Hesitant Belonging: Understanding Generational Traumas of Forced Migration in Black and
Palestinian Diaspora Contemporary Transnational Fiction

by

Lara El Mekaui

A thesis

presented to the University of Waterloo

in fulfillment of the

thesis requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2024

Examining Committee Membership

The following served on the Examining Committee for this thesis. The decision of the Examining Committee is by majority vote.

External Examiner   Yasmeen Abu-Laban

                           Professor

Supervisor(s)   Heather Smyth

                           Associate Professor

                           Jay Dolmage

                           Professor

Internal Member   Veronica Austen

                           Associate Professor

Internal Member   Vinh Nguyen

                           Associate Professor

Internal-External Member   Nazli Akhtari

                           Professor

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This dissertation explores the concept of "hesitant belonging" within the context of Black and Palestinian Diaspora Contemporary Transnational Fiction. The study investigates how forced migration, identity formation, and the related affects of uncertainty and ambivalence shape the experiences of diasporic individuals. By analyzing four literary case studies, the work highlights how hesitancy, as a *space* of uncertainty and stagnation, a *response* to past trauma and ongoing violence, and a *tool* for refusal and resistance, influences the sense of belonging in migrant bodies navigating different locales. The broader goal of the dissertation is to elucidate the role of hesitation in understanding complex and difficult forms of belonging, as well as its intersection with diaspora studies, postcolonial studies, affect theory, and trauma studies.

Table of Contents

Introduction

I.   Overview

My dissertation will contribute to the exploration of migrant identity and representations of belonging in contemporary transnational fiction. I develop the notion of "hesitant belonging," which situates hesitancy as a key element in understanding contemporary belonging. I examine in particular the connection between forced migration, identity formation, and the affects of uncertainty and ambivalence that I theorize as hesitancies prevalent in belonging. I argue that hesitancy is important in diasporic belonging because it captures a complex discomfort that is hard to articulate in migrant bodies navigating different locales. For example, a Palestinian woman living in Canada might feel dislocation when her ancestral home is under siege and perpetual violence, while the world around her goes about their business as usual. Hesitancy reveals the invisible heaviness of belonging that we carry. After I establish my theoretical framework, I present four literary case studies formed out of contemporary transnational novels, where I highlight different ways in which the characters experience hesitant belonging. In the texts I have chosen, familial experiences and histories of forced migration are transferred from generation to generation through collective memories and accumulated traumatic experiences. Moments of hesitancy expose the complications of belonging in such cases.

       I argue that hesitation between belonging to local places and global spaces is central to articulating global personhood. My claim is that hesitation is a key factor in understanding communities that come together based on migration-induced experiences of collective trauma. I argue that those who have been historically othered and carry that trauma into their present lives go through stages of hesitancy in figuring out their sense of belonging due to the pull of the

unreckoned past into the uncertain present. My main goal is, therefore, to elucidate the role that aspects of hesitation play in understanding difficult and complex belonging. In the course of my investigation, I engage the intersections and tensions between several related fields, namely diaspora studies, postcolonial studies, affect theory, trauma, and memory studies.

II.   How I came to this project

In the 2019 Holberg Conversation, Paul Gilroy introduces his work by introducing his background, a method I have adopted in my own introductions of my research, describing the journey that is a significant influence on the project. My story also informs my reading methodology, for I approach the literature I read with caution and mistrust, with a wounded heart that hopes for the best, but expects no tidy narratives, for those do not exist, or even make sense to me. In an interview with Patricia Saunders, Saidiya Hartman explains that "the "autobiographical example is not a personal story that folds onto itself; it's not about navel-gazing, it's really about trying to look at historical and social processes and one's own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them" (Saunders 7). Like Hartman, I include the personal here, "to tell a story capable of engaging and countering the violence of abstraction" (*Wayward Lives* 7). Stuart Hall explains that "we all write and speak from a particular place and time", from a specific history and culture; "what we say is always 'in context', positioned" (Hall 222). My dissertation work developed over a troublesome five years, which has inevitably informed the context of my thought and theorization.

My own formation is informed by the historical and social processes of colonialism's realities and afterlives. Lebanon, a young country with ancient roots, established after the

collapse of the Ottoman Empire by the formation of the French Mandate for Lebanon and Syria in 1923, is tumultuous to say the least. In the afterlife of its colonization, the country struggles economically, socially, and politically. This reality is tethered to the ongoing settler colony in our neighbouring Palestine, which has been occupied by the apartheid state of Israel since 1948. My understanding of settler colonialism and occupation is heavily attached to the Palestinian cause. Furthermore, moving to Canada to study and work at the University of Waterloo has also educated me on the reality and history of Indigenous being and belonging in this settler-colonial state. The University of Waterloo is located on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Neutral (Attawandaron) peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations Haudenosaunee, which includes six miles (ten kilometers) on each side of the Grand River. In "'From Jerusalem to the Grand River, Our Struggles are One': Challenging Canadian and Israeli Settler Colonialism" (2013), Mike Krebs and Dana Olwan present general commonalities between the settler colonial projects of Canada and Israel. The first formative aspect of settler-colonialism in both cases is "the displacement of Indigenous peoples from their land, and theft of that land and all its possible resources for the use and benefit of settler populations" (144), which Krebs and Olwan argue is achieved in Canada and the U.S. through the reserve system.

These commonalities are unsettling for me as a newcomer to Canada, given the tension and violent history my nation has with its Israeli neighbor. As a Lebanese citizen from the South of the country, a land that was under Israeli occupation until May 2000 that witnessed countless deaths and unaccounted for disappearances, I am personally familiar with encroachments on one's land and country, as well as the personal and sociocultural implications this carries. Living

3

in close quarters with Palestinian friends, colleagues, and neighbors also makes me sensitive to their plights and claims for home in and return to historical Palestine. Israel is always perceived as the encroaching enemy, consistently positioning Lebanon as transiently independent, perpetually awaiting war. Indeed, any given year or month, anyone, from political analysts to psychics, warns of a coming war. This reality at least informs a sentiment of protracted violence, a built-in anxiety.

Writing this thesis has been extremely difficult. Partly for the obvious reason that writing a doctoral thesis is a hard, tedious, often alienating, confidence-shaking, uphill battle, but mainly because of being Lara: a Lebanese-Ukrainian, international graduate student in Canada during a global pandemic and economic recession, an ongoing war in one of my home spaces, and economic and social declination following political uprisings and a nuclear level-scale explosion in the other. This confluence of experiences has been excruciating. In addition, moving to Canada has intimated me with descriptions of life away from home as a migrant and their implications on identity.

Since starting my PhD at the University of Waterloo, both my homelands, Lebanon, and Ukraine, have gone through significant events of unrest and violence, altering my own perception of the world as well as engraving the heaviness of grief forever on my heart. Michael Cruz Kayne writes that "grief is not one thing, it is a galaxy of emotions, most of which are put in orbit by the loss of someone you loved, and the harrowing (or not) circumstances surrounding that loss. But we only get to talk about one part publicly: the sadness. but there is more!" (michael cruz kayne). I became all too familiar with the intricacies of grief's prismatic potential in November 2020, and I am still familiarizing myself with its multitudes to this day. The loss I

personally feel is for my home country generally, my favorite city, Beirut, and my family, more specifically. The Lebanese people revolted magnificently and gloriously in October 2019, only to feel the whiplash of the rise and crash into the slow and sometimes viciously active violence of economic collapse and social decay. This occurred a month and a half after I started my program at Waterloo. I suddenly found myself split, physically in Waterloo, mentally, emotionally, in Beirut. Videos of friends rioting, protesting, getting beat up and teargassed filled my days, while I was meant to learn about Eurocentric ethics in poetry and the implications of smart cities and technological and surveillance advancements. Still, this was nothing compared to what I felt ten months later.

On August 4th, 2020, the city of my young adulthood, of my most cherished memories and attachments, Beirut, literally exploded, with little to no accountability till this day. I knew trauma before through the simmering of silence and collective amnesia, through the untold suffering incurred by my community in the Civil War and Israeli occupation, as well as the 2006 war, which I experienced firsthand, and which temporarily displaced my family. However, it was not until after August 4th that the weight of what had happened hit me. I, away and safe in Canada, almost lost my home, everything and everyone was at risk. I, tired of pandemic lockdowns and cynical about Lebanon's future, had to call everyone I knew back home to ask if they were safe, to receive any response to prove they were alive. On November 4th, 2020, I realized I had not thought about the Blast all day. Busy studying for my upcoming exams and having an ordinary day, I was privileged enough to not recall for a day that Beirut was in despair. The guilt that hit amplified over the next 6 months, exacerbated by continued life in trying times of lockdowns and social weariness, academic and professional burnout, and political calamity all

over the world. By May 2021, I started having panic attacks quite regularly. Breathing became strenuous and difficult, and what I always referred to as "optimal anxiety" revealed itself to be debilitating. Once I sought help, I realized that my anxiety was not new, but had instead been a part of me for years, lying dormant until conditions became unbearable and coping incomprehensible.

As I draft and write this thesis, my mother's homeland, Kyiv, is being bombed regularly by the Russian colonizing tyrant, endangering, and devastating the lives of many of my loved ones. Since February 2022 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the perpetual grief has been extended to what my family and I took for granted as our safe haven. The sudden precarity and violence that blew up my cousins and their families' lives turned them into refugees and displaced individuals. The discrepancy in media coverage and international aid allotted to Ukraine compared to Lebanon, not to mention Afghanistan, Palestine, Syria, Sudan, and the resounding inequity in the global value of who is considered grieveable and who is not, is not lost on me. This became even more apparent by how the world reacted differently to the War on Gaza that began in October 2023. When the world showed strong solidarity with Ukraine, showing solidarity against genocide in Gaza became less clear-cut.

The uncertainty of these last few years collectively and globally with COVID has also been difficult: add to that the shaking of my worlds, my attachments, and belongings, as well as the political unrest that continues to impact both my spaces of study: I from the privileged position of being in Canada, am distantly witnessing what I try to theorize: how can you be and belong in an uncertain world? What does it mean to be a person of the world, when your locales are on fire, crumbling? How is belonging impacted by historical, protracted, and ongoing

violence and trauma? These are questions that guide my theorization of hesitancy and my reading of the novels in this thesis. In answering these questions about spatial belonging, reaction, and coping in the world, I expand the agency of hesitancy, exploring its spatial significance, its responsive dimensions, and its abilities as a tool.

I want to add that my own hesitation and mistrust in global citizenship, hospitality and camaraderie did not occur due to these events of the past 4 years but have informed my sense of being and belonging as a hyphenated being, born, and raised in the South of Lebanon, culturally connected to Russia and Ukraine, as I am a quarter each. I grew up in occasional times of rest with an inherent knowledge of the potential of war and violence. But it wasn't until after August 4th explosion, however, that I knew trauma intimately, that I recognized it in older generations as well as in my own; as well as its haunting and slithering impact on my own sense of belonging to home and the world. Writing this thesis and researching memory and trauma has also made me more aware of the traumas I have suffered, based on the memories that linger. Two stand out from 2006: the first is of a bomb detonating near my home, its reverberations so loud and near that the windows were shaking. I remember jumping out of my bed and pouncing on my younger sister, who shared the room with me, pulling her behind the bed by the wall and hiding, fearing that the window glass might break. The second is of our arrival in Kyiv, Ukraine as refugees in July 2006, after what remains an excruciating, long, and bizarre journey. Once we reached safety and exited the airplane, we were swarmed by newscasters and cameras, looking to get shots and interviews with the Lebanese refugees rescued. The fact that these two memories stay with me, that I remember them often, tells of their formative impact on me. As a child who experienced war, I think I have strong reflexes now. I tend to consider the worst-case scenario in my head and

then seek relief that it will not happen, while also feeling comfort in preparing myself for it. In embarking on my journey to understand my anxiety, that thought became evident to me recently and has been part of me and my thinking and actions for over a decade. This catastrophic thinking or catastrophizing is a symptom of my anxiety, which inevitably relates to being in worst-case scenarios.

Even writing this is quite tricky because I do not want to be considered a victim. Life has its beautiful moments, and I have privileges in it, but as a rule, I cannot look at life in idealistic terms. I was brought up in a culture where everything can be taken away just like that, and where every generation has to learn this lesson of cruelty over and over: mine was the recession, the Beirut explosion, and the squashing of the October 2019 uprising; my sister, who is 15 years my senior, learned this lesson and developed her apathy in 2004 following the Cedar uprisings, when unity and peace seemed within reach, but not really. Then there are my parents, who lived in and through the Israeli occupation in the 80s and continue to resort to collective amnesia and the apathetic stance of "this is war" to cope with limited and suffocating life, hoping for nothing but better for their children, which inevitably must be outside of Lebanon. Three out of four of their children have immigrated, and fourteen out of sixteen of my Lebanese cousins live abroad. One out of two of my Ukrainian cousins is a refugee in Canada.

As I do this work, I realize its significance in terms of healing and breaking the cycle of apathy. By not only acknowledging, but also attempting to understand and remedy how growing up in a place of conflict has impacted me directly and generationally, I can give back to my community, bear witness, and have enriched conversations with my parents that I believe give them peace as well. Living apart is never easy, living with rage, love, and strong affect is crucial

to resisting the apathy of defeat. Michelle Balaev defines trauma as "a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society" (Balaev 150). This definition aptly describes my personal journey with understanding trauma and how it has shaped me. The lens through which I evaluate society, culture, and literature has also been influenced by my life experience. I am fully convinced that understanding the emotions and vulnerability that come with grief and trauma allows for an honest understanding of what it means to be a person in migration, a person of the world.

I have always been fascinated by the complicated connotations behind being part of the world, specifically as a hyphenated, multi-cultural individual. My background informs my MA work, which is on indecisive cosmopolitanism in the context of the works of Lebanese American author, Rabih Alameddine. The idea for my PhD project grows from my MA work. In the two years after my MA, I read two books in a row that deeply resonated with my own thinking: Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing.* Both novels told intergenerational stories of forced migration and accounted for the trauma(s) transferred, and how they influenced being and belonging for each generation. *Salt Houses* is about the Palestinian Diaspora*,* while *Homegoing* focuses on two branches of a family, telling parallel stories, one of which explores the history of the Black Diaspora, through the lenses of chattel slavery, forced migration, as well as economic immigration. The strong connections between the two works lead me to focus my case studies on these two Diasporas, not necessarily in comparison, but definitely in conjunction. The work that follows is an attempt to understand belonging, focusing on the connections between trauma and affect, and how these entities govern one's sense of being and belonging in place and space.

This dissertation is divided into two parts: Part 1 theorizes hesitant belonging. Here, I draw on postcolonial, trauma, and affect theories to build a versatile understanding of hesitancy, belonging, and hesitant belonging. Part 2 focuses on literary analysis of four novels, which allow for a rich exploration of hesitant belonging as fluid and fraught in relation to histories of forced migration and contemporary cosmopolitan being. To conduct this analysis, I will examine the polyvalence utility of hesitancy, and how and when it prevails in the narratives. Furthermore, in the chapters, I explore the significance of hesitancy in relation to the historical and present circumstances presented in each novel, unpacking themes of grief, trauma, belonging, and uncertainty that become evident. To begin, I ground my understanding of the world and belonging through the lens of cosmopolitan studies, which will launch my exploration of belonging. Cosmopolitan discourse has long considered the implications of belonging beyond homelands. It is also one of many avenues to study diasporic identity and transnationalism. From there, this work will shift its focus to a theorization of belonging, through connecting it to a protean ideation of hesitancy.

I foremost ground this study from the personal: I am Lebanese, I am Ukrainian. I am an international student residing in Canada, in unprecedented times of uncertainty. I position myself as a hesitant local, uncertain about my belonging. This positionality informs the theorization and reading to come.

Chapter 1: Hesitant Belonging in our "Cosmopolitan" World

> It is all happenstance, […], whether we are miserable or not. We are a tragedy. […] A whole broken-up tragedy, standing in the middle of the world cracking. […] I felt as if we had been scattered out with a violent randomness (*At the Full and Change of the Moon* 258).

In the lines above, Eula, a woman living in Toronto, who is the great, great-granddaughter of Marie Ursule, an enslaved woman who sacrificed her life for the future of her descendants, laments on the circumstances and conditions of her existence. The quotation evokes questions about belonging: How does one belong when the conditions of their existence are happenstance? Are they the results of the scattering of people with a violent randomness? What does it mean to be "a whole broken-up tragedy," "standing in the middle of the world cracking"? Eula's reflection, as a Caribbean woman descending from the scattering of violent randomness, comes in an instance of hesitancy; a space in which she stands and contemplates the conditions of life, of her family. As a reaction, her hesitancy manifests as uncertainty in figuring out her relation to the world. Eula also utilizes hesitancy as a tool to negotiate and unpack this uncertainty, to understand her affiliations. Eula's sentiment here speaks volumes for migrants who are defined by their scattering and violent origins, who are the victims of forced displacement in one form or another. Denied belonging by the world, the mainstream, through forms of exclusion, migrants become hesitant.

This dissertation considers issues of belonging to the world, advocating for the value of hesitancy in understanding and unpacking belonging. I use literary analysis to examine

conditions I characterise as hesitant belonging. Hesitation has spatiotemporal as well as affective/cognitive dimensions. The uses of hesitancy are multifaceted. Throughout this work, I define hesitancy as a response, a space, and a tool.

To belong to the world is to acknowledge its violent predisposition. Hesitancy offers the *space* to reflect on the historic past and understand its implications in the present and the future. In the *space* of hesitancy, one can question the meaning of belonging to a single locale and to the world at large, individually, and collectively. Our political global present's unsettled nature complicates one's sense of belonging. This is due to the pulling of the past, which in turn causes hesitation in the present. Hesitancy is grounds for negotiating one's place in the world because one's place is not isolated and bounded; it is linked to grief, to histories of dispossession and displacement. Hesitancy is also an operative *tool.* Working through hesitancy allows the breaking of a cycle of "stuckness" (Ahmed 2015) and uncertainty. Simultaneously, hesitancy is a *response* that manifests as an affect: hesitancy leads to feelings of rejection from and of the world that has rejected; in turn, hesitation leads to wayward acts (Hartman 2020), apathy, and feelings of nothingness.

Through conducting a literary analysis of contemporary transnational fiction that focuses on issues of belonging in intergenerational narratives of transhistorical trauma in the context of the Palestinian and Black Diasporas, I observe how instances of hesitancy uncover deep underlying crises within migrant beings. I also apply hesitancy as a methodology: In this work, I sit and stay with the uncertain present as portrayed in the literature and attempt to unpack it through the lens of hesitancy. Through this lens, I can identify the state and feeling of hesitancy in characters and show how hesitancy operates as a space, tool, and response. My polyvalent

approach to unpacking hesitancy offers nuance differently and more intimately than what cosmopolitan theory offers. To apply my theory, which I outline in the next section, I conduct close readings using literary examples from Palestinian and Black forced migrations and diasporas, respectively. These novels are written by women living in North America: Dionne Brand, Yaa Gyasi, Hala Alyan, and Susan Abulhawa, who have set their transnational narratives in relation to and at the heart of the Black and Palestinian diasporas respectively. I read *Salt Houses* by Hala Alyan and *Against the Loveless World* by Susan Abulhawa to study the Palestinian Diaspora, and *At the Full and Change of the Moon* by Dionne Brand and *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi to study the Black Diaspora. I analyze how these narratives represent the world and the conditions afforded to the characters to operate and navigate within it. I argue that hesitant belonging is an important positionality that the works explore. The novels address the legacies and realities of forced migrations within these diasporas. In each case, the characters experience hesitancy as they negotiate their belonging in the world.

I.   Hesitant Belonging

Hesitancy often gets a bad reputation. Dictionary definitions of the term describe it as a negative action, a failure to do something (Cambridge Dictionary). It is often perceived as a weakness or a transient state in decision-making and affirmative existence. Hesitancy is defined as a hindrance, reluctance, or lack of willingness or eagerness to do something. It is also attributed because of indecision or uncertainty (Dictionary.com). Dictionary definitions focus on an individual lack of action and certitude. They don't consider the causes for its debilitation or allow room to explore its potential agency. However, there is value in hesitancy that should not go unappreciated. It presents a pregnant place for pause and retrospection; in its multidimensionality as a space, tool,

and response, there is a search for deeper meaning. Hesitancy validates the complexity and transience of belonging tried and tested by migration and displacement.

I consider hesitancy from many angles in this work, and I work with its multiple interpretations. I develop my definition of hesitancy from a literary outlook. In *Hesitant Heroes*, comparative literature and German studies scholar, Theodore Ziolkowski, explores what "hesitations tell us about the nature of heroes" (2). Ziolkowski defines hesitancy "as psychologically motivated, as it uncovers tensions of identity and cultural crisis for the individual that in turn unmask deep-lying crises within society" (2). In his analysis, he makes a connection between hesitancy in action to one's place in the world: "Private hesitation," he argues, "constitutes the fissure through which we enter the public world of […] quite different fictions" (7). Hesitancy here, as a fissure or a rupture, represents a pause or a disruption that reflects a tension in relation to belonging to the world. Through conducting a psychological and social analysis of popular literary heroes, Ziolkowski attempts to expand the understanding of cultural history and the specific periods that brought the narratives forth. In his analysis of hesitancy which he relates to inhibition and repression, Ziolkowski studies the social and psychological conditions that reveal tensions of a personal nature for the heroic characters, but also another layer beyond the narrative itself for the writer and their place in society. My own definition of hesitancy is informed by Ziolkowski's explorations: Hesitancy is psychologically motivated as it uncovers tensions of identity and cultural crisis for the individual that in turn unmask deep-lying crises within society. It is a breaking of a cycle and of continuation that presents moments of "stuckness" and uncertainty that require attention. Hesitancy is a pulling of the past due to the uncertainty of the present moment. It is a lapse between binaries in belonging,

subjectively and to the world writ large. Hesitant belonging can be characterized as the loss or delay in belonging to the world, a key tenet for cosmopolitan belonging. At first glance, the idea of belonging to the world is conflicted, especially for groups who are defined by their rejection by the world, such as refugees and forced migrants. The implications of hospitality and hostility in global belonging are integral here.

Hesitancy can also be seen as a necessary pause or slowing down of action, or even an act of gaining time; within hesitancy there is a crucial negotiation that needs to take place to determine what the next steps should be. Hesitancy is often accompanied by a reaction or certain feeling that causes uncertainty. Relying on feminist and affect theorists' unpacking of negative and complex states such as discomfort, unsteadiness, and uncertainty, I extend the same sort of attention and openness to hesitancy, which— as any dictionary definition will tell you— is synonymous with discomfort and disruption. Judith Butler interrogates the value of grief and mourning as a resource for politics, for understanding "the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself" ("Violence, Mourning, Politics" 19). Grief becomes a critical asset for the evaluation of vulnerability in ourselves and in others. Within this slow process, I argue hesitancy is found, in the critical uncertainty and unknown. This resonates also with what Lauren Berlant describes as the space of impasse: "In the impasse of the transitional present, situations unfold in ongoing crisis" (194). I will elaborate more on the impasse in chapter 7. Hesitancy is necessary in negotiating one's place in the world, in unfolding the ongoing crisis of belonging, because, in line with Butler's thought, one's place is not isolated and bounded. It is linked to grief, to histories of dispossession and displacement. One becomes aware of their own vulnerability, particularly "under certain social and political conditions, especially

those in which violence is a means of life" (18), be it historic, slow, or active violence that mark one and their community. Butler states: "The boundary that contains me is made up by the primary others who are past for me, not only live on in the fiber of the boundary that contains me, but they also haunt the way I am, as it were, periodically undone and open to becoming unbounded" ("Violence, Mourning, Politics" 17). This impasse, this periodical openness and undoneness is where hesitancy takes place. This need for negotiating one's vulnerability and one's position in the world is bound by the past. Brand and Sharpe also describe the surmounting grief of the past situated in the present in *A Map to the Door of No Return* and *In the Wake*, respectively. Saidiya Hartman adds: "We pass through these spaces, and all we have lost, and the long history of our defeat fill us with a grief that is all but unbearable" ("A Room with History").

With this in mind, hesitancy informs my own reading method. I examine and embrace the ambiguity of the present as portrayed in migrant literature, with the aim of delving deeper into it through the lens of hesitancy. Through this hesitant methodological lens, I examine hesitancy's multivalence as space, tool, and response in the novels. Rachelle Chadwick centers politics of discomfort as "a critical [and potentially transformative] dimension of feminist methodologies and research praxis;" this praxis engages with feminist postcolonial and affect theory. Discomfort is conceptualized as involving research strategies that include engaging with 'gut feelings' and embracing interpretive hesitancy, which is the engagement with what is 'epistemically uncertain,' countering comfort and willful ignorance by dwelling on "the sensation(s) of feeling [uneasy, uncertain,] and unsettled, and considering the epistemic and political significance of such feelings for research practices" (15).

Indeed, Chadwick argues that "an ethic of feminist interpretive reticence and hesitancy is a decolonizing methodological logic (drawn from Black, postcolonial, and Indigenous feminist praxis) that involves resisting claims to epistemic authority, reproducing easy coherence and filing (away) the lives, voices, and complex experiences of others into comfortable singularities, homogenizations, and categorizations" (10). This methodology falls under vulnerable feminist methods that "involve a 'receptivity to not knowing and to remaining with uncertainty and hesitancy'" (11). Both Butler and Chadwick's conceptualizations follow what Tiffany Page calls vulnerable methodologies, "in which openness to interpretive uncertainty, ambivalence, and disquiet is foregrounded" (Chadwick 11).

My own attending to hesitancy serves to highlight narratives that resist and challenge historical authority and normative narratives. For this, I spend a lot of time delineating the historical and political conditions that continue to render Palestinian and Black subjects in the diaspora hesitant. Historical accountability and contextualization are part of my methodology, as these are the conditions that lead to the lapse in binaries of belonging that defines my theorization here. The historical losses in conflict with the ambiguous present cause hesitance in belonging. Therefore, understanding the histories of rupture are vital for this project. My methodological use of hesitancy allows me to carefully examine the uncertain present as portrayed in literature and analyze it through the lens of hesitancy. Through this approach, I can identify the state and feeling of hesitancy in characters and illustrate how hesitancy operates as a tool, space, and response.

Both Butler and Chadwick advocate for vulnerability and relationality: Butler argues for the connectedness between humans and the ethical responsibilities we have towards one another,

calling for the recognition of the value of grief and the vulnerability of the other as essential in establishing true equitable international feminist coalitions. Chadwick explores the politics of discomfort (pain, shame, embarrassment, anger, etc.) as a means of countering and resisting the flattening and erasure of differences, specificities, embodied, and affective intensities and ambivalent feelings, recognizing and staying with the affects others have on us. Chadwick conglomerates the messiness and stickiness embodied by hesitance that we shall see is synonymous with the specifically Arab term *qahr,* but more generally to Sara Ahmed's concept of stickiness. Sara Ahmed formulates the particularly useful concept of 'stickiness' to describe how some objects shared and circulated socially "become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 11). Things can be sticky because they are loaded with affect. And sticky things can obviously stick to other things. For Ahmed, there is a '"rippling" effect of emotions; they move sideways through "sticky" associations between signs, figures, and objects (45). Feeling hesitant is sticky, and therefore unclear and complex, as it is charged and often not apparent what makes one pause or hesitate in a specific moment. The causes of hesitation may be apparent, but they may also be unconscious. Ahmed explains that "what is repressed from consciousness is not the feeling as such, but the idea to which the feeling may have been first connected" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 45). This is the "stickiness" that hesitancy embodies.

Due to an affect of unease, being and belonging might become sticky. I theorize hesitancy as a critical asset for the evaluation of vulnerability in issues of belonging, and for the unpacking of the stickiness of contemporary belonging for marginalized cosmopolitans. Hesitancy is a means for unpacking and understanding complex belongings for those impacted

by the trauma(s) of forced migration. Hesitancy is valuable because it allows internal negotiation between diverging decisions. By negotiation, I refer to the deliberation one goes through to understand feelings of belonging; negotiation also means to dwell on and sit with uncertainty that the characters experience. Where Chadwick sits and dwells on the value of discomfort as a research method, and Butler stays with grief, I invite giving hesitancy the same sort of critical attention. In this space of hesitancy, one sits and dwells on the traumatic experiences of forced migration and incurring personal traumas and their impacts, personally and intergenerationally.

Thinking of the connection between trauma and hesitance transitions us from methodology to response. A traumatic experience is tied to vulnerability. Trauma puts one in a vulnerable position, in a constant state of nervous dysregulation and alertness. Coping with trauma is often tethered to dealing with grief and pain. Hesitancy is intertwined with trauma, operating in a feedback loop with trauma. Hesitancy is a response to trauma and a means of coping with it. It is an aid in navigating traumatic memory. This takes form in how one decides to handle the uncertainty and discomfort trauma brings forth, whether that be through shoving the trauma away and moving forward, opting to forget and disassociate with the traumatic event, or whether that is through stagnation and lingering in what Joan Didion calls "the vortex," the space of memory and grief that pulls one away from reality and keeps one stuck in the loss, engaging with the work and the memories it calls up. This could also take shape in wayward[1] living, in rebelling against the confines of an oppressive world and opting to live otherwise, to

---

[1] Saidiya Hartman's notion explored in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019).

drift.[2] Hesitancy connects to errantry[3] as well as to unexpected and discomforting acts and behaviours, covering up or raging against one's trauma.

In my exploratory research, many questions have emerged that will help guide my work. They include the following: What is revealed when transhistorical traumas and familial memories are used to study contemporary belonging? How is belonging impacted by historical, protracted, and ongoing violence and accumulating trauma? How do you belong in the present when the past marks your existence? Finally, how does hesitancy influence belonging to local and global spaces? All these questions help answer the larger question of how we investigate global belonging and personal and transhistorical trauma through the framework of hesitant belonging.

II.   "A Person of the World": Cosmopolitanism and Issues of Belonging

My work takes off from a re-examination of global personhood, which is the basis of cosmopolitanism, which is one form of framing the transnational (Ryan 1230). I take up the concept of belonging found in cosmopolitanism and the implications of belonging to the world, which addresses hospitality and hostility concerning global migration. Recent approaches to studying belonging emphasize the different dimensions of this concept. According to Antonsich, belonging is a combination of intimate experiences of feeling at home in a certain place and politics of belonging (644). The latter refers to the challenges around determining what

---

[2] Kate Lahey and Sonja Boon explore the concept of drifting in "The Impossibility of a Future in the Absence of a Past: Drifting in the In-Between" (2019).

[3] Eduard Glissant's concept explored in *Poetics of Relation* (1997).

is involved in belonging and being a member of such a community. Cosmopolitanism addresses the politics of belonging in the global sphere.

To start with, I will provide an overview of the various aspects of cosmopolitan discourse. The word 'cosmopolitan' derives from the Greek word 'kosmopolites' which translates to "citizen of the world." This definition has been taken up and expanded profusely in diverse modalities of moral and sociopolitical philosophy, to a degree that the base definition of "citizen of the world," has been reimagined as "person of the world." The survey on the development and state of cosmopolitan discourse will show that there is an acknowledgment of the unjust conditions of the world that render many "persons" as opposed to "citizens" of the world.

Cosmopolitanism has been widely adopted to describe various significant perspectives in moral, ethical, cultural, and sociopolitical philosophy. The shared notion in its various conceptualizations is that all humans, regardless of their political and national affiliations, belong to a single global community that should be nurtured. Cosmopolitan spaces have been imagined in numerous ways, from spaces of hospitality and inclusion, such as safe havens and open cities, to political transnational organizations that safeguard people across borders. The concept of cosmopolitanism is often discussed in terms of moral conventions regarding human relationships and responsibilities. It is often founded on the binary notions of sameness and otherness, as well as the individual and the collective. In one popular iteration, cosmopolitanism has been used to denote shared markets, and perhaps most popularly, cosmopolitanism has been employed to signify luxurious and exclusionary lifestyles and cultural expression. Sociologist Craig Calhoun criticizes cosmopolitanism as a means of global governance, due to its usual association with

capitalism and Western hegemony. As cosmopolitanism is theorized from the perspective of those capable of frequent travel, "easily entering and exiting polities and social relations around the world, armed with visa-friendly passports and credit cards" (Calhoun 90), it does not seem capable of reflecting an equitable and diverse notion of what the world is. Instead, most cosmopolitan discourse remains Western-centered, presenting itself as a middle ground between widespread "corporate globalization and reactionary traditionalism of nationalism" (91). Additionally, in "Cosmopolitanism from Below: Universalism as Contestation," James Ingram regards the term cosmopolitanism as "impossible, hyperbolic or paradoxical" (68). Since there is no literal or legal possibility of being "citizens of the world," the term is inevitably void, and "necessarily figurative" (68). Such cosmopolitanism creates a false sense of belonging in the world; where certain groups are accepted and treated hospitably, while others are rejected and subjected to inhospitality as they migrate.

Cosmopolitanism through its extensive and ancient conceptual development and deconstruction has come to encompass opposing definitions, especially when thinking of a universal, shared global community. As a ubiquitous term, it remains abstract and threatens to eradicate difference and nuance. Nevertheless, the notion of "person in the world" is a theoretically rich container of my theorization of hesitant belonging. Since the 1990s, cosmopolitan theorists have examined the question of belonging through the study of colonialism, citizenship and nationalism, migration, refugeehood, ethics, and human rights. Theorists such as Bruce Robbins, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and others address these issues in their explication of what it means to belong to the world, by turning their attention to plural and multiple imaginings of shared community, noting the legitimacy of difference and particularity

22

to universalism. Many recognize the importance of historical suffering and collective trauma in creating global communities.

Still, the prescriptive force in cosmopolitanism remains heavily contested. In *Cosmopolitanisms* (2002), Dipesh Chakrabarty, Carol A. Breckenridge, Homi K. Bhabha, and Sheldon Pollock distinguish between "the cosmopolitanism of our times" and "triumphalist notions of cosmopolitan coexistence" which are negatively linked to late capitalism, enlightenment, modernity, and neoliberalism. Cosmopolitanism as a discipline re-emerges to counternarratives of linearity and historical purity, creating space for the precarious and dispossessed. This form of cosmopolitanism allows unlimited revisiting of the past to uncover varying forms of cosmopolitan interactions and cosmopolitan identities. It participates in archival work, "[giving] way to the plurality of modes and histories" (8). Chakrabarty et al. define cosmopolitans today as "victims of modernity, failed by capitalism's upward mobility, and bereft of those comforts and customs of national belonging. Refugees, peoples of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles represent the spirit of the cosmopolitical community" (6). These groups have been omitted in predominant iterations of cosmopolitanism that regarded the world through the elitist exclusionary universalistic outlook of world citizenship. The shared community of the world is thus associated with suffering; it is a world populated with "the victims of modernity," and those "bereft of those comforts and customs of national belonging." With the number of people displaced around the world only increasing, the suffering of some becomes the suffering of all, not only in a sense of compassion, but also through a growing need for hospitality and welcomeness to aid those left without any sense of locale and are at the mercy of "the cosmopolitical community." "The failure of capitalism's upward mobility" is characterized by

globalizing movements that are more interested in creating grand narratives of false inclusion and unity, leaving many actual victims of forced migration and imperial violence outcasted, and ignored, alienated from the so-called shared community of the world. In addition to this tradition in cosmopolitan discourse, Craig Calhoun approaches cosmopolitanism by focusing on connections between human relationships. Calhoun emphasizes the importance of attachments over detachments, and the idea that our connections to the larger world are varied and incomplete, rather than universal. He highlights the significance of our specific localities, nations, religions, and cultures in shaping our relationships with others and the world, and how our historical circumstances influence these relationships:

> We are connected, but incompletely. We have responsibilities because of our connections, because we are affected by and affect others, not just because of abstract similarities. At the level of both individuals and culture more broadly, we are transformed by the historical processes of social action and interaction; these give us capacities for mutual understanding. (198)

Calhoun categorizes migrants as "agents of interconnection in a global world and sources of multicultural diversity in societies that cannot readily understand themselves as homogeneous" (198). Migrants here represent cosmopolitans not as powerful or privileged, but as actors in globalization, developing varying connections and loyalties to and beyond national boundaries.

Additionally, in *Cosmopolitanisms* (2017), Robbins and Lemos Horta recognize the value of hesitancy in understanding contemporary global belonging and being. They distinguish between new and old cosmopolitanisms, referring to historian David Hollinger's categorization

of "new" cosmopolitanism: "the new cosmopolitanism merely assumes that wherever and whenever history has set peoples in transnational motion, sometimes very forcibly, it is to be expected that many of them and their descendants will show signs of hybrid identity and interestingly divided loyalty" (1). They make the point to assert that cosmopolitanism discourse has been utilized to describe "substantial social collectivities, often nonelite collectivities that had cosmopolitanism thrust upon them by traumatic histories of dislocation and dispossession" (3). They assert that "cosmopolitanism can be defined as any one of many possible modes of life, thought, and sensibility produced when commitments and loyalties are multiple and overlapping, none of them necessarily trumping the others" (3). The plurality afforded to Cosmopolitanism mirrors the multivalency I afford to hesitancy. Robbins and Lemos Horta situate hesitation as a feature of new cosmopolitanism, specifically in declaring loyalties and affirming belonging. Cosmopolitans in their openness and ambiguity adhere to positive as well as negative forces of attachment and detachment, respectively.

My theorization of hesitancy builds on cosmopolitan rhetoric by considering the nuances that complicate belonging in our interconnected world. Significant to my work is this mention of cosmopolitanism being "thrust upon" collectives," due to "traumatic histories of dislocation and dispossession," because my project interrogates cosmopolitanism due to force, a result of being thrust into the world, beyond the home in a violent and traumatic manner that impacts and continues to impact people. Understanding the world and those who belong to it through the perspective of the vulnerable, new cosmopolitanisms set the stage for my analysis of how such actors experience belonging. Furthermore, the discrepancy between the definitions of cosmopolitans as elite and marginalized subjects merits a closer examination of how migrant

bodies exist in such hesitant spaces. How do those not afforded the hospitality of cosmopolitanism navigate the world they are forced into? My framework of hesitant belonging commits to such an examination, paying attention to hesitancy as a space, tool, and response. The contrast between elite and marginalized cosmopolitans highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of how migrant beings belong in a world they are forced into, which is what the framework of hesitant belonging examines.

My expansion on cosmopolitanisms here serves to contextualize the complex terms "world," "community," "being," and "belonging" that will be utilized throughout this work. Moreover, ideations of a shared world raise questions about what definition of the "world" cosmopolitanism ascribes to. Is the world, simply part of the binary of nation/world, local/global? Or is it the economic world of free trade? Is it the world of Eurocentric Western hegemony, or does it actually include all, equitably? Indeed, As Lisa Lowe points out, cosmopolitan theories have not always accounted for how "over the course of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, liberal and colonial discourses improvised racial terms for the non-European peoples whom settlers, traders, and colonial personnel encountered" (Lowe 7-8). The fact that cosmopolitan theories do not always satisfactorily engage with those colonial hauntings leaves them vulnerable to accusations of neoliberalism from critics like Lisa Lowe, Saidiya Hartman, Saree Makdisi, Edward Said, Paul Gilroy. Lisa Lowe critiques liberal universalism as a colonial and Euro-centric approach: "Even as it proposes inclusivity, liberal universalism effects principles of inclusion and exclusion; in the very claim to define humanity, as a species or as a condition, its gestures of definition divide the human and the nonhuman, to classify the normative and pathologize deviance" (16). Lowe's point aligns with critics of cosmopolitan

universalism like Calhoun and Ingram who expose the exclusionary reality in the supposedly inclusive project of world hospitality. In *Cruel Optimism*, Laura Berlant describes how liberal-capitalist society offers opportunities for people to establish mutually beneficial relationships that appear fair and encourage them to create a meaningful life and construct safety nets for themselves. However, the optimistic and universalistic ideals of cosmopolitans often create unrealistic fantasies that eventually unravel, leading to feelings of distress, disconnection, and anxiety. In this dissertation, "the world" is understood as the world plagued by neo-liberality, globalization, and capitalism. "The world" is undoubtedly marked by Western hegemony, imperial legacies, and colonial hauntings.

The novels of migrant writers in this dissertation confront the enduring legacies of imperialism and colonialism. In her writing, Susan Abulhawa directly addresses the responsibilities of "the world" towards Palestinians, rendering the global community loveless, hostile, and wilfully ignorant of the violence committed against Palestinians. Yaa Gyasi portrays the globalizing connection between the economy of chattel slavery and the outsourcing of Africans to the West. Still, within and despite the dominant "world," there is the world that migrants and refugees carve out within these hegemonic centers. The mainstream world conditions the spaces afforded to migrant bodies, but they in turn create their own spaces of acceptance, of love, and of resistance. Abulhawa emphasizes Palestinian spaces of love and belonging even in the trenches of militant and violent occupation. Gyasi also opens windows into the lives of Black subjects finding tenderness and belonging amidst a hostile reality. Migrant writers and subjects craft hesitant spaces that have these qualities of love, resistance, belonging, and tenderness to counter the historical and ongoing violence of belonging to the world. In this

dissertation, the novels I use as case studies serve the purpose of historical revision, incorporating counter-narratives that defy clean-cut, white-washed historical accounts. The characters I categorize as persons of the world are victims of modernity; they and their descendants make their way through more-or-less hostile and broken worlds.

This project uses cosmopolitanism as a launchpad only, to present questions of belonging to the world in the context of those victimized by colonialism and globalization. Cosmopolitanism today has shifted its approach from above to below; the concept aligns itself with migrant and diasporic experiences, which will be centered moving forward as I explore why belonging is fraught and fluid in the world, and therefore hesitant and in constant need of negotiation. I situate my analyses in the context of the negative forces of migration through the study of characters directly impacted by colonization, slavery, war, and displacement. They are vulnerable cosmopolitans, victims of forced migrations.

III.   Traumatic Inheritances and Affective Experiences

New cosmopolitanism theorists establish that traumatic histories and inheritances of dislocation and dispossession are part of the composition of marginalized cosmopolitans. Traumatic experiences of forced migration have a profound impact on an individual's sense of belonging, resulting in hesitancy. This trauma has both short-term and long-term effects that extend across generations and geographical boundaries. Hesitancy is manifested in those who have directly or indirectly experienced trauma and are still impacted by its memory. The relationship between trauma and hesitancy is two-way: trauma causes hesitancy, and hesitancy, in return, allows for

the unpacking and potential healing of trauma. This relationship represents what I call response in my three-dimensional hesitancy thesis.

To ground my study of trauma in hesitancy, I turn to trauma studies. I begin with Cathy Caruth, who is a formative and distinctly influential theorist in trauma studies. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth defines trauma as an "overwhelming experience of sudden and catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Ward 4). According to Caruth, the effects of trauma are not immediately noticeable. She defines trauma as a psychological injury that takes time to manifest itself, often through flashbacks, nightmares, and repetitive actions of the survivors (Caruth 3-4). Trauma is not limited to the initial violent or traumatic event, but rather is experienced as a resurfaces of unprocessed emotions and memories that continue to affect the survivor later on. While she sets the parameters of how trauma seeps into the unconscious and impacts individuals' post-event, Caruth neglects the intergenerational implications of trauma or societal conditions that could cause or contribute to trauma. Instead, she regards traumatic experiences as non-representational, apolitical, and ahistorical, and the traumatized subjects as being passive and amnesic.

To support my argument, I rely on trauma scholars who engage with genealogy and culture. In *Trauma, A Genealogy*, Ruth Leys counters the notion of linearity in understanding trauma and takes a genealogical approach to understand the afterlives and lingering impacts of traumatic events. Such an approach has been adopted in historical and cultural studies that explore the continuous effects of culturally and historically significant traumas in history such as the Black Atlantic Slave Trade and the Palestinian exodus of 1948. Saidiya Hartman and

Christina Sharpe theorize the afterlives of slavery and the wake, respectively, as means of capturing the ongoing legacies of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and chattel slavery in North America. Lila Abu Lughod and Ahmad Sadi position the mass displacement of Palestinians in 1948 and the creation of the state of Israel as a catastrophic and melancholic event that continues to mark Palestinian subjects globally. These theorists help me refine my arguments on hesitant belonging in specific historical contexts, as I will show more clearly in chapters two and five.

The genealogical and transhistorical traumatic markers I mention above have significant impacts on individuals in their modern time, as they carry histories and realities of traumas into their contemporary lives. Such subjects carry hesitancy with them into the present, belonging in a state of ambivalence. While it might seem suitable to diagnose such individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder, I argue that what they experience is deeper than what this diagnosis offers. Experiencing hesitance is complex in that it is not in the post; it is a reaction to a reality of unbelonging that the person must navigate. According to the DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria for PTSD, a person with post-traumatic stress disorder is someone who has been exposed to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence. Based on the criteria, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, learning about a loved one's traumatic experience, or repeated exposure to unpleasant details of the traumatic event. PTSD can cause a range of symptoms, including intrusive thoughts, avoidance of triggers related to the trauma, negative changes in mood and thinking, and significant changes in arousal and reactivity. These symptoms usually occur after the traumatic event has taken place. However, a PTSD diagnosis can be inapt in describing the trauma faced by those experiencing continuous traumatic events without reprieve, as in times of war, or under military

occupation. Samah Jabr, the head of the Palestinian Authority's mental health unit, questions

whether PTSD is a suitable term to describe what Palestinians go through as Palestinians "have

never been in the 'post'" (Pietromarchi). PTSD is a complicated term to employ when talking

about groups that continue to experience and witness violence. There is a hesitance therefore in

applying PTSD as a diagnosis when talking about the ongoing state of suffering in one's world.

Yes, there are direct traumatic incidents that one survives but is tortured by, but the slow

violence of accumulated transhistorical trauma, leads to ambivalence for both Palestinians and

descendants of the Black Atlantic.

This insight especially cautions us about scholarship that attempts to universalize

Eurocentric experiences and strategies for coping and defining trauma. Perhaps a wider net of

experiences should be considered within the context of the colonial and postcolonial worlds.

Abigail Ward cautions against "the politics and ethics of writing from the West about non-

Western peoples, and [the] psychological approaches to postcolonialism [that] have often been

dismissed for their perceived Eurocentrism" (Ward 6). Rosemary Sayigh criticizes the omission

of colonialism as a cause of contemporary world suffering by established Western-centered

theorists such as Caruth (Sayigh 54). Especially in addressing the traumas of Palestinians, "the

persistent association of trauma studies and Holocaust histories" proves to be extremely

frustrating to Palestinians (Ward 6). Sayigh argues in turn that the Nakba (Palestinian exodus in

1948) has been absent from the trauma genre which "reinforces the marginalization of

Palestinian claims to justice […] contribut[ing] to the failure to reach an equitable settlement"

(58). Indeed, much of trauma theory scholarship can be traced back to Holocaust testimony,

literature, and history. Stef Craps criticizes the field of trauma theory for its narrow focus on the

traumatic experiences of individuals in Western, hegemonic, and wealthy nations. This limited

perspective fails to account for traumas experienced by marginalized groups such as

"postcolonial indigenous groups and disempowered racial and diasporic groups living in Western

countries" (Craps 3) and non-Western communities and nations. Moreover, Eurocentric trauma

scholarship tends to overlook systemic conditions that enable traumatic abuse. Hegemonic

definitions of trauma have also been criticized for being culturally insensitive and exclusionary,

with charges of cultural imperialism leveled against the uncritical cross-cultural application of

Western trauma concepts in the context of international humanitarian disaster relief programs.

