



## Endless Agony and Death in Diaspora: A Study of Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky And Water*

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### Abstract

*Nakba* 'Catastrophe' draws a significant milestone in the history of the Palestinian literature, mainly in its issues, trajectories and concerns. It remains the inner traumatic moment of the Palestinian collective memory since 1948 until present. What happened during and after *Nakba* is thousands of Palestinians were forcibly displaced from Palestine and dispersed in different countries over the world. Such disastrous event created endless agony for Palestinians and forced them to live in several exiles. In exiles, they become homeless seek shelters and livelihood and wait to die as refugees. Their hope to return to their homeland becomes a sort of dream in their writings. This paper aims to examine *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, a novel by Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian American novelist whose works focus on the Palestinian tragedy after *Nakba*. The significance of the present study springs from its focus on the Palestinian diasporic writings and examines a masterpiece narrative that has not been received enough attention from critics and researchers. Through the analysis of the novel, the study attempts to expose the Palestinians' traumatic experiences and miseries; their resistance, struggle and hopes. It highlights

the remarkable efforts made by the Palestinian writers to resist through literature, the Israeli occupation and encounter their Israeli narratives. It moreover, reveals the war crimes committed by Israelis in the occupied territories. The study is based on a descriptive analytical method and it has been guided by a number of historical studies which deal with the Palestinian issue and diaspora.

**Key words:** Nakba; Palestine; Diaspora; Occupation displacement; Resistance; Blockade

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

While a vast amount of research on history and politics exist on the issues related to the Palestinian Israeli conflict, a focus on literature has been of secondary importance. Through literature, the Palestinian writers try to explore the innumerable injustices they suffer from and highlight the reality of their tragedy, suffering and agony. Like their people, the Palestinian writers suffer from the displacement and exile. Occupation causes for them incurable wounds and intense anguishes in their lives and feelings. They experience the coercive displacement, persecution, homelessness, blockade and all kinds of injustice and humiliation. Throughout decades the world has witnessed several massacres of Palestinian innocent civilians, the destruction of houses and burning of farms. Those who have survived, have found themselves compelled to leave their houses, villages and cities without taking their savings or even food for their children. They have become strangers in different foreign countries seeking shelters and refuges. All those events have created a definite influence on the conscience of the Palestinian

writers to hardly work in raising the awareness of their people and rewriting the catastrophe in a different style.

It is clear that their memories are colored with sadness and sorrow, but they have taken the efforts to draw their homeland map by actions and words. They do not isolate themselves from their national issues and the problems and concerns of their people. They, through their resistant narrative, give a voice to those who are voiceless. They write stories, biographies, novels, poems, and memoirs to narrate the 20<sup>th</sup> century tragedy of Palestinians which has been going on till the present. In their literary works, they record the names of villages, cities, valleys, hills, shrines, streets, springs, wells and farms to conserve them to the generations. Moreover, they write poems about the land, nature, sea, trees and soil; narrate stories to glorify the heroism of Palestinian resistance and struggle. These literary works are nothing but a counter-narrative of Palestinians in order to unveil the reality which is denied by the Zionist narratives. Susan Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, like most of Palestinian narratives, depicts the Palestinian sufferings and tragic stories in the occupied territories and exiles. The events narrated by the novelist reveal sides of Palestinians' miseries from *Nakba* until the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through four generations of Palestinian tragedy, Abulhawa in her novel highlights issues like: the atrocities and violations against Palestinians, their coercive displacement after *Nakba*, their endless suffering in exiles, the rape of women during the Israeli invasion, shortage of food and medicine, the spread of starvation, the effects of blockade, the agonies of detainees in the Israeli prisons and the bad treatment their families have been facing. Furthermore, the novelist passionately glorifies the Palestinian resistance and struggle, the spirit of rebellion and Palestinian patriotism in resisting the Zionist occupation.

The significance of the present study springs from its focus on the Palestinian diasporic writings and examines a masterpiece narrative that has not been received enough attention from critics and researchers. Through the analysis of the novel, the study attempts to expose the Palestinians' traumatic experiences, miseries, resistance, struggle and hopes. Under the issues of Palestinian displacement and diaspora, the present study attempts to highlight the remarkable efforts made by the Palestinian writers who, through literature, encounter the Israeli narrative and reveal the war crimes committed by Israelis in the occupied territories. The study tries its best to provide a brief historical background of the Palestinian diaspora. Finally, the study is based on a descriptive analytical method and it has been guided by a number of historical studies which deal with the Palestinian issue and diaspora. It presents a textual analysis and critical reading of the studied novel; focusing the attention on some events and stories which reflect the endless suffering of Palestinians and reveal the deep pain as they die refugees in exiles.

