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## *A Study of Intersectionality in Abulhawa's Against the Loveless World*

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the intersectional oppression experienced by Palestinian women in Susan Abulhawa's novel *Against the Loveless World*. Through the lens of Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality, the research identifies how the protagonist, Nahr, navigates various forms of oppression throughout her journey. Nahr confronts injustices symbolized by the 'Cube,' a metaphor for the Israeli Solitary cell where she spends years incarcerated. Her quest for identity, survival, and love takes her across Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine – all places marked by Middle Eastern patriarchies, war, and racial xenophobia. Nahr's experiences include being forced into an arranged marriage in Kuwait, working as a sexual escort in US-occupied Iraq, living as a refugee in Jordan, and ultimately becoming a prisoner in Palestine. This trajectory underscores the intersectionality of her struggle, where her gender, Arabian roots, and transnational relocations intersect to expose her to a harsh world dominated by military



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fascists, religious bigots, and cultural anarchists. This paper argues that Crenshaw's Intersectionality theory highlights the multi-layered forms of discrimination faced by women, including the historical phallogocentric domination rooted in essentialist gender binaries, as well as the cultural exclusivity perpetuated by Middle Eastern patriarchy. *Against the Loveless World* thus serves as a compelling narrative illustrating the complexities of women's oppression and resistance within intersecting systems of power and discrimination.

**Keywords:** Intersectionality, Refugee, Palestine, Discrimination, Oppression, Patriarchy

## 1. Introduction

Intersectionality has emerged as a critical framework for analyzing the intricate dynamics of power, oppression, and identity across various social contexts. Initially the term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), this framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of race, gender, class, and other social identities in shaping individuals' experiences of discrimination and marginalization. Originally developed to address the unique struggles faced by African American women, Intersectionality has since been applied to various contexts worldwide, shedding light on the complex intersections of privilege and disadvantage.

This research endeavors to apply the concept of Intersectionality to the examination of the refugee crisis depicted in Susan Abulhawa's novel *Against the Loveless World* (2020). As a Palestinian American writer, Abulhawa offers an exploration of the plight of Nahr, a second-generation Palestinian refugee navigating the aftermath of catastrophe. The creation of Israel, in the words of Karmi (2007) is explained as, "The creation of Israel converted a settled, mostly agricultural society into a nation of refugees, exiles, second-class citizens and communities under military occupation" (Karmi, 2007, p. 17). Thus, the creation of Israel dramatically altered the Palestinian landscape, transforming a settled society into one of refugees, exiles, and second-class citizens under military occupation. This historical backdrop sets the stage for Nahr's story, encapsulating the struggles faced by generations of Palestinians affected by displacement and oppression.

Central to the narrative is Nahr's resilience and determination to survive amidst oppressive systems, which continually uproot her from one place to another – from Kuwait to Iraq, Iraq to Jordan, and eventually back to Palestine. Abulhawa employs a unique narrative structure, alternating between chapters named after geographical locations and sub-chapters within the confines of a metaphorical cube. This intricate naming convention reflects the spatiality, architecture, and geometric principles

embedded within the novel, providing readers with a panoramic view of Nahr's journey.

However, while the novel skillfully captures the complexities of Palestinian displacement and survival, the connection to Intersectionality theory requires elucidation. Intersectionality offers a lens through which to examine the intersecting systems of power and discrimination that shape Nahr's experiences as a Palestinian woman navigating various social, political, and cultural landscapes. By applying Intersectionality to the analysis of *Against the Loveless World*, this research aims to uncover the nuanced intersections of gender, nationality, and displacement within the novel, shedding light on the multidimensional nature of oppression and resistance faced by Palestinian refugees like Nahr.

Abulhawa's previous works, notably "Mornings in Jenin" (2006) and "The Blue Between Sky and Water" (2016), similarly tackle themes of displacement, trauma, and resilience within the Palestinian context. Through her nuanced portrayal of female characters and their struggles, Abulhawa underscores the intersecting forms of oppression faced by Palestinian women.

Therefore, this research attempts to de-fossilize the narratives of refugees particularly of Palestinian refugees by incorporating Intersectionality as a theoretical framework instructive in analyzing *Against the Loveless World* (2020). The main aim of this research is to highlight an individual's struggle, externalized in Nahr's displacements, against the oppressive systems of power in order to create a counter-culture of resistance led by women.

## **2. Literature Review**

The primary text of the paper, *Against the Loveless World* (2020) belongs to the genre of Palestinian Political Fiction having a sub-genre of post Nakhba Palestinian Fiction. In this aspect the novel discusses the second-generation post Nakhba period in which Nahr's parents and grandparents were forced to leave their homeland and belongings; and were impelled to live as refugees in a Kuwaiti ghetto.

