

## **Palestinians in Exile: Home and Identity in Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World***

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### **Abstract**

The present article examines Susan Abulhawa's novel *Against the Loveless World* as a literary articulation of the experience of Palestinians exile following their expulsion from their homeland. Through a close reading of the novel, the study examines the multifaceted and shifting constructions of identity that emerge in contexts of displacement, dispossession and exile. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives and conceptualizations of identity as articulated by Hall, Anca, Schultermandl, and Toplu, the article attempts to foreground the novel's depiction of identity as fluid and dynamic, rather than static or fixed and constantly in flux, shaped and reshaped by the shifting political, social and cultural contexts. It argues that protagonist's identity emerges from the interstitial spaces between cultures, histories, and geographies and that protagonist's sense of self is not a monolithic or unitary entity, but rather a multilayered and ever-evolving amalgamation of her Palestinian roots, her experiences of exile, and the cultural influences she encounters in the host countries. Further, the study contends that Abulhawa's novel represents the lived realities of Palestinians in exile while simultaneously situating them within the wider discourse of transnational identity formation, resistance, and survival.

**Keywords:** Palestine, Exile, Home, Identity, Fluidity

## **Palestinos en el exilio: hogar e identidad en *Against the Loveless World*, de Abulhawa**

### **Resumen**

El presente artículo examina la novela de Susan Abulhawa *Against the Loveless World* como una articulación literaria de la experiencia del exilio de los palestinos tras su expulsión de su tierra natal. A través de una lectura detallada de la novela, el estudio examina las construcciones multifacéticas y cambiantes de la identidad, que surgen en contextos de desplazamiento, despojo y exilio. Basándose en las perspectivas teóricas y conceptualizaciones de la identidad, articuladas por Hall, Anca, Schultermandl y Toplu, el artículo intenta poner en relieve la descripción que hace la novela de la identidad como algo fluido y dinámico, en lugar de estático o fijo, y en constante cambio, moldeado y

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remodelado por los contextos políticos, sociales y culturales cambiantes. Se sostiene que la identidad de la protagonista surge de los espacios intersticiales entre culturas, historias y geografías, y que el sentido del yo de la protagonista no es una entidad monolítica o unitaria, sino más bien una amalgama multifacética y en constante evolución de sus raíces palestinas, sus experiencias de exilio y las influencias culturales que encuentra en los países de acogida. Además, el estudio sostiene que la novela de Abulhawa representa las realidades vividas por los palestinos en el exilio, a quienes sitúa en el discurso más amplio de la formación de la identidad transnacional, la resistencia y la supervivencia.

**Palabras clave:** Palestina, exilio, hogar, identidad, fluidez

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## Introduction

The expulsion of Palestinians in 1948, also known as the *Nakba* (Arabic for 'catastrophe'), was a series of events that led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs from their homes and the creation of the Palestinian refugee crisis. In 1947 United Nations declared a Partition Plan which called for the division of Palestine into two separate Jewish and Arab states. When the State of Israel declared independence in May 1948, the conflict between Palestinians and the newly established Israeli state started. The outcomes of the conflict was the destruction of more than 450 Palestinian villages and towns and the expulsion of more than 700,000 Palestinians (Saloul, 2012, p. 1; Abu-Lughod and Sa'adi, 2007, p. 3; Morris, 2007, p. 37). The *Nakba* was a major humanitarian catastrophe that had a profound and lasting impact on the Palestinian people, leading to the creation of a large Palestinian refugee population dispersed across the world. Today, the Palestinian refugee population is estimated to be around ten million people. Of these, approximately four million Palestinians are internally displaced, living in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and within Israel itself. However, the majority of the Palestinian refugee population is scattered across the world (Saloul, 2012, p. 1).

The forced displacement of Palestinians from their ancestral lands has had a tremendously destabilizing effect on their sense of identity, belonging, and connection to the place. Being disconnected from their homeland created a profound disruption and dislocation. Every single family has been affected by this loss. According to Saloul (2012), "nothing forged Palestinian identity as adamantly...as the loss of Palestine" (p. 2). For many Palestinians living in exile, whether as refugees or in the diaspora, this loss of home becomes a central part of their personal and collective identity. It shapes how they understand themselves, their history, and their relationship to the Palestinian cause. In spite of the tremendous effects of loss of home on Palestinians living in exile, Palestinians "have managed to maintain a shared national identity since al-Nakba" (Saloul, 2012, p. 2).

Palestinian writings in exile constitute one of the significant articulations of displacement, dispossession and cultural survival in the contemporary world. Since the *Nakba* of 1948, Palestinian writers in exile have been obligated to grapple with the realities of exile and statelessness. Their literary production has collectively formed a body of work

which is deeply personal as well as profoundly political. Across various genres—fiction, poetry and memoir—their writings articulate recurring themes which convey the profound anguish of their displacement and the persistent struggle to assert their identity, rootedness and belonging.

Palestinians in exile have been keen to narrate their story. According to Jayyusi (2007), “The will to narrate, and to tell, is everywhere evident, and evident too in various practices and forms, from poetry to graphics and posters, from film to theater. And it is in the repeated tales, *similar* but *different*, that the collective space and dimensions of the catastrophe and the predicament that ensued from it are figured and made present” (p. 110). Key Palestinian writers include Suheir Hammad (1973-), Lisa Suhair Majaj (1960-), Naomi Shihab Nye (1952-), Randa Jarrar (1978-), Nathalie Handal (1969-), Ibrahim Fawal (1933 - 2020), and Shaw J. Dallal (1931–2016) in American; Selma Dabbagh (1970-), Ahmed Masoud (1981-), NS Nuseibeh (1992-), Isabella Hammad (1990-) in Britain; Randa Abdel-Fattah (1979-), Samah Sabawi (1967-) and Micaela Sahhar in Australia. The major themes that often feature prominently in Palestinian literary works in exile are the Nakba, the experience of displacement and dispossession and their ongoing struggle to survive in the face of occupation and violence. In addition, their experience of living in exile has become a central part of their narrative. For many Palestinian authors and intellectuals, exploring notions of identity, belonging, and the impact of displacement has become a major focus. Furthermore, the psychological and emotional toll of displacement, loss of homeland, yearning for return and the alienation in exile are common thematic threads in Palestinian narratives. Palestinian writers have deployed various forms of recreating the homeland. Among the most intriguing of these are fictional narratives and Abulhawa’s novels are among the prominent narratives in this regard.