## 2. PALESTINIAN DIASPORA: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The *Cambridge Dictionary*, online dictionary, defines Diaspora as: "the spreading of people from one original country to other countries". The original term of 'Diaspora' as Cohen Robin (1997) mentions: "is derived from the Greek verb *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over)". "It signified a collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamed of home but lived in exile" (p.ix). Sean Carter (2005) refers that the term 'diaspora' encompasses "a multitude of ethnic, religious and national communities who find themselves living outside of the territory to which they are historically 'rooted' (pp.54-63). Vijay Agnew (2005) mentions that 'diaspora' indicates "the dispersion of a group of people from one center or two or more peripheral places, as well as to the collective memory" He goes further to state that "Diasporas are usually communities that have been unwillingly dispersed by slavery, genocide, war, expulsion, indentured labour, political exile or refugee exodus" (p.193).

Therefore, the Palestinian diaspora refers to the mass exodus of Palestinian people who were forcibly expelled by the Zionist occupation from Palestine to different countries. The majority of these dispersed people went to Arab countries and still living there as refugees in camps. The rest of them went to foreign countries and they could not come back home till today. Statistical reports estimate that three-quarters of Palestinians left their homes in 1948. Edward Said (1980) writes: "According to the most precise calculation yet made, approximately 780000 Arab Palestinians were dispossessed and displaced in 1948" (p.14). *Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics* (PCBS, 2015) estimates that the number of Palestinians in Arab countries is 5.46 million and around 685 thousand in the foreign countries.

The Israeli occupation has created a man-made disaster which caused a long diaspora in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. From the time of *Nakba*, the Palestinian people have been dispersed in different countries and they are suffering till today. Therefore, *Nakba* is the traumatic event in the Palestinian history and literature that has received much attention by writers from different countries. Baroud (2010) indicates that *Nakba* "was a massive attack on an unarmed civilian population who had no army, and who had suffered a violent expulsion and mass exodus" (p.76). The PCBS (2015) defines *Nakba* of Palestinians as "a process of ethnic cleansing in which an unarmed nation was destroyed and its population displaced to be replaced systematically by another nation". Hence, *Nakba* is the real catastrophe in the modern history of Palestine that has created a profound negative change in the life of Palestinian people psychologically, socially and politically. Ilan Pappé (2006) describes *Nakba* as the "mechanism of the 1948 ethnic cleansing". It is "the crime the Zionist movement committed against the Palestinian

people in 1948” (: p. xvi). In *All That Remain*, Walid Khalidi (1992) likens *Nakba* to the “ineluctable climax of the preceding Zionist colonization and the great water shed in the history of the Palestinian people, marking the beginning of their Exodus and Diaspora” (p. xxxi).

The Palestinian disaster was committed by groups of Zionist organizations with the help of colonial powers. “Unlike a natural catastrophe, the Palestinian Nakba was the result of a man-made military plan with the consent of other states, leading to a major tragedy for the Palestinian people” (PCBS, 2015). The British supported Zionist organizations to easily make immigration to Palestine. Therefore, the Palestinian catastrophe began when Jews started illegally immigrating to Palestine from Europe, Russia, South and North Americas, as well as from the Arab countries. It has been said that same boat that carried Jews to Palestine, carried Palestinians out of Palestine. The myth they believed that Palestine is a land without a people for a people without a land. The Palestinian writer, Salman Abu Sitta (1998) in *The Palestinian Nakba 1948* explains the consequences of *Nakba* and refers to the direct participation of imperialism in the occupation of Palestine:

The Palestinian Nakba is unsurpassed in history. For a country to be occupied by a foreign minority, emptied almost entirely of its people, its physical and cultural landmarks obliterated, its destruction hailed as a miraculous act of God and a victory for freedom and civilised values, all done according to a premeditated plan, meticulously executed, financially and politically supported from abroad, and still maintained today. (p.5)

The Zionist organizations formed armed groups and started invading the Palestinian villages and cities. They used all types of weapons to kill villagers, burn bodies and destroy houses. The ethnic cleansing and barbaric massacres forced the Palestinians to seek shelters instead of facing a certain death. According to the (PCBS, 2015) “In 1948, 1.4 million Palestinians lived in 1,300 Palestinian towns and villages all over historical Palestine. More than 800,000 of the population were driven out of their homeland to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, neighboring Arab countries, and other countries of the world”. Pappé (2006) refers that only 160,000 of about 850,000 Palestinians living in the territories designated by the UN as a Jewish State remained on or nearby their land and homes, becoming the Palestinian minority in Israel (p.138). Even though, these who resisted the displacement and stayed in the occupied lands, Israelis treated them as second citizens. “According to Israeli law, only a Jewish citizen has full civic rights and privileges, whereas Arabs are given simpler, more restrictive rights” (Said, 1978, p.306).