Much of the Palestinian literature emerged in earlier 20th century was a response to the major political, social and cultural changes witnessed by Palestine. The modern-day Palestinian literature constitutes Nakhba or Catastrophe as its central theme around which other motifs such as violence and war are interlaced. Therefore, the trail of the origins of Palestinian fiction or novel dates back to the earliest phases of struggle for liberation and political independence. The Palestinian writers have ensured the remembrance of Nakhba or the greatest tragedy in the Palestinian life through their

novels and other genres of literature. In this regard, Susan Abulhawa holds a significant position in Palestinian Literature. Her works are explored and interpreted in a variety of theoretical frameworks which continue to supply meanings to his works adding to the body of knowledge. Moreover, her works are often regarded as distinguished pieces of Palestinian writings having a focus on Palestinian life and identity. On the subject-matter the writer has endeavored to write several articles on international forums to highlight the Palestinian crisis. Apart from being a novelist and a prose writer, Abulhawa is also regarded as a unique poet in representing Palestinian voice across the globe in contemporary era.

According to Qabah (2019), Abulhawa asserted in the introduction of her collection of poetry, *My Voice Sought the Wind* (2013), that, “I wrote poetry before I wrote anything else. Poems in Arabic, to be precise” (Qabah). Moreover, she wrote this collection of poetry over the course of five years. Abulhawa through these poems brought to the world a general representation of her own experience. Moreover, this collection has a set of five sections each describing different encounters to pain and sufferings. Beginning from her personal journey to the horrors of nostalgia and trauma the collections lead its readers to various phases and finally the readers experience a sense of hope and reconciliation in the last section. Qaba Also asserted that many critics regard Abulhawa’s poems parallel to those of Mahmoud Darwish’s poems. One of these critics is Amin Khan, who is a Poet and Author of *Vision of the Return*. He very aptly describes Abulhawa’s collection of poetry as:

Susan Abulhawa’s poetry stems from the long forgotten dark, luminous, tightly knit root of flesh and soul... The figure of the Palestinian she carves from the bark of the olive trees of the troubled landscape of her memory, is that of the op-pressed, the violated, the exiled. But then, in her voice, suffering and exile only bring us closer to the intricate and true essence of life - and poetry: a relentless struggle for love, freedom, and dignity... Her flesh open, her soul open, Susan Abulhawa is able to capture in a handful of naked words the infinite anxiety, and the unaccomplished delight, of the wide human experience (Qabah, 2019).

Therefore, Abulhawa deliberately crafts her poems, fiction and non-fiction in a way that inspire its readers by instilling hope and optimism.

It is however true that Abulhawa started her writing career formally with her first novel *Mornings in Jenin* (2006) that is translated in more than 30 languages. *Mornings in Jenin* (2006) takes its readers to the back in the history during the Israel-Palestine historical conflict. Erchoff (2021), in his online review of the novel, argues that the novel takes several dimensions including “Misery, oppression, grief, and hope, and

blend these together in a stunningly realistic story that conveys the Palestinians' undying attachment to their homeland" (Erchoff, 2021). Moreover, one can argue that the initial agenda of Abulhawa was to record and unravel the obnoxious realities behind the Israeli occupation and particularly the brutality of Israeli during intifada period, but she was carried away by the powerful characters and their experiences which assisted her in creating a unique and appealing story lines.

Moreover, a deep influence of Arabic literature and Arabic language is evident in all Abulhawa's novels. Abulhawa (2012) during an interview with a media outlet Arablit admits the fact that her writings particularly fiction is deeply influenced by Arabic literature. Moreover, she further asserts that sometimes her readers consider her language "too lofty, too verbose, too flowery" but this style came from Arabic language (Qualey, 2012). Commenting upon the choice of this style, Abulhawa knew that her targeted readership belongs to English Language and she specifically puts it down in her interview that she meant to put a Palestinian voice in English Literature. Therefore, her novels particularly *Mornings in Jenin* (2006) is often considered as a deliberate attempt to introduce a Palestinian voice in the cannon of English literature.

The literary significance of Susan Abulhawa is by no means less significant. In this regard, Salam (2021) in one of the articles entitled as "The Burden of the Past: Memories, Resistance and Existence in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* and Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses*", describes that how "many Palestinian novels in Arabic, English and other languages deal with the aesthetic depictions of memories and their role in shaping Palestinian national identity and collective consciousness" (Salam, 2021, p. 2). However, among contemporary Palestinian novels, researcher places *Mornings in Jenin* (2006) into a category of novels written by emerging female voice who offers relatively new and contemporary insights into the representation of Palestinian life and trauma. This trauma occurs due to the fact that Palestinians are either internally displaced or are forced to live as refugees in neighboring host countries. Moreover, the Salam (2021) argues that this trauma is in collective memories of the individuals and these memories are a part of fragmented individual tales, whose repetition registers again and again the loss and the sense of being displaced. Therefore, the individual memories become part and parcel of national collective identity and it could not be separated from this national identity. It is also credible that in *Mornings in Jenin*, the characters have their own personal tales of "Palestinian heritage, culture and memories of the past" (Salam, p. 7). The characters have passed these stories to their younger generations who also consider their past as traumatic and painful. As a result, these stories made it possible for the younger generations to know the real event that caused this pain and trauma in past.