To establish cross-cultural understandings of survivors' traumas, normative trauma theory ought

to expand its outreach. Furthermore, it must consider the relationship between First and Third

World traumas, as well as trauma nuances and experiences that differ from what Eurocentric

trauma theory identifies as trauma aesthetics and conditions. Craps argues that "by narrowly

focusing on the level of the individual psyche, one tends to leave unquestioned the conditions

that enabled the traumatic abuse, such as political oppression, racism, or economic domination"

(28). Examples of postcolonial violence are illustrated in my case study texts.

Accounting for colonial and postcolonial violence that instantiates trauma and hesitancy

is crucial for recognizing and developing an understanding of the nuanced and multiple

representations of traumatic experiences and how they occur and develop. Abigail Ward and Stef

Craps study traumatic experiences in the postcolonial world. Abigail Ward states that "there is

not one homogeneous postcolonial trauma, such as a unified trauma of colonization; rather,

scholars studying postcolonial traumas must be attentive to the specifics of location, historical

and cultural contexts, and concerned with past, current, and even future traumas" (8).

Postcolonial trauma supports the continuation of historic traumas in the present, or what Edward Said has called an "uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms" (*Culture and Imperialism* 1). Stef Craps advocates for a new approach to trauma theory from a postcolonial perspective. He emphasizes the need to move beyond the "trauma culture" of spectacle and sentimentality towards a more nuanced understanding of loss, trauma, and mourning. This requires an awareness of the social and historical contexts in which trauma narratives are produced and received, and the diverse strategies of representation and resistance that these contexts invite or necessitate. Such an awareness strengthens one's understanding of the world; it also informs the self which in this subjective study of belonging is important as I study belonging through the lens of individual subjects represented by characters.

Michelle Balaev identifies "the transformation of the self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and world" (150) as an essential element of unpacking trauma. Balaev acknowledges the play between self and world; with a rupture, a traumatic event that inevitably impacts and transforms an individual, there is inevitable negotiation and alteration in how one views oneself as well as the world. Especially when one becomes aware of the violence the world inflicts, it becomes difficult to feel welcome in it. As one navigates an inhospitable world, the self also changes. In the case of forced migration, or exile – in its most generalized definition— one's sense of being and belonging is uncertain and open to redefining. One is hesitant to belong while also aching to find belonging.

This is where my thesis on hesitant belonging connects insights from trauma theory, cosmopolitanism, and postcolonial studies. Those forced to migrate due to a traumatic event may suffer from PTSD; their descendants who learn of the trauma experiences by their family, friend, or community member may also experience PTSD. But what about those who are a few generations detached from directly experiencing colonial traumas and still witness the continuing violence against people who look like them or come from or live in the same ancestral land? Is the unease and melancholia they experience a form of PTSD, or is it something else? This is where the trauma of forced migration takes on an affective aspect; in Arabic, the term *qahr*, is apt in describing the generational impacts and imprints of collective trauma and suffering. Author Saeed Teebi describes *qahr* as "the feeling of being overwhelmed by injustice. It's a desolate, frustrated, unsolvable feeling" (Teebi). Blogger Khadija Muhaisen Dajani adds:

> It is when you take anger, place it on a low fire, add injustice, oppression, racism, dehumanization to it, and leave it to cook slowly for a century. And then you try to say it, but no one hears you. So, it sits in your heart. And settles in your cells. And it becomes your genetic imprint. And then moves through generations. And one day, you find yourself unable to breathe. It washes over you and demands to break out of you. You weep. And the cycle repeats. (@khadijaadventures)

This feeling of *qahr* is what occurs when injustice is rooted long-term, encompassing several generations, and amassing the feelings of anger, sadness, and frustration, beyond PTSD. This, I argue, is where hesitancy comes in and nuances trauma; in facing the slow burn of injustice cross-generationally, hesitancy nuances one's relationship to trauma of forced migration and ongoing violence and suffering. As individuals coming from displacement navigate the world

that continues to oppress their people and potentially them as well through silencing and threatening, there is hesitancy in navigating the collective past and present. My examination of hesitancy through the nuancing of affective experiences and traumatic inheritance paves a way in which belonging in the world can be better understood. I articulate the multiple valences of the value of hesitancy as a means of belonging; through defining it as a product of and protection against trauma. Hesitancy is a space, a tool, and a response. It is dual response to trauma as a product and protection. Hesitancy is what happens when the individual or collective is in the midst of trauma; hesitancy also happens in the afterlife of a traumatic event; of displacement. Hesitant belonging is informed by traumatic memory and ongoing oppression.

IV.   The Impasse: Hesitancy in the Ongoing Present

My theorization of hesitant belonging builds on moments of hesitance in the present that are tied to the past and the future. I present hesitant belonging subjectively, and it is quite nuanced, differing for each individual and often adding more complications than resolving uncertainties. Feeling belonging is never static; by engaging in work that calls for thinking about feeling and not feeling belonging, I invite complications and analyses that challenge what is often described as universal and therefore expected. Experience is always unique and never universal, trauma is always unique and never universal; there may be patterns that help more abstractly and generally understand an experience, but nuance prevails. My study of the world right now, or the now as presented in the novels, is informed by Lauren Berlant's understanding of "the ongoing present;" which she calls "the impasse." Berlant defines the present as "a place where pasts are spatialized among many elsewheres that converge in the sensorium of the people feeling out the conditions of their historical scene" (Berlant 17). Again, my definition of hesitancy is categorized by a

symbiotic relation between the past and the present in relation to the future. The present is undoubtedly informed by the past, which in turn impacts the decisions made for the future. In the varying novels, the authors present moments in the characters' lives, where they must confront the past in their present moment, before deciding about the future. Berlant also views the present as "overdetermined by way of anachronism" (17); anachronism is the plague of hesitant belonging, history, and the collective and inherited remembrance of it, marks the characters sense of being and belonging in the present.

V.   In-betweenness: Hesitancy and Migration

One of the ways I perceive hesitancy is as a cause for the sense of in-betweenness that halts solidified connections to places as well as to the world. While I do agree that attachments and detachments are evident in persons of the world, I argue that they differently develop a sense of in-betweenness in belonging that becomes more apparent when looking at the generational impacts of detachment. Therefore, the experience and legacy of traumas of forced migration are thus critical components of understanding and living in the shared world. To understand hesitancy in this context inevitably involves understanding trauma's particular impacts on individuals, or in my case studies, the characters who are victims and descendants of victims.

In this hybrid and divided environment of cosmopolitanism, hesitancy becomes only natural, especially in navigating one's sense of belonging. The expansion of what cosmopolitanism entails connects the field very intimately with transnational migration and globalization, where, as Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt explain, "the ways in which identity and experience are disconnected from space and transcend national boundaries" are studied

(259). Migration is also connected to social trauma; the conditions that render people as refugees and forced migrants are traumatic in and of themselves, and the way people are treated in the transit or target countries can also be traumatic and can leave "transgenerational traces in post-traumatic and attachment disorders, uprootedness and loss of social and political confidence" (Hamburger, Hancheva, Özcürümez, Stankovic, Tutnjevic). Sara Ahmed implores that we must be mindful of the "real and substantive differences" in the histories and therefore conditions of migration. In "Home and Away," Ahmed inquires: "what different effect does [migration] have on identity when one is forced to move? Does one ever move freely? What movements are possible and, moreover, what movements are impossible? Who has a passport and can move there? Who does not have a passport, and yet moves?" ("Home and Away" 332). These provocative questions echo Avtar Brah's inquiry when she asks: "The question is not simply about who travels, but when, how, and under what circumstances?" (Brah 182). Ahmed and Brah's interrogations of the conditions of movement, specifically forced migration, open up the cosmopolitan debate of who and how one belongs.

To further the unpack the tensions of in-betweenness, attachment, and belonging, hesitancy becomes a necessary ambivalence. Using the word "ambivalence" resounds with postcolonial theorization starting with Homi K. Bhabha, who understands this sort of hesitation as ambivalence within the context of the relationship between the colonizing and colonial subjects. In "Spectral Sovereignty, Vernacular Cosmopolitans, and Cosmopolitan Memories," Homi K. Bhabha presents three snapshots of cosmopolitanisms: the first is "spectral sovereignty," the second is "vernacular cosmopolitans," and the third is of "cosmopolitan memories," which constitute a complex temporal layering of memory that sees the past in

conflict with the future, caught between a "double time frame" in which the injustices and negative politics of the past are confronted with an impatient project of progress. Bhabha examines these memories through literary representations in postcolonial fiction. He situates postcolonial traumas in cosmopolitan realities, exploring the friction between time and space— which, in turn, impact being and belonging. The "double time frame" is the space of negotiation I situate in moments of hesitancy. The representations I focus on reveal the complexity of contemporary belonging where the past is often at odds with one's present and future. This indeed creates a sense of ambivalence for many of the characters. Ambivalence is present in this space of in-betweenness. In all four of the novels to be studied, the connection to homes and the world at large is best described as ambivalent; complicated by the violences of history and the dejection of constant displacement and scattering.

I now move on to examine these quandaries of belonging more specifically in the Black and Palestinian Diasporas. I look at belonging in the context of migrant/ diasporic/ scattered communities and how such belonging relates to belonging to and in the world; therefore, feeling belonging is often impacted by othering and rejection as well as shame and grief. My analysis of hesitation attends to both structural historical oppressions and to affect. Both collective oppression and personal affect interweave in how one assesses their changing sense of being and belonging in the world. In the novels, I follow the affects the characters exhibit in making sense of the world. In addition, there is a desire for belonging which is explored in relation to forming community, solidarity, and return. The focus on forced migration intricates belonging as it attaches it to rupture, discomfort, and trauma.

VI.   Belonging in Diasporas

Diaspora theory productively brings together attention to structural oppression, collective affect, and liminality and offers further theoretical purchase for my hesitancy thesis. As I explore hesitancy in relation to belonging to homelands and new lands, I examine what diasporic belonging means. To talk about diasporas in general, is to talk about "the scattering of a people across different lands and countries and languages" (Chude-Sokei). Edwidge Danticat, quoting the Haitian journalist and radio commentator, Jean Dominique, defines diaspora members as "people with their feet planted in both worlds" (51). This sense of in-betweenness and splitting within the migrant subject has both geographically and mentally been extensively theorized by postcolonial and transnational cultural scholars, such as Homi Bhabha, presenting "a disjunctive temporality" (*The Location of Culture* 177), an unresolvable ambiguity, and "double consciousness" (Du Bois) as ways of understanding the cosmopolitan, migrant reality.

Central in this reality is the idea of home and its multiple imaginings as they relate to questions of belonging and return. Indeed, diaspora embodies the subtext of "home." The concept of diaspora implies distance and a connection between the "home" of the diaspora and the "home" that is the origin. According to Avtar Brah, the diaspora, as the space of migration evokes the "traumas of separation and dislocation," but it can also act as "the sites of hope and new beginnings" (190). Diasporas "are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure" (190). The contestations and reconfigurations of diaspora also carry a reassessment of the meaning of "home." Avtar Brah interrogates the positionality of home and presents the frameworks for conceptualizing "home" in the diaspora: "On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic

imagination. In this sense, it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality" (Brah 188-89). "Home" here is described similarly to formulations of identity which are continuously plural and in process, even when they appear as fixed; "home" is also quite subjective for its interpretations are informed by "political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging'" (189). To lay claim to a "home" often implies inclusion and belonging; however, in the case of diaspora, exclusion may be critical in the formation of these communities away from the homeland. People in diasporas may cling to imaginary formulations of "home" when they experience social exclusions in their new locales, so "feeling at home" and "staking claim to a place as one's own," may be out of reach; thus, leaving "home" as a farfetched desire, or conceptualizing "home" through cultural belonging instead of physical belonging. Brah shows how homing desires for diaspora communities vary based on the history and conditions of a particular diaspora: "The problematic of 'home' and belonging may be integral to the diasporic condition, but how, when, and in what form questions surface, or how they are addressed, is specific to the history of a particular diaspora. Not all diasporas inscribe homing desire through a wish to return to a place of 'origin'" (189). Furthermore, "home" may be constituted based on historical displacement, migrations, and mobilities in general, away from essentialist claims of belonging to a fixed home: "The *concept* of diaspora places the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, *inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins*" (189). So far, I have built up the argument about the importance of home for belonging that in turn is the grounds for my argument on hesitancy.

The concept of the "unhomely" assists in grasping the discomfort in diasporic being, the relocation of home in the world, and the renegotiation of belonging. Homi Bhabha introduces the concept of "unhomely" to represent the "estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world" (*The Location of Culture* 13), complicating the relation between home and world. Bhabha takes the condition of displacement, that has flung so many into transnational living, into account questioning belonging in and outside of homes and negotiating one's place in the world: "In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (*The Location of Culture* 13). Bhabha also includes the descriptor of "stranger," a common feeling that many in exile and diaspora relate to. Cosmopolitan subjects also identify as strangers in the world. In *Lose Your Mother,* Hartman defines the slave as the stranger: "those outside of the web of kin and clan relationships, non-members of the polity, foreigners and barbarians at the outskirts of their country, and lawbreakers expelled from society" (5).

The concept of the "unhomely" complicates conceptualizations of "home," as "home" becomes a political space that situates the political in the personal and the world in the home, forever disrupting traditional binary divisions between home and world. In the case of the migrant, the displaced, and the refugee, the idea of "home" is inevitably disrupted and attached to the public through social and collective memory and trauma. "Home" cannot exist without "unhoming", without "negotiating the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites" (13), connecting the "wider disjunctions of political existence" to "the traumatic ambivalences of a personal psychic history" (15). Bhabha's concept of "un-homely" is the bringing forth of historic traumas and exclusions into the conceptualization of "home". The

"unhomely" describes the tension in my hesitancy dynamic; pulling of the past is the weight of

historic traumas and inclusions that cause hesitancy in the present and thus influence future

actions.

These varying desires for home are reflected in the two Diasporas interrogated in this

dissertation. With Palestine, there is a strong desire for a return to the homeland with displaced

subjects holding close to tangible memorabilia of home such as birth certificates, passports, and

keys to homes left behind. In contrast perhaps, ideations of home when understanding the Black

Diaspora connect to "homelessness" and the estrangement in the "unhomely"—where one

belongs to neither the land of origin nor to the place they settle in—and an inability to return to a

fixed home. Brand describes the experience of the Black Diaspora as one emptied of fixed

origins, with the door of no return acting as a symbol of loss and forgetting that offers no

answers or fulfillments of homing desires: "If we return to the door it is to retrieve what was left,

to look at it — even if it is an old sack, threadbare with time, empty itself of meaning" (*A Map to

the Door of No Return* 94). Saidiya Hartman describes the sense of estrangement in losing one's

home, one's past: "Being a stranger concerns not only matters of familiarity, belonging, and

exclusion but as well involves a particular relation to the past. If the past is another country, then

I am its citizen. I am the relic of an experiment most preferred not to remember, as if the sheer

will to forget could settle or decide the matter of history" (*Lose Your Mother* 17-18). The

estrangement in the "unhomely" is in tension with any ideations of belonging and homing in the

context of Diaspora, creating unease and discomfort. That hesitancy prevails here is an

acknowledgement of historical traumas and social exclusions that shape our understanding of

what it means to belong. Furthermore, Christina Sharpe writes of Black being and belonging in

the wake; one meaning for "the wake" is the ongoing disaster of transatlantic slavery that continues to disrupt and devastate the lives of Black subjects everywhere (14). Saidiya Hartman offers up the concept of "afterlife of slavery" in describing Black being in the Diaspora which entails "skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment" (6). To be in the Black Diaspora, explains Dionne Brand, is to live in the "inexplicable space" (21) of in-betweenness among the past and the present, always haunted by "the door", the middle passage, and the impossibility of return. The Black Diaspora's ethos, which both Sharpe and Brand explore, is conditioned by experiences and histories of colonialism, enslavement, systematic oppression, racial othering, and violence that complicate being and belonging to any place and the world beyond. Joy, resilience, and resistance also mark the Black Diasporic experience as traditions, customs, and communities continue to exist and grow despite the colonial project's attempt to erase and eradicate. *At The Full and Change of the Moon* interrogates the Black Diaspora in the Caribbean, Europe, and in North America; *Homegoing* accounts for historical forced migrations within Ghana and to the U.S.A. Where *Homegoing* clearly identifies a homeland and point of origin that is lost, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* follows the persistent sense of homelessness experienced by the descendants of enslaved people and the ambivalent desire for an impossible return. The encompassing term of Black Diaspora here incorporates the Caribbean Diaspora in *At The Full and Change of the Moon* and the Ghanian Diaspora and African Americans in *Homegoing.*

As for the Palestinian Diaspora, it is important to talk of the exodus, *Nakba* (catastrophe), settler-colonialism, and ongoing *shatat* (scattering). Hala Alyan describes Palestine as fracturing and haunting; to her, the Palestinian Diaspora is a "rupture of identity," continuously broken,

exiled and dislocated no matter where one resides. Yasir Suleiman writes of the Palestinian

Diaspora as a condition resulting from bitter necessity, with its members "agonisingly scattered

around the world," since the Nakba in 1948 and other significant dates for loss, "all within living

memory" (4). The Palestinian Diaspora is attached to an existing homeland, Palestine, and is

constructed in relation to national belonging and being through experiences of exile and

dispersion, resistance and defeat, and desires for return. *Salt Houses* features Palestine as the

disturbing and disrupted past, while *Against the Loveless World* centers it as the forever

homeland.

With disrupted belonging, there is anguish that needs to be resolved or at least

understood, and what I argue for is that this anguish is related to history, to familial and passed

down cultural trauma. The examples I provide show how hesitant belonging manifests

intergenerationally and collectively in relation to Palestinian displacement and in the afterlives of

slavery. I will now explain why I use literary analysis to apply my theory of hesitant belonging.

VII.   Contemporary Transnational Intergenerational Fiction

Hesitancy is beneficial in describing ways of belonging in our geopolitical, war-torn,

transnational real world. It provides a nuanced lens into understanding how historical traumas

impact contemporary belonging. I use fiction to highlight how hesitancy informs our

understanding of complicated belonging. Literature serves as a powerful tool for exploring and

dissecting social experiences of oppression, trauma, and displacement. Fiction offers up a space

to provide multiple perspectives on the variety of human responses to shock and trauma (Vickroy

130). Laurie Vickroy explains that "trauma is located within the dynamic process of feeling,

remembering, assimilating, and recovering from the experience" (131). By depicting traumatic events and survivors' varying experiences of reliving, coping, and living with such events, fiction offers up an honest platform for unpacking the past, or as author, Isabella Hammad puts it: "Fiction unbuttons the constraints of history: in fiction you can inhabit the past more freely, imaginatively" (Hammad). In the four novels, characters reckon with the historical past and respond to trauma differently; some opt for silence, while others opt to talk about and share their stories in an effort to heal. The authors also choose to portray trauma through feeling, remembrance, assimilation, and rebellion, adhering to the reality that trauma and traumatic recollection do not occur in a singular manner and vary for each character. In representing intergenerational trauma, the authors craft subtle depictions of inherited, historical events and actions that lead to disarray and confusion varyingly impacting the characters. Moreover, the authors engage with world-making through ambivalence. Their protagonists are faulty human beings. Their hesitance is evident as they doubt and deliberate in the ongoing present: they suffer from guilt, shame, and pride. They experience political emotions, and are political bodies, regardless of their ambivalence towards politics. The novels portray complicated realities, showing how colonial, postcolonial, gender, and class experiences distress belonging.

Through literary depictions, marginalized individuals are given a voice and perspective, which can challenge dominant historical and social narratives. This is particularly important for those who have been dispossessed, as their narratives often counteract the erasure of their history. Andrea Davis explains that Black female writers have utilized narrative to not only counter erasure, but to celebrate and elevate Black existence, positioning Black migrants as migrant "interlocutors and wayfarers" who offer thinking that counters that of the nation on the

Black experience (Andrea Davis 33). By exploring the traumas of forced migration, the narratives resonate globally, as they uncover the hidden realities of how violent and disruptive events can seep into generations of unsettled existence.

Through examining these unique accounts, I identify patterns and reactions that emerge to connect global experiences of catastrophe and unbelonging. This connection, however, should not be mistaken for a universal blending of traumatic experiences, as each individual, community, family, and diaspora has adapted to their own nuanced experiences of suffering and survival. Rather, these narratives provide a common ground for resistance and improvement, through care work and empathy. Transnational intergenerational narratives center new cosmopolitan characters, those who have been failed by modernity and capitalism (Chakrabarty et al. 6). Such narratives challenge the connotations of belonging and examine the hesitancies and uncertainties in navigating one's affiliations, whether they are familial, national, or collective. The writers of the four novels to be studied weave family trees through their narratives, foregrounding their stories of migration in violent ruptures that lead to generational displacement and devastation. The characters bear witness to the realities and hauntings of war, diaspora, and immigration.

The four novels all question the implications of belonging. They contrast each other in how they negotiate their characters' hesitancies: in all cases, there is uncertainty and discomfort brought on by the ruptures of history and lineage that are uncomfortably laid out for the reader. These chosen works of fiction depict transhistorical traumas and familial memories in the narrative, thus creating a linearity in their explorations of contemporary belonging. By depicting the long-term impacts of catastrophic events such as the Nakba and the Black Atlantic Slave

Trade, these works create links between uncertain belonging in the present and the legacies of community-devastating forced migrations in the past.

In my research, I employ an affective methodology that looks at "the emotional" to understand global politics. This methodology involves closely analyzing the characters and narrative structures of the texts I study. Through this analysis, I aim to highlight how each text contributes to my thesis on hesitant belonging in unique ways. In each chapter, I examine a different aspect of hesitancy that impacts belonging through the characters in the novels and their navigation of their worlds. By focusing on character analysis, I explore the emotional experiences of individuals as they interact with their surroundings, objects, experiences, and memories. Additionally, I examine the narrative structures to understand the role of generational storytelling with multiple narrators, perspectives, and writing styles. This exploration raises questions about the structure of the chapters, the connections between different time periods and characters, and the revelations of relationships and hauntings within the narratives. Furthermore, character analysis provides me with a valuable perspective to delve into and comprehend the tensions that shape hesitancies in time and place. To understand the ambivalence that characters experience in their worldly situations, I analyze their environmental conditions, their connections to previous generations, and the factors that have led them to this moment of uncertainty depicted in the text.

Thus far, I have established the framework that informs the concept of "hesitant belonging," which launches from an inquiry in cosmopolitan studies but breaks away to delve deeper into issues of belonging. In developing my own definition of hesitancy, I have opened the limitations of hesitancy to encase various affective experiences and trauma responses to

complicate the conditions of hesitancy. Furthermore, I have justified my choices of literary texts as well as elaborated on my reading methodology. In the sections to come, I present an important historical and cultural account of Palestinian and Black Transnationalism before conducting careful and thoughtful readings of each of the novels with a focus on hesitant belonging. I present these historical and cultural accounts to foreground the issues that accumulate and add to what I theorize as hesitant reactions, spaces, and tools. Hesitant belonging is nuanced by the specific histories that lead to a people's migration and displacement, which is why in my study of hesitant belonging within the context of Palestinian and Black Transnational literature, I delineate the histories and realities of these two groups' movements, at least one of which most people actively ignore or are ignorant of.

Chapter 2: Hesitant Belonging in the Palestinian Diaspora

I.   **Introduction**

What does it mean to be Palestinian and to belong in the world? This question often perplexes me as a scholar of Palestine and as a neighbour to Palestine. Palestine has been under settler-occupation since 1948; millions of Palestinians have been forced to migrate, and generations have never been back. Still, Palestinian sovereignty and right of existence is often contested in today's world. Canadian-Palestinian author, Saeed Teebi writes in October 2023: "To be Palestinian is to constantly have basic facts of your existence disfigured or denied" (Teebi). Teebi voices *qahr*, which is *the* frustration and defeatist feeling of injustice that Palestinians. Palestinian identity is often left as an existential question. Do Palestinians have a place in our world? Do they belong? For generations now, Palestinian descendants scattered around the world have had to hold on to an identity that is criticized and condemned globally. In what is to come, I consider hesitancy in relation to Palestinian belonging. I generalize Palestinians, but focus mainly on third, fourth generation Palestinians born and raised outside of Palestine/Israel. I identify significant dates in Palestinian contemporary history to build an understanding of the issues and terms that are significant for Palestinian identification and belonging.

When one speaks of Palestinians, context matters. Palestinians are Indigenous to Palestine and the land. However, due to the large-scale forced migration of Palestinians, they are often only thought of as refugees and immigrants, displaced to other geographies in the region or elsewhere. 1948 is known as the year of catastrophe and rupture. For Palestinians, this year is a key date not only because of the tragic events which took place then but also because it marked

the conclusion of a process of expulsion considered to substantiate a nation's disappearance, rendering it perpetually displaced. 'Palestine' could no longer stand on its own; it would be accompanied by an affix always: 'the Palestinian question,' 'the Palestinian issue,' 'situation,' etc. The expulsion that occurred led to the scattering of Palestinians in the region and globally, developing a specific migrant identity unique to Palestinians.

The following section will elaborate on the significant historical dates of Palestinian dispossession that continue to mark Palestinians globally today. This part will also examine the critical shifts in Palestinian identity as a nation of resistance and as a global Diaspora. The novels effectively challenge the suppression of dominant historical and colonial narratives and actively advocate for the resurgence of Palestinian voices and ideas, both from within Palestine and the diaspora. Palestinian identity has been both remarkably consistent and resilient, but also adaptable and shifting as historical forces impinge on the people. This Palestinian identity, and its shaping by historical experiences, is what is passed down through generations. I frame my explanation of Palestinian being in six categories that have characterized and added to this identity: Before the Nakba, the Catastrophe, Scattering and Rupture, Diaspora, Return, and Belonging. I use the same terminology in my discussion of Black Transnationalism in the subsequent section. In understanding contemporary belonging and the hesitancy that accompanies it, it is important to comprehend the gravity of forced migration and its individual and collective implications. Both Alyan and Abulhawa's novels reference and explore Palestinian being and belonging within these categories; both authors recognize the lingering generational influence of the Nakba as well as the resulting displacement that inevitably shapes the contemporary characters' identities both in Palestine and in diaspora.

The historic events I present and the key terms I establish help frame the significance of Palestinian identity and Palestinian time within the novels, *Salt Houses* and *Against the Loveless World*. Understanding the collective losses and their affective influences on Palestinians within Palestine, in the settler-colonial state of Israel, in the region, and in diaspora, in the last century, allows for a broad understanding of the hesitancy to belong that is evident in the characters that are studied. In modern history, the national identity of Palestine, as a standalone nation and culture, as well as an Indigenous people with claims to the land, has been questioned. Palestinian identity which had already been in the consciousness of the people for hundreds of years, took on a nationalistic countenance, following the same patterns that many new-forming nations adhered to. Definitively, Palestinian indigeneity is valid as are the people's nationalistic claims. Palestinian subjects present ample ground for the study of hesitant belonging due to their powerful sense of resistance to and defiance of erasure as well as identity malaise and deep grief.

II.   Before the Nakba: Palestine Pre-1948

Palestine as a historical entity, a holy land, a strategic area, has had immense value for many groups. Palestine, and Jerusalem specifically, is a land of significance for Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths. For this reason, members of the three monotheistic faiths have a strong relationship to the area. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all have claims to the area. Religious and cultural significance about this land goes back two thousand years, with "its villages, shrines, castles, mosques, churches, and monuments dating back to the Ottoman, Mameluke, Ayyubid, Crusader, Abbasid, Umayyad, Byzantine, and earlier periods" (Khalidi 49).

Delving into the ancient and historical significance of Palestine is beyond the scope of this dissertation. There is a lot of scholarship that establishes the long history of Palestinian identity and connection to land and peoplehood that counters ahistorical accounts of distinct Palestinian people before the Mandate.[4] Instead, the focus here will be on the realities of Arab Palestinians during significant turning points before and after 1948 when they had to fight and assert their being and belonging to the land. The dates pre-1948 are important in understanding the gravity of 1948, the year commemorated as *Nakba,* the Arabic word for catastrophe. This history upholds the reality that Palestine and Palestinians existed prior to the formation of the state of Israel on the land and are not nomadic people with false claims. Palestine as an Ottoman colony, a British Colony, an Independent State existed. The dates that are described as of 1948 form signposts for "Palestinian time" (Abu-Lughod and Sa'di 5), focal points of reference for the drastic change in the lives of Palestinians, inside Israel, refugees in camps, and exiles in the region and globally. I will provide further elaboration on Palestinian time later in the chapter.

The Arab population in Palestine are not an anomaly or a group of nomadic groups, but a people who have had long historic ties to the land[5]. Pre-1948, Palestine was under the British Mandate, and before that it was part of the Ottoman Empire for four hundred years. According to historian Rashid Khalidi in *The Hundred Years War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance*, the development of Palestinian nationalism and a coherent Palestinian identity had been established for around two hundred years before the formation of the State of

---

[4] See Kanafani (1972); Doumani (1995); Bernard (2017); Ra'ad (2010); Pappe (2014); Lockman (1996); Joudah (2013); Kamel (2015); Masalha (2018); Hjelm (2019); R. Khalidi (2020).
[5] They are connected Not simply to the region to which they can be divvied up to, but to the land itself that comprises modern-day Israel-Palestine.

Israel. Indeed, references to Palestine as a country date back to 1670 when Mufti Khay al-Din al Ramli refers to "our country" of Filastin (Palestine) in legal documents (Awad and bean 9). In 1899, Yusuf Diya Khalidi, then mayor of Jerusalem, names the Palestinian people and the land Palestine in his correspondence with Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism, thus proving the collective conscious and self-identification with Palestine. Before the threat of Zionism became evident in the late nineteenth century, Palestinians identified more with their cities and villages than with the nation. Family affiliations were more apparent than nationalistic ones. People distinguished themselves as Jaffan, Jerusalemite, Haifan, Nabulsi, etc.; each community had its cultural nuances as evident in the different *tatreez*, embroidery, patterns used to represent each community. However, with the threat of new occupation and land-grab looming, the Palestinian national identification grew. As all national identities, it was malleable and shifting as the geopolitics of the region were under distress. This identity grew with the weakening and collapse of the Ottoman Empire, enforced by the takeover of the land by European armies and the British Empire, as well as the inception of Zionism and the sowing of the seeds of forming the Jewish State in Palestine.

Palestinian identity took on a nationalistic countenance, following the same patterns of anti-colonial sentiment that many new-forming nations adhered to coming from under the throes of Empire and colonial rule in Southwest Asia and North Africa. Khalidi explains that the occupation of Palestine and the conditions for the formation of the Israeli state follow pre-established tactics of colonial settler movements: "the modern history of Palestine can best be understood in these terms: as a colonial war waged against the Indigenous population, by a

variety of parties, to force them to relinquish their homeland to another people against their will"
(22-23).

However, the claim of Palestinians as Indigenous residents of the land has been
contested, as have every aspect of their being and belonging. Israeli historian and political
scientist, Ilan Pappe[6] argues in favor of the framing of the Palestinian struggle as both
Indigenous and national. In a brilliantly fleshed out article in *The South Asian Quarterly* titled
"Indigeneity as Cultural Resistance: Notes on the Palestinian Struggle within Twenty-First
Century Israel" (2018), Pappe studies various definitions of indigeneity and their applications to
the Palestinian struggle. In essence, Palestinians as internal refugees and second-class citizens in
Israel should be categorized as indigenous in their fight for representation, equality, and land. In
full alignment with Pappe's position, Mike Krebs and Dana Olwan create a comparison between
the settler-colonial tactics in Canada against Indigenous people and Israel's against Palestinians.
Krebs and Olwan argue that claims of Indigeneity and sovereignty are challenged in Israel
through "the expansion of […] interconnected and highly developed policies of land
confiscation, annexation, alteration, and fragmentation" (144).

To counter the Israeli state's attempted erasure of Palestinian sovereignty and claims to
the land, memory and hesitancy work are integral in reaffirming the longstanding connections of

---

[6] Pappe belongs to the "New Historian" school of Israeli academics, who counter the state's creation narrative of
Israel, calling the expulsion of Palestinians a deliberate and ongoing act of ethnic cleansing. The scholars I cite share
the position that Palestine is a sovereign nation with a rich and deep history in the land. Indeed, many scholars and
writers have drawn comparisons between Palestinians and Indigenous peoples specifically in North America. In
their documentary, *Spaces of Exception*, Malek Rasamny and Matt Peterson juxtapose Indigenous Reservations with
Palestinian refugee camps. The documentary explores the histories and political commonalities found between
Indigenous and Palestinian communities in North America and Southwest Asian refugee camps, respectively. The
documentary 'attempts to understand the land, it's memories and divisions' (*Spaces of Exception* 2018).

Palestinian communities to the land. Culturally and literally, narratives of belonging to the land pre-1948 and other significant moments in Palestine, are plenty.[7] Authors, playwrights, and filmmakers have expansively written about life in Palestinian cities and villages, documenting traditions and customs that date back hundreds of years, proving the indigeneity and intimate connection of the people to the land. Definitively, the Palestinian indigeneity is valid. Both *Salt Houses* and *Against the Loveless World* contribute to such narratives of belonging in Palestinian literature. Hesitancy becomes a useful framework here; hesitancy in how we interpret this history, how we affectively respond to it, and how we are implicated in it, allow for a deeper analysis of the historical and ongoing conditions that impact Palestinian identification and belonging.

1. Palestine under Ottoman rule

During the Ottoman Empire, which ruled the area for four hundred years from 1517-1917, Palestine was part of what was known as Greater Syria which included Lebanon, Syria, and Transjordan as well. The Ottoman state did not attempt to change "the ethnic or cultural mix of the Arab population" under its dominion. Overall, the Empire's Arab subjects in Palestine and elsewhere "enjoyed self-rule generation after generation (Manna' 62). Life in Palestinian cities and towns was vibrant; long stretches of olive and orange groves were sprinkled across the land; dynamic import and export economies employed most of the coastal residents; competing

---

[7] Playwright Raeda Taha's works: *Where can I find someone like you, Ali?* (2015)*, 36 Abbas Street* (2017), and The *Fig Tree* (2022) spatially and temporally examine Palestinian belonging within the land. Rashid Masharawi's film *Recovery* (2021) documents life in Jaffa before the Nakba through the recollecting of Taher Al Qalyubi, attempting to understand his own connection to Jaffa, Mashrawi's ancestral land, as he was born and raised in a Ghazzan refugee camp only hearing of tales of Jaffa's former might.

newspapers and cinemas kept the locals informed, up-to-date, and cultured (Awad and bean 15). The land was never barren, was never free for the taking[8].

However, with the defeat and ultimate dissolution of the Ottoman Empire during World War I, Palestine underwent "profound material shocks [that] heightened the impact of the wrenching postwar political changes, which obliged people to rethink longstanding senses of identity" (Khalidi 38). In a span of thirty-one years, the ruling powers in Palestine changed hands three times, from the Ottoman Empire to the British government (1917), to the British Mandate of Palestine (1920-1948), and finally to the establishment of the state of Israel (May 15th, 1948). These drastic political upheavals created a schism in the people and led to gradual change in Palestinian identity and the gradual development of a staunch and unflinching national belonging that transcended governing powers.

2. World War I and the end of Ottoman Rule

The Ottoman Empire joined World War I and fought alongside the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary); upon its defeat, the Empire fell into ruin, dismantling a 600-year-old occupation of Southwest Asia, North Africa, and Eastern Europe in 1922. The defeat in the war led to extreme hunger and excessive hardship in the Empire. The Ottoman Empire accumulated "the heaviest wartime losses of any major combatant power, with over three million dead, fifteen percent of the total population" (Khalidi 35). In Palestine, the population declined by six percent

---

[8] I want to clarify that I am not claiming *terra nullius* in this statement. Even if a land was empty of people, I do not condone any state occupation and colonization of a land. The statement merely reflects and contrasts the notion that Palestine was *Terra nullius,* a territory without a master.

after steadily growing annually by one percent until 1914 (McCarthy 25-27). Therefore, the first World War marked great loss, suffering, and poverty in Greater Syria, which underwent a famine as well as economic and social declination in the aftermath. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the allied powers made decisions concerning Palestine and Greater Syria. Through the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916,[9] the region was cut up and divided between the allied forced privately. Palestine fell under British rule, while the French governed Lebanon.

3. British Rule and the Palestinian Mandate

British rule of Palestine lasted three decades, but "had a far greater and far crueler impact on Palestine than four centuries of Ottoman rule" (Manna' 62). Palestine was occupied by Britain at the end of 1917 and was then transformed into a Mandate under British civil administration in April 1920.

a. Belfour Declaration

In November 1917, the British secretary of state for foreign affairs, Arthur James Balfour addressed a letter to a prominent British Jewish supporter of the Zionist movement, Lionel Walter (Lord) Rothschild (Masalha 309), that has come to be known as the Balfour Declaration, which expressed support for political Zionism and sympathy for the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people; this highly controversial document comprised of one sentence that read:

---

[9] The Sykes–Picot Agreement was a 1916 secret treaty between the United Kingdom and France, that outlined the partitioning of the members of the dissolved Ottoman Empire.

Her Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national

home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the

achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done to

prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in

Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country. (Balfour

1917)

The Balfour Declaration officiated the creation of the Jewish state in Palestine, solidifying the

threat of Zionism encroaching on Arab-Palestinian sovereignty and indigeneity in the land, with

"Britain's support of Theodor Herzl's aims for a Jewish statehood" (Khalidi 39). The omission

and othering of the Arab-Palestinian residents,[10] rendered as "existing non-Jewish communities

in Palestine," exacerbated the coming threat to the national and political rights of the people.

As Khalidi points out:

They were described in terms of what they were not, and certainly not as a nation or a

people—the words "Palestinian" and "Arab" do not appear in the sixty-seven words of

the declaration. This overwhelming majority of the population was promised only "civil

and religious rights," not political or national rights. By way of contrast, Balfour ascribed

national rights to what he called "the Jewish people," who in 1917 were a tiny minority—

6 percent —of the country's inhabitants. (39)

---

[10] The overwhelming Arab majority constituted approximately 94 percent of the population at that time (Khalidi 39).

Straightforwardly, the Balfour Declaration afforded the Zionist movement sovereignty and complete control of Palestine. At the same time, it pulled the rug out from under the majority Arab residents, launching "a full-blown colonial conflict, a century-long assault on the Palestinian people, aimed at fostering an exclusivist 'national home' at their expense" (Khalidi 40).

The conspicuously exclusionary language and labeling of the Balfour Declaration that overlooks and outright denies Palestinian existence formulates "a crucial element in the erasure of Palestinian national rights and peoplehood by the Balfour Declaration and its sequels" (Khalidi 46). Moreover, the demographic and power changes following World War I triggered a shift in Palestinian national sentiment, transforming from ties rooted in love of country and family loyalty and locale, to more politically apt sentiments of modern nationalism (Khalidi 42).

b. **Post-World War I and the Mandate of Palestine**

As part of the nationalist sentiment emerging, rebellion and opposition to foreign rule were imperative in the Palestinian national identity. This is evident by the protests and a popular uprising in the nineteen-thirties that took place in the aftermath of the declaration against the British Mandate (Ali). 'Adel Manna' and Rashid Khalidi both point to Palestinian resistance and protest predating both British rule and the establishment of the state of Israel, but it is significant to acknowledge that the shift that occurs with the Balfour Declaration marks a new form of activism for Palestinians, one that has the people fighting for their very existence. The overall goals of Palestinian nationalism in the post-First World War period shifted radically from autonomy and equal citizenship under the Ottomans to anti-colonial struggle, liberation, and

independence during the British Mandatory period. Crucially, active resistance to the existential threat posed by Zionist immigration to and settler-colonialism of Palestine during the Mandatory period became central to the Palestinian nationalist struggle. In the post-First World War period, Palestinian nationalist resistance organizations began to flourish. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the multiple nationalistic organizations that emerged pre- and post-1948, but is important to note that they were many, and political resistance became a part of the fabric of being Palestinian (Masalha 215). The popular uprisings in Palestine broke out despite a clear imbalance of power in favor of the authorities, British, or Israeli. The people were able to carry on the rebellion for several years and to score gains because of their willingness to sacrifice and their ability to work together over an extended period (Manna' 62).

After World War I, the people of Palestine were suffering from collective trauma, facing a startling new reality: they were to be ruled by Britain, and their country had been promised to others as a "national home" (Khalidi 43). The Palestinian Mandate essentially made the conception of a Zionist administration permissible alongside the British mandatory government, which worked on supporting and developing the Zionist administration:

> This parallel body was meant to exercise for one part of the population many of the functions of a sovereign state, including democratic representation and control of education, health, public works, and international diplomacy. To enjoy all the attributes of sovereignty, this entity lacked only military force. That would come, in time. (Khalidi 51)

Essentially with the takeover of the British, grew the Palestinian sense of powerlessness in designing their own futures and exercising their sovereignty. This powerlessness is a trope Samir Kassir attributes to "Arab malaise," which in the Palestinian condition specifically is characterized by "powerlessness to act to affirm your existence, even merely theoretically, in the face of the Other who denies your right to exist, despises you and has once again reasserted his domination over you" (4). As the British government stifled the political prowess of Arab-Palestinians and bolstered the military and political capabilities of the Jewish residents and settlers, which culminated and expounded with the formation of the state of Israel, malaise, and the feeling of subjugation in the face of global powers, only accumulated for Palestinians.

In the 1930s, with the ascendancy of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party to power in Germany and the immediate persecution and ultimate threat imposed on the Jewish community in Germany, the number of Jewish immigrants to Palestine grew expansively. In 1935, more than sixty thousand Jewish immigrants made their way to Palestine. By 1939, "the Jewish population grew to more than 30 percent of the total" (Khalidi 52). This mass migration of Jews to Palestine brough fast economic growth and rapid population shift over only seven years, which in turn, combined with considerable expansion of the Zionist movement's military capacities, made it possible to transform Palestine into a Jewish state (Teveth 166), which officially took form on May 14th, 1948, with the declaration of the formation of the State of Israel.

III.   The Catastrophe: The Nakba

The war of 1947, which took place from November 1947 to May 15, 1948 (Sanbar 87), resulted in the British retreat from Palestine and the immediate formation of the State of Israel. This led

to an unprecedented exodus of Palestinians from their land. According to Sanbar, this war was not a straightforward colonial occupation, but rather the replacement of one people by a community of 600,000 settlers transported to Palestine during the British Mandate (87). The establishment of the state of Israel in May 1948 marked the *Nakba,* which is the Arabic word for catastrophe. It also led to an exodus of Palestinians, representing a point of unbearable loss and pain. Lila Abou-Lughod and Ahmad Sa'di describe the seismic upheaval incurred that year:

> The 1948 War led to a society disintegrated, a people dispersed, and a complex and historically changing but taken for granted communal life was ended violently. The Nakba has thus become, both in Palestinian memory and history, the demarcation line between two qualitatively opposing periods. After 1948, the lives of the Palestinians at the individual, community, and national level were dramatically and irreversibly changed. (3)

Evidently, the Nakba represents a traumatic event and a sore issue for Palestinians; it signifies "fear, helplessness, violent uprooting, and humiliation. It embodies the unexpected and unstoppable destruction that left them in disarray, politically, economically, and psychologically" (Abu-Lughod and Sa'di 9). The trauma of the Nakba and its aftermath can be appropriately addressed through the lens of postcolonial trauma which addresses the nuances of loss, trauma, and mourning beyond the spectacle of the traumatic event.

IV.   Scattering and Rupture

In this study of Palestinian trauma, I consider the collective, intergenerational, and individual traumatic occasions and memories to build a more comprehensive understanding of how

Palestinian being and belonging are influenced by the past. The rupture of 1948 rendered

Palestinians "people of the world," at the mercy of the world. The detachments and devastations

brought on by the creation of the state of Israel that forced millions of Palestinians to migrate

inevitably marks a trauma that impacts Palestinian subjects. Their understanding of their place in

the "shared world" and how they belong to it is fraught, as politically, Palestinians' right of

return and sovereignty is contested globally. These are the subjects I study through the lens of

hesitancy. Elias Sanbar notes that narratives on Palestine have rarely depicted the exodus, Nakba

itself, focusing on its aftermath and the history that followed: "It is as if the trauma they

experienced had made them mute, as if absolute absence has banned tales about its beginnings

until the return to the land had begun" (Sanbar 94).

Essentially, 1948 marks a key date not only because of the tragic events which took place

in the war but also because it indicates the conclusion of a process of expulsion considered to

substantiate a nation's disappearance. Later displacements and expulsions are seen as the

extensions of the Nakba as poet and activist Mohammad Al Kurd declares in his address to the

United Nations on November 11th, 2021, outlining the continuous transgressions happening

against the Palestinian people by Israel: "At a certain point in every Palestinian's life, we realize

that the Nakba is far from over. It continues every time Israel revokes Jerusalem residencies. It

blares in street signs stripped of Arabic. It punctures us in constant campaigns of

dehumanization" (Al Kurd 2021).

Abu-Lughod and Sa'di identify a focal point in the Nakba that they designate as

"Palestinian time": "The Nakba is often reckoned as the beginning of contemporary Palestinian

history, a history of catastrophic changes, violent suppression, and refusal to disappear. […] The

Nakba is the point of reference for other events, past and future" (5). After the war, Palestinians were forced into two regions: the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with many being internally displaced from their homes in occupied Palestinian regions and relocated to these two areas.

None of the Palestinian characters in the novels I study reside inside Israel, and therefore, their experiences are distinct and different from the Palestinian civic struggle within the settler-colonial state. Instead, my focus is on the Palestinian struggle for statehood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as on displaced Palestinians who are not able to return to their homeland. Abulhawa and Alyan's novels portray these displacements brought on by the 1948 War. Though *Salt Houses* and *Against the Loveless World* are set after the Nakba, each novel mentions the Nakba and how it initially displaced their lineages.

From the historical narrative standpoint of Zionism, the establishment of the State of Israel symbolized the rebirth and return to the Jewish homeland, within a decade after the persecution of Jews in Europe and their subjection to concentration camps and mass genocide. Israel's creation was represented, and sometimes conceived, as an act of restitution that resolved this dialectic, bringing good out of evil. Nevertheless, if the establishment of a Jewish state represents hope and salvation for the Jewish people, it did so on the backs and the exclusion of the Palestinian population. Palestinians and their descendants were rendered to life without dignity and safety as either second-class citizens within the State— for the few that were allowed to claim citizenship following the 1952 Nationality Law that declared Palestinians in Israel as citizens ("Indigeneity as Cultural Resistance," 160)—or as a largely refugee people, a humanitarian case. The Palestinians were excluded from reaping any benefits of the unfolding of this could-be righteous history. Their catastrophe was either disregarded or reduced to a question

of ill-fated refugees, similar to the many millions around the world—those who wandered in Europe following the end of World War II or those forced to flee the violence that accompanied the partition of India.

