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Space, Place, and Ecological Memory in Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses*

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ABSTRACT: This research examines Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses* through Yi-Fu Tuan's theory of space and place, alongside the concept of ecological memory. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the analysis explores how the novel represents displacement and the transformation of place experienced by a Palestinian family across generations. Tuan's distinction between space as open, unstable, and unstructured, and place as meaningful and rooted in lived experience, is used to examine how characters continuously reconstruct home under conditions of forced migration and political instability. The analysis focuses on four characters representing different generations—Salma, Alia, Souad, and Manar—and examines how each move between space and place through changing environments and historical rupture. Their experiences show how unfamiliar spaces are gradually transformed into meaningful places through memory, bodily experience, and emotional attachment. At the same time, ecological memory explains how sensory and environmental traces of the homeland persist across generations, shaping how place is perceived and imagined even after displacement through inherited memory. The findings suggest that in Salt Houses, displacement destabilizes the boundaries between space and place. The novel highlights how place is constantly produced and re-produced across generations, even under conditions of displacement.

Keywords: Hala Alyan, Yi-Fu Tuan, space and place, ecological memory, Palestinian diaspora

1. Introduction

Space and place are central concerns in diasporic literature, especially in narratives of migration and displacement, where belonging is constantly reshaped across shifting geographies. In the context of diaspora and spatial studies, space is understood as something produced through relations, movement, and lived experience. Diasporic belonging is not anchored in a single homeland but is formed through ongoing processes of negotiation across multiple locations, histories, and everyday practices of mobility (Hall, 2024). Avtar Brah's concept of 'diaspora space' frames belonging as something produced through intersecting histories of migration rather than fixed origins (Brah, 2025). Migration and cultural geography research highlights how place are continually reconstructed through every day spatial practices, where home becomes less a stable location and more a lived and shifting experience shaped by movement and memory (Massey, 2005). In this sense, diasporic literature does not simply represent

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displacement but actively explores how space is transformed into meaning through lived experience.

Memory studies further extend this spatial understanding by highlighting how remembrance moves across time and geography. According to Astrid Erll's 'travelling memory' explains how memory circulates across generations, media, and cultural contexts, being continuously reshaped in the process of transmission (Erll, 2011). These studies suggest that displacement disrupts not only cultural continuity but also sensory and spatial familiarity, raising questions about how place-based memory survives when direct access to environment is lost.

This research uses the concept of ecological memory to examine how memory is tied to environment and everyday experience in diasporic literature. Ecological memory refers to how sensory and material encounters with places become part of how individuals remember and relate to home (Barthel et al., 2010). In conditions of displacement, this environmental continuity is disrupted, making it necessary to consider how attachment to place is sustained, transformed, or fragmented when lived environments are no longer accessible. This research also focuses on Yi-Fu Tuan's distinction between space and place to understand how spatial meaning is produced through lived experience and attachment. Tuan's concept is used for analysing how all the characters relate to the matter of displacement that disrupts the transformation of space into place in diasporic contexts.

These theoretical concerns are central to Hala Alyan's Salt Houses, a Palestinian diasporic novel that follows a family displaced from Palestine to Kuwait, Amman, Beirut, Paris and Boston. The novel depicts how homeland is remembered and altered across generations, shifting from lived experience to increasingly fragmented and dynamic forms of belonging. Its structure makes it particularly useful for examining how space, place, and environmental memory interact under conditions of long-term displacement. Hala Alyan is a Palestinian-American poet, novelist, memoirist, and clinical psychologist whose work explores themes of displacement, identity, family, and belonging. Drawing on her experiences within the Palestinian diaspora, she creates emotionally powerful stories that examine memory, migration, and resilience. Alyan is the author of acclaimed works such as *Salt Houses* and *The Arsonists' City*, which portray the complexities of family life across generations and borders. Her writing is known for its lyrical style and emotional depth, reflecting both her literary talent and her background in psychology. As Alyan states, "As long as we exist, we challenge several falsehoods" (Alyan, 2023), highlighting her commitment to preserving Palestinian experiences and narratives through literature.

