



## RESEARCH PAPER

# Love, Loss, and Liberation: Tracing Feminine Trauma and Political Awakening in *Against the Loveless World*

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## ABSTRACT

The research investigates how feminine trauma and identity affect political awakening through Susan Abulhawa's novel *Against the Loveless World*. The paper examines how Nahr converts her experiences of love, loss, and repression into political resistance and personal emancipation. The investigation is built upon Freud's Afterwardness (Nachtraglichkeit), Lacan's symbolic disruption and Caruth's trauma approach to establish trauma as a political and temporal framework. The article analyzes displacement and patriarchal and wartime psychological effects through close textual analysis within a qualitative research framework. The study demonstrates that the trauma in the book shapes character growth by transforming Nahr from an oppressed subject into a person with political awareness. The analysis in the conclusion shows how Abulhawa uses her narrative to expose systemic oppression and present powerful examples of female strength. The research recommends additional analysis on Arab women's literature due to its dual function in psychological and political resistance.

**KEYWORDS** Feminine Trauma, Political Awakening, Afterwardness, Symbolic Disruption

## Introduction

In psychoanalytic terminology, trauma extends beyond one solitary incident which disrupts the mental state of a person. Psychoanalytic research describes trauma as an event that produces ongoing effects that develop their significance throughout time. People fail to process their traumas during the actual event. The meaning and emotional consequences of a traumatic situation emerge after the person builds mechanisms to understand the event from a historical perspective. Trauma persists across time because the mental process of integration happens later, leading to a substantial impact on how the person experiences their present mental state. The initial incident appears untraumatizing at first, but later triggers psychological and emotional reactions that intensify when it links to another similar circumstance. The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict has led to decades of displacement, violence, and socio-political upheaval for Palestinians, with profound psychological and cultural consequences. The discourse on trauma, memory, and identity has been a bedrock for philosophical and psychological debate over almost a century now. These topics are very important in Palestinian literature because displacement, political oppression and exile within influence peoples' the lives and communities. Palestinians have been displaced, witnessed violence and experienced socio-political turbulence for decades because of an interstate hostility with Israelis. It has been almost a century since the study of trauma and memory, and how this impacts identity, has been the basis of philosophical and psychological discussion. Because displacement, political oppression,

and exile are part of people's lives and communities, they are crucial in Palestinian literature.

Susan Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* (2020) is an abundantly powerful evocative novel that nevertheless evokes the psychological landscape of feminine trauma amid the horrible truth of political instability and exile. The novel as narrated in the story of Nahr, Palestinian woman, who is confined in an isolated cell which she calls "the Cube" proceeds with a shattered, non-cumulative timeline, a copy of the distortion caused by trauma and memory. In addition to narrating a personal story of misery and survival Abulhawa constructs a literary window through which all the different modes of oppression that women suffer from – especially when occupation, patriarchy, and cultural displacement comprise – are critically examined. The novel's narrative is a mechanism through which to articulate silent histories, excepting the emotional and political dimension to resilience, identity and resistance within the context of a prolonged conflict. This study explores how Nahr's love, betrayal and a radical political awakening during her journey are so intimately tied in with her trauma experiences and the restrictive social settings that define her life. Her pain does not go in a straight arc towards closure; instead, it repetitive, alters and seep into her relationships and identity, in broken and creepy manners. By referencing Freud's Afterwardness, Lacan's Symbolic Rupture, and Trauma theory by Cathy Caruth, this research argues that Abulhawa develops a framework of a narrative that follows the nonlinear temporality and re inscription of trauma. *Against the Loveless World* is not merely a story of survival. It's a strong statement about how pain, as communicated through memories, histories and political violence, can be a spark for self-realization/resistance/agency reclamation. Nahr's emergence per Abulhawa is a reconstruction of identity through psychological relief, community struggle as opposed to an attempt at reintegration.