Before moving on the next significant historical event, I want to introduce important concepts, affects, and terms that come out of the scattering of Palestinians and the rupturing of their belonging.

1. **Victims and Resistors**

Aleida Assman characterizes three roles for national collectives to assume when facing negative events in the past: "that of the victor who has overcome the evil; that of the resistor who has heroically fought the evil; and that of the victim who has passively suffered the evil" (Assman 553). In the case of Palestine, the second and third roles are befitting of the national collective identity post-1948. Palestinians are victims of global politics; oppressed and deemed obsolete, residents of a land declared terra nullius, vacant for the establishment of the state of Israel. As displaced and dispossessed people, Palestinians are victims of the disaster cast upon them; however, they are also proud resistors, fighting furiously against eradication and erasure for their land and home. I examine the affects associated with victimhood and also the key ideas related to resistance. In the novels *Salt Houses* and *Against the Loveless World*, through the matriarchs, Salma and Sitti Wasfiyeh, respectively, the reader learns of the tantamount and accumulating price Palestinians have had to pay for their expulsion and continuous displacement. In S*alt Houses*, Hussam and Salma Yacoub are forced to leave Jaffa in 1948 and re-establish a home in Nablus in the West Bank. In *Against the Loveless World,* Sitti Wasfiyeh, Nahr's grandmother

was chased out of Haifa, then out of Ein el Sultan, a Palestinian village and refugee camp in the Jericho (Areeha) Governate of the State of Palestine in the Eastern West Bank. The novels portray Palestinians as victims experiencing the affects of victimhood that are represented as shame, tortured remembering, and insistent forgetting.

a. Shame, Remembering, and Forgetting

The *Nakba*, the *Naksa*, and the continuous defeat and suppression of the Palestinian people contribute to affects of shame and guilt, which in turn appear as forgetfulness and silence in post-traumatic situations. Fawwaz Traboulsi questions how people handle remembering events that evoke feelings of shame and guilt in them, his answer is formulaic: memory obliges forgetfulness. Perhaps this formula also acts as a dichotomy, the public obligation of memory, and the private need for forgetfulness. Palestinians as a collective need to remember to regain what was lost, to fight for their reclamation. Individuals on the other hand, need to forget to go on living. Focusing on hesitancy in the case of Palestinian belonging serves to highlight the spirit of resistance and to challenge the historical authority and normative narratives that "contribute to the continuing failure" (Sayigh 58) of the global community to aid Palestinians.

b. Resistance post- 1948 and key terms of Palestinian identity

In the aftermath of 1948, with the formation of one state on top of another, and the mass migration of Palestinians. Palestinians were at a threat of disappearing both physically and as an idea. Israel was gaining more global and hegemonic support, while global backing for Palestine was significantly weaker. Nevertheless, Palestinians of course had not disappeared in the years after 1948. The year 1948, however, would be tortuously cemented in the collective memory of

Palestinians, and it would transform the collective identity, from a people in a land, to a people fighting for the land taken. Small irredentist militant groups arose in the 1950s and had a significant impact on Southwest Asia, triggering both the 1956 and 1967 wars (Khalidi 125-26); with 1967 becoming another crucial marker of Palestinian time,[11] denoting the *Naksa*, the setback, which led to the further annexation of Palestinian land.

2. The Naksa (The setback), Six Day War of 1967

The Naksa, which translates to "the setback," refers to the displacement of Palestinians inside the occupied territories and neighbouring Arab countries following the Six-Day War in 1967.The year 1967 is another significant marker for Palestinian time. In 1967, Israel emerged victorious in the Arab-Israeli war and subsequently gained control of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. This setback led to another exodus, with more than 250,000 Palestinians migrating. However, a significant number remained behind in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, finding themselves now outnumbered by Israeli settlers who advocated for the occupation of these territories (Encyclopedia Britannica). Palestinians who had evacuated their homes following May 15, 1948, and settled in the towns of the West Bank or Gaza for nearly twenty years, would now "come under direct Israeli military and administrative control […], when Israel occupied, after the 1967 war, those remaining parts of historic Palestine" (Abu-Lughod 77).

---

[11] As Palestinians suffer an influx of conflict and evacuations from their homes, there are an abundance of markers of time and seismic shifts that become more personal and less collective. 1948 and 1967 mark the two main collective periods of mass evacuation and displacement, but with the ongoing evacuation and expulsion of Palestinians from their hometowns and villages, the seasons of migration are multiple.

These settlements in the occupied territories are considered illegal by the United Nations and the international community under international law. Settlements are still constantly being developed. Notably, the evacuation of the East Jerusalem neighborhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan in 2021 made international headlines. Human Rights Watch reports that the Israeli government approved "building 12,855 new housing units in settlements in the occupied West Bank" in the first half of 2023(Human Rights Watch 2024).

V.   Diaspora

After 1967, when Israel occupied the remaining parts of Palestine, in what came to be known as the *Naksa*. Palestinians from then on began to reconnect their accounts and memories in relation to each other in their different sites and were able to mediate their own experiences through the different ones of other subgroups within the larger collectivity. Therefore, 1967 was the point when a mutual orientation to and connection between different Palestinian communities of quotidian experience began to be radically reconstituted and refashioned (Jayyusi 109). This allowed the development of an identity for the Palestinian Diaspora; one based on expulsion and loss, but also memory, liberation, and resilience.

VI.   We Were Here: Palestinian Resistance and Resilience

Resistance to Israel and protection of the land is integral to Palestinian identity post-1948. In many cases, this took on a military front through the continuation of active fighting against the colonizers that had shifted the Palestinian identity from their battles against the British and then the Israeli, as an effort to "reestablish the Palestinians as a regional force and to represent their rights and interests" (Khalidi 126). In *Salt Houses,* the reader learns about acts of protest and

resistance through Mustafa and Atef's political engagement. The two men are active members in the political meetings that take place in their mosque and are later arrested and imprisoned in 1965 and then in 1967.

To adequately comprehend the significance of resistance and resilience, I will elaborate on three key terms that shape Palestinian identity post-1948. These terms are *al awda*, *fedayee*(s.)/*fedayeen* (pl.) and *shaheed* (s.)/*shuhada* (pl.).[12]

1. Al Awda: The Return

Al Awda means "the return;" just as Palestine was envisioned as a homeland for Jewish populations to return to, so do the evicted and displaced Palestinian residents of the land hope for their return to their ancestral land. Since the displacements of 1948, the concept of "return" had been crucial for Palestinian identity and resistance.

Return signifies the lapse of binaries in belonging that hesitancy represents; between loss, unhoming, and the futility of return on one hand, and homing desires and the hope of a return on the other hand, sits the hesitant subject, unsure of how to be in the world that continues to exclude and justify its inhospitable ways while performatively acknowledging the suffering of the expulsion of these subjects and their people. Of course, a return to a homeland, to Palestine, is complicated by the duality of "unhoming." Bhabha's concept of "unhomely" is useful in describing the discomfort and ambivalence felt by the people displaced from home. As a

---

[12] I use the Arabic words and not their English translations in my definitions to ensure that the significance of these concepts is maintained in relation to Palestinian resistance.

community, there is a reality of being unhomed that is felt quite astutely; Palestinians displaced long for return to their identifiable homeland, Palestine. "Return" as an ideology is inevitably complicated by the passage of time, by several generations being raised away from home, seeking belonging in the world, while holding Palestine close in heart and in identity. In *Salt Houses,* the varying generations are keenly in tune with the duality of "home" and "unhoming." They negotiate their belonging to various transnational homes as well as the original homeland, Palestine. In the narrative, Alyan unravels personal and historical traumas related to multiple sites of belonging.

"Return" is essential and charged in multiple manners. Lila Abu-Lughod explains that the "term evokes nostalgia for the homeland [migrant Palestinians] were forced to flee in 1948 and a reversal of the traumatic dispersion that sundered families, ruined livelihoods, and thrust Palestinians into humiliating refugee camps or individual adventures to rebuild lives armed with little more than birth certificates, keys to the homes left behind, and the stigma of having somehow lost their country to an alien people" (Abu-Lughod 77). *Against the Loveless World* depicts the undignified realities of Palestinians in refugeehood in the region. Abulhawa creates a narrative of return and homegoing that addresses the charged connotations of return for her Palestinian protagonist.

The stigma is fueled by the shame of loss and defeat; Samir Kassir connects the feeling of shame to the state of Arab malaise, a brewing sadness and sickness brought on by accumulating defeat and loss. Arab malaise is epitomized in the Palestinian case, where Arab identity becomes connected to continuous loss and struggle. Eyad Al Sarraj, founder and director of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, and human rights activist, explains that intergenerationally,

Palestinian identity, both personal and national, is enmeshed with humiliation and defeat. Arab malaise ties in with *qahr*. Qahr is the Arabic term that translates to frustration but also defeat, anger, frustration, existential dread, and feeling the weight of injustice. These sentiments bring forth feelings of hesitancy. Hesitancy occurs in the amalgamation of the variety of emotions that make up qahr that are often hard to put into words or to recognize as complex emotions.

To foster the hope of return, many Palestinian subjects hold on to memorabilia of the homeland such as keys to their ancestral homes, old passports that state Palestine as country of birth. Holding on to return keeps the past in the present and in the framework of the future. Wael Salam and Safi M. Mahfouz explain that "the past is not a mere memory that no longer relates to the present, but rather a place all Palestinians live in. In fact, for all displaced Palestinians, the past dictates the present and the future, a sort of dialectical relationship suggesting that to understand the present and plan for the future, there is a need to actively and purposefully remember the past" (304).

Return is also a political issue; the "right of return" is a demand for righting a moral wrong. It is also a demand that the story of that expulsion not be erased" (Abu-Lughod 77). The concept of *Al Awda,* the idea of the return became the central call for political action, for the reclamation and restoration of the land, of Palestinians on their sovereign land.

2. Fedayee

This brings us to the second term, *Fedayee. Fedayee* is an Arabic word that means self-sacrifice. It is used to describe Palestinian freedom fighters and paramilitary groups who combat Israel.

The term dates to the Naziri Ismaili sect of the 11th and 13th centuries and referred to devotees who were willing to self-immolate for group goals.

Khalidi explains that the fedayeen were "small militant groups that relaunched the Palestinian national movement in the 1950s and early 1960s [that] put forward simple objectives for their struggle. For them, Palestine had long been an Arab land with an Arab majority. Its people had been unjustly dispossessed of their homes, their property, their homeland, and their right of self-determination. These groups' main purpose was to return the Palestinian people to their homeland, restore their rights, and oust those whom they saw as usurpers" (136). As evident in Khalidi's explanation, *fedayeen* fight for *al awda*.

3. **Shaheed**

Another important concept in the Palestinian context is that of the martyr, the *shaheed*, a fallen victim of the Israeli occupation and aggression. The fallen fighters in battles against the British colonizers and then the Israeli occupants become "revered symbol[s] of heroic armed militancy" (Khalidi 126). Bassem Eid explains that the idea of martyrdom is a central factor in shaping Palestinian national identity: "Palestinians perceive martyrs not only [as] those who commit suicide bombings, but to all of those who died within the context of the struggle against the Israeli occupation" (Eid). Martyrs are perceived as brave individuals, those who die for the sake and love of their country – even those who die simply for existing and being Palestinian in unnecessary and cruel deaths at checkpoints or elsewhere.

Thus, the identifications of *Fedayeen* and *shuhada* are significant markers of Palestinian being. In *Salt Houses*, Atef's father was a fedayee and died a gunshot at the hands of an Israeli

soldier, thus becoming a shaheed, a martyr. In essence, resistance and martyrdom become quintessential symbols for collective identification through which Palestinians defined themselves; Palestine "constitutes a proud resistant nation, whose members are ready to give their life for the national cause" (Eid). Depending on what side of the political spectrum one belongs to, fedayeen are either seen as freedom fighters for Palestinian independence, or as terrorists against the state of Israel. Martyrs befallen in battle are either perceived as victims or defeated attackers. Many Arab and Palestinian heroes are misconstrued due to this dichotomy; where they are celebrated on one side as freethinkers and revolutionaries, they are chastised by the other as violent aggressors. A vital example of this is Ghassan Kanafani, who is a renowned literary figure who was also deeply involved in politics and militant activism. He was a writer and journalist, and his ideas and images played a major role in the revival of Palestinian identity" (Khalidi 125). A poignant novelist, Kanafani's prose vividly portrayed the obstacles Palestinians faced: "the travails of exile and the pain of life in post-1967 Palestine, now entirely under Israeli control" (Khalidi 125). His five novellas, notably *Men in the Sun* (1963) and *Return to Haifa* (1969), are widely translated and hugely popular. The novellas "encouraged Palestinians to confront their dire predicament and forcefully resist the powers that oppressed them" (Khalidi 123). As a journalist, Kanafani was the editor and spokesperson of al-Hadaf, the weekly magazine of the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Khalidi, who was a personal acquaintance of Kanafani in Beirut, explains the dichotomy in the perception of Kanafani as both a hero and a terrorist: "In light of his literary renown and militant activism, he was a significant figure in the revived Palestinian national movement. For the same reason, he

was a target of the PFLP's enemies, the foremost being the Israeli government and its intelligence services" (123).[13]

In July 1972, Kanafani was assassinated in a car bombing by the Mossad, together with his seventeen-year -old niece, Lamis Najm (123-35). The killing of Kanafani was an act of stifling a prominent voice of the Palestinian national and liberating movement, a suppression of hope and inspiration for the Palestinian people.

Beyond prominence and cultural significance, the killing and martyring that occur haphazardly at the hands of Israeli forces and settlers are beyond any reasonable explanation. The justification for killing Palestinians that remains to this day is that the killing is necessary protection against terrorists, who would kill if not killed first. This hollow justification is used time and time again as innocent Palestinians are killed in home raids[14] [15], at checkpoints on their way to their sisters' weddings[16], or on their way to school[17], and many other harrowing situations. October 2023 has witnessed an unprecedented escalation in massive killings in Palestine. As of November 22nd, 2023, almost 14,000 Palestinians have been killed in Northern

---

[13] The categorization of Kanafani as a terrorist was absolutely shocking to me when I learned of it in 2021 when an event at the University of Toronto commemorating this important literary figure was heavily protested and then cancelled. As in many schools in Lebanon and across the Southwest Asian region, Kanafani's novellas were assigned to us, and we read his work diligently and harrowingly. Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* was my first literary introduction to the heaviness of life in Palestine and to the hostile and impossible conditions that would lead men to attempt to escape across the desert in a car, only to suffocate and die on the long journey.

[14] https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/palestine-israel-jenin-child-dies-following-raid

[15] https://www.birzeit.edu/en/news/birzeit-university-mourns-students-murdered-israeli-occupation

[16] https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-soldiers-kill-palestinian-west-bank-checkpoint-sisters-wedding-day

[17] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/21/israeli-forces-kill-young-palestinian-man-in-occupied-west-bank-2

Gaza alone, with bombing occurring in Southern Gaza and Lebanon. Following a surprise attack

by Hamas-led gunmen from the Gaza Strip on October 7th, 2023, with the kidnapping of Israeli

hostages, Israel declared a war on Palestinians in Northern Gaza. Saree Makdisi describes this

attack: "seeing armed Palestinian fighters standing over disarmed Israeli soldiers was like

witnessing events pulled out of the pages of Frantz Fanon's classic anti-colonial work *The

Wretched of the Earth* or scenes from Gillo Pontecorvo's *Burn!* Those images were a reminder

of what this has always been: a struggle between a colonial power driven by an exclusionary

racial ideology and a battered, occupied, besieged, but still unwavering people" (Makdisi). Ilan

Pappe has declared that what is happening at this moment is a human catastrophe of a massive

scale, not only in the Gaza strip, but will likely be extended to the West Bank ("Crisis in

Zionism, Opportunity for Palestine?").

Against the Loveless World is fully set after 1967, and mentions many *fedayeen,* martyrs,

and Palestinian liberation heroes from the first and second Intifada. The novel also presents

characters who undertake violent actions for the sake of Palestinian liberation and anti-

colonization, adhering to what Frantz Fanon describes in "Concerning Violence," as the violence

that the natives take up in retaliation to the violence that governs and informs "the ordering of

the colonial world" (Fanon 40). Violence is therefore often necessary in the battle for liberation

for the Palestinian people, causing many to join liberation activist and/or militant groups, or to

form their own as an anti-colonial means. Mustafa and Atef in *Salt Houses* were members of a

community that convened in their local mosque in Nablus, while Bilal and Ghassan and their

comrades in *Against the Loveless World*, organized independently. In the latter novel, Abulhawa

examines the dichotomy of hero and terrorist; as her characters are intrenched in different ways

in Palestinian liberation, with Nahr, her protagonist, literally being incarcerated for acts of terrorism, in a maximum protection prison complex in Israel when we are introduced to her.

VII.   Belonging

With the Nakba came the international campaign to swallow up and disappear Palestine. As the history of Israel as a state emerged, it illegitimated the claims of Palestinians, rendering them nomad people in unclaimed land reserved for the Jewish state. Therefore, proving the existence of Palestinians and their connection to the land became part and parcel of national narratives. The novels themselves act against the erasures of dominant history and colonial narratives; they also support a resurgence of Palestinian voices and ideologies from the diaspora and inside Palestine.

The Nakba represented a point of unbearable loss and pain for Palestinians, but, in its aftermath, resilience literature emerged, helped to reshape a sense of Palestinian identity and purpose, and allowed the resurgence of Palestinian political agency post-1948. Rashid Khalidi notes the important role writers and poets such as Ghassan Kanafani and Mahmoud Darwish held: "In novels, short stories, plays, and poetry, they gave voice to a shared national experience of loss, exile, alienation. At the same time, they evinced a stubborn insistence on the continuity of Palestinian identity and steadfastness in the face of daunting odds" (Khalidi 123). Therefore, with the production of resilience and resistance literature in Palestine, and with the description of Palestinian-ness within literature, the Palestinian identity is solidified.

Salt Houses and *Against the Loveless World* depict collective experiences of shame and loss, and also examine the melancholy of alienation and life in exile. Both novels explore the

cost of Palestinian resilience and resistance in different ways. *Against the Loveless World* is more befitting of the genre of resilience and resistance literature, since it presents characters who actively resist the Israeli occupation, embracing tropes of Palestinian culture and identity as an act of endurance against erasure. *Salt Houses* sows the seeds of survival and coping, exploring the disillusionment with the ethos of resistance and plunging into the shame that is carried with defeat.

VIII.   The Novels

Susan Abulhawa is the daughter of Palestinian refugees who fled the 1967 Six-Day War. She is a human rights activist and vocal opposer of settler-colonialism and the continuous dispossession and violence against Palestinians. Her novels chronicle and represent the histories of the occupation of Palestine from 1948 and onwards. Her acclaimed debut novel, *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) presents a historic arc of Palestinian oppression and connection to the land from before 1948 to modern times, explicating the pain and violence endured by Palestinians as they are forced out of their own homes, kicked out of their ancestral villages, abused and killed as refugees, and hallowed and broken as immigrants in the U.S. Abulhawa does not shy away from addressing the vital markers of Palestinian identity as a colonized and ejected people. Her 2020 novel, *Against the Loveless World*, follows in suit, highlighting the traumas and difficulties of Palestinian refugeehood in Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) and the realities of contemporary life in the occupied Palestinian territories for Palestinians who live under the oppressive thumb of the settler-colonial state.

Against the Loveless World grounds its characters in the Arab World, specifically between Kuwait, Palestine, and Jordan. They live in refugeehood and under occupation; their experience of the Palestinian Diaspora is not the same as the Yacoub family's. In this novel, the intifadas, the settler invasions, and the geopolitics of the region are prevalent. My readings of both novels unpack historical and personal traumas as they impact the protagonists' sense of belonging to the world and also to their communities. The pulling of the past and its protracted influence on the present is strongly visible in both narratives, and the different characters experience several instances of hesitancy while negotiating their belonging to the worlds they live in.

Like her cosmopolitan characters, Palestinian American poet and clinical psychologist Hala Alyan grew up transnationally. Born in Carbondale, Illinois, she was raised between Kuwait, Oklahoma, Texas, Maine, and Lebanon. Though she was born in the US, Alyan spent her childhood in Kuwait until her family sought asylum in the United States from Kuwait following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. As a psychologist, Alyan specializes in trauma and addiction work with various populations. Her psychological training is evident in her writing, as Alyan explores the traumatic implications of war and displacement, directly and intergenerationally. Indeed, intergenerational familial and cultural traumas are central themes in her two novels, *Salt Houses* (2017) and *The Arsonists' City* (2021). In her multifaceted writing, Alyan contemplates in-betweeness in her and her protagonists' identities.

Salt Houses follows the well-to-do Yacoub family from Palestine to different new locales that they will call home. Hussam and Salma leave Jaffa for Nablus in the aftermath of the Nakba. Their daughter Alia marries Atef in Nablus, and they live a joyful and loving few years there

with Alia's brother and Atef's best friend Mustafa by their side. However, following the arrest and torture of Atef and Mustafa during the Israeli takeover of Nablus in the six-day war of 1967, which results in the Mustafa's disappearance and unconfirmed death, Atef and Alia suddenly migrate to Kuwait and set up their lives there, never to return to Palestine. Atef and Alia have three children: Souad, Riham, and Karam, who ultimately move to Paris, Amman, and Boston, respectively. Their children have their own children who also disperse globally.

The *Naksa* of 1967 is central for the development of the narrative in *Salt Houses*, as the traumatic incidents that will be explicated in chapter three are triggered with the Six-Day War, and its generational reverberations on the Yacoub family. The *Naksa* also marks the expulsion of Nahr's family from Palestine to Kuwait in *Against the Loveless World*. Beyond the *Naksa* and the Iraqi-invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the histories represented in the novels diverge. *Salt Houses* catapults its characters into life in diaspora globally. The characters experience 9/11 and live in the aftermath of Arab-hate and otherness in North America. They experience the Lebanese War in 2006 while they summer in the country. The novel tackles the sentiment of *qahr* that frames many of the characters' hesitancies.

Though I am speaking of displaced Palestinians in both novels, the depicted displacements, and the decisions the characters make due to their displacement are quite different. In "Reflections on Exile," Edward Said distinguishes between the different definitions of displaced individuals. Said categorizes anyone prevented from returning home as an exile; being an exile constitutes a banishment, a life that is "anomalous and miserable," filled with "the stigma of being an outsider" (190). The distinction in exile between refugee and expatriate are important to keep in mind for the sake of comparing status in the two novels. Said defines

79

refugees as "a creation of the twentieth-century state"(190). A term that is politically charged, "refugees," he writes, "[suggests] large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance" (191). Whereas expatriates "voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons. Expatriates may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer under its rigid proscriptions," (191) Said explains.

Though the Yacoub family is displaced with every political upheaval, they are able to do so with comfort and volition due to their wealth. Indeed, the matriarch, Salma, prays for money when she thanks Allah for all that he has been given to her family; wealth as well as class play a significant role in the division between refugees and expatriates: "Widad and Alia and Mustafa, they might have known gunfire and war, but they were protected from it with the armor of wealth. It is what separates them from refugees in the camps dotting the outskirts of Nablus" (*Salt Houses* 11). Salma is astutely aware of the privilege wealth provides, especially in migration and war. Throughout the novel, Alyan consciously chooses not to use the word refugee, highlighting the status of the Yacoub family. "Expatriation" becomes the term Alyan uses, even when describing their forced stay in Kuwait, following their banishment from Nablus: "Kuwait was a place of expatriation" (209). In Riham's chapter, the destitution of refugees is described in gory detail as Riham's husband Latif would invite wounded war victims from neighboring countries to the wooden shed on their property and provide them with medical treatment.

Against the Loveless World examines the lives of Palestinian refugees in Kuwait during the 1970s and 80s; Nahr grows up knowing only the life of second-class citizenship, othered from her peers at school for being a refugee. Upon financial hardship, Nahr becomes a sex

worker to support her family and educate her brother. With the Iraqi invasion, the family is

forced to flee to Jordan to join the massive Palestinian refugee community. In *Salt Houses*, the

anguish of Alia in her massive villa and its wealth is practically sickening when compared to

Nahr's life; very much in keeping with upper-middle-class malaise, Alia is suffocated by the

emptiness she feels in this foreign country she is forced to stay in. Where both must leave

Kuwait as a result of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Alia during, and Nahr after, their stories of

continuous exile are strikingly varied. The Yacoubs live in villas, have servants, study abroad,

invest, and travel: their exile is not the same as Nahr's and her family.

IX.   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided historical, emotional, and cultural context on the issues that

Palestinians carry with them. The Palestinian identity and its complex history of dispossession,

displacement, and resistance inevitably shapes contemporary affects of belonging among

Palestinians, especially those born and raised outside of Palestine. In the following two chapters,

I offer an in-depth analysis of how Palestinians in displacement approach and appease hesitant

belonging through the novels, *Salt Houses* and *Against the Loveless World*. By understanding the

historical events and key terms that have characterized Palestinian identity, we can appreciate the

hesitancy to belong that is evident in the characters.

Chapter 3: A Person of the Hostile World: Hesitancy as a Feedback Loop in Susan Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World*

Hesitancy serves as a mechanism to question and challenge notions of belonging. It operates as a feedback loop, where trauma leads to hesitancy. Hesitancy is not an isolated response, but rather a manifestation of inherited refugeehood and the lasting impact of traumatic experiences endured by migrants throughout their lives. Hesitancy commonly arises during periods of transition, reflecting the profound and complex crises experienced by migrants. The process of displacement and movement significantly contributes to this hesitancy, as it exposes individuals to unfamiliar environments and uncertain circumstances. It is a moment of pause or uncertainty, serving as a powerful tool for individuals to confront and process personal trauma. By taking the time to reflect, analyze, and make sense of their experiences, individuals can develop a deeper understanding and embark on a healing process. Embracing hesitancy allows individuals to navigate the complexities of trauma with greater resilience and self-awareness, ultimately emerging stronger and more empowered.

In short, trauma leads to hesitancy, and hesitancy, in turn, helps to unpack and address the traumas, creating a feedback loop. I explore this claim through analyzing Susan Abulhawa's 2020 novel, *Against the Loveless World.* Through a singular narrator and a life story told from within a space of uncertainty, I examine how traumas of forced migration create hesitancy in the protagonist, Nahr, and how within the space of hesitancy, she confronts the weight of her traumas, ultimately finding a definite place of belonging and conviction. This novel focuses on Palestinians in the SWANA region, transitioning between Kuwait, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel. The themes of Palestinian dispossession and identification are prominent in this narrative.

Abulhawa is a staunch activist of Palestinian voices, which she animatedly and thoroughly depicts in her novels.

In my reading of *Against the Loveless World*, I draw parallels between the protagonist's individual experiences and those of her family, as well as traumatic historical moments in modern Palestinian history. My analysis highlights how displacement and movement bring hesitance. I also focus on how spaces of hesitation lead to clarity and conviction; hesitancy thus becomes a tool that Nahr applies multiple times in the novel, to assert her identity and her belonging.

I explore hesitancy as a response, a space, and a tool; I reiterate that the uses of hesitancy are multifaceted. By space of hesitancy, I explore specific spaces of displacement and unbelonging that characters are situated in; in the case of Nahr, these are represented by Amman, Jordan, and the Cube, a maximum-security prison in modern-day Israel. As a tool, hesitancy becomes a facilitator for trauma work, doing the act of reckoning with what may be suppressed, forgotten, or hidden, allowing in the suspended space of unbelonging an unpacking of what is uncertain. Finally, hesitancy is a response to a traumatic event where the subject is rendered uncertain when confronting tribulation. To begin, I will show how the text represents the world, followed by an analysis of hesitancy as a response, space, and a tool.

I.   Belonging Against the Loveless World

The novel delves into the harsh reality of being at the mercy of the world, depicting the experience of rejection by the global community and the struggle to find one's place in a local setting. Susan Abulhawa's 2020 novel explores themes of incarceration, settler-colonialism,

refugeehood, regional displacement, and return. It vividly portrays the daily violence endured under settler-occupation. Furthermore, the novel chronicles the collective history of Palestinians from the 1970s to the early 2000s, touching upon noteworthy events such as the Nakba (catastrophe of 1948), the Naksa (setback of 1967), the Oslo Agreement, and the Intifadas (Uprisings).

Almost as a paraphrasing of the book's title, this narrative follows a character who receives no love from the world and exists in spite of it. Nahr, the protagonist, is a Palestinian freedom fighter, she is locked away in solitary confinement in an Israeli maximum security prison complex, in a cell known as "The Cube." In this place, Nahr reflects on her entire life thus far, accounting for her youth and young adulthood in Kuwait, the Iraqi invasion of 1990, her forced migration to Jordan, and her multiple returns to Palestine. In her account, the reader learns about Palestinian precarity in the region, in Palestine, and in refugeehood. The reader also learns about Nahr's family, her loves, her friends, and the challenging life Nahr had, which gave her the title of "terrorist/whore" in the Israeli media. Throughout the narrative, Nahr undergoes several migrations, first to Jordan and then to Palestine. Kuwait is her home until it no longer is, and Iraq shatters her sense of belonging. Jordan becomes a place of anguish and displacement. In Palestine, upon returning to her homeland, Nahr confronts the harsh reality of an over-policed apartheid state that constantly threatens her people at home and in the diaspora. Despite this, Nahr finds acceptance in Palestine and builds a community when states repeatedly fail her and the Palestinian people.

The novel presents a juxtaposition between two worlds; the mainstream world that depicts Palestinians as lesser-than-human, terrorists and collateral damage, and the personal

world of Palestinians surviving against all odds, maintaining traditions and customs, loving, and fighting for their people and land. Through her account, Abulhawa critiques state and international treatment of Palestinians in Palestine and in dispossession. Nahr, following in the footsteps of women[18] before her, rejects the idea of nations and claims her own personhood and statehood: "Eastern music is the soundtrack of me, and dancing is the only nation I ever claimed, the only religion I comprehend" (*Against the Loveless World* 12). Nahr embodies the experience of statelessness, although the patriarchal world of nation-states does shape and alter her life trajectory, attesting to Giorgio Agamben's description of these organizations as "absolutely incapable not only of resolving the problem [of mass forced migration] but also simply of dealing with [refugees] adequately" (115).

Unlike the other novels to be discussed, *Against the Loveless World* features a single narrator, Nahr. Having a single narrator allows for an interesting exploration of memory, collective and individuated. Nahr's narration offers a glimpse into her own memories and experiences, which may fade or become distorted as she recalls them from her prison cell. While Nahr and her family live within two Palestinian diasporas in the novel, the memories they share are not collective; they belong to Nahr alone, and she interprets them based on her own unique experiences that may not always align with the collective. I mention memory here because the novel is written in a memoir style. Nahr is an imprisoned woman writing from her solitary jail

---

[18] I am thinking here about Virginia Woolf's declaration: "As a woman I have no country, as a woman, my country is the world;" (Woolf) as a scathing commentary on women's limited rights in England in 1938, while also proposing answers to the question of how to prevent war.

cell, recounting her life. I argue that Nahr uses hesitancy as a means of trauma work, writing and recounting a life that her contemporary state prompts her to forget and relinquish.

II.   Hesitancy As a Response to Trauma

Let me begin with the state of trauma and how hesitancy is a response to it. In the previous chapter, I explained how Palestinian dispossession and expulsion is a traumatic occurrence that has marked generations of Palestinians in and out of their homeland. Throughout the novel, Nahr grapples with her identification with Palestine, gradually developing a connection to her homeland through lived experiences. Nahr faces the question of what it means to be Palestinian with each instance of displacement, as a woman, a refugee (twice over), and as a Palestinian in Palestine. She states, "Everything came down to being Palestinian and the whole world was out to get us. It wasn't until I had survived time, war, and prison that I understood why" (23). Nahr represents the complexity of Palestinian identification, as she is a refugee unwanted in the world, a citizen of a sovereign nation, and a non-citizen of an occupied territory.

Hesitancy is a common reaction to traumatic experiences that can impact an individual's sense of belonging. Michelle Balaev highlights the interplay between self and the world, and how traumatic events can transform an individual's perception of themselves and the world. Traumatic experiences such as forced migration and exile can compound the uncertainty about one's sense of belonging. Examining how hesitancy connects to trauma provides us with a deeper understanding of its impact on people's lives. For Nahr, the traumatic experiences of forced migration, refugeehood, and war lead to hesitancy in finding her place in the world. Additionally, I examine hesitance as an affect, a response to trauma. Studying hesitancy and its nuanced

86

affective experiences can help us understand the causes and experiences of trauma and displacement. By exploring the reasons why some individuals and groups may be hesitant to belong, we can gain valuable insights into how to foster a sense of belonging.

To understand hesitancy as a response in this novel, we must examine how Nahr addresses her identity as a Palestinian in the diaspora. The novel explores the literal and metaphorical conditions of Palestinian migration, displacement, and return. I explore moments of trauma, grief, and loss that Nahr experiences as a Palestinian in the diaspora to better understand her hesitant positionality as both a refugee and a Palestinian. Nahr's sense of belonging in the world is intertwined with her traumas. Hesitancy as a response to trauma is evident in how Nahr hesitates to identify as Palestinian. Initially, this can be understood as a response to and rejection of collective and inherited trauma; however, as she migrates to Jordan then Palestine, gradually her hesitancy takes on a different form and then subsides, transforming from a trauma response to a means of healing. In the following sections, I examine how Nahr's sentiments and, therefore, hesitancies evolve in relation to her migration and places of belonging.

1. **In Kuwait – Third Spaces and Hesitance**

This section portrays Nahr's journey as an outcast woman navigating the patriarchal world, highlighting the precariousness she experiences due to her gender. In Kuwait, where she considers herself at home in refugeehood, Nahr faces rejection and abuse, struggling to conform to the societal norms of both Kuwaiti and Palestinian cultures. Hesitancy lingers as Nahr confronts continuous rejections, not only from her husband and men but also from the country itself. Despite her deep love for Kuwait and her efforts to assimilate, Nahr remains an underclass

Palestinian who can never fully belong. Still, growing up there, Nahr does not want to be Palestinian, does not want to be a descendant of dispossessed refugees at the mercy of their host country; instead, she wants to be Kuwaiti.

Kuwait has always been a transient and unstable place, especially for a refugee who cannot claim permanent roots in exile. Despite this, Nahr had a life there and strongly clung to it. Kuwait was where Nahr grew up and had formative experiences as a young woman and adult. She resided in Kuwait for the first 25 years of her life, considering it her only home. Nahr loved Kuwait and desired nothing more than to be Kuwaiti: "I loved everything about Kuwaitis—their delicate Khaleeji thobes, their Matchboos with browned chicken and hot sauce, their diwaniyas, pearl diving traditions, and tribal ways. I even taught myself to speak their dialect and could dance Khaleeji 'better than their best'" (22-23). Furthermore, Nahr did not relate to the collective history and trauma of her people, viewing it as a painful past. She distanced herself from it, forming allegiance with Kuwait as much as she could. However, what Nahr struggles to understand as a youth, is that for a refugee like her, Kuwait would always be a liminal space, a transient space of instability. Kuwait was not truly her home as she was a Palestinian refugee, a second-class citizen who could never fully belong in Kuwaiti society: "Although Kuwait never allowed us more than temporary residency – making it clear we were always guests... [Palestinians] participated and contributed in nearly every sector of life, but we remained an underclass" (22).

Belonging is hesitant when it is conditioned by how your place of residence, your locale, welcomes you. This idea will be taken up in each chapter; how one belongs to the world is subjective, but one's sense of belonging is also reactionary to global sentiments that could be

hospitable or not. Often, belonging is found elsewhere, in a third space. Homi Bhabha describes existing in a 'third space' as a condition that arises from the interactions of past and present. In *Against the Loveless World*, the third space is a liminal space created by the contact between two cultures and statuses – citizenship and refugeehood, belonging and unbelonging. It is an unstable space shaped by antagonistic conditions related to turbulent political realities. An example of Kuwait as a liminal space is presented through Nahr's childhood. Nahr attempts to create a "third space" for herself and her loved ones, an "elsewhere," an identity beyond Palestine within the community that hosts them. She desperately tries to belong to Kuwait while distancing herself from her Palestinian roots. However, the hospitality of Kuwait is a malleable entity that cannot be relied on. This is evident in how Palestinians are treated in Kuwait following the Iraqi War. As Kuwaiti public favour turns against Palestinians, they become at risk of being kicked out of the country. As Nahr witnesses ongoing violence and prejudice against Palestinians, her sense of belonging in Kuwait becomes more uncertain, even though she strongly desires to fit in.

Nahr cannot achieve true belonging in Kuwait. To navigate her unstable belonging in the world, she dissociates from challenging times and tries to maintain a sense of busyness. In the face of her traumas, Nahr copes through escape and dissociation, which hinder belonging but are also necessary. As a child, she ignores her Palestinian heritage, and as an adult, she suppresses disappointment, disengages from violent situations, and copes through dissociation. Bessel van der Kolk describes dissociation as the essence of trauma, where overwhelming experiences are split off and fragmented, causing emotions, sounds, images, thoughts, and physical sensations related to the trauma to take on a life of their own. These sensory fragments of memory intrude into the present, where they are re-lived. In affective terms, the disillusionment of the fantasy of

"the good life," which encompasses upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and durable intimacy, can lead to various responses such as "depression, dissociation, pragmatism, cynicism, optimism, activism, or an incoherent mesh" (van der Kolk 77). Nahr's fantasy of belonging in Kuwait, of establishing a good life, eventually unravels. The Kuwait chapter builds up this fantasy and culminates in a violent scene of disillusionment and dissociation. Nahr fails to acknowledge her traumas until Kuwait disillusions her as a place of belonging. Hesitancy arises and forces her to confront personal and collective traumas. In Kuwait, Nahr experiences dissociation and not belonging, which leads to hesitancy. Dissociation is not hesitancy.

To understand the impact of Nahr's dissociation on her sense of belonging, I will provide one positive and one negative example. Throughout the narrative, dancing serves as a release for Nahr. Using dance, she copes with the hardships of life and escapes into music. Nahr is described as a phenomenal dancer who captivates her audience. Dancing is a spiritual act for Nahr, a meditative state of complete surrender to the music: "When the music plays, my body moves as it wishes. I never tried to control anything. It was complete surrender to music and all the unseen, unknowable forces it inspired. I let rhythm rub against my body and wrap around my breath. Maybe that's what people saw, because dancing is the nearest, I've come to true faith" (11). Dancing provides an escape from pain and heartache for Nahr. She finds solace and escape through dance. However, her passion for dance also puts her in dangerous situations in the conservative, patriarchal Kuwaiti society. She must adhere to strict societal rules regarding how a woman should behave and look. These dangers lead me to describe the second coping example as "negative": she relies on dissociation and escapism in moments of physical and sexual danger.

90

The negative example of how escape and dissociation influence Nahr's sense of belonging is her tendency to dissociate in moments of physical and sexual danger. From a young age, Nahr is treated as inferior because of her gender and lack of success in school. As a young adult, she enters a loveless marriage to a Palestinian revolutionary in Kuwait only to be abandoned scandalously. In her new status as an abandoned woman, Nahr deviates from the norms of Palestinian and Arab customs. Desperate for money, she becomes involved with Um Buraq, an elderly Iraqi woman with Kuwaiti citizenship. Nahr starts working as a call girl, initially hired to dance at parties but ultimately coerced into sex work. During this period, Nahr faces hostility and becomes a victim of sexual exploitation, gang rape, and genital mutilation due to a non-consensual and unsanitary abortion. In these violent situations, Nahr "checks out" and dissociates, lying still and counting the minutes. Dissociation becomes her coping mechanism. Nahr's dissociative activities help her survive, allowing her to focus on the passage of time and the end of the assault. Dancing is a positive example of a coping mechanism because she's connected to her body. This other example helps her survive but is negative because it disassociates her from her body.

The Kuwait section of *Against the Loveless World* depicts Nahr's struggle to belong in a liminal space, torn between her desire to fit in and the traumatic experiences she carries. Nahr copes with life's hardships through escape and dissociation, which impair her sense of belonging. Dancing provides her with a temporary escape and a spiritual connection, but it also exposes her to danger in a conservative society. Dissociation allows her to survive traumatic situations, but it further disconnects her from her body and inhibits a sense of belonging. Kuwait represented a liminal space for Nahr, as well as her formative place of upbringing. Kuwait is a space of

unbelonging, a site for trauma upon trauma for Nahr. While Nahr does not confront her traumas head-on in Kuwait, she creates distance from them through dissociation.

Though still physically in Kuwait, the next section, titled Iraq in the novel and here, represents a political and affiliative shift for Nahr.

2. In Iraq – war and freedom in limbo

I continue to show the conditions of unbelonging and hostility that compound trauma that leads to hesitancy. In "Kuwait," the personal traumas that impacted Nahr were described. In "Iraq," the traumas are of a political and collective nature. Nahr gradually becomes aware of the injustices and fickle feelings towards Palestinians in Kuwait. For Nahr, Iraq and Saddam Hussein, in particular, signify rescuing. The Iraqi invasion began on August 2nd, 1990. Nahr is at a party, dancing for elite and wealthy Kuwaiti men. Several of these men surround Nahr and proceed to attack her sexually: "Before too long, four men surrounded me, pawing and pushing up against me. I could not fight them off. […] Memories flashed through my mind. All the choices and circumstances that had brought me to that moment. I thought I was going to die that night" (74). Minutes into the assault, the room was startled by new voices entering the violent party, informing everyone that Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait and that Iraqi soldiers were in the streets. This caused enough alarm and emergency for the men to flee the scene and to leave Nahr alone. Nahr would forever valorize Saddam Hussein as her saviour at that moment. If it weren't for the invasion "one hundred thirty-two seconds" (74) into her assault, Nahr could have been killed. Instead, she was spared, thanks to Saddam: "I didn't care if Iraq had a right to invade,

whether Kuwait had been slant-drilling for oil under the border, or if Yasser Arafat[19] was a son of a bitch for siding with Saddam. All I knew was that Saddam Hussein had saved my life that night" (82).

Nahr declares the seven months of the occupation as a happy liberating period: "for the duration of Iraq's presence in Kuwait, I was a liberated, happy woman" (82). Weeks into the occupation, Hussein annexed Kuwait as Iraq's 19th province. Perhaps for this reason, Nahr names the following section Iraq. She notes the transition in not only how she is treated as a woman but also how she is treated as a Palestinian: "I had not understood the extent of our subordination until I knew what it meant to be respected, not in spite of being Palestinian but precisely because of it. We felt it, and it was hard not to revel in it. We simultaneously loved and resented Kuwait, just as Kuwait both loved and resented us" (83).

This period in Nahr's life marks another liminal period of belonging. In the chaos of war, Nahr could operate and move freely. For Nahr to feel adjusted in such a turbulent time is indicative of her own restlessness and lack of stability, perhaps a feeling she is not aware of herself as it happens. Under the occupation, Nahr is given respect as Palestinian and less special attention and more freedom from the male gaze as a woman. However, this is short-lived. As the occupation ends, Kuwaitis show great resentment towards Palestinians. No longer existing in a balanced relationship of hate and love, citizen and non-citizen, Palestinians are treated as pariahs, cooperators with the enemy, and are forcibly exiled from the country. For Nahr and her family,

---

[19] Yasser Arafat (1929-2004), Palestinian leader and chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Arafat was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to create peace in the Southwest Asian region alongside the Israeli politicians Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin.

this takes shape through the capture and torture of Jehad, Nahr's brother, who was not even in Kuwait for most of the war as he was a university student in Jordan. Still, he was accused of being a cooperator with the Iraqi army.

The decision to not leave Kuwait was a hesitant one. Nahr felt personally responsible for her brother's torture as she and her grandmother were hesitant to leave Kuwait prior. Between choosing to leave or stay, Nahr opted for a known enemy instead of the unknown. Nahr knew no other home and believed she could weather anything that happened in Kuwait. Her grandmother Sitti Wasfiyeh on the other hand, was too old and tired to keep migrating: "But it was Sitti Wasfiyeh who persuaded my brother it was pointless to try to make us flee. […] she asserted, 'I'm not going anywhere. I'm tired of being chased out of wherever I am in the world. Out of Haifa, then out of Ein el-Sultan, then Jordan, and now Kuwait? No, I'll just die here instead of facing another exodus. I'm too old for this shit that these shit people keep doing to us!'" (92).

The hesitancy shown by Nahr and her grandmother to leave Kuwait prior to the Iraqi invasion is a trauma response. Having experienced multiple displacements and exoduses throughout their lives as Palestinians, they faced a constant state of uncertainty and instability. This trauma response manifests as a reluctance to leave, as they have grown tired of being chased out of their homes and facing the hardships of starting over in a new place. Despite the potential dangers, they choose to stay in Kuwait, believing that they can weather anything that comes their way. This hesitancy to leave and the desire to hold on to what little stability they have left is a result of the collective trauma experienced by Palestinians, who constantly live at the mercy of other states and face the constant threat of displacement and further exodus.

Nahr begins to feel the collective toil of being Palestinian. After feeling respect and acceptance from the Iraqi army in contrast to experiencing complete rejection and hostile treatment she and other Palestinians receive in Kuwaitis post-war, Nahr becomes aware of the traumatic inheritances and accumulations she receives. To live stateless is to live at the mercy of other states, always threatened with further displacement and exodus. To be Palestinian in Diaspora is to always be at the whim of the other, at the mercy of the host's hospitality. Hesitancy emerges as a response to trauma, as evidenced by Nahr's reluctance to identify as Palestinian.

III. Spaces of Hesitancy: The Impasse in Jordan

I define spaces of hesitancy as spaces where individuals are forced to pause to process the calamity they have incurred. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Laurent Berlant's concept of "the impasse" is useful in understanding hesitant belonging or belonging in the "ongoing present" (Berlant 17). The present is informed by the past, and the past influences the choices made for the future. In *Against the Loveless World*, Susan Abulhawa presents Jordan as the space of hesitancy or the impasse where her protagonist must confront the past in her present moment before deciding about the future. In Jordan, Nahr is unable to keep moving forward, but instead breaks down and experiences the heaviness of uncertainty and indecision. This is detailed in the third section, "Jordan," through descriptors of Nahr's emotions and also through comparing Nahr's involuntary pause to her mother and grandmother's proactivity in displacement.

Although Nahr experiences significant trauma and unbelonging, leading to hesitancy, in Kuwait and Iraq, it is in Jordan that this hesitancy reaches its culmination. In this country where Nahr finds herself in a state of uncertainty and pause, she experiences a shift in her perception

and understanding of herself and her surroundings. This space becomes significant in the narrative as it serves as a catalyst for Nahr's awakening and heightened awareness of the collective trauma she belongs to. It is a place where she becomes acutely aware of her sense of unbelonging and unlovingness in the world that has made her, and her fellow refugees marginalized. This section focuses on how Jordan represents collective trauma and hesitant belonging for Nahr after she and her family are forced to leave Kuwait due to violence and hostility against Palestinians. In Jordan, Nahr struggles to find her place in the world, feeling depressed, undone, and unhomed. In Amman, Nahr becomes aware of her reality as a migrant body, afflicted by temporariness, instability, and displacement across generations. She is hesitant to accept her refugee status and displacement, yet she begins to understand the reality of her family's experience as displaced individuals. Nahr's inability to feel a sense of belonging in Jordan highlights the deep-rooted sense of hesitancy and ambivalence that comes with forced displacement and migration. Jordan then becomes the space of hesitancy for Nahr and for the novel.

