



## TRAUMATIC TRANSFERENCE OF THE DISPLACED: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL STUDY OF *THE LEMON TREE* AND *MORNINGS IN JENIN*

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### Abstract

The study explores trauma faced by the biblically displaced Jews and the forcefully displaced Palestinians. Through the lens of psychoanalytical transference, the root cause of the issue and its possible effects are identified and analyzed. By keeping in view the two texts, 'The Lemon Tree' and 'Mornings in Jenin', written by Sandy Tolan and Susan Abulhawa, the concept of transference is traced in events like Nakba and Independence of Israel and are studied from the view of the aftermath of such experiences. It explores the relationship between traumatic experiences and their relevance to the current situation of Israel and Palestine. It also excavates the psychological logic behind the aggressive behavior of the Israelites hindering the process of resolution be it convivial or one-state theory. The study concludes on the note that the cycle of aggression and resistance from both sides will continue and will not break unless the traumatic transference is not stopped.

**Keywords:** *Conviviality, Displacement, Jews, Nakba, One-State Theory, Palestine, Transference.*

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## 1. Introduction

The issue of Israel and Palestine has escalated in the past few decades, and the world powers are silent on the matter, for them the answer to Jewish question was by generating Palestinian question and hence the current scenario. The vivid and gruesome experiences of both people are neither tolerated nor to be forgotten yet in the world of social media and awareness they are both somehow neglected. The behaviour of people towards a people that has gone through a trauma makes them doubly nervous and in return they are unable to control their feelings.

Understanding the past experiences of both the people is very important and to make the experience digestible for the reader, writers like Sandy Tolan and Susan Abulhawa have worked hard. Sandy Tolan is an American based Jewish writer and an award-winning radio and print journalist. He has written *Children of the Stone: The Power of Music in a Hard Land* which was a finalist for a 2015 LA Times Book Prize. Tolan's area of interest is in Israel and Palestine conflict and its dynamics. As a journalist he keeps a closer eye on the power dynamics in the Israel-Palestine issue and presents the audience a very unbiased reality which many media platforms are unable to do. His major concerns are the intersection of land conflicts, ethnic identity, extinction of natural resources, indigenous issues, and the weakening global economy.

In his novel, *The Lemon Tree*, he has given an account of two families: one Arab, one Jew and an unlikely yet life altering friendship which becomes a milestone in the history of modern Israel and Palestine. From where sprouts the buds of hope and peace along with the dream of both the lands surviving parallel to each other without building walls and barriers. The novel explores not only the conflict but the centuries old enmity of Muslims and Jews and notes the changes in behaviour as well as the dogmas toward each other.

Susan Abulhawa on the other hand, is a Kuwaiti born Palestinian American writer and political activist. Her writing comes from her firsthand experience of the war and the catastrophe that the Palestinians had to face. Born to refugee parents, she has a history of the trauma that is attached to these people. Her writings like Tolan are nuanced and take reality as it is i.e. without sugarcoating or exaggerating it.

In the novel, *Mornings in Jenin*, a story of three generations is woven where each one of them has to face displacement and trauma. Along with this trauma these Palestinians face humiliation at the hands of their oppressor which like themselves is just a human and like them. It is the story of displacement of these Palestinians and

how their lifestyle changes in the makeshift refugee camps. It is the narrative of the refugees and their survival in the bleakest possible scenarios. It is an insight into the psychological construction of these refugees who are living in the camp and how through the years life has clinched its claws on them. According to The Guardian, “This is a brave, sad book that tells the story of a nation and a people through tales of ordinary lives lived in extraordinary circumstances” (Barr, 2011).

Both the narratives have one thing in common and that is the representation of both Muslims and Jews in the times of suffering. Where Tolan’s work is a detailed chronological happening of events, Abulhawa’s work is the psychological diary that brings into light the grief and trauma the characters went through. Both the writers have included the perspective of both sides to make the reader understand the depth of the issue. The story starts from the Jewish perspective and their historical baggage and moves to the aftermath of their traumatic experience. The trauma of the globally displaced Jews then becomes their weakness and their strength but simultaneously, it comes as a catastrophe to the Arabs who are nothing but peaceful peasants, only concerned about their olives and its harvest.

The origin of Palestine-Israel conflict can be traced from the displacement of Jews as early as 70 B.C. in the Roman empire (Wolfe, 2006). This displacement then embedded in them a psychological insecurity which after holocaust came out in the form of the atrocities that were seen in the war of Independence. This war was a “pledged[sic] to help establish a national homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine” (Tolan, 2007, p. 3). Once this homeland was built as a safe haven for Jews, it became a “tale of dispossession, of being stripped to bones of one’s humanity, of being dumped like rubbish into refugee camps unfit for rats” for the Palestinians (Abulhawa, 2010, p. 78). The history of displacement for Palestinians became a gory reality since they were exiled in their own homeland, they were made to move from camp to camp and the tagline “a land without people for people without land” became the bearer of humiliation and a blindfold which the whole world wholeheartedly accepted (Abulhawa, 2010, p. 38).

