AN IMAGINARY HOME IN
DIANA ABU-JABER’S ARABIAN JAZZ

Belo Horizonte
Faculdade de Letras
AN IMAGINARY HOME IN DIANA ABU-JABER’S

ARABIAN JAZZ

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Mestre em Letras:

Estudos Literários, Área de Concentração Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

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Belo Horizonte
Faculdade de Letras
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

2015
Reis, Simone Cristina Motta. An Imaginary Home in Diana Abu-Jaber’s Arabian Jazz [manuscrito] / Simone Cristina Motta Reis. – 2015. 113 f., enc.

Orientadora: Gláucia Renate Gonçalves.

Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Linha de pesquisa: Literatura, História e Memória Cultural.

Dissertação (mestrado) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Faculdade de Letras.


Dissertação intitulada *An imaginary home in Diana Abu-Jaber's "Arabian Jazz"*, de autoria da Mestranda SIMONE CRISTINA MOTTA REIS, apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos Literários da Faculdade de Letras da UFMG, como requisito parcial à obtenção do título de Mestre em Estudos Literários.

**Área de Concentração:** Literaturas de Língua Inglesa/Mestrado

**Linha de Pesquisa:** Literatura, História e Memória Cultural

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Belo Horizonte, 26 de março de 2015.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The research that led to this dissertation was fully funded by the Brazilian National Research Council (CNPq).

I’m grateful for my mother, Mara, for her unconditional love. She has always encouraged me to pursue bigger dreams. Thank you for always believing in me, even when I didn’t believe in myself;

To my grandmother, Margarida, for her love support and friendship. I could not have done this without you;

To my best friend and sister, Paula, for always providing me with a good laugh and showing me the importance of having fun;

To my father, Paulo and all my family, for rejoicing with me at all my accomplishments;

To my friends at UFMG for their support and encouragement;

To my professors who have supported me and helped me to get this far;

To my advisor, Glaucia, whose support and encouragement since my undergraduate days made me want to pursue an academic career. Thank you for your amazing classes and your support throughout my journey at UFMG;

To Diana Abu-Jaber for writing such an amazing novel which has inspired me to do this research.
This dissertation aims at discussing the changing notions of home, from a locus to an imaginary place for immigrants, specifically Arab Americans. To accomplish this research, I based my research on Diana Abu-Jaber’s novel *Arabian Jazz* to try to demonstrate, through the main characters Matussem, Fatima, Jemorah and Melvina, how each of them represents a phase of diaspora: from classic to contemporary and also their different perspectives of home. With that, I intend to show that the change of the notion of diaspora is connected to the change of the concept of home. I also intend to demonstrate that every diasporic experience is different and unique to each diasporic subject. I will focus this investigation on Jemorah Ramoud and how she copes with her diasporic condition to finally understand what home is.
RESUMO

Esta dissertação tem como objetivo discutir a evolução da noção de lar, que é primeiramente considerado como um local e depois é modificado para um lugar imaginário especificamente para os imigrantes árabe-americanos. Para realizar esta análise, eu baseei minha pesquisa no romance Jazz Arabian de Diana Abu-Jaber, para tentar demonstrar, através dos personagens principais Matussem, Fatima, Jemorah e Melvina, como cada um deles representa uma fase da diáspora: da clássica à contemporânea, e também as diferentes perspectivas de lar. Com isso, pretendo mostrar que a mudança da noção de diáspora está ligada à mudança do conceito de lar. Também pretendo demonstrar que cada experiência diaspórica é diferente e única para cada sujeito. Concentrei esta investigação em Jemorah Ramoud e como ela lida com sua condição diaspórica para finalmente entender o que significa o conceito de lar.
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1- Introduction

Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles. (15) Salman Rushdie – *Imaginary Homelands and other essays.*

Arab immigration to the United States began at the end of the nineteenth-century. According to Michael Suleiman in Arabs in America: *Building a New Future,* “The term ‘Arab Americans’ refers to the immigrants to North America from the Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East and their descendants” (1). Tanyss Ludescher, in the article “From Nostalgia to Critique: An Overview of Arab American Literature”, affirms that Arab-American literature, as well as, immigration was divided into three phases: “The first wave (1880-1924) of immigrants was made up of Greek Orthodox, Maronite, and Melchite Christians from Mount Lebanon and the surrounding Syrian and Palestinian provinces” (93); Suleiman mentioned that “130,000 Arabs had immigrated to the United States by the late 1930s” (1), most of them were considered illiterate in the English Language and therefore many had to work as
peddlers across the country, creating then many communities of Syrians throughout the United States of America.

Even though most of the immigrants were thankful for the given opportunity to live in a different country, distant from the dangers of armed conflicts and warfare, they still considered their host country as such: host and not permanent, as Suleiman posits:

Their objective was to make the greatest amount of money in the shortest possible time to help their families in the old country and eventually to retire in comfort in their village or neighborhood. In the meantime, they spent as little as possible of their income in America, often living in crowded tenements and, while on the road, in barns or shacks to avoid expensive hotel costs. They did not live rounded lives, allowing themselves no luxuries and finding contentment and solace in family life. (6)

At the time, those who migrated to the United States could still have some contact to their homeland, receiving other family members in the United States, and with them news from home. All of this changed after the World War I, according to Ludescher. Those who tried to return could not, because of the war. They also could not receive other members of family because of the immigration quota imposed by the United States and Canada. About the perspective of moving back to the homeland, Suleiman affirms that:

World War I was a watershed event for Arabs in North America, cutting them off from their people back home. This separation from the
homeland became almost complete with the introduction of very restrictive quota systems in the United States and Canada after World War I, which practically cut off emigration from Arab regions. These developments intensified the community's sense of isolation and separation, simultaneously enhancing its sense of solidarity. One consequence was a strengthening of the assimilationist trend – a trend already reinforced by the American-born children of these Arab immigrants. (4-5)

Because of it Arab immigrants stopped seeing themselves as visitors but as participant inhabitants of that location: Arab-Americans. Discussing this issue, Ludescher affirms: “it dawned on Arab Americans that it was unlikely that they would ever return to their country, they were forced to address crucial questions about their identity as Arab Americans and their relationship to America” (98).

The immigration of the second phase began after World War II. As Ludescher affirms, the effects of such event on the immigrants who already lived in the United States began. Differently from the first phase, the second one brought with it educated immigrants highly connected to the Arab way of thinking and living. Another difference seen in the shift of diaspora was that these new immigrants were no longer mostly Christians, but also Muslims. As Ludescher states, the second phase of this immigration “included […] a number of Palestinian refugees who had been rendered stateless as a result of the catastrophic 1948 Arab-Israeli War” (94).

About the number of Arabs who immigrated to the United States in this second phase, Suleiman mentions: “A conservative estimate is that there were approximately
350,000 persons of Arab background in the United States on the eve of World War II” (1). There was also a change in the economic behavior of these immigrants since the idea to move back to “the old country” was dim. If before there no investments made in their well-being in America, from this point on Suleiman affirms that:

The substantial investments they had made in homes, property, and real estate in the old country lost their original purpose, and much more attention was paid to material improvements and investments in their new countries. (8)

The third phase, lingering until today, started due to many facts, as explained by Ludescher. The first fact was the passing of the Hart-Cellar Act in 1965, which “abolished the long-standing quota system” (94) in the United States, and as a consequence more people entered the country. The second fact was the “war with Israel and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands” (94) in 1967 which forced many to migrate to different countries since theirs was undergoing a significant war. The third fact was “The Lebanese Civil War in the 1970s and 1980s” (94). After these events, there was a growing concern over the Arab world and its politics, which, again, forced the migration of many families away from Lebanon. Ludescher continues by saying that “The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Gulf War, and the 1987 Palestinian uprising against Israel (the First Intifada) further politicized the Arab American community” (95). It is no wonder that these politicized new-comers would influence the way the American based community would live under their reality of immigrants.

Not until the first decades of the twentieth century do we begin to talk about an
Arab-American Literature, that is, literature produced by immigrants from the various countries that comprise the Arab World and their descendants who were born in the United States and “In the 1990s, the size of the Arab community in the United States has been estimated at less than one million to the most frequently cited figure of two and one-half to three million” (1), according to Michael Suleiman.

One of the early groups who were dedicated to writing about the Arab experience was called Al Rabital al Qalamiyah, or the New York Pen League. Elmaz Abinader, in her article “Children of Al-Mahjar”, affirms that:

This organization […] was comprised of writers from Lebanon and Syria who often wrote in Arabic and collaborated with translators of their works. Ameen Rihani, Gibran Khalil Gibran, Mikhail Naimy and Elia Abu Madi served as the major figures in this period, and frequently are credited with developing an interest in immigrant writing in general. (1)

Led by Khalil Gibran and Ameen Rihani, the Al-Mahjar – meaning “Arab immigrant poets” – were a literary group that was very active in the 1920s and paved the way for a second and third generation of Arab-American writers. They wrote about issues of assimilation, the conflict between the place of origin and the new cultural environment continued to be relevant and, indeed, crucial for the representation of this diasporic group. However, their works did not present a resolution for such conflict. In fact, they generally pointed to the very impossibility of any kind of resolution for the predicament of Arab Americans.

Although the Al-Mahjar started publishing their work in the twenties, they would only become known by the general public because of the rise of “ethnic
Writers from Hispanic American, Native American, Asian American and African American worlds emerged, accompanied to a lesser degree by Arab American writers. What went largely unrecognized in the 1970s was that Arab Americans were among the first immigrant writers to organize and to be recognized as a literary force by the broad U.S. literary community. (1)

While the first Arab-American writers and, to a large extent, those of the second generation tended to write more poetry and autobiographical pieces, they more often than not, favored the representation of an assimilationist attitude. Those writers whose voices began to be heard, in the wake of multiculturalism, usually put at stake the very basis of assimilation and probe into the many instances of negotiation, at times even the most intimate ones, that takes place between the homeland and the host-land, and that contribute to the development of a unique experience of home for the diasporic subject.

Arab-American literature has been represented by many renowned poets as mentioned before, who continued the tradition of the early poetry. Many Palestinian poets come to mind; names such as Naomi Shihab Nye, Sharif S. Elmusa, Natalie Handal, and Suheir Hammad are examples of Arab-American writers who problematize their own lives as hyphenated peoples. Abinader affirms:

The Arab American poets are not mired in a tradition of mere homage and nostalgia, or simply adhere to safe forms and styles that allow them to be easily categorized. Rather, they appear everywhere – from open
microphone readings to contemporary coffee house poetry competitions (familiarly known as "slams") to the pages of respected poetry anthologies and literary journals […] The new generation of writers, including spoken word performers and rap artists, attend to the matters of their time as well as to the concerns of history. They follow the great tradition of Al-Mahjar. As the children of Gibran, Naimy, Rihani, and Madi, these writers will continue to make their marks and influence American literature. (6)

Some Arab-American novels have broken the ethnic barrier and became well known by the mainstream Americans. The most successful example was the adaptation of the novel written by Syrian-American Mona Simpson, *Anywhere But Here*, in 1999 played by Susan Sarandon and Natalie Portman. Joseph Geha and Diana Abu-Jaber are also examples of important writers who address the issues of being both Arab and American and the hardships of such experience. According to Abinader, Abu-Jaber’s first novel, *Arabian Jazz*,

was well-received by a wide readership. Abu-Jaber pulls no punches in her portrayals of life within the Arab community that are both: self-effacing and funny, bittersweet and nostalgic. By refreshing the memory, she keeps the questions of survival alive. (5)

Geha and Abu-Jaber describe with mastery the hardships endured by diasporic descendants coping with their double cultural identity and inability to call only one place their home.

Diana Abu-Jaber is a professor currently teaching Creative Writing at Portland
State University. She has published several articles and four novels focusing on the Arab-American experience: *Arabian Jazz* (1993), *Crescent* (2003), *The Language of Baklava* (2005), *Origin* (2007), in addition to the recently published *Birds of Paradise* (2011). One could say that the common denominator in her first three novels is the attempt to write about the experiences mainly of women who try to adjust their lives as hyphenated people. Abu-Jaber tries to describe the characters’ conflicts with one another and within themselves, as they negotiate with their American and Arab selves.

*Arabian Jazz*, the novel which I will be discussing in this dissertation, was one of the few novels written by an Arab-American writer at the time of its release. Although it was well received by many critics, some people from the Arab-American community did not share the enthusiasm for the book. Tanyss Ludescher affirms that

> *Arabian Jazz* produced a flurry of controversy because it broke an unwritten rule in the Arab American community that members should not criticize Arabs and Arab Americans in public [...] some readers were offended by her grotesque stereotypes of Arabs. (104)

I would argue that this is one of the most difficult tasks for writers such as Abu-Jaber because, although she feels the need to please the Arab community, it is almost impossible not to address some obscure experiences common to many Arab-Americans, such as being addressed as “sand-niggers”, for example. These scenes, as dark as they might be, may not be strange to many immigrants but, nonetheless, are topics avoided by most of the people from that community. In an interview to Robin E. Field, Abu-Jaber said that what people thought to be grotesque such as the story of Fatima being kidnapped, was actually intended to be humor. Abu-Jaber continues the
interview by saying: “I push on stereotypes. I will deliberately press on these long-held clichés as a way of perversely testing them, I really like to try to open everything up” (211). Diana Abu-Jaber is, nonetheless, considered to be “One of the most gifted novelists in the Arab American community” (Ludescher, “From Nostalgia” 104).

Ultimately, Arabian Jazz, as Kate McCullough affirms, is a representation of “home as multiple, as layered levels of displacement, reflecting the structuring impact of refugeeism on the thematic level of the novel” (810).

The novel to be studied is set sometime in the end of the twentieth century, in a small town upstate New York, where Matussem Ramoud lives with his daughters Jemorah and Melvina. They live around people who are considered “white-trash” (90), as Jemorah was told. The girls’ lives were marked by the sense of not belonging since they “didn’t fit even with them, those children nobody wanted” (94). Jemorah made the effort of becoming invisible, while Melvina chose to be a respectable nurse, someone not to be trifled with. Matussem, on the other hand, saw “their country home [Euclid] as a place of perfect forgetting” (86). His late wife Nora, from an Irish–American background, died from typhus on a trip to Jordan and her husband never quite recovered from it. By playing the drum in a jazz band, Matussem allows his younger daughter and his sister Fatima to take control of the family life. Fatima honestly feels the need to be the mother figure for her two nieces, as well as for her own brother; it is no wonder this becomes the source of many conflicts in this family.

Arabian Jazz shows different views, or experiences, of the Arab diaspora in the United States: the classic one, represented by Fatima who is sure about where her home is the place of origin, whether one intends to return to it or not; a contemporary
one, represented by Matussem who is completely adjusted to the American way of living; and a conflictive one represented by Jemorah: second generation Arab American.

Even though we are dealing with three views, there seem to be four different approaches to understand their condition as Arabs in America: one lived by the Arab immigrants who refuse to change their ways, as Fatima; another more acceptant of the migration, similar to Matussem; one who lives under a grave confusion, as Jemorah; and the fourth and last one, by Melvina, who has adapted completely to being hyphenated.

Fatima’s view, marked by the ambiguous desire to return to Jordan, represents the old view of Diaspora. She holds tight to her families’ traditions as a way to keep her culture alive, and to affirm her identity as an Arab woman. While Fatima makes sure to follow the same rules that her mother in Jordan followed, thus emulating, in the United States, life in the country of origin and expecting her nieces to do the same, Melvina and Jemorah are caught between two equally strong cultures. Melvina does not seem to have developed any identity issues, which is not the same for Jemorah.

Matussem does not bother with what other people think of him. He knows he is different and there is no way he can change that, mostly because he does not fully understand how American society functions. For him Nora was reason enough for him never to go back to Jordan and, ever since her death, he created his own particular way of adapting to the American way of living.

Jemorah struggles to find a place where she belongs, and in this process she is caught between two completely views of the world: one represented by her mother and
the other represented by her aunt. I am arguing in this dissertation that this inability to find where her ‘home’ and her ‘people’ might be the cause of Jemorah’s inability to start living her life by making her own decisions. The solution to this dilemma is, as I hope to demonstrate, that there really is no solution to her condition, thus echoing James Clifford’s reasoning that there is no ‘cure’ to being diasporic.

Melvina, differently, is a dedicated nurse and lives for her job. She does not seem to be troubled by her split vision, and seems to assimilate American culture without any difficulty. I would argue that she represents the new view of Diaporas – the one where there is no desire to return to the homeland. She understands her hyphenated condition and is able to deal with the consequences of such by investing heavily in her career as a nurse, and keeping her relationships strictly professional, for the most part of the novel. Melvina feels that she has been deprived of information about her past, especially of who Nora was, because neither Jemorah, nor her father shares their memories with her.