In this space of hesitancy, Nahr sits and dwells on her traumatic experiences of forced migration and assault. She only begins to comprehend their calamity, personally and intergenerationally in Jordan. When she and her family must leave Kuwait due to violence and hostility against Palestinians and her family following the Iraq war, Nahr feels her own displacement. The family moves to Jordan, which is a haven for millions of Palestinian refugees and displaced individuals. In Jordan, Nahr experiences *shatat* (scattering) and loss: "Now the land had been pulled from under my feet and I wobbled in the unsteady terrain of refugees, struggling to carry on" (114). Abulhawa describes Nahr's state as "a haze of exile and idleness"

(115). Nahr views the world "through the lens of loss" (115), a disorientation that ruled her days, she was faced with the "incomprehensibility of forced, permanent displacement" (119). Nahr experiences Arab malaise, the powerlessness attributed to affirming your existence, or *Qahr*, terms I dig deeper into in the next chapter.

Jordan represents an awakening of an inherited trauma for Nahr. As she faces her first exile and experiences the accompanying affects of disorientation and depression, she also becomes aware of the continuing legacy of this fate for Palestinians. In her family, Nahr is the third generation to be displaced; she finally sees displacement's long-term impact on her family: she realizes that her mother was her "age when she was forced out of her home in Palestine" (118). Furthermore, she is struck by how differently they, as seasoned refugees, adapt to their new surroundings while she struggles to collect her bearings. As she is unable to shake off the tribulations of their recent displacement, Nahr tries to understand how and why her mother and grandmother can adapt so quickly. She ponders: "maybe it was easier because the trauma of forced displacement was already well-known to them, and they understood how idleness and purposelessness could dull the mind, drop the eyelids, and seep too much sleep and despair into the day. They were experienced refugees, better equipped to handle recurring generational trauma" (115). In this observation, Nahr identifies the reliance that becomes expected of well-weathered refugees. What she identifies as ease is more like familiarity with heartbreak, with the patterns of re-establishing a life in displacement that her mother and her grandmother have had to do before. From witnessing her own family members go through the motions she must now learn, Nahr's understanding of generational trauma deepens. This observation shows that Amman is a rude awakening for Nahr. Even though life had already been unkind to her, she had

only known one home, Kuwait. She had kept a distance from her Palestinian identity, choosing to believe that her fate was always in her hands, and that her Palestinian identity didn't necessarily matter. However, global politics proved her wrong. As Kuwait turned hostile against Palestinians, Nahr lost all she knew and was rendered hesitant, uncertain of how to be in the loveless world. Unlike her former proactive nature of always seeking solutions, even amid chaos and destitution, Nahr pauses in Jordan. She is unable to shake off the feeling of defeat and loss.

Nahr is disillusioned by the world's hospitality in Amman. She struggles to find her place, to cope with what she had just experienced in Kuwait as well as the uncertainty of the future. She is disoriented, unable to comprehend the "forced, permanent, displacement" (118). Nahr's existential crisis and loss of identity following her forced migration from Kuwait to Jordan highlight the traumatic nature of forced displacement. The conditions that cause people to become refugees and forced migrants are traumatic, and the way they are treated in transit or target countries can also be traumatic. Nahr experiences such trauma in Jordan, which initially serves as a transit country but ultimately becomes her new home. She spends days in bed, all of Amman was "a reminder of loss" to her (114). In this time of pause, Nahr can no longer avoid her thoughts and the unbearable calamities that she experiences and carries, as she did in Kuwait: "The endless work with which I'd populate my time in Kuwait to keep thoughts at bay was gone" (126). Instead, in the idleness of exile, Nahr is also confronted with the traumatic experiences she experienced. Intrusive memories keep "replaying over and over behind [her] eyes" (126). These traumatic memories feel like "talons ripping at [her] entrails" (126). Nahr was not only confronting the intergenerational trauma of continuous displacement, but she was also

facing the traumas of the sexual abuse and violence she lived through that were clawing at her day and night.

Nevertheless, some good does come to our protagonist in the space of hesitancy; Nahr grows closer to her family, seeing them through this lens of loss. Because of her hesitancy in Jordan, Nahr is able to negotiate her place in the world and her connections. She builds a familiarity and a new intimacy in sharing the experience of displacement. Nahr matures as she experiences her own displacement and appreciates her elders' experiences of displacement in a new light. In this space, she forms stronger ties with her own family. She forms an even stronger connection with her grandmother, mother, and brother based on the collective experience of displacement that Palestinians experience, generation after generation. She helps her mother with her *tatreez*[20] business, becomes more patient and understanding of her grumpy grandmother, and reinforces her bond with her changed brother.

Moreover, Nahr begins to develop an interest in Palestine. The narrative aligns with the historical signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1990, which allowed Palestinians in displacement to reapply for their identity cards and to visit their families in Occupied Palestine. Her mother and brother visit first and come back feeling elated and more connected to the homeland than ever before. Palestine starts to "feel more real" (138) for Nahr: "It was no longer the lost home and heritage trapped in Mama's tin box of old photos of her childhood in Haifa, [her] parent's wedding, and their life in Ein el-Sultan" (138). Palestine materializing in her mind is a significant shift for Nahr. As she transitions from being loyal to Kuwait and feeling at home

---

[20] Embroidery in Arabic

there to a complete sense of homelessness and belonging in Jordan, Palestine posits a place of hope, a possible space of belonging when all other belonging is temporary and precarious for Palestinians. Jordan is a transit home, which Nahr visits before she settles in Palestine. Ultimately, post-incarceration, Jordan is rendered her forever home, her place of freedom, as Palestine is no longer accessible to her. Nevertheless, Jordan's initial transience differs from Kuwait's. In its space of uncertainty, Nahr is able to sit with her traumas and ultimately work through them, at the very least finding belonging within her family and seeing them in a different light, as the carriers of the suffering that she only now sees as her own, the burden of displacement and refugeehood, the heartache of Palestinians. As a space of hesitancy, Amman, Jordan, represents displacement and unbelonging that Nahr and Palestinians are caught in.

Nahr's sense of belonging is challenged, and she experiences a feeling of in-betweenness that prevents her from forming solid connections to places and the world. As a result, she becomes hesitant and aware of the generational legacy of displacement to which she belongs, making her firsthand experience of the trauma of forced migration that Palestinians go through time and time again all the more poignant. In Jordan, Nahr experiences hesitant belonging. In the uncertainty of their violent displacement, Nahr is knocked down; she is unsure of her belonging.

Spaces of hesitancy, as evidenced here, are represented in tumultuous times where one is unable to act but is caught in pause and retrospection, in the paralysis of trauma. In the lack of certitude of such times, one is left to reflect on their hurt and anguish, in turn seeking certainties. Being in a space of Hesitancy acknowledges the complexity and liminality of belonging constantly challenged by forced migration and displacement. Spaces of hesitancy are spaces of breaking, of rupture and disruption of the norm that mirror a tension in relation to belonging to

the mainstream world. In Jordan, the past pulls Nahr into retrospection and uncovering her traumas, while the present moment is uncertain.

IV.   Hesitancy Healed: In the homeland -belonging and being Palestinian

Before discussing hesitancy as a tool that can be used, it is important to note the awareness of hesitancy and its resolve. Around half the novel takes place in Palestine: Being in Palestine, in the West Bank, is a turning point for our protagonist. Palestine represents return, belonging, and home for Nahr. Initially, Nahr is hesitant to accept Palestine as her space of belonging. After her mother and brother successfully visit Palestine and come back with stories, Nahr agrees to go back to finalize her divorce from Mohammad. Her first visit is complex. Nahr is defensive and keeps her guard up. She feels judged, and she is worried that her reputation has made its way to the homeland. She holds herself strong against any insensitive and sexist commentary and actions. As a woman, Nahr expects unkindness and gossip from strangers, and she acts accordingly. As a Palestinian, she is hesitant to embrace the homeland and the acceptance offered to her by Bilal and his mother. Gradually, Nahr fully embraces her Palestinian identity as well as the markers of that identity such as the spirit of resistance, the importance of land, and the necessity for resilience. Nahr develops the feeling of "home" as she reconnects with nature, the way of life, her family's heritage, and the community around her. This is significant because for once Palestine does not feel liminal but can potentially transform into a forever home for Nahr, despite its political precarity and the constant threat of ethnic cleansing and land invasion that looms over their shoulder as they live under siege. Palestine grows as the "forever" home and not an elsewhere for Nahr. Even when she is forced to leave, post-imprisonment, exiled to Jordan, it remains with her. Abulhawa notes the impossibility of full belonging for those whose

lives have been displaced and dispersed; their memories and longings spread out all over and elsewhere.

Still, Palestine comes as close as possible to a fulfilling home and space of belonging for our protagonist, mainly because of how she is ultimately welcomed and loved, but also because of the familial connections she uncovers through finding her mother's childhood home and loving the land. She visits her mother's childhood home, in Haifa, and picks figs from a tree her grandfather planted, before being chased off by a Jewish woman who now lives there. […]. Appreciation and love for the land itself allow her to cope: "I was content to just sit there in the splendid silence of the hills, where the quiet amplified small sounds—the wind rustling trees; sheep chewing, roaming, bleating, breathing; the soft crackle of the fire; the purr of Bilal's breathing," Nahr reflects. "I realized how much I had come to love these hills; how profound was my link to this soil" (296). Nahr finds belonging in every sense with Palestine, with the land, the nature, the people, and their cause. Unlike the hesitancy of Amman and the trauma in Kuwait, Palestine validates Nahr's sense of belonging as a member of this community. Palestine symbolizes the loving home, countering the global loveless world that has been inhospitable to Palestinian refugees, and supportive of their occupation within Palestine. The love of land is a significant marker for Palestinian identification and belonging; she carries the memories of its soil of the hills with her as she is forced back into exile. Her ability to recall nature in the dehumanizing space of The Cube is how she utilizes hesitancy to affirm her sense of belonging, as I will show in the next section.

Significantly, Abulhawa does not shy away from showing the violence as well as love in every day Palestinian life. Not only is her protagonist exposed to her ancestral people's culture,

history, and reality, she also experiences the political reality of active hostility of the occupying

state against her people. Within the ancestral homeland, not only does Nahr experience

displacement and devastation as a refugee, but she "returns" thus becoming Palestinian in a way

she had not identified or cared about before. As I mentioned earlier, *al awda,* "return" is a

charged concept for Palestinian being and belonging. Nahr's visit to Palestine puts her face-to-

face with the history of Palestinian displacement, while also allowing her to witness what life

under Israeli occupation truly is like. She experiences "successive trauma without respite" (266).

She witnesses the events of the second Intifada[21]. She witnesses settlers encroaching on the

Palestinian village she resides in. Violence after violence of course exhaust her as she indicates

that she "[needs] time to mourn, time to recover" (266). Violent measures are deemed necessary

in the struggle for Palestinian liberation.[22] In the novel, Bilal, Ghassan, and their companions are

tortured, kidnapped, raided, and killed by the Israeli regime with and without cause. We learn

that they have organized independently as an anti-colonial measure, smuggling weapons, and

planning attacks against their aggressors. Nahr joins Bilal's group. Initially, she is hesitant, but

ultimately, she becomes a key symbol for the second Intifada, leading to her capture, arrest, and

incarceration. Abulhawa humanizes the subject that is caught in the contrast of hero and terrorist,

as her characters are involved in different ways in the Palestinian liberation movement. By

reading Nahr's narrative and learning about her love and losses, the reader is sympathetic

---

[21] The second intifada, known as the Al Aqsa intifada, took place between the years 2000 and 2005. The second intifada, which was more violent than the first, began in 2000 after negotiations between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat failed. Israelis claim that Arafat made a deliberate decision to resort to violence, while Palestinians point to a provocative visit by Israeli politician Ariel Sharon to the contested Temple Mount. Both Arafat and Sharon played a role in the intifada's start, but the underlying cause was likely a lack of trust between the two sides that made war inevitable once the peace talks collapsed (Beauchamp).

[22] This statement aligns with anticolonial and decolonial practice and theory. See Fanon 1963; Pappe 2023.

towards her. Nevertheless, Palestine represents Nahr's ultimate place of belonging, of feeling at home; yet it comes with the weight of political (un)belonging. As a Palestinian in an occupied land, living under the rules of an apartheid state, Nahr's sense of belonging is both complicated and uncomplicated. She is beyond doubt loyal to her loved ones, but also to her Palestinian community and people; she has, however, given up or perhaps never has had faith in the international community, which has failed Palestinians time and time again. Palestine transforms from a vague distant homeland to the site of abundant love and belonging for Nahr. She inherits the trauma of settler-colonialism and acquires the spirit of resistance. Taking what she has experienced as injustices against Palestinians in Kuwait and in turn observing the injustices in Palestine while engaging in conversations with Bilal, Ghassan, and their group, Nahr finds her place within the resistance movement, becoming an active member of a group fighting against the oppressive system. Rosina Ali writes that "what fuels her fight isn't a divine commandment about good and evil; it is the land itself." I would add that it is what the land represents for her: which is love, belonging, and acceptance.

Palestine acts as a safe space for Nahr. It is the site of her personal growth as well. She does everything in her power to defend what she loves. This takes shape through political action (freedom fighting) in her pathway to resolve and certainty. Through resolving her hesitancies and establishing awareness of her traumas and the unfairness of the world as opposed to the welcoming of her community, Nahr is able to utilize hesitancy to take control.

V.   Hesitancy As A Tool To Unpack Trauma

As hesitancy is a space one finds oneself in, it also takes on a more active role as a tool to be used to unpack the same traumas that caused it. In this sense, hesitancy resurfaces as a tool of resilience, countering the defeatist and uncertain implications of the term, and becoming a more pragmatic teleological tool of action. When working with trauma, hesitancy can serve as a tool to help unpack suppressed, forgotten, or hidden emotions and memories in the suspended space of uncertainty. I argue that by taking hold of her story and telling it, Nahr uses hesitancy as a tool to unpack her trauma and to remain resilient and resistant against imprisonment.

Nahr's incarceration is not unique and relates to over 4,000 Palestinian security prisoners currently in the Israel prison system (B'Tselem 2023). "The Cube," Nahr's prison cell, acts as a site for memory, for remembrance and survival in a stagnant, timeless present. The narrative opens with a middle-aged Nahr in a high-security prison cell in isolation. Here, Nahr writes her confessional: "As soon as the metal door slammed shut, and I was unlocked from the wall, I picked up one pencil and opened the notebook. I stare at the blank pages now, trying to tell my story - everything I confessed to Bilal and everything after" (*Against the Loveless World* 10). From the onset, the reader encounters a deeply traumatized narrator; we know that the story to be told comes from an impoverished mind in captivity. Akin to a place of pausing, the atemporal nature of her prison cell makes it a possible space for hesitancy. However, Nahr feels no uncertainty in "The Cube," and she can therefore utilize hesitancy to maintain control.

In "The Cube", time seems to stop: "The cube is devoid of time. It contains, instead, a yawning stretch of something unnamed, without present, future, or past, which I fill with

imagined or remembered life" (4). Abulhawa plays with temporality in her depiction of "the Cube" as an atemporal place. To be in "the Cube" is to be stranded in time. Furthermore, the reader learns that Nahr becomes numb and devoid of feeling in the stagnation of "the Cube": "Nothing can move in confinement, not even the heart" (10). This additionally frames the narrative to come as one that is devoid of an "emotional" perspective, which the narrator signals is different from what storytellers do: "I want to tell it as storytellers do, with emotional anchors, but I recall emotions in name only. My life returns to me in images, smells, and sounds, but never feelings. I feel nothing" (10).

"The Cube" is not a space of hesitancy. It is a place in which she uses hesitancy as a tool to unpack her trauma. In "the Cube", Nahr contemplates her entire life; replaying every decision, choice, and circumstance she ever made. Nahr informs us that her memory often wanders as she rots in "the Cube": "On this particular day, I had been roaming the shores, deserts, and malls of Kuwait in simpler times" (5). She identifies this form of mental travel in her grandmother, Sitti Wasfiyeh: who "never really left her village in Palestine," roaming Ein el-Sultan in her mind as Nahr does in the Cube (14). "The Cube" also triggers traumatic memories from Nahr's life that she recounts, such as her recovery from the unsanitary abortion that was forced upon her in Egypt, that she spent weeks recovering from at Um Buraq's house: "I lay there throughout the night, watching memories and imaginations play on the ceiling, much the same as I do now in the Cube" (66). Even before "the Cube", Nahr had resorted to memories in moments of tribulation; in the terrible moment of her sexual assault by multiple men on the beach in Kuwait, Nahr goes into her memories, "memories flashed through my mind. All the choices and circumstances that had brought me to that moment" (74).

106

Nahr retells her story and focuses on moments of hesitancy, of difficult decisions to ground herself and remain strong. She is not hesitant in her position, but she evokes hesitancy as a tool to overcome the hardship she finds herself in. She will not break. Nahr recounts her life chronologically, beginning with her youth in Kuwait.. This could be perceived as a method of gaining control of time and reality. Notably, the writer, Nahr, insists on her part in the story; hers is not simply a story of the past being recounted but also one of the present. It is also one that continues beyond Nahr's time in the Cube. Abulhawa plays with temporality: as the prison space is a unique site of temporal control[23], where cyclical time is lost, the events outside of this space are narrated in a structured chronology, establishing prison time as only a part of this linearity, one that will pass, one that will be overcome.

Nahr opts to pull from the past in the Cube. Instead of surrendering to its hesitant space, she resists with the only means available to her, the same tool Abulhawa uses: her memory and her pen. In the stagnant present of the Cube, in its waiting, Nahr has nothing but the past to pull back to: "The guards are accustomed to the conversations I have with the walls. I know I'm alone here. I'm not delusional. But the way memory animates the past is more real than the present. I see and feel and hear Jehad, Sitti Wasfiyeh, Mama, Baba. Most of all, I am with Bilal here" (23). This is not to be mistaken for melancholic remembrance or nostalgia, as Nahr evokes her loved ones as a form of resistance against her oppressors. She pulls to the past, to her people, her certainties, to maintain a sense of self and belonging in the suspended present. In the dehumanizing conditions of the prison cell, Nahr recounts her life story with reference to

___

[23] The ship is also a unique cite of temporal control. See Christina Sharpe.

moments of hesitancy in belonging, all to remain resilient and not be hesitant against the loveless world.

Unpacking hesitancy is a tool used to assert one's sense of identity and belonging, especially in the face of dehumanization and conflicted narratives that counter one's assertions. Experiencing hesitance as a reaction and living in hesitant spaces make one quite intimate with hesitance's affordances. Nahr has worked through her hesitancies and can then employ the learned strategies of unpacking in the Cube. The strategies take shape as storytelling, journaling and recounting her life's hardships and affirmative moments.

VI.   Conclusion: Hesitancy as the feedback loop

Hesitancy thus far has proven its multifaceted nature; in relation to trauma, hesitancy operates as a feedback loop, occurring as a response to traumatic events, simmering and expanding as a space one lingers in, and returns as a tool used to heal and cope with trauma. Hesitancy comes full circle here: resurfacing as an antidote to its own ailment. As trauma causes hesitancy, hesitancy loops back to heal trauma. Nahr transitions from being hesitant in her position to evoking hesitancy as a tool to overcome the hardship she finds herself in. Hesitancy as a feedback loop affirms concrete belonging as opposed to hesitant belonging. Nahr's physical return to the homeland resolves any hesitancy in belonging for Nahr. Instead, she rejects the world that rejected her people, and she reinforces her identity as Palestinian, even if in exile. Nahr learns how to employ hesitancy as a tool. As a tool, hesitance, and the skill of its unpacking help Nahr affirm her belonging. She is able to utilize hesitancy as such a tool in spaces that attempt to break her.

In *Against the Loveless World*, Susan Abulhawa delves into the complexities of Palestinian existence and identity through the life story of Nahr, a Palestinian woman who endures displacement, trauma, and violence. Abulhawa emphasizes the significance of place, gender, and migration in shaping individual and collective Palestinian identity, as portrayed through Nahr's experiences. Throughout the novel, Nahr's hesitation in identifying with Palestine is highlighted as she faces the challenges of being a refugee, a citizen of a sovereign nation, and a non-citizen of an occupied territory. However, through her journey, Nahr gradually develops a strong connection to Palestine and becomes an active member of a group fighting against oppression.

Abulhawa critiques the treatment of Palestinians by states and international organizations in Palestine, shedding light on the shortcomings of these entities in resolving the issues of forced migration and refugee crises. Like my own critique of cosmopolitan ideologies of belonging and hospitality, Abulhawa constructs a narrative that explicitly exposes the victimization of Palestinians in displacement due to settler-colonialism and regional/global politics. Through Nahr's experiences, Abulhawa illustrates the devastating impact of occupation and apartheid on the Palestinian people, while also exhibiting their resilience and resistance. The novel emphasizes the importance of community and collective memory in shaping individual and collective identity, as Nahr draws strength from the experiences of her family and ancestors. Nahr's journey of hesitation allows for negotiating her situation and feelings, ultimately leading her to become a fearless fighter. It is through uncertainty and discomfort that she finds resolution and certainty.

The story serves as a testament to the strength of the Palestinian people and a call to action for justice and equality in the face of oppression. To understand the deep connection between hesitant belonging and trauma, *Against the Loveless World* provides the space to do so. Nahr's hesitancy in belonging stems from traumatic experiences that preceded her birth. Born into refugeehood and second-class citizenship, Nahr instinctively desired to distance herself from Palestine and find belonging elsewhere, such as in Kuwait. However, Nahr's expulsion from Kuwait and her subsequent stay in Jordan, which I call the "space of hesitancy," forces her to confront her hesitations and face her traumas. This process ultimately leads her to rediscover her home in Palestine, returning with a strong sense of determination and self-identity. Her affirmed belonging helps her endure her time in the suspended space of the Cube. By recounting her life, tribulations, loves, and victories, Nahr can maintain a sense of being and belonging throughout her years in the Cube. Nahr is not a terrorist; she is not a villain, she is not a "human animal."[24] Nahr's unpacking of hesitancy resonates with Palestinians in Palestine and globally who must defend Palestinian existence, countering accusations of antisemitism, hate speech, and malintent simply by advocating for a free Palestine.

This chapter has examined how hesitancy intertwines with direct trauma. Through a feedback loop of response and reaction, hesitancy manifests and evolves. The concept of hesitancy serves as a powerful lens to examine the characters' sense of belonging in the novel. By delving into specific spaces of displacement and unbelonging, such as Amman, Jordan, the

---

[24] Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant referred to Palestinians as human animals when announcing the complete siege of Gaza on October 9th, 2023. See https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/10/9/israeli-defence-minister-orders-complete-siege-on-gaza.

narrative delves into the complexities of the characters' experiences. Furthermore, hesitancy not only acts as a tool for trauma processing, allowing individuals to confront and address suppressed emotions, but it also operates as a response to traumatic events, leaving subjects uncertain in the face of adversity. Within the realm of hesitancy, the characters grapple with their yearning for a better world while navigating the intricate challenges of finding their place within it. Through this thorough exploration of hesitancy, the novel sheds light on the profound difficulties faced by migrants and underscores the profound impact of displacement on their sense of belonging.

Chapter 4: A Person of the Hospitable World: Feeling Hesitancy in the Aftermath of Trauma in Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses*

Hesitancy is a lapse between binaries in belonging, subjectively and to the world writ large. Hesitant belonging is characterized as the loss or delay in belonging to the world. Thus far, I have established that hesitant belonging can operate as a feedback loop. In this chapter, I go a step further and observe hesitancy in the aftermath of trauma, focusing not on the trauma but how one feels about it. Hesitancy and trauma have an intertwined relationship; trauma causes hesitancy, and hesitancy heals trauma in return. In this chapter, my focus shifts from direct trauma to how characters feel hesitant to belong, especially once trauma has solidified its heaviness cross-generationally. I explore the feelings of uncertainty and loss as hesitancy. I examine hesitancy in this manner through Hala Alyan's debut novel, *Salt Houses,* which focuses on the inheritance of personal and cultural trauma among Palestinian diasporic individuals. The novel provides insight into the impact of historical and personal loss on the Yacoub family's intergenerational trauma. These losses manifest as hesitant belonging for the studied characters.

In this chapter, I observe how hesitancy feels and performs and how individuals emotionally code-switch, resorting to silence, anger, and random and irrational decisions to navigate their sense of belonging in the world. Unlike the previous chapter, I don't search for resolve or management with hesitancy. Instead, I observe the state of hesitancy as it is, and I try to understand how it is depicted in the different generations. In *Against the Loveless World,* hesitancy's impact was explored in relation to resilience, resistance, and healing; in *Salt Houses*, hesitancy is a daily-survival mechanism for those generationally plagued with *qahr*, through the tactic of emotional code-switching. The chapter highlights how hesitancy is an inherited state for

migrant bodies, and it notes its emotional and mental heaviness as hesitant belonging weighs individuals down.

Salt Houses explores the Yacoub family's struggle with belonging across generations as they navigate the trauma of displacement and migration from Palestine to new locales. The text examines the effect of *qahr* and how it affects the characters' sense of belonging, as charged effects of anger, sadness, and defeat are passed down from generation to generation. For older characters, hesitancy takes shape in confronting their place in relation to their world and opting to break with it. For the youngest generation, hesitancy is evident in the feeling of in-betweenness and discomfort with one's history, unable to rectify it within one's present. My analysis of Hala Alyan's debut novel *Salt Houses* traces the familial inheritance of personal and cultural trauma that manifests in moments of hesitancy for the characters in different transitional periods. I argue that the hesitancies of the Yacoub family uncover deep and underlying crises within migrant beings. *Salt Houses* juxtaposes generational migration with persistent trauma that is forcibly forgotten or hidden and plays with the tensions of carrying the past and being in the present.

In *Salt Houses*, we are introduced to multiple characters representing different generations; they experience moments of hesitancy in navigating how they exist in the world. Alyan's novel documents the period surrounding the Six-Day War of 1967, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the 2006 Lebanon War. These dates are important historically, as well as in the narrative, as they signify reference points for displacement for Palestinians, Iraqis, Kuwaitis, and Lebanese all impacted by these times of conflict. Palestinian time frames the narrative, or "the point of reference for other events, past and future" (Abu-Lughod and Sa'di 5) as Lila Abu-

Lughod and Ahmed Sa'di describe it. In the novel, the two markers of time are the Nakba and the Naksa. In the first chapter, which follows the matriarch Salma, life is demarcated as before and after 1948, before Jaffa and after Jaffa. Whereas, for her youngest daughter, Alia, who was too young to remember the 1948 exodus, the point of change is the 1967 six-day war, before and after Nablus. It carried the certainty of Palestine and life in the past as she navigated her life in diaspora. For Atef, the Naksa is also the turning point; he carries the past as he establishes himself in the present, elsewhere. The Naksa represents a collective and a personal loss for Atef. Personal because he loses Mustafa, and because Atef is the victim of torture at the hands of the enemy, forever scarred and shamed, as he is exiled from Palestine. Michelle Balaev explains that "personal loss can be understood as the lived experience of a traumatic event by an individual" (152). This loss is rooted in Atef as well as in Alia. The family's intergenerational trauma stems from the personal loss of Mustafa, in addition to the historical and ongoing loss of Palestine that they are always aware of. With each generation, with each shift in time and place for the Yacoub migrants, Palestine becomes more abstract.

Several turning points represented by times and decisions that mark a shift in the characters' allegiance and sense of belonging are described and noted in *Salt Houses.* Being in Palestine, at home, is the point of reference for what the Yacoub elders recognize as certainty, as safety; life in the aftermath becomes conditioned by the hesitancies of trauma for Alia and Atef as well as their descendants. Across the generations, the Yacoub family has been impacted by amassing and passed down trauma. In this polyphonic narrative, Alyan provides insight into the characters' own psyches as well as how they have been influenced by their parents' actions and traumas. Moments of hesitancy happen at turning points in the characters' lives: from the great-

114

grandmother Salma, as she prepares for her daughter's upcoming wedding ceremonies, Alia reckoning with the loss of Mustafa and the new life she carries, Souad choosing to move to Paris then to uproot her family to Lebanon, and Manar opting to visit Palestine as soon as she finds out she's pregnant. *Salt Houses* showcases four generations of Palestinians in exile, uncertain of their belonging, hesitant in how to go about in the world.

Quintessentially, *Salt Houses* also explores Diasporic sentiment and feeling. With no physical or tangential knowledge of Palestine as a homeland, home is an abstract concept for the Yacoub children as they seek belonging elsewhere, hyphenating their identities, and expanding their cultural connections. Avtar Brah states that "identity is always plural and in process, even when it might be construed or represented as fixed" (189). This sentiment speaks true for Souad and Karam and their offspring. They wish for stable belonging but that simply has not been the case for them, ever. Atef and Alia might mourn a home lost, a fixed entity of what home means, which is Palestine, but this has never been the case for their children, let alone their grandchildren. Riham seeks solace through religion and grounding activities such as gardening, following in suit with her grandmother. Souad, on the other hand, struggles in the US and finds comfort in Lebanon that offers some familiarity, some recognition, if not as a native but as a neighbour, especially with her accent being identified as Palestinian, for example.[25] The Yacoub children who live in the diaspora beyond the Arab world invite plurality into their identity, especially as they marry people from different nationalities. All the characters share the affliction of Arab malaise, which is the understanding of home in trouble and conflict that also

---

[25] There is no chapter from Karam's perspective, but given his circumstances, as an international student in the US who settles there, one can assume his identity remains in process as well.

embodies sentiments of *qahr*. Like many Palestinian families in displacement, the extended

Yacoub family carries hurt, guilt, and shame with it. To use Samir Kassir's words: "Palestine

feels like a permanently open wound every day" (Kassir 21). Palestine inevitably touched every

one of the Yacoub family members' senses of belonging to the world.

In the following section, I look at emotions in relation to hesitancy, focusing on the act of

emotional code-switching and the emotions that make up *qahr.* I focus on the distance between

hesitancy and the traumatic event itself, focusing less on the direct trauma and more on the

relationship between generational trauma and affects that take on a hesitant nature. I also observe

how the feeling of hesitancy passes through the generations. I focus on Alia, who experiences the

trauma that pushes the family out of Palestine. I also examine Souad and Manar, Alia's daughter

and granddaughter. These three female characters experience moments of hesitancy as they

move into the world and attempt to create spaces of belonging.

I.   Unpacking *Qahr:* Collective affects of hesitant belonging

Feeling hesitancy can take shape as feeling nothing; it also manifests as *qahr,* the Arab word I

have used earlier, that combines defeat, anger, frustration, existential dread, and feeling the

weight of injustice. *Qahr* strongly correlates with the sentiment of Arab malaise introduced by

Samir Kassir. Palestinian defeat and the larger defeat of Arabs in the face of colonial violence

and occupation, which has irreversibly worsened the conditions of Arabs in the SWANA region,

is represented as a melancholic state. The global demand for Palestinians to prove their right to

life, existence, and grief culminates in the feeling of *qahr*. Hesitancy occurs in the amalgamation

of the variety of emotions that make up *qahr.* The mixture of anger, grief, sadness, anxiety, and

despair make up *Qahr;* together, these emotions create heavy and complex internal senses of being and complicate belonging, therefore resulting in hesitant belonging. In this chapter, I focus mainly on three emotions: grief, anxiety, and anger. I structure my analysis around these three emotions as they are prominently expressed by the characters as they negotiate their belonging.

It is only natural to feel hesitant when reality, knowledge, and conviction do not align. As such, to feel hesitant in belonging is to feel an in-betweeness and a split in one's sense of belonging. Hesitancy manifests as an identity crisis as well. As Palestinian-Canadian author Saeed Teebi writes: "To be Palestinian is to constantly have basic facts of your existence denied" (Teebi). Hala Alyan similarly writes "The task of the Palestinian is to be palatable or to be condemned. The task of the Palestinian, […] is to audition for empathy and compassion. To prove that we deserve it. To earn it" ("The Palestine Double Standard"). Palestinians such as Teebi and Alyan who come from rich histories of Palestinian being, belonging, and trauma, who carry family histories, old passports, family homes, letters, and death notices, are constantly gaslit into invisibility. Palestinians have no hesitance in accepting or denying their existence, but the hesitance comes in how to react and exist in the world; whether they should be angered by the world or be silenced to survive through it, remains a daily struggle.[26] With this choice in hand, hesitancy becomes performative as well; this comes in play with the idea of emotional code-switching. I unpack the affects of *qahr* expressed by the characters that in turn contribute to

___

[26] In her 2023 article in the *New York Times*, Hala Alyan argues that Palestinians must audition for the world's empathy, dehumanizing themselves to be viewed as humans. Grief and mourning, in this case, become "resources for the rethinking of community and of international relations" (Butler), as grief is not naturally given to Palestinians by the inhospitable global community. Indeed, Palestinians are often designated as ungrievable by states who bolster and support their occupier, sidestepping in their language the human value of Palestinian life and reaffirming Israel's right to defend itself while vaguely condemning the loss of Palestinian life, if at all.

a feeling of hesitant belonging. I examine grief, anxiety, and anger. After this, I explore how people can navigate the world with *qahr* through emotional code-switching and the example of Manar.

1. **Grief**

Qahr carries a strong and deeply rooted sense of grief that manifests in generational panic and anxiety. The character of Alia represents how grief becomes embodied and is carried in one's heart and cells. Through Alia's example, the connection between hesitancy and grief becomes clear. Hesitancy unresolved festers into *qahr*. As Alia has forever left Nablus unresolved and bereaved, life's conditions force her to move on, yet she is not ready. In chapter three, we see Alia's struggle with letting go of the past to survive in the present and build a future. The pull of the past is quite strong, and it manifests through the affects of *qahr*.

From the initial chapter, Alyan foreshadows that Alia's life will be marked with grief and tragedy. We are introduced to Alia through Salma's eyes as a young, free-willed, and stubborn bride. An ominous premonition is attached to Alia's fate as Salma reads her fortune and sees a zebra, which appears to symbolize uncertainty and impending tragedy. Later on, in the chapter from Alia's perspective, the reader learns of the loss of Nablus following the six-day war of 1967 and its grievous toll on both Alia and Atef. Alia left Nablus for Kuwait without knowing she was leaving for good, without realizing she was saying goodbye to Mustafa for good, without even considering that Atef would be forever changed. Alia understands her place in the world through her grief, through the sudden and quick shifting of her centers of belonging. In Kuwait, Alia

experiences hesitancy as she figures out her place in the world, especially as her place of belonging, Nablus, Palestine, is forever tied to grief and dispossession.

In chapter three, the reader in the middle of preparing a meal for an upcoming event. In celebration of their first New Year's in Kuwait City, Atef and Alia throw a party and invite their newly acquainted friends, a group of Widad's friends and Atef's work colleagues, to their villa. The New Year's party is meant to be a celebration of new beginnings, including the life growing inside of her. However, it also marks a literal push toward the future, towards newness, while the hold of the past remains quite prominent for Alia. However, Alia is caught in the hold of grief during the whole ordeal. Her memories assault her and pain her, making it impossible to bring in the New Year with friends and family, causing her to look for an out, for an escape to the sea. In *The Year of Magical Thinking,* Joan Didion writes, "Grief has no distance. Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life" (27). In her flashbacks, Alia's present mind speaks to her to remind her that she "cannot forget them in [her] grief," them being those still living, there with her.

To better understand her grief, it is important to note the sources of Alia's grief, which are located in three areas: Palestine, Mustafa, and Atef.

a. Palestine

The present of chapter three is in the aftermath of the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War, months into her and Atef's new life in Kuwait City. Alia experiences hesitancy as she figures out her place in the world, especially as her place of belonging, Nablus, Palestine, is forever tied to grief

and dispossession. The Arab defeat in 1967, referred to as the Naksa, the setback, became a haunting source of humiliation and shame for Palestinians and Arabs collectively. In the time of Arab Nationalism and collective hope, the defeat was crushing to Arabs across the region and to Palestinians intimately, who dealt with the devastating damage and amplified displacement. With Atef and Mustafa, we saw the hope of the revolutionaries, all to be squashed in a tumultuous six days. This public defeat that led to a collective Arab identification with shame and sadness that Samir Kassir defines as the "Arab malaise" was exacerbated for Alia, whose brother and husband were caught in the crossfire: "The Israelis were winning. And for Alia, who had believed the Arabs would conquer, whose only concern was keeping the men she loved on the sidelines, the sweeping victory was inconceivable" (61). In chapter three which is narrated from Alia's point of view, Alyan paints the picture of collective defeat that Palestinians and Arabs in Kuwait and around the Arab World were mourning. Oum Kulthoum[27] plays on the radio when Alia turns the knob passively as she talks in the kitchen with her sister Widad:

> This song is one of the Naksa songs that have cropped up in recent months, with sorrowful violins and intonations lamenting the losses of the war. The defeat. Every day on every channel, the songs play, haunting the living rooms, the marketplaces, even the schools, all over Kuwait and, Alia knows, other Arab cities. Grieving the death of men, all the land lost, but mostly the defeat itself, the hot, mushrooming shame of it. (57)

The entire chapter is tinged with collective grief. It is also layered with Alia's personal grief and loss of Palestine. Throughout the chapter, as she is afflicted with nostalgia in an impossible

---

[27] Oum Kulthoum was an Egyptian singer, songwriter, and film actress active from the 1920s to the 1970s.

moment that conditions newness and resolution, Alia remembers it all, the unbearable losses and the small things that make up a life: "Alia thinks of her bedroom in Nablus. The seashells she filled with bobby pins. The tangerine dress she'd bought right before the trip to Kuwait and never worn. Photographs, necklaces, the glasses and silver *ibrik* her mother gave her" (75). Alia feels displaced even with the material losses of the tangerine dress and seashell bobby pins. In exile, the memories of Palestine are visceral for Alia. Kuwait will always be lacking in comparison to her lost homeland, Palestine. This adds to Alia's sense of hesitancy, of unbelonging.

b. Mustafa

Alia also experiences personal grief with the loss of the person closest to her, her brother, Mustafa, in addition to the collective and national loss of Palestinian territory. A year apart, the two had spent their entire lives together. During the New Year Party, Alia's mind is clouded with grief, swarming with fragmented memories of all the losses in her life, all at once. One memory that "assaulted her" (61) was a bird Mustafa had found and cared for when she was five and he was six. Her mind kept warping around Mustafa as a caring, sensitive child, to Mustafa as a young man, and then to nothing. No future is to be imagined for Mustafa, who disappeared. The description of memory as assault insinuates that the memory is not wanted but is instead intruding on Alia. Cathy Caruth (1996) defines trauma as "the wound of the mind [which] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivors" (3–4). The memory of Mustafa acts as this traumatic wound for Alia that, in this tense time of the party, uncovers her mourning that has not fully set in her conscience.

In processing the death and loss of Mustafa, Alia's mind flashes to his youth as well as the future he could have had, incarnations that "had to be folded away" (72). This folding away comes in the form of silence. Her children do not learn much about Mustafa's life, except for his premature death. Alia so desperately wants to process all her losses with community, if not in Palestine, then in Amman, Jordan: "Yes, everyone was distraught, mourning the houses and cities they'd left behind, the men beneath the soil. Shouldn't they mourn together? Palestine has vanished for them – this knowledge crept up on Alia slowly, a new death every morning: Mustafa gone, Nablus gone –but they can find the ashes in Amman, collect them to build another life" (59- 60). Alia recognized that in collective mourning and sharing grief with the community there was resolve and relief. Jordan, which houses more than 3 million Palestinians that compose more than half of its population, acts as a refuge, a hopeful haven, for displaced Palestinians. This processing of loss becomes a point of contention for her and Atef; Atef wants to hide away from the loss, carrying on in Kuwait, forcefully forgetting what cannot truly be forgotten: "What she had, what remained, was Atef"(72-3). Over the years, they continue to be in conflict over Amman; Alia chooses to spend every summer in Jordan, continuing to find solace and comfort there and not in Kuwait, Atef's imagined and constructed home for them. In those early years in Kuwait, distance grows between her and Atef which was created with him withholding information about what happened to Mustafa, until "the volatility in their marriage" cooled over, "yielded to camaraderie" (134).

c. Atef

In addition to Mustafa's loss, a changed Atef returns to her. A traumatized, injured, detached Atef, whom she must reacquaint herself with: "What she knows about her husband, what she

thought she knew about the man has scattered like dandelion seeds beneath a child's breath since he returned from the war" (50). Her husband comes back a changed man. She grieves the loss of who he was and who they were. In the lives they have to live after the war, they have left their common loves: Palestine and Mustafa.

Indeed, it is difficult for Alia to keep her griefs separate and chronological; they drift in her mind and surface unwanted emotions beyond her control: "The bird, Mustafa, bombs, Atef, Nablus" (62). The hold of the past is overwhelming, as is Alia's grief. These memories cyclically occupy her mind, surfacing through affects of anxiety that make life in the preset suffocating.

2. Anxiety

In her state of overwhelming grief, Alia experiences an episode of anxiety during the New Year's party she and Atef host. Her experiences of grief and anxiety lead to hesitant belonging. Alia's anxiety manifests through flashbacks and out-of-body experiences for her at this moment in time. During the event, Alia loses feel of her body, intruding flashbacks occupying her mind as she prepares to play hostess; her flashbacks take her to Atef's return, to his injuries, to the news of Mustafa's death: "The chest aches with want; it catches at her throat, dwarfs her. She misses Mustafa. Like a city after a tsunami, the earth is altered without him, wrecked" (66).

The event of the party represents hesitancy for Alia, who is caught between the tensions of the pull of the past and the push of the future; she is rendered uncertain and anxious in the present. Alia cannot help but think of the past, of the impossibility of the future that encroaches. As she prepares to welcome her guests, Alia's mind flashes back to her initially temporary arrival and visit to Kuwait, to the announcement of war and defeat, to the days of silence with no

123

news from either Mustafa or Atef and to Atef's move to Kuwait, cementing their permanent move from her home, from Nablus. The glimpse of Alia we see in Kuwait during the New Year's party reveals Alia's amounting anxiety.

To overcome this state of anxiety Alia is in, she escapes the party. She asks Ajit to drive her away in the early hours of the New Year. Alia "thinks of the palaces" (74), of the transformation Kuwait has undergone from a desert to a modern lavish city. This makes her think of generational loss. What is lost for the elderly is not lost for the youth who never possessed it. Alia finds herself connecting with her elders, her mother, aunts, and uncles, who knew "a Palestine before the big war, before soldiers and exodus" (74). This connection makes her contemplate the world her offspring will enter into, a transformed world after the Naksa. She recognizes the grief that remembrance possesses: "Easier, she thinks, to remember nothing, to enter a world already changed, than have it transform before your eyes" (74). Alia understands the anguish of remembering a situation in her eyes, impossible to overcome. Her belonging will forever be hesitant, plagued by nostalgia that has a strong hold on one's mind and heart: "Nostalgia is an affliction [....] Like a fever or cancer, the longing for what had vanished wasting a person away. Not just the unbearable losses, but the small things as well" (74-5). For Alia, the opposite of forgetting is not remembering but not knowing to begin with. You cannot remember what you did not know.

These memories and thoughts float around in Alia's mind restlessly, taking her out of the present, away from her body. They simmer and overflow in a panic, causing anxiety in Alia. Alia flees her party, unable to breathe or feel her body; she seeks the comfort of stability away from the reality around her of the impending new year. She disrupts the servants' celebrations and asks

Ajit, the driver, right at midnight, to drive her away. When Ajit asks her: "Where would you like

to go, madame?" (71), Alia's mind flashes back to what is familiar, to a lighter, certain time in

Nablus:

> The question dangles in front of Alia and her mind blanks, then races off.

> Lemon-colored bedrooms, an armoire full of summer dresses. A hidden pathway behind a
> schoolhouse, the sound of boys yelling, her own feet bare over cool, moist earth. Garden—
> before its ravaging—at sunset, mint tea. Running wet cloths over tiles, the marble sparkling
> like gems.

> "The water." Her voice is astonishingly clear. "Take me to the water, please. (71-72)

The water acts as a place of solace for Alia. Alia heading to the water amid her panic plays into

the significance of water as a cleansing, purifying entity. Alia "remembers her body" (76) in the

icy water. Overcome with the sensation of the cold, she can get out of her head, to abandon the

assaulting memories, at least for the moment, to be in the present.

Alia's despair and grief weigh heavily on her, amassing her state of panic. The only

release possible is through water. Only in this space, does Alia ground herself and welcome the

beginning of her new life away from Palestine; water is a rebirth, a regeneration. She announces,

"So, this is the beginning" (76). The water is what allows Alia to find a semblance of belonging.

Chen et al. describe the metaphor of water as home, of thinking of water as home: "Thinking

with Water emphasizes that this home (this place, this body, this time, this planet) is composed

largely of water." (Chen et al.14). Alia reconnects with her body in the water, thus accepting the

reality she is in, perhaps resolving or beginning to resolve the hesitancy in her belonging in Kuwait, without Mustafa, with the altered Atef and their expanding family. Alia's metaphorical affliction becomes a reality when she develops dementia in her later years.

This glimpse into the Yacoub family's early days in Kuwait portrays a shift from life in Palestine to life in Diaspora; therefore, exemplifying a shift from identification as Palestinian to Palestinian in Diaspora. This shift becomes more evident when we are introduced to the children, Souad, Riham, and Karam, and the cultural conflicts emerge, especially as Alia fears her children are becoming "Westernized." Especially with Souad, Alia worries about her attraction to the West, to foreignness.

3. Anger

[Qahr] is when you take anger, place it on a low fire, add injustice, oppression, racism, dehumanization to it, and leave it to cook slowly for a century. And then you try to say it, but no one hears you. So, it sits in your heart. And settles in your cells. And it becomes your genetic imprint. And then moves through generations. And one day, you find yourself unable to breathe. It washes over you and demands to break out of you. You weep. And the cycle repeats. (@khadijaadventures)

Qahr carries a lot of anger. Anger is a strong feeling. It can turn active and violent, but it can also be slow and simmering. Anger is a silent killer, a strong energy that can be all-consuming.

Within *qahr*, anger acts as a retaliation against the oppressive conditions that stifle an individual and a community. Anger in this sense can be restorative and revolutionary. Maria Lugones describes second-order anger as "a cocoon, an inward motion intent on sense-making," (104); it is characterized as transformative, "resistant, raging, un-communicative, and forward-looking" (Lugones 117). Lugones writes in "Hard-to-Handle Anger":

> There is anger that is a transformation of fear; explosive anger that pushes or recognizes the limits of one's possibilities in resistance to oppression; controlled anger that is measured because of one's intent to communicate within the official world of sense; anger addressed to one's peers in resistance; anger addressed to one's peers in self-hatred; anger that isolates the resistant self in germination; anger that judges and demands respect; anger that challenges respectability. (105)

In moments of hesitancy, anger arises as a means of reacting to hesitant belonging. When an individual is in a situation where one has no agency, or is unable to change their circumstances, anger acts as a return to self. In *Salt Houses,* this is apparent with Alia and Souad, who resort to anger as means of revitalization.