This study is beyond psychoanalysis into the existential and political philosophy in order to explore the various implications of exile and trauma more generally. Hannah Arendt (1951) also links exile not only to a physical state but also to a quite serious existential rupture. According to Arendt, statelessness removes a person's position in the world because without action and political belonging a person's position in the world falls away. This split in their self is not a result of psychological suffering, but political and social uncertainty. This is supplemented by Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) and Martin Heidegger (1927), who consider the struggle noted above between being and its external forces. In particular, Sartre's concept of "bad faith" (self-deception) is appropriate to the protagonist of *Against the Loveless World* (2020), who initially responds to society's expectations by having relationships in order to conceal her inner suffering. Yet, as her political enlightenment advances, she attempts to reach beyond what Sartre would call 'authenticity,' to reclaim agency over her narrative in external tyranny. In the meantime, Heidegger (1927)'s concept of "being in the world" stresses the crucial link between human identity and geographic location. Abulhawa's characters are exiled physically and philosophically as dislocation interferes with their sense of identity.

Freud's retroactive nature of trauma has become increasingly relevant in those societies that are in the aftermath of war, displacement, and systemic oppression, such as in contemporary Palestine or other conflict zones. Past traumas can dump so much trauma on generations – shaping collective identity and memory – that psychoanalytic concepts such as afterwardness help think about how we do mean past traumas in the present. Using Freud's idea of afterwardness, we fully realize how trauma from past events in Abulhawa's novels is played out in subsequent experiences with characters recognizing themselves less and less in those past events, as well as their relationships as they begin attempting to live with their pasts. Moreover, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman (1992) point

out the significance of testimony in trauma processing, which is also a fact that sufferers often find it hard to say. Both texts employ nonchronological storytelling, memory breaks, and shifting viewpoints to represent the fragmented character of traumatic memory, which is reflective of Abulhawa's narrative patterns. This study therefore contributes to an expanding corpus of literature concerning the relation between trauma, the narrative, and identity by incorporating these theoretical views.

## Literature Review

*Against the Loveless World* is an incredibly beautiful tale about a Palestinian refugee, Nahr, but who lives amidst horrible realities of exile, prison, and shattered relations. And also in this novel, there is also a deep-dive, into things like sexuality, politics, and psychological resilience and existential crisis. It is set in the era of political turmoil, personal migration. With these themes there have been numerous scholarly interpretations of the novel that have focused on specific points in the narrative complexity of the novel and its geopolitical relevance.

One early critique to be made of *Against the Loveless World* was made by Lila Abu-Lughod (2021) which pointed out the novel's feminist implications. In a highly patriarchal society, the researcher set the sexuality of Nahr up to be the source of agency and resistance. Abulhawa, as argued by Abu-Lughod criticizes current standards by presenting the refusal of Nahr towards set moralities and expectations, especially in relation to relationships, desire and freedom. From her associations (as a dancer or meditations on love and desire), Nahr's body is a reason for her identity and sexuality. This is central to Abu-Lughod's work because not only is it part of her identity, it is also a way of claiming and standing up to racist patriarchy. Abu-Lughod analyzed the way in which the book fights broader cultural norms that sustain gendered inequality. If while the patriarchal limits she has to face in her community are interdependent from her difficulties, Nahr's story suggests that the systematic brutality of exile and colonization is part of the greater picture. The research touched on the novel's psychological elements very briefly but its greatest contribution was Nahr's story which would give the feminist criticism of it and interesting ground for further research regarding deeper psychological and existential issues.

Awad (2022) turned the focus to the novel's political aspects. He looks at personal and social resistance in relations with others. He was interested in Abulhawa's critique of power and oppression systems in general and their impact on the lives of women under patriarchal and colonial frameworks. Nahr's struggles were used by Awad as an example of broader sociopolitical issues, a product of and a challenge to these oppressive forces. Nahr does more than she goes; she is not the victim of these repressive forces that she actively negates, asserting her power in ways that undermine both patriarchal and colonial narratives, says Awad. For instance, she opposes conventional norms and is defiant in the face of jail, all of which denotes that she is a symbol of determination and struggle. He studied how the novel tackles societal violence that backs up the occupation and exile policies. According to him, Abulhawa draws the cycle of oppression and resistance. He explains how one's identity is very much political. The influence of her experiences of both domestic and social forms of violence on her views of her identity is apparent in Nahr's views. Nahr's story, according to Awad, demonstrates how individual and social challenges are interdependent. The author also argues the need to address both for meaningful change.

