 16). Her determination has not stopped yet; she still believes in staying in Jaffa and pitying those who leave.

It is hard to live all the life and even generations under oppression; Sumud gives them a choice and agency in the face of powerlessness. Though it is often unnamed and seems hard for many scholars to define and describe it, "it is categorized as something typically Palestinian" (A. M. Rijke 19). The perseverance of the people is rock solid, as it takes all the steadfastness and resilience in the world to normalize burying the dead and drying up tears now and then. They take time as their sympathizer which smooths the brittleness of life. Abulhawa describes the same scenario in her novel as:

But after the dead were buried and all the tears had fallen, time thinned out to a liquid that rushed over Gaza like a stream over rocks, smoothing the jagged corners and coating them with a new moss of life. The legion of able bodies clearing rubble, rebuilding, recycling, cooking, and gathering was an industry that reconstituted the community. (153)

As commendable as the spirit of Palestinians in face of adversity is, the determination and will to hope and look for miracles and better days have become their

living attribute against which they are defined. “People still find the will to hope for miracles in this damned place.” Lines of a poem in the rifts of memory came quietly to Nur. Hope is not a topic, it is not a theory. It’s a talent” (Abulhawa 166). Hope is their partner in dark times. They know the art of it. Decades of persecution couldn’t dwindle their spirits nor blackened the twinkle of hope in their hearts.

“Resistance is the prerequisite of Sumud” (Marie, Jones and Hannigan 20) as it refers to surviving in the face of occupation, adversity, lack of resources, and constant fear of losing a life. It is a socio-political term that implies the importance of staying there and doing something for Palestine. This inherent responsibility of not abandoning one’s homeland and feeling the obligation of staying close to her and doing something or even just by being there is labeled as Sumud. The characters in the novel continue their lives on the brink of destruction and the banks of Gaza with the same vitality, vigor, and devotion as ever.

The commitment to stay true to the cause of Palestine and display Sumud is inherent to the Palestinian cause. This determination and thought process has integrated Sumud into Palestinian discourse and has made it a political power. Provoking nationalist fever is a commonplace strategy to infuse vigor, but in Palestinian discourse, it carries a pivotal position as it is used to steer and create a voice to fight for their rights. Alaa’s grandmother believes that there is no life away from one’s own land as it has debilitating effects on the psyche. Staying together makes one strong even in tough conditions. She decides against everybody else's will and stayed in Jaffa for Jaffa means life to her. She stays there till her last breath. She considers living near the sea for that is the only thing that has not changed. “Whenever she mentioned Jaffa’s name, she would take a deep breath, as if the city had, all of a sudden, betrayed her and scorched her heart” (Azem 14-15).

The turmoil in their lives has not just been limited to expulsion only. They have to display steadfastness and resilience in every department of their lives. Sumud has become a strategic methodology and art of living in the face of forgetfulness. It is not a choice or an option but an obligation. The commitment to stay by the land at times has had the biggest weightage in the cause of liberation but the dispossession has continued for decades and resultantly, its aftermath and consequences have started affecting the coming generations.

While the older fought against the expulsion, they also dread the mind mapping of the younger Palestinian generation at the hands of Zionist forces. Jotting his thoughts down in his red notebook which Alaa has termed his memoir, he pens down his sentiments about what he cannot reveal publicly. He reveals how hard it has been to distinguish between the stories of settlers, their white dreams, and blatant lies to his stories, his grandmother's, and "those of others who are like us, inside me" (Azem 66). Those memories and stories carved up his mind and matter. He acknowledges that the drill has been hard, especially if the history is so muddled up that one cannot recognize his people.

I memorized their stories and their white dreams about this place so as to pass exams. But I carved my stories, yours, and. We inherit memory the way we inherit the color of our eyes and skin. We inherit the sound of laughter just as we inherit the sound of tears. Your memory pains me.  
(Azem 66)

The novels suggest that while links to an event may have deep and prolonged effects and produce an injured collectivity, the injury within the collective do not look the same. Both works primarily underscore the dynamics of individual reactions within the collective. Alaa's writing is a form of dissent, an act of rebellion. He feels that his words can curate Palestinian space in his notebook like in his mind and heart. He considers Writing as a rebellion and this action constitutes Sumud as doing something against the strong demands a never-ending courage.

Alaa rambles over his thoughts and reminisces over the past life he has lived and that of his forefathers; he feels that death has never been a strange experience. It has become a part of them as it always kept them company. Even though the expulsion and revamping have killed the city and its people, Alaa feels that he has never been scared of death and the major reason has been the fact that they are born and live in a place that has been the "cradle of disasters" (Azem 75). Jaffa has become a place where disaster and sadness are commonplace and its real inhabitants have been friends with it. These situations that are not normal for the world are normal living conditions for the people of Jaffa. Even the reality is distorted so that Alaa feels he cannot find himself and others like him in Zionist stories. Alaa feels that everything is distorted, hazed, and chaotic, yet, writing in

such a situation demands a resilience unique of its kind. Alaa's writing has switched to plural pronouns automatically as these sentiments are experienced by everyone like him.

