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Reclaiming Homeland: Nativism and Identity in Susan Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World*

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Abstract

Palestinian literature underlies the category of postcolonialism which explores oppression, violence and its effects especially nativism in the shape of displacement, resistance, exile, violence, nostalgia, crisis of identity, migration both forced and voluntarily. The present research focuses on Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* (2019) that tries to explore how Abulhawa represents the issues of nativism raised due to the displacement/dislocation of the natives in the occupied territory and what tactics have been used by the natives of the land of Palestine to resist against the occupiers. The main purpose of the present study is to understand this notion through tracing out the different concepts of nativism such as resistance, displacement and crisis of self-image presented in novel. The present study highlights the role of displacement, trauma and memory in shaping lives of the characters in the novel. It has been focused here to determine diaspora's identity of protagonist Nahr and identity of other Palestinian characters as well. The investigation takes place in the theoretical framework by studying the various postcolonial theorists like Bill Ashcroft, Edward Said and Maxwell. For this purpose, a postcolonial term; *nativism* was applied by considering the postcoloniality model of Maxwell (1965) to explore the basic reasons of resistance and displacement including the sub factors such as alienation, transportation, migration, enslavement and intervention in the said novel. Hence, the violence and oppression has caused the crisis performing to self-identity which appeared as the primary reason of all the aspects which have been tried to investigate through the postcolonial notion of nativism. The findings of the research show the affected lives of the people of Palestine by uprooting them from their own land.

Keywords: *Identity crisis, Migration, Identity Reformation, Survival, Sense of Belongingness*

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the development of Arabic and Palestinian literature in the context of the Arab-Israel conflict especially in the realm of displacement, identity, sense of belongingness, memory and nativism as it is depicted in the work of Susan Abulhawa *Against the Loveless World* (2019). Palestinian identity was not well delineated from the greater Arab identity prior to al-Nakba; but Zionist intervention and displacement further



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contributed to a sense of collective identity and Palestinian nationalism. In response, Palestinian and Arab writers used poetry, novels, short stories, biographies, autobiographies and other literary genres to maintain cultural memory and identity. Although Arabic remained the language of Palestinian literature, and English gradually came to play a more significant role in reaching the international audience. Diasporic writers then, therefore, helped shape Palestinian literature as a counter-discourse to the dominant Israeli discourse.

1.1 History of Arab Literary Tradition

The history of Arabic literature is intertwined with the history and development of the Arabic language. The Arabic literary tradition stretches from North Africa to the Arabian Peninsula and is quite culturally and linguistically diverse. It has been subject to significant political and cultural developments in its evolution. After the destruction of Baghdad in 1258 by the Mongols and the expansion of the Crusaders, the political power of Muslims diminished and a period of *Inhitat* (literary and cultural decline) followed from about the 13th to the 18th century. Arabic was the language of government and religion, but there was limited literary and cultural activity (Gabrieli, 1962). In the eighteenth century, the signs of an Arab renaissance appeared in the region of Syria-Lebanon and Egypt. This was a time of cultural interaction between the Arab world and Europe and the modernisation of political and cultural systems under the influence of Europe, which was also the time of *nahda*, or resistance/renaissance. New literary concerns and intellectual debates arose during the colonial encounters (D'Afflitto, 2007). Accordingly, nationalism, despotic regimes, linguistic choices, women roles and illiteracy became significant concerns of literature and ideology.

By the start of the twentieth century, despite the political divisions of the Arab world, writers showed unity in literary themes and nationalistic feelings. The British occupation of Palestine and Iraq and the French colonial rule in Syria-Lebanon led to an increase in anti-colonial protests. In 1945, the League of Arab States was founded to defend the Arab territories occupied by the British and French in the war, and during the 1950s, as Morocco, Iraq, Tunisia, Sudan and then Algeria became independent, literature expressed hopes for a new country and a new life. Palestine was an exception, however, since the founding of Israel in 1948, Palestinian land was displaced and lost. This year, 1948, is then the first year of al-Nakba ("the disaster") and this changed the course of Palestinian literature and the way it interacted with Arab literary tradition. Poetry in Arabic has always enjoyed a special place in literature. Languages continued to play a major role in the Arab cultural identity even when times are bad (Anghelescu, 1993). Poetry was seen as a source of knowledge of culture and a representation of the Arabic language (Allen, 2006). It is highly appreciated for its oral delivery, memorization, rhythm and metrical form, and was often used to depict themes of war, desert, camel or heroic victories (D'Afflitto, 2007). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, though, colonial contact threatened to disrupt existing cultural arrangements. According to Adonis (1990), the modern Arab mentality is a 'dual dependency' in which the past would be relied upon to bridge with limited creativity, while the West would be the source of technological and intellectual adaptation. Modern poets then began to break away from the traditional styles of poetry and began using different forms of poetry such as free verse.