Susan Abulhawa, a renowned Palestinian-American writer and human rights activist, has written three acclaimed novels that have found wide international readership. Her debut novel, *Mornings in Jenin* (2010), has been translated into 32 languages and sold over 1 million copies worldwide (Day, 2023, n. p.). This remarkable reach has made Abulhawa the most widely read Palestinian author to date. Her second novel, *The Blue Between Sky and Water* was published in 2015. Her third and last novel is *Against the*

*Loveless World* (2020). The three novels have been widely acclaimed and received significant critical praise. Her narratives provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the Palestinian (hi)story, “exposing the Zionist atrocities and crimes against the Palestinian civilians as well as exploring the experiences of Palestinian families and communities living under occupation or in exile” (Alwuraafi, 2024, p. 123). Besides, the writings of Abulhawa serve as a powerful medium for exploring the multifaceted, dynamic nature of Palestinian identity, especially as it relates to the ongoing realities of exile and displacement and give voice to the personal and political dimensions of this experience.

Susan Abulhawa’s literary output, profoundly shaped by exile, resistance and the insistent longing for homeland, contributes to and resonates with the broader corpus of Palestinian writings in exile. Her works do not only embody the recurring themes and motifs of Palestinian writings in exile but also employ narrative techniques that are commonly shared by other Palestinian writers in exile. Hence, her oeuvre is situated within the broader landscape of Palestinian literary traditions in diaspora. Abulhawa, like other Palestinian diasporic writers, positions herself within a transnational literary discourse that interrogates issues of displacement, identity, belonging, and cultural survival and dispossession.

Abulhawa occupies a noteworthy place within the entwined aesthetic, political and narrative traditions of Palestinian literature in diaspora. Her works are not only fictional accounts of exile, displacement and belonging but also a significant aesthetic contribution to a new tradition that amalgamates political testimony with literature. Her fiction, deeply rooted in Palestinian historical realities, contributes significantly in a broader cultural project of narrating Palestinian story, countering the hegemonic narrative, contesting erasure, and preserving Palestinian identity within the context of exile, occupation, and dispossession. Like Darwish’s poetry or Kanafani’s fiction, her prose is imbued with intense and poignant lyricism, a deep connection to homeland, and an unyielding sense of loss. She adapts these qualities into her fiction, crafting multigenerational family sagas that intertwine realism with poetic intensity. Her narrative strategies, including nonlinear timelines, intergenerational storytelling and multiple perspectives, highlight the endurance of Palestinian memory across time and space.

Abulhawa's novel *Against the Loveless World* captures the experience of the Palestinians living in exile following their expulsion from their homeland. It narrates the experience of Nahr, the protagonist of the novel and a second-generation Palestinian living in exile and her struggles with issues of identity. Abulhawa in this novel explores how Nahr's sense of identity evolves and emerges from the interstitial spaces between cultures, histories, and geographies. Through Nahr's journey, the novel illuminates how Nahr's identity is forged within the interstices - the liminal spaces between belonging and not-belonging, tradition and modernity, homeland and host country and demonstrates that her identity is dynamic, constantly renegotiated as she moves across physical and psychological borders. Actually, the novel is a powerful literary exploration of the fluidity of identity, using Nahr's experiences to illustrate how, for Palestinians, displacement, exile, and the intersections of cultures can give rise to more nuanced, multifaceted understanding of the self. That is, Nahr's story serves as a case study for exploring the multifaceted and often fraught nature of Palestinian identity in exile.

### **1. Conceptualizing Fluid Identity**

It is clear that identity is not a stable set of practices and beliefs which are rooted in a specific bounded space or time; rather, identity is a fluid assemblage of beliefs, behaviors, and practices that coalesce within a shifting context imbued with power dynamics and competing interests. It is continually shaped and reshaped by certain contexts, experiences, ideas, and beliefs.

Many prominent theorists have explored and developed the concept of identity as fluid and dynamic, rather than fixed or static. The idea of a fluid identity suggests that one's sense of self is not monolithic or unchanging, but rather evolves and shifts over time in response to various social, cultural, and experiential factors. Hall (1990) observes: "identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, unlike everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (p. 225). Hall argues that identity is not an innate, essential quality, but is actively constructed and

reconstructed through an individual's interactions, affiliations, and positioning within broader societal structures. From this viewpoint, identity is seen as multifaceted, contextual, and subject to change, rather than a singular, stable core. Hence, identities become just "names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within" (Hall, 1990, p. 225). Hall (1990) asserts that identities are shaped by the social, political, and cultural contexts in which they are situated. An individual's engagement with new political, cultural, and social influences can lead to a destabilization and reconfiguration of their previous sense of identity and self. Hence, identity, as a process, is "constantly changing, in flux, ambiguous and fragile" (Pullen, 2006, p. 1). Identity is fluid identity not rigid or fixed and is liable to constant change and is influenced and shaped by external dynamics.

Echoing Hall, Schiltermandl and Toplu (2010) affirm that, "identities are not unified or stable, but are fluid entities which constantly push at the boundaries of the nation-state, thereby re-defining themselves and the nation-state simultaneously" (p. 11). The perspective presented here is that identities are not fixed, coherent, or stable entities, but rather are fluid and shifting. Identities are seen as dynamic constructs that are constantly in flux, continually redefining and renegotiating their boundaries and parameters. Further, this view suggests that identities do not simply exist within the confines of the nation-state. Rather, identities are seen as pushing at and transgressing the boundaries of the nation-state, simultaneously redefining both themselves and the nation-state in the process. The fluidity and boundless nature of identity means that identities are not contained or limited by rigid national or state-based frameworks. They overflow those boundaries, creating new configurations and understandings of both individual and collective identity.

Similarly, Anca (2012) contends that "Identities are multiple and in constant movement. They change because of the need for self-development, the desire to act in the multiple communities we all belong to, or aspire to be a part of" (p. xv). The implication is that identity, from Anca's perspective, is an ongoing process of becoming, rather than a stable state of being. It is shaped by both individual drives for self-actualization, as well as the social contexts and group memberships that individuals inhabit and aspire to belong to.

The inherent fluidity and changeability of identity often gives rise to questions around issues of belonging and social/cultural boundaries. During times of political crisis, the struggle over membership and inclusion within particular groups becomes increasingly politicized. These moments witness the movement of people across borders and boundaries, as well as the relocation of individuals between different social categories - not necessarily due to physical migration, but rather shifts in class, religion, beliefs, convictions and other markers of identity. Political crises present a persistent dilemma for individuals who face a continual need to make decisions and choices about traversing various boundaries as they seek to navigate where they truly belong. In such circumstances, identity is revealed as fluid and permeable, as people grapple with redefining their sense of self and community amidst the instability and upheaval brought on by political turbulence. The struggle to belong becomes an ever-present concern, as individuals strive to find their place across shifting social and political landscapes (Allen et al., 2021; Broom, 2020, p. 65; Lam and Lim, 2017).

