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Waging War on the Womb: Women's Bodies as Nationalist Symbols and Strategic Victims of Violence
in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*

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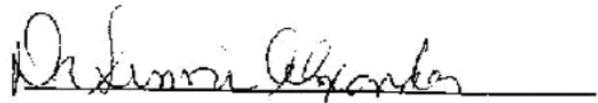
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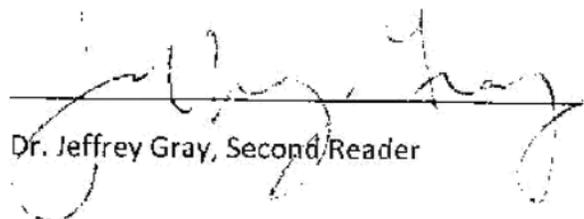
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This Thesis, *Waging War on the Womb: Women's Bodies as Nationalist Symbols and Strategic Victims of Violence in Susan Abulhawa's Mornings in Jenin* by Noora Badwan has been approved for submission for the Degree of Master of Arts in English Literature by:

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Waging War on the Womb: Women's Bodies as Nationalist Symbols and Strategic Victims of
Violence in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*

Nationalism is a patriarchal construct that clearly delineates women's roles in the social structure, and assigns female bodies specific roles in the nationalist, social, and political narratives, albeit passive ones; ironically, as integral to nationalism as women are, they are only ever pawns used by the state, never equal participants. They are often assigned the role of the mother figure who produces new citizens to populate the nation and who are expected to raise them to be "good citizens" and offer them up to the state as potential tools. The mother figure is a nationalist icon who is also often forced to be the nation's sacrificial lamb. The woman is relegated almost exclusively to the domestic sphere and her body becomes synonymous with the land; therefore, if the nation is threatened, so too is the female body. If the land or the nation become vulnerable and exposed to the enemy, then the nation's women are also placed in jeopardy. When the nation or land is "scarred" or damaged, so too are women's bodies and minds "scarred" in various ways. In Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*, most of the female characters rarely overtly go against their Zionist oppressors (though they do resist in other, subtler ways) and are expected instead to be the traditional domestic fixtures as mothers and wives, despite the fact that traditional Palestinian life as they know it is being destroyed all around them. Nationalism (both Palestinian and Israeli) hurts Palestinian women and silences them; grief and familial bonds are repressed all for the sake of the masculinist nationalist agenda. Young men are collateral damage placed before the tanks and missiles of Israel to be martyred and later used as symbols. These men's mothers too become symbols of patience and stoic sacrifice for the state. Nationalism also establishes motherhood as a contested site of conflict; Israeli nationalism (Israel and Zionism) uses mothers, children, and motherhood as strategic

targets, while Palestinian nationalist political groups politicize and uses motherhood as a weapon and tool for its cause. Still, these silenced Palestinian women do manage to find ways to adapt mothering and express themselves and to resist this silencing in their own unique ways.

In *Mornings in Jenin*, motherhood is reduced to a tool and a site of contest and conflict. Mothers are expected to produce sons who will ultimately become collateral damage for the Palestinian nationalist agenda and target practice for the Israelis. The Zionist forces fear being “outnumbered” by the Palestinians, and so they strategically target mothers as well in an attempt to contain the reproduction of Palestinians. Meanwhile, Palestinian nationalism capitalizes on this fear by encouraging women to produce more men to fight and die for the nation, completely disregarding these mothers’ feelings and desires. *Mornings in Jenin* follows the Palestinian Abulheja family through several generations in different parts of Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, and the United States. Many female characters in the novel suffer immensely at the hand of both Zionist and Palestinian nationalism. Amal, the novel’s main character and protagonist, loses her beloved father when he leaves home for news on the impending Zionist threat and never returns or is heard from again. Amal later is placed in an orphanage after her mother, Dalia, becomes barely functional due to the trauma and grief of losing her son, Ismael; he is stolen by Moshe, an Israeli soldier, right out of her arms in the chaos of a Zionist attack on the village. Yousef, Amal’s brother, loses his wife Fatima, his daughter Falasteen, and his unborn child to a vicious massacre orchestrated by Israel in a Lebanese refugee camp. Muna, Amal’s childhood friend from the orphanage, loses her parents to Arab nationalist political violence. While Palestinian women are expected to sacrifice and endure in silence, the women and girls of the novel find their own ways to resist and assert themselves against masculinist nationalist expectations.

The Zionist invasion changed not only the social and familial aspects of Palestinian identity, but the political aspect as well. Prior to the Nakba, nationalism was not a major concern of the Palestinian people. One's loyalty was to his family, his village, and his faith. On a slightly larger scale, Palestinians also felt united with their fellow Arabs in the rest of the region, especially Levantine Arabs (from what are now Syria, Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon), as they share a common language and ethnicity, as well as a similar culture. However, as the situation escalated in Palestine, and after suffering a humiliating defeat in the Six Day War against Israel in 1967, many Arab leaders turned their backs on the Palestinians. In *Mornings in Jenin*, Muna Jalayta recounts the story of her father's assassination at the hands of an agent of the Hashemite monarchy of Jordan. Her father had been a "professor who lectured the truth about King Abdullah's dirty dealings with Golda Meir," the Israeli prime minister infamous for denying the existence of the Palestinian people in the Holy Land (Abulhawa 147). Muna then denounces the Arab leaders, claiming that they "betrayed" the Palestinians, "just like the British," and swears that she would "kill every one of them if [she] could, from the Hashemites to the House of Saud," the ruling family of Saudi Arabia; the Arabs' betrayal is much more painful, of course, as the Palestinians had (perhaps naively) expected that their fellow Arabs would come to their aid in their time of need (Abulhawa 147). Muna echoes the sentiment shared by many Palestinians who had waited twenty years for their people to come to their aid, only to be sorely disappointed when many Arab leaders instead chose to work with the enemy for their own benefit, leaving the Palestinians to fend for themselves. While Arab nationalism originally supported and fought for the Palestinian nationalist cause, after the Six Day war, many Arab leaders made deals with Israel in exchange for statehood of their own and abandoned the Palestinians. Thus arose the figure of the "lone wolf" martyr nationalist who purposely risks or lays his life down for the sake

of his country, as he has grown weary of waiting for others to take action and defend the motherland.

