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The Presence of Women and Absence of Men

In Susan Abulhawa *the Blue Between Sky and Water*

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to,

My family

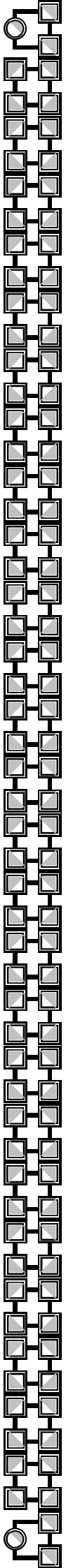
My friends

My teachers

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Abstract

Susan Abulhawa's novel, *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, portrays the profundity of Palestinian identity amidst Israeli occupation and its attempts to erase Palestinian heritage. This research sheds light on the leading role of Palestinian women within the narrative, highlighting their emergence as pivotal figures in resistance against the occupier's systematic efforts to dismantle Palestinian history and identity. Through an examination of characters such as Nazmiyeh and Nur, the research uncovers how Palestinian women combat the challenges of occupation with resilience, embodying a multifaceted form of resistance that extends beyond mere physical confrontation. Additionally, it explores how these women act as guardians of Palestinian culture, actively preserving its legacy from the encroachments of occupation. Their roles as storytellers, custodians of tradition, and pillars of familial and communal strength highlight their indispensable contributions to the preservation of Palestinian identity. By emphasizing the presence of women in contrast to the absence of men, Abulhawa emphasises the power and resilience of Palestinian women in the face of danger, providing a moving testament to their enduring spirit and their crucial role in the struggle for justice and cultural continuity.

Keywords: Palestine, Women, Occupation, Resistance, Cultural identity.

ملخص

تصور رواية سوزان أبو الهوى، الأزرق بين السماء والماء، عمق الهوية الفلسطينية وسط الاحتلال الإسرائيلي ومحاولاته لمحو التراث الفلسطيني. يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على الدور القيادي للمرأة الفلسطينية في السرد، ويسلط الضوء على ظهورها كشخصيات محورية في مقاومة جهود المحتل المنهجية لتفكيك التاريخ والهوية الفلسطينية. من خلال دراسة شخصيات مثل نظمية ونور، يكشف البحث كيف تكافح النساء الفلسطينيات تحديات الاحتلال بمرونة، مما يجسد شكلاً متعدد الأوجه من المقاومة يمتد إلى ما هو أبعد من مجرد المواجهة الجسدية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يستكشف كيف تعمل هؤلاء النساء كحراس للثقافة الفلسطينية، ويحافظن بنشاط على إرثها من تعديات الاحتلال. إن أدوارهم كرواة القصص وحراس التقاليد وركائز القوة الأسرية والمجتمعية تسلط الضوء على مساهماتهم التي لا غنى عنها في الحفاظ على الهوية الفلسطينية. من خلال التأكيد على وجود المرأة على عكس غياب الرجل، تؤكد أبو الهوى على قوة المرأة الفلسطينية ومرونتها في مواجهة الخطر، مما يوفر شهادة مؤثرة على روحها الدائمة ودورها الحاسم في النضال من أجل العدالة والاستمرارية الثقافية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: فلسطين، المرأة، الاحتلال، المقاومة، الهوية الثقافية.



General Introduction

1. Background and Aim of the Study:

The portrayal of women in Susan Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015) is situated within the broader historical context of Palestine, marked by colonialism, displacement, and continuing conflict. The absence of men reflects the realities of Palestinian life, where many have been forced to leave their families behind due to imprisonment, exile, or martyrdom. Through contextualizing the novel within both historical and literary frameworks, this research endeavors to analyze, discuss, and illustrate the intersection of gender dynamics with political upheaval with the scope of the presence of women and absence of Palestinian men in Abulhawa's novel. In doing so, it aims to show and demonstrate the resilience displayed by Palestinian women in the middle of Israeli occupation of their land, enduring rape, violence, and trauma, while also expressing hope and optimism to reclaim dignity, and sense of home, and belonging.

In the realm of literature, the intersectionality of various themes and ideologies often serves as a rich ground for exploration and analysis. Susan Abulhawa's work, *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, captures such a conjunction, where the presence of women and the forced absence of men become central points of narrative inquiry. This dissertation endeavours to dissect and elucidate the depths of Abulhawa's novel, examining historical contexts, theoretical frameworks, and thematic elements that shape her narrative.

At the heart of this dissertation lies in the search for the factors surrounding the portrayal of women and the notable absence of men in Susan Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water*. By examining historical courses and theoretical foundations, this study seeks to unravel the subtle layers of gender, identity, and power embedded within the narrative landscape.

2. Research Statement of the Problem:

The statement of the problem revolves around the portrayal and significance of Palestinian women in Susan Abulhawa's novel, *The Blue Between Sky and Water*,

against the backdrop of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and erasure of Palestinian identity. The problem lies in understanding how Palestinian women are depicted within the narrative, how they overcome the challenges posed by occupation, and how they resist efforts to dismantle their cultural heritage. Additionally, the statement of the problem addresses the need to explore the roles of Palestinian women as custodians of Palestinian culture and the ways in which they contribute to the preservation of Palestinian identity amidst harsh conditions.

Chapter two of the study develops the themes of exile, displacement, resistance, and empowerment within Susan Abulhawa's novel. This chapter discusses how the characters wrestle with the experience of being uprooted from their homeland and the ways in which they resist and assert their right for freedom in the face of occupation. Through close analysis of key passages, the chapter studies the psychological and emotional impacts of exile and displacement on Palestinian identity. Moreover, it explains examples of resistance and empowerment among Palestinian women, highlighting their resilience and capacity to challenge oppressive forces. In general, it attempts to interpret the relationship between exile, resistance, and empowerment as depicted in the novel.

3. Research Questions:

The representation and role of Palestinian women emerge as central themes within the narrative. Against this framework, this study aims to delve into the depiction of Palestinian women in Abulhawa's novel and their significance in resisting Israel's attempts to erode Palestinian identity. The following research questions are:

1. How are Palestinian women depicted in Susan Abulhawa's novel, *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, in the context of the Israeli occupation of Palestine?
2. What challenges do Palestinian women face in navigating the complexities of occupation, as portrayed in the novel?
3. In what ways do Palestinian women resist the Israeli efforts to erode Palestinian identity and heritage within the narrative?

4. Research Methodology:

The research methodology for this study involves a qualitative approach combining textual analysis, feminist literary theory, and cultural studies. Through close reading of Susan Abulhawa's novel, *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, the portrayal and characterization of Palestinian women will be examined within the context of occupation. Drawing from feminist theory, the study will analyze gender roles and differences and power structures shaping the experiences of Palestinian women. Cultural studies will provide insights into the depiction and contention of Palestinian identity and heritage in the novel. This methodology aims to offer an inclusive understanding of the role of Palestinian women in the novel, their resilience, and contributions to the Palestinian struggle for justice and cultural continuity.

5. Dissertation Structure:

This dissertation is divided into two chapters. In the first chapter, the dissertation builds up the theoretical framework of the topic. The section “The Arab Diaspora” serves as a pivotal backdrop against which Abulhawa's narrative unfolds. From the shores of Palestine to the distant lands of exile, the dispersion of Arab communities shapes not only the characters' experiences but also their sense of belonging and displacement. By contextualizing the novel within the broader framework of the Arab Diaspora, the dissertation endeavours to illustrate the complexities of cultural identity and diasporic consciousness.