The concept of identity has become “highly contested and complex” (MacKeown, 2013, p. 33), emerging from the interplay between an individual's self-imagination and the broader global power relations that significantly shape their social, cultural, and material realities (Cover, 2016 p. 150). In other words, it is no longer tenable to assume that identity is solely a matter of individual choice and volition. Rather, one's identity is profoundly affected and constrained by the social, political, and structural forces at work in their surrounding environment. At the same time, identity cannot be seen as simply inscribed or imposed upon individuals by society. This would fail to account for the agency and self-determination that individuals exercise in crafting and renegotiating their sense of self. Identity, then, exists in a dynamic tension between personal imagination/volition and the powerful social, political, and global influences that condition and delimit the possibilities for identity formation. It is this interplay between individual subjectivity and systemic/structural factors that renders identity such a contested and multifaceted concept in the contemporary world. Abulhawa in her novel *Against the Loveless World* examines the complexities of Palestinian identity as her protagonist navigates the turbulent forces of social, political, and global dynamics.



Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Hall, Schultermandl, Toplu, and Anca, this article attempts to examine Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* through the lens of their proposed concepts, exploring how the novel illuminates fluidity and sociopolitical dynamics of identity. The study endeavors to explore how identity in Abulhawa's novel is continuously negotiated, reshaped, transformed and contested across cultural, historical and political contexts. The portrayal of identity in Abulhawa's novel reflects their theoretical understandings that identity is not stable or unified but a fluid entity that constantly pushes at the boundaries of the nation-state. Her protagonist negotiates the tensions between both personal and collective identity, within the framework of diaspora and occupation. Her identity is inseparable from the wider Palestinian struggle, yet she is never wholly defined by it; this reflects the fluid interplay between personal subjectivity and collective belonging.

## **2. Palestinians in Diaspora: Home and Identity**

For the first generation of Palestinian exiles, or what Mason (2007) calls "*al nakba* generation" (p. 272), identity has remained largely Palestinian. Lacking a stable, permanent homeland that they can unequivocally call home, Palestinians have had to anchor their collective identity and belonging in shared memories, histories, and cultural touchstones. Forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands, many Palestinians find themselves in a state of perpetual exile, unable to firmly root themselves in a specific geographic territory. This lack of a secure, universally recognized homeland creates a profound sense of dislocation and dispossession for them. As a result, they have had to turn to alternative sources to sustain their national identity and solidarity. They cling tightly to common histories, traditions, and sites of memory - whether physical locations, rituals, or narratives - that connect them to a shared past and experience, despite their dispersal across the globe. These memories work as a means of preserving their roots and traditions in the face of displacement and dispossession. For them, the "sites of memory, that is, elements of the past in which 'memory crystallizes and secretes itself' give meaning in the present as they create focal points of collective identity especially in nation-building processes. Palestine –

as a location—is a site of memory in its most literal sense” (Fischer, 2019, p. 34). They turn to their memories in search of solace and a sense of belonging and meaning within them. The tragedy they endured compels them to relive their happy moments of the past in their minds prompting in them a sense of nostalgia and melancholy.

These memories have taken on an almost mythic quality, imbuing the homeland with a romanticized sense of belonging, identity, and cultural authenticity that the second generation may feel is missing from their own lived experience. The homeland becomes a symbolic repository for a perceived ‘true self’ or uncompromised cultural heritage. So, the identity of the first generation is “coloured with memories of peaceful rural life and people they left behind” (Abdul-Rahim and Abuateya, 2005, p. 64).

Later generations of Palestinian exiles, and due to the absence of first-hand physical contact with Palestine, live in “alienation, because the refugee identity was the only one they knew” (Abdul-Rahim and Abuateya, 2005, p. 64). These generations’ relationship to Palestine has been passed on through “acts of memory” as well as mnemonic links to Palestine (Schulz, 2003, pp. 12, 100-101; Khalidi, 1997, p. 153). Families and friends have done their best to provide the younger generations with sufficient knowledge about Palestine and strengthen their national identity. This has assisted them in creating a sense of belonging to Palestine. However, the interplay between their attachments to their ancestral homeland of Palestine and the realities of their lives in exile has resulted in the fragmentation of identities and dual belongings. This intersection of “roots” and “routes” profoundly influences their understandings of home, identity, and belonging (Schulz, 2003, p. 111). The result of this is “not only a loss, but a lack of something. The basis of identity is not only lost, but never existed, and the dream of ‘returning’ represents a search for identity as much as for a place” (Schulz, 2003, p. 111). The physical distance from Palestine has diminished opportunities for face-to-face interaction and cultural exchange that are crucial for identity formation and preservation. Hence, younger generations feel a more abstract connection to Palestine as their understanding of the homeland is filtered through stories, media, and cultural practices that have evolved in the diaspora context.

Due to the various political, social and economic factors, Palestinian identity in exile is not fixed or unchanging, but rather adapts and evolves over time and in different

contexts. It is not a monolithic or rigid concept; rather, it is an active, constantly shifting phenomenon. It is shaped by the lived experiences, perspectives, and choices of Palestinians themselves, rather than being predetermined or stagnant. It is being heavily influenced by the circumstances of exile and responsive to the realities Palestinians face. This is what Edward Said argues in “The Mind of Winter” published in 1984. Building on the concept of the hybridity and the ‘third space’, Said has drawn from the language of music to further elucidate the nature of identity for Palestinians in the diaspora. He proposes that the hybrid identity of Palestinians is “contrapuntal” in character - a musical term referring to the interweaving of multiple, independent melodic notes that play simultaneously (p. 55). Just as in a contrapuntal musical composition, the identity of Palestinians in exile is not a singular, harmonious note, but rather a complex arrangement of various elements flowing over, around, and through one another. Multiple ‘voices’ or aspects of their identity - their roots in Palestine, their experiences of displacement, and the influences of their host communities - can be heard concurrently. This contrapuntal quality resists fixed notions of identity, instead embracing the simultaneous co-existence of different, and at times dissonant, strands that together create a richer, more nuanced understanding of self. The Palestinian refugee experience is not a linear narrative, but rather a polyphonic composition where various threads intertwine, overlap, and give rise to new harmonies.