Even before the violence arrives in Ein Hod (the Abulheja family's village), the effect of the impending Zionist threat is made evident in social interactions and expectations; social norms that form the very backbone of village society are "bent" with the onset of the new fear of losing one's land and identity. Dalia's public humiliation, for example, comes prior to the Nakba, when many Palestinians were still not directly affected by Zionist incursion on their land. The young Dalia, falsely accused of having stolen a horse, is publicly branded like an animal by none other than her own father. In order to "restore his honor," Dalia's father ties her "to a chair in the center of town and put[s] a hot iron to the hand she was forced to admit had been the one that had stolen the horse" (Abulhawa 15). She endures this excruciating pain silently, as her father warns her that "if [she] scream[s], [he will] burn the other hand" (Abulhawa 15). Dalia "[makes] no sound" despite the torture she is forced to endure, but instead pulls "the pain inward" (Abulhawa 15). The psychological damage this punishment inflicts on Dalia is more traumatizing than the physical scar it leaves behind; "[h]ad she screamed, perhaps the fire would not have reached so deeply into her" (Abulhawa 15). The silence that is forced upon her in this scene by the patriarchal culture and domestic violence leaves an indelible mark on her psyche. The stoicism she learns sets the precedent for the rest of Dalia's life, and she later bequeaths it to her daughter Amal. She is punished publicly in order to "break her" of her "insolence" and "childish carelessness"; the whole village knows of Dalia's mistake and her rebellious nature, so her father goes about disciplining and humiliating her publicly so that all may know of his dedication to male honor (Abulhawa 14-15). Patriarchal control of female bodies is closely intertwined with male Palestinian honor; Palestinian masculinity "is attained by constant

vigilance and willingness to defend honour (sharaf), face (wajh), kin and community from external aggression and to uphold and protect cultural definitions of gender-specific propriety” (Holt 226). Dalia’s father tortures her in front of the whole village so that his ““honor shall have no blemish”” (Abulhawa 15).”To restore his honor” and to stop the wagging tongues of the village women, who think Dalia to be a “shame on her family” for her “sexual” and “vulgar carelessness,” Dalia’s father decides to “crush his youngest daughter’s insolence once and for all” (Abulhawa 14-15). Ironically, it is this experience (among others) that hinders Dalia’s ability to fully connect with her children as a mother. The silence and stoicism she is forced to take on afterwards make it difficult for her to openly communicate with and express her love to her children.

It is also worthy of note that Dalia is punished so severely not only for supposedly having stolen a horse, but also for avoiding the hard work of the olive harvest. The heavy price she pays for the alleged theft is indicative of Palestinian village society’s respect for others’ property, foreshadowing the later outrage Palestinians feel at the theft of their land by Israel. Another aspect of Dalia’s “crime” that sets the village abuzz with gossip is her intentions for “stealing” Darweesh Abulheja’s horse; she had taken a “covert respite” from the “olive harvest,” failing to do her duty to the precious land and olive trees that are the livelihood of the people and which are closely entwined with Palestinian identity (Abulhawa 14). This apparent lack of concern for the land and its fruits is shameful in the eyes of the people of Ein Hod. However, fortunately for Dalia, the village never learns of her interactions alone with Darweesh during her “covert respite.” When she falls off the horse and breaks her ankle, a scandal emerges, and Darweesh contemplates “ways to defend Dalia, [though] he [knows] his involvement would bring a far greater punishment to bear on her” (Abulhawa 14). In the traditional Palestinian culture of the

villagers of Ein Hod, Dalia being alone with Darweesh and speaking to him would be considered an exceedingly heinous dishonor against her family name and respectability, arguably the highest; Dalia ends up running from Darweesh when she reflects on the situation and is “overcome with fear of being caught with a boy,” knowing that she’d “be beaten if her father learned of it” (Abulhawa 13). Palestinian female honor stems from her chastity and repression of her sexuality (a form of silencing). Palestinian male honor has much to do with controlling and protecting one’s female relatives (mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, etc.), as he protects the feminine land; both Palestinian women and the land are controlled by the masculine. As such, had Dalia’s meetings with Darweesh been publicly exposed, her father would have taken even more drastic measures to regain his honor.

Later, when Yehya and Basima Abulheja’s son, Hasan, expresses his desire to marry Dalia, politics and the Zionist threat compete for importance with village honor in the Abulheja household. After that fateful day in 1948 when the British were ousted from Palestine and Israel began massacring and exiling Palestinians, the family unit that is so integral to Palestinian culture was no longer as safe or stable as it had been. However, the creation of Palestine into a veritable war zone nearly overnight made mothering much more difficult. Even prior to the Nakba, rumors of violent Zionist activities set many Palestinians on edge and upset the balance of the home and the family unit. Upon hearing Hasan’s plans to wed Dalia, Basima goes into a fit of “wild” rage at the scandal that would come of him ending his arranged betrothal to his cousin to marry a “filthy Bedouin thief” with a negative reputation who is also from a “non-landed” family with no historical ties to Ein Hod (Abulhawa 16). She “flail[s] her arms, tug[s] at her thobe with pleas to Allah, beat[s] her chest, and slap[s] her own face” all while “pleading” and “cursing” in an attempt to “dissuade her son” from his decision (Abulhawa 16-17). Yehya,

however, insists that she cease her histrionics, drawing attention to the issue of the impending approach of the Zionists; “[t]he country is being turned upside down by Zionists and you’re in a bad temper because your son wants to marry a pretty girl you don’t like” (Abulhawa 16).