The novel then became an increasingly significant genre, especially after mid-twentieth century, when writers looked for forms that could accommodate changing social and political realities in the Arab world. Religious and historical prose accounts



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were significant influences in early Arabic prose, and the elements of poetic language were retained; however, colonialism, the rise of the press, and translation helped to increase the volume of literary publication. Social and political change was increasingly depicted in historical novels and short stories as a realistic story. In Egypt, the novel emerged via Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006), Taha Hussein (1889-1973), and Hussein Heikal (1888-1956), and in particular, Zainab (1913) by Heikal is considered as a major contribution to the Arab novel. Increasingly the Arab and Palestinian writers explored themes of exile, imprisonment, murder, and resistance, with Abd al-Rahman Munif (1933–2004) being the intellectual voice of a new set of circumstances.

1.2 Conflict between Israel & Palestine

In the second half of the twentieth century, Western colonialism seemed to wane all over Africa and Asia, but not so in Palestine, which was subjected to greater political and territorial pressures under the Zionist regime. The history of the relationship between Jews and Muslims is complex, in that both share a common lineage with the Israelite monotheists, and have experienced many of the same historical events in their shared past (Tessler, 1994). While religion played a role in the historical context of the Arab-Israel conflict, so have political, colonial and territorial factors. Anti-Semitism in Europe, especially violent persecution in Russia from the 1870s, led to a rise in the number of Jews moving to Israel and to the push for a separate Jewish homeland. Jewish settlement in Palestine started on an individual basis prior to the 1880s, and then land acquisition expanded with the Ottoman authorities. Migration picked up during the early part of the twentieth century when the persecution of Russians increased, and after World War I it became more of an issue. At the same time, Palestinian Arab identity evolved along with the nationalistic claims, and British policies fostered Jewish settlement and had expressed support for Arab aspirations. In the second aliyah, Jewish land acquisition forced Palestinian peasants to leave, and added to economic destitution. It is no surprise then that in Palestinian literature the concept of homeland, land, sunlight and olive trees is a frequent theme, reflecting the importance of land to both competing national narratives, of Arabs and Jews.

In the 1930s, some 20% of Palestinian residents were without land (Tessler, 1994). Increasing tensions, both from growing instability and from the Arab Revolt, and British moves to limit Jewish immigration and land purchase fueled Zionist political demands. This crisis resulted in the Peel Commission and further attempts to negotiate a political settlement. In 1939, Britain issued the White paper, which envisaged restrictions on Jewish immigration and property acquisition and on an undivided Palestine ruled by a joint system. It was neither accepted by the Arabs nor accepted by the Jews, and the threat of the Nazis and the consequences of the genocide further bolstered the calls for a national home for the Jews. The United Nations General Assembly then made a suggestion of an international supervised partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state with Jerusalem having a special status, which was accepted with reservations by the Zionists, but rejected by the Arabs. After the British evacuated in 1948, there was armed conflict. The Zionist forces, including the Haganah took control of the areas that had been assigned to the Arabs and Israel was created as a State. Most Palestinians were expelled or driven from their homes and took refuge in Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Syria, and those who stayed faced political marginalization and hostility. The ghurba literature produced in response to al-Nakba was a powerful expression of exile, alienation, sadness, and identity loss. Emile Habibi never left Palestine but he felt alienated in his own country (D'Afflitto, 2007). So, displacement became a fact and a



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condition of literature.

1.3 Palestinian Literature

Palestinian literature is a form of discrimination, oppression, displacement, resistance and struggle for identity. Palestinian writing was linked to “resistance literature” by Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1972) who provided characters a room to speak out about their experiences (Kanafani, 1980). The same sentiment of international solidarity, human freedom and personal freedom is also emphasized in Mahmoud Darwish's poetry. After al-Nakba in 1948, and the Six-Day War in 1967, Palestinian literature was used to sustain the Palestinians' sense of identity and to link one generation to another. Three geographical strands are generally identified: literature written in the occupied territories, literature written by Palestinians within Israel, and literature of the Palestinian diaspora, since 1967. The present study will be concerned with the third category. Susan Abulhawa, in her novel *Against the Loveless World* (2019), states that Nahr's life is about Palestinian displacement, identity, resistance, trauma and perseverance. The novel opens and closes with Nahr's arrest in the “Cube” (cubicle), an automated solitary confinement cell, for terrorist activities. Her imprisonment serves as the framework for her memories to emerge and her Palestinian experiences, thereby challenging representations that tell Palestinian stories without Palestinians.