The section “Postcolonialism” discusses the embedded colonial legacies and the enduring effects of imperial domination. Through the lens of postcolonial theory, it examines how Abulhawa sails through the terrain of power, resistance, and subjugation, shedding light on the complicated relationship between colonizer and colonized. Within the realm of postcolonial literature, narratives emerge as sites of contestation and negotiation, where marginalized voices find expression and agency. By situating Abulhawa's work within this literary tradition, this section aims to

elucidate the ways in which the novel engages with themes of identity, representation, and cultural hegemony.

Central to the discourse of postcolonialism is Edward Said's seminal work, "Orientalism," which critiques Western representations of the 'Other' and interrogates the apparatuses of Orientalist discourse. Drawing upon Said's insights, this subsection examines how Abulhawa deconstructs Orientalist tropes and subverts colonial narratives, offering alternative perspectives on Arab identity and experience.

In the section of feminist discourse, Abulhawa's portrayal of women occupies a central position, challenging traditional gender norms and patriarchal structures. Through an exploration of feminist theories and Palestinian women's experiences, it expounds the ways in which the novel addresses the themes of agency, resistance, and solidarity within the context of gendered oppression. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's point of view provides a critical lens through which to examine the concept of gender and representation in Abulhawa's narrative. By questioning notions of identity and power, this subsection seeks to disentangle the dialectics of agency and constraint that shape women's lives in the novel. Grounded in the realities of Palestinian women's lived experiences, this section delves into the socio-political context within which Abulhawa's characters reflect their struggles and aspirations. By laying bare issues of oppression, resilience, and collective action, this subsection illuminates the ways in which gender intersects with broader structures of power and resistance.

Chapter two dives into gender relations and differences within Susan Abulhawa's novel, *The Blue Between the Sky and Water*. The chapter begins with an insightful Introduction, which sets the groundwork for this exploration, outlining the significance of examining the roles of women and the striking absence of men throughout the narrative. Following this introduction is a detailed "Summary of the Novel", which provides readers with a comprehensive overview of the plot, characters, and major events. This summary serves as a contextual background for our subsequent analysis, clarifying the thematic lines that run throughout the novel.

The dissertation then deals with the theme of "Resistance and Empowerment", where it closely analyses the ways in which female characters manage and resist the

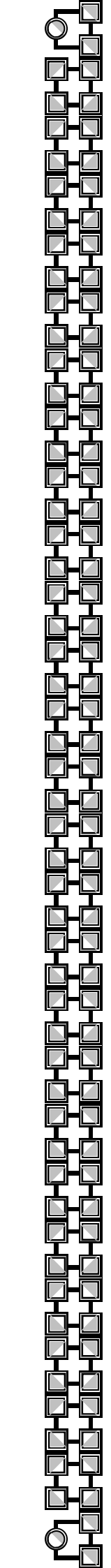
oppressive forces of Israeli occupation. Through character analysis, it discusses moments of agency and empowerment, laying emphasis on the strength and resilience exhibited by these women in the face of Israeli occupation.

Moving forward, the section, “the theme of Exile and Displacement,” gauges the profound impact of displacement on the identities and relationships of the female characters. It details how their experiences of exile shape their sense of self and belonging, particularly in the absence of male figures, and how they handle the hardship of life in a land marked by conflict and loss.

The subsequent section, “Motherhood and Sisterhood”, focuses on pivotal roles of motherhood and sisterhood in the lives of the female characters. Through close examination of their relationships and interactions, it uncovers the ways in which bonds of kinship serve as sources of strength and solidarity, offering emotional support and resilience within the harsh realities of occupation and displacement.

Finally, the research calls attention to “The Absence of Men”, where it shows the significance of the clear absence of male characters in the novel. Through careful analysis, it lays bare the implications of this absence on themes of power, authority, and identity within the narrative, shedding light on the unique perspectives and experiences of the female characters as they live and experience a world dominated by conflict and loss.

In conclusion, the two chapters lay the foundation for a comprehensive analysis of Susan Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, situating the novel within the intersecting frameworks of Arab Diaspora, postcolonialism, and feminism. By examining the historical and theoretical outlines that shape the narrative landscape, this dissertation endeavours to expand on the complications of gender, identity, and power, inviting readers to engage with the text in new and informative ways.



Chapter One: Historical and Theoretical Background

1.1. Introduction:

Chapter One presents an extensive overview of Arab Diaspora with a special focus on Palestinian issue as a recurrent question in Arab Diaspora literature and postcolonial studies. Susan Abulhawa's novel, *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, serves as a poignant exploration of the Palestinian Arab diaspora, complicatedly weaving together the threads of history, identity, and resistance. Rooted in the rich soil of Palestine, the narrative delves into the deep complexities of voice, often marginalized, amplifying the struggles of a people caught in the crosscurrents of postcolonialism. Abulhawa, a Kuwait-born Palestinian American, brings a unique perspective to the discourse, offering a lens that sees through the intersections of diasporic experiences, feminism, and the relentless pursuit of justice.

As a resident of Pennsylvania, Abulhawa voices both physical and metaphorical landscapes, creating a bridge between her ancestral homeland and her current home. Her personal and geographical journey mirrors the broader narrative of displacement, resilience, and the persistent yearning for a homeland deeply resonant within the Palestinian diaspora. The author's commitment to women's equality and dignity, particularly for Palestinian women, manifests in the narrative, breathing life into characters who defy oppression and challenge societal norms.

The theoretical exploration of Abulhawa's work aims to unravel the layers of her narrative, unveiling the complex marriage between cultural identity and the global forces of power. Through the lens of postcolonial theory and feminism, we embark on a journey that transcends borders, acknowledging the silenced voices and weaving them into the fabric of a narrative that demands attention, empathy, and understanding. In this chapter, we portray the cultural and social background of Abulhawa's writing in the lens of literary and cultural theories.

In this chapter, we review, discuss, and analyse the situation of Palestinian women, examining their experiences and voices within the broader context of Arab diaspora, postcolonial literature, feminism, and Spivakian theory. Through the lens of

Susan Abulhawa's impactful writings and the works of other Palestinian women writers, we go through the complexities of identity, resistance, and representation of Palestinians, precisely women.

The first section of this chapter explores the concept of the Arab diaspora, shedding light on the experiences of Palestinians living outside their homeland. By examining the diasporic identities and narratives of Palestinian women, we gain insights into the transnational connections, challenges, and aspirations that shape their lives.

Moving forward, we analyse the realm of postcolonial literature, where Palestinian women's voices have emerged as powerful agents of resistance and resilience. Through critical analyses of literary works by Susan Abulhawa and others, we explain how Palestinian women writers address themes of displacement, colonialism, and cultural survival in their narratives.

Next, we turn our attention to feminism and Spivakian theory, examining how these frameworks meet Palestinian women's experiences. By interrogating power dynamics, representation, and agency, we seek to understand how feminism and Spivak's concept of the subaltern inform our understanding of Palestinian women's struggles and aspirations.

Finally, we delve into the realm of Palestinian women's writing, where their voices reclaim agency and challenge dominant narratives. Through an exploration of Palestinian writings, we uncover the diverse collection of stories, perspectives, and truths that Palestinian women authors bring to the forefront.

In each section, we aim to expand on the identities and experiences of Palestinian women, highlighting their resilience, creativity, and longing for freedom in the face of harsh conditions. By centering their narratives within these intersecting frameworks, we endeavour to intensify their voices and contribute to a deeper understanding of the Palestinian experience.

