

الأثر المأساوي للمنفى في رواية "صباحات جنين" لسوزان أبو الهوى: دراسة

نقدية

كلية الآداب و العلوم الإنسانية- قسم اللغة الانكليزية

ماجستير دراسات أدبية اختصاص الأدب المقارن

الطالبة: رغد بشار العبد الرجب

المشرف: د. هيفاء قريد

تتناول هذه الدراسة البُعد المأساوي للمنفى وتداعياته على بناء الهوية في رواية "صباحات جنين" للكاتبة والناشطة الفلسطينية-الأمريكية سوزان أبو الهوى، وهي رواية تُرجمت إلى 32 لغة وبيعت منها أكثر من مليون نسخة. تشير هذه الدراسة إلى أن الرواية تركز بشكل أساسي على الحياة المأساوية لعائلة فلسطينية عبر أربعة أجيال، بدءًا من معاناة التهجير القسري من قريتهم إلى مخيم جنين للاجئين. وتُروى القصة بشكل رئيسي من خلال منظور بطلتها "آمال"، التي تعكس معاناتها المحاور الأساسية للرواية مثل فقدان، والهوية، والصمود، والأثر المستمر للصراع الفلسطيني-الإسرائيلي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المنفى، الهوية، الشتات

The Tragic Impact of Exile in *Mornings in Jenin* by Susan Abulhawa: A Critical Approach

Abstract

This paper proposes to investigate the tragic issue of exile and its repercussions on identity construction in *Mornings in Jenin*, a novel by Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian–American writer and activist, which was translated into 32 languages and sold more than a million copies. The novel is concerned with the tragic life of a Palestinian family's experiences across four generations, beginning with the miseries of their forced displacement from their home village to the Jenin Refugee Camp. As a narrative, the story is narrated primarily through the perspective of its heroine, Amal, whose sufferings bring about the overall motifs of loss, identity, resilience, and the enduring impact of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict.

Keywords: exile, identity, diaspora.

Introduction

Mornings in Jenin is a historical fiction novel by Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian American writer, human rights activist, and political advocate. Abulhawa's works are deeply rooted in the Palestinian cause and the challenges faced by Palestinian refugees. Her academic background in biomedical science contrasts with her literary repertoire, which is profoundly influenced by her personal experiences of displacement and asylum.

Born in Kuwait to Palestinian refugees of the 1967 war, Abulhawa moved between several countries. She spent her early years in the United States, returned to Kuwait at the age of five, and lived in occupied East Jerusalem at the age of ten. In Jerusalem, she spent three years in a girls' school and orphanage before returning to the United States as a teenager. These experiences of exile and displacement have significantly shaped her writing, providing a unique and authentic perspective on the Palestinian struggle.

Mornings in Jenin was first published in 2006 under the title *The Scar of David* by a French editor. Two years later, Marc Parent acquired the rights and released the novel in translation with the new title *Mornings in Jenin*. The novel has since been translated into twenty languages, and Bloomsbury re-released it in English. The inspiration for this novel came from Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*, which tells the story of a

Palestinian boy raised by a Jewish family who found him in their home after taking it over in 1948.

The catalyst for writing *Mornings in Jenin* was the Battle of Jenin in 2002, during the Second Intifada, which ended in a tragic massacre. In the afterword of the novel, Abulhawa explains,

I traveled to Jenin when I heard reports that a massacre was taking place in that refugee camp, which had been sealed off to the world, including reporters and aid workers, as a closed military zone. The horrors I witnessed there gave me the urgency to tell this story. The steadfastness, courage, and humanity of the people of Jenin were my inspiration. (251)

Mornings in Jenin narrates the Palestinian cause from a subaltern Arab perspective, using a Western language. Susan Abulhawa re-informs both the Western audience and the Arab diaspora about the authentic story of Palestine and its history of occupation. The novel creates an authentic Palestinian echo in response to the dominant Western narrative, using a Western language to bridge the gap between these audiences. Abulhawa not only reclaims the authentic Palestinian narrative but also challenges the prevailing discourse, offering a poignant exploration of cultural identity and the resilience of the Palestinian diaspora identity.

The novel explores how the identity of the Palestinian diaspora is fragmented. Abulhawa's work reflects the dynamics between exile and cultural identity. Having retold the story of Palestine since 1948, the novel

urges the Palestinian diaspora to rediscover their roots and identity. It highlights how seventy–seven years of exile have transformed them into a minority shattered in various Western societies.

Having reviewed Susan Abulhawa's background and the context in which *Mornings in Jenin* was written, it is clear that her personal experiences and the historical events she witnessed have deeply influenced the novel. To understand the novel's impact and significance comprehensively, it is essential to examine the resonance it has created and how literary critics have interpreted this. The following paragraphs review various literary perspectives that illuminate the novel's key themes. By examining these reviews, we can better appreciate the novel's influence in literature and its role in shaping and representing the discourse on Palestinian identity.