Raised in a Palestinian refugee community in Kuwait, Nahr name is two-fold, Nahr/Yaqoot, and through displacement, marriage, abandonment, political resistance and family trauma. In the wake of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, her link to Palestine grows more pertinent. Her brother joins the resistance, gets arrested, tortured and is later freed in exchange of money earned by Nahr. The family then moves to Jordan where her mother continues to follow the traditions of the Palestinian people with embroidery on kaftans, and Jihad urges Nahr to go back to Palestine to reunite with his roots. Nahr's trip to Palestine and her engagement with Bilal changes her perceptions of identity and resistance. The novel partly takes place during the Oslo Accords (1993), and is about Israeli violence, restrictions on Palestinian movement, extrajudicial killings, resistance, distrust and love, and social customs. Nahr's involvement in the Palestinian resistance is a cause of frustration and pride. Her journey is a personal journey which reflects the ways in which mundane Palestinian lives are molded by extraordinary political conditions. In *Nahr and Bilal*, Abulhawa highlights the human cost of colonial violence and military occupation, and exposes narratives which abstract Palestinian people from their humanity. The novel is thus a depiction of exile as provisional, and Palestine as permanent aspect of identity.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The current study tries to meet the following objectives:

1. To trace out the role of nativism in shaping the identity of displaced Palestinians from individual to collective and their struggle to maintain this identity with special reference to the novel, *Against the Loveless World*.
2. To explore the representation of the desire of natives to return towards their aboriginal culture and belongingness in Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World*.

1.5 Research Questions

The present study explores the following questions:

1. How does nativism shape the identity of displaced Palestinians from individual to collective in their struggle incorporated in the novel, *Against the Loveless World*?



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2. How does Abulhawa represent the desire of the natives to return towards their aboriginal culture and belongingness through *Against the Loveless World*?

1.6 Rationale of the Study

However, Palestinian literature has been comparatively less studied and the experiences of Palestinians have not been well conveyed to readers in other parts of the world. This study presents Palestinian literature as an integral part of human and literary discourse by examining individual and collective identity from a postcolonial perspective. It examines nativism in Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* (2019) in order to grasp the Palestinian experience of occupation and brutality that Abulhawa describes as not a war or conflict, but the brutality of the occupiers in Palestinian territory. The study also takes into account Palestinian resistance against the colonialism, neo-colonialism and cultural domination which impedes individual and national identity. The study aims at raising awareness among readers and researchers knowledge about the Palestinian literary representation which highlights the salient features of nativism.

1.7 Statement of the Problem

The Palestine-Israel conflict has been narrated in a variety of political versions and Palestinian dispossession, violence and identity challenges are poorly articulated. There are certain pro-Israeli narratives that justify the violence against Palestinians as defense, and many studies have failed to put an emphasis on everyday life under occupation. There are some scholars who try to offer other explanations, but such scholarship is still lacking. Palestinian suffering, displacement and the constant striving to maintain individual and collective identity through literary representation therefore must be considered.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The study relates to the ongoing debates in literature about Palestinian resistance and the maintenance of cultural identity, traditions and values in the face of the Israeli occupation. It explores nativism as a postcolonial and specifically Palestinian literary phenomenon, and how Palestinians seek to recover and hold on to identity in a displacement and violent setting. It might also serve as a guide for further scholars who wish to work on the other aspects and themes of postcolonial literature.

1.9 Delimitation of the Current Study

This research is bounded to Susan Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* (2019). It explores the notions of displacement, cultural/self-identity, belongingness, memory and trauma within the postcolonial framework of nativism. The study also briefly sketches the historical evolution of the novel's long-standing relationship with Arabic literature, and examines the impact of tradition, history, cultural orientation, nativism, and memory related trauma in the novel.

2. Literature Review

The history, political landscape, culture, and colonization were all factors in the development of Palestinian literature. Palestinian narrative art was strongly affected by Western stories translated into Arabic, both in terms of its form and its content, from the beginning of the twentieth century through the mid-twentieth century (Yaghi, 2001). The translators chose western stories based on the current needs of the people, and writers chose the stories based on the people's expectation for entertainment and education



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(Tuma, 1963; Ghanayem, 1995). Palestine, especially Jerusalem, was of great importance to Arab Christians and Muslims but was not initially a major literary centre like Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad or Beirut. With the advent of the British Mandate in 1922 and the growth of patriotic writing from that era, however, the volume of writing increased, especially in newspapers and journals with regard to the Mandate, Jewish immigration, employment and the sales of land. Palestinian literature from the late 19th century until the late 1950s was constituted by love poems, historical and theological essays, educative works and translations. (Al-Asad 1957)

