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**Collective Memories, and Diasporic Experiences  
in Hala Alyan's Poetry**

**A B S T R U C T**

The construction of the diasporic identity is inextricably linked to the collective memory of home culture: its geography, history, traumatic experiences, and achievements. This paper tackles the effect of trans-generational trauma, diaspora, and collective memories on the second generation of diasporic individuals as represented in selected poems by the Palestinian-American poet Hala Alyan. It traces the development of her exilic identity through the analysis of selected poems by her, written over different periods. The poems have been chosen from Alyan's volumes: Atrium (2012), Hijra (2016), the Twenty-Ninth Year (2019), and an individual poem published in (2020). The paper examines some significant concepts such as diaspora, trans-generational trauma, displacement, and home-seeking. The paper argues that trans-generational experiences and collective memories can affect the formation of the identity of second-generational immigrants. It contends that what happened in the past will affect the subsequent generations, and they will permanently be haunted by it.

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**الذكريات الجماعية و تجارب الشتات في شعر حلا عليان**

علي محمد سعدون عبد الرضا / قسم اللغة الإنجليزية ، كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية ، جامعة واسط  
الأستاذ مساعد دكتور أروى حسين محمد / قسم اللغة الإنجليزية ، كلية التربية ، جامعة تكريت

**الخلاصة:**

يرتبط بناء هوية الشتات ارتباطاً وثيقاً بالذكريات الجماعية لثقافة البلد الأم: جغرافيتها وتاريخها وتجاربها المؤلمة وإنجازاتها. يتناول هذا البحث تأثير الصدمات المتنقلة عبر الأجيال ، الشتات والذكريات الجماعية على الجيل الثاني من المغتربين كما تمثل في قصائد مختارة للشاعرة الفلسطينية الأمريكية حلا عليان. يتتبع هذا البحث تطور هوية الشتات للشاعرة من خلال تحليل قصائدها المختارة ، والتي كتبتها على مدى فترات زمنية متباعدة. القصائد أختيرت من مجلدات حلا عليان: أتريوم (2012)، هجرة (2016) ، السنة التاسعة والعشرون (2019) ، وقصيدة فردية نشرت عام (2020). هذا البحث يدرس أيضاً بعض المفاهيم المهمة مثل: الشتات، الصدمات عبر الأجيال ، النزوح والبحث عن الوطن. يناقش هذا البحث كيف يمكن ان تؤثر

تجارب النزوح المنتقلة عبر الأجيال و الذكريات الجماعية على تشكيل هوية الشتات للجيل الثاني من المهاجرين. هذا البحث يؤكد أن ما حدث في الماضي سيؤثر على الأجيال اللاحقة ، وسوف يطاردهم بشكل دائم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الاستعمار، الهجرة، صدمة النزوح، الجيل الثاني من المهاجرين، الهوية و البحث عن الوطن

## 1.1 Introduction

The diaspora has evolved into a global problem that affects practically everyone's lives in recent years. It is no longer associated with the Jewish diaspora or any specific country; it has become a global issue and is playing a bigger role in people's lives. There are several causes of diaspora, such as colonization, war, political unrest, tyrannical rulers, economic factors, and poverty. Most often, diasporas take place as a result of colonialism and the post-colonial era that followed. Therefore, one of the unfavorable effects of post-colonialism is the diaspora. The Diaspora itself produces a lot of effects on people's lives and has its waste. The aftermath of diaspora includes displacement trauma, traumatic memories, trans-generational trauma, nostalgia, and a longing for one's home.

First-generation immigrants are affected directly because they have lived through the traumatic experiences of diaspora. Moreover, diaspora affects the second generation of immigrants indirectly because they will be affected by the traumatic memories through their parents' tragic experiences. They are not eyewitnesses but they will be affected by trans-generational trauma through their parents' memories and storytelling. A Palestinian-American poet has been chosen to study the effects of diasporic experiences and trans-generational trauma on the second generation of immigrants. Hala Alyan (1986–) is a Palestinian-American writer and clinical therapist. During her parents' journey to the US, Hala was born in the USA of a Palestinian father and a Lebanese mother. Her displaced family moved from Palestine to Lebanon, Iraq, the UAE, and Kuwait before finally residing in the US. During the first Gulf War, Alyan's family left Kuwait when she was only four years old. Alyan has lived around the world, between the Mideast and the Midwest. Even when they got asylum in the USA, they lived in different places around the USA. Alyan is indirectly affected by the diasporic experiences and traumatic memories of her prior diaspora. She inherits them through the haunted memories of her parents to

become hers. Selected poems have been chosen over different periods from Alyan's volumes: *Atrium* (2012), *Hijra* (2016), *The Twenty Ninth Year* (2019), and other external resources to study the effect of trans-generational trauma and the transformation of diasporic experiences.

During the past decades, researchers have increasingly started to focus on the phenomenon of diasporas. Many researchers argue the concept of diaspora and its effect on a particular nation. Others argue the concept as a political issue, while others adapt the concept and link it with a literary work.

Johan Jansson examines the use of the Cuban Diaspora in the U.S. as a case to analyze whether it is possible to observe through history if the diaspora may have changed its affiliation from its homeland towards its host land and, as a result, might decrease or cease to meet the criteria of being a diaspora. His thesis is titled *Meeting the Conditions of Being a Diaspora: The Case of the Cuban Diaspora in the United States of America* (2017). Jansson also talks about the four waves of exiles from Cuba. The Exiles with Hope, who made up the First Wave, were followed by The Second Wave for Freedom, The Mariel Event, The Third Wave, and The Final Wave, which occurred in 1994.

In his thesis entitled *The Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma Through Distributed, Mediated Visions of Memory in 2nd Generation Canadian Chinese Experience* (2014), Nathan M.L. focuses on how trauma affectively spreads from one generation to the next. What "methods of perceiving" may ethnic Chinese diasporans use to re-establish lost traumas and hidden histories? How can Chinese Canadians interact with problematic, mediated views of the past and cultivate a reflexivity that both "sees" haunted histories and critically resists the issues with power that arise during memory production?

Christina La Rose examines how Arab-American female poets express the issue of violence and articulate peace-building tactics in the Levantine region and internationally in her dissertation, *Arab American Women's Poetry: Violence and Boundaries in the Levantine Diaspora* (2018). In chapter four of this study, Larose argues the poem "Sahar & Her Sisters" from Hala Alyan's collection *Atrium* (2012). This poem makes clear how gender and violence are inexorably linked, how male violence—both physical and psychological—enacts the devaluing of female life, which is viewed as inferior to male life from the moment of birth.

The current study addresses the following hypothetical questions: Is there a connection between diaspora, traumatic memories, belonging, and nostalgia? And do they affect the diasporic persona physically or psychologically? How does trans-generational trauma shape the diasporic identity of the second generation? What is the change that is happening during the age's advance of exilic life and the poetry of Hala Alyan? The current study investigates the effect of trans-generational traumatic experiences and memories on the construction of second generation immigrants' diasporic identities. Hala Alyan is not an eye witness, though she is affected by the traumatic memories of her home nation through her family's experience and those around her. Additionally, this study aims to demonstrate that exilic identity is a dynamic concept that changes through time. The current study, however, aims to demonstrate that exilic identity is not immutable but rather evolves with time, much like a child does as they move from childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. It traces the development of diasporic identity from birth to majority in selected poems from Hala Alyan's *volumes Atrium* (20012), *Hijra* (2016), and *The Twenty-Ninth Year* (2019). No one has yet tackled these three volumes in the academic scholarly fields, except for the poem "Sahar & Her Sisters" as mentioned previously. This study traces the reflection of the effect of trans-generational trauma in Hala Alyan's poetry (the reflection of her parents' traumatic memories, her childhood, and when she became a bearing-witness in her majority).