Alkhateeb (2024) critiques the novel's critique of Western feminist frameworks, particularly regarding feminist frameworks in the global south. Nahr's path — even

though it defies the simple victimhood narratives so often grafted onto the discussion by Western feminist discourses — resonates with women he sees reflected in Taliban centers. According to him, Nahr's journey has the potential to unsettle some of the themes of victimhood that have become so commonplace in Western discourses, whereby complex identities are reduced into a dichotomy of oppressors and the freed. Instead, Nahr is a more complicated character of power, resistance, and survival, even fragility and suffering, existing together. Nahr's narrative is about defiance and self-determination, sorrow. She opposes both patriarchal standards of her society and neocolonial forces that determine her environment, and makes her a multidimensional survivor as well as an anti-system oppressor. Al-Khateeb points out instances in the novel where Nahr chooses to use her freedom, not letting herself be bound by collective and social standards, or her outspoken openness. Nahr believes that freedom is never a never-ending struggle for power, identity and determination and these acts of disobedience are proof of it. In this essay, Al-Khateeb looks at how *Against the Loveless World* attacks the use of Western feminist concepts in the context of women in the global South (Kaifa, Yaseen & Muzaffar, 2024). The research said that Nahr's story is a counter-narrative to the savior complex that is often embedded in Western liberation discourses. The novel portrays Nahr as a protagonist in her own destiny, navigating her problems and creating herself around the cultural and political reality of the world in which she lives.

Research on *Against the Loveless World* has been chiefly concerned with its feminist, social, and cultural concerns. The scholars who have focused on the other aspect of the novel's gendered oppression, power structures, and the interconnections between personal and collective resistance include Abu-Lughod (2021), Awad (2022), and Al-Khateeb (2024). Almost all of the previous research on *Against the Loveless World* has focused on its feminist and socio-political aspects, with no focus on Nahr's psychological experiences. More specifically, this study aims to shed light on how previous traumas recur and are reinterpreted in the novel, a task in which it is necessary to delve more profoundly into the lack of involvement of the trauma theory, especially Freud's Afterwardness. However, the study uncovered large cracks in its understanding of the mechanism by which Afterwardness works in the story to represent the circular and developing character of trauma. This study will help with this gap by focusing on the psychological mechanisms through which Nahr deals with her past traumas and recovers her power as a person. By integrating Freudian notions of afterwardness with Abulhawa's existential and feminist themes, *Against the Loveless World* is used to provide a more detailed explanation of how human psychology interacts with bigger societal forces.

## Material and Methods

The research design relies on psychoanalytic trauma theory to analyze the concept of "afterwardness" developed by Sigmund Freud during his career. In his work *A Project for a Scientific Psychology* (Freud, 1950), the Austrian psychologist established that trauma does not immediately take hold during the experience but requires reinterpretation through later life events. Trauma exists in an inactive state within the unconscious until specific periods of emotional fragility, when it emerges as fragmented or distorted experiences. The main character, Nahr, in *Against the Loveless World* experiences frequent trauma reactivations stemming from her past experiences with exile and betrayal, and gendered violence, which influence her emotional responses along with her identity fragmentation and political development.

Freud's early research on memory, repression, and trauma is the foundation of his psychoanalytic framework that is investigated. The discussion proceeds to the origins of Afterwardness, where emphasis is placed on its enabling the understanding of the

unpredictable nature of trauma processing. Freud (1895/1966), in *A Project for a Scientific Psychology*, outlines how: "Memory traces are subjected to a deferred revision, altering the significance of past experiences when later events trigger them" (Freud, 1895/1966, p. 357). Research in the study of trauma in psychoanalysis has changed greatly since Freud's early research. Not only is trauma known as a psychological disintegration, but it is also recognized as a way in which the experience of humans is affected in many areas, including memory, social systems, and identity. To comprehend how traumatic experiences shape the unconscious mind, change behavior, and how it would appear, or manifest itself, in terms of language and memory, psychoanalysis provides a theoretical framework. Freud, Lacan, Caruth, Laub, and Herman have expanded the field of trauma research with observations from neuroscience, literature, and philosophy. This section addresses historical and contemporary psychoanalytic viewpoints on trauma, as well as the origins and history of the psychoanalytic viewpoints on trauma. Sigmund Freud's early investigation of trauma was based upon his research on hysteria and repression. In *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) written with Josef Breuer, Freud proposed that trauma is worked through dissociation, producing psychotic signs indicating unresolved suffering. He also advanced the notion of Afterwardness, that traumatic events, while not immediately clear, are later constructed based on memories as they are remembered (Freud & Breuer, 1895/2001).