Translation from English, French and Russian led to the introduction of Eliot and Pound's novel, short story, literary criticism and modernist poetry.. Despite this, a considerable amount of literary work continued to be romantic, emotional and classical, and writers were inspired by British Romantic/Victorian and French classicist traditions to challenge colonial ideology. Later, Romanticism, symbolism, surrealism and neoclassicism were tried to be sentimental, abstract, introspective or too rhetorical to convey the political turmoil of the Arabs. Beginning in the 1960s, Palestinian writers began to use folk language, and to depict Palestinian life under Israeli occupation, in more realistic ways. In the early 1970s, resistance poetry became an important aspect of Mahmoud Darwish's work, however his work transcends militant nationalism to universal themes of love, suffering, spirituality, life and human existence (Alkahlan, 2023). The literature of forced displacement came from within Israel as well as from outside Palestine, and it was written by exiled writers. After the war of 1948 and the occupation of West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, displacement was a growing political and literary issue. During Israeli military control, Palestinian Arabs were confined and restricted with regards to cultural and literary production. Writers were thus frustrated in trying to maintain their presence, language, history, and cultural identity (Ozacky-Lazar, 2002; Boimel, 2002). Palestinian intellectuals, therefore, created literature and critical studies to support Palestinians' right to their literature, history and civilization (Saleh, 2010; Nabeeh, 2003; Ataya, 1990).

Palestinian fiction initially faced challenges in developing an autonomous literary genre. Until the 1950s and 1960s, Palestinian fiction was not very innovative, due to the disintegration of Palestinian state institutions and the lack of political consciousness. Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1920–1994), Samira Azzam (1927–1967), and Ghassan Kanafani (1936–1972) became prominent figures. Emile Habibi (1922–1996) along with Mohammad Naffa, Muhammad Ali Taha, and Tawfiq Fayyad played a major role in this. Similarly, Susan Abulhawa being a leading Palestinian-American writer focused on the conflict from the Palestinian perspective, and from the humanistic point of view by portraying the emotionally complex characters and the realistic depictions of displacement, occupation, identity, and resistance. She in her novel *Against the Loveless World* (2019) expands on these issues by following the story of a Palestinian refugee woman and the repercussions of the 1967 Six-Day War. Nativism, nostalgia, resistance, displacement, enslavement, alienation, migration, settlement, and intervention are all themes that are explored in the novel, and nativism is especially a quest for identity. Davidson (2010) refers to Abulhawa as an informal representative, who adds to the Western picture of the Palestine-Israel problem. Likewise, **Alsyouf (2025)** examines Darwish alongside Yeats and Heaney and specifically discusses **mythopoetic cultural resistance and Palestinian national resistance**.

For Palestinian literature, displacement implies exile, homelessness, alienation and loss of the connection to the home land. Exile can "disintegrate identity" but "also deepen the attachment to homeland. The longing to return is a strong motivator of



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displaced persons' identity and cultural awareness (Mahfood, 2021). According to Said (2000), exile is not just the physical return to a former home, but a constant quest for identity, belonging and a place to belong. Thus, in the literature of the Arabs "home" has literal, psychological, geographical, sociological and political significance. Palestinian displacement has thus played a central role in the Arab diasporic identity and solidarity (Wardi & Wardi, 2008).

Farag (2022) discusses the concepts of representation, Palestine and exile in the works of Ghassan Kanafani and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra. The study demonstrates how displacement affects the relationship of Palestinian people to their country, making imagined belonging and geographical separation at the core of Palestinian literary narratives. Farag (2022) also explores the notions of Palestine, homeland and exile in their works. The study suggests that exile is a condition of physical and symbolic displacement from the homeland, the geographical and the imagined, and that the Palestinian land is a main element in the process of shaping Palestinian identity. The study also reveals the ways in which literary images of exile solidify the link between exile, homeland, and Palestinian belonging. Ahamed and Risana (2024) explore exile, dispossession and national identity in Darwish's poetry. They demonstrate the links among the themes of land, memory, cultural heritage, exile, and dispossession in the shaping of Palestinian identity and in the ongoing quest for belonging.

Unlike voluntary migration, Palestinian displacement has a different historical texture and is rooted in forced expulsion and ongoing political dispossession. Palestinians were scattered in refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the U.S. and Europe, faced racial discrimination and political turmoil and continued to yearn for the return to Palestine. In Mattar (2022), the author explores Palestinian exile by documenting displacement after the Nakba, and its ongoing impact on Palestine's relations with Palestinian exiles. The study posits exile as a situation of being "without home" while still being "in home"; being exiled while being also connected to the homeland. Similarly, Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015) and *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) make these themes of displacement, indigenous identity, and the quest for home central themes (Bellour & Boussouf, 2016). Zafar et al.'s (2024) state that the transnational and the emphasis on displacement, dispossession, diaspora, landlessness, trauma and fractured identity are explored. The study states exile as physical and psychological experience of loss and dislocation.

