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Abstract:

*Twenty-first century literature broaches cultural concerns including, inter alia, migration and diaspora, memory and nostalgia, identity and heritage, and history and lineage, all converge in new spaces. As people are in constant mobility, they often settle in foreign lands, where cultural interactions naturally unfold among them, giving rise to multicultural societies. Thereupon, numerous modern diasporic authors attempt to mirror the multicultural ethos in their texts. This study maps how the culinary element behaves as a cultural connector in the Arab-American Diana Abu-Jaber's memoir *Life Without A Recipe* (2016). Additionally, it peruses how she accentuates the urge to forge a transnational territory, wherein the seemingly irreconcilable cultural sets can ultimately reunite and harmonise the dissonance amongst cultures and identities. The paper invokes the deleuzoguattarian postmodern concept of the "rhizome" (1987) and E. W. Soja's notion of the "Thirdspace", where the reconciliation is made between cultural divides. It concludes that the memoir is a narrative of interbeing and transnationalism, which rejects the hierarchical binaries and relocates Abu-Jaber's bicultural self in a rhizomatic Thirdspace.*

Keywords: *culinary element, diaspora, cultural divides, rhizome, thirdspace*

ملخص

يناقش الأدب في القرن الواحد والعشرين قضايا ثقافية متنوعة تشمل الهجرة والشتات، والذاكرة والحنين، والهوية والتراث، والتاريخ والنسب، حيث تتقاطع هذه المواضيع في فضاءات جديدة. مع الحركة المستمرة للأفراد، غالبا ما يستقرون في أراض غريبة، حيث تتكشف تفاعلات ثقافية طبيعية بينهم، مما يؤدي إلى نشوء مجتمعات متعددة الثقافات. في هذا السياق، يسعى العديد من كتاب الشتات العصريين إلى عكس روح التعددية الثقافية في نصوصهم الأدبية. تستعرض هذه الدراسة كيفية توظيف الكاتبة العربية الأمريكية ديانا أبو جابر لعنصر الطهي كوصلة ثقافية في مذكرتها "الحياة بدون وصفة" (2016). كما تفحص كيفية تأكيدها على ضرورة بناء فضاء عابر للحدود الإقليمية، حيث يمكن للمجموعات الثقافية التي تبدو غير قابلة للاندماج أن تتوحد في النهاية وتتناغم مع اختلافاتها الثقافية وهوياتها المتنوعة. يعتمد البحث على المفهوم المابعد حدثي "الجذور" (1987) لدولوز وغاتاري، بالإضافة إلى نظرية إدوارد سوجا عن "الفضاء-الثالث"، حيث يتم التوفيق بين الانقسامات الثقافية. وتستنتج الدراسة أن المذكرة تمثل سودا للتعايش المشترك بين الهويات والثقافات، الذي يتجاوز الحدود القومية، ويرفض الثنائيات الهرمية، ويعيد تحديد الذات ثنائية الثقافة لدى أبو جابر في "الفضاء-الثالث الجذوري".

الكلمات المفتاحية: عنصر الطهي، الشتات، الانقسامات الثقافية، الجذور، الفضاء-الثالث



1. Introduction

Twenty-first century literature navigates the intricate landscape of cultural issues, encompassing themes such as migration and diaspora, memory and nostalgia, identity and heritage, as well as history and lineage, all of which intertwine within new and evolving spatial contexts. Being on the move, second and third generation immigrants often find themselves in foreign territories, enmeshed in “a condition of continuous (micro)diaspora” (Colombo, 2013, p. 20). *Ergo*, mobility, fluidity, adaptability and openness have emerged as pivotal hallmarks of the century and resulted in cultural exchanges, which arise naturally leading to the formation of multicultural societies. However, departing from the homeland while belonging to the Global South have placed individuals at risk of being less recognised or even “othered” and their deep-seated concern with “place and displacement becomes conspicuous (Ashcroft et al, 2002, p. 8). In truth, the large-scale human mobility and attempts to cultural hybridisation and syncretism have failed to suppress the line between the Orient and the Occident. In response, a multitude of modern diasporic authors labour to capture this variegated cultural mosaic within their narratives, delivering a rich and nuanced exploration of socio-cultural intricacies in a globalised world. Thereupon, the Arab American author, Diana Abu-Jaber, endeavours to merge the Other with the Self as a subtle thread running through the fabric of her text and presents the world’s different cultural divides as rhizomatic and thus, centerless and non-hierarchical regardless of geography, particularly America, a territory where racial discrimination remain pervasive. In doing so, she destabilises the arborescent structures of the rigid Western discourse and contrives a Thirdspace, where she navigates her identity, culture, and home through a harmonious, transnational discourse of fluidity, multiplicity and interconnectedness.

