



*Religious Dilemma and Identity Crisis in Susan Abulhawa's  
Mornings in Jenin*

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المعضلة الدينية وأزمة الهوية في رواية سوزان أبو الهوى صباحات في جنين.

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## **Abstract:**

*Arab American literature is a comprehensive subject in which researchers examine and analyze several topics that are considered controversial in the Arab world, highlighting the numerous conflicts it has experienced and continues to face. Palestinians are considered one of the most common victims of Zionist occupation-related violence, assassinations, child snatching, and home demolitions. Many Arab American novelists, such as Susan Abulhawa, emphasized that religion is a fundamental element in the development and preservation of one's identity in a certain community. Mornings in Jenin (2010) is a literary work that explores the repercussions of social, ethnic, and war crimes in contemporary literature. It is the best example of portraying the impact of Israeli attacks on Palestinians over many years, affecting their psychology and religious identities. Religion often plays a significant role in shaping personal identity, social connections, cultural norms, and moral values. This paper aims to explore the religious identity crisis of Abulhuja's family and how religion significantly influences the formation and reformation of their religious identity, focusing on Amal's and Ismael's loss of religious identity in particular. Therefore, the study explores the novel's portrayal of identity status and the factors contributing to religious identity loss.*

**Keywords:** *Child snatching, Israeli attacks, Mornings in Jenin, Religious identity, and Victims of Zionist.*

## **المخلص:**

يعد الأدب العربي الأمريكي موضوعًا شاملاً يدرس فيه الباحثون العديد من الموضوعات التي المثيرة للجدل في العالم العربي، مع تسليط الضوء على الصراعات العديدة التي عاشها وما زال يواجهها. يعتبر الفلسطينيون من أكثر ضحايا العنف المرتبط بالاحتلال الصهيوني والاعتقالات وخطف الأطفال وهدم المنازل. أكد العديد من الروائيين العرب الأمريكيين، مثل سوزان أبو الهوى، أن الدين عنصر أساسي في تنمية هوية الفرد والحفاظ عليها في مجتمع معين. "صباحات في جنين" عمل أدبي يستكشف تداعيات الجرائم الاجتماعية والعرقية وجرائم الحرب في الأدب المعاصر. تعتبر الرواية أفضل مثال على تصوير تأثير الهجمات الإسرائيلية على الفلسطينيين على مدى سنوات عديدة، والتي أثرت على نفسياتهم وهويتهم الدينية. حيث يهدف هذا البحث إلى استكشاف أزمة الهوية الدينية لعائلة أبو الحجة وكيف يؤثر الدين بشكل كبير على تشكيل وإعادة تشكيل هويتهم الدينية، مع التركيز على فقدان أمل وإسماعيل لهويتهم الدينية على وجه الخصوص. ولذلك تستكشف الدراسة تصوير الرواية لحالة الهوية والعوامل المساهمة في فقدان الهوية الدينية. الكلمات المفتاحية: خطف الأطفال، الاعتداءات الإسرائيلية، صباحات في جنين، الهوية الدينية، ضحايا الصهيونية.

## **Introduction:**

### **Religion's Role in Contemporary Conflicts:**

Religion has always been a central theme in literature, providing writers with a rich source of material for exploring complex moral and ethical issues. Religion's role in contemporary conflicts is a complex and multifaceted issue, intersecting with ethnic, national, economic, and political dimensions. The influence of religion on conflicts can be both direct and indirect, serving as a primary motivator for violence in some cases, while in others, it acts as a tool for political mobilization or as a means to assert identity. Religion often serves as a key component of individual and communal identity. In multi-ethnic or multi-religious societies, religious differences can become focal points for division, especially when they overlap with ethnic or national identities. Conflicts may arise when groups feel their religious identity is threatened or marginalized, leading to clashes over both tangible resources and intangible values.

Religion is a limitless source of inspiration for the depths of human existence. Many agree that the conflict between the Islamic world and the West is primarily political, but religion is often considered one of the main reasons. In the West, Islam is considered a fundamentally violent doctrine that prompts worshippers to commit terrorist acts. In fact, Islam teaches

mercy, justice, and respect for the basic rights of the individual. Secularists may view all religions as fundamentally divisive and obscurantist. There is a symbiotic relationship between religion and current politics: each influences and worsens the other. It is necessary to point out that none of the so-called "world religions" encourage or condone murder; all of them are based on the disciplined rejection of violence.

Historically, when a region encounters fighting, religion often becomes involved in the conflicts and impacts the situation. This occurred during the First Crusade in 11<sup>th</sup> -century Europe and continues to happen in the Middle East and Palestine nowadays. However, continuous warfare may hurt people's hopes and desires, relationships, and religion. It can also lead to a loss of faith and the belief that they have nothing to lose.

In the twentieth century, it was widely considered that secularism was the new philosophy and that religion would no longer play an essential role in the world's politics. However, in almost every major world religion, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, aggressive and deeply rooted political faith has challenged this belief, identifying the need to bring God or religion back from the margins, where they have been relegated in modern secular society.

However, there is still a place for violence. All religious fundamentalism stems from a fear of annihilation, believing that

contemporary society seeks to eradicate genuine religion. These groups' ideologies and myths, sometimes fiercely nihilistic and apocalyptic, reflect a deep fear of annihilation (e.g., religious Zionists' Messianic eschatology in Israel). Fundamentalists believe they fight for survival, and when they feel threatened, they will lash out violently. The history of Jewish fundamentalism shows the issues of the dispossession of Palestinians have become an essential issue for them.