Several years before, Hasan’s and Dalia’s marriage would likely have caused more of a scandal and concerned Yehya and the rest of Ein Hod to a greater extent; in this case, the looming Zionist threat casts a gloomy shadow over Palestinian village life and disrupts its simplicity and microcosmic politics. Later, Palestinian nationalism will not allow for such dramatic displays of emotion, especially grief, even at the death of one’s own son, as his martyrdom is thought to benefit the nation.

Dalia later faces yet more trauma that she struggles to process due to being silenced and emotionally repressed by her past experiences and her society. When her second baby is stillborn, she grieves silently. She “suffers a feverish grief, cloistering herself in lockjawed solitude”; Basima is eventually able to “end that episode of grief” by encouraging her daughter-in-law to join in her hobby of breeding roses (Abulhawa 20-21). The new roses symbolize “a new beginning,” a way for Dalia to nurture, create, care for, and “mother,” everything she could not do for her stillborn baby (Abulhawa 21). Again a connection between women and the land is made. Basima later dies of a heart attack in her rose garden, and afterward “Dalia [becomes] the custodian of her beloved roses” (Abulhawa 21). She plants a rose bed at Basima’s grave; the same soil that nourishes the roses contains Basima’s body. While Palestinian nationalism considers men to be the protectors of women and the land, it is in fact the women, in this case, who tend to the land and ultimately become a part of it.

Years later, when the village is attacked for the first time and Dalia loses her father and most of her sisters, she sits among the rubble in a silent, rigid daze (Abulhawa 29). Her husband

Hasan discovers her in a “wordless haze,” frozen in the awesome silence of the aftermath” (Abulhawa 29). She does not move, does not give any hint of emotion or pain, so much so that her “rigid posture, unblinking eyes, and tight clutch around [her baby son] Ismael frighten[.]” Hasan (Abulhawa 29). She never moves from her place, and Hasan’s brother, Darweesh, eventually must carry her inside the house. She cannot even fully register the traumatic event; when her brother-in-law carries her away from the debris, all she notices is “how pretty and clear” the sky is, wondering if the attack had all been nothing but “a bad dream” (Abulhawa 29). This scene also draws parallels between women and the land. The village is left in a “rotten quietude, devoid of fury, love, despair, or even fear” (Abulhawa 28-29). Likewise, Dalia is utterly silent, and, due to shock and trauma, completely numb and dissociated from her surroundings. It is worthy of note that, despite the tragedy, the only aspect of Dalia that never wavers is her concern for her sons. It is her motherly attachment to her children that ultimately brings her back to reality when she emerges from her stupor only to ensure that Yousef is “safe in his father’s” arms and Ismael is safe in hers; she never once lets go of Ismael throughout the attack and the aftermath (Abulhawa 29). Like many mothers in the novel, Dalia adapts her mothering style with bravery, despite the odds.

She successfully does so until she is faced with the shocking and traumatic loss of her baby son Ismael; afterwards she cannot repress her grief as she has been accustomed to for most of her life thus far. Once Dalia realizes that her son has disappeared in the chaotic aftermath of an Israeli attack on the village, she finally allows herself to verbalize her pain; she “scream[s] like she hadn’t when her father burned her hand” as a girl, a “loud, penetrating, consuming unworldly scream from a mother’s deepest agony” (Abulhawa 33). After years of silent suffering and suppression of her emotions, it is only when she is denied the right to mother her child that

the dam she has built up around her emotions breaks down. Here again the Palestinian female psyche is “scarred” simultaneously as the land is attacked and scarred, left “burnt” and “lifeless” (Abulhawa 29). Just as the land never fully recovers from the trauma of Zionist attack and invasion, so too does Dalia’s mind never heal. Just as the land is helpless against the Zionist onslaught, so too is Dalia lost, never able to find her son or even to know what became of him. Dalia’s grief at the loss of her baby and Jolanta’s joy at adopting the boy and renaming him David reflects the loss of Palestinian land and identity at the hands of Jewish Zionist settlers who have no real right to it, who claim to love it but who do not accept its true nature and instead mold and scar it in unnatural ways.

Jolanta is infertile as a result of repeated rape at the hands of Nazi soldiers, and so keeps a baby who is not hers from a people whose land she also is just as complicit in stealing from them as her husband Moshe is. Ironically, Jolanta suffered a similar fate to the Palestinian women who she feels are so different from her. Her experiences during the Holocaust deny her the “elemental gift of motherhood” that Moshe envies the Arabs for, especially as they are “already so numerous” (Abulhawa 37). The same violent, masculinist, racist hypernationalism of Israel that aims to bar Palestinian mothers from birthing and mothering future Palestinians was practiced by the Nazis against Jews like Jolanta. When Moshe spots Dalia with her children in the village, all he can think of is “how unfair it was that this Arab peasant should have the gift of children while his poor Jolanta, who had suffered the horrors of genocide, could not bear a child” (Abulhawa 36). While he later feels guilt for kidnapping Ismael and leaving Dalia “heartbroken” and “delirious with the loss” of her baby, Jolanta’s happiness and opportunity to finally become a mother, albeit in an unconventional way, override the guilt (Abulhawa 39). Similarly,

“Jolanta does not conceptualize herself as a settler or a colonizer; she views herself instead as a refugee seeking asylum, which is one of the great promises of Zionism despite the reality that it is in fact a colonial movement. Jolanta thus embodies some of the difficult moral questions that have arisen from Zionism. Abulhawa does not necessarily absolve Moshe and Jolanta of their actions, but she seeks to explain them so that their actions, whatever readers make of them, are seen as the acts of pained humans rather than of anonymous sociopaths” (Salaita 138-139).