Despite a growing number of researchers that has been done on Salt Houses, most existing studies focus on trauma, exile, and cultural identity. Mohammed and Mahlaqa (2026) in their paper entitled "Transgenerational Loss and Trauma in Alyan's Salt Houses: Reshaping Identity between Memory and Exile." focuses on pain of loss and trauma has affected different generations through the intergenerational conflict between the past and the present. Kali and Abeetha (2026) in *Displacement and Cultural Identity: Reading Salt Houses* focuses on the aspect of cultural identity in a Palestinian diaspora experience that discusses themes related to memory, hybridity and intergenerational trauma. Researches that encompass or focus on spatial and ecological

memory has not yet been touched. This research addresses that gap by integrating Yi Fu Tuan's concept on space and place with concepts of ecological memory to examine how these concepts relate to the matter of displacement and place attachment.

This framework shows why space and place are important in literary studies. Literature does not only describe settings, it shows how meaning is shaped through places and environments. By exploring ecological memory, this research explains how place, space, and belonging are formed through lived experience and passed down across generations. This is especially important in Palestinian literary works, as the situation in Palestine remains an urgent global concern. It helps us better understand how Palestinian identity and memory are connected to space and place, and how these connections continue despite displacement.

2. Method

The diasporic novel *Salt Houses* by Hala Alyan is chosen for this research as a corpus that pictures how a Palestinian family across generation has to go through several condition of displacement due to political instability and war. Using a close reading method, this study examines the relationship between characters and setting across generations by analysing narrative descriptions related to sense of space and place. This analysis is elaborated with Yi Fu Tuan's theory of Space and Place as well as concepts of Ecological Memory.

Yi-Fu Tuan is widely regarded as one of the founders of humanistic geography, a branch of geography that emphasizes human experience, perception, emotions, and values in understanding places and environments. Tuan's work explores how people experience and assign meaning to the spaces they inhabit. According to Tuan, space represents openness, freedom, and the potential for movement, whereas place represents security, attachment, and meaning developed through experience. He argued that places are not merely physical locations but are spaces that have become meaningful through human interaction and lived experience. Through daily activities, memories, and emotional connections, individuals transform abstract spaces into significant places (Tuan, 1977).

Another key concept developed by Tuan is topophilia, which refers to the emotional bond between people and places. Tuan described topophilia as the affective ties that individuals form with their physical environment. These attachments may emerge from cultural traditions, personal memories, aesthetic appreciation, or social relationships associated with a location. Topophilia explains why people often feel a deep sense of belonging to their hometowns, neighbourhoods, or natural landscapes and why they may experience nostalgia when separated from these places (Tuan, 1974).

Displacement happens when people are forced to leave their homes because of war, natural disasters, or environmental change. Besides losing their homes, displaced people may also lose their connection to the environment where they have lived for many years. Barthel et al. (2010) define social-ecological memory as the knowledge, skills, experiences, and cultural practices that people develop through their interaction with nature over time. This memory is passed from one generation to another through daily activities, stories, traditions, and community practices. It helps communities understand and manage their environment.

This knowledge becomes part of the community's memory and supports its survival and resilience. Barthel et al. argue that social-ecological memory is not only stored in places but also in people and communities (2010). Even after displacement, people can keep their knowledge through storytelling, cultural traditions, and community networks. Both Ecological memory and Yi Fu Tuan's concept is used in this research to elaborate the matter of displacement and place attachment. This research examines how four characters—Salma, Alia, Souad, and Mannar as a representation of each generation in the story relates to the matter of space, place and ecological memory.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Salma: Place, Memory, and Ecological Rupture

Salt Houses is structured in chapters that shift between different characters across generations, with each chapter focusing on a different member of the family and showing how their experiences of displacement and memory shape their sense of home over time. The novel starts with Salma-the first generation in the story and her family during the aftermath of the 1948 Nakba. The family is told forced to leave their home in Jaffa and begin a new life in Nablus. Salma, along with her husband and children experiences this move as a sudden break from their previous, more stable life. Through Salma's storytelling it can be understood that the first generation feels Jaffa more as 'home' in comparison to Nablus. Salma missed her home with a tenacity that never quite abated. She spent the first years in Nablus daydreaming of returning (Alyan, 2017, p. 6). In this case, it can be seen how one's movement between spaces does not directly create 'place' because as in Tuan's concept place represents security, attachment, and meaning developed through experience. Life in Nablus does not give the same sense of attachment and security as Jaffa, although moving between spaces appears to be potentially possible. In the first parts of Salma's story, she appears to be longing for what remembered as 'home' through certain objects that functions as a strong attachment that creates a sense of a strong place.

