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## Negotiating Identity in Exile: A Postcolonial Study of Ambivalence and Hybridity in Morning in Jenin

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### Abstract

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The evolution of identity is a lifelong process, involving diverse strands of experience and exposure. This research explores Amal's character from Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* to examine the dynamics of ambivalence and hybridity that she experiences as a Palestinian American. The objective of the research is to delineate the ambivalent and hybrid dynamics of the socio-psycho conflict experienced by the first-generation migrants from war-torn territories such as Palestine. Employing Bhabha's concepts of ambivalence and hybridity, it highlights the problem of the constant strife of such individuals to achieve a sense of belonging while simultaneously struggling to make sense and retain the familiarity of their deeply rooted indigenous consciousness, and determine if Bhabha's assertions are adequately applicable to the Palestinian community or not. Through textual analysis, the research analysis dialogues and instances concerning Amal's struggle to navigate her dysphoric crisis. It is found that while Bhabha's assertions concerning ambivalence give insight into the social and psychological toll experienced by such individuals, they do not adequately address the constant pull experienced by such characters to return to their indigenous cultures to heal the rift they experience in their selfhood in their attempts to find a home. This research serves to highlight the multifaceted dilemmas of the Palestinian plight by drawing attention to how Palestinian migrants have been depicted in the novel, continuously striving to retain their Palestinian identities from being completely absorbed into the host culture and experiencing a perpetual erasure of their roots.

**Keywords:** post-colonial Analysis, ambivalence, hybridity, *Mornings in Jenin*, Palestine

## Introduction

The conflict between Palestine and Israel dates to the 19th century and has never come to an end to date. The conflict started with Israel's occupation of the West Bank. The 55 years of conflict have caused many Palestinians to leave their homeland and settle in nearby countries like America (Masood, 2022). Many writers from Palestine illustrate the Palestine-Israel conflict in their literary work. One such representation is found in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*. The novel has the setting of *Jenin's massacre in 2002*. "The story started in April when Israeli Defence Forces attacked the Palestinian displaced person camp in Jenin, levelled it to the ground, slaughtered more than seventy individuals, and left regular folks alive in their obliterated homes and seething structures. Israeli occupation troops utilised each substantial method for killing and went on for nearly 16 days, April 3-18" (Al-Mahamari et al., 2013, 29-36). Palestinian literature, unlike other literature, is different in its way because it is written for a cause. It is written to display the narrative of the marginalised and spread their discourse. Those Palestinians who have seen expulsion in *the 1947 and 1960s* are traumatised. However, the generation after that, the third and fourth generations, are not directly affected (Mir, 2013). Therefore, the question arises whether the third and fourth generation remember their roots the way the first and second generations remember.

Migrating from the war zone causes the characters to experience the traumatic colonial experience. The characters, migrating to different countries, construct their identities, i.e., diaspora identities. "Diaspora identities are those who are continually producing and replicating themselves, through change and distinction"). Thus, the diasporic identities are hybrid as the colonised subject is always in motion, moving from one side to another, occupying an ambivalent state (Hall, 2015). Belonging in two different places can give a person a different vision, but it can also put one in an ambivalent position of not belonging to any place. This state of being from both places and not belonging to any place simultaneously puts a

person in a state of confusion about their identity (Bhandari, 2020). Palestinian community finds itself not only in legal but also in emotional limbo as well due to the politicised position of the issue of Palestine.

This research uses Bhabha's postcolonial concept of hybridity and ambivalence, which is primarily based on the people of the subcontinent, to analyse the hybrid identities of the central character Amal in Susan Abulhawa's novel *Mornings in Jenin*. The research endeavours to explore myriad ways in which the characters struggle to find home, keeping in the context of their hybrid identity, to explore Bhabha's concept regarding the Palestinian expelled community and their first-generation living in other countries, and to examine whether Bhabha's concepts are equally applicable to the Palestinian diaspora community as they are to the subcontinent. Palestinian literature has multifaceted arenas that invite exploration, as this issue is inherently unique in its kind. The research provides an insight into the lives of the Palestinian community and the problems they face daily. Not only are they expelled from their land and homes, which require an unshakable determination to keep their identity alive in the face of perpetual erasure at the hands of Zionist forces, but they also present the problems encountered by first and second generations due to their hyphenated identity.