1.2. Arab Diaspora:

In a broad sense, the term "diaspora" refers to a community that has spread or expanded across at least two countries (Schulz 9). In the Palestinian context, it is seen as "*al-ghurba*" or "*Manfa*", where the Palestinian is a stranger, that carries all the notions of suffering, cold, winter, estrangement, and dislocation" (Schulz 20). The Palestinian diaspora represents a multifaceted dimension of cultural heritage, historical resilience, and ongoing struggle for self-determination. Rooted in a complex history of displacement, the Palestinian people have traversed continents, forged vibrant communities while grappled with the enduring quest for justice and return to their ancestral homeland. As one of the most significant and enduring diasporic populations globally, Palestinians have dispersed across the world, maintaining steadfast connections to their identity, land, and collective aspirations. Amidst the challenges of displacement, exile, and political upheaval, the Palestinian diaspora serves as a testament to the resilience of a people bound by a shared history, culture, and unwavering determination for liberation and dignity.

Regarding the usage of "diaspora" among Palestinians, Helena states that diaspora is very complex: "One problem is political and moral. Employing the term 'diaspora' might to many Palestinians indicate a potential acceptance of the Palestinian dispersal, making the term dubious" (Schulz20). She also quotes Edward who argues against using the term "diaspora" because it ties Palestinian to the homeland, which makes its "associations enigmatic" (Schulz 20).

The Palestinian diaspora community includes individuals who are either refugees themselves or descendants of refugees (Schulz 2005, 21) . Specifically, Christian migration began in the late 18th century, motivated by reasons such as avoiding conscription in the Ottoman army or seeking better opportunities in the "new world." Migration patterns continue as refugees in Jordan or Lebanon seek improved living conditions and job prospects in the Gulf region, families send their children abroad for education in the USA, and individuals face displacement and barriers to entering various countries.

Helena Schulz (2005) examines the criteria for identifying members of the Palestinian diaspora community. She considers whether it solely includes those displaced from their homeland in 1948 and 1967 or encompasses all residing outside the borders of 'historical Palestine (21). She discusses the situation of refugees from the West Bank and Gaza, who live within Palestine's territory but were expelled from their homes in 1948. Schulz also raises questions about how Palestinians within Israel's borders should be regarded, particularly those who remained within their homeland but became a minority in a new state, citizens of Israel. Many Palestinians in the “occupied Palestine” faced 'internal displacement' after the 1948 war. Additionally, a form of 'diasporization' has occurred for West Bank and Gaza residents since the 1967 occupation, with land loss leading to a sense of alienation for peasants and landowners.

Schulz believes that the concept of 'diaspora' holds broader significance for Palestinians beyond specific migration and displacement processes. It represents a condition of alienation and estrangement, reflecting “shattered lives and homes” (21). Therefore, “diaspora” will be used broadly, viewing Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Palestine as leading 'diasporic lives' to some extent. However, displacement, dispersal, forced movement, and restricted mobility have significant implications. The alienation from land, territory, and place defines the lives of most Palestinians, although in varying aspects. It is important to note that Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel “occupied Palestine” do not live in the diaspora but rather experience a diasporic condition (Payel 2021, 50).

Sussan Abulhawa stands as an embodiment of the Palestinian diaspora, wielding her literary ability to illuminate the lived experiences and collective memory of her people. Born into exile, Abulhawa's upbringing in Kuwait and subsequent displacement to the United States infused her with a profound understanding of the complexities of identity, displacement, and longing for homeland. Through her celebrated novel *The Blue Between the Sky and Water* and other literary works, Abulhawa skillfully steers through the complex layers of Palestinian history, weaving together narratives of loss, resilience, and the enduring struggle for justice. As a diasporic figure, she transcends geographical boundaries, serving as a voice for the

silenced, a beacon of hope for the dispossessed, and a steadfast advocate for Palestinian rights on the global stage. Abulhawa's unwavering commitment to truth-telling and humanizing the Palestinian experience resonates deeply within the diaspora and beyond, solidifying her legacy as a luminary whose words continue to inspire, educate, and empower generations to come.

The exploration of diaspora in Arabic literature delves into themes such as migration, diasporic experiences, and exile, all deeply rooted in early Islamic interactions with hijrah or migration. Contemporary challenges of diaspora and exile have given rise to literary expressions addressing immigration, conflict, isolation, distancing, and dislocation (Al-Malah, 2009, p. 11). British Arabic literature, originating from the region, grapples with analogous hybrid exilic and diasporic predicaments, fostering tension between the core and the periphery, native land and host nation, time, belonging, loyalty, and affinity (Al-Malah, 2009, p. 11). Between 1930 and 1970, Arab migrants assimilated into mainstream American society and various communities, blending seamlessly into the cultural fabric. The one-century Anglophone Arabic literary scene can be categorized into three distinctive trends: the Mahjar emigrants in America at the onset of the twentieth century, Europeanization enthusiasts in the mid-1950s, and eventually, the hyphenated, transcultural writers of the past 40 years dispersed globally due to circumstances like exile or diaspora (Al-Maleh, 2009, p. 11).

According to Al-Maleh (2009), the early Arab immigrants were poor, came from illiterate homes, and created their own literary elitism. They were able to maintain a balance between the East and the West, while the following generation of the 1950s, coming from wealthy families, ardently embraced the identity of the European "other," symbolizing the traumas of the ethnic "colonized" who were forced to accept their own loneliness and isolation as a result of severing ties to their mother country despite inevitable rejection by metropolitan forces (Al-Maleh, 2009, p. 12).

Diaspora literature explores the concept of homeland, where displacement and narratives of harsh journeys occur due to economic compulsions; essentially, diaspora refers to a minority community living in exile. It particularly emphasized the real-life

movement of people worldwide in their discussions on diaspora (Rimi Sara, 2008, p. 4). It refers to a scattered population living outside the region considered their ancestral homeland. These communities often share a common history, language, or cultural identity, despite geographical separation. The term carries a sense of both dispersion and connection, highlighting the complex relationship these communities maintain with their homeland.

1.3. Postcolonialism:

Postcolonialism had enormous effect on Palestinian literature. It can serve as a tool for decolonization, countering the effects of colonial influence and expressing the struggles of native peoples. In their article, "The Effect of The Postcolonial on Palestinian Literature", Al Mohammed Salim al Hassani and Ghaith Saleh Mahdi (2022) examined the impact of postcolonialism on two novels by Palestinian authors. They emphasized the advocacy for non-violent resistance against occupation while portraying the daily struggles and atrocities faced by Palestinians (4). They argued that Postcolonial literature should challenge stereotypical representations imposed by dominant forces and addresses a wide range of themes such as immigration, slavery, resistance, and identity. They also stress the importance of literature as a tool for strengthening marginalized voices and rewriting history from a postcolonial perspective (1). Hella Bloom Cohen (2016) believes that postcolonial theory helps investigate the impact of colonial ideologies on Palestinian society. It studies the historical roots of racialized conflicts in Israel-Palestine, tracing them back to British colonial policies such as the Balfour Declaration (1). It deconstructs the conflicts between Jews and Arabs (2).

Postcolonialism is noticeably visible through its primary objects of analysis: European representations of the colonies and non-European self-representation (Hassan 2001, 4). By examining these two areas, the postcolonial project lays bare imperial themes embedded within Western literatures and emphasises a history of cultural exclusions perpetuated by colonial powers. Moreover, it draws on an anti-colonial legacy to rewrite and , challenging traditional narratives and perspectives (4).