This contribution to our knowledge of trauma can make a difference by adding a linguistic and structural dimension to Jacques Lacan's reconstruction of Freud's psychoanalytic framework. Freud defines trauma as a mostly psychological wound which reappears as repression and from the unconscious, whereas Lacan specifies trauma through his tripartite model of the psyche (Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real). In his *Écrits* (1966), he gives the most accurate reading of how trauma is not just a personal ailment, but a rupture in the very systems that fashion reality and selfhood. For Lacan, trauma is an encounter with the Real, a state that is beyond language and symbolic representation. The Real is what does not integrate into the Symbolic Order, and what it means is that it cannot be labelled, classified, or decoded by the subject's cognitive and linguistic capacities. As Lacan (2002) states, "The Real is that which remains outside of symbolization, returning as a rupture that destabilizes the subject" (p. 58).

In *Against the Loveless World*, Nahr's fragmentary recollections and shifting narratives depict the psychological consequences of confinement and exile, revealing the delayed and developing character of trauma. The integration of Afterwardness and trauma theory allows for a more detailed examination of how Abulhawa's characters perceive and process their pain. Trauma is not one isolated incident. Instead, over time, it grows, revisited and reinterpreted with the help of memory and narrative (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001). In both these texts conflicts for characters are not individual issues, but they are closely related to the social histories of displacement and violence. Through this paradigm, the study unveils the ways trauma changes identity, how memory becomes a site of resistance and how the past influences the rest of the present in puzzling yet complex ways. This study emphasizes the dynamic and reconstructive nature of memory as it combines Afterwardness and psychoanalytic trauma theory with *Against the Loveless World*. The research shows the ways in which Abulhawa contradicts linear notions of healing and identity in the case of Nahr who, with fragmented memories, creates herself in *Against the loveless world*. Rather than that, they present trauma as a fluid, ever-shifting experience that must be continually reconstructed and reinterpreted, highlighting the fact that memory is fluid and the long lasting impact of contemporary and personal horror in the psyche. Nahr's trauma is no longer used as a passive source, but as an active empowerment. Judith Butler (1997) believes that, an oppression might bring about new forms of autonomy that can enable people to use their grief as an avenue to action in politics. Nahr's transition from

victimization to resistance is consistent with this idea – her pain does not go away, but its meaning changes with time, showing the essential concept of Afterwardness. According to Jacques Lacan, trauma occurs when subjects encounter “the Real,” which disrupts their symbolic order stability (Écrits, 1966/2002). Lacan’s analytical work on how language fails to contain enormous trauma elements helps explain Nahr’s fragmented story and her destroyed self. Trauma theory developed by Cathy Caruth explains that people experience trauma when they cannot understand an event and need to retell it which deepens both the cyclic and unresolved nature of suffering (Unclaimed Experience, 1996).

These theoretical methods form an integrated psycho-philosophical framework for understanding Nahr’s experience, which shows that her healing path consists of perpetual intersections between memory and identity, and resistance. The text examines personal trauma and its interaction with historical events, along with political forces, particularly during times of occupation and exile, where the feminine mind adapts through fragmentation and suppression before reconstructing itself.