By that very fact, *Against the Loveless World* (2020) also sheds light on the predicament of Palestinian whose fate is marked by atrocities inflicted upon by colonizers and those in power. In this regard, a critic in his online review of the novel in *The New York Times*, asserts that “Abulhawa has created a spirited protagonist who lives invisibly and in opposition to her ‘loveless world,’ telling her own story on her own terms lest either her comings or goings be forgotten” (Khadiwi, 2020). Therefore, it is Nahr who has a certain sort of resilience and strength to tell his story to the world which is oppressive and totally against her.

The preceding discussion illuminates that Abulhawa’s works are interpreted and explored by several researchers in different ways. All these works add to the body of knowledge as researchers have tried to interpret every text with multiple theories, which contributes towards the richness of scholarly resources available in discursive domain of knowledge. Similarly, this paper also endeavors to analyze Susan Abulhawa’s latest and seminal work *Against the Loveless World* through the concept of Intersectionality. Through this theoretical model, this research will explore the diverse web of sections which causes discrimination against the protagonist and her family in *Against the Loveless World*.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This research attempts to analyze Abulhawa’s *Against the Loveless World* (2020) using the idea of Intersectionality by appropriating the term to the crisis prevalent in the novel. Intersectionality is a concept which describes that every individual is marked by certain social classifications which overlap to provide a unique identity to an individual and hence they determine the experience of that individual. In fact, it unravels the fluidity of an individual’s identity in terms of its formation through certain standards thrust upon him by the society. As in every society there are certain parameters and standards that cause the discrimination between classes and result in class stratification in the society, bourgeoisie and proletariats in the words of Karl Marx, each class embody certain set of standards that make them fall under a certain category. Similarly, Carastathis (2014) quotes Crenshaw’s definition of Intersectionality as the framework that demonstrates how the “systems of oppression overlap” (Carastathis, 2014, p. 306). Similarly, an Intersectional approach encompasses how related identity categories such as race, gender, and class overlap to create inequality on multiple.

In the context of the novel, there is a story of a protagonist, Nahr, who appears to be marginalized by society on account of certain elements that make her vulnerable in the hands of a society that is marked by discrimination. Nahr appears to harness a number

of identity markers that are seen as inferior or of less value in the eyes of society and as a result she becomes a victim of discrimination and hence oppression. On account of her maltreatment by the society as result of a number of factors, Crenshaw's concept of Intersectionality becomes a relevant critical tool to understand the victimized state of Nahr and the logic behind her ill fate.

Nahr's experiences as a woman are central to the narrative. She navigates patriarchal societies in Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine, facing challenges such as forced marriage, abandonment, and exploitation in the sex industry. Her gender intersects with other aspects of her identity, shaping her experiences of oppression and resilience. Moreover, Nahr's identity as a Palestinian woman influences her experiences as she moves through different countries in the region. Her family's displacement from Palestine to Kuwait and then their status as refugees in Jordan highlights the impact of colonialism, occupation, and displacement on Palestinian identity and experiences.

Nahr's socioeconomic status also plays a significant role in her story. While she experiences periods of relative privilege, such as well-paying escort work, her status as a refugee and her experiences of poverty and exploitation underscores the intersections of gender, race, and class in shaping her experiences and opportunities. In addition to this, Nahr's status as a stateless person, belonging neither fully to Kuwait nor to Palestine, adds another layer of complexity to her identity and experiences. This aspect intersects with her gender, race, and class, influencing her access to rights, resources, and opportunities in different contexts.

Apart from these aspects, sexuality is also a crucial factor that is worth exploring through the lens of Intersectionality. Nahr's experiences of love and desire, including her arranged marriage and her later romantic relationship in Palestine, provide insight into the intersection of gender, sexuality, and cultural expectations. Her agency and autonomy in navigating these relationships reflect the complexities of negotiating identity and desire within patriarchal and heteronormative societies.

Thus, Nahr's life story serves as a poignant example of how systems of power and oppression intersect to shape individual experiences, underscoring the necessity of an intersectional approach in understanding and addressing inequality and marginalization.