Abulhawa’s novel *Against the Loveless World* serves as a poignant and accurate example that illustrates the second-generation Palestinian identity in exile as they navigate between preserving their cultural heritage and integrating into the host society. Her three novels offer a rich exploration of Palestinian identity in diaspora across generations. Though other writers have paid much attention to the Nakba and the traumatic experience of the first generation, Abulhawa’s depiction of second-generation Palestinians provides nuanced insights into how displacement, dispossession, memory and national identity are inherited, transformed, and renegotiated by Palestinians born into exile. Her characters carry the heavy weight of inherited memory and intergenerational trauma. Their lives are shaped by the legacies of trauma and memory inherited from the first generation. Her characters, moreover, navigate the complexities of identity in exile. Born in exile, they

confront a duality: they, through family narratives, are intimately connected to Palestine and socially and culturally shaped by the host society. This tension demonstrates Hall's conception of identity as fluid and historically situated.

### **3. Identity in *Against the Loveless World***

#### **3.1. Kuwait: Nahr's Early Identity Formation**

The novel follows the story of a young Palestinian refugee named Nahr as she navigates the challenging and precarious circumstances of her life across the Middle East. At the core of the story is the clash between the protagonist's personal aspirations and the formidable social, political, and material constraints she faces as a displaced Palestinian. Born in exile, and constantly on the move, she confronts a profound sense of dislocation and transfiguration of her identity. As she moves between different communities and social contexts, attempting to find stability and opportunity, Nahr is confronted with various forces that constrain her choices and aspirations. The novel highlights how her identity is shaped not just by her individual will and aspirations, but by the social and political realities imposed upon her as a Palestinian refugee.

The novel opens with Nahr in an Israeli jail that she calls the Cube. As she sits alone in a solitary confinement, isolated from the outside world, she spends her days reflecting back on the series of dramatic, and often traumatic, events that have led her to this present predicament in a foreign prison. Born in Kuwait in the 1970s to Palestinian refugee parents, Nahr's early dreams and aspirations were fairly modest—to find a perfect husband, start a family, and open her own beauty salon one day. However, her life takes a far more turbulent and unpredictable trajectory. After a brief and ill-fated marriage, Nahr finds herself increasingly destitute, forced to resort to prostitution in order to support herself and her family teetering on the edge of poverty. The upheaval caused by Iraq invasion of Kuwait renders her a refugee, just as her own parents had been. Seeking a more stable future, Nahr undertakes a grueling journey that eventually brings her to Palestine where she finally manages to establish a semblance of a home. It is in Palestine that she finds love and sense of purpose, as her destiny unfolds against the backdrop of the ongoing

Israeli occupation. Yet even this hard-won stability and connection proves fleeting and transitory, leading her down an increasingly desperate and radicalized path that has ultimately landed her in this isolated prison cell, where she is contemplating the series of traumatic displacements and losses that have defined her life as a Palestinian exile. Nahr's story is one of thwarted dreams, relentless upheavals, and the grappling with a fragmented identity shaped by political forces beyond her control. Her reflections from the solitary confinement encapsulate the profound challenges faced by those whose lives have been indelibly marked by the legacy of displacement and occupation. It is within this framework that Nahr's identity as a Palestinian exile is explored in this article.

Nahr's identity crisis has its roots long before her own birth. Before she enters the world, the foundational elements of her identity are already in flux, shaped by the historical traumas and dislocations of her family and the Palestinian people as a whole. When her parents were expelled from Palestine in June 1967, her mother was pregnant with her. Her parents carried whatever they could and walked long distance before crossing the River Jordan at the Allenby Bridge. Crossing the River, her mother "'made a deal with the river. I said I'd name you after it if it didn't swallow any of us.' But calling me Jordan would have been too strange. That's how I got the name Nahr. *River*" (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 19). To repay her debt to the river, the mother has kept her promise and named her daughter Nahr. However, her father does not like the idea. He named the new born child Yaqoot, after his girlfriend, and it is this name which has been recorded on her birth certificate—not Nahr. Only Nahr's family and a few administrators at school know her real name and even though they call her Nahr. Hence, since her very birth, Nahr has two names and two identities.

Living in diaspora has always been associated with homelessness, uneasiness and instability. For exiles, there always can be a persistent feeling of not fully belonging—of existing in a kind of liminal space between the ancestral homeland and the countries or communities where they reside. This sense of unbelonging often stems from the rupture of displacement and exile from their place of origin. Additionally, diasporic individuals may find themselves not fully embraced or accepted within their host societies, viewed as perpetual outsiders or foreigners. However, this is not the case of Nahr, who was born and grew up in a two-bedroom apartment in Hawalli, Kuwait. Although she grew up listening to

Palestinian stories of her mother and grandmother, she feels that Kuwait is her home: “Although I grew up hearing stories of Palestine, I didn’t get the politics, nor did I care to learn...Palestine remained the old country in my young mind, a distant place of my grandmother’s generation” (Abulhawa, 2020, pp. 12-13). Nahr’s comment conveys a sense of distance and detachment she feels regarding the political realities of Palestine, even though those realities remain a significant part of her family’s collective memory and identity.

In fact, Nahr has never felt homeless in Kuwait. Rather, she has absorbed its culture, and never has a sense of homelessness or lack of belonging. Born in Kuwait, it has been easier for her to undergo a cultural assimilation, adopting and adapting to the cultural norms, values, and practices of the Kuwaiti society. Expressing her self-identification with Kuwait, she asserts:

I loved Kuwait. It was my home, and I was a loyal subject of the royals. I lined up every day of school with the other students to sing the national anthem. I sang with passion and allegiance to Kuwait’s successive ruling emirs. I grieved when Emir Sabah Salem el-Sabah died in 1977. And every February 25, we partied like mad to celebrate Kuwait’s Independence Day as if it were our own. (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 22)

This excerpt shows a deep sense of attachment, loyalty, and belonging that Nahr feels towards Kuwait and its people. She identifies herself with Kuwaiti citizens when she declares that she has been ‘a loyal subject of the royals,’ indicating a strong allegiance to the Kuwaiti monarchy and political system. Further, Nahr’s actions of lining up daily at school to sing the national anthem and participating in the national festivals reinforce this sense of national pride and identification. Her grief at the passing of a former Kuwaiti Emir demonstrates her emotional connection and affection to the ruling family. This feeling of love for Kuwaiti Emirs further cements her deep sense of belonging and pride in identifying herself with Kuwait.

