

Amal's Intercultural Encounter in Shaping Her Diasporic Identity in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*

Aimatul A. Maghfiroh^{1,*} Much. Koiri¹

¹*Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia*

^{*}*Corresponding author: aimatulmaghfiroh16020154060@mhs.unesa.ac.id*

ABSTRACT

In this modern era, going from one country to another could be done easily supported by the advancement in technology. People who come to a new country need to fit into a 'new' society in case they want to be acknowledged, or they could keep their culture and oppose conformity. This study aims to reveal Amal's intercultural encounter in shaping her diasporic identity in Susan Abulhawa's novel *Mornings in Jenin*. To avoid a broad analysis, the study is limited only to Amal, the main female character in the novel. Postcolonial approach and theory, culture and identity, and diasporic identity theories are used for data analysis. Particularly, Martin and Nakayama's multi-stages of identity development theory is also used to reveal the development of Amal's diasporic identity in her journey as a minority in the States. The study shows that Amal's intercultural encounter has critical roles to shape her diasporic identity. As an Arab who lives in America, her cultures collide with American cultures. Amal has undergone a confusion state: if she did not conform, she would feel the Otherness in herself and could not socialize well with American society. Eventually, Amal decides to conform to American culture. She reduces her Arab identity, but not entirely while gaining a new identity as an American.

Keywords: *Diasporic Identity, Identity Development, Intercultural Encounter*

1. INTRODUCTION

In this modern era, people could move from one country to another in ease without any obstacles. These phenomena have a significant role for migrants to reach their goals, which mostly are to pursue a better life and education that cannot be achieved in their origin country. Some of them left their country of origin as political refugees to find asylum. It is possible that their origin country has or had a war with, or colonized by another country.

Postcolonial literature is the literature by people from formerly colonized countries [1]. Some writers use postcolonial as their background in their works. Their works mostly to show their cultural identity. The writers are mostly from the Third World country with their transnational literature, for instance, Susan Abulhawa and her work, *Mornings in Jenin*. Susan Abulhawa is also an activist in humanity and has successfully built an association for Palestine children to maintain the Right to Play for Palestinian Children, called Playground for Palestine. She was born to a Palestinian Refugee in Kuwait in 1970, moved to the United States as an infant

before returning to Kuwait when she was five years old. She lived in an orphanage when she was ten three years in Jerusalem, then departed again to the United States. In 2002, Susan came to visit Palestine, and it inspired her to write *Mornings in Jenin*, her notable work [2].

Referring to Ioakimidis [3], Said's Orientalism work exhibits articulately how the romanticized and twisted Western contemplations of the 'Orient' were part of the bigger regal inspiration. Nowadays, culture, writing, and feel can play a major role in the figure of oppressed populations and justifying individual geopolitical interventions based on such prejudices. Still, in Ioakimidis [3], Said's Orientalism is never far from a thought that recognizes the Europeans against those 'non-Europeans,' and it can certainly be argued that the important segment of European culture is made up of hegemonic culture both within and outside Europe: the possibility that European character is better looked at than all groups and societies of non-European people.

Aside from Edward Said with his Orientalism, there is also Gayatri Spivak with her theory about *othering*. Notwithstanding the fact that the *other* identifies with the point of convergence of need or power (the M–*other* or Father – or Empire) concerning which the subject is

given, the other is the subject prohibited or 'acted' by the strength speaking. *Othering* illustrates the various practices by which pioneer talk expresses its subject matter. In the interpretation of Spivak, *Othering* is an argumentative practice in view of the fact that the colonizing *other* is set up at the same time as the colonized *others* are provided as subjects [4].

Mornings in Jenin is a popular novel, a magnificent prologue to the authentic occasions that still plague the Middle East. The tale supplements were crafted by a Palestinian lawmaker and researcher, Hanan Ashrawi; Edward Said, the Palestinian researcher and critics; and Robert Fisk, the columnist and author practicing in the Middle East. Without a doubt, Susan Abulhawa cites from Fisk and recognizes the help of Ashrawi and the impact of Said in delineating the disengagement of the Abulheja family from their territory after the Israelis involved Palestine in 1947 to set up a Jewish State. Abulhawa, through the eyes of Amal, draws the individual encounter as a Palestinian outcast presently living in America. Abulhawa's utilization of words depicts the poignancy of people adapting to the severe occasions of dispossession [5].