In scrutinizing European representations of the colonies, postcolonialism exposes the ways in which colonial powers constructed and portrayed the colonized "other" (Hassan 2001, 4). This involves examining how Western literature, art, and discourse have often produced stereotypes, exoticized cultures, and justified colonial domination (Hassan 2001, 5). By deconstructing these representations, postcolonial scholars reveal the underlying power forces and ideological frameworks that shaped colonial narratives, thus shedding light on the mechanisms of oppression and cultural hegemony. The most significant impact of colonial discourse analysis lies in its reformulations of cultural value. By challenging dominant narratives and exposing the biases inherent in colonial representations, it disrupts the traditional canon, creating space for alternative or postcolonial texts to be recognized and valued (Hassan 2001, 6). Through this process, colonial discourse analysis facilitates a more inclusive and diverse understanding of literature and culture, articulating marginalized voices and perspectives that were previously overlooked or silenced within mainstream discourse.

1.3.1. Postcolonial Literature

John Lye (1993) thinks that post-colonial theory is a framework that examines literature written in countries that were previously or are currently colonized, as well as literature from colonizing countries that addresses colonization or colonized peoples (93). It focuses on how literature from the colonizing culture often distorts the experiences and realities of the colonized people, portraying them as inferior and inscribing their "otherness" onto their own narratives (Lye 98). Moreover, post-colonial theory explores how literature from colonizing countries appropriates the language, imagery, traditions, and other elements of colonized cultures (Lye 100). This approach deals with the complexities of the post-colonial situation, both in terms of the writing and reading experiences of both colonized and colonizing peoples. It highlights the importance of literature by colonized peoples in articulating their identity and reclaiming their past, which is often characterized by the imposition of colonial narratives and the suppression of indigenous voices (102).

Kishan Swaroop Rana (2021) explains that postcolonialism aims to decenter Eurocentric standards and shape the identity of indigenous peoples, challenging the notion that Western and European cultures hold superiority over Eastern cultures (45). In the context of Palestine, postcolonialism seeks to deconstruct Eurocentric narratives and redefine the identity of Palestinians. It challenges the assumption of Western and European cultural superiority, particularly in relation to the ongoing Israeli occupation. Palestinian postcolonial discourse aims to recover narratives, histories, and cultural heritage, asserting the value and validity of Palestinian experiences and perspectives in the face of colonial oppression. Postcolonialism involves aspects like marginalization, selfhood, cultural diversity, mixture, and movement (Rana 49). Individuals on the margins confront societal, governmental, and financial exclusion, contend for sustenance, lack basic liberties, and undergo exploitation. They are categorized disparately, confront ostracism, societal inequity, and disparity, and dwell on the brink of destitution. This marginalization obstructs their entry to chances and adds to societal segregation (Rana 51).

1.3.2. Edward Said's Concept of Orientalism and Postcolonial Thoughts

The roots of Orientalism can be dated back to the Middle Ages and Renaissance, where pre-modern Europe, particularly France, first interacted with the Orient through activities such as exploration and the Crusades (Donzé-Magnier 2017, 2). During this period and extending into the Baroque and Rococo eras, Orientalism served as an artistic influence, with European artists drawing inspiration from the exoticism, sensuality, and fantasy associated with the Orient (2). However, it was during the 19th century that Orientalism emerged as an independent artistic and literary movement in Europe. Although not tied to a specific artistic style, Orientalism focused on themes such as exoticism and the romanticized portrayal of Eastern cultures (Donzé-Magnier 2). Through art, literature, and other cultural expressions, Europeans sought to engage with and depict worlds and cultures they had not previously encountered, shaping Western perceptions of the Orient. According to Edward said (1980):

...by Orientalism I mean several things, all of them, in my opinion, interdependent. The most 'readably accepted designation for Orientalism is an academic one, and indeed the label still serves in a number of academic institutions. Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient-and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist-either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism. (Said 1980, 10)

Said's second definition of "Orientalism" " is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident " (Said 1980, 10). It is fundamentally based on distinction between "the Orient" (typically referring to the East) and "the Occident" (usually meaning the West). This division is not simply geographical but also includes ontological (related to existence and being) and epistemological (related to knowledge and understanding) differences, causing stereotypes and power inequities between Eastern and Western societies.

In his book *The Question of Palestine* (1979), Said fervently highlights the injustices that accompanied the establishment of "the modern state of Israel" and the occupation of Palestine. He seeks to challenge and counter the prevailing narrative that portrays Arabs, including Palestinians, as terrorists and murderers of innocent victims. Said's goal is to "write back" against this dominant narrative, demonstrating that there exists a legitimate Palestinian counter-narrative that deserves recognition and understanding (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia 2009, 116). Said suggests that the belief in a divine promise, a notion fundamental to Zionism and acknowledged even by figures like Lord Balfour, was a significant factor in the appeal of the Zionist movement (116). This promise excluded the existence of Palestinians from the outset. Both European and Jewish visions of the state of Israel were shaped by this divine promise, which inherently omitted the presence and rights of the Palestinian people. Therefore, the Palestinian existence was marginalized and excluded from the map of both the Western World and Israeli occupation from the very beginning. In short, Said believes that the Zionists' primary achievement lies in their capacity to control the narrative about Oriental Arabs and present their perspectives to the Western world:

Emancipated themselves from the worst Eastern excesses, to explain the Oriental Arabs to the West, to assume responsibility for expressing what the Arabs were really like and about, never to let the Arabs appear equally with them as existing in Palestine. (As qtd. in Ashcroft & Ahluwalia 2009, 118).

Said criticises the dehumanizing portrayal of Arabs as inherently inferior to Europeans and Zionists simply because of their Oriental identity: “Arabs are Oriental, therefore less human and valuable than Europeans and Zionists; they are treacherous, unregenerate, etc.” (as qtd. In Ashcroft & Ahluwalia 2009, 118). This way of thinking spreads harmful stereotypes and prejudices, painting Arabs as untrustworthy and morally deficient. Attaching negative characteristics such as treachery and unregeneracy to an entire group of people based only on their cultural or geographical identity is not only unjust but also serves to justify discriminatory practices and policies of the Western World and Modern state of Israel. It reinforces Western power that marginalizes and oppresses Arab communities, denying them their humanity and freedom. Franz Fanon, a prominent postcolonial theorist, argued that racism is inherent to colonial domination, suggesting that the oppressor justifies their control over the oppressed by dehumanizing and denigrating them based on racial or cultural differences (Cohen 2016, 2). Fanon explains how the Israeli state's policies, such as land confiscation, military occupation, and discriminatory laws, are not just about political or territorial control but are also fortified by racialized perceptions of Palestinians as inferior and unworthy of equal rights and dignity (2).

Edward Said captured the identity crisis of Palestinian people who are displaced and dehumanised in his book on Palestine, *After the Last Sky*, when he states:

Identity – who we are, where we come from, what we are – is difficult to maintain in exile ... we are the ‘other’, an opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement, an exodus. Silence and discretion veil the hurt, slow the body searches, soothe the sting of loss. (As qtd. in Ashcroft & Ahluwalia 2009, 4).

Palestinian underwent the trauma of being displaced out of place and history: “It is as if the trauma they experienced had made them mute, as if absolute absence has banned
tales

about its beginnings until the *return to the land had begun*” (Sanbar 200, 93). In his memoir *Out of Place* (1999), Edward Said reflects on his childhood and upbringing as a Palestinian Arab in British-ruled Palestine and later as an immigrant in the United States.