## **1.2 Diaspora, trans-generational trauma, displacement trauma and home-seeking**

Diaspora is not a new phenomenon in the world or the lives of people. Diaspora has been around from the beginning of time (Bhat, 2015, P.6). It has existed since the dawn of time, dating back to prehistoric times. It's mentioned in sacred scriptures like the Bible and the Holy Quran. Since Adam and Eve were exiled for offending God, there has been a diaspora. People's lives are becoming increasingly influenced by the diaspora as time goes on. Firstly, the Jews were driven out of Palestine and Egypt. Then there's the diaspora of Armenians, as well as African and Asian diasporas. The diaspora has become a global issue in recent years, affecting practically everyone's life (2015, P. 6).

Many theories examine the origins of the term "diaspora," with many arguments that the term originally stems from different cultures. Kevin Kenny, Professor of History in Irish Studies at New York University, investigates the origins of the term "diaspora" in his latest book *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction* (2013). He claims that the term "diaspora" comes from the

Greek verb diaspeirein, which is a combination of the words dia (over or through) and speirein (to scatter or sow). (Ch:1, P.20). According to William Safran (1930–), Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the University of Colorado Boulder, the term "diaspora" is derived from the Jewish word "galut" (2005, P. 36). According to him, this word meant deracination, legal restrictions, oppression, and a difficult transition to a host country whose hospitality was unstable and fleeting. It also suggested the presence of an expatriate community on foreign soil who considered their stay to be transient.

With time, the term "diaspora" has acquired a multi-faceted meaning. The term became popular in the 1980s as a means to describe folkss who had been estranged from their birthplace. Until 1993, the term "diaspora" was defined in New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary as "... all those Jews who live outside the biblical land of Israel." However, the dictionary added another definition in the same year:"... the situation of people living outside their traditional homeland."(Sheffer, 2003, P. 9). Although the first explanation in the dictionary might be argued to link the diaspora to a religious connotation, the second explanation lays the framework for a more modern definition. Walker Connor (1926–2017), a nationalist and Middlebury College Professor of Political Science, defines diaspora in a broad sense that is not limited to the Jewish diaspora. In his article *Modern Diasporas in International Politics (1986)*, Connor defines "diaspora" as "that segment of a population living beyond their country"(P.16). In all of its forms, diaspora has something to do with scattering and dispersal. diaspora is no longer limited to the Jewish diaspora; it has evolved into a global issue affecting nearly every part of the globe.

Diaspora is an important concept in postcolonial theory, and it is at the heart of this study. As a result, it's important to stress the Diaspora's connection to postcolonial theory. A body of postcolonial theory is a body of thinking largely concerned with accounting for the political, aesthetic, economic, historical, and social effects of European colonial control throughout the world from the 18th to the 20th centuries (Atuahene, 202, P. 3).

Postcolonialism is concerned with the effects of colonization on cultures and communities. Literary critics coined the word postcolonialism in the late 1970s to describe the different cultural repercussions of colonization. Post-colonialism, as the term implies, refers to the time after colonialism in which the colonized reclaim their rightful place by attaining freedom and therefore defeating political and cultural imperialism. In general, postcolonialism appears to be a direct result of colonialism. However, we still see colonialism in the form of neocolonialism in the

postcolonial era, which gives rise to new diasporic movements like those in Palestine and Afghanistan (Bhat, 2015, P. 1). Postcolonial philosophy takes many forms and interventions, but they all make the same basic claim: that the society we live in is hard to comprehend without taking imperialism and colonialism into account. Diaspora is one of these key forms. It is One of the most fundamental concepts in postcolonial theory. "Diaspora," according to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2013), is a crucial historical fact of colonialism. Colonialism was a diasporic phenomenon in and of itself, involving the temporary or permanent dispersion and settlement of millions of Europeans over the globe"(P.61). According to Ashcroft et, diaspora is intrinsically tied to colonialism because it was this historical situation that caused people to be dispersed around the world due to various causes or types of compulsion.

The issue of traumatic memories that are "at a distance both temporally and physically" is at the heart of the concept of diaspora (Brah, 1996, P. 180). Because traumatic memories are the repercussions of diaspora, the history of the connection between the diaspora and traumatic memories is almost as old as diaspora itself. They both affect the migrant's life. Because most diasporic individuals are compelled to flee their homelands, they face a mental battle wrought with horrific memories and suffering. The word "trauma" comes from the Greek verb "titrosko," which means "to wound" or "to pierce." The Greek term maintains the ambiguity between physical and psychological harm, making no clear distinction between the two. The term "trauma" is now more generally used to refer to emotional or psychological harm rather than physical pain. We believe that if someone claims to be traumatized, he has encountered a terrible or unsettling experience. As a result, we concentrate on the emotional impact rather than any potential physical injury. Trauma is defined as a pathological mental and emotional condition, an injury to the psyche caused by catastrophic events or the fear of such events that overwhelms an individual's normal response mechanisms (Kurtz, 2018, PP. 1-2; 240–241).

Displacement is a traumatic experience that haunts migrant's life. The dislocation and tragic memories of their country affect the majority of diasporic individuals. People are forced to leave their nation for a variety of causes, including wars, religious persecution, political or economic pressures, property loss, and starvation. It's possible that the displacement may endure months, if not years. It could be the experience of a single writer or intellectual who has been exiled voluntarily or violently, or the displacement of an entire community (Kurtz, 2018, P. 15). Layla Al-Maleh, an associate professor of English literature, discusses the diasporic individual's

mixed sense of home in her well-known book *Arab Voices in Diaspora* (2009). According to her, diasporic people are in a perplexing situation since "both the past and current communities are partly unreachable." (P. 455). If the new home of the diasporic individuals rejects their identity, customs, and way of life, they will be unable to establish roots in the new environment. According to Safran, diasporic identity is far from "fixed or pre-given" because it is formed "in the furnace of everyday life's materiality; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively." (quoted in Brah, 2005, P. 179). Traumatic memories act as an obstacle in the diasporic individual's life, which he cannot simply overcome. There will be a chasm between the imagined and real representations of his homeland community.

Positive identification, according to the first generation of immigrants, with a "homeland" can be accompanied by feelings of alienation when assigned to a home one has never lived in or denied belonging by those who still live there. They strive to re-create their homeland in their minds since they don't feel at home in their new location, yet the country they imagine can never be accurate. When a diasporic individual returns to his homeland after a long absence, he inevitably finds himself in an unfamiliar environment. And now, despite feeling at home in his hometown when he thinks about it, he can't help but feel out of place when he visits. In the same way, the "new" land can be a source of both pleasant and negative othering experiences (Rushdie, 1991, P. 56; Al Maleh, 2009, P. 455). On the other side, later generations have never experienced migration and have no recollections of life before it (Brah, 1996, P. 194). They are the inheritors of diasporic memories that are repeated, reappropriated, and reinterpreted in the present. They create their own diasporic narratives of home and belonging based on these recollections throughout their lives (Kuah-Pearce & Davidson 2008, P. 2).