Coping with the inability to enforce change, to return to the joyous past in Nablus, Alia resorts to anger as a means of making sense of the world that no longer makes sense. As time progresses, Atef and Alia resort to silence, at Atef's behest, when it comes to remembering the past. Even Mustafa becomes a ghost they do not speak of:

> they go entire years at a time without speaking [Mustafa's name]. It became a tacit rule between her and Atef: If it hurts, leave it. Their marriage had a glove compartment, a

127

hollow, cluttered space where emotional debris went. […] Mustafa, those first few months in Kuwait, Nablus. Palestine tossed in there like an illegible receipt, keys that no longer opened any door. *Why would we*, Atef seemed to beg her silently in those early years after the war, his face tightening with pain, when she spoke of Nablus, when she cursed Meir and Rabin and the day they'd been born. So, she spoke of it less and less, everything they'd left behind her dreams of walking into her childhood bedroom, the way her entire body drummed when she thought of the place that was suddenly not hers anymore. She folded it away. (145)

What we see in the passage is repression. Instead of dealing with their grief, Alia and Atef have tacitly agreed on shoving away the pain. For Alia, folding the pain of Nablus and her and Atef's life in Palestine away creates a deep rage and anger that she ultimately takes out on her family, constantly looking for fights, yelling: "There is immense relief in yelling" (142). As Alia's exterior world changes, she develops an interior harshness as a shield.

Out of her fear and inability to control her life, Alia resorts to anger. She is presented as a bitter and angry mother; constantly yelling and irritated with her children and husband. She becomes a fiery force that judges harshly and demands respect through her anger. Audre Lorde explains that anger is "loaded with information and energy" (Lorde 127). In Alia's case, her anger is informed by her anguish: she hates Kuwait, hates all the pain, loss, and injustices incurred, and thus moves forward with anger. Anger is also a means of survival (Lorde 132). Alia uses her anger to remember Palestine and to transfer its memory to her offspring, grounding them in the obligation of family as opposed to the duty to a nation. Anger is a direct result of

hesitancy. Unable to fathom her sense of belonging after all that has occurred in her life, Alia

resorts to anger.

Throughout the novel, Alia expresses strong feelings against her children's migrations

toward the West, away from the family. She attempts to transfer her anger to her daughter,

Souad, in the face of detachment and forgetting. As the reader is introduced to Souad in chapter

7, we see her incessant fighting with her mother, who channels her frustrations onto her family.

Souad is a rebellious teen, constantly at odds with her mother. This is most evident in Alia and

Souad's interaction when Souad opts to stay in Paris during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The

Iraqi war itself and its aftermath make it unsafe for the Yacoub family to remain in Kuwait,

therefore displacing them yet again. In addition, the war allows Souad to plan her own to part

with the family and the region, opting to stay in Paris and marry at the tender age of eighteen.

The world makes no sense to Souad; she is spending a glorious summer in Paris, attending a

summer institute, enjoying her final days with Elie before they part ways for good, and colluding

with Parisian and Arab emigres and intellectuals freely, independently, away from Alia's

belligerent and overbearing control. She does not understand the weight of war "back home," its

unpredictability and length. She is resolved the war will be over soon, trusting the media, but her

family has already made plans to move to Amman because it is impossible to tell what is going

to happen, especially with the recent history of loss in Palestine. Atef and Alia will not risk

staying; safety is the priority. The war and the move to Amman provide Souad with an escape. In

her rebellious youth, she takes this escape to create distance from her mother: "She feels not love

but detachment, an odd calmness […] The realization settles over her, imagining tomorrow, her

mother's fingers dialing the phone, a lifetime of *Souad, Souad, where were you, when will you be home*" (175). Souad makes her decision out of spite against her mother.

It is with Souad that Alia's spitefulness and unhappiness with life is most evident: "her entire life she has been denied a good fight" (144). Souad, her youngest, who looks and acts like a combination of her and Mustafa, brings forth memories that had been actively buried. In Souad, Alia finds a sparring partner, Souad sees her mother's unhappiness in Kuwait, her love for Amman, and in Souad, Alia sees the potential and wildness of youth, almost resentful of what it could lead to. Yet, what we shall see with Souad and later on with Manar, is not the transference of this anger but the healing and channelling of the anger into something clearer and more beneficial. Anger is transferred from one generation to the next, but it becomes more ambivalent and less focused, ultimately replaced by resolve.

As Souad grows older, her own anger simmers. Anger also become quintessential in Souad's feeling of *qahr*. With time, Souad begins to regret her decision as the permanence of the invasion and its aftermath becomes clear to her: "Paris had transformed for her after the wedding, its vivacity turning leaden. The days became shorter, colder; the permanence of the invasion sank in. On particularly icy mornings, Souad caught herself daydreaming about Kuwait. For a summer, Paris seemed infinite, vast, with its shops and museums and cafés. But as her new home, the city chafed, the cobblestone streets always crowded, the sky pocked with clouds" (211). Having grown up in Kuwait. Souad grew up in the comfort of familiar warmth. She was Palestinian in a country with an Arab population that allowed her to feel comfort in the Arab community. As Alyan writes about her own upbringing in Kuwait, in this country, "being Palestinian was fairly common" ("The Palestine Double Standard"). Elias Sanbar notes that some

130

Palestinians feel more familiar and less 'dislocated' in neighbouring Arab countries. This is the case for Souad, who seeks belonging in Lebanon. Upon returning to Lebanon, she feels less of an outsider, an in-betweener, a hesitant local and cosmopolitan, but more of a Palestinian:

> She had missed the muezzin, the food, even her own tongue faltering in Arabic. In Beirut, she has gone back to being Palestinian. To everyone, from the cabdrivers to the bank tellers, her accent exposes her. It reminds her of Kuwait. When she was a girl, this cataloging of origins never struck her as strange; Kuwait was a place of expatriation, and everyone seemed to come from somewhere else. Elie had his Lebanon, Budur her Iraq. Even if a person's heritage was flimsy, unused for years, you were where your father was from. (209)

In the quote, Souad notes the uniqueness of a place of expatriation as opposed to a place of immigration. Kuwait and Lebanon provided a sense of familiarity for Souad. She did not feel like she had to assimilate. But she belonged as an Arab and, more specifically, as a Palestinian. Souad also calls to ancestral roots; to belong is to know where your father was from; this is where you were from. Souad learns to appreciate her roots and associates her sense of belonging to the SWANA region.

Unlike Lebanon and Kuwait, Paris carried not only a geographical distance but also a personal one. Paris, and later the USA, represented an isolation and coldness that Souad had not anticipated. It is one thing to choose to leave one's homeland and a completely different thing to never be able to return, to be rendered an exile. The more the world ceased to make sense to Souad, the more she found relief, like her mother, in anger. Her wedding bliss quickly turned

sour as she and Elie began to fight early on in the marriage; in the fights, Souad found

reconnection with herself: "Such relief, after months being the too-young wife struggling to learn

French and getting lost in Parisian alleyways. The anger was bracing. It reminded her of herself"

(212-213). As Alia resorted to anger, so does Souad. Anger "reminded her of herself" within its

space, within its hot feeling, Souad was able to hold on to a sense of belonging, be it a toxic

connection to her mother, or to the anguish of caring for what is lost and far: home, familiarity,

family.

From Paris, Souad moves to the U.S. and then eventually to Lebanon. With each

migration, Souad's identity morphs: The Gulf War and Souad's immigration transform her from

a Palestinian in Kuwait to an Arab American, a new hyphenated title that carries its own

implications and prejudices, especially in a post-9/11 U.S.A. Raised in a post-9/11 U.S.A., Najla

Said laments on this identification: "In America, there is no doubt that since 9/11, [An American

from the Middle East] officially [became] an Arab, bridging the gap between two worlds that

don't fully understand each other" (251). The further Souad goes from what is familiar to her in a

sense of belonging and identity, the more the gap grows and the more she grieves and resents the

world around her. She grieves her failed marriage and the hardship of life abroad; this,

unfortunately, leads to harbouring resentment in her children for having a mother they need to

take care of. In places without the privilege of familiarity with Palestinians, Souad experiences

anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian hostility. In post-9/11 USA, Arabs are often designated as

terrorists and treated with hostility. Even as a privileged subject, Souad is aware of the

ungrievable sentiment towards her and her kind. Anger, therefore, represents a continuation of

rebellion in the face of an unpredictable and distant life away from everything she knows. It is

her own cocoon; her anger is a form of self-care and resistance to the loss of control in life in

Diaspora conditions.

In Souad's perception, this varying spatial experience that impacts belonging in identity

is also felt temporally. Souad experiences time differently in the SWANA region which

represents home for her (Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, and Palestine). In Diaspora,[28] Souad is hit

with the elasticity and flexibility of time: "America wasn't like that. You became what you

coveted. Memories were short" (209). America is contrasted here with the idea of Palestinian

time, time that stands still in a sense, with markers that warp events surrounding them, years and

lifespans identified as before or after the Naksa. In America, years pass by in an instant. Same

with Paris, which becomes a blur to Souad. Standing in the balcony of her Beirut apartment,

Souad reflects on the passage of time:

> What Souad marvels at most is the time. Squandered. The whirlwind that swept her life
>
> since she was eighteen—*eighteen,* that night at the fountain, and then the hasty marriage
>
> and then Manar and those years trying to be a mother, a wife—Time. That is how she
>
> thinks of it, as a person, Time, as something terrifying and tremendous. What else could
>
> account for it? How the years had spun by, the 1990s in their entirety now one big blur of
>
> Paris and Boston, of shitty neighborhoods and cheap restaurants and the kids getting

---

[28] The reader will notice that Diaspora is used here differently than in *Against the Loveless World.* In Abulhawa's
novel, the characters visit Palestine and reside there and in the region. The region acts as the diaspora, where there is
the familiar, but the ancestral home is also within reach. The familiar and home differs in *Salt Houses* for Palestine
becomes more and more distant with each generation as the family members geographically migrate farther as well.
The idea of Palestinian welcomeness in the West as opposed to in the SWANA region is examined. Palestinians are
part of the national fabric in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Kuwait, Egypt, etc. To negate Palestinian existence is
outlandish, whereas in Europe and America, Palestine and Palestinians have to fight harder for their recognition and
humanity. See Alyan 2023.

colds—there were certain winters, *entire winters,* that were captured in her memory as the single, swift motion of swooping down with a wad of tissues and squeezing little noses, squeezing so that the snot ran green and viscous—and the fights, she and Elie yelling for hours. It was Time, whirling her along, spinning, spinning, until it finally stopped, and she looked around, blinking, and she was thirty-two. (223)

As Souad loses track of time and her life in a sense, she exists hesitantly in Paris and in the US. What fuels her in this time of hesitation and fraught belonging is anger—with her husband, herself, and the world. Upon her relocation to Lebanon, to what is familiar, where time warps again and slows down, is she able to find herself in affects other than anger and grief.

Through Alia and Souad, anger's value in hesitant belonging is apparent. Anger pulls the past into the present, awkwardly placing what *was* with what *is*. Anger surfaces when the familiar is caught in an unfamiliar sense of belonging when it does not fit. As Alia and Souad lose their familiar spaces, they carry anger as a sense of loyalty to themselves and their past, as a means of dealing with the hesitancy of the present. Anger preserves one's loyalty to self by protecting the hurt of the past, creating a fortress around what one has left behind and lost as a means of protection in confronting the present and the future.

II.   Navigating the World: Emotional Code-Switching

Emotional code-switching is the conscious navigation and selective sharing of emotions in varying social situations and with different audiences. The term "emotional code-switching" is employed in *Salt Houses* to explain how third-generation descendants of forced migrants navigate their cosmopolitan world in relation to their ancestral homes. In the same vein, Dionne

Brand writes "Being in the Diaspora braces itself in virtuosity or despair" (A *Map to the Door of No Return* 8). Emotional code-switching operates as such as a skill in navigating despair. It accounts for the precarious, cautious, and hesitant navigation of one's identity and emotions linked to one's spaces of belonging. Emotional code-switching connects intimately with hesitancy as it acts as a response to the lapse between binaries in belonging. Emotional code-switching is a reaction to the delay in belonging to the world.

Belonging, of course, differs between each generation because of the difference in experience. The first generation has direct life experiences in the homeland, whereas the second generation has indirect knowledge of the ancestral homeland through collective memory. There are different relations to Palestinian being in the novel. I identify common and collective sites of grief and trauma, but I also explore individual dealings that are not homogenous. Even though Palestine appears to be a fixed home in the novel for Salma, Atef, and Alia, its significance wavers or, at the very least, weighs differently across the generations. The younger generation, Lina, Manar, Souad, and Karam, never encounter Palestine as their physical home; they grapple with understanding belonging while living in the Diaspora, in the United States specifically, and trying to understand their connections to Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq, three centres of perpetual instability in the Southwest Asian region. For members of the third generation in Salt Houses, the trigger of crises in the homeland, in Palestine, evokes hesitancy in understanding how to be and belong in the diaspora. The characters employ emotional code-switching in their responses. This hesitancy oscillates between anger and silence, but more generally, as a halt in figuring out how to feel. Despair is overwhelming, as is fear and anger and self-preservation.

Furthermore, the ability to emotionally code-switch closely relates to *qahr* and manages the spaces in which *qahr* can be expressed. With *qahr* as an inherited state, the adapted third generation knows how to navigate the world perhaps more smoothly than their predecessors, yet at what cost? Where and how can one show frustration, anger, and outrage? What are the spaces for such expression? Palestinian, Syrian, Iraqi, etc. individuals, raised in Western countries, through the asylum, refugee and immigrant programs, struggle to navigate their new homes with their lost homelands. One gauges out spaces of safety and emotional belonging through emotional code-switching, especially in a Western context. About her own experience, Alyan writes: "Being Palestinian in this country — in many countries — is a numbing exercise in gauging where pockets of safety are, sussing out which friends, co-workers or acquaintances will be allies, which will stay silent. Who will speak" ("The Palestinian Double Standard" 2023). In certain spaces, it is crucial to practice self-censorship and conceal one's identity due to the potential consequences of speaking out against injustice. Chad Nilep defines "code-switching" as the practice of changing grammatical systems or codes in discourse to signal changes in context (Nilep 1). When codes are emotions, this means that the individual must govern their emotions based on the context and the anticipated reaction. To emotional code-switch, is to in accordance with the space one is in and the level of comfort one can afford. The act of emotional code-switching is essential in navigating one's daily world, especially when they come from histories of forced migration and violence that continue to suffer.

Moreover, navigating one's emotions strategically is a certain evolution of the anger expressed in hesitant belonging for the older generation. This term is introduced in Manar's chapter. Manar, Souad's daughter, explains that the act of emotional code-switching is used to

navigate the messed-up lives that she and her originally Palestinian friends lead. Emotional code-switching is described as a byproduct of being a third-generation displaced Palestinian: "the notion that one's problems, the disarray of one's life, all springs from one's heritage" (*Salt Houses* 276). Manar is the youngest of the Yacoub family, as presented in the novel. Where Souad and Alia longed for a home left behind, Manar's hesitancy came in alleging connection to a home never known. Why does Manar feel connection and despair when it comes to Palestine? Hesitancy is negotiated through the act of emotional code-switching, assessing specific spaces and how one is to belong and act, and doing so accordingly, whether that means being untrue to one's internal self and succumbing to the alienation of the world.

Manar is hesitant to allege belonging, especially to Palestine. Manar is half-Palestinian, half-Lebanese, and was raised between the eastern U.S. and Lebanon. Her connection to Palestine isn't as solid or as clear as her grandfather's and grandmother's, nor as directly linked as her fully Palestinian mother. Instead, Palestine makes up part of her cultural heritage, one that she has never visited and knows little about in terms of the family's history since Atef and Alia do not discuss Palestine in great detail with their children and grandchildren. Manar is not simply a Palestinian, or a Lebanese, or even an Arab; she is an Arab-American. In her memoire, *Looking for Palestine*, Najla Said talks about the confusion and conflict of growing up with an Arab and an American identity. Like Manar, Najla is Lebanese-Palestinian, but very much American, born, raised, and schooled in New York City. As Said puts it: "I don't feel entirely American, never have, but it's not because I don't want to or because I don't seem it – I do want to, I do seem it. I don't feel entirely Arab though either, for the same reasons. But I also certainly don't feel like any combination of the two" (271). Najla's discomfort with her hyphenated identity is

common amongst second-generation immigrants raised in an environment completely different from that of their parents. Add to that the disdain against Arabs in a neo-liberal U.S.; one might easily feel othered while at home, not sure how to affiliate with this other. Manar resonates with this sentiment. She is often confronted with her heritage in opposition to the American reality, which often questions and negates her heritage. This brings forth a sense of in-betweenness: a split that Manar tries to resolve through emotional code-switching. Manar and her peers are the product of what Saeed Teebi calls the "direct result of often violent, intentional and illegal dispossession" ("The Palestinian Double Standard"). Though generations have passed, Manar recognizes that her cosmopolitan life did not begin out of volition but out of violence, out of immense loss and suffering. This continues to haunt her. However, as a cosmopolitan entity, Manar knows how to navigate varying spaces of belonging, always with hesitance, always with uncertainty.

In *Salt Houses*, it is not until Manar visits Palestine that there is some relief in being both of Palestine and of the world. She is a third generation Palestinian; born in Paris, raised in Boston and Beirut, living in Manhattan, and currently visiting her ancestral home, Palestine, for the first time ever. She has never lived there, only knowing the land as a distant unattainable entity. Due to her complicated and traumatic heritage, Manar hesitates to belong anywhere fully. Even in Palestine, she feels nothing. Manar finds herself in a situation where she must go to Palestine. She's pregnant, and her life is in New York with Gabe, yet Manar cannot ignore her dire urge to go to Palestine to her ancestral land. It becomes a matter of now or never for her. There is urgency. It is a gut feeling that she must go. Manar cannot go on with her New York life without knowing what her ancestral home actually is, and what it means to her.

In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed explores the significance of sensation, noting that it often leaves an impression that is not easily defined. She further argues that a gut feeling possesses its own intelligence, and a feminist intuition may detect when something is not right. Ahmed emphasizes the need to delve deeper into these feelings to gain a better understanding of them (27). Building on Ahmed, Rachelle Chadwick describes gut feelings as the engagement with what is epistemically uncertain, countering comfort and wilful ignorance by dwelling on "the sensation(s) of feeling [uneasy, uncertain,] and unsettled, and considering the epistemic and political significance of such feelings" (15). For Manar these feelings of uncertainty in the present can only be resolved by encountering what should be the ultimate space of familiarity, Palestine. For her, it is her a connection that is important to establish before her life moves forward with a new child with a new American partner, taking her yet a step further away from her ancestral roots. Manar feels she must go back now before she brings a child into the world to understand and potentially resolve this lingering hesitancy she carries. Manar needs to find personal resolve to understand how to keep her life going and what role the past must play in it.

Return, as I explained earlier, is a significant factor for Palestinian identity, it is considered charged and potentially reparative. Unlike, Nahr's return, however, Manar does not feel a sense of homecoming. She is not welcomed as one of the people's own, and instead feels an estrangement, as an American tourist visiting. Manar visits Jaffa, , which was the Yacoub family's original hometown pre-1948. However, Manar is not aware of her family ties to Jaffa. All she has heard of was Palestine and maybe Nablus. In Jaffa, Manar feels nothing— she even concludes that she went there for nothing at all. We see Manar contemplating her duty there at that moment: Atef and Alia's descendent, back in the land, returned to recuperate.

On the beaches of Jaffa, she parties with tourists: "She thinks of the slaughters going on, the occupation surrounding them, all the revolutions that flicker and blaze and die. It would seem like such a monumental, brave, lovely act, all this revelry in the face of war, except that Manar knows it has always been like this" (293). Her visit is anticlimactic, she does not carry the fervor of a young Atef, she is no revolutionary.

As a third-generation Palestinian, Manar does not place the same significance on land as her elders. Born in Paris and raised between Boston and Beirut, it can be understandable why Manar's belongings are more scattered and less place-focused. Palestine is not Manar's loss; she does not know to miss it; instead, Manar's hesitation only grows there: "It fascinates Manar— not just history in general, with its empires, collapses, and revivals, but also the faint, persistent echoes that seem to travel through millennia. Land eaten and reshuffled, homes taken— daughters and sons speaking enemy languages, forgetting their own— the belief that we are owed something by the cosmos" (293).

How can she belong to this land unknown to her, a land of significance to her family, to her people, but of no subjective attachment of her own? What is Manar owed? What has she lost? By the time, Manar visits Palestine, there is no concrete memory to connect to; collective memory fails to harness a sense of belonging to Palestine. She faces a dilemma: how can she honour her family, her grandfather and grandmother, the lost great-uncle? Manar rereads her grandfather's letters that have travelled across the world with her: "But Mustafa, we still thirst for it. Our mutiny is our remembering" (294).

Manara is the first member of the Yacoub family to go to Palestine in over four decades. Manar travels to the center of her family's heart and soul, the home of emotional trauma and baggage, and yet she feels nothing. Manar channels this internal feeling of nothingness and considers the value of her being in Palestine to the collective to the family. She may feel nothing, but her visit means something. It is not her individual return but her family's collective "return" to the homeland. Her "return" becomes an act of healing for her family, but not for herself, for she feels nothing. Camille Turner describes the return to the ancestral home as a mission of love and healing: "We stand as a beacon to humanity to recover and reckon with the past to gain the strength and wisdom needed to create the future" (Turner 153). Manar performs an act of release; by carving out her family tree in the sand, ephemerally etching the Yacoub family into the land. Manar confirms her connection to her family, acknowledging the history this land carries, but acknowledging that her place is with her family more than a geographical connection, which ends up being Lebanon, where the Yacoub family reunites over summers. The resolve Manar finds is in tracing her family tree in the sand as an act of honor, resilience and remembrance of her family's attachment and belonging to the land.

This feeling of nothingness that Manar experiences is interesting for my study of hesitancy. Feeling nothing is, in one way, quite anticlimactic and, in another, so charged. Is this where years of emotional code-switching fail Manar? Why is it that when she is in the place where she is meant to feel, meant to have an emotional catharsis, that she does not? Or is it a commentary on the state of affect, on the inability to impose a feeling? Manar straddles the space of hesitant belonging, the space of in-betweenness that defines her generation of forced migrant

descendants. As emotional code-switching is a response to hesitant belonging, then perhaps apathy and nothingness is the response to perpetual navigation.

III.   Conclusion

This chapter delves into the complex feelings that make up hesitancy through the framework of the Arabic term *qahr* as it relates to legacies of colonial oppression, injustice, and violence. Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses* illustrates how intergenerational trauma and displacement can lead to a state of hesitant belonging that affects the characters' sense of identity and connection to the world around them. I focus on the affects of grief, anxiety, and anger as key components of *qahr* that are extensively explored in the novel. Furthermore, by examining Alyan's definition of emotional code-switching and using it as a means of navigating the world, akin to hesitant belonging, the chapter highlights how hesitancy is an inherited state for migrant bodies, weighing them down with its emotional and mental heaviness. Ultimately, this chapter contributes to a better understanding of the legacies of forced migration and its impact generationally, emotionally, and otherwise, which informs how subjects navigate their belonging in the world.

Chapter 5: Hesitant Belonging in the Black Atlantic

The second half of this dissertation switches its attention to the vastness of the Black Diaspora, and the questions of being and belonging that influence Black subjects' understanding of their place in the world. The Black Diaspora is multifaceted; it is rich and extensive in its definitions and constituents. In considering the traumas and the ambivalence that Black subjects in the Caribbean, in North America, and in Europe experience in relation to history and homeplaces, hesitant belonging fosters a space for the creation of communities and spaces of belonging. Hesitant belonging resounds with what Christina Sharpe refers to as "living in the wake." Sharpe interrogates what it means to live "the history and present of terror" (23) as the ground of everyday existence. Through metaphor, Sharpe theorizes the wake around Black being and belonging and the terror and violence that has historically and presently marked Black subjects. The wake implies a heaviness that complicates belonging. The wake represents the carried trauma and the ongoing trauma inflicted on Black lives. Hesitancy is not synonymous with the wake, afterlives. Instead, in my multidimensional use of hesitancy, I examine how Black subjects operate hesitant spaces, react to realities of rupture, and utilize hesitancy in how they navigate the world.

My definition of hesitancy as a pulling forward of the past due to the uncertainty of the present moment resembles the temporal play within the wake between the past and the present. In unpacking hesitancy, there is "wake work" (C. Sharpe 17): "a mode of inhabiting and rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives" (18). Hesitancy as it reveals the tensions of identity and cultural belonging, allows for a similar examination of what we inhabit as global residents and the ruptures that have occurred and continue to occur. This

thinking resounds what Saidiya Hartman identifies as "the aftermath of slavery," the residual and ongoing implications of being Black in North America, in the Diaspora. Hartman attends to the history of enslavement and its transatlantic journey to modernity, reckoning with the past not yet past for members of the Black Diaspora: "I am a reminder that twelve million crossed the Atlantic Ocean and the past is not yet over. I am the progeny of the captives. I am the vestige of the dead. And history is how the secular world attends to the dead" (*Lose Your Mother* 18).

In relation to contemporary belonging, I examine affects of waywardness and ambivalence in characters. Such modes of being are in direct correlation with hesitancy in affirming one's belonging, especially in relation to the break with history that the slave trade led to in the Caribbean and in North America. As with the parallel Palestinian history section, I begin here with a point of rupture designated as the catastrophe. I examine different significant moments and events that contribute to a sense of hesitancy in belonging.

I.   **Catastrophe**

A significant historical marker of the Black Diaspora's expansiveness is the reality of colonialism and the Atlantic Slave Trade that resulted in the commodification, enslavement, and transference of Black and African lives to the New World. Akin to how Palestinians use the term Nakba, or catastrophe, to refer to the creation of the state of Israel and the ensuing displacement of Palestinian subjects, catastrophe has also been used to define the deep ruptures caused by colonialism in the Black Atlantic. In "The Black Aquatic," Rinaldo Walcott refers to the Black diasporic "catastrophe" (Walcott 66) and in *Bla_ck,* NourbeSe M. Philip "names *Maafa*, from the Kiswahili word for "terrible occurrence" or "great disaster" (Philip 32). Christina Sharpe crafts

an entire metaphor on blackness and being in the language of grief and mourning through the description of "the wake":

> Transatlantic slavery was and is the disaster. The disaster of Black subjection was and is planned; terror is disaster and "terror has a history" (Youngquist 2011, 7) and it is deeply atemporal. The history of capital is inextricable from the history of Atlantic chattel slavery. The disaster and the writing of disaster are never present, are always present. (C. Sharpe 14)

As Sharpe puts it, the catastrophe of the Black Atlantic is "deeply atemporal" (C. Sharpe 14), making it difficult to designate time-markers as clearly as with the case of Palestine. To call this historic catastrophe atemporal implies that its relations transcend time, are extensive and ever-present. In *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Dionne Brand adds to this sentiment of atemporality: "Having no name to call on was having no past; having no past pointed to the fissure between the past and the present" (5).

This fissure, this fracture in history and time, creates room for hesitancy in belonging, for discomfort and a need for reckoning with the past and the present, and the vacuum in between. The forced migration of Transatlantic enslavement marks the origin of a vast network of Blackness in the Diaspora, with a fraught connection to an ambiguous homeland. Saidiya Hartman describes this fissure in time as an act of parcelling time, "lopping off the past as if it were an extra appendage as if they could dispose of the feelings connecting them to the world before this one and banish the dreams they had imagined as the route back. In time, they decided the present was all they could bear" (*Lose Your Mother* 15). Akin to the warping of time in the

Palestinian setting as before and after the Nakba, time in the context of the catastrophe of the transatlantic slave trade is experienced as the unknown or estranged past, and the present.

Both Dionne Brand and Yaa Gyasi investigate this fissure and relationship between the past and the present. Brand examines the fissure through the language of scattering; through the breaking up of the family, connection to a home and roots that have been forever disrupted. Scattering reflects a randomness, a circumstantial and haphazard way of living that has impacted the characters who migrate and move along with life because the connection to home is ambivalent: instead, characters choose to focus on the present, and negotiate their sense of belonging to the circumstances of life. As Brand notes in *A Map to the Door of No Return,* there remains a persistent sense of homelessness experienced by the descendants of enslaved people and the ambivalent desire for an impossible return, expressing the complicated affects of homing desires. Such descendants hope for the safety and security of home while living with the wake, the anguish and suffering of violence, and dislocation. Moreover, there is an active assertion of forgetting that conditions being and belonging in migration. This will be examined further in Chapter 7. As for *Homegoing,* rupture is conceptualized as a continuous forced reality within the context of the United States and Ghana. Gyasi examines the systematic conditions of fissure that make belonging nearly impossible and threatening. I explore this intricately in Chapter 6.

I link the catastrophe of the transatlantic slave trade with the colonial and capitalist extractive history of the African continent, specifically West Africa as portrayed in *Homegoing.* I also connect this catastrophe to the overlapping oppressions within the Caribbean. *At the Full and Change of the Moon* envisions these integrations of Indigenous, enslaved, and indentured peoples from India, Africa, and Amerindia in its narrative within the New World, with Marie

Ursule as an enslaved subject transferred from Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago, and Bola, as the mother, bringing together all the outcasts in the elsewhere that is Culebra Bay, birthing a wayward people, without affiliations in the world.

Enslavement is not a new concept,[29] and indeed slavery had been a means of conquer and conquest for centuries; however, the gravity and calamity of the slave trade across the Atlantic led to a seismic shift and disruption in history and identity.[30] The capture and trade of Africans within the continent and across the Atlantic was a military and trade act that devalued people as human and rendered them captives and commerce, without volition. *Homegoing* details the business of the slave trade in the Asante and Fante regions of the Gold Coast, noting the local implications within the trades. Akosula refuses to shake the hand of James, the Asante grandson of the Fante king, stating that: "Everyone is part of this. Asante, Fante, Ga. British, Dutch, and American" (*Homegoing* 99). What should be noted, however, is that colonial rule conditioned enslavement and the trafficking of people as the means of life for the colonizer and the colonized. Colonized subjects abided by the trade rules and regulations of the British; to gain weapons and goods from the British, the empires and tribes of the Gold Coast provided people as a commodity for trade and sale. Gyasi particularly investigates the intricate enmeshment of the slave trade pre-, during, and post-colonial rule. The slave trade preceded the exploitative land

---

[29] The term "slavery" comes from the term "Slav" which was used to describe Eastern European enslaved people in the medieval world (*Lose Your Mother* 5).

[30] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to map out the entire history of enslavement of people; however, Lisa Lowe's *Intimacy of the Four Continents* (2015) as well as the anthology *The Cambridge World History of Slavery: Volume 3, AD 1420-AD 1804* (2011) are good places to start. Cosmopolitan discourse also maps out global connections and intersections from antiquity, noting the global movement created via trade but also via slave exchange. See: Breckenridge, Carol A., et al., editors. Cosmopolitanism. Society for Transnational Cultural Studies by Duke University Press, 2002.

grab known as the "Scramble for Africa." As Toby Green notes, the first African captive was

sold in Lagos, Portugal in 1444 (Green 25). The first Europeans to arrive on the Gold Coast were

Portuguese sailors in 1471.With them, a trading outpost was established that "changed hands

multiple times and took on a new function as a prison for enslaved Africans during the rise of the

transatlantic slave trade" (Okoth 379). The Scramble began in the 1700s and catapulted the

colonization, devastation, and extraction of the African continent. The "Scramble for Africa" was

the disastrous capitalist and colonial endeavour of the European superpowers in the 19th century

on the African continent between 1881 and 1914. While Portugal had already established a

physical presence in the Gold Coast since 1471 (Okoth 379), the Berlin Conference of 1884-

1885 formalized the "Scramble for Africa." European powers arbitrarily divided up Africa

between themselves and began administering their new colonies.

Tejumola Olaniyan reminds us that in the 1800s, chattel slavery was at its peak, though

chattel enslavement of Africans had been in existence for approximately 249 years before the

eighteenth century (Olaniyan 21). According to Toby Green, the era of European Atlantic

expansion marked a time when Africa was viewed mainly as a source of resources to be

extracted and consumed by outsiders (Green 109). This mindset created a system centered

around the extraction of resources, which allowed Europe to enter African trade networks and

formed the basis for Africa's integration into preindustrial modernity. This system, based on gold

and an abstract concept of value, ultimately led to the mass enslavement and transportation of

millions of Africans across the Atlantic world (Okoth 380). During this period, African and

enslaved people's identities were constantly challenged and threatened with erasure; colonial

administrators, traders, and company agents viewed enslaved Africans as mere objects to be

owned and traded, stripping them of their humanity. Lisa Lowe explains that over the course of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, white and European settlers rationalized African people enslaved as "violent threats to be eliminated;" furthermore, these settlers "discounted native people as uncivilized or non-Christian, conflated the inhabitants with land and nature, imagined them as removable or extinguishable, or rendered them as existing only in the past" (7-8). This in turn again largely contrasted with the expansion of philosophies of freedom by the likes of Immanuel Kant and David Hume, who "seemed so keen to get to the desired ideal (universal emancipation) that they were ready to step on the many Black bodies that littered their intellectual landscape" (Gikandi 29-30). The irony that a great catastrophe of human enslavement was at its peak during the age of the conception of freedom exposes the paradoxes found in cosmopolitanism as well, which arose as a universal utopia of hospitality and belonging initially, only to exclude and marginalize those deemed unworthy of hospitality.

The catastrophe that is the slave trade produced a rupture in being and belonging: it created a break with history and ancestry, catapulting so many lives to new worlds and new realities. The colonial violence through the dehumanizing act of the enslavement of Africans led to the shipping of millions of Black bodies across the Atlantic, expanding the slave trade in the New World. This bred new grounds of identification: while initiatives like Marcus Garvey's Back to Africa movement sought to achieve the return to an African homeland for Black people and to establish Black nationalism through the celebration of African history and culture, the collective experience largely was about connecting people not to a homeland but to experience of lack and loss, through migrant longing and existence.

II.   Rupture/Scattering

As with the Nakba, the catastrophe led to ruptures in belonging and identity. The event of the slave trade, as well as the colonization of the African continent and the Caribbean, connects the entire world through Imperial enterprises. Black diasporas globally take their own unique shapes, as is evident in the assertion of Black identity in France, for example[31]. However, studying the entirety of the scattering and dispossession of Black subjects is beyond the scope of this dissertation; I limit my study to the Black Diaspora in the Caribbean and in North America, where the novels I study situate their characters.

I examine the rupture in the journeys across the Atlantic known as the Middle Passage. In the 18th century, English traders coined the term "Middle Passage" to refer to the second leg of the triangular journey that ships took from England to Africa, then to the Americas, and finally back to England. From the crew's perspective, the Atlantic crossing was the middle leg of the trip (Webster 22). Additionally, the meaning of "Middle Passage" has changed over time. It now not only denotes the transatlantic route itself, but also the horrific experience that enslaved people went through during the crossing. As a result, the Middle Passage is now synonymous with the generational suffering of Black people (Webster 22). In the imagination, the Middle Passage describes the journey to the unknown, away from history. Beyond arrivals to Latin America, the Caribbean, the USA, and Canada, many Black subjects were dehumanized, living in enslavement in complete unbelonging.

---

[31] See Pattieu, Sylvain, et al., editors. *The Black Populations of France: Histories from Metropole to Colony.* University of Nebraska Press, 2021.

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, the forced transportation of enslaved Africans resulted in an unparalleled experience of dispossession and suffering. The Transatlantic Slave Voyages database recorded 36,000 voyages across the Atlantic between 1514 and 1866(slavevoyages.org). During this time, an estimated 12.5 million Africans passed through the holds of slave ships, with nearly two million dying on journeys across the ocean. In the Americas, an estimated 2.8 million African men, women, and children were forcibly transported into slavery. The British were the primary international slave traders and carriers of captive Africans shipped to European colonies in the Americas by the later eighteenth century (Webster 1). Camille Turner sets up the chronology of Black dispossession: "The 10.7 million who survived were forced to labour for generations to build the wealth of those who enslaved them. For centuries, it would be debated and debatable whether their lives and the lives of their descendants were human lives at all, and whether they mattered" ("Unsilencing The Past: Staging Black Atlantic Memory In Canada And Beyond" 8).

In the context of the Caribbean, the Black Atlantic slave trade was a significant event that permanently altered the ethnography of the Caribbean region, for millions of African individuals were forcibly transported to the Caribbean. Despite the harsh conditions and cruel treatment, Caribbean people carved their own identities as islanders, as diasporic entities of mixed origins: Black, Indian, Indigenous, Chinese, and Lebanese, etc. Caribbean people identify with the plurality of their ethnic origins, sometimes in conflicting and sometimes in aligning manners. The traumatic rupture of "enforced separations from Africa" (Hall 227) is layered with nuance differences in customs, cultures, and countries.

North of the Caribbean, the reality and history of slavery in the United States inform every aspect of the country's foundation and development. In the preface to *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story,* Nikole Hannah-Jones explains that 1619 marks "the year white Virginians first purchased enslaved Africans, the start of American slavery, an institution so influential and corrosive that it both helped create the nation and nearly led to its demise is indisputably a foundational historical date" (xix). In Canada, African slavery began in New France. Both Black and Indigenous subjects were subjected to slavery in that region (Siemerling 33). The first named Black individual in Canada is Mathieu de Coste, who was a servant of Port Royal's governor in 1608. The first enslaved African, whose voice was recorded and transcribed, was Olivier Le Jeune in 1632 (Winks 1). Within the Canadian context, there is a "diminished sense of history," as Rinaldo Walcott describes (2006), where Canada celebrates its abolitionist history but keeps its implications in the Black Slave Trade silent. As a colony of the British Empire and a shipbuilding nation, Canada's connection to the Middle Passage is intricate. Camilly Turner shows that "In the eighteenth century, 42 slave ships were built along the eastern seaboard of what is now Canada for the transatlantic trade of Africans" ("Unsilencing The Past: Staging Black Atlantic Memory In Canada And Beyond" 1).

The journeys of fragmentation led to the formation of Diasporas and communities within spaces of unbelonging. Paul Gilroy observes that since the event of the Black Atlantic Slave Trade, this history has "continually [been] crisscrossed by the movements of Black people—not only as commodities but [as] engaged in various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship, as a means to re-examine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory" (Gilroy 16). The rupture caused by the Black Atlantic Slave Trade and the

ensuing scattering to new and unfamiliar lands holds great significance for contemporary Black subjects in the Diaspora searching for their connections to both the land they reside in and an imaginary homeland.

III.   Diaspora: Exploring the Historical Struggles of Black Subjects

In "Thinking Diaspora with Stuart Hall," Jenny Sharpe notes that the nuanced identity of a diaspora has its own relationship and perspective on slavery, colonialism, and globalization, based on its geographically dispersed centers (J. Sharpe 25). This is evident in the uniqueness of how Black subjects visualize their belonging in different locales. Stuart Hall comments: "The paradox is that it was the uprooting of slavery and transportation and the insertion into the plantation economy (as well as the symbolic economy) of the Western world that 'unified' these peoples across their differences, in the same moment as it cut them off from direct access to their past. Difference, therefore, persists - in and alongside continuity" (227).

The identity of the Black Diaspora is not connected to dates and concrete losses as I present the case with the Palestinian Diaspora, but it is about the symbolic meaning that gets associated with a specific event. Themes of belonging, dispossession, loss, memory, and liberation are equally significant. The histories and realities of slavery, which haunt Black subjects, help us understand how subjects question belonging and seek it. However, they are also not the only routes to establishing and understanding contemporary belonging. Though the literature I study examines roots and routes of dispossession, questioning both belonging and non-belonging, there are inevitably more explorations of Black belonging and place-making that are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Even though my own study connects belonging and

hesitancy to suffering and trauma, many studies explore Black senses of place and belonging

without basing it "on suffering but on human life" (McKittrick 948). Black geographies, for

example, represent more than a critique of conditions of struggle, calling for research that is

more than just a "descriptor of social ills" (Wright 2). Instead, Black geographies involve active

engagement with Black life, affirmative expressions of Black identity, and Black geographies

(Allen et al. 2019).

Within North America, there are many configurations of continuity and adaptive

emplacement. The relation to the Black Atlantic is only one means of understanding one's

belonging, while other ideas, such as Africadian or African-Canadian and the Black Pacific,

evoke other established routes of affiliation. In his work, Nova-Scotian poet George Elliott

Clarke describes the African-Canadian identity. He examines his ragged belonging, shaped by

many migrations and routes, uniquely marked by his Canadian identity as well. Clarke presents

one example of how successive historical moments of emigration/immigration have shaped a

sense of belonging and intersection of Black Atlantic history and Canadian history. Clarke

distinguishes between African-Canadian and African-American blackness: "African-American

blackness has been and is a model blackness, a way of conceiving and organizing African-

Canadian existence. Perversely, though, we will always veer away from it, only to return to it,

relentlessly, with unstinting vengeance" (9). The Black Pacific is a concept that expresses the

interweaving circuits of migration beyond the East to an imaginary Africa. It allows new

possibilities for understanding belonging and diasporic expansion Westward. Heather Smyth

explains that "the term "Black Pacific" alludes to the unexpected cultural connections and

commitments we can witness when diasporas grow in their respective locations […]it looks not

just East in the imagination to Africa […] but also West to Asia and the Pacific rim and is shaped by the geography of the Pacific as well as the confluence [of diverse cultures] in British Columbia." (Smyth 390).

In the Caribbean, the diasporic identities of its people are "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew": "What is uniquely - 'essentially' - Caribbean: precisely the mixes of colour, pigmentation, physiognomic type; the 'blends' of tastes that is Caribbean cuisine; the aesthetics of the 'cross-overs', of 'cut-and-mix'" (Hall 236). Afro-Caribbean identification connects to the past, which is very present in daily Caribbean culture; however, the pull of the past is accompanied by the integration of differences with the discontinuity of the past and the mashup of its inhabitants that gives it a unique identity based on the historical blending of peoples from different backgrounds.[32] Though the countries of the Caribbean are quite different in their own right, they are unified by their traumatic histories and subjugation. Belonging in the Caribbean is therefore associated with displacement and discontinuity with history, integrating the rupture of history and the regenerative culture of the people to continue and evolve into what becomes a distinctly multicultural but also uniquely Caribbean identity, taking European, African, and American interventions and human imports to establish a confluence of sameness and difference, that is a Caribbean sense of belonging. This continuity and evolution are beautifully represented in *At the Full and Change of the Moon* through the figure of Bola, who births into the sea, ahistorically and without attachment.

---

[32]Except for the remaining Indigenous peoples from pre-Columbus times who were displaced, none of the current inhabitants originally "belonged" there. It represents the place of continuous displacement due to the legacies of slavery, colonization, conquest, and migration.

With reference to this dynamic of continuity and disruption, The novels I study situate themselves in the Black Diaspora differently; Yaa Gyasi explores the British Slave Trade as it channels to North America and examines how enslaved people become part of the fabric of the United States, examining different historic moments from the 1800s up until the twenty-first century, while also examining colonial history in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) through a Ghanian family that does not leave the continent, that is spared from the slave trade due to status and luck, but also, through colluding with the slavers. The novel also explores the contemporary migration of Africans. *Homegoing* looks at the opposing spectrums of the Slave Trade, those profiting and aiding the colonial project through the slave trade, and those who are captured and sold into lives of slavery. *At the Full and Change of the Moon* examines a globally widespread diaspora from Venezuela and the Caribbean to Europe, U.S.A, and Canada. The novel doesn't connect to a homegoing or an African homeland as *Homegoing* does, but instead examines belonging in the Caribbean and beyond through the exploration of drifting and discontinuity in relation to the ruptures of history. *At the Full and Change of the Moon* plays with the confluence of sameness and difference that informs a Caribbean sense of belonging through the figure of Bola, who births in abundance transnationally, the doppelgangers, Adrian and Priest, and the antithetical sibling duos: Adrian and Maya; Priest and Eula.

The two novels present the evolving conditions for the migration of Black people and the problems that arise with it. *Homegoing* explores connections to Africa, imagining a full return and upholding strong connections to the original home continent, while *At the Full and Change of the Moon* explores the ideations of belonging in Diaspora, disconnected from long lost homes.

IV.   "Return"

For the Black Diaspora, hesitancy is strongly connected to the idea of return. Like the Palestinian example, return is a difficult desire that renders individuals and groups hesitant in the space of contemporary belonging. In the case of Palestine, forced migration is paired within ongoing violence and hardship that five generations of displaced Palestinians witness internally and in Diaspora, rendering return complicated and less attainable with each military attack. In the context of the Black Diaspora, return is so far removed from a physical homeland and existing history, that it becomes mythical or ideological. Return where? To what?

There are contestations on what return signifies in this context. Movements like Back-to-Africa, led by Marcus Garvey, aimed to establish a return to an African homeland for Black people and to establish Black nationalism through the celebration of African history and culture. Abdul Alkalimat notes that over time, there have been four significant waves of migration out of Africa: "the spread of humanity from its origin in Africa; the spread of civilization from the Nile Valley and other African empires; the spread of traditional African culture because of the European slave trade; and migration out of modern Africa" (69). For many Black people, staying connected to Africa has always been crucial in terms of finding solidarity and shaping their identity through "maintaining connections, through interactions and the reconstruction of memory" (73).

However, Dionne Brand argues that there is no return. Just as migration was forced, there is no choice in the matter of return. Stuart Hall notes that there is no physical return for Caribbean subjects to Africa. Though Africa as an imaginary is very much within the fabric of

varying Caribbean cultures, return to it is metaphorical, abstract. There has been too much rupture and distance, destruction of history to conceive of a physical return to a homeland: "To this 'Africa', which is a necessary part of the Caribbean imaginary, we can't literally go home again" (232). Belonging is connected to return, for in the desire to return that many migrant bodies have, there is a desire for belonging. Hall writes on this desire for belonging and for origins:

> It is because this New World[33] is constituted for us as place, a narrative of displacement, that it gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to 'lost origins', to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning. […] Who has not known, at this moment, the surge of an overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins, for 'times past? And yet, this 'return to the beginning' […] can neither be fulfilled nor requited, and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery. (Hall 236)

While Hall sets up belonging as an impossible desire, a nostalgia, Brand rejects belonging all together: as having no past; having no past pointed to the fissure between the past and the present. In *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes on Belonging*, Dionne Brand laments on the Black Diaspora and its relation to the "door of no return." This door is imagined in the consciousness of those living in this diaspora: "But to the Door of No Return which is illuminated in the consciousness of Blacks in the Diaspora there are no maps. Since leaving was

---

[33] The Americas: Hall refers to The Americas as "The New World," in reference to the colonial expedition to the Americas, and the "discovery" of "The New World," which was falsely labeled as Terra Incognita.

never voluntary, return was, and still may be, an intention, however deeply buried. There is as it says no way in; no return" (9).