"Everything around me is fragmented" (Azem 75). Even with these fragmented and distorted scenarios, Alaa continues living in an Israeli-occupied Jaffa like his grandmother, who did not leave it when the situation worsened or the settlers took over the country. Cultural trauma relies on narrative building and revisiting it time and again. Revisiting an event classifies that particular incident as a cultural trauma but failing to offer newer meaning with time puts the younger generation's attachment with that particular event in an ambiguous and ambivalent position. Since the younger generation's link with the event positions only on the meaning-making, monotony diminishes the link over time. Alexander calls it a period of "Calming Down" (22). Storytelling remains one of the mediums to propagate the same incident with different words to remain attached to the past. The texts show grandparents memories and stories as a link to the Palestine of their time. Sumud is shown to be the coping mechanism and a connection to the past and future.

Alaa's grandmother has witnessed a transition period as she has lived in Jaffa of her time and she later sees Jaffa being held hostage and changed at the hands of Israeli forces. She would always teach resilience and loyalty- the gist of Sumud to her grandson Alaa. These memories have inculcated information about the Jaffa of old times and have imprinted the scenes of older times on his mind. Alaa mentions that he always feels like living in her Jaffa when he is around his grandmother. He feels that he has transcended the time with her and it does not matter to him at that time whether he lives above or beneath the contemporary city of Jaffa. His grandmother never liked the expression of living above or beneath the city as she opines that it is the same Jaffa, one needs to look at it from Palestinian eyes. She always manifested strength, true love, and loyalty for her city and said that no one can rob Jaffa from them. It thrives in the hearts and minds of her and many like hers.

I told you once that, with you, I felt that I was living the world of your Jaffa before "that year." I live in an entire world above, or beneath (it doesn't matter) the city we live in. You didn't like me saying that Jaffa was buried beneath Jaffa. You said that Jaffa will always be Jaffa. It exists everywhere



around us. We have to look to see. (Azem 72)

While the event that takes place in real-time, its representation remains a point of concern. An experience of an individual, bystander or survivor of a large-scale trauma can be altered into a large national-scale narrative that frames the event. Schaap calls it “Cultural trauma identity displacement” (91). The stories and narration impact an individual's psyche and thoughts as it provokes the thought process and forces one to ponder upon the issues at hand. The same scenario can be seen with Alaa, who has spent considerable time with his grandmother. During childhood, he would listen to the stories of the original Jaffa buried under the new one and the city's inhabitants buried under it. Alaa feels that with all the baggage of sorrow, sadness, and trauma at the back of mind and in the previous generation, how can the newer generation start new and fresh? Acknowledging their previous trauma is a prerequisite for a newer start and fresher look at life. All the grandparent's generations are slowly fading away, Alaa ponders whether that insinuates the erasure of history.

Alexander also mentions the need to resolve the issue at hand as a mandatory step to ease the confabulated conditions of life and mind. He states that resolution of any issue demands to be resolved not only on a collective scale but on an individual level as well. “Trauma will be resolved, not only by setting things right in the world but by setting things right in the self” (5). Alaa's intention of producing a memoir is one such step in that regard. He wants to close the time and lock it in his words in his red notebook. He reflects on the need of doing something but sees fewer options available to him. These little options make Alaa adamant about documenting his experience so that others can look back into history. He believes in staying in his country, and coexisting strategically with the Zionist Jews, for that is the bare minimum he can do. Alaa feels that Sumud has been bequeathed to them. It is generational and is inherited, the way trauma is. Alaa feels hopeful every morning he wakes up, even if that hope is a frail one. “I wake up in the morning, I remember you and smile. “God will ease things.” Then I listen to Fairuz singing “Yes, there is hope” (Azem 64).

Sumud has become a prerequisite for living under occupation. While it infuses spirit into the national consciousness and drives towards liberation, it also resists the silencing

and submission that trauma ensues. Palestinians have displayed Sumud not only on the battlegrounds but have inculcated its teaching in their writings, fiction, and undocumented history as well. Although Sumud has attained a place in the national narrative and Palestinian resistance movement, the novels examined in this chapter bring forth more complex cases about its routinization and its dissemination in the future generation. Another aspect that comes to the limelight is the ambivalence and ambiguity the younger generation holds due to the routinization and framing of the older generation's narrative. The abovementioned excerpts of the novel show evidence of Sumud found in both the selected texts and hence answer research question two of this thesis. It leaves room for further debate regarding the carrier groups required for the revitalization of Nakba, which is carried out in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **COMMEMORATING THE INCIDENT OF NAKBA THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF WRITING**

Nakba is an Arabic word that refers to a great disaster or catastrophe. It mentions the destruction of Palestinian villages that later became part of the State of Israel from 1947 to 1949, according to the United Nations Partition Plan. It points to the destruction of four hundred Palestinian villages and expulsion of millions from their homes, ultimately leaving less than half of Palestinians in their homes, half of them in Israeli settlements, the rest on the West Bank and Gaza strips, and many others constituting a diaspora. Discussing the rubric of Nakba helps in highlighting and foregrounding the injustices that are visible, both past and ongoing, to achieve justice. It also aims to bring forth the lived reality of the Palestinians. Since Nakba happened roughly from 1947 to 1949, those who had lived during that time faced these atrocities and dispossession firsthand. Latter-coming generations have experienced this incident through the narration of their older generations. Along with Sumud that they have displayed over generations by staying near their lands and not abandoning them, Palestinians have also inculcated the event of Nakba in their history and tried to revive its spirit every year by revisiting it on the 15th of May.