In her research paper titled “Trauma and Resistance in Susan Abulhawa’s *Mornings in Jenin*,” Emin El Sayed Reslan discusses the theme of trauma. Reslan explores the concept of trauma and its features, depicting several types of traumas and the stages of trauma response using modern trauma theories by Cathy Caruth and Ronald Granofsky. She examines how Abulhawa engages trauma in her narrative memory, using it as an indicator of “oppressive cultural regimes and practices” (183). Reslan identifies two types of traumas conveyed by Abulhawa: personal and cultural. Cultural trauma is exemplified through Al Nakba and Al Naksa, significant events that marked the creation of Israel and the subsequent Israeli occupation of Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Personal

trauma is exemplified through the character of Amal, who faces personal trauma during Al Naksa in 1967 at the age of twelve, witnessing the war and its impact (191).

Reslan further analyzes how the traumatized protagonist, Amal, passes through three stages of trauma response: regression, fragmentation, and reunification (193). Regression refers to a state where “the traumatized character goes back to a state characterized by protected existence” (191), exemplified by Amal’s life with her father before Al Naksa. Fragmentation occurs when the traumatized character hides their weakness and reshapes their identity to overcome trauma, as seen when Amal transforms into Amy to suppress painful memories from Palestine. Finally, reunification is achieved when the traumatized character accepts their trauma. Amal reaches this stage when she reunites with her brother Yousef in Lebanon and later with her second brother, David, after the loss of her husband.

Reslan’s analysis highlights how Abulhawa’s portrayal of trauma is intricately linked to the sense of identity and cultural resilience of the Palestinian diaspora. By examining these stages of trauma, we gain a deeper understanding of how cultural identity is shaped and redefined through the experiences of displacement and exile, and how it is influenced by historical traumas.

Having explored Reslan's analysis of trauma and cultural resilience in Susan Abulhawa’s *Mornings in Jenin*, I examine in the following paragraphs how Ayman M Abu-Shomar addresses the

theme of identity in his literary review of this novel. It is noticeable that while Reslan focuses on the stages of trauma and their impact on cultural identity, Abu-Shomar delves into the quest for identity and the humanistic portrayal of characters. Both reviews provide a comprehensive understanding of how Abulhawa navigates the complexities of cultural identity in her narrative.

In his article “Diasporic Reconciliations of Politics, Love and Trauma: Susan Abulhawa’s Quest for Identity in *Mornings in Jenin*,” Abu-Shomar explains that the quest for identity is crucial for Abulhawa. This quest shapes her narrative and addresses key issues in constructing realities (129). Abu-Shomar notes that Abulhawa uses an exilic voice, traumatic experiences, and historical testimonies, which are expressed in the in-between space of translation and renegotiation to convey cultural meaning.

Abu-Shomar emphasizes Abulhawa’s insistence on presenting the human side of her characters, depicting the protagonist's identity quest as a humanistic mission to reconcile with “fragmentations and inconsistencies” (113). He praises Abulhawa’s nuanced portrayal of Jewish characters and explores how Amal, the protagonist, perceives the inherent human virtues of the Other, allowing her to transcend political reification through humanism.

The article also examines the symbolism of Palestinian identity through the Old Lady, an ancient olive tree, and its connection to Amal’s

identity. Abu-Shomar notes that the Old Lady represents rootedness and belonging, which complicates Amal's search for identity resolution. This tension between Amal's fragmented identity and the stability symbolized by the Old Lady prompts a process of negotiation and re-identification of old concepts (131).

Finally, under the section "Trajectory of Diaspora: Amal between Worlds," Abu-Shomar discusses the sense of belonging within the diaspora. Through Amal's journey of exile, he conveys the suffering of diasporic individuals, characterized by displacement, victimization, alienation, geographic dislocation, and border-crossing (131).

Silem Nachida's article, "The Struggle for Identity in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010)," complements the previous reviews by Eman El Sayed Reslan and Ayman M Abu-Shomar by emphasizing the role of diaspora in shaping both Palestinian personal and collective identities.

Among the few studies that specifically discuss the theme of identity is Silem Nachida's article, "The Struggle for Identity in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010)." One chapter of this article examines the impact of diaspora on the formation of both Palestinian personal and collective identity throughout the novel. Nachida concludes that personal and collective identities are interdependent and interactive in diasporic communities. The author argues that although the Palestinian diaspora lost their land, their attachment to traditions and nationalist views

in exile sustains a sense of nationhood, preserving the collective Palestinian identity within these communities.

Nachida uses the character of Amal to illustrate this argument, stating, "There is a clear relationship between memory and identity for Amal who lived in exile held memories and history of her homeland. —The traumatic loss of homeland strengthens the connections of refugees and exiles to the homeland, and it continues to play an important role in their individual and collective imagination, constituting a central aspect of their self-definition" (60).

Following Silem Nachida's emphasis on the role of diaspora in shaping both personal and collective Palestinian identities, I examine the review of Abdulrahman Al-Ma'amari, Noraini Md Yusof, and Ravichandran Vengadasamy. Their article, "Strangers in My Home: The Quest for Identity in *Mornings in Jenin*," further explores the theme of identity, focusing on both personal and national dimensions.