The later generations have a sense of belonging to their fatherland through the memories and stories of their parents. This sense of belonging is lived through imaginations which is quite different from reality. For example, when an immigrant child visits his fatherland, as an adult, for the first time. It appears that the worlds of imagination and representation are not quite in sync, and that this lack of coherence harms sentiments of belonging. An immigrant feels in-between, s/he neither belongs to their "fatherland nor to the new land" (Al Maleh, 2009, P. 454). The question of "Where do I belong?" is more compelling for descendants of migrants, and the meanings they attach to home are more complex (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, P. 217). Add to the complexity, there are Differences between first-generation migrants, who may connect their

diasporic experiences to memories of a time before migration and subsequent generations, for whom the 'new land' was never new and whose memories of the 'homeland' are more fractured. The numerous complex ways the "original home" is recalled reflect the layeredness of contemporary notions of home. Personal and collective memories provide the framework within which we all interpret our past and present experiences and orient ourselves toward the future. This means that memories of previous homes, as well as ideas about where 'we' come from, feed migrants' impressions and desires of home and belonging (Davidson, 2008, P. 26; Leung, 2008, P. 164).

For those who had never visited their fatherland, it was almost mythical, the best of all places, a place where they felt at ease. The majority of people who were unable to visit their hometown before returning were directly or indirectly involved in domestic concerns. They imagined the entire country rather than a specific location for them. If their hometown or village of origin was taken into account, it was simply as a representation of their fatherland as a whole. Young immigrants who were born and raised in another country are unable to establish their expectations of home on their personal experiences. They find themselves in a slightly different predicament. Their cultural and physical appearance relegate them to the role of 'Other' in the present home, yet they do not have their own memories of the past home. The country is less idealized for those who had the opportunity to visit before going home, but it is still unfamiliar place to return to. Returning to one's roots is more symbolic than real (Hammer, 2005, PP. 72-73; 115).

Subsequent diasporic generations may think that the loss and horrific experiences of their fathers will not be theirs because they didn't suffer. They imagine that the memories themselves are not theirs or they won't be haunted by them because their memories lacked the pain and panic which experienced by their parents. They think that they won't inherit the traumatic memories because they didn't suffer. The fact is, they not only inherit the traumatic memories, but the pain as well (Fass, 2008, P. 3). The other generation will inherit the preceding generation's psychic substance and manifest symptoms that arise not from their own experience but from a parent's, relative's, or community's psychic conflicts, traumata, or secrets. This process seems as if an individual is being plagued by the ghosts of a preceding generation's unfinished business (Schwab, 2010, P. 49). Collective trauma is passed down to subsequent generations in various and refracted ways. They receive violent histories not only through the factual memories and



traumatic experiences of their parents and relatives but also through the traces of affect, particularly the unintegrated and inassimilable affect (Al Maleh, 2009, P. 455; Schwab, 2010, PP. 14, 42).

Because the material world has no intrinsic value in itself, the most relevant way to think about the home's symbolic quality is as a signifier of it rather than as something distinct from it. Homes are not geographical locations, but rather internal destinations chosen by individuals (Duyvendak, 2011, P. 37). This implies that the material world has no inherent "home value" and must be associated with meanings and emotions. Michael Jackson (1940-) writes in his influential book *At Home in the World (1995)* that "home is founded less in a place and more in the activity that occurs in the place" (P.148). As a result, home is more of a result of one's own creating than of the location itself. It is the immigrants' responsibility to instill sentiments of security, belonging, and safety in places over time. We don't feel at home everywhere or with everyone, thus it's a purely artificial feeling. It appears that being at peace necessitates including some and dismissing many. The word "home" loses its meaning when it is everywhere and we feel at ease with everyone. Everyone needs to feel at ease, yet it's a rare occurrence: no one feels at ease everywhere or with everyone (Duyvendak, 2011, P. 106). Home is more of an emotion and a set of senses than a physical location.

The words "home" and "nostalgia" are linked. The spiritual value of a home is more important than its physical value. "Home can be a synonym for origin," according to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, meaning "someone's or something's place of origin, or a place where a person believes they belong." Though dictionaries may describe home in this way, the current experience or perception of the concept of home has fundamentally changed for all of us, particularly for hyphenated peoples and specifically for Arab-Americans. Due to the fast pace of life and ongoing internal feuds over allegiance, "home" has become a source of strife and instability rather than a secure haven. Immigrants are more nostalgic for home's spiritual significance than for its physical location. Nostalgia is a well-known psychological term with a strong connection to memories and home. It is a fundamental concept that has been shaped by the diaspora and has implications for immigrants' lives (Rozveh & Faramarzi, 2017, P. 531). The word "nostalgia" comes from the Greek words "nostos" and "algos," which mean "return" and "pain". According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, nostalgia is a form of grief brought on by being away from one's home for an extended period of time. As a result, the phrases "pain" and

"return" are critical in this combination to ensure that nostalgia is a psychological rather than an organic condition. Nostalgia, from a psychopathological standpoint, is a yearning for a magnificent past that no longer exists and cannot be recreated. Nostalgia is a yearning for simpler times, as well as a comparison of the past and present. As a result, nostalgia and longing for the past can cause melancholy and suffering. Humans are grieved by their social, political, and cultural situations, as well as their absence from their ideal location. Their current life conditions are generally unfavorable (Rozveh & Faramarzi, 2017, PP.531-532).

It is important noting, especially in light of the Arab diaspora's experience in the United States, that immigration to the United States of America has a lengthy history. It began in the seventeenth century and is still going strong now. People come to America from all over the world for a variety of reasons, including political, religious, and economic motives. The term "Arab-American" is just recently coined to correspond to other appellations identities, such as African-American, Asian-American, and many more. The hyphen implies that both sides of the hyphen are in some way balanced or even in tension. In other respects, hyphenation subverts the "melting pot" metaphor by expressing identities that appear to resist "melting" or dissolving in mainstream America. With the rise of multiculturalism and ethnic consciousness, the hyphenated term adapts well to modern speech, proudly asserting hybridity and gently claiming space (Al Maleh, 2009, PP. 423–424). The hyphen symbolizes a clash between the past, which represents the home country, and the present, which represents the host country. Each eye is directed to a different side of the hyphen that joins the cultural inscription's two terms. It's as if they're two separate personalities attempting to coexist within the same individual (Al-Samman, 2000, P. 325).

The Arab-American hyphenation experience has proven to be one of the most successful and fruitful diaspora experiences in history. Arab-Americans have contributed significantly to American literature, poetry, music, art, business, finance, and a range of other cultural, political, industrial, and economic endeavors. One of Arab-American immigrants' most noticeable contributions to American society is poetry (Daniels, 2006, P. 6). Arab-American poets use poetry to portray the Arab diaspora's dilemma. Arab-American poetry has become an important literary form in the United States in recent years. Poets of Arab heritage in the United States understand that poetry is one of the most powerful tools for breaking down racial and linguistic boundaries. As a result, there has been a considerable increase in the publication of Arab-American poetry.

Arab-American poets' success signals a substantial shift in the social and political status of Arabs in the United States. They may now utilize poetry to create new spaces in which their voices can be heard (Majaj, 2008, PP 3,4).

### **1.3 Hala Alyan: biography and diasporic life as a second generation persona**

Since the first half of the twentieth century, Palestine has struggled with wars, revolutions, and forced displacement of its people (Schulz and Hammer, 2003, P.30). Throughout the previous century, Palestinians life have revolved around moving to and residing in places other than Palestine. This experience has had a profound impact on every Palestinian household. Palestinians live in a variety of places around the world, in larger or smaller communities, yet something or someone significant is constantly missing from their lives. Their lives are shaped by their longing for absentees and for contact via old and new media (Hammer, 2005, P. 2). The Palestinian diaspora is found all over the world, with the majority of its members living in the Arab world. However, many Palestinians live in Europe, the United States, and Latin America. Migration from Palestine began in the late eighteenth century, and was predominantly led by Christians and aimed at the 'new world' of the time. Palestinian migration has also been triggered by attempts to secure better living conditions, since most Palestinians desire a better life for themselves and their children. However, their poverty is a factor of the migration and, later, the Israeli occupation, as well as untenable living conditions. The majority of Palestinians live in exile, and the majority are refugees (Hammer, 2005, PP. 2-3).