The classic view of diaspora is similar to what happens to Jemorah Ramoud in Abu-Jaber’s novel. People generally think that returning to the country, where there are people who look like them, will solve the problem of identification and belonging, and that will restore everything that was shattered in the moment of the departure. However, this is not what usually takes place. There are many accounts of people who felt just as foreign upon their return to their homecountry as they did in their host country.

This is what this dissertation proposes to discuss. After so many accounts as diverse as the nationalities of those who started new lives in the Unites States, we now
understand that “home” is not a simple concept to grasp or define, and to accomplish this research I will mainly rely on theorists and critics, which will be mentioned later, who have studied the phenomenon of modern diasporas and the conflicts they provoke. They have raised awareness of the conditions of diaporic subjects, and their struggles concerning their host-land and their homeland.

Although in this Master’s dissertation I am analyzing a novel about Arab Americans, it will be important to rely on writers from other backgrounds to support my findings. Doing this I hope to show that my research can possibly be used to discuss the experiences of other diasporic peoples and not only those of Arab background.

According to the *Cambridge’s Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, home can be a synonym of origin: “someone’s or something’s place of origin, or place where a person feels they belong.” Though dictionaries may define home this way, the contemporary experience or perception of the notion of home has deeply changed for all of us, but especially for hyphenated peoples and specifically for Arab-Americans. ‘Home’ no longer equals a safe place but rather a place of conflict and instability due to the fast pace of life and to the constant internal conflicts regarding issues of affiliation. Both the United States and several Arab countries have been facing political issues that have been aggravated after the attacks to the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001. This growing instability among Arab descendants in the US is a reflex of how difficult the negotiation between two different cultures can occur for these people, since they are one but at the same time are always separated by a hyphen.

I will mainly rely on eight writers to discuss the idea of diaspora and home.
First, Salman Rushdie and his work *Imaginary Homelands* is extremely relevant, since he discusses the volatile notion of home as an imaginary construct to which one cannot possibly return. Rushdie admits, in the homonymous essay, that the book *Midnight’s Children* was written “of memory and about memory” (10). What he means is that most of the times our memory builds settings that are, sometimes, not a true picture of the past; Rushdie’s India never existed anywhere other than his imagination.

Similarly, an imaginary home is what will motivate Jemorah to return to Jordan. She fantasizes about a place that will give her everything that she has lost with the death of her mother (who was not Jordanian, but died there). Rushdie writes that he and the main character of his novel are “obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost” (11). I believe this passage sums up Jemorah’s experience as a second generation immigrant. Her memories of the “Old Country” are from the time when she was a child. In the beginning of the book she sees Jordan as the place where she can restore her mother’s life and retrieve the past she lost with her mother’s death. However, later on Jemorah concludes that there are some pieces of herself that she will never find, and even if she did, there might not be any space for them now.

Salman Rushdie uses the image of a broken mirror to explain his experience as an immigrant. Rushdie also talks about the “Indias of the mind” (10), and in *Arabian Jazz* we are able to see the “Jordans of the mind” – a rendering of Jordan that exists in the memory of the Jordanian immigrants, Matussem and his sister Fatima, where they were brought up, and also, in the memories of Jemorah’s childhood.

Another writer I’m relying on this dissertation is Palestinian-American critic
Lisa Majaj. Her concept of a ‘split vision’ helps us to understand Jemorah’s and Melvina’s condition. Having a split-vision forces “us to direct our gaze not only backwards, to the past, but forward, to an as-yet-unwritten future” (77). In other words, each eye faces a different side of the hyphen that links the two terms of the double cultural inscription.

Needless to say, the ‘split vision’ of the Arab diaspora in the United States, or of any other group for that matter, is far from being a homogeneous condition. Religion, political affiliation, and generational distinctions greatly inform the experience of each man and each woman in the Arab-American community. Again in Rushdie’s Imaginary Homelands, we are introduced to the notion of culturally translated individuals: as Rushdie states, “having being born across the world we are translated men” (17). The Indo-British critic explains further: “it is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation, I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained” (17). Being a translated person is a key notion for the study of minority literatures, and also for Diaspora Studies, insofar as it emphasizes precisely the fact that those individuals who left their countries of origin to live elsewhere do not share the same feeling of belonging to the host country’s culture. As a result, they have to constantly translate themselves to adjust and cope with everyday situations.

The third writer I am relying on is Arjun Appadurai and his work Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. I believe this work helps us to understand the process and importance of imagination for diasporic peoples. The first chapter entitled “Here and Now” explains how globalization, mass media, imagination
and fantasy work into creating “imagined worlds” (33). This seems to be very helpful since the novel to be studied is set in our modern times and, as we move forward, we’ll see examples of how imagination paved the way for Matussem Ramoud and his family to move to the United States, and how it also created in Jemorah and Melvina their own home, not based on locality but on imagination.

For Appadurai, today there are several kinds of diaporas. There are “diasporas of hope, diasporas of terror, and diasporas of despair. But in every case, these diasporas bring the force of imagination, as both memory and desire, into the lives of many ordinary people” (6). He affirms the difference between diasporas today and diasporas in the past are “the images, scripts, models, and narratives that come through mass mediation” (6). What he means is that there are no novelties when one decides or has to move to a different country, today the distances between countries have diminished and our information about such countries has increased. Appadurai continues by saying:

Those who wish to move, those who have moved, those who wish to return, and those who choose to stay rarely formulate their plans outside of the sphere of radio, television, cassettes and videos, newsprint, and telephone. For migrants, both the politics of adaptation to new environments and the stimulus to move or return are deeply affected by a mass mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space. (6)

This seems to be the case of Matussem Ramoud. His moving to the United States was mostly due to the opportunities he would have there. I believe the decision to immigrate to New York was largely influenced by mass media, which portrayed the American society through the broadcast of TV shows, movies and music. All of them
created in Matussem, as his family, an imaginary America. In Matussem’s imagination the United States was the place of Tom Mix (famous actors of Western Movies) and Flash Gordon (hero of a British-American science fiction movie), as he shares:

In Jordan we watched his movie. Him and Flush Groodin – seventy, eighty hundred times! We loved these. We kids go running all over these movie places, like Beit al Zoon, the bear-man. They don’t get movies like that in these country. (38-9)

We can see that even before Matussem came to the United States his view of his host country was shaped by the movies and this helps to create a collective imagination of the United States. The excerpt of the novel also seems to be an example of what Appadurai posits: “More people than ever seem to imagine routinely the possibility that they or their children will live and work in places other than where they were born” (6). Later, when he came to live in Euclid, Matussem said: “I don’t care how many Bonanza you watch, nothing get your brain ready for real America!” (89).

In spite of many voluntary migrations, forced migrations are still very common nowadays. Appadurai also writes about what compulsory migration requires: “these people, they move and must drag their imagination for new ways of living along with them” (6). I believe that imagination is crucial for any diasporic subject to cope with the difficult process of building a new home, or somewhere similar to one. To be reminded of the differences, difficulties and challenges of having to participate in a place which requires a new way of living seems to me to be next to impossible, if imagination does not take part in this process. It is important to say, as did Appadurai, that “imagination” is:
No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility […] The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order. (31)

Appadurai affirms that this imagination does not help to create a homogeneous identity. In fact, it causes people to feel included even outside their homecountry. Appadurai expands this concept and affirms that media, and not only written materials such as novels, are used to create a sense of belonging, not to a location but to an idea – communities of sentiment. Now imagination is used as the glue which holds people together creating a sense of belonging even if they are living in a completely different country. Having access to mass media, these immigrants have access to what they would only see in their country, as well as what is happening in all other countries, thus increasing the number of migrants and creating a sense of disorganization and deterritorialization, as Appadurai puts it.

Today, we have access to any kind of information about any country from any place in the world. Broadcasters recently have been focusing on making their local
news global. Rapes in India, anti-gay laws in Russia, the tragic loss of young university students in Santa Maria here in Brazil, everything has made the headlines all over the world. So, the physical distance from the home-country becomes less important because of the access to such information. As a result, immigration is less and less painful to diasporic peoples, they are no longer alone.

Access to information and knowledge of others who are also immigrants is how I believe Fatima manages to maintain her routine; not only because she is together or has a clear understanding of where her home country is, but also she has the possibility to be a part of a “group that begins to imagine and feel things together” (Appadurai 8).

This imagination proposed by Appadurai could be similar to what Rushdie posits when referring to his “India of the mind”. He has managed to stay away for so long from his homeland and, still kept his connection to it because he was not alone. His imagination had ground to grow due to his memories and the information he was fed with during the many years he spent in the United States.

The difference between Fatima, Matussem and his children is that their imagination created a host country while his children have to imagine a place where they belong, since they are both Arab and American. Matussem’s imaginary home is Jordan, which he still visits; however, Melvina and specially Jemorah have to create a place of their own somewhere where they can feel whole – specially Jemorah who struggles to find a place where she belongs.

The fourth theoretical source I am using is Avtar Brah’s book Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities. She proposes a distinction between the two possible ways to understand the word home in the introduction “Situated Identities / Diasporic
Transcriptions”. Brah writes that home is “an invocation of narratives of ‘the nation’” (3) similar to the country in which you were born, the name written on your passport, and it is also:

the site of everyday lived experience. It is a discourse of locality, the place where feelings of rootedness ensue from the mundane and the unexpected of daily practice. Home here connotes our networks of family, kin, friends, colleagues and various other ‘significant others’. It signifies the social and psychic geography of space that is experienced in terms of a neighbourhood or a home town. That is, a community ‘imagined’ in most part through daily encounter. This ‘home’ is a place with which we remain intimate even in moments of intense alienation from it. It is a sense of ‘feeling at home’. (4)

These concepts are extremely important because we are able to see that home can be understood in practical terms, especially for hyphenated peoples, as the country in which one live. It can also be seen from a more emotional perspective: a place where one feel part of a community.

This appears to be one of the main issues for Jemorah, in Abu-Jaber’s novel. Jemorah is under the impression that Jordan, where she last felt at home, is her homeland and that the host-land, the United States, is just the country where she resides. Jemorah, as Brah, belongs to two cultures, and to resolve this conflict between the ideas of home she theorizes that they, as diasporic peoples, are not looking for the return to their homeland but what they want is homing desire. She emphasizes that “The homing desire […] is not the same as the desire for a homeland” (177). Brah
suggests that this space diasporic peoples live in a place of uncertainty, also inhabited by non-diasporic subjects. It is a place of conflict in which the non-diasporic subjects have a role to play; they can increase the feeling of being away from home.

This is what happens to the Ramoud family, especially to Jemorah. Her experience with the school bus is one of the examples of how other people increased her feeling of displacement. Jemorah had to make herself invisible to others, so as not to be bullied by the other kids. However, these non-diasporic peoples can also share the experience of not belonging. Euclid, where the Ramouds reside, is described as a poor town where people are entitled as “white-trash” (90). They are also on the margin of society, with conflictive experiences concerning home and belonging. One of the residents of the town told Jemorah when she was younger: “No one ever escapes this place […] You want to think twice about moving here. It’s like that show – The Twilight Zone?” (90). This shows how uncomfortable it was for a “white-trash” American to live on the margins of society, just as Jemorah and her family lived.

The fifth important writer to be used is William Safran and his articles “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return” and “The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective”. Both articles are essential for my research since both of them will be helpful to understand the concept of Diaspora and how it has changed over the years. In the first article, Safran puts in perspective classic and contemporary diasporas by analyzing how the notion of diaspora has changed over the years. The conflictive views of diaspora are explained by Safran as he affirms that:

Members of diaspora communities are by turns mistreated by the host
country as "strangers within the gates" or welcomed or exploited for the sake of the domestic and diplomatic interests of the host country. Internal social unity has on some occasions required that minorities be kept as diasporas. (92)

In order to discuss these diasporas, he proposes a set of guidelines to identify classic diaspora, including the need to return home, and the idealization that their true home can never be their host-country. In this text he discusses other diasporas, which can also be considered classic, but for some reason do have much recognition and have not been studied as much as the Jewish Diaspora. To it, he compares the Armenian, Polish, Palestinian diasporas, to cite a few, and other minorities who have also undergone diasporic experiences. However, he affirms that “Not all ‘dispersed’ minority populations can legitimately be considered diasporas” (86) and gives the example of the Gypsies because, according to Safran:

[…] to a certain extent, their homelessness is a characteristic of their nomadic culture and the result of their refusal to be sedentarized. Moreover, diaspora consciousness is an intellectualization of an existential condition: the Gypsies have had social and economic grievances […], but they have not been asking themselves questions about "the Gypsy problem" in the way that the Jews have thought about a "Jewish problem," the Poles about a "Polish problem," and the Arabs about a "Palestinian problem." The Gypsies have had no myth of return because they have had no precise notion of their place of origin, no clear geographical focus, and no history of national sovereignty. (87)
As I have mentioned before, the need of returning home is an important element to describe classic diasporas, and throughout the years this necessity to move back to the “true home” has not been a priority for some diasporians. Many today have preferred to focus on the making of a new home, and take on the identity of permanent diasporians, as Safran writes:

Some diasporas persist—and their members do not go "home"—because there is no homeland to which to return; because, although a homeland may exist, it is not a welcoming place with which they can identify politically, ideologically, or socially; or because it would be too inconvenient and disruptive, if not traumatic, to leave the diaspora. In the meantime, the myth of return serves to solidify ethnic consciousness and solidarity when religion can no longer do so, when the cohesiveness of the local community is loosened, and when the family is threatened with disintegration. (91)

The second article I am using to demonstrate the differences and similarities between the Jewish diaspora and other classic diasporas. In the article “The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective”, Safran discusses other diasporas in the light of the most classic and well-known diasporas of all times, one that he affirms to be a prototype for the understanding of all the others, because

The Jews are the oldest diaspora; they lacked a “homeland” for two millennia but thought about it constantly and the idea of a return to it – at first an eschatological conception and much later a concrete one — remained part of their collective consciousness. (37)
Having this long lasting diaspora as a method to understand the others he focuses on the “myth of return”, the idea or ideal of home, the importance of religious and other institutions so as to maintain the unity of the diasporic peoples. Lastly discusses the multiple homes that the Jews have created for themselves and how difficult, or impossible, it is to find unity when talking about home for them. Safran finishes explaining that the issue of diaspora for Jews is far from over, even with the creation of their homeland of Israel. He conjectures:

[…] the relationship between Jews in the diaspora and the homeland remains stronger than that which obtains in the case of most other comparable groups. To be sure, there are divergences: While Zionism (however defined) is still an important “connecting” ideology among diaspora Jews, for many Israelis it has been eclipsed by that which has already been achieved, and what remains to be achieved, in the homeland. During crisis situations, however, de-Zionization in the homeland is arrested and reversed, and pro-Israelism is accentuated as a sustaining factor of Jewish identity in the diaspora. (57)

The sixth writer to be used is Eva Hoffman and her essay “The New Nomads”, in which she discusses the idea of memory of one’s home and the term ‘new nomads’. This will be helpful in the discussion of this master’s dissertation, having in mind the analysis of the first generation American born: Jemorah and Melvina. Hoffman opens the essay by stating the meaning of being exiled for medieval Europeans. She suggests that to be an “exile was the worst punishment that could be inflicted. This was because one’s identity was defined by one’s role and place in society” (40). She goes on
discussing the most famous diaspora: the Jews and how they coped with their condition as exiles.

For Hoffman, their survival was due to two points: maintaining their identity, and believing in the entity of home. She justifies these points and writes: “Israel […] increasingly became less a geographic and more spiritual territory, with Jerusalem at its heart” (41). Believing in the entity of home is what I believe happens, not only to Jemorah, but also to the first generation of descendants who cannot understand their identity. They believe not in a geographical place but in a spiritual one. Jemorah, specifically, lives under the illusion that the Jordan of her mind will be a place where she will find others similar to her. Nevertheless, she realizes at the end of the novel that her home is, much like Israel for the Jews, a spiritual territory.