In her memoir, Brand defines her title metaphor in terms of the complete loss of African people sold as slaves and dispersed from their places of origin, but also in relation to the persistent sense of homelessness experienced by their descendants and the ambivalent desire for an impossible return. Brand contemplates a diaspora that does not fixate on the ideolology of return. Furthermore, she explores the possibility of full circle belonging through return; the return to the door that acts as a "site of pain which will turn into the site of pleasure" (93). Brand is cognizant of the futility of return and full belonging to fixed origins: "The idea of return presumes the certainty of love and healing, redemption, and comfort. But this is not return. I am not going anywhere I've been, except in the collective imagination. Yet, the imagination is itself a pliant place, lithe, supple, susceptible to pathos, sympathetic to horror" (90). The idea of "home" therefore lives in the collective imagination.

Brand describes the experience of the Black Diaspora as one emptied of fixed origins, with the door of no return acting as a symbol of loss and forgetting that offers no answers or fulfillments of homing desires: "If we return to the door it is to retrieve what was left, to look at it — even if it is an old sack, threadbare with time, empty itself of meaning" (94). The wounds and traumas of the forced exiles of generations ago, of enslavement and displacement, are direct results from the exclusion of home and from the historical forgetting and loss of traceable beginnings and origins. Moreover, Brand counters the notion that origins are important for belonging: "Too much has been made of origins. All origins are arbitrary. This is not to say that they are not also nurturing, but they are essentially coercive and indifferent" (53). In the

159

diaspora, manufactured origins as nation, family, tradition are created to satisfy the need for home; however, such conceptualizations are formed on exclusionary power structures that require the erasure of complicated origins by shedding any markers of difference and assimilating into a homogenous sense of home as a nation.

The different approaches to diaspora and belonging are evident in a contrast between *Homegoing* and *At The Full and Change of the Moon***.** These themes and the shape of hesitancy differ between Palestinian and Black diasporas as well as between the two books. Through these novels, I will show how hesitant belonging operates within different experiences of the world as well, revealing different facets. The space of hesitant belonging presents a charged place for pause and contemplation of one's belonging. In displacement, there is uncertainty, there are unanswered questions about the past, about how it informs one's present and how it can guide the future. Hesitancy validates the complexity and transience of belonging tested by migration. In the context of the Black Diaspora as presented in the novels differently, the past has a hold on subjects unfamiliar with their ancestral past due to the rupture of the Middle Passage. The two novels address the uncertainty and migration differently. Where *Homegoing* works hard to recover what is lost and to map a path back*, At the Full and Change of the Moon* embraces the drift, the refusal of mapping and return.

Gyasi's novel centers on the idea of a home to leave and to return to. The novel accounts for the violence of capture and scattering; however, it identifies a physical homeland, a place for return. The chronological division of the novel also makes the idea of linearity and return attainable. Though Esi's American descendants lose track of their family, name, and heritage, the reader remains aware of the lineage, which culminates in a happy ending with Marcus, the woke

Black Studies and History student. Marcus visits/returns to Ghana passing through the Golden

Gates, the Door of No Return, literally jumping into the water, remedying his and his family's

fraught relationship with water, which is the site of "premature death for Black people in a global

structure" but also a space of regeneration and healing (Walcott 66). Gyasi constructs in her

narrative what Paul Gilroy refers to as a redemptive return to an African homeland (Gilroy 4).

Homegoing aligns with African-centered narratives of return that keep the Black

Diaspora in connection with its African origins, solidifying the notion that "being in the world

for Black people has always required a link back to Africa" (Alkalimat 73). On the other hand,

At the Full and Change of the Moon subscribes to a different perception of the Black Diaspora;

one that is atemporal, that focuses less on restoring a connection with a nation or a homeland.

The expansiveness of the Black Diaspora renders it homeless without origins and atemporal,

with a lost connection to the African continent. Brand's novel explores what it means to be truly

scattered, disconnected from the idea of a center, a home. Saidiya Hartman puts forward the

definition of waywardness in describing the afterlives of slavery in the context of formerly

enslaved Black people in the Northern United States and their descendants at the turn of the

century: "Wayward, related to the family of words: errant, fugitive, recalcitrant, anarchic, willful,

reckless, troublesome, riotous, tumultuous, rebellious and wild" (*Wayward Lives* 227). Brand's

book relies less on connection to physical place and ambivalently reckons with return; it situates

errant and wayward characters trying to belong in the world with a deep sense of awareness of

where they come from, where they were, and how they might live.

My argument on hesitant belonging reckons with the binaries of return/no return that I

have shown in the scholarship thus far. With Hall, Gilroy, and Alkalimat, we see a desire for

161

home and to understand one's history through silences, through what is erased. There is a desire for coming home or finding home that resonates with Avtar Brah's notion of 'homing desire,' that stresses humans having a craving for belonging, but that this might not be attached to a real place or even be attainable in the first place. Instead, the homing desire becomes relational and sticky, which is to say the personal feelings one holds towards homing desires are strong and complex. In the plurality of conceptions of "home," Dionne Brand acknowledges in *A Map To The Door of No Return* varying desires of home, some of which are related to longing for nation and concrete threads of "biological or communal association" (*A Map to The Door of No Return* 1) solidifying one's place in the world. Still, the desire can never be fulfilled since the Black Diaspora cannot formulate a map or a return: "Since leaving was never voluntary, return was, and still may be, an intention, however deeply buried. There is as it says no way in; no return" (1).

Unlike the case of Palestine, where the homeland has a geographical location, a name, and a tangible history that can be felt through old passports and keys to homes demolished, the scattering and vastness of the Black Diaspora, its long history and expansive geographies of origins and migration make it difficult, impossible, unattainable to return to static origins. Carrying such a loss of history leads to a state of hesitance and ambivalence in feeling belonging in a world that has taken one's history and displaced them.

V.   Belonging

a. Belonging in a loveless World, Living in the wake:

It is only befitting to call back to James Baldwin's "Letter to my nephew"—which inspired the title of Susan Abulhawa's Palestinian narrative, *Against the Loveless World* – when discussing the brutal conditions of the world that threaten Black people globally, but specifically for this project in the Caribbean and in North America. Baldwin addresses a letter to his namesake, James, explaining the unfair conditions of the loveless world, and the odds that are stacked against Black men specifically, who, in Baldwin's prose, are set up institutionally, to perish and fail. Baldwin writes:

> You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you
> were black and for no other reason. The limits to your ambition were thus expected to be
> settled. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity and in as many
> ways as possible that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire
> to excellence. You were expected to make peace with mediocrity ("Letter to my
> Nephew").

Written in 1962, Baldwin's ominous statements remain true today, as anti-Blackness remains quite present today. Black life remains threatened by institutional, political, and cultural brutality. With hundreds of thousands of Black lives being destroyed by countries stuck in the past, and racial violence and black mortality only increasing, Black existence is rendered in perpetually precariousness.

Contemporary movements and scholarship document the continuation of anti-Black violence perpetrated to this day. Black Lives Matter-Toronto founders, Sandy Hudson and Rodney Diverlus share a sentiment very similar to Baldwin's on what it means to be Black: "to be Black means having a deep understanding of the precarity of living in societies built on anti-Blackness, thriving off the exploitation, control, and disposal of our whole selves" (Diverlus and Hudson 5). In *Policing Black Lives,* Robyn Maynard gives reference to the "all-too-frequent reminders of both how little value is placed on Black life and the seemingly limitless levels of hostility directed at Black individuals and communities" (Maynard 2). In Canada and the U.S., state violence against Black bodies remains rampant. M. NourbeSe Philip affirms that "the currents of racism in Canadian society run deep, they run smooth" (Philip 39).

These descriptions of ongoing violence perpetrated against Black bodies is captured by Christina Sharpe through the multiple registers of the wake. Living in a loveless world, in a world that continues to allow anti-Black violence to occur, is to live in the wake, which is to live with "the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of everyday Black existence" (C. Sharpe 23). Sharpe engages with the wake to address "ongoing problem of Black exclusion from social, political, and cultural belonging; abjection from the realm of the human (C. Sharpe14). The values and beliefs that dehumanize Black individuals have led to their over-surveillance, over-policing, and underprotection in North American society. Anti-Blackness lives in "how slavery's violences emerge within the contemporary conditions of spatial, legal, psychic, material, and other dimensions of Black non/being as well as in Black modes of resistance" (C. Sharpe 14). Furthermore, the brutal realities of continued anti-Black violence resonate with Saidiya Hartman's notion of the afterlives of slavery, which take form in "skewed

life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment" (*Lose Your Mother* 6).

As Sharpe employs the wake to lament the terrible conditions of Black being and to grieve Black death, so does she employ it as a tool for resistance: "If we are lucky, we live in the knowledge that the wake has positioned us as no-citizen. If we are lucky, the knowledge of this positioning avails us particular ways of re/seeing, re/inhabiting, and re/imagining the world. And we might use these ways of being in the wake in our responses to terror and the varied and various ways that our Black lives are lived under occupation" (C. Sharpe 22). I draw similarities between my multifaceted usage of hesitance and Christina Sharpe's usage of the wake.

This takes us to another important aspect of belonging in the Black Diaspora: resistance and resilience.

b. We Were Here: Resistance and Resilience

Resistance to enslavement and the oppression of Black being are prominent and longstanding in the Black Diaspora. In many cases, this took on an armed front, but also resistance has occurred through other means such as writing and passing down stories and traditions. With the catastrophe of the slave trade, as well as the ongoing violences against Black communities in North America and elsewhere, resistance and resilience are integral for survival. There have been countless rebellions and uprisings among the enslaved community, both on ships and on land, which have had significant impacts on the course of history. An example of such an uprising is Nat Turner 's revolt in 1831 in the United States (Breen). Numerous uprisings also occurred in the Caribbean. The Maroons, led by figures such as Nanny in Jamaica, were able to resist and

fight against the British, leading to treaties being signed between the two sides[34]. Such events contributed to the fight for freedom and equality, which was continued by prominent figures such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman. In *At the Full and Change of the Moon,* Marie Ursule organizes uprisings and mass suicide in retaliation to enslavement. Furthermore, the ongoing struggle for equality has been championed by various groups and leaders, including the Civil Rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, and Black Lives Matter. The eruption of the Black Lives Matter movement, which was established in 2013 in the U.S., has international chapters, including ten chapters in Canada has led to a global shift in perspective regarding the value of Black life; bringing forth the injustices and violences "inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes" ("About" blacklivesmatter).

Additionally, remembrance and storytelling have long been forceful tenets of Black resistance and resilience,[35] especially against a faulty archive and colonialist/capitalist accounts of history. To unpack hesitant belonging, it is necessary to negotiate the hold of the past in the present; therefore, recounting history and transferring stories allows the subject to take control of the narrative and to explore their belonging in the present. In "Site of Memory," Toni Morrison asserts the importance of re-membering and the work of imagining the ordinary lives of enslaved people beyond what the archive portrays; Brand and Gyasi engage in such work, telling stories of history, marking not only time-changing events, but also the everyday, envisioning the daily

---

[34] See Kopytof (1976); Wilson (2009)

[35] The rhetoric of resilience is not without its complication; the ongoing expected resilience of people living in the wake, with brutality and terror as daily realities, calls for more accountability from institutions; alleviating the onus of resistance from people.

lives of people, their thoughts, desires, fears, and dreams. Both authors present neo-slave narratives, which "go beyond the binaries of slaves and masters, victims and victimizers, to show the pervasiveness and complexity of a social system" (Babb 218), bringing forth tales of Black interiority, as well as the hardest stories of human existence within the hold, within captivity, filling in the blanks of "historical and geographical dis/continuation" (C. Sharpe 23) through critical fabulation and radical imagination, engaging with the archive of Black disposession deeply. Saidiya Hartman explains that historians of enslavement must "grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor" (*Wayward Lives* xiii).

A helpful concept is critical fabulation, which is an approach that involves blending historical and archival research with critical theory and fictional narrative to address gaps in the historical record. Saidiya Hartman introduces the concept of critical fabulation by placing "the voice of the narrator and character in inseparable relation, so that the vision, language, and rhythms of the [subjects] shape and arranges the text" (Wayward Lives xiii-xiv). Hartman employs this approach in her 2020 book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* as a means of telling intimate Black histories. In a separate earlier essay "Venus in Two Acts," Hartman explains that the approach of critical fabulation makes "visible the production of disposable lives (in the Atlantic slave trade and, as well, in the discipline of history)" ("Venus in Two Acts" 12). I use the concept of critical fabulation in analyzing the novels, claiming that the authors engage in critical fabulation in their own accounts of black migration and slavery.

VI.   The Novels

In their novels and oeuvres, Brand and Gyasi bring to the forefront the life experiences of Black

being throughout the time of African colonization, the Transatlantic Slave Trade of the 18th

Century, enslavement in North America and the Caribbean, and beyond. In their works, they

expose the brutality and pain of catastrophe, but also allow space for joy, freedom, and healing.

Yaa Gyasi was born in Ghana and raised in Huntsville, Alabama. Her writing tackles the

histories of the Black Atlantic Slave Trade and its aftermath in North America, as well as the

history and reality of systemic racism in the U.S. Like Alyan, in both her novels, *Homegoing*

(2016) and *Transcendent Kingdom* (2020), Gyasi forges strong connections between familial and

cultural history and her protagonists' understanding of their identities and senses of belonging.

Gyasi's writing addresses the tolls of slavery and systematic racism on Black subjects in the

present medicinally, economically, and societally. As a Ghanian-American, Gyasi reckons with

her own sense of belonging in relation to the complicated and charged history of Ghana.

Yaa Gyasi's 2016 debut novel *Homegoing* explores ruptures: ruptures of forced

migration and ruptures of what Heinz identifies in the novel as "non-belonging" (Heinz 129).

The novel examines the different registers of home and its potentialities as a space of restoration

and return, as well as escape and haunting. The events of *Homegoing* span 300 years of

transatlantic Black existence, ending with an almost-restoration of connection with the youngest

of both the Ghanaian and US lineages, as they cross paths and go to Ghana together. The novel

details the history of colonialism and the slave trade in the Asante and Fante Empires in the Gold

Coast in the 1800s. *Homegoing* also documents Black history in the United States throughout the

history of the Atlantic Slave Trade, American plantation chattel slavery, as well as the history of

Black life in the American nation. *Homegoing* reckons with the legacies of colonialism in Ghana and in North America, exposing the long term and ongoing implications of the colonial experiences. The book presents an act of restoration of kinship, an imagined resolution for the rupture of the past for both those who left and those who stayed.

Dionne Brand was born and raised in Trinidad and Tobago and immigrated to Canada in 1970. She is an acclaimed writer of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. Her work tackles belonging and being and the complexities of claiming any single identity. In her non-fiction, part memoir book, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, Brand examines the ruptures in belonging, in geography, in history, and in lineage that have marked the realities of many diasporic identities, specifically Black Diasporic identities forever shaped by the violent history of the Black Atlantic Slave Trade. These ruptures and their imagined mapping through "the optic of the door of no return" (C. Sharpe 21) shape the fragmented yet interconnected narratives in *At the Full and Change of the Moon* and the author's sense of being and belonging.

The novel charts the trajectories of Caribbean migration from Trinidad through England, Europe, Canada, and the United States of America, establishing the fictional town of Culebra Bay in Trinidad as the ground homeland from the nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. The narrative depicts a scattered world where the characters are spread out worldwide, negotiating being and belonging differently, haunted by the violent past of their matriarch, Marie Ursule, while also carving out their own path in wayward manners.

In my focal transition from Palestinian to Black transnationalism, the markers of hesitancy also change based on the specific historical and sociocultural events that impact one's

sense of belonging. Thus far, I have examined hesitancy's connection to trauma as well as the affective nature of hesitancy in the aftermath of trauma. I continue in my exploration of the feeling of hesitancy; exploring hesitancy in the afterlife of slavery through the idea of "stickiness." In the following two chapters, I continue to categorize hesitancy as a space, tool, and response. In the tension hesitancy creates between the past and the present, it *does* something. Hesitancy allows unpredictability and waywardness, it offers space for rumination and reckoning.

Considering hesitancy in the conversation of Black diasporas and global belonging is vital, as hesitancy is integral to the understanding of the "uneven battle between anti-Black violence and Black resistance" (King). How does one cope with the historical knowledge and experience of injustice while resisting these very injustices? Hesitancy provides the space to consider the contradictions of belonging in a nation that is both host and hostile to its racialized residents. Additionally, the space of hesitancy allows for a rebellion against the loveless history and conditions of the world, where individuals can drift, disrupt, and desire. To live in a hesitant world is to experience hesitant belonging, unable to fully feel comfortable within systems designed to oppress and violate its members.

Chapter 6: A Person of the "Sticky" World: The Afterlives of Colonialism and Slavery in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*

I.   Introduction

To feel hesitant is to feel unbelonging; this is not only a feeling but a political history and reality. This chapter focuses on hesitancy as a means of reckoning with historical events, specifically slavery and colonialism and its afterlives, as portrayed in the novel, *Homegoing*. In the novel, the trip Marjorie and Marcus take to Ghana shows the varying operations of homecoming and homegoing. Marjorie is returning to the familiar and coming home to her family and a land she knows well. Marcus, on the other hand, is a tourist visiting, unaware of his own homegoing, almost like a pilgrimage to the motherland, to the homeland long lost, Africa, Ghana. Specifically, I explore how hesitancy occurs in the "sticky" afterlives of slavery and colonialism. Hesitancy is a sticky situation; it is sticky in its multidimensionality: hesitancy is a space, a tool, and a response: a space for reckoning, a tool for resolution, and a response to racial and colonial violence. However, beyond its usage in addressing and identifying direct trauma, hesitancy here calls to the historical past; in its pause, hesitancy reckons with the memory of colonial and racial violence.

One way of understanding hesitancy is by studying its affective value via the concept of "stickiness." Sara Ahmed uses "stickiness" to describe certain social objects that become saturated with affect and tension. Emotions are riled up and generated through the process of "sticking figures together (adherence), a sticking that creates the very effect of a collective (coherence)" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 119). These objects are sticky because they are

emotionally charged and can easily attach to other elements. Ahmed explains that emotions have a rippling effect and can move through sticky associations between signs, figures, and objects. In "Affective Economies," Ahmed explores rhetorical and political strategies to appeal to the effects of love and hate; I examine the "stickiness" of accumulated historical and socio-political events that correlate and become "sticky," producing a sticky affect in turn, which is hesitancy. Accumulated events become sticky and produce sticky affect. Hesitancy is a sticky affect. The individual may experience consciously the affect of hesitancy but not consciously the events that cause the affect. And this stickiness also binds the community. Hesitation is an example of something sticky that is unclear and complex. Hesitant belonging compiles hate, suffering, anguish, fear, confusion, love, and joy; when the conditions of one's belonging to the world are fraught, one becomes ambivalent, feeling a sticky hesitance towards how to belong. This hesitance is caused by both conscious and unconscious factors. Ahmed believes that what is repressed from consciousness is not the feeling itself but the ideas to which the feeling may have been first connected. There is also the stickiness passed down through the collective in belonging to a community that has been marginalized, carrying pain and injustice intergenerationally. This is the stickiness that hesitant belonging embodies: unease and strong affect that render belonging unclear.

To elaborate on how hesitant belonging can be sticky, I examine a historic and contemporary site of pain and violence. I analyze the deep-rooted history of colonial and racial violence of slavery and its afterlife as portrayed in the novel *Homegoing*. Saidiya Hartman uses the term "afterlife of slavery" to refer to the ongoing inequities faced by Black people in the

Diaspora. These inequities include limited opportunities, restricted access, higher mortality rates, increased incarceration, limited health access, and impoverishment.

In relation to the experiences of slavery discussed in *Homegoing,* Yaa Gyasi, in her Op-ed for the *New York Times*, recounts the first time she visited the Cape Coast Castle, a "place where slaves were confined before being shipped to the New World," which was located only 50 miles from the town where her mother grew up. Indeed, the history of Ghana and the Gold Coast's role in the slave trade is often sealed and silenced. The novel portrays these histories and traumas by examining racial violence and Black mortality, which plague all the characters. In the chapters accounting for slavery, Gyasi exposes the veil that was hiding the proceedings of history too terrible to describe. Esi, we shall see, is the site of pain and sorrow that predicts "the life of slavery ahead, in which she and her children will be objects to be bought and sold" (Heinz 130). Esi's story is the site of anguish in the afterlives of slavery, in which H, Willie, and Sonny struggle in the brutal conditions of the world, narrowly surviving it. Esi's story is the site of hesitancy that we will see Marcus carries with him generations later.

Homegoing centers experience catastrophe and unbelonging and show their afterlives. The afterlife of slavery is sticky; *Homegoing* shows this stickiness by combining colonial violence, the Atlantic Slave Trade, chattel slavery, the Fugitive Slave Act, US Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement in the US, and the Harlem Renaissance in its intergenerational polyphonic narrative. By the time the most contemporary character, Marcus is introduced, he is affectively charged with the history that he belongs to. Combined, "stickiness" describes the complex feeling one might have in the afterlife of slavery when caught between a treacherous

collective past and a precarious present and future. Stickiness connotates the stuckness found in hesitancy that this analysis tries to unpack.

In my analysis, I look at the hesitancy exhibited mainly by the youngest of the two lineages: Marjorie and Marcus as they are the two characters who are given the space to examine their positions in the world and their relationships to it in relation to history. They experience hesitant belonging in the present due to the tensions and traumas of racial and colonial violence of the past. I begin my analysis in the past focusing on Esi's lineage mainly, accounting for the histories, legacies, and hauntings that foster sticky affects and hesitancy in Marcus. I then travel back to the future to show how Marcus and Marjorie navigate their belonging in the present and how they reckon with all that is and was.

II.   Sticky Belonging: To be Unhomed and Homeless, Nothings from Nowhere

Hesitant belonging plagues Gyasi's characters. It is sticky, as it is deeply rooted in the legacy of the slave trade. Beginning in the 1800s, *Homegoing* roots its narrative in colonial violence and slavery. The world in this novel is severely marked by colonization and its transatlantic legacies. It is a world of fracture, forced travel across oceans. The world is marred by the history of chattel slavery in the Gold Coast and in the United States of America. The novel shows the trade of human life occurring between the Fante and Ashanti empires, deeming slavery as cursed events that would plague the enslaver and the enslaved.

Homegoing is not only a fictional account of Ghana and the US's horrid history of colonialism and slave trade, but it is also a tale of a family rupture. The novel's structure reflects the disconnectedness of two sisters, Effia and Esi, living separate lives and passing on parallel

yet divergent lineages; they and all their descendants are marked with unbelonging and uncertainty about what home means. The narrative begins with Maame, the ancestral matriarch, and follows the accounts of eight generations of her descendants. Maame is kidnapped and enslaved as a servant in an Asante village. There, she gives birth to a daughter, Effia, before she sets a fire and then flees. Effia is married to a British slaver. Her son becomes a slaver and colonial pawn in his own right. In Fanteland, Maame has another daughter, Esi, who is also captured, imprisoned, and enslaved. Esi is shipped to North America, enduring the hardship of the hold of the ship and then plantation enslavement in the South. Nes, Esi's daughter lives the reality of chattel slavery, whipped, and scarred by a white Master, and is ultimately killed while trying to escape the plantation. Throughout the novel, belonging is a fraught challenge and a required reckoning. Baaba, Otcher's second wife who raises Effia, proclaims to her: "you are nothing from nowhere" (*Homegoing* 27). This proclamation exemplifies the rupture with history and affiliation that comes with slavery. Baabe's words echo throughout the novel, with belonging being sought after and desired by every character.

Gyasi includes a genealogical tree at the beginning of the novel to highlight the lost familial connections and to foreground the stories of migration in violent ruptures that lead to generational displacement and devastation (Figure 2).
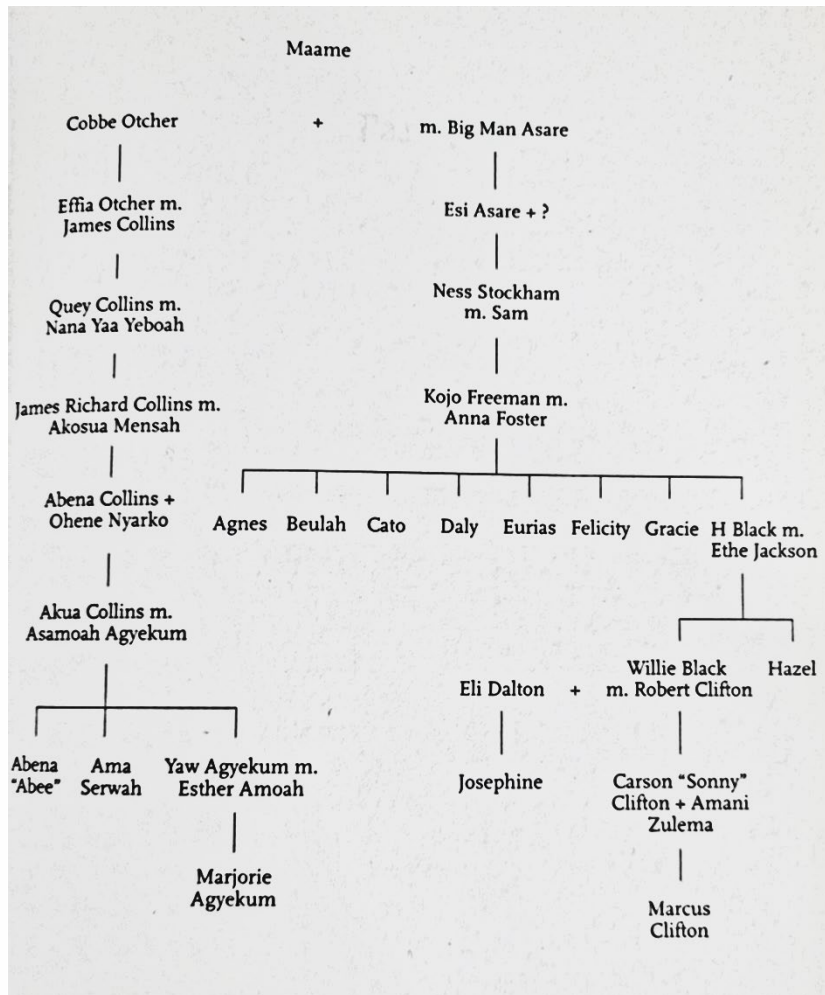
Figure 2: Genealogy Tree in *Homegoing*

Clearly, Gyasi deems these relations pertinent to the narrative. All of her characters not only hail from the Gold Coast but also share a bloodline. The genealogy tree emphasizes kinship and the bond between the two lineages in the reader's mind.

Homegoing provides a timeline of significant events in the history of Black people in America leading up to the 21st century. Its scope is vast, covering over three hundred years of history. Gyasi presents moments in time that are pivotal for the characters and the climate of

their time. Especially in Esi's lineage, the author depicts specific systematic injustices and racial violence against Black subjects in the USA. In the American lineage, Gyasi portrays many of her characters as products of their time and victims of circumstance, leaving them with little agency or opportunity for reflection. The characters are often too busy reacting and surviving to contemplate their circumstances. Gyasi shows the unbelonging of the enslaved subject and how it plagues their descendants for generations. Hartman writes: "Torn from kin and community, exiled from one's country, dishonored and violated, the slave defines the position of the outsider. She is the perpetual outcast, the coerced migrant, the foreigner, the shamefaced child in the lineage" (*Lose Your Mother* 5). This systematically enforced status of outsider conditions Esi's descendants, establishing an intergenerational sense of estrangement and uncertainty in them. The reader observes the first-person accounts of Maame, Esi, and Nes, all enslaved women, each a generation apart. The characters bear witness to the realities and hauntings of slavery. Shannon King explains:

> African American memory is replete with these stories. Many African Americans live with the memory of their slain loved ones. Survivors and witnesses of anti-Black violence live with these memories, too. Collectively, these stories of anti-Black violence are passed down from generation to generation and re-remembered as African Americans watch recordings of anti-Black violence. (King)

This reality is only reflected in Marcus's chapter, where he contemplates the traumatic legacies of Black violence in the US as he hesitates to come up with a topic for his dissertation. By the time we are introduced to Marcus, the most contemporary descendent, Gyasi slows down the pace of the narrative, offering moments of less active violence and presenting moments of

stagnation. Marcus is given the space to hesitate and question his sense of estrangement and belonging to the United States and the world around him.

III.   The Space Of Hesitancy: Belonging in the unsettled present

What is homegoing as opposed to homecoming? One connotes a willed journey, while the other implies a return.

The title *Homegoing* is adapted from "an old African American belief that death allowed an enslaved person's spirit to travel back to Africa" (Miller). Black funeral traditions in American culture have long preserved the tradition of homegoings (Stanley). The verb "go" stipulates a journey, a volition, whereas homecoming with the verb "come" carries an invitation, a return to what is known and familiar.

The space of hesitancy is living in a reality governed by a complex understanding of home. In her essay "Beyond Sedentarism and Nomadology: Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and the Ambivalent Desire for Home," Sarah Heinz examines the themes of belonging and homing desires in Gyasi's novel. Heinz observes the contrast between stability and homelessness depicted in each character's life circumstances and how they shape the trajectories of their descendants. She concludes that the home space is fluid and complex, twinning realities of estrangement with deep desires for belonging. Heinz describes home as "an absence, elusive, and constantly in the making, but it also is an aspiration" (131). In complement, Iain Chambers describes homecoming as completing the story of migration, "a domestication of the detour" (Chambers 4), perhaps even an obvious return; what then is to be said of home-going? Is it the

beginning of the story of return, the story of reverse migration? How can elusive and ambivalent desires for homecoming be mitigated?

The journey of home-going is the journey of hesitant belonging. The space of the ambivalent home is that of hesitant belonging. Dionne Brand writes that there remains a persistent sense of homelessness experienced by the descendants of enslaved people and the ambivalent desire for an impossible return. This ambivalence and homelessness plague the characters on both sides of the Atlantic. Gyasi straddles with both potentials of home, as the mythical space and the tangible place. The designation of "home-going" as a constant process, devoid of a resolution in an original home align with Avtar Brah's assertions about diasporic ideations that "'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination" (Brah 188), that offers no real return to a fixed home entity. Gyasi situates the narrative with the distinctive historical experiences of the colonization of the Gold Coast and the Atlantic Slave Trade through Ghana. This loudly centers an origin, a homeland, while also conceding that there is ambivalence in how the characters relate to home as a place of belonging, and whether "coming" home actually merits an actual restorative return home.

We witness this hesitancy in both Marcus and Marjorie. The university becomes a space of hesitancy for Marcus; he struggles to belong in a space that was not built for him and was systematically set up to cast him out. For Marjorie, America and Ghana represent her spaces of hesitancy; she grapples with belonging between her adopted home and homeland. I will elaborate more on this in how each character reacts to the conditions in their spaces.

IV.   Reacting to Sticky Realities: Hesitancy As A Response To Racial And Colonial Violence

When considering one's positionality in the world and recognizing the legacies of forced migration and violence that have brought them to their current moment, hesitancy is a valid reaction. The reader witnesses these reactions in Marcus and Marjorie as they navigate their sense of belonging and home. Hesitancy belonging embodies stickiness that channels through feeling discomfort in certain spaces and also feeling uncomfortable with oneself. There is a stickiness passed down through the collective in belonging to a community that has been marginalized, carrying pain and injustice intergenerationally. Marcus and Marjorie experience hesitant responses to the environments they are in, unsure of their belonging.

1.   Reacting in the Afterlife of Slavery: Marcus's

Marcus's discomfort in Stanford and also in water represents his awareness of living in the aftermath of slavery.

a.   Unbelonging in academia

An example of Marcus's hesitancy is his discomfort in academia. He feels a great sense of unbelonging in the university. Additionally, developing his research topic proves to be sticky:

> How could he explain to Marjorie that he was not supposed to be here? Alive. Free. That the fact that he had been born, that he was not in a jail cell somewhere, was not by dint of his pulling himself up by the bootstraps, not by hard work or belief in the American Dream, but by mere chance. (*Homegoing* 296)

In this quote, we see Marcus's sense of guilt for his own freedom and the opportunities he has access to. He carries the weight of his history on his shoulders. He experiences hesitant belonging in America due to the country's history of violence against black people, which shapes his existence. Marcus genuinely believed that "he was not supposed to be here" (296). "Here" refers to Stanford, where he is a doctoral graduate student at an Ivy League university.

He views the world as being so biased and unfair towards Black people that survival— let alone success— was a case of chance, less an act of hard work and volition. Understanding the conditions stacked against his success, Marcus has an acute awareness of the precarity of the afterlives of slavery and the limitations afforded in the world, which Hartman describes as "skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment" (*Lose Your Mother* 6). These limitations marked his own family and the larger Black Diaspora. Saidiya Hartman writes: "Mere survival was an achievement in a context so brutal. How could one enhance life or speak of its potentialities when confined in the ghetto, when subjected daily to racist assault and insult, and conscripted to servitude?" (*Wayward Lives* 237).

As an academic at Stanford, Marcus has defeated the odds stacked against him and his people by the anti-Black conditions of the world. However, he hesitates in moving forward, especially since he carries the stories and pains of his father, grandmother, and great-grandfather, H. This is evident in Marcus's struggle in selecting a topic for his dissertation. Initially, he plans to focus on the convict leasing system that cost his great-grandfather H valuable years of his life. However, as he delves deeper into his research, he realizes that the project must be rooted in history. It becomes clear that to understand his great-grandfather's story fully, he would also

need to explore his grandmother Willie's experience of escaping Jim Crow laws by migrating north. Discussing the Great Migration would then require an examination of the cities that welcomed these individuals, such as Harlem. This, in turn, would lead to addressing his father's heroin addiction, his repeated incarcerations, and his criminal past. In understanding the history and realities of living while Black, Marcus connects to a deep history that dates back to the days of chattel slavery, a harsh reality that threatens Black life everywhere.

He hesitates in this work. For Marcus, bringing all this history into a project is inevitably overwhelming and debilitating. He feels stuck, uncertain of how to delve into all these legacies while also reckoning with his own achievements and existence. He was not supposed to be here. Marcus experiences a stickiness of emotions that he needs to unpack to do his academic work. The unpacking that occurs also becomes the active work of healing the collective traumas of racial violence. I will address this more in a later section when I discuss hesitancy as a tool. Marcus's reaction of unbelonging in the academic sphere links strongly to the active work of reckoning he is doing through employing hesitancy to unpack belonging.

When the reader is introduced to him, he is in a state of researcher's paralysis, unable to narrow down his topic of study, going into debilitating spirals of overthinking and non-working: "When Marcus started to think [about all the injustices in Black history], he couldn't get himself to open even one book" (*Homegoing* 290). He is unsure of how to proceed and where to begin with his work. The farther he digs, the mor entrenched the history appears to be, which causes him to pause. In Marcus's archival digging and the pulling out of history, Gyasi makes a case for restoring history instead of ahistoricity. Marcus is able to trace back his roots, and perhaps the farther he engages, the father he will reach in connecting back to Esi, back to Maame. There is

no proof for this in the novel, but there is a sense of openness Marcus experiences as he steps

into the water in Ghana.

b. The Black Aquatic

Marcus, like the other descendants of Esi in America, has a complicated relationship with water,

which is the site of "premature death for Black people in a global structure" but also a space of

regeneration and healing (Walcott 66). The story portrays water as both a place of violence and

rebirth, highlighting the resilience and strength of Black individuals in the face of historical

adversity.

As Marcus' chapter opens, the reader immediately learns that he "did not care for water"

(284). Viscerally, he did not enjoy being near it, let alone inside it. Marcus's aversion to water is

most definitely a direct reaction to what his father, Sonny, had told him: "black people did not

like water because they were brought over on slave ships. What did a black man want to swim

for? The ocean floor was already littered with black men" (284). Throughout the novel, Esi's

descendants have an ambiguous relationship with water; Kojo works at the docks in Baltimore,

though he is weary of the ships' dark history. Nes recounts the deaths at sea Esi experienced on

her voyage across the Atlantic. However, when Marcus goes to Ghana, his perception of water

transforms; he experiences a feeling of joy, renewal, and healing, symbolizing the unpacking of

collective trauma and the exploration of his roots and the routes that led to his place in the world.

When Marcus and Marjorie visit the Cape Coast Castle, they walk through its upper and

then lower levels, learning about the history of its inhabitants and visitors who often did not mix.

They both feel discomfort in silence: "Marjorie shifted her weight, and Marcus tries not to look

at her. It was the way most people lived their lives, on upper levels, not stopping to peer underneath" (*Homegoing* 298*)*. Upon encountering the Door of No Return, the door that "leads out to the beach, where ships waited to take them away," Marcus begins to feel nauseous, unnerved by the detached historical accounts of this grave history regurgitated to tourists; he feels the sudden urge to be elsewhere, anywhere but in the haunting castle. Marcus experiences visceral unbelonging in the castle, leading him to need to be elsewhere. He reacts without thought; he opens the doors and passes through them, running towards the beach on the other side. Marcus does not belong to the castle; his history does not stop there but is memorialized in the journey elsewhere, in the water.

Something shifts for Marcus, the water that he had had an acersion to now seems to call him. As he reaches the beach, Marcus looks towards the water and faces his fears: "The fear that Marcus felt inside the castle was still there, but he knew it was […] a wild thing that could still be controlled, contained" (300). In the water, Marcus embraces the other side of the Black aquatic. Rinaldo Walcott notes the relation between water and Blackness and its double-sidedness: "The blackness birthed by the aquatic is the very same blackness that produces premature death for Black people in a global structure and relations where Black people are fungible as far as concerns the structure of governance, capital, and social regulation that emerged from that moment" (Walcott 66). Marcus faces his hesitancy by going into the water with Marjorie. This experience is restorative for Marcus, triggering an emotional memory and reminding Marcus of where he comes from and the route back to a potential place of origin. This is expressed in the welcoming he receives from Ghanaians throughout their time in Ghana,

wishing them *Akwaaba*, welcome, and by Marjorie as she places her stone around his neck and says: "Welcome home" (300).

2.   To Be An In-Betweener: Marjorie

Marjorie's hesitancy is a reaction to her fraught sense of belonging to the world; she experiences a stickiness in confronting the legacies of colonial violence. We are introduced to Marjorie quite similarly to how we are introduced to Manar in *Salt Houses*. Marjorie arrives in Ghana and is accosted almost immediately by street pedlars trying to trick tourists "into paying for things Ghanaians knew were free" (264). Exhausted and irritated, Marjorie shouts at the local pedlar in Twi: "I am from Ghana, stupid. Can't you see?" to which he retorts: "But you come from America" (264). This only angers Marjorie more, and she walks away.

From this opening scene to her chapter, Marjorie is presented as a hybrid being, occupying an in-between space, an elsewhere: she is Ghanaian, yes, but also American. But not fully American, and not Black American, but African in America. Throughout the chapter, young Marjorie learns to navigate these varying identity markers; she is bullied in her middle school for not being Black enough. Drawing on her upbringing as a Ghanaian American in the South, Gyasi situates Marjorie and her family in her hometown of Huntsville, Alabama. Growing up in Huntsville, Gyasi writes: "We moved to Alabama the summer I turned 10. […] There were no Black Americans, let alone West Africans, in the neighbourhood. Because the Huntsville schools were, and still are, extremely segregated, and because my family lived on the white side of town, I was the sole black student in almost all of my classes" ("I am Ghanaian-American. Am I Black?"). For African immigrants to North America, "Black" is adopted as a new marker

185

often, one that needs to be reckoned with. Narratives from African immigrants to North America tend to note the moment of racial identification. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's protagonist in *Americana*, Ifemelu, states that in Nigeria, "race was not an issue," in contrast to the US where it is; Ifemelu goes on to declare that she "did not think of [her]self as black and [she] only became black when [she] came to America"(Adichie 359). Elamin Abdelmahmoud also identifies the shift in self-identification upon moving from Sudan to Kingston, Ontario, as a teenager: "It took two stopovers and nineteen hours of total flying time for me to become Black. I left Khartoum as a popular and charming (and modest) preteen, and I landed in Canada with two new identities: immigrant and Black" (Abdelmahmoud).

Mirroring Gyasi's discomforts growing up, Marjorie has sticky feelings and hesitancies in determining her sense of belonging: "Her family lived on the southeast side of Huntsville. They were the only Black family on the block, the only Black people for miles and miles and miles" (*Homegoing* 268). Marjorie experiences hesitancy in being and belonging in the present due to the tensions and traumas of the past. In America, she is a stranger. Marjorie explains the linguistic distinction and distancing created to emphasize her estrangement. She separates those who were enslaved and thus transported to a new modernity, an atemporal history, and those who remained in Ghana, continuing with a linear progression of history from colonization to decolonization to immigration as in the case of her family: "They had a different word for African Americans. *Akata*. That *akata* people were different from Ghanaians"(273).

Marjorie struggles with her sense of belonging as both Ghanaian and American; she experiences loneliness and aloneness in navigating these spaces of ancestral and contemporary belonging: "I mostly feel like I don't belong [in Ghana]. As soon as I step off the airplane,

people can tell that I'm like them but different too. They can smell it on me. […] The way I do not fit here or there" (*Homegoing* 278). Marjorie is hesitant to embrace her belonging to Ghana and to America, not in the manner of nationalism, but in the sense of cultural and social belonging. Marjorie feels "too long gone from Ghana to be Ghanaian" (273). The street pedlars confirm her hesitation by calling her a tourist by identifying her as American, a non-Ghanian, a visitor. Similarly, Marjorie is not entirely comfortable with identifying as Black because of the historical and cultural contexts of Blackness in America that she does not feel like she relates to. Her teacher, Mrs. Pinkston, says, "Listen, Marjorie, I am going to tell you something that maybe nobody has told you yet. Here, in this country, it does not matter where you came from first to the white people running things. You are here now, and here black is black is black" (273). This moment shows hesitancy for Marjorie as she struggles with her identification and sense of belonging. In high school, she is ostracized as Black but not Black enough, "the wrong kind" of Black (268). Her peers label her as white. Marjorie is mocked for how she speaks, her accent turning almost British – mocked and told she "Sounds like a white girl" (269). In America, Marjorie learns that racial designators fall beyond skin colour. They take on cultural, linguistic, and anthropological elements. In migration, there are complex and contradictory relationships to social privilege and marginality ("Home and away: Narratives of migration and estrangement" 342) that Marjorie experiences as a Black subject and an African immigrant. She experiences racism when her crush, Graham, in high school, cannot take her to prom because the school and his father deem their pairing inappropriate. He disappoints her further by exoticizing her as "not like other Black girls" (280), revealing his racial chauvinism and bias.

Marjorie then reacts hesitantly to the world around her as she struggles to find a footing, a complete belonging. Marjorie feels the heaviness of being both a stranger in America and too long gone from Ghana. It is too long gone from the mother continent to continue calling it the mother continent: "She wanted to tell Mrs. Pinkston that she could feel herself being pulled away too, almost *akata*, too long gone from Ghana to be Ghanaian" (273). "Too long gone," as if the stretch of time evaporates one's belonging and link to a homeland. As if the potential to return is broken. Saidiya Hartman cites another term from her visit to Ghana, Obruni, meaning stranger. She writes: "Obruni forced me to acknowledge that I did not belong anyplace. The domain of the stranger is always elusive elsewhere. I was born in another country, where I felt like an alien […]. I had grown weary of being stateless" (4).

V.   Possible Return: Hesitancy as a Tool for Restoration

Gyasi positions return as a possibility for Black subjects. By creating this possibility, Gyasi is at the opposite end of the spectrum to Dionne Brand, who wholly rejects the idea of return. For Gyasi, return is in the form of a concrete homeland that can heal and restore the pain of history and modernity. *Homegoing* links the Black Diaspora and Africa as an ancestral homeland.

As hesitancy is a space one finds oneself in, it also takes on a more active role as a tool used to unpack the stickiness of the afterlife of slavery, allowing for the process of healing to commence. Storytelling and writing are the tools employed to negotiate belonging and maintain history. Hesitancy here operates as a tool of inquiry that is used to dig deeper. Marcus and Marjorie take their heritages seriously and adopt them into their professional lives through pursuing higher degrees, employing the tools of storytelling, writing, and researching to reckon

with the hesitancies of belonging and the histories of colonialism and Black subjugation, and ultimately to restore their connections to concrete and imaginary homes.

I examine Marcus and Marjorie's independent and collective healing in relation to the metaphor of water that is heavily employed throughout the text as the space of contention and restoration.

1.   Sitting in the Room with History: Marcus

Marcus explores his hesitant belonging in his dissertation writing as he reflects on his personal struggles and familial history. To hesitate is to pause; Marcus pauses, or rather delays, his dissertation writing as he reckons with his own belongings. This pause has allowed him to evaluate his situation and determine the best course of action for him and his research. As Marcus's research is based on affect, it is challenging to differentiate between hesitancy's use as a tool and its reactive value, as they are interconnected for Marcus. His emotions inform his research. Marcus uses hesitancy as a tool to pause and unpack the stickiness of belonging he feels, ultimately leading to a journey of healing.

Marcus grapples with his family's and the overall Black history in America. He is uncovering the afterlives of slavery, as well as the legacies of racial violence. To understand and advocate against the violent history of the US, he has become an academic. Marcus practices what Toni Morrison calls "rememory" by bringing the archive to life. This is done by animating the lives of Black subjects to keep in memory and recollect the systemic history of racial violence and oppression. On this journey back through his research, he goes to Prat City in Birmingham. There, he faces ambivalence and paralysis, overwhelmed by the history he is trying

to capture and by the feelings of being part of this overpowering history of oppression. He laments:

> It was one thing to research something, another thing to have lived it. To have felt it. How could he explain to Marjorie that what he wanted to capture with his research was the feeling of time, of having been a part of something that stretched so far back, was so impossibly large, that it was easy to forget that she, and he, and everyone else, existed in it – not apart from it, but inside of it. (*Homegoing* 295)

It is no surprise that following this thought, Marcus shares with Marjorie why he is afraid of water, explaining that it is the limitlessness and the opacity that scares him: "It's because of all that space. It's because everywhere I look, I see blue, and I have no idea where it begins" (296). His research and his relationship to water are described in similar terms, expressing an impossible largeness that encompasses him and Marjorie and every one of their family members. As he dives deeper into his research, he drowns. In this work, Marcus engages in the archival process of finding a home, a search that also attempts to resolve his hesitancy. His homing desire becomes relational and sticky.

Beyond his research, Gyasi paints Marcus as someone attuned to his and his family's incompleteness, as someone who craves an unknown half that is missing: "In that room with his family, he would sometimes imagine a different room, a fuller family. He would imagine so hard that at times he thought he could see them. Sometimes in a hut in Africa" (290). Marcus feels "in the room with history" (*A Map to the Door of No Return* 24). In her memoir, Dionne Brand describes history's prominent presence in the present. History is felt and observed in the

everyday. Marcus's hesitancy is in this pulling of the past constantly into the present; he is in the history; he feels it especially as he attempts to unpack it, to understand it.