The spirit of commemorating Nakba is not limited to a single day, but its importance lies in the spirit of the tragedy that struck them out of nowhere. Through this incident, they define, express, and extend their solidarity to the sole and ultimate cause of returning to their land and homes someday. By reviving and remembering the incident, they recollect injustices that have happened to them. They envision the right to return to their ultimate and rightful homes. In addition, the power dynamics in the region have negatively affected them. Since Zionists have an excess of powerful media houses, the Palestinian side of the story is less heard of.

One of the fundamental tenants of trauma theory states that denials cannot negate the events that have happened in reality. The event that resulted in undermining and repressive power cannot be denied by force only. The personalized memory of people cannot be erased or destroyed by decree or by force. Such incidents become imprinted in

collectivity's minds and become an impetus that guides them about future decisions accordingly. Attempts to commemorate the victims of the incident are ways to immortalize the brutal memories of an event and are presented as an effort to bring that unfortunate incident into objective reality (Alexander 8). Giving importance to any particular incident helps victims cope with tragedy, as they feel their trauma has been acknowledged. “Monuments, museums, and memorials are . . . attempts to make statements and affirmations [to create] a materiality with a political, collective, public meaning [, and] a physical reminder of a conflictive political past” (Alexander 8). Commemorating such an incident that happens to a community helps generations remember the origin and importance of that event in the national discourse.

The subjective experiences of thousands of people who share a sense of sameness and numerous other characteristics common among them or in other groups in the world shape the identity of that community. These sameness or shared characteristics can be based on ethnicity, religion, or nationality. Vamik Volkan describes this sense of sameness and sharing of certain qualities as the fundamental property for any community to constitute a group that helps maintain and protect their identity and well-being. Volkan describes “Chosen Trauma” as one such component of larger group identity as it refers to the same mental images or traces of a traumatic event that group ancestors suffered at the hands of an enemy (79). Reactivating those traces and images of trauma that have befallen their ancestors brings solidarity among community members, generation after generation. The transgenerational transmission of narrations of these traumatic episodes in the lives of communities not only helps them define the event but also instills in the newer generation’s responsibility to share the grief, loss, and humiliation that they have faced due to the injury caused to their forefathers at the hands of the opposing forces. It is also linked with the older generations’ inability to mourn or avenge the wrong done to them, ergo putting the responsibility on the coming generations to amend the main part of their history. These injured self-representations are deposited in the minds of growing children to infuse a sense of duty in them to mourn the loss or reverse humiliation, and if somehow they cannot do it, pass it on to the next generation.

Nakba, which took place in 1947, was revitalized and transmitted through generations. As Palestinians stand on the weaker side of the battle, their side of the story

has been muted. Zionists have taken most of their land and hence, autonomy in their lives and national interests. This hegemony has washed them away from their lands and their identity. Palestinians define themselves against the tragic event of Nakba and use it as a tool to fight ethnic erasure. The lived experiences of the older generations have become Palestinian tales to infuse vigor and recognition of the harm and injustice caused to them. It is also used to raise awareness in their coming generations about their ethnicity and identity at the perpetual risk of erasure.

While many diaspora writers have used their skills to spread the message and their side of history to the Palestinians and the world in general, these writers immensely discussed the importance of writing as a tool to fight this erasure and disseminate the importance of Nakba. Fictional representations highlight the trauma and injury caused to people in real-time. Writing is one such tool, and its significance can be traced from the fact that every writing from Palestinians is with a covert cause- to know the history and wrong done to them. They wrote with the same interest, and their fictional characters were also seen promoting the need to document their side of history. Abulhawa's novel selected for this study is a multi-generational saga of a family that carries traces of the importance of writing. Similarly, Ibtisam Azem's novel discusses the importance of writing and documenting, even when/if all of them are erased.

Palestinians narrate the events that have occurred in their lives. Narration is a way of weaving stories that may not hold much substance to the settlers but a medium for Palestinians to live with the remnants of their identity. While many of them are displaced, few have become diaspora, and others languishing in jail, they all bond with each other by recollecting instances of the past, reviving the good old days in their homes in their gossips. Mamdouh in Abulhawa's *The Blue between Sky and Water* leaves his home to find employment in nearby Arab countries. Over time, he moved from one place to another and eventually settled in the US. Even Nazmiyeh protests his departure, but Mamdouh envisions a better life and financial gains away from Palestine. Though he was far from home and would rarely come because of the closure of borders, Nazmiyeh would ensure she talked about him. She furnished her empty rooms with stories from the past. Not only Mamdouh, who went away by whim, Mazen, who is languishing in Israeli jail, is also a part of Nazmiyeh's routine. Reminiscing over the past brings a happy flashback and keeps

them part of the family. Their place has never been filled by anyone else, and Nazmiyeh made sure that it is always there in the minds and hearts of the grandchildren and nephew nieces of Mamdouh and Mazen, respectively. “It was not nostalgia, but a chore of memory, a task to keep them near” (58).

While Israel has appropriated everything that is Palestinian, the people of Palestine ensure that their upcoming generations are raised in Palestinian values and shades. They firmly believe that the core values of being Palestinian cannot be taken away or replicated, and they can only be transferred to and regenerated in their generations. They also believe that it comes with sacrifice and staying near their homeland, saving them from muddling and polluting their generations from other breeds. When Mamdouh and Yasmine come home with their firstborn, Mhammad, Nazmiyeh pleads that they should stay here and not go away as it will help Mhammad grow in Palestinian culture. She implores that living at her forefathers will help Mhammad navigate life and instill the true Palestinian value he cannot find away from home. “Even if it wasn’t Beit Daras, it was still Palestine” (Abulhawa 58).