Israeli occupation did not only drive out the Palestinian people from their lands, but started demolishing villages and towns to wipe out the existential state of the Palestinians and to kill any hope of return. The Israeli

Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, agreed on June 16, 1948, to prevent thousands of Palestinian civilians to return to their homes who had by then been displaced by the war (Morris, 2004, p.141). According to documentary evidence, the Israelis controlled 774 towns and villages and destroyed 531 Palestinian towns and villages during *Nakba*. “Nearly 500 Palestinian villages that were frequently evacuated and then completely flattened during the war years of 1947-49” (Ramzy, 2010, p.1). The atrocities of Zionist forces also included more than 70 massacres in which more than 15 thousand, Palestinians were killed. (PCBS, 2015)

During the Arab-Israeli War, Israel in 1967 occupied the remaining twenty-two percent of Palestine which led to the displacement of thousands of the inhabitants of these cities and villages. “namely the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as other Arab territory [...] approximately 350,000 Palestinians were uprooted from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – over half of them for the second time” (Chatty et al 2005, pp.15,16). *The PCBS* (2015) estimates the Palestinian world population totaled 12.4 million by the end of 2015. Statistical data also show that refugees constitute 42.8% of the total Palestinian population in Palestine. UNRWA records showed that there were 5.59 million Palestinian refugees registered at the beginning of 2015. Around 28.7% of Palestinian registered refugees live in 58 refugee camps, of which 10 are in Jordan, 9 in Syria, 12 in Lebanon, 19 in the West Bank, and 8 in the Gaza Strip (PCBS, 2015). Hence, a number of Palestinian narratives expose the dilemma of Palestinians post-*Nakba* and cover wide aspects of their tragedy, displacement and diaspora. *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, the studied novel of this paper, narrates sides of Palestinian displacement, diaspora and exile.

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### 3. THE BLUE BETWEEN SKY AND WATER: A BRIEF SUMMARY

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*The Blue Between Sky And Water* (2015) narrates the tragic stories of the Palestinians Post-*Nakba* and reveals its disastrous aftermaths. It focuses on a history of four generations of Palestinians through the Baraka family’s experience. It further deals with aspects of the miserable conditions of the siege imposed by Israel on the inhabitants of Gaza. Through an effective prelude the novelist opens the novel. The events of the novel took place at the time of *Nakba* until the exchange of prisoners in 2011, when more than a thousand Palestinian prisoners were released in return for an Israeli soldier called Gilad Shalit. The novel is set in *Beit Daras*, Gaza, Cairo, and Charlotte in North Carolina. The novelist in a flashback begins to draw a clear image of a historical Palestinian village called *Beit Daras*, which was built in 1325. The village is surrounded by gardens and olive farms. Like many Palestinian villages, *Beit Daras* was



invaded in 1948 by Haganah and the Zionist Gangs. Due to that invasion, many farmers, children and women were killed. The Zionist forces bombed, burnt, raped and killed without remorse. The survival villagers were forced to flee from their villages to Gaza. As one of the survivors, the Barka family went on a long road heading to Gaza, where the refugee camp was created as a substitute homeland for them.

Nazmiyeh is raped by a group of Zionists while she is looking for her lost sister, Maryam. Um Mamdouh, her daughter, Nazmiyeh, and her husband, Atiyeh live in a refuge in Gaza and from there the family is scattered to different countries. Some of them go to Kuwait, others migrated to Egypt and America. These who stay in Gaza live in tents and start to work as fishermen in the Mediterranean. Nazmiyeh, the eldest daughter, takes care of their mother and the rest of the family. Mamdouh works with the village beekeeper and falls in love with his daughter, Yasmine. After years of working in beekeeping, he marries Yasmine and moves outside Gaza. He travels to Egypt to find an opportunity to work in construction. Then he takes Yasmine and they both go together to Kuwait. Later, they migrate to America with hope for a new work and a best life. When Nazmiyeh gives birth to her first child, a son with grey eyes, the new baby reminds her of one of her rapists. Nazmiyeh gives births to a number of sons while she is waiting for a daughter whose name should be Mariam as her sister has suggested. After eleven sons, Nazmiyeh has a daughter and she names her Alwan. Mazen the elder son of Nazmiyeh is arrested by Israeli soldiers and taken as a detainee because of his role in resisting Israeli occupation. With endless difficulties and deliberate restrictions, Israeli authority allows Nazmiyeh to visit Mazen only once every six months. Like Nazmiyeh, the Prisoners' families are treated badly. They face all kinds of humiliation when they visit their relatives. They are ordered to wait naked for hours before meeting their relatives in the prisons.

