Spatiality in Contemporary Arab American Migrant Fiction: A Geocritical Reading

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Abstract

Spatiality in Contemporary Arab American Migrant Fiction: A Geocritical Reading is a study of migrants' space(s), and/or a textual map, from a geocritical perspective in an attempt to answer essential questions in relation to the experience of migration. Given the different motivations behind migration from some Middle Eastern countries, such as Palestine, Iraq and Syria, to the United States, what type of space(s) are stressed in the works of Arab American writers writing in the diaspora? How does the experience of migration affect migrants' space(s)? How do migrants draw a new map in the diaspora? My analysis employs geocriticism as a literary analytical tool, within the implications of the Middle East and America as real referents of space in the selected texts. Hence, I draw on some works of Edward Soja and Henri Lefebvre on space and the contemporary works of Bertrand Westphal and Robert Tally Jr. on geocriticism. In this study, I use geocriticism and reformulate it, in order to explore the writings of Mohja Kahf, Randa Jarrar, Diana Abu-Jaber, Laila Halaby and Miral al-Tahawy.

With their shared emphasis upon the spatial experience of Arab migrants in the United States, the works of these authors can be read to manifest some of the multi-spatial aspects and collective facets of Arab American literature. My research examines space in the Arab American migrant novel, employing the geocritical framework proposed by Bertrand Westphal. Westphal's theory provides a platform for exploring the spatial experience that is constituent of migration in diverse contemporary Arab American narratives. The aim of this study is two-fold, scrutinising space and migrants. On the one hand, I explore the spatial aspects and their manifestations in the life of Middle Eastern migrants in the United States, investigating space in its different forms. On the other hand, through my examination of spatial aspects, I study migrants' spatial experience and position in both diaspora and homeland places. By so doing, I am revising Westphal's theory in the context of migrant Arab American fiction.

Key words:

Arab American literature, migrant fiction, geocriticism, literary space, spatiality.

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To all those who doubt their ability to achieve their dreams, the road is not rosy, but the destination is worth it.

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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Introduction: Spatiality and the Arab American Migrant Novel

The choice of the spatio-temporal frame for this study has sprung from my personal, close observations as I grew up between two Middle Eastern countries, Syria and Saudi Arabia. My experience has been affected by this context which has driven me to be motivated by spatial aspects: real and symbolic borders. In late 1990, my parents had to leave Dammam for Damascus, fearing the Iraqi-Kuwaiti war and its harmful impact on the whole region, given that Saudi and Kuwait are neighbouring countries, and the air pollution resulting from the Gulf war could not be restricted.[1] This made Damascus my birthplace and a first home rather than a secondary one. From 1991 until 2011, I lived between two different countries. I do not refer to the geopolitical borders of these two places. Rather, I would be living a Damascene life at our home in Dammam. Once stepping out of our home, I would be moving to another cultural world. Although Saudi and Syria are both Arabic countries sharing the same Arabic language and culture and to some extent religion, the differences are much more noticeable and harder to ignore.[2] In 2003, as a teenager I watched the American troops in Iraq, and Baghdad and its streets looked so like the streets of Damascus to me. By 2010, the Arab Spring had started in several Arab countries, making drastic changes in the political, cultural, social and urban space(s) of these countries.[3]

Having this personal background in mind, my thesis examines the contemporary Arab American migrant novel written within this specific spatio-temporal frame by employing the geocritical framework proposed by Bertrand Westphal. Westphal's theory provides a platform for exploring the spatial experience that is constituent of migration in diverse contemporary Arab American narratives. Reading Arab American literature alongside the concept of geocriticism enables opportunity to revisit Westphal's theory of geocriticism by applying it to literary texts. At the heart of *Spatiality in Contemporary Arab*

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[1] In 1990 and due to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and according to the narrative of the government of the United States, Saudi Arabia could be a target for Iraq whose army was the strongest Arabic one at the time. Based on this, the role of the United Sates in the region and its political space was crystallised by the presence of its troops in Saudi, Qatar and Bahrain.

[2] Islam, Christianity and Judaism coexist in the cultural and urban space of Syria and other Levantine countries like Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine which is explicitly represented in Kahf's *The Girl*. The cultural and urban space(s) in Saudi are more limited to Islam despite the existence of other different minorities of other nationalities. Residents of different ethnicities, nationalities and religious denominations have been living in Saudi and other Gulf countries since that last century which contribute in the cultural space of these countries though to a different degree and in a different scenario from that of other Middle Eastern countries.

[3] There is an interesting study on Arab Spring literature by Abida Younas in which she explores the aesthetics of post-Arab Spring literature by employing and reformulating the concept of minor literature.

American Migrant Fiction: A Geocritical Reading (2022) is an argument about the multi-dimensional role of space in the life of Arab migrants in the United States and their respective influence on American space more generally. The aim of this thesis is to re-examine geocritical and spatial strategies used by contemporary Arab American authors in their literary writings. Graham Livesey suggests that space has become "fragmented between disciplines, each of which has its own language that particularizes and problematizes" it (Livesey 2004: 11). My analysis engages with this spatial "everywhere" as the selected narratives represent the evolving nature of space and the broadly understood notion of mapping in ways that revitalise previous paths of reading Arab American migrant fiction. Hence, my research lies at the intersection of critical theory, literary studies, geography, sociology, politics and the history of Middle Eastern American relations and modern history.[4] My study offers a critical evaluation of Arab American literary narratives and examines the spatial rhetoric that marks their position within wider culture of American literary space. This multidisciplinary perspective seeks a comprehensive version of the migrant novel: its real and imagined spaces and its migrant and non-migrant people. By so doing, I offer a critical elaboration of the emerging theory of geocriticism and an evaluation of the migrant novel in an age of increasing migration waves. My study offers a revised geocritical evaluation by reading Arab American literary narratives and examines the spatial rhetoric that marks their position within the American literary space.

My study places prominence on a selection of Arab American novels that epitomise a multifaceted engagement with transatlantic space and their rigorous attention to diverse spatial forms, such as the geographical, urban, cultural and social, including different notions of place whether cognitive or physical. The multifarious focus of my selected novels, while bringing breadth and depth to my analysis, also serves the objectives of my study, which aims at a fresh, radical and inclusive geocritical evaluation of Middle Eastern American narrative writing. Since my focal spatial point in this study is the Middle Eastern American zone, my selected texts span a number of Middle Eastern countries that are the source of waves of migration to the United States like Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Iraq, and others which have had roles in the journey of migrants from these countries like Egypt, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia at the turn of the millennium. My choice of this specific time-space domain

[4] My use of the term 'Middle East' throughout this research is limited to Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Arab Gulf countries and Egypt. This limitation is due to the spatial and historical frame of my selected texts for this study.

has been specifically boosted by the tremendous events and wars that have not only resulted in waves of migration but also enhanced the dynamic role of the United States in the area and as a host for the people of these Middle Eastern countries.

The objective of my study, then, is to provide a revised geocritical approach by reading migrants' spatiality through a close textual analysis of Middle Eastern authors' novels. This methodology helps to illuminate more profound geocritical readings of Arab American writers' prose fiction and contribute insights into existing spatial scholarship. Moreover, the study foregrounds a novel approach to this kind of fiction by discussing its geocritical potentials. My central claim here is that while Arab American literary production is recognised as postcolonial, this also shapes the way in which the novels engage with the geographical, urban, cultural and spatial encounters which affect the experience of migration. Hence, I argue that the experience of migration is spatial, and that space and cartography are of paramount importance in the migrant Middle Eastern narrative. My claim does not preclude the role of temporality or time but sheds light on spatiality and its intricate role in the experience of migration as represented in Middle Eastern migrant fiction. This argument springs from the idea that the relationship between the present and the past, between the instant and the enduring in migrant life is represented by and replaced with a relation of a line, a distance between 'here' (a point) and 'there' (another point).

The concepts of space, spatiality and mapping in the field of postcolonial studies have "*always* been central" to the postcolonial experience (Teverson and Upstone 2011: 1, original emphasis). Space has reasserted itself in critical theory aided by a new aesthetic sensibility in an age marked by the transformational effects of postcolonialism and globalisation. By new aesthetic sensibility, I refer to the representation and realisation of space in the cultural landscape, especially that of literary writing. In the age of globalisation, addressing a humanitarian experience like migration and representing a local space or reacting to political issues cannot occur in isolation from global concerns. Space also can be approached from the perspective of those who never leave their location, or from the perspective of those who escape the boundaries of one place and connect to another regardless of their way of so doing. Those who stay or leave are both affected by mobility because we live in a world of ongoing political and economic conflicts. The movements of migrants, tourists or refugees result in ripples of influence that touch almost everyone. Hence, the experience of migration, for example, shows how contemporary art practices are increasingly defined by both movement and attachment to place. This dual desire is explored in the literary representation of Arab migrants in the United States in the selected texts from

a multi-dimensional perspective, shedding light on the positive side, such as having a peaceful life with better economic conditions and humanitarian rights, as well as the negative, like marginalisation, homesickness or identity crisis. These factors of movement and globalisation have foregrounded space in literary studies, deconstructing traditional geographical and cultural borders and reconstructing them in new ways, such as the notions of liquid geographies like rivers and seas and the cultural traditions which separate and gather people as discussed in Chapter Two. Hence, I explore how these borders, for example, are turned into 'liquid' ones in Diana Abu-Jaber's *The Language of Baklava* and *Crescent* in Chapter Two. However, these 'liquid geographies' are reshaped into solid borders as I explain through my discussion of Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* and *Once in a Promised Land* and Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* in Chapter Three. This spatial critical turn documents a notable tendency within critical scholarship to reappraise and reconfigure literary space(s).

By writing the experience of Arab migrants in the USA, the authors of the selected texts in this study emphasise how both space and time affect migrants' relation with the space they encounter. This is to say that space changes, develops or deteriorates according to the economic and political systems at a given time, which consequently influences the experience of migration. Hence, my focus upon space in this study does not preclude the importance of the relationship between time and space. As Foucault states, "space itself has a history in Western experience and it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space" (Foucault 1986: 22). The same idea is discussed by Mikhail Bakhtin in his essay 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Towards a Historical Poetics', illustrating the importance of the spatial-temporal relationship. He stresses the inseparability of time and space in literary analysis using the term "chronotope" which he gives to "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 1981: 84). With his focus on Greek literature, Bakhtin explains how changes in the representation of time and space are connected to transformations occurring in our experience of time and space beyond the literary world of the novel. For example, the experience of migrants from the MENA region changes across history due to changing political interests and regimes. This aligns with the British Marxist geographer David Harvey's argument regarding the shift from modernism to postmodernism and the role of capitalism in the production of space. This cultural condition has altered the ways in which space is perceived, experienced and conceived. Hence, one cogent way to understand the represented humanitarian experience in the selected works is, as Harvey puts it, to consider them in terms of "an intense phase of time-space compression" where

intensified events during a specific time in a particular space affect daily lives of people (Harvey 1989: 284). According to Eric Bulson, "spatial representations in novels are ideological, they are influenced by the culture, history, economy, and politics of a particular time and place, they reflect ways of seeing the world and the scores of individuals who live, and have lived, and will live in it" (Bulson 2007: 11). The focus upon spatial representations and metaphors that motivates this study is driven by this broader 'spatial turn' that has taken place in the humanities and the social sciences in the last few decades. The geocritical approach that I employ in close reading the selected Arab American texts benefits from the work of these previous spatial scholars.

One needs to take into consideration the disruptive effects across the different spatial levels of political, social, economic and cultural aspects on the increase of migration and the consequent influencing factors on the migrant figure and the associated space in the experience from the 1960s to the present-day. The combined forces of economic globalisation, neo-imperial conflicts, new transport and communications technologies, mass migrations, political devolution and ecological crises on a planetary level and existing social and spatial relations are in a constant process of reconfiguration. Having this in mind, space as a category of social thought and the 'spatial turn' in the cultural domain will be re-evaluated. Edward Soja argues that "a distinctively postmodern and critical human geography is taking shape, brashly reasserting the interpretive significance of space in the historically privileged confines of contemporary critical thought" (Soja 1989: 11). In this light, social and spatial relations are conceived as "dialectically inter-active, interdependent" (Ibid.: 81). They cannot be separated since a society is one aspect of the general spatial body which affects and is affected by other aspects. Through my reading of the selected texts in this study, Soja's and Harvey's spatial notions still find their way in an era beyond the postmodern age. It is not my intention here to suggest that the transformation from modernity to postmodernity that Harvey describes can be mapped directly onto the Arab American context in the texts under study. Rather, I argue that in keeping with Foucault, Bakhtin and Harvey, the analysis at the heart of my thesis maintains the inseparability of time, space and politics in narrative representation, to show how the spatial elements at the selected historical period beginning at the end of the 20th century, have influenced the life of Arab-American migrants which compelled Arab-American writers to represent the experience of migration in their novels.

The relationship between space and time becomes manifest at times of international crisis, like the events of 9/11. The changes that occurred in the United States affected the

Middle Eastern-American relationships on different levels which consequently affected both American and Middle Eastern spaces. My use of the term space refers to all the surrounding dimensions of a subject who is mainly the migrant figure in this study. These dimensions include the literary sphere of the narrative text, the real represented world and the imagined literary world. Moreover, I use the term to refer to different spheres of the real represented world: the cultural, the social, the religious, the geographical, the temporal and the urban. These spatial dimensions are referred to throughout this thesis as 'space'. As this study is concerned with the Middle Eastern migrant figure to the United States, any spatial aspect that affects the experience of migration and migrants' lived experience is identified in order to have a multi-dimensional understanding of migration in the given context. These spatial aspects are manifested differently in the selected texts under study. For example, in Diana Abu-Jaber's *The Language of Baklava* and *Crescent*, spatial borders are manifested as fluid in nature. In contrast, in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* and *West of the Jordan*, liquid geographies like rivers are depicted as rigid geographies that separate people.

With close reading of the different dimensions of space in representing the experience of migration in the selected texts, I conceptualise the term of liquidity in two different notions. I read liquidity or liquid geography in this study to illustrate the position of migrants within the geographical boundaries of the United States. The first use of the term appears in Chapter Two to describe the relationship between migrants of different origins and their methods of acculturation despite any cultural, ethnic, religious borders, to name a few. Hence, I describe migrants' space in America as liquid, a concept developed by reading Abu-Jaber's polysensorial narratives. However, my use of the term in Chapter Three reads liquid geographies and places as solid divides which cause disruption in migrants' life in the USA, a notion developed through my reading of Halaby's texts.

1.1. **Changing Positions**

The dramatic events of 9/11 changed the position of Arab Americans from what Nadine Naber once described as an invisible group in the United States into a "highly visible community" (Salaita 2006: 245). The need to reconceptualise Muslim identities becomes particularly urgent in "times of political crisis (such as 9/11), [in which] ordinary Muslims feel compelled (or are explicitly asked) to explain what it means to be a Muslim" (Roy 2004: 23-24). Indeed, the need to explain Muslim identity post 9/11 became almost a public duty, according to Roy. At this stage, there is a post-9/11 tendency in Western public discourses to homogenise all Muslims irrespective of their cultural background which increasingly

resulted in the multiple articulations of (Arab) Muslim identities in both local and translocal spaces. Arab writers in diaspora, especially in America, have felt the responsibility of writing within this heated atmosphere which has affected their writing in a way showing the influence of the political tension. These connections between the negotiations of national, Muslim and diasporic identities and Islam's and Middle Easterners troubled relationship with the West indicate the importance of thinking about the position and the influence of different spatial aspects on the migrant figure beyond 9/11. The events of 9/11 form a turning point in the cultural and literary space where Arab and Anglo-Arab writers take the responsibility to express themselves, their culture, societies and people and make their voice heard through their writings. It is important to document the way that Arab writers are "writing back" to the dominant Western discourses in order to address the relative marginalisation of Anglophone Arabs in the West. Based on the "war on terror" fiction has been undergoing a constant process of evolution over the last two decades.

Edward Said's thoughts about Orientalism show the development of this term and its changing direction of production and expression. Said examines in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) Western representations of Middle Eastern societies and cultures. In a geopolitical sense, the Orient signifies the Middle East, Asia and the Far East where territories were once part of one or another European Empire. Said's use of the Orient signifies a system of representation framed by political forces that brought the East into the Western Empire and its consciousness. Hence, the West uses the word *Orient* in its relation to the East and as a mirror image of and a reference to the inferior, the alien (other) to the Occident (West). Orientalism, then, as an academic term is used to signify Western doctrines about the Orient. Said offers different definitions for Orientalism; however, the succinctly defining one is that Orientalism is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 1978: 3). In the light of this perception, the Middle East is a static entity and cannot define itself, which is the reason behind the West taking control of the Orient. Said maintains that the Western representation of the Orient is determined by stereotypes and prejudices. Orientalism in this sense has influenced the Western perceptions of the Arab Middle East and Middle Eastern people of themselves. In 'Orientalism Reconsidered', Said explains the difficulty of understanding the region whose principal features seem to be in "perpetual flux" and that no one tries to grasp it can "by an act of pure will or of sovereign understanding stand at some Archimedean point outside the flux" (Said 1985: 92). Said discusses American hegemony, representing the social and intellectual realities of Orientalism in the USA. The status of power which the United States occupies and its impact on the Middle East necessitates and reflects a shift in the literary field.

By this light, 9/11 is not the rupture it is portrayed as in US media and politics, but a continuation and bolstering of a long history of US racialization, surveillance, and exclusion of its Arab citizens and migrants. The Orient and its people, whether living in the Middle Eastern countries or as migrants in the USA, claim their position and their right to express and represent their East with its multi-dimensional space. Thus, when the hyphen in Arab-American is used, it becomes an indication of the source of representation which is Orientals themselves.

In the selected texts, such as Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and Laila Halaby's *Once in A Promised Land*, the Orient as imagined by the West and the Orient as represented and lived by its people are depicted. According to Said, imaginative geographies are techniques of representation, ways of othering spaces and places through recourse to specific images, codes and conventions, that both reflect and enable relations of power. Hence, we see the stereotypical Western image of the Middle East and its people as discussed in detail in Chapter Three which shows how in moments of international crisis such as 9/11 orientalist stereotypes are re-invoked. We also see how the representation of certain places like the Dawah Centre as explained in Chapter One is developed. At the beginning of the narrative, the Centre is represented according to the Orientalist image of an Islamic place to the extent that it becomes a conflict space for Khadra as explained in Chapter One. Later in the narrative, Khadra realises that this place was built on traditional norms which follows the Orientalist image of Muslim Orientals. However, returning to it after some years, she finds how its system has developed to suit the new generations and the American life. In the same texts, the Arab-American authors represent their homelands as real not imagined or othered space. This intersection between the real and the imagined is central to the geocritical approach this thesis is following.

The Dawah Center is also a good example of Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia. Heterotopia is a term used by Foucault in his "Of Other Spaces" to describe certain cultural, institutional and discursive spaces which are 'other'. In other words, it is the manner in which some places and defined spaces which surround migrants, in the case of this study, in social existence can reduce their autonomy and their sense of identity. The Dawah Centre as well as Um Nadia's Caffé in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* exemplify Foucault's heterotopias within the wider American. According to Foucault, heterotopia is the case of a society and culture having power as well as the interest of realising this power by defining the subject (migrant) through differentiating him/her from the general society. As Foucault explains, there are places in every culture and civilisation that are formed in the

very founding of society, something like counter-sites. These places can be found within the culture they represent, contest and invert. At the same time, these places are located outside of the space they represent, even though it may be possible to indicate the location of the space they represent in reality. Since these places are different from all the sites that they reflect, Foucault, by way of contrast to utopias, calls them heterotopias (Foucault 1986: 24).

The selected works in this study show how Arab American writers position their production within the wider American cultural domain. By addressing associated issues of migration, they expose this human experience in spatial terms. On the one hand, they attempt to be part of wider American literature by exposing and exploring the physical and cognitive borders that divide people and prevent a peaceful coexistence. On the other hand, they provide psychological insights into migrant and non-migrant Americans. Their literary techniques show a departure from any formal orthodoxies and tend to seek a free narrative which is not restricted to any borderline. Hence, the concepts of cognitive mapping and liquid geography are explored in the selected narratives for this study.

1.2. **The Geopoetics of Arab American Migrant Narratives Shaping a Geocritical Space**

Geopoetics explores the inspiring and innovative modes, forms and poetics of "earth-making—because, at its etymological root, that is precisely what geopoetics is: Earth-making" (Magrane et al. 2019: 1). Scholars like Eric Magrane, Linda Russo, Sarah de Leeuw and Craig Santos Perez argue that practitioners of geopoetics from different fields share the concern not only "with the past and present (what has been or is being made) but also with the possibility of shaping new futures" (Ibid.). Arab-American authors whose texts are under consideration in this study share this concern of shaping the future or rather the position of migrants in this world, taking into account their past and present as explored in the first chapter by reading Mohja Kahf's and Randa Jarrar's novels in the development of their coming-of-age female protagonists. As will be discussed in detail, the two characters go on a journey cognitively mapping their position in the USA as Muslim, Arab, female migrants. This practice of route-finding is, perhaps, the ultimate goal of geopoetics (Magrane et al 2019: 1). In line with the notion of geopoetics, my study explores literary poetics as a means to representing the experience of migration. However, my focus in this thesis is to explore the theory of geocriticism as a wider umbrella under which the wider spatial experience lies.

Robert Tally Jr. notes in his preface to Bertrand Westphal's *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Space* (2011) that "[g]eocriticism allows us to emphasize the ways that literature interacts with the world", adding that this approach also allows us "to explore how all ways of dealing with the world are somewhat literary" (Tally 2011: x).[5]Westphal has advocated a "geocentred" or "geocentric" approach to literature in his book, where he allows one geographical place to serve as a focal point for a variety of critical studies by placing *place* at the centre of debate (Westphal 2007: 112). The geocritical literary methodology is a "framework that focuses on the spatial representations within [literary] texts" and also "explores the overlapping territories of actual, physical geography and an author's or character's cognitive mapping in the literary text" (Tally Jr. 2008: 4). According to Tally, one of the fundamental tasks of geocriticism is to analyse and explore "the new cartographies that aid us in making sense of our places and spaces in the world" (Tally Jr. 2013: 114). Taking Westphal's argument farther, I place 'migration places' at the core of my study. It is worth clarifying, here, that my use of the word 'place' follows Gieryn's definition of it as a conceptual domain which includes spatial overlaps between three variables: geographic location, material form, and investment with meaning and value (Gieryn 2000: 464- 465). My use of the word space is, however, more general and abstract, implying cultural, social, economic, political and urban space.

Westphal's approach allows a particular place to serve as a focal point for a variety of critical studies. For example, one can study the River Clyde or the Nile, a city like London or Alexandria and their representations across different texts whether these are fiction or non-fiction. By so doing, a geocritical study establishes in advance a particular place to be studied. It is true that a place is, after all, a place; however, a place becomes special due to the different experiences of individuals. Westphal further identifies four elements for a geocritical study (Westphal 2011: 111-47). Those are multi-focalisation, polysensoriality, stratigraphic vision and intertextuality. While Westphal's geocritical approach provides an intriguing method for examining the interrelations of space, place and literature, my use of the term in this study does not neatly follow his method.

In this study, my geocritical approach sets the experience of migration as the centre point rather than a specific geographical location. More specifically, the focal site is the space where aspects of migration manifest themselves as influencing factors in the life of migrant people and/or people involved within these space(s). My analysis is not limited to

[5] Westphal's book was published in 2007 and translated into English by Robert Tally in 2011.

the United States only or to one Middle Eastern country or to the Mediterranean Sea or to the Atlantic Ocean. Rather, in every chapter there are several places and spaces that make significant contributions to the life of migrant and non-migrant people. These also vary as some of them are physical like urban places, border checkpoints, rivers, mountains, deserts, homes and cafés, whereas others are imagined spaces like the world of Abdelrahman Salahadin in the uncle's story in Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* and the one that the Palestine Waheed has in his memory which does not exist on current real geopolitical maps in Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home*. Yet, these places intersect and together shape the experience of Arab migrants in the United States, a space which is rich in multifarious possibilities, challenges, disappointments, opportunities and hopes.

The purpose of Westphal's multi-focalisation technique is to question any tenacious stereotypes and generalisation about the place under study. Hence, my analysis engages with different points of view within every selected text and across the disciplines that provide the contours of Arab American migrants' space. The selected narratives also challenge any stereotypes or individual bias. I also embrace the notion of 'polysensoriality' in reading migrant space as in Chapter Two, since, as Paul Rodaway points out in his *Sensuous Geographies* (1994), the space under consideration may not be perceived by vision alone, but also by other human senses. Further, the different senses do not only perceive space but also create it as discussed in detail through *Crescent* and *The Language of Baklava*. This thesis also maintains a 'stratigraphic vision' in which the space under study is analysed and understood to comprise multiple layers of meaning. Finally, my study adopts intertextuality as a central notion, stressing that all textual spaces necessarily encompass or relate to other spaces in literature and reality.

The term intertextuality was coined by Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s within the paradigm of poststructuralism, describing the phenomenon of a continual exchange and relationship between texts. In her work *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* Kristeva explains that a text is "a permutation of texts, intertextuality in the given text," where "several utterances, taken from other texts intersect and neutralize one another" (Kristeva 1980: 36). For Kristeva, a text is "a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorbtion and transformation of another" (Kristeva 1986: 37). A different approach from Kristeva's is Gerard Genette's view of intertextuality as a "relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts" as "the actual presence of one text within another" (Genette 1997: 1-2). The literal form of Genette's intertextuality appears in quotations and allusion, for example. What I refer to as intertextuality in this study has a broader sense,

combining both Kristeva's and Genette's. Intertextuality as employed in the selected texts for this study implies a variety of intertextual relationships, highlighting different spatial aspects in the life of migrants. For example, the religious quotations from both the Qur'an and the Bible in Kahf's and Jarrar's texts show the influence of religious space in the life of Khadra and Nidali in the development of their character as discussed in Chapter One. Kahf, in particular, starts every chapter with an epigraph which relates in some way to the content of that chapter. Her chosen epigraphs are extremely diverse quoted from different sources like the Quran, the Bible, Prophet Muhammed's (pbuh) sayings, scientific, historical and mythological books and English, American, Russian, Egyptian, Iraqi, Persian literature, besides song lyrics. Kahf's polyphonic intertextuality supports her view of identity as a texture knitted from various multiplicities. By so doing, she also connects all these texts and puts them in the same narrative space of her novel, subverting hierarchies and undermining the superiority of one over the other. Intertextuality is also employed by Diana Abu-Jaber as one of the literary devices that shows the liquidity of geography as argued in Chapter Two. For example, Abu-Jaber utilises western literary works in *Crescent* as in her delineation of Han's character, which is in a way similar to Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Employing intertextuality in Abu-Jaber's two selected books reflects the liquid socio-cultural space of her migrant characters and the extent to which both American and Middle Eastern cultures intersect and speak to each other, creating the space of a migrant.[6]

Intertextuality is apparent in the selected texts where poetry, songs, recipes, folktales, Qur'anic verses and news are interwoven in the main narratives. They appear as quoted pieces following Genette's approach and, at the same time, Abu-Jaber's texts do not include simply quotations and allusions to other texts. Rather, Abu-Jaber and Kahf do not present clear or stable meanings. Intertextuality in their texts engages with a text's existence within society and history in view of the fact that it is inextricably connected to the on-going cultural and social processes. As Graham Allen puts it, intertextuality "fore-grounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life" (Allen 2000:5). A cogent example is Kahf's treatment of religious and cultural views which makes her text's meaning understood, in Kristeva's view, as temporary re-arrangement of elements with a socially pre-existent meaning. Hence, my research is an attempt to contribute to an understanding of the position of migrant narratives in the early twenty-first century. In the previous century, American migrant fiction developed from being a "somewhat marginal, minor, and even morally questionable form of writing at the turn of the century into a cradle

[6] See Chapter Two, 2.1. Where "Geography turns liquid".

of artistic innovation and a booming literary field in the wake of postmodernism" (Paul, 2001: 249). In the American literary scene, there was a dedication to the experience of migration "new and old, by a group of writers (white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class) previously not concerned with issues of ethnicity and immigration" (Ibid.). This movement has developed in the twenty-first century with the increasing and intensifying experience of migration to become an essential issue in Arab American writers' works. In this light, Arab American fiction is one representative example of this movement of migrant fiction from the marginal space of the American cultural environment closer to its centre.

According to Steven Salaita, Arabs are "a globalised ethnic group manufactured into ostensible unity by purveyors of racial or religious dogma, a group that in reality has no binding feature other than an intercontinental geographical origin, itself too vast to facilitate unity realistically" (Salaita 2006: 246). The existence of an Arab migrants' community in the United States creates spatial challenges for both Arab Americans and Americans. However, contrary to Salaita's argument, all minorities (Arab, Hispanic; Asian) have become Americans in their way; in the final analysis, these migrants are American despite diversified cultural origins implicated in their pre-migration experiences. This also affects American cultural, social and urban spaces. At the same time, the political, social and psychological previous experiences of migrants "can have an effect on their quality of life, even as they settle in the United States" (Salari 2002: 581). Hence, my study scrutinises the narratives which represent Middle Easterners who are out of the geographical region that once gathered them and reveals the workings of spatial aspects in their life on a different land, in the American space.

While the selected texts for this study vary in their narrative style, they share similar themes and are all a product of a globalised world where home and identity are complex constructs emerging from cultural contact and mobility. The characters' experience in each text is shaped by Middle Eastern and American cultures and politics. I argue here that migrant characters are "postcolonial subject[s] constituted through real and imagined geographical processes and identities, through ongoing conflicts, stereotyping and the fantasising of different parts of the world" (Sharp 2009: 2-3). Hence, understanding the migrant figure requires exploration of the geographies that shape migrants' experiences and identities. Although the selected texts reflect the "fluidity of our contemporary globalised world", they also recognise the existence of rigid borders (Ibid.: 3). These borders are formed in the past and highlighted in the present after the political changes which consequently influence the experience of migration. My argument and analysis in the following chapters

assert that migrants' space is structured, deconstructed and restructured through geographies of reality and imagination, contributing to and revising the theory of geocriticism.

In the domain of geocritical studies, Anglophone Arab literature and Arab American literature is rarely explored. One exception is *The Geocritical Legacies of Edward W. Said: Spatiality, Critical Humanism and Comparative Literature* edited by Robert T. Tally, in which each essay highlights the significance of Said's work for contemporary spatial criticism. One interesting issue this book raises about Said's writing is his demonstration of "the human (all-too-human) need for a sort of figurative mapping, most often in the form of aesthetic productions, of the social, historical, and cultural spaces in which we live and struggle" (Tally 2015: 2). As will be presented in the upcoming chapters, these notions are explored in the narratives of contemporary Arab American authors. With so much writing being published in the last few decades, I believe that it is significant to review these works critically, to reflect on the emergent themes and speculate their future directions, taking into consideration the spatial aspect in representing a world on the move.

My selected texts for this study serve as prominent examples of how the changing spatio-temporal scene has respective impact on the Arab American literary scene. The first anglophone Arab writers reflect in their works "a sense of collective optimism, celebration, and exultation" (Al Maleh 2009: 4). Their writings negotiate boundaries beyond the spaces of birthplace with an in-dwelling contentment. This is unlike the later generations whose works are mostly expressions of pain and agonising dislocation, characteristic of postcolonial hybridity. The writing of the early Arab migrants is a kind of 'metropolitan' hybridity, to borrow R. Radha-Krishnan's words, "ensconced comfortably in the heartland of both national and transnational citizenship" (Radha-Krishnan 1996: 159). This hybridity helped them in negotiating themes of 'identity politics' of both their place of origin and their chosen abode but with less tension than their successors. This does not mean that there are no typical 'now' and 'then, the 'here' and 'there', the 'them' and 'us' in their writing. However, the earlier generation of migrant writers maintained a balance amidst the "disjunctions of temporal and spatial distance, preserving their dual allegiance in so doing" (Al Maleh 2009: 4). They were well-placed within the general atmosphere of the growing materialism of the West and a nostalgia for a purer, pre-industrial world. They were also encouraged by an international readership that was looking for sources of inspiration beyond specific cultural borders. Their literary production is characterised by an attitude "heralding the greater 'pluralism'" that was to characterise much later works like the ones selected for this study (Al Maleh 2009: 4-5). They did not betray their cultural memory or deny their

past or prove disloyal to their country of origin. Rather, they viewed both past and present critically, much like the texts under scrutiny. Ameen Rihani, for example, believed firmly in his country, Lebanon, and saw it in the context of the great Arab heritage. At the same time, he saw the Arab world in the wider context of the family of nations. He considered himself as the beneficiary of "the rich synthesis of Christian-Muslim traditions and was fully aware of the larger perspectives of a global culture and civilization in which peace prevails and harmony exists between East and West" (Ibid.). About America, his second home, he says "Like Greece and Rome, America is developing itself from a conflux of various nations and antithetical elements. The Melting Pot certainly has a soul. And this soul will certainly have a voice. And the voice of America... is destined to become the voice of the world" (Rihani 1921). Describing the American space as a melting pot, here, is significant and worth contemplating as it is used in the later Arab-American novel and in the wider migrant literature. Embracing people of different nations, cultures, ethnicities and religions has brought migrant and white Americans into the common ground of the United States as a geographical location which makes the American space globalised. However, this does not mean that the various backgrounds of its people have completely disappeared. Migrants' different pre-migration cultures and experiences prove to persist as discussed in detail in the consecutive chapters of this thesis.

The liquidity characteristic of the migrant space in America is controversial as it is manifest in two different ways in the texts under study. In one way, liquidity is read in reference to the disregard for borders between migrants of different backgrounds and between migrants and their wider American space as illustrated in Chapter Two. In a different manner, Laila Halaby employs liquid geography and places metaphorically to illustrate the dividing borders that prevent Arab migrants from maintaining a stable life, as illustrated in Chapter Three. These two different readings of liquidity are not contradictory, but rather represent the existence of different scenarios which are affected by the changing political conditions. Rihani describes American cultural space as "being coloured and shaded, impregnated with alien influences, which will embody the noblest expression of beauty and truth that the higher spirit of the Orient and the Occident combined is capable of conceiving" (Rihani 1921). Migrants' influence on American space is manifest in Diana Abu-Jaber's texts, substantiated in the depicted culinary images. Rihani uses the beautiful adjectives of being coloured and shaded to describe the impact of migrants on the general American space. At the same time, he uses the word 'alien' to describe these influences. The beauty and strangeness of the Orient combined with the Occident create this American space. He foresaw how Western and Eastern people in America "will embody also a universal

consciousness, multifarious, multicolour, prismatic... while every people has its own traditions, which differ more or less according to the national, social and historical influences acting upon them, they all find a common soil in America and an uncommon hospitality" (Ibid.). Those notions are present in the much later texts of Arab American writers like the selected ones in this study, yet, they negotiate them within a politically charged atmosphere which challenges the spatial experience of Arab Americans within the historical timeline in these texts.

The selected works in this study show how Arab American writers position their production within the wider American cultural domain. By addressing associated issues of migration, they expose this human experience in spatial terms. On the one hand, they attempt to be part of wider American literature by exposing and exploring the physical and cognitive borders that divide people and prevent a peaceful coexistence. On the other hand, they provide psychological insights into migrant and non-migrant Americans. Their literary techniques show a departure from any formal orthodoxies and tend to seek a free narrative which is not restricted to any borderline.

Emigration, Immigration and Migration

One final note I find worth clarifying is my use of the word 'migration' and its derivations in the selected works of Arab American authors. It is significant to distinguish between the closely related terms of 'emigration', 'immigration' and 'migration'. My choice of the word 'migrant' throughout this study is significant and relative to the overarching argument of the consecutive chapters. The word 'migrant' refers in its general meaning to a process of movement. In the context of this study, migration is the movement of people across borders whether geopolitical or metaphorical. Considering the point of departure of the subjects under study, I do not find the words 'emigrant and immigrant' accurate here. The focus of 'emigration' is the point of departure while 'immigration' focuses on the point of arrival. The texts of Mohja Kahf, Randa Jarra, Diana Abu-Jaber, Laila Halaby and al-Tahawy cannot be considered emigrant literature since they are not a documentation of exile and do not focus on the country of origin and the wrench of migration and the pain of living with one's own milieu. Graeme Dunphy explains in the context of Turkish-Dutch literature that 'emigrant' writing is characterised by its focus on the country of origin and "a sense of rootlessness, disorientation and frustration, often politically committed and critical of the host society" (Dunphy 2001: 20). As will be shown in my analysis of the selected texts, there is no central focus on the country of origin but rather a multi-spatial setting. Besides, the

social criticism in these narratives is not directed to the host society solely but to both the host and the homeland societies. Political commitment is not represented as a commitment to the home country or the host country. We find political criticism of both as in Kahf's and Abu-Jaber's novels where no single stance is taken, but antihumanitarian politics is pointed out regardless of the political body. Thus, I do not categorise the texts under study here as 'emigrant' literature.[7]

My case studies do not completely belong to the category of 'immigrant' literature either. Dunphy characterises this group as a writing about "loss of identity" and the "troubled individual" which is true of Kahf's and Jarrar's coming-of-age female protagonists (Dunphy 2001:20). However, the focus in these two texts is not solely on the country of residence—there is hardly one in Jarrar's text. Furthermore, Dunphy explains that people in immigrant literature are comfortable in their host country or at least in their own closed circles within diaspora. This cannot be said about the migrant characters we encounter in the texts under scrutiny here. If this can describe one stage of the life of the Arab migrants in the American space, it is temporary and vulnerable because of the changing political scenarios in the two regions. In the following chapters, my analysis shows the ongoing process of movement in my selected novels which can be physical and/or metaphorical between homelands and diaspora with no single focus on one geographical space but rather a constellation of geographies which shape the narrative space, its characters, style and themes. Furthermore, the reasons behind the movements undertaken by the characters in the fiction under study vary from one text to another and even within one text. These could be political, economic, psychological or tourism and family visits which are real and/or metaphoric. Hence, I use the word 'migrant' to highlight the ongoing and borderless experience of movement.

Chapters Overview

The texts studied in this thesis are set in some Middle Eastern countries and the United States, providing unique examples to explore how Arab authors represent Arab migrant characters experiencing their American and Middle Eastern surroundings. While each text is treated as a separate literary production emerging from a contingent geographical and historical point, an attempt is made to highlight the spatial features and the continuities and ruptures that exist in both the themes and form of these texts spanning the 1990s and

[7] By antihumanitarian politics I refer to the practices and/or legislations of some governments and their charged political discourses which invoke the presence of migrants, immigrants, emigrants and refugees in their countries as a threat to the host country and its people.

2000s of the Arab American literary space. I argue that this body of literature can provide a better comprehensive image of this transatlantic space and its people. By focusing on the spatial experience of migration represented by Arab characters in America, I further argue that the encounter between the Middle Eastern and American spaces in each of the selected narrative texts initiates a particular understanding of the relation between migrants and their encountered spaces, and on the other hand, understanding the impact of these spaces on the migrant characters.

The texts under study have been written by female authors, reflecting the dominant female literary voice in Arab American fiction.[8] These works belong to the tradition of Arab American women's migrant fiction, exploring the lives of women who have been represented either by their patriarchal home culture or the patronising colonial host. This situation has inspired them to contest and challenge the abounding stereotypical representations of their lives and identities in their writings, either focusing upon women as a repository of national culture when produced by their patriarchal home culture or fixing them in the position of the passive victim of oriental patriarchy and religious practices when produced by the patronising colonial host. In line with what Marlene Goldman argues within the context of Canadian women's writing in her *Paths of Desire*, these fictions "posit a link between a subversive engagement with established discourses and attempts to disrupt the configuration of gender within society at large" (Golman 1997: 4). The difference in the case of the selected writers in this study is that being Arab American women adds the question of race to create a more complex system of subversion and a more elaborate disruption of established discourses. Arab American women writers, however, distinguish themselves by finding a way to relate contemporary Arab American women's writing to the American tradition of the novel. They do so by drawing upon another set of American traditions like multiculturalism and the American dream and on various real and imagined geographical places.

Chapter One is an exploration of *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf and *A Map of Home* by Randa Jarrar. The two texts reflect the spatial experience of two coming-of-age female protagonists in the multicultural space of the United States. I argue in this chapter how these texts are exemplary cognitive maps of the Arab migrant figure in the

[8] It is worth mentioning, here, that women writers outnumber men in the Arab-British context to the extent that Layla Al Maleh describes Arab British literature as "mostly female, feminist, diasporic in awareness, and political in character" (Al Maleh 2009:13). Arab British writers include: Ahdaf Soueif, Fadia Faqir, Leila Aboulela and Sabiha Al Khemir, to mention only a few.

United States. Their journeys are transatlantic and take place between the Middle East and the United States. In their narratives, Kahf and Jarrar perform social and psychic cartography by exploring migrants' space through the character of coming-of-age girls, Khadra and Nidali. These two characters develop through their physical interaction with certain geographical, urban and cultural spaces. I classify these spaces according to the development of these two characters mainly into **spaces of conflict**, **of illumination** and **of reconciliation**. My argument focuses on the relation between space and identity formation for migrants. In other words, every physical geographical and/or urban space migrant characters encounter contributes to their cognitive mapping as Arab, Muslim migrants in the United States.

