

Exilic Consciousness and Diasporic 'Third Space' in Susan Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes.v25i2.522>

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Received: 23.2.2024

Accepted: 13.12.24

Published Online: 19.12.2025

Abstract: This research proposes a decolonial interpretation of Palestinian diaspora and exile in Susan Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* (2020). Through its interdisciplinary exploration, this paper raises the question of how diasporic being and exilic consciousness furnish a bodily 'Third Space' that encompasses both a scattering (*shitat*) and focal grassroots resistance. This paper proposes an intersectional analysis and a praxis of decolonizing the body in exile and diaspora by approaching it from a deconstructive reading of a 'Third Space.' Through multidimensional ways, Nahr's body becomes a site for colonial resistance that refutes and disrupts hegemonic discrimination. The antihero challenges institutionalized sociopolitical milieus, and supremacist ideologies that aim to circumnavigate her resistance against what are the 'symptoms' of diaspora. This reclamation of agency over her body and her eventual falling into radical love are argued to constitute the exilic consciousness with which Nahr decolonizes her own body within a 'Third Space' and in turn, her fluid, diasporic being. Thereby, the findings of this research conclude that the novel will incessantly cement a perennial timelessness; for ever since its publication, the novel is considered as the most relevant Palestinian novel, specifically to the Shaikh Jarrah uprising and the 2021 war on Gaza, followed by the century's 2023-2024 International Court of Justice ruling on order of Israel's committing genocide in the strip.

Keywords: decolonizing the body, diasporic 'third space', exilic consciousness, Susan Abulhawa

1. Introduction

Palestinian literature often tends to tap on a potential of return in its narratives - whether directly or indirectly - through plot and sub-plot focalized around a stratagem for, or gamble with, the intention to return *to* Palestine. Often, the main character is exiled *away* from Palestine, wrapping this trauma-bound displacement with a yearning to return *to* the homeland. The story of the radical heroine/hero who fights the Israeli occupation's echoing control over and across geographies, both metaphorically and physically, often renders the Palestinian literary heroine/hero as one yearning for the normalcy of pre-occupation— a Palestine whose people were simply people unburdened with such narrative. The narrative of return has been an underlying, almost subconscious, fabric that furnishes the direction and motivations behind characterisations employed by many Palestinian authors. The justification behind calling the main character or protagonist as the Palestinian 'heroine' or 'hero' in this study is related to the connotation tied to this quest and desire for the victory of radically decolonising and returning both land and people.

The events marking the recurrent displacements of both the Palestinians and the normalcy of living on one's homeland are the Nakba in 1948, followed by the Naksa or Six-Day War of the 1967, successively exiling some to a travel-destined life of repetitive mobility into and through neighbouring Arab countries, and from there to the West, while simultaneously keeping the remaining Palestinians exiled within their own lands, suffering under the constant threat of being displaced, suffering under an internal diaspora (Hamdan et al. 2021). This traumatic *shatat* or diaspora and then *manfa*, or the infamous 'exile' that banned and barred the return of Palestinians to their homes in Palestine, become the fundamental states of characters in Palestinian literature. Sa'di (2015: 217) describes this state of being as "either actual or metaphorical exile" – an unrelenting "exile/return polarity, which they believed, until recently, could only be dissolved by the reconstitution of Palestinian society."

The trauma of these two major events of displacements became the markers of the Palestinian struggle, a struggle that is frequently termed as an Arab case: *qadiyyah Arabiyyah*. Ever since, events external to Palestine yet direct constituents of the struggle include the 1982 massacre of Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon, the 1991 Gulf War that displaced many Palestinians from a main host country that is Kuwait, and the Oslo Accords peace process that started in 1993 both re-established Palestinian dependence on the newly established settler-colonial state of Israel, but also allowed the return of some Palestinians, facilitating a transnational community that either returned through physical return or through elite economic investments in Palestine (Dorai 2002). These successive events moulded and influenced the diaspora of Palestinians, securing the lock on their exile, their *manfa*, or their 'shunning' into no-return (Hassan 2011).

As slowly, but surely, the Palestinian recouped into the dream of liberation in the face of what Said perceives as a "condition of terminal loss" and "discontinuous state of being" (Sa'di 2015: 219). In an interview with Weiss (2020), Abulhawa stresses on the need for transnational connections between all those who suffer colonial strictures. *Against the Loveless World*, she explains in the interview, draws on twenty years of regional, Arab and Palestine histories and developments in the Palestinian liberation struggle. In fact, during the interview, Weiss remarked on how in the novel Abulhawa demonstrates more of "Palestinian consciousness" than she is occupied with "checking it against 'American sensibility'" (Weiss 2020) – a conclusion Abulhawa repeatedly affirms and validates throughout the interview. Hence, the novel is an exploration of Arab-Palestinian relations, and is a study of the Palestinian not in the West but in the Arab region and even in Palestine.

