

Promoting Identity and a Sense of Belonging: An Ecocritical Reading of Randa Abdel-Fattah's *Where the Streets Had a Name*

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Abstract

This paper examines Randa Abdel-Fattah's novel entitled *Where the Street Had a Name* (2008). The main goal is to examine how interacting with ecology, culture, and nature in the contexts of the host land and the homeland as depicted in the novel promotes identity and a sense of belonging. It also aims at analyzing the links between land and identity from an ecocritical perspective and how Palestinians' land and identity are psychologically, mentally, and physically interconnected. Through using natural forms of Palestine, humans' and non-humans' interconnectedness and the symbol of the iconic jar of homeland soil and its possibilities for revitalising Hayaat's identity, Abdel-Fattah attempts to reveal her ecological connection to the land of her origin and how this tight connection promotes identity and shapes the sense of belonging. This paper reveals that it is impossible to separate Palestinians from their homeland because the land is part of their identity. Therefore, the current debate provides new perspectives on how to open a new horizon for identity strengthening in Abdel-Fattah's and other Muslim diasporic writers' works.

Keywords

Ecocritical approach, promoting identity, land and identity interconnectedness, sense of belonging, ecological identity, Muslim diasporic writers

Introduction

As a direct consequence of occupation and the establishment of the State of Israel on Palestinian land, Palestinians either have left or been forcefully cut off from all contact with their homeland and presently live in the diaspora. Those people may be far from their homes, but their native land is still very much alive in their hearts and souls. In the diaspora, Palestinians struggle with multi-cultural identity. This is evidently represented in the Palestinian literature where the search for identity, a sense of belonging, and loss of land are dominant

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themes. Even though Palestinian diasporic writers live away from their homeland, they continue to stay environmentally attached to the land where they were born, and their literary works reflect this association (Iaccio). Palestinians' daily suffering, whether under occupation or in the diaspora, reminds them of their identity as citizens of the land and their displacement could yield a culture of rootedness (Abu-Remaileh). The effects of the Nakbah on Palestinians are encapsulated thus:

Al-Nakbah was the moment in history when the Palestinians' world order, which had been considered part of the "laws of nature", was violently and dramatically altered: their legal rights as having Personae – that is, as being legal subjects – were greatly diminished, obliterated altogether. Their cultural and physical environment underwent a dramatic transformation, and their existence as a national community ceased to be taken for granted. (Sa'di 185)

The sense of loss and the treatment Palestinians receive under occupation give them the motivation to fight for their right to return. Ignoring the fact that so many Palestinians were born away from their land, they have just a strong sense of identity and therefore are actively fighting to come back to their homeland as they always believe they are "refugees or exiles" (Naguib 49). The sense of loss in exile is unlike any other kind of sense. Exiles lose their inner selves when they lose their homeland (Alghaberi). They are ruled by the belief that returning home seems to be the only way to reclaim their inner self (Jabra).

The Nakbah in 1948, the establishment of the Israeli state, and the subsequent displacement and dispersion of Palestinians from their homeland to become refugees in various regions of the world have all had an impact on Palestinian literature (Iaccio). According to Starkey, inevitably, the literary scene following 1948 mirrored the Palestinian people's preoccupation with refugee status. Among the first novelists to contribute to making the Palestinian issue both personal and literary issue were Jabra, Ghassan Kanafani, and Halim Barakat.

Palestinian authors, more than most other Arab authors, have been affected by their political matters and proceed to seek self-identification in their literary works. Jayyusi contends:

There are problems of identity, even problems over the simple acquisition of a passport; Palestinian writers have to spend their lives either as exiles in other people's countries, or if they have in fact remained in their own ancestral homeland, either as second-class citizens in Israel proper or lacking any citizenship at all under Israeli military rule in the West Bank and Gaza. (2)

The perplexing situation of Palestinians who live in the diaspora or occupied territory inspired the writers to devote much of their work to the Palestinian issue. Abdel-Malek and Jacobson agree that leading authors often feel inclined

to dedicate much of their literary production to national issues when national groups are driven by political conflict. Palestinian literature describes the upheavals that occurred just after Nakbah and discusses the psychological consequences of losing one's homeland, emphasising the right of Palestinian refugees to get back to their motherland (Siddiq). Anglophone Arab literature is studied in academic institutes around the world because it offers Western readers information about Arab thoughts and also reflects the true image of Arabs, which has worsened since the September 11, 2001 event in the US (Al Maleh).