Chapter Two shows how simple, everyday activities give a polysensorial feature to space as represented in Diana Abu-Jaber in *The Language of Baklava* and *Crescent* through the life of migrant characters. There is a growing correlation between migrants' perception of space and the workings of their varied senses as persistently depicted in the texts. The chapter also attempts to see how sensuous practices and metaphors contribute to the engagement of migrant minorities with their new adopted country; here, the USA. As the previous chapter tackles migrants' cognitive mapping, this chapter critiques the way the feelings and issues of migrants are translated and communicated through the languages of food and storytelling. The multi-sensuous constellation in Abu-Jaber's texts adheres to Westphal's and Tuan's notion of the role of different human senses in understanding a space, and I argue that the migrants' space is no exception and that its complexity requires first close analysis to understand its configuration and then reconfiguation as Abu-Jaber attempts in the selected texts. Through my critical reading of Abu-Jaber's two texts, I argue that interweaving the two elements of food and storytelling in her writing conforms to Westphal's notion of the polysensoriality of space which is here transatlantic, Middle Eastern-American space. Diana Abu-Jaber, here, addresses issues from the experience of migration and the relationship between them and their space, such as cultural identity, cross-culturalism and globalisation.

My argument about the polysensoriality of space has become particularly relevant during the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 when people around the globe have been put under lockdown. Many of them are away from their homes and families never knowing when they are returning home. Places which are usually vibrant, like coffeehouses, restaurants, museums, cinemas, and every place that holds social activities have become silent and deserted. People must find alternatives, so they have resorted to multi-sensuous and novel

ways to adapt to the new lifestyle and face the confusion and uncertainty which have been forced upon them unexpectedly. Social distancing and self-isolation are the most effective ways of defeating the spread of the virus. People are faced with two options: either to self-isolate or to put themselves at the risk of catching the virus which might lead to death. Within the context of migration, people are obliged to choose between leaving their life in the homeland and their beloved people to pursue a better life on another land or to risk their life, human rights and future and stay where they are. Feelings of isolation and social distancing and travel bans have become globally shared conditions at the time of the pandemic. Hence, many people during the lockdown practice multi-sensuous activities to satisfy their need to belong and socially engage within the available spatial environment and their desire for travelling, meeting friends, working and engaging with fellow human beings. Music is played on balconies, food is prepared from scratch, families' and friends' gatherings are held online, to name a few. The polysensorial notion of space as a tool that separates and brings people together is central to my argument in Chapter Two.

Chapter Three explores migrants' space in Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* (2003) and *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) and Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* (2011) as an influencing and controlling tool in migrants' life in post 9/11 America. Middle Easterners living in the United States have been thrust into the forefront of the American psyche since the 9/11 attacks. Considerably, negative attention and stereotypes in the American society have assigned collective guilt to entire Arab American, Muslim and Middle Eastern migrant communities. Literary works like the selected ones in this chapter are an attempt by writers from this community to counterbalance this collective negative view, giving a more realistic perspective. More specifically, my geocritical analysis of these selected texts focuses on how migrants' spatial experience has changed and become intensely politicised after 9/11 events. In other words, what I described as liquid geography in the previous chapter (that is before 9/11) has transformed into rigid, solid geographies. My analysis is not limited to the migrant communities, but it also addresses the non-migrant American issues to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the given scenario.

Each writer in this study attempts to negotiate their migrant characters' position in American space and their homelands, this space is a contested zone due to a revival of Orientalist and stereotypical racial representations of Arabs. These characters live in a "median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half detachments" (Said 1994: 34). This in-between state is intensified by the conflict between traditional Arab values and the freedom and

opportunities America seems to offer. In other words, the migrant figure is caught between resisting the East with its despotic regimes and the West with its portrayal of enslavement and unenlightened others. Accordingly, these characters struggle until they find a place for themselves and claim an Arab identity without being marginalised in American society. By investigating the spatial experience of migrant characters and especially women in all the selected texts, this thesis attempts to contribute to the deconstruction of some stereotypes related to Arab American migrants particularly women characters. Such writings make a significant shift in themes and narrative techniques from their predecessors who tended to assimilate within American cultures which often involved breaking away from traditions and homeland. The texts under study take another direction of highlighting the spatial struggles and represent what it means to live as a "hybrid". They reflect how migrants aspire for coexistence and acculturation which is different from complete assimilation. Their writings also show how reaching an understanding of their position requires understanding of their newfound spaces.

Chapter One: Cognitive Mapping of Migrants' Identity in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home*

> "Liar," she says to the highway sign that claims "The People of Indiana Welcome You." The olive-skinned, dark-haired young woman drives west on the old National Road. A small zippered Quran and a camera are on the hatchback's passenger seat in easy reach, covered by an open map—States of the Heartland. Khadra Shamy spent most of her growing-up years in Indiana. she knows better than the sign.
>
> (Kahf 2006: 1)

The above quotation from the opening passage in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) situates the female protagonist Khadra Shamy's spatial experience at the core of the book. Khadra's gender, religion and diaspora place are identified from the first few lines. The novel traces the development of Khadra as a child whose parents and brother migrated from Syria to the United States. The narrative shows how Khadra's character develops as she moves between different American and Middle Eastern cities. She grows up in Indiana, travels to Makka and Damascus and finally resides in Philadelphia. Every location shows Khadra's position and contributes to her development and understanding of the multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic American space through the different urban and geographical aspects she encounters until she reaches a reconciliation stage in her life in Philadelphia.

Similarly, the spatial experience of the female protagonist Nidali Ammar in Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008) undergoes drastic events that force her to migrate from one country to another, causing a sense of bewilderment and loss that is represented in her sexual disorientation as will be shown later in this chapter. It is a coming-of age novel which follows the first-person account of Nidali, born to a Palestinian father and an Egyptian mother. Nidali is born in Boston and has an American passport, but she spends her early childhood years in Kuwait. Due to the Iraqi-Kuwaiti war, Nidali and her family leave for Egypt where they stay temporarily until they migrate to the United States. These different locations with their multi-spatial aspects contribute to the development of the character of Nidali until she finds her way in life.

Khadra's and Nidali's troubled selves are explored in the spatial stages which I identify in the following sections. Psychological and cognitive chaos continues hand in hand

with the development of the two coming-of-age migrants until they reach the reconciliation stage, a new life of spatial and self-reconciliation where they no longer suffer from conflict and where there is ample stability within them. These spatial elements interrelate and together play a significant role in the development of Khadra's and Nidali's characters and experiences in the American space. The protagonists' journeys are transatlantic and take place between the Middle East and the United States. Kahf and Jarrar perform social and psychic cartography by exploring migrants' space through the character of coming-of-age girls. Khadra's and Nidali's characters develop through their physical interaction with certain geographical, urban and cultural spaces. I classify these spaces according to the development of these two characters mainly into a **space of conflict**, **of illumination** and **of reconciliation**. My argument focuses on the relation between space and identity formation for migrants. In other words, every physical geographical and/or urban space migrant characters encounter contributes to their cognitive mapping as Arab, Muslim migrants in the United States.

It is worth mentioning, here, that by physical geographical space I refer to the natural feature of space like a mountain, a river, a desert or a gulf, and by urban space I refer to the planned and built space by human beings within a city like a mall or an airport, to name a few. Hence, the two selected texts emphasise the role of literature in the process which Fredric Jameson terms "cognitive mapping" and provide an understanding of the experience of migration. Since space in the context of Kahf's and Jarrar's narratives is a mental, cartographic construct as it is being investigated and grappled with all the time, I employ a geocritical approach in my reading of their narratives. The geocritical methodology is a "framework that focuses on the spatial representations within [literary] texts" and also "explores the overlapping territories of actual, physical geography and an author's or character's cognitive mapping in the literary text" (Tally Jr. 2008: 4).[9] According to Robert Tally Jr., one of the fundamental tasks of geocriticism is to analyse and explore "the new cartographies that aid us in making sense of our places and spaces in the world" (Tally Jr. 2013: 114). The new cartographies that could be found in migrant fiction are the developed ways of reconciliation that migrants follow to come to terms with their new life in diaspora as in the case of Khadra and Nidali in this chapter and like the migrant characters' ways in the two next chapters. It is against this provoking background that Arab-American novelists,

[9] For more details on geocriticism, see 'Introduction'.

like Kahf and Jarrar foreground the dilemma of migrant, female characters who develop and reach maturity through the spatial circumstances of their experience as children of migrants.

Physical, socio-cultural and functional grappling with the dictates of space makes it incumbent upon migrants to continuously revise and internalise their ever-tense conception of space. Soja's argument manifests itself in the spatial movements of the protagonists in the two texts. According to Soja, spatial interactions are influenced mainly by three important factors: 'physical distance and its various direct transformations (including accessibility and relative location); socio-cultural homogeneity (under which is included membership in kinship, ethnic, social, and other "identity" groups); and functional complementarity' (Soja 1971: 4). Hence, Khadra's and Nidali's spatial experience develops through their physical interaction with the space(s) of conflict, illumination and reconciliation.

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf and *A Map of Home* are *bildungsroman* novels which serve as rich examples of mapping Middle Eastern migrants' spatial experience in the multicultural space of the USA. One of the narrative features in these two texts is shifting settings in accordance with the female protagonist's physical, spatial movements. The importance of this narrative feature lies in the impact of the various Middle Eastern cities and American space on Khadra and Nidali: their geographical location, cultural and urban spaces. However, they both return to the USA with a sense of hope and a desire to establish a new life. Khadra and Nidali continuously investigate their social and urban spaces within the diaspora as they are politicised. The novelists' representation of the various forms of space in the life of the migrant characters align with Soja's argument that space 'has been shaped and moulded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. *Space is political and ideological*. It is a product literally filled with ideologies' (Soja 1980: 207; emphasis added). Hence, my analysis is an attempt to map these spaces by highlighting their impact on the identity of the female protagonists and how they react and interact with them.

Kahf's depiction of Indiana as arguably a (space of conflict) and Philadelphia a (space of reconciliation) from the point of view of the migrant protagonist in her novel conforms to Soja's characterisation of the urban space. I also find that Kahf's choice of these two specific cities which have different spatial features, whether natural, urban or cultural, is deliberate to reflect the stages of Khadra's personal development and perception of the diasporic life. However, the representation of Damascus (space of illumination) serves as a metamorphosis stage for Khadra. Like Kahf, Jarra is a migrant author who writes about

the experience of migration in her novel *A Map of Home* through the lens of a coming-of-age female protagonist. Jarrar was born in 1978 to an Egyptian mother and a Palestinian father in Chicago, and the family moved to Kuwait two months later (Jarrar 2020). As a child of migrants, like Nidali in the text, she lived in different places, including Kuwait and Alexandria, and witnessed political events unfolding in the Middle East, like the Gulf War (1990-1991) before she ended up in New York. Hence, the experience of migration of the two protagonists, Khadra and Nidali, is highly influenced by spatial aspects such as geographical, urban and cultural spheres as will be discussed in the following sections in detail. Jarrar's depiction of Palestine, Kuwait and Alexandria as arguably a (space of conflict), Alexandria becomes also a (space of illumination) and Texas a (space of reconciliation) traces the cognitive map of Nidali. While migrants experience an enhanced perception of such spaces, they acquire the ability to be at one with both worlds. Only through mapping and remapping can these cartographic signposts they can survive the dilemma of being migrants whose real home is less understandable or recognisable.

1.1. Space of Conflict

By ***space of conflict***, I refer to the space where migrant characters struggle with a fractured identity and where the senses of disorientation and detachment are crucial to their development. For example, on the first pages of *The Girl,* Khadra the central consciousness of the novel is depicted as returning to Indiana, the State where she is brought up as a Muslim migrant and the one which has contributed to her sense of dislocation. She reacts disapprovingly to the welcome signpost along the road which is introduced as both rebuffing and revolting: '"Liar," she says to the highway sign that claims, "The People of Indiana Welcome You."' (Kahf 2006: 1). The State of Indiana is the place from where she escaped searching for her position in the world and in the USA as a Muslim migrant woman. Kahf attempts to demystify the image of the Muslim woman in her poetry and critical work as well. What distinguishes her works is her writing in an "adoring portrait of a woman wearing a face veil" as in "My Babysitter Wears a Face Mask" from her *E-Mails from Scheherazad* (2003), an attire which is considered extreme and threatening among the "vast majority of the literati in the Muslim world" (Mattawa 2008: 1591). Yet, Kahf does not address the Muslim countries in her writings. Rather, she addresses a largely Western audience by presenting seemingly intolerable Muslims through which she challenges the contemporary "diversity discourse *to make room* for them" (Ibid., emphasis added). The opening lines which capture Khadra's feelings upon coming back to Indiana are full of implications in terms of space. The immediate response of Khadra towards her visit to central Indiana is

based upon her experience within its social space. The physical open-map in the passenger seat is a token of the correspondence between her cognitive mapping of the American space she is now part and parcel of and the acquired sense of "mapping" her new existence after her interactive spatial experience with different cities. This is apparent in her differentiation between the welcoming signpost and the unwelcoming geographical and social spaces of the city and her turbulent, contradictory feelings. After residing in Indiana for some time, Khadra still cannot seem to find her place in it, resentful of the state's flatness and urban homogeneity that excludes diversity. The flatness of Indiana's natural and urban geographies is a representation of its social space, which is hostile to migrants.

In *The Girl*, Carol Fadda-Conrey considers the opening passage of Khadra's return to Indiana as "an entryway into reassessing the trajectories of belonging to the places and homes to which she has been imaginatively and physically connected throughout her life" (Fadda-Conrey 2014: 70). Although I agree with Fadda-Conrey's observation on the opening passage as a reassessment of Khadra's relationship with the places and spaces which contributed to the development of her character, I would extend her argument further and shed light on the fact that these places do not only contribute to Khadra's sense of belonging. I think that this passage is not only for reassessing Khadra's relation with these places, but it also highlights the role of human geography and physical geography in improving and/or deteriorating the experience of migration.[10] On the one hand, the passage foregrounds and asserts the seemingly negative spatial experience, the physical geographical space reflecting the social one, of the protagonist in Indiana which is elaborated as the narrative proceeds. On the other hand, it also highlights the cultural, social and urban factors in Khadra's life that have accompanied her on the journey. From the first passage of the book, Kahf introduces Khadra speaking to and of physical geography and identity, pointing to and proving their importance. Khadra does not speak of her identity only but speaks broadly of the coordinates of a map "in which nation, belonging and identity fluctuate but never really coincide" (Cariello 2014: 227). This first passage in the novel also puts cognitive mapping at the core of the text. For one thing, it shows how far Khadra clings to two vital props throughout her journey: the Quran and the camera. The Quran stands for her Islamic ideologies in life and from which Kahf quotes repeatedly while the camera becomes the

[10] Human geography and physical geography are two main branches in the science of geography. Human geography studies people and includes cultural, urban and social geographies beside other sub-branches while physical geography mainly deals with the natural characteristics of the Earth. For more information on geography and its branches and their particular focus, visit the Geography Realm website on: https://www.geographyrealm.com/what-are-the-branches-of-geography/.

reason she returns to Indiana on a job, tasked to shoot photos of the community within which she was raised. These two symbols represent Khadra's commitment to space, which are notions of human geography, past and present. Another significant symbol which reflects the cognitive relationship between Khadra and Indiana is a map of "States of the Heartland" which is a clear reference to physical geography (Kahf 2006: 1). Why would Khadra, who knows the place very well as she grew up in it and even knows it "better than the sign" need the map? Her need for a map can be read as a sign of her inner loss and dislocation in this city which despite the years has not changed.

On different occasions, Kahf describes Indiana as an alienating space in which migrants are unable to map (in their mind) their position or the urban totality in which they find themselves. Not only is the urban space to which Khadra reacts described as alienating; but so, too, is the social space. Disalienation or as I would call it, here, migrants' spatial integration, as Jameson suggests, "involves the practical reconquest of a sense of place and the reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories" (Jameson 1991: 51). In other words, migrants' disalienation or spatial integration in their diaspora space is possible when they engage with the place they inhabit by relying on their memories of other familiar places from their past. Although these memories might be negative, visiting their site works as a positive factor in helping migrants reconcile their past and integrate with their new space. Unlike trauma theory which centres on the passivity of the traumatised subject, I would argue that cognitive mapping and disalienation/spatial integration is an inner process of subjectivity where the former (i.e. cognitive mapping) leads to the latter (i.e. spatial integration) (Felman and Laub 1992; Caruth 1996). Spaces where migrant characters have a negative experience like Khadra's parents' memories in Damascus, Khadra's memories in the Dawah Centre and Indiana, Nidali's father's torturing memories in Palestine and Nidali's negative experience visiting Palestine contribute to having a positive experience in diaspora space when revisited. Hence, through the process of cognitive mapping, migrants could reach a sense of disalienation and/or spatial integration. Khadra's, her family's and other migrants' disalienation and continuous remapping of their routes are achieved through the reconstruction of their social space and extending it till it is part of the total space of the vaster American space.

Khadra's construction of her identity as well as her attempt to create a space for herself within the American space always implies a physical movement and a change in the actual space she inhabits. Cariello argues that Khadra's spiritual journey is manifested and

engineered by her physical movements and the change of locations and the ground under her feet as well as "the bodies surrounding her, and the scents, horizons and architectures" embracing her throughout her journey (Cariello 2014: 228). Thus, Khadra can be pictured as an agent through which Kahf draws a map or an illustration of the Middle East and America and their contrasting lines. Cariello's note on the significance of the physical movements and engagement of Khadra with the different forms of surroundings and spaces manifests the role of space and its influence on identity formation. Yet, I would stress, here, that the spatial influence on the character of Khadra is heightened because of the condition of being a migrant. It is the experience of migration that makes Khadra more engaging and aware of the particularities of the places she visits. That is to say, if Khadra were not a migrant, her character might have been affected differently and, consequently, developed by what she experiences in these places in a different way; for instance, a tourist's experience is different from a migrant's.

Kahf sheds light on the gap Khadra struggles to overcome between being a female Muslim migrant from the Middle East and being American by nationality. This perplexity is manifested in the scene on the day her father announced they are becoming American citizens: "The five of them walked into the Marion County Courthouse in Indianapolis like a family in mourning" (Kahf 2006: 141). For Khadra, obtaining American citizenship "felt like giving up, giving in. after all she'd been through at school, defending her identity against the jeering kids who vaunted America's superiority as the clincher put-down to everything she said, everything she was" (Ibid.). Khadra's sense of loss increases after obtaining American nationality. This is shown in the varied reaction of the Dawah Center community and the predominantly Afro-American Salam Mosque community to her father's citizenship *khutba* (sermon). Some of them consider it treason to the cause of Arabs and Muslims as America is an active participant in exacerbating conflict in the Middle East, whilst others agree with Wajdy, Khadra's father, that there are "Islamic qualities" in America such as "Law and order, cleanliness, democracy, freedom to work and honestly seek the provision of the Lord" (Kahf 2006: 144). The ethnic diversity within the Dawah Center and the contentious attitudes towards certain political and national issues, such as obtaining American nationality contribute to Khadra's perplexity and lead her to pursue further studies about Islam and its different schools, which are distinct from her parents' or any subjective viewpoint she has encountered within the Dawah community.

The Dawah Center can be considered a temporary space of comfort before it develops into a space of conflict. On the one hand, it forms a focal point for the Shamy

family to position themselves in central Indiana where Khadra and other migrant children in the community learn the basics of their religion and find social support until their roads diverge.[11]Thus, it might not appear a space of conflict at first sight; however, I would categorise it under the classification of space of conflict for three reasons. First, the physical position of the centre, which is located close to the Fallen Timbers Townhouses where the migrant families live, is at the edge of Indianapolis, indicating the distanced position of migrants from the social space of the city.[12] The Dawah Center is an example of Michel Foucault's heterotopia as a space of othering.[13] While the Centre is supposed to bring migrants closer to the social space of the city, being closer than their houses to the heart of the city, it is farther distancing them from it: "The Center was only a mile from the Fallen Timbers Townhouses at the edge of Indianapolis, but technically lay within the city limits of Simmonsville, a small, economically depressed town" (Kahf 2006: 38). Second, it is a source of conflict for Khadra who notices the ethno-racial diversity within its community. For example, her parents make comments on blackness and whiteness and refuse that their children marry an African Muslim despite the invalidity of this classification in Islamic norms. My last reason behind considering the Dawah Center a space of conflict is its relation to the larger non-migrant social space of Indiana. Kahf draws a picture indicating the spatial relation between the community of the Dawah centre and the larger community of Indiana by depicting the corporal position of Zuhura, a young, Afro-American active member in the community.

1.1.1. Being a Muslim Female of Colour in a Space of Conflict

Through the character of Zuhura in *The Girl*, Kahf stresses the struggle of women of colour in establishing their position within the American space. Zuhura observes the protest of antagonistic onlookers, a group called American Protectors, led by a man named Orvil Hubbard against the Muslim presence and the space engulfing migrants like herself from the

[11] It is worth noting, here, that the Dawah Centre and mosques in general as places of worship for Muslims are not supposed to reflect a monolithic consciousness. Rather, Islam and the term 'Muslim' denote an assemblage of ethnicities, nationalities and cultural heritage. In spatial terms, places of worship are supposed to be borderless in the political or ethnic sense. Kahf and Jarar interestingly highlight how these places are sometimes politicised and/or misused.

[12] Reflecting migrants' sense of alienation through the spatial setting is also employed in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993). The migrant Jordanian family in the text is situated in a poor white neighbourhood. The town of Euclid becomes the home of this transplanted family, and it is described as a space of conflict: "Euclid, New York, was virtually the same as it had been one hundred years ago when two roads intersected and that point was named" (Abu-Jaber 1993: 88).

[13] See 'Introduction', p. 8.

centre. Her confrontational spatial position introduces her murder later on at the hand of the Ku Klux Klan although the case of her murder is never resolved in the text. Zuhura's character is described as struggling hard to come to terms with the social space of Indiana unlike most black women in the same city. Her personality is represented as an exceptional example; unlike most Afro-American women, she does not "fit into this landscape" of Indiana (Kahf 2006: 44). The first action taken by Hubbard against the Dawah community is calling the Immigration and Naturalisation authorities, accusing the community of harbouring illegal immigrants. During the building inspector's visit to the centre and while measuring the shutters, Zuhura points out that "zoning law has often been used as a tool to keep people of other races out" (Kahf 2006: 43). The inspector pays no attention to her and Wajdy Shamy signals for her to go to her house which she disapproves. This is because she is not like "most of the Indiana black women" who live in the social landscape of central Indiana by the unspoken rules of "getting along" in this place (Ibid.). Kahf's delineation of Zuhura's character is one example that refutes the Western stereotype of Muslim women. Her sharp rational faculties and self-confidence are not what the locals think they know about migrants who look like Zuhura which makes her physical presence a challenge "to knowledge held dear" (Ibid.: 44). Further, Zuhura becomes the first active black woman in the Muslim Council at Bloomington campus who organises events on Islam. All these events lead to Zuhura's murder and shed light on the Western stereotype of the Muslim woman as a victim and/or a rebellious escapee from Islam. Instead of searching for the killers or questioning the "American Protectors", the police arrest and question Zuhura's Arab, Muslim fiancé, and the *Indianapolis Star* reports the murder as "*Honor Killing—Middle Eastern Connection*" with a column on "the oppression of women in Islam" (Ibid.: 97). The police and the local media suggest and adopt the Western Victim-Escapee narrative in Zuhura's case and her killers are never caught.[14]Zuhura's story emphasises central Indiana as a space of conflict for Khadra and increases her personal conflict and detachment. Zuhura becomes a symbol for Khadra and the young girls of the community. Years later, Khadra remembers Zuhura's story and wonders "what if she'd been just a regular Muslim girl trying to make her way through the obstacle course—through the impossible, contradictory hopes the Muslim community had for her, and the infuriating, confining assumptions the Americans put on her?" (Ibid.: 358). To Khadra, she is a "girl looking for a way to be, just *be*, outside that tug-of-war" (Ibid., original emphasis).

[14] For details on the western Victim-Escapee narrative about Muslim women, see "The Pity Committee and the Careful Reader: How Not to Buy Stereotypes about Muslim Women" by Kahf.

Religion plays a distracting and constructing role for Khadra.[15] Reading the text, religion can be seen as central to portraying Khadra's passage of development whose spatial realisation illuminates her in many ways, and to creating shifting and conflicting spaces for the main migrant characters in the text. For example, Khadra's upbringing within the diasporic space is strictly religious as her parents choose to live close to the Dawah Centre and its social environment whose religious ideologies influence her childhood character. At the age of sixteen and after the family becomes American by nationality, Khadra upholds a radical religious view fostering her identity as a Muslim woman. In this way, she "donned black headscarves with a surge of righteous austerity that startled her parents", becoming "stern in dress and gaze" (Kahf 2006: 149) and further going on a regime of dates and water "to emulate the diet of the Prophet" (Ibid.: 153). Khadra's struggle is shown through her relation with her veil. Khadra's behaviour can be considered a psychological reaction to the ethnic discrimination she is suffering from at this stage. Racial/ethnic discrimination is defined as "a chronic stressor that arouses physiological responses such as anger, frustration, and helplessness" (Abdulrahim et al. 2012: 2116). At this stage, she struggles because she is torn between her American life and the values of her traditional migrant parents, expressing her anger towards obtaining American nationality.[16] Khadra's radicalism does not last long and her religious view changes as she travels to Saudi for pilgrimage and then to Syria which also changes her perception of her social space in the USA.

Despite Kahf's upbringing in a devout household and her three-generation extended family with Muslim Brotherhood roots, she criticises the group's narrow interpretation of Islam.[17] She believes that it is an "anticolonial political movement that is just not spiritual enough to incorporate all facets of Islam" (MacFarquhar, 2007). However, in an interview, Kahf expresses her dismay that Islam "is being painted as extremist and terroristic, not only

[15] The female Muslim characters are interesting, and this could be one reason behind the dominance of female voice and representation in literature. Women's experiences as migrants are "more fraught than their male counterparts" because women are faced with a more severe divide between the private and public spheres (Santesso 2013: 4). More specifically, their bodies become contested spaces through which they negotiate religious identity. This is reflected, for instance, in Muslim women's dress code and *hijab*. This religion-gender issue appears not only in terms of sexual politics (as it appears in Jarrar's text), but it also shows in symbolic politics, including the ongoing debate over the Islamic veil as can be seen in Kahf's novel.

[16] For more interesting ideas on the association between discrimination and psychological distress for Arab Americans, see Sawsan Abdulrahim, Sherman A. James, Rouham Yamout, and Wayne Baker, 'Discrimination and psychological distress: Does Whiteness matter for Arab Americans?', Social Science & Medicine 75.12 (2012): 2116-2123.

[17] Mohja Kahf travelled from Syria to the United States in 1971, before her fourth birthday (MacFarquhar, 2007). Her family went into exile because her father was a member of the banned Muslim Brotherhood in Syria (Ibid.).

in Western media but by secular Arabs, Arab feminists, and other in the Arab world who consider themselves 'progressive'" (Davis, Zine and Taylor, 2007: 383). Hence, in her novel *The Girl*, she treats questions of migrant identity and redefines Muslim American women's subjectivity within the context of the Muslim community, presenting to her readers various versions of Islam. By so doing, she denounces the essentialised clichés and Orientalist ideas about Muslims "—generally non-white, people—ideas which have achieved a startling prominence at a time when racial or religious misrepresentations of every other cultural group are no longer circulated with such impunity" (Said 1997: xi-xii). Kahf's novel not only tackles the experience of migration but also depicts the pluralistic view of Islam as an influential factor in the spatial experience of migration as it appears in the character of the female protagonist Khadra.

To enhance Khadra's sense of confusion, her journey to perform *Hajj* (pilgrimage) in Makkah, Saudi Arabia confronts her with a different Middle Eastern social and religious space. Khadra's fluctuating sense of belonging and detachment, of a multi-dimensional identity is shown during this trip. In the beginning, she expresses the sense of belonging she feels when "They landed. At last, Khadra thought, someplace where we really belong. It's the land of the Prophet. The land of all Muslims" (Ibid.: 159). This feeling of belonging does not last for long because once the family is in the airport "Three lanes separated people for visa processing: Saudi and Gulf nationals, U.S. and European passport holders, and "Others." Khadra was dismayed to find that she and her family fell in behind the American couple in the U.S. line" (Ibid.). These words capture Khadra and her family in the cosmic world of the airport which throbs with conflicting vestiges of space based on identitarian, geopolitical categorisation. The scene can also be considered a space of conflict for Khadra as her fractured identity is highlighted. Kahf represents the two contradicting feelings of belonging and detachment in one place, the airport. Border sites help to understand globalisation and bordering processes in which geopolitical borders appear more as "zones, bands, intensities of control—and crucially, contestation" (Andrijasevic 2010: 977-978). Khadra feels a sense of belonging to a certain geographical space as a Muslim. Yet, her feeling as a migrant is reflected in the control system in airports which puts Khadra and her family in a separate line from others. Further, her detachment from the social space is reflected when she is treated as an *Other*.

Khadra's sense of detachment and loss is increased by her identity as a Muslim regardless of her Arab ethnicity. For example, she is torn between her orthodox Muslim parents and the different schools of Islam she encounters within the Dawah Center

community and the different cultural norms in the various places she visits, which augments her inner chaos. These conflicting ideologies within her are reflected in her hijab style which will change as it will be shown later in accordance with her character's development. Khadra's bewilderment and chaotic state reach the climax point after her divorce and abortion. Her disagreement with her parents on her life choices, like her divorce, abortion, living away from the family and finally marrying an African-American man encourages her to break the spatial boundaries which she has been living within. These boundaries include Indiana with its geographical and social spaces besides, and more significantly, the migrants' community, her traditional parents and the American socio-politics.

Khadra's relation with the Dawah Centre conforms to Jamie Brassett's idea that "[a] material space, a space which oozes, is a necessary production of both the dislocation of the map/thing-mapped dialectic and the promotion of myriad vectors constitutive of subjectification" (Brassett 1994: 18). A person can achieve his/her own material space by continuously negotiating, as migrants do, the relationship between real and imagined spaces. As such, a migrant character like Khadra negotiates her connection with the Dawah Centre and its community as she grows up and her character develops. Consequently, she grasps her position as an individual and as a Muslim, migrant woman living in the USA. Kahf's and Jarrar's treatment of religious space and its influence on migrants' spatial experience highlights its effect on the experience of migration. Edward Said argues in *Orientalism* (1978) how "imaginative geography" represents different types of space based on the distinctions made by individuals or groups. Kahf's Dawah Centre is a clear physical and imaginative example of Said's argument which forms a familiar space for the migrant Muslim community. For the Dawah community, the familiar cultural, religious and social space of the Centre becomes 'ours' while an unfamiliar space outside its imaginative borders becomes 'theirs'. Said identifies this as a process "of making geographical distinctions that can be quite arbitrary. . . . It is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our own minds; 'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from 'ours'" (Said 1978: 54). Hence, it is this complicated and limited space which Khadra finds conflicting and restricting from her integration into her American space.

In *A Map of Home*, although there is no place of worship like in *The Girl* which exemplifies Nidali's conflict, religion is still employed by the author in Nidali's spatial development. Yet, the religious element has little effect on Nidali's spatial experience in comparison to its role in Khadra's. Like Khadra, Nidali is keen on participating in a competition for memorising Quran. Her father helps her in choosing some short verses for

the competition and explains that this should not be for the sake of winning the competition but rather to guide her in her life as "Life itself is a test" (Jarrar 2008: 45). Nidali succeeds in winning the competition. Despite the small number of female participants, Nidali joins the competition and has her certificate amended to have the female suffix which is added to the already printed one addressed to male participants. This incident shows Nidali's determination to prove herself capable of whatever she sets her mind to despite the obstacles she might encounter. Despite her presence in Kuwait, a Middle Eastern, Islamic country, Nidali is able to participate in the competition, a space predominantly occupied by male participants, unlike Khadra who is denied participating in a Quran competition held in the USA. Khadra is unable to participate in the competition because the sponsors limit it to males only. This incident increases Khadra's inner conflict and pushes her to step away from the community of Dawah Centre because this discrimination on gender-basis is not Islamic.

In comparison to Khadra, Nidali is not concerned with the religious and/or cultural norms of her family. In the case of Khadra, she is represented as an obedient child who follows her parents' Islamic and cultural norms; she even goes to extremes at some stage of her coming-of-age years so much that she follows a diet of eating dates only. She also experiences personal dilemmas in her relationships, her marriage, divorce and the second marriage for example, until she reaches a conciliation point by stepping away from the imposing environment of the Dawah Center and her family. Nidali, on the other hand, decides to conduct her life according to her own set of values and norms. While Khadra's relationships adhere to religious and cultural norms, she bases her decisions on religious and cultural norms that she establishes in her first and second marriages. Nidali, on the other hand, never commits to any boundaries and instead lives as if she is on a journey of discovery. Nidali's identity crisis begins on the day of her birth, signalling the start of a long journey of self-discovery.

1.1.2. Home as a Source of Conflict

From the beginning of *A Map of Home*, Jarrar introduces Nidali as the central consciousness of the story by narrating the scene of her birth in Boston and the incident of her father giving her a boy's name presupposing that the baby is a boy then changing it by adding the suffix "i" to feminise it. Starting with the names of the characters, which is the

reason, perhaps, why the first chapter is entitled "Our Given Names",[18] Jarrar reflects the Palestinians' struggle in finding their position and a home in the American space. Nidali (meaning 'my struggle' in Arabic) is the name of the female protagonist. This name has a double reference in the story. It could be her father's struggle as he tries throughout the narrative to raise his daughter carrying her home country Palestine within herself: "moving was part of being Palestinian. Our people carry the homeland in their souls" besides his struggle to find a home for his family (Jarrar 2008: 2). It could be also Nidali's struggle as she tries to adapt herself to the changing geographical, cultural and social spaces she moves to throughout the narrative besides her struggle against her father's determination that she adopts his norms of living as a migrant in the United States.

Gradually, the story develops as a struggle of this girlchild on two interrelated levels. On the one hand, Nidali's quest for identity is thoroughly aggravated and propelled by the condition of migration which influences the whole family. As Cariello argues, Nidali's feelings of estrangement and inadequacy resonate "in the interstitial space between childhood and adulthood, and at the same time, *between geographical territories* left behind and the unknown ones ahead" (Cariello 2014: 274, emphasis added). Taking Cariello's observation further, it could be maintained that the geographical territories are so significant that they influence the characterisation and the choice of setting (historical and geographical) to construct a textual map of the Middle East from the 1960s to the 1980s. By highlighting the historical events happening in the area and their consequences for Palestinians, Jarrar emphasises the significance of the geographical place and its influence on its subjects (migrants). The lack of a homeland for Palestinians ruins any sense of belonging. In Edward Said's words, "Every Palestinian achievement is flawed by this paradoxical truth, that any survival outside Palestine is ruined in a sense by its impermanence, its groundlessness, its lack of a specifically Palestinian sovereign will over the future" (Said 1979:155). The specific place of the Middle East at the specific times of *Nakba*, the Palestinian exodus in 1948, *an-Naksah*, "The Setback" in 1967 and the Gulf War in 1990, have ostensibly influenced the migration movements of the Ammar family. As discussed in the 'Introduction', this spatio-temporal frame line contextualises Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope in the novel, and understanding "an intense phase of time-space compression" is the key to

[18] The name of Nidali's father is Waheed which means "alone, or lonely". This can be a reference to his loneliness in his struggle to preserve the map of Palestine. It can also be a reference to his failure in this struggle. Giving his daughter the name Nidali (meaning my struggle) is a reference to his struggle of preserving the Palestinian identity and map in his children.

understanding postmodernity (Harvey 1990: 284). The notion of time-space compression necessitates the erosion of barriers between time and space. The consequences of the historical events in Palestine and other Middle Eastern countries do not have limited borders to stop at. Rather, they extend to the present and the future of migrants whose lives are impacted. These consequences also lead to the implosion of spatial boundaries as they extend to cause geopolitical turmoil that affects migrants. One result is the chaotic, shattered socio-psychic self which controls their cognitive positioning in the world.

At first, Nidali positively responds to her father's attempts at teaching her to draw the map of Palestine. This stresses her fractured identity as a migrant child torn between where she lives and where her ancestors belong. However, she eventually develops her own version of the map by deleting all borders and having a white page: "Baba told me go get a blue book from the bookshelf, "PALESTINE IS MY COUNTRY" in big white letters on its side . . . Baba flipped to a page with the real map of Palestine on it and made me trace the map and draw it over and over again . . . Baba checked my last map of home, he called it" (Jarrar 2008: 68, emphasis added). This quote clarifies how Nidali does not have the same concept of the map of home as her father and is merely following his instructions of drawing the map he believes to be the map of his home. Despite the safe and stable life Nidali leads with her family in Kuwait, it is a space of conflict on a personal level. This is because of the constant attempts of her "Palestinian" father to map his daughter's route in life according to certain norms and a modelling agenda which Nidali wholeheartedly rejects.

Jarrar delineates the character of Waheed as a traditional representation of the exilic person who is "banished from one's homeland" (Naficy 1999: 9). The loss of the referent homeland for Waheed triggers his inability to live in the new available places for him, such as Alexandria after fleeing Kuwait. Even in Kuwait where he has a job and a safe environment, his attempts to position himself within different social and cultural space(s) are affected by his being a migrant. I find Jarrar's urban description as well as the location of Waheed's flat in Kuwait along with his social relations cleverly and interestingly described to establish the connectedness and disconnectedness of the migrant character of Waheed and his varying, interacting space(s). In the 1970s, Kuwait was a "haven for Arab intellectuals and for people who wanted to live in apartments that did not resemble shelters" and apparently Waheed is one of them (Jarrar 2008: 9). Moving to Kuwait is not the first transition for Waheed: in his first year of marriage he has already moved twice: once from Egypt to Boston and then from Boston to Alexandria. Waheed explains these travels to Nidali as part of the price of being Palestinian: "Our people carry the homeland in their souls.

You can go wherever you want, but you'll always have it in your heart." (Ibid.). For Nidali, it is a heavy load to carry: later, she decides to free herself from carrying it as she decides to have her own map in life both physically and metaphorically.

Jarrar's text provides pivotal spaces in Nidali's life: those of the so-called home and diaspora. The title of Jarrar's book foregrounds the cartography of home for Palestinian migrants. The indefinite article could be read as reminiscent of the map of Palestine, though it is not clear in the text if home in the title refers to Palestine or any other country, as it changes and suggests that the map in the book is just one of other possible maps of home or Palestine that could have different cognitive meanings for Palestinians.[19] Marta Cariello argues that Jarrar's novel, as its title suggests, is a search for the cartography of home (2014: 276). The cover of the book presents a girl riding a bicycle against the background of the map of part of the Middle East: the Arabian Gulf countries highlighting Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine. The highlighted countries in the cover are the places amongst whose political relations the destiny of the family as migrants is formed. The backof the cover shows part of the northern coast of Africa showing the Mediterranean port of Alexandria where the family lives for a short time before their final migration to the United States. The continuous movements and the interaction with the different social spaces in Kuwait and Alexandria contribute to her perception and creation of Nidali's space later in the USA. Like Khadra's spatial experience, Nidali's encounters as a migrant can be read as going through spaces of conflict, spaces of illumination and spaces of reconciliation.

Jarrar contextualises the personal dilemmas of the characters within the larger socio-political space of the Arab world. The book represents the struggle of Palestinian migrants cognitively mapping their position in a new land through three main characters who struggle with every journey they undertake as a family. First, there is Nidali, the coming-of-age female protagonist who constantly tries to adapt to new geographical, cultural, personal and social spaces. Next, there is Waheed, Nidali's Palestinian father who leaves his home country Palestine as a young man to study architecture in Egypt in the 1960s and is deprived of the right to return. Finally, there is Fairuza, Nidali's Egyptian-Greek mother. Like Kahf's narrative, Jarrar's characterisation along with her employment of shifting settings (spatial and temporal or geographical and historical) and polyphony could be read as a cognitive

[19] See Appendices, Figure 1. for the changing geopolitical map of Palestine over years.

cartography of a Middle Eastern migrant family in the United States.[20] The book opens in Boston where Nidali is born, and then the narration develops in Kuwait, Egypt and finally Texas, where the family settles permanently.

Cognitive mapping can be discerned in the characters' attempt to draw a map of Palestine which is apparently a source of anxiety for Nidali. According to Nidali and her father Waheed, there are two versions of the map of Palestine. The first one is based on Waheed's knowledge of the actual map and the political circumstances which have changed its geopolitical borders and his first-hand experience in the country. The second version of the map is Nidali's; a map that grows from her father's directions of drawing it according to the actual map of the country before the Israeli occupation, i.e. before 1948 and 1967. Jarrar, thus, emphasises the overlapping borders between physical and cognitive maps—a concept that lends itself to geocritical interpretation. Simultaneously, she demonstrates how history and memory shape real and imagined maps that serve as literary metaphors for Palestinian migrants and their geographical experiences. The difference between Waheed's version of the map of Palestine and his daughter's is their different relation to Palestine as a homeland. While Waheed is rooted in Palestine as a home country, having grown up living in it amongst his fellow Palestinian people, witnessing and suffering from the consequences of its wars, Nidali lacks this link to the country and has a totally different sense of home which Jarrar reveals every time her protagonist Nidali moves to a new country.

Palestine as a space of conflict functions as a cognitive source of conflict for Waheed and his daughter. Waheed's map of Palestine is the result of the accumulation of his historical spatial knowledge of Palestine. His cognitive map represents Palestine according to his memory of the actual map by manifesting it in teaching his daughter Nidali to draw it according to the pre-*Nakba* map.[21] The *Nakba* as well as other historical events in the Middle East form a key element in migrant authors' narratives. Hence, understanding the spatial-historical context of the experience of migration is necessary for revealing its impact on the migrant figure. According to Jo Guldi, "every discipline in the humanities and social

[20] In her debut novel *The Parisian* (2019), Isabella Hammad provides a dynamic spatial representation of a transnational era and a history that was unfolding and changing the map of the world at the critical time between the two World Wars. Within the spatial context, the novel can be understood as a textual atlas of the Levantine and French locations that make up the text's physical setting. In terms of chronological and geographical contrasts, Hammad's novel, like Jarrar's and Kahf's, tracks the evolving sense of identity in the aftermath of the political, social and cultural transformations of the time. In her work 'Mapping Spaces, Identities, and Ideologies in *The Parisian* (2019), Dr Fadwa Abdel Rahman gives an interesting geocritical reading of Hammad's text.