This paper intends to expand upon these areas of discrimination whose intersection becomes a discriminatory space for Nahr to suffer. They are gender, class and ethnicity or nationality, which provides a discriminatory space and it is used by the society to maltreat her. As far as the structure of the research is concerned, it will entail the analysis of the novel while analyzing the novel using these discriminatory variables

including nationality, ethnicity, class and gender. This research will explore a conclusion in which the significance of the research will be shown that how it adds to the world of literature and what are the findings of the research.

#### **4. Discussion**

##### **4.1. Intersectionality: Nationality, Class and Gender-Oriented Discrimination in Against the Loveless World**

The paper tends to explore Susan Abulhawa's representation of Palestinian community particularly women in *Against the Loveless World* through the framework of Intersectionality. Intersectionality helps illustrating the oppression and injustice faced by Palestinians on their multiple and mutually colliding identities. This chapter is structured in a way that the first part of the chapter examines Nahr's persona as someone displaced from her homeland and the subjugation she faces. Viewed from an intersectional framework her identity as a refugee and particularly Palestinian refugee has a lot to do with her discrimination in host country. Secondly, Nahr's economic position will be discussed in the light of intersectionality and thirdly the role of gender in oppressing an already suppressed individual will be analyzed. Therefore, the chapter entails detailed discussion of how multiple identities played their role in creating injustice and discrimination against a certain individual or group.

Susan Abulhawa wrote her third novel *Against the Loveless World* totally from a life of a Palestinian refugee by disapproving Zionist and particularly western frameworks. This novel takes Palestinian struggle and its representation to another level by incorporating resistance and defiance through the character of Nahr. It is significant to deconstruct Nahr's persona in order to have an all-encompassing and wholesome view of someone raised amidst the chaos of being a refugee, living miles away from their ancestral land, far from traditions and culture. The disposition, Nahr carries, is marked by an extremism rather radicalism, that is not expected from a child of refuge. Usually, refugedom along with other calamities involving poverty, trauma and disease, also brings an element of subjugation, one's inherent ability to stand against evil and a refusal to obey constructed system of injustice, inequality and repression. Thus, bringing resignation to life that is blatantly loveless. In the context of the novel, this usual construct and behavior of a vulnerable person is challenged.

Therefore, this is an aim of Intersectionality to highlight and divert the attention of masses towards the analysis of social structure which causes inequality. This particular social structure which has inherent capabilities to exploit is a direct manifestation of power hierarchies influencing the individuals and groups. The arguments about the working of power being ubiquitous as Foucault (1995) mentions are apt when viewed



in the context of oppression, hierarchies, exploitation, inequalities and racism in the novel.

#### **4.2. Disposition of Nahr as an Emblem of Resilience**

Exploration of *Against the Loveless World*, through the framework of Intersectionality necessitates the discussion of Nahr's character which is central to this debate of standing against the discrimination or letting the system overpower you. Nahr being a girl in the first place, a refugee in the second and socially and economically vulnerable in third, becomes powerless and an easy victim of a system that deals with her in a brutal way by marginalizing her identity. It is, however, significant to consider that with all sorts of suppression her personality emerges as a strong, powerful and tough being, which not only backfires against the injustice but also gives them a tough time dealing with her.

The rebellious nature of Nahr could be seen from very beginning of her teenage where she was head of her girls' gang in school doing deviant things including an adventurous sort of initiation of sexuality. This disposition was further ignited by her very early marriage to Mhammad leading heartbreak and her encounter to Um Buraq. Apart from being a daughter of refuge with absence of a fatherly figure, these two events played very significant role in shaping Nahr's identity. Therefore, her construction is very much indebted to her encounter firstly with Mhammad and secondly to the field of prostitution through Um Buraq. As she latter in cube while recollecting her life events asserts that "Turning to Um Buraq stands out as pivotal in altering the course of my life" (ALW 46). Thus, these two events were considered as significant in transforming and revamping Nahr's life.

Mhammad is considered to be the first man Nahr got exposed to. However, it is true that initially Nahr was attracted to him out of jealousy and competition with her friend Saba. But gradually this encounter turned into physical attraction and infatuation which latter paved a way in transforming Nahr's life as the only reason for her attraction towards Um Buraq was the fact that she was heart-broken by Mhammad's rejection and considered herself as a discarded woman. The resonance she felt with Um Buraq, despite Um Buraq's bad reputation, was solely based on the fact that both were deceived by their husbands. As Nahr after her first meeting with Um Buraq asserts that "I thought she would understand me; that she would know how it felt to be a discarded woman" (ALW 45). Although everyone around Nahr including her best friend Saba warned her to stay away from Um Buraq but still she showing her tough and non-flexible nature turned deaf ears on what everyone said about her.

