

Loyalty to Historical Female Identity in Susan Abulhawa's Mornings in Jenin

Bouchria Faiza *

Amar telidji University of Laghouat, (Algeria), fa.bouchria@lagh-univ.dz

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to investigate the influence of historical identity on community belonging and to conduct a literary analysis of identity in "Mornings in Jenin," addressing deficiencies in the comprehension of Palestinian identity formation through literature. This article aims to assess the impact of historical identity on Palestinian belonging, employ conventional literary analytical techniques on the novel, integrate the function of collective memory in diasporic narratives, deconstruct motifs of trauma and resistance, and juxtapose theoretical frameworks in postcolonial identity analysis. Trauma and resistance manifest as interconnected themes that uphold cultural resilience, whereas diasporic identity negotiation underscores the conflicts between cultural preservation and adaptation. This article highlights the novel's function in expressing Palestinian identity during displacement, stressing the necessity for more sophisticated, intersectional, and contextually informed methodologies. These insights enhance theoretical comprehension of identity dynamics in Palestinian literature and contribute to wider cultural and political discussions regarding displacement and resistance.

Keywords: historical identity, belonging, resistance.

INTRODUCTION:

The forced displacement of Palestinians from their own country was one of the worst things that transpired in the twentieth century. The creation of the Israeli entity in 1948 caused a lot of Palestinians to leave their homes, leaving them destitute in their own country and refugees in several nearby countries. A number of people are still thought to be stateless, and they can't go back to their homes and communities. A lot of them also moved to Latin America, North America, and Arab countries. Some people have recently live in Europe as refugees or as part of a diaspora. The Palestinian diaspora has defined itself as a victim diaspora. Writings by Palestinian diaspora writers mostly show the pain, suffering, and hopes for an independent state of Palestine. Their books, short stories, and memoirs show what life is like for Palestinians living in the host country. So, the feeling of place is very important for Palestinian diasporas to show who they are and claim their country. A lot of women writers try to connect their characters to a certain area or places. Some novelists, as Susan Abulhawa, move beyond cultural boundaries and traverse countries. A lot of people who study globalization and transnationalism have talked about the idea of a global sense of place, which is now called "cosmopolitanism." Susan Abulhawa, who is Palestinian American, sees transnationalism as the only way to figure out who she is and where she fits in. The long-running conflict between Palestinians and Israelis has forced some Palestinians living abroad to fully integrate into the community where they live or to identify as global citizens. For Palestinians, home is especially essential because their identity is often perceived as strange and not central. Susan Abulhawa is a Palestinian American whose stories reach across time and location. She is a young Palestinian diaspora writer who supports the Palestinian national cause and fights against stereotypes about Middle Eastern women. Her first novel, *Mornings in Jenin* (2006), was a great sensation. It got good reviews and was translated into six major languages. In this sense, it is true to say that Palestinian diasporic and exilic literature is alive and well and well regarded. Writers in this group have been adding to the collections of world and diaspora

literature. A lot of what they write is about victim diasporas, which are groups of people who have been oppressed for a long time. Sirhan thinks that sharing a tale offers life and significance to the Palestinians who have had to abandon their homes¹. It is full of agony and misery, yet it also communicates a message of power. There are still memoirs, short stories, and novels coming out of different diaspora civilizations that give the Palestinian political question a character and energy that political discourse doesn't have. Asmaa Naguib (2011) says that Palestinian novelists have taken on the job of keeping the communal experience alive and telling it again so that the story of Palestine doesn't fade into obscurity. Since 1948, when the al-Nakba began in Palestinian history, this has been the major topic of most of the literature by Palestinians living outside of Palestine. Edward Said was one of the first Palestinians living outside of Palestine to firmly support the cause of Palestine. He wrote a lot about the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, but it doesn't get enough attention in the West. Said makes a solid case for looking at the wrongs on both sides of the split between Israelis and Palestinians again. He initiated a "writing back" initiative to change the western stories that impact how people think about Arab Palestinians. He had used every occasion and venue to tell the world about the hopes of the Palestinian people (Yi, 2011). He spoke out for Palestine in the West and campaigned against the politics of taking land away from people². The voices of today are just as vital, but they shouldn't be cultural guides. Their job is to back up the story of Palestine and add to the Palestinian counter-narrative.