This study maps how the culinary element behaves as a cultural connector begetting a “Thirdspace”, different from H. Bhabha’s, across Abu-Jaber’s *Life Without A Recipe* (2016), which is a memoir set against the backdrop of the massive immigrations over the world. It is a probe into how the author merges food recipes and family memories in her narrative in an endeavour to connect her Jordanian cultural heritage to the American one. Additionally, it peruses how she accentuates the urge to forge a new territory, wherein the seemingly irreconcilable cultural sets, the Orient and the Occident represented by her

father's and grandmother's respectively, can ultimately reunite and harmonise the dissonance amongst cultures and identities in an already-multicultural milieu. Further, it demonstrates how Abu-Jaber's memoir offers a new perspective of considering spatiality and multiculturalism; she attempts to obfuscate the boundaries between the "superior" and "inferior" cultures and reterritorialises a rhizomatic space for hyphenated identities to co-exist.

The text under study, *Life Without a Recipe* (2016), is written by Diana Abu-Jaber who was born in upstate New York, to a Jordanian father and an American mother. Raised amidst the intricacies of a bicultural identity within a multicultural context, she designs her memoir with a scrupulous delineation of the junctions of the East and the West, tradition and modernity. The text portrays journeying without a route map and investigates the complexities of the quintessential immigrant experience, identity, culture and familial discord. Abu-Jaber frames the narrative by the unending tension between Bud, her Jordanian immigrant father deeply attached to his cultural lore, and Grace, a spirited, strong-willed and liberated German grandmother embedded in American traditions. The two disagree on everything including, food, work, and especially how Diana should live her life in the United States. Metaphorically, the portrayal of such simmering tension serves as a microcosm of a broader conflict echoing E. Said's binary opposites and discourses of separation. The memoir explores how the contrasting cultural influences between Bud and Grace shape Abu-Jaber's sense of self, as she negotiates a new fluid space fusing diverse cultures. Through embracing fluidity, Abu-Jaber endeavours to bridge the cultural gap between these two opposing worlds through food and recipes to harmonise the disparities, creating a multicultural identity in a diasporic space.

Much of the existing scholarship on Abu-Jaber's *Life Without a Recipe* falls short of fully engaging with the profound interplay between displacement, identity, cultural disparities, adaptability, and the rhizomatic Thirdspace. However, few scholars have addressed themes including substantially semiotics of food, hybrid identity and the immigrant experience. In the realm of literary food studies, Z. Tabačková (2018) probes into how food acts as a griot. By exploring segments related to food preparation and consumption, the critic detects a different role food plays within the narrative. Metaphorically, she perceives food as a storyteller "whose tale revolves around the search for memory and the search for identity" (p. 56). For her, food reconfigures memory

and discloses certain features about one's identity. She further explains that Abu-Jaber exploits the commemorative function of food through recalling a story or advice at each preparation or consumption of food in her writing. Thus, the culinary element becomes a vessel for preserving and transmitting the past, as well as reviving wisdom from earlier times (Tabačková, p. 61).

In the framework of hybridity, S. J. Jaber (2021) examines, in *The Dynamics of Hybridity in Diana Abu Jaber's The Language of Baklava and Life Without a Recipe*, the representation of mixed identities and compares Abu-Jaber's depictions of the theme of hybridity from different aspects, particularly identity, culture and language in both memoirs (p. 7). The study unravels that both memoirs demonstrably reveal aspects of post-colonial theory as the author seeks to depict her new hybrid context (Jaber, p. 8), which is, in Bhabha's words (1994), the "Third Space of enunciation". This space is distinct from Abu-Jaber's original worlds, the East and the West (Jaber, p. 8). Accordingly, the memoirist attempts to provide the readers with an image of Eastern culture and identity different from the one presented in Western texts and discourses.