To live with the post traumatic experiences of the past, these displaced fractions started to transfer their volcanic emotions onto the other as a form of catharsis which brought havoc into their lives. According to Freud, transference is the projection of certain emotions onto someone else (Freud et al., 1991). This transference of emotions through aggression and violence can be seen in both of the displaced strata i.e. Palestinians and the Jews.

To explore the transference of trauma in the displaced Jews and Palestinians and its effects on the current scenario, textual analysis is employed. To identify the post-traumatic effects witnessed by both the parties and their unconscious projection of emotions onto others, the psychoanalytical transference of emotions is dissected.

### **1.1. Significance of Study**

Since the Israel-Palestine conflict has flared up again, to come a solution is important. But looking at either party from an extremist or political point of view has neither done good to them nor the world. According to the Jews, the land they are settling on belongs to them whereas, Palestinians believe that this land is their inheritance from 40 generations. While the mainstream media shows the casualties each day, the inhumane reality and experiences are something that the world will not be able to understand. To get an insight into the insolvability of this crisis, the main problem needs to be addressed and simply labeling any party as extremist would not help identify the root cause of the conflict.

By identifying the transference of traumatic emotions of the displaced Jews and Arabs, the current scenario of the conflict will be visible. Not only would it help identify the traumatic experiences but also analyze the process of psychological transference and the variety of emotions that are being transferred, making the conflict even more complex.

### **1.2. Objectives of the Study**

The objective of the study is to identify the transference of emotions which is the factor causing violence and aggression in the displaced Jews and people of Palestine. By critically evaluating the selected texts, the research aims to:

1. Identify the types of emotions that are transferred onto the other.
2. Understand the illogical aftermath of this transference in the current scenario.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

The study explores the following research question:

1. What are the traumatic experiences faced by the displaced people that are causing transference in the novels?

## **2. Research Methodology**

The study explores the psychoanalytical phenomenon of transference in the traumatically displaced Jews and Palestinians. This research uses qualitative method, and

the researcher is using the concept of psychoanalytical transference given by Freud (Freud et al., 1991). It also dives into the definition of displacement and the experiences that come out of dislocation. By analyzing the experiences of displaced people and their unconscious transference of certain emotions, the reason behind Jews aggressive and violent behaviour will be discovered.

### 3.Literature Review

Writing the narrative of the displaced is not an easy task yet one that many have attempted. The difficulty lies in bringing out a nuanced story that is not made up as the gravity of the matter is far beyond that, yet to justify the reality that actually does not make sense. Both the writers perform the task seamlessly as a writer said about Tolan's writings that it encapsulates the "human dimension of the conflict so vividly and admirably" (Segev, 2007) making the conflict unravel in such a way that the aspects which are unseen becomes visible. Another critic believes that these pieces of historical fiction are not just stories of past, but they are a pathway for "those who wish to not only understand the catastrophe of the Palestinians with their heads but with their hearts" (Bularca, 2024).

The displacement of Jews is the main cause of the displacement that Palestinians had to face. According to the Britannica, the Jewish diaspora came into being after the Babylonian exile (Young, 1998). From there onward started their history of displacement, their experiences of dislocation were not traumatic at that point but after the Holocaust, their identity and psychology completely changed. The change was so drastic and horrific that challenged their existence and as Ari states in the novel, "It killed us, what happened, even though we escaped. Have you noticed how empty my mother's eyes are? She's dead inside" (Abulhawa, 2010, p. 23). At that time, the exiled Jews who swarmed Palestine started to usurp it in their frantic state of mind by rationalizing their act through religion which caused Palestinian displacement and dispossession.

According to *The Key Concepts in Post Colonial Studies*, dislocation is described as, something that "occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event" (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p. 65). These experiences are the instances of being a refugee, building new homes, surviving in displacement and the state of being homeless. With these experiences come far more dangerous emotions like hatred, anger, insecurity, jealousy etc. which give birth to many social and moral issues. But these emotions are projected onto the people around or at a micro level. Once the process of transference takes place it does not stop like the process of fusion and ends up in a larger disaster.

Transference according to Freud was, “displacement of quantifiable neuronal energies as well as the psychological phenomena Freud observed occurring between him and his patients” (Makari, 1994). Similar were the circumstances of the Jews who came after the events of Holocaust to the land of Palestine. For them, “Israel was a tiny haven for Jews in a world that had built death camps for them” (Abulhawa, 2010, p. 94) and hence started the movement to build a Jewish state on the blood of Palestinians whom they were unable to register. Although both sides faced unjust treatment from the world yet “the complex history of the Palestinian refugees should not be reduced to a simple analogy with no evidentiary basis” (Kamel, 2019).

#### **4. Discussion and Analysis**

The Israel-Palestine conflict has its roots in politics and religion. The issue came into being when Jewish diaspora sought refuge in Palestine and once, they settled there, the sense of lost biblical destiny overcame them making them claim the land by all means. Amid the chaos, the world kept silent since it was one of the accomplices. After the atrocities of Holocaust and the human experimentation of the world at the expense of Jews, the insignificant had to choose a strategy for their survival. The horrors they faced in those gas chambers, the terrifying killings and the unjust expulsion made the Jews psychologically upset. The idea of humanity and identity was then challenged, people saw, “old, young, sick and well, mothers with their nursing babies, pregnant women, packed like sardines and weak from standing; they cried out desperately for help, for pity, for water, for air, for a scrap of humanity” (Tolan, 2007, p. 65). But the world turned a blind eye to them. They were killed mercilessly and were forgotten just like that. These traumatic experiences made them hollow from inside, but that hollowness soon filled with a new ignited dream of a new homeland.