Amal is the main character in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* who happens to travel and live in several countries because she lived in a Refugee camp in Palestine. She was told to move and get an education in Jerusalem after her father was nowhere to be found, her mother died, and her brother's leaving made her left alone. After spending years in Jerusalem, Amal was awarded a scholarship from the United States. Without any doubt, she flew to America and lived there by herself. After her arrival, she was noticing the differences between her and American citizens. She also realized the contrast between Arab and American culture. Therefore, she tried to fit herself into American culture [6].

Intercultural encounter is inevitable when someone comes to a new place. Exclusively, when you come merely not to a retreat but for pursuing a better life. In order to be accepted by a new society, people need to conform. They need to fit into a 'new' society in case they want to be acknowledged, or they could keep their culture and did not want to conform. However, they will be regarded as *others*, the condition of being unique to and an outsider to the social personality of an individual and the character of the *Self* [7]. As a newcomer in America, Amal was experiencing an intercultural encounter between her own culture and new culture, and she did want to conform to the new culture. In the process of conformity, Amal somehow was negotiating, losing, and also gaining an identity.

Previous studies have primarily used postcolonial approaches to analyze *Mornings in Jenin*. The dialectic of past and present; diasporic reconciliation of politics, love, and trauma for Abulhawa herself; also Amal quests for identity, individual and national identity; have been found in the novel [8][9][10].

According to Soud [10], this novel explores the consequences of cultural, ideological, racial, economical, and political boundaries. Susan Abulhawa conveys a sense of trust where the reader could grasp the cultural background with some degree of understanding and acceptance. Abulhawa's novel welcomes a difficult perusing by blending the narrative of diverse human conditions through arranging and rising above antagonistic issues educated by divided and separated recollections and voices. Even though the components of disengaged, exilic, and horrible encounters rule the life of the hero, Amal (with the long vowel; which means the plural of 'hope', as Abulhawa stated), - her other conscious and protective voice stays predominant all through the whole story. With this outlook, she affiliates with human "diasporic ontological existence", whose essence is to refuse 'counter-violence', dogma and ideology, and to disrupt essentialized constructions of realities [8].

This paper is continuing Maghfiroh's study entitled, *The Portrayal of Amal's Diasporic Identity in Susan Abulhawa's Mornings in Jenin*. The article shows that Amal -the main character in the novel has five ideal types of diasporic identity: she has been dispersed, retains a collective memory about her homeland, believes that Americans cannot fully accept her, considers that her homeland is an ideal home to return to, also keeps experiencing nostalgia and longing of her Palestine [6].

And yet, in the present study, the purpose is to reveal how Amal's intercultural encounters shape her diasporic identity. Conceptually speaking, the encounters play important roles in shaping identity. It is then necessary to see how they work in the novel.

Throughout the formation of identity, the cultural context has shaped how identity is created. According to Samovar et al. [11], every ethnicity or people and their cultures have cultural patterns or popularly known as cultural values. Several studies have found some theories about cultural values; however, this research will use Hofstede's Cultural Dimension that is believed to have matched Amal's experience.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions has six values [11] that are influenced and modified by culture, and there are individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity/femininity, long-term/short-

term orientation, and indulgence/restraint. Hofstede successfully conducted a survey then publicized his theory and results that show a significant number of possible American and Arab countries (including Palestine) are contradicted to each other in their cultural values.

According to Hofstede's value dimensions, the survey shows that Arabs live in collectivistic societies where group interests take precedence over those of the individual. That more likely the society takes attention to social norms and duty defined by in-group rather than behavior to get pleasure. In collectivistic societies, people are born into extended families, clans, or tribes that support and protect them in exchange for their allegiance.