Another research has been conducted through the lens of autoethnography. L. M. Pazargadi (2021) approaches Abu-Jaber's memoir drawing on Brinda Mehta's concept of autobiography. She considers the work as a type of autobiography, which serve as "as a palimpsest preserving personal memory, familial stories, and socio-cultural systems within the contours of the memoir" (Pazargadi, p. 1). She asserts that the author creates system of culinary signs and endeavours to transmit her hybrid identity. She also builds on Elizabeth Ettore's concept of feminist autoethnography, which is a way of maintaining a political agency (Pazargadi, p. 1). Therefore, the incorporation of recipes is viewed as an autoethnographical form connecting personal identity with cultural memory through the culinary element. Through food, Abu-Jaber has managed to locate the self and contrive a space for diasporic Arab American voices in an effort to defy marginalisation.

The above-mentioned studies, though relatively varied, report different layers of meaning encapsulated within Abu-Jaber's text, yet they have dismissed Abu-Jaber's efforts to bridge the gap between the cultural divides, depicted through the tension between her Jordanian father and American grandmother reflecting the Orientalist dichotomies, the East and the West respectively. Throughout the embrace of the fluidity in defining the notion of home and the exploration of various recipes, she tends towards the contrivance of a decentralised, flexible,

non-linear space wherein she harmonises the conflicting worlds and cultures to which she belongs. The current study is an attempt to expand the analysis of the aforementioned cultural aspects in Abu-Jaber's memoir through building on chiefly the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the "rhizome" to read the fluid notion of home. It also relies on Soja's notion of the "Thirdspace" to explain how the character Diana's kitchen becomes a space where ingredients and recipes engage in an equitable dialogue and coexist in harmony, dismantling the outdated dichotomy.

The study employs an analytical methodology to examine the author's insistence on the requisite coexistence of diverse cultures within an "acentered", transcultural space portrayed in *Life Without a Recipe* through the culinary element. This approach seeks to examine the passages where the binary dichotomies are invoked and how Abu-Jaber attempts to blur the line between them through the promotion of the Deleuzoguattarian rhizomatic model and the creation of a "Thirdspace" of fluidity and harmony.

Regarding the rhizome, it is a concept, introduced by G. Deleuze (1925-1995), who is primarily a French philosopher, and the radical psychiatrist, F. Guattari (1930-1992, in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975). The collaborative work is an analysis of Kafka's depiction of movement in his novels and short stories, but it also correlates with a particular mode of reading and writing. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), which is a translation of *Mille Plateaux* (1980), the term has a dual significance; it broadly describes modes of thought and analysis that are non-hierarchical, fluid, and decentred, while also carrying a more defined literary sense and pertaining to specific writing styles (Oxford Research Encyclopaedia, 2021). Thus, the term is applied to portray a form of composition that is distinguished from conventional book structures and embraces a theory of language that departs from fundamental structures, logic, or grammar, and instead supports a more open-ended, dynamic process of variation. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), "rhizomes are anomalous becomings produced by the formation of transversal alliances between different and coexisting terms within an open system" (p. 10). Through fostering random, expansive, and decentralised connections, rhizomatic "lines of flight" will intersect, evolve, and overlay one another. Rethinking reality as evolving and nomadic without dichotomies seems to be one of Abu-Jaber's efforts to create a

rhizome and advocate a non-hierarchical cultural system that challenges linear structures, laying the emphasis on fluidity and multiplicity.

To read Abu-Jaber's space, the kitchen, from a socio-spatial perspective, the study also draws on the concept of the Thirdspace theorised by the American postmodern geographer, E. W. Soja (1940-2015), in *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996). Soja propounds the idea of the Thirdspace as "the assertion of an alternative envisioning of spatiality" (p. 163), which defies "all conventional modes of spatial thinking" (ibid). Accordingly, he proposes a different understanding of the notion of space and deconstructs traditional approaches to spatiality of individuals and societies. This echoes Abu-Jaber's redefinition of the kitchen, as she seems to go beyond the physical space to reach an imagined territory where "all histories and geographies, all times and places are immanently presented and represented" (Soja, p. 311). Soja adds that when the Thirdspace is born, everything is fused,

subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. (p. 57)

The memoir reimagines the reality of spaces such as the notion of home and the kitchen while individuals are on the move trying to negotiate cultural, identity, historical and geographical boundaries. The reconciliation between recipes and ingredients reflects the decline of dichotomies and uncovers how the memoir navigates and integrates various cultural elements, focusing on their interplay within a context that subverts conventional boundaries. It also relocates Abu-Jaber's bicultural self in a rhizomatic Thirdspace.