Undergoing a trauma is a social event that defines injury to the collectivity, main identity, establishes victim and distributes the material and ideal consequences (Alexander 22). Such a calamity revises collectivity identity and as a result gives birth to a search for a collective past. Thus, Nakba is a chosen trauma whose significance Palestinians try to disseminate through the art of writing and hence give birth to Sumud for the greater national cause.

Alexander suggests that “collective actors” (10) represent social pain as a fundamental threat to the identity and wellbeing of community under oppression. He called them “Carrier groups” (11). Carrier groups are collective agents of trauma process. Their positionality in the social structure of a community support them in formulating process also termed as “meaning-making” (Alexander 11). In the current study, Palestinian diaspora writers, Susan Abulhawa and Ibtisam Azem serves as speaker who through their literary fiction articulate the traumatic past and chaotic present of the Palestinian community. Their writings have served as a medium in generating a discourse about Nakba and its significance in Palestinian resistance movement. In similar ways, the element of

writing is found in many instances in Abulhawa's narration. The importance of writing is significant in "cultural (re)classification" by which the past event of trauma stays relevant amongst young generation. Abulhawa has subtly inculcated the medium of writing to share not only the history of Palestine but also the tragic episode of Nakba and the atrocities committed against the natives. It has also been used to infuse the spirit of nationalism. It highlights the significance of disseminating the spirit of Nakba and helping future generations understand the vitality of this event for the Palestinians. The motifs of colors, writing, and reading have been nicely intertwined while describing the dark episodes of atrocities committed during the times of Nakba. By adding supernatural elements, Abulhawa has helped readers foresee through the eyes of Mariam, and Khaled the essence of this medium that will help them curate a little space for them in the world.

Abulhawa has shown Mariam to be gifted with a love for color and writing. She often collected and sorted them. Khaled, who comes from the Baraka family's third generation, is named after Mariam's imaginary friend. She meets her imaginary friend Khaled by the river. Khaled would teach Mariam to read and write (Abulhawa 14). This intergenerational conversation, a token of supernatural elements, adds essence to the message of reading and writing. This connectivity between the first and third generations lasted because of the words and messages. This highlights the need to document the older generation's experiences so that the younger generations know their roots and origins. The incident of Nakba can only be kept alive in the hearts and minds of the younger generation through writing. The spiritual relationship between Mariam and Khaled is substantiated through love for reading and writing, which sends a covert message of essentiality. Abulhawa reinforces this idea in her novel in the following words.

My great-khalto Mariam collected and sorted the colors. Two generations later, I was named after an imaginary friend. However, it may not have been imagined. Maybe it was really me. Because we meet by the river now, and I teach her to write and read. (*The Blue between Sky and Water* 14)

Nakba has personalized importance in the lives of Palestinians, as they have experienced a complex series of suffering. From the demolition of their homes to the expatriation of their lands to the catastrophe that took away their lives, this has

continuously strained their lives and psychological health. Therefore, it represents the gravest humanitarian crisis and the central point of Palestinian history. However, the experiences of war and its consequences on the psychological and social life of Palestinians have remained hidden and absent from the public and academic discourse. The birth of this lacuna has come into being due to the sociopolitical and power dynamics of the region and is also the result of the self-silencing of the personal accounts of the victims of Nakba. The deficit in accounting for the harrowing details of the human tragedy has only added more to the trauma inflicted on the target community. The deficit in accounting for the harrowing details of the human tragedy has only added more to the trauma inflicted on the target community. This lack of documentation of the firsthand experiences of the victims of Nakba amplified its effect on the hurtful experiences of the past. It has also led to the erasure of their side of history and hence their identity. The recurrent motif of writing expressed by Abulhawa in her novel, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, supports the idea and inherent need to use the medium to imprint the experiences in an inerasable way.

Power dynamics have affected the financial and social lifestyle of Palestinian refugees. Israel has created an open-air prison by closing all Palestinian borders to the world and crippling the financial conditions of the locals. Even under such circumstances, Palestinians cannot negate the importance of writing and using it to educate the world about their prevalent and deplorable conditions. Abulhawa has supported the idea that, regardless of the situation and environment, abandoning the cause cannot be an option. Mariam in *The Blue between Sky and Water* is an example in which poor conditions cannot prevent one from its cause. Mariam's love for writing led her to steal her sister's kohl to fulfill her writing urge.

When Mariam was five years old, she stole her sister Nazmiyeh's eye kohl and used it to write a prayer on a leaf that she had tossed into the river of Beit Daras. It was a prayer for a real pencil and permission to enter the building you go to when you have a pencil. (14)

Mariam's character teaches the reader to avail the opportunities that one comes across. She made an imaginary friend, Khaled, who taught her to read and write. Khaled, who later is shown to be the grandson of Mariam's sister, Nazmiyeh shows how writing



can help one transcend the realms and times. Living through words is the need of the day for Palestinians. “She created an imaginary friend named Khaled, who waited every day by the river of Beit Daras to teach Mariam to write and read” (15).

Storytelling is a part of Arab culture and tradition, and it is deployed by Palestinian refugees as a method or tool to tackle the need of that time during the post-Nakba period in 1948. Individuals exercise this traditional art to enumerate the scenes of tragedy that have befallen them. Their account of struggle and revolt, displacement, exodus, survival, and heroism acts as a buffer against national disappearance. These narrations and oral history have become a key genre of Palestinian Historiography—a guarding genre that helps dispel the looming danger of disappearance from the history of the Palestinian people.