The seventh theoretical source is Rosemary Marangoly George and her book *The Politics of Home*, in which the myth of home as a place of belonging, protection and safety is demystified. George affirms that home before was considered as a place that “moves along several axes, and yet it is usually represented as fixed, rooted, stable – the very antithesis of travel” (2) and that it “connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection” (1). However, George argues that this has changed after the several diasporas that have taken place in history. Whether they occur for political, cultural or financial reasons does not change the fact that home, today, a “is not neutral place” (9); home carries many conflicts of belonging. Those who undergo through this experience are often struck with the similarities and disparities of their host-land and the community of people from their home-country. In the novel at stake this is one of the main sources of
conflict for Jemorah Ramoud; everyday she is reminded that Euclid is not where she belongs. No one looks like her, shares her ideals and understands her culture. Concerning the issue of home, George sustains that

home is a place to escape to and a place to escape from […] It is a community. Communities are not counter-constructions but only extensions of home, providing the same comforts and terrors on a larger scale. Both home and community provide such substantial pleasures that have been […] assumed as natural. (9)

George also expands on the difference between the terms “home” and “home-country”. Using the term “home”, we are, almost always, talking about that place where we feel welcomed, where we are, even in the midst of adversity, in common ground; it “evokes and aura of safety and stability” (21).“Home-country” is always separated by a hyphen meaning that is not your home, it is not your community; this it is where you live.

For her, as well as for many diasporic peoples, home is elsewhere. This seems fairly simple for the subjects who have a place of birth to return such as Matussem and Fatima. Their family lives in Jordan, they have grown there and have a sense of belonging to that locality, but what about the first generation American born Jemorah and Melvina? They were born in the United States, but do not feel part of that society because of their father’s nationality, their appearance, and life experience. What they will conclude is that being “everything and nothing” (330) – belonging to two different cultures – does not have to necessarily diminish them: their identity is something that might be an addition to their personality rather than a fault: a capacity to see both cultures and understand them. Still, they will always be in a place of conflict and
negotiation.

Lastly, I am using James Clifford’s ideas for a possible solution for the issue of displacement for diasporic subjects. Clifford states there is no “cure” for the discomfort caused by a lack of unity in the identity of these diasporic subjects, such as we see in the Ramoud family. Clifford writes:

> Peoples whose sense of identity is centrally defined by collective histories of displacement and violent loss cannot be ‘cured’ by merging into a new national community. This is especially true when they are the victims of ongoing, structural prejudice. Positive articulations of diaspora identity reach outside the normative territory and temporality (myth/history) of the nation-state. (307)

This is exactly what happens to the Ramouds – a family who has survived several tragedies, beginning with Aunt Fatima who buried four of her younger sisters “so my baby brother can eat, so he can move away and never know about it” (334), and who later was abducted by the military force and then returned to her family. Another tragedy that happened on Jordanian ground was Nora’s death.

This last event shaped Jemorah’s and Melvina’s outlook on American society, becoming closer to their father’s origins. This gives the impression to be even more significant because they, according to Jemorah, don’t “seem right” (328). They don’t look anything like their mother, who was of Irish descent, and are therefore associated to their father’s Arab culture.

This prejudice became even clearer when her boss said that her father was not “any better than Negroes” (294) and that her mother should have never gotten married
to Matussem. This episode enhanced the difficulties Jemorah found to see herself as a participant of that community in Euclid. Jemorah will soon find that there is no home to return to. This seems to be true not only for Jemorah but for first generation immigrants – Matussem, and Fatima. Melvina, however, understands that there is no way to leave the conflict behind and that sometimes a definite return to one’s native place is not even at stake, as Clifford affirms:

diaspora communities are ‘not-here’ to stay. Diaspora cultures thus mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/ desiring another place. (311)

I am using these texts as theoretical sources for this dissertation, as well as the novel *Arabian Jazz*, so as to establish similarities and differences between the diasporic experiences and the fictional characters of the novel. I will also compare the different diasporic experiences between the first immigrants and the first generation of Arab Americans; by doing so I intend to demonstrate one of the sources of conflict between both generations. The first sees home as a country and is connected to a land. They are bound to Jordan – the country located in the Middle East, while the second generation, because of their hyphenated condition, is not connected to a land or country but the idea of it – an idea of a place where they can belong completely and not feel misplaced as they do in their host-land.

I also hope to show that this idea of a perfect belonging is a romanticized view of home, one that only Jemorah insists on pursuing since her identity has been shattered ever since her mother died in Jordan. Returning home, for Jemorah, has little
to do with being physically home but with being accepted for who she is – something she last felt when her mother was alive.

I hope to prove in this master’s dissertation that Diana Abu-Jaber’s novel exemplifies two different kinds of diaspora: one that is classic and the other that is contemporary. What makes them different is the relationship that diasporians have regarding home. Also, that the issue of home nowadays is less connected with belonging to a physical land but rather with how one feels when they are home. This is a construction that has to be learned and understood. I intend to demonstrate this by having Jemorah Ramoud as a main focus of my dissertation in hopes to prove that for her, as well as for many diasporic peoples, there is no physical home to return to only an imaginary home which is a result of a negotiation of both cultures: Arab and American. For such I have structured the chapters in the following order:

In this first chapter I have chosen to introduce the topic of my dissertation and also present the main theorists I am working with. The theorists I have mentioned here are the ones that I consider to be the most relevant for my research. They are the ones in which I found support to prove the conclusions I have reached at the end of my reading for this master’s dissertation. Of course, I will also rely on other theorists such as: Sara Ahmed in the article “Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement”, who discussed what I have called the new idea of home in chapter II, and Robin Cohen and his book Global Diasporas: An Introduction, on which I based my research of classic diaspora and contemporary diaspora and their characteristics.

Other important theorists I thoroughly used are Khachig Tölölyan and James Tuedio. Tölölyan’s ideas of contemporary diaspora and his new perspective on
diasporas today were important to demonstrate, in Chapter II, that the concept of diaspora has gone through a significant change over the years, and urges for reassessment of the term, as an attempt of not emptying the idea of diaspora from its original meaning. Tuedio’s ideas were used, in chapter III, to posit the idea that home is not concerned with the connection to the land but to the people. Home is a feeling forged by relationships one makes, no matter where they are – an idea that is also shared by Ahmed. In Chapter I my main purpose is to make clear the objective of this master dissertation and also indicate the possible results of what I found during the process of research.

In Chapter II, I intend to show the changes the term diaspora has suffered: encompassing more and different experiences of dispersion. With that, I will also try to demonstrate that the idea of home for immigrants has also changed from a physical place to an imaginary one – a home that can be constructed anywhere, one that is dependent on memory, community and belonging. To determine this shift from the physical idea of home to a multi-placed one, I will contrast not only diasporic experiences but also the representation of home from Gaston Bachelard’s point of view: that the home is a metaphor of our whole selves and holds our deepest secrets, to Sara Ahmed’s idea that:

home is indeed elsewhere, but it is also where the self is going: home becomes the impossibility and necessity of the subject’s future (one never gets there, but is always getting there), rather than the past which binds the self to a given place. (331)

I will also briefly discuss the problems Arab-Americans have when living in the
United States as an attempt to introduce the topic of the last chapter.

In Chapter III, I will solely focus on the novel I chose to study *Arabian Jazz*. I am attempting to show the different immigrant experiences that the book portrays: one that sees the host-country as temporary (seen in Fatima); one that has a strong sense of affiliation (seen in Matussem); one that sees only the conflict between cultures (seen in Jemorah); and one that understands that the hyphen between Arab-American is a given and there is no use fighting it (seen in Melvina).

The chapter will thoroughly discuss Jemorah’s issues as an Arab-American and how she copes with the realization that she cannot avoid cultural conflict in her life. There will always be situations in which she will stand out either by being too Arab or too American. I will demonstrate that Jemorah came to a closure over her conflict as a first American born Jordanian American: the place she truly belongs, especially after a conversation with her cousin Nassir, who warned her that her true goal in moving to Jordan was the search for her mother and not a home. Nassir and Melvina also convinced Jemorah that being hyphenated does not mean that one are losing anything, but gaining enough distance to evaluate both cultures and using whatever best suits Jemorah’s interests. Moreover, I will try to show that Jemorah finally understood Melvina when she said “In the book of life every page has two sides” (6), and will finally be able to feel at home.
2- Home and Diaspora: A concept

When does a location become home? What is the difference between ‘feeling at home’ and staking claim to a place as one’s own? It is quite possible to feel at home in a place and, yet, the experience of social exclusions may inhibit public proclamations of the place as home. (190) Avtar Brah – *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*

Dispersion and Diaspora have always been a part of human existence, as the idea of community supersedes the idea of nation or country. Khachig Tölölyan, in the article “Diaspora Studies: Past, Present and Promise”, claims that dispersion is a much broader idea than diaspora because, according to him, the latter concept “is merely one of several kinds of dispersion so that, in a curious reversal, it has become a synecdoche, the part – diaspora – standing for the whole” (5).

The word diaspora was first used to describe three classic experiences: the Greek, the Jewish and the Armenian, according to Tölölyan. Although the oldest of them is the Greek diaspora, the Jewish is the most famous; also addressed as “The Diaspora”, it has established the patterns for other contemporary dispersions.

Although this chapter focuses on theorizing home, it is important to address the concept of Diaspora and how it has changed over the years. Discussing the changes of diaspora will allow us to better understand why home has become such a complicated
issue, in our modern times. In this sense, Roger Brubaker, in the article “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora”, proposes that we approach the study of diasporas in a different, more pragmatic way. He believes in the study of the practice of diaspora, before using it as a normative category of analysis; he states:

As a category of practice, ‘diaspora’ is used to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilize energies, to appeal to loyalties. It is often a category with a strong normative change. It does not so much describe the world as seek to remake it. (12)

This is why this chapter is crucial for my master’s dissertation. To fully understand the experiences of the main character in Diana Abu-Jaber’s novel, we need to understand why diaspora and home spur so many conflicts and how these diasporic experiences have started in the first place. In this chapter, I intend to discuss what I call classic diaspora, which contemplates the idea of returning to one’s homeland. I also intend to address the contemporary diaspora that does not aspire to home-country. By discussing the transformation in the notion of diaspora itself, I intend to prove that the notion of home has also changed. Ultimately I intend to prove that the idea of home has shifted from a physical location to an imaginary construct.

As I mentioned before, there is a dilemma involving the widespread use of the term “diaspora” over the term dispersion. Brubaker states that “the use of ‘diaspora’ has proliferated in the last decade; its meaning has been stretched in various directions”, it has also dispersed from “the meaning of the term in semantic, conceptual disciplinary space” (1). This information shows us that Brubacker believes that the term diaspora has become a fad. Later he states that the term “loses its discriminating
power – its ability to pick out phenomena, to make distinctions. The universalization of diaspora, paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora” (3). The solution to this problem, according to him, is to avoid this overuse. The consequences of this overuse are that it

[…] may be more fruitful, and certainly more precise, to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on. We can then study empirically the degree and form of support for a diasporic project among members of its putative constituency, just as we can do when studying a nationalist project. And we can explore to what extent, and in what circumstances, those claimed members of putative diasporas actively adopt or at least passively sympathize with the diasporic stance”.

(13)

As we can see diaspora is not a unified experience, and it does not only take in consideration the sole process of leaving the home-country for a host-country. To be considered diasporic one must feel in exile, otherwise many dispersion could be considered diasporic experiences, as well, in the United States especially.

In accordance with Brubacker’s notion of diaspora, Stéphane Dufoix in her book called Diasporas provides us with and important definition of what this concept must involve:

'diaspora’ must […] have a number of factors involving the origin of the (voluntary or forced) migration; settlement in one or several countries; maintenance of identity and community solidarity, which allows people to make contacts between groups and to organize activities aimed at
preserving that identity; and finally, relations between the leaving state, the host state, and the diaspora itself, the last of which may become a link between the first two. (21)

There are many theories regarding the origin of the word ‘diaspora’ and many claim that the root of this word come from different backgrounds. Dufoix begins her book by saying that “‘Diaspora’ is a Greek word, derived from the verb diaspeiro, which was used as early as the fifth century B.C. by Sophocles, Herodotus, and Thucydides” (4). She affirms that the term diaspora has “always meant the threat of dispersion facing the Hebrews if they failed to obey God’s will” (4). Also, that the term ‘diaspora’ as we have come to know, “changed to designate both the scattered people and the locale of their dispersion” (5).

Differently, William Safran, in the article “The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective”, affirms that the word diaspora comes from the Jewish word galut. According to him, this word

[…] connoted deracination, legal disabilities, oppression, and an often painful adjustment to a hostland whose hospitality was unreliable and ephemeral. It also connoted the existence on foreign soil of an expatriate community that considered its presence to be transitory. (36)

Whether the word comes from Greek or Jewish or even from Armenian gaghut (Tölölyan 9), Robin Cohen in Global Diaspora: An Introduction has didactically and historically separated diaspora into four phases. The first phase used the term Diaspora (with capital letters) to address only the Jewish and the Greek experience. Later, it encompassed the African and Armenian; some also considered the Palestinian diaspora
a part of this group. This experience was often looked upon as tragic. Diasporians were seen as victims and were given no choice but to flee their countries, homes and as a consequence their lives behind.

The second phase of diaspora encompassed, not only those who fled their home country, but “several categories of people – expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities tout court” (Safran, 83). Consequently, the amount of peoples who considered themselves, or were considered diasporic, increased in large numbers during this second phase.

The third phase occurred during the 90’s, as Cohen mentions. During this period more and more people became deterritorialized for many reasons: economic, political, social or financial; making diaspora a worldwide phenomenon. It compelled diaspora critics to rethink the definitions of the term because it had become much more intricate.

The forth and last phase of diaspora studies is the phase we are living today. This phase is marked by what Cohen calls “consolidation”, in which the “increased complexity and deterritorialization of identities are valid phenomena and constitutive of a small minority of diasporas” (2). It is, in fact, the most current and therefore difficult to be studied because their organization patterns differ from classic and predictable diasporas.

The biggest differences concerning the new view of diaspora and the old one is that diasporians were viewed as victims and their sole objective in life was to return to their home-country to continue their lives and they were. However, migration is marked by the lack of identity, home, peace and fulfillment. Iain Chambers in the book *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* argues that diasporians are
Cut off from the homelands of tradition, experiencing a constantly challenged identity, the stranger is perpetually required to make herself at home in an interminable discussion between a scattered historical inheritance and a heterogeneous present. (6)

Throughout these phases, we were able to see that sometimes migration happens willingly, some return to the homeland, which is sometimes a possibility, but most of the times this return may not happen. People are managing to live their lives aware of their identities and beliefs while making their homes elsewhere.

Concerned about these many different phases of diaspora, Cohen wrote an article called “Solid, Ductile and Liquid: Changing Notions of Homeland and Home In Diaspora Studies”. In it, he classified these four phases into three types of diaspora: “solid (the unquestioned need for a homeland), ductile (an intermediate, more complex, idea of homeland) and liquid (a post-modernist rendition of virtual home)” (4). I will address Cohen’s types of diaspora putting them into two categories: The solid, which I call “classic”, and the ductile and liquid, which I call “contemporary.”

2.1 Classic Diaspora

Classic diaspora or the classical interpretation of diaspora, also solid diaspora, has in mind the Jewish experience as well as the Greek and Armenian. All of them were concerned about the idea of the return to the home-country. About the solid idea of diaspora, in Transnationalism: Diasporas and the Advent of a New (Dis)order, Appadurai affirms that “Motherland, fatherland, native land, natal land, Heimat, the
ancestral land, the search for ‘roots’ – all these similar notions invest homelands with ‘an emotional, almost reverential dimension’” (122). What defines the classic diasporians, then, is their distance from their homeland and consequently their inability to return, turning them into permanent diasporians.

This is what happened to Matussem Ramoud’s family when they left Nazareth to go to Jordan. Running from war they had to leave their home and begin their lives again. This change had a serious effect on the Ramoud family, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Concerning the classic Diaspora, in “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return” Safran states that diasporas have

[D]eveloped a set of institutions, social patterns, and ethnonational and/or religious symbols that held it together. These included the language, religion, values, social norms, and narratives of the homeland. Gradually, [these] communit[ies] adjusted to the hostland environment and became [themselves] a center of cultural creation. All the while, however, [they] continued to cultivate the idea of return to the homeland.

(36)

This desire of returning home and seeing the host-country as temporary is an important notion of the classical diaspora. It is the reason why classic diaspora is set apart from the contemporary perspective diaspora. Safran proposes other sets of characteristics that would help us, for academic purposes, to identify such diasporic peoples:

1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a
collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (83)

These ideas are easily recognized within three basic diasporic experiences, according to many theorists: they are the Jewish, Armenian and Palestinian diasporas. In order to deepen our comprehension of all three of them, I will present them briefly as an attempt to show the difference between the classic and contemporary diasporic experiences.

2.1.1 Jewish Diaspora

There is no doubt that that Jewish diaspora is one of, if not the oldest, diasporas of the world. It has certainly been the most famous and discussed diasporas of the world. As a consequence, it has also become an important part of the Jewish culture.
Safran, in “The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative Theoretical Perspective”, mentions that “Exile has been considered the ‘normal’ condition of Jews” (38). The first exile story dates back to 70 AD when Jews were expelled from Jerusalem by Titus, a roman king.