## Research Objectives

The research endeavours to attain the following objectives:

1. To explore myriad ways in which the characters struggle to find home, keeping in the context of their hybrid identity.
2. To explore Bhabha's concept regarding the Palestinian expelled community and their first-generation living in other countries.
3. To test whether Bhabha's concepts are equally applicable to the Palestinian diaspora community as it is to the subcontinent.

## Research Questions

The article aims to answer the following

research questions:

1. How does the character Amal in the novel *Mornings in Jenin* display ambivalence and hybridity?
2. In what ways does Bhabha's theory support the Palestinian exilic community, and where does it fall short in encompassing it?

### Hybridity and Ambivalence

This research attempts to investigate the novel based on the concept of hybridity and ambivalence propounded by Homi K. Bhabha in his seminal work *The Location of Culture* (1994), where he has explained the concepts of ambivalence, mimicry, stereotypes, and discrimination. He is of the view that the main objective of colonial discourse is to construe stereotypes that legitimise their conquest. This is achieved by stereotyping colonised people in derogatory ways. Bhabha (1994) departs from this view of Said in *Orientalism* that such an aim is not fully met. He explains that the 'Discourse of Colonialism' (McLeod, 2010, p. 46) is not successful in achieving its agenda as it is pulling the colonised subject in two opposite directions. On one hand, they are stereotyping the colonised subject and, on the other hand, they try to understand them through Orientalist projects. Bhabha (1994) says that this split of the contradictory position of the colonised subject puts it inside and beyond their Western understanding, which is "once other, yet entirely knowable and visible" (McLeod, 2010, p. 47).

Bhabha (1994) argues that the colonised subject is always in motion, moving from one side to another, occupying an ambivalent state. This swaying between two polarities makes it impossible for the colonisers to give them any fixed status, whose repetition of stereotypes acknowledges that such fixity cannot be achieved. Similarly, colonialist powers look for differences that result in justification to separate the Orient from them. This difference gives them the option of civilising them through their Orientalist project, and they take the help of culture to fulfil their aim by saying that it is understandable. Bhabha (1994) says that this binary, of being different from us, yet knowable, creates a third space where the

fixed colonial identities become inverted. "Difference is neither One nor the Other but something else besides, in-between" (Bhabha 1994, p.55).

"Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal" (Bhabha 1994, p.159-160). Hybridity and mimicry reevaluate the discriminatory ideas and the repetition of those ideas. It shows the deformation and displacement of those unsettling ideas. It questions these concepts of colonial power and inverts them by pointing and questioning them (Castle, 2008). Bhabha (1994) views hybridity as a tool through which colonised subjects can fight the stereotypes attached to them (Singh, 2009). The crucial element for the subordinated people is to retrieve their past and their indigenous culture, but they are also aware of the dangers of such acts that invite the danger of 'fixity and fetishism' of identities in colonial culture (Bhabha). This produces an intervention beyond a bridge that carries the estranged feelings of belonging and a sense of home. "To be un-homed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public sphere" (Bhabha 1994, p.17).

### Research Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative approach. The literary text has been explored and explicated by using the textual analysis method. Through close reading, the literary text has been reread to find the instances supported by the target theoretical framework. Different quotations and instances have been included and paraphrased to support the argument.

### Literature Review

The literature review for this research represents the ways through which post-colonial literature represents the search for psychological stability, displacement, and fractured identities. Stenofi (2014) comparatively analyses the short story 'A Pair of Jeans' by Qasira Shahraz and 'Everyday Use' by

Alice Walker through the lens of postcolonial feminism. The analysis of female characters brings forth the issues of the identity of females in the postcolonial world. Analyses of intrinsic elements like themes, symbols, and the plot also highlight hybridity and mimicry. Even with the problems encountered by the female characters, they have shown the importance of liberty, freedom, and the choice of living one's life to the fullest. The research focuses only on the female protagonist of these two short stories, and the author's background and culture are used as a reference to support the choices of the main characters. Characters, including Mariam and Mama, experience a double identity. The research focuses on females getting liberated in one way or another, but does not fill the gap of how Mariam, Mama, and her two daughters deal with the issues of being stuck in hybrid cultures. Furthermore, by focusing on relatively stable postcolonial settings, Stenofi overlooks the limitations of Bhabha's framework in active conflict zones. My paper bridges the gap by establishing how these concepts of hybridity fall short when applied to war-torn Palestinian literature.