Moreover, one can assert that although the adversaries she and her family were experiencing in host country were due to being a refugee, however, it is also true that Nahr's exploitation for being a woman is also closely linked with her non-conformist nature because many times in the narrative she unknowing puts herself in a position where she becomes an easy victim of those in power. For instance, it could be argued that despite warnings from her mother she, while challenging the social norms, got married to a man, only at the age of sixteen, out of infatuation. Not only this, but her disposition to always act out as a bold and fearless being puts her family in trouble, with Saddam Hussein invading Kuwait. It also resonates with the operations of power as power operates on those exhibit deviant natures in order to maintain peace and order in a society.

### **4.3. Ethnic Identity as a Marker of Injustice**

Throughout the narrative, the intersection of class and gender along with the ethnicity are enacted all over the Palestinian community. The marginalization of Nahr and her family, as Palestinian refugees, is evident in the initial chapters of the novel. Nahr, although is a Palestinian by origin but was born in Kuwait and she considered Kuwait as her land. However, it was Kuwait and its people that always considered Nahr as an outsider and "Palestinian as stupid" (ALW 25). Nahr was aware of the fact that Kuwait disapproves Palestinians despite the fact that they contributed in making Kuwait's economy stronger.

Although Nahr and her family, like other Palestinian refugees, served and participated in Kuwait economy, yet they were considered as temporary residents living in ghettos. All their hard work and labor could not earn them a respectable position in the host country. Their ethnicity and nationality always paved a way to endanger their position and it is used by oppressors as a tool of exploitation. There are multiple instances of discrimination against Nahr and her family based on her nationality and ethnicity. For instance, Nahr was subjected to this discrimination as a child in the school when she was humiliated by her fellow friend who said that Palestinians are stupid and at another point when Nahr was not allowed to perform on Kuwaiti Independence Day despite the fact that she was born in Kuwait and she learned their accent and rituals. Thus, there is a series of discriminatory episodes based on the fact that Nahr and her family was an outsider in the host country.

Thus, this consciousness and fear of being an outsider also contributed in making Nahr what she was. The sense of homelessness and being an alien became a significant motif in the second half of the novel where Nahr fought against the oppressive regimes of settler colonizer in Palestine. Going to Palestine made her realize what it is like to have a homeland, and this realization brought confidence in her personality which

latter played its role in motivating her to become a part of revolutionary team headed by Bilal in Palestine.

Initially her views about Palestine were indifferent but gradually she developed a feeling of love and affection towards her land. In the initial chapters she says that Palestine was “a distant place of my grandmother’s generation” (ALW 25). But latter in the novel she asserts that Palestine is “where we began” (p. 117). Thus, her initial views were transformed because through the course of her life she learnt the importance of owning something, particularly a piece of land. Therefore, it can be argued that this transition was based on the fact that, through various discrimination she faced due to her being a Palestinian she learnt the importance of land and how significant it was to have a homeland in order to survive.

Moreover, Bonnie Thornton Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana (2009) wrote in their essay entitled as “Critical Thinking about Inequality: An Emerging Lens”, that Intersectionality intends to focuses on the connection between state of opportunity or “privilege” and the position of restriction and “constrains” created by the inequality in the lives of a group (p. 6). In the context of racism, the theorists assert that Intersectionality significantly highlights the limitations created for the people of color and the privileges created for the whites. Similarly, viewing *Against the Loveless World*, against the backdrop of this idea, one can argue that the dimensions of inequality operated here in the same way as it operated in the case of people of color. For instance, many a times in the novel, Kuwaiti’s got this privilege of being a native while the refugees from any other region in general and Palestine in particular, faced the limitations of being from another region despite the extent of efforts they put to be among the privileged ones.

In the similar way, if we analyze the instance when American soldiers took over Kuwait after the invasion of Saddam Hussein, Palestinians were perceived as monsters and traitors even they have nothing to do with the Iraqi or American invasions. Kuwaiti’s make the most of their being the native inhabitants of the country by pushing the Palestinians to the sides due to their nationality and ethnicity. Nahr very aptly sums up the whole situation and the exploitation rising from it by asserting that, “I one way or the other Palestinians would have to pay” (ALW 78). Thus, it would be right to assert that Nahr’s encapsulation of the situation was accurate because she and her family was later arrested and accused for plotting against Kuwait. Thus, this instance elaborates the oppression one group faces for their identity and the position of privilege the other enjoys for their celebrated identity.

Another significant illustration to substantiate the argument could be explored in the later part of the novel. The latter part is set in Palestine where Nahr with Bilal and her

mother-in-law counters Jewish occupation and barbarity. The Jews being in the position of power not only exploit Palestinians but also subject them to severe punishments. It can be argued that their oppression is out of hatred and animosity against the Palestinians. Thus, once again Palestinians have to face the consequences for their ethnicity and nationality. In the context of the above argument if we analyze the event of harvest, it is clear that Jews attacked the fields of olives and destroyed them before harvest just due to their position of privilege although they knew the fact that “Olive have been the mainstay and centerpiece of social, economic and cultural presence” of Palestinians (ALW 194). While on the other hand, Nahr and her family along with other villagers could do nothing but to resent and curse due to the limitations and constrains the Israeli state has imposed on them.