When Alwan reaches maturity, Abdel Qader loves her and they get married. After a year they have their first son, Khaled, the narrator of the most events in the novel. After a couple of years, Abdel Qader and Alwan have their second lovely child, a daughter whose mother names her Rhet Shel as a gratitude to Rachel Corrie. Corrie is an American activist who was killed in 2003 by an Israeli bulldozer while she was trying to prevent Israelis from demolishing the Palestinian houses in Gaza. In America, Mamdouh and Yasmine live with Mhammad, their only son. Mhammad refuses to speak Arabic. He changes his name into Mike and marries a Christian woman from Spain. Within years, Mhammad and his wife have Nur, a beautiful daughter. In America, Mhammad has a mysterious accident that leads to his death. Nur's mother abandons her and she grows up with her grandfather.

When Nur becomes a youth, she goes to Gaza as a psychotherapist to help Khaled who suffers from Locked-

In Syndrome. In Gaza, she discovers that Nazmiyeh, Alwan and Khaled are her relatives whom grandfather used to tell her about. Nur knows that Atiyeh, the grandfather of Khaled, was killed by Israeli army years ago. In Gaza, Nur falls in love with Jamal, a married doctor who works in Gaza. Nur is abused by Dr Jamal. She is illegally pregnant. Jamal promises to marry Nur, but finally, she discovers that he has deceived her. He has travelled to Canada with his family leaving her to face an endless depression. Abdel Qader, Khaled's father, was also bombed by Israeli's airstrikes during the war in 2008. The family spend days to get out his body from the rubble of his destroyed home. Nur does not find any means to help Khaled. Finally, Khaled died while his mother is looking for a way to take him abroad for treatment. Nur discovers how much the Gazans suffer from the suffocating blockade imposed by Israelis. The novel ends while the Baraka family celebrates welcoming Mazen and thousands of political prisoners. Nazmiyeh is very happy because Mazen is set free, and is free and he is coming home.

#### 4. COERCIVE DISPLACEMENT: THE BEGINNING OF SUFFERING

*The Blue Between Sky and Water* focuses on Palestinian displaced characters through whom the daily stories of their sufferings are narrated. Throughout the whole novel, Abulhawa exposes their dilemma after the Israeli occupation of their homeland. The novelist excellently chooses the Baraka family as a sample for the displaced Palestinians to depict the reality of their tragedy and suffering. She narrates different stories of violence and premeditated massacres that happened in 1948 and after which led the Baraka family and thousands of Palestinians to escape from their villages to Gaza. By focusing on four generations, the novelist shows how thousands of Palestinians have been killed and thousands have been displaced and dispersed in different countries in the world. She narrates numerous historical facts and evidence to reveal how people of *Beit Daras* were forcibly expelled from their houses and lands. The novelist, in a literary style, wants to rewrite the Palestinian history and reveal the coercive displacement, the pain of exiles and the difficult situations faced by Palestinians. Through the characters of the novel, she draws such images and narrates these horrible events to unveil the crimes of Israel. Her purpose is to convey to the readers how Zionist groups destroy and burn homes, farms, and lands of the powerless Palestinians to gain their sympathies. She narrates the story of Nazmiyeh, a displaced Palestinian woman, who is raped by a group of Zionists; the stories of killing the wounded men; the scenes of bombings and destroying houses; the fleeing of survivors from villages while death is taking them by storm from everywhere.

“More Jews will return and the skies will rain death upon *Beit Daras*” (Abulhawa, 2015, p.24).

The novelist creates her characters from the society itself to let them, as victims and eyewitnesses, narrate the reality of horrible moments of displacement. “Sometimes, unseen snipers aimed and people dropped. There was nothing to do but collect the dead and injured and continue on” (Abulhawa, 2015, p.32). The novelist shows how Zionist terrorists brutally treat elderly women and wounded son. “When a group of them happened upon a slight old woman effortlessly carrying a wounded man in her arms, they ordered her to stop. She turned the whites of her eyes at them, and a potent broth of fear foamed in the intestines of the soldiers. One of them shot the woman, and she fell bleeding, dropping her wounded son” (Abulhawa, 2015, p.33). These brutal scenes deeply touch the hearts of the readers as if they were watching a tragic film. Their heartbeats have been increased and they discover how miserable and helpless the Palestinians are.