1.4. Feminism:

Feminism is a socio-political movement aimed at advocating for the rights of women in patriarchal societies. It addresses the social structures and norms that shape perceptions of gender, determine treatment, and dictate societal expectations regarding behaviour. As Mary Klages thinks, a feminist is someone who:

sees the gender systems currently in operation (in our culture and in other cultures) as structured by a basic binary opposition — masculine/feminine — in which one term, masculine, is always privileged over the other term, and that this privileging has had the direct effect of enabling men to occupy positions of social power more often than women. (2017, 64)

In the Palestinian context, feminism shows the integral role of Palestinian women's movement within the broader national democratic struggle for liberation and sovereignty (Kuttab 2009, 103-4). It underlines how Palestinian women's activism has evolved over time, closely knotted with and influenced by the different stages of the national struggle. Since the early 20th century, Palestinian women's activism has been profoundly connected to the national liberation movement. Their participation has been driven by a sense of identification with the collective aspirations of the Palestinian people for self-determination and independence (Kuttab 104). Since the 1920s, Palestinian women have actively engaged in various forms of resistance alongside men, sharing in the struggles, sacrifices, and aspirations of the nation as a whole. Their activism has been shaped by their commitment to the broader goals of the national struggle, including the pursuit of justice, equality, and sovereignty for the Palestinian people. Palestinian women are “displaced at home” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2010, 3), disclosing the profound dislocation these women feel within their own communities. Beyond the physical displacement, Palestinian women also endure emotional and

psychological trauma. They not only lose their physical homes but also their sense of safety, security, and belonging (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2010, 3) The ongoing political conflict between Israelis and Palestinians worsens this trauma, as their suffering is often denied or ignored, and their voices are silenced.

As all women, a Palestinian woman still pursues equality and dignity, a foothold in nationalist narratives by exposing gender differences that portray national liberation and citizenship as masculine traits in contrast to femininity (Hasso 1998, 422). In other words, national narratives are often associated with masculine qualities, while femininity is seen as something separate or inferior in this context. Nevertheless, Palestinian male nationalist narratives often elevate women as essential for the reproduction of the nation, likening the land of Palestine to women's bodies. Furthermore, these narratives represent the appropriation and occupation of Palestine as a form of sexual violation and appropriation of women's bodies Hasso 1998, 422). Fundamentally, they express the struggle for Palestine's sovereignty and control as a violation akin to the violation of women's bodies, drawing parallels between the oppression of the nation and the oppression of women.

1.4.1. Spivak's Postcolonial Feminist Theory:

In her essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1985), Gayatri Spivak examines the capacity for marginalized and oppressed groups, referred to as the subaltern, to have their voices heard (Rana 48). Spivak defines the subaltern as those who are socially and economically marginalized. She discusses the conditions faced by natives during colonial rule and the challenges encountered by women in the postcolonial era (Rana 48). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) states that "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (28).

In the context of Palestinian women, Gayatri Spivak proposes that within systems of colonialism, marginalized groups, including women, are often silenced and marginalized even further. Spivak argues that the subaltern, or the marginalized and oppressed, are denied a voice and their histories are erased within colonial structures.

For Palestinian women, who face crossing forms of oppression due to both colonialism and patriarchy, Spivak highlights the extent of their marginalization. Not only are they silenced by colonial powers, but their voices are further obscured due to their gender. Their experiences, struggles, and histories are often overlooked or ignored, leaving them even more invisible within the broader narrative of colonialism.

Graham Riach (2017) analyses and quotes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's definition of the "subaltern," describing as all individuals who are "removed from all lines of social mobility" and belong to the "illiterate peasantry" (38). She adds that these are people who lack access to education or other resources that could help them improve their social standing. Spivak's definition can be applied to the case of Palestinian women who are marginalized and disenfranchised within society. These women may face barriers to social mobility due to factors such as limited access to education, economic resources, and opportunities for advancement. Consequently, they may find themselves in a position of vulnerability and marginalization, lacking the means to improve their socio-economic status or challenge existing power structures.

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Gayatri Spivak explores the possibility of marginalized groups, or subalterns, being able to express themselves and attain self-representation (Riach 38). By "speak," Spivak means more than simply vocalizing words; it covers having one's message acknowledged and recognized within broader social, academic, economic, and political contexts (38). Spivak's investigation exposes whether the existing global power structures, which encompass various spheres such as academia, economy, and politics, allow for the voices of the subaltern to be heard and acknowledged. Her conclusion is pessimistic, suggesting that these structures currently do not provide the necessary platforms or recognition for subalterns to articulate their experiences and perspectives effectively (39).

Spivak's use of the term "Subaltern" emphasizes the complexity and fluidity of subaltern identity, suggesting that it is not a fixed category but rather a dynamic and complex construct (Riach 40). This identity can be shaped by various factors such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, and religion. For Spivak, "subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" (as qtd.in Riach 41): Not only are women subordinated by colonial

powers or dominant social groups, but they are also oppressed within their own communities due to gender norms and inequalities. In the case of Palestinian women, a voice in writing their histories is crucial for a more accurate representation of their experiences, addressing intersectional oppression, empowering women, fostering community solidarity, and informing policy and advocacy efforts (Stockdale 2008, 13).

Spivak suggests that the voice of the subaltern woman is systematically silenced and overlooked within dominant discourse. When she endeavors to articulate her experiences or assert herself and identity, her voice is often muted and disregarded. This silencing occurs due to a combination of factors, combining oppressions of patriarchy and imperialism, or occupation in Palestine's case, which work in tandem to marginalise and disempower her. As Spivak claims “, Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object formation, the figure of woman disappears.” (as qtd. in Nigm & Shalash 2023, 2). Furthermore, within the context of imperialism, the subaltern woman's voice is further suppressed as colonial powers impose their own narratives and agendas, which prioritize the interests of the colonizers over those of the colonized.

1.4.2. Palestinian Women's Issues:

Nationalism in Palestine, like in many other regions, is closely connected to gender norms and expectations. Traditional notions of masculinity often dominate nationalist discourse, exalting characteristics such as strength, bravery, and assertiveness, while simultaneously marginalizing or overlooking contributions from women and femininity (Rubenberg 2001, 217). As a result, women's liberation is frequently perceived as opposed to the unity and coherence of nationalist programs, further prolonging patriarchal structures within political spheres (217). However, Palestinian women also stand as resilient agents of resistance against the dangerous agendas of Israeli occupation. Their activism, deeply rooted in the struggle for justice and dignity, involves political, social, and humanitarian causes. Palestinian women have always played key roles in challenging Israeli policies and asserting the rights of their communities.

Palestinian women tend to overcome their everyday sad life of death and bereavement. They embrace everyday acts of joy and normality as forms of resilience challenges conventional notions of resistance, stressing the importance of maintaining hope and humanity amongst hardship and adversity (Richter-Devroe 2011, 33). In a context marked by prolonged conflict and occupation, this emphasis on joy and normality serves as a powerful assertion of freedom, countering any stereotypical narratives of victimhood and despair (34). By humanizing the Palestinian experience and increasing the voices of marginalized groups, especially women, this reframing of resistance helps reinforce the resilience of Palestinian society. Consequently, it boosts empathy, solidarity, and a deeper recognition of the ongoing struggle for justice and freedom in Palestine.

By focusing on the everyday struggles of Palestinian women, Palestinian women can uncover the complex ways in which resistance manifests in daily life. These forms of resistance may include acts of cultural preservation, community organizing, education, economic empowerment, and defiance of oppressive norms ((Richter-Devroe 2011, 34). For example, women may resist patriarchal structures within their communities by defending their rights, challenging traditional gender roles, and encouraging for gender equality. Nicola Pratt (2011) characterizes Palestinian women as "frontliners" because they occupy a unique and complicated position in the struggle against the Israeli occupation (Pratt 2011, 1). Palestinian women are often victims of the violence committed by the occupation, experiencing directly the devastating consequences of military aggression and oppressive policies. This violence is seen in various forms, including the imprisonment or killing of relatives, the destruction of homes, harassment at checkpoints, and the destruction of vital resources such as olive trees, which serve as a significant source of income and sustenance for many Palestinian families (Pratt 2011, 1).