Ironically, while Moshe and Jolanta wish for the disappearance of the Palestinian people and for them to stop producing children, as all Zionists do, it is a Palestinian child who gifts Jolanta with the joy of motherhood that she would otherwise never have experienced. Abulhawa presents both Palestinian and Israeli characters with all different moral codes and humanizes even those who commit heinous acts.

Amal, Hasan’s and Dalia’s youngest daughter, emerges from the Israeli occupation of Palestine with her own physical and psychological scars, just like her mother. As a girl, an Israeli gunshot leaves her with a noticeable scar on her lower abdomen that greatly decreases her self-esteem; this can be juxtaposed with the abuse and scarring of Palestinian land, in this case the “peach orchard” that once “bustled with activity during the spring harvest” and had been a “clandestine meeting place in the winter for young lovers,” but is now declared “off-limits to Arabs” (Abulhawa 116). Once there, Amal notices that she is all alone, and masturbates for the first time, feeling ashamed of herself all the while due to her culture’s and religion’s strict rules regarding female sexuality and its dangers. The gunshot wound and scar she later receives can be read as punishments for her double transgression in this scene; she trespasses on land that is no longer considered hers and also “trespasses” into the forbidden territories of her body and

sexuality, which, according to the Palestinian masculinist nationalist narrative, should be “saved” for her future husband solely so that she may produce children for the state. From then on, “the ruttled flesh” on her stomach is “a reminder that” she is “damaged goods no boy would want,” as well as a warning against “violating” her own body and the colonized land of Palestine (Abulhawa 125). Yet again, the colonizer’s violence disturbs the Palestinian nationalist concept of the family unit; Amal’s gunshot wound is a “rape” of sorts. The Israeli’s soldier’s bullet “penetrates” her against her will, and her bleeding wound is reminiscent of a broken hymen. It is worthy of note that the bullet lodges itself in her lower belly, near her womb. Amal’s scar and “disfigured body” cause her to “dread marriage, which would surely bring a new flavor of rejection and abandonment” (Abulhawa 159). Her subsequent negative feelings toward marriage work against the Palestinian nationalist agenda; after all, if she never marries, how can she have children (keeping in mind that doing so out of wedlock is not a viable option in this context)? If she does not marry, she cannot produce children (preferably sons) to sacrifice to the state. After leaving the orphanage, she chooses not to return to Jenin, as she now fears the possibility of marriage in her current physical state; she feels there is “nothing left for [her] in Jenin but scraps of [her] childhood and the debris of the family lost forever, all of it packed beneath the boots and tank treads of patrolling Israeli soldiers” (Abulhawa 158-159). Palestinian land, people, homes, history, and dreams are all trampled by Israeli soldiers, literally and figuratively. She rejects and abandons Palestine for its “scars” like she fears her future husband will reject and abandon her for hers. The scarred, ravaged Palestinian woman’s body and the land are yet again juxtaposed as undesirable “damaged goods.”

Amal also inherits her mother’s psychological scars. In Cathy Caruth’s work on trauma, she posits that “catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves for those who have passed through

them...by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control”; trauma is inherited by way of the mother (Caruth 1). She defines trauma as “the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (Caruth 4). When Amal’s beloved husband Majid is killed and she is forced to give birth to their daughter Sara all alone in the United States, her trauma leads her to close herself off emotionally, just as her mother Dalia did. She imitates the very defense mechanism that she had resented Dalia for as a child: “[w]hatever you feel, keep it inside. Oh, Dalia, Mother! I understand!” (Abulhawa 228). Despite wanting nothing more than to die, Sara’s birth “force[s] upon [her] the will to live,” if only for her daughter’s sake (Abulhawa 229). Though she is present physically in her daughter’s life, Amal struggles with exhibiting her deep love for her daughter in an open manner, just as Dalia did with her. All three women in this family suffer from strained mother-daughter relationships thanks to the violence of the Zionist occupation. Mothers are denied the right to healthy mother-child relationships, and must be resourceful in making do with what they have and adapting the way in which they love and mother their children in their own (sometimes “unconventional”) ways.

Amal’s time in America, away from the motherland, however, is not as therapeutic as she hoped it would be. She feels that Palestine holds nothing for her, and she hopes that the United States will grant her opportunity, a future, and blissful anonymity. However, as many exiles learn, especially those in the West, Amal realizes that America’s promises prove empty. She loses all sense of her identity, attempts to assimilate and forget Palestine. In “Reflections on Exile,” Edward Said claims that despite the naïve notions and accounts of exile being “heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant,” these in fact “are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by