While Sa'di's (2015) argument focuses on the exile/return axis, the more contemporary visual of the Palestinian hero and heroine have become intertwined with radical resistance for liberation. Despite the fact that the trauma of displacement is the logical source of a scattered "discontinuous" being, a close-reading of the literary manifestations in the radical main character of the Palestinian novel, who despite the accusative, reductive western label of 'terrorist', and the slogan of "from the river to the sea Palestine will be free" as anti-Semitic (Malik

2021), is a hero that still believes in resistance even if armed, even if violent, even with no foreseeable return. Susan Abulhawa is an illustrator of this contemporary trope, a stream bearing a collective exilic consciousness that is inherently pregnant with a story of return, but is fundamentally a demonstration of radical resistance. In the past, Abulhawa published an award-winning debut *Mornings in Jenin* (2010), a novel that “is partially influenced by Ghassan Kanafani’s *Returning to Haifa...*” (Allawzi et al. 2023), and primarily set in Ein Hod, Palestine. It revolves around the Nakba and its consequences on breaking a family unit, kidnapping the son and raising him with the very distaste that causes the displacement of the Abulheja family to Jenin before the main character, Amal, is sent to Jerusalem for boarding school education and before, once more, immigrating to America and becoming “Amy”. While Amal, meaning *hope*, is depicted to be in the limbo of represented hope, a hope for return, she nonetheless enters a constant state of resistance as her way of being. More contemporarily in 2020, Abulhawa’s third novel, *Against the Loveless World* was released with a ground-breaking heroine: the main character Nahr, whose unconventional snappiness, confidence, self-centeredness and finally, radicality, are characterizations that veer her on the periphery, if not the whole embodiment, of the anti-heroine archetype. Nahr is relentless, uninvested in education as Amal is in *Mornings*, a woman who indulges in underground resistance groups just as she indulges in a natural talent at dance performance as a calling from the rhythmic invitations of “*tarab*” and Arabic music. A woman of street wisdom.

Nahr is the Arabic word for “river” – a body of water in constant motion, initially between two banks, before joining the vast, possibility-tainted ocean. Nahr’s story starts with her mother’s pregnancy with her while crossing the River Jordan to the East bank of the river that is now the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. While travelling over the bridge separating the two countries, Nahr’s mother strikes a deal with the river to name her daughter after it, should it safely land her in Jordan before collapsing and killing her and her infant as was the destiny of others. The river reciprocates, and the baby girl Nahr or ‘River’ is born. Nahr is not nostalgic to return to Palestine, and her name may connote the dichotomy or polarity of two banks, but not across the exile/return axis. As a matter of fact, it can be easily observed that the character is detached from, and bored by, her paternal grandmother and her mother’s post-traumatic repetitive urge to tell and retell of their Nakba and Naksa respectively. In this instance, this research contextualizes upon Said’s reading of exile by aligning it with the deconstructions of a character who is not considered an intellectual until she overcomes her feelings of unhomeliness through finding romantic love as intertwined with decolonial resistance.

Like Abulhawa, Nahr’s early life is set in Kuwait whose landscape of shores, beaches, corniche and the sea constitute more of Nahr’s memory than the conventional inherited trauma of the Nakba and Naksa. The story of Nahr is contoured with a new nonchalance regarding the history of Palestine and ends with an involvement and a deep preoccupation with contemporary possibilities and common consequences of underground, radical and armed resistance. The anti-

heroine does not immigrate to the West neither, and only journeys from Jordan-Kuwait-Jordan and then back and forth between the latter and Palestine – this is the world that the reader witnesses in *Against the Loveless World*. It is set around the Gulf War of 1991, culminating in the early 2000s, but mainly exploring the ramifications of the Gulf War on Nahr – the world the reader witnesses is the Arab world, including occupied Palestine.

Against the Loveless World is acceleratingly drawing the conclusion of being “exceptional” (Mullen 2020: 3) amongst Abulhawa’s previous works; the protagonist starts with, and as this paper will argue, remains in a state of constant motion, as she visualizes this motion early in the novel saying “But I know that going from place to place is just something exiles have to do. Whatever the reason, the earth is never steady beneath our feet” (2020: 27). Nahr’s life and experiences are often influenced and potently formed by moments of solidarity with the marginalized, the disarmed and the oppressed in both Palestine and Kuwait, as evident by the general use of word “exiles” instead of ‘Palestinians’, standing out as a character who is perceptive, empathic and reflective, despite her eccentric exceptionality. In her review of the novel, Khadivi (2020) describes this current under which the plot moves as “artfully looping together comings and goings, entrances and exoduses, burials and birthdays in a humming narrative of human movement” (p.3). “Nahr” is one of three pseudonyms which the character harbours and uses. Each of her names is related to a secret or reclusive story; “Yaqoot” (pp. 19-21) is her birth name after one of her father’s many mistresses and lovers and is hence prohibited by her mother; “Almas” (p. 44) is the pseudonym she uses during her nightly shifts as a dancer in Kuwait’s underground, secret underground prostitution arena.