Additionally, the study references Soja's concept of "Thirdspace," which represents a hybrid space where different cultural elements intersect and interact, facilitating reconciliation and integration. In this context, the memoir is interpreted as a narrative of interbeing that transcends hierarchical binaries. It relocates Abu-Jaber's bicultural identity within a rhizomatic Thirdspace, where Jordanian and American cultures are not merely juxtaposed but are dynamically intertwined and redefined. This theoretical lens allows for a deeper understanding of how the memoir reconfigures cultural boundaries and fosters a new, inclusive space for hybrid identities.

2. Discussion

2.1 Divides and Superiority: Cultural Chasms between Eastern Cauliflower and “Catholic Cookies”

In diasporic literature, the theme of cultural differences have long been the focus of scholarly inquires and an inspiration for authors. The tension in global interactions have created a binary opposition between the “civilised” West and the “exotic” East. Hence, challenging this Orientalist dichotomy, which have long influenced global views, becomes crucial and inevitable in order to subvert the stereotypes. Abu-Jaber poignantly captures the cultural divides existing between her Jordanian father, Bud, and her American grandmother, Grace.

The disparate backgrounds and beliefs of Bud and Grace very often coalesce in the kitchen. There are numerous instances, in *Life Without a Recipe*, which suggest tension, cultural differences, and intolerance between Bud and Grace. One of the evocative lines that encapsulates this tension is “Before they’d met, neither Grace nor Bud could have imagined each other, not once in a million years. They came with their ingredients like particles of lost and opposing worlds, the dying old divisions—East and West” (Abu-Jaber, 2016, p. 21). This passage vividly describes the cultural chasms between the father and the grandmother and accentuates the improbability of finding a meeting point. Abu-Jaber does not use the kitchen as a physical space but rather as a metaphorical one, which represent a battlefield where these conflicting worlds clash and coalesce to reveal the complexities of the cultural divisions to which they refer.

In another instance, Grace considers the food Bud’s prepares as a form of punishment. For her, when the girls misbehave, Bud would prepare “cauliflower seething in olive oil and garlic, the bitter, sulfurous ingredients he hacks up when he’s in a mood. Stuff that tastes like punishment to an eight-year-old” (Abu-Jaber, 2016, p. 19). Grace, in an attempt to fight Bud’s cauliflower, runs into the kitchen and prepares cookies, which seemingly reveal a “superior” culture as she comments, “Only higher civilizations bake cookies. ... I don’t know how you people would celebrate Christmas if I wasn’t around. Run wild like savages” (Abu-Jaber, p. 17). Accordingly, cookies, though small, are culturally significant denoting the West, “the civilised”. Grace’s statement incarnates her strong conviction in the refinement and superiority of Western customs. Her statement “I don’t know how you people would celebrate

Christmas if I wasn't around," further accentuates her sense of indispensability in upholding American traditions and without her crucial presence, the family might descend to what she considers as a "savage" practice. This moment illustrates the tension between cultural differences within Abu-Jaber's family members.

In truth, geographical borders do not define cultural differences; the shared language, beliefs, practices, history and memory are behind the creation of a culturally diverse group or nation. In this respect, E. Hobsbawm (1975) asseverates that cultural differences are so embedded in our societies and territorial divisions based on culture are observed everywhere. Elements including language, customs, and memories are all that make one nation different from the other (p. 98). Yet, this does not imply that one nation is better than the other. In bicultural families, Grace's remark, imbued with a touch of irony, about a minor traditional practice like cookie baking becomes a symbol of sophistication and superiority emphasising cultural differences and identity.