the loss of something left behind for ever” (“Reflections on Exile” 137). Similarly, while Amal attempts to enjoy “freedom” in America, in fact she feels lonely and unfulfilled, falling victim to the “age of the refugee” (“Reflections on Exile” 137). The word “exile” itself has romantic connotations and is reminiscent of the likes of “Joyce and Nabokov,” who willingly *chose* exile and produced literary works inspired by their experiences; however, the “cosmopolitan” literary and intellectual exile constitutes a small minority and his experiences are not indicative of the common exile’s experience (“Reflections on Exile” 139). One must “think instead of the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created,” such as the Palestinians, in order to understand the true experience of the exile who is *forced* to be an exile (“Reflections on Exile” 139). Nationalism, particularly Palestinian nationalism, is an “assertion” and affirmation of belonging, and in doing so it “fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages” (“Reflections on Exile” 139). Said posits that all “nationalisms in their early stages develop from a condition of estrangement,” so that nationalism is a direct response to exile and a feeling of being alone (“Reflections on Exile” 140). Exiles are in a “discontinuous state of being” and are eager to “see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people” (“Reflections on Exile” 140-141). Both the Palestinians’ and the Jews’ desires for statehood stem from persecution and feeling disconnected from their land, their culture, and their people. Still, exiles like Amal feel the need to leave because they believe that “exile is sometimes better than staying behind or not getting out: but only sometimes” (“Reflections on Exile” 141). Amal creates a new home for her daughter in America, but also learns that it cannot be a true home for them; mother and daughter both yearn for Palestine and ultimately return there. This is fitting, as “the dream of ‘return’ is still a passionate sentiment around which [Palestinian] identity has been constructed” (*Gender*

and Nation). Even when Amal is shot in her native Palestine, she only feels peace, and Sara is eager to learn stories of her mother's past and the Abulheja family.

Just as Dalia and other Palestinian mothers like her are denied the right to mother their children, the Palestinian men in the novel are unable to protect their land or their women from Israeli aggression, and thus are emasculated and rendered impotent. The once proud, lively, Darweesh is reduced to begging an Israeli soldier to keep his prized horse, Fatooma, from being confiscated, and the results are tragic; Fatooma is shot dead and a gunshot to Darweesh's chest leaves him paralyzed from the waist down, condemning both himself and his wife to a "cheerless fate" (Abulhawa 32). Thus, Darweesh's wife is also denied motherhood, as her husband is now alive "only from the chest up" and cannot conceive a child with her (Abulhawa 32). Similarly, Hasan is helpless to prevent his son Ismael from being kidnapped, and he is nowhere to be found when Dalia is nearly attacked by Israeli soldiers. Later, Yousef can do nothing to prevent the bloody murders of his wife and daughter; his grief and rage at the deaths of Fatima, Falasteen, and his unborn child are ultimately useless. It is this powerlessness and failure to protect his family (and the future of the nation), however, that awakens Yousef's righteous rage that Palestinian nationalism attempts to use as a weapon at Yousef's expense. It is only after this gutting loss that his righteous anger and burning desire for "vengeance" emerge and he wholeheartedly fights against and resists the Israeli occupation with no thought for his own well-being, as he now feels that he has nothing left to lose (Abulhawa 241). The desire to defend and protect the land and the Palestinian female body inspires nationalist sentiment in Palestinian men like Yousef; in a similar vein, Palestinian female bodies like Fatima's and Falasteen's must be sacrificed to the colonizer in order to spur on the patriarchal masculinist nationalist struggle.

Israel recognizes this aspect of Palestinian nationalist culture and uses it against the occupied people.

“[T]he occupation deliberately uses family relationships for control and collective punishment.... Where girls and women are concerned they are vulnerable as females, not just as Palestinians, because the Israeli reading of Arab psychology leads to sexual aggression or threat being used against them as a means of intimidating the population as a whole” (Sayigh 7).

Such is the case with Yousef and his family, as well as many others during the massacre at Sabra and Shatila. After the tragedy, Amal comes across journalists’ accounts that shock her; “there were women lying in houses with their skirts torn up to their waists and legs wide apart, children with their throats cut,” as well as “blackened babies” who were “slaughtered” and “tossed into rubbish heaps” (Abulhawa 225). Finally she learns of Fatima’s and Falasteen’s fates as well; Fatima is found on “her back, her dress torn open and” Falasteen dead behind her. For good measure, “[s]omeone had slit open [Fatima’s] stomach, cutting sideways and then upwards, perhaps trying to kill her unborn child” (Abulhawa 226). As a mother, Fatima is a threat to Israel, as are her children; the elimination of mothers and their children is a key tactic for and a form of genocide (even if they have become refugees in another country, such as Lebanon in this case); additionally, it emasculates Palestinian men and renders them powerless, unable to protect their land, women, or children from attack. Rape adds yet more insult to injury, as it “dishonors” and humiliates the Palestinians as well. While many Palestinian women have been killed simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, many have also been “tortured or threatened to put pressure on husbands, brothers or sons” who otherwise resisted Israeli forces (Sayigh 7). “All possible combinations of family-bound male/female feelings - love, fear, shame, protectiveness -

are employed to shock and break down resistance”; the Palestinian’s passion and great capacity for emotion are their weaknesses and Israel’s greatest weapons against them (Sayigh 7-8).

The most pervasive anxiety that plagues Israel is that of being outnumbered by the Palestinians. Consequently, the primary goal of Zionism and Israeli nationalism is to “limit[] the physical numbers of members of groups that are defined as ‘undesirable’” (*Woman, Nation, State* 8). (While these “undesirables” have primarily been Palestinians, Israel has invited criticism for its discrimination against Ethiopian and Yemeni Jews as well, including sterilization of women and bans on entry into Israel). There are several methods utilized for population control by occupying forces. One method is through “immigration controls,” or laws that bar certain people from entering the country (*Women, Nation, State* 8). Israel’s primary means of controlling the Palestinian population, especially in its early years is “physical expulsion of...and even actual extermination of them” (*Woman, Nation, State* 8). Nationalist movements like Zionism that wish to stifle an “undesirable” group also work to “limit the number of people born within specific ethnic groups by controlling the reproductive capacity and activity of women” (*Woman, Nation, State* 8). Such is the case with many of the women in *Mornings in Jenin*, as mothers are either killed, deprived of their children, or traumatized to the point that they cannot effectively connect with their children as they would like to. The “demographic race” between the Israelis and Palestinians and the fear of being outnumbered have inspired “active calls for women to produce more children so that no ‘demographic holocaust’” will occur (*Woman, Nation, State* 8). In the novel, Moshe expresses the Zionist bitterness against the Palestinians and their many children, especially since his own wife cannot have children as a result of targeted violence against her as a Jewish woman.