Living in Kuwait during her formative years—a period of youth and adolescence when individuals are most open to cultural influences and developing their sense of identity—Nahr easily assimilates into the Kuwait community. She has been able to readily

and seamlessly integrate elements of Kuwaiti culture into her own worldview and ways of being, suggesting a high degree of receptiveness and adaptability on her part. Expressing her deep fondness and appreciation for Kuwaiti culture, Nahr states:

I loved everything about Kuwaitis—their delicate Khaleeji *thobes*, their *matchboos* with browned chicken and hot sauce, their *diwaniyas*, pearl diving traditions, and tribal ways. I even taught myself to speak their dialect and could dance Khaleeji ‘better than their best.’ That’s what someone told me. In eighth grade, I was even selected to be part of the official troupe that danced on a televised celebration for the royals during Independence Day. (Abulhawa, 2020, pp. 22-23)

Nahr’s statement expresses her deep fascination and appreciation for Kuwaiti culture and traditions and reveals a level of immersion and engagement with various aspects of Kuwaiti cultural identity that goes beyond casual observation. It, further, expresses a sense of having gone to great lengths to fully embrace, participate and enjoy Kuwaiti clothing, food, accent and way of life. The fact that she was selected for an official troupe that performed during a televised Independence Day celebration for the Kuwaiti royalty further underscores Nahr’s deep integration into the Kuwaiti cultural fabric. It paints a vivid picture of Nahr, who has gone to extraordinary lengths to embrace and embody the cultural traditions and expressions of the Kuwaiti people to the point of being recognized and included in official cultural representations.

Many factors, undoubtedly, have led to Nahr’s assimilation in the Kuwaiti mainstream culture. Nahr’s physical features which resemble the Kuwaiti ones help her assimilate and be accepted in the Kuwaiti society, rather than being perceived as an outsider or foreigner. In other words, Nahr’s Arab physical appearance enables her to easily blend in and assimilate into predominantly Kuwaiti community and to avoid racial discrimination that people with different physical traits often face. In other words, being an Arab living in an Arab state reduces racial discrimination. Moreover, Nahr’s easy assimilation can be attributed to the similarities that the Kuwaiti and the Palestinian cultures share. The common cultural traditions, religious practices, and social norms that exist among Palestinians and Kuwaitis help her create a sense of familiarity and belonging.

Generally, Palestinians, living in Arab states where they share a common Arab ethnic and cultural heritage, experience a greater sense of belonging and acceptance. In such an environment, cultural, racial or ethnic differences are less pronounced or emphasized within the broader Arab community. The shared use of Arabic as the primary language facilitates their communication, understanding, and social integration and reduces barriers and social or racial discrimination and prejudice.

A close reading of the novel shows that Nahr during this stage of her life has been a naïve and innocent young girl. She is a passionate dancer, kind-hearted and good-natured. In her younger years, Nahr harbors dreams of being loved, marrying an ideal man, starting her own family, and acquiring modern household appliances that would make her the envy of her peers. Taken together, these three intertwined dreams—of marriage, motherhood, and material comfort—represent Nahr's youthful vision of a fulfilled, prosperous, and socially esteemed life. They encapsulate the traditional feminine ideals that she has internalized and aspired to during this stage of her life. Regarding her identity in this stage, it can be said that due to her assimilation in the Kuwaiti culture, she has always perceived Kuwait as her home and identified herself with Kuwait more than with Palestine. She develops a stronger sense of belonging and identification with Kuwait.

### 3.2. Nahr and Um Buraq: A New Identity

Another factor which has shaped Nahr's identity is the economic one. Abandoned by her husband at the age of nineteen, and due to the dire financial circumstances facing her family, Nahr finds herself thrust into the role of the primary provider at a young age. With limited options available, Nahr takes on the burdensome responsibility of ensuring her family's basic needs are met. This heavy obligation profoundly shapes the trajectory of her life. Leaving her dreams of marriage and domesticity behind, Nahr accepts an exploitative and dangerous job, prostitution. The vulnerability and trauma of these experiences begin to chip away at her youthful ideals and sense of self. She gets acquainted with a woman named Um Buraq, who introduces her to the new world.

Nahr's acquaintance with Um Buraq helps her develop a new identity. She chooses a new name 'Almas' meaning Diamond. She starts her journey with prostitution and Um



Buraq becomes her guide in this journey. Expressing her astonishment at the change she undergoes, Nahr says:

I have thought much about that decision to choose another name. Was I making a commitment to something? To a rebellion, perhaps. A rejection of the script to achieve a respectable life—modesty, a husband, children, social status, money? Was I wanting to try life on the margins of all that was unnaturally proper? (Abulhawa, 2020, pp. 44-45)

As this excerpt demonstrates, Nahr has been thinking of changing her name which entails changing her identity. Moving in a new route needs a new identity. When faced with desperate financial circumstances, Nahr turns to prostitution as a means of survival - a harrowing choice driven by a lack of alternatives and the pressing need to support her family. This experience would undoubtedly be traumatic, forcing Nahr to confront the fragility of her moral code and the harsh realities of the world. Through the act of prostitution, Nahr has been compelled to adopt a new persona to disguise her true self. This process of changing her identity serves as a psychological defense mechanism, allowing her to emotionally distance herself from the degradation of her older self. It has also been a practical necessity, as she seeks to protect her family by concealing her identity and the nature of her work. The transformation of Nahr's identity goes beyond just the surface level. As she is forced to compromise her values and endure the trauma of exploitation, her sense of self has been profoundly shaken. She, undoubtedly, struggles to reconcile her former dreams and aspirations with the harsh realities she faces, leading to an existential crisis and a radical reimagining of who she is.

The moment Nahr slips into the red dress—which symbolizes her feminine allure transgression, it triggers a profound transformation in her sense of self and identity. This sartorial shift represents a potent metaphor for the deeper psychological and emotional changes that begin to take hold within her:

Um Buraq...gave me a few skimpy things to try on. One little red dress she chose clung to me, accentuating my curves. I ran my hands over my body, watching in the mirror how it slid from my breasts to my waist and glided over the arches of my

hips. I felt glamorous. It was probably the most expensive clothing I had ever worn. In this dress, I could be someone other than a twenty-year-old failure, who'd only learned to read well enough in her teens, fallen in love with and married the first man who came along, then wound up little more than gossip fodder. I could be Almas, a diamond, in this dress. (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 46)

Nahr's detailed description provides a vivid and evocative glimpse into her experience of wearing a particular dress, and the profound psychological and emotional impact it has on her. As she runs her hands over the fabric, feeling it cling to the contours of her body, she experiences a surge of self-awareness and self-appreciation. In this charged moment, Nahr feels the possibility of being someone other than the older, constrained person she has been once. She is able to revel in her physical beauty and femininity, which likely stands in stark contrast to how she normally perceives herself. The dress offers her a rare opportunity to step outside the confines of her current circumstances and imagine a more elevated, sophisticated version of herself. This suggests that the dress has a transformative power, allowing Nahr to see herself in a new, more alluring light.