> But it was gone, the old tray and coffee set, along with so many of their belongings, the dresses and walnut furniture and Hussam's books. All left behind in that villa, painted the color of peach, that had been their home. (Alyan, 2017, p. 1)

It can be seen from the quotation above how Salma feels attached to home as a place rather than just a space because strong attachments are formed through lived experience and memorable objects. From an ecological point of view, Salma's experience reflects the breakdown of a human–environment system. The loss of the 'villa, painted the colour of peach' along with 'walnut furniture and Hussam's books' emphasizes not only cultural but also environmental, since the home once functioned as a place where daily life and surroundings were deeply interconnected. In this sense, the house can be seen as a small ecosystem made up of routines, objects, experiences. When that system is taken away, the family does not just move—they become disoriented in a more fundamental, environmental way. (Alaimo, 2010). Salma's husband—Hussam's deteriorating health condition and reaction makes this especially clear when he says, 'They took my home, they took my lungs. Kill me, kill me.' (Alyan,

2017, p. 3), linking the loss of place directly to bodily survival. This fits with the idea of the "embodied environment," where health and identity are tied to place (Alaimo, 2010). Ecological memory helps clarify that what disappears is not only the physical home—space, but also the continuity of everyday environmental life that once supported it—place. Tuan's distinction between 'space' and 'place' helps explain this shift. Space is open and undefined, while place becomes meaningful through lived experience and emotional connection (Tuan, 1977).

Salma's emotional attachment to Jaffa remains stronger than anything the new environment can offer "…in Salma's mind, this remains the new house, the Nablus house. She has come to love in a resigned way," (Alyan, 2017, p. 10) suggesting that Nablus has not yet fully taken on the meaning of home. From the perspective of ecological memory, this can also be seen as a break in continuity—the loss of accumulated knowledge and familiarity that normally helps people settle into place (Barthel et al., 2010).

Tuan's idea of topophilia—the emotional bond between people and place—also appears in Salma's relationship with her garden in the story. Salma in her new home in Nablus spent hours each day focusing on gardening trying to 'rebuild her once lost comfort zone'. Her need to work the soil reflects a desire to reconnect physically with land: I need it out… I need to see the soil (Alyan, 2017, p. 12). At first, the soil resists her efforts: She worked on the soil for months. Nothing happened. This can be read as an environment still unsettled, not yet responsive to human care, much like Salma's own unsettled sense of belonging. Over time, though, the garden begins to change: The garden has done her proud… lush greenery followed, flowers and shrubs and trees pushing through soil (Alyan, 2017, p. 12). The courtyard gradually shifts from empty space into meaningful place through ongoing care and attention.

This process also resembles ecological succession, where ecosystems slowly recover and grow more complex after disturbance (Odum, 1969). Salma's gardening reflects this pattern: barren soil shows disruption, while later growth shows recovery. The garden grows alongside loss rather than replacing it, suggesting that place-making is never fully separate from grief or displacement. Seen through ecological memory (Barthel et al., 2010), the gardening also reflects how environmental knowledge and habits persist even after relocation. Salma carries with her an implicit sense of how land should respond, how it should be worked, and what care looks like. The garden's eventual flourishing suggests that this memory is not erased by exile but reactivated in a new setting, even if it is shaped by absence and comparison with Jaffa.

Salma's story shows that exile is not only about losing a homeland, but also about having to rebuild relationships with place from disrupted conditions. Jaffa remains a deeply rooted place tied to memory, while Nablus begins as uncertain space that slowly becomes meaningful through care, time, and emotional investment. Through ecological memory, it can be seen that place-making is never entirely new—it is always shaped by what people carry with them, even when the original place is gone.