While nationalism is created by men for men, and nearly always places women at a disadvantage, there are times in *Mornings in Jenin* when even men realize the toxic nature of nationalism. Amal's older brother, Yousef, learns this lesson the hard way after the murder of his wife and children. While Fatima and Falasteen are murdered in cold blood, Yousef is spared the same fate and lives on with the burning desire to avenge his wife and daughter. He allows his anger over the destruction of their bodies to fuel his righteous rage against Israel. Nationalism takes advantage of this familial sentiment; an angry man with little left to lose has the potential to be molded into a martyr by nationalist forces. Fatima and Falasteen, as well as the couple's unborn child, are sacrificed for Yousef to embrace the vengeful nationalist sentiment. Yousef's grief is politicized by nationalism and he is encouraged to wield it as a weapon against the enemy. At the very end of the novel, Yousef recounts how "they" want him to "drive [a] bomb into the American building" as retaliation for the United States' political and financial support of Israel (Abulhawa 322). At first, his loss combined with nationalist brainwashing make him consider the act; "I'll make it happen. I'll kill. I will," he claims (Abulhawa 321). However, when Fatima comes to him in a dream and reminds him that "love is what [they] are about," he decides that, as much as he wants Israel and its allies to "bleed," he "cannot desecrate Fatima's love with vengeance" nor will he "besmirch [his] father's name with the lies they will tell" (Abulhawa 321). Still, Yousef fears that "the wheels have been put in motion" and he wonders if he can "turn back" now (Abulhawa 321). When he does finally tell the Palestinian nationalist forces that he will not go through with the suicide bombing, they call him a "coward," and inform him that although "he'll not go through with it," "it will go through him" (Abulhawa 321). Although it is not Yousef who bombs the building, it is his face that is "broadcast and printed around the globe" (Abulhawa 322). All the Palestinian nationalist entity leaves him with

are a “gun and solitary bullet” so that he may do the “honorable thing” if he is found (Abulhawa 322). He suffers as an exile the rest of his days, as a “laborer” in Basra, a beggar in Jordan, and finally a janitor (Abulhawa 322). Still, he vows to “keep [his] humanity,” to “live this pain, but...not cause it; instead he decides to “eat [his] fury and let it burn [his] entrails” rather than make death his “legacy” (Abulhawa 322). It is worthy of note that Yousef does not contain his rage out of any nationalist or political sentiment. Rather, it is the memory of and love for his family that help him to be patient and persevere. It is memories of Fatima, his “father’s books,” and his unsent letters to Amal that sustain him in his solitude and exile (Abulhawa 322). Nationalism used then discarded him as a man, just as it used all the women in his life, and he makes the wise decision to cherish love and family over political agendas that are willing to sacrifice innocents to make a statement.

The slashing of Fatima’s stomach and the subsequent death of her child at the hands of Lebanese military forces funded and backed by Israel cause Fatima to have a horrific cesarean section. She is one of many mothers and potential mothers targeted by Israel as a means of containing the Palestinian population. By stunting the reproductive capacity of Palestinians, Israel effectively stifles the threat of the Palestinian people. Mothering and motherhood become contested sites of conflict; war is waged against the womb as it is against the land, the nation, and the people. Pregnancies like Fatima’s are terminated in the most violent and barbaric manner, and children are murdered with abandon (or stolen, as in the case of Ismael). Mothers cannot be sure that they will have a successful pregnancy and birth, nor can they be too optimistic that their children (especially their sons) will live to adulthood to have children of their own. This fear tactic serves the Zionist agenda.

As in many nationalist movements, Palestinian women are placed in a hierarchy in their society based on their contributions to establishing a legitimate recognized state, mainly through reproduction and perpetuating the culture. Women are often relegated passive roles in the nationalist agenda (though of course not all of them are content with this and do in fact take active roles). Dalia protects her children as best she can. Amal gives up her own life for her daughter's by blocking a bullet meant for Sara. However, women are typically assigned several roles, according to Nira Yuval-Davis. The first role, that of the "biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities," is by far the most important; without women there can be no more Palestinians, and, of course, no Palestine (*Women, Nation, State* 9). Israel's genocidal attempts to limit the number of Palestinians is a result of their fear of being outnumbered by the people they oppress. It is imperative to nationalism that more citizens continue to be consistently created. Women also serve as "reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups," which is integral to preserving bloodline and identity (*Women, Nation, State* 9). When Amal and her daughter Sara return to Palestine years later, Huda, Amal's childhood friend, tells them stories of all they have missed since their time in America, reawakening Amal's memories and increasing Sara's love for her culture in the process. When David (once the long-lost Ismael) visits his sister Amal in America, she too tells him stories of their family and village, and teaches him pieces of the Arabic language and a chapter of the Quran. She serves as the purveyor of the nation's language, history, and culture. Without culture the nation has no history, nothing to claim as exclusive to it or to legitimize it. The women preserve the culture, as they are queens of the domestic space; "[t]he role of women as ideological reproducers is very often to women being seen as the 'cultural carriers' of the ethnic group" (*Woman, Nation, State* 9). If Sara had not returned to Palestine and heard the stories from Huda, she would have known very little of her

own culture. Importantly, Huda does not share these stories out of a desire to indoctrinate Sara into Palestinian nationalist ideology; rather, she does so out of love for her friend's daughter and a desire to connect her to the people, not political ideologies regarding the people.