Furthermore, Nahr's declaration that the dress is possibly the most expensive clothing she has ever worn hints at the rarity and specialness of this moment. This dress represents an indulgence and a departure from Nahr's typical circumstances, perhaps hinting at a desire for a more lavish, sophisticated and comfortable lifestyle. Most poignantly, Nahr's revelation that in the new dress she is becoming 'someone other than a twenty-year-old failure' reveals the deep-seated insecurities and sense of inadequacy that she has grappled with - a young woman who feels she has already fallen short of societal expectations. The dress, then, becomes a means of escape and reinvention. It allows her to momentarily shed her self-perceived identity as a 'failure' and imagine a more glamorous, empowered version of herself.

To finish the transformation, Nahr applies too much makeup: "I applied heavy makeup for Almas, creating an alluring and sophisticated version of myself. I liked this woman in thick kohl, mascara, and red lipstick staring back at me in the mirror" (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 46). This statement which describes Nahr's application of heavy

makeup for 'Almas' reveals another significant moment of identity transformation and self-exploration. Through this act of cosmetic enhancement, Nahr crafts an 'alluring and sophisticated' version of herself, one that stands in stark contrast to her previous self-perception. The emphasis on the makeup elements - the 'thick kohl, mascara, and red lipstick' - suggests a deliberate, almost ritualistic process of self-fashioning. Nahr is consciously creating a new visual identity, one that she can project outwardly to the world and, importantly, see reflected back at her in the mirror. The makeup serves as a transformative tool, allowing her to take on a new persona. The act of 'liking' this altered version of herself is particularly poignant. It suggests a rare moment of self-acceptance and self-appreciation, where Nahr is able to recognize and embrace her own innate beauty and desirability.

By assuming the new identity, Nahr disregards the old one. And to completely hide herself behind the new one, she never carries her ID with her as instructed by Um Buraq. The decision to leave her ID behind when she adopts this new, made-up persona is a significant and intentional act that speaks to Nahr's desire to fully immerse herself in this alternative identity. By shedding the tangible markers of her previous self, she is able to more completely inhabit and embody the 'alluring and sophisticated' woman she has created through her cosmetic transformation. Without identifying documents that typically anchor an individual to a specific legal and social identity, Nahr is able to temporarily shed the constraints of her past and existing circumstances. Not having her ID allows her to move through the world unburdened by the expectations and assumptions that would otherwise cling to her. This act can be seen as a symbolic rejection of the limited options and societal perceptions that have previously defined her. Her decision suggests that she is not simply playing dress-up or indulging in a momentary fantasy. Rather, she is consciously crafting a new version of herself that she inhabits and projects to the world. This underscores the deliberate and thoughtful nature of this transformation—she is not simply masquerading, but actively constructing an alternative identity.

Noticing the transformation she has undergone, Nahr comments: "It wasn't really me, but Almas." (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 49). This statement reveals a profound moment of self-reflection and identity exploration for Nahr as she experiences the dramatic transformation

brought about by her new appearance. On a surface level, the comment suggests a clear distinction between Nahr's true self and the persona of 'Almas' that she has embodied through her makeup, dress, and shedding of her identifying documents. There is an acknowledgment that the woman staring back at her in the mirror is not a direct extension of her real self, but rather a carefully crafted alternative one. However, this delineation between 'me' and 'Almas' is more complex and multifaceted than it first appears. The use of the word 'really' implies that there may be an element of Nahr's true self present within this new incarnation, even if it is not a complete or accurate representation. This duality speaks to the inherent tension and fluidity of identity. Nahr seems to recognize that this transformation, while dramatic, does not entirely erase or negate her core sense of self. There is an underlying awareness that aspects of her authentic being are still present, even as she assumes this new persona. The act of naming this alternative identity 'Almas' also suggests a degree of intentionality and ownership over the transformation. Nahr is not simply passively inhabiting a new role, but is actively constructing and claiming this new facet of her identity. This moment of self-reflection and commentary on the nature of her transformation hints at the profound psychological and emotional implications of Nahr's journey. She is grappling with the fluidity of identity, the capacity for reinvention, and the ways in which external appearances can both conceal and reveal aspects of the self.

This identity shift can be considered as the catalyst for Nahr's eventual political awakening and radicalization. The injustices she experiences, coupled with her newfound understanding of the world's brutality, fuel her anger and a determination to fight back against the systems that have forced her into such a precarious position. Ultimately, Nahr's journey through prostitution and the changing of her identity represents a powerfully human story of resilience, disillusionment, and the forging of a revolutionary consciousness. It is a testament to the capacity of the human spirit to endure and transform in the face of immense adversity.

### 3.3. Jordan: Nahr's Real Homelessness

Another event which has a tremendous impact on Nahr's identity and self-perception is her expulsion from Kuwait in 1991. Due to the political tensions between

Kuwait and Palestinian authorities over their support of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, thousands of Palestinians living in Kuwait were expelled. Abulhawa's novel gives a brief glimpse on the issue as it details Nahr's journey out of Kuwait. In fact, Nahr's radical change comes the moment when she leaves Kuwait. The act of physical departure marks a dramatic rupture in her lived experience, severing her from the cultural foundations that has hitherto defined her sense of self. Up until that moment, Nahr's identity and way of life are deeply rooted in the traditions, rituals, and social fabric of Kuwaiti society. Her daily rhythms, relationships, and overall worldview are shaped by this familiar cultural context. However, upon moving to Amman, she finds herself disconnected from those familiar elements that had previously grounded her identity and sense of belonging. Nahr experiences a profound sense of loss and alienation after leaving Kuwait because it is the first time that she experiences displacement and feels homeless. Expressing her sense of loss in Amman, she confesses: "Everywhere I turned in Amman there was a reminder of loss" (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 114). As a first time displaced, she encounters many challenges in Amman. The city is entirely different; the quality of life is inferior; nothing resembles Kuwait.

Detailing Nahr's life in Amman, the novel throws light on her struggle as she grapples with the disorientation of being separated from the cultural touchstones she once took for granted. This cultivates feelings of displacement and alienation, as she attempts to adapt to the different norms and expectations of her new environment. The abrupt transition represents a profound personal crisis for Nahr, as she is forced to cope with the loss of her established identity and the disorientation of adapting to a radically different cultural landscape. Beyond the practical adjustments, Nahr also confronts a deeper existential crisis. The loss of Kuwait, where she has cultivated her roots, challenges her sense of self and belonging, forcing her to redefine her identity in the absence of those familiar cultural anchors. This internal struggle with alienation and a yearning for her former way of life are central thematic threads in Nahr's story.