This exile has lasted until the creation of Israel in 1948, making their diaspora last almost two millennia, as Safran mentions. It is the longest diaspora known to mankind. This is what makes this diaspora so distinctive; for centuries this community had only their spiritual land to cling to, since their physical homeland only became a reality in the twentieth century. They have been persecuted practically everywhere in Europe, but still managed to maintain their identity and hope that one day they would return to the home of their forefathers.

The imaginary idea of Israel made the first immigrants see themselves as visitors in their new host-country. They had a clear image about where their home was, an idea which was passed on from parents to children. As these first immigrants saw their host-country as temporary, they made sure to create mechanisms to secure their uniqueness: religion has been one of the most efficient of them.

Everywhere in the world we see Jewish families celebrating the mitzvahs or commandment, each and every one of these celebrations are a reminder of their difference to the goy (gentile). Maintaining their identity in host-countries requires, as mentioned before, a number of actions: constant use of their language, storytelling to younger generations, a connection with the religion and avoid the affiliation to the host-country. As we can see, the Jewish community has excelled in keeping their traditions. Safran mentions that
The Jewish diaspora is the only one to have developed several diaspora languages in which, incidentally, elements of the homeland language continue to be embedded, and much of whose extensive literature has made references to the mythical as well as real homeland. (41)

Their culture has so much importance to the world that it was incorporated into the cultural calendar of many countries. It has also become a big part of the American culture. As an example we can see that many goy know about the Jewish tradition of Hanukkah and Yon Kippur. There is also kosher food being incorporated into people’s diet. There are also growing economic strategies focused to please the growing Jewish population. Many of them have not assimilated the American culture as much as the American culture has assimilated Jewish customs and culture.

Eva Hoffman in the article “The New Nomads” writes about the historical importance of the Jewish diaspora and how they have kept their identity:

The Jews […] survived their Diaspora—in the sense of preserving and maintaining their identity—by nurturing a powerful idea of home. That home existed on two levels: there were the real communities that Jews inhabited in various countries; but on the symbolic and perhaps the more important plane, home consisted of the entity “Israel,” which increasingly became less a geographic and more a spiritual territory, with Jerusalem at its heart. While living in dispersion, Jews oriented themselves toward this imaginative center of the world, from which they derived their essential identity. (40)

This is where I want to introduce that the idea that a home is not a place but an idea.
This idea is so powerful that made it possible for the rise of Zionism, which is a good example of the upholding to traditions. Zionism consists of a nationalist movement created to make possible for the Jewish people to return to the Land of Israel; however, many disagree with this movement by affirming it to be too fundamentalist.

It has been pointed out as the reason why of all Jews in the world, 42.9% of them are currently living in Israel, according to a survey from 2012\(^1\). Moreover, it is said that all Jews who moved back to their homeland were considered to be different from those who reject the idea of returning and were often ostracized. Safran also argues that:

[…] the Jewish diaspora continues to be used as prototype because it combines such features as ethnicity, religion, minority status, a consciousness of peoplehood, a long history of migration, expulsion, adaptation to a variety of hostlands whose welcome was conditional and unreliable, and a continuing orientation to a homeland and to a narrative and ethnosymbols related to it. (39)

These features are common to the other two diasporic experiences that I will address in the next topic. Tragic stories are also the reason these ethnic communities have kept their unity.

### 2.1.2 Armenian Diaspora

The Armenian diaspora is said to be overshadowed by the Jewish experience since it is not as well-known; however, both are very similar in many ways. The Armenian diaspora is believed to have begun in the year 578 AD when Byzantine Emperor Maurice ordered the expulsion of his fellow Armenians. Later, in the late nineteenth century, an upsurge with the intention to gather all Armenians was created to unite those who were scattered around the world into a land. Nevertheless, this attempt was not successful, since 300,000 Armenians died in conflict with the armies of “The Red Sultan”, as Sultan Hamid was called in the Ottoman Empire.

Another tragedy struck the Armenian population in the First World War, when they were deported to other Middle Eastern countries, or killed by the Turks. Mass deportations to Palestine and Syria took place at that time as well. About this immigration, Cohen affirms:

It is now widely accepted (though still fiercely disputed by Turkish sources) that close to one million people – about half the Armenian population – were either killed or died of starvation during the 1915–16 period. If we add to this figure those who perished in the period up to 1922, the number of Armenian dead may safely be put at round 1,500,000. (51)

As we are able to see, the persecutions and mass annihilation of the Armenian people is very similar to the event the Jews experienced during their diasporic process. Similarly, parts of their identity were surprisingly kept despite the adversities they lived, such as their religion and cultural traditions. This desire to endure in the midst of
persecution is also a trait seen in the most famous diaspora of our history. According to Safran this similarity occurs because this community is

based on a common religion and language, a collective memory of national independence in a circumscribed territory, and a remembrance of betrayal, persecution, and genocide. (“Myths”, 84)

Moreover, Safran posits that both Jewish and Armenian diasporas have created strong institutions capable of maintaining their identity and becoming part of their host-country culture. They have also allowed themselves to be culturally and linguistically involved with their new country, meaning: their society does not have many impediments to learning and interacting, to a certain extent, with the other peoples that may live in the same location in which they live. Armenians have become a conspicuous part of the new societies without leaving their own traditions behind.

One important institution that has kept a certain unity within the Armenian society is the church. In the same way of the Jewish experience, religion has a key role when discussing the continuity of a culture as I mentioned before. Attending church services is similar to being reminded of the people one belong, your inheritance, and ones customs. For that reason the Armenian Catholic Church has played a very important role, whether in the United Stated or in the Middle East, because it was a reminder of their ethnicity and cultural background.

The difference between these communities is that there is no Armenian country comparable to Israel. A Soviet Armenia was created in the 1920’s, and was soon taken over again by the Turks; Safran states that today “there is an Armenian republic, but it is a severely truncated land – most of historic Armenia is in Turkey” (84).
About his experience as an Armenian born and raised as an exile, Khachig Tölolyan, who wrote “Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment” describes a similar experience of the Jewish diaspora since they also envision an imaginary home as a way to maintain their identity as Armenians:

Our diasporian task was to develop and maintain an alternative view of Armenian nationhood, one which aspired to an independent national homeland and understood that the diaspora would both support and help to reshape that homeland by its financial, intellectual and cultural resources. (7)

The next community I will be discussing has a land to fight for, which they have been fighting for decades. Their people, similarly to the Jewish, are extremely rooted to that land which has been causing a long and painful conflict generating a difficult and long lasting diaspora.

2.1.3 Palestinian Diaspora

The description of the Palestinian experience of exile as “Palestinian Diaspora” has not always been a consensus within diaspora scholars, mostly because of the ongoing territorial conflict between Israel and Palestine. Some say that the inclusion of Palestine to the list of many diasporic communities could be a disservice to the Palestine agenda, because it somehow loses its particularities. Also because when it is put on the generalized diaspora list it, in a way, weakens the movement.

According to Helena Lindholm Schulz and Juliane Hammer, who wrote a book
called *The Palestinian Diaspora*, the first big conflict which forced people to leave their homes for good, was The Great Revolt of 1936-39. They affirm that:

The Great Revolt was a popular uprising which started spontaneously and without direction from the urban-based political elite, the *ay’an*. It consisted of a general strike as well as violent attacks against the Jewish population and Jewish institutions. It was also an uprising against the British mandate and the politics of the local elite. The uprising was finally crushed in 1939 by harsh British repression, resulting in the flight of many of its leaders and activists. (23)

This conflict was already engraved in Palestinians lives and stories. The destruction of their homes, customs and the loss of their leaders defeated them in a way that they would never fully recover from. The loss to the British repression was not going to be the only one they would suffer, as we know.

It was from 1947 to 1948, the years of creation of the State of Israel, that Palestinians became one of the largest diasporic communities of the world. Data collected on the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Science* shows that approximately 75 percent of the Palestinian Arab population (almost 700,000 people) became refugees. This experience was so dramatic that there is a name to describe it: *al-nakba*, or the catastrophe.

Schulz and Hammer stated that this episode has become crucial to the Palestinians narrative. This is something that Lisa Majaj, in an interview published in the *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, discusses. She also mentions the importance of “embedded losses – losses which are both political and personal” (407);
Loss is embedded into my familial narrative – that of my grandmother’s family who fled Jaffa in 1948 to become impoverished refugees in Jordan, or of my aunt killed by a bomb, or my father who lost his homeland and died in exile, or my relatives who continue to live in Jerusalem and the West Bank under escalating hardship. My familial narrative on my father’s side is a story about loss – and that loss is the loss of Palestine. (407)

For many Palestinians these losses are the beginning of their story, Shultz affirms: “It is to this forceful process that Palestinians trace their identity. In narratives of identity the exodus is frequently given ‘primordial’ quality. It is the birth of the Palestinian nation” (24). This diasporic experience is the one we read as the experience of the fictional characters of Diana Abu-Jaber’s novel, especially Matussem’s parents.

They fled their home-country of Nazareth and moved to Jordan because it was where most Christians were concentrated. The exile from Nazareth and the conflict in the Middle East greatly traumatized many of the inhabitants of those areas, and Abu-Jaber portrays it when Fatima, Matussem’s sister, questions her nephew when he undermines the struggles of their family. He affirms that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is “a game without end” (334); Nassir recognizes that both sides have had losses and, therefore, he does not see any point in this ever ongoing war. Fatima, enraged at that comment, said:

Is not any kind of game![…] I forbid you use such word in the house of my brother, is no kind of game, you stupid, stupid boy. For all you lose
and you learned nothing. You think you can go just cross the ocean and wipe your hands like the Roman kings? What I care for these people ones think are your friends? What of my losses? What of my parents’ shame, driven off the good land and sacred home the father’s fathers built? When we were homeless and dying without food […] Can I buy a bar of American soap and wash these away, as you have washed up your self?

(334)

In this passage we can see that because this conflict has lasted through generations, it is very much alive in the hearts of the first immigrants who were directly impacted by conflict. Nassir’s distance of his people’s tragedies and acculturation going in and out of colleges allowed him to understand that the tragedy of war affects both sides Israeli and Palestinian. This distance comes as a great offence to all the struggles his aunt and his family had to endure to allow him to live away from war.

The major conflicts mentioned earlier have escalated to the violence seen today which led more and more people to leave their homes and join other of refugees. According to the The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) website:

Today, some 5 million Palestine refugees are eligible for UNRWA services […] Nearly one-third of the registered Palestine refugees, more than 1.5 million individuals, live in 58 recognized Palestine refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. (no paging)

As we are able to see the Palestinian Diaspora can be considered a classic diaspora
since it displays all the characteristics described by Safran and mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and it can be seen as the largest diaspora existing today.

Relating these facts to Abu-Jaber’s novel, we read that the Ramoud family migrated twice, and it is important to think about the second migration that the Ramouds have done, when Matussem and later Fatima decided to move from Jordan to the United States. The decision to cross oceans and start a new life on the Occident was not due to a particular war, but it was rather an economic decision, one that motivates many people today to leave everything behind in search of better work opportunities, and with that we are called to question how their idea of home has been modified, if that modification has ever even happened and how they view home after a second migration.

2.2 Contrasting Notions of Home: Past and Present

As we’ve seen, classic diaspora and those who have experienced it are very connected to the locality of the homeland. Much of the identity of these people is attached to their forefathers’ home, and by leaving it they ultimately leave a piece of themselves; some never fully recover from it. In this section, I am arguing that the notion of home has changed along with the notion of diapora. Both of these notions needed to be changed since this phenomenon has never gone through a halt; it continued to develop and it has encompassed more and more different experiences, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

Rosemary Marangoly George, in her book *The Politics of Home*, discusses these
changes of the notion of home, and shows, by analyzing works of fiction, how it was portrayed during colonialism and post-colonialism. She posits that today the primary connotation of “home” is of the private space from which the individual travels into the larger arenas of life and to which he or she returns at the end of the day. And yet, also in circulation is the word’s wider signification as the larger geographic space where one belongs: country, city, village, community. Home is also the imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography. (11)

She also affirms that the idea of home was very much connected to the idea of country. So when the idea of “home-country” came along, it suggested that there were more than only private and public, or communal and individual spaces as thought before, according to George.

When studying home and what it represents, it is impossible not to mention one of the most classic theorists about this topic: Gaston Bachelard. Bachelard wrote a book called *Poetics of Space*, in which he draws a connection between who we are and the home we live in. This study ties a localized home, a place, to our sense of self.

Bachelard posited that to fully understand the idea of home it was not enough to only describe it, but it was necessary to surpass descriptions and pursue a phenomenological examination on the idea of the house. He calls this study “topoanalysis” and posits that it “would be the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives” (8). It is only through it that we will fully comprehend the totality of what home is. For him “[…] our house is our corner of the world. As has
often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word. If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has beauty” (4). He continues: “the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer; the house allows one to dream in peace” (6).

For Bachelard our identity is intrinsically connected to the house we live in. The analysis of it will help us to understand, in the deepest level, our personality along with our fears and narcissisms. Home is the physicality of who we are as people. Moreover, Bachelard affirms that:

Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another. In the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being’s first world. Before he is "cast into the world," as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle. (7)

I would argue that this definition of home, compared to contemporary diaspora studies, has supported the idea that every diasporic being is bound to suffer wherever they go. It is no wonder, since their “cradle” is no more. A life of wandering, as we commonly find in contemporary diasporas, would be the most miserable existence ever lived in the world, since they would have to face “the storms of life” without any shelter, according to Bachelard.
His notion of home is highly connected to the idea of happiness and wholeness which are also ideas found with the first diasporians who had been removed from their homeland. Bachelard also affirms that those memories made under the protection of home are more powerful than the ones that are made out or away from home:

We live fixations, fixations of happiness. We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images. Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home.

(6)

Such memories need to be housed by all the rooms and fixtures. A classic house had many rooms for many different purposes some decades ago. He claims that the more rooms the houses have, the clearer our memories will be, and writes that “thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated” (8).

Bachelard is very clear in pointing out that, for him, the house is very symbolic, and it can be seen as a metonymy of who we are. Only topoanalysis is able to shed light into all “nooks and corners of solitude” (14). Although he was not writing about diaspora itself, I find that Bachelard understood and was able to theorize about those who were, for whatever reason, away from home, and was able to describe the sense of loss that haunted these people. He states:

If we have retained an element of dream in our memories, if we have gone beyond merely assembling exact recollections, bit by bit the house
that was lost in the mists of time will appear from out the shadow. We do nothing to reorganize it; with intimacy it recovers its entity, in the mellowness and imprecision of the inner life. It is as though something fluid had collected our memories and we ourselves were dissolved in this fluid of the past [...] Indeed, at times dreams go back so far into an undefined, dateless past that clear memories of our childhood home appear to be detached from us. Such dreams unsettle our daydreaming and we reach a point where we begin to doubt that we ever lived where we lived. Our past is situated elsewhere, and both time and place are impregnated with a sense of unreality. It is as though we sojourned in a limbo of being. (57-8)

It seems to me that this feeling of being in a limbo describes exactly what classic diasporians feel when leaving their homes. Many questioned their identity because inhabiting their home was a distant idea, therefore their memories of home could have been imagined memories that were never lived, homes that were not based on reality, but idealized.

The safety of their homes and home-countries were sometimes their imagination trying to cling to the necessity of returning to their home. Bachelard’s tone, when talking about this limbo, is one of negativity; the idea he posits is that one is incomplete if one leaves ones home for whatever reason.

As I see it, there is a parallel between Bachelard’s limbo of being and Salman Rushdie’s “Indias of the mind”. Both describe the fragility of our memories that are, in many times, of our own creation and have no foundation in reality. Classic diasporians,
as they are robbed of their lives when they are forced to live elsewhere, imagine their home, their country and, as a consequence, wonder what their lives would have been like had they stayed in their homeland. They are stuck in a limbo of what’s real and their expectations of what would have been. This parallel can be seen in Rushdie’s essay “Imaginary Homelands” when he describes his experience of returning to his home:

A few years ago I revisited Bombay, which is my lost city, after an absence of something like half my life. [...] I felt as if I were being claimed, or informed that the facts of my faraway life were illusions, and that this continuity was the reality. (9)

Bachelard believes that our memories are somehow engraved in every part of the house, including drawers, chests and wardrobes. It is where we hide our secrets, and place the most intimate parts of ourselves. When we are forced to live outside of this place we cannot feel complete. If we looked only at this passage and not the rest of Rushdie’s essay we could assume that the return would remove Rushdie, as well as other diasporic peoples, from this limbo of being and not being. Yet when we continue the reading we see that being in this limbo or “to deal in broken mirrors” can be something positive.