Susan Abulhawa, an Arab-American novelist, is a human rights activist who depicts the struggle between Palestine and Israel. She is a unique writer who combines current sensibilities with a realistic perspective. She is trying to achieve a true synthesis of Eastern and Western spiritual and religious thought of philosophy, which is a very important feature of her novel and should receive great attention in our current world of religious intolerance and racial wars. Exploring the religious vision as expressed in Abualhawa's novel *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) with particular reference to our own time has been a very enlightening and enriching experience since it enlarges one's vision of life and society.

Abualhawa's religious, cultural, and social, beliefs do not contradict modern perspectives. Identity formation is greatly influenced by various factors, such as personal, ethnic, cultural, and social factors. She argued that religious and ethical ideals

should not be viewed as situational phenomena emerging naturally. She asserted that religion is above our limited understanding of life and cannot be replaced by other systems. The novel explores the significant role of religion in shaping characters' identities, highlighting their differing faith relations. Abualhawa continues to illuminate modern man's crisis-ridden inner self. She delves into existential crises like the value of religion, the consequences of personal decisions, and the moral dilemmas associated with religion. The paper aims to explore many identity statuses and causes of loss, as well as the poignant and complex relationship between religion and the identity of its two central characters, Ismael and Amal.

### **The Role of Religion in Identity Formation:**

Religious differences can contribute to creating conflicts. The relationship between religion and contemporary conflicts is inherently negative. Understanding the nuanced role of religion in conflicts is crucial for developing effective strategies to address the underlying causes of violence. Religion cannot be separated from identity; it forms an integral component of humanity. Recent decades have witnessed an increasing interest in religion. It is a major domain of people's lives around the world because it can provide a source of attachment Security, social support, comfort, the meaning of life, and self-control.

Previously, religious studies were seen as a peripheral and minor field lacking significance in the world. Since it is just one of those liberal arts fields with no cash value, it is not important or useful like economics, political science, business, medicine, or physics. Other social dimensions such as ethnicity and religious affiliation are crucial in identity formation, providing meaning and legitimacy for life activities, maintaining group identity, and strengthening relationships. Therefore, George N. Atiyeh asserts that understanding any culture demands the study of both religion and language because they are "the two basic components of any culture." (Atiyeh, 1977, p.73).

Religion's role in identity formation is a complex and multifaceted aspect of human development that affecting people and societies. Culture, religion, and identity are inextricably related since each contributes to the construction of identity. Beit-Hallahmi (1991) argues that most individuals do not choose a religion but instead are born into one. Therefore, religious identity is defined as "an individual's distinctive religious group affiliation and respective beliefs" (Beit-Hallahmi, 1991, p. 87). Individuals are called religious when they act according to the beliefs of the organization to which they belong. According to Molaiy et al. religious identity is the "sense of belonging to a religious group due to the acceptance an individual has of the group's beliefs." (Molaiy, 2016, p. 185).

In most cultures, individuals owe their religious identity to the religion of their parents rather than choose it. The preceding definitions emphasized the idea that religious identification refers to an individual's association with a certain group as a result of sharing its members' perspectives. Therefore, every individual is a member of different social and cultural groups, making their identity a complex process. The term "identity crisis" generally refers to a period of uncertainty and confusion about an individual's sense of self and belonging. (Baumeister et al., 2018, p. 4). In the context of the novel it refers to an individual's transition between two identities and the characters might undergo such crises as they navigate the complexities of their identity in the midst of political upheavals and personal challenges as Dombrovskis (2016) states that:

Identity crises occur in people and during the transitional stages of life when young people seek to answer questions concerning what career to choose, what political or religious group to follow. Therefore, based on the above definitions, an identity crisis emerges when the individual feels fear about his future, which seems to him ambiguous or diffused. It also emerges due to the sense of inconsistency the individual feels as a result of wavering between two or more alternatives regarding his racial or religious belonging. (Dombrovskis, 2016, p.311)



Political leaders and movements exploit religious beliefs to mobilize support, and frame conflicts in religious terms to rally followers. This can include portraying opponents as a threat to religion, thus justifying violence in defense of religious principles. Some contemporary conflicts with religious dimensions are rooted in territorial disputes, where land holds significant religious value for multiple groups. Jerusalem is a clear example of this, as it is a holy city for Jews, Christians, and Muslims and a focal point in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In such cases, religious significance exacerbates regional conflicts, making the situation more complex.

In her novel *Mornings in Jenin*, Palestinian-American author Susan Abulhawa grapples with the religious dilemma faced by the characters as they navigate personal, political, and social challenges in the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Susan Abualhawa's literary works deal with the issue of Arab American identity. Her perceives a profound relationship between religion and literature. Abualhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) is a discussion of the political, historical, social, and religious status of Palestine and the events that still plague the Middle East from 1948 until the present day. The novel follows the lives of Ismael and Amal and their family as they struggle to survive and resist the Israeli occupation of their land. Throughout the novel, religion plays a significant role in shaping the characters'

identities, beliefs, and actions, highlighting the complex interplay between faith, ideology, and politics in the context of the ongoing conflict.