Farahbakhsh (2016) "Bhabha's Notion of Unhomeliness in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe: A Postcolonial Reading*" discusses major concepts of unhomeliness, hybridity, and ambivalence. Through the close textual analysis of the major characters present in the novel, the work lays bare the deep emotional and psychological state of in-betweenness that they go through. Moving from one state to another, they look for better life opportunities but cannot find the calmness and serenity of the heart in the new place. The feeling of being in an ambivalent state is visible when *Foe*, Friday, Cruso, and Susan do not feel at home, even when the new place is providing them with all the luxuries of life. Even after going back to their native place, they struggle to find the psychological comfort that home offers. This psychological tussle of not being comfortable anywhere is the real struggle for the characters. They move "between two cultures and identities, and through the act of imagination, they create a

new space which does not belong to either one of the two worlds" (Farahbakhsh & Ranjbar, 2016, p. 105). The article focuses on the issues that have emerged from belonging to two different cultures simultaneously. It does not explicate the strategic advantages that Bhabha talks about, which come from an ambivalent scenario. Zohdi (2018) explores the lost identity in *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Saleh, which results from hybridity and ambivalence. The pressing issue of modern times is the lack of contentment and emotional satisfaction when people move from one place to another, and there they lose their sense of self or being at home. Mustafa and the unnamed Narrator both have lived abroad for several years, but their attitudes and modes of living vary. The narrator has found his identity by imagining his homeland; thereby believing that his identity has merged and belongs to two cultures, while, on the other hand, Mustafa Saeed has struggled with being where he is. He lives in the coloniser's country. Get their education and, in return, cheat on their women to commit the same kind of atrocities that they did when they colonised their homeland. Both restage their past because of some scraps and fragments that control and shape their behaviour toward any situation. His Arabic nationality, manuscripts that he sees bring back memories from his homeland. Mustafa Saeed, though, tries to avenge the atrocities committed by the colonisers, loses his identity in the process because by harming the local women of their country, he follows the footsteps of the colonisers. Hence, he leaves the identity of an Arab and becomes like them (Zohdi, 2018). While the research explores the psychological toll of migration and living abroad, they overlook how hybridity functions within active war zones. This research addresses the gap by analysing Palestinian literature.

Ebileeni (2019) has tried to question the narration, discourse, and debate initiated by Palestinian writers like Susan Abulhawa and Susan Muaddi Darraj regarding the cross-generational implications of Palestinians'

displacement in the US context. Taking *Mornings in Jenin* and *The Blue Between Sky and Water* by Susan Abulhawa as a corpus, the article briefly mentions the writing style of the authors. While it maintains that Abulhawa tries to write in an anti-colonial style prevalent in third-world countries, generating a cosmopolitan dimension in Palestinian works. Fixation of roles, as in Abulhawa's works, shows the stress on the continuation of the idea of an immutable nationalist colour and discourse, even over a period of several decades, which might hinder the development of narrations and fix it to a specific geographical location. The fictional narration of Abulhawa's *The Blue between Sky and Water* and *Mornings in Jenin* shows the American context to be either marginally or negatively framing the characters' experiences. The writer shows a biased attitude where she focuses on the national context, ignoring the idiosyncratic experiences in local settings. Sara Abulhawa in *Mornings in Jenin* and Nur Valdez in *The Blue between Sky and Water* remain deeply affected by the tragic aspects of mainstream Palestinian narratives. Maurice questions the biased attitude of Abulhawa as she represents the Palestinian diaspora as a static outcome due to the grave historical injustice that needs to be reversed for future generations to live peacefully. Abulhawa does not look beyond "national frames" (2019, p. 6) as her works are unmistakably linked to the national script being propagated. "*Strangers in My Home-The Quest for Identity in Mornings in Jenin*" (2013) is a part of a larger scheme of ongoing research that is being conducted to find the quest for identity in Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*. The research focuses on Amal's journey and her transformation due to her experience of traumatic incidents that she witnessed in her life. The socio-political situation has had a deep impact on her psyche and personality. The novel encompasses four generations and a family saga of a Palestinian family from 1948 to the present day. The research utilises Johann Heder's theory of national identity and John Locke's theory of memory and personal identity. Their findings show the importance of memory about