Palestinian-diasporic writers' works have emerged because of the lack of identity and a sense of belonging. In their literary works, many writers depict the tale of a "lost land" (Al Maleh 38). Through their creative practices, Arab-Australian writers are actively involved with the land of their origin. Although they reside away from their motherland, they are intellectually, mentally, emotionally, and physically enslaved by it. Al Maleh claims that the actual distance from it enhanced their view of what happened back 'home,' and converted their nostalgic thoughts and desires into informative reasoning. Many diasporic Muslim writers perceive their culture and recreate excerpts of reality in their works (Kuyucu).

Randa Abdel-Fattah (1979-), a Palestinian-Egyptian Australian writer, managed to stand among diasporic Muslim writers for her young adult fiction, which depicts sentimental and moving events based on the Muslim young adult experience in the two contexts of multicultural Australia and the real historical story of the Palestinians' endless suffering and struggle to reclaim their own land. Her work also depicts the identity issue of displaced young adult Muslims, whose predicament is shared in both host and homeland contexts (Almutairi et al.).

Randa Abdel-Fattah was born in Australia. Among her novels are *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005) and *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2006), both of which bring forward the everyday struggles of a young adult Muslim within the Australian context. Her third novel *Where the Streets Had a Name* (2008) is set outside of Australia.

Randa Abdel-Fattah seeks to represent the daily pain of Palestinians in diasporic countries and in their own country. She sought to draw readers' attention to the deep association between Palestinian land and identity through her chosen novel, *Where the Street Had a Name*. Abdel-Fattah attempts to depict how Palestinians in exile search for their identity. The novel narrates how a thirteen-year-old girl named Hayyat, who is raised as a refugee in the curfew-strewn town of Bethlehem with the rest of her family, leaves home in search of a jar of soil from her former homeland to gratify her aging grandmother's last desire to touch the land of her birth. Hayyat is joined by her Christian Palestinian friend Samy on a journey that takes the reader through some of the

country's landmarks. Despite the challenges and risks they face, given the severity of curfews, countless checkpoints, the presence of soldiers everywhere, and the wall that separates them from Jerusalem, these two teenagers manage to enter the city and leave with a jar filled with its soil, albeit not the soil where their home used to be.

The themes of identity, land, and belonging recur throughout the novel. Abdel-Fattah recounts sentimental and progressing occurrences based on the true story of Palestinians' endless misery and struggle to reclaim their homeland. The novel explores the unquenchable desire of displaced people to return to their motherland. Moreover, the characters' reciprocated search for home and yearning for a return to their homeland is the novel's central theme. This is demonstrated through numerous representations of Palestinians, both young and old, including the protagonist's grandmother, father, and companion, all of whom have been forcefully evicted from their homeland. Nonetheless, it is the grandmother, Sitti Zeynab, who gives the novel its name, as her never-ending desire to rejoin the land of her birth before she passes away is symptomatic of every Palestinian's longing. It is real that a major issue with ecology appears to be evident in Abdel-Fattah's novel in which land has been used as an important scenery against which the story evolves (Ahmed and Hashim). Abdel-Fattah uses ecocritical aspects of human-land connectivity to reflect contemporary ecological consequences in diasporic writings, especially those by Palestinian diasporic writers.