3.2. Alia: Space, Embodiment, and Environmental Encounter

The second generation—Alia and her husband Atef—move to Kuwait after the Six-Day War in 1967, continuing the family's cycle of displacement. Unlike her mother

Salma, whose attachment is tied to the lost homeland of Jaffa, Alia feels most connected to Nablus, where she grew up. Through Yi-Fu Tuan's concept of place, Alia's sense of belonging can be seen is shaped by lived experience, familiarity, and emotional attachment rather than inherited memory (1977). Nablus becomes her primary place because it is the environment she knows through everyday life, while Jaffa remains a homeland known mainly through stories and memory.

The family's move to Kuwait shows how displacement reshapes relationships with place. Tuan (1977) argues that movement turns familiar places into memory while forcing people to encounter unfamiliar spaces that have not yet gained personal meaning. As a result, Kuwait initially appears to Alia as an unfamiliar space rather than a place, lacking the familiarity and emotional attachment she associates with Nablus. This alienation is intensified by environmental conditions. Alyan describes how Alia …hadn't known the sun could blaze with such violence, that air could be so blistering that even inhaling seemed an Olympic task" (Alyan, 2017, p. 51). The scene highlights embodiment in place experience. People first encounter environments through bodily sensation before they interpret them (Tuan, 1977). For Alia, Kuwait is first experienced physically, through heat that affects breathing, movement, and comfort.

Alia's memories of Nablus—Palestine therefore influence how she experiences Kuwait, making its heat, smells, and atmosphere feel more unfamiliar in comparison to Nablus. This can be seen when… she missed her bedroom, the of the sloping hills of Nablus, the sound of the men laughing over her burned meals. She couldn't wait for home. (Alyan, 2017, p. 53). These memories reflect both topophilia and ecological memory: landscapes and sounds tied to everyday belonging. Through them, Palestine remains active in shaping how she understands new environments because as Barthel et al. states that ecological memory refers to environmental knowledge and sensory experience that persist after displacement and continue to shape perception (2010).

Tuan also argues that home provides stability and security within an uncertain world. For displaced people, however, this stability is repeatedly disrupted. Kuwait never becomes home for Alia because it remains unfamiliar, while Nablus—Palestine shifts increasingly into memory. This tension appears when Alia considers moving to Amman. Alyan writes that Palestine has vanished for them…. Nablus gone—but they can find the ashes in Amman, collect them to build another life. (Alyan, 2017, pp. 59-60). The image of ashes suggests fragments of a lost place that still shape identity. Amman becomes appealing partly because its landscape resembles Nablus, allowing ecological memory to bridge past and present. Familiarity through repeated experience strengthens attachment to place (Tuan, 1977).

Kuwait remains a space rather than a place because it does not yet hold familiarity, meaning, or emotional attachment. On the other hand, Amman becomes a place because it resembles Nablus, and in Tuan's terms this familiarity supports reinventing place, while ecological memory is reactivated through these environmental similarities, allowing a partial sense of belonging to form even without a return to the original homeland—Nablus.

3.3. Souad: Fragmented Space and Emotional Instability

Souad's journey in *Salt Houses* moves through Paris, then Boston, and later toward Beirut, without ever fully settling into a stable sense of home. She first relocates to Paris and then Boston because of her husband, but when the marriage breaks down, she later leaves with her children for Beirut. This breakdown is important because, in Yi-Fu Tuan's terms, place is not only a physical setting but something produced through emotional stability and lived relationships. A home becomes a meaningful place when familiarity, routine, and intimacy accumulate over time. When these are disrupted, the spaces people inhabit lose their grounding and remain closer to space than place.