[21] See Appendices, Figure 2 for the map of Palestine before the 1948 *Nakba*.

sciences has been stamped with the imprint of spatial questions about nations and their boundaries, states and surveillance, private property, and the perception of landscape" (Guldi 2020:5). Later in the text, Waheed gives up his insistence on the pre-*Nakba* borders of Palestine (before the Israeli occupation of most of the Palestinian territories) and declares that no one would know the lines of the map. Despite his insistence on teaching his daughter the contours of Palestine, he is unable to fulfil his attempt to dictate the story of his people which Cariello notes as an explicit metaphor for Palestinian history (Cariello 2014). Nur Masalha observes that "the Nakba remains a key site of Palestinian collective consciousness and the single most important event that connects all Palestinians to a specific point in time" (Masalha 2012: 206). Waheed tries to narrate the story of his people and their historical struggle, but despite the long hours Nidali spends waiting for him to express his feelings and speak about his memories, this is never fulfilled. Jarrar's delineation of Waheed's unfulfilled narrative of his Palestinian heritage and his memories can be understood as a translation of the disappointment of the Palestinian cause and the loss of hope in restoring the map of Palestine. This frustration is due to the unprecedented support given to Israel by Clinton's administration and the United Nations which has changed the demographic map of Palestine along with its geopolitical borders.[22] The different representations of Palestine, the one that Waheed has lived and kept in his memory that becomes only a drawn map or a literary textual representation but one that does not exist on the actual map of the world, and the current map of Palestine conform to the geocritical basic norm of the interaction between the "real and fictional" spaces.

Nidali's struggle is enhanced through her direct physical interaction with certain places where her migrant identity resonates. For example, Jarrar's description of the journey to or out of Palestine highlights the nature of the so-called real maps which are mere drawings that do not reflect the reality of the represented lands and cannot represent the road map of migrants. On their journey to Palestine to bury Nidali's grandfather, Waheed's father, Nidali checks the map and asks her father, "Why can't we just drive there, or take a plane straight there?" (Jarrar 2008: 95). It is through the Jordanian border that the family can enter

[22] Clinton's administration modified at least four policies on the Middle East in support of Israel, like openly allowing the use of U.S. funds to finance the growth of Jewish settlements in Arab East Jerusalem and other occupied territories, permitting Israeli rule over Arab Jerusalem, endorsing Israel's right to deport Palestinians and accepting Israel's contention that the Arab territories captured by Israel in 1967 are "disputed" rather than "occupied" (Neff 1994: 20). On 29 November 2012, the United Nations decided "to accord to Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations" (Cited in Zimmermann 2012: 304). For more information on the status of 'Palestine' before the International Criminal Court on the basis of the 2009 Ad Hoc declaration, see Andreas Zimmermann's article "Palestine and the International Criminal Court Quo Vadis?" (2012) and Alain Pellet's "The Palestinian Declaration and the Jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court" (2010).

Palestine. This shows how she is torn between the cognitive (metaphorical) map of the country that she has harboured in her mind so far and the physical and legal one superimposed upon her and other Palestinians. Nidali contemplates her geographical surroundings while travelling from the airport in Jordan to the Palestinian border. Immediately, the young girl starts comparing it to Kuwait and Egypt: "In Jordan, we took a taxi from the airport to the border . . . I looked all around me, at this new place that looked nothing like sandy, flat Kuwait, or lush, flat Egypt. I saw the rocks sticking out of the mountains that flew past us and the sand and the green trees lining the road" (Jarrar 2008: 95). Her sense of loss is reflected in the rocks; it is a new place where she tries locating herself, and this is one of the characteristics of cognitive mapping.

Although Kuwait is referred to on one occasion as "home" by Nidali, it can be read as a source of conflict for her as well. The life of the Ammar family in Kuwait is delineated around specific spatial elements to represent a map of the place from the migrant point of view. The depiction of the setting in Kuwait starts from the family's little flat, which Nidali describes as "filled with blueprints and plastic models of houses instead of notebooks and poetry and ashtrays: a reality that filled him [Waheed] with great sadness" in reference to the fact that his life in Kuwait is based on his career as an architect (Ibid.: 12). Then it moves to The New English School in "Jabriyya, Kuwait, a gray and blue brick and concrete monstrosity made up of three large buildings" (Ibid.: 10). The school and home form two opposing entities for Nidali: home is where her loving parents argue and fight and where her father tells stories of his homeland, while the English school is where she is taught facts and where there are teachers who "weren't supposed to love [her] and they didn't. They were English and cold and didn't resemble us at all. I liked this, that they did not hold a mirror up to me" (Ibid.). These two physical entities can be compared to Palestine and any other host country they might happen to migrate to someday; the first being a homeland where one is supposed to be conforming to the prevalent social and cultural lines and where emotional relations are at issue; the latter being where one is free to draw one's own map in life. In other words, the spatial ambience of Palestine and all that it connotes implies serenity and passion while that of the West connotes impartiality and factuality. Throughout the text, Nidali is delineated as a person who is not keen on abiding by any rules or restrictions. Rather, she seems to be creating a space of her own that suits her and like-minded people. That is why she is in a conflict zone between her desire to create her own route in life and her father's enforced boundaries.

Nidali's spatial conflict manifests itself in her sexual behaviour as well. In an online article, Jarrar debunks the myth that those interested in "kink," or queer sexual behaviour, come from abusive backgrounds. She says that practically everyone is brought up in homes where they are encouraged to obey their parents without question and "to believe that their bodies belong to their parents, to the state, to [their] bosses, or to God" (Jarrar 2019). Although Waheed is delineated as abusive with his daughter on many occasions, Nidali's revolutionary character and sexual thoughts are not represented as a reaction to his abusiveness. Rather, Nidali's character and sexuality are represented as a rejection of rules and the cultural and religious restrictions imposed by her father. This means a rejection of being modelled against a specific template and, hence, creating a map of living according to her norms. Nidali's sexual awakening and sexual identity are part of her journey in search of identity. Jarrar delineates Nidali's sexual experiences openly as part of who Nidali is. Regardless of the religious or cultural norms and expectations of the social space(s) she encounters or of her family, Nidali attempts to find her place in life without following the map of these spaces drawn by anyone else. It is worth noting that Jarra is aware of the limitations imposed on the constructions of Arab Muslim identity post 9/11. Although the events in her novel take place before the 9/11 events, they have influenced her writing, forcing her to make conscious choices while creating her characters. In an interview by Zilka, Jarrar admits that she "wanted to see a representation of Arabs and Arab Americans [she] could relate to" (2008). She stresses this in another interview by Zocalo, saying that she "had to create [her] own Arab American character[s]. There weren't any I could relate to, not only in fiction but also obviously in popular culture. I don't relate to any of the Arabs on TV. They are not real, they are not authentic-they are stereotypes" (2009). Jarrar's reference to the type of Arab characters who appear on TV reflects the influence of popular culture and cinema on how Arabs are perceived not only in America but in the world, considering the global influence of the American film industry. In the same interview, she states that she "wanted to create Nidali, the narrator, because [she] wanted her to exist in the landscape of narrative fiction, and Arab American literature too" (Ibid.). Hence, the character of Nidali, in particular, is an attempt to find a space for Arab migrant girls other than common stereotypes.

Jarrar's characterisation of Nidali and Waheed in a way that does not raise sympathy can be seen as a response to an approach to the portrayals of Muslims in popular culture. In her book *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*, Evelyn Alsultany notes that Muslims are depicted in more sympathetic ways in U.S. movies and TV dramas such as *The Practice* (1997), *Boston Public* (2005) and *Law and Order* (1990).

However, Jarrar does not follow this trend of sympathetic representations of Muslims because this might serve hegemonic constructions of race. In Alsultany's words, "sympathetic images of Arabs and Muslims after 9/11 give the impression that racism is not tolerated in the United States, despite the slew of policies that have targeted and disproportionately affected Arabs and Muslims" (Alsultany 2012: 15). Hence, Jarrar chooses to delineate more real Arab and Arab American characters who exist in life and she can relate to. Like Jarrar, Laila Halaby represents different types of characters who defy stereotypes as discussed in Chapter Three.

Jarrar portrays Nidali as someone who is in control of her choices and who defines her own boundaries and paths in life. Thus, Nidali's sexual experiences from masturbation to experimenting with partners and boyfriends, notably Fakhr el-Din with whom she begins a relationship in Kuwait and with whom she reconnects in Alexandria, are a vital aspect of her life and the development of her character. The narrator spends much time describing Nidali's sexual thoughts and experiences, which help her establish a sense of self within her space. For example, her relationship with Fakhr which starts in Kuwait, is kept secret because them being Arabs living within a social space that rejects this relationship: as Fakhr says to Nidali, "we're just Arabs" (Jarrar 2008: 120). Nidali's relationship with Fakhr can also be read as a revolutionary act towards her father who becomes fierce upon realising that she "was on [her] way to becoming a woman" (Ibid.: 122). Her father expects her to perform according to the cultural and religious norms and obey his restrictions. Waheed and his fierce reactions to his wife and daughter highlight how some masculinities are sometimes torn between "gender ideologies: the traditional, the liberal, the Islamist, and even the secular" (Maloul 2019:190). According to Monterescu, this kind of masculinity is "situational" which maintains "ambivalent relation with Islamic and liberal poles on the ideological continuum, relations that change according to situational interactions [… and] manoeuvres between them and manipulates them to serve its need" (Monterescu 2006: 134). Hence, situational masculinity "attempts to symbolize a return to 'traditional' patriarchal values, although it allows locally for liberal practice, which clearly contradict the 'traditional' discourse" (Ibid.: 135). In the case of Waheed, he is an educated Palestinian poet and architect who grew up in a village. Then, he moved to Egypt to pursue his education. On some occasions, we see some inherited ideas about gender roles which he cannot defy like him becoming fierce when his wife Fairuza neglects her duties as a mother and wife and spends most of her time playing the piano.

Fairuza's character and manner of talking to Waheed show her as a stubborn and strong-willed woman. For example, when Waheed believes that she is more concerned with her piano and music than with him and family responsibilities, he attempts to enforce his dominance by swearing and yelling, making violent gestures and threatening divorce. Fairuza, in reaction to his threats and aggressive language, tells him in foul language that the prophet stated that a man must 'please' his wife. Waheed appears to infer that her desire for pleasure stems from her displeasure with their sexual relationship, so degrading to his manhood. As a result, he drives Fairuza to the middle of the Kuwaiti desert where he abandons her. She eventually makes her way to a relative's house, where she stays for a few days. This incident demonstrates Fairuza's strong character in her relationship with Waheed as opposed to the usual passive victim. For example, her foul language, like "your mother's cunt", undermines Waheed's manhood and his authority (Jarrar 2008: 63). By her characterisations, Jarrar encourages her readers to "reconsider the perceived supremacy of Arab men over Arab women" (Maloul 2019: 190). In my opinion, she also contributes to defying stereotypical representations of Arabs and Arab Americans, like Laila Halaby does in her *West of the Jordan* as discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

Nidali's fractured identity and her sense of fragmentation are also represented in her sexual relationships. In Alexandria, she experiences confusion in her sexual identity between heterosexuality and homosexuality as she tries to help her friend Jiji practice kissing to impress her boyfriend. Jiji asks Nidali if she is suggesting lesbian behaviour which Nidali denies. However, Nidali is more confused, "[she] tried to figure out what it meant that [she] liked girls and boys! It was bad, bad, bad, and [she] was bad, and Baba told [her] so" (Ibid.: 176). Later, she reconnects with Fakhr el-Din by coincidence through a bicycle accident and renews their relationship. Again, Jarrar refers to the private, personal relationship of Nidali as a refused, criminal act in the public space of Alexandria, "He snatched a kiss and looked away like nothing happened, as though he were a pickpocket on the bus" (Ibid.: 185). The narrator explains how "kissing in public is illegal in Egypt" (Ibid.). Ironically, if it is done by foreigners, people would "stop their cars to watch as though the blonde people were television stars showing themselves in public" (Ibid.), but in the case of Nidali and Fakhr, they would be sent to the police station instead. It is these contradictions in Nidali's experiences which contribute to her sense of detachment and confusion, aggravated as they are by being tested against the background of alien geospace. This also stresses Alexandria as a space where Nidali reaches the utmost point of conflict and, at the same time, where she reaches reconciliation as described later.

Nidali is depicted as growing up within a mobile geography and identity which highlights the impossibility of having one definite map of home. In Kuwait, where the family is safely settled and where Nidali has a normal life, she follows her father's instructions about tracing the map of Palestine and learning it. However, when the family flees to Egypt, where Waheed is unemployed, Nidali who lost her secure home and friends in Kuwait is depicted as immersed now in exile and dislocation, without hope of returning to Kuwait.[23] In this context, Nidali tries to draw the map of Palestine with the borders she knows by heart, but she fails to draw it due to the uncertainties of war and "the void of negated self-determination" (Cariello 2014: 282). Not only is Nidali influenced by the geographical and historical changes, but Waheed has also grown uncertain about his map of his homeland Palestine:

> One afternoon, I sat at the dining table and drew a map of Palestine from memory. Baba walked by, coffee in hand, and said, "You still remember that?" I nodded and looked at he map nervously, hesitated whether I'd drawn it right. I pointed at the western border and asked, "Is that right?" "Who knows," he said, waving his hand dismissively. "What do you mean, Baba, when you say 'who knows'?" "Oh, habibti. That map is from a certain year. The maps that came earlier looked different. And the ones that come after, even more different." "What do you mean?" "I mean there's no telling. There's no telling where home starts and where it ends." (Jarrar 2008: 192-3)

Nidali finds the map she is trying to draw torturing as it brings pain and tears to her father, and as it is uncertain and restricting. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, Nidali finds comfort in the white page that better suits her mobile identity, deleting all borders she has been trying to draw correctly. By doing so, Nidali decides to draw her own map and her own identity without being restricted to a map whose borders are never protective but rather restrictive.

> I erased the western border, the northern border. I erased the southern and eastern border. I surveyed what remained: a blank page, save for the Galilee. I stared at the whiteness of the paper's edges for a long, long time. The whiteness of the page blends with the whiteness of my sheets. "You are here," I thought as I looked at the page and all around me. And oddly, I felt free. (Ibid.: 193)

Having set herself free from the restrictive borders of a map that does not represent her identity as a Palestinian-Greek-Egyptian girl, Nidali decides to write or draw her personal, cognitive map in this world.

[23] Palestinians were denied entering Kuwait in 1990 because Yasser Arafat supported Saddam Hussien's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990.

The conflict Khadra and Nidali experience is resolved in a space of illumination, that is, a space where the migrant character experiences an epiphanic realisation that prepares them for the subsequent stage of spatial reconciliation. Both works depict this time in a Middle Eastern metropolis. Kahf describes Damascus as a place of illumination for Khadra in *The Girl*. Jarrar presents this moment in Alexandria in *A Map* as the climax of Nidali's struggle as a migrant prior to her decision to self-liberate. I find the selection of Damascus and Alexandria intriguing, given their historical and cultural significance. Both cities have a multi-ethnic heritage and a multi-religious and multi-social foundation.

1.2. Space of Illumination

By ***space of illumination***, I refer to the space(s) where the migrant characters realise their past conflicts and experience a metamorphosis in their spatial relations. The second part of *The Girl* focuses on Damascus, Syria, Khadra's birthplace and her parents' homeland. Khadra's development in Damascus is influenced by its social space, as well as the city's natural geographical features and location and its architecture, which helps her position herself in American space so that she feels she is going "home" on her return journey from Syria to the United States. Her openness to and perception of her multi-ethnic and multi-religious social space is enhanced by these diverse geographical qualities. Khadra's main knowledge about Syria comes from Wajdy, her father, who narrates some parts of his life in Syria and some historical accounts of the Islamic civilisation to his children. His aunt, who is referred to as *Téta* (meaning grandmother), also narrates some historical accounts to Khadra and her youthful life experiences and marriage to a Palestinian refugee. Yet, it is when Khadra visits Syria and interacts and lives within the Damascene space physically and psychologically that she comes to an understanding of her complicated feelings and position as an Arab, Muslim migrant. Other non-migrant characters who live in Damascus also take turns in narrating particular incidents. By so doing, Kahf gives voice to the voiceless to represent the influence of the political scene on the social space of the city which is one of the reasons behind migration from the country. For example, Khadra's aunt narrates her daughter Reem's experience on the day when women were obliged to take off their hijab or get shot on the streets of Damascus by Rifat Assad's troops in 1982 (Kahf 2006: 280). The narrative structure of the novel rests ostensibly on the gradual build-up, in the reader's mind, of how these incidents, mostly centred on spatial memories, serve as a counter-balance to the shifting cartographic awareness of characters, especially Khadra. It is fascinating to see how Damascus, a city that has seen numerous political crises and welcomed migrants from

Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq, to name a few examples, has been portrayed as a zone of illumination for migrant Khadra.

1.2.1. Cities of Diversity: Damascus and Alexandria

In *The Girl,* Khadra's first encounter with the city when she arrives foregrounds it as a place where she finds the answer to her uncertainties. Khadra manages to arrive at her Téta's house in Damascus although there is no map to guide her. This can be attributed to her psychological engagement with the city which she knows about only through her parents' stories. On this, the omniscient narrator says: "Somehow all the unfamiliarity seems familiar to Khadra. 'And then we turn here, and there will be a rise in the road, and an arch,' her mind said—or no, she wasn't even thinking it with her mind, was her feet, her body moving itself—and there it was. The rise in the road, the arch" (Kahf 2006: 268). Her walk through the city was unconscious, but rather a drifting one: "As if her body retained an unconscious imprint, as if the ground remembered her feet and guided them" (Ibid.). Again, Kahf makes a geographical reference linking Khadra to her space. She is able to find her way and moves around the city without the need for a map. It can be understood that Khadra's need for a map of Indiana at the beginning alludes to her loss in its social space and her inability to position herself within it while the absence of her sense of loss in Damascus annuls her need for a guide or a map. In other words, the migrant's cartography of the mind and the heart leans on reciprocity between the turbulent worlds within and without. It is not just harmony between Khadra and Damascus that lends her the ability to grasp its cartographic specificities; it has to do mainly with how her mindset, even in the States, has enhanced her cognitive visualisation of the city. By analogy, much as every inch of her being can recognise the physical details of the space of the new metropolis, she has some deep aversion to it simply because she is still, in the eyes of everyone, just a Muslim, a migrant, an insignificant *Other*.

Kahf also provides a description of the urban places of Damascus and the changes in the city due to the waves of migration that it incorporates which allows for a multi-ethnic and multi-religious presence in the city. Khadra contrasts the Damascene urban space with the flatness and sameness in the urban space of Indiana. To Khadra, Indiana has "nothing for the eye to see. Strip mall, cornfield, small town main street, Kmart, Kroger, Kraft's, gas station, strip mall, soybean field, small town main street, Kmart, Kroger, Kraft's, strip mall. All blending into one flat sameness" (Kahf 2006: 2). To her, the place seems dull, narrow and lifeless. If this is considered a general characteristic of Indiana when compared to other

big American cities, like New York or Los Angeles, Kahf's choice of specific cities in relation to the development of Khadra's character cannot be haphazard. Flying to Damascus in a "reckless state of mind" and visiting the city for the first time after migrating from it as a little child, Damascus "an eastern place . . . where she came from: Syria. Land where her fathers died. Land that made a little boomerang scar on her knee" (Ibid.: 266). Contrary to what she thought of the city according to the lenses of her parents' memory, "the real Damascus had swollen. Whole new neighborhoods had sprung up, and chunks of outlying land had been swallowed by the urban maw. Damascus was full of country folk newly migrated from the villages, and of refugees from neighboring countries. Army garrisons and Palestinian camps surrounded it" (Ibid.: 268). The sense of sameness and flatness springs from the loss of mapping, internal and external, that Khadra suffers from. She is presented as neither fully Syrian nor ultimately American. She lives on the fringes, psychically shattered despite the mind maps and the physical maps.

Through her projection of certain places in Damascus, Kahf is again employing the natural and urban geographies of the city which are diverse and embrace ethnic and religious diversity. Téta, Wajdy's aunt, introduces Khadra to the city's history and social sphere, which I find interestingly diverse. Damascus is portrayed as a contentious city, which I believe is the ideal setting for Khadra to meet spatial disparities. On the one hand, it shares some characteristics of central Indiana's unwelcoming social space for refugees as demonstrated in Téta's elopement story. Téta as a young lady fell in love with a Palestinian refugee whose marriage proposal is rejected by her parents for being an outsider and a migrant. This feature of the city's social space is linked to its natural, geographical location which is "Far from the sea and its ports, slow to take in waves of change, suspicious of strangers" (Kahf 2006: 291). On the other hand, it shares the Philadelphian diverse and welcoming urban and social space for migrants. This is reflected in Téta's friendship circle and the urban and natural places of the city.

Kahf plays the role of a mapmaker in *The Girl* by projecting certain places and employing them as the location of her protagonist's development. Two types of places are projected in this text; urban and natural. The urban spaces are places of worship, old houses and open shops (*souq*). As for the natural geographical places, these are the Ghuta countryside and the mount of Qasyoon. All of these spatial cornerstones are emblematic of the foundation of the protagonist's consciousness. For instance, certain places and their architecture like the mosque of Muhyideen Ibn al-Arabi, Hamadiya market, Jobar Kanees and Téta's house with their traditional, historical architecture encompass the history of the

city (Kahf 2006: 294, 304). These places reflect the welcoming nature of the city and its multi-ethnic and multi-religious social space shown in its urban space. Khadra is surprised to know that her grandmother's lifelong friends are of different religions. The two Jewish characters, the rabbi of the synagogue and her Téta's third friend Iman, who represent a slice of the diverse Damascene social space, make Khadra perplexed for a while; it is only later that she absorbs this multi-faith friendship in her Téta's circle: "Khadra was left to absorb in silence the fact that the third friend had been Jewish" (Ibid.: 305). Khadra feels attached to the rabbi and imagines herself being his granddaughter because of his deep Damascene accent: "[h]is voice in those chords [is] like family to her" (Ibid.), along with his long friendship with Téta and Hayat and his warm welcome to Khadra when he knew her connection to them. Her awareness of the presence of the Arab Jewish community is reminiscent of "the Marion County librarian who once gushed, 'Oh, you can speak the English language! And your accent is American!'" (Ibid.). The spatial setting and the whole situation are "suddenly too much" to Khadra and "she [begins] to gasp. Great gasping sobs poured out and wouldn't stop" (Ibid.: 306). This point can be considered the illuminating, epiphanic incident for Khadra who goes through fits of dreaming, crying, blessing and sleeping for a few days through which all the people whom "she once held at bay, as if behind a fiberglass wall. Now the barrier was removed, and they all rushed into her heart, and it hurt: Livvy. Hanifa. Im Litfy. Joy's Assyrian boyfriend, whose holocaust she'd denied. Droves of people, strangers and neighbors" (Ibid.: 306-307). This spatial imagery of fibreglass highlights the barrier between Khadra and the members of her social space in the USA who differ from her own familial circle and the Dawah Center community. Kahf compares multiethnic environments to two distinct natural and urban geographies in Indiana and Damascus and uses them to reawaken and develop Khadra's character. One could argue that the novel's narrative trajectory is founded on this mental and physical journey from and to the Middle East, which enlightens Khadra and prepares her for a condition of reconciliation.

The two natural places – Mount Qasyoon (Kahf 2006: 297) and Ghuta orchards (Ibid.: 308) – work as spatial borders that flank the multi-ethnic social space of the city. From atop the mountain, a multiethnic social space is highlighted. Khadra's recovery from her fits and her cognitive map which now includes all the people and spaces that she knows and likes are realised in Ghuta Orchards where she experiences a moment of sublime tranquility. At this point, Kahf chooses to depict Khadra's new life navigation based on the latter's religious convictions in conjunction with a geographically free environment, all of which contribute to the moment of relief experienced by Khadra. The following quotation

shows Khadra in harmony with her religious views as she is contemplating her surrounding geographical space.

> Khadra paused, standing there in the fading rays with her palms spread, her hands spiralled upward to the sky like question marks. She was in a position like the first stand of prayer . . . She remembered when she'd taken her last swim in the Fallen Timbers pool as a girl. She closed her eyes and let the sun shine through the thin skin of her eyelids, warm her body to the very core of her. She opened her eyes, and she knew deep in the place of yaqin that this was alright, a blessing on her shoulders. Alhamdu, alhamdulilah. The sunlight on her head was a gift from God. Gratitude filled her. Sami allahu liman hamadah. Here was an exposure, her soul *an unmarked sheet* shadowing into distinct shapes under the fluids. Fresh film. *Her self, developing* [emphasis added]. (Ibid.: 309)

Khadra sees herself as a *tabula rasa*, free from all built-in knowledge. She is in a state where her knowledge comes from her lived experience. This scene is narrated in cinematic language to describe her spiritual status, allowing the reader to imagine and feel the moment of character transformation. The author describes Khadra's physical posture which reflects her psychological status. She is directing her question to Allah, raising her hands to the sky in the shape of a "question mark". Then, she is cleared by her swim as a child in a flashback, followed by the answer to her bewilderment implied in the feeling of clarity and blessing under the sun's rays. The image of Khadra's soul becoming a clean sheet shadowing "distinct shapes under the fluids" summarises the scene, marking the end of her bewilderment and realising herself anew. By describing this moment of enlightenment during her contemplation of space, the narrative encompasses both Khadra's past and present experiences, referring to the last time she went swimming as a girl in the Fallen Timber, the location where she first lived with her family upon arrival in the United States, and the present Khadra. This can be seen as Khadra's wish to abandon her life in Indiana and begin afresh in a different location. Kahf depicts Khadra's transformation through the shift in her headscarf. Her new headscarf is a symbolic transformation which shows her readiness to go back to America as a liberated Muslim woman who has moved away from the past dominant forces of gender roles of orthodox Islamic norms. After this moment of self-realisation, Khadra's concept of hijab is different and reflects metaphorically the definition of her identity "being compactly outlined by clothing that fit to the line of her body—that *defined* her body, instead of giving it freedom and space like hijab did" (Kahf 2006: 310, original emphasis). Here, Khadra experiences an epiphanic realisation that prepares her for the next stage of spatial reconciliation.

As in Kahf's text, Jarrar develops the idea of acceptance and reconciliation amongst people from different religious beliefs and multicultural backgrounds in *A Map of Home*. For example, Nidali develops this notion from early childhood as her maternal grandmother is a Christian migrant from Greece. In Alexandria, one of the oldest, historical cities in the Middle East, Nidali experiences the coexistence and integration amongst people believing in different religions. In a discussion between Nidali and her mother about people's different beliefs while contemplating the Gulf in Kuwait, Fairuza explains, "the truth is, different people believe different things" and truth in itself is "something too big for everyone to agree on" (Jarrar 2008: 18). These words advocate the idea of multi-perspective truth which changes from one person to another and, therefore, this requires a multifocal narrative, for example, to provide a comprehensive representation.

Nidali, like Khadra, is subjected to psychological duress in Alexandria until the point at which she decides to free herself. The text depicts Alexandria in two different historical eras and discusses how Waheed and Nidali see this spatial distinction. In the first period between 1968 and 1971, Alexandria is shown through the eyes of Waheed, a young Palestinian migrant, an architecture student and a poet who falls in love with Fairuza, an Egyptian-Greek girl. The urban places which are highlighted are those where Waheed meets Fairuza, such as tram tracks, corniche-side cafés, Nefertiti Beach, Montazah, Ibrahimiyya Hall, Alexandria University where Waheed reads his poetry and the Palestine Hotel where his wedding party takes place (Jarrar 2008: 32-39). All these emblems of space show Waheed fitting himself within the cultural and social spaces of Alexandria, studying, giving public readings of his poetry and getting married. In comparison, the second phase of the 1990s shows Alexandria as a transit place where the Ammar family finds refuge after fleeing the Gulf War in Kuwait, which is represented as a home for Nidali, at least, if not for Waheed.

Alexandria is one of Nidali's favourite summer holiday destinations. However, when it becomes "real, permanent", "its flaws peeked out" (Ibid.:161). Upon arriving in Alexandria, the narrator gives a direct description of the social space as the family passes through the crowded streets of the city: "The people still lined the streets and pawned their wares or bought other people's wares and shouted . . . the sidewalk where they grilled their corn and hung about corniche's railing instead of finding a job or leaving a job and rendezvousing in alleys" (Ibid.). The narrator, presumably speaking the innermost feelings of Nidali, finishes this observation of the social space by reflecting on the city taking them as a family as "the new refugees, continuing a tradition of refugees by coming to Alexandria.

My grandma [comes] here with her family from Crete when things [are] bad there. My baba [comes] here from Jordan because he couldn't go back home. And now here I was, back where we all eventually went" (Ibid.). Jarrar's choice of Alexandria could be based on the long history of the city welcoming refugees. This could be attributed to its strategic location as a Mediterranean port, geographically open and close to other Mediterranean countries. Instead of the heart of the city, where the family could stay with Nidali's maternal grandfather, Waheed insists on living in their holiday, beach flat in Ma'moora where they "[are] the only ones there since it [is] a summer town. I [don't] see a single soul. The streets [are] empty as though the small neighborhood [has] been through a war too" (Ibid.). Waheed's adamant adherence to this isolated location for their flat can be read as a reflection of the refugee state he carries within him and which affects his family, especially that he has been "thrice refugee-d" (Ibid.: 162).

Unlike her father, Nidali can edge her way through the cultural and social spaces of Alexandria and Texas and further considers Kuwait a home where she is safe and has friends. For instance, Nidali's choice to ride a bicycle through the city of Alexandria and to take the bus in Texas at the beginning before she rides the bicycle again is a significant indication of her engagement with these spaces and a mapmaker of her route within them. From a psycho-geographical perspective, Nidali's act of 'drifting' is essential to achieving a better connection to the city. Contemporary psycho-geographers like Iain Sinclair and Will Self revive the act of drifting, walking or roaming. For Self, walking is "a means of dissolving the mechanised matrix which compresses the space-time continuum" (Self 2003: 1). In Alexandria, Nidali goes through the urban space, observing the social space: "I pedaled down to the beach . . . I turned around and zoomed in and out of streets that were illuminated by people's televisions that had been brought out onto balconies for the evening . . . When I looked up from the street I didn't see the stars; I saw hundreds of blue television screens dotting the skies" (Jarrar 2008:92-93). Nidali's observation of people gathering in front of TVs, watching the American show Dallas refers to the domination of American culture through media. This reference to the Egyptians' interest in American TV shows indicates American global cultural influence. The stereotypical Arab characters Jarrar mentioned in the interview, as noted earlier in this chapter, and other ideologies have a global influence which emphasises the significance of self-representation. On the other hand, this sociocultural phenomenon underscores the interconnectedness between the individual and the social within the novel's spatial paradigm.

In *A Map of Home*, every description the narrator provides of the spatial settings which the Ammar family encounters can be read in relation to the characters' position within this new space and their ability to acclimatise themselves to it. For example, Waheed seems unable to cope with the cultural and social space of Alexandria and Texas where he finally ends up. When he is obliged to flee Kuwait with his family through Iraq to Jordan to reach Egypt because of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and because of the Palestinian government's support of this invasion, he is unable to position himself in the newly encountered spaces. However, during his studentship days in the 1960s-70s, Waheed is more integrated within the cultural and social space of Alexandria. Jarrar shows this relation between Waheed and his location through her detailed description of the urban space of the city, highlighting specific places which seem to speak to him. This recalls Henri Lefebvre's observation that space "speaks . . . ., embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations . . . ." (Lefebvre 1991: 42). By so doing, the narrative focuses on the psychological experiences of migrant characters in a metropolis, such as Alexandria in this case. For example, the places that are highlighted at this stage of Waheed's life in Alexandria are those to which he is attached emotionally, like Ibrahimiyya Hall, Alexandria University where he recites his poetry, the places where he meets Fairuza, Alexandria tram tracks and the music building where he first listens to her playing piano, and Nefertiti Beach, Montazah. The difference between the two contexts is the narrative viewpoint and the accompanying portrayal of the political events taking place in the Middle East. The displacement of Waheed and Nidali motivates them to build "a 'local' politics that thinks beyond local" (Massey 2007: 15). There is a need for migrants to rethink the local places to articulate a spatial politics that addresses the challenges arising from migrants' displacement. This is seen in Waheed's relation to and involvement in local places in Alexandria like the opera hall and the university.

In the opera hall where music is played, the locality of the building is transformed into a universal place. Music is a remarkable metaphor in the text, especially the piano, as represented in relation to Fairuza's migrant character. At first, she is introduced as a student of music and a pianist who plays western classical music. She attempts to compete with Waheed as a poet by utilising her musical skills: "the sun would be shining on the old, pinkish-white, Parisian-style green-shuttered buildings, Baba would be standing at the corner of Saad Zaghlul Street, and Mama would pass by with her music book poking out under her breast, Frédéric Chopin, Ballade no. 3 in A-flat Major, op. 47" (Jarrar 2008: 32). However, Waheed knows nothing about music, "unless you played him something nationalistic or a tune he and his friends could dabka to, their arms linked in pretzels or

defiance, their legs slamming the floor then flinging away from it" (Ibid.). For Waheed, classical music is not for "a guy from *a mountain and a history of suffering*; that was the way he felt about the Beatles too, and anything pop culture—related that his contemporaries, who seems to lack his sense of guilt and baggage, enjoyed it" (Ibid.: 34, emphasis added). Here, Jarrar points to the impact of the formation of Waheed's character, based as it is on Middle Eastern cultural and geographical spaces, and his attitude to and perception of music. The trope of music in this context is much more than an artistic genre; it is made subservient, at the hands of Jarrar, to the spatial enterprise of the novel. Waheed is captivated, nonetheless, by Chopin's Ballade no. 3 as it reminds him of home: "He was shocked at how much that melody moved him, at how much he yearned to go back to it. Quite simply, it reminded him of home" (Ibid. 35). This is an emphasis on the role of music as a cultural bridge that does what translation does between languages.

Fairuza's love of music, the choice of specific musical pieces and her determination to play the piano in the different places she migrates to seem essential in understanding her sense of migration. In Kuwait, for example, she is unhappy as she does not have the chance to play the piano. She argues with Waheed about having the instrument at home and succeeds in having one at their house. As she plays the piano in Kuwait, she feels more comfortable and music does her good as it has done before to Waheed; it reminds her of home. Her sense of migration is now mitigated: "this is my life now, my instrument . . . through which I'll be expressing myself. I won't be in the bathroom cleaning or reading the paper anymore. Forget the paper. It's full of stupid people doing stupid things to ruin the world. I've got music. The house," she said, nodding to [Nidali], "will have music" (Jarrar 2008: 56). She takes refuge in music away from the ugliness of the world that has triggered her migration.

1.3. Space of Reconciliation

By ***space of reconciliation***, I refer to the space(s) where migrant characters are able to locate themselves in diaspora as a result of the illumination they have experienced in the previous stage. Upon her return to the USA but not to Indiana, at this stage, Khadra is mapping a new route in her life at a distance from her previous social space as well as her geographical one. Kahf introduces this part with an interesting epigraph:

> Come then, here is world upon world, and all
> that you seek and desire. You yourself are the traveller
> and the Goal, lover and Beloved. The earth

> seems a riddle, but you—if you see yourself
> with Love's eye—are the answer —Shah Dia Shirazi (Ibid.: 314)

By inscribing this epigraph in *The Girl*, Kahf introduces the new navigation Khadra makes after her spatial experience in Damascus. Kahf, here, emphasises the multi-layered nature of the world we inhabit, including America, and how Khadra is a traveller within it whose destination, or purpose, is her Self. Kahf's choice of this epigraph alludes to the nature of fact as problematic, a puzzle, as fact "strategically call[s] into question the supposedly historical and factual discourses that have defined what it means to be female", and what it means to be Muslim American (Goldman 1997:7). Following her return from Damascus and realisation of her true self, Khadra is able to find promise in Indiana although not in the central area. On a visit to her parents who moved away from central Indiana and the Dawah Center to the southern side, Khadra's viewpoint about Indiana is changed. She notices how the South Bend "[is] not really that flat hopeless flatness" and its people are not like "people in Indiana that wouldn't ever change" (Kahf 2006: 380). She discusses how foreign-born migrants shaped the industrial cities of northern Indiana, demonstrating migrants' beneficial role in American social and urban settings and contributing to Khadra's evolved feeling of reconciliation.

The last destination in the development of Khadra is her travel to the USA, the space of reconciliation where her fractured identity is reconciled with its space. At this stage of the narrative, it is the same Khadra who is seen, towards the end of the novel, as utterly at one with her newfound comfort zone, the melting-pot represented in Philadelphia where she finds immense absorption in the social and urban landscape willing to accept her into their cosmopolitan space and extreme tranquillity resulting from her acquired ability to reach out to the manifestation of multifarious spaces. Between rejection and acceptance lies the messages that space can yield to the migrant psyche as fictionalised by Kahf; the potentialities of space can work miracles, if heeded, towards harmony and positive coexistence and can equally act as a stumbling stone, if overlooked, on the way to self-education and self-fulfilment:

> Philadelphia, unlike Indianapolis, had a diverse array of mosques to choose from. Besides the one with her father's friend, there was the Black Sunni, the Shia center, the NOI place, students' enclaves at each university, and suburban mosques full of immigrant professionals. There was also a radical mosque in a little apartment over a shop on Chestnut Street, where a small colony was congealing around a Libyan sheikh and his Kuwaiti sidekick. There was even a gay/lesbian congregation that met in a secret location that changed every week. (Ibid.: 327)

Heeding the urban space of Philadelphia in this passage stresses the migrant character's relation with the encountered space and how this reflects on Khadra's feeling of inclusion. This spatial description of the city represents the way a globalised modern city like Philadelphia in this text helps in creating a welcoming atmosphere through its urban space for any migrant regardless of personal differences like cultural, religious, ethnic or sexual identities. The metaphor of a "small colony" forming in the urban space of Philadelphia using the word "congealing" to describe the construction of migrants' communities is meaningful and symbolises the experience of migration. The suffering, ugliness and pain which the adjective 'congealing' connotes are part of migrants' journey. However, when the migrant self finds its destination, the agony and bewilderment of a migrant, like Khadra and Nidali, for instance, have gone through disappear.

Khadra decides upon changing her new social space or rather mapping a new route in her life which is also linked to a change in her geographical location. Of the new space that Khadra charts for herself, the narrator says, "Now she was left only to choose where. She wanted to move to a big city where she knew no one. There, she'd make it on her own, carve out a life that would manifest gratitude and modesty and love. She would throw her beret up in the air in a celebratory way, slow motion. She wanted her own theme song" (Ibid.: 315). In Philadelphia, Khadra joins a photography school and starts discovering her new space. Unlike the spatial description of Indianapolis, Philadelphia's social network is reflected in its urban space which is described as globalised and encompassing. For example, the first social connection Khadra makes is with a Jewish friend who could understand her different religious principles. Both Blu and Khadra go to a food store that is "just the size of a regular Kroger back in Indiana. But what a difference. In the same number of aisles, it managed to fit a whole world of foods" (Ibid.: 317). In this small place, Kahf sheds light on the multicultural space of Philadelphia which allows room for otherness. More description of the urban space of the city is given through the different places of various minorities, compared to the ones in Indianapolis as shown in the aforementioned quoted passage on Philadelphia (Kahf 2006: 327). More multi-ethnic communities are introduced, forming the social and urban space in Philadelphia. There are the Circassian community centre including Chechnyans, Turks, Bosnians and Albanians, and the Sofi lodge whose location and architecture are described to indicate its integration in the Philadelphian, American space: "It sat deep down a dirt road in the Pennsylvania countryside, … With its Iroquois-longhouse shape, the dergah was the only mosque Khadra had ever seen that looked American. Really American in its style and the way it sat rooted in its physical surroundings, looking like it belonged" (Ibid.: 327). The strategic positioning of the Sofi centre's physical location and

architecture within American territory relates to the evolving changes and assimilation of migrants in their newly adopted country. This is also evident in the Dawah centre in Indiana, where Khadra observes the centre's transformation during her visit.

The narrative associates Khadra's past in Indiana with the spatial rejection of her migrant community. Although Khadra upon returning to Indiana is a decade distanced from the young girl she was, "terrorized by neighborhood boys shouting 'Foreigners go home!' and the girl bewildered by her mother's sobs of 'We are not American!' . . . from the girl who cried into her pillow at the defeat the day the U.S. citizenship papers came", she never thinks of herself as American (Kahf 2006: 390). She is still traumatised by her childhood feelings "caught between homesick parents and a land that didn't want her. Not just didn't want her, but actively hated her, spit her out, made her defiant in her difference, yet at the same time made her unfit to live anywhere else" (Ibid.). Khadra realises how her overseas trips "enabled her to see that she was irrevocably American, in some way she couldn't pin down. Yet even now, she never thinks of herself as American, not really. When she says 'Americans,' "Americans do this or think that," she means someone else" (Ibid.: 390). At this stage, Khadra has become closer to her inner self and has developed her personal borders. For example, Chrïf, a migrant friend, tries to convince her to date him and have a sexual relationship and when she refuses, he accuses her of pretending to be a "kind of liberated woman on one level, but on another level [she's] just [her] typical backward Muslim girl" (Ibid.: 359). Khadra feels that she is humiliated and bullied and decides to leave, asserting to herself her identity as "An Arab American Woman" who has her own borders and refuses to be ridiculed or labelled.