Theoretical framework

The crisis in the environment had no bearing on literary studies in the sixties and seventies (Glotfelty and Fromm). Nor is there any sign that the institution of literary studies was aware of the environmental crisis. For instance, there have been "no journals, no jargon, no jobs, no professional societies or discussion groups and no conferences on literature and the environment" (Glotfelty and Fromm xvi). In the mid-1980s, environmental crises became a focus of literary studies. This kind of research took off in the early 1990s (Glotfelty and Fromm). During this time, many special conferences and sessions on environmental literature began to appear. Estok and Kim asserted that "while ecocriticism began as an American academic pursuit, it is now a multinational, multi-vocal, multicultural area of scholarship" (1).

Glotfelty and Fromm defined ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). The first use of the term ecocriticism dates back to 1974 when Meeker coined the concept of "literary ecology" in his essay "The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology," sowing an ecological seed in the field of literary studies. Four years later, Rueckert defined ecocriticism as a literary tool based on Meeker's ecological kernel.

Soper and Bradley wrote, “It has been hailed as one of the most timely and productive developments in literary and cultural studies in recent decades,” (p. xiii). Ecocriticism is concerned with the relationship between humans and nonhumans and how they interact. Ecocriticism, according to Glotfelty and Fromm, is distinct from other critical approaches as it “expands the notion of the world to include the entire ecosphere” (xix).

Slovic considered ecocriticism as “the study of explicit environmental texts by way of any scholarly approach, or conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationship in any literary text even texts that seem, at first glance, oblivious of nonhuman” (160). According to Love, ecocriticism focuses on the “interconnection between the material world and human culture, specifically the cultural artifacts language and literature” (196). Ecocriticism examines literature from the perspective of the earth-centered approach (Glotfelty and Fromm). Literary theory, in general, studies the relationship between writers, texts, and the world. Ecocriticism advocates a paradigm shift from human-centric to bio-centric thinking, which bridges the gap between the mutually exclusive categories of center and periphery. It examines how humans and the natural world interact in literature. It focuses on how environmental issues, environmental-related cultural issues, and attitudes toward nature are portrayed and examined. Studying how members of society behave and respond to environmental issues is one of ecocriticism’s key objectives. The higher social emphasis on environmental destruction and advancements in technology have made this type of critique quite popular in recent years. Consequently, it offers a novel approach to reading and evaluating literary texts. (Kern).

In Arabic literature, however, “Ecocriticism is still in its infancy” (Ahmed and Hashim). They argue that “it is still quite unknown and opening up the field in Arab academia is immensely valuable for incorporating Arab voices in the recent ecocritical arguments” (15). “It’s a two-way street,” says (Sinno). It requires genuine collaboration between Arab scholars and writers who are interested in environmental scholarship, as well as existing ecocriticism scholars, writers, and editors in the West” (125). This new theory could be tested in Arabic literary works because Arabic literature “dwells in the natural environment” (Ahmed and Hashim 15). Therefore, ecocriticism is employed, in the present study, as a different analytical perspective for reading Randa Abdel-Fattah’s novel *Where the Street Had a Name*.

Interconnectedness

In the present framework, interconnectedness is defined by the connection between land and identity. It also teaches us that land is an important part of our identity and promotes our sense of belonging. As soon as you lose your land, you lose your identity and self-representation. “We don’t know who we are

unless we know where we are” (Ahmed et al.). Consequently, Abdel-Fattah’s novel connects the concept of identity to the concept of land, which is central to ecocriticism. “Interconnectedness is among the most basic of ecocriticism tenets, as ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnectedness between humans and nature,” say Ahmed et al. (10). Interconnectedness as an ecocritical concept can be defined as a term that has been coined to expose how the relationship in both human and nature are symbolically interconnected. Therefore, this concept involves analyzing the interplay between humans and their environment and the relationship that exists between them in literary texts. It is used to expose how land and identity are spiritually connected in Abdel-Fattah’s work.