Resistance is the collective reaction to oppressive structures and can manifest itself in many ways. In Foucault's (1980) theorization, resistance cannot exist without power; it is where power exists. Alkahlan (2023) explores Mahmoud Darwish's poetic views on nationalism and resistance with a particular focus on the importance of literature in the affirmation of the Palestinian national identity. Alkahlan (2023) looks at how the poem and the role of literature in affirming the national identity of the Palestinian people can be explored. The study shows the role poetry plays in maintaining a sense of attachment to homeland and resisting political and cultural displacement. From a postcolonial perspective, Dayan and Al-Hawtali (2025) are concerned with the effect of Darwish's diasporic identity on his poetry. They discover that Darwish's exile and displacement do not diminish his sense of Palestinian identity and that his poetry is a resistance to "compulsory" displacement and a way to keep links with the homeland alive.

Abulhawa, in her novel, *Against the Loveless World* (2019) wrote about the inside world of Palestine. The concept of her writing is revamped to highlight the current scenario of Palestinian lives discussing the terrible incident of *al-nakba* in the history of



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Palestine and its native individuals. She discusses about this terrifying exodus with the severity of the situation which can be traced in its complete manners through her writing. The present study tries to explore the concept of nativism and identity in *Against the Loveless World* (2019) with the postcolonial theoretical perspectives.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses qualitative, analytical and interpretative research design, which examines the concept of nativism in the context of post-colonialism, specifically in the context of Palestinian individuals' struggle against the Israeli occupation in Susan Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* (2019) through close textual reading. The theoretical approach is based on the concepts of post-colonial ideology as developed by Helen Tiffin, Gareth Griffiths, Bill Ashcroft and Edward Said in their work, *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) and *The Empire Writes Back* (2002) respectively, which conceptualizes post-colonial ideology and discusses the colonial assumptions about the indigenous population. Ashcroft et al. (1989) see postcolonialism as a critical approach to the challenge of the inequitable colonial situation, and Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) reveal the psychological and material effects of colonial oppression. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) offers a description of how the West has defined itself against the East as the inferior "Other," while *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) relates cultural representation and imperial power. Bhabha's (1984) idea of mimicry also illustrates the influence of colonial authority on its subject to mimic the colonizer.

In the present study, nativism is explored as a means of representation and resistance, where indigenous communities express their personal and collective identity in language, culture, geography, religion and race (Rappa, 2018). It became a problem of knowledge as a reaction to colonialism that aims to reclaim indigenous languages, culture, suppressed histories, and indigenous identities. A model of postcoloniality is formed for textual analysis on the bases of D. E. S. Maxwell's (1965) model which has seven concepts namely displacement, migration, enslavement, transportation, settlement, intervention, and alienation. Each of these is studied as a process that works to erode indigenous self-image and cultural identity and thus produces identity crisis and nativist opposition.

4. Discussion and Analysis

The chapter explores the Palestinian nativism in Susan Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* (2019) in terms of dislocation, disintegration, statelessness, loss, pain, tragedy, exile, resistance and violence from a postcolonial perspective. The novel depicts the lives of Palestinian refugees that are affected by the conditions of occupation, displacement, patriarchy, migration and political violence. The story is told from the perspective of a Palestinian woman, Nahr, who is imprisoned in the Israeli Cube, as she considers her past and tries to build and rebuild her identity. Her experiences include homelessness, lack of equality, homosexuality, stigma, feeling part of something, feeling loved, forgiveness, hope, friendship, war and family instability. Nahr is a Palestinian refugee woman who speaks about the experiences of the Palestinian people in war and their struggle to find their identity. Further, her dedication to her family, especially her brother, underscores the intricate dynamics of personal survival and communal duty. Abulhawa's female characters then embody the overlapping impacts of patriarchy, colonialism, exile and repatriation.



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4.1 Bewilderment of the Natives of Palestine

Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* (2019) exemplifies Palestinian natives' experience of being colonized, exiled, traumatized and subjected to patriarchy. Nahr re-creates a life that has been brutalized, but refuses to be a victim of that brutality. Her various names—Nahr, Yaqoot, Nanu and Almas—represent the divided consciousness that she has. She adds: “Sometimes, I’ll tell you the story behind my having two names. Three, if you count Nanu, which is reserved for Jihad. Almas was long gone by then.” (Abulhawa, 2019, p.164). Nahr is known as Nanu to her family and to other women in her class, Yaqoot is her name on her formal documents, Almas her name as a prostitute in her struggle for becoming and survival. As such the pluralistic naming is an indication of the precarious nature of women's identity in a society and culture that is subject to social, cultural and political pressures.