Palestinian history and the construction of identity. The main elements of personal identity are components of memory, and the main factors of national identity are the customs and rituals of that community (Al-Ma'amari & Yusuf, 2013). Although the research deeply analyses trauma, memory, and fixed national identities in Palestinian narratives, it leaves a critical gap by not interrogating the limitations of Bhabha's concept of hybridity within such actively war-torn communities, which this paper will address.

Amrieh and Zuhair (2020) bring forth the connection and intertwining of Palestinian history and Palestinian flora. Taking Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* as a corpus, the paper illustrates the story of four generations of Abulhawa and the incidents that have shaped their lives. It portrays the connection of trees with everyday life experiences in a way that reflects the strong connection between trees and their family. This bond between trees and family shows themes like rootedness, identity, loss, and rejuvenation. Seen from this perspective, the research shed light on different aspects of the life of the Palestinian community in general and the Abulhawa family in particular (Abu Amrieh & Zuhair, 2020). Mami Fouad (2020) discusses the postcolonial predicament about the Palestinian issue. They reveal that liberal ideology is often considered a tool for self-determination, and the Palestinian issue is a glaring example of flaws in this concept. From a refugee's perspective, liberalism gives strength to the concept of the begging bowl, but those refugees living in their own country and under siege remain a question of debate that has not been answered by the Postcolonial rubric. *Mornings in Jenin* shows that even after fictional descriptions and aesthetic embellishments, and regardless of how poetically they are described, they might not champion the galvanising perspective of freedom (Fouad, 2020). While these critical analyses highlight ecological rootedness and the political failures of liberal frameworks, they neglect to evaluate Bhabha's concept of hybridity under conditions of ongoing siege. This paper addresses the gap by

signifying its inadequacy for war-torn communities.

Al Soud (2015) has critically discussed Arab American writers who are relentlessly spreading the message between east and west about how life is altering in both spaces. Taking Mornings in Jenin as a primary source of investigation, it shows cultural and regional differences present between America and Palestine, and how people navigate between both spaces. Abulhawa deals with the issue of nostalgia by showing the transformation and resurgence in the character of Amal, who starts to feel uncomfortable in the US and undertakes a journey to her ancestors' homeland, Palestine. She feels stuck in Philadelphia, and her yearning to know her roots takes her to the place that has been a constant part of the stories her mother narrated to her (Al Soud, 2015).

While the reviewed literature extensively explores distinct facets of postcolonial displacement, such as the trauma of cross-generational exile, gendered identity struggles, and the nostalgic quest for roots within Palestinian fiction, these studies largely overlook the specific application of Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial concepts to this particular body of work. Specifically, the existing research fails to address how Bhabha's theories of ambivalence and hybridity apply to migrated war-zone communities and how these specific groups navigate settling among other diverse diaspora populations. Therefore, this paper highlights and fills this critical gap in the existing literature by examining Palestinian literature through Bhabha's theoretical framework to better understand the complex, intercultural assimilation of war-displaced refugees.

### Analysis

Palestinian conflict has marred the social and psychological growth of their diasporic identity, as the atrocities of the conflict drive them from their homeland to seek refuge and sustenance from an alien society and culture. This research analyses Abulhawa's novel Mornings in Jenin through the lens of hybridity and ambivalence. Ambivalence is a third space, an in-between

position, created as a consequence of the constant state of motion experienced by the migrant individuals. In their efforts to connect and adjust with the host culture and its people. Hybridity is the resultant state of their individual identity with elements of both native and host cultures.