## Results and Discussion

Susan Abulhawa’s *Against the Loveless World* is more than just a political novel; it is a deeply psychological and philosophical investigation into the disintegration of selfhood, the long shadow of trauma, and the existential fight for agency. The novel examines, under the perspective of Afterwardness (Freud, 1895/1950), how previous tragedies continue to have a significant impact on Nahr’s identity, relationships, and political consciousness, rather than only being in the past. The protagonist’s journey, which is characterized by resistance, suppression, and relocation, shows how trauma is a dynamic, nonlinear force that molds the present and determines the future rather than a single incident. As Nahr said, “But I know now that going from place to place is just something exiles have to do. Whatever the reason, the earth is never steady beneath our feet” (Abulhawa, 2015, p. 40). Nahr’s voice is that of a woman detached by exile and assaulted by a world that constantly seeks to impose its will on her. She stated: “I am already lost in thoughts of what it all means. I roam my mind, unearthing faces and voices in the vast terrain of memory” (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 280). This statement captures the confusion within her psyche, which is an attribute of trauma theory. Freud (1920) argued that traumatic events fracture identity, which causes an internal separation between the self that underwent the trauma and the self that strives to make sense of it. Nahr, who has been deprived of her homeland and subjected to constant physical and mental abuse, demonstrates these cracks throughout her narrative. Her sense of self is torn between past and present, home and exile, love and rebellion. In keeping with Julia Kristeva’s (1982) concept of abjection, Nahr is in a condition of transition, neither completely inside nor outside. Her body, sexuality, and memory are all disputed areas with governmental and patriarchal forces attempting to limit female autonomy. However, as Butler (1997) points out in *The Psychic Life of Power*, oppression can serve as a stimulus for resistance. Nahr’s resistance, her unwillingness to be erased, is a declaration of selfhood against a world that has attempted to reduce her to nothingness.

One of the most remarkable aspects of *Against the Loveless World* is Abulhawa’s integration of personal pain and social resistance. Nahr’s political awakening is not a distant intellectual exercise, but an emotional reaction to her pain. She said, “The ceaseless accumulation of injustice made me want to fight the world, to lash out somehow, scream. But all I could do was weep in my brother’s arms” (Abulhawa, 2020, 179). Nahr survives her trauma by detachment and denial, but as she gets more involved in political opposition, she reframes her pain in terms of a broader, historical fight. As a result, she gains freedom that she previously simply had powerlessness. Dori Laub and Shoshana

Felman (1992) suggest in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* that trauma survivors have to regain their subjectivity by narrating their experiences. Nahr's path parallels this concept—her political involvement is about more than only Palestine; it is about expressing a self that has been continuously suppressed. Through resistance, she establishes her presence.

Despite her resilient nature, Nahr's trauma continues to shape her ability to be personal. Her interactions with Bilal demonstrate her mistrust and emotional isolation. "I don't know when and how I will see Bilal, though I know we can't ever be together openly. I may never find a place in this world, but for now, in this moment, I feel the purest, most perfect joy" (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 293). Here, Abulhawa encapsulates the soul of trauma's lasting effects—how the remembrance of violence can impair even love. Cathy Caruth (1996) believes that trauma distorts energy, forcing survivors to experience previous agony even in periods of comfort. For Nahr, the relationship is a battleground where the past and present meet. However, it is through relationships that she begins to restore her shattered identity. While her journey has been affected by loss, Abulhawa demonstrates that human connection, no matter how fragile, may lead to recovery. In this way, the novel resembles Homi Bhabha's (1994) hybridity theory, in which identity is a dynamic negotiation between past scars and present possibilities. Ultimately, Abulhawa's narrative does not provide straightforward suggestions. Instead, it makes readers confront the harsh realities of relocation, violence, and persecution. However, inside this book is a monument to the human spirit's tenacity and to how even the most broken among us may find meaning in difficulties. Nahr emphatically states that

I assure Mama again that I am not depressed, that yes, I know you are proud of me, and yes, I know you think I am a hero, and yes, I know you don't think I am that other word." But I tell her that I am not a hero either, that language is absurd, life is absurd, this theater of visitors is absurd, and the hum of the goddamned refrigerator is grating my bones, and please trust me that I need solitude. I'm not bothering anyone, just please give me some peace, some quiet. (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 285)

In this particular firm remark, Abulhawa captures the essence of survival—the resistance to disappear, the unwillingness to be seen, and the persistent quest for freedom.