Khadra's cognizance of where she stands in the world acknowledges her Oriental roots yet still denies her complete absorption into the new culture. She has yet to produce a new space for herself, to quote Lefebvre's acclaimed title *The Production of Space*. According to Lefebvre, "there is nothing imagined, unreal or 'ideal' about [social space]", and that social space "Itself is the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions, some serve production, others consumption (i.e. the enjoyment of the fruits of production). Social space implies a great diversity of knowledge" (Lefebvre 1991: 73). Out of her introspection and examination of all these emblems of space, she may one day settle on one to stick to. The spatial description of Indiana and Damascus is contrasted to that of Philadelphia. Indiana is geographically located in the heartland of the country. It has "unbearable flatness" (Ibid.: 1), its flatness in terms of urban space which is "100% American" (Ibid.: 3). Damascus is also in the heartland of Syria which could explain why

migrants' experience reservations within its social arena. However, the city has also accepted refugees and migrants, who have had an impact on its social and urban space over time. This is one of the reasons why Damascus is depicted as a city where Khadra encounters both misgivings towards migrants and a welcoming and loving atmosphere. Contrary to Indiana and Damascus, the narrative spatial description of Philadelphia appears to be the space where Khadra finds herself best located: "Here in Philadelphia, America didn't seem so dead-against what Khadra was. The Pennsylvania terrain was hilly, with nooks and crannies in it that *held more possibilities* than the flat same-everywhere horizon of central Indiana, where a newcomer made an easy target" (Ibid.: 391, emphasis added).

Kahf's choice of Philadelphia seems deliberate for a number of reasons. First, the name of the city which means in Greek "City of Brotherly Love" sheds warmth on Khadra at the beginning (Ibid.: 317). Second, the coastal location of the city qualifies it to be a suitable place for the transatlantic movements of migrants. Third, Philadelphia occupies a central place in the history of the United States, particularly, Benjamin Franklin's migration from Boston to this city. Franklin's description of Philadelphia is interesting in comparison to Khadra's. Coming from the Puritan influence in Boston to Philadelphia, Franklin finds the "City of Brotherly Love" an ideal environment to start anew. Describing his state upon arriving in Philadelphia, he writes, "I knew no soul nor where to look for lodging" (Lemisch 1961: 6). Franklin gives a detailed description in this part of his autobiography, entering into the city in a miserable condition so that such an unlikely beginning would be compared to the figure he has become later. Over time the penniless teenage migrant becomes a respected businessman who becomes so active in public affairs that he launches a library, a hospital and a college, to name a few of his contributions to the city. Similarly, Khadra's journey is depicted in relation to the spatial movements she takes, navigating her position in the American space. It is the Philadelphian space that offers possibilities, as it did for Franklin, for Khadra to build a life for herself which, at the same time, contributes to building and developing space(s) in the fictional cartography of the same space. Yet, it has affected Khadra's journey towards self-actualisation and towards positioning herself within the American space. Unlike Franklin, Khadra's experience questions race as a significant factor in the construction of the Syrian ethnicity in the United States, especially in the first half of the twentieth century. The early Syrian migrants struggled to position themselves within racial hierarchies and were racialised by American politics, culture and law. Consequently, they viewed themselves in racial terms (Gualtieri 2009: 2). By contrasting Indiana and Philadelphia, Kahf represents the migrants' spatial relations in a way that conforms to Soja's idea of localisation. Every human activity takes place at a particular location or within

specific geographical contexts (Soja 1971: 3). However, localisation is one of the basic aspects of human society because it provides the essential link between man and space and "establishes the framework for human spatial interaction" (Ibid.). Thus, localising her narrative in multiple spatial settings and contrasting two American cities, Kahf asserts that locations play a significant role in framing migrants' relation within their surrounding space. What Kahf accomplishes in this novel is that she attempts to transform Khadra's local experiences in each city she visits and lives in into cognitive parameters that enable her to comprehend the American globalised space.

Like Khadra, Nidali in *A Map of Home* is able to reconcile with and position herself within the American space. While Waheed's character is a traditional representation of exile and his map of Palestine is predicated on historical considerations, Nidali's map is more cognitive and transhistorical, conforming to the globalisation of the postmodern world. The character of Nidali and consequently the configuration of her new places conforms to Naficy's suggested redefinition of exile as an exilic state which is free from "the chains of 'homeland' as its referent, and is rather focused on a more nuanced, culturally driven displacement" (Naficy 1999: 19). Jarrar's delineation of Nidali's character asserts Naficy's redefinition of the migrant figure. Nidali is virtually free from the referent homeland of Palestine which sets her free to cognitively draw her map of homeland or a home at any other geographical place on the planet and consequently position herself within every geographical and cultural space she moves into.

The last part of Jarrar's text represents the experience of migration of the Ammar family to Texas. The author shows the impact of this movement on the family through the relation with their new cultural and geographical space. Three important spatial elements are significantly employed in the representation of this reciprocal relationship between the characters and space; first, the location and description of Ammar family's house in Texas; second, the school and the educational space within which Nidali is involved; third, the shopping mall as a globalised space. Jarrar provides two versions of American life through Nidali's lens where the real and the imagined are compared in her text. The first picture of American life is Nidali's imagination of living in America which she describes in cultural and urban terms as follows:

> When I thought of living in America, I pictured straw yellow hair, surfboard, snow; I saw girls and boys holding hands and breaking up and kissing in public; I heard rock music and rap music and pop music and throngs of people swaying and singing; I tasted ketchup and mustard and mayonnaise; smelled streets and new cars and

> sometimes horses and barns, dollar bills and bacon. I tried to imagine a school; it would look like my new school: arches, a courtyard, old desks, and my old school: concrete, gray, sandy playground, but I would add one thing to my vision, and this was my own ideal symbol for America: privacy, as embodied in Lockers. Lockers, rows and rows of silver, gleaming, tall, rectangular lockers; lockers with locks on them, lockers labeled and numbered. (Jarrar 2008: 201)

Nidali's visualisation of the cultural and urban spaces is centred around two elements: the cultural environment and a school that would position her within the space of this new country, forming a starting point from which to find her way in the new cultural and social spaces. Despite being an American by birth and belonging to America "only on paper, in the confines of [her] small blue passport", Nidali is terrified of never fitting into this new place (Jarrar 2008: 201), "afraid of Texas, afraid of the cowboys" (Ibid.: 203). She is not only worried by the new place she is moving into but she is also disturbed by the idea of working on feeling at home again and losing the sense of belonging she has developed in Alexandria, of being in a seemingly infinite circle of migration.

Jarrar uses spatial metaphors to represent Nidali's cultural experience in Texas. One example is Nidali's desire to "translat[ing] [her]self" to adapt herself within the schooling environment amongst her fellow students (Jarrar 2008: 225). Translation is metaphorically a cultural bridge, a transitional method to reach a target point. Another example is how Nidali perceives the sitting pattern of students during their break:

> [T]his student center was like a map of the world: the white kids with money, the ones who showed up in the Beamers and their Pathfinders, sat in the top left; the white people with no money, the ones who drove Metros, sat in the top right; and the thesbians, who were also white, sat in the middle (around where France would be). Then the black people sat in the bottom center; the Latino kids sat in the bottom left; and the nerds sat on the bottom right. I discovered that no one was interested in where I was from because people in this high school didn't ask, "Where are you from?" They asked, "Where do you sit?" (Jarrar 2008: 221)

In this passage, the narrative spells out the severity and inhumanity of the capitalist system which directly influences the kind of space every character occupies, either willingly or unwillingly. At the same time, it posits the idea of cognitive mapping for a migrant individual like Nidali to position herself within it; it does not matter where she comes from, but it matters where she positions herself. In the beginning, Nidali does not join any of these groups; she rather chooses to isolate herself until she realises where she can best fit her own predilections.

Nidali and her mother attempt to establish a normal life in Texas and become familiarised with the city. Nidali's attempts to relocate to Texas succeed, as she begins school and makes new friends, and makes plans for her college study outside of Texas, in Boston, where she was born and where the book opens and ends. Her mother finds relief in playing the piano in the shopping centre and in gardening her house yard. Waheed, as Nidali describes him, is like the odd Texan weather: "it is hot, it is cold, and Baba loves it because it is like him and can't decide which one it wants to be or even if it wants to stay or leave" (Ibid. 242). He wants to build a house and at the same time, he keeps reminding his family that they are in the U.S. to earn money and get proper education and not lose their identity.

In the end, Nidali continues with her journey of drawing her map in life by pursuing her education in Boston away from her family in Texas. Jarrar's choice of specific places in the text is significant. As indicated earlier, the relationship between Kuwait, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, and the U.S. has played an essential role in the family's life regarding their migration. Palestine as a referent homeland becomes an illusion for the family and its real, historical map overlaps with Nidali's and Waheed's cognitive maps.

Kahf's and Jarrar's shifting spatial setting and the protagonists' physical movements within the United States and some Middle Eastern cities suggest that physical movement through different geographical sites makes migrants' cognitive maps more visible. By reflecting on the space(s) which have influenced Khadra's and Nidali's journeys, it can be concluded that space in its different shapes, whether it is physical, human or geographical, has a significant role in understanding the dilemma of migrant characters in positioning themselves within a globalised, multicultural world. It further establishes the role of localised space in migrants' cognitive mapping as it builds migrants' spatial experience. These localised experiences lead together to a better comprehension of the globalised world. The spatial settings show how globalised urban space, like Philadelphia and Boston, enhances the possibility of migrants' integration within new places. Yet, a physical and psychological engagement with the place that forms part of a migrant's identity, like Damascus and Alexandria, can help in building a better understanding of the diaspora space and, consequently, bridging the gap between migrants and their new space. One of the key findings in this chapter is the geocritical aspect of migrants' fiction as it takes at its core the reciprocal relationship between migrant characters and their surrounding spatial aspects. By so doing, the discussion has attempted to extend Bertrand Westphal's geocentred approach of geocriticism by developing a vaster scope of space in relation to the humanitarian experience; that is of migrants.

Chapter Two: Food and Folktales—Spatial Metaphors in Diana Abu-Jaber's *The Language of Baklava* and *Crescent*

Dearly I yearn for my mother's bread,
My mother's coffee,
Mother's brushing touch.
Childhood is raised in me,
Day upon day in me.
And I so cherish life
Because if I died
My mother's tears would shame me.

Mahmoud Darwish (Translated by A.Z. Foreman)

I return
After my limbs have been strewn across all the continents
And my cough has been scattered in all the hotels
After my mother's sheets scented with laurel soap
I have found no other bed to sleep on . . .
And after the "bride" of oil and thyme
That she would roll up for me
No longer does any other "bride" in the world please me
And after the quince jam she would make with her own hands
I am no longer enthusiastic about breakfast in the morning
And after the blackberry drink that she would make
No other wine intoxicates me . . .

Nizar Qabani (Translated by Shareah Taleghani)

In his last published book, issued while he was hospitalised in London days before his death, the Syrian poet and diplomat Nizar Qabani conveys his longing for his mother and home in Damascus using sensuous images. His poetic language is inspired by Damascene natural and social environment, tackling thorny issues of feminism and politics in Arab society. Likewise, the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish expresses his yearning for his freedom and his mother while in an Israeli prison by employing sensory, poetic images, referring to the smells of his mother's coffee and bread. Both Qabani and Darwish resort to simple, everyday practices and recreate their departed places which they have absorbed through all senses to reflect and address their sadness and loss or confusion. This chapter shows how simple, everyday activities give a polysensorial feature to space as represented by Diana Abu-Jaber through the life of migrant characters. Everyday details and human relationships are represented in a polysensorial manner as there is a growing correlation between migrants' perception of space and the workings of their varied senses as persistently depicted in the texts. 'Perception' implies both: sensation or feelings and cognition or insight (Rodaway 1994: 10). Hence, my use of the word here refers to the active process of the "*reception of information* through the sense organs associated with sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell" which leads to "*mental insight*, or a sense made of a range of sensory information, with memories and expectations" (Ibid., original emphasis). It also attempts to see how sensuous practices and metaphors contribute to the engagement of migrant minorities with their new adopted country, here, the United States. As the previous chapter tackles migrants' cognitive mapping, this chapter critically reads how the feelings and issues

of migrants are translated and communicated through the language of food and storytelling. The multi-sensuous constellation in Abu-Jaber's texts adheres to Westphal's and Tuan's notion of the role of different human senses in understanding a space, and I argue that the migrants' space is no exception and that its complexity requires close analysis and reconstruction as Abu-Jaber attempts in her selected texts.

The Language of Baklava (2005), (henceforth, *TLOB*) is a memoir into which Abu-Jaber weaves food memories. These memories illuminate the Jordanian and American cultures of her childhood. Stories of her food-obsessed Jordanian father, the barbeque day and her father's dream of opening a restaurant help in perceiving and creating space in a polysensorial way. The book explores Diana's childhood intermittently visiting Jordan and growing up between American and Arabic cuisine. This book includes features of different genres like autobiography, cookbook and fiction. In *Postcolonial Life-Writing* (2009), Bart Moore-Gilbert argues that "autobiography has always proved difficult to classify", and it becomes more complicated in the Anglophone world due to the intersecting spatial intersection as illustrated in this study (Moore-Gilbert 2009: 69). *TLOB* includes some recipes which makes it a hybrid memoir and cookbook. Yet, it is written in a literary language that makes it closer to being an autofictional book. Autofiction is a term coined by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977 which is used by authors as a means of positioning the self in a new context as in the case of Diana in *TLOB.* Although the book traces the life of the Abu-Jabers as a family and their real life between the USA and Jordan, the author relies on fictive devices as the 'emplotment' of the protagonist's, Diana's, trajectory in relation to particular moments of crisis (which function as dramatic climax). She also uses figurative language which is highly polysensorial. The author gives a metaphoric, polysensorial description of the food, markets and gatherings and how they influence Diana's and her father's relation with a given place as will be shown in the subsequent sections. At the same time, the author employs cinematic techniques as in the opening passage of the book and uses food metaphors to describe her feelings as a child whenever there is a movement to Jordan or within the USA. Using these fictional elements in narrating her autobiography makes *TLOB* closer to the genre of autofiction. Autofictive writing is a vehicle for authorial self-exploration and a way of "asserting one's voice and existing in society" (Pepe 2019:11). The author achieves 'stylistic harmony' which is guaranteed by what Gusdorf calls "fine logical and rational order" in the development of Diana's subjectivity and identity (Gusdorf 1980: 43, 41). In this way, Abu-Jaber explores her migrant self and asserts her voice as an Arab American and places her writing within the wider American cultural space.

The correlation of cooking, eating and feeding along with storytelling emerges as an inseparable combination of migrants' hunger "for home, for family, for the old smells and touches and tastes" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 6). By this, Abu-Jaber translates a whole space of homeland into these sensuous experiences. Diana's and her family's relationship and experience with Jordan and its people are formed and disclosed in *TLOB* by their multi-sensory perception of it, similar to the meals her father cooks in the United States. In her childhood, Diana lives with her family for a year in Jordan, experiencing every detail of their life not only by sight but by taste and smell as well. For example, Diana's and her sisters' movements and visits to different places and relatives are guided by her father's sensuous memories which function as narrative tools that help to draw their routes while in Jordan. Abu-Jaber notes that "the stories [are] often in some way about food" and further explains that "the food always turn[s] out to be about something much larger: grace, difference, faith, love" which applies to the narrated stories (Abu-Jaber 2005: xi). In both texts, the oral-culinary themes and structure stress Abu-Jaber's idea that "the body is the place of the spirit" ('A Prophet in Her Own Town' 2006: 224). In other words, she could be understood as saying that once the body is satiated with culturally rewarding food this exhilarates the soul and consequently augments one's acclimatization with one's whereabouts, whether real or configured. In the same interview, Abu-Jaber explains the relationship between her family and food which is the subject of *TLOB*: "Our family is a character in that sense, and it's a character that's formed around food: food as a way of instructing us and containing our cultural legacy" (Ibid.: 225). Food then is the locus of understanding; essentially tied up to spatial connotations, it becomes a breathing entity in Lefebvre's sense. It is maximally utilised here as a tool that not only propels the action forward but as a crystallisation of that acculturation process in which Abu-Jaber's characters are perennially involved. In the text, every chapter offers a recipe of an Arabic dish that has implications about a memory in Jordan or an experience in the life of Diana's migrant family in the USA. Commenting on this strategy of attaching dishes to life incidents and experiences as a migrant family, she says in another interview that she "use[s] that dish to talk about [her] father's love affair with food and how [they] were raised in this totally food-obsessed family, and the implications that the dishes had for [them]; how each one symbolized a different stage in [their] evolution as a family, as immigrants" ('The Only Response to Silencing' 2002). By these statements, Abu-Jaber does not only assert the significant role of food in the experience of migration in her family but she also asserts the polysensorial characteristic of space as a determining factor in the development of her characters' experience with their places. This polysensorial feature is shown through migrant characters' perception and understanding of their surrounding space as well as through their production of acculturated space that disregards

political, ethnic or religious borders as we will shortly see. Through my critical reading of Abu-Jaber's two texts, I argue that interweaving the two elements of food and storytelling in her writing conforms to Westphal's notion of the polysensorality of space which is here transatlantic, Middle Eastern-American space. The author addresses issues from the experience of migration and the relationship between migrants and their space, such as cultural identity which is highlighted to reflect the liquidity of borders in migrants' American space. The polysensorial characteristic of space allows for the acculturation and coexistence of migrants, disregarding any borders which might cause alienation or exclusion.

As Carol Fadda-Conrey notes, Abu-Jaber places borderlands in dialogue so that they influence and transform each other. Taking Fadda-Corney's observation farther, my reading sheds light on the polysensorality of space; in other words, how these borderlands are perceived and reconstructed through the involvement of human senses. By writing her autobiography in *TLOB* followed by the fictional text *Crescent* (2003), Abu-Jaber asserts the polysensorality of migrants' relation within the space in which they are involved. Her writing employs cultural and aesthetic notions of food and fairy tales in revealing migrants' experience of attachment and detachment regarding their immediate space or diaspora and of homeland. From another perspective, Sihem Arfaoui Abidi reads Abu-Jaber's narratives as resistance to the exclusionary politics of Arab Americans in the United States (2015). Fadda-Conrey's and Abidi's arguments can be further developed by considering space as an influencing factor in the experience of migration. Hence, it is interesting to investigate how far human senses are crucial in the characters' spatial experience. As discussed in the introduction, Westphal and Tuan believe in the importance of the multi-sensoriality of space which does not belittle or ignore the sense of sight but appreciates the senses of smell, taste, touch and hearing (and listening) as well. As I mentioned in the introduction, polysensorality is one of Westphal's geocritical parameters in a study of space.[24]I use the term and its derivations in this chapter as a feature of migrants' space that is realised, absorbed and identified by different human senses and consequently is recollected and reidentified in a multi-sensory way that forms human spaces. Through the assemblage of family storytelling and cooking, the two narratives create connections and construct new places that have a peaceful, multicultural atmosphere. It is a new lived space that has some features of the real/conceived spaces and the imagined/perceived ones.

[24] See 'Introduction' for details.

Spatiality and its implications in relation to the experience of migration are prominent in the two selected narratives. Doreen Massey argues that sometimes people attempt to draw boundaries as they move between places as is the case with migrants. Massey says that drawing these boundaries imposes "selective filtering systems; their meaning and effect is constantly renegotiated. And they are persistently transgressed. Places not as points or areas on maps, but as integrations of space and time; as *spatio-temporal events*" (Massey 2005: 130, original emphasis). The opening passages of *TLOB* and *Crescent* provide a spatio-temporal description rich with a multi-sensory description. The memory with which Abu-Jaber starts her memoir *TLOB* is described as "a cavelike place, bright flickering lights, watery, dim echoes, sudden splashes of sounds, and—hulking and prehistoric—TV cameras zooming in on wheeled platforms" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 3). This quotation foregrounds the past by describing a place that she remembers not only by its image but by the sounds she heard. The alliterative series of "sudden splashes of sounds" highlights the significant role of human senses in making sense of space or in perceiving it, past and present. As if these sounds are awakening a forgotten past and recalling it into the present, so Diana, here, is prepared or called to look at her past experience in the places she lived in as a child. This time-space compression in the experience of migration is directly expressed in her 'Foreword' to *TLOB* where she states how a migrant "compresses time and space—starting out in one country and then very deliberately starting again, a little later, in another" (Abu-Jaber 2005). The author starts her two texts with exotic scenes and settings which reflect the life of migrants, an experience that she describes as a "sort of fantasy—to have the chance to re-create yourself. But it is also a nightmare, because so much is lost" (Ibid.). This notion of starting a new life in diaspora and establishing a seemingly stable life for migrants is seen in the migrant characters in both texts, in Han's, Aziz's, Sirine's uncle in *Crescent* and Diana's father and uncles in *TLOB* because they lost a lot in the process of recreating themselves and starting anew.

The writer, like in *TLOB*, shows a space-time compressed scene that foregrounds her narrative and the spatial experience of the migrant characters, demonstrating how several timelines are in play in *Crescent*. The novel cleverly weaves two tales, a contemporary one set in the 20th century USA and an imagined folktale taking place in the 19th century. The first contemporary story is set in Los Angeles, mostly in a Lebanese restaurant where the female protagonist Sirine works as a chef. Sirine was born in the USA to an Iraqi father and an American mother. Due to the early death of her parents, she is raised by her uncle. Sirine becomes friends with an Iraqi scholar, Hanif, who becomes her guide to the culture of her late father. Hanif becomes intrigued by his mysterious past and his life in Iraq. The second

story is told by Sirine's uncle who narrates the tale of Aunt Camille and her son Abdulrahman Salahdin who ends up in Hollywood. These two stories intersect in Sirine's imagination so much that she thinks of Abdulrahman Salahdin as Hanif.

In the opening scene of *Crescent*, Abu-Jaber creates an atmosphere of exoticism by describing the sky in Baghdad which can be seen as a cinematic scene: "The sky is white. The sky shouldn't be white because it's after midnight and the moon has not yet appeared and nothing is as black and as ancient as the night in Baghdad. It is dark and fragrant as the hanging gardens of the extinct city of Chaldea, as dark and still as the night in the uppermost chamber of the spiralling Tower of Babel" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 15). These few lines refer to Baghdad at two historical phases: the glorious past which will be explicitly recollected by Sirine's uncle and the 20th-century Baghdad under the rule of Saddam Hussein. Moreover, this quote hints to the structure of the narrative as its wider narrative line is a story taking place in the Middle East in the past narrated by the uncle to Sirine in the modern USA. These lines also describe the childhood background of Han, the Iraqi exile and co-protagonist. It is an aching scene that will inform and manufacture the future life of Han. Abu-Jaber uses a cinematic narrative technique in this scene by incorporating the sounds, colours and smell of Baghdad to create a visual picture of the city at two different times as readers could see and hear the exploding rockets that lighten the night. She uses precise sensorial language to visualise the city under a missile attack from Iran. If the rockets are close, one "can hear the warning whisk before they explode" while the ones that explode in the sky "send off big round blooms of colors, pinwheels of fire" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 15). By giving this polysensorial description, the author helps the reader to visualise the city under attack. Abu-Jaber also foregrounds space in cafés, restaurants and kitchens which are intensely charged spaces in both narratives. Within the context of migration, there are opportunities for migrants to reach an understanding of the complexities they experience like Diana and Bud in *TLOB* or the agonies they bear within themselves as, for example, is the case with Sirine and Han in *Crescent*. In such places, migrant characters might meet one another so that they find peace, love, and relief to ruminate over their exile and loss. Abu-Jaber is sensitive to the fact that "borders are within persons and communities, as well as in discourses and geopolitical spaces" which is the reason behind her two selected narratives being articulated with the historical and contemporary journey of the exile or migrant (Bromley 2000: 2). As will be explained in the following sections, by foregrounding these places along with multi-focalisation and intertextuality, Abu-Jaber creates a narrative space that echoes Henri Lefebvre's, Edward Soja's and Homi Bhabha's spatial ideas.

2.1. Where “Geography turns liquid”

The liquid nature of the American space is established by the Arab American poet and literary critic of Lebanese origin Etel Adnan. In reference to Arab Americans in the USA, she argues that “to be an Arab is already being a bit an American. And being an American is already being almost an Arab, even without knowing it. Americans are a nomadic people. Arabs are a nomadic and restless people. Both are restless and reckless” (Adnan 2000: 86). Her words bring together Arabness and Americaness by shedding light on the shared features of being nomadic and restless. This notion of liquid space is conveniently expressed through culinary practices in Abu-Jaber’s two texts as will be explained below. According to Anh Hua, diasporic identities “are not fixed, rigid, or homogeneous, but are instead fluid, always changing, and heterogeneous” (Hua 2005: 193). In this respect, Abu-Jaber’s narratives serve as textual examples of the fluidity of Arab American space in a polysensorial way.

Surprisingly, while highlighting cultural divides among migrants, Abu-Jaber creates a borderless environment through the food she describes being made on nearly every page of the text. Hence, food “plays a key role in [migrants’] desire to keep their ethnic identities alive in an immersion of otherness that can, if not guarded against, supplant the traditions of home” (Timothy 2016:66). Yet, Abu-Jaber does not only preserve Arabic tradition in the dinner she holds, but she flavours an American tradition with Arabic ones. In *Crescent,* the “Arabic Thanksgiving” dinner held by the Arab American chef Sirine is a clear representation of this process (Abu-Jaber 2003: 216). Of pertinence to the writer’s hybrid identity, she conceives it as “a way of being American and having an American tradition that also seemed to make room for our differences” (‘A Prophet in Her Own Town’ 2006: 217). In the same interview, Abu-Jaber explains how this culinary tradition is a space that combines the two transatlantic entities of America and the Middle East. Thus, Thanksgiving can be seen as “the apotheosis, the place where we could have long-standing American traditions: [her] mom’s traditions, and what she knew about Thanksgiving and being American, accompanied with [her] dad’s great love of cooking and food and the memory that comes through his dishes” (Ibid.: 217-218). This multicultural space is produced by Sirine in her combining of tastes and smells that come from different cultures.

One scene in *Crescent* which reflects how the differences of migrants in the USA are turned liquid is a simple gathering of migrants and sharing of food during the Arabic Thanksgiving that Sirine organises. Mercer and Strom see the untraditional Thanksgiving

dinner as a political gesture within the realms of the novel (Mercer and Storm 2007: 43). Indeed, the dinner gathers a wide range of migrants from Um-Nadia's café and Han's department of different origins, nationalities and cultures which range from Europe to El Salvador, Mexico, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Their contribution to the dinner affirms this diversity: "there's a big round fatayer—a lamb pie—that Aziz brought from the green-eyed girl at the Iranian bakery; six sliced cylinders of cranberry sauce from Um-Nadia; whole roasted walnuts in chili sauce from Cristobal; plus Victor brought three homemade pumpkin pies" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 216-217). In addition to this, there are what Sirine adds which she looks up "trying to find the childhood foods that she'd heard Han speak of, the *sfeehas*, savory pies stuffed with meat and spinach—and round mensaf trays piled with lamb and rice and yogurt sauce with onion" and, of course, the turkey (Ibid.:214). Crowning this multicultural, untraditional Thanksgiving, Sirine's uncle makes a big toast: "Here's to sweet, unusual families, pleasant dogs who behave, food of this nature, the seven types of smiles, the crescent moon, and a nice cup of tea with mint every day. *Sahtain*.[25] Good luck and God bless us everyone" (Ibid.: 217). The panoramic image of this dinner when looked at as one picture becomes a symbol of the multicultural, borderless space of migrants. On the one hand, the listing of the different dishes according to the countries of the people who bring or prepare them for the dinner highlights the political borders of the guests' homelands. On the other hand, the complete table ignores these borders. The uncle's toast is symbolic where he refers to the nature of the food they are having being American. He also mentions "seven types of smiles" which can be read as a reference to the different home countries of the guests or could be a reference to the seven continents. It could also be a reference to William Empson's book *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1966) in which he represents ambiguity as a puzzle: a symbolic reference to the ambiguities of migrants' life. To highlight the Middle Eastern taste of his toast, he refers to the crescent and to the Arabic tradition of drinking tea with mint.[26]

The conversations taking place over this cross-cultural dinner table are a vivid reflection of Appiah's notion of cosmopolitanism. According to Appiah, "cosmopolitanism shouldn't be seen as some exalted attainment: it begins with the simple idea that in the human

[25] "sahtain" is an Arabic word mainly in the levant dialects. Its literal meaning is 'two healths'. This expression is used when you offer others food or when others offer you food.

[26] It is interesting, here, to refer to Abu-Jaber's first novel *Arabian Jazz* (1993). In a similar notion to the "Arabic Thanksgiving", this title foregrounds the Arab American identity. Jazz is a quintessential American popular expression of a marginal culture obtaining mainstream "high culture" appropriation, similar to the Jordanian American family who struggles to position itself in the American space.

community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association" (Appiah 2006: xviii—xix). Abu-Jaber's technique of making full use of culinary traditions and food recipes can be read as a polysensorial strategy, highlighting the cosmopolitan nature of space. She succeeds in creating a cosmopolitan space through the Thanksgiving feast which underscores this notion of building community through conversation, and by addressing the whole senses of Sirine's guests. Ironically, Sirine is the only person in her circle of family, friends and colleagues who never steps outside Los Angeles, yet she is the one who manifests cross-culturalism in the text. Through her cooking, she explores the past and the present, her roots and other characters' personal and political experiences. The Thanksgiving dinner scene interrogates these notions magnificently, conforming to what Abu-Jaber expresses in an interview where she states that food is "one of the most immediate and powerful ways of creating the metaphor of the hearth and a gathering place, a place where the collective forms" ('The Only Response to Silencing' 2002).

The social and cultural space of home in the old country in the first place encompasses folktales and dishes with recipes of special smells and tastes and, of course, sight serves as a product of cultural order. These cultural items are charged with meaning that reflects the cultural and political space in the Middle East and the USA. For example, Sirine describes Hanif's voice as a "complicated sauce" because it is a "lightly accented, fluid voice, dark as chocolate. His accent has nuances of England and Eastern Europe" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 24). She uses a culinary metaphor and adjectives to describe Han which reflect his journey as a migrant as Han is influenced by the places he lived in since he left Iraq. Like Sirine's impression of Han as complicated, Iraq, his homeland, is also described by Hanif himself as complicated. Hanif tells Sirine how in Iraq "everyone tells jokes and fables. It's too difficult to say anything directly" (Ibid.: 51). Commenting on her uncle's fable of mermaids, she asks Han if he means that "fables are secret codes?" (Ibid.). Han explains the difference between Iraq and America: "In America, you say 'secret codes,' but in Iraq, that's just the way things are. Everything's sort of folded up and layered, just a bit more complicated" (Ibid.: 52). He explains to her how this is not a bad thing, and that it is a necessary language that people need to use to be safe because they do not want to be understood by secret police: "Like, here [in America] you only need to know one language, but in lots of other places you need extras" (Ibid.). In diaspora, the different stories, smells and tastes from the old countries of different characters, but mainly Iraq, have become decoded or dissolved, i.e., expressed openly and recreated with migrants' displacement and changing space as in the case of Han who is able to express himself clearly to Sirine being

in the USA and away from the political atmosphere of Iraq where people fear informants. He is in a safer country and surrounded by his homeland's cultural elements exemplified in the uncle's story and the food.

Abu-Jaber also shows how migrants create their personal place in diaspora in a polysensorial way or, in other words, the atmosphere of their homes in the new country is created using cultural items which address their senses. For example, on her first visit to Han's flat, Sirine notices how the flat smells of "thyme and sumac and something with a rich, pearly sweetness" as thyme and sumac are commonly used and essential ingredients in Middle Eastern cuisine (Abu-Jaber 2005: 76). Han also plays the songs of the famous Lebanese singer Fairuz whose voice and songs put her in the "status of a cultural icon, in the Arabic-speaking world but also beyond" (Chemam 2022: 17). Han apologies to Sirine because he does not have any American music to play as he wants to offer her an "all-American" dinner. Sirine tells him that she is "not really all-American" (Ibid.). Despite Han's attempt to Americanise his dinner for the sake of Sirine, the homely atmosphere shows the Middle Eastern smells, tastes and music. The notion of creating space for migrants is shown in Sirine's fusion of these displaced tastes and smells with American ones which can be read as a production of a new space that encompasses migrants' interrelationship and their coexistence. In other words, it is a way of producing a space that accommodates order and disorder. This resonates with Lefebvre's notion of space production which he says, "encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity –their (relative) order and/or disorder" (Lefebvre 1991: 73). This reconstruction of sensory past experiences is represented in the character of Han as observed by Sirine.

Another example of Abu-Jaber's manipulation of textual space for different cultures is her employment of intertextuality as this appears in Sirine's conversation with her uncle at Han's flat after his sudden travel to Iraq: "Wait. She [Sirine] constructs a chair and a table out of Han's books. Before sitting, her uncle looks at them and says, "Let's see, *The Iliad* and *The Collected Works of Shakespeare*. That will do nicely" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 259). Sirine's uncle sits down only when she makes him a makeshift chair out of a stack of books which are landmarks in western culture. This incident shows that there is a constant process of borrowing and mutual influence and interaction between different cultures. Yet, it also shows the role of intellectuals like Han, Aziz and Sirine's uncle, all being university professors in an unnamed university in the USA, in translating these cultures and drawing on them simultaneously. Intertextuality appears clearly in Abu-Jaber's reference to Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. She depicts the character of Han as a parallel contemporary

Arab character to the character of Gatsby as a romantic and idealist lover. Both Han and Gatsby are caught between their past which haunts them and their present life in which they try to position themselves. Han is represented as continuously nostalgic for Iraq. At the same time, he is aware of the opportunities his experience in the West has opened up for him. These two elements besides his love for Sirine make him similar to Gatsby in his unwavering belief in marrying Daisy and recreating the past. Both characters undergo hardships in their life which creates an affinity between them. By creating the character of Han as a parallel to a charismatic American character, the author attempts to represent the migrant figure from the Middle East as a human being whose experience is similar to a character that is familiar and close to the American audience.

The storytelling style of Abu-Jaber, which depicts migrants' space as liquid, is represented in the language of food. In *TLOB*, a chapter entitled, "Native Foods", is designed to refute the idea of privileging one cultural food over another for the family despite the seemingly privileged Jordanian cultural food. While Bud is on a visit to Jordan to explore the possibilities of moving his family there, Abu-Jaber presents "Comforting Grilled Velveeta Sandwiches" prepared by her American mother. This dish serves to highlight the differences between Diana's parents and, at the same time, puts the two cultural dishes of kabob and lentils and Velveeta Wonder bread sandwiches on equal grounds. Of the difference between her parents, she says, "where Bud is hot and worked up, she's clear and cool and waiting; where Bud is talking all the time, she listens; where Bud knows exactly where he's from starting a thousand years ago, Mom shrugs and says: Irish, German, maybe Swiss or Dutch?" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 30-31). All these differences are explored and designated in this chapter as "native" in an attempt by Abu-Jaber to represent a space that consists of different experience of different places bound together without a sense of exoticism or otherness. Every so-called native culinary experience when put in combination or besides another one is calculated to create a new one that allows every person to experience it to enjoy the moment without feeling peculiar.

In the same chapter, Abu-Jaber annuls the idea of homeland-food as the only way to access an authentic cultural past. An interesting character depicted in negotiating the authenticity of homeland food is Munira, the Bedouin maid. Munira criticises the physical appearance of Diana and her sisters as unhealthy and attributes this to their consumption of American food. For her, the family's relocation to Jordan is timely for allowing the children to recover from being Americans by eating Jordanian food which she describes as much better as "real food" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 35). Initially, Munira could be considered a voice of

authenticity, i.e., of Jordanian culture and tradition, that supports the homeland cuisine and its native food. However, Abu-Jaber undermines the authority of Munira as "would-be voice of authenticity" (Bardenstein 2010: 170). As Bardenstein notes, Munira becomes the catalyst for Diana's, her mother's and her sisters' desire to prepare American pancakes in Jordan. This incident of preparing American pancakes in Jordan serves as a condensed metaphor leading up to a deeper understanding of the cultural space in the family's life as well as for Munira and other natives of their migrant relatives, Diana and her family.

To prepare American pancakes, Diana, her mother and sisters go shopping for the ingredients in the open-air market. In this Jordanian Big Market, they do not find ready-made pancake mix. Instead, they find the essential, raw ingredients only. Munira and the neighbours gather around in Diana's house and crowd into the kitchen to taste what they call "burnt American flat food" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 38). To the amazement of Diana and her mother, they like the pancakes and bring food from their homes for sharing: "good bread with sesame seeds and fresh hard-boiled eggs and tomatoes warm from the garden, fragrant mint and tubs of rich yogurt and salty white cheese and olives and pistachios" which turns out as "an excellent pancake breakfast" that provides a new possible meaning of "Native Food" (Ibid.). Though Munira considers American food insufficient at the beginning, by this point in the chapter, she and other neighbours are asking for the pancakes' recipe. At the same time, Diana and her family enjoy the breakfast: a new kind of American-Jordanian "pancake breakfast" without a sense of cultural borderlines. Although Abu-Jaber depends a great deal on including Jordanian dishes in *TLOB* and Iraqi ones in *Crescent*, she does not depict the food of her migrant characters' homeland or the Arabic food as the "exclusively valorized medium of authenticity" to be contrasted with mainstream culture (Bardenstein 2010: 171). This scene is another example of how Abu-Jaber has managed to concoct a fictional cartographic space by bringing together transatlantic tastes into a crucible of social gathering but this time in the old country, not in the diaspora.

Abu-Jaber's juxtaposition of a wide range of American and Arabic recipes and Western and Eastern traditions asserts the permeability of cultural borders. Abidi argues that this works towards manifesting the arbitrariness and volatility of borders (Abidi 2015: 16). In geocritical terms, this fluid representation of cultural borders in diaspora gives migrants the advantage of figuratively crossing borders, travelling places that they are no more able to visit physically. It also enables them to compose a new space that is compatible with their present life. Mercer and Strom consider this cross-cultural trait in Abu-Jaber's characters as a resistance to "categorization as Arab, American, … Arab American" (Mercer and Storm

2007: 40). For instance, Sirine and Aziz in *Crescent* clarify this view of multitude. Sirine's physical description as an olive fair-skinned half Arab with "almond-shaped, and sea-green" eyes, is a symbol of the author's interest in cultural fluidity and ignoring borders (Abu-Jaber 2003:17). Aziz, a migrant Syrian poet, comments: "I am Aziz, *I am large, I contain multitudes*. I defy classification" (Ibid.: 105. Emphasis added). Borrowing this line from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" shows Aziz's philosophy (originally Whitman's philosophy) of the self as an evolving and expanding entity which will be continuously broadened and challenged by new experiences so that the earlier version of it becomes a starting point. From these few quoted words from Whitman on Aziz's tongue, Abu-Jaber represents the migrant self as a space in which "the past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them. / And proceed to fill my next fold of the future/ Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes)" (Whitman 1894: 78). Aziz's words also assert the idea of cultural fluidity in the migrant character and that points to the fact that a migrant person cannot be reduced to one particular place or culture. According to Edward Said, "No one today is purely *one* thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind" (Said 1994: 407). Rather, she/he becomes so rich in cultural and personal differences that they become difficult to classify.

By shedding light on daily life practices, the author analyses disparities between her characters, cultures and regions, while also demonstrating how the existence of borders within diaspora territory presupposes the existence of borders in migrants' previous nation. This echoes Zygmunt Bauman's fluid modernity; a term that succinctly describes the contemporary world. In his book *Liquid Life* (2005), Bauman interweaves his most recent philosophical and sociological reflections. He correlates solidity and liquidity, two distinctive features of two eras: modernity and postmodernity into what he terms liquid modernity in relation to contemporary existence and the question of identity. In this regard, the continuous transformations and movements which migrants encounter also transform their vision of identity. Although migration in itself might grant the migrant individual a sense of freedom, it also marks the birth of a new 'life-politics'. For Bauman, this marks the transformation of identity from a 'given' into a "task" and the replacement of the heteronomous "determination of social standing with a compulsive and obligatory self-determination"; one resorts to self-building (Bauman 2001: 154). According to Bauman, personal identity is fluid, with individuals (migrants here) being presented with continual possibilities. This fluidity gives freedom to the migrant subject to be who or what he or she wants to be. However, when one becomes "somebody," one discovers there is no more

freedom which leads to a continuous state of unfinishedness, full of anxiety and feeding uncertainty. By his statement, Aziz holds his freedom tight and refuses to lose it and, consequently, be in a continuous state of uncertainty.

2.2. Highlighting Borders

Despite her representation of migrants' space in the USA as multicultural and a fluid one that encompasses differences as in *Crescent*, Abu-Jaber does not neglect the fact that borders whether political, cultural or ethnic are brought to the fore at some places. The Thanksgiving dinner also marks a turning point in the narrative as things after that go wrong. This comes against a romanticised image of a multicultural, peaceful space. Rather, place gains a more accentuated presence in the events following the dinner. It was marked as a foregrounding of upcoming unpleasant incidents. Atef Laouyene reads this event as a revelation of Abu-Jaber's "misgiving about romantic and idealized projections of an interethnic and multicultural space immune to potential tensions and misunderstandings" (Laouyene 2015: 596). These misgivings are more apparent in Um-Nadia's Café where interethnic and political tensions ferment. It must be noted also that this café was owned by an Egyptian cook who sold it after being marked as a site for potential "terrorist schemes developing in the Arab-American community" during the Gulf War which makes it a heterotopian space , borrowing Foucault's term (Abu-Jaber 2003: 21).[27] When Um-Nadia reopens it, she sends off the two CIA men who used to visit the restaurant "sitting at the counter every day writing things in pads. All they did was glance at the Middle Eastern students and take notes" (Ibid.: 20–21). This can be understood as an indication of the Middle Eastern migrant life in the American society when things worsen in the aftermath of the September 11 dramatic events.