Culture and identity always stand side by side, and identity is constructed by culture and society. Identity is social and cultural with unrelated or unconnected to neither spiritual nor historical elements [12]. According to Weeks in Barker et al. [12] identity is about uniformity and dissimilarity, personal and social, 'about what you have in common with other people and what renders you different from others. Identity is constructed by social and cannot exist 'outside' representations of culture. Each person will have an identity produced by society, called social identity, about how others expect and think about ourselves. We also have Self or personal identity, which represents the concept we had about ourselves. Furthermore, society constructs a cultural identity that Stuart Hall [13] believes is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities are the purposes of distinguishing proof, the shaky purposes of identity, or suture, which are made inside the talk of history and culture.

In acquiring and developing identity [11], the environment and media have a significant role. Theoretical approach, as quoted Samovar in his book, Phinney has three stages, even though the model focuses on ethnic identity, it is relevant to the acquisition and development of cultural identity. The initial stage is unexamined ethnic identity, trailed by ethnic identity search, and the final stage is an ethnic achievement.

On the other hand, Martin and Nakayama offer multi-stage identity development models for minority, majority, and biracial individuals. This study will concentrate on minority individuals because Amal's relocation to the United States made her a minority, and it is the most pertinent to this paper's context.

The primary stage is similar to Phinney's, an unexamined ethnic character, in which people are uninterested with identity issues. In Martin et al. [14]

minority groups initially accept the values and attitudes of the majority culture. Someone who is not in the majority usually tries to be a part of the majority. They would think and take the majority group's side.

The second stage is trying to fit in with the dominant culture and may even have negative mental self-views, this stage is called conformity. This stage is characterized by the internalization of the values and norms of the dominant group and often continues until they encounter a situation that causes them to question predominant cultural attitudes.

Resistance and separatism, stage three, is usually the effect of some cultural encounters between old and new. After conforming to the dominant culture, the minority would be aware that the values of the dominant culture are not always beneficial and they tend to separate from the dominant culture.

In the last stage, integration, individuals have a feeling of pride in and relate to their group identity, also exhibit an acknowledgment of different groups.

As a result of previous studies, Amal shows that she has a diasporic identity because she has lived in several countries and she keeps relating to her hometown. She cannot escape from her past and she must live her present. She has been in between throughout her journey. The concept of diaspora focuses on transnational travels, journeys, even the mass movement of people leaving their home country [15][16], which is more common now than in the ancient world. Contemporary diaspora is no longer a one-way movement out of the nation, as communication and technologies greatly facilitate it [17][18].

Hall [13] allows us to consider that the diasporic experience is characterized by heterogeneity and diversity, an origination of personality that lives with and through, and not despite contrast, but by hybridity. Diasporic identities are those that cut crosswise over and dislodge national limits, making new types of having a place and testing the fixing of national characters in connection to put. According to Sanyu [19], Hall argues that distinguishing diasporic pieces of proof are tied with living 'in interpretation' as people 'must figure out how to occupy two characters, communicate in two dialects, to decipher and arrange between them. In Bozdağ [20], diasporic identities are not to be perceived merely as reproductions of the national identities in a new context. Identities are in a constant process of articulation and becoming, and not of being. Furthermore, diasporic identities are 'constructed within, not outside of representation' [13].

William Safran has six features of the ideal type of diaspora in his journal: (1) they or their ancestor have been scattered; (2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth from their homeland — its physical location, history, and achievements; (3) they believe that their host society— and perhaps cannot — entirely accept them; (4) they regard their homeland as their actual, ideal home and as the spot to which they or their relatives would (or should) in the extended run return—when conditions are suitable; (5) they accept that they should, by and large, be focused on the upkeep or reclamation of their unique country and to its security and success; and (6) they keep on relating, by and by or vicariously, to their homeland, and the presence of such a relationship significantly characterizes their ethnic mutual cognizance and solidarity [21].

2. METHOD

Considering that this study is to analyze the cultural values In order to establish a fundamental understanding for the reader, ensure the research consistency, and avoid board analysis which could digress from the main topic, the study is limited only in Amal character, the central or main character in the novel.