Land-Effect

Ecocriticism is a discipline that studies the relationship between humans and the natural world, as well as how they interact (Mishra). The term “earth-centered approach” denotes a shift from an anthropocentric perspective, which “considers humans to be the most important life forms and other forms of life to be important only to the extent that they affect humans or can be useful to humans,” to a more “biocentric” perspective, which believes that “all life has intrinsic value” (Kortenkamp and Moore). Humans and land are inextricably linked, and it is impossible to separate them (Alaimo). Alaimo also asserts that humans and the environment are inseparably connected (2).

Ecological identity

The search for the ecological aspects of Palestinian identity is a potential and worthwhile pursuit. According to Estok and Kim, ecological identity is defined as:

one such concept that attempts to disentangle utilitarian viewpoints from modern attitudes on the environment. Unlike the modern, conventional, self-sufficient, and self-contained sense of identity, an ecological identity stands for that which is (re)created in a process of negotiations between the individual and the environment in which that person exists. (19)

Thomashow defines “ecological identity” as “all the different ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of self” (3). “Ecological identity describes how we extend our sense of self in relationship to nature,” he continues. The relationship one has with the environment, which is a part of one’s identity, can reveal ecological identity (Estok and Kim). Khalidi discusses the aspects of the Palestinian identity crisis in his book. He claims, “The manifestation of the Palestinian identity crisis appears clearly at borders and checkpoints where they feel their alienation as if they are not Palestinians” (Khalidi 2). By provoking the fauna and flora that comprise Palestinian nature, Abdel-Fattah expresses her

ecological connection to that of the Arab world, the place from which her parents and other Palestinians were displaced. As a result, she reflects a variety of ecological patterns that influence her Palestinian identity. She appears to have a strong connection to the homeland she yearns for. Based on this background, in what follows, an analysis of the characteristics of the relationship between identity and land is provided.

Non-human interconnectivity

Natural Forms: Flora

Olive Tree

The linkage between Palestinian identity and land can be traced by using some of Palestine's natural forms. Images of numerous parts of nature, such as mint, olive trees, cucumber, and zaatar, are not just a source of nutrition for Palestinians, but also integral parts of their identity. The olive tree is a symbol of power and resistance for Palestinians. It is a part of their identity and a source of inspiration for them to fight for their right to return. It is also a symbol of stability and serves as a reminder of identity and occupied land and provides a sense of belonging. As a result, Palestinians use this tree in their daily meals no matter where they live. The correlation between land and identity is demonstrated by Hayat's description of the harvest of olives:

After the harvest, I would watch in amazement as olives were ground into paste beneath two huge rolling stones. Then Baba and his workers would spread the pulp on circular straw mats and load the mats into a press that squeeze the paste to produce thick, yellow-green, fragrant oil which was later collected in big plastic containers. (Abdel-Fattah 21)

Abdel-Fattah reinforces the message that Palestinians who have been exiled are constantly drawn back to the land they have left behind. They feel disoriented because they are separated from their homeland. The narrative emphasises the symbolic relationship between Palestinian identity and land through the harvest process.

Cucumber Plant

The association between identity and land can also be understood through certain Palestinian flora that is widely cultivated in Palestine and eaten as a staple meal. This sort of plant is indicated in the words of Sitti Zeina: "Ohh! Yes. Not to mention the problem of how I am to make you my jars of pickle cucumber! You know how much Ahmad loves them. He told me that he preferred them over his mother's" (Abdel-Fattah 17). The use of *cucumber* suggests a significant linkage between Palestinians and their land since this *pickled cucumber* is frequently used in Palestinian meals. The phrase *pickled cucumber* conjures up a sense of emotional attachment and rootedness between the writer and her land of origin.

Palm Trees

Another type of Palestinian flora that has been used to represent the interconnectedness of Palestinian identity and land exists in Hayaat's father's description.

Oh... Well, palm trees or olive trees, what's the difference? The roots of this land are holy. (Abdel-Fattah 20)

The writer's use of *palm trees* and *olive trees* indicates that she is deeply connected to the land from which her family was uprooted. The narrative utilises such types of plants to demonstrate how Palestinian identity is intertwined with the land and how they are inextricably linked. The phrase *the roots of this land are holy* implies that these trees are sacred to Palestinians and represent their culture and identity. Palestinians derive their strength from these trees which are deeply rooted in the ground and from which Palestinians derive their sense of belonging to the land.