In their article "Strangers in My Home: The Quest for Identity in *Mornings in Jenin*," Abdulrahman Al-Ma'amari, Noraini Md Yusof, and Ravichandran Vengadasamy focus on the theme of identity. They study identity through Johann Herder's theory of national identity and John Locke's theory of memory and personal identity. The article examines two types of identity: personal and national.

Amal serves as an example of personal identity. The authors argue that Amal's personal identity is marked by her childhood memories, especially those of her father reading Arabic verses to her. Amal represents the Palestinian personal identity, built on memories of peaceful years in Palestine. This conveys the contemporary Palestinians' nostalgia for their land and normal life, revealing the deep attachment between Palestinians and their homeland.

The second type of identity examined is national identity. The critics clarify that Palestinian rituals, customs, and traditions form the basis of Palestinian identity. They emphasize the national acts and sense of all Palestinian characters in the novel. The authors conclude that *Mornings in Jenin* is a novel of remembering and memory, examining the impact of memory on Amal's personal identity. They also highlight that Palestinian national identity is reflected through the narration of traditional cultural practices by the novel's characters.

This analysis complements the previous reviews by Eman El Sayed Reslan, Ayman M Abu-Shamar, and Silem Nachida. While Reslan focuses on the stages of trauma and their impact on cultural identity, Abu-Shomar delves into the quest for identity and the humanistic portrayal of characters, and Nachida emphasizes the role of diaspora in shaping both personal and collective identities. Al-Ma'amari, Md Yusof, and Vengadasamy add to this understanding by exploring the interplay between personal and national identity, further enriching our

comprehension of how Abulhawa navigates the complexities of cultural identity in *Mornings in Jenin*.

Despite extensive analyses, there remains a need to delve deeper into specific aspects such as the inferiority complex, assimilation process, and the persistent influence of memories on identity. My research aims to fill these gaps by examining how Amal's experiences of inferiority, her attempts at assimilation, and the haunting presence of her past shape her sense of identity and form her diasporic cultural identity. This research offers new perspectives on the intricate dynamics of identity in *Mornings in Jenin*.

This paper tracks the evolution of Amal's cultural identity in exile, exploring the intricate dynamics of identity formation within this context. It examines the interplay between the inferiority complex and the assimilation phase that exiled individuals undergo, highlighting the role of memories in shaping identity. Drawing on postcolonial theories and concepts such as Frantz Fanon's "inferiority complex," Stuart Hall's "cultural identity," Homi K. Bhabha's "uncanniness," and Peter Weinreich's "identity concept," the paper also incorporates insights on assimilation from John W. Berry, Jean S. Phinney, David L. Sam, and Paul Vedder. Divided into two sections—'The Interplay of Inferiority Complex and Assimilation in Diasporic Identity' and 'The Persistence of Memory and the Reclamation of Cultural Identity'—the paper delves into the psychological and social dimensions of Amal's journey. It examines how feelings of inferiority and efforts to

assimilate shape her cultural identity, and how persistent memories of her homeland reinforce her sense of self.

The Interplay of Inferiority Complex and Assimilation in Diasporic Identity

Mornings in Jenin vividly portrays the formation of Arab diasporic identity amidst the turmoil of displacement and diaspora. This section delves into the intricate dynamics of the inferiority complex and assimilation, exploring how these forces shape the protagonist Amal's cultural diasporic identity. Drawing on postcolonial theoretical frameworks by Stuart Hall and Frantz Fanon, I analyze key moments from Amal's life to uncover the psychological and social dimensions of her experience in exile. This exploration not only enhances our understanding of Amal's character but also sheds light on the broader implications of identity formation in diasporic contexts.

Amal navigates the complex dynamics of inferiority and assimilation, which profoundly shape her cultural identity. The sense of exile is reflected in her feelings of inferiority, stemming from her displaced status and the marginalization she experiences in her new environment. These feelings challenge her self-esteem and cultural pride, making her struggle to maintain a positive sense of self. Simultaneously, the sense of exile is evident in her efforts to assimilate into a new culture, which creates a tension between her Arab heritage and the norms of her new environment. This tension highlights the psychological and social struggles of trying to belong in a foreign land while preserving her cultural identity.

These forces interact to mold Amal's diasporic identity, reflecting the broader struggles of Arab individuals in the diaspora. Through Amal's journey, we see how exile shapes her sense of self, influencing her interactions, emotions, and cultural connections, and ultimately, her identity formation.

Abulhawa's visit to the Jenin refugee camp in the immediate aftermath of the massacre in April 2002 inspired her to fictionalize *Mornings in Jenin*. The novel, a work of historical fiction, covers remarkable events that transformed 'the Arabic Palestine' into 'Israel' and 'the Arabic Palestinian population' into either 'the occupied population' or 'the shattered Palestinian diaspora.' Abulhawa visualizes Palestine with authentic details rooted in the first generation who experienced both Zionist colonization and the first displacement, "Al Nakba." The second generation, represented by Amal, experiences displacement from east to west and embarks on a search for their stolen past and history. The novel reflects the sense of Palestinian identity in exile through Amal's character, who visualizes how diasporic identity reflects both her sense of exile and her sense of Palestinian-ness.