However, it is worth noting that Nahr is the name her mother chooses for her and what she goes by in Palestine, although Yaqoot is specifically the one used when she is arrested by the Israel’s Occupation Forces. Just like her geographical routes through life, Nahr’s very identity is mostly revealed to readers as they witness the multiple layers to her identity and how an aspect as fundamental as identity is also constantly shifting to uphold survival in a world that is constantly imposing its shapeshifting. Nonetheless, the novel’s structure follows a different route that is told through the imprisoned voice of Nahr who immediately introduces her reflective, retrospective attempt to tell her turbulent story in an almost apathetic state in the dissociating “Cube” – a prison cell in one of the Israeli prisons in Palestine – stating: “I stare at the blank pages now, trying to tell my story – everything I confessed to Bilal and everything after. I want to tell it as story-tellers do, with emotional anchors, but I recall emotions in name only. My life returns to me in images, smells, and sounds, but never feelings. I feel nothing.” (2020: 10)

The novel is structured into seven sections, under which there are dissimilar numbers of chapters, with the first section titled “Kuwait” followed by the first chapter within the section, “The Cube, East”. From this point onward, the retrospective narrator and voice of Nahr starts her story of growing up in Kuwait - from the prison cell. Yet, the narrative voice is consistently the tool with which she furnishes a created space where truth resides, even truths she has not exposed to her

lover and companion in the underground resistance the reader enters at the end of the novel. It is Nahr's own voice that emanates from memory and imagination, both of which are incubated by the mind within the Cube. Often with literature about the marginalized, the reader witnesses the creation of a space where the character can defy the central structures, establishments and systems that have pushed them into the margins. In Palestinian literature, such as *Mornings*, the story opens with the heroine's inner monologue as she stares down an Israeli soldier pointing a rifle at her forehead. Similarly, in *Against the Loveless World*, while Nahr is in the Cube, she responds to prison guards internally. With the use of first-person point of view, and just as the viewpoint arrests the reader within the perception of the narrator, Nahr's candidness and perceptive responses to life and survival are iterated. Rarely do we see the character being outright explicit about her vulnerability, albeit her straightforwardness, as evident in her refraining from exposing the full truth with Bilal, who is intimately and personally an advocate and the most informed character on the heroine's history and present.

Instantly, the idea of the Cube becomes an important pathway to symbolically unveiling the exilic and diasporic consciousness of the antiheroine Nahr. To instantiate, Tankard (2024) explicates in her review of the novel how Abulhawa deftly incorporates the profound symbolism associated with the Cube through a Platonic reading: "One of five Platonic solids, representing earth, a cube as prison cell separates public and private spaces—yet Nahr has no privacy. Architects consider the sun's path across the sky when orienting their buildings. Abulhawa locates the Cube's window high, disorienting Nahr: "time is immeasurable in here." (ibid: 4).

However, this paper circumnavigates the nature of this internally constructed place that drives Nahr's viewpoint. In other words, this paper examines the nature of Nahr's consciousness, and how it translates to govern this "ungovernable" (Weiss 2020) character's *being*. The *concept* of space - rather than physical space - is theoretically interpreted by Homi Bhabha as a study of diasporic being. Bhabha's (2004) third space theoretical construction emerges from a postcolonial lexicon, where he defines the first space as the space of the cultural home that is inhabited by the existence of the native or indigenous people of the culture and land (p.43). This space becomes an arena of cultural expression by indigenous performance. The second space is imposed by colonial structures of host countries. In *Against the Loveless World*, second space is evident by Zionist Israel where they impose their own institutional violence through law, religion, language, government and cultural dogmas such as the acceptable social ways to behave in society. The native or indigenous has to preform and function within this space, or else they will receive a punitive punishment.

According to Bhabha, the second space does not allow the native access to resources to articulate their existence and their identity as they feel it. Towards the novel's resolution, Nahr joins an underground freedom fighter group to which she is introduced to by Bilal, her ex-husband's bother, and who would later become her own. At first, Nahr is motivated through infatuation, love and a blaring logic to join Bilal at solving the problem of the water pipelines that have been redirected from

Bilal's farming land to the Israeli settlement nearby. Nahr's successful endeavour of redirecting the water back to Palestinian-owned land is representative of the first time she feels a connection not only to the land, but its interior infrastructure. It is after this first radical act of resistance to land theft that she experiences love – for both the land and Bilal; a radical love simultaneously built as an affinity to Palestine and her thus far potential romantic lover.

Contextually, Bhabha's 'second space' of the colonial structure does not allow the articulation of this first space identity, therefore the native is left with no choice but to create and construct a third space. Because Nahr and her family escape Kuwaiti authorities and army just as she rebels and attempts to escape from Israeli Occupation Forces, she reiterates her sentiment regarding the state of exile and shows that the exiled are surrounded by state-led limitations that force the exiled to acknowledge both sentiments of rejection and captivity that incurs the creation of a third space. Because the native cannot function wholly within the second space, whether within the colonial second space, or in host countries, because of colonial strictures or discrimination within social classes determined by race, color, nationality and language, the exiled carve out a third space where they are able to create a hybrid identity – a space where they are able to build a bridge with individuals who realise and help them articulate identity. In this sense, the hybridity of culture signifies a third space whose essential nature is not geographically located, but is where the multiple cultures intersect with solidarity. Titled after a line from James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* (1963), *Against the Loveless World*, echoes the state of having "the earth keep shifting beneath our feet" which reflects Nahr's character in her affinity to Um Buraq, a Iraqi woman who has been abandoned by her Kuwaiti husband for her infertility, and who escorts Nahr into high-end sex work scene in Kuwait, but also strengthens and hinges the heroine against the loveless world. Similarly, Nahr establishes a connection and solid friendship with a homosexual boy, Mohsen, whose Kuwaiti father storms in to throw him at Nahr so she can "take care of the boy" (p.69) or correct him into heterosexuality. Instead, they speak openly about their sexualities and this human connection motivates him to help her once she escapes Kuwait during the Gulf War to Jordan. In essence, the novel calls for a transnational consideration through this third space not to simply reaffirm the solid state of diaspora, but to rather conceive of the space where exiles retreat as the world 'lovelessly' locks the door on their identities.