Nahr's fight is, therefore, not only individual but also about the broader issues of Palestinian women whose identity is continually being reconstructed through displacement and social norms. Her life can be said to have been part of a “lost era,” as she remarks: “Her life was one of a lost era, in some ways too idyllic to be real.” (Abulhawa, 2019, p.170). In Nahr, Abulhawa sets up a framework that dismisses the image of the Palestinian woman as a passive victim, and instead represents the protagonist who is purposeful in reconstructing her existence under conditions of colonial and patriarchal power.

4.2 Representation of Displaced Identities

The idea of displacement is a major theme in postcolonial literature, and is intertwined with homelessness, identity crisis, alienation, migration, slavery and cultural denigration (Ashcroft et al., 1989; 2001; 2202; 2007). In *Against the Loveless World* (2019), displacement is a condition rather than a one-time occurrence, impacting successive generations. Displaced face discrimination, deprivation, disrupted education and family structures, economic marginalization and emotional trauma (Goyal, 2013). The idea of a constant displacement is embodied by Nahr's family. As she said:

“My father made the dangerous journey back into Palestine after he got us to safety in Jordan. Palestinians learned the first time in 1948 that leaving to save your life meant you would lose everything and could never go back.”

(Abulhawa, 2019, p.33)

The statement links people's displacement to collective memory of Nakba (1948). Nahr also sees the displacement as an inherited experience:

I looked at Mama’s face, that thing in my chest squeezing again, and it occurred to me that she had been around my age when she was forced out of her home in Palestine. She had come to Amman then too, before journeying on to Kuwait with my father. It seemed to me that fate was inherited, like eye color.

(Abulhawa, 2019, p.108)

Her displacement from Kuwait to Amman and finally Palestine is a reminder of the destabilizing force of displacement on stable belonging. As she arrives in Palestine, Nahr finds her ancestral land, and she witnesses Israeli violence against Palestinians, such as attacks on farmers while they are harvesting the olive trees. These experiences



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change her view of Palestine and inspire her dedication to the Palestinian cause. Her personal engagement with Bilal, a resistance leader, further links personal belonging to political resistance. During the second Intifada, when organised attacks break out, Nahr is arrested, tortured, tried and locked up in solitary confinement for 16 years without any evidence of her direct involvement. The novel thus portrays the three modalities of imprisonment, migration, exile and sexual violence as linked, and forms of violence impacting Palestinian life. This representation also corresponds with Patrick Williams' (2009) identification of territorial, ontological, narrative, historiographical, ethical, and dialogical forms of Palestinian dispossession. Likewise, Cernea lists eight key threats facing IDPs: living without land, without work, without a home, without being part of the community, with ill health, without food, without access to common property assets, and without social integration. The life of Nahr and those of her family illustrate how these conditions exist at personal, familial and political levels. The novel's displacement narrative can also be related to Anita Desai and Kiran Desai's fiction which deals with alienation and the dilemma of people who live away from their homeland (Mathur, 2009). In this context, Nahr's experience enriches the literary portrayal of displacement by bringing together geographical uprooting, political statelessness, suffering by gender and the quest for identity.

4.3 Portrayal of Natives' Souvenirs.

Historically, Palestinian literature has dealt with love, religion, individual journeys, collective memory, women's rights, and education, but in recent years, the subject of the Israeli occupation has become prominent in the work, especially since 1948, the Nakba which reshaped Palestinian literature as a significant tool to articulate dispossession, memory and resistance. *In Against the Loveless World* (2019), memory serves as a means of holding on to a homeland that has been physically and psychologically disturbed. Nahr remembers her mother's collection of black and white photographs of Haifa, which were taken during her time there: "Mama saved a collection of black-and-white pictures from her time in Haifa. Her family had been well-off, but European Jews stole everything when they conquered Palestine in 1948—right down to their furniture, books, and bank accounts" (Abulhawa, 2019, p. 29). These photographs are tangible remembrances of a loss of homeland and a link to Palestine for the family. In 1948, Nahr's mother is a refugee when she falls pregnant with Nahr in 1967. Nahr thus lives in Kuwait with a Palestinian inheritance passed down through her mother and grandmother. It is the old country of her grandmother's generation, she recalls: "Palestine remained the old country in my young mind, a asocial place of my grandmother's generation" (Abulhawa, 2019, p. 29). The memory of Palestine therefore persists through family stories even in the event of their disconnection from the geography of Palestine.