Amal, a Palestinian child who grew up in the Jenin refugee camp after Zionist forces invaded her village, Ein Hood, and forced her family to flee, exemplifies the Palestinian children born in refugee camps or exile, suffering from the absence of a homeland. For them, the notion of home

is incomplete and elusive, making the hope of returning to Palestine a central part of their identity.

Born after 1948, Amal's identity is deeply tied to the loss of her roots and land, preserved only in the elders' stories. The concept of home, which she never experienced firsthand, is an abstract reality conveyed through the memories and narratives of her family and community within the camp. The collective memories of the Jenin Refugee Camp shape Amal's character and her sense of Palestinian-ness. These memories, filled with the pain of their narrators who were often lost to subsequent wars or death, are inescapable for Amal. Despite her attempts to erase them, these memories invade her soul and narrative, causing her to oscillate between flashforwards and flashbacks throughout the novel.

Amal's life is a constant struggle between reclaiming her Palestinian identity and adapting to her present reality, often questioning, "Who am I?" After the death of her mother, Dalia, Amal moves to an orphanage and later secures a scholarship to the United States to pursue a master's degree. In the fifth chapter, "El ghurba," translated by Abulhawa as "the state of being a stranger" (134), Amal experiences various forms of alienation in different contexts and situations. Amal's journey highlights the complexities of diasporic identity formation in exile, where the past and present continuously intersect. To better understand these dynamics, it is essential to explore the theoretical foundations of the identity concept, as defined by key scholars.

Stuart Hall, in his article "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," writes that identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. He suggests that instead of viewing identity as an accomplished fact, we should see it as a 'production' that is never complete, always in process, and constituted within representation (222). This perspective is crucial in understanding how Amal's identity is continuously shaped by her experiences of inferiority and attempts at assimilation. Peter Weinreich, in his book *Analysing Identity: Cross-cultural, Societal and Clinical Contexts*, defines identity as the totality of one's self-construal, linking past, present, and future. This definition highlights how Amal's sense of identity is influenced by her past in Palestine, her present struggles in America, and her aspirations for the future (80).

Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, describes the quest for identity as a passionate search driven by the hope of discovering a rehabilitative era beyond current misery and self-contempt. He writes, "Perhaps this passionate research and this anger are kept up or at least directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation, and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others." (210). This description is particularly relevant to Amal's journey, as she grapples with feelings of inferiority imposed by a colonial mindset and strives to reclaim her identity.

Abulhawa conveys the passionate rediscovery journey of identity that Amal undergoes, portraying it as both a psychological and political mission to assert Palestinian subjectivity against Israeli violations. She asserts that identity is a dynamic production, woven from threads of experience, culture, and representation over time. This dynamic process is evident in Amal's struggle with her inferiority complex and her efforts to assimilate into American society, which continuously shape her diasporic identity.

One of the most significant triggers in shaping her diasporic identity is the interplay of the inferiority complex. In the chapter titled "El ghurba," Amal's first sense of "inadequacy" in America is vividly portrayed. This feeling of "inadequacy" or inferiority overwhelms her from the moment she steps into America. As Amal reflects, "FEELINGS OF INADEQUACY MARKED my first months in America. I floundered in that open-ended world, trying to fit in. But my foreignness showed in my brown skin and accent. Statelessness clung to me like bad perfume and the airplane hijackings of the seventies trailed my Arabic surname" (135). These lines express and justify the initial sense of inferiority that engulfs Amal.

Abulhawa discusses the psychological complex of inferiority produced by colonialism, formed through the confrontation between the colonized (Amal) and the colonizer (America or the West). This confrontation creates a colonial space that evokes the inferiority complex in Amal's mind, stereotyping her as inferior due to her colour and race. Amal's experience generalizes to any Arab or non-Western minority in

exile, reflecting the colour-based inferiority imposed by the Western colonial machine.

Abulhawa sheds light on how the sense of identity of coloured minorities is subjected to racial discrimination by the racist West. The author illustrates how the West, as the colonizer, uses skin colour to justify discrimination, inventing the inferiority complex that fuels feelings of inadequacy within the exiled individual's self. This denigrates the natural, inborn physical and cultural traits of coloured minorities. *Mornings in Jenin* conveys the idea that colourism is a tool used by the Western racist colonial machine to tailor and produce an inferior identity for the Other, justifying Western superiority.

Producing the inferior Other consolidates the superiority of the Western subject. This process of Othering reinforces the Western subject's sense of superiority. By defining themselves in opposition to the Other, they maintain their dominance. The Western subject's identity becomes intertwined with notions of supremacy, perpetuating a cycle of inequality. The act of producing the inferior Other serves to consolidate the perceived superiority of the Western subject. This dynamic is deeply rooted in colonial history and continues to shape global power structures.

Frantz Fanon explains the inferiority industry by the West in his *Black Skin, White Masks*, writing that "The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: *It is the racist who creates his inferior*"

(69). Abulhawa, through Amal, illustrates how the racist creates the sense of inferiority within Amal's identity through many examples in the novel.