As a character in both constant states of motion and influx produced by a state of exilic consciousness, Nahr is not "to succumb to the demands and contingencies of the everyday and become...citizens of a new country" (Sa'di 2015: 217). In this unhomey space, one which Bhabha describes as one created out of the loss of the first space – often interpreted as the homeland, and the rejection of the "second space", Nahr becomes an advocate to those who govern their own bodies. Out of her exilic consciousness that constantly reminds her of a man's world and the patriarchal gaze at a woman who employs her body into sex work, that those who are free are those who drive their bodies willingly – be it into sexuality, homosexuality or the unrelenting threat inherent in radical, armed resistance.

Another theoretical premise that this paper will embark upon is Said's interdisciplinary accentuation of exile that is concerned with the intellectual only; perhaps focalizing on intellectual consciousness. That is, it is our firm belief that Abulhawa's novel adumbrates the *zeitgeist* of Palestinian intellectual consciousness, which will be buttressed in forthcoming sections. However, we tend to delineate how the regular citizen or the freedom fighter who is preoccupied with praxis rather than critical intellect, is often omitted from Said's focality. Nonetheless, this paper attempts to provide a kaleidoscopic bridging with, and to, Said's reading of exile by aligning it with the deconstructions of a character who is not considered an intellectual until she overcomes her feelings of unhomeliness through finding romantic love as intertwined with decolonial resistance. The added value to this research thereby is proposing a nascent theoretical method to approaching Said's theories of exile that funnels an imperative to dissect an individual within the diaspora. Where theories of the intellectual have been translating and dismissing the Palestinian struggle into peace treaties, radicality as imbued by Abulhawa becomes the only conclusion to exile intellectuality.

2. Exilic consciousness and feeling unhomely

It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home.

Theodore Adorno

Minimia Moralia (2005: 187)

So which of your Lord's favors do you two deny?

You and I are absent,

you and I are present and absent

Mahmoud Darwish

In the Presence of Absence (2011: 22-24)

The whole world is a hotel, and Jerusalem is my home

Edward Said

Out of Place (1999: 13)

Said upheld an interdisciplinary accentuation of exile that is concerned with the intellectual only; perhaps focalizing on the awareness of the intellectual. However, the regular citizen or the freedom fighter who is preoccupied with praxis rather than critical intellect, is often omitted from Said's focality. Nonetheless, this paper attempts to provide a kaleidoscopic bridging with, and to, Said's reading of exile by aligning it with the deconstructions of a character who is not considered an intellectual until she overcomes her feelings of unhomeliness through finding romantic love as intertwined with decolonial resistance. While Said provided a pertinent connection between exile as a facticity, and exile as a metaphorical condition, he also provided a diagnosis of the exilic intellectual by studying the socio-political history of migration, and geographical dislocation. More importantly, he connected the condition of an outsider to exile - "the pattern that

sets the course for the intellectual outsider is best exemplified by the condition of exile, the state of never being fully adjusted, always feeling outside the chatty, familiar world inhabited by natives so to speak, tending to avoid and even dislike the trappings of accommodation and national well-being" (1996:59). Hence, exile for the intellectual subject within this metaphysical condition is "restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others" (p.59).

However, when approaching *Against the Loveless World* with this formulaic definition of the intellectual, one can read the main character through Susan Abulhawa. Where Nahr is driven by forced restlessness, Abulhawa drives her forward into radical resistance through narrative. In this sense, radical resistance is sought as part of intellectuality of the author – then transmuted specifically when devising stratagems such as Nahr's "chaos theory". Where theories of the intellectual have been translating and dismissing the Palestinian struggle into peace treaties, radicality as imbued by Abulhawa becomes the only conclusion to exile intellectuality. Therefore, although Nahr breaks the conventional Palestinian literary heroine's mould and detaches her from the sentimentality of her mother and grandmother's nostalgia, she is nonetheless only moved by and through radical resistance. But Nahr is not nonsensically unintellectual. As she shares with Bilal about being suspended from school in Kuwait when, in second grade, she asked questions about God and his role in one's choices and life decisions, but in retaliation, Nahr claims to have slit the principal's tires, and to which Bilal answers "You've been a rebel and revolutionary your whole life, woman!" (2020:294). It is only after cohabitating with Bilal and the rest of her newfound partners in Palestine, that James Baldwin, poetry and various intellectual allusions are discussed between her and Bilal.