Zionist terrorist groups attack their villages with heavy weapons. They kill and destroy everything cruelly. Tens of women and innocent children are killed and hundreds are injured. Those who have survived have nothing to do but to flee to Gaza to rescue themselves. The novelist supports her narrative by bringing stories from the history. It is written that “fifty women and children from *Beit Daras* were slaughtered in a single day” (Abulhawa, 2015, p.27). The air is heavy and people are unable to breathe. People with children, wives and mothers rushing in frightened motions. “Children struggled to keep pace with their elders, who pulled them by the arms. Bewilderment carved lines in every face that Nazmiyeh passed, and despite the noise and chaos around her, she thought she could hear heartbeats pounding on chest walls” (Abulhawa, 2015, p.28). The novelist effectively describes the level of heartbreaks and anguishes of Palestinians when they are put between only two options either to leave their homes or to be killed. This talent depiction enables the novelist to convey her message excellently to the readers. She wants to highlight the disastrous consequences of the coercive displacement of Palestinians and provoke the free world to condemn the crimes and violations committed by Zionist occupation. These events are not fantasy, but definitely the bitter reality of what happened to Palestinians during and after Nakba.

The Haganah and Stem Gang now called themselves the “Israel Defense Forces and they marched into Beit Daras after hours of sustained bombardment with mortars. [...] The forest was engulfed in flames, swallowing homes to the north. Clouds of smoke hovered low, painting the world black, settling on the dead like dark shrouds and invading the lungs of the living, who heaved and convulsed as they sought refuge. Chaos reigned, perpetuated by more explosions, gratuitous now that Beit Daras was fully consumed by the fog of death and defeat. The villagers who had stayed behind either had been killed or were already fleeing toward Gaza, and the rest were taken prisoner, never to be seen again. (Abulhawa, 2015, pp.30-31)

The novelist goes further to expose the abnormal situation when Zionist terrorists from foreign countries invade Palestine, kill its people and loot their lands. They drive out the remaining original inhabitants from their homeland and force them to live in exiles. The Palestinians become outsiders in different countries and the foreigners become settlers in Palestine. The novelist’s aim is to criticize the negative political situation of the Western countries towards the Palestinian issue. She states two reactions of people around the world while they are watching on their televisions the so-called Jewish army from different countries destroy the neighborhoods of non-Jews.

Everyone staggered about drenched in another loss, new rage, and revived fear People watched on their televisions as this Jewish army of Poles, Austrians, Germans, French, Brits, Italians, Russians, Ukrainians, Iranians, and others marched into Jerusalem, demolishing neighborhoods of non-Jews. It was a shocking moment that split the world in two: those cheering and those crying”. (Abulhawa, 2015, p.58)

The novelist ironically shows how the abnormal situation in Palestine has been normalized because of the shameful silence of the world. “Eventually, the abnormal was normalized, and the constant brutality of Israeli soldiers became the cost of living” (Abulhawa, 2015, p.58). The novelist shows her sadness and clarifies how the tragedy takes disastrous dimensions. She sees that Palestine is scattering while Israel becomes closer. The strangers in Palestine starts seizing the lands and loot what remains of Palestinians’ homes. They usurp the land, falsify the history, and uproot the traditional songs to erase everything related to Palestine.

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, 2015, p.5)

Zionists do not only loot the lands and uproot the culture, but they also rape the Palestinian women. Nazmiyeh as a victim, yet, a survivor suffers psychologically from unfinished trauma because she has been gang-raped before her younger sister, Mariam. The novelist reveals how her rapists are too cruel and inhumane. They order her in a language she cannot understand to scream to satisfy their brutal desire during the sexual assault. “Scream!” [...] “As the soldiers handled her, ripping her clothes, forcing her onto her back, baring her flesh, Nazmiyeh ordered Mariam to turn away and close her eyes and ears tightly as she could” (Abulhawa, 2015, p.37). The novelist narrates such a case to refer to the continuous violations against the Palestinian women and refers to thousands of rapes and oppression against them since Nakba up to date. It refers rather to the usurpation of Palestinian land, the violations of Palestinian daily life and the denial of Palestinian independence by

Zionist terrorists. The problem also takes a psychological dimension when Mazen, the son of Nazmiyeh, asks her one day: "Were you raped? Am I the son of your rapist?" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.55). The oppression against Palestinian women takes different ways, in Israeli prisons, women are kept naked before being given minutes to see their relatives from behind the iron fence. They are only allowed once every six months to visit them. The novelist shows how Nazmiyeh spends hours waiting to reach the place of her son, Mazen. "The buzz of the alarm went off, signaling that their time together was over Mother and son held one another in the tight grip of sight, safeguarding the memory of the previous thirty minutes" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.110).