Jenin is a Palestinian city in the Northern West Bank, about 75 km from northern Jerusalem. It is a miniature Palestinian image with a stolen identity, a country whose name has been engraved on the global map under the name Palestine for centuries, then suddenly changed to Israel. The title highlights the bright mornings amid the darkness of war. The novel deals with the depiction of religion and the impact of El Nakba on the faith and culture of Abulhuja's family. It represents a shift in identity and depicts the real suffering of four generations of Abulhuja's family during the Israeli attacks. These generations range from ordinary farmers in Ein Hod to refugees on the Jenin campus. The novel supports the status of Palestinians and describes in detail scenes of Israeli crimes, violence, and discrimination "In 1948, more than half of the Palestinians were expelled from their towns and villages, largely by a deliberate Israeli policy of 'transfer' and ethnic cleansing." (Masalha. 2012, p. 73)

Israeli Forces attacked Jenin and destroyed the camp in 2002. When Abulhawa visited Jenin as an observer of the 2002 conflict, she stated, "the horrors I witnessed there gave me the urgency to tell this story". In fact, the roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict are based on racism of religion, ethnicity and

nationalism. The atrocities and massacres that lasted over 16 days prompted Abulhawa to write *Mornings in Jenin*, telling the stories of trauma, loss, and resistance following the one-sided conflicts of 1948, 1967, 1982, and 2002. (Hamdi 2011, p.22). The novel is the best example of showing the impact of war not only on a person's psyche but also on his religion and cultural condition. She masterfully exemplifies how the attack changed the Palestinians' lives upside down in general and Abulhuja's family in particular. Since her novel provides static information about the political, social, and cultural shifts that occurred in Palestine throughout many years of Israeli attacks.

### **Religious Rituals and Identity Formation:**

Religion is often closely tied to cultural identity. It provides individuals with a sense of belonging to a particular community, shaping their cultural practices, traditions, and customs. Abualhawa's novel serves as a spiritual spark for spreading religious issues and sheds light on the inner self of a modern man who endures crises, especially his religious identity, as a result of modern lifestyles and wars. Arab American authors are recognized as effective sources for representing Palestinian issues, Handal asserted that: "As Arabs and Muslims living or born outside the Arab world, we are the ones that the West has most access to, we play an important role in the way others

define us, the image we project is vital and our voices an important force of change." (Majaj, 2006, p.4).

*Mornings in Jenin* depicts the story of the Abulheja family, who were exiled from their hometown of Ein Hod by Israel in 1948 and sent to a camp in Jenin. The Abulheja family, which includes different generations: Amal's grandfather Yehya, her parents Hasan and Dalia, and her brothers Yousef and Ismael/David, are all subjected to detachment from the land of Ein Hod at different levels. Amal and Ismael are the most influenced as a result of such tragedies. It depicts a loss of their identities as Muslims and creates a religious gap in their personal lives. (Rolston, 2014, p. 42)

The novel is a political and religious protest in which individuals' identities are shattered and fragmented as a result of childhood trauma, culture shock, and cultural conflict created by war and exile. Its deep insights into religion, society, and culture are particularly relevant in today's complicated predicament. The story illustrates an alteration in identity and discusses the actual agony of four generations of Abulhuja's family throughout the Israeli terrorist attack.

These generations vary from local farmers in Ein Hod to refugees on the Jenin campus. The novel advocates for Palestinian rights and vividly depicts images of Israeli atrocities, violence, and prejudice. The novel begins by describing the

Abulhuj family before the Israeli occupation. It shows the family as traditional farmers enjoying a peaceful and pleasant life in Ein Hod, a small Palestinian village. Abulhawa opens the story with a hint of the true religion that this family adheres to, stating,

It was still dark, only the babies sleeping, when the villagers of Ein Hude prepared to perform morning salat the first daily prayers [...] Wudu, the ritual cleaning before salat sent murmurs of shehada into the morning fog and hundreds of whispers proclaimed the oneness of Allah and his prophet Mohammed. (Abulhawa, p. 11)

Islam is built on five pillars: testifying that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God; establishing prayer; paying zakat; Hajj; and fasting Ramadan. Abulhawa observes that these Palestinian farmers are Muslims, and the Salat is a fundamental component of their daily lives. Their days begin with the morning Salat, followed by shehada. The last pillar is the essential element of being Muslim. They are asked to pray five times a day. Palestinians identify as Muslims by following these Islamic traditions. Palestinian practice of these daily religious rituals demonstrates their religious affiliation.

Through the lives of its characters, the novel showcases Palestinian customs and traditions, highlighting the richness of Palestinian culture, which includes language, food, celebrations, and the resilience of the human spirit amidst adversity. However,

Abulhawa's literature creates a trusting sense for readers to comprehend and respect the Palestinian culture and heritage; this is confirmed by the employment of the phrases Wudu, Salat, Shehada, Allah, and Mohammad.

Abulhawa shows the value of prayer as a means of achieving aspirations, as she says: "Today they prayed outdoors and with particular reference because it was the start of the olive harvest. Best to climb the rocky hills with a clean conscience on such an important occasion." (Abulhawa 11). The olive harvest is a tremendous opportunity for Palestinians, and they constantly strive to generate large harvest crop yields. However, they choose God as a route to fulfilling their desires. So, as much as they pray to God, they gather strength and climb the olive trees. These religious beliefs and rituals can create a strong relationship between individuals, reinforcing a collective identity that transcends individual distinctions.