Nahr, the main character of *Against the Loveless World*, represents the psychological and existential consequences of displacement and loss, which influence her relationships, trust issues, and political awakening. Her Palestinian background, defined by exile, conflict, and betrayal, is an active force influencing her present. Freud's (1895/1950) idea of Afterwardness is useful in understanding how Nahr's history is constantly reinterpreted in light of her changing experiences. Trauma does not remain fixed at a single moment; rather, it resurfaces in various circumstances, which impacts her challenges with relationships and eventual transformation into a politically active person. Displacement strips people of stability, familiarity, and agency, which can result in a shattered sense of self and profound difficulty in building strong relationships. "They were experienced refugees, better equipped to handle recurring generational trauma" (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 106). Nahr's experiences as a refugee and a woman negotiating patriarchal and colonial hierarchies have left her distrustful of both persons and systems. Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory contends that early life disturbances, particularly those involving abandonment and instability, have long-term effects on interpersonal connections. In Nahr's instance, men's betrayal—whether in the form of parental neglect, a deceptive spouse, or the commercialization of her body in exile—causes her to approach relationships with caution and defensiveness. Even in situations where trust is earned, such as with Bilal, she struggles to balance vulnerability with self-preservation.

From a philosophical perspective, Jean-Paul Sartre's (1943/2007) existentialist stance in *Being and Nothingness* provides insight into Nahr's detachment. Sartre believes that humans often suffer from *mauvaise foi* (poor faith) – false beliefs based on restrictive stories from the society. Built on the Hilary's own experience with the way she has been objectified and rejected in the society she lives in, Nahr's self-perception suffers from her rejection to form any strong emotional bonds. Her closeness is not based on trust, but on an ever constant battle between her trauma and her need for independence. Although Nahr's experiences make intimate connections problematic, they lead her to political involvement. The trauma scholars (Cathy Caruth, 1996 among others) indicate that trauma is more than a personal problem. it is a force which needs to be expressed and acted upon. Nahr's is a feminism that responds to the dislocation born in her, turning pain into resistance. The loss of her homeland does not simply haunt her; it motivates her determination to fight injustice. Hannah Arendt's (1951) investigation of statelessness in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* aligns with Nahr's journey, highlighting how the loss of a country leads to radical political activism. Nahr's imprisonment is a physical and symbolic reflection of how the past continues to have an impact on the present. According to *Discipline and Punish* by Foucault (1975/1995), systems of power both shape and punish the opposition. Nahr's solitary confinement does not break her; instead, it reinforces her knowledge of tyranny and the importance of resistance. Nahr's past betrayals make her skeptical of relationships, which support psychological and trauma theories (Bowlby, 1969). Her struggles with emotional vulnerability have a similarity to Sartre's existentialist themes of self-definition in the context of societal objectification (Sartre, 1943/2007). Nahr's distress intersects with the larger Palestinian struggle, which shows how individual suffering is converted into communal resistance. According to Caruth (1996), trauma needs political articulation, transforming activism into a technique of processing and reshaping grief. Similarly, Arendt (1951) argues that oppression demands action since the oppressed acquire power through resistance. For Nahr, Zionist displacement policies not only destroy her ties and feelings of belonging but also drive her to rebuild her identity through rebellious behavior. Therefore, her action goes beyond a reaction to personal tragedy; it is a battle for the maintenance of people's history and rights. Nahr's idea of her trauma grows while she is in jail, and political activist, and in self-analysis; these are all that demonstrate the non-linear process of loss and identity.

Susan Abulhawa's excellent example of *Against the Loveless World* is a story, which does not create trauma as a shadow of the past, but undermines it as a mutable actor which reconstructs identities, relationships, resistance. By the plot of Nahr's adventure, the novel unveils that relocation, violence, and prisoning are not fixed acts; but rather they, echos, live in time, reverberating in unexpected, and quite frequently outrageous, ways. Abulhawa's approach to trauma however is closer to Sigmund Freud's (1895/1950) theory of Afterwardness, where traumatic events are not comprehended in their whole when the event occurred, but remain reconstructed and repeated later on, in different contexts. This effect, of delayed and recurrent trauma processing, has affected Nahr's ever-changing consciousness of herself, her relationships, and her place in the larger political battle. Through this exploration of the fractured nature of memory and continual return of sorrow, Abulhawa stresses the important fact that healing or resistance is not a linear process in which the past is left behind once and for all; rather, it is a kind of process or journey, nonlinear, not discontinuous: the past is not eliminated but is continually transformed within a host of present circumstances. The descriptions of Nahr's emotional turmoil treated by Abulhawa correspond to these theories. The narrative portrays trauma as a permanent force that changes over time in her life not an event. Throughout several periods of displacement (from her family's expulsion from Palestine, to her own confinement in an Israeli isolation cell), Nahr's history returns in ways that impact the way she views self and the world.