The resilience of the women in the novel is evident in their attempts to find resourceful ways to fulfill their roles as mothers and preservers of language, culture, and history against the odds. The trauma and emotional scarring that Dalia, Amal, and Fatima endure inhibit their ability to mother and do their part, and yet they endure. For example, Dalia is emotionally and psychologically "scarred" by the attack on Ein Hod and the loss of her son Ismael. The destruction of the land and being deprived of her right to mother Ismael when he is stolen from her leave her a hollow shell of a woman, just as Palestine becomes a husk of its former self with the establishment of Israel. Still, she carries on raising her children in the absence of their missing father and delivering babies as a midwife in the village. Amal associates her scar, inflicted by Israeli soldiers, with Palestine and the loss of her homeland that she later feels she has no right to. While several male Palestinian characters throughout the novel also have scars or marks on their bodies which associate them with the "scarred" and damaged land of Palestine, they are not as psychologically damaging as they are to the female characters; emotional and psychological "scarring" take a greater toll on the female characters' psyches and, subsequently, on the family unit. The mental "scarring" damages the children of these integral Palestinian mother figures, which, in the patriarchal Palestinian nationalist discourse, threatens the future and very fiber of Palestinian identity and nationhood.

Mornings in Jenin explores the treatment of female bodies in the nationalist struggle. Prior to the Nakba (i.e. "catastrophe") in 1948, Palestinian nationalism as it is known today did not exist; it "emerged...in response to Zionist immigration and settlement" (Gelvin 93). Prior to

this event, Palestinians were united primarily by a common language, ethnicity, history, and land. There was no concern for borders or nationhood prior to the Zionist attack on Palestinian existence, even though the land had previously been conquered and claimed by the “Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders, Ottomans, [and the] British” (Abulhawa 27). All these invaders had allowed the Palestinians to “live on their land as they always had,” so “nationalism was inconsequential”; “[a]ttachment to God, land, and family was the core of their being and that is what they defended and sought to keep” (Abulhawa 27). With the establishment of the “bourgeois” and “essentially European colonial” state of Israel, Palestinian identity and personhood were called into question and Palestinians mobilized to assert their existence and their right to their ancestral land (*Orientalism* 252, 270). The Palestinian man became the freedom fighter, determined to take back his land from the Zionist invader and reclaim it as his own. The Palestinian woman, particularly the peasant or farmer woman, became confined almost exclusively to the domestic sphere. She could help her people’s cause by mothering more Palestinian children and instilling nationalist values in them; “[n]ationalist discourse defined ‘Palestinian woman’ in terms of her reproductive capacity thereby making of women's sexuality and fertility a patriotic and explicitly political issue” (Sherwell 294). In “helping” the cause, however, women stand to lose more than they gain; they are expected to sacrifice these children as “martyrs” and are not even allowed to grieve for them openly. With the expulsion and massacre of the Palestinian people by Israeli forces, producing more Palestinians to populate the colonized land and to resist Zionism became imperative. In order to articulate “an identity rooted in the land,” Palestinian nationalism frequently utilized the image of the peasant woman dressed in traditional clothing (Sherwell 295). In fact, “Palestine itself was imaged as a peasant woman” who needed to be protected and defended by Palestinian men (Sherwell 295). The Palestinian

female body and the Palestinian land are equated to each other. “There was a continuum between men's protection of women in the domestic sphere with their commitment to the national struggle,” as women were the protectors of Palestinian culture and the traditional family unit, as well as mothers of future Palestinians (Sherwell 296). Peasant symbolism “is mobilised to serve political and patriarchal interests of a male middle class leadership” (Sherwell 296). However, although it was mostly men who were tasked with actually fighting Zionist forces, women were often still subjected to bodily violence as casualties of war.

In an interview conducted by Zeynep Turan with Hiam Sabat, a Palestinian woman living in the diaspora, the “Bethlehem she identifies with is not so much the city for what it is or was, but the place her... mother and grandmother...constructed with stories as well as relics” (Turan 44). It is considered the responsibility of women to construct Palestine and bequeath its history and culture to the next generation. “Women were seen as vital in passing on Palestinian traditions and instilling political consciousness within the young,” as men were off doing combat with the colonizing enemy (Sherwell 295). They were tasked with birthing more Palestinians and raising their sons to be future fighters, and their daughters to be future mothers who would take their place one day. Prior to the rise of Palestinian nationalism with the establishment of Israel, a man’s greatest honor would be his skill as a farmer, his crops, and the amount of children he had. With Palestinian nationalism came the concepts of resistance and martyrdom. Still, even while men and boys were dying and being imprisoned, many did not even have nationalist intentions, “for such a concept was too precarious” (Abulhawa 253). Rather, as Amal notes upon her return to Palestine, they throw rocks and resist out of boredom, “peer pressure” and “under an umbrella of abstract politics, which they did not understand” (Abulhawa 253). While Palestinian martyrs are typically considered to be male, women, especially wives and mothers, suffer immensely as

well. Huda asks her twin boys, Jamal and Jamil, not to throw rocks at Israeli tanks; “[d]on’t break my heart,” she begs (Abulhawa 253). “Don’t break your father’s heart while he waits in their jails,” she implores them, reminding her sons that Israel took their father “just like that,” and she fears losing Jamil and Jamal the same way (Abulhawa 253). It is the wives and mothers like Huda who are the forced to endure silently while their husbands and children are ripped from them as a result of nationalism, forced to sacrifice their loved ones for the sake of the harmful abstract ideology of nationalism.