The two selected narratives can be read as polysensorial representations, i.e., they involve heightened attention to the senses, to places where the author highlights multi-cultural, interethnic space while observing differences between cultures and within a culture like the Arabic one. Carol Fadda-Conrey argues that, in *Crescent*, Abu-Jaber carves out a space for Arab American literature or what she calls ethnic borderland (Fadda-Conrey 2006: 187). According to Gloria Anzaldúa, borderlands are "physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different cultures occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two

[27] See 'Introduction', p. 8.

individuals shrinks with intimacy" (Anzaldúa 1999: 19). The two texts under study feature intersecting cultures. *Crescent,* in particular, maps different minorities in the United States, such as Arabs, Arab Americans, Turks, Latinos and Iranians. Fadda-Conrey argues that Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* adds to Anzaldúa's borderlands, including "[t]he psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands", in addition to the geographical ones (Ibid.). Abu-Jaber contextualises all different minorities within one place, like the "Teherangeles" district in Los Angeles, a café or around one dinner table where despite their different backgrounds, sometimes with political grudges like between Iran and Iraq, people are brought closer together on humanitarian bases when they share their stories whether beautiful or painful. To illustrate, this fictional name of the "Teherangeles" area is inspired by an existing area nowadays "commonly called Tarantula" (Cariello 2009: 328). Within this area is Um-Nadia's Café which can be considered the core place where the main events occur. It is where the main Iraqi-American protagonist Sirine works as a chef and also where the burning issues of the migrants, such as melancholy and nostalgia are raised and addressed. It is also where the tension of politics and war news coming off the television from the Middle East and the love story between Sirine and an Iraqi migrant germinate. Um-Nadia's Café plays a central role in revealing the polysensorial feature of space and how the author negotiates migrants' spatial issues and their relationship with the homeland and/or the diaspora. It is also where borders between minorities are foregrounded and dissolved. One could safely say that this small place forms a focal point in the narrative where a number of migrant-related issues are developed. For instance, Iranians refuse to enter the café only because Sirine is half Iraqi although she herself buys the ingredients she needs from an Iranian shop and maintains a friendly relationship with its owner.

2.3. Liquid Thirdspace

Similar to characters in *TLOB,* characters in *Crescent*, both in the main narrative and the family fable, encounter instances of cross-culturalism and attempt to cope with a world teeming with turbulence and difference, one that must be reconciled with on all levels. Homi Bhabha's 'Third Space' in a text representing migrants' space(s) appears where two or more cultures interact at what he calls 'the realm of the beyond' (Bhabha 1994: 1). The beyond, here, is a contested space where 'the borderlines of the "present"' along with 'the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (Ibid.: 2-7). This complexity of the migrant figure is due to the "sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the "beyond"' a migrant has (Ibid.: 2-7). Bhabha argues for the importance of thinking beyond

borders and says that "what is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (Bhabha 1994: 2). According to Bhabha, these "in-between" spaces "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Ibid.). Abu-Jaber could be understood, in light of Bhabha's argument, as elaborating such strategies in her narratives that are of food and folktales (both involving almost all human senses), reflecting on the richness of these in-between spaces. In *Crescent*, for instance, Sirine tries to find a standpoint for herself as an Arab-American in the tale her uncle narrates and in the food that she cooks. She experiences moments of illumination as she contemplates how she "inherited her mother on the outside and her father on the inside," and she further thinks that "if she could compare her own and her father's internal organs—the blood and bones and the shape of her mind and emotions—she thinks she would find her truer and deeper nature" (Ibid.: 231). Sirine's thoughts about her physical appearance and her blood reflect her in-between space. Her thoughts about her ancestral development lead her to create a space that is polysensorial. In relation to the role of the body in *Crescent*, Marta Cariello argues that Abu-Jaber inscribes "an entire relationship between two bodies inside a landscape that is substituted for by the senses: the space where these bodies move is not a material ground, but a scent, a taste, and a sound" (Cariello 2009: 314). Cariello's argument corroborates the idea of this chapter that space is polysensorial and can be found and approached by senses other than the sight. Expanding on Cariello's argument, it can be maintained that space, because of its polysensorial nature, affects the interaction between persons who inhabit a certain location. Their view of this space is through their many senses, and this feature of space allows people to interact with and/or reconnect with a place from which they are distanced.

Analysing Sirine's spatial realisation of her body is relevant to Lefebvre's spatial thoughts on the function of the body in perceiving the surrounding space. According to Lefebvre, "the relationship to space of a 'subject' [migrant] who is a member of a group or society implies his [and/or her] relationship to his [and/or her] own body and vice versa" (Lefebvre 1991: 40). He explains that "Bodily lived experience, for its part, may be both highly complex and quite peculiar, because 'culture' intervenes here, with its illusionary immediacy, via symbolisms" (Ibid.). Hence, Sirine thinks of her body to understand the places she comes from, and how her body is a product of two married cultures symbolised in her physical appearance and her blood. Her body, here, in association with her lived

experience as an American are in a dialectical relationship that is expressed through her cooking, work as a chef in an Arabic café and her love relationship with Han.

There is no steady or fixed life for Diana or her family in either Jordan or the United States. Jordan, for instance, is not portrayed as a longed-for homeland because both Diana and her father visit and live there for considerable periods of time; sometimes the entire family travels to Jordan during Diana's childhood, and as an adult, she travels to Jordan and lives there for a year, and her father visits her. Every time Diana visits Jordan and returns to the USA, her spatial relationship with both places is triggered and rejuvenated. This represents the interpenetrating characteristic of the two spaces. Furthermore, since *TLOB* does not construct binaries, it neither needs nor develops a "Third Space" of some stable, unambivalent entity. Bardenstein argues that Abu-Jaber's text partially overlaps with Bhabha's conception of the "Third Space" despite describing it as "ambivalent" (Ibid.: 167). Thus, she describes space in *TLOB* as "new positions" as the narrative does not "trace two original moments from which [a] third emerges". Rather, she finds it articulating a different kind of space "which enables other positions to emerge," but these positions do not become fixed (Ibid.). For instance, these new possible positions are represented in Bud's dream of owning a restaurant. Bud plans and works for opening a restaurant in Jordan where he could offer Jordanian food which he cooks and masters throughout the narrative. However, and by the end of the novel, he manages to open a restaurant in the USA which he runs with his family and offers burgers to customers. Instead, he comes back from his visit to Jordan and announces to himself repeatedly that "he really and truly lives in this country, this Amerikee, this beauty, place of lost radio songs, unknowable glances, cold blue lakes, of work not family, of facing forward not back, of solitude not tribes, of lightness not weight, and he goes out and finds the place" where he establishes his own restaurant with his new realisation of America (Abu-Jaber 2005: 324). He realises that he needs to live where he is, in America, not in Jordan and his attempts to recreate the Jordan he lived in during his childhood are no longer the same. What matters to him is not the type of food but the idea of cooking and feeding people and "keeping them alive in the desert of the world—that is all he really cares about" (Ibid.: 225).

Abu-Jaber's narrative space also reflects Edward Soja's 'Thirdspace' which is similar to Bhabha's "Third space" and his postcolonial concept of "in-between space". Soja's "Thirdspace" also dovetails with Lefebvre's lived space and he defines it as "an-Other way of understanding and acting to change the spatiality of human life, a distinct mode of critical spatial awareness that is appropriate to the new scope and significance being brought

about in the re-balanced trialectics of spatiality-historicality-sociality" (Soja 1996: 10).[28] Soja interconnects sociality and historicity with a lived space in which the subject (migrants here) is continuously negotiating the experiences of both material and ideological spaces, combining opposites of "subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history" (Ibid.: 57). This combination that characterises Soja's 'thirdspace' shows itself in Abu-Jaber's artistic interweavement of contested space(s) and characters within her texts.

Abidi argues that the intertwinement of the two realms of storytelling and food communicates the construction of a multi-layered Arab American vision of identity. In geocritical terms, this oral and culinary implication in grounding the Arab American experience in the spirit of a collective identity is at the same time offering a stratigraphic vision of it. By stratigraphic vision, I mean that the stories and food in the texts under study suggest multiple levels of meaning and consequences for comprehending space. As in *TLOB*, Abu-Jaber's technique of blending two cultural aspects of food and stories is a means of establishing an Arab American place. Bud's spatial relation with his old country and the new one can be understood through his cooking. The dishes he cooks for his family in the USA are mainly Jordanian and they invoke memories of his childhood and life in his homeland. Diana describes him as a "clueless immigrant—practically still a boy" at the beginning of his life in the USA when he lacks experience in relation to the American space (Abu-Jaber 2005: 4). The diasporic space for him at this time falls into Tuan's definition of space as undifferentiated (it is American for him with no particularities or personal attachment). It is a space that entails openness, freedom and threat. Contrary to the USA, Jordan for Bud is a place that has value for him; it is his homeland, his birthplace, the place where his family is rooted and where he has always dreamt of opening a restaurant.

In the first vignette in *TLOB,* "Raising an Arab Father in America", the narrator conveys in detail the life of her immediate and extended Jordanian family in the USA by describing a barbecue party. This activity is accompanied by the customs of the old country and is reincorporated into their life in the new one. However, the narrator points out that this

[28] In spatial terms and according to Lefebvre, there is a dialectical relationship within the triad of the "perceived, the conceived, and the lived" (Lefebvre 1991: 39). The perceived space is concrete, physical and objective. The conceived space is abstract, symbolic and subjective. The lived space is the everyday experience, and it is both objective and subjective.

time the barbecue is different: “one day the shish kabob goes a little differently” (Abu-Jaber 2005: 11). The barbecue is held at Uncle Hal’s, on the outskirts of Syracuse, New York where there are chickens, a goat and a barn. The children play excitedly with a lamb for hours. Later, they are sent away for ice cream. When they come back, they find no shish kabob for dinner but stuffed squash and chicken, and “Lambie” is off to visit his grandmother. Many years later, Diana learns from her father the real story behind the disappearance of “Lambie”. The brothers thought that they could butcher a lamb like they used to do when they were in Jordan years ago. However, the years they have been living in America have changed them: “we thought we could still do it,” Bud said. “But we couldn’t”. Barbecue parties and “making shish kabob always reminds the brothers of who they used to be. The heat, the spices, the preparation for cooking, and the rituals for eating were all the same as when they were children, eating at their parents’ big table. But trying to kill the lamb showed them: they were no longer who they thought they were” (Abu-Jaber 2005: 19). Despite the disappointment of Abu-Jaber’s brothers, the general atmosphere is joyful and light. The children have spent a joyful time with Lambie, feeding and hugging him before piling into the Beetles and going to the ice cream stand. The whole gathering enjoys the company of each other singing and playing, and they eat their substitute dinner with their habits: the grown-ups piling the children’s plates with food and Uncle Hal feeding the children from his hand. After this scene, Abu-Jaber introduces a recipe for “Peaceful Vegetarian Lentil Soup” which, as Bardenstein suggests, is a “far cry from rosy seamless integration of ‘old world’ customs into ‘new world’ life” (Bardenstein 2010: 170). The incident is initiated when one of the brothers sees the lamb in his neighbour’s field. It makes him think of “the feather-light springtime in Jordan when the countryside was filled with new lambs and of the scent of freshly grilled meat” (Abu-Jaber 2005: 17). By this episode, what seems to be “authentic” or “traditional” has not remained as it is but changes and becomes unsettled. However, the enjoyable, happy atmosphere which is briefly disturbed by the failure to slaughter the lamb as they have planned suggests that despite the disappointment and the changes that they might encounter, they can still be happy and enjoy themselves. The narrator seems to be emphasising the fact that change and transformation are unavoidable in life. However, this does not rule out the possibility of a fusion of cultures that would allow migrants to thrive and build their own happiness. The Abu-Jabers had a similar experience in Jordan, and it left them with such a positive and happy impression that they now wish to duplicate it in the United States. However, the second experience has a different influence on them because it is not the same place: an experience that has its own blessing and pleasure.

Diana represents her father's emotional attachment to his homeland through sensory images, mainly culinary ones: "he cooks and croons in Arabic to the frying liver and onions songs about missing the one you love. I ask him whom he misses, and he ponders this and says. 'I don't know, I just do.' Then he gazes fondly at the frying liver as if it is singing sweetly back to him" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 20). Sidney Mintz argues that food practices are regarded as identity signifiers and a medium to project self-expression. Borrowing Mintz's words, I find that Ghassan's cooking obsession "serves not only as a fulfilling experience, but also as a liberating one—an added way of making some kind of declaration. Consumption, then, is at the same time a form of self-identification and of communication" (Mintz 1996: 13). Diana's father expresses his longing and declares his attachment to his homeland through his cooking. At the same time, this process liberates him from this attachment which enables him to position himself in the USA. Throughout the book, such scenes are presented as if by his engagement in the process of cooking, he is transported to Jordan, the place for which he longs. The representation of Diana's father as both a storyteller and a cook and the interweavement of feeding and telling throughout the narrative in *Crescent* and *TLOB*, including recipes in the latter, are textual evidence of the role of human senses in revealing migrants' spatial experience. Diana's aunt in *TLOB* states that "'eating is a form of listening'" which suggests the significant role of these two metaphors in composing not only the text but also migrants' conceived space.

2.4. Nostalgia Across Borders

Another theme that Abu-Jaber represents in a polysensorial way is migrants' nostalgia for their past and homeland. In Abu-Jaber's works of art, nostalgia is an objective correlative for the spatial image of the motherland that traverses borders. For example, Diana's father, Ghassan, or Bud as she calls him in her culinary memoir *TLOB*, resorts to cooking and to telling his food-related memories of his homeland Jordan while in the USA. His obsession with cooking and recreating the familial activities he used to have in the old country is a way to recreate the feelings he has had at that place. Living these experiences, like cooking, sharing a meal with relatives and friends, listening to stories, and shopping in open markets to name a few, addresses one's whole senses which means that one has stored not only what one has seen, but also, as is the case with Abu-Jaber's family in *TLOB*, the tastes, smells and sounds they encountered in Jordan, for example. Likewise, Sirine, in *Crescent*, reconnects with her late father's homeland Iraq and communicates love, memories and thoughts of her identity in her kitchen and while cooking within a multi-cultural, culinary setting and through her migrant uncle's storytelling. Abu-Jaber's selected texts

could be read as reflecting how they are principally informed by the polysensorial spatial experience of migrants. In an interview with Robin Field, Abu-Jaber declares that "storytelling, along with food, [is] one of the great pillars of [her] own cultural education" ("A Prophet in her Own Town" 221). In *Crescent* and *TLOB*, she emphasises the prominence of these two elements in an Arab-American narrative and evidently in an Arab-American migrant's spatial experience. In order to convey the spatial experience of migrants in both homeland and diaspora, Abu-Jaber relies on the evocation of the senses and the use of sensory language. She draws upon references to the sensory experiences of smell and taste represented in the dishes her characters cook and the places they encounter. Thanks to her sensory language coupled with her cinematic narrative, one could literally feel oneself in the middle of a migration experience.

TLOB distinguishes itself from other ethnic culinary memoirs as Abu-Jaber maintains a non-reductive, multi-dimensional representation of the involved places, their inhabitants and their attitude to and experience of food. Carol Bardenstein explains that most cookbook-memoirs tend to produce a "largely nostalgic register" (Bardenstein 2010: 161). The narrative worlds in such books mostly conjure up memories from "back then" or "back there"; food recipes and culinary activities are often employed as a "restorative" or "reconstituting" process (Ibid.). Abu-Jaber crosses generic borders in *TLOB* (between the novel, memoirs and cookbooks) which reflects the evolving relationship between migrants and their new places. In the context of migrant texts, *TOBL* might seem to be a book representing a reductive version of identity or evoking a univocal nationality or ethnicity, such as Arab or Arab-American in this text. However, Abu-Jaber maintains a critical distance from common migrants' sense of nostalgia. She creates a spatial relationship by portraying a dialectical, evolving relationship between her characters and the places and cultures they become involved with. In other words, this book does not represent migrants' relationship with their space as a fixed entity nor as essentialised binaries of homeland and host land. The same ideology is adopted in *Crescent* in representing unconventional, complex portrayals of the intricacies of Arab-American migrants' inter-relationships. Such practices create a space of equality and comfort for migrants who lost their original homes and how they fight tooth and nail for attaining a sense of newfound home in the diaspora.

2.5. The Road from the Mythical World of the Arabian Nights to Hollywood

Each text represents a creative world that interrelates parts of the Middle East and the United States. *TLOB* is a culinary memoir which narrates the author's and her family's experience between their respective space(s): Jordan and the United States. In both texts, Abu-Jaber relies heavily on folktales and food as cultural, spatial tools which assist migrants in addressing and approaching spatial issues in relation to their lost and new space(s). With her employment of telling and feeding, the author also asserts the interconnectedness of real and imagined worlds.[29] These two worlds are structured within the narrative through the figure of a storyteller to form a frame narrative and a paratext. Likewise, *Crescent* meshes the mythical world of the *Arabian Nights* and its exoticism and the Hollywood film industry in the story of aunt Camille and her son Salah Eldain as narrated by Sirine's uncle, with contemporary USA and Middle Eastern countries, mainly Iraq. The sub-story of Salah Eldain runs in parallel with the main contemporary story of the female protagonist Sirine's relationship with the exiled character Hanif El Eyad (known as Han). The narrative employs polyphonic and polysensory techniques in tackling migrants' experience in the diaspora and their relationship with their homeland.

Cooking and eating together, as well as other activities centred around food and cooking, are commonplace household activities that, though seemingly insignificant, hold profound spiritual significance. As Abu-Jaber puts it on the tongue of Aziz quoting from his spiritual mentor, a migrant poet and lecturer in *Crescent*, "Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 31). In *Crescent*, the author foregrounds the significance of storytelling in connection to food. While Sirine is a chef and her main focus is on food, her uncle is the storyteller figure in the text. These two trajectories intersect in the kitchen where she prepares his favourite Arabic food, while he narrates the tale of his great Aunty Camille and her son Abdelrahman Salahadin's adventures. The setting of his tale is a fantastical Arabian landscape where jinns' homes are quite unlike the customary "living rooms or dining rooms or studies or bathrooms or even very comfortable beds", since these creatures would prefer "a nice kitchen, to satisfy their

[29] In an anthropological spirit, Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an "imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 1983: 6). The imaginative nature of the concept of nation can be seen clearly in the context of migration where members of any nation might never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them; yet, in the minds of each lives the image of their lost nation.

sweet tooth, maybe bake a little knaffea, brew a little coffee, have a few people over—that sort of thing" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 193). Almost every chapter is introduced by the narrative voice of Sirine's uncle. Sometimes, his story erupts into the main narrative that goes parallel to the 20th-century, Arab-American events in Teherangeles.

Abu-Jaber's artistry in *Crescent* lies in the fact that she reflects the notion of narrative liquidity and the intersection of the real and imagined worlds through the two levels of narrative. Gerard Genette's narrative model identifies different levels of narrators based on their involvement in the narration. The outermost level is extradiegetic which is concerned with narration itself. The narrator tells a story, but he remains an outsider with no indication of personal involvement in the story. For example, Sirine's uncle tells the story of Aunt Camille and her son Abdelrahman Salahadin, but he is not part of it. At the same time, the uncle is a character in the main narrative where we can identify him as an intradiegetic narrator because at some incidents he tells Sirine about some personal stories like his migration with her father from Iraq to the USA. In this case, the uncle becomes a homodiegetic intradiegetic narrator.

In "Food and Stories to Grow Into: The Pastiche of Inclusions in Diana Abu-Jaber's Writings" (2015), Sihem Arfaoui Abidi asserts that there is an oral-culinary thread running throughout the two narratives. In my reading of these texts, this thread can be seen as a spatial metaphor that relates migrants to different places (their homeland and adopted land), and a creative way of addressing issues of loss and confusion. Abu-Jaber's philosophy of food implies that it "should taste like where it [comes] from. You can sort of trace it back" (*Crescent* 2003:69). This highlights the differences in origins amongst migrants, while also allowing her to trace her own family tree back to her Iraqi uncle's stories and the food she prepares. One of the most important things Abidi observes about Abu-Jaber is that she uses oral-culinary storytelling to connect all of her storylines. When looking at the text from the standpoint of space, it can be argued that Abu-Jaber actually confronts contested areas on a single ground, which is the text. As a result, she is creating a "new stance" by blurring the boundaries between oral storytelling, culinary writing and fiction. On top of all of that, this thread connects worlds from various historical periods. It also demonstrates the multisensory nature of space in terms of how we perceive and create it.

The figure of her uncle as a storyteller and the tale which he narrates throughout the text form a metaphor for the journey a migrant goes through until finally a hybrid figure is formed as represented in the character of Abdelrahman Salahadin. Abdelrahman Salahadin

in the uncle's tale can be compared to Han's character in the late twentieth-century timeframe of the novel. Ishak Berrebbah asserts the role of the uncle's folktale in consoling and guiding Arab American listeners. More specifically, he regards the uncle's storytelling as a "kind of a map and [as] instructive for both" (Berrebbah 2020: 133) as the uncle explains that stories, "can point you in the right direction but they can't take you all the way there" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 384). Thus, storytelling can be seen as an allegory for its readers, especially Arabs and Arab Americans as it is conventionally known that stories convey hidden meanings and messages about the real world. For example, Sirine finds guidance in this story, given the fact that she always fails to open her heart for love, as her uncle refers to it as a story of "how to love" (Ibid.: 17).

Magali Cornier Michael argues that the two narrative lines within *Crescent* echo each other throughout the novel and that they finally combine into a hybrid form by the end of the text (Michael 2011: 314). Borrowings from *Arabian Nights* in the uncle's story bestow a "culturally specific dimension and are tied to the exploration of the complexities of hybrid identity within the context of the United States" (Ibid.). Comparing the uncle's story to *Arabian Nights,* the uncle can be compared to Shahrazad. In *Nights,* Shahrazad is a powerful storyteller who uses storytelling as a hopeful and life-affirming endeavour by strategically telling unfinished, suspenseful stories to the King who, "distraught by the betrayal of his wife, had become a murderer of virgins", taking a virgin every night and having her killed the next morning (Naithani 2004: 275). Shahrazad withholds the endings to her tales night after night in order to keep herself alive, and consequently to save the women who would take her place if she were to die. By so doing, her stories produce hope as Roy P. Mottahedeh says: "if something astonishing is produced and something more astonishing promised, there is interest and, consequently, hope" (Mottahedeh 1997: 31). Like Shahrazad, Sirine's uncle withholds the ending of his story which keeps Sirine's interest and hope of having a good ending; however, and like life itself, the uncle's story and Shahrazad's remain without a definitive ending. Abdelrahman Salahadin is thought to have died several times; yet, he reappears with another incarnation of himself and he is ultimately seen as a Hollywood actor. Similarly, Han could have died during his escape journey across the desert or when he leaves Sirine towards the end of the text and goes to Iraq risking his life. Han survives every danger and succeeds in building his career as an academic and reappears at the end in a newspaper with the name of Abdelrahman Salahadin.

Unlike Shahrazad, Sirine's uncle, who is the storyteller in *Crescent,* is not threatened by death. He is an Iraqi migrant to the United States. He can be described as a teacher of his

Middle Eastern, Iraqi culture, a healer and a source of hope to Sirine and other Arab American audience in the novel. His story being about an Arab hero and his wanderings whose adaptability and survival skills interest the uncle's listeners who need to develop these skills within the context of their diaspora. The two characters of Abdelrahman Salahadin and Han, especially given that the latter takes the name of the former at the end, confuse Sirine due to the likeness she finds between their stories: "she got confused and couldn't quite remember if it was Han or Abdelrahman who loved her, if it was Han or Abdelrahman who dove into the black page of the open sea. Was it Abdelrahman who had to leave her, to return to his old home, or Han who was compelled to drown himself, over and over again" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 394). This merging between the hero of the uncle's tale and Han and the ultimate transformation of Abdelrahman into an actor serves as a model for the existing possibilities for Arab Americans to embrace hopeful and dynamic hybridity.

Michael (2011) argues that the uncle's tale instantiates Edward Said's notion of "plurality of vision" that imagines "both the new and the old environments [as] vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally" (Said 2000:186). In alignment with Michael's argument, the uncle's story by providing a plural vision, it also provides a multifocal representation of the space(s) it represents. On the one hand, the uncle is an Iraqi, or an oriental storyteller located in the United States. On the other hand, his story also includes a non-oriental figure, the British explorer Sir Richard Burton located in Syria and to whom Aunt Camille sells herself as a slave in order to find her son Abdelrahman. She hears that the Englishman has found the source of the Nile River and hopes to go there and meet the Mother of all Fish and ask about her son. Sir Richard Burton is represented as a wanderer of the Arab world, dressed like a native Arab and Arabic "went into his heart like a piercing seed, growing tendrils of beliefs and attitudes" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 121). The depiction of a western character within a different cultural space who behaves and dresses like an Arab is a behavioural anachronism. [30]These details along with Sir Richard Bruton's figure and his representation within the Middle Eastern space provide a more comprehensive and multifocal viewpoint of the involved space which can be considered one essential aspect of a geocritical reading.

More interestingly, Sir Richard's role in the text is also significant for the narrative space of the text in comparing and contrasting two intersecting different worlds across different historical periods. Burton keeps his Victorian aptitude for "ownership, an

[30] Behavioural or cultural anachronism is the use of archaic objects or ideas into a modern context as an aesthetic element.

attachment to things material and personal, like colonies and slaves" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 121). He writes his translation from French to English of a book entitled *The Perfumed Garden* the title of which Aunt Camille interprets as if it is a description of Burton's house in Syria where she resides at the time. This reference to *The Perfumed Garden* can be considered a twofold or double spatial metaphor. On the one hand, the book (like the reference to *The Arabian Nights*) is one of Abu-Jaber's intertextual references that makes her narrative space reminiscent of Soja's thirdspace by employing trialectics of spatiality-historicality-sociality. The original author of this book is Cheikh Nefzaoui who discusses sexuality from Arabic and Islamic viewpoints. On the other hand, aunt Camille believes that she is in this so-called perfumed garden when she is in Bruton's house in Syria which is described as a garden in Abu-Jaber's text. It "was loud with birdsong, splashy with butterflies; ladders rose into bowers, grapes swayed, trellises swung and vines clung, and the sky arched like the roof of a mosque" (Ibid.: 122). The narrator, Sirine's uncle, continues his story, describing Burton's day in that house sitting with friends and people coming and going "talking, eating, forming opinions, messing up the paperwork" (Ibid.). Sirine's uncle immediately brings in comparison to this world another world with a totally different historical phase, "Not like this so-called America today where they just talk all day long on their phone, their computer, and no one ever lays eyes on each other and no one remembers how to cook a tomato or to bring flowers or to kiss the babies" (Ibid.). Hence, Abu-Jaber utilises the character of Sir Bruton, his translated book and his house to compare two different spaces, and at the same time, to create a narrative space that represents what I shall call a liquid thirdspace.

2.6. "From suffering come the greatest art"

In Abu-Jaber's reference to forgotten places and/or former home countries of migrants, the polysensorial quality of space is underscored through the recreation, imagination and memory of these places, for example, by traditional food or music. In *TLOB*: in one scene Diana visits an Oriental restaurant with her maternal grandmother in the USA. The menu stands as a cultural register of forgotten places and a microcosm of the geographical land where they culturally belong: "this menu is a treasure map that takes me on its dotted line over snowy mountains, through hushed trees, past jade lakes . . . dishes named for generals and princes, forgotten cities, and sinewy rivers", Diana thinks (Abu-Jaber 2005: 98—99). This technique of listing cultural and geographical references as names of dishes emphasises their importance in migrants' life and in their integration into the diaspora space. In a wider context, Abu-Jaber's integration of recipes in every chapter of *TLOB* reflects this idea of the culinary role in migrants' spatial experience. The inclusion of

cultural recipes in a memoir like *TLOB* also shows an attempt of eliminating borders between genres which contributes to my argument of the polysensoriality of space and its impact on migrants' life.

In the same scene described above, the author shows the role of music in attaching migrants to their new country. Diana notices how the Chinese waiter turns from being a "remote, stately man" into a state of excitement and astonishment at hearing her grandmother praising Chinese opera (Ibid.: 99). The opera brings comfort to Chen the waiter and it might be said that a kind of common ground is built on mere reference to Chinese opera performance between him and Diana and her Gram. While the grandmother thinks that she is being nice to the Chinese waiter by her reference to what she thinks is a 'Chinese' opera, Diana sits restlessly out of embarrassment because of Gram's racist talk. Chen tells Gram that it is only people who have known suffering in their life that appreciate the opera because; as he claims, "from suffering come the greatest art" (Ibid.: 100).

In *TLOB*, Diana's father and other migrants from the old country (Jordan) are described as "hungry: for home, for family, for the old smells and touches and tastes" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 6). The familial intimacy in Jordan is transferred and reconstructed in the United States. In the words of Henri Lefebvre: "where an intimacy occurs between 'subject' and 'object', it must surely be the world of smell and the places where they reside" (Lefebvre 1991: 197). The manifest inclusion of food and stories as essential pillars in the construction of Abu-Jaber's narratives can be seen as an attempt by an Arab American author to establish a new space through sharing intimate experiences. Hence, we find the Middle Eastern and American space(s) are merged into one dish or in a friendly gathering whether in Jordan or the US. The intimate relationship migrants (represented in Abu-Jaber's family in *TLOB* and some characters in *Crescent*) have within their diasporic space supports the argument of the sociocultural geographer Doreen Massey and the literary critic Sten Pultz Moslund. Massey and Moslund argue that understanding places requires reading them as "open, dynamic, and intimately connected with a global reality of constant movement and change" (Moslund 2015: 204). Abu-Jaber represents this dynamic, global change through cooking dishes that turn out to be cross-cultural, global ones assembling all elements of her identity. In *TLOB*, Abu-Jaber self-reflects and highlights the borderlines she and her family live on while she carries this further and highlights and bridges the gaps between her various migrant communities and like-minded Americans in *Crescent*.

In both books, Abu-Jaber tries to highlight the cross-cultural, genuine links between migrant groups in the United States by focusing on their culinary habits and recipes. In *TLOB*, Bud establishes a friendship with his Italian migrant neighbour, Mrs. Manarelli, in Syracuse which starts with them entering each other's kitchens and sharing recipes and cooking tips. Another connection is strengthened between Diana and her father on the one hand, and between Olga, Diana's Russian-Jewish friend, and her concentration-camp survivor father on the other. This happens when the two fathers discover that the other's food tradition includes stuffed cabbage. Olga's father, Mr. Basilovich, who is represented as depressed, silent and detached breaks this withdrawal by talking to Diana praising Bud's stuffed cabbage and decides that Diana as "an emissary of [her] father, must taste the Russian-Polish-Ukrainian-Jewish version of stuffed cabbages, which he calls *golubtsi*" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 164). Abu-Jaber, here, is representing foods across migrants of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds as a comforting means through recognition of shared traits that have the power to affect Bud and Mr. Basilovich though in different ways. In the case of Mr. Basilovich, the comfort which preparing his version of stuffed cabbage brings to him is momentary. A few days later he is hospitalised, and though he seems to start getting better, he eventually commits suicide. Mr. Basilovich has a longstanding suffering and "his gaze is forever wafting over shoulders and seeking out doorways; he is only partially present" (Ibid.). As a young man, he has been shipped with his family from Russia to the concentration camps from where he escapes and crosses Europe on foot, "enduring dramatic perils—towering barbed-wire fences, vicious dogs, gunshots, starvation, and mountaintop exposure", and once in America, he begins his attempts to kill himself (Ibid.: 161). Thus, Abu-Jaber argues that the food of the lost homeland does not necessarily bring comfort or a harmoniously integrated new present as in the case of Bud, but it could also result in detrimental consequences; i.e. the connection is too powerful and recalls painful memories as the case of Mr. Basilovich.

Similarly, in *Crescent*, the idea of addressing painful memories and the loss and destruction the migrant characters experience is represented through approaching the corelative sensory experience of smells, tastes and listening which are combined in a kitchen, for example. Sirine and Han share their painful memories and the loss of home and family that torture them. The narrative illustrates what happens to displaced people like Han, whether by politics, misunderstandings or death as in the case of Sirine. Han tells Sirine about his escape from Iraq and his crossing of the desert, and she narrates the tragic death of her parents. When Han tells Sirine that she is "the place [he] want[s] to be—[she's] the opposite of exile", she fully grasps his feelings of him belonging to her, and how he finds

his lost senses of belonging and safety in her (Abu-Jaber 2003: 158). Despite their mutual longing for the sense of home and her understanding of his loss, she is worried that preparing his Iraqi, favourite dishes might awaken his desire to return to Iraq. Thus, instead of preparing the *frekah* he asked for, she prepares a traditional American breakfast.

Sirine explores migrants' feelings of sadness and loneliness through her conversations with her uncle. She asks him why he never speaks of Iraq. He explains how talking about Iraq involves a comparison between then and now which is a sad thing. He elaborates on how the Iraq he and his brother, Sirine's father, came from "doesn't exist anymore. It's a new, scary place. When your old house doesn't exist anymore, that makes things sadder in general" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 142). While having this conversation with her uncle, he asks Eustavio, an Italian waiter, if he thinks that "immigrants are sadder than other people". Eustavio approves, "*certo*! When we leave our home we fall in love with our sadness" (Ibid.: 142-143). While listening to them, Sirine takes a bite of a rich panna cotta, and "it melts into a dozen separate flavors. She can smell oranges and lemons, cherry and wood, and even the soft silk and wool of Persian carpets, the smell she thought came from Iraq" (Ibid.: 144). Evoking memories of shopping for food as a child with her uncle where it did not matter if the shop was Persian, Greek or Italian, this experience asserts that food can serve as a common denominator. Food migrates with travellers across the Mediterranean and beyond, and many middle eastern foods are also the main ingredients in the food of many other cultures. Hence, cultures or a cultural space cannot be static but remain in constant motion and "trying to find some primordially authentic culture can be like peeling an onion. Cultures are made of continuity and changes and the identity of a society can survive through these changes" (Appiah 2006: 107). Abu-Jaber portrays these ongoing transformations through the music and flavours brought to the American cultural space by waves of migration.

Aside from intertextuality, Abu-Jaber's selection of specific locations incorporates Soja's spatiality-historicality-sociality, such as a restaurant in Jordan where Bud looks for his past life and the source from which he has learnt about Bedouin protocols. One day while in Jordan on a Fulbright scholarship, Diana, along with Bud and her American friend who is called Fattoush visit a restaurant called "Kan Zaman", meaning "once upon a time". This restaurant as a lived space could be read as a significant spatial metaphor. On the one hand, its name can be read ironically as Mai's voice indicates while translating the meaning of its name to Fattoush, referring to the changes which occurred in Jordan that are totally unlike the ones besetting the country at the present time. The three of them go on a trip to a fortress

in the desert where "at the top of the hill is a walled city that was occupied by the Abu-Jabers generations ago" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 278). Diana had seen this place during her childhood twenty-five years ago when she and her family ate with the rest of their extended relatives in the Bedouin manner. During her second visit, she feels that the place is different from the last time. As they move around the place, Bud proceeds to a "tent with his hands out and open as if he is about to start flying, and the rest of [them] follow. [She] realize[s] as we [they] approach that the red tent is actually an elaborate entryway leading into a vast, open courtyard full of tables and people" (Ibid.: 280). Bud has been looking for this restaurant following his senses, which reflects the "inter-relationships between the senses and the multisensual nature of geographical experience" (Rodaway 1994: 25). Yet, this geographical nature of the senses is not even but "variable across space and through time, between individuals and communities, between cultures and periods" (Ibid.: 37). On the surface, this area is an incarnation of the past and the Bedouins' culture for Bud, who feels responsible for introducing it to the foreign visitors despite the fact that he is a visitor himself, and despite Mai's sardonic statement that all of this tradition has been eroded by time. The restaurant is described as natural for its stone walls and medieval light, and Bud being in this "Kan Zaman" is presented as "finally in place" where he has learnt from the Bedouins how "to give food, water, and shelter to anyone who needed it, before they needed it" (Ibid.: 281). Of Bud's attachment to this place, Diana noted how he scrutinises the dishes on others' tables and leans to ask if they are satisfied with everything as if he owns this restaurant.

One aspect of Abu-Jaber's writings is her focus on the way her migrant characters absorb the cultural space with which they become involved. According to Paul Rodaway, "sensuous experience is, in any case, often a complex of senses working together offering a range of 'clues' about the environment through which the body is passing" (Rodaway 1994: 25). In other words, the body is the medium through which a specific space is recognised and information about it is gathered. At the same time, these senses contribute to the definition of that information, that is, participate in sense making or understanding a given space. For instance, one day, Diana's father announces that the family is to move to Jordan after having lived in Syracuse for several years. Diana's comment on this piece of news underscores her and the family's relation to their immediate, cultural space that has been steadily built in a multi-sensuous way, "consuming American culture, TV, music, and especially its lavish, oily fast food—fried fish burgers, fried chicken, and quart-size ice-milk Fribbles from Friendly's restaurant" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 134). Diana and her family have lived in the USA and have grappled with its cultural space by eating its fast food, listening to its music and watching its TV programmes. They have been absorbing its cultural space and

growing up consuming it, so that it becomes part of them rather than living an isolated lifestyle because change is inevitable as part of Bauman's liquid modernity. Diana's description of the modern American lifestyle demonstrates how she and her family absorb American cultural space in a polysensorial manner. If they had merely lived physically in the USA; i.e. by existing physically in the country, they might have been in a more vulnerable position.

Diana rejects the move to Jordan and the assumption that she would have to re-create herself when she tastes the juice her friend's mother prepared at a going-away party which she used to like, emphasising the polysensorial nature of space and its function in migrants' relationship with a specific place. For her, it tastes now like everything else she used to taste when she returned to the U.S. after being away in Jordan: "it tastes of sugar, stone, chemicals—the way everything did when I first returned to States. That fiery reentry comes back to me, the memory of having to re-create myself at seven, at nine, and now again" (Ibid.: 135). She comments that shopping in the Jordanian, open-air market is different from shopping at P&C in Syracuse. Jordan is depicted in this context as being encompassed in this specific location that is wholly assimilated via all senses: "the original scent of Jordan is here: sesame, olive, incense, rosewater, orange blossom water, dust, jasmine, thyme" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 37). She tries to imagine Jordan through what she retains of "vivid impressions worked into [her] body, sharp and inexorable—the whiteness of the streets, the stone houses, the running children. These tokens have always been within [her]: the scent of mint in [her] parents' garden, the intricate birdsong, the seeded crust of the bread, and the taste of dried yogurt steeped in olive oil" (Ibid.: 135-36). It is her body and its senses that retain the Jordan which she has recognised as a child. Abu-Jaber, here, uses descriptions of sensuous experience which also reflects "the basic multisensual character of geographical experience" (Rodaway 1994: 36). In other words, the author shows how migrants' spatial realisation requires different senses to live the experience to its utmost; i.e. to lessen the feelings of detachment and estrangement.

After the family has sold their house and Diana's parents resigned from their jobs, their move to Jordan is cancelled. Abu-Jaber's narrative, however, continues along the same lines of reflecting the importance of being involved in a space mainly through a polysensory approach. Diana and her sisters feel isolated in the new house which is located in the countryside. It is only when Diana's friends Jess and Ed help her decipher this place that she arrives at harmony with her universe. Before that, Diana only looks at the surrounding fields from a distance, mourning her previous life, until she discovers a new way of conceiving

this rural place. This brings us to the importance of other senses in relation to a particular place and that the distanced, mere sight of it cannot be adequate in the journey towards acclimatisation with the new world. As Diana comments, if "you hang back and gaze at the fields from a distance, they look pretty and empty, yielding nothing", but once she gets within these fields, she acquires a new perspective: "a land of leaves, buzzing walls, heat-struck mirages floating on air" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 149). She is now able to understand and consider this place from a totally different perspective.

2.7. The Language of Food, the Language of Love and Reconciliation

Despite the cosmopolitan setting and the demonstration of the cross-cultural power that Abu-Jaber employs in her narrative, she is adamant about emphasising cultural differences in the face of the prevailing culture. She speaks of this in her memoir saying that her "grant proposal describes a novel that I will write about characters undergoing ambitious self-excavation, recovery, and reconciliation as they move between countries. It is set in both America and the Middle East, and it is meant to draw together [her] own deep cultural ambivalences-to try to look right at the conundrum of being Arab-American. Arab and American" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 235). Hence, culinary activities and characters' reactions to certain types of food are employed as tools of self-excavation, reconciliation, recovery or communication.