Palestinian women experience an exceptional hardship. Nationalist movements often depict the nation as a unified body, and Palestinian women can become symbols representing the entire cause. This focus on their bodies makes them vulnerable to

exploitation. The term "weaponization" describes how women are used as tools in the conflict, not as fighters, but by enduring threats and violence (Pratt 2011, 3). Israeli soldiers using them as human shields and threatening them with sexual assault are horrifying examples of this weaponization. Despite being victims of violence and oppression, they actively resist by creating "counter-spaces" within militarized environments (Pratt 2011, 4). These "counter-spaces" allow them to assert liberation and challenge dominant discourses that seek to silence them. One example provided is when Palestinian women and girls are held up at Israeli checkpoints, disrupting their access to education, work, and healthcare (4). Despite these constraints, they engage in acts of resistance such as studying, breastfeeding their children, and speaking out against Israeli soldiers. These actions defy the Israeli occupation's attempts to limit Palestinian education and suppress their voices.

1.5. Conclusion:

In this chapter, we reviewed and analysed the narratives of Palestinian women, crossing the landscapes of diaspora, postcolonial literature, feminism, and Spivakian theory. We also endeavoured explain the situation Palestinian women, revealing complexities of identity, resistance, and representation within the Arab diaspora. Our exploration began by shedding light on the experiences of Palestinians living outside their homeland, illuminating the transnational connections and challenges that shape their lives. We then delved into postcolonial literature, where Palestinian women's voices emerge as potent instruments of resistance against displacement and colonialism.

Turning our attention to feminism and Spivakian theory, we questioned power and freedom and the subaltern position of Palestinians, especially women, who suffer both male- dominance and occupation. Through critical analysis, we showed the ways in which feminism and the concept of the subaltern enrich our comprehension of Palestinian women's struggles and aspirations.

Finally, we discussed Palestinian women's issues, where their voices reclaim agency and challenge dominant narratives. Through this exploration, we uncovered a

diverse range of stories, perspectives, and truths that help have a deeper understanding of the Palestinian experience. In each section, our aim has been to elucidate the complex nature of the identities and experiences of Palestinian women, magnifying their resilience, creativity, and longing for freedom in the face of hardship and war. By centring their narratives within interconnecting backgrounds and contexts, we have sought to strengthen their voices and show a greater appreciation for the richness of the Palestinian experience.



Chapter Two: The Presence of Women

1. Introduction:

This Chapter discusses and analyses Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water*. It addresses themes of Palestinian women resistance, empowerment, exile, displacement, and identity, presenting a portrayal of Palestinian women's experiences. The narrative reveals the unwavering courage and resilience of Palestinian men and women amid occupation and cultural erosion. This chapter aims to unravel Abulhawa's exploration, emphasizing the impact of exile on the Palestinian community and the enduring significance of familial bonds, sisterhood, and womanhood in resisting dispersion and identity loss.

Central to our exploration is the theme of resistance and empowerment, woven into the fabric of Palestinian society by generations of women who refuse to be silenced or subdued. Through acts of quiet defiance and bold defiance alike, these women challenge the status quo, asserting their agency in a landscape fraught with hatred and hardship. Their stories serve as a testament to the indomitable spirit that continues to fuel the Palestinian struggle for liberation and justice. we examine the notion of empowerment as Abulhawa's narrative illuminates the ways in which Palestinian women harness their collective strength to confront loss and displacement and transcend limitations. In the face of systemic oppression and structures, they carve out spaces of autonomy and solidarity, reclaiming their voices and asserting their rightful place in society.

Yet, alongside resilience and empowerment, *The Blue Between Sky and Water* confronts the harsh realities of exile and displacement, laying bare the wounds inflicted by forced migration and dispossession. Through the experiences of characters torn from their homeland and thrust into the diaspora, Abulhawa offers a clear reflection on the profound sense of loss and longing that permeates the Palestinian experience.

Finally, the chapter discusses the profound bonds of sisterhood and motherhood within Palestinian communities. Through acts of nurturing and solidarity, Palestinian mothers impart resilience to their children, while sisterhood offers solace and

empowerment in the face of adversity. These bonds, rooted in love and shared struggle, remind us that the true essence of Palestinian resilience lies in the collective strength of women who refuse to be silenced, forging paths of hope and solidarity amidst the tumult of occupation and displacement. From the shores of Gaza to the bustling streets of exile, they cross the fluid boundaries of nationhood and culture, forging connections that transcend borders and defy categorization.

2. Summary of the Novel:

The story begins in Beit Daras, a small Palestinian town near Gaza, just before the 1948 Nakba. It follows the lives of the Baraka family across four generations. The family consists of Um Mamdouh, a widow known as the "mad woman" in Beit Daras, and her three children. Nazmiyeh, the eldest daughter, is a strong and responsible young woman who takes care of her family. Mariam, her younger sister with different-colored eyes, enjoys reading and writing. Mamdouh, their brother, works as an assistant to the village beekeeper.

Nazmiyeh was perhaps the most beautiful girl in Beit Daras. She had a strong personality but could also be sassy and use foul language. She felt responsible for taking care of her family, especially her younger sister Mariam. Despite hearing about the crimes committed by Zionist gangs against Palestinians, Nazmiyeh's wedding to Atiyeh, her first love, brought great joy to the Baraka family. Unfortunately, their happiness was short-lived as the Nakba of 1948 reached their village.

When the occupation state of Israel) was established, Zionist groups carried out terrible massacres in Palestinian villages. The Zionist forces attacked Beit Daras, burning it down and violently forcing families to leave their homes, lands, and belongings behind. While men stayed behind to defend the village, women and children traveled long distances to reach Gaza. As families escaped from Beit Daras during the Israeli bombardment, Nazmiyeh tragically lost her younger sister Mariam. When she went back to search for her in Beit Daras, she was captured and sexually assaulted by

the Zionists, who killed Mariam in front of her. Only Mamdouh, Nazmiyeh, and her husband Atiyeh managed to survive and reach the refugee camps in Gaza.

In the challenging conditions of the Gaza refugee camps, families faced hardship and longing for their lost homes in Beit Daras. They tried to adapt and rebuild their lives while holding onto hopes of returning. Nazmiyeh and her husband Atiyeh worked hard to raise their family. Meanwhile, Mamdouh chose to pursue a new life in America. However, tragedy struck him years later when he lost his only son, Mhammad, in a traffic accident, and his wife Yasmine to cancer. With nothing tying him to America anymore, Mamdouh planned to return to Gaza with his granddaughter Nur. Sadly, he passed away before fulfilling his wish to return home.

In America, Nur grows up in orphanages and foster homes after her Spanish mother leaves her, and her beloved grandfather passes away. With him gone, she feels disconnected from her Palestinian roots, as he was her connection to Palestine. Alone in a foreign land, Nur faces many challenges but remains determined to create her own path. She falls in love with a married doctor from Gaza and decides to follow him there. Her decision is driven not only by love but also by a desire to serve her people in Gaza.

During the intense bombing of Gaza by Israeli forces, Alwan, Nazmiyeh's daughter, tragically loses her husband. Additionally, her son Khalid is left in a coma-like state due to the attacks. By coincidence, Nur sees Nazmiyeh and Alwan in an interview, unaware that they are her last remaining family. Driven by a strong urge to help, Nur, who is a psychologist, decides to travel to Gaza to provide assistance to Khalid.