The research statement is disclosed by using a postcolonial approach. The data source of the study is taken from the novel titled *Mornings in Jenin* by Susan Abulhawa, published by Bloomsbury Publishing in 2010. This novel consists of 352 pages. This is a literary study that requires a postcolonial approach and also several theories from diaspora studies. The data are in the form of direct and indirect quotations, phrases, and dialogues. To collect the data, the researchers did a close reading to find and classify the data needed in the form of quotations and statements relevant for the analysis—in line with the research aim.

For the analysis, the researchers apply Martin and Nakayama's concept of multi-stage identity development to describe Amal's identity development. Meanwhile, for diasporic identity, the researchers mainly use William Safran's ideals type of diaspora. Discussion is conducted to show how Amal's intercultural encounters shape her diasporic identity. Afterwards, a conclusion is drawn from the whole discussion.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The novel is a transnational literary work that has a post-colonial narrative. Using background *Jenin Massacre* in 2002, Susan Abulhawa shows the moment

when Palestine was overpowered by Zionist. Most Palestinian live in refugees, including the main character — Amal, and they were outcasted and exiled from their own country. Despite living with a sense of freedom, most refugees are shackled in their own homes.

When Amal arrives in the United States, there will be a definite encounter between American culture and Arab culture that stick to her. This encounter has the most critical role in Amal's diasporic identity construction. As stated earlier, this study uses multi-stage identity development models for the minority by Martin and Nakayama.

The first time she arrived at the United States to attend university, Amal feels confused about being herself. The first event that stimulated her diasporic identity while she was in America. She felt the differences between her and American. On the first day when she just landed, she was picked up by her host-parent, and cannot find the right phrases to show how grateful she was,

"Thank you," I answered, unsure of the proper American response to her gracious enthusiasm. (p. 169)

The word unsure shows her confusion, at this level is the difference between American's language and Arab's and Amal is completely conscious about this barrier. Showing gratitude in Arab has various ways, according to Amal, not merely 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.

The first stage of identity development happened when Amal was a first-year student at Temple University. Amal is cognizant of being different from her peers, even though they never said that she is different explicitly. Amal is conscious. She said in the novel about her foreign accent and name that she regards it as a barrier that gets in her way to blend in. Hence, Amal is unconscious that this event is relating to her identity issues. The way she uttered words, she regarded it as a foreignness that she could not even escape from like a barrier. As she said, "My accent was a social handicap, or at least I regarded it as such" (p. 173).

Amal was experiencing an enormous cultural gap between Americans and the Arab. One day when her room neighbor, Elana, asked her about Amal's sex life makes Amal contemplating what she should say about her culture and being a virgin. Because in Arab culture, different gender —not blood related even prohibited from

being in one room without any presence of adults or parents.

“Have you ever had sex?” she asked unctuously. I froze. I had never even kissed a boy. (p. 172)

Involving girls' virginity is a severe consequence in Arab culture, and it is taboo to talk about sex life in public. When Huda (Amal's best friend) was abused and molested by her father, and she confesses to Amal, then Amal tells her father, this is the background of Huda live with Amal's family. In the narrative, Abulhawa is showing the perspective of an 8-years-old girl talking about sexual harassment that happened to her best friend, and she successfully disguised the real problem with her way of telling it.

He was a dreadful man who beat her, and when she was eight, It happened. He did It to her. It would be an unforgivable betrayal to utter the word. It happened the first and only time, she confessed to me as if it were her disgrace, and she allowed me to tell Baba. An alarm had concentrated in Baba's eyes when I relayed the heavy secret, which I did not fully understand. (p. 84)

There is some Arab culture that contradicted to American culture, which happens to Amal and makes her in shock. Even in Arab or Muslim culture, staring intensely at the opposite gender too long could be considered as a sin.