Diana's complex relation to her family's food is developed in a later chapter entitled "Candy and Lebeneh" when she attends college away from home. This is more than a rejection of the Middle Eastern food which her father loves to cook. It goes further beyond that to a rejection of being culturally associated with one part of her life. The extended metaphor of food is employed here by Diana in distinguishing her family lifestyle as Middle Eastern migrants and her Americanised one. In her first year at college, she starts creating her own lifestyle by making her choice of music, coffee and a boyfriend, choices that her father would never approve as she declares. However, she finds the food in the dorm inedible and survives on eating candy at the shop where she works. On her periodic visits to her family, she eats Bud's Middle Eastern dishes, but she finds herself vomiting in the middle of the night. This sensation of nausea accompanies her during her first year at college to the extent that she "turns inside out, [her] body physically rejecting the food. A rejection of something more powerful than food" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 227). Bardenstein argues that this incident signals the representation of food as an "essentialized cultural marker of authenticity with restorative . . . powers", and at the same time, food does not become a symbol of

rejection of cultural identity (Bardenstein 2010: 175). In other words, Abu-Jaber neither represents food as an essential, clear-cut cultural, ethnic marker nor does she employ it as a tool to completely refuse or abandon cultural identity. Sometime later, Diana experiences what might be called an epiphany, a sudden realisation which contributes to her ultimate transformation. Abu-Jaber argues that some other narrative texts represent some characters experiencing a moment of realisation by contemplating the outside, physical world: "a sort of veil is lifted and there is a glimpse of the infinite" which is the case with Khadra in Kahf's novel as discussed in the previous chapter (Abu-Jaber 2005: 228). However, Abu-Jaber, here, represents a reverse approach which makes the outer, physical world around her push Diana towards her senses: "It pulls [her] immediately and irresistibly into the senses, the physical world, and [she] feel[s] a startling cellular jolt of exquisite love and connection to people . . . [she] sense[s] the distances between places, the country house and suburbs, even between America and Jordan, start to disintegrate. Geography turns liquid. There is something in us connecting every person to every other person" (Ibid.: 228-229). After this, Diana suddenly desires *labneh*, strained yogurt which is "the simplest dish in the world" (Ibid.: 229). In the wake of this incident, Diana recovers from her nausea and she is able to enjoy her father's food whilst also carving out her unique identity as an Arab-American.

Gitanjali G. Shahani dwells on the relationship between food and literature in migrant fiction as follows: "immigrant writing, in particular, has dwelt on the tensions that arise as diasporic communities are compelled to negotiate spaces such as supermarkets and school cafeterias in their adopted land" (Shahani 2018: 23). By foregrounding cultural practices like cooking and storytelling in her narratives, Abu-Jaber attempts to depoliticise Arab-American representation in American, information media. One way of politicising the space of Arab-American migrants in diaspora is through media; i.e. addressing the different senses of people as in the sensoriality in the film industry and digital photography and the tactility of the keyboard and screen. These different mediums are sensory methods in representing the politicised Arab Americans. Hence, Abu-Jaber follows the same method of addressing all human senses in order to enhance the process of depoliticising migrants' place in diaspora. In so doing, she offers a different lens to understand Arab Americans and their cultural background. One cousin of Diana comments that, "in this country, the Arabs are seen only through the lens of politics. The TV says we're oil sheikhs or fundamentalists or terrorists or all three at once. It's all stereotypes! We have no charm or texture! When do we get to have homes and parties and jokes and children? We need a strong national identity! We're held hostage by ideology, by things like Hollywood and politics and Palestine" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 128-29). Through her writing, Abu-Jaber counter addresses geopolitical reports

in which individuals necessarily take a back seat to geopolitical categories and distinctions according to their nations, religions, borders, territories and authorities, to name a few, by putting "a human face on people who are culturally erased and provide human histories, family life, the day-to-day things that people can relate to, food, family, love, loss" ('The Only Response to Silencing' 2002).

Abu-Jaber discusses migrants' issues and addresses their problems through approaching their senses. The shattering sufferings they experienced are addressed in gentle practices that might heal, as if she were claiming that the whole body has witnessed these big events and one way to heal it is through its senses. Abu-Jaber chooses cooking and eating besides storytelling to communicate this. According to Carolyn Korsmeyer, "eating together is a common signal among most peoples for friendship, truce, or celebration" (Korsmeyer 2002: 187). She adds, "Both eating and narrative are cultural practices. When food is treated in fiction, therefore, it brings to light the way eating may achieve significance within the tradition the narrative in question addresses or in which it participates" (Ibid.). Korsmeyer's words invoke the communicative characteristic of such practices, by which languages are characterised by. In agreement with Tuan's idea of experience and intimacy, she says, "the intimacy of eating is part of what knits together those who eat—the mutual trust presumed, the social equality of those who sit down together, and the shared tastes and pleasures of the table" (Ibid.). Abu-Jaber not only handles food from the cultural point of view but interweaves it with the specificities of migrant experiences of her characters.

Some critics like Lorraine Mercer and Linda Strom argue that in *Crescent*, and I would add *TLOB* to this, the language of food serves as a cogent approach to ethnic history. They add that food forms a kind of contact zone, borrowing Mary Louise Pratt's term. According to Pratt, a contact zone refers to "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" and includes "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations" (Pratt 1992: 7–8). Mercer and Strom find Abu-Jaber's contact zone different from Pratt's. They argue that while Pratt's concept involves "conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict," Abu-Jaber's contact zones are domestic ones which establish themes of the world-as-home and the personal as political, situated in places like cafés, kitchens and homes (Ibid.: 8). Pratt also develops the idea of contact language which can be seen in the two texts. According to Pratt, this contact language is one of the "improvised languages that develop among speakers of different tongues who need to communicate with each other consistently" (Ibid.). One characteristic

Pratt emphasises in the contact zone is that "such languages are commonly regarded as chaotic, barbarous and lacking in structure" (Ibid.). Abu-Jaber disagrees with Pratt's chaotic view of diasporic cultures and her treatment of food serves as a metaphor for her own perspective. In that sense, Abu-Jaber's narratives help us to envisage the harmony brought about in the migrant communities she represents. She argues in an online talk that "eating is one of the things that crystallizes your experiences and the metaphor of food is a way to translate these cultural experiences. Thus, the treatment of food in *Crescent* becomes a 'safe' way for white American readers to listen to dangerous topics like war, Iraq, the Middle East" (PSU talk 21 October 2006).

Abu-Jaber does not stop at the point of absorbing places and living a spatial experience in a polysensorial way but takes this further when her characters take routes in their movements within a given space by following their senses. In *TLOB*, Diana's and Bud's visits to Jordan and Sirine's movements in Los Angeles in *Crescent* are mostly represented and described not only by their physical appearances which are conceived by sight but the representation that can be called, here, multi-sensuous. Rodway points out that "a sensuous geography cannot just describe the geographical experience, it must also consider more fundamental questions about the nature of person-environment relationships and what constitutes a geographical reality for a given society (or culture) at a given moment in time and space" (Rodway 1994: 6). Abu-Jaber reflects the cultural, social factor in what constitutes reality for migrants through highlighting migrants' relationship with their old country and reflecting it in their everyday practices of cooking and gatherings. What places like Iraq and Jordan mean to migrants at certain times in the past has changed after the journey of migration and the experience of living in a different place.

The role of migrants in the liquidation of space is reflected in shopping places. This kind of space is highly polysensorial in the sense that it addresses nearly all of the human senses as portrayed by the author. Abu-Jaber approaches the issue of globalisation by emphasising the importance of markets in the lives of migrants in our modern environment, where instability, uncertainty and individualism are essential factors. Globalisation has proven to be a powerful engine of the delocalisation process, thanks to economic expansion and corporations' conquest of global markets. Shops are significant metaphors for the enhancement of the sense of globalisation and more importantly assertion of the author's theme of the world-as-home or "liquid society", to borrow Bauman's concept, in *Crescent*. The shop, owned by Iranian migrant Khoorosh, is where Sirine finds the imported spices and food products. A rich influx of spices engulfs Sirine as she enters it. Abu-Jaber depicts

such places as a globalised space or a microcosmic world that Sirine is drawn to even though she needs nothing. Abu-Jaber seeks to depoliticise the interaction between migrant communities by bringing migrants from conflicting countries, religious and cultural backgrounds together on common humanistic grounds. Despite the conflict between Iran and Iraq and the American invasion of Iraq, she concentrates on portraying all the diverse populations as if she were preparing a new dish using ingredients from all around the world. Abu-Jaber attributes this routine of visiting this place to Sirine's "dreaming of new dishes located somewhere between Iraq, Iran and America" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 123). The Victory Market, where the Iranian shop is, occupies a central part in Sirine's spatial attachment which has been forming since her childhood. In the Victory Market, she enjoys "the immigrants' special language of longing and nostalgia" by which she refers to the language of food (Ibid.: 124). As a child, Sirine used to spend time in that market, holding her uncle's hand as they looked for special flavours that were not available in American grocery stores. Sirine finds a bond amongst the different shops in the Victory Market: "it didn't matter if the shop was Persian, Greek, or Italian, because all of them had the same great bins of beans and lentils, glass cases of white cheeses and braided cheeses, murky jars of olives, fresh breads and pastries flavouring the air" (Ibid.). In the world of slippery identities which Abu-Jaber represents in her texts, food is often a catalyst that keeps migrant characters centred.

Sirine's engagement with the Victory Market, as well as her knowledge and awareness of the various cultural backgrounds of the shops and the smells in the market, develops as a result of her reception of the different aromas from across the world that permeate the air. Kelvin E. Y. Low argues in his book *Scent and scent-sibilities: Smell and Everyday Life Experiences* that domains of social life, like race, class and gender, form signposts of inquiry in the social sciences and beyond. Low extends his argument to the role of smells in forming a "powerful (yet unseen) epistemological tool with which one may employ to understand" how the aforementioned social domains "may be reconfigured, negotiated and perpetuated" (Low 2008: 84).

Understanding the language of food becomes significant at points where Diana in *TLOB* and Sirine and Han in *Crescent* develop their connection with and affiliation to their wider space. One interesting episode delineates Diana with her aunt Aya who comes from Jordan to visit her brothers in the States. Aunt Aya is, like Munira, an untraditional Bedouin voice and she helps Diana figure things out while they spend time together in the kitchen. At this moment in the book, Diana has been arguing with Bud who threatens to send her to Jordan after receiving a negative report from school. Aya suggests that she and Diana bake,

a suggestion to which Diana responds rebelliously: "Fine, … as long as it isn't Arabic" (Abu-Jaber 2005: 185). Aunt Aya understands Diana's hatred of Arabic food as a protest against her father who is obsessed with it. Aya as an untraditional voice surprises Diana with her response that she hates Arabic food, too. Then, she suggests that they prepare 'baklava' using its Greek name instead of '*baklawa'* as Arabs call it and the two of them agree that they are never quite sure who made it first which makes Diana accept this. Abu-Jaber, here, explains the language of baklava as an alimentary medium not necessarily limited to any location, but rather as polyphony and a multi-cultural diction that can be understood by all human senses.

Sirine first appears in the text brewing Arabic coffee for her uncle. This simple act reflects how food is a contact language for Sirine and "a medium to translate experience and create a meaningful world" (Mercer and Strom 2007: 40). For her, food is not only a contact language but also a creative healing therapy and a love monument. As a child, she witnessed how her American mother used to cook her father's favourite Middle Eastern dish whose smell would bring him to the kitchen immediately. Such a simple act teaches the child Sirine that food is a language of love. Nine-year-old Sirine uses this language to communicate with everyone around her. Her understanding and appreciation of the food language have been her little secret; a belief that she has kept private and personal, that she has learned through years: "the only truth she seemed to possess—that food was better than love: surer, truer, more satisfying and enriching. As long as she could lose herself in the rhythms of peeling an onion, she was complete and whole. And as long as she could cook, she would be loved" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 217–18). Food seems, here, Sirine's resort and the only truth she is sure about: she can feel it through all her senses and can find out every particular ingredient that is used to prepare certain dishes, unlike everything else she comes through in her life. Whenever she is confronted with uncertainty or confusion or even when she has an identity conflict, she cooks herself and her lived experiences into coexistence.

The role of food as a source of solace and a language of communication is also significant to Han, an exiled character in *Crescent*. In his small flat, the Iraqi Professor Hanif Al Eyad, or Han, experiences several significant, sensuous elements that are commensurate with his overall grasp of his spatial connections. As Sirine enters the flat, she looks around briefly and notices the picture window full of stars and a "sound vague as bees or distant bells hums between the black spaces in the sky, then she realizes it's coming from the corners of the room: a woman singing" (Abu-Jaber 2003: 76). The first time he invites Sirine for dinner at his place, he is keen on preparing an American dinner for her. He studies *The Joy*

of Cooking and *The Betty Crocker* cookbooks to prepare a meal of meatloaf. She finds Han "intrigued by the new kind of cooking, a shift of ingredients like a move from native tongue into a foreign language: butter instead of olive oil; potatoes instead of rice; beef instead of lamb" (Ibid.: 77). By so doing, Han tries to communicate with Sirine through the language she loves, the language of food, and in so doing it becomes easier for him to reach out to her world. Once again, the language of food is used as a contact language when Han feeds Sirine a "morsel of lamb from his fingers" whereby food becomes "their own private language" (Ibid.: 299). Han tells Sirine how he likes kitchens: "[he] never much wanted to be up in [his] father's orchard. [He] liked this. [He] liked the kitchen. The table. Stove. Where the women were always telling stories" (Ibid.:67). Han's reference to the kitchen foregrounds its influence on him as a child. The kitchen is constantly reminiscent of the stories women exchange besides the cooking which together create a strong influence on Han and his perception of his home and its wider space. Despite the portrayal of women controlling kitchens, Diana's father and Han bring this cultural notion into the discussion. By introducing two male characters as active members within this domestic space, Abu-Jaber also transcends what may be termed the kitchen-gender-border polemic, transforming it into a borderless domestic space.

By scrutinising small details of everyday life and social practices, like friends' gatherings, preparing a meal and sharing it, listening to music or stories, and shopping for groceries, Diana Abu-Jaber asserts the polysensorial nature of coming to terms with space. Such practices constitute an ontological space leading to a reconciliation with other different spaces; i.e. a space within which migrants do not feel estranged or detached. In her narratives, she does not deny the geo-political borders that persist within migrant communities. However, she tries to reconstruct these borders in a way that brings them together to communicate through the language of food. Abu-Jaber aligns with Rodaway in asserting the role of the senses in different cultural contexts, especially among migrants here. The examples that have been explored above show that what is lost cannot be redeemed but can be reconciled. This focus on the spatial memories of migrants that are recreated in the new adopted country, embedded in certain dishes or some family stories, helps in going forward rather than trying to live in the past. The two texts offer a number of stories of different migrants to allow for a mutual understanding, and consequently, a possibility of blurring the geo-political borders amongst migrants in diaspora. Stylistically, Diana Abu-Jaber succeeds in representing a kind of **liquid thirdspace** which locates her texts within the domain of geocriticism. She does this by highlighting different worlds and spaces while, at the same time, diminishing these borders on the humanistic level. To do so, she utilises

intertextuality and multi-focalisation which bring forward real and imagined places over different historical periods and provide a multidimensional viewpoint.

Chapter Three: The Politics of Space in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* and *West of the Jordan* and Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights*

> In America, where I live, native people settled along rivers and, like tribal people worldwide, accepted them for what they were: unpredictable, sometimes erratic, changeable beings. Instead of making a river their border, they viewed both banks as a natural territory. When the European settlers came, they diverted rivers and tried to harness them, with little regard for the people they might be affecting, which is similar to what the Israelis did when they hijacked the River Jordan in 1964; the 1967 war started because Israel was caught trying to divert the Jordan away from the West Bank and Jordan. The result of that war was that Israel controlled—controls still—most of the headwaters of the Jordan, much of the Jordan itself, and is in partial or total control of all the aquifers (Halaby 2007: 244).

Liquid, natural geographies like seas and rivers have strategic significance in peoples' lives and states' power across history. In the above quotation on the tongue of Jassim Haddad, the male protagonist and hydrologist in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), water, a source of life, is described as a source of conflict, especially in the Palestinian-Israeli context. He explains the relationship between native American people and rivers. Like tribal people, he explains, they settle by riversides accepting the natural features of water as unpredictable, erratic and changeable. In this case, rivers are not viewed as dividing borders between the settlers and the other riverbank. On the contrary, they consider both banks as their one natural territory. This situation has changed with the coming of European settlers who diverted rivers to control them, interfering in their natural flow and negatively affecting the Native people. Jassim compares this situation to what the Israeli occupation has done in Palestine by diverting the River Jordan. In this text and in her *West of the Jordan* (2003), Halaby employs the metaphor of water in representing the conflicts of Arab American migrants in post-9/11 events.[31]She does not only employ natural liquid geographies in her narratives. Rather, we will also see the symbol of water in exposing the conflicts of her migrant characters in their American social space and in their homeland. In the two previous chapters, Arab-American authors like Mohja Kahf, Randa Jarrar and Diana Abu-Jaber represent migrants' attempts to position themselves and integrate their homeland cultural heritage within American space. This attitude manifests itself best in Abu-Jaber's texts

[31] According to a survey conducted by the Arab American Institute published in the *Washington Post* on August 24, 2012, nearly six in ten Americans said that they do not know a Muslim compared to three in ten who said they did, while the rest were unsure. The report says that people who knew Muslims were more likely to have favourable views of them (Sacirbey 2012).

where rigid and resentful geography (i.e. geographical features which are represented as unwelcoming and difficult for migrants to live within) and spaces are turned liquid in her fiction; i.e., differences are eliminated and/or celebrated.[32] We have seen migrants' cognitive mapping and the multi-sensuous practices to position themselves in diaspora as in the previous two chapters. Yet, their attempts have been shattered by the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Trade Towers. My attempt in this chapter is to continue my reading of migrants' space in Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* and *Once in a Promised Land* and Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* (2011) as an influencing and controlling tool in migrants' life in post 9/11 America. More specifically, my geocritical analysis of these selected texts focuses on how migrants' spatial experience has changed and become intensely politicised after the 9/11 events. In other words, what has been described as "liquid space" before September 11 has transformed into rigid, solid geographies because one quality of a liquid society is 'fluidity' which makes it undergo a continuous change when subjected to stress, and the stress, in the context of migration space under study here, is considerably political.

In the selected texts, natural liquid geographies like the River Jordan and places like swimming pools and showers are used to reflect migrants' spatial experiences. For example, in *West of the Jordan*, crossing the river from Palestine to Jordan can become a form of control and limitation and/or of empowerment for migrants, especially women.[33] In *Once in a Promised Land*, Jassim's status as a hydrologist and his workplace where he has access to the water system of Tucson and his swimming routine in the gym are the source of his temporary yet stable life in America and at the same time the reason behind losing it. In *Brooklyn Heights*, although al-Tahawy does not employ the metaphor of water as Halaby does, the choice of the female protagonist's zodiac sign being Scorpio which is a water sign is symbolic of the female protagonist's character. One feature of Scorpios is being mysterious. Mystery, here, is not only a characteristic of Hend, but it is also a feature of the Arab American spatial experience after almost a decade of 9/11 tragic events. Here arises the question of the liquid geography concept which I explored in the two previous chapters where borders are eliminated between migrants, leaving a sense of mystery about the future of Arab Americans in America after the 9/11 events. Hence, space and water are politicised

[32] See "Chapter Two" for more details on the concept of liquid geography in Abu-Jaber's selected texts.

[33] The bridge is a symbol of hope and survival as it links the West Bank with Jordan, and it serves as an emblem of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. In 1995, the Oslo II interim agreement divided the West Bank into three areas of administration. Area A is under exclusive Palestinian control. Area B is under the dual control of the Palestinian civil authority and the Israeli military while Area C is under exclusive Israeli control. For Palestinians, leaving Jenin for Hebron (both in Area A) requires a change in zones up to fifty times, whereas an Israeli could travel across the West Bank without ever leaving Area C (Gregory 2004: 99-100).

in a way that affects the spatial experience of Middle Eastern migrants. Taking all these elements into consideration, I explore in this chapter the impact of politicised space on migrants' lives and how it is represented. Simultaneously, my analysis examines the influence of American multi-faceted space on Arab migrants. By reading Halaby's and al-Tahawy's texts, I attempt to shed light on the workings of the politics of space in the lives of migrants and their spatial experiences, which are not always characterised by total peace or insecurity. The fluid society of migrants is shown in the selected narratives as being plagued by detrimental globalisation, which erodes migrants' rights in the globalised American realm.

Politics shapes and defines the very homes, streets and cities in which we live. More specifically and as this study focuses on the experience of migration, politics is an influencing factor that affects the way migrants try to pursue their lives in places other than their homelands. We can easily fail to recognise that the spatial dimension of our lives is essentially political. By politics of space, here, I mean a migrant's position within power hierarchies created through political, economic, geographic and other socially stratifying factors in both homeland and diaspora. Questions of *who* can be *where* and what they can do here or there are at the heart of a migrant text. My reading of the selected books is an attempt to trace these spatio-political factors in the construction of Halaby's and al-Tahawy's migrant characters and the experience of migration. These factors affect migrants' sense of empowerment in different ways. For instance, and as one of the primary issues that I will tackle in this chapter, gender issues are essential reasons behind migration or staying at home, and they also influence spatial organisation and representation. My reading also considers the texts as political space by which the two authors contribute to understanding Arab-American relations in the aftermath of 9/11. Therefore, the chapter will mainly be motivated by the exploration of Arab American migration space as propounded by Bertrand Westphal and others.

The experience of migration in the three selected novels is narrated mainly from the point of view of female migrant characters, some of whom are settled in the USA and/or in the Middle East, providing different geographical locations as focal narrative standpoints. Halaby also includes white Americans' viewpoints about Arab migrants within the post-9-11 American social space besides migrants' ones. This multifocalisation in a multi-geographical setting provides a comprehensive understanding of migrants' narrative space and reflects the characters' state of mind and self-understanding. Through the portrayal of

the displaced characters, Halaby and al-Tahawy explore themes of memory and trauma, belonging and gender from a spatial perspective.

3.1. Where Liquid Geography Turns Solid

The place is the United States and the time is September 11, 2001, a time-space encapsulation that forms the focal point in *Once in a Promised Land*. This novel tells the story of an Arab couple, Jassim and Salwa, enjoying a stable life in the USA. When the tragic events of 9/11 occur, their personal life is also shaken by Jassim's car accident and Salwa's miscarriage. Halaby explores the life of Middle Eastern migrants in the USA during this time by shedding light on the personal life of Jassim and Salwa and shows how the personal space becomes public as will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

In the analysed texts in previous chapters, political events contextualise migrant characters' development while in the selected text, here, they have a direct impact on the characters' development and our understanding of their spatial experience. These events also contribute to destroying the seemingly peaceful life of migrants in the USA and their friendships with white Americans. The liquid space which I used to describe the borderless space of migrants living in the USA has been turned into a solid and rigidly bordered one.[34] In this text, Halaby deconstructs the American social space and unfolds the state power and policies towards Middle Eastern migrants which form part of its social texture. She does so by highlighting the impact of the tragic 9/11 events on the life of Salwa and Jassim, a migrant couple of Palestinian-Jordanian origin as well as on white Americans. Mucahit Bilici writes on this issue: "Americans have still not fully recovered from the trauma, nor has the American government been able to conclude the two wars that it launched in response. And while everyone in the country has been negatively affected in some way by the securitization of everyday life that came in the wake of the crisis, the group that has suffered most has been Arab and Muslim Americans" (Bilici 2011: 133). The negative impact can be read from a spatial perspective on both migrants and white Americans and their relationship with each other, on the one hand, and with the American space(s), on the other one.

The titles of Halaby's selected texts *Once in a Promised Land* and *West of the Jordan* are significant and provide a clear hint to the core of this study. The 'promised land' in the title can be read as an irony, given that this was the term used by Jews for Israel and Puritans

[34] See my discussion of Gloria Andalzua's concept of borders in section 2.2. Highlighting Borders.

for pre-US North America where despite the different narratives these lands remain in conflict. In the first novel, Halaby's focus is on the diasporic space while in the latter the focal point, to which all characters and almost all events are linked, is in the Middle East, Palestine and Jordan. Salaita interprets the title of the first novel as a singular moment in the past or a sequence, as in "Once I arrived in the United States" (Salaita 2011: 87). It can also be read as having mythological implications as it is a replica of the opening phrase of fairy tales "once upon a time" which introduces the invalidity of the American dream and keeps it at the level of a fairy tale as the Afterword in the text suggests. From a geocritical perspective, I see Halaby's two texts as two parts of one space; that is of Arab-American space—including both migrant and white Americans—: geographical, cultural and social.

The aftermath of September 11 in its widespread impact—on the American and Middle Eastern spaces—has the liquid nature of quick spread and the difficulty of being restored to a balance. Halaby employs this in prompting events and actions to the extent that one might think that things could have gone in a different direction if such a tragedy had not occurred. Although the text tells a linear story, the author employs analepsis and deviations throughout the book to enhance the awareness about space. These movements in the narrative can be seen as a reference to the mental disturbance of the characters. For example, in *Once in a Promised Land*, the narrative uses analepsis when a character is suffering from an incident in the present time and switches to narrating an incident from the past, like in the case of Jassim's mental state after a car accident. For example, since the "fateful Tuesday when the planes hit, his mind had not cleared on entering the water but rather captured memories, mostly of home" (Halaby 2007: 62). Then the narrative goes in flashback to Jassim's past: "back to before his American beginning" (Ibid.). About the state of Jassim, the narrator comments: "After the accident, his diorama sufficiently shaken, he began to see, slowed down, and looked at those looking back. And for the first time he felt unsettled in his beloved America, vaguely longed for home, where he could nestle in the safe, predictable bosom of other Arabs" (Halaby 2007: 165). Using this technique reflects a disturbance of water flow which usually takes one direction. The disturbing, tragic events on both the personal and public levels can be seen as a strong storm unsettling a liquid geography, like a sea or an ocean, and swallowing whoever risks coming near to it. Hence, the two involved geographical entities are juxtaposed side by side in the text to reveal the public reaction to the events regardless of their direct location. For example, Salwa's family call her to ask about her despite her distanced location from the site of the attack because of their awareness that things will not be the same towards Arabs in America. In the US, Salwa's colleague

advises her to be careful and encourages her to show her position to the public by hanging the American flag on her car.

Jassim Haddad and Salwa Khalil are a married couple who live in Tucson, Arizona. They have a routine and a set route that they follow every day. Jassim starts his day with a swim, comes home to spend some time with Salwa and then goes to work. One day, Jassim has a car accident and Salwa suffers a miscarriage. Both unpleasant events turn their life upside down although neither of these accidents relates to the attack on the trade towers. Yet, their relationship is affected, and a division is created between the couple that disconnects them from each other and from their society alike. Although they seem to lead a successful life in Tucson, things go out of their control and their life and relationship change. The main accident that disturbs Salwa's serene life is the miscarriage of a pregnancy she hides from Jassim. During the short time of her pregnancy and the miscarriage, Salwa's thoughts about her life in the USA are made clear by the author. While still recovering from the miscarriage, she thinks that "American life [is] *deceptively* full: a giant house filled with desired items, cars too large to fit in their owners' garages, fine designer clothes to decorate the manicured body and all to cover the shell" (Halaby 2007: 101, emphasis added). She thinks of American life as illusive and empty of meaning for her, a materialistic life. Unlike Jassim, Salwa is never committed to American life or to her marriage. For her, there is a huge difference between the marriage and the American life she is living and the idea of marriage and life in the States which she has had in mind. Both have become an illusion and meaningless. Jassim's life changes and starts to collapse when he accidentally hits a teenager with his car. The boy dies at the scene, and Jassim is cleared of wrong-doing by the police. However, after the accident, Jassim is unable to go back to his cherished routine and finds comfort in the company of Penny, a Denny's waitress. The obvious reasons to the reader are personal and beyond government surveillance and anti-Arab racism. However, American domestic politics force them into situations that worsen things that they would otherwise have eschewed.

One narrative technique that reflects the fluid effect of this event is the employment of water. As a child, Jassim's uncle tells him, "Water is what will decide things, not just for us but for every citizen of the world as well" (Halaby 2007: 40). From then on, Jassim becomes fascinated with water. His fascination grows larger as he becomes a hydrologist and his understanding extends beyond its physical properties, extending to its cultural, emotional and political resonance. By being a successful hydrologist, Jassim secures a stable life in the USA. Yet, it is water that ends his career and his stable life in the USA as he becomes a

suspect or a potential criminal who might poison the water running in the city. It is worth mentioning, here, how the choice of Jassim's profession as a scientist, a hydrologist, is significant and echoes Judith Butler's point about the assertion of "not only American values but fundamental and absolute values" which have appeared in the time after 9/11 (Butler 2004: 2). Butler explains how intellectual positions are considered "either complicitous with terrorism or as constituting a 'weak link' in the fight against it" (Ibid.). It is also swimming with which Jassim starts his day to relax. Yet, it is also while having his shower at the gym that Jassim encounters Jack Franks who turns out to be a former marine with a sense of patriotic duty and prejudices against Arab men based on a personal experience.

It can be noticed that Halaby develops Jassim's and Salwa's personal life changes in accordance with the political turmoil at the time. In the aftermath of the dramatic events, the American social space becomes intensified with suspicion towards those deemed to be Arabs or Muslims. In the beginning, Jassim refuses to accept the new reality both Salwa and he are experiencing, and that their stable life in America is to be different. One simple scene set at the beginning of the text reveals Jassim's and Salwa's attitudes towards the racist actions of some simple, white American characters. For example, the couple is shopping in a department store where a young sales clerk named Amber becomes suspicious of Jassim and calls security for him. While Amber's action enflames Salwa, Jassim reacts with deliberate equanimity. Salwa furiously asks Amber for the reason she called security. Amber feels ashamed and confused and explains to her manager, Mandy, "You told us to report anything suspicious, and I thought he looked suspicious" (Halaby 2007: 31). In this scene, Halaby negotiates important political themes and the different viewpoints of various members in the American society. On the one hand, Amber represents a common racial stereotypical attitude of many white Americans towards Arab Americans. Yet, her reaction to the definition of "suspicion" is a process in which her manager Mandy is complicit because she tells her employees to report anything suspicious. It can be inferred that 'suspicion' comes encoded to Mandy, and she passes these implications to others. Mandy's words imply a practical assurance that a case like Jassim's is easily predictable, given that someone suspicious is conterminous with Middle Eastern ethnicity. On the other hand, Amber does nothing wrong according to the general scene of post-September 11 in the USA. This scene exemplifies the drastic change in the position of Arab migrants in the seemingly peaceful, stable multicultural American space.

Salwa's and Jassim's behaviour towards each other and towards the accidents they encounter might seem unexpected. However, reading their reactions in light of the public

space where they live and the events taking place, their behaviour can be considered symbolic of their inability to find comfort in a place that has been always a haven or storybook one for them and a disappointment in a land that held promises for them which were never fulfilled. For instance, Jassim loses his job after fifteen years because of an FBI investigation. This investigation has been initiated against him because of some wrong suspicions and reports from Bella, the receptionist at his workplace and Jack Franks, who knows him from the gym and is a customer of Salwa's bank as a consequence of the 9/11 events. Their reports and suspicions turn the car accident he had into a political case endangering his personal life in the country. These two characters, as we will see in the next part, engineer the end of Jassim's life career based on their own perceptions of him as a Middle Eastern person. His appearance, career and the sad car accident all combine to portray him as a potential threat to American space in general, showing how the personal becomes political.

Liquid geography is also integrated in *West of the Jordan*, creating rigid borders in the life of migrants. During her visit to Jordan, Hala, one of the female protagonists, meets Sharif Abdel-Hameed, a cousin from her mother's side, and recollects her childhood memories with him and how he has always made her feel "the delight and power of [her] words" (Halaby 2003: 120). Sharif is represented as loving, supportive, and empowering to Hala. When Hala was a child, Sharif introduced her to Palestine as their home. On a summer holiday in Aqaba, Sharif tells Hala to swim "home" which confuses her because crossing the water does not lead to Amman where home is for Hala but to Palestine where home is for her mother and Sharif. Sharif corrects himself and says, "I mean Palestine" (Ibid.: 125). Hala tells Sharif that they cannot swim to Palestine which Sharif thinks is right. However, they take one paddleboat from a nearby hotel and pedal slowly till they can see the houses on the shore and Sharif starts singing a song that Hala remembers her mother also singing. This atmosphere makes Hala feel safe despite her confusion towards the direction of home which is Amman for her but Palestine for her mother and Sharif. This scene and its geographical setting are highly significant. Aqaba has a strategic location as it occupies a small stretch of land on the tip of the Red Sea, sharing borders with Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. All of these countries can be easily seen from the Jordanian shore. The metaphor of water is meaningfully used by Halaby in *West of the Jordan* and in *Once in a Promised Land*. Here, water as a fluid topography is politicised and is controlled by police as any fixed, land borders. Salaita sees this as symbolic of the characters' liminality, a "visible physical presence, but one that cannot be accessed and therefore one that takes on extraterritorial dimensions" (Salaita 2011: 85). This scene can also be read as a representation of the fluidity

of geopolitical borders and how they reflect the changing status of migrants' national identity according to the changing migration policies. In Halaby's texts, Palestine and its people are always her motivation and focal point upon which her narratives are built. She notes in an interview that "Palestine has always been central to [her] writing. Love of land, loss, exile, forcible removal, the physical beauty of land being bitter-sweet because it is so often seen through memory rather than today's life" (Salaita 2008: "Interview with Laila Halaby").

Water has a formative role in Halaby's texts since it accounts for Palestinians' recollections of their country as well as their experience of exile by crossing the Jordan River, as in *West of the Jordan*. By virtue of metonymy, the water metaphor in *Once in a Promised Land* does not just serve to organise the narrative; it also mirrors the lived experience of migrants in the USA following the horrific events of 9/11. The turbulence of displaced waters, a heterogeneous, non-linear mesh of flows and counter-flows, symbolises Jassim's and Salwa's exile experience. This use of water reflects Palestinians' lived experience on their land, which Eyal Weizman refers to as the "anarchic geography" of the occupied territories (Weizman 2007: 7). In the West Bank, Israel uses a variety of temporary and transportable border barriers, such as "separation walls", "checkpoints", "road blocks", and "closed military areas" (Ibid.). The effect of these Israeli borders is "dynamic, constantly shifting, ebbing and flowing […], stealthily surrounding Palestinian villages and roads" (Ibid.: 6-7). This situation and by analogy the life of migrants in the USA along with Weizman's assertion are, in effect, an instance of Zygmunt Bauman's description of fluidity as a "prime technique of power" (Bauman 2000: 11). According to Bauman, in an age of liquidity, the capacity to move efficiently through space is cultivated as an attribute of power: "In 'liquid' modernity, it is the most elusive, those free to move without notice, who rule" (Ibid.: 120). After the events of September 11, any movement by Middle Eastern migrants in the USA is closely monitored and charged. In this context, Halaby's metaphoric use of liquid geography and water is a depiction of Palestinians and migrants in general in diaspora, shedding light on migrations' spatial politics.

3.2. White Americans' Public Reaction and Trauma

"'What do you mean that you are Palestinian from Jordan?' *Does it mean you will steal my money and blow up my world?*'", a client asked Salwa (Halaby 2007: 113, original emphasis). These words from a client at Salwa's workplace exemplify part of the public reaction of white Americans after the 9/11 events. In *Once in a Promised Land*, Halaby employs a multifocal narrative technique which allows for the inclusion of white American

different experiences and reactions towards Middle Eastern migrants after the destruction of the Twin Towers and offers an understanding of American space in a broader range than previously. Her narrative includes many active white American characters, which provides a more comprehensive picture of the public American space and Arabs in America. By "active" characters, here, I refer to those who have a role in the development of both events and migrant characters and in providing the different viewpoints of white Americans about the political scene at the time and the consequent negative behaviours towards Arab Americans. These characters vary in their positions from Salwa and Jassim and in their attitudes towards the issue.

By representing a wide range of characters, Halaby does not limit her narrative to the Arab migrant characters only, but she also sheds light on the traumatic experience of white Americans. The increasing gap between migrant and white Americans in *Once in a Promised Land* is supported by the concept of patriotism according to white Americans.[35] The type of patriotism represented by the white American characters in this text is called imperative by Salaita (Salaita 2011: 88). According to Salaita, "imperative patriotism" is the post-September 11 type of patriotic attitude that appeared in the United States. It demands compliance to a particular notion of safety and national interest as the one these characters have. Moreover, this patriotic attitude relies on imaginary ethnic features which produce a distinction between "us" representing good Americans and "them" representing evildoers. Hence, Jassim, here, represents the stereotypical imagery of the Middle Eastern male-beard, dark skin, menacing eyes and similar representations of "them". By describing him as "suspicious" in the shopping scene above, Amber signifies a particular prejudice existing in post-9/11 American society.

Another traumatic character is Jack Franks who contributes to Jassim's involvement in FBI investigations. The narrator describes him after the Twin Towers have been flattened saying that "In those few hours and the days that followed, everything he had run from, every weakness he had disguised, came bubbling to the surface. All that was really wrong in his life came back to haunt him, to erase the man he had become" (Halaby 2007: 165). His doubting interest in Jassim's life to the extent of asking the receptionist to keep an eye on him and to inform him of any suspicious movements shows how the tragic events have

[35] In his article 'Beyond Orientalism and Islamophobia', Steven Salaita defines the notion of patriotism in the public sphere of the United States since 9/11 as "acquiescence to geopolitical interests masquerading as moral imperatives" (2006: 246). In this article, he disprivileges the terms of Orientalism and Islamophobia and outlines the features of anti-Arab racism based on intensive research of American media.

brought back his repressed, past, personal negative experiences. He justifies his interest as patriotic behaviour: "*These are some scary times we live in*, he reasoned to himself. *My number-one duty is to help protect my country. The president said that specifically, that it is our job to be on the alert for suspicious behavior, to help the police, to be the eyes and ears of the community*" (Ibid.: 173, original emphasis). The narrator explains how this situation has allowed Jack an opportunity to feel "armed with a righteous and vital responsibility and therefore important, selfless", without considering the consequences of his actions and their impact on Jassim's life (Ibid.).

Jack's loss of his family and work, according to Freud and Breuer, is traumatic not in and of itself, but in remembering it. Jack loses his position as a Marine in his thirties due to a genetic mutation that makes him bitter towards everyone and turns him into an alcoholic. Meanwhile, his wife signs up to host a student from Jordan with whom his eighteen-year-old daughter elopes. She calls after a year of disappearance to tell him that she has married the exchange Jordanian student. He travels to Jordan to find her, expecting to see her in some sort of primitive harem. Against his expectations, he finds his daughter "relaxed and contented and happy … and her face [is] smooth and clear" (Ibid.: 164). Her refusal to return with him to the USA and calling the Jordanian village her home destroy him to a great extent. Losing his wife and children, he decides to close this chapter in his life and to start anew. He tries to become an FBI agent or a police officer but does not succeed in this, and instead earns a living renovating and selling houses. The traumatic experience is realised after a latency period of deferred action which delays the effects of the past (Breuer and Freud 1955: 192). Years have passed until the 9/11 events have called Jack's negative memories to the surface and have shaped his perception of the political scene and, consequently, have influenced his reactions to Arabs like Jassim.

Another character representing the American trauma that has been awakened by the attacks on the World Trade Center is the boy who passed away in Jassim's car accident. Before the accident, the boy has a skateboard with "Terrorist Hunting License" which, he believes, gives him the right to hunt "some terrorists" (Halaby 2007: 76). The boy's ideas about terrorism seem to have been forced upon him. While on a bus, a man notices his skateboard and asks him how he would recognise terrorists, he says, "I'll know" which shows a chauvinistic prejudice and a preconception about the image of a terrorist. When he asks the man about his reaction if he sees a terrorist, his answer seems to perplex the boy: "Son, there's so much more to it than that … isn't it crazy what's happening to this world?" (Ibid.). We learn the boy's name, Evan, when the accident occurs. Jassim visits Evan's

mother to offer his condolences and help and to console himself as he has been having panic attacks since the accident. When Jassim tells her that he is an Arab, she laughs hysterically and explains to Jassim: “when 9/11 happened, Evan was freaked out, totally freaked out” (Ibid.: 200). She continues how he “ranted and raved about how Arabic people should all be kicked out of this country, rounded up, herded up, and thrown out” (Ibid.). She explains how she has ignored his words because everyone has been scared at the time of the events that “those people were going to blow us all up” (Ibid.: 201). She continues describing how Evan has gone further with his thoughts that he once tells his mother that he “wished he could kill an Arab” which has shocked her (Ibid.). Evan has these racist thoughts from his father “who is a racist prick”, says Evan’s mother (Ibid.). Although she tries to explain to Evan that “most Arabic people don’t have anything to do with it,” he will not listen (Ibid.). Evan represents one of the many divergent viewpoints held by white Americans at the time, whose thoughts and actions are impacted and systemised by both the surrounding and dominant state’s policies.

Halaby also shows how migrant and white American friends have been influenced by the tragic events. For example, Penny the waitress acts as Jassim’s saviour and guides him to approach Evan’s family as a treatment for his psychological disturbance after the accident. They enjoy each other’s company, and each one of them has hope in the other: Jassim fighting alienation in America and Penny fighting her loneliness and being interested in Jassim’s lifestyle. However, they both hide their true attitudes from each other. In a trip they make together to Wal-Mart, Halaby highlights the differences between these two characters by referring to their cultural and economic background. Jassim feels that he is in the *souq* in Amman, “a place he couldn’t stand, for the same reason he wouldn’t have liked Wal-Mart if he hadn’t been invited to go with Penny: too many poor people, too many products to sift through, all of questionable quality” (Halaby 2007: 278). Jassim’s feelings in this scene are counterbalanced by Penny’s suspicious attitude which she hides from him. In a conversation with her friend Trini, she tells her that “he’s so different from those people” and he is “nothing like those people. He’s a scientist, and he’s been here awhile, and you can tell he’s a good person” (Ibid.: 281). She further suggests while watching the news that the USA blows up Afghanistan: “Sometimes I don’t understand why we don’t just bomb those places. You know, blow up Osama and all his buddies and done with it” (Ibid.). Trini asks how Penny can like Jassim and, at the same time, want to bomb his countrymen. This small conversation reveals how a “Malicious generalization about Islam [has] become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West”, quoting Edward Said (Said 1997: xii). It demonstrates the impact of the government’s inflammatory discourse regarding

Middle Eastern migrants, despite the fact that Afghanistan is not a Middle Eastern or Arab country, and that Jassim, the focus of their discussion, is not Afghan but Jordanian.

