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**A POST-COLONIAL STUDY OF DISLOCATION IN SUSAN
ABULHAWA'S, 'THE BLUE BETWEEN SKY AND WATER'**

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Abstract

This research paper aims at exploring the socio-political situation of the Palestinian-Israeli imbroglio which has been reflected in the selected novel of Susan Abulhawa. This is exploratory study and its methodology is qualitative in nature. The writer of this novel, 'The Blue between Sky and Water' is understood to have played as a Palestinian Subaltern spokesperson and she has emerged as one of the strongest voice of the Palestinian resistance. The selected work is studied in the context of Dislocation which is an integral aspect of Postcolonial theory. The purpose of this paper is to study the restriction imposed upon indigenous population as well as those who are put away in camps by Israelis as depicted in the selected novel. This paper is expected to

open an avenue that would encourage further application of the selected postcolonial tool on other literary texts.

Introduction

Through the novel, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, where the Israeli-Palestinian conflict serves as the backdrop, this paper examines how dislocation disintegrates family and some of the natives impose self-exile and disperse around the globe. But, they want to return home and live there. This dislocation germinates seeds of homelessness among Palestinians. Dislocating the individuals from their native home and marginalizing them to refugee camp is not only depriving them from the basics of life but also making them victim of sojournment for generations. Palestinians are scattered around the world because of the uneven circumstances and those who are still abiding in Palestine, are dislocated to West Bank and Gaza. The very land of Palestine is being dislocated by Israelis, with the intention, to relocate themselves as the new settlers there.

Dislocation is a concept of "Postcolonialism; a term which has been used since the late 1970s by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization" (Elleke, 2005, p. 6). Furthermore, Elleke describes it to be "seen as a result of the historic rupture between colonies and metropolis. Besides, it is often associated with metropolitan, diasporic, migrant, and minority spaces and postcolonial literature itself is now widely perceived as a reflection of that globalized world, or as a part of that cross-planet re-figuration" (Elleke, 2005, p. 38).

Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian author, has complex relationship with home, which she portrays through sense of dislocation in her character's narrative. The selected novel, plays out against the backdrop of a contested homeland and the construction of an imaginary land, inseparable from the specific conflict between Palestine and Israel. *The Blue between the Sky and Water* is the second novel by Abulhawa that depicts the forceful "creation of the State of Israel" (Bano, 2018, p. 1) by inflicting holocaust on the innocent Palestinians who were displaced from their ancestral home and were compelled to live a life of refugees throughout their lives.

However, Bano (2018) describes that the selected novel is the story of four generations, begins in Beit Daras, a rural Palestinian village near Gaza in the year 1947, where Baraka family lived comprising of a widow, Um Mamdouh and her three children. The family was living a happy life in the village before the tragedy broke on their village. The novel depicts Palestinian Muslims as a marginalized community, powerless enough to react and the slightest act of protest is nabbed by the colonial masters.

In addition, the novel *The Blue between Sky and Water* is an example of true literary narrative to historical denial that featured bold attempts by colonial regimes to excise the history of indigenous natives. The writer chooses to place the book in Gaza and illustrate the multitude wretched experiences Gazawis have had to endure since 1948 makes the novel all the more timely but the real story is one of resilience (Joseph, 2015). In this regard, Reno (2015) argues that:

Gaza is substituted as the largest open-air prison in the world. Thus, Susan Abulhawa transports readers the place, where freedom is top most priority but is as impalpable as

the sea air. The "blue" referred to in her latest novel's title is a place, on the horizon, where dominance and marginalization are powerless. It's also a place existing of its own independent size, where the spirits of the both living and departed twin (p. 1)

The term dislocation is in proximity with the concept of place which leads to the concept of home. Since Edward Said, Abulhawa is emerging the next spokesperson of Palestine. This paper intends to represent Palestinian issue from Postcolonial standpoint. As the problem of Palestine has garnered sufficient political attention. The point that needs to study is to look that nuance not from Zionists perspective democratically but from Postcolonial lens that deconstructs the so called Jews liberation movement and co-habituating of the mighty colonials over the land. This hold over land causes the dispersion of Palestinians.