1. The Palestinian Exiled Woman's Attachment to her Homeland

One of the most complex and humane issues is the Palestinian case. Palestinians are currently living under what is essentially a military occupation and have been denied statehood since the end of the British mandate. Any peace talks must take into account the Palestinians' right to life and existence. The establishment of the Israeli entity in 1948, which is widely recognized to have signaled the end of the Jewish diaspora, also caused the Palestinians to disperse. The Israeli entity has been methodically displacing

Palestinians since that day, destroying their villages and preventing the refugees and displaced from going back to their homes. In addition to erasing any recollection of Palestine, all of this is done to firmly establish Israel's existence.

Therefore, for some Palestinian women writers, the world's "exile" is troubling because it suggests that they may never return to their homeland. Generally, exiles are able to build several communities and social relationships outside of their homes, as well as their own imagined homes while they are destitute. Since they have an imaginary concept of home, the term "home" is only used in a symbolic or metaphorical sense. Despite the term's stigma, the Palestinian diaspora is now widely accepted and recognized. It has become a tangible reality, and the current focus is to make such exiles more lively and enrich them with cultural experiences and ties to their homeland. Many authors and policymakers genuinely understand the Palestinian diaspora's important role in politics, the economy, culture, and the fight for national identity.

There have been disagreements on the legitimacy of the idea of Palestinians living in "exile" overseas. According to Sari Hanafi (2003), "the Palestinians abroad do not constitute a real diaspora, but rather a 'partially diasporized people'³. He creates a typology of three distinct groups: diasporized individuals, populations in transit, and absorbed populations. He tries to break the definition of exile in his analysis, which disentangles the core of the Palestinian diaspora. However, for Palestinians who are victims of the diaspora, arriving is a kind of gain rather than a loss. Since many Palestinian women diasporas maintain active ties to their country through various means, it does not signify the decline of Palestinian culture. Despite the acknowledged structural complexity of the Palestinian diaspora, there are several opportunities that can strengthen their function in preserving political engagements and cultural ties. Both exile and diaspora, regardless of their precise definitions, have been used to denote migration and mobility. Indeed, analyzing the claims of the diaspora's homeland raises certain concerns regarding the contribution of the Palestinian diaspora to advancing pro-nationalist goals and bolstering cultural identity. Today's Palestinian women in

exile are equally concerned with Palestine's main issues and actively participate in all facets of their country's fight. Since al-Nakba, Palestinian women around the world have remained unwavering and uncompromising in their commitment to preserving a common national identity. The bond between the Palestinian women in exile and the Palestinian identity, however, is somewhat fragile. This is a result of both the ruthless military might and the Israeli master narrative. Indeed, this is one of the actual issues that exiled women and Palestinian nationalists must deal with. Migration is viewed as a possible danger to Palestinian national identity since it disrupts the innate bond and link between location and identity. Nonetheless, women authors from Palestine who are exiled are expected to establish new, alternative platforms for expressing their threatened cultural identity. In her book, Susan Abulhawa depicts both pain and power. She does, however, support the Palestinian national cause and acknowledge her heritage.

2. Depictions of the Female Identity through the Lense of Exile

Susan Abulhawa is a Palestinian-American writer whose fiction extends beyond borders, challenges stereotypes, and portrays the daily problems of Palestinians. *Mornings in Jenin*, her first novel, is a work of fiction that crosses borders and looks at Palestinian history and culture. The story follows the Abulheja family over four generations as they contend with the violence and upheaval in their home nation. The family has close roots to Ein Hod, a quiet community of olive farmers. When Israel declares itself a state in 1948, the peace of Ein Hod is disrupted forever. Everyone in the area had to move to a refugee camp in Jenin. Hasan, the father, is a Palestinian who disappeared in the 1967 war. Dalia, the mother, becomes insane. Amal, who is only a child, barely makes it through a week in a bomb bunker. The tale of Amal, a Palestinian lady who lives in Jenin and subsequently goes to the United States, is told in the book. Amal, the main character, was born in a refugee camp after El Nakba.