Palestinian oral history also resists the hegemonic narratives of Nakba. The importance of documenting Palestinian memory of 1948 and its legacy comes from Nashef (2019), and the importance of the oral history in the fight against dominant Zionist narratives comes from Yahya (2017). Slyomovics (2007) also holds that recorded history and eyewitness accounts should be used to fill in the missing pieces to the destruction of Palestinian villages and the deletion of memory. Women's experiences, particularly stories of sexual violence, have often been overlooked in official histories, resulting in Astashkevich's (2018) narration of silence. This untold trauma is vividly captured in Nahr's memory:



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Sounds are what fill those days in my memory. They echo through the facts, the images, the pain of a fractured rib, the desire to take my brother's place in their torture dungeons, the anguish of unmistakable endings—the end of innocence, of a home, of health, of days with day dreams and nights without nightmares.

(Abulhawa, 2019 p.89)

Memory then is a document of history and a form of resistance to erase history. The Cube symbolically represents a space of imprisonment, surveillance, memory and narration. Imprisonment becomes a chance to testify, as Nahr writes her story in a notebook with pencils in solitary confinement. East, West, North, and South, as well as up and down, are the six directions that emphasize the spatial symbolism of entrapment and dislocation. The juxtaposition of the controlled geometry of the Cube and Nahr's memories that are vast and expansive illuminates the tension between colonial control and narrative freedom. Moore-Gilbert (2016) writes that Palestinian is an exception as there is no undeniable Palestinian territory equivalent to the historical mandate, and about 750,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes over the 1947 or during the next two years in the land apportioned to Israel. Nahr's dislocated path through Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine, therefore, reflects this greater historical disjunction.

4.4 Nativism— A Cause to Resist

In the novel, resistance is a reaction to oppression and the neglect of the existence of Palestinians. Bhabha (1994) suggests that marginalized experiences can offer vital knowledge of domination, history, diaspora and displacement. Resistance can manifest in a variety of ways, such as silence, words, physical opposition, and writing. Through literature, Abulhawa creates a counter-discourse to question the dominant discourses about Palestine. Said (1992) claims that Palestinians' stories must be forgotten in order to legitimize the occupation. Abulhawa recognizes this erasure and puts Nahr's account at the heart of the story. Similarly, Bhabha (1990) proposes that resistance may be manifested as a reaffirmation of the colonized subject, when his/her experiences and existence are excluded from the dominant discourse. Narrating is thus an act of resistance for Abulhawa. Nahr's life is a reminder of the interplay of personal events and political ones. Her love of Palestine is clearly linked to her feeling of belonging and alienation. She remarks:

I packed my bags. The belonging and acceptance I had found seemed an illusion. Palestine was my mother's world. It belonged to SittiWasfiyeh's stories. Palestine did not want me, nor I her any longer. I was again untethered and vulnerable, a stranger in a place that had felt like home.

(Abulhawa, 2019, p.156)

In this fragment of the text, the homeland and the alienation from the homeland are a paradox. The trauma of Nahr is not just a reflection of her own experiences, but also of the psychological impact of that war and displacement. Nativism grows out of this not only because of attachment to land, but because of repeated experiences of dispossession, violence, and a denial of self-determination.

4.5 Identity Retrieval under Erasure

The novel explores ideas of identity through displacement and exile, memory and the preservation of cultural identity. Saadi (2002) suggests that the experience of exile



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can exacerbate Palestinian nativism, and Bardenstein (2002) points to olives as a significant symbol of culture, belonging and collective memory. As she said: “Um Buraq, and I began making body butters and facial moisturizers from olive oil, goat’s butter, herbs, myrrh oil and frankincense. It was a craft she’d learned as a little girl from her grandmother in Basra. We sold everything we made” (Abulhawa, 2019, p. 83). The destruction of olive trees then also represents a bid to eliminate Palestinian culture. Indeed, during curfew, Bilal and Nahr talk about the intentions of the Israeli armed forces for the natives, and also tried to be persistent at their own stance which has been observed through their discussion:

These people are trying to wipe away all traces of us. I’m going to do whatever it takes. Even though they pump poison and sewage into our wells and springs, all I’m trying to do is spook them enough to make them leave. So, yes, that’s what I’m doing, and I thank you for having the brilliant idea in the first place.

(Abulhawa, 2019, p. 309)

The text connects environmental and cultural erasure and resistance. According to Foucault (1980), reconstruction can create an erasure of the identity of an individual or society. Nahr thus has several names, Nahr, Yaqoot, Almas and Nanu, all of which refer to different stages of survival and identity reconstruction, she reveals while make a conversation with Bilal: “Sometimes, I’ll tell you the story behind my having two names. Three, if you count Nanu, which is reserved for Jihad. Almas was long gone by then” (Abulhawa, 2019, p.164). Her eventual recognition as the daughter of refugee parents in occupied Palestine illustrates how the identity, which has been repeatedly fragmented and threatened with erasure, has been retrieved.