Abulhawa also refers to the significance of El Haj, an essential pillar of Islam for all Muslims, as indicated by a quote. "His neighbor has always a quality of wisdom [...] He became Haj Salem after his pilgrimage to Mecca, and the new title bestowed him with age beyond that of Yehya. (Abulhawa, p. 12) In other words, this speech indicates that the word "Haj" in Arab societies refers to the elderly or anyone who visits Mecca, even if he is young. Moreover, Mecca is a holy place, and Muslims should at

least visit this sacred place once in their lives. Therefore, Abualwa reinforced the significance of this pillar in terms of Islam and Palestinian religious identity. Through Salem's journey to Mecca, the author clarifies his identity as a Palestinian Muslim and promotes Palestinian identity through Islam.

Abulhuja's family and all Palestinians consider God to be the source of power. They state, "My Lord Allah, let your will be done on this day" (Abulhawa, p. 11). They consistently seek God's satisfaction and hold onto his mercy. Abulhuja's ancestors were Muslims, and Yahya's Quran book belonged to his grandfather once before. Yahya's grandfather taught him the Quran orally because he could not read it, but he could only memorize and feel its beauty. Although Abulhuja's family has a sincere relationship with God, the main reason behind picking up the Quran book by Yahya before leaving the Olive Land is to thank God for his blessings and to ask him to preserve them because they believe in the power of God. Moreover, Abulhawa emphasizes in her statements the importance of the Holy Book (the Holy Qur'an), which contains all the laws and principles of Islam.

Yehya issued his command an old Quran from the pocket of his dishdashe. The holy book had belonged to his grandfather, who had nurtured these groves before him. Although Yahya could not read, he liked to look at the

pretty calligraphy while he recited surahs from memory (Abulhawa, p. 13).

Abulahwa employs Dalia's character to emphasize another Islamic ritual, which is the wearing of hijab. According to her, "She did not always remember to wear a traditional covering of hijab and let the wind roam her hair." (Abulhawa, p. 14). This suggests that Palestinian girls begin to wear hijab at an early age, as Dalia is in her adolescence. Hijab is considered one of the distinct characteristics that Palestinians use to demonstrate their self-representation. Thus, Abulhawa expressed this through the adoption of the term hijab, which Palestinian women used to wear as a symbol of their religion, culture, and identity.

Abulhawa identifies the actual purpose of Zionists in Palestine by remarking, "Jews have always lived here. That's why so many more are here now, isn't it? While we believe they were simply seeking refuge, poor souls just wanting to live, they've been amassing weapons to drive us from our homes" (Abulhawa, p. 26). Palestinians believe that Jews are coming to Palestine to occupy their country and force them to leave their land and establish a Jewish state in Palestine "Hasan, they're going to take the land. They've launched a campaign across the world calling Palestine 'a land without people'. They're going to make it a Jewish homeland." (Abulhawa, p. 25).



Religious extremism has a direct role in some contemporary conflicts, with radical groups using violent means to pursue their vision of religious purity or dominance. Zionist extremist groups often interpret religious texts in ways that justify violence against others, including both outsiders and members of their faith. Abulhawa portrayed the Zionists' first attack through their exploding bombs "Damn Zionists! What the hell do they want from us?" (Abulhawa, p.23) Despite all of the weapons that the Jews launched at the Ein Hod, Palestinians rely on religion as their primary defense, striving for God's support in hard conditions to protect themselves from Zionist aggression. Yahya raises his hands and states:

We'll put it in the wise hands of Allah and Hasbiya Allah wa niaamal wakeel. Furthermore, he is always creating peace upon his family member and say —Allah will protect us, son and I will protect you and your mother and brother (Abulhawa, p.27).

Another reference to the religious indication of the novel is the use of the religious names of the novel's characters, such as Yahya, Yousef, David, Ismael, etc., to exemplify prophets' names in the Quran. Abulhawa relies on these names to capture readers' attention, highlight Palestinians' strong religious connection, and seek God's help in times of threat. While the novel does not delve into the religious practices of Islam per se, the Muslim identity of

the characters serves as a backdrop to the broader narrative of Palestinian displacement and suffering. The Muslim character's background is integral to their identity and shapes their experiences and the injustices they endure. Through the depictions of David/Ismael and Amal, the novel invites reflection on the universal themes of displacement, belonging, and the search for one's roots, which resonate with many across different cultures and religions.

Abulhawa indicates that the Palestinian families wanted only to live in peace on their land and rely on God to support them in doing so. "Attachment to God, land, and family was the core of their being, and that is what they defended and sought to keep." (Abulhawa p. 28). After the Zionist occupation of Abulhuja's village of Ein Hod, they forced the families to vacate their lands and sanctities "The village was laid to ruin... it had taken only hours for the world to turn upside down" (Abulhawa, p. 29)

### **(Ismael and Amal) the Religious Identity Restoration**

Abulhawa believed that religion was essential to both individual and societal well-being. Her insightful thoughts on religion and culture are highly relevant and effective, intended to counter the present tendencies of fragmentation and dispersion. Palestinians experienced a very critical period known as El Nakba. During that period, they were subjected to

several traumatic events, including the loss of family members, religion, and land, all of which led to a sense of despair and migration to an unknown nation. El Nakba did not just force Palestinians to abandon their homeland; it also destroyed family cohesiveness. It is the turning point in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since it symbolized the boundary between Palestine before the Israeli attacks and the loss of their identities following the foundation of the Jewish state.