As a fixed mode of representation characterized by racist inferiority, Amal is called "the rag head" by one of her American colleagues, Elana Rivers. "She made no attempt to speak to me, though she referred to me not infrequently as "the Arab," pronounced "ayrab," or as "the rag head." (137). Elana represents the response of the Western colonizer to the visual identification of the inferior colonized, and how this visual identification threatens the superior Western identity, since visual identification is part of a circulation of relations rather than a one-way fixed relation.

Elana's derogatory terms– "the Arab" and "the rag head"– reveal a deep-seated bias that reduces Amal to a fixed mode of representation characterized by inferiority. Such labels perpetuate racist inferiority, used as an imaginary pretext by racists to show their false superiority. Elana tries to impose her superiority by labeling Amal with inferiority, reflecting the racist ideology she holds. Abulhawa explores how the colonial system uses the inferiority mechanism to establish false ideas within colonized communities, with the function of denigrating Others' cultural traits to control the minorities' minds and identities.

Elana's behavior exemplifies the response of the Western colonizer, an identity rooted in privilege and superiority, to the visual identification of the colonized. Labeling Amal reinforces existing hierarchies, where the colonizer's identity is threatened by acknowledging

the humanity and complexity of the colonized. Visual identification becomes a tool for maintaining dominance, rather than fostering genuine understanding or empathy. Through Elana's example, Abulhawa sheds light on the representation process of the Other. "The rag head" is an ethnic slur used for Arabs or Muslims in the US, indicating the defective representation of a given reality, fixated and arrested by the colonial producer's racist view.

Elana represents the aggressive and superior colonizer, whose aggression also reveals an underlying anxiety towards the Other, who poses a threat to her identity and existence according to colonial discourse. Abulhawa uses the relationship between Elana and Amal to highlight the ambivalence inherent in the colonial context. Amal, as a colonized, experiences a complex process of internalized inferiority. This internalization is not a natural occurrence but rather a consequence of the oppressive structures imposed by colonialism. Amal begins to internalize feelings of inadequacy and inferiority through her interactions with Elana, which is a direct result of the racist ideology propagated by those in power, which reinforces hierarchical structures and perpetuates the myth of inherent inferiority. Elana's behavior and attitudes towards Amal exemplify how the colonizer imposes inferiority on the colonized. The constant assertion of superiority and the dehumanization of Amal serve to maintain the power dynamics and justify the exploitation and subjugation inherent in colonialism. Amal's struggle with her identity and self-worth reflects the

broader impact of colonialism on the psyche of the colonized, illustrating how deeply these oppressive structures can affect individuals.

The theme of exile is intricately linked to this internalization process. Amal's exile is not just a physical displacement but also a psychological and emotional one. Her displacement from her homeland exacerbates the internalized feelings of inferiority and the struggle with identity. Exile amplifies the sense of loss and dislocation, making it even more challenging for Amal to reconcile her identity and self-worth. The relationship between Elana and Amal thus serves as a microcosm of the larger colonial experience, where the colonized are forced into exile, both physically and mentally, as a result of the oppressive colonial structures.

Elana and Amal's relationship is a powerful example of how colonialism perpetuates a cycle of internalized inferiority among the colonized. This internalization is driven by the racist ideologies and oppressive structures established by the colonizers, highlighting the profound psychological impact of colonialism. Amal's exile further underscores the deep and lasting effects of colonialism, as it encompasses both physical displacement and the internal struggle with identity and self-worth.

Amal's feelings of inferiority in America are a manifestation of the broader struggles faced by diasporic individuals. These struggles are shaped by the pervasive effects of racism and colorism, which impact their sense of identity and self-worth. The internalization of these oppressive attitudes drives their efforts to assimilate, often at the expense of their

cultural heritage, reflecting the enduring psychological impact of colonialism.

As a reaction to the inferiority complex and discrimination, Amal attempts to assimilate into American society and culture. “I metamorphosed into an unclassified Arab–Western hybrid, unrooted and unknown. I drank alcohol and dated several men— acts that would have earned me repudiation in Jenin” Amal said (135). Assimilation is defined in the article “Immigrant Youth: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation,” which answers three questions:

First, *how* do immigrant youth live within and between two cultures? [...] Second, *how well* (in personal, social, and academic areas of their lives) do immigrant youth deal with their intercultural situation? And third, are there patterns of relationships between *how* adolescents engage in their intercultural relations and *how well* they adapt?” (Berry, John W. et al. 305).

The article further explains, “*Assimilation* is the way when there is little interest in cultural maintenance combined with a preference for interacting with the larger society” (Berry, John W. et al. 306).

Amal assimilates into American society by adopting its cultural norms, values, and practices, abandoning her original culture. She Americanizes her Palestinian identity, muting her Muslim Arab identity and

covering it with an American facade that grants her access to American societal threads. She becomes a Palestinian face with an Arab race and an American identity. This transformation highlights the tension between her desire to belong and the loss of her cultural heritage, a common struggle in diasporic identities.