This is the most important difference between Bachelard’s and Rushdie’s theories. According to Bachelard, living in a limbo can only be a negative experience and Rushdie affirms that this lack of memories, or the fact that memories are invented or real, can be positive for those who are in exile. It is because of this limbo that the few memories he has from his past have taken on a role of major importance in his
career as a writer in exile; he believes that “The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were remains; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities”. He also affirms that these memories are “a useful tool with which to work in the present” (12).

Rushdie considers his identity to be “plural and partial” (15) and although his diasporic experience may be placed within other classic diasporas, since he too had to leave home because of persecution of his family, his outlook over his condition as diasporic can be viewed as a contemporary one because he does not grieve over the past that he has lost. He celebrates his memories, even the invented ones, as if they are just as important as reality. He affirms:

[…] Indian writers in these islands, like others who have migrated into the north from the south, are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. This stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer in place of 'whole sight'. (19)

This vision Rushdie writes about is similar to Majaj’s “split-vision” and it is extremely important to understand the idea of contemporary diaspora. It is also a modern take on the idea of home that does not see home as a location, but as a place in our imagination. Today, we are compelled to rethink their idea of home and origin as being grounded to a fixed location, one where one belongs to or not. The question of the contemporary view of home is explained by Avtar Brah:

Where is home? On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it
is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of ‘origin’. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day... all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations. In other words, the varying experience of the pains and pleasures, the terrors and contentments, or the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture. (188-9)

As we can see, Brah’s idea of home is extremely different from Bachelard’s. Brah’s view of home is very contemporary and embraces the positive and negative aspects that every experience of diaspora brings to all diasporic peoples. Home for Brah, as well as for most diaspora scholars, is not concerned with the location or with the returning to home, but with a home experience which involves how one relates to a community and its members.

This is an important aspect that Jemorah could only understand after the talk with her cousin and sister. For Jemorah, home was Jordan and Nora. After Nora’s death Jemorah found it difficult to make any other connections, especially when there were so many demonstrations of prejudice. The complex issue of home is further explained by Brah

The question of home, therefore, is intrinsically linked with the the way in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political
and personal struggles over the social regulation of ‘belonging’. As Gilroy (1993) suggests, it is simultaneously about roots and routes. The concept of diaspora places the discourse of ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins. The problematic of ‘home’ and belonging may be integral to the diasporic condition, but how, when, and in what form questions surface, or how they are addressed, is specific to the history of a particular diaspora. Not all diasporas inscribe homing desire through a wish to return to a place of ‘origin’. (189)

Brah’s affirmation is especially true when studying contemporary diasporas which do not always follow the pattern described by Safran mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. Also, it again detaches home from a location and attaches it to an idea.

In the case of the Ramoud family, Brah’s notion of home is essential to the understanding of their relationship towards Nazareth, Jordan and Euclid. In the novel we can see that there is not much conflict regarding the imagination and return to their home, except for Jemorah; differently from Matussem, Fatima and Melvina who are very aware of what, where, and how home is. This is a topic that I intend to deepen in the next chapter.

When analyzing contemporary diasporas, we also see that there is little or no attachment to a physical home. Those peoples who have lived generations in diaspora do not consider returning home as a solution or even a possibility sometimes. About this issue Iain Chambers, in his book *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, sustains that:

This inevitably implies another sense of ‘home’, of being in the world. It
means to conceive of dwelling as a mobile habitat, as a mode of inhabiting time and space not as though they were fixed and closed structures, but as providing the critical provocation of an opening whose questioning presence reverberates in the movement of the languages that constitute our sense of identity, place and belonging. There is no one place, language or tradition that can claim this role. (4)

Sarah Ahmed also discusses the problematic of home, since clearly there is a paradox for immigrants who may never truly “feel at home”. She gives an account of her own experience as an immigrant and how she has never felt at home in England. Then, she argues that there needs to be a new concept of home that would encompass the lack of physical territory, so that everyone could feel at home without being in a particular place. She begins by explaining that home is a matter of feeling. She posits:

The issue is that home is not simply about fantasies of belonging – where do I originate from – but that it is sentimentalized as a space of belonging (‘home is where the heart is’). The question of home and being at home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being at home is here a matter of how one feels or how one might fail to feel. (341)

Her experience and account of feeling at home is the very contemporary idea of what home needs to be understood: home is a place where one is free to create other connections and become a part of other people’s lives, as Matussem, Fatima, and Melvina were able to do, and as Jemorah could only understand at the end of the Abu-Jaber’s novel. Ahmed explains how one can feel at home rather than just being there;
she argues that:

The immersion of a self in a locality is hence not simply about inhabiting an already constituted space (from which one can simply depart and remain the same). Rather, the locality intrudes into the senses: it defines what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers. The lived experience of being-at-home hence involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them: being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, inhabit each other. (341)

This is something that Jemora could not understand: she was able to allow Jordan to be a part of her; Nora died there and when Jemorah returned to the United States it was as if everything that she had lived before going to Jordan was not real. She could not inhabit Euclid, therefore, Euclid could not feel like her home. To better understand this contemporary idea of home, Ahmed affirms that the new concept of home should resemble a skin because it “suggests the boundary between self and home is permeable, but also that the boundary between home and away is permeable as well” (341), Ahmed’s ideas are in accordance with what George posits, since home for her is not a place but a community.

As we are able to see, the theories about home have shifted from being a house which represents our true self, and the holder of our deepest and most secretive thoughts from having no specific locus. Our modern times and the necessity, availability, or desire to move has turned the idea of home into a liquid idea (to use both Bauman’s and Cohen’s idea).

2.3 Contemporary Diasporas
Contemporary Diasporas have been occurring ever since mobility was facilitated and the world has become smaller and smaller after the World Wide Web and mass media were created. Avtar Brah affirms that:

The diasporas proliferating at the end of the twentieth century will be experienced quite differently, in some respects, in this age of new technologies and rapid communications compared with the time when it took months to travel or communicate across the seas. The impact of electronic media, together with growing opportunities for fast travel, invests Marshall McLuhan’s idea of ‘the global village’ with new meanings. Simultaneous transmission to countries linked by satellite means that an event happening in one part of the world can be ‘watched together’ by people in different parts of the globe. Electronic information ‘super-highways’ usher new forms of communication unimaginable only two decades ago. These developments have important implications for the construction of new and varied ‘imagined communities’. (191-2)

In this passage Brah introduces the idea that Appadurai also discusses: the changes that technology has made in the lives of diasporians and in diaspora itself. It is known that the use of the internet has brought us closer, making the physical distance from family, friends, and culture seem somehow smaller.

This is what happened to the Ramoud family. Being spread around the world with family members living in Europe, the United States and the Middle East there is no other way to maintain the feeling of family if not through the use of technology.
Nassir, when leaving his cousins, jokes by saying that as long as their aunts are in Jordan he could never be missing, someone will always know his whereabouts. Their family is always connected, in spite of their distance and that is how their community stays together. These modern imagined communities are no longer separated by borders or countries; they are floating within internet clouds and social media, there is no physical location where one needs to go, as home can be anywhere for most contemporary diasporians.

As mentioned in the first chapter, many people today have the opportunity to do what the fictional character Matussem Ramoud did: migrate to a different country in search for a better chance for financial and personal success. About this contemporary diaspora Hoffman affirms that:

[It] has become the norm rather than the exception, which in turn means that leaving one’s native country is simply not as dramatic or traumatic as it used to be. The ease of travel and communication, combined with the loosening of borders following the changes of 1989, give rise to endless crisscrossing streams of wanderers and guest workers, nomadic adventurers and international drifters. Many are driven by harsh circumstance, but the element of voluntarism, of choice, is there for most.

(42)

I would argue that this is one of the differences between classic diaspora and the contemporary one: many people have few reservations in regards to leaving their land because the idea of homeland in our modern times has become less and less connected to its physical location. About the role of media and modern migrations, Appadurai
affirms that:

The story of mass migrations (voluntary and forced) is hardly a new feature of human history, but when it is juxtaposed with the rapid flow of mass-mediated images, scripts, and sensations, we have a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities. […] electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of imagination. […] Neither images nor viewers fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound within a local, national, or regional space. (4)

In this passage Appadurai also affirms that today practically everyone knows someone who either has lived in a different place, someone who desired to do it, or has returned home. So it seems to be impossible to address these peoples as we did with classic diaspora subjects. The compelling forces for such have drastically changed (not to say that classic diaspora cannot occur today) and are motivated and kept with a different set of institutions.

Cohen also addresses “global diaspora” and explains that contemporary diaspora is now a matter of globalization. He gives us four reasons for this phenomenon to be happening:

1. A globalized economy that permits greater connectivity, the expansion of enterprises and the growth of new professional and managerial cadres, thereby changing but creating new opportunities for diasporas;

2. New forms of international migration that encourage limited
contractual relationships, family visits, intermittent stays abroad and sojournning, as opposed to permanent settlement and the exclusive adoption of the citizenship of a destination country;

3. The development of cosmopolitan sensibilities in many ‘global cities’ in response to the multiplication and intensification of transactions and interactions between the different peoples of the world; and

4. The revival of religion as a focus for social cohesion through dispersal, renewed pilgrimage and translocation resulting in the development of multi-faced world religions connected in various and complex ways to the diasporic phenomenon. (141)

Matussem, one of the main characters of the novel studied, is an example of this new contemporary diaspora; he moved to the United States motivated by television shows, as I will briefly discuss in the next chapter. Fatima, who has also willingly migrated to the United States with her brother, was able to maintain her “roots” because there was a community of Christian Arabs that had already been to the community when she arrived in Euclid.

Thus, returning home was never an issue for Matussem and Fatima, and it does not seem to be an issue for these contemporary migrants as well. Since they carry their home with them, their filiations are constantly reaffirmed by other equals they find wherever they move. They are able to create communities such as “Vila Libanesa” (Lebanese Village) in Sao Paulo, or Little Syria in Manhattan and, by doing so, they find a way to be home away from home.

However, we cannot say that all diasporas today are led by choice and that today
there is no such thing as immigrants of war. Affirming this would be closing our eyes to major conflicts which have been occurring in the Middle East. In 2014 we witnessed the increase in the number of refugees at a level only seen during World War II, according to United Nations reports.

This report points to more than 50 million people who were forced to leave their home-countries because of war. It seems surreal that in the same year in which we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, a symbol of our bipolar world, we are still seeing the creation of other physical walls, as is the case of Israel and Palestine and imaginary walls, as seen in the borders of Syria, for example. As we know, the issue of Diaspora, although it has been the topic of many academic productions, is still current and therefore needs to be constantly revisited.

Contemporary diasporas challenge the prototypical idea of Diaspora (with a capital D) because it may not be a source of grief and sorrow, but a source of happiness and accomplishments. It might not contemplate the idea of return because there may not be a place to return to. One might not want to leave again in hopes to “be home”, because they have adopted their host-country as their own and the host-country accepts them and their culture as a part of itself. One example that comes to mind is the Jewish population in the United States. Some diasporic peoples are reluctant to return to their homeland because it would mean another diaspora, in the sense of leaving their whole lives behind to start over in a place where they don’t know they will belong. Their affiliation has grown so strong that their culture has “replaced filiations […] that are forged with institutions, associations, communities and other social creations” (George, 16). Brah also discusses contemporary diasporas and the homing desire:
I argue that the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire. The homing desire, however, is not the same as the desire for a ‘homeland’. Contrary to general belief, not all diasporas sustain an ideology of return. Moreover, the multi-placedness of home in the diasporic imaginary does not mean that diasporians subjectivity is ‘rootless’. I argue for a distinction between ‘feeling at home’ and declaring a place as home. Processes of diasporic identity formation are exemplars par excellence of the claim that identity is always plural, and in process. The relationship between the two is subject to the politics in play under given sets of circumstances. In other words, the concept of diaspora refers to multi-locationality within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries. (194)

I would argue that this passage elucidates the contemporary notion of home and diaspora. If before home was looked at as a place where one’s whole history was merged with the land, the house, the history, now home has become an experience which has to be constructed. It has embraced the positive and negative aspects of having no place to return.

Not being bothered by their hyphenated selves, Melvina and Nassir both feel completely at home where they are: Nassir calls himself a nomad and has no problem living with the instability of being homeless. Melvina, because of her pragmatic personality, has no problem embracing both cultures. She understands that this negotiation is supposed to happen, but she can still manage to maintain the most
important part of her Arab culture: her family, which seems to be the part that has been kept intact throughout the changing notions of home for that family.

Contemporary diasporas are almost all linked with work relations, as Appadurai mentions. Instead of migrating from the country to the big city, today people are migrating from countries to other countries with better job opportunities. Of course this was the reason why many people have moved away from their home, but it seems that today, when these migrations happen out of free will there is no conflict of where one’s true home is. Cohen mentions that this is why pilgrimage has become bigger and bigger. One can visit ones forefathers’ homeland, see family again, enjoy the nostalgia that being home brings and later go back to one’s current home, where real life happens.

This is the challenge for all of us who study diasporas. Again, it seems that technology allows glimpses of home to be seen wherever immigrants go, there is loss but nothing compared to what first immigrants felt when they fled from war, lived their whole lives in a foreign country and died away from home. The loss can be perceived with the use of the mother tongue which now is restricted to the house, or the adaptation to a new culture that is now lived every day, instead of seen on television or movies, or maybe by restricted family conversations mediated by a computer, rather than face-to-face.

This is why the concept of diaspora and home needed to be changed. Although the Jewish model of diaspora has not ceased to exist, today there has been a change that claims for recognition and also needs to be studied.

2.4 Home for Arab Americans
The issue of home for Arab Americans was never simple, and it became worse because of the tension between these two different cultures, aggravated by the support of the United States that voted for the creation of the state of Israel in 1946. Identity has always been an issue since the community addressed as Arab consisted of many different nationalities who had Arabic as their mother tongue. Suleiman mentions a few of them:

The Arabic-speaking countries today include Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, pre-1948 Palestine and the Palestinians, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Somalia and Djibouti are also members of The League of Arab States and have some Arabic-speaking populations. (1)

When leaving their home, many of these peoples lost their national identities as Arabs which was largely based on language. This is very important because when these people are put on the same category they lose their sense of community and are now obliged to live with other ethnicities that maybe considered themselves as enemies. According to Suleiman:

Imigrants from the Arabic-speaking countries have been referred to and have referred to themselves by different names at different times, including Arabs or Arabians, but until World War II the designation Syrian or Syrian-Lebanese was used most often. The changeability of the name may indicate the absence of a definite and enduring identity. (2)
The relationship between the East and the West has been gradually deteriorating because there was the constant presence of the United States supporting some Arab countries over others as for example, the support of Iraq in detriment of Iran in George Bush’s administration, and later the support of all Arab countries to fight Sadam Hussein’s Iraq in George W. Bush’s administration. This followed the most symbolic event that represents the tension between the Arab culture and the American culture: the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th in 2001. After this event the hatred of the Arab culture has escalated up to something similar to anti-Semitism: a kind of anti-Arabism, which seems to grow stronger everywhere in the world.

However, Suleiman mentions that the Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG) was created in 1967 specifically because of the hatred for the Arab community. Their intention was to mobilize the community and to defend themselves from the anger shown to them because of the cause of Israel. Suleiman also mentions that the

[…] first priority was the need to provide accurate information about the Arab world and Arabs in North America and to distribute this literature to the public at large, wherever access was possible. It sought to educate the Arab countries and people about the true nature of the problems facing the region and to educate Arab intellectuals and political leaders about U.S. and Canadian policies and the American political process. (11)

After that, other organizations were created to advocate for the Arab-American cause, such as The National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA) and the Arab American
Institute (AAI). All of them tried to stand for their cause by working “as a political lobby to defend and advance Arab-American causes” (11).

In spite of the efforts of many organizations, anti-Arabism and the demonization of Arab culture did not end. About this issue it is impossible not to mention one of Edward Said’s most well-known books, *Orientalism*, which is dedicated to explaining how we, from the West, romanticize and sometimes demonize the Eastern culture. Said affirms the Occident is only able to see the Orient through preconceived and exotic ideas. Said claims that for us Westerns there is a certain unity that brings us together and therefore, it sets us apart from the other part of the world. Our vision of the West has been given to us by accounts that already treated the Orient with bias, as Said affirms:

Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he mentions. What he mentions and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact. The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation: as early as Aeschylus's play The Persians the Orient is transformed from a very far distant and often threatening Otherness into figures that are relatively familiar (in Aeschylus's case, grieving Asiatic women). (21)

Orientalism, then, is a kind of set of lens that prevents us from knowing the whole
information about the Orient. What we get acquainted with is only the most exotic, the most shocking, and most of the times the worst of the Eastern culture. As we can see, it poses as a problem for those who live between the Arab American hyphen, from which there is not escape.