Nakba destroyed villages, causing many natives to evacuate. This forceful evacuation by Zionists has resulted in the deletion of villages and is a cohort effort to delete Palestinians from history. In order to deter this extremism, older generations have used the art of storytelling to remember the Palestine of their time. Their oral testimonies or personal narration of their land are a vital source for recovering their motherland's lost history, voice, and details.

Nur’s grandfather, who left Bait Daras during expulsion, has only left it physically. He was unable to remove this from his mind. He made it a ritual to talk about Bait Daras and its people to his granddaughter, who was born and raised in America. He wants her to know about his motherland, even if it is from a distance. He narrates thousands of stories to Nur, so that she may not forget the place of his birth that burns in his heart. He wants to give birth to a Palestinian descent in America by inculcating all the values that keep him tied to the roots of his home. Not abandoning his language, Arabic, was also a way of reminiscing and staying true to his past and country. He often stressed the need to converse in the Arabic language. His stories capture the zeitgeists of Palestine. “He once told Nur, “Stories matter. We have composed these stories. The human heart is composed of the words we put in it. If someone says mean things to you, do not let those words go into your heart, and be careful not to put mean words in other people’s hearts” (72).

The older generations share stories about their time and place so that their land, which has been usurped, thrives in the memories of the coming generation. The

grandmother of Alaa narrates stories to him about her Jaffa, which have changed immensely. Alaa says that even though he was very young enough to comprehend the stories that his grandmother would narrate, he would still listen to them. He grew up on those stories, and every time during the walk in the city, his grandmother would talk about streets and places and would name them from the old times, which contradicts the names of the places mentioned on the signboards. He says he learned to see what she saw and the plight of people who moved out of that place during Nakba. Alaa ruminates about the thought process that occurred because of these stories. He feels that he shares a deep bond with people who are expelled even without meeting them. "I knew all the boring (and at times interesting) details about their lives. I knew all the jokes they used to tell. All of this, without having even met one of them. And I probably never will" (Azem 66). These stories raise awareness about the forgotten past of a particular community. Alexander stated that when members of the wider public participate and acknowledge the pain and tragic episodes in the lives of any target community, the arena and social understanding of cultural trauma improves and broadens the new form of social incorporation (24).

Volkan mentions that images of the injured self are deposited in the mind of the growing self-representation of children of the coming generation. In the same way, by sharing the chosen trauma, members of collectivity are linked together. Hence, the tragic event becomes a part of a larger discourse of the victim community (87-88). The meticulous details of the catastrophic event of Nakba that inaugurated the erasure of Palestine imbued the dread that permeated the then community as well as the coming generations. The neighbors of that time turned against the community of Bait Daras and eventually declared the state of Israel. "The Haganah and Stern Gang now called themselves the "Israel Defense Forces," and they marched into Beit Daras after hours of sustained bombardment with mortars" (Abulhawa 37) and sooner the influx of Jewish immigrants is seen to the new state of Israel. On the one hand, war had deteriorating effects. It simultaneously juxtaposes many human emotions at the same time. A war can produce cowardice and bravery. The legends were created under these circumstances. Khaled describes the story of his great-grandmother who people claim to be a strange woman. Her aura was different from the people of her time. The courage that she displayed while seeking refuge was known to almost all the people of Bait Daras. Her story has been retold

numerous times, and therefore she is titled “Um Sulayman, the brave old woman of Beit Daras’ (Abulhawa 37).

This writing motif is seen in Ibtisam Azem’s *The Book of Disappearance*. Alaa, a young journalist living in the city of Tel Aviv, Old Palestine, now Israel, reverts to scribbling his thoughts in a red notebook that he saw while passing through an old stationary bookshop. The red color of the notebook attracts Alaa's attention. He immediately buys it and decides to begin writing his memoirs. For decades, survivors of Nakba and the generations who followed afterward told others about their experiences and the nature of dispossession. They used poetry, art, writing, and memorial processes to share their experiences.

As traumas are the experiences of a particular community, they are, therefore, imagined and represented in a particular way so that the collective identity becomes significantly revised. This revision of identity requires a search and remembrance of the past for the collective trauma that they have endured, as memories are fluid but enormously embedded in the contemporary self. “Identities are continuously constructed and secured not only by facing the present and future but also by reconstructing the collectivity’s earlier life” (Alexander 22).

Alaa’s grandmother died long before he could make sense of her stories, but her stories remained ingrained in his mind. He would often contemplate on them, and every time he walked through the old city, her words and stories would echo in his ears as if he had witnessed them. While scribbling his thoughts in his red notebook, he would have a dialogue with his grandmother and would tell his comparison of Jaffa and his. He mentioned that his and her Jaffa are the same, yet different. Both cities are trying to impersonate each other. He touches upon the fact that her naming of the city is deeply ingrained in his mind, and he now looks at Jaffa through her eyes. “You carved your names in my city, so I feel like I am a returnee from history” (Azem 20).

Alaa feels like a ghost roaming in her grandmother’s city and finds her ghost too, roaming in his city; yet, they both call it Jaffa. The curation of the mind for a particular set of history to be inculcated into memories is one way to fight the deletion at the hands of Zionists. While all material things can be usurped, memories can be neither deleted nor

removed. Older generations want Palestine to live in the hearts and memories of the coming generation. Nur's grandfather and Khaled's grandmother also believe in the same concept. The story narration had a covert aim- the younger generation would witness the land of Palestine through their eyes, which would hinder the erasure process that is being processed by antagonist forces. "She tells me stories from Beit Daras, then I live them when I go there" (Azem 172).