Nahr's disrupted identity and changing self, epitomize Afterwardness in reality. During the whole story, she tries to connect the past and the present between her, switching from possessing and powerless. According to Freud (1920/1955) we have a desire to relive horrific events because there is an unconscious urge to deal with ongoing grief. This is well illustrated from the relationships of Nahr, particularly her past with trust and intimacy issues. Otherwise she cannot forget or overlook her experiences in being sexually abused, betrayed and exiled. They regularly reemerge affecting her perspective on power, love, and lack thereof. As a philosopher Paul Ricoeur (2004) wrote, memory does not mean to remember or recollect the past; it means to comprehend it to make sense of the present. Nahr's failure to build sustainable partnerships is thus an example of this problem. In her disbelief to others, her past traumas become visible in her, making it difficult for her to accept love. Her love for Bilal though strong as well she keeps a defense around herself to avoid being rejected or betrayed. Her past in a different perspective contains the risk of danger as opportunity value. Traumatic narratives are also closely associated with political consciousness as in the case of the author's use of resistance to tyranny narrative through Nahr in the book. Afterwardness is manifest in Nahr's political activation that originates in her reinterpreted traumas. At first she considers her loss as part of her own circumstances, but as time goes along, she learns that this loss is part of a greater history of Palestinian exile, exile and resistance.

Hannah Arendt (1951) suggests that pain, and particularly trauma resulting from structural oppression, compels them to articulate their suffering politically. According to Abulhawa, Nahr was not motivated by anything in the present rather, her radicalization was a process. Her time in jail is an important turning point in her history. She reconstructs her history in jail which drives her political activism. Her rebellious acts turned the pain of exile and imprisonment into something new. Nahr's fragmentary memories and shifting sense of self align with contemporary psychological theories of trauma. Cathy Caruth (1996) suggests that unassimilated traumatic events come into play again in new circumstances. The retroactive effect is evident in Nahr's difficulties with intimacy and trust, as her past experiences of displacement and violence are reactivated in the present moment, which destroys her ability to form stable relationships. In addition, I argue that Abulhawa's use of narrative fragmentation illustrates the psychological dynamics of dissociation and repression as found in Van der Kolk's (2014) work on trauma and memory. Moreover, the novel demonstrates that pain transcends the personal. As therefore, it becomes political. For this reason, it fuels Nahr's advocacy against Zionist tyranny. Further, this is supported by Arendt (1951). He claims that trauma often pushes people to political articulation and resistance. Abulhawa shows us that trauma can not only fracture identity but also be the catalyst for resistance and defiance. Healing is a negotiation of past and present.

For Nahr, trauma functions within this historical cycle, in which past experiences of loss, deception, and exile are repeatedly reenacted and reframed within novel settings. The most severe illustration of this is her connection with men, where she suffers from trust and intimacy as a result of previous betrayals and societal oppression. Nahr's arranged marriage to Mhammed, her subsequent interactions with Bilal, and her final bond with Yahya are all impacted by prior scars that reemerge in new marital dynamics. As Nahr said, "But that time in the underground and the truth about Mhammad had unhinged something between us. I had to leave, even though I knew there was no future for me in Amman" (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 164). Instead, it highlights how Nahr's early encounters with betrayal and displacement create a trademark emotional detachment, which is a testimony to trafficking the landscape of someone's emotions long after the happening itself with Freud's theory. The biggest damage of Nahr's trauma is emotional isolation, which, according to Freud's theory of repression and the return of the repressed