The idea of feeling history and its towering bearing in the present relates to hesitancy as a reaction. Marcus takes his reactions to racial and colonial violence and delves deeper into understanding them, into unearthing the stickiness of history or at least understanding it better. Though this leads to additional hesitancy and debilitation, he carries forward, going further back in time, in the journeys of migration till he goes to Ghana. Being in the water in Ghana symbolizes a restorative countering to the traumas of racial and colonial violence of history for Marcus. His fears slowly alleviate as he overcomes his dislike of water and being in it. He can feel the emotions beyond the collective trauma and violence that weighs him down; instead, he is given a space for healing. The act of running through the Door of No Return, towards the sea, into the water is described as reactionary, devoid of thought, while also clearing Marcus's mental blocks through experience. This is the feeling of time that he wanted to recapture. Passing through the door of no return and being inside the water has restorative potential that he seeks through his research. This is Marcus's homegoing.

Through his research, Marcus works on unearthing the sources of his hesitancy; however, ultimately, it is his going to Ghana and his bond with Marjorie that is pivotal in Marcus's unpacking of his hesitancy.

2.   The Waters that Wade Us: Marjorie

Marjorie applies her hesitancy as a tool, through the process of writing, she recovers lost connections and addresses hesitancies. As Nahr in *Against the Loveless World*, resorts to

narrative accounts to affirm her belonging, so does Marjorie through her writing. Writing is Marjorie's means to belonging, to understanding.

Storytelling is also a crucial tool for restoration. The familial history passed down through dreams and stories in Marjorie's family preserves the flows of migration and ancestral heritage, which are crucial for understanding the history of colonialism and its impact on present-day experiences. Storytelling is an act of reckoning with colonial memory, bringing the historical past into the present as a means of restitution and potential return. Marjorie is informed about her familial heritage in Ghana, even with disruption and changes in the home setting; Marjorie knows of Effia, Quey, James, Abena, from her grandmother Akua— the Old Lady— and her father, Yaw. Storytelling deepens Marjorie's understanding of her migration and her ancestry.

In fact, the Old Lady sets up the conditions for return by introducing Marjorie to the water and explaining that people were lost there, ancestors were lost there, educating Marjorie on the connections across the Atlantic, and ultimately making Marcus's time in the water even more significant. Her grandmother teaches her about those lost in water, and the hauntings that follow the family. Akua transferring these stories to Marjorie is what Sara Ahmed calls an act of "generational storytelling about prior histories of movement and dislocation" ("Home and away" 342).

Marjorie is extremely attached to her grandmother. Old and frail, Akua is dying in the chapter narrated from Marjorie's perspective; she calms Marjorie but reminds her that death is but a journey: "only bodies died. Spirits wandered. They found Asamando, or they did not. They

stayed with their descendants to guide them into waking from their fog of unloving, unliving"
(276). Old Lady affirms the journey of death and return epitomized in the tradition of
homegoing. Her words also confirm the significance of lineage and ancestry. In the cruel world
of the unknown and the unloving, ancestors guide the path and haunt. We see this with Marcus
and Marjorie differently. In no supernatural way, Marcus is haunted by the immediate history of
his predecessors as well as the unknown history of historical erasure and loss of lineage, whereas
Marjorie carries her family's history.

Additionally, the histories or "dream stories," as they are referred to in the novel, help
Marjorie work through her own complex sense of belonging. She uses writing to reckon with the
familial legacy of the slave trade in migration and with her own racial identity. This is
exemplified in her hesitancy in high school to write a poem for an assembly. Her poem is "built
from the dream stories" her grandmother had shared with her (283). It evokes the connection
between Black subjects in America and Ghana, entities she belonged to: "Split the Castle open/
find me, find you" (lines 1-2); "We, two, wade. / The waters seem different/ but are the same./
Our same. Sister skin" (lines 12-15) (282). Marjorie brings back the theme of water that carries
such heftiness for her as a Ghanaian who immigrated by flying over the Atlantic and for Black
subjects in the United States. In America, she is Black; though her journey and history to this
land differs, she acknowledges the roots of rupture in colonialism in the Castle. Marjorie's
understanding of water is quite different than Marcus's. Through metaphor, Marjorie negotiates
her belonging between two continents. Marjorie imagines connection through the Middle
Passage, recounting the journeys of rupture as the space of hesitance that divides but also binds
Africans and Black subjects.

Marjorie works through the stickiness of her belonging through writing and reading, finding solace in African and African American literature, which she majors in later. She addresses this through her writing, constantly reckoning with her connection to Ghana and the US. Marjorie works through her aloneness and estrangement by finding common grounds in her Blackness, between her home and her homeland. She tackles these unhomely feelings of isolation that connect to living and feeling in the afterlives of slavery and colonialism that implicate all the other characters.

3.   Homecoming: Hesitancy As A Tool For Restoration

The story culminates in a partial restoration of connection between the youngest members of both lineages as they cross paths and go to Ghana together. This aligns with redemptive return narratives that imagine a return that keeps the Black Diaspora connected to its African roots, emphasizing that belonging "in the world for Black people has always required a link back to Africa" (Alkalimat 73).

Ultimately, Marcus and Marjorie's journey towards Ghana feels like a homecoming, especially as everyone welcomes them throughout their trip. The visit leads to a reaffirmation of belonging and a stronger, more resilient bond between them. In this sense, hesitancy resurfaces as a tool for resolution and healing, connecting beyond the oppressions and violence of history to find a place of community, of grounding, of home. In their friendship, Marcus and Marjorie support each other and share each others fears –water and fire respectively – and hesitancies with one another, which allows them to face them head on.

Hesitancy as a tool for pause calls for negotiation and restoration. In its pause, there is an unpacking of the stickiness, perhaps not always consciously, but allowing for healing emotions to break away and shine. Even in the darkest of moments, finding community and solidarity evokes emotions of validation and healing. Hesitant belonging is a means to embrace connection and resilience in the face of historical rupture and lovelessness. Marjorie and Marcus illustrate this process in their reunion. Hesitancy is actively utilized in the novel as a tool for resolve. Both Marjorie and Marcus sit uncomfortably and hesitantly in the world; however, they find resolve in each other in an actual reunion that is completed with a trip to The Door of No Return in Ghana and a dip in the water.

VI.   Conclusion

Throughout *Homegoing*, hesitancy's multivalence is evident. As a tool, hesitancy becomes a facilitator for reckoning; in the suspended space of hesitancy, the individual can consider the collective memory of slavery and its legacies in relation to their impacts generationally on Black subjects. Hesitancy is the pause necessary for one to consider the action needed to move forward, whether acting through anger or writing and uncovering what is lost from the archive. Hesitancy is also the pause needed to negotiate one's charged sense on the path to healing. Additionally, the novel explores the different registers of home and its potentialities as a space of restoration, return, escape, and haunting. The novel strongly highlights the possibility of return as a way to heal and restore the pain of history and modernity. Through the concept of homegoing, Gyasi maintains a link between the Black Diaspora and Africa as an ancestral homeland.

Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* is a powerful examination of the ruptures caused by forced migration and the stickiness of the afterlife of slavery and colonialism in the context of Black existence over three hundred years. The novel evokes what Hartman deems "most chose to avoid: the catastrophe that was our past, and the lives exchanged for India cloth, Venetian beads, cowrie shells, guns, and rum" (*Lose Your Mother* 4). The characters experience various hesitations in belonging in the present due to the tensions and traumas of racial and colonial violence. This hesitancy manifests in pausing and delaying action, in feelings of estrangement, ambivalence, uncertainty, and stuckness. Gyasi portrays her characters as products of their time and victims of circumstance: The characters carry the curse that had plagued their ancestors. The separated sisters, Effia and Esi, are "doomed to stay on opposite sides of the pond" (*Homegoing* 39). Effia becomes the wife of a colonizer, giving birth to colonial subjects, while Esi is kidnapped and taken to the dungeon, destined for America as an enslaved woman, giving birth to Black individuals conditioned by the racial laws of the growing nation. Marcus and Marjorie bear the accumulated experiences of their family, which leads to their sense of hesitant belonging. They are the inheritors of all the sticky experiences their predecessors faced in the novel.

Gyasi explicitly connects the dots between the two divergent lineages in this novel's final chapter. Restoring the connection between the two lineages, one African and one American, evokes the hope of redemptive and restorative return, putting forward hope for healing the generational wounds of colonialism and enslavement. The relationship between Marcus and Marjorie is almost symbiotic: Marjorie will take Marcus to Ghana and unknowingly connect him to his ancestry, and Marcus will help Marjorie connect with Blackness, an identity she takes on

as an immigrant in America. In Ghana, passing the Door of No Return, Marcus feels whole, he finds the missing piece that he had been longing for, that America could not provide. Their trip to Ghana embodies the restoration message in Marjorie's poem. Both help each other work through their hesitancies, unpacking the stickiness of their emotions.

Through the process of hesitant belonging, Gyasi advocates embracing belonging for the reunification of bonds, which in turn is an act of resilience against the rupture of history against the lovelessness of the world. Marjorie and Marcus's connection to one another presents a clean reunion and the clarity they need. The act of homegoing ultimately leads to a reaffirmation of belonging, but only after each of them goes through the throes of reckoning through hesitant belonging.

Chapter 7: A Person of the Scattered World: Willful Ambivalence and Waywardness in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*

> If I can say it. Let me. I think that Blacks in the Diaspora feel captive despite the patent
>
> freedom we experience, despite the fact that we are several hundred years away from the
>
> Door of No Return, despite the fact that the door does not exist; despite the fact that we
>
> live in every state of self-agency, some exceedingly powerful, some less so of course but
>
> self agency, nonetheless. One might even argue for the sheer magnificence of our
>
> survival against history. Yet … (*A Map to the Door of No Return* 43-44)

Feeling captive is the running theme in my analysis of hesitant belonging in this chapter. Dionne Brand's 1999 novel, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, shows the contradictory forces of freedom and captivity as experienced by the characters, Eula, Adrian, Maya, and Priest. Despite the fact that the characters migrate throughout the novel, traveling between different countries and continents, there is no freedom in their movement. In contrast, their movements are escapes or circumstantial. Hesitant belonging is presented here in the contrast between freedom and captivity; freedom is found inwardly and waywardly, while the world and its political and social operative systems hold Black subjects captive. As with *Against the Loveless World*, Brand's novel tells the story of survival against the world, against history.

In this chapter, I expand on hesitancy's ambivalent trait, examining the correlation between willful ambivalence and waywardness as operatives in hesitancy. Here, I examine hesitancy as a space that is exemplified in what Lauren Berlant calls the "impasse." Additionally, I focus on hesitancy as a response to the world's cruelty and the violent conditions of its history.

Hesitancy projects as a wilful wavering, a waywardness. Finally, I investigate hesitancy as a means for non-belonging to the world by opting to not deal with reality, but in choosing to drift through the world. As a tool, hesitancy is expressed as wilful ambivalence.

Hesitant belonging manifests in negotiating one's belonging within the dichotomy of freedom and captivity. The characters either crack under the pressures of the world or refuse to belong all together, embracing their nonbelonging through rebelliousness and ambivalence towards the world one drifts through. I use Brand's novel to study hesitancy as non-belonging in these multifaceted aspects. Belonging and its obstacles are not individualized in the novel; instead, the characters are cognizant of the social construct of non-belonging and the terms of social existence.

In contrast to narratives of origin like *Homegoing*, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* shows what it is like to have no traceable roots or beginnings and to live with an omitted history in the room. For Brand, there is no beginning, no home, no return: "It no longer exists. It should not exist" (*A Map to the Door of No Return* 90). Brand argues that since there are no known origins, then there are no possible returns, "no ancestry except the black water and the Door of no Return" (50). The door is less a place than a threshold of the brutal history of capitalist modernity, which is why Brand characterizes living in the Black Diaspora is a survival against this history.

Nevertheless, return being an impossibility, there is still an overpowering historical presence that governs the present, a pulling of the past into the present. Brand metaphorically draws this pulling, as sitting in the room with history:

One enters a room and history follows; one enters a room and history precedes. History is already seated in the chair in the empty room when one arrives. Where one stands in society always seems related to this historical experience. Where one can be observed is relative to that history. All human effort seems to emanate from this door. How do I know this? Only by self-observation, only by looking. Only by feeling. Only by being a part, sitting in the room with history. (*A Map to the Door of No Return* 24)

History is the omnipresent captive in Brand's analogy. History governs how one belongs and exists in the world. Historical experience dictates one's present no matter how much one attempts to escape it. Brand identifies this recognition of history through affective and psychic dimensions as Sadiya Hartman elaborates in her essay on Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return*: "The door is the end of traceable beginnings and provides a figure for describing the psychic and affective dimensions of Black existence in the diaspora" ("A Room with History"). One recognizes history by feeling it, by being haunted and inhibited by it.

Additionally, this spatial-temporal disruption of the pull of the past in the present represents an in-betweenness embodied through hesitant belonging, an attempt to exist in the present while navigating the pull of history. The feeling of in-betweenness occurs because of the rupture with the past, that haunts and lingers in the present. Brand writes: "Our inheritance in the Diaspora is to live in this inexplicable space. That space is the measure of our ancestors' step through the door toward the ship. One is caught in the few feet in between" (*A Map to The Door of No Return* 21). If the only true space of existence is at the frame of the door, with one foot in the past, and one in the present, so to say, such existence is in the space of the impasse.

I use the description "scattered" to describe the world created in Brand's novel. This scattered world and ambivalent relation to it befits the space of the impasse, which overlaps in some ways with, though does not fully encapsulate, what hesitant belonging offers. Berlant describes the impasse as "a holding station that doesn't hold securely but opens out into anxiety." (199). One navigates as if treading water in the obscure and unclear. This ambivalent space of in-betweenness presents the ideal conditions for my theorization of hesitant belonging. Unpacking hesitancy in its multi-facility, I contribute to the exploration of being and belonging in the Diaspora for those categorized as victims of modernity. Hesitancy occurs in this ambivalence of transition, of constant precarious being on shaky grounds.

The narrative depicts a scattered world where the characters are spread out all over, negotiating to be and to belong differently, haunted by historical loss and the violent past of their matriarch, Marie Ursule. Marie Ursule is an enslaved woman in the nineteenth century who organized a mass suicide as a final means of escape and liberation from her enslavers. She saves only Kamena, who would traverse homeless and homesick looking for a dreamland, and her daughter, Bola, who would love and lust abundantly in Culebra Bay, mothering many children, scattering them all over the world. Scattering reflects a randomness, a circumstantial and haphazard way of living that has impacted all the characters who migrate and move along with life because the connection to home is ambivalent: instead, characters choose to focus on the present, on circumstance and move with that.[36] The characters act wilfully and waywardly, and

---

[36] In the Palestinian section, the Arabic translation of scattering, *shatat*, is used to describe displacement. The representations of scattering are different in both cases; attachment and belonging are crucial in Alyan and Abulhawa's narratives. Scattering is a forced condition, but it is centred around an existing land and homeland,

they defy the conditions of the world through non-belonging, rejecting belonging altogether. The novel charts the trajectories of Caribbean migration from Trinidad through England, Europe, Canada, and the United States of America, establishing the fictional town of Culebra Bay in Trinidad as the ground homeland.

I focus on two sets of siblings in conjunction and individually: Priest, Eula, Adrian, and Maya. Each of these characters displays hesitant belonging. They are struck with feelings of liminality; acutely aware of their world's fragility, while also entrenched in its ambiguous disorientation as they transition across boundaries and borders. To understand the characters' ambivalence and wayward ways, I employ hesitance as a useful lens to unpack non-belonging for the varying characters.

I.   Space of Non-Belonging: Hesitant Belonging and the Impasse

Lauren Berlant offers the impasse as both "a formal term for encountering the duration of the present and as a specific term for tracking the circulation of precariousness through diverse locales and bodies" (199). Berlant focuses on precarious subjects under the thumb of capitalism and upward mobility. She examines the state of impasse in unexpected loss and in coasting. This is also the space that leads to drifting, as we shall see in the next section. In the unbearable nowness of it all, drifting is an act of refusal, retaliation, and resignation. The characters I classify as persons of the world are victims of modernity. They navigate daily realities plagued with the precarities enforced by the legacies of forced migration, colonialism, and capitalism.

---

roots, and tangential objects such as keys and passports that assert Palestinian being and belonging, if not to a nation than to a family, to a land.

They are vulnerable cosmopolitans, victims of forced migrations. They occupy the space of hesitant belonging.

The space of hesitant belonging is represented in Eula and Adrian's chapters. Both characters lament the harsh conditions of the world as they find themselves at an impasse; however, this impasse is that of the historical present, the situation of the unbearable loss and grief, Black subjects in migration have to negotiate.

1. **Eula in a World Cracking**

> It is all happenstance, […], whether we are miserable or not. We are a tragedy. […] A whole broken-up tragedy, standing in the middle of the world cracking. […] I felt as if we had been scattered out with a violent randomness. (*At the Full and Change of the Moon* 258)

I use this quotation earlier in this dissertation to lay the groundwork for what hesitant belonging encompasses. Eula describes this state perfectly; acknowledging the circumstantial and tragic nature of belonging in the world, especially as a person who comes from a history of violence, of great scramble that has led to rupture and catastrophic scattering. Eula, more than any of the characters, centers the circumstances of the loss of memory, the break with Africa that brought her ancestors to the Caribbean and her to Toronto. Eula acknowledges what Andrea Davis refers to as Black women's profound dislocation from the land (Andrea Davis 86). In this dislocation, Eula occupies the impasse; she acknowledges "precarity as the condition of being and belonging" (Berlant 194). She is adrift without any allegiance to land, caught in the crisis that marks Caribbean women's dispossession and hesitant belonging.

In the chapter "Blue Airmail Letter," Eula writes letters addressed to her deceased mother. The letters show Eula's image of the world, a broken place with glimpses of hope that are better to forget. The historical conditions of the Black Diaspora that are interrogated here are the breaking up of the family, the connection to a home, to roots that have been forever disrupted. Eula's disheartening words address the impossibility of belonging fully. They show the lapse between the binaries in belonging, subjectively and to the world writ large. Eula experiences hesitant belonging as the loss of belonging to the world. The loss occurs due to the rupture with the past, the divide between kin and community brought on by the system of slavery. Marie Ursule plunged Bola into exile and from then on, kin was disrupted repeatedly, with every descendent dealing with a complicating sense of filiation, running away from kin and community on their terms.

Eula is no different. She runs away from her family. However, her disruption of connection is complicated beyond only the conditions of diasporic and historical loss. An obvious reason for her desire to escape and leave the past behind is her brother, Priest, who sexually abused Eula in her youth and maintains a terrorizing hold over her. Eula's escape from an abusive and violent home contributes to her desire for movement. Eula runs to escape suffering, for survival, survival of the self; she escapes in search of life and living, whether that be through her maps and global letters, or through dancing and drinking the nights away: "I didn't want anyone bothering me or holding me up" (233).

Still, the trauma of the past has a hold on Eula that makes it impossible to fully detach from it. She craves the familial connection but hates its scattering and the violence rooted in it. In her description of Toronto, it is evident that Eula has a pessimistic outlook on the world. She

refers to Toronto as the city at the end of the world, with rubble, and its residents, debris. Eula observes this world and internalizes its wreckage. She relates Marie Ursule's life to her own, expressing a circularity and repetition in history: "History opens and closes, Mama. I was reading a book the other day about the nineteenth century, and it seemed like reading about now. I think we forget who we were. Nothing is changing, it is just we are forgetting" (*At the Full and Change of the Moon* 234-235). The opening and closing of history echoes Brand's sentiment of sitting in the room with history. Eula observes the historical present as a situation that is vicious and unchanging. She takes notice of the impasse, the hold in life, and the implications of that are escape and run as she might, the past remains ever present with her; her mind never calm, "always running, running, running" (241). The crushing conditions of her personal past as well as the historical past keep Eula in the space of in-betweeness emobodied through hesitant belonging.

Eula's moment of contemplation represents the pause of hesitant belonging; she takes in the past and its resonance in the present. In negotiating the situation of the historical present, Eula feels unsurmountable grief.

2. **Adrian: Captured And Crushed by the World**

I move to Adrian's perception of the world now to expand on the impact of living in the broken-up tragedy of a world cracking. Adrian's story is a powerful testament to what it is like to occupy the space of hesitant belonging. His encounters and reflections reveal the unbearable heaviness and cruelty of the world he longs to belong in, where violence and rejection continually crush his soul.

Adrian feels like a captive in the world. Adrian is helpless; he succumbs to a life of drugs, getting high any chance he can to escape the unbearable heaviness of being. His softness makes him passive, a receptor and not an initiator of the circumstances of life. Unlike Priest who sets his course, following and fumbling the "fuck it" moments, Adrian follows whatever course is available to get him away from home. He becomes a smuggler across the waters. He makes his way away from the islands to the Main, to Florida, hoping for a more tender life, but alas, he is caught in Priest's schemes, becoming his mule and accomplice, until Maya sends him a ticket to Amsterdam.

His journey is one of profound sadness and disorientation, symbolizing the precariousness of living in a hostile world on the outskirts. In Chapter VI, titled "Soft Man," the reader is introduced to Adrian. He is described as a soft man; a man broken by the world, a person quite aware of his heartbreak, of the anguish and heaviness he carries: "Every day you wake up and there's something trying to just break your heart. Not a day there isn't something just waiting there lashing your blood right open" (*At the Full and Change of the Moon* 175). Immediately, he describes his own sadness. As he wakes and goes to bed with a broken heart, Adrian questions how to articulate the pain he feels, his experiences overlapping with his present and situating him as a resident in the impasse: "How would he explain something cracking his heart like a stiff door opening to let in something you don't want?" (175). He wakes haunted, overwhelmed, and crushed by "the spectre of captivity. The door of dreams" (*A Map to the Door of No Return* 27). This depiction of Adrian's past overlapping with his present situates him as a resident in the impasse, deeply attached to the "soft hierarchies of inequality" that define his place in the world (Berlant 194).

These soft hierarchies are actualized through the INS, through all the forces of inhospitality and rejection that prevent Adrian from belonging to the world; instead, he always finds himself put down and rejected, which crushes his soul. His utter sadness and sense of disorientation and loss in life are symbolic of the precarious conditions of living in the impasse and how living on the outskirts, living in a rigged hostile world can break a person. Adrian's experiences of indentured labour, prison, and the INS deportation camp contribute to his profound sense of exclusion and non-belonging. For Adrian, the space of hesitancy is shaped by the unbearable heaviness and cruelty of the world he longs to belong in. He paints a pessimistic and tough image of the world that breaks someone soft and precarious like him. Adrian sees how the world and everyone in it want "to fuck him up" (184), to impose violence on him, causing him to be in a constant state of fear and alertness. Occupying the space of indentured labour, Adrian is very familiar with and broken down by the ugly side of the world. The negative forces of capitalism and upward mobility leave those like him behind, cast away.

Additionally, Adrian's experience in the INS camp shows the precarity of being in a Black body. Not only does he feel captivity in the world, but he also is also captive within his own body. As Brand writes, "The body is the place of captivity" (*A Map to the Door of No Return* 31). Grandison writes of the significance of the INS camp in the novel and how it represents the precarity of Black bodies such as Priest and Adrian's:

> The persistence of systemic inequalities is perhaps best illustrated by the coincidental
>
> encounter of Adrian and Priest – cousins who look almost identical but who have never
>
> met – in an INS camp in Florida. The fact that two such different characters converge

unexpectedly in the same punitive facility highlights social mechanisms that destine

individuals who look alike to similar fates. (Grandison 765)

Grandison points to the likelihood of Priest and Adrian meeting as they did; they are victims of

the world of social mechanisms that condition Black bodies as is the case with these two

characters.

Thinking of the social mechanisms that destine Black subjects to similar circumstances, I

return to Brand's ideation on inheritances in the Diaspora to talk about Adrian and the affective

dimension of occupying a hesitant space: "Our inheritance in the Diaspora is to live in this

inexplicable space. That space is the measure of our ancestors' step through the door toward the

ship. One is caught in the few feet in between" (*A Map to The Door of No Return* 21). Adrian

experiences this in-betweenness as he is haunted by his father and grandfather's miserable fates.

This inheritance connects to a larger sentiment of capture and suffocation, extending beyond

Adrian's own being; expanding the crushing sense of the lineage and expansiveness of

nonbelonging in the world he lives in. Adrian feels the lineage of captivity. He traces the

inequity and oppression of the world to his father and grandfather; workers burnt in oilfields in

Curacao. He bears the scars of forced exile that have been passed down through generations.

Furthermore, Adrian sees the cruelty and exclusion in the big city he wanders through. In

Dam Square in Amsterdam, he is dazed, confused, and heartbroken. Adrian is overwhelmed and

discomforted by so many faces like his around him, by the crowdedness of migrants floating in

this city:

The blocks from Dam Square to the station were littered with men like him – men from

everywhere, ducking into coats even though it was June, a coldness running through

them, exiting, and entering the streets off the square in swift movements. Going nowhere

like him, trying to figure out the next bit of money, the next laugh, the next fix. A debris

of men selling anything, anything they could lay their hands on. […] Haunted shifts of

them from Curacao, Surinam, Africa. (180)

Instead of finding solace in the world around him, he feels fear and a desire to escape from the

never-ending cycle of exhaustion and decay. Amsterdam should have been his freedom, his

escape from captivity, yet captivity is all he sees around him. In this landscape and strange city,

Adrian is overcome with the sameness of precarity, with the spectres of capture in precarity, of

diasporic violence and dispossession.

Adrian drifts in these spaces, keeping the past alive in the present, opting to stay in the

space of ambivalence. Ultimately, he resorts to an overdose as a means of seeking relief from the

weight of the world. However, this quick fix only leads to a slower decline over time.

Eventually, Adrian allows the world to crush him, and he drifts away for good. In the impasse, in

the in-between, he tries to remain sedentary, escaping from his place in the world. He is the

victim of circumstance and modernity. He is a captive of precarious conditions of ongoing

disorientation and insecurity.

Eula and Adrian's contemplations echo Hartman's sentiment about living in the impasse:

"We pass through these spaces, and all we have lost, and the long history of our defeat fill us

with a grief that is all but unbearable" ("A Room with History"). This is the *space* of hesitant

belonging: in the impasse of circularity of history, in the heaviness of living in the situation of the historical now as a broken-up tragedy, in a world continuously cracking. I now move on to examining hesitance as a response.

II.   Two-Fold Waywardness: Responding with Refusal

As a response to the impasse and the precarity one finds themselves in, hesitant belonging is inevitable. This hesitance manifests in acts of waywardness. As the characters yearn for freedom, they must navigate their societal position. They are drawn to "the errant path taken by the leaderless swarm in search of a place better than here" (*Wayward Lives* 227). I use "waywardness" to describe how the characters, specifically Priest, navigate their place in the world. Waywardness represents an ongoing exploration of what might be— an improvisation with the terms of social existence when the terms have already been dictated. "Waywardness," defines Hartman, is "the avid longing for a world not ruled by master, man, or the police. The social poesis that sustains the dispossessed" (*Wayward Lives* 227). It is also "the unregulated movement of drifting and wandering, sojourn[ing] without a fixed destination, ambulatory possibility, interminable migrations, rush and flight, black locomotions: the everyday struggle to live free" (227). Waywardness is a response to the impasse. In a movement away from the conditions society forces on the precariat, waywardness is a way out, an alternative.

Many of the characters in Brand's novel see themselves as set up against the world, or better yet, existing in a world set up against them. The characters experiment with acts of waywardness in how they go about their lives. For the characters, existing in a world set up against them means rebellion in their daily life and wayward existences against the loveless

world. Samuel Sonnes is a dishonorably discharged soldier from the Second West India Regiment. Priest and Adrian operate in the ultimate space of inhospitality, transgressing through borders, trading in illicit substances, and ending up in a deportation camp. Maya seeks freedom in sex work as an escape from the preconditioned circumstances of life. Eula flees the life of domesticity and motherhood, building her own life in Toronto, where she drinks and dances all night. The characters in Brand's novel do what they want and not what the world wants of them; that is, until circumstances become overpowering, thus conditioning and possibly breaking the characters. Again, we see the pull of the past conditioning the present. As the characters seek escape and freedom, the hold of history keeps them captive.

Furthermore, in the novel, waywardness is established as an inheritance, meaning we see acts of waywardness early on with the matriarch Marie Ursule and then with Bola. Marie Ursule sacrifices her life for the dream of a future for her descendants. Several moments of foreshadowing occur in the opening chapter of the novel: "In another century without knowing of her, because centuries are forgetful places, Marie Ursule's great-great-grandchildren would face the world too" (*At the Full and Change of the Moon* 18). "They would come to be whatever impulse gathered the greater in them, like threatened forests flowering" (20). Indeed, her descendants live waywardly:

> The lives of her great-great grandchildren, their lives would spill all over floors and glass cases and the verandas and the streets in the new world coming. Their hearts would burst. When asked, they will say they had no reason for knifing someone or blowing a kiss. They had no reason at all for sitting numb, with cocaine or gin or music coursing through their fingers. (*At the Full and Change of the Moon* 20)

In this passage, there is foreshadowing of the wayward manners Marie Ursule's descendants will adopt in their lives. Their hearts will burst, and they will act without reason, reacting and acting spontaneously out of impulse and desire. In their rebellions against the conventions of life, they respond to the conditions of the world by refusing them, choosing to live as they please and resolving not to belong.

Given the violent and inequitable life circumstances they find themselves in, Marie Ursule's descendants navigate the world impulsively, attempting to escape its heaviness. This impulse comes from Marie Ursule's own impulsive act, having and keeping her daughter, Bola. Marie Ursule describes Bola as her vanity, as her lustful act, the beginning of a long lineage to come. If the beginning of lust is with Marie Ursule, then lust and impulse is expounded with Bola, who acted purely out of personal desire and impulse, with no additional attachment to anyone else. Indeed, it is with Bola, that waywardness is mapped out, that the inception and the scattering of her offspring occurs. Lust is what drives Bola. She has no hesitance and cares not for belonging. Waywardly and freely, she exists in Culebra Bay on her terms. She births abundance and randomness. We see the seeds of how the characters become who they are from Bola; they all take the lust for life and the preoccupation with feeling and senses over logic. Additionally, she sets them up for that with her detachment and aloneness – scattering her children worldwide.

Bola symbolizes the randomness of migration, of Diaspora. Bola marks her descendants with freedom, with the inclination to drift and be wayward, detaching them from belonging to her. Unlike Gyasi's Effia and Esi, whose loss of home dictates the pathways and perpetual searches for belonging in their descendants, Bola's wayward orientation inspires untethered

belonging in the generations to follow; her descendants also carve out their own paths in wayward manners. As Bola lives for herself, freely and waywardly, so too does Priest attempt to carve his own spaces of belonging despite the haunting circumstances of the world.

In the space of hesitant belonging, waywardness might seem like the only way to establish a good life that counters or ignores the confines of belonging in a world that has rejected its most precarious subjects. To be wayward is to be hesitant in response to the circumstances and situations of the world, reacting with refusal and with freedom. With Priest, waywardness is set up as a double-edged sword.

1. Priest: Waywardness As A Double-Edged Sword

In the space of hesitant belonging, waywardness is how he strives for a "good life;" cheating and adhering to a different playbook on navigating the world. However, his wayward nature also gets him in trouble; this is described through his impulsive reactions, which are called "fuck it" moments. Priest also flips between hesitance and lack-of in the two-sidedness of his waywardness. He reacts to the world hesitantly in order to survive it; however, when he has his impulsive "fuck it" moments, he is not hesitant, but quite certain in his affects. Waywardness is a response to the world and a reaction, respectively.

Priest—Bola's great-grandson, the troublemaker—is a tyrant, out making his way in the world abiding by the law of brutality that the world follows. His brutality cannot be justified; beyond a wayward retaliation, there is relishment in his actual cruelty and villainous nature. Through Eula's narrative, the reader learns that she was sexually abused by her much older brother, Priest, when she was a child. His monstrosity marred and marked Eula for life. Eula also

describes him as a terror to her family's household: "he caused the fences to bend and the house to break" (246). His cruelty and perversion towards younger women extends from the unspeakable and shameful reality of incest to the grooming and abuse of Gita, the fifteen-year-old girl he impregnates and drags along in his treacherous life: "[his mother] wanted to erase [her son's] touch from the little girl's body" (153). Yet these terrible acts, in Priest's mind, are a power that he wields, a treacherous ruthlessness, marking him a tragedy looming over his victims (152). Two truths hold for Priest: he is a predator, a treacherous individual, and he is a wayward victim of modernity. I do not use the latter to justify the former; his predatory acts, which are, in his perspective, wayward retaliations, are harming others.

Instead of situating himself against the world, Priest aligns himself with it, by acknowledging its brutal system that is rigged and disadvantageous against certain people, such as his people, the castaway, the dispossessed, and the displaced. He embraces chaos and antagonisms in the world: "This was the heart of the world […] palpable and brutal, sucking in blood and pumping it out callously without thought just instinct, that was its only mission and he was like a vein in it, hungry, and just as ruthless" (173). He embraces the ruthlessness of the world in his behaviour.

Again, in Priest's acts of waywardness, he is reacting to the space of hesitancy, which I have already argued is well described in the language of the impasse, which is "the transitional present, situations unfold[ing] in ongoing crisis" (Berlant 194). As Lauren Berlant explains, in the impasse, subjects do what they can to "live and flourish under conditions of ongoing disorientation and insecurity" (194). Subjects, like Priest, improvise in the ongoing present, waywardly. Hartman's description of waywardness fits aptly as a reaction to the impasse.

214

Hartman explains that "waywardness is an ongoing exploration of what might be; it is an improvisation with the terms of social existence, when the terms have already been dictated, when there is little room to breathe, when you have been sentenced to a life of servitude, when the house of bondage looms in whatever direction you move. It is the untiring practice of trying to live when you never meant to survive" (*Wayward Lives* 228). Priest adopts an improvisation in his approach to the world as described by Hartman; he tries to grab hold as much as he can and rebels against the confines of belonging that exclude him. He justifies his vile actions through this framework of improvisation. This is even more clearly shown by his status as an alien, an illegal resident within the US. In reaction to the impasse, Priest carves his own path against the set conditions of the world. He feels entitled to the ways of the world that are not structured, not proper, but violent and cruel. He chases the "good life," giving no thought to any moral code, and ruthlessly taking care of himself. Priest operates within the shadows and the grey lines, making the best of what could be in a system set up against those like him, and he fulfills the part of the outlaw, the outcast, happily.

Akin to Marcus in Homegoing, Priest felt that the good life was not meant for him, that people like him were not meant to do well, to succeed; however, he tried to find success on his own conditions, in what he calls the slippery routes of life. He operates accordingly: "He had not been disillusioned or had some bad experience that he could put it all down to. He had simply seen the world and that was that. And he understood how slippery every moment was and he liked the thrill of it. Slipping from the knowable to the unknown, walking from one street to the next, being different all the time" (161). Priest lives his life within the confines of the slippery. He negotiates his sense of belonging in relation to an amoral understanding of the world, of the

knowable and unknowable. To navigate such a world, Priest operates in a slippery manner, which involves shifting, being different all the time, trying whatever it takes to make it. Priest commits to a life of errantry, a life of "bobbing and weaving, dipping and diving around big people and bigger life" (167), and he relishes in it. In his waywardness, there is freedom. He owes nothing to anyone and goes as he pleases, moving along in the world recklessly. Priest wants to carve out his own way in life and not be limited by what the world has assigned as available to him. He is determined to cheat the system, to play the game of the world well, and to take care of himself and himself alone. However, he repeatedly realizes that "the good life wasn't for him anyway, even though that was what he had stolen for, that was what he had beat somebody up for" (136), and he miscalculates and has these "fuck it" moments, which are moments of recklessness, that would lead to the foil of his latest get-rich-quick scheme.

In his waywardness, there is also recklessness, or what Priest describes as the "fuck it" moment: "it was the one moment that he didn't have under control – he couldn't control himself – he could feel it coming in him" (136). There is a loss of control that instead of letting it overwhelm him, Priest seemed to embrace it: "he couldn't hold on to it anyway, he wasn't made for it, he was made to trawl the bottom of life, so fuck it. You couldn't turn bad things good" (136). "Fuck it" becomes Priest's life mantra. Priest reacts to these intense feelings, this sudden vigour that arises, in destructive and harmful manners. These moments defy any sense of hesitance as Priest accepts his non-belonging, his life in the margins, in waywardness.

The "fuck it" moments are reactions to failure and miscalculations and call for deep emotions that the world attempts to crush within Priest. Even though he is described as an apathetic nihilist in most cases, "believing in nothing" (161), Priest is addicted to the experience

216

of intense emotional experiences that would lead to these "fuck it" moments. This is evident in how Priest distinguishes between home and the US: "He soon lost the old thought in him that America was where you lived well. Maybe they lived better than where he'd come from on the whole but not in the small ways, not in the raw-boned pain and anguish" (172). Priest identifies an emotional lacking for him in the US. These small ways, the raw-boned pain and anguish, are addictions to Priest. He has strong affects: he felt with intensity and brutality when he felt.

Nevertheless, his anti-hesitancy in his "fuck-it" moments counters the hesitancy Priest experiences in the form of shame. The reader learns that growing up, Priest had a sense of shame that once he overcame it, once he felt "relief at not having to appear good to anybody" (139), he was overcome by a ruthless, shameless, and reckless manner in life. Indeed, he transferred his shame onto others; believing himself to be inherently bad, Priest finds control through the power of shaming others and violence.

Priest represents those lost by the cosmopolitan world system, those othered and abandoned. He embodies the vile justification of ruthlessness that he believes represents the world, which in its ugliest forms involves murder and molestation. Priest is responding in what he thinks is the right way, the correct manner to be against a loveless world, to love not with tenderness and care but with brutality and ruthlessness. Expressing hesitancy through such waywardness is a retaliation against the unjust structure of the world to the oppressive and lost history that has made one precarious in the present. However, his own anguish, rage and waywardness also deter that which he is chasing; he cannot get the good life when he knows it was never meant for him.

I finally transition to hesitancy's utility, which I describe as drifting and willful ambivalence.

III.   Hesitancy as a Tool: Wilful Ambivalence: Drifting

Hesitancy projects as a willful wavering, a waywardness. I examine the correlation between willful ambivalence and drifting as operatives in hesitancy. The concepts of drifting and willful ambivalence emerge as powerful tools to use against the impasse and rigid expectations of the world. Engaging in drifting allows individuals to resist mapping, grounding, and containment, embracing the multiplicity of possibilities of freedom. Willful ambivalence, rooted in obstinance and persistence, challenges normative conditions and provides a tool for negotiation and agency.

Focusing on the character of Maya, I show how Maya uses hesitancy to escape from the brutality of the world. Maya chooses to resist the societal norms of colonialism and patriarchy by refusing to belong altogether. She drifts through life seemingly passively, but in reality, she actively rejects the terms of social existence, to the extent that she can under the thumb of capitalism. Despite being aware of the social constructs of non-belonging, Maya disregards them and forges her path. Even though she chooses to work as a sex worker, literally subjecting her body to capitalistic use, she does so out of her own volition, opting to live a life of her own. In forging her own path and leaving her past, Maya finds freedom through her mind's wanderings even when her body is a product for consumption. I use Maya last because she helps culminate my theorization of hesitancy in relation to ambivalence. Like Priest, Eula, and Adrian, she resides in the impasse space and reacts waywardly. However, with Maya, there is an overt description of hesitancy's agency through drifting and willful ambivalence.

Similarly to how I modelled hesitance as a feedback loop with trauma in chapter three, I argue that hesitance operates in a feedback loop as a response to the impasse as a tool of survival against the impasse. Impasse-like hesitancy is multifunctional; there is the space of the impasse in which one is acutely aware of the present, in a spatiotemporal sense, and there is the embodiment of impasse, which is to be in the state of hesitancy, which allows for the negotiation of one's life and belonging. Lauren Berlant explains that: "the concept of the present as impasse opens up different ways that the interruption of norms of the reproduction of life can be adapted to, felt out, and lived" (Berlant 199). They perceive the present as an impasse, which means that acts of interruption and rebellion against the norms are expressions of freedom, which Maya seeks through her drifting. Drifting and waywardness are tools of hesitance. As characters respond waywardly to the impasse, they drift willfully to counter it.

Kate Lahey and Sonja Boon offer up drifting as a resolution to the impasse; they position it as a response to their inquiry: "What do we make when linear time is flooded by histories and futures and, at the same time, all-too-much-now-ness?" (41). Boon and Lahey identify the overwhelming heaviness of the present that is bound to the past and the future. They identify the tension in the all-too-much-now-ness that I have argued creates hesitance in belonging. Hesitancy is necessary in negotiating one's place in the world because one's place is not isolated and bounded; it is linked to grief and histories of dispossession and displacement.

Moreover, considering hesitancy's spatiotemporal, affective, and cognitive dimensions, examining its utility through willful drifting demonstrates how hesitancy negotiates moments of "stuckness" and uncertainty. Drifting in Boon and Lahey's framing is a productive channel for negotiating uncertainty by slowing down time and refusing to adhere to the loudness of the all-

too-much-now that causes hesitance in the impasse. As hesitancy is multi-faceted, so too is the potentiality of drifting, as presented by Boon and Lahey, abundant: "In its aimlessness, drift refuses mapping, grounding, containment, capture, measurement. In its seeming passivity, drift resists colonial desires. In its seeming passivity, drift celebrates new becomings, a multiplicity of possibilities, a scattering, layering, imaginative commitment to chance, potential, serendipity, and the power of the journey itself" (42). This quote shows that both drift and waywardness resist the confines of capture. Aimlessness and passivity interrupt and falter the conventions of upward mobility and progress. In aimlessness, there is ambivalence.

I take up Sara Ahmed's definition of willful. Building from the figure of the feminist killjoy, Ahmed conceives of the willful subject: "Feminist killjoys: willful women, unwilling to get along, unwilling to preserve an idea of happiness" (*Willful Subjects* 2). Ahmed takes the standard definition of willfulness as obstinance and gives it a fiery spin: "Willfulness involves persistence in the face of having been brought down, where simply to "keep going" or to "keep coming up" is to be stubborn and obstinate. Mere persistence can be an act of disobedience" (*Willful Subjects* 2). Drifting and waywardness are also obstinacy, going against the grain and the normative conditions of the rigid world. In these acts, there is an obstinate willfulness.

By exploring hesitance in the impasse and as a wayward response, I have established the foundation for asserting that hesitancy's ambivalence is willful. As a necessary ambivalence, hesitancy unpacks the tensions of in-betweenness, attachment, and belonging. Thinking of ambivalence as willful gives the seemingly passive state agency. In the novel, the characters employ willful ambivalence as they carve their places in the world by traversing aimless paths and resisting containment. The novel resists colonial desires by rejecting belonging and

embracing the path of errantry, of drifting, examining the varying possibilities of scattering. Hesitant belonging manifests in negotiating one's belonging within the dichotomy of freedom and captivity. As a tool, hesitancy is used to seek freedom. Hesitancy is the means to be as one desires against the world's circumstances. Hesitancy allows, at the very least, moments of reprieve in an otherwise crushing world.

In the novel, willful ambivalence is most evident through the act of drifting, of following one's own desires as opposed to society's expectations. Maya employs drifting as a tool for survival. By drifting, she lifts the heavy veil of the world, disassociating and escaping from reality, away from time. The chapter "In the Window" shows Maya's drifting in and out of thought, reflecting on the cruelties of life and the heaviness and contemplating the airiness of drifting that allows her to survive and keep going. Maya experiences disassociation and not belonging, which leads to drifting. Hesitancy arises in navigating this chapter's binaries of captivity and freedom. The hardships of life represent captivity for Maya while drifting inwardly is freedom.

The chapter opens with a stillness in time; Maya has drifted into memory; at this moment, in this second that is still, Maya is in the window where she sits in the red-light district in Amsterdam. Physically, Maya is sitting on a couch with the Flemish man, the father of her daughter, watching TV. She recounts the window, life in Curacao, her family, and the attack from Walter and the shattering of her window. Despite the heaviness of circumstances, Maya remains preoccupied with herself, finding solace inwards. Maya drifts in the impasse, ignoring the calamity of the world around her. Maya finds her place in the window, on display, but owing to no one.

To add, Maya flows like water, lightly escaping the world's heaviness. Her movement is described in water metaphors: she moves with fluidity: "She made herself strong and liquid" (221). In addition to water, airy metaphors are used to describe her drifting. Brand employs the action of drifting in her description of Maya. She gives Maya an airy feeling, a slow approach to the world that defied time and history. Indeed, in Maya's descriptions of the world and her family, she often uses the terms "dense" and "heavy" (216). The contrast between lightness and heaviness reveals how Maya sees and negotiates the world. She deliberately drifts to deal with the heaviness: "Drifting- she liked the word: suggesting streams of her appearing and dissipating in the air" (214).

She is fascinated by her own body, by its cyclical changes and impacts on her body and her transforming emotions: "After the day of feeling the world as it was, hopeless and suicidal, after watching her body swell with water, she felt euphoric at the warm feel of her blood gushing uncontrollably as if a breath was let out" (221). "Feeling the world as it was, hopeless and suicidal," reveals Maya's awareness of the world around her. She shares with Adrian's sense of futility regarding the world they live in; yet, unlike Adrian, she does not let the world overpower her; she survives by remaining true to herself, willfully ambivalent to what the world demands of her, and drifting as she pleases. Maya is mainly preoccupied with herself as a defence against the roughness and ruthlessness of circumstances. Her thoughts enthrall her: "the clutter and impatience of ideas and the way a thought jumps around until it is nothing but a fragment of a thing, half of itself trying to remember itself" (221).

Maya creates distance from the harshness of the world through disassociation. *The* window gives her the space to drift, to dream of the good life she wants, and escape the brutality

in the backroom. Unlike Nahr in *Against the Loveless World*, who seeks to belong, Maya does not seek any belonging beyond herself in her drifting, and her disassociations are not only to escape traumas but also to imagine peace. *Maya rebels against the confines of an oppressive world and opts to live otherwise, to drift.* Drifting mentally provides her with a temporary escape and freedom. She dissociates from challenging times and resides in her thoughts and memories to navigate her place in the world. As a child, she ignores her father and mother, who ignored her back for the most part, and as an adult, she disengages from violent situations and copes through dissociation. Dissociation allows her to survive the world's rigidity; Maya does not care for belonging to a world that has ignored those like her.

Maya projects a passivity that is, in fact, quite intentional. She is willfully ambivalent about the expectations others have of her. Everyone in her life seems to want to have a hold on her, which she refuses. She escapes her father's hold after his death; she defies her pimp by doing as she pleases in the window and taking up a lover. As a wayward drifter, Maya defies societal expectations and chooses to navigate the world on her terms. She copes with the circumstances of her life by drifting, by flying away from reality into her memories and specific moments. To her brother, Adrian, Maya's passivity appears as an impatience, not in an anxious way, but as if there was always a better place for her to be spending her time, and that is, in her mind's eye, escaping reality into memories of Curacao, of peace of the window.