Mountains and Hills

Another mechanism of interconnectivity between identity and land is yet revealed in the following lines:

I listened to the quiet and looked out at Jabal Abu Ghneim, a mountain encircled by softly rolling hills and valleys. Baba told me that before the vegetation was torn down to make way for a settlement it was a thickly forested, luscious green mountains. (Abdel-Fattah 21)

The narrative attempts to employ pure nature by referring to *Jabal Ghneim*, *bills*, and *valley*, to point out the correlation between Palestinian identity and land in a personalised manner. The narrative seeks to express how beautiful Palestinian landscapes seem to be before they are destroyed by occupation. The depicted mountains *encircled by softly rolling bills and valleys* represent the Palestinian nation's magical locations. Whatever damage the occupation leaves behind, Palestinians' hearts and souls are still left with a sense of beauty for Palestine.

Human interconnectivity

Hayaat's father

The link between land and identity can be identified by the words of Hayat's father in describing some Palestinian locations:

There are many Christian holy sites on the mountain ... Shepherd's Field, Saint Theodore's Well, the Byzantine monastery, and the Church of Bir Qadisum where Mary dismounted before giving birth to Jesus. (Abdel-Fattah 22)

The narrative mentions some Christian places in Palestine to reflect on the association between Christians and Muslims in Palestine and to emphasise that Palestine is a land for all. It portrays the harmony of Christians and Muslims in

Palestine and their right to live together on the same land. Furthermore, these places are an integral part of Palestinian identity. As a result, they will never be separated because they have shared the same suffering throughout history, and their bond is deepened in blood.

Hayaat's grandmother

Keeping records of prosperity after being displaced for many years represents a greater connection between Palestinian identity and land. Sitti Zeinab's line could be used to trace these links: "The deeds to my land... as though letting me in on special secret" (Abdel-Fattah 55). The preceding line evokes feelings of attachment to one's homeland and the interconnectedness of Palestinians and their land. Sitti Zeinab still maintains the deeds of her lost land even after decades of displacement. Keeping the land record demonstrates Palestinians' desire to come back, and this desire is bolstered by the presence of a strong bond between Palestinians and their homeland. The narrative tries to emphasise the unlikelihood of separating Palestinians from their land because they always believe they will recover by returning to their homeland. The urge of Palestinians to return to their homeland demonstrates a deep affection and connection to their homeland. As Sitti Zeinab in the story says: "Many of the houses were now occupied by Israeli families. Some parts had changed, so much so that they were unrecognisable to us" (Abdel-Fattah 57). After some time, Sitti Zeinab returns to her home to see it and breathe the air of her land. She is aware that her village has been occupied by Israeli families, yet she insists on visiting it because she is deeply attached to her land and home. The correlation between identity and land reaches a climax when Sitti Zeinab asserts:

If I could have one wish, Hayaat, it could be to touch the soil of my home one last time before I die.... When your root is ripped out from under you, you risk shriveling up. All I want is to die on my land. Not in my daughter's home, but in my home. (Abdel-Fattah 63)

The dream of Sitti Zeinab is to reach out and touch her home, which is built on Palestinian land. The narrative captures Palestinians' longing for their homeland. The image of home is used to represent the rapport that exists between Palestinians and their homeland. They regard their land as holy, and it provides them with a sense of being alive on this planet. They believe their souls are imbued in their homeland. This land only serves to remind them of their origins. Sitti Zeinab's dream to touch the soil of her homeland denotes Palestinians' high regard for Palestinian land. This land provides a solid foundation for them to fight for their survival. Sitti Zeinab's wish to touch the soil of her homeland before she dies, instead of seeing her exiled sons, proves that Palestinians love their homeland more than their children.