Although these moments are fleeting and Nahr remains faithful to her nature, justifying that "although I tried to read with him, abstract political theories didn't hold my interest. I preferred stories, human dramas" (2020: 297). The character's name weaves a representation of how the river's dynamic flows into ocean, as though intellectuality can only be deemed worthy when completed into larger motion and realistic turbulence. According to Bhabha (2004), the state of unhomeliness is a moment that "creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow..." (9) where an emerging point in one's life occurs where the world shrinks for the diasporic individual and then broadens vastly. This paper argues that this expansion becomes Nahr's third space. For this unhomeliness according to Bhabha is inherently manifest "in that rite of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation" (2004: 9). This cohabitation reaches its climax of love and human, intercultural and intimate connection contextually in the section 'Palestine, Always' where Bilal and Nahr's love deepens concurrently as their plan to pollute Israeli waters as an act of pushing out the newly inhabiting settlers. Within this same section are chapters titled "'The Anatomy of Home", "Homecoming" and "Chaos Theory" (to be explored further in the third section of this paper) – all of which are titles that connote the enmeshment of both homeliness and resistance at once.

Within or without Palestine, it is evident that exilic experience leads to an exilic consciousness. Nahr seeks exile within her own consciousness because

neither of the countries she inhabits provides a sense of homeliness to her, and when she is exiled the first time from Kuwait, she cannot fathom to experience another physical exile. Nahr, upon being exiled from Kuwait, narrated from the Cube where she is imprisoned by the Occupation forces in Palestine, expresses an understanding that there is neither “homeliness” in Kuwait, Jordan nor even Palestine, “I didn’t know where I’d live, or what I would do if I went back, but there was no returning to Kuwait, and no place for me in Amman. I wasn’t sure there was in Palestine either, but I longed to return” (2020: 158). Her developing detachment from land and constant yearning for her beloved reaffirms the notion that the Palestinian is in exile within Palestine and anywhere else and that home, if ever arrived to, lies in the love and heart of others – in the people of the land, rather than the land itself. She self imposes her own exile through crossing and re-crossing the ‘inbetweenness’ (Bhabha 2004: 32) as evident by the seventh and last section titled “Between Freedom” and ends, ironically, at the chapter “Joy”.

Upon being released from the Cube, Nahr returns to neither an unguaranteed nor clear plan to stay in Jordan, meeting Um Buraq there and receiving news of Bilal’s survival and good health – yet it is the joy of simple freedom from prison that she describes as joy, along with the state of statelessness as she was exiled to Jordan since Bilal was not yet arrested by the Occupation Forces. Nahr’s inbetweenness is almost natural, existent in her consciousness and restless mind because she occupies an exilic displacement and had exiled herself within displacement in Kuwait, Jordan and the first trip to Palestine, which encompasses Friedman’s (2004) corroboration: “What happens to the human spirit between worlds, to desire and longing as they cross and re-cross geographical and cultural borders, to the domains of intimacy and family in migration, dislocation, and relocation?” (p.190) This question mirrors Nahr’s consciousness as she tries to situate her feelings of homeliness by crossing and re-crossing the geographical and cultural borders of Kuwait, Jordan and Palestine, confessing that “This was what it meant to be exiled and disinherited – to straddle closed border, never whole anywhere” (Abulhawa 2020: 259).

In *The Representation of the Intellectual* (1996), Said discusses the idea of the intellectual exile by utilising Adorno as the model for his discussion. He postulates that “Adorno was the quintessential intellectual, hating all systems, whether on our side or theirs, with equal distaste. For him life was at its most false in the aggregate- the whole is always the untrue.....placed an even greater premium on subjectivity, on the individual’s consciousness, on what could not be regimented in the totally administered society” (p.55). Not only does Adorno parallel Bilal and Nahr’s consciousness, where the former is an intellectual who refutes all systems whether in Palestine or Israel, and the latter as a rebel in action living in exile, but also that the condition of exile is inextricably intertwined with one’s consciousness, utilizing exilic consciousness in order to think through their ontological states. As such, Nahr is of rebellious essence, a trait she repeatedly highlights throughout the novel as when sharing stories of her rebellion at school, against the clients Um Buraq brought or against the Kuwaiti army that attempts to humiliate her brother through torture. Colonial, state-led structures of all kinds

follow Nahr and her family, equally deconstructing and scattering the unit and their lives.

Existing in a third space through one's exilic consciousness quintessentially encompasses the idea of production. Production in exile differs in transgenerational diaspora, as in the novel, Nahr's mother- who is similar to Adorno's situation as he created his magnum opus *Minima Moralia* (2005) in his American exile- is reciprocally able to create and produce by designing kaftans to brides. On the other hand, Nahr finds stagnation as she is unable to find the niche of her existence within the economic folds of a Jordanian society. Nahr's first innovative, intellectual creation happens in Palestine where she formulates her "chaos theory:

We need chaos, not organization," I said, deliberately not looking at Bilal. "No one is more organized than Palestinians," I began, mockery framing my words. "Look how we all stand so orderly at checkpoints, obediently producing our little green passes for our masters... Remember when I fizzed a soda bottle in a soldier's face? You all thought it was such a big deal, and the soldiers nearly shit their pants. Why?" I answered myself, pushing my neck forward: "Because it was a little bit of chaos in a theater of organization!" (2020: 188)

Thus, Nahr is not moved to action through embroidery nor her attempt at producing cosmetic body butter – a meditative practice that she leaves behind after becoming acquainted to radical resistance in Palestine. Her innovation does not materialise until she is contemplating action against the Israeli Occupation Forces. The urge to act is transformed into a plan when Nahr uses an analogy between dance and her chaos theory. She explains: "People don't need to be told to dance. You just play music and their bodies know what to do. You can organize them all day to dance, but no one will move until you play the music. We just have to figure out what that music is that will compel individuals and small circles of people to act however they can all over the country, without trying to organize them in advance" (2020: 240).