Palestinians have been displaced for more than five decades and have experienced more than a century of migration. Nevertheless, they insist on their national identity and claim the right to an independent state (Hamme, 2005, P. 2). Patterns of Palestinian migration are complex. Yet, the main causes of emigration for most Palestinians in the diaspora were the wars of 1948 and 1967, which have been dubbed the Nakba and naksa. These wars caused various types of conflict migration, but they are all described as coercive and involuntary in nature. (Schulz and Hammer, 2003, PP. 23,39; Hammer, 2005, P. 15). The Palestinian Professor of Modern Arabic Studies, Yasir Suleiman (2016), states that "In the Palestinian national consciousness, 1948, the year of the Nakba (catastrophe), and 1967, the year of the Naksa (setback), are traumatic watersheds that mark the loss of Palestine." (P.1). Those wars are the paramount factors behind the Palestinian experience of exile. As a result of migration, almost every Palestinian family has had to deal with

the separation of family members and the need for long-distance communication (Hammer, 2005, P. 21).

Hala Alyan (1986–) is a Palestinian-American writer and clinical psychologist. During her parents' journey to the US, Hala was born in the USA of a Palestinian father and a Lebanese mother. Her displaced family moved from Palestine to Lebanon, Iraq, the UAE, and Kuwait before finally settling in the US. During the first Gulf War, Alyan's family left Kuwait when she was only four years old. Alyan has lived around the world, between the Mideast and the Midwest. Even when they got asylum in the US, they lived in different places around the US. Currently, she lives in Brooklyn with her husband, where she works as a clinical psychologist. Alyan got her BA from the American University in Lebanon and her MA from Columbia University. Alyan then got her Phd in clinical psychology from Rutgers University. She specialized in trauma, addiction, and cross-cultural behavior (Alnes, March 5, 2021; Spear, November 17, 2017).

Hala Alyan is the author of several poetry collections and two novels. She is the winner of the 2013 Arab American Book Award, the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Award, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, and a finalist for the Chautauqua Prize. In several interviews, Hala Alyan explains how her writing of poetry and prose develops each other. She states, "Each process feeds a different part of myself." (Darling, December 11, 2018). Alyan writes prose every day for thirty minutes, which has helped her to write poetry pretty abidingly. "It's also helped me play with form and not be afraid to experiment," she explained. (Dowling, March 11, 2021). On the other side, poetry also helps Alyan in writing fiction. According to Alyan, "poetry" is really detailed, granular, and specific." (Darling, December 11, 2018). This is useful for Alyan because she considers writing fiction just a repetition of the process of writing poetry.

Alyan's experience in clinical psychology played a major role in her writings. Her job as a clinical psychologist helped her to depict the state of homelessness caused by wars and conjunctures and stress the Palestinians' claim of return (purkert, January 31, 2022). In an interview with John Stintzi, she states: "I definitely found myself inundated by clinical material, particularly traumatic stories of displacement and asylum seeking, and had some brilliant supervisors and peers." (March 30, 2018). According to Alyan, both therapy and poetry necessitate meticulous attention to detail and emotional understanding. "As a therapist, you're assisting people in putting their tales together," she explains. "You're assisting people in making

sense of chaos, or a jumble of seemingly unrelated events. It's akin to composing poetry" (Shrivastava, March25, 2021:<https://www.voxmagazine.com>).

Alyan has enrolled some of her own clients in narrative therapy, which is a method that uses writing and storytelling to help people reclaim the narratives of their lives or terrible events. For many people, poetry is just a collection of words, but according to Alyan, "Poetry saves lives. Poetry is a lifeline." (Shrivastava, March25, 2021). Even though Alyan uses poetry in therapy, however, she states, "I can't fictionalize clients' real-life experiences, but I imagine there's a certain "lifting" that occurs when considering the effects of trauma on memory and emotional processing." (Stintzi, March30, 2018). She sees and experiences how "displacement, loss, and intergenerational trauma" affect the way emotional regulation occurs (or does not) and how emotions-as-currency are dealt with in general in both her clinical work and her "normal" life as a diasporic persona. In an interview with Jacqueline Alnes, Alyan states:

As a therapist, I work a lot with immigrants, children of immigrants, and folks that have been displaced. A generation later, you see how traumatic histories have trickled down to the folks that have never lived in a war-torn zone or have never actually directly interacted with their parents' house or their grandparents' house.(March 5, 2021)

Even the most protected, comfortable suburban children can be affected by intergenerational trauma. If a region of the earth has been colonized or occupied, they will never be able to completely free themselves. For many generations, they have been living in the shadow of it. The effects of something that happens to you will be felt approximately three generations later. It simply is. Trauma is transmitted epigenetically, but there are also these subtle things that we inherit and pass down to our children. Caretakers can also experience this; it's not just those you are genetically related to. We inherit things emotionally and psychologically from people.

Alyan is one of a new generation of Palestinian women who are writing bold new narratives (Saad, March13, 2019). She has turned ordinary life and diasporic journeys into allegories of an ongoing gender and political struggle. Palestine and the enormous migrations of Palestinians throughout the Middle East and Midwest have figured prominently in Alyan's poetry. In a personal interview via Instagram App, she states, "Writing most of my poetry was a way of making sense of the world, particularly the journey that we have to make after dislocation and displacement." (May 22, 2022). Alyan is a writer who writes about never-ending journeys,

existential discomfort, and the search for home. She also represents her personal experience as well as that of her family.

#### **1.4 Trans-generational trauma, exilic identity, and collective memories in Alyan's poetry.**

As a result of calamitous events in particular nations, the phenomenon of trans-generational trauma is very popular and dominates the lives of their subsequent generations. In his prominent book, *Intergenerational Trauma: The Ghosts of Times Past* (2016), Thomas Hodge defines trans-generational trauma as "the carryover of the effects of trauma across generations"(P.7). In essence, trans-generational trauma happens when people show symptoms of trauma-related disorders as a result of what their parents and ancestors went through. The traumas of the past can be seen to affect people in the present, even though those people haven't directly experienced the trauma. This is true in a variety of different cultures and groups of people. Trans-generational trauma can be absorbed in a variety of ways, including directly through the mind, from one's parents, and through one's social environment. Each one penetrates the mind, upending the very foundations of their sense of security and snatching one's breath away (Bakó & Zana, 2020, PP. IX, 7). In his prominent book *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (2010), Gabriele Schwab (1946-) discusses how trauma affects and is transmitted to future generations, "Traces of psychic life can be transmitted from person to person and from generation to generation. This process may unfold through individual as well as collective histories"(P.51). Children of victims or criminals, the descendants of a violent past, carry a collective psychology that spans multiple generations. The subsequent generations are the inheritors of their descendants' traumatic memories and experiences as long as they live.