(Freud, 1915/1957) is one of his most severe consequences. Nahr, who has been exiled, imprisoned and subjected to tyrannical male dominance finds sensitivity hard to draw out, considers emotional openness a threat to their autonomy. Her body interacts with the world and the repression is clear – she fights for intimacy while knowing she will be betrayed. Repressed trauma, according to Freud (1915/1957), will often manifest in distorted forms, e.g. defensive behavior, disconnection or self-sabotages. The concept of the Real (1966/2002) by Lacan gives more light on the issue. For Lacan, trauma is a meeting with something outside the realm of symbolic representation, something that cannot be properly represented or named by language. Nahr's trauma is not just remembered, but relived, so she cannot fully assimilate into stable relationships or imagine a grief-free world. Afterwardness does not only influence the relationships of Nahr with people, but also signals her political growth. Trauma is not just a personal experience for her; it is a social and historical force which shapes her perception of resistance. For Nahr, Freud's theory of Afterwardness explains that past events gain new meaning in the present: for Nahr, this means presenting personal pain as part of a larger political struggle. Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman (1992) argue that as trauma survivors will often recover meaning through narrative rebuilding a process in which they are recounting their events in ways that allow them to regain freedom. This is precisely what Nahr endures, that is her personal grief is transformed into a space of political articulation making her someone who resisted rather than a victim of exile. Nahr's transformation from a defeated, disenchanted woman in pain to a participant in resistance movements as described by Freud (1920/1955) is referred to as "working through" trauma, which literally means reinterpretation of old traumas allowing for psychological integration and forward motion.

The imprisonment cell, in the beginning an isolation room synonymous with tyranny, later becomes a room of self-definition and realization of political consciousness. This is within the philosophy of decolonization by Frantz Fanon (1961), where the oppressed must reconstruct their suffering as fuel to revolutionary consciousness. Nahr's experience is not an isolated psychological state, but rather part of a bigger intergenerational pattern of pain and displacement. By Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (2003), it is possible to define historical trauma as "the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations", and that is particularly relevant to Palestinian exile narratives. Nahr's sufferings in *Against the Loveless World* reflect those of earlier Palestinian women's generations, reflecting the way trauma is inherited through time. Nahr's fears and complications are constructed by her mother's life of displacement and solitude; an unspoken, but a very strong one. "I listened, realizing I was hearing something from the silent depths of my mother" (Abulhawa, 2020, p. 31). In here, Abulhawa shows how trauma is more than an individual load; it is a historical heritage that Nahr has to live with as she fights for dignity and self-determination.

## Conclusion

The study has shed light on the intersection of gender, exile and political turmoil and informed us that the feminine psychological struggles in these novels are not a separate individual issue, but deeply rooted in the larger sociopolitical realities. Abulhawa particularly points to the cyclical nature of trauma that undercuts the linear story of healing. The characters do more than transcend their pasts; instead, they find themselves negotiating their painful histories all the time, revisiting and re-framing them as they work their way through their present circumstances. This is based on the recent trauma studies (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001), which emphasizes that trauma outlives the moment of its occurrence, by means of missing memories, narrative disruptions, and unconscious reprisal. By focusing on the real experiences of exiled women, Abulhawa's books not only subvert historical and political wrongs, but also give a deep insight into the life-long

psychological effects of exile, loss and resistance. Through this research it has been demonstrated how the protagonists' present lives are still fundamentally shaped by memories of past traumatic experiences, particularly those concerning loss and displacement, which continue to determine their emerging sense of self, capacity for intimate connection and political activity. One of the main results of the study is that trauma is not an all at once event but rather retrospectively pieced together from subsequent events, as per Freud's view of Afterwardness (Freud, 1895/1950). The research showed the relevance of trauma and Afterwardness to understanding the complex relationship between the past and the present. Trauma was not considered an event but a process which was influenced by later experiences and societal systems. The introduction also situated Abulhawa's works in a wider sociopolitical context, marking them as relevant to contemporary trauma studies. Nahr's fragmentary memories and emerging political engagement in *Against the Loveless World* are an ongoing attempt to make sense of past violence and relocation and thus are an example of Caruth's (1996) assertion that trauma affects time as it goes by.

### **Recommendation s**

The major finding of this study is that trauma is not only a source of distress, but also a driver of resistance and self-definition. Whereas Freud's approach considered trauma largely as the return of the repressed, Frantz Fanon (1961) radicalised the psychoanalysis of trauma as a political force that can produce revolutionary consciousness. Nahr's transformation from a victim of patriarchal oppression to a combative political figure is an example of Fanon's point that decolonization is a psychological and existential rupture through which oppressed people regain their independence through resistance.

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