Reasoning Amal's assimilation process from Fanon's perspective, we find that Amal's attempt to whiten her identity is a deciphering process, converting the American lifestyle, coded in her subconscious as superior and civilized, into a behavioral language. This behavioral language reflects both the colonized's neurotic obsession with inferiority and the defense mechanisms they resort to. Amal suppresses her Palestinian sense of identity and adopts American culture and norms, which contradict her Palestinian identity, indicating her desire for belonging. This behavioral language reflects Amal's neurotic obsession with inferiority stemming from the racial discrimination she faces in American society.

Amal's efforts to camouflage her Palestinian identity with an American one to whiten her identity also interpret her ego-withdrawal, a defense mechanism she follows to avoid the pain of the past and fit seamlessly into the Western milieu. Amal's assimilation process involves complex dynamics related to identity, race, cultural influence, and a desire for belonging. This process is illustrated and justified by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* when he tries to understand and analyze the dream of one of his patients, a black person, to be white. He explains,

asserting two important points that justify the desire of the colonized subject to change their identity:

1. My patient is suffering from an inferiority complex. His psychic structure is in danger of disintegration. What has to be done is to save him from this and, little by little, to rid him of this unconscious desire.
2. If he is overwhelmed to such a degree by the wish to be white, it is because he lives in a society that makes his inferiority complex possible, in a society that derives its stability from the perpetuation of this complex, in a society that proclaims the superiority of one race; to the identical degree to which that society creates difficulties for him, he will find himself thrust into a neurotic situation. (74)

In conclusion, Amal's journey of assimilation into American society is deeply intertwined with her inferiority complex, a product of colonial and racist discrimination. Her attempts to adopt American cultural norms and suppress her Palestinian identity highlight the complex dynamics of diasporic identity, where the desire for belonging often conflicts with the preservation of cultural heritage. This interplay of inferiority and assimilation shapes Amal's sense of identity, reflecting the broader impact of colonialism on diasporic identities. Thus, her dilemma can be summed up as follows: either stick to her own national identity and tradition or to

integrate into the foreign culture at the expense of the fragmentation of her selfhood as a person. So even if she adapts to the new environment, she will still be seen as an alien.

The Persistence of Memory and the Reclamation of Cultural Identity

Despite Amal's efforts to assimilate, memories of Palestine continuously invade her present, blurring the lines between past and present. This section examines how these memories, along with the stories of Haj Salem, help Amal reconnect with her Palestinian roots, reinforcing her cultural identity. The concept of uncanniness, as explored by David Huddart, highlights the psychological struggle Amal faces as she navigates her diasporic identity. This section delves into how these persistent memories and the stories of her past, particularly those of her mother and Haj Salem, play a crucial role in reconnecting Amal with her Palestinian roots. Through this exploration, we see how the past, despite efforts to repress it, continually resurfaces, reinforcing Amal's cultural identity and shaping her sense of self.

Although Amal does not miss any opportunity to erase the features of her Palestinian national identity and avoid the past, she is repeatedly haunted by uncanny feelings disguised as ghosts from Palestine. When Amal's cultural identity becomes distorted by assimilation and the borders between her Palestinian identity and her assimilated one are blurred, an uncanny feeling arises in her life. Uncanniness is defined by David Huddart in his book *Homi K. Bhabha*, where he explores concepts

developed by Bhabha using simple and accessible language. One of the concepts explored is the ‘uncanny,’ which Huddart describes as being close to what Freud calls repetition compulsion. This refers to the way the mind repeats traumatic experiences to deal with them. Huddart writes, “The uncanny is close to what Freud calls repetition compulsion, which refers to the way the mind repeats traumatic experiences to deal with them. The feeling of uncanniness is, therefore, the feeling you get when you have a guilt-laden past which you should really confront, even though you would prefer to avoid it” (55).

Throughout the novel, Amal’s past returns to her through the unconscious repetition of memories, such as her mother’s ghost visiting her. Amal says,

Walking downtown once, I thought I saw my mother, the gust of a ghost breezing through my reflection in a store window. I paused, staring at my mother’s daughter. Dalia, Um Yousef, had bequeathed to me the constitution that could not breathe while holding hands with the past. She could isolate each present moment while existing in an eternal past, but I needed physical distance to remove myself. (138)

These lines reflect how Amal is affected by the memory of her mother and how this memory pulls her back to her nation and binds her to her history like an unyielding force, even as she yearns for distance and release.

Abulhawa reflects the sense of uncanny that the colonized subject experiences in exile as a reaction to the repression of traumatic memories like war and displacement, which inevitably reappear unexpectedly. Stuart Hall clarifies how the past infiltrates our souls, commenting that "The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual 'past', since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always-already 'after the break'. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 266). The unexpected reappearance of the past throws Amal into a state of desperate nostalgia, where she recognizes that the past cannot be erased since it lurches back in different shapes.