#### **4.4. Nahr’s Identity on the Basis of Economic Status**

In addition to this, it was not only her nationality but also her economic status that pushed her into the depths of oppression and exploitation. Although, her being a refugee was a primal cause in her discrimination, her economic status is also considered to be a crucial element in determining the behaviors of those around her. As Bonnie Thornton Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana (2009), asserted that, “oppression is constructed and maintained through multiple aspects of identity simultaneously” (p. 7). Appropriating this motive of multiple aspects of identity in the novel we see that Nahr is carrying weight of multiple identities with her including class, social status, ethnic status and gender. All these identities played their respective roles in determining the oppression and exploitation Nahr faces.

Nahr being the eldest daughter of the family is burdened with the responsibility of provider. Since her childhood she was mindful of the fact that her mother is the sole breadwinner of the family, so as she grew up a desire of making her family financially stable and well off developed in her. The childhood consciousness is evident from the instance of her marriage where she and her family demanded some money from her in-laws as security. Moreover, although she was unconsciously exploited by Um Buraq who impelled her into the profession of prostitution, there was her desire too in becoming a call-girl. She chooses this profession solely for the purpose of doing some good to her brother and her family financially. Viewing this from the point of Intersectionality, the financial situation of Nahr is not independent of any factor. Rather it depends and coincides with the fact that she was an ethnic minority in the host country. Her identity as a refugee collides with her financial position to create oppression through institutions and thus constraining her. For instance Nahr’s grandparents had lands and they had been well off in their native land but European Jews stole everything from them and thus made them flee their own home land. She narrates in the novel that “Mama kept a box of black-and-white photographs from her

life in Haifa. Her family had been well-off, but European Jews stole everything when they conquered Palestine in 1948 . . . Her family became penniless overnight, then scattered to different corners of the world or died” (ALW 25). Thus, if Europeans didn’t steal from Nahr’s forefathers she would have all the money and economic stability in her homeland.

Moreover, when she was pushed into the dirty work by Um Buraq, it is already mentioned that she initially she was unaware of it but then gradually it became a necessity for her to earn more money through the field of prostitution. If we analyze her first encounter with the profession, it is clearly implied that she was naïve and innocent. Her innocence is evident from the instance that she was unable to comprehend the nature of the party in which she was brought by Um Buraq rather she was confused and perplexed by unfamiliar environment, as she asserts that: “What are they doing? What am I doing? . . . I do not know how long I was dancing . . . A rush of fear added to my confusion . . . I could hear the ocean but it was too dark” (ALW 51). Thus, she was repelled from the environment she saw there but the only motive behind her decision to continue the profession was money.

It is clearly evident in the text that when she was offered money from Um Buraq, she was shocked and amazed by the amount because it was almost six to seven time more than what she used to earn in a month by working full –time. She asserts that “I wanted to give the money back and never see this woman again. But I made three hundred dinars a month working full-time, and here she was offering me two thousand” (ALW 53). Thus, her economic status and financial vulnerability exposes Nahr to public embarrassment including Um Buraq who miss-used Nahr’s potential, as the former exploited the latter by playing with her emotionally and blackmailing. Um Buraq knew that Nahr was concerned about her family so she took an advantage of her position by offering her an opportunity through which she could turn her dreams and her family’s dreams in reality.

Moreover, intersectional analysis also addresses the social inequalities by examining the question of social and economic justice. Bonnie Thornton Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana (2009) notes in their seminal work “Critical Thinking about Inequality: An Emerging Lens” that intersectionality directs the readers “to look at structural inequalities by examining the question of social and economic justice” (2009, p. 8). In the context of the novel, Nahr’s economic deprivation is a primal result of unequal distribution of society’s resources and accumulation of wealth in the hands of few people. Karl Marx (2016) uses the terms “have” and “have-not” representing the two dominant classes in a society: the proletariat and bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie belongs to upper class and are the people who control the wealth and means of production of a society, while on the other hand there are proletariats, the working classes, usually

working for the upper class. Therefore, talking about this class division Marx asserts that “The working men have no country” (Marx & Engels, 2016). Viewing this notion to the context of the *Against the Loveless World*, the quote seems quite relevant.

In *Against the Loveless World*, Nahr, lower class Proletariat, suffers from the same faced by working class. She was used to do several jobs in a day. Her routine includes “school clerk job, evening retail job, home, repeat” (ALW 54). Thus, like the workers of middle class Nahr owns no property and in order to make her both ends meet it became mandatory for her to secure a passive amount of income for herself and her family. It became a necessity to find an employment and work for someone demonic whether it includes Um Buraq or her clients. Therefore, Nahr has no choice other than working under duress for an exploitative social relationship.