4.6 Sense of Belonging for Homeland and Culture

In postcolonial standpoint, nativism is the cultural and political reclamation of identities and practices which have been suppressed by colonial power. Continuing to focus on language, culture, geography, religion, race and territoriality, it also asks questions about essentialism and cultural authenticity. Palestinian literature is used to convey loss, displacement, exile, and resistance. Palestinian writers employ literary devices to convey their feelings of loss and resistance as well as to reflect the political and social repercussions of Zionism and Palestinian fragmentation (Rooney, 2014). Mir (2015) also highlights the displacement, exile, isolation and ongoing desire of Palestinians for a homeland. Universalism is then another prism for Palestinian literature to depict oppression, not just as a religious dispute, but rather as a struggle between colonizer and colonized. Palestinian writers make comparisons to other instances of oppression in history. Palestinian and Jewish testimonial writing, for instance, is compared with regard to displacement, statelessness, domination and historical trauma by Garloff (2005). Palestinian writers, therefore, use the testimonial approach to record the Nakba and to resist erasure of Palestinian experience. In the context of homeland and belonging, and its complex nature, Nahr's return to Palestine is a case in point. She experiences an intense emotional connection with the landscape:

I was content to just sit there in the splendid silence of the hills, where the quiet amplified small sounds—the wind rustling trees; sheep chewing, roaming, bleating, breathing; the



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soft crackle of the fire; the purr of Bilal's breathing. I realized how much I had come to love these hills; how profound was my link to this soil.

(Abulhawa, 2019, p.194)

The land transforms from a place of belonging to an emotional, cultural and historical belonging. But the belonging was fleeting:

The belonging and acceptance I had found seemed an illusion. Palestine was my mother's world. It belonged to SittiWasfiyeh's stories. Palestine did not want me, nor I her any longer. I was again untethered and vulnerable, a stranger in a place that had felt like home.

(Abulhawa, 2019, p.192)

Nahr's homeland and her strange place, she experiences Palestine at the same time. In the end, Nahr's trip is the recovery and re-claiming of Palestinian identity. Her journey through Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine captures Bauman's (2005) conception of identity as a dynamic process, created by social and geographical conditions. However, Nahr's journey is not just a movement, her final destination is linked to freedom and belonging, to reclaiming homeland. Nahr is where Abulhawa sees nativism as a means of resistance, where the expelled subjects regain a sense of identity, memory of culture, and the homeland. Nahr's fragmented identity becomes a strength, resistance, and belonging as a refugee and as a daughter of refugees.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that Susan Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* (2019) makes Palestinian nativism a permanent struggle for identity, cultural memory, homeland and resistance in the context of displacement and colonial oppression. Palestinian fiction and poetry deal with nativism in terms of resistance, diaspora, exile, love, and collective memory; and the struggle for identity that is always connected to the oppressive impact of the occupation. The extensive displacement that followed the historical events of the 1948 al-Nakba, the Six-Day War and ongoing violence have led to a rich level of displacement, and Palestinian writers have documented and communicated their cultural identity in languages such as Arabic, English, Swedish, French and others. Abulhawa's work belongs to this literary tradition, as she gives voice to marginalized and misrepresented Palestinian identities. The study concludes that the main issues in the novel are consensual and coerced migration, transportation, alienation, displacement, suffering and attachment to Palestinian values. The novel follows the story of the Palestinian people being expelled from their homes, placed under restrictions, detention, torture, killing and cultural dispossession.

The results show that nativism is a process that turns individual displacement into collective identity and resistance. Nahr's journey from Kuwait to Jordan, Palestine, and finally to the Israeli prison illustrates the instability of being displaced and the intensification of Palestinian identity as she veers through the many locations. Nahr is a Kuwaiti, but her Palestinian heritage is an integral part of her identity. Through her experiences of exile, sexual violence, imprisonment and political oppression, she slowly emerges from the role of the displaced person to become an active member of the Palestinian resistance. Love, especially towards Bilal and her bond to Palestine, becomes a transformative and radical force. The study also concludes that the notion of cultural memory offers a means of recalling the Palestinian identity. The nativism, then, is not



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just geographical but the maintenance and reconstruction of the cultural identity in the face of exile and erasure. Further research is needed as feminist and psychological interpretations might offer additional insights and comparative analyses of Palestinian and Kashmiri literature could shed light on similar experiences of loss and exile. Apprehension, nostalgia, phobia and post-traumatic stress can also be explored in the context of identity crisis and self-image in future research.

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