Volkan described that the chosen trauma is reactivated in the new generation when the circumstances induce anxiety and a stressful environment is produced. There can be many reasons for these stressful elements that give birth to anxious moments in the larger group, the most important of which is a new looming danger, anticipated attack, or threat. Volkan called this situation a 'time lapse' (89). This term suggests the fear, expectations, fantasies, and defense associated with the chosen trauma that comes into existence when conscious and unconscious connections are made between the mental representation of the past tragic event and the current threat. This results in a magnification of the threat and enemy as if the tragic event had happened just yesterday and magnifies the stature of the enemy, turning him into a new, rather than ancient.

Alexander opines that the previous theory that illuminated the process of trauma by looking at an issue from a psychoanalytic perspective insists on working backward through the traces or residues of the past that are left on the contemporary through the process of a community (6). Working backward on the residue of memories is a decisive factor in collective identity formation. The generations that have not witnessed the tragic episode of Nakba firsthand know it through the traces of narrations and stories of older generations.

Alaa, whose memory is brimming with the stories of her grandmother's experience of Jaffa, reflects on them and writes in his red notebook to immortalize and materialize it. His grandmother has died, and now he knows the stories and events of Old Jaffa. He does not want these scenes to be erased after he has gone. He retells the tales, writes to remember, and makes it a part of collective memory. Alaa writes in his notebook, addressing her dead grandmother, "Why am I telling you, again, what you already told me? Perhaps, I am writing out of fear and against forgetfulness. I write to remember so that those memories are not erased. Memory is my last lifeline" (Azem 73). He feels that his

grandmother's death carries a sense of eternal loss that can neither be reversed nor fulfilled. She is not just a person who has perished, but she carries the space in part of history. Her presence is an embodiment of the past and tragic episodes of Nakba, inherently important to the current scenario and collective consciousness surrounding Palestinian identity. Alaa feels that whenever he writes, he traverses back in time, and talking to her grandmother makes him feel a part of the time she has lived in.

Palestinians have chosen a medium of writing to disseminate the spirit of Nakba while also trying to infuse in their Palestinian spirit and identity. Trauma has evolved and dented their psyche, yet, it never stunted their growth as a nation; hence, Palestinians have developed themselves as one community that is struggling with annihilation yet fighting it in different ways.

Nakba has become a pivotal point in its history, defining its identity, and has become a central focus in the cause of liberation. The instances provided above in the chapter accentuate writers' choice of using the medium of writing in sharing the unknown side of history and information about future endeavors in the wake of the cause of liberation.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This thesis discusses how literature assists in advancing the boundaries and discussions surrounding trauma theory, often girded by psychoanalytically driven discussions that mostly proffer fragmentation, gaps, and voids. While the effect of any traumatic event or episode on one person's psyche is significant to his wellbeing; it certainly is of the same importance to the collective growth of society and community subjected to any trauma. Evaluating discussion surrounding culturally inspired texts embedded in Palestinian colors, this thesis contends that the literary representation of the trauma faced by Palestinian and their responses to it are complex, varied, and much valiant. It also presents the fictional descriptions of traumatic scenarios and incidents that have happened in Palestine but are absent in any Western narratives and scholarships. Departing from the conventional representation and script of trauma theory, the selected texts present a complex image of suffering and survival. The thesis has selected Palestinian texts to emphasize the specificity of traumatic events and counter responses towards the traumatic event of Nakba. These texts serve as a site of contestation regarding the meaning-making that classifies any event as cultural trauma. As the introduction of the thesis points out, the selection of corpus is made based on the uniqueness of the issue of Palestine. Both the selected texts show narrative similarities regarding the living condition of the target community. Asserting itself, despite the difference of temporalities, both texts reinforce the compelling sense of linkage regarding trauma and its long last effects concerning the characteristics of its transference in generations, showing that it is a human experience and can be exacerbated if the community is targeted due to its culture or ethnicity.

This thesis has expanded its discussion surrounding three key elements of trauma and the natural response to these traumatic events. The first is trauma itself. For any trauma to be healed, it needs to be acknowledged first. The mainstream media offers a tilted balance in favor of certain narratives and interpretation; by extending on sociopolitical approach towards the event of Nakba, the evaluation of the selected texts offer a different viewpoint and points us in different directions.

Palestinians are never heard, let alone acknowledged. Literary representation provides a compelling platform for the world to have an insight into the wound that does not find healing. Both the target texts, *The Blue between Sky and Water* by Susan Abulhawa and Ibtisam Azem's *The Book of Disappearance*, provide a detailed account of the traumatic episodes in the lives of Palestinian due to Nakba, an expulsion that took place in 1947. They are expelled from their homes and their land, property, and other belongings have been expropriated. They have witnessed war crimes like rape. The generation that faces these horrendous humanitarian crimes vividly remembers the expropriation and trespassing of Palestine altogether. Displacement is not the only traumatic incident they face, they are crushed on various grounds and in multiple scenarios. The older generations presented in both novels vividly describe the expropriation of land and homes and the eventual expulsion. In addition to that, rape has been one of the lethal weapons used against the Palestinians to crush them emotionally and psychologically. The barbed wires and no-go areas are designed by the Israeli soldiers to curtail the movements of Palestinians hence, proving their superiority over them in terms of power.