Having this perspective in mind, it becomes clear that being recognized as an Arab in America as Jemorah Ramoud’s case, in the novel under analysis, seems to be extremely difficult. Thus, it is no wonder that, at the first blunt encounter with an aggressive prejudice from her boss Portia made Jem want to “go home”. What she means by home is not Jordan necessarily; but anywhere she will not be set aside, ostracized and condemned for looking like a non-Western woman. I argue that this, although a work of fiction, is an account of what happens to many Arab-Americans who are faced with the same experience as Jemorah. Rosina Hassoun wrote an article called “Impact of US Occupation in the Middle East on Arab Americans”, in which she describes what it means to be Arab-American a few years after the World Trade center attacks:

The feelings of extreme alienation and isolation of Arab and Muslim Americans in the midst of the occupation in Iraq and the revelations of the torture abuses there, coupled with feelings of shame (because the US is still, after all, our country too) set up a painful range of emotions. Those of us that carry US passports and want to travel in the Arab world are now painfully aware of the fact that our partial Arab identity does not protect us from being associated with US actions. Our ties and connections to the region may now also be endangered. (18)
Being Arab-American in this moment and in many moments after the terrorist attacks meant not being home anywhere, it meant being associated with the enemy on both sides. Thus, home for these hyphenated peoples does not evoke tranquility, safety or peace, but a constant conflict with themselves. It seemed impossible to be seen beyond stereotypes and prejudices. Chambers argues that these diasporians are

Cut off from the homelands of tradition, experiencing a constantly challenged identity, the stranger is perpetually required to make herself at home in an interminable discussion between a scattered historical inheritance and a heterogeneous present. (6)

Right then, after their attacks, their view on their condition as immigrants also changed, and it was something that other immigrants might not have experienced, as Hassoun explains, “there is a split in the subaltern awareness of Arab Americans from the different waves of migration and their descendants” (18). She claims that the previous waves of immigration did not live under regimes that targeted them as enemies; in fact, it is what happened to Matussem Ramoud. Brah had already written about Hassoun’s ideas:

Clearly, the relationship of the first generation to the place of migration is different from that of subsequent generations, mediated as it is by memories of what was recently left behind, and by the experiences of disruption and displacement as one tries to reorientate, to form new social networks, and learns to negotiate new economic, political and cultural realities. Within each generation the experiences of men and women will also be differently shaped by gender relations. The reconfigurations of
these social relations will not be a matter of direct superimposition of patriarchal forms deriving from the country of emigration over those that obtain in the country to which migration has occurred. Rather, both elements will undergo transformations as they articulate in and through specific policies, institutions and modes of signification. (190)

Although he was aware of his condition as an immigrant, he truly believed in the American dream: he married an Irish-American woman, created a jazz band in which he played the drums and, even after his wife’s death, continued to live in the United States. Matussem was unaware, or pretended to be unaware of the discomfort his identity caused in people; something that could not escape Jemorah’s sight. Matussem’s experience of being Arab in America was completely different from Jemorah’s, because she knew that people associated her with a group of people who were considered unfit to live in the most prominent Western country. The effects of being rejected by the American community and the quest for home for Jemorah, as a representative of many Arab Americans, are topics that I will discuss in Chapter III.

3 - A new home?
Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles. (15) Salman Rushdie - *Imaginary Homelands*.

Brah affirms that “The problematic of ‘home’ and belonging may be integral to the diasporic condition” (189). Nowadays, we are in an ever more borderless world and modernity has allowed more and more people and families, for whatever reasons, to live anywhere in the world.

In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Arjun Appadurai discusses modern diasporas as well as the conditions and the market created for these specific peoples to feel home anywhere. As an attempt to explain this global trend, Appadurai mentions that “deterritorialization” is a common practice today because it “transcends specific territorial boundaries and identities” (49). He also mentions the “homing desire” has created a specific market “which thrive[s] on the need of the relocated population for contact with its homeland” (49). This is where the problem
occurs – this homeland, that is so intensely sought for, “is partially invented, existing only in the imagination of the deterritorialized groups, and it can sometimes become so fantastic and one-sided that provides the fuel for new ethnic conflicts” (49). Provided with this information we are called to think about where, what, or who home is for diasporic peoples of today, and understand the difference between those who have migrated under forceful situations, and those who have done it willingly for other reasons.

In our times, home is not one of the simplest ideas to define, especially considering all of those whose families have gone through the process of any kind of immigration: what happens when others are constantly singling a person out as the one who is different? Or when one is born in a country that does not accept you as a participant of it? Or when one has to, at all times, declare that one is in fact, a part of that particular country? Certainly, people who undergo those situations rightfully begin to question where their identities lay, since it surely can’t be on the place they are living at the moment. This chapter intends to understand the perspective of home for hyphenated peoples by analyzing Arabian Jazz. So, where is home for the main characters of Abu-Jaber’s novel?

The Ramouds’ experience is similar to many families who have only survived because of the processes of exile or immigration. This nearly nomad lifestyle made the family spread around the world. In the novel, we read about Ramouds living in Jordan, in the United Kingdom and in the United States. They identify themselves as Ramouds because of their physical appearance: “black hair combed and oiled to drench the curl out of it, a soft, rising nose, and exquisitely lidded eyes” (323), as well as their
behavior concerning their origin. They are exiles and, through humorous, Abu-Jaber gives us hints of how they coped with having no land of their own.

First generation immigrants, Matussem’s family migrated from Nazareth to Jordan when their homeland was under warfare. According to Matussem, their parents never recovered from this experience, one that became a part of him when he decided to move to the United States. About Matussem’s idea of home, the narrator enlightens us about his thought on Nazareth and Jordan:

[L]ost to the world was Matussem’s private land, like the country his parents tried to leave as they made lives in Jordan, as they let go of their children’s memories and let them grow up as Jordanians. Matussem was only two when he left Nazareth. Still, he knew there had been a Palestine for his parents; its sky formed a ceiling in his sleep. He dreamed of the country that had been, that he was always returning to in his mind. (260)

It is interesting that Abu-Jaber wrote “tried to leave” when writing about the experience Matussem’s parents had leaving Nazareth. I would argue that the attempt to leave Nazareth has not been successfully accomplished by Matussem’s parents or his sisters. It is a common feeling in almost every first generation immigrant who had the experience of leaving the place where they were born. When forced to leave, it seems that these families never fully recover. Their personalities, as well as their identities, are connected to that land, which had to be abandoned; leaving it means leaving a part of themselves as well.

Edward Said published Reflections on Exile and Other Essays in which we can have a personal account of a prominent theorist about Diaspora issues. These essays
help us to understand what it means to be considered an exile, rather than a refugee, as
the Ramouds were in Jordan. Said mentions that:

Exile is originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished,
the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being
an outsider. Refugees, on the other hand, are a creation of the twentieth-
century state […] suggesting large herds of innocence and bewildered
people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas ‘exile’ carried
with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality. (144)

His account is one written out of solitude, as the account we find with classic
diasporians. Said writes about his condition with a grim point of view. According to
him there will always be missing parts in his life. In this perspective this idea is very
similar to Bachelard’s limbo, which does not see anything positive with being away
from home. Said also mentions that:

Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. They generally
do not have armies or states, although they are often in search of them.
Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives,
usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or
a restored people. (140-1)

When such diasporic experiences happen under harsh circumstances the
diasporic subject, such as Matussem, Fatima and their parents, often feel as if they
were robbed of a life they planned for themselves in their homeland. They are left only
with themselves and the hope that someday they will be able to belong to a land once
again. This is why in Diaspora Studies we often read about the “myth of return”, which
is not always a possibility, and it does not always correspond to the expectations when returning to their homeland.

These expectations resonate with what Salman Rushdie described as his “imaginary home”. Rushdie himself wrote about how different his imaginary India was from the actual country and how fertile his mind was to create a land that is so alive in his imagination. The same can be seen when studying the Ramouds’ experience – the Nazareth Matussem “was always returning to” only existed in his mind.

Adding to the feeling of displacement there was also a constant fear of what might happen to the integrity of Ramoud family. Feeling as her family is made of exiles, Fatima shows us how concerned she was in regards to their preservation. She spent her life trying to reinforce the qualities of the family’s morals and traditions. It is important that, despite living in the United States, her family continues to be thought of Arabs and their ideology must be kept intact. We are able to see that feature when the narrator voices Fatima’s concern about her family and friends:

She lived among Americans, in places they had built, among, their people, but despite this, she wanted to keep herself, her family, and a few friends apart from the rest. She wanted what the Americans had, but at the same time, she would never relax her hold on herself. It was not appropriate to mingle. Americans had the money, but Arabs, ah! They had the food, the culture, the etiquette, the ways of being and seeing and understanding how life was meant to be lived. (360)

Fatima is also the character that explains and exposes some of those fears of being an exile. I would also argue that she is the one who demonstrates the hardships of
being a woman of a poor family in Jordan. When arguing with Melvina, Nassir and Jemorah about the need of getting married, Fatima reveals secrets that haunted her all her life. First, she admits assisting her mother in the killing of the sisters who were born after Matussem:

You think you can go just cross the ocean and wipe our hands like the Roman King? [...] Babies I buried with my mother watching, so this rest could live, so my baby brother can eat, so he can move away and never know about it. [...] praise Allah he [Matussem] was born so fortunate!

Born a man, not to know the truth. (334)

As we can read, the passage shows us a grave resentment with the conditions Fatima’s family was put under – she feels that the true culprit of her tragic experience and her sisters’ death was the forced migration which resulted in not having a home, food, or money to afford any more lives. She also blames herself for not being able to convince her mother to make a different decision and spare her sisters’ lives. To increase the feeling of guilt, she was the one who had to assist her mother in the burial of her newborn sisters.

A second tragic experience Fatima underwent was a kidnapping which ended with her life being spared. Fatima did not feel relief, but rather it increased her resentment towards God, since she feels her life should be taken away because of what she did to her sisters, obeying her mother’s orders. Fatima thinks her life was supposed to be taken because of her foul acts:

When I am sixteen, and foolish girl, standing outside alone in the dangerous street, in Jerusalem, the Israelis come for me; this is my
punishment, at the hands of God. I think they will kill me. It will be starving to death, for all the food those babies would eaten. It is on their hands now, in the camp of my enemy, bad place. I think, now and end to my bad thoughts in this room of theirs without doors. It is nothing to the room I live in, in myself! [...] And they let me live. After four days alone with misery, I am let go of their prison, I am left even by my enemies. I am returned to die again, again, again. (337)

By sharing these experiences Fatima is trying to make Nassir and Melvina understand that there is a reason for her to hold tight to the traditions of her people, and for her to desire Jemorah’s marriage with such intensity. Through Jemorah’s marriage, Fatima would fulfill a role she would never be able to with her younger sisters. It would mean that her sins against her sisters would be forgiven and that her moving away was not only about abandoning and forgetting these terrible memories, but making amends with her past. This last migration could be vindication.

Melvina, feeling sorry for her aunt, mentions: “They forgive you, they all forgive you [...] They’re here, in the air, all around us” (336). Later, when Matussem visits Jordan and discovers what had happened, he is asked to send Fatima a message:

We laid the babies to rest [...] You must tell Fatima. It’s over. There is no one left to protect, nothing to do now but mourn and reflect. We want her to come back, to visit and see her home and family again. To know that it’s over. (354)

Moving to the United States gives Fatima the chance to avoid the trauma she had lived; even though Jordan brings back awful memories, Fatima knows very well who her
people are and where her home is. She moved from Jordan to take care of her younger brother and, as mentioned before, make sure her nieces would marry good Arab boys.

However, when her brother moves to Euclid and marries Nora, he creates a new home, one that is not based on the Arab tradition, or on a connection to the land, or even cultural affiliation. When Matussem marries Nora, his home is based on the love they had for each other. Later, Matussem would incorporate the American culture, in his own way, and this is when the comic side of the novel appears.

Matussem’s attempt to “blend in” within the community of Euclid resulted in an exaggerated behavior. We are able to read about Matussem’s cultural perspective in two humorous situations. One, when he decides to have a collection of flamingos, or Disney characters in his yard. According to the narrator:

Every May since they moved to the country, [Matussem] went through fits of exuberance, driving to the local hardware store and bringing home lawn decorations of deer, flamingos, and Disney characters the way some people bring home stray animals. The front lawn was littered with cartoon figures and exotic birds. Matussem didn’t arrange them with any particular design, but sprinkles them at random, even propped them out in the fields and weeds, much to the delight of Peachy across the street.

(107)

Another when he speaks with his neighbor Hilma Otts:

[…] her and Matussem’s conversations were amiably conducted across wide spaces, usually across the street or over the aisles of Bumble bee Groceries. Matussem considered this distancing another of the myriad
American eccentricities he’d discovered since he arrived. (89)

Despite his difficulties Matussem has successfully created a home where he is able to negotiate his Arabness and his adopted Americaness. As I have argued, Matussem’s love for Nora is the reason why he became so attached to Euclid – it is what is left of his relationship with Nora, what ties him to the love of his life. It is also what allowed Matussem to dream of Nora every day, helping him to live his life and raise his daughters as well. What troubles Matussem does not seem to be the distance from Jordan or his family, but his distance from Nora. In the very beginning of the novel the narrator tells us that every time Matussem opened his eyes he was baffled with Nora’s death (Abu-Jaber, 1), he could not believe that she had passed away because

    His wife’s face was imprinted on his consciousness. He thought of her as he drove to work in the mornings through ice and rain. His sense of loss was sometimes so potent that he became disoriented. (1)

The narrator also mentions that “Nora had been his history once; now only the land was left” (260). Leaving Euclid, then, meant leaving his history with Nora and his sentimental home. A place where he could, by playing drums, stay in contact with his wife, since:

    He believed that any music was prayer, sending a message out to the sky. Nora was always his audience; she was over there listening. He knew that his drumming – its sound and intensity – had the power to penetrate the heavens and earth. (16)

As we know, Matussem and Fatima migrated to the United States and show almost no confusion to where their home is. One could argue that both have a clear
idea of where their home is, and because of that, they do not suffer from the anxieties of not knowing who they are, and what they are supposed to do with their lives.

There is evidence to believe that their idea of home is closely linked with people they chose to relate to or the ones they allow into their lives. I would, then, argue that the construction of “home” seems to be much more concerned with the emotional/relational bonds than territorial bonds. Brah explains this relationship:

[…] the relationship of the first generation to the place of migration is different from that of subsequent generations, mediated as it is by memories of what was recently left behind, and by the experiences of disruption and displacement as one tries to reorientate, to form new social networks, and learns to negotiate new economic, political and cultural realities. (190)

Matussem’s and Fatima’s experience differ from Jemorah’s and Melvina’s since he and his sister have migrated twice: the first time from Nazareth to Jordan, and the second from Jordan to the United States. After leaving the East, which seemed to occur in peaceful conditions, Matussem’s and Fatima’s lives were not paralyzed as when they moved to Jordan. The possibility of returning to Jordan was never an issue, and during the novel there are several moments when some family members come from Jordan to visit the Ramouds in Euclid.

Matussem is also persuaded to visit his family in the Old Country, as they call it. Melvina tries to convince her father to visit Jordan by saying “This is your homeland, your people, this is a journey to your past, to all our pasts” (259). Matussem does not see any importance in visiting his past, because for him Euclid was his
“misplaced past” and “Nora has been his history” (260) from which he did not want to leave.

James A. Tuedio, in his article “Ambiguities in the Locus of Home: Exilic Life and the Space of Belonging”, writes about home in the field of philosophy and states that home is a singular creation, meaning: each one of us signifies our own idea or ideal about home. He also mentions that:

How we make a home will depend on the choices we make concerning where to “give and take” with regard to contingencies and vulnerabilities in our life. The home we make will also depend on our give and take with respect to the needs and desires of those we choose to include or exclude from our homespace. The more home is organized around relations with others, the more the continuity of the homespace will depend on the efficacy of those relations. In effect, the gathering force of home becomes a contextual frame of reference in support of the various interpersonal relations upon which it is dependent. To the extent that home provides contextual support for the various relationships upon which it depends for its continuity, the process of homemaking would seem to require a constant vigilance to the qualitative dynamics of the interpersonal relations upon which the preservation of homespace depends. (7)

Related to what Tuedio affirmed, Matussem and Fatima have created their homespace in Euclid and have continued to live their lives despite their ethnic affiliation. He has a jazz band and every time he played his drums he felt that “he was home, at last truly home” (352). Fatima is obsessed with being one of “The Lady Pontificals” of the
Syrian Orthodox Church. Both of them have managed to maintain and create other interpersonal relationships to give themselves the opportunity to build a present home that does not exclude their old home, their identity or beliefs. They have created a home that is functional and it does not stop Fatima and Matussem from moving forward with their lives. The same can be seen in Melvina’s attitude regarding her identity and home.