Nahr's displacement and relocation to Amman brings her closer to her Palestinian roots and cultural heritage. It is during her life there that she begins to deeply appreciate and value her Palestinian identity and background which have been less salient when she

was living in Kuwait. The experience of being uprooted seems to foster a stronger identification and connection with her Palestinian origins and traditions. Nahr's identity transformation is seen in her outlook to Palestinian heritage. For example, when she was in Kuwait, she never thought of Palestinian *tatreez* (embroidery) as something special. However, when she experiences exile, she starts perceiving it in a new way:

I had watched my mother embroider now and then over the years, but I'd never paid much attention to it. To my young eyes, embroidered caftans belonged to another generation, and I foolishly thought them unrefined compared to modern European clothes. But in Amman, in the haze of my exile and idleness and through the lens of loss, the spectacular intricacy of *tatreez* crystallized as I watched my mother create gorgeous caftans, and I finally realized hers was a masterful testament to our heritage and her own artistry. (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 115)

This confession reflects a profound shift in Nahr's perspective on the cultural and artistic significance of the traditional Palestinian art of embroidery. Her initial dismissive attitude towards embroidered caftans as belonging to 'another generation' and being 'unrefined' compared to modern European clothes reveals a youthful lack of appreciation for this longstanding cultural tradition. However, this perspective undergoes a radical transformation once she finds herself exiled in Amman. It is within this context of cultural dislocation and emotional turmoil that her eyes are finally opened to the true artistry and heritage embodied in the intricate embroidery of the caftans. This transformation in Nahr's perception suggests that the act of displacement and the experience of loss have served as a catalyst for a deeper connection to her cultural heritage. The familiarity of her mother's *tatreez* practice, now seen through the lens of Nahr's newfound appreciation, becomes a vital anchor that grounds her and provides a tangible link to her Palestinian roots, even in the midst of the disorientation of exile.

Nahr's exile in Amman cultivates in her a feeling of homelessness, and consequently her connection and perception of Palestine undergoes a radical transformation. She confesses that Palestine has begun to feel more 'real' to her, rather than just an abstract, lost homeland:

Palestine had begun to feel more real...Maybe it was the experience of war and exile, or just the passage of time; maybe it was my contemplation of Mama's *tatreez*, or simply not wanting to be in Amman that made Palestine bloom in my imagination. It was no longer the lost home and heritage trapped in Mama's tin box of old photos from her childhood in Haifa, my parents' wedding, and their life in Ein el-Sultan. (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 138)

This passage demonstrates Nahr's evolving relationship with the idea of Palestine, suggesting a growing sense of connection and tangibility to a place that had previously felt more abstract and distant. Nahr contemplates several possible factors that may have contributed to this shift. She presumes it could be the trip undertaken by her mother and brother, or experience of war and exile or simply the passage of time or mother's *tatreez* that have sensitized her to the realities of displacement, allowed her perspective to evolve and triggered a deeper connection to her cultural heritage and, by extension, the notion of Palestine. Nahr does not know the exact factor behind this shift in her perspective. However, it is all of these put together. As Nahr matures, her relationship to her Palestinian heritage deepens and becomes more meaningful and her Palestinian origins and history more palpable. Hence, she starts idealizing Palestine: "In the long, idle hours since we came to Amman, I had begun to idealize Palestine as others did, and I secretly imagined a fresh start" (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 129). The period of inactivity and dislocation appears to have created a space for Nahr to reflect on her circumstances and her relationship to the idea of Palestine. This might also suggest that, as a coping mechanism or in an effort to find meaning in her exile, Nahr starts to romanticize the notion of Palestine and the prospect of a fresh start there. In other words, Palestine is no longer a repository of lost memories and heritage, but a place that represents the possibility of a new beginning. This idealization speaks to the human tendency to project hopes and desires onto places that represent the possibility of renewal and reinvention, especially in the face of upheaval and loss. Nahr's newfound appreciation for her mother's artistry and this inclination to idealize Palestine speak to the multifaceted nature of her evolving relationship to her cultural identity and heritage. As she navigates the challenges of exile, Nahr appears to be engaging in a process

of both rediscovering and re-imagining her place in the world in order to anchor herself in the familiar while also envisioning alternative paths forward.

### 3.4. Palestine: Nahr's Route to the Roots

The last stage of Nahr's identity transformation takes place when she visits Palestine. Suleiman (2016) writes: "Palestinian identity exists in a state of constant alert, waiting to come to the fore at every pulling of a trigger, destruction of a home, uprooting of an olive tree, burning of a field, crossing of a checkpoint, building of a settlement and at every border crossing, even when a diasporic Palestinian travels on a passport of his or her acquired citizenship" (pp. 3-4). This is what Nahr experiences when she crosses the Palestinian-Jordanian borders. As the story unfolds, Nahr decides to visit Palestine to get divorced. Arriving Palestine, she has mysterious feelings: "Maybe it was finally getting through, or some spiritual call from my ancestors, but I was overcome with relief—and something akin to belonging—when I emerged on the other side of the crossing terminal" (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 151). Nahr's comment about what she feels describes her transformative experience as she crosses the border from Jordan to Palestine. The language used suggests that this moment represents a significant shift in her relationship to her cultural heritage and sense of identity. The fact that Nahr feels 'something akin to belonging' when she emerges on the other side of the crossing terminal indicates that this physical act of traversing the Jordanian river and entering Palestine has triggered an emotional and even spiritual response within her. Her reference to her ancestors implies that there is a deep, ancestral connection that she feels in this moment - as if crossing into Palestine has allowed her to tap into something primal and essential about her cultural identity. Further, it suggests that this experience has unlocked an essential, primal part of her identity that had previously been suppressed or denied. This suggests that the land itself, or the act of physically setting foot in this place, has unlocked an innate, almost mystical bond that she has with her ancestral home. The feeling of relief that she experiences is also quite telling. It suggests that there has been a sense of unease, discomfort or even dislocation that she has been carrying, and that stepping into Palestine has provided a release from that burden. This implies that Palestine, for Nahr, represents a



place of belonging, of being at 'home', where she can drop the weight of displacement and exile. Ultimately, this emotional moment of arrival and transformation underscores the profound, almost transcendent significance that Palestine holds for Nahr's sense of self and belonging.