Relatively, Said postulates the condition of exile as the inability: "to go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one with your new home or situation" (1996: 53). Just as Nahr comments on her own fantasy of the possibility of having had a normal life with Bilal, elaborating that "I allow myself to imagine that the dignities of home and freedom might be the purview of the wretched of this earth" (Abulhawa 2020: 354), Adorno also states in his section "Asylum for the Homeless" that it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home" (2005: 187). It is through the sexual abuse she suffers through her sex work in Kuwait that Nahr dissociates from her body, only to find refuge in this very entity upon falling in love with Bilal, simultaneously finding her innovative purpose within the Palestinian group of friends she adjourns in Palestinian resistance.

Abulhawa re-conceptualizes the antiheroine's bodily third space; for Nahr uses her own hybrid body to create a space to make sense of her existence, that is initiated by an unhomely estrangement; "But what is home? Who feels at home while at home?" Anzaldúa (1999) postulates in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, adding

that "I had to leave home so I could find myself... But I didn't leave all the parts of me: I kept the ground of my own being... So yes, though 'home' permeates every sinew and cartilage in my body, I too am afraid of going home" (p.7). Nahr reflects Anzaldua's exilic consciousness as home and elsewhere simultaneously become sites of dislocation through either colonisation, estrangement and social exclusion.

While Nahr cannot resonate with the second space in the host countries of residence, but under the guidance of Bilal and the shackles of Israel's enforced lockdowns on Palestinians, she turns domestic spheres to a third space through arm trafficking. This plot development resonates with Bhabha's appropriation of Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story* (1999), where the protagonist Alia "makes her diminished domesticity into the 'perfect cover for gun-running: suddenly the home turns into another world..." (Bhabha 2004: 38). Nahr reconceptualizes the domestic spaces where "the personal-is-the political; the world-in-the-home" (Bhabha 2004: 38). Consequently, this unhomely moment starts to highlight the diasporic traumatic experiences and cultural displacement in their host countries, and marks in them their political existence even within the first space. As a result, Nahr's diasporic life with an exilic consciousness creates a passage to her third space, as she works and reworks the cultural and geographical terrains and itineraries of multi-dimensional dislocations illuminated through her psychological and bodily effects of belonging fully and nowhere. It is until she finds love through Bilal that she becomes rooted not in a sense of home, but fantasies of a home as a spiritual place where she can never be at home, and from which she must escape to feel at home with herself. Devi (1995) figuratively expresses: "I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry 'home' on my back" (p.21). Thus, it is apparent that exilic consciousness is carried on and across geography as a state of diasporic being rather than a safe citizen to a certain land. It is in Palestine that she finds the only true love, and it is through this love that she finds herself at home in Palestine – but only briefly in what she calls "honeymoon" (Abulhawa 2020: 345). The reason why the exilic individual creates a third space is not only because of diasporic and exilic states, but because freedom of choice is restricted and curbed by society:

So while it is true to say that exile is the condition that characterizes the intellectual as someone who stands as a marginal figure outside the comforts of privilege, power, being-at-homeness (so to speak), it is also very important to stress that that condition carries with it certain rewards and, yes, even privileges. So while you *are* neither winning prizes nor being welcomed into all those self-congratulating honor societies that routinely exclude embarrassing troublemakers who do not toe the party line, you are at the same time deriving some positive things from exile and marginality (Said 1996: 59).

Dancing in the novel sets out to capture the essence of Said's aforementioned corroboration, as Nahr deconstructs it within her third space while she bodily combats the discourses that substantiate a reductionist perception towards it. Dancing becomes the strong culture that leaves its affect everywhere it is performed, whether in a wedding in Kuwait, or in Palestine, it is through dancing that Nahr's body enters the field of vision. In fact, early in the novel, she affirms

that “dancing is the only nation I ever claimed, the only religion I comprehend” (Abulhawa 2020: 12). Therefore, the bodily third space she occupies when dancing blurs the geographical boundaries.

2.1 Nahr’s construction of a third space through her diasporic being

Now the land had been pulled from under my feet and I wobbled in the unsteady terrain of refugees, struggling to carry on.

Susan Abulhawa

Against a Loveless world (98)

I am forced to admit that I am, to them, nothing but a series of destinations with no meaningful expanses in between.

Monique Truong

The Book of Salt (90)

May we find the language

that takes us

to the only home there is...