Maya is a wayward woman, escaping what life wrote for her and attempting to create her future:

She only wanted to drift down streets or drift out into the country. She wanted a car and a lover and warm weather when she might feel the breezes on her body. And a beach. Or cold weather and a sure house and a fireplace and beer or port. That was all. She wanted to be nowhere on time, and she wanted incidents of music in cafés and clubs when she drifted into music as if she were music itself. She wanted sourness on her tongue and sweetness, too, and smells of cooking bread. She wanted kitchens, spotless, without soot or dirt, and well, she just wanted to drift on the cream of life, what else? (215)

Even Maya's plans for a good life are ambivalent; they are not mapped out and concrete but ethereal and flowing. Maya desires freedom, and drifting represents that for her. In reality, we see Maya in different spaces of confinement: Dovett's house, Walter's sex shop, and living with the Flemish man and a child. Life weighed her down compared to the airiness she aspired to in her drifting.

To be a drifter is to be a wayward wanderer positioned against the confines and expectations of the rigid, capitalist world. Maya tries to resist the confines of her family and the patriarchal expectations set up for her; she escapes Dovett, her father, her mother, and Curacao. However, Maya's fantasy of freedom, of "drifting on the cream of life" *(At the Full and Change of the Moon* 215), of establishing a good life, eventually unravels. *She utilizes* drifting as an act of refusal; she embraces passivity in the cruel world and finds freedom inwardly. However, when Maya becomes a mother, it becomes harder for her to drift away, especially as her child carries all that she has been and done, inheriting her traumas as well as her predecessors: "If your grandfather falls in fire, it is a sign" (225).

Despite Maya's drifting away from belonging and connection related to ancestry, there are many similarities between her and the older Bola. Bola is willful, as is her great-granddaughter. Both Bola and Maya embody drifting as a way of being and non-belonging, opting to forego attachment by living in the perpetual present. Bola births in the sea and loves in the sea, the relationship to water is positive, very much a celebration of life in abundance, in excess. Maya finds calmness in remembering the island and the ocean of Curacao. She feels the same power Bola did within her body, owing nothing to anyone and living for herself. Maya shared Bola's selfishness and love of abundance. Maya is a clear descendent of Bola, carrying her impatience for suffering and the ability to "giv[e] birth to a world" (69). Maya feels the sense of power in her body: "as if rightly she could give birth to the world and wouldn't, giddy and spinning, anything possible, and an energy so powerful she felt that she could spring above time, and wondered why she hadn't" (221). There are evident inheritances of ancestral memory, and Maya becomes weary of them when she has a daughter of her own.

In lineage, there is attachment, and even Maya could not escape this fully, ultimately being weighed down by her daughter. Reality catching up with Maya represents a moment of hesitancy in how to drift with this new attachment. Having a daughter is difficult for Maya because she sees herself in the child, "it is as if the child is flooded in whatever, she, Maya, is feeling at the moment, and Maya is afraid of feeling nothing or revealing everything" (225). She feels her daughter's entrenchment in "circumstances, which envelop them both in any room" (226). The reference to the room brings us back to being in the room with history, drift as she might. History catches up and weighs her down, and she will also be in the room with her child.

Willful ambivalence and drifting are tools to refuse the world and escape reality's harshness, if only temporarily.

In conclusion, we see willful persistence in Maya. Maya disobeys through seeming passivity; she reverts inwardly to not be brought down by the world; in her refusal to participate, she is willful. She employs willful ambivalence through her unwillingness to adhere to the confines and expectations of the world. Maya's ambivalence becomes willful because active agents of the past intrude on her present, and she negates and escapes. She chooses not to deal with the world, making this her way of navigating the world, on her conditions, away from the confines of capture and society, as much as she can. Ultimately, circumstances govern her life, but she finds moments of freedom in her drifting. Through her willful ambivalence and refusal of confinement, Maya then exhibits a means of escape from the world's captivity that this dissertation has been arguing cultivates hesitant belonging, and she embodies this by drifting.

IV.   Conclusion

In *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Dionne Brand masterfully depicts the complexity of belonging to a fraught world through her migrant characters. The characters are scattered randomly and seize "radiant moments of ordinariness;" they live in the moment as much as possible, avoiding the world and its hauntings. The moments we are privy to in Priest, Maya, Eula, and Adrian's narratives display the heaviness of hesitant belonging. In the suspended space of the impasse, each character tries to find their way in the world by drifting, not abiding by the script, and choosing to belong waywardly. They drift between the binaries of confinement and freedom, seeking freedom waywardly. Saidiya Hartman explains that Brand offers a way-making

to nowhere, a drifting as opposed to a journey in her tale of transnational migration and being: "Is nonbelonging the price of this regard, this perception that breaks her and breaks her away from what has been atmosphere and environment?" ("A Room with History"). Furthermore, the characters are descendants of historical moments of loss (Berlant 198). Their history is missing, and they are rendered as drifters. The characters are willful and wayward. They defy the conditions of the world by non-belonging.

Ultimately, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* presents a powerful exploration of hesitant belonging and scattered identity that speaks to the ongoing impact of historical traumas on individuals and communities. Through the lens of hesitancy, the novel presents a nuanced portrayal of belonging and identity in the context of historical traumas and their ongoing impact. The characters' hesitation in understanding their place in the world and connection to their past is a valuable lens to unpack belonging.

Conclusion: Belonging and Being in Contemporary Transnational Literature

It's hard for those of us who are from places like Freetown or Port-au-Prince, and those of us who are immigrants who still have relatives in places like Freetown or Port-au-Prince, not to wonder why the so-called developed world needs so desperately to distance itself from us, especially at times when an unimaginable disaster shows exactly how much alike we are (110)– Edwidge Danticat, *Create Dangerously: the immigrant artist at work*

At the beginning of September 2020, I resumed my readings for my secondary comprehensive exams. I picked up Edwidge Danticat's *Create Dangerously*. What was meant to be a kickstart to my long reading list became an emotional endeavor I did not expect. I felt the calamity of catastrophe, of worst-case scenarios, come to fruition. While reading, my body tensed up as if in response to my friends witnessing the Beirut Blast again.

I related to Danticat's anguish in the heartfelt essays on Haiti and being an immigrant from a devastated homeland. In an already vulnerable and deeply sad state of mind, the collection of essays unraveled me, reigniting my mourning for Lebanon, my grief for the permanent change in my generation, and my frustration over my parents' quick adaptation and resilience to uncertainty and instability. I extended my sorrow to Danticat and her people in Haiti. I wept with anguish as if it was I who was useless in diaspora again as my people died. Our histories and present realities were not identical, but they both deserved more from the world. We both deserved deep and genuine care from this world we were forced to belong to.

I sat in silent numbness reckoning with the unfairness in the world, dislodged in my present moment in cruel contrast to that of people in excruciating misery. As I read comfortably

on a porch swing in suburban Oakville about the disasters of Haiti, I remembered my own

visceral disbelief at learning of the Beirut blast as I was idly shopping in Walmart in Waterloo.

How can my world crumble while I mundanely exist elsewhere? Danticat reckoned with the

same existential questions, with the same struggles of hesitant belonging.

As I drew connections between Lebanon and Haiti, so has this dissertation allowed me to

see the grounds for connection between global communities that foster out of colonial and

imperial expansion and disregard for human life, reinforcing the idea that colonial experiences

have ongoing traumatic implications on the self and the collective. This journey in understanding

how belonging in the world today is impacted by traumas of forced migration and generational

trauma has been transformative. Though I focus on two communities separate from my own, I

believe this theorization is applicable and relatable in many diasporic and immigrant contexts.

The decision to leave and start fresh in a new country and new land is never an easy one to make.

To be born into a community of heartbreak and distance is not a choice. To feel belonging is

often complicated when one cannot pinpoint what they belong to, the present, the past, the local,

the ancestral.

Hesitancy is something that is inevitably encountered by everyone. It is a phenomenon

that we cannot escape from, and its presence is often accompanied by a sense of discomfort that

can be challenging to navigate. However, the experience of this discomfort is crucial and integral

to shaping our perspectives and understanding of the world around us. By negotiating and

unpacking the intricate affiliations that inform our sense of belonging, we can deepen our

understanding of the complex intricacies that make up human experience. Beyond its affective

value, which refers to its ability to elicit emotional responses, hesitancy also serves as an

important critical lens. This is a point that I have consistently argued throughout the chapters of my work. Hesitancy, in its various forms and manifestations, is not simply a passive state of indecision but can be an active, critical tool that allows for deeper understanding and insight. In my exploration of hesitancy, I have delved into its polyvalence - its ability to exist as a space, a tool, and a response simultaneously. This exploration has been conducted in relation to direct and generational trauma, as well as the broader context of colonial, systematic, and racial violence, and their enduring legacies. Each of these conditions complicates our understanding of the world and adds to my theory of hesitancy, shedding light on its multi-faceted nature and the myriad ways in which it impacts our lives.

I.   Hesitancy As A Critical Asset

In this dissertation, I employ an affective methodology that looks at "the emotional" to understand global politics. In my research, I have explored the impact of historical and ongoing traumas on contemporary belonging, and how traumas of forced migration affect one's sense of belonging in the world. I also investigate how hesitant belonging influences belonging to local and global spaces. I theorize hesitancy as a critical asset for the evaluation of vulnerability in issues of belonging and for the unpacking of the stickiness of contemporary belonging for marginalized cosmopolitans. Hesitancy is valuable because it allows internal negotiation between diverging decisions. It is a means for unpacking and understanding complex belonging for those impacted by the trauma(s) of forced migration. This unpacking takes form in how one decides to handle the uncertainty and discomfort of belonging in the world, whether it is by repressing the trauma and moving on, by choosing to forget and disconnect from the traumatic event, or whether it's by staying stuck in a state of uncertainty or "the vortex" or "the impasse,"

in any way we have chosen to perceive the intolerable pause of the present moment, which is burdened by the violence of the past and present.

In the development of my argument, I have employed the autoethnographic by involving my own reality in my theorization. The reality and memory of perpetual trauma and grief in one's community pull one in different directions, navigating the broken and crushing world that keeps them stuck in the loss, engaging with the work and the memories it calls up. I say this first and foremost as a Lebanese Ukrainian seeing white phosphorous bombs falling on the South of Lebanon, a mere hour away from her parents' home, while I work and talk about the changing weather and the cuteness of cats and all the other elements that make life in Canada beautifully mundane. Hesitancy is a lapse between binaries in belonging, subjectively and to the world writ large. Hesitant belonging is characterized as the loss or delay in belonging to the world, a key tenet for cosmopolitan belonging. To experience hesitant belonging is in a sense to drift through the world, to navigate the opposites of belonging in your immigrant home and unbelonging in your abandoned home. To respond to the conditions of hesitant belonging is to experience *qahr* and grief and anguish that you carry heavily with you as you continue to persist and traverse. It is both to live in the vortex but also in the matrix, seeing what neocolonial and liberal militarism is capable of in your devastated homelands while still having to pretend everything is peachy in the West when you reap what benefits of "freedom" you can in the illusion of the elsewhere. To live with hesitance is to have sticky feelings, to emotionally code-switch from anger to amiability. Hesitance could also take shape in wayward living, rebelling against the oppressive world's confines and opting to drift. Hesitancy connects to unexpected and discomforting acts and behaviours, covering up or raging against one's cosmopolitan traumas. Hesitancy is found in the

critical uncertainty and unknown. Hesitancy is necessary in negotiating one's place in the world, in unfolding the ongoing crisis of belonging, because one's place is not isolated and bounded. Furthermore, hesitancy is linked to grief, to histories of dispossession and displacement.

By examining affective experiences and traumatic inheritance, I gain a deeper understanding of how global belonging and personal and transhistorical trauma can be studied through the lens of hesitant belonging. Essentially, this research aims to shed light on how we can better understand the complications of belonging in the world that I have described as hesitant but has been theorized by others in the language of the impasse, drifting, waywardness, and the wake. By interrogating with hesitance, one becomes suspicious of every interaction, action, and thought iterated in a context. Unpacking what may seem ordinary but is nevertheless uncomfortable through tracing the moment studied back to disruption in time, geography, and history. This examination has looked into the quandary: What does it mean to be uprooted? How do legacies of forced migration take shape? The study of hesitance has provided ample room for analysis of both.

II.   Hesitancy and Trauma Theory: A Path Forward

Clearly, the connection between hesitancy and trauma is concrete. Trauma puts one in a vulnerable position and often takes them out of safety, out of what they are used to. Coping with trauma is tethered to dealing with grief and pain. I have explored this relationship and described it as a feedback loop; where there is trauma, there is hesitancy; hesitancy is both a response to and a coping mechanism for trauma. It is an aid in navigating traumatic memory. In what I have described so far, I advocate that seeing the value of hesitancy allows for a better understanding

of belonging. Beyond the narratives, conjoining narrations of historical traumatic experiences can also be a means of decolonization. Trauma theory, which considers cultural sensitivity and inclusivity and aims to recognize and address the sufferings of people worldwide, can serve as a powerful tool for bringing about positive change. My theory of hesitance can shed light on instances of injustice and abuse and can inspire us to envision a different future for the world. Exposing hesitancies allows for the understanding and potential healing of colonial and racial traumas. By utilizing hesitance to study the past and develop an awareness of its influences on the transitional and cosmopolitan present, it is possible to not only warn but act against repeating the violence and errors of the past, to a larger affect of anguish and injustice due to colonial violence. We see this today with the global protests against the war in Gaza. Black, Indigenous, Jewish, Indian, Pakistani, and many other groups that have voiced their solidarity recognize their own colonial and imperial traumas and are standing up against the repetition and continuation of such violence. The novels I have explored amplify the legacies of colonial and racial traumas through the exploration of affectual responses apparent in the hesitant state of belonging expressed by the characters.

III.   The Novels

In the four novels analyzed within this dissertation - Susan Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World*, Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses*, Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, and Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* - the characters grapple with hesitant belonging as they navigate through the complexities of displacement, trauma, and migrant belonging. The concept of hesitant belonging allows for the exploration of their experiences in a nuanced manner, revealing how each character's sense of belonging is disrupted and complicated by their histories and the legacies of

233

forced migration and colonial violence. The analysis of these texts reveals a spectrum of hesitant belonging, ranging from feelings of dislocation and disconnection to profound ambivalence about the sense of home, identity, and community. This comprehensive exploration of hesitant belonging underscores its significance in understanding the deeply complex and multifaceted experiences of diasporic individuals in contemporary transnational literature.

I have shown how each novel situates hesitant belonging in its narrative and how each narrative offers a new perspective on the value of hesitance as a space, tool, and reaction. I will now add that putting different groups in contact with one another in this dissertation contributes to intersectional solidarity work, calling largely for refusal as a means of countering colonial and imperial legacies. Abulhawa and Alyan are vocal advocates for Palestinian liberation. In the context of the Black Diaspora, Gyasi and Brand are also strong voices when it comes to advocacy for Black subjects. Brand dedicates much of her writing to exploring the affordances of Blackness and belonging in ordinary spaces. Gyasi writes extensively on the historical systematic injustices against Black bodies in America. Together, these works offer the potential to alter the world we live in by embracing the hesitancies that guide us. They also offer a space for thought on what it would mean to read works that show the intersection of violence of settler-colonials and anti-Black racism together. This brings me to what I hope my dissertation ultimately leads to: more meaningful solidarity work.

IV.   Hesitancy and Solidarity

This work on hesitancy and belonging contributes to relationality and care work, which provides the space for imagining solidarity work between allied and varying communities built, broken,

and bolstered by colonialism, imperialism, and forced migration. My theorization of hesitant belonging as a means of understanding and navigating belonging is also necessarily intersectional. By studying Palestinian and Black dispossession in conjunction, I uncovered thematic links that I did not recognize prior. Drawing on powerful histories that are commemorated in the language of catastrophe, exile, rupture, dispossession, scattering, and diaspora, I find it possible to generate new outlooks of what Black-Palestinian solidarity can look like, allowing space for radical imagining of "what of liberation for Palestine, Black America, and all oppressed people can be" (Peterson-Smith 183).

In my work on hesitance and solidarity, I think about the connection between Black and Palestinian Diasporas through Angela Davis's intersectional approach to solidarity and connection amongst Black and Palestinian social justice movements in tackling ongoing social struggles. Bringing these narratives of different collective traumas and histories together illustrates the "ever-expanding community of struggle" (Davis 2) that in turn allows for the unfolding of specific histories. Since the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, Black thinkers and activists have empathized and connected with Palestinians. James Baldwin speaks of the price Palestinians pay for the British colonial policy. Malcolm X writes about the occupying state of Israel as colonial camouflage. The main connection is based on the troubling concept of home and the resonating feeling of displacement and colonial violence.

Members of both Diasporas are concerned with the concept of home and reflect on the meaning of origins and returns. In our contemporary times, Black Lives Matter movements and Palestinian organizations have come out to support each other's causes and to practice intersectional solidarity. Both of these movements raise important ethical questions: "Whose

235

lives matter?" and "Who can be considered human?" Additionally, the ethical demands associated with these questions require nation-states to acknowledge how their existence is intertwined with and enabled by the oppression and violence against Black and Indigenous peoples. Significantly, the recent Israeli war on Palestinians in Gaza has led many to connect the dots between the intersectional ties between Palestinians and other historically marginalized and oppressed groups. This comes out of a global need to counter the international silencing of Palestinian support and solidarity. In the international ongoing and massive protests calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, many US demonstrators protesting for a ceasefire in Gaza and an end to US funding of the Israeli military have been Black activists carrying signs saying, "Black Lives 4 Palestine".[37] Demonstrators are drawing connections between the Palestinian and Black liberation movements. Black Lives Matter has played a significant role in raising awareness about Palestine. Solidarity between Black organizers and Palestinians has deep roots, with parallels becoming clearer in recent years. Some demonstrators highlighted the similarities between Israeli law enforcement and US police. American public opinion on Palestine has warmed, especially among young people. Growing activism on the left, including anti-Zionist Jewish groups,[38] has also contributed to the shift in the conversation. Global solidarity is an important aspect of the movement against white supremacy and colonialism.

One example would be the solidarities fostered globally with Indigenous communities. Palestinians are Indigenous and are living the settler-colonization of their land. Palestinians

---

[37] AFP. "Black Lives 4 Palestine." Arab News, 2023, www.arabnews.com/node/2405181/world.

[38] https://www.notonourdime.com/

globally share, sympathize, and stand with Indigenous people advocating against colonialism.[39][40] In the context of North America, Black and Indigenous communities are the foundation of the modern settler-colonial countries the people live in. Contemporary scholarship on Palestine also centers intersectional solidarity work, linking the Palestinian cause to Black Lives Matter and Indigenous activism globally. Karim Kattan identifies the commonalities between the material realities of anti-Palestinian and anti-Black violence in North America:

> The values of our lives are similarly dismissed. Both populations face mass incarceration, discrimination, police, and military brutality. The United States and Israel share techniques, strategies, and apparatus. […] In 2014, Black and Palestinian solidarity was made visible as the massive protests over the police murders of Michael Brown in Ferguson coincided with Israel's Operation Protective Edge in Gaza that killed over 2,300 Palestinians. (23)

In the 46th issue of *The Funambulist* (January 2023) which focused on questioning global solidarities, Leopold Lambert affirms that "solidarity does not erase the specificity of each situation and each struggle; quite the contrary" (17-18). In the reflections on global solidarity networks, with a specific focus on the centrality of Palestine in the global anti-colonial struggle and the issues of solidarity surrounding it, Lambert notes the extended solidarity Black activists have shown towards "Palestinians fighting against ethnic cleansing and settler colonialism" (16),

---

[39]https://idlenomore.ca/idle-no-more-stands-in-solidarity-with-palestinian-people/

[40]https://therednation.org/statement-of-indigenous-solidarity-with-palestine/

even as recent as spring 2021 during the Sheikh Jarrah campaign in Jerusalem against the expulsion of Palestinians from their lands and homes.[41]

Resilience is another marker of both Diasporas though the histories and experiences are quite different, the commitment to maintain and revive culture and tradition is a prominent marker in both Diasporas. Palestinians reject and fight severely against attempts to erase their presence and history from their historic land. Resistance literature, music, film, and theatre heavily document Palestinian peoples' experiences on the land and their fight for their continuing identity and sovereignty as Palestinians. With the Black Diaspora, in its broadness and expansiveness, traditions and customs have survived the Atlantic Slave Trade and have taken new shape in new homelands such as in North America and the Caribbean. Similarly, resistance takes form through survival and joy, through celebration and assertion of freedom in the face of oppression.

Studying these two communities together enables us to examine belonging in the present marked by the past. The ongoing violence against these communities creates conflict in their sense of belonging. By investigating these two diasporas in conjunction, we gain crucial insight into the impact of historical and ongoing violence and accumulating trauma on belonging. My work here brings new light to unpacking traumas faced within communities formed by the

---

[41] In the same issue of *The Funambulist*, Karim Kattan examines in "How do We Reach Each Other? Towards Generative Solidarities," the exchange of solidarity between Palestinians and Black people in North America, concluding that Black activist movements have "stood in solidarity with Palestinians in much deeper ways than [Palestinians] have with them" (25), calling for a change in Palestinian acts of solidarity that surpass performative and appropriative approaches and work on even "production and distribution of knowledge, of value, of concern" in solidarity (25).

victims of colonial projects and forced migrations. Hesitancy represents a contemporary unease and anxiety felt in navigating oneself in a globalized world.

The fostering of relationships extends beyond Black and Palestinian relationality and understanding; anyone who has experienced forced migration, collective trauma, violence imposed against their people, and historical and familial rupture can relate to the state of hesitant belonging. Both communities have endured centuries of oppression but have also forged powerful connections and a shared understanding of the ongoing legacies of colonialism.

My work highlights the experiences of Black and Palestinian subjects, amplifying their voices and perspectives. By studying their navigation of belonging through the particular lens of hesitancy, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the ongoing legacies of oppression, capitalism, and colonialism and how they continue to shape our world today. Ultimately, my goal has been to contribute to a broader movement toward decolonization and liberation, challenging and transforming the systems of power that perpetuate inequality and injustice. By centering on the experiences and perspectives of marginalized communities, we work towards a more just and equitable world for all.

References

"About - Black Lives Matter." *Black Lives Matter*, blacklivesmatter.com/about/. Accessed 27
June 2023.

"Black and Free: Project Overview." Naila Keleta-Mae, www.nailakeletamae.ca/project1.html.
Accessed 27 June 2023.

"Explore the Origins and Forced Relocations of Enslaved Africans across the Atlantic World."
Slave Voyages, www.slavevoyages.org/.

"Fedayee." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

"Hesitancy | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary." *Cambridge Dictionary*,
dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hesitancy.

"Hesitancy Definition & Usage Examples." Dictionary.Com, Dictionary.com,
www.dictionary.com/browse/hesitancy.

"The Occupation of Water." *Amnesty International*, 5 Aug. 2022,
www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/11/the-occupation-of-water/.

"Statistics on Palestinians in Israeli custody" *B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for
Human Rights in the Occupied Territories*, 20 November 2023,
https://www.btselem.org/statistics/detainees_and_prisoners/.

"Where We Work | UNRWA." *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
in the Near East (UNRWA)*, www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan.

"World Report 2024." Human Rights Watch, 2 Feb. 2024, www.hrw.org/world-report/2024

Abulhawa, Susan. *Against the Loveless World: A Novel.* Atria Books, 2020.

---. *Mornings in Jenine.* Bloomsbury USA, 2010.

Abdelmahmoud, Elamin. *Son of Elsewhere: A memoir in pieces.* New York: Ballantine Books, 2022.

---. "Opinion: From Khartoum to Kingston: A Journey to Becoming Black." *The Globe and Mail*, 14 May 2022, www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-son-of-elsewhere-book-elamin-abdelmahmoud/.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Return To Half–Ruins: Memory, Postmemory, and Living History in Palestine." *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, Ed. Lila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad H. Sa'di. Columbia University Press, New York, NY, 2007, pp. 77-104.

Abu-Lughod, Lila, Sa'di, Ahmad H. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, Columbia University Press, New York, NY, 2007.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. New York: Anchor Books, 2014.

AFP. "Black Lives 4 Palestine." *Arab News*, www.arabnews.com/node/2405181/world.

Agamben, Giorgio. "We Refugees." Symposium (Syracuse), vol. 49, no. 2, 1995, pp. 114–19, https://doi.org/10.1080/00397709.1995.10733798.

Ahmed, Sara. *Living A Feminist Life.* Duke University Press, 2017.

---. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion.* Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.

---. *Willful Subjects.* Duke University Press,2014.

---. "Affective Economics" *Social Text*, Duke University Press, vol.22, no.2, 2004, pp. 117-139.

---. "Home and away: Narratives of migration and estrangement." *International Journal of Cultural Studies,* vol. 2, issue 3,1999, pp, 329-347.

Al Kurd, Mohammad. "Speech by Mohammed Al-Kurd before the UN General Assembly." International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, 11 Nov. 2023, United Nations, New York.

Ali, Rozina. "Rewriting the Story of the Palestinian Radical." *The New Yorker*, 14 April 2021.

Alkalimat, Abdul. *The Future of Black Studies*. Pluto Press, 2022.

Allen, Douglas, et al. "Placing Race: On the Resonance of Place with Black Geographies." *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 43, no. 6, Oct. 2018, pp. 1001–19,https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132518803775.

Allen, Douglas L. "Asserting a Black Vision of Race and Place: Florida A&M University's Homecoming as an Affirmative, Transgressive Claim of Place." *Geoforum*, vol. 111, May 2020, pp. 62–72, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.03.007.

Alyan, Hala. "The Palestine Double Standard." *The New York Times*, 25 Oct. 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/25/opinion/palestine-war-empathy.html

---. "A Letter to My Husband." *Emergence Magazine*, 31 Mar. 2021, https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/a-letter-to-my-husband/

---. *The Arsonists' City.* Harper, 2021.

---. *Salt Houses*. Windmill Books, 2018.

---. "Palestinian American poet and clinical psychologist Hala Alyan has an MA from Columbia University." *Poetry Foundation*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/hala-alyan

Antonsich, Marco. "Searching for Belonging – An Analytical Framework." *Geography Compass*, vol. 4, no. 6, June 2010, pp. 644–59, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00317.x.

Assmann, Aleida. "Transnational Memories." *European Review* vol. 22, no. 4, 2014, pp.546–556.

B'Tselem. "Statistics on Palestinians in Israeli Custody | b'tselem." *B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories*, 20 Nov. 2023, www.btselem.org/statistics/detainees_and_prisoners.

Babb, Valerie. "The Neo-Slave Narrative." *A History of the African American Novel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017, pp. 218–235.

Balaev, Michelle. "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory." *Mosaic*, vol.41, no.2, 2008, pp.149-165.

Barakat, Rana. "Reading Audre Lorde in Palestine: Exploring Differences between Generative and Extractive. " *Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research,* vol. 9, no. 1, 2023, pp. 25-31, https://kohljournal.press/reading-audre-lorde-palestine.

Beauchamp, Zack. "What Were the Intifadas?" *Vox*, 20 Nov. 2018, www.vox.com/2018/11/20/18080066/israel-palestine-intifadas-first-second.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism.* Duke University Press, 2011.

Bernard, Aida A. "Recovering Neighborhood Histories in Shatila Refugee Camp." *Jerusalem Quarterly*, vol. 69, 2017, pp. 6–27.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994.

---. "Spectral Sovereignty, Vernacular Cosmopolitans, and Cosmopolitan Memories." *Cosmopolitanisms*, 2020, pp. 141–152, https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479829682.003.0012.

Blackmer. "Pinkwashing." *Israel Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2019, p. 171, https://doi.org/10.2979/israelstudies.24.2.14.

Boutte, Gloria, Bryan, Nathaniel. "When will black children be well? interrupting anti-black violence in early childhood classrooms and schools." *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2021, pp. 232–243, https://doi.org/10.1177/1463949119890598.

Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities.* London: Routledge, 1996.

Braidotti, R., Hanafin, P., & Blaagaard, B. (Eds.). (2013). *After Cosmopolitanism* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi-org.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/10.4324/9780203102121

Brand, Dionne. *At the Full and Change of the Moon.* Knopf Canada, 2000.

---. *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging.* Vintage Canada, 2002.

---. "Brownman, Tiger . . ." *Bread out of Stone*. Toronto: Vintage Canada Edition, 2019, pp. 73-89.

Breen, Patrick H. "Nat Turner's Revolt (1831)." *Encyclopedia Virginia,* 14 Nov. 2023,

    encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/turners-revolt-nat-1831/.

Butler, Judith. "Violence, Mourning, Politics." *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and*

    Violence. Verso, 2004, pp. 19-49.

---. "Universality in Culture." *For Love of Country?* Martha C. Nussbaum et al. Ed. Joshua

    Cohen. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002, pp. 45-52.

Boon, Sonja, and Kate Lahey. "The Impossibility of a Future in the Absence of a Past: Drifting

    in the In-Between." *Atlantis* vol. 40, no. 1, Dec. 2019, pp. 32–44.

    https://doi.org/10.7202/1066419ar.

Calhoun, Craig. "The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Toward a Critique of Actually

    Existing Cosmopolitanism" *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol.101, no.4, 2002, pp. 869–

    897.

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History.* Johns Hopkins

    University Press, 1996.

Chadwick, Rachelle. "On the politics of discomfort". *Feminist Theory*, vol.22, no.4, 2021, pp.

    556-574, https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700120987379.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh, Breckenridge, Carol A., Bhabha, Homi K., Pollock, S. editors.

    Cosmopolitanism. Society for Transnational Cultural Studies by Duke University Press,

    2002.

Chambers, Iain. *Migrancy, Culture and Identity*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Chen, Cecilia, et al. "Introduction: Toward a hydrological turn?" *Thinking with Water*, 1 Oct. 2013, pp. 3–22, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780773589339-004.

Chude-Sokei, Louis. "On the Many Meanings of Black Diaspora." *Literary Hub,* 3 Feb. 2021.

Christou, W., Huton, A., Kelly, M. "Israel's Use of White Phosphorus in Lebanon." *The Washington Post*, 11 Dec. 2023.

Ciocia, Stefania. "Trauma, Gender and the Poetics of Uncertainty." *Vietnam and Beyond: Tim O'Brien and the Power of Storytelling,* Liverpool University Press, 2012, pp. 123–184.

Clarke, George Elliott. *Black* (Revised Second Edition), Gaspreau Press, 2012.

---. *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. University of Toronto Press, 2002.

Cole, Juan. "Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in the Twentieth Century." *Macalester International*, vol. 23, 2009.

Crabtree, Mari N. *My Soul Is a Witness: The Traumatic Afterlife of Lynching.* Yale University Press, 2022, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw83s.

Craps, Stef. *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Cruz Kayne, Michael [@CruzKayne]. "but grief is not one thing, it is a galaxy of emotions, most of which are put in orbit by the loss of someone you loved, and the harrowing (or not) circumstances surrounding that loss. but we only get to talk about one part publicly: the sadness." *X,* Nov 18, 2019, https://twitter.com/CruzKayne/status/1196646190709907456

Dajani, Khadija,[@khadija_muhaisen_dajan]. "There is no English equivalent to the Arabic word

    qaher قهر. The dictionary says "anger" but it's not. It is when you take anger, place it on a

    low fire, add injustice, oppression, racism, dehumanization to it, and leave it to cook

    slowly for a century. And then you try to say it but no one hears you. So it sits in your

    heart. And settles in your cells. And it becomes your genetic imprint. And then moves

    through generations. And one day, you find yourself unable to breathe. It washes over

    you and demands to break out of you. You weep. And the cycle repeats." Instagram,

    October 2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CyPLYJdMEU1/

Danticat, Edwidge. *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*. Vintage Books, 2011.

Davis, Andrea A. *Horizon, Sea, Sound: Caribbean & African Women's Cultural Critiques of

    Nation*. Northwestern University Press, 2022.

Davis, Angela. *Freedom is a constant struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a

    Movement.* Haymarket Books, 2016.

de Olazabal, Itxaso Dominguez. "On Indigenous Refusal against Externally-Imposed

    Frameworks in Historic Palestine." *Millennium*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2022, pp. 212–36,

    https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298221131359.

DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M. *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island

    Literatures*. Univ Of Hawai'i Press, 2010.

Didion, Joan. *The Year of Magical Thinking*. 4th Estate, 2021.

Doumani, Beshara. *Rediscovering Palestine: merchants and peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–

    1900*. Univ of California Press, 1995.

Dowling, Sarah. "Grief, Bodies, and the Production of Vulnerability." *Canadian Literature*, no. 143, winter 2020, pp. 155.

Dryden, OmiSoore. "It's in Us to Give: Black Life and the Racial Profiling of Blood Donation," *Until We Are Free: Reflections on Black Lives Matter in Canada.* Ed. Rodney Diverlus, Sandy Hudson, and Syrus Marcus Ware. University of Regina Press, 2020. pp.211–224.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Souls of Black Folk, by W. E. B. Du Bois, Project Gutenberg, 1996, www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm.

Eid, Bassem. "Martyrdom and National Identity." *The Jerusalem Post | JPost.com*, 5 Mar. 2008, https://www.jpost.com/opinion/op-ed-contributors/martyrdom-and-national-identity

Eltis, David, Stanley L. Engerman, Keith R. Bradley, Paul Cartledge, and Seymour Drescher, eds. *The Cambridge World History of Slavery Volume 3: AD 1420-AD 1804*. Vol. 3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Friendly Sr., Alfred. "The Middle East: 2. the Fedayeen." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 1969, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1969/09/the-middle-east-2-the-fedayeen/659459/

Gikandi, Simon. "Between Slavery and Taste: A Response." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2014, pp. 29–32. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.45.4.29.

Gilroy, Paul, and Bjørn Enge Bertelsen. "The 2019 Holberg Conversation with Paul Gilroy."

    YouTube, YouTube, 28 Oct. 2019,

    www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBntPdPcQes&ab_channel=HolbergPrize

---. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Verso, 2022.

Green, Toby. *A Fistful of Shells*. University of Chicago Press, 2019.

Goyal, Yogita. "Africa and the Black Atlantic." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 45 no. 3,

    2014, p. v-xxv. Project MUSE, https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.45.3.v.

Gyasi, Yaa. *Transcendent Kingdom.* Bond Street Books, 2020.

---. *Homegoing.* Vintage Books, 2017.

---. "I'm Ghanaian-American. Am I Black?" *The New York Times*, 18 June 2016,

    www.nytimes.com/2016/06/19/opinion/sunday/im-ghanaian-american-am-i-black.html.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Essential Essays, Volume 2: Identity and*

    Diaspora. Ed. David Morley. Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2019, pp.222–237.

Hamburger, Andreas, Hancheva Camellia, Özcürümez, Saime, Scher, Carmen, Stankovic,

    Biljana, Tutnjevic Slavica, editors. *Forced Migration and Social Trauma*

    Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Psychoanalysis, Psychology, Sociology and Politics,

    2018.

Hammad, Isabella. Interview. Conducted by Feroz Rather. "Isabella Hammad Interviewed."

    BOMB Magazine, 28 Apr. 2023, bombmagazine.org/articles/2023/04/28/isabella-

    hammad-interviewed-2/.

Hannah-Jones, Nikole, and Jeneen Interlandi. "How the Bad Blood Started." *'1619' Podcast*,

    The New York Times, 23 Jan. 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/01/23/podcasts/1619-

    podcast.html.

Hartman, Saidiya. "A Room with History." *The Paris Review*, 9 Jan. 2023,

    www.theparisreview.org/blog/2023/01/09/a-room-with-history/

---. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*. WW Norton,

    2020.

---. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2008, pp.

    1–14, https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1.

---. *Lose Your Mother.* Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007.

Heinz, Sarah. "Beyond Sedentarism and Nomadology: Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and the

    Ambivalent Desire for Home." *Kulturwissenschaftliche Zeitschrift*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2020,

    pp. 119–132, https://doi.org/10.2478/kwg-2020-0030.

Hjelm, Ingrid, et al., eds. *A New Critical Approach to the History of Palestine: Palestine History

    and Heritage Project* 1. Routledge, 2019.

Ibrahim, Arwa. "Thirty Years On, Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait Still Haunts Region." *Al Jazeera,* 1

    Aug. 2020, www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/1/thirty-years-on-iraqs-invasion-of-kuwait-

    still-haunts-region.

Ingram, James. "Cosmopolitanism from Below: Universalism as Contestation." *Critical

    Horizons: A Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory*, vol. 17, no.1, 2016, pp.66–78.

Jayyusi, Lena. "Iterability, Cumulativity, and Presence: The Relational Figures of Palestinian Memory." *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, Ed. Lila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad H. Sa'di. Columbia University Press, New York, NY, 2007, pp. 107–133.

Joudah, Ahmad Hasan. *Revolt in Palestine in the Eighteenth Century: The Era of Shaykh Zahir al- 'Umar*. Gorgias Press, 2013.

Kamel, Lorenzo. *Imperial perceptions of Palestine: British influence and power in late Ottoman times.* Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.

Kanafani, Ghassan. *The 1936-39 revolt in Palestine.* Committee for Democratic Palestine, 1972.

Kassir, Samir. *Being Arab*. London: Verso, 2013.

Kattan, Karim. "How We Reach Each Other? Towards Generative Solidarities". *The Funambulist,* issue 46, 2023.

Khagram, S. and Levitt, P. "Migrating Lives and Communities." *The Transnational Studies Reader: Intersections and Innovations*, edited by Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt, Routledge, 2008, pp.259–260.

Khalidi, Rashid. *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance*. Profile Books, 2020.

Kopytoff, B. "Jamaican Maroon Political Organization: The Effects Of The Treaties". *Social and Economic Studies*, 87, 1976. https://doi.org/27861598

Kim, David. *Cosmopolitan Parables: Trauma and Responsibility in Contemporary Germany*.

      Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2017.

King, Shannon. "Anti-Black Violence, African American Memory, and The Trayvon

      Generation." *Organization of American Historians*, www.oah.org/tah/history-for-black-

      lives/anti-black-violence-african-american-memory-and-the-trayvon-generation/

Krebs, Mike, and Dana M. Olwan. "'From Jerusalem to the Grand River, Our Struggles Are

      One': Challenging Canadian and Israeli Settler Colonialism." *Settler Colonial Studies,*

      vol 2, no.2, 2012, pp. 138-64, https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473x.2012.10648846.

Lambert, Leopold. "Questioning our Solidarities: Introduction *"The Funambulist,* issue 46,

      2023.

Leys, Ruth. *Trauma, A Genealogy.* The University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Lockman, Zachary. *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish workers in Palestine, 1906-1948.*

      Univ of California Press, 1996.

Lorde, Audre. "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," *Women and Language,* vol

      11, no.1, 1987, pp. 127.

Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.

Lugones María. "Hard-to-Handle Anger." *Pilgrimages = Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition*

      against Multiple Oppressions, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, 2003.

Makdisi, Saree. "Things in Palestine May Never Be the Same Again." *The Nation*, 13 Oct. 2023,

      www.thenation.com/article/world/gaza-israel-conflict-future/.

Manna', 'Adel. "Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Rebellions in Palestine." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1994, pp. 51–66.

Manning, Patrick. *The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

Marshall, David J. "Existence as Resistance: Children and Politics of Play in Palestine." *Politics, Citizenship and Rights*, 2015, pp. 245–262. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-57-6_9.

Marzette, DeLinda. "Children of Fire and Water: Motherhood, Migration, and Home in Yaa Gyasi's Homegoing." *South Central Review*, vol. 38, no. 2-3, 2021, pp. 102–108. https://doi.org/10.1353/scr.2021.0038.

Masalha, Nur. *Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History*. Zed Books Ltd., 2018.

---. *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*, London: Zed, 2012.

Maynard, Robyn. *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present.* Halifax*:* Fernwood Publishing, 2017.

McCallum Guiney, F. "Generational Perspectives on Homeland-Oriented Diasporic Humanitarianism: Coptic, Assyrian, and Iraqi Christian Charities in the United Kingdom." *International Migration Review*, 57(2), 2023. pp. 707–730. https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183221139145

McKittrick, Katherine. "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place." *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 12, no. 8, Dec. 2011, pp. 947–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2011.624280.

Miller, Laura. "A Sprawling Epic of Africa and America." *The New Yorker*, 23 May 2016,

    www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/05/30/yaa-gyasis-homegoing

Morrison, Toni. "The Site of Memory." *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, edited

    by William Zinsser, 2nd ed., Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1995, pp. 83–102.

Motahane, Nonki, et al. "Rooting Routes to Trans-Atlantic African Identities: The Metaphor of

    Female Descendancy in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*." *African Identities*, vol. 19, no. 1,

    2020, pp. 17–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2020.1788505.

Nilep, Chad. "Code Switching" in Sociocultural Linguistics." *Colorado Research in Linguistics,*

    vol. 19. Boulder: University of Colorado, 2006. Pp.1-22.

Okoth, Christine. "The Extractive Form of Contemporary Black Writing: Dionne Brand and Yaa

    Gyasi." *Textual Practice*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2021, pp. 379–394.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236x.2021.1886705.

Olaniyan, Tejumola. "Teaching Notes on Simon Gikandi's *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*."

    Research in African Literatures, vol. 45, no. 4, 2014, pp. 17–23. JSTOR,

    https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.45.4.17.

Pattieu, Sylvain, et al., editors. *The Black Populations of France: Histories from Metropole to

    Colony*. University of Nebraska Press, 2021. JSTOR,

    https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv253f8g0.

Pappe, Ilan. "Crisis in Zionism, Opportunity for Palestine?" *Center for Middle Eastern Studies*,

    UC Berkley: YouTube, 19 Oct. 2023,

    www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OcjOP8iUCU&t=3903s.

---. "Indigeneity as Cultural Resistance: Notes on the Palestinian Struggle within Twenty-First Century Israel." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 117, no. 1, Jan. 2018.

---. *The idea of Israel: A History Of Power And Knowledge*. Verso Books, 2014.

Peterson-Smith, Khury. "Cops Here, Bombs There. Black-Palestinian Solidarity," *Palestine: A Socialist Introduction*. Edited by Sumaya Awad and brian bean. London: Haymarket Books, 2020.

Philip, NourbeSe. M. *Bla_ck.* Book*hug, 2017.

Pietromarchi, Virginia. "Jenin Raid Is over. Palestinians Are Left to Cope with the Trauma." *Al Jazeera*, 10 July 2023, www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/10/jenin-raid-is-over-palestinians-are-left-to-cope-with-its-trauma-2

Press, Associated. "UN: 2022 Likely Deadliest for Palestinians in West Bank." *Voice of America (VOA News),* 30 Oct. 2022, https://www.voanews.com/a/un-2022-likely-deadliest-for-palestinians-in-west-bank-/6811454.html

Ra'ad, Basem L. *Hidden Histories: Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean*. Pluto Press, 2010.

Regan, Bernard. *The Balfour Declaration: empire, the mandate and resistance in Palestine.* Verso Books, 2017.

Robbins, Bruce, Lemos Horta. *Cosmopolitanisms*. NYU Press, 2017.

Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. London: Zed Books, 1984.

Ryan, Connor. "Defining Diaspora in The Words of Women Writers: A Feminist Reading of

      Chimamanda Adichie's 'The Thing Around Your Neck' and Dionne Brand's *At the Full*

      and Change of the Moon." *Callaloo*, vol. 37, no. 5, 2014, pp. 1230–44.

Said, Edward. *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays*. Granta, 2012.

---. "Invention, Memory, and Place." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2000, pp. 175–192,

      https://doi.org/10.1086/448963.

---. *Culture and Imperialism.* New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Said, Najla. *Looking for Palestine: Growing up Confused in an Arab-American Family*.

      Riverhead Books, 2014.

Sanbar, Elias. "Out of Place, Out of Time." *Political Uses of the Past: The Recent*

      Mediterranean Experience, edited by Jacques Revel and Giovanni Levi, F. Cass, London,

      2002, pp. 87–94.

Salam, Wael J., and Safi M. Mahfouz. "Claims of Memory: Transgenerational Traumas, Fluid

      Identities, and Resistance in Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*,

      vol. 56, no. 3, 2020, pp. 296–309, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2020.1755718.

Saunders, Patricia J. "Fugitive Dreams of Diaspora: Conversations with Saidiya Hartman."

      Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal, vol. 6, no. 1, 2008, p. 7,

      https://doi.org/10.33596/anth.115.

Sayegh, Rosemary. "On the Exclusion of the Palestinian Nakba from the "Trauma Genre."

      Journal of Palestine Studies, vol. 43, no. 1, 2013, pp. 51–60.

Selekman, Emily, and Emily Davis. "Homegoing Historical Context." *Moving Fictions:*

      Exploring Migration In Modern Literature, 2020.

Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press, 2016.

Sharpe, Jenny. "Thinking 'Diaspora' with Stuart Hall." *Qui Parle*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2018, pp. 21–
46, https://doi.org/10.1215/10418385-4382974.

Shlaim, Avi. *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist movement, and the
partition of Palestine.* Clarendon Press, 1988.

Siemerling, Winfried. *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered: Black Canadian Writing, Cultural
History, and the Presence of the Past.* McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015.

Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through
Radical Resistance.* University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

Smyth, Heather. "African Diaspora and Coalition: Multiracial Writing and Arts Activism in
Canada." *Diasporas, Cultures of Mobilities*, 'Race' 3, 2016, pp. 257–74,
https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pulm.9588.

Stanley, Tiffany. "The Disappearance of a Distinctively Black Way to Mourn." *The Atlantic*, 26
Jan. 2016.

Teebi, Saeed. "Opinion: To Be Palestinian Is to Constantly Have Basic Facts of Your Existence
Denied." *Globe and Mail.* 17 Oct. 2023.

Ṭeveth Shabtai. *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War*, Oxford University
Press, 1985.

Turner, Camille. *Unsilencing The Past: Staging Black Atlantic Memory In Canada And Beyond.*
2022. York University, Doctoral Dissertation. Yorkspace.

---. "The Afronautic Research Lab." *Until We Are Free: Reflections On Black Lives Matter In Canada*, edited by Rodney Diverlus, Sandy Hudson, and Syrus Marcus Ware, University of Regina Press, 2020, pp.153-163.

Van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score.* Penguin Books, 2015.

Vickroy, Laurie. *Reading Trauma Narratives, the Contemporary Novel, and the Psychology of Oppression*. University of Virginia Press, 2015.

Walcott, Rinaldo. "The Black Aquatic." *Liquid Blackness*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2021, pp. 63–73. https://doi.org/10.1215/26923874-8932585.

---. "Salted Cod....: Black Canada and Diasporic Sensibilities." *Reading the Image: Poetics of the Black Diaspora, exhibition catalogue*, Canada Council for the Arts, 2006.

Ward, Abigail. *Postcolonial Traumas: Memory, Narrative, Resistance*. Springer, 2015.

Webster, Jane, *Materializing the Middle Passage: A Historical Archaeology of British Slave Shipping, 1680-1807*, Oxford, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199214594.001.0001.

Wilson, Kathleen. "The Performance of Freedom: Maroons and the Colonial Order in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica and the Atlantic Sound." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 1, 2009, pp. 45–86. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40212041.

Winks, Robin W. *Blacks in Canada: a History*. Fiftieth anniversary edition., McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780228007906.

Wright, Willie Jamaal. "Memorial for Alton Sterling, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 2016."

    Southeastern Geographer, vol. 57, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1–3,

    https://doi.org/10.1353/sgo.2017.0000.

Ziolkowski, Theodore. *Hesitant Heroes: Private Inhibition, Cultural Crisis*. Cornell University

    Press, 2018.