Another example is Jassim's greatest advocate, friend and boss Marcus who is anti-republican and anti-war but starts to have doubts about Jassim's humanity. When the FBI investigations and questioning sessions have started against Jassim, Marcus supports Jassim and tells him "I am your friend. If you need anything, please come to me. To us. my family and I want you to know that" (Halaby 2007: 226). At the beginning of the investigations, Marcus complains about the abuse of Jassim's civil liberties to his wife, Ella. Yet, he has implicit doubts since he has discovered during one FBI questioning session about Jassim's car accident, killing an anti-Arab boy as a result. Discovering this fact raises Marcus's doubts despite his long friendship with Jassim which can be seen as an example of American trauma. This leads Marcus to act according to these doubts by the end and to fire Jassim from the company which in its lifetime has never seen such arbitrary decisions: "Marcus had fired seven people, all administrative and technical. He had never fired someone he considered to be his equal, nor had he let someone go for such ambiguous reasons as with Jassim" (Ibid.: 295). This incident shows the huge schism the destruction of the Trade Towers has left in American society.

Another character that shows the negative preconceptions about Middle Eastern people is Jake. Shortly after her miscarriage, a gap is created between Salwa and Jassim and her society. She finds herself involved in an affair with Jake, a part-time teller at the bank and (unknown to Salwa) a low-level drug dealer. Salwa's affair with Jake comes to an end when she discovers that he has been bragging about their sexual encounters to another colleague. This incident reveals how Jake has been chauvinistically affected by the tragedy like many white Americans. At the same time, the incident gives Salwa the strength to decide on leaving him and to travel back to Jordan. She decides to visit him and say good-bye and finds him intoxicated. When she tells him that she is leaving, he abuses her, first, verbally, "So you're running back to the pigsty?" and then attacks her physically on the head with a sharp-edged picture as she is leaving his flat and shouts, "Goddamn fucking Arab bitch!" (Halaby 2007: 320-22). Jake's words indicate to Salwa the American's perception of her built on her ethnicity and all negative associations come to the surface in such moments of dispute.

Joan's sense of nationalism is another example of imperative patriotism. To emphasise Joan's view of America as global, which necessitates devotion to a certain form of patriotism

embodied by the American flag, Halaby renders Joan's recommendation that Salwa hangs the American flag on her car apparent as ostensibly true or sincere. Joan tells Salwa that she "never know[s] what people are thinking, and having this will let them know where you stand", Salwa feels a nagging discomfort at this suggestion (Halaby 2007: 55). Joan is unaware of the various meanings of the American flag being hung in the week following the 9/11 attacks. Joan's words to Salwa refer to what Bush stated in his address following the 9/11 attacks, that there are only two opinions: "either you are with us or you are with the terrorists" (Bush, President Bush Addresses the Nation). Joan's words to Salwa suggest a binary situation in which neither Salwa nor anyone else can "hold a position in which one opposes both and queries the terms in which the opposition are framed" (Butler 2004: 2). For Salwa, while this could mean solidarity with the victims of the attacks or a token of mourning, it could also mean support for the government and an agreement on using military action. Salwa knows that Joan does not realise all this and that she intends to communicate a particular meaning: a genuine concern about Salwa and an assurance to her to stay safe. However, what irritates Salwa is the implicit demand Joan's suggestion has of displaying a certain level of patriotic devotion. These different meanings of America from different viewpoints lead us to the next section where I discuss the representation of America as different worlds as seen by Middle Eastern migrant characters.

From a geocritical perspective, Halaby's texts provide different, yet intersecting, worlds of the real (i.e., lived experience of an individual or community) and the imagined realms of America. In Jassim's words—which can be read on behalf of many professional Arab-American migrants— "more than a decade of good citizenship, he had never for a minute imagined that his successes would be crossed out by a government censor's permanent marker, that his mission would be absorbed by his nationality, or that Homeland Security would have anything to do with him" (Halaby 2007: 299). He thinks that "Things like this aren't supposed to happen in America. Americans are pure, simple people, their culture governed by a few basic tenets, not complicated conspiracy theories" (Ibid.). Issues of racism and anti-Arab attitude arise from the different meanings of "America", or as I would call it the "lived" and the "imagined" America. Halaby provides a number of versions of America according to the character and his or her personal experience, whether it be a migrant or white American and/or those who never set foot in America. For example, Salwa has a cynical attitude which grows in response to the indignities she faces as an Arab in the USA. She thinks that America is an unattainable promise: "Only the America that pulled at her was not the America of her birth, it was the exported America of Disneyland and hamburgers, Hollywood and the Marlboro man, and therefore impossible to find" (Halaby

2007: 49). Like Salwa, Jassim has fluctuating feelings towards these different conceptions of America despite his attempts to remain reasonable as an antidote to Salwa's political rigidity. Jassim's pragmatism collapses when FBI investigations result in the loss of his job as well as of his faith in the American system. The tragic end of their flourishing life in the USA shows how Arab-Americans like Salwa and Jassim are viewed and judged through a racial and ethnic frame that they become deemed less than human or as having departed from the recognisable human community. The launch of the FBI investigations against Jassim also show how the "state allocates to itself a power, an indefinitely prolonged power, to exercise judgements regarding who is dangerous and, therefore, without entitlement to basic legal rights" (Butler 2004: 57).

3.3. Women reconsidering their space(s)

Halaby's *West of the Jordan* traces the story of four female cousins who are coming of age between the United States and Palestine. As the narrative develops, we gain insights about these young women's struggle to reconcile their identities, relationships and independence while experiencing the cultural complexities of being Arab women. Hala is a student living in Tuscon. She struggles to choose between her life in the USA and Jordan. Mawal is the only cousin who lives in Palestine and remains deeply attached to her family and traditions. Sorya is the rebellious one, living in Los Angeles. She is involved in a physical relationship with her uncle and fights alienation. Khadija is represented as not quite comfortable within American teen culture. She is terrified by the sexual freedom of her American friends and scarred by a traditional and often abusive relationship with her father. These four characters are greatly influenced by the women in their lives. They are the daughters of four sisters, and the head of their family is their Bedouin grandmother.

At the heart of *West of the Jordan* lie two seemingly opposing themes of dream fulfilment and/or unfulfillment, as well as the realms of reason and capitalism. The reader is introduced to both domains in this work without being forced to choose between them. Despite Hala's clear gender attachment of women to unfulfilled ambitions and men to business and rationality, which she associates with her late mother and uncle, the work as a whole is an attempt to break through these gender barriers. Hala, for example, and other female characters, symbolise the polar opposite of this gender divide. Each of the four main female protagonists is depicted as a woman who is empowered by her surroundings. Similarly, as will be seen later, many males are depicted as being unable to live a satisfactory existence. The depiction of various scenarios defies this widely held stereotype about Arab women:

"The Woman of Unfulfilled Dreams" (Halaby 2003: 83). In the context of migration, James Clifford argues that diasporic experiences are "always gendered" (Clifford 1994: 313). In Halaby's *West of the Jordan*, I find diasporic and/or homeland space(s) with their different layers influencing factors on the diasporic subject in different ways according to the subject's gender. Furthermore, the migrant subjects with their differences deconstruct both diaspora and homeland spaces and women's space in particular.

The maternal cousins Hala, Mawal, Soraya and Khadija are the main female characters of Palestinian origin in *West of the Jordan*. The fact that the link between these characters is a maternal one that connects them all to Palestine is significant. The dominance of female characters and voice in Halaby's novel deconstructs the image of a helpless and victimised Arab woman prevalent in the American representation of the East, especially of Arabs by situating different types of Arab women within the complexities of the spaces they encounter, such as diaspora and postcolonial experiences like the female protagonists in the texts analysed in the previous chapters. By so doing Halaby and other Arab women writers "have helped to dispel the persistent orientalist fascination with Arab women that reduces their lives to gender and sexual oppression under the purportedly unchanging, backward traditions of Arab-Islamic society" (Majaj 2002: xix). This representation of women can be read as an assertion that it is women who have the power of connecting people with their homes. Clifford comments on this point that women in diaspora, "connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex strategic ways", then continues, maintaining "community can be a site both of support and oppression" (Clifford 1994: 314). It is not only the community but also the geographical location and its political scene and consequent impact on the social space that can support or oppress.

The majority of the Arab migrant novelists in the United States during the timeframe of this project, since the turn of the millennium, are females. As my focus is on spatial issues in relation to the experience of migration from the Middle East to the United States, the question of the gender of my selected texts' authors being female becomes central. Starting from Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home*, to Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* and *The Language of Baklava*, gender issues of the female protagonists in relation to their space and to other male characters have been tackled significantly in relation to the female protagonists' spatiality. Coming through Halaby's two texts, *West of the Jordan* and *Once in a Promised Land* and al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* has led me to reflect on the relation between gender and space in this kind of narrative: how

gender influences the migrant characters' spatial experiences and how it shapes places represented in the narratives.

Despite all the restrictions that female characters encounter because of their cultural space, Halaby represents Palestinian women as the soft power of this nation and the inspirations for its children's future. It is no surprise that Halaby's *West of the Jordan* asserts the powerful role of women within the Palestinian nation. At the time of writing this chapter, Israeli occupation has triggered violence, firing stun grenades and rubber bullets on Palestinian crowds protecting their homes in Sheikh Jarrah district.[36]One way of resisting the expansion of the Israeli settlements is the artistic and social media campaigns undertaken by Palestinians and many other Arabs and non-Arabs, non-Muslims who support the Palestinian cause. One caricature posted by Creative Palestinians Facebook page shows two women. One buried woman—Mona al-Kurd's grandmother—extends her hand with a key, most probably a home key, to her granddaughter whose legs are drawn as tree roots. This is one, simple example of the role of Palestinian women in protecting and resisting the continuous Israeli campaigns.[37] In her novel, Halaby contributes to deconstructing the stereotype of a helpless and victimised Arab woman by representing a heterogeneous narrative about her female protagonists.

The dominant presence in Halaby's two novels and in al-Tahawy's is the female authority which highlights women's realisation of their spatial experience, in reconsideration of their borders within the Middle Eastern and American context. In Halaby's *West of the Jordan*, for example, we have four main female characters who are also the narrators whose experiences with migration are different. Some of them are migrants themselves and others perceive the experience of migration through their relationship with migrants being relatives and joined by their mothers' homeland, Nawara village in Palestine. Yousef Awad argues that Halaby's representation of the daily experiences and the intersections of gender, race, class, ethnicity and religion in her works inform the lives of Arab young women in both

[36] In April 2021, Palestinians living in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah faced eviction to make way for Israeli settlers. This has resulted in the eruption of violence against protesting Palestinian families.

[37] See Fig. 3. in appendices. Nabil al-Kurd, 77-year-old, has lived in Sheikh Jarrah with his family since 1956 on land provided by the Jordanian government to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees. The picture shows Mona al-Kurd and her late grandmother (Nabil's mother) who lived in Haifa until Israel expelled the family in 1948 to become refugees and settle in Sheikh Jarrah in 1956. Mona and her brother take the responsibility and face the dangers of reporting what is going on in the area, exposing the violent attacks by Israeli soldiers. For more details, check Al-Jazeera website, "Sheikh Jarrah residents speak out on Israel's forced expulsions" on: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/11/sheikh-jarrah-residents-speak-out-on-israels-forced-expulsions>

Palestine and America. My reading, however, is concerned with the impact of the geographical, cultural and political settings surrounding the narrative; more precisely, motivating and developing it in relation to the female characters. While Awad suggests that the structure of the novel is based on presenting a number of episodes "that crucially inform the identities of the four teenage narrators", I suggest that these episodes are more influenced by the cultural norms and social policies as in *West of the Jordan* and by the political intricacies of the geographical locations involved in the narratives as in *Once in a Promised Land* (Awad 2012: 212). As with Halaby's narratives, al-Tahawy's novel can be read from gender-spatial perspective. *Brooklyn Heights* depicts the story of Hend, an Egyptian mother, with her eight-year-old son Ziyad in Brooklyn, New York. Hence, the representation of the personal space, the urban space and the wider geographical space in relation to the factor of gender as an influencing aspect in the migrants' experience and their spatial power-relations provides a wider, multifaceted picture of the experience of migration that allows us a better understanding of the complex role of gender politics in relation to the geographical, cultural and social spaces. The active role of the spatial setting offers the female character the opportunity to negotiate their spatial position and borders.

The reader's first encounter with Hala in the text is on an airplane, flying to Jordan from the United States where she lives with her maternal uncle, Hamdi, and his American wife, Fay. Hala's character can be seen as a symbolic bridge between the two spaces of the Middle East and America, culturally, politically and physically. On the one hand, she has a Jordanian father and a Palestinian mother, and on the other hand, she migrates to the United States as a teenager to pursue her studies. Through Hala as a narrator and a symbolic bridge, Halaby untangles gender issues that originate from these spaces, especially in relation to migration. "The Woman of Unfulfilled Dreams" refers to Hala's mother, Huda, while "The Voice of Reason and Capitalism" refers to her maternal uncle, Hamdi, as Hala describes them (Halaby 2003: 83). However, this comparison between Huda and her brother can also be understood as a personification of the Middle East and the United States. Hala's migration to study in the USA is initially a fulfilment of her mother's unfulfilled dream. Halaby discusses through Huda's story a socio-political issue which females encounter within the Middle Eastern cultural space. Huda and Hamdi are children of a traditional and landowning father from Nawara, a village in Palestine. Despite Huda's and Hamdi's father being a traditional man, he allows his children, especially his daughter, to travel to pursue their education in the USA, confronting cultural and traditional norms by this decision. This shows how respecting his cultural traditions does not contradict his belief in the power of education and its importance for both males and females. I do not find his character a contradictory one. Rather, Halaby

deconstructs a stereotypical representation of male characters in the Western narrative of a fierce father who tortures his children, especially females by delineating different examples of father figures in her narratives. By so doing, Halaby contributes to dismantling what Mohja Kahf calls the composite Victim-Escape western stereotype of the Muslim woman as victim (Kahf 2011: 111).

Kahf's Victim-Escape stereotype can be seen in the character of Huda. For instance, she is represented as a victim of her cultural background which diametrically affects her choices in life. While she is still a student at high school, her father responds to one marriage proposal on the account that she still needs to finish high school, and, after that, she will join a university which might be abroad. He states that after she finishes her university education, she is the one who will be free to accept or refuse this offer. Until this point, Huda's father supports his daughter's freedom to pursue her choices in life regardless of the social politics of the time in Nawara. Halaby describes how such an offer is considered an opportunity for any girl from the village to have a better life out of Palestine which works as a bridge for her family to the rest of the world. Huda's story reflects how females' space of freedom requires support from their male family members. In this case, if this right is given to them, it can always be taken at some time. This is what happens to Huda whose dream is destroyed because of an irresponsible rumour; this obliges her and her father by the force of the socio-politics of their village to change the path of life she has chosen. Yet, Halaby does not represent Huda's father as fierce or as the one to be blamed for the end of Huda's education in the USA.

The details of Huda's story are narrated by Mawal, another female protagonist and narrator. She provides an insight into her grandfather who is Bedouin and traditional; yet, he is so different from anyone else in the village that he lets his daughter go to America and live with her brother to pursue her studies. This reflects the social space and female position within it which requires a male's support to be empowered. Huda's father is described as open to new ideas, and Huda's travel is considered one of them. He believes in empowering women through education, stating that "'[t]here is nothing wrong with letting a girl learn as much as a boy does. That is our only hope,' he repeated to the many doubters" (Halaby 2003: 20). His words advocate the right of education for females and males equally as they both are the hope for the village and the Palestinian nation on the wider scale. Despite her father's support and open-mindedness, he could not face the scandalous rumours, coming from some individuals with their own agendas in his village. At this point, the impact of her cultural space is a restrictive space despite Huda's physical location in the USA at the time.

Although Huda might seem a victim of her cultural identity, she cannot be considered completely a victim. In the States, Huda has a friendship, or maybe as Mawal suggests has fallen in love, with a boy from Jerusalem. Mawal describes their relationship as formal and Arab-style. When a boy from the same village of Hamdi and Huda spreads a rumour about Huda, the whole village of Nawara knows of this news and Huda's parents become hysterical. Her father orders Hamdi to send Huda home or if she does not do so, she will not have a home to return to. Although Huda returns home and though her parents are convinced that she has told the truth, her dream of education remains unfulfilled because of the "big-mouth village" (Halaby 2003: 21). Huda's story illustrates the patriarchal origins of female autonomy within this milieu, and how female migrant space is determined by male authority. Huda's right to education and space of freedom have been given and taken by the same patriarchal system. In the case of her daughter Hala and years later, the situation is not much changed. Although Hala pursues her studies in the USA, she could not have done this without her father's approval. Yet, Halaby emphasises the role of women in defending their rights. The difference between Huda and her daughter Hala is that the latter refuses to be a victim like her mother. Initially, it is with the support and insistence of her mother that she is allowed to travel to Arizona and stay with her uncle Hamdi to study at high school. At the end of her visit to Jordan, it is after Sharif's words to her father in support of Hala's travel rather than marrying him that he is convinced to send her back to the USA to go to the university. She feels relieved when he tells her his decision: "I feel I have been granted the greatest freedom" (Halaby 2003: 195). Both Huda's and Hala's lives are influenced by their cultural space which is represented here as restrictive. Yet, each one of them has a different experience that leads to a different end.

Huda's unfulfilled dream and marriage to a Jordanian is perceived as a positive, hopeful and lovely incident by other Nawara villagers. As narrated by Mawal in a chapter entitled "Crossing", Huda's marriage across the River Jordan is the first but not the last one of a Nawarese girl. This social event becomes a spatial means for the Palestinian families to "release their daughters to a different world" as life gets harder (Ibid.: 47). The use of the word 'release', here, indicates a situation of imprisonment and confinement which does not apply specifically to the girls only in Nawara, but might also be interpreted as a reference to the kind of life Palestinians have under the Zionist occupation. Amal Talaat Abdelrazek argues that Mawal has "no choice" but to accept her position in Palestine, a place that "imposes" gender and political "imprisonment" on her as a displaced Arab woman (Abdelrazek 2007: 139). Although Huda's life has been impacted by the social policies of her village, she becomes the empowering icon for her daughter Hala. Hala's story is an

example of a changing spatial position of females in a Middle Eastern modern social space which develops gradually and over the course of travelling and living between homeland and diaspora. Crossing the River Jordan is a point of transition in both space and time, a journey to a free place and a prospective future. [38]

In *Once in a Promised Land*, Salwa starts thinking about her dreams and her existence in America after her miscarriage. All her dreams, though not mentioned directly in the text, are accomplished: "Each one had been worn, lived in. Lived out. So what was left? This life was the one she had custom-ordered according to her specifications, each bullet point checked off. It was all there, exactly" (Halaby 2007: 99). She likens her dreams to clothes and things packed in a suitcase and dragged to America, like a list that she has prepared while in Jordan and ticked off in the USA: she "had just assumed that *fulfilling* would come along automatically with *American freedom*" (Ibid., original emphasis). She has not reconsidered her wishes or developed them. When she meets Jassim in Amman and listens to his lecture on water, she becomes fascinated by his knowledge and his American educational background. When he proposes to her, she finds in him the code for freedom. She thinks that "tucked in the word *freedom*, somewhere near the double *e*, was the code that for a husband to offer his wife the freedom to do as she pleased" (Ibid., original emphasis). America for Salwa is the land of dreams, princesses and freedom. In short, she believes in the "American dream" which Halaby proves to be a myth as her life changes in post-9/11 America. Salwa's post-9/11 experience makes her reconsider her life in the USA and think of returning to Jordan.

In line with Awad's argument, Paul Gilroy notes that investigating cultural identity leads to a comprehension of "our subjective experiences of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which that fragile subjectivity" takes shape (Gilroy 1997: 301). While Awad and Gilroy focus on the comprehension of the subject's identity and its construction, my focus is on the role of spatial settings and how the represented space(s) contribute to migrant characters' spatial experiences. Halaby cleverly interweaves the American and

[38] The River Jordan forms a central point in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, particularly the politics of water. It is, then, extensively employed in the literary production that tackles the Palestinian issue. The bridge across the river has various names testifying to its position at the confluence of multiple historical and territorial claims. Hence, it is "the Bridge of return"; "the King Hussein Bridge" (to Jordanians); "the al-Karama Crossing" (to the Palestinian Authority); "the Allenby Bridge" (its colonial incarnation). For example, in Mourid Barghouti's memoir, *I Saw Ramallah*, this bridge is a catalyst for his reflections on the fracturing influence of displacement. David Farrier's interesting article argues how *liquid* vision of life in exile and in the occupied territories is represented in Barghoti's memoir and how this serves in "decentring of environmentalism" where postcolonial insights offer a corrective to bioregional approaches that neglect politics.

Middle Eastern spaces and reveals their politics and the impact of these politics on the life of her characters, migrants and white Americans as discussed in the earlier sections. At the same time, she foregrounds American dualities and intermingles them with the mythologies and promises of the Middle East, especially through the characters of Hala and Mawal in *West of the Jordan*, each in her own way, and through Salwa and Jassim in *Once in A Promised Land*. Hala notices the contradictions between the idea of America and its lived reality, on one hand, and between America and the Middle East, on the other. She observes during her first week in Jordan, "There *is* comfort to be in my own house, to wake up in my own language, but all those faces I've carried with me for so long wear suspicion in their eyes as they greet me. I have walked so far away from them" (Halaby 2003: 77, original emphasis). These thoughts by Hala reflect her sense of in-betweenness. Her state of liminality is highlighted in her temporary relationship with Sharif who embodies her childhood and the Middle East for her. She only remembers him through reflecting upon a childhood memory of a trip to Aqaba, a place that has its significant geographical and political location.

Although Hala returns to Arizona as she desires by the end of the text, she returns with an awareness of the inaccuracies and the mythological aspect of America as well as home. In the first chapter of the novel, Hala is described as returning "home" on her flight to Jordan; yet, she is always described as a "visitor" and as uncomfortable during her flight. This indicates the uncertainty of her notions of home or diaspora and the fluidity of these two spaces. However, Hala reconsiders her experiences in Jordan and the USA and becomes more confident in what she really wants and despite her love for Sharif, she considers her return to the USA a new beginning. At this point, Hala says, "It is time to start something new, and something old, not to fix something unfinished" (Halaby 2003: 204). On her flight back to the USA, she sits comfortably in her seat, wearing *roza* with a necklace map of Palestine. She is released from achieving her mother's unfulfilled dream. Therefore, she considers it a new beginning although she is not new to the USA. The *roza* and the necklace map are symbols of carrying the Palestinian heritage with her and preserving it wherever her physical geographical location is. Her trip to Jordan becomes an empowering one which makes the Middle Eastern sites she has visited places of empowerment and self-actualisation. Thus, when she returns to the USA, she starts reflecting on her surrounding American urban and social space in relation to her identity.

Hala is represented as a woman who is conscious of her space of freedom although she as a teenager fears the idea of travelling to Arizona and leaving her family. At the beginning

of the novel, she states that she "was terrified at the thought of being away from [her] family, even though the idea of going to America—the America [her] mother had only tasted—was exciting" (Halaby 2003: 9). The novel highlights from the beginning of the text the two intersecting versions of America: the mythological, dreamt of America and the real world of America with which Hala's cousins Khadija and Soraya struggle. "America" as an idea or a dream is attractive to someone in Hala's position or to her mother Huda who barely tasted it, but in reality, and as will be shown later in this chapter, life in America entails sacrifices and hardships. For example, some female characters like Huda and Khadija in *West of the Jordan* encounter hardships in their diasporic space because of their gender identity as females and their cultural background as Arabs in the USA.

Visiting Petra, a famous archaeological city in southern Jordan, is also one of Huda's unfulfilled dreams which Hala accomplishes and this contributes to her new realisation of the American space. Hala asks if she can climb to the top which Abu Salwan approves though it is not proper for girls to race up the stairs with foreigners according to his cultural norms. Hala and Fawziyya, Abu Salwan's granddaughter, climb the stairs of the mountain together. Hala considers turning around, but also thinks that if she does not go up now, she probably never will. They both reach the top of the mountain out of breath and drenched in sweat. By so doing, Hala is breaking the stable norms of the cultural space and the repeated public performance of gender in a Middle Eastern public space which is not familiar with its female subjects climbing to the top of Petra mountain, for example. Her role, here, is also an empowerment to her fellow women. Judith Butler suggests a link between space and gender in her *Gender Trouble* (1990): "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 1990: 140). According to Butler gender identity is unfixed, provisional and fragile. She argues how the repeated public "performance" of gender reinforces gender identity, situating gender in external space in both individual performative acts and the physical environment. As a result, Hala's trip to Petra can serve as a foregrounding event for her to shift from being empowered and supported by her late mother, who was the reason she was able to attend secondary school in the USA, to becoming self-empowered and attending university there rather than remaining in Jordan and following her mother's fate. The gendered public/private split and the relationship between gender and movement effectively show how space itself may become a form of control and constraint of women's mobility. At the same time, space is a place where women may be themselves, break free from gender restraints, and gain power.

Doreen Massey's *Space, Place, and Gender* develops a focus on "the intricacy and profundity of the connection of space and place with gender and the construction of gender relations" (Massey 1994: 2). She argues that geography matters to the construction of gender and the fact of geographical variation in gender relations. She explains that geography is a significant element in the production and reproduction of both imaginative geographies and uneven development. Massey's argument applies to the imaginative geographies—considering the represented ones in the texts as fiction—but my argument takes hers further into the different spatial levels considering mythologies about both America and the Middle East as imagined geographies. We see the influence of visiting the geographical sites in Jordan and living within their social space in the reshaping of Hala's spatial interaction with life in the USA. Halaby reflects on the impact of the trip to the Middle East and its culture on Hala in coming to terms with the spatial setting where she lives in Arizona. After her return to Arizona, to Hamdi's and Fay's house, Hala notes how the house is decorated in "high-class American style" (Halaby 2003: 216). To her, this style has "no soul, no colors" and it is "only outside walls that wandered in and stayed. Show-off house with no heart or fancy bracelets" (Ibid.). She links this style of the house to Hamdi's attempt to fit in which is a possibility. She sees the house's bare walls and thinks how this bareness does not allow any imagination. She complains to herself, "it is a grayish, whitish abstract. I cannot imagine anything when I look at it. I might as well just stare at the wall" (Ibid.: 117). She compares this American-style house to her family's house in Amman which she always thinks of as her mother's. Salaita argues that Hala's viewpoint of Hamdi's house and American social space relies on a conflation of whiteness and proper American-ness which is symbolised in Hamdi's and Fay's house. In other words, Hala believes that "American" people, or as it is implied "white American," people, are only a specific social slice of the American social space which is upper-class Americans, white or otherwise. By this, Halaby highlights the rooted class prejudices and ethnocentrism of American society. For example, Jasim and Salwa in *Once in a Promised Land*, are successful in their careers and lead a luxurious life in America. However, with the 9/11 events, they have been confronted with a number of anti-Arab racist assaults.

One aspect of the cultural space in Jordan that contributes to Hala's spatial realisation and empowerment as an Arab girl living in the United States is her relationship with her father and her love of Sharif. Halaby represents Sharif's love for Hala as a sacrifice for the sake of Hala so she can follow the path she chooses for herself in life. In the same conversation which she overhears between her father and his friend, she learns that her father sees her as different from the rest of his children after she has come back from the USA and

as he believes that she has her mother's spirit. Sharif tells Hala's father that he thinks Hala "needs to choose her own life. 'If I have true love for her, which I must in order to marry her, I must allow her to be free. This is why I refuse you'" (Ibid.: 195). When Hala and her father are alone, he tells her how proud he is of her and how he cannot think of a decent match for her now, implying that she should graduate, or at least begin university before marrying. Hala feels that she has been "granted the greatest freedom" (Ibid.: 197). This phrase reflects Jordan with its cultural space and her closer familial one as a source of empowerment for her which will help her lead a free life of her choice in the United States without losing her attachment to them.

Mawal, who resides in Nawara, is another female protagonist who is a geographically distant observer of the Palestinian-American migrant experience. She can be considered the representative voice of Nawara and its people, both those who never left the village and those who are migrants to Jordan and the USA. Through Mawal, Halaby draws two versions of Nawara: one is the village itself located geographically in Palestine; the other is a smaller one in the United States. Mawal likens the Nawara community in the USA to "an army calling all able-bodied young men away and then never returning the bodies" (Halaby 2003: 15). These two versions of Nawara are juxtaposed to each other in the act of stitching the embroidered dresses which are called *rozas*. While Mawal is stitching the fabric, she listens to her grandmother's stories about the village's old days, to other women's stories and to news about the migrated people of the village. In this way, a dress is stitched with the spirit of Nawara's people regardless of their geographical location and/or the timeframe of their life. The pattern of the *roza* is also significant and related to the specific geographical location of the village as Mawal explains. The intricate stitching perfectly reflects the essence of the village, which Mawal characterises as follows: "at the top of the West Bank, just west of the Jordan River, east of Jenin", yet far enough from these places that it is a peaceful village that "only every so often releases an avalanche of stones and fire" when the Israelis invade parts of Nawara to build their settlements (Ibid.). Mawal explains that each pattern of the intricately embroidered Palestinian dress of *roza* represents a different site of Palestine because every area has its own pattern. For her, stitching *rozas* is done in honour of her ancestors and to keep the memory of her community's past. Hence, like threads connecting themselves to the fabric to create beautiful *rozas*, Mawal as a narrator is the thread that connects the different characters to Nawara and each other. She functions as a narrative catalyst through whom settings and characters diverge and converge. These metaphorical meanings of the *rozas* are repeated ubiquitously in the text as Mawal stitches and narrates stories of other characters:

Stitch in red for life.
Stitch in green to remember.
Stitch, stitch to never forget. (Halaby 2003:103).

The geographical location of Mawal in Palestine is significant to the narrative as a multifocal locus of control. From one perspective, she can be perceived as she is the only character who has stability in her life. She keeps history and stories, provides details about other migrant characters and has the ability to observe and comment on their life in America. However, gossips and second-hand tales are the major sources of all her knowledge about her relatives and their American life. Steven Salaita argues that this distanced observation of Mawal "confers to her a certain power, though, because it enables her to assess these events without being embroiled in them" (Salaita 2011: 83-84). Salaita considers Mawal's ignorance of other migrants' encounters in diaspora and their misfortunes as a merit because she manages to engage America without succumbing to its inevitable contradictions. From my perspective and reading Mawal's position in Nawara, I do not find it less empowering. On the one hand, if we look at the geopolitical position as Salaita does, she could be perceived as encountering the misfortunes of spatial and political limitations; these, like dealing with Israeli checkpoints and other indignities of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, do not affect her American counterparts. On the other hand, if we look at her social space, she loses her power of seeing and criticising the faults of the social space she lives within. Although at one point she refers to Nawara as a "Big-mouth village", she is unable to realise the limitations imposed on her for being female (Halaby 2003: 19). At one point, Mawal describes Huda's marriage using her mother's words as an act of 'dragging' which in itself implies force: "Huda was the first lovely Nawarese girl *dragged* by marriage across the River Jordan, but not the last" (Halaby 2003: 47, emphasis added). Mawal herself says that someday she will visit America but only when she gets married. This implies that the only option she has to realise this dream of visiting America is for her to get married so she can have a male patron.

If Mawal is disadvantaged in criticising the social space of Nawara, she is in a powerful position of seeing the reality of America. She summarises the relationship between Palestinians and America in a simple image. She complains that "You would think our village was in love with America with all the people who have left, like America is the best relative in the world that everyone has to visit" while, in fact, "America is more like a greedy neighbor who takes the best out of you and leaves you feeling empty" (Halaby 2003: 96). This statement from Mawal reflects the role of women in resisting occupation and keeping

both ancestral tradition and land to preserve the physical landscape and Palestinian culture or what is left of it. In other words, she maintains the politics of pride in the Palestinian tradition and folklore which she inherited or learnt from her grandmother: "'No matter what our difficulties, it is better here,' she would always say" (Halaby 2003: 96). By showing the breaking apart of Salaamas' close family structure, Halaby, here, sheds light on the fact that migration undermines Palestine and favours the United States. Mawal expresses her sadness that migrants claim a deep allegiance to Palestine but take their talents elsewhere.

3.4. Exotic Soraya Demystifying Transatlantic Mythologies

Halaby's depiction of the solid mythologies about America, such as the American Dream and the Promised Land, and about Arabs, like the victim women, echoes Bauman's portrayal of the "solids whose turn has come to be thrown into the melting pot and which are in the process of being melted at the present time, the time of fluid modernity" (Bauman 2000:6). These solid ideas are "the bonds which interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions—the patterns of communication and co-ordination between individually conducted life policies on the one hand and political actions of human collectivities on the other" (Ibid.). The character of Soraya exemplifies this process of liquefaction and transformation of melting solid traditional mythologies. Soraya can be considered Mawal's foil in *West of the Jordan*, or the different voice which allows a wider and a distanced viewpoint from Nawara's community in Palestine. She lives with her family in Los Angeles, USA, where she has the habit of making up exotic stories about herself and her Arabic culture. Like Mawal, Soraya also offers her viewpoint and description of the other characters in the novel. This multi-focalisation provides a transatlantic representation of the characters' spatial experiences in both the Middle East and the USA by having two almost different characters in two different geographical and cultural positions.

Salaita's analysis of Soraya's character focuses on her role in undermining mythologies about America and the American dream. Yet, it could be said that because Soraya is "fully aware of her situation as in-between hybrid who does not completely belong in either culture", she is empowered to demystify both Arabic and American mythologies (Abdelrazek 2007: 147). Many of the migrant characters in *West of the Jordan*, representing the attitudes of many real-life migrants to America, view the United States as a peaceful haven where they can follow a specific trajectory: arrival, hard work, slowly accumulated wealth, family and home. A comparable but slightly different mythology can be said about white Americans. This mythology casts the United States as a secure but perpetually

threatened site of economic possibility and ethical exceptionalism. Soraya here not only undermines the American dream for migrants, annihilating the American exceptionalism for white Americans, but she also criticises the Middle Eastern cultural space which some migrants uncritically celebrate without recognising or admitting its faults. Like Hala but in her own way, Soraya is a participant in changing and breaking the set and definite mythological stereotypes of the Middle Eastern cultural community in the USA.

Halaby's association between the physical location of her characters and their viewpoint of America and the Middle East can be also detected in the character of Soraya. She represents Soraya as a dissenting voice and positions her at a distance from the Middle Eastern geographical, social and cultural space which I find an empowering factor for Soraya as an Arab female possessing the faculty of judging and criticising. Her character is unlike Mawal whose location is within the Middle Eastern space. Through Soraya, Halaby exposes the faults of both homeland and America and the complexities and intricacies of the two places. By so doing, she keeps each of the assumed trajectories of migrant and white Americans—the American dream and American exceptionalism—at the level of *assumption* and does not take them for granted. The author represents both the scenarios of the unpleasant repercussions of following these trajectories and the possible different experiences of abandoning them. By challenging the cultural, religious and social norms of her Middle Eastern background and migrants' trajectory towards the American dream and the myths of American exceptionalism, Soraya is as she describes herself "a new breed. A rebel" (Halaby 2003: 56).

Soraya's character is delineated as sexually liberated from any cultural restrictions. Yet, in her rejection of being restricted to either Arab or American cultural space, she becomes trapped in her desire to be accepted by the American people. The narrative shows how Soraya is aware of herself as a sexually attractive girl, and her attractiveness is often associated with the exoticism of the image of Arabic cultural space. She uses/misuses her understanding of how such mythologies are rooted in the socio-cultural American space. In her high school, she often tells fake stories to her classmates: "I tell them what they want to hear, which is nasty stories about young men sticking their things into goats and some twelve-year-old girl being carried off on a camel to be third wife to old Shaykh So-and-So and the five oil wells my father owns" (Halaby 2003: 24). This confuses her exasperated mother who does not understand why Soraya reinforces these stereotypes and never bothers to explain. This takes us to Soraya's opening line in the text, "I have fire," she says (Halaby 2003: 24). This does not only denote Soraya's multiple affairs with men and reveals at the

same time her tendency towards exaggeration, but it also shows her ability to bring people together or to scatter them away. Soraya seeks power by fulfilling stereotypes because she refuses to be docile or subservient. Thus, by telling her classmates stories of these escapades, she protects herself and prevents her classmates from using these stereotypes against her, but she also reinforces them to gain acceptance from white Americans by solidifying these misconceptions.

Throughout the text, Soraya adopts a negative and resisting attitude towards her community which does not approve of her behaviour that aims essentially at asserting the stereotypes of Arabic culture. Soraya is not concerned with her community's consent; rather, she is aware of it and is convinced of her reasons: "My sister and cousins are the way my mother wishes I were and she is always comparing us and telling me what good girls they are and how I am just a headache" (Halaby 2003: 25). Soraya's association of liberation with the American culture is highlighted when she talks about her sister: "I like to enjoy myself, unlike my sister Pauline who, *despite her American name,* is very conservative and believes that all answers lie in God's words and that suffering is good" (Ibid., emphasis added). She believes that her liberal behaviour is making her closer to the American culture and more distanced from the Middle Eastern one.

Soraya criticises Arab society's sexuality, as well as the behaviour of women in her family and men's dominance over women. She criticises her uncle, Khadija's father, for example, who is shown as harsh and disrespectful to his daughter. On a wedding occasion, he becomes fierce and insults his daughter by dragging her out of the party for no apparent reason except for seeing her dance with Soraya's American friend Ginna. The passive response of Khadija and other women who witnessed this incident intensifies Soraya's sense of shame regarding her community and family which allows the mistreatment of women.

One feature of Soraya's controversial character is her bizarre sexual relationship with her uncle Haydar. This relationship denotes a "fetishization of familial bonding and a sexualization of male power" (Salaita 2011:81). In an interview with Halaby, she describes the character of Soraya as "one of those girls who you run into every so often who is grown in a way that girls generally are not, who is aware of herself as a sexual being. I think that this is the reason for her relationship with her uncle. Obviously, he is hugely guilty in the whole mess, but I don't think it is as simple as an older man taking advantage of a young girl. I don't think Soraya tries to rebel" (Halaby n.d.). From one perspective, Soraya is rebelling against the sexual rules of her community by having a sexual relation with her

uncle and she is feeling the power of forcing him to reveal his secrets of the past. Soraya's character can be considered a violation of the binary categorisation of women in Arabic culture as either a "virgin" or a "whore". The Palestinian-American poet Nathalie Handal comments on the process of going beyond sexuality as it is cultivated by Arabic culture. She argues that she personally "[has] to construct [her] notion that [she] would dishonor the family and [her]self if [she has] sex, deconstruct[s] [her] belief that [she] was a whore if [she] enjoy[s] sex. [She] need[s] to gain knowledge and acknowledgment" (Handal 2005:100). Handal calls this process the "unveiling of the mind" (Ibid.: 101). Soraya undergoes this process through her relationship with her crazy uncle Haydar as she describes him.

Haydar's character also merits exploration as his character and his mental state in the USA are the result of his past life in his Palestinian village. In Arizona, Haydar is described as eccentric and as always gloomy, with his condition worsening until he becomes completely insane. He is burdened and a victim of his past memories in Palestine as a boy. As a boy living with his family in Palestine, Haydar has witnessed the kidnapping of his father by some men who killed him in the valley. Although he sees their faces, he is unable to identify their names. Yet, he takes revenge for his father and kills them before crossing the ocean to the USA. This incident has tortured his soul throughout his life. It is clear how Haydar becomes a haunted man. It is important to notice here that his father was murdered for reasons pertaining to conflicting notions of space, Arab and American. Haydar's father "had land and ideas. He brought so much into the village from outside" which does not appeal to some other people in the village (Halaby 2003: 177). Soraya's uncle, like other male characters in Halaby's *West of the Jordan*, is beset by self-destructive behaviour, fuelled by their illusions about America, like Khadija's father, Soraya's uncle Haydar, her boyfriend Riad al-Ghareeb and Sameer who ends up murdered as Arab migrants in diaspora space. The link between all these male characters is the illusionary American dream which leads them into self-destruction and/or fierce, destructors of their families.

Soraya's challenge for both American narratives –the American dream and American exceptionalism–exposes the various forms of denial that accompany those myths. This inevitably makes her controversial. For example, her controversy arises in the story of Sameer Samaha which Soraya recounts. Sameer is a hard-working migrant who is supposedly murdered. Soraya does not believe that he has been killed in a random mugging and deems his death suspicious. She thinks that he has been a victim of his unfaithful wife who invented the story of a random mugger. Soraya's fantastical theory, not completely

unrealistic, is that Sameer comes home early and unexpected to see Suad with her lover and is consequently murdered. Soraya's conclusion about Sameer's story is her note about the idea of following blindly an abstract dream or the belief of the illusionary American dream and trying to bring a traditional space into a non-traditional one: "So that is what you get for Working Your Ass Off and then trying to be traditional" (Halaby 2003: 95). In these words, she is questioning the validity of the assumption that hard work and honesty, which Sameer has, will ensure migrant stability, success and secure life.

Another example that shows Soraya's challenge to the veracity of the American dream is an incident that occurs at a "white" bar. While at the bar with her cousin Walid, Soraya responds to racist encroachments by proclaiming, "We're Americans" (Halaby 2003: 59). This claim from Soraya proves too difficult for their bullies to believe, and the racist attackers beat up Walid and abuse Soraya badly. This incident does not only provide commentary on racism and belonging, but it is also fully relevant to the different uses of the term *American* which, here, produces confrontation and subsequent violence. Soraya's and Walid's pretence to be "Mexicans" at the beginning is not accepted in itself. However, this does not evoke violence until the moment Soraya claims that she and Walid are Americans. This leads the attackers to protect their sanctified mythology of a proper American identity: whiteness.