The Theme of al-Nakba in Palestinian Literature:

The planned effort to efface Palestinians by the Jewry reached its pinnacle during the 1948 events when the natives were thrown out of their dear homeland and the foreigners occupied the land. Army raids, kidnapping, looting, plundering were the mechanics exploited by the Zionist for the stricture of the people of Palestine. The period that followed the Nakba reflects the miserable situation of the people of the Holy Land where they are helpless refugees living in camps. Almost 780,000 Palestinians who resided the land and now almost ten million exiled Palestinians are dispersed inside Israel, Middle East and Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Saloul, 2012, p. 130).

a) Textual Analysis of the Selected Passages

In *The Blue between the Sky and Water*, we can notice the dialectic relationship of indigenous natives with their land as it influences the course of the events of the novel. It is depicted in the very initial pages, where the writer compares the lives of Palestinians before Nakba and after it. As the text states, "those were perhaps the happiest days of the Baraka's lives together. Um Mamdouh was respected, Mamdouh was happy in his job of keeping bees, and Nazmiyeh became dreamy, looking prettier than ever" (Abulhawa, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, 2015, p. 21).

But these golden days of their lives were soon to be perished as a catastrophe came to the village in May 1948 when European Jewish immigrants declared a new state of Israel in place of ancient Palestine which was supported by the Britishers. As an unseen character of the novel foretells a war to Hajje that:

More Jews will return and the skies will rain death upon Beit Daras. The big-headed stubborn Bedrawasis of Beit Daras will not surrender. Time and again they will repel the enemy, but the enemy's fury is great. Native blood will pour from these hills into the river, and the war will be lost. (Abulhawa, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, 2015, p. 24)

The above-mentioned reference prophesized the arrival of the Jews, who will demolish the land, natives and everything. Abulhawa does not skip any instance of Jews occupation and settlement. She gives the remote history of the land of Bait Daras. The narrator is omnipresent, who knows each and every detail of the land from its birth to present day. Abulhawa also goes deep into the very Nakba of 1948, giving the details of recurrent attacks and execution of lots of people. This

transfer causes lots of unrepairable loss on the part of indigenous natives. The author states that situation very well: "...Nazmiyeh walked with others in the trek toward Gaza, deafened by the screams of her heart wanting to go back..." (Abulhawa, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, 2015, p. 29).

The issue of exile is very effectively portrayed by Abulhawa in her both novels as what Edward says in his essay, "Reflections on Exile":

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. (Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, 2013, p. 137)

Moreover, Abulhawa gives an eye witness account of the havoc in first part of the novel. In which a family is representative of the one of the biggest diaspora of the earth. The military forces were controlling them directly. They distribute food, tent even ration books. "These ration booklets would thus accumulate into pieces of identity and inheritance, sometimes framed in museum halls" (Abulhawa, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, 2015, p. 43). This distribution causes a new identity for them which is not pre-given but created one by the colonials. At first, they deemed that this transfer is for a short time, they started settling there, but, when the duration lengthens with the passage of time, the desire to go back home get stronger. As Abulhawa states:

In time, mud bricks and corrugated metal replaced the cloth tents and the refugee camps gave rise to a subculture marked by adamant pride, defiance, and an unwavering insistence on the dignity of home, no matter how long it took or how high the price. (Abulhawa, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, 2015, p. 48)

The Palestinians, who have migrated, were unable to create home outside home, but they attempt which is also presented in the novel. The characters of the novel when Mamdouh migrates to Kuwait and thrives there. He tells about his success as "Palestinians are building Kuwait from the sand up," (Abulhawa, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, 2015, p. 54). But the very family of Nazmiyeh was scattered around the world. Now, the brother who is in Kuwait, tells her that he is moving to North Carolina, America and one of her son is already engaged and is planning to go to Saudi Arabia for work. In this way, her family is dispersing in various places as in the same way that her country does, Palestine is also dispersing. She thinks:

She thought Palestine was scattering farther away at the same time that Israel was moving closer. They confiscated the hills and assembled Jewish only settler colonies on the most fertile soil. They uprooted indigenous songs, and planted lies in the ground to grow a new story. (Abulhawa, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, 2015, p. 59)

Mamdouh is the character who migrates and suffers from a constant loss of home. He is shown as the mouthpiece of Abulhawa who suffers a constant loss of native land. He does not refer Palestine as his country but as home. As it is stated in the text: He called his sister in Gaza. "There is nothing in the world I want more than to be home now. There is nothing left for me

here" (Abulhawa, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, 2015, p. 79). Boym mentions that home becomes an issue only if it is lost; one only feels the need to question home if it is no longer there. The first time we start to think of the meanings of home, home country and homeland is the time we "experience the first failure of homecoming" (Boym, 2001, p. 251). At the very beginning of the unit twenty one he refers Palestine as home "He called his sister, my teta Nazmiyeh, to tell her they were coming home, at last" (Abulhawa, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, 2015, p. 73). Georges Balandier, the French anthropologist points out this somberly in his book *Political Anthropology* that the most of the European peoples, in the recent past, have ventured the expansion almost throughout the whole world. Mamdouh says that