For many second-generation Palestinians who are born and raised in exile, their sense of Palestinian identity is heavily influenced by the stories, memories, and narratives passed down from their parents and grandparents. These personal accounts of Palestine become a vital connection to a homeland they have never experienced firsthand. When Nahr's perceives the Palestinian landscape, she remembers all those stories and memories she has been told by her mother and grandmother:

I gazed toward the unfolding land, where rolling hills met the sky. Images began to converge in my chest, deepening my breathing...Sitti Wasfiyeh's tales about Ein el-Sultan; stories from Mama, Baba, neighbors, and friends about Haifa. The ones I thought I'd discarded, tuned out, dismissed. They were all there to greet me, enfolding me in the embrace of our collective dislocation from this place where all our stories go and return. Here is where we began. Where our songs were born, our ancestors buried. (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 152)

This rich and evocative passage powerfully evokes Nahr's profound connection to the land of Palestine as she gazes upon it. The language used paints a vivid sensory and emotional portrait of how Nahr experiences and internalizes homecoming. Nahr's reaction suggests that the mere sight of the Palestinian landscape triggers a profound emotional and even spiritual affinity within her. The images that converge are not just visual, but seem to tap into layers of memory, history, and ancestral connection. They bring to her mind the stories of her grandmother and mother. It is as if the landscape has unlocked a floodgate of recollections that were previously discarded, dismissed and tuned out but now return to enfold her in their embrace.

Nahr's life in Palestine and her acquaintance with Bilal changes her dramatically. Though she has never been fond of the rugged outdoors, through the force of Bilal's passionate connection to Palestinian environment, she begins to see the rocky hills

differently. Gone was the persistent cacophony of traffic, pedestrians, street vendors and the buzz of streetlights that had filled every corner of her cramped living spaces in Kuwait and Amman. Instead, she awakes to the melodic songs of birds and wind chimes, and is lulled to sleep at night by the orchestral sounds of crickets, along with the calls of jackals and wolves. She starts feeling the Palestinian landscape: “I found myself breathing deeply and deliberately in the mornings, inhaling the immensity of that silence. It made me realize how limited my world had been that I could not imagine the need to pack more than house slippers in addition to multiple pairs of heels, even though I knew I would be here at least a couple of months for the divorce proceedings” (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 159). It is also through Bilal that she comes to know and identify different plants and herbs which are usually associated with Palestinian folklore, culinary uses and medicinal values. She begins joining Hajjeh Um Mhammad and Bilal for morning *salat* and, soon, she starts performing prayers five times a day in an attempt “to be part of their lives” (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 160). Nahr develops an intimacy with the Palestinian landscape and the once city girl becomes a peasant girl:

I was content to just sit there in the splendid silence of the hills, where the quiet amplified small sounds—the wind rustling trees; sheep chewing, roaming, bleating, breathing; the soft crackle of the fire; the purr of Bilal’s breathing. I realized how much I had come to love these hills; how profound was my link to this soil. The turmoil of the days past dissipated...I could breathe deeply, lie on earth, let the crowded, chaotic thoughts colliding in my head recede. (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 186)

Nahr’s deep, visceral connection to the land and geography of Palestine is paralleled by her unwavering commitment to the Palestinian national struggle. Just as she intimately experiences and interacts with the contours of the Palestinian landscape, she is equally immersed in and devoted to the Palestinian cause. Her bond with the physical terrain of her ancestral homeland triggers her identification with the broader political and cultural fight for Palestinian rights and self-determination. Returning to Palestine, Nahr is transformed by the power of her roots; she re-emerges as a radical political activist who risks and sacrifices everything in order to bring her family back to their ancestral homeland. Hence,

she joins Bilal and others in their struggle for freedom. It can be asserted that Nahr's homecoming is an almost alchemical process that profoundly reshapes her as an individual. Her reconnection with her roots unlocks something essential within her, allowing her to tap into a primal, ancestral well of identity and belonging.

The emotional dimension of her homecoming has imbued her with a profound sense of purpose and commitment. Hence she develops a potent, revolutionary political consciousness - one that is willing to take a bold, even dangerous, action in the name of reclaiming her family's rightful place in Palestine. She understands well the high stakes and personal sacrifice involved in this political awakening. Nahr is now willing to put everything on the line - her safety, her security, even her life - in order to fulfill what she sees as a moral and political imperative to restore the Palestinian people to their ancestral homeland. This metamorphosis from a more passive, disconnected state to an active, radical political one represents a powerful reclamation of agency and self-determination. Nahr has tapped into the transformative power of her cultural heritage, intellectual engagement, and emotional bonds to forge a new, emboldened political identity. In doing so, she is positioning herself as a champion for the Palestinian cause, willing to take bold action in the face of adversity.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The novel's protagonist, Nahr, like most of the second-generation diaspora, provides a new perspective to the ongoing discussions on diaspora by offering her own unique understanding and conceptualization of what constitutes home and identity. During her journey to Palestine, she develops an awareness of who she is and her place with regard to her origins. Through this experience of reconnecting with the homeland, Nahr gains new insights into how she situates herself within the complex dynamics of the Palestinian diaspora. The trip prompts her to reflect more deeply on her place and relationship to her Palestinian roots which have previously been somewhat abstract or distant for her as a member of the second generation living in diaspora. This evolving awareness and redefinition of her identity and connection to Palestine becomes a central theme as she navigates the physical and metaphorical landscapes of her ancestral homeland. Her journey

offers readers a window into the unique perspective and experiences of diasporic Palestinians like Nahr who are grappling with questions of home, belonging, and multifaceted identities.

A close reading of *Against the Loveless World* shows that Nahr's identity is fluid rather than being a fixed or static. In other words, Nahr's identity is not rigidly defined or a predetermined entity but rather an ongoing process of negotiation and renegotiation, allowing her to adapt and respond to the changing circumstances and environments she encounters. It emerges from the interstitial spaces between cultures, histories, and geographies. As she confronts new challenges, experiences and perspectives, she continuously redefines and reasserts her sense of identity. As she navigates different contexts, communities, and experiences, her sense of self evolves and shifts, rather than remaining stagnant. Nahr's identity is shaped by the intersection of various facets such as her nationality, gender, class, and personal experiences. These different aspects of her identity interact and influence one another, leading to a dynamic and multidimensional sense of self. Moreover, Nahr's identity is heavily shaped by the social, economic, political, and cultural contexts she finds herself in, both in the diaspora and during her time in Palestine. Her sense of belonging and self-identification can fluctuate based on the specific circumstances and power dynamics at play.

To conclude, the exploration of identity in Abulhawa's novel resonates with the theoretical frameworks articulated by Hall, Anca, Schultersmandl and Toplu, who argue that identity is not a fixed essence but rather varies and changes over time and an individual can develop multiple and overlapping identities. The novel demonstrates that identities cannot be labeled, as they are never singular or fixed but rather a fluid and dynamic construct, constantly in motion, shaped and reshaped by history, culture, politics and personal experiences. Nahr exemplifies this fluidity, as her identity and sense of self undergo significant and substantial transformations throughout the story. Her identity evolves in response to shifting circumstances, sociopolitical forces, and cultural or relational encounters. Nahr's shifting identities illustrate how identity is constructed at the intersection of personal agency and broader structures of power.

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