Israel's corps brutally attacked and destroyed everything in Ein Hod as Abulhawa declares that: "The Associated Press reported that the Israeli planes and infantry had violated the Palestinian truce by the unprovoked attack, and bombs rained as Dalia ran from shelter with terror-stricken Yousef and screaming baby Ismael.". Dalia Hasan's wife was moving from place to place to keep her children safe from Israeli attacks; eventually, she lost all of her family members. "The village was laid to ruin and Dalia lost all but two sisters. The father who had burned her hand lay charred in the same town square". (Abualhawa, p. 25).

This loss did not influence her spirit; she was moving on, protecting her children and searching for a safe place far from the Jewish soldier, as Abulhawa stated: "Dalia kept him clutched to her chest, afraid to let him down despite the heavy load" (p. 29); Dalia, despite her efforts to protect her family,

lost her youngest son, Ismael, who was kidnapped by a Jewish soldier. This accident illustrates the beginning of Dalia's traumatic state "one instant, six-month-old Ismael was at her chest, in her motherly arms. In the next Ismael was gone" (Abualhawa, p. 32).

Abulhuja's family's fate was changed after Ismael's kidnapping and seriously affected Abulhuja's life as Abulhawa states "An instant can crush a brain and change the course of life, the course of history" (Abualhawa, p. 32) Dalia's experience with a lost child and land led her to disconnect from life, both physically and psychologically. This detachment can be observed in her inability to reunite with her family, including her daughter Amal. Dalia is illustrating her failure as a mother in the new state of psychological estrangement in which she finds herself as she "could not find the will to discipline [Amal] physically, as she had Yousef." (Abualhawa, p.32)

This tragic accident has created a void in Dalia's existence and shows her emotional turmoil due to this, as Abulhawa comments (Volkan, 1994, p.110), "Dalia stopped and so did time. She screamed like she hadn't when her father burned her hand. A loud, penetrating, consuming, unworldly scream from a mother's deepest agony... An instant can crush a brain and change the course of life." (Abualhawa, p 32).

Moshe, a Jewish soldier, decides to kidnap a Palestinian child. Moshe kidnaps Ismael from his family and takes him to his wife, Jolanta, who has not given birth. Moshe is a Jew who denies God's power, and he is the only one who controls our fate. He blames God for being unfair in his decision to give the Palestinians gorgeous children, while he did not do so with his wife; "Jolanta had suffered so much; how could God deny her the elemental gift of motherhood while granting so many healthy children to Arabs, who were already so numerous?" (Abualhawa, p. 36).

Moshe is successful in fulfilling his plan and surprises his wife with the new child. Jolanta renames Ismael and gives him a new identity and religion "then his name is David in the name of my father" (Abualhawa, p.37). As a result, his entire behaviour has changed, Ismael is a Muslim-born child raised in a Jewish family. He learns everything about Jews and becomes the first rival of his own family. As a result, his entire demeanor, including his name, has transformed.

Abulhawa uses David's name to represent the messenger of Allah to guide Israelis. Ismael (David) symbolizes two different religions (Judaism and Islam), indirectly referencing the story of prophet Ibrahim and his son Ismael. Ibrahim accepted God's decision to slaughter his son, despite pain, and Ismael's strong belief in God positively perceived the decision.

Abulhawa's character, Ismael, experienced such a sacrifice, creating pain in his family.

In this novel, religion is closely linked to the Palestinian people's land, culture, and history. The novel emphasizes the importance of religion, stories, memories, and traditions in preserving this heritage, especially in the face of attempts to erase or marginalize Palestinian history. The mutual relationship between Palestinians and their homeland reflects their history and family identity. Undoubtedly, family heritage and cultural identity are passed down through Arab names, as every kid carries the names of his father and grandfather up to the fifth or sixth degree of ancestry. Furthermore, the rootedness of the tree is symbolic of the rootedness of the family. In both the novel and real life, Palestinian families are often scattered, vanished, and eliminated from history. Abulhawa's inclusion of the Abulhejas' family tree at the beginning of the novel may be seen as an attempt to reunite them and keep them all together.

Ismael is a Muslim who later becomes a Jewish soldier fighting Muslims. He was raised as a Jew and deeply nurtured hatred towards the Palestinians. Ismael (David) is one of the Abulheja family members, and his inclusion serves as a complex symbol of the broader themes of religiosity, loss, identity, and the cycle of violence that the novel explores.

Abualhawa reflects the presence of David's and Ismael's respective religions with this transformation. She indirectly reveals that "Muslims and Israelis are cousins: God revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad, who belongs to Abraham's son Ismael, while the Torah is for Moses, who belongs to Israel (Jacob), Abraham's grandson".

In the novel context, Ismael's character is not explicitly detailed under this name, as the primary focus is on a character born as Ismael but later known as David. This transformation in identity from Ismael to David itself is a potent symbol of the novel's themes of loss, identity, and the deep impacts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, discussing the characters known both as Ismael and David can provide insights into the author's exploration of these themes.

One of the central religious dilemmas faced by the characters in the novel is the tension between their Muslim faith and their identities due to the violence and suffering they are subjected to as a result of the Israeli occupation. The themes of liminality and double awareness are another form of identity deconstruction. They play significant roles in shaping the narrative and the characters' lives, reflecting the complex identity struggles and the psychological impacts of living in a conflict zone. Both hover in one environment when two or more cultures with different faiths, nation-states, ethnicities, or

linguistic groups interact, and concerns about transnational and trans-cultural collaboration reveal a sort of heterogeneity, pluralism, multiplication, diversity, de-culture, or de-identification.