Amal, now known as Amy in America, finds herself constantly confronted by her past. Despite her efforts to erase her Palestinian identity, memories of war, displacement, and repression resurface unexpectedly, haunting her and reminding her of her roots. These memories blur the lines between her present and past, making it difficult for her to assimilate fully into American society:

Palestine would just rise up from my bones into the center of my new life, unannounced. In class, at a bar, strolling through the city. Without warning, the weeping willows of Rittenhouse Square would turn into Jenin's fig trees reaching down to offer me their fruit. It was a persistent pull, living the cells of my body, calling me to myself. Then it would slouch back into latency (139)

These memories serve as a powerful reminder of Amal's national identity, calling her back to her roots. Despite her attempts to adopt a new facade, she realizes that she will always belong to the Palestinian nation. Her Arab-ness and the primal cries of Palestine anchor her to the world, prompting her to seek out historical accounts that match the stories told by Haj Salem:

But no matter what facade I bought, I forever belonged to that Palestinian nation of the banished to no place, no man, no honor. my Arabness and Palestine's primal cries were my anchors to the world. And I found myself searching books of history for accounts that matched the stories Haj Salem had told (143)

Connecting with Haj Salem's stories helps Amal maintain a link to her cultural, historical, and social roots. These tales, passed down through generations, bind her to a collective memory filled with longing, resilience, and loss. Reconnecting with these stories allows Amal to reclaim her Palestinian identity, providing a sense of belonging and healing her emotional wounds.

Jo McCormack, in *Exile Cultures, Misplaced Identities*, comments that "Memory battles' can be viewed as attempts by exiles or their descendants to secure a place in the collective memory" (125). The novel highlights the link between marginalized exiled individuals and their national identity, showing how memories empower Amal by fostering a

sense of representational belonging. These memories shape her self-perception, values, and cultural affiliations, helping her navigate the complexities of her dual identity.

Palestinian collective memory is visualized in the novel through the stories of Haj Salem, which archive Palestine's history and link the diaspora with their roots and Palestinian identity. Abulhawa aims to produce the Palestinian identity by retelling Palestinian history and reviving collective memory. *Mornings in Jenin* is a practice of presenting Palestinian identity and an act of imaginary reunification, attempting to reconstruct the unity of the Palestinian people dispersed by colonization.

Haj Salem's stories, Amal's memories, and the narrative of Palestinian history since 1953 visualize Palestine and provide an authentic vision to the Palestinian diaspora, reaffirming national identity and reviving collective memory. Stuart Hall, in his article "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," clarifies the impact of reconnecting with forgotten history and lost national memories, stating: "Crucially, such images offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas" (224). Hall further explains why this reconnection is essential for diaspora and exilic people: "They are resources of resistance and identity, with which to confront the fragmented and pathological ways in which that experience has been reconstructed within the dominant regimes of cinematic and visual representation of the West" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 224). *Mornings in Jenin*, as a work of literature, represents this imaginary

coherence, serving as a quest for rediscovery and a work of representation.

Amal's journey in *Mornings in Jenin* vividly illustrates the intricate link between diasporic identity and the persistence of memory. Despite her efforts to assimilate into American society, Amal's memories of Palestine continuously resurface, blurring the boundaries between her past and present. These persistent memories with the stories of Haj Salem that represent Palestinian collective memory serve as a powerful force that reconnects her with her Palestinian roots, reinforcing her cultural identity.

Through Amal's experiences, the novel highlights how the reclamation of cultural identity is an ongoing process for those in the diaspora, driven by the enduring power of memory and the collective narratives that bind them to their heritage. This exploration underscores the resilience of cultural identity in the face of displacement and the vital role of memory in preserving a sense of self and belonging.

Conclusion

Identity theme in *Mornings in Jenin* is intricately woven through the experiences of Amal, a Palestinian woman navigating the complexities of diasporic life. This paper has explored two critical aspects of her identity formation: the interplay of inferiority complex and assimilation, and the persistence of memory and the reclamation of cultural identity.

The first section, The Interplay of Inferiority Complex and Assimilation in Diasporic Identity, delves into Amal's struggle with feelings of inferiority and her attempts to assimilate into American society. Growing up in the Jenin refugee camp, Amal's identity is deeply tied to the loss of her homeland and the collective memories of her community. The psychological impact of colonialism and racial discrimination exacerbates her sense of inadequacy, driving her to seek acceptance in a foreign culture. However, this quest for assimilation often comes at the cost of her cultural heritage, creating a tension between belonging and preserving her Palestinian identity.

The second section, The Persistence of Memory and the Reclamation of Cultural Identity, examines how Amal's memories of Palestine persistently invade her present, blurring the lines between past and present. These memories, along with the stories of Haj Salem, play a crucial role in reconnecting Amal with her roots. The concept of uncanniness highlights the psychological struggle she faces as she navigates her dual identity. Despite her efforts to repress her past, the memories of her homeland continually resurface, reinforcing her cultural identity and shaping her sense of self. Together, these two aspects illustrate the dynamic and multifaceted nature of diasporic identity.