She was quite upset that she was homeless. Her mother Dalia died, her father Hasan disappeared, and her brother Yousef joined the

resistance. She was sent to an orphanage. Amal was one of the best students at the orphanage, so she got a scholarship to study in the US. During her first several months in the US, she feels terribly out of place. She feels that she's been kicked out of her family and her culture, and she's working hard to fit in with this new one. Amal says, "I felt like I wasn't good enough when I first came to America." It was hard for me to fit in in that open-ended space. But my brown skin and accent made it evident that I wasn't from here. I felt like I didn't belong anywhere, like a bad smell, and the plane hijackings of the 1970s happened because of my Arabic last name (135). Amal's discomfort got worse as she sought to get over the unpleasant feeling of ElGhurba, which is the experience of being alone. Amal felt diminished, out of place, and eager to belong. She wants to settle down in America, start over, and leave behind her bad past in a country that is racist and makes her a target of racial oppression. She wants to forget that she is Palestinian and all the bad things that have happened to her. Amal stopped being involved in politics so she could have more fun. She also doesn't write to her family anymore. She even changed her name to Amy, which means hopeless. "I was a word that didn't mean anything anymore. A woman who has lost her past. To be honest, I wanted to be someone else" (142). The Palestinians are using Amal's name to try to get their country back. This name makes her think of her life as a refugee and how lonely she is because she can't live with her family because of the terrible things Israel has done. "I didn't have any friends and didn't talk much. I was Amy. A name that doesn't mean anything. Amal had no hope, no matter what vowel it was (192). Amal loves the way Americans live.

Amal has a hard time forgetting her memories, even when she tries to ignore her past self, because she has deeply internalized the trauma of being uprooted. She knows that her country is very appealing. She says, "No matter what mask I wore, I was always part of the Palestinian nation of the banished to no place, no man, no honor." Her Arabness and the primal cries of Palestine were her ties to the world. Even though Amal tries to forget her past, her thoughts and

feelings are always there. She can't forget that she had to leave her home and lost her land.

Amal moved to Lebanon after she got her master's degree. Yusef, her brother, called her. He had married Fatima after leaving her to join the resistance a few years ago. Amal married Madjid, a doctor who was a friend of her brother's, and became a teacher in Lebanon. The Israeli attack in 1982 ruined Amal's dream of a better future. It led to the great massacres Sabra and Shatila, which are one of the most brutal crimes in history. Amal found out about the terrible things that happened in the US that murdered her husband Majid, her brother's wife Fatima, their daughter Falasteen, and another baby that was not born yet. Amal was waiting for Majid to come to the US so they could get away from the danger and take care of their new baby safely. Majid had planned to devote his life to the Palestinian cause instead of getting married before he met Amal. But the family's love for each other is just as strong as their love for their country. Amal is very sad and scared that her husband and family have died. This has changed her almost as much as Dalia did when her child died. During the terrible events in Sabra and Shatila, Yousef's wife was raped and his kids were killed. The news talked about this terrible and scary thing. Amal was told from the US about Fatima's death that someone had slit open the woman's stomach, cutting sideways and then upwards, perhaps trying to kill her unborn child. She looked at a picture that showed how her unborn child had been taken from her womb.

Susan Abulhawa recounts the deaths in Shatila and Sabra. In houses, women lay with their legs spread wide and their skirts torn up to their waists. Young men were lined up along a wall for execution, and their throats were cut, and they were shot in the back. The tragedy of Amal and the Palestinian people is more complex than words or images can convey. Empty whiskey bottles, U.S. Army ration tins, and Israeli army medical equipment were thrown into piles of debris along with babies—blackened babies because they had been killed over twenty-four hours earlier and their young bodies were already beginning to rot (177).

While Israel committed horrible, barbaric, and violent crimes against innocent people who pleaded for assistance in escaping Israel's political garbage, people around the world remained silent and unconcerned. According to Newsweek, the most significant event that occurred in the week preceding the killings in Sabra and Shatila was Princess Grace's passing. That's unfortunate. The world's most powerful nations have always supported Israel and continue to do so. Her violent and vicious actions have never been referred to as "terroristic." The politics of violence were open to Ariel Sharon. He was referred to as a "man of peace" by George W. Bush, the 43rd president of the United States (182).

Amal was sad and angry that her husband had died. Her soul had died with him, there is nothing in the world that can help her wounds heal, ease her pain, or put her broken spirit back together. Amal had a lot of emotional pain, but she was able to move on from the horrible things that Israel did in Sabra and Shatila. Dalia's words, which she always hears, give her strength again. Dalia seemed to know what would happen to Amal, so she wanted her to be a creature that couldn't feel sad or unhappy. "Don't tell anyone how you feel," she used to tell her when she was a kid (179). Like Dalia, Amal has learned how to deal with pain and keep it to herself. The terrible bloodshed in Israel hasn't made the Palestinians give up, just like Amal. It has made them strong and ready to fight back. Amal had a daughter named Sara after the Sabra and Shatila murders. After she lost the best things in the world, the latter meant everything to her.