..., something caught and oppressed by the strict ways of a religious culture that would not permit him even a gentle kiss on her cheek. (p. 136)

According to Hofstede's value dimensions, the survey shows that Arabs live in collectivistic societies where group interests take precedence over those of the individual. That more likely the society takes attention to social norms and duty defined by in-group rather than behavior to get pleasure. In collectivistic societies, people are born into extended families, clans, or tribes that support and protect them in exchange for their allegiance.

Amal is aware of her foreignness or *Otherness*, and she believes that she needs to conform to American culture as soon as possible. She begins trying to fit in. Her desire to be part of the community is as massive as she wants to gain freedom. She narrated that she cannot find the commonality between her and American. She feels out of place and eager to belong (p.172).

“Palestinian girl of pitiable beginnings was trampled in my rush to belong and find relevance in the West.” (p. 173)

“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.” (p.173)

The shreds of the evidence above show how desperate Amal to conform to American society. She wants to belong to society as the phrase 'to belong' has repeated a few times. Thus, she tries to jump and change her cultural and religious points of view into American ethos. She narrated herself as an unclassified Arab-Western hybrid, unrooted and unknown. Amal has done sin if she still remembered in Islam that *Khamr* or alcohol is *haram* and prohibited, therefore, she continued that I (she) spun in cultural vicissitude. Amal was experiencing cultural change, and she kept doing it when she was in America. Amal is aware that she still belongs to the Arab family and Arab culture. However, she cannot help the urge to conform.

In this case, Amal has developed her identity as a minority, according to Martin and Nakayama's multi-stages identity development. She already reaches the second stage, which is conformity, to try to fit into her new society and become part of it. This evidence supported Hall's theory that a diasporic identity could be characterized by heterogeneity and diverse variety, an origination of personality that lives with and through, and not in spite of contrast, however by hybridity.

After she graduated, she moved to West Philly in a minority ghetto community, and still, she cannot find the sameness between her and American. Nevertheless, it did not stop her. She spent her life as an American with West Philly citizens. She works as a clerk in a small store. Days by days, months by months, she finally feels accepted. All that matters to Amal is accepted by the new society.

“What I knew for sure was that people in West Philly thought I was beautiful, not different, and my accent was not a call for mistrust. The very things that made me suspect to the white world were backstage passes in the black neighborhoods.” (p. 177-178)

Afterward, she lost her Arab identity, which at first she was trying to maintain. She conformed to American and separated her Arab culture away. Mostly, Arab culture tends to relate to religious tradition and doctrine, such as sex before marriage and drink alcohol, and those are prohibited and considered as a sin because it is written in the Muslim Holy book, *Qoran*. Regarding Al

Soud [10], Amal attempts to remove herself from social and strict conventions and to teach to increase social acknowledgment in the United States, working on everything taboo in Palestine just as getting a charge out of a guaranteed great chance that would encourage her character and personality. She additionally feels remorseful and sees herself as a deceiver for her country for fitting into American culture and detesting her strict forbiddance, as she described herself,

“The undercurrent of my life in America was a sense of shame that I had betrayed my family—or worse, myself.” (p.174)

Amal has undergone a confusion state if she did not conform, she would have felt the *Otherness* in her and could not socialize well. Therefore, the evidence below proves that she has reached the third stage of Martin and Nakayama's identity development, resistance, and separatism. After some intercultural encounters and she conforms to American culture, she feels that she needs to resist American culture because it has benefited her in the United States even though she knows that some of the American cultures are not.

She tries to forget her past, her 'old' home, by consigning to American culture even though she is conscious that it should be wrong because a lot of American culture values contrast to Arab culture values.

“But I consigned myself to American mores and subscribed to their liberties.” (p. 174)

“I deliberately avoided political discussions, did not write to the people who loved me, and let myself be known as "Amy"— Amal without hope. I was a word drained of its meaning. A woman emptied of her past. The truth is that I wanted to be someone else.” (p. 178)

After she finally changed her name, the first thing that comes to her thought is she could easily socialize and would be accepted. For her, a foreign name could inhibit her from blending into Western society, which a significant number of people will have a western name. Therefore, she cast her meaningful name to become Amy with coldness and a million secrets she has.