Moreover, the class vulnerability brings a lot of other issues to forefront threatening one’s dignity and self-respect. Therefore, associating human dignity to the amount of money one possesses. In addition to this, capitalist system also brings a lot of mental and psychological health issues in the working-class including alienation and isolation. According to Marxist school of thought, the capitalist mode of economy dehumanizes human beings and is a source of alienation. Karl Marx (1959) in his theory of Alienation describes that human beings are self-sufficient and independent till they are able to provide and feed themselves. Once a person starts living on others, especially the upper class, his “human status and dignity” is threatened (Marx, 1959). Moreover, this loss of dignity causes a person to alienate from society and the product he is making. In the context of the novel, Nahr also deals with the similar issue. She tries her best to do every sort of job that would bring her “respect and social standing” (ALW 54). Thus, the system operated so well on her making her life “robotic...busy, exhausted and numb” (ALW 54). Therefore, one can comment that Nahr is a victim of class conflict, and her identity as a person belonging to working class along with her being a refugee makes her an object to be exploited.

Doubtless, Nahr is a revolutionary and rebellious spirit therefore instead of resigning to fate she looks for alternatives. For instance, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, the elite of Kuwait fled the country leaving their properties and wealth behind including “diamonds, cash, gold-bars” (ALW 72). So, Nahr and many other poverty-sicken people availed this opportunity. Many looters broke in the unguarded houses of Kuwaiti Elite and took whatever they could. This act of stealing and looting money can be seen as an act of retaliation of an ordinary class of people against the Rich. Moreover, drained by an exploitative system, these frustrated victims of class conflict did whatever they can do in a limited set of conditions to stand against the oppressors and face them directly. Although, this act latter put the protagonist in trouble yet at this point, she tried her best to counter the system and its manipulation as best as she can.

#### **4.5. Nahr's Identity on the Basis of Gender**

Intersectional analysis of *Against the Loveless World* also necessitates the dissection of gender-based identity of Nahr. With the consideration of gender as a cause of oppression, one might assert that Palestinian women currently living as a refugee in the host country are facing “triple oppression”, a term coined by Claudia Jones (Lynn, 2014). Triple oppression refers to the violence faced by a community due their class, gender and race or ethnicity. Establishing a connection, between this idea of triple oppression and the female character's in *Against the Loveless World*, necessitates the discussion of abuse faced by Nahr in the novel. As it is already mentioned above that Nahr was forced into prostitution due to her vulnerability as a refugee and a working-class woman. Here the discussion tends to unravel Nahr's exposure to suppression due to her gender along with her status as a refugee and a person belonging to unstable economic status.

Moreover, Abulhawa not only unravels the class and ethnic discriminations between Palestinian and non-Palestinians but also talks about the series of discrimination within the Palestinian community. Although women are perceived to have autonomy over the personal life but it can be inferred that precisely it is men who have a control in a patriarchal society. In a patriarchal society, it is men who create and establish hierarchies and social autonomy over women. In the Palestinian context, the men are shown to have dependence over the Non-Palestinian community and thus can exercise their power on the community that they consider as their subordinates, which are Palestinian women.

Relating this idea to the textual example, the treatment of women including Nahr, Um Buraq and Nahr's mother is significant to discuss. Beginning with Um Buraq, despite the initial harsh and rude disposition, she is also a victim of brutal system. Although it appears in the first place that Um Buraq is the one who exploited Nahr but a further exploration into her character reveals that she is also victimized and subjected to brutal treatment. Her husband cheated her and married to another woman was a major cause that changes the course of her life. Along with the economic instability Um Buraq's status was also of a foreigner in Kuwait thus all these identities contributed in her predicament. Likewise, Nahr's mother is also victimized by her husband, there are a lot of textual references illustrating that Nahr's father was involved in affairs with different women. For instance, when Nahr was taken in a part by Um Buraq, although Nahr didn't know the nature of that party, it is mentioned directly in the narrative that Nahr asserts, “this isn't the sort of place my father went on his long nights away” (ALW 52). Even Nahr's real name Yaqoot was given by her father at the name of one of his ex-girlfriends, Yaqoot.

Talking about Nahr and her exploitation as a woman, Nahr is a prime example of subjugation. Like her mother and Um Buraq, she is also left alone and divorced at a very young age. Initially it is significant to look at the exploitation done by Mhammad, although he was a Palestinian and socially and economically equal to Nahr, yet the oppression done by him is crucial to discuss as Nahr “was nineteen” when Mhammad “walked out” of her life, leaving her in a chaos (ALW 40).