Ibtisam Barakat

‘Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood’ (17-19)

Although Nahr’s journey in diaspora and exile is individualistic, as she conceptualizes a third space through her bodily experiences, the empowerment she employs through her revolutionary resistance is a collective empowerment. It is her existential crisis of existing as a diasporic being that enables her to create a path towards collective resistance after journeying to Palestine and meeting with the underground resistance. Kuttab demonstrates the importance of warranting a collective resistance by substantiating a counterargument towards a deterministic facticity that pedestals individualistic resistance rather than a collective one in ‘Empowerment as Resistance: Conceptualizing Palestinian women’s empowerment’ (2010) inferring that: “This process by itself is a challenge to the way empowerment is being used and practiced nowadays, that focuses on individuals and not the collective and hence cannot have a transformative nature.....” (p. 249).

Kuttab stresses on a socio-historical formulation of the concept of empowerment that takes its focal point the female’s agency and her transgressiveness of national and political consciousness through her “engagement in national resistance for social liberation” (2010: 249). Correspondingly, diasporic being is an existential condition where Nahr’s continuous travels from one country to another becomes an incentive that occupies the bulk of the novel. Although she transcends colonial territory imposed on her physicality by challenging dichotomous discourses, it is the transformational force of the displacement consciousness she experiences through existing as a diasporic being that establishes her agency. This line of interpretation can be argued to subsist a circular argument in the novel, where Nahr tries to continuously locate and relocate her identity

through a socio-cultural and political formation rather than internalizing her static patriarchal fate of functioning as a divorced, exiled, and traumatized woman, “I had to become another person, someone at the other end of disgrace, rape, and exile” (Abulhawa 2020: 95). Such idea ensues from Bourdieu (1977), who corroborates that the construction of the autonomous human being is not to be considered only from a biological anatomy, but from a social, cultural and political formation. To give an illustration, Nahr’s identity formation throughout the novel is somewhat shaped by her intersubjective encounters with people from the different folds of life, where she opens her eyes to aspects that have been alien to her, as she states that “Until I met Um Buraq, it had never occurred to me that patriarchy was anything but the natural order of life” (Abulhawa 2020: 50).

The condition of existing as a diasporic being entails a diasporic reality, where the subject continuously weaves and interweaves a multidimensional and intermingling socio political and cultural webs that carries their existence. Such a diasporic reality valorises this multi-dimensionality where it creates a splitness of a self that seeks to be at home and feeling unhomely in one’s home, as Nahr’s splitness in the novel can be realized to be illuminated upon her arrival to Palestine, stating: “The landscape that lived in the hearts of Mama, Baba, and Sitti Wasfiyeh didn’t feel like home, though it took hold of me nonetheless” (Abulhawa 2020: 126). This state of splitness is empirically imbued in her diasporic being, where it weaves for this duality of existence through a personal, social and cultural construction to find a meaningful reality in a totality of a Palestinian diasporic landscape inside and outside of Palestine. More importantly, Nahr’s diasporic condition is a modern one, as it alienates her from the historical diasporic condition her mother and grandmother experience and exist within:

It wasn’t like that for Mama or even Sitti Wasfiyeh, who had sworn she would never recover from becoming a refugee again. It amazed me to see how quickly they got comfortable in the new apartment and settled into a routine, as if their lives had simply been excised and replanted elsewhere, intact, with just a dusting of grief they shook off before returning to the business of living. Maybe it was easier because the trauma of forced displacement was already well-known to them, and they understood how idleness and purposelessness could dull the mind, droop the eyelids, and seep too much sleep and despair into the day (2020: 94).

Nahr’s life does not abide to the normal diasporic pattern that her parents and grandmother experience altogether; “Ideally, the pattern that diaspora follows should start with the past lived in the homeland, leading to a state of diaspora that the dispersed subject experiences, projecting frozen memories that form a certain enchantment of the homeland” (Ammari, Allawzi and Al-Sharah 2019: 8). While ascending from two generations who have experienced exodus, Nahr however finds it difficult to assimilate to her parents’ and grandmother’s Palestinian identity, as her journey comes at a critical stage in the history of the two countries she has ever known; Kuwait and Jordan before embarking on a journey to Palestine. While she momentarily felt that she might belong in Kuwait by joyously learning how to dance for their independence day, and learning to sing the national anthem to show full

allegiance to the rulers of the country, she is yet discriminated against when her school decides to exclude her from participating because of her Palestinian origins.

Consequently, the experience of living as a full-fledged citizen in Kuwait never ceases to be materialized, and she is slotted within the strictures of permanently being a second-class citizen, “we participated and contributed in nearly every sector of life, but we remained an underclass” (Abulhawa 2020: 32), creating an existential crisis imbued in a sense of loss to having a sense of homeliness. This sense of homely loss imprisons her, as it becomes a vestige within her exilic consciousness and diasporic being, “I stumbled awkwardly through the unfamiliar milieu of Palestine, and Bilal was there to pick me up...” (2020: 126). Her parents' and grandmother's generational trauma and experiences in Palestine do not make full sense to her because they remain fragmented segments of a distant past, reinforcing a growing abyss between their past in Palestine and Nahr's present in Kuwait and Jordan. Lest one can perceive that the generational trauma of becoming refugees is comprehended well by Nahr's mother and grandmother but still cannot make sense to Nahr; “They were experienced refugees, better equipped to handle recurring generational trauma” (2020: 94).