Notwithstanding that Abu Jaber is *de facto* torn between two cultures, she does not seem to be setting down her in-between identity or highlight the cultural differences. She rather attempts to find common grounds to conciliate between the lost culture and the host culture. As such, she represents her Arab culture and Western culture as interacting and evolving across borders, mirroring the complex realities of second-generation immigrants experience in the contemporary era. This cultural exchange echoes what is called transnationalism, which is achieved through fluidity. For Abu-Jaber, the classical approach of dividing the world according to Western thought has now entered a state of crisis by the introduction of the rhizome model, which seeks to decentre the centre and destabilise traditional conventions by new flexible concepts and hypotheses.

2.2 Negotiating the Shifting Sands of Home and Identity: Abu-Jaber's Attempts at Fluidity, Reimagination and Transnationalism

The notion of home has been a subject of study in various disciplines since antiquity. It is viewed as a reality present across all locations and eras, albeit manifesting in diverse forms and with different characteristics. In diaspora, the notion of home has long occupied the centrality of the literary ground and the term retains different meanings. Traditionally seen as a static entity, home has been often represented as a singular and idealised physical space associated with belonging and identity. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2024), home is “a dwelling-place... the fixed residence of a family or household... the dwelling in which one habitually lives, or which one regards as one's proper abode”. Yet, in contemporary literature, its definition has shifted from fixed to fluid as individuals are in constant mobility. In *Life Without a Recipe*, Abu-Jaber muses on the world her parents have created and comes to understand that her true homeland is not a place determined by geographical borders but by where family is.

Abu-Jaber's father, driven by his desire to marry her mother, leaves Jordan to build a life in America. Likewise, her mother's willingness to move and live in Jordan embodies the fluidity of the notion of home in the narrative. Abu-Jaber writes “Or perhaps after a few years of suburbia, she really is ready for the adventure. In either case, I have no recollection of my mother resisting the move: She sells the furniture as stoically as she gave away her wedding dress to the nun's charity the last time we moved to Jordan” (Abu Jaber, 2016, p. 118). This illustrates the theme of fluidity as experienced by the family. Referring to her mother's act of selling furniture and giving away her wedding dress highlights the pragmatism the family adopts to approach life changes, transitions and uncertainties coinciding with relocations. More importantly, it not only insinuates a redefinition of the fixed notion of home but exposes it as something that can be reproduced in the territory the family lands at as well.

Moreover, Abu-Jaber tells us the story of her mother, thinking beyond her social, political, economic and national boundaries, and substantially, embracing a transnational attitude. As individuals negotiate and reconcile their sense of self across different spatial and cultural contexts, transnationalism promotes the fluid nature of identity. It encompasses “a subjective, universal consciousness... in favor of international movement and change... It is not just a spatial movement

of people between locations, but an attitudinal drive and way of thinking that does not see national boundaries as unsolvable restraints" (p. 8). Abu-Jaber emphasises the possibility of creating transitional communities, which are actively participating in the globalised world rather than adhering to the traditional idea of nation-states, seen as isolated entities.

Abu-Jaber displays home as a place where personal relationships develop and flourish, in which each individual gives and receives. Home is a place where relationships are originally formed and individuals come to be defined (Patrão Neves, 2018, p. 73). It is a territory, be it real or imagined, where one can find the true and personal expression of belonging and comfort. As the spatial configurations of spaces are not confined to physical limits, Abu-Jaber provides a different definition of home and destabilises the predominant meaning. Using Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, she deterritorializes the fixed meaning of home and substitutes it by a more fluid definition in the memoir. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) create a metaphor using the wasp and the orchid to explain deterritorialization and reterritorialization. They enunciate that the wasp "reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome" (p. 10). This highlights how the orchid has a symbiotic relationship with the wasp; they interact and undergo a transformation to re-establish themselves in new territories. The process of reterritorialization involves the reproduction of new social, cultural and territorial forms (p. 8). This evidences the dynamic nature of home, belonging, culture and even identities and affiliations and shows how meaning can be constantly shifting and adapting to fit within new contexts with the rise of globalisation, demographic movement, and transnationalism.

In a transnational context, the "deterritorialization of culture" is a key feature in an epoch of rapid and frequent mobility. It reflects how nowadays, people tend to identify with multiple communities regardless of not sharing the same physical space with the other members. This insinuates that national and regional cultures can no longer be categorised or understood as a unified and distinct identity (Papastergiadis, 2000). The movement of identities and culture unescapably accompanies the movement of people between locations. This displacement has weakened the rigid significance of borders as outlined by the nation-states.