Hayaat's Character

Hayaat's desire for her tiny pieces of body to touch her homeland also symbolises the unification of Palestinian identity and land. Hayaat explains:

I peer out at the landscape. I want to climb those stone stairs, touch the hills.... I want to tear our papers and identity cards into million tiny pieces and throw them to the wind so that each piece of me can touch my homeland freely. (Abdel-Fattah 107)

Palestinians would like all obstacles to be eliminated to be able to get back home as they believe they are psychologically exhausted. Regardless of the challenges and suffering they confront inside the occupied territory, they would never accept alternatives. As a result, some well-known locations in Palestine serve to remind Palestinians of their identity. "Jerusalem and the surrounding green rolling hills filled with olive trees" (181) are a source of inspiration for Palestinians. The frequent use of olive trees as an ecological symbol of Palestinian identity is evidence of the author's land-based identity. The use of wild domesticated nature forms reveals the homeland's ecological presence, which is associated with Palestinian identity. Hayaat's intention to bring her grandmother a jar of Jerusalem soil evokes a sense of Palestinian identity and land interconnectivity. This attitude can be identified in Hayaat's words: "Stay alive," I whisper. "I'll let you touch that soil again." She doesn't. (Abdel-Fattah 71)

Hayaat is concerned about her grandmother's health and decides to bring her a jar of Jerusalem soil, believing that it will aid in her grandmother's recovery. She is aware of the deep affection her grandmother holds for her motherland, thus Hayaat recognises that touching the soil of the homeland will make her grandmother feel better. The term "soil" is used to represent Palestinian land that has been taken away from Palestinians and how they are associated with it. The author wishes to emphasise that Palestinians will continue to suffer as long as they are separated from their homeland. Similarly, Hayaat's mood shifts as she gets closer to the Old City, symbolising Palestinians' relationship with their homeland. "I can particularly feel the soil running through my fingers" (190), she says, indicating her strong desire to see and touch the soil of her grandmother's village. This incredible feeling and deep yearning for the motherland exemplify a strong bond between Palestinians and their homeland. The narrative effectively employs *soil* to demonstrate Hayaat's ecological ties toward the land she hopes to return to.

The effect of land*On human voice*

Abdel-Fattah seeks to reveal the effect of land on the human voice through the characters of Hayaat, and how the voice of the landowner is actually muted when he loses his land. The excerpt that follows details Hayaat's father's

dedication to the earth's voice and the ways in which the environment affects his personality:

In Beit Jala, he was loud and jocular. Working on his land made him happy and we felt that happiness when he came home to us in the evening. However, in our apartment in Bethlehem, Baba sits in silence, sucking his argeela or flicking through the news channels. (Abdel-Fattah 24)

The preceding lines depict the impact of land and its indirect effects on the human voice. Hayaat's father used to own and manage his land by himself. His emotional connection to his homeland brought him immense joy and power. He was energetic and articulate in opposition; however, he is currently being displaced from his land, which has resulted in complete solitude. His personality has altered at this point. He is deafeningly quiet and inactive. The loss of his property has a negative impact on his personality and voice. When his land is taken from him, he metaphorically loses his voice. For him, the new residence due to dislocation is a source of unending suffering, as if he were "a parent mourning a child" (24). The story continues to show Hayaat's father in his new home in Bethlehem.

This displacement has transformed his attitude towards himself as well as his family. With the loss of land, his personality is being influenced psychologically. His voice is muted, and his smile has vanished entirely from his face. While spending time with his family, his smile was portrayed as "a parent mourning a child." Likewise, the expression "The rubble and ruins are inside him" (24), for instance, expresses the father's emotional and psychological trauma. His migration inside his residence as "a self-conscious guest" (25) indicates that he has become a visitor to Palestine, rather than a Palestinian citizen holding a spiritual connection to the land where he was born. The Israeli occupation of Palestinian land has placed a curfew that restricts Palestinians. This restriction is exemplified by Hayaat's description of the curfew time:

There is a deathly ghost-town kind of silence to the right. There are no cars, footsteps. No bats, owls, or rustling of leaves. Perhaps bats and owls have curfew restrictions too. The soldiers' voices crash against the silent night. (Abdel-Fattah 31)

In terms of silence, the impact of the curfew on humans and non-humans can be considered a critical component of the ecological perspective. Similarly, the occupation's curfew has a negative impact on Land-Voice attachment. Hayaat describes the situation of Palestinian families when a curfew is imposed. The curfew muted the entire family, including children, adults, and the elderly. The narrative is attempting to demonstrate that the loss of the land also results in the loss of the vocal cords. Palestinians' land is taken away from them, and their voices are stifled. Palestinians, Siti Zeinab says, "under her breath" i.e., they cannot speak up even in their own homes, according to Arabic proverbs.

On mind

When close to his land, Hayaat's father is just in the best state of consciousness. Working on his farm made him content and attentive. Although he toiled away in his land, his smile never left his face. His closeness to his homeland made him joyful, active, and alert. His perspective has shifted since his land was taken away. He no longer cares about his land or his family because he lost his spiritual connection to it. Sitti Zeinab's description of her village and house to Hayaat demonstrates the interconnectedness of land and mind: "My village was perched high in the hills of Jerusalem and our House was at the top of the village" (Abdel-Fattah 48). Sitti Zeinab never forgets where her village and home are because her consciousness is linked to her land. She is, however, an elderly woman whose connection to her land aids her in recalling all the details about her village and home. Her mental engagement with memories of her motherland demonstrates land-mind interconnectedness.

The images of various aspects of home, land, and nature, such as "limestone house, the arched windows, hills, stones, jasmine, almond trees, and olive trees" (50), elicit a strong sense of memory that "suffocates" her present and elicit a sense of land-mind attachment. Those memories and scenes assist the grandmother in taking deep breaths. The expression like "Those memories stow themselves in my windpipe until I dare not conjure another memory or I will scarcely be able to breathe," (50) highlights the impact of past images of land on the grandmother's mind, as well as the perseverance of land-mind interconnectedness.

On the human body

Land is a source of energy that revitalises the human body, particularly the elderly, because they are historically connected to one another and share fascinating stories that will be remembered forever. Sitti Zeinab, for instance, becomes physically active and vibrant once she is connected to her birthplace. The grandmother's generation has a stronger connection to the land than any other. Hayaat describes her grandmother's physical reaction to the smell of her motherland soil. Once she gets much closer to her land, "Her heartbeat and the sound of bullets firing in my brain" (233). A handful of soil could nourish her frail body. Similarly, Sitti Zeinab's connection to her motherland is reflected in her physical reaction which could be deduced vividly through her song when she smells Jerusalem soil:

The breeze of our homeland revives the body and surely we cannot live without our homeland that bird cries when it is thrown out of its nest. So how is the homeland that has its own people? (Abdel-Fattah 233)
"The breeze of our homeland revives the body," for example, is a symbol of land-body attachment. The narrative demonstrates her ecological ties to the land

where she was displaced. She wants to make sure that land is a source of health that “revitalises the body” when it becomes tired. The grandmother’s body is frail, but a whiff of Jerusalem soil is enough to nourish her. The physical reunion of the grandmother’s body with her land can be embodied as she touches the soil that Hayaat brings back:

I quickly open the jar and thrust it into her hands. “Look,” I say. Frowning, she peers into the jar. She takes a sharp breath. I take the jar from her. “Open your hands” I pour some soil into her open palms. “Jerusalem soil,” I whisper. I see her eyes and I know that every step of our journey was worth this moment. (Abdel-Fattah 237)

The handful of home soil represents the novel’s depiction of the land-body connection. The invisible and unspoken bond between the old grandmother and her homeland comes to life when she touches the soil that Hayaat brings back. Thus Abdel-Fattah shows that Palestinians and their homeland cannot be separated.