He said he would be home soon. His long exile would be over. Exile, he said, had stolen everything. It had excised his home and heritage and language from his only son. It had taken his Yasmine. Exile had made him an old man in a place that had never become familiar. But life had been merciful, too, for he had a gift of this miracle granddaughter, who could now return home to Gaza with him. (Abulhawa, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, 2015, pp. 118-9)

Nazmiyeh is the character who misses home while living there. She misses the pre Nakba period where she is happy with her family. This is the collective memory that she shares. The loss of home is unreparable, people create it in their imagination as a compensatory strategy which helps in alleviating the loss (Porter, 2001). Darwish summarizes the link between memory and home. He states that home is a place where one has a remembrance, without them one cannot have a real relationship to a place. And it is a place which, if left once, is difficult to attain and is impossible to return. The theme of missing home is also discussed in her first novel *Mornings in Jenin*. The writer ends chapter one as: "Our bond was Palestine. It was a language we dismantled to construct a home" (Abulhawa, *Mornings in Jenin*, 2010).

The next character who personifies exile, is Nur, granddaughter of Nazmeyah's brother, Mamdouh who was born in America but destiny brings her back to Gaza to meet his family and people living there in worst condition because of the seizing of the place. Nur belonged to the category of those people who though by origin are Palestinians but because of displacement they are far away from their country, culture and heritage. According to Abulhawa:

History took us away from our rightful destiny. But with Nur, life hurled her so far that nothing around her resembled anything Palestinian, not even the dislocated lived of exiles. So it was ironic that her life reflected the most basic truth of what it meant to be Palestinian, dispossessed, disinherited, and exiled. That to be alone in the world without a family or a clan or land or country means that one must live at the mercy of others. There are those who might take pity and those who will exploit and harm. Our lives by the whims of the host, rarely treated with the dignity of a person, nearly always put in place. (*The Blue between Sky and Water*, 2015, p. 89)

The book deals with the story of brave women of Palestine living in Gaza and sharing and supporting each other, as Abulhawa herself says in the novel: Mama and Nur found in each other a shared fear of loss, loneliness, and longing for love, and it made sisterhood from there (Abulhawa, *The Blue between Sky and Water*, 2015).

Abulhawa gives recurrent references of Israel's military power to encroach its colonies and menacing guard towers. In these circumstances the life of Palestinians was more than the miserable. The writer describes them as "They steal and steal, kill and maim," (Abulhawa, *The*

Blue between Sky and Water, 2015, p. 128). The natives were so horrified by them that they celebrated their lives after surviving the attacks. Nazmiyeh was also happy that at least they had not killed Mazen, he died naturally. Zionists do not left any attempt in hurting the natives. Sometime they intrude in their parties, refrain them from going too far for hunting and many more. In her book review of *The Blue Between the Sky and Water: Powerful Plea for Palestine*, Margie Orford, author of the novel, *Water Music* and member of the Board of PEN International remarks that:

Susan Abulhawa's gripping and deeply moving tells the story of Palestine after "history arrived". In 1948, the formation of the State of Israel and the subsequent wars wrenched this ancient land apart, sending some Palestinians fleeing for the illusory safety of crowded refugee camps in Gaza and scattering many others into exile. (2015, p. 1)

Conclusion

The paper has found that the tenet of Postcolonialism such as dislocation is helpful to understand the nuances of the conflict between Israel and Palestine as presented in Palestinian Literature in English. This vantage point of dislocation is documented very masterly in the selected work *The Blue between Sky and Water* by Abulhawa. The application of the theory on the relevant work is quite in accordance to the written content that gives reader the flare of colonialism which is understated. The paper has been completed with full dedication keeping focus upon the issue undertaken. Various references from different sources have been collected to build the body of the knowledge with particular reference to the old conflict in the Middle East. Mutual empathy is needed to come to terms with this issue for the purpose of peace. The entire geographically dislocated perspective of the novel reveals the Israelis colonials who are not guilty and have sympathy of world. Taking this discontent as a point of departure, Abulhawa proceeds on to illuminate the ways by which discontented territories subsist in a wholesome world which needs to be reflected upon. Abulhawa espouses the narrative that could be interpreted by the lens of Postcolonialism vis-à-vis, dislocation. She cultivates her conception of home and homeland from the indigenous lens that the researcher was tempted to pursue the research. In its essence, the novel *The Blue between Sky and Water* is a text that embodies the lives of four generations and Abulhawa switches as a subaltern migrant.

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