Amal is a central character of the novel; her parents, who have been displaced from their homeland and are forced to live in refugee camps, worry about their children's future. Like any other parent, having concern for one's children is a universal attitude, which is also the concern for Amal's parents. They are intimidated by the bleak prospect of possibilities a refugee camp holds for the future generation. "There was nothing left for me but my father's dream, for which he had drudged for pathetic wages, to save enough that his refugee children might get an education" (p. 125). Amal's father does not lose hope, even with the odds weighing more to their side, and continues doing menial jobs to earn and save some for his children. He knows that there is nothing more important and more concerning for a parent than a child's future. Amal has seen her father going through all situations just to make sure that he has some money saved and left for his children.

Refugee camps are not something unknown to the Palestinian community. It has been a constant part of their lives as ancestral generations have lived in them. Like any other community, Palestinians know that no calamity can stop their growth, development, and success. They have tried to grow constantly, even with the few chances they have. Most of them decide to move to other places that offer numerous chances of leading a normal life. "The future can't breathe in a refugee camp, Amal. The air here is too dense for hope. You are being offered a chance to liberate the life that lies dormant in all of us. Take it." .... That was all my uncle needed to say" (p. 136). Moving to another place has its own struggles. Getting adjusted to an environment that is opposite to one's own requires immense strength to either adapt to one's way of living or to uphold one's

parental cultural lifestyle and keep one's own identity. According to [Bhabha \(1994\)](#), such a diasporic identity is an occupation of an ambivalent state as individuals constantly aim to create and subsequently sustain a sense of belonging. It culminates that such diasporic identities are hybrid as the colonised subject is always in motion, moving from one side to another, occupying an ambivalent state. For instance, Amal struggled while living in Philadelphia as she encountered a contrasting way of living there. In Arab countries, the open display of affection is considered taboo even with one's spouse. Amal has not only been confused, but she has also found herself at a crossroads, as she has never talked or thought about kissing a stranger. "Have you ever had sex?" she asked unctuously. I froze. I had never even kissed a boy" (p. 172).

Another barrier that immigrants find when they move to another place with contrasting characteristics from their country is the language. They find the language difficult to crack. Amal encountered the same issue as she struggled with her word choices while communicating with her American host. "Thank you," I answered, unsure of the proper American response to her gracious enthusiasm" (p. 169). She found her language and accent different from those of her American friends, which made her look different from them. She could not get to their zone due to this alienating character in her personality. "My accent was a social handicap, or at least I regarded it as such" (p. 173). She feels like she is in a difficult situation as she is unable to be at home. This feeling of Alienation, being adrift in an estrange culture and unknown people, has been described by [Bhabha \(1994\)](#) as "to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres " (p.17).

Amal finds herself at a crossroads as she cannot decide what mode of behaviour or code of conduct she should adopt. On one hand, she has an Arab lifestyle to follow, but on the other hand, she feels alienated as her fellows are indulging in

activities that are strictly prohibited by Arab society. "..., something caught and oppressed by the strict ways of a religious culture that would not permit him even a gentle kiss on her cheek" (p. 136). She feels herself in limbo, which hinders her confidence and, as a result, causes confusion and chaos in her mind. Struggling to find the right way of living and moving with the current tradition of the place has been Amal's biggest battle. Since she is living in Philadelphia, she must decide which way of life she has to adopt. Following an Arab lifestyle in America, people looked at her in an uncertain way. They would gaze at her with a confused look. This quandary made Amal go by the proverb of doing in Rome as Romans do. She decides to abide by the traditional rules and regulations of the American lifestyle so that she does not feel like an odd person out. "The undercurrent of my life in America was a sense of shame that I had betrayed my family—or worse, myself. But I consigned myself to American mores and subscribed to their liberties" (p. 174). Even though she has started expressing and embracing the American mode of life, deep down she feels the longing for her old self. She feels lost due to the new living and yearns for her older self. "I felt sweet nostalgia and longing for old friends. (p. 175). Bhabha describes this struggle of belonging as an attempt to create a hybrid identity. He asserts that hybridity reevaluates the discriminatory ideas and the repetition of those ideas. It shows the deformation and displacement of those unsettling ideas ([Bhabha, 1995](#)). However, as a refugee, forced to abandon their homes, and to assume an alternative reality as their own, Palestinians like Amal are unable to completely subvert their deeply seated longing for their home despite their best efforts to create their hybrid identity.