In her poem "medusa", as a case in point, Alyan likens diaspora to Medusa, describing it as monotonous as that mythological character. She resorts to western legacy and mythology as a source of inspiration and a means of adjusting them to contemporary issues related to the Palestinian diaspora and the exilic identity: "Let us say coy. / Relentless talent:/ I breakfast on nettle,/ the spikes impossible to floss..."(Alyan, 2012, P. 29). The poem opens with subjective pronouns and vivid images that suggest cruelty and harshness. Medusa, the speaker in this poem is an emblem of callousness. In her exile, she suffers the pain of 'spikes', and reluctantly eats the stingy leaves of 'nettle. The poet adopts Dante's image of serpents opening their throats as graves: ".....*The serpents uncurl their green throats,..*"(Alyan, 2012, P. 29). Serpents have been used in literature as symbols of fraud, death and violence. In his "Inferno", Dante portrays the thieves as

running away from the serpents without any hope of hiding. Medusa, metaphorically represents any exiled woman whose beauty and youth have been raped by the serpents of exile. The word 'nettle' is the name of a wild plant with heart-shaped leaves. The leaves of this plant are covered with sharp bristles and thorns that cause aches and are difficult to remove. In this line, the speaker speaks of her childhood when she was born far from her homeland to suffer from the bitterness of diaspora (nettle). In the following lines, the speaker illustrates the fake promises of the diaspora. Diaspora is like Medusa's curse, it makes humans as dead in life. It is a curse and endless pain.

The title of the poem "Medusa" is derived from Greek mythology. Medusa, also known as Gorgo, was once an extremely attractive young woman, known in particular for the beauty of her hair. The sea god Poseidon was drawn to her beauty and raped her at the sacred Athena temple. Her rape in the Athena temple marked the start of her tragic story. Furious at the desecration of the temple, Medusa was turned into a monster by Athena, who also took away her beauty and changed her long hair into poisonous snakes. Additionally, she was cursed with the lethal ability to turn anyone who stared at her face into stone. From her culture and homeland, Medusa was exiled, and she was left on an island by herself. Medusa's life was altered irrevocably (Milne, 1946, PP. 126–130).

The appointed Poet Laureate in 2009, Carol Ann Duffy (1955–) was the first who wrote a poem entitled "Medusa" in her volume *The World's Wife* (1999). Duffy used the myth of Medusa to illustrate the destructive effects of anger and jealousy. The poem reimagines Medusa as a contemporary wife who suspects her spouse of being unfaithful. It follows her development from a stunning young bride into a terrible, homicidal monster. This new persona is both sympathetic and terrifying. This poem illustrates how terrible hatred, resentment, and distrust can be. It also points to how men exploit women only to throw them away when they are no longer young and attractive. Unlike Duffy, Hala Alyan rewrites the Greek myth of Medusa to connect it to the Palestinians' diaspora and illustrate the effects of exile on diasporic people. In Alyan's poem, the god sea is presented as Israel's invasion of Palestine, while the Palestinians in general and the speaker in particular are presented as Medusa, forced to leave their homeland. The poet writes this poem in free verse. The poem is divided into several sections. Each section consists of two lines and is associated with the following lines instead of standing alone. The poet uses this interpenetration of the lines to support her intention of connecting Greek mythology with the diaspora. The poet also uses a mixture of short and long sentences. Long sentences help the poet

speaking descriptively and not pausing in mid-sentence. They have an effect on the rhythm of the poem by making lines that are not all end-stopped. Therefore, they help the poet narrate her ideas seamlessly. On the other side, short sentences help to emphasize important points and specific details. By using short and long sentences, the poet adds more drama to emphasize the gloomy tune of the poem.

"When she peered into my coffee cup,  
the fortuneteller saw rivers,

said I must learn  
to quiet myself.

All I could see was the bitter coffee  
left behind in my mouth,

all I can ever see is the bitter  
things leave behind"(Alyan, 2012, P. 29).

As Medusa, the speaker is cursed with endless pain and displacement, which she describes as a hyperaesthetic gift. In these lines, the speaker narrates what the fortuneteller saw in her coffee cup. The fortuneteller saw a river, which is a metaphor for a path and journey that one must take. The journey and the story flow as the river does (Jessica, November 8, 2021). The fortuneteller continues to describe the journey, which he describes as the bitterness of the coffee. The fortuneteller sees a hard and painful future, the same as the past. As a result, life in exile is not better than before it. The exile persona will live in a place he doesn't belong to, and the place where he belongs, he can't live in. Therefore, the meaning of belonging will be confused for the diasporic persona. He will live in between. Physically, he will live in the host land; spiritually, he will live in the homeland. As Schulz (2005) states, losing the "homeland" means losing the essence of the soul (P.113). As a result, this explains the sufferings and endless pain of the speaker's journey.



At the end of the poem, the speaker says, "*Athena, you ruined me.*" (Alyan, 2012, P. 30). This line illustrates the speaker's description of the gift as a hyperaesthetic. As Medusa was angry with Athena for cursing her and exiling her for eternity, so the speaker is angry because she is being forced to live far from home and her life is destined to live in endless exile. Because Medusa was raped, she was cursed with the ability to turn people to stones. Like Medusa, the Palestinians are cursed with an endless, chaotic diaspora. Like Medusa's curse, diaspora turns immigrants into stone-like characters and takes away their humanity.

Affected by trans-generational trauma and the exodus of her ancestors, Alyan writes many poems depicting the diasporic life and the sufferings of her people. "Hijra" is a poem from Alyan's 2016 volume *Hijra*. She chose the title of this poem to be the same as the title of the volume. This title reflects her vulnerability to the trans-generational trauma of the Palestinian diaspora and the diasporic life she leads. It also indicates the rootedness of her Arabic identity and her sense of responsibility toward the language of her ancestors. According to Alyan, it is a tragedy to find ways to keep your "culture" alive in diaspora (An interview with Laura Metter, January 9, 2018). It is a tragedy because you are trying to keep your essence alive. As a result, she uses many Arabic words in her poetry to keep her original language and culture alive inside her. As the prominent Palestinian critic and writer Edward Said (2000) construes, "Perhaps the greatest battle Palestinians have waged as a people has been over the right to a remembered presence and, with that presence, the right to possess and reclaim a collective historical reality" (P.184). The word "Hijra" is an Arabic word that means, in English, immigration and the existence outside of the homeland. This poem explains the Palestinians' diaspora and the difficulties they have faced during their exodus. Alyan as a second generational diasporic persona does not have her own traumatic memories of 1948 and 1967, but she knows about The-Nakba and The-Naksah as a part of the collective memory of her people (Hammer, 2005, P.23). Hala Alyan writes this poem in free verse. She doesn't follow a regular rhyme scheme, rhythm, or meter. Instead, she gives her own shape to the poem. She liberates herself to focus more on the ideas and the strategic events that she wants to convey. She also uses the style of long and short sentences. While the short sentences grab the reader's attention and express a significant detail, the long sentences are used to develop the theme, give a vivid description, and express the idea of the poem thoroughly.

"Sleepwalkers, uterus dust, you heard the gunfire

and folded into clay. We begged our bodies for  
alchemy, death into new lungs; we fed bread  
to the jinn. The clouds followed us, a scrap  
of summer moon as gazelles made a meal of ash" (Alyan, 2016. 15).

At the beginning of the poem, the speaker addresses the refugees and unborn babies. The speaker likens the refugees to sleepwalkers; they are half-conscious as if they are doped. When a person is forced to leave their homeland, they will lose the core of their lives. He will live in a state in between. He is neither dead nor alive. The speaker also addressed the unborn babies who are still in their mother's womb. They will suffer as their mothers and ancestors did. In an interview with Jacqueline Alnes, Alyan states, "Something that happened way before you were born can have a direct influence on you and how you move through the world." (March 5, 2021). As a result, she uses the pronoun "we" to indicate immigration as a collective experience, not a personal one. She is haunted by the traumatic memories of those who lived through the experience. The speaker explains the refugees' behavior when they hear the gunfire; they fold and lie in the clay to hide themselves. The word "alchemy" suggests the refugees' wish to change their faith and find a new life, as "alchemy" changes the substance of materials. Immigration brings no life for Palestinians; it is a death in life. As Helena Schulz (1964–) states, "home is so important that being away from home equals not being in the world at all." (2005, P. 111).