As both her parents' past along with her grandmother's froze, it is only continued through their diasporic memory of what constitutes Palestine. Diasporic memory is imbued in characters like *sitti* wasfiyeh and her mother who serve the purpose of voicing the forgotten truth about Palestine, the land that existed before Zionist occupation. Subsequently, this diasporic memory provides a twofold dissection; it creates an identity crisis where a continued sense of unhomeliness experienced in host countries or countries of residence affects and raptures Nahr's consciousness, creating in her a vagrancy of existing as a diasporic being. And it allows her to trace a homely feeling vicariously through the diasporic memory of her parents and grandparents:

Images began to converge in my chest, deepening my breathing. Memories of two trips we'd taken as children with Baba; 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. The *adan* sounded from unseen minarets. It floated through me, raised the hair on my arms, made me close my eyes and inhale the call to prayer (2020: 118).

While her grandmother and mother construct a diasporic memory of Palestine, Nahr deconstructs a diasporic memory of Palestine while inhabiting the Cube, remembering her times of resistance against settler occupation and the love she experienced with the resistant fighter Bilal. Even the description of houses inhabited in both Jordan and Kuwait, also discern a similar sense of unhomeliness; the balcony in their house in Kuwait manifests a patriarchal discrimination where Nahr's clothes are lined in the back in order not to attract lustful eyes from pedestrians. Each unhomely house marks for Nahr a historical displacement, that

even her mother's house is historically displaced by being occupied and colonized by a Jewish settler. These unhomey houses of racial, cultural and colonial displacement become bridges to "the in-between diasporic origins..." (Bhabha 2004: 48), and turns them into a struggle of liberation. It is in this sense that Nahr turns to arm resistance, as Nadine Gordimer postulates "like so many others of this kind, whose families are fragmented in the diaspora of exile, code names, underground activity, people for whom a real home and attachments are something for others who will come after." (Bhabha 2004: 21)

Nevertheless, it is Nahr that acts across multiple generations by continuing the resistance towards the colonial warfare that made her grandmother and parents diasporic, through her underground resistance, and by fighting the settler who stole the home of her mother, postulating transgenerational diaspora. With her transformative experiences of political activism in Palestine, Nahr creates a diasporic space that becomes locational, as it establishes a resurgence of an indigenous history by employing memory that becomes a multidirectional linkage to the traumatic past of her grandmother and mother's.

3. Conclusion

Ever since its publication in 2019, *Against the Loveless World* must be considered as the most relevant Palestinian novel, specifically to the Shaikh Jarrah uprising and the 2021 war on Gaza, followed by the century's 2023-2024 International Court of Justice ruling on order of Israel's committing genocide in the strip (See 'Summary of the Order'). The liberation of the Palestinian people had become unavoidable, and Israel's impunity to launch an unstoppable carnage across the Gaza strip, had come to reveal the "loveless world" that Abulhawa refers to in the title and across the novel. An Israeli-led blockade eventually forced a famine across the strip, prohibiting aid from coming in through the Rafah strip amidst an absolute collapse of all social and civic institutions (Shurafa, Goldenberg and Chehayeb 2024). Meanwhile, it is impertinent to remember that Palestine includes the West Bank where aggressions and settler violence increased against the Palestinians there, debunking the Israeli myth of Hamas being the central reason for the full-fledged, and repetitive wars against Gaza. In essence, Palestine, headed by Gaza stood isolated, against the loveless world. While none exclaimed an opposition to Palestinians and Palestine, it was South Africa who filed the order of genocide at the International Court of Justice – a country with its own history of apartheid and settler colonialism. And like Nahr's intersectionality and solidarity with characters such as Um Buraq or Mohsen, the marginalized South Africa, and the only party to enforce a red sea blockade, the "Houthi Yemenis" (Al Jazeera 2023), joined forces to fight off this loss of love that plagues the world.

In conclusion, *Against the Loveless World* is a novel that can easily be articulated as a work of literary resistance. To have created a main female character who is unconventional in the constructionism of her speech, action and decisions is a statement of itself made on part of Susan Abulhawa. Like all Abulhawa's main characters, Nahr is multi-layered – a hybrid being – representing marginality wherever it may be located and relocated. Nahr's gradual development over the

course of the novel and her awakening to revolution could not but be deconstructed. This deconstructive and interdisciplinary approach, hence, presents the character in her multiple states – framing her as a system of signification in and of itself. It is in each of the physical, imaginary and constructed spaces she occupies that the character can be delineated and dissected concomitantly. Furthermore, it is through her relationships with (and to) other characters that we conceive of Nahr as a being who is unhomey, perhaps with a lifepath that is unhomey in its constant deviation from homeland. Nahr's final exile to Jordan in order to keep her away from her infamous freedom-fighter husband, Bilal Abu Jandal, is a final impression of the Palestinian as constantly exiled, constantly conscious of the exile, and is left with little choice but to resist through the colonial structure already mapped out as the foundation of the Palestinian's destiny. Through re-envisioning diasporic literature and literatures of the exile, the antiheroine's travels become a vignette that outlines the quotidian experiences of existing within a duality of homely-unhomey states, creating this sense of disillusionment. Every time Nahr gets disillusioned, she gets a deeper sense of reality. Hence the subject matter of this study utilizes on the accentuation that one's diasporic being and exilic consciousness become the ultimate sense of reality.

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