In Gaza, Nur meets her great-aunt Nazmiyeh, who recognizes her as Mamdouh's granddaughter due to her mismatched eyes, reminiscent of Mariam's. Despite the challenges of living in Gaza and adapting to unfamiliar customs, traditions, and culture, Nur finds solace in the city. Reuniting with her family and rediscovering her roots in Gaza brings a sense of peace to her wounded spirit.

The novel beautifully captures the complexities of Palestinian identity and the enduring spirit of familial bonds in the face of adversity. Through vivid imagery and

heartfelt prose, Abulhawa transports readers into the heart of Gaza's refugee camps, evoking a profound sense of empathy and understanding.

3. Resistance and Empowerment:

Mamdouh moved to America with his wife Yasmine, and there he formed his small family with their only son, Mhammad. Mamdouh found in America the decent life for which he immigrated, but exile in America made him miss something that America could not give him; despite all the financial gains that Mamdouh obtained there. Meanwhile, back in Palestine, the absence of men due to various circumstances, such as imprisonment, death, or forced migration, left the women to bear the burden of resistance and resilience. Despite the challenges and dangers, they faced, the women of Palestine continued to stand strong, supporting each other and their communities in the struggle for justice and liberation. This contrast between Mamdouh's pursuit of a better life abroad and the ongoing resistance of women in Palestine highlights the difficult life of exile, identity, and the enduring spirit of resilience. For Mamdouh:

Exile in America offered a professional career and financial gains that my great khalo Mamdouh could have only dreamed about anywhere else. "It's a great country," he told Yasmine, who was not entirely convinced. But he believed it, even though exile made him a foreigner, permanently out of place, everywhere. (Abulhawa 2015, 67)

Mamdouh and Yasmine's ability to integrate into American society while maintaining their Arabic language, culture, and norms illustrates their capacity for cultural adaptation and flexibility. Despite living in a new and unfamiliar environment, they actively preserve their Arabic identity, recognizing its importance in shaping their sense of self and connection to their heritage. At the same time, Mamdouh and Yasmine demonstrate openness and receptiveness to the American society around them. They engage with the local culture, customs, and social norms, allowing themselves to be

influenced by their new environment while also retaining aspects of their own cultural heritage

When it comes to their son, Mhammad, his integration into American society is marked by a deliberate distancing from his Arabic heritage. Unlike his parents, who adeptly balanced their cultural identity with their integration into American life, Mhammad opts to discard his Arab name in favor of a Western one, 'Mike.' This decision serves as a poignant symbol of his detachment from his cultural origins and his aspiration to assimilate seamlessly into the dominant culture. Furthermore, Mhammad's marriage to a Spanish woman who does not share his religious or cultural background further shows his detachment from his Arab ancestry. By choosing a partner who is not connected to his heritage, Mhammad signals a disconnection from his cultural roots and a prioritization of assimilation into mainstream American society. In conversations with his mother Yasmine, who aimed to persuade him to embrace his Arab identity and consider giving his future daughter an Arabic name, Mhammad adamantly rejected all connections to his Arab heritage, including the idea of an Arabic name:

“Mama, you know I like to be called Mike.”

“Mhammad is your name because I’m your mother and that’s what I named you.

Where did we go wrong? You deny your identity and marry a woman who looks down on us like we’re filth. Straighten up, boy!” (Abulhawa 2015, 67).

In contrast to Mhammad's rejection of his Palestinian heritage, Nur consistently yearns for her roots. As the protagonist of the novel and Mamdouh's granddaughter, she embodies the essence of exile, having been born and raised in America. Following the tragic loss of her father, Mhammad, in a traffic accident, Nur's grandfather, Mamdouh, takes on the responsibility of sponsoring her. He is deeply committed to imparting to her a comprehensive understanding of Palestine, ensuring that she maintains her connection to her homeland. This dedication is highlighted in the novel:

Her grandfather wanted to tell her that story and a thousand more from Beit Daras, again and again, and her curiosity pleased him. He wanted her to know and never

forget the place that burned in his heart. He also insisted that they only speak in Arabic. (Abulhawa 2015, 65).

Mamdouh, along with other Palestinians living in exile, holds vivid memories of their homeland. They reminisce about their childhood experiences there, finding solace and resilience in these recollections to alleviate feelings of melancholy and nostalgia. Passing down tales of Palestine to their children and grandchildren, they strive to maintain a connection to their country and preserve their original identity for future generations

4. Exile and Displacement:

Abulhawa's writing is deeply influenced by her personal experiences of displacement and longing for home, which infuses her work with a profound sense of nostalgia. She frequently explores this theme in her novels, drawing on her own trauma to depict the struggles of her characters in various situations. With each novel she publishes, Abulhawa solidifies her reputation as a powerful voice for Palestinians in literature, using her platform to shed light on their experiences and advocate for their stories to be heard. Through her novel *The Blue Between the Sky and Water*, she offers an emotional and authentic portrayal of the Palestinian experience of exile, resonating with readers and earning her recognition as a significant literary figure.

Edward Said explored the concept of exile not just as a physical displacement but also as a psychological and existential condition. He argued that exile could lead to a sense of alienation, loss, and fragmentation, as individuals grapple with their identity and belonging in new environments. In his essay in *Reflections on Exile*, he thinks:

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow

of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. (As qtd. in Bano 3)

Nazmeyah's experience reflects the profound trauma and displacement endured by many Palestinians during periods of conflict and upheaval. As a young bride, she was forced to flee her village alongside her family, friends, and fellow villagers, leaving behind their homes, possessions, and way of life. The threat of violence, including the fear of being killed, re-raped, or robbed by Zionist forces, compelled them to abandon everything familiar and seek safety elsewhere.

For Nazmeyah, Palestine has become synonymous with exile—a state of being uprooted from one's homeland and thrust into a world of alienation and despair (Shehzadi et al. 5146). The loss of her ancestral land and the forced separation from her community have left her feeling disconnected and hopeless. The memories of her former life are tainted by the traumatic events that led to her displacement, and the ongoing conflict perpetuates a sense of longing and sorrow for what was lost. She contemplates:

She thought Palestine was scattering farther away at the same time that Israel was moving closer. They confiscated the hills and assembled Jewish only settler colonies on the most fertile soil. They uprooted indigenous songs, and planted lies in the ground to grow a new story. (Abulhawa 2015, 59)

In Nazmeyah's eyes, Palestine is no longer a place of belonging and security but rather a symbol of the pain and suffering endured by herself and countless others. The concept of exile involves not only physical displacement but also the emotional and psychological toll of being severed from one's roots and heritage. For Nazmeyah, the notion of returning home is clouded by the harsh realities of occupation and conflict, leaving her feeling trapped in a perpetual state of longing and despair.