Furthermore, Palestinians face political persecution and physical atrocities levied on them. The world neither acknowledges their pain nor is their traumatic status recorded in history. Instead of acknowledging Palestine as a war-torn place, it is propagated as a land without people which is inhabited and occupied by Israelis. The imbalance of power dynamics has added a conundrum to the position of Palestine in the world. Their presence in the land but apparent absence on the map of the world speaks volumes of the persecution meted to them. Like any other traumatic incident that is recorded in history, historians have turned a blind eye to the issue of Palestine. The lack of Palestinian representation has made them an absent or never existent community. While memory has been the only way of reckoning the presence of Palestinians, the cultural package adds one way of limiting access to the traumatic episodes in the lives of Palestinian women. Though both the writers of the selected texts provide a female narrator who presents their side of history and document it in the form of stories, many other narrations of such kind are absent in Palestinian discourse.

Another nefarious step of the Zionists has been to control the minds of young Palestinians who have not witnessed the incident of Nakba firsthand. They try to alter their

minds and inculcate the teachings and history they want to write about the place. They use their power over them to auto-tune the minds of young Palestinian and add doubt about their patronage and history. This conundrum adds doubt to their minds, hence, their identity. While Jeffery Alexander has chronicled the ways cultural and collective trauma affects the community, his attention to the theoretical application has mostly been about the incidents that have happened in the West only. His theory does not refer towards the incidents and events that have happened at the hands of Western powers.

In the same way, it does not provide a compelling argument regarding the forceful absence of voice from theoretical, political platforms which further alienates the victim community. Palestinians living in their country and those who live away from it, try to revive their culture and identity inherently personal to them through fictional portrayal, curating a little space for themselves to resist this ethnic erasure. They stood firm even with little power while trying to combat the inner enemies and outer battles. They derive their inspiration and spirits from their culture and tradition. Standing by each other and not defying its motherland has been one way of challenging this erasure. Even with all the artillery that Zionists possess, these texts show that they are capable of surviving violence and can also challenge it.

The second key element this thesis discusses is the resilient character shown by the Palestinian community. Palestinian community derives strength and character from their culture and tradition and calls it Sumud. This word is atypical of the other forms of resilience displayed by other communities in the face of tragic events. Sumud is an Arabic word that means steadfastness. They have inculcated the spirit of steadfastness to their everyday life and believe in staying in the land even without livable conditions. These texts demonstrate that the resilience displayed by the Palestinians does not preclude their lived reality or their suffering. Chapter Five illustrates that resilience comes alongside pain and the agony of these historical moments.

Contrary to the concept of victimhood and destruction that trauma possesses, these descriptions of resilience show that communities can have the capacity to stem courage and resilience out of it. It can motivate one, exactly as it attempts to destroy. The resilience demonstrated by the Palestinian community is in no way simple, yet, it resists tumbling



into absolutes.

Sumud is a multifaceted concept. It does not include staying in one's land but includes elements of being steadfast in forming a discourse and a political voice. They also intend on using their space, even small, to evade the invasion on many platforms. Both texts carry shreds of evidence of the covert and obvious display of Sumud. The characters in Abulhawa's novel *The Blue between Sky and Water* show the courage and resilience displayed by the female characters who go through the tragic episodes of rape at the hands of soldiers, yet they do not succumb to it and continue evacuation with other village members.

Similarly, villagers of Bait Daras stood with each other and, without bias and class difference, decided to live on the banks of Gaza. War turns out to be an equalizer that removed all the financial and class differences between them. The small differences are forgotten for the bigger cause of regaining their homeland back. In the same way, they display the unprecedented manner of re-rooting themselves away from home, yet on their land and try to rebuild their lives there. The intermittent episodes of attack and displacement could not break their spirits and Palestinian recoil back after every tragic episode to start their lives again.

Furthermore, they do not adhere to their created living conditions and always find a way around it. The barbed wires, curfews, and patrolling can curtail their movements but cannot curtail their spirits. While the contemporary study of trauma suggests the victim's survival in submission, these texts negate this concept by exhibiting Sumud in novel ways. These texts are self-referential and vividly portray Sumud. Trauma theory tends to believe in retaining traumatic incidents; these texts show that these memories can be used as testimonies that can interrogate and confront opposing narratives. The biggest challenge after displacement has been to bring awareness amongst the coming generation about its forcefully erased identity and history. Trauma has the property of passing on in the generations. These texts signify that similar to trauma, Sumud, too, can be intergenerational. While fighting on many fronts, Palestinians are fully aware that their coming generations are at risk of Zionist's systematic plan of erasing their past or any rudiments left of it. They plan to completely devoid the coming Palestinian generations of

knowing their roots, history, and any incident that shapes their personality.

But contrary to this point of trauma theory that victims succumb to the aggressor's plans, Palestinians have also shown Sumud in this regard. The older generation uses stories and memories of their times to educate their generations about the past and conditions in which they have lived. Palestinian's life and political voice surround two principles: educating their future generation about Nakba's incident and instilling in the spirit of Sumud.