Tuan's distinction between space and place helps clarify this process. Space is open and unfamiliar, while place develops gradually through repeated experience, bodily presence, and emotional attachment (1977). Place is therefore not given in advance but formed through living. In Souad's case, this process is repeatedly interrupted. In Paris, despite its cultural richness, she never develops a sense of attachment. Paris had transformed for her after the wedding, its vivacity turning leaden (Alyan, 2017, p. 211) remaining emotionally detached. Paris thus remains at the level of space because it never becomes familiar or emotionally grounded. A similar dynamic continues in Boston. Souad experiences a hungry, invisible malaise (Alyan, 2017, p. 207), suggesting a sustained sense of dislocation rather than a momentary difficulty. Even her domestic space becomes unsettling She hates white now. It became oppressive, like living in perpetual mist (Alyan, 2017, p. 218). Instead of offering stability, Boston reproduces the same lack of attachment. From Tuan's perspective, this indicates that without emotional continuity and repeated engagement, environments cannot fully develop into place.

Tuan also argues that perception of place is never neutral; it is shaped by memory, emotion, and prior experience (1974). New environments are always interpreted through what has been lived before. This is where ecological memory becomes useful. Ecological memory refers to the persistence of environmental knowledge, sensory experience, and cultural understanding that continues to shape how new places are perceived (Barthel et al., 2010). It is not simply recollection of a homeland, but a carried framework for interpreting what 'home' should feel like. For Souad, this memory is tied to Palestine through family narratives and inherited expectations of belonging. As a result, new places are rarely experienced in isolation; they are constantly measured against this absent but emotionally charged reference point. This makes it difficult for Paris and Boston to develop into meaningful places, since they are always filtered through a sense of displacement.

This becomes more evident in her imagining of Beirut. She associates it with familiarity and recognition, "…somewhere familiar, somewhere people look like us, talk like us…" (Alyan, 2017, p. 207). However, this familiarity is still mediated by ecological memory rather than direct experience, as Beirut is imagined through cultural and environmental resemblance to Palestine. Yet this imagined continuity is destabilised when she is told, "You're not Lebanese" (Alyan, 2017, p. 207), despite insisting, "She had never been to Palestine, but yes, she was Palestinian" (Alyan, 2017, p. 210). Her sense of belonging is therefore not grounded in lived place, but in inherited memory and affiliation.

Across these movements, Paris and Boston remain largely unformed as places because they never accumulate the emotional continuity required for attachment. The breakdown of her marriage further weakens the possibility of place-making by removing a key source of domestic stability. Beirut comes closer, but remains unresolved. Palestine persists as the central site of attachment—not as a lived environment, but as ecological and cultural memory that continues to shape how all other places are experienced, evaluated, and understood.

3.4. Manar: Inherited Memory and the Limits of Place Attachment

The last generation in the story is the character Manar, a grown woman living in Manhattan who has long felt a strong urge to visit Palestine for reasons she cannot fully explain. Unlike her grandparents, Manar experiences the effects of displacement indirectly. She has not witnessed the loss of Palestine herself, instead, she inherits this sense of loss through family stories, silences, and cultural memory. As a member of a later diasporic generation, her experience highlights the challenges faced by those who have grown up far from their ancestral homeland. This distance from her roots creates a conflict of identity and belonging, as she struggles to reconcile her connection to Palestine with her life elsewhere. “That parched, grasping part of herself, thirsty to feel something that would link her, in some ancestral way, to the world?” (Alyan, 2017, p. 287). The metaphor of thirst suggests a desire for connection and rootedness.

People do not simply inhabit places—they create relationships with them through everyday encounters, sensory experiences, and personal histories. In the novel, Manar’s journey to Palestine illustrates the complexity of this relationship. Although she has never lived in Palestine, she develops a strong attachment to it through family stories, photographs, and inherited memories. Through the perspective of Tuan’s theory and the concept of ecological memory, Manar’s experience shows how landscapes can be emotionally inherited across generations. However, her encounter with Palestine also reveals the limitations of memory, exposing the gap between an imagined homeland and the reality of place.

From the beginning, Palestine exists for Manar as a place preserved through fragments of family history rather than direct experience. This is suggested when she is told, “You can try to find things in the letters, maybe even the house” (Alyan, 2017, p. 279). The letters and the house function as repositories of memory, connecting the present generation to a landscape that exists largely in recollection. According to Tuan, places are created through accumulated human experiences and meanings. Although Manar has never experienced the house herself, it carries emotional significance because it represents continuity with her family’s past. Through ecological memory, stories and material traces relations between people and environments even after physical separation has occurred.