In addition to the title, Alyan uses Arabic words in the text, which are transcribed into English. These words are dialogic; she uses them as a means to create a dialogue between cultures. She also uses them as a means to represent her hyphenated identity. She uses the word "jinn," which is an Arabic word that refers to creatures that live in deserted places. The speaker says, "We fed bread to the Jinn," This phrase refers to the caves and deserted places where Palestinians were forced to live during their exile. The Palestinians were forced to live in haunted places where no one lived but Jinn. Among all the suffering and panic the refugees are going through, there is a divine care that protects them. The clouds refer to the divine resources that surround them in their exile.

"We became seamstresses, mapping departure  
into our eyelids. Allah's calligraphy stitched  
our vertebrae. We wrote their unsaid names

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on parchment, buried them in boxes, gave birth  
to our daughters in caves. When our breasts wept  
milk for months, we drank it ourselves"(Alyan, 2016. 15).

In these lines, the poetess explains the women's situation: they become seamstresses and sew the name of "Allah" with beautiful ornamentation on their clothes because "Allah" is their only protector. The poetess uses the word "Allah", which is an Arabic word, instead of God, to indicate her Arabic identity and Islamic religion. Those women are planning to leave their homes because of wars and destruction. Home is no longer a safe place for Palestinians. For most Palestinians, home, both as a private space and as a national symbol of cultural attachment, is defenseless and temporary. However, the problem is not just the loss of homes but also the inability to find new ones. As a result, home is more spiritual than physical for most Palestinians. As Danny Rubinstein (1937–) states in his prominent book *The People of Nowhere* (1991), "Every person in the world lives in a place, except the Palestinians, The place lives in them"(P.195). The speaker says, "We wrote their unsaid names on parchment." In this line, the speaker may refer to the names of their cities or dead people that they wrote on their parchment as an immortalized memory. At the end of the poem, the speaker narrates the culmination of the sufferings of the pregnant women who give birth to their children in caves. Those pregnant women were starving and living in a horrific situation. They drank their own milk to feed themselves. This poem explains how traumatic experiences and collective memories affected the poetess. Even though she didn't experience those events by herself, they impacted her and haunted her memories. In this poem, the poetess used gloomy visual images to portray immigration (hijra) as a traumatic experience immersed in pain and panic. She also explicates that diaspora is not a positive experience, it is a death in life.

The attack on memory that "Austerlitz experiences" is not confined to one individual memory but comprises the "collective trans-generational memory of his people," as Gabriele Schwab (2010, P. 51) explained. Memories are passed down from generation to generation, most visibly through stories told or written, but also more subtly through a parent's or grandparents' moods. Because of her affectedness of collective traumatic memories, Hala Alyan writes many poems that reflect her personal experiences and those around her. As she states, "I usually write about things that are happening in my life, or in the lives of people around me that I care about" (Metter, January 9, 2018: <https://pankmagazine.com>). Alyan's poem "Fatima," from her 2016

*volume Hijra*, reflects her affectedness of her grandmother's experience. In this poem, she sketches a portrait of a woman (her grandmother) living in diaspora in the Midwest of the USA. She chooses the name of this poem to be the same as the name of her grandmother to reflect how strong her affection for her grandmother is. According to Alyan, Fatima is a bridge between the past, present, and future. As she states in an interview with Meredith Boe, "Fatima was my maternal grandmother and one of the true, enduring loves of my life. She was gentle and fierce and a conduit between the past and the future." (February 7, 2019). Like most of her poems, Alyan writes this poem in free verse. She liberates herself from the strict rules of rhyme scheme and meters to focus more on the gist of the poem. This poem is divided into three stanzas. The poetess uses a mix of long and short sentences. She uses long sentences more than short sentences to speak descriptively and shows the estrangement that Fatima faces in the US. She uses short sentences to add specific details and memorable things in the poem.

At the beginning of this poem, the speaker starts to describe her feelings of estrangement in the USA, where everything is different, even the birds: "The birds have a different aubade here, of revival and dominion." (Alyan, 2016, P.32). In this line, the speaker explains that birds in the USA have different songs than the birds in her home. She uses the word "aubade," which is a French word that was first used in the English language during the 1670s, as translated in the Oxford Learner's dictionary. In French, it means "dawn serenade," while English speakers use the word to refer to love songs sung in the morning hours. The speaker feels that the songs of those birds indicate power and dominion, not love songs. She feels that even birds consider her a minor. She feels home-sickness and nostalgia for her homeland: "Along the Midwest, a hallucination of highway light after light as signs blur by." (Alyan, 2016, P.32). In this line, the speaker describes how she is lost in the empty streets of the Midwest, haunted by memories of her homeland. Helena Schulz (1964–) comments on how the memories of the homeland are stuck in the minds of the diasporic persona. She says in her book *The Palestinian Diaspora (2005)*, "the homeland in the mind remains forever as it was. There is no change." (P.97). When the present is harsh and the future is unknown, we seek solace in the past, hoping to find something to help us cope with estrangement and alienation in our lives. The exiled people always look back to the other side of their hyphenated identity; their memories of the homeland will never vanish. The speaker continues to explain her agony in the Midwest. She sees the place where she lives as an awful place and deserted: "A tundra of strip malls and bankrupt towns." (Alyan, 2016, P. 32). In this line, the speaker uses the word "tundera," which refers to a large land where trees do not grow because

of cold weather. She doesn't only see the town drearily, but the weather as well. As Juliane Hammer (2005) comments on the Palestinians' sufferings in diaspora, "it is al-ghurba, where the Palestinian is a stranger, that carries all the notions of suffering, cold, winter, estrangement, and dislocation" (P. 60). She feels this town is deserted and hollow because she doesn't belong in that place. Her body lives in the Midwest while her soul is in the Mideast.

In the second stanza, the speaker sees the Midwest as an obscene society that leads to the ruin of her daughters' morality: "Amrika is the pink meat we fry in oil to crisps.// My daughters grow fleshy and cunning."(Alyan, 2016, P. 32). In these two lines, the speaker uses the word "Amerika", which is a word used in the US during 1968 to refer to the fascist or racist aspect of American society. She (metaphorically) likens American society to "pink meat", which was used in the twentieth century as a symbol of an upcoming period of hardships and difficulties. The speaker continues to express the difficulties she faces. She says, we fry the pink meat in oil to crisp. As explained in the dream meanings of old English, fried meat is a symbol of being influenced by others and living in the shadow of others. Therefore, she expresses her terror of the Midwest because, as she is forced to leave her homeland, she is forced to live in the host land. The speaker came from an Islamic religious family. As a result, she is afraid of the effect of the new norms on her daughters. She is afraid of seeing her daughters grow up in the shadow of a fascist society.

In the last stanza, the speaker says: "They speak of barbarity like a hope, fat stars anchored in lanterns for Allah to see."(Alyan, 2016, P.32). In this line, she clarifies that her daughters see the breakdown of Western society as a source of hope and personal liberty, whereas she sees it as fascism. The speaker uses the words "fat stars," which stand for moral shortcomings and sins. These "fat stars" are before the eyes of Allah, who sees everything. The speaker uses the word "Allah" instead of God to reflect her Arabic Muslim identity. As a Muslim, it is hard to accept western norms. She experiences the anxiety of losing one's essential identity in a foreign place. Therefore, she is struggling between the sides of her hyphenated identity. As Suleiman (2016) states, "Being Palestinian means that your identity is as fragmented as the landscape of your homeland."(P. 172). She is struggling between the norms of her Arabic identity and the western norms, which she is trying to accept and her daughters grow up with. The speaker suffers a kind of dissolution of her sense of self. She has a psychological struggle because of the memories of the past which she can't restore and the harshness of painful experiences which she

can't endure in the present: "The cold twists my bones into a nest, and the window becomes a creek of fingers." (Alyan, 2016, P.32). The speaker likens herself to a bird (a metaphor) that is wrapped in a nest because of hopelessness, grief, and depression. She feels lonely and alienated in a society that is nothing like her earlier life. She is haunted by the traumatic memories of her home. She is stuck between the past and the present.