The third key element that chapter six discusses in this thesis is the commemoration of the event of Nakba and its significance in infusing its spirit in the everyday lives of Palestinians. It discusses Nakba as a chosen trauma by utilizing the theoretical framework of Vamik Volkan, who opines that communities tend to refer to a few incidents from their history and transfer them into their generations. By doing so they keep the spirit and memory of that event alive. These events are kept alive in the lives of societies or nations by disseminating the stories or memories surrounding it and allotting a particular day in a year to commemorate it and make it a part of nationalist discourse. The main reason behind such an act is to educate their generations about the trauma that has hit them in history. They also believe in infusing in them the spirit to revolt or avenge the wrong done to them. In case their generations fail to live up to their expectations, these feelings are transferred on to the next generation with the hope of avenging the wrong. Most societies use such tragic events to define themselves and eventually become an inherent part of their history and identity.

Chapter six sheds light on Palestinian writers' efforts as they use their space to highlight the trauma and grapple with the opposing discourse. They have also undertaken the responsibility of bringing the atrocities against the native Palestinians in front of the world. Another important task that Palestinian writers have taken is to educate their people about the event of Nakba, which has become a fundamental component in their identity.

The transfer of intergenerational infusion of Sumud and trauma in future generations takes place through writing. While it educates the masses about Nakba's history, it also acts as a vehicle in transferring Sumud, which has become an element and a voice typical to Palestinian resistance.

Both the selected texts are intergenerational family sagas where the older generation continuously reminisces past, home, and Palestine. Their discourse surrounds Nakba and recollection of past events that have happened in their lives. Nazmiyeh and Alaa's grandmother's memories serve as reservoirs of past incidents. They recollect all the small details about their country that are on the constant verge of erasure. They dread that the whole of Palestine will be destroyed and made into something else that cannot be recognized. They want to leave imprints on their grandchildren so that their memories act as chapters of history where the old and original Palestine can be found.

Nur, who is the fourth generation of the Barka family, resides in the US with her grandfather Mamdouh. Mamdouh has introduced Nur to the art of writing, a link his youngest sister Mariam love for writing. He wants his granddaughter to scribble every small event in her life. He shares with her the stories of Bait Daras and his family members. He wants her to know about the place that burns in his heart. These memories and narration eventually lead Nur to Bait Daras, first on an office assignment, leading to her permanent settlement there. She feels at ease when she reaches Gaza and seems to her as if she is meeting her grandfather after his demise. Even on her first visit, she feels a strong emotional connection with Gaza as if she has known the place since the beginning. All the stories of his grandfather flooded back and flashed in front of her eyes.

Similarly, Alaa, who has lived with his grandmother, narrates the incidents and stories his grandmother would tell him. After her demise, he feels the need of documenting the stories about old Jaffa. His grandmother would call her Jaffa Old and contemporary to be the new Jaffa. She would comment that the invasion of land, curtailed movements, and evacuation of their homes at the hands of settlers killed the city's spirit.

The people of Jaffa left the place and killed its originality as well. Their leaving resulted in outsiders taking over the place and making it their own. Alaa's red notebook symbolizes the bloodshed of history and spirit of the city. He starts writing about his grandmother's memories that are still vivid in his mind and add them to his memoir. Alaa, while jotting in his notebook about the fateful expulsion that took place in his grandmother's time in 1947, also adds the lived reality of Arabs in Israel in contemporary times. He writes about the discrimination and cruelty that he has faced firsthand. Even

being a reputed journalist, he has witnessed inhumane and indecent accounts that have happened to him solely for his being an Arab.

In conclusion, Palestinians have faced the worst atrocities on an individual and on a collective scale. Israelis have committed the worst war crimes against the community, and the violence has not ended yet. Unlike the study of trauma theory that suggests victims' survival in submission, Palestinians deviate from this concept and tenant of trauma theory as they derive persistence and resilience from the atrocities committed against them. They use their brutal force to create the resistance needed to defend themselves, even on a small scale. Their steadfastness is deeply embedded in their culture and tradition and calls it Sumud that has become their mainstream discourse in dispelling foreign narrative. Palestinians struggle for homeland is multifaceted as they use fiction to delineate atrocities committed against the indigenous community, they also utilize Sumud as a coping mechanism and a vehicle in grappling communal discourses. They derive their identity from the incident of Nakba as it left an indelible mark on the group's consciousness. They believe their identity to be deeply embedded in the event of Nakba, which has become a pivotal point in their national history. They disseminate its spirit in the future generation by using the medium of writing. They have created a small literary space for themselves that is used to fight ethnic erasure leveled against them on so many grounds.

This thesis has tried to create a web by linking Nakba as a cultural trauma that gives birth to Sumud as a coping mechanism. While writing has been used as a carrier group in fighting ethnic erasure and disseminating the spirit of Nakba and Sumud, it has also been used to carve out a little literary space for Palestinians to generate a political and literary voice.

Palestine issue is a colossal rubric that invites readers and critics to look at it from different angles. Both these texts can be analyzed as a comparative study where the writers seek to establish a connection between perpetrators and victims. Both the writer's viewpoints and positionality differ in representing the Palestinian community in literary texts; however, Nakba as a trauma remains a commonality between the two. Much work has been done surrounding female representation of trauma and atrocities committed against them due to their gender; these texts generate a space to interrogate the complexity

of survival as represented in literature. A psychological analysis of the character of Khaled who faced locked-in syndrome, can be a door for deeper meanings that can be connected to the core issue of Palestine. Another compelling extension of this thesis can be a detailed inquiry of how trauma travels, a literary study of second and, where possible third and fourth generation accounts of trauma and memory making, and how they react to or are linked towards the traumas, victimhood, and memories of older generations.

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