Manar’s attachment to Palestine is intensified by her own unstable childhood. The narrator explains that she told Gabriel everything. About her chaotic childhood, chubby daughter of bickering parents, dragged from Paris to Boston to Beirut. Half Palestine, half Lebanese (Alyan, 2017, p. 280). Constant movement prevents her from developing a stable sense of rootedness and belonging. Because Manar lacks such an experience,

Palestine becomes increasingly important as a symbolic homeland. It offers the possibility of permanence in contrast to the instability that has defined her life.

The significance of Palestine is further reinforced through intergenerational memory. The novel states, "Palestine was something raw in the family, a wound never completely scabbed over. Her grandparents rarely mentioned it." (Alyan, 2017, p. 281). The metaphor of the wound suggests that Palestine continues to exist within the family not simply as a location but as an emotional and historical presence. Even silence becomes a form of remembrance. Ecological memory is not always transmitted through explicit narratives; it can also be communicated through absence, longing, and unresolved grief (Autti et al., 2026). The homeland remains embedded in family consciousness, shaping Manar's understanding of herself long before she sees the land.

When she finally arrives in Palestine, her imagined homeland becomes a tangible environment. The narrative describes:

> These places she has read about, circles on a map, suddenly emerge, smelling of fruits and car exhaust. I'm in Ramallah, she marvels to herself. This is Haifa. Her pang for Palestine had always been an amorphous thing. It was a hat rack for all her discontent. But suddenly Palestine is real. It is filled with people who have her hair and voice …. there were people over here being Palestinian. (Alyan, 2017, p. 282)

This passage illustrates Tuan's distinction between abstract space and lived place. Before her journey, Palestine exists primarily as an idea represented by maps, photographs, and stories. Upon arrival, sensory experience transforms abstraction into reality. The smells of 'fruits and car exhaust' emphasize the materiality of place. For Tuan, places become meaningful through embodied encounters with the environment. Manar's recognition that Palestine contains ordinary people rather than symbolic figures challenges the idealized version she has carried throughout her life.

Despite this encounter, she continues to hope that Palestine will provide emotional certainty. The narrator notes, "A part of her had fantasized that trip would restore her in some faith, a land to which she'd feel unflinching attachment." (Alyan, 2017, p. 283). This expectation reflects what Tuan calls topophilia, the affective bond between people and place. However, Manar assumes that attachment can be inherited automatically through ancestry. She imagines that entering the homeland will produce an immediate sense of belonging. Her journey ultimately shows that emotional bonds to place are complex.

This longing extends beyond family history and toward the environment itself. Manar seeks confirmation that she belongs within a larger ecological and historical continuity. Palestine becomes the imagined source of that connection. "Yet the reality of the homeland repeatedly fails to match her expectations. But Al-Aqsa had been a disappointment, the Holy Sepulcher as well. Though each marketplace was perfumed with spices, each mosque framed with beautiful calligraphy, she felt uninspired" (Alyan, 2017, p. 287). Although these places possess historical and cultural significance, they do not generate the emotional transformation she anticipated. Tuan emphasizes that meaning emerges through personal experience rather than through symbolic importance alone. Sacred sites cannot automatically create attachment and Manar

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discovers that belonging cannot be guaranteed by entering a place that is supposed to matter.

This tension between memory and reality becomes most visible during her visit to Nablus:

> Nablus was the biggest disappointment of all. She'd expected to feel kinship…. Manar had formed an image of Nablus: an expansive, generous land peppered with olive groves, valleys between yellow hills. In one of the photos, her younger grandparents grinning into the camera, she could see slivers of indigo sky, bunches of wildflowers. But there were no wildflowers. (Alyan, 2017, p. 287)

The ecological details in this passage are significant. Olive groves, hills, wildflowers, and open skies form part of the environmental memory that Manar inherits through family photographs. These natural elements become symbols of a homeland she has never known firsthand. Through ecological memory, landscapes are preserved not merely as scenery but as emotional and cultural knowledge passed between generations. However, when Manar confronts the actual environment, she discovers that it does not correspond to the remembered landscape. The stark statement, 'But there were no wildflowers' emphasizes the collapse of her idealized vision. The place preserved in memory proves impossible to recover completely in reality.