Melvina, as her father and aunt, also succeeds in creating her own home, despite experiencing the same as her older sister: Jemorah. She seems to have a pragmatic way to deal with her life, in opposition to Jemorah, who is more concerned about her ethnic/cultural differences. According to Melvina’s supervisors, “she was ‘all nurse’” (13) and when Jemorah wonders about her own life she feels jealous of her sister because Melvina loved her job. She has allowed her job to define her personality, her self, which allowed her to create a home within her hyphenated status.

The narrator tells us that Melvina began to play nurse “when she was three, bandaging her older sister in dish towels” (133). Not bothered by her status of “less than American”, Melvie is the one who has clear vision about her condition as hyphenated and the impossibility to perfectly belong to one world. Her self-assurance comes from a memory of her mother saying: “I want my girls to be free” (308). I believe that this memory and her detachment from the pressures of being a good Arab girl made Melvina exactly what her mother expected her to be: a free woman.

While reading the novel, we see that Melvie is the one who pushes both Matussem and Jemorah to move away from their comfort zone: Matussem is forced to go back to Jordan to see his family and Jem is forced to ponder about having a life of
her own. Melvie does not allow her sister only to exist, and not live up to her potential. She is the moving force, sometimes a literal one, who makes this family make amends with their tragic past and accept the possibilities the future will bring.

Melvina’s experience of being hyphenated does not seem to be a problem. Her identity as a nurse surpasses the difficulties of being “Arab-American”. She is able to relate to other people who do not come from the same background, and she does not live any emotional turmoil concerning her Arab self. Quite the contrary, because of her pragmatic nature she sees the country she was born with an impressive clarity. She mentions to Jemorah:

Americans don’t like anybody! Americans don’t like Americans […]
And what you are talking about, you are and American. Where do you think Americans come from, when they’re not captured on reservation?
They come from other places. That’s what an American is. (328)

Being recognized not as Arab or American but as a tough nurse shifted Melvie’s experience from a painful story of rejection and loss, to one that has the respect and recognition of others around her. This seems to be the main difference between Melvina and Jemorah.

Jemorah, differently from her younger sister, cannot manage to create any other relationship outside her family, and cannot overcome the loss of her mother. Her friends are her sister’s friends and the image of her mother’s death haunts her with regularity. She compares her life with her mother’s and feels guilty because she is unable to emulate it. Jem is not only haunted by the memory of Nora: she is also haunted with the life her aunt wants her to have. I would argue that these discrepant
ideas created a halt – a gap between real life and the vision of a life she wants to live. It suits her to live in Euclid, a place she makes no connections, has no friends and has no life. Euclid for Jemorah is a “non-place”. The idea of the “non-places” was coined by French anthropologist Marc Augé in the book entitled Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity. Augé makes a distinction between “place” and “non-place”. “Place”, also called “anthropological place”, is:

[the location] of identity, of relations and of history. The layout of the house, the rules of residence, the zoning of the village, placements of altars, configuration of public open spaces, land distribution, correspond for every individual to a system of possibilities, prescriptions and interdicts whose content is both spatial and social. To be born is to be born in a place, to be 'assigned to residence'. In this sense the actual place of birth is a constituent of individual identity. (52-3)

And “non-place” is “a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity” (77). Although he does not write about fiction or the diasporic experience, this concept of a “non-place”, a place of those who are in transit and where there is no creation of identity, can be used to study this novel because it discusses the importance of belonging to a community.

Euclid is described as a place where we can only find outcasts, and it becomes a non-place for Jemorah as she is unable to relate to anyone outside her family. One example of this was Jemorah’s memory of the children with whom she studied. She remembers that, of all the children she went to school with, some “dropped out or got pregnant, went to juvenile homes, foster homes, penitentiaries, turned up poverty-
stricken, welfare-broken, sick, crazy, or drunk” (93). Jemorah also talks about the children who lived in Euclid and her inability to belong with them: “[I] didn’t fit in even with them, those children that nobody wanted” (94). Euclid is not described as a place where people function as a community; it is rather a place where the marginalized peoples co-exist, since there is no place for them within the American society.

To summarize the idea of a non-place, Augé mentions: “Clearly the word ‘non-place’ designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces” (94). I would argue that Euclid was a place of transit, for Jemorah, and it seems that no one grew roots there because of its inhospitable atmosphere. It is the place of work and forgetting, it is also described as violent, filled with poverty.

There, Jemorah was able to put on hold the mourning for the tragedy of losing Nora who is, as I see it, the epitome of home for them. Jemorah spends her life in that non-place, which for Augé is a place of solitude. Living in that place where she didn’t belong was a big problem to the main character. She is the one who suffers because of her inability to belong either to America or to Jordan. Moreover, Augé concludes that “in a world of supermodernity [the one we live now] people are always, and never at home” (109). Jemorah also came to that conclusion in a moment of desperation to define to which culture she belonged to, and when she was told that what she wanted was impossible, Jemorah questioned: “So it shouldn’t matter if I choose America or Jordan […] It’s the same either way” (330). She still cannot accept that having a
unified vision of the world is impossible for her, and those were born in a culturally diverse family.

This is one of the main problems Jemorah has with herself. She does not know how to live having what Lisa Majaj calls “a split-vision”, which is when an Arab-American gazes both at the United States and the Middle East. Such difficulties have paralyzed Jemorah’s life. She has no will of her own and, as a consequence, no life at all. It is as if her life had stopped when her mother died and her “Americaness” became a problem. Even though she was born and is living in the United States, Nora’s death seems to have caused this break, and ever since it happened Jemorah can only see herself as Arab. In fact, aware of the paralysis Jemorah is under, Matussem encourages her to move – to get out of their house, accept the marriage proposal from Gil Sesame, an old classmate, and move to Utah. Matussem encourages Jemorah by questioning:

Jemmie, wait […] I’m afraid you are waiting for some signs from me, for me to say that you are suffered enough. Well you are, all right? You are suffered enough” […] is like you staying at these crummy job to prove something that don’t needs proving. He wants to take you to Utah, right? […] Utah or Jordan. Take pick. (38-9)

Matussem sees that Jemorah is not able to make a decision that would include leaving her family, her house and with that, all Jemorah believes that defines her as a person.

Tuedio discusses the materialization of identity, which creates the feeling of belonging. However he claims that even having a materialized identity one may feel like an outsider; for him, being defined by the place we were born does not prove to be enough to avoid any identity questioning:
People with materialized identities may still find themselves yearning for a lifestyle, for company, for social nourishment, for the vitality of community, and above all for meaning, belonging, and a sense of place. As self-evident traditions of home-life become less and less accessible, we become increasingly attached to a nostalgic sense of the meaning of home. In the process, we may anchor this sense of home in an appropriation of invented traditions, most noticeably when our connection to self-evident traditions begins to wane and take with it our sense of homeplace. (5)

As Jemorah does not feel at home and longs for acceptance, she does exactly what Tuedio describes: anchors her sense of home in Arab traditions. At this point in the novel, Jemorah can only define herself by the absences in her life; for instance, she does not have a fulfilling job, nor the “right look”, or her mother’s presence, her mother’s love, or a place where people look like her. She also lacks the desire to overcome these problems. Jem is not ready to let go of the differences to create her own meaning of home – one where all these apparent opposite ideas will coexist in harmony.

Jemorah declares her frustration with her split-vision by accusing her mother of leaving too early, not giving Jemorah a chance to understand what it meant to be American:

I’m tired of fighting … You don’t understand. I’m tired of fighting it out here. I don’t have much idea of what it is to be Arab, but that’s what the family is always saying we are. I want to know what part of me is Arab. I
haven’t figured out what part is our mother, either. It’s like she abandoned us, left us alone to work it all out. (307)

She is caught between two completely different visions of the world; one represented by her mother and the other represented by her aunt. As I affirmed before, she has not learnt that to be comfortable in her own skin she constantly needs to negotiate her affiliations; this is the only way she can survive being hyphenated. As she is reasoning about this inability to overcome her issues, she states:

I’ve spent so much of my life not daring to look up, look around at what there might be for me. I’ve spent so much time trying to please her [Nora], to guess what she wanted. And listening to Aunt Fatima telling me to be a good girl. (308)

However, she fails to understand the advice her mother gives her when she was a little child: “Your home is here. Oh, you’ll travel, I want you to. But you always know where your home is” (78). Nora tells Jemorah where she wanted her home to be, after listening to Matussem’s sisters talking about the “Old Country” and marriage. She also explained to her girls how they should understand their condition as daughters of an American mother and Arab father.

If we were to discuss the symbolism of the mother for both Arab and American culture we will find that, usually, it is the mother who makes the bridge between the child and the outside world. Normally girls, who are deprived of living with their mothers, have much more difficulty to construe their identity. After all, the role model for what being a woman rests on the shoulders of the mother. Not only that but, the sense of community, belonging, and much of the cultural heritance is passed on from
mother to daughter, especially in the Arab culture.

Jemorah also faces another problem: rejection because of her Arabness as she mentions: “I don’t fit in. I haven’t put together a life. [...] I’m so tired of being a child, being good, wanting people to like me. They don’t like me. They don’t like Arabs” (328). To expand her problems, the recollections Jem has about her childhood are almost always of rides on the school bus and about the rejection she felt all her life. The narrator tells us “Jem did not let herself remember. There was no room left in her to think about any of it; she knew those children had been right. She didn’t fit in even with them, those children that nobody wanted” (93-4). She mentions that those children, her schoolmates, were considered ‘white-trash’ and she felt worse than them. Later, in a conversation with her sister and her cousin, she mentions: “It's not enough to be born here, or to live here, or speak the language. You've got to seem right” (328).

This quest for her identity became more problematic after her talk with Portia, her boss, who knew the girls’ mother during her teenage and college years. This conversation opened Jemorah’s eyes to an impossible barrier to cross: prejudice. And it has highly influenced her on the decision she would make later, pushing her to stop “holding back, losing herself in dreams” (299) and embrace her “Arabness”.

Portia represents the stereotypical white American who believes the only way to save Jemorah from her tainted blood and succeed is to deny who she is, change everything about herself and become white or at least associated with another immigrant culture considered to be more acceptable for the white community in Euclid. Portia feels the urgency to “save” Jem from Nora’s “mistake” to marry a non-white man and does not measure words to try to convince Jemorah to stay in her job in the
hospital and become a respectable nearly-white woman. She tries to sway Jemorah using her mother’s death as an example not to be followed:

Your mother used to be such a good, good girl. She was so beautifully white, pale as a flower. And then, I don’t know […] She met your father in the second year and she just wanted attention […] This man, he couldn’t speak a word of our language, didn’t have a real job. And Nora was so-like a flower, a real flower […] I know for a fact her poor mother-your grandmother- had to ask for a picture of the man for her parish priest to show around to prove he wasn’t a Negro. Though he might as well have been, really who could tell the difference, the one lives about the same as the other […] You know, it’s not too late for you, Oh sure you’re tainted, your skin color. A damn shame. But I’ve noticed that in certain lights it’s worse than others. Your mother could have made such beautiful children – they could have been so lovely, like she was, like a white rose. Still it could definitely have been worse for you, what with his skin. Now, if you were to change your name, make it Italian maybe, or even Greek, that might help some. I’m telling you this for love of your mother. I feel forever I might have saved her when that Arab man took her and you kids back to that horrible country of his over there. It’s a wonder you’ve survived that place, so evil, primitive, filled with disease! […] I’m telling you, Jemorah Ramoud, you father and all his kind aren’t better than Negroes, that’s why he hasn’t got any ambition and why he’ll be stuck in that same job in the basement for the rest of his life… And
now you can go that way, too, or you can come under my wing and let me educate you, really get you somewhere. We’ll try putting some pink lipstick on you maybe highlight your hair, make you American. (293-95)

Jemorah continued to be paralyzed allowing Portia to continue voicing her opinions about Jem’s life and her new romantic relationship with Ricky Ellis:

I love back talk; it tells me so much about a person. It explains why you’re in heat over garbage like that Ellis kid. White trash worse than lazy darkskins. Multiplying your mother’s mistake. That’s what it leads to breeding worse and worse trash. Here I am offering you a real chance and your mind’s too trash-low even to see it [...] This is my whole point, I want to cave whatever of your mother’s clean blood is left. For your own good, I can’t let you quit. Don’t you see? You stay here, we’ll work together, I’ll scrub all the scum right off you, make you as pure and whole as I can. (295)

After this conversation Jemorah finally came to a realization that Portia, and as a consequence, the people she represented: Americans, could never be her people. America could never be her home, after all, a home is supposed to make you feel complete, to foster one’s culture, and not force one to make changes which disowns everything Jemorah knew and believed. She was struck by the animosity in which Portia described her father and his background. Jem was also amazed with the solution Portia had to her problem which was to make her whiter and also to forget about the community and the values which were given to her by father all her life.

This excerpt allows us to see the amount of prejudice there is surrounding Arabs
and their culture. It also gives us an account of how difficult it was for Jemorah to relate to her American side. It is important to remember that neither Jemorah nor Melvina had contact with their American side since their mother died when they were very young, and Nora’s parents blamed Matussem for Nora’s death and abandoned their grandchildren.

Portia made more evident that Jemorah did not fit within that community and the conversation she had encouraged Jem to decide to go back to Jordan, as a desperate attempt to return to the place where she could be with her people, her mother and consequently, discover her true identity. Jemorah decided that she wanted to leave the United States. She was convinced that it was necessary for her to marry her cousin Nassir and “go home”. Even though Melvina was against it and argued to change her sister’s mind, Jemorah affirms that she does not know what the spirit of her mother wants her to do, and continues by saying:

I don’t want to keep hanging on to a place or a dream that comes from someone who is not around anymore. I’ll marry and move to Jordan. I’ll be free because I’ll be with people who have my name and who look like me. (309)

Melvina does not accept her sister’s decision to move to Jordan, yielding to her family’s pressure but is happy that Jemorah finally had the courage to make a decision for herself. Melvina, then, helps her to quit her job at the hospital and explains that life is about making changes; she affirms:

Even our father, Mr. Chicken, finally disembarked. Granted, your escape to Jordan is a feebleminded plot, but I thought the idea might have
inspired you with enough gumption just to get you out and look around.

Life is change, flux, movement. You move or you shrivel up. Case closed. (313)

This change Melvina was talking about did not only entail changing jobs, but changing the perspective of life, changing how her sister lived her life. Jem chastised herself because she was different, and could not see her hyphenation or split vision as a positive trait of her personality.

Soon after her talk to Portia, Jemorah accepted to marry her cousin, partially because they were already childhood friends. Nassir and Jemorah became friends when they were very young and Jem’s family went visiting Jordan. They used to walk together and play with each other, even though they did not spoke the same language.

This friendship became stronger after Jem’s mother died. Nassir spent all his time beside his cousin as if he was the only one who really knew the gravity of what had happen to his cousin and her family. After Matussem and his girls left Jordan, they never saw Nassir again, so it came as a big surprise when he appeared sitting on Matussem’s chair when Jemorah came home. At the time Nassir came to visit, Matussem was visiting their family in Jordan and Jemorah did not take long to recognize his cousin, after all he was a “man bearing the unmistakable features of the Ramoud clan” (322-3).