After Israel declared its independence, a constant state of war broke out for the Palestinian Arabs since the land where Jews placed their dream was the land of Arabs. For the Palestinians, this land meant their gardens of olives and dreams but for Israel it was the holy promised land. The zeal and passion to usurp the land from the Arabs grew day by day because as the time passed the sense of insecurity in the Jews started to settle. For Arabs “they had endured many masters- Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders, Ottomans, British, - and the nationalism was inconsequential” (Abulhawa, 2010, p. 27). The only thing they knew was their family and their harvest but that was soon taken away from them. As the Jewish state established and flourished, the Palestinian deteriorated and disaster became its destiny. The insecure, frail, naïve Jews then turned stern, aggressive nationalist who only believed in one thing and that was their right on that land.

Amid the war of 'right to return' and 'right to exist' came the idea of peaceful coexistence of both the people which was seen as "Israel's long-term survival" (Tolan, 2007, p. 137) policy. But for the Palestinians who had no part in Jewish diasporic atrocities, were unable to do so. For them "the symbolic permanence of the shelter was too much to bear" (Abulhawa, 2010, p. 41). For the proud, loving Arabs, the humiliation of being a refugee for no good reason became a sore source that would eat them up from the inside.

Unable to project their feelings and emotions, the Jews left the facade of two-state theory and launched the Jewish supremacy ideology according to which "a greater Israel defined not just as a Jewish state but one in which the law enshrines Jewish supremacy over all Palestinians who remain there" (Wolfe, 2006). To evade the Jewish nationalists and to sweep the humiliation, Palestinians started to raise their voice, not by projection but through psychological transference.

Since the dilemma of Palestinians was twofold and problematic, instead of understanding it they started to look for a cathartic solution. They began 'intifada' which was resistance through knives. Whatever was left for them or not they began to salvage it through the little instances of that violent and aggressive resistance against the Jews who in the first place transferred their unsaid and unsolved emotions and projected them unto the Palestinians who were just helping them.

Another by-product of the whole situation came as the fear of Arabs in the heart of Jews, since they were told to protect the land that was given to them by the God himself, they were just performing the duties assigned to them. For them hundreds and thousands of Arabs who were killed in the name of land became a threat, their souls haunting them and staying in their conscience like Macbeth's dagger. "Our enemies, the Arabs states, are a mere nothing compared with those hundreds of thousands of Arabs [that is, the Palestinian refugees] who will be moved by hatred and hopelessness and infinite hostility to wage a war on us" (Tolan, 2007, p. 152).

To an extent the Palestinians tried to adjust to the circumstances that they faced after the exile, but the hope of return remains lit in them, the stories of glorious past, the remembrance of the love of olives and the last memory of the homes kept them moving. The experiences that they had as refugees were very dark but the hope to return maintained their sanity but once that dim hope was vanquished the sensibility also vanished. "Those who had fled become refugees once again, in another human junkyard dotting Israel's brief history. And those of us who remained became prisoners in Jenin" (Abulhawa, 2010, p. 82). For these refugees, living in prison on their own land was better than freedom in exile. But in either case, they transferred their hatred of the colonizers to the hatred towards life and breathed a love for death.

As the Jews transferred their hatred for world and projected it out on the Palestinians Arabs who lived on that land for forty generations. They fixated their sight on the Palestinians and unable to avenge themselves from the world tried to exercise their power on the powerless. They planted the seed of hatred in their younger generations by instilling in them a wrong history which eventually became a big burden in their hearts. To silence the demons, they sought the help of death; by annihilating and violating the existence and humanity, they channelized their anger and aggression which became the reason of dispute. And the vicious cycle of violence then came full circle when the Arabs, after utter humiliation and dispossession time and again took a stand and stood with whatever sanity they had. That led them to sacrifice themselves in the name of war, land and their loved ones, “only the latter occurred because of the former, underscoring for me the inescapable truth that Palestinians paid the price for the Jewish holocaust” (Abulhawa, 2010, p. 273).

## 5. Conclusion

For Edward Said, the solution to the problem was a peaceful acceptance of what has happened and forgiveness. For the Jewish Israelite the solution exists in Jewish supremacy where the law and order will be regulated according to them. For the extremists, the solution lies in complete genocide or clean sweep of the other party. But it truly lies in the psychological process of traumatic transference which started after Holocaust and has been continuously going on in one way or the other changing its forms and colours. Only by stopping this phenomenon, will the Jews be able to see, and the Palestinians be able to accept. For the metamorphosis of the transferred emotions, a new set of emotions and experiences are required that can only guarantee the countertransference, resulting in the birth of new human emotions and halting the cycle of violence and aggression.

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