Ecological identity

Randa Abdel-Fattah reveals how Palestinian ecological identity is framed through Palestinians’ sense of loss of land and identity. As the grandmother informs Hayaat, the feeling of loss of land and identity is shown in the actual Palestinians’ suffering in the refugee camps: “When the Israelis confiscated our land in Beit Jala, we moved to a small poor neighborhood in Bethlehem. Our house now has two bedrooms instead of four and we are living off Baba and Mama’s savings” (Abdel-Fattah 5). This quote depicts the suffering of Palestinians in refugee camps. Israelis force them to flee their homeland and live in makeshift shelters in the refugee camps. Taking land from Palestinians and determining where they can live by occupiers, on the other hand, causes them to feel as if they have lost their identity. Palestinians’ suffering in host countries serves as a reminder of their identity, which is tied to their birthplace. Their land and identity are spiritually and emotionally linked, as the loss of Palestinian land also means losing their identity.

In addition, imposing a curfew on Palestinian land causes Palestinians to feel as if they have lost their land and identity. Only the Israeli occupation has the authority to determine when Palestinians can go shopping. The phrase “we were permitted to leave our houses for two hours” (1) implies that Israelis time Palestinians’ daily activities. Israelis give Palestinians a set amount of time to go out and return. This curfew makes Palestinians feel the loss of their land and identity since they are unable to move freely

Likewise, the Israeli checkpoints used to check Palestinians in their own land cause Palestinians to feel a sense of loss of land and identity. The presence of checkpoints on Palestinian land evokes the Palestinians’ sense of land loss. Checkpoints are set up all over the place and Palestinians are daily checked by

Israelis. The expression “By the time I arrive, my nerves will be frazzled” (16), for instance, implies that they suffer greatly when moving from one location to another due to the numerous checkpoints found throughout the Palestinian territory. Furthermore, what happens to Palestinians at checkpoints in their own country causes them to feel as if they have lost their identity. When traveling from one city to another, they spend several hours at these checkpoints.

Another source of Palestinian suffering is the wall that the occupation has built to divide Palestinian cities and villages. The daily suffering of Palestinians because of the Israeli-built wall is represented thus: “The wall scares me. I feel as though it will crush and suffocate me, even while it stands.... This is what happens when I see the wall. I see loss and death” (Abdel-Fattah 40). This massive wall prevents Palestinians from seeing and visiting one another. The expression “When I see the wall, I see loss and death” evokes feelings of land loss. Separating Palestinian families, cities, and villages aims to erase Palestinian identity. This wall, and its effects on Palestinians’ daily lives, simply remind them of their ties to the land.

Conclusion

The search for identity, and a sense of belonging to the occupied land, as well as how Palestinian identity is inextricably linked to it, is an eternal quest. The interconnectedness between Palestinians and their land is revealed through the writer’s ecological connection to the land of her origin. This connection is embodied by utilising some aspects of the nature of Palestinian land that has had a mental, vocal, and physical impact on Palestinians. The symbol of the iconic jar of homeland soil and its possibilities for revitalising Hayaat’s identity exemplifies the ecological bond in which Hayaat’s identity is molded. Furthermore, Hayaat’s manifestation of “the handful of soil” she brought and the vitality of her grandmother’s body demonstrates the close relationship between identity and land and, in turn, represents the new culturally assimilated area in which the ecological identity is formed.

Abdel-Fattah succeeds in emphasising the importance of the land in promoting identity and a sense of belonging among those who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. Palestinians and their land share an ecological bond that, given their rooted ties, makes it impossible to separate them. In addition, the ecocritical viewpoint emphasises the connection between land and identity, as well as the nostalgia that comes with being away from home. In the context of ecocritical studies, we can conclude that the inextricable link between land and environment is critical to the construction of identities. Thus, the current debate provides new perspectives on how to open a new horizon for identity strengthening in Abdel-Fattah’s and other Muslim diasporic writers’ works.

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