## 5. DEATH IN DIASPORA

The novelist, a third-generation refugee, tries to clarify the real meaning of diaspora and exile. Like millions of Palestinians in diaspora, Abulhawa for many times has been denied to return to the homeland by Israelis. Therefore, this definitive novel rises from her indestructible roots to Palestine. And to narrate what happened to the Palestinian people after Nakba; the novelist embodies the real situation of exile and diaspora through her characters who are expelled from homes and became refugees seeking shelter and safety. The novel spans several generations of the same families and their sufferings from separation. The Baraka family and thousands of other families face all kinds of injustice and persecution in diaspora and in Gaza as a local exile. They overnight become refugees inside or outside Palestine waiting to die in diaspora. Nazmiyeh, the older woman in the Baraka family, summarizes this tragedy in a frustrated and sad voice. "Those were the days"—and lamenting fate: "Who knew we'd die refugees?" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.226). In exiles they suffer physically and psychologically for more than seventy years.

The novelist brings many events and testimonies to prove the real miseries of Palestinians in exiles. She takes the reader to the fact that most of the characters in the novel die in diaspora as refugees. "Alwan had even heard of a family that spent a few thousand dollars for two buckets of dirt from Nablus to sprinkle over their exiled father's grave when Israel would not allow them to fulfill his dying wish to be buried in Palestine" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.182). Um Mamdouh dies in Gaza as a refugee, Mamdouh migrates to America with Yasmine and they both die there. Nur's father, Mhammad, die in an accident in America as an exile. Atiyeh, Nazmiyeh's husband is killed in the refugee camp in Gaza by the Israeli army. Abdel Qader and his only son bombed by the Israeli airstrikes during the war in 2008. Like many other victims, their relatives spent days to get out his body from the rubble of he destroyed home. "It took several days to dig Abdel Qader's body out from under a collapsed building"

(Abulhawa, 2015, p.153). The novelist shows how hard these Palestinian refugees try to become anything but themselves; they will always remain displaced, exiled and aliened. Mamdouh goes to America to find a new life but he discovers that exile takes everything he has. He believes that "Exile, [...], 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" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.119).

## 6. EXILE AND THE DREAM OF RETURN

The novelist shows different kinds of humiliation the Palestinian people encounter. She gives a complete narration of their sufferings in exile, their struggle to resist the occupation and their renewable hopes to return homeland. It is true that in exile, Palestinians lose their homeland, but they do not surrender and struggle to come back home and gain the independence of Palestine. They unwillingly have left their homeland, but they still maintain their memories, conserve their Palestinian identity and connected to Palestine, which exists in their hearts. They participate in the national struggle by all means. They never lose hope to liberate their homeland. This dream is recorded in their songs and writings as they write about the pain and anguish of life in exile. They reflect these states of anxiety and hope in literature and arts as a means of struggle and resistance.

The study argues that, in exile, memory always opens up and goes back to the past to recall the difficult moments of departure or displacement when someone is compelled to leave homeland and becomes refugee in exile. Such bitter moments stick in mind and cannot be easily forgotten. They become endless traumas and remain in a person's conscience forever. This is exactly what happened to the Palestinians when they find themselves displaced and refugees in exiles. No doubt, they live in a double exile, and sometimes lose hope to return, but they do not forget their historical and legal rights of Palestine. They still have a connection to the homeland and do not lose hope that one day they will be reunited with the holy lands and real dignity. They believe that there is no dignity to live outsiders in exiles or to die away from home and family. Nazmiyeh pleads her brother to come back to Gaza because "There is no dignity in life or death away from your home and family" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.118). The novelist prompts Palestinians not to accept the situations they are put in; or to waive their right to return. She addresses their inner hearts and incite them not to forget what happened to their grandfathers after Nakba. She brings historical facts, views and images from the homeland to animate their memories and connect them to the homeland even if they are in the exile. She wants them to seriously find all possibilities to come homes.



## 7. REFUGEES AT HOME

Gaza is a small strip on a land of 160 km, inhabited by more than one million and a half of Palestinians; most of these inhabitants are displaced from their villages and cities after Nakba and the war of 1967. The city is located on the seaside bordering Egypt and the newly-created State called Israel. The city is considered one of the most populous cities in the world. The novelist sheds light on the life in Gaza and the miserable conditions inside the refugees' camps. She also focuses on the effects of siege imposed by Israel, the shortage of food and medicines and spread of starvation and diseases. Since 2007, Israel restricts the flow of goods, fuels and services into Gaza. They tightly control the borders and force many citizens to resort to smuggling goods through tunnels. An illegal blockade leads Gaza to become "the largest open-air prison in the world (Abulhawa, 2015, p.ix).