Hala Alyan had a hard childhood, like many Palastinias who live in what is called in Arabic al-ghurba. She moved with her family to different places around the Mideast and Midwest. In an interview with Chris Kraus, She states, "By the time I reached my tenth birthday, I had lived on three continents. The Gulf War, my parents' graduate studies, and financial necessity shuttled my family across the world into the Midwest." (May1, 2017: <https://lithub.com>). She had been treated as a minority in the US. She was struggling between her origins as an Arabic girl and the norms of the host country. She states, "I wanted nothing more than to fit in." (Kraus, May1, 2017). "Oklahoma" is a poem from Alyan's most recent volume, *The Twenty Ninth Year* (2019). This poem describes the struggles that she faced in her childhood, while she was a schoolgirl in the USA. This poem describes her sufferings and feelings of otherness. Alyan wrote this poem in prose form. The place of this poem is Oklahoma, and the time is during the mid-1990s. She doesn't use a rhyme scheme or meter in this poem. She focuses more on narrating her traumatic memories and feelings of otherness, which are vividly affecting her despite the passage of more than thirty years. The Speaker-Poet starts the poem with a direct description of her feelings: "For a place I hate, I invoke you often. Stockholm: I am eight years old" (Alyan, 2019, P. 22). As a result of bad treatment and bullying, she hated the place and its people. The speaker also narrates: "In history class I don't understand why a boy whispers *sand monkey*." (Alyan, 2019, P. 22). These lines describe the western understanding of the East, which depends on imagination and assumptions instead of facts and observations. Americans associate Oriental barbarians with desert lands. They think of the Orient as others and the minority (Said, 1985, P. 9). The schoolboy calls the speaker a sand monkey because he thinks she came from desert lands.

The speaker continues to express the harsh treatment she faced by the children: "The Mexican girls let me sit with them as long as I braid their hair, my fingers dipping into that wet black silk." (Alyan, 2019, P. 22). The speaker was not even allowed to set up with other girls, only when they made use of her. The speaker even tries to imitate them at home because she only wants to fit in and stop feeling different: "I try to imitate them at home—mirame, *mama*—but my

mother yells at me, says they didn't come here"(Alyan, 2019, P. 22). In an interview, Hala Alyan states, "I straightened my hair. I cut my hair. I dyed my hair blonde. I gained weight. I lost weight."(Kraus, May1, 2017). Alyan was forced to change her appearance and pretend to do many things just to be accepted by other children.

"Heaven is a long weekend. Heaven is a tornado siren  
Heaven is pressed in a pleather booth canceling school.  
sipping Pepsi between my gapped teeth, at the Olive Garden,  
listening to my father mispronounce his meal"(Alyan, 2019, P. 22).

As a result of the struggles and hostility she faced as a school girl, for the speaker, heaven was a long weekend and not having to go to school. The speaker feels in-between. She neither belongs to her parents' homeland nor is accepted by the host land. The word "belonging" is associated with feeling at home. A place where you are accepted by others and you don't need to pretend or imitate others to be accepted. It is a place where you can just be yourself. The speaker-poet is struggling between here and there (Iglesias, January 31, 2019). For the speaker, heaven is spending time with her family, where she finds consolation during this difficult time. In an interview with Meredith Boe, Alyan states, "Trauma can age us, but it can also arrest us—leave us stranded at a certain developmental stage in our lives."(February 7, 2019). The feeling of otherness and the traumatic memories of her childhood vividly affected Alyan's life. She is stuck in the traumatic memories of the past which she can't get rid of, despite the passing of long years.

Hala Alyan is confronted with multi-linguistic and multi-cultural experiences. Alyan wishes to traverse different spaces to tell a story about the history, dilemmas, disenchantments, and ambivalences of her people. Despite more than thirty years having passed, Alyan is still stuck in the past and affected by the sufferings of her people throughout the ages. She wrote the poem "When They Say Pledge Allegiance, I Say" in 2020 and it was published in *The Adroit Journal*. In this poem, she narrates the immigration of the Palestinians throughout the ages and how she is affected by the collective memories and trans-generational trauma. Hala Alyan writes this poem in free verse. The poetess doesn't use punctuation in this poem. By avoiding the punctuation marks, the poetess is able to create more ambiguity and, therefore, more possible meanings. She doesn't capitalize any words in this poem except the pronoun "I" and the names of the Arabic cities. She capitalizes every "I" pronoun in the poem to uplift her personal identity and indicate

that she is the speaker in the poem. In this poem, she uses the enjambment style. Enjambment is a poetic term describing the continuation of a statement or phrase from one line of poetry to the next. It comes from the French and means "to stride over". The reader is moved easily and quickly without interruption to the following line of the poem when an enjambed line lacks punctuation at its line break. Enjambment gives fluidity and a prose-like aspect to poetry by allowing a notion to overflow across lines. Poets use literary devices like enjambment to add complexity. By fleshing out a notion rather than reducing it to one line, enjambment creates a more complicated story inside a poem (Baldick, 1996, P. 28). The speaker-poet starts the poem by describing her country as a ghost: "my country is a ghost // a mouth trying to say sorry and it comes out all smog"(Alyan, May2, 2020). She describes her country as a ghost because it is a land empty of its citizens. It is a place where there is no place for its people. Palestine is a ghost because its citizens were forced to flee their homes. Therefore, the Palestinians' diaspora is the trauma of the past, which haunts the present and will affect the future. The Palestinians' diaspora is the symbolic disease of heredity that destroys the joy of life in the younger, freer generations.

The speaker-poet continues describing her country as: "my country is a machine // a spell of bad weather" (Alyan, May2, 2020). Exile is the polar opposite of what is safe, secure, and predictable. It isn't a representation of life after movement, but of movement itself. Diaspora, or life abroad from one's homeland, is a state of flux, implying an insecure and fleeting state of fugitive status. The Palestinian writer Edward Said states, "Exile... is 'a mind of winter' in which the pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable." (Said 1984; quoted in *Schulz*, 2005, P.10). Perhaps this is another way of saying that life in exile follows a different calendar than life at home and is less predictable and seasonal. An exile is defined as a life lived outside of one's usual routine. It's nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal, yet the moment you grow used to it, its unsettling energy bursts back into action. The speaker-poet likens her country to bad weather because the Palestinians live in chaos. They are spreading around the world. They exist everywhere but in their country. "my country is a number like—it is 1948"(Alyan, May2, 2020). In these lines, the poetess likens her country to the number 1948. This year marks one of the most catastrophic events in Palestinian history, which is called Al-Nakba. During the 1948 Palestine War, approximately half of prewar Palestine's Arab population fled or were exiled from their homes. The exodus was a crucial part of Palestinian society's fracture, dispossession, and displacement (Sa'di, 2002, PP. 185–195). It is the year of Alyan's ascendants dispersed from Palestine, as many Palestinians did. Hala Alyan was born of a Palestinian father



and a Lebanese mother. She states: "my great-great-grandmother flattens bread with her hands while my other great-great-grandmother prays with her hands // one watches her land disappear // the other builds a house on land that will disappear"(Alyan, May2, 2020). The first one watches her country, Palestine, being destroyed and the Palestinians forced to flee their homes. The other one is building a house in Lebanon, which will be destroyed. In these lines, the poetess merges between the narrative of the past and the present. The past was when Palestine was destroyed and the present, which explains the current events that Lebanon and its people are living in.

