



Digital Echoes and Hybrid Forms: The Aesthetics of Displacement in Abulhawa's Fiction

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Open Access

Manuscript ID:
BIJ-SPL2-NOV25-MD-071

Subject: History

Received : 23.07.2025

Accepted : 24.10.2025

Published : 14.11.2025

DOI: 10.64938/bijsi.v10si2.25.Nov071

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Abstract

This article explores the aesthetic strategies of displacement in Susan Abulhawa's fiction, with a primary focus on Mornings in Jenin and supporting analysis from The Blue Between Sky and Water and Against the Loveless World. Abulhawa constructs a literary form that reflects the fragmented experience of Palestinian exile, through a hybrid narrative structure that blends historical fiction, poetry, memoir, magical realism, and digital testimony. In accordance with the theoretical frameworks of Linda Hutcheon's 'historiographic metafiction' and Gloria Anzaldúa's 'borderland aesthetics', this study examines Abulhawa's prose dissolves genre boundaries to embody the trauma, resilience, and memory of dispossessed identities. The concept of "digital echoes" is explicit through the character Yousef, in Mornings in Jenin. Yousef's use of the web (page) is to counter media silences, by focusing on the convergence of technology and confessional writing to narrate political realities. The article also analyses the integration of poetry as a intertextual device to reinforce the collective memory and cultural identity. Abulhawa, through her unique hybrid style, reclaims narrative agency and offers a poetics of survival for displaced communities.

Keywords: susan abulhawa; mornings in jenin; aesthetics of displacement; narrative hybridity; historiographic metafiction; borderland aesthetics; poetic prose; digital echoes; collective memory; intertextuality; exile and identity; poetics of survival.

Introduction

Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) is not merely an epochal narration of historical events but an aesthetic hybrid storytelling of Palestinian Nakba and its impacts. An interwoven genres (prose, poetry, historiography, and memoir) creates complex literary texture that resonates as a digital echo – fragmented, polyphonic, and emotionally nuanced. Through the lens of hybridity, this article examines the aesthetics of displacement in Abulhawa's fiction foregrounding her genre-blending techniques and the poetic language as a form of cultural resilience.

Hybridity as Aesthetic and Strategy

In accordance to Linda Hutcheon's idea of "historiographic metafiction" and Gloria Anzaldúa's idea of "borderlands consciousness," Abulhawa's narration establishes a space where fiction, personal testimony, and collective memory intersect. This is evidence in the opening lines of *Mornings in Jenin*:

"You are born with a scream, and the echo of that scream stays with you, ricocheting off the walls of your life" (Abulhawa 1).

The above textual quote is not a mere metaphorical language; it is an echo of trauma through generations. The phrase "echo of that



scream” is symbolic of the digital reverberation of memory, one that cannot be pinned to a single moment or genre. To enhance the realism of the text Abulhawa inserts excerpts from the Arabic classics.

“Oh long night, dawn will come,
but will be no brighter without my love.
You are a wonder, with stars held up
as by ropes of hemp to a solid rock.”

(Abulhawa 60).

This lyrical prose deliberately disrupted the traditional flow of narrative to articulate the relationship between Amal and her father. This is also an evident when Amal reflects on her father’s loss and her people’s dislocation, the narrative into veers into lyrical register:

“We walk on a thread of memory, our shadows
long on the ground of exile” (Abulhawa 105).

Here, the poetic interjection is not ornamental but structural – it forms the backbone of an aesthetic of displacement where conventional prose collapses under the weight of memory.

Genre Mixing and Narrative Innovation

Mornings in Jenin refuses the confines of singular genres. It oscillates between the genres of historical novel, epistolary narrative, diary, poetic memoir, and political chronicle. This genre-blending reflects the fractured identity of its characters, who live in exile and whose histories are transmitted through memory, story, and feeling rather than linear documentation.

The letters between Amal and her brother Yousef offer epistolary intimacy while merging personal narrative with political commentary:

“I am not whole. I was broken in Ein el-Hilweh,
and my pieces scattered over the Middle East”
(Abulhawa 189).

This fragmentation of the self—voiced through the personal letter—serves as a literary form mirroring physical and psychological dispersion. These echoes are intensified by the poetic references that are either embedded in the text or alluded to.

Abulhawa weaves in lines inspired by Mahmoud Darwish’s poetry, using intertextuality as a literary strategy

“We have on this earth what makes life worth living” – Darwish, quoted indirectly as Amal recalls her father’s resilience and quiet hope (Abulhawa 94).

The poetic vision here is not idealized but rooted in resistance and endurance. Amal, the narrator, becomes the carrier of these poetic legacies, and her voice becomes a vessel for both story and song.

The Aesthetic of Displacement

The account of displacement, in Abulhawa’s narrative is not only a political condition but also a problem of representation. How does one narrate a history that has been silenced or erased? Her answer lies in the hybrid structure of her fiction.