The novelist narrates different stories of Palestinians' sufferings in Gaza which becomes a local exile for millions of Palestinians. She depicts the real situation of Palestinians in Gaza who live as refugees at homes. She brings some of miserable images of the displaced people inside the camps who fight to get bread and soup. "they lined up five times a day for salat [prayers]. They lined up twice a day for bread and soup. They lined up for communal toilets" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.43). Although there are not enough tents for them, their camps are brutally attacked by the Israeli army from time to time. They are crammed collectively in one tent without the necessities of life. Mamdouh lives in a tent and he shares that small tent "with his sister Nazmiyeh, her husband, Atiyeh, their children, and Atiyeh's parents" (Abulhawa, 2015, pp.46-47).

Further, the novelist brings another image of the miserable life in Gaza where hospitals are not able to serve people because of the lack of medical equipment and the shortage of medicines. Khaled suffers from Locked-In Syndrome and his family cannot find a hospital to do test to check his brain. "Um Khaled, we can't trust these tests completely anymore because the kits come through the tunnels without any refrigeration or regulations" [...] "There are no resources to check for brain activity" (Abulhawa, 2015, pp.251, 155). It is clear that the novelist criticizes the hypocritical world, particularly the United Nations which is established to maintain peace around the world. Unfortunately, it does nothing for the Palestinian people whose country is occupied and who become refugees seeking medicines and shelter for their children. The UN is powerless to stop violence against Palestinians and save the lives of a million and a half in Gaza.

We were locked up in Gaza. Of one and a half million people, five or six could trickle in or out each day through Egypt. Misery leaked into the streets and fermented under the sun for years. [...] we wanted to consume the world outside our borders,

to take in the sun of another shore, open our eyes to a moon of another sky, walk the ground of another earth. We wanted to live, to move and travel to work, produce, and export. Our prison was not being allowed to see or do, and our escape was to find ways to taste the rest of the world. (Abulhawa, 2015, p.271)

The novelist satirically mentions the prohibited items which Palestinians hardly smuggle through underground tunnels from Egypt to Gaza. She criticizes the fallacies in changing the facts when Israelis consider the basic necessities of the Gazans to be prohibited items. By doing so, she unveils the hidden offensiveness and meanness of the Israeli occupation "They smuggled a vast list of banned items, like diapers, sugar, pencils, petrol, chocolate, phones, eating utensils, books" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.142). The novelist exposes the claims of Israelis that they are democratic and their State respects human rights. Nevertheless, the reality is completely different. The reality says that they occupy others homeland, loot their farms and violate the international humanitarian law by imposing an illegal siege on the Palestinian people. It is not logic to occupy others' lands, siege them and prevent them from smuggling the basic needs to survive. The tunnels underground represent a new means of resistance and struggle. They are the only arteries and veins that provide a life for more than a million and a half in this abnormal situation. The tunnels are the only friends of Palestinians to remain alive in this cruel and hypocritical world. Khaled says:

I lived in these times of the tunnels, a network of underground arteries and veins with systems of ropes, levers, and pulleys that pumped food, diapers, fuel, medicine, batteries, music tapes, [...] and anything else you can think of that we managed to buy from the Egyptians twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week". (Abulhawa, 2015, p.1)

The occupiers broaden their crimes by preventing the entry of construction materials into Gaza. They demolish Palestinian houses and never allow them to rebuild them again. Yet, Palestinians do not give it up. They recycle the remaining rocks of destroying houses as alternatives. "Israel had long ago blocked building materials from entering Gaza, but a local entrepreneur had started a profitable enterprise recycling rocks and rubble, into new building bricks. The brothers pitched in to buy what they could of these bricks and used various mud mixtures instead of cement, which was impossible to find in Gaza" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.154).

In addition to this miserable and inhumane blockade, Israelis bomb the tunnels from time to time, but Palestinians dig them again and again, longer and deeper. Their high spirit and perseverance are indefatigable. They have strong morale and revolutionary means to resist the occupation, fight to live and struggle to achieve the goal of liberation. "The tunnels undermined Israel's plans to put us on a diet. So, they bombed the tunnels and a lot of people were killed. We dug more that were bigger, deeper, and longer. Again, they bombed us" (Abulhawa, 2015,

p.1). The rebellious spirit is kept alive in the Palestinian hearts. It brings impacts of specific historical events that occur in the course of resistance struggle waged by the people against the oppressor.