When Moshe was dying, David learned that he wasn't a real Jew. A violent Arab woman had taken him from her. David's sister Amal is the only other person in his family, and he finally finds her after a long journey. Amal's reunion with her brother after thirty years apart has made her want to go back home even more. Consequently, she fled her residence of exile and alienation, which is "an intolerable rift that is imposed between a human body and its native environment, between the self and its real home."⁴ Amal, David, and her daughter Sara go back to Jenin. Sara wants to learn more about her hometown, her people's history, and the problems they face. Susan uses the title "Mornings in Jenin," to represent the mornings when Hasan read

poems to Amal. She wanted to go back to Jenin even more after seeing her brother David, who knew who she really was.

Sara started studying her mother's and her people's history in Jenin. Amal kept this from her in order to spare her the suffering she endured. Sara's mother, Amal, informed her that her father passed away during a 9/11-like incident. She asks, "Do you remember what it was like when the Twin Towers fell on September 11?" The same thing happened to your father. Israel bombed our apartment building the night before he was scheduled to leave Beirut to visit us. (234). Although the 9/11 Twin Towers collapse is a significant historical event, the murder of Palestinians and the bombardment of their homes frequently go unreported. Amal compared 9/11 to Sabra and Shatila.

In 2002, there was another massacre of Palestinians in Jenin. At the time, Israel's prime minister was Ariel Sharon. He is among the most criminal and discriminatory Zionists in history. In February 2001, Sharon was chosen. In 2002, Amal was shot while attempting to save the life of her 16-year-old daughter, Sara. "I feel sad for him," Amal says. "My eyes, soft with a mother's love and a dead woman's calm, weigh him down with his own power and I think he will cry." She says this just before she passes away and in her remark about the soldier who was going to murder her. Due to his attachment to the murderer, the child is depressed. I feel terrible for the youth whose leaders misled them about power, war, symbols, and flags (238). In the midst of the terrible and vicious act of killing an innocent woman whose heart is brimming with love and compassion, the comment demonstrates how human the Palestinian people are. At the time of her death, "[t]he petition of memory pulled her back, and still back, to a home she had never known," despite the fact that she passed away in her birthplace (9). Amal passed away before achieving her greatest ambition, which was to return home. The pre-Nakba locations and the land of Palestine itself hold special significance for Palestinians. They serve as more than just places to honor the deceased; they are also representations of all that has been lost and places that people long to return to but are unable to do so (Lila Abu Lughod & Ahmad H. Sa'di 13). The Abulhija family's fourth

generation, Sara, will lead the Palestinian cause. Hearing that Haj Salem had passed away and been buried alive devastated her. This man used to tell Amal stories about Palestine. Regarding Haj Salem's passing, Sara writes to her deceased mother, "To have lived so long, only to be crushed to death by a bulldozer." Does being a Palestinian mean this? (243). The Palestinian story will continue even after the passing of Haj Salem, the storyteller. Sharing memories across generations is crucial. Palestinians will continue to narrate the same horrific tale for many generations to come. They all tell the same sufferings: they lost everything, were robbed of their humanity, and were tossed away like trash into refugee camps that aren't even fit for rodents. Of having no rights, home, or nation (66). Abulhawa wrote her novel to tell the world about the massacre in Jenin in 2002.

3. CONCLUSION

In her book, Susan Abulhawa tries to explain what it means to be a Palestinian growing up in exile and to belong. She strongly supports the Palestinian national cause, but she also works on her idea of what it means to be a Palestinian woman. As a whole, *Mornings in Jenin* is a cross-border work, and Susan sees herself as a member of the world. Even though she believes in what it means to be Palestinian, she feels at home in many places. By writing about Amal, Abulhawa tries to show the perfect Palestinian woman who has to live away from her home country but stays faithful to it. Also, Abulhawa's writing is very important because it tells the story of Palestine and shows what it's like to cross borders, move between countries as a refugee, and live in the diaspora as a homeless person. Though the novel is often designated as a painful story, it brilliantly represents the condition of the contemporary Palestinian diasporas. It is full of affection and hope. Abulhawa is not so much preoccupied with the notion of the romanticized home; she rather highlights the individual Palestinian female experience.

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Footnotes:

¹ Sirhan, Nadia. (2014). Folk Stories and Personal Narratives in Palestinian Spoken Arabic: A Cultural and Linguistic Study. Palgrave Macmillan p.50.

² Yi, Li. (2011). "Edward Said's Thoughts and Nationalism." Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies 5.3 p70-73 .

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⁴ Said, Edward. Reflections on Exile and Other Essays p. 173.