At one point, Amal feels even the language isn’t enough to reflects their reality. The following phrase carries the burden of it.

“Language itself cannot carry the burden of our sorrow, so we carry it in silence, in poems, in children’s names” (Abulhawa 156).

This meta-narrative moment signals an awareness of the limitations of prose. In response to it Abulhawa inserts rhythm, metaphor, and even silence as aesthetic elements. Her genre-blending thus functions as a response to displacement’s unrepresentability.

The Narrative also includes a Prayer-LIKE Passage During the Bombing of Jenin

“Oh God, if we must die, let it be in dignity, not in dust. Let us have the decency of mourning and the grace of memory” (Abulhawa 232).

This prose-poem form evokes lamentation and resistance, echoing oral traditions of mourning and also representing the collective mode of memory-making.

Poetry as Political Memory

The poetic voice in Mornings in Jenin is not only an aesthetic indulgence but also a political act. It documents loss and love in forms that transcend



factual events. Poetic language becomes a repository for what has been eliminated from the mainstream historical records.

Abulhawa's Prose Borrows Directly from Arabic Poetic Traditions, Creating Rhythm and Cadence Even in Translated English. For Instance

"Our past clings to the wind. It speaks in the olive trees and walks with the footsteps of children" (Abulhawa 210).

This imagery evokes both nostalgia and the imbrication of memory in landscapes. The poetic metaphors resist the erasure of place and identity. It also renders an aesthetic interconnection between the poetic narration and the political history.

In aligning herself with Darwish and other poets of exile, Abulhawa amplifies the affective weight of poetic lines within the larger narrative structure. Amal's mourning, Yousef's rage, and Dalia's silence all find articulation through poetic digressions that defy generic norms.

Digital Echoes: Memory in the Contemporary Age

The title's term "digital echoes" also finds relevance in the way Abulhawa's novel operates as a network of repeated, fragmented memories—akin to digital media. The narrative is non-linear, looping through time and echoing key moments across generations.

Just as digital memory can be fragmented, reassembled, and constantly reshaped, so too is the narrative of Palestine in Abulhawa's work. Memory in her fiction is stored not chronologically but thematically, emotionally, and poetically.

Hybrid Structures in Abulhawa's Later Works

In *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015), Abulhawa expands her hybrid narrative approach by weaving magical realism, mythic storytelling, and historical testimony into a single narrative. The novel incorporates folk legends, dreams, and intergenerational voices, allowing the dead to narrate and the spirit world to interact with the physical. The storytelling is often non-linear and lyrical that is to emphasis on the pain and beauty of Gazan life under

occupation. The narrator sometimes becomes abstract, almost omniscient, speaking from a collective consciousness that mirrors Palestinian oral storytelling traditions. For instance, the grandmother Nazmiyeh's bold, visceral voice contrasts with the mystical tone of her brother's spiritual narration, this shows how Abulhawa blends the sacred, the sensual, and the politics in fluid form. Abulhawa's narrative structure challenges the Westernized fixed narrative conventions, asserting Palestinian storytelling modes as valid and striking forms of resistance.

In *Against the Loveless World* (2020), Abulhawa pushes genre hybridity further by embedding a political manifesto, carceral narrative, and erotic confession into a single, transgressive female voice. The protagonist, Nahr, narrates her life story from a solitary confinement cell she calls "the Cube," and the text moves between testimony, inner monologue, journal-like reflection, and revolutionary critique. The voice is unapologetically direct, shifting from rage to sensuality to political vision—often within a single chapter. Nahr's reflections on incarceration are filtered through poetic thought, such as: "Solitude taught me the sound of my own breath as revolution"—a line that fuses existential introspection with political defiance. Abulhawa's use of fragmented chapters, disjointed chronology, and confessional prose mimics the psychological ruptures of exile. It also creates an experimental form that aligns with feminist and postcolonial literary traditions. In this novel, the style of hybridity becomes an act of narrative liberation, allowing the suppressed identities and their histories to speak in their own irregular way, yet seems coherent and powerful.

Conclusion: A Poetics of Survival

Thus the above discussion depicts that Susan Abulhawa's fiction especially *Mornings in Jenin* is a novel that challenges literary norms by embracing hybrid narrative forms and poetic interludes. Abulhawa's genre mixing is not a stylistic flourish but aesthetics of displacement – a necessity to tell a displaced story in the phase of history. By weaving historical fact, poetic memory, and personal



reflection together, she constructs a text that resists both literary categorization and political erasure of Palestinians. The novel becomes a digital echo chamber of loss, resistance, and hope—where each poetic phrase and hybrid form carries the burden of collective exile. It is not merely a story of a family, but a story told in multiple registers, genres, and languages—a story that insists on being heard, not just read.

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