Like the land, women are physically and psychologically scarred as a direct result of patriarchal nationalistic discourse. Their bodies, feelings, desires, even their children, are rendered expendable for the ultimate purpose of establishing nationhood. Like other nationalist movements before it, Palestinian nationalism took a “nation first, women after” strategy that disregards women’s emotions and wants as expendable (Massad 469). Mothers are reduced to producers of sons who will serve as cogs for the nationalist machine. Nira Yuval-Davis recounts the words of one Palestinian woman she met who quipped that Palestinian women “need to have one son to fight and get killed, one son to go to prison, one son to go to the oil countries to make money and one son to look after [them] when [they] are old” (*Gender and Nation* 11). Tragically, motherhood, mother, and child (as a “martyr” and sacrificial lamb) are utterly politicized and the naturally sentimental and emotional relationship is sanitized of feeling and painted as a necessary strategy for defeating the enemy. Mothering becomes a site of contest and conflict rather than of unconditional love. However, not all Palestinian mothers remain passive participants in the nationalist movement or allow themselves to be exploited in silence.

Dalia rejects the expected role of the “heroic mother” when her baby son Ismael is stolen from her and she allows her anguish to be shown and heard. She does not silently accept the loss

of her son, nor does she keep her grief hidden or private. Rather, she refuses to be silenced as she has been all her life. She abandons the stoicism her trauma instilled in her and finally allows herself to *feel* her loss as a kind of resistance to male nationalist silencing of women. Similarly, Amal also refuses to lose her child and instead inverts and adapts the meaning of nationalist Palestinian motherhood at a crucial moment. Near the very end of the novel, Amal throws herself on her daughter to protect her from an Israeli sniper's bullet and is shot and killed. Her last words to Sara are "I love you"; rather than allow her daughter to be martyred in front of her, Amal instead takes matters into her own hands and actively chooses to martyr herself for *her child's* sake, not for the state's (Abulhawa 307). She refuses to sacrifice her child to the Palestinian struggle.

While Amal does become a martyr, it is not for Palestine's sake, but rather for the sake of her daughter and their bond. She dies with a martyr's sense of peace and accomplishment; "Amal died without knowing death. She died with the joy of having saved her daughter's life. With contented thoughts and with love" (Abulhawa 311). She did not die in vain for an empty, abstract political ideology that places its own people in danger, but rather for her daughter's future. Having struggled with establishing a mother-daughter relationship in which she could explicitly tell Sara how much she loved her, like many mothers in the novel, she expresses her love and establishes that connection in other ways. For Amal, dying for her daughter and finally verbally expressing that she loves her compensates for the emotional distance she developed as a result of her trauma. In her final selfless act, Amal defies both Israel and Palestinian nationalist ideas regarding motherhood. Not only does she reject the role of "mother of the martyr," she also hopes to perpetuate the Palestinian people with her daughter's survival; one of her final thoughts are of the "pitter-patter refrain of Majid's and [her] grandchildren [Sara] might bear someday"

(Abulhawa 307). While this dream serves the Palestinian nationalist agenda and this possibility would defy Israel, it is important to note that Amal depoliticizes her sacrifice and her dreams for Sara. She puts precedence on the emotional and personal aspects of mothering rather than the nationalist ones.

Ultimately, while nationalist movements generally promote high-minded ideals of equality, freedom, and brotherhood for all the nation's citizens, women are often left with little to benefit from this patriarchal system. While men take on the roles of fighters and protectors in the political and public spheres, women are assigned an almost exclusively domestic role as homemakers, wives, and, most importantly, mothers. These roles are presented as integral to building a strong foundation for the state. Female sexuality and the female body are strictly policed by the male nationalist discourse; the sole purpose of women's vaginas and wombs is to produce new future citizens of the state. Additionally, the female body becomes not only a symbol of the state, but also the state's property. In fact, the female body and the children it produces are sometimes sacrificed for the greater good of the state by the state itself, or by an enemy of the state. Motherhood becomes contested and politicized. Since female bodies are often equated to the land in many nationalist narratives, any damage the land suffers is inflicted on women's bodies as well.

In Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*, the women of the Abulheja family suffer from many psychological and physical scars and trauma inflicted on them by Palestinian men and the Israeli occupiers. As a result, they are left as silent second-class citizens who arguably endure the brunt of the violence inflicted on the Palestinian people. The Palestinian female body is synonymous with the physical Palestinian land, while also symbolic of the patriarchal nationalist cause. Ultimately, female bodies are nothing but pawns in the male nationalist discourse that

uses them as sacrificial lambs, domestic symbols, or inspiration for the movement created by and for men. Women hold great power in their potential as mothers, for it is they who populate the nation and strengthen it, while also passing on blood, language, tradition, and customs integral to the state. However, they are liabilities as much as they are assets, as potentially childbearing women are easy targets and the loss of these women is a crushing blow. Still, these mothers' resilience is apparent through their choices to sacrifice for their children rather than to sacrifice the children themselves, and to adapt as best they can to their traumatic situations and mother their children as best they can. Ultimately, while Palestinian nationalism may claim to fight for its women and children, in fact it is created by men for men, and uses women and children as mere pawns in the political game. Women and boys can be sacrificed at any time for the state, and even after imprisonment or death, they become political nationalist symbols. Mothers like Amal and Dalia, and even men like Yousef, resist nationalism and make their own choices.

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