Liminality is defined in Latin as the threshold that divides one space from another. The anthropologist Arnold van Gennep coined it as a symbol for rites of life, which are rituals done to transition an individual from one phase of life to another. In the twentieth century, the term was employed in literature to convey an ethic of life that oscillates between two cultural extremes. In literature, liminality defines "to the idea of the betwixt and between, notions of being neither here nor there." However, in the novel, liminal individuality is present in the colonial framework through the story of David or Ismael, who was born Palestinian and raised Israelite. (van Gennep, 1977, p.65).

Liminality refers to the experience of being on the threshold between two different existential planes, cultures, or states of being. For the characters in *Mornings in Jenin*, liminality is a constant state due to the ongoing conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. This is not only a physical reality, manifested in the displacement and the occupation, but also a psychological and cultural phenomenon. The characters often find themselves caught between the past and the present, between



what was Palestine and what is Israel, between their memories of home and the reality of refugee camps or diaspora.

David's (Ismael) character offers a unique perspective on the Muslim identity through the lens of someone who was born into it but raised outside of it, in stark opposition to his birthright. This duality presents a rich ground for exploring themes of identity and belonging. It also leads to a loss of identity for Ismael as a Muslim and creates a religious gap in his personal life. His journey back to his roots, the discovery of his true heritage, and the reconciliation of his dual identity underscore the novel's message about the inextricable link between personal identity and cultural heritage. His struggle with his identity, the pain of realizing his origins, and the eventual empathy he develops for the Palestinian cause highlight the novel's exploration of the human side of the conflict, transcending political and religious boundaries. David, through his journey, embodies the potential for understanding, reconciliation, and the breaking down of barriers built by hatred and wars.

David inherits his biological Palestinian parents' traits, but his false identity turns him into an Israelite with total authority over others. While he serves in Israel's troops, he meets his brother, Hasan, he suspects his real identity and suspects that he is an Arab Muslim man. In fact, this doubt arises when his cousin Ilan

tells him that he is not Jewish. Later, when Moshe reveals the horrible truth about David's real family, David is caught between illusion and reality. He feels that he lives as a stranger, his identity has fluctuated between Muslim and Jewish, Arab and Israeli, leading to an eternal conflict and a constant sense of suspicion and hatred towards those around him. David's family breaks down; his wife cannot tolerate it and asks for a divorce, and their son Jacob lives with his father while Uri lives with his mother.

David, like rootless individuals who belong nowhere, finds no relief even when he seeks solace in alcohol or solitude. He acknowledges that he is on the borders of two cultures (the colonized and the colonizing), with evident "cultural gaps.". He finds himself in-betweenness "Either he is Arab or Israeli? Or is he Muslim or Jewish? Learning the truth of his origin so late in his life had indicated every thought, every love, and every conviction that had built David into himself... to learn that his very existence was the fruit of Arab love; that his first breath had a waited him at the arch of Arab woman's womb" (Abualhawa, p.200)

"Mornings in Jenin" does not focus heavily only on the religious aspects of its characters' lives but rather on their humanity and experiences as part of the Palestinian diaspora. The story of Ismael/David, against the backdrop of Muslim identity,

becomes a powerful narrative about the loss and rediscovery of self-amidst the ravages of conflict, making a profound statement on the resilience of the human spirit and the complex tapestry of identity that defines us all.

David's in-betweenness condition allowed him to lose his confrontation zone as Abulhawa refers "the two truths of one man each as true as the other, opposite the other, repelling the other in an infinite struggle for David's soul." (Abualhawa, p. 200) Therefore, he struggled with his true sense of belonging "You and I are the remains of unfulfilled legacy, 54 heirs to a kingdom of stolen identities." (Abulhawa, p. 211), As a result, he avoids alcohol and seeks to bridge cultural borders, creating a third place for himself, as he emphasizes in a post on Sara's Web: "I'll never be wholly Jew nor Muslim. Never wholly Palestinian nor Israeli. Your acceptance made me content to be merely human" (Abualhawa, p.243) David endeavored to realize the reality of his identity and religion. Finally, he successfully returns to his biological family and religion.

While liminality restricts the two cultures confronting a person in an exile or colonial environment, double consciousness encloses them, creating an inner "twoness" as depicted in Amal's character. Abulhawa illustrates Amal as a younger generation diasporic member born as a refugee in Jenin Camp. She was sharing her parents' perspective on stolen land, observing the

physical and psychological damage caused by the 1967 war on the camp and her family members. She fails to feel safe even while surrounded by them. Amal is Abulhuja's youngest daughter, she is most influenced by the Zionist attack that costs the lives of almost all of the members of her family.