Another character through which Soraya reveals the illusionary nature of the American dream is Riad Fancy-Dance, as she calls him. Riad grew up in a refugee camp in Lebanon and Soraya can see the impact of war and the sense of loss and disorientation in his eyes. She sees his multiple relationships and his dancing as a quest for identity because he misses something: "He lost his country more than any of us, but what [she] sees ain't dancing; it's searching, like looking for his own self and not being able to find mirror" (Halaby 2003: 116). She refers, here, to how Riad lacks a sense of belonging and the guidance that one might find in a community, for example. Riad is lost and resorts to drugs and multiple relationships to "fill his own empty self" (Ibid.: 117).

Like Soraya, Khadija deals with cultural conflicts in school and at home; yet, she is different from Soraya. Khadija's problems begin with basic issues like her name. "In American," she explains that her name "sounds like someone throwing up or falling off a bicycle" (Halaby 2003: 36). In school, even her friendly Social Studies teacher expects her to know more than her classmates because her parents are not American although there are many other students who are not Americans themselves. To this, she "want[s] to scream at

him that [she is] just as American as anyone here" (Halaby 2003: 74). At home, when Khadija points out to her mother this reality of herself being American, her mother screams, "No! No daughter of mine is American" (Ibid.). Khadija tries to integrate herself into American life by having a friendship with her classmate Patsy. However, on a visit to Patsy's house to study, she has mixed feelings of shock and regret upon seeing Patsy with their friend Michael in a sexually intimate position for her. Khadija feels "dirty, like when you go by a car crash and look by accident and on purpose at the same time, but then you feel sick" (Halaby 2003: 179-80). This makes her realise how much her Palestinian cultural background has shaped her worldly outlook. Unlike Soraya, Khadija is presented as adhering to her Middle Eastern cultural restrictions regarding sexuality which are breastfed to her by her mother.

Khadija's conflicts are more intriguing than her name or friendships and are what distinguish her from Soraya. Khadija's story is in short "a story of loss: loss of a homeland, of dignity, of self-confidence, and of dreams" (Abdelrazek 2007: 152). Her relationship with her abusive father tells us a lot about both the impact of the failure of the American dream for him as a male migrant and how American and Palestinian social and institutional policies influence Khadija's character as a woman. Her father attributes his abusive treatment of his children to the failure of his American dream. She explains how her father "has many dreams that have been filled with sand. That's what he tells [her]: 'This country has taken my dreams that used to float like those giant balloons, and filled them with sand. Now, they don't float, and you can't even see what they are anymore'" (Halaby 2003: 37). Halaby depicts Khadija's father, who is a part-time mechanic, as the poorest of the male migrants in the text, an alcoholic, sometimes physically abusive and religious. It seems that Halaby links his poverty and abuse indirectly to his religiosity. One night while Khadija's mother is away from home on a visit to Palestine, her father becomes excessively abusive in a drunken fit and attacks his father and baby son. This incident prompts Khadija to call the police. This act causes her feelings of fear that she will be blamed for breaking up family. At this point, Khadija's narrative part is entitled "Fire", a description that is given to Soraya's character. This indicates the change in Khadija's passive attitude towards the violence of her father as she acts and calls the police on him.

Khadija's unhappy ending confirms the undermining of cherished American mythology in Halaby's texts. Her father's story of failure along with Sameer's death become symbolic of the conflicts that exist in migrants' communities: the strict religious devotions and disperate cultural norms, free-market capitalism and migration. As for Khadija's spatial

position, we can say that she is trapped between her demanding Middle Eastern cultural background and her life in American society. Her position as a female migrant from the Middle East and her traditional parents and her father being abusive puts her in a difficult position with her conflicting loyalties. This demand arises from her being a teenager, a high school student, a migrant with bilingual and multicultural identity and working-class status. Having an uncomfortable atmosphere at home with family and at school with her "American" friends, Khadija tries to reconcile different elements of her life which simply will not acquiesce to be reconciled. Khadija's torturing situation pushes her to reconsider her position taking into consideration all these aspects and to obtain power against the abusive treatment of her father.

3.5. Writing in Arabic—Arab Woman in American Space

The concept of women's unfulfillment in *West of the Jordan*, as represented in the character of Huda, also unfolds in Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights*.[39]Hend, the female protagonist, and her eight-year-old son migrate to the United States looking for a better life after her divorce. Al-Tahawy delineates the character of Hend as depressed and alienated, both in her village in Egypt and in Brooklyn, as a child and a woman. Her disconnectedness or alienation from her society is reflected in the textual urban organisation. By textual urban organisation, I refer to the representation of the places where Hend lives, like her childhood house in the village and the building where she lives in Brooklyn. The writer draws a cognitive thread between the Egypt Hend has grown up in and Brooklyn where she lives. As Hend wanders the streets, avenues, markets and cafés of Brooklyn, a memory from her life in Egypt is recollected. Every place Hend visits in Brooklyn can be read as a signpost in Hend's life whether as a reminder of a memory from Egypt or of her life in the USA. This connection between Hend's two worlds, Egypt and Brooklyn, her past and present grounds her in Egypt by the use of analepsis and could be read as the reason behind her negative attitude which she has carried within her from her negative experience in Egypt towards her new life. In this case, Egypt forms a space of restriction. For example, "Seventh Avenue"

[39] My selection of al-Tahawy's text, which was originally written and published in Arabic, has two reasons. First, my project has a geographical scope in the Middle East in relation to the United States and al-Tahawy's text provides a voice from Egypt, one of the most strategic countries in the area, geographically, politically and socially. The second reason is more technical and literary as I shed light on the representation and textual, spatial organisation in a way different from Halaby whose texts are originally written in English. The fact of being written in Arabic intrinsically affects the politico-spatial portrayals in this text, by reminding the reader throughout the text of the Middle Eastern space represented in Egypt. It is worth mentioning that al-Tahawy was born and raised in Egypt and then migrated to the US. For more biographical details about al-Tahawy, see her interview with Aaron Bady.

and its location on a hill reminds her of "Pharaoh's Hills back home" (al-Tahawy 2012: 35). Hence, we notice that every chapter in the text is named after a street or a place name except for chapter six "Tango", nine "Pluto in Capricorn" and twelve "The Cold Season" which are still related to a particular place. In "Pluto in Capricorn", for example, the narrator lists the characteristics of the astrological sign Capricorn, and then the narrative moves to a café in Cairo's downtown where Hend and her friend used to meet. Here, the narrative goes in a flashback to Hend's life in Egypt. The author emphasises Hend's belief in astrology throughout the narrative by alluding to her zodiac sign or describing its traits several times. Despite the fact that Hend constantly reads her horoscope with a pessimistic outlook on life, she anticipates a change in her life when her zodiac sign goes to Pluto. Al-Tahawy, thus, refutes the premise of totalising systems, such as astrology. Hend being a migrant character gives her a better position "to realize that all systems of knowledge, all views of the world, are never totalizing, whole or pure, but incomplete, muddled and hybrid. To live as a migrant may well evoke the pain and loss of not being firmly rooted in a secure place but it is also to live in a world of immense possibility with the realization that new knowledge and ways of seeing can be constructed" (McLeod 2000: 215). The narrative follows Hend's memories back and forth, in Egypt recollected in Brooklyn. Hend's migration to the USA involves travelling to the place where she dreams of finding herself and obtaining her freedom. She is clinging to possible chances that may change her attitude to life in New York, but this does not happen because she is profoundly grounded in Egypt spiritually. Egypt, here, or the space of attachment, is both a space of restriction and empowerment for Hend which keeps her in a state of melancholy after migrating to the USA. At the beginning of the text, the reader remains ignorant about the identity of the protagonist and the only information that can be inferred is that it is a "she" a woman with her son. The case remains as such until the reader is confronted with a few fragmented words: "My name is Hend. I came here from Cairo – why, I don't know exactly. I'm trying to learn English. I love the Arabic language" (al-Tahawy 2012: 14). She utters these words while sitting amongst other refugees and migrants like herself whose reasons vary for being in the USA; yet, Hend does not know her own reason. Before coming to the stage of introducing herself to other migrants, she uses the third person feminine pronoun 'she' which gives the character an air of aloofness. The apparent, simple interpretation would be the distance between her and her homeland. The deeper meaning can be the distance she feels between her current self which is at odds and fragmented and her girlhood self which she keeps remembering and is afraid of forgetting because this distanced girl has been rebellious, a girl whose mother strived for her to be gentle and obedient to her Bedouin social norms. Hend keeps trying to retrieve this stubborn, rebellious version of herself, but she becomes a copy of her mother after a short marriage

and a hard divorce. She travels all this distance to the land of freedom in a hopeful quest for this lost self.

The Brooklyn flat building where Hend lives also mirrors her past entanglements and her memories of her spouse, who vanished from her life after she caught him having affairs with other women. Through the regular sound of his footsteps, Hend detects the routine of one of her neighbours, whose flat is directly above hers. One day, he gives her his card and tells her that he is a dance instructor. As he becomes her dancing instructor, they start to walk together and Hend talks about her memories. Charlie and Hend become friends, but when she notices that he deliberately tries to be charming and puts his arm around her, she stops him. She wonders if he attributes her reaction to a kind of radical cultural difference and starts maintaining a wider space between them. Charlie's philosophy of the tango dance is that of a shared space. Hend notices that "most of the other students, both men and women, have been recently divorced; the question of distance perplexes them too" (al-Tahawy 2012: 97). One day, Hend refuses to become closer to Charlie and have a sexual relationship with him, they avoid each other since they have had a heated argument. The supremacy of male characters in Hend's life persists in the USA as it does in Egypt.

Hend's character is driven by fear which, like her memories, hinders her from being a confident, independent woman. In Brooklyn, Hend is supposed to rebuild herself, to start a new chapter in her life where she would become free from her Bedouin cultural restrictions which she recollects throughout the text. Al-Tahawy gives a description of Brooklyn and its bridge upon Hend's arrival which reflects the lively spirit of the city.

> She had found it on a Google map of Brooklyn, a narrow strip making its way up towards the long, arching span that connects the two islands. She watches as sparkling new cars zoom across the Brooklyn Bridge, pedestrians stream down the walkway, and tourists admire the setting sun from its heights. They gaze in awe at the tip of Manhattan, which looks from up there like a birthday cake ablaze with candles, a round and luscious apple, brilliant with lit skyscrapers. *But she turns her back on the spectacle* (al-Tahawy 2012: 1, emphasis added).

Referentiality in the above passage is established through the detailed description of real places. The author uses musical and sensory images like 'sparkling', 'gaze in awe' and the images of 'a birthday cake ablaze with candles' and 'a round and luscious apple' to describe the attractions and beauty of the city. The author also foregrounds Hend's sense of displacement in establishing her identity as an outsider, carrying her identification documents. Hend moves towards Flatbush Avenue where the flat she has chosen is. The

narrator tells us that the choice of this particular area from amongst all other streets is "because it becomes her: a woman shouldering her solitude, a couple of suitcases, and a child who leans into her whenever he grows tired of walking" (Ibid.). Foregrounding this spatial setting of Hend from the beginning creates an impression of her character. She is loaded and burdened with her life in the past. The reference to the technology of Google maps in this passage in contrast to the physical map which Mohja Kahf mentions at the beginning of *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* shows the role of internet technology in the spatial experience of migrants. Hend "had found" the city and the flat before her arrival which gives her the opportunity to have an idea about it on the internet before being physically in that space. This reduces the possibility of Hend getting lost or feeling strange in her new location. This reference to the use of internet technologies refers to a new generation of writers who employ technologies as fictional devices in their writings. For instance, social media and blogging have become a personal space for people to express themselves, their preferences, thoughts and emotions. Al-Tahawy, in *Brooklyn Heights*, delineates her protagonist Hend, a middle-aged woman who escapes her native country, in a continuous attempt to write throughout the text. She also represents an Egyptian village filled with old women whose lives are shaped by social forces beyond their control. These narrative elements can be read as an attempt to empower an oppressed generation of women who need the space to express themselves and have their voice heard. It also introduces the autofictive writing practice in the new generation of Arab writers.

In *Brooklyn Heights*, the autofictive narrative technique appears in the setting, characterisation and narrative voice. The descriptions of the settings in New York, the Egyptian Delta and Cairo are anchored in the life of the author as they are in the text. There is also a convergence between Hend's identity and that of the author. This overlap is retained when Hend identifies with Lilith, another fictional character in the text, who is an ageing Egyptian migrant. Another autofictive element appears in the convergence between the al-Tahawy's omniscient authorial voice and that of the protagonist in Hend's interior monologues.

Throughout al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights*, Hend is caught in her past memories and is unable to release herself from the painful memories she lived. She is described as having passion and will to change her life but is hindered by her fears and anxiety. One of the dreams that she has carried from Egypt to the USA is her incomplete manuscripts but by the end of the text there is no hint that she will complete them. For her, writing is an outlet and the only way to be freed from her bitter memories: "all she wanted to do was to write, so much so

that she felt she would die, if the bitter mountain of words stayed trapped inside her" (al-Tahawy 2012:129). The manuscript, here, symbolises Hend's space of freedom and the tool which will heal and empower her only if she is able to complete it: "she had to finish her first and only manuscript, 'I Am Like No Other', but writing is intractable, like a wounded woman, and at some point, she realized that, after all was said and done, she was incapable of healing those wounds" (Ibid.).

The combination of Hend's melancholy, her memories, the act of writing and her incomplete manuscript almost constitutes a process of healing which as readers we are not sure is achieved by the end of the text.[40] Both geography and gender are important factors in Hend's psyche. Egypt and the United States are the two places where Hend's life and experience are shaped. Hend is a deeply melancholic character whose female, Arab migrant identity is shaped by gender ideology and socio-economic and political structures. Although the two countries have almost nothing in common between them, both are represented to share similar structures of patriarchal hierarchy. Early in the text, the author gives a prolepsis of Hend's experience in the USA. Hend opens a fortune cookie in one of New York's restaurants which reads: "*That which awaits you is no better than that which you have left behind*" (al-Tahawy 2012: 5, original emphasis). This hierarchy represented through the male characters in Hend's life causes the marginalisation and exclusion which Hend experiences in her homeland and in diaspora, triggering feelings of melancholia and sadness.

The narrative represents the physical and emotional displacement from a female protagonist's viewpoint. It is in Hend'sbody where her memories of her childhood and a failed marriage in Egypt reside because they are related to her ex-husband's sexual relations with other women and finally leaving her with her son. On different occasions, Hend comments on her body and expresses her dissatisfaction with its physical appearance. Even when she quarrels with Charlie, he abusively comments on her body as she leaves his flat. Hence, "a process of healing and recovery" would facilitate learning "not to forget the past but to break its hold" (hooks 1989: 77; 1989: 155). The act of writing, especially journal writing for hooks, can cultivate the insight and detachment that makes the memories of the subject, Hend's for example, and her mind "a refuge, a sanctuary" instead of a source of

[40] In the context of African American women writing, bell hooks argues in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992) about the reliability of memory, especially the heritage of dehumanisation and suffering can make some writers feel burdened and even traumatised as in the case of Hend. According to hooks's argument, someone like Hend is weighed down by depression and fears of being re-traumatised by similar painful incidents.

suffering and a space wherein one could experience "a sense of agency and thereby construct [her] own subject identity" (hooks 1991: 149). However, Hend's experience in American space shows that she fails to escape the confinement of an imposed subjectivity which is symbolised in her failure to finish her manuscript. Al-Tahawy describes in an interview how *Brooklyn Heights* is "a very melancholy novel, with a lot of quiet pain," she adds about its ending that "it doesn't resolve: there isn't happy ending, there isn't a sad ending. There's no catharsis, perhaps" (Bady 2014: 6).

Brooklyn Heights as a text is centred in large part around a small Bedouin community where Hend is born and raised and it focuses on portraying the life of women and their space. Unlike Halaby's *West of the Jordan*, al-Tahawy limits the representation of women to images of domestic violence, sexual harassment and reproductive rights. Hend also is presented as an essentially feminine character despite her independent life with her son and despite migration. Hend's memories are embodied because they are rooted in the specificities of her physical body as a female, a maternal body weighed down by hard work. For example, she is concerned about her physical image and body and sees herself as ugly because of the stretch marks and the scars she has because of pregnancy, giving birth and miscarriage. These visible marks on her body which function as another kind of text are a strong reminder of the past from whose spectre she plans to be exorcised by coming to terms with the life of migrants awaiting her. Her passive memory of her mother as a woman whose life is drained because of the many births she gave and being centred around her husband could be one reason that has led Hend to migrate.

Although Hend does not like her physical appearance and the marks she has on her body, they work as a tangible reminder of her past life because she does not want to forget.[41] Hend's melancholia is "future-oriented as much as attached to a past that cannot be forgotten or recognized within the logic of knowable memory" (Khanna "Post-Palliative" postcolonial.org, Nov. 2017). Forgetting for Hend means her failure to complete her manuscript. In the hospital because of her hurting chest, she answers the doctor's questions and explains that she is always "under a lot of stress, but this is the first time [she's] felt [her]

[41] The scars on Sethe's back in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* resemble Hend's marks on her body, which, like Hend's, serve to form a narrative. Sethe's scars resemble a magnificent tree, which can be emblematic of picturesque plantations like Sweet Home but is rooted in the ugliness of servitude, a memory of her days as a slave in Kentucky prior to the Civil War. Despite the fact that she lives as a free woman in Ohio, she remains enslaved by memories of her existence as a slave. Similarly, Hend's scar is a reminder of her unhappy marriage and enslavement-like relationship, as it is a sign of her motherhood and her nation Egypt. Physical scars can be seen as analogies for the writings themselves in both *Brooklyn Heights* and *Beloved*. Each is a work of art that arose from a tragic event in the past.

heart racing like this. I feel it in my shoulder. [she's] begun to forget, and [she doesn't] want to forget…Hemingway began to lose his memory too. He couldn't write any more because he was losing his memory" (al-Tahawy 2012: 159). Hend aspires to be a writer and by referring to Hemingway, here, she could be aspiring to write like him and if she starts to forget like him, she will not have the chance to do so. Hend's inability to write could be a result of her Arabic cultural background and her personal negative experience which the Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi describes as a crime in her society:

> Writing: such has been my crime ever since I was a small child. To this day writing remains my crime. Now, although I am out of prison, I continue to live inside a prison of another sort, one without steel bars. For the technology of oppression and might without justice has become more advanced, and the fetters imposed on mind and body have become invisible. The most dangerous shackles are the invisible ones, because they deceive people into believing they are free. This delusion is the new prison that people inhabit today, north and south, east and west...We inhabit the age of the technology of false consciousness, the technology of hiding truths behind amiable humanistic slogans that may change from one era to another...Democracy is not just freedom to criticize the government or head of state, or to hold parliamentary elections. True democracy obtains only when the people - women, men, young people, children - have the ability to change the system of industrial capitalism that has oppressed them since the earliest days of slavery: a system based on class division, patriarchy, and military might, a hierarchical system that subjugates people merely because they are born poor, or female, or dark-skinned. (Nawal El Saadawi 1994)

Hend is not free from the cultural shackles despite her migration to the United States. Her being an Arab female and all the cultural associations still prevent her from being completely free and would deter her from writing which is an act of freedom.

The narrative opens during the American presidential elections shortly after Hend's arrival with her son. This election in particular is historical for the United States as Barak Obama becomes the first African American president after a long history of racism against African Americans. This change in the history of America gives hope to Hend that she can also make a change in her life. However, Hend is unable to create a permanent change in her life. Throughout the narrative, she remains melancholic and her attitude towards life and her future stay negative. At the end of the text she sees herself in the character of Lilith, an old Egyptian woman, who left her comfortable life, her husband and son behind in Egypt and came to the USA seeking a new life. She had a great passion for music and life which she felt would be held down by her society's expectations. At the end of the text, Lilith dies after losing her memory. When Hend sees Lilith's belongings in boxes outside her flat, the two characters become intertwined.

On the night when Obama became president-elect, her son Ziyad smiles as she tells him that the fireworks and celebration are because Obama won the presidency. "I've got to tell Obama that a lot of things have to change", Ziyad says (al-Tahawy 2012: 8). The word "change" is repeated several times with emphasis in the text. For example, Ziyad tells Hend that he made signs with his friends at school with the word "change" asking Obama for change. He also tells her that she needs to change, too. Obama's presidency does not stop racism against African Americans.[42] In brief, Hend is unable to change her life despite the change of her geographical, social and cultural space, and Obama as a person is unable to change the whole social and public American space towards African Americans. It is a lifelong endeavour and challenge to be sought and resuscitated through collaborative work, not just politically or socially but through all possible means.

In terms of liquid geography, the prospect of a possible peaceful life in the American space for Middle-Eastern migrants has been drastically and negatively affected after the 9/11 events. As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, the endeavours to achieve this goal by fictional migrant Middle Easterners to the USA have been changed with the attacks on the Twin Trade Towers. This chapter has shed light on the emphasis on the diversity of viewpoints, aspirations and experiences between the Middle East and America and among Arab-Americans and white Americans, providing a comprehensive understanding of the migrants' spaces. From the perspective of space and gender, Halaby and al-Tahawy reflect the shift in migrants' relation with their diaspora space. This is shown in the presentation and employment of liquid geographies and metaphors which are employed to underscore the rigid borders and spatial gap between migrants and their space(s). Halaby's two narratives can be considered as two parts of the migrants' worlds of home and diaspora: while one focuses on the Middle Eastern geographical area, the other shifts to the United States. In *West of the Jordan*, the writer does not delineate subservient Middle Eastern women whether in the area or in the USA. Yet, she deploys realistic women whose power is expressed in different ways, subtle and explicit like Huda, Hala's mother in her support for Hala, Mawal's strong care of the Palestinian history, future and people, Soraya's fierce independence and Khadija's stance against her aggressive father. Al-Tahawy's narrative also gives an insight into the representation of women's spatiality in a text written originally in Arabic which

[42] In 2013, the international social movement Black Lives Matter was formed in the United States in dedication to fighting anti-Black violence, especially police brutality.

shows writing as an act of empowerment for burdened migrant women who hope for a change in their life.

The examination of selected Arab-American works from the turn of the millennium shows that they are mostly informed by migrants' spatial experiences. Through a geocritical reading of Arab migrant writers' portrayal of the status of migrants within the American sphere, the feasibility of leading a stable and peaceful life in exile has been called into doubt. More crucially, the study focuses on the impact of various forms of space on migrants' spatial experiences, providing a complete picture of the real and imagined geographies. In the last decades of the twentieth century, Arab-American writers explored the willingness and possible ways of integrating migrants in the diaspora space. While Chapter One shows the cognitive mapping and representation of migrants' spatial experience, Chapter Two explores the materialistic, polysensory method of the perception and reproduction of space. In these two chapters, writers are reflecting on the possibilities of improving the position and the spatial experience of migrants in the American diasporic space.

Coda: Arab American Narratives

Despite the geocentric approach in his geocritical model, Westphal's final line in his book *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* says that "geocriticism operates somewhere between the geography of the "real" and the geography of the "imaginary" . . . two quite similar geographies that may lead to others, which critics should try to develop and explore (Westphal 2011:170). As I explained in the 'Introduction', my geocritical approach as applied in the context of Arab American migrant fiction is not limited to a certain place. Hence, it is more propitious for a geocritical study to take into consideration the humanitarian interaction and reciprocal influence between space and human beings. This thesis has employed a geocritical framework to explore the ways migration and spatiality intersect and inform each other in the Arab American novel. At various points, these two key concepts can be seen to open new spaces, highlight possibilities of new becomings and create new approaches to reading migration narratives. Bertrand Westphal's geocritical model has provided a platform to explore the spatial experience that is constituent of migration in a range of contemporary Arab American novels. In the preceding chapters, the aim of this study was two-fold, focusing on and analysing space and migrants. While I investigated the spatial aspects and their configurations in the life of Middle Eastern migrant characters in the United States, I studied these characters' spatial experience and position in both diaspora and homeland contexts.

In the thesis, I have elaborated Westphal's theory by employing it in the context of migrant Arab American fiction. Unlike the geocentric model, my analysis engages with the notion of spatial "everywhere" as my selected texts represent this evolving nature of space and its broadly understood notion of mapping in ways that revitalise previous paths of reading Arab American fiction. My research, hence, is informed by intersecting fields of critical theory, literary studies, geography, sociology, politics and history of both the Middle East and the United States. Yet, I limit the scope of my study geographically and historically to span Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Arab Gulf countries and Egypt in relation to the United States at the turn of the millennium. As my argument in the previous chapters shows, the multidisciplinary perspective seeks a comprehensive version of the experience of migration and the involved space in the Arab American novel, closely analysing and reading its real and imagined spaces and its migrant and non-migrant people. This is to provide a critical development of the growing theory of geocriticism, as well as a revaluation of the migrant novel, in an era marked by migration crisis that emphasises the reciprocal interaction between migrants and their space.

The selected narrative texts of Arab American authors subvert Westphal's geocentered approach. Westphal's geocritical model situates a place at the centre of a geocritical reading while my selected narratives challenge the geocentred approach by representing intersecting spaces (real and imagined) in the experience of migration, highlighting the interconnectedness of homeland and diaspora space. The uniqueness of the migration experience and the individuality of migrants show and highlight the spatial aspects and qualities of the involved spaces in the experience, whether physical spaces such as natural and urban settings or imagined worlds such as the ones in folktales.

Further, my analysis revised elements of Westphal's geocritical model by expanding their scope to examine the interrelations of space, place and literature. Hence, my chapters showed how Arab American authors used *multifocalisation, polysensoriality* and *stratigraphic* techniques in their writings which resists any persistent stereotypes and generalisations about the space under study. By so doing, the selected narratives collectively provide an aspiring panoramic picture of the transatlantic Middle Eastern American space and its people. They are represented not only as marginalised, victims or not-belonging, but also as capable human beings, belonging to the diaspora space and to its people through an ongoing ever-changing space.

At the core of this thesis was the desire to study an eclectic mix of Arab American narratives, including broadly personal and humanitarian narratives, all of which address the manifestations of space and its effect on the narrative strategies in writing the experience of migration. The study aims to enhance awareness of the modern Arab American presence in the United States by exposing this eclectic mix of narrative themes and forms. It also refers to the many challenges presented by Arab American literary narratives. This study is unique in that the works under consideration have never been studied from a geocritical viewpoint, shedding light on how the selected authors' narratives, with their differences, reflect intersecting spaces that inform migrants' lives in various ways. At the thematic level, this project seeks to highlight the voices and the dilemma of those who have been stereotyped and yet noticeably shaped and reshaped by their real and imagined spaces.

In the preceding chapters, I demonstrate that Arab American authors employ their narrative space in exploring the interactive relationship between migrants and the involved spaces in the experience. This provides a multi-dimensional picture of the experience of migration and the world we inhabit. I explain how these different writers use different narrative techniques and strategies to create real and imagined worlds in their narrative

space, such as when Kahf and Jarrar use cognitive cartography to represent the transatlantic experience of migrants or when Abu-Jaber uses polysensorial techniques to highlight the fluidity of borders. Chapter Three investigates how peaceful migrants' lives have been disrupted in the aftermath of 9/11, examining how 'liquid borders' are not maintained and how Halaby's liquid geography creates stiff borders.

I have identified spatial tactics utilised in the portrayal of migrants' experiences after reading Arab American narratives from a geocritical perspective. Language, settings and metaphors take on a spatial flavour when authors incorporate Arabic cultural quotations like songs and folktales into their stories, contributing to the creation of actual and imagined worlds. Spatiality is also foregrounded as they employ different narratological strategies such as cinematic narrative as in Abu-Jaber's opening scenes. For instance, Kahf's novel opens resembling an American road movie, hinting at her embarking on a journey that will position her in the American space. Abu-Jaber also uses light and sound terminology at the opening of *Crescent* which foregrounds the real and imagined worlds of the main narrative and the uncle's story or Iraq and the United States of the text. Another aspect that enhances the spatiality of these selected narratives is the American cultural presence in the migrant characters' lives as part and parcel of their character that enforces the liquidity of borders. Even though Halaby's narratives represent these borders as rigid and as intensively existent, they still incorporate the white American voice and culture which resists any exclusion of the general multicultural space in the narrative space. The narrative writings of Middle Eastern Americans issue from a multicultural perspective. The relevance of spatiality in reforming migration representation and giving an anti-stereotypical depiction of migrant and white Americans is highlighted by their status as migrants and their use of multicultural, multilingual, cross-genre methods.

The new anglophone Arab writers of our time are part of the global demographic shifts that have occurred in recent decades and continue to do so. Both linguistically and culturally, these authors' works have a lot to offer. Their shared history and language, combined with their distinct variances in religious convictions, social customs and political orientations, create a panoramic vision of the Middle East. In their diasporic abodes, the United States in this thesis, Arab Americans are compelled, more out of necessity than choice, to negotiate their position and identities with firm links to Middle Eastern space. Indeed, the selected texts and my geocritical analysis in the three chapters emphasise the significant role of various spatial aspects in the life of migrants of both homeland and adopted one, an active role that is necessary for understanding the world at large and the one

of migrants both real and imagined. This geocritical reading of migrants' space alters our understanding of migrant literature and space and, more specifically, Arab American literature.

Arab American literature has been consolidating its position in mainstream American writings in the past few decades. The Arab-American writer and critic Evelyn Shakir describes the time as "an exciting moment" for Arab-American literature showing "every sign of coming into its own" and with "new writers … surfacing, new voices … sounding" (Shakir 1996: 3). Some believe that this thriving of Arab American writing was engendered by the "rise of multicultural and ethnic awareness in the USA, starting in the 1970s" while others maintain that what "spurred the growth of Arab American literature" was partly "the search for voices outside the traditional canon of Anglo-American male literature, a search which led to the burgeoning interest in ethnic American writers (Ludescher 2006: 106). Indeed, as the selected texts studied in this thesis demonstrate, the narratives create a space that includes both Arab and American spaces, allowing for a transatlantic reading of two geographical entities that are far apart yet so interactively close to meet in one narrative space where the imagined and real worlds intersect.

Future Visions and Concluding Remarks

I believe the best way to end this project is to look toward the future. The future of both geocriticism and anglophone Arab literature is interesting for further studies. This thesis has sought to explore the relationship between space and the migrant figure in the Middle Eastern American context. My study can be a starting point for further research from different perspectives. Not all anglophone Arab narratives necessarily foreground and/or employ spatiality nor are they necessarily motivated by migration or movement. Yet, migrant literature is by nature based on the concept of movement and thus spatiality becomes essential here.

There are many potential avenues for future research on migrant literatures to be explored, which I am unable to include due to the limitations of my study. My first chapter highlights the role of urban space and natural geographical aspects in configuring migrants' position and relationship with their diaspora and homeland spaces; this could be taken further in various directions. For example, other anglophone Arab literature written within different contexts like the British, Canadian, Australian, German, Turkish and other European countries which have been the abode of migrants in the last two decades (as a

result of the ongoing turmoil in Arab countries) would affect the literary production of these contexts in different ways. A different experience of migration would be within the Middle East from war zones to a more stable and safer ones like migration to Arab Gulf countries, Egypt and Jordan. The special geographical, political and economic characteristics of these places would necessarily have an impact on migrants and the literature addressing their experience. Another direction would be to study the literature produced during the time when Middle Eastern countries like Syria, Palestine and Egypt were welcoming migrants and refugees. One might study the representation of the migrant figure and his/her experience in those works and the impact of the political, urban and natural geographical space(s) on the experience at the time.

There are some thought-provoking works to be explored spatially and artistically, such as *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* (2019) by Christy Lefteri, which narrates the journey of Syrian refugees from Aleppo to the UK within the context of the Arab Spring. Another similar text is *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* (2018) by Atia Abawi. This novel is set in a country torn apart by war, with Daesh fighters posing a threat to its citizens. To stay alive, they must travel from Syria to Turkey and then to Greece, where they will confront danger at every turn. For example, these two works give a textual map of refugees' journeys. If they reach their destination, the places they travel through on the way have an impact on their psychology and future lives. Holly S. Warah's *Where Jasmine Blooms* (2017) is another example of intersecting worlds, emerging from interwoven perspectives of three women. It is a story of love, longing, culture and compromise, home and homeland where we read about the suburbs of Seattle to the villas of Jordan and the refugee camps of the West Bank; places that inform the characters' life and inform us of these real places through fiction.

The growing cultural awakening in the Anglophone Arab literature can be attributed to a number of factors. One significant factor is the political unrest in most Middle Eastern countries, which has an impact on the literary and cultural landscape. People's travels out of their native nations for various reasons, as well as their exposure to different cultural, geographical and social space are key variables in the creation of new literature and the direction of future research. One interesting research topic is the literature's narrative strategies: would it be metaphorical, as in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, because the authors, whether physically present in their home nations or in exile, are unable to utilise realistic techniques? Or, instead, may spatial distance be a motivating factor for writers to express directly the challenges of the Middle Eastern space in general?

I began this research by going back over the last few decades, reading about the Middle East from various perspectives and focusing on the impact of its geographical, political, cultural and historical domains on its people in the context of migration to the United States. However, by reading the current situation in the Middle East within the international context, and the fact that global power is no longer centred on the United States, one can detect a tentative image of its spatial literary future, taking into account changing international powers and their impact on the Middle Eastern countries and migration. Is a similar Arabic and Russian or Chinese intersection feasible? For example, there is a clear intersection between the Middle Eastern and American cultural spaces in the texts investigated in this thesis. International organisations such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund are under pressure to adapt to new power realities as a result of the emergence of other political powers. The rebalancing of power among the five permanent members, notably China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as Germany, may threaten the status quo in the wake of global power shifts as can painfully be observed in the current devastating aggression of Russia against Ukraine. In the case of migration, any decision affecting the Middle East, for example, will not be implemented unless it meets the interests of these countries. However, the region does not appear to be at peace in the foreseeable future due to the conflicting interests of various nations in the Middle East and the joint interest of safeguarding the presence of Israel in the region. One example of the opposing forces is Syria, where a proposal has been made to remap the geopolitical borders of the country, separating it according to races and religions. This is paradoxical because in modern writing, what is referred to as Greater Syria, often known as the Levant, historically included modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine, as well as sections of southern Turkey and the western half of the Anatolian peninsula.

The conceivable scenarios would be altered if we analyse migration in respect to one of the different global powers other than the United States. Russia and China, for example, play a significant influence in the Middle East on many levels, depending on the Middle Eastern country in question. For example, Russia, China, and Iran all assist the Assad regime in Syria in suppressing the popular movement that has transformed the nation into a battleground for global powers, despite the deaths and destruction. People were driven to flee their country to any other available location; some made it to a supposedly secure zone, while others died in the process. In some circumstances, when life becomes a torture, losing one's life is the best option. But it is not simply conflicts that force people to flee from their

homelands. Even when there are no actual wars, the number of migrants grows when people live in severe economic conditions with increased repression of human rights.

When it comes to the reciprocal influence of migrants and the diaspora space, the impact of migration on both Middle Eastern and diaspora countries is worth investigating outside of the United States. Is acculturation and/or integration of migrants possible in Russian or Chinese space, for example, if it is possible in American, British, or European space? Are Russia and China viable options for migrant workers? True, the Soviet Union as a unified political authority no longer exists, but the legacy of the Soviet Union lives on in the minds of Russians. Would people in Russia or China be able to accept the changes that migrants would bring to the current society and culture, as we view it in the American context, in terms of social and cultural space? Not to mention the fact that China has been hesitant to accept non-ethnic Chinese immigration in the first place. Furthermore, according to some polls, the vast majority of Chinese "strongly oppose the idea of accepting Middle Eastern refugees and especially Muslim refugees " (Varrall 2017: 4). Because the United States of America is "a nation of immigrants," as John F. Kennedy put it, it plays a role in allowing migrants to integrate into its territory on all levels currently, which is not the case in communist nations such as China or Russia (Soerens 2013: 2).

I spent the first two decades of my life rotating between Saudi Arabia and Syria. In my early twenties, I moved to the United Kingdom to pursue my education. This has given me the opportunity to live a variety of spatial experiences and provided me with a prism through which I can observe the various perspectives of a human being as their position changes. I am in Saudi Arabia, but I do not speak the native tongue. In Syria, I am in my birthplace, where I speak and appear like any other Syrian and am only identified as a Saudi at border crossings. I am a Saudi Arabian foreign postgraduate student in the United Kingdom. By the looks and/or the tongue, I am one of the Syrian and Iraqi migrants. These encounters exemplify the concept of "everywhere" space. They emphasise the junction of 'real' and 'imagined' space within a human being, underscoring the interconnectivity of multiple types of space within a human being. When I went on vacation to Austria and Germany in 2015, during the height of the refugee crisis, one of the most emotional and powerful occurrences that I will never forget is that I witnessed migrants swarming train stations and airports, some approaching me, offering to help me file my documents so that I might become a legal refugee. I watched police deporting illegal refugees on a train from Salzburg to Munich. On the plus side, I witnessed the impact of Middle Eastern migrants on their new country, where European music is played on the streets alongside the aromas

emanating from Middle Eastern restaurants, creating a unique atmosphere. Understanding or decoding a specific area, or a city, is based on human spatial experience, according to one of the thesis's key findings. The importance of space in human life is demonstrated by exploring the complexity of the relationship between space and literary representation from a spatial perspective. Spatiality as a social product is “simultaneously the medium and outcome, presupposition and embodiment, of social action and relationship" (Soja 1989: 129). My study is a different way of “looking at the same subject, a sequence of never ending variations on recurrent spatial themes” to show how literary production is significant in revealing, telling and retelling, shaping and reshaping human spatiality (Soja 1996: 9).

Appendices

Figure 1. changing geopolitical map of Palestine over time.

Source: https://visualizingpalestine.org/visuals/http-visualizingpalestine-org-visuals-shrinking-palestine-static

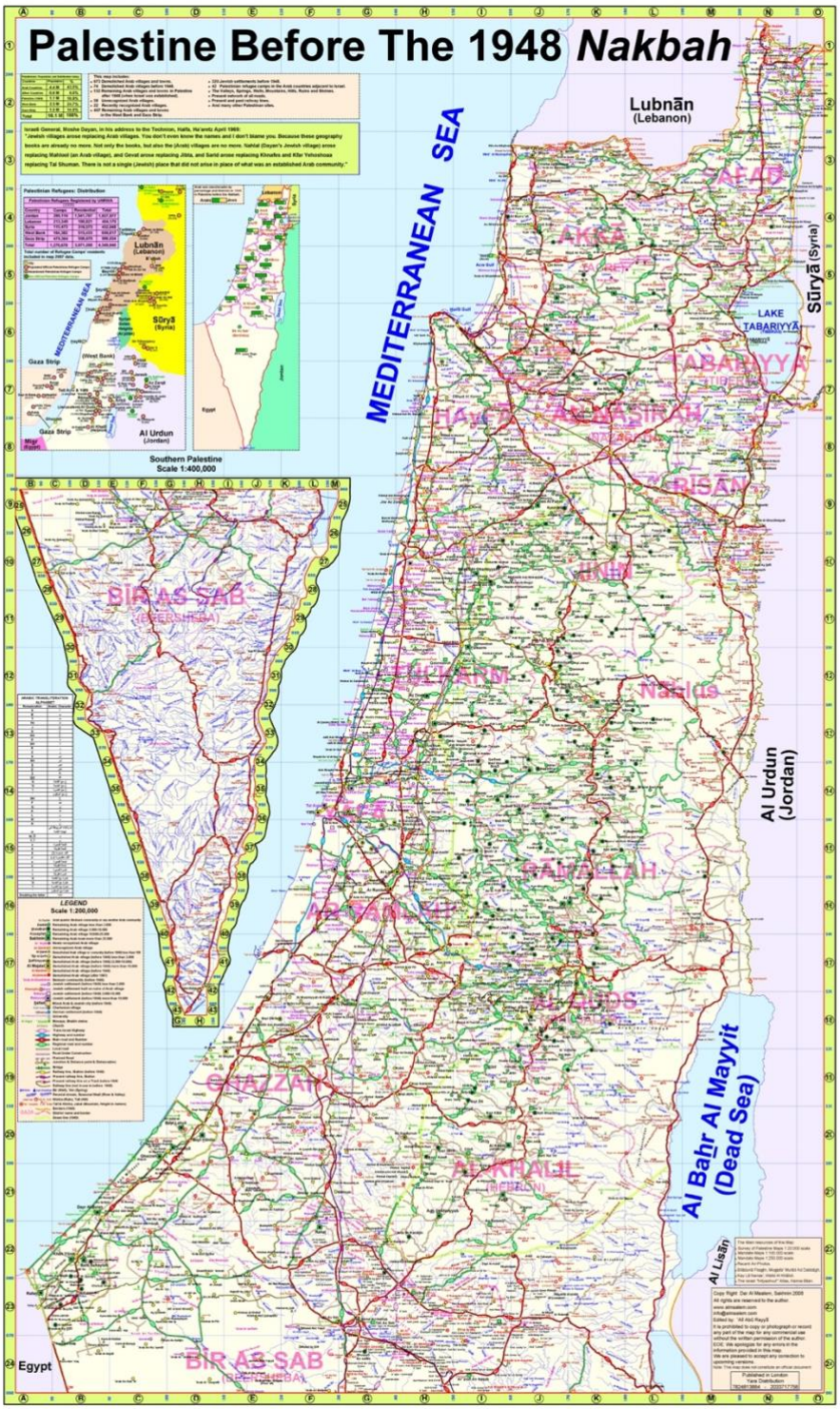

Figure 2. Map of Palestine before the 1948 *Nakba* (The Palestinian catastrophe).

Source: https://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Maps/Story11857.html

Figure 3. in support of the Palestinian cause against the Israeli attack on Sheikh Jarrah district.

Source: https://twitter.com/kurd_muna/status/1412768380453638147/photo/4

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