Manar's journey in trying to search for meaning and form an emotional bond to a place continues to the city of Jaffa. "This morning, Manar decided on a whim to visit Jaffa. The city has a pacifying effect on her, the shoreline jutting out to meet the sea." (Alyan, 2017, p. 288). Her arrival at Jaffa can be seen symbolically as a full circle bringing her back to her 'root' in the city her family was originally from before they were displaced for the first time. The story in Manar's part ends in Jaffa, ironically bringing an unexpected realization of her full journey. She takes a breath. "I've come here for no reason" (Alyan, 2017, p. 295). Her realization that she has come for no reason reflects her understanding that Palestine could not provide a singular revelation or restore a lost identity.

The novel last part shows a powerful image that connects her sense of self and place "…she can see herself through the fisherman's eyes: drenched, squatting in seawater. Not a woman in the throes of revelation, but something peripheral, another unnecessary foreigner, Ajnabiyeh, she can hear him thinking" (Alyan, 2017, p. 296). Although she carries Palestinian ancestry, she remains an outsider to the social and environmental realities of the place. Her inherited connection does not erase the distance created by history and displacement. This realization is emphasized in the scene where …She imagines her whole family standing on this shoreline, in a row. "… A large wave washed over the sand, the water eating her words, her family come and gone in this sea that belongs to none of them" (Alyan, 2017, p. 296). The sea functions as a powerful ecological symbol. Unlike houses, photographs, or letters, it cannot preserve memory in fixed form. The last line in this quote shows what Yi-Fu Tuan describes as the distinction between space and place. The sea remains an open, transient space through which her family passes, but because it offers no lasting attachment or sense of belonging, it never becomes a stable place.

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For much of her life, Palestine exists for Manar as a place rather than merely a space. Although she has never visited it, ecological memory allows her to develop an intimate connection to the homeland through stories, photographs, family narratives, and environmental imagery passed down across generations. These inherited memories transform Palestine from a distant geographical territory into a meaningful place that shapes her identity and sense of belonging. However, when Manar finally encounters Palestine in reality, she discovers a gap between the place she has imagined and the physical space before her. Her disappointment reveals the limitations of inherited memory, demonstrating that memories transmitted across generations cannot fully reproduce the complexities of lived experience. The Palestine she seeks exists through collective memory and longing. Ultimately, the novel suggests that belonging does not depend on recovering an idealized homeland. Instead, it emerges through the ongoing negotiation between memory, identity, and the environments people inhabit, as spaces continually become places through human experience and emotional investment.

4. Conclusion

This study has examined Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses* through Yi-Fu Tuan's concepts of space, place, and topophilia, alongside ecological memory. By tracing the experiences of four generations—Salma, Alia, Souad, and Manar—the analysis illustrates that displacement does not simply result in the loss of home, but produces an ongoing and unstable process of place-making across time and geography.

Across the novel, space is initially experienced as unfamiliar, unstable, and often alienating due to forced migration and political disruption. In contrast, place emerges through emotional attachment, memory, bodily experience, and repeated engagement with environment. This transformation remains unstable, as place is continually reconstructed and redefined through movement, rupture, and changing geographical contexts. Home is therefore not a fixed origin, but a shifting process shaped by both lived experience and inherited memory.

Ecological memory sustains this process across generations by preserving sensory, cultural, and environmental traces of the homeland, even in conditions of displacement. While these memories help maintain a sense of continuity, they remain partial and fragmented when confronted with new environments and lived realities. *Salt Houses* illustrates that belonging is not achieved through return to an original homeland, but through the continuous negotiation between memory, identity, and changing spatial realities. Even under conditions of displacement, the novel highlights the continuous production and reproduction of place across generations.

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