The effects of exile and traumatic experiences not only haunt the actual victims but are also passed on through many generations (Schwab, 2010, P. 1). Hala Alyan is not an eye witness of the events of Al-Nakba and Al-Naksah, but she is affected by trans-generational trauma and collective memories. Seamlessly, the speaker-poet likens her country to another horrific event to indicate her sense of losing home: "my country is a number like— it is 1967 and every Arab leader is crying every mother is clutching // the sons she has left"(Alyan, May2, 2020). This event is known as Al-Naksah, which can be translated as a serious, quick escalation of an earlier catastrophe. The Naksah occurred during and after a six-day war between Israel and a number of Arab countries surrounding it, which resulted in Israel's relatively easy victory and the seizure of territory under the sovereignty or administration of its neighboring governments. This horrible conflict led to the relocation of a quarter to a third of the Palestinian population and the start of a new era in which the entire population was forced to live under a complicated Israeli administration (Masalha, 2018, P. 322).

The speaker's narration shifts from generation to generation: "my great-grandmother names my mother // nostalgia, while my other great-grandmother names my father // a gun // my country is all ghost"(Alyan, May2, 2020). Her great grandmother named her father a "gun" because the Palestinians' life is always associated with revolutions, fighting, and claiming their right to return home. The other great grandmother named her mother "nostalgia" because of a longing for the past. The speaker-poet relocates to the narration of her parents' exile from Palestine and Syria: "my country is remember when we left Akka // I mean Gaza // I mean Homs"(Alyan, May2, 2020). In an interview with John Stintzi, Alyan states, "The past is not a mere memory that no longer relates to the present, but rather a place all Palestinians live in."(March30, 2018). In fact, the past defines the present and future for all displaced Palestinians. It implies that in order to comprehend the present and plan for the future, one must actively and

consciously recall the past. The past and the collective traumatic memories of her people are vividly rooted in her writings and affect her life. As she states in an interview with Alnes, "The ways in which sociopolitical turmoil, occupation, and war trauma have spidered their way through my people's history is something that I definitely keep gravitating back towards." (March 5, 2021). In addition to the capitalization of the pronoun "I", she capitalizes the first letters of Arabic cities: Akka, Gaza, and Homs to ensure her Arabic identity and sense of belonging.

Even though Alyan left the Mid-East when she was only four years old, she is affected by the traumatic memories of their exile through the stories she has been told by her parents: "my country is a number like— it is 1990 // my mother is crossing a border I mean desert I mean life // I am at her heels" (Alyan, May 2, 2020). In these lines, the speaker-poetess resembles her country to their exile from Kuwait because of the first Gulf war. In an interview with Sarah Neilson, Hala Alyan states, "When I talk about inheritance, I really don't think of physical objects at all. I think of inheritance far more as something theoretical, psychological, and emotional." (March 16, 2021). Her inherited traumatic memories affect her psychologically and emotionally, which are vividly reflected in her poetry. Alyan isn't only affected by trans-generational traumatic memories of wars and exile of her people, she becomes an eye witness to the sufferings of her people: "it is 2003 and I am in Beirut watching Baghdad burn because of America // I mean I am in my country // watching my country burn because of my country" (Alyan, May 2, 2020). In these lines, she speaks of her experience as an eye witness to the sufferings of her people. She considers the USA, Iraq, and Lebanon as her countries. She considers America her country because she has physically lived in America most of her life. She considers Iraq her country because it is a part of the Arabic community and her parents lived for a couple of years in Iraq. She also considers Lebanon her country because her mother is Lebanese and she lived her early childhood in Lebanon. In an interview with Jacqueline Alnes, Hala Alyan comments on how her feelings and ideas of home have been changed:

Home is something that's been constantly evolving for me. It's gone from meaning something very specific and pinned to a specific place into something more general. So I think of home as a language; I think of it as food; I think of it as certain cultural traditions. It's become more about the sense of community than a specific place, which I think happens a lot to people in diasporic communities, understandably. (March 5, 2021)

Alyan's meaning of "home" is complicated because she neither belongs to the USA nor lives in her home of origin. She spends nearly all of her life moving from one place to another. As a result, she thinks of home as having a psychological meaning and a sense of community but is not associated with physical meaning.

Hala Alyan navigates through the ages. She narrates her experience of trans-generational trauma before her birth and during her early childhood. She also narrates her own traumatic experience as an eye-witness: "it is 2020 and the women in Beirut are a sea"(Alyan, May2, 2020). In this line, she speaks of the Lebanese women's sufferings at the current time. This line may also conclude what she has said at the beginning of the poem: "the other builds a house on land that will disappear." In these two lines, she merges between the past and the present. Alyan ends the poem by explaining that all her countries live with endless suffering, migration, and political turmoil: "it is every year and my country is taken // I mean my country is stolen land // I mean all my countries are stolen land"(Alyan, May22, 2020). In these lines, she expresses how her Arabic identity is rooted in her and how she is affected by the horrific events that dominated the lives of her people. Despite being a second-generation diasporic persona, her diasporic experiences and traumatic memories affect her and dominate her writing. In an interview with Laura Metter, she states, "Given the legacy of immigration and war in my ancestral homelands, I wanted to share poems that examine migration, both literally and emotionally."(January9, 2018). Alyan wants to be the voice that expresses the achiness of the migration and traumas of her people through the past and present.

## **Conclusion**

This paper demonstrates the interconnectedness of diaspora, trauma, home, and nostalgia. Traumatic experiences, displaced trauma, home-seeking and nostalgia are the debris of diaspora, and they all affect the formation of the hyphenated identity of diasporic individuals. The hyphen symbolizes strife between the past, which represents the home country, and the present, which represents the host country. Each eye is directed to a different side of the hyphen that joins the cultural inscription's two terms. It appears like there are two separate personalities attempting to coexist within the same individual.

This study demonstrated the psychological effects of exile, trans-generational trauma, and collective memories on Hala Alyan's life. Moreover, It examined the impact of those concepts

through analyzing Alyan's poems over different periods of her life. It contends that although she is a second-generation diasporic persona, trans-generational trauma, collective memories, and the diasporic experiences of her ancestors affect her life. She doesn't only inherit the collective memories but the pain as well. As a result, she feels in between; she neither lives in her fatherland nor belongs to the host land. The question of "where do I belong?" dominated her psyche. Her affectedness of trans-generational trauma and collective memories vividly dominated her writings as well as her life.

The crystallization of her Arabic identity is reflected in her life as well as in her poetry. In her volume *Atrium* (2012), she resorts to western legacy and mythology as a source of inspiration and a means of adjusting them to contemporary issues related to the Palestinian diaspora and the exilic identity. In her 2016 volume, *Hijra*, she uses an Arabic word transcribed into English. She uses it as a means to create a dialogue between cultures. This title also refers to the crystallization of her Arabic identity. In this volume, she uses many Arabic words in the texts to loudly claim her Arabic identity. In her volume *The Twenty Ninth Year* (2019), the rootedness and the crystallization of her hyphenated identity become clearer in her writing. She starts to express her sufferings when she was a child and vividly criticizes how people treated her as other and a minority. Therefore, the exilic identity is not fixed, but it grows and develops throughout time.

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