Amal is undergoing an enormous self-loss because her cultural heritage, social life, property, and sense of belonging are lost. Feeling lost is one of the most difficult effects of trauma on the personality. Therefore, her uncle Darweesh decided to keep his promise to his brother by placing Amal in a safe place. He urged her to leave Jenin, as being a refugee creates failure and does not offer better opportunities to achieve the success that her father desired "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...Take it." (Abulhawa 112) He raised his voice and spoke to her sharply that the only way for her to fulfill her father's dream and become a successful woman was by departing Jenin someday, when your father and I meet again, I will have to report to my older brother how I set his daughter on the right path, the one he would have wanted you to take (Abulhawa, p. 112)

When Amal agreed to leave Jenin, her uncle cautioned her to keep her salat. Abulhawa emphasizes the significance of

praying in Palestinian daily life and confirms her Muslim identity "Study hard, and don't stray on your salat." (Abulhawa, p. 113). Amal was awarded a scholarship to America due to her high educational level. Amal felt lost and unable to recognize herself, she had numerous questions in her mind. So she felt the distinctions between her Arab and American identities " Who was I indeed! A pathetic orphan, stateless and poor, living off charity. The American scholarship was a gift I had no right to refuse." (Abulhawa, p. 129).

America is a country with enormous opportunities. As a result, it received a wave of immigrants from all over the world. Arabs are among the immigrants who come to this country in search of peace, fleeing religious disputes and political pressures imposed by the colonial occupation. Palestinians were compelled to flee their homes as a result of Israeli brutality. Furthermore, the Arab population in the United States is dominated by several ideologies that aim to explain their religious and ethnic uniqueness from other ethnicities because religion is one of the features that symbolize their own identity.

Amal arrived in America with the hope of creating the best version of herself, but eventually felt strange and unwelcome in her new land. During her walk through Philadelphia's

streets, she observed a stark contrast between the city's culture and her own country. There is a significant cultural gap between American and Arab cultures. Abulhawa uses Edward's Orientalism theory to illustrate the distinctions between Amal's culture and that of the Americans "I wandered among the contrasts of wealth and poverty... I found no commonality with the men and women who walked with purpose and self-possession". (Abualhawa, p.227) Abulhawa emphasizes the importance of having deep religious roots in a spiritually nourished culture since the notion of culture reflects her strong belief in religion.

Amal's tendency to start a new life and find her self-centered fulfillment in the new land is apparent through many signs, one of which is the change in her name, Amal became Amy. This implies that her decision to change her name demonstrates her determination to liberate herself from the burden of the memories associated with that name. She also believes that simply changing her name will help her fit in with American society. Then, her need for a strong identity is apparent in her strategy towards integrating into the new realities of the American setting. "Amal of the steadfast refugees and tragic beginnings was now Amy in the land of privilege and plenitude" (p. 179) She tries to belong to

American society, as the phrase 'to belong' has been repeated a few times. (Hall, 1996, p. 4).

When she landed and was picked up by her host parent, she tried to show her gratitude "I answered, unsure of the proper American response to her gracious enthusiasm." (Abualhawa, p. 169). The word 'unsure' shows her confusion about the differences between American's and Arab's identity since Amal is completely conscious of this barrier. Showing gratitude in Arab has various way, according to Amal, and is not limited to a 'thank you.' It could be "May Allah bless the hands that give me this gift." "Beauty is in your eyes that find me pretty"; "May God extend your life,"; and Arabs still have many versions of it. This is another indication showing her Islamic heritage. She could touch a sense of belonging and even escape from the foreign barrier when she uttered these words.

The Arab or Muslim culture contradicts American culture, therefore, Amal lived in a state of in-betweenness. Therefore, she started to establish a new identity and belong to a new country "I felt diminished, out of place, and eager to belong" (Abulhawa 137). She was raised far away from Arab and Islamic culture and kept rejoining herself in American society. As a result, her behavior began to change, exhibiting unacceptable and forbidden behaviors in Islam. Amal had lost

herself and unconsciously forgotten her identity and religion. She was engaging in unethical behavior, which is forbidden in Islam "I metamorphosed into an unclassified Arab\_ Western hybrid, unrooted and unknown.

I drank alcohol and dated several men [...] I spun in cultural vicissitude, wandering in and out of the American ethos until I lost my way. I fell in love with Americans and even felt that love reciprocated. I lived in the present, keeping the past hidden away until I lost my way" (Abulhawa, p.173)

Amal tries to change her cultural and religious points of view into American ethos to conform to American society. She has committed sins despite she always remembering that in Islam "Khamr or alcohol" is haram and prohibited because she is undergoing in cultural change. Amal adopts a fragmented persona by avoiding nostalgia and adopting a dual identity, yet she feels deeply guilty and shameful for betraying herself and her family. She states: "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." (Abualhawa, p.174).

Amal starts to deviate from the religious beliefs of her family as a Muslim. Abulhawa discusses Amal's religious identity transformation due to living in "El Ghurba" and the war's impact on Palestinians' identity and religion, illustrating the



conceptual framework of Amal. As a refugee, experiences an identity crisis, she constantly moves between the US, Lebanon, and Palestine, leading to a fragmented sense of home. The term 'to belong' has been repeated several times as evidence showing Amal's desire to blend into American culture. Amal is still aware that she still belongs to the Arab family and Arab culture. Thus, she reverses her cultural and religious beliefs into an American ethos where she defines herself as "an unclassified Arab Western hybrid, unrooted and unknown". Amal was experiencing cultural change, and she kept doing it when she was in America. (Cohen, 1997: p. 3). The following statement shows how desperate Amal is to conform to American society.