Interestingly, observing that more and more people are living in a constant condition of movement, the ability to be fluid resonates with the concept of nomadism which traditionally means the lifestyle of people constantly moving from one place to another and never remain tethered to one space, often in search of better living conditions (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). In a Deleuzoguattarian sense, nomadic strategy, through the introduction of the rhizome, describes an approach, which draws on the fluidity, adaptability, and resistance of fixed identities, social organisations, single meanings or inflexible structures. In other terms, identities, cultures, and meanings are continually in flux, resembling nomadic people's continual mobility.

In the memoir, Abu-Jaber tends to adopt a rhizomatic approach to identity and ethnicity, as her sense of self is not restricted to a singular geographical or cultural space, but rather the product of multiple, intersecting influences. She is aware that her Jordanian father and American German grandmother reflect two distinct cultural backgrounds, but instead of preferring one to the other, her identity evolves through the interaction and amalgamation of both. This exemplifies the transnationalism and the Deleuzoguattarian rhizomatic model, wherein roots are neither singular nor deep; they spread out in multiple directions, forming a complex and interconnected network. Hence, she debunks the hierarchisation of cultures and civilisations and substitutes it by non-linearity and decenteredness. Abu-Jaber's diaporic experience as an immigrant and a descendent of immigrants further reinforces the rhizomatic aspect of her identity. Abu-Jaber's text emphasises that being an immigrant parallels living in an ending state of becoming. Her continual movement between different cultural spaces shapes her identity and renders it constantly shifting and adapting.

2.3 Blending Cultures in the Kitchen: A Reconfiguration of Space

Because the world's cultures need to be considered as exchanges which are constantly mobile and transformative, Abu-Jaber continues to advocate transnationalism. She visits Jordan and learns how to prepare the traditional Middle Eastern dessert called, Knafeh, from her relatives who were taught by their Palestinian grandmother Anissa. This lineage of knowledge through the culinary element becomes a medium of connecting with her cultural background. Knafeh becomes not only symbolic of Abu-Jaber's familial roots and connection to the Middle East but also a source of continuity across different generations and spaces.

Critically reflecting this cultural behavior, the act of preparing Knafeh, in this context, does not denote Abu-Jaber's desire to assume her identity of ethnicity (Dalessio, 2012, p. 7), nor to express her belongingness to a specific ethnic group or territory. In the midst of the conflict between Bud's cauliflower and Grace's cookies, new meals have appeared. Grace and Diana's trip to Paris "get culture" (Abu-Jaber, 2016, p. 42), where they eat French patisserie on the bank of the Seine, Diana seems to enjoy the experience; she vividly describes it,

The moment intertwined with the bolt of French blue sky, the warm summer air, the smell of the Seine. When we bit into them, the pastries were crisp, then bright puffs; they were clouds and bridges and fine art in gold frames and old books in leather bindings and weightless days to come. (Abu-Jaber, p. 46)

The passage delineates a picturesque setting, which suggests Diana's cultural immersion and aesthetic appreciation.

Another illustration of blending and appreciating other cultures is when Diana, together with her boyfriend Jeremey, try various recipes from the vegetarian *Moosewood Cookbook* or *The International Cookbook*, such as the Italian spaghetti carbonara (Abu-Jaber, 2016, p. 177), and the legendary Peking duck from the Far East. Their kitchen is transformed into a "cooking lab" (Abu-Jaber, 2016, p. 35), where they explore the "creative process" (p. 35). It reunites the conflicting views on cooking, which seem to have eventually found a middle ground. Their exploration of different cuisines and experimenting with new recipes convey a search of "constructing a multicultural identity that is based on both descent and the ability to consent" (Dalessio, 2012, p. 9). Resorting to diverse cookbooks highlights a shared culinary experience of blended ingredients and ways of cooking all coexisting in a harmonious space of combined heritage. The interconnection of recipes implies the author's reimagination of identity, tree-like structures and the Orientalist discourse of dichotomies, advocating a rhizomatic Thirdspace, wherein beings and entities are connected, constantly influencing and influenced by each other (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7).