When there was a bombing in the U.S embassy in Lebanon, she was carefully watched by the CIA's detective and she met her foster mother's ex in a bar and there was news about the bombing and it related to her brother. Her foster mother's ex exclaimed, “Fucking terrorist, I think we ought to carpet-bomb the whole fucking place. Get rid of every last sand-nigger.” She was too upset to think clearly and rage had over her. Thus, she punched him right in front of the CIA's agents. With this event, she cannot entirely relate to American culture because some of them are racist. She

cannot help but defend her family and country. This shows that Amal has slowly reached the last stage, which is integration. Even though she resists keeping American culture, she cannot cast her 'old' culture away. She integrated into her 'old' society but appreciated other cultural groups.

There was an incident where Amal had just returned from Beirut, and a few months later, her husband was reported dead by the phone call from her brother. She is now a single mother who has to take care of her own child, even though she used to barely feel what it feels like to be loved and cared for by her own mother.

“...but now Amal was bound by custom to ensure the proper running of the household. Before the war, the backdrop to Amal's life had been colored with Baba's love at dawn, Mama's stoic rearing, and Yousef's clandestine love affair with Fatima. Now, those hues were replaced by military green and the pale of depletion. Neighbors looked at her with pity and whispered.”

“What is the girl going to do?”

“She almost marrying age. That's good.”

“Yes. God willing she'll find a good man soon to take care of her.” (p. 110)

Arab is known for their patriarchal culture when girls or women should be at home, running their household while men are the one who works for their family. When her mother, Dalia, was out of consciousness after the war and lost her father as well, and Yousef was going to fight, so Amal was left alone. The event happened when Amal was twelve-years-old. She cannot do anything except running her household by herself. While a contrary event happened after Majid's death, Amal became the breadwinner for her family. She broke her culture to survive in the United States.

“I rejoined the working society, stepping unobtrusively into the steady American flow. I returned to work in the pharmaceutical industry, leaving Sara in the care of Elizabeth most of the time.” (p. 245)

“Only Sara was a threat to my hardness.” (p. 246)

Amal was raised with tough motherhood from Dalia. Moreover, she keeps her distance from her daughter, fearing catastrophe will happen if she tells what happened to her. Amal never has a bond with her daughter. She scarcely has time for Sara (Amal's daughter). However, deep down in Amal's heart, she loves her daughter even though it is hard to face her who has a similar face feature with Majid, her late husband.

"I held my breath and clenched my jaw to keep from remembering love or wanting it ever again, and I laid Sara in her bed with care now, turning to dress myself in the chill of Amy and a fine black suit before leaving for my job." (p. 249)

The aftereffect of Majid's death and Yousef becomes CIA's fugitive, Amal begins to register herself to merge into a complete American citizen, who favors individualism and she becomes cold with a massive wall that she has built majestically without regard to the surrounding environment.

Thus from the excerpt above, it can be concluded that Amal is developing her diasporic identity through her intercultural encounters between Arabs and American culture. Amal slowly reduces her Arab identity while gaining a new identity as an American. Yet, her diasporic identity makes her stuck and it is unstable for she cannot maintain her Arab culture nor became an American completely.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals Amal's intercultural encounters took an important role in shaping her diasporic identity. By using Martin and Nakayama's identity development model of minority, researchers disclose Amal's diasporic identity development. Experiencing being 'Others', Amal consciously wants to fit into American life. She consigns herself to American liberty and lives like Americans. She drinks alcohol and dates several men, forgetting that it is prohibited in Arab culture. She slowly reduces her Arab identity while gaining a new American identity as Amy. She changed her name so she could easily blend herself into her new society. Amal registers herself to merge into a complete American citizen, favor individualism, and she becomes cold with a massive wall that she has built majestically without regarding the surrounding environment. Nevertheless, it does not go as well as Amal could think. Her tragic past and memory still haunt her. Amal is stuck between the past and present. Amal fits well with Saffran's ideal type of diaspora and definitely has showcased a diasporic identity. Her diasporic identity makes her stuck and it is unstable for she cannot maintain her Arab culture nor became an American completely.

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