The novelist uses a very lovely simile when she likens the Palestinian who dig tunnels as rodents. They do so, just to survive. The tunnels underground are like beautiful lines of story. "When the sky, land, and sea were barricaded, we burrowed our bodies into the earth, like rodents, so we didn't die. The tunnels spread under our feet, like story lines that history wrote, erased, and rewrote" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.141). In spite of exile, suffering, imprisonment, torture, and assassination, the Palestinian resistance fighters succeed to continue fighting the occupation and break the siege by all possible means. They keep their heads up and never think of surrendering.

Through it all, Palestinian resistance fighters, holed up in tunnels with little more than bread, salt, and water, refused to surrender, and continued to fight a vastly superior military force. Despite the horrors and terror they suffered, Palestinians in Gaza supported the resistance because, in the words of one man, "We'd rather die fighting than continue living on our knees as nothing more than worthless lives Israel can use to test their weapons". (Abulhawa, 2015, p. 288)

Palestinians physically and psychologically suffer from displacement, exiles, and diaspora; their struggle is mixed with death, tragedy, and defeat, yet, they are not subjected to despair, disappointment or frustration. Mazen bravely tells the occupier "YOUR BULLET CANNOT TOUCH MY HUMANITY! IT CANNOT TOUCH MY SOUL! IT CANNOT RIP MY ROOTS FROM THE SOIL OF THIS LAND YOU COVET! WE WILL NOT LET YOU STEAL OUR LAND!" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.63). The novelist depicts these experiences of Palestinian refugees either in exile or in territories. They are a symbol of all Palestinians inside and outside the homeland. They are not only subjected to the pain of exile and alienation but also to the danger of war and genocide committed by the occupation from time to time. The novelist shows how the besieged people in Gaza do not give up to overcome the man-made problems. They participate in the national struggle by all means. They never lose hope to liberate their homeland. This dream is recorded in their songs and writings as they talk about the pain and anguish of life in exile. They reflect these states of anxiety and hope in literature and arts as a means of struggle and resistance.

Eventually, it is apparent that the novelist chooses a very impressive event at the end of the novel to deliver her message to the readers and the occupiers. She emphasizes that Palestinians will never stop their sacred struggle to be free and gain their independence. They, one day, will face the Israeli occupiers to leave Palestine. They will celebrate their independence like their celebration to welcome thousands of political prisoners who are released in turn of an Israeli soldier. " Hamas had won. Gilad Shalit,

the captured Israeli soldier, would be exchanged for one thousand Palestinian political prisoners" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.282). Nazmiyeh is very happy because Mazen is released, and he is coming home. The freedom of Mazen symbolizes the independence of Palestine and the return of Mazen confirms the return of Palestine. Mazen and thousands of political prisoners are released by force and Palestine will be liberated by the same way. "Hajje Nazmiyeh's chin quivered and she begins to cry". "My son," she whimpered. "Mazen is coming; home. I didn't think I'd live to see the day" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.283).

## 8. CONCLUSION

Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water* narrates some of the tragic and tragic stories of Palestinians and their endless sufferings after *Nakba*. Through the exiled characters, the novel traces their stories and sheds light on their coercive displacement, their experiences in exile, nostalgia, siege, shortage of food and medicines, spread of starvation and the life in camps. It reveals the crimes of Israelis in Palestine and exposes the falsity of Israelis who claims that their State respects human rights. It shows how Palestinians die in diaspora as refugees and their hope to return to the homes becomes a dream in their writings. The present study has attempted to read the tragic stories of Palestinians and focus on their collective memory to expose their sufferings and the brutality of Zionist occupation against them. The study has found that the Palestinian writers suffer from displacement and exile, but they do not isolate themselves from the reality of the Palestinian issue and the sufferings of their people. The study concludes that the novel reflects the novelist's personal experience as a Palestinian refugee. The novelist records the historical facts and the collective memory in her narratives to reflect the real situation of Palestine rather than depicting fictional themes. Additionally, this paper has found that the narrative tackles the social, political and humanitarian dimensions as well as taking literary aspect. The revolutionary discourse of Palestinian literature as a means of resistance has been reflected. The Palestinian men, women and youths are seen struggling to liberate their homeland and insist on the expulsion of the Zionist occupiers from Palestine. The novel emphasizes that despite all these frustrations, sufferings and injustice, the Palestinians continue struggling to gain their independence.

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