Amal's efforts to establish a new life in America are hindered by her tragic past, which she describes as "still with me". (Abuahawa, p.174) She cannot endure these dreadful flashes of memory, which blur her identity and destroy her new life. Her new behavior shows a contradiction to the Islamic lifestyle she used to have in Palestine, and this contradiction intensifies the identity crisis that she goes through by creating mental crises within her psyche. It seems that she holds a "sense of shame that [she] had betrayed her family – or worse, [herself]". (Abualhawa, p. 174)

The moral values instilled by religious teachings can shape behavior, influencing aspects such as honesty, charity, and virtue. Her unstable personality is associated with dissatisfaction with life, which leads to negative feelings of guilt/fear towards God and religion. Amal faced a cultural clash between Arab and American cultures, which shocked her. In Arab or Muslim culture, looking at the opposing gender for too long may be considered a sin. She was unable to fall in love because of religious oppression. Oppressed implied that Amal must free herself from religious and cultural traditions to convey her feelings, especially in love "something caught and oppressed by the strict ways of a religious culture that would not permit him even a gentle kiss on her cheek." (Abualhawa, p. 136)

Abualhawa's novel precisely conveys the issue of identity. She was not opposed to anyone's sincere desire for pleasure and development. But, she was strongly opposed to making pleasure-seeking an objective to destroy one's self. She aimed to guide others towards purity and holiness, which ultimately lead to pleasure. Amal's message resonates with a society that prioritizes acquisitiveness, status, and self-glorification. Amal seeks a state of reconciliation as she tries to heal her psychological trauma by meeting with her long-lost Israeli

brother, Ismael, or David, who is on a quest for his actual identity. When David asks Amal if she still considers him an "abstraction," she replies silently:

No.... You and I are the remains of an unfulfilled legacy, heirs to a kingdom of stolen identities and ragged confusion. In the complicity of siblinghood, of aloneness and unrootedness, Amal loved David instinctively, despite herself and despite what he had done or who he had become (Abualhawa, p. 270)

Belonging to a religious community may contribute to a person's sense of purpose and provide a source of comfort and guidance during challenging times. Despite avoiding her old culture and identity, nostalgia for her hometown of Palestine brought back memories of her homeland. Amal felt the desire to go back to Palestine again. The underlying structure of the novel reveals the conflict of religious ideas, which is apparent in the characters' depictions of Amal and David. The novel carries universal meanings: "human beings are united by similar sufferings, by the longing of different homelands and by the belief that there is nothing left after war, only other wars." (Safran, 1991, p.88),

Amal is affiliated with human "diasporic ontological existence", her buried nostalgia for her country and religion is aroused despite her deliberate efforts to hide it so that she

would be changed into a person with a one-sided identity in America, the identity of the dominant country that would embrace and give her some privileges. However, developing a one-sided identity on the ruins of the original and rooted one renders life destructive for her.

The novel also delves into the personal identities of its characters, particularly through the protagonist, Amal. Her journey from childhood in the Jenin refugee camp to adulthood in America and then back to Palestine is not just a physical journey but an exploration of her identity and religion. Through her eyes, readers see the struggle of balancing between two cultures, the pain of exile, and the quest for a sense of belonging and religion. Many religions provide a moral and ethical framework that guides individuals in their decision-making. The moral teachings of a religion can influence how adherents perceive right and wrong, contributing to the formation of their moral identity. (Abu Shomar, 2015, p.127)

Religion can influence an individual's self-concept by providing a framework for understanding their purpose in life. Many religions offer a narrative about the meaning of human existence, helping individuals find purpose and direction. Ismael and Amal's loss has disrupted her identity, leaving her without support from her parents, siblings, or home. Abulhawa's work

highlights how tragic events and the victims' suffering affect not only the protagonists' personal life, but also their mental health and religion. The work weaves together terrible incidents to illustrate the gravity of the al-Nakba and the ensuing violence that followed, which have haunted Palestinians for generations. War, loss of religion, displacement, and loss of identity and land are all reminders of painful and traumatic experiences. (Spivak, 1990: p. 60).

In conclusion, the story spans several generations, allowing readers to see how identity is transmitted, transformed, and sometimes challenged within families. The novel demonstrates how each generation experiences unique challenges, but they are linked by their religion, common history, and collective memory of and displacement. Abulhawa successfully reviews the Palestinian psyche and seeks to support the cultural and religious traditions of her people. She uses narrative memory to combat the Israeli regime's forcible displacement of Palestinians. She uses ethical and moral humanism when he portrays Palestinian characters. Abulhawa has a humanistic perspective on advocating for love and peace among those who carry the same sense of dispersion or displacement.

## **Conclusion:**

*Mornings in Jenin* is a deeply emotional exploration of how identity and heritage are preserved, challenged, and reshaped in the face of ongoing conflict and displacement. The Palestinian sense of national and religious identity is strong and often defined in opposition to the Israeli occupation. Their identity is closely tied to their land, homes, and the memory of their displacement, underscoring the significance of land not just as a physical space but as a symbol of heritage and identity. *Mornings in Jenin* is a thrilling and heart-wrenching novel that traces the lives of multiple generations of the Abulheja family. It explores the ambivalent identities of the Abulhaja family in the Diaspora, highlighting Hasan's inability to protect due to his child's loss in the 1967 massacres. Abulhawa's novel is a tribute to the resilience of the human spirit and the enduring power of family, history, and the land itself in shaping who we are. The concept of identity is multifaceted, reflecting both the personal and collective experiences of the Palestinian people. The novel tackles inner turmoil, homeliness, and feelings of loss and despair, a lack of orientation, self-alienation, and loss of religious identity particularly from a Muslim perspective of its main characters, Ismael and Amal.

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