Later in the novel, as Nahr was pushed into prostitution, the humiliation she faced by her clients is also a matter to be discussed and explored. Collins (2000) in her book *Black Feminist Thought*, very aptly puts the Prostitution and the exploitation of women as “Prostitution represents the fusion of exploitation for an economic purpose— namely, the commodification of...women’s sexuality” (144). Linking this to the narrative, when we analyze Nahr’s first encounter with her first client, she got injured as when “a big shard of glass” (ALW 52) from the beach stuck in her back. Moreover, it is quite evident that all the dirty work she is doing is because of economic purposes. She intends to send her brother to a good college in order to overcome the economic disparity. She also asserts in the narrative that it was choices that brought her to do this dirty work (ALW 66).

Moreover, it is also credible that certain qualities are attributed to Black women in order to justify and normalize the process of oppression and injustice (Collins, 2000). These qualities create and enhance stereotypes and thus create a consciousness in the minds of people against a certain sect. Appropriating this idea in the context of *Against the Loveless World*, it is essential to explore it from Nahr’s perspective. Many a times in the narrative the same things happen with Nahr. Nahr is ascribed with characteristics that are socially deviant and hence the process of injustice is normalized for her by keeping forth a picture of her as a queer individual. In *Against the Loveless World* Nahr is treated in a brutal way by many male characters just because she is a prostitute. For instance, the night Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait Nahr was raped by a group of men in a ruthless and she tolerated all this treatment with patience because of her economic vulnerability.

In the context of Intersectionality, it is crucial to examine that women are suppressed due to their gender not only by the men but also by women. In context of Black Feminism, the women were subjected to inequality and suppression due to their women at the first place and being a woman of color in the second not only at the hands of men but also at the hands of white females due to the racist ideologies. Thus, the black females were considered to be doubly suppressed and remove from the reputable status. This idea is explored by Abulhawa in *Against the Loveless World* in the context of Palestinian women. The Palestinian women are also viewed by the Western women as insignificant and sub-ordinate. This obvious juxtaposition between



Western and Eastern women is evident in the text. The initial pages of the novel explore this idea that how Nahr is seen as insignificant by a white female reporter who investigates Nahr while questioning her dignity and grace. Moreover, the insensitive attitude of female reporter also resonates with the idea of doubly suppressed situation of a non-European female.

Therefore, this analysis of Nahr's economic status, gender and social identity comes under the category of intersectional analysis in an individual capacity. It is also credible that Intersectionality or intersectional analysis operates on two levels: individual level and societal or structural level (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). At individual level it reveals the way interlocking system including class, gender, ethnicity and social status creates a wide range of opportunities for the expression of individual identities. Thus, relating this idea to *Against the Loveless World* one can see that intersectional web of systems have created a way and an opportunity for Nahr to express herself through her individual identities.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper by employing close reading of the text illustrates the trajectory of oppression the protagonist, Nahr, faces at the hands of the world depicted in Susan Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* (2020). To probe into the multifarious layers of oppression that in amalgamation determine the fate of Nahr, the theoretical framework of Intersectionality is employed. Intersectionality acts as an overarching frame of reference that allows assimilating all the markers of discrimination. In the context of the novel, Nahr is subjected to discrimination on the basis of three major factors which include gender, nationality and class. These three markers of identity provide the discriminatory space for Nahr to be discriminated.

In conclusion, the analysis of *Against the Loveless World* through the intersecting lenses of gender, class, and nationality/ethnicity illuminates the discriminatory spaces in which Nahr navigates. Through this research, we have uncovered the multifaceted layers of oppression that shape Nahr's experiences, underscoring the intricate interplay of power dynamics within patriarchal societies. By examining how Nahr's gender intersects with her class status and Palestinian identity, we have revealed the ways in which systems of discrimination converge to marginalize and oppress her. This research not only contributes to the understanding of Nahr's individual narrative but also serves as a broader exploration of the intersecting forms of discrimination present in societies. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of intersectionality as a framework for analyzing and addressing inequality in literature and beyond. Ultimately, this study adds valuable insights to the world of literature, highlighting the

significance of examining narratives through an intersectional lens to uncover the nuanced complexities of identity, power, and oppression.

In a nut shell, this research contributes to the discourse by opening up the avenues to lookup the oppression and discrimination against a certain sect in a critical way. This Intersectional reading of *Against the Loveless World* allows the readers to explore the diverse dynamics of oppression and inequality operating in a society and challenging the institutions normalizing the injustice through power. Moreover, it also contributes by giving voice to the voiceless and marginalized by exploring their situations and circumstances, in this context these are the Palestinians. The major takeaway of this paper is for the critical exploration web of identities that causes injustice and discrimination of the people that are already oppresses.

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