Another instance where Abu-Jaber uses food as a medium to bridge and promote understanding, solidarity and even connection among different cultures is when she and her third husband Scott, decide to adopt a daughter and hire a babysitter for her. Soledad, born of a Cuban mother and a Nicaraguan father. When the babysitter's family faces the imminent threat of expulsion from their

house, Diana, driven by compassion, endeavours to show empathy and decides to offer them food of consolation. She serves them “carbonara, meatballs, spicy chili, lentil soup” (Abu-Jaber, 2016, p. 177). Food becomes a way to give solace and commiserate with Soledad on the unfortunate circumstances her family is enduring. Over time, Soledad starts to ask for Cuban food Diana is unfamiliar with like tres leches cake, guava pastelitos and ropa vieja. Guided by the *Eat Caribbean Cookbook*, Diana begins venturing into the Cuban cuisine navigating new culinary challenges. This act begets a space of negotiation and opens avenues for individuals to coexist in multicultural environments.

Noticeably, Abu-Jaber attempts to build her narrative upon Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic philosophy (1987), which criticises hierarchical systems describing them as “arborescent systems” (p. 16). Accordingly, these centred systems should be subverted and substituted by “acentered systems”, which is the kitchen, wherein “communication runs from any neighbour to any other... all individuals are interchangeable... and the final, global result synchronized without a central agency” (p. 17). Abu-Jaber follows Deleuze and Guattari’s model, which argues for an alternative perspective; an evaluation of things based on “a plane of consistency”, namely on their value an inherent worth they possess and how they interact with each other in their context or assemblage (p. 22). This seems to be her clear rejection of the Western dualistic reasoning and the unnecessary need to refer to external standards in judging expressions and actions. Abu-Jaber’s act of trying out new different recipes from the world’s cookbooks displays not only fluidity but renders the kitchen a space where she decentres the centre and the so-called “superior” and “inferior” cultures are fused.

The “Thirdspace” and the rhizome meet at the nexus of openness and multiplicity as Soja (1996) states that it is a “space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives” (p. 5). Accordingly, the kitchen, where food from different cuisines is being prepared, served and consumed, becomes a space open to multiple interpretations. Following Soja’s conceptualisation (1996), the “Thirdspace” is created out of spatiality, historicity, and sociality (p. 57). That is to say, the different historical, cultural, societal and spatial contexts of Diana’s family encounter in the kitchen, the “lived space” (p. 10). Diana’s journey of self-conceptualisation ends in a

"Thirdspace", in which ingredients and spices from all over the globe are being explored and the traditional geographic and cultural borders are overstepped.

Abu-Jaber, in the context of diasporic, transnational communities and cross-cultural negotiations, moves between different cultural spaces and influences taking elements from each to construct a multicultural identity to fit in the new environments. In doing so, she contrives a rhizomatic Thirdspace where she maintains connections to her roots, yet rethinks hierarchy, categorisation, and adherence to fixed identities. She blurs conventional boundaries and embraces a more open-ended, changing sense of self. Her multicultural identity is manifest through the embrace of new cultural forms, transcending traditional, rigid structures.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Abu-Jaber's memoir, *Life Without A Recipe*, is a subtle exploration of identity, culture, and the experience of immigrants in a globalised world. She endeavours, through the evocative mediums of the culinary element and family memories, to delineate the diaphanous fabric of a diasporic experience while people are navigating a multicultural identity within unfamiliar spaces. She reunites the East and the West, the seemingly opposing worlds of her Jordanian heritage and American upbringing, as her text assuredly unfolds as a narrative accentuating the idea of subverting traditional hierarchical structures. Her transnational narrative is an attempt to efface the imaginary line between the Occident and the Orient rejecting the gulf between them through offering the reader a more fluid definition of the notion of home and reimagines her multicultural identity within a centerless, interconnected "Thirdspace". This space, neither fixed nor singular, embraces the complexities of a rhizomatic existence, where cultural roots intertwine and identities engage in constant dialogue, mirroring the rich mosaic of a life straddling different worlds. Through the rhizomatic approach, Abu-Jaber, therefore, offers her readers a powerful testament to the possibilities of a self that transcends rigid traditional boundaries and flourishes within the commingling of multiple cultural threads.

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