Mamdouh's character embodies the experience of migration and the persistent longing for a sense of home. In Abulhawa's narrative, Mamdouh serves as a voice for the ongoing struggle and displacement faced by many Palestinians, mirroring Abulhawa's own perspective on loss and longing for their native land. As he says, "There is nothing in the world I want more than to be home now. There is nothing left

for me here.” (Abulhawa 2015, 79). Mamdouh's portrayal highlights the perpetual state of upheaval experienced by those who are forced to leave their homeland. Despite being physically removed from Palestine, Mamdouh's attachment to his native land remains deeply rooted in his identity. He doesn't merely view Palestine as a country on a map, but rather as a cherished concept of home—a place that holds profound emotional significance and cultural heritage. He also says:

He said he would be home soon. His long exile would be over. Exile, he said, had stolen everything. It had excised his home and heritage and language from his only son. It had taken his Yasmine. Exile had made him an old man in a place that had never become familiar. But life had been merciful, too, for he had a gift of this miracle granddaughter, who could now return home to Gaza with him. (Abulhawa 2015, 118-9)

5. Motherhood and Sisterhood:

The theme of sisterhood and motherhood in the novel reflects the resilience and solidarity among women living in challenging circumstances, particularly in Gaza, often referred to as the "world's biggest open-air prison". The novel explores the narratives of courageous Palestinian women residing in Gaza, who unite in sharing support and solidarity with one another, as expressed by Abulhawa within its pages: “Mama and Nur found in each other a shared fear of loss, loneliness, and longing for love, and it made sisterhood from there.” (Abulhawa 2015, 251). The bond between Mama and Nur illustrates the transformative power of shared experiences and mutual support. Despite facing fear, loss, and loneliness in their lives, they find solace and companionship in each other. Their relationship evolves into a sisterhood born out of empathy, understanding, and a common yearning for love and belonging.

Through Mama, Nur, and other female characters, the novel celebrates the resilience and fortitude of Palestinian women in the face of misfortune. Despite living in a restrictive and challenging environment, they demonstrate courage, compassion, and solidarity in their daily lives. Their collective strength and support for one another serve as a source of inspiration and hope amidst the hardships they endure. For

example, In Gaza, Nur reunited with her family, including her aunt Nazmiyeh, who recognized her by her mismatched eyes, reminiscent of Mariam's. This meeting fulfilled Nur's longstanding search during her years in America. Finally, she connected with her roots and discovered her origins. Despite the challenges of life in Gaza, Nur made the decision to remain there, surrounded by her family who enveloped her in the warmth and love she had long yearned for. This choice is illuminated in the subsequent lines of the novel:

Nur came every day and stayed longer than she needed to. She thought she was keeping a promise. Doing something good. Helping. She was, of course, but only by coincidence. She came to bathe in the cramped bustle of family and neighbors. She came to watch life up close, to rub her soul raw with the rhythms of our families. The warm mist of our lives condensed on the cold dry surface of Nur and she sopped it all up. That's why she came, for the dew of family caught on her skin. (Abulhawa 2015, 166)

Despite the physical distance that often separates Palestinian families, the emotional bonds between them persist, if not intensify. Palestinians maintain a profound connection to their families, underlining the significance of sisterhood and motherhood in Palestinian society. These bonds serve as pillars of strength, uniting individuals against the erosive forces of Zionist attempts to undermine and reshape Palestinian identity.

6. The Absence of Men:

The *Blue Between the Sky and Water* magnifies the absence of men in a sense of solitude, vulnerability, resilience, and hope that pervades the narrative: “In the abandon of that solitude, we could see how tiny we were, how small and defenceless our earth. And from that terrible dignity, we heard the susurrus of a long-ago old woman’s words: this land will rise again. (Abulhawa 2015, 275). In the absence of men, Palestinian women often play a central role in providing emotional support and stability within families and among friends. They often step up to provide essential support to those affected. This may include offering refuge, organizing aid, or

advocating for peace. They work to protect and restore what has been lost or damaged, whether it is cultural heritage, human rights, or the environment. Palestinian women challenge societal norms and expectations, proving that they are capable of anything they set their minds to, regardless of gender stereotypes (Ahmad 2022, 58).

The absence of men means women are unprotected and defenceless. The presence of Israeli occupation symbolizes the violence, oppression, and dehumanization inflicted upon Palestinian communities, particularly women. In the novel, Abulhawa narrates the brutal rape of Nazmiyeh and how she suffers physical and psychological pain: "More soldiers moved in and out of her body, scraping away her life until they had had enough. She lay there, a hollow carved-out thing streaked in spent tears, crusted blood, and dried fear" (Abulhawa 38, 39). Nazmiyeh's pain and horror do not stop. It exacerbates when she delivers the boy of her rapist. Her trauma was unbearable: "This one is the son of the devil. How can I love this thing? How do I love a son of the devil?" (44). Nazmiyeh's anguish and horror know no bounds. They intensify when she gives birth to the child of her rapist. Her trauma becomes unbearable: "This one is the son of the devil. How can I love this thing? How do I love a son of the devil?" (Abulhawa, 44). The absence of men in Palestinian women's lives has led to rape and sexual trauma.

Nur, raised in the United States, is the granddaughter of Mamdough, Nazmiyeh's brother. Upon arriving in Gaza, she unknowingly connects with Nazmiyeh's family due to her resemblance to Nazmiyeh's sister, Mariam, with one green eye and one brown eye. Nur falls in love with Dr. Jamal Musmar, a married man, after being misled by his words. Despite Dr. Jamal's empty promises, Nur believes in their relationship, and they spend their time together. "She stood except a tattered old shoe clutching a letter, crying, At last, crying...Nur cried, the whole of her dismantled into three parts: an old shoe, a crumpled letter and a missed menstrual period." (Abulhawa 248). The absence of men, which can also symbolise the absence of a sovereign state and law, exposes Palestinian women to all forms of betrayal and manipulation. In patriarchal societies, men are often seen as guardians and protectors of women and families. However, in the context of occupation and violence, Palestinian

men may be targeted, imprisoned, or killed, leaving women vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and displacement.

Abulhawa's novels vividly evoke and illustrate the profound trauma inflicted upon Palestinian women through imagery of violation and dehumanization. Despite the brutality and absence of men's protection, they endure. Thus, the traumatic experiences experienced by the Palestinians, especially the women, make them braver and more daring. Despite the immense challenges they face, these women actively resist oppression, rape, and violence and assert their presence and power in reclaiming their dignity, autonomy, and homeland.

7. Conclusion:

In conclusion, Susan Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water* deeply explores themes such as resistance, empowerment, exile, and identity, with a particular focus on Palestinian experiences. This chapter portrays the unwavering courage and resilience of both Palestinian men and women amidst occupation and identity erosion. Despite the challenges of exile, Palestinians draw strength from their homeland's memories, using them as a source of resilience against displacement and nostalgia.

Moreover, the narrative stresses the profound impact of exile on the Palestinian community, revealing their struggles with homeland loss and identity rootedness. Yet, amidst adversity, Palestinians remain determined to uphold their cultural heritage and fight for their rights. Central to the story is the significance of sisterhood and womanhood in resisting dispersion and identity loss. Women play a crucial role in preserving Palestinian culture, forging connections through shared experiences of resilience. Through sisterhood, Palestinian women find unity and strength, challenging forces of displacement and cultural assimilation.

General Conclusion:

In conclusion, the analysis of Susan Abulhawa's novel, *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, has provided enlightening understandings of the diverse experiences of Palestinian women in the middle of Israeli occupation and its attempts to obliterate Palestinian cultural identity. Through a qualitative exploration informed by feminist literary theory and cultural studies, this study has revealed the remarkable resilience, agency, and contributions of Palestinian women in overcoming challenges such as displacement and cultural suppression. Characters like Nazmiyeh and Nur serve as poignant examples of the complexities of Palestinian identity construction and resistance, emphasising the fundamental role of women in preserving Palestinian heritage. Besides, the examination of themes like resistance and empowerment offers valuable perspectives on the continuing Palestinian struggle for justice and cultural continuousness within systemic oppression. The researcher hopes that this dissertation enriches the literature about Palestine, helping to explain the complex nature of gender, identity, and resistance in Palestinian literature and stressing the lasting strength and determination of Palestinian women in their quest for dignity, equity, and cultural preservation.

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