Nassir is an educated man who left Jordan do pursue an academic career in universities from the West. He has a “graduate degree in science and anthropology at Cambridge and Oxford respectively” (327) and has come to Harvard to begin a post-doctorate degree. Because he has lived a long time in London and now is living in the
United States, Nassir understands Jemorah’s sense of dislocation, but he also knows the reason why Jemorah wants to change her life. Nassir mentions:

[…] maybe you believe, dear friend, that is has all been waiting for you since you left its doorstep in 1970, that you’ll return and find the great peace of tomb still there, that you can go back to my grandmother’s home and wander without responsibility or care. Just as you’ve preserved it in your memory. (328)

Nassir explains that he is not denying marrying and moving to Jordan. On the contrary, he wants Jem to move to Jordan aware of situation that awaits her and also he wants to make her understand the possible real motif for her to make that change:

Don’t think I have lost my allegiance to our time together. For me that in itself is enough reason to marry you, if that is indeed wish. […] Say the word, open sesame, and it is my command. But first you must understand, sweet, maybe-betrothed, that your childhood is not back there waiting for you to reenter its halls. (331)

Accepting the arranged marriage to her cousin, Jem and Nassir have a long conversation about the accident that made him lose one eye and their past together in Jordan – when Nora died. Nassir mentions:

I’m not saying I it wasn’t hard, but merely senseless. I can’t put a reason to it any more than I can to your mother’s death. If Fatima thinks she can look to the home country and find her meaning there, then I don’t begrudge her. But most of the people who come to America, the immigrants, they think that this is just another place like home. A thing
they will be able to hold and understand. It’s not that easy. (339)

Jemorah then tells him that she understands what he is saying, but she would like to live in a place she could call home: “I think I know […] how important a place is, and the need for a particular land, a location, for anyone to live, to have that land to call home. I know that’s what I want” (339). Nassir instigates Jemorah to think about this connection to a land and the importance it really has on her life:

How many people know, after all, what it is to really live in a particular place, as you say. To have your past and the past of your past tied up in a patch of land, to walk on the bones of your buried dead and hear your name in every particle of dirt under the wheels of tanks and trucks as if under the force of the ocean. Who can know it who hasn’t lived it? This is what our family has lived. We spring from exiles and refugees, Jemorah, you and I. We go on, to be sure, but the place of our origins is swept away. (340)

This passage also echoes Salman Rushdie’s *Imaginary Homelands*. It enlightens us to the difficulties most diasporic subjects undergo and to a possible solution to the matter of home. Rushdie expounds:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge - which gives rise to profound uncertainties - that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that
was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.

(10)

Said wrote about the feelings exiles have about their condition. He also wrote about a particular feeling of jealousy felt by them and it can be relatable to what Jemorah wants to feel when mourning about her Arab-Americanness and her inability to fit with one culture. He asserts:

Exiles look at non-exiles with resentment. *They* belong in their surroundings, you feel, whereas an exile is always out of place. What is it like to be born in a place, to stay and live there, to know that you are of it, more or less forever?(143)

Jemorah has yet to understand that there is no home, in the sense that she is looking for; it is all in her imagination. This place where she will feel whole, understood and recognized comes with a difficult negotiation. Jemorah’s situation can be explained by Sara Ahmed who writes about the paradoxical feelings immigrants have towards their home. Ahmed posits:

[...] ‘the past’ becomes associated with a home that it is impossible to inhabit, and be inhabited by, in the present. The question then of being at home or leaving home is always a question of memory, of the discontinuity between past and present. (343)

Ahmed also posits some interesting ideas that can helps us with the understanding of the connection that Jemorah has to her home and her imagined Jordan. She mentions:
Interestingly, it is the ‘real’ home, the very space from which one imagines oneself to have originated, and in which one projects the self as both homely and original, that is the most unfamiliar: it is here that one is a guest, relying on the hospitality of others. It is this home which, in the end, becomes Home through the very failure of memory […] The very failure of individual memory is compensated for by collective memory.

(330)

I believe that this is what happens to Jemorah. Her memories of Jordan come from the stories her father and her aunt have told her. She idealizes her home just because she has almost no memories of herself and worst, she has no idea of how it is for an adult woman to live in Jordan, since she only lived there as a child. Her experience is similar to Rushdie’s accounts on his imaginary India:

[…] my India was just that: 'my' India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions. I tried to make it as imaginatively true as I could, but imaginative truth is simultaneously honorable and suspect, and I knew that my India may only have been one to which I (who am no longer what I was, and who by quitting Bombay never became what perhaps I was meant to be) was, let us say, willing to admit I belonged. (10)

Jemorah believes that her true home is in a place where she does not look different and, after everything that had happened to her in the United States and the death of her mother in Jordan, she is convinced Jordan can be her home, as she mentions:
I only know that I want to change my life. A new start. It would be difficult in Jordan at first, I know. I don’t expect miracles. But I might fit in so many ways, a general, public way, where I could walk in the streets and ride busses and go into stores and feel like it’s okay. There’s all our family there. I wouldn’t be such an outsider. (330)

She also insists on marrying Nassir so that they can later move to Jordan to “be free because I’ll be with people who have my name and who look like me” (309). Her illusion is soon shattered by her cousin who explains to Jemorah that it is useless to struggle against her hyphenated nature:

And I’m telling you … this ‘home’ that you seek is not there, not in the sense that you mean, not even close. People like you and Melvina, you won’t have what your grandparents might have had. To be the first generation in this country, with another culture always looming over you, you are the ones who are born homeless, Bedouins, not immigrant your immigrant parents. As you and your sister just said, everything and nothing. You’re torn in two. You get two looks at a world. You may never have a perfect fit, but you see far more than most ever do. Why not accept it?(330)

Nassir plays an important role in Jemorah’s decision and her new perspective about her split-vision. He states that he is a “professional nomad” (342), and explains to her cousin that she will not fit in one or the other culture because she belongs to both at the same time – Jemorah has the perspective that most people will never have – she has her split vision of the world, as Majaj affirms that “As hyphenated Americans we
seek to integrate the different facets of ourselves, our experience, and our heritage into a unified whole. But the schism in our vision often affects our balance” (67).

Jemorah has to translate not only herself but her beliefs, actions, decisions, always taking into consideration both parts of the world represented by her and her sister: Arab-American culture, not one or another, but both. What Nassir tells Jemorah echoes what Iris Marion Young, in the chapter entitled “House and Home” from the book On Female Body Experience, affirms about the difference between nostalgia and remembrance of home and its preservation:

Thus the activity of preservation should be distinguished from the nostalgia accompanying fantasies of a lost home from which the subject is separated and to which he seeks to return. Preservation entails remembrance, which is quite different from nostalgia. Where nostalgia can be constructed as a longing flight from the ambiguities and disappointments of everyday life, remembrance faces the open negativity of the future by knitting a steady confidence in who one is from the pains and joys of the past retained in the things among which one dwells. Nostalgic longing is always for an elsewhere. Remembrance is the affirmation of what brought us here. (143)

Matussem, Fatima and Melvina, as well as many other immigrants, have already solved this puzzle and understood the need to make their home a place where they can remember their past and still make way for what is to come; they also understand that their difference is not what defines them – but it is what they construct with these differences. They bond with other peoples and are not haunted with the challenges they
faced before getting to Euclid. As an example we see that Matussem seems to understand that there is no harm in moving, and he suggests he would do it again if he hadn’t found his home, the place he and his deceased wife Nora chose to live. As he explains, “Believe me, sometimes, I don’t know why I move to these balls-freezer place. Only your mother can get me to stay in these refrigerator” (39).

I would argue that the love they feel for Nora thrusts Matussem and Jemorah into different actions. Matussem is driven to stay in Euclid to keep his memories of the time they spent together. He is also driven to new experiences that could include other and different people. Jemorah, on the other hand, is driven to move to Jordan in hopes that she can, somehow, change the tragic fate her mother had. Jemorah is nostalgic about her past and cannot see a future for herself without the presence, even if imaginary, of her mother. By moving to Jordan, Jemorah would feel complete again because what connected her to America was her mother and ever since she died a greater gap was created by the hyphen in her Arab-Americanness.

Jemorah is not only torn because of her mother’s death but mainly because of herself. She slowly understands that the past cannot paralyze her life. Stories of tragedy are very common in her family, because all of them have experienced disasters: Jemorah, Melvina and Matussem lost Nora, Nassir lost his eye, Fatima buried her younger sisters, and Matussem’s parents had to leave their home to preserve their lives. However, none of them stopped pursuing and accomplishing change in their lives. Their past did not define them, and they overcame many difficulties while still honoring their past. About the preservation of home, Young affirms that:

Homemaking consists in preserving the things and their meaning as
anchor to shifting personal and group identity. But the narratives of the history of what brought us here are not fixed, and part of the creative and moral task of preservation is to reconstruct the connections of the past to the present in light of new events, relationships, and political understandings. (154)

After understanding that there is a possibility to have a past and a future, and that one does not eliminate the other, Jemorah decides to accept Melvina’s suggestion and applies for Stanford University. Jemorah made the decision to pursue an academic career after two men, who were invited to have a snack at the Ramoud’s picnic showed discomfort when realizing they were eating with Arabs. After eating and drinking with the Ramouds one of them asked “So what are you all anyway? I-talians? Wet-backs?” Matussem told them they were Arabs from Jordan one of the boys said “Arabs, Jesus fucking Christ. And we ate their food” (361). Jemorah would study this hatred she was all too familiar with, and realized that living in Euclid allowed her to know what was needed to begin her studies. She said: “Euclid gave her the knowledge of the poorest of the poor, living like a secret pulse inside the country” (362). She also wanted to study her home, her family, because to her:

This was worth studying, she thought, things that were hidden inside the crust of the earth and sky, the things that lay hidden in her people: her father’s heart in the drums, her sister’s ministering fingers. (362)

It seems that only by studying the phenomenon of diaspora Jemorah will be free from the stigma she carries. She seems to understand that her split-vision will permit Jemorah to study from a different perspective: the perspective of the hyphen. Jemorah
sees both sides and has a chance to study it better when entering college in California. This understanding allows a rebirth to a new life and a new home. This home, now, has room for not only Arabs or Arab-Americans but also people from other backgrounds who are open to relationships regardless of nationalities, beliefs, and cultural differences.
Conclusion

In this dissertation I studied Diana Abu-Jaber’s novel Arabian Jazz in order to demonstrate that the idea of home has become more complex than the mere issue of locality. I also tried to associate the change of the concept of home with the change of the concept of diaspora. For such I, firstly, demonstrated the differences between classic and contemporary diaspora which is closely connected with the idea of the locality of home. In my research I could find that the classic diaspora longs for homecoming while contemporary diaspora does not.

I was able to come to this conclusion by putting into perspective classic diaspora and its idea of returning to the homeland, seeing the host-country as temporary and seeing the diaspora experience as painful, and one that only entails loss. Then I used as examples of classic diaspora the Jewish, Armenian and Palestinian experience and showed how they have kept their identity by the use of religious institutions, maintenance of the language and a keen sense of community.

When contrasting classic to contemporary diaspora I could see that the importance of religious institutions and language have remained. However, contemporary diasporians do not seek the return to their homeland, therefore, they were free to create a new life for them and assimilate much more of the American lifestyle without giving up on their cultural identity. Most of the contemporary diaspora and the assimilation to the new way of living also brought an identity problem. This also happened to first Arab Americans of classic diasporians, which is the main topic of my dissertation.
By analyzing the main characters of the novel – Fatima, Matussem, Melvina and Jemorah, I could see that all of them together, as well as their views on homeland and host-land, could be seen as representatives of the changes in the idea of diaspora and home.

I concluded that Fatima could be seen as a representative of the classic diaspora: she sees the United States as a temporary home and longs for the day she will be able to permanently move to Jordan, after her nieces are all married to good Arab boys. She sees the United States as a place that lacks all the qualities Jordan has, and because of it can never be called home. Fatima struggles to maintain her Arab culture and is adamant that her family does the same. Fatima’s diasporic experience could be seen as classic because it happened with pain, loss and struggle, a pain so strong that not even her escape from the East could ease. Fatima was haunted by the loss of her sisters, her parent’s home and her responsibility to take care of her younger brother Matussem and her nieces Jemorah and Melvina.

Matussem could be seen as a representative of those who migrated for economic purposes and are thankful for the opportunity to build a better life. Matussem accepted Euclid as his home because of his relationship with Nora, which has impacted his life in such a way that for him to leave Euclid would mean to leave the home he created with his late wife.

I also found that Melvina could be a representative of contemporary diasporians; those who understand their condition as hyphenated and know that the connection to the land, as classic diasporians wish for, is rare and almost non-existing nowadays.
Therefore, she is not bothered by their split-vision, in fact, Melvina seems to have a clear idea of the differences between her family and the others, and still understand that today we can all possibly become immigrants, or we all know someone who has immigrated somewhere. Melvina sees this process pragmatically and is more bothered by the fact that both Matussem and Jemorah refuse to share stories from their past, when Nora was alive. Her mother is the past Melvina wants to know because I believe that she understands that the place one is from is irrelevant compared to the ones who carry the stories which made one’s family who they are.

Lastly, Jemorah would be the representative of most second generation immigrants because she lives in conflict with herself and does not feel complete. Jemorah is torn between her Arab self and her American self. Similar to many sons and daughters of immigrants, Jemorah also feels misplaced in her host-country and fantasizes about the homeland of their forefathers. However, this home is imaginary and retuning to it does not have the effect these diasporic peoples expect. This is why Nassir convinces Jemorah not to move to Jordan: he understands that her conflict involved not only her Arabness in America, but also her mother’s death in Jordan. Jemorah ultimately wanted to live where her mother was, and for her this place was where her father’s family lived and where Nora died. Jemorah’s conflict was the main issue I wanted to discuss, as it affected her life profoundly: she had no control over her life, refused to make her own decision and, as a result, led a completely empty life.

At first in my research I thought that it was her relationship to Ricky Ellis that helped Jemorah to accept herself as she was. However, I found that it was because she finally found people who had the same characteristic as hers, and led fulfilling lives,
showing that she was able to pursue her own dreams. The conversation with Nassir and Melvina and the understanding that there is no place in the world in which she will feel completely accepted. It seems to me that this is the most important part of the novel: it is when Jemorah discovered that pain and difficult life experiences would happen to her no matter where she lived and that this connection to the land was something difficult to be found. The characteristic that was common to all in her family is that they were all immigrants; this had become their culture since their first important diaspora experience which was moving from Nazareth to Jordan. When Nassir explains this to Jemorah by giving examples of other people he has met who live under the exact circumstance as her cousin lives, Jemorah sees that she does not have to belong to an American or Arab community, but the community of those whose lives are marked by diaspora.

By accepting her condition of carrying traits from two different and often conflictive cultures, Jem could finally be herself and move past her mother’s death. Deciding to study the prejudice she knew all too well meant being free from it as well. She no longer had to accept a job she didn’t like or accept the label her boss Portia gave her father: sand-nigger. To understand her split-vision is to become free from the past of prejudice and humiliation.

I also could see that within every generation there is a unique diasporic experience. I have tried to show that, although belonging to the same generation of first generations of Arab-Americans, Jemorah and Melvina had experiences that were completely different. The first was completely paralyzed by her cultural and physical differences, and the latter was able to surpass these differences by creating a persona
that did not allow others to diminish based on her cultural background. This book reminds us that, although the diasporic experience is a universal phenomenon, it is also very unique to every immigrant. Some may say that today diaspora has become easier to live with because of the advances of technology, and that there is no real loss in contemporary diaspora as there were in the classic.

However, dealing with diaspora and diasporians has become a more and more delicate issue of our modern times. Because migration seems to be easier to happen, it does not mean that there is no loss to be found. Every human being wants to be seen as an equal; all of us want to belong with something or someone. In search for that Jemorah, as many sons and daughters of immigrants have turned to education, to the academic world to understand their condition as hyphenated, owners of what Majaj calls a split-vision, or as Nassir puts it being “everything and nothing” (330).

It becomes clear that instead of the connection to the land the most important is to fulfill a homing desire. The homing desire, as Brah coined, takes in consideration many other aspects, other than the land itself, and in my research I tried to prove that this feeling of belonging is more concerned with how we relate to a community, how we are perceived by it and how we allow this community to be an active part of the creation of a self that needs constant negotiation between the Arab and American culture in the novel.

Having said this, it would be interesting, for further studies, to contrast how the conflicts studied in Diana Abu-Jaber’s novel appears in Arab-Brazilian novels, to see if the same identity issues occur in a country that does not have the same relationship that the United States has with the Arab community. It would be interesting to see the
issues of affiliation and the issues of “imaginary homes” from those who migrated to Brazil and also their children’s perspective on this matter.

There is in fact no solution for those who are diasporic, as Clifford affirms. Hyphenated or displaced from their homeland. However, there is something to be learned from it. Being two, having two cultures, as conflictive as the Arab and the American gave, Melvina the clarity to see past beyond prejudice of color, economic status and made her a better nurse because of it. Nassir too benefited from being a professional nomad because he, as well, could see past being Israeli and Palestinian, he saw that from this conflict there were losses in both sides. What I am arguing is that possessing a split vision is a solution, because, as Rushdie affirms, “human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all the senses of that phrase” (12). According to Rushdie, “those of us who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps had modernism forced upon us” (12).

Having imaginary homes allows us to become whoever and whatever we want to be, it frees us from stereotypes and impossibilities that are forces upon us. For Jemorah, understanding and recognizing her imaginary home represents the beginning of a life lived in constant negotiation, but finally feeling that there is a home for her fragmented self.
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