In conclusion, *Mornings in Jenin* offers a profound exploration of identity through the lens of Amal's experiences. The novel underscores the resilience of cultural identity in the face of displacement and the enduring power of memory in shaping one's sense of self. By examining

the interplay of inferiority complex, assimilation, and the reclamation of cultural identity, this paper highlights the complexities and nuances of identity formation in the context of diaspora.

References

- Abulhawa, Susan. "Dardashe – Episode 11: Susan Abulhawa – Full Interview." *YouTube*, uploaded by Rabet, 13 May 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJIYiFAQ_Ek. Accessed 5 April. 2023.
- Abulhawa, Susan. "Exile, Heritage, and the Palestinian Struggle | Susan Abulhawa | PalPulse Podcast." *YouTube*, uploaded by PalPulse, 16 Dec. 2024, www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qwP8bdQjlo. Accessed 13 Mar. 2025.
- Abulhawa, Susan. *Mornings in Jenin*. New York, USA: Bloomsbury USA, 2010.
- Abulhawa, Susan. "Susan Abulhawa | "Mornings In Jenin"." *YouTube*, uploaded by Paul Shannon, 10 Oct. 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=SD3yR_C9nYQ.
- Abulhawa, Susan. "Writing Mornings in Jenin & Uplifting Palestinian Children | Susan Abulhawa." *YouTube*, uploaded by afikra, 26 April 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=cNM3jBDR_Do&t=2363s.
- Abu-Shomar, Ayman M. "Diasporic Reconciliations of Politics, Love and Trauma: Susan Abulhawa's Quest for Identity in *Mornings in*

Jenin." *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2015.

Allatson, Paul, and Jo McCormack, editors. *Exile Cultures, Misplaced Identities*. Rodopi, 2008.

Al-Ma'amari, Abdulrahman, et al. "Strangers in My Home the Quest for Identity in Mornings in Jenin." *Procedia, Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 118, 2014, pp. 29–36.

Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2007.

Avishek, Parui. "#4 Homi Bhabha's 'The Other Question' | Part I | Intro to Cultural Studies." *YouTube*, uploaded by NPTEL–NOC IITM, 5 June 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsI_mvL-yUE&list=PLyqSpQzTE6M9vZH2ZS5Z763NFtm2sPVz&index=4&t=27s. Accessed 20 July 2023.

Avishek, Parui. "#5 The Other Question | Part II | Introduction to Cultural Studies." *YouTube*, uploaded by NPTEL–NOC IITM, 5 June 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuUqDIAvOFk&list=PLyqSpQzTE6M9vZH2ZS5Z763NFtm2sPVz&index=5. Accessed 21 July 2023.

Berry, John W., et al. "Immigrant Youth: Acculturation, Identity and Adaptation." *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2006, pp. 303–32.

Bhabha, Homi K. "The Other Question." *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 6, 1983, pp. 18–36.

Bhabha, Homi K. "The Third Space. Interview by Jonathan Rutherford." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, pp. 207–221.

Dabashi, Hamid. *BROWN SKIN, WHITE MASKS*. Pluto Press, 2011.

El Sayed Raslan, Iman. "Trauma and Resistance in Susan Abulhawa's Mornings in Jenin." *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies (IJAES)*, vol. 17, Jan. 2017, pp. 183–206.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann, forewords by Ziauddin Sardar and Homi K. Bhabha, London: Pluto Press, 2008.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox, commentary by Jean-Paul Sartre and Homi K. Bhabha, Grove Press, 2004.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, pp. 222–237.

Hall, Stuart. "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference." *Radical America*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1989, pp. 9–20.

Hall, Stuart. "Thinking the Diaspora: Home–Thoughts from Abroad." *Essential Essays, Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*, edited by David Morley, New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2018, pp. 206–226.

Huddart, David. *Homi K. Bhabha*. Routledge, 2006.

Mirmasoomi, Mahshid, and Farshid Nowrouzi Roshnavand. "Blackness, Colorism, and Epidermalization of Inferiority in Zora Neale Hurston's *Color Struck*: A Fanonian Reading of the Play." *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2014, pp. 55–65.

Nachida, Silem. *The Struggle for Identity in Susan Abulhawa's Mornings in Jenin (2010)*. 2017. Larbi Ben M'ehdi University–Oum El Bouaghi, Master's dissertation.

Ouyang, Wen–chin. *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel: Nation–State, Modernity and Tradition*. Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

Said, Edward W. "Nationalism, Human Rights, and Interpretation". *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, Granta Books, 2001.

Said, Edward W. *Out of Place: A Memoir*. Vintage Books Edition. 2000.

Said, Edward W. *The Question of Palestine*. Vintage Books Edition, 1992.

Salam, Wael. "The Burden of the Past: Memories, Resistance and Existence in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* and Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses*." *Interventions*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2021, pp. 31–48.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 66–111.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World." *Textual Practice*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1996, pp. 245–26.

Walder, Dennis. *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory*. Routledge, 2011.

Weinreich, Peter, and Wendy Saunderson, editors. *Analyzing Identity: Cross-cultural, societal and clinical contexts*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2003.

Williams, Patrick, and Laura Chrisman, editors. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Columbia University Press, 1994.