For example, one thing that Amal notices, which she feels to be a positive change in her new abode, is that she does not feel any restrictions that are commonly placed in her home, Palestine. She feels free, physically as well as in spirit. She enjoys this freedom and

wishes people back home could feel this freedom. She says, "No soldiers here. No barbed wire or zone off-limits to Palestinians. No one judges me. No resistance, cries, or chants. I was anonymous. Unloved. Wearing my first bathing suit, I remembered Huda's great yearning after the Battle of Karamah, when we thought we would return to our Palestine" (p. 179). It should be noted that even the changes Amal describes as positive, the positivity and the sense of freedom are in the absence of the atrocities from the occupiers against her and her people. This binary connotation of freedom demonstrates the conflict she experiences in her consciousness as a Palestinian refugee, struggling to be American. She often discusses with herself that whenever Palestine would be free, having the same freedom as the one she is witnessing now, she would go back and be her own self, her real and original self. This freedom would earn her herself back. She feels that she has masked herself with someone else's identity. Going back would be like finding her old self, which she desperately misses. "I had thought of little else but to return to my family, to myself. But I had also forged realities in America and in many ways, the place I had called home for the past years had become part of me" (p. 181).

In essence, the ambivalence and contrasting traits of both countries put Amal into an emotional and social limbo. She could not decide whether to live with an American mode of life or continue with her ancestral style of living. Surviving in America requires one to adapt to its customs and code of living. As she mentions, "I rejoined the working society, stepping unobtrusively into the steady American flow" (p. 245). Amal thought adhering to these codes would result in the loss of her Arab roots and her ancestral traditions, but not following them would cause her alienation and oddity. She changes her appearance and her persona and becomes Amy, away from all the Arabic ways, and immerses herself in the American liberal lifestyle. Amy or Amal decides to jump from persona to persona as per need, whenever required. Amal, in her heart, and Amy, for her adjustment to the

new environment, take a toll on her mental health as she juggles between both sides of her identity.

### Conclusion

Postcolonialism deals with modes, thoughts, representations, and particular values of countries that were formerly colonised. It deals with the attitudes, common practices, and things associated with these countries in the past and present. While many theorists have come up with different discourses and concepts, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Bhabha have attained a central place in changing the course of Postcolonial studies. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and ambivalence are the leading concerns of diasporic studies. The character of Amal challenges Bhabha's argument that the colonised subject is always in motion, moving from one side to another, occupying an ambivalent state. According to Bhabha, the swaying between two polarities makes it impossible for the colonisers to give them any fixed status, whose repetition of stereotypes acknowledges that such fixity cannot be achieved. Amal, through the process of assimilation and integration, adapts to a foreign culture. However, she has changed herself strategically. Inside her heart, she still considers herself Amal, not Amy. She is Amy for American culture. Similarly, Bhabha's notion of in-betweenness, in which the people of the subcontinent comes in the crossroad between the two cultures and ultimately struggles to find where should they go and what should they be, applies to the Palestinian community to the limit that unlike people of the subcontinent, Palestinian people (Amal) knows her roots lie deep in Palestine and wants to be back to her country. Thus, Bhabha's theory of hybridity and ambivalence falls short when it comes to Palestinian Literature ([Abu Amrieh & Zuhair, 2020](#)). Ultimately, this research advances postcolonial discourse by indicating that Bhabha's framework of hybridity is fundamentally inadequate for capturing the rooted identities and lived realities of actively war-torn communities.

## Future Recommendations

This research may pave the way for analysis of other Palestinian and postcolonial/diasporic literature in connection to the formation of identity under the light of intersectionality theory. The concepts of ambivalence and hybridity can also be explored to examine other literary and non-literary texts in identifying how the in-betweenness of forced identities is navigated.

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